



The Drumming Before the Door

Ages 6-9



Chapter 1: The visitor

"He's here!" says Mendy.

He runs to the window, then to the door, then back to the window.

His cousin Sruly is coming for the afternoon. Sruly lives far away. Mendy hasn't seen him since the winter, when they made a snow rabbit with one ear much bigger than the other.

Today they can build a rabbit out of blocks. Or a whole rabbit house. Mendy has put the best blocks in a basket.

Outside, a car parks.

Mendy's heart goes boom-boom-boom.

His feet bounce against the floor. His fingers feel fizzy. He takes a big breath, but it catches halfway.

Then he steps away from the door.

"Mommy," he whispers, "I think I don't want him to come."

Chapter 2: The wrong name

Mommy turns from the table. Her blue tichel covers all her hair.

"What makes you think that?"

Mendy puts a hand on his chest.

"The fast thumping. Like when I hear a strange noise at night."



Mommy looks through the window. Tatty is greeting Sruly and Uncle Berel beside the car. Nobody is waiting alone outside.

"Is something about the visit worrying you?" she asks.

Mendy tries to find something. Sruly isn't mean. He doesn't break Mendy's things. Last time, he shared the long red sled without anybody asking.

"Maybe the blocks," Mendy says.

"What about them?"

"Maybe... I don't know."

Now he is worried. He has a worried body, so there must be a worried thing somewhere. He looks for it as hard as he looks for a missing mitten.

At the door, Sruly laughs at something Tatty says.

Mendy wants to see what is funny.

He also wants to stay where he is until the thumping stops.

Chapter 3: Two kinds of running

Mommy pulls a chair closer. "Sit with me for a moment. We can look at what's happening."

Mendy sits on the edge.

"When you run in the yard, does your heart thump?"

"Yes."



"Do you always want to stop playing then?"

"No."

Mendy taps his toes. Outside, Sruly is taking his bag from the car.

"This morning, what did you want to happen?" Mommy asks.

"I wanted him to come. I wanted him to see the blocks. I still want to show him the little wheel that fits underneath."

The words tumble out fast.

Mommy smiles. "I hear a lot of wanting."

"But my heart!"

"A fast heart can come with being excited too. We don't have to call every thump the same thing."

Mendy listens to his chest. He can't tell it to change its noise just because Mommy gives him another name for it.

"What if I'm a little worried and excited?"

"You can tell me both. We can go slowly."

Chapter 4: Not a test

Mendy wants to ask whether he is definitely excited. Definitely feels like a nice word to have.

Then he hears Sruly knock.



Mommy gets up. "Would you like to open the door with me, or have me open it?"

"With you."

He holds her hand with his fizzy fingers.

Sruly stands beside Tatty, carrying a flat paper bag.

"I brought something," Sruly says.

He pulls out two paper rabbit ears. One is long. One is very short.

Mendy laughs so suddenly that he forgets to listen for the thumping.

"The snow rabbit!"

"I thought he needed a summer house."

They carry the ears to the block basket. Mendy sits down, then stands up again to fetch the wheel.

"You're bouncing," Sruly says.

"I know."

Mendy doesn't tell Sruly that bouncing means the visit is wrong.

He shows him the wheel instead.

Chapter 5: The quieter afternoon

For a while they build without talking. Sruly makes a wide doorway. Mendy makes a ramp for the rabbit's little wagon.



Later, they sit at the kitchen table for the snack their parents prepare.

Mendy notices that his feet are still.

He is glad Sruly came. He is also hungry. The block rabbit is waiting in a house without a roof because neither boy wants to build one yet.

"The thumping got smaller," he tells Mommy while she puts out the plates.

"How is the visit?"

"Good. It isn't running-fast good now. It's sitting-here good."

After snack, Sruly wants to look at Mendy's picture books. Mendy almost brings the whole shelf.

Then he chooses the rabbit book and one other.

They have an afternoon, not a race to use every minute.

When Uncle Berel says it is time to go, Mendy wishes the afternoon could be longer. That feeling has a different name again.

He doesn't try to turn it into the wrong visit.

He walks to the door with Sruly and asks whether the paper ears can stay.