



## When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw and Other Stories

*Isaac Bashevis Singer*

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Eight stories based on traditional Jewish themes from Eastern Europe include: Shrewd Todie & Lyzer the Miser; Tsirtsur & Peziza; Rabbi Leib & the Witch Cunegunde; The Elders of Chelm & Genendel's Key; Shlemiel, the Businessman; Utzel & His Daughter Poverty; Menaseh's Dream; When Shlemiel went to War

## When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw and Other Stories Details

Date : Published January 1st 1969 by Farrar Straus Giroux (first published 1968)

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Author : Isaac Bashevis Singer

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## **From Reader Review When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw and Other Stories for online ebook**

### **Ms. Wayne says**

Publishers Weekly

Eight stories, some inspired by traditional Jewish tales, feature such characters as Shlemiel, Todie, Rabbi Leib and Menaseh. PW called this ``a rich collection that will be enjoyed by both young and old." (All ages)

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### **David Baldwin says**

Like his stories for adults, Singer's stories for children are a delight.

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### **Laura Boudreau says**

Fun book of classic Jewish folktales

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### **Phil Jensen says**

Solid, well-illustrated book of Yiddish tales, partly original, partly from the oral tradition. I prefer it slightly over Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories because the stories have more purpose and focus.

My favorite out of the collection is "Shrewd Todie and Lyzer the Miser," but I'm not so sure about using it instructionally. One Jewish character is greedy, and the other is a fraud. Not exactly fighting the stereotype, there. "Utzel and his daughter Poverty" or the title story would be better choices.

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### **Christina Packard says**

The stories were quietly entertaining.

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### **John says**

This is a fun collection of stories for adults as much as young readers. There are a few real gems in the collection, several good tales, and a couple that just aren't that good. But overall this was a pleasure to read.

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## **Kalkeydan Ayele says**

When Shlemiel Went To Warsaw is a book on eight world war stories based on traditional Jewish tales. Written by one of the great story tellers of our time. The book has Zemach's illustrations to keep the readers wanting to see more.

I think the important part the author is trying to say or illustrate is how traditional Jewish tales are very interesting and very personal and close to her because her mother and grandmother used to read the exact stories to her when she was a child. Now she tells them in her own way.

I couldn't really connect with the stories because firstly I don't like traditional tales or stories at all and secondly there was nothing in the book that related to me or my life.

The author wrote in her own way the stories that were told to her and passed down by her mother and grandmother about traditional Jewish folktale. Which she dedicated to her mother and father who were enthusiastic storytellers.

In conclusion I didn't really enjoy the book and felt like I chose the wrong book to read. I would recommend this book for people who enjoy reading traditional tales probably from the age of 12 and above.

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## **Richard says**

This is one of my favorite comical books of all time. I love the Shlemiel stories and have read this collection several times...

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## **Rebekah says**

I read this collection over and over when I was a kid. And I loved staring at the pictures.

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## **Josiah says**

"In our time, when literature is losing its address and the telling of stories is becoming a forgotten art, children are the best readers."

—*When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw & Other Stories*, from the Foreword

I have to admit, Isaac Bashevis Singer really has a way with folk tale humor. His shlemiels do such comically absurd things that it will make anyone laugh, and in doing so the author has achieved the rarity of a book with comedic appeal to readers of any age or background. Most of the vignettes included in *When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw and Other Stories* have their roots in Isaac Bashevis Singer's Yiddish culture, and seem nearly unique in the way that they portray most of the main characters as unbelievable fools, yet still

deliver a relevant message about human nature and life as we know it.

*Shrewd Todie & Lyzer the Miser*, the first story in this collection, is one of those "just desserts" tales of retribution about the poor but crafty man getting one over on the wealthy but penurious neighbor whom everyone has been waiting for years to see get knocked down a peg. Todie isn't your typical hero, being incurably lazy himself, but he gets the job done. *Tsirtsur & Peziza* is a short but effective fable about an imp and a cricket who live in what is essentially a hole in the wall, and what happens when their world is turned upside down one day as they are forced to evacuate the home they've always known. The story allegorically demonstrates that perceived safety can actually be a negative thing when it inhibits healthy risk taking and personal growth, and Tsirtsur and Peziza are the living objects for this lesson. All told, I would argue that this is probably the second-best story in the book.

*Rabbi Leib & the Witch Cunegunde* is another tale with a definite moral. This one concerns the triumph of good over evil when a person on the side of good is willing to use smart trickery to achieve victory. *The Elders of Chelm & Gendel's Key* returns us to a world of pure but entertaining nonsense, as the town elders of Chelm prove time and again that their buffoonery is the stuff of legend. Picking up where that one left off is *Shlemiel, the Businessman*, which relates the story of the ways that simpleminded Shlemiel gets tricked out of his money again and again, and how no one in his village can figure out what's actually happening (remember, this is still Chelm we're talking about, so it's not a town populated by geniuses).

Switching back to a moral fable, *Utzel & His Daughter Poverty* tells the tale of a lazy man and his daughter as they come to learn something about the connection between hard work and personal success. This is probably the story that has the most obvious fantasy elements to it, but the lesson to be learned is very real and grounded firmly in common sense. I'd have to say that *Menaseh's Dream*, which comes up next, has to be the finest story of the entire lot. Twelve-year-old Menaseh, who has lost his parents and grandfather to death at a young age, is visited by a dream that gives him a glimpse of his future. He's even able to see his parents and grandfather for a few moments during the dream, and they assure him that he will join them one day, but that he must complete a long and difficult journey first. Menaseh awakens from his vision and is met by an unmistakable sign that what he experienced was more than just a dream, and it's enough to give him hope for his future. The story's emotion is played lightly, but the depth of its meaning still outshines that of the other tales, in my opinion.

For the finale, we have the one we all were waiting to read, *When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw*. Back we go to Chelm, where Shlemiel has now decided that he needs to get out and see the world on his own, without his wife and kids. On his way to Warsaw, a prankster turns Shlemiel's shoes around at night so that when he puts them on in the morning he unwittingly (which seems to happen a lot) travels back to Chelm. Shlemiel is dumbfounded (again, a common occurrence) to have somehow ended up back in Chelm, and draws the conclusion that there must be a second village called Chelm exactly like his own, populated with people who look and act exactly like the neighbors he's always known. So what is he to do when his "family" approaches him in this alternate Chelm, and expects him to be their husband and father?

Whether funny or thoughtful, each of the short stories told by Isaac Bashevis Singer in this book has its own distinct merit, and are well worth reading for anyone interested in stories that offer a sense of culture, a lot of quirky humor and a vivid object lesson or two. *When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw & Other Stories* is a book both entertaining and enlightening, and I definitely had fun with it. I hope that other readers do, too. I would rate it at two and a half stars.

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### **Debbie says**

I didn't know anything about this book before encountering the title in the Children's Authors card game, but I'm glad I did.

Shlemiel's stories (three in this collection) are amusing to read, conveying life lessons even as they are ridiculous, and I found myself wishing I could share these stories with slightly younger children. I liked the other stories, which Singer claimed his mother told him and he reworked, but not all of the stories were equally pleasing. The story of Utzel and his daughter Poverty and the story of the imps and the crickets seemed more heavy-handed as stories with morals and no real adventure or charm, like the other stories.

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### **Padraic says**

I woke in the middle of the night, thinking about this book, and how much my son would love it. He does. And now I love it more.

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### **Gale says**

“The Foolish Foibles of Folks from Chelm”

These 8 little tales, reflecting life in a Jewish village in Poland, are lighthearted spoofs on simpletons, as well as the respected Elders of Chelm. They even include a fable about an unlikely pair of friends--a cricket and an imp. We witness both harmless pranks and dishonest cheats; delusions and dreams factor in as well. The witch Cunegonde wages war on a wise rabbi (the eternal struggle between Good and Evil), and we witness the trials of a poor girl with no dowry or beau. Married life is satirized, while the value of hard work (or at least honest labor) is praised. Stinginess and Laziness are ridiculed. Typical peasant fare—which applies to human nature thew world over.

The word “Shlemiel” means a simpleton--a naïve fellow, in Yiddish. But sometimes even a fool can outwit another fool and once in a while a fool may actually stumble into a good deal. Cute fluff for readers 12 and up, offering universal appeal.

(March 30, 2013. I welcome dialogue with teachers.)

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### **Ashley says**

A full review is viewable on my blog, Books from Bleh to Basically Amazing

I'm debating between a 3 and a 4. This is a Newbery Honor winning collection of very Jewish short stories. Some of them were great and a lot of fun. Others were just a little too much of the ridiculous for my taste.

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### **Thomas Bell says**

I thought that this book was dumb. Some of the stories maybe deserved 3 stars - maybe. Most did not.

A lot of these stories are about people being stupid. No real morals come about; I think it is to make little kids laugh as you read it to them. Just not my style.

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