



No Jobs for Nosson

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: The List with Nothing on It

Nosson finds the job list beside the breadboard.

BUY BREAD has a tick. FOLD TOWELS has a tick. RETURN THE CHAIR has a tick so large it looks like a bird flying away.

He checks the back.

Nothing.

"I need another job," he tells Mama.

She looks up from her book. Her burgundy tichel covers every bit of her hair.

"You don't need one. You've finished your jobs."

"There must be something."

"There is something. Sit down. Have an apple."

Nosson doesn't want an apple. An apple can occupy a person for three minutes. After that, what is he supposed to do with himself?

Down the hall, his little sister giggles at something Tatty says.

They sound perfectly happy.

That is the part Nosson finds hardest.

Chapter 2: Useful

Nosson likes being useful.



When someone needs a pencil, he has one. When the younger children need their book found, he knows which sofa cushion swallows it. When Mama asks for a small errand, he is already wearing shoes.

At family visits, people say, "What would we do without Nosson?"

He keeps that sentence somewhere inside, polished and ready.

This afternoon, everybody seems to be managing without him.

He goes to the pantry and straightens the tins. Mama comes in for flour.

"Did you move the peas?"

"I put all the green labels together."

Mama blinks. "The peas go on the lower shelf so I can find them. Please put them back."

Nosson puts them back. Then he washes two clean cups because they have water spots.

"We need those cups," his sister says. "Tatty is making cocoa."

"I'm helping."

"They're already clean."

Nosson grips the dishcloth.

Nobody says what they would do without him.



Chapter 3: The Broken Afternoon

Tatty comes into the kitchen.

"Cocoa?"

"I'm busy."

"With what?"

Nosson looks at the two cups.

"Things."

Tatty takes one of the cups and sets it down.

"Come sit with me a minute."

Nosson sits because now someone asks him to do it. That feels different from deciding to sit for no reason.

Tatty waits until the younger children carry their cocoa into the next room.

"Is something bothering you?"

"No."

Tatty doesn't fill the silence.

Nosson rubs a water spot that isn't there.

"Nobody needs anything."

"That's true this afternoon."

"Then I'm just in the way."



Tatty looks straight at him.

"Is that what you think happens when your jobs end?"

Nosson shrugs. He doesn't want to say yes. He doesn't want to say no and go back to pretending the cups matter.

Chapter 4: The Hour He Can't Fix

They talk at the kitchen table.

Tatty asks when Nosson last spent an afternoon doing something he chose, rather than something useful.

Nosson remembers his model railway. Then he remembers arranging its carriages for his little brother. Then fixing the station sign because somebody wanted it fixed.

"Those don't count?"

"They can. I'm asking what you want."

Nosson doesn't know.

That surprises him more than the empty list.

Tatty suggests half an hour without looking for jobs. They can try a puzzle together for part of it, then Nosson can choose something else.

"What if you need me?"

"I'll ask. You don't have to patrol the house."



"What if I don't enjoy it?"

"Then you don't enjoy that part. It doesn't become a debt you owe the kitchen."

Nosson almost smiles.

They set the timer. Nosson puts it behind the puzzle box so he doesn't spend the whole time watching it.

Chapter 5: A Very Long Ten Minutes

The puzzle is a harbor with too many boats.

Nosson finds four corners quickly. He likes that part.

Then Tatty gets called to the front door. Nosson looks at the timer.

Only ten minutes have passed.

There are twenty left. Somewhere in the house, an entire job might be waiting unnoticed.

He starts to stand.

Then he sits down again and pulls the blue pieces closer.

He doesn't feel peaceful. He feels like someone guarding a room with the wrong key.

A piece with half an anchor fits beneath the smallest boat.

Nosson enjoys that.



He immediately wonders whether he should put the puzzle away and do something worthwhile.

Tatty returns and sits beside him.

"I nearly went looking for a job," Nosson admits.

"What kept you here?"

"This anchor."

Tatty studies it. "Very useful anchor."

Nosson gives him a look.

"All right. Very unnecessary anchor."

This time Nosson laughs.

When the timer sounds, he is holding a piece with a tiny shoe on it. Who puts a shoe in a picture of a harbor?

He stays to find out.

Chapter 6: The Sentence at Supper

At supper, Mama asks how the puzzle is going.

"There's a shoe," Nosson says. "We can't find its person."

His little brother wants to see. His sister wants to know if it belongs to a pirate.

For several minutes, they argue about the shoe.



Nosson doesn't fetch anything. He doesn't solve anything. He sits in his chair, putting in suggestions.

The conversation still has a place for him.

After supper, he carries his plate to the counter. That is one of his usual jobs. He can finish it without spending the rest of the evening inventing others.

Later, Mama sits on the edge of his bed.

"Tatty told me a little about this afternoon," she says.

Nosson looks at his blanket.

"I like helping."

"I know. I like that you help. I also love having you here when there's nothing to carry."

He picks at a loose thread.

"People say, 'What would we do without Nosson?'"

Mama goes quiet.

"We mean thank you. But I can see how that sounds like a job that never ends. I'll try to say what I mean."

"Don't stop thanking me."

"I won't."



Chapter 7: Saturday's Other List

On Shabbos afternoon, Nosson sits with Tatty and the younger children.

His eyes keep searching the table while Tatty talks. A napkin needs straightening. A book needs moving. Surely someone wants something.

He rests his hands on his knees.

"Can we talk about the shoe again?" his brother asks.

"I think it belongs to the harbor master," Nosson says.

"I think it's a pirate," his sister says firmly.

Nosson stays through the argument.

On Sunday, Mama puts a new job list beside the breadboard. There are three small things for Nosson, agreed with him.

He finishes them.

Below the last tick, he doesn't add anything.

He goes to the harbor puzzle. A tiny trouser leg appears next to the shoe. The answer is close.

From the kitchen, Mama calls his name.

His shoulders jump. "Yes?"

"I'm coming to look at your puzzle."

Nosson moves the box so she can sit down.