



The Pencils on the High Shelf

A forgotten errand, a week-long rule
she gave herself, and a repair that
needed a different tool

For ages 12-15





Chapter 1

A Whole Week

On Sunday evening, Miri put her colored pencils on the highest shelf she could reach.

Then she put her sketchbook beside them.

"You're cleaning?" her sister Chaya asked.

"No drawing until next Sunday."

"Why?"

"Because I forgot something. Again."

Chaya looked from Miri to the shelf.

"Are the pencils the ones who forgot?"

Miri didn't answer. She had already decided this would be an unpleasant week. It seemed important that it be unpleasant enough to count.





Chapter 2

The Empty Place

That afternoon, Mama had asked Miri to collect a stack of paper napkins from Aunt Leah, who lived downstairs. Aunt Leah had bought extra and offered them for the family supper.

Miri had said yes. Then Chaya had asked for help finding her missing school folder. Then Miri had remembered a homework question. Then she had sat down to draw a fox.

By the time Mama asked about the napkins, Aunt Leah had left for a visit.

Mama used the smaller supply already in the kitchen. There were enough for supper, but the errand still hadn't been done.

"Please tell me when you haven't managed something," Mama had said. "I was counting on you."





That had hurt more than shouting.

Miri had forgotten to bring a borrowed container downstairs the week before too. The container had eventually gone back. Her memory, apparently, had not improved with it.

Chapter 3

The Closed Sketchbook

On Monday afternoon, Chaya brought an apple with a funny bump to Miri's desk.

"It looks like it has a nose. Draw it."

"I can't."

"You can. The apple won't move much."

Miri pointed to the shelf.

Mama came past the open bedroom door wearing her navy tichel.





"Why is your sketchbook up there?"

Miri explained her rule. If she lost something she enjoyed, perhaps she would finally remember things.

Mama sat on the edge of Chaya's bed.

"Have you thought about how you'll remember the next errand?"

"I'll feel bad whenever I want to draw."

Mama looked at the apple, then at Miri's empty desk.

"Would that tell you which errand to do?"

Miri had not worked out that part.

Chapter 4

Downstairs

Aunt Leah was home that afternoon. Miri went downstairs with Mama's permission and knocked.





Aunt Leah opened the door in a brown sheitel, carrying the empty container Miri had returned the previous week.

"Just washed," she said. "It's ready for its next adventure."

"I'm sorry I didn't collect the napkins yesterday."

"Your mother told me. They're here."

Miri took the stack.

"Do you need anything carried up or put away?"

"This basket goes in my kitchen. You can take it in, please."

Miri carried it to the place Aunt Leah showed her. The basket was heavier than the napkins. Neither job involved sitting upstairs feeling terrible.

On the way back, she wondered whether that meant the repair was too easy.





Chapter 5

The Reminder That Could Work

At home, Mama checked where the napkins should go. Then Miri asked her the question about easy repairs.

"I was still inconvenienced yesterday," Mama said. "Collecting them now doesn't change yesterday. But you did what remained to be done."

Miri set the napkins in the cabinet.

"I don't trust myself to remember next time."

"Let's try something more useful than trusting very hard."

They looked at where household requests usually reached Miri: in the kitchen, often while she was on her way somewhere else.





Miri found a small pad and hung it beside the kitchen doorway on an existing hook. She put a pencil through its spiral.

The first page said: ERRANDS I HAVE AGREED TO DO.

Below it, she wrote the task and when it needed doing. If she could do a short task at once, she could do it before starting something else. If she couldn't manage it, she would tell Mama rather than silently leave it on the page.

Chapter 6

The Apple Waited

"May I draw now?" Miri asked.

"The pencils weren't taken away by me," Mama said.

Miri reached for the sketchbook, then stopped.





It still felt as though enjoying herself meant she hadn't cared enough.

Mama did not tell her to stop caring. She asked Miri to bring the apple to the kitchen table, where she was sorting a sewing basket.

Miri began with its lopsided outline. Every few minutes, she thought about the missed errand.

She kept drawing. The feeling did not have to approve each pencil stroke.

"That apple looks offended," Mama said.

"It has been waiting since lunch."

For the first time that day, Miri laughed.





Chapter 7

A Line Before the Fox

On Wednesday, Mama asked Miri to bring a folded tablecloth to Aunt Leah before supper.

Miri was carrying her pencils toward her desk.

"Before supper," she repeated. She wrote the errand on the kitchen pad, then looked at the tablecloth on the chair.

It would take a few minutes now. Her fox could wait a few minutes without turning into a different animal.

She delivered the tablecloth and crossed out the line when she returned.

On Thursday, she nearly left a different errand until too late. The pad caught her attention as she passed the doorway. She told Mama she needed ten more minutes, and Mama said that would work that day.





The pad had not made her incapable of forgetting. It had given her something to look at and a reason to speak before a problem grew.

Chapter 8

Back on the Desk

On Sunday, the sketchbook was already on Miri's desk.

Chaya noticed.

"Your week is over."

"I changed the rule."

"No drawing for two weeks?"

"No. When I forget something, I find out what still needs doing. Then I work on how to remember it."

Chaya put a pear beside the sketchbook.





"This one's shaped like a slipper."

Miri moved her pencils to make room.

She still owed people care when she agreed to help. She might still have to apologize or handle an inconvenient consequence. Those things were different from inventing a miserable week for herself.

The kitchen pad stayed by the door. When forgetting troubled her, she could talk to Mama and adjust it.

The high shelf held a box of spare paper.

The pencils stayed where they could draw.

