



# Strange People

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## A Dollar

One afternoon in Autumn I stopped at a cafe to get a cup of coffee. A lot of people were in there and there was a lot of coming and going.

Near the entrance was a middle-aged man just standing there, as though he were trying to decide if he wanted to enter or not into an establishment where there were so many other people... He was wearing a speckled suit. Grey and white like a mix of salt and pepper. His face was gray and his skin dry. His cheeks and jaw were sunken like a skeleton.

He sat down at a table across from me. As he hung up his hat, I saw that his head was like his suit: a mix of salt and pepper... He did not look in my direction. As he waited for the waiter, he looked ahead with a dull stare, like one stares who has no moorings and no goal in life.

I got an unsettling feeling from the salt and pepper man on this Autumn afternoon. I called the waiter over to bring my check so that I could pay and leave.

When he came to me I handed him a five-dollar bill. He produced his money purse and with a waiter's dispatch and a snapping of his fingers he counted out four dollars bills and plunked down the coins.

As I collected the bills, I had the feeling that the man across from me was looking at me... Something caused me to lift my head, as though an invisible finger had pointed and said to me "Look at him!"...

And I saw how he looked at me and at the money with eyes that nearly sprung out of his head; his hands trembled, and I had the feeling, that he was about to leap at me, and with one hand strangle me and with the other hand grab the money... His mouth was hanging open and I heard him stutter something with a voice like someone who had been buried alive asking to be dug out of his grave:

"Miss... or Mrs... pardon! Forgive me..."

I left the cafe and had only gone a few steps, when I felt that he was following me... I turned to him and looked at him.

"Don't take offense... I would like to ask you something."

"Nu, good, ask," I answered him brusquely.

"Did you notice how I looked at the money?"

"Yes," I answered with a forced calmness, "but I didn't find that unusual. Everyone has a habit of looking at money."

"No. I was only looking at one of the dollars!... And I would like for you to tell me, about the dollar bill with the tiny, almost imperceptible clipped corners. Does it carry the serial number 9539875, from the "K" series, and the year 1899. The small letter "c" with the number 456 next to it? And if "yes"? Would you exchange that dollar bill with another?"

"Yes," I looked at him in total surprise, "Everything is correct: the numbers, the year, everything! Here, take the dollar."

He understood the look on my face and met my look with his own, and holding that look he quickly answered:

“Ah, no, you are mistaken, I am not crazy... If you would like to hear a strange, sad story, I will tell you all about it. Since you are the one that I saw the dollar with, I will gladly tell you the story and you will understand what that dollar bill means to me...”

We went to a nearby park. It was just beginning to grow dark, and the lamp lights began to flicker feebly in the gray mist. Yellow leaves stirred in the wind, as though disappointed that they could not simply remain where they had fallen...

We sat down. For a few minutes he sat in silence, then suddenly began to speak in a broken voice:

“You know, I have killed a person. I killed my own wife!...” And seeing my fright, he quickly added:

“But, don’t be afraid, I am not simply an ordinary murderer. I am a gentleman-murderer.”

“And what do you want? Is your conscience torturing you?” I asked him, forgetting that all this had some connection to the dollar bill.

He simply said:

“I’m suffering!...”

“Give yourself over to the law. When the courts judge you your heart will no longer suffer and cry out...”

“You talk like a judge!” He said with nervous agitation. “No court will ever judge me. In the courts I would be, perhaps, regarded as a hero... Human justice is a strange creature, which stands lower than the people themselves!... And if yes? And if I am judged, would anything be set right by that? Anything change? Would I need a judge or a hangman? Ah, I can be my own executioner!... But people who have experienced that, which I have, have nothing more to fear from life, and do not seek the release of death...”

“Now, let me explain better to you what happened. I do not bring my story to the world to answer for myself. I come with it to accuse the world! Listen:

“This all happened twenty-one years ago. At that time I was twenty-one years old. At a wedding for a friend of mine I met a pretty young girl, slim, with beautiful blue eyes, brown silky hair; her demeanor, movements and manner were cold and proud, like the demeanor of a Litvak woman from a distinguished house.

“The path to her was not as hard as I thought it would be. I was also a handsome young person; tall, lively, and we quickly became good friends.

“My friend’s wedding was cheerful and happy, and the feeling grew in me that I should have a wedding also. In my mind the young lady was already my bride.

“Short and sweet, in about three months we were married.

“But, are you still interested in this?...”

“Go on, go on!” I urged him, curious to know what this had to do with my dollar bill...

“Alright:

“Although we did not have a long courtship, we had a sweet life after the wedding. With each day our love grew.

“From this cold and proud woman who before the wedding forbid me a kiss, came a woman full of freely given love and tenderness. Thus, were we happy.

“And this is how a carefree life of love and trust disappeared in about three years. We had not yet had any children, but this did not bother us. We were young enough to wait and hope...

“In passing I will note that we were doing well even though money played no role in our life. I had some money left over from my bachelor years. My partner and I opened a business selling woman’s clothes. Even though I was very busy with the business, I still always found time to spend with my wife.

“And something else that has little to do with these events will I tell you: My wife and I always looked at life with open eyes. We never had any narrow opinions. And I never damned another person for acting freely. When I would read in the newspaper about a family tragedy, I would hold my wife tight, with fright and dread, like a mother hugs her child when she hears about another child who dies for some reason.

“And on a beautiful, hot, summer day exactly three years after our marriage, it occurred to me to go home early and take my wife to the beach to go swimming.

“I went up the steps and in the house. Everything was quiet, and I thought either my wife wasn’t at home, or had laid down for a little nap. In our bedroom was a young man and the bedding was tossed about..

“I will try to make this short with as little tragedy as I can. How I would just like to skip it altogether...

“My wife and the young man were scared to death and confused. Who he was, I don’t know even to this very day. But I saw him grab a chair with both hands and prepare to defend himself. My wife gave out a frightful cry, turned white as chalk, and looked beautiful in her misfortune. You are wondering how I managed to take all of that in? With twenty pairs of eyes I was able to see! All of my senses were sharp and awake in me.

“But the most remarkable and surprising thing in the world was that in me there was absolutely no urge to kill, no urge to murder. Of course I could have ground them into ashes, but in that moment that I saw them I had become a cold outlaw...

“And I remember me saying to them coldblooded and poisonously:

“Young man, pay me a dollar and get out!

“At that moment it was not clear in my mind what I had meant by that. Only when I heard my wife’s distraught scream did a light go on in my head as to what I wanted and my goal...

“The young man stood there as if frozen, still holding tightly to the chair with both hands and looked at me in crazed fear.

“Yes, yes,” I said again, “Pay me a dollar and go!

“With one hand he searched in his pants pocket, with the other he kept his grip on the chair and with terrified eyes he watched my every move. He took a dollar from his pocket and handed it to me.

“I took the dollar and cast a poisonous, smiling look at my wife, who was standing there as if on a gallows. Then I left the room to let them get dressed.

“I waited for them by the door.

“He did not trust himself to go all the way to the door and stood looking out the window... I went over to him and took both of his arms and guided him to the door. I felt his bones crack in my grip. He cried out from the pain. “You see how strong I am,” I warned him, “You see how enraged I am! I could kill you with my bare hands, and I will do just that if you even mention my wife’s name. If you want to live, then go, and don’t let your bones cross my threshold ever again!”

“My face must have been terrible to behold, because he was too terrified to say even one word. As he was going he began stammering something about his guilt. With my clinched fist I beckoned him to be silent, and showed him the door. I never saw him again in my life. After a few minutes, I too, left the house.

“I ran down the steps like I was escaping an eminent danger, then stalked the streets. I ran from street to street like a hunted animal. My head was splitting like a bolt of lightning in a stormy sky, and my ears were buzzing as though stuffed with flies. My heart was pounding in my chest and I ran from street to street, farther and farther. I did not understand what was happening to me and why I was running.

“I must have run for a couple of hours. Suddenly, I felt my knees give out under me. I drug myself as far as a public park with benches and trees, and sat down. Sat?... That doesn’t describe it. I fell onto the bench half dead!...

“With my legs still, my mind began to still also, and I began to grasp what had happened... And I started to think about what to do next... What would happen now?...

“No, you don’t understand,” he said to me, fearing that I might interrupt him, “No, you don’t understand how suddenly it came over me, without willing it in the least.”

“Would I ever see in my wife her unhappiness, a wish, a longing for something, would I perhaps then, or today or in years hence, be able to understand the reason for what happened? Whenever I came home I found her happy, cheerful, animated, either working or reading a book.

“And I had decided, like a cold outlaw, not to ask a single question. I had been stubborn, for me it would remain a secret, a puzzle... Even though I knew that my wife would have told me the truth, if I had just asked. And the truth is always the best option in such a case... Don’t you think so? But I couldn’t with her nor did I want to talk about it... We did not talk about a lot of things.

“Today,” he went on after a moment of silence and reflection, “Today it is hard for me, almost impossible to simply recount what happened. Don’t forget, that today, after eighteen years there stands before you a thoroughly agonized and miserable man. A man who has gone through the seven levels of hell without a whimper... Today I see the world with clear eyes...”

He struggled to free himself from several memories, that cried out in his mind, and fell back into the earlier tone of storytelling.

“In short, as I said to you earlier, I wandered over the New York streets. At seven o’clock our dinner time, just out of pure habit, I went home. As I went up the steps I was struck with a frightening thought: Perhaps she was lying dead on the bed... And in the next instant of fright, I thought it would be just as well... Dead on the same bed...”

“I found her in the house with her mother and her youngest sister, aged 14-years. Obviously, she had regained her strength and had made dinner.

“After figuring that out, I bit my lip and said nothing.

“We all had dinner together. My wife no longer looked like a person of flesh and blood, but rather like a chalk statue run by springs and gears. My heart was dead and not even a spark of mercy could live there...”

“Because of her mother, probably, she spoke to me and even tried to smile. I simply took the dollar out of my pocket and played with it, winding it through my fingers... That was all it took, and she stopped talking to me. Her mother must have figured out that we were having some sort of argument. She left, taking with her the young girl.

“I quickly left the house also. And, for practically the first time, without my wife.

“Late at night I returned home. My wife was not asleep. She did not know what she should do, and could hardly stay on her feet.

“Where should I set up your bedding?” she asked with her head cast down and a broken voice.

“Don’t bother about me, you go lay down,” I answered in a curt and nasty tone, and I remained in the bedroom.

“I suddenly realized that my wife was ashamed to undress in front of me... I went into the next room and broke down from the pain. There I felt her hand hand on my knee. I was greatly shocked! She broke out crying; a quiet, sad weeping...”

“It was the first time I heard my wife cry. In that instant I lost control. My hands went out to her, to embrace her and press her to my aching heart and to weep with her. But my heart had been poisoned. The poison was running in my blood. And I screamed:

“What are you thinking now?! And what do you want?”

“She lifted up her crying eyes, her blue, deep eyes! She uncovered her neck and whined:

“Strangle me, or hear me out and forgive me!”

“I won’t do either! You must live!...” I yelled, “Live, live, you must!...”

“We never spoke about it again. We never again spoke about it at all.

“I came home every night. We ate together at the same table, we shared the same bed. Two voiceless people... We didn’t even communicate with gestures.

“Sometimes she would forget herself in her sleep and cuddle up to me. At times in my sleep I would call out, “A dollar, the dollar!”

“Like a sick child to a father, by day and by night she would raise her feeble hand to me like one who is drowning would stick their hand out of the water to call for help. Thus, did she silently beg me, and finally she fell to my feet and threw her arms around me. You hear, this proud Litvak woman with the carriage of a queen of the home, laid herself at my feet!...”

“How beautiful she was! A wife with a sin in her heart, had a special charm; the true charm of shame. The charm of a bowed head...”

“And she turned all of that charm toward me with a sort of wifely gaiety in order to win me back... But on each occasion I dangled the dollar before her eyes, and, thus, I defended myself from her...”

“After a while she gave up. No glimmer of hope was left in her face. She went around silent and shamed.

“Now comes the worst part. Shall I continue with the story? The worst and most horrible in the world!”

“Yes, yes, tell me,” I begged him.

“I began to notice that my wife was going hungry... I understood that she wanted to starve herself to death... At the same table I ate, and she ... starved...”

“Nu, and now you understand how it was that I killed my wife?! Do you understand in fact? Do you really understand the horrible difference between killing someone by way of an unjustifiable, murderous attack, and watching someone starve under your very eyes every moment of the day. And you don’t lift a finger to help! No, killing someone with your fist is more noble than that... Today, it seems to me that not helping someone who is drowning, surrounded by water, is more horrible than flinging someone into the water... You can hardly grasp such a muddled morality, can you? But to me it was clear as day...”

I was sitting next to the graying man, as though a man made of salt and pepper, in this ordinary park. The gray twilight lay all around us... Not like a day that was coming to an end, but rather like a world was ending... And he began to talk once again:



“In three months her beauty was gone; in six she could no longer stand up. She was coughing and spitting blood... The doctors told her to travel to a better climate. But she didn’t want to. She just wanted a good word from me... She didn’t get it... Money, yes, but not one good word...

“And shortly afterwards she did not leave her bed.

“During the day she would sit up looking out at the world, or stare at the ceiling in silence. If I walked into the room she would look at me... I seldom had a word to say, even though every evening I visited the sickroom. I would sit looking out the window without the slightest interest in what was out there, just letting my gaze fall where it will; anywhere but her bed... She could see that I was suffering, and she felt it for both of us. Often I would see her crying, quietly without a sound and without force. But I was stubborn, frozen in stone as if under a spell. I had no control over my sense of mercy or my sense of love...

“She looked frightful. Her face yellow and thin, and sometimes her cheeks would turn flaming red. Her eyes sank deep into her head with dark circles under her eyes, and the corners of her mouth were always moist.

“Once, apparently, she thought that she was dying and she called to me. I was upset and out of habit I looked for the dollar to take out and dangle before her... She looked at it and turned over in bed to face the wall.

“A couple of weeks later the doctor told me that the hour of her death had struck; I stood at the foot of the bed and she looked at me with love and pain.

“Do you know anything more horrible than the gaze of a dying person as they look with half-dead eyes at the living? The last look of a dying wife when her gaze turns toward her husband!...

“I sat on the bed next to her side. Her dying eyes gleamed blue. She knew that her time to go had arrived... And that a new life beckoned... She took my hand and in joy she called out my name:”

“Rubin! Rubele! Do you remember our wedding? Do you remember how I looked in my white veil and my white dress? And the new day... A new life... How after our wedding... Yes, Rubele?...”

“Our eyes met, hers shown like two gemstones lit by the last rays of the sun, and my eyes burned with tears.

“She became more lively, talkative; she smiled at me. Her even, white teeth looking young and healthy in her half-dead mouth and laughed in triumph... She caressed my hand, and wiped her mouth with a white cloth... But I did not give her a kiss...

“Then suddenly her eyes went cloudy as though filled with gray spiderwebs. The final minute had come. She could no longer speak and with one hand she seemed to try to brush something away from her eyes. Her other hand lay stiff in mine. In a couple of seconds she tried with her last glimmer of strength to lift herself up and whispered:”

“The dollar... Take the dollar away... From my eyes... The dol...” “And so, with a final look as from two needles, and with the unfinished word, “dollar” she died.

“And I was left sitting there with her dead hand in mine, until someone took me away, and covered her with the bed sheet.

“Everything that happened after that is not important and I will end quickly.

“After her death I stayed a few weeks at the house and went to work every day. But I was walking through an alien world. Anyone else who had been struck with such misfortune would have felt it very deeply, but in time the burden lifts little by little and one begins to distance oneself from death, and one forgets...

“But that is not the way it happened with me. Immediately after her death I felt relieved. A great, heavy sin was lifted from my shoulders. But later with every day the pain grew and my heart ached.

“I couldn’t go to the shop anymore. My partners bought me out and I left New York.

“And I wandered from state to state, and country to country for eighteen years.

“I was in Europe with its beautiful cities, interesting culture and beautiful ladies, and it drove me back to the bustling America. I traveled to a distant noisy West, and I drug myself around in the hot, lazy South; I was in Mexico, Africa; But in all of that travel I never found a single day of peace, in none of those places could I even stay for one year.

“Everywhere I went, she was there with me... Everywhere I saw her starving face. How she could hardly stay on her feet, how she could not lift her head to look at me from shame...

“Nu, I ask you, can’t a man go crazy? But I wasn’t crazy! God punished me in a strange way: My mind was clear, my senses heightened, my heart open, just so that I could feel the crime against my wife all the stronger gnawing away at me...

“God’s punishment afflicted me and sent me to judgment and execution! I would have gladly given up my life, if my life had been dear to me!... But such a life is no offering... And what is it to end a life, when death is a release?...

“And I ask you, you alone, the whole world. Why can’t we forgive our wives?... We forgive so easily our sisters, children. Doesn’t a father’s heart beat stronger for his unfortunate, sinful children? Does a brother refuse a sinful sister? Why are women so forgiving, so beautifully forgiving?... It is so beautiful, so wonderful to be able to forgive someone’s sin! Especially when one begs forgiveness.

“I couldn’t, I didn’t dare forgive...”

He suddenly sank deep into thought, considering the words he had just uttered.

I had grown weary of listening, and wanted to draw things to an end. I asked him:

“And, how exactly, did you lose possession of the dollar?”

“Very simple. It was in my suit pocket when someone stole my jacket with the dollar in the pocket. Since then I have not spent a single dollar without examining it to see if it was ‘the’ dollar...

“And isn’t it remarkable and unusual that, that just when I returned to New York, I found the dollar!... Yes, I can be relieved, stop believing, but I can not free myself from superstition...”

“And why do you want the dollar now, after so many years of suffering?”

“I don’t know, but you must trade the dollar with me. It doesn’t make any difference to you, one dollar for the other...”

“I will give you the dollar, but with one condition, that you rip it up into tiny pieces,” I said to him decisively.

“No, I can not do that,” he answered with sadness in his eyes.

I took the dollar and tore it up. I tossed the pieces into the wind.

He shuddered, but seemed to breathe easier, as though he had been freed from a horrible vow.

And the man, half-gray, like from salt and pepper, tried with his expression to elicit a word of comfort.

“Think well of the dead. To speak of them without love is our only sin... A person dies in and of themselves. However, they continue to live with us and in us...”

He interrupted me with irony.

“So, your philosophy seems to work out to: I am dead to my wife and she is alive to me...”

“Yes, that is the way it is; we the living are dead for the dead. The dead live in us for as long as we live... The living live like the dead... You, for your wife are dead, she for you is alive, alive in your memory...”

“Yes, my friend, for every living person there is, perhaps, a dead person, every sorrow has its solace; but for a man with regrets there is no solace, no relief. Life does not have that capacity...”

He suddenly stood up, and with an unusual speech he thanked me:

“So, I thank you. To hear out a man’s story is a fine thing... Every person is bound to one another with a thin thread called life... Have a good evening. Perhaps we will meet again, to talk about life and death. Death is, after all, every man’s enemy, but it is my friend... Good night...”

And with that the salt and pepper man left, walking like a man carrying a heavy burden on his back...



# The Illusion

I had not seen my friend Sasha for five years. I had left him happy in Paris, in love and with a brand new diploma in law.

I had not received a letter from him in the last two years, and had heard nothing about him in that time.

And, when after five years, I ran into him in a cafe in New York, I hardly recognized him. I did not want to believe my eyes, that this was the handsome, healthy Sasha that could sleep twelve and fourteen hours straight while outside heaven and earth turned upside down. Or, he could be on his feet for two days and his eyes would still be bright like flowers kissed by the dew.

At first glance I suspected that he had been drinking, or worse had been smoking opium...

Sasha's head of brown-blond hair fell in crazy clumps in all directions; his teeth yellow from too many cigarettes, his collar with worn edges, and his necktie had the cotton lining sticking out.

Immediately after our first greeting, he turned to me and with a nervous, rasping voice he said:

"Tell me, Yakov, what is the difference between the truth and a lie? Wherein lies the difference? Where does the truth end, and where does the lie begin, or vice versa?"

Without thinking I said:

"What is, is the truth, and what isn't is a lie."

"Wrong! Simple schoolboy!" he replied in a very loud voice.

I stayed silent, shocked, and with alarm I looked at Sasha.

I tried to get him out of the cafe, but it didn't work, so I ordered us black coffee.

"No, Yakov," he suddenly said feebly, "No, very often what is for your soul and fantasies a truth, is outwardly for the simple brain a blatant lie; and what is sometimes a lie for the eye, thought and judgment can for the inner "I" be a beautiful truth... Do you understand me, Yakov?"

A shudder went through me. I thought to myself: "When someone starts philosophizing over truth and lies, they are probably full of troubles... Sasha – a philosopher!..."

We left the cafe together and I asked him:

"What is it, Sasha?"

He nearly broke down from that simple "What is it, Sasha?" He wanted to say something, but his throat tightened and the words stuck. He faked coughing to hide a silent weeping from deep in his soul that rose to his eyes and throat.

I looked away and pretended to watch the bustling crush of people around us. A summer sun had heated the air around us like a quicklime oven.

On the sidewalk an Italian played a grind organ; a young girl with a flowered kerchief on her head passed a tray with coins and collected pennies. A dozen young girls wearing curved shoes and ornate dresses did a charming dance. I gave Sasha a side-glance: He was doing a childish dance, because he could not keep pretending to cough to stop the weeping from his heart in front of people...

We walked down to the waterfront. We saw a boat was leaving to go somewhere along the Hudson River, and we got on board. Mostly to get away from the turmoil and the heat of the city.

Sasha saw how curious, although patiently, I was waiting... He looked far out onto the river, and said:

“As you know, three years ago I got married, it happened like this: For a while I had become tired of the life in Paris, defending myself from intrigues, and carrying out my own intrigues. The constant night-life. I traveled back to the town where I was born to see my mama and papa. There I saw the pretty, naive Leah. I still thought of her as a little, blonde girl with golden pigtailed; me – as a grown boy. Because she had become a quiet, pretty person, other people had already come to see her as a woman rather than a child.

“In short, I fell in love with her, won her trust and love, and we got married. I called her Laura. In the first place, the name was very dear to me, and secondly, she was born to carry the name of Laura. Steady, blonde and “wifely.”

“My Laura was pretty, naive and respectable; but small-town and uninteresting. She loved me the way a Jewish wife loves; with submission and respect. I was not content and she did not understand.

“I took on the task of changing her, but one-sided. I wanted that, for her, love should be a cult, and I – her idol... I gave her erotic novels to read, constantly spoke to her about love, love – not healthy and primitive – only refined and exaggerated. I knew that in this quiet, blonde wife slept something wonderful that would bring out her inner beauty. One had only to stimulate it and bring it to life. The morality of love, I had entirely entrusted to *her*...

“Shortly after our wedding we left the little village and moved to Paris.

“Parisian style clothing, Paris chic, the brown Jewish eyes – and my Laura became a beauty! Up to this point everything had gone like a children’s fairy-tale, sheer happiness upon happiness. The husband rich, the wife beautiful, Paris... Up to this point ideal and later – garbage...

“One afternoon I met with a friend, an artist; I had had an old grudge with him, and in that moment it occurred to me to take him home with me to taunt him with my good fortune... I was so certain of my Laura, I felt that she could only be in love with me, her husband, the one she had married. Because for the whole of “Gay Paree” she was still just the modest, pious Leah.”

Sasha remained silent for a few moments and I thought that he was about to come to the point. I had been smoking without halt, and now offered him a cigarette. He continued on with the story:

“Even though I did not invite him again after that first visit, he, nevertheless, began to visit us at home. It would have been bad manners for me to make my displeasure known to him. Laura was friendly,

radiant, but tactful. In short, I will not burden your ears with all of the details. They fell in love one with the other. They didn't do anything foolish. My Laura said it straight out to me, asked for forgiveness, crying like all the women in all of the novels: She must go away with him; She can not live without him. She wants to be honorable with me, she wants to remain respectable. I will find someone better, and she is not worthy of me. Not forgetting to tell me how she had been suffering for a while, how pained she was, and how she had tried to leave me. With one word: She and She... And I was nothing but an obstacle, something that one had to beg forgiveness from, so that it doesn't come back to you in your dreams... Of course you know the women! Or, perhaps you don't know them?... I was gut-punched, confused as from a deadly blow, and still had to do the dance with them, the pathetic, blessed dance... I had to be the noble man from the modern novels... I had no need for the house without my Laura. I left, leaving them with everything...

"I settled somewhere in a garret in a sort of spiritual exile. I lived like a fool, hoping that Laura, after the first disappointment would come running back to me... I was the one who brought about the changes in her, raised her to know the good life, to love intensely, and now my charlatan of a friend would have her!... Do you understand, Yakov my friend, how good I was doing?!..."

"I had made her sick with *what* I could, and *how* I could. She wanted me to visit the house and be her friend, but I did not go and did not make myself her friend; She wanted me to continue to go about elegantly dressed, and to continue with my work. I stopped working, and went around disheveled. She wanted to come to my room to clean and put my things in order. I forbid her to come.

"But I had fallen so low that I wanted her to come back to me out of pity.

"She did not come back to me, and you can see for yourself how much I suffered without me having to tell you..."

He suddenly fell silent, thinking to himself, then forcefully threw his half-smoked cigarette into the water, and lit another.

"But I did get my revenge!" he said with an evil smile.

I was shocked, and braced myself to hear the worst.

"Understand that deep in my heart I believed that she would at some point miss her Sasha. All that we had together, one does not easily forget!..."

Sasha suddenly became animated, and a fire came to his paste-gray eyes, and they lit up like blue lanterns. He went on with his story:

"It was an evening at the beginning of summer. She let me know that she was coming over to see me... I straightened up my room as best I could. I even brought in some flowers!... Because she loved flowers.

"She arrived. She was a beautiful as an angel in her silk dress. But I could see the sorrow in her eyes... She held herself cold and distant, talked about ordinary things with a noticeable sharpness. I had the feeling that I had once again become her god... And convinced that she had come to beg me to take her back... I knew what I had to do, and I was calm and deliberate..."

“She started to stroke my hand, my forehead. She kissed my head and threw her arms around me. I let her kiss and caress me, but I pretended to be indifferent. I did not respond. I wanted to see her at my feet... She knew it, she felt it... Suddenly she began to display such a wonderful love, and a devilish, wild passion that even Lilith with her gang of demons couldn’t manage!...”

“I held in my arms, my ex-wife... She said that she hated him... He was very mean to her. He had even struck her... And – when I felt that she was once again ready to be my wife, I pushed her away and I spit on her... She began to beg me: “My good Sasha, my dear Sasha, you are the only one I love... Take me back!...” And I spit on her again... She endured the spitting; and more ardently, passionately kissed me and begged me to take her back...”

“Then I ripped open her blouse and I spit on her naked body!...”

“Sasha shut up!” I suddenly heard my own voice say.

“You are shocked on hearing that, but me even more on recounting it,” He said looking at me.

He rested his head on the ship railing, and I heard him sobbing...

“What is it, Sasha?”

“Nu, don’t you understand that everything was a lie? A lie dreamed up, thought out, and wished for! A lie that grew in my mind and spread through my marrow and my blood... For two years I have clung to the lie until it has become a truth, my own truth...”

“Is it all a lie, Sasha?” I quietly asked.

“No, all of it was true except the story of that last evening. She never came to me to beg to take her back, and I never spit on her and pushed her away... But that remains my truth... Do you understand?”

The boat arrived at the shore. Sasha and I got off. In the meantime night had fallen, and we stopped at several cafes. We ate together in uneasy silence. Late at night I took Sasha home like one takes someone from a hospital and – his truth also became my truth...

## Mine...

In all of America there is not an object or a living person that Lifshe could with justification refer to as “mine.” She couldn’t even take heart and say: “My landlady and my shop, and in all that is also included: The landlady where I live and the shop where I work. Because today one works and lives here, and tomorrow – there.

With jealousy in her heart Lifshe thinks about the people who are light of heart and the word “mine” just falls from their lips. It is my “grocery,” my “butcher,” my “doctor,” and my “boarder.” Just mine and mine. For her the word “mine” never slips from the tongue...

It is not my friend, and even not my dog or my cat. In order for it to be mine, there has to be a cost associated with it... In order to be able to say: That puppy is mine, one has to have given it some milk to lap up when it was little, bandaged it’s paw when it was injured, or at least tossed it a bone from the table for it to gnaw when it was hungry...

In Grodno there is an elderly woman who cooks for stranger’s weddings, and sells hot beans and peas on the street. Lifshe writes to this woman every couple of weeks: “My Mame, my dear Mame.” And the woman answers her: “My dear child. Regarding the charitable few dollars. It pains my heart to take money from a young girl...” But hard times, one must provide for the two orphans. It is after all not a bad job to cook for weddings, but there are none in Grodno...” Don’t have any money, but one always get joy from the children... The son-in-law, the dead daughter’s husband, wants to go to America. There are two or three considerations. He is, God forbid, not responsible for her daughter’s death, and some other points. God should allow, that they should not become more estranged. That is what is proper and correct. She will send one child with him, so that in America he will not feel free as a bird, and the second she will send over to him later... Already a couple of letters have come from the Mother in the same style.

Lifshe did not look at the world with big eyes. She wanted very little. She would have liked to say: “My husband, my children, and my four walls.” She would have protected those things as holy, but it was not destined to be...

It was as though Lifshe was always sitting at a stranger’s table, listening to people say, “mine, mine alone,” bitter, she never once said out loud the word “mine”...

She distanced herself from her landladies, just because everything belonged to them. The peddler that the landlady bought socks and underwear from, who could barely wheedle a dollar from her to pay her debt, was referred to as “my peddler”... My laundry man, my milk man, mine and mine. It always made Lifshe sick, she either wanted to argue or eat her heart out... And both were a curse. She would blurt out:

“How is he *your* milk man? He delivers milk to thousands of housewives!”

People took her to be a bitter woman and a little befuddled.

In the shop a young woman asked her:

“Lifshe, is that your bobbin, the one with the red thread? I found it next to your machine”



Lifshe answered:

“That is the machine’s bobbin.”

Others heard this and behind her back one of them tapped their finger on their forehead... It did not take long before they realized that Lifshe never said the word “mine.” That started a game among her coworkers and they would ask her questions about ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ just like in the game where you are not supposed to say “yes and no and black and white.” But Lifshe never played, and never said the word “mine”...

After the last couple of letters, with the news about the newborn something began deep in her heart concerning the word “mine.” “My brother-in-law and my nephew.” The words did not yet come to her lips, but they lived deep in her heart. She had never met him, “my brother-in-law.” During the fifteen years that she had been in America, her younger sister had gotten married in the Old Country, had had two children and had died.

And in about two months someone would suddenly be here from the other side of the ocean, from home, someone she would call “my brother-in-law,” The lock would fall from her lips and she would speak the word “mine”... It didn’t bother her any more. What else would be. If there would be a marriage contract or not. It is like a curse to take a sister’s husband. But she would say, “my brother-in-law!... My nephew, and the boy would say: “My Aunt Lifshe.”

A photo arrived. Young with a mustache the points of which were twisted to fine points like needles. Lifshe saw in him a good, and intelligent and noble brother-in-law...

The landlady where Lifshe was living was divorced from her first husband, and a widow of her second husband. A healthy, lively widow with a white neck and dimples. After looking closely at the photo, the landlady said to Lifshe that she would move the current boarder from the front room and take in the brother-in-law with the child. The current boarder may put up a fuss. The boarder would rather marry her than be pried out of that room... Ever since he has been a boarder he has never had such a brightly lit room, such warm blankets to cover himself with and such fat suppers. Then the landlady said: “He will soon be moved.”

And one day Lifshe was sitting at work and said to the machine worker next to her:

“My brother-in-law comes this week! With my nephew.” The words simply spilled out of her mouth... What a step it was for her to say such a thing to another woman. That her brother-in-law was coming, what did that mean to the other woman?... The words just leapt from her tongue and fell out...

No sooner than the words came out, there was laughter. A curious merriment ensued, Lifshe said: “My brother-in-law”! For a year they had been trying to get her to say the word “mine” just like other people. They all chipped in a quarter and bought confections, almonds and apples and made a celebration, joking with Lifshe, and she took it good-naturedly...

When the brother-in-law arrived he became the “front-room boarder,” and got warm blanket and a nightshirt with the landlady’s maiden name embroidered on it...

Between Lifshe's room and the brother-in-law's room was the landlady's room... Whenever he wanted to have a chat with his sister-in-law, he had to pass through the landlady's room... Previously the landlady had her room elsewhere, that aggravated Lifshe.

The landlady decided to make Lifshe move. The landlady could make her move. If Lifshe wanted to she could take the nephew with her, but the brother-in-law would keep the front-room...

"Nothing in America is "mine." Today he can be your brother-in-law, and the next day your landlady's husband..."

The brother-in-law was shocked, pale, wanting to say something but he couldn't, the little nephew cried.

And Lifshe stood there, defeated, with her eyes wide open she watched what was happening. But Lifshe took a stand, and nervous with a strange, pinched voice she yelled:

"Beryl, you're moving with me and with the boy!..."

"Yes, yes, of course, what else? Certainly..."

"What "certainly?" When "certainly?" You're staying here!"...

Lifshe's inner voice said: "He's already not my brother-in-law."

But out loud she yelled: "He is my brother-in-law and my nephew, and we move together... They are mine... mine!..."

## A Bitter Joke

“No sooner is a person born than lurking all around him are all of the sicknesses and sorrows in the world.” Benny, with a child in hand, called out to his newly arrived cousin, Boris.

The cousin, a newcomer to America, a ‘greener,’ wearing a Russian shirt, understood, that his American cousin wanted to make excuses before him. He smiled to himself, the way an intellectual greener smiles when he hears an American shop worker philosophize, and he said:

“As a young child one has to endure a variety of passages and crises. And with God’s help they are overcome and one grows into a boy of eighteen or twenty years, surrounded by dangers that one has to deal with the whole life long... And at twenty-four, twenty-five years old, you suddenly have a bride by your side, usually a pretty girl, that you can kiss and embrace whenever your heart glows. She accepts all sorts of wifely gifts with the same manner that she accepts coffee and pastry from a waiter in a restaurant. And she flies into a rage if you say a friendly word to another young lady.

“But all of that doesn’t matter, a young man must get married. You can not buy your way out of it, unless one is a great genius!... And it makes no difference which one you marry. Young girls are all alike, but there are only two sorts of wives: Good housewives and bad housewives. In one year after the wedding it matters little what sort of young girl you married, just like in the five minutes before you die it doesn’t matter what kind of life you lived.”

The greener cousin, Boris, an intellectual and idealist with a very full life, thought to himself: “The fellow speaks with intelligence, my cousin does! The two were not previously acquainted. They only knew that their two fathers were brothers. When Benny learned that a greener cousin was coming, he went to New York to see him and to invite him to come visit him in Passaic. Boris did come to visit. A mutual friendship developed between the two of them, in spite of the differences in ages and levels of education.

Benny laid the sleeping child in his little bed, and once again his hands were free. He could think now and speak with enthusiasm:

“Listen to me, it doesn’t matter, you can take advice from me, even though you are the intellectual and I am the worker. As one grows older everything evens out... I want to warn you about two women so you can protect yourself: The first one is a woman who has read Karl Marx, and the second is a woman that a boy committed suicide over... Protect yourself from the two...

“Just my luck, the woman over whom the boy committed suicide came to me. Something even worse could have happened to me. I could have fallen into the hands of the woman who reads Karl Marx in Russian. In my case there was a small tragicomic element with the greener boy “Abi Schnobel.” I speak embittered and cynical about his death, because what happened affected me so strongly... However, I don’t feel any guilt about it. Because, if a boy can take the one and only life given to him on account of a petticoat, he could also take his life for having, God forbid, slipped in the dance hall and fallen down, or over a similar foolishness!...”

Benny stopped talking. He heard his wife coming. She came in with a bunch of packages, breathing heavily and panting like a fat goose. Her fresh and pure face, colored from the first winter frost.

Seeing the greener cousin, she was embarrassed sweating profusely:

“One tires like this after one is married! One can’t be like that before the wedding... You will eat dinner with us. It is not often that an intellectual wanders to Passaic. My friend and her husband will be coming by later. She is very much an intellectual. She knows, it seems, everything about Karl Marx! And she has also read Kautsky. It is a pleasure to hear her talk.”

And Feny had a following thought, that the greener cousin should know her background also... That she, too, was not simply a housewife... She wanted him to know that because of her, a boy had taken his own life. But she didn’t want to just bring the subject of Abi up herself. Ach, if only he, Benny, were smarter!...

At the same time she was disappointed that she did not know that he was coming. She had cooked for tonight a big tsimis with stuffed neck and a barley soup with beans. If she had known, she would have prepared a bullion, a roast.

Benny knew his Feny very well. He always knew what was going on behind that white, bright forehead when she was thinking. And coming back from the kitchen he dropped this line:

“See, my brother, a tsimis with stuffed neck is cooking in the pot! Let me tell you, just for that alone is it worthwhile living in this failing world!... My wife has not yet read Karl Marx...”

Benny said this in all innocence. The greener intellectual’s eyes lit up, only Feny made an unhappy face.

“Don’t let me forget for a minute what happened...” she said with a mysterious sigh.

Boris was sitting in the rocking chair, peacefully smoking Benny’s cigarettes and only from time to time offered a clever word. He was disappointed. A wife over whom a man had taken, as Benny said, his one and only life, should be tall, slim, and dreamy, and she, Feny, is a healthy, fat, Litvak woman. That depressed him. He would want her to be pale and withdrawn from the misfortune. She, however, was the opposite, lively and feeling proud and because of it, entitled to a better life... A trifle according to her that a man had committed suicide...

Feny finally went into the kitchen and Boris had a chance to ask Benny:

“How exactly, did it happen?”

“I can tell you in three words a story that has gone on for three years:

“Feny was a pretty young girl. He fell in love with her. I was just an acquaintance of the “Karl Marx lady.” The boy was head over heels in love with Feny. And I would always make fun of him about it. “Go on,” I once said to him, “and tell Feny you want to marry her. I will go with you, and I bet she will welcome the proposal with open arms.” He answered me: “And if she refuses, I will kill myself.” Naturally, I did not take him at his word. Day in and day out he would tell us stories about how much in love with her he was. Telling a girl you love her is one thing, and asking her to marry you – is something completely different... One evening a crazy, unfortunate thought came into my head – At that time I was about twenty-two years old – I thought it would be a good joke to ask Feny to marry me, totally without ever having declared my love to her. Feny was surely not in love with me, and she

had certainly thought more about him than of me. There were a whole bunch of us. I called her over saying that I had a question to ask her, and, pretending, I laughingly asked her if she was interested in marrying me? She immediately said to me: “And what will Olga say about that?” Olga is the one who was reading Karl Marx. In short, Feny was a pretty young girl, and the foolish question gave her a naive charm. I gave her a kiss, then a second, then a third. We returned to the company. I had already completely forgotten about the whole joke. The whole rest of the evening Feny was bursting with delight and cheerful. Early the next morning I was extremely chagrined at the whole story, and decided that as soon as possible I would go to Abi and explain everything. I would tell him the whole story, except for the part about the kisses, and I would advise him to go to her with a real marriage proposal and everything would be put to rights.

“Unfortunately, it never occurred to me that on that same evening Feny would tell him that I was now her fiancé.

“That early morning was a Sunday. I was still laying in bed when a friend stopped by and told me the bad news, that Abi had killed himself. I can’t describe to you how hard the news hit me. A great bit of it has stayed with me my whole life...

“In short, Feny cried and cried and went into hysterics. I had to comfort her, and in comforting her, we got married for real...”

As Boris looked at his cousin Benny now, his pale, thin face with a deep personal sadness in the eyes, he could see that he carried with him an inner sorrow and pain in his heart... Boris’ respect for him grew somewhat more.

Right after mid-day when Feny spread out the beautiful tablecloth on the table, she gave the cousin an album to thumb through. He saw a picture of a handsome young man with a flower in his lapel and his hair parted down the middle. With a silent gesture Benny let Boris know that this was the young man in question. Feny didn’t see the gesture and said:

“You are looking at that picture? Handsome, huh? An uncommon young man... He took his own life... Benny can tell you, I can’t, because it makes me heartsick... He killed himself on the same night that Benny and I became engaged...” All the time she was saying that, she was wiping her eyes with a white handkerchief.

“Do you think that Benny loves me all the more because of that? That I am more dear to him? I am to him as every housewife is to your Hetskel. Nu, yes, I was too young and did not understand the value of a true, loving heart...”

“Perhaps you will want to explain that “value” to your friend the Karl Marx lady? Wait, brother, soon you will get a lesson about “value” and “added value,” and how in Passaic they do not know how to make it happen. Their “theory of value” turned into married life.” Benny, in a nervous and venomous, voice interrupted her speech.

There would have most likely ensued one of their daily arguments had not the doorbell rang. In came Olga, her husband and two children. It did not last long. Olga saw that an intellectual had also come, and she made use of her stored treasure chest of knowledge. And the words “Social Influence,” “Political Economy,” “more value in production,” began falling about like wood chips. Olga’s husband read a newspaper and sighed heavily. Benny gritted his teeth and looked at his greener cousin. And

Feny was so used to the strange words, which she had never understood, that they sounded to her like common household words such as diaper, stew pot and stirring-spoon. Olga's children became sleepy. She had her husband lay them down to sleep in their clothes. Olga had already expressed the opinion that the "economic factor" is the most important in life and that all other factors revolve around that one factor. Feny stood by proud and happy. Benny suggested that all three men should go for a walk and show the greener cousin Passaic.

Feny and Olga were taken aback. Each cast an evil look at their own husband, but Benny gave the men a push and all three went down to the street. And two unappreciated wives were left to talk about the men's leaving and to unburden their hearts...



# Hannale

Why did I leave New York?

Perhaps it was foolish to do so. It is just that at that time I thought I had to. And you don't know how much I was tormented and how much I yearned during those years that I spent outside of New York! Because how much interest can a person, like me, have for all of the provincial towns where there is no Jewish community and no Jewish life...

But let me better explain to you about my being away:

A couple of months after I came to New York, a friend of mine recommended me as a tutor for the young children in the Rubin family. I was to teach them Hebrew and Yiddish.

The father of the family, Aaron Rubin, was one of the national newly observant people which had suddenly appeared in New York like mushrooms after a rain. The mother, a good, quiet woman, had complained about the very little Jewishness that existed in their home. They had four grown daughters, fairly pretty, and all four were engaged; they had one son, Max, seventeen-years-old, in high school, and the youngest child, Hannah, or Hannale, who mama and papa had spoiled.

Hannah was fourteen-years-old, with a good head of curly, chestnut-colored hair with gold highlights, a lackluster skin tone like a bronze coin, blue eyes with dazzling, silky eyebrows. Because her face was dark, her eyes sparkled in a rich blue color. Hannah was the prettiest in the house.

Max and Hannah were my two students. The older daughters were not interested in learning Yiddish. But all of them were very friendly with me. I taught them every day and became a member of the household.

I don't know how it happened, but in the evening when we were all sitting around the table eating, drinking tea, or just chatting, Hannele would climb up into my lap, snuggle up and sit. The father, the mother, the sisters and often visitors would sit around the table and not say a single word. And they did it in such a truly childish manner, that one really couldn't say anything. I would stroke her pretty head, and sometimes give her a kiss, like one kisses a child. At that time I was twenty-eight years old, but understand, I pampered her like one pampers a little child. That was the routine nearly every evening. Once the mother said: "Go, my child, get down from his lap. Let him drink a glass tea." Or, sometimes the father would make a joke saying: "Hannele, why don't you sit a while on your sister's lap." The girls would blush, whisper together, then break out in a laugh. And Aaron Rubin, who was a wealthy businessman, and a cheerful person, always loved to make jokes, and got a lot of pleasure from making people laugh – would add: "Get down Hannele, and let Max sit on his lap, he is also his teacher." That would always get a laugh and comments from the four daughters. Max would laugh, mama laughed, I laughed, and Hannah would laugh and say: "But I am the youngest." That would cause more laughter, then we would fall into more serious conversation.

Often it would happen that Hannele would go to sleep in my lap, and the father would take her from my hands and carry her to her room and put her down to sleep.

Hannele was a very diligent learner. Max got a little Hebrew and Yiddish into his head, and when he could get out of a lesson, he was happy. Often I would be teaching Hannele all by herself. During the class the child would sit very well-behaved and studious, and I was quite pleased at that. However, after the hourly session, she would hang on my neck, and would not let go of my hand. I had the feeling that Hannah was not a fourteen-year-old child, but a fourteen-year-old woman... I started to become uneasy, and I didn't know what to do...

As I said just now, it has been seven years since Hannele came to me. Right now...it is different. Now she must be a girl of twenty-one, and that does my heart good, only then would I do everything in the world to turn her look away. So much womanly desire, and so much womanly fervor is present in those child-blue eyes! Her look is so enraptured, as if she sees in me wonder after wonder.

Once this happened: One evening I spent with them, it was raining hard outside, and since Max and one of his sisters, the one that Hannele slept with, were away visiting friends in Philadelphia, Mr. Rubin and his wife came to me and suggested that I stay with them overnight. Max's room would be empty.

The whole family went to bed. I was still awake reading a book until late into the night. When I finally did get sleepy, I turned the gaslight down and went to sleep. I don't know how long I was asleep, when suddenly I felt a heavy weight on my feet. When I opened my eyes, I saw Hannele laying across my knees. Outside it was growing light. A clear moon was shining, and by the moonlight I could see quite clearly. She was dressed in a white nightgown; her bare feet were sticking out from under the nightgown; under her knees she had stuck a red sofa cushion. She was laying there quiet and still, such that I could not tell if she were awake or sleeping. I didn't know what to do; I was afraid to wake her, perhaps it was her intention that I was not supposed to know she was there.

Slowly, very slowly, I freed myself from under her little head, and I got out from the bed. I got myself somewhat dressed. I was so agitated from the scene: Hannele laying on my knees, unclothed, at the foot of the bed, illuminated by the moonlight, that I got on my knees by the side of the beautiful girl, and I prayed to God to protect me from all that was evil.

Only one thing was left for me to do: To lift her from the floor and carry her to her bed and let her sleep. However, she circled my neck with her little hands, and with a child's caprice she would not let herself be put to bed, unless I lay down with her, too. I laid down but with a peeved voice I said:

“Lie still, Hannele! Lie there quietly. I want you to go to sleep.”

She held on to my neck and the way a small child pleads she whispered: “Ani ohev otakh, and I love you, and ick hob eich lieb!”

I did not answer a word, and I patted her on the back the way one pats the back of a child until they go to sleep.

When it just started to dawn, she finally went to sleep. I unwrapped her hands from my neck, looked at her for a few moments, then left the room.

The next day, without saying a word to anyone, I left New York. I only wrote to the father, that I had been offered a good job in the West, and that I was leaving.



And to be right and proper, I must tell you that in the several years that I have been away from New York, I have not for a single day forgot about Hannele; and I will not forget her...

Have I been brutal? For sure. But what could I have done in such a situation? I, too, had begun to wonderfully, passionately fall in love.

And today I return from my exile, full of hope and with a pounding heart, to see Hannele once again; To see her at twenty-one years!... She has not married yet. From time to time I would receive a letter from the father, whenever one of his daughters got married or gave birth to a child.

How Hannele will welcome me, I have no idea. But I am going to New York to see my old student, Hannele.



# Shalita

The first time I saw her in Palestine I was a student at the Bezalel school. She had been in nearly every colony. We ran into each other again in Egypt, in Paris and now in New York. One of my friends met her in Argentina; one of the writers I know knew her from Warsaw, Vilna, Vienna and other big cities.

In every city where she was people talked about her a lot. Women, from the start would be standoffish to her, and later they would soften toward her. Men fell in love. She would have her “adventure” then move on without even saying a final “stay healthy.”

I have no idea if her name was truly Shalita. No one knew her family name. When people pressed her, she would tell such wonderful lies that fine, normal respectable people’s hair would turn upside down.

She was beautiful, but not by the European understanding of beautiful: She was dark, her chin a little too prominent, full lips, sensual, and stark coral in color; She was of average height, a little too plump, but her limbs were shapely and her hands and feet small; because her skin was so dark, her teeth and the whites of her eyes were all the more striking.

She spoke Hebrew, Arabic and nearly all world languages nearly fluently, and with a nice intonation. She was always poorly dressed, but with an oriental flavor: She wore round, gold earrings, a lot of jewelry in silver and gold in primitive Italian and Spanish style. She smoked an awful lot, and could drink a lot of wine when she could get it. And Shalita always managed to get a lot of wine to drink...

I was not interested in her pedigree. She is a good companion to spend the night with under the open sky. She can smoke instead of eat... She would share the last bit of tobacco with anyone, and could also take your last cigarette. Once, when I didn’t want to give her my last cigarette, after I had smoked all of the others, she smacked me hard in the nose and took the last one from me. I felt wronged and was angry with her, she just laughed good-naturedly. She usually kept us supplied with tobacco and food. Where she got it from was a mystery... She once broke the bones of a young sentimental lover who was an ardent idealist about “truth and honor,” because he had spied on her to find out where she often disappeared to for several days.

What I want to tell you about is our meeting in New York. I will not idealize her, and not criticize her, simply tell the story:

We met there as good, old friends. Once during a literary evening, I looked around and Shalita was there! It was like she had fallen out of the sky. She greeted me like we had just seen each other yesterday; with no enthusiasm whatsoever. Shalita gave everyone the impression of a cold, unmoving creature: She is lazy, relaxed and can sit for hours in one place smoking. But she can suddenly move with the power and the impulse of a tiger when just moving from one chair to another.

The attendees for the evening were: Writers, painters, social workers and those who are active around them. A few radicals, a couple of elderly intellectuals, and a couple of art patrons.

Shalita was a hit. She sang new Hebrew songs, Arabic folk songs, and her body subtly moved in rhythm with the music.

The manufacturer, Rosenbloom with his wife, were in the audience. Madam Rosenbloom is a pale, thin woman with a long narrow neck and gray mono-colored eyes, but with a very modest appearance. He, Rosenbloom, is a healthy, full-blooded man, radical, intelligent and with a financier instinct, which she, his wife, did not have... He would silently, and secretly, dream of beautiful, healthy women, orgies and pleasures.

When he saw Shalita that evening, he immediately fell in love with her. The artists tried to draw her attention to themselves: some with moody songs, and others with haughty discussions of all the arts. Rosenbloom offered wine and more wine with a free hand... Shalita soon got the young men and women together and saw to it that he should deal out enough wine so that the whole artistic group would be able to happily continue drinking.

Rosenbloom always had success with women: He is handsome, a sport, and all of his wife's friends were in love with him. That gave him the courage to turn to Shalita on the sly:

"Shalita, my beautiful Gypsy! Would you like to go for a drive with me one day in my automobile? I'll take a vacation."

Shalita measured him with her eyes and said:

"Yes, if you will bring your best cigarettes and a lot, I mean a lot of wine to drink, then I will go with you."

"When?"

"In about a couple of days."

He suddenly saw his wife's knowing look and he froze.

Shalita quickly got up, and in her usual way came over to sit beside me, and began to talk to me in an openhearted and confidential tone.

"Nu, how do you find life here in New York. Do you work a little?"

"It is going good for me. If I only had fifty dollars to buy frames for my paintings, I could have an exhibition..."

"If I had fifty dollars," The poet L... yelled out loud with enthusiasm, "I would publish a beautiful book of songs, even though what I really need is a warm coat and shoes..."

"And do you always have tobacco for your pipe?" Shalita asked me mysteriously and confidentially.

"Cafe people always need to smoke," I answered.

We did not speak any more about it. Afterwards I saw her nearly every day in the cafe, then suddenly she disappeared.

One evening in late autumn I was sitting with L... in my studio. It was raining outside and we did not want to go to the cafe. First we heard a sudden knock on the door, and then in walked Shalita, rain-soaked and tired. She drove L... from the sofa and laid down.

After a couple of minutes she took from her bosom a small purse of money and said lazily:

“I’ve got a hundred and twenty-five dollars with me.” Then she tossed me fifty, the way one tosses a bit of food to a hungry cat, and the same amount to the poet L..., in spite of the fact that she had only ever seen him a couple of times. That left her with twenty-five dollars.

“You,” she had turned to me, “must see about purchasing frames and have an exhibition. And you, she said turning to L..., your songs won’t run away, buy yourself a coat and shoes.”

My friend, the poet, was shortsighted enough to pose a question:

“Where did you get so much money?”

The whites of her eyes and her teeth flashed on her dark face, and she made a movement from the sofa to get up. I started to tremble. I thought she was going to punch him. L... is a fragile young man with a sunken chest, and Shalita is strong as a brick wall.

She saw my fright, laughed and said:

“Oh, I’ll tell you. In the couple of days that I was gone, I wandered over empty fields and forests. On a rocky, sandy path I saw an old, ugly wizard. When he saw me, he smiled. He had two large teeth in his mouth, and from his two red eyes fell tear drops. You, beautiful woman, take me and kiss me,” he called out to me. “No, you old wizard, Shalita only kisses those who are young and handsome and strong,” I said to him. “From your kiss I will become young and handsome and strong,” “No, you old wizard, I will not kiss you,” I teased him. “I can strike the large stone with my staff, and it will yield up diamonds, jewels and American dollars,” he said to me with a cackling laughter. “I want to see that with my own eyes, you old wizard!” And he did so. I grabbed the hundred and twenty-five dollars and ran away...

Shalita tossed away the cigarette she had been smoking. She had worn herself out telling us her little story. She turned to the wall and went to sleep.

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When the money was spent she said to me with a ringing laughter:

“I went away with Rosenbloom. We stayed overnight in a hotel. We drank a frightening amount of wine, smoked and ate. He went to sleep and I counted the money in his pockets. When morning came I made sure that he did not have to spend much. When it was very early, I let him sleep and I went out for a walk. The second night went like this: Early on, I took the money, leaving him enough to get home. I went for another walk and this time did not come back..”

“That sounds a lot like the truth,” I said to her.

Shalita was offended and answered:

“Shalita only tells lies when people ask her things...”

“And you do not want to be disagreeable?”

“Oh, he is a gentleman and a smart boy! If he didn’t have so much money, he would be a wonderful guy. You will see with how courteously I will go to greet him, if I run in to him in the cafe.

# The Oldest Daughter

It was quiet all day in the room. The four daughters and the youngest son, Sammy, were at work. The old man had set up the oven, the Mama had put supper together, and when she was done, she sat down in her cushioned chair with the foot rest.

For her part, she wanted to nag the old man about why he wasn't out looking for husbands for the daughters. – Wasn't she healthy, without rheumatism in her feet, and when she was out in public men looked at her. Why were there so many young girls in America? She is being punished by there being so many marriageable young women, which the local wise men don't understand.

And in the evening, when the four daughters and the youngest son were set free from their workplaces, the Mama cried out: "The gates of Gehenna have opened up!"

For several years the other three daughters had waited for Hannah, the oldest. She should be the first to marry, they all thought: It does not look right for the younger ones to marry first... But, when it began to look like the wait was never going to end, they began to think about themselves. Because, each of them wanted to escape from the crowded living space; from the grumbling mother and the foolish father.

For the three daughters it was time to get married; and for Hannah, the oldest, it was way past time. The youngest, Evelyn, already had a boyfriend, but she had never brought him into the house. The Mama would have chewed them both up and spit them out.

Between the eldest daughter and the Mama, the relationship was not good. The mother was always whining that nursing all of the daughters had ruined her health, and Hannah, silent and morose, gritted her teeth against all that befell her. She was a reddish blonde. She looked neither young nor old, like a fruit at the end of summer which had matured to ripeness under the sun.

Suddenly, a young man burst into the room. He came to see Frieda; the second from the youngest. The room was a mess! But Frieda showed them his bank book, and yelled out that it was good fortune for him and for her. The mother and father agreed, and Frieda became a fiancée. After that Evelyn brought her young man to the house. Young, with a milky complexion, and barely visible mustache. Both of them worked up their courage and said that they were engaged. At a gesture by Evelyn, he brought into the room a greener cousin lately arrived in America, and in two shakes there was a marriage contract between him and Etle, the second eldest next to Hannah.

This was the start of some bad days for Hannah after all three of her sisters were engaged. The house became even more constricted for her. In the evening or on the Sabbath and Sunday, she did not know where to be. If she went into her bedroom, she would find Frieda laying on the bed, her fiancé sitting with her and stroking her head. If she went into the "front room," Evelyn would be pounding on the piano, and teaching her beau how to dance. In the kitchen Etle would be sitting with her greener drinking tea with jam chatting about what the world was doing. And when she came into a room they would shoot her an unfriendly look as though to say, "I am sitting with my fiancé, you shouldn't come in here."

Even worse than all that, was to look at her Mother. With gray, darting eyes in her sickly yellow face, she looked at Hannah with a glance which spoke with ill humor: "Didn't want to follow a mother's

advice? In your younger years none pleased you! You wanted to look too high... You wouldn't lower your sights a little bit... Now you are left sitting, an old maid..."

Also, Hannah did not have any friends, all of them had married and had forgotten about her. She could only leave the house and go sit alone on a bench and wait until the fiancés had to go home.

Hannah only had one hope left: Once the three sisters were finally married she would once again have a place in the house...

The marriages happened one after the other. In the course of two years her hopes had come true. Her three sisters flew away to their own nests.

They took a smaller apartment. The elder mother and father and the youngest sibling. By now he was a twenty-year-old young man. He worked and was devoted to Hannah. She was like a mother to him... Everything was about Hannah. Hannah, how do you like my suit? Hannah, are you pleased with my hat? And Hannah, give me this or that. He looked at the old mother like an old bubbie who had to be in the house, sighing and devouring their lives.

The sickly, old Mama was very bitter about it. How could it be that her youngest son, her one and only son, never came to her? Whenever he needed something he turned to her, to Hannah... Like she didn't even exist in the world... Even the one thing, the most sacred thing for a mother to give to her child, food, had been taken from her by Hannah...

"You sit, no need to mix in, I will get Sammy something to eat," Hannah would say to her when Mama started to get up and head to the kitchen to make Sammy a meal.

And Sammy had, indeed, wanted Hannah to cook for him. Because Mama had never, ever shook the crumbs from the tablecloth or given him a napkin.

But there was one thing that Hannah never took from Mama's hand: Feeding Papa. That was left for her to do. She felt that this was the only reason left that she had to live in this world: To give her husband, the father, something to eat... Taking the father's food to the table, she always looked at Hannah victorious: Na, see, I am still the woman of the house; without me, who would feed Papa?...

Hannah and the Mama never spoke with one another. They were like two strangers in the same room. Two women: One who had had a lot of children and married them off, and the other, a barren woman... And the two could not make peace with one another...

Hannah, no longer worked in the shop, she ran the house.

On the days when she brought the washing in from the line, pressed them, and folded the father's and the brother's underwear, she felt like a wife... She did the duties of a wife... Pressing and folding men's clothing and mending socks. The duty of every wife... When sewing on buttons, she always cast a look at the Mother, sitting there, out of place, with one hand in the other, and she stitched just like her mother with her own eyes gray and darting: "Since you are already far too old, and can no longer do this, I have to do it." And the Mother with the same eyes as the Daughter: Bitter, gray, with tiny black pinpoint in them, would shoot a look back: "You rip the work out of my hands!... No one needs me anymore! No one needs me anymore... Such a thing! She takes the work from my very hands!"...

The Mother and the Daughter make each other understood with only their eyes, they have no need to talk...

And Hannah, while darning her brother's socks, worried about what would happen if her brother got married, and she would have to remain home alone with Mama and Papa... Moments would come when she would forget about being left behind at home... Sometimes Sammy would need to make a decision about something and ask for Hannah's advice... He was that dependent on her, and on those occasions she felt that she really was his mother. Had she not been the one to raise him?...

There came to her some wonderful moments, her work gave her such magic moments. In the weave of the socks were also woven such fine stories also... And for hour after hour she daydreamed. She did not see or hear the Mother, she was fully occupied with something... Into the house would come something much better, more wholesome... And things would be better with her. It would express itself as more kindness. Even with the Mama, she would be more kind... He would be a widower, and have a small child... She would take the child in hand and became its mother, she hold it close and the child would stroke her face with its tiny hands. That sweetness went straight to her heart. And when she mended his clothes and applied patches, the stitching was very fine and the patches so thin with tiny stitches. And the meals? You could smell the food on the table from the next room... And all around the room there was a good feeling and stillness, and one would say: "Hannah, do you have a pair of socks for me? Perhaps there are socks, clean, attractive, fine and thin!" And he would ask again: "Hannah it is mid-morning, I am ready to go to the table... And things would also be better with her mother. She would place her head in her Mother's lap, and cry her eyes out, cry from joy, and whisper a secret in her ear, and her Mother would be very happy... Such happiness... And she would say: "My daughter and my prayers had been heard by God... A grandchild..."

"Enough already, you'll go blind," she suddenly heard her mother's voice, as though coming from somewhere in the distance, "It is growing dark, and you don't have glasses to put on!..."

Just that, "you don't have any," enraged Hannah like a hellish fire, and all the gall and bitterness in her ignited. She felt like she could now strike the Mother. She wanted to hit her!... To punch her again and again in the stomach, and with each blow say: "Na, it's because of you that I remain an old maid until my braids turn gray! You children needed nursing! In my younger years not letting me make pretty clothes... Never let me dress up, but made me sew nice clothes for your daughters so that they could get husbands... Na, and enough!..."

But Hannah bit her lips. She remained silent... She answered only: Don't you bother about my eyes! Who would do the work? You, maybe?"

"I am really something evil to you, this old woman is an enemy to you, your sick Mama, huh? Soon, soon I will be gone from this world, will that be better for you?... A life sacrificed for four daughters, and now the old Mama is useless..."

But Hannah bit her thin lips, clinched her teeth, and kept silent.

And both women looked at each other hostile, and full of sadness.



# A Strange House

Rebekah had the best room in the house.

Rebekah, a single woman, who for years had worked hard working at a news stand in the open air... Her face burnt and darkened by the sun, wind and rain like the bark of an oak tree. Her hair – showed itself as a muddy blonde, as though it had forgotten to turn gray... She wore spectacles, smoked and always kept a little cat. Not so much because she loved cats, but it was just to have something to get mad at, punish and to love. One might say that she even disliked cats, but her cat was more dear to her than life itself.

She was always fighting with people, because she had a habit of telling them the truth right to their face. She did not deceive herself, and could not stand it when other people deceived themselves... However, Rebekah was a good person. – Always ready to do others a good deed. Not stingy, people really liked her in spite of her eccentricities.

In another room – always behind a closed door – lived Sonya, a quiet, single woman with a bird-like nose who never looked anyone in the eye. She had her “friend.” She only went into the common room when she had tea for herself or her friend.

Sonya and Rebekah were together. Some time ago Rebekah said to Sonya that it would be nicer and easier if her “friend” would join her in the same room rather than coming over all day and half the night – and instead of paying rent, to deny the landlady a few dollars.

In the third room were two sisters from Pinsk. Hinde, the oldest – a very proud woman, with red hair and a blue-white complexion. Her background is that she refused marriage with a rich widower because he did not have a pedigree; Becky – – A healthy young girl with a reddish complexion and a pair of reddish hands.

A fourth room was not lucky enough to have a regular Boarder. All sorts of misfortune churned within. Either one would come who expected the world to rescue him, or one who preached that: One should let the world destroy itself, because that is where it is headed... Neither one of these types of problem boarders paid any rent, and a third and a fourth had to be kicked out...

So, each time the room was vacant the single ladies would wait in hopeful anticipation – perhaps this time a good fish would swim to out to their shore... Except for Sonya, she did not bother herself about it, she had her “friend.”

The landlady herself, Sophie Kravitz, came to America after having spent a year in a Russian prison for political reasons.

She and Rebekah knew each other from Minsk, where they had both belonged to the “Alliance;” but there they only knew each other at a distance. Sophie was younger, an activist, and Rebekah was more distant from the movement.

In New York they became good friends. Sophie threw herself into the movement, became a party member in the Worker’s Ring, Rebekah dismissed the local movement with a wave of the hand – To

her it lacked the Russian truth and the Russian earnestness... She secretly hoped for a little personal happiness... She was more involved with herself than others.

Rebekah and Sophie had worked together and gone to meetings. Rebekah never met a decent man at the meetings – The intelligentsia wanted to be on board with the workers, the workers wanted to buy on time and they couldn't close the deal... Sophie got to know Boris, a young man who collected "accounts" and should have been studying law. In the beginning she found Boris disagreeable. She did not like "professionals." – A man should work for the party, for the organization and not look to make a career for himself.

And yet, the thought to be done with working in a shop, and become a lawyer's wife, had sweetly sneaked into the soul of the dry, woman of the movement. Sophie, whose thoughts had always revolved around the words: Struggle, organization, terror and conspiracy, had quickly made peace with the words: Love, home, child and kitchen. It did not take long for Sophie and Boris to take an apartment as "friends."

Boris was always standoffish from the common workmen. But Sophie was a good earner and that was sufficient for the both of them. Boris wore his hair longer than the average person, always wearing soft silk neckties, with white, clean hands and well manicured nails.

A pince nez on his classic nose differentiated him from the common man. He always proclaimed: That he had French mannerisms, a big Russian heart and a clever Jewish brain.

Not a full year went by before Sophie was ready to give birth. She went to a state hospital, and there gave birth to a baby girl. She stayed there two weeks. She spent two more weeks at home then went back to work in the shop. Early each morning she would take the baby to a nursery, and in the evening after work she would take the baby back home.

Her life was going very well, and that lasted a year and a half. Sophie worked and did not complain, Boris was intelligent and loving, and Sophie had a second child. She could not go to the hospital, there was nowhere that could take the first child.

Rebekah was able to come to her aid with money and help in the home. They took a dwelling, and Sophie rented the rooms, collected the rent and did the cooking. She was able to have the child in her own home.

Sophie did the washing and housecleaning from early until into the evening. Boris had even worked a little bit, but it hardly kept him in smokes, shaves and silk ties.

Boris began to bend under the pressures. The children crowded him and his activities... He came to see that men should never get married. His spirit, his soul were crippled and the beautiful, lofty dreams and ambitions were hacked down like young saplings... All of that had become crystal clear to him. She had worn out all of her charms working in the shop, going all hours, and gave up staying in clean, fashionable clothes.

Being a basically lazy person, he wondered at how she could get up so early in the morning. After a night of mothering the children, she got up fresh and chipper, carrying the children off and going to work. Or, in the cold, gray early mornings she would spring from her warm bed, wash up with cold

water. He, on the other hand, would snuggle down in the warm covers, and go back to sleep. In those times he loved her and had a lot of respect for her.

Now, however, she was always busy in the kitchen, poorly dressed, the children pestering her and whining while she yelled at them. He ceased to see her as an equal. Sophie felt the change in his attitude and it scared her to death – Her handsome Boris could leave her! She began showing him more affection and devotion, until he was deeply moved by it, and promised never to leave her, as long as she was not a disturbance in his life.

He had totally stopped working. He slept half the day, came to eat supper, and then was gone for the rest of the evening. In the heart of the unmarried Rebekah there grew an anger against both of them. She began to open Sophie's eyes and tell her the truth...

In the evenings they would sit together and talk so that no one could hear them:

“If your “little friend” wants to come to you from time to time, what would be the purpose? You will have one child after another after another. He will grow younger and more handsome, and you – an old Jewish lady with wrinkles and gray hair. You should drive him out like a dog and raise your children!”

At first Sophie got angry with Rebekah. “Indeed! How can you say such a thing?!” For a few days Sophie wouldn't talk to Rebekah. Then, the next evening when Rebekah pointed out how he was living and how she was living, Sophie broke down in tears and conceded that Rebekah was right. A couple more days passed and Sophie found the courage to talk to Boris.

She remarked to him that he should get a job and earn money on his own. Boris looked at Sophie like she was crazy. “Why this all of a sudden?” he asked, becoming suspicious that Rebekah had some hand in it. Later, with tears in her eyes, she bid him to leave. She could work and earn enough for the children, but not for everybody. As for leaving...he wouldn't hear of it. What was he, a scoundrel, a ne'er-do-well, that he should leave his wife and children?... And above all, how could he live without his children?

Boris tried placate Rebekah. He gave Sophie friendly looks, made a point of touching her as they passed, spent a couple of nights at home because of her instead of going out. All as if to say that he was still deeply in love with her...

Rebekah understood his game. She knew that he did all of that, the lazy bum, for a piece of bread and a place to live. She began to curse him, and make the house feel more crowded. He was afraid of her and ashamed. He had to pack up his silk neckties and leave the house.

After a half year he showed up again. He came to see the children... While there he told Sophie that he had landed a good position as bookkeeper with a big corporation. At the moment he only had enough money for carfare and lunch. He wanted to stay overnight so that he wouldn't be late for his first day of work.

At first Sophie was on board and ready to make him breakfast and lunch to take with him. She tiptoed in to wake him, but didn't have the heart. He was so handsome and sleeping so carefree – His black hair on the white pillow, his noble face. It was, after all, her handsome Boris... How she loved him then. In that moment she forgave him everything... She bent over to awaken him with a kiss. Half awake and half asleep, he pulled her into bed and whispered in her ear:

“It doesn’t matter Sophie, I can go to work at midday...”

When she heard Rebekah stirring, Sophie sprung from the bed, ashamed, and began making breakfast for Rebekah.

But Rebekah did not have a single word to say to her, and did not look in her direction. She also did not touch her breakfast.

At midday, Boris left for a couple of hours. When he returned he said that the job would be starting in a week.

That whole week was like a honeymoon.

Rebekah didn’t talk to either of them. In the evening when she returned from her newsstand, she ate dinner in an angry silence, then took the cat with her into her room.

Two weeks passed, and everything had returned to the old routine. Sophie wept to Rebekah that she did not now have the strength to work like she did before. Rebekah once again came to her aid, and told Boris to get out.

The same story repeated itself a couple of months later. Boris came back with an impending job. Rebekah grabbed a broom and in a shrieking voice she screamed:

“Get out of our house you ne’er-do-well! You come here to take the last bit of bread from your children! Get out! If you show up again I will break your back and legs!”

He never returned.

Two years passed. Sophie was a little more like herself. When she got a few dollars she bought a red blouse for herself, a red dress for Olga, and a red ribbon for little Matvitshik. So, the red clothes were the last things left from the Movement and Social Revolution.

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It happened that the room was once again without a boarder. The women were once again hoping and waiting: Perhaps a nice fish will swim to our shore.

Sophie, Rebekah and Hinde were at home every evening – there was nowhere to go. Sonya always sat by herself, behind a closed door, with her friend, and Becky couldn’t stand having Hinde in the house. All three were uneasy and longed for a new person to take the empty room...

Every afternoon and the same every evening, both Rebekah and Hinde would ask:

“Nu, any news, is the room rented?”

Then, one evening, Sophie ran to Rebekah hurriedly and said to her that the room was rented.

“Really, who? A man?”

“Yes, but not one of us,” Sophie answered, “I could not wait any longer.”

“So what? He will pay more punctually and stay longer...”

“Nevertheless...”

“What nevertheless! Don’t be a fool!” said Rebekah angrily, “With comrades it is good to share part of the leviathan after the social revolution, but not to live together with them. Much less you?!”

Sophie could find nothing to say to counter the “Much less you.”

After she had spoken about the comrades, Rebekah’s face became even more bitter. The gray eyes behind the spectacles flashed with rage and her jawbone was equally angry! Her spoke with bitterness. And Sophie knew that she had better not get in her way.

After a few moments Sonya came in. Sophie also told her the news, that the room had been rented. Sonya was indifferent to the news and went to her room.

Hinde and Becky came in arguing. Becky had learned a street song in the shop, and Hinde could not stand the fresh lyrics that Becky wanted to sing. She struck a suggestive pose and with hoochie coochie gestures she sang:

O, my love, will you please,  
Pull down the curtain!

Her shapely body turned and her arms moved as though throwing her arms around a boyfriend as she ended:

O, my love, don’t you see,  
I’m madly flirtin’!

Hinde let out a wild cry and grabbing a broom she said:

“Becky, stop! I’ll brain you with this broom! How impudent! Aren’t you ashamed to sing such a song!?!...”

Rebekah agreed with Hinde, but when she saw Sonya had left and couldn’t hear Becky sing, she mimicked the performance for her.

After supper Becky went out. Sonya went to her room, and Rebekah and Hinde helped Sophie wash the dishes and clean the room. All three stayed to wait for the new boarder. They all waited together, and each for their own self...

Around nine o’clock he arrived. He was a lean, short little man in a bright, light overcoat; a strange smile was on his face, a smile from one ear to the other. His eyes were like muddy water, with a reservoir of fear in them; he was bald, had a flat nose, and his red cheeks did not add any charms to him.

Rebekah and Hinde were disappointed: No nice fish had swum to their shore.

Sophie introduced him as Mr. Myerovitz, and they immediately invited him to tea.

In his honor all three sat at the table and drank tea with jam.

Myerovitz drank his tea in silence and with a strange smile as he looked around.

Rebekah smoked, petting the cat sitting in her lap, and from time to time took a sip of tea.

Hinde nervously stirred her tea clinking her spoon on the sides of the glass, and Sophie drank hers in small gulps.

A strange, thick silence hung in the air. A silence that felt like, some one was about to say something, but the words would not slip from the tongue... Even little Matvitshik, who was always whining or crying, stayed quiet and looked around strangely.

The silence endured until Hinde, just to have something to say to break the silence, blurted out:

“Rebekah, won’t you ever put down that nasty cat!”

“People are nasty, not cats!” said Rebekah, offended, and looked at Myerovitz.

“Cats are not loyal!” Hinde said in her defense.

“That’s what people think who are themselves disloyal and common. Cats have feelings, cats are thankful...” Rebekah said, holding the cat closer to her.

Hinde did not respond.

“Take, for example, a man,” Rebekah continued growing more angry and bitter, “A man who idly roams the streets. Give him something to eat, clothes; he becomes your friend, you love him... With your help he becomes a doctor, a rabbi, he plays a role in the neighborhood and – afterwards he doesn’t recognize you on the street...”

Sophie and Hinde knew what she meant and who she meant...

Rebekah held the cat and petted it even more.

Myerovitz, who this whole time had remained silent with a smile on his face unaware, suddenly let out a hoarse, hacking, unending laugh:

“She is right! Who are the snitches, spies, traitors, provocateurs. Men or cats? Who buried the revolution in Russia, who?”

Everyone looked at him with their eyes aghast. But he kept on talking:

“I lived with my “tovarish,” and when we argued, he went to the police station on the corner. He told them I had taken part in the movement to kill von Pleve, and now there is not a single policeman in New York who doesn’t know it. There! That’s what men can do!...”

Sophie and Hinde did not understand what was going on with him. But Rebekah began to turn very unfriendly.

Myerovitz, after firing off that cannon shot, once again fell into a silence, with a smile on his face like a carved idol, looking innocent.

A silence once again fell upon the room.

Sophie took the child to put it to bed.

Hinde suspected that Becky had gone to the movies with a boy from the shop that Hinde did not like. She grabbed a scarf and went to look for her.

Rebekah was left alone with Myerovitz.

After a couple of minutes Sophie was snoring. Little Matvitshik slipped out of his bed, and ran to Rebekah and climbed up onto her lap.

“Would you believe it,” Myerovitz turned to her with a secret, “Would you believe it? It is true, I knew about everything, and more than just knew... And in 1905 I played an important role in the revolution, knew everything that was happening in the C.K. But I did not help with the assassination plot. And do you think that my real name is Myerovitz? No one in the world shall know my real name. If it were known, I would be lost!...”

Certainly Rebekah believed everything he said, and that it was all true. But her fear grew by the minute; she wished that Hinde would come back up, anything so that she would not have to sit alone with this man.

Hinde and Becky did return soon, arguing and cursing; little Matvitshik was screeching, it was quite a tumult. In all of the hoo-ha Sophie got up from bed with tousled hair.

Myerovitz thought that the whole house had gone crazy so he went and hid in his room.

By midnight everyone had gone to sleep. But Rebekah could not go to sleep, she had this illusion... That Myerovitz had slipped out of bed and was watching her through the keyhole... And that from there he might storm into her room... Trembling, she got out of bed and pushed the table and chairs against the door to barricade herself in the room.

Myerovitz was also not sleeping. He was thinking about what a strange house he had fallen into: The landlady in the red blouse, who looked so intensely at him... The stillness behind the closed doors, which had every few minutes, like a bird, swept in dreamlike after a glass of tea... The red Hinde, who nervously clinked her spoon in the tea glass, the sister with the pair of strong fists; and her, with the cat... What does she want? What is she doing behind that door?... Is she going to storm into my room?!... With that thought he sprung from his bed, quickly got dressed, packed his valise and opened the door that led into the corridor. After that preparation, he wasn't so frightened and he went to her door. He looked through a crack in the door and began to yell at her:

“Aha! You wanted to storm into my room, ostensibly listening to me talk about my revolutionary activity, and all the time knowing who I am? But I know you!... They have sent sharper people than

you after me: Beautiful German baronesses, Parisian dancers, and even true kosher Jewish daughters. But I know you! I know you and hate you!... You think you can calmly spy on me! You want to find out if I really killed von Plevé, ha?!..."

Blurting out that last question, he rushed out of the house.

Rebekah breathed a sigh of relief. She closed the door. She was very happy that no one in the house heard the outburst and made a fuss. Even Hinde who never slept, did not hear.

She smoked a cigarette. The cat knew that now she could sit in Rebekah's lap again. Rebekah began to think of the movement as a huge ruin: Collapsed in on itself... Everything broken... This generation would not rise up. Madmen! Total madmen...

And the heart and soul of this callous woman of the movement, wept for the movement. She also wept for her played-out life, and those tears mixed with the others.

The next morning: Sophie, Rebekah, and Hinde agreed that the front room was a schlimazel, and the whole house was strange... And when they said that in front of Sonya, she stared at them with the air of a strange startled bird, and said nothing.



# Respect

Gossie and Sam fought simply because she, Gossie, secretly liked to squabble with Sam. Afterwards he would apologize and be sweet as honey. If a week would go by without an argument, he would forget that he was in love with her... But this time Sam was enraged at his young wife and did not apologize.

Gossie was burning like she was on fire; It was impossible for her to be in the house. Coming back from going to work, she would eat, pace like a boarder, read the newspaper, play with the children, but she would not look at him.

It was early Sunday morning. Sam did not have to go to work. He put on his Sunday suit with a new necktie, and with a close shave, he looked as handsome as in his younger years. That made her so upset that she didn't prepare breakfast, did not clean the house, and went around angry with her hair uncombed. On top of that she did not let go of her child's hand for a minute. She couldn't even find time to fasten her shoes.

Suddenly, another wave of rage arose in her. She let go of her child's hand, gave him an angry shove and yelled:

"Go to your father, go, he can hold your hand with the one he tore from me!"

The child cried, and the father took him lovingly, and threw a poisonous look at Gossie.

"If only you had a mama who was a good housewife..."

"You're not pleased? You should have taken that greenhorn, your cousin. She would have been a good housewife..."

Sam Leibowitz came here as a child, he grew up in the narrow streets of New York. Doing hard work, good work, and nasty work, he did not become a respectable boy. But a respectability did grow in him due to his cousin, Hannah. An older girl, not pretty and a poor person in New York. He felt sorry for her because she had not married, and had to work so hard in a shop. She felt sorry for him because he was raised without parents and was so abandoned. She always tried to tell him about his family and the homeland, how lovely it was to live there in a tiny shtetl. He felt proud of his family, and Hannah gave him love like a good sister.

"Leave Hannah alone, you hear!" he said getting even angrier, "She is my cousin and living in misery there... She does better than this dirty house and the way you look!..."

"You and your cousin are evil demons..."

Sam leapt up in a rage, and with the child in one hand, he smacked Gossie with the other.

Gossie began to scream:

"Gewalt, someone save me! My husband wants to kill me dead! Gewalt! Call the police!"

Sam left the room, closing the door, put down the crying child. When he saw Gossie standing there with a shoe in her hand, about to throw it at his head, he blocked it and drug her into the bedroom. He threw her down on the unmade bed face down on the pillows and cold-bloodedly beat her mercilessly. It took all of Gossie's strength to turn over and face him. She was not screaming any more. She was too shocked. She looked with a deadly horror at his blood-splattered face, and his wild eyes. She instinctively looked at his face to see if he was planning to kill her.

"Sam let me up, you will end up killing me!" she said, crying. She threw her arms around his neck pressing herself against him hoping to change the murderous intent in him into passionate desire for her...

He threw her back down on the bed and, with full disdain he went into the dining room.

His every limb was trembling; It was the first time he had ever struck her... Up to this point he had never laid a finger on her. He had struck his wife... his Gossie; He was confused and shocked.

Gossie leapt from the bed energized, and with a tiger's agility she grabbed the child and house keys, put on her shoes, and was out and down the steps.

Sam was sure that she was going for a policeman to have him arrested. His first thought was to run away. But he did not stir from the spot; hitting his wife, he would not deny it, he would not run away, it would be what it would be... He sat there and waited. One hour passed then two and Gossie did not return with a policeman. Sam was tortured by remorse, he remembered how well his sister and brother lived together at home.

Night fell, no policeman had come for him and Sam was beginning to feel more respect for Gossie...

He took off his Sunday clothes. Even though he was hungry, he laid down to go to sleep. Sleep would not come to him, the hunger and remorse would not leave him...

Around midnight he heard Gossie and the child return. He pretended to be asleep to see what she would do. She put the child down in its cradle, and a little later he could smell the aromas of sweet pickles and coffee. His hunger was gnawing at him painfully, but he was afraid to stir from bed or to move. He waited like a cat to see what she would do. He heard her lay down in the bed fully dressed on the edge of the mattress. After a little while, very slowly, she drew nearer to him. He continued to pretend to be asleep and sighed as though sleeping. Then she drew even closer with her cheek against his. A shudder went through his body out of desire for her. But he pretended to sleep...

"Sam," she said to him with tenderness and love.

He got up and took her in his hands like she was a little child. He danced her around kissing her and crying from happiness and joy.

"Gossie, my darling girl!" he called to her, thrilled.

"Like a true American girl! You took the blows like a heroine in a story, I love you! I love you today more than ever!"

She rested happily in his arms. One eye was black and blue and swollen shut, but with the other she looked at him with pure delight.

“You are so strong, Sam, like a prize fighter! I spent the whole day without being able to move a limb due to the pain. My father wanted to come and fight you!... He certainly would have gone but my stepmother and I stopped him. I lay there and thought how much love you would have for me when I came home...

He kissed her with wild passion, and complemented her.

“You are your father’s daughter! He raised you with the sting of a whip! Like a teamster’s daughter! And like a true American girl!”

Just before daybreak they ate super, happily talking and cackling with laughter. She remember how he broke Mike’s bones, because she went to a dance with him. Her left eye twinkled, dark and full of fire. Her right eye was shut due to the swelling. She was happy. Their love had stopped cooling off, and now it was like before; the tenderness of their time as newlyweds, and the unbridled love of their first days of married life. Gossie was proud, and happy and looked with pride at her battered eye. It was the first time she had received a blow from her husband... And... It wasn’t such a dangerous thing... Now she didn’t feel any pain... And the eye that was blue? She would find an excuse for it in the morning... And how Sam would treat her!... Tomorrow they would go to the movies, he wouldn’t go out to play pinochle all evening and leave her alone...

In the morning Sam got up to go to work, it was bright in every corner of the room. A good breakfast was ready and waiting for him. Gossie was done up in a pretty kimono and happy. At first he looked away from her blue, bruised eye, but soon he got accustomed to it and it did not bother him. Gossie, on the other hand, wanted him to look at her with her damaged eye. With any other wife he would surely be in trouble... But for her part it was worth two times nothing... And she knew that he was extremely proud of her, and both felt like it was the day after their wedding...

# Muddled

Shechna loved to go walking in cemeteries. Because of that his friends would say of him: He is muddled, a little odd in the head, not playing with a full deck. The usual words thrown his way by everyone did not include “meshugge, crazy,” but also he was not like everyone else.

Shechna, on the other hand, took himself to be something of a philosopher, and he did not bother himself about what others said about him... Actually, he rather enjoyed it.

People naturally loved to hear what someone who was a little odd in the head had to say. Sometimes people like that would say something clever... Ordinary people only repeated things that wise men had already said long ago...

People go to parks, to green woodlands looking for peace and quiet, beauty. Shechna found all of that in cemeteries...

He did not have any friend or neighbor in the New York cemeteries; he also didn't have any in the city...

Shechna had the feeling that some rather strange thoughts had planted themselves in his mind, thoughts – thoughts that would not clarify themselves, and would not go away with the wave of a hand – they persisted as he went through the cemeteries. There his head was somewhat lighter, so clear and pure and there were answers to a lot of things...

Was life such a great pleasure?.. Was it such a good deal to be born?

Those were the propositions rolling around in his poor mind. His mind was loaded with such questions that pressed on him like a heavy weight. He only searched for answers to those questions in his own weary mind. He thought:

“Yes, being born is a great thing, a privilege. It is a great joy to be a child... A child is above all else a spark from every wonder in the world... But when he grows up, he is nothing more than a mistake. Along comes the pain of living after being born... Then along comes death to release him from the pain... In that release is the greatest product which God has provided for mankind. God's gift to man is simply his soul, the birth of the soul in the body is the shadow. Moreover, man and soul must switch around in death from what they were in life...

Shechna waited with a certain impatience for the great moment of death... He got great pleasure in imagining the beautiful scene of his death:

He is alone at the peak of a beautiful mountain. He is looking around at a clear, wide heavens. He looks down in the valley at the people scurrying around and swarming like flies and he expires in the lofty heights... Or: He stands before a great crowd of people. He tells them how foolish life is, and how wonderful death is then – dies... Or else he lies in a small bed and looks around. He observes up to his last moment how the people hustle and bustle. He smokes his pipe and his last breath goes out through the pipe and mingles with the smoke...

There were also times when Shechna wanted to be like the others... In those times he would go to work and earn money, dress well and be a man like the other men... And when he got tired of being like everyone else, he would become the philosopher... Or, like his acquaintances would say: "Shechna has gone muddled again."

It occurred to Shechna: He would try to remember the day he was born; the first minute of life... Why should man not be able to remember this great event?

When he was a growing boy, he loved to hear his Mother tell him how he was born: "You came with a powerful cry, and the next day you were already smiling," she would say.

Why would he cry as soon as he was born? And why did he smile the very next day?... There must have been a reason for his cry and his smile. This was something very interesting to try and figure out...

To get to the bottom of it he figured that he could go to his Mother at home – She lived in the same room, even the furniture was in the same places as before – It would allow him to ponder all that had happened then and he would remember...

Once Shechna decided to go back home. He calmly went to work, and saved enough money to travel.

\* \* \* \* \*

Everything in the room was exactly like before, when he was a young child... The bed, the chest of drawers, the table, just a little older. And his Mother had grown older like the table and the bed... And Shechna thought:

"House furnishings like people grow old..."

He sat for hours in the little room and tried to remember: "There stood the bed thirty years ago, the second day of Shavuot in the evening, Mama lay in bed in labor. Tryne the midwife flitted around the room waiting for him to arrive. A little drunk, she took a bit of tobacco and waited for him... He was laying with his mother in her uterus, and he was quite content. Suddenly, it was very tight around him, he wanted to move his hand, move his foot, but there was no room. He wanted to get out. As soon as he was away from Mama's lap, until he was six years old... A chill caused him pain, a pair of big, hard hands grabbed hold of him, and that is why he cried... Yes, that's it; he had remembered... In the morning they bathed him and wrapped him in swaddling, warm and dry. They laid him at his mother's breast and he suckled. The whole process pleased him very much and he smiled."

Afterwards, once Shechna had remembered everything, he had no more desire to stay in the stetl with his old mother in that room... What's more his Mother was always looking at him with pitying eyes and crying... He was longing for the bustling New York and his return.

Once back in America he no longer thought about his Mother and his birth.. He already knew about all that...

Roaming the streets he thought hard about the strange silence which hung over the cemeteries. While they were covering a grave and everyone was turning to go home, someone suddenly pulled on his arm:

“Shechna, buy a ticket to a ball, it is for a feeble minded man. They will send him to Liberty, so that he can live there!”

“So! When they send him to Liberty he can live! Here, take fifty cents and keep the ticket.”

The young man took the money and moved on, all the while thinking, “Shechna is really muddled.”

And Shechna also moved on brooding: “When they send him to Liberty, he can live... can live...”

He soon forgot about the young man and continued on his way... He looked very carefully at the sidewalk he was on... In his very footsteps another would walk when he was here no longer. The sun would remain in the same spot in the sky, the streetcar would go by and the Jewish lady in the pharmacy with the shawl around her shoulders, possibly, would then return to buy the same item. No difference from then and now. Why walk on the sidewalk today?...

Shechna had the feeling that these thoughts were getting all tangled up in his head. The idea came to him to take a long walk in a cemetery. He gave the watchman a few cents to let him in. He went in and sat quietly by a grave.

He always chose a child’s grave, and he comforted the dead child: “You have been spared having to live through the miserable life of man. Yes, my dear, little dead child...”

He sat there for two hours, and then Shechna rose up peaceful and unburdened, and returned home.



## Breeding



# Breeding

Once in the room just a quick glance, and one could see that there lived the daughter of a comfortably wealthy father, an enlightened individual. And the mother – half housewife and half lady.

The room was carefully divided into three areas. One corner – provided with plush curtains – with a toilet mirror and provisioned with perfumes and eau de cologne. Also with a white bed, making this the bedroom. Another corner with a divan and silken cushions, a book shelf with English, German and Russian novels. There were copies of famous paintings in neat rows on the wall – The parlor; behind the hearth with green burlap and rose embroidery – the kitchen.

And Elisheba, thin, tall with a sharp, pale, noble visage, the grayish hair always exquisitely combed, done up with silk and satin. She looked like a faded aristocrat in a castle prison.

In Kovno, the city of aristocrats and haughty personages, Elisheba was reckoned as the prettiest and most successful single woman. Her embroidery was very artistic. And all of the wealthy young women tried to copy from her. In her singing, Elisheba's voice rang higher and clearer than anyone's, in dancing her feet were the lightest.

School boys, when they saw Elisheba floating lightly down the street, would respectfully stand aside, and between them they would say that when they grew up they would take for a bride a girl just like Elisheba.

As far as marriage was concerned: Whomever Elisheba wanted, the father would not permit, and whomever he chose, Elisheba would quickly rule out for marriage.

Elisheba was the only daughter among three brothers, and Mama, Papa and the brothers always gave in to her.

However, suddenly their business started to go bad. They held on as long as they could. Two of the brothers went to Africa. They sought to get rich there so that they could maintain the beautiful family home, and the beautiful family name in Kovno. The youngest son went to America, with the same goal.

The youngest brother took Elisheba with him to America.

From that time fifteen years passed. In New York the work in the shops had turned her hair gray, her face pale and withered; but Elisheba remained the same noble, pampered, well bread woman, a Jewish aristocrat.

In America, the younger brother learned the bookbinding trade. He was able to start his own business and was doing well.

He got married. He met a woman who also had a good family background, her ancestry was that she was born in Kiev itself; and was in the habit of visiting a rich aunt in Petersburg. Her name was Olga. She had long, blonde hair and knew students.



He set up a home for his wife and his sister. The in-laws argued, first in Russian and later in Yiddish. Elisheba could not stand that Olga was so vulgar in her boasting about officers and students. Olga could not bear it and hated Elisheba's noble, Lithuanian ancestry. The brother thought his sister was right; Olga answered his stance with hysterics like a Petersburg teamster and screamed that she wanted a divorce. And Elisheba set up the little room all for herself.

Now she no longer worked. Her brother gave her what she needed to live on, and from time to time the brothers in Africa sent her some money.

The younger brother felt guilty about Elisheba, that he had gotten married before her. At the very least he could take his sister out to the theater in the evenings; and he felt very proud when he was with her. In his eyes even today she was the beautiful, proud Elisheba who everyone looked at with respect in their eyes and wonder. And now either there would be a fight in the house, or he would have to lie when he wanted to spend an evening with his sister.

And Elisheba had to sit alone day and night. But silently and secretly there remained a glimmer of hope in her: There would yet come a doctor, an engineer or lawyer, with good manners, a noble man; he would treasure her, and forgive her the several years, and graying hair and they would be happy together. And her brother, the noble soul, would be the happiest in the world.

A young man came over from Kovno. In the old country he was a tanner. In London he learned the bookbinder trade. Being a Socialist, he got involved in a strike and the London police were keeping an eye on him.

There he heard about his Kovno "Landsman," his compatriot, and came to him to go to work. He, Sam Tanner, remembered Elisheba and her brother from Kovno. He was a ten-year old boy, and Elisheba at that time was a young woman of twenty years. He remembered her. He saw her in the factory, when she came to see her brother. Naturally, she did not know him and did not remember him.

Elisheba's brother loved Kovno and anyone who came from Kovno. Because of that he even invited Sam Tanner over to the house. Little by little Sam became a frequent visitor and a friend of the family.

Olga hinted to her husband, that he should see Elisheba married to him.

For a week he did not speak to her or look in her direction or take the liberty to talk to her about it. Olga, naturally, did not mean to lessen her background; She wanted Elisheba to get married and she wanted her husband to stop having to support his sister.

Olga began to talk with Sam about it; Just the thought of it made him think his head would split in two... He could not sleep all night. Him...marry Elisheba!... If he were to write about it to the people in Kovno, in their little street where he had lived, that he, Shachke Tanner, was going to marry Elisheba, Yechiel Nathanson's daughter! Kovno would go off the rails! By golly! He would do it. And they would know that in America your family background was unimportant, rich or poor, all were equal... Here the rabbi and the bath attendant are made of the same leather. But... in truth, she is ten years older than him! With gray hair... But, she is Elisheba! She was the prettiest girl in Kovno. They even talked about her high boots. He would do it. He is a Socialist, he would demonstrate that all people were equal. When Sunday came Sam put on his new blue suit, his red tie, and lacquered shoes and went to see Elisheba.

He found her sitting on the divan with a book in her hand; dressed in silk, satin and cream lace. She looked to him like a Polish aristocrat, before whom he would not even know how to bow.

He lost himself, with his head swimming he took off his hat and took her hand.

She quickly withdrew her small, thin hand from his, red and broad, and nearly round.

He reminded her that he was from Kovno, and told her everything that had transpired there since she left, who had gotten married, who had left for America, and who had fallen into destitution.

She listened to all he had to say, all the while looking at his womanly, rounded forehead, with an odd scar above his eyebrow, the red splotches on his head, the ruddy face with the thin lips, the lacquered shoes with the thick green socks. Everything about him disappointed and offended her.

“How do you like America, Elisheba?”

“I have been here so long, I have become accustomed to it,” she answered.

“I am very pleased with America, much better than London. Here all men are equal, rich and poor.”

Elisheba remained silent. She thought to herself that he has already sat there too long. But he continued speaking:

“Have I already told you about our strike in London, and how I worked with my strike-brothers. Once I was walking through the streets of Whitechapel. I saw my man. Wait! I think, and I hit him with a hefty punch in the eye, and a second in the stomach. I worked him over from lung to liver, then I turned myself around to another street and calmly whistled the “Marseillaise,”

“You would do better to talk about Kovno, I can’t stand to hear about such things,” she remarked quietly.

“But, Elisheba, don’t think that a revolutionary is a thug; but a scab and a spy should be taught a lesson. And I? To women... I mean... To ladies, I am always a gentleman. Aha! This is not Kovno, here even a tanner’s boy can become a gentleman. And I have come to you, because your sister-in-law asked me to... That is, she advised me to. She is very intelligent. Here, she said, family background doesn’t play a role... If and when... They make me a foreman...”

Elisheba shuddered. She nervously sprung up from the divan, and haughtily ordered:

“Excuse me, go home. I want to go to lunch. And send my brother in to me!”

“All right, I’ll go, I will send your brother in to you; we will see each other again,” he said offering her again his wide, round hand.

When he was gone the highborn-child from Kovno, the Jewish aristocrat, broke down crying into her silk cushions.



# Old Shlome Aurdank

When old Shlome was in a good mood, he would give his white head a shake, straighten his round shoulders, take a stance like a cantor at a podium and sing:

He was big and tall,  
He was a Leipzig merchant.

It started out with a strong melody, but quickly fell into an uneasy, rhythmic lament. To keep up his good mood, Shlome only needed a glass of his fierce whiskey with his cake after morning prayers.

His wife, Masha, even though she had raised two daughters, still looked like a woman who was childless: A tall, withered woman with small nostrils and a stiff mouth. She spoke in measured words, and hissed her “s’es” and “sh’es” like a snake. At his singing she would call out:

“Incomprehensible bleating... You drink like a gentile. Your two daughter have... a disgraceful drunk for a father...”

If the daughters were nearby, they never got into the argument. Even though they sided with the mother, they loved their father and forgave him. They also kept in mind that their mother was the one earning a living... Today, however, the wheel turned. They were growing up, working, earning good money and supporting the household. Their mother had told them many times, that it wasn't her business, if they wanted to support the father also... That bothered the mother very much. He had never for his own self raised a single finger. She had very much wanted to drive the old man from the house and stay there with her daughters. But she was afraid to do it and begrudge him a bite of food in his mouth.

Her enmity toward him began in their early years together... He was a nothing husband, ten years older than her. His family wanted her, so that she could turn him into a mensch, a respectable person... Shlome did not want the marriage, because Masha in her younger years was no great beauty. But Shlome's father believed that a respectable man should have an ugly wife.

After the first child he did try to go to work, but it did not work out. He always had to pay extra for the couple of baskets that he overturned...

She, Masha, became the trader in the market, and she was a run-away success... But she did not want to feed him. If he wanted to become a learned man, a teacher, she would have committed.. One time at lunch she told him that two mouths to feed was enough for her... That night Shlome found the door and gate shut to him.

In the morning he was not to be seen in the stiel. He had disappeared like a stone in water.

After three years, Shlome suddenly showed up. He was dressed in a black, cloth coat with a satin collar and lapels. He had a shiny top hat, a cane in his hand and was speaking German.

His first visit was to Rhoda the saloon keeper.

“Shlome, where have you been?” people demanded.

“In Leipzig.”

“What did you do there?”

“Commerce.”

“With what?”

“See...,” he said, thinking for a moment, and indicating his coat and top hat, “with a cloth coat and a top hat...”

And right from there they gave him the nickname of the “Leipzig Merchant.” When people saw him pay Rhoda the saloon keeper with a ten ruble note for his drink, the word spread all over the stetl that Shlome had returned from Leipzig a wealthy man, stuffed with riches.

Masha quickly gave both daughters a bath. She dressed them in their Sabbath clothes, tightly braided their hair, and then sent for their father.

For three days they enjoyed a life sweet as cake. On the fourth day all of the money was spent. Since it was the eve of Rosh Hashanah, she kept him over the holiday, then sent him away to do more commerce...

After that he came back every year in the hope that they could return to a good life for ever. And every year they were fooled...

Though no one from the stetl traveled to Leipzig, nevertheless people knew that when he was there Shlome went from door to door collecting donations, just like all of the other beggars in that town... No more were they wrecked and ragged carrying heavy sacks on their shoulders. He went around in a cloth overcoat and old top hat, with his cane in hand and the rich Germans gave him money. The Leipzig Jews had a reputation for generosity. And when there came such nice “Russian” Jews like Shlome, who looked like a fallen wealthy man, who tipped his hat and bowed with a true German “Guten Morgen,” and “Guten Abend,” and sometimes sang Eliakum Zunser’s or Abraham Goldfaden’s Yiddish songs; when he did so “this Russian Jew” won from them the seventh grace.

And so that is how he was able to come home each year with several nice rubles and dressed like a dandy. Masha, however, became more combative. The women at the market always confronted her with the fact that her husband went to the doors of the Germans. The daughters had grown up, and had a little money. They packed up their bedclothes and went to America.

A couple of years later the daughters brought their father over. At fifty-five years old, Shlome had a full head of white hair, his beard – white and well groomed. In his cloth coat he looked like a great rabbi. They were ashamed to send him out to work. To take such style and standing away from such a Jew, with a head and beard like white silk and put him behind a pushcart with onions, or put him in a shop at Bigel Steel! They were happy that he should be at home and help Mama in the house. And it did become homey for him, all that he had done for them was evened out and was just a thought. Meanwhile, Mama soured... She was always angry and would not let him do anything for her...

Before the daughters would give their pay to Mama, they would always hold back a couple of dollars for Papa so that he would not have to go to her. And for them alone he would go through fire and flood.

“Papa, bring me the shoes from the cobbler,” the younger daughter, Tybel, said to him, giving him a quarter.

“I will go. He will drink the money,” the mother hissed, mixing in.

But Shlome brought the shoes. He handed the ten-cent piece to Tybel, but she did not take it, and the old man shot the mother a taunting glance.

When the daughters were away at work, Sholme would as usual put on his coat with the satin lapels, comb his hair and beard, sneaking a sideways look at Masha, and how she bored through him with her light green eyes, he would sing as loud and lusty as he liked:

I am big and tall,  
I am a Leipzig merchant.

“Schlepper, beggar, go from door to door!... A Leipzig merchant!...

And Shlome, to pick at her, would move his big, heavy body rhythmically and sing:

He loved many maidens,  
Brunette, blonde and silent...

“Your heart should go silent. A father of daughters!...”

Today he goes to Janette,  
And tomorrow to Lisette,  
To Malkhe he goes early,  
In the evening to Marie.

Masha grabbed the broom, foaming at the corners of her mouth.

On the edge of the step he caught another verse:

Therese was too hot,  
Blondine was too witty...

And he headed out toward Second Avenue.

There was a Vienna cafe there where he would sit all day. He drank a stein, and then another, because that is what you do... He looked through the German newspapers, often he might get, one way or another, a ticket to a theater. For him every day was a holiday. Everyone in the cafe knew that Shlome loved the theater, and nearly every week he got one or two tickets. The daughters also loved the theater, and, if he could go with them, he was happy as a king...

The daughters could never get Mama to go out to the theater. Once they took her to a benefit, and she swore it would be a decade before she went to another one. Why? Simply because her one affliction was that she should see strangers?... And dances and balls she hated from the bottom of her heart for the same reason..

Toward evening when it was time for the daughters to come home from work, Shlome would go home. And if a good brother, a young man at the cafe had paid for his stein, he would be able to buy some fruit from a street vendor, and sometimes a few flowers for his daughters. And a smile would come across their full, rosy, wrinkle-free cheeks. Masha would grow more hard and crusty, and at supper she would begrudge him every bite of bread he put in his mouth.

Thus passed the days and years. Masha looked like a tree with gray-brown bark that no longer turned green. He, Shlome, was like a rose, his hair – whiter and thinner, and the shoulders a little more round and bent over. The daughters were over thirty years old, and an uneasiness and sadness weighed upon the house. Masha complained: “The father is a drunk, the daughters can’t get a marriage contract.” He knew that it was her fault: She would not let the daughters go anywhere. If a boy came by, she looked at him like a big mean bird ready to peck his eyes out.

Added to all that, Shlome had to suffer the fact that his cloth coat had lost its true black color. The shoulders were shiny, and around the arms it was obviously worn. The old satin vest did not add to the finery. Only the satin collar and the lapels still looked like new. That was his only comfort... Still looked brand new in spite of everything!...

And when the oldest daughter, Sarah, came home one evening with a boy and said that he was her finacé and that after they were married they would take the father, but the mother would stay with Tybel, Masha twisted her lips into what was supposed to be a happy smile, served cakes and carafes with her own Passover grape wine.

The first happy day in his own room... And old Shlome livened up, drank glass after glass of the good wine. The old woman had to keep quiet and stand aside. He became animated, sang theater songs, imitating the actors.

“I like the old man. He is so jolly!” the fiancé said happily.

Tybel and Sarah were pleased as they watched over the scene. Masha sat as though her face was hurting from having to smile, and old Shlome was hopping about singing:

He was big and tall,  
He was a Leipzig merchant.



## On Old Age

Old Hannah Byle understood that the children would take it hard when she left the house today, Sunday, when all others stayed home. For her, going to see her cousin, Gitele, was not a seldom event. However, she felt that this time the departure was not like all of the others... In any case, she thought: If it were, they would have to know, perhaps not, in old age one must not make a fool of ones self...

She got dressed carefully. But she was ashamed. She was not having a good day, she answered for herself alone. In her younger days she lived in poverty and distress. And when she was forty years old, he was already gone and left her a desolate widow. All alone she had to give the older children away and raise the younger ones. And now the children were so occupied with their own children, that they did not have a minute free to even look at their old mama.

Thinking thus, she combed her white hair, made a sort of a compromise between fashion and her face in choosing which dress to put on, the black or the gray. The gray is lighter, summery, but it was nearly Springtime!... The black, on the other hand, is newer and goes well with her. Nevertheless, she put on the gray; it makes her look younger, and she had told Gitele that she is around about sixty years old, and if he asks, or not, she should not talk about age. Others are such strange people, they want to know exactly how old everyone is, thought Hannah Byle with chagrin.

But she was well over seventy. Having to take away a whole ten years – a horror! Anyway, people are people, who doesn't deny their age? Except before God! He in heaven knows how old she is... What can she do about it, he has said that he is not more than sixty. In the younger years one takes one, two, three years off. When older – five! But in later years that doesn't work, and one has to subtract ten or fifteen.

And at seventy, she continued to think, is seventy so old? From seventy to a hundred and twenty is quite a few, quite a few years.

But the teeth... She looked in the mirror and was very distressed for the children. She had seen several women with false teeth like pearls. And Hannah Byle comforted herself that her teeth were not yet damaged. But she can not crack nuts with them, and has to have everything dunked and soft...

By midday the old lady was feeling strange, because everyone was occupied with themselves thinking about the pleasures awaiting them on a beautiful Sunday after the Sabbath.

“Mama, you are also going out? You are bustling about!” her eldest daughter said to her.

“Nu, child, since you are all going out, I want to go to Gitele; she is all alone.”

And, indeed, the daughter was disappointed. Perhaps the daughter was troubled. The son sometimes looked for things please the old mother? My grandchildren, as a bubbe should be in the world, to bake sweet cakes and prepare conserves for her boys and girls in order to be honored. But she, the daughter, knew quite well, that she had wasted a whole life...

At Gitele's the elderly man was already sitting and waiting. He was sitting with a glass of boiling hot tea, he blew across the tea and drank it slurping. He was a portly Jew with a round, bowed back. He had a nice beard with mixed yellow, red and white, and the colors added up to fifty-five years old...

Hannah Byle's old eyes lit up when she saw him.

"How are you doing, Reb Motel" she asked him after a while, once she saw him.

"Oh, how are you doing," he answered.

"How are your children?" she asked further.

"Thank you for asking, how are yours?"

And Reb Motel did not wait for an answer; he loved to talk about his children.

"My son, the doctor, recently made a "reparation" on a dangerously ill patient on the verge of leaving this world, and he was immediately brought back to health. And my son-in-law, the pharmacist, people get from him the best medicine, even home remedies they get from him. And the other children make a fine living."

"My children," said Hannah Byle a little embarrassed, "My children are not doctors or pharmacists, but all of them, thank God, make a fine living. Ordinary, but nice," she added as an afterthought.

"That doesn't matter," answered Motel, "Not all heads are born for studying."

"Where are you staying now?" Hannah Byle asked him.

"Oh, sometimes with the daughter, sometimes with my son, the doctor, just like the "Jewish King Lear." Have you ever seen in the theater the "Jewish King Lear?" I tell you, every Jew, who has ever had a child should go see it. It was written by Reb Jacob Gordin, peace grant him, all by himself! I saw him with my own eyes at my son, the doctor's, home, just like I see you now."

"And nevertheless I come here and sit all day with Gitele," he added, "She is a relative, and he is a relative of mine, we are in-laws."

Gitele brought some fruit to the table, conserves and tea.

"You know? There is no place to go when you are old. The children are hard to please – all have their heads full of studies. In short, it is not good... When you are raising children you don't think about what will be the result... Older people understand one another. It is hard to talk to your own children. What do you think?"

"Yes, yes, that is certainly the way it is," Hannah said with a sigh and felt as though the same destiny bound itself once again to their old souls...

They were all silent for a few minutes. Gitele went to see after her child in the street.

"Let's go for a ride on the streetcar, such a pretty day," suggested Motel, "I love the sunshine. Its warmth on the back, a mechayeh, a pleasure! Let's ride all the way to the Inlet, they play music there."

"If Gitele wants to go, then I will go," answered Hannah Byle, embarrassed as a young girl.



“And with just me you are afraid to travel without a chaperon?”

“Afraid? Ach, God Forbid! It is more festive with a threesome.”

“Ay, you have already made your mind up. In your younger years was it also more festive in three’s?”  
laughed Motel.

“But on the other hand,” he added, “Gitele will certainly go with us: it is no fun for her to be alone... What do you think?”

Gitele took the child in hand and all set out to ride to the Inlet.

Reb Motel launched into praising the sun, which warmed one in all their limbs. And for the cool breezes he also had a good word. In general Reb Motel was good humored and never had anything bad to say about the world. He recounted to Hannah Byle the politics of his shul, about the rabbi, the cantor, the shamus and they were delighted to hear about them.

At the Inlet they found there were a lot of people. Music played. The crowd sat at long wooden tables and quenched their thirst with soda water and beer. The water around them was muddy, and everything in the world was swimming in it, except fish. Around the body of water fields stretched out, meadows, hills all saturated in fresh green colors.

They all sat down on a bench. The child was sleeping in Gitele’s arms. She was uneasy, the clear sky over their heads and the green earth under their feet reminded her of better days and of happier company other than the two elderly people who were getting to know each other here.

“A person should not be alone,” Reb Motel began to speak about proper matters, “Every night it is not good for me, I was hit with a faintness, and there I was by myself. I thought that my end had come... I barely made it to morning, and then I rushed to my son, the doctor.”

“Only a stone should be alone. You should have quickly taken a glass of Epson salts. Perhaps it was something you ate,” she answered, showing him that she knew what to do in such cases.

“You should be healthy, I need to drink something, a woman’s remedy, and I have a son who’s a doctor?”

Hannah Byle remained silent.

“But what help is it that I haven’t had even a tiny morsel to eat that was cooked properly since my wife died, and for the lack of her delicacies my stomach deteriorates, and I have been suffering from stomach problems for several years now.”

“Gitele shot a look at the old man, and he immediately realized that he was saying things he shouldn’t.

“Why shouldn’t you get married? I don’t mean any harm in asking you. You still look good, ayin-hara, not old and very strong,” he said turning to Hannah Byle.

“There is not simply an appropriate party. You can’t just go out into the street and come back with a husband. And the children, they should remain healthy, can’t be left behind. Not long ago some one

spoke to me about a match, but I didn't want it, he had already been ruined! He can study well and was once a big merchant. He left after the meeting. But the children all in one voice said: "What, we are going to be raised by some stranger, a step-father!?"

"That is the same argument my children make. I say to them: "My children, I am old, you can't know my needs. I want to get married and live on my own." They answer me: "We do not want to feed some strange woman." Parents give up an entire life for their children, and children support the old mama and papa, because as people say, you can't drive them out into the streets. What do you think?"

"That's it exactly!" sighed Hannah Byle.

"But listen to what I want to tell you. You try all week to talk with your children, I will also discuss things with my son the doctor, and we will set up a chuppah for a wedding. Gitele has already talked to you about it. And if our children are not in agreement with it, it won't matter." And here Motel became proud, straightened somewhat his back and said: "Fine, Reb Motel can still carry a burden on his shoulders and be a peddler! I can still earn for the both of us. What do you think?"

Dusk had fallen. The sun had set behind the trees and lit the sky red in the west. In the east it was already darkened, and a cool breeze was blowing.

"It is too cool for you, perhaps? Hannah Byle asked with concern in her voice, "Let's return home."

The last several years had collected so much goodness, so much love in her soul, yet she had no one to shower it upon. The children didn't need it, the grandchildren were already growing up. And what use do they have for a bubbe who can't speak English? And she felt every remnant of love in her go over to him who needed her goodness just as the earth needed the sun.

He took her to Gitele's house where the elderly woman was staying overnight. They separated with the promise to talk to their children during the week, they should live so long, and meet again at Gitele's and tell how the discussions with the children went.

Gitele looked at them and thought with chagrin that these two old people had more love in their hearts, than she had with her husband, except for the first few years of their marriage...

# The House with the Green Porch

The house with the green porch stood in a quiet street in Peterson. Next to the porch grew a low, broad tree, and close to the tree, a streetlight. In the Summertime when the tree was full of leaves the streetlight was hidden.

In the house lived the Schein family.

In the Summertime Abe Abelson would come and sit on the porch and wait... And after a few minutes Clara would come out, often with an unfinished bit of food in her mouth, and sit next to Abe on the bench. Their conversation was always about work. Clara worked making overcoats and Abe was a silk weaver. In a calm, but important tone, they would tell what had happened in both of their shops during the day. When they had talked it out, they would repeat the whole thing, or what they remembered from yesterday.

Clara was a quiet, modest girl of eighteen. Her beauty was also modest: A pale, clear face, with good blue, bashful eyes, and soft, dark hair always combed smooth. And Abe – A tall, strong boy of twenty years.

They never managed to sit alone for a long time on the porch. Soon the younger sister, Masha, the youngest sister, Sadie, and the youngest brother, Leibele would also come out. And the Mother, Malka Schein, wearing a wide apron, also appeared on the porch. With her hands on her hips and a broad smile on her full face, she looked at her children and thought: “Soon I will be giving up a daughter,” and in the house she said with joy to her husband: “Since we live in a house with a nice porch, none of our daughters will remain old maids... What do you say, Mendel?”

Abe’s younger brother, Jake, would also come every evening and sit on the porch, as well as other boys and girls with their friends. It was enough for a mother that her daughter would say that she was going to Malka’s to sit on the porch, and the mother would not be worried... It was always welcoming and cheerful, Winter in the house, Summer on the porch. Everyone – young, pure hearts, the hardships of life as yet had no grip on them.

Abe and Clara were engaged. They made the agreement according to the usual manner because Mama and Papa insisted on it. No one had talked about the wedding itself, both were still too young. The bride and the groom were saving up money together.

Abe was still too young and didn’t understand why he had to, as fiancé, take time to grow accustomed to his intended bride. He thought that a fiancée was nearly a wife, and he should be able to express any opinion, and tell her what she should or should not do. And, since he did not know to act with her, he really enjoyed his role as fiancé. Without asking, he could say: “Clara, I don’t want you to go around with that girl.” And Clara would not associate with her. Because who would know better than Abe?

Jake thought that there was no finer, no more beautiful girl than his brother’s fiancée in the whole town. And very often it would bother him that he was not the older brother...

Abe began to see that Jake looked too often at his fiancée.

One Friday evening when Carla was wearing a white, blouse top at the Sabbath table, Jake said without thinking:

“Clara, you have such a white neck!”

That caught Abe, and an argument quickly broke out between the brothers. But Abe held himself back so as not to disturb the Sabbath.

The Father took Abe’s side: “Jake had no reason to be looking!” But the Mother said that it meant nothing, a brother could look.

A fight broke out when Clara sewed a kimono out of a sheer fabric. On a Sunday morning when Clara knew that Abe was coming, she put on the new kimono and went around the room doing some sort of housework.

Both brothers came, and Jake could not restrain himself. In his surprise he called out:

“Clara, your naked arms are showing through, through the kimono!”

“And who asked you to look!?” Abe shrieked in anger.

“I can’t look? What will I look at?” Jake answered.

“Why don’t you look at Masha? She is also wearing a kimono.”...

“Masha is still a little girl,” Jake said, looking at Masha.

Masha screamed and started crying because Jake had hurt her. Why did he have to hurt her? In the morning she put on a long dress and went to work, no one should look at her because she is still a little girl!...

Abe gave Jake a slap in the face. That was followed by an argument and a fight.

Clara ran into her room and took off the kimono. Abe followed her with scissors and cut the garment up into shreds.

Later, after Abe had thought it over, he said:

“Clarale, I don’t want you to wear sheer fabrics with short sleeves. It is not nice, your neck is too white.”

“Indeed, if one has a black neck it is not pretty to go in sheer clothing,” Clara responded.

“Too white is also not pretty, everyone looks.”

Nu, no more did Clara wear sheer fabrics with short sleeves.

For five years Abe and Clara were engaged, and on the sixth year they married. Abe, with their savings and a partner, opened a silk mill. Right from the start business was good and they obtained a beautiful

dwelling, far from the house with the green porch... They only went back on holidays to eat Mama's delicacies.

During that time Jake also got married, but not with a pretty woman. He took the dowry money and also opened a silk mill. And he, too, went away from the house with the green porch. And so it is, that he who has married is out from under the bridge... Flown away to their own nest.

After their wedding, Malka hired a goy, a gentile, and he enclosed the porch with shutters, still in green. The house shined from the street...

Masha became a bride, and Sadie was already having boys come to spend time with her. On the green porch things were once again cheerful in the Summer evenings. A younger generation – sang newer songs on the porch. But there were also heard the old song repeated: “Young men and young girls together.” There were weddings, and some flew away from the green porch and the true, old tree which had hid them from curious eyes, and the silent, bright streetlight which shed its charming light on them. They were raising their own children elsewhere.

After Malka and Mendel had given all of their daughters in marriage, they moved to a smaller apartment. And Malka said with a cheerful laugh: “One has to let people marry off their own daughters. A blessed house, that's the house with the green porch.”

And another family with other daughters took possession of the house.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Abe and Jake came into their middle-ages, they had become rich silk manufacturers with chewed up necks. The brothers treated each other well, and helped one another with whatever the other needed.

Jake came to Abe's private office, sat himself down across from his brother at the desk, offered Abe a cigar, and smoked one himself, and said with a laugh:

“Here, take a cigar in return for the slap in the face you gave me for looking at your bride. Are you still up until today such a fool?”

Both brothers laughed, remembering on those times and on the house with the green porch. Nowadays, they referred to the house as the “Old Shanty.” Abe pretended to reproach Jake for the “Shiksa”... It is not good, children grow up. People talk to one another about pretty girls and wives with a twinkle in their eye. One gives oneself a ‘tip’ where it is foolhardy... Jake recounts his troubles with his wife. She is jealous. Abe says that Clara is totally a godly person. Jealousy would never occur to her.

And Clara? The quiet, bashful Clara has already raised the fourth child. She is healthy and still young and pretty. Every year Abe is more dear to her and she loves him more. And when old friends from the green porch come to see her and tell her stories about Abe: Someone had seen him driving with somebody in his automobile and with some beauty sitting in a restaurant; whether Clara believes it or not – she answers them that she will not say one unreasonable word to Abe: “Whatever Abe shall do, and wherever he may go, at home he will always find a pure house, a good meal, and a soft bed.” Soon it is known all over town what Clara said. Some laughed and some shook their heads, that it should be so.

However, when Clara became pregnant with her fifth child, she became very unhappy. Her friends gave her advice. She... Them... For everyone it was quite simple... Clara also began to be persuaded... But for her things were not simple... She contracted blood poisoning and with all of her riches she could not buy her way out of death... She lay in agony for ten days – and she was gone...

The misfortune was so great for Abe, so sudden and so horrible, that Jake had to watch him to make sure he did not take his own life.

The vaudeville dancer who Abe knew, suddenly became a godly person, started dressing very modestly, spoke of fidelity and the joys of family. She came to see the orphans, and patted their heads. Abe was ready to marry her, but Jake mixed in and wouldn't let him.

The bookkeeper in Abe's shop had displayed such sympathy and pity to the handsome, rich widower, that when Abe asked her to go to the theater with him, she willingly accepted, simply out of compassion. Even Jake could not talk about her without a twinkle in his eye...

In short people had shown Abe sympathy and compassion every step of the way.

And a year after Clara's death, Abe got married for the second time. The younger children needed a mother... He took for a wife, Carolyn, the rabbi's daughter.

Around this time Abe began to experience fatigue through his whole body. The time had come to relax a little... Since Clara passed away Abe was not the same: Streaks of gray in the hair and death are things you can't get around...

However, Carolyn had only just managed to extract herself from the rabbi's house, and her capricious and sickly mother. Like an unchained wild animal did she come into Abe's house... She began to organize shindigs and parties. She dressed herself in a brassy, wealthy matter, always with bare arms and neck, and Abe, tired, danced after her...

But Abe was not the only one; becoming uneasy, thoughtful... and Jake looked him in the eye...

"Jake, remember the house with the green porch? Abe asked him often.

"Oh, the old shanty," Jake always answered, but without a smile and often with his head cast down... "We should take the automobile and drive by for a look..."

"I drive by there often, Jake. And I always get a strange chill. A sadness and yearning comes over me... Strangers are in the house and on the porch. I don't know them and they don't know me. The color is faded, the shutters are broken. That house is really old, brother Jake!..."

One evening late in the Summer, Jake and Abe agreed to drive by the house, the house with the green porch. In the car were Abe, Carolyn, the older children and Jake and his wife. Abe told the chauffeur to drive the car by very slowly. The house had suddenly come back to life: The porch and shutters were freshly painted green; on the porch were sitting young boys and girls singing songs...

Abe's oldest daughter, a twenty-year-old, cried out:

"Zayde and Bubbie used to live here."

Abe bowed his head down. Jake ordered the chauffeur to drive on. No one understood him, not even the daughter. But Jake had understood his brother, because his life also was empty and a waste...

## A Cozy Family

Abraham Ginzburg, while still walking through the corridor, heard his wife say to the children:

“Sush, be quiet, Father is coming.”

He was already angry at hearing that, and coming into the dining room, in an angry tone he said:

“When did I ever say that it should be quiet in the house when I came home? I don’t need quiet! What I want is when I come home the children should fall on me with kisses screaming: “Father is home! Father is home!” and not just to sit there frightened. What am I, a burglar, that my children should be afraid of me?!”

“They were fighting,” his wife answered him. Sara, completely unperturbed, remained sitting in her chair with her hands folded across her checkered kitchen apron. And in her gray, sad eyes showed, as though through a cloud, a beaten-down look. Her gaunt, pale face flushed with a red tint – She was ashamed.

“So they were fighting, so what? Children! Alas, children... Two little biddy children, the daughter is fully ripened in the mother!... A girl of eighteen should look like a girl of fourteen! To me it is surprising that she doesn’t put on as charming an apron as her mother,” he said casting a look at his daughter, a lean, pasty girl with a thin, noble face.

Sara stood up and took off her apron. The young girl blushed. Mother and daughter both remained silent. But their silence fell heavy on Abraham and he went on to say:

“They were fighting! A misfortune in the town. Me and my brother and sister were deadly when we fought. Today we would cut one another’s throats.”

“Go eat, Abraham!” Sara said with her usual soft voice.

The table was ready, and the housemaid served the supper. Something pressed on his heart. The words were stuck in his throat – not to speak out loud and not to be suppressed.

In spite of his crossness Abraham Ginzburg was not argumentative and not a screamer. Since he was a tall man with broad shoulders, a nice gray-black beard and a large head with graying black hair, people were frightened when he got just a little angry. His wife, Sara, knew him well. His workers in the factory also, but nevertheless, when he said something, no one wagged their tongue or opened their mouth to contradict him.

“So, let us know what it was that they were fighting about? And if it comes to blows, I will help you,” Abraham laughed, turning to the children.

“Oh, concerning their argument! Motele likes America, New York, the best, and Reyzele especially likes Vilna,” the mother offered for them.

“Nu ya, Reyzel you know so much about New York, as much as Motel remembers from Vilna.”



“A young girl should just sit in the home with her mother. Go with girls, go with boys! I assure you, when one has a mother as humble as yours you can rely on her.”

The young girl blushed and did not know what to do with her hands.

“Abraham!” Sara yelled with a reproach in her voice.

The telephone rang.

“I will, I will answer it myself!”

“Feitelman invited me to play pinochle,” he said when he came back, “Do you want to go, too? She, Mrs. Feitelman, asks every time why you don’t come with me. Now, there is a wife! A very active woman! She plays cards with us. She is healthy and fat. Have you ever see such a back!...”

“Abraham, be quiet!” Sara ordered, “Go Reyzel, play something on the piano, and you Motele, go outside and play for a while.”

Motel, an agile youngster, with eyes like his father’s, was on the other side of the door in an instant, and Reyzel unwillingly got up to go to the piano.

“Come with me,” Abraham asked again, once the children were gone, “She is a fine woman, you did go there once.”

“Once is enough,” Sara answered curtly, looking at the wall.

“Your are jealous of her,” teased Abraham.

“I am not jealous,” Sara said curtly and ashamed.

While changing his necktie, he turned to her again:

“This is a nice tie, isn’t it? Does it go well with my new suit?”

“A little too loud. It would go better with a twenty-five or thirty-year old, than for a fifty-year-old Jew.”

When anyone reminded Abraham of his fifty years, he would really get angry.

“In the first place I am forty-seven and not any fifty years! You really are unfortunately jealous. And this is why: Your pair of murderous eyes! And she is really to me...”

Sara quickly left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

At 1:30 in the morning Abraham came home tired and despondent. He found Sara laying on the divan fully dressed.

“Why didn’t you go to bed?” he asked her, quickly undoing his colorful necktie.

“I wasn’t sleepy.”

But Abraham could read in her face, that she wanted to talk to him, and sat down on the divan next to her.

“Are you angry Sara,” he said full of regret, “You think that it is such a great pleasure to go a play cards with Sheyke Feitelman. It is enough for me that I have him as a partner in the business...”

“I’m not going there! I don’t like it there, so I’m not going.”

“So that it is it, then, that you and I are two different worlds. Two separate worlds, Sarale... You have eyes like the heavens. Your hands are white, thin with small fingers. You are noble. My hands are big and hairy, with thick veins. In me my blood cooks like in a kettle. I eat a lot, I sleep hard, I can stand noise, tumult: I actually like it. I can’t stand peace and quiet. I am a big, healthy Jew with a big heart. But that heart is always in pain. And one day that big heart will explode from the pain. I can’t endure the whole life here. I can’t even look at Sheyke Feitelman!...

“I should have my factory in Vilna, without partners. Live in a big house, there should be a big table in the dinning room, always with a bottle of wine and snacks for everyone who might come by. Have a wife who is healthy and cheerful, with devilish eyes, a little modest, but a faithful Jewish wife, not like Mrs. Feitelman who flirts with everyone except with her own husband. A balaboste, mistress of the house, in a white, broad apron, with a colorful trim. At dinner time is brought from the kitchen the tasty morsels, from the cellar a good wine, from the cabinet the sparkling silverware, and no matter how many hungry people there should be in Vilna, they should come to Abraham Ginzburg for eat and drink! And when I go through town, people should point me out: “There goes Abraham Ginzburg!” And there I could travel around all day with Sheyke Feitelman. And since he can’t squeeze yet two cents from a pair of sleeves, yet a cent from a hem, and extract the last bit of strength from a sewing machine. Then he wouldn’t be very rich, Mrs. Feitelman wouldn’t have so many rings on her fat, red hands. Do you understand me now, Sarale, how much I am suffering?”

Sara wanted to respond. He didn’t give her the chance, he went on talking excitedly:

“Ach, home life! It is a winter night in the home, and when the moon shines, the two beautiful horses are harnessed to the sleigh and off we go over the hard-frozen snow! The horses run as steam comes from their nostrils. Bells clang from near and far, the frost stings, laughter can be heard in the distance in the clear night, and the little wife snuggles closer and closer...”

“What is relevant to Feitelman I can’t help you with, but we... I, Abraham, I can free you... I can give you a divorce...” Sara broke down softly weeping.

“God protect! I will give you a divorce?! After we have lived twenty years together? Do you know what that means, twenty years together,” he put his arms around her and kissed her, “What kind of foolishness are you talking?”

“Why not, Abraham? You want a younger one, prettier, you want to have children with her...”

“To me you are young, pretty, and I have enough children! You foolish little wife, you pure soul. Do you know what you are for me in my life? If it were not for you and your pure eyes I would have fallen into a miserable bankruptcy... Snatched the workers salaries... I would have become a drunk, an outcast... But you and Reyzele, you with your noble eyes, you have protected me from such evils. Always my hot blood has dragged me down, down... And your eyes have always shined for me and shown me heaven... Come, Saraele, go to bed. Sleep in good health, and drive the foolishness from your head. I should divorce you?!

# Poverty's Children

It is a sunny Autumn day.

The countryside around the little Lithuanian village of Varsan was quiet, and enveloped in the warm, golden sunshine. The trees rustled and the background was painted in blue, violet and orange-gold.

In "Oginski's Wood" which was fenced in with gray, wooden planks, next to an old hunched-over apple tree, Sheyndel was collecting apples. She threw stones at the tree, and some would hit and some would miss. From time to time one apple would fall, and sometimes a whole clump together. After every apple fell he would measure the clump with her eyes: kopek apple, two for a kopek, and three, four for a groshen to cook.

Right after Shabbath she wants to sit in the market with the apples. It would be for the first time and her heart pounded in her chest from joy and fear. She had placed the apples in a sack, arranged with the biggest, reddest apples on top and tried to feel like she was at the market. In her mind, she tried to be like the young widow, Freydele. By her the apples always looked fresh and tasty, and she made money. As she sat by her apples, she smiled with her young dimples on her cheeks and said: "Apples, like wine with sugar! It melts in the mouth, like the years for all Jews."

But, to go and sit in the market! One little thing held her back. She was the stranger, and the community... To start out at the market with wives. Above all with Minnah the "gossip" with her three daughters like the demons. The market belongs to them, and they run the place. But she will not look at anything; she will also become a merchant...

She went to the market every Monday and looked jealously at the women who served the farmers. Selling chickens, eggs, butter and vegetables. What a genius Minnah is with a hen. She gives a tap on the belly, under the wing, at the gizzard, and she knows immediately if the hen is for laying or for cooking.

She pondered. Seeing the market place around market day during Hanukkah time. From all around come the farmers in their sleighs over the snow-covered streets. The cheerful sounds of people talking, the market filled with the quacking of geese, ducks and turkeys. And the women stand in the doorways and on the bridges with a sweet taste in the mouth...

And the next morning they gather around Leibzig, the wagonman's house. The big wagon stands there harnessed to two horses, packed with baskets of eggs, open boxes, clucking hens and geese ready to travel to Prussia. Minnah and her daughters run around all hustle and bustle. Freydele, the widow, stands in one place, neat and smiling, casting sly glances at Itazkele, the wagonman's son. He gestures to her to come and sit by him near the horses. Reyzel, Minnah's middle daughter, see this and takes her place next to Itazk. Old Nechama gets angry and grumbles about Itzak joking with that wanton girl. Because of that they could once again arrive late at the market in Prussia. It goes on until Leibzig gives a command to his son: "Go!"

And horse, poultry, and women; neighing, clucking and chattering headed out to Prussia and the market.

And every Tuesday Sheyndel was left behind, unhappy, yearning in the empty market place. She felt that there was no better and no more beautiful thing in the world than to trade in the marketplace. And her greatest wish, and secret dream was to become a market-woman and trade in the market.

She began to even more forcefully throw stones at the apple tree. Jumping down, she felt the linen pouch at her bosom. A desire had awakened in her. She wanted to empty the coins out of the pouch onto the grass and count them again. No one was around... She look a the white, silvery coins with the love of a mother looking at her children. The white, silver grivnes, gildens, half-rubles! For five years she had saved up kopek by kopek... All together they totaled two and a half rubles! She was struck with a frightening thought. Some sort of a mishap could befall them!... She quickly put them back into the little pouch, and placed them back next to her heart, hidden. Actually, the idea came to her that she should give this fortune to the rabbi for safekeeping, it was too risky to keep it with her... But she didn't trust anyone, and she kept the money with her day and night.

These savings she had worked for all by herself. When she was just a young girl of just nine or ten, in the summertime she would run over the hills and meadows gathering, collecting raspberries and wine grapes and take them to the women to sell. Each of the women gave her something different for her efforts, one some clothing, another some old shoes. She remembers the first five-kopek piece she earned. Once she collected a basket of beautiful, red raspberries and brought them to the wealthy lady, Sarah Leyah. Right on the spot she gave Sheyndel a five-kopek coin, and an old dress to boot. From that point on she only wanted coins for her pursuits, even if it was only a single kopek. And little by little she had worked out weights and measures. A plate and a dish were her measures, and she judged weights by hand. In the summertime she could feed herself and did not need to come to town... In the winter she collected rags and bones and still had to resort to receiving alms.

But now she would no longer have to rely on alms!... She will be a seller. Selling in the market, the same as all the other women... She would sew herself a new dress, buy new shoes! In her whole life she had never had new clothes. And just the thought of new clothes filled her with happiness and joy... There were two great joys in the world: Selling in the market and wearing new clothes that she made herself... And she must achieve those two joys...

She impatiently counted the days on her fingers: Friday, Sabbath, Sunday and – Monday was market day...

Suddenly, she heard behind her a stifled laughter. Quick and agile as a cat she spun around and saw Schloyme, the water carrier. With his broad hand over his mouth he tried to hold back his laughter. As soon as she looked at him, he laughed so hardily and loud that the whole forest was filled with “Ha-ha-ha, he-he-he,” and wide and far over the fields and hills you could hear echo: “Ha-ha-ha, he-he-he.”

Sheyndel got angry and with a severe look in her eyes she asked:

“What are you laughing at! You lunatic!”

“At you,” Schloyme shrugged with his broad shoulders. His eyes, childish eyes, blue like the blooms in the corn field, looked foolish and ashamed.

“At me?! What about me is so laughable?” she said, her dark eyes flashing. Her dark face went red with anger, and from her full, open lips shone two rows of white, sharp teeth, just like a gypsy's.

“It’s just that,” said Schloyme with his eyes twinkling, pointing his finger at her, and again his cackling laughter resounded over the fields and hills, and once again the echo came back: “Ha-ha-ha, he-he-he, hoo-hoo-hoo.” But he wanted very much for her to understand, that he meant well with his laughter, and she shouldn’t be mad at him. He tried to explain why he was laughing:

“I see you every day, and every day you are like a little girl. And today for the first time I see that you have become a grown woman with big hands and feet! And... more I will not say. You can see for yourself.”

Sheyndel began to pull at her too-tight dress here and there, very embarrassed.

She looked at him from head to toe and remained silent. She concentrated very hard and a plan was born...

He continued to observe her with his nice blue eyes, somewhat embarrassed.

“Do you want more apples, Sheyndel?”

“There are two big apples.”

Schloyme climbed up the tree like a bear, used all his power to shake the branch which was packed with apples. Then he climbed down and helped her collect the apples.

They both sat down under the apple tree.

She handed him an apple. The “snake” had taught her how to select the best apples... A roguish spark shown in her eyes, a smile played on her full lips. An odd smile, something instinctively clever... How she wanted to deal with the apple...

He felt her hand, the soft movement, the touch of a young girl’s hand. A shudder went through him.

He stretched out full-length on the grass and savored the warmth of the sunlight. He felt as though the sun was not only warming him, it was stroking him and saying: Schloymele, you are so good, so dear, we are in love, love...

“Have you carried everyone enough water for Sabbath?” Sheyndel asked him.

“Yes. And now I must go to the shul. Come home with me, I will carry your sack of apples.”

He got up with a jolt, and placing both hands flat against his cheeks he yelled:

“Everybody go to shul.” It resounded over the fields, and returned the echo: “E v e r y b o d y g o t o s h u l.” Schloyme laughed out loud at the crazy echo.

They left “Oginski’s Woods.” Schloyme carried the sack of apples like it was a feather pillow, and Sheyndel looked at him mockingly: “Such a hero! That a young man like that should be a water carrier and one who calls people to shul...”

She went to the bath-woman's room, put the apples away, and began to help prepare the cholent, set the table and light the lights. On Friday evenings and the Sabbath she ate with her at her table, so she helped her out at the baths on Thursday's heating the water for the women.

Tslate the bath-woman is the only one in the town that Sheyndel liked even a little bit. Tslate had always taken the place of a sort of half-mother... She was the only person where Sheyndel could cry on her lap when someone from the village had yelled at her, or gave her a smack. The bath-woman was always good to her, for as long as she could remember... And she remembered that she had been brought here from far, far away... Over roads and fields, and she arrived here at the baths which also served as a poorhouse on the days when the baths were not warmed. Everyone slept on the floors and that is where they ate also. During the days they went from house to house begging for handouts, and there was one evil woman who would scream at her calling her names and saying that she was an orphan without a father or a mother. And she also remembered:

One early morning she realized that no one was in the bathhouse and she was alone on the floor. She screamed out loud; Tslate came in, and took her into her room and gave her a little milk and bread. Later men began to look at her. They started asking: "Who is your father, who is your mother and what is your name." But she didn't even know if someone had to have a mother, a father or a name...

Around this time she fell under the protection Tslate at the bathhouse. In a small way she became a servant of the community. The women in the village fought over her to get her to work for them, minding small children and running errands. When she got older she learned from the women, that wandering poor people had left her in the village... People gave her all sorts of hints about mother and father... Because she was not a pretty child, they gave her the nickname "Sheyn" [Pretty], "Shindel" until it became "Sheyndel."

And Tslate had to fight all of the women in the village to get Sheyndel to work for her. And what troubles she had to go through with Myer-Itziken, once Sheyndel grew into a young woman!... She had her own daughter sleep on the floor with Sheyndel, so that he, her father, wouldn't bother her... How many times at night, when her jewel had disappeared from bed, did she have to go running to find him. Offer him goodies, threaten him with bad things, she would tell the community, and she would not back down until he was back in his own bed. More than once she had to give him a poke in the side or a punch in the stomach.

\* \* \* \* \*

Through the village Schloyme's strong voice rang out:

"Everybody go to shul! Everybody in shul!"

"Schloyme'ke already calling everyone to shul," Tslate complained and set herself to work.

Sheyndel also got started. She placed the candles on the table, set out the challahs covering them with the challah cloth, and prepared everything for Tslate to bless the candles. Tslate saw all of that and thought to herself: She is quicker to get work done than one's own child.

Myer-Itzik came in and saw Sheyndel serving in such a charming manner and honored her with a pinch on the arm which made her see stars, and cry out in pain.

Tslate also cried out:

“Heretic, betrayer of Israel! Don’t bother her! Hear me, you trayf bone!”

“Aha, do you want one too, you old dog?” Myer-Itzik teased.

“Not in your life, dear God!”

And Myer-Itzik left to go to shul.

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Schloyme the water-carrier did not close his eyes the whole night. That was nearly the first time that had ever happened to him. An image danced before his eyes: Green fields, sunny meadows, apple trees, and Sheyndel with a red, flowered blouse, the sleeves pushed up above the elbows and a full bosom. His blood cooked like a kettle of hot pitch, his brain burned and nearly split. His eyes blinked from the need for sleep, but sleep would not come to him.

He lay there with his mind on fire thinking: He would take her for his bride. A healthy young woman... And perhaps a pretty one also... Her an orphan, he an orphan... The very thought caused him to tremble. An orphan?... Who knows... A rejected child, left behind in the village by poor people. But such... Good... Dear Sheyndel... With such round arms... Maybe she really is just an orphan... His blood burned and drove him toward her. But his brain bothered him: Perhaps a b... bastard... Why would he get married to a ... No, he would pull the covers over his head and go to sleep. Surely it was the daemons that carried him into “Oginski’s Wood.” Up to that point he had never set eyes on it. Always a small, not fully grown young girl, then all at once she has a growth spurt like a tree... He buried his head in the pillow and wanted to go to sleep, but before his eyes she stood there a grown, suddenly developed young woman with her insolent face and sharp, smiling teeth, like a gypsy. He ran, chasing her and she sprung and leapt away from him like a goat... That made him angry and he chased after her with all his strength. Her leaps were more and more agile over the fields, streams, meadows, bridges. Oh, oh he has finally caught her, and she spins out from his hands. But finally – captured! She shuddered in his powerful paws. But no, he did not let her go... She would never free herself from his hands... She finally calmed down, and offered him an apple.

\* \* \* \* \*

Early in the morning on the Sabbath he woke his sisters and brothers, like every Sabbath. They wanted him to crow like a rooster, meow like a cat, bellow like an ox, roar like a lion. But he was grumpy, not fully awake and with a feverish head.

After the Sabbath meal Schloyme couldn’t sit still. He had never been like this. Normally, he was comfortable wherever he sat... Out of habit he walked down Preisisher street to the spring; He looked down into the unruffled, Sabbath water. He gave the yoke a shake with the hanging bucket then refastened it. Not knowing where else to go, he walked on to the spring in Ritever Street. He paced around the spring from which he scooped and scooped water the whole week long. He took a little water in his hand, drank from it and the rest he spread in the garden. He rocked the yoke back and forth, and did not know what to do with himself. The sun shone, and the streets were empty, people were still at the Sabbath table, and he became uneasy, longing for something. He did not know for what, and where that longing came from.



Where should he go now? Maybe by Aunt Tslate at the baths? It had been a long time since he had gone there. His father and step-mother had argued with Aunt Tslate. But he, he had nothing against her... She was, after all, a good person. When he visited her, she always asked if he was hungry, and told him stories about his mother. Yes, he would go to see Aunt Tslate, she is, after all, a good person...

“Well, look who’s coming to visit!” Myer-Itzik called out when he looked out the window and saw Schloyme arriving.

“Now that’s a young man, strong, a water-carrier Reb Schloyme ben Tsbe Rub!” he called out with in a melody of a call to prayer, until Schloyme had crossed the threshold.

Aunt Tslate was overjoyed, saying that, “Blood is not water,” and honored him with Sabbath tea from the stove.

Schloyme was befuddled when he saw Sheyndel. Looking at her he scratched his left ear with his right hand.

“I’m afraid the lad has cast an eye on Sheyndel, and that is why he has come. See how red he becomes just like a beet! Why are you bashful, you dummy!” Myer-Itzik said, elbowing him in the side, and whispering a religious word in his ear which made him blush even more, and became even more befuddled.

“Jewish children, the Jew is all in!” Tslate cast a good-natured Sabbath Day look at Schloyme and Myer-Itzik, “Nu, so what? Schloyme is a young man and Sheyndel is a young girl.”

“And am I saying then, that it is something else? So then, if there is going to be a wedding, we should drink to it. Why not, indeed? The lad is every bit of twenty-five, and with a job to boot.”

Schloyme, even though he was embarrassed, he was, nevertheless, pleased that people were talking about him, and that was a good thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday Sheyndel found a place to sit at the marketplace with two sacks of apples, big and small. The other women looked at her. Those who were also selling fruit cast curses at her with their eyes. And they grumbled: “Look who has come along to wrest the last bit of bread from our mouths.” But those who were selling other items showed her how to sell. Every kopek she earned, she held in her hand. With trembling hands, but with pride, she made change. When she ran out of change she put her hand in her pocket where she kept the small coins, and the jingle of the coins encouraged her... She watched as Schloyme carried water, and emptied both buckets somewhere in the interior of the houses, then returned to the well. And with a certain derision she thought of him: “Better to deal in hog hair, furs, and be a man...”

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Once, on a chilly Autumn night, Schloyme and Sheyndel both went for walks in a deserted street. They had not made a rendezvous, not made a date. They were both waking in the dark night and met by chance. So they came together. Sheyndel was wrapped up in a warm scarf, and no one would

recognize her. As she walked past the last Jewish house, Schloyme lit the lantern so they could see where they were going. There was nothing to talk about, so they said nothing.

Schloyme thought about her. He wanted to tell her how strange he felt since he had met her in “Oginski’s Wood” collecting apples. Something plucked at his heart, but he did not know how to explain it, so he said nothing at all. Sheyndel had already worked something out in her businesswoman’s mind, but did not want to tell him. And so, with a purely disinterested tone in her voice, she asked him:

“Schloyme, are you tired yet of carrying water?”

“Tired! Why? Who would carry the water, and what would I do?”

“Sell in the market.”

“If everybody is selling in the market, who will carry the water?”

“Why would that bother you?”

“Who else would worry about it? I am the water-carrier!”

Suddenly there were other lanterns near them. They went silent and had the feeling that somebody might catch them and rob them. Goldie the fruit-seller who lived in the last house on the street, walked past them. Just to be sure, they called her by name, then continue on. Schloyme and Sheyndel heard her say to her neighbor:

“Kroynelach, look who is going around with boys at night! If God wills it, even a broom can shoot!”

They quickly turned into another street, and knew that first thing next morning Goldie would be beating the drum and sounding off all over the town. Shloyme wanted to shield Sheyndel from slander and thought to himself: “So, if she wants to be an engaged couple, there would be nothing to talk about. But how do I say that to her out loud?... Thinking it is one thing but saying it out loud? The words don’t follow one another, and will not fall from the tongue.” He wants to give them a push: “Go dear words, say this and that to Sheyndel,” but they, the words, do not follow his instructions. And when they did obey, they fell from the tongue very awkwardly:

“You know, Sheynde, what they are going to be saying about us tomorrow in the town. I am happy about it. When they say it, it will be the truth...”

Sheyndel laughed. The hardy, clever Shloyme pleased her. She knew that he would be good to her, like no one up to now had ever been. And, indeed, she saw in him a help to her plans about selling in the market.

She, also, could not find the words to say what she wanted. But Sheyndel did not need words. She moved closer to him, pressed against him, and leaned her cheek toward his mouth.

“One can’t, Sheynde, not before the engagement agreements,” he stuttered.

“You idiot, one can,” and she kissed him.

When he felt Sheyndel's kiss on his cheek, he went wild with the great shock and overwhelming joy. He laughed, cried, and wanted to yell out. Cry out from the depth of his lungs. But instead he stuttered:

"No, Sheynde, enough, one can't before the engagement agreements, God won't allow it."

Later he accompanied her to the path to the bath-house, and went home by himself.

The next day was cold and dreary. Sheyndel went to the market place lost in thought. Partly about selling and partly about Shloyme's words. From a distance she saw Shloyme's step-mother coming toward her. She felt that the step-mother was coming directly for her, and she felt that because of that... Her heart was filled with fear, and she wanted to run. However, she stood still and waited; When the step-mother came closer, she first noticed how agitated and angry she was.

A few steps away from her the step-mother screamed:

"Listen to me, you shameless woman, don't think for a moment that you will simply, by hook or crook take Shloyme away," she yelled and was white with rage.

"Shloyme is not going to get married to a... He had a respectable Jew for a father," she added.

"I was not trying to take him away," Sheyndel blurted out, also with a stifled rage, wanting to get away.

"You tramp! You have the nerve to answer me. You want to take the little bit of bread he has from the mouth of my upstanding little darling!... That he should have to slave for you! His father is old and sick!"

Sheyndel looked with fright at the angry woman with the sunken chest and the pale half-starved face. She became aware of her own young, healthy body, and wanted to leave without responding.

"Nothing to say, you insolent girl! Shlepping around with him the whole night long. Everyone knows... Such a bastard!..." she yelled out loud, like the gall had exploded in her. She sprung like an animal and took Sheyndel by the hair.

With the word "bastard" Sheyndel lost control. She saw a wheel of blood and fire before her eyes, and suddenly felt a slimy, bony throat in her hands... She pressed hard and felt disgusted and cold from it, like she was pressing a heap of frogs in her hands. She felt a piercing pain and burning in her head, and far, very far away she thought she could hear deranged voices screaming: "Bastard! Bastard!"

A circle of woman quickly formed around her and all were screaming. Shloyme suddenly appeared as if he had sprung up from the ground. He tore them apart, took Sheyndel by the hand and disappeared with her.

Sheyndel quickly recovered herself and lay down on the grass. Shloyme sat down on the grass beside her, looked at the bunch of ripped out hair, and like a child, he sobbed.

Sheyndel was still yellow, and her lips were pale and trembling. She said to Shloyme:

"I will not stay here any longer."

“Where will you go, Sheyndele, where?”

“To another village.”

“And what will I do?”

“You come with me...”

“What are you saying, Sheyndele? You child!... The village, the wells... And my elderly father?...”

“When you earn money you can send him some. The two of us will make a business.”

In the distance Sheyndel saw two Jews coming toward them. She realized right away that the men were coming for Shloyme. She immediately saw before her eyes... A decision as solid as a wall, take form right where she stood. She would not let them take Shloyme from her. She needed him now... She put her arms around him, and pressed him tight against her. She felt his inner shudder of joy, and she pressed him even more passionately closer to her body. She did this with devilish cleverness, but not without a great amount of fear... They were going to take him away! Where would she go?... In a wifely manner brought her lips to his ear and whispered:

“Come, Shloyme, come away from here. Come to a new village!” Her voice had suddenly become soft, like a mother’s when she told her children stories, “In a new village!... Have you never traveled in a wagon from break of day until the sun began to set? Seen windmills turning in the distance! Seen the clouds of smoke arising from chimneys. You travel farther and farther until a new village lies at your feet. There, in the new village, we will have our wedding, and I will hold you tight.”

And again she felt his inner shudder of joy and a weeping in his heart.

“In a new village, Shloyme! In a new village!...” She kissed his ear, and took a step back to let Noah the Shopkeeper and the Shammes get to him.

“We have come to you, Shloyme, to tell you that your mother is sorry, and that she wants you to come and eat supper,” Noah the Shopkeeper said to him watching Sheyndel from the side.

“Yes indeed, eat supper, we should all live so good,” the Shammes broke in.

“I don’t want to eat,” Shloyme said in anger.

“What do you mean, you don’t want to eat?” Noah said, trying to be clever, “You haven’t had your supper yet. And if you have not eaten, that is a good sign that you are hungry. Especially since at your home there is a stuffed kishke cooking, with spleen, intestine, calf’s throat. Oh, who wouldn’t want to eat!...”

“Go home, don’t be a fool! Everything will be like it was before. There is still plenty of water in the wells. On Passover you will get new buckets and a new yoke,” said Noah the Shopkeeper, who liked to hear himself talk, broadly sermonizing.

“Sure, you will get new buckets for Passover, sure, go home,” the stodgy Shammes added to flatter the rich shopkeeper.

Sheyndel stood there, tense as a cat, without taking an eye off of Shloyme.

“I will not carry water any more,” Shloyme answered, as though he read the answer in Sheyndel’s face.

“You don’t want to carry water any more?! A laugh, on my honor,” Noah laughed, and the Shammes joined in, “A man carries water for the village for ten years, and suddenly, not me, not you, he won’t carry water anymore.”

“Already enough water carried, let someone else carry water.”

“A fable! And after I have prayed for over forty years, can I say: Enough praying, already, let someone else pray? Truly a fable. If a horse, you should pardon the comparison, knew how to talk, he would want to say, that he didn’t want to pull the wagon, enough pulling, already. But you, you idiot, you don’t see God’s plan and the wisdom in it? The horse that pulls the wagon carries water...”

“You didn’t make him a born water-carrier, or swear him in as a water-carrier,” Sheyndel mixed in.

“See here, little daughter, we have nothing to say to you,” Noah said turning to her, “We don’t know your mother and we don’t know who your father was... You can just go!”

“Indeed, truthfully, what do we know?” the Shammes interrupted.

And in Shloyme a fire irrupted inside because they said what they did. Once again, Sheyndel was not bothered by what they said. She knew that she had to leave the village, and she wanted Shloyme to go with her... Now he was more to her than a beloved young man, whose kindness and love she had sought. He was for her a bridge from a village where everyone was trying to drive her out, chasing her and throwing stones – to a village filled with love and joy and where everything awaited her!... And that bridge was being taken from her by Noah the Shopkeeper and the stodgy Shammes... She went pale, enraged, her eyes burned like lanterns, and with those eyes she cast a spell over Shloyme and called on him to go with her.

“If you don’t want to, no one can make you. Without water the village can not exist. I hate to beg anyone,” Noah gloated. He left pulling the Shammes along with him and whispered in his ear:

“We will send the step-mother along with the children.”

Sheyndel’s sharp ears did not fail to hear what was whispered, and made an effort to quickly get Shloyme away from there. She knew that if the children came, he would go with them...

“Shloyme, we must get across the border. I want to do my selling in Prussia. See, I have money,” she showed him the linen bag at her bosom.

“Come, Sheynde, my crown, come back to the village, everything will be forgotten, no one will dare make a sideways peep about you.”

“No, not that,” Sheyndel said with resolve.

Sheyndel looked out over the fields, trying visualize what Shloyme would be seeing. Soon she saw in the distance a slovenly woman coming surrounded by little dolls... She knew who it would be... She looked at Shloyme, and embraced him with her young body. She felt him bend toward her.

He stroked her warm throat with his cool fingers, and she bared her warm bosom. She remained silent. But every one of her limbs spoke: "See, do you feel how warm my body is... Come, come with me... Shloyme."

"Sheynde, little mother, my crown," he said, trying to resist her, "come back to the village..."

But Sheynde, like a sorceress threw her last card... A trump ace! It must happen:

"Come Shloyme, it is getting late and we must take care to find some place to stay the night. In a town the Prussians will let us stay in a barn with hay."

Since no living person was nearby, the exhausted Sheyndel spoke those word as quietly as a secret...

He slowly got up. She held his head in both hands, so that he could not look back... And they both walked up the hill on the way to the Prussian border.

# Todie Rodies' Daughter

My Bubbie told me:

When she was still a young girl in a small Lithuanian village near the Prussian border, there lived Todie Rodies, a wealthy man, and his lovely wife, Dobie, and his one-and-only daughter, Rodie Goldie Altinke. A beautiful Garden of Eden, they should all have in the next world. Rodele was named after her Bubbie, may she rest in peace. They gave Goldie her name during a time of great fright, when Vinkie the “chicken-catcher,” went to visit Feyven the Gangster, and the latter began to pour whiskey for the non-Jew Stankis. First, Vinkie the village constable chased him, then gave the order to banish him forty miles from the town. A clever thing to do. Soon there was a commotion, a turmoil, and everyone was shaking in their skins. In this time of great fear, no one noticed Goldie in an instant withering away, becoming weak as a sparrow. When they did get around to remembering her, they gave her the name of Goldie, after the Rabbi’s wife who had died that same year from an illness. And they gave her a third name, Altinke, by virtue of the fact that it was, in that day and time, not good to go around in the evil depths. From that time on, everyone called her Goldie Todie Rodies. In the first place because she was named after the Rabbi’s wife, may she rest in peace, who was a righteous woman as is befitting the wife of a Rabbi, but also because she had a heart of gold. A dear, golden heart, but it did not beat as it should have... Not the heart and not the pulse. It really was the secret of secrets, only in this village, people knew, that in everyone there was a beating of the pulse, in the rich as well as the poor.

She was raised on milk and honey, fresh prepared pigeons and oranges. But she had the power, like Aaron Leib the Gabbai, of blessed memory, to remove the evil eye. Someone under the curse of the evil eye had only to gaze upon her. Because she was such a person, and had such a bright little face that one could not look directly at it, just like one can not stare into the sun. And you must understand that in order to remove the evil eye it was not necessary to go to Aaron Leib the Gabbai. For this one was, you should pardon the expression, under the “cowl” which could remove the evil eye.

And the entire village constantly wished blessings upon her. And in a time of disease the cemetery literally remained untouched because of her.

He, Todie Rodies, himself, had perhaps moved a hair away from Yiddishkeit. He trimmed his beard a little too aggressively, dressed in sable furs and plain white shirts, like a prince, you should pardon the comparison. He would travel to Obervertz to do business and look up the wealthy men there.

But the beautiful Dobie, believe me, you could travel the whole world over with all of its cities and Midrash houses, and you would not find another like her. There are not many such nice people as they are. Such charitable people, such pious, good souls. I am honored just to mention their names. They did not go around dressed like rich people, but rather like the shoemaker or bath-keeper, you should pardon the comparison. A kerchief on the sheitel [wig], half silk, maybe on the Sabbath or on holidays, maybe a silk one. On Thursdays all of the poor people in the village received from them a weekly stipend so that they could make the Shabbath. On Fridays they would share candles, and took care of anyone who did not have a clean shirt to wear to shul. They helped poor brides, widows and orphans. They cared for the sick, sending them bowls of healthy chicken soup – accompanied by bread. Who can count all of the things that the beautiful Dobie, the wealthy man’s wife, has done for everyone!?

And those who had troubles weighing on their heart – Who has not had troubles weighing on their heart? – They would come to the beautiful Dobie and tell their troubles to her. Even when a woman had had a fight with her husband, as is normal for women, they, too, would run to the beautiful Dobie. People went to her more than they went to the Rabbi Judge Welvelen. She became the female judge.

And little Goldie never left her mother's lap. Goldie heard everything and saw everything, and her food did not build her strength. Everything laid heavy on her heart, like I said, a golden little heart, and a weak one, she would often faint.

Once, she fainted during a rich man's wedding. In one room were all of the wealthy children, all done up in "vinegar and honey," and the children ate as much cake as they wanted. The poor children were standing by the door and the windows, and with their little eyes, like you could have shaken black pepper from them, and the poor children looked on. Goldie gave her portion away to the poor children, but the other kids did not want to give their portions up to them. The sight struck at Goldie's weak heart and she fell in a faint. When that happened it upset the whole wedding.

In the morning, needless to say, the beautiful Dobie baked as many treats as she could. On the Sabbath she invited all of the poor children to come to her, and Goldele gave out big portions of the treats to all of them. She knew every one of them by name, and when the children were happy, she was happy.

One other time when she fainted, they had already opened a grave in the cemetery before she revived. It was a hot summer day. Young girls had come and were playing near Todie Rodies' house. They had woven their hands together and were dancing in a circle. The beautiful Dobie called to Goldie: "You know what, my child, go and play with them." Goldele went out and the girls placed her in the center, with great gladness and joy that Todie Rodies' daughter was playing with them in the circle. They began singing with full throats, one of their own songs.

Goldie stood in the middle, the other girls barefooted and half-naked singing:

There's no bread, there's no bread,  
So we eat white challah,  
And she who turns in the circle  
She will become a bride.

There's no shoes, there's no shoes,  
We go about barefoot,  
And she who turns in the circle  
Will have a full purse.

There's no meat, there's no meat,  
So Mama is cooking a soup,  
And she who turns in the circle  
Will have a full stomach.

This struck her little heart, and her head spun and she fell down in a faint. It was only through prayers, the Gabbai's spells to remove the evil eye, cooking herbs from the cemetery and the great doctors coming from Prussia that they managed to save her life. And the most renowned of the doctors said that she needed fresh air, air to breathe.



Not far from their house was a mountain, and people actually called it Todie Rodies' Mountain. Below it – a valley and along the mountain was a lake. On the other side of the lake were forests and forests, crowded with trees. The tall trees rose up into the heavens. People would go there just to enjoy the fresh smells.

On every nice day the beautiful Dobie would spread out a sheet, put a cushion up against a tree, and Goldie would sit there. Alone in the house, Dobie could keep an eye on her from the window. And this is where the whole story began. Listen, my gray, short hairs under my kerchief, stand up like needles when I think back on this.

Here is the story of that time: Goldele had begun to see angels flying around her. One angel who was invisible, revealed itself to her. And whatever she wanted, the angel was able to accomplish, because she was such a beautiful child of God. So, do you think, Goldie would ask for a healthy heart? She asked for food for the poor little children. Food and clothes and shoes. Goldie told this story herself, and what she said one could believe. And she recounted with her own pure mouth thus:

“Every day when I would sit under the tree, they began to come to me, Hannah the Bathwoman's girl, Sarah Hinde, little Itzik the Orphan, all of the fruit-seller's five children, the butcher's children, Gitke and Yankele the wagonman's, and all, all of the poor children from the village. And they would stand around, so poor and hungry. The good angel would come and spread out a table. It was supported by a bit of white cloud. Half of it was for the boys, and the other half for the girls. And when the cloud passed by, all of the children were dressed in Sabbath clothes. The girls in white piqué and the boys in cashmere. They sat around a big table and in platters of silver and spoons of pure gold, a little white cloud brought roasted doves, noodle tzimmes with ground sugar, chicken soup with stuffed chicken necks, tzimmes with dumplings, and challah with braids on top. A woman's voice would say: “Children, say a blessing!” The children would say the Hamutzia benediction on bread and their prayer was a treat for heaven. The woman's voice would answer “Amen” in a clear song of well-being that spread out over the fields and gardens. And we ate all and drank all which had come to us from heaven to the table. Afterwards the woman's voice would say: “Children say a blessing!” And the children would follow with “Baruch Hoo baruch Shemo” and with that the sky would clear and the sun would shine.”

You understand! Goldie had seen all of this with her eyes closed. And every day it was the same. At home she had completely stopped eating. She said she wanted to eat with the children at the table. The beautiful Dobie would watch from the distance and not see anything. No one saw anything or heard anything but Goldele. She would sit and talk, talk with the woman's voice. Afterwards her eyes would sparkle, burn, at once black, then blue. And they grew big, such as the whole world could have seen through them!... But her body grew more and more thin. Not eating. They watched as Goldie, who people had poured gold down her throat, began to succumb to starvation. But no, she would only eat with the children at the table... No and no again, and there was nothing anyone could do.

So then, what more is there to say? One day at the end of Tammuz. The sun was setting in the west, a thick cloud had settled over the woods. Goldele was still sitting on the cushion which was set out on the sheet under the tree. The clouds drifted, and seemed to drift out of the woods itself. The sun was nowhere to be seen. A chill came that went strait to the bones. You understand, right?, what sort of chill!... The beautiful Dobie shivered like a leaf and did not trust herself to walk. One did not want to frighten her. Meanwhile, the whole town, like a single person, felt it and they began to gather from all seven streets into a group and moved toward the mountain. They saw how the beautiful Dobie sat next to Goldele, and could not get up...

Everyone ran, children and cattle. They took her into the house... They revived beautiful Dobie, but Goldele was dead, as dead as all the others in the cemetery. Beautiful Dobie lived until the funeral. Her soul was hardly able to stay in her body. And she fell on Goldele's coffin with a broken heart... You know what happened in our town? Todie Rodies himself remained alone in Obervertz. They sent a telegram to him, and he came. He sat shiva, cried, sobbed, and after thirty days, he left again. Could something good come from that, to keep traveling back to Obervertz?

And today:

Now that I am an old woman, already thirty years in America, and hideous, I would want to be back in that village! The living would not know me and not recognize me. I would go, go to Todie Rodies' house, and see who is living there now... I would go to the fence of the cemetery where lie: The beautiful Dobie with Goldele, the Rabbi's wife Goldie, Rabbi Judge Welvelen, Aaron Leib the Gabbai, and Neche the Exalted. The whole population of the village at that time is now in the cemetery. Then I would walk all of the streets and ask every man and every woman: "Do you know who the beautiful Dobie was? Do you know the fate of Goldele? And do you know who Todie Rodies the rich man was?"

# Those Who are Silent



## A Damask Tailor

Uh-hoo, those old years! Those were good times!... Thirty years ago in Kiev...

So would old Baruch-Lazar often sigh into his gray beard, his twisted sigh. And note how the old Khea-Golde would accompany him with her sigh, and *h-e-r-s* had a totally different meaning: Distress, cooking for weddings a whole year, preparing bread for foreign Germans, on Passover becoming a preparer of matzos and watching over a full house of hungry mouths and greedy eyes...

Baruch-Lazar had long forgotten about all of that. He only thought about his own memories:

He recycled the ribbed cape of the old lady aristocrat Pototzke, stitched with white threads outlining a large bird, from the neck to the back, and then stitched in black, sparkling beads. The neighborhood women came to gaze at it in wonder. And everyone gasped drooling when looking at the sparkling bird. And no better could any young wife or maiden wish for than for Baruch-Lazar to sew such a cape like the countess' except from camlet or cashmere.

"What have you not said to your Baruch-Lazar? Such a bird! Truly a living bird!" a neighbor lady said with envy to Khea-Golde.

And Khea-Golde answered with chagrin:

"What does he get from it? What does it do for him? Five fingers and a grip! Not even water over kashe..."

Baruch-Lazar was never bothered by Khea-Golde's complaints. Even if only a little work came to him, he would, with great diligence, take to sharpening and whetting his little knife, then separate the seam and remove the detritus. After that would come a series of smoothing and pressing of the good silk. Once all of that was done, he would begin cutting free hand his own pattern with the scissors. It would take him days and days. But nothing; What would a pattern do for him, for as long as it took, his mind was busy for as long as it took to complete the job.

And early every morning, after Baruch-Lazarus had prayed and eaten, he would get back to his work, and while he worked he sang. Earlier he had tested his voice with a: "Bim, bam, bim, bam" then in a loud voice he would gargle:

Oh the young girl, she could step fine,  
She went off with the captain.  
Woe to the mother, woe to the children,  
And woe to the whole household.

While singing he would look with alarm at his nine-year-old Eske, who was sitting on a high stool teaching himself a basting stitch. Later when he was finished with his work, he would carry on a conversation with the little song he had been singing, and with his own tune he argued with his voice.

"Make her, the woman:"

Rather than live with an offender of Israel –  
The young years to cut short.

“He begged her, and threatened her:”

Oh, your words,  
It brings me to sorrow,  
Your words will disappoint you,  
As I will take from your words gold and silver.  
Oh, but they will pour out.

“But she is a modest woman and answers:”

My gold and my silver I will give to you myself,  
But I will stay in my house.  
Rather than live with an offender of Israel –  
The young years to cut short.

“Just like that, just like that, correct! That is how a pious woman should answer,” Baruch-Lazar would add with his own tune and immediately begin with the second verse.

Khea-Golde, if she wasn't busy with a wedding or a bris, and the children were fed, would also sit by the tailor's table and help, hand him things, thread needles, and therefore would always ask him: “Anu, Baruch-Lazar, sing about the woman who didn't want to be with the offender of Israel,”

The little song had seven charms for her. She also had from her whole heart believed that the woman was right not to want to be with an offender of Israel. She did not know how to learn a Yiddish tune. She was raised in a Russian town among non-Jewish goyim, she grew up as a half-peasant. Baruch-Lazar suffered because of that his whole life. He was very devout and not at all a bumpkin. And when he heard how she prayed or said a blessing, it cut to his heart, and sounded like a goy speaking. Khea-Golde was his second wife, and he had a sickly child from the first. She raised him as her own. He was very grateful to her for that. He thought: God will forgive her. Her reward in heaven has already been prepared, because of the way she mothers the sickly, quiet child.

In America Baruch-Lazar's great reputation was minimized, while Khea-Golde's increased. Every day she would cook on the oven a big pot with meat. Noodles she would cook during the week. Sugar cost almost nothing, and water flowed from a faucet...

Khea-Golde had one thing that pained her heart, it was that Baruch-Lazar would eat no meat, not even on Friday evenings. That is why when the family would go out to eat a little meat, she would throw hers away and say that she had already finished it.

The truth, indeed, when she was giving business to the butcher's son, she moved heaven and earth to also open a butcher shop. Can a damask tailor who had sewn in his home for an aristocrat, and countess, work in a butcher shop? His hands were accustomed to stroking silks and satins, that, Khea-Golde understood, when she saw how the butcher shop went under together with her Baruch-Lazar...

He, Baruch-Lazar, even went all out for a half year in the butcher shop. He had been raised with and grew old working with big, sharp scissors, but before the big butcher knife, he trembled. When he had

to take a meat cleaver and chop a rib, flank, or a marrow bone, it seemed to him as though he were hacking the live beast and his hand would shake... Cutting a piece of spleen, lung or liver, he felt like he was cutting up a cow... And could hear it crying out moo!... moo!... When his fingers were smeared with clotting blood, he would have fear of his own hands... And above all he was shocked by the black, solidified blood around the heart... He would not even go near a slaughtered animal. Khea-Golde could see that he would not do in a butcher shop, and sold the business at a big loss.

All that was left was the heartbreak that Baruch-Lazar from that time on would not eat any meat.

Ten years had passed since Baruch-Lazar and Khea-Golde had been in America. All of their children had already left home and the two elder parents were staying with them. The mother and father were still helpful. The mother cooked, baked and fried. Father saw to the clothing when a button or a hook was missing. Once with scissors and needle in hand, Baruch-Lazar once again became the damask tailor. He sang again, but with a rasping in his throat, the old song, and Khea-Golde reminded him:

“Anu, Baruch-Lazar, sing about the woman who did not want to marry the offender of Israel.”

Baruch-Lazar straightened and beat out the meter:

Rather than live with an offender of Israel –  
The young years to cut short.

But his voice came out like a not-yet-slaughtered rooster, and Baruch-Lazar coughed and gasped for air.

Khea-Golde wanted to show him that her voice was even today still good, she began to sing. She knew that he hated her goyish singing, but she understood that and wanted to tease the old man...

She sang a verse from an old peasant folk song...

Baruch-Lazar did get aggravated and angry:

“Nu, does that have any flavor? A pumpkin goes into the garden and asks himself what’s going on, the cucumbers, the radishes, the beets! Can a pumpkin walk? You, old lady...” And he was also a little annoyed that her voice did indeed still sound young...

She continued singing with another verse...

That song fired up Baruch-Lazar, and his heart pained him. What a peasant!... An old Jew of seventy years, kayne hora, should sing like she has a nickel in her pocket and goes into a bar to drink her sorrows away with bitter whiskey.

“Old woman!” he yelled out loud, “Old woman, you have gone mad!”

Khea-Golde fell into an embarrassed silence.

Baruch-Lazar went back to his old thoughts... Khea-Golde is still a goy... The way she walks, talks, is just like a Russian peasant... Lord in heaven! For all these years he has, indeed, lived with and had children with a goy!... Above all when she sings a goyishe song it seems to him to change her... But then Baruch-Lazar would remember, peace be with her, that she was a simple person, and he should be forgiving, while she was a respectable Jew... His anger evaporated and he asked her:

“You know what, Khea-Golde, let’s both sing the song about the woman and the offender of Israel.”

Rather than live with an offender of Israel –  
The young years to cut short.

# The Young Aunt

Already, for that alone, Dood'ke had great respect for his Aunt Esther, because she did not call him Dood'ke, or Dood'l but Dood. He was already a big boy, just a year away from Bar Mitzvah, and people shouldn't distort his name and call him Dood'l, like Mama called him after a scolding, or Dood'ke like people called him out of habit. The name "Dood" was his ticket to go into the society of "big boys."

Aunt Esther was 19-years old. He had never called her "Esther'ke" like everyone else did, but Aunt Esther. But one time he shamefully called her "Esther" like she was an equal, he felt good, as though he were acting like a grown young man. But as soon as he said "Esther" without title "Aunt" his heart would jump, and soon after he would feel as though his ears were on fire. He avoided it after that.

He would, he thought to himself, never look at a "maiden" if he couldn't find one in the whole village who was as pretty as his Aunt Esther... One as least as mature as her and with the same thin waist. A face as noble and charmingly pale. But no, no where! He had looked at all of the young girls in the village at least a hundred times: Either one was taller and thinner, or the other was shorter and thicker. And the rest – either tall and lean as a post, or short and thick like a block of wood.

His Aunt Esther was unique... So full of charm. Just like Queen Esther, the mother of Rachel and Ruth.

Once he heard a neighbor slander his Aunt saying: "Esther'ke is still so thin because she is an orphan and has to live with her sister." That engendered in him an odd anger against the Mother. All the times she yelled at him, it did not bother him. But when she yelled at Esther, or cursed at her, it would lie heavy on his heart and his lips would contort to cry. And in order to hide it from Esther, he would always hurry into another room."

And it was good that Aunt Esther was in the house... It was never awkward. And the Father would act differently... And it was always like a holiday in the house.

There was just one disappointment. The young boys in the village would call her a name. "The Prussian," because she was from Memel and had a "German" manner. He wanted to break the bones of every one of them, and teach them a good lesson about calling his Aunt "The Prussian," but he was ashamed. Be that as it may, people had already suggested that he liked his Aunt Esther more than he liked his Mother... He made out that the suggestion bothered him like three times zero. They called her "The Prussian" a hundred times a day... But an anger burned in him.

In the village the wives thought of him as a good boy, and a lot of the mothers wished that their children were as good as Reb Hertzl's Dood'ke. He knew, and *he* was the only one that knew, that he was good because of Aunt Esther... He could have been the worst, breaking through all the roofs, braking the rungs of the ladders, and gone around smudged like a chimney sweep. But now it was scented water in the morning, and every day he washed his face and hands with soap, and combed his hair with a part to one side like a Prussian.

Nearly every evening when Aunt Esther went to visit her friend, Sarah-Beylken, she would take him with her. She was afraid to walk alone in the dark, muddy little streets, and even in Summer, when it was light outside, because in the middle of the village was an old shrine. And people said that demons



did violent things there at night. And Dood'l because he was walking with his Aunt Esther, felt he was capable of tangling with demons and ghosts if they wanted to bother her... They would walk entwined, that is to say she would have her arm all the way around under his shoulders, and her right or left hand would rest on his shoulder, and that is how they would walk together. He really wanted hold her tight around the waist, but he was ashamed and didn't do it, but it was also good the way they did walk. Something odd happened... He felt as though everything was alive. There the bridge, the posts, and the trees – Everything had suddenly acquired a soul... A beautiful one, a singing one...

And suddenly something happened which overturned everything. It was as though someone had built a beautiful temple, out of pristine snow, and then covered it with warm mud. From a nearby village a boy came with a head crowned with red curls, and lips that seemed to be carved from a fresh liver. People said of him that he had Korah's money, great wealth, and all of the fathers and mothers rejoiced: None had considered that there would be a marriage contract with Esther'ke: A poor young woman, and a nobody to boot...

That Aunt Esther would be excluded by the wealthy lumber merchant, Dood had no doubt. But that she would please him is something that Dood could not imagine.

The whole town buzzed about the great match that Esther had made – God must have had a hand in it, because her father and mother were in the next world and worked to help her.

Dood'l was the only one to suffer a great heartache. Dood took an immediate dislike to him like to a spider. He wanted someone to come like a... Someone like David the King, or a Bar Kochba, a handsome teacher... But a redhead!...

And once the contract was validated, and the conditions set, Aunt Esther lost a lot in his eyes. She would get married, become like all the other wives, just like the neighbor, Tsire-Lah, with a big belly and bent-over shoulders, and she would curse from a mouth without teeth... His Aunt Esther would become just like Tsire-Lah! He could just weep out of pity for her...

But he could do nothing about it. If he were bigger, as tall as she, he would be able to mix in... And every night before he went to sleep, he always thought, how could Aunt Esther stand it that the husband would be sitting or laying next to her? The redhead couldn't even climb up a ladder, or make his own bows and arrows, or throw a stone up to the stars, or clamber like a squirrel up a tree like he could?... He is a redhead, a bird made out of lead!... He would have a word with Aunt Esther and after that have his Father tear him to pieces...

According to the terms of the marriage contract the wedding was to take place in six months. However, the "Redhead" didn't want to wait that long, and it took place three months later, just after Sukkot.

They took lodging in an apartment.

Dood did not want to visit them in their house. And for as much as his Mother begged him, cajoling or threatening, that he should go visit them with a little fried carp, or a freshly baked bread, or once with a tray of sour sorrel, he never went. The worst was when the Mother pushed him to go over to spend the night because the new Uncle had to travel overnight. That is when his Father also mixed in. But nothing would get him to go!

When he saw her “with a belly” he really felt hostile toward her. She had such a fine waist!... The redhead... And even though her face had become even more noble, and thin, just like a sick person on the verge of death, he still did not bother about her... He was still angry with her. He could not look at her with that big belly... He would shudder just standing near her, for fear that he might inadvertently brush against her belly...

It was getting closer to his Bar Mitzvah. He knew his sermon very well. But just the thought that she was sitting there in loose clothing with her big belly, and he, the Uncle – like a redheaded ram, made him confused. He was embarrassed in front of his friends.

And after his sermon when Aunt Esther hugged him and he felt himself pressed against her stomach, a sort of shock came over him and a strange revulsion, which stayed with him for several days after.

A month or so after the Bar Mitzvah, Aunt Esther had a baby daughter. He fled from the house. About three weeks later his Mother sent him with half a hen, and he went to see her: He had not seen her since the Bar Mitzvah.

She was once again thin and straight and so noble, as though the soul in her had grown. And something was laying in the cradle, well swaddled, just a little part of a hand was to be seen. He could not hold himself back. Slowly, he tip-toed over and saw the tiny face. It was smiling in its sleep. Soon his angry heart was gone. He forgave Aunt Esther everything. He kissed the baby’s tiny little hands, trembling with fear that he might press too hard with his lips. Aunt Esther was overjoyed, and Dood’l sobbed with remorse.

“You have a cousin, Dood, will you love her?”

Dood’l cried, because he had been so mean to his Aunt Esther the whole time.

# The Butterfly

The two of them were leaning against the railing on the boardwalk, looking out over the beach and the ocean. The sea was quiet, still and a muddy green. It was high tide. The waves on the beach foamed and splashed as they slid up the mound of wet sand and tried to wash away the debris that the tide had brought in.

An October sun warmed them and an October breeze stirred.

He was tall and thin, with wide, broad shoulders, reddish curly hair, and he was always looking around in an embarrassed manner. She – fine features, with blonde hair, and small hands and feet. Somewhere between an overgrown child, and a not fully-grown woman...

“Kih’le, see in the distance, the masts of the ships? Oh, how that draws me there!” he said with longing.

“Oh, Zemach, just look over there, the white sea shell by the post? I want to have it!” the blonde Kih’le plucked at his arm with a childish little finger indicating a clump of sea shells, “I want to have it for a soap dish.”

And suddenly, Zemach saw how an exhausted butterfly had landed on the wet sand, and could no longer lift itself up. He worked and tried, fluttering the red-brown little wings with great effort, but could not budge from the spot. It could have been that his wings had gotten wet. And then, there came swirling and tumbling behind him a wave...

“Oh!...” Kih’le cried out.

And before she could end that outcry, Zemach was hanging, like an orangutan, over the railing and then he dropped down onto the sand. He caught the butterfly, and with his wet shoes he climbed the steps back up to the boardwalk.

Kih’le had a happy thought: The butterfly is mine... The butterfly is mine...

She ran to Zemach and carefully took the butterfly by its closed wings with her fingers. With quick steps she headed home with the captive butterfly in her hands. Sometimes its long, silky feet would clasp her finger and try to spread its wings to fly away... Kih’le, however, was very careful. Even though she was alarmed each time the little feet, like hairs, clasped her finger.

But Kih’le in spite of the alarms, was not afraid as long as Zemach was there by her side, or behind her...

And Zemach was walking behind her with his lazy, thoughtful stride. A strange thought had come to him: He wanted to be able to pin her two hands behind her and carry her like she, Kih’le, carried the butterfly... How strange that would look... People would undoubtedly stop and stare... And do nothing, as usual... And Zemach thought that the butterfly must certainly be embarrassed. Because his body is so ugly, like a little worm... His whole beauty and pride were his wings, but Kih’le had taken his wings and pinned them, concealing them, and hiding his body, and if, he is a male and there should

happen to fly by a “she” and see him with his wings pinned back in the hands of an odd-looking beast...!

“Kih’le, let the summer-flyer go, the wings should be dry now and he can fly away...”

“Really! It’s going to die, and I’ll keep it pressed in a book.”

They were nearly to the house. Kih’le went in and placed the butterfly on the table. He stayed there as though dead with outspread wings. Kih’le didn’t want him to die with his wings closed... She blew her warm breath over him, and he began to flutter the ends of his wings, as though to catch the breeze... He crawled until he reached a spot of sunshine on the far side of the table. There, he opened his wings wider. A soft, red-brown with two black satiny ribbons near the edge. And the whole wing embellished with black ribbons and countless round spots distributed randomly. The farthest tip of the wings had eyes like yellow topaz. The softness of satin, the shimmer of silk, and sparkle of gold shown from the butterfly.

“Oh, how beautiful!” Kih’le was enchanted, “Zemach, come in, look, it is still alive!...”

Zemach grumbled under his breath, the meaning of which was that he would not go in and see. He stayed out on the balcony in a rocking chair with his feet up on the railing.

“Stick a pin in his head, or put him between the pages of a book and pile a bunch more books on top, and he will quickly die,” was a piece of advice from her younger sister.

“He will soon die like this and perhaps the wings will stay beautiful...”

“On the other hand, perhaps he will become weakened and lose the color in his wings? Follow my advice, stick a pin in his head” – was her younger sister’s offering – “Or else ask Zemach.”

“Zemach is peeved because I am not taking the butterfly out to the garden and letting him go. Zemach caught him for me...” Kih’le said.

The whole household came running as to an evil wonder, to see the butterfly. It was as though they had never seen one before. And, when they got tired of it, they left.

Kih’le went outside and complained to Zemach:

“He won’t die...”

“Let him live!” he answered, annoyed.

“No, he will eventually die, and I will have a reminder of how you jumped over the railing, maybe twenty-five feet to the ground! And how you rescued him before the waves came. I don’t ever want to forget it!...”

Zemach cast an embarrassed, sideways look at her.

“Not so that you could have him, is why I jumped down, and also not so that he could have a couple more summer days. I just didn’t make any calculations... I didn’t want the waves to smack him...”

“That is what you are saying now,” Khih’le said to tease him, “It was for me! For me you made the jump!”

He did not answer her, and she flitted away, just like a butterfly. A light-blonde, bright, sunny, walking human-butterfly... Without wings, and, therefor, not as beautiful...

Zemach thought to himself: Those who have wings should not light upon the land... Someone will catch your wings, and it’s over!... Both, him and the butterfly, belong to Khih’le. Why? Well, because people call her Khih’le... And Khih’le calls to everyone, because they all belong to her... The Father, the Mother, the Sister and him. And now the butterfly...

I’ve been to many places, seen: The beautiful gentile girls of the Tyrol, the German Gretchens, Parisian dancing girls, brown-skinned and black-eyed Arab women, the girls of Jerusalem, dull, high-brow Spanish women, seen it all, loved them with my whole heart, and then moved on... And here, with Khih’le I stay... He, Zemach, the giant, the redhead, the wild one, stopped and stayed with Khih’le... And even though he could blow her away the way one blows a fly off of ones sleeve, he can not leave her and travel on...

And why did he stop wandering after one look at her?... That is what unlaced his shoes... Straight and stiff, not a single knot on either. And she ordered and forced him to look at how beautifully she undid the shoelaces... And thus, with the same order, one was forced to listen to all of her foolishness. With one glance at those blue, clear eyes, a fine, thin nose, and you knew that she was the one, Khih’le...

“Zemach, come eat your lunch,” Khih’le yelled from inside the house. He did not come.

She came out to him and sat down in his lap. Zemach remained indifferent, as he would have if a fly landed on his knee... And Khih’le understood why...

“All in all he will obviously die...” she pleaded.

Zemach did not eat. He was plagued with unrest and longing. He knew that he could open the window and let the butterfly go. But, if she cried and got dark circles under her eyes... Cried like a beaten dog. And the whole family would shoot daggers with their eyes...

For an entire afternoon Khih’le fussed over the butterfly, wanting him to die quickly, and Zemach should soon forget about it... But surely overnight the butterfly will die... She thought, and she waited...

The next morning. He was still alive. In truth, just barely alive. But he still fluttered his wings, and lived!... And Zemach went around the house acting as though a moribund person were in the room...

After midday, the sun was shining brightly and Khih’le was eager to see how the butterfly would like the warm sunshine outside. She took it outside and set it down in the sunlight in the grass. He started to wobble, and dance around. Zemach stood nearby and both of them watched.

The butterfly took flight and Khih’le ran after it.

“Khih’le, you let him go?”

“Yes, can’t you see?”

“I like you like this.”

And to celebrate Zemach went to do a little work, writing...

A little later they sat together on the balcony and chatted.

A red-brown butterfly flew by.

“Maybe that’s him... Our butterfly,” Zemach said.

“Maybe,” Khih’le said and snuggled closer to him.

“Doesn’t it give you pleasure to see him flying and in the sunshine?”

“Yes,” Khih’le answered, and Zemach kissed her little hands.

At night he sat at his writing desk. Khih’le was sleeping. Her small, pale face looked as peaceful as a dead child. And Zemach had to look to see if the blanket was moving from her breathing to know that she was alive...

The idea came to him to thumb through his bible. But, he wasn’t sure where he had set it down. He looked around for it with his eyes, not wanted to wake Khih’le up. Then he spotted it under a pile of heavy books. What he found then tore his heart apart...

In the pages of the bible lay a stiff, flattened, red-brown butterfly with black satiny ribbons and circles around the edge of the wings.

He looked at Khih’le, and her face looked like that of a dead child...

# Esther

It was the twelfth of May, a few years ago. A warm, sunny day, I was sitting in Washington Square Park coming off of Fifth Avenue and was idly paging through a newspaper. I wanted to be able to do for myself and was looking for a job in the unending “Wants.” You know how our people will lock themselves in a shop or office and sit all day with long, foolish lines of numbers! With a pencil I wrote down in my notebook addresses, because I hoped not to get a job in one of those places. A bird screeched and I let the newspaper fall. I watched the birds fly like white clouds in close formation in the sky, and looked at the trees in bloom. Then I saw what looked like the chauffeur of an automobile walking directly toward me. I looked at him in surprise, and in a very stiff and polite manner he said to me that the lady in the automobile wanted to talk to me. I was very confused, and cast a look in the direction of the car. Through the open window I saw a smiling, young, lovely face. I went to her. A pair of intelligent, gray eyes openly looked at me. The chauffeur stood nearby. I was even more confused. My suit was worn, with thinning fabric at the knees, my hat unblocked, but my collar was white, a nice cravat, and new shoes on my feet. I took off my hat and with great respect, I bowed to her.

“Would you ride with me a little ways in my automobile?” she asked me with a calm demeanor. I noted that she was paler than she should have been, and her mouth twitched a little when she spoke.

I didn’t know what to do.

“Come, the weather is beautiful!” She continued, saying it almost as an order.

The chauffeur opened the door and I climbed in. A pleasant but sharp scent of perfume went all through me. Through her shiny-blue silk dress I could see the veins of her soft, round knees. The automobile drove on for several minutes. I did not say a word. The silence was good, the way it needed to be.

After a short while, I took her hand. It was as cold as the hand of a corpse. I took both of her tiny, thin hands in mine, and blew my hot breath on them to warm them up. I looked at her lovely, pale face, and kissed her hand. She looked at me calmly and silently. We both remained silent. Suddenly, our mouths came together and we kissed. Then we both looked deeply in one another’s eyes like two old friends. We were not embarrassed.

“Who are you, a being from the earth?” I asked her.

“Don’t ask me anything. I am from a hard, cold earth condemned to a life-long sorrow... The Spring and the whole Summer is mine... I will share it with you. But don’t ask me anything, that is the condition.”

“And what is your name?” I asked, ignoring the condition.

“What is your favored name?”

“Esther!” I said suddenly, thinking back to Queen Esther.

“I am called Esther...”

“What are you, painter, poet?” she asked me.

“What made you think I was one or the other?”

“Nu, tell me, you are a tailor?”

“No, I am a poet.”

“A poet... And how long has it been since you had a meal?”

“A full two days, but I am not hungry, I have drank a lot of coffee and tea, and smoked way too much, Oh, I have a wonderful pipe, and when I smoke it I don’t want to eat.”

“But painters and poets are generally the poorest of artists. They are the least able to agree to compromises...”

Fine feelings, and well understood. I wanted to tell he so but, before I could she said:

“I am also hungry, let’s go together somewhere to a restaurant.”

She sent the chauffeur away with a friendly “Good-bye.”

On the way I asked:

“How did all of this come about?...”

“Well, I have searched for you this whole springtime... And today, driving past the park, I suddenly spotted you. A face such as yours, is not seen in the surroundings that I find myself in. The young people have sated, satisfied faces with happy, gray eyes; the middle-aged ones have flat, extinguished eyes. Nothing in the world captivates them, except for the youngest of the chorus girls on Broadway.”

In the restaurant she said to me:

“There is something I do want to say to you, please do not misunderstand me. – My Father is a sixty-year-old dilettante. He paints noble women from the city in deep décolleté, writes sentimental verses in flowery poems. He is an elderly, American aristocrat. My eighty-year-old Bubbie, Father’s Mother, is an elderly child. Reads modern novels, sings old Scottish songs, locks herself in her room and re-reads, for God know how many times, a packet of letters, that she received from someone, who later became the president of the United States, and has now been dead for a long time. She reads them to me and her old eyes sparkle. All of the letters breathe a great life. Her beauty, her gifted nature is praised and sung. With her gnarled fingers she covers up the name, but I know who it is. And the dear old woman, knows that I know. And she gives me a sneaky smile. And my Mother is truly from another world: She comes from a puritanical New England family, and is like an old withered lily. Daily she is shocked by dances, talk and jokes, which gives Bubbie and I a great deal of amusement. She gave Father five children, for which he allowed himself to give her a kiss in mine or Bubbie’s presence. We all love her so much! But she feels herself a stranger in the house. And in the thirty-five years that she and my father have been married, she has never been able to become accustomed to my Father’s frivolous nature. Mama says, I am just like my Father. And it is true.”



“And I know,” she continued, “that in New York there is someone, already bald, with a little belly, well connected, worth millions and is waiting for me... In the meantime he passes the time with actresses, chorus girls and every Sunday he comes to have lunch with us. I asked to put him off for the Summer, and my dear Father worked it out for me.

“That’s enough, I won’t say a word more. We will see each other again tomorrow.”

She took my arm, looked deeply into my eyes and showed me a pair of intelligent, gray-blue eyes filled with fire, passion and a laughing parting.

We saw each other every day. Very often she would come to me early in the morning and we would not part until nighttime. In every corner of the city, except for the aristocratic areas, we could be seen together. Her greatest pleasure was when we went to a totally unknown borough, and wandered around the whole day, riding streetcars and going to museums.

Little by little, I don’t know how, I was dressed in a fine, new suit, silk shirts, and my room filled up with paintings and antiques. Every day she became more happy and more beautiful.

Once I was taken with a strange caprice: She must tell me how much she loved me.

“I love you just as much as every Jewish beggar woman that I encountered on the way to see you, is dear to me. I have such love for all of the poor, filthy children with dark, sparkling eyes! You, too, have such eyes, these sorts of eyes are only seen in Jewish children. And when I read in the newspapers that in Russia they beat Jews, I cried the whole night through. Your brothers and sisters are being beaten, and for that, I cried.”

I laid my head in her lap, and I wept.

“I would like to tell you a joke from my Mother,” she said lifting up my head and kissing my tear-filled eyes, “Once I had a conversation with my Mother about Jews. She looked on to me with her honest, puritanical eyes and said: “You have been talking a lot about Jews lately.” I was embarrassed. I had not realized that I had been talking frequently about Jews. Nevertheless, she said to me: “There are good Jews and bad Jews. For example: Shylock was a bad Jew, and Rothschild and Baron Hirsch were good Jews.” Then she piously placed one hand upon the other and fell silent.”

A time came when she couldn’t stay with me all day. I felt that it wasn’t because she loved me any less, rather something else, and I couldn’t figure out what. Days came when we could hardly spend an hour together. I got angry and raised my voice. She merely said:

“I could die for you every minute of the day, but my life belongs to my Mother. She gave me the life, wherein I met you.”

One day, it was the seventh of October. I was sitting in my room and waiting for Esther. A messenger came carrying a letter from her. In my confusion I let him go without taking an answer to the letter. The contents of the letter:

“I can not see you today. Tomorrow is my wedding. I thought that it was still two weeks away. Why it was suddenly changed, I have no idea. Tomorrow we will be going away, it looks like it will be

Bermuda, and perhaps elsewhere also. I don't know. He is short, with a bald head, a belly, and he thinks he has rheumatism in his feet. Yes, and he is very needy. Your Esther.”

My first thought was to run, cry out, not let go! Then, for the first time I realized that I did not know her name, had no address, in a word, I knew nothing about the woman. She came to me like a Summer bird, and flew away with the Summer.

## Comes the Frost...

Outside it is frosty. Winter clouds scud about, low, they fall on your head... The gray frost is coming. It is here...

The frost gets into your bones... Really Rachel, there is frost in your bones?... In that particular little room one was old, and it was cold. But outside, outside people were going around with sunshine in their hearts!... The sun squeezed from past springtimes...

Dressed in dark green velvet, a large hat and with white gloves she gives piano lessons. And afterwards on the step they yell after her: "The piano teacher goes! The piano teacher goes!" Women in the corridor straighten out their aprons across their stomachs. Another, with a child in her arms, held the child up and asked with her eyes: "See what a pretty child I have." A goodhearted person says behind her back: "A mercy, that she climbs stranger's steps..." Rachel smiles sweetly to the women and the children, and outside, she carries away with her sunshine in her heart...

It happened once, that near the door of the disgusting Maxel, her sharp ears picked up someone's voice on the other side of the door ask: "Something of a beauty, your piano teacher, Maxel?" "No sir, a long nose." Quick and emphatic, he didn't have to give it a thought. She had a long nose, and that's all there is to it. She waved it away with her hand. After all, Maxel, didn't she have beautiful eyes? Rachel had her mother's eyes... But Maxel was just a child. He saw her nose before he saw her eyes.

A few minutes later Maxel tapped out with his thin, dirty little fingers: do re mi fa sol la ti do. Rachel listened, and somewhere in a corner of her brain could be heard: A loooooong nooose... He glanced once at her and that was it... Seeing that she had a looong nooose... She wanted to smack Maxel with her hand across his thin, dirty little hands, such that his fingers should break and the piano should collapse from the blow! Do re mi fa sol la ti do, do ti la sol fa mi re do... And Maxel gave her a dollar and a half. The half-dollar wrapped in a piece of paper, and said with embarrassment: "For the week." Rachel smiled sweetly; she knew that Mother would ask: "Nu, Maxel, what did the teacher say to you?" "He would answer, "She smiled..."

But when she came home to her little room, Rachel did not smile. The sunshine in her heart was already gone... And the frost returned to her bones... She crawled out of the green velvet, threw aside the silk undergarments, and felt very thin... And was ashamed of her own thinness... Such pointed elbows... And sharp knees... Quick, put on the silk kimono! Wrap yourself in silk and velvet... The limbs will look softer, sweeter... In velvet the knees bend, and the hands move as if by command. In the Spring the limbs were supple and the heart laughed, only the mind was aware and valued these treasures like a miser his gold. And when the first frosts came on, it penetrated the bones first of all...

Yesterday the clouds scudded by gray and restless. Her heart was also restless. She thought the world was about to extinguish itself. Today, the sun was inflamed like in Summer. The outside was golden! Anu, Rachel, jump into your green velvet and go for a walk. Maxel doesn't need a lesson today. Go and leave the heart within you to its desires... And do whatever you desire. You are pretty, Rachel... Just look in the mirror. Look away from the couple of wrinkles, look how your eyes have lit up, and your mouth smiles back at you. There, you have nothing to worry about... Put on the big hat and the white gloves and pin on the yellow chrysanthemum. It enchants the eyes, the yellow chrysanthemum on the green velvet...

And, as you walk the Jewish streets, you will soon encounter him... Him, the Jewish intellectual. And alone like you, Rachel... Go and let yourself get to know him... He is also searching; searches and longs like you, Rachel... He is intelligent and will know you by the fire in your eyes, and by the yellow chrysanthemum. He is a smart young man. He knows that, it is just so in this world, that one does not pin a golden chrysanthemum on green velvet, while outside there is already a frost...

And perhaps, Rachel, he is also hungry... His coat is worn and for Summer. And perhaps the glimmer in the eyes is a double one, both hunger, and love for you... Draw him to you. As it is, in your fantasies you have already done so many times... Be a woman, cook an evening meal, and afterwards sit by the piano and let him see how your fingers spring lightly over the keys when you play, "The Rabbi Bids Us to be Joyful." And over all of your limbs will spread a warmth. And, perhaps, he will recognize you...

See that you are his Rachel, his Rachel'e... Not at all a stranger in green velvet with a chrysanthemum pinned on... And he will stay with you... For all evenings, stay with you...

The sun was a Summery gold, shining, warming, as though it wanted to forget, that there should already be a frost; and perhaps it already knew, but wanted to be good today... Just today, among all of the gray, frosty days... And Rachel walked around, thinking and looking in the show-windows. However in every pink blouse... Or in the green one with the flat gold, she played the Elegy... Or, Chopin. And the red bedroom slippers every morning early with every kimono... Oh, if she only had them... And the beautiful children in the little cradles with the mamas.. And her eyes searched every passerby...

A block further on and he came toward her, the young man, handsome, noble. The closer, the more handsome and the more noble. Just as I thought, just as imagined, my young man!... He doesn't see me, Rachel'le, she who plays so wonderfully on the piano... Ach, how my heart beats! It will spring from my chest. Rachel, Rachel'le, don't lose control of yourself... Say something... Let your heart beat. Faint away from fear?... Give yourself a pinch in the hand, see, he is coming toward you... Give another pinch. That's good... It hurts... Rachel, talk to him, in just an instant he will have gone past you... Stop him and speak to him... Look then, he is a good man, a noble man... Your tongue is lame?... Then speak with your eyes... Rachel, Rachel'le... I'm not going to keep pinching you in the hand... Your eyes, also, are cast down?... Gone past. He passed so close by you... Turn your head around, Rachel, Rachel'le! I beg you, I love you... Maybe he will turn his head around... Can't you move your head a bit?... So go, turn around and go home and let the frost enter your bones...

The sunlight from past Springtimes pressed into your heart, extinguished itself... The gray night has come, and the ever-present frost has penetrated your bones...



# The Mountain Spirit

A few days after the plowing the sun burned hot, then a heavy rain came, afterwards a light breeze stirred, and all at once everything on the mountain began to bloom. This year Springtime came early.

Naftali, the farmer's nephew, was very happy that Spring had come early this year. In the Summer when he came to visit, they called him Nathan, and in the Winter they went back to calling him Naftali. Nathan, for him, was the symbol of hot, golden days, clear skies, of happy songs that one sang on starry nights. And he liked the sound of the name. And Naftali, was for him the symbol snowy, uncertain pathways; short, gray days and long, endless nights; bare mountains; the woods sparse and open. All of that hummed and sounded sad coming from the name Naftali.

But in all of that joy, there was still one more cause. In the first warm days, the Aunt would travel to New York, and stay for a few weeks with her sister, and visit doctors with the children; the Uncle should also go, and in his place would come the Aunt's niece Gitel. She came for her health, to rest a little bit, and also because at her place in the ciyt there was not a lot of room and there would not be place enough for both her and her Aunt.

Naftali was in the stable with the horses. He was very friendly with them, petting them over their long heads, over their soft sides, and gave them a good portion of hay and oats. Silently, he transmitted his thoughts to the horses. The Aunt and Uncle will be going away. He would drive them to the station, and bring back Gitel. And driving back, up the mountain he would drive the wagon very slowly, so that the ascent would not be too difficult for her. He would go on foot leading the horses while she sat in the wagon. And all day they would ride and walk around. He would let the reins drop, and he would chat with Gitel. He would let her chose the way, she already knew all of the paths on the mountain.

And early one bright, beautiful morning his Aunt said to him as she served him breakfast, that he should not forget to go to the train station to meet the six o'clock train, because Gitel was coming today.

Naftali himself did not know what stuck in his throat, was it laughter at her foolish speech, or just joy. He could have laughed at what she said! He could not have possibly forgotten to go to the station, Gitel was arriving. That he would forget?! Nu, and where were the horses? They would soon remind him, indeed, if he had forgot. The Aunt and the Uncle had no idea that they did not have to remind him, but the horses knew did know something...

And the same day that they left, Gitel arrived. He knew her from before. He saw her each time Uncle sent him to make purchases in New York. But on this Spring evening she looked different than usual. A pale young woman with red, round earrings, and a string of pearls around her neck and white silk gloves. He was ashamed when she gave him her little hand in the white silk gloves, and his hands were so thick and wide. His blood rushed to his face, and he quickly took her hand.

Driving from the station back home it was just the way he told the horses it would be: He went on foot, Gitel sat in the wagon. He remained silent the whole time. He was angry, but he didn't know about what or with whom, certainly not with the horse; more likely with Gitel. Why does she stay in New York? Why such an interest in New York! She is pale, she is thin; she must, without a doubt, be unhealthy. And he was so disappointed with her. No, he would not give her any sympathy. What's with her? She can't come here and be refreshed and healthy? And losing himself in thought he gave

the horse a sharp snap with the whip. Then he slapped himself, why did he whip the horse? He had told the mare that going up the mountain he would walk with her step by step...

At the farm there was a farm-hand, a helper, who would go through fire and flood for Naftali. He had done double the work to allow Naftali to pay attention to Gitel. And Naftali drove Gitel away from the oven. He wanted to do the cooking, she was not to do any heavy, coarse work. In the afternoon he hitched the horses, the young man was to wash the old carriage, and they would go for a drive.

The wagon went up or down the mountains, with their rocks and ruts, and when the wagon was jolted, she would unwillingly fall up against him. He told her all sorts of stories about the mountains. He wanted to scare her a little, and have her lean into him out of fright. And he had dreamed up a story about a mountain spirit who was half-human and half-devil, and flew about the mountain peaks and tree tops dressed in white. He didn't do anyone any harm except occasionally, he would play a prank on someone and show himself, naturally, in the middle of the night, come to their window, bang on it, show himself and then run off. And when Gitel asked where this mountain spirit came from, he didn't need to think about it, the fantasy had already done its work in him, and he quickly answered:

"Where did he come from? There was once a handsome young man from the big city who used to flatter all of the young girls with sweet words. He had done wrong to many young girls, then afterwards told them that they were not very faithful... And one only-daughter, beautiful as a princess, and a pious girl, like a young maid from Jerusalem, was a victim of his. She had a child. He left her and then slandered her. She cursed him saying that he should never find a place in the world but that he would be chased away and hunted, that he would be thrown and pitched from one place to another and his soul should meld with a devil. And because he was very remorseful is the only reason why he remained half-man and half-devil.

And Gitel listened to all of this in fright. Naftali had wished that it would be the case, and that the ghost would come in the night, and tap on Gitel's window and really frighten her and cause her to scream: "Gewalt, Naftali!" And when that happened the sound of the name "Naftali" would ring beautiful in his ears. He would come running, throw his arms around her, to protect her. He would do nothing to harm her, God forbid. He was not a big city boy. He would just caress her, and while he was doing so, he would be gentle and trembling, because his hand is so heavy... And she would be afraid to be alone in the room, and he would lay on the bed beside her, on top of the covers and she would be under the covers. He would kiss her forehead, her delicate ears with the red earrings. And he would think up a great deal of nice stories to keep her from being very afraid, but just enough fright to cause her to snuggle up against him. And he would protect her from all of the spirits of the fields and forests.

And Naftali, himself, began to believe in the mountain spirit that he had dreamed up, and bid him to come and fly down from the high mountain top and show himself, tap on Gitel's window and then disappear...

And in a beautiful Spring night, when he could not get to sleep, and after he had spent a couple of sleepless nights, his mind became agitated, a fantasy began to play in his head. It came to him that he could for just a moment become the cursed mountain spirit. He would be both. First, Naftali, he who would protect her, then the evil young man... He would get a white sheet, cut out holes for the eyes, nose and mouth. Wrap himself in it, and then tap at Gitel's window, and immediately be ready to run to her bedroom.

He got out of bed almost in a dream, like one who had been hypnotized. He had a quiet superstitious feeling that bothered him, that he would himself actually become a cursed mountain spirit, but he had to do this... He clamored up on the balcony roof, and tapped at Gittel's window, and like a flash showed himself in the window. Instantly he heard her voice:

“Naftali! Naftali, the mountain spirit! Gewalt, gewalt, the mountain spirit!”

With an unnatural impetus he leapt from the roof, tore off the sheet and rushed to her room, half-dressed. He came upon her in her white night-shirt, standing huddled in a corner of the room with her hands over her face, so that she could not see out. In her terror she threw her arms around his neck. Her whole body was shuddering from fear. He, too, found that he was frightened. He had thought, that he had really become the mountain spirit for a moment.

“Nu, don't be afraid, Gittel, he won't come back... I am sure of it...”

Don't go away, Naftali, I am afraid,” Gittel said with tears in her eyes, “It was justice for him, a good atonement for him. He shouldn't have done so many bad things to those young girls! But I was so scared. Don't leave me!”

He led her to the bed, tucked her in well under the covers, and sat himself down. She drew him closer to him, nestled her cold, face in his warm neck, and after a minute cuddled closer. He sat there as though possessed, cold, not even able to give her a comforting caress. Something had become crystal clear in his mind, that his happiness and joy had been purchased through a calculated story, all nonsense, through a lie. If she knew the truth!... In that moment he was ready to tell her everything, that such an evil man had never existed, and that there was no mountain spirit, that it was his fault that all of this had befallen her, that he had invented it all in his head. But no, not this night. Another time he would tell her, but not this night!... Tonight the young woman would cuddle and warm herself against him.

And Gittel called to him:

“Now I am not afraid of him. He can show himself again. A good, pure atonement on him... He should have not done bad things to those young women...”



# Herring

The fine sounding name, Ephraim Rappapart, would sooner fit a successful herring dealer, who had supplied thousands and thousands of tons of herring to various parts of the world, and accumulated a large amount of wealth and respectability, rather than him. By chance or by luck herring had always played a role in his life, in spite of the fact that he hated herring. Except for the fact that he hated both the smell and the taste of herring, he was the blood-enemy of the whole species. Naturally, he didn't have anything against the little fishes when they happily swam around the Scandinavia shores, and laid spawn for future generations. The truth was that the little fishes were pretty with their finely webbed tails, thin heads and the skin decorated with silver scales. He quickly came to hate the innocent herrings because, when he was still a young boy, his Father tore him from the village, from the sunny, simmering hot countryside, and sent him to Lithuania in a yeshiva where he also took his meals. The Lithuanian women fed him herring.

When he was old enough to be drafted into the army, he went to America. And there in New York, as a greenhorn, when he went to a restaurant to eat, he did not know the words for the good things on the menu, so, shamefully, he would say to the waiter: "Herring." And it really was a nice treat if they cooked it in vinegar and honey or they fried them in butter.

After years of effort and exhausting work he was no longer a greenhorn. He was giving lessons in English, and thanks to the growth of the Yiddish newspapers and journals, from time to time he earned money for writing articles, sometimes he gave speeches at meetings, and scratched out a living.

And as much as he hated herring, that is how much he loved books... And Ephraim Rappapart was not a great, rich herring dealer, but rather just a poor book lover.

His appearance befitted him: A thin, lean young man in his early thirties; his chest was bare and sunken, and he barely reached an average height. His hair did not seem to go with him: part of it had grayed, and part of it had fallen out. For all that, he had a pair of bright, sparkling eyes like black amber, and white, even teeth like two rows of pearls.

And Ephraim Rappapart had amassed a collection of fifteen hundred to two thousand books in his library in Yiddish, in Hebrew, Russian, German and English. And he knew and loved every one of them. In his library he was like a sultan in his harem. Every old volume brought him sweet memories, and every new book promised him joy.

His love for books almost went as far as mania. He would sit for days in his room and look through various books. He avoided even the most innocent acquaintances with young women, for fear that one might come to him to borrow one of his books.

When he met Jenny, a tall, healthy young woman with thick, nappy hair, and freckles on her nose and around her eyes, but with big blue eyes and a fine mouth, he got to know her but only because she did not read books.

He met Jenny on a mountain, among other women who did read books.

Jenny was born on Essex Street. She was raised there and went to school there. Lately, she was living with her parents in the Bronx. She spoke very good Yiddish, and was on her first trip to the



mountains... That is about all there is to say about Jenny. Her dream boyfriend would have been a prize fighter, but she also liked Ephraim.

And Ephraim waxed poetic over Jenny: "Such a primitive!... Such a healthy, ordinary woman. Not a broken soul like those others who lie in hammocks and read books... A fully natural person. A rarity in today's generation." He would educate her according to his standards. He would refine her. She would be refined, but in her soul she would remain primitive..." This, he promised to himself.

Jenny did not know of any other type of a relationship with a young man except a marriage contract. Therefore, when she returned to New York she invited Ephraim to come and meet her mother and father. He was very much repulsed by their coarseness and having to eat a lot of herring... It seemed to him that the whole interior of the house was like the inside of a jar of herring... He could think of nothing but getting out of there... But there, he was considered to be Jenny's fiancé. He did not understand how that had happened... And it was difficult to backtrack from it. And when the holidays came, instead of buying himself some new clothes, he had to buy Jenny a ring. But truth be told, he received from his future father-in-law a watch with a chain which was worth twice the value of the ring... Shortly after that was the wedding and they moved in with the parents. The mother-in-law chopped herring, fried herring, marinated herring, and when he was in the street and dressed-up, he lived in fear that he reeked of herring like his father and mother-in-law...

Ephraim Rapapart did not have a profession, and the mother and father quickly became reluctant to give him even bread with herring... In addition, the mother-in-law was afraid to be in a room with so many books that were not holy books... But Jenny stood by him: "He is a respectable, educated man. He can not do ordinary work." And she made plans to do it herself.

And a couple of months later, after their child was born, Jenny taught Ephraim how to manage bottle feeding, and she began every day to travel downtown, without saying a word to him. Jenny had a friend who lived downtown, and had married a wealthy herring dealer, and it was she that Jenny turned to for help. She secured a small shop on Essex Street, where people knew her. Her friend's husband gave her a few barrels of herring on credit, and Jenny opened a herring store. The two rooms in the back of the store were dark, the windows had iron bars on them, and the floorboards were broken. She did not say anything to Ephraim until it was all over. They moved in to the rear of the herring store.

Ephraim nearly fell out from apoplexy, but falling out was not a way out. He had a child in the cradle...

"And what will I do with the books!..." He said full of hate, and grinding his teeth.

"The books? I should know?... Pack them in crates, and you can store them in the cellar. I don't have any business now with books!..."

Ephraim Rapapart felt like taking his head and putting in on the wall...

"A married man and the father of a child, should make himself so foolish. Books! You should have more common sense, on my word," Jenny said very earnestly, and without anger.

Ephraim Rapapart remained silent with a silence that meant: "Who will I talk to there..."

But Jenny did not want to be quarreling, so she continued on by saying: People work hard to make a living for themselves, then they read books.

But he came to another conclusion. Of the two rooms he took one of them for his books and his writing desk, and the other room had to serve as bedroom, dining room and kitchen.

As far as selling the herring, Jenny did not leave it to him. She could not rely on him, but since he was an educated man he would be the herring bookkeeper.

And his misfortune was fully realized. Jenny did not have any time for cooking, customers were constantly coming for herring...

It was a compliment to Jenny, she was stronger than Ephraim Rapapart. He could not refine her. She, on the other hand, was able to coarsen him. He did not raise her up, she drug him down to her level.

A second child came to the herring shop. The herring business was going good, but life was going the same. For Jenny, things were good... Soon, they would take the upstairs apartment, as soon as someone moved out... Meantime, she began to collect cut glass, one piece after another, and tools for making curtains, and dreamed of having a nice parlor...

Little by little, under the constant reek from herring and assorted dried and salted fish, he sank to Jenny's level. He stopped being foolish about writing. He had lost courage and hope for something else, and that he would ever be able to extract himself from this herring hell.

He was shaken from his state of confusion, when he began to suspect that some of his books were missing... But he could not be certain; his catalog of books had long since gone missing.

And once, coming into the shop, he saw one of his books with gilded edges, and fine hard paper. It was entitled: "Beautiful Literature in the Elizabethan Era in England." It was laying there with pages ripped out and covered in herring scales. A look of craziness could be seen to come into his eyes. He went into the back rooms, picked up a piece of iron, and began to hammer a piece of cut glass which sparkled like diamonds, until it was smashed into tiny, tiny pieces.

The children were shocked and began screaming, and Jenny gathered them up like someone protecting them from a great danger. For the first time Jenny cried over her bitter fate. She worked so hard! Tried so hard for them. Why was this happening to her?

"That's for ripping up my books and using them to wrap your nasty herring!..." He could barely find the breath to speak, fighting against the rapid pounding of his heart.

"What is the problem?" Jenny wept, "I was out of newspaper. Every Jewish lady who purchases a herring, wants me to wrap it well in paper, no one, God forbid, wants people to see that she is carrying home a herring. Where can I find so much paper? You were not here, I couldn't leave the children alone, so it occurred to me to take one of your books: It is good paper, it doesn't leak through, and one page is enough to wrap a whole herring. What is the problem? You have so many books! Such an expensive fruit platter! With blood and sweat I worked for it, in order to fix up a house like respectable people!"

But Jenny, when she saw how pale and unhappy Ephraim looked, and with what eyes he looked at his “martyred” book, she began to feel guilty in regard to her husband.

And Ephraim Rapapart, felt, like a cut from a sharp knife, his misery. The wife who sold herring was not his... The children who wandered around among the barrels of herring were strangers to him. But he belonged to them... A prisoner in a herring shop. He, the book lover...

## A Kovno Jew

Reb' Aba was a Jew nearing seventy years. Tall and thin, with a white silky head of hair and a white longish beard. Always dressed in a long, black, cloth kaftan, it gave the impression of an ancient Venetian merchant, who was trading in rich brocades, precious stones, and silks with the aristocrats. His wife Chyene – a short, rotund Jewish woman bedecked with old fashioned jewelry. Chyene wore the jewelry to show people that she was the mistress of the house and not a nouveau riche.

The house also remained in the old fashioned Lithuanian style. In the hall was the silverware: Beakers, a spice box, the silver sugar bowl; In the kitchen also on the shelves: Polished brass candlesticks, mortar and pestle, the platters and copper pans. On the commode, on top, stood a small, polished temple with tiny mother-of-pearl windows, and on the wall – picture frames with cut-out menorahs.

Elderly Chyene was very proud of all of these objects, and took care that not a fleck of dust should fall on them. And when she was alone and looked upon them, Chyene would say:

“That, the old man, he should live long, made by himself. He has golden hands, they should serve him for a hundred and twenty years.”

They led quiet, calm lives without cares, with the support of their children. The children were all married and had large businesses in Broadway and lived in various wealthy neighborhoods in the city. They all wanted to have Mother and Father with them but old Aba held the view: “What need do I have for wide, empty boulevards? Why must he have trees and street lights? His shul, the Jews needed him, and right on Henry Street where he had lived for the last twenty years.”

For several years now Reb' Aba did not work. He devoted himself, body and soul to the shul and to shul matters. He was honored there and they elected him president. And because Reb' Aba was something of a scholar he knew, simply, that the shul should be a holy place where Jews could come to pray. But he also saw that in the shul there was also politics. This was hard for him to swallow, and he also saw that the shul was a place to conduct business and in order restore honor to it, he demanded a return to grace for the leaders of the shul saying that the shul was only to be used for prayer.

Reb' Aba made it very clear that he would hear no more about it... And to himself he said: “Done with business, a Jewish life, travel to Eretz Israel!...” But he only said this to himself, because he wanted to keep it a secret from his elderly Chyene. And not being accustomed to keeping secrets from Chyene he choked back the words and hid them from her.

Reb' Aba began to wander in silence as though through a foreign world, thinking, pondering.

Chyene saw it immediately, saw the unrest under his white brows, and the tightness of his lips through the white beard...

On a Friday night when Reb' Aba came home from shul and uttered “Good Sabbath,” Chyene could tell from the tone of the “Good Sabbath” that something was weighing on him. He said Kiddush, but he could not eat. He sat at the Sabbath table, but only out of duty to the Sabbath.

“Something not right with everyone, Aba?” Chyene said looking at him.

“Eh, it seems so to you,” Reb’ Aba began eating some of the Sabbath fish.

“Do you imagine that I can’t tell? What, I don’t have, God forbid, eyes in my head? I see, I see that you are not eating anything, you’re not drinking anything and you are not sleeping all night long. Your heart, your heart is bothering you... Everything, everything comes from the heart...”

“Already too long in America, Chyene, and I am filled with longing... My heart is longing.”

“Yes,” Chyene sighed, figuring that he was longing for Kovno.

“But understand, Chyene, a Jewish woman, she should live long, is a different type of person. A Jewish woman lives three times in the world: In her young years – her own life, afterwards – with the children, and in her old age she lives again through the grandchildren.”

Old Chyene looked at him with fearful eyes that asked: “What is going on with you?”

“When a man sees himself to be nearing seventy years, and has not lived according to his mind and not according to his liking, and he can not fix it, that is bad! And if you think that I have been happy all these years, then you are wrong. It was the children... Keeping them in shoes, getting them married, and that is how one gets driven down in a few years, like a teamster’s horse...”

But Chyene had a feeling that what he was saying wasn’t the real problem. She wanted to help him, and didn’t know how. She remained silent, listened and sighed...

“Above all I have a heartache due to the shul,” he continued, “Jews shouldn’t go around in a shul the way, you should pardon the expression, the gentile goyim do in a shop. Politics and politics! The Creator, and the Torah have become merchandise. People do matzahs, make donations with interest! For that God must do the multiplication.”

God created such a world... Such a world! Gave us a Torah! Have you thought about when, Chyene’le? Created a world and gave us a Torah!”

“Yes, God’s wonder is great,” Chyene sighed again.

“Created such a world!...” Reb’ Aba went into raptures, “Take for example the first words of the bible:

– In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth – For the world that means: God created heaven and earth. But I, Chyene’le, I see it before my very eyes: It was a dark chaos, that is to say: Heaven, earth and the waters were all mixed together, God took the waters and put them in the oceans and lakes, spread out over our heads the blue sky and placed millions of stars there and a moon. He formed high mountains, spread out fields and forests with all sorts of plants and herbs. And then he said: Let there be light! And that ignited a flaming sun, which illuminated and warmed the entire world!

“You hear me, Chyene? I thought that you had gone to sleep on me. Listen, people say that in Eretz Israel the sky still glows so clear, so bright as the day God created it... But no one, not everyone is remembering to go there.” Reb’ Aba ended his speech at that point looking at his old Chyene with a pleading look on his face, like a child who wants something from his mother.

Chyene suddenly realized what the old man was getting at.

“Ay, Chyene’le, I want to go there!... I want... That is to say, if you want to go also...”

“What then? I would let you travel alone at your age?”

“And the children?”

“They don’t need us anymore...”

Reb’ Aba sprung from the table filled with joy, grabbing Chyene he spun her around and hopped about with her. Kissing her, he cried out:

“Wife! I have such a wife, a saintly woman! She should live long, and we shall both live in Eretz Israel!”

Chyene was embarrassed by the kiss and, panting, she stammered:

“Go on! It is not nice to act so foolish at your age!”

“What, me old? Who’s old? I am a young man of seventy!...”

“Chyene’le,” he gave her a loving poke in the side, “About the children, you know better how to talk to them. And to get results from them...”

“Right after the Sabbath, we should live, I will have a talk with the children...”

And a much happier Reb’ Aba sat back down before the Sabbath candle, and read from the newspaper for old Chyene.

# The Angry One

When Yosel, Pesach the teamster's son, spoke with the young girl from Rietavas, he could find no fault with her that would preclude proposing a marriage contract. Her family background was fine, she had a dowry, and the bride was clever and attractive. He had noticed her attractiveness the very first time he laid eyes on her. Wherever his eye fell, there was woman's handwork: Sewn, knitted and woven. Needlework samplers with golden stars and a golden key to heaven, a Western Wall the color of goat hair, and a pair of lions, all hanging in frames on the wall.

The Mother's eyes took everything in and with a sweet smile the elderly woman said:

"Everything you see, my Sarah Gittel, she should live long, made with her own hands!"

And nevertheless, as Yosel came home from visiting with his prospective bride, he found himself hesitating: I don't want the marriage contract.

"Why?!" His father and Yonkel the Matchmaker looked at him with wolf's eyes.

"Her cheeks do not glow," Yosel argued, "A young girl's cheeks should glow, if not it's no use... Take our in-law, Hannah. She has already had two children, her husband has gone to America, nevertheless her cheeks still glow like two poppy flowers."

They both yelled at him because he was looking upon his sister-in-law. Didn't he know that one simply did not do that?..."

Yosel was embarrassed. Really, why did he have to mention Hannah?..."

But after Yonkel the Matchmaker with a fiery lecture assured him that young girl's cheeks did not glow the way they should until after the wedding because before marriage they were sad, Yosel agreed to the marriage contract.

"What do you say to today's young brats, Reb' Pesach? We in our younger years, perhaps, also had the nerve to look to see if the young girl's cheeks glowed, or not?! We took what they gave us and wished for more," Yonkel the Matchmaker said as he turned to the old teamster.

But for himself he rubbed his hands together happily satisfied: He closed the deal on the marriage contract! The contract is as good as in my pocket..."

Yosel could even allow that his bride's cheeks would glow... He, himself, was a clever lad and knew, though it shouldn't happen for around a hundred and twenty years, his father would pass away, leaving behind two of his own horses and half of a house. Nothing else, and on the other hand, there was a dowry involved, Sarah Gittel is an attractive woman, so it has to be Sarah Gittel..."

The wedding was beautiful and very respectable. After the entertainment was over the following day the couple went to the in-laws side of the family and stayed with them for the Seven Blessings.

Driving with the wife into town with her whole wardrobe on the wagon with the two horses, Yosel was a very happy man. He was literally frying in joy... There was only one thing that upset him: He could

not understand why Sarah Gittel's cheeks weren't glowing. He was expecting cheeks like two red apples! Perhaps even more beautiful than by his sister-in-law Hannah... What's more, Hannah had a way of charming you with her eyes, with her smile and draw you away from your very bones... She would be red, then pale, and when she spoke you could not take your eyes away from her... And afterwards you could not forget what she said... She drew you to her... He had never seen anyone to compare to her...

Nevertheless, she could not manage to request of her husband that he send her a steamship ticket for her and the children. The truth is that the brother wants him, Yosel, to give her the money to travel to America. And perhaps the brother is justified, after all he, Yosel, is remaining here with the two horses and the half house. But up until this point he has not hurried to do so, because it was so nice, so pleasant to have Hannah and the children in the house. In the winter evenings she would get the playing cards and they would play sixty-six. A Sabbath or other holiday would be brightened by her presence, she has golden hands... But, now he would see Hannah and the children leave for America, since he is now the master of his own house...

He gave the reins a slap – Why had he suddenly started to think about Hannah... He would have plenty of time later to think about her. He was driving his young wife, Sarah Gittel, to his home. He looked at her, as though he was seeing her for the first time. Sarah Gittel was sitting by his side, by the horse, wearing a satin fur-lined coat and a hat with red flowers on the top, and her cheeks glowed.. And in Yosel's eyes Sarah Gittel looked like a true aristocrat. His heart leapt with joy. There was only one thing that he found strange: Here she is, Sarah Gittel, who was a foreign young girl from Rietavas, and there she was his wife... He had given her a good, really good kiss before they neared the village.

She was very pleased with him. Father and Mother, he knew, were very happy about the marriage. There was only one thing that worried him: What would Hannah say about her!... In his heart he felt that Hannah would not be pleased with her... And if Hannah laughed even once, he would, perhaps, not be able to ever live with Sarah Gittel..

“Yosel, why didn't your sister-in-law, Hannah, come to our wedding?” Sarah Gittel suddenly asked him.

“One of her children was sick,” he murmured under his nose. But he felt flushed, and uncomfortable about the lie he had just told to his young wife. However, he knew that Hannah was peeved, because he had not bought her silk for a dress to wear at the wedding. This had hindered the celebration, he remembered with chagrin...

“People have told me that your sister-in-law Hannah the type of woman that are a dime a dozen.” and she poked him in the side.

“Josel, however, did not want to talk about Hannah, and he gave Sarah Gittel another kiss.

“Once again, I don't think I like your sister-in-law Hannah,” she said not wanting to let the subject drop. Outwardly she laughed, but she felt very uncertain...

“But Sarah Gittel, you like me, Father and Mother also, why are you bothering about Hannah?” Yosel said, losing patience.



Arriving in the village they were greeted by the people yelling “Mazel Tov.” Women and young girls came to their doorways to get a look at Yosel and his wife. The bell which hung between the horses klanged and made a real commotion upon their arrival.

The Mother-in-law threw herself upon her new daughter-in-law with kisses, the sister also. But Hannah had hardly moved her lips when giving Sarah Gittel a kiss.

Hannah was dressed in her best Sabbath dress, and her little bit of jewelry, her wig was set on her head and looked like her real hair, and she looked as beautiful as a young bride.

Sarah Gittel took all of that in with one glance. It stung her heart. The older daughter-in-law was beautiful... She immediately lost her courage. She could not compare with the older daughter-in-law...

Because of that Sarah Gittel almost immediately developed a dislike for Hannah.

And in the first week it was clear that the two daughters-in-law could not stand one another... Yosel was pained to his very heart over it. He rented rooms nearby, bought some furniture and moved in with Sarah Gittel.

Her Mother and Sister came to visit them, perhaps, ten times a day. Hannah, on the other hand, would come on Friday night, or during the day on the Sabbath, and each time she would be wearing her best Sabbath dress, with the jewelry which looked so good on her. And for Sarah Gittel it was like getting stabbed in the eyes... Sarah Gittel actually turned yellow and green from anger and because of that would tease Hannah about her expensive outfit.

Yosel told her once that she shouldn't do that, because Hannah only had that one good dress. That really fired Sarah Gittel up, because Yosel was taking Hannah's side... That made her angry with him...

And they argued, and he gave in to Sarah Gittel: Hannah is a foolish braggart, not at all pretty, and it is not very attractive for her to put on airs, just because her husband has, unfortunately, gone to America.

Yosel yielded to her on every point and it ended in kisses.

Sarah Gittel never closed the shutters at night. Women and girls would, nearly every night, sneak up under their windows and watch the couple kiss. People said that they did that on purpose, just to needle Hannah... And she never came to look, so said all of the women. If she knew how much in love they were, she would plotz...

Soon the daughters-in-law stopped talking to one another, and Hannah stopped coming to their home. Sarah Gittel also wanted Yosel to stop talking to Hannah, but she could not manage that, because, why would Yosel be angry with Hannah? She was in misery, with no recourse but to live with her mother-in-law, and she was such a dear soul... She laughed and sang and flitted around like a bird in Summer...

No, not even Sarah Gittel would be able to get Yosel to be angry with Hannah.

If she saw Yosel say even one word to Hannah, she would get in a dither. She would go to him and issue an order:

“Yosel, come home!”

Hannah would simply smile, and Yosel would follow his wife home, embarrassed and walking ten steps behind her.

Sarah Gittel had managed everything, but she ended up not getting any joy out of it. She got more pale, yellow and sunken... Yosel would go out without thinking. What should he do? Sarah Gittel would not contribute one kopeck to send Hannah to America. He dared not mention it.

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Three or four months after the wedding, they agreed that Yosel would go on the Sabbath to see his Mother. Sarah Gittel could not stay calm at home and she followed him. Though the back door she saw Yosel and Hannah sitting together and talking, and no one else was with them. She overheard:

“Yosel, you must do it. You are Chaim’s brother, you have an obligation,” Hannah said with tears in her eyes.

“Hannah’ke, though I be murdered and killed, I’ll do it if I can. Aye, Hannah... Hannah!...” Yosel blurted out in a whine..

“It is also a mercy for you, Yosel,” Hannah tearfully sobbed, “For you, for Chaim and for the children. They long for their Father...”

Sarah Gittel ripped open the door and stood before them with her face lit up and wild eyes.

“Yosel, tell Sarah Gittel straight out what we have agreed to!” Hannah stammered, very upset.

Sarah Gittel ran like a crazy person.

At home Yosel suddenly met up with Sarah Gittel completely changed, quiet, with a meshuggeh, crazy look in her eyes. She was in bed...

Yosel went to her with his face full of pleading, and he said to her:

“Hannah wants me to give her a hundred and fifty rubles so that she and the children can go to be with Chaim. In truth, Sarah Gittel, we will remain here with the half house and the two horses, and Chaim is after all a son like I am. He will not get any more of the assets...”

“You cried in front of her and with that you killed me without a knife!” Sarah Gittel said no more, she was lost in her anger...

All that Yosel said after that fell on deaf ears... She drove him away from her, and would not budge from the bed.

Early the next morning Sarah Gittel still had not stirred from her bed. She was sick and angry... She lay there a whole day, not eating or talking to anyone. The next day was the same, and also the day after that.

All of Yosel's begging and crying, his kisses, the Mother-in-law's crying, the Father-in-law's begging did not make any difference. She lay there full of anger and just stared at the ceiling.

They sent a message to her Mother. Both of them came, her Mother and her Father with curses and great commotion saying that Yosel's family had murdered their daughter.

Later they calmed down a bit. Yosel explained everything to them, and the Mother saw that the best thing to do was to give Hannah the money she needed to go to America...

Sarah Gittel, however, lay there with the money under the bed covers and protected it like a snake.

She had taken nothing to eat. She screamed that they would poison her.

She did accept some food from her own Mother, and ate it like she was out of her head. It was frightening to watch Sarah Gittel eat! And scream: You're wasting your food.

Doctors advised to take her from the bed by force. But that didn't help either. She would not leave her bed. Her Mother and Father's tears did not help either. Yosel did not dare go to bed... And Hannah and Sarah Gittel's Mother-in-law dared not show themselves at the threshold.

Week after week passed by in the same way laying there, eating, drinking and being angry.

Soon they became accustomed to the fact that Sarah Gittel would simply lay in bed and be sick and angry. Even if they poured gold down her throat it would make no difference. Yosel began to drive his wagon like he used to, because they needed the money.

The doctors did not know what was wrong with Sarah Gittel. The family called experts, curse removers, and all sorts of remedies were given her, but nothing helped. Sarah Gittel remained in her bed stuck there, an empty shell with meshuggeneh eyes and silent.

More and more weeks went by. It seemed as if Sarah Gittel was a little better. Yosel stayed by the bed with the Mother-in-law in the room. They had tried leaving her alone with Yosel, perhaps they would reconcile...

"Mother-in-law," Yosel said once, "Mother-in-law, she can get better, she can, only one thing stops her... Her heart will not let her..."

"Wind to me and woe to me," her Mother wept.

One day her Mother and Mother-in-law were able to take her by the hand to Yosel and they made the bed. On that day everyone believed that she would get better...

But, as Yosel spoke to her, when she went to answer she couldn't, her tongue prevented her from answering.

She let him hand feed her chicken broth, looked at him, but she could not talk to him... She spoke to her Mother, to her Father-in-law and Mother-in-law. But to Yosel, when she wanted to say something to him, the tongue in her mouth would not move...

She relapsed into her silence and spoke to no one. When they gave her food, she ate it, but did not ask for it. She no longer looked at anyone, rather, she turned toward the wall and remained silent...

There came moments when they did not know if Sarah Gittel was alive or laying there dead. With closed lips, staring open eyed, she would lie for hours, not moving a limb. It frightened everyone to look upon her. She looked like a dead corpse, in which life suddenly caused a movement...

And yet people felt that there was nothing wrong with her, she wasn't sick, she was just angry... Angry unto death... She could not forgive Yosel that he had cried before Hannah... She could not be reconciled to the fact that the older daughter-in-law was prettier.

One early morning, nearly a year after their wedding, they saw Sarah Gittel laying there as usual, silent, stubborn with open staring eyes.

"Sarah Gittel," Yosel called to her.

She did not answer.

After that, her Mother said:

"Sarah Gittel, my child."

"Shush, perhaps she is still sleeping," the Mother-in-law bid them to be quiet.

They did not want to startle the sick woman...

But when they laid a feather to her nose, the feather did not move... And when they put a mirror to her mouth, the mirror remained dry, without a breath from respiration.

Then they knew that Sarah Gittel was dead.



# The Powdered Corpse

In life Aniete never used powder.

In life she had wrinkles on her forehead and around the edges of her mouth. Her face yellow, and she had sunken cheeks. Her black hair was always modestly combed.

She always wore a black dress with a blouse. Her one ornament was a white collar with a looped ribbon that fell to her chest. Sometimes a red one, and often a black one. It would depend upon her mood and what was going on around her... Her inner moods were wrinkled in accord with the wrinkles around her mouth.

That is the way it was in Aniete's life, modest and strict in her old maid years, as though enclosed in a Holy Ark.

And now she is dead, and they lay her in a polished coffin with a glass cover. The wrinkles on her face – were carefully erased by the talented hands of the mortician. The sunken cheeks – full and made young, powdered with a rose-tinted powder. A drop of rouge, lightly applied, colored the death-blue lips, and they had done up her hair in a pompadour. She was dressed in her sister's white picnic dress. She lay there all done up, powdered and made up in the beautiful coffin with the glass cover.

Yes, the mortician had done a fine piece of work; never, not even in her younger years, did Aniete look so pretty... So pretty and so stylish...

And from the modest, cordial Aniete has come a powdered corpse; coquettish and proudly done up.

This is how it happened:

Aniete passed away on a hot day at the end of Tammuz on a Friday evening. She died without a word and with a last, unseeing glance around her...

The vicinity around where Aniete lived was a free, not-god-believing one, and in the case of a death they did not know what to do with the dead person.

Her sister, Hania, cried and wailed, and did not want to leave the room. Soon she would run away from her who was dead for five minutes, or, perhaps, not dead at all... But now she lay there on the same pillow that the both of them slept upon. Everything was shared by the two of them... Every single thing in the room.

Friends wanted to take her away, feeling that it was not proper to bewail a corpse like the Irish do...

One made the point: Free men, though, must know that for everyone death is nothing more than a scientific result of life. The earth needs the dead, to grow fecund and to make the beautiful flowers grow.

But that did not console Hania, her sister, Hannah, was dead...

In the meantime, night had fallen. Tomorrow was the Sabbath, and what could one do with a dead body then...

They turned to the Funeral Society, and the answer was that one must wait on the Sabbath until the stars will appear, or until early Sunday. A second and a third group came back with the same answer.

The body had to remain in the room...

Members of the group, All World Freedom, came. Each had some advice on how to get the burial done sooner... Because the room was hot, and no one could get ice either on the Sabbath...

Among all of the friends gathered was Julia, an old friend of Aniete, who was married to a Christian, a professor. Unbeknownst to the others she slipped away and for good money she engaged a goyishe, non-Jewish mortician, and he did a really good job.

When Hania saw her quiet, modest sister, Hannah, so coquettishly decked out, powdered and made up, she fainted from the shock. She got angry, and screamed why had they done this? But who could reason with her. It was her misfortune... And troubles will overwhelm the mind...

And yet, every one who saw Aniete as a dead coquette in the coffin, must be impressed by the daring; unsophisticated Aniete, who in life was so unpretentious, so nice and proud in her plainness!...

An elderly, pious Aunt came from Brownsville weeping: Hannah'le, Hannah'le she screamed and threw herself on the coffin. They did not want to let her... But, since she had already done so and seen Hannah, she let out a cry "Shema Israel" and was very upset.

"That dead person is not her, where is the body?" she wept.

"Yes, it is Hannah. See what they have done," Hania cried out, weeping anew.

There were found among some people, those who laughed at the old woman and the sister, and there were those who cried with them.

And the dead Aniete lay in her coffin powdered, colored, and wrapped in her white dress. The dead woman's red lips smiling cynically.

# At the Cemetery

Everything happened suddenly, everything rushed and fast...

Pneumonia by its nature did not like to dilly-dally long with its victims, here and there, over the course of a few days, and then, on the fourth day, Michael Beylin was taken away... In about his fortieth year when men usually make all sorts of compromises with life... One after the other their young dreams die, and their youthful fantasies; the heart has been torn apart chasing them... With the still unhealed scar, they find comfort and clamp on to life. Live to live life! Live out of fear of death!... But pneumonia must have its portion... And as the statistic calculates the death toll for the year, and it is not hiding behind its fellow colleague diseases...

Everything happened quickly, everything fast. The doctor had hardly established the diagnosis, and the family alerted that a danger lurked...

There must be a mistake... The doctor has blundered... The family complained...

A long line of black carriages followed the deceased's wagon. The widow with a seven-year-old daughter in the first carriage, two grown sons with their families in the second, and more family and friends in a third, fourth and more and more... People walked behind, passersbys stood and watched. The deceased was a well-known man, the newspapers wrote announcing the death. They counted his virtues, and hundreds of curious people came to see if it would be a big funeral...

A lot of people traveled by streetcar to the cemetery. It was a warm day at the beginning of Spring. The sun warmed the scene and made it seem like the middle of Summer. It was as though there was nothing else to do. Rather than roam the boring streets, better to go to the cemetery. A ride in an open streetcar was the thing, mourners would be needed. To ride will be something... And a tear to shed also...

It was a beautiful day, and it was a big beautiful funeral...

At the cemetery there was nothing to upset one... The lawn was already green, the sky was clear and open, the birds chirped in the trees. There were a lot of tombstones with well-known names. On others the grass had only just begun to sprout... At the cemetery it was easy to philosophize. On every stranger's lips hung the words, "vanity of vanities," people looked around in the excavated graves, then they looked up at the bright sky...

The widow, who was exhausted from crying, now wept silently, but as soon as she regained some strength, she would begin screaming again until she fell exhausted once again on the casket. The sons wept and the little daughter stood next to her mother trembling and sobbing, "Papa, dear Papa!"

At the moment when it was time for the rending of garments, a woman came running into the cemetery. She was pale, with cried-out eyes. She looked like she could barely hold herself upright on her feet. She wept silently. People probably would not have noticed her, except that she suddenly ran to the casket and fainted.

“Who is she? Who is she?” Everyone said, but no one knew. A minute later, and then everyone thought they had the answer as to who she must be...

“She must be his sister.”

“What do you mean a sister? Can’t you see that Mrs. Meylin doesn’t recognize her?”

“Maybe a niece?”

“Maybe, but who knows?”

“Could it be a friend from America?”

“She must be a daughter from a first marriage,” another took a guess.

“What did you say? She is a daughter from his first wife? – Did you hear that, Minnie, she is a daughter from his first wife,” she shared with the friend next to her.

“What are you gossiping about? What first wife! Michael Beylin didn’t have any other wife, she is the only one.”

“I’m not saying that. I am just speculating. So, who is she then?”

And the unknown young woman, after people had revived her, went off to the side and cried frightfully... A circle of curious guessers stood around her. They watched as she cried and wiped the tears from her red eyes with a handkerchief.

The widow had not seen her yet. And the people waited to see how she would react when she noticed her...

They had lowered the casket in the grave and filled in the hole.

“Yitgadal v’yitkadash sh’mei raba...,” the oldest son recited Kaddish with an English accent.

“Mama, who is that woman crying?” He asked his weeping Mother after saying Kaddish.

And the younger son after him:

“Who is she anyway?... See how she is crying.”

Mrs. Beylin lifted her eyes to the weeping woman and looked at her... She did not recognize her. And suddenly she let her eyes study the woman’s body... Mrs. Beylin turned even more pale, and it looked like she was going to scratch out the woman’s eyes.

The people who saw that were tense, and their heads turned from the widow to the young woman and back.

But with the last spark of anger, the widow stopped. Suddenly, with a half-dead smile, she said straight out to her son:



“She is... She is... The Aunt’s a... Niece...”

“A niece! A niece!” The whisper passed through the cemetery.

The weeping woman threw her arms around the widow’s neck, and they both broke out crying together.

“Come home with us, come my child,” she whispered in the woman’s ear, “Come, and I will raise another child for Michael...”

The young woman began to sob hysterically, and the widow comforted her with a few good words.

Friends of the family began returning to the black carriages.

The deceased’s brother helped the widow and the children into the carriage, and then he turned to the young woman:

“Come, ride with us.”

The young woman looked at him, she was not pleased with the look on his face. And crying, she walked alone to the streetcar...

# The Toast

The well-known hall was brilliantly lit. On the white cloths spread out on the tables were set wine, flowers and fruits.

The banquet was set up by the local writers to say 'hello' to the newly arrived poet, a grateful young man of about twenty years.

He was sitting up high on the dais like a bridegroom, and around him the younger poets according to their rank and fame...

One of the writers, one who was in between the two generations, old and young, was holding a slip of paper with the names of those who were to offer toasts to the new poet.

There began to fall from their lips, one toast after another full of praises. Some began with bold chutzpah, and some trembling in fright. There, one with a bass voice, and another like a soprano.

The poet himself was sitting nervously, agitated and resolved to write clear, good, beautiful verses... Yes, he would surely live up to their songs of praise... He was feeling a love for America, for the land where you could be made suddenly famous and popular... And just like the "Great Fathers" he began to speak: He was too moved by this evening which he did not deserve. His tears stuck in his throat, and he could find no words to thank them for the warm, loving event.

After the official toasts and festivities, they turned their attention to the ladies who had been sitting the whole time like lost sheep and totally bored.

They had also come to meet the poet face to face; they bathed and groomed, sewed new dresses, and brought them along with fresh faces, smiling mouths, good looks, pale necks, soft arms, and without words they said: "Na, take, you, our poet! You child, so near to God! Gifts, gifts we come to give to you!... See how my arms are so white and slender? That is to wrap them around you, my poet! See how my teeth sparkle white and sharp? That is to bite your neck, my poet! And see how my soft shoulders bow obediently? That is for you, my poet! Will I? Will I? Will I be the chosen one?"

And Halevi thanked, thanked properly, with his whole heart, the members for the toasts, and the young girls for the gifts... And he shook everyone's hand, and with his eyes he assured them of everything good.

Only she, about whom he had heard good and bad, and wanted to meet, did not come. She held back, for effect...

When a pale, dark woman in a black silk with a wise step, came into the hall, he knew that it was she, and his heart began to pump his blood faster...

"Tzila, Tzila Zeidel!" Many voices called out to her at the same time, "Come here, we will introduce you to the new poet, Halevi!"

But Tzila just waved her hand to say that she would come soon, but meanwhile she was with two acquaintances. Halevi understood that she was seeking something, and he listened to a verse which

someone was continuing to read to him, while dropping out here a line and there a word. It didn't matter because he was only watching Tzila. Her fine, dark face, somewhat older, the intelligent, dark eyes with cares and passion mixed. Her slimness was evident in the black, silk dress. The jewelry she was wearing characterized her mood: A brooch with the head of a sphinx on green enamel; A interlaced neck chain of Roman gold, like the scales of a snake; On her thin, chocolate gloves she wore a pair of rings of an old-fashioned style. From her narrow shoulders hung a silk shawl in oriental colors. Taken as a whole she looked like an exotic, mystical bronze statue from a capricious artist.

Halevi said to himself: "She is an artist. Any other woman who looked like that would be ugly, but on her it is the most beautiful"...

Without any ceremony he went to her, introduced himself, proud as one who had descended from his pedestal, and said to the woman: "You see, I have come down from on high and bow before you, because you are a beautiful woman!"

They looked at one another, his eyes were mellow from the wine and the enchantment – Hers were devilishly black.

"I have heard that you write verses, colleague Tzila? Interesting! A woman who writes verses!"

"And what do you do, engrave your verses on ivory? Or, scratch them on gold? You write and erase and write over again until you achieve the desired sound, not so? And if the editor wants, he rejects your work. Yes, that's how it is, isn't it?"

Halevi was too addled from the wine, and lavish praises, to catch the anger in her tone, with which she wished to push back on his not very friendly, "colleague Tzila."

He laughed, he liked her response. Character, he thought, she has character!"

Later, when she had also had some wine to drink, she became a little more feminine, laughed, sang, and flirted in her own manner.

Halevi filled to the top two wine glasses, and asked her to drink a toast with him.

"What are we drinking to?" Tzila asked as she looked him in the eye and laughed.

"That you shall be mine!" Halevi said softly, but with a firm voice, as he lifted the glass to his lips.

With the swiftness of a wild animal, Tzila slapped the glass from his hand, spilling the wine on the floor and breaking the glass.

Both stood there in shock, Halevi from a superstitious feeling, and she from a girl's fright...

For the whole evening after that, Tzila looked at Halevi with delight. She liked his shameless audacity... Not every poet colleague concealed those same words in the same ugly fashion... That is how artists are, artists don't grab... and don't devour... They take people and things peacefully and beautifully.

And Halevi followed her around for the rest of the evening with two glasses of wine; He must succeed with his toast...

And once again they stood opposite one another with two glasses of wine, face to face, and she perversely asked him:

“What are we drinking to?”

“That I shall be yours!” he answered submissively.

And Tzila slowly drank the glass of wine right to the bottom.

## In Twenty Years or So

They both sat together at a nearby park. He kissed her, and she, the quiet, pious Sheva did not resist. He, Henekh, was her fiancé. This evening they would part, and early the next morning he would set out for a one year stay in America. At the end of the year he would come back and they would be married.

Everything was clear, sure and agreed upon. But Sheva cried... Her heart was filled with foreboding, a young girl's heart...

"Henekh, you will forget about me," Sheva pressed closer to him.

"Me forget you? Sheva! You are my fiancée."

Sheva smiled through her tears.

"You must write me every day, do you hear, Henekh, every day a letter."

"How then? For sure, you are my whole life, my soul, and you, Sheva'le also should not forget me."

"Me forget you? God protect! No, no I did not mean God..." Sheva answered, turning red.

"I have told you, Sheva'le, that you must believe until you have convinced yourself..."

"You are so good, Henekh!"

Henekh kissed her again, and it made him feel sad and good at the same time. There was something this evening that he was not sure about: if there was, indeed, a God in heaven... And, yet, he was very pleased that Sheva believed that there was... He felt that because she thought there was, she would not forget him...

Yes, Sheva may believe and trust in God. Of that he was sure... He had never been so much in love with a woman.

"Henekh!"

"Yes, my love."

"When you return, you should bring me a nice set of forks and knives."

"Certainly, and what else?"

"And from Paris bring me a souvenir of silk lace, and a nice brooch." Sheva blushed at having asked for a wedding gift.

"Certainly, and I will also bring you a string of lace beads."

"And will you be traveling through Tovrig to see my sister?"

“For sure, how then?”

A drizzling Autumn rain began to fall, and they had to leave the park. He asked her:

“Come with me to my room.”

“I can not, Henekh, I am afraid of Mamma...”

“But we are betrothed.”

“Yes, but Mamma doesn’t know. She is afraid of you. She has often heard you talk about “liberating the world,” and “freeing mankind,” and she trembles at the thought. And when you talk about God, she simply plotzes from anger and heartsickness.”

“Nu, and you, Sheva?”

“I am not afraid. I mean, if, perhaps, you are right...”

The raindrops began to slap their faces. The house where she lived was next to the park, and he accompanied her there.

She very much wanted to say to him, that she would be thinking about him all night. But her tongue refused to move... She struggled with herself, wanting to be cheeky... And say it to him, choosing him... And he would, perhaps, remember her the whole year... Nu, but her tongue was stubborn and didn’t want to do it. And because she could not say to him, that she would think about him the whole night through, she didn’t say anything...

“Don’t forget to come tomorrow to the ship!...”

“Yes, of course...”

The next morning at the ship there was great confusion, a hoo-haa, and they couldn’t talk. They kissed and kissed, and Sheva waited until the very last.

On the way home her mind spun like the spindle on a weaving machine: A year... In about a year... Over a year... One month... Two months... Three... Six... Nine... and twelve!... Yes, she thought... Tall, with dark eyes, and the hands soft as silk... And he smiled wisely and had a heart of gold... And when he kissed, he entrusted her with a secret...

That was twenty years ago...

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And today, after about twenty years, when Sheva becomes sad, she goes to the little park where they sat on that last evening, and she recalls everything, word for word... The next twenty years passed like the first year... One month, two months... Three... Six... Nine... and twelve.

Her hair had turned gray, the eyes weak, the heart full of longing... An old woman... A sad one... A stubborn one... Her mother gone to her grave... But she waits... One month, two... Three... Six... Nine... and twelve months... He will come...

In the course of the twenty years, she knew this much about him: He got married in Europe, went back to America and there he freely lived with various women. She endured it, living in isolation heartbroken and in shame...

Very few people were left from twenty years ago who knew what had happened then... She no longer knew where he was, and she waited one month, two months... Three... Six... Nine... and twelve.

And when the sadness and intense longing came to her, she would go to the park.. The same bench was still standing in the same place... If the bench was not occupied, she would sit herself down, and for her, it would be twenty years ago... If the bench was occupied, she would be chagrined that they had the nerve to sit there. Sometimes her heart would grow weak, and she would have pity on a young girl sitting on the bench... She felt like going over to the young girl and warning her that one should not sit on that particular bench, it could bring heartache...

Last week she saw a forty-five year-old man walking in the park, she could have sworn that it was Henekh... But it was not him. He would have recognized her... And, he was fat, looking old and with a strange demeanor. It couldn't be Henekh...

Since that evening, she has gone every night to walk in the park... Perhaps, she would run in to him again. He reminded her so much of Henekh... Maybe, Henekh looked like that today...

One night she did see the man walking in the park. Yes, she could swear that it was him, Henekh, Henekh twenty years later. But why didn't he see her? She passed so close by him... Her heart would not cease pounding... Just one more time walk past him... She looked him right in the eye and he did not recognize her. Is that possible?... There, he looked at her with eyes that asked: "Lady, why are you looking at me like that?..."

"Henekh!" The name fell from her lips.

The forty-five year-old man in the strange little park jumped:

Henekh?! For years and years he had not heard that name, who, besides his Mother had ever called him Henekh?... In Russia they called him "Genrikh," in Paris, "Henri," and there in America, "Henry." But "Henekh," who in God's name can that be?... An old Jewish lady in a park called him "Henekh!" Has his Mother come back from the grave?

"Henekh, it's me, Sheva."

"You are Sheva?... No, Sheva is young with blond hair and blue eyes!"

"Are you, then, really Henekh? You were also young..."

"Yes, it's really Sheva! Your voice!... Come here and sit, Sheva. How are you?..."

“But...you see!” She answered quietly. A shudder as though from the grave went through every part of his body at the words, “But...you see.”

“Let’s sit down, Sheva, tell me everything...”

“There, on that bench...”

They sat down. Henekh sat silent with an unsteady heart.

“Why didn’t you write to me?”

“Should I remember after twenty years, why I didn’t write to you twenty years ago?”

“I remember everything:

Then, on this very bench we sat. It was the end of the year... We parted and I asked you to bring me a nice set of forks and knives, silk beads and a brooch when you returned. And you promised to bring me a string of lace beads...”

“And you remember all of that right up to today? Sheva, it has been, already, twenty years!...”

“Yes, it has been twenty years, and I thought that tomorrow it would happen...”

The strange forty-five year-old did not know what to say to the elderly Sheva, who thought that it would all happen tomorrow...

“And did you not go to visit my sister in Tovrig?...”

Sheva, let’s talk about how things are today. Tell me more... Tell me... Did you get married?”

“God forbid, I told you that I would wait for you, don’t you remember? Back then, on the night before you left?...”

“Sheva, I beg you, let go of what happened back then. Today I am an old man, I have a daughter... As old as you were then... She is engaged to be married...”

“A bride!” Sheva said hastily, “Just see to it that her fiancé doesn’t go to America...”

And old Henekh, the former “Genrikh,” “Henri,” or “Henry” trembled at the warning... Tears formed in his eyes, and he wanted to say: “May God protect...”

“Probably it was God’s will, Sheva...”

“God?!” Sheva exclaimed, “There is no God!”

“Sheva, Sheva what do we know?...”

“No, Henekh, there is no God, you were right...”



“Sheva, come home with me, I will introduce you to my wife and child...”

“What would I do with you in your home?”

“Live there in the same house with you as a servant?”

“Sheva, let’s be friends, Sheva, I beg you, forgive me.”

And as Henekh asked for forgiveness, she turned her gray head to the side and twenty-year-old tears came to her eyes...

He kissed her out of regret for what he had done, and Sheva wept. For the first time in about twenty years.