



One Cake, Two Wishes

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: The Wrong Drawing

The birthday cake on the kitchen table has a pond on one side and an enormous book on the other.

Henny stares at the drawing.

"That's not our cake."

"It's a possible cake," Mama says. Her navy tichel covers all her hair. "Bubby wants to know what you both like."

"We like ponds."

Across the table, her twin sister puts down her pencil.

"I asked for the book," Tzippy says.

Henny looks from the cake drawing to Tzippy's face. Yesterday, they agreed on the cake. At least, Henny thinks they did. She drew the pond; Tzippy nodded while reading.

"Since when?"

"Since Mama asked me this morning."

Mama turns the drawing so the twins can both see it. "Nothing is ordered yet."

Henny folds her arms. "It looks like two cakes stuck together."

"We are two people," Tzippy says.

The kitchen gets very quiet.



Chapter 2: Henny-and-Tzippy

At school, the twins hang their coats on neighboring hooks.

"Birthday plans?" their friend Baila asks.

"Sunday," Henny says. "The usual."

Tzippy adjusts the strap of her bag. "Not all the usual."

Henny wishes she could reach across the hallway and put those words back.

Their birthdays have a system. One cake. One table. One outing with Mama. Every year, Bubby gives them matching notebooks with different initials.

People say Henny-and-Tzippy so quickly it sounds like one long name.

Henny likes being one long name.

At break, Tzippy sits with Baila to discuss a book Henny hasn't read. Henny waits for someone to ask about the birthday. Nobody does.

On the way home, she kicks a dry leaf ahead of them.

"You could have told me."

"I am telling you."

"Not in front of Baila."

Tzippy stops walking. "Henny, I keep trying to tell you things. You finish them for me."



The leaf catches against a fence.

Henny leaves it there.

Chapter 3: Two Blank Lines

After supper, Mama asks each girl to write one birthday wish on a separate scrap of paper.

"Something our family can actually arrange," she says. "Not a pony."

Tzippy grins. Henny doesn't.

Her wish is easy. The small garden where they always watch the ducks from the bench beside the pond.

She writes it, then tries to see what Tzippy is writing.

Tzippy covers her page.

"What? It's not a secret present."

"I want to finish my own sentence."

Mama collects the scraps. Henny's says GARDEN. Tzippy's says USED-BOOK SHOP.

"We can visit both," Mama says. "They're on the same street. I'll check the hours."

"That's not the point," Henny says.

Mama leaves the papers on the table. "What is?"



Henny's eyes start to sting. She hates that. It makes her look like someone having a fuss over a duck.

"Next year she won't want the garden at all. Then she'll want a different birthday. Then everything will be different."

Tzippy's hand goes still beside her paper.

"I only asked for the bookshop."

Chapter 4: The Box Under the Bed

Henny goes upstairs and pulls out the birthday box.

Inside are old cards, two blue ribbons, and the photograph where Tzippy has cake on her nose. Henny remembers wiping it away. She remembers Tzippy laughing so hard that Mama took the photograph before either girl sat properly.

Tzippy appears in the doorway.

"Can I come in?"

Henny nods.

Tzippy sits on the rug. She picks up one of the ribbons.

"I don't want everything different either."

"You say we're two people."

"We are. I still want the cake and Bubby's notebooks. I want you at the bookshop."



Henny studies the photograph.

"Then why didn't you tell me about the cake before?"

"When you drew the pond, you said, 'Good, that's settled.' I was in the middle of my book. I nodded. Then I thought I couldn't change it."

Henny remembers saying exactly that.

Tzippy has a part in the misunderstanding too. Somehow that feels better than being the only wrong person, and worse than being completely right.

"Next time, don't just nod," Henny says.

"Next time, ask me."

Neither sounds especially pleased.

They stay on the rug anyway.

Chapter 5: One of Each

On Sunday, the twins stand outside the bookshop with Mama.

Henny expects shelves. She doesn't expect the little wooden ladder behind the counter, or the basket of books with damaged covers, or the bookseller who remembers Tzippy from a previous visit.

"Still searching for the second volume?" he asks her.

Tzippy lights up.



Henny feels the unpleasant little pinch again. Here is a whole conversation she isn't part of.

She nearly says they need to leave for the garden.

Instead, she looks at the basket.

There is a book about ducks.

Of course there is.

She takes it out and discovers a page about feet. Duck feet are much stranger than she expects.

"Look at this," she says.

Tzippy comes over. She doesn't pretend to be interested for very long.

"That is a lot of foot."

Henny laughs. "It's an excellent foot."

Mama lets each girl choose one book within the birthday budget. Tzippy finds her second volume. Henny buys the duck book.

At the garden, Tzippy reads on a bench near Mama while Henny watches two ducks argue over absolutely nothing she can understand.

"You're missing them," Henny calls.

"I'm here," Tzippy says, and looks up.

For a minute, all three watch.



Then Tzippy goes back to her book.

Henny stays with the ducks.

Chapter 6: The Middle of the Cake

Bubby arrives for the family supper wearing her floral tichel, not a strand of hair showing. She carries one cake.

A pond fills one side. An open book fills the other. A thin path of icing runs between them.

"I nearly put a duck reading a book in the middle," Bubby says. "Then I decided your duck had enough to do."

Tzippy laughs first. Henny follows.

The twins cut different pieces. Henny wants water. Tzippy wants the corner with the little icing bookmark.

"Next year," Aunt Chana says, adjusting the edge of her neatly tied tichel, "perhaps we should get you separate cakes."

Henny opens her mouth.

Then she looks at Tzippy.

"Do you want that?"

Tzippy thinks. "I don't know yet."

Henny doesn't know either. A separate cake sounds lonely. It also sounds like more cake.



"We can decide next year," she says.

After supper, the twins put the new birthday cards in their box. Mama brings them a little print of the new cake photograph. Tzippy slides it beside the photograph with icing on her nose.

There are two notebooks from Bubby, green and purple this time.

"Which one?" Henny asks.

"Purple. You?"

"Green."

No trade is necessary. No one has to pretend.

Tzippy takes her new book upstairs. Henny brings the duck book after her.

They read on opposite ends of the same bed.

Every so often, Henny puts a finger on a wonderful foot and turns the book around.