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Dog, Fish, Shoes (Or Beans)

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“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 Morrices, 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