

Chapter One

“Let’s go for ice cream.”

My five favorite words in the entire world.

I turned away from the TV, which I wasn’t really watching anyway, and looked up at my grandmother. She had been cleaning the kitchen after lunch but was now standing in the doorway, smiling. Her purse was over her shoulder, and her keys were in her hand. Ready to go.

“Yes, please, Bubby!” I jumped up off the couch. I was thankful for ice cream, but maybe even more for something to do.

Every Sunday I went to my grandparents’ condo for a visit. It was pretty boring most of the time. I love them and all, but we never do anything.

They don’t like the kind of movies I like. They don’t want to go anywhere. And I hate watching sports, which seems to be the only thing my grandfather ever has on the TV. I guess my dad liked sports when he was alive. My zaida assumes that as a boy and his grandson, I do too. Out of respect, I watch when I visit. He seems to like it when we watch together. Most of the time, I just tune out.

Zaida was sitting in his big brown lounger, leaning way forward, very interested in the baseball game on the big screen. He obviously hadn’t even heard the magic words.

“Zaida?” I barked to get his attention. “Come on. We’re going for ice cream!”

Bubby shook her head. “He won’t want to come.”

Zaida glanced away from the TV to look at me. “You sure you don’t want to stay here and watch the game? It’s a nail-biter!”

“I’ll be back later,” I said. “You can catch me up.” I didn’t want to hurt his feelings.

“Suit yourself.” He shrugged. “Bring home some chocolate mint?”

“Sure,” Bubby said, jingling her keys. “Come on, Fishel. I need to stop at the yarn store too.”

When we got to the front door, I worked my feet into my sneakers and followed her out.

We got into the elevator to ride down the eleven floors and then two more to the parking garage. “Do you need something special from the yarn store?” I asked. Because she always seemed to have lots of yarn at home.

“Yes.” She sighed. “More sock yarn. One of my friends asked me to make a pair for her granddaughter’s tenth birthday. On top of all the ones I’ve promised everyone else.”

My grandmother was famous for her socks.

She knitted them from special yarn and each pair was one of a kind. Well, two of a kind, I guess.

Each year at Hanukkah, I got three pairs that she had knitted just for me. Each set had a different pattern but was always made in my favorite colors—purple, pink and green. She spent hours and hours making them, her knitting needles click-clacking. It was kind of amazing actually. Sometimes I watched her knit, the yarn looping over the needles. Over and over. Her hands moved so fast they were a blur. More and more of the sock appeared below her needles, and the ball of yarn got smaller and smaller. It was like watching magic happen.

Then she'd get weird about me staring and tell me to go bug my grandfather.

When I wore the socks she made for me, I felt special. Like she was sending love and hugging my feet. Sounds weird, I know, but it's not really.

I thought my grandmother loved knitting. But her sigh made me wonder if something was wrong. "How come you don't seem happy about making them?"

She gave me a small smile as we got to the car. "Oh, I am. I just wish I didn't have so many requests."

"People love your socks, Bubby."

"They do. Not a terrible problem to have. Thank goodness they last a long time too—otherwise I'd never sleep. I'd spend every hour knitting to replace them as they wore out!"

We drove around and around up the ramp of the parking garage to get out. It made my stomach roll, almost like the rides at the fair.

We were out in the sunshine before she spoke again. "So, Fishel, have you decided on your bar mitzvah project yet?"

Ugh. Wasn't it enough that my mom and Rabbi Seigel kept asking me if I'd figured it out yet? Apparently not. Everyone needed to know.

"Not yet," I said. "There's so much to do to prepare for my bar mitzvah. It feels like a full-time job."

You have to learn to read a part of the Torah in Hebrew and help your family plan your party. You also have to do a mitzvah—good deeds—project. It's not like