

The Tray Beside the Office Door

A missing collection, a story about her, and a correction that needed the right room

For ages 12-15



Chapter 1

The Change

On Monday, somebody asked Devorah whether she had returned the money.

"What money?"

"The coins from the book collection."

Devorah stared at her classmate.

The Bais Yaakov class had collected coins for new books on Thursday. Devorah had carried the covered tray to the school office, where Mrs. Levin counted it and wrote the amount in the register.

Nobody had told Devorah that anything was missing.

Now two girls beside the classroom door had gone quiet.

"Who said I had money to return?" Devorah asked.





The answer was a shrug.

Chapter 2

Three Different Stories

At break, Devorah heard another version.

She had forgotten the tray in the hallway. Or she had taken it home. Or she had used some of the coins and put them back.

Three different stories, all wearing her name.

She wanted to walk into the classroom and shout that whoever had started this was a liar.

That would make everybody look at her. Some girls hadn't heard any of it yet.

She also wanted to find the girl who had said it first and make her feel as embarrassed as Devorah felt.

Instead she went to her teacher.





Her voice came out higher than she expected.

Chapter 3

What She Could Tell

Mrs. Adler, whose brown sheitel was neatly covered by a small hat, asked Devorah to sit.

Devorah told her what she had done on Thursday and the versions she had heard that morning.

"I didn't take anything," she said. "I want them to know that."

"We'll check the office record," Mrs. Adler answered. "You don't need to investigate every retelling yourself."

"But what if they think asking you means I'm afraid of being caught?"

The teacher let that question sit for a moment.





"You came to the person who can help sort it out. That is the useful thing to do."

Devorah's face was still hot. A useful thing didn't always feel like a comfortable thing.

Chapter 4

The Register

Mrs. Levin remembered the tray.

She was wearing her gray sheitel, and the same blue cardigan she had worn on Thursday.

"You brought it just before lunch," she said.

She opened the register. Beside Thursday's date was the amount, with Mrs. Levin's initials and a note that the covered tray had been returned to the classroom later.

Nothing was missing from the collection.





Devorah looked at the ordinary ink on the page. She had wanted a dramatic piece of proof. The office had a perfectly ordinary one.

Mrs. Adler thanked Mrs. Levin and closed the register.

There were other classes' amounts on the page. Devorah didn't need to carry the whole record around for people to inspect.

Chapter 5

The Right Room

Back in class, Mrs. Adler spoke plainly.

"A claim about Thursday's book collection has been going around. The office record confirms that the tray was received and the money counted. There is no missing money. Stop repeating claims that haven't been checked."





She didn't ask the class to vote on Devorah's honesty.

She didn't name a supposed first speaker and invite a new round of accusations.

When a girl tried to add another version, Mrs. Adler stopped her.

"Bring questions to me privately. We aren't turning this into a performance."

Devorah kept her eyes on the desk.

The correction was what she had wanted. Hearing it in a room full of people still felt difficult.

Chapter 6

The Apology at Break

At break, one classmate came over.

"I'm sorry. I repeated what I heard without asking."





Devorah wanted to say something sharp enough to make the girl flinch.

"It was horrible to hear it about myself," she said instead.

The girl nodded.

"I told the two girls I said it to that it wasn't true."

That was a real repair, in the same small circle where she had passed it on.

Devorah didn't have to say the morning had been harmless. She also didn't have to punish the girl before the apology could count.

"Thank you for correcting it," she said.





Chapter 7

Mama's Table

At home, Devorah told Mama, whose dark green tichel was tied neatly behind her head.

Now that the facts had been sorted out, Devorah began to cry.

Mama didn't say there was nothing left to cry about.

"The record was right all along," Devorah said. "I still felt as though I had to prove I was good."

Mama listened.

They agreed that if the claim came back, Devorah would tell Mrs. Adler rather than spend every break trying to chase it.

One correction might not stop every careless retelling. That wasn't a reason to leave Devorah handling it alone.





They ate an ordinary supper after the tears.
Ordinary things were still allowed.

Chapter 8

Another Tray

On Wednesday, Mrs. Adler asked who could take a folder to the office.

For a moment, Devorah stayed very still.

Then she raised her hand.

She wasn't trying to prove that Monday had not hurt.
She was doing a small job she had done safely
before.

At the office, Mrs. Levin thanked her and took the folder.

The collection tray was on the shelf beside the door,
empty and ready for another class.





Devorah didn't need to take a photograph of it or collect a witness for every errand. The adults knew what had happened and had taken responsibility for the correction.

She returned to class with no tray, no register, and no speech prepared.

Just her own name, which she had not given away to the story people told about it.

