



The Visit She Doesn't Host



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18





Chapter 1: The Wrong Invitation

"Is your sister free on Sunday?" her friend asks.

Amital starts to answer with the time she is free.

Then she hears the question again.

"My sister?"

"We wanted to finish talking about the book."

Amital is eighteen. Her friend is eighteen too. They have known each other since the first school year when both could read the names on their coat hooks. Amital's younger sister is sixteen.

Until recently, the younger girl was the person who sometimes joined their visits for ten minutes. She brought a question, borrowed a pencil, or listened while they talked.

Last Sunday, she had a whole question about the ending of a book the friend had also read. Amital had not read it. While she cleared the cups, the two girls compared the last chapter with the first.

Now there is a second Sunday being discussed.

"I could be home after three," Amital says.

"We were thinking two, if the families agree."

"I'm out until three."

Her friend pauses.

"I know. That's why I'm asking your sister."





Chapter 2: A Familiar House

At home, Amital finds her sister reading at the table.

"You and my friend are making plans?"

Her sister looks up.

"We talked about asking for Sunday. Nothing's settled yet."

"Why didn't you ask me?"

"What did you need to decide?"

Amital looks around the room. It is their shared family dining room.

She cannot point to a chair or a doorway that belongs to her particular friendship.

"It's usually my visit."

"This one isn't."

The words are plain. They hurt anyway.

Mama comes in with the household calendar. She has not agreed to anything yet. The girls explain the requested time. Mama can be home, and the room is available. She will check the arrangement with the friend's family.

"I'm not here until three," Amital repeats.

"You have your own afternoon arranged," Mama says.

"So you'll let them visit without me?"

Mama puts the calendar down.





"What concern do you want me to check?"

Amital has no concern about supervision, time, or the room. She wants Mama to find one that sounds better than her own answer.

"It feels strange," she says.

Mama does not cross out Sunday because it feels strange.





Chapter 3: The Book She Hasn't Read

Amital takes the book from the family shelf that evening.

Her sister has permission to lend it to her. Amital opens to the beginning.

If she reads it quickly, she can be part of the next conversation. That is not a foolish reason to read. The book may interest her too. After six pages, she discovers she is not reading for the story. She is collecting opinions that will sound useful at the table.

She marks a passage about a window. Her friend likes noticing details. Perhaps Amital can point out that the window appears again later.

She does not know whether it does. She turns to the ending to check, then realizes she has skipped the whole middle.

Her sister passes the doorway.

"Do you like it?"

"I'm not far enough in."

"The middle is the best part."

Amital wants to say she can work that out herself. Her sister has offered a reading opinion, not taken away her ability to read.

"I'll keep going another time," Amital says.





She closes the book with her place marked honestly at page six.
She does not need to turn Sunday into a discussion she has
prepared to enter.





Chapter 4: Her Own Thursday

At school, Amital's friend asks whether their usual Thursday walk is still arranged.

The families have already agreed to it. They meet after their classes and return at the checked time.

"Unless you're seeing my sister instead," Amital says.

Her friend goes quiet.

"Thursday is with you."

"You seem to have plenty to talk about with her."

"I do."

Amital expects a quick addition: not as much as with you. It does not come.

"We've been friends for years," Amital says.

"I haven't forgotten."

The friend puts her folder on the desk.

"Do you want to change Thursday?"

"No."

"Then I want to keep it. I also want the visit with your sister."

Amital feels the two plans set beside each other without a winner.

"I didn't mean you had to choose."





"It sounded like you wanted me to say one counted less."

Amital looks down at the desk.

"I don't know what I wanted you to say. Something that made it feel like before."

"It isn't exactly before."

Neither girl tries to settle the whole friendship before the lesson begins.





Chapter 5: The Person in the Middle

On Thursday, they take their usual walk.

For the first few minutes, Amital listens for mentions of her sister. None comes. Then she feels embarrassed that she is keeping count of words that are not being said.

Her friend describes a difficult class assignment. Amital asks a question. They disagree about whether one paragraph belongs at the beginning or the end.

It is an ordinary conversation. Amital has missed having it while she watches for evidence about Sunday.

At the corner, her friend asks whether the family arrangement is confirmed.

"Mama said yes. Your mother confirmed two until three-thirty."

"Good. I'll ask your sister which part she wants to discuss."

"You can tell me, and I'll tell her."

"I can ask her when we see each other at the community class tomorrow."

Amital stops walking for a moment.

She has been picturing herself carrying each question between the girls. If every conversation passes through her, she is still part of every conversation.





"You don't need me to pass it along," she says.

"No. But thank you."

They start walking again.

Amital tells the friend she does want to keep their own agreed time.

She does not ask for a promise that no future Sunday will ever change it.





Chapter 6: Before She Leaves

On Sunday, Amital finds herself setting out three cups.

Mama looks at them.

"Are you back for the start of the visit?"

"No."

"Then your sister can prepare what she needs."

Amital puts one cup back.

Her sister comes into the room with the book and a few notes.

"I could tell you which parts she usually likes," Amital offers.

"I'll ask her."

"She doesn't like too many questions at once."

"I can talk to her, Amital."

The younger girl is not shouting. She sounds tired of being introduced to a person she already knows.

Amital moves away from the cups.

"I keep treating this like I'm arranging my visit."

"You're not."

"I know. I'm trying to know without taking over."

Her sister rests a hand on the book.





"You can come say hello when you get back. If we're still talking, please don't make it a different visit."

Amital nods.

She tells Mama she feels left out before leaving for her own planned afternoon. Mama listens. She does not ask the sister to cancel the visit to remove that feeling.





Chapter 7: Home at Three

Amital returns at three.

Mama is in the kitchen. The two girls are at the table, with the book open between them.

Her friend looks up.

"Hello. How was your afternoon?"

"Good. We walked farther than expected."

Her sister moves a chair slightly so Amital can pass to the shelf without bumping it.

There is an empty chair. Amital could sit down. Nobody has made sitting forbidden.

She could also use the chair to take the conversation back.

Her friend points to the book.

"We're still arguing about this chapter."

"I only reached page six," Amital says.

The two girls laugh because page six is nowhere near the chapter in question. They do not laugh at her for not reading it.

Amital takes the notebook she came to collect from the shelf.

"I'll let you finish."





She goes to the other room and writes down something she wants to ask her friend on their next walk. It concerns their own assignment, not a report of this afternoon.

From the dining room, she hears another laugh. She feels the old pinch. She leaves the notebook open and does not go back to find out what made it.





Chapter 8: An Ordinary Goodbye

At three-thirty, Mama reminds the girls of the agreed finishing time.

They close the book and clear the cups. Amital comes to say
goodbye with the family.

"Thursday as usual?" her friend asks.

"Yes."

Her sister asks about another book. The friend says she will look for
it before suggesting a time. Mama will check any new visit
separately.

Amital does not offer to collect the book, choose the date, or make
sure the girls tell her every part of the plan.

After the friend leaves, her sister returns the borrowed book to the
shelf.

"Did you enjoy it?" Amital asks.

"Yes. We still disagree about the last chapter."

"Then you have something left to argue about."

Her sister smiles.

Amital takes down the book and opens to page six. She reads the
next page without looking ahead for a sentence she can bring to
somebody else's visit.

