

The Speech She Never Gave

Fourteen versions of a request, one
unexpected question, and a sewing class that
needed another look

For ages 12-15



Chapter 1

The Card

Rivky had decided to quit the Wednesday sewing class, and she had the speech to prove it.

It lived on an index card in her pencil case. It opened politely, gave three reasons, and answered everything Mama might say, including "but you were so excited in September" and "we already paid for the term."

Version nine had footnotes.

She rehearsed it walking to school. At lunch, Baila asked why her lips were moving over her soup.

"Remembering something."

That was true. Rivky could remember every word on the card. She wasn't sure she could explain why she wanted to say them.





Chapter 2

The Fourteenth Version

By Friday, the speech was on its fourteenth version.

Rivky folded the card and put it in her pocket before supper. Afterward, she asked Mama, who was wearing her brown tichel and drying dishes, if they could talk.

"Of course."

Rivky delivered the opening exactly as written.

"I would like to discuss leaving my sewing class."

Mama put down the towel.

"All right. Which part do you hate?"

Rivky's next sentence was about her workload. It did not answer that question.





Chapter 3

Off Script

"The whole thing," Rivky said. "Sewing."

Mama looked toward the chair with the new pillowcase folded over its back.

"Including that?"

Last week, Rivky had made the baby sit through a pillowcase presentation. She had shown him the seams. He had chewed one corner and appeared satisfied.

"I like the fabric part," she admitted.

Mama pulled out a chair. Rivky sat too, keeping the folded card in her pocket.

"And the cutting," Rivky said. "And marking it with chalk."

"What happens after that?"





Rivky rubbed a thumbnail along the edge of the table.

"The machine."

Chapter 4

The Real Answer

Three weeks earlier, the sewing machine had caught Rivky's zipper and bunched the fabric around it. Mrs. Berg had helped free it, but Rivky had been the last girl still working.

Now she dreaded the machine's speed and noise before class even began.

"Mrs. Berg told me she could help me practice," Rivky said. "I nodded. Then I pretended I had extra cutting to do."

"Does she know you don't want to use it?"





"Not exactly."

The card offered scheduling conflicts and workload. Neither was the reason she had spent Wednesday staring at a machine she did not want to touch.

Mama reached for the dish towel again.

"We can ask about your choices. There may be more than one."

"Will you come with me?"

"Yes. You can explain the machine part."

Chapter 5

At the Cutting Table

On Monday afternoon, Mama and Rivky met Mrs. Berg before the younger girls' class. The teacher wore a dark brown sheitel, and a measuring tape hung over her shoulder.





Rivky began with her prepared opening. Then she left the rest of the speech in her pocket.

"I like cutting and choosing fabric. I haven't wanted to use the machine since the zipper got stuck. I didn't tell you how much it bothered me."

Mrs. Berg put down her scissors.

"Thank you for telling me. We could arrange some practice with me beside you. Or you could take a break while we discuss another class."

Rivky glanced at Mama. Mama waited.

"Is there sewing without a machine?" Rivky asked.

Mrs. Berg took a small pouch from a drawer. Tiny stitches ran along its edge.

"Mrs. Feld teaches hand sewing on Thursdays. I don't know whether she has space. Shall we ask?"





Chapter 6

A Place to Try

Mrs. Feld was preparing materials in the next room. Her navy tichel matched the little pincushion on her table.

She had one place available. She showed Rivky a sample and explained that the class worked slowly on small projects.

"It still takes practice," she said, turning the sample over so Rivky could see the stitches underneath.

Some were uneven. Rivky found that more encouraging than a perfect front.

Mama asked the office about transferring the registration. The office approved the switch for the remaining weeks without an extra charge. Thursday fit their arrangements at home.





Rivky did not have to decide while standing over a trapped zipper. She took the class description home and read it before asking Mama to make the transfer.

Chapter 7

Thursday's Knot

On Thursday, Mrs. Feld showed Rivky a backstitch.

Rivky's thread knotted on her fourth stitch.

For a moment, she had the familiar urge to announce that she was bad at sewing.

Mrs. Feld held out her hand.

"Show me where it caught."

Rivky showed her. They freed the thread, and Rivky tried again. The next row was slow and uneven. She liked being able to stop with the needle in her hand.





At home, she put the little practice square beside the pillowcase.

"Another presentation?" Mama asked.

"The audience has already gone to bed."

Chapter 8

The Shorter Card

The old card became a bookmark. Its opening had helped Rivky begin two conversations. The rest had stayed folded in her pocket.

A week later, she wanted to ask Mrs. Feld about a project that seemed too large for her.

She took out a fresh card and began writing possible objections. Then she crossed them out.

This time, she wrote five words:

Tell the truth. Then listen.





Beneath them, she added the actual question: Could I start with the smaller pouch?

At class, Mrs. Feld offered two sizes and asked what Rivky wanted to practice.

Rivky looked at the samples before answering.

The card stayed on the table, with enough empty space for an answer she hadn't written herself.

