

MOISHE KULBAK

Muni The Bird-Seller

Muni's father, a man with a thick tangled beard, walked about the room one of those dreary winter nights, thinking. He was thinking about that overgrown son of his, who had no legs, poor thing, and propelled himself along from day-break on his behind over the cold clay floor, and—help!—he was making a beggar out of him!

Night after night he worried about it, and swore: that boy was eating him out of house and home!

Only when the Spring began, and the frost melted, this Jew with the thick tangled beard came home one-day with a secret joy. He had brought a cage with birds; he set it down on the table, and from his bosom slowly produced Odessa doves—slowly and carefully, as if they had grown there under his arm-pits. Then Muni suddenly smelt a delicious warmth rising from the birds' bodies, a pleasant cooing and chirping that moved him to tears. He crawled down from the couch, startled and confused. He nearly fainted. And his creased and wrinkled father growled through his prickly beard:

'There you are, curse that has afflicted me, breed these, and earn your living!'

And after that Muni's father died.

(This prefatory section is missing from the translation
in Howe, Treasury)