



The Miss on the Other Board



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18





Chapter 1: The Wrong Square

Yishai sees the wrong square before the instructor does.

It is on the board beside his own, where his classmate is arranging flat pieces to match a printed pattern. The classmate finishes these puzzles quickly. Today he puts a striped piece where a dotted one belongs.

Yishai feels pleased.

He does not mean to. The little pleasure arrives before he decides what to do with it.

The instructor notices and asks the classmate to compare the two squares again.

"I missed that," the boy says.

He switches them and continues.

Yishai, seventeen, looks at his own pattern. He has three pieces left and no place for the long one. He has been stuck there for eight minutes.

For a moment, being stuck feels less uncomfortable. The other board has a mistake on it too.

Then he checks again.

The classmate's mistake is gone. Yishai's long piece still does not fit.

He watches the other board instead of turning his own piece.





Chapter 2: The Story He Nearly Tells

At the end of the supervised puzzle session, the boys return the pieces to their trays.

The instructor checks the trays before putting them away. The puzzles are for practice. There are no prizes and no public ranking.

Yishai's classmate completes his pattern. Yishai leaves his unfinished, as the instructor allows when the session ends. His pattern card will stay with his tray for next time.

In the hall, another boy asks how the session goes.

Yishai almost begins with the striped square.

It would be an entertaining little report. He could say the fast boy finally got something wrong. Nobody would need to know how long Yishai watched the other board afterward.

Instead, he says, "I have three pieces left."

"Hard pattern?"

"For me, yes."

The boy describes his own puzzle and goes to the next classroom. Yishai walks on. He is glad he does not turn an ordinary corrected error into news.

He still wants to think about it.





Chapter 3: A List That Isn't Practice

At home, Yishai makes a small mark beside the classmate's name in his notebook.

He does not have a formal record of everyone's puzzles. The notebook is supposed to hold his own practice notes. He adds a heading now: Misses.

There is one mark.

He remembers a different session when the same boy asked for help. Does that count as another miss?

It is not an error he can describe. He gives it a mark anyway.

Two looks better than one.





Tatty asks what he is writing.

"Puzzle notes."

"What will you try next time?"

Yishai looks at the two marks.

He cannot use them to answer the question.

"I don't know yet."

Tatty sits nearby while Yishai tells him about the striped square and his own long piece. He leaves out the pleasure at first. It feels harder to name than the unfinished puzzle.

Then he says, "I liked him getting it wrong."

Tatty listens without asking him to take the notebook to the classmate.





Chapter 4: What the Pleasure Does

"Do you want to make his next puzzle harder?" Tatty asks.

"No."

"Do you plan to interfere with his work?"

"No. I just want him not to be good at all of it."

Yishai points to the marks.

"I know that sounds awful."

"You can dislike a feeling without making it your next job. What are these marks helping you do?"

Yishai thinks of the time he spends checking the other board while his own pieces stay still.

"Notice when he isn't perfect."





"Was perfect the claim he made?"

"No. He said he missed the square."

The boy already admits the error. Yishai is keeping a special record to prove something nobody contests.

"It made my puzzle feel less bad," he says.

"For how long?"

"Until he fixed his."

Tatty does not promise that Yishai will become faster or stop comparing. He asks whether there is a practice note about Yishai's actual board that would be useful.

Yishai looks at the page beneath the two marks.

There is room for one.





Chapter 5: An Honest Next Step

Yishai writes: Check the long piece before filling the small spaces. He is not sure that is the correct next step. It is what he wants to ask the instructor about.

Tatty suggests adding the question mark rather than recording a guess as an instruction.

Yishai does.

Then he looks at the classmate's name.

"Should I tell him what I felt?"

"What would you be asking him to do with it?"

Yishai considers saying he only wants to be honest. But the other boy would need to hear that somebody is quietly pleased by his mistakes and possibly reassure him afterward.





"Nothing. Maybe tell me he doesn't mind."

"Has he been affected by something you did that needs correcting with him?"

Yishai has not told the hall boy. He has not moved a piece or mocked an error. He has been watching and making private marks instead of working.

"Not that I know."

He crosses out the Misses heading and the two marks. He can still see them beneath the line. He does not need a fresh notebook to make the earlier choice vanish. On the next page, he leaves space for the instructor's answer rather than copying his tentative idea several times. That answer will concern his pieces, not whether the other boy deserves his reputation. Below his own question, he writes the pattern number so he can find the unfinished work at the next session.





Chapter 6: A Choice During the Next Miss

The instructor brings out the trays.

Yishai asks about the long piece before beginning. The instructor shows him that two spaces he has already filled divide the remaining area in a way the long piece cannot fit.

"Try checking those before deciding where the long piece goes."

Yishai removes two pieces and sets them beside his tray.

At the next board, the classmate asks whether he may check the back of his pattern card. There is another condition to the puzzle, and he forgets it.

Yishai hears the instructor's answer.

The little pleasure returns.

He wants to look up and see the error properly. It might deserve a new mark, even though he has crossed out the heading.

He keeps his eyes on the space his removed pieces leave.

"This corner?" he asks the instructor.

The instructor checks the actual board with him.

Yishai tries one arrangement. It does not fit. He moves the piece back without using the other boy's question as evidence that his own attempt is good.





Chapter 7: Still Behind

The classmate finishes before him again.

Yishai does not suddenly find that they are equally quick. The other boy begins a new pattern while Yishai is still working on the three pieces.

He dislikes that.

He also fits the long piece into a space that makes sense at last.

One small square remains wrong. The instructor asks him to compare it with the card.

Yishai almost glances sideways, as if his classmate's attention could decide whether this error is bearable.





Then he moves the square.

When the instructor checks the finished board, Yishai feels real pleasure in it. It is quieter than the pleasure of catching the striped piece. It lasts long enough for him to write a useful note before packing up.

Two early pieces blocked the long one. Check the remaining shape.

The note describes this pattern, not every puzzle he may ever meet.

His classmate returns his tray.

"Finished?"

"Yes. I had to take two pieces out."

"That happens."

Yishai puts his own pieces away.





Chapter 8: A Different Record

At home, he shows Tatty the practice note.

"He still finishes first," Yishai says.

"And your pattern?"

"Finished. I know where I got stuck now."

He does not tell Tatty that the comparison disappears. It comes back when he pictures the new pattern his classmate began.

There is no mark for that in his notebook.

At the next session, Yishai chooses a pattern the instructor says is a suitable next step. He does not choose the hardest one just to defeat the other board. He does not choose a finished easy one just to collect a quick success.

His classmate works beside him. Yishai hears pieces shifting but cannot tell whether they are mistakes or checks.

He leaves them unrecorded.

On his own page, he writes the new pattern number and draws the empty shape he needs to examine first.

