



The Good Part of Helping

Ages 12-15



Chapter 1: 1. The invitation she wants

The job is sorting old postcards.

That is the first thing Faigy likes about it.

Mrs. Stern, the librarian, finds two boxes while clearing a cupboard. The cards belong to the school archive. Before a small display can be prepared, someone needs to sort the approved copies by the places written on them.

"No cutting or writing on them," Mrs. Stern says. "Just groups on the table. I'll handle the originals and decide what may be shown."

Faigy offers to help during Thursday's library period.

She enjoys old pictures. She likes sorting things. She also likes the idea of Mrs. Stern noticing that she can do a job without constant reminders.

Then she notices how much she likes that idea.

Her hand is still raised.

Chapter 2: 2. The first postcard

At the library table, Mrs. Stern puts out the approved copies. Her brown sheitel covers her hair neatly.

One card has a stone bridge. Another has a shop window with a striped awning. Faigy wonders what the street looks like now.

The first pile takes shape easily.



Mrs. Stern comes to check.

"You've followed the labels carefully. Thank you."

Faigy feels warm inside.

Then she feels ashamed of the warmth.

She isn't helping for the right reason. A really kind girl, she decides, would think only about the person who needs help. She would not enjoy the postcards or the thank-you.

Faigy looks down at the bridge and moves it to another pile.

It doesn't belong there. She moves it back.

Chapter 3: 3. Something much duller

At home, Mama asks about the postcards while folding a tablecloth. Her navy tichel is tied smoothly at the back.

"I should choose a different job," Faigy says.

"Is something wrong with this one?"

"No. I like it too much."

Mama waits for the rest.

Faigy explains the old streets, the neat groups, and the thank-you. She thinks of offering to scrub the storage shelf instead. If the job is unpleasant enough, perhaps it will prove she isn't taking anything for herself.



"Does Mrs. Stern need that shelf scrubbed?" Mama asks.

"I don't know."

"What did she ask you to do?"

"Sort the copies."

Mama lays the cloth flat.

"Is enjoying them stopping you from doing the job she needs?"

Faigy can't find a yes. That doesn't make the warm feeling innocent in her mind yet.

Chapter 4: 4. The question beneath the job

"I want her to think well of me," Faigy says.

"And you want the sorting to help?"

"Yes. Both."

It sounds worse when she puts both wishes in one sentence.

Mama doesn't tell her every possible motive is harmless. She asks what Faigy would do if Mrs. Stern needs the copies arranged differently.

"Change them."

"What if she has to help another pupil and doesn't thank you again?"

Faigy thinks about that longer.



"I'd be disappointed. But I'd still finish the part I promised."

They talk about the difference between a good part she receives from helping and a payment she demands from the person she helps.

Enjoying the pictures doesn't create a new fee for Mrs. Stern. Wanting recognition doesn't have to decide the way Faigy handles the job.

"I don't know whether every reason inside me is perfect," Faigy says.

"You can pay attention to what you choose to do. You don't need to spend the whole job inspecting yourself."

Chapter 5: 5. The card with two places

On Thursday, Faigy finds a card with one place printed beneath the picture and another written on the back of the copy.

She wants to put it in a pile and keep the tidy rows moving. Sorting quickly feels good.

Then she remembers the librarian's instruction: set uncertain copies aside for checking.

She makes an uncertainty pile.

Mrs. Stern comes over after helping two younger girls.

"Good catch. That one needs my attention. Could you leave the uncertain ones together?"



No praise about Faigy's patience follows. The librarian carries a box to her desk and answers another pupil's question.

Faigy watches her go. She likes being noticed. Today the attention is brief.

The bridge still interests her. The remaining copies still need sorting.

She returns to the work without inventing a reason the librarian ought to stay beside her.

Chapter 6: 6. A real limit

Five minutes before the library period ends, Mrs. Stern asks whether Faigy can finish another box.

Faigy looks inside. It has more copies than the first box.

She almost says yes to keep looking helpful.

Then she remembers her next lesson.

"I can start a group, but I can't finish this box today."

Mrs. Stern checks the time.

"Leave it closed, then. Put your finished groups in these sleeves, and we'll continue another day."

Faigy follows that instruction. She doesn't create unfinished piles so she can claim one more generous offer.

There is pleasure in the neat sleeves. She lets it be pleasure, not evidence that the sorting is secretly useless.



Chapter 7: 7. The bridge on display

A week later, the bridge copy appears in the display Mrs. Stern prepares. Faigy recognizes the small figure beside the rail.

Another girl asks what it is.

"One of the archive postcards," Faigy says. "Mrs. Stern can tell you about it. I helped sort the copies."

She doesn't make her contribution disappear. She doesn't make herself the archive's owner either.

The girl looks at the bridge, not at Faigy.

Faigy stays a moment longer because she likes the picture. Then she goes to class.

The helping is real. The interest is real too.

Neither one needs the other to leave the room.