



Not a Gift After All



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18





Chapter 1: A Week Is a Small Word

Elishama writes the amount on a scrap of paper.

His friend watches him fold it.

"You don't trust me?"

"I don't trust my memory of numbers."

That is true. It is also not the whole reason.

Elishama is eighteen. He saves part of what he earns helping at an approved bookshop job. The money in his drawer has a purpose: a course he and Tatty are still checking before any payment. It is not spare just because it sits quietly.

His friend needs supplies for a personal bookbinding project. He says money he expects next week will cover the amount. Elishama agrees to a small loan within the family arrangements he discusses with Tatty. They name the amount and repayment date. This is an agreement between these fictional boys, not advice to lend money or a statement about what any legal rule requires.

The friend takes his own copy of the note.

"Next Thursday," he says.





"Yes."

A week seems easy to wait. Elishama likes being the person who makes another boy's afternoon possible.

He puts the remaining savings away.





Chapter 2: Nothing Urgent

Thursday arrives without repayment.

The friend comes to the study room with his repaired volume. It has a handsome dark cover and a corner that lies slightly higher than the rest.

Elishama admires the cover before asking about the money.

"The payment I expected is delayed," the friend says. "I don't have yours yet."

Elishama's first feeling is disappointment. His second is embarrassment that money can interfere with looking at a good cover.

"It's fine. Nothing urgent."

"Thanks. I knew you'd understand."

He does understand a delay. He does not understand how long it will be. His answer lets the conversation skip that part.

Later, Tatty asks whether the loan has come back.

"Not yet."

"Is there a new date?"





"No. I said it was fine."

Tatty puts his book down.

"Does that mean you agree to a later date, or you no longer expect repayment?"

"Neither. I just didn't want to sound like the kind of person who counts every coin."

"You are counting money saved for a purpose. That doesn't tell us your whole character."

Elishama looks at the drawer. He wants the loan to be both generous and invisible.

It is currently neither invisible nor clear.





Chapter 3: The Word at the Table

On Sunday, the boys meet two friends at the community study room, with the usual adult supervision nearby.

The bookbinding project comes up. Elishama's friend brings out the volume.

"Elishama made it possible," he says. "He helped me with the supplies."

Elishama warms at the public thank-you. He does not immediately clarify the loan.

Then the friend adds, "A gift at exactly the right time."

The word stops him.

He can correct it in front of everybody. He can smile. He can say nothing and later be furious that the audience does not know what he never tells them.

"Can we speak afterward?" he asks quietly.

His friend nods, a little puzzled.





Elishama does not make the table decide whether he is kind enough to forgive the money. He also does not agree to the word gift by enjoying the first sentence.

After the session, they stand near the open office where an adult can help if needed.

"I meant a loan," Elishama says. "I still mean one."

His friend looks at him.

"You said it was fine."

"I meant a delay was fine. I didn't say that clearly."

"You said nothing urgent."

"That didn't mean I was giving it away. I should have asked for a new date instead of trying to sound easy about it."





Chapter 4: The Price of Being Easy

His friend closes the book.

"I don't have it."

"I'm not asking you to pull it out of the cover. I'm asking what we can agree on now."

"I can't name a date until the payment comes."

Elishama dislikes that. He wants the same Thursday back, with the money and no conversation.

"Then why did you call it a gift?"

The friend looks away.

"Because I thought you were letting it go."

There is a pause.

"Maybe I wanted to think that," he adds.

Elishama wants to use the admission as proof that all the fault belongs on the other side. But he also remembers Nothing urgent and the warmth of the thank-you.





"I want it back," he says. "I don't want to chase you every time we meet."

"So we're going to stop being friends over this?"

"I don't want that. I also don't want friendship to mean the repayment disappears."

The friend suggests paying a small part immediately and the rest when his expected money arrives. Elishama does not agree just to end the uncomfortable moment. He wants to discuss the uncertainty with Tatty and come back with a plan they both understand.

They choose a time for that conversation. It is a time to decide the next step, not another invisible repayment promise.





Chapter 5: A Badly Wrapped Revenge

At home, Elishama decides he will stop admiring the book.

It is a childish decision with impressive staying power. He looks at the crooked corner and thinks it deserves more attention than the attractive cover.

At the next study session, he could tell the other boys the corner is badly made. He could call the friend a person who owes money and watch the public thank-you change shape.

Tatty asks why he is staring at a blank sheet.

Elishama admits what he wants to say.

"Is the problem the corner?" Tatty asks.

"No."

"Then don't ask the corner to settle it."

Elishama laughs once, unwillingly.

They look at the original note and what changed afterward. Tatty does not tell him to forgive the money because lending it is kind. He does not tell him to collect it aggressively to show strength.





He helps separate the amount, the missed date, the unclear reassurance, and the next conversation. They consider Elishama's actual savings needs and what is still unknown. No one uses the course's possible cost as a threat against the other boy.

"You can ask me to sit with you," Tatty says. "A calm conversation isn't something you have to earn by never needing help."

Elishama asks.





Chapter 6: A New Agreement Has Limits

The friend agrees to speak with the trusted adults' support. He can bring his own adult if he wants. The conversation stays private and factual.

Elishama reads the original note. Then he names the sentence he regrets.

"I said it was fine without saying what fine meant. I didn't intend to cancel the loan."

His friend acknowledges the amount and that it is still owed under their agreement. He explains what he can pay now and what remains uncertain. They do not inspect his family finances or demand access to accounts.

With adult help, the boys agree on a realistic next arrangement. It includes the part repaid now, the balance, a specific check-in date, and what to do if the expected money still does not arrive. No one invents certainty about a payment outside the friend's control.

Elishama is not thrilled with the schedule.

It is more useful than Nothing urgent.





The friend asks whether Elishama will still help choose a title label for the book.

Elishama wants to attach repayment to that question too.

"I can look at it Sunday after the session," he says. "That isn't a new loan."

"I know."

It is an awkward clarification. For now, awkward is better than another invisible arrangement.





Chapter 7: Not Every Visit Is an Account

On Sunday, they look at the title label for ten minutes after the supervised session.

The first design is too wide. The second makes the title look like three unrelated words. Elishama suggests a small change. His friend tries it.

The book looks better.

Elishama feels pleased, then annoyed that he feels pleased while money remains owing.

The new check-in date is not today. The adult-supported plan is in place. He does not need to turn every opinion about the book into either a collection attempt or a certificate of forgiveness.

"The cover works," he says.

"Except this corner."

"Yes. Except that corner."

They laugh about it without pretending it means nothing.

On the agreed date, the expected payment has still not arrived. The friend tells Elishama before Elishama asks. They follow the check-in





arrangement and involve the adults as agreed. Elishama is disappointed. Giving the news promptly does not make the money reappear.

It does stop him spending the entire afternoon wondering whether the friend will avoid him.





Chapter 8: What the Drawer Holds

Over the following weeks, the agreed payments begin to arrive. A balance remains at the end of this story. The boys and their supporting adults keep the actual arrangement clear.

Elishama puts each returned amount into his savings and updates their shared record. He does not call a partial repayment full because he wants a neat ending.

Tatty asks whether he would lend again in the same situation.

"I don't know. I would ask better questions. I might say no."

"You can."

Elishama also knows he could choose a real gift within an approved plan someday. If he does, he wants to call it a gift before handing it over, not after he becomes ashamed to ask for a loan back.

At the study room, his friend opens the bound volume.

"This label looks right now."

"It does."





The account remains unfinished. The book can be useful anyway.
Their friendship is being worked on through a series of ordinary meetings, not decided by one public sentence.

At home, Elishama closes the savings drawer.

He keeps the record where he can find it. He does not carry it to the supper table to remind everyone who he is.

For tonight, the amount has a number, the next check has a date, and the book has a title.

