



The Welcome She Chose

A cousin at the door, a familiar greeting, and
a way to be warm without agreeing

For ages 12-15





Chapter 1

Before the Knock

Chaya's cousin Naomi was coming after three months away.

They had exchanged letters about Naomi's new school. Chaya had saved a funny paragraph about a classroom cabinet that opened only if somebody tapped its left corner.

She wanted to hear more.

She didn't want the greeting Naomi usually gave her: two quick squeezes and a dramatic kiss on each cheek.

When they were small, they had made up the greeting together. At thirteen, Chaya didn't enjoy it anymore.

She practiced saying hello while putting cups on the kitchen table.





The doorbell rang before she found the right sentence.

Chapter 2

The Old Greeting

Naomi came in carrying a paper bag of cookies.

"My favorite cousin!"

She opened her arms.

Chaya stepped back.

"Hello. I'd rather not have the big greeting today."

Naomi's smile slipped.

"Since when?"

"I'd rather wave."

Chaya lifted one hand. It felt terribly small beside Naomi's outstretched arms.





Mama, wearing her brown sheitel, took the cookie bag and welcomed Naomi into the kitchen.

She didn't push Chaya forward to repair the doorway.

Chapter 3

Still Cousins

At the table, Naomi stirred her tea longer than it needed.

"You used to like it."

"I know."

"Did I do something?"

Chaya wanted to say yes because a reason outside herself might be easier to explain.

Naomi hadn't hurt her. Chaya simply didn't want that greeting.





"No. I want to see you. I don't want the squeezes and kisses."

"That sounds a bit cold."

Mama put a plate on the table.

"Chaya can choose how she's greeted," she said.

"You can both be glad to see each other without the old greeting."

Chaya's relief was so strong that she nearly cried into her tea.

Chapter 4

An Ordinary Question

For a minute, the conversation didn't move.

Chaya looked at the saved letter beside her place.

"Does the cabinet still get stuck?"





Naomi blinked.

"Worse. They finally took the door off."

"Then why tap it?"

"Habit. One girl tapped the empty space on Monday."

They both laughed.

Chaya could ask an ordinary interested question. She didn't need to compensate for saying no with a hundred compliments or a promise to accept the greeting next time.

Naomi wasn't required to become cheerful immediately either.

They ate the cookies and talked about school.





Chapter 5

The Photograph

Naomi brought out a photograph of the class garden.

The girls stood beside a row of pots, with their teacher wearing a neat dark sheitel beneath her hat.

"This one is mine," Naomi said, pointing to a plant that looked like a tired feather duster.

Chaya leaned closer.

"What is it?"

"Supposedly rosemary."

Naomi shifted the photograph toward her. Their shoulders didn't need to touch for them to see it together.

The afternoon had plenty of ways for them to share something.





The old greeting was only one thing they had stopped doing.

Chapter 6

The Second Doorway

When Naomi stood to leave, she paused by the door.

"A wave?"

"Yes, please."

Naomi waved with a solemn face. Then she made it so elaborate that her hand nearly hit the coat hook.

Chaya laughed.

"Smaller wave."

"Very demanding cousin."

This time it sounded like their usual joke, not a complaint she was expected to fix.





Mama thanked Naomi for coming.

Naomi took her empty bag and said she would bring another garden photograph when the rosemary improved.

Chapter 7

What Mama Didn't Require

Afterward, Chaya helped clear the cups.

"Was I rude?"

"You greeted her, told her what you preferred, and showed interest in her visit," Mama said. "Saying no to a kiss isn't the same as refusing to be kind."

"She didn't like it at first."

"People sometimes need a moment when an old habit changes. Their disappointment doesn't decide what happens to your body."





Mama's words were plain. They weren't instructions to become suspicious of every cousin.

Chaya still liked Naomi. She also liked having her wave accepted.

If anyone ever ignored her no or made her feel unsafe, she knew she should tell Mama or another trusted grownup.

Chapter 8

A New Line

That evening, Chaya wrote back about the missing cabinet door and the garden photograph.

She didn't add an apology for the wave.

At the end she wrote, Come again when your rosemary has leaves worth photographing.





Then she changed worth photographing to leaves we can identify. Naomi would enjoy that more.

The letter was warm. So had the visit been, after its awkward beginning.

Chaya wasn't choosing between affection and a boundary.

She had said what greeting she wanted and stayed for the conversation she wanted too.

Next time, the wave would already be part of their history.

