

# Chapter One

“Adina, can you please come here for a minute?” Mrs. Weiss called from the kitchen.

“I’m right here, Ima!” Adina sped up the basement stairs and stood panting in the doorway.

Her mother looked up. “Oh, good, you brought up those extra dish towels,” she said thankfully. “Put them on the *pareve* counter, and come help me over here. I need these cookies put onto those two white platters. Do you think you can do that? It doesn’t have to be in a design ... just neat rows.”

“I’d love to,” replied Adina in mild surprise. Ima didn’t usually entrust such a task to her. *Tamar must be really busy if Ima needs me for this*, she thought.

Happily, she began filling the platters with mouthwatering cinnamon pinwheels still warm from the oven. There were so many.

“Should I pile them on top of each other?” she asked.

“That’ll be fine.” Mrs. Weiss tackled the last dishes in the sink, her eyes darting nervously to the clock. “Only forty-five minutes until the party starts, and still so much to do!” she declared to no one in particular.

“Oh, Ima, everything will fall into place,” Adina said reassuringly. “It always does!” She flipped her chestnut brown ponytail off



her neck, and wiped her forehead on the cuff of her sleeve. No wonder Ima was feeling nervous; it was steamy and hot in the kitchen. "And I'm so excited Shevy is coming tonight, aren't you?" she continued. "This will be her first time at our house."

Mrs. Weiss set the last pot on the drainer and dried her hands on a clean towel. "Yes, sweetie, I am," she said, moving to the door. "I'm going to check the freezer. Just bring the platters to the *sukkah* when you're done, okay? Tamar will know where to lay them." As she passed Adina, she stooped and put a kiss on the back of her twelve-year-old's neck. "And thank you for calming me down."

Adina's cheeks grew warm with pleasure. She carefully set the last pinwheel on the pile and lifted the platter to carry into the *sukkah*. Just then, fifteen-year-old Tamar called, "Adina, where are you? I really need your help out here!"

"On my way," Adina called back.

Holding her loaded tray in both hands, she crossed the dining room to the french doors, and walked through them straight into the *sukkah*. How beautiful it looked!

Tamar's delicate features showed relief at the sight of her younger sister. "Oh, there you are," she said. Gracefully, she reached for the platter, and set it beside the centerpiece of autumn leaves entwined with chrysanthemums.

"There are two of these platters, aren't there?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Adina. "I'm bringing the other one." She paused to look at Tamar's elaborate decorations. Chrysanthemums of bronze, orange, and darkest burgundy stood in short, round vases, making bright splashes of color along the table.



“It looks so pretty!” she said admiringly. “You really have an artist’s touch, Tamar.”

“Thanks,” Tamar said with a shrug. “Adina, hurry and bring in the second platter ... I need your help with these napkins.” She held up a package of floral napkins whose colors perfectly complemented the lively bouquets.

“Sure; I’ll be right back.”

Adina hurried back with the second platter, which Tamar set to the left of the centerpiece, opposite the first platter. Then she took a napkin and said, “Now watch me for a minute, and you’ll see what to do.”

Adina watched with growing bewilderment as Tamar’s fingers swiftly transformed the napkin into a little fan.

“There!” She placed it behind a paper plate, and put a plastic cup neatly in front. “Okay! Ready to get down to work?”

“I guess so,” Adina said a little uncertainly. She bravely took a napkin, an anxious pucker in her soft brown eyes. Awkwardly, she tried to copy Tamar’s movements. Fold, pleat, poke a finger inside to keep the fold ... ugh! Adina looked at her napkin in disgust. It looked more like a flat tire than a fan! And it wouldn’t stand up as Tamar’s had.

Tamar looked over at Adina’s first try and took the napkin out of her hands. She made some deft creases here and there, and, suddenly it looked perfect, standing properly behind the cup. “See? Like that! It’s easy; you’ll get the hang of it as you go along,” she said.

Adina tried and tried again, but her napkins looked sloppy and second-rate next to Tamar’s. Noticing her sister’s discouragement, Tamar said, “Don’t worry, Adina, it’s fine if

your napkins don't come out as well as mine. Come on, we still have this whole pile to do."

The patronizing remark pricked Adina's sensitive little heart, but she did her best to produce fans as pretty as her sister's. She just wished she had Tamar's flair.

"Okay, there we go. We're all done," Tamar declared in satisfaction as she surveyed the festive-looking table.

As Tamar admired her work, Adina couldn't help wishing she had been endowed with talents like her sister's. Her wistful musings were interrupted by Tamar's reminder that their guests were arriving shortly.

"Let's go wash up before everyone gets here," she advised.

"That's a good idea," Adina agreed. As they went back inside, she said again, "I'm so excited Shevy is coming tonight, aren't you?"

"Mm-hm. I wonder if she will come on time," answered Tamar. "I'm looking forward to getting to know her better."

"I know," nodded Adina. "She seems really cute and friendly."

Adina's cousin Peretz, their oldest cousin, had just become engaged to Shevy. Although Adina had met the new *kallah* at the *vort*, she couldn't wait to see Shevy again at the party. She walked slowly toward the stairs, daydreaming about the pretty, petite bride, when she was summoned by fourteen-year-old Avi.

"Adina, can you come here for a minute?"

She hurried down the hall to the den, where Avi and Moishy were practicing their music to entertain the guests. Dark-haired Avi sat on a chair, his guitar strap over his shoulders, and freckled, five-year-old Moishy stood patiently nearby.



“Thanks, Adina.” Avi’s eyes lit up as she entered. “We’re just about finished practicing, and I want you to tell us how we sound.”

“With pleasure,” Adina smiled, settling herself on the couch.

Avi had written a song about *achdus* for the *Sukkos* celebration. He struck a few lively chords, and Moishy began the beautiful words in his sweet, lilting voice, Avi adding harmony:

“We gather together, united as one,  
Joined in the *sukkah* for bonding and fun;  
Surrounded by warmth and the vast sky above,  
It’s easy to feel our connection and love.”

When they were done, Adina clapped enthusiastically. “That harmony is perfect!” she said, impressed. “Avi, I don’t know how you always come up with such good songs,” she added with just a hint of envy

“Thanks,” Avi grinned.

Adina left the den and made for the stairs, hoping to have time to re-comb her hair and change her shirt. The front door opened, and her father walked in, carrying a crate of soda on his shoulder.

“Hi, Adina, I’m glad you’re here,” he said. “It looks like we have exactly eight minutes to finish up. I’m going to the *sukkah* to put out the drinks, and Ima just went to put on her *sheitel* and make-up. She asked if one of you could quickly wipe down the counters.”

Adina stopped in her tracks and did an about-face. “Okay, I will,” she said.

Minutes later, Ima and Tamar reappeared in the kitchen,

looking fresh and dressed-up for the party. The doorbell started ringing soon after, and all the Weiss relatives began to trickle in, making their way to the *sukkah*. Adina was glad when Dassy Friedman, her first cousin and best friend, arrived. Dassy was the only cousin her age, and the two of them had been very close since they were babies.

“Hi, Adina,” Dassy grinned, her dark eyes dancing. “How was your day?”

“Pretty boring,” Adina admitted. “All we did was prepare for this party.”

“I know what you mean,” Dassy answered sympathetically. “That’s how it was for us last year when the party was at our house.”

Dassy looked around the vast *sukkah*, which teemed with members of the four Weiss families who lived in town. Fluorescent lights hung from the leaf-strewn bamboo ceiling, brightening the happy faces of all the guests. Although the weather outside was nippy, it was warm in the *sukkah*, as everyone huddled together.

“I see Shevy didn’t come yet,” observed Dassy.

“Actually, I think she just got here,” said Adina excitedly, hearing a commotion inside the house.

Adina’s guess was correct, and in a moment, Shevy entered the *sukkah*, her *chassan* Peretz on one side, and her future mother-in-law, Aunt Rivka, on the other. Behind her trailed her adoring sisters-in-law.

“Look who’s here!” announced Moishy. “It’s Peretz and his *kallah*!”

“It most certainly is!” Abba beamed, and he immediately



broke into a hearty rendition of “*Siman Tov U’Mazel Tov.*” The men joined in, and the ladies clapped along. When the song was done, Peretz took a little bow and made a show of thanking everyone.

“Thank *you* for coming and for bringing your *kallah* with you,” Abba retorted merrily. “Shevy, welcome to our home, and welcome to our family.”

Shevy smiled shyly, and Ima invited her to take a seat beside Aunt Rivka and Peretz’s oldest sister Faigy. “Please make yourself at home,” Ima urged Shevy. “Sit down and enjoy.”

“Thank you,” Shevy answered. “The table is set beautifully, and the food looks delicious.”

“Aunt Shifra and her family always throw the best parties,” Aunt Rivka informed Shevy. “Aunt Shifra is an amazing cook, and Tamar always sets up so elegantly. You’ve met Tamar, haven’t you?”

Shevy was reintroduced to Tamar and then to all the other cousins. They were making small talk when Mr. Weiss interrupted.

“Ahem!” He cleared his throat loudly for silence. “Now that everyone has had a chance to taste some of the delicious food, and to catch up with their dear relatives, I think we’re ready for a bit of entertainment. We’ll start with a short musical performance by Avi and Moishy, and then we’ll move on to a fun game which I’ve prepared.”

A hush fell over the *sukkah* as everyone looked toward the Weiss brothers. Avi and Moishy stood poised and calm as they began their presentation. Adina marveled at her brothers’ confidence, especially Moishy’s. How could he be so relaxed?

As they sang the chorus the third time, some of the men joined in, repeating it a few more times. Avi glowed at the success of his song. When he and Moishy finished, everyone applauded enthusiastically.

“Encore! Encore!” demanded several cousins, and Avi and Moishy graciously sang a few more *niggunim* that everyone knew.

“Thank you, boys,” Abba nodded. “And now, please sit down quickly before anyone asks for another round.” He smiled at his sons, clearly proud of them. “It’s time for part two of our program, an intense and exciting family game. Listen closely to the instructions.”

As Abba began to explain the rules, Adina slipped inside to use the restroom off the kitchen. As she washed her hands, she heard voices in the kitchen.

“Okay, here’s the box of tea bags Aunt Shifra wanted.” Adina was able to identify that as her cousin Faigy.

“And don’t forget the sugar and honey. They’re right there on the shelf, too. This pantry is so super-organized,” remarked another voice, which Adina recognized as Shevy’s.

“That’s because my aunt is such an unbelievable *balabusta*. Her whole house is always in perfect shape.”

Adina was ready to rejoin the party, but decided to wait until Faigy and Shevy left. They would probably feel uncomfortable knowing she had heard them discussing her mother. Her hand on the doorknob, Adina remained in her spot.

“The whole family seems so talented,” commented Shevy. “I was so impressed with the way Tamar set the table, and I loved Avi’s song. He and Moishy both have great voices, too! Isn’t there another sibling? A younger sister, I think?”



“Oh, Adina. She’s a sweetie, but no special talents there.”

Tears stung Adina’s eyes as she heard Faigy dismiss her so summarily. Was she so ordinary and unremarkable? The voices faded as the older girls left the kitchen, but one last comment floated back to Adina.

“It must be hard for her to be surrounded by such talented siblings and parents – which reminds me, I really want to watch your uncle’s game.”

Inside the washroom, Adina stood frozen in place. Numb with shock and pain at what she’d overheard, she couldn’t move for several moments. Tears streamed down her face. She gulped and swallowed hard to keep from breaking into loud sobs.

*So that’s what people think of me*, she thought, devastated. She’d always appreciated her parents’ and siblings’ special abilities, and sometimes felt a mild twinge of envy. But it had never occurred to her that she had no talent at all. Faigy and Shevy’s casual remarks had changed all that. In an instant, the awful realization hit her – she was a nothing! Just a simple, average girl, who’d somehow gotten stuck in a family of stars.

As Adina sat crying, reflecting on her miserable fate, she came to a decision. No way would she remain the pitiful odd one out. Adina determined that somehow she would find a way to shine. She, too, would become a star.