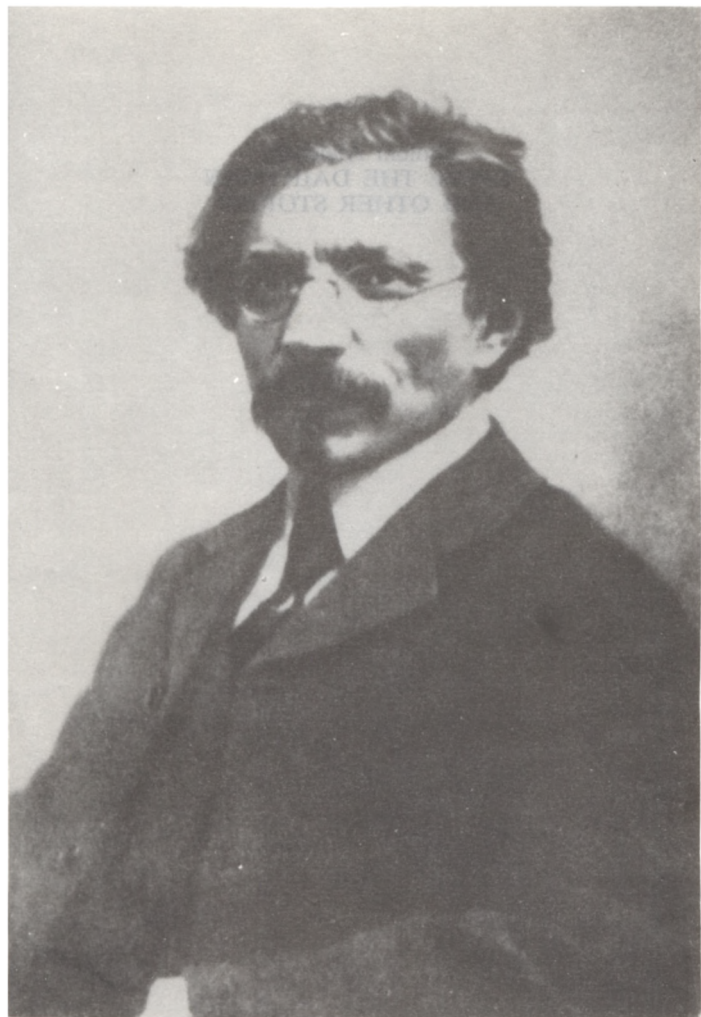


# Sholom Aleichem

*Tevye the Dairyman  
and Other Stories*



Sholom Aleichem  
TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN  
AND OTHER STORIES



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## *Tevye the Dairyman and Other Stories*

Translated by *Miriam Katz*



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Translation from the Yiddish  
Designed by **Pavel Nikiporets**  
Illustrated by **Alexander Kaplan**

ШОЛОМ-АЛЕЙХЕМ

Тевье-молочник

Повесть. Рассказы

*На английском языке*

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# WORDS OF GREETING, WORDS OF PEACE AND HOPE

## I

The heroes of Sholom Aleichem! All the immeasurable contradictions of the time, all its gigantic conflicts, its mad storms, its destructive earthquakes, its ruthless battles so disunited and dispersed them, so broke up their fates that they have become unrecognizable, remote from the world whose breath we feel as we turn over the pages of Sholom Aleichem's books.

Sholom Aleichem stands among the splendid writers so dear to humanity—Nikolai Gogol and Charles Dickens, Anton Chekhov and Guy de Maupassant, Lu Hsun and Ivan Franko. . . Their characters were molded from one and the same precious alloy of love and sorrow, joy and wrath, jest and laughter. Sholom Aleichem once wrote: "In order to become a folk writer one must have talent and be a patriot and a friend of the people, be humane and love people; while castigating and ridiculing one must remain loyal and devoted to them both when he is serious and when he jests. . ."

The life of his people, their aspirations and dreams were shown by Sholom Aleichem through the living vernacular of the folk. He scornfully rejected the insults flung at the modern Jewish language, Yiddish. The Talmudic sages disdained it, affirming that it was vulgar, it was limited, it was a dialect, it was a mish-mash and a jargon. The choice of language at that time was for a Jewish writer equal to a social choice—for whom was he writing: for the broad masses of the people or for a privileged few? Weighty confirmation



that this “jargon” was a rich and colorful language were the works of such predecessors of Sholom Aleichem as Mendele Mocher Sforim and as Avrom Goldfaden, playwright, poet and founder of the Jewish theater.

In speaking of his love for his people the writer never expressed any nationalistic ideas affirming the “eternal and sacred unity” of the Jewish people or the absence in it of any class distinctions, allegedly as a result of its religious unity, and he never ignored social contradictions.

Sholom Aleichem was acquainted with the teachings of Karl Marx. The gallery of images of revolutionary-minded young people is not very numerous, but the author portrayed each image with respect for the heroic path they had chosen. All his love and sympathy were with the oppressed, exploited working people; he created such vivid, full-blooded types as the dairyman Tevye who was endowed with a powerful life force, as the touchingly quaint tailor Shimen-Elya, the young revolutionary Marxist Yosif and many, many others — sad and merry, hot-tempered and gloomy, visionary and restless, courageous and tender. Here, surrounded by his characters, Sholom Aleichem makes friendly jokes, laughs gustily, burns with anger, and together with them he is exasperated, he dreams, struggles and strives to find a way out, he seeks sympathy and understanding.

But what a change comes over this kindly person when he finds himself in the office of a wealthy businessman or a smart dealer, in the home of a usurer, amidst a company of mercenary Zionist journalists! The humorist disappears, and we see a merciless satirist who portrays, with indignation and contempt, the repulsive images of the Kasrilovka rich man Mordkhe-Noson, the stock-broker Feifer, the swindler Arkadi

Shveitzer, the white slave trafficker from Buenos Aires, or the Lvov patron of literature and the arts, Levius. This is why the great writer was so viciously attacked by a pack of petty scribblers who accused him of insulting the people, of having no respect for national traditions, of scoffing at “the behests of our forebears”.

Sholom Aleichem had the moral support not only of his numerous Jewish readers, not only of the progressive circles of the Jewish intelligentsia, but also of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish intelligentsia who, through their outstanding representatives, testified their recognition of the brilliant talent of this Jewish writer. Having read the first, complete, part of the long story *Motl, the Cantor's Son* Gorky wrote the author a letter in which he said: “My highly esteemed brother-writer! I have received your book and read it, laughing and shedding tears. A marvelous book! It seems to me that the translation is well done and reflects the translator's love for the author, although in certain places one does feel that it is difficult to convey through the medium of the Russian language the sad and warm-hearted humor of the original. I say—one feels this.

“I like the book very much. I repeat—an excellent book! Throughout it radiates such a warm, kindly and wise love for the plain folk, and this is a rare feeling in our day.” Similar letters, full of warmth and respect, were written to Sholom Aleichem by Vladimir Korolenko and Lev Tolstoy.

Already during his lifetime the writer's fame and popularity expanded far beyond the boundaries of national circles of readers.

Sholom Aleichem understood how important it was for him to broaden the horizons of his creative interests in order to approach, on the basis of the national experience, problems of humanity as a whole, international problems. He understood how important it was for the future of his folk not only to destroy all kinds of ghettos and Pales of Settlement, but also to struggle against all the things that promoted the spiritual isolation of the Jewish people—religious fanaticism, Messianic arrogance and Zionistic presumption that strove to isolate the broad Jewish masses from the worldwide liberation movement headed by the proletariat, from the mainstream of progressive human thought. Sholom Aleichem understood this very well and he was an ardent advocate for the unity of the liberation aspirations of the Jewish people with the liberation struggle of all the peoples of the Russian Empire. Three years before the October Revolution he prophetically declared: “Our people’s future is only here, in this country where we live. The bad times will pass away, the dark clouds will disperse, the sky will become clear.”

Sholom Aleichem repeatedly emphasized in articles, statements and letters his love for and faith in the Russian people, he never identified them with Russian tsarism, on no account did he extend the just hatred towards the bloody regime in the tsarist “prison of the peoples” to the ordinary Russian people. The Russian language was not only dear to Sholom Aleichem’s heart, he held it to be his second native tongue: “The Russian language is close to my heart. . . I have

worked on it sufficiently for it to become a native language." While still in secondary school he learned the language so well that he earned his living by giving Russian lessons. The writer's first literary efforts were written in three languages: Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. Already in 1884 his story "The Visionaries", written in Russian, appeared in print; later, in 1891, when he lived in Odessa, Sholom Aleichem wrote newspaper columns, feature articles and stories in Russian that were published in the Russian press.

The progressive Russian intelligentsia soon noted the new talent that had appeared in Jewish literature. Already in the 1890s translations of Sholom Aleichem's stories appeared in the *Nizhegorodsky listok*. Gorky read them and pronounced them to be "excellent things". Thus began the long-term friendly relations between the two great writers, an attentive relationship full of mutual respect. When Gorky, in 1901, made plans for publishing a collection entitled *Stories by Jewish Writers* he first of all approached Sholom Aleichem. When the first edition of the works of Sholom Aleichem in Russian translation began to come out in 1910 Gorky kept an eye on every volume. He lived at that time on Capri and from there he wrote the above-cited warm letter. Sholom Aleichem, touched by this letter, sent a grateful answer. In November 1904, on the eve of stormy uprisings, revolutionary upsurge and the orgy of counterrevolutionary reaction, shooting of workers' demonstrations, peasant revolts and Jewish pogroms—in such troubled and portentous days Sholom Aleichem came to St. Petersburg where he met Gorky personally for the first time. Their conversation was devoted to questions of literature—both general and Jewish. Of course, this was not a talk conducted within a close range of purely literary interests. It was a talk between two leading

representatives of their peoples. The same is true of their long-term correspondence. Until the last days of his life Gorky retained the memory of his Jewish brother-writer. He could not refrain from mentioning Sholom Aleichem in 1934 at the First Congress of Soviet Writers as “an exceptionally gifted satirist and humorist”.

Although Sholom Aleichem’s correspondence with Anton Chekhov, Vladimir Korolenko and Lev Tolstoy was not very copious, his strong spiritual ties with them, the knowledge of their works and admiration for them were manifested in his own works and in his numerous statements.

The overall inspirational impact of Lev Tolstoy’s genius on the development of Sholom Aleichem’s talent is unquestionable. A more direct influence was exerted by Anton Chekhov. In his artistic questing Sholom Aleichem set himself the goal of “attaining Chekhov’s clarity, pithiness and chariness of words and sentences”.

Particularly strong were the ties linking Sholom Aleichem to his native land—the Ukraine. The Ukraine was the birthplace of Goldfaden and Sholom Aleichem, of the Soviet Jewish writers Bergelson, Shvartsman, Der Nister, and Markish.

The best representatives of both peoples always sensed this friendly handclasp, these fruitful contacts —both material, spiritual, linguistic and artistic. Everything created by Sholom Aleichem reflects these spiritual ties. Although inseparably bound with the treasures accumulated in the folklore and the literary traditions of the Jewish people, Sholom Aleichem readily used colors, techniques and expressions borrowed from Russian and Ukrainian folklore in portraying his personages. His Tevye finds for almost every occasion in life a Jewish, Ukrainian, or Russian

saying or proverb. The humor of the old dairyman is also enriched by the astute, slightly sad, sharp wit of Yiddish folklore, by the keen, colorful Ukrainian jest, and by the mocking resourcefulness of Russian by-words.

Sholom Aleichem once told his brother: "When I was writing poetry I looked high and low for Taras Shevchenko's song of songs—*Kobzar*—and I couldn't find it. I was ready to give anything and pay anything for it. Only now do I see that I would have lost nothing if I had paid the highest price even for his *Katerina* alone."

The image of *Katerina* was particularly dear to Sholom Aleichem. The fate of the unfortunate Ukrainian girl was very similar to that of the Jewish women who repeatedly attracted the attention and sympathy of the writer (for instance, in the stories "Birth", "Three Widows" and the novel *Tevye the Dairyman*). Among Sholom Aleichem's female characters there is also the image of a Jewish girl who marries a young revolutionary and becomes his companion on the difficult path of struggle against social and national injustice. Such a girl was Hodel, *Tevye's* second daughter.

#### 4

Man is the focal point of the creative aspirations, efforts and discoveries of Sholom Aleichem. Man at the turn of the 20th century. This was a period of an ever-increasing break-up of the patriarchal customs of the age-old Jewish community wherein endless poverty surrounded the masses of artisans, petty shopkeepers, craftsmen, laborers and intellectuals who comprised the petty bourgeois majority in the *shtetl* society in which the formation of the first generation of the

Jewish working class had already commenced. This was also a period when the economically strengthened Jewish bourgeoisie, having finished with the phase of enlightenment, *Haskalah*, with its progressive, for that time, struggle against the rule of the rabbis, now again armed itself with new forms of religious fanaticism.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the humoristic nature of Sholom Aleichem's writing. His is a complicated humor, its nature is contradictory: a mild jest is quickly replaced by a wrathful satirical attack, an ironical smile often conceals a human tragedy; this is akin to Gogol's laughter that hides bitter tears and sharp reproaches against reality. Sholom Aleichem himself wrote that life's sea of tears, having gone through his creative prism, was turned into laughter. This laughter of his is frequently more like a shout of protest. With deep emotion the writer contemplates the surrounding reality, his spiritual vision penetrates the inner world of the people he creates and he does not conceal that he is sitting in judgement on them. By no means is he to be looked upon as an indifferent observer, a nonchalant naturalist. A full-blooded realist, a master in the great art of the knowledge of humankind, an art that lives by truth alone, by faith in Man and by hatred for all that is stagnant, all that is antihumanitarian, one whose optimism is not superficial but is an integral feature, as are life and movement—such a man was Sholom Aleichem, such was his remarkable contribution to the world's treasure-house of realist art. Sholom Aleichem's stories and novellas comprise an inimitable world. . . Without it the picture of Man's past would be incomplete, several precious pieces of smalt would have fallen out of the mosaic of History. That is why we cherish both for ourselves and for the coming generations the images

discerned in life by one whose keen eyes that were both sad and merry closed forever in the faraway and alien to him city of New York seven decades ago.

5

Sholom Aleichem was born in the Ukraine, in the small but ancient and famed town of Pereyaslav (now called Pereyaslav-Khmel'nitsky), on March 2, 1859 into the family of Nokhum Rabinovich, a poor shopkeeper. The boy was named Sholom—Solomon. His childhood was spent in Pereyaslav and, for the greater part, in another small town, Voronkov. In his autobiography Sholom Aleichem tells us: “. . . I spent my very best years, the golden, wonderful and foolish years of childhood, in a tiny *shtetl*—no larger than a fingernail—Voronkov, not far from Pereyaslav.” It is this Voronkov we encounter so frequently in the works of Sholom Aleichem under the invented name of Kasrilovka. The picturesque legends of the *Haggadah*, the ironic stories reflecting Jewish folk humor, interwoven with Ukrainian bywords, fairy tales, with true stories and songs, thrilled the childish imagination, arousing inquisitiveness and curiosity.

A religious family. Traditions guarded, although not too strictly, by the father, the owner of an unpretentious inn in Pereyaslav. Gradual impoverishment. The humble existence of the family. The *heder*—the Jewish elementary religious school where the boy showed the first manifestations of a richly endowed, lively and indomitable nature.

After the *heder* the young Sholom Rabinovich went on to study at a Russian district school. Graduating from it in 1876, he began an independent life, left his home and went away to a village called Sofievka, an



estate rented by a wealthy man, Loyev. There Sholom lived for about three years as the domestic teacher of Loyev's daughter Olga. The young teacher and his still younger pupil fell in love with each other. Old Loyev, a self-conceited and wilful person, rudely broke off their relationship and turned the teacher out of the estate. However, in 1883 Sholom Aleichem did marry Olga Loyeva, who from then on was his friend, assistant and companion in his not easy life as a writer.

During these years Sholom Aleichem made his first conscious steps in the field of Yiddish literature. His first long story—*Two Stones*—was written in Yiddish and published in 1883. His second work, "The Elections", also came out at the same time, and it was the first work to be signed by the pen-name "Sholom Aleichem", which means "Peace to you" in Hebrew.

Sholom Aleichem's appearance marked a further stage in the development of the new Yiddish prose, founded by one whom Sholom Aleichem most respectfully appellated "my grandfather". This was Mendele Mocher Sforim (1836-1917), a Zhitomir and Odessa teacher who was a wise and steadfastly optimistic person. The mastery of his sincere, clear and simple stories, written at times with a kindly smile, at times with an ironic chuckle, and at times with a satirical taunt were a source that nurtured Sholom Aleichem's talent. Mendele Mocher Sforim invariably supported him and the younger man heeded his friendly advice which at times could be frankly severe.

In 1887 Sholom Aleichem wrote the long story "Sander Blank and His Family" and the novella "The Pen-Knife".

The 1890s were years of a creative upsurge for Sholom Aleichem, although in his private life he experienced much grief and misfortune. The legacy left by his father-in-law was rapidly devoured by unsuccess-

ful attempts in the field of commerce, an occupation Sholom Aleichem was absolutely incapable of pursuing owing to his nature and his interests. He generously spent money on cultural undertakings, on the publication of Yiddish books. However, although this period terminated in financial ruin, the writer gained a great deal spiritually. He had become acquainted with certain aspects of life that were previously inaccessible to him, he had acquired new social experience, new strata of society had been opened to him. The writer came to know the life of the rich Jewish bourgeoisie, the world of its servitors and minions. This provided him with enough material for creating the characters of the businessmen, speculators, stock-brokers, conceited rich people, and of the miserable *luftmenschen*, "dealers in air", who populated the pages of a book about one such unsuccessful dealer, Menachem-Mendel (the cycle of stories about him was commenced in Odessa in 1892), and also about an entirely different person—the cheerful, strong, persistent and truly folkish and down-to-earth toiler—the dairyman Tevye (the series of his "monologues" first began to come out in 1894 and was completed in 1914).

Tevye the Dairyman is the most popular, picturesque and optimistic figure in the gallery of personages created by Sholom Aleichem. By arduous labor Tevye made a place for himself on earth. This persistent, fruitful labor hardened his nature against adversity and injustice. Tevye likes a good joke, and he draws from a double store of humor, for he knows the Yiddish *khokhmeh* just as well as the Ukrainian *smikhovina*. He is no stranger to Talmudic scholarship, but how he twists and turns it! He resembles Romain Rolland's Colas Breugnon with his staunchness and vital tenacity; a toiler of the earth, by nature he differs from all of Sholom Aleichem's other heroes. He has

seven daughters—pretty, industrious, clever. Religious fanatics forbade Jews to cross over national boundaries—a Jewish girl was forbidden to marry a non-Jew, a Jewish boy was forbidden to love a Ukrainian or Russian girl; however, nobody was able to prevent Tevye's daughter from falling in love with the Ukrainian youth Fedka and from bravely defending her right to this love from her father. And the father, when he is alone with himself, thinks some remarkable, unusual thoughts: "What is the meaning of Jew and non-Jew? . . . And why did God create Jews and non-Jews? . . . And since He did create Jews and non-Jews, why should they be so isolated from each other, hate each other? . . ."

The atmosphere of the time was pregnant with new, unusual events. The first Russian revolution was approaching. Tsarism attempted to ward off the people's anger, fomenting national enmity and antisemitism, placing a knife in the filthy hands of the Black Hundreds and the pogrom-mongers. Sholom Aleichem lived through the terrible Kiev pogrom of 1905, but neither flagrant injustice, national insult, nor the bloody crimes of the dark forces could shatter the writer's prophetic hopes that this accursed discord, generated by enmity and hate, would disappear and the fates of Chava and Fedka would be just as bright as the fate of Hodel—the dairyman's second daughter who also chose for herself a new way, a road illuminated by revolutionary fires. One of the fighters in the revolution was Feferl, young Hodel's beloved. This narrow-chested, sickly son of a poor Jewish family did not have a very combatant appearance, but his revolutionary determination, his principles were indestructible. Hodel follows him into exile, leaving family and homeland. When her father asks her what, actually, her beloved has done, this youth for whose sake

she is disowning even her own family, he hears an answer he is to remember throughout his life: "He (Feferl—*Ed.*) is a man who cares nothing about himself. All he did was for the good of others, for the good of the world, above all for the toilers, the working people. . ."

Such were the fates of two of Tevye's daughters. However difficult they may have been, yet their loves were much worthier than that of his fourth daughter, Shprintze, who preferred a rich, useless, conceited parasite.

The image of the boy Motl is portrayed with the same penetrating feeling for the pure, kindly, integrally cheerful national character as that of the dairyman Tevye. Sholom Aleichem vividly depicts the capitalist social order in the second part of *Motl, the Cantor's Son*. The orphan Motl made his difficult way from poverty-stricken Kasrilovka to the gigantic, roaring, never-sleeping New York; this journey was full of bitter premature experience.

Sholom Aleichem saw that people were looking for a chance to leave their native Kasrilovkas and go to the "land of liberty", America. The author repeatedly—in the wonderful story about the boy Motl, in the "Notes of a Traveling Agent", in the story "Berel-Aizik" and in the novel *Wandering Stars*—turned to the theme of Jewish emigration, picturing the destruction of the legends about the "happy land of liberty" across the ocean.

The misanthropic essence of the American life-style was observed by Sholom Aleichem with the same revulsion that ran through Gorky's American essays, the novellas of Sherwood Anderson, Vladimir Korolenko's story "Tongueless" and Franz Kafka's unfinished novel *America*.

The writer was a very sick man. In 1908, after his

return from America, he set off on a journey through the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Polish *shtetls* where considerable masses of the Jewish population lived. Sholom Aleichem's meetings with his readers turned into real demonstrations of the popular respect and love for their writer. In Baranovichi (Byelorussia), he caught a cold and was laid up in bed. The doctors diagnosed a flare-up of pulmonary tuberculosis.

He went to Italy to recuperate. There, in the Italian town of Nervi, he received telegrams and letters with get-well wishes and greetings.

## 6

Feelings of loyalty and love for his motherland never faded from the heart of Sholom Aleichem. In his distant travels this feeling nurtured his thoughts and drew him homeward, to the Ukraine, to Russia. In 1914 he again set out to travel the western provinces of the Russian Empire, to visit the towns for whom history was preparing the severe ordeals of the First World War in the near future.

When the war broke out Sholom Aleichem was taking a cure at the German spa Albeck. With great difficulty the writer managed to get out of the place. At the end of 1914 he arrived in New York.

The last years of life, the last years of intensive creative work. . . The writer seemed to have a presentiment of the short time he had left for finishing (he never did, however) two of his, perhaps, favorite books—the book about the poor, kind-hearted boy Motl and his autobiographical long story *From the Fair* about the cheerful, quick-eyed Sholom, that is, about himself.

Writing did not come easily. His thoughts were far away, beyond the ocean, where the fires of an unprecedented in history imperialistic war were already flaming over his native land. The writer sharply condemned the fratricidal massacre. But even through the bloody fog of war he discerned a happy future. He believed: "The world is on the eve of a reconstruction. There will be a new world, new horizons are opening. . ."

On the morning of May 13, 1916, Sholom Aleichem passed away. His last wish was to be buried in his native soil—in Kiev.

Historical circumstances prevented the fulfilment of this wish. His body found its eternal rest in alien soil, in New York. But he was buried there as he had requested in his "Testament": "Let my body be buried not among aristocrats, among famous or rich people, but among the common folk, the working people, side by side with the real folk, so that the memorial that will later be raised over my grave should embellish the humble tombstones around me, and the humble tombstones embellish my memorial in the same way as the simple, honest folk embellished their writer in his lifetime."

Ten novels, twenty plays, hundreds of stories, numerous poems, verses, feature articles, essays, and several studies—such is the legacy of this indefatigable toiler.

His living, heartfelt words have won him the love of readers throughout the world. His works have been published in our country in editions totalling millions of copies. In Pereyaslav, Sholom Aleichem's birthplace, a museum dedicated to him was opened. In Kiev and other cities streets have been named after him. . .

From the lofty peaks of the social achievements attained in the Soviet Union by the joint efforts of all its

fraternal peoples one sees the boundless vistas of a truly happy new world, a world the writer saw only in his bright visions. . . The peoples who carry aloft the banner of revolutionary humanism hold in high esteem those of their precursors who, under the stringent conditions of social and national oppression, lived, worked and struggled in the name of the happiness, liberty, equality and fraternity of all people.

Among them is the great Sholom Aleichem in whose works we read words addressed to us—words of sincere greeting, words of peace and hope.

*Mikola Bazhan*

In loving memory of my parents,  
Moishe and Esther Katz, and the  
author of these stories.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

As a young man in New York my father worked on the staff of the Yiddish newspaper *Der Tog* (The Day). It was to this newspaper that Sholom Aleichem contributed some of his last stories, from the time of his arrival in the USA from Europe in 1914, at the beginning of World War I, and up to his death in 1916.

The long, narrow slips of tinted paper on which Sholom Aleichem wrote, with tiny curlicues scribbled on the margins, fascinated my father. He subsequently treasured them, so great was his admiration and respect for the great Jewish writer. I remember the look of those manuscripts from my childhood.

Such were the memories and thoughts that prompted me to undertake the translation of this book from the Yiddish into English, without quite realizing the difficulties that awaited me.

Yiddish, the language of the European Jews, is a Germanic language that is about a thousand years old; about twenty percent of it is old Hebrew and Aramaic. There are several dialects of spoken Yiddish, Western and Eastern. At home we spoke the Lithuanian-Byelorussian dialect, but since both my parents were Yiddish writers our language was on a much higher literary level than the language of the *shtetl*—the small Jewish town in the Pale of Settlement. Sholom Aleichem's characters used the Polish-Ukrainian dialect, interspersed with a smattering of Ukrainian, Polish and Russian words and expressions. Moreover, in the almost one hundred years that have elapsed since the stories in this book were written,



Yiddish, as any other language, has undergone some changes, so that modern literary Yiddish usage in the USSR differs somewhat from the language spoken at the turn of the century. The original text, particularly the Tevye stories, is heavily weighted with Hebrew quotations and intentional misquotations from the Bible and other Holy Books, and with a profusion of Hebrew words and phrases (aside from the Hebrew that is an integral part of Yiddish). All such quotations and most of the words and phrases are given in italics in English.

I have strived to convey to the reader the atmosphere of a world that no longer exists, the world of the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia under tsarism. It was no easy task to bring the idioms of two languages, Yiddish and Hebrew, into a third language—English.

Without a past there is no future. I sincerely hope that the stories in this book will give new generations a certain insight into the humor, the love, the kindness and concerns of a poor people who often never knew where their next meal would come from.

I have tried my best, and I hope that criticism will be lenient.

Certain words and expressions have been left in their original form (in Yiddish or Hebrew) and are given in transliteration. To ensure my readers a full understanding and enjoyment of these delightful stories I have included a glossary.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the many people who helped me with the Hebrew and found books and dictionaries for me. Among them are the staff of the Jewish monthly magazine *Sovietish Heimland* (Soviet Homeland) and my American friend Hal-dor Reinholt.

Miriam Katz  
Moscow, 1987

*Terze the Dairyman*



## *I AM NOT WORTHY...*

With all respect to my very dear friend Reb Sholom Aleichem, God grant you health and a good living together with your wife and children, let great pleasure be yours wherever you go, amen!

*"I am not worthy!"* So I must say using the words our forefather Jacob said—in the Sabbath section of the Torah—when he set out against Esau, begging your pardon... If this is not quite right, I beg you, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, not to hold it against me, I am a simple man. You, of course, know more than I do—that goes without saying. Alas, a person coarsens in a village: who has time to look into a book or learn a portion of the Torah with Rashi's commentaries, or anything else? It's a lucky thing that when summer arrives the rich people from Yehupetz come to Boiberik to their summer homes, their *dachas*, so that one is likely to meet an enlightened person sometimes, to hear a good word. Believe me, the remembrance of those days when you sat near me in the woods listening to my foolish yarns is dearer to my heart than any amount of money! I don't understand how I found so much favor in your eyes that you should take up with such an insignificant person and even write letters to me and, above all, put my name into a book, serve me to the world as a dainty dish, just as if I were I don't know who, so I may well say: *"I am not worthy!"* True,

I am really a good friend of yours, let God help me to a hundredth part of what I wish you! You saw, I am sure, how well I served you back in the good old days when you lived in the big *dacha*—do you remember? I bought you a cow then for fifty rubles, it would have been a steal at fifty-five. What if it did drop dead three days later? It was not my fault at all: didn't the other cow I gave you also kick the bucket? You know very well yourself how hard I took this, I absolutely lost my head then! I tried my very hardest to get you the best of everything, so help me God, and you, too, if he so wills, in the coming year. He should, as they say, "*make our days the same as in olden times*". And let God help me make a living and be healthy, and my horse—begging your pardon—should be healthy, and my cows should give enough milk for me to go on serving you with my cheese and butter in the best possible manner, you and all the rich people from Yehupetz, God grant them success in their undertakings, all good things and happiness. And the same to you for the trouble you take, for bothering yourself on my account, for the honor you are paying me with your book. I can only repeat: "*I am not worthy!*" With what have I earned such an honor—that a world of people should suddenly become aware that on the other side of Boiberik, near Anatovka, there lives a Jew named Tevye the Dairyman? But you probably know what you are doing, I don't have to teach you wisdom, you know how to write, and in all other matters I trust your noble nature and am sure that you will see to it in Yehupetz that this book brings me, too, some benefit. It really would come in handy now: the Lord be willing, we shall soon have to think of a match for a daughter, and if He grants, maybe even for two daughters at once. Meanwhile remain in good health

and be happy always, as your friend Tevye wishes you from the bottom of his heart.

*Tevye*

Oh, yes! I almost forgot! When the book is ready and you are prepared to send me some money, please send it to Anatovka, care of the local slaughterer. I observe two memorial days there, one in the autumn, just before the Russian *Pokrov*, and the other around the Russian New Year. These days I spend in the *shtetl*. Ordinary letters you may send directly to me in Boiberik, addressing them: *Peredat gospodinu Tevelu molochnaho yevrei* \*.

1895

## THE GRAND PRIZE

*A wonderful narrative describing  
how Tevye the Dairyman,  
a poor man burdened with a large family,  
was suddenly, out of the blue,  
made happy through a miraculous event  
worthy of being written up in a book.  
It is presented as told by Tevye himself,  
word for word*

“Who raiseth up the poor out of the dust,  
And lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill...”

*Psalms, 113:7*

If you are destined to win a grand prize, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, it comes right home to you. As it is said in the Psalms, when it moves your way it comes in a rush!

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\* To be forwarded to Mister Tevel the milky Jew (incorrect Russian).—*Tr.*

Cleverness or skill have nothing to do with it. But if, God forbid, it goes the other way—you may talk yourself blue in the face and it will be of as much use as last winter's snow. Over a bad horse, they say, neither wisdom nor advice can prevail. A man toils, struggles, gets so exhausted he is ready to lay himself down and die! Then all of a sudden, no one knows from what and from where, luck descends on him from all sides. As the Torah says, "*Relief and deliverance will come to the Jews.*" It means that while his soul is still in his body, while the blood still pulses through his veins, a Jew should never lose hope. From my own experience I know how the Almighty led me to my present livelihood. How did it happen that I started selling cheese and butter all of a sudden, when my grandmother's granny never dealt in dairy foods? It will be worth your while to hear the whole story from beginning to end. I'll sit down here next to you on the grass and let my horse graze meanwhile, for, as it is said, "*the soul of everything that lives*"—a horse is also one of God's creatures.

Well, it was around *Shabuoth* time—I don't want to tell any lies, it might have been a week or two before *Shabuoth*, or maybe even a few weeks after. Don't forget that little by little, to be precise, a year of Sundays has already gone by since then, that is, exactly nine years or ten, or maybe a bit more.

In those days I was not the same person I am now. That is, I was the same Teveye, but different. As they say, the same old woman but under a different veil. I was then—may this never happen to you—as poor as poor can be, although, to tell the truth, I am by far no rich man today. You and I together should this summer earn what I would need to be as rich as Brodsky, but as compared to those days I am today a well-to-do man with my own horse and wagon, with a couple of.

knock on wood, milch cows and another cow that is due to calve any day now. It would be a sin to complain, we have cheese and butter and fresh cream every day, all earned with our own labor, we all work, nobody is idle. My wife, bless her, milks the cows, the children carry the jugs and churn the butter, while I myself, as you see, drive to the market early every morning and call at every Boiberik *dacha*. I get to meet this person, that person, all the important people from Yehupetz, I chat a while with them and this makes me feel that I am also worth something in the world, that I am, as they say, no “lame tailor”. To say nothing of the Sabbath; I’m really a king then, I look into a Jewish book, I read the weekly portion of the Torah, a bit of *Targum*, some of the Psalms, *Perek*, this, that, and something else; looking at me, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, you probably think: “Eh, this Teveye really amounts to something!..”

But what was it I began to tell you? Oh, yes, so at that time, I was, with God’s help, a bitterly poor man, starving to death—such a fate shouldn’t befall others—with my wife and children three times a day not counting supper. I toiled like a mule, hauling logs from the woods to load into box-cars at the railway station for, it’s a disgrace to say, two *zlotys*\* a day, and this not every day, either. Go and support such a houseful of eaters, God bless them, and also, begging your pardon, my boarder the horse who wanted to know nothing of Rashi’s commentaries but had to munch fodder every day without any excuse at all!

So what does God do? It is He, after all, who feeds and nurtures us, He rules this little world in a wise and orderly manner. Seeing how I struggle for a piece of

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\* A Polish monetary unit equivalent to less than half of a U.S. dollar.—*Tr.*



bread, He says to me: "You think, Tevye, that it's already the end of the world, that the sky has fallen down on you? Pooh, you are a big fool! Just wait, you'll see how, when God so wills, your luck will about-face and a bright light will shine in all the nooks and crannies." Like in the High Holiday hymn describing the Day of Judgement: "*Who will be raised and who flung down*"—who will ride and who go on foot. The principle of this is faith—a Jew must hope, only hope and have confidence. What if you do suffer meanwhile? After all, that is why we are Jews, as it is written: "*Thou hast chosen us*"—it is not for nothing that the whole world is envious of us. Why am I telling you this? I am telling you what God did for me, really "*miracles and wonders*", you must hear it.

"*And there came the day.*" One summer evening I was driving my empty wagon home through the woods. My head was bowed, my heart was heavy. The horse, poor thing, could barely move its legs. "Crawl, *shlimazl*, get lost together with me! Since you are Tevye's excuse for a horse you must know what it means to fast all of a long summer day!" There was silence all around me, every crack of my whip echoed and re-echoed in the woods. The sun was setting, the day was dying. The shadows of the trees became longer and longer—as long as the Jewish exile. As the dusk thickened, a great gloom settled in my heart. Various thoughts flitted through my mind, images of people long dead came towards me. Then I remembered my home, woe is me! The house is dark and bleak, the children, bless them, are naked and barefoot, waiting, poor things, for their *Tateh*, their father the *shlimazl*, hoping he will bring them a fresh loaf of bread or maybe even a white roll. And she, my old woman, is grumbling, as women are wont to do:

“Children I had to bear him, a whole seven, take and throw them—God shouldn’t punish me for my words—alive into the river!” Nice hearing such words, eh? A man is no more than flesh and blood—the stomach cannot be filled with words. You snatch a bite of herring and then you yearn for tea, but with tea you must have sugar, and sugar, they say, is in Brodsky’s refineries. “For the piece of bread I go without,” says my wife, God bless her, “my innards will excuse me, but without a glass of tea in the morning I am a dead woman—the baby sucks all the juices out of me the whole night long!”

. Meantime, one is, after all, something of a Jew; *Minhah*, the afternoon prayer, is no goat, it won’t run away, but pray one must. Then just imagine what kind of praying it was when, just as I stood up to say *Shmin-esra*, the horse, as bad luck would have it, bolted and I had to run after the wagon, holding on to the reins and chanting: “*God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob*”—truly a fine way to chant *Shmin-esra*! And to make it worse, I was then just in the right mood to pray with zest, from the bottom of my heart, hoping that it might, perhaps, lift the load from my soul.

Well, to make a long story short, here I was running along behind the wagon and chanting *Shmin-esra* loudly, as if I were in the cantor’s pulpit in the synagogue: “*Thou sustaineth the living with loving kindness*”, and “*keeping Thy covenant even with those who sleep in the earth.*” Oh, thought I, not only the dead lie in the dust... Oh, how we suffer! Not, of course, those rich people from Yehupetz who spend a whole summer at their *dachas* in Boiberik, eating and drinking and basking in luxury. Oh, God Almighty, what have I done to merit this kind of life? Am I worse than other people? Help, dear God! “*Look upon our afflictions*”—just look upon us how we toil, put an end

to the wrongs suffered by the wretched poor, for who, if not You, will take care of us? "*Heal us, O Lord*"—send us the medicines, the ailments we already have. "*Bless us*"—bless this year for us, O Lord our God, with every kind of crop, with corn and wheat and barley; although, thinking it over, what will I, *shlimazl* that I am, get out of it? What difference does it make to my nag—begging your pardon—whether oats are dear or cheap? But shame on me, you don't question God, and a Jew, especially, must take everything as being for his good and say: "*And this, too, is for the best*"—probably God wills it so...

"*And for slanderers let there be no hope*"—I went on chanting; the slanderers and the 'ristocrats who say there is no God in the world will be put to shame when they get *there*. They'll pay for their blasphemy, and with interest, because He is one who "*breaketh His enemies*"—a good payer, with Him you play no games, with Him you are humble, you implore him, you cry out to Him: "*Merciful Father*", dear, kind Father! "*Hear our voices*"—listen to us. "*Have mercy upon us*", have pity on my wife and children, they, poor things, are hungry! "*Deign Thou...*"—have compassion for your beloved Children of Israel, as you once did in the Holy Temple, when the Priests and the Levites... Just then—stop! The horse suddenly stopped and stood stock-still. Hastily I rolled off the last piece of *Shmin-esra* and then raised my eyes: two very strange creatures were coming towards me out of the forest. They were either disguised, or strangely dressed.

Bandits—flashed through my mind, but I immediately thought better of that. Pooh, Tevye, aren't you a fool! Just reflect, you've been driving through this forest for so many years, both in the daytime and at night, why should you suddenly think of bandits today? "Giddy-up!" I shouted to my horse, took heart and

treated it to a few lashes of the whip, making believe I hadn't noticed anything.

"Reb Jew, my good man, listen!" cried one of the creatures in a female voice, beckoning to me with a kerchief. "Do please stop for a moment, wait a while, don't run away, we won't do you any harm!"

Oho, an evil spirit! was my thought, but I soon told myself: You ass! Why all of a sudden devils and demons?

So I stopped the horse. Now I took a good look at the creatures: females, the older one wearing a silken kerchief over her head, the younger one wearing a wig\*. Their faces were flaming red and covered with beads of sweat.

"Good evening, well met!" said I very loudly, trying to look cheerful. "What do you wish? If you want to buy something I have nothing but a bellyache I wish on all my enemies, a weekful of heart pains, a head dizzy from worries, dry aches and wet anguish, troubles and misery wholesale and retail!"

"Shush, shush," they cried. "Just see how his tongue has loosened! When you hook a Jew with one word beware of your life! We don't want to buy anything at all, we only wanted to ask you whether you know the way to Boiberik?"

"To Boiberik," I exclaimed, forcing myself to laugh, "it's just as if you'd asked me whether I knew that my name was Tevye."

"Oh, so your name is Tevye? A good evening to you, Reb Tevye! We can't see what's so funny? We're strangers, from Yehupetz, we live on a *dacha* in Boiberik," they said. "We went out for a short walk early this morning, but lost our way in the woods, and have been wandering around in circles ever since and

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\* Religious married women wear wigs.—Tr.

couldn't find the right way. We heard someone singing, so at first we thought, God forbid, it was a bandit. But when we got closer and saw that you were, thank God, a Jew, our hearts felt a little lighter. Now you understand?"

"Ha-ha-ha! A fine bandit!" said I. "Did you ever hear the story of the Jewish highwayman who attacked a passer-by and asked him for a pinch of snuff? If you wish I can tell it to you."

"The story leave for another time," they said. "Better show us the way to Boiberik."

"To Boiberik," I repeated. "Why, this is the right way. Even if you don't want it to this road will take you directly into Boiberik."

"So why didn't you say so at once, why the silence?"

"Should I have shouted, or what?"

"In that case," they said, "you know, perhaps, how far it is to Boiberik?"

"It's not far," I answered, "only a few versts\*, that is, something like five, six or seven, and maybe even all of eight versts."

"Eight versts!" exclaimed both women at once, wringing their hands and almost weeping. "Do you realize what you are saying? It's no trifle—eight versts!"

"Well," said I, "what can I do about it? If it were in my power I'd have made the distance a little shorter. A person must try everything in the world. On the road it happens that you have to crawl uphill through mud, and it is the Sabbath eve, to boot, the rain is lashing your face, your hands are numb with cold, your heart is faint with hunger, and—cr-ra-ash! An axle breaks."

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\* An old Russian unit of linear measure equal to 3,500 ft.; 8 versts is 5.5 miles.—*Tr.*

“You’re talking like a ninny,” they said to me, “you are out of your mind! Telling us old wives’ tales, stories from the *Arabian Nights*? We haven’t the strength to take another step. Except for a glass of coffee and a butter roll, we haven’t had a morsel of food all day, and here you come along with your yarns!”

“Oh, if that’s the case,” said I, “then it’s another thing. As they say, you don’t dance before you eat. The taste of hunger I understand very well, you don’t have to explain... I probably haven’t as much as seen any coffee or butter rolls for well over a year.” As I spoke a glass of steaming coffee with milk and a fresh butter roll appeared before my mind’s eye, and other goodies, too. Oh, you *shlimazl*, I thought to myself, so you have actually been raised on coffee and butter rolls? A hunk of bread with a piece of herring isn’t good enough for you? But the Tempter, Heaven preserve us, spites me with visions of coffee and of rolls! I smell the coffee and taste a butter roll, fresh, delicious, soul-enlivening!

“You know what, Reb Tevye?” said the women. “It would be a good idea, since we are standing here, for us to climb into your wagon and for you to take the trouble to drive us home to Boiberik. What do you think of that?”

“A fine notion,” said I, “here I’m coming *from* Boiberik while you have to go *to* Boiberik! So what’s the solution?”

“Well, so what,” they said, “don’t you know what to do? A wise man would turn his wagon around and drive back to Boiberik. Don’t worry, Reb Tevye, rest assured that when, God willing, you get us home safely we should have as many afflictions as what you’ll lose on this transaction.”

They’re speaking gibberish to me, thought I, obs-

cure language, most unusual! Into my head came corpses, witches, pranksters, evil spirits. You block-head, son of a woodpecker, I told myself, why are you standing there like a stump? Jump onto your wagon, show your horse the whip and make yourself scarce! Meanwhile, however, in spite of myself, I unintentionally let out:

“Get into the wagon!”

The women didn't have to be asked twice. They climbed in, I seated myself on the box, about-faced the shafts and gave my horse a taste of the whip—one, two, three, giddy-up! But who, what, where? The animal wouldn't budge, go and cut it in two!

Well, I thought, now I understand what kind of women these are. It was no good wind that drove me to stop all of a sudden and be drawn into a conversation with women!

You must understand: on the one hand, there was the forest with its silence and gloom, on the other, these two creatures in the guise of women... My imagination ran wild. I recalled the story told about a carter who was once driving all alone through a forest. He suddenly saw a bag of oats lying in the road. He jumped off his dray and lifted the bag—it was so heavy that he all but ruptured himself before he managed to heave it onto the dray. Then he continued on his way. After a verst or so he took a look at the bag of oats—no bag, no oats. Instead there was a goat in his dray, a bearded goat. He tried to touch it, but the creature stuck out a tongue a yard long, let out an eery, mad peal of laughter and vanished into thin air!

“Why aren't we moving?” asked the women.

“Why we aren't moving? You see, don't you,” said I, “that the horse is not in the mood.”

“So use your whip—you have one, haven't you?”

“Thanks a lot for the advice, it's a good thing you

reminded me, but the trouble is that this animal has no fear of such things. He is as used to the whip as I am to poverty," said I, trying to joke, but meanwhile shaking as if in a fever.

To make a long story short, I poured out the bitterness of my heart on the poor beast until, with God's help, it bestirred itself "*and they went out of Refidim*"—we drove away along the road through the forest. A new thought entered my head as we jogged along: Oh, Tevye, are you an ass! "*If thou hast begun to fall*"—a pauper you were and a pauper you'll stay! Look, God has sent you an encounter that happens once in a hundred years, so why don't you settle beforehand on a payment for your services? You should know what they will give you. According to justice, conscience, humaneness, law and I don't know what else there is no sin in earning something out of such an affair. Really, why not get a lick of a bone since it has come your way? Stop your horse, you ox, and tell them, so and so, "*I will serve thee for Rachel thy daughter*"—if I receive such and such a sum from you, well and good, if not—I must ask you, begging your pardon, to get off my wagon! But then I thought again: You really are an ox, Tevye! Don't you know that a bearskin can't be sold in the forest, or, as the peasant says: *Sche nye poimav a vzhe skube*, that is, you haven't caught it yet and are already skinning it!

"Why don't we move a little faster?" asked the women, poking my back.

"What's your great hurry? Nothing good ever comes of haste," I answered, glancing at my passengers out of the corner of an eye: women, seemingly, ordinary women, one with a silken kerchief on her head, the other with a wig. They sat there looking at each other and whispering.

"Have we still far to go?" they asked.



"Most certainly no farther than from here," I answered. "Soon we'll go downhill, then uphill; after that downhill and uphill again, and only after that will come the big uphill stretch and then the road will take us right into Boiberik..."

"A piece of *shlimazl!*" said one woman to the other.

"A lingering ailment," remarked the other one.

"The last straw!" exclaimed the first one.

"Looks crazy to me!" rejoined the second one.

Of course I must be crazy, thought I, since I let myself be hoodwinked!

"Where, for instance, my dear ladies, would you like to be dropped off?" I asked.

"What do you mean—dropped off?"

"It's just an expression drivers use," I answered. "In our lingo it means, 'Where do you wish me to take you when we get to Boiberik, God willing, in good health', as people say, it's better to ask twice than to blunder once."

"Oh, so that's what you mean? Then please drive us to the green *dacha* that stands by the river on the other side of the forest. Do you know where it is?"

"Why shouldn't I know," said I, "I'm at home in Boiberik. I should have as many thousand rubles as the number of logs I've hauled to that *dacha*. Only last summer I delivered two loads of wood there at once. A rich man lived there, a millionaire from Yehupetz who must be worth at least a hundred thousand rubles, or even two hundred thousand!"

"He lives there this year, too," said the women, whispering to each other and tittering.

"Oh, so it is likely that you are some kin of his?" I asked. "Then it might not be a bad idea if you would kindly take the trouble to put in a good word for me, do me a good turn—there might be something for me to do, some kind of a job. I know a young man, Israel

is his name, he lived near our *shtetl* ... he was just a nobody. Well, now he's gone up high, nobody knows how, he's become a big shot, earns twenty rubles a week, or even forty—I don't know! Some people have luck! Or, for instance, what does our *shokhet's* son-in-law lack? What would have happened to him if he hadn't gone away to Yehupetz? True, he did have a real hard time during the first few years, he almost starved to death. But his troubles are over now—the same should happen to me. He sends money home already and wants to bring over his wife and children, but he has no residence permit\*. So how come *he* lives there? He has plenty of troubles, I can tell you that... Well, I always say that if you live long enough you are bound to get somewhere. Here is the river, and here is the big *dacha!*" With these words I drove dashingly right up to the porch.

Our appearance caused a great uproar! What joyous exclamations and questions!

"Oh, oh, Granny!" "Mother!" "Auntie!" "Our lost ones have returned!" "Congratulations!" "But where were you?" "A whole day, we were worried sick!" "We sent post-riders in all directions." "We thought, who knows what might have happened. Wolves, or maybe bandits, God forbid!" "So what's the story?"

"It's a fine story, really: we got lost in the woods and wandered far away, ten versts maybe. Suddenly there appeared a Jew. What kind of Jew?.. A *shlimazl*, with a horse and wagon... Had trouble persuading him."

"Of all the horrible nightmares! All alone, with no guide?" "What an adventure, what an ordeal! We must say a prayer for deliverance from danger!"

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\* In tsarist Russia Jews had to live within the Pale of Settlement in small towns. Special residence permits were needed for living in larger towns and cities.—*Tr.*

Soon lamps were brought out to the porch, the table was set and they began to bring out hot samovars, tea-glasses, sugar, preserves, dainty pastries, fresh-smelling butter rolls, followed by all kinds of food, the most expensive sorts, broths twinkling with fat, roasts and goose, the best wines and cordials.

I stood outside, observing from a distance how, knock on wood, these Yehupetz rich folk ate and drank, no harm should befall them. It's worth pawning your last shirt, I thought, only to become a rich man! What fell to the ground from this table would be enough, I thought, to last my children a whole week until Saturday. Oh, kind, true God, You are a long-bearing Lord, a great God and a good God, merciful and just, why is it that You give one everything, the other nothing? One has butter rolls, the other—the plagues of Egypt. Then I had another thought: Eh, but you are a great fool, Tevye, upon my word. Do you want to tell *Him* how to rule the world? Since *He* wills it so, then so it must be; if it had to be otherwise it would have been otherwise. But why shouldn't things actually be otherwise? The answer is: "*We were slaves...*" That's why we are Jews, the Chosen Ones of this world. A Jew must live with faith and confidence; he must believe, firstly, that there is a God in the world, and he must trust in the Eternal One, trust that, God willing, things will get better.

"Where is that man?" I heard somebody ask. "Has he already left, the *shlimazl*?"

"God forbid!" I raised my voice from the distance. "How could I leave without saying goodbye? *Sholom aleichem*, a good evening to you, '*God bless the sitters*', eat in good health, and welcome!"

"Come over here, why are you standing out there in the dark," they said. "Let us at least have a look at you, see your face. Perhaps you'll take a drop of vodka?"

“A drop of vodka? Ah,” said I, “who refuses to take a drop of vodka? As the Good Book says: ‘*What is for health and what is for death*’, which means, as Rashi explains, that God is God and vodka is vodka. *Lehayim!*” said I and emptied the glass. “May God keep you wealthy and happy. Jews should always be Jews, God should grant them health and strength to endure their troubles.”

“What is your name?” asked the rich man, the *gvir* himself, a fine-looking man wearing a skullcap. “Where do you come from, where do you live, how do you make a living? Are you married? Do you have any children and how many?”

“Children? It would be a sin to complain,” said I, “for if each one of them is worth a million, as my Golda wants to convince me, then I’m richer than the richest man in Yehupetz. The trouble is that poor is not rich, crooked is not straight, as the Book says: ‘*Who has made a distinction between the sacred and the profane*’, meaning that he is merry who has the *mezu-men*. However, it is the Brodskys who have the money, while I have daughters. And from girls, as they say, the head twirls. But no matter, God is our Father. He rules, that is, He sits up above and we struggle down below. One toils, hauls wood—what else is there to do? As the *Gemara* says: ‘If you can’t have a meat dish then a herring is a good fish.’ The whole trouble is the eating. As my grandmother, God rest her soul, used to say: ‘If the mouth weren’t so bold the head would be crowned with gold.’ Please excuse me, but there is nothing straighter than a crooked ladder and nothing crookeder than a straight word, especially when you down some vodka on an empty stomach.”

“Let the man have something to eat!” ordered the *gvir*, and at once there appeared on the table all kinds of food: fish and meat, roasts, quarters of fowls, and no end of gizzards and livers.

“Will you have something to eat?” they asked. “Then go wash your hands.”

“A sick man you ask, a healthy one you give,” I said. “But thank you anyhow. A drop of vodka—that’s all right, but to sit down to such a feast while out there, at home, my wife and children, God bless them... If it were your kind will to...”

In short, they must have understood what I meant, for they began to load my wagon, each one carrying something separately: this one a white loaf, that one some fish, another one a roast, this one a quarter of a fowl, that one tea and sugar, a third one a pot of drawn fat, a fourth—a jar of jam.

“These things,” they told me, “you’ll take home as a gift to your wife and children. Now tell us what we should pay you for the trouble you took on our account.”

“What an idea—I should tell you! As much as your kind nature wills, that much you will pay me. We won’t haggle,” I said, “a gold piece less, a gold piece more, as they say. A pauper can’t become any poorer.”

“No, we want to hear from you yourself, Reb Tevye! Don’t be afraid,” they said, “for this, God forbid, we won’t chop your head off.”

What does one do in such a case, I thought. It’s a plight: if I say “a ruble” when perhaps they might give me two!.. If I say “two rubles” I’m afraid they might look at me as if I were crazy: what is there to pay two rubles for?

But at this point my tongue slipped, and before I knew it I cried out: “A trey!!!”

This made the whole company laugh so loudly that I thought the earth would swallow me.

“Please excuse me if I’ve said the wrong thing,” I said. “A horse goes on four legs and sometimes

stumbles, so what can you expect of a man with one tongue?"

The merriment went up a pitch, they actually held their sides with laughter.

"Let there be an end to your laughter!" cried the *gvir* and took a big purse out of his inner pocket, and from the purse he pulled out—how much do you think? A tenner, a note as red as fire, I'm telling you the truth, as both of us live and breathe! And then he said:

"This you have from me, and you, children, give from your pockets as much as you think you should."

In short, what can I say? Five-ruble, three-ruble and one-ruble notes began to fly onto the table. My limbs trembled so that I thought I'd faint.

"Well, what are you standing there for?" asked the *gvir*. "Take up the few rubles from the table and go home in good health to your wife and children."

"God bless you," said I, "and reward you many times over, you should have tenfold. a hundredfold as much as you have, and all good things and great happiness!" With these words I raked up the money with both hands, without counting, and crammed it into all my pockets.

"Good night," I said, "a good future and good health to you, and great happiness to you and your children and your children's children."

As I turned to go to my wagon the *gvirte*, the rich man's wife, she of the silken kerchief, called me back:

"Wait a moment, Reb Tevye. From me you shall receive a special gift if, God willing, you come here tomorrow morning. I have a dun-colored cow, it used to be a wonderful milker, gave twenty-four glasses of milk. Somebody cast a 'good' eye on it and now it no longer milks—that is, you can milk it, but no milk comes out..."

“A long life to you,” said I, “don’t trouble yourself, with us your cow will both be milked and give milk. My old woman, God bless her, is so clever that she shreds noodles from nothing, with five fingers makes gruel, celebrates the Sabbath out of miracles and puts the children to bed with slaps... Don’t be angry with me, please excuse me, I beg your pardon, perhaps I let my tongue run away with me. A good night, health and joy be yours forever.” With these words I went out into the yard.

I looked for my horse—woe is me, a misfortune, a calamity! I searched here and there and everywhere—“*the child is not*”, there is no horse!

Well, Tevye. I thought to myself, you’ve been had!

And then there came to my mind a fine story I once read in a book: a company of “evil brethren” once caught an honest Jew, a Hasid, when he was away from home, and lured him to an out-of-the-way palace where they wined him and dined him. Suddenly they all disappeared, and he was left all alone with a female who soon turned into a wild beast that quickly became a cat, and the cat—a dragon. Look out, Tevye, I said to myself, maybe you are being duped?!

“Why are you fumbling out there, what are you grumbling about?” somebody asked me.

“Why am I fumbling!? Woe is me that I live in this world,” I answered, “my horse is gone.”

“Your horse,” they answered, “is in the stable, just take the trouble to go over there, into the stable.”

I went into the stable, and what did I see? Yes, truly, as I am a Jew! My nag was faring quite well, standing among the *gvir*’s horses, its jaws immersed in oats, chewing with great gusto!

“Listen here, my sage,” I said to the horse, “it’s time we went home. One shouldn’t go for food so greedily. An extra bite may cause great harm.”

In short, I finally managed to talk the horse, begging your pardon, into letting me harness it, and then I set out for home in a lively, merry mood, chanting "*Almighty Lord*" as if I were tipsy. The horse, too, had undergone a great change, had grown, as it were, a new skin. It no longer waited for a lash from the whip, it ran as smoothly as a psalm.

It was a bit latish when we got home, but I woke up my wife with a happy shout.

"Happy holiday, *mazl-tov*, congratulations, Golda!"

"A black and desolate *mazl-tov* to you," she answered. "What's put you into such a festive humor, my dear bread-winner? Are you returning from a wedding or a circumcision celebration, my goldspinner?"

"A wedding and a circumcision rolled into one! Just you wait, my wife, I'll show you a treasure," said I, "but first wake up the children, let them, poor things, also partake of the Yehupetz dainties."

"Either you are insane, crazy or deranged, or out of your mind? You talk like a madman, God have mercy on us!" So spoke my wife and dealt me out the whole chapter of curses as a woman usually does.

"A woman," said I, "is always a woman. It was not for nothing that King Solomon said that among his thousand wives he couldn't find a single level-headed one. It is indeed a lucky thing, upon my word, that it is no longer the fashion to have a lot of wives," and I went outside to my wagon and brought in and put out on the table all the goodies that had been packed up for me.

When my crew saw the loaves and rolls, when they caught a sniff of the meat, they pounced on the food like a pack of hungry wolves, poor things. Their hands trembled as they snatched the food, but their jaws worked unerringly. As the Book says: "*And they did eat*"—and Rashi explains: they crackled like locusts. Tears came to my eyes.



“So tell us,” said my spouse, “who gave a meal for the poor, or was it just a feast, and why are you so proud of yourself?”

“Have patience, Golda, you’ll learn everything in good time. But first blow up the samovar, then we’ll all sit down around the table and drink tea in proper style. A man lives only once, not twice, especially now when we already have a cow of our own that gives twenty-four glasses of milk; tomorrow, God willing, I’ll bring the cow home. Now, Golda,” said I, pulling out the whole pack of money, “try and guess how much money we have here!”

I took a look at my wife—she was as pale as death, couldn’t utter a word.

“God be with you, Golda darling,” I exclaimed, “what’s scared you so? Maybe you are afraid that I stole this money or held up someone? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You’ve been Tevye’s wife for such a long time, how can you think such things? You little fool, this is *kosher* money, earned honestly by my own wit and toil. I saved two souls from great danger, if not for me, God knows what would have happened to them!”

In short, I told her the whole story from beginning to end: how God had led me by the hand. After that we both began to count the money over and over—it was exactly twice eighteen \* and one extra, so there we had a bundle of thirty-seven rubles! My wife burst into tears.

“Why are you crying, silly woman?” I asked.

“How should I not cry when the tears flow?” she answered. “When the heart is full the eyes overflow. So help me God—my heart told me that you would return with good tidings. I can’t remember when my

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\* Eighteen—a good luck number.—*Tr.*

Grandmother Tzeitl, may she rest in peace, last appeared to me in a dream. I was lying asleep and suddenly I dreamed I saw a brimful pail of milk. Grandmother Tzeitl was carrying this pail, covered with her apron to shield it from the evil eye, and the children were wailing, 'Mama, a sip of mi-i-ilk!'"

"Don't gobble up the noodles before the Sabbath, dear heart," said I, "let Grandmother Tzeitl abide in bright paradise, I don't know whether we'll be the richer for that. However, if God could perform the miracle that brought us a cow He will probably see to it that the cow is a real cow... Let us better put our heads together, Golda my heart, and decide what to do with the money."

"By all means," said Golda, "what do you plan to do with so much, knock on wood, money?"

"With the greatest pleasure." said I. "But what do *you* think we might do with such a big, knock on wood, sum?"

So then we both began to think, to plan, to rack our brains, to consider all kinds of businesses. What didn't we buy and sell that night! We bought a pair of horses and soon sold them at a profit; we opened a grocery store in Boiberik, sold out the stock and soon opened a dry-goods shop; we bargained for a piece of forest-land, took a few rubles for the option and backed off; we tried to buy the Anatovka meat tax concession\*, made some money and decided to become money-lenders.

"My enemies should be so mad!" at last cried my

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\* A special tax on *kosher* meat levied by the tsarist government. The right to collect it was granted to a concessionaire, a wealthy person who extorted the money from the Jewish population, making life especially hard for the poor. — *Tr.*

wife. "You want to squander the few *groszy*\* and have nothing left but a whip-handle?"

"What then? Do you think it's better to deal in grain and go bankrupt? Isn't it enough that the world is being beggared through wheat? Go and hear what's doing in Odessa!"

"What do I care about Odessa?" replied Golda. "My forefathers never set foot there and neither will my children as long as I am alive and my feet carry me."

"Then what do you want?" I asked her.

"What I want? I want you to stop playing the fool and talking nonsense."

"Of course," said I, "you're the wise one now; as they say, rubles give rise to thoughts, so if you are *maybe* going to get rich you are surely *already* wise. It's always so!"

Well, we quarreled and made it up several times, and at last we decided to buy, in addition to the cow we were getting for nothing, a real milch cow.

You probably want to ask me: why a cow and not a horse? So I'll answer: why a horse and not a cow? Boiberik is a place where all the wealthy Yehupetzers rent *dachas* for the summer, and since they are refined folk accustomed to having everything delivered ready-made to them, to be put straight into their mouths—firewood, meat, eggs, chickens, onions, pepper, parsley—then why shouldn't someone undertake to bring them cheese and butter and cream and so on? Seeing as the Yehupetzers are fond of food and their money is, you might say, a bastard, a good profit could be made from such a business. The main thing is to

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\* A Polish monetary unit equal to 1/100 zloty.—Tr.

deliver good merchandise, and such wares as mine you wouldn't find even in Yehupetz. Both of us together should receive as many blessings as the number of times important people, Gentiles, have implored me to bring them fresh dairy products: "We've heard, Tevye," they would say, "that you are an honest man, even though you are a scabby Jew." Do you think you'll get such a compliment from Jews? My enemies should waste away for as long as I'd have to wait for it! From our pettifoggers you don't get a good word. The only thing they know is to peer into someone else's pot. Seeing that Tevye has an extra cow and a new wagon they begin to rack their brains: from where and from what? Maybe this Tevye deals in counterfeit money? Or runs a still on the quiet?

Ha-ha-ha! Go on, brotherkins, rack your brains in good health! is what I think to myself.

I don't know whether you'll believe me, but you are almost the first person I've told the whole story to, just as it happened...

However, it seems to me that I've already talked a little too much. Please don't hold it against me, but we've both got to go about our own affairs, or, as the Bible says, "*Every crow to its own kind*"—to each his own. You to your books, I to my pots and jugs. But one request I will make: don't write me into one of your books, and if you do, then at least don't mention my real name... I wish you health and may everything always go well with you.

1895

## THE SOAP BUBBLE

"*There are many thoughts in a man's heart*"—that's what it says, doesn't it, in our sacred Torah? I don't have to explain it to you, Reb Sholom Aleichem. In plain Yiddish we have a saying: "The best horse needs a whip, the wisest man—advice." Who do I mean? Myself, that's who, for had I had the sense to consult a good friend and tell him everything, I would surely not have gotten myself into such a pretty mess. "*Life and death issue from thine own lips*"—when God wishes to punish a man He takes away his reason. How many times have I told myself: Just think, Tevye, you blockhead, people say that you aren't altogether a fool, how come you let yourself be taken in, and so stupidly? What would you have lost from the earnings—knock on wood—you make with your little dairy business that has won such a good reputation everywhere, in Boiberik, in Yehupetz, and far and wide? How fine and how sweet it would have been right now if your *mezumen* was lying quietly in a chest, safely hidden, without a human soul being aware of it! For who cares, I ask you, whether Tevye has any money or not? Indeed! Was the world much interested in Tevye when he lay sunken—such a fate shouldn't befall others—nine cubits deep in the ground, dying of hunger three times a day with his wife and children? Only later, when God took notice of Tevye and changed his luck all of a sudden, when Tevye somehow or other managed to build up a little business, when he began to save up a few rubles, only then did the world take heed and plain Tevye became Reb Tevye—no kidding! Plenty of good friends appeared; as it is written in the Book: "*He is beloved by everyone*"—when God gives a spoonful people offer bucketfuls.

Each and everyone came along with his advice: this one said a dry-goods shop, that one—a grocery, this one—a house, an estate, landed property, another one said wheat, this one—timber, that one—auctioneering...

“Brotherkins!” I told them. “Leave me alone! You are wildly mistaken: you apparently think I am Brodsky. We should all have as much as I need to make up three hundred rubles, even two hundred, or even a hundred and fifty! Another’s property is easy to count; it seems to glitter like gold, but when one comes up close it’s only a brass button.”

In short, may Heaven preserve them, our petty folk did finally put a “good” eye on me! God sent me a relative—such close kin that I couldn’t have told him from a hole in the wall! Menachem-Mendel was his name, a rolling stone, a flighty gadabout, a twister, a good-for-nothing, may he never rest! He hooked on to me and turned my head with his fantasies, his castles-in-the-air. So you may well ask me: “*Wherefore did it come to pass?*”—how did I, Tevye, fall in with Menachem-Mendel? The only justification I have is the passage from the *Haggadah* that says: “*Slaves we were...*”, meaning: so it was ordained. Here’s the story.

I went to Yehupetz once at the beginning of winter with my bit of merchandise—over twenty pounds of fresh butter from butterland, a couple of bags of beautiful cottage cheese—gold and silver, we should both wish ourselves no worse! As you understand, I sold off my goods immediately, didn’t leave myself a lick; I didn’t even get to visit all of my summer customers, the Boiberik summer people who look forward to my coming as if I were the Messiah. And no wonder—they get sick and tired of your Yehupetz dealers who can by no means supply them with such

goods as Tevye's. I don't have to tell you—as the prophet says: "*Let another praise thee.*" Good merchandise is its own praise.

Well, I sold out all my wares, threw my horse a little hay and went for a stroll in the city. "*Man is born of dust and to dust he returneth*"—a man is no more than mortal, so he wants to take a look at the world, catch a breath of air, look at the rarities Yehupetz displays in its windows, as if saying: "With your eyes—as much as you like, but with your hands—don't you dare!"

Standing in front of a large window behind which there lay piles of gold half-imperials \*, silver rubles and no end of all kinds of paper money I thought: God Almighty! If I had but a tenth part of what I see here what would I have to ask from God and who would be equal to me? First of all I'd find a match for my eldest daughter, give her a dowry of five hundred rubles in addition to bride-gifts, clothing and wedding expenses; my horse and wagon and the cows I would sell and move to the city, buy myself a seat by the Eastern wall in the synagogue, and for my wife, God bless her, a few strings of pearls, and I would give out alms like the finest householder. I would see to it that the Temple got a new tin roof instead of standing, as it does now, roofless, ready to cave in any minute. I would set up a *Talmud-Torah* for the children and a hospital, as in all decent towns, so that poor people shouldn't have to huddle on the bare ground in the prayer-house, and I would immediately get rid of that brazen Yankel, the trustee of the burial society, and put an end to his guzzling vodka and chicken livers at the community's expense!

"*Sholom aleichem*, Reb Tevye!" somebody called to me from behind my back. "How are you?"

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\* A gold coin in the former Russian Empire.—*Tr.*

I turned around and took a look—I could have sworn I knew his face! “*Aleichem sholom*,” I answered, “where do you hail from?”

“From where? From Kasrilovka,” he answered, “I’m a kinsman of yours, your wife Golda’s own third cousin once removed.”

“Hold on,” said I, “aren’t you a son-in-law of Boruch-Hirsch, Leah-Dvosya’s husband?”

“Right you are,” said he, “I am Boruch-Hirsch Leah-Dvosya’s son-in-law, and my wife’s name is Sheine-Sheindl, Boruch-Hirsch Leah-Dvosya’s daughter, so now you already know me.”

“Just a moment,” said I, “your mother-in-law’s grandmother, Sarah-Yenta, and my wife’s aunt Frumeh-Zlata were, I seem to remember, first cousins, and if I am not mistaken, you are Boruch-Hirsch Leah-Dvosya’s middle son-in-law, but I’ve forgotten what your name is, it’s slipped my mind somehow. What is your real name?”

“I am called,” said he, “Menachem-Mendel Boruch-Hirsch Leah-Dvosya’s, that’s what they call me at home, in Kasrilovka.”

“In that case, my dear Menachem-Mendel,” said I to him, “I owe you an altogether different sort of greeting! Come, tell me, my precious Menachem-Mendel, what are you doing here, how are your mother-in-law and your father-in-law, long life to them? How is your health, how is your business getting along?”

“Eh,” said he, “my health is, thank God, not bad, I live; but my business affairs aren’t so good at present.”

“God will help you,” said I, glancing at his threadbare clothes and worn-out shoes. “No matter, God will help you, things will probably get better. As the Book says, ‘*All is vanity*’, money, I say, is round, today it rolls this way, tomorrow that way, the main thing is to



go on living. What is most important is hope, a Jew must go on hoping. What if you do suffer? After all, that's what we Jews are in this world for. As they say, if you're a soldier you must smell gunpowder. '*Man is likened to a broken pot*'—the whole world," said I, "is a dream. Better tell me, Menachem-Mendel, my good man, how you come to be here, all of a sudden, in Yehupetz?"

"What do you mean," he asked, "how I come to be here? I've been here already, little by little, for something like a year and a half."

"So you," said I, "are a local, a real Yehupetz resident?"

"Sh-sh-sh!!!" he exclaimed, glancing around in all directions, "don't shout so loudly, Reb Tevye; I do live here, but that's between you and me."

I stood there looking at him as if he were crazy. "You're a fugitive," said I, "and hiding yourself in the middle of the market-place?"

"Don't ask," said he, "Reb Tevye, that's the way it is. You, apparently, have no idea of the Yehupetz laws and customs... Come, I'll explain, so you'll understand how one can both *be* and *not be* a local resident." And he gave me a whole song and dance on the subject of how a person struggles for his life in Yehupetz.

"Listen to me, Menachem-Mendel, come with me to the village for one day," said I, "your bones, at least, will get a little rest. You'll be our guest, and a most welcome one, my old woman will be overjoyed."

In short, I talked him into coming with me. When we arrived—what jubilation! A guest! An own third cousin! No small matter, for blood, as they say, is thicker than water. My wife began to shower our guest with questions: What was new in Kasrilovka? How was Uncle Boruch-Hirsch? What was Aunt Leah-Dvosya doing? Uncle Yosl-Menashe? Aunt Dobrish? And how were their children getting along? Who had died? Who

had gotten married? Who was divorced? Who had given birth and who was expecting?

“Of what use, my dear wife,” said I, “are someone else’s weddings or circumcisions to you? You’d better see to it that we have something to put into our mouths. ‘*All who are hungry enter and be fed*’—before eating one doesn’t feel like dancing. If it’s a borsht—well and good, if not—no matter, let it be *knishes* or *kreplakh*, stuffed or empty dumplings, or maybe even *blintzes* with cheese, or *vertutti*—anything you have, but make it quick.”

Well, so we washed our hands and had a good meal, as you say: “*They ate*” and Rashi explains: “As God bade them.”

“Eat, Menachem-Mendel,” I urged him, “anyhow, as King David said, it is a ‘*vanity of vanities*’. It’s a foolish world and a false one, while, as my grandmother Nehameh of blessed memory used to say—she was a clever old woman, wondrously wise—it’s in the bowl that health and pleasure are to be sought.”

My poor guest—his hands even trembled—couldn’t find enough words to praise my wife’s cookery. He swore by all that was sacred that he couldn’t remember when he had eaten such a wonderful dairy meal, such delicious *knishes* and *vertutti*.

“Don’t be silly,” said I, “if you’d had a taste of her bakery, or noodle pudding—you would then learn the meaning of Paradise on earth!”

Well, after we’d eaten and said our benedictions the talk turned to what was uppermost in our minds; he spoke of his affairs, I—of this and that and another; he talked about his deals, told us stories about Odessa and Yehupetz, said that about ten times already he had been *na konye i pid konyom*—riding a horse and thrown from the horse—rich today, poor tomorrow, rich again and again a poor man. He dealt in some

kind of stuff I had never in my life heard of, absurd and crazy sounding: *hos* and *bes*, shares-shmares, Potivilov, Maltzev-shmaltzev, the devil knows what they are, and the crazy figures he named, ten thousand, twenty thousand—money like firewood!

“I’ll tell you the truth, Menachem-Mendel,” said I, “from what you tell me of the ins and outs of your business I see it calls for real skill and know-how. But there’s one thing I can’t understand: since I am acquainted with your good lady it puzzles me greatly that she permits you to fly around so and doesn’t come after you riding a broomstick!”

“Eh,” said he with a sigh, “don’t remind me of that, Reb Tevye, I get enough from her as it is, both cold and hot. You should only hear what she writes me, then you would say that I am a saintly man. But this,” he went on, “is a small matter, you expect a wife to nag you to death. There is a much worse thing: I have, you must understand, a dear mother-in-law! I don’t have to tell you—you know her yourself!”

“So with you,” I said, “it’s as the Bible says: *‘The flocks were ringstraked, speckled and grisled’*, which means a boil on a boil and a blister on the boil?”

“Yes, Reb Tevye,” said he, “you’ve got it right; the boil is a boil, but the blister, oh, the blister is worse than the boil!”

Well, so we went on chatting until late at night. I was already quite dizzy from his yarns, from his crazy stories of the thousands of rubles that fly up and down, of Brodsky’s wealth... All night long I dreamed of Yehupetz ... half-imperials ... Brodsky ... Menachem-Mendel and his mother-in-law. Only in the morning did he get down to brass tacks: what, then? “Since,” he said, “with us in Yehupetz cash has for some time now become preferable, while nobody cares a hoot for merchandise, therefore,” said he, “you have a chance,

Reb Tevye, to snatch yourself a goodly sum and at the same time literally save me, bring me back to life from the dead.”

“Childish talk,” said I to him, “you must think that I have the Yehupetz kind of money, half-imperials? You little fool,” said I, “what I lack to be as rich as Brodsky we might both of us wish we could earn before Passover.”

“Yes,” said he, “that I know. But do you think a large sum is necessary for this? If you gave me a hundred rubles today,” he said, “I would turn it into two hundred in three-four days, into three hundred, six hundred, seven hundred and why not even a whole thousand?”

“It is quite possible,” said I, “that it’s as our Book says: *‘The profit is great but it’s far from my pocket!’* But what’s the use of such talk? It’s all very fine when there’s something to invest—but when there is no hundred rubles it follows that *‘alone you come in and alone you go out’* or, as Rashi explains, when you plant a sickness you reap a fever.”

“Eh, come on,” said he, “I’m sure you can find a hundred rubles, Reb Tevye. With your business, your name, knock on wood!”

“What’s in a name?” said I. “A name, naturally, is a good thing. But what of that? I remain with my name, while the money is all Brodsky’s. If you want to know precisely, I’ll tell you that I have all in all barely a hundred rubles, but I have eighteen holes to patch with this sum: first, to marry off a daughter...”

“Just listen to him,” said he, “that’s just the last to fit your shoe! Because when, Reb Tevye, will you have another such opportunity to invest one hundred and take out, God willing, enough for marrying off children, and for something else, too?”

And he went into a new three-hour-long harangue to

let me understand how he makes three rubles out of one, and from three—ten. First of all, he said, you invest a hundred rubles and then you order ten some-things—I've already forgotten what they're called—to be bought for you; then you wait a few days until its price goes up. Then you send off a telegram some-where with an order to sell, and with the money to buy twice as much; then the price goes up again and you dispatch another telegram: this goes on until the hundred becomes two hundred, the two hundred—four hundred, the four—eight, the eight—sixteen hundred, real "*miracles and wonders*"! There are people, he said, in Yehupetz, who just recently walked around barefoot, they were brokers, messengers, servants; today they live in their own brick houses, their wives complain of stomach ailments and go abroad for treat-ment. They themselves dash around in Yehupetz on rubber wheels—hoity-toity, they don't recognize peo-ple any more!

Well, why drag out the story? He got me hooked. Who knows, I thought, maybe he was sent to me by fate? After all, I do hear that people find their luck in Yehupetz with the aid of their five fingers—am I any worse than they? He doesn't seem to be a liar who thinks up such songs out of his head. What if my luck really does, thought I, take a turn in the right direction and Tevye becomes something of a person in his old age at least? Really, when will the end come to my struggles, my exhaustive drudgery? Day in and day out again the horse and wagon, and again cheese and butter. It's time, Tevye, to take a rest, I told myself, to become a somebody, to go to the prayer house, to look into a sacred book. But what if, God forbid, things should go wrong, that is, fall buttered side down? Better not to think of that!

"Well? What do you think?" I asked my old woman. "How do you like his plan, Golda?"

“What can I say?” she replied. “I know that Menachem-Mendel is not, God forbid, just anybody, he won’t hoodwink you. He does not come from any tailors or cobblers! His father is a very upright person, and he had a grandfather who was really a jewel: he sat day and night studying the Torah, even after he went blind. And Grandmother Tzeitl, may she rest in peace, was also no simple woman.”

“It’s a fable about *Hanukkah* lights in the summer,” said I, “we’re talking business, and here she comes along with her grandmother Tzeitl who baked honey-cakes, and with her grandfather who lost his soul in a wine-glass... A woman is always a woman. It’s not for nothing that King Solomon traveled the world over and couldn’t find a woman with a rivet in her head.”

In short, we agreed to set up a partnership: I invest the money and Menachem-Mendel his wits, and whatever God sent us we would divide half and half.

“Believe me, Reb Tevye,” he said, “I’ll make a fine deal for you, God willing, as fine as fine can be, and with God’s help will bring you money and money and more money!”

“Amen, the same to you,” said I, “from your mouth into God’s ears. But there is one thing I don’t understand: how does the cat get over the water? I am here, you are there; money is a delicate material, see? Don’t take offense, but as our Forefather Abraham said: *‘If you sow with tears you shall reap with joy’*—it is better to make sure beforehand than to weep afterwards.”

“Oh,” said he to me, “maybe you want us to sign a paper? With the greatest pleasure!”

“Shush,” said I, “if you look at it another way, it comes to the same thing: it’s either or; if you want to kill me, of what use will a piece of paper be to me? As it is written in the Talmud: *‘The thief is not the mouse, but the mousehole’*—it isn’t the note that pays but the

man, and if I already hang by one foot let hang by both."

"You may believe me," he said, "Reb Tevye, I swear to you on my most holy word of honor, so help me God, I haven't the slightest intention of duping you, God forbid; everything will be above-board and honest. God willing, we'll divide everything equally, half and half, share and share alike, a hundred for me, a hundred for you, two hundred for me, two hundred for you, three hundred for me, three hundred for you, four hundred for me, four hundred for you, a thousand for me, a thousand for you."

Well, so I got out my few rubles, counted them over three times—my hands trembled as I counted—called my old woman to be a witness, made it clear once more what blood money this was and gave it to Menachem-Mendel; I sewed it up into his breast pocket so it shouldn't, God forbid, be stolen on the way, and we decided that no later than next Saturday week he would, without fail, write me a full account of our affairs. We took hearty leave of each other, embraced and kissed each other as is usual among relatives.

When I was alone all sorts of sweet thoughts passed through my mind, all kinds of daydreams, so pleasant that I wished they would never end. I saw a large, tin-roofed house in the middle of town, a real mansion with sheds and stables and stalls, with large and small chambers, with pantries full of good things, and I saw the mistress of the house jingling her keys as she flitted from room to room—and she was my wife Golda, but unrecognizable: her face has changed, it has become the face of a wealthy woman, with a double chin and pearls strung around her neck; she gives herself airs and curses the maids vehemently; my children go around in their best clothes doing nothing. The yard is

flocked with chickens, geese and ducks. Inside the house everything is bright, a fire flickers in the oven, supper is cooking and the samovar is puffing as it boils merrily! At the head of the table sits the master of the house, Tevye, that is. He is wearing a houserobe and a skullcap, around him sit the most prominent men of the town fawning on him, cringing before him: "If you please, Reb Tevye, no offense meant, Reb Tevye..."

"Oh," thought I, "money—the devil take your fathers and forefathers!"

"Whom are you cursing so?" asked my Golda.

"Nobody, I was merely thinking, daydreaming, seeing visions—ah, hopeless things... Tell me, Golda my love," said I, "do you know what he deals in, this relative of yours, Menachem-Mendel?"

"What I dreamed the other night and last night and this whole year should fall on the heads of my enemies! You sat up with the man a day and a night talking and talking and talking, and then you come to me and ask me what he deals in! You made up some sort of an agreement with him, didn't you?"

"Yes," said I, "we did make up something, but *what* it is I don't know, not for the life of me! There's nothing, you see, to get hold of; however, one thing has nothing to do with the other, don't you worry, my dear wife, my heart tells me that everything will turn out well and we, with God's help, so it seems to me, will earn money, and lots of it—so say 'Amen' and cook supper!"

Well, a week went by, and then another, and still another—no letters from my partner! I was beside myself, I lost my head and didn't know what to think. It can't be, thought I, that he should simply forget to write a letter; he knows quite well how anxiously we await it here. But then again another thought struck me: what will I do to him if he, for instance, skims the



entire cream for himself and tells me that we haven't earned anything yet! Go tell him he's a so-and-so! But it can't be, I told myself, how is it possible? I treat a man as I would a close and dear relative, I should only have what I wish for him, so how can he play such a trick on me? Then another thought struck me: the devil take the profit, let it be his, "*Deliverance and protection will come from the Lord*"—may God save my investment from harm! A chill ran through my body.

You old fool, I said to myself, you already prepared a purse, you dunce! For the hundred rubles you could have bought yourself a pair of horses the likes of which your ancestors never owned and exchanged your wagon for a spring-hung britzka!

"Tevye, why don't you think of something!" cried my wife.

"What do you mean—I don't think? My head is bursting from thinking," said I, "and you say I don't think!"

"Something must have happened to him on the way," said she. "Either he was waylaid by robbers and cleaned out from head to toe, or he fell sick on the way, or, God forbid, maybe even died."

"What else, dear heart, will you think up?" I asked her. "Suddenly robbers out of the blue!" But I myself thought: Who knows what could happen to a man on the road?

"You, my wife, always have to think the very worst!"

"Well," said she, "he comes from that kind of a family. His mother, may she be our defender in Heaven, died not long ago, still a young woman; he had three sisters, so one of them died in her girlhood, the other one did get married, but caught a cold in the bath-house and died, while the third one lost her mind

right after her first confinement, lingered on for some time and then died.”

“All life ends in death,” said I, “we’ll all be dead some day, Golda. A man is like a carpenter: a carpenter lives and lives and dies, and a man lives and dies.”

In short, we decided that I should go to Yehupetz. A bit of my stock-in-trade had accumulated by this time, a shopful of cheese and butter and cream, all of prime quality. We harnessed the horse and, as Rashi says: “*They journeyed from Sukos.*” On to Yehupetz!

As I drove along, despondent, of course, heavy-hearted, as you may well imagine, all alone in the woods, all sorts of notions and thoughts entered my mind.

Now won’t it be a fine thing, I thought, if when I arrive and start asking about my man I hear: “Menachem-Mendel? Oho-ho! That one is in clover, has his own brick house, drives around in carriages, is not to be recognized at all!” So I pluck up courage and go directly to his house. “Whoa!” somebody exclaims at the entrance and gives me a hard shove with an elbow. “Don’t push so, man, this is no place for pushing.” “I am,” I say, “a kinsman, my wife is his third cousin once removed.” “*Mazl-tov,*” he answers, “a great pleasure; however, it won’t hurt you to wait here by the door a while...” It dawns on me that the doorman should be tipped... As they say, “*What goes up must come down*”—meaning that the wheels won’t turn if the axle isn’t greased. And then I go straight upstairs to Menachem-Mendel and say: “A good morning to you, Reb Menachem-Mendel!” Who? What? “*There is no speech, there are no words.*” He doesn’t recognize me at all! “What do you want?” he asks. I almost faint.

“What does this mean, Mister, you no longer recognize relatives? I am Tevye.”

“Oh,” says he, “Tevye? The name seems familiar...”

“Then maybe,” say I, “my wife’s *blintzes* are also familiar to you, remind yourself of her *knishes*, dump-lings and *vertutti!*”

Then quite different thoughts come to my mind: here I come in to Menachem-Mendel and he gives me a most hearty welcome. “A guest! A guest! Sit down, Reb Tevye, how are you, how is your wife? I’ve been looking forward to your arrival, I want to settle our accounts.” And then he takes and pours me a hatful of gold coins. “This,” he says, “is the profit, and the principal stays in the business; whatever we earn we’ll divide in half, share and share alike, a hundred for me, a hundred for you, two hundred for me, two hundred for you, three hundred for me, three hundred for you, four hundred for me, four hundred for you.” So thinking I get a bit drowsy and don’t notice that my nag has strayed from the road; the cart catches on a tree, and I get such a jolt from behind that sparks fly from my eyes. It’s a good thing, say I to myself, that at least no axle broke, thank God.

Well, at last I got to Yehupetz. First of all I sold off my goods very quickly, as I usually do, and then I went about looking for my partner.

I wander around for an hour, two, and three, but “*the lad is gone*”—I can’t find him! I begin stopping people, asking them whether they’d heard of or seen a man with the lovely name of Menachem-Mendel? “If,” they say, “his name is Menachem-Mendel you should look for him with a candle; this isn’t enough,” they say, “there are lots of Menachem-Mendels in the world.” “You probably mean his family name?” say I. “Let me know as much evil, with you together, if, all told, he isn’t called—at home, in Kasrilovka—by his mother-in-law’s name alone, that is, Menachem-Mendel Leah-Dvosya’s. What’s more, his father-in-law,

already a very old man, is also called by her name—Boruch-Hirsch Leah-Dvosya's, and even she herself, Leah-Dvosya, that is, is known as Leah-Dvosya Boruch-Hirsch Leah-Dvosya's. Do you understand now?"

"We understand," they say, "but all this is still not enough; what is his business, what does he do, your Menachem-Mendel?"

"What is his business? He does business here with half-imperial gold pieces, some sort of 'bess-mess', Potivilov, sends telegrams someplace—to Petersburg, to Warsaw," I explain.

"Oh!" they cry and rock with laughter. "Do you mean the Menachem-Mendel who sells last year's snow? Go, if you please, down over there—to the other side of the street; that's where lots of hares run around, and yours among them."

The more one lives, the more one eats, think I to myself, so now it's hares!? Last year's snow!?

So I crossed to the other side. There were so many people there, may no evil befall them, as at a fair; the crowd was so dense that I barely pushed myself through. People ran around like madmen, one this way, the other that way, bumping into each other, a real Bedlam with everyone talking, screaming, waving their hands: "Potivilov..." "Done, done!" "Caught you at your word!" "Shoved in a down payment ... it'll scratch..." "You owe me brokerage..." "You're a rat ... you'll get your head smashed..." "Spit in his face..." "Just look—a real kill!" "A fine speculator..." "Bankrupt!" "Flunkey!" "A curse on you and your ancestors!" Now slaps were about to fly in earnest.

"*Jacob fled,*" I muttered to myself, "run away, Tevye, or you'll catch a few slaps yourself!"

Well, well, I reflected, God is a Father, Shmuel-

Shmelki is his servitor, Yehupetz is a city and Menachem-Mendel is a breadwinner! So this is the spot where people catch fortunes, half-imperials? This Bedlam is what they call doing business? Alas and alack, Tevye, with your commercial deals!

To make a long story short, when I stopped in front of a great big show-window displaying all kinds of trousers I suddenly saw, reflected in the glass, my lost partner. When I looked at him my heart missed a beat, I felt faint. If I have an enemy anywhere, or if you have one, let us both live to see them looking the way Menachem-Mendel looked! A coat? Boots? And his face—why, my God, healthier-looking corpses are laid to rest.

Well, Tevye, now you are really done for, I thought to myself, you can say goodbye to your little nest egg, as they say: There is neither bear nor forest—neither stock nor money, nothing but troubles...

He, evidently, was also greatly embarrassed, because we both stopped as if frozen and couldn't utter a word; we only looked right into each other's eyes, as roosters do, as if to say: "Both of us are hapless unfortunates, we might as well take up our sacks and go begging from house to house!"

"Reb Tevye," he said in a low voice, barely managing to speak, choking with tears, "Reb Tevye! Without luck one shouldn't be born at all ... rather than such a life ... be hanged ... drawn and quartered!" And not another word could he utter.

"Of course," I said to him, "for this deed of yours, Menachem-Mendel, you deserve to be laid out right here in the middle of Yehupetz and flogged until you see grandmother Tzeitl in the other world. Just think what you've gone and done! You've taken an entire household of living people, innocent, unhappy people, and cut their throats without a knife! Oh God, how

will I come home now to my wife and children? Come on, tell me yourself, you murderer, robber, cutthroat!”

“It’s true,” said he, leaning against a wall, “it’s true, Reb Tevye, so help me God...”

“Gehenna, you fool,” said I, “Gehenna is too good for you!”

“All true, Reb Tevye,” said he, “all true, so help me God; rather than such a life, such a life, Reb Tevye...” and he hung his head.

I stood there looking at him, the *shlimazl*, as he was leaning against the wall, his head bent, his hat awry, and every sigh and every groan tore at my heart.

“Although”, said I “if we look at it another way, then it becomes quite clear that maybe you are also innocent; let us examine the matter from all sides: did you do this with malice aforethought? But it would be foolish to think so, you were my partner on equal share-and-share alike terms; I put in the money, you put in your brains, woe is me! Your intention was for the best, for life and not for death, as the saying goes. Oh, so it turned out to be a soap bubble? It was probably not ordained; as it is said: ‘*Don’t rejoice today because tomorrow...*’. Man proposes and God disposes. Look, you little fool, take my bit of business—it’s a solvent business; still, as I say, since it was then so ordained, Heaven preserve us, last autumn one of my cows—it shouldn’t happen to you—lay down and died; it could have brought in a bargain—fifty rubles if sold for *treif* meat; directly after that a red heifer fell, I wouldn’t have considered taking even twenty rubles for it—well, so what can you do, wits won’t help. If you’re out of luck you’re lost!

“I won’t even ask you where my money is,” I said. “I understand very well where it went, my blood money, woe is me! It’s in a sacred place, in last year’s snow. And whose fault is it if not mine? I let myself be

talked into reaching out for easy money, stuff and nonsense... Money, brother, must be toiled for, slaved for, worked to the bone for! You deserve a good thrashing, Tevye, you do! But of what use is my crying now? As the Book says: *'The maiden screamed'*—scream yourself blue! Wit and remorse—these two things always come too late. It wasn't fated that Tevye should become a rich man. As Ivan says: *Nye bulo u Mikiti hroshi i nye budye*—no money had Mikita and none will he have. Evidently that's God's will. *'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,'* Rashi explains. Come, brother," said I, "we'll take a few drops of vodka!"

And so, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, all my dreams turned out to be a soap bubble! Do you think I took it to heart and grieved over the loss of my money? May I be as free from evil! We know what the Good Book says: *"The silver and the gold are mine"*—money is mud! The main thing is man, that is, that a person should be a real human being. But what did grieve me? My lost dream. I wanted, oh, how I wanted to be a rich man at least for a while. But is wisdom of any use in this? *"Perforce you must live"*, says the proverb—with groans you live and with groans you wear out a pair of boots. You, Tevye, says God, should keep your mind on cheese and butter and not on daydreams. But faith, hope? The more troubles, the more faith, the poorer one is the greater are his hopes. From this it follows...

But it seems to me that I've talked too much today. It's time to think of my business. As they say, each one has his own scourges.

Fare you well, be healthy and happy always!

1895

## TODAY'S CHILDREN

You said “today’s children”? “*I have raised children*”—you bring them into the world, sacrifice yourself for them, toil day and night, and for what? You think maybe it’ll come out right this way or maybe that way, according to your own notions and means. I can’t compare with Brodsky, of course, but neither am I just anybody, believe me: we don’t come, as my wife, bless her, says, from tailors or cobblers, so I reckoned that I’d draw winning numbers with my daughters. Why? Firstly, God blessed me with goodlooking girls, and a pretty face, as you say, is half a dowry. Secondly, I am now, with God’s help, no longer the Tevye of former times, so I can aim for the finest match even in Yehupetz—what will you say to that? Yes, but there is a God in the world, a Merciful Father who shows his great miracles and makes me hot and cold, tosses me up and down. So he says to me: “Tevye, don’t talk yourself into any foolishness and let the world go on as it does!..” Just listen to what can happen in our big world, and who gets all the luck. Tevye the *shlimazl!*

To make a long story short—you probably remember what happened to me, may this never happen to you, the story with my kinsman Menachem-Mendel, may his name and remembrance be erased, our fine deal in Yehupetz with the half-imperials and the “Potivilov” shares, such a year on my enemies! How I grieved then! I thought this was the end, no more Tevye, no more dairy business!

“What a fool you are,” my old woman said one day, “stop your worrying, nothing good will come of it! You’ll only eat your heart out. Look at it as if you’d been waylaid by highwaymen and robbed clean. Better take a walk to Anatovka, go see Leizer-Wolf the butcher, he is very anxious, he says, to see you.”



“What does he need me for? If he is thinking of that dun-colored cow of ours,” said I, “he may as well take a big stick and beat the idea out of his head.”

“Why so?” she asked. “Is it the milk you get from her, or the cheese and butter?”

“It’s not that,” said I, “it’s the idea in general. It would be a sin to give such a cow away to be slaughtered; ‘*A pity for living things*’, says our Holy Torah.”

“Oh, stop it, Tevye! The whole world knows that you are a bookish man. Listen to me, your wife,” said she, “and go and visit Leizer-Wolf. Every Thursday when our Tzeitl goes to his butcher shop for meat he pesters her: ‘Tell your father he should come and see me. I have some important business to discuss with him.’”

In short, once in a while a man must mind his wife, mustn’t he? So, thinking it over, I let myself be talked into going to Leizer-Wolf in Anatovka, a walk of about three versts. I came to his place, but he wasn’t at home. “Where is he?” I asked a snub-nosed woman who was flitting about the house.

“He’s in the slaughterhouse,” she answered, “they’re slaughtering an ox there since early morning, he should soon be home.”

I wandered around Leizer-Wolf’s home admiring its fittings. A household, knock on wood, after my own heart; a cupboard full of copperware, couldn’t be bought with a hundred and fifty rubles, a samovar, another samovar, a brass tray, another tray from Warsaw, a pair of silver candlesticks, large and small gilded goblets and cups, a cast-iron *Hanukkah* lamp, and many other things, all kinds of trinkets without end.

God Almighty! I thought, I should only live to see my children, bless them, have so many fine things!

What a lucky man the butcher is! It's not enough that he is so rich, so he has to have only two children of his own, already married off, and be a widower into the bargain!

At last the door opened and in stomped Leizer-Wolf, hurling curses at the *shokhet's* head. The slaughterer had ruined him, he had rejected an ox as big as an oak-tree, declared it *treif* over a mere trifle, found a pinhead blemish on a lung, may the Evil One catch him!

"Good day, Reb Tevye," he said, "why is it so hard to get you to come here? How do you do?"

"I do and I do and get nowhere. As the Book says: '*I want not your honey and want not your sting*'—neither money, nor health, nor life and soul."

"It's a sin to talk so, Reb Tevye," said he, "as compared to what you once were you are today, knock on wood, a rich man."

"We should both have what I still need to be as rich as you think I am. But no matter, '*Ascacurdeh demaskanteh desnubnoseh defercloseh\**', as it is written in the *Gemara*," said I, thinking: more fool you, butcher-boy, if there's such a *Gemara* in the world!

"You're always ready with the *Gemara*," said Leizer-Wolf. "You are lucky, Reb Tevye, to be skilled in reading the tiny letters. But how do knowledge and learning concern us? Let us better talk of our business. Sit down, Reb Tevye." As he said this he shouted: "Let there be tea!" And as if by magic the snub-nosed woman suddenly sprang from somewhere, snatched up the samovar as the devil snatched the *melamed*, and vanished into the kitchen.

"Now," said he to me, "when we are alone, eye to eye, we can talk business. For some time already I've

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\* Words without meaning—abracadabra.—Tr.

wanted to have a talk with you, Reb Tevye, and I've asked you many times, through your daughter, to take the trouble... See, I've cast an eye..."

"I know," said I, "that you've cast an eye, but your efforts are all in vain, it won't go, Reb Leizer-Wolf."

"Why so?" he asked and looked at me as if scared.

"Because," said I, "I can afford to wait a while, the river hasn't caught on fire yet."

"Why should you wait when we can come to an agreement at once?" he asked.

"That," said I, "is firstly. And secondly, I'm sorry for the poor creature, '*A pity for living things!*'"

"Just look at him, how he takes on!" laughed Leizer-Wolf. "If somebody heard you he would swear that she was your only one! It seems to me, Reb Tevye, that you have, knock on wood, plenty of them!"

"So let them be," said I, "and let whoever envies me have none."

"Enviest you?" he asked in surprise. "Who speaks of envy? Quite the opposite, just because they are so fine I want... You understand? Don't forget, Reb Tevye, what favors you may get out of it!"

"Oh, of course, of course," said I, "your favors can turn a head to stone. You won't grudge a piece of ice in the winter, that we've known for a long time."

"Eh," said he in a honey-sweet voice, "why do you compare, Reb Tevye, then with now? Things were somewhat different *then*, and *now* they're different again. Now we're becoming sort of kin, aren't we?"

"What kinship are you talking about?" I asked.

"Ordinary—in-laws!"

"What do you mean, Reb Leizer-Wolf, what are we talking about?"

"No, you tell me, Reb Tevye, what we are talking about."

“What do you mean,” said I, “we’re talking about my dun-colored cow that you want to buy!”

“Ha-ha-ha!!” Leizer-Wolf rolled with laughter. “A fine piece of cow, and dun-colored to boot, ha-ha-ha!!!”

“But then what did you mean, Reb Leizer-Wolf? Go ahead, tell me, so I’ll laugh too.”

“It’s about your daughter, your Tzeitl, we’ve been talking all the time! You know, of course, Reb Tevye, it shouldn’t happen to you, that I’m a widower. I thought the matter over and decided that there was no need for me to look for luck among strangers, have dealings with matchmakers, with the devil knows whom, when here we are both on the spot. I know *you* and you know *me*, I like the girl herself, too—I see her every Thursday in my shop, I’ve spoken with her a few times, she’s a nice, quiet girl. As for me, you see for yourself that I’m no poor man, I have my own house, a couple of stores, a few hides up in the attic and some money in the chest as well; what need is there, Reb Tevye, to make difficulties for each other, to play games with each other? Let’s just shake hands on it, one-two-three, do you get me or not?”

In short, when he had had his say I sat there speechless, as one who suddenly receives upsetting news. My first thought was: Leizer-Wolf... Tzeitl... He has children her age... But soon I stopped myself: Just imagine, such luck! Such a lucky thing for her! She’ll have anything she wants! Well, what if he is a bit tight-fisted? In our times this is supposed to be the greatest virtue: “*Man’s closest friend is he himself.*” When you’re good for others you’re bad for yourself. His only real drawback is that he is a bit common. Well, all right, not everyone can be a scholar. There are plenty of rich men, fine men, in Anátovka, in Mazepovka, and even in Yehupetz who can’t tell a cross from an

*alef*. Still, since it is so ordained, let me have as good a year as the respect they draw from the world. As the Book says: “*You can’t build without a foundation*”, which means that learning lies in a strong-box while wisdom is in the purse.

“Well, Reb Tevye,” said he, “why are you silent?”

“Should I yell?” I asked, pretending to hesitate. “This, Reb Leizer-Wolf, is a matter that calls for reflection. It’s no joke, she’s my first-born child.”

“On the other hand,” said he, “just because she’s your first-born you will be able to marry off a second daughter, too, and later on a third, you get me?”

“Amen, the same to you!” said I. “There’s no big deal in marrying off a child, let God only send each her predestined one.”

“Oh, no, Reb Tevye,” said he, “I mean something altogether different, for, thank God, you don’t have to worry about a dowry for your Tzeitl—everything a girl needs for her wedding, clothing and so on, I take upon myself, and something will find its way into your purse, too...”

“Fie, shame on you!” I cried. “You’re talking, begging your pardon, as if you were in your butcher shop! What do you mean—into my purse? Fie! My Tzeitl is not the sort of girl, God forbid, that I should have to sell for money, fie, fie!!”

“If you say ‘fie’—let it be ‘fie’,” said he, “I meant for the best, but if you say ‘fie’ let it be ‘fie’. If it suits you it suits me! The main thing is that it should be as soon as possible, I need a mistress in the house, you get me?”

“I won’t raise any objections, but my spouse has to be talked with,” said I, “in such matters she takes the lead. It’s no trifle. As Rashi says, ‘*Rachel weeps for her sons*’—the mother covers everything. Then she herself, Tzeitl, should also be asked. As they say, all

the in-laws were taken to the wedding but the bridegroom was left at home!”

“Nonsense,” said he, “you shouldn’t ask—you should *tell*, Reb Tevye. Go home and tell them what is what and set up the wedding canopy—a couple of words and drink a toast to wet the deal!”

“Don’t speak that way, Reb Leizer-Wolf, a girl is no widow, God forbid.”

“Naturally,” said he, “a girl is a girl, not a widow, and for that reason everything must be settled beforehand—clothing, this, that and other matters. Meanwhile, Reb Tevye, let’s take a few drops to warm ourselves, what do you say?”

“With pleasure,” said I, “why not? As the saying goes, Adam is a man and vodka is vodka. We have a *Gemara* in which it is written...” And I rattled off a “*Gemara*”, a sheer invention, something from the *Song of Songs* and from the *Song of the Kid*.

Well, so we imbibed the bitter drops, as God bade us. Meanwhile the snub-nosed woman brought in the samovar and we fixed ourselves a couple of glasses of punch. The time passed merrily, we congratulated each other, talked, babbled about the match, mentioned this and that and again the match.

“Do you know, Reb Leizer-Wolf, what a gem she is?”

“I know,” he said, “believe me, I know. If I hadn’t known I wouldn’t have spoken at all!”

Both of us spoke at the same time. I shouted: “A gem, a diamond! You should only know how to take good care of her, not to show the butcher in you...”

And he: “Don’t worry, Reb Tevye, what she will eat at my table on weekdays she never had in your house on holidays...”

“Come on,” said I, “food is not all that important. The rich man doesn’t eat gold coins, nor the poor

man—stones. You are a coarse person, so you won't be able to appreciate her housewifery, her *hallah*-baking, her fish, Reb Leizer-Wolf, her fish! It's a real privilege..."

To this he said: "Reb Tevye, you are, excuse me, already played out, you don't know people, you don't know me..."

"You put gold on one scale and Tzeitl on the other and they'll balance!" I shouted. "Listen, Reb Leizer-Wolf, even if you had your two hundred thousand you wouldn't be worth the heel of her foot anyhow!"

"Believe me, Reb Tevye, you are a great fool, even though you are older than I am!.."

In short, we must have yelled at each other in this manner for quite a while and we drank ourselves tipsy, so when I came home it was already late in the night and my feet felt as if they were shackled.

My wife, bless her, immediately guessed that I was soused and gave me a good dressing down.

"Hush, Golda, don't scold," I said quite cheerfully, almost ready to dance a jig, "stop shouting, dearest one, we should be congratulated!"

"On what joyous event?" she asked. "For having sold the dun-colored cow, poor thing, to Leizer-Wolf?"

"Worse!"

"Exchanged it for another cow? Hoodwinked poor Leizer-Wolf?"

"Still worse!"

"Come on, say something, just see how a word has to be squeezed out of him!" she shouted angrily.

"*Mazl-tov* to you, Golda," I repeated, "we must both be congratulated, our Tzeitl is betrothed!"

"In that case you're really good and drunk and no joke! You must've had quite a glassful somewhere!"

"I had a few drops of vodka with Leizer-Wolf, and he and I also drank a few glasses of punch, but I'm still

in my right mind," I said. "Know, brother Golda, that our Tzeitl has become engaged, in a lucky hour, to Leizer-Wolf himself!"

And I told her the whole story from beginning to end; how, and why, and when, everything we had talked about, without missing the slightest detail.

"Listen, Tevye," said my wife, "God should always help me wherever I go—my heart told me that it wasn't for nothing that Leizer-Wolf summoned you! But I was afraid to think about it, afraid it might, God forbid, all come to naught. I thank Thee, my dear God, my kind and faithful Father, only let it all be in a good hour, an auspicious hour, and may she grow old with him in honor and riches, because Frumeh-Soreh, may she rest in peace, didn't have too good a life with him. She was, may she forgive me, an embittered woman, couldn't get along with anyone, not at all like our Tzeitl, a long life to her. I thank Thee, thank Thee, dear God!.. Well, Tevye, what did I tell you, you noodlehead? Does a person have to worry? When it's destined it comes straight home to you..."

"Quite true, there's a proverb that clearly says..."

"What do I need your proverbs for," she said, "we have to think about getting ready for the wedding now. First of all, make a list for Leizer-Wolf of everything Tzeitl will need for her wedding; she hasn't even a stitch of underthings, not even a pair of stockings, you tell him. Then—clothes. She needs a silken gown for the wedding, a woolen dress for summer, another for winter, a couple of cotton house-dresses, petticoats, and I want her to have two coats: a cat-pelt burnoose for weekdays and a good one, with ruffles, for the Sabbath; then—hook-up boots on high heels, shoes, a corset, gloves, handkerchiefs, an umbrella and all the other things a girl must have in these times."

"How come, Golda darling," I asked, "that you know about all this nonsense?"



“Why not?” she retorted, “didn’t I live among people? Or perhaps I never saw, when I lived at home in Kasrilovka, how people dressed? You let me talk everything over with him; Leizer-Wolf is a wealthy man, he won’t like to be bothered by the whole world. If you eat pork, let the fat at least run down your beard.”

To make a long story short, we talked in this way until daybreak.

“Well, my wife,” I said at last, “go and put together the bits of cheese and butter you have and I’ll set out for Boiberik. All is well and good, but the business can’t be put aside, as the Book says: *‘Man’s soul belongs to God’*, meaning that his body is on earth.”

It was still dark when I hitched my horse and wagon and set off for Boiberik. When I arrived at the market-place in Boiberik—oh, my! Can there be a secret among Jews? Everybody already knew everything and congratulations were showered on me from all sides.

“*Mazl-tov*, Reb Tevye! When, God willing, is the wedding?”

“The same to you,” said I, “it’s as the saying goes: the father hasn’t been born yet but his son has already grown up on the roof.”

“Nonsense, Tevye, you’ll have to stand us a drink; knock on wood, such luck, you’ve struck it rich—a gold mine!”

“The gold can give out, what remains is a hole in the ground!”

However, not wanting to be a swine and begrudge my friends a treat, I said: “As soon as I get through with all my Yehupetz customers I’ll stand you some drinks and eats, we’ll have a fling, and that’ll be that, which means *‘merriment and enjoyment’*—even beggars may celebrate!”

I got through with my business very quickly, as

I usually do, and then treated a bunch of good friends to a few drinks. We wished each other luck, as is proper among people, and I set off for home in a lively mood, half-seas over. The sun shone hotly on this fine summer day, but the shadows of the trees protected me from the heat on both sides, and the scent of the pines was as balm to the soul. I stretched out like a lord in my wagon and let the horse have the reins: plod along, old friend, I said, you know the way home yourself. As we trundled along I raised my voice in song; I was in such a festive mood that I sang the tunes sung on the High Holidays from *Rosh Hashono* to *Yom Kippur*. Lying on my back I looked up into the sky, while my thoughts were here on earth. The Heavens, I thought, are for God, while the Earth he gave to the *Children of Adam*, they should bash their heads against walls, fight as the cats do for great “luxuries”, fight for being appointed *gabeh*, for honors and seniority in reading the Torah and lessons from the *Prophets* in the synagogue... “*The dead cannot praise God...*” People don’t understand how they should praise God for the favors He confers on them... But we, poor folk, when we have one good day we thank and praise the Lord and say “*A’ve*”—I love Him, for He hearkens to my voice and my pleas, He inclines His ear to me when poverty and afflictions surround me on all sides. Here a cow suddenly lies down and dies, then a devil brings along a relative, a *shlimazl*, a Menachem-Mendel from Yehupetz who takes my last ruble, and I already think that I am done for, this is the end of the world, there is no truth on earth. What does God do? He sends Leizer-Wolf the idea to take my Tzeitl as she stands, without a dowry, and therefore I will double my praises to You, dear God, for having looked at Tevye and come to his aid. Let me have proud pleasure from my child, when I come to visit her, God willing, and

see her as the mistress of a wealthy home, all found for her, closets full of linen, well-stocked pantries with Passover chicken fat and preserves, coops full of chickens, geese and ducks...

Suddenly my horse made a dash downhill, and before I knew it I found myself lying on the ground amidst all the empty crocks and pots and the wagon on top of me! With difficulty and pain I managed to crawl out from under the wagon and get to my feet, bruised and half-dead. My wrath I vented on the poor horse. "Damn you," I shouted, "may the earth swallow you! Who asked you, *shlimazl*, to show that you can run downhill? You almost made a cripple of me, you *Asmodeus*." I gave it to him good and hard—as much as he could take. The poor animal evidently understood his mischief had gone too far: he stood with his head hanging low as if ready to be milked.

"The Evil One take you," said I and uprighted the wagon, picked up all the pots and crocks, and continued on my way.

It's a bad omen, I said to myself, hoping no new misfortune had happened at home...

Yes, "*So it was.*" I drove along for about two versts and was already near home when I noticed somebody walking towards me in the middle of the road—a woman. I got a little closer—Tzeitl! I don't know why, but my heart felt as if it were sinking. I jumped off the wagon: "Tzeitl, is it you? What are you doing here?"

She fell on my neck, weeping loudly. "God be with you, daughter," said I, "why are you crying?"

"Oh," she answered, "Father, *Tateh!*" Her face was bathed in tears.

The light went out of my eyes and my heart contracted painfully.

"What is it, daughter, what's happened to you?"

I asked and put my arms around her, stroking and kissing her. But she went on crying: "Father, dear Father, kind Father, I'll eat only one piece of bread in three days, have compassion for my youth!" And again she was choked with tears, couldn't utter another word.

Woe is me, I thought, I see where the land lies. It was an ill wind that took me to Boiberik!

"Silly little girl," I said, stroking her head, "why should you cry? It's either one or the other—no is no. Nobody, God forbid, is going to force you against your will. We thought it was for your good, we meant it for the best. But if your heart is not in it—what can be done? It probably wasn't ordained..."

"Oh, thank you, dear Father," she cried, "a long life to you." And once again she fell on my neck and started weeping, shedding tears.

"Listen, let there already be an end to this weeping," said I, "even eating meat dumplings can become tiresome! Get into the wagon and let's go home, your mother will be thinking God knows what!"

So we both got into the wagon and I began to calm her down with talk. I told her that we had the best of intentions; God knows the truth, all we wanted was to shield our child from misery. Well, it's come to nothing—evidently, such was God's will.

"It wasn't fated, daughter," I said, "that you should become the mistress of a wealthy home, and that we should reap a little joy in our old age, harnessed as we are, one might say, day and night to a wheelbarrow, not a good moment, only poverty and misery, bad luck over and over again!"

"Oh, *Tateh*," she cried and again began to shed tears. "I'll go out and be a servant, I'll carry clay, I'll dig ditches!..."

"Why are you weeping, foolish girl," said I to her.

“Am I reproaching you? Do I have any grievance against you? I’m in a dark and bitter mood, so I’m simply pouring out my heart, I’m talking to Him, to the Almighty, telling Him how He deals with me. He is a merciful Father, He pities me, but shows His power over me—He shouldn’t punish me for my words—He settles accounts with me, and what can I do? Shout for help?”

I told her that probably things were meant to be so. He is up high above us, while we are down here, deep, deep in the ground, so we must say that He is right and His judgement is right, because if we look at it otherwise then I am nothing but a great fool. Why am I shouting, making such a racket? I am a tiny worm, I said, that wriggles down here on earth, so small that the slightest breeze, if God so wishes, could destroy me in an instant. Now do I have to make a stand with my foolish wits and try to tell Him how He should rule His little world? Probably, since He orders it to be so, it must be so; of what good are complaints? In our Holy Books it is written, said I, that forty days before a child is conceived in its mother’s womb an angel comes along and announces: “The daughter of so-and-so will marry so-and-so!!” Let Tevye’s daughter marry a Getzel, son of a Zorach, and Leizer-Wolf the butcher go elsewhere to find his mate; what is due to him won’t run away, while you, said I, God should send your predestined one, only he should be a worthy man, and the sooner the better. Let His will be done, and I hope your mother doesn’t yell too much, but I’ll get enough from her anyhow!

Finally, we got home. I unharnessed the horse and then sat down on the grass near the house to try and think up what to tell my wife, to invent a tale from the *Arabian Nights*, so as to avoid trouble.

Evening was approaching. The sun was setting, frogs

were croaking in the distance, the horse, hobbled, was munching grass, the cows, just returned from pasture, were standing over their mangers, waiting to be milked. All around me was the smell of grass—a true Garden of Eden! So I sat meditating and thinking how cleverly the Almighty had created this little world of His, so that each creature, from a human being to a cow, should earn its bread, nothing is for free! You, cow, if you wish to eat—let yourself be milked, yield milk, support a man and his wife and children. You, little horse, if you want to munch—trot back and forth to Boiberik, day in, day out, with the pots and crocks. The same goes for you, Man. If you want a piece of bread—go and toil, milk the cows, run around with the jugs and pitchers, churn butter, make cheese, harness the horse and drag yourself early every morning to Boiberik to the *dachas*, bow and scrape before the rich Yehupetzers, ingratiate yourself with them, smile at them, see to it that they are satisfied. God forbid you should injure their pride! Still, there remains the question: “*Mah nishtano?*”—where is it written that Tevye must slave for them, get up at the break of day, when God himself is still asleep, and for what? So that they should have fresh cheese and butter for their morning coffee? Where is it written that I must wear myself out working for a thin gruel, a *kulesh* of groats, while they, those rich Yehupetzers, rest their bones at their *dachas*, don’t lift a finger for themselves and eat roast ducklings, good *knishes*, *blintzes* and *vertutti*? Am I not a Jew like they are? In all fairness, why shouldn’t Tevye spend at least one summer at a *dacha*? Ah, but where will the cheese and butter come from? Who will milk the cows?.. Why, they, the Yehupetz rich, that’s who!.. This crazy notion made me burst out laughing. As the saying goes, if God listened to fools the world would have another face.

“Good evening, Reb Tevye!” someone greeted me. Turning around, I saw an acquaintance, Motl Kamzoil, a young tailor from Anatovka.

“Welcome! Mention the Messiah and see who comes!” said I. “Sit down, Motl, on God’s good earth. What’s brought you here all of a sudden?”

“What’s brought me here? My feet!” he answered and sat down near me on the grass, looking towards the barn where my girls were flitting back and forth with the pots and jugs.

“It’s already quite some time since I’ve wanted to come and see you, Reb Tevye,” he said, “but I never seem to have the time: you finish one piece of work and take another. I now work for myself; there is, thank God, enough work, all of us tailors have as many orders as we can manage: it’s been a summer of weddings. Berel Fonfach is having a wedding, Yosel Sheigetiz is having a wedding, Mendel Zayika is having a wedding, Yankel Piskach is having a wedding, Moishe Gorgel is having a wedding, Meir Krapiva is having a wedding, Chaim Loshak is having a wedding and even the widow Trehubikha is getting ready for a wedding.”

“The whole world,” said I, “is celebrating weddings, I am the only exception; apparently, I am not worthy in God’s eyes.”

“No,” said he, looking towards the place where the girls were. “You are mistaken, Reb Tevye. If you wished, you could also be getting ready for a wedding, it depends only on you...”

“How come?” I asked. “Maybe you mean a match for my Tzeitl?”

“A perfect fit!”

“Is it at least a worthy match?” I asked, thinking meanwhile: Won’t it be a fine thing if he means Leizer-Wolf the butcher!

“Cut and sewn to measure!” he retorted in tailors’ talk, still looking off to where the girls were.

“From where, for instance,” I asked him, “is this match of yours, from what parts? If he smells of a butcher shop I want to hear and see nothing of him!”

“God forbid,” he answered, “by no means does he even begin to smell of a butcher shop. You know him very well, Reb Tevye!”

“Is this really a straight thing?” I asked.

“And how,” said he, “straight! Straighter than straight! It is, as they say, merry, cheerful and lively—cut just right and sewn expertly!”

“So who is the man, tell me?” I asked.

“Who is the man?” repeated Motl, his eyes still on the barn. “The man is, Reb Tevye ... you must understand—it is I myself.”

No sooner had he said these words than I jumped to my feet as if scalded, and he after me, and so we stood face to face like ruffled-up roosters.

“Either you’ve gone crazy, or just simply lost your mind! You are the matchmaker, the in-law and the bridegroom all in one, that is, a whole wedding with your own musicians! I’ve never,” said I, “heard anywhere that a young man should be his own matchmaker!”

“As regards what you say, Reb Tevye, about me being crazy—let all our enemies go crazy, I still have, you may believe me, all my wits about me. One doesn’t have to be crazy to want to marry your Tzeitl. For example, Leizer-Wolf, who is the richest man in our town, also wanted to take her, even without a dowry... Do you think it’s a secret? The whole *shtetl* already knows it! And as for your saying that I have come alone, without a matchmaker—you simply amaze me, Reb Tevye! After all, you are a man who knows something of the world. But why beat about the bush?



This is the story: your daughter Tzeitl and I pledged our troth more than a year ago.”

If someone had stabbed me to the heart I would have felt much better than when I heard these words: first of all, how comes he, Motl the Tailor, to be Tevye’s son-in-law? Secondly, what kind of talk is this: they had pledged their troth, given each other their word to marry? And what about me? So I said to him:

“Don’t I have some say where it concerns my child, or nobody asks me at all?”

“God forbid!” cried Motl. “That’s just the reason why I came to have a talk with you, for I heard that Leizer-Wolf had proposed a match, and I have loved your daughter for over a year already.”

“So if Tevye has a daughter named Tzeitl and your name is Motl Kamzoil and you are a tailor, then what can you have against her that you should dislike her?” I asked.

“No,” said he, “that’s not what I mean, I mean an altogether different thing. I wanted to tell you that I have been in love with your daughter for more than a year and that your daughter loves me and that we have pledged our word to each other to marry. I’ve wanted to come and talk the matter over with you several times, but have been putting it off for later, until I lay a few rubles aside to buy a sewing machine, and after that get myself decently clothed, since nowadays any self-respecting young man has to have two suits and several good shirts.”

“Oh, get lost with your childish reasoning!” I shouted at him. “What will you do after the wedding, throw your teeth up into the rafters, or maybe feed your wife with shirts?”

“Eh, I really am surprised at you, Reb Tevye, that you should say such things! I mean, it seems to me that when you got married you owned no brick mansion,

and yet... One thing or another—whatever happens to the Children of Israel will happen to Reb Israel. After all, I am a bit of a craftsman, too.”

To make a long story short—he talked me into giving my consent. After all, why kid ourselves—how do all Jewish children get married? If one were to look at these things too closely, people of our class would never get married at all.

Only one thing troubled me, and I couldn't for the life of me understand it: what did it mean—they had given their word to each other? They themselves! What has the world come to? A boy meets a girl and says to her: “Let's get engaged, give each other our word to get married.” That's simply wanton behavior!

However, when I took a look at my Motl, as he stood there with his head bowed, like a sinner, I saw that he was in full earnest, not trying any trickery, and then I had second thoughts. Let's look at the matter in another way. Why am I putting on such airs? Am I of such noble descent—Reb Tzotsele's grandson—or am I giving my daughter such a great dowry, or a splendid outfit? Alas! Yes, Motl Kamzoil is really a tailor, but he is a fine young man, hard-working, can earn his wife's bread, and an honest boy, too, so what have I against him? Tevye, I told myself, raise no foolish objections, and say, as it is written in the Good Book: “*I have forgiven you*”—I wish you happiness!

Yes, but what's to be done about my old woman? She'll make such a scene! How can I reconcile her to this match?

“You know what, Motl?” I said to the young suitor, “you go back home, I'll fix up things here meanwhile, have a talk with this one, that one. As it is written in the Book of Esther, ‘*The drinking was according to law*’—everything must be considered. And tomorrow, God willing, if you haven't changed your mind, we'll probably see each other.”

“Change my mind?” he shouted. “Me change my mind? I shouldn’t live to leave this spot, I should turn into a stone, a bone!”

“What’s the use of swearing to me,” said I, “when I believe you without your oath? Go in good health, and a good night to you, and may you have pleasant dreams.”

I went to bed, too, but sleep wouldn’t come; my head was almost splitting as I devised one plan after another, until at last I hit on the right one. What was this plan? Listen and you’ll hear what Tevye can think up!

Around midnight, when the whole house was fast asleep, one snoring, another whistling, I suddenly started yelling at the top of my voice: “Help! Help! Help!!!” Naturally, my screams woke the whole family, first of all—Golda...

“God be with you, Tevye,” she says, shaking me, “wake up, what’s going on, why are you screaming?”

I open my eyes, pretend to be looking around on all sides, and exclaim, as if terrified: “Where is she?”

“Where is who—whom are you looking for?”

“Frumeh-Soreh,” I answer, “Frumeh-Soreh, Leizer-Wolf’s wife was standing here just now...”

“You must be out of your head with a fever, Tevye, God save you!” exclaims my wife. “Leizer-Wolf’s Frumeh-Soreh, may she rest in peace, passed over to the other world long ago.”

“Yes,” say I, “I know that she died, but still she stood right here just now by my bed and spoke to me, she grasped me by the throat and wanted to strangle me!”

“God save you, Tevye, what are you babbling about?” says my wife. “You saw a dream—spit three times and tell me the dream, and I’ll interpret it for you as a good omen.”

“Long may you live, Golda,” say I, “for having woken me up, otherwise I might have died on the spot from fright. Give me a drink of water and I’ll tell you my dream. Only I must implore you, Golda, not to be frightened and think God knows what, because it stands written in our Holy Books that only three parts of a dream may sometimes come true, while all the rest is nonsense, falsehood...”

“First of all,” I said, “I dreamed that we were having a celebration, I don’t know whether it was a betrothal party or a wedding. There were many people, both men and women, the rabbi and the *shokhet*, and musicians, too... Meanwhile, the door opens and in comes your Grandmother Tzeitl, may she rest in peace...”

Upon hearing about Grandmother Tzeitl my wife went pale as a sheet and cried:

“What was her face like and what was she wearing?!”

“A face she had,” I said, “I would wish on all our enemies, yellow as wax, and she was wearing, naturally, a white shroud. ‘*Mazl-tov! Mazl-tov!*’ she said to me. ‘I am happy that you have chosen for your Tzeitl, who carries my name, such a fine and decent bridegroom, his name is Motl Kamzoil. He was named after my Uncle Mordecai, and although he is a tailor, he is an honest boy...’”

“Where does a tailor come into our family?” asked Golda. “There are *melameds* in our family, cantors, blacksmiths, gravediggers, and just poor people, but, God forbid, nary a tailor nor cobbler!”

“Don’t you interrupt me, Golda,” said I, “probably your Grandmother Tzeitl knows better than you do... Upon hearing such congratulations from Grandmother Tzeitl I said to her: ‘Why do you say, Granny, that Tzeitl’s betrothed is called Motl and that he is a tailor

when actually his name is Leizer-Wolf and he is a butcher?’

“‘Oh, no,’ said Grandmother Tzeitl once more, ‘no, Tevye, your Tzeitl’s bridegroom is Motl, he is a tailor and with him she’ll live to a ripe old age, God willing, in honor and riches...’

“‘All right, Granny,’ said I to her, ‘but what is to be done about Leizer-Wolf? I gave him my word only yesterday!..’

“No sooner had I uttered these last words than Grandmother Tzeitl vanished and in her place there appeared Leizer-Wolf’s Frumeh-Soreh and addressed me in the following manner: ‘Reb Tevye! I have always held you to be an honest man, a learned and virtuous man. But how comes it,’ said she, ‘that you should do such a thing, that you should want your daughter Tzeitl to be my heiress, to live in my house, keep my keys, put on my coat, wear my jewelry, my pearls?’

“‘It isn’t my fault,’ said I, ‘your Leizer-Wolf wanted it that way...’

“‘Leizer-Wolf?’ she screamed. ‘Leizer-Wolf will come to a bad end, and your Tzeitl... A pity, Reb Tevye, on your daughter; she won’t live with him for more than three weeks, I’ll come to her at night and take her by the throat like this...’ And with these words she began to strangle me, so that if you hadn’t woken me up I would already have been far, far away...”

“‘Tfu, tfu, tfu!’” spat out my wife three times. “May it fall into the river, may it sink into the earth, may it crawl into attics, may it rest in the forest, but it shouldn’t harm us and our children! A wild and evil dream, may it fall on the butcher’s head and on his hands and feet! He isn’t worth Motl Kamzoil’s littlest fingernail, even though Motl is a tailor, because if he was named after Uncle Mordecai he is most certainly

not a born tailor. And since Grandmother, may she rest in peace, has taken the trouble to come back from the other world to congratulate us we must say that this is probably for the best and it is just as it should be, in a lucky hour. *Amen Selah!*”

To make a long story short I tell you that I must have been stronger than iron that night if I didn't die of laughter lying there under my blanket... “*Praised be He who did not create me a woman*”—a woman is always a woman...

Next day, of course, we celebrated their betrothal, and soon after that the wedding—almost at one stroke. The young couple now live quite contentedly: he plies his trade, goes around in Boiberik from *dacha* to *dacha* picking up work, she is busy day and night with the cooking and baking, washing and cleaning and fetching water from the well, and they barely make enough for bread; if I didn't bring them some dairy food from time to time, or a few *groszy*, things wouldn't have been at all good; but go talk to her: she says—knock on wood—that she is as happy as can be, only her Motl should be in good health.

So go and argue with today's children! It's like I told you at the beginning—“*I have raised children.*” You work your fingers to the bone for them, bash your head against the wall, but “*they haven't obeyed me*”—they insist that they know better. No, say what you will, but today's children are too clever!

But I'm afraid I've tried your patience this time more than ever before. Don't hold it against me, live in good health always.

1899

## HODEL

You are surprised, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, that Tevye hasn't been seen such a long time? You say he has greatly changed, his hair has gone grey? Why, if you only knew what troubles, what heartache this Tevye has been having lately! As it is written: "*Man is born of dust, and to dust he returneth*"—man is weaker than a fly and stronger than iron... A real character out of a book, that's me! Wherever some pestilence, some misfortune or trouble crops up—it never dares miss me! Why is this so, can you tell me? Maybe it is because I am a trusting person and take everyone at his word? Tevye forgets what our wise men have warned us of thousands of times: "*Believe him but keep an eye on him*", which in plain language means: "Don't trust a dog." But what can I do, I ask you, if such is my nature?

As you know, I am a great optimist and never lodge any complaints with the Eternal One. Whatever He ordains is good—for even if one did try to complain, would it be of any use? Since we say: "*My soul is for Thee and my body is Thine*", then what does man know and what is he worth? I always argue with her, with my old woman: "Golda," I say, "you're sinning! We have a *midrash*..."

"What's your *midrash* to me," she says, "we have a daughter of a marriageable age and after this daughter there come, knock on wood, another two daughters, and after these two—another one, let no evil eye fall on them!"

"Pshaw, Golda, that's nonsense," say I. "This, too, was foreseen by our wise men. There's a *midrash* for this that says..."

But she won't let me talk: "Daughters, grownup

daughters, are of themselves a good *midrash!*” Go argue with a woman!

So you see that I have, knock on wood, a choice of merchandise, real good wares, I can’t complain—one girl is prettier than the other. It isn’t for me to praise my own children, but I hear what the world says: “Beauties!” And the prettiest is the second one, Hodel is her name, she is next after Tzeitl, the one who fell in love with a tailor, if you remember, and so cooked her own goose. As for looks—this second daughter of mine, Hodel, I mean—what shall I say? She is, as it is written in our sacred Book of Esther, “*of beautiful form and fair to look upon*”—shines like gold! Besides, as bad luck would have it, she has to have a head, too, reads and writes Yiddish and Russian, and as for books—she swallows them whole! You may well ask: what is there in common between Tevye’s daughter and books, when her father deals in cheese and butter? That’s just what I ask them, the fine young men, I mean, who haven’t got a pair of pants, begging your pardon, they can call their own, but they have an urge to study. As we say in the *Haggadah*: “*We are all sages*”—everybody wants to learn, everybody wants to study. Go ask them: study what? Why? Goats should know as much about jumping into a neighbor’s garden! Why, they aren’t even permitted to enroll anywhere! Hands off!—shoo, away from the butter, kitty!

But you should see *how* they study! And who? Children of workmen—of tailors, of cobblers—so help me God!

Off they go to Yehupetz, or to Odessa, “lodge” in garrets, eat plagues and wash them down with fevers, for months on end don’t as much as look a piece of meat in the eye, six of them pool their money to buy one loaf and a herring and—heigh-ho, make merry, paupers!..



In short, one such boy landed in our corner of the world, not far from here; I used to know his father, he was a cigarette-maker, as poor as poor can be. If our great sage Reb Jochanan Hasendler was not ashamed to sew boots, there is nothing wrong with having a father who rolls cigarettes.

One thing, however, troubles me: why should a poor man be so anxious to learn, to study? True, the devil didn't catch him, he has a good head on his shoulders, a very good head. His name is Perchik—"little pepper", but we translated it into Yiddish as Feferl—peppercorn. He really does look like a pepper, you should see him: a wizened, black and homely creature, but chock-full of brains, and with a tongue—real brimstone!

Well, here is what happened one day as I was driving home from Boiberik. I'd sold my wares, a full transport of cheese and butter and cream and various greens. Sitting in my wagon I lost myself, as I often do, in thoughts of heavenly things, of this and that, of the rich people from Yehupetz who had it so good, knock on wood, so good, and of Teveye the *shlimazl* and his little horse who both slaved throughout life, and so on.

It was summertime, the sun was hot, the flies were biting, and the world all around me was a delight, vast and open. I felt like getting up and flying, or stretching out and swimming!..

Meanwhile, I looked around and saw a lad striding on foot through the sand, carrying a bundle under his arm, sweating and out of breath.

"*Rise, Yokel, son of Flekel!*" I cried to him. "Here, come along, I'll give you a lift, my wagon is empty. How is it written in our Book? *'If you see the ass belonging to a friend of yours lying under its burden you shall not pass it by'*—all the more so a human being."

So he laughs and climbs into my wagon.

"From where, for instance," I ask him, "does a young man pace?"

"From Yehupetz."

"What has a lad like you to do in Yehupetz?"

"A lad like me is taking examinations."

"And what profession," I ask, "may a lad like you be studying for?"

"A lad like me," he says, "isn't sure himself yet what he is studying for."

"If that is the case," say I, "why does a lad like you trouble his head in vain?"

"Don't you worry, Reb Tevye," retorts he, "such a lad as I knows what he is doing."

"Since you know who *I* am," I say, "then why not tell me, for instance, who *you* are?"

"Who am I? I am a human being."

"I see," say I, "that you're not a horse! I mean, *whose* are you?"

"Whose should I be? I am God's."

"That I know—that you are God's," I say. "It is written in our Books, '*All living things are His.*' What I mean is from whom do you stem; are you one of ours, or maybe from Lithuania?"

"I *stem*," says he, "from our forefather Adam, but I *come* from this neighborhood, you know me."

"So who is your father, come on, tell me!"

"My father," says he, "was called Perchik."

"Phoo," I spit in annoyance, "did you have to torture me so long? So you are the son of Perchik the cigarette-maker?"

"So I am the son of Perchik the cigarette-maker," he admits.

"And you study," I say, "in the 'classes'?"

"And I study," says he, "in the 'classes'."

"All right," say I, "*Adam* is a man and '*tzipur*' is

a bird, but tell me, my jewel, what, for instance, do you live on?"

"I live on what I eat."

"Aha," say I, "that's good; so what do you eat?"

"Anything I can get."

"I understand, you're not finicky: if there is something to eat you eat, if not—you bite your lip and go to bed hungry. But this is all worthwhile—as long as you can study in your 'classes'. You think you're equal to the rich boys of Yehupetz? As the verse goes: '*All are beloved, all are chosen.*' "

And I went on talking to him in this manner, giving him chapter and verse.

But you have another guess coming if you think he listened meekly: "They won't live to see the day I equal myself with them, those rich Yehupetz brats! To hell with them!"

"It seems to me that you really have it in for those rich people! I'm afraid they must have divided your father's inheritance among themselves!"

"Let me tell you that I and you and all of us possibly have a large share in *their* inheritance," said he.

"You know what—let your enemies speak for you. I notice only one thing: you are not a pampered young man and your tongue needs no sharpening; if you have the time, come over to my house this evening, we'll talk a little and you'll have supper with us."

Of course, I didn't have to repeat my invitation; he arrived in the evening, right on the dot—when the borsht was already on the table and the dairy *knishes* were frying in the oven.

"If you wish," I said to him, "wash your hands and say grace, if not—you can eat unwashed—I'm not God's steward, I won't be beaten in the other world for your sins."

As I talked to him I felt that somehow I was

attracted to this little man; just what it was I don't know myself, but drawn to him I was. I like people with whom one can exchange a few words, sometimes a proverb, sometimes a *midrash*, or discuss heavenly things, this, that, and another—that's the kind of person Tevye is.

From that day on my young man began to drop in almost every evening. He had a few private pupils, so as soon as he had finished with his lessons he would come over to me to relax and enjoy himself a little. You can imagine what he got for his lessons if our wealthiest man is used to paying no more than three rubles a month, and the teacher has to, moreover, help him with his paper-work—read telegrams, write addresses, and even run errands sometimes. And why not? As it is written: "*With heart and soul*"—if you eat bread you should know for what. He was lucky, though, that he ate with us most of the time, and for this he gave lessons to my daughters; as the Book says: "*Eye for eye*"—a slap for a slap.

In this manner he became like a member of our family. The children would ply him with glasses of milk, while my old woman took care that he should always have a clean shirt and a pair of darned socks. That was when we changed his name to Feferl—the Yiddish word for the Russian *perchik*; it may truly be said that the whole family came to love him as if he were our own kin, for by nature, I'll let you know, he is really a fine person, nothing underhand about him: "*Mine is yours, yours is mine.*"

There was only one thing I didn't like about him: his disappearances. All of a sudden he would up and go, and—"*The child vanished*"—no more Feferl!

"Where have you been, my dear song-bird?" He's as mute as a fish.

I don't know about you, but I hate a person with

secrets. What I like is, as they say, to *talk* and to *tell*. But one must give him his due: once he did start talking it was "*who by fire, who by water will be destroyed*"—fire and water! What a tongue—Heaven preserve us! He spoke "*against the Lord and against His annointed, let us break their bands asunder*". The most important thing, of course, was breaking the bands. Such wild ideas he had, absurd, crazy plans, everything topsy-turvy, upside-down! For instance, a rich man, according to his crazy notions, is worthless, while a poor man, quite the opposite, is the real goods, and if he is a workman he tops the stack, because he works with his own hands, and that's what is most important.

"Still," I said, "that doesn't come up to money."

This made him furious and he tried to convince me that money was the root of all evil on earth. Money, he said, is the source of all the falseness in the world, and everything that goes on is not fair, and because of money injustice reigns over the world. And he cited me thousands of arguments and examples that made no sense to me at all...

"It comes out," I said, "that, according to your crazy reasoning, the fact that my cow is milked and my horse draws loads is also not fair?" Such and other tricky questions I asked him, bringing him up short at every step, as Tevye can! But my Feferl also knows how to argue—and does he know! I wish God hadn't granted him such skill!

If Feferl had anything on his heart he immediately came out with it. We were sitting outside my house one evening, discussing all the aspects of these matters—it's called philosophy. Suddenly he remarked, Feferl, that is: "You know what, Reb Tevye? You have very bright daughters!"

"Really, I thank you for the news, they have whom to take after," was my retort.

“One of them,” he went on, “the eldest one, is very sensible, a human being in the full sense of the word.”

“That I know without your telling me,” said I, “the fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

That’s what I said to him, but my heart, naturally, melted with pleasure, for what father, I ask you, doesn’t like to hear his children praised? How was I to foresee that this praise would grow into a fiery emotion, Heaven protect us!

Well, “*And it was night and it became day*”—the time was between day and night. I was driving along in Boiberik from *dacha* to *dacha* when somebody stopped me. I took a look—it was Ephraim the Matchmaker. This Ephraim, you must know, is a matchmaker like any other matchmaker, that is, he arranges matches. Upon seeing me in Boiberik he, Ephraim I mean, stopped me, saying:

“Excuse me, Reb Teveye, there is something I have to tell you.”

“My pleasure, only let it be a good thing,” I said and stopped my horse.

“You, Reb Teveye, have a daughter!” he said.

“I have,” said I, “seven daughters. God bless them.”

“I know,” said he, “that you have seven, I have seven myself.”

“So we have,” said I, “a total of fourteen daughters.”

“All right,” he went on, “let’s finish with the joking. What I have to tell you is this: I am, as you know, a matchmaker, and I have a match for you, a young man who is something special from special-land! Top quality!”

“And what,” asked I, “do you call something special, top quality? If he is a tailor, a cobbler, or a *melamed*, then let him stay where he is, and for me, as it is written, *‘freedom and deliverance will come*

from another place'—I'll find my equal somewhere else, as the *Midrash* says."

"Eh, Reb Tevye, you're starting on your *midrashim*? Before talking with you one has to tighten his belt! You shower the world with *midrashim*. Better hear out what a match Ephraim the Matchmaker wants to offer you; you just listen and keep quiet." And with this he began to read me his bill of sale.

What can I say? Something really out of the ordinary. In the first place, he comes of a good family, he's no upstart without kith or kin; this, you should know, is the main thing for me, since I am no nobody myself: in my family there are all kinds of people—"*spotted, striped, and speckled*", as it stands in the Bible; we have just plain people, we have workers and we have men of property... Then, the young man is a scholar who is well-versed in the fine little letters. With me this is no small matter because I hate an ignoramus as I hate pork! To me an unlettered man is a thousand times worse than a rowdy; as far as I'm concerned you may go around without a cap, or even upside-down, but if you know what Rashi says you are already one of mine! That's the kind of person Tevye is!

"Then," went on Ephraim, "this man is rich, chock-full of money, he drives in a carriage drawn by a pair of fiery steeds—you even see the smoke!"

Well, thought I to myself, that isn't a bad thing, either. Better a rich man than a pauper. As it is written: "*Poverty is fitting for Israel.*" God himself hates a pauper, otherwise a poor man wouldn't be poor.

"Well," asked I, "what else?"

"What else? He wants to become related to you—he's so eager, he's almost dead! That is, it's not exactly you he has in mind, he's dying to marry your daughter, he wants to marry a beauty, that's what he wants..."

“Oh, that’s the way it is?” said I. “Let him go on wanting. But who is he, this rarity of yours—a bachelor, a widower, a divorcee, a black year?”

“He is a bachelor,” said Ephraim, “although not so young, but a bachelor.”

“And what,” I asked, “is his holy name?”

That the matchmaker wouldn’t tell me, go take and roast him alive!

“Bring her,” said he, “to Boiberik, then I’ll tell you.”

“What do you mean—I should bring her? You can bring a horse to the fair, or a cow to be sold!”

Well, matchmakers, you know, can persuade a wall. We fixed a date: after next Saturday I would bring her, God willing, to Boiberik.

All kind of sweet thoughts came into my mind. I already imagined my Hodel driving in a carriage drawn by a pair of fiery steeds, and the whole world envying me, not so much because of the carriage and horses, as because of the benefits I bring the world through my rich daughter; I help the fallen with loans without interest—I let this one have twenty-five rubles, that one fifty, another one a hundred; as you say, other people have souls, too.

So I meditated, driving home towards evening, giving the horse the whip and talking horse-language: “Horsie,” I said, “giddy-up, giddy-up, hey, now just make with the legs a little faster, then you’ll get your portion of oats sooner; as the Bible says: *‘Without food there’s no learning’*—if you don’t grease the axles the wheels won’t turn.”

As I was talking in this manner to my horse I noticed two people coming out of the woods—a man and a woman, apparently. They were walking close to each other, talking very earnestly. Who could they be, I thought as I peered at them through the fiery rays of



the setting sun. I could swear that it was Feferl! With whom was he strolling, the *shlimazl*, so late? I shielded my eyes with my hand and looked closer: who was the female? Eh, doesn't she look like Hodel? Yes, indeed, as I live—it's Hodel! So this is how they study grammar and read books? Oh, Tevye, aren't you a fool! With such thoughts I stopped my horse and called out to the young people:

"A good evening to you, and what's the latest news about war? How come you're here all of a sudden? Whom are you waiting for? The day that's gone by?"

Upon hearing such a greeting my young couple stopped—"Neither in Heaven nor on Earth"—which means neither here nor there, shamefaced and blushing.

They stood so for a few minutes without uttering a word, their eyes downcast; then they raised their eyes and began to look at me, and I at them, and they at each other.

"Well," said I, "you're looking at me as if you hadn't seen me for a long time. It seems to me that I'm the selfsame Tevye as before. Not changed a hair."

I spoke to them half in anger, half in jest. At last my daughter Hodel, her face redder than before, said:

"Father, we should be congratulated."

"*Mazl-tov* to you," said I, "with good luck may you live. What's the celebration? Did you find a treasure in the woods? Or maybe you've just had a narrow escape from a great danger?"

"We should be congratulated," said Feferl, "we are betrothed."

"What do you mean," asked I, "by 'betrothed'?"

"Don't you know what 'betrothed' means?" he asked. "Betrothed means that I am engaged to marry her and she is engaged to marry me."

Speaking so Feferl looked right into my eyes. But I also looked straight into *his* eyes, and I said:

“When was your betrothal-party? And why didn’t you invite me to the joyous event? I’m something of a relative, am I not?”

You understand, I joked with them, but worms were eating me, preying on my soul. But no matter, Tevye is not a woman, Tevye likes to hear out things to the end...

“I don’t understand,” said I, “a match without a matchmaker, without a marriage contract?”

“What do we need matchmakers for?” he, Feferl, asked. “We’ve been engaged for a long time already.”

“Really? Divine miracles! So why did you keep quiet about it until now?”

“Why should we shout?” he asked. “We wouldn’t have told you today, either, if not for the fact that we’ll soon be parting, so we’ve decided that before this happens we must get married...”

This, as you understand, upset me greatly. “*The water reached up to the neck*”—I was hurt to the quick. His saying that they were engaged—well, that I could endure—how is it written? “*A’ave*”—love—he wants her, she wants him. But marriage? What words, “We must get married!” Gibberish!

It seemed that the bridegroom-to-be understood that I’d become a bit unhinged, so he said:

“See, Reb Tevye, this is how things stand: I have to go away from here.”

“When are you leaving?”

“Very soon.”

“Where, for instance, are you going?”

“This,” said he, “I can’t tell you, it’s a secret...”

You hear? It’s a secret! How do you like that?! Along comes a Feferl, a small, dark, homely creature, presents himself as a bridegroom, wants to marry my daughter, is about to leave and won’t say whereto! Isn’t it galling!?

“All right, a secret is a secret,” said I, “everything is a secret with you. Only let me understand this, brother: you, after all, are a man of honor and are immersed in humaneness from head to toe. So how does it figure with you that you should all of a sudden, out of the blue, take Tevye’s daughter and turn her into a grass widow? This is what you call honor? Humaneness? I’m lucky that you haven’t robbed me or set my house on fire...”

“Father!” exclaimed my daughter Hodel. “You just can’t imagine how happy we are, he and I, that we’ve let out our secret to you. It’s a load off our hearts. Come, Father, let’s kiss each other.”

Without more ado both of them embraced me, she on one side, he on the other, and they started kissing me and hugging me, and I them, and, evidently out of great zeal, the two of them began to kiss each other! A spectacle, I tell you, a real theater!

“Maybe it’s already enough,” said I, “of kissing? It’s time to talk of practical matters.”

“What practical matters?”

“A dowry,” said I, “clothing, wedding expenses, this, that, and the other...”

“We need nothing,” said they, “neither this, nor that, nor the other.”

“Then what is it you do need?”

“We need,” they said, “only the wedding ceremony.”

Did you ever hear the like?

Well, in short, my words had as much weight with them as last year’s snow, they had their wedding! Of course, you understand that it wasn’t at all the sort of wedding that suited Tevye. What a wedding!.. A very quiet ceremony—woe is me!

Moreover, there was my wife, too—as one says, a blister on a boil! She nagged me, pestered me to tell

her the reason for such a harum-scarum, hasty wedding. Go explain a fire to a woman! So I had to invent a maudlin story about an inheritance, a rich aunt in Yehupetz, all lies, all for the sake of peace.

On the same day, that is, a few hours after this fine wedding, I hitched up my horse and wagon and the three of us got in—that is, I myself, my daughter and he, the new-fledged son-in-law of mine, and we went to the railway station in Boiberik. Sitting in my wagon I glanced stealthily at the couple and thought to myself: What a great God we have and how wondrously He rules this world of His! What strange, absurd beings He has created! Here you have a young couple just from under the wedding canopy: he is going away, the devil knows where, but she is staying behind—and not a single tear do you see, for appearance's sake at least! But no matter, Tevye is not a woman, Tevye has time, he can wait and see what the outcome will be...

Well, I saw a couple of young men, fine fellows with worn-out boots who came to the train to say goodbye to my song-bird. One of them was dressed like a peasant, I beg your pardon, with his shirt hanging out over his trousers; a whispered conversation took place between him and my son-in-law.

Look at that, Tevye, I said to myself, maybe you've gotten mixed up with a gang of horse-thieves, purse-snatchers, lock-breakers, or counterfeiter?..

Driving home from Boiberik with Hodel I couldn't keep these thoughts to myself. She burst out laughing and tried to convince me that these were very fine young men, honest, extremely honest, men whose entire lives were dedicated to the welfare of others, who didn't think of themselves at all.

"The one with the shirt," said she, "comes from a most respectable family, he left his wealthy parents

in Yehupetz and won't take a broken *grosz* from them."

"Really? Actually a very fine young man, as I live!" said I. "In addition to the shirt hanging out over his pants and his long hair, if God should help him to acquire an accordion, or a dog to run after him—that, indeed, would be most extremely charming!"

With such talk I was getting even with her, and with him, too, pouring out the bitterness of my heart, that is, on the poor girl...

And she? Nothing! "*Esther held her peace.*" Makes as if she doesn't understand.

I say: "Feferl." She comes out with: "For the common weal, workers..." A hopeless thing!

"What's the use," said I, "of your 'common weal' and your workers if everything is a secret with you? There is a proverb that says: Where there's a secret there's thievery... So tell me, daughter, why did he leave—Feferl, I mean—and where did he go?"

"Anything else," said she, "but not this. You'd better not ask about it. Believe me, when the time comes you'll know everything. God willing, you'll hear, and perhaps very soon, many things, much good news!"

"Amen," said I, "let it be from your lips to God's ear. But our enemies should know as much of health as I have even an inkling of what is going on here with you and what the play-acting means!"

"That's just the trouble—you won't understand."

"Why so? Is it so hard to understand? It seems to me that I understand more difficult things."

"This cannot be understood," said she, "with the mind alone. It must be felt, felt with the heart..."

That is how my daughter Hodel spoke to me, and while she talked her face flamed and her eyes burned. Heaven preserve these daughters of mine! When they

get involved in something it's with mind and heart, with body and soul!

In short, I'll tell you that a week went by, two, three, four, five, six and seven weeks—“*Neither voice nor money*”—no letters, no messages.

“Feferl is lost!” As I said this I glanced at my Hodel: there was not a drop of blood in her face, poor girl, and she went about the house looking for something to do, trying, apparently, to drown her grief in work. Still, she never even as much as mentioned his name! Hush, quiet, just as if there had never even been a Feferl in the world!

However, one day, when I came home, my Hodel's eyes were swollen from tears. I started to ask questions and found out that not long ago she had had a visitor—a long-haired *shlimazl*, who had spoken in secret to her. Aha, thought I, that must be the fellow who left his rich parents and wears his shirt over his pants... So without more ado I called my Hodel out into the yard and asked her bluntly:

“Tell me, daughter, have you already heard from him?”

“Yes.”

“Where is he then, your predestined one?”

“He is,” says she, “far away.”

“What is he doing?”

“He's in prison!”

“In prison?”

“In prison.”

“Where is he in prison? Why is he in prison?”

No answer. She looks me straight in the face and keeps quiet.

“Only tell me, daughter mine,” said I, “as I understand, he is in prison not for robbery; in that case, since he is no thief and no swindler, I don't understand why he is in prison, for what good deeds?”

She was silent. "*Esther held her peace.*" Well, thought I, you don't want to tell me—don't; he is your affliction, not mine. Serves him right! But inside, in my heart, I carried a pain, I am, after all, a father; doesn't it say in our prayers: "*As a father pities his children*"—a father is always a father.

Well, the evening of *Hashono Rabo* came. On a holiday it's my custom to take a rest, and my horse, too, rests. As the Torah says, "*Thou shalt rest from thy labors and so shall thy wife and thy ass...*" Besides, there is not much to do in Boiberik: it needs no more than one blow of the *shophar* to make all the *dachniki*, the summer people, scatter like mice during a famine, and Boiberik becomes a waste. At such times I like to be at home, to sit outdoors on the *prizba*\*. This is the best time for me. The days are gifts. The sun is no longer as hot as a lime kiln, it caresses you softly, a pleasure to the soul. The forest is still green, the pines still exude their pungent scent, and it seems to me that the forest takes on a festive look, that it is God's own tabernacle, his *sukkah*; this, I think, is where God celebrates *Sukkoth*—here, not in the cities where there is such a tumult, with people rushing back and forth, panting for breath, all for the sake of a piece of bread, and all one hears is money, money, and money!..

This night of *Hashono Rabo* was truly like Paradise: the sky was blue, the stars twinkled and blinked as if they were human eyes. Once in a while a star would shoot by, as an arrow flies from a bow, leaving for an instant a green streak—a falling star, somebody's luck had fallen. There are as many lucks as there are stars in the sky... Jewish luck... I hope it isn't my bad luck,

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\* A mound, or ledge, of earth banked against the outer walls of peasant houses (Ukrainian).—*Tr.*

was my thought, and this brought to mind Hodel. During the last few days she had become brighter, livelier, and looked altogether different. Somebody must have brought her a letter from him, from her *shlimazl*. I'd have liked to know what he wrote, but I didn't want to ask. She said nothing, so I kept quiet, too: Tevye is not a woman, Tevye can wait...

As I sat thinking about Hodel she herself came out and sat down by my side on the *prizba*. Glancing around, she turned to me and said, in a low voice:

"Do you hear, *Tateh*? I have to tell you something: today I am going to say goodbye to you ... forever."

She said these words almost in a whisper, I could hardly hear her; her look was so strange—I'll never forget it. Meanwhile a thought flitted through my mind: She wants to drown herself!

Why did I think of drowning? Because—may this never happen to us—not long ago a Jewish girl, she lived not far from us, fell in love with a peasant boy and because of this boy... You understand already... These troubles affected her mother so that she took sick and died, and her father spent everything he had and became a pauper. The peasant boy changed his mind and married somebody else. So she, the girl, I mean, went to the river, threw herself into the water and drowned...

"What do you mean," I asked, "that you are going to say goodbye forever?" As I spoke I looked at the ground, so that she shouldn't see how upset I was.

"It means," said she, "that early tomorrow morning I am going away and we'll never see each other again... Never..."

Upon hearing these words I felt a little better.



Thank God for this at least—it might be worse, while better has no limit.

“Where, for instance, are you going—if I might have the honor of knowing?” I asked.

“I’m going,” said she, “to him.”

“To him? So where is he now?”

“For the time being,” she said, “he is still in prison; but soon he will be deported.”

“So you’re going, you mean, to say goodbye to him?” I asked, playing the fool.

“No,” she answered, “I’m following him out there.”

“Out there?.. Where is this ‘out there’, what is the name of the place?”

“We don’t know yet exactly what the place is called, but it is very far,” she said, “far and full of terrible dangers.”

That’s what my Hodel told me, and it seemed to me that she spoke with exaltation, with great pride, just as if he’d accomplished something so important that he should be awarded a medal weighing at least thirty pounds!.. How was I to answer her? For such things a father gets angry with his child, hands out a couple of slaps or gives the child a good dressing down! However, Tevye is not a woman. To my way of thinking anger raises the devil. So I retorted, as I usually do, with a passage from the Bible:

“I see, my daughter, it is as the Bible says, ‘*Therefore shalt thou abandon...*’ Because of a Feferl you’re abandoning your father and mother and are going away to nobody knows where, somewhere out in a desolate place, on the shore, evidently, of the frozen sea where Alexander the Great sailed and got lost and was stranded on a distant island among savages, as I once read in a story-book...”

I spoke half in jest and half in anger, and all the time my heart wept. But Tevye is not a woman, Tevye

restrains himself. Neither did she, Hodel, lose face: she answered me word for word, quietly, thoughtfully. Tevye's daughters can talk.

Although my head was bowed and my eyes were closed, yet it seemed to me that I saw her, Hodel, that is; I saw that her face was just like the moon, pale and lusterless, and her voice sounded muffled and it trembled... Should I fall on her neck, plead with her, implore her not to go? But I know that it won't help. Oh, these daughters of mine! If they fall in love it's with soul and body, with heart and mind!

Well, we sat out there on the *prizba* for a long time, maybe all night. We were silent most of the time, and when we did speak it was almost not speech—half-words... She spoke and I spoke. I asked her only one thing: where did anyone hear of a girl marrying a fellow just in order to be able to follow him to the devil knows where!?

To this her answer was: "With *him* I don't care—I'll go anywhere, even to the devil knows where!"

I tried to explain to her how foolish this was. So she answered me that I would never be able to understand it. I told her a story about a hen that had hatched ducklings; no sooner did they gain the use of their legs than they took to the water while the poor hen stood clucking on the shore.

"What," asked I, "will you say to that, daughter dear?"

"What," asked she, "can I say? It's a pity on the hen, but because the hen clucks should the ducklings not swim?.."

Can you understand such talk? Tevye's daughter utters no empty words...

Meanwhile time did not stand still. Dawn was already breaking. Inside the house my old woman grumbled. She had already sent for us several times, saying it was high time to go to bed; seeing that this was of no

use she stuck her head out of the window and said to me, with her usual benediction: "Tevye, what's got into you?!"

"Let there be silence, Golda," said I, "as the Bible says, *"Why the uproar?.."* You must have forgotten that it is *Hashono Rabo* tonight? On *Hashono Rabo* our fates are sealed for the coming year, so on *Hashono Rabo* we stay up all night. Now you just do what I tell you, Golda: please kindle the fire in the samovar and let us have tea; meanwhile I'll go and hitch up the horse. I'm taking Hodel to the station."

And then, as my custom is, I made up a new cock-and-bull story about Hodel going to Yehupetz, and from there still further, all on account of that business, the legacy, and it might be that she would stay there over the winter, and maybe even over a winter and summer and another winter. Therefore, said I, we have to give her some food for the journey, some linen, a dress, a few pillows, pillowcases, this, that, and another.

As I ordered my womenfolk around, I told them there should be no weeping, for it was *Hashono Rabo*.

"There is an explicit law against weeping on *Hashono Rabo!*" I said.

Well, they minded me as a cat minds, and there was plenty of crying, and when the time of parting came there was such an uproar, such weeping—the mother, the children, and even she herself, Hodel, particularly when she was saying goodbye to my eldest daughter, Tzeitl. (She and her husband, Motl Kamzoil, always spend the holidays with us.) Both sisters fell on each other's necks—we could barely tear them apart...

I was the only one who didn't break down—I was as firm as steel and iron. I mean, that's just a saying, "steel and iron"; in my heart I was like a boiling samovar, but I showed nothing—fie! Tevye is, after all, not a woman!..

We didn't talk at all on the way to Boiberik, but when we were already near the station I asked her, for the last time, to tell me what, actually, he had done. her Feferl?

"Every thing," said I, "must have some sort of taste."

At this she flared up and swore by all the holiest oaths in the world that he was absolutely innocent of any crime, pure as fine gold.

"He is a man," she said, "who cares nothing about himself. All he did was for the good of others, for the good of the world, above all for the toilers, the working people..."—so be a sage and try to guess what that means!

"He worries about the world?" I asked her. "Then why doesn't the world worry about him if he is such a fine fellow? But please give him my regards, this Alexander the Great of yours. Tell him that I rely on his honor, for he is a man of honor and I trust that he won't deceive my daughter and will write a letter once in a while to her old father..."

You think that as I spoke she didn't fall on my neck and begin to cry?

"Let us say goodbye," she said. "Farewell, *Tateh*, God knows when we will see each other again!"

At this I finally broke down myself... I remembered this very Hodel when she was a baby ... a little child ... I carried her in my arms ... in my arms...

Please excuse me, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, that I ... like an old woman... Oh, if you only knew what a daughter Hodel was ... what a daughter... You should see the letters she writes... A godsend, this Hodel! She ... deep, deep in my heart ... deep, deep, I haven't the words to express what I feel...

You know what, Mr. Sholom Aleichem? Let us better talk of more cheerful things: what's the latest news about the cholera in Odessa?..

1904

## CHAVA

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good"*—whichever way God leads is good. That is, it should be good, for try and become a sage and make things better! Take me—I wanted to be clever, I interpreted Bible verses this way and that way and saw that it was of no use, so I gave it up as a hopeless job and told myself: Tevye, you're a fool! You won't overturn the world. The Almighty gave us *"the pain of bringing up children"*, which means the sorrows inflicted by children should be looked upon as blessings. For instance, my eldest daughter Tzeitl fell in love with the tailor Motl Kamzoi, so have I anything against him? True, he is a simple soul, not very well versed in the fine little letters, I mean, but what can be done? The whole world can't be educated, can it? But he is honest and hard-working, he works, poor man, by the sweat of his brow. They already have, you should only see, a houseful—knock on wood—of bare-bellied young ones, and both of them struggle *"in honor and in riches"*, as the saying goes. But talk with her, she'll tell you that everything is, knock on wood, fine with her, it can't even be better. The only trouble is that there isn't enough food... There you have, so to say, round number one.

Well, and about the second daughter, I mean Hodel, I don't have to tell you, you already know. With her

I gambled and lost, lost her forever! God alone knows whether my eyes will ever behold her again, unless we meet in the next world, in a hundred and twenty years... Whenever I speak of her, of Hodel, I still can't take it, it's the end of my life! Forget her, you say? How can one forget a living person? Especially such a child as Hodel? You should only see the letters she writes to me—your heart would melt! She writes that they are doing quite well out there. He sits in prison and she earns a living. She washes clothes and reads books and visits him every week; she hopes, she says, that the pot will boil over here, in our parts, the sun will rise and everything will brighten, and then he and many others like him will be released, and after that, she says, they will all begin their real work and turn the world upside-down. Well? How do you like that? Fine, isn't it?..

Yes, so what does the Almighty do? He is, after all, "*a gracious and merciful Lord*", so He says to me: "Just you wait, Tevye, I will bring something to pass that'll make you forget all your former troubles..."

And sure enough—this is a story worth hearing. I wouldn't tell it to another person, because the pain is great and the shame is still greater! Only, as it is written in our Book: "*Shall I conceal it from Abraham?*"—I have no secrets from you. Whatever I have on my mind I tell you. But there is one request I want to make: let it remain between the two of us. I tell you once more: the pain is great, but the shame, the shame is still greater!

Well, as it stands in the *Perek*: "*The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to purify a soul*"—God decided to do Tevye a favor, so he went and blessed him with seven female children, daughters, that is, all of them lovely, clever, and beautiful, fresh and healthy—pine trees, I tell you! Oh, if only they had been ugly and ill-

tempered it might have been better for them and healthier for me. Now, I ask you, what is the use of a good horse if it is kept in a stable? What's the good of having beautiful daughters when you're stuck away with them out in a hole where they see no live people except Ivan Poperilo, the headman of the village, or the clerk Fedka Galagan. a tall Gentile fellow with a mane of hair and high boots, and the Russian priest, may his name and his memory be blotted out. I just can't bear to hear his name—not because I am a Jew and he is a Christian priest. On the contrary, we have been well acquainted for many years. That is, we don't visit each other to have a talk, nor, of course, do we wish each other a happy holiday; but, no matter, when we meet we say good morning, a good year, what's new in the world? I hate to get involved in long conversations with him, because they are sure to turn into a discussion: your God, our God. But I don't let him go on—I interrupt with an aphorism and tell him that we have a certain verse in the Bible... So he interrupts me and says that he knows all these verses as well as I do, and perhaps even better, and he begins to recite our Holy Bible in Hebrew to me, with his Gentile pronunciation: "*Bereshit bara alokim*"\*—every time, every time the same thing. So I interrupt him again and tell him that we have a *Midrash*... "The *Midrash*," he says, "is called the *Tal-mud*," and he hates the *Tal-mud* for the *Tal-mud* is sheer trickery... So of course I get good and angry and start laying out anything that comes to my mind. Do you think he cares? Not at all! He looks at me and laughs, combing his beard with his fingers all the while. There is nothing more maddening in the world than the silence of a person you are

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\* "*In the beginning God created...*", the opening words of Genesis (Hebrew).—*Tr.*

shouting at, calling all manner of foul names—and not getting a word back! You are boiling, your bile is rising, while he just sits and smiles! At that time I couldn't understand it, but now I know what that smile meant...

Well, as I was coming home towards evening one day whom should I see standing near my house but the clerk Fedka, talking to my third daughter, Chava, the one who comes after Hodel. Upon seeing me the fellow about-faced, took off his cap to me and left. So I asked Chava:

“What was Fedka doing here?”

“Nothing,” she answered.

“What do you mean by nothing?” I asked.

“We were just talking.”

“What's there for you to talk with Fedka about?”

“We've known each other for a long time.”

“I congratulate you on your acquaintanceship! A wonderful friend—Fedka!” cried I.

“Do you know him then?” she asked. “Do you know who he is?”

“Who he is—that I don't know,” said I, “I haven't seen his family register, however, I do understand that he probably stems from the greatest celebrities: his father must have been either a cowherd, or a watchman, or simply a drunkard.”

To this she, Chava, that is, answered: “What his father was I don't know, to me all people are equal; but that he himself is no ordinary person—that I know for sure.”

“And namely what sort of man may he be? Let me hear.”

“I'd tell you,” said she, “but you won't understand. Fedka—he is a second Gorky.”

“A second Gorky? Then who was the first Gorky?”

“Gorky,” she answered, “is almost the greatest man in the world today.”



“Where does he live,” I asked, “this sage of yours, what is his business and what kind of sermons does he preach?”

“Gorky,” said my daughter, “is a famous writer, an author, a man who creates books, a wonderful, rare, honest person. He also comes from the common folk, he had no schooling at all but is self-educated. Here is his portrait,” she said, taking a small picture out of a pocket and showing it to me.

“So this is he, your saintly man, Reb Gorky? I could swear that I’ve seen him somewhere,” I said, “either at the railway station carrying sacks or in the woods hauling logs.”

“So in your opinion,” said she, “it’s a fault if a man toils with his own hands? Don’t you yourself work hard? And don’t we work hard?”

“Yes, yes,” said I, “you are quite right, in our Law it says: *‘When thou eatest the labor of thine own hands’*—if you don’t work, you won’t eat... Still, I cannot understand what Fedka was doing here. It would give me greater pleasure if you were acquainted with him at a distance; you mustn’t forget *‘Whence thou camest and whither thou goest’*—who you are and who he is.”

Her answer to this was: “God created all men equal.”

“Yes, yes, God created Adam our forefather in his own likeness, but we shouldn’t forget that each one of us must seek his equal, as it is written: *‘From each according to his means...’*”

“Amazing!” cried she. “For everything you have a quotation! Maybe you can also find one explaining why people divided themselves up into Jews and Gentiles, into lords and slaves, into nobility and beggars?”

“Tut-tut-tut, daughter!” said I. “It seems to me that you’ve gone too far—strayed, as they say, into the *‘sixth millennium’*.”

I explained to her that this had been the way of the world since *“before the six days of Creation”*.

So she asked: “Why should that be the way of the world?”

I answered: “Because that is how God created His world.”

“Why did God create His world so?”

“Eh,” said I, “if we started asking questions—why this and why that—*‘there would be no end to it’*, it would be a tale without an end.”

“God gave us reason,” she said, “so that we should ask questions.”

“We have a custom,” said I, “that when a hen begins to crow like a rooster it is immediately taken to the slaughterer, as we say in our benediction: *‘Who gave the rooster the ability to discern between day and night...’*”

“Maybe we’ve already had enough yammering out there?!” shouted my Golda from the house. “The borsht,” she said, “has been standing on the table for an hour already, but he’s still singing Sabbath hymns!”

“Here we have another holiday!” said I. “It’s not for nothing that our wise men said: *‘Seven idle words hath a golem’*—a woman contains nine measures of speech. We’re discussing important matters and she comes along with her milk borsht!”

“The milk borsht,” said she, “may be just as important as all your ‘important matters’.”

“Congratulations! Here we have a new philosopher, directly from under the oven! It isn’t enough that my daughters have become enlightened—now Tevye’s wife has begun to fly through the chimney up into the sky!”

“Talking of the sky,” said Golda, “may the earth swallow you!”

How do you like, for example, such a welcome on an empty stomach?

To make it short, let us leave the prince and turn to the princess—I mean the priest, may his name and memory be forgotten!

One evening I was driving homeward with my empty jugs and crocks; just as I was coming into the village I met the priest coming from the opposite direction in his iron-coated britzka, proudly driving the horses himself, his well-combed beard flowing in the wind. May the ill luck from this encounter fall on your head, I thought to myself.

“Good evening!” said he. “Don’t you recognize me, or what?”

“It’s a sign that you’ll soon become rich,” said I to him, taking off my cap and intending to continue on my way.

“Wait a while, Tevel,” said he. “What’s the great hurry? I have a few words to say to you.”

“Oh,” said I, “if it’s something good—very well, and if it isn’t—keep it for another time.”

“What do you mean by another time?” he asked.

“Another time means when the Messiah comes.”

“But the Messiah,” said he, “has come already.”

“That I have heard from you before, and not once, better tell me, Father, something new.”

“That’s just what I mean to tell you,” said he. “I want to have a talk with you about you yourself, that is, about your daughter.”

This sent a pang through my heart: what had he to do with my daughter?

“My daughters,” said I, “are, God forbid, not the kind of girls you have to speak for, they can stand up for themselves.”

“But this,” said he, “is a matter of which she herself cannot talk, another must speak for her, because it is a most important matter, her future depends on it.”

“Whose concern is the future of my child?” I asked.

“It seems to me that since we are speaking of futures I am a father to my child for a hundred and twenty years, isn’t that so?”

“True,” said he, “you are a father to your child. However, you are blind to her needs. Your child is reaching out for another world, but you don’t understand her, or else you don’t want to understand her!”

“Whether I don’t understand her or don’t want to understand her is another matter,” said I. “This we can have a little talk about. But what has it got to do with you, Father?”

“It has quite a lot to do with me, for she is now under my care,” he answered, looking me straight in the eye and combing his flowing beard with his fingers.

This jolted me, to be sure: “Who? My child is under *your* care? What right have you?” cried I, feeling my temper flaring up.

“Don’t get so worked up, Tevel!” said he with a cold-blooded smile. “Slow down. You know that I am no enemy, God forbid, of yours, even though you are a Jew. You know that I respect Jews, that my heart bleeds for them, for their obstinacy, for their stubborn refusal to understand what is meant for their own good.”

“Don’t you talk to me of our own good, Father,” said I, “for every word I now hear from you is like a drop of deadly poison, like a bullet piercing my heart. If you are, as you say, such a good friend of mine I ask only one favor of you: leave my daughter alone...”

“You are a foolish man,” he retorted, “nothing bad, God forbid, will happen to your daughter. She will be happy—she is going to marry a fine man, I should live such a life.”

“Amen!” said I, forcing myself to laugh, while my heart was a burning Gehenna. “And who may he be,

this bridegroom, if I might have the honor of knowing?"

"You must know him," said the priest, "he is a fine and honest young man, and pretty well educated, although self-taught, and he loves your daughter and wants to marry her, but he can't, for he is not a Jew."

Fedka! was my instant thought, and I felt my head swimming; a cold sweat broke out all over my body, I could barely keep my seat in the wagon. But I wouldn't let him see anything—he won't live to see the day! So I picked up the reins, gave the horse a few lashes and took off without a goodbye—"*departed like Moses*".

When I got home—oh, everything was topsy-turvy! The children were lying with their faces buried in pillows, weeping loudly, Golda was more dead than alive... I looked around for Chava—where is Chava? No Chava!

I knew better—woe is me—than to ask about her. I was beset by the torments of the grave, and a flame of anger burned in me, I don't know against whom... I felt like giving myself a beating... I started yelling at the children and let out the bitterness of my heart on my wife.

I couldn't find a place for myself, so I went out to the stall to feed the horse and found him standing with a leg twisted over the far side of his trough. I grabbed a stick and began laying into the poor beast as if bent on skinning him and breaking all his bones: "May you burn alive, *shlimazl!* May you starve to death—not a single oat grain will you get from me! Troubles, if you like, you may have, and anguish, blows and plagues!.."

Shouting so at the horse I soon caught myself thinking: "*A pity for living things*"—for a poor inno-

cent beast—what do I have against him? I sifted a little chopped straw into the manger and promised the horse that I would show him, God willing, the letter “hay”\* in my prayer-book on the Sabbath.

Then I went back into the house, lay down and buried my head in the pillow. I felt as if my chest had been cut open, my head was splitting from thinking, from trying to understand, to grasp the real meaning of all this. *“How have I sinned and what is my transgression”*—how have I, Tevye, sinned more than the rest of the world that I am punished more than all the Jews? Oh, Almighty God, Lord of the Universe! *“Who are we and what is our life?”* Who am I that you always have me in mind, and never permit any blight, trouble or misfortune to pass me by?!

So ran my thoughts, and I felt as if I were lying on live coals; then I heard my poor wife groaning and sighing—my heart bled for her.

“Golda,” I asked, “are you asleep?”

“No,” she answered. “What then?”

“Nothing,” said I, “we’ve got ourselves into a nice hole. Maybe you have some idea of what’s to be done?”

“You ask me for advice,” said she, “woe is me... A child gets up in the morning, strong and healthy, gets dressed and embraces me and begins to kiss me, hug me and bursts into tears, but says nothing. I thought that she—God forbid—had lost her mind! So I ask her: ‘What’s the matter with you, daughter?’ She doesn’t say a word and runs out into the yard to see to the cows and disappears. I wait an hour, I wait two hours, three hours—where is Chava? No Chava! So

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\* The name of the first letter of the word “hay” in Hebrew.—Tr.

I tell the children to run over to the priest's house for a minute..."

"How did you know, Golda, that she was there?"

"Alas and alack! Don't I have eyes? Or maybe I am not her mother?"

"If you have eyes and if you are her mother," said I, "then why didn't you say anything, why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you? When are you at home? And when I do tell you something—do you listen to me? When a person tells you something you immediately answer with a quotation; you've drummed my head full of quotations and that's how you get by..."

That is what she, Golda, said to me, and I heard her weeping in the darkness... She is partly right, thought I, because what does a woman understand? It pained my heart to hear her groaning and weeping. So I said to her:

"Look, Golda, you are angry at me because I have a quotation for everything; well, even this I must answer with a quotation. It is written in our Book: '*As a father has mercy on his children!*'—a father loves his child. Why doesn't the passage read: '*As a mother has mercy on her children*'—that a mother loves her child? Because a mother is not a father; a father can speak differently to a child. Just wait, tomorrow, God willing, I'll see her."

"God grant," said she, "that you will be able to see her, and him, too. He is not a bad man, even though he is a priest, he does have compassion for people. You implore him, fall to his feet, perhaps he'll have mercy."

"Who, the priest, may his name be accursed! I should stoop to the priest? Are you crazy or have you lost your mind? '*Do not open your mouth to Satan*,'" said I, "my enemies won't live to hear of such things!"

“Ah, you see! There you go again!” exclaimed Golda.

“What did you think? That I should let myself be led by a woman? That I would live according to your female reason?”

We spent the whole night talking in this manner. At the first crow of the cock I got up, said my prayers, picked up my whip and set off straight for the priest’s house. As you say, a woman is only a woman, but where else should I have gone? Into the grave?

When I entered the priest’s yard his hounds gave me a splendid welcome and wanted to “fix” my cloak and taste the calves of my Jewish legs, to see whether they were good for their canine teeth... It was my good luck that I had taken my whip along; with its aid I made them understand the Hebrew quotation, “*Not a dog shall bark*”—or, as it goes in Ukrainian, *Nekhai sobaka darom nye breshet*—don’t let a dog bark in vain.

The barking and the uproar brought the priest and his wife out into the yard. With difficulty they managed to drive off the merry pack and then they invited me into the house, receiving me as an honored guest—they even wanted to put on the samovar for me. I said that the samovar was not necessary, that I had something I wanted to talk about with the priest eye to eye. He guessed what I meant and winked at his spouse to please shut the door from the other side.

I came straight to the point without any preamble: let him first tell me whether he believed in God... Then let him tell me whether he felt what it meant to part a father from a child he loved. Next, let him tell me what, to his mind, was a good deed and what was a sin? And another thing I wanted him to make clear to me: what does he think of a man who sneaks into another man’s house and wants to change everything in it—move the chairs, the tables and beds?



Of course he was bewildered: "Tevl, you are a clever man, and here you come and hurl so many questions at me at once, and you want me to answer them all at one go. Wait a while and I'll answer all your questions, from first to last."

"No," said I, "my dear Father, you'll never answer these questions. Do you know why? Because I know all your thoughts beforehand. Better give me an answer to this: May I still hope to see my child again or not?"

At this he jumped to his feet: "What do you mean—see her again? Nothing will happen to your daughter, quite the opposite!"

"I know," said I, "I know you want to make her happy! That's not what I'm speaking about. I want to know where my child is, and whether I can see her?"

"Anything you want," said he, "but that—no."

"That's the way to talk," said I, "short and sweet and right to the point! Goodbye now, and may God repay you many times over!"

When I got home I found my Golda lying in bed all bunched up like a ball of black thread; her eyes had already run out of tears. I said to her: "Get up, my wife, take off your shoes and let us sit down on the floor and mourn our child for seven days, as God has commanded. *'The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away.'* We are not the first and we are not the last. Let it seem to us that we never had any Chava, or that she has left us, like Hodel who went off beyond the *'mountains of darkness'* and God alone knows whether we will ever see her again... The Almighty is a merciful God, He knows what He does!.."

With such talk I poured out the bitterness of my heart, feeling that tears were choking me, like a bone stuck in my throat. But Tevye is not a woman, Tevye

can restrain himself! That, of course, is only in a manner of speaking, because, first of all—the shame! And secondly, how can I restrain myself when I've lost a living child, especially such a child, a diamond embedded deep in both my own and her mother's hearts, almost more precious to us than all the other children, I don't know why. Perhaps it is because she had been very sickly as a little child, had suffered "*all the troubles of the world*". We used to sit up with her whole nights, several times we snatched her, literally snatched, out of the clutches of death, breathed life into her, as one would breathe on a tiny, trampled chick, because if God so wishes He makes the dead come to life again, as we say in a *hallel*: "*I shall not die but I shall live*"—if it is not ordained that you should die you don't die... And maybe it is because she was a good and faithful child, she always loved us both with all her heart and soul. So I ask: how could it happen that she should cause us such grief? The answer is that, firstly, such was our luck. I don't know about you, but I believe in Providence; and secondly, it was some kind of witchcraft! You may laugh at me, but I must tell you that I am not so benightedly foolish as to believe in gnomes, elves, *domoviks*\*, spooks and other such nonsense. But I do believe in witchcraft, for what could it have been but witchcraft? Just hear me out and you will also say the same thing...

In short, as our Holy Books say, "*Perforce you must live*"—a human being does not take his own life—these are no idle words. There are no wounds that don't heal, and no trouble that is not forgotten with time. That is, one doesn't actually forget, but what can be

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\* A goblin, or brownie that was, according to superstition, supposed to live in every house (from the Russian word *dom*—house).—*Tr.*

done? "*Man is likened to a beast*"—a man must toil, suffer, labor to exhaustion for his piece of bread. So all of us got down to work, my wife and the children with the jugs and jars, I with my horse and wagon, and "*the world continued in its course*"—the world does not stand still. I told my family that Chava was "*never to be mentioned nor thought of*"—no more Chava! Blotted out for good! Then I got together some fresh dairy products and set off for Boiberik to my customers.

In Boiberik my customers welcomed me most enthusiastically: "How are you, Reb Tevye, why haven't we seen you such a long time?"

"How should I be," I answered, "*We renew our days as of old*"—I'm the same *shlimazl* I always was, one of my cows has dropped dead."

"Why is it," they asked, "that all these miracles happen to you?" Then all of them and each one separately wanted to know what kind of cow I had lost, how much it cost me, and how many other cows I had left. Laughing merrily, they joked and made fun of me, a poor man, a *shlimazl*, as is the custom of rich people when they have just had a good meal, are in a cheerful mood, everything is fine and green outdoors, the weather is balmy—just right for a nice snooze. But Tevye is a person who can take a joke: not for the life of me would I have let them know what my feelings really were!

Having sold all my goods I set off for home with my empty crocks and jars. Driving through the woods I slackened the reins and let the horse go on slowly, so that he might stealthily crop a tuft of grass now and then. Losing myself in meditations I let my imagination run away with me, thinking of life and of death, of this world and of the next, of what the world actually was, why a man lived, and similar things—all in order not to let myself think of Chava. But as if in spite, namely

she, Chava, crept into my mind. Here she comes towards me, tall, stately, beautiful and fresh as a pine tree, or as she was in early childhood, a tiny, sickly, almost lifeless little baby nestling in my arms, her head drooping over my shoulder. "What do you want, Chaveleh? Bread soaked in milk? A sip of milk?.."

For a while I forgot what she had done and my heart went out to her, my soul ached with longing for her. Then I remembered, and anger flared up in my breast against her, against him, against the whole world and against myself for not being able to blot out her memory, tear her out of my soul. Why can't I do it? Doesn't she deserve it? Was it for this Tevye had to be a Jew among Jews? Did he toil and suffer, root the ground, and raise children only for them to be torn away by force, to fall away as a pine cone falls from its tree, and to be carried away by the wind and by smoke? For instance, I thought, a tree, say, an oak, grows in the forest; then someone comes along with an axe and chops off a branch, another branch and another branch—what is the tree without its branches, alas? Better go, lummoX, and chop down the whole tree and put an end to it! Why should an oak stand bare in the forest!..

As these thoughts flitted through my mind my horse suddenly came to a standstill. What was the matter? I looked up and saw—Chava! The same Chava as before, hadn't changed a bit, not even her clothes were different!

My first impulse was to spring to the ground and embrace her, kiss her... But I was held back by a second thought: Tevye, what are you, a woman? I gave the reins a tug and cried to the horse: "Giddy-up, *shlimazl!*"—and pulled to the right. But Chava also went to the right, waving her hand to me, as if to say: "Stand still a while, I have to tell you something."

Something seemed to snap in me, something tugged at my heart, my limbs went weak and I all but jumped off the wagon! But I held myself in check and pulled the reins, making the horse turn left—Chava also moved left, looking at me wildly, her face deathly pale... What shall I do? I thought to myself. Shall I stop or drive ahead? Before I could look around she was already holding the horse by the bridle and crying: “*Tateh!* I’ll sooner die than let you move from this spot! I beg you, please hear me out first, *Tateh-Father!*..”

Eh, thought I, you mean to take me by force? Oh, no, my dear! If that is what you mean—it’s a sign that you don’t know your father... And I began to lay into the poor beast for all it was worth. The horse lunged ahead obediently, turning its head backwards and twitching its ears.

“Giddap,” I told the horse, “*Judge not the vessel but its contents*’—don’t look, my clever one, where you shouldn’t.” But do you think that I myself didn’t want to turn my head and look back, to have at least a glimpse of the spot where she remained standing? But no, Tevye is not a woman, Tevye knows how to deal with smouldering Satan...

Well, I don’t want to waste your time with too long a story. If it was ordained that I should suffer the torments of the damned after death, I must surely have atoned for all my sins already. I know the taste of Gehenna and of purgatory, and of all the other tortures that are described in our Holy Books—ask me and I’ll tell you!

All the rest of the way home it seemed to me that she was running after the wagon and crying: “Hear me out, *Tateh-Father!*” A thought crossed my mind: Tevye, you are taking too much upon yourself! What

harm will it do if you stop for a while and hear what she has to say? Maybe she has something to say that you should know? Maybe, who knows, she has changed her mind and wants to come back? Maybe she suffers in her life with him and wants you to help her escape from a living hell?.. Maybe, maybe and maybe and many another maybe flitted through my mind; again I saw her as a child and was reminded of the passage: "*As a father has mercy on his children...*"—a father can have no bad children, and I blamed myself and said that I "*do not deserve to be pitied*", that I am unworthy of walking upon the earth!

So what? Why all this fretting and fuming, you stubborn madman? Turn your wagon back, you brute, and make it up with her, she is your own child, not another's! Strange thoughts crept into my head: What is the meaning of Jew and non-Jew?.. And why did God create Jews and non-Jews?.. And since He did create Jews and non-Jews, why should they be so isolated from each other, hate each other, just as if this one is from God and that one is not from God?.. I was sorry that I was not as learned as others in holy and in secular books, where I might have found the true justification for this...

In order to break up this train of thought I began to chant: "*Blessed are they who dwell in Thy house, and they shall continue to praise Thee...*", saying *Minhah*, the afternoon prayer, as God bade us.

But what good was this praying, this chanting, when inside, in my heart, an entirely different melody was playing: "Cha-va! Cha-va! Cha-va!" The louder I chanted "*Blessed...*" the louder became the "Chava" tune, and the more I tried to forget her, the clearer was her image in my eyes, and it seemed to me that I could hear her voice crying: "Hear me out, *Tateh-Father!*" I tried to stop my ears so as not to hear her,

I shut my eyes not to see her; I chanted the *Shmin-esra* and could not hear my own voice, I beat my breast and called myself a sinner and did not know what my sin was; my life was in a muddle and I myself was bewildered. I told nobody of this encounter and spoke with nobody of Chava, asked nobody about her, although I knew very well where she was and where he was and what they were doing, but nobody would find out anything from me. My enemies won't live to see the day I complain to anyone. That's the kind of person Tevye is!

I should like to know whether all men are like this, or whether I alone am so crazy?

You know, for example, it sometimes happens... You won't laugh at me? I am afraid you will...

For instance, it sometimes happens that I put on my Sabbath coat and set off for the railway station; I am ready to get on the train and go out there, to them, I know where they live. I go to the ticket-window and ask the man to give me a ticket. He asks, "Where to?" "To Yehupetz..." So he says, "I know of no such city." So I say, "Then it is not my fault..." And I turn and go back home, take off my Sabbath coat and get down to work, to my dairy wares and the horse and wagon. As it is written: "*Each man to his labor*"—the tailor to his shears, the cobbler to his last.

Yes, you are laughing at me! What did I tell you? I even know what you are thinking. You are thinking: This Tevye, he is something of an imbecile!

Therefore, "*Up to here and no further*"—it's enough for today, I mean... Be well and strong, and write me letters. And, for God's sake, don't forget what I asked you: keep silent concerning this, don't make a book out of it. But if you do happen to write, write about

someone else, not me. Forget about me. As the passage goes: "*And he was forgotten*"—no more Tevye the Dairyman!

1906

## SHPRINTZE

I owe you a most hearty greeting, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, peace be with you and your children! Oh my, my—a good many years have gone by since we last met, how much water has flown under the bridge since then! The anguish both we and our people have had to put up with during these years! Kishinev, a "cosnetution", pogroms, troubles, evils\*—oh, dear God, Almighty Lord of the World! But I am surprised—don't take it amiss—you haven't changed a hair, knock on wood, knock on wood! Now take a look at me: "*Behold, I look like a man of seventy*", while I am not yet sixty. Do you see how white my hair has grown? Ah, it's "*the pain of bringing up children*"—what you have to endure from children! Is there anyone who has suffered so much pain from his children as I have? A new misfortune befell me—what happened to my daughter Shprintze is more terrible than all my other troubles. However, as you see, life goes on, for it is written: "*Perforce you must live.*" Go on living, even though your heart is breaking as you sing this little song:

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\* Kishinev, "cosnetution", pogroms, troubles, evils. In 1903 a Jewish pogrom was instigated by the tsarist government in Kishinev followed by numerous other pogroms; in 1905 the government was forced to cede a Constitution under pressure of the growing revolutionary movement in the land but it did little to improve the life of the toiling masses.—*Tr.*



*Of what use is my life, what's the world to me,  
When I have no luck and no money do I see?*

In short, as it stands written in *Perek*: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to grant merit...*”—God wanted to do his Jews a favor, so we were blessed with a new trouble, a “cosnetution”! Oh, what a “cosnetution”! All of a sudden a tumult, a commotion broke loose among our rich ones, a stampede began from Yehupetz to foreign health resorts, allegedly on account of their nerves, to take warm baths and salt-water cures—all of it last year’s snow and other nonsense! When Yehupetz was deserted Boiberik with its air and its woods and its *dachas* went to pot! As we say in the morning prayer: “*Blessed be He who bestows mercy...*” So what happened? We have a great God who rules the world and watches out for his poor wretches and makes sure that they suffer a little more on earth.

What a summer we had, oh my! Boiberik began to fill up with people running away from Odessa, from Rostov, from Yekaterinoslav, from Mogilev and from Kishinev—thousands of rich people, money-bags, millionaires! In their towns the “cosnetution” was, apparently, fiercer than with us in Yehupetz, because they kept coming and coming. One might have asked: Why do they come running to us? The answer is: Why do our people run to them? It has already become, thank God, a custom among us that no sooner do rumors of pogroms begin to spread than Jews start running from one town to another; as the Holy Book says, “*They journeyed and they encamped, they encamped and they journeyed*”—which means: you come to me and I’ll go to you...

Meanwhile, as you may well imagine, Boiberik

became a big town overflowing with people, with women and children. Now, children like to peck at food, so dairy produce was in high demand. From whom, if not from Tevye, were dairy foods to be bought? So Tevye became the fashion, from all sides you heard nothing but Tevye and Tevye. Reb Tevye, come here! Reb Tevye, come to me! When God wills—why question it?

“*And it came to pass...*” It all began one day before *Shabuoth*. I brought some dairy goods to one of my customers, a rich young widow who had come to us from Yekaterinoslav with her sonny-boy, Aronchik, for the summer. You understand, of course, that her first acquaintanceship in Boiberik was with me.

“I’ve been told,” she said, the widow, I mean, “that yours are the best dairy products.”

“How could it be otherwise?” said I. “It is not for nothing that King Solomon says that a good name lets itself be heard, like the sound of a *shofar*, throughout the world, and if you like I can tell you what the *Midrash* has to say about that.”

So she interrupted me, the widow, I mean, and told me that she was a widow and was unversed in such things. She didn’t even know what it was eaten with. The main thing was that the butter should be fresh and the cheese tasty... Well, go talk to a female!..

In short, I began to come along to the Yekaterinoslav widow twice a week; every Monday and Thursday, punctually as a time-table, I would bring my dairy foods, without asking whether they needed them or not. I became an intimate in the household, as I usually do, and began to take a closer interest in the domestic affairs: stuck my nose into the kitchen, and told them a few times what I found necessary to tell them about running the house. The first time, naturally, I got a scolding from the servant-girl—she told

me not to butt in, not to peep into stranger's pots. Next time my words were heeded, and by the third time they already asked my advice, because she, the widow, I mean, had by then realized who Tevye was.

It went on in this way until the widow disclosed her trouble, her affliction, her misfortune—Aronchik! He, a young man of twenty and something years, said his mother, cared for nothing but horses, bicycles and fishing, and beyond that—nothing! He wouldn't even hear of business, of making money. His father had left him, she said, a handsome fortune, almost a million rubles, but he took no notice of it at all. He only knew how to spend, he was foolishly open-handed!

"Where is he," I asked, "this boy of yours? You just turn him over to me, I'll have a little talk with him, edify him, quote a few proverbs, tell him a *midrash*."

So she laughed: "A *midrash*? You'd better bring him a horse, not a *midrash*!"

Suddenly, as we were talking, *the lad arrived*—in came the young man, Aronchik, a lad stately as a pine tree, strong and good-looking, the picture of health. He wore a wide belt right over his trousers, begging your pardon, a watch was stuffed into a pocket in the belt, and his sleeves were rolled up above his elbows.

"Where have you been?" asked his mother.

"Out in a boat, fishing," he answered.

"A fine occupation," I said, "for such a lad as you. Back at home everything may be going to wrack and ruin while you catch fish here!"

I took a look at my widow—she was red as a beet. She must surely have thought that her son would grab me by the collar, deal me a couple of slaps and then throw me out like a piece of broken crockery. Nonsense! Tevye is not afraid of such things! I, when I have something on my mind, I go ahead and say it!

“*And so it was.*” The young man, upon hearing such words, stepped back a little, crossed his hands behind his back, looked me over from head to toe, emitted a queer whistle, and suddenly burst out into such laughter that both his mother and I feared he had lost his mind for a minute!

What shall I say? From that time on we became friends, real good friends! I must tell you that the longer I knew the lad, the more I liked him, even though he was a scamp and a spendthrift, far too free with his money, and something of a dolt, too. For instance, he could meet a poor man, thrust his hand into his pocket, pull out some money and hand it over to this man without counting it. Who ever heard of such a thing? Or he could take a good new coat off his own back and give it away. Talk about folly! I was really sorry for the mother! She used to complain to me, ask me what she should do, beg me to try and hammer some sense into his head. I, of course, did not begrudge her this favor—why should I? Did it cost me any money? So I began to sit down with him and tell him stories, give him examples, quote passages from the Torah and roll off *midrashim*, as Tevye knows how to do. He really became interested and seemed to enjoy listening to me. He kept asking me all sorts of questions: how did I live, what kind of a home did I have?

“I should like,” he once said, “to pay you a visit some day, Tevye!”

“If anybody wants to visit Tevye,” I answered, “he just picks himself up and drives over to Tevye’s farmstead—you have enough horses and bicycles. And at a pinch it’s no big deal to come over on foot—it’s not far, you only have to cut through the woods.”

“When,” he asked, “are you at home?”

“I can be found at home,” I answered, “only on the Sabbath, or on a holiday. Wait! You know what? Next

Friday, God willing, is *Shabuoth*, if you want to stroll over to our farm my wife will treat you to *blintzes* such as—and I added in Hebrew—‘*our blessed ancestors never ate in Egypt!*’ ”

“And what does that mean?” he asked. “You know that I’m not at all strong in Hebrew quotations.”

“I know,” said I, “that you are weak. If you had gone to *heder*, as I did, you would know even *what the rebbitzen said*—what the rabbi’s wife said.”

So he laughed and said: “Done. You shall have me as a guest. I’ll come to you, Reb Tevye, on the first day of *Shabuoth* with a couple of friends to eat *blintzes*, but you see to it that they are hot!”

“*At white heat, inside and out*—from the frying pan right into your mouth!” said I.

When I got home I called out to my old woman: “Golda, we’ll have guests for *Shabuoth!*”

She immediately came up with: “*Mazl-tov*, congratulations, who are they?”

“That you’ll find out later,” said I, “you get a batch of eggs ready—we have plenty of cheese and butter, thank God. I want you to make enough *blintzes* for three guests, people that approve of eating and don’t even begin to know anything of Rashi’s commentaries.”

“Oh, you must have picked up some *shlimazls* from the hungry lands?” said she.

“You’re a fool, Golda,” said I. “First of all, it wouldn’t be such a calamity if we should, God forbid, feed a poor man with *Shabuoth blintzes*. Secondly, be informed, my dear spouse, my modest and pious wife Madam Golda that one of our *Shabuoth* guests will be the widow’s boy, the one who is called Aronchik—I told you about him.”

“Oh,” she said, “that’s a different story.”

The power of millions! Even my Golda, when she

gets a whiff of money, becomes an altogether different person. That's the way of the world, what do you think? How does it go in *hallel*? "*Gold and silver, the work of man's hands*"—money is the undoing of man...

Well, the bright, green Holy Day of *Shabuoth* came. How beautiful, how green, how bright and warm it is out in the country when *Shabuoth* arrives I don't have to tell you. Your richest man could only wish to have such a blue sky, with such a green forest, with such fragrant pines, such lush grass, pastureland for the cows that stand chewing their cud and looking at you as if to say: "Give us such grass all the time and we won't begrudge you any milk!"

No, you may say whatever you like, tempt me with the best livelihood to move from the country to the city—I won't exchange places with you. Where have you such a sky in the city? As we say in a *hallel*: "*The Heavens are the Heavens of the Lord*"—it's God's own sky! When you look skywards in town what do you see? A brick wall, a roof, a chimney—but where will you find such trees? And if some wretched tree does manage to survive you cover it over with a cloak!..

However that may be, my guests were full of admiration when they came to my farm on *Shabuoth*. They came, four young men, on horseback, their horses—one better than the other! As for the prancer Aronchik was seated on, it was a real gelding, the likes of which you wouldn't be able to buy even for three hundred rubles!

"Welcome, guests," I greeted them. "Is it in honor of *Shabuoth* that you've come on horseback?\*" No matter, Teveye is not too pious, and if, with God's help,

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\* Jewish religious laws forbid riding on anything or in any conveyance on the Sabbath and on holidays.—*Tr.*

you should be whipped in the next world the pain won't be mine... Hey, Golda," I called, "see to the *blintzes*, and let the table be carried out here into the fresh air. There is nothing inside the house I could boast of to our guests... Hey, there, Shprintze! Taibl! Beilke! Where are you? Get a move on you!"

My orders were obeyed: the table was carried outside, chairs were placed around it, a tablecloth laid, plates, spoons, forks, salt brought out and very soon Golda appeared with the *blintzes*, piping hot, right from the frying pan, plump and tasty! My visitors couldn't praise them enough...

"What are you standing there for," I said to Golda, "go and repeat the same verse over again. Today is *Shabuoth*," I said, "so the same prayer has to be said twice!"

Golda immediately filled up another platter and Shprintze served the *blintzes* at the table. Suddenly I saw, as I glanced at Aronchik, that he couldn't take his eyes off my Shprintze! What had drawn his attention to her? "Eat," I said to him, "why aren't you eating?"

"What else am I doing if not eating?" said he.

"You are looking at Shprintze," said I.

At this everybody began to laugh, my Shprintze too. Everybody felt so happy, so good—a good, joyous *Shabuoth*... Go and foresee that from this merry-making would spring a misfortune, a lament, an evil, God's punishment on my head, the blackest misery and suffering on my soul!

But man is a fool. A sensible man mustn't let anything get to his heart, he must understand that things are as they should be, for if they should have been otherwise they wouldn't have been as they are! Don't we say in the Psalms: "*Put thy trust in God.*" Put your faith in God and He will already see to it that you are doubled up under your load of misery and still

keep on saying: "*This, too, is for the best.*" Listen to what can come about in this world, but listen carefully, because this is where the real story actually begins.

"*It was evening and it was day.*" Late one afternoon I came home, dead-tired after my day's work, exhausted by the running from *dacha* to *dacha* in Boiberik. Hitched to my front door I saw a familiar horse. I was ready to swear that it was Aronchik's prancer, the one I had then judged to be worth three hundred rubles. I went up to the horse, slapped his rump, tickled his neck and ruffled his mane. "Well, well, my beauty," I said to the horse, "What are you doing here?" The animal turned his winsome face to me and looked at me with his clever eyes, as if to say: "Why ask me? Ask my master."

I went inside and began to question my wife. "Tell me, Golda my love, what is Aronchik doing here?"

"How should I know," she answered, "he is one of your buddies, isn't he?"

"So where is he?"

"He went with the children for a stroll in the woods," she answered.

"Why suddenly a stroll?" said I and asked her to give me supper. When I had eaten I began to think: What is it, Tevye, that upsets you so? When a person comes to visit you do you have to get so rattled? Quite the opposite...

As I was thinking this I looked outside and saw my girls walking with the young man, holding bouquets of freshly-picked flowers, the two younger ones, Taibl and Beilke in the lead, followed by Shprintze and Aronchik.

"Good evening!"

"The same to you."

Aronchik stood there with a strange look on his face, patting his horse and chewing a blade of grass. Then he turned to me:



“Reb Tevye! I want to do business with you—let’s exchange our horses.”

“You haven’t found anyone else to play jokes on?” I asked.

“No,” said he, “I’m in earnest.”

“So you’re in earnest,” said I. “How much, for instance, does your horse cost?”

“How much would you value it at?” he asked.

“I value it,” said I, “at three hundred rubles, and perhaps even a bit over that.”

He laughed and said that the horse cost more than three times that sum, and then asked: “Well? Is it a deal?”

This talk was not at all to my liking: What did he mean by offering to exchange his expensive horse for my outspent *shlimazl* of a hack? So I told him to put off business for another time and jokingly asked him whether that was really the reason for his visit. If that was so, I said, it was a waste of his travel expenses...

To this he answered me quite seriously: “Actually, I came for another reason. If you like, let us take a little walk.”

Why this urge for walking? I thought to myself as I accompanied him to the nearby grove.

The sun had gone down some time ago, it was already darkish in the green grove, the frogs were croaking at the dike, and the fragrance of the grass was balm to the soul!

Aronchik walked and I walked along with him. He was silent and so was I. Then he stopped, cleared his throat, and said:

“Reb Tevye! What would you say, for instance, if I told you that I love your daughter Shprintze and want to marry her?”

“What I would say? I would say that one madman’s name should be erased and yours put in its stead,” I answered.

So he looked at me and exclaimed: "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said!"

"I don't understand you."

"That's a sign," said I, "that you are not so very bright. As it is written: '*A wise man hath his eyes in his head*', which means that a smart man understands a wink, while a fool needs a stick."

This rather offended him. "I speak to you plainly and you answer me with witticisms and quotations!" he said.

To this I said: "Every cantor sings as he can, and every preacher preaches for himself. If you want to learn what kind of preacher you are, talk this thing over with your mother first, she will make everything quite clear to you."

"Apparently," said he, "you take me for a child that has to ask his mother what to do?"

"Of course you have to ask your mother," said I, "and she will certainly tell you that you are an imbecile, and she will be right."

"She will be right?" he asked.

"Of course she will be right," said I. "What kind of a husband are you for my Shprintze? Is she your equal? And, what is most important, what kind of a relative-by-marriage am I for your mother?"

"If that's the case, Reb Tevye," said he, "you are greatly mistaken! I am no eighteen-year-old youngster, I seek no in-laws to please my mother. I know who you are and who your daughter is. She suits me, and that's the way I want it to be and that's how it will be!"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," said I. "I see that you've already finished with one side. Have you already made sure of the other side?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean my daughter, Shprintze. Have you already spoken to her about this, and what does she say?" I asked him.

This seemed to offend him, but he laughed and answered: "What a question! Of course I have spoken to her, and not just once but several times—I come here every day."

You hear that? He'd been coming here every day and I knew nothing! You're a cow, Tevye, in human likeness! You should be given straw to chew! If you permit yourself to be led by the nose you'll be bought and sold before you know it, you donkey!

Thinking thus, I walked back to the house with Aronchik; he said goodbye to my gang, mounted his horse and "*departed like Moses*"—trotted away to Boiberik.

And now let us, as you say in your books, leave the prince and turn to the princess, to Shprintze...

"Listen, daughter," said I, "there is something I want to know: you tell me how come that Aronchik talked to you about such a matter without my knowing anything about it?" Do you get any answer from a tree? I got the same answer from her! She lowered her eyes and blushed like a bride, but didn't as much as utter a word!

Bah, I thought to myself, you don't want to talk now, but you'll talk a little later... Tevye is not a woman, he can wait!

I waited for some time, for, as it is said, "*his day will come*", then at a moment when the two of us were alone, I said: "Shprintze, answer my question: do you at least know him, this here Aronchik?"

"Of course I know him," was her answer.

"Do you know that he is a whistler?"

"What do you mean—a whistler?"

"An empty nutshell that whistles when you blow into it."

To this she said: "You are mistaken, Arnold is a fine person."

"He is already Arnold to you," said I, "not Aronchik the charlatan?"

"Arnold," said she, "is no charlatan, Arnold has a kind heart. Arnold lives in a house of mean-minded people who know nothing but money and money."

"Oho," said I, "so you, too, Shprintze, have become an enlightened philosopher. You also despise money?"

In short, from this talk I understood that things had gone pretty far with them, and that it was a little too late to undo them, for I know my children. Tevye's daughters, as I already told you once, when they fall in love, it's with heart and soul and body! And I thought: Fool! Why should you want, Tevye, to be wiser than the whole world? Maybe it is God's will that through this shy little Shprintze you should be succored, be rewarded for all the blows and pains you have endured; maybe it was ordained that you should live well in your old age and learn how good life can be in the world? Perhaps it was fated that you should have a millionairess for a daughter? And why not? It doesn't suit you? Where is it written that Tevye must be a poor man forever, that he must always drag himself around with his nag, delivering cheese and butter to the rich Yehupetz gluttons!? Who knows, perhaps it was destined from above that in my old age I should redress the wrongs of the world, become a benefactor, a hospitable host, and maybe even sit down with Jewish scholars and study the Torah?

These and other shining, golden thoughts entered my mind. As it is said in the morning prayer, "*Many thoughts are in man's heart*", or, as the peasants, begging your pardon, say: *Duren dumkoyu bogateyet*—a fool gets rich only in his thoughts.

I came into the house, took my old woman aside and started a conversation with her: "What, for instance," I asked, "would happen if our Shprintze became a millionairess?"

So she asked: "What is a millionairess?"

"A millionairess means the wife of a millionaire."

“And what is a millionaire?”

So I explained: “A millionaire is a man who has a million.”

“How much is it, a million?” she asked.

To this I said: “If you’re such a simpleton and don’t know how much a million is, then what is there to talk to you about?”

“Who asks you to talk?” was her retort. And that was also true.

Well, a day went by and I came home in the evening. “Has Aronchik been here?” I asked. “No, he hasn’t...”

Another day went by: “Was the lad here?” “No, he wasn’t.”

To go to the widow on some pretext was unbecoming; I didn’t want her to think that Tevye was eager for the match. Actually I felt that for her all this was like “*a rose among thorns*”, like a fifth wheel to a wagon. Although I couldn’t understand why. Just because I didn’t have a million? But now I had a relative-by-marriage who was a millionairess! But whom was she getting for a relative? A poor Jew, a pauper, a Tevye the Dairyman. So who had more reason to be proud, she or I? I’ll tell you the plain truth: I began to want this match, and not so much because of the match itself as for the satisfaction of getting the better of them.

Damn them all, the rich Yehupetzers, let them know who Tevye is! Up to now one heard nothing but Brodsky and Brodsky, as if all the rest weren’t human beings at all!

Thus I reflected, driving home from Boiberik. When I came into the house my wife welcomed me with good news: “A messenger was here just now from Boiberik, from the widow. She wants you to come there at once, without fail; even if it is the middle of the night you must hitch up the horse and go to her, they want to see you very badly!”

“What’s got into them?” I asked. “What’s the great hurry, why haven’t they got any time?” I looked at Shprintze—she was silent, only her eyes spoke, and how they spoke! Nobody could understand what was in her heart as I could...

I had been afraid all the time—anything was possible—that the whole affair might come to nothing, so I said everything I could think of against him, that he was this and he was that; however, I saw that it was like being up against a blank wall, and my Shprintze was wasting away like a candle.

I hitched up the horse again and set off towards evening for Boiberik. As I went along I thought to myself: Why should they summon me in such haste? To say something? About the betrothal? He could have come to me for that, I think. I am, after all, the girl’s father. But this notion made me laugh: Who in the world has heard of a rich man coming to a poor man?! It could only happen when the end of the world came, in the time of the Messiah. The time that will soon come, as those young whelps wanted to convince me, when the rich and the poor will be equal, share and share alike, mine is yours, yours is mine and other such nonsense! It seems to me that ours is a clever world, and yet such fools live in it! Well, well, well!

With these thoughts I reached Boiberik and drove directly to the widow’s *dacha*. I stopped the horse—where was the widow? No widow! Where was the young man? No young man! Then who sent for me?

“I sent for you!” said a roly-poly little man with a plucked beard and a thick golden chain across his pot-belly.

“And who are you?” I asked.

“I am the widow’s brother,” said he, “Aronchik’s uncle... I was summoned by a telegram from Yekaterinoslav and have just arrived.”

"If that is so, then *sholom aleichem* to you," said I and sat down. When I had seated myself he said: "Sit down."

"Thanks," said I, "I am already sitting. So how do you do, and how does the 'cosnetution' do in your part of the world?"

To this he gave me no answer, plumped himself down in a rocking-chair, his hands in his pockets, his pot-belly with the golden chain bulging out, and addressed me with the following words:

"You are called, I think, Tevye, aren't you?"

"Yes," said I, "when I am called up to read the Torah they say: 'Arise, Reb Tevye, son of Shneyer-Zalman.' "

"Listen to me, Reb Tevye," said he, "of what use are long discussions? Let us go right to the issue, to the business on hand."

"With pleasure," said I, "King Solomon said a long time ago: '*For everything there is a time*'—when business has to be spoken of, let it be business. I am," said I, "a businessman."

"It's evident that you are a man of business. That is why I want to talk to you as one merchant to another. I want you to tell me, but quite openly, how much this will cost us, all told?.. But speak quite frankly!"

"If," said I, "we are to speak openly, frankly, then I must own up that I don't know what you are talking about."

"Reb Tevye!" said he, without taking his hands out of his pockets. "I am asking you how much, all told, this business will cost us?"

"That depends," said I, "on the kind of wedding you have in mind. If you decide upon a swell wedding, as is fitting for you, I'm not in a position to foot it."

He stared at me in surprise and said: "Either you are playing the fool, or you really are a fool... Although you don't look like a fool, because if you were one you

wouldn't have managed to lure my nephew into this morass. You invited him to your home allegedly for *Shabuoth blintzes*, showed him a pretty girl who may or may not be your daughter—I don't care to go into such details—and he fell in love with her, that is, he liked her. Well, and that she, too, liked him, that of course goes without saying, we are not questioning that. I don't know, perhaps she is an honest child and is in earnest, I won't go so far into the matter... But you mustn't forget," he went on, "who *you* are and who *we* are. After all, you are a sensible person, how could you even presume that Tevye the Dairyman who brings us cheese and butter might become related to us by marriage?... So what if they gave each other their word? They can take their word back! There is no great misfortune in that, and if his breach of promise has to cost us something we have nothing against paying. A girl is not a boy, whether she is your daughter or not, I don't care to go into such details."

God Almighty! What does the man want? thought I.

Meanwhile, he doesn't stop talking over my head for a moment; I needn't think, says he, that I could contrive a scandal, spread it about that his nephew, says he, had proposed to Tevye the Dairyman's daughter... And I should knock out of my head the notion that his sister was the kind of person from whom money might be pumped... If there was no trouble she wouldn't mind paying a few rubles: she would put it down to charity... We are human beings, after all, sometimes you have to help a person...

You want to know how I answered him? I said nothing, woe is me. "*My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth*"—I lost the power of speech! I got up, turned my face to the door—and fled, as if escaping from a fire, from prison!

There was a buzzing in my head, a shimmering



before my eyes, and the man's words seemed to repeat themselves in my ears: "Speak openly..." "A daughter or not a daughter..." "A widow to be pumped..." "Put it down to charity..."

I went to my horse, covered up my face and—you won't laugh at me?—I burst into tears. I wept and wept! When I had had a good cry I got into the wagon and laid into my horse, and only then did I ask God a question, as Job once asked: "What hast Thou seen in old Job, dear Lord, that Thou never leavest him be for a moment? Are there already no other people in the world?"

When I got home I found my gang, knock on wood, in a merry mood. They were eating supper, only Shprintze was missing. "Where is Shprintze?" I asked.

"What happened," they asked, "why were you sent for?"

So I repeated my question: "Where is Shprintze?"

And they again asked: "What happened?"

"Nothing, why should anything happen? Thank God, all is quiet, nothing is heard about any pogroms."

At these words Shprintze came in. She took one look into my eyes and sat down at the table, just as if the whole thing had nothing to do with her... Her face showed nothing, only this quietness of hers was a bit too much, unnatural.

I didn't like this sitting of hers, lost in thought, and her blind obedience. Told to sit—she sits, told to eat—she eats, told to go—she goes, and when her name is called she jumps. When I looked at her my heart ached and an anger burned in me—I didn't know against whom. Oh, dear God in Heaven, Almighty Lord, why do you punish me so, for whose sins?!

Well, shall I tell you the end of the story? Such an end I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, and it would be wrong to wish it on anyone, for the misfortune of

children is the worst curse in the chapter of *Admonitions*! How do I know, maybe someone did put that curse on me? You don't believe in such things? So what else can it be? All right, let me hear what you think. But what is the good of such a discussion. Listen to the end of my story.

One evening I was returning from Boiberik with a heavy heart. Just imagine the sorrow and the shame, and how I pitied my child! And what about the widow, you may ask? And her son? What widow? What son? They left without even saying goodbye! It's a shame to admit it—but they didn't even settle their debt to me for cheese and butter... But that is not what I'm talking about, they probably forgot. I'm speaking of the way they left without even saying goodbye!.. What the poor child went through no other human being except me knew, for I am a father, and a father's heart understands...

Do you think she said even a single word to me? That she complained? Or wept even once? Eh! Then you don't know Tevye's daughters. Quiet, withdrawn, she kept her grief to herself, but she flickered and melted away like a candle! Once in a while she would sigh, but that sigh was enough to tear my heart asunder!

So I was driving along homeward, deep in sad thoughts, asking our Heavenly Father questions and answering them myself. It wasn't God who was bothering me so much—with Him I had already made it up, one way or another. People, that's who worried me; why should people make life bitter both for others and for themselves when they could live well and happily? Could it be that God created Man so that he should suffer on earth? Of what use was that to Him?..

With such thoughts I drove into my farmstead. From

afar I saw a crowd of people by the dike—men, women, lads, girls and small children without count. What could it be? It was not a fire. Maybe somebody had drowned—went bathing by the dike and found his death? Nobody knows where the Angel of Death awaits him, as we say in the hymn describing the Day of Judgement.

Suddenly I saw my Golda running, her shawl flying, her hands stretched out before her, and in front of her my daughters Beilke and Taibl, all three of them screaming, wailing: “Daughter! Sister! Shprintze!!!”

I sprang from the wagon—I don’t know how I didn’t break my neck—and ran to the river, but when I got there it was already all over...

What did I want to ask you? Oh, yes! Have you ever seen a drowned person? Never?..

When a person dies he usually dies with his eyes closed... The eyes of one who has drowned are open—do you know the reason for this?..

Please excuse me, I’ve taken up too much of your time, and I myself am also not a free man: I have to go to my horse and deliver my wares. The world is a world. One must think about earning a living, too—and forget what has been. Because it is said that one must forget what the earth has covered, and while a man lives he cannot part from his soul. Witticisms are of no help, and we must return to the old adage saying that as long “*as my soul abides within me*”—plod on, Tevye!

Goodbye, be well, and if you think of me sometimes, don’t think ill of me.

1907

## TEVYE GOES TO PALESTINE

*As told by Tevye the Dairyman  
while traveling in a train*

Look who's here! How are you, Reb Sholom Aleichem? What fine company! I never even dreamed of it! My best greetings, and peace be with you! I wondered all the time and thought and thought: What's happened, why is it that he is seen neither in Boiberik nor in Yehupetz such a long time? Anything could've happened: maybe he has settled all his accounts and left us altogether—moved to the place where black radishes and chicken fat are not eaten? On the other hand, I thought, can it be possible that *he* should do such foolishness? He is, after all, a sensible person, as I live! Well, thank the Lord for seeing you in good health, as it is written: "*A mountain with a mountain...*"—a man with a man...

You are looking at me, Panie\*, as if you can't recognize me. I am your good old friend Tevye. "*Look not at the vessel but at its contents*"—don't let my new coat deceive you. This is the same *shlimazl* Tevye as before, to a hair, but when you get dressed up in your Sabbath clothes you begin to look as if you were somebody, maybe even a rich man. When you go out among people you can't do otherwise, especially if you are going on such a long journey, to Palestine, no small matter.

You look at me and think: How come such a simple little person as Tevye who dealt all his life in dairy foods should suddenly get such an idea into his head, a thing only someone like Brodsky could allow

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\* *Panie*—Sir, Mr. (Polish).—*Tr.*

himself in his old age? Believe me, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, "*it is altogether puzzling*"—this expression is all around true. Please move your valise a little, and I'll sit down here opposite you and tell you my story—just listen to what the Almighty can do...

But before I begin I must tell you that I have for some time now been a widower, may this never happen to you. My Golda, God rest her soul, is dead. A simple woman, without learning, with no pretensions, but she was very devout and pious. Let her intercede in the other world for her children, they made her suffer enough in this one and perhaps were even the cause of her leaving before her time. She couldn't bear their having scattered in different directions—one this way, the other that way. "Alas," she would say, "what is left of my life, neither child nor chick! Even a cow," she said, "longs for its calf when it is weaned away from her..."

That's how she spoke to me, my Golda, shedding bitter tears. I watched the woman waning from day to day like a candle; my heart went out in pity for her, and I said to her: "Eh, Golda darling, in our *Rosh Hashono* prayer it says: '*Im k'vonim im k'vodim*'—whether we're like children or like slaves. With children or without children—it's all the same! We have a great God, a kind and strong God, but still," said I, "I should have as many blessings as the times the Almighty plays one of His tricks, my enemies should have such luck."

But she, may she forgive me, was, after all, only a woman, and so she said to me: "You are sinning, Tevye, you mustn't sin."

"Oh, come on," said I, "did I say something bad? Did I say anything, God forbid, against the ways of the Almighty? For since He has created His world so

wonderfully, so that children are not children and parents are no better than dirt," said I, "then He, of course, knows what He is doing."

But she didn't understand me, her mind was wandering: "I am dying, Tevye," she said, "who will cook supper for you?"

Her voice was barely audible and she looked at me with such eyes that even a stone would be touched. Tevye, however, is not a woman, so I answered her with a saying, with a quotation from the Bible, with a *midrash* and another *midrash*:

"Golda," I said, "you've been a faithful wife to me for so many years, so you won't make a fool of me in my old age."

As I said this I took a look at my Golda—it was the end!

"What's the matter, Golda?"

"Nothing," she barely whispered.

I saw that the game was in favor of the devil, so I hitched up my horse and drove to town and brought back a doctor, the best doctor. When I got home—oh my, oh me! My Golda was already stretched out on the floor with a candle burning at her head; she looked like a little mound of earth raked together and covered with a black cloth.

I stood and thought: "*That is all that man is!*"—so this is the end of a human being!? Oh, Almighty God, the things you've done to your Tevye! What will I do now in my old age, a wretched and miserable man? And with that I fell to the ground.

But go weep and wail! What's the use? Listen to what I want to tell you. When you witness death closely you become a heretic and begin to think: "*What are we and what is our life?*" And what is this entire world with the wheels that turn, the trains that rush along crazily, with its entire tumult and bustle all

around, and even Brodsky with his millions—vanity of vanities, altogether nonsense and trash.

Well, I hired a man to read *kaddish* for her, for my wife Golda, may she rest in peace, and paid him for a whole year ahead. What else could I do, if God had punished me, given me no males, only females, only daughters and daughters, no good man should ken them! I don't know if everybody has such trouble with their daughters, or if, perhaps, only I am such a miserable *shlimazl* who has no luck at all with them? That is, I have nothing against my daughters themselves, and luck is as God wills. I should have at least half of what my girls wish me. Quite the opposite, they are too devoted to me, and anything that is "too" is in excess. Take, for instance, my youngest, her name is Beilke. What idea can you have of the kind of child she is? You have known me, thank God, for a year and a day, and you are aware that I am not the kind of father who sits down and begins to praise his children just for the sake of talking. But since I've mentioned my Beilke I must say just this: Since God began to deal in Beilkes he never created *such* a Beilke! Her beauty we won't even discuss. Tevye's daughters, you know that yourself, are famous far and wide as great beauties. But she, Beilke, puts all the others into the shade! A beauty of beauties! But that is not all. In regard to my Beilke one may truly quote the words from *A Woman of Valor*: "*Charms are deceitful*"—I am speaking not of looks but of character. Gold, pure gold, I tell you! From the first I was always the cream of the crop with her, but since my Golda, may she rest in peace, passed away, I became the apple of Beilke's eye! She wouldn't let a speck of dust fall on me. I already said to myself: the Almighty, as we say in our prayer, "*precedes anger with mercy*"—God sends remedies for a scourge. However, it's hard to tell which is worse, the remedy or the scourge!

Go be a prophet and guess that Beilke would, on my account, sell herself for money and send her father in his old age to Palestine! That's only in a manner of speaking, of course. She is just as much to blame for this as you are. The whole fault is his, her chosen one's. I don't want to curse him, may a barracks collapse over him! Then, perhaps, if we should want to think the matter over carefully, to dig a little deeper, it might turn out that I am more guilty than anyone else, for there is a passage in the *Gemara* that says: "*Man is obligated...*" But it's a fine thing, as I live, that I should have to tell you what the *Gemara* says!

Well, to make it short—I don't want to keep you too long. One year went by, then another, my Beilke grew up, became, knock on wood, of a marriageable age, while Tevye went on with his trade, driving, as always, his horse and wagon, and delivering cheese and butter to Boiberik in the summer, to Yehupetz in the winter—may a deluge flood it, as it once did Sodom. I can't stand that city, and not so much the city itself as the people, and not all the people, but one man—Ephraim the Matchmaker, may the devil take him and his father's father! Now listen to what a matchmaker can do to you.

"*And there came the day...*" I come to Yehupetz once in the middle of September with my wares. I give a look—"Haman approacheth"—Ephraim the Matchmaker is coming towards me! I once told you about him. Although Ephraim is a pesky person, but no sooner do you see him than you must stop—that's the kind of power this man has.

"Ho, there, my sage," I say to my horse, "stand still a while, I'll let you have something to chew." I stop Ephraim the Matchmaker, greet him, and begin to talk to him in a roundabout way:

"How is business?"



He answers, with a deep sigh: "Bad."

"How come?"

"Nothing to do," says he.

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all!"

"What's the matter?" I ask.

So he says: "The trouble is that matches are no longer concluded at home."

"Where then are matches concluded now?" I ask.

"Somewhere out there, abroad," says he.

"So what, for instance, should a man like me do, whose grandfather's granny never set foot there?"

"For you, Reb Tevye," says he, offering me his snuff-box, "I have a piece of goods right here on the spot!"

"Namely?" I ask.

"A widow without children, has a dowry of a hundred and fifty rubles, used to be a cook in the very best houses," says he.

I give him a nasty look. "Reb Ephraim, for whom do you propose this match?"

"For whom should I propose it if not for you!" says he.

"Of all the wild and crazy notions—may they fall on my enemies' heads!" I shout and give my horse a taste of the whip, meaning to drive away. But Ephraim stops me:

"Please excuse me, Reb Tevye, perhaps I have offended you. But tell me, who did *you* have in mind?" he asks.

"Who should I have in mind," say I, "if not my youngest daughter?"

At this he suddenly springs back and slaps his forehead: "Wait! It's a good thing you reminded me, a long life to you, Reb Tevye!"

"Amen, the same to you, may you also live until the

coming of the Messiah. But what's the matter with you," I ask. "Why the great rejoicing?"

"It's good, it's unusually wonderful, Reb Tevye, it couldn't be better in the entire world!" he cries.

"What, namely, is this goodness, tell me?"

He answers: "I have a match worthy of your youngest daughter, a piece of luck, a grand prize, a rich man, very rich, a millionaire, a Brodsky. He is a contractor and his name is Padhatzur."

"Padhatzur? A familiar name from the Bible," say I.

"What Bible," says he, "where Bible? He's a contractor, this Padhatzur, he builds houses, brick buildings, bridges. He was in Japan during the war and brought back heaps of gold. He drives around in carriages drawn by fiery steeds, he has footmen at his door, there is a bathroom right in his own house and furniture from Paris, and he wears a diamond ring on his finger. He is not at all old, not married, a real bachelor, top quality! What he is looking for is a pretty girl; it doesn't matter who she is, she may be naked and barefoot, as long as she is a beauty!.."

"Whoa, there!" say I to him. "If you fly so fast, without stopping to graze your horse, we'll find ourselves, Reb Ephraim, at the other end of nowhere. Besides, if I am not mistaken, you once tried to fix up this very same match for my older daughter, for Hodel."

Upon hearing these words of mine, he, Ephraim, began to laugh so hard that he had to hold his sides. I thought the fellow would have a stroke!

"Oh," he exclaimed, "you're thinking of the time my grandmother was brought to bed with her first child! That fellow went bankrupt before the war and ran away to America!"

"*May the memory of a righteous person be blessed,*" said I. "Maybe this one will run there, too?"

This outraged the matchmaker terribly:

“What are you talking about, Reb Tevye? That one was,” said he, “a good-for-nothing, a charlatan, a spendthrift, while this one is a contractor since the war, with a business, with an office, with clerks, with ... with ... with...”

What can I say—the matchmaker got so excited that he pulled me off my wagon, grabbed me by the lapels and began to shake me, and he wouldn't let go until a policeman came up and wanted to take both of us to the police station. A lucky thing it was that I remembered the Biblical passage which says: “*You may take interest from a stranger*”—you've got to know how to handle the police...

In short, why take up so much of your time? This Padhatzur became my youngest one's, my Beilke's, betrothed. And “*the days were not long*”—I mean, it did take quite some time before we raised the wedding canopy. Why do I say that it took some time? Because she, Beilke, was as eager for this match as one is eager for death. The more this Padhatzur showered her with gifts, with gold watches and diamond rings, the more loathsome did he become to her. Things don't have to be spelled out to me, you know. I understood this very well from the look in her eyes and on her face, and from the tears she shed in secret. I thought it over and once remarked, as if in passing:

“Listen, Beilke,” I said, “I'm afraid that your Padhatzur is just as much to your liking as to mine, as sweet to you as he is to me, isn't he?”

She turned fire-red and asked:

“Who told you that?”

“Why then do you cry all night?” I asked.

“Do I cry?”

“No,” said I, “you don't cry, you sob. You think that if you bury your head in a pillow you'll hide your

tears from me? You think that I, your father, am a little boy, or that my brain has dried up and I don't understand that you are doing this for your old father? That you want him to be provided for in his old age, so that he should have a place to lay his head, and wouldn't have to, God forbid, go begging from house to house? If that is what you think," said I, "then you are a big fool. We have a great God and Tevye is not one of those ten loafers who sit down to the bread of charity. Money is worthless, as it says in the Bible. Take, for instance, your sister Hodel, a pauper, one might say, and yet," said I, "look what she writes from the devil knows where, from the ends of the earth, and how happy she says she is with her *shlimazl* Feferl!"

Now, you try and guess what she, Beilke, replied!

"Don't compare me with Hodel," she said. "Hodel's time was a time when the whole world rocked on its foundations, it was on the verge of turning upside-down; people were concerned about the world and they forgot about themselves. Nowadays the world is a world again so that each one is concerned with himself and the world is forgotten..."

That is how Beilke answered me—try and understand what she meant!

Well, you are something of an expert on Tevye's daughters, aren't you? But you should have seen her during the marriage ceremony! A princess! Gazing at her in delight I thought to myself: Is this Beilke, Tevye's daughter? Where did she learn to stand so, to walk so, to hold her head so, and to dress so that her clothes looked as if they had been poured out over her body?

However, I wasn't allowed to admire her for long; on the very day of the wedding, about half-past five in the afternoon, the newlyweds got up and left; they departed by an express train for the devil knows

where, for "Nitaliye"\* , as is fashionable among rich people. They returned when winter had already come, around *Hanukkah*, sent me a message saying that I was to come to them in Yehupetz *immediately* and *without fail*. This made me think: If they had just wanted to see me they would simply have asked me to come, that's all. But why the *immediately* and *without fail*? Probably something important was up—but what? All sorts of thoughts, both good and bad, flitted through my mind: Maybe the couple had already quarrelled out there, and were on the verge of divorce? But at once I reproached myself: You're a fool, Tevye, why do you always expect bad things? How do you know why they have sent for you? Maybe they miss you and want to see you? Or perhaps Beilke wants her father to be near her? Or it may even be that Padhatzur wants to give you a job, take you into his business and make you a supervisor over his contracts?.. Anyhow, I had to go. So I got into my wagon and "*went forth to Heron*". To Yehupetz.

Along the way I let my imagination run free. I saw myself abandoning the village, selling the cows, the horse and wagon, all my goods and chattels, and moving into town. There I would become first a supervisor in Padhatzur's business, then his cashier, and then the manager of all his building contracts, and after that a partner in all his business affairs, fifty-fifty, and I would drive around just as he did, behind a pair of fiery steeds, one a bay, the other a chestnut. And I began to think in amazement about myself: "*What is this and what is it all for?*" How come such a modest little man, Tevye, to deal with such important affairs? What do I need all this hullabaloo for, this never-ending day-and-night fair with its bustle and tumult?

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\* Italy (distorted).—Tr.

How does it go—“*to seat them with the mighty*”—to hobnob with millionaires? Let me be, I want a quiet and peaceful old age, I want to be able to look into a volume of the *Mishnah* from time to time, to read a chapter from the Book of Psalms—one has to have the next world in mind sometimes, too, isn’t that so? As King Solomon said: Man is verily like the cattle, he forgets that no matter how long he lives he will have to die some day...

With these thoughts and visions I arrived in Yehupetz and drove directly to Padhatzur’s house. To boast to you of his “*grandeur and wealth*”—that is, of his home and its furnishings—of that I am not capable. I’ve never had the honor of visiting Brodsky in his home, but I am certain that there can be nothing finer than my son-in-law’s house! You will understand what sort of mansion it was if I tell you that the man who guarded the door, a lanky fellow with silver buttons, would by no means let me in, do what you will. So how was I to get in? Through the glass door I could see him, may his memory be forgotten, brushing clothes. I winked at him, spoke to him in sign language, showing him by gestures that he should let me in, for the master’s wife was my own daughter... But he understood nothing, the lout, and motioned to me, also in sign language, to go to blazes, to go my way, that is. Such a pig-headed idol! Just think, to visit your own daughter you’ve got to have pull!

Woe unto your grey head, Tevye, look what you’ve lived to! Such was my thought as I looked through the glass door. Then I noticed a girl moving about inside. Must be one of their housemaids, I decided, marking her shifty eyes. All housemaids have shifty eyes. I am a frequent visitor in many wealthy houses and I know all the maids in them. So I winked at her: “Open up, kitty!” She obeyed, and opened the door and asked me, in Yiddish, “Who do you want?”

“Does Padhatzur live here?” I asked.

“Who do you want?” said she in a louder voice.

But I said, still louder: “When you are asked a question you should answer. *First things first*—does Padhatzur live here?”

“He does,” she answered.

“If that is the case we speak the same language. Go and tell your Madam Pádhatzur that she has a guest, her father Tevye has arrived, and he’s been standing outside for quite a while like a beggar at the door, because he didn’t have the honor,” I said, “to find favor in the eyes of that Esau with the silver buttons who isn’t worth your littlest fingernail!”

Having heard me out, the maid giggled impudently, slammed the door in my face, ran upstairs, then downstairs again, opened the door for me and led me into a real palace, such as my grandfathers’ grandfathers never saw even in their dreams. Silk and velvet, gold and crystal, and when you walked you didn’t even hear your own footsteps, for your sinful feet were treading on the most costly rugs, soft as snow. And clocks! Clocks on the walls, clocks on the tables, clocks without end! Good Lord! Have you many more of this kind in the world? What does a person need so many clocks for? Such were my thoughts as I walked, my hands clasped behind my back, a little further on. Suddenly I saw several Tevyes at once on all sides, one Tevye going here, another going there, one coming towards me, another walking away from me. Confound it! Mirrors on all four sides! Only such a bird as this contractor could afford so many clocks and so many mirrors!

Here Padhatzur came to my mind, a fat, roly-poly little man with a bald head who speaks in a high voice and doesn’t laugh but snickers. I recalled how he came to me in the village for the first time with his fiery steeds; he made himself at home at once—as if he were

in his father's vineyard! Got acquainted with my Beilke, then called me aside and whispered a secret into my ear—but so loudly you could have heard it on the other side of Yehupetz. What was this secret? The secret was that my daughter had found favor in his eyes and he wanted “one-two-three and a wedding canopy”. That my daughter had found favor in his eyes was not difficult to understand, but this “one-two-three” was “*like a double-edged sword*” to me—as if a blunt knife had pierced my heart. What did he mean by “one-two-three and a wedding canopy”? And what about me? And what about Beilke? Oh, didn't I just long to give him a couple of quotations from the Bible and a *midrash* to remember me by! But on the other hand, I thought, why should you, Tevye, interfere? Did it help you a lot with your elder daughters, when you tried to advise them against their choices? You rattled like a drum, poured out your whole Torah, and who was the fool at the end? Tevye!

Oh, well, as the story-books say, let us leave the prince and turn to the princess.

Well, so I obliged them and came to Yehupetz. They greeted me affectionately: “*Sholom aleichem!*” “*Aleichem sholom!*” “How are you?” “How are things with you?” “Be seated!” “Thank you, I'm quite comfortable.” And all the other ceremonies, as is the custom.

It didn't seem proper to ask them first why, “*Today of all days*”, they had sent for me. But Tevye is not a woman, he can wait.

Meanwhile, a tall man-servant in enormous white gloves came in and said that lunch was already on the table, so all three of us got up and went into a room entirely made up of oak: an oaken table, oaken chairs, oaken wainscotting, an oaken ceiling, everything elaborately carved and painted and designed. On the



table was a royal spread: tea and coffee and chocolate, shortbread and pastries, fine cognac, the best appetizers, salted and pickled dainties, and all manner of other delicious foods, fruits and vegetables. I'm ashamed to say this, but I'm afraid that at her father's table my Beilke never saw such delicacies.

Well, they poured me a drink, then another. Drinking to their health and looking at her, at Beilke, I thought: At last you have lived to see the day, Tevye's daughter, as we say in *Hallel*: "*Who raiseth up the poor out of the dust*"—when God helps a poor man—"and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill", the man becomes altogether unrecognizable. She seems to be Beilke, and yet not Beilke.

I remembered the other Beilke, from the past, and I compared the two Beilkes—and my heart ached. It was just as if I had struck a bad bargain, had done something that couldn't be undone. Let us say, for instance, I felt as if I had exchanged my hard-working little dobbin for a colt without being able to tell what would become of it in the future—a horse or a block of wood.

Eh, Beilke, Beilke, thought I, what has become of you? Remember how you used to sit at night by a smoky lamp, sewing and humming to yourself, or how you would go out and milk two cows in a flash, or roll up your sleeves and cook me a simple borsht, or a dish of dough pellets with beans, or cheese-filled dumplings, or bake me some poppy-seed cookies, and you would say: "*Tateh*, go wash your hands!" This was, for me, the best of all melodies!

Now she sat there with her Padhatzur like a queen; two footmen were waiting at the table, clattering the plates—and she, Beilke? She didn't say a single word! He, Padhatzur, talked for both of them, his mouth didn't shut for a moment! Never in my life have I seen

anyone who was so fond of jabbering, of chattering the devil knows what, without stopping his snickery laughter. Of such types it is said: he makes his own jokes and laughs at them himself.

Besides the three of us there was a fourth person at the table, a red-cheeked character. What and who he was I don't know, but that he was no mean eater was self-evident. All the time Padhatzur talked this guest went on gorging himself; as it says in *Perek*: "*Three who have eaten*"—he certainly ate enough for three.

This one ate and that one talked, and all of it such empty things I couldn't care a hoot about: *podryad\**, *gubernskoye pravleniye\*\**, *udelnaya vedomost\*\*\**, *kaz-nacheistvo\*\*\*\**, Japan...

Of all this the only thing that held some interest for me was Japan, because I had had something to do with that country. During the war, as you know, horses were in great demand and were sought for high and low. Of course, the authorities got to me, too, and they took my horse to task, measured him with a yardstick, drove him back and forth and then gave him a white card\*\*\*\*\*. Well, I told them that I'd known beforehand that their trouble was in vain, for, as the Bible says: "*The righteous man knoweth the soul of his animal.*" Tevye's horse is not a horse that goes to war.

But please excuse me, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, I get one thing confused with another and am apt, God forbid, to stray from the highway. As you say, let us get back to business—to my story.

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\* Contract (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\* Provincial Board of Directors (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\* Royal Family Real Estate Register (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\*\* The Exchequer (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\*\*\* A certificate giving exemption from military service.—*Tr.*

Well, so we ate and drank our fill, as God bade us. When we got up from the table he, Padhatzur, took my arm and led me into a separate chamber—his “study”—a royally decorated room with rifles and spears on the walls, and tiny cannons on the table. He seated me on a sort of sofa, soft as butter, took out, from a golden box, two thick, aromatic cigars and lighted them, one for himself, one for me. Then he sat down opposite me and said:

“Do you know why I have sent for you?”

Aha, thought I, he probably means to have a talk with me about business. But I played dumb and said: “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*”—how should I know?”

“I wanted to have a talk with you—about you yourself,” said he.

Must be about a job, I thought to myself, and said: “If only it is something good—my pleasure, let’s hear it.”

He took the cigar out of his mouth and began a whole speech:

“You are,” said he, “no fool and so you won’t take offense if I speak to you frankly. You must know that I do business on a large scale, and when one engages in such big business deals...”

Yes, thought I, he has me in mind. And I interrupted him and said: “As the *Gemara* says in the Sabbath chapter: ‘*The more business, the more worries.*’ Do you know,” I asked him, “how this passage from the *Gemara* should be explained?”

He answered me quite frankly: “I’ll tell you the honest truth: I never studied any *Gemara* and I don’t even know what it looks like.”

That’s how Padhatzur answered me and burst into his snickery laughter.

How do you like that? I would think that if God has punished you by making you an ignoramus then let it

at least be covered up, why go boast about it? Thinking so I said to him:

“I did figure that you hadn’t much to do with such things, but let’s hear what you have to say further.”

So he went on: “Further I wanted to tell you that with my business and my name, with my *polozheniye*\*, it doesn’t suit me that you are known as Tevye the Dairyman. I want you to know that I am *lichno*\*\* acquainted with the Governor, and it is quite possible that Brodsky might come to visit me, or Polyakov, or maybe even Rothschild, *chem chort nye shutit?*\*\*\*”

That’s what he said to me, this Padhatzur, and I just sat there looking at his shiny bald head and thinking: It may very well be that you are personally acquainted with the Governor, and that Rothschild might come to your house some day, but you talk like a despicable cur... And I said, with a bit of resentment:

“So what can be done if Rothschild does indeed come to see you?”

You think he understood the dig? *There was neither bear nor woods*—he understood nothing!

“I wanted you,” said he, “to give up this dairy business and occupy yourself with something else.”

“Namely with what?”

“With whatever you like,” he said, “there are lots of businesses in the world! I’ll help you out with money if only you stop being Tevye the Dairyman. Or, hold on,” said he, “why not pick yourself up one-two-three and go to America? Eh?”

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\* Standing, social status (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\* Personally (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\* “What doesn’t the devil joke about?” A Russian saying, which means “you never can tell”.—*Tr.*

After saying this he pushed his cigar back into his mouth and looked me straight in the eye, his bald head glistening...

Well? How does one answer such a crude fellow? My first thought was: Why are you sitting, Tevye, like a clay *golem*? Get up, kiss the *mezuzah*, slam the door and get out without as much as a goodbye! It really made my gall rise! The impudence of this contractor! What does he mean, telling me to give up my own respectable business and go away to America? Just because Rothschild might visit him some day Tevye the Dairyman must fly to the ends of the world?!

My heart was boiling with anger like a kettle, and I was already upset from before this talk. My wrath was directed against her, against my Beilke: Why are you sitting there like a queen amidst the hundred clocks and the thousand mirrors, while here your father, Tevye, is running the gauntlet over live coals? As I live, I thought, your sister Hodel made a better marriage than you! It is true, of course, that she doesn't have such a house with so many expensive gew-gaws as you have, but she has Feferl for a husband, and he is a fine human being, a man who doesn't think of himself—his concern is for the whole world... And, in addition, he has a head on his shoulders, not a pot with a shiny lid on it! And what a tongue he has, this Feferl—gold and gold! He, when you give him a passage from the Bible, comes back at you with three! Just you wait, my dear contractor, I'll quote you a passage that'll make your head spin!

That is what I thought and then addressed him with the following words:

"Well, it's no great matter that the *Gemara* is a closed book to you—this I forgive you. When a Jew sits in Yehupetz and his name is Padhatzur and he is a contractor," said I, "the *Gemara* may well be forgot-

ten in the attic. But a simple passage even a peasant in bast shoes will understand. You know, of course, what the *Targum* says about Laban the Aramaean: '*Hafrom-tah lapigstailah hakanmaknoh lafurhatah.*'"

He stared at me and asked: "What, then, does it mean?"

"It means," said I, "that from a pig's tail no fur hat can be made."

"In regard to what do you say that?"

"In regard to your bidding me to go to America."

Emitting his snickery laughter, he said:

"If not to America, then perhaps to Palestine? All old Jews go to Palestine..."

No sooner had he uttered these words than they sank into my brain as an iron nail sinks into wood: Stop! Maybe this isn't at all so bad, Tevye, as you might think? Maybe it is a good plan? Because rather than have such pleasure from children as you have, Palestine is perhaps better? What do you risk and whom do you have here? Your Golda, may she rest in peace, is already in the grave, while you yourself, God forgive me, haven't you suffered enough? How much longer can you tread the earth?

Actually, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, I must confess that I have for a long time cherished a dream to visit Palestine; I would like to stand by the Wailing Wall, by the tombs of the Patriarchs and Mother Rachel's Tomb, and see with my own eyes the River Jordan, Mount Sinai and the Red Sea, the cities Pithom and Raamses, and other such things. My imagination carried me away to the blessed Land of Canaan, "*the land flowing with milk and honey*", but he interrupted my reflections, this Padhatzur, right in the middle, saying:

"Well? What is there to think about so long? One-two-three..."

"With you, praise the Lord," said I, "everything is

one-two-three... For me it's a difficult piece of the *Mishnah*, because to pick oneself up and travel to Palestine one has to have the wherewithal..." At this he emitted his snickery laughter, got up, went to his desk, took a purse from a drawer and counted me out a goodly sum of money. I immediately understood what he meant, took the wad—the power of money!—and put it deep down into a pocket. I wanted to quote a few passages and a *midrash* for his edification, to round everything up, but he paid no attention at all to my words and said:

"This will be more than enough to get you there, and when you arrive at your destination and need more money write us a letter and it will be forwarded to you one-two-three... I hope you won't have to be reminded again about leaving, for, after all, you are a man of honor, a man with a *sovest*\*."

That is how my son-in-law Padhatzur spoke to me with his snickery laughter that crept right into one's entrails.

I suddenly caught myself thinking: Why not fling the money right back into his face and quote a passage to the effect that Tevye is not to be bought for money, and with Tevye you don't speak of honor and of conscience?

However, before I could open my mouth to say something he rang a bell, called in Beilke and said to her:

"*Dushenka*\*\* , you know what? Your father is forsaking us, he is selling everything he has and is going away one-two-three to Palestine."

"*I dreamed a dream but I do not understand it*"—I dreamed it the other night and last night! So I thought to myself and looked at my Beilke—not a trace of any

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\* Conscience (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\* Dearest, darling, sweetheart (Russian).—*Tr.*

emotion on her face. Stood there as if rooted to the floor, not a drop of blood in her face, looking from him to me, from me to him—and not a single word! I watched her and also said nothing, so the two of us were mute, as it is written in the Psalms: “...*my tongue clave*”—we had both lost the power of speech. I felt dizzy, a pulse was beating in my temples as if I had breathed charcoal fumes. What could be the reason? Perhaps, thought I, it’s from that fine cigar that he gave me to smoke? Yes, but he is also smoking, this Padhatzur! Smoking and talking, his mouth doesn’t shut at all, although his eyelids are drooping as if he’s ready to fall asleep.

“First you’ve got to go,” said he, “from here to Odessa on the express train, and from Odessa by sea to Jaffa. Right now is the best time for traveling by sea, because later the winds and snows and storms begin and—and—and...” He mumbled, his words were getting jumbled as if he were falling asleep, but he didn’t stop his chatter: “And when you are ready for the journey you’ll let us know and we’ll both come to the railway station to see you off, because who knows when we’ll see each other again?”

These words were followed by a gaping yawn, begging your pardon; he got to his feet and said to her, to Beilke: “*Dushenka*, you sit here a while and I’ll go and catch forty winks.”

You’ve never said a better thing, as I live! At least now there is someone on whom I can pour out the bitterness of my heart! This is what I said to myself, intending to take my Beilke to task, to give her a good scolding for everything that had piled up in my heart that morning, but now she, Beilke, fell on my neck and began to weep. How do you think she wept? My daughters, may no evil befall them, are brave, they keep up their courage, but then, when it comes to



something, they suddenly break down and the tears begin to flow from them as the sap flows from a tapped birch. Take, for instance, my older daughter Hodel. How she carried on, how she wept when she had to leave to share her Feferl's exile in the cold lands! But there is no comparison: that one can't even hold a candle to this one!

I'll tell you the honest truth: I myself, as you already know me, am not a man who is ready with his tears. I wept long and bitterly only once, when my Golda, may she rest in peace, was lying on the ground, and once more I wept when Hodel went off to join her Feferl and I was left standing by the station like a big fool, all alone with my little horse; then, maybe another couple of times it happened that I, as you say, blubbered a little, but I don't remember that I ever made a habit of weeping. Now Beilke and her tears wrung my soul so that I couldn't restrain myself and I didn't have the heart to say even one cross word to her. To me you don't have to explain things. My name is Tevye. I soon understood the reason for her tears. They weren't just tears; they were, please understand me, tears for "*the sin I have sinned before thee*", for not having listened to her father... So instead of giving her a piece of my mind and pouring out all my wrath against her Padhatzur, I began to console her with such an example and such an example, as Tevye can. She listened to me, my Beilke, and then said:

"No, *Tateh*, that is not why I'm crying. I have no complaints against anyone, I am crying because you are going away on account of me and I can do nothing about it. This is what torments me so."

"There, there," said I, "you talk like a child, you've forgotten that we still have a great God and that your father still possesses all his senses. For your father," I continued, "it's no big deal to travel to Palestine and

come back, as it is written: '*They journeyed and they encamped*'—*tuda i nazad*—there and back again."

I tried in this way to comfort her, but to myself I thought: Tevye, you're lying! When you leave for Palestine it'll be "*may he rest in peace*"—no more Tevye!..

Just as if she could read my thoughts, Beilke said to me:

"No, *Tateh*, that is how you comfort a little child. You give it a doll, some plaything to hold and tell it a pretty story about a little white kid... If it comes to storytelling," said she, "let *me* tell *you* one. But the story I want to tell you, *Tateh*, is more sad than beautiful."

That is how she spoke to me, my Beilke. Tevye's daughters don't speak in vain. She gave me a whole song and dance, told me a saga, a story from the *Arabian Nights*, how this Padhatzur of hers had lifted himself from the lowest depths to the highest levels, all by his own wits, and now he sought the glory of having Brodsky visit his house; to achieve this he was handing out donations, simply pouring out rubles by the thousand in all directions. However, money alone was not enough, you had to have "lineage", too, so he, Padhatzur, that is, was moving heaven and earth in order to show that he was not just anybody. He boasted that he was descended from the great Padhatzurs, that his father was also a famous contractor. "Although," said Beilke, "he is fully aware that I know that his father was a poor musician. Now he tells everybody that his wife's father was a millionaire..."

"Whom does he mean?" I asked. "Me? Maybe I *was* once destined to have millions some day, but that will have to suffice me!"

"Oh, *Tateh*," said Beilke, "if you only knew how I blush when he introduces me to his acquaintances

and starts telling them what important people my father, my uncles and my whole family are—pure fantasy! But I have to endure all this, listen and keep mum, because he is very capricious in these matters.”

“You call it ‘caprice’,” said I, “but to me it sounds like abomination and downright chicanery.”

“No, *Tateh*,” said Beilke, “you don’t know him, he is not at all as bad as you think. Only he is a man whose moods change frequently—one minute he is like this, the next like that. He is really kindhearted and generous. A mournful mien on a person’s face will prompt him, if the moment is propitious, to do anything for this person. As for me—why, nothing is too good for me! You think I have no influence at all with him? Not long ago I persuaded him to rescue Hodel and her husband from their distant exile. He swore to me,” she said, “that he would spend thousands on it, but on one condition—that they go from there directly to Japan.”

“Why to Japan,” said I, “why not to India, or, for instance, to *Padan-Aram*\* to visit the Queen of Sheba?”

“Because he has business in Japan,” she answered. “He has business dealings all over the world; what he spends in a day on telegrams alone our whole family could have lived on for six months. Yes, but what good is all this to me when I am no longer myself!”

“It comes out,” said I, “as we read in the *Perek*: ‘If I am not for myself who will be for me?’—I am not I, you are not you.”

So I spoke to her, here a saying, there a quotation from the Holy Book, although my heart bled to see how my child suffered “*in riches and in honor*”, as we say.

“Your sister Hodel,” I said, “would have done differently.” But she, Beilke, interrupted me:

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\* A place mentioned in the Bible. Here meant in an ironical sense—“to some other place”.—*Tr.*

“I’ve already told you, *Tateh*, that you shouldn’t compare me to Hodel. Hodel lived in Hodel’s time, and Beilke lives in Beilke’s time... From Hodel’s time to Beilke’s time the distance is as great as from here to Japan.”

Do you understand the meaning of such strange talk?

Oh, I see that you are in a hurry, Mr. Sholom Aleichem. Another two minutes and all my stories will end. Satiated with the worries and anguish of my lucky youngest daughter, I left the house “*in mourning and with bowed head*”—completely crushed and beaten. I flung away the cigar, the fumes of which had made my head spin, and shouted after it—after the cigar, that is:

“Go to limbo, damn you!”

“Whom do you mean, Reb Tevye?” asked a voice behind my back. I turned my head and took a look—it was he, Ephraim the Matchmaker, may the Evil One catch him!

“Welcome, whom do I see!” I exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“What,” said he, “are *you* doing here?”

“I am visiting my children.”

“And how are they?” he asked.

“How,” said I, “should they be? We should be as lucky!”

“As I see,” said he, “you are quite pleased with my merchandise?”

“And how pleased!” said I. “May God repay you many times over.”

“Thanks for your kind words, perhaps you might add a gift to your blessings?” he said.

“Why, didn’t you receive your matchmaker’s fee?” I asked.

“He shouldn’t have more himself, this Padhatzur of yours.”

“What was wrong,” I asked, “too small a sum?”

“Not so small a sum as the ‘goodwill’ that went with it!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” said he, “that it’s all gone already—not a single *grosz* left!”

“Where did it go to?” I asked.

“I married off a daughter,” he answered.

“Congratulations,” said I, “may God grant them good luck and you should live to have joy from them.”

“Great joy,” he retorted, “I have already lived to have from them. I landed me a scoundrel of a son-in-law. He beat and tortured my daughter, picked up the few rubles and went off to America.”

“Why did you let him go so far?”

“What should I have done with him?”

“You should have sprinkled salt on his tail,” said I.

“You are evidently in a cheerful mood, Reb Tevye?”

“God grant you at least half of it, oh, Lord Almighty!” said I.

“So that’s how it is? And I thought you were a rich man! But since you aren’t—here’s a pinch of snuff for you!” said he.

Having gotten rid of the matchmaker with his pinch of snuff, I drove home and began to sell off my household goods, objects that had accumulated over the years. Mind you, such things aren’t done as quickly as you speak of them. Every pot, every trifle cost me a piece of my health. This reminded me of Golda, may she rest in peace, that reminded me of the children, God bless them. But nothing hurt me so much as parting from my horse. Looking at him I felt guilty. So many years we had toiled together, suffered together, gone hungry together, and suddenly I take and sell him! I sold the horse to a water-carrier.

because from teamsters you get nothing but insults. I went to them to sell my horse, so they said:

“God be with you, Reb Tevye, do you call this a horse?”

“What then is it—a candlestick?”

“No,” they said, “it’s not a candlestick you have here, it’s a *Lamed-Vovnik*—one of the Thirty-Six Saintly Ones.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” they said, “an ancient creature of thirty-six years without a vestige of teeth, with a grey lip and trembling sides—like an old woman on a frosty Sabbath eve!”

How do you like such teamster-talk? The poor horse, I could swear, understood every single word, as it is said in the Holy Book: “*The ox recognizes a buyer*”—an animal knows when it is being put up for sale. You want proof? When I closed the deal with the water-carrier and said “good luck to you”, my little horse suddenly turned his winsome face to me and the look in his patient eyes seemed to say: “*So this is my lot for all my labors?*”—this is how you thank me for my service?..” I looked for the last time at my horse as the water-carrier led him away to teach him a harsh lesson, and I remained standing there all alone, thinking: Almighty God! How wisely You manage Your little world! You have created a Tevye and created his horse, and the same good luck befalls both of them! A human being, however, has a mouth and can at least complain, unburden his heart, but what can a horse do? Alas, it is but a dumb beast and, as it is said, herein lies “*the advantage of man over beast*”.

You are looking, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, at the tears in my eyes, and you probably think: This Tevye

apparently grieves for his horse? Why, dear man, for my horse? I grieve for everything, and I will miss everybody. I will miss the horse, I will miss the village, I will miss the village elder and the village policeman, I will miss the Boiberik summer people, the rich Yehupetzers, and even Ephraim the Matchmaker, a plague on him, because when all is said and done, what is he but a poor wretch trying to make a living?

When, God willing, I get safely to the place I am going to, I don't know what I will do there; but it's as clear as day that first of all I will go to Mother Rachel's Tomb. I will pray there for my children whom I will probably never see again, and I will also keep Ephraim the Matchmaker in mind, him and you and all the Jews. Now let us shake hands, be well, a happy journey to you, and give my regards to each and every one.

1909

## GET THEE OUT!

My heartiest greetings to you, Mr. Sholom Aleichem! *Peace be with you and your children!* I've long been looking out for you, I have a whole pile of "merchandise" collected especially for you. I've asked: "*Where are you?*"—why don't I see you anymore? I was told that you have been traveling all over the world, in faraway lands, as it is said in the *Megilah*, the Book of Esther: "*The one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of Ahasheurus...*"

But it seems to me that you are looking somewhat strangely at me? Apparently, you are thinking: Is it he or not he? It is he, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, it is he!

Your old friend Tevye, Tevye the Dairyman in person, the same Tevye, but no longer a dairyman, just an ordinary Jew, an old man, as you see, although in years I am not so old. As it is said in the *Haggadah*: “*Here I am, a man of seventy...*”—but it’s still quite a way off to seventy! Oh, why is my hair so white? Not from joy, believe me, dear friend. Partly my own troubles are to blame, not to complain, and partly the troubles of our people—a bad time! A bitter time for Jews...

However, I know what’s pinching you—it’s something else. You’ve probably recalled that we once said goodbye to each other when I was about to leave for Palestine. You must therefore be thinking that you see Tevye after his return from Palestine, and you probably already want to hear about my visit to Mother Rachel’s Tomb and the Cave of Machpelah and other such things? Rest assured, if you have the time and want to hear a remarkable story, then listen attentively, as it is written: “*Hear ye!*” You will see for yourself that man is a mute beast and that we have a mighty God who rules over the world.

What portion of the Torah is being read in the synagogue this week? *Vayikro*—“Leviticus”? But I’ve been introduced to an altogether different chapter—*Lech-lecho*—“Get thee out!” “Get thee out, Tevye,” I was told, “*begone out of thy country*”—out of your village where you were born and lived all your life, “*to the land which I will show thee*”—wherever your eyes lead you... And when was Tevye given this lesson to learn? When he had already become old and weak and forlorn; as we say in our prayers on *Rosh Hashono*: “*Do not cast us off in our old age!*”

But I’m running ahead of my story, I clear forgot that we were speaking of how things were in Palestine. How should things be going on there, my friend? It is a fine country—both of us should be as lucky—“*a land*



*flowing with milk and honey*”, as it is said in the Torah. But the trouble is that Palestine is in Palestine, while I, as you see, am still here, “*outside of the Promised Land*”. In the *Megilah*, Esther says: “*If I perish I perish.*” These words, I tell you, must have been written about Tevye. A *shlimazl* I was and a *shlimazl* I’ll die. There I stood, one foot almost on the other side, in the Holy Land, it only remained to buy a ticket and board a ship—and away! So what does God do? He thinks up something else for me. Just you listen.

My elder son-in-law, Motl Kamzoil, the Anatovka tailor, Heaven preserve us, lies down hale and hearty and goes and dies! That is, he never actually was what one might call robust. How could it be otherwise? He was, alas, only a poor workman, day and night he sat either “*absorbed in study or in worship of God*”—plying his thread and needle, patching, I beg your pardon, pants. So he sat and worked until he got the chest disease, and once it began, he hawked and coughed until he coughed up the last bit of his lungs. Nothing helped him, neither doctor nor medicine, goat’s milk nor chocolate with honey. He was a fine person; it’s true he was no scholar, but he was an honest man with no pretensions, and how he loved my daughter—simply adored her! He sacrificed himself for the children, and would have given his life for me!

So, “*Moses passed away.*” Motl died and left me holding a bomb: how could I even think of Palestine then? I already had a fine Holy Land right in my home! How, I ask you, could I leave a widowed daughter and her little orphaned children without a piece of bread? On the other hand, one might think, how could I help her when I myself was a sack full of holes? I couldn’t bring her husband back to life, return their father from the other world to her children, and, besides, I myself am also nothing more than a sinful man: in my old age I wanted to rest my bones, to feel

myself a human being, not a beast of burden. Enough fuss and bother! Enough of seeking the pleasures of this world! Some thought must be given to the next world, too, it's already high time! All the more so, since I had already played havoc with my bit of chattels: the horse, as you know, I had let go some time before, sold off my cows, and had only a pair of bull calves left that might perhaps become something worthwhile in the future if properly tended and foddered... And now suddenly go and become, in my old age, a provider for orphans, a father to small children!..

But do you think this is all? Wait a while! The most important part is still to come, for if one trouble strikes at Tevye you may be sure that another one is following fast on its heels. For instance, once a misfortune befell me—one of my cows fell, so right after that—such a thing shouldn't happen to you—a second one lay down and died...

That is how God created His world, and so it will remain—nothing can be done about it!

Well, you remember the story of my youngest daughter Beilke, the grand prize she won, the big fish she caught—that Padhatzur, the bigshot, the contractor who made a fortune in the war and brought sackfuls of money to Yehupetz and fell in love with my daughter—he wanted a beautiful wife; he sent Ephraim the Matchmaker to me, may his name be forgotten ... implored on his knees that she marry him, almost had a stroke, took her as she stood, without any dowry, and bedecked her from head to toe with gifts, diamonds, jewels... Great luck, wasn't it? Yes, well, all this luck flowed away like a river, and what a river! A river and a bog, God save us! When God orders the wheel of fortune to turn back everything starts falling buttered side down; first, as we say in a *hallel*, it is "*Who raiseth up the poor out of the dust*", but before

you know it—bang—and it becomes “*That looketh down low upon Heaven and upon the Earth*”—into the pit together with the traces!..

God loves to play with a human being. Oh, how He loves it! How many times did He play in this manner with Tevye: up and down! The same thing happened to my contractor, to Padhatzur. You probably remember how proud he was of his house in Yehupetz with his thirteen servants, with his mirrors, clocks, and gew-gaws? Faugh, fah, fie! I think I told you, if you remember, how I tried to get my Beilke to make him buy this house in her name? They paid as much attention to my words as Haman does to a rattle—what does a father understand? He understands nothing! So what do you think the outcome was? My enemies should have such an outcome: in addition to going bankrupt, losing everything, having to sell all the mirrors and clocks and his wife’s jewelry, he also got mixed up in some messy business, and had to flee the country and go to where the holy Sabbath goes—to America, that is. All heavy hearts go there, so they went, too. At first they had a very hard time in America. The little cash they had was soon used up, and when there was nothing to chew the poor things had to go to work; they worked at all kind of backbreaking jobs, toiled as the Jews toiled in Egypt, both he and she! She writes that now things are easier, thank God: they operate a stocking machine and are “making a living”... That’s what they call it out there, in America, but here we would say “living from hand to mouth”. It’s a lucky thing, she writes, that there are only the two of them, with neither chick nor child. “*That too is for the best.*”

So now I ask you, doesn’t he deserve to be cursed with the foulest curses—I mean Ephraim the Match-maker? For the wonderful match he arranged for me, for the dirty mess he got me into! Would she have

been worse off if she had married, say, a workman, as Tzeitl did, or a teacher, as Hodel did? Oh, they didn't have it too good, either? One is a young widow, the other is in exile with her husband at the back of nowhere? But that's as God wills it—what can man foresee?..

You know, she was really a wise woman, my Golda, may she rest in peace: she took a look around in good time, said goodbye to this foolish world and departed to the next one. Don't you think that rather than endure "*the pain of bringing up children*" I have suffered on account of my daughters, it is a thousand times better to lie peacefully in the grave?.. However, our *Perek* says: "*Perforce you must live*"—a man cannot take his fate into his own hands, and if he does he gets rapped over the knuckles...

Meanwhile we've strayed from the road and therefore *let us return to our original subject*—let us leave, as you say in your story-books, the prince and return to the princess. Where were we? At lesson *Lech-lecho*—"Get thee out!" But before we begin *Lech-lecho* I want to ask you to be so kind as to stop with me for a while at *Balak*—the lesson of Vengeance. It has been the custom, since the world began, to first study *Lech-lecho* and later *Balak*, but with me it was the other way round: I was taught *Balak* first and then *Lech-lecho*. You might as well hear how *Balak* was taught to me, it might come in handy some day.

It happened some time ago, soon after the war, at the height of the "cosnetution", when "*salvations and consolations*" for the Jews—the pogroms—began, at first in the big cities, later in the small towns. But they never reached me, nor could they have done so. Why? Very simple! When you live for such a long time among Gentiles, down-to-earth Esaus, you are on friendly terms with all the householders of the village.

"Friend of the soul and Father of mercy"—"Batiushka\* Tevel" was held in high esteem! Advice is needed—"whatever Tevel says", a medicine against a fever—"go to Tevel", a loan without interest—again Tevel. Then why should I think about such things, about pogroms? Nonsense! The peasants themselves had told me many times over that I had nothing to fear, they wouldn't let anything happen to me! But *sure enough*—I'll tell you a fine story, just listen!

One day I came home from Boiberik—I was still hale and hearty then, in full feather, as they say—I still dealt in cheese and butter and various greens, too; I unharnessed my horse, threw it some hay and oats, and all of a sudden—I hadn't even had time to wash my hands before eating—my yard was full of peasants. The whole community had turned out, from the *starosta*—the village elder—Ivan Poperilo, down to the cowherd Trokhim, and they all, to my mind, had a strangely festive look... At first my heart even missed a beat—what sort of a holiday was this all of a sudden? Could they have come to teach me a harsh lesson? But on the other hand, I immediately had a second thought: Feh, Teveye, you should be ashamed of yourself! All your life you've lived here, one Jew among so many Gentiles, in peace and in friendship, and nobody ever did you the slightest harm!..

So I went out into the yard and greeted the crowd warmly: "Welcome, my dear friends, what brings you here? What's the good word? What news have you for me?.."

The *starosta*, Ivan Poperilo, stepped forward and said, quite openly and without any preliminaries at all: "We've come, Tevel, to beat you up."

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\* "Father", also "my dear fellow"—an obsolete respectful form of address; also "Father" in addressing a priest (Russian).—Tr.

How do you like that? “Beating about the bush” is what we call it, language of implications, that is...

You can imagine how I felt. But to show them my feelings—oh, no, quite the opposite! Tevye is not a little boy...

“*Mazl-tov!* Congratulations, children!” I exclaimed quite cheerfully. “But why so late? In other places they’ve already almost forgotten about such things!..”

Ivan Poperilo, the *starosta*, that is, now said, very earnestly:

“You’ve got to understand us, Tevel. We’ve been hesitating, trying to decide whether we should give you a beating or not. All around, in other places, your people are being scourged, so why should we leave you out?.. So we, the whole village, have decided that we must punish you... But we don’t know exactly what to do to you, Tevel: either only knock out all the window-panes and rip up the feather-beds and pillows, or burn down your house and barn, and all your goods and chattels?”

These words really brought a chill to my heart. I looked at these neighbors of mine as they stood there leaning on their long staffs, whispering to each other. It looked as if they really meant business. If so, I thought to myself, as it says in the Book of Psalms: “*The waters are come in even into the soul*”—you are in real trouble, Tevye! Something must be done, but what? “*Do not give Satan an opening.*” Eh, Tevye, I said to myself, with the Angel of Death one plays no games, I must think of something to tell them!

Well, my dear friend, I won’t go into all the details, but a miracle was apparently ordained and the Almighty kept up my courage; I said to them, to the peasants, good-naturedly:

“Please listen to me, gentlemen! Hear me out, my dear neighbors: since the whole community has decided so, it means that you probably know best that

Tevye deserves to have his entire property and chattels ruined by you... Only you must know," said I, "that there is a Higher Power than your village community! Are you aware that there is a God in the world? I do not mean *my* God or *your* God, I am speaking of the God who is everybody's God, who sits up there in Heaven and sees all the meanness and vileness that goes on down here... It may be," I went on, "that He Himself has marked me down to be punished for nothing, innocently, through you, my best friends, but it may also be that, on the contrary, He by no means wants any evil to befall Tevye... Who can know what God wants? Perhaps one of you will undertake to find out?.."

In short, they apparently understood that they wouldn't get far with Tevye; the *starosta*, Ivan Poperilo, addressed me as follows: "It's like this, Tevel. Actually, we have nothing against you. You are a Jew, of course, but not a bad man. However, that is neither here nor there—we must do something to you. The community passed such a decision—we can't go back on it! At least," he said, "we'll smash your windows. This we must do, for if somebody drives through our village let them see that we've punished you, otherwise we'll be fined..."

Such were his exact words, just as I told them to you, so help me God in all my undertakings! Now I ask you, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, you are, after all, a man who has traveled all over the world—isn't Tevye right when he says that we have a mighty God?..

So that is the end of section *Balak*. Now we'll go back to section *Lech-lecho*—"Get thee out!" This lesson was taught to me not long ago, and in real truth. No fine speeches or moralizations could help me this time. But this story I must tell you in detail, with all the particulars, as you like stories to be told.

It was in the days of Mendel Beiliss—at the time

when Mendel Beiliss, our scapegoat, suffered the torments of the damned for someone else's sin, and the whole world was in a turmoil over the affair. One day I was sitting on the *prizba*, lost deep in thought. It was a hot summer day, the sun was baking my head as I meditated: But how, how could this be possible? In our times! Such a wise world! Such great people! And where is God? The ancient Jewish God? Why is He silent? How does He permit such a thing? How, and why, and wherefore!!! Such thoughts about God lead one to ponder over Heavenly things, to speculate: What is *this* world? What is the *next* one? And why doesn't the Messiah come? Eh, I said to myself, wouldn't he do a smart thing, the Messiah, if he came riding along on his white horse right now! Wouldn't that be a wonderful sight! It seems to me that our Jewish folk never needed him so badly as they do today! I don't know about the rich people, the Brodskys, for instance, in Yehupetz, or the Rothschilds in Paris. It may well be that they don't give a hoot for him; but we, the poor Jewish people of Kasrilovka and Mazepovka and Zlodzeyevka, and even of Yehupetz, and even of Odessa, are looking forward to his coming. Oh, how we wait for him! Our eyes are practically popping out of our heads from the strain of watching out for his arrival! Our only hope now is that God will perform a miracle and the Messiah will come!..

Meanwhile, as I sat lost in such thoughts, I looked up and—a white horse was approaching, with a rider on its back. The man pulled up his horse right at my gate. Whoa! He got off, hitched the horse to a gatepost and came right up to me.

“Zdravstvui, Tevel!”\*

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\* “Hello, Tevye!” (Russian.)—Tr.



"*Zdravstvuite, zdravstvuite, vashe blagorodiye,*"\* I answered, quite warmly, while my heart said, "*Haman approacheth*"—you are looking forward to the Messiah so the *uryadnik*, the village policeman, arrives...

I stood up to greet him, the *uryadnik*, that is: "Welcome, welcome, be my guest, what's new in the wide world and what good word will you say to me, Your Honor?" But my heart was almost springing out of my chest, so anxious was I to know what his business with me was. However he, the *uryadnik*, was in no hurry. He lit up a cigarette, blew out the smoke, spat, and then asked me:

"How much time, for instance, do you need, Tevel, in order to sell your house and all your belongings?"

I looked at him in amazement: "Why should I sell my house? In whose, for instance, way is it?" I asked.

"It's in nobody's way," said he, "but I've come to send you away from the village."

"Is that all, nothing else? For what good deeds? How did I come to earn such an honor?" I asked.

"It isn't I who am sending you away," he answered. "It's the *guberniya*—the provincial authorities."

"The *guberniya*?" I asked. "What has it noticed on me that it doesn't like?"

"It's not you alone," he said, "and not from here alone—from all the villages around, from Zlodeyevka, from Grabilovka, from Kostolomovka\*\*, and even from Anatovka that was up till now a *shtetl* but has also become a village. All, all your people will be driven out."

"Even Leizer-Wolf the Butcher?" I asked. "And

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\* "How do you do, Your Honor!" (Russian.)—*Tr.*

\*\* The names of the villages are derived from the Russian words *zlodei*—villain, *grabitel*—burglar, and *kostolom*—bone-breaker.—*Ed.*

Naftole-Gershon the Lame, too? And the Anatovka *shokhet*? And the Rabbi?"

"All, all of them, everybody!" said he and even made a cutting gesture with his hand, as if he were holding a knife...

This made me feel a little better. As we say, "*The troubles of the many are a half-consolation.*" However, I was greatly vexed by the injustice of the thing, and an anger burned in me, so I said to him, to the *uryadnik*:

"Tell me, do you at least know, *vashe blagorodiye*, Your Honor, that is, that I have lived in this village much longer than you? Do you know that my father, may he rest in peace, lived right here, in this corner, as did my grandfather, may he rest in peace, and my grandmother, may she rest in peace?" I counted out my whole family by their names, told him where they had lived and where they had died...

He heard me out all right, but when I finished talking he said:

"You're a funny Jew, Tevel, and you've got nine measures of speech in you. Of what good are your stories about your grandmother and grandfather? Let them enjoy their rest in Paradise. And you, Tevel," he went on, "you go pack your bag and baggage and clear out—march-march to Berdichev!"

This made me still angrier: wasn't it enough that he'd brought me such good tidings, this Esau, so he has to pile insult on injury, jeer at me—"march-march to Berdichev!" Let me at least give him a piece of my mind... So I said: "Your Honor! In all the years since you became the Chief here, how many times did you hear any neighbor of mine complain that Tevye stole something, robbed him, cheated him, or just took something? You just ask among the householders whether we haven't always been on the friendliest terms? Haven't I come to you, Your Honor, many

times to intercede for the peasants, begging you not to be so harsh with them?"

This, apparently, he didn't like! He got to his feet, crumpled his cigarette, threw it away, and said:

"I have no time to engage in idle chatter with you. I received a paper and the rest is none of my business! Here, sign this paper, you're given three days to sell off your belongings and get ready to leave."

I saw that things were bad and nothing could be done, but I said:

"You're giving me three days, that's what you're giving me? For that may you live three years in honor and in riches. May God repay you manifold for the good tidings you've brought me!"

I let him have it, as Tevye knows how! What's the difference, I thought, since I have to leave anyhow. What is there to lose? But had I been at least twenty years younger, and had my Golda, may she rest in peace, been alive, and if I were the same Tevye the Dairyman as in olden times I would surely not have given up so easily! I would have fought until blood flowed! But now? "*What are we and what is our life?*" What am I today and who am I? Only half the man I used to be, a splinter, a broken vessel!

Oh, Lord of the Universe, God Almighty! I thought to myself. Why do You always pick on Tevye? Why don't You sometimes play a game—just for fun—with, say, a Brodsky or a Rothschild? Why aren't they taught the lesson *Lech-lecho*—"Get thee out!"? It would be more to the point with them than with me. First of all, they would get the real taste of what it means to be a Jew. Secondly, let them, too, feel that we have a mighty God...

Oh, well, this is all empty talk. With God you don't argue, and you don't give Him advice on how to run the world. When He says: "*Mine is the Heaven and mine is the Earth*", it means that He is

the Master and we must obey Him. Whatever He says is said!

I went into the house and told my widowed daughter the good news:

“Tzeitl, we are moving out of this village, someplace to a town. We’ve lived in a village long enough,” I said. “*He who changes his place changes his luck...*’ Go and start packing the bedding and bedclothes, the samovar and all the rest of our junk, while I go out to sell the house. A paper has arrived which orders us to clear out of here in three days. Three days from now not even a whiff of us must remain here!”

These tidings made my daughter burst into tears and, looking at her, her little children, for no reason at all, also began to cry. Our house was full of wailing and laments as if it were *Tishab b’Ab*, the day on which we mourn the destruction of the Temple! This made me good and angry, and I poured the bitterness of my heart out on my poor daughter:

“What do you want from my life?! What’s all this blubbering for all of a sudden? Like an old cantor at the first prayer on a fast-day?.. What am I—God’s favorite son? Am I the only one to be so honored? Aren’t plenty of Jews being driven out of the villages now? You should have heard what the *uryadnik* said! Even your Anatovka that was a *shtetl* up to now has, with God’s help, also become a village—probably on account of the Anatovka Jews, so that all of them could be driven out. If that’s how it is, then how am I worse than all the other Jews?”

In this manner I tried to comfort her, my daughter, that is. But being a woman, she said:

“Where will we go to, so suddenly? Where will we go to look for towns?”

“Fool!” said I. “When God came to our great-great-grandfather, our Ancestor Abraham, and said to him ‘*Lech-lecho*’—‘Get thee out of thy country!’—did

Abraham question Him then, did he ask: 'Where shall I go?' God told him: '*Go unto the land which I will show thee*'—which simply means 'to all the four corners of the world...' We'll go," I said, "wherever our eyes lead us, wherever all the Jews go! Whatever happens to the Children of Israel will happen to Reb Israel. Are you a greater aristocrat than your sister Beilke who was a millionairess? If it suits her now to be with her Padhatur in America and 'make a living' there, then what we'll have here is good enough for you... Thank the Lord that we at least have the means to move. A little is still left over from before, the cattle and chattels we sold also brought us something, and something will come in from the sale of the house. From a speck and a speck you get a full peck—and '*that too is for the best*'! But even if, God forbid, we had nothing," I said, "we'd still be better off than Mendel Beiliss!"

In a word, I managed to persuade her not to be so obstinate. I made it clear that when an *uryadnik* comes and brings a paper saying you must go you can't be a swine and you have to go. After that I went out into the village to fix up the matter of the house. I went directly to Ivan Poperilo, the *starosta*, the elder, that is, of the village. He was a well-to-do man and had long had his eye on my house. I went into no explanations—I'm no fool—I simply said:

"I want you to know, my dear Ivan, that I'm forsaking you."

"Why so?" he asked.

"I'm moving into a *shtetl*. I want to live among Jews, I'm no longer young. What if, God forbid, I should go and die?.."

"Why can't you die right here? Who is preventing you?"

I thanked him kindly and said: "You'd better do the dying here yourself, you'll find it more handy, while

I'd rather go and die among my own people... Buy my house, Ivan, my house and kitchen garden. To another person I wouldn't sell, only to you."

"How much do you want for your house?"

"How much will you give me?"

"How much," he repeated, "do you want for it?"

Again I asked how much he was willing to pay. So we haggled and bargained and slapped each other's hands until at last we came to terms. I took a good down payment so that he shouldn't, God forbid, change his mind—I was too smart for him. And that was how I sold off in one day—dirt-cheap, of course—my whole property, turned everything into money and then went to hire a wagon to cart off the remaining odds and ends of poverty.

But what happened after that—only to Tevye do such things happen! Listen attentively, I won't keep you long, I'll tell it to you in two, as they say, words.

Just before it was time to leave, I entered the house. It was no longer a home, it was a ruin. Bare walls that literally shed tears! The floor was strewn with bundles, bundles, and bundles! On the stove sat the cat, a poor, orphaned creature—it looked so mournful, it cut me to the heart and brought tears to my eyes... If I weren't ashamed of showing such weakness before my daughter I would have had me a good cry. After all, as one says, my father's house!.. Here I grew up, this is where I struggled and suffered all my days, and now, suddenly—*Lech-lecho!* Say what you will, it is a sorrowful thing!

But Tevye is not a woman, so I restrained myself and pretended to be in a cheerful mood. I called out to my daughter the widow: "Come here, Tzeitl," I said, "where are you?"

She came out from the other room, her eyes red and her nose swollen. Aha, I said to myself, my daughter has started her lamentations again, like an old woman

on the Day of Atonement! These women, I tell you, the least excuse and they cry! Tears come cheap with them.

“Fool!” I said to her. “What are you crying for again? Aren’t you silly? Just think of the difference between you and Mendel Beiliss.”

But she paid no attention to my words and said:

“*Tateh*, you don’t know why I am crying.”

“I know the reason very well, why shouldn’t I know it? You are crying,” said I, “because it grieves you to leave your home. Here you were born, here you grew up, so it hurts you to part from it!.. Believe me, if I weren’t Tevye, if I were someone else, I would kiss these bare walls and these empty shelves... I would drop down to this ground!.. I am just as sorry as you are for every last bit! Foolish child! Even this cat—do you see how it sits there on the stove like a poor orphan? A mute tongue, an animal, and yet—what a pity, it is being left behind all alone without a master, *tsar-balekhaim*—a pity for living things...”

“There is someone else who is still more to be pitied,” said Tzeitl.

“Namely?”

“Namely,” she said, “we are going away and leaving one person here, lonely as a stone.”

I couldn’t understand what she meant. “What are you babbling about? Where’s the fire? What person? What stone?” I asked.

“*Tateh*,” she answered, “I am speaking about our Chava.”

When she said these words I felt, I swear, as if I’d been scalded with boiling water or clubbed over the head! My anger aroused, I began to shout:

“Why all of a sudden Chava?! How many times have I told you that Chava was never to be mentioned or remembered!”

Do you think this scared her? Tevye's daughters have a power in them!

"*Tateh*," she said, "don't get so angry, better remember what you yourself have said many times. You said that it stands written that a human being must have compassion for another human being, as a father has compassion for his child."

How do you like that? Her words exasperated me still more and I cried:

"You're speaking of compassion? Where was *her* compassion when I cringed like a dog before the priest, his name should be blotted out, when I kissed his feet while she was probably in the next room and heard every word?.. Or where was her compassion when her mother, may she rest in peace, was lying—this shouldn't happen to you—right here on the floor covered with a black cloth? Where was she then? And what about the nights when I couldn't sleep? And the heartache I suffered all the time and still suffer when I remember what she did to me, for whom she exchanged us—where was her pity for me?" I couldn't talk any more, my heart was pounding so...

Perhaps you think that Tevye's daughter found no words to answer me with?

"You yourself, *Tateh*, say that even God Himself forgives those who repent."

"Repentance?" I cried. "Too late! The twig that has once torn itself away from the tree must wither! The leaf that falls must rot, and don't you dare speak to me of this any more—'*Up to here and no further!*'"

In short, when Tzeitl saw that words availed her nothing—Tevye is not a person who can be won over with words—she fell on my neck, began to kiss my hands and cry:

"*Tateh*, may evil befall me, may I die right here on the spot if you repulse her as you did that time in the woods when she stretched out her hands to you and you turned your horse in the other direction and fled!"



“Why are you heckling me so?! What a nuisance, what a misfortune on my head!”

But she wouldn't let go of me, she held me by the hands and went on protesting: “May evel befall me, may I drop dead if you don't forgive her, she is your daughter just the same as I am!”

“What do you want from my life!” I cried. “She is no longer my daughter! She died a long time ago!”

“No,” said Tzeitl, “she never died and she is again your daughter as before, because from the very first minute she learned that we were being sent out she told herself that we were *all* being sent out—she, too. Wherever we went—Chava herself told me this—she would also go. Our exile is her exile... Look, *Tateh*, here is her bundle!”

All this my daughter Tzeitl said in one breath, as we recite the names of Haman's ten sons in the *Megilah*, she didn't let me put in a word. She pointed to a bundle tied up in a red shawl, and immediately opened the door to the other room and called: “Chava!”

That is how it was, as I live...

So what shall I tell you, dear friend? She, Chava, just as they write in the story-books, appeared in the doorway, healthy, strong, and as beautiful as before. Hadn't changed the slightest bit, only there was a worried look on her face and her eyes were a little clouded. She held her head up proudly and looked at me—and I at her. Then she stretched out both hands to me, and could utter only one single word, almost in a whisper:

“*Ta-teh...*”

Please forgive me, but when I remember that day tears come to my eyes. But you shouldn't think that Tevye, God forbid, dropped a tear, or showed that he

had a soft heart—nonsense! That is, what I then felt deep in my heart—that’s something else. You yourself are also a father of children and you know as well as I do the meaning of the words, “*A father hath mercy on his children.*” When a child, however it may have sinned, looks right into your heart and soul, and says “*Tateh!*”—come on, just try and drive it away!.. But on the other hand, I recalled the fine trick she had played on me... Fedka Galagan, damn him ... and the priest, may his name be forgotten ... and my tears ... and Golda, may she rest in peace, stretched out on the floor, dead... Oh, no! Tell me yourself, how can one forget, how can one forget such things?.. But on the other hand again ... how is it possible! After all, she was my child. “*A father hath mercy on his children.*” How can a man be so cruel when God says of Himself that he is a “*long-suffering God and slow to anger...*” Especially since she had repented and wanted to return to her father and to her God!..

What have you to say to this, Mr. Sholom Aleichem? You are, after all, a man who writes books and you give the world advice, so tell me, what should Tevye have done? Should he have embraced her and kissed her, and said to her, as we say on *Yom Kippur* at *Kol Nidre*: “*I have forgiven thee in accordance with thy prayers*”—come to me, you are my child? Or perhaps I should have turned the shafts, as I did that time in the woods, and said to her: “*Lech-lecho*”—begone, that is, go back in good health to wherever you’ve come from?.. No, suppose you were in Tevye’s place, tell me frankly, as between good friends, what would you have done? If you cannot answer me at once I’ll give you time to think it over... Meanwhile, I must go—my grandchildren are already waiting for me, looking out for their grandfather. You must know that grandchildren are a thousand times more precious than children. “*Children and children’s children*”—no small matter!

Please forgive me if I have given you a headache with

my talk; at least, you'll have something to write about... And now—goodbye. If God wills it we shall probably meet again some day...

1914

(*Halaklakot*—“Slippery Places”—is a very short story previously never translated from the Yiddish, written in 1916, just before the author's death, as an addition to “Get Thee Out!” In it Tevye, meeting the author by chance in a train, elaborates on how he managed to avert the lesson *Balak*—Vengeance—when the peasants came to beat him up or burn down his house. He told them that if they were in the right they would be able to repeat God's own words as written in the Holy Bible in the ancient language. By no means could any of them repeat the Hebrew words, hence the story might be called “Tongue-twisters”. The following is the last paragraph of the story.)

I have become a wanderer, one day here, another there. Ever since the lesson *Lech-lecho* was read to me I have been on the move and know no place of rest where I could say: “Here, Tevye, is where you shall remain.” Tevye asks no questions—he is told to go, he goes... Today, Mr. Sholom Aleichem, we meet in a train, tomorrow we may find ourselves in Yehupetz, next year—in Odessa, Warsaw, or even America—unless the Almighty looks around and says: “You know what, children? I'll send you down the Messiah!” Oh, how I wish He would play such a trick on us, He, the Ancient Lord of the Universe! And now—farewell. I wish you a happy journey, give my regards to all our people and tell them not to worry: *Our ancient God still lives!*

1914—1916

*Stories*



# THE TOWN OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE

The town of the little people I am leading you into, friend reader, is located exactly in the center of the blessed Pale of Settlement into which Jews were crammed head to tail, like herrings in a barrel, and were bidden to procreate and multiply. The name of this famous town is *Kasrilovka*.

Where does the name *Kasrilovka* come from? This is from where:

Among us a poor man is endowed with many appellations: there is the lowly person, the poor man, the pitifully poor man, the remarkably poor man, the man who has fallen into poverty, the destitute man, the down-and-out man, the pauper, the piteous pauper, the miserable beggar and the beggar of beggars. Each of these appellations is uttered in a different tone of voice... But there is still another name for a poor man—a *kasriel* or a *kasrilik*. This word takes on an altogether different tune. For example: “Oh, am I, knock on wood, a *kasrilik!*..” A *kasrilik* is not just a pauper, a *shlimazl*; this is already, you must understand, such a poor man that he doesn’t even feel degraded, God forbid, by his poverty. Quite the opposite, it is something to boast about! In our vernacular he is “poor but merry”...

Stuck away in a remote nook, isolated from the entire world around it, this town, as if orphaned, stands alone, dreaming, bewitched, engrossed in itself, just as if it has absolutely nothing to do with all the tumult and hurly-burly, the running and the scurrying, the devouring of each other, and all the other good things that human beings have taken the trouble to create and for which they have invented various names, such as “culture”, “progress”, “civilization” and other similarly fine words before which a decent person takes off his hat with great respect. Little, little people!.. Let alone automobiles, aeronautics and aviation—for a long time they didn’t even want to hear about our ordinary old railroad train and wouldn’t believe that such a thing actually did exist anywhere in the world. “I know what,” they’d say, “it’s idle fancies. Nonsense, much ado about nothing, a cow flew over the roof...” and other pithy words of this sort. At last it so happened that a certain Kasrilovka householder had to go to Moscow. He went, and when he came back he swore by all that is sacred that he himself had gone right to Moscow in a train in three quarters of an hour!.. So the Kasrilovites certainly did turn him inside-out: how could a Jew, a householder, swear to such a patent lie? However, it turned out that he had been misunderstood; he actually did not travel for more than three quarters of an hour in the train—the rest of the way he made on foot. As the story goes, the fact of the train was a fact against which nothing could be said, for if a Jew, a householder, swears such solemn oaths he probably didn’t suck the story out of his thumb. All the more so since he explained quite clearly how the train ran, and he made a drawing on paper showing how the wheels turned and the smoke-stack whistled while the carriages flew along the rails and Jews traveled to Moscow... The little people

listened to what he told them, nodding their heads in feigned agreement, but in their hearts they had a good laugh and thought: So we are to believe that wheels turn, a smoke-stack whistles, a carriage flies along rails and Jews travel to Moscow—and come back!

As you see they are all alike, the little people, not melancholy, gloomy folk or anxiety-ridden little businessmen. Indeed, they are renowned the world over as resourceful, witty, cheerful living souls. Poor but merry. It is difficult to say what, actually, it is they rejoice over. Why, nothing—it's a great life!.. A life? Go ask them, for instance: "How do you make your living?" So they'll answer: "How we make a living? You see, don't you, ha-ha-ha, we live..." And a remarkable thing—whenever you meet them they're running helter-skelter, like poisoned mice, in different directions, and they never have any time. "Where are you running to?" "Where we're running to? Don't you see, ha-ha-ha, we're running, hoping for a lucky chance to earn something for the Sabbath..."

To earn something for the Sabbath—that is their ideal. A whole week they'll work, labor, sweating blood, suffering, chewing earth, eating plagues, drinking fevers, as long as there is something for the Sabbath. Indeed, when the precious holy Sabbath arrives, then—get lost Yehupetz, get lost Odessa, get lost even Paris! It is said—and let this be a fact—that since Kasrilovka became a town it has never happened that a Jew should, God forbid, go hungry on the Sabbath. How can a Jew not have some fish for the Sabbath? Or if he has no fish he has meat; if he has no meat he has herring; if he has no herring he has a *hallah*; and if there is no *hallah* he has bread and onion; if he has no bread and onion he borrows some from his neighbor; next week on the Sabbath the neighbor will borrow from him—"The world is a wheel



and it turns..." He'll come out with such a saying and demonstrate with a hand how the wheel turns... Among the little people, when it comes to witticism—hold on. For a wisecrack they'll sell, as one says, both father and mother. The world is full of yarns about them that sound like jokes. But you may rest assured that all these stories are really true.

For instance, there is the story about the Kasrilovka householder who got so sick and tired of hungering in Kasrilovka that he set out to roam the world in search of luck; he became an emigrant and found himself in Paris one day. So, naturally, he was eager to get to Rothschild, for how come a Jew finds himself in Paris and doesn't meet Rothschild? But the drawback was that he wasn't allowed to enter. "What's wrong?" "Your tattered caftan." "You're smart guys, you are," argued the Jew. "If I had a good caftan what in the world would make me come to Paris?" In short—a bad deal! However, a Kasrilovka Jew never loses face and always manages to come up with some bright idea. So he thought things over, and then called to the doorman: "Go and tell His Lordship that it is no tramp who is calling on him but a Jewish merchant who has brought him an article the likes of which all the treasures in the world couldn't buy here in Paris."

On hearing such words Rothschild, just out of curiosity, told the doorman to let the merchant in. "*Sholom aleichem.*" "*Aleichem sholom.*" "Sit down. Where are you from?" "From Kasrilovka." "What good tidings do you bring?" "What can I tell you, Mr. Rothschild? It's like this: among us it is rumored that you are, knock on wood, a man of fair means, I should have at least a half, a third would also be enough. Well, and as regards honors you surely don't lack them, for he who has money has authority. In short, what is it you do lack? Just one thing: *eternal life*. So

I've brought it here to sell." Upon hearing the words "eternal life" Rothschild exclaimed: "A rare thing—what will it cost?" "It will cost you, Mister... (here the Jew stopped to reflect) as much as three hundred." "Perhaps we can haggle?" "No, Mr. Rothschild, that won't do. I should have as many blessings as the figure topping three hundred I could have named. But no matter—a word said cannot be unsaid." That's what the Jew said and Rothschild, without further ado, went and counted out three hundred bucks in cash, one by one. So first of all our Jew slipped the bit of *mezumen* into his pocket and then turned to Rothschild with the following words: "If you want to live forever I advise you to leave this noisy Paris and move with bag and baggage to us in Kasrilovka, then you'll never die, for since Kasrilovka became a town no rich man has ever died there!"

Then there is another story about a man who even managed to forge his way to America itself... But if I went on spinning yarns about the little people and their ideas and fancies I should have to sit here with you for three days and three nights talking, and talking, and talking. Let us rather turn to a description of the town itself.

You probably want to know what Kasrilovka looks like? Pretty as gold. Some say—from a distance. From a distance it looks like a ... how shall I put it, for example? It resembles a sunflower densely packed with sunflower seeds, or a noodle-board with lots of *farfl*—noodle-pellets—on it. The town lies before you as if on a platter, and you can see it from a mile away with all its wonders, because the town itself, you see, lies on a hill, that is, a hill has pushed itself onto the town, and at the foot of this hill there are numerous little houses, one atop another, like graves in an old cemetery, like old blackened toppling gravestones. There are

no streets to speak of, for no compasses were used in building, designing and measuring these houses; neither is there much space between them. Why should a plot of land stand uselessly vacant when a house can be built on it? It is written in the Book: "*Lishvakh yeytser*"—the creative urge—and it means that the world was created for living on, for *living* on, not for looking at. What's the use of looking?..

However, don't you worry, there are streets, too, big streets and little streets and narrow streetlets and backstreets. What does it matter that they aren't too straight, a little crooked, running downhill and uphill, and suddenly there is a house in the way, or a cellar, or just a big hole in the ground? All you can do is not to venture outside all alone in the dark without a lantern. But you needn't worry about the little people who live there: a Kasrilovite in Kasrilovka among Kasrilovites will never get lost. Each one finds his way home to his own wife and children, like a bird finds its nest...

Then there is a half-circular, or perhaps four-cornered open space in the middle of the town in which stand the shops, the storehouses, the butcher shops, the little stands and stalls; this is the market-place. It comes alive early every morning when a lot of peasants, men and women, arrive, bringing all manner of goods and provisions, fish and onions, and horseradish, and parsley, and all other kinds of vegetables. Having sold their bit of vegetables they buy from the Jews other necessities, and that is how the Jews eke out a living, not so grand perhaps but still—a living. It's better than nothing, after all... Right there in the market-place all the goats of the town lie stretched out during the day, warming themselves in the sun, and there, too—God forgive for mentioning them together—are the synagogues, the houses of prayer and study, and the *heders* where Jewish children learn the

Torah, prayers, reading and writing... The rabbis and their pupils sing and shout so loudly that you can go deaf... There is also the bath-house where the women bathe, the house for the poor where Jews die, and all the rest of the fine places that let themselves be felt from afar... Oh, no, Kasrilovka still knows no sewerage, plumbing, electricity, nor other such luxuries, but what does it matter? "Listen, people die the same death everywhere, and they are buried, see, everywhere in the self-same earth, and the earth is packed in with the self-same shovel!"—that's what my teacher Reb Isroel-Malech used to say at a celebration when he was good and merry, well in his cups, and already preparing to pull up the skirts of his caftan and abandon himself to dancing a *Deutsch* or a *Kazachok*...

What Kasrilovka can really boast of is its cemeteries. This blessed town owns two rich cemeteries: one is the old cemetery, the other—the new cemetery. That is, the new cemetery is also, mind you, old enough and rich enough in graves. There'll soon be no place for burials, should there, God forbid, happen a pogrom, a cholera epidemic, or just some misfortune in the nature of today's misfortunes.

What the little people of Kasrilovka are mainly proud of is the old cemetery. Although this old cemetery of theirs is already overgrown with grass and trees and there is hardly a single intact tombstone in it, still they look upon it as a place of reverence, of beauty, a treasure, and they take care of it as if it were the apple of their eye. Why? Because besides the ancestors of their forefathers who lie there—rabbis, holy men, scholars, all great celebrities, important people, there are grounds for believing that in this cemetery were also buried a great number of martyrs killed by the *haidamaks* in Khmel'nitski's time... This sacred spot is

the only piece of “property” the little people can call their own in the world; they are its sole owners; it is their only plot of land, their only piece of field where grasses sprout, trees grow, where the air is fresh and it is easy to breathe...

• You should see what goes on there when the end of the summer comes, about the beginning of the month *Elul*, during the “weeping days”—ai-ai-ai! Men and women—mostly women—coming and going, a milling mob of people—it’s no trifle, the graves of our forefathers! People come here from all over the world to have a good cry and to pour out the bitterness of their hearts on the holy graves. You know what I’ll tell you? Nowhere is weeping so easy and so comforting as in Kasrilovka, in the Field. That is, in the synagogues one can also weep to his heart’s content, but how does it match against the “Graves of Our Forefathers”? Our ancestor’s graves are also a source of income for the Kasrilovka stonecutters, innkeepers and cantors. The beginning of the month *Elul* is a real “harvest time” for the local poor, for women and for cripples.

“Have you already visited our Field?” a Kasrilovite will ask you with such pride as if he were asking whether you had already visited his father’s vineyard. If you haven’t been there, do him a favor and go out to their Field, read the old, almost obliterated inscriptions on the half-caved-in tombstones; in them you’ll find a piece of the history of an entire people... And if you are a person capable of enthusiasm and inspiration you will, having contemplated this poor town with its rich cemeteries, be unable to refrain from repeating those ancient words: *“How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!..”*

## SIMHATH TORAH

What a sober man keeps in his lung  
A drunken one lets slip from his tongue.

*A Jewish saying*

### I

“A quiet man, an honest man, won’t harm a fly on a wall,” was what people said of him in Kasrilovka, and he really was such a man.

“Don’t you take it for granted that he really is such a milksop, such an innocent lamb—still waters run deep!”—such was the frequently reiterated opinion of his employer, Reb Leibke, a man who owned a fine shop and was favored with extensive credit and distinguished in-laws.

“Woe is me with this *shlimazl* of mine, alas, God Almighty, any enemy I may have should get the same!” complained his wife Keileh-Beileh. Long ago, in her girlhood, she had had an affair with Motl Shpraiz, the scribe who wrote letters for girls (mostly to their fiancés). After that no match could be found for her and she was already well beyond the marrying age when her people managed to marry her off to Zorach-Boruch the Faithful. She was his second wife, so to spite him for his first wife’s children she presented him with a new baby every year.

“I can afford to make *them* look after *my* children,” Keileh-Beileh would say, but Zorach-Boruch paid no attention to her words since he was hardly ever at home.

Zorach-Boruch the Faithful (so he was known in Kasrilovka and he had no other name there) was always busy with the affairs of the shop, from early morning till late at night. He even had his food brought to him in the shop, but he never managed to get a proper meal: no sooner did he lift the first spoonful to his mouth than, as if on purpose, customers entered the shop.

Zorach-Boruch knew beforehand that he had only to wash his hands and begin the pre-meal prayer than—presto!—customers would flock into the shop. This time it was two peasants and a Jewish woman. The peasants, upon entering the shop, threw back their heads and gazed at the upper shelves, while the woman, seeing that Zorach-Boruch was performing the pre-meal ritual hand-washing, backed off modestly and said, with a coy smile:

“Eat, eat, Reb Zorach-Boruch, I’ll wait.”

However, Zorach-Boruch is not one to let a customer go away.

“What would you like?” he asks the woman, almost choking on a slice of bread, and at the same time approaches the peasants:

“*A sho, dyadki, skazhete dobroho?\**”

It turns out that the woman needs something the shop doesn’t carry, while the peasants admit that they have just dropped in for a look, nothing more, and, to dispel any suspicion that they mean to buy anything, they stand there for a while, craning their necks, and then slowly leave the shop. But Zorach-Boruch dislikes customers to leave without buying anything, so he runs after them and tries to pull them back by the coat-tails:

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\* “What’s the good word, friends?” (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

*"Eh, cholovichi, perevernish, ya sho mayeh tobi kazateh!\*"*

However, the customers don't let themselves be talked into returning and they go away the devil knows where; meanwhile the woman has slipped out of the shop and scurried into another one.

So upset is Zorach-Boruch that he loses his appetite, and on top of that his boss, Reb Leibke, has to come in and take him to task for his bad luck:

"Who was here?"

"Who was here?" repeats Zorach-Boruch, swallowing whole chunks, almost without chewing. "Customers were here."

"Customers? What did they buy?"

"What they bought? Fevers is what they bought!"

"So why do you say 'customers'?"

"What should I say?"

"Customers means people who let you earn something."

"Earn something? Don't I want to earn something?"

"Thank you for your good intentions!"

Both the master and his man are in a huff with each other, but they refrain from uttering cross words: the master feels that he has actually nothing to say to his man, while the latter, out of respect for his employer, does not talk back, no matter what is said to him.

But now in comes the mistress, jangling her keys, and repeats the same brew:

"Who was here?"

"How do I know who was here," says her husband, "ask him."

"Who was here?" she asks the salesman, jangling her keys.

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\* "Eh, man, turn around, I've got something to tell you!" (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*



The Faithful swallows the last bite, gets to his feet, shakes the crumbs out of his beard and looks at the mistress.

“Why are you looking at me like that? I asked you who was here?”

“Who was here?” repeats Zorach-Boruch in the previous manner. “Customers were here.”

“Customers? What did they buy?”

“What they bought? Fevers is what they bought!”

“So why do you say ‘customers’?”

“What should I say?”

“Customers are people who let you earn money.”

“Earn money? I would gladly earn some money together with you.”

“I’m in earnest!”

These last words are uttered in such a tone and with such venom that Zorach-Boruch almost throws up his meal. He is glad when some poor devil comes into the shop and asks to be shown some goods, although they all know—the master, the mistress, their salesman and the customer himself—that he is no customer at all: he will buy *nothing*.

“This, you mean, is your final price? Very well, I’ll drop in again, without fail, tomorrow morning...”

“Tomorrow with grief!” mutters Zorach-Boruch to the would-be customer’s back. Upon this the master throws him an ugly look and orders him to shut up and never speak such words behind a customer’s back. The mistress jangles her keys and adds fuel to the fire:

“What does he care if that one never as much as sticks his nose into our shop again? Is it his headache if we’ve got to meet a promissory note tomorrow?”

Zorach-Boruch says nothing. He merely gives her a look out of the corner of an eye. This look means: A promissory note? Whose head then does ache over this note?

All three know very well whose head aches when the time comes to pay back a loan, and all three are silent. The silence continues for several minutes. Who breaks it? Why, Zorach-Boruch. He jumps up suddenly, as if stung by nettles:

“Oh, it’s skipped my mind altogether! I have to run over to the priest, maybe he’ll give me some money. He promised to give me some today. If he doesn’t—I just don’t know how we’ll meet the note.”

With these words Zorach-Boruch snatches up his bamboo cane and sets off to see the priest. In the doorway he bumps into the mistress and hears her jangling her keys and grumbling:

“Skipped his mind ... much he thinks ... costs so much blood...”

In their hearts, however, they all know who carries the entire burden of the business, whose head aches when a loan has to be made, who remembers about money and who worries over promissory notes, and all three are certain that this is as it should be and can by no means be otherwise.

## 2

What Zorach-Boruch has to suffer from his employers is multiplied threefold when he comes home in the evening. The house is bleak and smoky, the smaller children are screaming, the samovar won’t come to a boil, while Keileh-Beileh, on the other hand, is boiling like a kettle, lashing about, fretting and raging, heaping the vilest of curses on *his* children.

“Eaters! A house full of eaters! Take other people’s children—this one is sickly, that one has measles, chicken-pox or some other children’s disease, another one breaks a leg ... but *these*—nothing takes them!”

However, Keileh-Beileh sinned when she spoke so,

and she knew she was sinning, for if any sickness broke out anywhere, an infection, a downpour—it was in their house. But when a child fell ill—be it his or be it hers—she moved heaven and earth, ran for the doctor herself, didn't sleep at night, and nagged her husband, making his life miserable.

“What kind of a father are you? A fine and true father! The child, poor thing, glows like a red-hot skillet—but does it even begin to bother him?! A heartless man!”

Zorach-Boruch utters not a word, just as if somebody else were meant. He is content to be able to snatch a bite of something and then topple into bed like a sheaf and fall asleep: early in the morning, while God himself is still asleep, Zorach-Boruch is already in the shop, “doing” the books. He says his prayers hastily, gulps down a glass of chicory brew with an egg-dough bagel and then runs out to make a short-term loan “to tide them over the fair”. His master is in a huff, the mistress grumbles, while at home his wife scolds, reads him out the whole *Toykhekhe*—the chapter of curses in the Bible. And so it goes on the whole year, the whole year round.

The one day Zorach-Boruch can rest from his week's toils is Saturday—how wonderful it is that there is a Saturday, a Sabbath, in the world. Only on that day does he feel how broken-down he is, there is not a sound limb in his body, just as (not to be mentioned in proximity) a horse who only begins to pant and heave its sides after it is taken out of its traces. Comes the holy Sabbath day, Zorach-Boruch the Faithful flings all his worries to the wind, throws off his yoke, forgets that there exists a shop with a master, a mistress and books to keep, with debts, promissory notes and priests, with short-term loans, with customers and with turnover. On this day he has no master over him,

no elders, and he wants to know nothing of a wife; he knows only God and the Sabbath. So he relaxes; he sleeps his fill, dons his Sabbath coat and overcoat, his Sabbath cap, his creaky Sabbath boots, and then goes to the synagogue. Once a week he sleeps properly and eats properly, he rests, and his soul rests, and all his limbs rest, and he thanks and praises Him who lives eternally for the gift He has bestowed on His beloved folk of Israel—for the only, holy, sweet and lovely Sabbath.

But still holier, sweeter and lovelier are the holidays. What other people have such a Passover as the Jews have? thinks Zorach-Boruch the Faithful and is envious of himself for having been born a Jew.

“Who else has such a merry holiday as *Sukkoth*, as *Hoshono Rabo*, as *Shmini-Atseres*, and, above all, as *Simhath Torah*... Just listen to the words themselves: *Simhath Torah*! On *Simhath Torah* a Jew makes merry! On *Simhath Torah* Jews drink strong beverages! On *Simhath Torah* Jews get drunk!”

So ruminates Zorach-Boruch the Faithful, and he looks forward to the merry holiday as to the coming of the Messiah.

The Messiah doesn't arrive, but the merry holiday does. With the oncome of *Simhath Torah* Zorach-Boruch seems to have grown a new skin: he is not the same man at all! Always silent, worried, away from home, he suddenly seems to wake up from a deep slumber, becomes lively, merry, invites people to his house for *kiddush*, goes to others for *kiddush*, pulls the *kugl* pudding out of the oven himself and vodka flows like water. He and his cronies, holding each other's hands, dance a *riked*—a Hasidic dance—in the middle of the street. Jews! Today is *Simhath Torah* all over the world!

*Hey-da!*  
*Dree-da-da!*  
*Ramte-dree-da-da!*

Peasants passing by stop to look at Jews roistering and playing the fool.

“*O tse harno, koli vzhe zhid da napivsy!*”—that is, when a Jew already does get drunk he goes all the way!

Zorach-Boruch the Faithful drinks and drinks, making up for the whole year, he drinks until he is so besotted that he doesn't remember his own name; he turns into a real hoodlum and is overwhelmed by the wish to find his master and mistress and let them know what he thinks of them, tell them the whole truth at least once—to let what's on his lung slip from his tongue and thus cool the fire burning in his heart!

“Damn him and his ancestors!” shouts Zorach-Boruch the Faithful and attempts to get to his employers, but he is held fast. Keileh-Beileh and the older children have a tight grip on his arms. Zorach-Boruch tries to tear himself loose, he flings himself about, he fights and yells as if he were in a madhouse.

“Let me!.. Lemme go!.. Damn him!”

Keileh-Beileh fears that he may, God forbid, actually tear himself away and attack his master and mistress and so lose his job. So she struggles with him with all her strength, ties up his hands behind his back with a towel, puts him, the *shlimazl*, into his bed and locks the door. But Zorach-Boruch, the gentle Zorach-Boruch who wouldn't harm a fly on the wall, raves and storms, breaks plates, fights, and keeps on yelling at the top of his voice:

“Lemme go!.. Let me!.. Damn them to Hell and back!”

Zorach-Boruch rages and shouts until he suddenly melts into tears and begins to sob and cry like a baby.

He recalls his father who died more than twenty years ago—oh, what a father he was, such a father!.. And so he weeps, the poor orphan, bathed in tears. This goes on until, at last, he falls asleep.

Early next morning, while God himself is still asleep, Zorach-Boruch the Faithful is already in the shop, “doing” the books. He says his prayers hastily, gulps down a glass of chicory brew with an egg-dough bagel and then runs out to make a short-term loan “to tide them over the fair”. His master is in a huff, the mistress grumbles and jangles her keys, while at home his wife scolds, reads him out the entire chapter of curses. And so it goes the whole year, the whole year round, until next year’s *Simhath Torah*.

1903

# YOU CAN'T WIN!

*Menachem-Mendel—a Matchmaker*

*Menachem-Mendel,  
while traveling,  
writes to his wife Sheineh-Sheindl  
in Kasrilovka*

To my beloved, modest, wise spouse Mrs. Sheineh-Sheindl, long may she live.

Firstly, I must inform you that I am, thank God, in good health and everything is fine with me. We should always, God willing, have only happy tidings and good news from each other. Amen.

Secondly, I must let you know that I am dogged by bad luck, nothing works out right for me, go and burst asunder! As soon as I received the few rubles you sent me I at once settled my bill at the inn and started packing. What more do you want? I even bought myself a ticket to Fastov and boarded the train, intending to go from Fastov straight home, to Kasrilovka, that is.

Yes, but we have a mighty God, so just hear what a trick He can play. I once wrote you that in the same inn where I stood there also lodged a matchmaker, Leibe Lebel'sky by name. He boasted that he carried the whole world in his bosom-pocket, that he earned sackfuls of gold. Meanwhile, he had to go away for a few days in connection with an important match. He had received, so he said, a "nurgent" telegram summoning him someplace without delay. His whole bundle of papers he left with the landlady, asking her to keep it for him until he returned from the matchmak-

ing, at which time he would settle his bill. And just as you saw him—so we saw him! Well, as I was leaving the inn the landlady said to me: “Since you are traveling along the same line, take the matchmaker’s bundle, perhaps you’ll meet that *shlimazl*, that Leibe Lebel’sky—hand him over his ‘cribs’.”

“What do I need someone else’s bundles for?” I replied.

But she said: “Don’t be afraid, it’s not money, it’s just sheets of paper, pages from a book.” And so it truly was!

When I was already sitting in the train I untied the bundle—merely out of curiosity—and had a look inside: it contained a whole fortune! Letters from matchmakers, lists of parents with marriageable children, and just written papers. Among the latter was a long memorandum in Hebrew, about possible brides and grooms—all in alphabetical order. I’m giving it to you word for word.

*Avruch*. Chava, daughter of Reb Leivi Tonkinog . . . very wealthy man . . . aristocratic lineage . . . his wife Miriam-Gitel also highly-born . . . girl tall . . . beautiful . . . four thousand . . . wants a “graduated”.

*Balta*. Feitel, son of wealthy Iosif Hitlmacher . . . “*prosveshchenetz*”,\* Zionist . . . finished bookkeeping school . . . exempt from military service . . . observes daily ritual of prayers . . . wants money.

*Glukhov*. Yefim Bolosny . . . pharmacist . . . shaves\*\* . . . likes Jews . . . lends out money . . . wants a brunette.

*Dubno*. Leah, daughter of rich Meyer Korzhik . . .

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\* Here: a person with a secular education as opposed to one who studied at a religious school.—*Ed.*

\*\* Orthodox Jewish religion forbids shaving—hence, the pharmacist was not a religious man.—*Tr.*



Good family . . . short stature . . . red hair . . . speaks French . . . can give money.

*Haisin.* Lipeh Brash . . . brother-in-law of Itzi Koimin . . . adviser at Reb Zalman Radimyshler's sugar refinery . . . an only son . . . handsome . . . insolent eyes . . . wants to strike it rich.

*Vinnitza.* Chaim Hekht . . . bachelor . . . dabbles in stocks and bonds . . . drives in a phaeton . . . fancy earner . . . has an even ten thousand.

*Zhitomir.* Rich man Shloimeh-Zalman Tarataika . . . two unmarried daughters . . . first-class beauties . . . the younger one a little pock-marked . . . piano, German, French . . . want educated grooms, diploma not necessary.

*Khmelnik.* Basya Flekl, wealthy woman . . . widow, money-lender . . . wondrously wise . . . wants a Talmud scholar . . . money not important.

*Talnoye.* Rabbi Reb Avremeleh Feintzig . . . widower . . . Bible scholar . . . Hasid . . . looks for a woman with a business.

*Yampol.* Moishe-Nisl Kimbak . . . newly rich upstart . . . wife Mrs. Beileh-Leah . . . dying for a match . . . will double whatever the other side agrees to give . . . matchmaker's fee will be paid as soon as the plate is broken\* . . . mother promises special gift for matchmaker.

*Kasrilovka.* Reb Noson Korach . . . Mammon-rich . . . avaricious swine . . . talks big . . . son of learned Iosif-Itzhok . . . sharp wits . . . Turgenev . . . Darwin. . . In still waters the worms are worst . . . asks for a poor orphan . . . a beauty of beauties . . . wouldn't hurt him to send some money for expenses . . . ungreased wheels don't turn.

*Lipovetz.* Son of wealthy Leibush Kapote . . .

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\* Breaking a plate is part of the wedding ceremony.—*Tr.*

a zealous Hasid . . . preparing to take examinations for eight classes. . . Resident of Odessa . . . plays the fiddle, knows Hebrew . . . very good-looking.

*Mezhibizh.* Reb Shimshon-Shepsl Shimelish . . . widower . . . has two daughters and three thousand . . . but first must get married himself . . . so he also wants a maiden.

*Nemirov.* Smitzik . . . Bernart Moiseyevich . . . of the real Smitziks . . . divorced . . . independent . . . expert hand in card game of *preference* . . . has influence with the authorities . . . worthy of a maiden with five thousand or a divorcée with ten thousand.

*Smela.* Pereleh Dama . . . divorcée with ten thousand . . . wants educated commissioner.

*Anatovka.* Householder Reb Mendel Lopata. Older over seventy . . . but strong, manly bearing . . . buried three wives . . . wants a maiden.

*Priluki.* *Gymnaziya* student Freitig. . . Son of wealthy Mikhel Freitig . . . wears hat at home . . . doesn't write on Saturday\* . . . wants twenty thousand and not a kopeck less . . . will give half against this.

*Tsaritsyn.* Inventory of wealthy widower Fisher. . . Lives in Astrakhan. . . Promises two winning tickets of the first loan lottery apart from the matchmaker's fee . . . will have to write him another letter . . . asked him to send me twenty-five rubles for expenses . . . at least stamps.

*Kremenchug.* Educated, wildly fanatical Zionist . . . hundreds of committees . . . clever . . . shrewd chess player . . . Talmud—by heart . . . gift of the gab . . .

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\* This shows that he observed Jewish religious laws, according to which males must always have their heads covered, and nobody should work, write, or travel on Saturdays.—*Ed.*

good sense of humor . . . writes a splendid hand . . .  
rumored already married.

*Radomysl.* Grandson of Reb Naftoli Radomyshler . . . follower of the Sadagora Hasidic rabbi . . . sugar refinery . . . a gold mine . . . half Hasid, half German—short sidelocks and long coat . . . fluent in languages and Biblical learning. . . Has millionaire uncle and military exemption receipt\* . . . looking for a beauty . . . good family . . . two hundred thousand . . . piano . . . respectability . . . French . . . wig . . . dancing . . . candle-blessing\*\* . . . girl with no suitors.

*Shpola.* Famous, wealthy Elya Chernobyler . . . lives in Yehupetz . . . sugar and real estate broker . . . partner of famous and rich Babishke . . . only daughter . . . demands a pie in the sky . . . groom must have greater knowledge than a doctor . . . exemption from military service . . . be handsome as the Biblical Joseph . . . wise as King Solomon . . . able to sing and play all instruments . . . family without a blemish . . . money without count . . . possessing all virtues . . . almost a Brodsky. . . Sent a telegram to Radomysl.

*Tomashpol.* Five girls . . . three beauties, two frights . . . each must have either a doctor with a properly equipped reception office or a lawyer with a good practice in Yehupetz. . . Sent out lots of letters.

As I sat there in the train with the matchmaker's bundle on my lap, I read and reread this Hebrew

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\* Confirmed payment for exemption from military service in tsarist Russia.—*Tr.*

\*\* In Orthodox Jewish religion a married woman must wear a wig, and it is her duty to perform the candle-blessing rite on the Sabbath.—*Tr.*

memorandum listing would-be brides and grooms. Then I started thinking: Lord of the Universe! How many livelihoods has the Almighty created for His Chosen Ones! Take, for instance, this matchmaking business. What, it appeared to me, could be finer and more respectable, better and easier than this? What is there to do in it? All you need is to have a rivet in your head and be able to put your mind to figuring out who suits whom. For example: Avruch has a girl, a beauty with a dowry of four thousand and she wants a “graduated”, while Balta has a Zionist, a scholar who has finished a bookkeeping course and wants money—aren’t they made to measure for each other? Or take Talnoye: there we have a widower who is looking for a widow with a business—why shouldn’t he pick himself up and go to Khmelnik where the widow Basya Flekl is looking for a widower without money, but with learning? Do you understand, dear wife—a person only has to be able to work out combinations. Had I been born to be a matchmaker I would have put the entire business on another footing. I would have got into contact with all the matchmakers, all the marriage brokers of the world, and then taken all their lists and sat myself down to pair off couples, first on paper, of course—a future bride and groom, groom and bride. In every town I would have me a partner—as many partners as towns, so many towns—so many partners! Everything we earned we’d share—share and share alike, half for you, half for me. It might perhaps even be worthwhile to open an office in Yehupetz or in Odessa, to have employees who would sit in these offices all the time, writing letters and sending out telegrams, while I myself did nothing but sat and paired off couples and worked out combinations!

Such were the thoughts, the fantasies and combinations that flitted through my mind, when suddenly a "good" wind brought a newcomer into my car. He was a man overgrown with hair from head to foot, dragging a sack and snuffling like a goose. In an oddly polite manner, quite out of the ordinary, this person addressed himself to me: "Young man," he said, "perhaps it might not be a bad idea if you kindly moved over a bit and so made room for a person such as I, for instance, to be enabled to have the honor to sit down comfortably at your side for a moment?"

"Why not? With the greatest pleasure!" said I and made room for him, and then asked him, just for appearance's sake, "Wherefrom are you?"

"Where I hail from, you mean? I'm from Koretz," he answered, "and my name is Osher, people call me Reb Osher the Matchmaker. I am, you see, a matchmaker, and have been one, slowly but surely, with God's help, for almost forty years."

"Oh, really?" said I. "So you are also a matchmaker?"

"From this," said he, "I must infer that *you* are most certainly a matchmaker, that is—you are one of ours, so you are lawfully entitled to a big hello—*Sholom aleichem!*" With these words the matchmaker stuck a huge, soft, hairy hand into mine and then asked me, also, apparently, for appearance's sake, in Hebrew: "*What is your name?*"

"Menachem-Mendel," I said, "is my name."

"Sounds familiar," he remarked, "I've heard it somewhere, but I don't remember where. Now you listen to what I have to say to you: since we've got into such great trouble—that is, I mean, since the Almighty in His providence so arranged it that we, two matchmakers, should meet in the same place, should find ourselves, so to say, under one roof, then it might

perhaps not be a bad idea if we fixed up something right here on the spot.”

“Namely what,” asked I, “should we fix up?”

“It might be that you have someone who is willing to partake of good wine in a bad vessel?” asked he.

“And what, namely, do you mean by good wine in a bad vessel?”

“With your permission,” said he, “I’ll explain it to you right away, give you chapter and verse, then everything will be clear,” said he. “I have a piece of goods in Yarmolinetz, top quality, an antique, his name is Reb Itzik Tashratz... As regards lineage—he’s immersed in it, for in addition to his own aristocratic ancestors she, his wife, is still higher-born. Only the trouble is that he wants his noble birth to be paid for in hard cash. However much he gives—he wants the other side to give twice as much...”

“Hold it,” I exclaimed, “it seems to me that I’ve got the exact article you need.”

With these words I opened my bundle, pulled out the memorandum of my matchmaker Leibe Lebelsky, found the note on Yampol and showed it to my companion:

“Here he is,” I said, “the one you’re looking for! Read, and you’ll see. Moishe-Nisl Kimbak, *parvenu*—a newly rich upstart, that is; is so eager for a match that he is dying—passing out, that is! Whatever the other party gives he pledges himself to double—to give twice as much, that is. Exactly what you are looking for!..”

Upon hearing such words and learning that this Moishe-Nisl Kimbak also promises to pay the matchmaker’s fee as soon as the plate is broken, and that an additional special gift is promised by the mother, my Reb Osher leaps to his feet, seizes my hand and shouts:

“*Mazl-tov*, Reb Menachem-Mendel, we’ve made

a deal! I noticed in your basket, if I'm not mistaken, egg-cookies, tea, and sugar, and other odds and ends, so perhaps it won't be amiss if we take a bite meanwhile, and when, God willing, we arrive safely in Fastov you'll take the trouble to go for hot water—I saw that you have a tea-kettle—then we'll have ourselves a couple of glasses of hot tea, and we'll get some booze, proof fifty-seven, at the station, and drink the healths of my Yarmolinetz aristocrat and your Yampol *parvenu* who is dying for a match. Let it be," said he, "in a propitious hour, in a lucky hour!"

"Amen," said I, "from your lips to God's ears. But faster said than done!"

Here he, the matchmaker, that is, interrupts me: "Your servant, Reb Menachem-Mendel, you don't know with whom you are dealing! You are not doing business with a callow youth, you are dealing with a world-famed matchmaker," says he, "who is called Reb Osher and who hasn't as many hairs on his head as marriages he has already, with God's help, arranged. We should both earn as many hundred rubles as the number of couples of mine that have already gotten divorced, married again and divorced again... Me—I have only to glance at a list to immediately feel whether it's a go or not. Your Moische-Nisl," says he, "is to my taste, he must have some flaw, so let us figure out what's biting him, why is he so eager for a match, what's burning, what's making it so hot for the mother that she even promises special gifts for the matchmakers? It stands to reason that there's a worm in the wood—a wormy apple, that is..."

"So what is your idea?"

"My idea," says he, "is a very simple one: we'll soon part and leave in two different directions. I'll make for Yarmolinetz to my high-born Reb Itzik Tashratz, while you'll go to Yampol to your Moische-Nisl Kimbak.

However ... we'll both have to buckle down to hard work. Your job is to make sure that the wormy apple coughs up the biggest sum you can talk him into giving, while I," says he, "will apparently have to make sure that my Tashratz, on the other hand, does actually give a half of that sum, as he assured me he would, because who can tell about a man who deals in genealogy?"

As you can see, my dear spouse, it all started with a jest, just for fun, and then suddenly turned into a real thing. A word for a word—and here we were already in Fastov. Well, so first of all we had some tea and a good meal, and then we began to discuss the matter in earnest. At first I felt rather embarrassed by the whole idea: what kind of a matchmaker am I? And what are someone else's lists to me? Outright robbery, if you please! As if, say, somebody had dropped a purse with money in it and I had picked it up... But on the other hand—what is there to make such a fuss about? It's either or... If the match works out—share and share alike! After all, I'm no highwayman to steal what doesn't belong to me. In short, I decided there was nothing wrong in what I was doing. So, as we had decided, we set out to our separate destinations—he to Yarmolinetz, I to Yampol. We made the following arrangement: when I got to the place I would first of all try to nose around and find out the reason for this Moishe-Nisl Kimbak's great eagerness for a match. Then I would pay a visit to the family and if I found the "principal" to my liking I'd knock off a telegram to him in Yarmolinetz, saying so-and-so, and he'd wire so-and-so in reply, and then we'd get together, probably in Zhmerinka, for the young people to look each other over and if they turned out to be a suitable couple the match would be on.



"The main thing, Reb Menachem-Mendel," said he, "is not to grudge money for expenses, to keep on sending telegrams; when the father of a future bride or groom sees a telegram a devil plucks at his heartstrings!"

Now, when it was time to buy our railway tickets it turned out that my splendid, top-notch matchmaker Reb Osher didn't have enough money to pay his fare. He said that he had laid out his last kopeck on dispatches and telegrams.

"You should earn," he said, "as much in a month as I spend in a week on telegrams."

You understand? That's how a matchmaker makes a living! Meanwhile, the train wasn't going to wait for us, so I had to lay out my few rubles, because I wasn't going to dump the whole business on account of expenses.

We exchanged addresses, took hearty leave of each other, and boarded our trains—his for Yarmolinetz, mine for Yampol.

When I got to Yampol I first of all began to investigate:

"Who is this here Moishe-Nisl Kimbak?"

So people said: "All Jews should have his worries!"

"Does he have many children?"

They replied: "Poor men have many children, a rich man has no more than one."

"What kind of child?"

"A daughter."

"A fine daughter, eh?"

"There's enough of her for two!"

"Does he offer a good dowry?"

“However much he gives—it wouldn’t hurt him to give twice as much!” was the answer.

I began to snoop around, trying to find out why. Snoop here, snoop there—found out nothing. So I donned my Sabbath coat and went directly to this Kimbak’s house.

To describe their house is impossible. A wealthy man’s home, full of good things, and the people themselves—jewels. When I explained who I was and why I had come, I was given a royal welcome: they treated me to sweet tea with spongecake and fragrant citron preserves, and a bottle of fine cherry brandy was put out on the table. My host, Moishe-Nisl, that is, made a good impression on me at once: a friendly, good-natured man. One might well say: a man without gall. As for his wife, the future bride’s mother, Beileh-Leah, that is, her I also liked from the very first glance. A good-looking woman with a double chin, quiet and modest. Both of them started to question me about the other party: who the people were and did they have a good son and what was he able to do? What could I answer when I knew nothing myself? But a clever man can always cook up some idea. So I said:

“Let us first finish with one side and then we’ll talk about the other side. First of all I want to know the exact sum of the dowry you’re prepared to give; secondly, I’d like to have a look at the principal.”

Upon hearing such talk my host, Moishe-Nisl, that is, turned to his wife Beileh-Leah and asked:

“Where is Sonichka? Tell her to come here.”

“Sonichka is still getting dressed,” answered the future bride’s mother, Beileh-Leah, that is, got up and went into the next room, while I and the future father-in-law, Moishe-Nisl, that is, remained where we were. We took a few drops of cherry brandy, chased it down with some citron preserves, keeping up a conversation.

What did we talk about? Nothing, empty words, much ado about nothing.

“How long have you been a matchmaker?” he asked me and poured me another little glass of cherry brandy.

“Since my marriage,” I answered. “My father-in-law is a matchmaker, and my father, too, was a matchmaker. All my brothers are matchmakers. Our family is almost entirely made up of matchmakers...”

I hatched one lie after another without so much as turning a hair, but I felt that my face was aflame. I myself don't know from where all these falsehoods came to me! But what choice did I have? As your mother says: “Once you've crawled into a bog you've got to keep on crawling...” As I have already told you, I had decided that if the Almighty made my luck hold and I succeeded in bringing off this match, then my part of the earnings I would, God willing, divide, without any justifications at all, half and half, with that other matchmaker, with Leibe Lebel'sky, that is, who had forgotten his bundle of writings at the inn. What can I have against him? What if, in all honesty, it might be ruled that my part should belong to him entirely? But then—where am I? Actually, I am the initiator of the whole undertaking. Is my work worth nothing at all? And am I obliged to spill out lies on another's behalf? Maybe it was God's will that he should lose and I should find, and owing to me three Jews would earn some money?

As I was musing so the door opened and in came my hostess, Beileh-Leah, that is, and right after her—Sonichka, the future bride, that is. A tall, good-looking, healthy girl, sturdy and sedate, like her mother.

My, that's some size, knock on wood, in height and width! I thought to myself. Not a Sonichka—a whole Sonichnik!

She was dressed, this future bride, I mean, rather oddly: her long, colorful cloak-like gown made her look

more like a matron than a girl—not because she looked old, but because of her bulk, knock on wood!

I should have liked to have a talk with her, to see what breed of animal this was, but her father—he wouldn't let anyone get a word in edgewise. He kept on chattering, flooding me with words. What do you think he talked about? Why, about Yampol.

"It is a town," he said, "chockful of gossips, envious people, archenemies, ready to drown you in a spoonful of water!"—and other such idle nonsense. Finally his wife, Beileh-Leah, that is, interrupted him and said:

"Moishe-Nisl, perhaps we've had enough talk? Better let Sonichka play something on the *fertipian*\*!"

"I'm all for it," answered Moishe-Nisl and winked at his daughter. The daughter went and sat down in front of the *fertipian*, opened a great big book and began banging the keyboard for all she was worth. Her mother, Beileh-Leah, that is, called out to her:

"Sonichka, what do you need those 'tudes\*\* for? Better give us 'Beyond the Danube Rode a Cossack', 'Hot Cakes', or something from 'The Witch', or even *The Song of the Sabbath*."

"*Pozhaluista*, don't *meshai*\*\*\*," answered Sonichka and drummed her fingers over the *fertipian* with such speed that the eyes couldn't follow them. Meanwhile, her mother Beileh-Leah didn't take her eyes off her daughter, as if to say: "Do you see those fingers?.."

After some time the parents slipped out of the room and I was left all alone with the bride-to-be, with Sonichka, that is. Eye to eye.

Now, I thought to myself, is the time to strike up

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\* Garbled *fortepiano*, the Russian for pianoforte.—*Tr.*

\*\* Etudes.—*Tr.*

\*\*\* *Pozhaluista*—please; *meshai*—interfere (garbled Russian).—*Tr.*

a conversation with her. Let me at least find out whether she can talk.

But how does one begin? I got up from my chair and went and stood behind her back and said:

"Please don't take it amiss, Sonichka, that I'm interrupting your music, but I wanted to ask you something."

She turned around to me, a sullen look on her face, and said angrily, in Russian:

"*Naprimer?*—For instance?"

"*Naprimer,*" said I, "I wanted to ask you what your wishes were? That is, what sort of a bridegroom would you like to be given?"

"*Viditye,*" she said, a bit milder already, lowering her eyes. "Actually, I would prefer a 'graduated'. But I know that's *ponaprasno*, so I should like, *po krainei meréh*, an educated man, because although our Yampol *shchitayet* itself to be a fanatical town, still, *nyesmotrya*, we have all *poluchet* a Russian education, and although we do not attend any *uchebnoye zavedeniye*, still, you won't find a girl among us who is not *znakoma*\* with Émile Zola, with Pushkin, or even with Gorky."

That's what she said to me, Sonichka, this "belle", that is, and on she went talking to me half in Yiddish, half in Russian—that is, mostly in Russian. Then the future mother-in-law, Beileh-Leah, that is, came in and called away the bride-to-be, as if to say: "There's a limit to all things!"

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\* *Viditye*—you see; *ponaprasno*—in vain; *po krainei meréh*—at least; *shchitayet*—considers; *nyesmotrya*—notwithstanding; *poluchet*—incorrect form of the Russian verb "*poluchat*"—to receive; *uchebnoye zavedeniye*—educational establishment; *znakoma*—acquainted (all in garbled Russian).—*Tr.*

After that Moishe-Nisl, the future father-in-law, entered the room and again we sat down for a talk between the two of us, a talk about the forthcoming match: how much dowry he would give, where we should go to get acquainted with the other party, the wedding date, and so on and so forth. I got to my feet, intending to go to the station to send off a wire, but he, Moishe-Nisl, that is, grabbed me by the hand and said:

“No, Reb Menachem-Mendel, you won’t go yet! First you’ll have dinner with us, you must be hungry.”

So we went and washed our hands and then sat down to eat and drink some cherry brandy. His mouth—that is, Moishe-Nisl’s, didn’t shut for a moment: Yampol, Yampol, and Yampol. . .

“You just can’t imagine,” said he, “what a town this is! A town of loafers and gossippers. Take my advice and keep your distance, don’t say a word to anybody. Don’t tell them anything about who you are and where you come from and what you are doing here; my name don’t so much as mention, just as if you don’t even know me. Do you get that, Reb Menachem-Mendel? You don’t know me at all!”

He repeated this about ten times; at last I left and dashed off a wire to my partner in Yarmolinetz, just as we had agreed. I wrote quite clearly in Russian: “Goods examined. Top quality. Six thousand. Wire how much opposite. Where get-together.”

A strangely worded answer arrived on the next day: “Sticks to ten. Opposite half six. Work for more. Consents Zhmerinka. Prime goods. Telegram me.”

With this I ran to my Moishe-Nisl. I showed him the dispatch and begged him to explain what it meant, for I understood nothing. He read the telegram and exclaimed:

“Man! What is it you don’t understand here? It’s

quite clear. He wants, see, me to give ten, then he'll meet me with half of six. Three thousand, that means. Now you go and let him know that he's already getting too smart. In short, here are my words," said he. "As much as he gives I'll put down double. And tell him that he shouldn't dawdle—exactly such words send him—because someone else may turn up."

I did as he said and sent off the following wire to my partner: "Short words. As much as he gives I put down double. Don't dawdle. Another one may turn up."

The answer that came from my Osher was again foggy:

"Agrees to half. Stipulates a thousand back. Goods a find."

Again I rushed to my Moishe-Nisl. So he explained again: "It's all quite clear. Your partner writes that he agrees to put down exactly half, but on the condition that he gets one thousand back. This is what it means: if I, for instance, were to give ten he should give five; but he wants one back. So it will turn out," said he, "that I actually do give ten, while he won't give more than four. A real wise-guy, this future in-law! He wants to swindle me from head to toe. However," said he, "I'm a businessman and know all about deals. What I'll do is give him twice as much as he gives and a thousand on top of that, rather than he should give me half and then take back a thousand. It'll work out this way then: if he gives three—I'll give seven, if he gives four—I'll give nine; if he gives five—I'll give eleven. Well," said he, "have you chewed that up? So go right away and send him a 'nurgent' telegram, telling him not to pigeonhole the deal and answer with a 'nurgent' wire agreeing get-together—and let there be an end!"

I rushed away and dashed off a "nurgent" dispatch to my Osher: "If three given lays down seven, if four

puts down nine, if five gives eleven. Don't hole up pigeons. 'Nurgently' wire departure."

In answer to this I got a "nurgent" wire consisting of only two words: "Departuring. Departure."

When does such an important telegram arrive? In the dead of night, of course. You may be sure that I slept not a wink that night. I began to figure out how much money I'd make if, say, for example, the Almighty helped me and I succeeded in concluding matches for all the names on the list Leibe Lebelsky had lost. In God's hands such things are possible, aren't they? I firmly resolved that if, God willing, I carried out this business I would form a permanent partnership with my Osher. He appealed to me, since I thought he was a very brave man and a lucky one, too. Naturally, Leibe Lebelsky wouldn't be left out, either. What could I have against him? Also a poor man burdened with many children. . .

I barely lived to see daylight, said my prayers and then went to my clients to show them the telegram. They immediately had coffee and butter-rolls served. We decided that all four of us would take the train to Zhmerinka that very day. However, so as not to arouse suspicions in Yampol, I would go by an earlier train and they would come later. Meanwhile I was to find a good lodging for them and order a tasty supper. And so it was. . .

I was the first one to arrive in Zhmerinka. I went to the best inn—actually, the only one in the town, the *Odesky Gostinits*—the Odessa Hotel, that is. There I first of all got acquainted with the landlady, a very pleasant and hospitable woman. I asked her:

"What have you got to eat?"

"And what would you like?" she asked.



"Do you have fish?" I asked.

"Fish can be bought."

"Well, and what about a broth?"

"A broth can also be served."

"With what? Noodles or rice?" I asked.

"Even with *klyotski*\*, she answered.

"Well, and what, for instance, about roasted ducklings?"

"For money," she said, "you get ducklings, too."

"And drinks?" I asked.

"What do you drink?"

"Have you got beer?"

"Why shouldn't we have beer?"

"And how about wine?"

"If you have the money," said she.

"Oh, well," said I, "if that's the case, then would you please kindly take the trouble, my dear woman, to prepare a supper for eight persons."

"Where," said she, "do you get eight people from all of a sudden when you are here all alone?"

"What a strange woman!" I exclaimed. "It's no concern of yours, when you are told eight it means eight!"

At this moment in came my partner, Reb Osher, that is, and he fell on my neck and started hugging and kissing me as if he were my own father.

"My heart told me," he said, "that I'd find you here, in the Odessa Hotel. Eh, is there anything a man could put into his mouth here?"

"I've just this minute ordered the landlady to prepare a supper for eight persons," I told him.

"What's supper got to do with it!" he cried. "Supper is supper, but we don't have to fast, do we, until our clients on both sides show up? I see that you are

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\* Tiny dumplings.—*Tr.*

already at home here, so be so good and tell them to set the table and give us a drop of vodka and some sort of meat dish to chase it down with, I'm simply dying of hunger!"

That is how he spoke to me, Reb Osher, and without more ado he took himself into the kitchen to wash his hands, got acquainted with the landlady, told her to serve whatever she had, and then we both sat down to a repast quite proudly. As he ate, Reb Osher recounted "*miracles and wonders*"—how hard he worked before he at last succeeded in "*cleaving the sea*"—talking the "aristocrat" into giving three thousand.

"What do you mean—three thousand? We were talking about no less than four thousand!" cried I.

"Begging your pardon, Reb Menachem-Mendel," said he, "I know what I'm doing. My name is Reb Osher! You must know that my 'aristocrat' had intended to give next to nothing since he is so highly-born himself and has a wife of still greater nobility. He argued that if he had wanted his child to marry just anybody, people would even pay *him* for the kinship! In short," said Reb Osher, "I've had a difficult job, it was like chopping wood, only worse. Finally, with great trouble and pain, I talked him into giving two thousand."

"What do you mean—two thousand?! You just now said three thousand!" I cried.

So he came back with: "Excuse me, Reb Menachem-Mendel, I am an older hand at matchmaking than you are, and my name is Reb Osher. Just let our parties get together, let the future bride and groom have a look at each other and, God willing, everything will end with '*happiness and joy*'. In my practice no match was ever broken off because of a paltry thousand. my name—you get me?—is Reb Osher!"

“However,” he went on, “there is one thing that sort of pinches me.”

“What, namely,” I asked, “pinches you?”

“What pinches me,” he answered, “is the *prizyv*, the conscription, that is. I’ve assured my Tashratz that although your Moishe-Nisl’s child is young and the very picture of health, still, he doesn’t give a hoot for the *prizyv*, he’s already done away with the *prizyv*.”

“What are you babbling, Reb Osher!?” I exclaimed. “What *prizyv*? What do you mean?”

Again he came at me with his: “Permit me, Reb Menachem-Mendel, I am called Reb Osher!”

“You may be called ‘Reb Osher’ eighteen times over,” I retorted, “but still I cannot understand what you are talking about! Yakking at me: *prizyv*—*shmizyv*! How does a military call-up concern my Moishe-Nisl? They’ve already started calling up females to the army, or what?”

“What do you mean—females? And where is your Moishe-Nisl’s boy?” asked Reb Osher.

“Where,” said I, “would Moishe-Nisl get a son from when he has, all in all, a one and only daughter, an only one, that is!”

“So it means,” said he, “that you also have a girl? But how is that possible? We were talking about a bridegroom!”

“Of course, about a bridegroom!” said I. “But I thought that you represented the groom’s side, that the groom’s party was yours!”

“From what did it follow that I represent the groom’s side?” he asked.

“And from what does it follow that mine is the groom’s side?” said I.

“Then why,” asked he, “didn’t you let me know that you had a maiden?”

“Well, and you—did you let me know that *you* had a maiden?” said I.

Here he got good and angry and said: "You know what I'll tell you, Menachem-Mendel? You're a matchmaker like I'm a rabbi!"

"And you," said I, "are a matchmaker like I'm a *rebbitzin*—a rabbi's wife!"

A word for a word, on it went. He says: "Jack-ass!" I say: "Liar!" He says: "*Shlimazl!*" I say: "Glutton!" He says: "Menachem-Mendel!" I say: "Drunkard!" This, of course, hits him where it hurts, so he ups and slaps my face. So I go and pull his beard—a real scandal, Heaven protect us!

You understand? So much money laid out, so much time and trouble! And the shame of it! The whole town came running to have a look at the smart matchmakers who showed their skill and brought two girls together! But this Osher, let the Evil One catch him, immediately slipped away, leaving me all alone to settle accounts with the landlady for the supper I had ordered for a party of eight. I was lucky at least in managing to escape before the parents with their two brides arrived in Zhmerinka. . . What happened there, how they made out—that I don't know, but I can imagine their embarrassment! . . .

Go be a prophet and foresee that this matchmaker, may his name be forgotten, would turn out to be such an empty thing, a windmill! A black year on him! Chatters, and travels, and flies, and sends telegrams—and it all leads to what? Two girls! . . .

Once and for all time, my dear spouse, I can't win, nothing works out, I might as well throw myself into the water alive! I write briefly because I am so depressed by this matchmaking. In my next letter, God willing, I'll write about everything in detail. For the time being let God grant us health and success. Remember me to the children whom I miss very

much, and also to my father-in-law and mother-in-law, with affection and to each one separately.

*Your husband Menachem-Mendel.*

*I forgot the main thing.* God sends a remedy for the plague. On the way from Zhmerinka it seemed to me that the sky had already fallen down on me. If I had only had enough money to pay my fare I would have somehow managed to pull myself home, to Kasrilovka, that is. But I figured out that I'd get stuck on the way, I could just as well go and lay myself down across the rails! But we do have a God in the world, so I got acquainted on the train with a queer fish, an agent or inspector of some kind. He assures\* people against death, and he began to talk me into going into his business, promising me mountains of gold, if I became an agent. Just what it is—an agent, and how people are assured against death—that's too long to write about. Besides, I've already written too much this time, so I'll leave it for another time.

*The same.*

1909

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\* Distorted "insures".—Tr.

# THE *PURIM* FEAST

## *A Scene From My Childhood*

### 1

“I don’t know what will become of this child, what this child will grow up into!?! A piece of slime, a wet handkerchief, a whining cry-baby! Of all the evil luck! That a child should never stop crying!”

So talks my mother to herself as she puts me into my holiday clothes, giving me either a shove or a jab in the shoulder, tweaking my ear, pulling my hair or pinching me painfully—and she expects these doings of hers to make me laugh, not cry. She buttons me up from top to bottom in my Sabbath coat that has already long been too small for me; it is so tight that my eyes almost pop out of my head and, besides, the sleeves are short. My constantly bluish-red hands seem to have grown longer than the sleeves and look as if they were swollen. My mother cannot stand this.

“Just look at that pair of paws!” she cries, giving my hands a smart slap to make me lower them down so they wouldn’t show.

“At Uncle Hertz’s table you keep those paws of yours out of sight, do you hear what I’m telling you? And that mug of yours shouldn’t be as red as, God forbid, the wench Yavdokha’s, and don’t you dare stare like a tomcat with those peepers of yours, do you hear what is being said to you? And mind you sit as

a human being should, and, above all—your nose, oh, that snout of yours! Here, let me have it, just let me put it to rights!”

As long as my nose is a nose life is tolerable, but when it becomes a “snout” and my mother sets about “putting it to rights”—then, alas, woe is my poor nose! Really, I don’t know how it is that my nose has sinned so much more in her eyes than all the other parts of me and has become such a bitter enemy of hers. To me it seems to be a nose like any other nose, a little thick, perhaps, and reddish, slightly turned up and fond of being a bit wet. Well, so what? For this it has to be hounded to death? You may well believe me that there have been times when I have begged God to relieve me of it, to make it fall off into all the black years and put an end to my misery! In my imagination I would see myself getting up one fine morning without a nose and going to my mother after breakfast... She catches me in her arms and cries: “Woe is me! Where is your nose?” I answer: “What nose?” I feel all over my face and look at my mother, thinking: Serves her right! Let her see what a face her son has without a nose! Childish notions, foolish fantasies! God pays no attention to my entreaties, the nose keeps on growing, Mother is always “putting it to rights” and I suffer agonies together with it. Most of all my poor nose catches it during holidays, at *Purim*, say, when we are getting ready to go to Uncle Hertz’s *Purim* feast.

Uncle Hertz is not merely the rich man of our family—he is the leading personage in our *shtetl*. “Hertz”, and “Hertz”, and “Hertz” is always on everybody’s tongue in all the little towns around us. It goes without saying, of course, that he owns a pair of fiery steeds and has his own *tarantass*. When it is driven, the wheels of this vehicle make such a clatter that the whole *shtetl* rushes out to see Uncle Hertz riding in it. He sits there like a lord, with his rounded, brass-colored handsome beard and fierce grey eyes, swaying back and forth in his seat and looking down at everybody through his silver-rimmed eyeglasses as if to say: “What are you compared to me? Riff-raff! I am Hertz the rich man, I drive in a carriage while you, *kasriliks*, beggars, paupers, splash through the mud!”

I don’t know about others, but I hate Uncle Hertz so much that I can’t stand the very sight of his red face with its fat cheeks, his brassy beard and silver-rimmed eyeglasses, his big paunch with the massive gold chain he wears across it, and his round silken skullcap. But what I detest most of all is his cough. He has his very special way of coughing. It is accompanied by a hunching of the shoulders, a jerk of the head, and a kind of snorting sound emitted through closed lips, as if he were saying: “Hark, everyone! I, Hertz, have coughed not because, God forbid, I have a cold, but simply because when I feel like coughing I cough.”

I just cannot understand our bunch of relatives: what is it that happens to them when *Purim* comes around and they get ready to attend the feast given on this holiday by Uncle Hertz? It seems to me that they all love him as they love a headache. Even my mother, who is his own sister, is not so terribly fond of him either, for when the older children are not at home (in



my presence she is, apparently, not ashamed to speak) she wishes queer blessings on him, such as “to find himself in her shoes, God willing, next year”. But let anyone just dare say a word against Uncle Hertz and she is ready to scratch his eyes out. Once I witnessed how my father let fall a word. You’d think God knows what, that he’d smirched Uncle Hertz’s honor! He merely remarked to my mother: “What’s new? Has your Hertz returned already or not?” She gave my poor father such a what-for that he didn’t know what to do.

“What do you mean—‘my’ Hertz? What sort of language is that? What kind of expression? What is this ‘my’, hey!?”

“Yours he is, whose else? Mine?” said my father, trying to fight back, but it was of no use. My mother attacked him on all sides at once:

“Well, and if he is mine, so what? So he is mine! It doesn’t suit you maybe? Perhaps the relationship isn’t good enough for you? Maybe you spent your father’s inheritance on him? You’ve never seen any favors from him, haven’t you?”

“Who says I haven’t,” my father tries to appease her, but nothing doing—my mother does not stop her offensive:

“Evidently you have better brothers than I have, don’t you? Handsomer, better, finer, decenter, richer, yes?”

“Stop it! Let there be an end to this! Leave me alone!” shouts my father, claps on his hat and rushes out of the house. Father has lost the battle, Mother has won it, as she always does. This is not because she rules the roost, so to say, but because it concerns Uncle Hertz. He is our rich uncle and we are his poor relatives, his “family”.

What, actually, is Uncle Hertz to us? Do we make our living from him? Or does he do us great favors? That I cannot tell you, for I don't know. But I do see that everyone in our family, old and young alike, is scared to death of him. When *Purim* time comes around all the relatives begin to get ready for Uncle Hertz's feast two weeks before the event. At home my elder brother, Moishe-Avrom, a pale-faced youth with sunken cheeks and black, thoughtful eyes, smooths down his earlocks whenever he is reminded about "going to Uncle Hertz for the *Purim* feast". And what can be said of my two sisters, Miriam-Reizl and Hanne-Rokhl, one of whom is already engaged? They already started making new dresses for themselves in the latest style specially for this party, and they bought pretty combs and ribbons for their hair. They were also anxious to have their shoes repaired, but Mother put this off for Passover, although it did worry her greatly that the poor girls were practically barefoot. She was mostly worried about Miriam-Reizl who was afraid that her fiancé, God forbid, might see her tattered shoes. As it is she had enough trouble with this fiancé who, on top of being a terrific boor, pretended to be something of a bookkeeper, although he actually was a corndealet's salesman; he put on airs and would like his fiancée, my sister, that is, to be dressed up fit to kill in the latest style like a princess. Every Saturday afternoon this salesman pays us a visit. He sits down by the window with both of my sisters and they talk and talk, mostly about fine clothes, new suits, new patent leather boots and galoshes, stylish hats with feathers, lace-trimmed parasols and also embroidered pillow-

cases and feather-bed covers with red insets, over which a white sheet is pulled down tautly, and over that comes a warm blanket, real flannelette; to get into such a bed in the winter is a sheer delight. I notice that my sister Miriam-Reizl suddenly becomes beet-red... She has a habit of blushing at every little thing. If he happens to look down at her feet she immediately hides them under her chair—she is evidently afraid that he might, God forbid, see the downtrodden heels and worn-out toes of her shoes.

4

“Are you ready for the feast?” my mother asked my father on the day after the reading of the Book of Esther.

“I am ready,” answered my father, putting on his long coat, “but what about the children?”

“The children are almost ready,” answered my mother, although she was well aware that the children, that is, my sisters, were still far from ready. They were washing their hair, rubbing almond oil into it, then dressing it for each other, primping themselves, putting on their new frocks and greasing and shining their shoes to make them look new. But of what use was all this shining when the heels—oh, those heels!—were worn down, while in front one could all but see their toes sticking out... What could be done to prevent the fiancé from, God forbid, seeing this? And just as if on purpose the Devil now brought him in, this salesman, dressed up in a new suit, with a stiffly starched collar and a stylish green necktie; from under his starched white cuffs a pair of enormous red hands with black-

edged nails protruded, while his hair—he had just had a haircut—stood on end. He pulled a starched white handkerchief out of a pocket. It reeked so of cloves that it made me sneeze; as I sneezed my narrow little coat burst on me—two buttons flew off. On seeing this my mother gave me a nasty look and cried:

“What a good-for-nothing! He can’t even keep his buttons on! Oh, that you shouldn’t really blow up into pieces!” Snatching up a needle and thread she sewed on my buttons. When this was done and everybody was at last ready we set out to partake of the feast at Uncle Hertz’s house.

Ahead of us walked Father, holding up the skirts of his coat; he was followed by Mother wearing a pair of men’s boots, for the mud was pretty deep; then came my two sisters, carrying their parasols (perhaps you know what anyone would want a parasol for on *Purim*?). After them my elder brother Moishe-Avrom strode through the mud, holding me by the hand and looking out for a dry spot, a footpath to step on, but each time he landed right in a mudhole and jumped back as if scalded: “Ooh-ooph!” Our groom-to-be, the salesman, walked alone at a distance, wearing a pair of deep, new galoshes—the only one who wore them. Every other minute he cried out loudly so that everyone should hear: “Oh, I’m afraid I’ll scoop up full galoshes of mud!”

In this manner we arrived to the *Purim* feast given by Uncle Hertz.

## 5

It is still broad daylight, but in Uncle Hertz’s house lots of candles are already burning in candelabra on the tables and in brackets on the walls. The table is

already set: a formidable *Purim hallah*, the size of the legendary *shorabor*\*, takes up a part of the table around which our whole family stands, all the uncles and all the aunts and all the cousins, all of them, praise to God, poor folk, some more and some less. They stand talking in whispers and waiting, as people wait at a circumcision for the godfather to bring the infant out.

Uncle Hertz is not around yet, but his wife, a black-lipped woman with false teeth and a string of pearls, bustles around the table in a fluster, placing plates and counting us over, each one separately, with her left hand, without any regard for the evil eye that might fall on us...

At last the door opens and Uncle Hertz himself appears. He is wearing his holiday attire: a shiny silken coat with very wide sleeves and the fur-edged hat he puts on only for the *Purim* feast and the Passover *Seder*. All the relatives bow respectfully, the men smile crookedly and rub their hands, the women give him a "Happy Holiday!", while we, the small fry, stand like *golems*, not knowing what to do with our hands.

Uncle Hertz gives us all, the whole family, one sweeping glance, his fierce grey eyes contemplate us through the silver-rimmed eyeglasses, and then he barks out his famous little cough and waves a hand:

"Well, why aren't you seated? Sit down, here are the chairs."

We all sit down, every one of us perched on the edge of his chair, we are afraid of touching the table and causing, God forbid, some disorder. A fearsome silence reigns in the large room. The only sound is that

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\* The wild ox or bison which will be eaten by the righteous when the Messiah comes.—*Tr.*

of the candles guttering. Lights shimmer in our eyes and a gloom chills our hearts. We are hungry, but at the same time do not feel like eating. Our appetites have suddenly been taken away by the oppressive atmosphere.

“Why are you silent? Say something, tell us something!” orders Uncle Hertz with a cough, a hunching of the shoulders, a jerk of the head and a smacking snort.

The family is silent. Nobody dares say a word at Uncle Hertz’s table. Strangely foolish smiles wander over the men’s faces; they would have liked to say something but don’t know what to say. The women exchange strained glances, talking with their eyes. We youngsters burn as if in a fever. My two sisters stare at each other as if they had never met before. My brother Moishe-Avrom gazes at the world from a pale, fear-stricken face. Nobody, but nobody, dares say a word at Uncle Hertz’s table. One person alone feels comfortable, as he does everywhere and at all times—my sister Miriam-Reizl’s fiancé, the salesman. He pulls the large, strongly-scented starched handkerchief from his back pocket, blows his nose loudly, as if he were in his own home, and remarks:

“Such weather on *Purim*! I thought I’d scoop up full galoshes of mud!”

“Who is this young man, hey?” asks Uncle Hertz, raising the silver-rimmed eyeglasses and emitting a cough, hunching his shoulders, jerking his head and snorting.

“My ... my fiancé ... my Miriam-Reizl’s fiancé,” mumbles my father in a low voice, as a person admitting that it was he who committed the murder, while all the rest of us remain sitting as if paralyzed and Miriam-Reizl—oh, my!—flames like a thatched roof on fire.

Uncle Hertz gives the whole family another sweep-

ing glance from his fierce grey eyes and presents us with another cough, another hunching of the shoulders, another jerk of the head and another smacking snort, and then says:

“Well? Why don’t you wash your hands? Go and wash. Here is the water.”

6

After the handwashing and a hurried benediction the family sits down around the table and waits for Uncle Hertz to bless the bread—to cut the ox-sized *hallah*; meanwhile we sit speechless, like mutes. Now we would already like to put something into our mouths, but Uncle Hertz dilly-dallies, as if out of spite, prolonging the ceremonies like a good Jew, like a rabbi. We barely live to see the *shorabor* slaughtered, but before we have had time to swallow the first bite Uncle Hertz takes another look at everybody, gives his little cough, hunches his shoulders, jerks his head, snorts, and says:

“Well, so why doesn’t somebody sing something? Sing a melody for the feast, it is *Purim* in the world today, after all!”

The relatives exchange glances, they all bid each other to sing, they haggle over it: “Go, sing something!”

“You sing!”

“Why me? Why not you?”

This goes on until one of the young men, Uncle Itzi’s Avreml, bursts into song. This Avreml has a hairless face and his eyes continuously blink; he has a squeaky voice and imagines that he can sing.

What tune Uncle Itzi’s Avreml meant to sing I don’t know, I only know that he grabbed himself by the throat and started off falsely in an unnaturally high

voice, almost a screech, singing something real wild and mournful; at the same time he made such a tragicomic face that you had to be either a god or an angel not to burst out laughing, especially since the youngsters facing me across the table had such a look in their eyes that you had to be stronger than iron not to laugh out loud.

The first outburst of laughter came from me and it was I who caught the first smack from my mother. This, however, did not cool me off, and it made all the small fry, including myself, break out into a fresh volley of laughter; this called forth a fresh smack, followed by laughter again, after the laughter another smack, and this went on until I was dragged out of the dining room to the kitchen, from the kitchen outdoors, and from outdoors, beaten and battered, home, drenched in tears, in bloody tears.

That evening I cursed myself, cursed *Purim*, cursed the feast, cursed Uncle Itzi's Avreml, and most of all—Uncle Hertz, may he forgive me: he is already long in the better world. Over his grave stands a tombstone, the finest one in our cemetery. A gold-lettered inscription on it lists all the virtues that distinguished Uncle Hertz during his lifetime:

“Here lies a man who was honest, good, warm-hearted, loving, open-handed, charitable, courteous, faithful, friendly...” and so on and so forth. “*May his soul repose in God.*”



## THE SEVENTY-FIVE THOUSAND

“Worries”, you say? “A bag of troubles?” With you everything is “a bag of troubles”... But to me it seems that since God created the world and since Jews became a folk nobody ever heard or saw, even in a dream, such a “bag” as mine! If you have a little time, please just move up closer and hear me out, I’ll give you the whole story, from Alef to Tov\*, with all the odds and ends—a story about seventy-five thousand. I feel a pressure right here, a tightness in my chest, a fire burns in me and I *must*, I just *must* get rid of it! You understand, don’t you? But do me a favor: when I stop or get sidetracked to God knows where, please remind me where I am, for since this merry-go-round, this affair with the seventy-five thousand started my head has been in a whirl and I often forget what I’m talking about... You understand, don’t you? Tell me, have you got a spare seventy-five thousand—confound it!—a cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the seventy-five thousand... I, the man you are looking at right

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\* The first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet.—*Tr.*

now, won seventy-five thousand rubles this past first of May. Offhand, one might assume that there is nothing so marvelous in this. Plenty of people win money, don't they? Why, a man from Nikolayev, they say, won two hundred thousand, a young man from Odessa, a bookkeeper in an office, won forty thousand—and everything is quiet, everything is in order... True, the whole world looks out for the big winnings, one hundred and thirty-six million people are envious of those who win such prizes. You understand, don't you? However, there are winnings and winnings. The story of this one is a remarkable and tangled-up story, a story on a story, a story around a story, a story within a story and a story about a story! See, you've got to tighten your belt to hear me out to the very end and understand the matter properly.

First of all let me introduce myself. I won't boast that I am a very learned or very rich man, or a great philosopher. You are looking at an ordinary Jew, a householder, a man, that is, who owns his own home, who has made something of a name for himself and is held to be a worthy person in his home town. You understand, don't you?

Once, it is true, I did have money, a goodly sum. A goodly sum? Well, Brodsky surely has much more. But no matter, I did have a few thousand rubles. However, God took a good look at me, as they say, and I was overcome by an urge to get rich quickly. I undertook a deal in grain in the famine-stricken *guberniyas* and lost all my money—I was, at least, lucky not to go bankrupt. You probably think that when I lost my money I lost heart? Oh, you don't know me! I am a person to whom money is as important as ... this cigarette ash. It is absolutely nothing to me, empty nothing! Of course, money is a good thing to have, but to go fight for it, to sacrifice

your life—no, thanks! Only, it's bad when you don't have what you need, when you lose your proper standing in the community, when you can't give the donation you would like to give. You may believe me if I tell you that when another householder is approached and asked for a three-ruble donation for the needs of the town, while I am passed over, it rankles in my heart. You understand, don't you? I would much rather endure a scolding from my wife because there is no money for the Sabbath than refuse to help a poor man while some loose change still jangles in my purse. You understand, don't you? That's the kind of crazy guy I am! Have you got any loose change—confound it!—a match to light this cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Yes, I lost my bit of cash and was left high and dry. One fine morning, when nothing was left, I said to my wife:

"Listen, Tshipora, I want to tell you something. We are cleaned out."

"What do you mean—cleaned out?" she asked.

"It means," said I, "that we haven't got even forty kopecks to our name!"

Being a woman, she started wailing: "Woe is me, the light has gone from my eyes, an evil day on me, Yakov-Yosil, what are you talking about, where is your money!?"

"*Sha, sha,*" said I, "why such a din? Where is it written that it was *my* money? God gives and God takes, or, as the saying goes, *Ne bulo u Mikiti hroshi i nye budye*\*.

"Where is it written," I went, on, "that Yakov-Yosil has to live in four rooms and keep two maids and go

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\* No money had Mikita and none will he have (garbled Ukrainian).—*Tr.*

out in a handsome Sabbath coat? There are plenty of starving Jews—so what? Do they die? If one should want to reason out why this, why that—the world would come to an end...”

Such and similar words and examples I spelled out for her until she, my wife, saw that I was right. You understand, don't you? I want you to know that I have a wife I don't have to be ashamed of, she is an understanding soul and there is no need for long arguments. She stopped her lamentations and even began to console me, saying that it was probably ordained so, that God was a Father and would, hopefully, show us a way... Without much ado we found a tenant for our place, moved into one small room and a kitchen and let the maids go. The wife, may she live long, rolled up her sleeves and took over the cooking, while I let it be known that I had become Reb Yakov-Yosil the Pauper. But what does it mean, a pauper, a poor man? There are, mind you, poorer folk than I. After all, I do own a piece of property, a house that nets me some profit. The only drawback is that there are four weeks in a month. If there were only two weeks we could, perhaps, make ends meet, but as it is, each month two weeks are left over for the next month. Not so good, what do you think? However, that's nothing, one gets used to troubles. Actually, there is no better or quieter life than that of a poor man: you are rid of all the bother over payments and loans, of scurrying around, of all that fuss und bustle! Yes, but there is a God in the world, so He says: “Why, Yakov-Yosil, should you live so peacefully, without troubles? You have a lottery ticket, haven't you? So here are seventy-five thousand rubles for you and be miserable.” You understand, don't you? Do you have a ticket—confound it!—a cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the lottery

ticket. A ticket? It might seem a simple thing—a man has a lottery ticket, wins seventy-five thousand and goes and collects the money? But just you wait! First of all, why does a Jew hold a ticket? In order to be able to pawn it and raise some money. So go, you fool Yakov-Yosil, take your ticket to a bank and get money for it! But the problem is that, first of all, there is no bank in our *shtetl*, and secondly, what is a bank to me? Can't a bank go bust if it wants to? The world is not a lawless place, nobody was grabbing my ticket from my hand, who needed my ticket? You understand, don't you? That's what I thought at the time, or maybe I didn't think at all; anyhow, I recalled that my tenant was a money-lender, a very fine young man, a learned young man, a respectable young man—why shouldn't I pawn my ticket with him? Let him only give me two hundred rubles, I'll take it like a shot, why shouldn't I? So I went to see my tenant, his name was Birnbaum, and I asked him:

“*Panie* Birnbaum, can you perhaps give me two hundred rubles on my ticket?”

“I can give you two hundred rubles on your ticket,” he replied.

“What interest will you charge?”

“How much do you think I should charge?”

“How should I know? Bank rates would be all right with me.”

“So I'll charge you bank rates,” said he.

Well, to make a long story short, we agreed on the interest and I handed over the ticket to him for five months and took the two hundred rubles. You understand, don't you? So, you blockhead Yakov-Yosil, go take a receipt from him saying that you have pawned such and such a lottery ticket of such and such a series and number! But no, quite the other way round: he, Birnbaum, made *me* sign a note saying that I had

borrowed two hundred rubles from him for a term of five months, leaving as security such and such a ticket of such and such a series and number, and that if I did not return the two hundred rubles on time the said ticket of the said series and number would be his and I would have no claims to him... You understand, don't you? What were my thoughts at that time? I thought: What is there to be afraid of? Either I'll pay him when the time comes and get my ticket back and everything will be in order, or I'll pay him the interest I owe him and he'll wait for the two hundred rubles—why shouldn't he wait? Why should he worry if he gets his interest?! You understand, don't you?

Well, sure enough, when the time came I didn't redeem my lottery ticket; the five months passed and then another five months, and so gradually two years and five months piled up. The interest, naturally, I kept on paying. That is, sometimes I paid and sometimes I didn't—what was there to be afraid of? That he might sell my ticket? He wouldn't sell my ticket, why should he? That's what I thought at the time, or maybe I didn't think at all. Meanwhile, times were not so good, no business was stirring, the months still went on having extra weeks, life was miserable and nothing could be done about it. As long as life goes on troubles won't be lacking... Until before Passover of this year...

A piece of business came my way: I bought a few carloads of millet, the price on millet went up, I made a good scoop on its sale and enjoyed such a Passover celebration, believe you me, that Brodsky himself was nothing against me! It's no small matter when a person owes no one a penny and atop of that has his own couple of hundred rubles as well—who was equal to me—you understand, don't you? So take the two hundred rubles, Yakov-Yosil, you blockhead, pay back Birnbaum his money and redeem your ticket! No,

thought I to myself, what's the hurry? Birnbaum won't run away with the ticket, I'll have time enough to redeem it after Passover, and if I don't—I'll pay the interest that is due and take out a receipt. That's what I thought at the time, or maybe I didn't think at all. You understand, don't you? I went and spent the money on sacks, and stored the sacks in a shed. Then God sent a bolt from the blue—just after Passover of this year, on April 30th, the night before the first of May, the day on which the lottery ticket was to be drawn, the lock of the shed was broken and all my sacks were stolen. I found myself cleaned out again.

"Tsipora," I said to my wife, "you know what? I have news for you—we're cleaned out again."

"What do you mean—we're cleaned out?"

"We haven't got a single sack left already!"

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What's happened to the sacks?"

"They were stolen last night from the shed."

At this, of course, she started weeping and wailing, as is usual with womenfolk. So I said to her:

"*Sha, sha*, Tsipora, don't cry so hard, you aren't God's only worry! Imagine, for instance, that a fire burned down our house and we came out of it as naked as the day we were born—would it have been better for you then?"

"A good example," she said, "but is that a reason for stealing our sacks?"

"What has one thing to do with the other? You just mark my words," said I, "the sacks will be found..."

"From where," she asked, "will they come back to you? The thieves will leave them at your door because your name is Yakov-Yosil? Do you think they have nothing better to do?"

"Eh, you're a fool," said I. "What God can do won't even enter a man's mind."

And so it was. The sacks, of course, were gone, vanished into thin air. What sacks? Where sacks? I rushed around like a madman, went to the police, looked into all corners, searched all the mouseholes—but who? what? Go look for last winter’s snow—a hopeless task! You understand, don’t you? My head was in a whirl, my heart was empty, my mouth was dry, my soul was a murky waste. As I stood in such a mood in the market-place in front of our “stock exchange”—the pharmacy, that is—a thought suddenly flitted through my mind. It was just before noontime. Hey, I thought, today is something of a doomsday, a day of reckoning, the first of May, the day of the lottery drawing, anything may happen if one relies on God. Ours is a great God and a strong one! If He so wills, He can make me and my whole family happy!.. But at this point I reminded myself of the stolen sacks and forgot that it was the first of May and that I owned a ticket for a lottery which was to be drawn on that very day. I started looking for the sacks again—some slight clues had been discovered. And so it went on all day and all night until the next day, the second of May. I was befuddled, hadn’t had a crumb in my mouth since the morning before, it was already one o’clock, my heart was faint—you understand, don’t you? So I went home, but there, in addition to all my troubles, my wife began to scold:

“Maybe you’d go and wash and take a bite of something? Maybe it’s enough already of the sacks? This is where your sacks are weighing me down—right here! The Evil One take those sacks! Do you have to lose your life on account of those sacks? With the sacks or without the sacks—it’s all the same! A business with sacks! Sacks-sacks! Sacks-sacks!”

“You know what, my wife,” I said to her, “maybe we’ve already had enough of the sacks? My head is



thoroughly sacked, so you have to come and sprinkle salt on my wounds: Sacks-sacks! Sacks-sacks!..." You understand, don't you? Could you spare me another sack—confound it!—another cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the sacks. Well, the sacks were lost. What could I do? A man can't just spit up his soul. I washed my hands and sat down at the table, but I couldn't swallow a morsel.

"What's ailing you, Yakov-Yosil?" asked my wife, long should she live. "Who crossed your path today?"

"I don't know myself what's wrong," I answered and left the table and lay down on the sofa. Just then the newspaper was brought in from the post-office. So why don't you take it, you blockhead Yakov-Yosil, and have a look, today is the second of May, maybe your ticket has won something? Who? What? I hadn't the slightest notion of whether it was the second of May, the twenty-second of June, or even the thirty-first of February! You understand, don't you? I took the paper and began to read it, naturally, as I always do—from the beginning. In a word, I lay there reading all kinds of news items: shot—hanged, stabbed—murdered, the English and the Boers—in one ear, as they say, and out of the other. What were the English to me or the Boers when my sacks had been stolen? The deuce take all the Englishmen and all the Boers in exchange for my sacks! That's what I thought at the time, or maybe I didn't think at all as I turned one page of the paper after another until at last I saw the words "Lottery Drawing"... Suddenly it struck me: maybe my ticket has won at least five hundred rubles? What a windfall that would be after this affair with the sacks! I looked through the lists of winning numbers, from the lowest to the highest. Not in the five-hundred-ruble winners, not in the thousand-ruble winners; five, eight, ten thousand rubles—nothing, of

course! On I went until I came to the seventy-five thousand rubles and then it suddenly hit me: series 2289, number 12! I could have sworn that that was my number! Still, how come such a *shlimazl* as I to win such a large sum? So I took a closer look—God Almighty! It was really my number! I tried to get up but couldn't, it was as if I'd grown to the sofa. I wanted to shout "Tsipora!", but my tongue had suddenly cleaved to my palate. I gathered all my strength and at last stood up, went to the table-drawer and looked into my book. Yes, as I live and breathe—series 2289, number 12!

"Tsipora," I called to my wife, my hands trembling and my teeth chattering. "You know what? Our stolen sacks have turned up..."

So she looked at me as if I had gone crazy.

"What did you say? Do you know what you are talking about?"

"I tell you," said I, "God has returned our sacks to us—repaid them a hundredfold and over ... a thousand-fold with interest... Our lottery ticket is a winner and we've won a hatful of money!"

"Are you in earnest, Yakov-Yosil, or are you making fun of me?"

"What do you mean—making fun?" I said. "I'm in real earnest, we should be congratulated, we've won money!"

"So how much have we won?" asked my wife, looking right into my eyes, as if to say: "Well, if this turns out to be a lie you'll catch it from me!"

"How much, for instance, would you wish us to win?"

"How do I know, a few hundred rubles, maybe?"

"Why not a few thousand?"

"How much is a few thousand?" she asked. "Five? Or six? Or maybe all of seven?"

"For more," I said, "you evidently have no taste?"

“Ten thousand?”

“Use your brains,” said I, “try a little higher.”

“Fifteen thousand?”

“Still higher!”

“Twenty? Twenty-five?”

“Still higher!”

“Yakov-Yosil,” she begged, “tell me, don’t torture me!”

“Tsipora!” said I and took her by the hand and squeezed it. “We’ve won a pile of money, a rich man’s fortune, you’ve never seen so much even in a dream!”

“Well, come on, tell me, tell me how much we’ve won, Yakov-Yosil, don’t torture me!”

“We have won,” I said, “a fortune, a lot of money, great riches—a sum of seventy-five thousand rubles! You hear, Tsipora? Five-and-seventy thousand!”

“Praise the Lord!” she cried, jumped up and began to rush around the house, wringing her hands. “Praised be Your name for having looked at us, too, and made us happy! Thank You, dear God, thank You! But did you check carefully, Yakov-Yosil? You haven’t, God forbid, made a mistake? Praised be the Lord, our merciful Father, our kind and true God! Our whole family will be happy, good friends will rejoice, enemies will sicken with envy! It’s no joke, so much money—knock on wood! How much did you say, Yakov-Yosil, seventy-five thousand?”

“Seventy-five thousand! Hand me, Tsipora, my coat, I’ve got to go out,” I said.

“Where are you going?”

“Where do you think I should go? I have to step over to Birnbaum, the ticket is in pawn with him. . . And I have no receipt for it.”

No sooner had I uttered these words than my wife’s face lost its normal color. She caught my hands and exclaimed:

“Yakov-Yosil, as you love God, don’t go there at once, first think over what you are doing and where you are going and how you should talk to him. Don’t forget that it’s seventy-five thousand!”

“You’re talking like a ninny,” said I. “What if it is seventy-five thousand? What am I, a little boy?”

“Listen to me,” she begged, “think it over first, Yakov-Yosil, consult a good friend, don’t go directly there, I won’t let you!”

To make a long story short, you know that when a wife puts her foot down she achieves her end. We invited a good friend and told him the whole story. He listened attentively and then agreed that she, my wife, was right, because seventy-five thousand was no plaything, and meanwhile the ticket was in another’s hands and I had no receipt for it. Money was a temptation, anything might happen—suppose Birnbaum was overcome by an evil urge—it was seventy-five thousand, after all!

You understand, don’t you? I tell you, they put such a scare in me with their talk that I also began to think God knows what. . . How should I handle this situation? It was decided that I should take two hundred rubles (money became available at once, for when you win seventy-five thousand you become a trustworthy person), and that someone should accompany me and stand behind the door while I spoke with my Birnbaum, paid back the loan with the interest and redeemed the ticket. One of two things would happen: either he would return the ticket, which would be fine, or he wouldn’t return it—I would then at least have a witness. . . You understand, don’t you? That’s all very well, I thought to myself, if he doesn’t know yet that the ticket has won seventy-five thousand rubles. But what should I do if he also has a newspaper and has seen that the ticket is a winner? And what should

I do if he upped and said—like the woman with the pot: “Firstly, I returned the ticket to you a long time ago; secondly, yours is an entirely different number; thirdly, I never took any ticket from you!..” You understand, don’t you? But maybe God performed a miracle and he still knows nothing about any winnings?

“Remember, Yakov-Yosil, it’s no trifle, you are going for seventy-five thousand! Not a hint, not a trace of the seventy-five thousand should be seen on your face! And whatever happens, remember that life is dearer than seventy-five times seventy-five thousand!”

That’s what my wife, she should be healthy, said and took both my hands into hers, imploring me to give her my word of honor that I’d keep calm. . . Calm? You understand, I should try and keep calm when my heart was boiling, my thoughts were churning and I couldn’t forgive myself: How come, how come, Yakov-Yosil, you blockhead, that you went and gave away a ticket worth seventy-five thousand to a Birnbaum, a perfect stranger, and took no receipt from him, no signature, no flourish made with a pen dipped in ink? You understand, don’t you?. . . Do you have a pen—confound it!—a cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, Birnbaum. . . Wouldn’t I be sitting pretty, I thought, if my Birnbaum has already seen the paper and knows about the seventy-five thousand as well as I do—maybe knew it even before I did—and I come along and say:

“God help you, *Panie* Birnbaum. . .”

“A good day to you. What have you to say?”

“Where is my ticket, *Panie*?”

“What ticket?”

“The lottery ticket, series 2289, number 12, that I pawned with you.” So he looks at me like a half-wit, all innocence. . .

Such were the thoughts that flittered through my mind, while my heart was ready to burst, I felt as if I were choking, couldn't breathe, couldn't draw the slightest breath!

How did it finally turn out? I came to his place: where is Birnbaum? He is asleep. . . Asleep? This surely is a sign that he knows nothing and has had no prophetic dream. Praise the Lord! . . I went into his house and met Feygele, his wife, in the kitchen. It was smoky and hot there, the dirt was up to one's neck.

"Welcome! A guest! Reb Yakov-Yosil!" she exclaimed and asked me into the parlor, seating me in a place of honor. Why, she asked, had I become such a stranger?

"Why I've become such a stranger? I don't really know why!" I answered, looking into her eyes meanwhile and thinking: Does she know or doesn't she? Apparently, she doesn't know. . . But perhaps she does? . .

"So how are you, Reb Yakov-Yosil?"

"How should I be?" I replied. "You must have heard of my bag of troubles?"

"What bag of troubles?"

"Can it be that you haven't heard the story of the sacks that were stolen from me?"

"Is that your bag of troubles?" she asked. "That's already an old story! I thought you had some new trouble."

Some new trouble? Maybe she means the seventy-five thousand? I thought as I looked into her eyes, but could read nothing in them, empty nothing, not the slightest trace of anything.

"Perhaps you'll have a glass of tea, Reb Yakov-Yosil? I'll have the samovar heated—and meantime my husband will get up."

"A glass of tea? Sure, why not?" said I, but my

heart seemed to fail me. I couldn't take in even a small breath of air, my mouth was dry, it was hot in the room, perspiration ran down my face. However, Feygele kept on talking to me—both of us together should know as much evil as I knew what she was talking about! My mind was somewhere else, in the little room where Birnbaum lay snoring peacefully—you understand, don't you?

"Why don't you drink your tea?" Feygele asked.

"What am I doing then?" I replied, stirring and stirring the tea in my glass with a teaspoon.

"You've been twiddling that spoon for an hour already," she said, "and not drinking at all."

"Thanks," I answered. "I don't drink cold, I mean hot, tea, I like it to stand and get good and hot—good and cold, I mean, that is, it gets nicely heated—cooled, I mean. . ."

"You seem to be quite upset, Reb Yakov-Yosil, you don't even know what you are saying! Should a person get so upset over some stolen sacks? God will help, the sacks will turn up yet. I've heard that a clue has been found. . . Oh, my husband is stirring, he is getting up already—here he comes!"

My Birnbaum came out of his room sleepily, wearing a silken skullcap on his head. Rubbing his eyes, he looked at me bleakly.

"How are you, Reb Yakov-Yosil?"

My first thought was: Does he know? Or doesn't he? It seems to me that he doesn't, but perhaps he does?

"How do you expect me to be? You've heard of my trouble with the sacks?"

"That story is already old hat, tell us something new. . . Feygele, do you have a bit of jam for me, my nap has left a bad taste in my mouth," said Birnbaum, making a face.

Well, since he is asking for jam, that's a sign that he

still knows nothing at all. . . Thinking such thoughts I began to talk to him the devil alone knows what about, my words simply wouldn't string together. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach, I was suffocating, my strength was ebbing. I felt that I might collapse or start yelling: "Help, fellow-Jews! *It's five-and-seventy thousand!*" You understand, don't you?. . Finally, God had compassion on me and I began to talk about interest.

"I can, *Panie* Birnbaum, pay some of the interest—that is, I can pay all the interest owing on my ticket."

"Oh," said he, "most certainly, with the greatest pleasure!" and he took a taste of jam.

"How much do I owe you?" I asked. "The interest, I mean?"

"Do you simply want to know the account or do you actually mean to pay cash?" he asked.

"No," said I, "that is, yes, I want to pay cash."

"Feygele!" he cried, "hand me the ledger!"

Upon hearing these words I came back to life. Poor wretch, he doesn't know a thing!

After I'd paid him the interest I said:

"Please, *Panie* Birnbaum, be so good as to write down in your ledger that you have accepted from me the interest due on my lottery ticket, series 2289, number 12."

"Write it down, Feygele, for the ticket, series 2289, number 12."

He hasn't the slightest notion! went through my mind and I began to talk about the ticket, saying that what was the use of having a ticket and paying interest on it. Then I asked: "What will happen to the ticket in the future?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Birnbaum, shooting a look at me out of the corner of an eye.



This look of his was like a stab in my heart. I had no use for this look, you understand, don't you? However, I took a grip on myself immediately and said:

"See, *Panie* Birnbaum, I say this because I've spent a lot of money on this ticket. As I live, you should take one per cent less interest from me. After all, as they say, old friends and close neighbors. . ."

"No," said he, "anything else, but not that. If you want to continue as before—all right, if not—pay me back my money and pawn your ticket somewhere else."

"Even today?" I asked, my heart going like a hammer: tick-tick-tack! Tick-tick-tack!

"Even this minute," said he.

"Here, take your money," said I and put his two hundred rubles down before him. My heart felt as if it were going to jump out of my chest!

"Take the money," he ordered Feygele, bending over to his glass of tea and putting another teaspoonful of jam into his mouth, then another and still another.

I am on tenterhooks, I long to see my ticket, but he goes on relishing his jam! Every minute, every second costs me blood and health! But you can't be a gross lout—a person likes jam, let him eat it to his heart's content. To egg a person on is not at all nice, you have to sit as if on live coals and wait for him to finish his jam. You understand, don't you? Maybe you have a little jam—confound it!—another cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, my Birnbaum and his jam. Finally, he finished, wiped his lips and then turned to me:

"Reb Yakov-Yosil, the money I've received from you, the interest you've paid me, so now I have to, so to say, return your ticket, don't I?"

"Quite evidently!" I exclaimed, pretending to be calm, but almost overcome with joy.

"But," said he, "the drawback is that I cannot return your ticket today."

At these words of his something seemed to snap in my heart. I was suddenly dropped to earth from the seventh heaven. How I managed to keep on my feet I don't know.

"What's the matter, *Panie* Birnbaum, why can't you return my ticket?"

"Because," he answered, "I haven't got it on me."

"What do you mean—you haven't got it on you?"

"It's lying," he said, "in the bank on my name."

I felt much better when I heard this, but then I began to think it over.

"Why have you become so thoughtful?" he asked.

"It's nothing," I replied, "I'm just trying to figure out how to get the cat over the water—how my ticket will come to me."

"Very simply. I'm going to the big city tomorrow and I'll bring your ticket back."

"Very well," said I, getting up, saying goodbye and making for the door as if to leave. But I turned back immediately.

"How do you like that, *Panie* Birnbaum, what kind of a merchant am I? The money I've returned, the interest I've paid but you still have the ticket—give me a receipt for it, at least!"

"What do you need a receipt for?" he asked. "Don't you trust me for two hundred rubles without a receipt?"

"Maybe you are right," said I and once more made for the door, but turned back again.

"No, it's wrong somehow, not businesslike. If you own a ticket that someone else is holding you should have a receipt for it. . . Listen to me, *Panie* Birnbaum, please give me a receipt. Why shouldn't you give me a receipt?"

Suddenly my Birnbaum picked himself up and went into his little room behind the curtain and called to Feygele.

"*Panie!*" I exclaimed. "I know why you are calling Feygele—you want to tell her to send out for the paper, today is the second of May so you want to look and see whether the ticket has won any money. Why should you take the trouble? I'll tell you the news myself: my ticket, the Lord be praised, has won good money!"

Birnbaum's countenance went through a gamut of colors.

"Really and truly? So help you God! How much did it win?"

"It won," said I, "a fine sum, may all Jewish children have the same, and that is why I want a receipt from you, do you understand or not?"

"But I'm telling you," said he, "that I wish God helps you win even the whole of two hundred thousand, I wish it from the bottom of my heart, believe me! Still, how much did the ticket win? Why are you afraid to tell me?"

"*Panie Birnbaum,*" said I, "what's the use of beating around the bush: the ticket has won seventy-five thousand rubles, and you have it. The interest I've paid up, the loan I've returned—so give me back my ticket! You say you haven't got it here, the ticket is at the bank? Then give me a receipt and let there be an end to this arguing!"

Useless talk! Birnbaum's eyes suddenly rolled in his head and his face turned a flaming red. Seeing that he was in a bad way I called him aside, took hold of his hands and said:

"Dear friend! Have pity on me and yourself, tell me what it is you want. We'll come to an agreement, don't torture me, I can barely stand on my feet. Tell me how

much you want and give me a receipt for the ticket. It's foolish, I won't leave your house without a receipt anyway, it's a question of seventy-five thousand rubles!"

"What shall I say to you?" he asked, his eyes burning like fire. "We'll ask people, whatever they say—so it will be."

"What do we need other people for?" I asked. "Let us act like people ourselves. Listen to me, Birnbaum, as you love God, tell me how much you want. Let us not turn ourselves into a laughing-stock, let there be no scandal!"

"Only public opinion!" he cried. "Whatever people say, that I'll do."

I could do nothing with him, so I opened the door and called out to my friend, my witness, that is: "Zeydel! You can go now!" Away rushed my Zeydel at top speed and spread the news through the entire town—Yakov-Yosil's lottery ticket has won five-and-seventy thousand rubles, Birnbaum has the ticket and refuses to return it!.. You understand, don't you?.. Nothing else was needed—in less than half an hour Birnbaum's house was full of people, the street in front of it was overcrowded, the crowd raised a din, a hullabaloo:

"Ticket..."

"Yakov-Yosil..."

"Birnbaum..."

"Seventy-five thousand..."

Friends took my wrongs to heart, some started banging on the table, others promised Birnbaum blows and broken bones, they threatened to smash the house into smithereens and no joke. It was finally decided to take the matter to our rich man. Whatever this leading personage ruled we would abide by. So the whole lot of us scurried away to the rich man's place.

Our leading townsman is, you must know, a quiet person, a decent, honest, and very fair man. Generally speaking, he detests this kind of arbitration. However, when a whole mob broke into his house with shouts of "Help!" he was afraid they might tear the place to pieces, so he had no choice but to take the matter into his own hands. We promised to accept his decision. Poor Birnbaum signed the ticket over to the rich man; it was agreed that tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, God willing, we would all go to the big city to take the ticket out of the bank, and whatever sum the rich man told me to pay Birnbaum so much I would pay. You understand, don't you?.. So maybe you think that this was the end of the matter? Well, well, you've got another guess coming! This was where the real merry-go-round began.

I had, you must understand, a partner for the ticket. Where did you ever hear that a Jew had a whole ticket all to himself? Who was my partner? My partner was my own brother, Henich is his name, he lives in a small *shtetl* not far from us. It was because of him, actually, that I pawned the said ticket with the said Birnbaum. That is, I meant the other way round—he, my brother, pawned the said ticket with the said Birnbaum through me... You understand, don't you? But in this there's a long story involved, and I must tell it to you in detail so you should get the picture.

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, my brother Henich... I have a brother, Henich, he should live a hundred and twenty years. What can I say about him? It isn't nice to talk against one's own brother, it's like washing your dirty linen in public. But no matter, it's all in the family. Somehow we don't think much of each other, you understand, don't you? What I've done for his sake, mind you, it should only return to me! I'm not boasting when I say that it was I who set

him on his feet. First God, and then I made a decent person of him. I don't have to brag to you, you understand, don't you? So when my brother sends me a lottery ticket and asks me to sell it or pawn it for two hundred rubles and send him the money—should I do it or not? Eh, then go ask him: What ticket? Where ticket? Go worry about the ticket, insure it, pay interest on it—that's no concern of his, he never even gave it a second thought. And when, with God's help, the ticket became a winner—who beat his head against a wall with Birnbaum? Who almost had a stroke before we reached some kind of agreement? Then finally, when we got down to brass tacks he, this brother of mine, argued: "Who asked you to lay yourself out for my ticket?" You understand such babble? How do you like such a brash claim?.. Naturally, this attitude of his distressed me, it wrung my heart: "Oh," said I, "since you are such an insolent creature, where is it written that the ticket is yours?"

"To whom then," said he, "does the ticket belong?"

"Whomever it belongs to," said I, "our first concern is to rescue it from a stranger's hands because it's no plaything, it's *seventy-five thousand rubles!*.. You understand, don't you?"

Well, so for all I did for him I should get scandals, table-banging, broken chairs?.. You know, it's true what they say: out of a pig's tail you can't make a fur hat... So I thought: Why fight with my brother in vain? A hundred and thirty-six million people envy us our prize and we, blood brothers, quarrel: *My ticket, your ticket*—fie, what a shame! First of all we should recover the ticket, this was a matter of priority. What do you say? Was I right? But go and argue with a crude lout! I mean my brother Henich, that's who I mean, God shouldn't punish me for such words... Had he told me before just *what ailed him*, had he told

me before that the ticket was not just simply a ticket, that it was connected with a snag, that there was a story behind it with a “bone” in it—I would have known what to do! But when did my brother Henich finally cough up this “bone”? Much, much later, when the ticket had already been signed over to the rich man and had been put under arrest in the bank by a court magistrate, and all of us, each one separately, had been taken to task: the magistrate summoned us to his presence and we were asked to kindly tell him the story of the ticket.

“How did this ticket come to you,” he asked, “and what has Birnbaum to do with all this? How does the rich man fit into the affair?”

A real merry-go-round! You understand, don’t you?

But how did the court magistrate get involved? Why should he want to hear all these yarns, huh? So listen, now comes the actual story with the snag, with the “bone” that sticks in the throat and won’t go up or down. A person can choke to death on such a bone!

You want to know where this “bone” came from? It originated with a sort of a monk, a Catholic priest. You understand, don’t you? This monk, or priest, lives in the same village where my brother Henich lives, and my brother has done business with him for many years: on trust alone Henich borrowed money from the priest and sold him goods. They were the best of friends. You understand, don’t you?..

One day—so says the priest, go believe him and his holy word—my brother Henich came to him with a request. “Father, I need,” he said, “a short-term loan of a couple of hundred rubles to tide me over the fair I have to go to.” The parson, however, answered that he had no money at all and there was nowhere he could get any.

“That’s no excuse!” said my brother. “I must have two hundred rubles, it’s a matter of life or death!”

"You're a strange man," replied the parson, "I'm telling you that I have no money. But I'll lend you a lottery ticket, if you wish, and you'll be able to raise money on it."

You understand, don't you? That was the very ticket which won the seventy-five thousand. At any rate, so the priest says, go believe him and his holy word. Now, when the ticket won so much money, the priest, naturally, came running to my brother and said:

"The ticket, thank God, has won a neat sum of money..."

"Yes, so they say," answered my brother.

"Well, and how will it be?" asked the parson.

"How will what be?" asked Henich.

In short, words here, words there, one says this, the other says that, one argues "cellar", the other argues "attic", but neither one has anything in black and white, on paper, you understand, don't you? My brother, at least, had the ticket, while the parson had—what? Heartache is what he had... What was the use of such talk? Finally, the priest begged my brother to give him at least a couple of thousand rubles. So go, you stupid ass Henich, and shut his mouth with a couple of thousand rubles and he'll stop pestering you! But my smart brother still thought:

Why should he get any money? The ticket is mine, strike me dead if I didn't buy that ticket from him three years ago!..

Still, everything might have run smoothly if not for our petty Jews, they should live in health! Our *shtetl* itself is a fine little town, perhaps you've heard about it? People call it *Pishi-yabeda*, meaning "Gossip-writers". Believe me, it is a town full of telltales and sneaks, they should burn to a crisp on a summer day! To make a long story short—they went to the priest and made it clear to him that he could make some



money out of this ticket; they explained that he should waste no time and go to the big city, directly to the persecutor, and tell him that he had been swindled out of a lottery ticket by some Jews and this ticket had now won seventy-five thousand rubles but they wouldn't return it to him... You understand, don't you? So the priest was not lazy and he went and did everything that was necessary, even more than was necessary, and therefore the ticket was, begging your pardon, "placed under arrest", and little by little we found ourselves involved in a grave affair, and no fooling... So here we had this evil nuisance! As if things weren't bad enough already! A new "bone" to contend with—a priest!..

My brother came to an agreement with the priest: he would give him ten thousand rubles, later he even promised fifteen thousand, but the priest changed his mind. He was in such a daze that he didn't even know what he wanted, see?.. So this is the story of the "bone", you understand, don't you?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the "bone". God ordained a fine snag for us, a bone sticking in your throat that couldn't be swallowed or spat out! Nothing budged it! However, there is, after all, a God in the world, a great God who punishes with one hand and heals with the other. People turned up, good brethren, in-laws, friends, and just onlookers who intervened in the affair. They tried one thing and another, turned this way and that way, from my brother to the priest, from me to Birnbaum, from Birnbaum to me, and from the two of us to my brother, then from all three of us to the priest again—twirling, turning, running, riding, talking, arguing; in short, with great difficulty matters were straightened out. What straightened out? How straightened out? Don't ask, as long as they were straightened out!.. As they say: wrongs are cooked for

supper, or, as my brother put it when he was brought face to face with the priest:

*"Vashe prepodobiye, yak nye psak, to psakets, nekhai budye yakhloiku!"*—that is, "Your Reverence, not your way, not my way, let's meet halfway!"

*"Nekhai budye yakhloiku*—let it be halfway," said the priest, "although, Henich, you're a swindler anyhow!"

*"L'haim, Father, your health!"* said my brother and offered him some vodka, and all of us raised our glasses and drank up and exchanged kisses—fine, good, everybody is satisfied... Satisfied? How could we feel satisfied when each one of us had almost held the seventy-five thousand in his hand and had let it go with the wind—phe-e-w! You want to know how? Here is a simple account: never mind about me—so I don't have the seventy-five thousand, serves me right! But I ask you what, for instance, would my brother Henich have done if I hadn't sent him a wire saying that our ticket had won seventy-five thousand rubles? Someone else in my place, learning of such a prize—you know what he would have done? He'd wipe his lips and keep mum. What is a brother, who is a brother? What is Henich to me? Why not let him think that I'd sold the ticket?! Or that I'd pawned it with Birnbaum and hadn't redeemed it on time? And Birnbaum had a receipt from me that I pawned such and such a ticket of such and such a series and number and that if I didn't redeem it on time the said ticket of the said series—you understand, don't you?.. So what? It never entered my head, I should be as innocent of evil! Because, as I live, I'm the kind of man for whom money is not important! What, after all, is money? Money is mud as long as, with God's help, as my wife

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\* A saying in mixed Ukrainian and Hebrew.—Tr.

says, you are healthy and have everything you need... No matter, although it *is*, after all, a pity, what do you think—*five-and-seventy thousand!* You understand, don't you?

Now, take Birnbaum. He is really an innocent soul. Poor man, he actually let the seventy-five thousand slip right through his fingers! He is simply an honest and extremely scrupulous young man who didn't want to profit from someone else's ticket. He only wanted to *ask people*, and he would abide by whatever they said. You understand, don't you? He could have been *kosher* all round, because he had a note from me saying that if I didn't redeem such and such a ticket of such and such a series on time—you understand, don't you? So the aforesaid ticket goes and wins the seventy-five thousand! Well, I ask you, isn't that enough to make a person's bile rise?.. There you have two unfortunate creatures who lost seventy-five thousand rubles all but from their pockets. Well? Isn't that so?

The third unfortunate is my brother Henich. Poor wretch, he rushes around as one who has been robbed, flaps like a slaughtered rooster, and it is really such a great pity that he is getting so little money, for isn't he accustomed to winning, every year or perhaps even twice a year, whenever the lottery tickets are drawn, no less than seventy-five thousand?! So around he runs, shouting: "What do they want from me!? They're robbing me blind! Give money to everybody! Give the priest, give my brother, give Birnbaum—they want to make a pauper out of me!" You understand, don't you?..

The fourth person, the priest, that is, is most certainly an unfortunate man! He swears, and his holy word should be believed, that he cannot understand why these Jews are dividing up his money. "Well, Henich may really be a swindler and he deserves to be

taught a lesson, but he is, after all, a hometown pal and a good friend... But the rest of the ‘company’,” he says, “what sort of kin to my ticket is this bunch?” You understand, don’t you? Go talk to a priest and make him understand what fairness is: one is a brother who could have pocketed the whole prize without anyone being the wiser, another is an extremely honest young man who holds a note from me saying that such and such a ticket of such and such a series—you understand, don’t you? Has he any ill intentions, Birnbaum, I mean, does he press any claims? God forbid! He only wants to ask people’s opinion—to do *whatever people say!* A man, see, who has fallen in love with people, a most *humane* human being—you understand, don’t you?

To put it in a nutshell, each one of these four people won seventy-five thousand rubles and each one lost seventy-five thousand rubles—four luckless, devastated souls!.. But never mind, a settlement was reached and—forget it! It was probably ordained so... Now what remained to be done? Why, it was time to divide the prize; that is, all four of us had to go to the bank, take out the ticket, receive the money, share it and then congratulate each other over a drink to wet the deal. Isn’t that right? But hold on, don’t be in such a hurry. First of all, the ticket was under some kind of a seal laid upon it by the court magistrate, so the first thing to do was to liberate it. But the priest didn’t want the ticket liberated until his share was guaranteed... You understand, don’t you? How was his share to be guaranteed? The ticket had to be transferred from the rich man’s account to the joint account of my brother Henich and the priest. But now the rich man wanted to have nothing to do with it—neither to see nor hear anything, for he affirmed, and he was right, actually:

“What business of mine is somebody else’s ticket?”

How can I make the transfer to another name of a ticket worth seventy-five thousand that doesn't belong to me and has been impounded by the law, and I don't even know whose ticket it is? First it belonged to Birnbaum and Yakov-Yosil, now I am told that it is Henich's and a priest's, later on new owners may show up, new Henichs and new priests—what will I do if each one of them demands seventy-five thousand from me? Where, dear people, will I get so much money to pay out? I am not Brodsky, after all!”

You understand, don't you? So an affair with lawyers began. Now lawyers, they are just like doctors: whatever one says the other says the opposite. Money they all take, and advice they all give—each one some different advice. One lawyer says that the rich man can very easily transfer the ticket to whomever he likes... Another one says that he must on no account transfer the ticket... Comes a third one and says that he *must* transfer the ticket, otherwise he'll find himself saddled with a bag of troubles. But there appears another lawyer and says that the rich man should just wash his hands altogether of the ticket, disown it, and then everything will be fine. Still another lawyer says: “Don't even as much as mention it! If the rich man washes his hands of the ticket it will remain hanging in the air and that will bring him no end of troubles!” Then a new lawyer appears and gives out a new piece of law: “If the rich man,” he says, “does *not* disown the ticket that's when he'll find himself in real trouble!” Comes still a newer lawyer who holds that whether the rich man disowns the ticket or doesn't disown it he'll be in trouble *both ways*... You understand, don't you? But to me it seemed that he had already shouldered a goodly “bag”, since, in addition to being pestered every minute in connection with this affair, he, poor soul, had to travel to the big city every

week, go from one lawyer to another, paying out money and imploring them to have pity on him and advise him how to get rid of this “bomb”. I really did pity the man, I tell you, a shameful thing it was! Take a man, an honest, quiet man who wouldn’t swat a fly on the wall, and burden him with such a bomb—can he remain hale and hearty? Maybe you know why? When? What had he done to deserve such a bomb? It was all on account of people interfering, wanting to do someone a favor, you understand, don’t you?.. Maybe you have another bomb—confound it!—another cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the bomb that people hung on our rich man... You want to know what was happening meantime to the bomb? Nothing, the bomb was still a bomb! It still hung in the air... Every week the miserable rich man hustled to the big city to see lawyers, the lawyers took money and dealt out advice, one said this, the other that, the third neither this nor that but quite the opposite, as they usually do. Only God in Heaven knew what the end of this would be, for no human mind could grasp the outcome, because if it were to come, God forbid, to a court hearing there was no knowing how it would turn out... You understand, don’t you? But meanwhile who was buried under nine cubits of earth? Yakov-Yosil! The *shtetl*—why only the *shtetl*—the whole world was attracted to my affairs. All fingers were pointed at me: “There goes the five-and-seventy thousand!..” I was torn away from *gesheft*, there wasn’t as much as a three-ruble note in my pocket, it was worse than before! My wife was ashamed to show her face in the market-place—they had taken to calling her “the new Mrs. Rich”... Special honors were showered on me in the synagogue on the very first Saturday. They had already even figured out how much of the

seventy-five thousand I would *have* to donate to the town, how much I *should* give to poor relatives and *what* I should do with the rest of the money. One said that I would probably turn money-lender; another argued that I would probably start dealing in grain again, as I had done before; still another sage pointed out that the best thing for me to do would be to open an office: the best business would come my way then, for no other office in our *shtetl* could boast of a capital of seventy-five thousand, could it? Cash is what they meant, real cash! You understand, don't you?.. The Jews of our *shtetl* are great unbelievers: no one believes that anybody anywhere has more than twenty-five rubles of his own in cash... Our *shtetl*, I want you to know, is a most respectable town, the Devil hasn't taken it! It is one of those towns that people ask about... It has enough idlers who have nothing to do, so they go around from Shmunin to Bunin and slander the whole world. Since they have no business of their own their minds are occupied with the business of others. They get together in front of the pharmacy in the market-place, our "stock exchange", so to say, and stand there estimating the affairs of others: they are *afraid* somebody else may earn something, and when someone loses money it is a delight to them, it adds to their health... So you must realize what a cloud moved over the town when the news of the seventy-five thousand came out! From that day on mouths didn't shut from morning to night. The idlers stung each other with words, they brought up the gall in each other, they crawled into other's hearts with their boots on.

"Why didn't *you* win the seventy-five thousand? They would come in extremely handy to you now!.."

"Why not *you*? You need the money much more than I do!"

To peeve the rest of the gang, a certain "accoun-

tant” figured out that I was the richest man in town. His calculations were simple: I had won seventy-five thousand, my house was worth another six or seven thousand, so there you already had almost eighty-five thousand, which was practically a hundred thousand! Now, when a Jew has a hundred thousand rubles it may be said that he has two hundred thousand, for when a man is reported to be worth two hundred thousand it means that he hasn’t even a full hundred thousand! It therefore means that I am a man who has two hundred thousand rubles—the richest man in our *shtetl*! Oh, there might be richer men than I? But who can know? Who went into their pockets and who counted their money? Maybe they’re already bankrupt? You understand, don’t you? This stung many people to the quick. The miserable wretches couldn’t get over it: how does an ordinary Jew, unexpectedly and all of a sudden, without any headaches, go and turn into a rich man worth seventy-five thousand? . . . There is an old bachelor in our *shtetl*, a rich miser, so some jokers sent, on purpose, a messenger to him, a certain Mendel-the-Beard, to give him the good news that Yakov-Yosil had won seventy-five thousand rubles; this made him so sick, may you be spared, that people thought he would give up the ghost! A great pity on the poor soul, he wandered around for several days as if he’d lost his mind! But he regained his health when he heard about my brother Henich and the “bone” that was snagging the affair. “Better let the priest have it,” he said, “why should a Jew get so much money? . . .” You understand, don’t you?

But do you think that my relatives, at least, didn’t begrudge me the money? They’d been tongue-lashed so long that if they could they would’ve drowned me in a spoonful of water! Mind you, had the seventy-five thousand actually come to me they would have spoken



differently. Probably everybody, both kin and strangers, would have been content, but since things turned out the way they did. . . Oh, well, the less said, the better. But no matter, the family may start sewing a big purse in anticipation of what they'll get from my brother Henich. What a charitable soul he is, my Henich, he should be healthy! When he starts giving out alms—that will be the day! Likely enough, he has already earmarked from sixty-five to seventy-two rubles to marry off a poor sister and pledged himself to give a whole hundred rubles to his old father: let the old man really feel that his son has won seventy-five thousand rubles. You understand, don't you?. . . So that much for the local relatives. As regards those who live in other places—they just made a beeline for me from all over the world, one with this bag of troubles, another with that bag. . . Many even began to fix up matches for their children on the strength of the prize money. Some divorced their spouses, hoping to achieve something better later on. . . No matter, these are all relatives, at least: as they say, from your own kin you have to suffer. You understand, don't you? But strangers, perfect strangers, why should I be forced to suffer from them? How have I deserved it? For whose sins? . . . Wherever I have any enemies, you hear, I wish them the joy of winning seventy-five thousand! You may truly believe me when I tell you that I can no longer stand the congratulations, the smirks and flattery bestowed on me. People I don't know from a hole in the wall come to me for advice!

“We've heard about you, Reb Yakov-Yosil,” they say, “we knew about your wisdom a long time ago. You mustn't think we are hinting at the seventy-five thousand the Almighty has blessed you with—God forbid! We've simply come to you to pour out the bitterness of our hearts. . .”

You understand, don't you? One man arrived from some strange town, I've forgotten its name, so far away that my grandfather's grandmother never set foot in it. . . One day the door suddenly opens and in comes a Jew and lays his bundle on the floor.

"*Sholom aleichem!*"

"*Aleichem sholom!* From where hails a Jew?"

"From Byelorussia. Are you Reb Yakov-Yosil?"

"I am Yakov-Yosil. What's the good word?"

"So it's really you yourself in the flesh, the Reb Yakov-Yosil who won seventy-five thousand rubles? I came here specially," says he, "that is, I was passing by and heard about the seventy-five thousand, so I thought I'd come and stop over for a day. I wanted to see with my own eyes that lucky man who *won seventy-five thousand rubles*. It's no small thing, it's *seventy-five thousand!* . . ."

You understand, don't you? Go tell each one separately the story about a Birnbaum who wants public opinion, about a brother called Henich, about the "bone", the rich man, the "bomb", the lawyers, all the devils and demons! . . . As I live, I was much better off *before* I won the seventy-five thousand than now, *after* the seventy-five thousand, and things were certainly quieter. To tell you the truth, today I'm not even sure of my life. Not long ago I went to see the lawyers in the big city. In the evening I was lured away by some rogue to his home in the Podol—to have a glass of tea. . . I come to him in the Podol, it is dark already. In the house sits a second rogue, a Jew with a fine beard, and both of them are poring over a religious book. My host says hello to me, gets up as if to light up a cigarette, but blows out the lamp and we find ourselves in the dark. . . You understand, don't you? As I live, if it were not so late and you weren't in a hurry to leave, it would be worthwhile to tell you this

story, too, and on top of it still another one, or, as they say, a pimple on a blister and a blister on a boil. You understand, don't you?

Short and good, where was I? At the end of the story? You think there's an end? Have a little patience, don't be in such haste, this is only the beginning. The beginning? It doesn't even begin to be a beginning! And whose fault is it? My own! What does it mean, my fault, how is it my fault? How do I know? I am only human, as they say, a mortal man, but when a misfortune is ordained what can one do? Why is it my fault, for instance, when I . . . but enough of that! One shouldn't put the horse before the cart—I mean the cart before the horse. Let me unfold the whole story gradually, from the beginning; that is, not from the beginning, but from the *last* beginning, from the place you thought was already the end. . .

However that may be, God helped us and we, with troubles, if you remember, in a cold sweat, came to an agreement concerning our shares in the ticket, each one was to get a share. Naturally, things weren't settled as fast as the story goes; there was plenty of talking and of shouting at each other. The priest couldn't see why Birnbaum and I, we two, that is, should receive money. My brother Henich would have liked me to rely on *his* fairness, *his* goodwill and common sense. My chum, Birnbaum, I mean, kept on crying that he wanted nothing, he wanted only public opinion, he wanted to hear what people would say. You understand, don't you? At this point brokers—three at once—poked their noses into the affair. They worked, they toiled, they straightened things out—and put an end to the arguments. It then remained, if you remember, to do what? It remained for all four of us to get together, go to the big city, take out the ticket, get the money and divide it up: this

is for you, this is for me, and goodbye! Yes, but when would this be possible? When there was a ticket to show. But if there is no ticket? What then? No ticket? There is, of course, a ticket, but where is it? Locked up in a bank somewhere in a stranger's name; moreover, that ticket is under an arrest, begging your pardon, by a magistrate's order—go take out such a ticket! So what had to be done? First of all, if you remember, it was necessary to close the case, after that we would see what was what. You understand, don't you? But who could close the case, rub it out, so to say? The priest, naturally. However, if you remember, the priest wanted a guarantee, that is, he wanted the ticket to be transferred to his account and then he would close the case. Sounds as if he, too, was right, doesn't it? But who should transfer the ticket to his name so that he could close the case? Our rich man, of course. So away we go to our rich man and ask him to kindly transfer the ticket and that would put an end to the matter. But again the rich man forwards his own argument, if you remember, and he is also right: "What do you have against me? Why have you saddled me with someone else's affairs?" "Of course you are right," we agree. "But what are we to do when without you the case cannot be closed?" "So what business is it of mine? Close the affair or don't close the affair—it's none of my business!" says he. You understand, don't you? Have you got an affair—confound it!—a cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, putting an end to the affair. Advice here, advice there, it was finally decided to appeal to the law. But first you need the advice of a lawyer, and for that you have to go to the big city. So here we go again: *what* lawyer should we go to? *This* person says we should go to *this* lawyer, *that* one says we should go to *that* lawyer. So, of

course, we go to both, what else can we do? Then, naturally, *this* lawyer says just the opposite of what *that* lawyer said, while a third lawyer comes up with something else. So we're in a bad fix and we go to a fourth lawyer. . . . To make a long story short—do I have to tell you what lawyers are? Lawyers and doctors—one and the same plague. Lawyers and doctors were created, deliberately, in order to contradict each other. Whatever one of them says the other must say just the opposite, just as—forgive the proximity—the Aramaic translation of the Bible. I have a good friend who says: “What, actually, is the Aramaic translation? The translator was a spiteful wretch. He had to have his own way. For instance, where the Hebrew has ‘he will say’ the Aramaic text has ‘he saith’; when the Hebrew Bible says ‘he will speak’, tell me, Mr. Aramaic Translator, what harm does it do you? No, indeed, that doesn’t suit him, he says ‘he spake’—so go and do him something!” You understand, don’t you? One lawyer says that all four of us should sue the bank and the rich man for not giving up the ticket to us—a good idea, huh? Comes another lawyer and says that only two of us should go to court—Birnbaum and I, both of us, that is, should sue the rich man alone for not ordering the bank to hand the ticket over to us. Also not such a bad idea, what do you think? But a third lawyer says that I have no connection with the bank. Does the bank know me? Did it do any business with me? Notice should be served by Birnbaum alone to the rich man, not to the bank at all, for what fault of the bank’s is it when he himself, Birnbaum, that is, just recently had the bank transfer the lottery ticket from his account to that of the rich man? Reasonable talk, isn’t it? However, along comes still another lawyer and yammers that neither I nor Birnbaum should sue—this should be

done by the priest and my brother Henich! Also seems reasonable, huh? Then a new lawyer has a brainstorm: he says that there is no need for anyone to sue anybody, for let us consider just how the ticket came to be in the bank in the rich man's name. Birnbaum put it there. Where did Birnbaum get the ticket? From me, from Yakov-Yosil. Where did I get it? From my brother, from Henich. And this brother of mine, Henich, from whom did he get it? He borrowed it—I mean bought it—from the priest. He says he bought it, the priest says he borrowed it, but what's the difference, what's done is done! Very well, says the lawyer, let the priest dun my brother Henich, my brother dun me, I should dun Birnbaum, and Birnbaum—whom? Birnbaum should demand the ticket from the bank. Yes, but the bank states that it no longer recognizes Birnbaum, it knows only the rich man. So let Birnbaum demand the ticket from the rich man, and the rich man—from the bank. Yes, but the rich man is afraid . . . what is he afraid of? He is afraid of being sued. So up comes the lawyer with another piece of advice: let Birnbaum give the rich man a signed release, I should give such a release to Birnbaum, my brother Henich should give me a release and the priest should give a release to my brother Henich. What could be fairer than this? But there appears still another lawyer, a smart guy who presents us with a conundrum: he tells us to shut up, for how do we know that the ticket's trail ends with the priest? Suppose another character suddenly pops up, like a jack-in-a-box, tomorrow, complete with witnesses and papers, and claims: "The ticket is mine! Good people, where is my ticket?!" What will happen then? This character will demand not the ticket, but already seventy-five thousand rubles! Who will he demand it from? From the rich man, from nobody else! Oh, the

rich man has a release note signed by Birnbaum, Birnbaum has a similar note from me, I have one from my brother Henich and my brother Henich has one from the priest. After that, says the lawyer, the rich man will have to sue Birnbaum, Birnbaum—me, I—my brother Henich, my brother Henich—the priest; it's like the story in the *Passover Song of the Kid*: cat—dog, dog—stick, stick—fire, fire—water, water—ox, ox—slaughterer—you understand, don't you? . . . So we are in a bad fix again. What is to be done? A new lawyer must be found, Kopernikov\* himself, and from him we should proceed to a still greater lawyer, to the "Golden Pointer". What is there to tell you—we didn't miss a single lawyer, we lawyered our heads off, wherever we went we heard nothing but lawyer and lawyer and lawyer. Do you have a spare lawyer—confound it!—a cigarette, I mean?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the lawyers. With God's help the lawyers hit on an idea—they are lawyers, after all! What was this bright idea? The idea was that Birnbaum and I, we two, should first of all sign a notarized paper saying that we have nothing at all to do with the ticket, that the said ticket was sent over to me by my brother Henich, who took it, rather, bought it, from the priest and that my brother asked me to pawn this ticket, which I did: I pawned it with Birnbaum for the sum of two hundred rubles. In other words, tell the story just as it really happened, that is, tell the real, pure, honest truth! Looks plain and simple, doesn't it? No finagling, no tricks—what can be better than the truth? Nobody thought of that before, you understand, don't you? . . . But hold your horses, we haven't got to the end yet. How could we,

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\* L.A. Kopernik (1845—1905), a prominent Kiev journalist and lawyer.—*Ed.*

Birnbaum and I, that is, take and hand over such a whip against ourselves? And what would become of our share? Suppose the other two told us to go kiss their—? Could we depend on my brother's honesty and the priest's trustworthiness? What of it that all of us signed a paper together and wished each other good health over a glass of vodka? It's all mud! A piece of paper costs next to nothing, while toasts can be proposed every day so long as there is something to drink. What did we want, Birnbaum and I, the two of us, I mean? We wanted a guarantee, security for what was ours, *what was due to us*. You understand, don't you? . . . This was when the real merry-go-round actually started.

"A guarantee? Why should they be given guarantees?" asked the other two. "As if it isn't enough that they're getting money for nothing, hand them over a guarantee, too!" This stung us to the quick:

"How come, you so-and-sos, this is how you repay us for our honesty? We're doing you enough of a favor, we could have taken the whole seventy-five thousand for ourselves and nobody would have been the wiser, yet you still have complaints?"

"So we owe you thanks and a pinch, so to say, in the cheek?" asked my brother Henich.

Didn't that vex me! A word for a word, a slap for a slap, as is common among brothers. However, we finally talked them into promising guarantees. What kind of guarantees? Their receipts? A fool's errand. Promissory notes? Not worth the paper they are written on. Then what? Cash! As my grandmother, may she rest in peace, was fond of saying: "The best dairy dish is a piece of meat." But where does one get cash when in our time nobody has any ready money? Nobody? That's not quite so, there is plenty of money around, but the Brodskys have it.



"In short," said I, "all this is idle talk. I'll sign nothing until I have a guarantee!"

"What kind of guarantee?"

"Any kind you like, only it should be a guarantee, so that the world shouldn't laugh at me afterwards and say that Yakov-Yosil played the fool." You understand, don't you?

So that's point one. Then my chum Birnbaum takes up his old refrain of *people!* . . . Since, he says, he is going to sign such an important paper he wants to put his trust in public opinion, he will do whatever people say.

"Harping on 'people' again? We've already finished with this once," said I, "what do you need people for? . . ."

"You must understand me," said Birnbaum, "I want to hear what other people say, perhaps they'll find that nothing is coming to me, so why should I take money for nothing?" You understand, don't you? I demand "guarantees", he wants "people".

"Guarantees," said he, "will come afterwards. First let us ask people's opinion."

"Again you're 'peopling'," said I, "my head is already peopled with your people! Better think of a guarantee, that's more important!"

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the guarantee. It was finally given, we were all tied up with one cord, we all signed papers on all sides in a notary's office, all the papers were submitted to the proper places, and we started a new round of lawyers, writing and signing papers, such a paper and such a paper, dragging ourselves every Monday and Thursday to the big city, running up expenses, paying for lodgings, sleeping with bedbugs—only the place had to be called a "hotel" (a plain inn wasn't good enough for them!), eating "portions", menu items—fried cockroaches

listed as broiled beef (plain stew wasn't good enough for them!), perspiring like in a Turkish bath, roasting in the sun, polishing the cobblestones, going deaf and mad from the clatter and the hoo-hah—all for what? For our great good luck—seventy-five thousand! An end should already come to the whole business; as my wife, she should live long, said: “A real copper coin in the hand is dearer than a gold coin in a dream. Your five-and-seventy thousand,” she said, “has already bored five-and-seventy holes in my heart. I would forego the honor,” she said. “What do I need it for?”

“Eh,” said I, “you're nothing but a woman and a woman is always a woman!”

That's what I said, but in my heart I felt that she was right, because what was I getting out of all this if I couldn't buy anything with it? I only bought myself enemies gratis free of charge: this one was just envious, that one begrudged me the money, he was afraid I'd get it—why should so much money come to Yakov-Yosil? You understand, don't you?

Rest assured that enough money was flushed away before we lived to hear the glad news that the affair was closed, that it no longer existed! Our eyes almost popped out of our heads before we were at last granted the joy of seeing our lottery ticket, in a lucky hour! But you mustn't think it was a simple matter to get to see it. Hold your horses, not so fast. First, a month had to go by in case somebody wanted to contest the decision. I don't think I slept a single night during that month. I was plagued by such wild nightmares that I would wake up in the middle of the night yelling: “Tsipora, I'm flying!”

“Where are you flying, what's this flight that's got into you?” she would ask. “Spit three times and tell me your dream.”

“I dreamed I had wings and was flying through the

air and was followed by wild beasts, by all kinds of strange flying creatures, serpents and dragons who intended to tear me to pieces..." That was my first dream. Another time I dreamed I was sitting on an enormous inflated red rubber sack; on it, in great big numbers, was printed "75,000"... It was, I dreamed, a Saturday afternoon on a summer day, you understand, don't you? The whole *shtetl*, all the men and women, were outdoors for a stroll, and people stopped every minute to stare at me wide-eyed... Suddenly—ba-a-ang!!! The rubber sack exploded, it burst open and I was falling, falling and shouting: "Tsipora, it burst!"

"God be with you! Who? Who burst? Let my enemies burst!..." So said my wife and woke me up; she interpreted my dream as a good omen, as a wife usually does...

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, taking out the ticket. When the time came for taking it out of the bank, we had a new problem: who was to go for it? Each one of us, naturally, considered himself to be the soul of honor, still, I was not obliged to put complete trust in another person—the temptation was too great, *seventy-five thousand rubles!* You understand, don't you?... So I don't believe you, you don't trust me—let us all go together. That is—what does it mean, all together? Something like ten people. How come ten? Count them up and you'll see: am I not one, is Birnbaum not two, is the priest not three, is my brother Henich not four—and what about the three lawyers (one representing the priest, another, a lawyer from Taraschany, representing my brother Henich, the third, a lawyer from Cherkassy, representing Birnbaum and me)? There you already have no less than seven souls, knock on wood; then what about the three brokers who got into the affair and straightened it

out—that makes exactly ten persons, a *minyén*\*, that is... At first this was a bit awkward. My brother Henich kicked up a rumpus: how could so many people, a whole gang, go into the bank? He affirmed it would be enough for two of us to go—he himself and the priest... He evidently didn't care for the idea that nobody trusted his honesty and the priest's holy word. His ranting, however, was of as much use to him as last year's snow, since each one of us pressed his own claim, and each one was right. I, for instance, insisted that I *must* go because I was a brother, not for the glory, but because one brother might hoodwink another brother. What could I do to him then—complain to the Heavenly Court? It's a brother, after all! My Birnbaum argued that since one brother didn't trust the other's honesty he, a complete stranger, couldn't trust in miracles! He had already been tactful enough, he said... You can't say he was altogether in the wrong. Nothing could be said against the three lawyers, either, they just *had* to be present, since plenty of papers still had to be drawn up... So only the three brokers remained, but they insisted that they also had to go, all three of them, since, they said, they were all old hands at the game, experienced people; they'd graduated from a good school, they said, the Yehupetz stock exchange, so they knew already what a broker's fee was, their *cartage*\*\*.. This money is like a matchmaker's commission, they said, that must be collected right on the spot during the engagement ceremony—you understand, don't you?..

We decided, however, that we should go in one by one, not all at once. But since each one of us wanted

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\* A prayer quorum of ten male adults, the minimum required for certain religious services.—*Tr.*

\*\* Incorrect *courtage* (French)—brokerage.—*Tr.*

to make sure that he was first, we all turned up in front of the bank at daybreak. We loitered aimlessly for quite a while until the door was opened and we were let in to get our ticket.

Well, I don't have to explain to you what a bank is. A bank dislikes haste—it has enough time. What does it care about tickets, about Yakov-Yosils, about seventy-five thousand, about priests, Henichs, Birnbaums, poor brokers who want to get their *cartage*, and just onlookers? It doesn't give a hoot! One employee lights up a cigarette, another chats idly, this one has himself a glass of tea, than one sharpens a pencil, and another reads a newspaper—sticks his nose deep into the paper and never so much as lifts his head—do what you want! We paced back and forth, we yawned, we coughed, we impatiently awaited the minute, the moment—but the bookkeeper hadn't come yet. Finally, the bookkeeper turned up, but the cashier wasn't there yet; the cashier came—the Director wasn't there. So where is the Director? He is still asleep. The head of the bank is still sleeping in his bed. What is it all to him—tickets, Yakov-Yosils, seventy-five thousand, priests, Henichs, Birnbaums, poor brokers who want to get their *cartage*, and just onlookers? How much, I wondered, does he earn here, such a *drektor*? At least six thousand rubles, or maybe even eight—and why not all of ten? Doesn't he toil hard enough, poor thing?.. I would agree to work here for half of that money, as I live, or even for one-third! I would work more than he does, and with greater devotion, you may rest assured! That's what I thought then as I stood there, or maybe I didn't think at all, you understand, don't you?..

At last the Director showed up. As soon as he entered we all rushed to him at once. This sort of frightened him and he waved us away. So then only the

lawyers, all three of them, and the priest went up to him and handed him our documents, you understand, don't you?.. The Director locked himself into his office with the papers, while we waited and waited until at last he came out. He was accompanied by a stout landowner and stood talking to him, with his, excuse me, backside to us—and they talked on and on. What did he care about tickets, Yakov-Yosils, seventy-five thousand, priests, Henichs, Birnbaums, poor brokers who want to get their *cartage*, and just onlookers?.. Suddenly he turned his face to us: "*Vashi bumagi gotovi, stupaitye v kassu.*"—Your papers, that is, are ready, go to the cashier... Couldn't say so before, you understand, don't you?

We took the papers and rushed to the cashier, we thought that at last the end of the story had come. An end? Where? What? Nothing doing! The cashier was busy, he was counting money, one-hundred- and five-hundred-ruble banknotes, as if they were rubbish, and gold, whole piles of gold, a tableful! How much money could there be there? Oh, my, if I had even a tenth of it I would thumb my nose at the whole prize!.. That's what I thought then as I stood there, or maybe I didn't think at all; meanwhile the cashier went on counting the gold without paying the slightest attention to us. What did he care about tickets, Yakov-Yosils, seventy-five thousand, priests, Henichs, Birnbaums, poor brokers who want to get their *cartage*, and just onlookers? The gold in his hands flew with a maddening-sweet tinkle, the tinkle of gold. The "clang of gold", you understand, don't you?

Short and good, where was I? Oh, yes, the gold. When the cashier had finished counting it, he raised his eyeglasses to us, snatched our papers, leafed through them as if counting money—hundred-ruble notes, say—his fingers cracking strangely meanwhile! After that

he opened a drawer and took out a pretty hefty package. He opened an envelope—tore it open—and pulled out the ticket, the real ticket, and asked: “Who will take it?..” Ten pairs of hands immediately reached out for it... “No,” said the cashier, “I cannot give the ticket into so many hands! Choose one person from your company...” So we chose one person, the eldest of the lawyers, you understand, don’t you? This lawyer took the ticket with both hands, slowly, gingerly, as an infant is held during the circumcision ceremony, and showed it first to the priest, then to my brother Henich, and then to me and Birnbaum, to both of us together, so that we should see whether this was the same ticket or not... The priest said that he had recognized the ticket from afar, while it was still in the cashier’s hands, he could tell by a certain sign. What was this sign? He refused to say... My brother Henich swore by his life that if he were awakened at, say, two o’clock in the morning and shown the ticket he would recognize it at first glance! You understand, don’t you? But Birnbaum and I, the two of us, that is, did not actually recognize the ticket—why should I lie about it? But we checked, very carefully, the series number and the number 12—that was the most important thing, wasn’t it? Then we rushed headlong to the State Bank to exchange the ticket for our sweet dough, for seventy-five thousand, that is. We all went there together, on foot, although it was uphill. The eldest lawyer carried the ticket with both hands, holding it over his head, so as, God forbid, not to lose it, or so that nobody should suspect him of trying to play any tricks, or exchange it, God forbid. Anything might happen, who could tell, such a *shlimazl* of a ticket! You understand, don’t you?

There were already not only the ten of us, now we topped two *minyens* and more! Where did so many,

knock on wood, people spring from? I'll tell you: first of all, there were good friends from our *shtetl* who had business in the big city on that day. When they saw that we were already going to cash our ticket at the State Bank they went along for company and also to see how such big winnings were paid out—it isn't every day such a thing can be seen. In a word, we had a whole procession following us, like mourners at a rich man's funeral, and we were given a fine welcome at the State Bank. The guard on duty at the entrance was a bit abashed at first when he saw such a crowd of Jews with a Catholic priest in their midst.

However, he welcomed us quite courteously and invited us to enter the Bank one by one. We went to the proper place, said the proper words and were led to an official whose bald head was as white and shiny as a dairy-food plate. Our ticket was handed over to him, something was said to him—I don't know what. This bald man was sitting behind a grille. He lifted his eyes, cast a keen glance at us through his glasses and went on with what he was doing: holding a sharp penknife he was scraping with it in a ledger, scraping and scraping without letup. He scrapes while we stand on pins and needles watching him, and the rest of the crowd stands watching us, looking us up and down, from head to toe. Meanwhile he, the bald-headed type, doesn't stop his scraping, and all around other officials sit at their desks counting money—how much money do you think? It was like chaff, like rubbish! Gold—stacks of it! It made me dizzy, its tinkle made my ears buzz and it dazzled my eyes!

Who, I thought to myself, invented this money that makes people so miserable, makes them beat their heads against walls, makes them ready to gobble up each other alive—there are no brothers, no sisters, no father, no child, no neighbor nor good friend, nothing



is dear in this world but money, money, and money!.. That's what I thought then as I stood there, or maybe I didn't think at all, you understand, don't you?

The official meanwhile continued his scraping in the ledger, for what did such things matter to him—tickets, Yakov-Yosils, seventy-five thousand, priests, Henichs, Birnbaums, poor brokers who want to get their *carriage*, and just onlookers?..

However, everything in this world comes to its end. God had mercy, the official stopped scraping, folded his sharp little penknife, hid it in a vest-pocket, took out a snow-white handkerchief and blew his nose loudly. Then he snatched the ticket, just as if it were a plain piece of paper worth no more than a *grosz*, opened up some kind of a book and began to look: a look into the book and a look at the ticket, a look at the ticket and a look into the book.

He is apparently afraid, the brainy guy, that the ticket is a forgery, I thought to myself. Scratch, scratch, sniff, sniff—it's an honest-to-God ticket, no forgery!

Suddenly he took the ticket and almost flung it into our faces, saying (I remember these words as if he just said them):

*"Who told you that this ticket was the seventy-five thousand winner?.."*

You understand, don't you? *Who told us?* How do you like that?

"What do you mean, who told us?" we cried. "Why, the ticket itself told us that it had won the seventy-five thousand: series 2289, number 12!"

"Yes," he replied quite seriously, "series 2289, number 12 did indeed win seventy-five thousand rubles, but your ticket is series 2298, number 12. *Malenkaya oshibochka*—a slight error..."

How do you like such news? What shall I tell you?

When he said these words we were at first all bewildered. We thought: Either he is mad or we are crazy, or we are dreaming a dream. We began to look at each other. At last we remembered to take a look at the ticket itself: yes, true enough! Series 2298, number 12! You understand, don't you?

What else is there to say, my dear friend? I am incapable of conveying even a tenth part of what happened, and you would never be able to write it up. Nobody can imagine the scene or paint the picture of what took place in the bank as we all stood there struck dumb, looking at each other. Our faces—how can I tell you what was written on them? They were no longer human faces, you understand, don't you? They were the faces of wild beasts, of animals in the likeness of human beings. We were ready to tear each other into shreds, and if looks could kill we would all have been dead!

So what had happened? What had been done to you? You had a dream about seventy-five thousand? Well, is it worth losing your life over it? Has life no other worth than money? Crazy people, you understand, don't you?..

But the one who annoyed me most was my buddy, Birnbaum, that is. The others, at least, tried to make excuses, to shift the blame on to someone else: the priest blamed my brother Henich, while Henich said that he hadn't even dreamed of any seventy-five thousand and would never even have come to know about it if Yakov-Yosil, I, that is, hadn't sent him a congratulatory telegram, you understand, don't you?

"You sure did take a good look into that newspaper, my brother!"

"So why didn't you have a look?" I asked.

"You started the whole thing," said Henich, "you had the ticket, you were the *real owner!*.."

Did you ever hear such a thing? Before, when the seventy-five thousand were in the offing, they wanted to cut me out altogether, but now, when the river had run dry, I became the *real owner*. You understand, don't you? All right, I, Yakov-Yosil, was to be the scapegoat, I would take the whole blame on myself. Let all the guilt be mine. Yes, but where were *your* eyes, you asses? You also saw, together with me, no less than nineteen times, all those papers and all the receipts and insurance notes, in which series 2298, number 12 was clearly written, while the winning ticket was series 2289, number 12. Why didn't it enter your heads to look and see that the 9 stood before the 8? And when the ticket was already in your hands couldn't you take another look into the list of winning numbers and see what series had won the seventy-five thousand—series 2298 or 2289? To plunge into a bank with a whole mob at your heels—that you weren't lazy to do—why not? You thought you were going to get money? You understand, don't you?..

But it was Birnbaum who burned me up most of all. You should have seen him, how he stood apart, as if he were an absolute stranger, as if all this were no concern of his at all. He'd just this minute, it seemed, been making a din with his "People! People!" He wanted public opinion, he wanted to do what people would tell him to do! And now there he stood like an innocent little lamb!.. This, you must understand, was what cut me to the bone, and I thought: Let me at least give him a piece of my mind for the agony he caused me on the second of May, if you remember, when I stood before him, imploring him, as one implores a bandit, to return the ticket.

"*Panie* Birnbaum!" I called out to him. "You now have all the time in the world to rely on public opinion. Here in the bank there are people enough, God bless

them! Why don't you say something? You are not interested in public opinion any longer? You've lost your trust in people?..”

The whole crowd stood there—you understand, don't you?—and gloated. I can't tell you what tickled them so. Either they were delighted with my advice to Birnbaum to rely on public opinion, or else they rejoiced over the fact that the seventy-five thousand had turned out to be a soap-bubble. I tell you and can swear by whatever you like that I don't give a damn for the money—let it burn to a crisp! But what does bother me is why, when people only *thought* that Yakov-Yosil had seventy-five thousand, he was “Reb Yakov-Yosil” and now that they have learned that Yakov-Yosil has nothing but, begging your pardon, a fig instead of seventy-five thousand, he is no longer “Reb Yakov-Yosil”!.. You rats, a curse on your fathers and mothers! What sin did I commit? Seventy-five thousand—yes, seventy-five thousand—no, what's the difference?

You know what I'll tell you, Reb Sholom Aleichem? You may be proud of your Jews and of the whole world! Mind you, it is, phew, a rotten world, a false world, a misled world, a foolish world! Now admit it, don't you hear a ringing in your ears and doesn't your hat twirl on your head from my seventy-five thousand? Please don't be angry with me for perhaps having addled your brains, and be well and healthy, do you understand or not? Let God send us better *geshefts*.

# GOING HOME FOR PASSOVER

*A story telling about the journey Fishel  
the Melamed made from Balta home  
to Khashchevaty for Passover and what  
happened to him on the way*

## 1

Twice a year, regular as clockwork, at the beginning of the months of *Nissan* and *Elul*, Fishel the *Melamed* sets off from Balta to his home in Khashchevaty to spend the Holy Days, Passover and *Sukkoth*, with his family. Fate has so arranged his life that he comes only as a guest to his wife and children, a most welcome one, to be sure, but only for a short time. As soon as the holiday ends he goes back to Balta, back to teaching, back to his *kantchik*, to *Gemara*, to slow-witted heads, to homelessness, to an uneasy life among strangers and to silent longing for his home.

But when he comes home he is a king! His wife Basheva comes out to greet him, her kerchief pulled down low over her forehead, her face flaming red, and asks him, in passing, without—God forbid—looking at him directly: “How are you?” And he answers: “How are *you*?” Froike, his thirteen-year-old son, greets him and Fishel asks: “How far have you gotten, Efroim, in your studies?” His daughter Reizl, not at all a bad-looking little girl with a short pigtail, hugs and kisses him.

“*Tateh*, what have you brought me for the holiday?”

“Cotton print for a dress and for Mother a silken shawl. Here, give your mother the shawl.”

Fishel takes a new silken (rather—half-silken) shawl out of his *tallith*-sack, and Basheva becomes still redder, pulls her kerchief down still lower—over her eyes—and feigns to busy herself with household chores, flitting from one place to another doing nothing.

“Bring me the *Gemara*, Efroim, let me hear how far you’ve gotten in your learning!”

Froike is a really fine lad, a diligent scholar with a bright, perceptive mind and a good memory, and he learns willingly. Fishel listens as Froike interprets the *Gemara*, correcting him when necessary, and his heart overflows with delight, his soul rejoices—what a wonderful son is Froike, what a jewel!

“If you want to go to the bath-house, here is a clean shirt laid out for you,” says Basheva in passing, without looking directly at Fishel. Fishel feels a strange elation, as one who has broken out of captivity into the free bright world and is now among his near and dear ones, among close and loyal people. In his mind he already pictures the well-heated bath-house with lots of steam and himself up on the top shelf with other men, sweating and beating himself with birch twigs—smack, smack—more, more! “Ah, what a delight, more, more!”

From the bath-house Fishel returns fresh and jaunty, as if born anew. Now he begins the holiday ceremony: he puts on his Sabbath coat with the new belt, throws a sidelong glance at Basheva in her new dress and silken shawl. Still a pretty little wife, as I live, he thinks, a pious, saintly woman. Then he goes with Froike to the synagogue. From all sides he is greeted with “*Sholom aleichem*”, with “Welcome, Reb Fishel, how goes it with a Jew a *melamed*?” “A Jew a *melamed* teaches.” “What’s new in the world?” “What can be new in the world? The world is the same

old world." "What's new in Balta?" "Balta is still Balta..."

So it goes, every six months the same questions and the same answers, not a word changes.

Nissel the Cantor stands up to chant *Maariv*; his voice rings out, growing stronger and stronger, becoming so high towards the end that it almost reaches the sky. Froike stands aside praying, and he prays so fervently that Fishel's heart overflows with delight, his soul rejoices: what a virtuous boy, what a pure child is Froike!

"Happy holiday! Happy holiday!"

"Happy holiday and a good year to you!"

At home the table is already set for the *seder*: the four cups of wine, the *morer*, the eggs, the *khroyses* and all the other Passover dainties. At the head of the table is the "throne"—two chairs and a large pillow. Soon Fishel the king will seat himself on "God's throne" in his white linen robe, with Basheva the queen in her silken shawl at his side and opposite them Efroim the prince in his new cap and Reizl the princess with her little pigtail. Hear, ye Jews! Show your respect! Fishel the *Melamed* has seated himself to rule!

## 2

The Khashchevaty wags, young men fond of making fun of others, of mocking the entire world, let alone a Jewish *melamed*, once invented a story about our Fishel. He had once, they asserted, not long before Passover, sent his wife a wire saying: "*Rebyata sob-rany. Dengi vezu. Prigotov puli. Yedu tsarstvovat.\**" Allegedly this meant: "Pupils signed up for next term.

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\* "Boys mustered. Bringing money. Prepare bullets. Am coming to reign." (Russian.)—*Tr.*

Am bringing teacher's pay. Make dumplings. Am coming to rule at *seder*."

This telegram, said the wags, was intercepted at the Balta station. Basheva was subjected to a search, but nothing was found; Fishel, however, was marched home under police escort with a gang of convicts. But I assure you most positively that all this was a lie, a sheer fabrication. Never in his life had Fishel sent any wires, Basheva was never searched and Fishel was never marched home under police escort. That is, he did once get home so, but it was not because of any wire—it was because of a passport, that's what was the matter. And he was deported not from Balta, but from Yehupetz, and it was not before Passover but in the middle of summer. It had entered his mind, see, to go looking for pupils in Yehupetz, but he forgot to take his passport along: he thought it was the same as going to Balta. This was a bad mistake, however, and afterwards Fishel warned his children and children's children never to look for pupils in Yehupetz...

Ever since then he teaches only in Balta; a couple of weeks before Passover he finishes with his lessons and makes preparations for leaving, so as to get home in good time for the Sabbath *Haggadah* reading. What is the most propitious time to go? Why, when the road is a road and a cart is available and the river Bug can be crossed either over the ice or on the ferry. Yes, but how do matters stand when, for instance, the snow is thawing, the mud is deep, no vehicle is obtainable, the ice on the Bug has just broken up and the ferry cannot be run yet, while to cross by rowboat means taking a tremendous risk—and the Holy Day is just around the corner? What is one to do in such a case? What do you do when you are traveling on a Sabbath eve from, say, Makhnovka to Berdichev, or from Sokhachov to Warsaw, and you are trudging up a hill on a dark night



in a downpour and are dying of hunger—and an axle of your cart breaks? The only thing to be said is that in such a case things are really not good!

The taste of “not good” is familiar to Fishel the *Melamed*. Since he became a *melamed* and has been journeying from Khashchevaty to Balta and from Balta to Khashchevaty he has encountered every kind of trouble the road can offer. He has had to walk more than half the way on foot, helping to push the cart. Once he was tumbled into deep mire in company with a priest—Fishel underneath, the priest on top. Once he tried to escape from a pack of wolves that were chasing his cart from Khashchevaty to Pechany, although later it turned out that the animals were dogs, not wolves... But the trouble he had this time as he was going home for Passover exceeded all his previous troubles.

The source of this trouble was the Bug; that is, the ice on the river broke up a little late, just at the time when Fishel was in a great hurry to get home, for it was Friday, Sabbath eve, and that year Passover fell on a Saturday.

### 3

Fishel arrived at the bank of the Bug Thursday evening. He had figured on getting there Tuesday morning, since he left Balta on Sunday after the fair. The devil had led him to the market-place to see whether some peasant's cart might be going his way! He would have done much better if he had gone with slick Yankel (a Balta coachman) on the “back seat”—the footboard in back of the coach. This meant riding backwards, exhausted and nauseous, his feet numb from dangling in the air, but he would have already been at home a long time ago, the “pleasant” journey forgotten! However, he wanted to find

a cheaper conveyance, and it is an old maxim that what is cheap costs dear. Jonah the drunkard, the man who rigs fares in Balta, did warn him: "You listen to me, man. Better pay two rubles and be seated like a lord inside the coach under the hood; remember, you are playing with fire, the holiday is very close!" But since a misfortune was fated the devil brought along a carter from Khashchevaty whom Fishel knew.

"Eh, *rabin*," he cried, "perhaps you want a lift to Khashchevaty?"

"All right, but how much, for instance, will it cost?"

How much it would cost—this he found necessary to ask, but it never entered his head to ask whether he would get home on time for Passover, for even if he walked behind the cart from Balta to Khashchevaty, making mincing little steps, as when standing for the eighteen blessings—even then it would not take him more than a week to get home for the holiday.

As soon as they left the town Fishel already began to regret that he'd agreed to hire this cart, although it was uncrowded, he was riding on it all alone, like a count in his carriage. However, the nag harnessed to the cart dragged itself along at such a pace that it was quite obvious they would not get far, for they jogged on and on a whole day and still made no headway. Fishel tried to get his driver to tell him how far they'd gone, but the man wouldn't answer, he only said: "*A khto yaho znayeh?*"—meaning, "Who knows?" Much later, almost at dusk, slick Yankel with his coach-and-four, the fiery horses sporting tinkling bells, overtook them with a hoop and whistle and a cracking of his whip. His large coach was packed with passengers both inside and outside, in front and on the back footboard. When Yankel saw the *melamed* on the peasant's cart he cracked his whip again and heaped curses on the driver and his passenger; he mocked both them and their

horse—slick Yankel was a past master at cursing. As he passed them he pointed at one of the cart's wheels:

"Eh, man, look, you've got a wheel turning there!"

"Whoa!!" The carter stopped his horse and he and his passenger got off and began to inspect the wheels and their hubs—they even crawled under the cart, but found nothing wrong.

The carter, at last realizing that slick Yankel had made a monkey of him, scratched the back of his neck and then began to curse Yankel and all the Jews with curses Fishel had never in his life heard; his voice went higher and higher, his anger grew hotter and hotter:

*"Ah, shob tobi dobra ne bulo! Shob ty nye dozhdav! Shob tobi likha hodina! Shob ty nye doyekhav! Shob ty propal! Ty! I tvoya skotina! I tvoya zhinka! I tvoya dochka! I tvoi titki i dyadki i kumy! I-i-i vsi vashi zhidi neverniye, nekhristi proklyatiye!\*"*

It took the driver quite a time to get onto his cart, and even then he couldn't calm down, couldn't stop heaping curses on Yankel and on all Jews... At last, with God's help, they reached a village where they could stop for the night.

Fishel got up early next morning, said his prayers (a portion from the *Book of Law*, a little from the Psalms), breakfasted on a *bagel* and was ready to continue the journey. But the trouble was that Fyodor, the carter, was not ready: he had sat up late into the night with a crony of his, making merry and getting drunk. He slept through all of next day and part of the night. Only after that did they continue on their way.

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\* "Ah, you should never see any good! You shouldn't live to see it! An evil year on you! You shouldn't get to your destination! You should perish! You! Your livestock! Your wife! And your daughter! And your aunts and uncles and in-laws! And-and-and-and all your infidel Yids, accursed Anti-christs!" (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

When they were finally on the road, Fishel said in reproof: “How is this, Fyodor! *Chort by tvoya mama, hayitokhn*—how come? *Ya tyebe naimayet befeyresh na praznik!.. Gdye bog? Gdye yeysher?\**”

Fishel rebuked Fyodor with many other words, and he didn't stop scolding in his own manner, as well as he could, half in Ukrainian, half in Hebrew, and the rest he explained with his hands. Fyodor understood quite well what Fishel meant, but answered not a word, not a syllable. He probably felt that Fishel was right, so he kept mum until on the fourth day, when they had just passed Pechany, they again met slick Yankel who was already returning from Khashchevaty: with a hoop and a crack of his whip slick Yankel gave our Fishel and his driver the glad news:

“You can turn back to Balta! The ice on the Bug has broken up!”

When Fishel heard the word “broken” it seemed to him that something had broken in his heart. Fyodor, however, thought that Yankel was making fun of him again, so he repeated all his most vehement curses, wishing all his wildest visions on Yankel's head and hands and feet, and he never shut his mouth until they reached the Bug on Thursday evening. He drove directly to Prokop Baranyuk, the ferryman, to find out when the ferry would run. The two of them, Fyodor and Prokop, sat down and took a drop of vodka, while Fishel turned his face to the east and said *minhah*, the afternoon prayer.

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\* “The devil take your mother... I hired you especially for the holiday! Where is God? Where is honesty?” (a mixture of garbled Ukrainian and Hebrew.)—*Tr.*

The sun was setting, its red beams pouring down on the mountains standing on both sides of the Bug; in some places they were still covered with snow, in others already greening; tiny rivulets cut through them downhill, rushing with a humming sound into the Bug, where they met with the running waters of the newly-broken ice and the drifting ice-floes. On the other side lay Khashchevaty, as on a platter, the whole town, its church spire glowing in the setting sun like a lighted candle. With his face to Khashchevaty Fishel said *shimenesra*, the eighteen blessings; he shaded his eyes with his hand, driving away the temptations that assailed his mind: Basheva in the new silken shawl, Froike with the *Gemara*, Reizl with the pigtail, the hot bath-house with its topmost shelf, fresh *matzah* with well-peppered fish and strong horseradish that stings the nostrils, Passover borsht and soaked *matzah* tasting of paradise, and all other good things that man's tempter can invent... However hard Fishel strived to drive away these thoughts they penetrated deeper and deeper into his mind, bothering him like summer flies, and wouldn't let him pray properly.

Having gotten through the eighteen blessings, Fishel went to talk to Prokop about the ferry and the eve of the Holy Day. He gave Prokop to understand, half in Ukrainian, half in Hebrew, the rest with his hands, what Passover meant to the Jews and what this Saturday eve was—the eve of Passover! If, God forbid, he did not get across the Bug by this time tomorrow he would be lost because, besides the fact that his wife and children were waiting for him at home (here Fishel sighed so deeply that it cut the heart-strings), he would not be permitted to eat or drink eight days running, and this would be no better than throwing himself into

the river right now! (Here Fishel turned away to hide the tears welling up in his eyes.)

Prokop Baranyuk understood the fix poor Fishel was in, and he said that he was aware that tomorrow was a Jewish holiday, he even knew the name of this holiday; moreover, he knew that Jews drank wine and vodka when this holiday came round; he even knew that there was another holiday when they *had* to drink vodka, and it was called “Haman’s ear”; he knew that there was still another holiday when all Jews *had* to get dead drunk, but he had forgotten what it was called...

“*Dobre, harne!*” interrupted Fishel in a tearful voice. “*Ale shto bude is nasha praznik?* What if, God forbid, *zavtra—shob toi chas ne bulo!*!”\*

Prokop said nothing to this. He merely waved his hand in the direction of the river, as if to say: “See what’s going on?!”

Lifting his eyes to the river Fishel saw a sight he had never seen, he heard sounds his ears had never heard. Fishel the *Melamed*, to tell the truth, had never in his life noticed the real “outdoors” nature, that is; he saw it only by chance, as it were, as he hurried from the *heder* to the synagogue or from the synagogue to the *heder*. The majestic blue Bug, flanked by the two looming mountains, the hum of the snaky rivulets as they streamed downhill, the rush of the drifting ice-floes, the fiery rays of the setting sun, the glowing church spire, the fresh, healthy smell of nature in the springtime just before Passover, and, above all, the proximity of his home and the impossibility of reaching it—all these things together so emboldened our Fishel that he was carried away, as if on wings, into a new

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\* “Well and good! But what about this holiday of ours? ...tomorrow—such an evil hour should not come!” (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

world, and it seemed to him that to cross the Bug was as easy as taking a pinch of snuff. If only the Almighty would take the trouble to perform a miracle everything would be possible...

Such and similar thoughts swarmed through his mind, raised him into the air and carried him so far away from the river's bank that he didn't even notice that night had fallen and the sky was asparkle with stars, that a cool breeze had stolen in under his coat and then under his *tallith-kotn*. Sinking into a deep reverie, Fishel meditated over things he had never even dreamed of before: heavenly things, divine Providence, the majesty of Nature, the Creator of the Universe, and so forth.

5

Fishel the *Melamed* spent a troubled night in Prokop the ferryman's hut—such a night should never return! At last morning came with a friendly smile from the bright and merry sun. It was a rarely fine day with a sweet warmth that turned the remaining bits of snow into slush and the slush into water, flowing from all sides into the Bug. The river became clearer, light-blue, high and sloping, and only seldom could one see large ice-floes, resembling living, fearsome beasts, white elephants, racing along in great haste, as if afraid of being late. Fishel said his prayers, ate the last piece of unleavened bread he found in his *tallith*-sack, and then went down to the river to see about the ferry. He was stunned when Prokop told him that the ferry would only begin to run, God willing, on Sunday afternoon! Fishel clutched his head with both hands. He was furious with Prokop and began to rave and swear at him in his half-Ukrainian, half-Hebrew—the rest with his hands—language: why had Prokop prom-

ised yesterday that today it would be possible to cross the river on the ferry? To this Prokop calmly replied that he had never promised Fishel to take him on the ferry; he had only promised to get him to the other side, and this he could do, if Fishel consented. He would take him across in a small boat, a dugout, not more than a trough, and it would cost no less than fifty kopecks.

*“Nekhai bude lodka, nekhai bude multer, abi nye praznikovaty, God forbid, na dviri!\**”

So said Fishel and he was ready to pay two rubles that very moment, or even attempt to swim the river, to sacrifice himself for the Holy Day. Now he began to urge Prokop to hurry up and get his boat or trough or whatever and take him across to Khashchevaty where Basheva, Froike and Reizl were eagerly awaiting his arrival. They might even be standing right now on that mountain on the other side of the Bug! They could see him, they were beckoning and waving to him, calling his name, but he couldn't see them because the river had grown so wide, so dreadfully wide, wider than ever before!

The sun had already climbed half-way up the deep, clear, blue sky when Prokop ordered Fishel to jump into his dugout, but when Fishel heard these words his arms and legs suddenly went numb and he didn't know what to do. Never in his life had he sailed in a trough, never rowed in a boat. It seemed to him that this contraption would immediately topple over and good-bye to life!

“Jump in and we'll get going!” repeated Prokop as with one thrust he brought the little craft nearer to the shore and took Fishel's bundle from his hands.

Fishel carefully rolled up the skirts of his long coat

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\* “Let it be a boat, let it be a trough, as long as I don't have to celebrate the Holy Day ... outdoors.” (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*



and began to twirl in one place, trying to decide what to do: to jump or not to jump. On the one hand were the Sabbath, Passover eve, Basheva, Froike, Reizl, the bath-house, the *seder*, the king... On the other hand—mortal danger, the Angel of Death, taking one's own life—suicide! One pitch of the boat, God forbid, and—may he rest in peace—an end to Fishel!..

Fishel with his rolled-up skirts turned round and round in one place until Prokop began to shout at him and said he didn't give a damn for Fishel and would cross over to the other side, to Khashchevaty, by himself. Upon hearing the cherished word "Khash-chevaty" Fishel was reminded of his near and dear ones. He mustered all his courage and tumbled into the tiny craft. I say "tumbled" because as soon as he placed a foot into the dugout it tilted and, thinking he was falling, he tried to pull back, but this resulted in his falling into the boat face-down; he lay stretched out on its bottom and for several minutes couldn't come to himself. His face was deathly pale, his hands and feet trembled and his heart ticked away like a watch: Tick-tick-tack, tick-tick-tack! Tick-tick-tack!

## 6

Prokop sits as easily in the stern of his tiny craft as he does at home on a chair. A thrust with his oar on one side, a thrust on the other side—the small vessel glides smoothly over the glassy water. Fishel is so dizzy he can barely sit. Sit? Oh, no, he is suspended in the air and his slightest movement will make him break away, the slightest inclination of his body and—ker-plunk!—an end to Fishel! This thought brings to his mind the verse from the Bible that says: "*They sank as lead in the mighty waters...*" His hair stands on end from the thought of such a death: why, it would mean

not getting a Jewish burial! He makes a vow ... what vow should he make? To give alms? But he has nothing to give. He is so miserably poor! So he vows that if God brings him safely home this will oblige him to study the Talmud night after night and within the year go through all its sixty-three treatises.

Fishel would like to know whether the other shore is still far off, but as ill luck would have it he is seated with his face to Prokop and his back to Khashchevaty. He could ask Prokop, but he is afraid to say a word—it seems to him that his voice alone will make the little craft swing and thus turn over—and an end to Fishel! However, Prokop himself begins to talk, saying that there is no worse time to sail a boat than when the ice is drifting. It is impossible, he says, to move straight across, you have to use your brains, to twist around and around and sometimes even go back a little.

“Here’s a great block of ice coming our way,” says Prokop and with a strong thrust of the oar reverses the boat, letting a tremendous ice-floe drift by. It passes with a loud, weird sound. Fishel never heard or saw such things before, and only now does he begin to understand what a risky venture this whole journey is! He would now give anything to reach the shore quickly or turn back.

“Oho, see that!?” exclaims Prokop, pointing somewhere upstream.

Fishel raises his eyes slowly, afraid to make any sharp movement; he looks and looks and sees nothing but water, water, and water.

“A tremendous ice-floe is heading for us. We’ve got to cross its path very quickly because it is too late to back up,” says Prokop and uses both arms vigorously, making their craft slide along, gliding like a fish in water. Fishel grows cold with apprehension. He wants to ask something, but is afraid to risk it. Prokop,

however, does all the talking himself: "It'll be a bad thing if we don't manage to slip across a moment before it gets to us!"

Fishel can restrain himself no longer and asks: "What, exactly, do you mean by 'bad'?"

"Bad means that we'll be lost," answers Prokop.

"Lost?"

"Lost!"

"But just what do you mean by us being lost?" asks Fishel once more.

"It means that we may be crushed."

"Crushed?"

"Crushed!"

Although Fishel does not quite understand what "to be lost" or "to be crushed" might mean he senses an air of "the other world" in these words and a cold sweat covers his body. To his mind again comes the verse from the Bible: "*They sank as lead in the mighty waters...*"

To make Fishel feel more comfortable Prokop tells him a fine story about something that happened last year at this time. The ice on the Bug had broken up, but the ferry wasn't running yet. So a client turned up just then, an excise official from Uman. He was a nice fellow and promised to pay a whole ruble for rowing him across. During the crossing it was their bad luck to have an evil encounter with two enormous blocks of ice. Prokop veered to the right and got in between them. He wanted to cut through upstream, but accidentally bumped into an ice-floe and—kerplunk!—they were in the water! It was a mercy that he could swim, but for the excise-man from Uman it was *kaput*—and the ruble was lost, too.

"*Propav karbovanetz!*"\* sighed Prokop, ending his

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\* "The ruble was lost!" (Ukrainian.)—Tr.

woeful tale. Fishel felt an icy chill go through him and his mouth dried up. He couldn't say a word, couldn't raise his voice or even emit a tiny peep!

7

They were moving along nicely when right in the middle of the river Prokop suddenly stopped sculling, looked intently upstream and then laid down his oar, got a small flask out of a deep pocket, tilted it over his mouth and made a few gulps, corked the flask and returned it to his pocket; after this he chewed several whole peppercorns and then explained to Fishel that he had to, really had to, take at least a couple of sips of the "bitter drops", otherwise he didn't feel good on the water... Wiping his mouth he picked up the oar, glanced upstream again, and said: "*A teper treba tikati!*"\*

Run? Where to? From whom? Fishel didn't understand this, but he was afraid to ask: he felt the nearness of the Angel of Death because Prokop got to his knees and started to ply his oar with all his might and main and, pointing to the bottom of the boat, said: "*Rabin! Liahai na spid!*"\*\*

Fishel comprehended what he was told to do, he made no bones about it and stretched out at the bottom of the boat. From afar he had noticed a dark cloud moving towards them, a whole mountain of ice was coming along. So he closed his eyes, pressed his face to the bottom, trembling like a lambkin, and whispered: "*Hear, O Israel...*"

Having recited this short prayer he began to think about "the Jewish burial" and imagined that very soon

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\* "And now we've got to run for it!" (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

\*\* "Rabbi! Lie down at the bottom!" (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

he might be lying at the bottom of the river and a great fish would come along and swallow him as the prophet Jonah was swallowed when he was fleeing to Tarshish. Recalling Jonah's prayer he sang it in a whisper, weeping, shedding tears: "*The waters compassed me about, even to the soul, the deep was round about me!*"

So sings Fishel the *Melamed* in a whisper, shedding bitter tears, feeling sorry for his Basheva, poor widow, and his orphaned children. Prokop, meanwhile, toils for all he is worth and raises his voice in song:

*Oy, vy halki!*  
*Oy, vy chernokryle!*  
*Cherno-kry-y-y-le!\**

Prokop feels at home on the water, as if it were dry land. Fishel's lament, Prokop's "jackdaws", Fishel's "the deep was round about me" and Prokop's "black-winged" fuse into a weird melody that floats over the river, a duet the likes of which it never heard since it was named Bug.

Why is he so afraid of death, this little man? muses Prokop after they have cleared the great ice-floe and he has taken a few more pulls out of his small flask and chewed a few peppercorns. Such a tiny creature, so poor and so shabby. I wouldn't trade even this old trough for him—but how he trembles for his life!

Prokop gives Fishel a nudge with his boot and Fishel shivers, Prokop bursts out laughing, but Fishel does not hear, he is praying, saying *kaddish* for his own soul and thinking about "the Jewish burial".

*"Vstavai, durnoi rabin, vzhe priyikhali! Vzhe my*

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\* *Oh, you jackdaws!*  
*Oh, you black-winged!*  
*Black-wi-i-n-g-ed!* (Ukrainian.)—Tr.

*u Khashchevaty!\**” shouts Prokop Baranyuk to his passenger Fishel the *Melamed*, rousing him as if from sleep. Fishel lifts his head slowly, cautiously and looks around on all sides with his tear-reddened eyes.

“Kha-ash-che-va-a-ty!??”

“Khashchevaty! *Davai, rabin, pivkarbovantsa!\*\*\**”

Fishel crawls out of the dugout and sees that he is at home at last. He cannot decide what to do—run to the town or dance a jig? Or perhaps he should, first of all, thank and praise God for saving him from such perils? He pays Prokop the fifty kopecks and grabs his bundle; he is about to run home but something stops him. He stands still a moment, then turns about to face the ferryman and says:

“*Slukhai no, Prokope serdtse. Ty prikhodi, am irtze khashem, zavtra na charku peisakhovki i praznikovoi ryba, do Fishel Spektor. Tchuyesh? Lemanashem!\*\*\*\**”

“A yak zhe? Hiba zh ya takey durney?” answers Prokop, smacking his lips in anticipation of the wine he will taste tomorrow and the fish he will eat. “*Peisakhova horilka? Zhidova ryba? Dobre, rabin, dobre!\*\*\*\**”

When Fishel the *Melamed* got home his wife Basheva, her face flaming red and her kerchief pulled down

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\* “Get up, foolish rabbi, we’ve arrived already! We’re already in Khashchevaty!” (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

\*\* “Come on, rabbi, let’s have the half-ruble!” (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

\*\*\* “Listen here, Prokop, dear heart! You come along tomorrow, for sure, for a glass of Passover wine and holiday fish, to Fishel Spektor. You hear? Without fail!” (A mixture of garbled Ukrainian and Hebrew.)—*Tr.*

\*\*\*\* “Of course! Am I a fool?.. Passover wine? Jewish fish? Fine, rabbi, fine!” (Ukrainian.)—*Tr.*

low over her forehead, asked him: "How are you?" And he answered: "How are *you*?" And she also asked: "Why so late?" And he answered: "We should say *goyml*. God performed a miracle..." Not another word did he add, for he did not want to speak about his marvelous journey—there was no time. He even had no time to ask Froike how far he had gotten in his study of the *Gemara*, or to give Reizl her gift and the silken shawl for Basheva. All this he put off for later—he was anxious to get to the bath-house before it was too late. He managed in the nick of time. Upon returning from the bath-house he likewise told them nothing, putting it off for later, for after the *seder*. However, he repeated, over and over, a few words: "God performed a miracle ... say *goyml*... The Lord disposes ... God's miracle... Praised be the Lord!"

Then, together with Froike, he hurried away to the synagogue.

## IT'S A LIE!

"You're going, it seems to me, to Kolomeya?"

"How do you know that I'm going to Kolomeya?"

"I heard you talking to the conductor. Are you actually a Kolomeyan, or are you only going to Kolomeya?"

"I am a Kolomeyan. So what?"

"Nothing. I'm just asking. Is it something of a substantial town, Kolomeya?"

"What do you mean by 'substantial'? A *shtetl* like any other in Galicia\*. A fine *shtetl*, a very fine *shtetl*!"

"I mean, do you have some fine people there, wealthy people?"

"We've got all kinds: there are rich men, there are poor men. Naturally, there are more poor people than rich ones."

"Same as in our place. For one rich man—knock on wood, a thousand paupers. Is there a rich man called Finkelstein in your Kolomeya?"

"There is a rich man, Finkelstein, a wealthy man. So what? Do you know him?"

"Know him I don't, but I've heard of him. Isn't he called Reb Shayeh?"

"Reb Shayeh, yes. So what of that?"

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\* A Polish province.—*Tr.*



“Nothing. I’m just asking. Is he really as rich as they say, this Reb Shayeh?”

“I should know? I haven’t counted his money. Why do you have to know? You want to know because you need credit?”

“No, I’m just asking. He has, they say, a daughter.”

“He has three daughters. Maybe you’re thinking of a match? How much dowry were you told he’ll give his daughter?”

“It’s not a question of dowry, you must understand. The question is about the family, the home, that’s the question: what kind of a home does Reb Shayeh Finkelstein have? What kind of house does he keep, I mean?”

“What kind of a home should it be? A home like all homes. A Jewish home, a fine home, a Hasidic home, a very fine home! People do say that as regards Jewishness there has of late... But it’s a lie!”

“What’s a lie?”

“Whatever they may say is a lie. Kolomeya, you should know, is a town of the worst liars.”

“So it’s all the more interesting to learn what, for instance, they say about his home.”

“They say that it’s already not the same as it was. For instance, formerly they used to observe all the rules very strictly. For Passover they always had special Passover *matzah*. He himself used to go twice a year to visit his *rebbe*. But now... Now things are not the same...”

“And that is all?”

“What else did you want? That he should shave off beard and earlocks and eat pork openly?”

“You said ‘they say’, so I thought God knows what they say! The main thing is the man himself—that he should be an upstanding person! That is, I mean, is he, this Reb Shayeh Finkelstein, something of a fine, respectable person? That’s what I mean.”

“What do you mean by a respectable person? A man like other men. What can I say? In our *shtetl* there is even talk that he is a bit ... but it’s a lie!”

“What’s a lie?”

“Everything they say about him is a lie; Kolomeya is a town in which people love to blacken each other. I don’t want to repeat such things, because that is already talking slander.”

“So long as you know that it’s a lie—it’s already no slander.”

“They say that he is ... a bit ... of a finagler.”

“A finagler? Every Jew is a bit of a finagler. A Jew finagles. Aren’t you a finagler?”

“There is finagling and finagling. About him they say, you should understand ... but it’s a lie!”

“What, actually, do they say about him?”

“But I’m telling you—it’s a lie!”

“I’d like to know the lie they tell.”

“It’s said that he has declared himself bankrupt three times already. But it’s a lie! I know only about one time.”

“And that’s all? Where have you seen a merchant who never declared himself bankrupt? A merchant carries on his trade until he ruins himself. If a merchant dies without having been a bankrupt it is a sign that he died before his time. What? Isn’t it so?”

“You think insolvency is everything? People say about him that he declared himself insolvent in a very ugly manner. He slipped away the dough and showed the world a fig. Do you understand?”

“Not at all a fool, evidently. Well, and besides that—nothing?”

“What else do you want? That he should murder people? Actually, they do tell a story about him that doesn’t sound nice at all ... but it’s a lie!”

“Really—what kind of story?”

“A story with a landowner ... all nonsense!”

“What kind of story with a landowner?”

“One of the landowners there ... promissory notes... How should I know what Kolomeya can think up? It’s a lie! I know it’s a lie!”

“If you know it’s a lie it won’t hurt him, will it?”

“They say he did business with a landowner, a very wealthy landowner, and the landowner trusted him entirely. Well, the landowner died, so he tendered two promissory notes signed by the landowner. This made a great stink in town: where did he get the notes, since the landowner had never, as long as he lived, signed any papers? Kolomeya, you should know, is a town that pays attention...”

“Well?”

“Well, well! So he had himself a pack of troubles...”

“And that is all? Every Jew has a pack of troubles. Did you ever see a Jew without such a pack?”

“This one, however, had, they say, three packs.”

“Three packs? Really, what other packs of troubles do they say he carried?”

“There was the business he had, they say, with a mill... But this is already certainly a lie!”

“So the mill probably burned down and people said that he himself had been *boyre mauri hash*—the “Creator of the fiery orbs”, and since the mill was already an old one he had had it insured for a good sum so as to be able to put up a new one?”

“How do you know that this was the story?”

“Know—I don’t know, but I am certain that it happened that way.”

“Such, that is, is the rumor in Kolomeya, but it’s a lie! I am ready to swear that it’s a lie!”

“I don’t care if it is the truth. What other pack of troubles did you say he had?”

"I said? The town says. But this is already pure libel, a false accusation, pure calumny."

"A false accusation? Calumny? Is it forgery?"

"Worse."

"What can already be worse?"

"It's embarrassing even to repeat what Kolomeya can think up! Empty people ... good-for-nothings... And maybe it was a frame-up in order to blackmail him? Don't you know how it is? A small *shtetl*, a rich man has enemies..."

"He must have had an affair with a servant girl?"

"How do you know? Somebody already told you?"

"Nobody told me, but I can well guess. It must have cost him a pretty sum, this same frame-up?"

"Let us wish that both of us together earned every week—I'm no enemy of yours—what it cost him, although, God is my witness, he wasn't guilty. A small *shtetl*... A wealthy Jew ... things go well with him ... people are envious ... simply—they are envious!"

"Possibly. Does he have worthy, respectable children? Three daughters, it seems to me, you said?"

"Three. Two are married and one is still a girl. Fine children, very fine children... However, it is said about the elder one that ... but it's a lie!"

"Come on, what do people say of her?"

"But I'm telling you it's a lie."

"I know it's a lie. But I want to know this lie."

"If you would want to listen to all the lies that are circulated in Kolomeya three days and three nights wouldn't be enough... They say about the eldest one that she wears her own hair! I can bear witness that it's a lie, because she is not at all so educated as to wear her own hair. About the second daughter they simply invented that, while she was still unmarried, she... But what can't Kolomeya think up! It's a lie!"

"It would be interesting to learn what people can think up in your Kolomeya."

“But I told you that Kolomeya is a town of the worst liars, slanderers and long tongues. Don’t you know? In a small town, when a girl walks out all alone at night in the street with a young man, it arouses a commotion: why should a girl walk around at night in Kolomeya all alone with a pharmacist?”

“And that is all?”

“What else did you want? That she should elope with him in the middle of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, to Chernovitsy, like, they say, the trick the youngest one played!?”

“So what kind of trick did the youngest one play?”

“It’s not worthwhile, as I live, to repeat all the nonsense that they talk in Kolomeya. I hate to repeat lies!”

“You’ve already told so many lies, so go on, tell me this one, too.”

“I don’t tell *my* lies, Reb Jew, I tell the lies others invent!.. And in general I don’t understand why you are so inquisitive about every single person, like a prosecutor? You, it seems to me, are a Jew who likes to snoop, to pry, to pull the bone-marrow out of another person, while you yourself are afraid of letting out a word... Please excuse me for telling you the pure truth, but you are, it seems to me, a Russian Jew, and these Jews have a most repulsive custom: they like to creep right into another’s heart, boots and all... They are, evidently, no small gossips... Besides, we’re approaching Kolomeya... Time to collect my things... Ex-cu-u-use me!”

## TWO *PURIM* GIFTS

### 1

Such a beautiful and warm *Purim* hadn't been seen in Kasrilovka for a long time. An early thaw had set in and the snow had turned into a slushy, waist-deep mire.

The sun shone brightly and a lazy breeze was wafting. A foolish little calf, thinking it smelled the spring, let out a bleat, lifted its tail, lowered its head and emitted a hesitant "moo!" In the streets snaky little rivulets ran downhill carrying along here a chip of wood, there a straw or a scrap of paper. It was fortunate that nobody in the town had as yet any money for *matzah*, otherwise one might have thought that it was not *Purim* but the day before Passover.

Right in the middle of the town, where the mud was deepest, two girls almost bumped into each other. They were both named Nekhameh; one was a dark, black-haired, robust wench with thick eyebrows and a snub nose; the other was a pale and sickly redhead with a sharp little nose. The first was barefoot, her legs thick and black, while the other wore a pair of something that pretended to be shoes: their toes gaped as if begging for food. Marvelous shoes! When their wearer walked they squelched, and since one of the soles was loose it dragged along with a flap and a squeak at every step. When these shoes were taken

off they weighed a ton! Of such shoes it is said that it is better to go barefoot than wear them.

Both Nekhamehs were carrying *Purim* gifts—*shalakhmones*—covered with white napkins and held up high with both hands. Seeing each other, both girls stopped.

“Ha, Nekhameh!”

“Ha, Nekhameh!”

“Where are you going, Nekhameh?”

“What do you mean—where am I going? I’m carrying a *shalakhmones*.”

“To whom are you carrying the *shalakhmones*?”

“To your place. And where are you going, Nekhameh?”

“What do you mean—where am I going? You see, don’t you, I’m carrying a *shalakhmones*.”

“To whom are you carrying the *shalakhmones*?”

“To your place.”

“That’s a real joke, I tell you!”

“Pure comedy!”

“Hey, Nekhameh, let me peep at your *shalakhmones*, huh?”

“You show me your *shalakhmones* first, Nekhameh!”

Now both Nekhamehs began looking around for a place where they could sit down for a while. God had pity on them and they noticed a log near an inn; so picking up their feet from the clinging mud they sat themselves down on that log, placing the trays on their knees and lifting the napkins to look at the *shalakhmones*.

First Nekhameh the redhead uncovered and demonstrated her tray of goodies. She worked for Red Yosi’s wife Zelda and was paid five and a half rubles for the winter, with dress and shoes. But what a “dress” and what “shoes”! All right, we’ll say that the dress was

a dress, with plenty of patches, true, but still a dress; the shoes, however, were men's shoes, they had belonged to Zelda Reb Yosi's son Menasheh who had a foot like a tub and a habit of wearing down the heels. Fine shoes, indeed!

The *shalakhmones* carried by Nekhameh the redhead consisted of a big, beautiful *hamantash*\*, two small cushion-shaped pies, one open and filled with noodle-pellets in honey, the other round and prettily decorated on both sides; a macaroon with a raisin stuck in its very center, a large square piece of torte, a goodly slice of marble cake, two small "royal buns" and a large helping of rye honey-cake that Zelda had been more successful with this year than ever before: either the flour had been very good, or the honey was pure, or the cake had merely been well-baked, or the dough had been beaten longer—it was like a thick, downy pillow!

Having admired Nekhameh the redhead's *shalakhmones* the black-haired Nekhameh uncovered her *shalakhmones*. She worked for Reb Aizik's wife Zlata. Her salary was six rubles for the winter, she had to find her own clothes and therefore went about barefoot, making Zlata hurl the most vehement curses at her.

"How can a wench go around barefoot all winter? She must want to catch a cold, the devil take her!"

Nekhameh, however, paid as much attention to these curses as Haman pays to a rattle. She would rather save up her money for Passover when, God willing, she would have a pair of shoes made with high heels and hooks for the laces, and also a bright cotton dress with flounces. Kopl the cobbler, who courted her, would certainly drop dead when he saw her!

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\* A triangular *Purim* pastry filled with poppy seeds and honey or plum preserves, also called in Russian "Haman's ear". — *Tr.*



The *shalakhmones* the black-haired Nekhameh carried consisted of a piece of strudel, two large macaroons, a fair-sized portion of dough-pellets cooked in honey, two cushion-shaped pies filled with tiny sweet noodle-pellets and decorated on both sides with little fishes traced in icing and two large poppy-seed cakes, black and shiny. full of nutmeats and fried in honey! Besides this there lay on the tray, smiling up at them, a bright, fragrant orange, its smell going straight to the heart and melting one's limbs.

2

"Listen, Nekhameh, you know what? Your *shalakhmones* is prettier than mine," said Nekhameh the redhead to the black-haired Nekhameh as a compliment.

"Oh, your *shalakhmones* isn't a bad one either!" said the black-haired Nekhameh, returning a compliment for a compliment, and tapping the *hamantash* with a finger.

"What a *hamantash*!" she exclaimed and even smacked her lips. "This is what I call a real *hamantash*!.. To tell the truth, I begrudge her nothing, that mistress of mine ... but such a *hamantash* ... a pox that size should settle on her face, Lord of the Universe! Listen, Nekhameh, I haven't had a crumb in my mouth today and I wouldn't mind tasting at least a morsel of this *hamantash*..."

"And do you think I had any food today? They shouldn't have more to eat the rest of their lives!" cried Nekhameh the redhead, darting glances in all directions. "Listen, Nekhameh, take the *hamantash* and break it in half so we'll have ourselves a bite. Where is it written that there must be a *hamantash* in every *Purim* gift? There's no *hamantash* in yours, is there?"

“I should have such a good year as you are right!” agrees the black-haired Nekhameh, breaking the *hamantash* in two and sharing it with Nekhameh the redhead.

“You know what I’ll tell you? Its taste is sheer paradise! The only trouble is that there is no more... For your *hamantash*, Nekhameh, you must taste a piece of cake from my *shalakhmones*, because, since we’ve got to get going they can very well do with a piece of cake less and a plague more... Do you know how much I’ve collected since early morning until now? A mere *zloty* and two *groszy*—and there is a hole in the *groszy* to boot... And how much did you get, dear heart?”

“I got even less—a plague on them!” says Nekhameh the redhead, taking big bites of the cake and gulping them down whole like a goose. “God grant that I should make a *zloty* for the whole day!..”

“Fine rich women, indeed! All right, let them all go and bury themselves!” says the black-haired Nekhameh, licking her lips after the cake. “Here I bring a *shalakhmones* to Henye the haberdasher. She takes the *shalakhmones* from me, fumbles in her pocket and then tells me to drop in later. She should croak in agony!”

“The same thing happened to me when I went to see Reb Aron’s Keila,” says Nekhameh the redhead. “I come in with the *shalakhmones*, so she goes and makes me a gift of a sugar-cookie, let God make her a gift of a new soul!”

“And the old one should be thrown to the dogs!” cries the black-haired Nekhameh, picking up one of Zlata’s macaroons and breaking it in half. “Here, dear heart, you eat this and may the worms eat them! I should worry if your mistress gets one macaroon less!”

“Oh, a pox on me!” exclaimed Nekhameh the redhead, jumping to her feet and wringing her hands. “Just see, dearie, what’s left of my *shalakhmones!*”

“Who is going to tell them, foolish girl?” said the black-haired Nekhameh, quelling the other Nekhameh’s fears. “Don’t you be afraid, today is *shalakhmones* day and they’re so flustered they won’t look too closely.”

With that both Nekhamehs covered their trays with the white napkins and went splashing through the mud just as if nothing had happened.

### 3

Reb Yosi’s Zelda, a round-faced, pretty woman in a red silken apron with white dots on it, stood arranging and sorting out the *Purim* gifts she was sending and the ones she had received.

Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin (such was his nickname in Kasrilovka) lay snoring on the sofa while Menasheh, a red-cheeked youth of about eighteen in a long lustrine cape, was getting under his mother’s feet and snatching now a piece of cake, now a couple of honey-pellets or a poppy-seed bun; he had stuffed himself so full of all these goodies that his teeth and lips were black and his stomach had begun to rumble.

“Menasheh, maybe it’s enough already, eh, Menasheh?” asked Zelda every minute.

“Enough, enough!” was Menasheh’s reply, as he stuffed another “last” tidbit into his mouth and smacked his lips.

“Happy holiday to you, my mistress has sent you a *shalakhmones!*” says the black-haired Nekhameh, offering the covered *shalakhmones* to Zelda.

“For whom do you work?” asks Zelda with a friendly smile, taking the tray from the girl’s hands.

“I work for Reb Aizik-Balbriskin’s Zlata,” answers the black-haired Nekhameh, waiting for the empty tray to be returned to her.

Zelda puts one hand into her pocket to get out a *grosz* for the girl, while with the other hand she uncovers the *shalakhmones*—and stands as if petrified.

“What’s this? Menasheh, just take a look!”

Menasheh looks at the *shalakhmones* and doubles over with such loud laughter that Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin almost falls off the sofa in fright.

“Huh? What? What’s the matter? Who’s there?..”

“Just look at this *shalakhmones*,” cries Zelda, crossing both hands over her stomach. Menasheh goes on laughing and Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin spits indignantly, turns his face to the wall and goes back to sleep.

Zelda flings the tray and the napkin at Nekhameh, saying:

“You tell your mistress she should live to next year and not be able to afford a better *shalakhmones*!”

“Amen, the same to you!” retorts the black-haired Nekhameh, taking the tray.

“You should fall headlong into the grave!” cries Zelda angrily, “you impudent hussy! How do you like that, Menasheh?”

#### 4

Reb Aizik’s Zlata, a woman who bears a child every year and is continuously doctoring herself, was already so exhausted from receiving and sending out *Purim* presents that she had to sit down on a stool, and from there boss her husband Aizik-Balbriskin (that’s what people called him behind his back because he celebrated a circumcision—a *bris*—every year).

“Aizik, take that piece of torte from over there and put it over here, and this piece of marble cake with those two poppy-seed buns put over there, Aizik, and hand me over that ‘cushion’ with the honey-pellets—no, not that one, the other one! Oh, get a move on you, Aizik! Just see how he has to be taught the alphabet as if he were a little child! And take that cookie, the bigger one, and put it over here. That’s right. Now cut that piece of torte in half, it’s too big, Aizik, a waste... Drop dead, you little bastards, scat!!”

The last words were addressed to a bunch of bare-bellied urchins crowding around her, greedily eyeing the goodies and licking their lips.

The urchins tried to steal closer from behind her back and grab something from the table, but upon noticing this the mother dealt out a slap, a jab, or a box on the ear.

“Happy holiday! My mistress has sent you a *shalakhmones!*” announces Nekhameh the redhead, offering her covered tray to Zlata.

“Whom do you work for?” asks Zlata with a friendly smile, taking the tray from the girl’s hands.

“I work for Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin’s Zelda,” answers Nekhameh the redhead, waiting for the empty tray to be returned to her.

Zlata puts one hand into her pocket to get out a *grosz* for the girl, while with the other hand she uncovers the *shalakhmones*—and almost faints.

“All the evil, dismal, deadly, dark dreams should haunt my enemies, fall on their heads and hands and feet and bodies and lives! Just look and see what sort of a *shalakhmones* this is! Making fun of me, the hussy!”

“Here, return this to your mistress!” shouts Zlata

and flings the tray with the napkin and the *Purim* gifts into Nekhameh the redhead's face.

5

Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin and Red Aizik-Balbrisnik are both Kasrilovka shopkeepers, their shops are next door to each other. Now, although they are, so to say, rivals, and not averse to enticing customers away from each other whenever possible, still, they are good friends, they lend each other money without interest, they visit each other's homes on festive occasions, and join in the benediction of the wine on holidays, just as good neighbors should do. In the summer they sit all day in one of the shops throwing dice, in the winter they drop into one another's shops to warm themselves a bit. Their wives also maintain friendly relations and are fond of picking the world to pieces. When one of them doesn't have enough goods she borrows from the other, they trust each other with their greatest secrets and hardly ever quarrel, but if it does happen that they get into an argument over some piece of nonsense they make it up very quickly... In a word—they live in full harmony.

On the day after *Purim*, when Red Aizik-Balbrisnik came to open his shop, Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin was already standing at the door of his own shop, puffed up like a turkey-cock and waiting for Reb Aizik to say "good morning" and then snub him by not answering... Reb Aizik, on whom his wife had also been working, unlocked his shop and stood himself in the doorway waiting for Reb Yosi to greet him and then give no answer... And so they stood one opposite the other, like two roosters ready to fight and waiting to see who would begin first... Both of them might have stood so a whole day if their wives had not arrived from the

market-place, their faces aflame and their eyes sparkling with anger.

“Aizik, why don’t you thank him for the fine *shalakhmones* his beauty sent me?” shouts Zlata to her husband.

“Yosi, why don’t you remind him of yesterday’s *shalakhmones*?” yells Zelda to her husband.

“Aizik, you hear, Aizik, she’s taunting us! Why don’t you answer, Aizik!”

“Why should I go and talk to a ‘lambkin?’” says Aizik very loudly, to make sure that Reb Yosi hears himself being called a “lambkin”.

“I’m afraid to tangle with a ‘balbrisnik!’” declares Reb Yosi in a loud voice so that Reb Aizik should hear himself being called a “balbrisnik”. At first glance, what is so terrible about the word “balbrisnik”? Any Jew whose wife is brought to childbed with a boy becomes a *Bal-Brisnik* on the eighth day.

However, Reb Aizik could stand anything in the world except the nickname “balbrisnik”. To him this was a thousand times worse than if he had heard his father being cursed. For this nickname he was ready to tear his adversary into shreds!..

The same thing was true of Reb Yosi. You might hand him three slaps, he would like it better than the word “lambkin”.

The whole market came running and could barely pull the two men apart! Everyone was eager to find out how and why two good neighbors and close friends should suddenly seize each other by the beard... But since all four of them—Reb Yosi, Reb Aizik, Zlata and Zelda—were talking at the same time, shouting and screaming, the only thing that could be made out was “*Shalakhmones!*”, “*Shalakhmones!*” and nothing else. What “*shalakhmones*”, where “*shalakhmones*”? That it was impossible to understand.

“If you don’t lodge a complaint with the Justice of the Peace against this ‘lambkin’ you may say goodbye to your life!” screamed Zelda at her husband, whereupon Reb Yosi appealed to the whole market-place:

“Jews, I call you to witness that this here hussy called me a ‘lambkin’! I’m going to the Justice of the Peace and handing him a complaint against her and her husband the ‘balbrisnik’!”

Now Reb Aizik raised *his* voice: “Jews, I want you to know that I’m putting you down as witnesses before the Justice of the Peace that this here ... this here ... this here ... I don’t want to call him by his fine name—that he has just now called me a ‘balbrisnik’!”

An hour later they were both at Yudl-the-Scribe’s; both named witnesses and both lodged complaints with the Justice of the Peace.

## 6

The Kasrilovka Justice of the Peace (the *mirovoi*) Pan Milinyevsky was a stout landowner with a long beard and a high forehead. He had been the *mirovoi* for such a long time that he knew the entire town very well, was familiar with every single person, especially with the Kasrilovka Jews: he knew each one separately, knew his nature through and through, understood Yiddish like a Jew and was as clever as can be. “A real Jewish head on his shoulders,” said the Kasrilovites.

Every autumn, soon after *Sukkoth*, the Feast of the Tabernacles, he is showered with complaints, all of them from Jews, God keep them healthy! These complaints do not, God forbid, deal with theft, murder, or violence—no! They deal only with having been shown “figs”, having been slapped in the face for these “figs”, with heated quarrels over being “chosen” in the



synagogues, that is, being given the honor of reading a chapter from the Torah. Pan Milinyevsky didn't like to stand on ceremony with the Kasrilovka Jews, he never let himself be drawn into a long discussion, and he did not permit them to do much talking, since it was all an endless story. If they wanted a peaceful settlement—well and good (Pan Milinyevsky was a peacemaker); if not, he put on his chain of office and announced in a ringing voice: "*Po ukazu na osnovaniye takoi-to i takoi-to statyi*\* I sentence Hershke for '*fosn-brashis*'\*\* to three days in the cooler and Yankel for '*fosn-torah*'\*\*\* to three days in the cooler..." As you see, he showed no preferences.

Exactly two weeks before Passover the "*shalakh-mones*" hearing came up. The small courthouse was full of Jewish men and their wives, almost all of them witnesses. There wasn't place enough for even as much as a pin to fall.

"Aizik, Yoska, Zlata, Zelda!" called Pan Milinyevsky. Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin and Reb Aizik-Balbrishnik with their wives got up from the front bench. Before the *mirovoy* could utter a single word all four plaintiffs began to talk at once, the greater and louder torrent of words coming, naturally, from the women.

"*Gospodin mirovoi!*" cries Zelda in a mixture of garbled Russian and Yiddish, pushing aside her hus-

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\* "In accordance with a decree based on such-and-such an article..." (Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\* *fosn-brashis* (instead of *hosn-brashis*)—the honor of reading from *Genesis* (Hebrew).—*Tr.*

\*\*\* *fosn-torah* (instead of *hosn-torah*)—the honor of reading from the Torah (Hebrew).—*Tr.*

band and pointing to Zlata: "*Ona, eta hultaika, do minye prislait* on this year's *Purim* a *kharoshi shalakhmones* to make a laughing-stock of me! A *parshivi* strudel *i odin* macaroon, *prosto* a mockery, *stram, tphooh!*\*"

"Oi! Oi! Oi! This I can't bear!" yells Zlata, thumping her chest. "*Dai bozhe minye takiy shmatok zolota!*\*\*\*"

"Amen!" cries Zelda.

"Shut up, big mouth! *Dva podushichki, gospodin mirovoi, dai bozhe mineh takoi* \*\*\* good luck, and marble cake, and royal buns, and a misery on her, and a rye honey-cake! And an Egyptian plague! And what about the Haman's ear? Oh, woe is me!"

"*Yakai Hameneh ukhe?*\*\*\*\* Nothing of the sort!"

The *mirovoy* tried, at first kindly, to calm down the women, and then angrily, ringing his bell; seeing that this was of no use he had the women thrown out into the street in order to bring a little peace into the court and make it possible for people to at least hear what was being said. He gave the men one sole piece of advice—told them to go to the rabbi.

"*Do rabina!*" he said to them. "*Do rabina s vashim Hameneh ukhe!*\*\*\*\*\*" The whole crowd thereupon left the courthouse and went on to the rabbi.

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\* "Mr. Justice of the Peace! She, this hussy, sends me ... a fine *shalakhmones*... A miserable strudel and one macaroon, simply ... a disgrace" (bad Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\* "God grant me such a chunk of gold!" (garbled Ukrainian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\* "Two cushion-pies, Mr. Justice of the Peace, God grant me such..." (garbled Russian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\*\* "What Haman's ear?" (Ukrainian).—*Tr.*

\*\*\*\*\* "To the rabbi with your Haman's ear!" (Ukrainian).—*Tr.*

Reb Yuzifl the rabbi, who must already be known to our readers, is, thank God, a most tolerant man. He likes to hear out each one to the very end, proceeding from the assumption that every person, no matter how long he talks, must finally stop, for, he says, a human being is not a machine. This time the only trouble was that all four plaintiffs spoke at the same time, one louder than the other, and the bystanders also kept barging in. But what did that matter? Everything in the world must come to an end... When they had all talked and shouted and quarrelled to the full and at last fell silent, Reb Yuzifl addressed both parties, speaking, as his custom was, slowly and politely, with a little sigh:

“Oh, oh, oh! Such a festival is coming, such a holy celebration, Passover! A trifle—Passover! Our fathers came out of Egypt, crossed the sea, such a big sea, over dry land! They wandered in the desert forty years, forty years! On Mount Sinai they received the Torah, such a Torah, which clearly says: *a've*—and thou shalt love have, *leroe*—not abuse, for your friend; as thou lovest thyself shalt thou love him! And here Jews quarrel, actually fight, oh, our sins, our sins, tear each other's beards out, and over what? Over foolishness, over nonsense, blaspheming before Gentiles, a sacrilege, as I live, a profanation, a shame!.. It would be better to think of providing alms for needy people for Passover, the poor things have no *matzah* for Passover yet—to say nothing of eggs, fowl fat and all the trimmings! But at least *matzah*, for Heaven's sake, *matzah* for Passover! A trifle—Passover! Such a holiday! Our fathers came out of Egypt, crossed the sea, such a big sea, over dry land, they wandered in the desert forty years, forty years! On Mount Sinai they received the Torah, such a Torah, such a Torah! Listen

to me, Jewish children, forgive each other, make it up, go home in good health and put your minds to the coming holiday, such a high and holy day!”

One by one the crowd began to leave the rabbi's house, feigning to laugh at Reb Yuzifl's judgement, wisecracking: “If not a judgement—at least a lecture!” as the Kasrilovka wags are wont to do. But in their heart of hearts they all felt that Reb Yuzifl was right and they were ashamed to repeat the story of the *shalakhmones*...

On the first day of Passover, right after the morning prayers, Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin (he was younger) came to Reb Aizik-Balbrisnik's home for *kiddush*. He praised the Passover wine and said that this year it was really something special, and he licked his fingers after eating Zlata's crullers. Early on the second day of Passover Reb Aizik-Balbrisnik (he was older) came to Reb Yosi-the-Lambkin's home for *kiddush*; he just couldn't stop praising the Passover raisin wine and Zelda's crullers. Later in the afternoon, after the meal, Zelda and Zlata got together and discussed the *shalakhmones* trouble—and then the truth came out as oil floats on water. Both servant-girls, the black-haired Nekhameh and Nekhameh the redhead, received their just deserts: immediately after Passover they were sent packing.

## ADVICE

“For the past three days a young man has been calling every morning, afternoon and evening asking for you. He says it’s very necessary for him to see you.”

Such were the glad news I got one day when I returned from a journey.

Must be an author with an “opus”, I thought to myself. No sooner had I sat down at my desk and begun to work than—aha, there it went, the bell.

The door was opened and I heard someone fumbling out there, taking off galoshes, coughing, blowing a nose—all the signs of an author! Well, so I should already like to see this character.

At last, with God’s help, he enters. He makes me a fine obeisance—that is, backing off a few steps, performs a sort of bow and scrape, rubbing his hands meanwhile, and then presents himself to me giving one of those names that go in one ear and out of the other.

“Sit down! What can I do for you?”

“A terrible need has brought me here to you. I mean, this thing is so important to me that it is, one might say, virtually a matter of life and death to me, and only you, I think, will understand. You write so much that you must surely know everything, must be clever in all things. That’s what I think; rather, not merely do I think so—I am convinced that it is so.”

I contemplate my caller: a typical small-town enlightener, an author. A young man with a pale face and big, black, pleading eyes, eyes that implore: Have pity on a lonely, lost soul! I have no liking for this kind of eyes, I am afraid of such eyes: they never laugh, never as much as smile, and their brooding gaze is always turned inwards. I hate such eyes.

“Well, so show me what you have there,” said I, laying down my pen and settling back in my chair. I expected him to put his hand into an inside pocket immediately and draw out a fat bundle of writing, most probably a novel in three parts, long as the Jewish exile, or a drama in four acts where the personages are named Murderson, Honestman, Devoutheart, Bitterbark and so forth—names that speak for themselves, letting you know whom you dealing with... Or maybe it was a wholly different thing—new songs of Zion, perhaps?

*Drawn there to the hills is he,  
Thither where the eagle soars free,  
Thither where blossoms the olive tree,  
Thither where resting the prophets would be  
As they sent praises to God on bended knee. . .*

I am familiar with such songs, with such rhymes that stick in your throat, shimmer in your eyes, buzz in your ears and leave an empty wilderness in your heart, a strange desolation in your soul.

But can you imagine—this time my guess was wrong! The young man did not reach into an inside pocket, he did not draw forth a fat bundle of writing, nor did he show any intention of reading me a novel, drama or new songs of Zion. He merely straightened out the collar of his shirt, cleared his throat loudly, and then began to speak:

“I have come to you, so to say, for nothing more than to pour out my bitter heart and to seek advice. A person such as you must understand me. You write so much that you must know everything, and only you can give me the proper advice. Believe me, whatever you tell me to do—that I will do. I give you my word of honor! But I beg your pardon, perhaps I am taking up your time?”

“That’s all right, it doesn’t matter. Go ahead, tell me your story!” I exclaimed, feeling as if a weight had been lifted from my heart.

The young man moved up to the desk and began to pour out the story of his bitter heart, at first speaking slowly, calmly, but the further he got the more heat did his words acquire.

“I am, you should know, a young man, as you see, from a small *shtetl*. That is, the *shtetl* is not so small, it is, to tell the truth, pretty big, a real town, you might even say, but compared to your city it is a *shtetl*—a small town. You, I believe, know this *shtetl* very well, but I don’t want to commit *poiresh bishmuy*, to name it, because, who knows, you might go and write it all up and this wouldn’t suit me for many reasons. . . You ask what my occupation is? Hm-mm. . . I am. . . Actually, so to say, I do nothing, I am still boarding with my parents-in-law, rather, we are not only boarded and lodged, but, in general, all our needs are provided for. She, my wife, you must understand, is a *basyekhideh*—a one and only daughter, that is; they have no other children and they can pretty well afford our upkeep for another ten years since they are, you should know, well-to-do, they might even be called wealthy, and in our town they are known as very rich people, since we have no richer ones. You must surely know my father-in-law, I think. I don’t want to tell you his name—it wouldn’t be proper. He is a man, you

should know, who likes to make a noise in the world, to make himself known. For instance, for the victims of the great fire in Bobruisk his was the biggest donation, for Kishinev he also gave more than anyone else. But in our own *shtetl* he gives next to nothing, it is only among strangers that he likes to make himself look big, so that everybody should know him. He is, you understand, no fool. He knows very well that in our town he is looked up to anyhow, so why should he go out of his way to impress any of his townspeople? So he keeps his own counsel and makes them all a fig! He is generous only with strangers who know nothing yet of his 'kindness'. Actually, he is a person who just can't give away money. He himself says he can't. When somebody comes to him for a donation he turns deathly pale and cries: 'Already?! You've already come to grab? Here, take my keys and go to my locker and take as much as you need. . . .' Perhaps you think that at this point he gets out his keys? Nothing doing! All his keys are locked up in a desk drawer, and moreover, the key to that drawer is also safely stowed away somewhere. That's the kind of man he is, my father-in-law. How do you like that? Of course, a person earns for himself the name he deserves. Between you and me, in our town he is called the *devorakher*—the 'other thing'—that is, the swine . . . behind his back, of course. To his face he is flattered so that it makes you sick. But he never turns a hair and takes it all for good money, pats his belly and wallows in clover. And how he wallows—how he lives! There is living and living. Judge for yourself: a person who doesn't as much as dip a hand in cold water, sits comfortably, eats heartily, sleeps well—what else do you want? After a nap he has the horses harnessed to his phaeton and sets out for a bit of a drive through the mud. Come evening—some of the townsfolk drop in,



one brings a tall story, another a savory piece of gossip—all stuff and nonsense, and they slander the whole town and they jeer at the whole world! Later the big samovar is brought in and he sits down with the slaughterer Shmuel-Abbe to play dominoes. Shmuel-Abbe the slaughterer, you should know, is a young man who, although he does wear earlocks, is of today's world: he goes about in a white collar and shiny boots, doesn't shun young women, has a blithe throat and carries a tune well, subscribes to a newspaper and plays a good game both of chess and of dominoes. When they sit down to play dominoes they can play all night long, while you've got nothing to do but sit and look and yawn until your jaws are almost out of joint! So get up, you fool, I tell myself, and go to your own little *heder*—your own room—and sit down and read a book or a newspaper. But no! Why? It's bad manners. A stranger is sitting here—how is one to get up and go away all of a sudden? Such a thing, mind you, angers my father-in-law. Actually, that is, he says nothing, but he puffs up like a turkey-cock and answers not a word, you can talk yourself hoarse! Looking at him, my mother-in-law follows suit. Then, seeing that her parents are at outs with their son-in-law, their daughter, my wife, that is, also begins to look thunder and lightning. After all, she is an only daughter, her parents' only child and they are, she says, her very life and soul, while she is the apple of their eye. They pamper her so that if it happens that she feels slightly out of sorts the doctor is immediately sent for, the whole world turns topsy-turvy! Well, is it then a wonder that such a being as she takes it into her head that the whole world was created for her convenience? Moreover, mind you, she isn't too smart, either. That is, were you to have a talk with her she might not look to be such a fool, not at all; you might say that she is

clever, quite clever, very capable indeed, with a man's brain in her head! But what of that? She is so spoilt and pampered that she is like a wild goat. Day and night it's either ha-ha-ha, or she suddenly plumps down in bed and starts crying like a baby. 'What's the matter? What do you want? Why are you crying?' Talk to a wall—does it answer? Well, this would be only half of my trouble. A wife weeps and weeps as long as she can and then stops. The biggest nuisance is my mother-in-law. She comes running at once, with her Turkish shawl over her shoulders, and begins wringing her hands and declaiming, as if reading from the woman's prayer-book, and a voice she has, you should know, like a man's: 'What is it, daughter-my-life? Again he? This rogue, this robber, this murderer? Woe is me! What does it matter to him, say, that I have only her, like a single eye in my head? Did his belly suffer the birthpains? Did his blood flow? . . .' And on and on she booms, the words pouring out as if from a sack! It seems to me that she'll go on pouring them out forever, never stopping. It stabs my heart, it gnaws at my soul and I am overwhelmed by a wish to snatch off her Turkish shawl, crumple it up in my hands, stamp on it with my feet and tear it into shreds! Although, actually, if you think it over, what should I have against her shawl? It's a shawl like any other Turkish shawl brought from Brody. You must know these Turkish shawls: a design of red, yellow, green, white and black squares, bespeckled with specks and be-fringed with fringes. . . ."

"But pardon me, young man!" I interrupt him in the middle of a sentence. "It seems to me you said you wanted my advice on some matter?"

"Oh, please excuse me," he replies catching his breath, "perhaps I am taking up your time? But all this was necessary, you must understand, for you to get an

idea of the house and of the people, since only when you know the house and the people will you be able to appraise my situation. In short, no sooner does she feel, God forbid, a little out of sorts—my wife, that is—than my mother-in-law gets the wind up and my father-in-law orders the phaeton to be sent for the doctor, the new doctor. Yes, that is what he is called in our *shtetl*—the ‘new doctor’. I don’t want to tell you his name, may a caitiff seize him! . . . And this is where the whole merry-go-round begins, the thing I wanted to tell you and ask your advice about.”

My young man stops for a minute, wipes his perspiring face, moves his chair a little closer to me and prepares to continue his story, meantime picking up something to fiddle with. There are people who just must handle some article while talking, otherwise they are unable to tell a coherent story. On my desk stands an array of various knick-knacks, rarities, toys, among them a tiny bicycle—a cigar-cutter. So fascinating is this little bicycle to everybody that almost anyone who comes to visit me picks it up first of all. Evidently, this young man also sensed the great attraction of this bauble. At first, as he was telling me his tale, he merely contemplated it, then he picked it up, and presently began to spin its tiny wheels—in a word, he never let the bicycle out of his hands any more. He went on with his story:

“Well, the ‘new doctor’. Doctors, you should know, are plentiful as dogs in our *shtetl*. There are Gentile doctors and there are Jewish doctors and ‘doctorlets’, there are also Zionist doctors, that is, doctors who are involved with Zionism. But the doctor I am speaking of is still a very young doctor, he is from our own town, a tailor’s son, that is, his father used to be a tailor—today he is no longer a tailor, because why should he be a tailor when his son is a doctor? Rather,

I mean the opposite: for this son, this doctor, it is unseemly to have a father who is just a tailor among other tailors. He, the tailor, that is, is a puny little man who wears a cotton-padded caftan, has a squint in one eye and a crooked finger; a voice this creature has like a rattle, and he goes around day and night and rattles: 'My doctor had such a practice yesterday, ah, what a practice! My doctor, when he wants to, can do anything! My doctor!' He makes everybody's head swim with his doctor! Besides, this doctor is, unfortunately, you should know, a woman's doctor, an obstetrician. So wherever there is a medical secret involved this cross-eyed tailor drums it out all over town. It's a pity on the young married woman or the girl who finds herself in this doctor's hands and on his father-the-tailor's tongue. . . . It once happened there was a young girl in our *shtetl* who. . . ."

"Pardon me, young man," I again interrupt him in the middle of a sentence, "but it seems to me that you wanted to ask my advice about something."

"Please don't take offense, perhaps I am taking up your time? But I started on the doctor because he is the *malekh hamoves*, the Angel of Death himself! If not for him my life would have been sheer bliss because, tell me, what is it I don't have? A wife I have, you should know, who is really somebody and a beauty, too. Mind you, we have no children yet and she is an only daughter, a one and only child, in a hundred and twenty years everything will be hers —mine, that is; and deference, as a rich man's son-in-law, people don't grudge me, thank God, neither in offering me a place of honor at the table at a party, nor in calling me up to read a chapter from the Prophets on the Sabbath and on Holy Days, nor in serving refreshments when a circumcision happens to be celebrated somewhere. Also with the citron and the

willow-twigs I am first after my father-in-law: first comes the cantor, naturally, then the rabbi, then my father-in-law and then I, and only after me the rest of the crowd. Even in the bath-house, when I, pardon me, take off my clothes, the bath-keeper raises a hullabaloo: 'Jews, make way for the rich man's son-in-law!' I swear to you that this kind of attention embarrasses me, I don't like it. Hah, but why say I don't like it? Flattery everybody likes and nobody refuses honors, so what's wrong? It is already too much, particularly since I know that I haven't earned it at all. How does it come to me? Just because my father-in-law is a rich man? So let them flatter him, let those lickspittles lick him until they bust, what has it got to do with me? Savages, I tell you, real wild ones. And I have to sit amidst them as if in prison, for I am not supposed to associate with just anybody: it wouldn't be seemly for the rich man's son-in-law. Talking with my father-in-law is like talking to an empty space. He, you should know, is just a common yokel, a very common creature, a big ignoramus, he should excuse me—since he doesn't hear it won't hurt him. And *she*—she is a wild goat, a one and only child, as I have already told you. Now she laughs and now she weeps, now it's ha-ha-ha and now she flings herself into bed and the new doctor is sent for. And this new doctor—blast him! Whenever I think of him my life doesn't seem worth living! Believe me, there are times when I feel like snatching up a knife and stabbing myself, or else running down to the river and drowning myself, so revolting has this doctor become to me."

Here the young man fell into a pensive reverie.

"So you, so to say, suspect that she..." I said, trying to be as tactful as possible.

"God forbid!" he exclaimed, jumping up as if I'd scalded him. Moving still closer to me, he said: "What

do you mean— suspect? A Jewish daughter! A *kosher* child! I am speaking of him, it's him I'm talking about, the handsome doctor, he should burn to a cinder! It is not so much the doctor as that fine little father of his, the cross-eyed tailor with the cotton-padded caftan, a fire should devour him! Day and night he goes around and rattles and beats his drum all over town. You think there is any truth in his rattling? Mud, empty nothings! He has a tongue and it wags. It should bother me, see, like last winter's snow. But the trouble is that a person has ears and ears like to listen, so when one listens attentively he hears some things he would much rather not have heard. All the more so in our *shtetl*—a town, you should know, full of gossipers and slanderers with long tongues that are famous far and wide! Anyone who falls foul of these tongues can already say goodbye! To my face, mind you, they are careful, but behind my back I have several times heard words that made me take notice, take good notice, catch a word here, give ear to a talk there and—what shall I tell you? I found out nothing, but nothing. One thing, however, I did notice: when he visits us she turns into a different person, with a different face, with different eyes. That is, it is the same person, with the same face and the same eyes, but the look is different! Do you get the picture? Her eyes take on an absolutely different expression and a different sparkle appears in them! Perhaps you think I didn't question her, didn't ask her: 'Please tell me, dear heart, what does it mean that when he comes here you turn into an altogether different person?' Guess what she answered? She burst out laughing with such a scornful ha-ha-ha that I thought the earth would swallow me up alive! Then, of course, soon after this laughter she threw herself into bed in such a fit of wailing that my mother-in-law with her Turkish shawl came running and started to

revive her daughter, reading out her bit of prayers meanwhile, while my father-in-law got out the phaeton and sent for the doctor. And whom did he send? Why, me myself, of course! When the doctor arrived she immediately felt better, the color returned to her cheeks and her eyes began to sparkle like diamonds in the sunlight... Just imagine the fine situation I found myself in. When I had to enter his house it was, you may well believe me, as if I were passing over into the other world. To enter Gehenna must be a lot easier. Just to look at that face of his, that noble little face! Red as a beet, even purple, and every pimple on it, every single pimple is covered with smaller pimples! Besides, he has a habit of smiling—smiles like an unwashed corpse. Whether there is anything to smile about or not—he smiles! Always smiles, and for some people he has a special sort of smile. Say, for me. Towards me he is always honey—sweet and soft—take him and apply him to a boil! His kindness to me has no bounds and no measure: it once happened that I wasn't in the best of health, caught this fashionable disease, the influenza. You should have seen how this man laid himself out for me, it simply went against the grain! And the remarkable thing is that the kinder he is to me the more, God forgive me, do I hate him. I just can't stand him. Especially when he sits in our house and they exchange glances, he and she... It seems to me that if I could grab him by the scruff of his neck and throw him out into the street my health would improve greatly. I can't stand how he gazes at her, how he smiles at her. I swore to myself that once and for all there must be an end to this! How long can such suffering last? The entire town, you should know, is already concerned with my affairs. I have no other choice than divorce. I see no other way out. Yes, but what then? What would I gain? After all—a rich

father-in-law? An only daughter, in a hundred and twenty years it will all be hers, mine, that is? A fine, clean *kaporeh*, a sacrifice! All right, so what did I do before? What do a lot of other young men do? Nothing else can be done! What do you say? Is there really no other thing to do but divorce her?..”

Here my fine young man again caught his breath, again wiped his face and looked expectantly at me, waiting for what I would say.

“How should I know? I also think that there is no other alternative for you than to divorce her. Particularly as I don’t see that your love is so ardent and, as you told me, you have no children yet, and the town talks—so what do you need this whole caboodle for?”

All the time that I spoke my caller continued to spin the wheels of the tiny bicycle, gazing at me with his black, deep, pleading eyes. When I finished he moved up still closer to me and, with a sigh, went on:

“You say—love?.. What of it? I don’t dislike her, why should I dislike her? Maybe I even love her. Yes, I really do love her, and very much indeed... What was it that you said about the town talking? Let them talk—a fire and a flood on them! I am only furious with him, it’s burning me up! Furious with him and with her. Why does she brighten up so when she sees him? Why, please tell me, I implore you, doesn’t she become rosy-pink and merry when she sees me? In what way am I worse than he? Because he is a doctor and I am not? So if I had been taught as he was taught I might, perhaps, also have been a doctor, maybe even a much better one than he! You may truly believe me that in letters, as you see me, I can well compete with him, while in the ‘sacred language’, in Hebrew, I’d also be one too many for him. So I think it all over again:



what have I actually found out about her for which I should give her a divorce? Oh, the new doctor? So what would I have done if instead of the new doctor I had been plagued by some other kind of devil? And where is it written that a young woman mustn't be acquainted with a doctor? That is firstly. Secondly, how will it benefit me if we do get a divorce? I myself, you should know, am an orphan without kith or kin, without a good friend—so go and become a poor bloke again, marry again, begin once more from scratch, so to say—the ABC. How do I know that I'll do better? Suppose I land in a still worse Gehenna? As things stand now—I know my trouble, and, after all is said and done, I am, as they say, the crown prince, the rich man's son-in-law, in a hundred and twenty years everything will, after all, come to her, to me, that is... You get the picture? Why should I go and cook up combinations, speculate? Life's no more than a game, a lottery. Isn't it so? What do you think? Is it not a game? Not a lottery?"

"I think," I said, "as you do: it is a game, a lottery. Of course, it would be better to make it up than to get a divorce."

I was pleased that my advice turned the balance more to amity than to divorce. Here, I thought, the matter would end. But no sooner had I finished speaking than he grasped the tiny bicycle and moved up very close to me, speaking right into my face:

"Make it up? Perhaps you are right... But when I remind myself of *him*, the Devil take him, of the doctor, I mean, with his pimply face!.. His father, the cross-eyed tailor, you should know, goes around town anyhow, rattling that the rich man's precious daughter is on the verge of a divorce. Can you understand the baseness of this *palgeh*, this wretch? If at least he didn't rattle! But since it's the talk of the town—what have I to lose? As they say—dirt can't get dirtier. As long as it was not out

in the open it was nothing, a mere pinch in the cheek to make it rosy. But now, when everybody is already talking about a divorce it seems to me that it is becoming indecent for me to hold on. There is no alternative but divorce. Huh? What do you say? Is it not so?"

"I think," I answered, "that you are right. Insofar as everybody already knows and everybody already talks about the divorce it is already indecent of you and you really have no other choice but a divorce."

"So you hold," he said, crowding up on me with his chair so that he was almost on top of me, "you hold, it means, that I must absolutely give her a divorce? Just think the matter over carefully. For instance, you are the rabbi and I come to you with my wife asking for a divorce, and you pop me a question: 'Tell me, young man, for what reason are you divorcing your wife?' What answer do I give you? 'The reason,' I tell you, 'is that she looks at the doctor and the doctor looks at her.' Well? Does it make sense? I ask you! Do I go ahead and explain about the eyes? What will I look like to the world then? Come on, say it yourself! To go and divorce a wife who is a beauty, an only daughter, a rich man's only child, everything hers in a hundred and twenty years, mine, that is... So what? What will the world say? Crazy! Huh? What? Maybe it's not so? Sure enough—hale and hearty and crazy?"

"That's my opinion, too: hale and hearty and crazy."

Now my visitor moved so close to me that our legs got entangled. In place of the tiny bicycle he had by now broken he pulled towards himself my inkwell. He sighed and went on with his oration:

"It's easy for you to say of another: hale and hearty and crazy! I should like to know what *you* would do if, for instance, such a thing happened to *you*? That is, if you had a father-in-law a yokel, a Turkish-shawled

mother-in-law who always grumbles and a wife who is strong and healthy but has herself doctored all the time, and if the town were pointing its finger at you: 'There he goes, the goat's young man!' It seems to me that you would jump up in the middle of the night, divorce her and run away to the place where the black pepper grows. What, maybe I'm wrong?"

"I also think," said I, "that I would jump up in the middle of the night, divorce her and run away to the place where the black pepper grows."

"Of course, it's easy to say," he exclaimed, "jump up, divorce her and run away to where the black pepper grows! Easily said—'run away'. What—run away? Who—run away? Where—run away? Into the grave?.. What about the fact that she is an only daughter, a one and only child?.. In a hundred and twenty years everything will be hers, mine, that is... Is this nothing? And, in general, what do I have against her? What do I have against her?.. Oh, no, you tell me what do I have against her?.."

"I am of the same opinion," I replied, "what do you have against her?"

"What do you mean?" he retorted. "And the doctor? You've forgotten about the doctor?! As long as I see this Angel of Death before my eyes I can't stand her, I can't look at her face!"

"If that's how it is," I said, "then you must divorce her."

"So what," said he, "will I gain? What can a young man like me do in these bad times? Come on! Tell me! Show your wisdom!"

"So," said I, "you shouldn't get a divorce."

"Not get a divorce? Well, and the doctor? As long as..."

"So you should get a divorce!" I exclaimed and wanted to finish this conversation.

“A divorce? So what will I gain? How...”

“So you don’t want a divorce?”

“Well, but the doctor?”

I don’t know what possessed me, but all my blood rushed to my head and everything went dark in my eyes. I caught my visitor by the throat, pressed him up against the wall and shrieked in an unnatural voice:

“You should divorce her, you bastard! Divorce her! Divorce her!! Divorce her!!!”

Our cries brought my whole household running. “What’s the matter, what’s going on here?” “Nothing, nothing!” I couldn’t even recognize myself when I saw my death-like face in the mirror. Then I had to beg my visitor’s pardon: I pressed his hand and repeated a thousand times that he should forget what had occurred between us... “It sometimes happens,” I explained to him, “that a person suddenly gets upset.” My young man was somewhat abashed and bewildered; he admitted that a person was not always his own master and that it happened at times that one might suddenly get upset... Then with the same contortion of his body as when he first entered, he left my room: the same backstepping, the same bow and scrape, the same hand-rubbing.

“Please do not be offended, perhaps I have taken up your time, and I thank you for your advice... Thank you very much. I wish you good health!”

“Don’t mention it... Go in peace.”

# BOYAZ THE *MELAMED*

## 1

What I felt on that first day when my mother led me by the hand to Boyaz the *Melamed* in his *heder* was probably what a little chicken feels when, after it has played its role of scapegoat in the *Yom Kippur* ceremony of atonement, it is carried to the slaughterer. The poor chick is all atremble: it understands nothing, but senses that something not at all like millet is in the offing... It was not for nothing that my mother tried to comfort me, telling me that a good angel would throw me a *grosz* from the ceiling; not for nothing did she give me a whole apple and kiss my forehead, and not for nothing did she appeal to Boyaz, asking him to be a little, at least a little, for God's sake, less stern with me, for "the child has just recently got over the measles".

As she spoke, my mother waved a hand in my direction, as if she were handing Boyaz an expensive crystal vase so fragile that the slightest touch might break it!

Proudly, happily, she went home, leaving "the child who had just recently gotten over the measles" all alone. At first I cried a little, then I wiped my eyes and bowed to the yoke of "*zeal and devotion*" in expectation of the good angel who would at any moment drop me a *grosz* from the ceiling.

Oh, that good angel! A real kind one! It would have been better if my mother hadn't mentioned him at all, because when Boyaz grabbed me with his dry, hairy hand and shoved me to the table I almost fainted, and when I lifted my eyes to the ceiling I immediately caught it hot from the *rebbe*. He pulled my ear and shouted:

“Bastard! What are you looking at?!”

Naturally, “the child who had just recently gotten over the measles” burst into tears and wailed “Ma-ma!” Then and there he got his first taste of the teacher's switch: “A little boy shouldn't look where he isn't supposed to look! A little boy shouldn't bleat like a calf—ma-ma!”

## 2

Boyaz the *Melamed* had a very simple method: the rod. Why the rod? He explained it by means of logic using, begging your pardon, the horse as an example.

“Why does a horse run? Because it is afraid. What is it afraid of? The whip. It's just the same with a child. A child should be afraid: he should fear God, fear his *rebbe*, fear his parents, fear sin, fear evil thoughts... Now, in order to instill real fear in a boy's heart his pants should be unfastened and let down, and the boy placed in the proper position face down and given a score of hot lashes: There is nothing better than the rod and long live the leather crop! Oh, whip and whack, lash and thrash!”

That is how Boyaz would talk, picking up his whip, handling it carefully, examining it on all sides as if it were an *ethrog*—the citron fruit over which blessings are said during the *Sukkoth* holiday. And then he would get down to work, earnestly, purposefully, and as he whipped he hummed a little ditty, nodding his head in tact:

*Whip and whack!*  
*Lash and thrash!*  
*Whip and whack!*  
*Lash and thrash!*

“*Miracles and wonders!*” Boyaz never counted the lashes but he never made a mistake. He whipped, but was never angry while doing so. Generally speaking, Boyaz was not an ill-tempered person—he only became angry when a boy resisted a beating, when he tried to squirm away, when he jerked his legs. At such times the *rebbe*’s eyes became bloodshot and he flogged without count, without his usual refrain, but admonishing the culprit:

“A boy should lie quietly when the *rebbe* flogs him. A boy should behave respectfully even while he is being whipped...”

Another thing that made Boyaz very angry was when a boy laughed while being whipped (there are such boys, it’s a kind of sickness, people say). Laughter was what Boyaz found most intolerable. He himself had never laughed in his life, and he couldn’t stand the laughter of others. You might have safely promised a large sum of money to anyone who could swear to have seen Boyaz laugh! Boyaz was not the kind of person who laughs. Even his face was unsuitable for it! Should Boyaz have suddenly taken it into his head to laugh his countenance would look worse than that of one who is weeping (there really are such faces in the world!). Indeed, what sort of a business is this laughter? Only empty-headed tomfools, dissolute loafers laugh! But people busy with earning their daily bread, those who are harnessed to the yoke of “*zeal and devotion*”—such people have no time for laughter! Boyaz never had any time. He was always busy either teaching or whipping—that is, he whipped while he

taught and he taught while he whipped. Actually, it would have been hard to isolate one from the other and point out just where the teaching ended and the whipping began.

However, I must say that the beatings we got from Boyaz were always well-deserved. He always found a reason. He flogged us for not studying diligently, for not praying properly, for disobeying our parents, for not looking into our book, for looking away from our book, for looking in general, for praying too hastily, for praying too slowly, for talking too loudly, for talking too faintly, for a torn lapel, for a button, for a hole, for a scratch, for dirty hands, for a spot in a prayer-book, for a tidbit, for running, for a prank, and so on and so forth without end.

He administered beatings for sins *committed overtly* and also for sins *committed covertly*. Thus, for instance, he flogged the whole school every Friday and also on the eve of holidays and before vacation time. He explained this by saying: "If you haven't earned these lashes yet you will, with God's help, earn them in the future." Another time he might beat you because somebody, one of your own classmates or someone else, had decided to do you a good turn and snitched on you to the *rebbe*. Or he might thrash a boy and merely hint: "You know quite well, of course, with what good deeds you have deserved this whipping." Then, too, he might beat a boy just out of pure curiosity:

"Well, well, let us see how a boy lets himself be whipped..."

In a word, "whip" and "switch", "fear" and "tears" were the reigning forces in our small and foolish world of childhood, and we had neither ways nor means, nor the slightest hope of escaping from this Gehenna.

What of the good angel my mother had spoken of? Where was he, this good angel?



I must confess that with the passage of time I began to have my doubts about the existence of such an angel. At too tender an age did a spark of disbelief penetrate my childish soul. At too tender an age did I begin to think: maybe my mother fooled me? At too tender an age did I familiarize myself with the feeling known as “hatred”. Too, too early in my life did I come to hate my teacher, Boyaz the *Melamed*.

Really, how was it possible not to hate him? How could one help hating a *rebbe* who didn't grant one a peaceful moment? “This is forbidden!” “Don't stand there!” “Don't go there!” “Don't speak to that one!” How could one help hating a person who hadn't a drop of compassion in his heart, who derived pleasure from the pain of others, who bathed in the tears of others and smeared himself with their blood!? Is there anything more shameful than the words “a whipping”? You might suppose that there could be nothing more humiliating than being forced to stand stark naked in a corner. Oh, but this wasn't enough for Boyaz! Boyaz demanded that a boy should undress himself unaided, that he should take off his pants, begging your pardon, himself, that he should lift up his shirt over his head himself, and stretch himself out, face down, a thousand pardons, on the bench—all the rest was already up to Boyaz.

*Whip and whack!*  
*Lash and thrash!*  
*Whip and whack!*  
*Lash and thrash!*

Boyaz did not do all the whipping himself—he had helpers, his “choirboys”, as he called them. Of course, they worked under his supervision: Boyaz saw to it that they shouldn’t, God forbid, somehow skip a single lash. “Less learning, more whipping,” he used to say, and he had a logical explanation of this theory of his: “Too much learning muddles up a child’s mind, while an extra lash causes no harm. For,” he said, “let us reflect: any science taught to a child goes directly to his brain, therefore an overdose confuses his thoughts and clutters his mind. Now, a whipping has just the opposite effect—the blows are transmitted from the rear part through the whole body to the head, cleaning the blood vessels, purifying the blood and bringing clarity to the mind—now you understand?”

So in keeping with this theory Boyaz never stopped purifying our blood and uncluttering our minds.

Alas! We no longer believed in the good angel who should have come down to us from above, we already figured out that he had been an invention, a fairy-tale used for enticing us into Boyaz’s *heder*, and we started to sigh and groan over our oppression, we raged and ranted and began to search for some means of deliverance from our bitter bondage.

#### 4

Twilight, the minutes between day and night, when the fiery red sun leaves the dark, cool earth for a whole night; the minutes of twilight, when the ringing, merry day goes away and in its stead the cheerless night with its dismal, secret quiet approaches... During these minutes the shadows creep up the smooth walls, extending in length and breadth.

Twilight, when our *rebbe* is at his prayers in the synagogue, while his wife is busy with her goat, her jugfuls of milk, or her pot of borsht... In these minutes of twilight we small fry would all get behind the oven in the *heder*, seating ourselves cross-legged on the floor, huddling together like a flock of innocent lambs. There, in the darkness, we discussed our terrible bane, our Angel of Death—Boyaz. The older boys who had already been studying under Boyaz for a number of years told us horrible things about him, swearing by all they held holy that Boyaz had beaten more than one boy to death, that Boyaz had already driven three wives into their graves and that he had so mistreated his only son that the boy died—and similar other wild stories that made our hair stand on end.

The older boys weaved their yarns, the younger ones listened attentively. Black eyes shone in the darkness, little hearts quaked, and we came to the conclusion that our *rebbe* Boyaz had no soul; a human being without a soul, as we knew, was no better than a wild beast that God himself bade us destroy... Thousands of plans, naive, childish plans were hatched in our heads, plans for ridding ourselves of this Angel of Death, this monster. Silly little children! These naive childish plans lay deeply buried in our hearts. We prayed to God for a miracle: let, for instance, the *heder* burn down, let the Evil One carry off the rod or ... or ... this last “or” we were afraid to put into words. Our imagination soared, fantastic scenes unfolded in our minds and wonderful sweet visions appeared before our eyes: visions of escaping into the open fields, of running downhill, of splashing barefoot in a brook, of playing a game of piggyback, of jumping over fences—good, sweet, foolish daydreams never fated to come true because all too soon we would hear a familiar cough, the clatter of familiar heels, the flapping of the soles of

familiar boots—and our blood would run cold, our bodies would seem to freeze... Again we sat down to study the Holy Book, to serve the Almighty, back to our lessons and prayers, and all this just as willingly as one goes to the executioner's block or the gallows. As we studied our lips murmured: "Almighty God, Lord of the Universe, will there come a wishful end to this Pharaoh, this Haman, this Gog-Magog? Will we ever be delivered from his oppressive, galling yoke? No, never! Never! Never!"

Such were the thoughts we cherished—innocent, foolish children that we were!

## 5

"Boys! Do you want to hear an excellent plan for getting rid of this Gog-Magog?!" Thus spoke one distressful day a boy from a senior class, a notorious scamp named Velvl son of Leib-Arye, his eyes shining in the dark like a wolf's. All the small fry surrounded him to listen to his plan for getting rid of our Gog-Magog. Velvl started to unfold his plan, but first he gave us a whole speech about how intolerable Boyaz had become, saying that this Asmodeus bathed in our blood, that he held us to be worse than dogs, because a dog, when it is beaten, yelps, while we were forbidden even this. And so on and so forth... In conclusion he said:

"Listen, boys, listen to me! I'll ask you one question!"

"Go ahead, ask!" we all cried as one.

"What would happen if, for instance, one of us got sick?"

"A bad thing!" we answered.

"No, that's not what I meant... I mean that if one of

us comes down with some sickness will he attend the *heder* or will he stay at home?"

"Of course he'll stay at home!" we shouted in unison.

Velvl went on: "Well, say two of us get sick?"

"Two will stay at home!"

"Well, and if three?" continued Velvl and we didn't get tired of answering:

"Then three boys will stay at home!"

"So what'll happen if, say, all of us get sick?"

"All of us will stay at home!"

"So let all of us suddenly be stricken by some ailment!" declared Velvl in high glee, but we exclaimed angrily:

"God forbid—what are you, crazy or out of your mind?!"

"I'm not crazy or out of my mind, but that all of you are asses—that's clear! Do I propose that we should really get sick? What I mean is that we should make believe we're ailing, so as not to have to go to the *heder*. Got me at last?"

After these words we began to understand Velvl's plan, and the plan was to our liking. We began to discuss just what sickness we would pretend to be afflicted with. One said "toothache", another said "headache", a third—"bellyache" and a fourth—"worms". At long last, however, we decided that we weren't going to complain of toothache, or of headache or of bellyache, and that worms were also of no use. We would do the following: all of us would suddenly develop pains in the legs and feet. The doctor could quickly get to the bottom of all the other ailments, but if a boy complains: "My legs hurt, can't move a foot!"—just let the doctor try and detect such an ailment!

“Remember, boys, not a single one of us gets out of his bed tomorrow! To make sure let us shake hands all around and pass a *tsitse*\* over each handshake and swear not to come to the *heder* tomorrow!” cried Velvl.

So we pledged our word to each other by a handshake, by all that was holy in the world.

We were a lively and cheerful gang as we walked home that evening, we sang songs as if we were heroic warriors who had devised a plan to overcome a foe, to win a battle.

Children! We have now come to the most interesting place in our story and I understand that you are eager to find out how this innocent childish plan, this crazy *heder*-boy strike ended! I understand that you want to know whether or not we kept our solemn word? How did we look when all of a sudden the whole *heder* came down with one and the same disease? What did our parents say? What did the *rebbe* do? Did we achieve our purpose?

What a pity, children, that I cannot finish the story, for it is holiday eve now, therefore I must interrupt myself in the most interesting place and leave the rest for another time... Now, since it is already time to say goodbye, I want to tell you that Boyaz is still alive. But what a life he leads! He no longer teaches—he hasn't been *melamed* for a long time. So what does he do? How does he make a living? He begs from door to door. If you chance to meet him (it's easy to recognize him—he is lame in one leg)—give him some alms. A pity on the poor wretch, his life is over—a bunch of frayed twigs!

1905

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\* One of the four tassels on the undergarment worn by Orthodox Jewish males.—*Tr.*

# YOSIF

## A "Gentleman's" Tale

Laugh at me, write up a column about me, even a book if you like—I'm not at all afraid of you. I tell you this beforehand because you are looking at a man who isn't easily intimidated. I'm not afraid of any writer, I stand in no awe of a doctor, a lawyer can't fuddle me, and I get no thrill from hearing that so and so is studying to be an engineer. I myself once studied, too—at a *Gymnazia*.<sup>\*</sup> True, I didn't get to graduate on account of an affair with a girl. A girl fell in love with me (I always was a good-looking lad). She said, this girl, I mean, that if I didn't marry her she would take poison. I wanted to marry her like *you* want to marry her. She wasn't the one and only iron in my fire—you get me? However, things had gone too far between us, so a brother of hers, a pharmacist from a druggist's shop, butted in and said that if his sister took poison he already knew what he would splash over me... So I had to marry, and I lived in misery with her for about three years. She demanded only two things from me: that I should stay at home and that I should not look at other women... How do you like such a business? What am I to do if God gave me a face that makes all the girls and young women get a crush on me?.. What

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<sup>\*</sup> A secondary school (high school).—*Tr.*

do you mean? God forbid! Nothing, they just fall head over heels in love with me, that's all. Wherever I go, wherever I travel, they attack me like bees, and the matchmakers chew my head off. Why? Because I am an up-to-date young man, and a handsome and healthy one, to boot, because I've made myself a bit of a name, earn good money, a ruble for me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne*\*—so they, the matchmakers, want to cover me with gold! But by no means do I let myself be caught: "Leave me alone," I say, "I've already been scalded once!" But they argue: "What harm will it do you if you take a look at another girl?" Who can refuse such a thing? So I go on looking at girls and girls look at me, fight over me, go wild over me, as I live, run after me! They all want me—all! Now, of what use is it to me that they want *me* when I don't want *them*? The one I do want—nobody but I knows who she is... So this is my trouble, this is what I want to tell you about, but at the same time I ask that it remain between us. Not on my account! I have already told you that I'm not afraid of being "written up", but, simply, what for? This you can take, so to say, as a preamble. Now I'll tell you the story itself.

You probably already understand that I won't tell you *who* and *what* she is and where she comes from. She is a young woman, a girl, a really pretty one, too, poor, and, more's the pity, an orphan. She lives with her mother, a young widow, also a good-looking woman. They keep a Jewish restaurant, a *kosher* one. Now, you must know that although, as you see, I am an up-to-date young man, a good earner, a ruble for me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne*, I do, after all, eat *kosher* food. Not because I am such a saint and

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\* And so forth (not very good Russian).—Tr.



am, God forbid, afraid of the thing that squeals,\* but simply because I am careful of my stomach; that's one reason. Secondly, Jewish food does taste better...

Well, so she keeps this restaurant, the widow, I mean, and she does the cooking and the baking herself, while the daughter serves at the table alone. *How* they cook there! Oh, *how* the food is served there! It all sings, I tell you, it all sparkles and shimmers. To eat there is a pleasure. Not so much the food itself as looking at the mother and daughter, one prettier than the other. You just ought to see that widow. She stands by the stove, cooks and bakes, and yet looks so fresh, so neat! Her face is like the driven snow, her hands are gold and silver, her eyes—flaming fires! I assure you that it is still quite easy to fall in love with her. So just imagine what a daughter of hers is like... I don't know whether you are versed in these matters, in the matter of girls, I mean. A face—strawberries and cream, cheeks—two cream puffs, eyes—two cherries, hair—silk, teeth—pearls, a neck—alabaster, a hand made for every finger to be kissed separately, and the upper lip turned up as a little child's—have you ever seen such a thing? I tell you: everything, but everything, is so graceful, so finely molded as if the whole were a model to put on show, as if one were to say: "Here, look and drop dead!" On top of that she has a laughter of her own and charming dimples in her cheeks; this laughter alone is already worth the whole price, for when she laughs everything laughs with her: you laugh and the table laughs, the chairs laugh and the walls laugh—life itself laughs! That is the kind of laughter she has, so go and look at such things and try to dislike them!..

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\* Jewish religious dietary laws forbid the eating of pork. — *Tr.*

To make a long story short, I felt, almost from my first meal there, that I was cooked—just cooked—and instantly! Although with me a girl, you must understand, is not such an oh-oh-oh thing... Now, as regards those myths—“love”, “romance”—I’ve never approved of such things. It’s alright, just in passing, to play around, why not?.. But to go and shoot oneself because of that—phooh! That’s for a sixth-form *Gymnazia* student, not for an upstanding man, what do you think?

When I felt myself good and cooked I went and called the mother aside; not, as they say, “to ask for the hand”... No! I am no rusher. But no matter. As they say, to feel out the goods does no harm. I started a sort of preliminary conversation: “What and where, here and there, how do you stand with your daughter?” So she asked: “What do you mean—how do I stand with my daughter?” “I’m talking,” I said, “about an aim, a future is what I’m getting at.” “Certainly,” said she, “but why worry about her future? It is already being taken care of...” No sooner did she utter these few words than I felt as if I’d been stabbed in the heart. “What do you mean,” I asked, “when you say it is already being taken care of?” “You see, don’t you,” she answered with a laugh, “what a caring soul she is!” Precisely at that moment the daughter herself came along, and when she comes everything lights up.

“Mama, has Yosif been here already?” she asked. The name “Yosif” she pronounced with an odd little lilt in her voice. Only a bride-to-be pronounces the name of her betrothed with such a lilt. Such is my opinion, of this I am certain. It wasn’t only that one time—whenever she uttered the name “Yosif” it was always with a lilting sound: “Yo-sif.” You understand? It wasn’t simply “Yosif”, it was “Yo-sif”...

In short, everywhere and every time I heard nothing

but “Yosif” and “Yosif”. When we sat down to eat the first thing would be: “Yosif?” “Won’t Yosif come today?” “Yosif said...” “Yosif wrote...” “Yosif has returned...” “Yosif gave...” Yosif-Yosif, Yosif-Yosif! I was really eager to take a look at this “Yosif”, to see his face!

It goes without saying that I had begun to detest this “Yosif” as one detests a spider, although why should he affect me so? How should I know? He must, I thought, probably be one of those fellows, a “comrade”, a member of their “fellowship”, or, as she used to call them with her rippling laughter, one of the “Yankelehs”. “Yankeleh” was a name, I tell you, as if made to order for them. Really, they are nothing more than “Yankelehs”, queer little characters, mostly of the type who wear long hair and black shirts—just what I dislike...

Do not be offended, you yourself, it seems to me, also have longish hair and wear a black shirt, and if you think it looks good you have another guess coming. A dinner jacket and a white vest look so many times better—I should have as many blessings! No sooner do I see a black shirt than I immediately—with all due respect to you—think of worn-out pants. Perhaps you think I didn’t tell them this? Of course I did! I’m a frank person, not given to flattery or bootlicking. You have something to say about me—go ahead, say it right to my face. The only thing I don’t like is when I am told that I am a “bourgeois”. For the word “bourgeois” I am ready to deliver a smack in the face! What kind of bourgeois am I? I am no worse than other people. I understand everything and know everything that’s going on, since I read all the new books and all the latest newspapers, too, just as everyone does—what kind of bourgeois am I? Is it because I wear a dinner jacket and a white vest while you wear a black shirt? I don’t mean you, I mean those “Yankelehs” with that Yosif I am telling you about...

I had several conversations with them during meals,

and I soon realized that their love for me was equal to mine for them. A heart, as they say, feels a heart. But no matter, I didn't have to go and tell them what I carried in my heart; besides, I tried to ingratiate myself a little with them, to buy my way into their "fellowship"; this was not so much on account of them as on account of that "Yosif", and not so much on account of "Yosif" as because of her! It grieved me, you understand, that she was constantly pronouncing his name, so I made up my mind: once and for all, let stones fall from Heaven, let the world turn over, but I must meet this character! I achieved my wish, for when I want to get something done no obstacles can stop me. Money doesn't figure. After all, I am, as I have already told you, a young man, a merchant, I earn good money, a ruble for me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne...*

It goes without saying that it wasn't as easy as you might think to worm myself into their fellowship. I moved slowly, step by step. I began to put in a word from time to time, just in passing, deploring the general troubles with a sigh, letting it be understood that for *such* purposes money didn't figure with me, that when one has to throw out a ruble he must throw it out. Do you understand what to "throw out a ruble" means? One person "takes out" a ruble, another "throws out" a ruble. There's a difference! To "throw out" is when you flick out your wallet and pull some money out of it: "*Izvoltye,*" meaning "Here you are"—without counting it! That's the way I like to do things. Not always, of course, but when it is necessary. When it is necessary to fling out twenty-five, fifty, or even a hundred rubles the hand must not quiver. For instance, you are giving a dinner or supper party. When the bill is brought you just glance at the bottom line, speaking about something else meanwhile; when

the change is brought you don't count it like a woman selling onions in the market, you just sweep it up with your hand and shove it into your pocket—and that's that! Life, you see, is a school one has to make one's way through. One has to *know* how to live! Of myself I may well say that I do know how to live, because I know the ins and outs, I know when you should go ahead and when you shouldn't. You may rest assured that I'll never "oversalt" anything and you'll never understand from my looks whether I am in a *milkhik* or *fleishik*\* mood.

You should have seen me among the "Yankelehs": you would surely have thought that I was a "Yank-elah" like all the other "Yankelehs". That is, I never let my hair grow long and never wore their kind of shirt; I wore the same dinner jacket and white vest I am wearing now. So what then? Why, I showed an interest in all the things they were interested in and spoke of the things they spoke about. "Proletariat" ... "Bebel" ... "Marx" ... "to react"—and other words like these used to shoot, as it were, out of my sleeve. But a remarkable thing! The harder I tried to cuddle up to them the further they moved away from me. I noticed that whenever I started pouring out those words—"proletariat", "Bebel", "Marx", "to react"—the "Yankelehs" would clam up and glance strangely at each other while picking their teeth... And what's more! Money they always took from me. Every Monday and Thursday, you should know, they gave concerts, and every time I was the first one to be burned: "The 'gentleman' will probably take a first-row ticket for three rubles again today?"

The "gentleman"—they had no other name for

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\* *Milkhik*—dairy foods, *fleishik*—meat foods. Jewish religious dietary laws forbid mixing them.—*Tr.*

me—was forced to take a three-ruble ticket every Monday and Thursday. Did he have any other choice? However, when the “gentleman” entered while the “Yankelehs” were in the middle of a conversation a hush would fall on them as if they had never spoken at all! Mutes!.. It goes without saying that the “gentleman” burned and sizzled over this. But what could he do? However, when I set myself a goal, as I have already told you, I don’t mind the cost. The long and the short of it is that I finally did worm myself into the fellowship, at least to the extent that I was permitted to attend one of their “discussions”—I was told that Yosif would speak there... You may imagine how overjoyed I was to have lived to see the day! I was going to see this “Yosif” and hear him speak!..

*Where* and *when* the discussion was to take place—that, a plague on them, I couldn’t find out. I didn’t even want to ask them. I knew that somebody would probably come and tell me. Among the “Yankelehs”, mind you, everything is done in secret. In their language it is called “*conspiration*”—this word I remember by heart. I wrote it down in my notebook. I, whenever I hear a fine word, immediately write it down in my notebook. Whether it will come in handy or not, that I don’t know, but it won’t do any harm, that’s for sure.

At last one fine summer morning (it was on a Saturday) two “Yankelehs”, in black shirts, of course, popped into my place and just called: “Come!” “Where to?” “What difference does it make to you? Come with us!” No help for it, I had to go with them. So off we set. We went way out of town and into a forest; as we walked along every now and then we would see one of the “Yankelehs” sitting under a tree, pretending to look in another direction while murmuring: “To the right!” or “To the left!” To say that I was

afraid is foolishness: what is there to fear from a Jew? But I just didn't feel that it was fitting for me, a young merchant with a bit of a name and a good income, for whom a ruble was no more than mud, *i tomu podobne*, to let myself be led by youngsters, by "Yankelehs". You get the picture?.. Well, that's neither here nor there. On and on we went, in and out of the woods, you might say, until at last we reached a high hill. Only after we had climbed to its top and then scrambled downhill did I see a black multitude of heads. This was the "Yankeleh" fellowship, sitting on the ground, boys in black shirts, girls in blouses, and just ordinary young people. But what a host! I'm afraid to say, but there must have been at least three thousand and perhaps even more, while the silence was such that if a fly had flown by you would have heard it! Quietly, tip-toeing, we joined this host of heads and sat down on the ground. I began to look around intently—where could this Yosif be? And then I saw ... can you imagine whom? I saw a familiar face, one of the "Yankelehs" who ate at the same table as I did in the widow's restaurant! Can you beat that!?

My first thought was: Is that all? So this is he, this is "Yosif"? And I had imagined he was God knows what! With horns!.. To tell you the plain truth, I was almost glad, I was very pleased that things had turned out in this way. I drew a comparison between him and myself—not because I consider myself to be such a good-looker that there is nobody handsomer than I. I don't fool myself: I know that there are men more handsome than I am. But as compared with him... You get me? I'll draw you a true picture of him as I saw him in those first minutes: leaning against a tree there stood a slight, pale, skinny, wizened, narrow-chested creature with wan, sunken, slightly flushed cheeks, with bushy eyebrows and blond, very short hair. His

brow, however, was white and broad, and he had a pair of grey eyes, like a cat's, but burning, and a mouth ... which spoke. God strike me dead if I can make head or tail of it even today! Where did this imp get the power to speak so loudly and so quickly and so much and so long and with such a glow and such a flame! I assure you that this was not simply speech, human speech. It was either a devil or some kind of machine that was wound up, or something from above was shooting out words and spitting flame, or maybe the tree itself was talking... All the time it seemed to me that in the next instant this little creature with the sunken pinkish cheeks and grey eyes would soar up into the air and fly away together with his words to someplace high, high up... But no!!! Say what you will, in my life I have heard the greatest and finest lawyers speak, but such speech I never heard and will probably never hear again...

How long he talked, that I do not know. I didn't look at my watch. I looked at him and at the great crowd that sat on the ground absorbing his every word as the hungry and thirsty swallow food and drink. But he who didn't see *her* while all this was going on never saw any beauty in his life! Among the sea of heads I discovered her, sitting cross-legged on the ground, her hands folded over her heart, her face alight, her cheeks aflame, her upper lip turned up, while the beautiful cherry-eyes smiled directly at him, directly at him! Why should I deny it? I envied him at this moment, not so much for the vigor of his words, not so much for the honor and the applause and the shouts of "bravo" that followed his speech... I was not as envious of all this as I was of how *she* looked at him! For one such look of hers I would give I know not what. It was a look that spoke for itself. It seemed to me that I could hear her voice saying, with that familiar lilt: "Yo-sif!"

I have already told you that for me a girl is not such



an oh-oh-oh thing. I've seen girls aplenty, for I am a young man who is, one might say, not ugly, who is up-to-date, a good earner, a ruble for me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne...* But even in the good years, when my wife worshiped the ground I walked on, she never looked at me in *such* a way. I made haste to go and sit down almost at her side, I made a nuisance of myself, darted around her like a fly, buzzed in her ears like a mosquito—nothing doing! Her eyes, like leeches, clung to his eyes, and his eyes—to hers. It seemed to me that these two, he and she, saw nobody but each other: he saw her and she—him and they needed nobody else! The torments of the grave, I assure you, are as nothing compared to what I felt then. A fiery Gehenna burned in my heart. I don't know against whom my rage was directed: against *her* or against *him*, or against both of them, or perhaps against myself?..

I got home that evening with a splitting headache and went to bed firmly resolved never again to step over that threshold, the widow's, that is. I need them all like seven hundred troubles! What are they to me? Wasn't I right?.. Well, so when I got up in the morning I could barely restrain myself, I counted the minutes and the seconds left until two o'clock—dinnertime, and then I went directly *there*. The whole company of "Yankelehs" was at the table, as usual, and he was also among them.

I don't know about you, but whenever I see an actor, or a minister, or just a famous person, and even though everybody knows that they are just like other people—they eat as others do and drink as others do, still, as soon as I am told that this man is an actor, or a minister, or just a famous person it immediately seems to me that he is different from other people, that he has something special in him that you can't get

at, as they say... That is how I felt when I saw *him* after his speech; seemingly, the selfsame “Yankeleh” as before, and yet not the same. There was a certain something in him. There was something written on his face. Just what it was I couldn’t tell you, but for this “something” I would give I don’t know how much! Not because I needed it—what good would it do me? Like ninety-nine troubles I needed it! I only wanted it because of *her*, because *she* never left *his* side for a minute; even when she came up to me and spoke to me she had only *him* on her mind, not me. In these things, mind you, I am an expert. It’s cost me enough to learn...

Now I found myself in a new Gehenna: before, when I didn’t know who Yosif was I pictured him in my mind as a tall, handsome, healthy man and I couldn’t stand him, I was envious of him and hated him, as you may well imagine. Now, when I already knew who the lucky man was, that he was just a “Yankeleh” like the other “Yankelehs”, I grew sick at heart... I cannot tell you whether it was because of *her* for idolizing him so (and this even a blind man could see!), or because of *him*—because God had endowed him with such eloquence—or perhaps I was simply sorry for myself for not having such powers... It was not because I needed them so much. What would I need them for? And not because I am by any means tongue-tied. Don’t think so! When I want to talk I can! I already spoke once at a *zasedaniye*, a conference, and guess where—in the Merchant’s Club. Those who heard me said that I did not speak badly, not at all badly!.. The resentment that filled me—I can’t explain it in words; it must be understood, rather—felt. One should have been in my place, he should have come to the restaurant every day, looked at her little white shimmering apron, at her bright, beautiful face that

shines and sings, should have heard her sweet, delightful laughter that melts your limbs, and at the same time seen *him* and felt that it was all for his sake, for him alone and for no one else! Oh, he must be removed from my path, he must leave, he must be gotten rid of. But how? I couldn't go and poison him, or shoot him: after all, I am no murderer, I am a Jew... To challenge him to a duel? Phoo! In a "novel" men challenge each other to duels, but I can't believe that such things can be true: it's just for the sake of writing, looks better that way... That's my opinion... Suddenly I had a brainwave: I'll go and have a talk with him. As one might say, "hand the key to the thief himself". Wasn't this a good plan? I didn't think it over for too long—I hate to think for long—and one day after a meal I spoke to him:

"You know what? I have an important matter to discuss with you. I have something I must talk over with you."

And he? Didn't as much as twitch a limb. He merely pinned his innocent-looking grey eyes on me, as if saying: "Go ahead, I'm listening."

"No," said I. "No, not here. I want it to be, as they say, between our four eyes—confidentially."

"Come along," said he and we went out into the street, where he stood still, looking at me and waiting, as if to say: "Well, so what is it you have to tell me?"

"Not here," said I, "when are you to be found at home?"

"I could come to you..." he said, but cut himself short. "If you wish, come to me tomorrow..."—and he took out his watch—"between half-past nine and half-past ten in the morning. Here's my address."

That is what he said to me and then pressed my hand, and pressing it looked straight into my eyes, as if asking: "Conspiration?"

“Conspiracy, have no fear!” I exclaimed and at this we parted, each going, as they say, his own way.

Of course, I never slept a wink that night. I lay in anguish and kept thinking: What will I say to him? Where should I begin? And what should I do if he upped and said:

“Mr. Gentleman, what business is it of yours that you butt into someone else’s affairs? What kind of kin are you, Mr. Gentleman, to a girl one of the ‘Yank-lehs’ has looked upon as his fiancée for God knows how long already?”

What answer should one give to this? And what should I do if, say, he takes me by the scruff of the neck and throws me down the stairs? That is, I am not afraid, why should I be afraid of him? After all, I’m going to him on a matter of business. One or the other—yes is yes, no is no! There is nothing to throw me down the stairs for!

Such were the thoughts I lay thinking all night long. Next morning at nine-thirty I was already climbing up to the devil knows where, to an attic, maybe two and a half hundred steps. I found him at home with another couple of “Yankelehs”. As soon as they saw me they exchanged strange glances, as if asking: “What’s the ‘gentleman’ doing here?..” My bird gave them a wink, however, and the “Yankelehs” took the hint, picked up their caps and made themselves scarce.

When I found myself alone with him, eye to eye, as one might say, I reeled him off a speech: “This and that, one thing and another, I am all alone, although I am a businessman with a bit of a name, a fine income, and a ruble to me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne*. Despite all this, I am familiar with all that goes on in the world, since I am an up-to-date man, I read everything, all the newspapers and magazines...” and here I went and poured out all the fashion-

able words: “Proletariat” ... “Bebel” ... “Marx” ... “to react” ... “conspiracy” and so on. He heard me out and then asked, simply, mildly, without any fancy words: “How can I help you?”

“With a trifling thing,” I answered. “With some advice.”

“I? Give you ... advice?”

That is what he said to me and planted his artless grey eyes on me, as if to say: “How can I, such a shrimp as I am, offer advice to such a gentleman?” You get the picture? He himself felt that all this was absurd. It goes without saying that I felt the same. But what was I to do? Since I was already in the water I had to, as one might say, steer for the shore. So I went and told him just what pinched me, told him the whole story of what my heart felt from the first minute I laid eyes on *her* and up to the present day, and that my life was no longer a life, *she*, I mean, doesn’t let me live! “I am not at all used,” I said to him, “‘to react’ so strongly over a girl—she could even be the crown princess herself; after all, I am a young man who, notwithstanding his up-to-dateness, is a merchant with a bit of a name and a good income, a ruble to me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne...*”

He heard me out and then said, simply, mildly, without any fancy words: “If you want my advice, I should say that you had best have a talk with her...”

“Well, but you?” I asked.

“I don’t want to...” and he caught himself short immediately. “I can’t, I have no time for such things.”

“No!” I exclaimed. “That’s not what I meant. I don’t ask you to speak to her—how could I ask such a thing? I only want to know what you have to say about this?”

“What,” asked he, “can I say to this? If her feelings for you are the same as yours for her...”

That is what he said to me, simply, mildly, without

any fancy words, and then he took out his watch, as if to say: "Our talk is almost over." The trick of looking at a watch, I must tell you, is one I understand perfectly. When I myself want to get rid of somebody I do just the same. The trouble is that not everyone takes the hint. But I took it. I got to my feet, asked him to keep this matter between us, "conspiracy", that is, and went home. What shall I tell you? The word "joyous"—that's nothing! "Happy"—still not what I mean. In the seventh heaven!!! Whomever I met, do you hear, I wanted to hug and kiss. Everybody and everything acquired a singular charm in my eyes. Of Yosif himself I say nothing: on that day I came to love him as if he were my own brother. If I weren't ashamed I would have gone back to kiss him heartily, and if I weren't afraid he might feel insulted I would have made him a gift of a gold watch with a fine chain and a large seal.

My joy was so great that I went to the club to celebrate. I sometimes, you should know, do drop into the club, "between day and night", as they say, and it's not because I like to play cards. I myself do not play, but I like to watch others play, and sometimes—very seldom—I like to "grease" somebody else's card. It's one of two things: either you take or you are taken. This time I was in luck, the cards favored me as never before! I won a pretty pile and called out to the gang of "bums" (that's what we in our club call the guys who have been cleaned out down to their last copper) and treated them to a swell supper with "Rederer" champagne. It was already broad daylight when I got home. On my table I found a message saying that my presence was urgently requested in connection with an important business deal. You are probably aware that we businessmen drop everything as soon as a telegram concerning business arrives, it's the end of the world,

get lost the cow, as they say, together with the halter. to blazes with everything else! You just pick yourself up and go.

I left, thinking I'd be away two days, but had to stay, naturally, three weeks. When I returned I rushed at once to the restaurant and found a great change in the place; not even as much as a hair remained of my "Yankelehs", and the ones that did show up were also quite different than before: they looked upset, strangely disturbed, subdued. They gobbled up their food standing, as they say, on one foot, and then slunk away with lowered heads, like dogs after a rain, one this way, another that way...

But most of all I wondered: where is Yosif? Why isn't Yosif around? I observed the "Yankelehs" attentively—somehow they'd become very huffy, talked in choking whispers: sh-sh-sh! It was already not simply "conspiracy", it was, as one might say, "conspiracy on conspiracy"!.. *She* was also strangely quiet, thoughtful and extremely "conspirational"... The pretty cheeks no longer flamed, the cherry-eyes no longer smiled. Where were the charming dimples that seemed to implore—come, kiss us? No longer was her laughter heard, the laughter that made everything laugh with her—you, the table, the chairs, the walls and all of life itself!..

You understand, of course, that I did not long very much for Yosif. But I cudgeled my brains over the question of what had become of him. Was it for a short time or forever? Did he send letters or not? To ask the "Yankelehs"?.. Could you get an answer out of them? They look directly into your eyes, pick their teeth and keep silent, as if to say: "Young man, if you want to know everything you'll grow old very soon."

Suddenly, one morning when I came to the restaurant to eat, I saw the "Yankelehs" all sitting around

the table, one of them reading a paper out loud, all the rest listening to him. This, apparently, must be about Yosif. How did I know? Why, by looking at her. She, with her little white apron and her cherry-eyes, had folded both hands over her heart, her face was alight, her cheeks flaming and her upper lip turned up—just as that other time in the woods... The only difference was that the beautiful cherry-eyes had looked at Yosif then, while now they were wandering somewhere up in the air, searching, probably, for him, still for him!.. What shall I tell you? I could barely wait until they had put the paper down; I opened it immediately and took a look inside—all my questions were answered at once: *My Yosif had been taken to task!* I had known all along that he wouldn't end well; if not today, then tomorrow he would be picked up for sure... Of course, how the matter would end was as yet not clear, only I understood very well that he wouldn't receive, as they say, a mere pinch in the cheek, he wouldn't be given any honey to lick, nor would he smell any spices...

What went on in my heart then I cannot explain: I can't say that I minded so very terribly, for he was, after all, in my way, a bone, as they say, sticking in my throat. Then again, to say that I was glad is not quite true either. As they say, such a thing shouldn't be wished even on one's worst enemy. Quite the opposite, you may truly believe me when I say that I desired from the bottom of my heart that God should perform a miracle and he should be ... entirely, that is, cleared. But that couldn't be; so let him be given just some light sentence, you get me?

For several days I walked around, I tell you, as if in a daze, I couldn't find a place for myself. When at last I learned that the case had, thank God, come to an end and that the sentence was to be announced on the following day, I swear to you by my life—and it is



precious to me—that I never slept a wink that night, rolling over from one side to the other, until at last it was time to get up. I tried to look into the club, not so much because I had any wish to play cards as because I thought that perhaps I would be able to forget it all for at least a minute... My heart was too heavy; I felt, almost knew, that there was little hope for him.

I was right. When I came to the restaurant at the usual hour I met two “Yankelehs” rushing out of it, disheveled, in a turmoil—God save us! I entered and saw a couple of strangers eating. The table was served by the mother, not by *her*, and the mother herself was also, you might say, not quite herself; I could swear she had been crying. So without putting the matter off I called the mother aside:

“Where is your daughter?”

“In her own room,” she answered, indicating with her eyes a tiny alcove that looked like a cage with a door.

The game I played with the mother was, you should know, rather a strange one. I never called a spade a spade, but I understood that she would be in favor of this match: an up-to-date young man with a bit of a name, a good income, a ruble to me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne*—why should she be against it? Moreover, I let her know several times that I was very much indeed interested in her daughter! An example: I said I didn’t like it that the girl served at the table... So what did the mother reply to that? “You don’t like it that she serves? So serve yourself!”

That is what she said then, the mother, I mean, brushing a bare arm over her face, so go do her something!

Yes, so where was I? At the little alcove. How and for what purpose I entered this small alcove, what were my first words to her—this you can ask me over

and over again, but I can't even begin to remember. The only thing I do remember is that I saw her sitting by the window in the selfsame little white apron she always wore. Her hands were folded over her heart, her face was pale, her cheeks white, without a drop of blood in them, her upper lip was turned up and the cherry-eyes were clouded and looking somewhere far, far away into the distance. She sat there lost in thought, without a single tear, without even any sign of a tear. But one could see that a quiet, unspoken grief had creased her white brow. I swear to you by my life—and it is precious to me—she was so beautiful at that moment, so divine, that I was ready to fall down and grovel at her feet and kiss her very footprints... When she saw me she was not frightened, she didn't get up, nor did she ask me what I wanted. I took a chair myself and sat down opposite her and started to talk, talk, without a stop, without an end. A spring-head of words suddenly began to flow out of me and I talked and talked and talked. What I said—I tell you, I don't know. I wanted to pour out my heart to her, to console her, to make her understand that she mustn't "react" so violently... In our language this means: she shouldn't take it so to heart, for she is still too young, too fresh and too pretty... I intimated that nobody could as yet tell where she would find her happiness... Here, for instance, was I, an up-to-date young man, a merchant with a bit of a name, a fine income, a ruble for me was no more than mud, *i tomu podobne*... I even gave her to understand that if she would say only one word to me, if she was ready to forget everything that had happened up to now, as if there had been nothing, nothing at all, no Yosif, no "Yank-elehs", no "conspiracy" in the world, then...

You hear me? I don't know myself from where such eloquence came to me. Perhaps you think she

responded with some answer to all this? By no means! She just sat and looked and looked and looked... What could this look mean? It might have meant: "Do you truly mean it? Somehow I cannot believe it..." Or: "I want to think it over." Or: "Leave me alone..." Or perhaps even: "Yosif." You understand? Not simply "Yosif" but "Yo-sif"!

What I looked like to myself after that—all my enemies should have such a time... For several days I was ashamed to let people even see me. There was such a misery in my heart, as if I myself was to some extent to blame for their misfortune. However much I tortured myself, trying to drive him out of my mind, to forget him, this Yosif, it was impossible!..

I assure you that I don't worry over dreams, I am not afraid of the dead, and I don't believe in witchcraft, but I swear to you on my honor that not a night went by without his coming to me in a dream, Yosif, I mean, waking me and pointing to his throat around which there was—not of me be it said—a blue mark... What do you think, do dreams have any significance? I know of a fact—it happened once to an uncle of mine... But this is nonsense! I don't believe in dreams! I was simply so upset that I lost my appetite, couldn't sleep... You think it was fear? No! But a person I had been acquainted with, with whom I had sat at the same table so many times—you understand? Well, as they say, what is to be will be, so I plucked up courage and made a beeline for the restaurant.

I came to the place—where restaurant, what restaurant? Nothing to show for it, the place was absolutely dried out! "What's happened to the restaurant?" "Moved out several days ago!" "What do you mean—moved out?" "Moved out means moved out..." I rang the bell at the entrance to the courtyard and rushed to the landlord: "What's happened to the

restaurant? Where has it moved to?" Nothing doing, no one can tell me where it has gone. So I, of course, was fired with ambition and, as they say, took offense. When I work myself into an ambition—beware! I rushed around, I tell you, like a madman, I went to the end of the world... And the "Yankelehs"? As if to spite me, not a single one was left over, as one might say, even for breeding!..

So I went to the police to investigate, to obtain information, that is... When I came to the police they barked: "*Chto nado?!—*" "What do you want," that is. So I said: "This and that, so and so, what's happened to the restaurant?" "What restaurant?" they asked. "Such and such a one," I answered. "What do you need it for?" they asked. You understand—how was I to go and explain why I needed it? So I said nothing. They asked me over and over again what I needed it for. What shall I tell you? I'd bought myself, as they say, a pack of troubles. Oh my, what a run I had! The devil carried me on his back! However, on the other hand, what, actually, had I to fear? After all, am I not a young man, a merchant, with a bit of a name, a good income, a ruble to me is no more than mud, *i tomu podobne?* I just don't meddle in such affairs! As the saying goes: "*Nye yevshi chesnoku—*if you haven't eaten garlic..." Then what? I hate it! You get me? *I hate it—*and that's all! I tell you, I heaped curses upon myself. There's a restaurant for you! There's a girl for you! There's a Yosif for you!..

How I wish I could forget her and put an end to it all! But, as if to spite me, she doesn't leave my thoughts. She still stands before my eyes in her little white shimmering apron, with her beautiful cherry-eyes that are a delight, with the little upturned lip, with the charming dimples that seem to implore: "Come, kiss us!" and with her laughter that melts the limbs...

Often at night, when I am deep asleep, I hear her voice calling: “Yo-sif! Yo-sif!” ... and I wake up in a cold sweat. Because no sooner do I remember *her* than *he* enters my thoughts...

You see? I am not waiting for you to take out your watch. I know that all things in the world must come to an end... Only please do not be offended with me for having taken up a little too much of your time, and give me your hand as a promise that everything I have told you here will remain between us two, as they say—“conspiration”!

Adieu!

1905

# IF I WERE ROTHSCHILD

## *Soliloquy of a Kasrilovka Melamed*

If I were Rothschild... So a Kasrilovka *melamed* indulged in fancy one Thursday when his wife was demanding money for the Sabbath and he had none to give her. Ah, if only I were Rothschild! Guess what I would do then? First of all I would make it a rule that a wife should always have a three-ruble note on her so she shouldn't have to nag when the good Thursday comes and there is nothing for the Sabbath... Secondly, I would redeem my Sabbath gaberdine from pawn. Or, no—my wife's catskin burnoose, so she should stop making me dizzy with her complaints that she is cold. Then I would buy this whole house outright, with all its three "chambers", with its storeroom, pantry, cellar, attic and all the other nooks and crannies so she should stop complaining that she hasn't enough room. Here, take yourself these two rooms, cook, bake, wash clothes, shred cabbage to your heart's content and leave me alone so that I can teach my pupils with an unclouded mind. When one does not have to worry over making a living, doesn't have to rack his brains over where to get money for the Sabbath—it is sheer bliss for the soul! With all my daughters married—a load off my back—what would I lack? I would then start looking around a bit at the town. The first thing to do would be to put a new roof

on the old synagogue to stop the leaks from overhead when men are praying; the bath-house—excuse the proximity—I would have built up anew, for a misfortune is bound to happen there any day now and, God forbid, suppose it is the day the women are bathing? But if I rebuild the bath-house, then, most certainly, the poorhouse should be torn down and a hospital put up in its stead—a real proper hospital with beds, with a doctor, with medicines, with broth every day for the patients—such as they have in decent towns. Then I'd build an old-age home so that old Jews, learned Talmud scholars, should not have to huddle by the stove in the prayer house. I'd organize a "Clothe the Naked" society so that poor children shouldn't have to run around with, begging your pardon, their belly-buttons showing; also a "Loan-Without-Interest" society, so that any Jew, be he a *melamed*, a craftsman, or even a tradesman, shouldn't have to pay interest, shouldn't be forced to pawn the shirt off his back. Another society I'd set up and call it "Provision for Marriageable Girls": if there was anywhere a poor girl, already over age, this society would provide her with decent clothes and a dowry and marry her off. I would introduce other societies of this type, too, in our Kasrilovka... But why in Kasrilovka alone? In all places where the Children of Israel live I would set up such societies—throughout the world! Then, to ensure that everything proceeds properly, as it should, guess what I'd do? I would found one big society, an outstanding organization that would take care of all the other societies, of all the Jews, of the Jewish community at large, so that Jewish people should be able to make a living everywhere and live in amity, so that they should sit in the *yeshivas* and study the Bible and Rashi and *Gemara* and all the other commentaries and

the seven wisdoms and all the seventy languages.\* Over all the *yeshivas* there would be one great *yeshiva*, a Jewish Academy, in Vilno, of course. From this Academy there would come out the most learned and wise men in the world, and everything there would be free of charge, “at the expense of the rich”—from my pocket, that is. Everything would be managed properly according to plan, there would be none of this “you-me-I-you-grab-nab” business and everybody would think only of the common good!.. What is needed for people to be able to think of the common good? Why, every single person must be provided for. Provided with what? With a livelihood. Without a livelihood there can be no harmony, no friendship among people. It is terrible to say, but over a piece of bread people are capable of murdering, of poisoning, of hanging one another. Even the enemies of the Jews, the Hamans the world over—what do you think they have against us? Nothing! It’s all over making a living. Should they themselves make a decent living they wouldn’t be at all so bad. The struggle for a livelihood leads to envy, envy breeds hatred, and this is the source, Heaven preserve us, of all the troubles in the world, of all the misfortunes, may they never happen to us, all the persecutions, all the killings, all the outrages and all the wars...

Oh, the wars, the wars! War, I tell you, is a world-wide massacre. If I were Rothschild I would put an end to wars, a complete end!

You may well ask: how? With money. Namely? Let me make it clear to you. For instance, two countries have a dispute over some foolishness, over a piece of land worth no more than a pinch of snuff. “Territory”,

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\* According to the Talmud there are seven sciences and seventy languages in the world.—*Tr.*



they call it. One country affirms that the territory is hers, the other country says: "No, it's mine!" On the first day of Creation, that is, God created this piece of land especially in honor of that country! But then along comes a third country and says: "Both of you are asses. This is everybody's territory, a public domain, that is." Territory here, territory there—and to make a long story short, they go on "territorying" each other until they start shooting with rifles and cannons, people slaughter each other like sheep are slaughtered, and blood, blood flows like water...

But if I came to them at the very start and said: "Stop this, brothers, and listen to me. What, actually, is the whole rumpus about? You think we don't understand your aims? It isn't the story you care for so much, it's the refreshments. Territory—that's just a pretext. The real thing is something else, twiddle-twaddle—contributions, money!" But if it is a question of money, then to whom does one go for a loan? To me, to Rothschild, that is. "Ho," I say to them, "you know what? Here, you Englishman with the long legs and checkered trousers, here is a billion for you! And for you, too, you silly Turk in the red fez, here is a billion! Here is also a billion for you, Auntie Reizl\*. One way or another, God will help you and you will return this loan with interest—not, God forbid, a high one, four or five percent per annum, I don't want to get rich at your expense."

Well, so you understand already what I mean? I have both made myself a deal and human beings stop slaughtering each other like cattle for no reason, for nothing. Since war has been done away with what need

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\* To mislead the tsarist censorship pre-revolutionary Russia is called "Auntie Reizl" in some of Sholom Aleichem's works. — *Tr.*

is there for weapons, for all those arms and troops and all the seventy things\*, this whole hullabaloo? None at all! When there are no longer any weapons, any armies, since an end has come to the hullabaloo—there also comes an end to hatred and envy, there are no more Turks, Englishmen, Frenchmen, no more Gypsies, no more Jews, and the entire world takes on another appearance, as it is written in our sacred Books: “*There will come a day and it will come to pass*”—that means, the Messiah will arrive. (He pauses.)

So maybe, huh?.. If I were Rothschild I might perhaps do away with money altogether. No more money! For, let us not deceive ourselves, what is money? Actually, it is only an agreement, a delusion. They take a bit of paper, print a pretty picture on it and the inscription “Three Rubles in Silver”. Money, I tell you, is no more than a temptation, a passion, one of the greatest passions. It is what everybody wants and nobody has... If there were absolutely no money in the world there would be no grounds for temptation, and passion would be no passion. Do you understand me or not?

What then?.. The question is, where would Jews get money for the Sabbath? (He pauses in reflection.)

The core of the matter is: where shall I get money for the Sabbath *now*?..

1902

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\* Seven, seventeen and seventy were, in a manner of speaking, magic or sacred numbers and were often mentioned.—*Tr.*

# BEREL-AIZIK

## *Wonders of America*

“America is a land of bluff...” “American bluffers...” That’s what strangers say. Green fools they are—they don’t even begin to know what they’re talking about. America couldn’t hold a candle to Kasrilovka and our Berel-Aizik would be one too many for all the American bluffers!

You will understand who Berel-Aizik is when I tell you that when, as it sometimes happens in Kasrilovka, somebody begins to blab, to talk nonsense, he is stopped by the following words: “Berel-Aizik sends you greetings”—he immediately guesses what is meant and shuts up.

A story providing a good characteristic of Berel-Aizik is told in Kasrilovka about a certain smart-alecky Jew. It is customary among Christians when they meet on Easter to give each other the glad news that Christ has come back to life—“*Khristos voskress*”—Christ has risen, that is. The answer to this is: “*Voistinu voskress*”—it is true, it means, he has actually risen, come back to life again... Well, so once it happened that a Christian met this smart-alecky Jew on Easter and gave him the glad message: “*Khristos voskress...*” So he is up against a wall, this Jew: what should he do? To answer the Christian with the words “*Voistinu voskress*”, when he knows it’s a lie and is against our

faith... To say “No, he hasn’t risen”—for such words he could come to a bad end... So he thought it over and said: “Yes, I already heard it today from our Berel-Aizik...”

Now just imagine—this Berel-Aizik went away to America, stayed there for quite a number of years and then came back. What amazing stories he told about America!

“First of all—the land. A country flowing with milk and honey. People make money, they snatch it up with both hands, they rake in gold! As for all kinds of dealing—‘business’ they call it—there is so much of it that your head spins! Whatever you want to do, you do. You want a factory—so it’s a factory, you want to open a little store—so it’s a store; to trundle a pushcart? Have yourself a pushcart. If not that, you may take to peddling, or get a job in a shop—a free country! You can swell up from hunger, stretch out cold in the street—nobody will bother you, they won’t say a word...

“Then take the size of the cities! The width of the streets! The height of the houses! They have a ‘little’ building there, ‘Woolworth’ is what they call it, so the tip of its chimney goes right into the clouds and even higher; it’s a fair guess that there are several hundred stories in this building. How does one climb to the attic? By a kind of ladder that is called an ‘elevator’. When you have to see somebody on the top floor you get into the elevator downstairs early in the morning and you arrive only towards evening, about the time of the afternoon prayers.

“Once, out of curiosity, I decided to go up to the top and have a look at the view, and I don’t regret it. What I saw there I’ll never see again. How I felt—that is beyond description. Just imagine, as I stood there at the top and looked down I suddenly felt something

strangely cold, an icy smoothness, brush against my left cheek. Not exactly like ice, more like a well-cooled jelly, slippery and quivering. Turning my head slowly to the left I took a look—it was the moon!

“Now, their whole life over there is chasing and rushing and catching up with themselves. ‘Hurry-up’ is what they call it. Everything is done in haste. They even eat standing on one foot. They dodge into a restaurant and call for a drink of whisky, and as for food—I myself saw how a man was served, for lunch, a fresh, squirming thing on a plate, and before he could manage to cut it half had flown to one side, the other half to the other, and that was the end of that guy’s lunch.

“Still, you should only see how healthy they are! Iron! Goliaths! They have this habit of fighting in the street, right out in the middle. Not that they intend to beat you up, to kill you, to give you a black eye, or knock out a few teeth, as it is done here. God forbid! It’s just for fun. They roll up their sleeves and start punching one another just to see who will win. In their language it is called ‘boxing’. Once I went for a walk in the Bronx, carrying a bit of merchandise, and I met two boys, two loafers, scamps, that is. They began to pick on me—they wanted to fight me. So I said: ‘No-sir, I don’t box.’ One thing after another—they won’t let me go on my way. So I thought to myself: If that’s what you want I’ll show you who is who. I went and laid down my bundle and threw off my coat and then ... did I catch blows! I barely got away with my life. They were two against one. Since then I never box anymore—you can shower me with gold!

“Another thing is their language. Everything is upside-down and as if for spite. For instance, our *kikh* is called a ‘kitchen’; we say ‘*katzef*’—they say ‘butcher’. We call our neighbor a ‘*shokhn*’, with them

he is a 'next-doorer'. The owner of a house is a 'landlord', and if it's a woman she is a 'landlordikhe'. Everything is inside-out. I once wanted to buy a chicken for the *Yom Kippur* ceremony, so I asked a neighbor to buy me a *huhn*, a rooster, that is. She asks me: 'You want a *huhn*? A hen, that is? But a hen is for me!' So I say: 'Let's put it this way: a *huhn*—a rooster—is for me and for you a *hihn*—a hen.' So she asks: '*Ahin*—where to?\*' On top of all my troubles she has to be a *Litvachke*, and is there ever any sense to be gotten out of the Lithuanian Jews? When by them a hen is a *huhn* instead of a *hihn*, while a rooster is a *hohn* instead of a *huhn*. So I get a brainwave and tell her: 'Buy me a gentleman chicken!'

"At last she understood and did me the favor of saying: 'All right', which is about the same as our 'Why not' or 'Oh, with the greatest shame' ... pleasure, I mean.

"Now take the esteem they have for Jews over there! No other people are as admired, respected and exalted as the Jewish people. The Jew is a VIP there. To be Jewish is something to be proud of. For instance, on *Sukkoth* you may meet a Jew in the middle of Fifth Avenue carrying a palm-branch and a citron\*\* and he has no fear of being arrested for that. When I tell you that they love Jews over there you can believe me. The only thing they detest is a Jewish beard and earlocks. 'Whiskers' is what they call them. So when they see a Jew with 'whiskers' they leave him alone, they only start tugging at his 'whiskers' and they

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\* Yiddish has several dialects, the chief difference being in the vowel sounds. Berel-Aizik speaks the Galician dialect, his neighbor—the Lithuanian, hence the misunderstanding. *Ahin* means "over there".—*Tr.*

\*\* A citron and a palm-branch are objects used in the synagogue during the *Sukkoth* rites.—*Tr.*

pull and tug at them until he is forced to shave them off. That is why the majority of Jews in America have neither beards nor mustaches. Their faces are smooth as a plate. It is hard to know who is a Jew and who isn't. How can one tell a Jew if not by his beard and his language? Only by the way he hurries along as he walks and waves his hands as he talks... But otherwise they are Jews, Jewish in all particulars. They maintain all the Jewish customs, love Jewish food, keep all the Jewish holidays. Passover is Passover. *Matzahs* are baked there the whole year round, and as for *khroyeses*—there is a special 'factory' (as it is called) for making it. Thousands upon thousands of workers sit in that factory and they 'manufacture' *khroyeses*. Jews also make a living there from celery and the bitter herbs used at the Passover feast—it's no joke, America..."

"Yes indeed, Berel-Aizik, what you tell us is all very fine. But we'd like to know only one more thing: do they die out there in America the same as over here? Or do they live forever?"

"Of course they die, why shouldn't they die? In America, when people go and die it's a thousand in one day, ten thousand, twenty thousand, thirty thousand! Whole streets just cave in! Entire cities are swallowed by the earth as Korah was in the Bible... It's no joke, America!"

"Well, then what's so great about them? They die, you mean, just as we do?"

"Yes, they die, but how—that's the question. It is not just the dying itself. People die the same way everywhere: they die from death. The main thing is the burial—that's the most important thing! First of all, it is an American custom for each person to know beforehand where he will be buried. For this purpose

he goes himself, while he is still alive, to the cemetery and haggles until he gets a fair price. Then he takes his missus and goes with her to the cemetery and says: 'See, dearest? This is where you will lie, and here—I, and our children will lie over there!..' Then off he goes to the funeral parlor and orders himself, in a hundred and twenty years, a funeral, any class he wishes. They have as many as three classes there: first, second and third. The first class is for very rich people, millionaires, and such a funeral costs a thousand dollars. That's some funeral, I tell you! The sun is shining, the weather is wonderful. The casket rests on a black catafalque and is inlaid with silver. The horses are all covered with black cloths and decorated with white plumes. The reverents—the rabbis, cantors and sextons—are also dressed in black, but with white buttons. The casket is followed by carriages—carriages without end! And all the children from all the Hebrew schools march in front and sing a Psalm, loudly, slowly, drawing out the melody: '*Ri-gh-t-e-ous-ne-ess sha-all go-o be-e-fo-ore hi-im a-a-nd sha-all ma-ake hi-is fo-o-t-ste-eps a wa-ay to-o wa-alk i-i-in!*' The whole town rings with this singing: it's no trifle—a thousand dollars!

“Second class is also a fine funeral, but not quite the same. It costs already only five hundred dollars. The weather is already not so fair. The casket, although it rests on a black catafalque, has no silver inlay. The horses and the reverents are dressed up in black, but with no plumes and with no white buttons. Carriages follow, but already not so many. Children from only a few Hebrew schools walk ahead and sing, but the melody is not so drawn-out: '*Righteousness shall go before him and shall make his footsteps a way to walk in!*' They sing mournfully, as if saying that here are five hundred dollars worth of psalms.



“Third class is already a very mean funeral and it costs only a hundred dollars. The weather is cold and cloudy. There is no catafalque for the casket, horses—only two, reverents—also two, carriages—not a single one. Children from only one Hebrew school walk in front, rattling off without any melody whatsoever: *‘Righteousness-shall-go-before-him-and-shall-make-his-footsteps-a-way-to-walk-in-righteousness-shall-go-before-him...’* Their voices are so sleep-thick and so low that they can barely be heard—a hundred dollars all in all, what can be expected for a miserable hundred dollars?”

“Yes, Berel-Aizik, but what does one who hasn’t got even a hundred dollars do?”

“He is in really big trouble! To have no money is bad everywhere! The poor man is always almost nine ells under the ground anyhow while he’s alive! Still, don’t get any funny ideas. In America they don’t let even a poor man lie around unburied. They give him a funeral free of charge, it doesn’t cost him even a cent. Of course, this burial is a very sad affair. No ceremonies at all, not a sign of a horse or a reverent. The rain is coming down in torrents. There are only two sextons, one on each side of the corpse, and all three of them, poor wretches, drag themselves on foot to the cemetery... Without money, you hear me, it’s better not to be born at all—it’s a rotten world... Can any of you men spare me a cigarette?”

# GLOSSARY

*Asmodeus*—in Jewish demonology an evil, destructive spirit.

*Beiliss*—see Mendel Beiliss.

*Brodsky*—a prominent Jewish millionaire, owner of sugar refineries, of the 19th-early 20th centuries.

*Elul*—the twelfth month of the Hebrew calendar (August-September).

*Gabeh*—a trustee or warden of a public institution, especially of a synagogue; also, manager of affairs of a Hasidic rabbi.

*Gemara*—the Aramaic name for the Talmud, especially that part of it which comments on the *Mishnah*, the collection of post-Biblical laws and rabbinical discussions of the 2nd century B. C., forming a part of the Talmud.

*Gog* and *Magog*—in the Old Testament prophecy, fierce and wild peoples (Gog) of the land of Magog (Gog's land), a war with whom will precede the end of the world.

*Golem*—in Jewish folklore an artificial figure, an automaton made in the shape of a human being and given life by a magic incantation; generally speaking, a dummy, a fool.

*Goyml*—a blessing said after escaping a great danger.

*Guberniya*—a province in tsarist Russia.

*Gvir*—a rich man (also *Nogid*).

*Haggadah*—non-legal elements of Talmudic literature: illustrative fables, adages, hymns, psalms and

songs; particularly the story of the *Exodus* read at the festive meals on the first two nights of Passover.

*Haidamak*—from the Turkish “haydamak”—to attack, to plunder. In the 17th-18th centuries *haidamaks* were Ukrainian Cossacks participating in the revolt against the Poles.

*Halakah*—the entire body of Jewish law and tradition comprising the laws of the Bible, the oral law as transcribed in the legal portion of the Talmud, and subsequent legal codes amending or modifying traditional precepts to conform to contemporary conditions.

*Hallah*—a twisted white bread eaten on the Sabbath.

*Hallel*—a hymn of praise consisting of certain psalms; recited on particular holidays.

*Hanukkah*—the eight-day Jewish festival commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees following their victory over the Syrians (165 B.C.).

*Hasendler, Jochanan*—a medieval Jewish philosopher who was a cobbler (*sendler* in Hebrew).

*Hashono Rabo*—the seventh day of *Sukkoth* when, according to Jewish lore, every man's fate for the coming year is irrevocably sealed in Heaven.

*Hasid, or Chassid*—an adherent of a Jewish religious movement founded in the 18th century in Eastern Europe. *Hasids* are organized into groupings devoted to particular rabbis. Pious devotion and ecstasy are generally stressed more than learning in this movement.

*Haskalah*—the Jewish enlightenment movement which flourished in the 19th century.

*Heder*—traditional elementary religious school for boys.

- Hos* and *Bes-a-la-hos*—to play the stock market on rising prices; *a-la-bes*—to play on falling prices.
- Kaddish*, or *Kadesh*—a prayer said by a mourner, especially by a son for his dead father or mother (recited twice daily in the synagogue for one year).
- Kantchik*—a disciplinary whip, rod or lash used by the *melamed*.
- Khroyses*, or *Haroyties*—a brown, sweet paste prepared from nuts, apples, spices and wine; eaten at the Passover feast as a reminder of the clay used by the Jews in making bricks when they were slaves in Egypt.
- Kiddush*, or *Kiddesh*—a benediction over wine; the Sabbath and holiday forenoon celebration in honor of a joyous occasion when this benediction is said.
- Kol Nidre*—a prayer recited at the beginning of the service on the eve of *Yom Kippur*, asking that all unfulfilled vows to God be nullified and all transgressions be forgiven.
- Kosher*—ritually clean or proper; mostly said of food and its preparation.
- Maariv*—the evening prayer.
- Mazl-tov*—congratulations, good luck.
- Megilah*—a scroll or lengthy document. One of the five books of the Old Testament which are read on certain holidays; explicitly, the Book of Esther.
- Melamed*—teacher in a *heder* (traditional elementary religious school for boys).
- Mendel Beiliss*—a Jewish man accused of the alleged ritual murder of a Russian boy in 1911. The case, instigated by the tsarist authorities and the reactionary Black Hundreds, was brought to court in 1913. Under pressure of public opinion Beiliss was acquitted.

*Mezumen*—cash, money, dough in Hebrew.

*Mezuzah*—a small tube containing an inscribed strip of parchment; it is attached to the doorpost of premises occupied by observant Jews and is symbolically kissed by persons entering or leaving. Also, a similar tube worn as a locket.

*Midrash*—a traditional body of post-Talmudic commentaries on the Old Testament dating from the 4th to 12th centuries A. D. Also, a *Midrash* book or passage (a *midrash*).

*Minhah*—the afternoon prayer.

*Mishnah*—the collection of post-Biblical laws and rabbinical discussions of the 2nd century B. C., forming a part of the Talmud; also, a passage from this collection.

*Morer*—bitter herbs (e. g., horseradish) eaten at the Passover feast as a reminder of the sufferings of the Jews in Egypt.

*Nissan*—the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar (March-April).

*Nogid*—a very wealthy man.

*Perek*—chapter. A chapter in the *Mishnah*: “Ethics of the Fathers.”

*Pithom* and *Raamses*—cities mentioned in the Old Testament.

*Pokrov*—a Russian Church holiday, October 1 (Old Style).

*Purim*—the holiday celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from the persecution of the Persian Haman, through Esther, the Jewish wife of King Ahaseurus (generally identified with Xerxes).

*Rashi*—an abbreviation designating Rabbi Shloime Itzhaki (1040-1105), well-known author of an 11th century commentary on the Bible and the Talmud which is studied along with the sacred works themselves.

- Rosh Hashono*, or *Rosh Hashanah*—the beginning of the Jewish New Year.
- Seder*—the service performed at the festive meals eaten on the first two nights of Passover. Also, order, arrangement.
- Shabuoth*, or *Shevuos*—Pentecost, an early summer holiday celebrating the gathering of the first fruits and the giving of the Torah to the Jews.
- Shakharis*—the morning prayer.
- Shlimazl*—an unlucky person, a ne'er-do-well; also, misfortune, bad luck.
- Shmini-Atseres*—the eighth day of *Sukkoth*.
- Shmin-esra*, or *Shimenesra*—the eighteen blessings which are said by religious Jews in the three daily prayers (morning, afternoon and evening—*Shakharis*, *Minhah*, and *Maariv*).
- Shokhet*—Jewish ritual slaughterer.
- Sholom aleichem* (shalom aleichem, sholem aleichem) —“Peace be with you”. Said in greeting, and the answering greeting is “*Aleichem sholom*”.
- Shophar*, or *Shofar*—a ram’s horn used in Jewish ritual, blown on special occasions (*Rosh Hashono* and *Yom Kippur*) in the synagogues, and also in war.
- Shtetl*—a small town, specifically used to designate the small towns in the Jewish Pale of Settlement where Jews were permitted to live—neither town nor village.
- Simhath Torah*—“rejoicing over the Torah”, the last day of *Sukkoth*, celebrating the completion of the year’s reading of the Torah.
- Sukkah*—a tabernacle or booth erected in celebration of the *Sukkoth* holiday; meals were taken in it.
- Sukkoth*—the Feast of the Tabernacles, symbol of the forty years of wandering after the departure of the Jews from Egypt. Originally a harvest festival.

*Tallith*, or *Talles*—a striped tasseled shawl worn by Jewish men during certain prayers.

*Tallith-kotn*, or *Talles-kotn*—“small *Tallith*”, a four-cornered tasseled undergarment worn by Orthodox Jewish males of all ages.

*Talmud*—the body of Jewish civil and religious law (and related commentaries and discussions) not included in the Pentateuch (the Torah), commonly identified with the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*, but sometimes limited to the *Gemara* alone.

*Talmud-Torah*—traditionally a tuition-free elementary religious school for boys maintained by the community for the poorest children.

*Targum*—the Aramaic translation of the Old Testament.

*Tateh*—father, daddy.

*Tishab b'Ab*—the day of the month Ab (July-August), a Jewish day of fasting and mourning in commemoration of the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem; hence, a desolate mood.

*Torah*—the Jewish Law, the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament.

*Treif*, or *Tref*—non-*kosher*, i. e., forbidden by Jewish dietary laws because of the ritual impurity of the animal (pork, shellfish, carrion), improper purification of the meat, or because of contamination with milk or dairy products. Hence, illegitimate, nefarious, shady.

*Yeshiva*—an institution of higher Talmudic learning.

*Yom Kippur*—the Day of Atonement, the most solemn of Jewish holidays and fastdays, when every person's fate for the coming year is said to be decided.

## REQUEST TO READERS

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"Man is the focal point of the creative aspirations, efforts and discoveries of Sholom Aleichem. Man at the turn of the 20th century... With deep emotion the writer contemplates the surrounding reality, his spiritual vision penetrates the inner world of the people he creates and he does not conceal that he is sitting in judgement on them... A full-blooded realist, a master in the great art of the knowledge of humankind, one whose optimism is not superficial but is an integral feature — such a man was Sholom Aleichem, such was his remarkable contribution to the world's treasure-house of realist art."

From the foreword written by the  
Ukrainian Soviet poet, Academician  
*Mikola Bazhan*

The present edition includes the novel *Tevye the Dairyman* and thirteen stories. Each work exemplifies Sholom Aleichem's temperamental narratives that scintillate with humor and are permeated with a poignant lyricism.