

The Notes She Kept Too Long

A friend's careful notebook, a request that kept being postponed, and the small borrow that became a debt

For ages 12-15



Chapter 1

Just Until Tomorrow

Miriam had the best history notes in the class.

Everyone said so. Her pages had dates in the margin, little maps, and summaries so clear that Mrs. Falk once held one up as an example.

On Monday, when Miriam was absent with a cold, Shani borrowed the notebook.

"Just until tomorrow," Shani said.

"Bring it in the morning," Miriam said. "I need it for the review."

Tomorrow came. Shani had copied half the chapter and left the notebook in her bag.

"I'll give it to you at lunch," she said.

At lunch, she said, "I left it in my locker. Tomorrow, I promise."





Chapter 2

The Borrow That Stretched

By Friday, the notebook had been in Shani's possession for four days.

She needed it, she told herself. Her own notes were a mess of half-sentences. Miriam had her memory; Miriam had already learned this chapter; Miriam wasn't even asking that hard.

That last part changed on Friday afternoon.

"Shani, I actually need it back today. The review sheet is due Monday."

"I'll bring it to your house."

"I have a thing after school. Can you - "

"Sunday," Shani said. "Definitely Sunday."

Miriam said okay, but she said it the way you say okay when you've stopped expecting the thing.





Shani heard it. She spent the walk home explaining to herself why it wasn't a big deal.

Chapter 3

The Notebook at Home

The notebook sat on Shani's desk all weekend.

She didn't copy from it. She didn't even open it. It just sat there, being hers for a little longer, next to the review sheet she hadn't started.

On Sunday evening, Mama, wearing her navy tichel, picked it up to move it off the table.

"This isn't yours."

"It's Miriam's. I'm giving it back tomorrow."

"How long have you had it?"

"A few days."





"How long did you say you'd have it?"

Shani felt the floor of the conversation drop one level.

"One day."

Chapter 4

What It Had Become

"It stopped being a borrow," Shani admitted.

"Somewhere around day three."

"What is it now?"

Shani looked at the notebook. Miriam's careful margins. The little maps.

"A debt," she said. "And I keep not paying it because paying it means admitting how long I've held it."





Mama put the notebook down gently, the way you'd put down something that belonged to somebody else's hard work.

"People forgive late returns much faster than they forgive discovering you were hoping they'd forget."

"I wasn't hoping - "

Shani stopped. She had, a little, been hoping exactly that.

Chapter 5

The Return

On Monday morning, Shani was at Miriam's desk before the bell.

"Here. I'm sorry. I said one day and kept it seven, and then I made you chase it, and then I gave you dates instead of giving you the notebook. You should





be able to lend me something without it becoming a project."

Miriam took the notebook and held it against her chest like a returned pet.

"I didn't want to be annoying about it."

"You weren't annoying. You were waiting for your own notebook."

Shani had prepared for Miriam to be cold. Instead Miriam opened to a page and said, "You know I made a second copy of the maps. You could have just asked for those."

"I didn't know."

"You didn't ask. You just kept the whole thing."

It was said without anger, which somehow made it land harder.





Chapter 6

The Review Sheet

Shani had one day for the review sheet and messy notes to work from.

It was a fair consequence and she knew it. She worked through lunch, and Miriam - who did not have to do this - let her look at the map copies during recess.

"Why are you helping me?"

"Because you gave it back and said the real sorry," Miriam said. "And because the maps are copies. That's what copies are for."

Shani wrote faster.





Chapter 7

The Next Borrow

Two weeks later, Shani needed a ruler for the geometry drawing, and Baila handed her one.

"Back by lunch," Baila said.

It was said lightly, but Shani heard the new thing underneath it: people were watching whether things came back.

She returned the ruler at lunch, first thing, before eating.

It was a small, almost invisible act. Nobody thanked her. Returning things on time isn't the kind of behavior that gets a parade.

But Baila noticed. Shani could tell because the next time she asked to borrow something, Baila didn't hesitate.



Trust, Shani thought, was built out of boring little returns. She'd been trying to build it out of promises, which was like trying to build it out of weather.

Chapter 8

What She Kept

On a clean page of her own - much improved - notebook, Shani wrote:

A borrow has a date. A date you keep stretching is a debt you're hiding. Give it back before they ask twice. The real sorry includes the real number of days.

She kept Miriam's map-copy offer in mind too, and made copies of her own best work for exactly that reason.

The notebook section of her shelf had two kinds of pages now: her messy ones, which were getting



better, and the memory of Miriam's, which had taught her something no history chapter covered.

Borrowed things go home.

The sooner they do, the more doors stay open.

