



Two Girls, One Apology

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: Not Both Yet

"We forgive you," Rina says.

Beside her, Malka goes still.

Chava looks relieved. Her apology for laughing at their entries in the class poetry booklet still hangs between them. Mrs. Adler has already spoken with her. Chava keeps her voice quiet enough that the other girls cannot hear.

Rina reaches for Chava's hand.

Malka keeps both her hands around her lunch bag.

She wants to say, Not we.

She also wants the conversation to end before her throat gets any tighter.

Rina smiles at her. Malka looks down.

Chapter 2: A Word Too Large

At break, Rina wants the three of them to walk around the courtyard.

Malka says she is going to read.

"She said sorry."

"I heard."

"So why won't you come?"



Malka can't find an answer that doesn't sound like she is asking Rina to stay angry too.

She doesn't want that. Rina isn't troubled by the apology. Rina wants to walk and talk about something else.

Malka wants time away from Chava's laugh. Yesterday, it interrupted the part of the poem where Malka describes her little sister's warm hand.

Chava called the line babyish. She called Rina's poem babyish too, but Rina is ready to move on.

Two poems. Two girls. One apology.

Somehow the apology becomes one answer for both of them.

Chapter 3: The Teacher's Desk

Mrs. Adler notices Malka sitting apart after lunch. Her cream-colored tichel covers all her hair.

"Would you like to speak?"

Malka joins her at the side of the room.

"Chava apologized. Rina said we forgive her. But I don't know what I want to say."

"What do you want me to understand?"

"I don't want Rina to think she's wrong. I also don't want her to answer for me."



Mrs. Adler nods.

"You can tell her both."

"Will that make another argument?"

"I can't promise what she will say. I can help if you need it."

The teacher explains that the class rule remains the same whatever Malka decides about the apology. Mocking someone's work isn't permitted. Malka can come to her if it happens again.

She won't have to keep Chava nice by choosing the correct answer fast enough.

That is a relief Malka doesn't know she needs until she hears it.

Chapter 4: Her Own Side

Malka speaks to Rina by the coat hooks.

"When you said we forgive her, I wasn't ready to say it."

Rina looks surprised.

"I thought you were. You didn't say anything."

"I couldn't find the words."

"Should I have said I didn't forgive her?"

"No. You can say what you mean. I want to say what I mean too."

Rina leans against the wall.



"I didn't want it to stay awkward."

"Neither did I. It stayed awkward inside me instead."

For a moment, neither girl speaks.

"All right," Rina says. "I shouldn't answer for you."

"And you can walk with her if you want."

Rina's face changes again.

"I wasn't sure about that."

Malka isn't sure how it will feel to watch them walk. But feeling unhappy about it is different from deciding where Rina may go.

"I'm going to read today," she says. "Could we walk together tomorrow?"

"Yes."

Chapter 5: No New Audience

Before the last lesson, Malka asks Chava to speak near Mrs. Adler's desk. The teacher knows they are there and remains close.

"I heard your apology," Malka says. "Rina was answering for herself, not me. I'm still hurt. I need a little time."

Chava looks at the floor.

"So you don't believe me?"

"I think you mean sorry. I still feel hurt."



Malka doesn't ask Chava to repeat the apology more beautifully. She doesn't know that it would change how she feels.

"What do I do?" Chava asks.

"Don't make remarks about my poem. Don't ask Rina to get an answer from me."

Chava nods.

Mrs. Adler helps them agree on ordinary classroom conduct: polite words, no pressure, and adult help if another problem comes up.

They return to their desks.

The whole class doesn't need a report about who forgives whom.

Chapter 6: The Page Stays In

At home, Malka tells Mama. Mama listens in her navy sheitel, all her hair covered.

Then Malka takes out the booklet draft.

"Maybe I should change the warm hand line."

Mama reads it.

"Do you want a different line, or do you want to remove the line someone laughed at?"

Malka reads it herself.



Her sister's hand really does fit into hers that way. That is why she wrote the poem.

"I want this line."

"Then keep it. If you want help with the poem itself, we can look at it together another day."

Malka slips the page back into her folder.

The apology isn't the only thing she needs time for. She needs to like her own words again without hearing Chava's voice over them.

Chapter 7: A Wednesday Answer

The next day, Rina keeps their walking plan. She asks about Malka's sister, not whether Malka has an answer for Chava yet.

For several days, Chava is polite. She doesn't keep asking. Rina walks with each girl at different breaks and doesn't bring messages between them.

On Wednesday, Chava passes a dropped page back to Malka without reading it or commenting.

It's a small thing. Malka notices it.

After lunch, she asks Chava for a minute.

"I don't want to keep holding the argument between us," she says. "I accept your apology. I might still feel uncomfortable for a while."

"All right," Chava says.



They don't arrange to become best friends. They have a class, some ordinary conversations, and a poetry booklet still to finish.

At the coat hooks, Rina asks whether Malka wants another walk.

"Yes."

They pass Chava on the way to the courtyard. Malka says hello. Chava says hello back.

Rina waits until they are outside before asking about Malka's little sister.

Malka tells her how the little girl keeps demanding a poem about her left hand too.

Rina laughs at the request, not the poem.

Malka laughs with her.

This answer belongs to Malka. So does the line she leaves on the page.