

The Tray She Carried Outside

A dull week, an unopened seed packet,
and a small afternoon that didn't
promise to fix everything

For ages 12-15



Chapter 1

Later

The seed packet had been on the kitchen shelf for nine days.

Chaya had wanted it badly in the shop. Tiny purple flowers, suitable for a windowsill box. She had imagined checking them before breakfast and drawing them when they bloomed.

Now Mama asked whether she wanted to fill the tray.

"Later."

"When later?"

"When I feel like it."

Mama, wearing her brown sheitel, left the packet where Chaya could see it.





Chaya wasn't angry with the seeds. She wasn't especially sad about any one thing either.

Lately, everything she usually enjoyed seemed to be waiting behind a door she didn't feel like opening.

Chapter 2

The List That Stayed Small

At Bais Yaakov, Chaya did her work and answered when spoken to.

At home, she let invitations become maybes, left her storybook closed, and spent a long time deciding whether anything would be interesting enough to begin.

She kept telling herself tomorrow would feel different.

Then tomorrow arrived and became another later.





On Tuesday evening, Mama sat down beside her.

"You've seemed unlike yourself for a while. Is something troubling you?"

Chaya thought carefully.

"I can't find a reason. That makes it feel silly."

"You don't need a good explanation before telling me how you're doing."

Chapter 3

Not an Order to Cheer Up

Chaya explained about the closed book and the invitations.

Mama listened. She asked about school, sleep, and the ordinary parts of the day, without turning it into a test Chaya could pass by smiling.





They would pay attention to how long this lasted and get qualified help if it continued, worsened, or got in the way of everyday life. Chaya could tell Mama sooner if she felt distressed or unsafe.

"For tomorrow afternoon," Mama said, "would you like to choose one small thing we can do together?"

"I don't want a plan to be happy."

"Then let's not make that the plan."

The seed packet was still on the shelf.

Chapter 4

Just the Tray

They agreed to put the tray and potting soil on the sheltered back step after school.

Not plant a perfect garden. Not promise that Chaya would enjoy every minute.





Just carry the things out and decide what to do next.

Mama checked that the weather and the sheltered step suited the job. She would stay with Chaya.

When Wednesday afternoon came, Chaya didn't suddenly want to begin.

"We can still bring out the tray," she said.

It was light enough to carry in one hand. Mama carried the soil.

The unopened packet followed in Chaya's pocket.

Chapter 5

A Crooked Row

The soil made a dry whisper when Mama poured it.

Chaya spread it with the little wooden spoon they used for planting.





"The packet says they need space," she said.

"How much?"

They read the ordinary instructions together and made a shallow row.

It was crooked. Chaya noticed, shrugged, and put the seeds in.

She wasn't having the most exciting afternoon of her life. She was doing something she had wanted to do before the week became so flat.

For a few minutes, the seed spacing took her attention away from wondering whether she felt interested enough.

That was a difference she could notice without calling it a cure.





Chapter 6

The Second Choice

After they cleaned up, Mama asked whether Chaya wanted to stop there.

"Could we label it? Otherwise everyone will think it's a tray of dirt."

"It is currently a tray of dirt."

Chaya smiled.

They wrote purple flowers on a small marker and put it in the corner.

The label didn't make the flowers arrive. It told the family what was growing.

Chaya put the tray where Mama had checked it would get suitable light.





She didn't add six more activities to prove the afternoon had worked. One small thing had been enough for the plan they made.

Chapter 7

Thursday Was Still Thursday

The next day felt dull again.

Chaya looked at the tray before breakfast. Nothing green was showing.

She had known seeds didn't appear overnight. She was less patient with herself.

Mama asked how she was doing, and Chaya answered honestly.

"Yesterday didn't make everything different."

"That wasn't the promise. We still need to pay attention to how you feel."





They kept the conversation open. Chaya didn't hide the dullness to protect Mama's idea.

After homework, she chose to read two pages with Mama nearby. She stopped after two. A book could be opened without signing a contract to enjoy the whole evening.

Chapter 8

A Green Line

Several days later, the first tiny green points appeared.

Chaya called her little sister to look.

"Which one is the purple flower?" her sister asked.

"They all are. They haven't put on their best clothes yet."





They leaned over the tray, careful not to touch the new shoots.

Chaya still had days when ordinary things felt harder to begin. Mama was helping her decide what support she needed; a tray of flowers wasn't being asked to take that grownup job.

But the tray had given her something small to do beside a person who listened, before she felt ready for a large cheerful afternoon.

She could notice a little interest when it arrived. She could ask for help when it didn't.

The marker still said purple flowers.

Below it, the green line was real, and small, and enough to look at that morning.

