

The Windows She Counts Again



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

Ages 15-18

Chapter 1: Twelve, or Fourteen

Gavriella counts twelve panes of glass in the entrance.

Then she counts fourteen.

The difference is the two narrow strips beside the inner door. They are glass. They are also behind a second frame, and she cannot tell whether the form means to include them.

At seventeen, she is good with lists. Tatty manages this apartment building, and sometimes she helps label envelopes or check that every apartment has a notice. Tonight, he asks her to note what she can see in the entrance before he completes a fire-insurance questionnaire.

"Only the visible panes," he says. "Don't climb or open anything. I'll check what the form needs."

She writes twelve, then fourteen beside it.

One pane contains a wire-like pattern. Another looks much thicker. She does not know what either difference means.

An upstairs tenant comes through with shopping bags. Gavriella moves out of the doorway.

"Helping your father?"

"Yes."

She likes the answer. It sounds more substantial than writing apartment numbers on envelopes.

She counts again before going upstairs.

Chapter 2: The Blank Field

Tatty is speaking to the building owner when she returns. He points to the kitchen table, where the questionnaire lies beside a folder.

Gavriella puts her note on top.

She does not fill in the form. That is his work.

But she reads the nearby fields. There are questions about the glazing, the entrance construction, and supporting documents. Some words resemble words she knows. She cannot tell whether resemblance is enough.

Tatty comes back into the kitchen.

"Thanks. What does the second number mean?"

"If you include the strips beside the inner door, it's fourteen. If not, twelve."

He looks at the form.

"I'll need to clarify what they mean. Leave it with me."

He puts her note inside the folder.

The task is finished.

At least, he behaves as if it is finished. Gavriella feels as if she leaves two possible answers sitting on a page that will eventually require one.

She wants to give him a number that does not need explaining.

Chapter 3: After Supper

At supper, Tatty discusses something else entirely: a plumber's appointment, a tenant's request, the cupboard hinge at home.

Gavriella wonders how he can eat while the entrance question is still unresolved.

"Does the glass number matter a lot?" she asks.

"It matters to answer the actual question accurately. A count doesn't tell us the glass specification. We'll use the records and ask where the wording isn't clear."

"What if I miss a pane?"

"Then we check the observation against the relevant plan. You don't have to establish the insurance answer."

After supper, she goes downstairs to return a library book to the neighbor.

On the way back, she stops at the entrance.

Fourteen including the narrow strips. Twelve without them.

Exactly as before.



She looks at the upper frame. From one angle, a reflected light makes it seem divided. From another, it is one pane.

She does not touch it. She counts the sections she can actually see, writes the same note again, and comes upstairs.

The second note does not answer what the form means.

Chapter 4: A Light in the Hall

At half past ten, Gavriella is still looking at her notebook.

She has drawn the doors and the strips. She starts a cleaner drawing, then stops because the cleaner lines look more certain than her knowledge.

Tatty has gone to his evening study session. Mama is folding laundry in the sitting room, her cream tichel covering all her hair and her long sleeves falling to her wrists.

"You're working late," Mama says.

"I want to make sure."

"About the panes?"

Gavriella nods.

"Do you know what else you need to find out?"

"Whether the strips count. And what kind of glass it is."

"Will looking at them again tell you that?"

Gavriella considers the question. A label might tell her something, if there is a label. A record might tell her something. Standing in the same place and seeing the same glass will not turn her into a person who knows its specification.

"I keep thinking I should be able to give one answer."

Mama puts the folded towel on the pile.

"You can give one accurate report of what you can and can't tell. That's different from supplying every answer the form asks for."

Gavriella closes the notebook.

At eleven, she opens it again.

Chapter 5: The Note With a Limit

By the time Tatty returns, Gavriella has three drawings and the same two numbers.

"I keep coming back to it," she says.

He sits beside her.

"Show me what you're trying to settle."

She shows him the strips, the upper reflection, and the field about the glazing. He listens without declaring that the worry is silly.

Then he puts the form beside the notebook.

"I asked for an observation. This form requires things an observation can't establish. I should have kept those two parts clearer."

"Can you use my note?"

"Yes. With its limits."

Together, they write a short description: twelve clearly visible main panes; two additional narrow strips beside the inner entrance, inclusion uncertain; glass specification not established by visual counting.

Tatty dates the observation and keeps Gavriella's first drawing. He does not copy a guessed number into the insurance field.

"I'll ask the person handling the insurance how they define that field," he says. "And the owner will obtain the relevant building or installation records. If more checking is needed, we'll arrange the appropriate adult to do it."

"When?"

"Tomorrow. The questionnaire isn't due tonight."

Gavriella looks at the clock. It is nearly midnight.

"I know that," she says. "I keep acting as if it is."

They put the papers in his work folder. He takes responsibility for the next steps.

The entrance does not change downstairs. The assignment changes upstairs.

Chapter 6: The Morning Question

In the morning, Gavriella wants to ask whether he already has the answer.

Tatty is eating breakfast. It is too early for the office he needs to contact.

She asks instead, "Is there anything you need me to do?"

"Not on that form. Get ready for school."

She gets ready.

At the entrance, the glass looks exactly as it did last night. She sees the narrow strips and feels the urge to begin at the left corner again.

She knows what another count would produce. It would still need the same clarification.

She goes through the door and walks to school.

During the first lesson, she thinks of the folder twice. She does not have to make the thought disappear before she reads the assigned page. She reads it, asks a question about the lesson, and writes the answer.

After school, Tatty tells her the owner is locating records. The insurance contact explains what supporting information is needed. One detail remains pending.

"So it's not done?"

"Not yet. It's being handled by the people responsible."

She would prefer done. Handled is what the afternoon actually offers.

Chapter 7: What Her Help Is For

Later that week, Tatty completes the questionnaire using the records and the clarification he obtains. He keeps the supporting documents with it. Gavriella does not inspect the final technical answers or approve them.

He tells her the observation helps him identify the question he needs to ask.

"Even with two numbers?"

"Because you explained the two numbers."

On Sunday, he asks whether she has fifteen minutes to label envelopes for a building notice.

"What exactly am I checking?" she asks.

He shows her the approved apartment list and the printed labels. Her job is to match them. He checks the completed set before anything is delivered.

She agrees to the fifteen minutes.

One label is missing. She marks that row and tells him instead of making a label from memory. He supplies the correct one.

At the end, she puts the envelopes in his tray and closes the list.

The task has a real edge. On her side are the matched labels and the marked exception. On his side are the notice, the approval, and the delivery arrangements.

That evening, she passes through the entrance with Mama. The light catches the upper frame and creates the same false division.



Gavriella notices it.

Then Mama asks which book she returns to the neighbor, and Gavriella tells her about its ending.

They go upstairs together.