

The Day Before the Poetry Circle

A rehearsal for the part that might
not go smoothly

For ages 9-12



Chapter 1

The Last Line

Esty had written a poem about a cat who refused to wear boots.

The last line was her favorite: "Four paws are quite enough to dress."

Tomorrow, Morah would hold an optional poetry circle. Each girl who wanted to read would sit in her usual seat while the others listened.

Esty wanted to read. She also wanted to know exactly how it would go.

"What if I lose my place?" she asked Mommy.

"You can look at your page."

"What if I drop the page?"

Mommy looked at the poem. "Then we can think about what you would do."





Chapter 2

Practicing the Wrong Part

Esty read the whole poem aloud three times.

Each time, she held the paper so tightly that its edges bent. Each time, she began again when she stumbled.

Now she was tired of the cat.

Mommy put a hand beside the paper.

"You know the poem. Perhaps we should practice what happens if something is awkward."

"That sounds worse."

"It may help you know what you can do. We aren't trying to promise that nothing awkward will happen."

They chose one likely difficulty: Esty might lose her place after someone coughed.





Chapter 3

An Unfinished Beginning

Mommy sat across the table.

Esty began the poem.

Halfway through, Mommy made a small pretend cough, as they had agreed.

Esty stopped.

Then she said, "One moment," and found the next line.

They tried once more, this time with Esty asking to start the sentence again.

"That felt strange," she said.

"Did the poem end?"

"No."





They practiced setting the page on the table instead of gripping it. Then they put it in her school folder. No more full readings tonight.

Chapter 4

A Different Difficulty

At school, Esty told Morah she wanted a turn.

When her name was called, she placed the poem on her desk.

Nobody coughed.

Instead, her sleeve brushed the paper, and it slid halfway under her spelling book.

Esty felt her face warm. That had not been the difficulty they practiced.

For a moment, she wanted to say she had changed her mind.





Then she remembered the part that mattered: she could pause, ask for a moment, and find what she needed.

"One moment," she said.

She moved the spelling book and straightened the page.

Chapter 5

Boots and Paws

The cat refused its boots. The girls smiled at the last line.

Afterward, Morah thanked Esty for reading. She did not say that everything had been perfect.

At home, Esty told Mommy about the sliding paper.

"So the cough practice was useless?" Mommy asked, smiling.





"No. It was the wrong problem, but the right sort of pause."

Esty still might feel nervous next time. She could prepare for that feeling without rehearsing until bedtime or predicting every possible mishap.

For the next circle, she had an idea about a goose with one mitten.

"One mitten?" Mommy asked.

"It refuses the other one."

