

The Good Morning on Her List



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

Ages 12-15



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Chapter 1: A patient morning

By eleven o'clock, Ruchy has helped three people without snapping once.

She finds her little cousin's missing cap. She sits through his long explanation of why it must have fallen behind the sofa, although it is already in her hand. Then she helps Aunt Chana match the children's coats to their owners before the family walks to Bubby's birthday lunch.

At Bubby's house, she sits beside the youngest cousin while the adults finish setting the table. He wants the same animal riddle three times. Ruchy asks it three times.

Aunt Chana, whose navy sheitel covers her hair fully, thanks her for being patient.

Ruchy likes that. She has been patient. It has taken work.

When everyone is seated, she is ready to stop being the helpful older girl for a while.

Chapter 2: The buttons in the jar

Her sister, Baila, is sorting the loose buttons from Bubby's sewing jar into little tins. Bubby sits beside her and keeps the jar and tins away from the youngest children. She wants matching sets kept together.

Baila pauses to compare two very similar buttons. She counts a matching group, then counts again.

A cousin asks why it is taking so long.



Ruchy copies Baila's counting, starting over in an exaggeratedly slow voice and making a great show of considering one button.

Two cousins laugh.

Baila closes the tin. She puts the remaining buttons aside and doesn't continue.

Mummy looks toward them. Her dark green tichel covers her hair.

"Ruchy, come speak with me in the hallway."

Chapter 3: The other things

Ruchy already knows what Mummy will ask about. She begins with the other things.

"I helped all morning. I sat with Yitzy while everybody was getting ready. I found his cap. I wasn't even impatient when he asked the same riddle again."

"You did help," Mummy says.

Ruchy feels the beginning of relief. Mummy has noticed.

"But you made fun of Baila's voice in front of the cousins."

"Once."

Mummy doesn't turn once into ten times. She doesn't let it turn into nothing either.

"She was working on the buttons. You could take a break. Making her careful counting into a joke was different."



Ruchy looks back toward the dining room.

"Doesn't all the helping count?"

"It counts as helping. It doesn't make that imitation kinder."

Chapter 4: A sum that won't work

Ruchy imagines a page with her helpful acts on one side and the imitation on the other. Three good things, one bad thing. Surely the larger column ought to win.

But what would winning do for Baila?

It wouldn't return the moment before the cousins laughed. It wouldn't make the button tin easier to open.

Ruchy had thought being patient would earn room to be sharp later. Nobody had offered that arrangement. The people she helped were not giving her tokens to spend on her sister.

"I'm tired of being asked for things," she says.

"Then we need to help you stop taking on more than you want. You can ask for a break. That is a separate conversation."

Mummy stays in the hallway with her while they work out what needs to happen next.



Chapter 5: What belongs in the apology

Ruchy asks Baila whether she can speak with her away from the table. Baila agrees.

"I'm sorry I copied your voice to make the cousins laugh. You were doing a careful job, and I made it public entertainment."

She almost adds the list of things she has done that morning. She leaves it out. Baila doesn't need a report about a missing cap before her sister owns the imitation.

"I don't want you helping with the buttons now," Baila says.

"All right. Would you like me to tell the cousins not to repeat the joke?"

"Tell them you shouldn't have made it one. Don't perform it again."

Ruchy agrees. Baila goes to Mummy for help with the remaining buttons.

Ruchy doesn't ask whether this makes them even.

Chapter 6: A short correction

With Mummy nearby, Ruchy speaks to the two cousins who laughed.

"I shouldn't have copied Baila's practice voice. She was sorting the buttons for Bubby. Please don't repeat it."

One cousin shrugs. The other says, "We weren't going to."



Ruchy wants to make them sound kinder, so the correction will feel successful. Instead, she leaves the sentence where it is.

Later, Baila opens the tin. Mummy sits beside her while she finishes the matching sets.

Ruchy stays at the other end of the table. She doesn't announce what a wonderful job Baila is doing to turn her apology into a performance. The buttons are Bubby's, and the careful counting is Baila's work. Neither needs to become proof of how well Ruchy has repaired the morning.

Chapter 7: A proper break

After lunch, Yitzy asks Ruchy for another riddle.

"I'm taking a break now," she says. "Ask your mother what you can do."

Aunt Chana helps him choose a quiet activity. Ruchy sits beside the window with Mummy for a few minutes.

"I still did help earlier," she says.

"Yes."

"And I still needed to fix what I did to Baila."

"Yes."

Neither answer has to defeat the other.



On the way home, Baila talks mostly to Mummy. Ruchy lets the walk stay a little awkward. She carries her own coat and leaves the tally page in her imagination unwritten.

Tomorrow she can help with something she has room for. She can also decline something before resentment builds.

Neither choice will buy permission to hurt someone afterward.