



STARDUST

BY SHIRA MOSKOWITZ



THE NEXT DAY IN

school, I sit down in my seat. Chassi isn't here this morning, so no one notices, let alone greets me. It's fine though. I'm used to it.

After quickly reviewing Chumash from the night before, I rip a piece of paper from my notebook and scribble down a few more notes.

A new tune has just entered my brain and I won't - can't - forget it.

I've always been musical. My mother says that I was born singing, which doesn't make any sense, but okay (my mother further explained this matter when I was eleven, saying that I was crying musically somehow, which still doesn't make any sense, but whatever).

I was only six when my parents noticed my flair for violin. My cousin, Daniella, who plays violin, had begun to teach me a few notes and I immediately caught on.

My parents caught me playing "Twinkle, Twinkle" and after begging them for a violin of my own, they acquiesced and gave me a trial run.

I bonded instantly with my violin, however weird that sounds, but there's no other way to put it, and, I don't know, developed the talent of composing songs. It's annoying at times, because though I try to resist the pull of music, somehow, I can't. It drives me crazy.

Why can't I just be a normal girl? I'm sure no one else's head is ever invaded by an army of music notes, clamoring to be put down on paper.

"Avigayil? Avigayil!"

I jolt out of my reverie and stare guiltily up at Mrs. Lieberman.

"What does Rashi say on the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*?"

I uncomfortably note that my Chumash is still closed. I can feel the eyes of

the whole class on me as I hurriedly open my Chumash and flip around for a few minutes, trying to find the place.

Mrs. Lieberman is standing there the whole time, frowning. "We are in *perek yud daled, pasuk vav*," she says tightly.

Cheeks burning, I flip to the correct page. Different music notes are still flitting about in my mind, forming and blending to create new sounds.

Without me even realizing it, I'm scribbling more notes down on my notebook page, my hand subconsciously forming G sharps and B flats.

When that particular rush finishes, I hurriedly slam my notebook shut and slide it away under my desk and look up.

Mrs. Lieberman is still looking at me, waiting. I slump, feeling my cheeks

CHAPTER 3

Avigayil is in a good mood when she comes home from school. She composes a new piece on her violin.

NONE NOTICE A GIRL, SITTING ON A SWING BY HERSELF, HALFHEARTEDLY KICKING THE SAND AS SHE ATTEMPTS TO MAKE THE SWING GO HIGHER

burn.

"See me after class," she tells me, and then turns to Sari Feingold, who answers correctly of course. I grit my teeth. I don't mind the rest of the girls really, except...her. Sari just gets on my nerves.

She is just so...perfect. She has well-off parents, good looks, brains and most importantly, lots and lots of friends. I am not jealous per se, I just don't like Sari. Argh. Why does she have to have everything?

For the first time, my heart lurches. *I wish someone would like me for who I am. I wish someone would want to be friends with me. Why can't I have friends? Am I always destined to be alone? A social outcast? Someone who is never allowed to play tag with the class, someone is banned from all games...*

I wince as a memory envelops me...

The bell rings and Morah Leah dismisses the first graders

for recess. "You can go play outside today," she says. "The rain stopped!"

"Yay!" cheer the girls as they race out. One lone girl follows, trailing slowly behind. Malka, a popular girl, immediately starts a game of tag, which most of the class joins.

None notice a girl, sitting on a swing by herself, halfheartedly kicking the sand as she attempts to make the swing go higher. She watches the girls running and shrieking with glee, unrestrained longing in her eyes...

Suddenly, the swing she's sitting on jerks and sways. She turns to find Malka and two other girls standing behind her.

"Get off the swing!" Malka demands. "We want it!"

"But I got here first!" she protests feebly.

"Get off!" To prove her point, Malka gives the swing's chains a vicious jerk. The rest of the first graders gather around Malka and the girl, not wanting to miss the show.

Malka and her two friends

start jerking the swing more and more violently until the girl can't hold on any longer. She crashes to the ground, and her brand new uniform that Mommy had just washed is stained with grass and mud. Her hands throb, and she notices blood. She starts to cry.

"Oh look," sneers Malka, "the baby's crying." She starts up the all-too-familiar chant, "Icky Avigayil! Icky Avigayil!" while the other students echo the mantra...

The girl stumbles to her feet. Why did they hate her? Why couldn't someone want to be her friend? She flees the playground, tears blinding her vision...

I shake myself out of the trancelike state I'm in, forcing that terrible memory away. I won't remember those days. I won't. But despite my best efforts to drive the recollection from my mind, it obstinately refuses to budge.

TO BE CONTINUED...