

The Story Thus Far

Two cousins, both named Mendel and both devoted to each other, jointly run a cheder in their native Rumania. As the country is entrenched in war, the cousins' hometown Yassi is invaded by a foreign army. An abandoned palace, previously used as an outhouse, is converted into army headquarters.

One night Mendel A goes there and finds a thief hiding a chest of ten thousand ducats which belong to the general. Mendel A removes the chest and takes it home, keeping it hidden under his cellar floor.

After the thief is killed and the general and his army are slaughtered in battle, Mendel A reveals to Mendel B his secret. They agree to invest the money. Mendel A gives Mendel B a thousand ducats, as *ma'aser*, and slips away to Kishinev, in Russia, far from the scrutiny of the Rumanian government.

Soon Mendel A becomes successful. His cousin, on the other hand, finds himself financially dependent on Mendel A. As Mendel B's resentment grows, he feels that he should be entitled to half the money in the chest.

In a letter to Mendel A, he demands four thousand ducats, which he will collect personally within a month. He threatens to denounce Mendel A to the Rumanian government if the demand is not met.

Distraught, Mendel A goes to consult with his mentor, the Shpuler Zeide, who asks Mendel A to donate money to the poor. Following the holy man's advice, he meets with Mendel B at month's end, offers him another loan, and urges him to take up his complaint with the Shpuler Zelde. When Mendel B refuses, Mendel A has him thrown out by the servants.

Furious, Mendel B informs on his cousin to the Rumanian government. Mendel A again runs to the Shpuler Zelde, who advises him of his rights: Mendel A, now a Russian citizen, can be tried in Kishinev, rather than in Yassi. The Shpuler Zelde promises to send him legal aid — a defender and two witnesses — and he tells Mendel A to arrange for Purim as the trial date. As he did previously, the Zeide asks Mendel A for money to be distributed to the poor.

Once this is done, Mendel A asks to meet beforehand with his counsel. The Shpuler Zelde tells him not to worry; the counsel will be at the trial. "He'll be wearing bright red gloves and a white round hat," adds the Shpuler Zelde.

MENDEL

By DEVORAH KIRSCH

It was Purim. Mendel A went through all the rituals — read the Book of Esther, danced in *shul*, gave money to the poor, and sent out gift packages. He also sent a *kvittel*, a note of request, to the

Shpuler Zeide. As the fateful hour approached, he nervously donned his velvet hat and straightened his collar.

When he found the courthouse still empty, Mendel A sat down on a

stone bench and waited. To his surprise, his counsel was not yet there. Neither was his cousin; a few Jews walked briskly down the cobblestone sidewalk, gift packages under their arms. The younger ones sported cos-

tumes.

Soon a pair of carriages pulled up, and out of each stepped a group of officials. Recognizing the Tsarist eagle on one and the bright Rumanian colors on the other, Mendel A hurried over.

"Good afternoon. I'm —"

"Yoo hoo!"

Another carriage creaked to a stop, and a group of about ten Jews bounced out. Two of them wore loose-fitting belts around their trousers, topped by caps and sheepskin jackets, the kind worn by shepherds.

Two other Jews hid their black-bearded faces behind white cotton beards. One frowned professorally and wore a thick pair of spectacles, with empty frames.

"My, my, I hope we're not late," he clicked. He looked at his watch and turned to the shepherds. "Behold, the witnesses."

"They're not my servants," Mendel A wondered. He asked the bespectacled man, "Are you the defender?"

"Oh, heavens, no. I am the prosecutor."

"Prosecutor?"

"Of course."

"Oh, so he is my counsel?" Mendel A motioned to the other cotton-bearded gentleman.

"Oh, no. That is the plaintiff?"

"Plaintiff?"

"Sure. And over there is the defendant."

Mendel A gaped at another Jew, who was made paunchy, or rather pregnant, by a pillow tucked inside his shirt.

Mendel A shook his head. "Well, then, where is my counsel?"

"Over there," answered the "prosecutor" simply. He pointed. "There

is your counsel."

The final man stepped off the carriage. He calmly gazed at the sun, then removed his bright red gloves. He approached the "defendant" and shook his hand.

"Good afternoon," he said.

Mendel A bit his lip to keep from

They entered the courthouse. The Russian took a seat behind the desk, while the others positioned themselves along the walls.

laughing. Atop the "lawyer's" head a sort of round white turban resembling a bell covered his *shtreimel*.

The lawyer then approached the officials. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. I trust I haven't kept you waiting."

"Shall we proceed?" asked the judge, eyeing the white bell strangely.

They entered the courthouse. The Russian took a seat behind the desk, while the others positioned themselves along the walls.

The judge donned a real pair of spectacles and held up a sheet of paper.

"The plaintiff — Mendel B?" he read. "And his prosecuting attorney."

The two cotton-bearded gentlemen strode forward.

"Your Honor," began the prosecutor, "I—"

"B-o-o-o-o-o!"

"His-s-s-s-s!"

He spun around and glared. The voices quickly hushed.

The prosecutor faced forward. "As I was saying, Your Honor—"

"Whoo-wh-o-o-o-o!"

"Tweet! Tweet!"

He again spun around. One of the Jews was blowing a whistle with a toy bird at the end that fluttered.

The judge rapped the gavel angrily. "That's enough!"

The prosecutor continued, "Your Honor, my client here insists that the defendant owes the Rumanian government ten thousand ducats. He says the defendant had stolen it from the general."

"Objection, Your Honor!" cried the defendant. "The plaintiff is relying on word of mouth. There was no visual evidence."

"Objection sustained," said the judge. "Please prove that he saw the money."

The other cotton-bearded Jew stomped forward. "Your Honor, I was given one thousand—"

"B-o-o-o-o-o!"

"One thousand—"

"B-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!"

"I said, one thousand—"

"B-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!"

"That's enough!" roared the judge.

He rapped the gavel so hard that it flew off his hand.

"Your Honor," the Jew insisted, "my cousin gave me one thousand ducats, as a bribe to keep my mouth shut."

"But did you actually see this chest of ducats?" demanded the judge.

"No," mumbled the plaintiff, "but he spoke about it. Said he found it at night while going to the outhouse—excuse me, the fortress. A thief was there, sir! A thief, hiding it."

"In the outhouse?"

"No, a fortress!"

"What? Two thieves, instead of

one?"

"Well, sir, there was a thief who first took the chest and tried to hide it," explained the Jew. "But he got his head cut off by the general. Only the general was himself killed later."

"Did he get his head cut off too?"

"No. Probably a cannonball did it."

"Your Honor." A Rumanian official rose. "According to our laws, anything left behind by the enemy is considered government property."

"If you can find it," muttered the judge. "Would the defendant like to come forward, please?"

Mendel A advanced, followed by his counsel.

"Your Honor, I'd like to speak on his behalf," said the counsel.

"So speak."

"Your Honor," explained the defender, "my client is a G-d-fearing Jew. How could he cheat and steal? A man who studies Torah? Besides, how could he have possibly gone to the fortress? A fortress well guarded by soldiers? And soldiers known to be trigger-happy?"

"But he did go at night," ventured the judge.

"Again, Your Honor, my client is a G-d-fearing Jew. An observant Jew. Would he dare go anywhere at dark? Night time is when evil forces are the most powerful. There are demons everywhere. Even the gentiles know that."

The "lawyer" emphatically shook his head. "No, Your Honor, a G-d-fearing Jew would think twice before going there."

"But why then this accusation—"

"Your Honor, my client not only disagrees with the plaintiff over this whole business, but he staunchly challenges him. How could he bear a

grudge? A man who studies Torah? Look at them — two cousins, more like brothers. Long ago they pledged to always help each other.

"You see, Mendel A came here over a year ago to earn a better living for himself. A man wanting to support his family. With G-d's help he

The "lawyer" emphatically shook his head.

"No, Your Honor, a G-d-fearing Jew would think twice before going there."

has succeeded. And never forgetting his pledge, he has continued to help his cousin. *Three times* he sent him loans, which Mendel B had badly needed. I offer them here as evidence."

He placed Exhibit A — the canceled checks — on the desk.

"And what did his cousin do? I'll tell you what he did, Your Honor," the defender continued sadly. "He completely forgot his own pledge. And why? All because of vengeance, that's why."

"Vengeance, is a fire, consuming everyone in sight. Whether the victim is guilty or innocent, it doesn't matter. Fire does not discriminate. Mendel B chose to blame his reversal of fortunes on Mendel A." He panted furiously. "And Mendel B... had the... *chutzpah*... to come to my client's door and ask for more money. As if Mendel A owed it to him!

"Naturally my client was offended. He even offered his cousin another loan. But was that enough for a greedy

heart? Of course not! Then he ordered his cousin to leave. When his cousin still refused, I'm afraid... my client took matters into his own hands."

He motioned to the two witnesses, who were in Balkan dress. They stepped forward.

"My client's servants. They saw Mendel B carrying on in front of their master, and... well let's just say that... the plaintiff got thrown off his high horse. Isn't that right?"

The two nodded.

"What you see, Your Honor," concluded the attorney, "is the all too typical story of an all too human trait — taking revenge."

"If Your Honor would permit, I'd like to tell a story showing you just how far this trait can go":

For those of you familiar with Poland, you know it may have one time been the best kind of place for Jews. But not anymore. Now the Jews are oppressed in every way by the *poritzes* — the noblemen.

Anyway, it is well known how these noblemen like to entertain themselves. Shall I even go into detail? Whenever these people throw a banquet, they like to bring over some luckless Jew and humiliate him. They make him do all kinds of vile things.

Anyway, one day a *pan* — a Polish nobleman — was riding his carriage home after a festive night at a friend's house. The champagne still danced in his head and on his breath. Passing by a Jew, he decided to have some fun.

The Jew was strolling down the road, leading a calf by a rope. As the carriage door came parallel to man and animal, the *pan* poked his head out the window.

"Pardon me. What is that?"

The Jew stopped and bowed. "A

calf, my lord. I am taking it home to slaughter in order to earn a few coins for Shabbos."

The *pan* looked at the animal up and down. "Why, this is a dog, if I ever saw one."

The Jew again bowed. "I'm afraid not, my lord. It's a calf." And with that he continued walking.

"You dare contradict me?" cried the *pan*. He suddenly cried out, "Janek! Vladek!"

The carriage stopped, and the coachman jumped off, followed by his assistants.

"Get to work!"

Immediately one seized the unsuspecting Jew and locked him in a vise, while the other wrenched away the rope with the calf. They then threw the Jew to the ground and began beating him to a pulp.

"Don't hit me in the face!" cried the Jew. "Not in the face!"

The nobleman mimicked, "Not in the face, not in the face."

They continued their grisly fun until blood turned the earth to mud. Then with a knife they ripped up the man's clothing.

"Bring his clothing here!"

The two burly men removed the Jew's hat and coat, and one of them snipped off his *payos* — ear locks — and his *tzitzis*. They handed them to the *pan*, who then told them what to do.

The calf stood there with blank calf's eyes, not at all protesting the hat that was placed on its head, the *payos* being attached to its ears, and the *tzitzis* that were somehow tied to its side.

"Looks pious, doesn't he?" said the *poritz*. He adjusted the hat.

When they saw him sprawled on the ground, they ran over.



After tethering the calf to the axle, the coachmen returned to the carriage and rode away, roaring and leaving the poor Jew in the road.

The nobleman had a lovely ball a few days later. The highlight of the evening was Moyshele the Calf, who chuckled and swayed in front of the hooting audience.

The Jew's family, meanwhile, had gone mad with worry. After the sky had turned to gray and there was still no sign of him, his sons and sons-in-law set out to find him. When they saw him sprawled on the ground, they ran over.

He groaned loudly when they propped him up. Holding him by each limb, his sons and sons-in-law carried him all the way back and placed him gently on his bed.

Recovery was slow. For the first few days, the Jew just lay in bed. Not a word did he say about what had happened; he seemed, in fact, to withdraw totally. Only his eyes burned in pain.

But finally he spoke, once he got back his strength, and he told his family about the *pan*. His sons clenched their fists in rage, and everyone there thought of ways to take revenge.



Unknown to the *pan*, one of the sons had landed a job on his estate, as broker for the vast wooded acreage. Whenever someone came by wishing to buy some lumber, the nobleman and his broker would escort him deep into the forest. Then

the buyer would point out the trees he wanted, and the nobleman would have them cut down and shipped back.

One day the broker came to the nobleman with exciting news: "My lord, there's a gentleman here to see you. A fine-looking gentleman, sir — wealthy, too!"

"Wealthy, huh?" thought the *pan*. He certainly needed the money.

He absolutely groveled before the visitor. This person, dressed in a long fox coat, sucked on a pipe and nodded wordlessly, just like any businessman calculating a ripe transaction. He finally said, "I'd like a really good tract of land. I want the finest trees available — money is no object!"

"Certainly!" cried the *pan*. He summoned his carriage. "Follow me!"

Bowing and scraping, he waited for the gentleman to enter; then he went in, followed by the broker. As the three of them jostled off, the *pan* lauded his forest's virtues. "The strongest birch you'll ever see — I guarantee it!" he declared.

But the buyer only sucked on his pipe and nodded.

They came at last to a steep mound. "Here's where we get off," explained the *pan* apologetically. "My carriage can go no further."

They walked the rest of the way. Wordlessly the gentleman followed the broker through upraised root and bark, with the nobleman stumbling behind.

"It's over there," chanted the broker, "over there . . . over there . . .

there. That's it."

"There?" The nobleman surveyed the foliage. "You've certainly picked a faraway spot, sir. I'll have to send a number of men . . . why, where is he?"

The buyer was gone. Behind an oak the *pan* detected some movements, as if someone were removing a fox fur coat and tossing it into a nearby hole. The broker, too, was missing.

"Hello?" called the *pan* uncertainly. He crept forward.

Suddenly he was seized.

He gasped.

"Don't move! Not a sound!" the broker hissed. He cupped his hand over the nobleman's mouth.

The struggling *pan* was dragged to the same oak and bound against it hand and foot. Then out stepped the Jew.

"Good afternoon, my lord," he said ironically.

His son removed two clubs from behind the oak, and together they began their work.

"Don't hit me in the face!" cried the nobleman with each blow.

The Jew answered, "Not in the face, not in the face!"

Blood began to seep through his silken breeches. Finally the two men stopped. They hurried out of the forest, leaving the *pan* in fetters.

The hours passed. When Janek, who had fallen asleep in the driver's seat of the carriage, awakened, he noticed that the sky was an ominous gray. He listened for any sounds of his master.

Nothing. Only an owl hooted, preparing for the night.

The coachman tugged the reins. He did not dare leave the carriage, for fear of horse thieves; nor did he dare

*One of the sons
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of the vast
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go out alone in the forest. With a crack of the whip he pulled the carriage in reverse and wheeled away. When he returned to the courtyard, he parked and unhitched the horses.

"Vladek! Hurry!"

He summoned two other riders, and together they set off back to the forest.

"My lord?" called the horsemen.

The nobleman called out faintly, "Over here! Over here!"

Like a rabbit the coachman crinkled his nose, and he motioned the others forward.

As soon as they found the *pan*, Janek raised him carefully onto the saddle.

"Ouch! Ouch!" cried the nobleman at every lunge of the horse.

A bruised and bloody mess, he was driven back to the manor and placed in his brocaded bed, while a doctor was sent.

He recuperated slowly — and silently. How could he tell anyone that a Jew had got the better of him? As his pain deepened, so too did his rage.



A few weeks went by before the *pan* could even get out of bed. He still remained silent, telling no one save a few servants, but his thoughts returned time and time again to that wretched Jew. He lay awake at night, tossing and turning, dreaming of blood.

The Jew, meanwhile, was also restless. "True, I paid him back for making mincemeat out of me. But what about the calf he took away? The money is gone. My livelihood!"

Pacing his cottage, the Jew pondered his next move. Hearing about the *pan's* sleepless nights gave him an idea.

For this he needed the help of his friend, a *Feltscher*. That's a barber, who in the old days was also a doctor. This barber, a little man with a pair of scissors always dangling around his neck, dressed up the Jew in a black business suit, and dyed his hair and beard a distinguished gray, so that he looked like a professor.

Then the two of them rented a fine carriage and together set off for the town neighboring the *pan's* estate.

The people oohed and ahed to see such a fine carriage, which passed by their dirty streets and pulled up in front of the inn. The "professor" stepped down. Pinching a pair of spectacles, he held them up and coldly studied the awning.

His "escort," the barber, rushed inside and panted to the innkeeper, "My master has come all the way here from Riga. He bids me find a room for him . . . the finest room in the house!"

"Riga!" The innkeeper rushed forward with a chair. "While you're waiting, sir, would you like to sit down?"

The professor eventually retired. His friend the barber stayed downstairs and helped himself to some of the innkeeper's whiskey.

"Yes, sir," gasped the barber. "It's certainly a privilege to be with such a man."

"Who is he?" asked the innkeeper in wonder.

"Who is he?" declared the barber. "Who do you think? He is Professor Sasha Sakowski."

"Professor Sakowski?" cried the innkeeper. "Amazing! But who is he?"

"Who is he," mimicked the barber. "I state the name, clear as a bell, and he still doesn't know. Well, what do you expect from these yokels? I'll tell you who he is. He is the

continent's leading specialist in sleeping disorders."

"Sleeping disorders?"

"That's right. Why, he was on his way, in fact, to a conference in Vienna."

"My, my," exclaimed the innkeeper. "Perhaps he could help my wife with her snoring." Then he brightened. "The portiz."

"The who?"

"The nobleman. I heard he has had a terrible time sleeping. Perhaps your master could help him."

Word was brought to Janek and Vladek, who had stopped by the inn for their usual late-night spree. As soon as they heard about this unusual visitor, they hurried and told their master.

The *pan* quickly begged the professor to come to the manor. When the professor arrived, the nobleman's wife ran down the stairs. "Thank goodness you've come!"

Trailed by servants, she escorted the professor up the marble staircase and knocked on an oaken door.

"Darling! A doctor is here to see you!"

"Go away!"

"Darling, this is a specialist! A professor all the way from Riga! He cures sleeping disorders!"

The professor eventually retired. His friend the barber stayed downstairs and helped himself to the innkeeper's whiskey.

Immediately the door opened.

The poritz stood there in a crumpled nightshirt. His face was puffy and his eyes were circled in black.

The professor walked in, his assistant at his side. The assistant was carrying a big black bag.

The professor pressed the spectacles closer to his nose. "Oh, my," he said, frowning, "I never realized it was this serious."

"What is it, doctor?" cried the wife.

"Obviously some rare disease. I must examine him completely. If milady would excuse me, I shall have to ask everyone except my assistant to leave the room."

Nodding, the woman and the servants backed away.

As soon as the door shut, the professor said, "Sir, if you will be so kind as to undress."

"My nightshirt?" asked the poritz. "Everything."

The professor turned to his assistant and said, "My bag, please." He removed a long flat stick and, after the naked man had slipped under the bedcovers, said, "Open wide, please." He waved the stick around. "Oh yes . . . yes . . . my, my. Just what I thought."

"What is it?"

"A classic case of insomnia."

Solemnly he motioned to his assistant, who again went into the bag and brought out a brownish-black liquid.

"Drink this." The professor mea-

sured it out and poured it into a porcelain cup.

The nobleman downed it and gagged. He reddened furiously, but eventually sank into the covers.

At the sound of snoring the professor again motioned to his assistant. Eagerly they withdrew a small artist's paintbrush and jar of paint, and set to work.

The professor then opened the door, to see the wife and servants waiting.

"Dear lady," began the professor, "I have administered a potent medicine to your husband. With G-d's help he shall sleep for hours. I am leaving you this jar of medicine. Please make sure your husband takes a spoonful each night."

"I don't know how to thank you, sir," blubbed the woman.

"It is nothing, madam. It is my obligation as a physician. But for my services, as well as my assistant's, I must ask a fee."

"Certainly, certainly," cried the woman.

"Let us say . . . fifteen rubles . . . each."

"Each?" repeated the woman.

"Madam, my assistant and I have interrupted our own journey in order to help your husband. Already we have kept prominent physicians waiting in Vienna. Fifteen rubles should be fair compensation, I think."

"All right, all right," said the woman in confusion. "Come downstairs and I shall pay you. In the

meantime, would you like to join me for dinner? I have a fine pork loin prepared."

"Oh, thank you," gabbled the professor, "but I am afraid we are already quite late. I have just received word this morning that there is an urgent operation in Frankfurt. I'm afraid I cannot wait."

Both he and his assistant took a deep bow and, rubles in pocket, hastened out the door.

The carriage had long clattered out of town when the poritz awoke. He stretched, invigorated, and threw off the bedcovers.

Then he gasped.

On his chest were painted the mocking words "Don't hit me in the face."



They say that those who laugh last laugh best. But do you think our Jew laughed best?

Not at all. Once vengeance has struck, it burns like a flame, until the person has extinguished all its causes. Once again the Jew paced his cottage.

"I got even for the beating and the calf. But what about my clothing and payos?"

Accordingly he began to drum up another plan. But this time his sons and sons-in-law would have none of it.

"We've helped you already," they said pleadingly. "Enough is enough."

Likewise, the Feltscher refused to help. The Jew then said, "Well, looks like I'll just have to do this myself."

He cast off his workday clothes and donned a threadbare pair of breeches with a matching shirt. Then he whitened his hair and beard with chalk, also adding touches of sickly red and dirty brown to his skin. By

For days he practiced walking with a pair of crude wooden crutches — falling down at first, but eventually mastering it, until he could even sling a big burlap sack over his shoulder. Then he set off for town.

the time he was through, he looked like a thing of scabs, rags, and slime.

Last but not least, he tied a sort of brace to his legs. For days he practiced walking with a pair of crude wooden crutches — falling down at first, but eventually mastering it, until he could even sling a big burlap sack over his shoulder. Then he set off for town.

Hobbling through the streets, he cried, "Alms! Alms for a helpless cripple! Please help a victim of war who is now a beggar!"

Some people spat at him as they hurried by, but others stopped to drop a coin or two in his cap. The "beggar" arrived at the poorhouse and knocked vigorously on the door.

After being shown a bed of straw, he ignored the unkosher food tossed in and helped himself to a few potatoes in his sack.

"Yes, sir, this town is nothing compared to where I've been," he said, gnawing away. "Why, people here don't know the first thing about what lies beyond their little bridge."

"What lies there?" asked another man, an amputee.

"Why, witches and spooks, that's what," cried the beggar. He spat out a potato skin. "Mighty awesome they are — you should see them come out and dance in the woods. The witches' Sabbath, that's what it's called."

He continued talking about imps, werewolves, and all kinds of nastiness, until he had gathered an audience around his bedside. The other cripples and crazies stared in awe.

"Once a horse sweats at night, you know it's a goner," he said matter-of-factly.

"Why?"

"The goblins got him!"

During the day the "beggar" made

his rounds, loitering around the market place and handing out his torn cap. "Alms!" At night he hunched over his straw mattress, entrancing his listeners.

They began to believe that he was himself a sorcerer, hiding all kinds of black magic. To this the "beggar" would not answer yes or no; instead, he hardened his eyes until they glistened.

Word soon got around about this remarkable vagrant. When it reached

the inn, where Janek and Vladek were having their usual swigs of beer, the two coachmen perked up their ears.

"Sorcerer, you say?"

They had the "beggar" brought to them and told him of their master's plight.

"Two times, see, this Jew outsmarted him. Two times he made a fool out of our master. Our master

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He continued talking about imps and werewolves.



(Continued from page 15)

longs for revenge. Perhaps you can help him."

"Certainly! Certainly!" cackled the beggar. "Anything to harass a miserable cur of a Jew. He'll rue the day he ever crossed paths with me!"

The coachmen hurried to their master and told him of this visitor. At once the *pan* sent for him.

When the beggar arrived, he waited on the courtyard stones. Even when the *pan* walked in, the beggar did not get up.

"Forgive me, my lord," he croaked. "But it is difficult for me to stand."

"Is it true what they say," demanded the *pan*, "that you are a magician?"

Sternly the beggar motioned with his head to the courtiers. "My lord, in order for us to talk, we must be alone," he answered.

"But my servants—"

"My lord... I have learned to trust no one."

Quickly the *pan* ordered the courtyard emptied. As soon as he was alone with the beggar, he knelt forward to listen.

"Tell me what happened," said the beggar simply.

Immediately the *pan* went into a tirade about the "dirty Jew."

The beggar asked, "Sir, have you any possessions of his? Any lock of hair or an article of clothing?"

"Certainly!" exclaimed the *pan*. He hurried out and returned with the *payos* and scraps of the coat. "Behold. The Jew's ear locks. They made quite a handy ornament— on

a calf!" He roared with laughter.

"Splendid," cried the beggar, and he pocketed the prizes. "With something of his I can now wield my power."

He lowered his voice. "Meet me tomorrow between eleven and midnight. That is the time when the dark forces hold sway, and when I can meet with my brethren."

"Your *brethren*?" gasped the *pan*.

"My fellow wizards. They'll help me in my work— our work."

"Splendid!" cried the nobleman.

*He lowered his voice.
"Meet me tomorrow between
eleven and midnight.
That is the time when
the dark forces hold sway,
and when I can
meet with my brethren."*

"But remember," hissed the beggar, "not a word to anyone. This must be conducted in greatest secrecy."

The beggar then wrapped his arm fraternally around the *pan* and bent closer. "We have two choices, you see. One: to meet with my 'friends' and have them come to this dirty Jew at night. They'll catch him in bed, paralyze him, and leave him to your will."

"I have a better idea," muttered the *pan*. "I'd like to take this piece of filth myself and tie him like a sheep— and flay him! Flay him, I say! Then I'll feed his flesh to my hounds!"

"Shhh!" The beggar trembled. "Sir, I have an even better idea. Let's suppose you and I capture this man ourselves?"

"How so?" asked the *pan*.

"Have a coffin made— a coffin with links for staves and holes for air."

"A coffin?"

"Right. Together we shall carry it to a bridge, about ten miles from here. That is where we shall lie in wait."

"And then?"

"And then... at eleven o'clock— for these words he lowered his voice chillingly— "that's when... the devil comes. Seeing that I've brought someone with me, willing to sell his soul just like mine, the devil shall well be satisfied. He'll use his magic and turn this Jew into helpless jelly."

"Together we shall wait under the bridge. I shall call out to the devil from under the bridge. He will cast a spell on the Jew, luring him over the bridge."

"When I call out to my friend, you'll come forward with the coffin. And then— presto! You'll tie him like a sheep and lock him inside, then bring him home for your own pleasure."

The *pan* tingled.

"Until that hour, you must keep the coffin hidden in your cellar," continued the beggar sternly. "And I repeat. Not a word to anyone! This must remain the strictest secret."

Immediately the *pan* set to work. He himself hammered away, measuring the boards and nailing in the metal links. He finished by drilling holes in the top.

The following night was clear and

illuminated by a full moon. The pan saddled a horse and carriage, placing the coffin inside. Then he set off alone for a good ten miles.

It was near eleven when he came to the bridge and found the beggar waiting beside a lantern and a cleft of rocks.

"Quickly. Place it there," hispered the beggar, motioning to a marshy bank.

The pan nodded and removed the coffin from the saddle.

"Well? Where is he?" asked the pan.

"In a moment. Don't you hear the distant bells? The hour has struck. Any moment now, and the devil shall be arriving."

The pan gazed in the blackness, expecting to see a red-eyed figure with horns. "Indeed, this is most impressive."

"My only concern," continued the beggar, "is how he might react if he sees you. These meetings are not for mortal eyes."

"Do you fear he might get angry?"

"Alas, yes." The beggar shook his mangy head. "And there's no telling what he might do."

The pan trembled. "Now I am afraid. Perhaps I should not have come."

"You want to catch the Jew, don't you? Look, I suggest that during the witches' hour you simply hide from view."

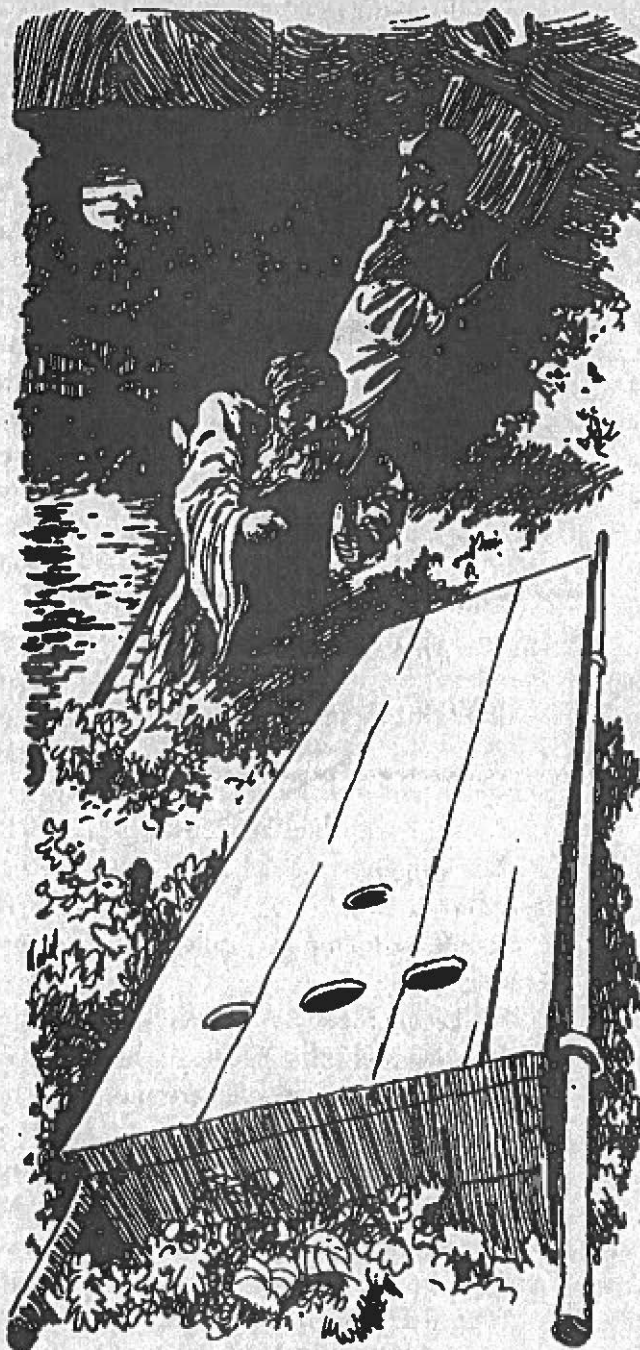
"Fine. I shall go under there," said the pan, pointing to the marsh.

"No! He'll see you," cried the beg-

gar sharply. "Do you think the devil is short-sighted?"

"But where else can I hide?" asked the pan, now in terror.

"There's only one place you can really hide. Inside the coffin!"



"There's only one place you can really hide," said the beggar. "Inside the coffin!"

"The coffin?"

"Yes. You shall stay there until the devil passes."

"But what about the Jew?"

"What about him?"

"Well, I'll miss him, won't I?"

"Of course not. My lord, he'll come afterward." The beggar wheedled, "Do not worry. The powers of darkness are very great."

Reluctantly the pan raised the coffin lid and slid inside.

"You're sure that the devil will get angry?" said the pan.

"My lord, I do not advise taking chances."

As soon as the pan's slender frame fit inside the wooden contours, the beggar bent over him.

"Are you comfortable, my lord?" he asked.

"Not really," grunted the pan. He placed his hands over his chest and settled still. "But this is definitely worth it if it means seeing the Jew once more."

"You shall," cried the beggar.

With a laugh he slammed down the lid and bolted it shut. The links snapped together.

He then raised the lantern high so that the person sealed within could see the face through the holes.

With a cloth the beggar removed the chalk from his hair and beard and tore off his shabby clothes, revealing the Jew's black cloak underneath.

"Not in the face, not in the face," he cried.

"You!" The pan tried to rise forward, but knocked his head against

the lid.

Still laughing, the Jew removed the braces from his legs and threw away the crutches. Then he leaped onto the horse and carriage and galloped swiftly down the bridge.

The *pan* shook the coffin, but to no avail. He hollered, "Help! Help!" But he was answered with silence. Through the holes he perceived a sky filled with stars, but no devil.

The *pan* stayed there for two days, intermittently screaming for help, until he was spotted by a searching party.

"Unlock me, you fools!" came the muffled voice.

In amazement they freed the prisoner, who by then was on the verge of becoming a corpse. The *pan* stumbled out and staggered the ten miles towards the town. There he found out that the Jew had sold the horse and carriage for two hundred rubles.

Nobody dared ask what had happened, though certainly some of them knew.



The attorney finished his story.

"Thus we see how great was the Jew's anger and his desire to get even. Unfortunately, my client's plaintiff has a similar difficulty."

He approached the tip of the judge's desk. "Your Honor, the moral lesson aside, there is a practical one. It concerns the nature of this so-called theft.

"I believe the lost contents are considered ownerless, even by the Rumanian government. This chest was left in the fortress by a thief. It originally belonged to a Swedish general, now dead. So is the thief. Even were my client guilty of taking the chest, from whom did he take it? A

thief? How can a thief rob from a thief and the act still be called theft?

"Therefore, Your Honor, this chest should be considered lost and irrecoverable property. My client should bear no responsibility."

The verdict was reached, and Mendel A was judged not guilty. A whoop went up from the benches, and the defendant was carried out the door by his exuberant supporters.



That Purim meal was most festive. The chassidim circled the table, danc-

Sheepishly Mendel A entered the dining hall and took a seat. As he did, the chassidim crowded around him, pressing him for details.

ing and singing their praise of the Shpuler Zeide.

Later that night he held another celebration. As he handed out *shirayim* (portions), he was informed of a visitor who had arrived from Kishinev and now waited in the *beis midrash*.

"Come in, come in," called the Shpuler Zeide.

Sheepishly Mendel A entered the dining hall and took a seat. As he did, the chassidim crowded around him, pressing him for details.

"It was incredible," declared Mendel A. He told them all about the characters that showed up at the courthouse and pleaded his case.

"The defender went on with a wonderful story," said Mendel A. "I think that's what won my case."

"What was it about?" asked one man.

As Mendel A related it, the others

gasped in wonder. "Why, that's the very same story the Rebbe told during the meal this afternoon."

"Really?" cried Mendel.

He slowly walked toward the Shpuler Zeide.

"Nu, Mendele," said the holy man, "what did you think of your defender?"

"Why, he was remarkable," answered Mendel. "A gift from G-d."

"He was definitely sent by G-d. He was, in fact, a *malach*, an angel."

"An angel?"

"That's right. Sent here in the merit of the eight hundred rubles you gave me to pay the orphans' dowry and wedding expenses. And that defender you will again meet, after you live, G-d willing, till a hundred and twenty, and give a reckoning of yourself in the heavenly court."

"What about that story?" asked one of the Zeide's disciples.

"Yes, what about it?" demanded the others. The hall echoed with "Please, Rebbe, tell us more about it."

The Shpuler Zeide calmly nibbled at his plate of fruit. Then he began:

"That story, indeed, has many, many secrets. The calf symbolized the sin of the idol we worshiped while we were in the wilderness.

"The *pan* who so brutally attacked the Jew and who was in turn attacked was none other than Amalek, the eternal enemy of the Jewish people. And the three methods of revenge were the three wars we fought with Amalek, the last one being fought by Mordechai.

"But my friends, there will be a fourth war with Amalek, and a fourth leader. That one will be none other than the holy Mashiach himself, may he come speedily. Amen." ❧

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TO OUR READERS

"*Mishenichnas Adar marbin besin'chah* — When Adar arrives, we increase our joy" reads the title of this issue's cover, which looks forward in appropriately lighthearted fashion to Purim.

"Torah Highlights" and "This Month" discuss various aspects of Purim. In addition, the conclusion of "Mendel" revolves around that holiday.

Rarely do we find a man called not by his father's name, but by his mother's. This is precisely the case with Rabbi Leib Sarahs, one of the early Chassidic rebbes.

In this month's biography, you will read how Reb Leib Sarahs' mother merited having her name memorialized.

One of the stories about Reb Leib Sarah's is told in "Passing Through."

"Unshaken As the Continent," "Our Story," and "Our Wonderful World" do not appear in the current issue, because of space limitations, but will return next month.

We wish all our readers a very happy Purim!

This Publication is made possible by a grant from the educational division of the



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MAIL ROOM

Golden Age Project

I really enjoy reading your magazines. I especially like the "Torah Highlights."

I am doing a project about the Golden Age in Spain. I was wondering if you have any pictures of things during that era. Do you have any pictures of Rabbi Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, Rabbi Yehuda

HaLevi, or the Rambam? If you do, I will be very happy if you please send them to me.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Ilana Cainer

Richmond Hill, Ontario

We are unable to provide pictures or other such materials, and recommend that you ask your librarian for assistance. Good luck!

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