



# Where the Pencil Can Stop

Ages 9-12



## Chapter 1: Not Yet

"Ready for the walk?" Mama asks.

"Almost," Toby says.

Her invented town has fourteen houses, a bridge, a bakery, and one very unfortunate street.

The street ends in the river.

Toby only needs to move it. She can finish before the family leaves.

Moving it means moving the bakery door. The new door faces a house without windows. Toby adds windows.

Mama comes back wearing her dark green tichel, with all her hair covered.

"We leave in five minutes."

Toby looks at the bridge.

Now the bridge looks crooked beside the straightened street.

"Just this part."

## Chapter 2: A Town That Grows

The drawing is for Toby herself. Nobody assigns it. Nobody is waiting to mark it.

She likes making the little world. She dislikes leaving it at an awkward place.



If a road looks wrong when she stops, the wrongness follows her into whatever she does next.

She wants to put down a finished town, not a town still tugging at her sleeve.

Mama says it is time. The route they have arranged is short, and the family needs to return before Tatty goes out.

Toby asks for one more minute.

Then another.

Mama doesn't wait for a town to be finished before a real family can leave its real house.

Toby puts down the pencil and comes.

Her face feels as crooked as the bridge.

## Chapter 3: The Street on the Walk

The family walks together along the familiar pavement.

Toby answers when her little sister speaks, but her thoughts keep rebuilding the street.

She misses a joke about a dog trying to carry a stick wider than the garden gate.

"You would have liked it," her sister says.

Toby feels worse. Now she is missing the drawing and the walk.



At a safe place where the family stops together, Mama asks what is bothering her.

"I can't stop when it's wrong."

"You did stop."

"But I keep thinking about it."

Mama nods.

"Putting down the pencil doesn't always put down the thought immediately."

Toby doesn't like that answer. She wants a better place to stop, one that makes everything feel finished inside.

## Chapter 4: Finished Enough to Leave

At home, Toby shows Mama the bridge.

"If I fixed this, I could have come nicely."

Mama asks what comes after the bridge.

Toby looks at the missing bank on the other side. Then at the bakery's very large windows.

"Another part."

They aren't errors she must fix before anyone can safely use the drawing. They are choices in a picture she can keep changing.

Mama asks what she could leave for next time.



Toby writes on a separate scrap: Bridge end. Bakery windows.

The town is still unfinished.

The scrap doesn't finish it either. It tells tomorrow's Toby where today's Toby means to begin.

She puts the drawing and scrap in a flat folder.

"What if I still want to do it?"

"You can want to. We can also stop for something else."

## Chapter 5: The Next Stopping Time

A few days later, Toby works on the town before supper. Mama tells her when the table will be needed.

She finishes the bridge. She likes it.

Then she begins a market stall.

At the stopping time, the stall has a roof and no supports. It appears to float above the road.

Toby nearly asks for one more minute. Supports are very small. She can draw them quickly.

She notices that she is offering the same answer as last time.

On the scrap she writes: Stall legs.

She puts the picture away while the stall is still floating.



It feels uncomfortable.

She carries the folder to her shelf anyway. Mama doesn't celebrate as though putting away paper is a great public event.

She asks Toby to set out the cups.

## **Chapter 6: A Thought Can Wait Too**

Toby thinks about the floating stall while she sets the first cup.

She nearly goes back upstairs.

Then her sister asks if stalls can have curtains. Toby says they can.

"Mine will be striped," her sister decides, although she doesn't have a stall.

They talk about a whole market of impossible shops.

The unfinished picture returns to Toby's mind once during supper. She remembers the scrap in the folder and returns to the conversation.

She isn't ordering herself never to think about the town. She is letting the thought visit without following it upstairs every time.

After supper, it is time for something else. The folder stays on the shelf.

## **Chapter 7: The Pencil Returns**

The next afternoon, Toby opens the folder.

The town doesn't punish her for leaving it. The stall still needs supports.



She draws them. Then she changes one of the bakery windows because she likes a round one better.

She may never make a final version of this town. That isn't a problem unless every afternoon has to wait outside its gate.

When Mama calls her to leave, Toby writes down one idea and puts the pencil away.

Her hand wants another line.

Her feet go toward the door.

This time, she hears the whole joke her sister tells on the stairs.