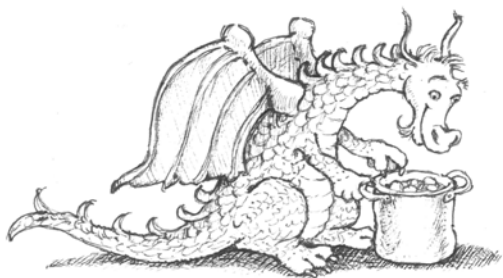


## chapter 1

### A Mysterious Egg



Shoshi Kapustin clapped her hands over her ears to shut out the pitying voices.

“Those poor darlings. Abandoned by such a selfish father. Mark my words: He has a new family in America. My cousin went to New York and never sent for his wife and children either.”

The village women were gossiping while waiting to draw water from the well, and, as usual, her family was their favorite subject. “You think you know everything, you miserable *yentas*,” Shoshi said. When it was her turn, she lowered her bucket so hard it slammed the surface of the water.

“Such manners,” sniffed the baker’s wife. “But then, look at her with that blazing hair and a temper to match. And a mother who lets her children run wild like animals.”

Shoshi felt a sharp finger poke her back. "Hurry child," the rabbi's wife barked. "Passover starts in six hours, and we *all* need water."

Shoshi whirled around, and her braids slapped her face like fiery whips. "My father *will* send for us. And when he does, we will join him in America and pick gold from the streets." She grasped the rope-handled bucket with both hands and marched down the village street, searching the crowd for her mother.

Mama would reassure her that Papa still loved them. Holding the bucket carefully, Shoshi walked past the ramshackle wooden buildings lining the muddy street. She peered into the butcher shop, with its thick carpet of chicken feathers, but her mother wasn't there. She scanned the crowd of women buying Passover matzos in the bakery, but her mother wasn't one of them. Shoshi found her standing at a table in front of the synagogue, selling the last of her meager supply of fresh eggs.

Her mother's head was covered in a black scarf, which hid all but a few strands of dark hair threaded with silver. Her eyes crinkled as she smiled at Shoshi, and she opened her arms. Shoshi plunked down the bucket and rushed in for a soothing hug.

"Mama, the baker's wife says that Papa will never send for us."

"That woman has razor for a tongue. May it cut her words to pieces so they can't do any harm." Ruth

Kapustin stroked her daughter's head. "I've told you over and over. Papa went to America because his brother, Mendel – may he grow like an onion with his head in the ground – borrowed our passage money and used it to open a restaurant. Papa works in the restaurant to make back the money for our steamship tickets."

"Why hasn't he written for five years? The baker's wife says . . ."

"*Shoshile*, gossip is a disease. Do not catch it. Listen to *me*. Your father would never abandon us." She stood and pointed to the synagogue. "Papa carved the Star of David over the synagogue door."

