



The Minute Beside the Aquarium

A library wait that does not
have to disappear

For ages 9-12





Chapter 1

The Closed Room

The library's little reading room had an aquarium beside its door.

Inside the aquarium, a striped fish slipped behind a green plant. Another fish hovered above a stone as if it had forgotten where it was going.

Mendy usually liked watching them. Today he wanted the door to open.

His class had come with Rebbi for a librarian's story hour. The previous group was still inside. Through the door came a burst of laughter.

"They got the funny part," Mendy said.

"We will hear our story when it is our turn," Rebbi said.





Mendy stood beside the wall with the other boys. He shifted one shoe, then the other. The story hadn't started, and already this visit felt very long.

Chapter 2

Watching the Wrong Thing

The librarian walked past with a basket of books.

"Soon," she told Rebbi.

Mendy watched her disappear behind a desk. Then he watched the reading-room handle. Then he looked back at the desk.

Leib pointed to the aquarium. "That fish is going backward."

"It isn't," Mendy said without looking.

Leib laughed. "Then how did you see it?"

Mendy looked. The fish was going forward now.





He had missed whatever Leib had noticed. He was so busy waiting for the visit to begin that he was missing the part of the visit happening around him.

Still, the handle did not move.

Chapter 3

One Place to Look

Rebbi came to stand near them.

"Stay here with us," he said. "You don't need to keep checking the desk."

"But I keep thinking about the door."

"You can notice that thought, too. You don't have to chase it."

Mendy faced the aquarium. He chose the striped fish and followed it with his eyes.





It passed the stone. It turned beside the plant. Its tail flicked twice.

The door, Mendy thought.

He almost turned his head.

Then he looked back at the fish. It was all right that the thought had come. He could still choose where to look next.

Chapter 4

Not a Race

Leib leaned toward him. "How many things can you find?"

Mendy started counting: fish, plant, stone, bubbles.

Then he stopped. Counting fast had made him skip the fish again.





"I don't want to win anything," he said. "I'm watching this one."

Leib watched with him.

For a little while they said nothing. Mendy could hear a low hum from the aquarium and a page turning at a nearby table. He felt the floor beneath both shoes.

The waiting was still there. So was a fish with a tail that never seemed to rest.

When Mendy thought about the door again, he noticed the thought and returned to the striped fish. He did not have to scold himself for looking away.

Chapter 5

The Part Before

At last the reading-room door opened.





Rebbi waited until the other group had passed, then led the boys inside.

"Did watching make them finish sooner?" Leib whispered.

"No," Mendy said.

That was the funny thing. He had not made the wait shorter. He had found something inside it.

The librarian opened a book about a goose that wanted a hat.

Mendy settled into his chair. For a moment, he wondered where the striped fish was now.

Then he heard the goose's first ridiculous request and turned his attention to the story.

