

Cursed from birth, Mendel Schlotz
is the unluckiest kid in his village.
He's also the only one who can save it.

Ask anyone—twelve-year-old Mendel can't do *anything* right. When he tries to herd goats, they get out. When he tries to chop wood, he breaks the axe. It's embarrassing to be called "Mendel the Mess-Up," but it's worse to be so clumsy that he can't even stand to read aloud without destroying the classroom. Nobody expects Mendel to keep out of trouble . . . least of all himself.

But when the Cossacks invade Mendel's remote Jewish village of Lintvint (famous for Lintvint kvatch, which is made from a *very* special ingredient), Mendel's not the only one in trouble. When he slips away from the mountain caves where his fellow villagers are hiding, out of *certainty* he'll find a way to make things worse if he's around them, he discovers an unexpected opportunity to save the day.

Mendel's always been different because everything he does turns into disaster.

Now, he's the only one who can help the people who doubt him.

Could Mendel's bad luck be the key to *saving* Lintvint? Or will his plan to drive the Cossacks off go as badly as everyone—including him—expects?

Sympathetic, funny, and warm, this fast-paced middle-grade graphic novel from a veteran Jewish comics star reminds young readers who feel just a little out of place in their world that sometimes our weaknesses can be our greatest strengths.

Terry LaBan knew he wanted to be a cartoonist at the age of six. He went on to contribute comics and illustrations to hundreds of publications, and to write and draw three indie comic book series for Fantagraphics Books and Dark Horse Comics. He wrote a number of series for DC Vertigo, and Donald Duck comics for Disney Egmont. His comic strip, "Edge City," was internationally syndicated by King Features, and appeared in newspapers daily from 2001 to 2015. He's also taught comics and graphic narrative at Jefferson University and the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts. Terry lives with his wife just outside Philadelphia. He has two kids, two cats, and a studio with nice, big windows.

HOLIDAY HOUSE



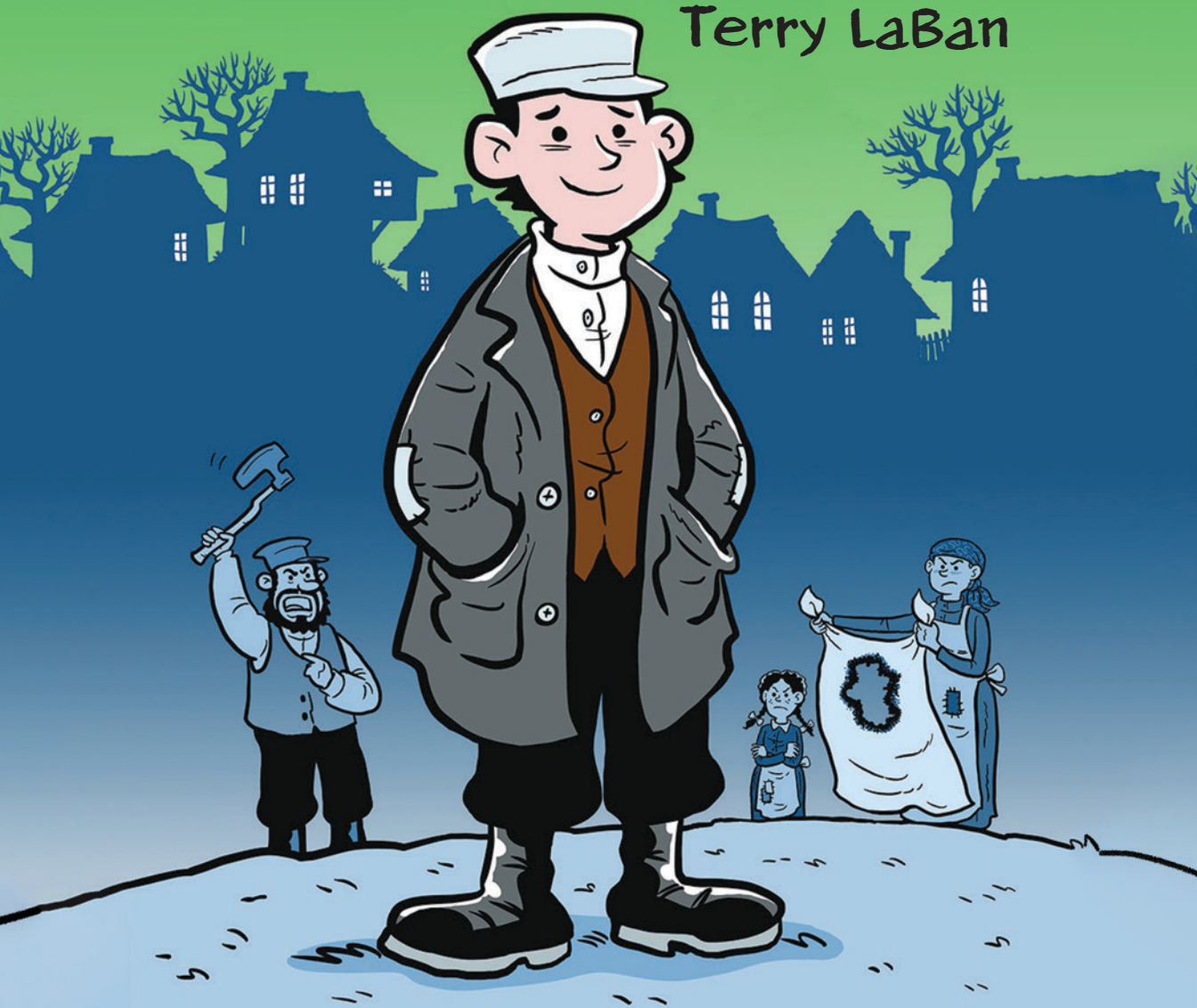
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MENDEL THE MESS-UP

Terry LaBan



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I'm stuck in a tree with my worst enemy, looking down at a pack of half-starved wolves that can hardly wait to eat us alive...



...and some questions are running through my mind.

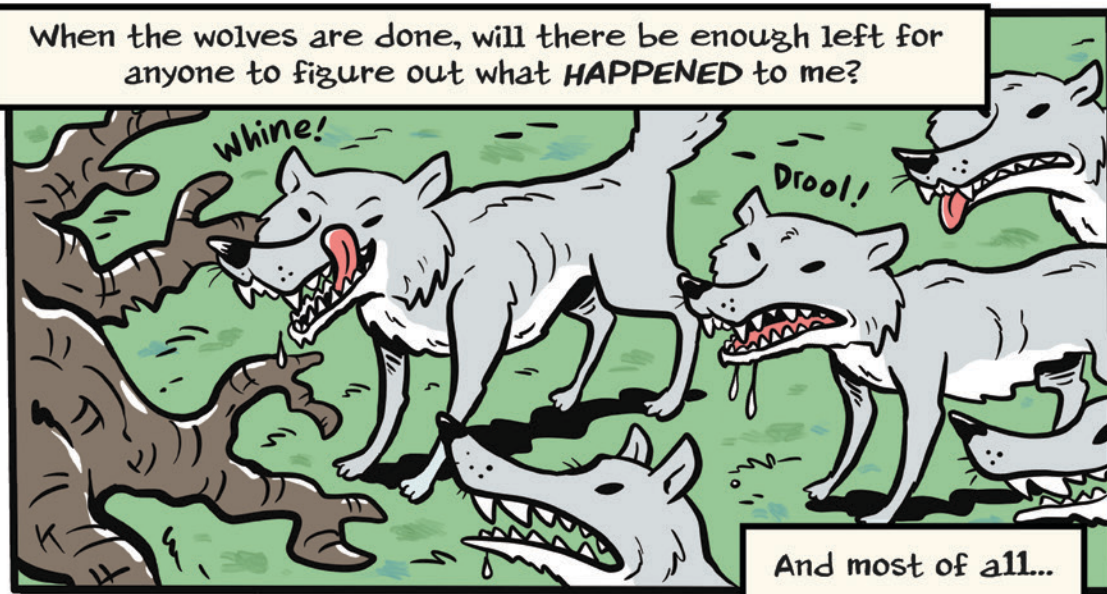
Why can't I do anything right?



Why did I think it was a good idea to show Pivik where my family is hiding?

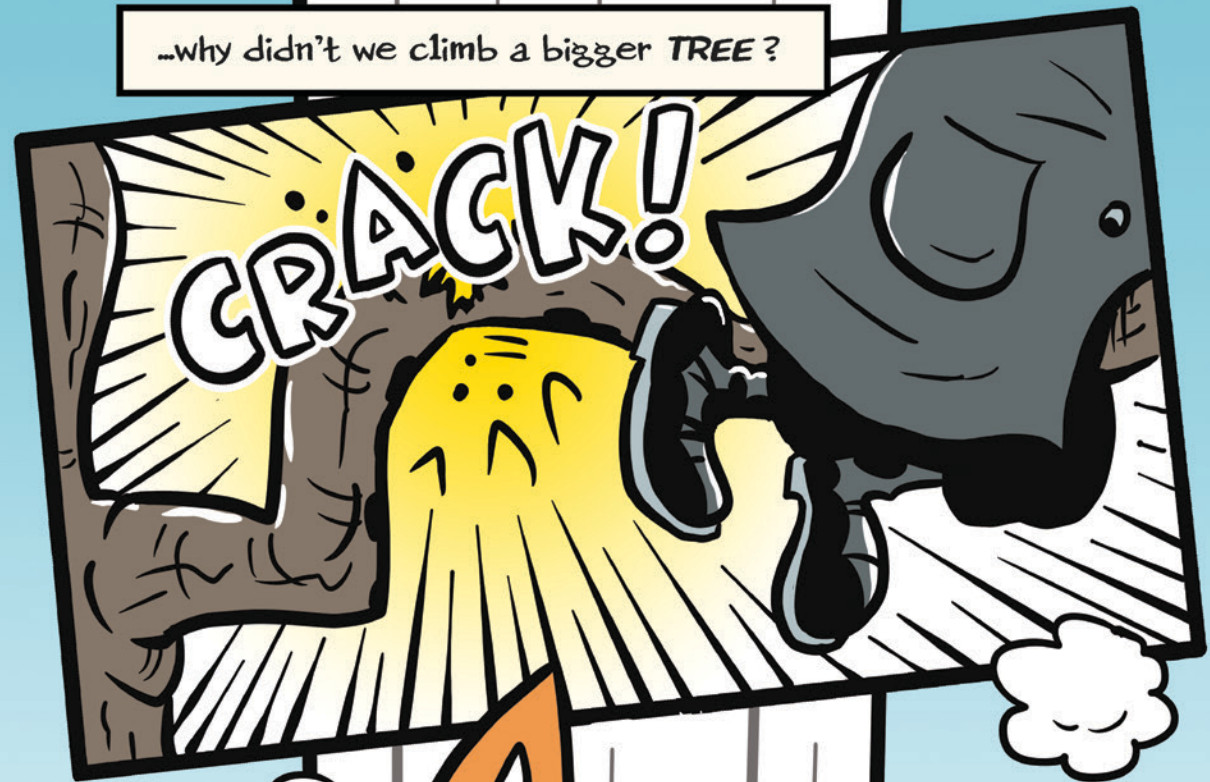


When the wolves are done, will there be enough left for anyone to figure out what HAPPENED to me?



And most of all...

...why didn't we climb a bigger TREE?



AAAAHHHH

But maybe I should start at the beginning...

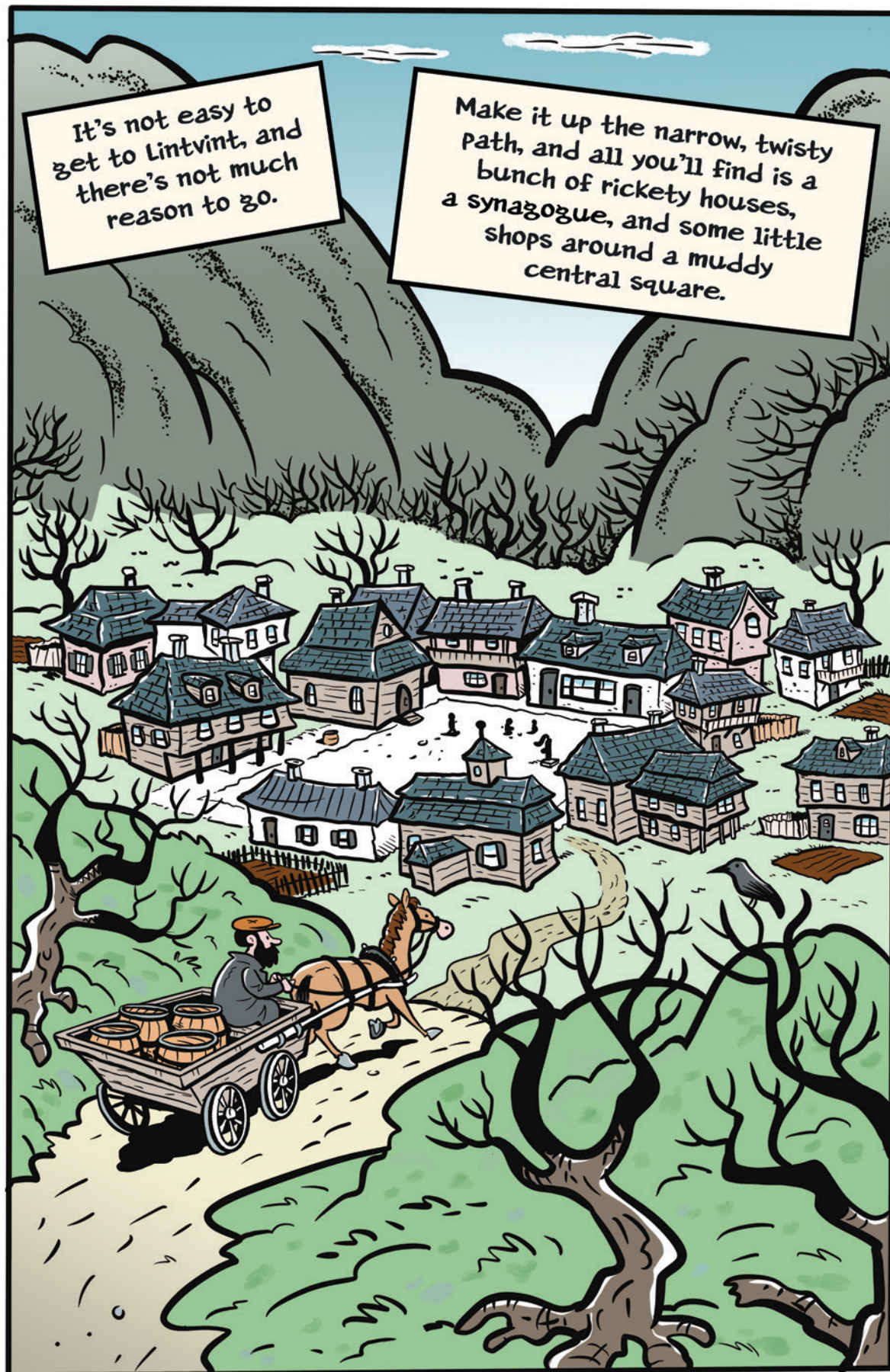
Part 1.

The EVIL EYE



My name is Mendel Mendel Schlotz. I live in a village called Lintvint, way up in the mountains of Nahsovia, a small country you've probably never heard of.





It's not easy to get to Lintvint, and there's not much reason to go.

Make it up the narrow, twisty path, and all you'll find is a bunch of rickety houses, a synagogue, and some little shops around a muddy central square.

Lintvint isn't a very exciting place. Not much happens around here besides the usual stuff we do every day.

Like chopping wood.



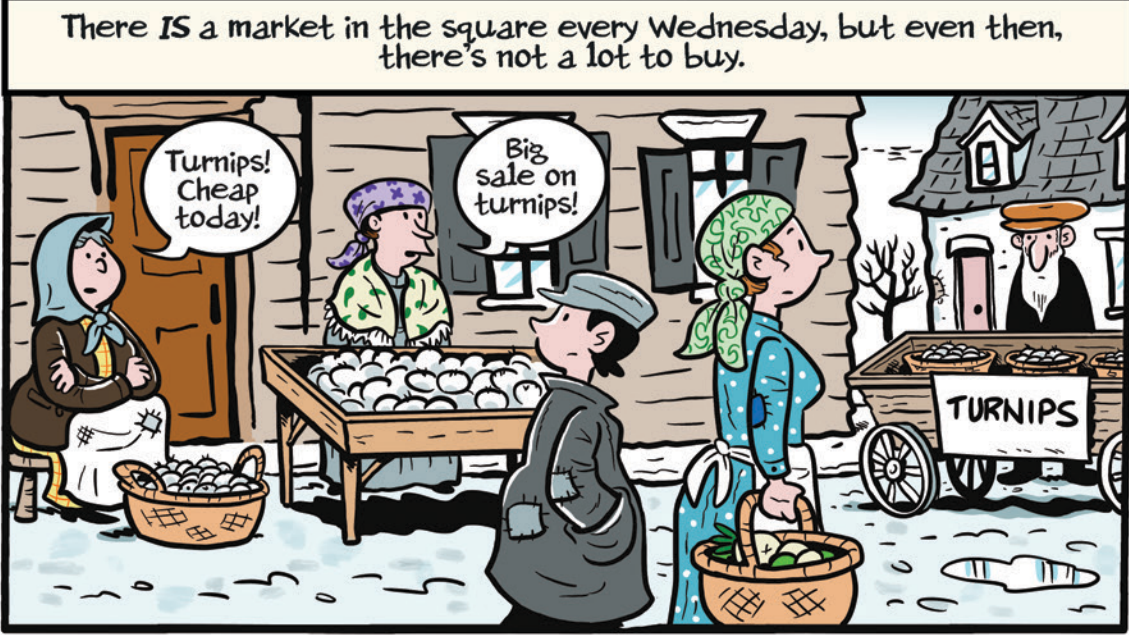
Hurry up! It's freezing in here!

And waiting to get water at the town pump.



Creak! Creak!

There *IS* a market in the square every Wednesday, but even then, there's not a lot to buy.

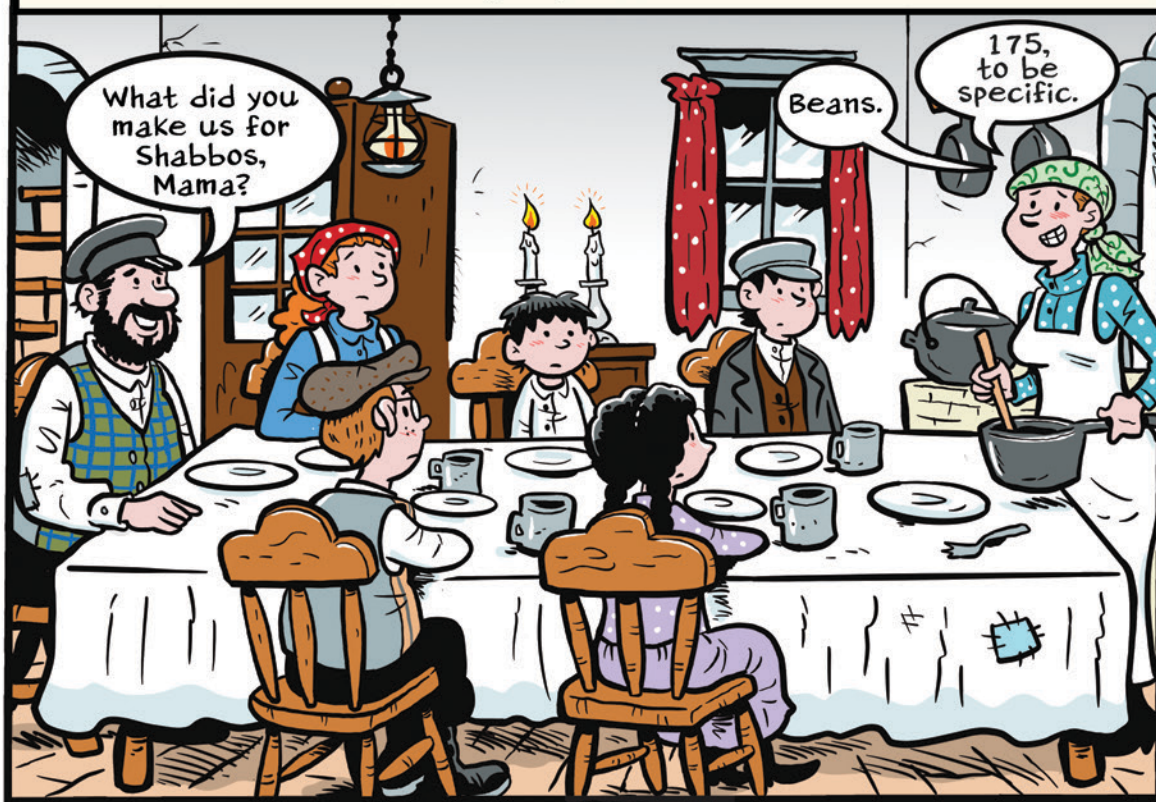


Turnips! Cheap today!

Big sale on turnips!

TURNIPS

But whatever else Lintvint may be, for me it's home, where my family lives. We're definitely not rich, but I wouldn't say we're poor, either.



Though it's true there are times when we don't have much to eat.



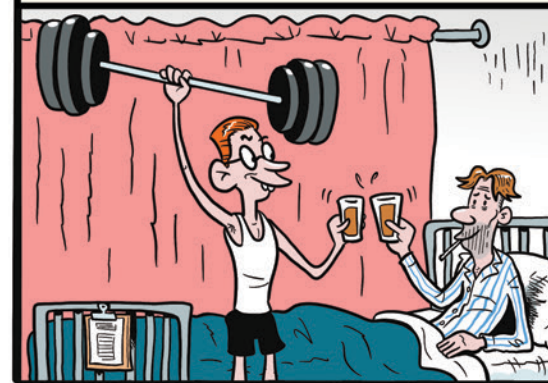
But I know we'll always get by as long as we can make kvatch.



Making kvatch is our village's main business. And our kvatch is famous all over Nahsovia.



They say a sip of Lintvint kvatch makes a weak man strong and a sick one healthy...



...a poor man feel rich and a rich man feel like a King!



But believe it or not, there are some people who'd never touch it, just because it's made from goat sweat.



But kvatch goats are nothing like the nasty old goats you usually see.



Quench your thirst, my lovelies!

They're specially bred for sweat purity and drink nothing but clean water from cold mountain springs.

The day before a sweat, the goats aren't fed, to make sure they're good and hungry.

Then, they're taken to my father's sweat run, which is right beside our house.

1.

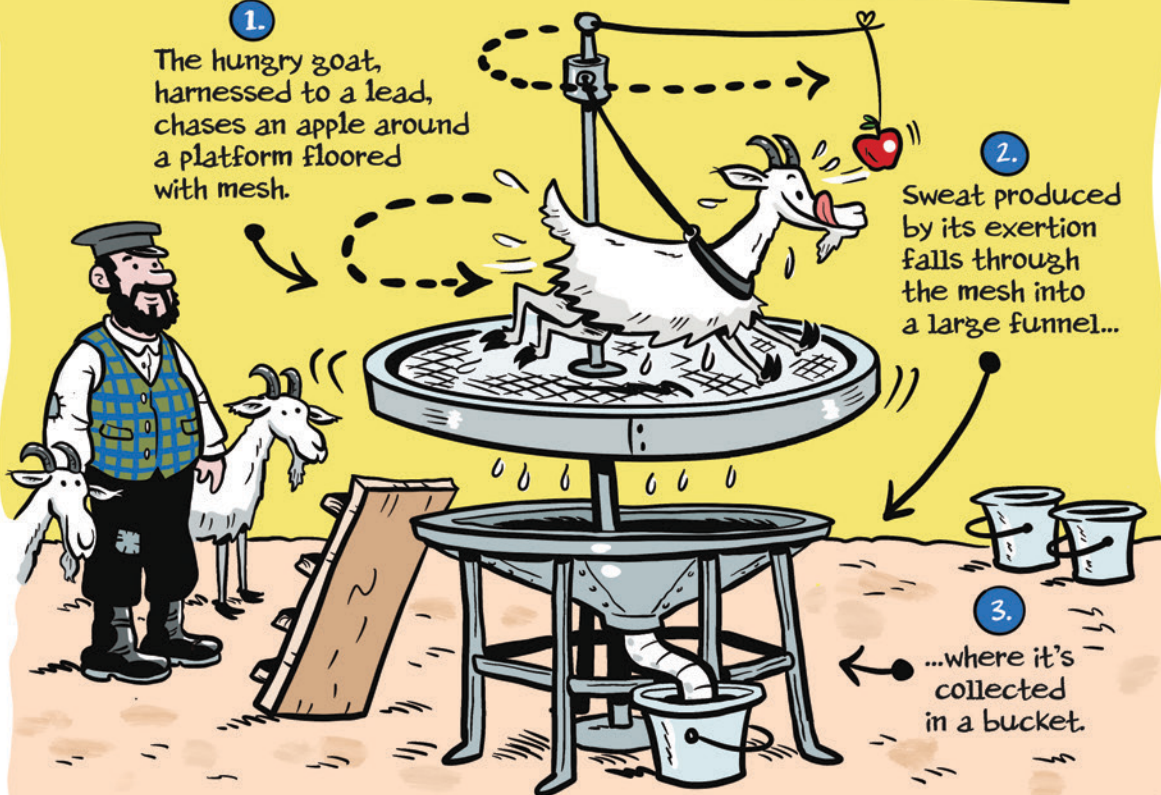
The hungry goat, harnessed to a lead, chases an apple around a platform floored with mesh.

2.

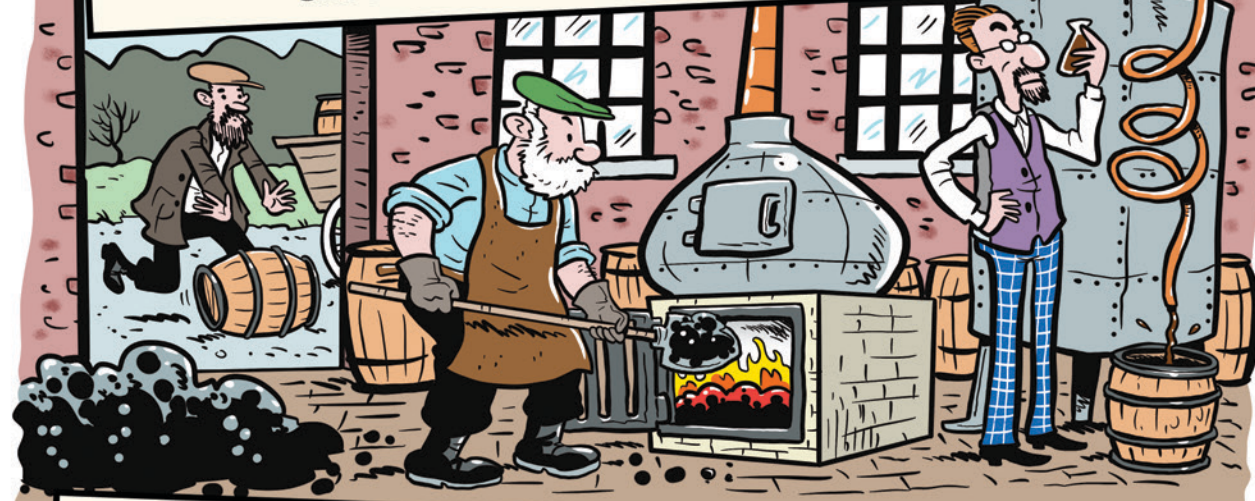
Sweat produced by its exertion falls through the mesh into a large funnel...

3.

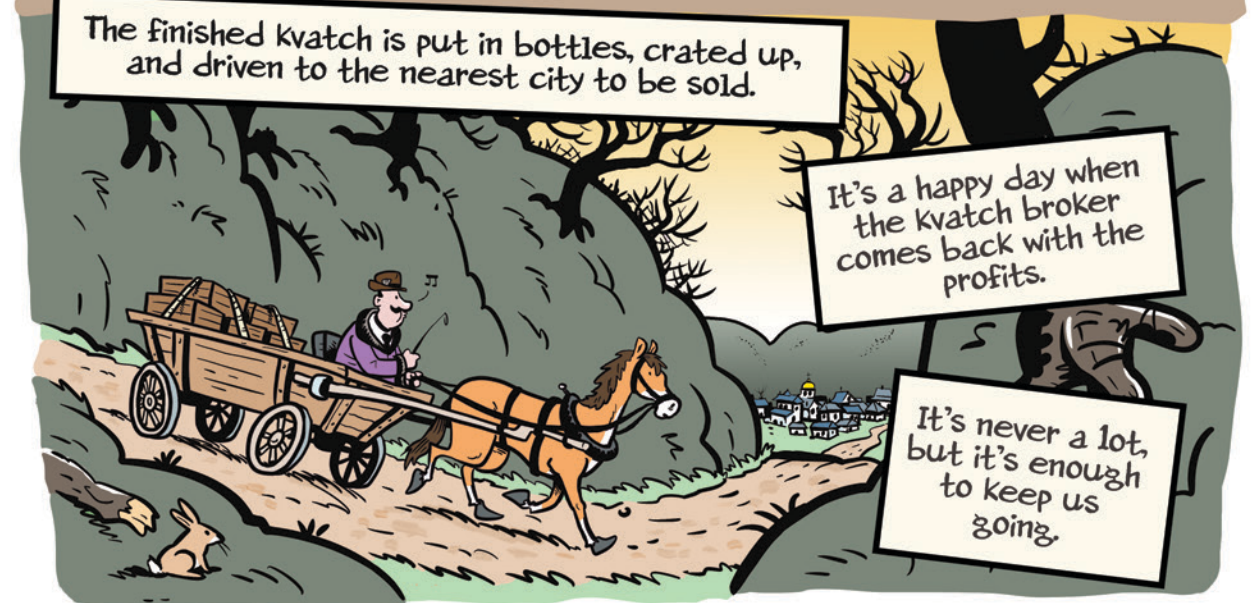
...where it's collected in a bucket.



Once my father collects enough sweat, he takes it to the brewer, who combines it with herbs and other ingredients and brews it using a secret process.



The finished kvatch is put in bottles, crated up, and driven to the nearest city to be sold.



It's a happy day when the kvatch broker comes back with the profits.

It's never a lot, but it's enough to keep us going.

Everyone in my family helps my dad sweat goats.

Well...everyone except ME.

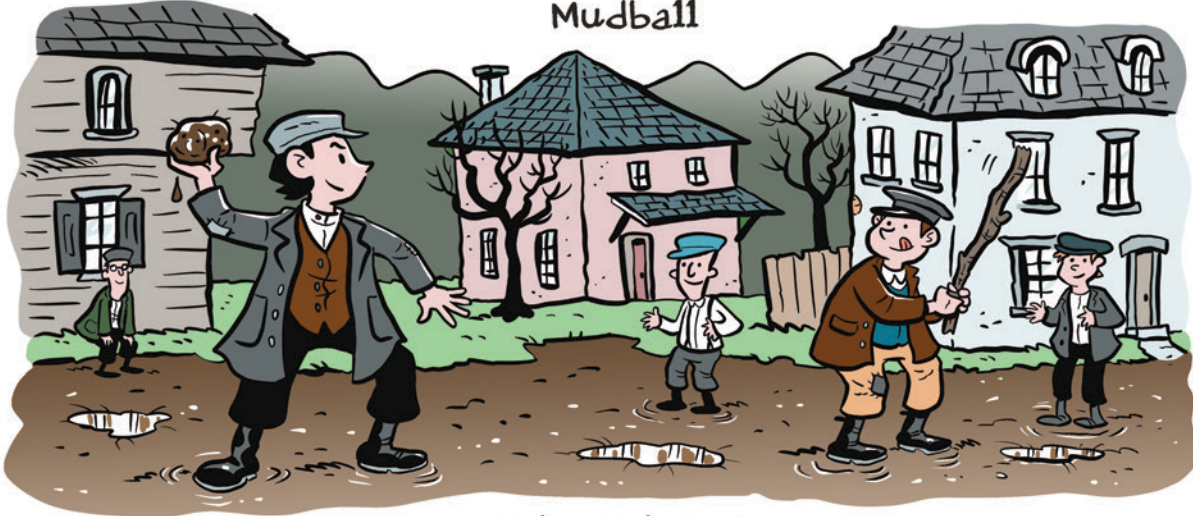


Sorry, son. We need to get this right.

That's because I have a problem.

See, in most ways, I'm a typical kid. I play with my friends...

Mudball



Hide-and-Seek

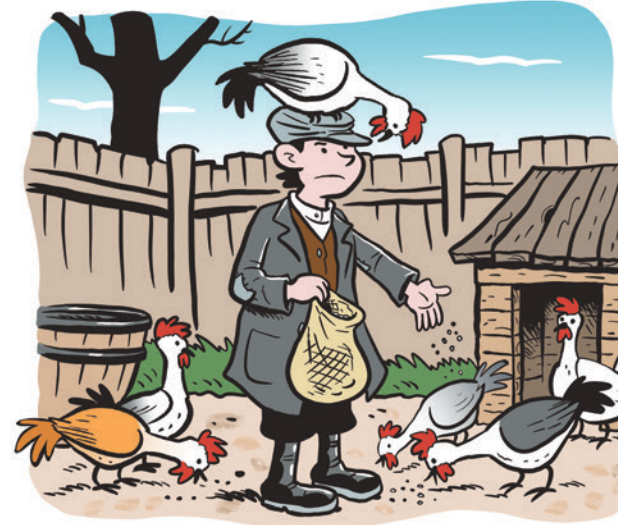


Duck Duck Goat



...and do my chores.

Feed the chickens.



Weed the turnips.



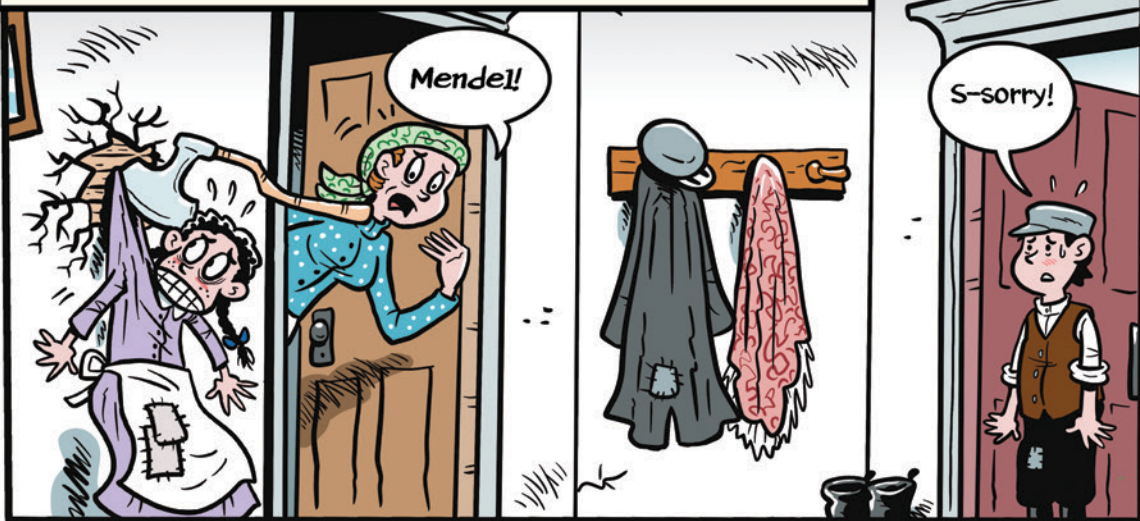
And of course, chop wood.



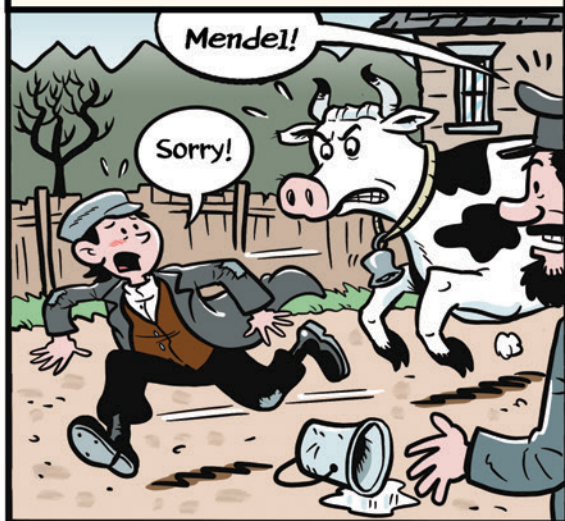
But there's **ONE** thing that makes me different from everyone else.



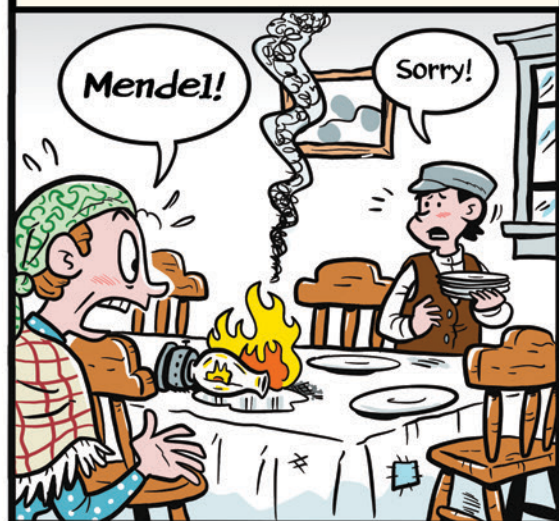
Which is that everything I do turns into a **DISASTER!**



Whether I'm trying to milk the cow...



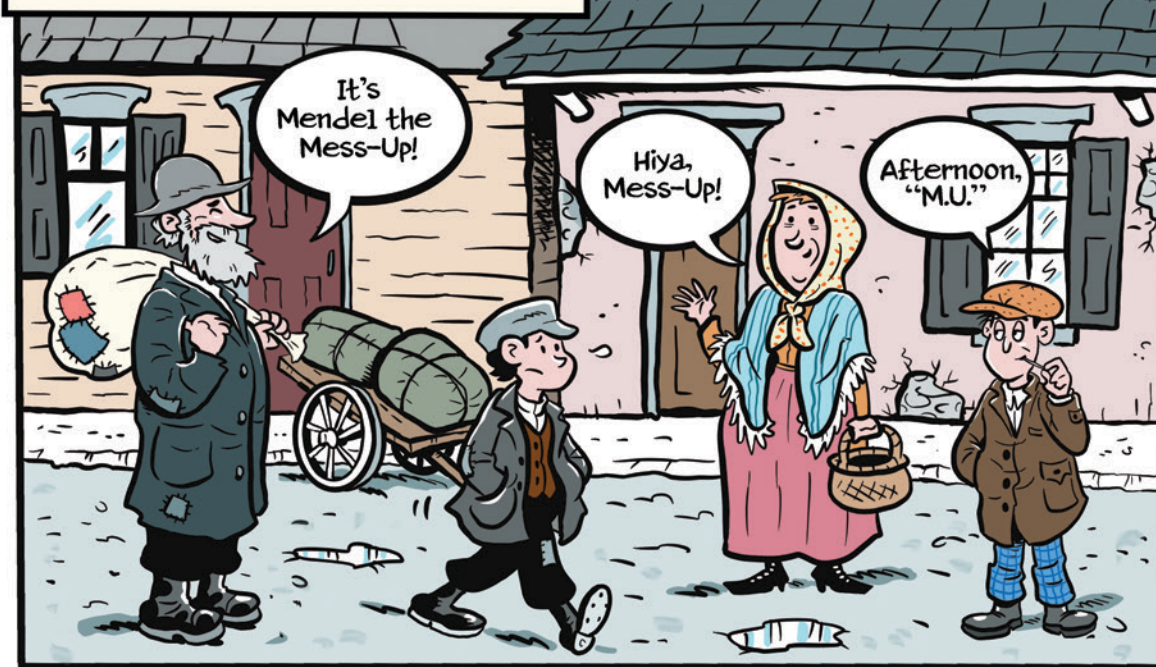
...or just setting the table...



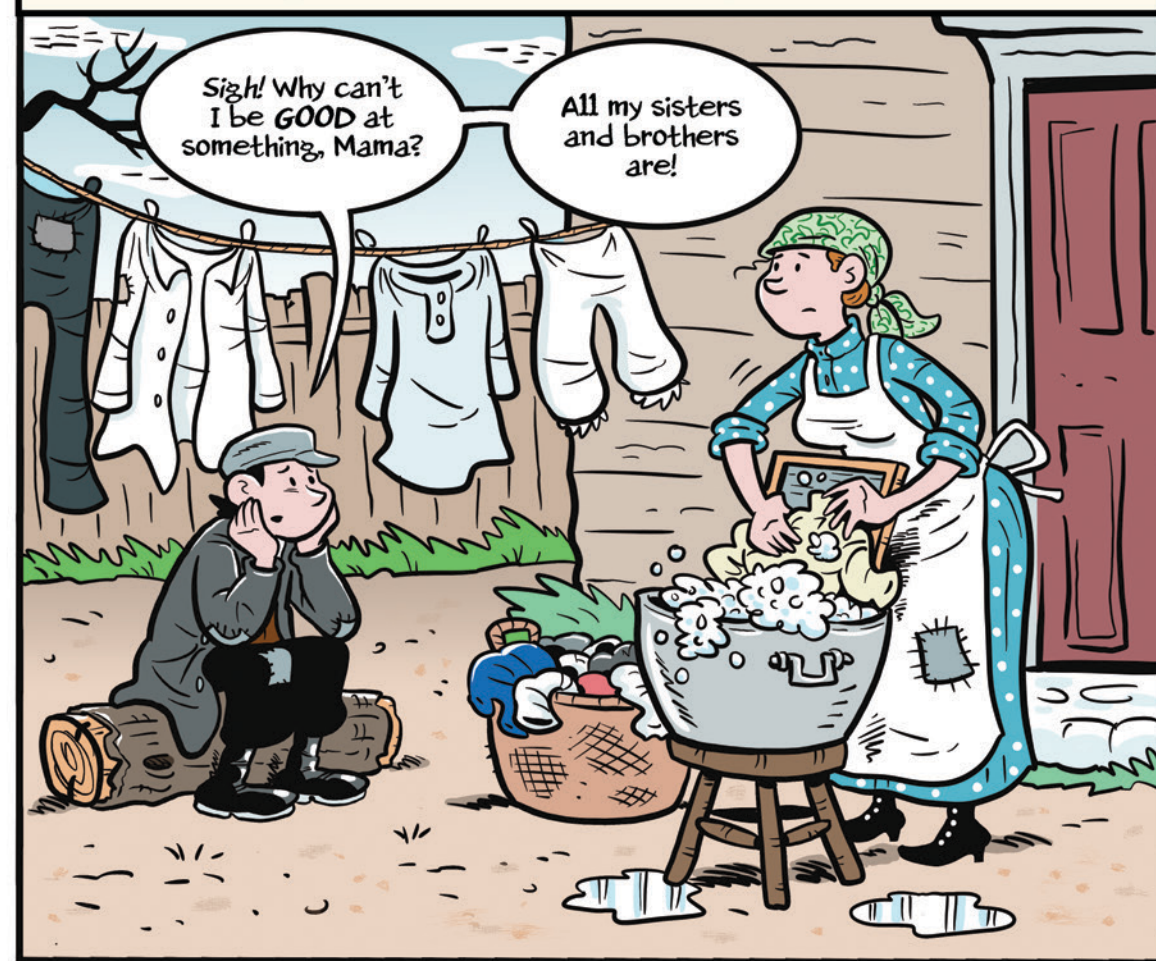
...the harder I try to do something right, the more it turns out wrong!



And **THAT'S** how I got my nickname.



As you can imagine, sometimes I start feeling pretty bad about myself.





Leib plays the trumpet.

Fleischa can sew.

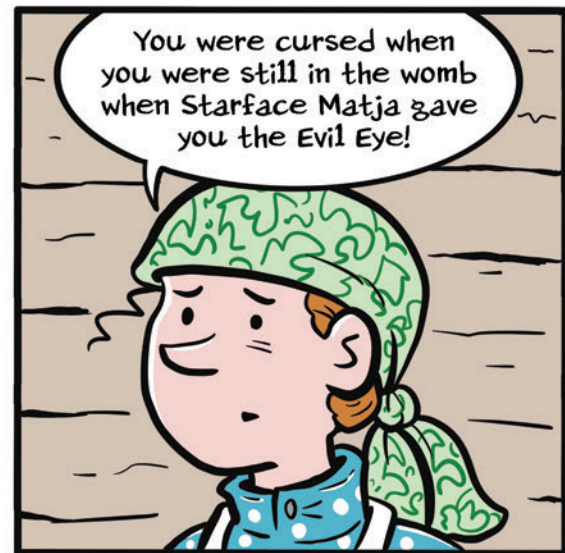
Halvah's an amazing cook.

Even little Pincus can herd goats!



But all I'M good at is messing things up!

I'm sorry, sweetheart—it isn't your fault!

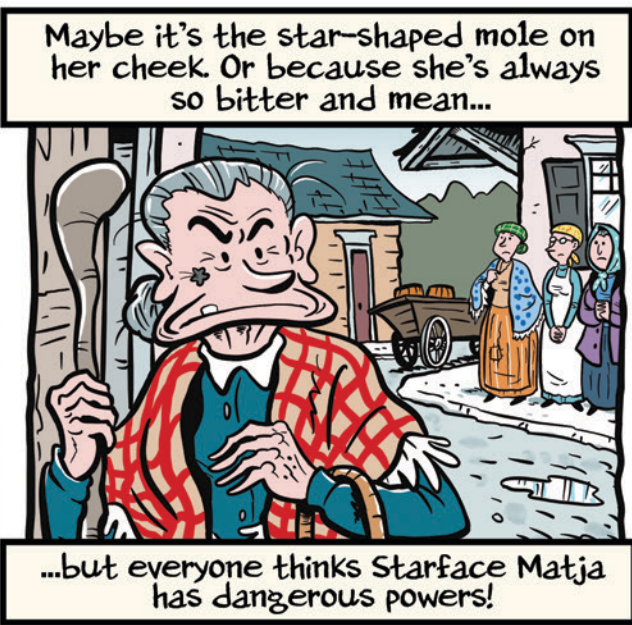


You were cursed when you were still in the womb when Starface Matja gave you the Evil Eye!



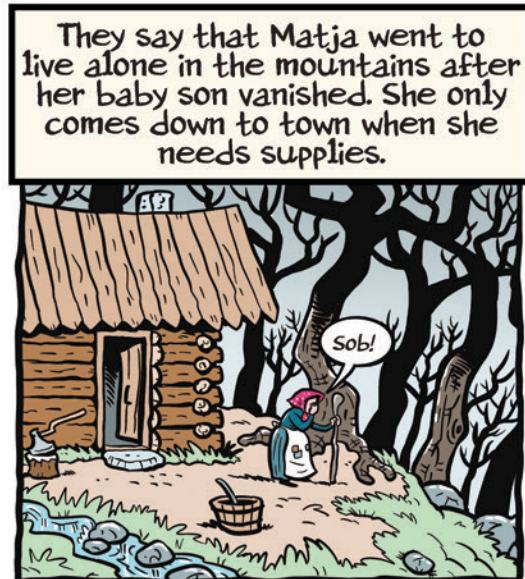
The Evil Eye! It's scary! At any moment, someone can curse you just by giving you a weird look!

ESPECIALLY someone like Starface Matja!



Maybe it's the star-shaped mole on her cheek. Or because she's always so bitter and mean...

...but everyone thinks Starface Matja has dangerous powers!



They say that Matja went to live alone in the mountains after her baby son vanished. She only comes down to town when she needs supplies.



That's what she was doing the day my mother, who was pregnant with me, ran into her.

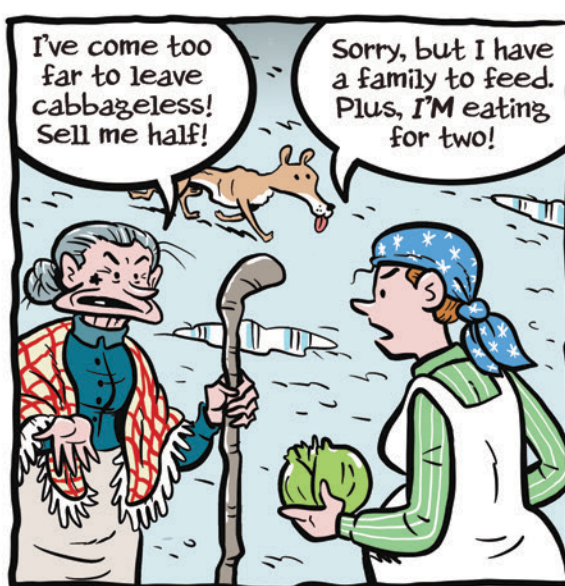
You have cabbage! I've been looking all over for one.

You're lucky—it's my last!



I was about to buy that cabbage myself!

You should've gotten here earlier, then!



I've come too far to leave cabbageless! Sell me half!

Sorry, but I have a family to feed. Plus, I'M eating for two!



So you could care less if a lonely old lady who LOST her only child STARVES!

I never said that!