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Albert Goldbarth

DOG, FISH, SHOES (OR BEANS)

“I was a shmooshled little girl,” my Aunt Elena says.
“I’m 17, I have a shape from a matzoh ball,
boomp boomp boomp I walk. So no wonder, Glicka
with big soft eyes like stewed prunes
has a boyfriend, he would jump through hoops of fire
for her if his wizzle was dipped in kerosene first,
and Pearl has a boyfriend, Misha does, Rebekka
whose body goes in and out like an accordion, hooy
she could walk down the street and the trolleys
fall out of their tracks. But poor Elena, me,
boohoo boohoo with the tears all shpritzing, don’t
laugh from my story, it’s very sad. So what
does Elena do on Saturday night, with everybody else
in front of the radio holding hands to ukelele songs?
Elena, the poor shmo, babysits for people
in her building. On the third floor are the Morrises,
with a dog a cocker spaniel—like a bowling ball
of dirty fur and always yapping, I
hated it—and a goldfish. And so for *them*
I don’t even *babysit*, they would hire somebody
I swear to wipe the dog’s tush if they could.
So I stay up there, I feed the fish and the dog,
I clean the box, I listen like an idiot
to the ukelele serenades like everyone else and I cry.
Good; so this is my Saturday date. One night,
does it *rain?*—like Noah’s Flood of a rain.
From nowhere, a Noah’s Flood all of a sudden.
I run to close the bedroom window—*whoops*,
and down the three floors goes the goldfish bowl
with Miss Goldilox, which the name is a joke,
like lox the fish, but a goldfish. It lands
in a puddle. I think to myself, ‘In a puddle?’

Could beeeee . . . this little fishy's heart still beats.' So I
run downstairs. . . ." ". . . *But,*" my Uncle Mo
 takes over "she leaves the door to the apartment open.
 This Is Important: remember. Meanwhile,
 a certain very handsome young man . . ." ". . . oh, handsome
 like a *blintz* that got run over . . ." ". . . is delivering
 a wagon of shoes from the Jewish Poor Relief Fund . . ."
 ". . . shoes? it was canned goods . . ." ". . . listen
 in *your* story maybe it's canned goods, *mine* it's shoes . . ."
 ". . . okay, Mr. Memory, but I'm telling you I see
 these little cans with the pears and the whaddayacallem beans
 on the labels . . ." ". . . shoes, it was shoes, it was shoes,
 up past your winkus in shoes, do you hear me . . ."
 ". . . don't laugh . . ." ". . . so anyway . . ." ". . . feh! . . ." ". . . where
 was I . . ." ". . . don't interrupt . . ." ". . . and I said
 'Pardon me Miss but is this poor shivering
 cocker spaniel yours?' . . ." ". . . and here we are to tell you
 this story Fifty Years Later!" Then we always said:
Did you go upstairs and kiss? And they always
never answered: "The fish, by the way, we never found."
"So you see?" she'd add. "Nothing is hopeless."

THE NUMBER OF UTTERLY ALIEN CIVILIZATIONS IN *STAR TREK* AND *STAR WARS*

He *likes* to be touched—it must be
 it reminds him of his mother's nightly
 fussy tuck, her brush-of-his-cheek,
 and all of the other subsequent formative contact
 from the world: the jockly high-fives in the gym,
 an early girlfriend's sweetly-puckered smacks
 along his inner thighs . . . as if his life has licked him

into hale shape, from out of no-shape,
 like a dam bear overseeing its cub. Then
 he weds. And *she?*—well, let's say