

# Ellie's Deli



IN A  
PICKLE!

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BY  
LISA GREENWALD

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Andrews McMeel  
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# CUCUMBER SALAD

Note: If covered tightly or in a plastic storage container in the fridge, the salad will keep up to a week.

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 cucumbers (peeled and sliced thin)
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 large onion (sliced thin)
- ½ cup vinegar
- ½ cup water



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place the cucumbers in a colander.
2. Place over a bowl and toss with salt.
3. Let stand for 30 minutes.
4. Take a handful of slices at a time and squeeze out the water.
5. Place the wilted cucumbers in a bowl.
6. Add the remaining ingredients and toss well.
7. Chill for 20 minutes.
8. Serve.

**ALWAYS** have adult supervision when cooking! Make sure that the adults are handling sharp knives and other tricky kitchen supplies, like food processors. Tie any loose hair back, too. And always wash your hands with soap and water before cooking.

# Chapter 1

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The thing about pickles is that you either love them (me) or hate them (Ava's mom).

For me, I love pickles so much that Bubbie got me an *I love pickles* keychain for my ninth birthday. I keep it with me all the time, kind of like a good luck charm.

For Ava's mom, she hates them so much she will send a sandwich back if a pickle shows up on the plate next to it. She always says "No pickle, please," to servers at restaurants, but sometimes they don't listen, or maybe they just forget.

Ava is my best friend. And we just so happen to be at my family's deli, Lukshen, right now where we're happily munching on half-sour pickles, my favorite.

"Tell me the story again," I say to Ava.

She rolls her eyes. "Ellie, how many times have I told you this?"

"A million." I laugh. "But I still find it fascinating."

Ava sighs. "Okay, so when my mom was a kid, she lived in this very remote part of Rhode Island. One day a bunch

of people from the synagogue went to New York City and brought back a bunch of famous Jewish city foods, like bagels and knishes and babka and a *huge* tub of pickles. On the drive back, the lid on the pickle tub was kinda loose, and the pickle juice spilled out a little on the bagels, but my grandma didn't tell my mom. My mom ate one, and . . ." Ava pauses for dramatic effect. "Well, a pickle-flavored bagel is just not appealing, even for pickle lovers."

"Unreal," I say. "So, so gross."

"Totally," Charlie adds.

"She's hated pickles ever since," Ava says.

"But they're *so good!* I can't believe she never even gave them another chance," I say after my last bite of half-sour.

"She'll never get over it," Ava replies. "I mean, she loves Lukshen, of course, and thankfully your Bubbie always remembers no pickles, Ellie. Still, to this day, pickles gross her out."

"Does your mom feel the same way?" I ask Charlie.

Ava's mom and Charlie's mom are sisters, so Charlie (or Charlotte, if you're her mom when she's mad) is Ava's first cousin. I know I'm Ava's number one, but if she has a number two, it's definitely Charlie.

“No.” Charlie shrugs. “She was such a picky eater as a kid; she didn’t eat bagels *or* pickles, so I guess she lucked out.”

“Wow,” I say after a sip of black cherry soda. “Too picky for bagels is *really* picky.”

Bubbie brought us three to Lukshen after religious school; she drives the Sunday carpool most of the time. We’ve been planning all week to go to Swirls, the new frozen yogurt place around the corner from Lukshen. It didn’t open for the day until now, though, so we had to come to Lukshen first. And *had* to eat some pre-frozen yogurt pickles, of course.

I toss my soda bottle into the recycling bin. “Ready to go?” I ask them.

“Yes! So excited about this,” Charlie says. “And I really need to talk to you guys about something when we get there.”

“We can’t talk about it here?” I ask.

“I mean, we could, but it’s so noisy in here I think I should wait.”

It’s actually amazing that it’s this noisy at Lukshen, considering we were basically on the verge of going out of business a few months ago. I nod. Sometimes in life there’s good and there’s bad. This one’s mostly good, but the bad is that it does make it hard to talk in Lukshen sometimes. Ava was basically screaming when recounting her mom’s story.

We walk as quickly as we can to Swirls since it's freezing out and not really frozen yogurt weather, but it just opened, and we couldn't wait to visit. It's kind of weird to open a frozen yogurt shop in the winter, but maybe they want to ease in.

As soon as we sit down at the table with our frozen yogurts and our hot chocolates (an amazing combination, by the way), I ask Charlie what's going on. I can't tell whether Ava knows or not.

"Are you sure you're ready to hear this?" Charlie asks.

"I think so," I reply, although I'm not totally sure if I'm ready actually since I have no idea what it is.

"So, the venue for my bat mitzvah party just closed! Out of the *blue*," Charlie shrieks. "And now my mom is saying we'll just postpone the party, but she doesn't know to *when*. And she's like, 'The service is the important part anyway, and blah blah blah' . . . I won't even end up having a party—I'm sure of it."

"Wow, that is really stressful, Charlie." I scrunch up my face. "I'm so sorry."

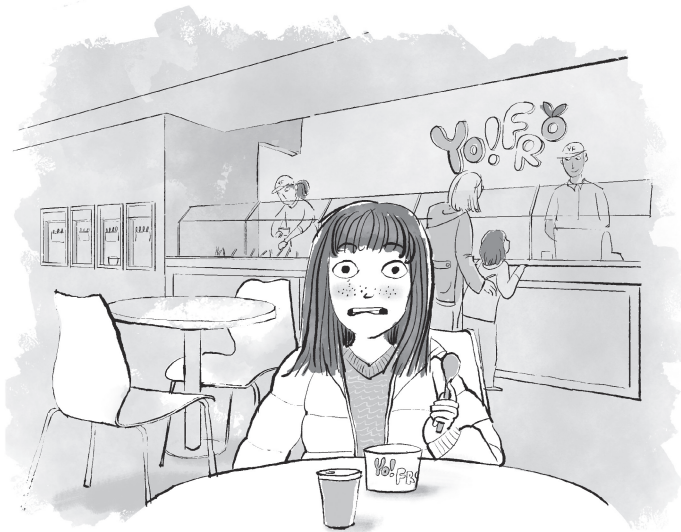
In a way, Charlie is sorta kinda like my cousin, too, since Ava and I are best friends. We all go to the same temple, so we see each other a lot, and it kinda feels like we're family. Charlie's a year older than Ava and me, though.

"I am *so* mega stressed, Ellie." Charlie looks over at me.

## IN A PICKLE!

I guess Ava does already know all of this, because Charlie's looking at me to weigh in. She twists her brown curls around her finger, closes her eyes, and rests her head back on the seat.

Ava looks at me with a wide-eyed, teeth-clenched face she makes when she doesn't know what to do or what to say. I don't know what to say, either.



The thing is, Charlie's mom isn't totally wrong. The service *is* the most important part of a bat mitzvah. That's when the actual "becoming a bat mitzvah" really happens. A bat mitzvah is when a Jewish kid—usually around age thirteen—is called to the Torah for the first time. The Torah is an ancient scroll that

contains stories and lays out the 613 laws that Jewish people live by. So, reading it is a huge milestone, and in our town of Marlborough Lake, we usually celebrate afterward with a party. The parties can be really over the top, but the service is actually what matters most.

“That sounds really hard, Charlie.” I don’t really know what to say, and part of me feels tempted to rub her shoulder or something, but we’re not THAT close, plus I need to eat this frozen yogurt that is sort of melting all over the table now. “I can’t believe that about the venue.”

Charlie starts crying, and Ava shakes her head, like she’s not sure how she ended up in the middle of this. Then Ava leans over and whispers in my ear. “Ellie, you gotta help me with this.”

“Um.” I bite my bottom lip. I mean, what can I do? It’s not like I can open a bat mitzvah venue.

“I helped you with the deli,” Ava continues and raises her eyebrows.

Ava’s right—a few months ago, she *did* help me save Lukshen Deli. There wasn’t a lot of money coming in, and my family was considering selling it. But thanks to Ava (and me, of course!), and a lot of other things, we saved the deli.

Plus, I love to help! Helping is pretty much my favorite thing. And just today, in religious school, we learned about

the famous sage Rabbi Hillel, who said, “*If I am only for myself, what am I?*”

It’s a sign—the fact that we learned this quote today and Charlie told me this bat mitzvah stuff today. It’s clear: I *have* to help.

“First of all, Charlie, let’s take some deep breaths. That always calms me down. And it’s proven to lower stress, too.” I pause. Charlie’s not following. “In and out. In and out. Just focus on your breathing, nothing else.”

Charlie actually listens to me on the deep breath thing now. She stops crying, and I think I see her body relax a little.

“Also, it’s true the service is the most important part, and that’s still happening, at least,” I add. I crinkle my eyebrows together. “And it’s not your fault the venue closed. I mean, no one could have predicted that.”

“Yeah, but what am I going to do?” Charlie asks. “I still want a party! It’s important to celebrate this milestone. If our synagogue social hall wasn’t under construction, I’d have the party there.” She holds her head in her hands. “This is such a disaster!”

I’m not sure if Charlie was always this dramatic or if all the stress is bringing it out of her.

Ava gives me the teeth-clenched look again, and I know what I have to do. I know what I have to say. This is my next mission,

and it's just as important to Charlie as saving my family's deli was to me.

"Charlie, it's going to be okay." I pause. I didn't expect to have another mission so soon, but it's okay. I can do this. "And I'll help! I love to plan stuff. I can be your unofficial bat mitzvah helper, planner, coordinator, whatever!"

Ava smiles, her eyes bulged out so wide it seems like they could maybe pop out of her head. What a gross thought.

"Oh my goodness, Ellie!" she yelps. "Yes! You're an amazing planner. Charlie, this is going to be great!"

I smile. I know that, of course, but it's still good to hear.

"Oooh, brainstorm!" Ava claps. "Nina can help, too! Her birthday party was epic. She'll have ideas! We'll totally find a new venue!"

Nina's our newish friend; she moved to Marlborough Lake earlier this year. Her dad was actually the restaurant developer trying to acquire Lukshen, so it's all a little twisted up and complicated, but we worked it out. He helped us with some stuff, and he's a consultant now.

Charlie wipes some tears away from her eyes and scoops the last bites of frozen yogurt out of the cup. "Thank you so much for offering, Ellie. But places book so early; I mean, Marlborough Lake is so small. . . . What if nothing else is available?"

“It’s okay. We got this. We can’t do it all at once. Obviously, you know that. Sooooo, step-by-step. Where should we start?”

“I don’t know!” Charlie shouts. “If I knew that, I’d have started already!”

See what I mean? Kinda dramatic.

“This is going to be so horrible,” Charlie wails. She puts her head down on the table at Swirls, which sort of grosses me out, but I ignore it. “My mom is going to freak out at my dad, like, every other second. They always freak out at each other when they’re stressed.”

Ava puts an arm over her shoulder.

“Ava, I think my parents fight more than yours did when they were married, and your parents got divorced!” Charlie shrieks.

I’m not sure that was the best thing she could have said. She seems to just blurt out whatever thought lands in her brain at any given moment.

“My parents never really fought, though,” Ava answers.

I add, “I mean, I never heard them fight,” just because I feel like I need to contribute to the conversation at least a little bit.

And it’s true: When they were married, Ava’s parents didn’t really fight. They actually got along great. Ava’s mom realized she liked women all along, and they got divorced. But they still get along really well.