

BY MICHAEL PERSHAN

# I AM BABY, PERSECUTED IN CITY OF NEW YORK

I am baby. I also am immigrant. I come to New York to escape persecution. And yet? Persecuted still. For New York City hates babies.

Was born several months ago in Old Country. Papa is teacher and Mama engineer. They give me cute nickname, “*Shprantzachloyzendichten*,” which in English means “viable offspring.”

People in Old Country hate us. To punish, we must wear pointy felt hat. They call mean words at us in street, such as “*Plonyonzebrachter*,” which in English means “boooooo.”

Mama and Papa kiss goodnight and put me in crib, but I listen through door. Papa has cousin in America. Is only choice, he says. Mama says, no—life is *here*, only home we know. Papa points at crib with tears in eyes. Mama also tears in eyes, then says, OK. Call stupid cousin.

A few days later, we get on boat. On boat, I feel good, just small seasick. I throw up on Mama only twice, one time poop on poop deck. Papa apologizes to crew. They say, we no care, not our boat.

Finally we arrive—New York City. Land of freedom, liberty, and understanding. Here can live even us *Plonyonzebrachters*, to reclaim harmful word.

Bus rolls up. We wait to get on. When it’s our turn, driver looks down at me. No strollers on bus, he says. Actual New York City rule. Baby get out of here.

Mama says, OK, no problem. Will take famously convenient New York subway.

But is cruel joke! When we get to subway there is enormous stairway, followed by another stairway, followed by entrance gates with what must be anti-stroller defenses. They have created obstacle course, designed specifically to keep babies from using subway.

This is like once, in Old Country, Papa needed socks. Man stopped him outside socks store. Papa said, I am allowed in? Man said, sure. Special *Plonyonzebrachter* entrance is that window up on second floor. You are welcome to come in through window. Papa walked home without socks, which in Old Country was toe fungus 100% guarantee.

Mama looks around. New York is richest city in world, must

have elevator in train stations? But, no. Absolutely not. Only handful, in richy-rich neighborhoods. OK. So Mama does what she must—she picks up stroller and walks us down dangerous subway stairs.

We are at bottom step when she trips. We go tumbling down. I cry, but crying for me is normal. I cry at loud noises and new colors. No biggie.

Mama gets up but screams with pain and grabs ankle. Luckily rest of her body is OK. Still, cannot clean apartments without ankle.

Mama must go to doctor. No problem! America is wealthy country. Surely take care even *Plonyonzebrachters*, with strong beautiful no-pay medicines. In America, free doctor on every corner, right? No, of course not, instead is Starbucks on every corner, because of country’s hate for sick and weak. Like Sparta.

Many people walk past Mama. People on way to work, also people coming home from parties. Two skinny men in very small pants look at us. They say, “Man, do you remember this city before the yuppies with their fucking strollers? Totally ruined the scene.”

That day, for first time, I think it OK to kill person.

I cannot speak, but I say to Mama, leave me here. This city hates babies and no like Mamas much either. You go find doctor for wounds. I will wait. Leave me here in train station, at bottom of murder steps. I will busk for milk.

But Mama does not understand or does not listen, because she just stands with one leg, holding stroller.

Just then, subway rolls into station. Doors open and who is it that gets off? It Papa! He is done from work cleaning schools and night and coming home, covered in dust and chewing gum.

Papa takes bottom of stroller and Mama takes front. People coming down the steps are annoyed by giant baby stroller. Papa calls them “*asshole*,” which is universal term for “*asshole*.” And then we are out of station, and we walk past buses and subways to get home the only way we can in a city that hates babies.

Is enough to make miss even toe fungus. Almost. **B**

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