“Gossip”
First published in Der veg in Warsaw, 1906

B ernshteyn’s dining room was full of guests. There were several women of various ages, a young lady of about fifteen or sixteen, two men, and the host himself, Mr. Bernshteyn. The women were engrossed in gossip while the men played cards. Neither group was entirely at ease.

The women were disturbed in their gossiping by the presence of the young lady, a brunette with intense eyes, a gentle face, and lively, impulsive movements. They were obliged to gossip over her head in hushed tones, using innuendo, sometimes even skipping over the most interesting, piquant details entirely. The men, who for their part would have been up for a proper game of rummey in five hands, were bored by the game of klabberjass. In the end all eyes turned to Grosman, a man of about thirty with a short, black beard and a mischievous, sardonic look on his face who was one of the three playing klabberjass. He was not rich, but he was well liked in the rich households of their circle. He was known as an intelligent, cultured man, good at telling anecdotes and an expert in all matters concerning the latest literary and artistic scandals.

“Pan Grosman will tell us a story,” the lady of the house, Mrs. Bernshteyn, said, addressing him in Polish.

Mr. Bernshteyn repeated the suggestion in Russian, and finally the third man among them, a moneylender, a big shot who worked with princes and generals—and quite wealthy himself—repeated the request in no-nonsense Yiddish: “Come on then, organ-grinder, turn the handle! Out with it!”

By Hersh Dovid Nomberg, translated by Daniel Kennedy

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL PARKIN

Pakn Treger 39