

Fifteen-year-old Moshe Levi is excited and terrified as he sets sail from Amsterdam on his very first business trip. His father is gone, and he's the head of the house now.

Will his voyage be successful?

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*Chapter One*

## **The Journey**

Moshe Levi jumped off the wagon before it stopped moving. He swung his heavy pack onto his back and took a deep breath of the salty sea air. There she was! The ship he was to board here in Amsterdam stood with sails unfurled, ready to depart for the faraway continent of Africa.

The sturdy fifteen-year-old couldn't have been more excited. Finally, he had the chance to be a man, to earn money for Mama and the children now that Papa was gone.

Moshe held out his hand to help Mama down from the wagon. How pale she looked in her black gown and shawl.

"Don't worry, Mama," he said, for the tenth time that day. "I must travel to buy goods, just like Papa did, and then we will have as much money as we need when I return!"

His mother couldn't help smiling at her son's youthful confidence.

“Don’t worry, indeed! What else does a mother do when her son is about to leave her side for the first time?”

Moshe had no answer for that. Instead, he lifted his little brother, Yosef, from the wagon and swung him wildly through the air.

“Moshe!” squealed Yosef.

Then, more gently, Moshe picked up three-year-old Miriam. She threw her chubby arms around his neck and hugged him with all her might. Suddenly, a lump formed in Moshe’s throat. He blinked hard, swallowed a few times, and handed Miriam over to Mama.

“Well,” he said brightly, “who wants to see the big ship?”

Yosef took Moshe’s hand. “But why do you have to go so very far? Papa traveled to closer places.”

“You know why,” Moshe answered. “Africa is the best place to buy certain goods to sell when I come back.”

“Like cork?”

Moshe stopped short and stared at his little brother. “Where did you hear that?”

Yosef looked a bit sheepish. “I heard you talking to Meneer Jacobs about it.”

“Yosef, I’m the man of the family now, and you’ll listen to me. Not one word about anything you ever heard me say to Papa’s partner about business. You could ruin everything for all of us!”

Yosef’s eyes grew narrow; he glared up at his older brother. “I will not ruin anything!”

Esther Levi stepped in to smooth things over, as she always did when her two headstrong boys challenged each other. How alike they were, with her husband’s dark eyes and intelligent minds.

“Moshe, that’s enough. Yosef is ten, and he’s old enough to understand about keeping important conversations private. Isn’t that right, Yosef?”

The young boy nodded sullenly.

But Moshe was still frowning. "Mama, Meneer Jacobs is counting on me to strike a good deal on importing cork from Africa. Our whole fortune depends on secrecy."

Mama looked sharply at Moshe. "Our whole fortune depends on Hashem, or G-d, my son. Never forget that. And why Papa's partner would send a boy to Africa instead of going himself... well, let's say no more about it."

Moshe's annoyance vanished as quickly as it had come. He threw an arm around Yosef's thin shoulders. "Mama is absolutely right. Everything depends on Hashem. Still, you won't say a word, will you, Yosef?"

"Of course not! And when you're gone, I'll be the man of the family!"

Moshe turned to hide a smile. "You certainly will be. That's why I'm counting on you to listen to Mama and help her with Miriam."

"I guess I can help with Miriam. But you

really need me to keep an eye on things for you. Don't worry; I will."

Moshe rolled his eyes, but said nothing. He was struck speechless by the sight of the ship up close. Sailors climbed up and down the rigging, passengers jostled each other as they scrambled aboard, and porters carried crates and trunks up the ramp and onto the huge sailing vessel.

"There's my trunk; Meneer Jacobs packed all the business papers for me. He even sent a porter from the warehouse to load it aboard."

"Meneer Jacobs has been very kind to us," Mama said. "I'm sure you will represent him honestly and well on your travels."

"Well, I don't like him," Yosef grumbled. "He stares at me whenever I come into the warehouse with a message for Moshe."

Moshe secretly agreed with his little brother. Meneer Jacobs wasn't very friendly. He had a cold stare that could be intimidating.

"Well, he'll like all of us much more if

I complete a successful business deal on his behalf.”

Suddenly the ship’s bell sounded. Little Miriam covered her ears.

Moshe dropped his pack and turned to bid his mother farewell. “It’s only a few months, Mama. I’ll be back before you know it.”

Esther smiled her approval at her son’s words. “You will.” Her voice broke, just for a moment, and her eyes grew bright. “But just in case things take longer than you expect, do take this package with you.”

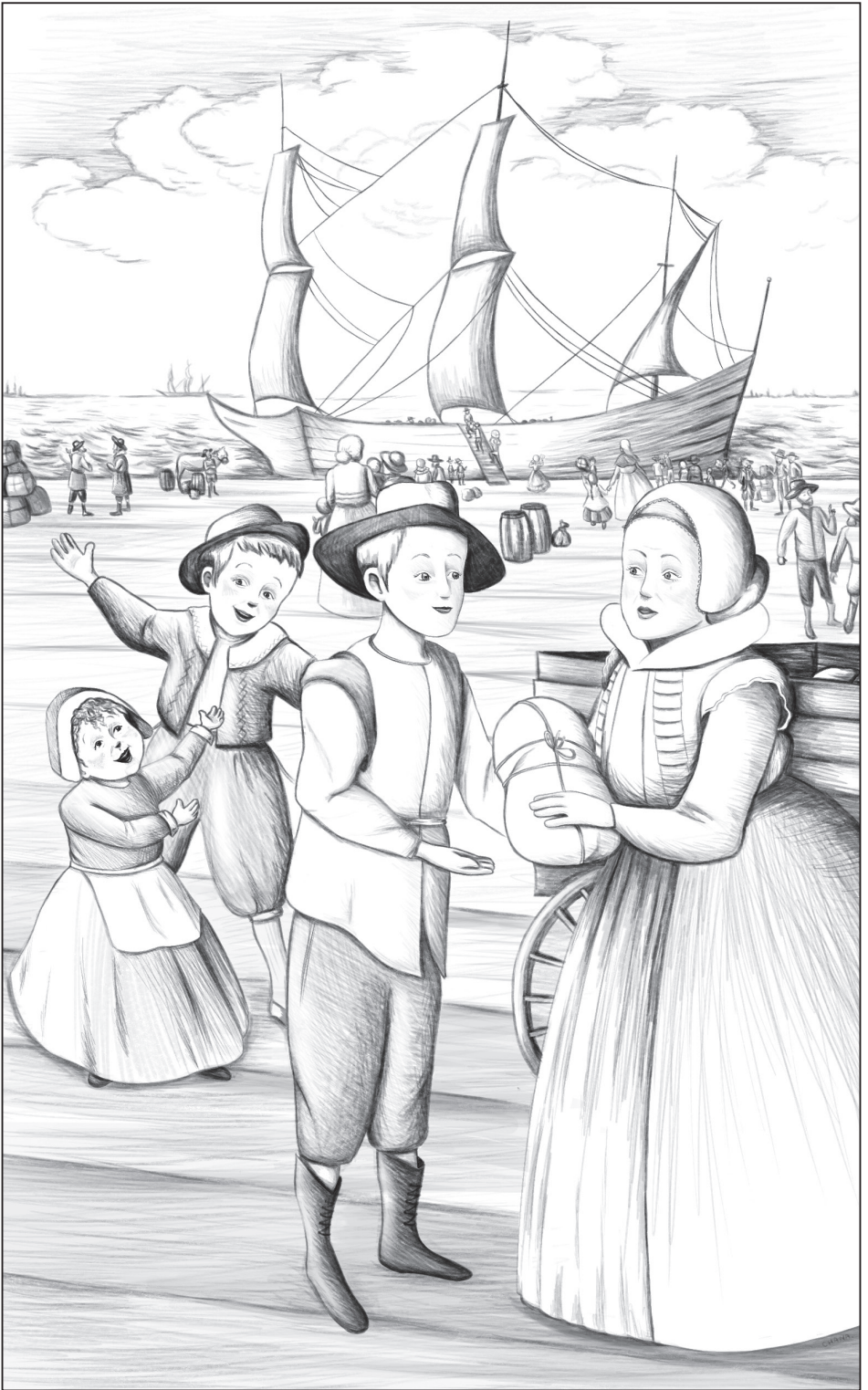
Curious, Moshe reached out to take the flat bundle.

“Inside are matzot, a Haggada, and a small flask of wine,” Mama said calmly, “just in case.”

“Oh, Mama! I should be back long before Pesach – before Passover!”

“Take it with you,” she said firmly. “I’ll rest easier knowing that you are prepared.”

Esther could not help but feel uneasy about





this trip. After all, so many dangers could come up on a sea journey! Pirates, bad weather... she shuddered to think about it.

The ship's bell sounded again, and the last remaining passengers hurried aboard.

"Come, children." Mama tried to smile. "Let us say goodbye to your brother and wish him success. We hope his trip is short and that he returns safely."

Moshe slapped Yosef on the back and kissed little Miriam's curls. He turned to Mama last of all, hugging her as if he never wanted to let go.

"All aboard!" The booming voice of the captain's first mate rang out loud and clear. Not trusting himself to say any more goodbyes, Moshe picked up his heavy pack and headed straight up the gangway onto the ship.

Once on deck, Moshe turned to get a last glimpse of his dear family. He was determined to make his fortune so that he could support and

take care of them. He was sure his father would have been proud.

How Moshe missed Papa at moments like this! How he needed his wise advice!

Well, as Mama had reminded him, it all depended on Hashem, his Father in Heaven.

“Please, Hashem,” he whispered, “keep my family well while I travel. Make my voyage successful, and bring me back safely to them!”