



The Answer in the Passenger Seat



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18





Chapter 1: The Quiet Return

The examiner has a voice so ordinary that Nachliel almost misses the sentence.

"You haven't passed today."

He sits still. The car is parked, the test is over, and the keys are no longer his responsibility. Through the window, he can see Tatty beside the building, hands in his coat pockets.

The examiner explains the recorded result. At one junction, Nachliel begins to move when he should not. The examiner intervenes.

Nachliel knows the moment she means.

He also knows what happens during the rest of the test. He follows directions, makes the turns, and does not lose the route. He wants those parts to add up to a different sentence.

They do not.

At eighteen, he has no shortage of things people expect him to begin doing. This is supposed to be one he can finish in an afternoon.

Tatty asks the question when Nachliel comes outside.

"How did it go?"





"Not today."

Tatty nods once.

"Do you have the result information?"

Nachliel gives it to him. He does not offer the rest.

They walk to their car. Tatty drives. Nachliel sits in the passenger seat, which feels like a comment nobody makes.





Chapter 2: The Better Explanation

His uncle arrives that evening to return a borrowed book.

"Driver in the house yet?"

Nachliel looks at Tatty. Tatty looks back without answering for him.

"I didn't pass."

"What happened?"

"The examiner intervened at a junction."

The uncle puts the book on the counter.

"Some of them are very quick to do that. Did she explain?"

"Yes."

"Sometimes one person makes a nervous learner more nervous."

Nachliel likes that sentence immediately. It is an explanation in which his uncle is loyal, the examiner is difficult, and he is unfortunate rather than unsafe.

"I did everything else properly," he says.

He means he does not remember another mistake. That is less impressive than everything.





His uncle asks whether there is a way to request a review. Tatty says they can read the actual process before deciding anything.

"If it isn't fair, you shouldn't just accept it," the uncle says.

Nachliel agrees with that. It sounds like standing up for himself. It sounds much better than another lesson spent on the place where the examiner uses the extra controls.

He does not mention that his instructor warns him about the same kind of rushed decision during practice.





Chapter 3: The Sentence That Does Not Fit

The next afternoon, the uncle brings a draft note.

It is not addressed or sent. He wants Nachliel to read it first.

The note says the intervention appears excessive and that the applicant shows sound judgment throughout the test. It asks for the result to be reviewed.

Nachliel reads sound judgment three times.

He can see the junction more clearly than he wants to. He is watching for an instruction, a gap, and the examiner's expression all at once. He feels a sharp pressure to get moving before somebody behind him gets annoyed.

Then she intervenes.

His uncle points to the paragraph.

"Is that accurate?"

Nachliel wants to say yes before accuracy becomes inconvenient.

"I don't know about throughout."

"Then change it."





He crosses out the word. Sound judgment during the test is still there. The sentence has merely lost its most obvious problem.

"What exactly is being complained about?" Tatty asks.

"The intervention," the uncle says.

Tatty turns to Nachliel.

"Do you think it was unnecessary?"

Nachliel looks at the paper.

"I think I could have stopped."

"Before the unsafe movement?"

He cannot answer that by wishing harder.





Chapter 4: A Lesson He Does Not Want

Nachliel meets his instructor with Tatty present. They review the result information and what the instructor observes during the earlier supervised lessons. No one asks Nachliel to recreate the junction alone or prove anything on a public road.

"I'm not here to decide whether you are generally sensible," the instructor says. "I'm here to work on a driving decision you aren't making reliably yet."

Nachliel dislikes the yet. It is a small word with room for an inconvenient number of afternoons.

He shows the complaint draft.

The instructor reads it.

"If you have a factual concern about the test, use the actual review process with accurate details. But this paragraph isn't what you're telling me happened."

"My uncle says she may have made me nervous."

"You may have felt nervous. It doesn't tell us that the intervention was wrong."

Nachliel looks away.





"I don't want everyone thinking I'm careless."

"That is something to talk about. It isn't something a complaint can settle by changing the junction."

The instructor proposes more supervised work on the decisions at issue. He explains that a retest will wait until they can make an appropriate plan based on readiness and the actual rules. He does not supply a guaranteed pass date.

Tatty asks Nachliel whether he wants to say anything else.

For a moment, he has the very childish wish that Tatty will tell the instructor he is clever and make that count.

"I want to know exactly what we're working on," he says instead.

The instructor gives him that answer.





Chapter 5: The Person He Disappoints

The uncle expects a revised paragraph.

Nachliel brings back the whole page.

"I don't want to send this."

The uncle lifts his eyebrows.

"Because your father says so?"

"Because I can't honestly say the intervention was unnecessary."

"You said the rest went well."

"Most of it may have. That doesn't answer this part."

His uncle puts the paper down.

"I was trying to help you not be pushed around."

"I know."

Nachliel does know. He also knows how much he enjoys having somebody ready to fight on his behalf. It makes the failure seem less like an event that belongs to him.

"I liked the explanation," he says. "I left out what the instructor told me before."





He explains the earlier difficulty without turning every practice into a confession.

His uncle listens.

"You could have told me."

"Yes. I should have."

There is a pause that no one fills with an encouraging story about a famous person failing a test.

"Keep the result paper," his uncle says finally. "Don't keep my draft if it's wrong."

Nachliel folds the result information into his folder. The uncle takes the draft away to discard.

Nothing gets sent.





Chapter 6: No Heroic Next Appointment

On Sunday, Nachliel's cousin asks when the next test is.

"It isn't booked."

"Why not? Get it over with."

Nachliel imagines the beautiful moment when he can answer a question about driving without explaining a delay. He could take another test quickly. A new appointment would give everyone something to stop asking about.

It would not change the issue the instructor identifies.

"I'm doing more lessons first."

"How many?"

"I don't know yet."

The cousin looks disappointed in the amount of news available.

Nachliel wants to invent a number. Not a large lie. A likely number.

A number that makes him sound as if he controls the plan.

"We'll decide with the instructor," he adds.





The cousin asks about a book on the shelf. The conversation moves on without a ceremonial declaration that delays are admirable.

Later, Nachliel tells Tatty he hates not having a date.

"I can understand that," Tatty says.

"You don't seem worried."

"I want you to learn safely. I don't need a deadline invented because supper guests ask questions."

Nachliel almost says Tatty does not understand being eighteen. Perhaps Tatty does not understand every part. He understands enough of this one to keep it out of the guests' hands.





Chapter 7: A Different Kind of Evidence

During the next supervised lessons, the instructor chooses what they practice and where. Nachliel follows the lawful learner arrangements and the instructor's directions. This story does not give a reader a set of driving instructions to try.

At the end, they discuss what improves and what still needs work.

One afternoon goes better. Nachliel wants to call it proof that the test was unfair.

Then he realizes he is using the new lesson to erase the old junction.

The improvement happens after more instruction. It can be improvement without being an acquittal.

"Can we write down what changes?" he asks.

The instructor makes a brief practice record with him. It does not contain a statement about his worth. It names the skill under supervision, the instructor's observations, and the next planned lesson.

Tatty reads the summary when they meet afterward.

"Is that a good afternoon?"

"Better in this part," Nachliel says, pointing.





He feels fussy for qualifying it. He also feels less trapped by his own answer. If next time is harder, better in this part can remain true about today.

At home, the summary goes into the folder beside the test result.

He does not tear out either page.





Chapter 8: Still on That Side

Weeks later, Nachliel is still not announcing a pass.

There is progress. There are more supervised decisions to make reliably. The instructor and Tatty handle the next arrangements with him using the actual requirements, not this story's calendar.

His uncle comes for supper.

"How are the lessons?"

Nachliel tells him about the practice record. He mentions one improvement and one part still being worked on.

The uncle nods.

"Better information than my letter."

"It is."

They do not need to argue about which one wants to help him more.

After supper, Tatty asks if Nachliel wants to come along on a short errand. Tatty will drive. Nachliel goes because he wants the company, not because the journey is another lesson.

He sits in the passenger seat.





The place is the same. It does not tell the whole story of the last few weeks. It does not tell him when he will pass. It cannot make a complaint true or a supervised skill reliable.

Tatty asks whether he likes the book his uncle returned.

Nachliel gives an answer without checking whether it makes him sound capable.

At the next corner, he notices the white road marking and then looks back at Tatty.

"The ending is weaker than the beginning," he says. "I want to see what you think."

They talk about the book while Tatty drives.

