

# Goyish Affairs

By Froyim Kaganovski

TRANSLATED BY MURRAY CITRON

**H**alf the carriage was taken up by the group of hunters, all older, heavy gentiles with mighty moustaches. Some were thin, with legs like poles—long and bony—covered with long stockings and yellow, scorched boots; some were thick, stocky, with aristocratic hands and signets. They sat in their green ornamental hats with feathers and leather coats. Around them, on the benches and on and under the seats in the railway car, lay hunting rifles and ammunition cases. The glazed eyes of dead hares peered out from under the benches.

The other half of the carriage was full of Jews, who were traveling from the nearby shtetlekh with their packs, sacks, and walking sticks.

The hunters smoked pipes and carried on a lively conversation. They were telling stories about the hunt. There was an open flask of cognac, and every story finished with a peal of drunken laughter.

It was already dark in the carriage, and the Jews, looking at the boots, leather belts, and guns, were quiet. Some buried their beards in their shoulders and snoozed. Others looked with sidelong, narrow glances at the commotion and heard the stories with disdain. The hunters talked only of things that were connected with hunting, about woods, about who shoots good and who shoots bad. Over and over one of them stood up on shaky legs, took his gun, and showed how he took aim at a hare—but the hare got away. Every time one of them took out his gun, the Jews turned their heads away and winked their eyes. One Jew even said quietly to another:

—Fellows, it would be good to go to the next carriage; it's not healthy to sit here.

The tall thin man with yellow boots, who had drunk a lot of cognac, talked most of all. He gave shows of how he ran and how he

shot, how the blood poured, how the dog grabbed. Mostly he talked to the stocky gentleman with the big moustache whom he called “Pan Doctor.” The Pan Doctor was much absorbed in the narrative; he asked about all the details, where the hare was standing, how it fell, on what side, and how the forest looked, whether it was closer to Lemberg or to Radom. Now a third person intervened, a blond man, in fact graying, whom the others called “Pan Judge,” and began to tell a long story about how a friend of his, a prosecuting attorney, was chasing after a bird and couldn’t catch it. He shot and shot and didn’t hit it until another hunter came and brought the bird down with one shot. Then his friend went home, locked himself in his room, took a revolver, and shot himself. All shook their heads and began again to drink from the cognac flask. After this story the Jews looked at each other. They shoved one sleeve in the other and, silently moaning, slept.

But one young man with glasses and a fedora, who had been sitting among the Jews, had listened intently to the hunters’ stories. A Jew with a yellow beard even said to him from the side:

—Young man, why do you need to listen so close to all this wisdom? It’s healthier not to hear . . .

Then, when the blond judge had finished his sad story about his friend, a second began to tell how he once lay in water for a whole night for the reason that he wanted to shoot a duck . . .

The Pan Doctor answered

—tak . . . tak . . . things happen . . .

The train ran on. The conductor lit the lamps, and the Jews all sat quietly and looked at the hunters with half-closed eyes. Just as it became light, the tall hunter with the yellow boots bent over and, pulling a shot hare out from under the bench, with its head hanging down, lifted it up high. Black flecks of blood dripped from the hare. The hunter called out:

—Panovieh! Gentlemen! Three days I slept in the woods, ate cold food . . . traveled twelve hours a day, besides the time I spent on foot . . . but it’s all worthwhile . . . after all, I am bringing something home . . . I don’t come with empty hands . . . what, what, gentlemen, I have brought something . . .

That minute the train began to slow down. The hunters gave a start. They took their packs and put their guns on their shoulders. In one minute they bundled themselves out of the carriage, leaving an empty flask of cognac and flecks of blood from the shot hares.

Then for the first time the Jews began to waken with long moans. They looked around and, seeing that the hunters were gone, one said to another:

—Please tell me, uncle, how much can cost such a hare?

—A hare? Who knows? A few zloté for sure . . .

—Then the goyim must be crazy . . .

At this the young man with glasses spoke up:

—Jews, you don't understand. It's not about cost; it's about ambition . . .

—About what? asked a Jew on the opposite bench. About ambition? What? Ambition!

And from all sides, from every corner, a beard appeared and asked, —About what?

The young man kept calling out, —Ambition! Till a Jew with a small grey beard said:

—The main thing, fellow Jews, who needs all that? Better we take a Yiddish word in our mouths.

And they all stood up to daven Maariv.

# In the Old Folks' Home

By Froyim Kaganovski

TRANSLATED BY MURRAY CITRON

Once again: Your mother's older brother was called Yosl, the older was called Mishkhal, and the third?

—The third was a stepbrother from her first husband. The first husband was called Chaim, he was a high-class Jew. He had that big paper shop in the market, right in the middle of the market . . .

—Nu, that I don't remember . . . I was still a child in those days; only Uncle Yosl I know well. I remember he was a tobacconist; he dealt in tobacco.

—Ah, there were two brothers that dealt in tobacco, my two uncles on my father's side. It seems you're making a mistake . . .

—What do you mean, I'm making a mistake? Didn't I know Yosl the tobacconist? A dark Jew with a beard, like tobacco.

—Yes, yes . . .

—So what are you talking about, I don't remember? That was my mother's brother, may she rest in peace!

—No, that was a brother of my father, who was my mother's second husband . . . Her first husband was Joshua; he was a waiter.

—Now I see already; you should forgive me, you really don't know what you're talking about. Joshua the waiter was a good friend of mine. Such nonsense—I don't remember Joshua the waiter?

—How could you have known him, seeing as when I was a boy he was in his sixties? I hardly remember him! . . .

—If you have such a head, whose fault is it? I remember everything, see, as if it was just now. I remember that when your brother Isaac got married to Reb Shloyme's daughter from Lublin they gave out bulkas in the street.

—My brother Isaac? . . . I didn't have a brother Isaac!

—Of course you had a brother Isaac! Let me think, with what did he deal? Oh yes, he had leather . . . his business was leather . . .

—Leather? None of us had business in leather! We all dealt in oil products. Ah, now I know who you might mean: you mean the Isaac who had iron; he dealt in iron goods! . . . He actually lived on the same street with us . . . He sadly had a nasty death. He choked on a bone in the middle of a Friday night. Wa-wa . . . The whole town was at the funeral! . . .

—So, in a nutshell. You say, not so? Well, no is no; maybe it doesn't suit you to say who you are?

—What do you mean by that? It doesn't suit me to say? . . . I tell you straight. I am from the Tenenbaums! I knew your family very well . . . I remember like yesterday how I used to come to your father, may he rest in peace, for a bottle of wine for Shabbas and yontev. He liked to say witty things, to ask questions . . .

—How could you come to my father for wine when my father didn't deal in wine? My brother-in-law dealt in wine. Wouldn't I know? And into the bargain, how does this come to my father, when all his life he dealt in lime? . . .

—What are you saying, that wine is worse, God forbid, than lime? . . . And in the second place, what is the difference with what a Jew does business as long as he makes a living? Upon my word, is it right for a Jew at your time of life to play such games? I remind you, your mother was a high-class Jewish lady, a lovely lady, like gold, a gute nshome . . .

—Yes, yes, that is true . . .

—Wasn't her name Dobelev?

—Not so . . . My mother, God rest her, was called Miriaml . . . Miriaml . . . That is what she was called.

—Well, leave me alone already . . . Next will you say that her father, your Zeyde, was not named R'Aron and didn't deal in glass?

—Certainly not.

—Then you are, you should pardon me, an old fool.

—And you are an ox!

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Both old persons sat like children on the long bench, in the withered, dried-out kitchen garden of the old folks' home, with small, narrowed angry eyes glaring at each other:

—There is no way to talk to you! You don't have a clear head . . . You have forgotten everything . . .

—You're going to tell me what my mother's name was, may she rest in peace? Ever heard of such a thing?

After a long silence one says to the other:

—How old are you?

—What's up now?

—Why are you afraid to say?

—I am around sixty-eight.

—And my age . . .

—So, you see? . . . You ought to remember!

—Really, I remember.

—Look, I'll ask you something . . . This you have to remember: What was the name of the old rabbi?

—What's the name of the old rabbi? Who doesn't know that? Reb Zaynvele . . .

—Reb Zaynvele, he says . . . Ay, this Jew is crazy! Listen to what I'll tell you: it shouldn't bother you, it seems to me, that you are really not a Radomer . . .

—So who says that I am a Radomer?

—You are not a Radomer?

—For sure not.

—So why do you keep bothering me?

And both old fellows moved off angrily from each other . . .

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