

THE LIGHTBULB

By Rebecca Klempner



I think I hear them coming up the stairs!" exclaimed Yehudah.

Just as soon as the words popped out of his mouth, the key turned in the lock. In walked Abba with Savta Sima, a suitcase, and a duffel bag.

Yaeli and Yehudah had looked forward to this visit for a long time. Savta Sima lived in Eretz Yisrael, so her grandchildren only saw her once a year for a two-week visit.

"Come sit on the sofa, Savta. Can I get you a drink?" asked Yehudah.

"That would be wonderful, dear. A little water would be nice." Yehudah ran to the kitchen in a flash.

Yaeli hugged Savta Sima tightly. She asked, "Should I take your bag to your room?"

"Not yet, sweetheart. I have something for you in there."

A big grin stretched across Yaeli's face. Savta Sima always brought the best gifts. Because they had to fit into Savta's luggage, each one was small in size, but very special.

What did she bring me this time? Yaeli wondered as Savta Sima poked around in her carry-on bag, chatting to Abba about her flight.

I remember when I was five years old and Savta Sima brought me that teeny, tiny doll. She fit into the palm of my hand! She had such a sweet little face and silky black hair, and I named her "Boobah Ahuvah"!

Another year, Ima and Abba must have told Savta that I like to write. She found a pocket-sized journal with a fancy cover just for me and slipped it into the flap

of her suitcase. It was perfect for scribbling my stories!

And remember last year! That was the best yet! Savta Sima gave me a real gold necklace with my name on it in lovely, looping Hebrew letters. I still wear that necklace every single Shabbos.

Would this gift be as special as that?

Yehudah reappeared with the water, followed by their mother. She kissed Savta Sima, and apologized, "I'm so glad to see you! I'm sorry I didn't make it to the airport, but I'm still cooking for Shabbos."

Savta Sima said with a twinkle in her eye, "I can tell ... it smells of vanilla!"

"It's sugar cookies. You can taste them as soon as they're cool," replied her daughter-in-law.

Yaeli watched this exchange and waited impatiently. Finally, Savta made a brachah, took a sip of the water, and put down her glass.

"Now for the gifts," she said. "First Yehudah, since he's the eldest." Savta Sima reached into the duffel bag. She handed Yehudah a small box. Lifting the lid, he found a coin. "Thanks, Savta!" he exclaimed in delight. "You remembered! I've been looking for that one for months!"

Abba patted Yehudah on the back. Ima said, "You have such a knack for choosing the right gift, Mom!"

"Thank you. You're such a sweetheart to say so! Now it's your turn, Yaeli," said Savta Sima. Turning toward her other grandchild, she pulled out her other package.

Wow, thought Yaeli. *This is bigger than usual!*

Everyone's eyes were on Yaeli as she tore through the wrapping paper and looked at her gift.

DRESS

"Oh," said Yaeli, forcing a smile on her face. "Thanks." She gave her grandmother a kiss on the cheek.

It's the ugliest dress I have ever seen! she thought.

"Excuse me," she added in a little, squeaky voice. Then she ran from the room.

Yaeli sat on her bed. She looked down at the vivid yellow dress, thinking.

It's so bright, I can hardly look at it without getting a headache! I don't want to wear it, but I can't tell Savta how much I hate it. She took a deep breath.

Yehudah strolled into the room. "There you are," he said. "What's wrong?"

She pointed at the dress. "I'll look like a lightbulb!" she cried.

Yehudah smirked, "It is loud, but it's not so bad."

"Oh, yes it is! Maybe I'll purposely spill something all over it. Something that will make a terrible stain that will never, ever come out!"

Yehudah ignored her. "Look, Savta's resting now, and we have a little while before Ima needs us to set the table for Shabbos. Why don't you come for a bike ride with me? You'll feel better."

Yaeli nodded. "Okay. I'll go get my helmet."

Yehudah was right. Yaeli did feel better as the cool air rushed against her face. She waved at her friend Baila as she rode past her apartment building. Waving back, Baila gestured for Yaeli to come over. Yehudah signaled he'd wait on the sidewalk for her.

"Did your grandmother get here safely?" Baila asked when Yaeli reached the front steps of Baila's apartment house.

Yaeli smiled faintly. "Oh, yes. She just arrived an hour ago."

"Your savta is so nice! She always brings you the best gifts. What did she bring you this time?"

"A dress," said Yaeli tightly.

"I'll bet it's gorgeous!" said Baila.

If you like looking directly at the sun, thought Yaeli. Maybe I'll donate it to charity and tell Savta it's lost.

Instead, she said, "It's only a couple hours until Shabbos. I'd better get going. *Shabbat Shalom!*"

"Gut Shabbos! Say hello to your grandmother for me!"

Back with Yehudah, Yaeli continued her bike ride. They rode past stately emerald trees and hedges studded with brightly colored flowers. Yaeli inhaled the freshly cut grass on her neighbors' lawns and noticed the slanting light as the sun dropped lower in the sky. She definitely felt calmer now.

"I'm glad Savta Sima is here," her brother said as they headed back home.

"Me, too," replied Yaeli.

Yehudah shot her a sharp look, then asked, "Then why did you run from the room so fast?"

"I didn't know what to say when I saw the dress."

"What if you hurt her feelings? And I think Ima was embarrassed that you acted so badly," Yehudah said. "The dress really isn't so bad."

"I'll look like a lemon! Maybe I'll tell her it's too small, or — better yet — much too short to wear. Savta would appreciate that."

"Yaeli, stop being ridiculous! Do you only love Savta when she brings you pretty presents, or do you love her always because she's your grandmother and she loves you?"

Just then, they reached their house. Yaeli locked up her bike and walked slowly inside, thinking about what Yehudah had said.

After her Shabbos shower, Yaeli pulled out the dress. She slipped it over her head and looked in the mirror. Even though it fit perfectly, she cringed. It really was the ugliest dress she had ever worn. With a sigh, she put on her Shabbos necklace and went downstairs to prepare the table for dinner.

"*Shabbat Shalom!*" Savta Sima said as Yaeli entered the living room.

"*Shabbat Shalom,*" Yaeli said back. "Thank you for the dress, Savta."

Savta Sima beamed. "I'm glad you like it, honey. I thought maybe you didn't after you ran out earlier."

Yehudah, who had just walked into the room, hid his laugh behind his hand.

Yaeli just ignored him. She said, "Savta Sima, I'm sorry I ran out of the room earlier."

"That's okay. I wouldn't blame you if you didn't like the dress. When I went shopping for it, I left my regular glasses at home. I didn't take off my sunglasses while I was in the store." Savta Sima winced. "I didn't really get a good look at the dress until I got home. It's a little bright. Maybe you could wear it with a sweater?"

Now it was Yaeli's turn to laugh. "I have the perfect sweater, Savta! Let me show you! Together, they'll look gorgeous!" Yaeli bounced up the stairs.

Savta Sima bounced up the stairs behind her as fast as she could. "I'll help you find the perfect sweater," she said.

Savta Sima really was the best, at picking gifts and so much more! 🍷