



CHAPTER 1

OH, PEANUTS!

Oh, peanuts! Why did I always have to watch my two little sisters? It was just so unfair! I knew my mother was a busy lady, but why couldn't she just go to the grocery store when they were sleeping?

I sat there glumly on the leather couch, watching Leah and Miriam play with magnetic blocks. I wasn't the oldest home. My father was learning with his phone *chavrusa* in his study and was not to be disturbed. My brother Zevi had just come home from school.

Outside, the day was stunning. Hearing all the neighbors playing and laughing through the window on this carefree Sunday afternoon made me feel worse. Life was so unfair!

“Grrr,” I announced.

Zevi poked his head into the room. “You know, Shevi, you could watch them outside.” Had he read my mind? “You don’t have to sit here moping on the couch. Put them on their bikes, in the stroller, or give them some sand tools and relax. I don’t know why you’re so upset about watching them. Besides, you know Mommy went out especially for you!”

Who did he think he was? Mr. Know-it-all? Zevi was right above me in the order of siblings, but often he acted as if he were my father.

“Easy for you to say,” I answered. “You are free as a bird on this gorgeous day, while I am stuck watching our little sisters!”

“Sometimes, it seems like you just *want* to be upset.”

Zevi left the room before I could answer.

That was a good thing, 'cause what would I have answered him? *You just want to be upset.* I'd been hearing that a lot recently. Everyone was against me! How could anyone believe I want to be upset?

I sat there for another few minutes, bored as a board, watching the girls build tall towers and then knock them down. Each time, they squealed in delight. They were playing pretty nicely with the magnetic blocks, but the crashing noise as the blocks fell grated on my nerves.

The previous evening, I'd had a late night with one of my friends. I had worked hard to earn the privilege, but it was worth it. We painted and baked and had ice cream. I only wish we would have had all the cool toppings like I had by Gitty's house another time.

I guess nothing could be perfect if I was involved.

That's how things usually worked with me. Most things didn't go right, like they do for everyone else. I must not have been born

with the greatest *mazal*. It was like I sat on the bottom half of a seesaw, and my end never went up. I rarely got privileges like other girls in my class did, and I usually had to be in bed before other kids around my age. My parents cared whether I did my homework or not. Usually, I got my clothing from my cousins – really cute and in style, but still hand-me-downs. I'm sure you get the gist.

After another ten minutes, the girls had added a new layer of tiles to the floor and were busy dancing and singing “The Wheels on the Bus.”

“Shevi, can we go outside now?” Leah asked after the line “The babies went waah, waah, waah,” and my sisters couldn't remember the rest of the words.

Blech. It would be such a big job to take them out. I'd have to drag their bikes out (the garage was never easy to get things out of), strap on their helmets (which they didn't like to wear), push Miriam's bike the whole time ('cause she doesn't know how to pedal), and then, when

they'd fall (at least once), I'd have to deal with the crying, wipe off their knees, get Band-Aids, smear some cream on their boo-boos, and calm them down. After all that, I'd have to put away their bikes (the garage again). Why would I subject myself to such torture?

"No, Leah, let's just stay inside for now."

Lazing on the couch was much simpler. But still, wasn't it unfair that I couldn't just enjoy the beautiful day?

"Please, please, please!" Leah bounced up and down. Miriam looked up and started to copy her to the T, motions and all. I had two annoying little girls hopping up and down like bunny rabbits and making me dizzy. Oh, peanuts! Now I had to deal with this on top of everything! Why couldn't they just leave me alone? Even the sound of magnetic blocks crashing was better than this.

"Fine!" I snapped as I sat up abruptly. The girls jumped back. "I'll take you outside! You better not kvetch. You better not fall."

The girls were too excited to think about

my warning. I guess that's a good thing, because when I thought about it, I realized just how silly it sounded. When you are really upset, you usually don't make sense, and I was really upset. "And before we go out, you have to clean up this humongous mess!"

The girls happily obliged, and all the magnetic blocks were in their box before I could get comfortable on the couch again.

Outside, the sky wasn't as blue as I expected, and the laughing neighbors were just one family playing on their swing set. Oh, why did I let Leah and Miriam convince me? Now I had to go through the whole bike-riding ordeal. Like I said, nothing ever worked out right for me.

After I finally strapped their helmets on, got their bikes out, got a few scrapes on my legs, and positioned them on the sidewalk, my mother pulled up. Seriously?! What timing. I had to go through the whole bike-riding ordeal for nothing? At least it was only half of the whole bike-riding ordeal.

“That’s so nice of you, Shevi!” my mother said as she emerged from her car. “Leah and Miriam, say a big thank you to your best big sister!”

Leah and Miriam turned their chubby faces toward mine (toward my face, not toward my *chubby* face – I’m *not* chubby) and with huge smiles said, “Thank you!”

For a minute, my heart fluttered. But the fluttering quickly turned into rapid beating when I saw what my mother brought home!