



The Purim Dinner
(an abbreviated excerpt)

Written by
Sholem Aleichem

Illustrated by
David Labkovski



“I don’t know what’s going to become of this child! He’s such a weakling, such a nothing, a crybaby. God help me! A child who just won’t stop crying!”

That’s what my mother was muttering to herself as she was dressing me in my holiday outfit, all the while poking me in the ribs or jabbing me in the back or tugging my ear or yanking my hair or pinching me hard, and she expected me to laugh not cry. She buttoned me from top to bottom in my little black Sabbath coat, which had long been too tight for me, so that my eyes almost popped out of my head; and the sleeves were far too short, and my chapped hands looked much too large for them, as though they were swollen, something my mother could not stand.

“Look at those paws!” She slapped me across the hands so I would draw them closer to me and not have those hands visible. “When you sit at Uncle Hertz’s table I want you to keep your hands hidden out of sight. Do you hear what I’m telling you?...And I want you to sit up like a person- but it’s that nose, oy, that no-ose! Give me that no-ose of yours, let me put it right!”

So long as my nose was called a nose I could put up with it, but since it became for my mother a “no-ose” and she took to “putting it right,” life became unbearable for it, my poor nose. I don’t know what sin my nose, more than any other part of my body, had committed to turn my mother into its bitter enemy. It seems to me it was a nose like all other noses- a bit fleshy, a bit reddish, a bit tilted up, and sometimes it liked to be a bit damp. So what of it? Did she need to make life so miserable for it? You can believe me, there were times when I begged God to rid me of it. I prayed it would fall off- the devil with it, and let there be an end to it! I used to imagine that one fine morning I would wake up without a nose... God didn’t hear my pleas. The nose grew, my mother was always “putting it right,” and both the nose and I were miserable. But my poor nose suffered most of all at holiday time, like on Purim, when we were preparing to go to Uncle Hertz’s for the Purim dinner.

