

When Ellie accidentally overhears that her family deli is most likely going to close, she does the only thing she can think of. She makes a wish on matzo ball soup.

Eleven-year-old Ellie is feisty, determined, and a little bit anxious. She considers Lukshen Deli part of the family—after all, it's been around for four generations, ever since her great-grandmother opened it. Ellie is determined to prove that old-fashioned Jewish delis can get with the times—but if her plan doesn't work, the deli will be sold for good.

This charming story contains over thirty black-and-white illustrations and fourteen recipes for quintessential Jewish American deli food, such as challah, chicken soup, blintz souffle, and rugelach. It's a delightful story about sticking up for what you believe in, business ownership, friendship, and family.



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Ellie's Deli



WISHING ON
MATZO BALL
SOUP!

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Ellie's Deli



WISHING ON MATZO BALL SOUP!

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Chapter 1

When you accidentally overhear that your family deli is most likely going out of business, and you'll probably need to move out of the house you've lived in your whole life, there's only one thing to do.

Make a wish on chicken soup.

I know it sounds strange but it's true. I don't have any intention of stopping because it works. I know it works because right before school started this year, I wished on a perfect pot of simmering soup that my best friend Ava and I would be in most of the same classes. And guess what? We are! It also worked the time in third grade when I wished I'd lose the top side tooth that had been wiggling for two weeks. And it worked the time in fourth grade when I wished for a snow day (even though there



was no mention of snow in the forecast) so our spelling test would be postponed.

The thing is, it's not like I can just wish on any random soup at any old restaurant. I can't make wishes on lobster bisque, or corn chowder, or even the creamiest tomato soup that goes with an ooey-goey grilled cheese sandwich.

No. I can only make wishes on one specific soup: the best chicken soup in the world at the best deli in the world—the one my family has owned for four generations.

Lukshen Deli, it's called, officially. But sometimes my family calls it Ellie's Deli because in kindergarten for show-and-tell, I brought in a picture of me in front of it, and the whole time I talked about the deli and how much

I loved it, especially the pickles and the chicken soup, the crinkle-cut fries and the way the brisket smells when it's in the oven.

I went on and on about all of that for so long that when kids from my class went to Lukshen, they'd tell their parents, "Oh, this is Ellie's Deli."



WISHING ON MATZO BALL SOUP!

On the surface, Lukshen Deli is a boring brick building with white, square tables inside and a back garden where sunflowers grow in the summer. Of course it has a fryer and a walk-in freezer, a grill and to-go items like bottled soda and bags of potato chips, but it's way more than that.

It's comfort and community and family and food.

I know it's just a deli and delis don't have feelings or emotions, but to me Lukshen is like my seventh immediate family member.

There's Bubbie, Zeyda, Mom, Dad, Anna, Mabel, and then Lukshen. That's how much our deli means to me: family member status.

Lukshen means "noodle" in Yiddish, my most favorite language. Yiddish is a language that Jews in Europe used to speak a lot, and some of them still do. It's like a mixture of German and Hebrew. It's my favorite because everything in Yiddish just sounds cooler than it does in English, like somehow it manages to capture the essence of each and every word. I mean, take the word *schvitz* for example. That means "to sweat." But *schvitz* just sounds better and more accurate, doesn't it?

I'm alone in the front of the deli right now, waiting for just the exact moment when the soup begins to simmer. That's when the magic happens. That's the time to make the wish.

Please please please don't let Lukshen close. I stare deep into the soup. Please also keep Bubbie and Zeyda healthy and alive until they're at least one hundred and twenty. Thank you, masterful brothy powers. Thank you so much.

"Ellie?"

I whip around and see my mom looking over at me. I'm not exactly sure where she was before this, or where she came from.

"You okay?"

I clear my throat. "Yup. Fine. All good. Was just checking on the soup."

She nods like she doesn't believe me. It's kind of shocking she's never seen me do this before; it's been a few years now, but I guess I'm pretty good at keeping secrets.

It's not like I could tell her that in second grade, when I was really panicked that I would get stuck in the bathroom during a fire drill, I wished over the soup to keep it from happening. And when it worked, I kept wishing on the soup because it obviously had magical powers.

Sometimes things start and you don't expect them to keep going forever, but then then they kind of do.

"I just can't believe this, Mara. Back in the day, there'd be a line of customers by now, out the door, around the block, all waiting patiently to place their orders," Bubbie says, coming out

of the back office, talking to my mom like they are in the middle of a conversation. “Sometimes not so patiently, I must add.”

My mom sighs. “Mah, please, enough with the *back in the day*. I can’t hear it anymore.” She walks toward the back and leaves the deli, maybe to go sit in the garden for a moment. She closes the door on her way out. It’s not a slam really, more of a forceful closure. I probably shouldn’t read into things like this, but I do. The way my mom closes a door really says so much about her mood.

“Oh, Ellie, my doll,” Bubbie says, starting to mix a bowl of matzo ball concoction. I say a quick goodbye in my head to the magical soup and I walk over to one of the smaller tables to try to finish my math homework. “This deli is my pride and joy—other than you and your sisters of course—but we need customers! Where are the customers?”

She laughs her deep, throaty laugh even though what she’s saying doesn’t strike me as funny.

I look up from my worksheet of word problems. “Ummm.” I don’t even know why I’m trying to respond to this. I clearly don’t have an answer.

It’s been three days since I heard Bubbie, Zeyda, Mom, and Dad having a “talk” in the den. They asked Anna, Mabel, and me to go play outside, so we knew something

was up since the three of us don't really play outside all together anymore. I kind of wish we still played outside. Our swing set with the tree house looks lonely to me now.

We pretended to leave, but then we sort of just stood by the open window and listened to them talk about closing, going out of business, how we'd be able to afford our lives, the possibility of selling both houses, moving somewhere less expensive.

It was the worst conversation I've ever overheard, and I eavesdrop A LOT.

My older sister, Anna, just got her driver's license. She's coming to pick me up in a little while since Mom decided to keep the deli open late for all the Rosh Hashanah orders that she thought would be coming in. But there aren't that many coming in, which is surprising since it's the Jewish New Year and a huge holiday for us, when families all get together to eat and celebrate.

It's been this way for the past few years, though. Fewer and fewer orders for Jewish holidays. Mostly last-minute ones, smaller ones, not the hustle and bustle the way it used to be. And fewer and fewer people eating in the restaurant, too.

Everyone says it's because the Jewish community in Marlborough Lake has gotten smaller over the years. I guess that's true, but non-Jews like deli food, too, of course. I mean, how could you not like deli food? If you're vegetarian, we have

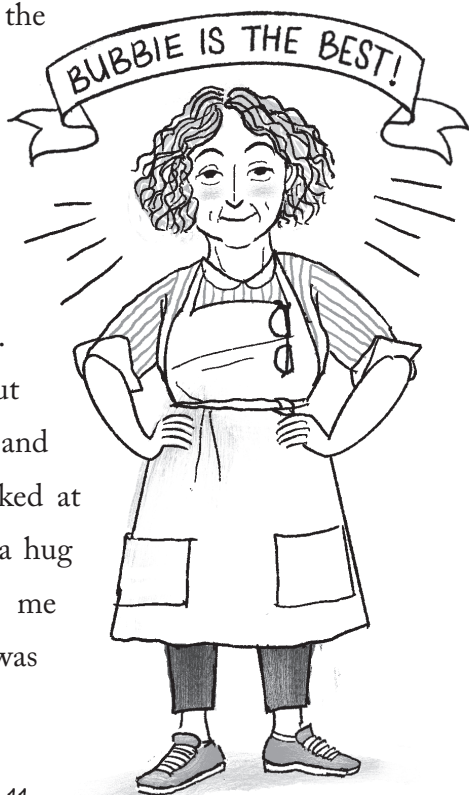
amazing vegetarian stuffed peppers, and even I, someone who doesn't like peppers at all, think they're delicious.

"I'm going home, doll, no need to stay late," my Bubbie says, taking off her apron. "Tell your mother."

"Okay, Bub. Love you."

"Love you more," she replies, the way she always does.

Sometimes I think Bubbie is the one person in the world who really gets me. Like there's a certain way she looks at me, and it's almost as if she's staring right into my thoughts. One time at the end of third grade, we were all standing around after our end-of-year celebration, sort of a graduation ceremony thing. And I was so sad because I'd never have Ms. Lerner again, and Bubbie put her hand on my shoulder, and she looked at me, and I looked at her, and she pulled me into a hug because she knew without me even saying anything that I was about to cry.



It's weird to think of your grandmother as your best friend and maybe soulmate, but I can't deny it—Bubbie is that person for me.

My mom comes out of the office a little later; her glasses are perched on the top of her head. "How's homework going? Anna just texted that she's on her way."

"It's good. Almost done." I look up at my mom and smile. I want to think of something comforting to say, something reassuring, but nothing comes to me.

"When you get home, please move the laundry from the washer to the dryer. Dad needs to leave for a temple board meeting, and he just put the wash in. I'd ask Mabel, but ya know . . ."

We both start laughing.

Mabel is my little sister. She's seven and the baby of the family, and nobody ever asks her to do anything. So much so that it's now become kind of a running joke. I made my mom promise that when Mabel turns eight in January, she's going to start asking her to do stuff, like emptying the dishwasher or dumping the bathroom trash into the main trash before Anna and I have to take it out. I really hope she keeps her promise.

We hear Anna honk the horn from outside and my mom shakes her head. I gather my stuff and walk outside.

Anna's in the driver's seat of my dad's old Jeep and she has her sunglasses on even though it's not even sunny anymore.

She thinks she's the coolest human in the world, but she's not, not at all.

"Ellie. Get in. Hurry up," she says, looking at her phone for a second, which is okay, I guess, since we're parked.

"Hi to you, too."

"Hi," she groans. "Can I just say something?" She turns down the music and starts driving.

"Uh-huh."

"Can you please not take the bus to Lukshen every single day and go home instead? It's so annoying that I have to come pick you up," she says.

I raise my eyebrows. "Like you don't enjoy driving all over town, Anna? Come on. I know you love it. So, stop."

"I do enjoy it, but I'm not your chauffeur. And Dad's mad about how much money I'm spending on gas lately," she answers. "Also, you don't need to hang out there all the time. It's weird. Find a hobby."

"This is my hobby. I'm interested in business ownership, and I want to take over the deli when I'm older and Bubbie and Zeyda retire."

We're at a stoplight and Anna finally turns her head to look at me. "Um, El. I don't really want to be the one to spell this out, but you know what we overheard the other day . . ."

I shake my head. “You are the most negative person ever to live, Anna.”

“I’m the most realistic person ever to live, Ellie,” she says, mocking me.

“You can be realistic and optimistic at the same time,” I tell her, and she ignores me.

We sit there quietly for the rest of the ride and Anna blasts some angry love song, probably thinking it’s cool or alternative or whatever, I don’t know. My older sister is a complete mystery in some ways, but she annoys me too much now to really want to figure it out. It wasn’t always like this, but somehow this is how I think it’ll be from now on between us.

We get home and Mabel is sprawled across the couch eating a gigantic bowl of popcorn.

“Hey Mables,” I say. She doesn’t look up from her show. “Hello! Earth to Mabel J. Glantz.”

She raises a hand up in the air in sort of a backward wave.

Some people think I’m so lucky to have two sisters, but with these two, I’m not so sure. Anna is rude and negative, and Mabel is in her own little seven-year-old world.

I’m stuck in the middle like a kayaker lost at sea, bouncing from one tiny island to another tiny island, never feeling like I’m in the right place.

“Hello, my favorites,” Dad says, coming down the stairs. “I’m off to a temple board meeting. Someone please move the laundry from washer to dryer.”

“Mom already asked me,” I groan from the armchair in the corner of the den.

“Thank you, Ellie,” Dad says. He walks over and scoops me into a sideways hug. “I can always count on you.”

I’m pretty sure I’m the only Glantz sister that people can count on. Some days I’m proud of that. Other days, not so much.

“Okay, I’m leaving,” Dad calls out to the house. “Can we please work on turning off some of the lights? We need to conserve some energy!”

“Uh-huh,” Mabel calls back. “I like the dark better, actually. It’s spooky!”

A little while later, I’m moving the laundry from the washer, while Anna yells at someone over FaceTime—some boy in her class who said something rude to Anna’s best friend, Phoebe. We’ve only been in school, like, five days and Anna’s already in the middle of some drama.

Ava, my next-door neighbor and BFF since preschool, comes bursting through our front door carrying a gigantic suitcase. Since we turned eleven, we’re allowed to go back and forth to

each other's houses pretty much whenever we want, from 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. That's the one rule.

"Um, Aves, are you moving in?" I giggle. "What's up?"

"My mom wants me to collect any clothes you're giving away for the clothing drive," she says, almost out of

breath, plopping herself down the couch. "Why we need to do it right now, I have no idea. But yeah. Do you have any clothes?"

I think for a minute. "Yeah, down in the basement there are a few bags, actually. You know, my mom is always going through stuff and then she never actually gets around to bringing the bags to the donation bins."

Ava gives me a bewildered sort of face and goes down to the basement.

When she returns, she sits down on the couch next me. "Is Anna literally always in a fight with someone or does it just seem that way?" Ava whispers.



“I think she kinda is. Wanna come upstairs for a minute?”

Ava looks at her watch, a sparkly pink plastic one she got on a beach vacation last summer. “Yeah, for a few minutes, but it’s almost eight thirty.”

When we get to my room, I lie back on my bed. It feels like I’ve been going nonstop since seven in the morning, which I guess I kind of have.

“You okay, Ellie?” Ava asks, sitting down next to me.

“I’m so, so tired,” I reply, staring up at the ceiling, wondering if I should just go to bed for the night.

“I can’t believe it about the deli,” Ava says. “My mom can’t believe it either. I mean, no one can. My grandma is the most shocked of all.”

I sit up, finally, and I watch her face fall. “What are you talking about?”

I didn’t tell her, so if Ava knows about the deli closing, it must be really official, spread around the community in a way where everyone is talking about it. Does that mean it’s too late to step in and try to change things? Have my soup wishes been for nothing? Maybe the magic has worn off.

“Nothing, never mind. I gotta go.”

She gets up to leave and I put a hand on her shoulder.

“Ava Naomi Milkin. Tell me this instant what you’ve heard.”

She stares at me, her green eyes as wide as I've ever seen them. "I heard the deli is gonna close," she says, so quiet it's pretty much a whisper. "I thought you knew."

"I didn't know it was official, like one hundred percent definitely happening," I say so quietly, it's practically a whisper.

Ava is a master eavesdropper, like me, but sometimes she gets confused.

This deli decision is not definite yet. I know it's not, because my parents haven't officially told us.

So that means there's still time.

Still time for my soup wishes to work.

Still time to save my deli.

