



The Hunger in the Script



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18





Chapter 1: An Empty Bowl

The bowl is perfectly clean.

Zehava turns it over. A blue flower circles its base, and somebody's initials are scratched into the glaze.

"Hold it with both hands," her friend says. "Not like you're checking whether it belongs to your aunt."

"It might."

"You're hungry."

"Not at the moment."

The friend taps the script.

"In the scene."

At seventeen, Zehava usually gets the school play's brisk older sister, the practical neighbor, or the girl who walks into a room and notices the missing envelope. This time, her role is a child waiting for supper that never arrives.

The scene is for a girls-only school fundraising afternoon supporting a local food program. Their teacher arranges the event





with the adults responsible. The girls can help, but the actual appeal, money, and program information need adult approval.

Zehava reads the opening.

The hungry girl looks into the bowl. Her mother looks away. The little brother asks whether supper is a dream.

"That's a strange thing for him to ask," Zehava says.

"It's moving."

"He could ask whether there's bread."

"Bread isn't poetic."

Zehava looks into the empty bowl.

At her house, the bread sits in the second cupboard because the first cupboard smells of the onions Mama stores beneath it. On delivery weeks, Mama puts the extra loaves in the freezer. The program does not give her family a tragic kitchen. It gives them groceries.

Her friend lifts the script.

"Let's try it again. This time, look as if you have no hope."





Chapter 2: The Kitchen Nobody Sees

At home, Mama is packing a bag for Zehava's younger sister.

There is a loaf on the counter and a stubborn zipper on the schoolbag.

Zehava watches her free a piece of lining from the teeth.

"Do people know?"

Mama looks up.

"About the bag? Anyone in the next room can hear me arguing with it."

"About the groceries."

Mama puts the bag down.

"The people who need the information for the program know. We don't have to make it everybody's business. Why?"

Zehava describes the scene.

She does not say her friend is cruel. Her friend thinks the program is worth supporting and spends two afternoons writing something she hopes will help.





That makes the bowl worse, somehow. If the writer is mean, Zehava can just dislike her. Now she has to dislike what a friend makes from kindness.

"You can say the scene doesn't seem right without telling anybody about us," Mama says.

"Then how do I explain that I know?"

"You don't need a family story to ask where the details come from."

Zehava folds the edge of her sleeve.

"What if they only give because they're upset?"

Mama considers the question rather than answering it with a pretty sentence.

"The adults can decide how to explain the need truthfully. We don't have to make your classmates' draft the only way anybody can care."

She picks up the bag again. The zipper now closes.

Nothing in the kitchen looks like the scene. Mama can be tired, worried, funny, and particular about where the bread goes. None of those things cancels the help they receive.





Chapter 3: A Question That Sounds Personal

The next day, Zehava asks her friend where the scene's details come from.

"Which details?"

"The mother looking away. No supper. The boy asking about dreams."

"It's fictional."

"But we're using it to explain a real program."

Her friend stacks the pages.

"We're not saying it's an actual family. The teacher knows that."

"I know. I'm asking whether it's an accurate picture of the help."

The friend looks toward the classroom door. Another girl is outside rehearsing her introduction.

"Do you want it to be a cheerful comedy?"

"No."

"Then people need to feel the problem."





Zehava hears the sentence as an instruction to bring her kitchen into the room and prove the problem exists. She could say, We get those deliveries. She could watch everything in her friend's face change.

She does not want that conversation. It is not necessary to her question.

"I don't think we know enough to write what the mother feels," she says.

Her friend pauses.

"You've played fictional people before."

"Not to explain what real families need from the people watching."

The bowl sits between their schoolbags.

For once, it is useful for neither of them to hold it.





Chapter 4: Not a Secret Test

Zehava asks for a short private conversation with the teacher.

The teacher reads the scene without interrupting.

"What change do you suggest?"

Zehava does not have a complete alternative. She dislikes having a complaint with no finished solution, as if that makes the complaint a hobby.

"I think we should check what the program actually wants said. Maybe there are facts we can use without inventing a family's worst evening."

"I can ask the coordinator about approved information."

The teacher puts a mark beside the bowl direction.

"You don't have to tell me why you notice this. If there's something personal you want help with, you can speak privately. The draft can be reviewed on its own."

Zehava breathes out.





She does not turn the offer into disclosure. She thanks the teacher and asks whether the scene will be held while the information is checked.

"Yes. I'll speak to the writers. You shouldn't have to negotiate every line alone."

That is a relief. It is also uncomfortable. Her friend will know somebody objects, and she will probably know who.

The teacher does not promise otherwise.





Chapter 5: The Disappointing Facts

The program coordinator sends the teacher approved descriptions of the work. The teacher shares only the material meant for the event, not family records or donor information.

It explains regular grocery support, discreet arrangements, and the way adults can contribute through the program. No recipient story is available for the students to use. The coordinator does not invite them to find one.

At the planning table, the teacher says the invented kitchen scene will not be used.

Zehava's friend stares at the blue-flowered bowl.

"Then what's the opening?"

"That's what we need to work on," the teacher says. "The facts are not a speech yet. They do give us its boundaries."

They try a page that reads like a notice outside an office.
Everybody dislikes it.

Zehava dislikes it too. Removing something unfair does not automatically produce something worth hearing.





One girl suggests following a grocery list through the program: the ordinary items people need, the work done by adults, the reasons predictable support matters. No list comes from a real household. The coordinator can approve a clearly labeled illustrative one.

"It could be boring," the friend says.

"It could," Zehava agrees.

The agreement surprises them both.

They start with the unremarkable fact that food is needed again after last week's food is eaten. They can explain a continuing need without manufacturing an abandoned child.

The teacher takes the final draft for approval. It is shorter than the first scene.

The bowl goes back to the supply shelf.





Chapter 6: A Friendship With an Unused Scene

After school, the friend waits by Zehava's desk.

"You could have trusted me to change it."

"I asked about it."

"You asked where the details come from. You didn't say the whole thing should go."

Zehava thinks about that. She does not need to argue that every sentence she uses is the best possible sentence.

"You're right. I should have said more clearly that I didn't want to perform it. I was trying to make the question do all the work."

Her friend puts on her coat.

"I spent ages on that script."

"I know."

"It wasn't supposed to insult anyone."

"I don't think you want to insult anyone."





Zehava almost adds that her friend ought to be grateful for the correction. That would be a convenient reversal: now the girl who writes a hungry child could play the gracious learner.

She leaves the line out.

"I still don't agree it has to go," the friend says.

"I know. The adults decide what the program can use."

They walk to the door together, not quite at the same pace.

The question about supper remains unasked between them.

Zehava does not owe her family as an answer.





Chapter 7: A Real Audience

On the afternoon, Zehava takes the smaller speaking part.

There is no empty bowl on the stage. A simple printed list illustrates ordinary groceries. The teacher explains that it is illustrative, not a recipient family's private list.

Zehava says her lines. She does not make her voice break on the word bread.

Afterward, an older visitor asks whether the girls can introduce her to a family so she can deliver something herself.

The teacher handles the question.

"Please speak with the coordinator about giving through the program. We won't identify recipients."

Zehava helps collect the reusable place cards. The adults manage the contributions and records. No one asks the students to guess whether the appeal raises more than the discarded scene would have raised.

Her friend comes to the table.

"The opening wasn't as dull as the office version."





"That's a very high compliment."

"Don't get used to it."

Zehava smiles.

They put the cards into the right boxes. It is a job they both know how to do.





Chapter 8: The Bread Goes Away

At home, a delivery waits in the kitchen.

Mama follows the arrangement with the program adults. Zehava helps put away the ordinary groceries once Mama asks her to.

There are potatoes, oil, and loaves for the freezer. Her sister wants to know whether the bananas are ready to eat. Nobody looks away when she asks.

"How was the afternoon?" Mama says.

"The speech worked. My friend is still annoyed about the scene."

"Both can happen."

Zehava puts the bread in its cupboard.

"I keep thinking maybe I should tell her. Then she'd understand."

"You can decide what to share with a friend. Not because you owe proof of your objection."

Zehava leaves the decision there for tonight.

She does not feel triumphant about the groceries. She does not suddenly love needing help. She likes knowing that the kitchen in her friend's imagination is not the one people are asked to fund.





On Monday, her friend asks for help with an entirely different scene. A mystery for the end-of-term girls' performance.

"Can you be the neighbor?"

"Does she get an envelope?"

"Two. And she loses both."

Zehava reads the first page.

The neighbor is fictional. Her problem is invented. Nobody is using it as evidence about families the audience never meets.

"I can work with that," she says.

