



The Stamp Board She Took Home

A library club, a changed system, and a job
that was no longer hers

For ages 12-15





Chapter 1

Her Six Squares

The stamp board fit in a shoe box.

Six squares, six ink pads, six stamps that Chaya had carved herself. A girl who returned a library book on time received a leaf. A girl who recommended one received a star.

Chaya had run the younger girls' reading club for a year.

Now she was moving to the older class, which ended later. Esti would take over the club.

"I'll show you the board on Tuesday," Chaya said.

"Thank you."

Esti sounded pleased. Chaya imagined the six squares remaining in their familiar places for years.





Chapter 2

The Folded Plan

On Tuesday, Esti brought a folded sheet.

She wanted the younger girls to keep their own reading cards. They would write one sentence about a book instead of collecting stamps.

"Some of them rush to return a book for the leaf," Esti explained. "I'd like to try something different."

Chaya set the shoe box on the table.

Her name was written inside the lid. Beneath it were the little stars she had tested on scrap card.

"The stamps work," she said.

"I know you've done a lot with them."

Esti hadn't said the board was useless. Chaya heard it anyway.





Chapter 3

Just Checking

For the first week, Chaya stopped at the reading room whenever her class finished early.

"Have you given out the leaf stamps yet?"

"We're trying the cards this week."

"You should make the card edges stronger. They bend."

"I'll see how they last."

"You need to tell them not to lose them."

Esti pressed her lips together.

Chaya was only helping. She had spent a year learning these things. Surely learning created a right to tell the next girl how to do them.

Then Esti asked her to speak in the hallway.





Chapter 4

The Doorway

"I need room to run the club," Esti said.

Chaya's cheeks warmed.

"I'm not stopping you."

"When you stand in the doorway and correct things, the girls look at you before they listen to me."

Through the open door, two younger girls were watching them.

Chaya moved farther down the hallway.

"What if the cards don't work?"

"Then I'll talk to Mrs. Landau and change them."

That was a proper answer. Mrs. Landau, the teacher responsible for the club, had approved the trial.





Chaya couldn't find the missing permission that would make the reading cards hers to stop.

Chapter 5

The Six Squares Again

At home, Chaya unpacked the board.

Mama, wearing her neat brown sheitel, sat down beside her.

"Esti doesn't want it."

"Did she say that?"

"She wants reading cards."

Mama looked at the tiny carved leaf.

"You made something useful for your year. That doesn't mean every later year has to look like it."





Chaya wanted to argue that changing a system was ungrateful.

But when she had begun the club, she had moved the old reading chairs into a circle. Nobody had made her keep the previous girl's straight row.

She hadn't called that change an insult.

Chapter 6

A Proper Goodbye

On Wednesday, Chaya asked Mrs. Landau whether she should leave the board at school.

The teacher, her dark sheitel covered with a small hat, asked what Chaya wanted.

"I'd like to keep it if it isn't needed."

"Then take it home. It belongs to you. Esti has what she needs for this semester."





They agreed that Chaya would give Esti the closet key and the list of books still out on loan. Those were club things, not memories to pack away.

A good handover didn't mean handing over instructions about every afternoon.

It meant leaving the next person with what she actually needed.

Chapter 7

The Question Esti Chose

Esti came to Chaya two days later.

"Do you remember who borrowed the green book with the bird on the cover? The name is smudged."

Chaya remembered.





She gave the name, then nearly added a warning about cards, edges, stamps, and everything that could go wrong.

Instead she said, "I've written it on the loan list."

"Thanks."

Chaya didn't have to refuse all help in order to stop taking charge. Esti had asked a particular question. She could answer that question and leave the rest.

Chapter 8

The First Card

At the end of the month, one of the younger girls showed Chaya a reading card.

A sentence across it said, I liked the baker because she went back when she was scared.

"I wrote it myself," the girl said.





Chaya smiled.

"I can see."

The corners were a little bent. The sentence was interesting. Both things were true, and the bent corners weren't her job.

At home, she put the stamp board on her own shelf. She might use it for something else one day.

The reading room had a different system now. The year she had given it hadn't disappeared.

She had handed over a job, not the right to care about it.

She was learning that caring didn't always mean standing in its doorway.

