MAX BERLLIANT IS a lost cause. He travels from Lodz to Moscow and from Moscow to Lodz several times a year. He knows all the buffets, all the stations along the way, is hand in glove with all the conductors, and has visited all the remote provinces—even the ones where Jews are only allowed to stay twenty-four hours. He has sweated at all the border crossings, put up with all kinds of humiliations, and more than once has been aggravated—has eaten his heart out, in fact—and all because of the Jews. Not because the Jews as a people exist, but because he himself—don't shout, whisper it—is also a Jew. And not even so much because he's a Jew, as because—if you'll forgive me for saying so—he looks so Jewish. That's what comes of creating man in God's image! And what an image! Max's eyes are dark and shining, his hair the same. It's real Semitic hair. He speaks Russian like a cripple, and, God help us, with a Yiddish singsong. And on top of everything he's got a nose! A nose to end all noses.

As if that weren't enough, our hero is unlucky in his occupation. He's a traveling salesman and it's part of his job to be friendly. He has to talk a lot, and in his business it's important that he should not just talk, but that he should be heard, and not just be heard, but above all be seen. In short, he's a sorry creature.

True, our hero did avenge himself on his beard. Beardless now, and decked out like a bride, he curls his whiskers, files his nails, wears a tie as glorious as what the Lord God himself might have worn had he ever worn a tie. Max has accustomed himself to the food in railway restaurants, but he continually vents his bitterness on the pigs of the world. If even half the curses he heaps on the species were to come true, I would be happy. But what's the use of being fussy? Might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, so Max took his life in his hands and began to eat lobster.

Why do I say he took his life in his hands? May our worst enemies know as much about their noses as Max Berlliant knows about eating lobsters. Should he cut them with a knife or stab them with a fork? Or should he eat them whole, just as they come?

Despite all these glorious achievements Max Berlliant can't hide his Jewishness; not from us, the Jews, nor from them, the Gentiles. You can pick him out like a counterfeit coin in a handful of change, and in a crowd of Abels he stands out like a Cain. At every twist and turn he is reminded who he is and what he is. In short, he's a sorry creature.

If Max Berlliant was unhappy up to the time of Kishinev, after Kishinev no one could touch him for misery. To harbor deep in your heart a great sorrow, and what's worse to be ashamed of it, is a special kind of hell. Max was as ashamed of what had happened in Kishinev as if he was personally responsible for it, almost as if Kishinev was part of himself. And as luck would have it, right after the incidents in Kishinev, his firm sent him into the very districts where it had all happened: Bessarabia.
That's when a new hell opened up under his feet. He had heard a thousand horror stories about Kishinev in his home town. Wasn't it enough that his heart had flooded with grief and filled with blood when he was told about the atrocities in Kishinev, atrocities such as never had been known or heard before? Will he ever forget the day they offered up special prayers in the synagogues for the slaughtered of Kishinev? Or how, on that day, the old men wept and the women fainted?

It must surely have happened to you while sitting on a train that you passed the place where some great catastrophe has occurred. You know in your heart that you are safe because lightning doesn't strike twice in the same spot. Yet you can't help remembering that not so long ago trains were derailed at this very point, and carloads of people spilled over the embankment. You can't help knowing that here people were thrown out head first, over there bones were crushed, blood flowed, brains were splattered. You can't help feeling glad that you're alive; it's only human to take secret pleasure in it.

Max knew he was bound to meet people in these parts eager to talk about the pogroms. He would have to listen to the wails and groans of those who had lost their near and dear, and he would also be forced to endure the righteous exhortations and malicious remarks of the Gentiles. So the closer they came to Bessarabia, the more he tried to find some way of escape, some way to hide from his own soul.

As they approached the region Max thought of staying behind when the other passengers got off. Then he changed his mind and jumped down onto the platform with the others when the train stopped. He made his way to the buffet as if he hadn't a care in the world. He ordered a drink, followed it up with some tasty tidbits forbidden to Jews, washed it all down with a beer, lit a cigar, and went up to the counter where they sell books and newspapers. There his glance fell on a certain ugly anti-Semitic newspaper called The Bessarabian, published by a certain ugly anti-Semite called Krushevan. And here in the very region where this fine newspaper was conceived, hatched, and born, it lay innocently-almost anonymously-all by itself on the counter. Not a soul was buying it, nobody even gave it a second look.

The local Jews don't buy it because it's so scurrilous, and the Gentiles don't buy it because they are sick and tired of it. So there it lies, nice and neat on the counter, put there to remind the world that somewhere on the face of this earth lives a certain Krushevan, a man who neither rests nor sleeps in his tireless search for new ways to warn the world against that dread disease: Judaism.

Max Berlliant is the only one to buy a copy of The Bessarabian. And why is that? Maybe because of the same urge that drives him to eat lobster.¹ Or maybe he wants to see for himself what that dog of dogs has to say about Jews? It's a proven fact that the readers of anti-Semitic newspapers are mostly Jews. That means us, little brothers, with all due respect... And though the publishers of such newspapers know it, they act on the principle that even if the Jew is treyf,² his money is kosher....

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¹ According to the Jewish dietary laws (Kosher laws or כשרות Laws), Jews are forbidden from eating shellfish.
² Treyf, 트ريف = food that isn’t Kosher. Metaphorically = something bad or forbidden.

From Facing History and Ourselves/Sholem Aleichem and the Challenges of Modernity
Accordingly our Max buys himself a copy of The Bessarabian, brings it back to the train, stretches out on the seat, and covers himself with the newspaper the way you cover yourself with a blanket. And while he is thus busying himself, a thought flies through his head: "What, for instance, would a Jew think if he came across a man stretched out on the seat covered with a copy of The Bessarabian? Surely it would never occur to him that the man under the newspaper might be a Jew ... What an idea, what a great way to get rid of Jews and at the same time keep a seat all to myself."

So reasoned our hero. And in order to make sure that no mother's son should find out who was lying there, he covered his face with the newspaper; he hid his nose, also his eyes and hair, and indeed the whole physiognomy-the one made in God's own image. He pictured to himself how in the middle of the night an old Jew, weighed down with packs and bundles, creeps onto the train, looks around for a seat, sees someone lying there covered with The Bessarabian, figures that he must be a squire at least, but a bad lot in any case, and probably an anti-Semite-possibly even Krushev himself. So the old Jew with his packs and bundles spits three times and goes away, while he, Max, remains lying there in lonely splendor, lording it over the whole seat. "Oh, oh, as I live and breathe, what a great joke!"

So much did this plan please our Max as he lay under his Bessarabian, that he burst into laughter.

After all, when you have eaten, washed it down with beer, smoked a cigar, and toward evening stretch out on a seat all to yourself-you have something to crow about....

Hush now, let's have quiet. Our hero, Max Berlliant, the traveling salesman whose route stretches from Lodz to Moscow and from Moscow to Lodz, is lying on a seat covered with the latest issue of The Bessarabian. He has just dozed off, so let's not disturb him.

Let's admit it, Berlliant is smart. But this time fate outsmarted him. Everything happened almost as he imagined. Someone did come onto the train-a burly fellow with two suitcases, and someone did notice him as he lay there covered with his Bessarabian. But instead of spitting three times and going away, the newcomer stood there studying him, this queer anti-Semite with the Semitic nose (for, during his sleep the newspaper had slipped off Max's face to reveal his nose, his stigma).

Our new arrival stands there, smiling. After placing his suitcase on the seat opposite Max, he steps out on the platform and returns with a fresh issue of The Bessarabian. Out of his suitcase he takes a pillow, a blanket, a pair of slippers, a bottle of eau de cologne, and makes himself comfortable. Then, stretching out on the seat opposite, he covers himself with the newspaper in exactly the same way as our Max Berlliant. He lies there smoking, looking at Max and smiling. He closes first one eye, then the other, and finally dozes off.

So let's leave our two Bessarabians sound asleep, seat to seat. In the meantime we'll introduce the reader to our new character: who he is and what he is.
He is a general. Not a general in the army and not a governor-general, but a general inspector, an agent for a company. His real name is Chaim Nyemchick, but he signs himself Albert, and everybody calls him Patti.

I admit it sounds a bit crazy. How from a Chaim you get an Albert is understandable. After all, among us Jews doesn't a Velvel become a Vladimir, an Israel an Isadore, and an Avrom an Avukem? But how does a Chaim get to be a Patti? To answer this we'll have to employ logic, study linguistics, and use common sense.

Our first move is to get rid of the "ch" in Chaim. Then we say goodbye to the "i" and the "m," leaving only the "a" by itself. So all we have to do now is to add on an "1" and a "b" and an "e" and an "r" and a "t." Now doesn't that add up to Albert? And from Albert it's just a step to Alberti, and from Alberti we get first Berti, then Betti, and finally-how could we miss? Patti! Sic transit gloria mundi. In other words, this is how to make a turkey out of a duck.

Our character is called Patti Nyemchick and he's a general inspector who travels the world the same as Max Berlliant. But his nature is entirely different. He's lively, active, and expressive. And in spite of the fact that his name is Patti and he's a general inspector, he's a Jew like other Jews, and he loves Jews. He also enjoys entertaining people with stories and telling Jewish jokes.

Patti Nyemchick is known far and wide as a raconteur, but he has one fault: whatever the anecdote, he'll swear by all that's holy that his story is true and that it actually happened. The trouble is he keeps changing the locale of his stories and forgetting what he said last time. It's also rumored that Patti, this inspector general, skims over prayers, bluffs his way through difficult Hebrew passages, exaggerates—or as they say in our parts, he's a liar.

So, having come into the train and having noted how our Max Berlliant is stretched out on the seat under an issue of the notorious Bessarabian, and having recognized from his nose that Max could in no way be a relation, either close or distant, to Krushevan and his fancy anti-Semitic rag, Patti's first thought is: "This'll make a great story; this'll have them rolling in the aisles."

That's the reason why Patti slipped out, provided himself with a copy of The Bessarabian, and lay down opposite our Max. Wondering what would come of it, he dozed off.

Now let's leave Patti the general inspector under The Bessarabian copy two, and return to Max the traveling salesman under The Bessarabian copy one.

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