

Joe the Waiter

by Y. Y. Zevin

From his Collected Works Published 1909 by the Hebrew Publishing Company, NY

Translation by Daniel Setzer
December 2014

דזשאָו דער ווייטער.
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דזשאָו געהט זעהן אַ כלה.

איהר פרענט ווי עס איז אונז גענאָנגען אום מוצאי
יום כפור, הלואי אויף די נוי'שע רעסטאָראַנטס געזאָגט
געוואָרען. די מיסעס האָט אָנגעגרייט טשיקענס און
קאָטשקעס, און טהייערע קאַשע, און לאָקשען-סונעל, און
געפילטע העלזעל, אפשר פאַר אַ פּאַלק סאַלדאַטען. מיר
האַבען זיך געריכט אויף אַ גרויסע ביזו — אַ שפּאַס
נאָך אזאָ גרויסען טעניט; און לסוף האָבען מיר געהאַט
בלויז צוואַנציג קאָסטאַמערס, און פון דיזע האָבען אַ
אַ העלפט געטרונקען בלויז טהעע מיט שטרודעל. עס
איז אַ גבורה, בנאמנות, מענשען זאָלען פּאַסטען אַ
גאַנצען מעת-לעת און גאָר ניט זיין הונגעריג!

זעה איך, אז די מיסעס געהמט זיך צום האַרצען:
סטייטש! זי האָט אזוי שווער געאַרבייט אַ גאַנצען
ערב יום-כפור, געקאָכט, געבראַוען און געפרעגעלט,
און דאָס אַלעס אָנגעגרייט אויף נאַכ'ן תענית, און לסוף —
נאָדיר! אזוי ווי עס וואָלט גאָר ניט קיין תענית ניט
געווען. מאַך איך צו דער מיסעס: „שאַ, מיסעס לעבען,
איהר דאַרפט זיך ניט זאָרנען. אויב די קאָסטאַמערס
זיינען ניט געקומען היינט, וועלען זיי קומען מאָרגען.
דער קאַדוק וועט זיי ניט געהמען, זיי קענען דאָס עסען
מאָרגען אויך. עס וועט זיין פּערשפּאַרט מאָרגען צו
קאָכען.“ אבער די מיסעס האָט אַן עהרליכע נאַטור און



1.

Joe Goes to See a Bride

You asked how things went for us on the evening of Yom Kippur, if only it could be said of the gentile restaurants. The Missis had prepared chickens and ducks, and wonderful kasha, and noodle pastry, and stuffed chicken neck, enough for a small army. I was expecting us to be busy - What a joke after all the preparations; in the end we only had twenty customers, and from them about half only ordered a glass tea and a strudel. It is heroic, impressive that men can fast a whole 24-hours and still not be hungry!

I saw how the Missis took it to heart: How is it possible?! She worked so hard during the whole day before the holiday, cooked, baked, and cleaned and all that done while fasting, and the result: Nada! It was as though no one had fasted at all. I said to the Missis, "Shoot! Mrs. Leven, don't worry yourself about it. If the customers don't come today, they will come tomorrow. They aren't all going to fall out from fits today, they can eat it tomorrow. It will save you cooking tomorrow morning." But the Missis has a noble nature and she said that she can not give our customers food on Sunday that was cooked on Friday. On Sunday she cooked dinner again. And what do you think happened Sunday? We had, perhaps, thirty customers, and a third of them asked for soft-boiled eggs with warm milk and they complained that they had wasted the morning. Now I am racking my brains and can not figure out how they can say that they have wasted the morning fasting? If a man doesn't eat, he gets hungry. You can even ask a doctor and he will tell you. But following a fast it ruins your morning – that I don't understand.

I came face to face with troubles last Sunday when a matchmaker came into the restaurant and wanted me to consider a marriage contract. I said to him, "So soon after the fasting? Who thinks of a bride at this moment?" He laughed, the matchmaker, and said that it goes well with the holidays, people have free time and families can sit at home and receive prospective bridegrooms who come to visit brides. I said to him, "...and what exactly are the essentials?" The matchmaker laughed again and asked me what I meant by 'essentials.'" I answered him, "The 'essential' is the magnitude in size, that is to say how much money does the young Miss have?" He said, "Five hundred." I thought to myself: Considering the usual exaggerations, there is probably about three hundred left, which is still enough to go into business and become independent." I asked him, "Nu, and what about the girl herself?" He answered with a casual air, "What difference does it make? The essential, according to you, is the dowry." I said, "See here, Mr. Matchmaker, I want to know what kind of a dish the bride is. Is she veal, chicken or is she perhaps only a duck? He said to me, "Well...she does have, maybe, a little flaw." I wanted to know what kind of flaw and he said I should go see the bride and make up my own mind. I said, "All right."

He took a little card out of his pocket and said, "On this card I have written the address. Go there tomorrow at eight o'clock, they will be expecting you. I will stop by there a little bit later. It is no longer fashionable for the groom and the matchmaker to arrive at the same time. Go there and introduce yourself. They will invite you in as a welcomed guest. The matchmaker left and I said to myself, "Nu, Joe, don't delay. Go out and get yourself a full dress suit, the way a young man should, who can crack nuts." Monday night I went to Canal Street to a man who rents full dress suits and wedding apparel. He put me in a black frock coat and cautioned me to be very careful not to bow too

low because if I did the coat might split. Then I went home and put on a white shirt with a blue tie and yellow shoes. I gave myself a look in the mirror – A complete dandy!

Shortly after, I took the streetcar to the address that the matchmaker had given me. When I arrived at the house I stopped dead in my tracks and stared up at the house in wonder. The house looked like someplace where aristocrats would live. By the door was a Negro servant in a uniform with brass buttons. He asked me who I came to see. “Does Mr. Lekech live here?” I asked the servant. He bowed to me and answered, “Yes Sir.” I wasn't sure if I should bow back to a Negro servant, then I remembered that the coat might split. The Negro servant led me into the hall. There I was met by another Negro servant who took me to an elevator and we rode up one floor. I said to the Negro servant, “Buddy, you are going to too much trouble, to go up one floor a person could climb on foot.” The Negro servant took me to a door and pressed a button by the door. The he left and left me alone, by myself, in the hall.

I stood and waited and wondered how such a man who would only give his daughter five hundred dollars for a dowry would be living in such a house with Negro servants. Then I remembered that among the aristocrats it was not at all fashionable to give dowries. So, why was he offering five hundred dollars as dowry? It must be because the girl has a flaw – what sort of flaw could it be? Perhaps the flaw was worth more than five hundred dollars. “Be a mensch, Joe,” I said to myself, “and don't let them make a fool of you.”

While I stood there thinking, another black servant came and opened the door for me. I thought to myself, “They are all blacks! In this house I have yet to see one white person. Perhaps the bride is also a black?” I told the servant that I had come to see Mr. Lekech. She asked me for my visiting card. I told her I did not have any cards with me. She asked if I had an appointment. She went away, but came back shortly and showed me into a beautiful room. As I entered the room I was met by a handsome gentleman with a white beard. He shook my hand and presented me to two pretty women. One was his wife, the other his daughter. Something wasn't right about the way they looked at me. There was something that did not please them; it was either my blue tie or my yellow shoes. I took out my handkerchief and wiped my face – it was getting very warm in the room. We all sat down and the young lady sat right next to me. A maiden – I noted - who was like a pine tree, just as round and thick as one and healthy as a Cossack. I thought to myself, where is her flaw? Maybe she has a foot made out of wood, or a wooden hand, or a glass eye, or maybe she is stuffed with cotton, or she is bald and wears phony hair. Just try talking to young women today!! I think to myself, “Since I don't know how, I don't want to make a mistake. I was very attracted to the girl and ready to take her just as she was.”

I sat there and couldn't think of anything to say to start a conversation. She kept looking me over, first at my yellow shoes and then at my tie. In the middle of that she spoke to me in English, “We have fine weather.”

“Sure, I said, but it is bad for my business, for in good weather my customers go to Coney Island and I lose my tips.”

She stared at me with both eyes. I thought, “Aha, there is the flaw!! She is a little mixed up in the brain. With that kind of a look in the eye, she has to be a little crazy. That's where they wanted to pack me in a sack! Joe, be a mensch!”

“We thought you were an importer of woolens,” the father said.

“You are mistaken,” I said to him, “I am not an importer of woolens. I am Joe the Waiter from the intellectuals' restaurant on east Broadway.”

“Papa!” I heard the daughter say, “There must have been a misunderstanding. This is someone else.”

In the midst of this the Negro servant came back in with another visiting card. In a couple of minutes the matchmaker entered the room. He took me by the hand and began to usher me out of the room saying to the others, “A mistake! Excuse me all! I gave the young man the wrong address.”

The whole house irrupted in laughter, but at my expense. However, the householder came to me and stopped me, saying to the matchmaker that he was not a gentleman to drive a man from a stranger's house.

“It is a shame,” he said to him forcefully.

In short they bid me sit down again and the young girl spoke with me in the most friendly manner and with less hesitation. I thought that we were getting back on track and they wanted me to go through with a marriage contract. But in the middle of it, the matchmaker came back in and whispered in my ear, “They do not want to do business with you, but you must be a mensch and be the one to get up and leave. Don't forget to say goodbye to each one.”

I stood up and said, “Goodbye all, I must be going.” Each one shook hands with me and had parting words for me. The older man accompanied me into the hall and up to the elevator. I said “Goodbye” to the Negro servant by the elevator and to the Negro by the door, and then I was in the street.

The matchmaker came a little bit later and brought me the correct address, for the correct bride, but I didn't want to do any more business with him. I showed him the door.

2.

When Joe Was an “Omnibus”

This happened five years ago. I was at that time an omnibus, that is to say, a helper to a waiter. Do you have any idea what problems an omnibus has before he becomes a waiter? An omnibus is a null. Alone, by himself, he is a nothing. Place him together with a waiter and then he is something. The waiter has to keep his eyes on the customers, and the omnibus has to keep his eyes on the waiter. He must support the waiter by carrying plates, spoons, knives and a glass of water. He has to run or jump at the right moment. However, he must not make himself too evident to the customers. And when it comes to the tip, the omnibus has to make 'skidoo' and run. He has to disappear like falling into the water, because all the tips belong to the waiter. So says the unwritten law. Everything falls on the omnibus, usually the most unpleasant things, like when a customer puts his hand in his pocket, the omnibus earns a kick from the waiter, but done in such a way that no one sees it, not even the omnibus. He just feels a sudden pain from the toe of a shoe in his behind. Button your lip, and don't say a word!!

During this terrible time, when I was living only with the hope of someday being a waiter, a simple headwaiter without a omnibus, an evil impulse told me to go to a dancing hall and learn to dance. You are probably asking yourself, why in the world would I need to learn to dance? Nu, a lot of waiters hang out in the dancing hall. Dancing can be very useful in our profession. A waiter must know how to dance, dance here, dance there, from one table to another and from there to the kitchen. All right, I'll get to the point, have a little patience. There in the dancing hall I met a young lady, not bad looking and made up like a baby doll. But she was a fool – a real block of wood.

She started talking to me and giving complements saying that I was a handsome boy. After that she asked me if I would be her 'feller.' It did not sit well with me. I said, “I hardly make enough to support myself. I don't make enough for a family, I can't even think about it.” She responded, “You big fool! Do you think I want you for a husband? I just want you to go out with me when I want to go out. Sometimes to the theater, sometimes to a ball, sometimes just for a walk. I will pay for everything with my own money. I work at a millinery shop and make good money. I will buy you a new suit also if you wish.”

In short, she continued to talk and talk and plead with me. I thought to myself, what a blockhead, what an idiot, but she convinced me. The customer who eats dairy noodles said that, indeed, deception and turning a man's head is something even the most foolish girl can do. When it comes to these types of things they all have smarts. So I went out with the girl, Mary was her name, like it was a steady job. My job was to go to her place a few times a week and take her on a visit to her girlfriends, once a week to the dance hall, sometimes to the theater or a ball, and sometimes just promenade down Grand Street. When walking down Grand Street she would meet female friends and introduce me to them as her friend. The word 'friend' she would take care to pronounce a little haltingly and lower her eyes as though she were being bashful.

I was very happy with this job. To begin with I got to go to the theater for free, suppers and snacks. Secondly, she gave me some money to dress myself. I stopped being afraid of her. She said she was thinking about getting a better man than I, more handsome and with a better income. She let me know that there was a suitor after her and followed her step for step, but she did not care for him. It was clear

she didn't want me either – she made a point of telling that to all of her acquaintances.

“I am not the only one who does this,” she would say, “in New York there are a lot of girls who have taken fiancées as rentals, just to have someone to go out with, and now and then they get one that turns out to be a catch.”

After we had been going out like this for about ten months she confided a secret to me:

“Listen, Joe, I already have a fiancée, a real fiancée, but that doesn't mean I am going to give you the sack, because I am still not completely sure about him. You young men! Can you really trust them? Now, Joe, you can be more useful to me than ever. You must pretend like you are jealous. When you meet my fiancée you mustn't let him see how things really are between you and I, but you must put on a show. No, you have to convince him that you are my real fiancée, and that you are very jealous that he is trying to make a match with me. That will really make him jealous and hurry him up.”

From that point on I came less often to see Mary. She began to split her free time between me and the other young man. But once I had the occasion to encounter him at Mary's house. Now I understand that it happened because she intentionally invited us both over at the same time.

The young man was clearly very jealous of me and gave me sharp looks with his eyes. I glared back at him to show him that I was even more jealous. Mary tried to appear good and attentive to us both. She, that foolish kid, played her role better than both of us! That made me angry at all the women of the world. I will stand by my opinion that any woman can act out any role she wants and the smartest man will not be able to figure out that it is a performance!

Yes, it is just like what the customer who eats dairy noodles said: “Bluffing, and turning a young man's head is something even the most stupid girl can do.”

“You know what?” Mary said to us both in a sweet tone, “We will all take a walk together down Grand Street. I will go into the next room and change my clothes.” At that point she gave me a wink, and a wink to him and she stepped into the next room.

As soon as she left the room, the young man asked me: “How long have you known this little flake?”

I was shocked when I heard him use such a word. Is this the way a prospective groom talks about his fiancée? I remembered that I was supposed to play my role, so I said to the young man:

“It is not nice to speak like that about a lady.”

“What?”, he asked, “are you really in love with her?”

“Yes,” I said.

“You're lying,” he said, “You are only here to put on a show, just like I am.”

“What do you mean, like you?” and at that point I awoke from my delusion. “You mean to say that you are not Mary's fiancée?”

“And you?” he asked.

“And you?” I asked.

We looked at each other like the two Kuni Lemels. The the young man smiled at me, slapped me on the back and said, “We are colleagues, Brother. Two bluffing fiancées at the same door!”

What happened after that I can tell you in a few words. Me and the other fellow continued to work at the same job, as rented fiancées for a couple of months more.

Word kept circulating among Mary's acquaintances and girlfriends that two young men were in love to die for her, they were crazy about her and followed her everywhere step for step. The end of the story is that Mary got married to an older fellow who had two rental girlfriends. As for that fellow, it is a story in itself. I will tell it to you some other time.

3.

A Waiter is Smarter than a Lawyer

Grab a glass tea, close your mouth, open your ears and listen. Sunday the Missis said to me, "Joe, you can take a day for vacation." Nu, can you guess where I went? Nu, I went to Coney Island. On Sunday the place is packed, but I had read in the newspapers that a judge had decided that the city could not charge more than five cents for the trip to Coney Island. I wanted to see how people could travel for a nickel and how Capitalists would obey a judge. In short, the first nickel I paid out while we were still on the bridge and thought that the conductor would not ask me for any more. When we got to the place where they demand the second nickel the conductor counted the passengers, then counted the fare box and said it was short and he had to collect two more nickels.

That unleashed a storm among the passengers because it was still a long way to the ocean. The conductor began to threaten everyone and said he would throw them off the car. A few people paid up then the rest gave in and did the same. When he came to me, I said to myself, "Joe, be a mensch and don't pay! Show him that you are a free citizen in America and teach the robber barons a lesson, they should think twice." That is what I said to myself, and to the conductor I said, "No, I will not give you another nickel as sure as I live." I heard a man sitting near me say, "Dat's right! I am not going to give another nickel either!" The conductor said to us, "I am going to throw both of you off the car." The man next to me said, "I am a lawyer and anyone who lays a hand on me or on this young man will pay dearly for it." That made me feel good. I smelled a little business. It is a good business, I thought to myself, and leaned over to the lawyer and whispered in his ear, "We will be partners, I am going to get damages and you will help." The lawyer became a little angry, he was probably German, and he said to me, "Hey, you are a mensch with no sense of honor. You want to make a business from this. This man treads on the heads of free citizens, we are being robbed of our rights, and you get it in your head to make a business of the situation. You are going to let yourself get beat up just to get a few dollars." That is just what he said to me. I looked at him like he was meshugge and said, "Today, why do we need lawyers if not to get damages?" He spit, angrily turned away from me and did not speak to me. I thought, get control of yourself, I will show you that even though you are a lawyer and I am a waiter, I will still out-argue the conductor.

In a moment the conductor had stopped the car and called for a special officer. He pointed out me and the lawyer. The special officer asked me to exit the car. I yelled out, "I want my change!" The conductor asked, "What change?" I said, "I gave you a dollar back on the bridge and you still haven't given me my change." The conductor flew into a rage and screamed, "Liar!" I said, "You are a liar! Count your fare box and see how many fares you have collected." I gave the conductor a wink, and I saw that he turned white. I continued, "We have here 80 passengers, so let's see how much money you have." I heard the conductor say to the special officer, "All right!" He rang the bell and the car started off again toward Coney Island. As soon as the car started moving the conductor came to me and counted out 95 cents in my hand and gave me a look like he wanted to eat me alive. I thought to myself, the tough-guy has made a profit of forty nickels on this trip, he is not hurting. I cast a glance at the lawyer, and he looked at me. My look toward him said, "Aha," he should see now who is smarter, a waiter or a lawyer. He looked at me as though he didn't know what to think about me. Finally, he opened his mouth and said to me, "You are a very common person, but you handled that very cleverly. I don't trust people like you. Are you a citizen?" "Sure, Mack!" I answered him, "I was a citizen three weeks after I arrived in America and in the first year I voted in the elections."

He burst out laughing so hard I thought he would fall out of the car. That was a messhugener German! First he is angry, then he is laughing!

That is how I taught the Capitalists a lesson. I have long had the habit when I go to Coney Island to count the passengers and count the times the conductor sounds the bell on the fare box. That way I can calculate how much he is making each day, and when he will have enough money to quit his job and go into the real estate business.

I have tried on several occasions to get a job as a conductor. They get a lot more tips. But it never came to anything. I had an acquaintance, a landsman, who was a conductor for two months. Now he has a dairy store that he tends himself and a second that his wife manages. He has two houses listed for sale and he pedals jewelery on the side. Also, he is a Notary Public and a little bit of a lawyer, too. Not long ago he was arrested by an inspector from the Board of Health because he found a milk-can full of water. When he was brought before the judge he argued that the water cost him more than milk. The judge asked him how could water be more expensive? My landsman answered, "Your Honor! It wasn't water." The judge got very angry and yelled, "What, are you crazy? Just a moment ago you said that water cost you more than milk, and now you turn it around to say it isn't water. I am going to send you away for contempt of court!"

My landsman said, "Judge! Your Honor! Don't be angry. It wasn't water. The story is, I placed it among the milk for a long time to keep the milk cold and fresh. Nu, doesn't that make it ice water? When I put it in the case it was not water. Nu, and when the ice disappeared how could I make a profit on it? You know very well that nowadays ice costs more than milk!"

And what do you think? The judge wouldn't let him go? Sure the judge let him go!

4.

He Buys Immortality.

Today, for an appetizer we have marinated fish! Aha, you are happy, I know that you like it. The best part, the middle piece, I have saved for you. You are going to be delighted.

There, now you have your piece of fish and I have the horseradish. And I have a story to tell you that will really please you. Starting today we are colleagues, associates, equals. I have been accepted as a writer. This is how it came to pass:

Yesterday a handsome Jew came in and said that he is an author [mechaber]. I did not hear him very well and I thought I heard him say he was a terrorist [mechabel]. I said to him, "Skidoo! I don't bluff, this isn't Coney Island." He repeated to me that he is an author, some one who makes books and he is the famous "Rabbi Sage." I asked him, "What kind of a sage are you?" He answered, "I write a book about the greatest people and the greatest writers in America and I add their photographs to my book." I asked, "How is that being a sage? Does it cost money?" He explained it very reasonably this way: "Each person who wants to be included in the book along with his picture pays me a few ducats. When the book is complete then I collect two ducats for each copy of the book they want." I said to him, "So, you get tips, big tips, and double them. You know, that is brilliant. Take me on as a partner."

Rabbi Sage laughed and answered, "I don't need a partner, because I don't need to put more money into the business." About then I noticed that the clock struck noon, and the customers would be coming in soon. I wanted to get done with him so I asked him, "What would you like to order today?" He responded like this, "Listen, Mister Joe! I have come to the conclusion that you are a great writer. Your biography and your picture should be in my book. Because, in what way are you any worse than the other writers? I should have as healthy a year as you write, better than the others, a thousand times better. I will write that in my book and print your picture so you can show it to your friends, your family and I am certain it will help you with a marriage contract."

I let myself be convinced and asked him if he could print my picture from a tintype. He said, "It is one in the same." I said, "But the tintype I had taken at Coney Island dressed in a bathing suit, and how can you stick me in the book in a bathing suit among the Rabbis, the brilliant personages and the writers?" He answered by saying that he can fix that: He will cut off my head, that is to say from the picture he will cut out the head and put it with another picture in a full-dress suit. That pleased me even more. And the more Rabbi Sage spoke to me the more I liked the plan. Finally I said to him, "How much? What do you want for that?"

"Five ducats to begin and two ducats when I bring you the completed book, and three ducats to make the picture."

My head began to spin when I heard that, so I gave the soup a little cold water, dug down for a little courage, and tried to think hard:

"Listen, Reb Sage," I said to him, "In America we don't use ducats. You mean, perhaps, a ten dollar bill. That is two weeks tips. I can't afford it because lately I have lost a lot of money to other sages just

like you. If you want to do a deal, it will have to be like this. When you bring me the completed book, I will give you five dollars.”

After a little back and forth he got the price up another dollar. Secondly, I only give him three dollars in advance and three when he gives me the finished book. On delivery I also give him a cup of coffee and three soft boiled eggs in the bargain. Now I am going to have my picture right after yours in the same book. I made him promise to put me in there right after you, because as far as I am concerned you are the best customer.

5.

A Man with Two Faces

There, in the restaurant a customer came in, Mr. Bonder was his name. He is not a regular customer. He shows himself only a few days around the first of the month, and a few days around the fifteenth. I understand that he is a landlord who has a house downtown and he comes down here from uptown to collect rent. Whenever he comes to the restaurant he always orders the sour beef. If we don't have sour beef he orders baked herring. It doesn't matter if I try to interest him in other things. That is a big deal for me. My craft is to know what people will like to eat. Have I already told you his name? Yes, Mr. Bonder is his name and he likes to talk a little. Once we talked about the rent strike. It was during the time when the strike was really cooking. He told me that the strikers were right. It really surprised me to hear that from a man who was a landlord. But he explained to me that the truth was that even in his own case there were a good number of landlords who charged their tenants too much. "Even I, for example," explained Mr. Bonder, "am a tenant to another landlord and I give him 40 dollars a month rent. I learned, however, that the previous tenant only paid 35, and I tell you, Joe, if the tenants in the building want to strike, then I will go on strike with them even though I am a landlord."

Two days later Mr. Bonder came back in lively and full of good cheer. He gave me a slap on the back and said, "Joe, you will be showing me some respect, I am a striker!" The tenants in the house where I live have united and gone on strike. They are offering five dollars less for each apartment."

"That's fine," I said, "It is a good thing that you are standing with the tenants."

"Joe," he continued, "you want to hear what sort of a speech I made yesterday before the strikers. If you want to hear it you will have to be a rebel because I am a regular agitator. I damned high rents, damned landlords, the real estate agents, the police....everybody!"

Mr. Bonder was so pleased with himself that he left a tip for me of a whole dollar.

Ten days passed before Mr. Bonder came back to the restaurant again, but he was not at all as happy this time as before.

"It is terrible, Joe," he said to me, "it doesn't pay to let yourself be led by ideals!"

"What has happened," I asked, "Why are you speaking so pessimistically?"

"Oh," he explained, "When I was engaged in my battle against the landlords, my tenants downtown went on strike against me. They are striking now in three buildings where I am the landlord, and they are demanding more than I can give to them. I swear to you Joe, by my word of honor I swear, it does not pay to let yourself be led by ideals."

"So why are you letting this eat your heart out?", I asked him, "You will work it out with your tenants. You are a mensch with a conscience."

"But," he countered and took from his pocket two postal cards, "Look at what kind of trouble I am in!

Here I have an invitation to come to a meeting with the strikers where I am in the finance committee, and there I have a post card inviting me to a meeting of the landlords association where I have been appointed a member of the executive committee. And imagine, Joe, both meetings are on the same evening. This evening!

Well, would you like to know the end of the story with Mr. Bonder? The end was that the landlords association kicked him out for belonging the strikers, and the strikers kicked him out for belonging to the landlords association. He lost on both sides. He had to give in to his landlord and he had to give in to his tenants. With one pair of feet you can't dance in two dance halls.

6.

Joe Become an Editor

Wednesday a man came into the restaurant and ordered a glass tea with nothing. I mean no cake, no strudel only the tea with a little lemon. Such customers are never good luck. They don't give tips because they are not spenders. I give him a glass tea but he just sits there and doesn't drink. It occurs to me that he thinks this is a kibitz café where men go, spend a nickel, and sit around a whole evening. He just sat there and looked at me and finally asked me if I was Joe the waiter. I said, "That is me indeed with the bones and the apron." He laughed and said, "The idiom fails me. It is true Yiddish." That ticked me off and I said, "You yourself are a true Yiddish idiot." He said I didn't understand him correctly. He meant something quite different. I said to him, "I come from the common people and one should talk to me with regular language and not with philosophy or filthy-ology."

He asked me to bring him a ten-cent cigar and told me to take one for myself on his bill. That softened me a bit and I let him go on talking. He went straight to the point and asked if he could talk some business with me.

"Certainly," I said, "as long as it is business that has in it a good tip."

He asked me, "First, can you tell me what are your principles?" I picked up a menu and said, "Here, take this. Here you will find all of the principles, from herring to compote." He said, "You are a Materialist. Don't you have any higher ideals than this menu?" I said, "On Friday we have fish, gefilte fish, whole fish, and also Moravian stew. He said to me, "You are a cynic." I answered, "See here, Mister, you are coming to me offering to do some business, tell me what the business is and how much are the tips. Why bother yourself about what I am? Do you want a marriage contract with me? Talk to me in plain Yiddish."

He took a big gulp from the glass and then recounted this story:

"I am the editor of a Yiddish newspaper. I do my work true and proper according to my convictions, according to my ideas and according to my understanding. Whatever comes my way, I do, what is crooked – I avoid. I try with all my might not to hurt anyone and to make every one happy. I strive to make my paper bigger and it should please all classes of people, be they pious, be they heretic, be they yellow, be they green, be they men, be they women, be they workers or be they Capitalists. In spite of that all of the readers are not content. The great majority, to speak openly, are very discontented. Every one of them cites a different failing in my paper. They write me letters and the contents are always the same, namely, that I, the editor, can not feel the pulse of the people and that I don't know what to give the readers. As to what I should give the readers, the letters are not in agreement. Some say I should have more stories, the next one wants more news, a third wants more novels, a fourth wants more philosophy, a fifth wants two serialized fiction pieces every day, a sixth says I should throw out all of the advertisements and print jokes in their place. As I have come to realize that I can in no way figure out the taste of the public, I have decided to choose a man that lives among the people and has the same tastes as the people and make this man the editor of my newspaper for a whole day so that I can finally learn the true tastes of my readers. This man chosen from the people is you, Mr. Joe. Because where is there another name so famous and so big among the common people as the name of Joe the Waiter? So, if you will be the editor of my paper for a whole day I will give you a big tip."

“Do I have to do a lot of writing?” I asked him.

“No,” he said, “not at all. An editor does not have to do any writing. An editor only has to measure.”

“How does an editor measure,” I asked, “in the length or width.”

“In the length,” he said, “but whole pages of paper, unsparingly.”

In short, we made a deal that he would give me three dollars for an early morning work day and that he would let me go by eleven o'clock, so that I could get back to the restaurant and take care of my customers.

I got to the editing room very early and found there perhaps a half-dozen writers, and among them a Jew with a beard and blue spectacles. I asked, “Who is the black beard?” They told me that he is “Gnendel the Philosopher” who writes advice for women on how to raise children and other things. I said, “Give him the sack, I hate bluffers like that. With me if you say kasha you mean kasha and not shav [sorrel soup], shav is not kasha and Gnendel with a beard, I do not need.” Gnendel grew angry and said, “Mr. Waiter, I mean Mr. Editor, you should know that I am not just anybody. I write the special correspondence from Berdychiv and from Russia every week, and the Brownsville Chronicle twice a week.” I said, “Mensch, it is not honest to bluff people like that. Why don't you do like other Yiddish newspapers and have correspondents everywhere?” The other writers laughed at me and said that I have not begun to understand what journalism is, and with my methods I would bury the newspaper in the ground in one day's time.

I could see that I was not going to get anywhere with them, so I sat down and shut up and looked at the clock on the wall and thought, “When will I be able to leave and go back to the restaurant and attend to my customers? I already regret taking this job because I heard how the writers laughed at me and whispered things like, “Oh, is that a chump! He has come here to make reforms. Has anyone ever heard of a waiter from a restaurant who would come to a newspaper and try to be an editor? And he wants all of us to jump to his tune and give the readers everything that he has on the menu. Feh, the waiter is no journalist. His ambitions are too high.”

I sat like that for an hour and stewed, then one by one the writers came to me with their drafts. I asked, “What am I supposed to do with them?” Gnendel with the black beard answered me with these words, “On each article you write remarks that this is a model for beautiful literature, and that you recommend it to the readers as a priceless pearl, that such articles should always show up in Yiddish newspapers and that the writer is a genius.”

“Just like that?” I said, “Not just a Gnendel, but a genius? You write on your article your own self whatever you want and leave me alone.”

How the edition got put together, I have no idea. The whole thing got done with no help from me. The writers themselves did the writing, did the printing, I just sat there as a front to all their work. Ostensibly, it was a man from the common people who edited the paper for a day. But the real work came after the newspaper edition was done. Earlier, I had a hard time collecting my three dollars. After that the writers came to me and circled around me and shoved an article under my nose and told me I should read it and see how nice and good it was. I took the article and read:

An Abandoned Wife with One Eye

It is well known that if Ruben is blind in one eye, it follows that he will probably be blind in the other eye also. Schopenhauer made that point long ago. Women will be women as long as the world turns. The modern woman is a man in a short jacket. She is an abnormal anomaly. Just as Ruben is blind in one eye, which is to say blind in both eyes.

In Essex Market Court one can see an example. A woman peddler who was blind in one eye, saw with the other eye that her husband was making out with their lady boarder.

And what was the result?

The result is what we have seen many times. She made a big fuss, and her husband ran away with the lady boarder. Now the woman peddler is still blind in one eye and in the other eye she is an abandoned wife.

After I read this, I did just what the peddler's husband did, I ran away from there as fast as I could.

7.

How to Make Money from a Fever

This is how things go in this world: If you see someone living like a wealthy man, you can be sure that he is a pauper; and if you see someone living like a pauper, then you can be sure that he is a wealthy man.

I know a wealthy Jew that is worth three or four thousand dollars. You should see what kind of a coat he wears! On this coat he ripped tears in the garment for four wives, and he is scared that the fifth wife will die and he will have to buy another coat because this one is so frayed and brittle that he couldn't make another tear.

This man comes here often with doctors who pay for his lunch. He does a big business with them. With them he is an agent for extras. You know of course that when a young doctor opens an office he has to begin by using extras. That is to say men and women who sit in the waiting room and wait ostensibly for their turn. These extras have various costumes. One has a bandaged hand, the next a bandaged head, a third has a discolored wound on the forehead, a fourth has a marinated oyster eye, one coughs, one scratches, the fifth whistles through his teeth, another has a glazed-over stare in the eyes, here one holds his belly with both hands and growls as though rats were dancing on his bowels. And when a real patient comes in he thinks to himself, "Gosh, what a great doctor this must be that they pound on his door and so many sick people are waiting for him." The extras sit and are called in one by one in order to the doctor's office and they go straight through and off to another doctor's office. The same extras work for several doctors.

A few days ago the agent for the extras came to me and asked if I wanted to earn a few dollars on the side. I said, "Why not? In the morning before eleven o'clock I can spend a couple of hours with one of your doctors." The agent said to me, "No, Mr. Joe, it is not easy being an extra, because extras that work for doctors must possess real talent. He must be able to be sick in ten different ways. A doctor's extra has to be able to have a fever by nine o'clock, at ten o'clock a stomach ache, at eleven o'clock a swollen cheek, by mid-day a neck injury, at one o'clock rheumatism, at two o'clock a bad cold, and so on. But for you, Joe, I have a plan for you to make a little money in an upstanding and easy manner."

"How so?" I asked him, "and by the way how much in tips are in it for me?"

"Already with the tips!" he called out, "with you the tip is the only thing that matters. I have a plan for you that will make you world famous, from the Bronx to Brownsville, and make you immortal."

I gave it a thought: Aha, this guy is bluffing me. He is going to try and suck a couple of dollars out of me, like that author who wanted to make me immortal with my picture in his book.

That's what I thought while he kept talking so innocently, "Your name will become popular like Ritzenal, or Spanish Fly. Listen Mr. Joe, one of my customers, a doctor, found a remedy for rheumatism. He wants to print your picture in the newspaper and advertise that it is the famous Joe the Waiter who owes his good health to Dr. Kanavalovski's remedy for fever."

“Where will my picture be printed,” I asked.

“In all of the newspapers,” said the agent, “in Yiddish, English, German, French, Dutch, Czech, Arabic, and I don't know what other languages. Your name will be more famous than the name of Shakespeare.”

“Shakespeare!” I called out with joy, “who will not know the Jewish Shakespeare. He writes pieces for the Yiddish theater. I was once a waiter in a restaurant, where he spent all his evenings and drank tea.”

The agent laughed and said that was not the Shakespeare he meant. Your Shakespeare, he said, is a shoe repair man. He is speaking about a much greater Shakespeare, and that my name would be even more renowned than the name of *that* great Shakespeare. And what's more, I would get three dollars a month as my tip.

“But that after all is the least of it,” said the agent, “You shouldn't think that the money you get is only for letting your picture be printed in the newspapers. No, you also have to work a little bit for the money. People may come to you looking for more information. You have to know what to say to them.”

Say what you want, the business deal pleased me. First, my picture will be in all the newspapers, then I will be more famous than the greater Shakespeare, and moreover, I will get a good tip with it all. America...such a country! You can make a business from anything! Even from a fever you can make money!

8.

Joe Goes Again to See a Bride

Yes, Sir, I went again to see a prospective bride. I will go get you your tea with strudel and you can take your time sipping your tea while you write down word for word about how I, Joe the Waiter, went to see another bride.

You will remember how the last time I went to see a bride and stumbled into the wrong house where there was also a bride, but for some other man not me. What happened to me this time is also worth telling. It is interesting. Write word for word as I tell you the story and, please, don't throw in any of your own wit.

Monday a man came in here and said that he wanted to talk to me about an important matter. I asked him, "Who are you?" He answered me, "I am a teacher." I said to him, "You mean to say that you are a melamed [religious teacher] only you are ashamed to say so." He answered me, "No, I am not a true melamed, I teach Hebrew in Hebrew." I said, "I have heard of this sort of thing. You teach the children Hebrew but without translation, the students have to figure out the meanings for themselves." "Yes," said the melamed, "Exactly so. That is the latest and the best method." I said to him, "Buddy, it is not so new. These methods of learning Hebrew without translation have existed in every diaspora for the last hundred years. I remember still how my Rebe taught me Hebrew in Hebrew and that was 25 years ago, when I learned Chapter. It was the same thing learning Chumash [Pentateuch]. Nu, I ask you, what have you Hebrew teachers accomplished? Authentic melameds have done the same thing."

The melamed laughed, I mean to say, the Hebrew teacher, and said that we would have to leave that question for another time, because he has come to me specifically for a different matter, a more important one. He has come to talk about a marriage match.

"So," I said, "are you also a matchmaker? All right, sit yourself down and tell me, how much money does she, the girl, have?"

"Eh," said the Hebrew teacher, "how does it come to you, the great ideologist, to talk immediately about the money? First off you should be interested in the young girl herself."

"Foolishness!" I said, "with me it is business before pleasure." The teacher laughed again and said that as far as money was concerned there was nothing to talk about. The father of the young girl, Mr. Hasenson, is a peddler of smoking materials and makes a golden business. The girl is a great beauty and is in love with you."

"What do you mean in love?" I asked, "Does she know me? Who is she?"

"That was the term she used – in love," the teacher answered, "Here is the whole story: I was in the house to collect my teacher's fee for a young boy who goes to my improved cheder [Hebrew school]. When I came in I saw that the people were drinking tea and were recounting a story that Y.Y. Zevin had written down word for word. They invited me to sit with them and drink a glass tea. We talked and laughed about your witticisms. In the middle of all that the daughter turned to me and said, "I tell you,

I am totally in love with Joe. I would love to meet him sometime and hear him talk.” Nu, when I heard that the thought came to me to try and make a match. I said to Mr. Hasenson's daughter, “I can bring you Joe, if you want.” When I said that they all jumped on the idea with joy. I am certain that this will result in a match.”

“Have you been in the matchmaker business a long time?” I asked the teacher.

“No,” he answered, “I have only just taken it up and not yet had a successful deal. Once I put together a good deal and almost, almost brought it to conclusion, but suddenly it turned into a dark day. At a wedding I noticed a young man who hung around the same girl and only danced with her. I thought to myself, that boy must really be taken with her, and she, so it seemed, didn't exactly hate him. I said to myself, I shouldn't miss this chance and I immediately went to work asking around to find out who he was and who she was. I felt as though I already had the match in my pocket. Then I found out that the young man and the girl were already man and wife.”

“Never mind,” I consoled him, “this sort of thing happens all the time in the world. God forbid, by you such a mistake will never happen again.”

We set on an evening when we could get together. When the evening arrived I got myself ready with my wardrobe. I went to Goldstick, the barber and borrowed his crinoline, by the blond doctor I got a stovepipe hat. I borrowed a walking stick from the dentist who comes here from time to time on a rare occasion looking for a kosher meal. I gave myself a look in the mirror. I was “O.K.”

I could hardly wait for the teacher, I mean matchmaker, and we set off together. Along the way I treated the teacher to warm sweet potatoes because my workday was over and I was no longer a waiter, I was a gentleman and a nickel to me was no money. As we walked down Grand Street I noticed a pushcart with candy. For five cents I bought chewing gum, and for five cents chocolate, because when one goes to visit a lady, one can not arrive empty-handed.

The house where Mr. Hasenson lives is ten blocks from here. We went up to the third floor. The teacher led the way and I followed him. “Here on the third floor is where they live,” he said to me and I coughed a couple of times to clear my throat. The teacher had knocked on the door. The door opened then closed. Another door opened and a woman invited us to come in where we found ourselves in the parlor. It seemed like the woman wanted to keep something from us since she didn't want us to go through the usual door. After the teacher introduced me, the woman said:

“I am sorry you have come at a time like this. It is unfortunate. My daughter is a little ill. But, please have a seat. Since you have come all the way here, stay a while. My husband will be here shortly.”

We sat there a while in silence. I glanced at the melamed and thought to myself, “Aha, Joe, this is where they are going to dump a sickness on you, a disease. Watch it, Joe, don't be a fool, and don't let them spin your head.”

That's what I said to myself and took heart not to let them make me a golem [idiot].

Soon Mr. Hasenson came in, a very genteel Jew with a tallit katan under his vest and a yarmulke on his head. We talked with him a little and he also said he was sorry that his household was a little unsettled due to his daughter who was not feeling well.

“What is wrong with her?” the teacher asked, “Is it something dangerous?”

“Well,” Mr. Hasenson said with a big smile, “We aren't women here, we can talk openly. My daughter, she should live long, tonight, good luck to her, went into labor and be assured that I will invite both of you to the bris [circumcision ceremony]. I thought I had rolled under the table when I heard that, and the melamed's mouth dropped open and his eyes bugged out. While I was not taking it very well, I had to take pity on the melamed. He had really fallen into the mud.

“Which daughter is it?” the melamed asked with a shaky voice.

“What do you mean, which daughter?” Mr. Hasenson asked back, “My daughter, Layla, I don't have more than one daughter.”

The cold tone in which Mr. Hasenson uttered those words made me understand that the melamed had made a huge mistake. Namely, that he had made me a match with a married woman, thinking that she was a maiden. But the melamed had not yet fully caught on to his mistake, and still looked puzzled and blinked his eyes.

In the middle of this a young, lively man with broad shoulders came into the room.

“Ah, there is my son-in-law, the father of the child,” Mr. Hasenson introduced him. Pointing to us he said, “Look, there is the famous Joe the Waiter and here is the melamed who teaches Bertsik.”

I took a look at the melamed and saw that he finally understood his mistake. Then I began to take my leave of everyone. The melamed did the same and followed me out like a lamb.

As we went down the steps, I murmured, “A woman – A woman that conceives - because she is fertile, and young – and she will breed, male – a male.” And on the last step I said to my matchmaker, “Goodbye,” and I assured him that he did not need to ever show himself before my eyes again, and if he comes in the restaurant again I will make him mincemeat.

9.

Two New Customers

“Sha – I nearly forgot. Today I wanted to tell you about two new customers who have come to us here in the restaurant. One eats loose soft-boiled eggs, the other one speaks in acronyms.

The one who eats soft-boiled eggs is a really fine guy, but no one can figure him out. He has got the idea in his head that everything a man eats and drinks is infested with tiny little worms, microbes, that you can only see with a microscope. Forget it, whatever he has in his head, it doesn't bother me even a little bit even if he believed that oranges grew in his nose. The only problem is that he likes to talk about the millions, billions, trillions and many millions of little worms that you can only see in a microscope and that creep around in herring, marinated fish and strudel.

I said to him once:

“Who had you look into a microscope and take this to heart? Don't look in the microscope and spare yourself all of the useless anguish. If a man thinks too hard about this stuff he won't want to stick even a piece of bread in his mouth. In a bakery for example when you go in you don't need to bring a microscope. You can see millions, billions, trillions of little worms with the naked eye. You see so many cockroaches that you would think that the walls are made of raisin cake. No more nothing, if you don't think about it, it won't bother you.”

The customer that eats soft-boiled eggs pushed away the plate containing the buttered bread and asked for a glass tea.

Aha! I thought to myself, I got him good! If he starts to go on about microbes again that you can only see with a microscope, I just have to remind him of the microbes you can see without a microscope. And if he doesn't leave other people to eat their dinner in peace I will fix it so that he can't either.

The customer that talks in acronyms is still a greenhorn. He came in last week for the first time, and as soon as he sat down he asked me a question:

“What are you, a S.T. or a S.R. or a Z.Z?”

“I don't understand such language,” I responded to him.

“Are you a Socialist-Territorialist, or a Socialist-Revolutionary or a Zion-Zionist?”

“Eh,” I said, “Don't spin my spodik [traditional fur hat]. Do you not realize that I am Joe the Waiter, the real one, the one-and-only Joe? It would be better if you just told me what you want for an appetizer, a G.H., a B.B. or a G.L?”

“What is that?” he asked, “I haven't ever heard of those parties.”

“Well,” I explained to him, “G.H. is gehakte [chopped] herring; B.B. is boiled beef; G.L. is gepregelte

[fried] liver.”

He ordered the chopped herring. When he was finished, I asked him:

“What would you like to have next? A B.Z., a G.L. or a G.K.?”

“What is that?” he asked me a little ashamed.

I explained farther to him:

“B.Z. is bulbe [potato] soup; G.L. is grobe lokshn [wide noodles]; G.K. is barley [gretshke] kasha. If you are going to talk in acronyms I am going to do the same.”

So that is how I gave him a good lesson. Never mind, Joe has a good head on his shoulders, and knows how to handle all types of customers.

10.

He Goes to See Two Brides at the Same Time

So, I was standing around listening to my customers kibitz [chat] with one another. A handsome Jew came in wearing a stovepipe hat. Said "Good evening" with a smile then called me over to the side and said:

"See, handsome young man, are you interested, perhaps, in getting married? I have for you a fine bride."

"What business are you in?" I asked him.

"What do you mean, what kind of a business?" he said, "I am a professional matchmaker. Up to now you have only had to do with amateur matchmakers, with them that do not do matchmaking as their primary business, whose primary business is teaching, or real estate and only do matchmaking as a side line for a little extra income. These amateur businesses are a Jewish sickness. This sickness has eaten into our nation and has ruined the best and the most able among us. This scum spreads and saps our strength in a hundred different ways and prevents us from building a great, a complete, perfect cause. The sickness has made half-men out of us, not fully baked. You have often run into a Jew who is a little pious, a little bit real estate agent, a little bit reverend, a little bit cantor, and a little bit mensch. Wholeness, perfection, "the epitome of perfection," as the books say, is a rarity among us, almost non-existent. What shows in individuals also shows in the totality. We have a little Zionist, a little Socialist, a little Jewish, but very few whole people. That is why I say to you, Joe, if you want a marriage match, don't have anything to do with the amateur matchmakers, only listen to a matchmaker like me, who makes his whole living as a matchmaker, and only deal with them."

I could see that this was a smart Jew, a worldly man. I asked him to sit down and I brought him a glass tea and listened to him further.

The matchmaker took a little booklet out of his pocket and read to me from there several possible matches. I listened to him and wrote down notes for myself with a pencil on a paper napkin.

"The maiden, Jenny, daughter of Kalman Bandar, real estate agent, with a dowry of a thousand dollars, she has a flaw - namely: Her face is pockmarked."

"I don't want her," I said and marked her out on the napkin. The matchmaker made a note in his book: He doesn't want a pockmarked girl.

He read another to me:

"Tserl Kirshner, widow, she has two grown sons and one small one, but she has a newspaper stand and does a good business."

"No!" I said forcefully without giving a reason.

He continued reading:

“Betsy, beautiful maiden, comes with every perfection, plays the piano, she is literally a 'peach.' She has no dowry.”

“Ah, this maiden I want to see,” I said, “A beautiful maiden is the best dowry. Her worst flaw is that she plays piano. But that is all before the wedding. After the wedding she will play with the pots and pans.”

We quickly decided upon an evening when I would meet her at the matchmakers house, because Betsy is a border with another family, and she thought it better to meet me at the matchmakers.

I arrived at the agreed upon time and the matchmaker led me into his parlor. He told me that the prospective bride was late, and he was going over to her lodgings to see what was up with her.

I sat and waited. After about twenty minutes the matchmaker came in and said to me:

“I went there and Betsy has not yet come home. She must have forgotten that she was supposed to go see an prospective groom. I have brought you the other young lady who shares the room with Betsy. She is also a fine maiden. Her name is Lizi, and I am certain that she will please you.”

I think it over, if not Betsy, perhaps Lizi. I don't have a marriage contract signed. It won't hurt to just to visit with her.

The matchmaker went out then came right back in the parlor with a black-haired young woman. He introduced us to one another: “Miss Lizi Spiegel, Joe the Waiter.” Her face went red with a shy blush, but I stepped forward and took her hand, and gave it a hearty handshake and said, “It is a great pleasure for me to meet you.”

The matchmaker withdrew from the room and I sat with Lizi and chatted with her. I told her about my customers who give small tips, and those who give big ones, and the ones who don't give anything. In the middle of that another young lady came into the room followed by the matchmaker.

The matchmaker asked her to go back outside with him, but she called out to Lizi and yelled:

“Ah, you disgusting person! Are you trying to steal my groom? What? You don't have enough boys? It seems like you already go out every night with a different guy!”

I realized that the woman who was screaming was Betsy. Next she turned on the matchmaker and yelled:

“Why are you making a fool out of me? You made a deal to show me a groom and instead you take that pig. You need to pay me back for the dress.”

The matchmaker began arguing with her and I could see that matters were becoming bitter. The young ladies began to fight with each other and with the matchmaker and it became a huge uproar.

What did Joe do? That is to say, what did I, the prospective groom do? I slipped out of the parlor grabbed my overcoat and my borrowed stovepipe hat and took to my heels.

No longer a groom, just a single guy. Two brides at the same time make for a dark day.

Down with Matchmakers!

The customer who eats dairy noodles said that the difference between married life and single life is this: When a young man is single he believes that one day he will be married, and he will no longer have to eat out in a restaurant. It is only after he is married that he realizes that he *must* eat in a restaurant.

Because you must understand that today's women, the dairy noodle customer explained to me, hate to bother themselves with cooking. The young man who convinces himself that after marriage he can stop eating in restaurants soon finds out that he has only traded a restaurant for a delicatessen store. Because by today's woman it just won't happen that she will take the time to cook a full meal. As soon as the husband comes home she runs to the delicatessen store, buys lox, wurst and tongue. Brews some coffee and makes her man a meal like you would have before a day of fasting.

What was it that triggered this discussion? Listen to me and write. The matchmaker who came to me last week and made the mistake of putting me together with two prospective brides at the same time, came back again proposing another match for me. But this time a decent one: A widow with two thousand dollars and two children.

Then a discussion started about getting married or not.

The matchmaker got me together with the widow. She was not a difficult woman. And with two thousand dollars cash, she is a rarity. I imagined in my fantasy my own restaurant, with union waiters, with union omnibusmen [bus boys], with union cooks, with union dishwashers, and my wife, I imagined, I would dress up a bit and set her at the counter as cashier. It would be proper.

So I fantasized, me Joe the Waiter, and it so filled my heart with joy that I saw the widow again and invited her out to go to the theater. Well, to my bad luck on that night the play they gave was about an unfaithful husband. One who marries a young girl simply to get her money, and after the marriage he brings upon her horrible sorrows. "Such men, men, you are all false!" cried out the heroine on the stage. I could see that these words went right up the widow's nose. She looked at me, cast her eyes down, then look at me again as though she wanted to say, "Na, you men." After the play I realized that I had to show her that I was a gentleman. I invited her to go with me to a restaurant on Grand Street.

I got us the best table, hung her coat up for her, then I hung up my overcoat and we sat down. As we got settled the owner of the restaurant who I knew a little came to our table and said:

"Joe, right this minute we are extremely busy, could you, perhaps, help us out for an hour minding the customers? I will give you a half-dollar and you will make tips on top of that."

I gave him a kick with my foot under the table, not hard just a light tap, and I winked at him to let him know that I had come there with a lady. He apologized quickly and left.

To tell the truth, I couldn't sit still. It was really busy. I saw the waiters running back and forth with plates, with platters, with knives and forks. I could hear the clinking of nickels, dimes and whole

quarters that the waiters were getting as tips.

Finally, we received our order: coffee with cake. The widow leaned toward me a little and said that she wanted to talk to me in earnest. I said, "All right, I am listening with both ears."

She asked me, "Do you love me for my money, or just for me personally?"

I said, "I love you because you please me."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Sure." I said in order to keep the peace, "Even if you did not have a penny for body and soul, I would still be in love."

"In that case," she said, "I will tell you the truth. That what the matchmaker told you, that I have two thousand dollars, was a little bit of a bluff. I don't have more than five hundred dollars, perhaps even a little less."

My mouth went sour, whether from the coffee or from the matchmaker I am not sure. But, I thought, one must be a mensch, and I made a cheerful face, and said to Madame:

"It doesn't matter if you don't have a single dollar. I don't look at the money. If you had the two thousand dollars that would be better, but what difference does it make?" I continued, "It is getting late and I must be going home."

We both got up from our places. I gave the waiter who served us a whole nickel as a tip. I accompanied the widow to the corner and said to her:

"See, you are not a little girl and you know where you live. You can see yourself home. I have to go see an acquaintance about an important matter. Off you go, you won't get lost."

We said to one another, "Good night." I lifted my borrowed stovepipe hat, like a gentleman, and we each went in our own direction.

The first thing I have to do, I thought to myself, is to catch up with the matchmaker someplace and break some of his bones. What chutzpah [nerve] of that lump wanting to fake me out with a widow that only has five hundred dollars by telling me that she had two thousand! He almost brought me a great misfortune. The more I thought about it the more my blood boiled. Right away I started out for the matchmaker's house and I rang the bell. I wanted my vengeance this very night.

Soon I heard a voice in the speaking-hole, "Who is it?" I said, "It is Joe the Waiter. Come outside Mr. Matchmaker, I need to see you right now. I want to pay you a little for your matchmaking."

"I'll come right down," the voice said. I waited in the hall, every second was for me like an hour. Finally, the matchmaker came down in a nightshirt and slippers, opened the door and bid me come up to his house.

"No," I said, "Right here is where I want to pay you for your matchmaking. How much do I owe you?"

“I should know?” he said, “What do you think is fair?”

“What I think is fair,” I said, “is that I should break some of your bones. You told me that the widow had two thousand dollars for her dowry, and today she said she was afraid that she only had five hundred. You are a bluffer! You wanted to swindle me. Take your matchmaking fee: Take one, two three, four, five in the head; Take one, two, three in the side; Take one, two in the other side. And take a kick in the south side for good luck.”

As I was raining down my fists on him, he was yelling, “Gevalt! Help!” But I had time to run away before anyone came to his aid.

The next day the matchmaker came here with a bandaged head and he wanted to make peace with me. It turned out that the widow really did have two thousand dollars, and perhaps even a little bit more than that, but what she told me in the restaurant is that she didn't have it. She got the idea to tell me that just to test me.

The matchmaker offered to try again to make the same match, but I was afraid that hidden in it all was another trick. It was possible, that the matchmaker would try to get even for the beating I gave him.

No more! I am no longer let my head get spun around by matchmakers, if I am going to get married, I will marry for love, for pure love alone!

Down with matchmakers – Long live love!

12.

Joe Gets Suspended from the Union

You failed to come here for the last few days, and in that time there has been a lot of news. And what news!

Listen to me and write it down word for word, and please, don't add any of your own wit, like you have done to me before. I want that it should all stay in my own style, because the style is the man, and the style of a writer is not the style of a waiter.

There were three passages where it looked like I said something that was not to the point, but I did not say it. Now write:

This happened on Monday. The sun was hidden behind the clouds as though it had gone on vacation. It was cloudy, damp and slippery from the mud, but in the restaurant it was cheerful, lively and busy. It was just at the start of the mid-day hour. All of the tables were taken. Customers were sitting and eating, and I was running around and chasing about as though I was being carried by the wind.

In the midst of all this two young people came in, and called me over with a voice of a self-important person, and one of them said to me:

“We are a walking delegation. Let us see your union card.”

I gave it to them.

“Let me see your button.”

I gave them my button.

They kept my union card and my button and said:

“Now, brother Joe, we have come to inform you that you have been suspended from the union. You must take off your apron and you may not attend to your customers until the union investigates a grave complaint against you.”

“What is the complaint?” I asked them.

“Come to the union and they will read the complaint to you.” one of the walking delegation responded, and he took his friend with him and left.

As soon as they left I took off my apron and explained to my customers:

“Ladies and gentlemen! I have to explain to you that I am very sorry that I can not serve you today. My union has put me in suspenders.”

Among my customers there was a great commotion. “Steich! How is that possible?” To suspend a waiter in the middle of service! And here everybody is hungry and on top of that, in a hurry just as usual. The customer who eats dairy noodles yelled, “Gevalt! My noodles, give them to me!” The customer who eats soft-boiled eggs begged for his, and the other men and women customers did not keep silent either because one was waiting for herring, the other for soup, and another had not gotten his compote, and others their tea and cake.

In short it was a pretty wedding.

“Ladies and gentlemen customers, I can not help it,” I said, “A union is a union, and a constitution is a constitution, and a by-law is a by-law and when one receives a suspension he must bear it. The Capitalists have their crazy rules, shouldn't we, the workers, also be a little foolish, ha?”

In that moment I felt so proud, because there sat so many people at the table and I hear all of them like a tomcat, while behind me stands the union, but in unity lies power. However, I thought to myself, sit a little while and hunger, so that you will truly understand the verse: “All wheels stand still, when your powerful want Aram.” And because Joe the Waiter is suspended from the union, people have to eat what is already on their plate: Challah, pumpernickel, pickles, radishes, horseradish, salt and toothpicks. However, from the kitchen no one will bring them anything because, it is written, that the boss himself or his Missis should, God forbid, bring you a piece of strudel or a glass water, then they are transgressing by-law number 737 which is found in paragraph 436, 744th part of the constitution of our union, and would lead to a sympathy strike by the kitchen along with the Polish girl who washes the silverware.

So as I am holding my fiery speech in my mind, a union man came in and said to me, “I am Schmeril, the union sent me to take your place.” I take the boy by the hand and introduce him to my customers with these words:

“Brother workers and customers! I, your old acquaintance, Joe the Waiter, have the honor to present to you the new acquaintance, Schmeril the Waiter.”

And no sooner had I gotten the words out of my mouth then all the customers began to cry out: “Joe the Waiter is dead, long live Schmeril the Waiter!”

My colleague, Schmeril, began now to serve the customers and I sat down at a table to see how many of my tips would end up going into his pockets. Schmeril had explained, that according to by-law 517, which is in paragraph 91 from the 44th part of the constitution of the Waiters Union of New York and Brownsville, if I am not allowed to end my shift, he can only serve customer from the beginning, from the first course on, from the herring. Five customers had already got up and left, the rest yielded to the strict union rules.

After Schmeril had the time to serve all of the customers with herring, another union man came in and walked over to me and said:

“I am Beryl. The union sent me to take Schmeril's place. It was a mistake that he was sent here. It is not Schmeril's turn, its mine.”

I took the new waiter by the hand and introduced him to the customers:

“Gentlemen and Ladies! I have the great pleasure and honor to introduce you to our new waiter, Beryl. It is not Schmeril's turn.” And immediately the customers cried out:

“Schmeril the Waiter is dead, long live Beryl the Waiter!”

Beryl had to do the same thing Schmeril did. That is to say he had to follow by-law number 517 which prohibited and union waiter from finishing the service of a suspended member. So Beryl was also required to begin service from the first course, the herring.

For four days I was without a job and without tips, a suspended waiter. I hardly survived until Thursday evening when the special meeting was called to handle the case against me. The meeting took place at 1 AM just after midnight, the usual time when waiters can hold a meeting. The Secretary held the hearing and asked me questions as though he were a prosecutor:

“What is your name?”

“Joe the Waiter.”

“You are also a writer?”

“No, I talk, only a writer who is one of my customers, writes down everything that I say, word for word.”

“Are you married?”

“I only wish, meantime, not yet.”

“How old are you?”

“I should know? Who got it into their head to count the years!”

“Are you a citizen?”

“I'll bet your sweet life.”

“How long have you been a citizen?”

“Fifteen years. Three weeks after I arrived in America a politician made me a citizen.”

“Who do you vote for?”

“Should I know? Like before! It goes to the one that gives the biggest tip.”

The Secretary wrote down all of my answers in a book. Then he wrote down something just for himself. After that he read the following official complaint against me.

New York the 21st February in the current year, Joe the Waiter, who wrote in the Daily Paper, that is to say, he spoke and a writer wrote it down word for word, a single man, of unknown age, a citizen and a lumpen proletariat, was summoned to the special meeting of the Independent Waiters Union, local

number 77 for New York and Brownsville, on the above named date, of the above named local number and was charged with with having broken a strict rule of the union, namely:

This accused brother, Joe the Waiter, as it has been rightly and truly confirmed through reliable testimony, did on the day of Tuesday last week strike a match and helped light a cigarette for one of his customers that was advertised in a newspaper that is being boycotted by the barber's union.

Therefor it is decided by our union, and in the name of all members, who are here present, that our brother Joe the Waiter, who is already suspended through our walking delegation, shall be punished by giving all of the tips that he will collect during the next five weeks to the union.

I got back my union card, and I am now back to work, but the tips belong to the union this week, and for four more weeks after that.

He Recounts a Novel from His Life

I have said it to you before, I said, “Down with matchmakers; long live true, pure love.” And I say that to you yet again. Write this down as I say it to you, word for word.

True, pure love, ach! Poets and writers have sung about it in all ages, and now, I, Joe the Waiter will sing of it. Ach, to see his little dove, he will be imprisoned by love! He sees heaven before his eyes, he doesn't walk he flies, his thoughts with turmoil team, everything is as in a dream.

It rhymes, huh? What did you think, it is not without a good reason that I am known as a philosopher-poet from the ghetto, and in spite of what so many poets from Shakespeare to me, have written about love no one knows with any certainty what love is, why we fall in love and what a strange power is love.

Think about it, all girls are the same. Nearly all have a face, they all have long hair, the same lack of reason, wear the same dresses, the same jackets, gab with each other with the same language, laugh with the same laugh, chew the same chewing gum, wear the same hair styles, puff themselves up the same way, walk in the same way, smile with the same smile, they are all 'almost' 18-years old, not any older, and wear the same size dress and gloves. But nevertheless, when one of us falls in love with a Betsy, it is Betsy that he will want and not Jenny, and if he falls in love with Lizzy, it is Lizzy he wants and not Annie. Take a guess and tell me, What is Love? Love is the greatest wonder of all time and thereafter, not even Shakespeare could say that he understood it, and neither can Joe the Waiter.

It rhymes again, ha? All right, in that lies the whole of my art. But you are curious to know why I have led you so deep into poetry and philosophy today. Well, I will now come to the point, or, as we say in the union, I will now come to the order of the day. So, Mr. Chairman, where was I? With the order of the day, yes. What is the order of the day about? About love. And, indeed, I can even explain it all with just four words, “I am in love.” Done! However, one can not write a novel with just four words. Because if all novels were that short the world would be as dry as a dried-out lemon. From greatest novels that have ten sections with eight hundred and ninety-nine installments, one can make something a little shorter: First section: I don't want her. Second section: She wants, I have regrets. Third section: Both want, the parents don't want. Fourth section: The parents are content, but somebody kills the bridegroom. Fifth section: The bridegroom lives, the bride is dead. Sixth section: The bride lives, the bridegroom is dead again. Seventh section: The bride marries another, but the dead bridegroom comes back to life. Eighth section: Old love does not rust. The young wife runs off with her first groom. Ninth section: Revenge! The man catches up with the runaway couple and shoots them both dead, and then he shoots himself. Tenth section: They are all alive and make peace with one another. So, this his how you can condense all of the novels in the world, and entire libraries can be printed in one book that you could carry on your watch chain. But what interest would the whole world have in that? What kind of flavor would that add to life?

That is why it is not enough to have just the fact, that I am in love, we must have all of the tiny details of my love. That is what I am going to tell you, and you will write it word for word.

I fell in love a long time ago but I held my love hidden deep in my heart. A while back, walking down Grand Street, I saw a young girl sitting by a soda water stand, papers, peanuts, candy and cigarettes. The girl had a face like all girls, but love is blind! And this love certainly blinded my eyes. And I saw in her a girl that was not like other girls. There she was sitting wrapped in a shaw, with a frozen little nose, and a fire pot in her hand. To me she looked like a heavenly being, a goddess, who was like unto the morning star.

I went over to her and bought a little bag of peanuts for a cent, and started a conversation. I learned from her that she was still half a greenhorn, without parents, only a brother who is still a boy and is her partner in the stand.

I bought from her a piece of chewing gum, and a paper, and a pack of cigarettes to show her that money was not an issue with me. As I left she said to me, "Call again."

The next day I spent a nickel with her, the following day a ten cents and so the novel continued for quite some time. Finally, I resolved to take courage and ask her to go with me to the theater. She quickly accepted my invitation and said that she is free in the evenings and she would indeed love to have some entertainment.

We decided on an evening and agreed to meet by her stand. When the long awaited happy evening arrived, she was already waiting for me all done up, and introduced me to her brother who was tending the stand.

We went together down the street, I had the impression that I was with a still green girl who knew nothing about the theater. Then it came out that she has already visited every Yiddish theater in New York, and is well acquainted with all of the plays this season. That is what I discovered along the way to the theater. Once inside the theater I noticed that every one of the ushers smiled at her, and one came up to her without paying any attention to me, he tapped her on the arm.

"What is that?" I asked a little upset, "How are you behaving? That is a lady!"

The usher moved away. Soon we ran into another, and when he saw my girl, he gave her a little tickle in the side and said, "Hello Betsy!"

"Does he know you?" I asked Betsy (That was her name).

"He knows me. He buys cigarettes from me and sometimes he lets me slip into the theater without paying," she explained.

As soon as we sat down in the theater, before the play started, yet another usher came over to us and said to Betsy, "Hay, my little cutie, Jack wants to see you. He is in the gallery."

Betsy excused herself to me and went with the usher, while I sat there bewildered, wondering who this Jack could be, and how he was related to her. I waited and waited, but she didn't come back. Meanwhile, they had begun to play the first act – and she was still not there. I was churning with shame and chagrin. Everyone around me saw that I arrived with a lady, and now I was sitting next to an empty seat. I was afraid to turn my head for fear of seeing people laughing at me.

When the first act ended, Betsy came back smiling sweetly like a little kitten. She said she had gone to

see a boy in the gallery, and he did not want to let her leave him until the first act ended.

Five minutes went past since she came back to me, and the same usher came back to Betsy and said, "Come up a while, my beauty, Sam wants to see you. He is on the other side in the first row by the door. Come, I will point him out to you." Again Betsy excused herself and left with the usher.

I could hear the people around me whispering, and how they stifled their laughter. Betsy was still gone when the curtain came up on the second act. At the end of the second act the usher came to me and said, "Betsy asked me to tell you that she will return at the end of the show and you can accompany her home. She ran into a group of boys that she is friends with and they won't let her go."

"Tell her she can sit with them until tomorrow morning," I said to the usher, and I took my coat and hat and I left the theater with a broken heart.

So there, that is the end of my great love. Ha, today's women! They are false, false, false! Imagine, still a greenhorn and already so accomplished!

Now when I walk down Grand Street I go out of my way to avoid Betsy. Why? I can not deny it. A man does not quickly forget a love. There is still something in my heart that pricks, nips, smarts. And every time I think of her, it wrenches a sigh from my heart. Ach, love, love, it is the greatest ideal! It is an old, old story, but whomever it strikes has brand new torments...

Right there make three dots. I can't go any farther.

Joe is a Businessman

I saw in the newspaper today that Rockefeller had wanted to give another 50 million dollars to charity, but later he cooled and did not do it. You see, therein lies a bit of psychology.

Not long ago I myself ran into the same story at a mass meeting. I came to the meeting full of enthusiasm, and my enthusiasm grew and grew with each word that the speaker uttered. What an exciting speech he gave! What a warm, hot, burning appeal he made! He called for a noble goal, and urged all of the people present to pledge as much as they could. I was so enthused my heart was warmed as though by a fine wine, and tears came to my eyes, and I resolved to donate five dollars and no less. The speaker continued to speak, and I listened and listened. Afterwards I thought to myself, three dollars would also be enough. The speaker took a drink of water and continued to describe the situation and to make his appeal, plead and request. A little later I thought, two dollars would be a good amount from me. After another half-hour he paused, everyone applauded the speaker thinking that he was finished. But when the speaker heard all the applause he started up speaking again. I thought to myself, Joe, you shouldn't let yourself get carried away. A dollar will be good enough from you. After another twenty minutes when the speaker paused again for a moment, everybody thought he was done and clapped bravo, and when the speaker heard the clapping he thought people were enjoying his speech and he kept talking. I reconsidered: Joe, a dollar is too much. That is twenty tips. A half-dollar is enough from a waiter. And as the speaker with mazel [luck] ended, all of my enthusiasm had cooled and I thought to myself, Joe, don't bother yourself. There are plenty of people who will give without you. And as a lady came to me with collection plate, I tossed in a dime and took out two nickels in change. The lady shyly looked aside and said a sweet "Thank you" to me.

One should not let enthusiasm cool. If you let it cool it loses its flavor. And I say to you, that is why our best and greatest plans fall through, because our orators talk too long and allow everyone's enthusiasm to cool down. They talk and talk and by so doing give their listeners time to think and have doubts. A speaker should do with his oration like a good waiter, like me for example, does. I go to a customer and say to him quickly:

"Whatkindofsoup would you like? We have kashabean, potatodumpling, macaroninoodle, rice, borscht. You want borscht? We just ran out. Rice also we just ran out. Kashabean we will be cooking tomorrow. Eat potatodumpling or macaroni."

All of that is what I say in one breath, and give the customer no time to stick, because if I give him time to seize on something he might lose his appetite.

But enough of this. I have to tell you a nice story, but don't laugh, just write it down word for word as I tell it to you.

On Wednesday into the restaurant came a gentleman, he appeared to be a German, but the nose he had looked Jewish. He came over and asked me, "Are you Herr Joe the Waiter?" I said, "Ja wohl, mein Herr Gentleman." (I can also speak German.) Put that in parentheses, just so. The German fellow said to me, "My name is Tsimech Tseferovitch. My yidene, mein Frau, I mean to say, is about to have a

baby. She is having a very difficult labor. I want to ask Ihnen, Herr Joe the Waiter, das you put together a minyan of Jews [quorum of ten men], they should say prayers that my Frau should have a lighter time of it. Ich give ihn ten dollar.”

I have never in my life had such a job, but the German had asked me for this with tears in his eyes, because he is not known in the Jewish Quarter, and only knows one person, and that is Joe the Waiter.

“All right, Mr. Tseferovitch,” I said to him, taking the ten dollars, “there is a shul [synagogue] not far from here I will go see the shames [sexton] and we will put together a minyan and say prayers for your yidene, your Frau, I mean.

As the German left, I thought to myself, I am going to do him a turn. I am going to say the prayers all by myself and the ten dollars will stay with me. Meanwhile, it got very busy in the restaurant and I forgot all about the prayers.

An hour later the telephone in the restaurant rang.

“Hello, who is that?” I asked.

“Dis is Mr. Tsimech Tseferovitch,” answered the voice on the telephone, “the prayers are all right. It worked. I thank you. Tell the other people to keep it up another five minutes and everything will be all right.”

“All right, Mr. Tseferovitch, I said, “I am happy that it worked.”

In another ten minutes the telephone rang again.

“Hello, who is that?” I asked.

“Dis is Mr. Tseferovitch,” the same voice answered through the telephone, “you can stop the prayers. It's a boy. Thank you.”

“Mazel tov,” I answered, “I will send word immediately that the men can stop praying.”

I went back to my work in the restaurant smiling and laughing to myself. The customers asked me why I was so happy today, but I told them that it was my little secret.

It wasn't ten minutes but the telephone rang again.

“Hello, hello,” I said.

“Dis is Mr. Tseferovitch,” I heard the same voice but it sounded angry, “You son-of-a-gun, stop the prayers! My wife just had twins. Stop the prayers. Hurry up!”

“I have stopped them,” I said.

“You are a liar!” the voice yelled.

About 45 minutes later Mr. Tseferovitch himself came running into the restaurant, and began waving

both fists at me, screaming in perfect Yiddish:

“If you don't stop the praying, I will have you arrested!!”

“What is going on?” I asked him.

“It's already triplets!” he yelled out.

I barely calmed him down and assured him that the prayers had ended, and there would be no more than triplets.

When I told this story to the customer that eats dairy noodles, he said:

“You are a business man, Joe, you should be speculating in Wall Street.”

Joe Goes to “Carmen”

The customer that eats dairy noodles made an appointment with the customer that eats loose soft-boiled eggs, that they should go together to hear Calvé sing “Carmen” at the opera house. They agreed to meet in this restaurant. The customer that eats dairy noodles came early. He ordered a glass hot water, and sipped and waited, and had time to chat with me and also to read the newspaper a little.

He sat and sipped and the time passed, and he did not realize it because the clock that hangs on the wall in the restaurant stopped working two weeks ago stuck at five minutes after six, and did not go any farther. The customer that eats dairy noodles glanced at the clock and saw that he had plenty of time, sat there relaxed and waited. His head was kind of dreamy and he did not notice that the clock had stopped. Every time he glanced at the clock he saw that it was five minutes after six and thought to himself, I still have time.

I noted the error right away, but I did not want to say anything because it is against the rules for a waiter to give a customer the feeling that he has sat too long. They might get angry and start going to some other restaurant.

So he sat there for two hours. Only then did he finally realize that the clock had stopped. He spit three times, then asked me what really was the time.

“Three minutes after eight,” I said, taking out my onion watch.

“To Hell with him,” he yelled out, meaning the customer that eats soft-boiled eggs. “I can see he is not coming. It is very late, I will have to go without him. Come, Joe, you can go with me. I have two tickets, good seats.”

“What are they playing today?” I asked.

“We are going to the opera,” he explained, “In opera they sing and don't act. Today they are giving “Carmen” in the new opera house. Calvé will act the role of “Carmen””

“You just said that in opera they sing and don't act,” I said.

“Yes,” he said, “They all sing of course, only Calvé acts. Her voice is not so a-ai-ai, but she has such a sassy twist, that the rich rascals smack their lips for her. And what advantages she has: Other divas go to see her expensive costumes, and the men go because it looks like she is not wearing clothes.”

“Ptuey!” and I spit, “No way I would go there even if some one offered me a dollar tip. Especially not to see what the rich rascals get heated up about.”

On the way the customer that eats dairy noodles told me the story of Carmen, the beautiful gypsy and how she had used her sassy demeanor to lead the handsome officer Don José, astray. The whole story stuck in my mind, there was just one detail I did not agree with him on. The customer that eats dairy

noodles said, that the story was fiction, but I am convinced that it is true, because gypsy women are all witches and Carmen had without doubt cast a spell on the officer.

When we entered the opera theater it was already full of men and women. Probably they all wanted to see what the rascals were getting excited about. All men are curious. Why should I be different?

We sat down, but I had the feeling that I had no room. Such narrow seats I had never seen in my whole life. You had to keep both feet next to one another, and you could not stretch your feet out, and if you did the back of the seat in front of you would be against you knees. I tried to hold my feet a little to the side so that my knees would be at a little angle, but there was still hardly an inch of space left.

“Gevalt,” I said to the dairy noodle customer, “What do you do with your feet? There is nowhere to put your feet, and my bones are already hurting.”

“It is even tighter over here,” said the customer that eats dairy noodles, “Look, this pillar is right in front of my eyes, I can hardly see anything that is happening on the stage.”

“Oy, my bones!” I grumbled.

“Oy, that pillar, to a black year!” he grumbled.

“Don't worry yourself,” I said to him, “I will tell you everything that happens on the stage.”

“All right, “ he said, “tell me everything you see.”

Meanwhile, I see how the people around us won't look this way. Perhaps, they are not happy that we keep talking to each other.

“To hell with them,” the customer that eats dairy noodles whispered to me, “Tell me, what is Carmen doing?”

“She is tied up,” I tell him, “with her hands behind her back, she is making eyes at the officer. She turns to one side, feh! She turns to the other side, feh! She turns back this way, feh! She turns herself back, feh! She winks her eye and turns again, feh, feh, feh! I can't look any more. Let's change seats.”

We quickly traded seats. Now I could not longer see her, the tart, I could only see Don José, who looked very excited, red as a brick. I glanced at the dairy noodle customer and he looked like Don José.

I whispered into his ear, “If you are upset by what you are seeing, let's change seats.”

He answered, “Ach, go on! You are talking foolishness. Don't you understand that this is beautiful art, pure art?”

“Yes,” I whispered, “she is showing off great art, that young thing. What do they call it, hoochy-koochy, ha?”

“Shh, Carmen is singing,” the dairy noodle customer whispered to me.

“My bones, Oy, my bones! I complained, “I don't have feet any more.”

“Shh, Don José is singing!” The dairy noodle customer gave me a poke in the side.

I couldn't stand it anymore, and it showed. When I stood up I had the feeling that my feet were gone and ants had landed all over my body. I immediately fell back into my seat because I saw an usher coming over toward me.

Meanwhile, God performed a miracle and I was able to go to sleep. I was able to sleep until the end of the opera.

I was deep in sweet slumber when the dairy noodle customer shook me by the arm and woke me up.

“What do you want?” I asked him sleepily.

“Let's go home!” he answered, “It just ended.”

An Unlucky Day

Wednesday was a bad day for me, not at all lucky. Everything for me ended up falling apart. First the new cook burnt the borscht, because of that a lot of customers kicked up a fuss. Next, about ten of my steady customers did not have any small change with them. Nu, I thought to myself, Joe, this is not a lucky day, and you better be careful, because on a day that is not lucky, bad luck has greater dominion, and you could be hit with a misfortune that you will have to claw your way out of.

It is not for nothing that the holy books say that the heart is a prophet. What? You say that this quote does not exist in any holy book? Nu, but the whole world is not meshugge [crazy]. And when people say that the heart is a prophet, perhaps there is something to it. But all of these dark thoughts were forgotten when a young man in a raincoat came into the restaurant and greeted me:

“Hello, Joe, good old brother, how are you doing?”

And with that he gave me a slap on the back that nearly made me drop the dish of burnt borscht I had in my hand.

“See,” I said to him, “with a waiter it is dangerous pull that stunt. Something hot could fall out of my hands and cause me to cook a customer alive.”

“But don't you recognize me, Joe?”

“Aha, Bentshe Gans! How are you doing? I hardly recognized you.”

“B-e-n-e-d-i-c-t G-o-u-s-e is what I am called now.” he said to me, “wish me mazel tov, good, dear brother!! I got married.”

“A match?” I asked.

“No, you are mistaken, brother,” he answered me, “It was love, pure love.”

“How much did you get along with the love?” I asked him again.

“Ah, go on,” he said, “I told you that this is love, no matchmakers and no dowry.”

“All right,” I said, “I believe you that it was love, joyful and burning. But how much money did you get? By me that is the main thing.”

“A million dollars,” he answered, “What did I say, a million? Ten million dollars. You only have to take a look at my Lizzy, and you, too, will say that she is worth ten million dollars.”

He invited me to come visit him in his home. I accepted his invitation with pleasure. We agreed that he would come get me at 6 PM because on Wednesdays they let me off work in the evenings, it is my vacation.

He came for me right on time. I was already shaved and done up like a dandy. We went together to the elevator and on the way he recounted to me what a wonderful wife he had, and what a happy family life he led.

The whole way he talked only about his wife, and how much in love he was with her and she with him, and how much they both loved one another.

Let me make it clear: That I was not believing everything he said to me, I hope I won't be punished for it in the next world. I had a suspicion that he was bluffing a little, as is usual for young people, especially only a year after the wedding, particularly when these young folks deceive themselves in something: Either they don't get the dowry they were promised, or they are merely disappointed, then, when they see a single person they kid them into thinking they are happy, exactly like the calico cat himself, and that their happiness is beyond measure.

We arrived at 106th Street station, and we went down the steps. He took me to Madison Avenue, where his apartment was located.

It was already 7 o'clock in the evening when we arrived. At the door of his place, he stopped me and said, "Joe, you will see what a creation she is, what a hostess she is. You will see how fine she sets a table, and when you sample her supper, you will see what a precious cook she is. Just wait here a minute I want to go into the candy store. I want to bring her a present.

I followed him into the candy store and watched him buy a pound of candy. A thought came into my head that I should also buy her a present. I saw a five-pound box of chocolate candy, I said that I wanted it and paid two dollars. My friend even said to me that it is not necessary, but I didn't listen to him. Leaving there I saw a fruit stand. I bought two dozen oranges and a dozen bananas took them away in a bag.

"If you are going to be so good," my friend said to me, "I don't want to get left behind. There is a flower shop. I am going in to buy a bouquet for my wife."

I went into the flower store with him and bought there a whole flower pot for a dollar and a half. Loaded down with our packages in both hands we climbed the stairs, and we crept up slowly from one floor to the next. On the third floor he stopped and began knocking on a door.

He knocked and knocked. No one answered. "She must have gone out for a while," he said to me. "Perhaps she ran to the grocery store." He pulled a key from his pocket and opened the door.

"What!" he called out puzzled, "she hasn't prepared the table, and the kitchen is empty. She hasn't cooked any supper!"

He led me to the dining room, and turned on the lights.

"Oh, there is a note," I said to him pointing to the table.

"It is from her!" he called out and read it out loud:

My dearest Benedict! A cousin from Boston has come to visit my mother. I am going to go see her. She is leaving in the morning for Europe. Pardon me for not cooking supper. I was in a hurry to go see my cousin. In the icebox you will find lox, butter and cheese. You can make coffee, if you want.

From me, your ever-loving,

Lizzy

P.S. After I wrote this, I looked in the icebox and saw that we are out of butter. I forgot that I ate it at breakfast. Lox is there but just a little piece and already dried out. You can go down to the grocery store and get some fresh. Along the way bring up a bag of sugar, and a bag of flour, a can of sardines, a dozen fresh eggs, and two schmaltz herrings. It will save me a trip. Also bring pumpernickel and a bottle vinegar. Put all of that in the kitchen. Also buy two pounds of onions.

Lizzy

As he read through the note he looked up at me.

“What do you say about that, brother?” he asked me, “It is the first time she has pulled this trick with me. I have to teach her something. She should know in the future how to leave the house and leave her husband a dried piece of lox.”

He sat himself down and wrote the following note on the same slip of paper:

My dearest Lizzy!

I thank you for the little piece of dried-out lox, except that I came home with a guest and we were unable to share a feast of that size. You should not wait for me to come back this evening too early. I am leaving to do a little something, and if I am not back tonight, I will be back in the morning, and if not tomorrow morning, then the morning after next. The grocery items you can attend to yourself.

Don't worry.

From me, your ever-loving,

Benedict.

“But what do we do with the presents?” I asked.

“The presents I will keep under the lounge chair,” he answered, “That note is just to scare her. We will come back around ten or eleven. We will go out and eat somewhere.”

He took the presents, both mine and his, and stuck them under the lounge chair. Then we went out to a restaurant. He treated me to a fine supper with wine. Afterwards, we went for a walk in the park.

“That will use up some of the time, and get us home later, so she will think that I am schlepping around god knows where. You know the women. When the husband is not home they think he is running

around with a flock of strange women. I tell you, if men did even half of the things their wives suspected them of, it would call down a second flood on the world.”

At about half past ten, we went back to his apartment.

When we were standing in the hallway on the third floor he said to me:

“I hear my wife's voice. I believe she was frightened by my ruse, and she sent for her Mama. She is a fiery woman. A mother-in-law like that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. I am afraid that from her I might get a portion.”

I stood there in the hall and didn't know what to do. Aha, I thought to myself, a heart is a prophet. For the whole day my heart told me that today things simply would not be going my way, that something would befall me.

“You know what, Joe? My dear, old, good friend? He said to me, “You go first. When the mother-in-law sees that I have come with a guest, she will be ashamed to make a fuss.”

The hall was very dark. A little light was coming from the second floor where the gas was still lit.

I knocked on the door, and soon the door opened and on the door sill stood a tall, thin woman. I saw her face, but she couldn't see me very well, because I was standing a little to the side in the shadows.

“You are already here!” she shrieked at me, “You charlatan! I'll have you arrested! How dare you write such things to my daughter, you coarse man, you so-and-so.”

“Please, it is a mistake,” I said quietly and my heart beat with fear because I saw my friend who was behind me creeping slowly up the stairs on all fours to the next floor to get away from his mother-in-law's rage.

“What kind of mistake?” she screamed at me, “You charlatan, the way you want to treat my daughter! I will smash your face! Look in this house!”

She grabbed my by the lapels and pulled me into the apartment.

“Mama, hush, quieter!” It is after ten o'clock. The neighbors are already asleep. Don't make any proper laughter.”

These words were spoken by a young woman, who arrived at the same moment that the mother-in-law pulled me inside. But then they both jumped with horror:

“That's not him!!!” they both yelled.

“Good evening!” a voice called out behind me, and my friend came in, the man of the house himself, calm and relaxed, as though nothing was going on.

“That is my friend, Joe the Waiter,” he introduced me. “and that is my wife, and that is my mother-in-law.”

The mother-in-law bit her lip. She realized that we had fooled her, but she was ashamed in front of a stranger.

“Excuse me, Lizzy, for my little joke,” my friend said to his wife, “to show you how true I am to you, look and see what we have brought you as presents.”

He crouched down by the lounge chair and began to throw the presents: the candy, the flowers, the oranges. “That is from me,” he said, “and those are from my friend, Joe.”

In a few minutes there was once again peace in the home. When it was time for me to go home my friend called to me:

Now Joe, good, old brother, be a gentleman and accompany my mother-in-law home.

Joe, as Author and Critic

Nowadays, it is the fashion to print stories with critical studies attached to them. That is to say: Earlier, one would print a story, and afterwards a critique of the story, and frequently the critique is six times longer and eight times wider than the original story itself. That is because you can't understand today's writers without the critical analysis. They start out in the middle and end in the middle, and the reader has to find the beginning and end for himself. Soon they will probably throw out the middle also and nothing will be left but the dots with the !!! And with the ??? Then the reader will have to make up the whole story himself. In short, I am creeping off topic ----- I meant that the critical study, that is to say the commentary, that men write about a story, the ones that are so much in fashion, are of the greatest necessity, because it helps the reader hit on ideas in the story without going into things that the writer did not intend. I have begun to think how much better my writing might please the readers and what greater success I might have if you would write critical studies to go along with my works. What, you can't do it? Well, you write just what I am saying. First I will tell you a story. Afterwards I will do a critical study of it, and you will write word for word. And whenever I pause, you make a dot, and when I scratch my nose, make three dots, and when I scratch the nape of my neck make an exclamation mark with dots !..., like that, bravo !...

Now make a big heading:

The Herring or a Head with a Tail *Symbolic psychological sketch by Joe the Waiter*

Now, Davy, steam! Write! This is the sketch itself:

They were man and wife... He was the wife... She was the husband...

They came to a restaurant to eat... They arrived together...

Were was I? Yes, they arrived...

They sat down...

The waiter came, he looked at him and asked, "What would you like?"

"We would like baked herring," they said.

The waiter brought them a baked herring, sliced in the middle into two equal parts.

They looked, the man and wife, at the baked herring...

"Nu, eat," he said to her.

“You start first,” she said to him.

The man grabbed a fork and took the piece of herring that had the head, and left on the plate the piece of herring that had the tail...

The wife took her piece of herring and chewed. With anger... She chewed with vexation...

And in the midst of that she said to her husband:

“If I had taken the first piece I wouldn't have been such a pig, like you, and taken the best piece with the head...”

“Yes,” said the husband, “and if you had taken the first piece you would have taken the tail. Nu, you have the tail, so what more do you want?”

In the restaurant one could hear a sigh. It was the waiter who sighed. He could see that from these people, he was not going to get a tip.

So, there is the story. Now I will give you the critical study on the story:

A Critical Study of Joe's Masterwork “The Herring” ***Written by Joe himself***

First, let us be careful. A critical study is not chopped liver. One must chew slowly, write!

Such a masterwork as this short, but very rich in meaning, story, “The Herring” requires that one should spend an entire year reading it, no, two years, no, an entire lifetime.

“They were man and wife”... Immediately you are given a picture of a married couple, man and wife, a similar pair... However, the writer comes and with a single stroke he turns over the felt saying, “He was the wife, she was the husband.” What a raucous satire, what a biting critique of today's upsidedown-with-feet-up-with-head-down-society... The man is a wife, a woman, a timid being, the wife is a man, a real guy, the rooster, the great authority in the house.

An what a house they have! We leave that to the imagination of the reader. The intelligent reader can imagine for himself what kind of a house it was, when the man is the woman and the wife --- the real boss...

The genial author breaks it up with this line:

“They came to a restaurant to eat... They arrived together...”

It moves your heart, it gives you a tug, a break inside. Just these simple words, “They arrived together” seizes the reader's heart... See, I scratched the nape of my neck. There make this mark !...

“They sat down” ... says the author. The reader can imagine for himself what the husband thought, and what the woman thought. In that lies the whole of his art in that the author says

nothing at all.

“What would you like?” The waiter asked. What a bitter joke, what irony lie in this everyday, ordinary question from the waiter!...

And the passage with the baked herring, and the unsymmetrical pieces --- Is that not a living example of the frightful egoism that exists between people, and even infects the family circle ?...

And I would like to make note of another thing, that is, Joe the Waiter will make note, the story with the herring is a symbolic presentation. The head and the tail of the herring stands for the struggle between both genders, both sexes, for which one cries, “We will be the head and not the tail” --- Everyone wants to be the head of the group.

Here is where the author made a masterpiece, which places him in the highest rung of literature.

For the common man this appears to be a simple story about a man, a woman, a herring. But it is not a common herring. It is a symbolic herring, a herring that represents the individualist theories of Nietzsche. And that is what I told the customer who eats dairy noodles. The customer who eats soft-boiled eggs even said that the same story could be told using two soft-boiled eggs, one should be a fresh one, and the other one stale. But the customer who talks in acronyms said, “I.L.H.B., that is to say “I like herring better.”

It goes without saying that I could write and write about this story, and keep writing until the Messiah comes. But I see your tea is cold. Drink up, or wait, I will get you another glass hot tea.

The Garbage Barrel System

Right now, by me, is very busy. This is the time I have my “summer boarders,” that is to say men whose wives are away in the “country,” and these men come to us to eat in the restaurant. It goes without saying that the tips they are giving does me good in my heart. They are having their own vacation in the city and can eat a well-cooked dinner, in a home-cooked manner. What then? I heard a story about a young man who married a college girl and she cooked a pie for him to eat that she baked herself and he got sick from it. Doctors had to do an operation to extract the pie from his stomach with a scalpel.

What did you say? It smells in the restaurant like something is not fresh? That is not from the restaurant, that is from the garbage barrel outside. Eight barrels are outside and six more in the cellar. Don't worry, it is sanitary. A customer read to me from an English newspaper an article, that garbage and filth are not unhealthy. “Quite the opposite,” it said in the newspaper, “one can see that the men who work with the garbage are all healthy and strong.” That was a big English newspaper said it, “The Times.” And it really is the truth. That is why a pig that lies all the time in garbage and filth and chews garbage and filth is healthy and strong. No more do we need to be warned away. I believe, the “Times” will now bring about a new fashion among the Yankees on Fifth Avenue, West End Avenue, Riverside Drive, and all of the other aristocratic streets. They will be filled with banana peels, rotting pieces of watermelon and other stuff strewn in the streets. The Yankees will stop criticizing Hestor Street and Essex Street and the aristocratic wives in the “400” will amuse themselves throwing plum pits and other odd and ends from their fire escapes into the alleys. The millionaire's servants will empty the ash buckets in the middle of the road and the rich avenues will be decorated with mounds of filth from which there will be such a smell that will overpower the smell of the automobiles. Why aren't you eating your schav? What? It bothers you to hear about garbage barrels while you are eating? But what can help you when it hits you in the nose? A-nu, tell yourself it is a perfume if you are such a classy person.

The garbage barrels are now the order of the day. They have become the central point of all politics. Garbage barrels and politics go hand in hand. Even in City Hall you hear about nothing but garbage barrels. There the City Mayor sent a Commission out to inspect the garbage barrels of New York. The Commission is composed of three prominent citizens with prominent noses. They are accompanied by members of the street cleaning department and members of the Board of Health. The street cleaners went with little brushes to clean up the people in the Commission and dust off their clothes. Meanwhile, the Board of Health officers came with spray bottles and sprayed the Commission people with some sort of medicine. The Commission members themselves went carrying perfume bottles by their noses. It was a grandiose and impressive procession that made a deep impression on the East Side, so wrote the “Evening Bluffer.” The Commission made an investigation and quickly discovered that there were more soda water stands than saloons. Afterwards the Commission came here to the restaurant to write up their report to the Mayor. I managed to get a copy of the report for you. I will read it to you, and you write it down word for word.

Report from the Garbage Barrels of Greater New York To His Honor the City Mayor of New York

We, the undersigned, who were appointed by you to investigate the garbage barrels on the East Side, have found the following, which we have the honor to report to Your Honor attaching samples from all of the articles which we found during our investigations:

Exhibit number one:

A head from a herring, found in a wooden barrel with ash. The head is very dried out from the sun, and only has one eye. It appears as though the other eye was eaten by flies.

Exhibit number two:

One egg, of the type one calls "cracked eggs." The egg was cooked by a Missis for a boarder, but the boarder threw the egg into the barrel.

Exhibit number three:

A lady's shoe, number 4.

Exhibit number four:

A man's sock. We are sending this exhibit in a jar of alcohol.

Exhibit number five, six and seven:

Peels from plums, a broken banana, a dried orange. These came from the remains of a party.

Exhibit number eight:

The tail of a cat. We have notified the coroner and the police, that they should look for the cat. We recommend to Your Honor that the wheels of our entire City Administration should be put in motion to search for the cat that belongs to this tail which we are presenting to Your Honor as "exhibit number eight."

*(signed): Mike Graft, Jim Burel, Tim Cinch
The Garbage Barrel Commission of New York*

So, that is the report from the Commission. Now they are looking for the cat that belongs to the tail which the Commission found. They first sent the tail to Columbia College to a professor of zoology so that he could determine what sort of a cat it belonged to. The professor analyzed the tail and found the following:

- 1) That the tail is from a cat.
- 2) That the cat is a calico
- 3) The cat has four feet.
- 4) It is without a tail.

The police issued a general alarm and the Board of Aldermen offered an award of a hundred dollars to whomever could bring them the cat without a tail. The result from that was that politicians went out all over the city, bought calico cats hacked off their tails and sold them to the City. The city treasury paid out a sum totaling four million sixty thousand dollars for tailless cats, but the real cat still was nowhere to be found and they are still searching for it.

We have heard that the garbage man strike has been settled. They will be accepting the same wages as before and 'collecting' barrels of the same type --- a quarter a week from each tenement house. The customer who eats dairy noodles said that the only way to settle the question of the barrels is to carry all of the garbage barrels to City Hall and bury the street cleaning department in them. Then we would have clean streets.

However, I have another plan to solve this extremely important question. My plan is the best, since it will solve all of the economic questions and bring peace between capital and labor, between government and citizens. My plan is: We should eliminate all sorts of salaries, wages, pay and remuneration. People should not receive a set paycheck, only *tips*. This will settle all questions between capital and labor and we will have honorable government office-holders. It is a psychological fact that people would rather pay a percent than a set amount. People will haggle with a peddler over an apple or an orange for a penny, but will give a waiter a whole quarter tip just for serving them with ice cream. If the street cleaning department for example would eliminate all wages, and if the office would only collect, let's say, a nickel a barrel, then they would make an effort to take away as much garbage as possible and the city would stay clean. We see that the change in our society, that is the evolution of our government system is moving in that direction. Salaries are being viewed little by little as being unimportant. The salaries are going away, back into the campaign fund, only tips --- That is the main thing to which the office-holder comes back to. If the government eliminates salaries and declares tips as lawful, then will all corruption disappear in a day. The office-holders will truly serve their customers. Yes sir, that is my deep conviction that sooner or later people will reform society according to my plan. And that is the best decision for the difficult problems of our time. In tips lie the salvation of all mankind.

Andrew Johnson's Farm House

(A story from the customer who eats dairy noodles.)

The last time that I came to have an interview with Joe the Waiter, he handed me over to the customer who eats dairy noodles. This customer had just come back from a vacation in the country, and he recounted to me the following interesting experience.

When it came time to go on vacation, I began looking for a place to go. A friend told me that I should go with him to a Christian farm. "By a Christian," he said to me, "it is still and quiet, clean and neat and you get good service." In short, as soon as we arrived at the farm we saw that the whole story was a fake, a swindle, a bluff. The farmer was a Jew to his bones, and his wife a Jewish wife like all Jewish wives, and it was not a Christian farm. At one time the farm actually did belong to a Christian, but two years ago he sold it to the Jew. The farm stayed in the goy's [gentile's] name and was advertised under the kosher Christian name: "Andrew Johnson's High View Farm House." Imagine my surprise when I arrived at the station and asked for Mr. Andrew Johnson, a black beard rushed over and said to us, that is, to me and to my friend, in perfect Mama Loschen [Yiddish], "You have come to see me. I am Andrew Johnson's successor. Now I am the proprietor, that is, the boss of the farm." My head spun with his English translations. "My name is Herris Burak," he said to us, and invited us to sit down in his wagon. Like prisoners we arrived at "Andrew Johnson's High View Farm House," which was located in the bottom of a valley. Just below the house was a deep ditch, that is probably why they called the house "High View." Arriving at the farm I found out that Mr. Burak had the same Christian kitchen and the same traif [non-kosher] cook as Mr. Andrew Johnson had on staff, so that the farm house would not lose the reputation as a Christian place. Right away I detected the aroma of pulled pork, which did not sit well with my Jewish sense of smell.

The minute that Mr. Burak arrived at his farm and entered the farm house, he became a different person. He stopped speaking Yiddish and spoke only English, and it was an English that the heavens could only take pity on! Only because he translated every English word into Yiddish, is the only way we could understand him.

I went to meet the other boarders in the farm house looking for the Christians, but I only found three Polish servants and one Irish governess staying together with her Jewish bosses. That was the whole pack of Christians in the Christian farm house. The boarders all spoke English, some better than others. They bragged about themselves and held their noses in the air, as though they were doing you a favor to talk to you.

I would be afraid for you just like any other person when on the following day they served up a traif dinner. I have never been meticulous about keeping kosher, but I have a rule that oysters should only be eaten when served by a goy and never when served by a Jew. Because when you eat oysters from a Jew they have the taste of canned.

And when you eat meat from a pig, you should eat it from a goy, not by a Jew, because when a Jew cooks up something from pork he koshers it up from habit. He salts it on a board and tenderizes it in water --- Can you even imagine what that tastes like? The traif delicacies in Mr. Burak's Christian Farm House were hard to eat. The aroma from lard (pig fat) made me a little queasy. People laugh

because Jewish food is always loaded with onions and garlic, but I say that onions and even garlic beat pig fat. If, for example, I eat an onion or garlic, everyone around me can smell it, but I got enjoyment from eating it. But pig fat is something else: It overloads the gall bladder.

My friend complained about the same thing. And we noted that the other boarders ate with difficulty, like martyrs, as though they were being martyred with every bite.

“Oy, a little piece of kosher sausage!” --- My friend whispered in my ear.

“Oy,” I said, “Or a little piece of herring, or a lump of roe from a herring, or a sour pickle, like the kind you can get in a Jewish delicatessen store.”

“Excuse me,” --- called out a young man who was sitting next to us --- “I overheard you talking. I sympathize with you because I, too, have a Jewish appetite and I would like to have a little Jewish delicacy. Let's go into town, it is only three miles from here. There is a Jewish grocery there, we can buy herring, sausage, salami and we will make a feast. Other things are there that we can get to go with it.”

“I have a better plan,” called out another young man who had one hand around his bride's waist and with the other hand he gestured with it as though he wanted to teach us the Talmud. “I heard what you said about going into town. Why would you go into town? There, by Mr. Burak in the icebox you can find sausage, salami, corned beef, pickles, herring and olives.”

“What are you saying?” We all exclaimed with amazement.

“Just what you heard,” the young man responded, “By chance I got a look at what Mr. and Mrs. Burak and their children were having for supper, and my mouth watered when I saw what they were eating: Chopped herring, fried sausage with eggs and all sorts of good Jewish things. I figured out where these things came from and found out that each time Mr. Burak goes into town he brings back kosher Jewish food for himself and his family, and all that is kept in the icebox.

Now we all moved to the “Summer House” which was a building near the farm house with a roof but no walls. It had little bank seats for sitting. Around us had gathered a large number of the boarders and we had more than a quorum to conduct a business meeting. My friend took it on himself to chair the meeting. Self-appointed, he called it.

“I make a motion,” someone said, “that we appoint a committee to go into the icebox and steal from it herring with the sausage, with the pickles and with other good things.”

“I second the motion,” called out the bride whose waist was still encircled by her groom's arm.

“I am opposed!” called out another young man, who, some one told me, was a school teacher. “We would do better to appoint a committee or a delegation to go to Mr. Burak and present our demands, that we want Jewish delicacies, herring entrée for dinner, sausage for supper and with the meat we should have Jewish pickles not goyish pickles. And instead of ham for breakfast he would better serve us corned beef or salami.”

This motion was accepted unanimously. We didn't even have to count the votes.

Mr. Burak was very surprised at our demands. He said that this could ruin the reputation of “Andrew Johnson's High View Farm House” which is known as a Christian place. He refused to give in to our demands. However, when we sat down at the table for dinner, we were in open revolt. We pounded on the table with forks and plates and yelled out: “Herring! Sausage! Salami! Hear Oh Israel!” Mr. Burak was mortified. In a few minutes plates appeared on the table with sliced herring and with onions. We all licked our fingers after. In the evening at supper we had soft sausages, dry sausages, salami and pickles. One person began to sing “Hatikva” [Hope], and soon most of us joined in. Involuntarily, I also joined in... The little piece of salami with pickle that I was chewing fanned the spark of Jewish nationalism. Joe, bring me a little piece herring and after that a little bit of noodles, they should be thick and hot. Hear me?

Joe sings “Kol Nidre”

If a lady tells you to hide under a sofa you should not follow that instruction. So say I, Joe the Waiter. Write this in my name, word for word.

I followed a lady's instruction and hid under the sofa --- and I almost came to a lot of grief over it.

Listen to the story and write it word for word.

This happened on Wednesday. It was my free evening when I was off from work. It was a pretty evening. A sweet breeze carried cool wings in its fragrances. --- No, no, I got it mixed up. --- I wanted to say, cool breezes carried sweet fragrances in its wings. No, excuse me, I made a mistake, it was a hot June evening and the wind was still. And I, Joe the World Famous Waiter, the Poet-Philosopher from the ghetto, as you call me, was walking on East Broadway.

I was walking slowly and proudly. As I walked through the streets I had the impression that all eyes were on me, just as though it were printed on my forehead that I was the World Famous Joe. I felt tight within my skin, as though I were three times bigger than I was, but was stuffed in my old skin. All great men feel this way. As I told this to Taplitzki the Superman, he said that the psychologists call that egomania and that it is a sort of insanity. Have you ever heard this wisdom from a clear head? Taplitzki himself is meshugge [crazy]. A person who only speaks of the future and starts every meal with tzimmes [stew] then works his way backwards to the herring, such a person is himself a meshuggener [crazy person].

Ach, what do you want! These are not side topics! Write word for word. And don't let yourself think that I am straying from the path. I was walking like that in the street, East Broadway it was, and I noticed a lady smiling at me from a window. The lady was not too young and not too pretty. But she was done up like a doll, and she was wearing a hat with big feathers, and with flowers and cherries, and grapes, and I would swear that on the hat was also a bunch of bananas. I looked at the lady and wondered to myself: Why is she wearing a hat in the house? I noticed that she did not stop smiling at me. --- I smiled back. She smiled broader, I smiled broader. I went a little closer to her and said, “May I have the pleasure?” She said, “Come in, no one is here.” I was a little taken aback, “Who knows who this lady is? It seems like East Broadway is a nice street and the house looked respectable, and next to the window from which the lady spoke to me there was a sign “Reverend David Ber Lakrez, Cantor, Circumciser, and Order of the Kadushin.” --- and still you can not be sure!

I got my courage up and went into the house. The lady was already waiting for me there. She led me into the parlor and asked me to sit down. She sat herself down next to me. My heart started to throb inside me --- thump, thump, thump.

“You are a handsome young man,” she said to me.

“And you are a pretty lady,” I said to her, “May I ask if you are still single?”

"I am still free," she said with a smile as she went to the mirror to adjust her hat. "Tell me, does the hat suit me?"

"Just like it grew from your head."

"And the dress I'm wearing?"

"Just like it was poured on."

"You are a fine cavalier. You please me. Would you like to take me out sometime to the Yiddish theater?"

"Yes," I said, "Sometimes I get pieces from famous actors."

"Go!" she called out suddenly cutting me off.

"Who, go?" I asked.

"You, you!" And she wrung her hands. "What can I do with you? Where can I hide you? Quick get down, there under the sofa, quick! Don't ask any questions."

I was shocked by what she said and jumped down under the sofa. I saw how the lady had quickly removed the beautiful hat along with the clothing and covered herself with a wrap. Things fell silent for a while. Then I heard people come into the room. I could not see their faces. The only thing I could see was two dresses and two pairs of pants moving around the floor. From that I understood that there were two women and two men.

"Well I would swear," said a woman's voice, "that the maid had put on my dress and hat. I can see right away that she did. Sadie! Sadie!"

I could see that an apron had come into the room.

"Well?" the apron asked.

"Who has been in the parlor?"

"No one."

"And who was trying on the dress?"

"No one tried on your dress, Mrs. Lakrez." --- And the woman left the room.

"Now, my daughter, play the piano, and Abe and I will practice a little for the High Holidays. Tomorrow all of the singers will be there for the last rehearsal," said a pair of pants.

A dress sat down at the piano and began to play "Kol Nidre" and the two pairs of pants began singing "Kol Nidre" until they came to:

"Ah---ah---ah---ah, oh---vey---oh! Aha---ha---ha! D---ayn---dar---no, oho---ha---oi---oi---oh!"

“---Oud---ich---taa---bano, oi, oi!” I sang out from under the sofa. I couldn't help myself. A year ago I was a singer for a Cantor during the High Holidays.

“Who is there?” asked four voices all at once.

“Meom kporim zeh---aha---ha,” I continued singing.

“Who is that?” the same four voices said again. “It is either a ventriloquist or a magician. The voice seems to be coming out of the earth,” one of the voices added.

“Ed yom kporim, aha, aha, haba elyenu ltuva, oi---oi---va, oi, ai oi, oi---oi---oi!” I continued singing.

“Call Caesar in!” I heard someone command.

I heard a whistle and a dog came running. The dog I could see clearly.

“Sic him!” said a man's voice. That was an order to the dog.

The dog began to run around the room and sniff in all the corners until he got under the sofa. He gave a bark and started to bury his teeth in my clothing along with my skin and tried to drag me out.

“Ai-ai-ai-ai!” I began to scream, but without a melody. “Save me from the dog! He will eat me alive!”

“A robber! Police! Police!” Everyone began to yell.

“I am not a thief. Let me explain to you how I got here,” I pleaded with them.

The “you” were an older couple with their son and daughter, it appeared to me.

“Listen to me,” I said to them, “I was passing your house and the lady wearing this dress called to me.”

“What dress?” the Cantor asked me, the Circumciser and Order of the Kadushin himself.

“The dress that is laying on the table.”

“What chutzpah! [audacity]” the daughter called out. “What chutzpah to say that I was the one to call him in.! I haven't even worn that dress today. I only had it out to fix some of the trimmings.”

“I didn't say that you called to me,” I pointed out to her, “I said that a lady wearing this dress invited me in.”

“Sadie! Sadie! Come here!”

The apron came back in.

“There, that is the lady,” I called out and pointed to the young girl. “This is the lady that invited me in.”

“Sadie, you tried on my dress!” Miss Lakrez said angrily, “I'll have you arrested!”

“Shush, quieter. Don't give her a bad time just before Rosh Hashanah,” The mother pleaded with a hushed voice, “For Rosh Hashanah I don't want to be without a maid! Leave her alone!”

The whole time that I was talking and Miss Lakrez, the Reverend Daughter, was screaming at the maid, Ceasar the dog did not stop barking at me. He almost certainly wanted to sample a piece of my thigh, but the Cantor's son was holding him back by the collar.

“If the young man leaves the dog will be still,” the Reverend said, and I took hand and foot and was out the door.

No more will I allow myself to be enticed by a woman, and if a lady invites me to lay down under the lounge, I will do better than that and just up and run.

Joe Becomes a Bridegroom

I have become a bridegroom. Don't rush to tell me "Mazel Tov." Wait until I finish my story.

You ask me how suddenly out of the clear sky I have become a bridegroom? Ask yourself, how does someone out of the clear sky get a headache, a stomach ache, fevers? When it comes it comes. I became a bridegroom before I knew it.

The customer who eats dairy noodles had a witty saying: Before marriage a man should keep his eyes open and after marriage he should keep them shut. The trouble with men is that they do it exactly backwards: Before marriage they are blind and only after marriage do they begin to see.

And that is how it happened with me, Joe the World-Famous Waiter, the greatest poet and philosopher of all waiters. I did not look around and I fell into a net.



Partly to blame is the countryside where I spent my vacation. There I made the acquaintance of a young girl, not at all mousy, I tell you, and she was dressed up like a doll. She arrived a day before I was supposed to leave, but in one day we became friends and she invited me to come visit her when she got back to New York. Last Monday I received a post card from her and on the post card was her picture in a bathing suit with two words under it: "Please call." Tuesday evening I took some time and went to see her. She lives uptown. No, I won't give you her address. Every customer that I told this story to asked me for the address, but I am smart and say nothing. I was dressed like a gentleman, as is appropriate for Joe the Waiter, when he goes to visit a lady.

When I entered her house I was met by an elderly woman in the hall, and when she got a look at me she said:

"That must be you, Joe the Waiter? I have heard a lot about you."

It goes without saying that I was very pleased to hear that, because what great man doesn't like to hear compliments? Only the dead do not get pleasure from hearing compliments. It doesn't matter if one is famous and praised in books and newspapers. However, for a great man it doesn't do to show outwardly that he values the compliments. I complained feebly like a girl who blushes and I answered:

"Oh, please, don't mention it. Tell me, is Miss Elizabeth at home?"

"You mean my little Lea?" said the woman, "She is getting dressed now. Come into the parlor and wait a few moments. She will be finished soon. My daughter makes it short. She is very efficient in everything."

The woman led me into the parlor and then she left. I could hear her voice as she spoke in the neighboring room:

"Don't rush Lea, let him wait, do yourself up fine. Let you pompadour down a little bit more. The boarder next door covers her left eye completely with her pompadour. Kvetch yourself a bit more in the corset and spritz yourself with a lot more of your good-smelling cologne. I will buy you another bottle in the morning. On a pushcart one can get a whole bottle for seven cents. Do what I say Lea! Don't rush, let him wait. The more you make a boy wait, the more it breaks his spirit. --- to the better."

I was getting impatient and let out a little cough.

"Oy, he coughs!" said the same woman, "Don't worry, my child, he is not sick. It is a good sign. When he coughs it is a sign that he is longing for you, that he can't wait."

An hour and three minutes I was sitting and waiting like that. Finally I got a whiff of perfume, then I heard footsteps, and soon Miss Elizabeth, or Lea, appeared and wished me a "Good evening."

The mother went off, and I understood, that she was staying in the kitchen.

I'll tell you the truth, I really liked the Mama right from the start. There are mothers who want to sit in the parlor when their daughters are being paid a visit by a young man. They won't leave even for a minute and mix in with the conversation. They don't understand that by doing that they are running over the whole business. They wink at their daughter, and often whisper in their daughter's ear some sort of advice on how to behave and what to say to the young man. Such mothers are a great

misfortune. On the other hand there are smarter mothers, who understand the situation better. When they know that a young man is coming to visit their daughter, they send their younger daughters out of the house. They also send the husband away. The mothers stay in the kitchen and pray to the Almighty. If another man comes to the house, they tell them that no one is home, and they make them to understand that they have to leave. I like those kinds of Mamas.

Miss Elizabeth and I sat ourselves down on two chairs, one next to the other, and we chatted about a variety of things. She is a girl who likes to laugh, who doesn't eat her heart out about anything. She told me that she really likes theater, and by her theater is her whole life. I promised her to take her to the theater.

In the midst of this I noticed the rustling of a dress. I figured out that the Mama was watching us through the keyhole. Nu, a Mother wants to know what is going on with her daughter. I moved my chair a little bit to be a little farther away.

“You don't find it comfortable to sit on a chair,” Miss Elizabeth said, “Come we will sit on the sofa.”

I followed her and that turned out to be my misfortune. The minute we sat down on the sofa, she laid her head on my shoulder, and I felt all cold and warm.

Suddenly the door opened and the mama came in. We both leaped up looking ashamed.

“Don't be ashamed, children,” the woman comforted us, “I am not one of the foolish mothers. It is all right. I think it is good that you have love one for the other. I am pleased.”

“Mama,” Miss Elizabeth said, “Mr. Joe is taking me...”

“He is taking you!” the mother cried out. Then she grabbed me and kissed me. “Mazel tov to you both my children! You decided that so quickly! Nu, it should be with mazel!”

You understand now how the misfortune happened? The daughter wanted to tell her mother that I was going to take her to the theater, but the mother did not let her finish the sentence and only got out “Mr. Joe takes me,” She didn't let the daughter get to the end, and she wished us 'Mazel tov.'

It was a very difficult moment. As one would describe it in a novel, there was a long, silent pause.

I looked at Elizabeth. She looked a little toward me and a little toward the ground. I wanted to take courage and explain that there was a mistake. But something took my voice away, and every time Miss Elizabeth looked at me, I got a twinge in my heart.

“You are bashful, my children!” the mama said, “What is there to be ashamed about? I am an unusual mother. Nu, all young girls are bashful; But you my child, my dear Joe, you are a man. Don't be bashful! Take my daughter in your arms and let the mother see you kiss.”

She pushed us both up against each other. Miss Elizabeth stuck out her lips – and what could I do? I ask you, really: What could I have done?

“That's it! Bravo! Do it again!” cried out the mother reveling in nachas [parent's joy from children].

See, you might laugh at me, but I did not enjoy that kiss. It was like a sour berry on a sober heart.

The old woman left the room but came right back with wine and glasses on a tray, with cakes and with fruits and nuts. It was apparent that she was ready for a celebration. Miss Elizabeth had regained her cheerfulness and her courage. She no longer acted bashful and from time to time put her arm around my shoulders and hung on my neck. This did not sit well with me and I could hardly speak.

“A young man of today to be so bashful!” called out the mother-in-law, “Just like my husband, may he rest in peace and have a bright Garden of Eden where his is now, he also was bashful just like that. Nu, don't be so bashful. Drink a little wine with my daughter, it should be with mazel.

The old woman herself drank down a glass, wished us, l'chaim [toast: To Life!] and we should grow old together and have children and grandchildren.

They wouldn't let me leave and I didn't get away until the night was half over. I can't tell you how happy I was to finally get away. Miss Elizabeth accompanied me to the hallway as is the custom. Our leave-taking took an hour and fifteen minutes by the clock. If you have ever been a bridegroom then you will know the flavor of such good-bye's.

Now I have to ask, what should I do? How can I turn things so that the young girl is not hurt and I shouldn't have any trouble?

Joe Un-becomes a Bridegroom

I want to tell you now how I un-became a bridegroom. Are you sure that all of your readers know how it was earlier that I became a bridegroom? You say it doesn't matter? You say one shouldn't retell a story from the beginning --- You will have to forgive me, you are still a simple literati. I must first give a short summary of the previous episode. Write down what I tell you word for word. The short summary you should mark so that it gets printed with small letters. Nu, now hack with your pen!

Short summary of how Joe became a bridegroom.

When Joe went on vacation in the country, he met a young girl. When the young girl got back to New York Joe made a date to go visit her. Her name is Miss Elizabeth. Her address? Not in your life! Joe was welcomed by the girl and also by her mother, who watched them both through the keyhole from the neighboring room. She kept an eye on her daughter. The girl said how much she liked to go to the theater. Joe promised to take her to the theater. In the midst of that the mother came in. "Mama!" the girl said to her mother, "Mr. Joe is taking me..." --- Before the girl could finish saying the Joe was only taking her to the theater, the mother cried out with joy, "He takes you? It should be with mazel," and she threw herself on Joe's neck.

Joe froze in his tracks like he was turned to stone. He lost all his courage. He couldn't get up the nerve to explain that a mistake had been made, so he remained a bridegroom. To learn what happened next you will have to keep reading:

Now this is beginning of the real poetry from the highly interesting novel of what happened with me, Joe the Waiter.

When the customer that eats dairy noodles came in, I told him the whole story, from the beginning, not the short version, and I described my sad situation, how I became a bridegroom through a mistake, and don't even get a penny for a dowry. The customer that eats dairy noodles was so moved by my tragedy that tears as big as beans began to pour from his eyes. The tears flowed over his cheeks, that had not had a shave in four days and they fell into the dairy noodles. That is to say the tears fell not the cheeks.

"Is there no advice for me, no remedy?" I asked, and my voice trembled like a palm frond being shaken. "Tell me, dear, good friend, at least say a few comforting words. The doubt and the sorrow are laying heavy on my heart, like potato latkes on a hard stomach. Save me, give me some advice!"

A fresh stream of tears gushed from his eyes and fell into the dish of noodles.

"Against women there is no advice and no remedy in America," said the customer that eats dairy noodles, "They are the bosses of the land. They have a monopoly on freedom. You could be the President of the United States; against a breach of promise case no one can protect you. The only thing you can do is pull some kind of stunt to make the girl or the mother regret the match."

A feeble glimmer of hope, like a single grape in a bowl of clear broth, appeared on my horizon.

"Keep talking!" I begged him, like you would beg a robber who held your life in his hands, "Keep talking, you have some idea, I can tell. --- So, speak, don't torture me, I will never forget the favor you do me. I won't accept tips from you for a whole year."

“First, bring me a third bowl of noodles, make sure they are thick and hot!” he said so cold-blooded, as though he had no concern that a man stood before him whose blood was draining from his heart.

I got him his plate of noodles. Six times he took a fork-full of noodles, then he drank a half glass of cold water, only then did he ask me a question:

“Tell me, Joe, is the girl's mother very pious?”

“Yes she is,” I responded, “She told me that she will only eat dairy six hours after she has kissed a mezuzah.”

“That is good,” said the dairy noodle customer, “Now, Joe, I will ask you another question. Are you pious?”

“Namely?” I asked, “Pious in what?”

“Do you smoke on the Sabbath?” he asked.

“Me? May G-d protect me! I don't smoke during the week either!” I answered.

The dairy noodle customer laughed and said:

“Nu, I will give you some good advice. Next Sabbath go visit your bride, and when you are there, see to it that a couple of cigarettes are sticking out of your pocket so that the mother is sure to see them.”

“But I don't smoke,” I said.

“You don't have to smoke, you just have to make it appear that you smoke.”

I liked the plan. On the Sabbath I took time out to visit my prospective bride. I did not forget to put some cigars in the top pocket of my vest. The Mother-in-law welcomed me in, and took me into the parlor, and asked me to wait a little bit, her daughter was getting dressed.

I thought I was going to have to wait over an hour while she got finished dressing. But I overheard the mother speaking with her daughter in the neighboring room:

“Why are you getting so dressed up? He is already your fiancée. Nu, since he is already your bridegroom, you don't have to make such a parade. Get past this dress. Put on the old one. Without doubt, you will please him now in an old dress also. Now that everything is set you don't have to get all dressed up. Why cover yourself with baubles? Foolish girl, he is already your fiancée and you are to be his bride.”

Miss Elizabeth did indeed come out almost immediately, in an old, worn house dress with a stained jacket and a dirty neck. It could be that she had not yet washed. Her hair was mussed and had a lot of feathers in it.

The Mother-in-law brought some refreshments in. She brought marinated fish, fruit and nuts. She also had some home-made wine. However, she still had not noticed the cigars in my vest pocket. I pushed back the lapels of my coat, stuck both thumbs in the armholes of my vest, but she still did not notice

anything. Finally, I took out a cigar and said to her:

“Mother-in-law, do you have a match?”

She looked at me like I had just hit her in the head with a truncheon.

“Sabbath! Goy! Don't you know that today is the Sabbath? Ah?”

“Yes,” I said cold-blooded.

“Get out of my house, you destroyer of Israel!” She ran out of the room then came right back in with a broom. “Get out of my house, you so-and-so! You came here to ruin a honorable Jewish daughter. Go! Go!”

I started running and the broom was at my heels. And each time the broom got closer and closer to me, until I felt a blow to the head. However, that did not bother me in the least. I felt as though I had been freed from chains, which had been clamped around my feet. I took the cigars which I still had with me to a barber in exchange for letting me wash up at the barber shop. Leaving there I headed to the restaurant. I walked slowly, relaxed, as though I was walking around my own living room and no one seemed to notice that I was walking around without a hat.

Now I have a new hat and a new spirit. I will never forget the favor that the customer that eats dairy noodles did for me. I will be grateful for his masterful advice for the rest of my life. See, would you like a cigar? I still have one left over. It is a good cigar. It cost three for a nickel. Light it up. We are done now.

On Art and Literature

You have come to interview me about the state of Yiddish literature in America? All right, I am ready! It has been a long time since we have talked about literature. What I am going to recount to you is the contents of the lecture I am going to give at the banquet for the waiter's union next month.

Ay, that will be an huge affair, our banquet. We will be the ones sitting at the tables, and we will be the ones eating, and we will be the ones tipping one another. It will be fun. You must come to the banquet as my right hand, my press agent and private secretary. Come on, be a mensch and attend to your job. Listen to me carefully, because what I will be saying today will be a very learned theme. It is not for the common people, the multitudes. It is targeted toward the intellectuals, the exceptional individuals. Therefore, you must not make any errors, and write everything just the way I say it word for word and period for period. Wait a minute --- Get another pen. Your pen is already scratching.

You're ready? All right, I will begin now:

Yiddish literature today has two different currents, or one might call it tendencies, if you wish. The customer who eats dairy noodles says that there is only one. Two different currents is what I say. That got your attention, ha? The two currents in literature are thus: One is the fashion to contract, make everything shorter, to cook a whole quart down to a single word. The second fashion is to expand, to take a single word and make from it a megileh [long, wordy document]. A story with a continuation follows. I will be talking about these two currents, these two tendencies today, I, Joe the Waiter.

The fashion to contract the literature, to make it shorter is not new. It is as old as the ten plagues that Rabbi Yehudah made into a short acronym: דצ"ך עד"ש באה"ב . The master calendar yields the whole of world history on a little slip of paper. In this calendar you will find the whole of history from the creation of the world to the epoch of "Teddy Bears." --- all on one page. You can learn it all in just a few minutes time and already be a historian. Hopefully, they will soon be able to do the same with all knowledge and science. But in the meantime we have to do without it in literature.

And since I, Joe the Waiter, am known as the greatest literati among all the waiters, I will therefore not hold back from the current literary customs and will give you the contents of two great novels in a concentrated format, that is contracted from a quart to a word.

The Bloody Tragedy

Earlier he did not want. Afterwards, when he did want, she didn't want.

But afterwards when they both were happy, an intrigant mixed in and told the lovers that the other lover was false.

The jealous lovers put on a story. There, that is the content from the great novel, "The Bloody Tragedy," which has been translated in all world languages.

It is a noteworthy, wonderful, suspenseful novel. The theme has been used by hundreds, no, thousands of novelists in many epochs in many lands.

A Man with 18 Wives

This world-famous novel was created by the renowned novelist, Tshepucha Shmirovski. The theme from the novel has also been used on the stage.

The 'plot' from the novel is a very simple one and yet notably suspenseful. Here is the content of the novel "A Man with 18 Wives":

A young man married a young girl and they became man and wife.

Afterwards, he left her, and went away to another city and took another wife.

Afterwards he went to third city and took a third wife.

Afterwards he went to fourth city and took a fourth wife.

Afterwards he went to fifth city and took a fifth wife.

Afterwards he went to sixth city and took a sixth wife.

Afterwards he went to seventh city and took a seventh wife.

He did this 18 times. He went to 18 cities and married 18 wives.

The end.

There, I have given you a sample of the fashion for shorting things. Now I will give you a sample from the new trend to expand things, making them longer and wider: Telling a little story, then talking about the story for years on end.

I will show you an even better trick. I will show you how one can take a tiny piece of literature, and praise it to high heaven, then destroy it. I will demonstrate the power of the critic, and how the power of life and death is found in the tip of his pen.

I will first dictate a story that I have created myself and is even better than my earlier work, "The Herring." Then I will talk about it. First I will show you how good it is, then I will show you how it is totally worthless. My new story is called:

Peanuts,
or
Little chews make big spits
Character Sketch
by Joe the Waiter

“Papa!”

“Ha?”

“Papa!”

“What, my child?”

“Papa, you promised me a present. Give me a penny.”

“What will you do with the penny?”

“Buy a horse, an automobile.”

The father smiled. He put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a pocketbook, from the pocketbook he took out a few coins. From the coins he selected a ten-cent piece and said to his six-year old son:

“Nu, little Jack, take ten cents, buy yourself something for a penny and bring me nine cents change.”

The little boy left the room. In about twenty minutes he returned.

“Papa! I bought a little bag of peanuts, here is your nine cents change.”

“You are a good boy, Jackie,” the father said. With one hand he took the nine cents and other hand reached into the bag of peanuts.

Quickly, one after the other the father cracked the peanuts, and smiled while doing so. When the son had finished eating all of his share of the peanuts, the father still had a lot left in his hand. The last peanut was a bitter one.

But the son bent down and took the bitter peanut and ate it.

The father smiled.

Now I will give you critique number one and critique number two. Write word for word, don't miss a single period.

Critique Number One

On Joe the Waiter's masterpiece “Peanuts, or little chews make big spits,” critiqued by Joe himself.

The character sketch “Peanuts” belongs to the highest form of realistic literature. Observe the naturalistic and yet loving “introduction” in the story. Already you see before you a father with his son and how they talk and deal with one another in this scene. The talented writer has created such drama in the opening of the story.

See how naive and innocent he describes the six-year old child who thinks that one can buy a horse or an automobile for a penny.

It is also characteristic how tenderly the father put his hand in his pocket. From there, that is to say from the pocket, he takes out a pocketbook, and from the pocketbook he takes several coins, and from the coins he takes a ten-cent piece. That is so masterfully described. The reader can clearly visualize how the father places his hand in his pocket, and from there, that is to say from the pocket, draws out a pocketbook and from the pocketbook several coins, and selects a ten-cent piece from the coins. It is simple, natural, and artful.

It is obvious that the ten-cent piece that the father gives the son is counterfeit. Although the author does not actually say so, one can figure it out for himself. If it were not so – why would the father be smiling? Right there is where one sees the difference between an artist and a scribbler. A scribbler recounts an entire story with a beginning and an end, but an artist says nothing, one has to figure these things out for yourself.

That is critique number one. Now I will show you the same thing turned around. Now write:

Critique Number Two

On Joe the Waiter's masterpiece "Peanuts, or little chews make big spits," critiqued by Joe himself.

The character sketch "Peanuts" belongs to the new trend in literature that nobody can understand, even the author himself. Up until now this kind of nonsense never found its way into print.

Shall we try to figure out what the author was trying to say? A bad father? But a bad father does not smile, and would not give his son any pennies. And what kind of an idiot child is that? A six-year old child should know that you can not buy an automobile or a horse for a penny. Unless it is a horse like the author.

Above all, I don't understand the direction of the story, and why it occurred to the author to write about peanuts? Why didn't he write about beans, peas, cabbage, cheese, or even blintzes? Peanuts are not Jewish – They sound odd in Jewish life, they weaken the strength of the race. The author should not have written about peanuts, or about a father and a son either. He should have thrown out all of the people and things and written a completely different story, about other stuff entirely, other people and other themes. It would have been something totally different and perhaps I would have had a totally different opinion.

Now do you see the trick? A good critic can do what he wants with a work. The main thing is to scribble then smear it.

24.

Five Young Husbands

You know what I would like to tell you – You can write this down under my name – The greatest sports in the world are married people. Please, I beg you, don't spin my spodik! [traditional fur hat] You are not going to convince me that only single men live well, and that married men are slaves. Cold noodles mister, you are not going to convince me! Do you know who lives well and free? A married man. A single man has to take care of himself. He always has fear that he will get a bad name and that will spoil his chances of making a good match. A single man is careful about who not to speak to, where not to go, not to play cards when he wants, not to drink when he wants. However, a married man rules the world like a black tomcat.

A few days ago in the evening five young, married men were here sitting together. They were nearly all newly married and they were playing cards right here at the same table where you are now writing down everything word for word what I am saying. Nu, while playing they drank five bottles of celery soda, several glasses of tea and smoked some cigars. By eleven-thirty their bill ran to a dollar and eighty-five cents.

When it came time to pay the bill, each one insisted on paying the bill for the whole table. I have a rule that when customers begin competing to pay a bill, I keep a sharp eye on them, because it happens that the group can leave the restaurant without anybody paying. They kept going back and forth for quite a while. Eventually, the customer who eats dairy noodles came along. They knew that he is my “star boarder.” As soon as the dairy noodle customer came in the five customers turned to him, and asked him to decide who among them should pay the dollar and eighty-five cents that they drank and smoked.

“I will tell you,” answered the dairy noodle customer and scratched his head under his hat. – “I have a plan for you. Since it is so late in the evening, every one of you should go home, and the first one of you who does not do exactly the first thing your wife tells you to do, that is who will pay the bill. Meantime, I will take responsibility for the bill here in the restaurant. Tomorrow we will meet here in the restaurant and see who has to pay the bill.

“All right! It is a good plan!” called out all of the five young married men at the same time.

“Remember!” said the dairy noodle customer, “He who goes home tonight and fails to do whatever his wife first asks him to do will have to pay the bill.”

“Very well!” answered the five married men and then they left.

It was exactly twenty minutes after midnight when they left for home.

The next evening the five good, young men got back together, and the dairy noodle customer also came. They held a sort of meeting around this table, the big one. The dairy noodle customer presided.

“Nu,” the dairy noodle customer called out, “The meeting is open, Mr. Dobrushkin! You have the word. Tell us what your wife asked you to do when you got home, and if you did it.”

Mr. Dobrushkin coughed once and then began his story:

When I got home, I tried to slip in quietly on tiptoes so that my wife would not hear me. However, as soon as I came into the bedroom my wife awoke: “You finally got here, ha? Go, go, go! I don't need you here. Go, sleep in the cellar, where tramps sleep!” That is what she said to me. I decided that rather than pay a dollar and eighty-five cents, I would sleep one night in the cellar. That's what I did.

“Mr. Dobrushkin is free,” explained the dairy noodle customer. “Now, Mr. Benstok, you speak.”

“When I got home,” recounted Mr. Benstok, “I walked through the kitchen. Everyone in the house was already asleep. I was a little hungry, so I opened the icebox looking for something to eat. Suddenly, I saw my wife standing before me in her nightgown with a light in one hand and she yelled at me, “You finally dragged yourself home, ha? What are you looking for in there? You would do better to sit on the ice and sit there all night!” I did what she said. I took a little piece of ice and sat on it until it was all gone. And when this piece of ice was gone I got another and sat on it until it was gone. That is how I sat on a piece of ice all night long.

“He is also free,” said the dairy noodle customer. He, too, obeyed his wife. Now, Mr. Galkin, you have the word.

Mr. Galkin lit up a cigar and said:

When I got home it was a quarter past one. You know that I live in the Bronx. As I entered my dwelling I was unconsciously whistling a little tune. My wife only caught a part of it. “Nu, nu, whistle a little bit more of it,” she said. I whistled more of it. But that moved her even more. “Nu, nu, perhaps you would give a concert, my dear man?” she said. I expanded my throat, coughed, and began to sing at the top of my voice a melody from Carmen. “Be quiet, already!” my wife cried out. I stopped immediately. Now, tell me, did I obey my wife?

“Three times over,” said the presider, “You certainly will not have to pay. Now, Mr. Pompkin will speak. “Ah, he is a goodnik! He always obeys his wife.”

“Yes, it is the truth that I listen to my wife. Not only do I follow her, I try if at all possible not to disturb her or upset her, because she is a very nervous woman. Last night when I came home so late I was very quiet and moved very slowly, in fact I crawled on all fours. But while I was being so very careful I met with a misfortune. In the darkness I banged into a stool and fell. When I fell I knocked over a pitcher of water that was sitting on a small table. My wife woke up, and greatly agitated she cried out, “Schlimazel! Evil! Wake up the children, wake up the neighbors!” I realized that if I did not do what my wife said, I would have to pay a dollar and eighty-five cents. I immediately began to dance around the room screaming in a wild voice, so that in a minute the whole building was awake.

“Bravo, Mr. Pompkin!” called out the chairman. “I knew you would obey your wife. I could never have guessed that you would go to those lengths. Now Mr. Schiapki will tell his story and if he obeyed his wife. If he did that would be bad news because I would be the one to have to pay the bill.”

Mr. Schiapki took a sip of tea and told his story. – My wife was waiting up when I got home. When I got close to my dwelling and saw that the light was on I realized that the little Misses was waiting for me with a nice gift. I made a promise to myself that I would do everything she asked of me. Once and for all – I had to show that I was a mensch with courage. Guess what she asked me to do! I opened the

door and when she saw me she spit and said, “Shame! How can you show your eyes before me? How can you shame me in front of the neighbors and come in so late? Go get a rope and hang yourself!” I figured it would be better to pay out a dollar and eighty-five cents rather than hang myself.

Mr. Schiapki took out a two-dollar bill and told me to keep the change.

Then the married sports went back to drinking their celery soda.

He Makes a 'Run' on Two Banks

Hoptse! I have a cold, not for you though I think. It is a great misfortune for a waiter to catch a cold. Hoptse! I have to turn my head, so that I don't sneeze in the plates.

You ask how I caught the cold? I will tell you. I got chilled last Tuesday when I was out in the streets to get my few dollars out of the bank. I belong to two banks. First I must tell you how I came to have money in two banks. The story is that I don't have the habit of putting my money in banks. But two solicitors came into the restaurant. Both are regular customers and both are regular tippers. You don't know what a solicitor is? A solicitor is an agent who goes around getting depositors for banks. One customer works for one bank and the other for another bank. Each one when he comes to speak with me wants me to open an account with his bank. I say to them, that is to one then the other, "I don't have much money." They tell me that one can start with two or three hundred dollars. I say to them, "I don't have two hundred dollars." They answer that if I don't have two hundred, then one hundred would also be enough, and if not one hundred, fifty is also good. They take everything.

If that's the case, I think to myself, I will give both of them a show. I will open up an account in each bank with fifty dollars.

I go into the first bank and deposit there fifty dollars. I write my name on a little card and in a book so that they will know my signature. The clerk gave me a bank book and a check book. He showed me how to make out a check. As a test I write a check to my own name for twenty-five dollars. "Do you want to cash this?" the clerk asked me.

"No," I answered, "I want to deposit it in another bank. I belong to another bank also."

At the second bank, I explained, I want to open an account with fifty dollars. I have twenty-five dollars cash and a check from another bank made out to me as "Myself." The clerk told me that was all right. I wrote my name on a little card and in a book just like in the first bank. Afterwards, they gave me a bank book and a check book. I went back to the restaurant very content with myself: I am a Jew, a real businessman. I have two bank books and two check books. How many people can say that?

In the morning I made out a check for twenty-five dollars from the second bank and deposited it back in the first bank.

The day after that I withdrew twenty-five dollars cash from the first bank and deposited it in the second bank.

The next day after that I exchanged checks with the lawyer who comes into the restaurant with his pretty typist. The lawyer gave me a check for twenty-five dollars and I gave him a check for the same amount.

Needless to say, I took the lawyer's check to the bank immediately, because you should never hold on to a lawyer's check very long.

So that is how I churned those few dollars. I had two bank books and deposited in both of them seventy-five dollars. Fifty dollars was in one bank and twenty-five in the other. The next day the fifty became twenty-five and the twenty-five became fifty.

This went along nicely for a few months. What a happy time that was for me, Joe! Each month I would go and get my new balance for my bank book; and each month I would get my checks back, with a rubber stamp on them and each month I would know that in one bank my balance was fifty dollars and in the other twenty-five. Every month the same thing, not a cent more and not a cent less.

However, I also took the checks and the bank books and calculated the balances myself because a businessmen had told me that banks can sometimes make mistakes. I recalculated all the balances in both accounts three times to make sure they were correct. No, neither bank made any mistakes.

But, not every day is sunshine, and luck is not always on your side. Monday some very bad rumors started circulating around town, and Tuesday there was a run on a very big bank on Wall Street. I thought to myself: "Joe, be smart, take your little bit of savings, because you never know what might happen. Today one bank crashes, tomorrow another. It is just like the measles, a contagious disease." However, when I repeated that to the lawyer who comes in here with the pretty typist, he laughed at me, and said I didn't have anything to worry about. I doesn't matter what goes on in Wall Street! Our bank is secure, as secure as the Bank of England. I thought to myself: Who knows how secure the Bank of England is? Can someone go to England to find out? It wouldn't be worth the trip, I would do better to withdraw my few dollars and the solicitors can go eat in another restaurant!

However, when I got to the first bank my heart grew lighter. I saw people coming in to make deposits, but no one was making withdrawals. I regained some trust, and thought that perhaps the lawyer was right. "How much is my balance?" I asked the bookkeeper. He went into the next room and came right back out with the answer, fifty dollars. I made out a check for forty-nine dollars leaving a dollar in the bank. I did the same thing in the other bank taking twenty-four dollars, leaving a dollar in the account. Now I have my bank books and my checks as before, and my risk is only two dollars. Nu, two dollars in two different banks is not such a great risk. If one bank catches a cold in the nose, I will have my other dollar back before the second bank sneezes.

Wait a minute, don't rush, I still have more to give you. But first let me have a good sneeze.

For some time I have done a lot of philosophizing over the customs and characteristics of our customers, and from my observations I am now able to share the following philosophical pearls, which I will do as you write them down word for word.

Philosophical Pearls

From Joe the Waiter.

A customer who gives a whole ten-cent piece when he comes with a lady, you can be certain that he won't give a penny the next time he comes in alone.

* * *

A customer who finds a hair in the soup will also find a cockroach in the challah. – Just to have an excuse not to tip the waiter.

* * *

Better five individual pennies than one worn-down nickel.

* * *

When a customer excuses himself saying he does not have any change, don't ask him to give you the rest of whatever he has, because he doesn't have any big bills either.

* * *

A lady who tips is as rare as a hen that lays finished pancakes.

* * *

When a man comes into the restaurant with his own wife, you should treat him just as you would if he came in with a strange woman, yet the man, who comes in with his own wife won't tip the waiter.

* * *

There are several different methods to get rid of an unwanted customer but the best are these two: 1. Overturn a glass of hot tea on him. 2. Throw his hat in a bowl of soup. But you have to play the role this way, so he thinks it is an accident: repeat the accident each time he comes into the restaurant until he stops coming.

* * *

If a customer wants to give you a cigar, refuse it. It is better a cash nickel than a cigar that is “two for five.”

* * *

After a customer has given you a tip it is not necessary to help him find his hat. He can find it for himself.

A Herring for a Herring

Today we have shav [sorrel soup]. The first sign of Spring in a restaurant. Say a blessing and eat shav. Fine shav, outstanding shav, made with milk and with an egg broken into it. With pumpernickel you can eat it and if you want I can also bring you some matzos.

We have already bought our stock of matzos, and the customers can't wait to get a taste of a little piece of matzah. ———— Now, take your pen and your paper and write word for word what I am going to tell you. The story I am going to recount to you today can be called, "A Herring for a Herring, or Tit for Tat."

A short while back a new customer came into the restaurant, completely unknown man in a stove pipe with a beard – No, the beard was on his face not on his stove pipe hat. I helped him off with his overcoat and wanted to take his stove pipe. He said he did not eat with a bare head. Then he began to read the menu, I thought his reading was pointless. All that was on the menu was like a Russian constitution. The chopped liver was already gone, fricassee is no longer there, boiled beef – not a lick, for an appetizer nothing is left but herring. – simple, everyday herring. After the guy in the stove pipe read the whole menu he called me over and asked, "What do you have for an appetizer?"

"Chopped liver, fricassee, boiled beef and herring," I named all of the items, because that is the way it is done in restaurants, the waiter must recite all of the offerings whether we still have them or not.

"Give me the chopped liver," he said.

"The chopped liver has sold out," I answered.

"Nu, then the fricassee," he said.

"Also sold out," I said.

"And the boiled beef?" he asked.

"Just herring," I answered, "That is all that is left."

"Then why did you name over everything on the menu?" he asked.

"That is the way it is done," I answered, "Every profession has its methods and rules. For example, why does a cantor always hold his thumb under his throat? It is the custom for the profession! For example, why does a matchmaker always have a schlump for a client? Because that is the custom!"

"How did you know I was a matchmaker?" he asked me.

"Who told you that I knew?" I asked back, "I still don't know. Perhaps I hit on it like a blind horse in a ditch."

“You are a lucky horse,” said the matchmaker, “the ditch is a schmaltz pit.”

I felt a little embarrassed at that. I ran to the kitchen to get the herring. When I got back to the table I found the matchmaker reading from a little book. He had one eye on his little book and the other eye on me.

“Here is your herring,” I said.

“A fine piece of herring,” he said to himself. “It was foolish of me not to order the herring first thing. It is actually a simple food, a solid food, appetizing, one can eat it at any meal, be one hungry or be one full, be one rich or be one poor. Herring is the delicacy of the whole nation of Israelites. So, you see, Mr. Joe, in my profession as matchmaker that people clump us together as though we were all the same. And I ask myself, “Why do they right off think us the same?”

“Yes,” I said, “That is a good question.”

“Would you want to have a good match?” he asked me, just that suddenly.

I was embarrassed again and did not speak.

“Listen, Mr. Joe,” he said to me and took the tail of the herring with his fingers. “I have here a fine match for you. I have right there, in my little book, six different maidens, and you can choose any one of them.”

“All right,” I said, “Let's hear about them.”

“I will read to you from my little book,” he said to me, “You consider them and then tell me which one you want.”

Here are the six maidens that the matchmaker read over to me. I wrote them down for you on a piece of paper. Copy it word for word.

Bride number one: A pretty girl, 19-years old, has rich parents, but she has a flaw: she is mute. The parents are offering a dowry of five thousand, to any man even if he is poor. It is a schmaltz pit.

Bride number two: A saleslady in a millinery store, 35-years old, eight hundred dollars dowry, not pretty, but she is happy to continue working after marriage. She is a prize.

Bride number three: A widow with a grocery store and two children. Makes a fine living. Must have a man who will attend to the children. A joy.

Bride number four: A typist, pretty as a baby-doll, plays piano, a good dancer. Wants a boy who is a good earner and will take her without a dowry. It is worth it to sell your shirt and to marry such a girl.

Bride number five: A cook in a wealthy house. Healthy and pretty. Makes good lokshen kugel [noodle pastry]. Five hundred dollar dowry. A practical match for a practical man.

Bride number six: Not pretty, not young, without dowry, weighs two hundred pounds. Comes from an esteemed family. Will be supported by rich relatives.

So the matchmaker counted out all the brides with their good point and their flaws, then he asked me which one I would like to have.

“The mute,” I said, “with the five-thousand dollar dowry.”

“She is already married,” responded the matchmaker.

“Then I will take the saleslady who is happy to keep working after marriage.”

“Only this morning she stood under the chuppah [marriage canopy],” said the matchmaker.

“Nu,” I said, “The widow with the grocery store wouldn't be terrible.”

“She had second thoughts,” answered the matchmaker, “She doesn't want to get married.”

“Nu, and the pretty typist?” I asked.

“She got married a long time ago and is already a Mama,” said the matchmaker. “And as for the cook, I can save you the trouble of asking. Today a prospective bridegroom came to her and I am sure there will be a match. For you, Mr. Joe, the only one left is bride number six. She is a fine maiden from a good family. She is sure to please you.”

“So, why,” I asked him, “did you tell me about six brides when you only had one to offer?”

“That is because,” answered the matchmaker, “it is the custom among us matchmakers, just like with waiters. First repeat everything on the menu then bring a herring. If you were to see the maiden, you, too, would say that herring is the best thing of all.”

In short, I saw that the matchmaker gave me a good comeuppance. He gave me a herring for a herring. But let me continue, I promised him that I would go to see the bride.

Indeed, that very evening the matchmaker made an appointment, and I went to see the bride. From the first minute I liked her. I saw a woman who had grown big and built sturdy, fat and thick, *kenehora* [wards off the 'evil eye'], indeed by two hundred pounds, maybe more. I hate your American thin physiques that swirl around in the streets like thin, little blades of straw dancing in the wind. A woman should be solid, like a good piece of furniture. I can not stand the sight of the skinny, slight, sunken, caved-in, dried-out, little birds, who peep like little birds, eat like little birds, and are only worth keeping in little cages, pecking at things with their beaks, and chirping.

At the door the mother of the prospective bride met me and immediately showed respect: Apples, oranges, bananas, nuts, almonds and tea with crackers. I noted that the bride did not speak. She let her mother do the talking for her.

“Yetta,” said the mother, “why don't you speak a little with the young man?”

“Mama, you know that it tires me to talk. You talk, I will listen.” With that she let out another yawn.

I tried everything to pull Yetta into the conversation.

“How do you like the weather today?” I asked her.

“Mama,” she turned toward her mother, “Tell him how we like the weather.” And she yawned again and began to suck on an orange.

In that minute I felt that there were two forces working within me. One which pushed me and one that pulled me. The customer that eats dairy noodles explained to me one time a whole philosophy where everything in the world was subject to two forces: A force that pushed and one that pulled. He called them centrifugal and centripetal. Without these two forces, he said, everything in the world, the earth, the sun, the moon, and all the stars would become a fricassee, a kasha. Those were the two forces I felt in this story, while cracking nuts next to Yetta.

The force which pushed away became stronger, and I began thinking how I could withdraw in an upstanding fashion, so that no one would feel hurt.

The older woman began asking me about my life and my livelihood. Afterwards she started to get to the point, asking why a nice boy like me was not already married.

“Well, it is just a little thing,” I responded, “that has kept me from getting married.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“I have a wife in Europe and have to get a divorce first.”

“A wife is what you call a little thing?” she asked jumping up very agitated.

“Well,” I said very calmly, “Compared to your daughter she is a little thing.”

“Mama,” Yetta called out with a yawn, “Tell the young man he can leave now.”

I took my hat and my overcoat and left with a mumbled, “Good night.”

I was successful. I got out of that nicely.

A Walking Delegate instead of Elijah the Prophet

Since it is the day before Passover, I will tell you a Passover story.

A couple of years ago, a few weeks before Passover, a young woman, who had been abandoned by her husband, came to work for us in the kitchen. She washed dishes, helped with the cooking and did other jobs in the kitchen. She was a beautiful woman, with black hair and blue eyes. No matter how much I told you about her, I could not make you to imagine all her charms. I am after all nothing more than a waiter, but you are a writer, you would be able to describe her charms better. You know, for example, that there are men and women who have within them a magnet that attracts hearts, and no one can point to the origin of this charm, and where it comes from in a particular man or woman. And, indeed, this woman had in her such a magnet. I don't know if the magnet lay in her thoughtful look, or in the wrinkle of her forehead, or in her helpful, good-natured manner or her noble voice. Our customers noticed her and made all sorts of excuses to go through the kitchen. Many of these customers who had never thought to wash their hands, now began to need to go through the kitchen to wash their hands before every meal. And there they would get a look and perhaps a little chat with Bertha. That was the young, abandoned wife's name.

The Missis, that is, the boss of the restaurant, came up with a good plan. She got Bertha a pretty vest to put on and a brand new apron and had her working in the restaurant itself, helping me out during the mid-day rush. The plan was a huge success. Bertha was able to attend to more than half of my customers, and the tips flew into my pockets, because in the presence of a lady, they were ashamed not to tip. They were afraid to have her think ill of them. With Bertha's arrival in the restaurant it was a new life. The Missis and I noted that the customers began to come to the restaurant with their hands already washed, their hair combed and with clean hats. Even the dairy noodle customer cleaned his hat which was usually covered with the dust of an entire year. The customer who eats soft-boiled eggs turned his cuffs over to the clean side, and Taplitski, the Superman, bought himself a new handkerchief. The Italian on the corner who shines shoes began doing a fine business. The barber in the middle of the block had to take on another worker. In a word, they became different customers, other men, clean, upstanding – gentlemen. After looking at these men, the Missis had the walls of the restaurant done with new wallpaper, repainted the ceiling, bought new tablecloths and new napkins. We now had a different class of customers and because of them we had to renovate the place.

The woman eventually left the kitchen altogether. The Missis stationed her at the cash register, so that she would be in the restaurant all day long. During the mid-day rush she continued to help me like before. Great good luck and blessings showered down on the restaurant from the time that Bertha started to be there the whole day. New customers came in every day, and those who were on the receiving end of one of Bertha's smiles were sure to come back every day. They thought it right to eat herring, just to be able to maybe have a short chat with the beautiful Bertha, see her smile and hear her cheerful voice. And the Rabbis were ready to pour black paint on the Orthodox, because they took a young woman in her blossoming years and cut her off from life. In their opinion she should be allowed to remarry even in the absence of a formal get [divorce] from the husband who ran off.

That is how things were going and the business bloomed like a garden, and the tips grew as thick as

trees. But there exist in the world men who can't stand to see others succeed. This type of person exists in the restaurant business also, and they began to make trouble.

Then, at a regular meeting of our union, Local 139 of Greater New York, I was required to give an explanation regarding the young woman who was now working with us in the restaurant. They wanted to know whether she was associated with the union and whether she had a right to work in a union shop.

I argued that in the first place, the woman was not a waiter, just a cashier, and that only a couple of hours in the middle of the day did she help me out, that is to say she worked as an "omnibus," busing tables. And secondly, I told them, it would be a simple matter to bring her into the union, and make her a member.

The union charged me with talking to the woman and convincing her to join the union. But when I came to Bertha with this proposal the Missis mixed in and said that she did not want it! She said that she did not want two union people in the restaurant and have pay them by the hour, and be a servant to them. If Bertha wants to keep working as she is now, that's good, but if she wants to join the union then she can just go back to the kitchen or leave. Things were now bad between me and the Missis, me and Bertha and me and the union. I was looking for advice on how to feed the wolf, keep the goat whole, and also the head of cabbage. I didn't want to have any trouble from the wolf or the goat. But what could I possibly do? Both the Missis and the union were dug in and ready to start a war. And Bertha was following the Missis.

I made an excuse not to go to the next union meeting. I sent a message saying I was sick and could not come. But a brother waiter let me know that the union had decided to call me out of the restaurant, and a walking delegate had been chosen to go to the restaurant and hand me an order to stop work. They were going to lay a boycott on the restaurant until the Missis gave in to the union demands.

It goes without saying that when a walking delegate has an order like that to deliver, they always select the time of day when the waiter is the most busy so that the blow is more forceful. And he did, indeed, select the perfect time, but that is for later in the story.

A day went by, two, three – everything was quiet. A week passed, ten days – everything was quiet. No sign of the walking delegate. I began to think that maybe the walking delegate had forgotten the whole deal. Then we got to the Passover holiday. I was over my head with work – a delight, such a holiday! The Missis had purchased all new plates, new pots, everything new. I told her it was foolish to spend so much money, because most of the customers will not believe that these are truly Passover dishes. When you show them the new dishes, new platters they will smile and say, "We know the bluff. One restaurant exchanges place settings with another restaurant for the holidays." Well, that really is not part of our story. Where was I? At Passover Seder. Have you been to a Seder in a restaurant? If you came to us in the restaurant, you would see such a Seder! Let me tell you what the Seder looked like.

From four tables we make one long table. That is where the Jews sit who say the Haggadah and practice the Seder in all its detail. At another table sits the customer who eats dairy noodles, with a pair of young people, and he practices another Seder. He does not say the Haggadah, the young people just eat matzah balls. The dairy noodle customer holds forth with a speech saying that today all Jews are still enslaved, just by different Pharaohs, and it is time that Jews became aware of it and stop building pyramids for the Capitalists. At another table is the customer who eats soft-boiled eggs along

with the customer who speaks in acronyms and they have their own Seder. They are both agreed that the Exodus from Egypt is just a nice old wives' tale and that today Jews should fight for a new deliverance... However, they can't agree on how the Jews should go about it. The customer who eats soft-boiled eggs wants a homeland in Israel. The customer who talks in acronyms wants a homeland, but not in the land of Israel. Nu, and by another table is Taplitski the Superman who tries to explain that there never was a Moses, no Pharaoh, no Ten Plagues, no symbols of Yehuda, and that the Jews never worked on the pyramids for Ramses, and the evidence is that they are still not finished to this day. And by the other tables are other Jewish folks celebrating the Seder according to their own tastes, according to the style of their class. Because, as you know, into our restaurant come a wide variety of people from different political parties, with different opinions, and that is why we have so many Seders. The Jews at the long table listened to all these new Seders like a tomcat, said their old Haggadah with gusto, with liveliness, gave the Egyptians their ten plagues, and little by little added to their portion until they had 250 plagues. And they drank four cups of the fine Carmel wine, that Bertha poured for them into new Passover glasses.

They got to the passage "Pour out your wrath..." where they had to open the door for Elijah the Prophet. The young people at the tables who were celebrating the Seder all smiled. They had given me the honor of opening the door for Elijah. And when I opened the door everything before my eyes went dark: In came the walking delegate from our union!

"Blessed be unto you!" All the Jews read from the Haggadah without looking up at the young man that just came in. "Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you and the kingdoms that have not called out your Name..."

The walking delegate didn't even look at them. Turning to me he said:

"By order of the President you must stop work, if not you will be suspended from the union."

"Pour out your indignation upon them," – The Jews there said as they continued reading from the Haggadah.

"Mister Elijah! Would you, perhaps, like to drink a glass of wine? There is a big glass sitting there right in front of you." That was spoken by Taplitski the Superman pointing to Elijah the Prophet's glass that was standing on the long Seder table.

"I have come here on business," – Answered the walking delegate with a severe tone to his voice. "Joe, remove your apron and leave the premises."

At this moment Bertha came in from the kitchen carrying a hot plate of chremslach [fritters made of matza] in her hand. Just as she saw our walking delegate the plate of hot chremslach fell from her hand.

"Zalman!" – She screamed.

The walking delegate's face went white like Bertha's apron. He began to back away toward the door. But Bertha grabbed him by the arm and screamed:

"Stop him people! That is my husband! That is the scoundrel who married me, took my dowry and threw me away."

Five pairs of hands fell upon the walking delegate and shoved him into a chair. Bertha herself went to get a policeman. They put the walking delegate into a room and kept him there until he granted Bertha a get [divorce]. He could have been forced to give her free support, but she did not want anything more than the get. During the same week the union struck the name of the walking delegate from their books, because our union is composed of upstanding men and women and we have no place for scoundrels.

Shortly after that the beautiful Bertha married a fine young man. And after Bertha left, everything went back to the way it was. The dairy noodle customer's hat is once again full of dust, the customer who talks in acronyms is again wearing a greasy necktie, the customer who eats soft-boiled eggs now has cuffs that are black with dirt on both sides, and Taplitski the Superman is back to using napkins instead of handkerchiefs. The Italian complains that few people care any more about having a shine on their shoes, and the barber is wondering what happened to his trade. Hard times have also come to the restaurant. The walls are sad, the customers are sad – Bertha is not there! No more good times! However, let's not worry – A great holiday is coming and you, Mister Zevin, should not forget to come. I still have more stories to tell you – for another time. Meanwhile, let's have a happy and a kosher Passover!

He Makes a Mistake and gets Punished

Today I have a story to tell you about how I caused trouble for someone and how I got punished for it.

Last week, one day around mid-day, a young man came in, I won't tell you his name – write without his name. Where was I? Yes, the young man came in and he gave me an envelope and said: “I want you should give this to a lady who will come in and ask for me.”

“And will you be having dinner?” I asked him.

“No,” he answered, “not yet. Give this to the lady and I will come in to eat around three or four this afternoon.”

After he left I gave the envelope a tap and with my finger I could tell that it contained a theater ticket. No one can lay a finger in my mouth. About ten minutes later a lady with red hair came in, a very pretty girl, and she gave me a sweet smile. I didn't wait for her to ask, I said to her right away, “Mr. So-and-so left this letter for you.” She looked at me and seemed a little confused. I said, “It is all right, he is a very upstanding young man.” The lady smiled and ripped open the envelope and took from it a theater ticket and a visiting card. I got a quick look. With my quick glance I was able to read: “Come on time, please, I shall be there.”

The lady put the ticket in her pocketbook. She ate her cake and drank her coffee then left. In a couple of hours the young man came back in, sat down at a table and commanded, “Joe, I am starving to death! Quick, bring me whatever you want. But fast!” And he pounced on the pumpernickel with the radishes.

I brought him chopped herring and he quickly calmed down. “Did the lady come by here?” he asked.

“A little question,” I said, “Certainly she came by, and she was very pleased. It was for her a nice surprise. She wasn't expecting it at all.”

“She wasn't expecting it?” repeated the young man, “What do you mean? What made you think she wasn't expecting it? Perhaps you didn't give it to the right person? Perhaps you gave it to the wrong lady?”

“No Sir,” I said, “I gave it to the right lady. A young, pretty girl with red hair.”

“Idiot!” he yelled angrily, “Mine is a blond!”

“What, they are not the same?” I asked, “A redhead or a blond?”

The young man was beside himself. If no one was looking I think he would have jumped me and killed me on the spot. I will tell you the truth, I was terrified when I looked at him, the way he glared at me with his eyes. In the middle of this a blond girl came in, not bad looking, and when she spotted the

young man she went straight to his table. She took him by the hand and said to him:

“Well, did you get the ticket for this evening?”

I stepped back a little from them. The young man whispered to the girl and pointed at me with his finger. I understood that he was telling her the story of how he gave the ticket to me and how I gave it to the wrong person. When the blond lady heard the whole story she began to laugh, and kept laughing for at least ten minutes. I thought that she was going get angry – First she laughed a lot. Because of her the young man calmed down and started to smile. Then he called me to him and asked:

“How did you come to give the envelope to that lady? Did she ask for me?”

“No,” I answered, “She didn't ask, it was just that when I saw her I jumped to the conclusion that this was the lady you were referring to.”

The blond lady laughed again, and because of that the young man smiled once more.

“What are you going to do now?” she asked.

“I am going to give my ticket to the waiter so that he can keep company with the lady in the theater.”

The blond laughed again. “It is a good plan,” she said.

The young man gave me the ticket and made me promise that if I saw the lady in the theater I would tell her about the mistake.

I have to make this short, customers will be coming in soon – That evening I did myself up like a dandy and went to the theater. I took along a few dollars and a little courage and resolved to be a real gentleman and invite the lady to a restaurant for a little something to eat. Imagine the failure I experienced. I fell down in the mud. But real mud. When I got to the theater and sat down in my seat I found myself sitting next to a bent-over Polish shikse [gentile woman]. I spoke to her in Polish, she told me that the daughter of the woman of the household where she works gave her a ticket to go to the theater. Clearly, the daughter of the house was the young lady with the red hair. She had from the start smelled the mistake, and sent the servant along in her place. What an encounter! After the first act I left the theater and went home.

Joe Has a Little Fright

It is good that you came! I have a lot to tell you. You don't want tea tonight? You want coffee once in a long while – all right. You want strudel with the coffee? All right, and have you really quit smoking? Because the customer that eats dairy noodles laughed at you, and said that you would go right back to smoking –

Ah, there I am. The coffee is good today, but better and finer is the story I will tell you today. I tell you I almost had to say the Blessing of Deliverance. At that time on Monday I thought my life was ending. I had already in my heart said, “Goodbye” to you, to the other customers and to my tips – but let's start from the beginning.

This all happened on Monday like I have already told you. The whole gang was here and they were debating the latest drama which had been imported from Russia and was playing in a Yiddish theater. You want me to name all the people who were take part in the debate? Well, I will say to you: The dairy noodle customer is not one. The customer who eats soft-boiled eggs is not two. The customer who talks in acronyms is not three. The customer who reads through the whole menu then orders a glass of scalded milk with zwieback is not four. Taplitski the Superman is not five, and I am not six.*

The customer who eats soft-boiled eggs said that the drama was the greatest masterwork there ever was and ever would be. People spoke of Peretz, of Hirshbein, and of Sholem Asch – above all about Sholem Asch. The customer who talks in acronyms said that Sholem Asch is a second Shakespeare. That is where the customer who orders scalded milk with zwieback leapt up hot under the collar and enraged. “Impossible!” he shrieked, “What chutzpa [nerve] to compare Sholem Asch with Shakespeare! It is an insult to Sholem Asch! No, Sholem Asch is the greatest of all the great poets, dramatists. Such as Sholem Asch has never existed and never will!” Taplitski the Superman, was a little unhappy. “One must,” he said, “not forget about Sudermann [Hermann Sudermann, 1857-1928] and Ibsen.” That is where the customer who eats soft-boiled eggs got beside himself and yelled, “What about Ibsen, what about Sudermann! What kind of a comparison are you making there? Sholem Asch is Sholem Asch! Pshaw! – Ai! Ai! Sholem Asch doesn't belong to any literary school. He is the founder of a new, of a unique school, that doesn't yet have any students. Scholem Asch is a true genius – that is not what you would call talent, you ignoramuses! Genius is totally different – genius is – genius is blood!”

“What do you mean blood?” asked the customer who eats dairy noodles.

“Blood is blood,” answered the customer who eats soft-boiled eggs, “blood means something that comes out when you bleed.”

- Jews would avoid naming people directly so as to confuse the Evil One and ward off the evil eye. This is why they might say, “Taplitski is *not* five,” to make the Evil One think Taplitski was not there and, thus, keep him from harm.

“A nice explanation!” called out the customer who eats dairy noodles. “I see this word “blood” by a lot of our writers. When they want to make an impression and they don't have a word for it they say, “blood.” Lord of the Universe, tell me what is this “blood?”

“I am not going to let you drag me into philosophy,” said the customer who eats soft-boiled eggs. “We are talking now about literature, about drama. What is your opinion of Sholem Asch?”

“I have an opinion of him, but I am keeping it to myself. It is not the time to speak freely.” So answered the dairy noodle customer.

And after he made that statement he stopped and left the group.

The other customers continued the heated discussion until the clock struck three. That is the time I leave the restaurant and am free until the evening.

I had taken off my waiter's uniform, put on my overcoat and went into the street to take a walk.

I only went three blocks when I ran into someone, can you guess who? Indeed, it was the customer who eats dairy noodles.

“They are still there?” the dairy noodle customer asked me.

“Yes,” I said, “They are still there and the discussion is still cooking. Right from the start they could not agree who was the greatest: Peretz, Hirshbein, or Sholem Asch. Now they seem to be coming to the conclusion that Sholem Asch is the greatest. And on you they are pouring black paint because you were acting so cold-blooded. They are judging you because you don't like Sholem Asch.”

The dairy noodle customer became white as chalk.

“What is wrong?” I asked, “What has frightened you?”

“Joe,” he said, “I am afraid, I am shaking. “The world is full of hothead fanatics who are ready to tear anyone to shreds who doesn't agree with them. And these hothead fanatics are in the world today, by the so-called civilized, enlightened, free-speakers. I get weak when it comes to saying something, it stays on the tip of my tongue, it squeezes the soul out of me, I am afraid of the crazy people, I tremble. However, I feel as though I must speak out, if not I will die on the spot.”

“What,” I asked, “You are afraid of me? Go on, man, you can say anything in front of me, just like one of your own people.”

He looked at me, like he did before, and afterwards he looked deep into my eyes, as though he wanted to touch my soul. Then he said with a weak voice:

“Come!”

“Where to?” I asked.

“In the Bronx,” he answered.

“What's in the Bronx?” I asked.

“Come! Afterwards you can ask,” he said.

We got onto the elevated and rode off. The whole time he did not speak. He was like a samovar that was sealed. I would have believed that he died right there. When we arrived at the station near the big park, we got off.

“Come!” he said.

“Where to?” I asked.

“Into the woods,” he answered.

“What's in the woods?” I asked.

“Come,” he said, “and don't ask questions.”

By then it was around five o'clock in the evening. But the days were now a little longer, and the sun hung on the edge of the sky, perhaps waiting until its union working hours were ended.

The dairy noodle customer walked ahead and I followed him. We came to a thick woods. That is where I stopped.

“Come,” said the dairy noodle customer.

“Where to,” I asked.

“Deep into the woods, where you can't see another living soul.”

“What are we going to do there where we can't see another living soul? I asked.

“Come!” he said, “and don't ask.”

The woods were very hilly with deep hollows and great rocks covered in moss. I looked at the dairy noodle customer, and saw that he was very agitated and he had a wild look in his eyes, like a man who was about to do some hideous deed. I started to be frightened. It suddenly occurred to me that he was possessed by a madness for murder and might whip out a knife kill me right there in the thick woods and toss my body into the deep hollow and no one would even hear a peep! I stopped in my tracks and did not want to go any further.

“Come!” he said.

“I'm not moving,” I answered.

“Come!” he yelled. “Animal! What are you afraid of? Come as far as that little mound. There is where I will tell you what is laying so heavy on my heart.”

I followed him, but very carefully, and kept a little distance between us, in case he pulled a knife out to kill me, I would be able to take to my feet.

Soon we were both on the little hill.

“Come!” he said.

“Where to?” I asked.

“Here, next to me. What are you afraid of?”

I looked him in the eye. He was a little calmer. His blood lust, I thought to myself, must have left him.

“Joe,” he said while looking around in all directions, “here in the woods we are safe from today's fanatics, from the hotheads who won't let a man say a word against their idols. But there, listen, we must be sure. Hush, I think I hear a noise.”

He carefully looked around in all directions, listening.

“No,” it is only the wind,” he continued, “No one is in the woods anywhere, and I am no longer afraid. Listen to what I want to say to you: Sholem Asch can not write!”

I slapped myself in the head, and I, too, looked around in all directions.

“Yes,” he went on, “and what he does write doesn't stick together from one thought to another, and he is a nudnik and a cripple!”

And once he had said all of that, he hugged me with great joy and called out:

“Joe! Now I feel so much better. I have said to you what has been laying on my heart like a stone.”

On the ride back we were both in a good mood, and we talked about a lot of different things. I promised to keep secret all that he had entrusted to me.

But the day after that he came to me, the dairy noodle customer, and said to me:

“Joe!” Now you can tell anyone you want about what I said in the woods. I am no longer afraid. I just came from City Hall. I've got a permit to carry a revolver!”

30.

Uncle Hershel

(Dramatic Tale in Three Parts)
Told by Joe the Waiter

Part One

My Friend Sam

Now that you have finished eating I will bring you a glass tea, and while the tea is cooling a little I will tell you the story of my friend, Sam, and his uncle, Hershel.

First, I want you to know that this is a long story, just so you can be prepared to work on it. You are going to write and write. But it will be worth the effort. This is an interesting story the likes of which you have never heard. It should be played in a theater because it has both comedy and tragedy. The cast consists of the following people:

(Write word for word as I say it to you.)

Me, Joe the Waiter

Sam, my friend

Goldie, his wife

Hershel Lapin, his uncle

Family from the groom's side, family from the bride's side, cousins, good friends, and an express wagon

So, those are the heroes of the drama that I will be describing to you. Now drink up your tea and we will get to work.

I was walking down Broadway about two or three months ago. It was during my two free hours each day. Who did I run into? And who called out to me by name? Sam Litvinov, my old acquaintance who I had not seen for three years. "Hello, Joe," he said. "Hello, Sam," I said. "Why are you looking so bad?" I asked him. "Don't ask, dear brother! Great troubles!" he answered. "So tell me, are you a home-owner?" I asked. "A little," he answered.

"What do you mean 'A little'?" I asked. The story came out like the one about the Litvak when he came to Ellis Island and they asked him if he was married and he said, "A little bit." So what means "a little bit?"

"You asked me," he explained, "if I was a home-owner, nu, and I say to you that I am a little bit of a home-owner yes, and a little bit of a home-owner no. A wife I have, but as for being the master of a household, I have nothing, not even a table to eat off of."

"What's is wrong?" I asked, "Are you that broke?"

"I am not broke," he answered me, "I have a few hundred dollars in the bank. I am just disappointed. We were counting on getting a large number of wedding presents and it all came to nothing."

"Ha, the old story!" I said, wanting to comfort him, "Let's take a train and ride to a park, and on the way you can tell me the whole story."

"I am sorry," he said to me, "that I didn't have your address. I would have counted it an honor to invite you to our wedding. There is one thing I am happy about. We had a stylish wedding. A big hall, with an electric wedding canopy, with a comedian, but the main thing, the presents we were counting on all fizzled out."

"An old story," I said.

"Not only," he went on with the story, "not only did our immediate family disappoint us with their presents, but from her side some of the in-laws did not even show up, and only sent telegrams. The whole time between our engagement and our wedding, Goldie never ceased talking about her rich Uncle Hershel Lapin who has a big housewares business on Eighth Avenue. She built him up to me, this rich Uncle, as though she wanted me to count him as part of her dowry. In the end it fell out that the Uncle did not come to our wedding, nor his wife, Aunt Dvoshe, nor his son Yosel, the real estate agent. They sent a Mazel Tov [Good luck wishes] by telephone – it was cheaper than a telegram – As a gift they sent a little table with a marble top, that had a value of a stinky three dollars, and that was a present from the richest uncle in the whole family!"

"An old story!" I said once again.

"Listen to me," he continued, "Already a week and I am sitting with my wife in an empty house waiting endlessly for something more to arrive. We need to have a table, we need some chairs, a sofa. We need other essentials for the house, but we haven't wanted to buy anything in the hope that my family or the in-laws might yet send us what we need. First they sent us their presents, now we have a house full of rags: ninety-cent alarm clocks, seventy-five cent albums, fancy corner tables, three of the same picture of Rebecca watering Eliezer's camels, two pictures of Yom Kippur in Port Arthur, a picture of Moses Montefiore, a pillow with a red cat in needlepoint on it, and a huge pile of other rags that most certainly came from a 5 and 10-cent store, and not a table, not a chair, not even a plate!"

"You have no shortage of sorrows, brother Sam!" I tried to comfort him with a little laugh.

"You think this makes me really angry," he said, "It shouldn't be allowed! They should choke on their presents. They ate twice as much at the wedding as their ragged presents are worth. That uncle of hers makes my head spin, Hershel Lapin. If I should meet him in the street I would rip him apart like a herring. It is his good luck that I don't know what he looks like, I have never had the damned honor to even see him. He goes around like a bandit. The whole time, since Goldie was first betrothed to me, she has been talking about Uncle Hershel, and telling me about his great wealth and his goodness. And in the end he did to her such a disgrace, such hurt. He simply took her and hurt her before all of the people who came to the wedding. Goldie cried pitifully. She still breaks down crying whenever she thinks back on it."

"So, what are you thinking to do?" I asked him.

"This is my reply to your question," he said as he opened up a newspaper. "Here are notices of sales of

the contents of private homes, furniture, household items belonging to a private family. Do you think it is a good plan to buy some things from these sales?"

"Why not?" I said, "Often one can get good bargains, but one has to be a little careful, you have got to be smart. If you want, I will help you. During the day I have a few free hours and I can go with you."

My friend, Sam, took me by both hands and thanked me.

"It is no big deal," I said to him, "You don't have to thank me. For an old, good friend everything is worthwhile to do. But I forgot to ask you something: Your wife, you said, is named Goldie. What is her family name?"

"Goldie Schapiro!" he answered.

When I heard the name I felt a rush of blood to my heart and I went all hot and cold. Can you guess who this woman was? A nu, you are a writer! Do me a favor and guess! No, you won't try to guess? I will tell you: Goldie Shapiro is a girl that people had me negotiate a marriage contract with two years ago. But nothing came of the match, because at the time Goldie did not have hardly a penny to her name. Ai, now I am very annoyed about how it turned out. To tell you the truth, then, when they proposed her to me as a bride, she really pleased me. I will tell you something more, (but this is something you have to keep to yourself) I really had fallen in love with her. But what can you do with love when the maiden doesn't have a penny? Love today, love tomorrow, with love you can not make a pudding, you can't even buy one. I ripped her out of my heart along with a little piece of my heart, and I forgot her, just like they write in the novels. And there, when I heard that she belonged to another, belonged to my friend, the old love awoke in my heart, the old flame, as one would say in the language of you writers. I was a fool, I thought to myself, when I had let such a pretty young girl, such a sweet Yiddishe daughter, fly out of my hands. She could have made me so happy!"

"What made you think to ask?" my friend Sam asked me.

"I think," I said, "that I know your wife. That is to say that I think I may have met her by chance."

"Oh, that will really be fine," he called out very pleased. "It is really good that you already know each other. Joe, dear, good friend, perhaps you would like to come home with me now? We are right at 34th Street. We can take the Second Avenue line and ride back downtown. I live on First Street."

"With great pleasure," I said, "and it will be nice to see Goldie again." I was taken by an odd desire. Her image began to form in my mind, and it was drawing me to her, it was pushing me to see her again, and talk to her again. I tell you, in that particular moment I thought I was going crazy. Tell me, has anything like that ever happened to you? You have never been in love, you say? You are a bluffer. I hate men who bluff. With me, what is in the lung is on the tongue.

Riding back we did not talk a lot. That is because I was not in the mood to talk. I wasn't sure what was going on with me, just that I was feeling strange. Finally, we arrived at the house where he lived, and we climbed the stairs – one floor, two floors, a third, a fourth. On the fourth floor we paused. No, he doesn't live there, he said to me. He lives a floor higher, it is just that he always stops here for a moment. And then, praise the Lord, we were at his three rooms, and the door opened from inside. I was afraid to look into the face of the blond wife in the blue dress who opened the door for us.

“Goldie,” I heard Sam say, “I have brought a guest, a good friend of mine, an old acquaintance whom I have not seen for a long time. Today by chance I ran into him on the street. Here he is! Shake hands with him!”

“This is the way you introduce a friend?” Goldie said with a sweet smile and held out her hand to me.

Oh, the smile, oh, the touch of her hand! I felt Gehenna and the Garden of Eden [heaven and hell] at the same time.

“My name is Joe, Joe the Waiter,” I said to her as was the custom.

“It is a pleasure to meet you,” she said to me, “I think that...”

“That we knew each other a little bit before,” I interrupted her, and I saw that she blushed, and I felt my face grow warm.

“I hope,” I continued, “that you will permit me to be your friend, just like I am your husband's friend.”

“With great pleasure,” she said, and she smiled.

“It will soon be tea time,” Sam said as he went into the kitchen, “I will prepare the kettle, and you, Goldie, go and get us a little bite to eat.”

“What do you think of my wife?” Sam asked me when Goldie had left the room.

“You were very lucky to meet her,” I said.

“She is pure gold, ah?” asked Sam.

“Yes,” I said.

“A lollipop, ah?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“A babydoll, ah?”

“Yes,” I said, “Right under your nose.”

“Joe! Joe!” he called out and threw both arms around me and danced me around the room. – “It is good to be alive! Goldie is the greatest treasure! I am a millionaire! A millionaire!”

Part Two

The Mystery Grows

Goldie returned. She went to the kitchen but quickly came back wearing a little white apron, and began spreading out cakes, apples, and a glass tea for each of us.

“I will tell you a secret, Joe,” said Sam, “this table is not ours. It was loaned to us by our good janitor, he should live a long life. Yesterday we ate breakfast on an overturned barrel, just like in Shiva, don't think about it.”

Only then did I realize how empty the house was.

“One has a right to a few pieces of furniture, and then there is my little wife. What do you have to say, Joe, about my little wife?” And Sam took Goldie's cheeks in his two hands and gave them a pinch.

“Sam! Stop that! You should be ashamed of yourself – right in front of your friend's eyes!” yelled Goldie and her face went red. – I don't know if it was because she was embarrassed, or if it was from being pinched.

“It's OK. He is a regular guy.” Sam said, “We don't have to be embarrassed in front of him.”

We drank our tea and talked business. Sam wanted me to go with him to a house on East 78th Street. He showed me a small notice in a newspaper that said:

Big Clearance Sale! Due to a family accident, I am forced to clear out the contents of my house including all household goods: Two pianos, carpets, curtains, brass beds, chairs, tables, mirrors, chiffoniers, pictures, and similar items. Come today and tomorrow all day.

(Here they gave a house number on East 78th Street.)

“It looks to be a good opportunity,” I said, “Only, I would be interested to know what kind of family accident it would take to cause a man to have to sell all of his household goods.”

“Maybe it was a family accident like ours,” laughed Goldie, “Maybe he got too many wedding presents of the same sort. And now he is looking to get rid of some of them. It would be a good plan for us, also, to have a clearance sale.”

“What do you say, Joe, to my Goldie?” asked Sam, “She can say such a thing, ah?”

The next day I went with my friend to the place. The dwelling where the sale was taking place had seven rooms. We found there a couple of minyans [group of 10 Jews] of people, men and women, looking at the furnishings. The first thing that seemed to me to be a little suspicious was that everything seemed to be brand new, like it had just come from the factory.

A young man who was circulating around and looking at furniture got into a little conversation with us. He pointed out a man with a trimmed beard and blue spectacles, and told us that he was the owner of the house. “He is,” the young man explained to us, “a big businessman, who had just recently married a young girl, twenty years younger than him. And he had just finished fixing up a house for her with a business. The girl fell in love with an actor and ran away with him!”

“Too bad,” said Sam with sympathy, “Imagine, a fine man like that and such a great pity. He did not deserve to be treated that way.”

I also felt sorry for him. I can easily imagine that it is not a very good-tasting thing when a wife runs off with another, especially if the wife is beautiful and you love her, and find yourself abandoned by her and you empty out your pocketbook to give her pretty clothes and a nice home. I can see in my mind's eye how a man comes home expecting to have his wife come running toward him, and he would find a table prepared for him with a little surprise: A kugel, or a favorite stew. But when he comes home, instead of a wife – four empty walls, and instead of a prepared table, only a little slip of paper: “Be healthy, my husband! I found a better man than you!” I can imagine what his heart must feel like as he sells off all of his home furnishings. And I can imagine how the hole in his pockets is greater than the hole in his heart.

But let me get back to our story:

Sam did not buy much more than a chiffonier and a few wine glasses. What he needed wine glasses for I have no idea. Perhaps he just couldn't resist spending a little more money. He couldn't buy any more than that because the man with the blue eyeglasses wanted big prices. It looked like he was trying to make a profit off of his misfortune.

Goldie was not too pleased with our first purchases. She said that might be better if she just went to Uncle Hershel's store, and she was sure that she would find some bargains there. Besides, an uncle – he wouldn't gouge her. For her, he might even sell it at cost without making a profit.

But Sam did not want any parts of it – not seeing it or hearing of it. He hated even hearing the name, “Uncle Hershel.” Even though he had never laid eyes on the Uncle, he hated him just like he hated the Angel of Death, whom he had never seen either.

There was nothing left for us but to try other clearance sales. In an English language newspaper we saw the announcement of a sale. When I went to see them on the weekend (it was my third visit), Sam showed me this advertisement:

Wonderful chance! A widower is forced to clear out the contents of his beautiful home, will sell out, at very low prices, all of the furniture, carpets, rugs, French mirrors, hand-made mahogany, etc. etc. Come early to get the best bargains. Number ____ East 106th Street.

We wasted no time in making our way to the place.

We were astonished when we arrived to see the same man with the trimmed beard and the blue spectacles helping and serving the people who wanted to buy. Sam looked at me, I looked at him, and we both looked at the man with the blue spectacles. Neither of us knew what to say, or what to do. Finally Sam went over to the man and asked him the price on a little mirror, but the man did not want to do any business with him. Instead he called over a young man from a number of people who were standing nearby and said: “Here is the man who will attend to you.”

Sam bought a small kitchen table, and they promised to deliver it to his home the same day.

“It must be an unusual misfortune with that man,” Sam said to me as we left the house. “In just a short time he has lost two wives. One ran off and the other – who would have thought it – died.”

“In New York anything can happen,” I said with my mouth, but in my heart I was thinking something else. Something that I didn't dare say out loud; that what I was thinking in my heart.

The house still looked nearly empty, and indeed, as I would enter I still didn't feel as though there were even enough chairs for an extra pair of people. Sometimes I would have the impression that it was good that way, that it was nicer that way. The rooms seemed more roomy, lighter, freer. When Goldie was in the house everything was there – more, I thought, no man could possibly wish for or long for.

Sam said that we should try the house clearance sales at least one more time. Eight or nine days later we set out from the house with the following advertisement that Sam had cut out of the newspaper:

A young couple wants to sell out their entire house furnishings, gorgeous mahogany furniture, a grand piano, and other things. Cause: Must move to Colorado for health reasons.

When we arrived at the place, (this time it was on the West Side), we thought we were having hallucinations. Imagine such a thing, we found there the same man with the little beard and the blue spectacles running the whole business of the sale.

“What is this? What does this mean?” Sam asked me.

“Should I know about such misfortune!” I said. Something about the story did not sit well in my mind.

“See,” Sam began calculating, “One week his wife runs away, the next week he becomes a widower, and eight days later he already has another wife, a sick one, that he has to move to Colorado for her health. Either the man is a swindler who is married to a lot of women, or the women were not struck down, and did not fly off. – It is a bluff that he uses for his business.”

“Follow me, Sam, don't buy anything. Let's go home. We will look for another clearance sale, a real one.”

We came back with absolutely nothing. Goldie was very disappointed. This was the first time I saw her a little angry, but even angry she still was lovely. And it did not last very long. It was a little like a small cloud drifting across a clear sky on a beautiful day that momentarily hides the sun – just a minute – no longer – that is how long her anger lasted. Soon she began to smile again, and soon she said laughingly:

“Oy, the both of you are some hard-working men! I think that in reality only women can do the buying. Men don't know how to buy.”

“You know what,” said Sam, “I am going to take out of the bank a hundred dollars and let you try a sale. But don't overpay, be careful.”

“Little fool,” Goldie cut him off in mid-word, not letting him go on. “You don't need to teach me about such things. I will show you that I can buy everything we need in one day's time, and there will be enough left from the hundred dollars for a hat for me – Cha-cha-cha!”

And that is how they left it.

Nu, I can see that you have already written a whole pile of papers, and you are tired. Take a little rest,

drink another glass tea, and afterwards we will end our little story. The end will surprise you so much that you will drop your pen.

Part Three

The Mystery is Solved.

So, where was I? Where did I leave off?

I left off at the point where my friend and his wife were going to test her expertise and she was going to go buy the needed furniture.

Lately, I was in the habit of going to see them nearly every day. For the most part I was able to get by there during the day, when he was not at home, and on rare occasion I was able to stop in during the evening when he was also at home. It was not because I was trying to be there when he was not home, it was just because I had more free time during the day than the evening. Because, as you know, I am a night waiter.

I happened to stop by one afternoon around five, and I saw an express wagon in front unloading packages. My heart told me it was for my married couple. I went up and in truth – I had guessed right. Sam had not yet come home from his route (he delivers newspapers). Goldie was there ripping open various packages. And the rooms were full of pieces of paper, string, lamps, little plates, some glassware, a few Vienna chairs and a round table.

“Ah, Joe!” she called out with joy when she saw me. “Look at what I bought! Take a look at the lamp. It only cost eleven dollars!”

“Eleven dollars?” I asked a little skeptically, “I think I saw the same lamp in a show window marked at four dollars and ninety-eight cents.”

“What are you saying!” she called out a little shocked.

“Just what you heard!” I said, and in that minute I realized that what I said was a cause for her to worry. And I turned my tongue around and said to her: “It doesn't matter, Goldie, it is worth the money. You should use it in good health.”

But Goldie did not answer me. Once again a cloud came across her face, and it didn't even help when I took out a match and lit all three gas lamps. Just a short time ago, I believe, she looked at all the household items she had bought with contentment and pride, and now she looked at them like someone who had been burned out of their home might look at the few things they rescued from the fire and destruction.

I believed, as sure as it was Tuesday in the world, we had given her more sorrow. I felt as though I was a little to blame also. If I hadn't have mixed in with my stupid talk, Goldie wouldn't have thought anything bad, and instead of sitting there dejected and beaten, she would be laughing and smiling like her usual self.

“Goldie,” I said to her from my heart, “Don't let this whole story bother you. As far as Sam is concerned, I guarantee you he won't say anything. I won't let him. I won't even let him show a bad mood.”

“Oy, my friend, if only you understood, if only you knew,” Goldie sobbed.

How can I explain? You can say I am behaving like a woman, but I could not stop myself from crying.

How do you like this story? Nu, you are a writer! Can you tell me why I was crying? See, don't laugh. If you won't stop laughing, I will stop the whole story and you will have to figure out an ending for yourself. I'm telling you, you have no right to laugh at me! If you have some wisdom to impart as to why I was crying that is good, but to laugh, one doesn't laugh at such feelings!

“Goldie,” I said to her, “Talk to me like a good friend, a true friend. Is there some sort of secret connected to the things that you bought?”

“Ah, I can't tell you,” and she began to sob even more.

“Listen, Goldie,” I said to her, “I want you to understand that I am here before you as a friend, who is ready at any time to sacrifice his life for you. If you want, I will take all the blame on myself. I will say to Sam: “I bought all these things myself with my own money and I make them a present to you. And I will give you more money, you should buy everything you need in a real store. Tell me, I beg you, where did you buy all of this?”

“What difference does it make?” she contended, “I can't tell you, and I can't accept your offer. You are after all a stranger.”

“Me a stranger?” I asked her and felt a deep pain in my heart. “Goldie, if you only knew how for the whole time you have never left my thoughts.”

“Excuse me,” she said with a strange coldness, “you forget that you are speaking to a married woman. That is not very nice of you, Mr. Joe.”

“Forgive me,” I said, “you took that wrong.”

“Enough!” She said a little more softly, “We won't speak about it any more. Enough! Sam is coming. I hear his footsteps.”

When Sam came in and saw what was going on in the house with the packages and the furniture, he asked:

“What is going on, Goldie? Where did you buy so many tchotchkes? How much did you spend?”

“See,” responded Goldie, “You men! With you it is always the same question about money. Well, at least look around first and see what I've bought.”

“I see a table with six chairs,” said Sam, “Everything else is tchotchkes. What's with the lamp? Why do you need a lamp? How much did it cost? Probably three or four dollars.”

“Ai, you're a cheap merchant!” I mixed in to try and keep the peace, “If you got a lamp like that for fifteen dollars it would be a bargain. Goldie spent six.”

“I paid eleven,” she said, and flashed an angry look at me, “I don't need you to tell a lie for me.”

“In short,” said Sam cold-blooded, “Tell me, Goldie, how much money is left from the hundred dollars?”

“Four dollars and thirty cents. I won't buy a hat with it.” She laid the money on the table.

“Yes, buy a hat,” said Sam in a much softer tone, “I just want to know where you bought these things. At a clearance sale?”

“Yes,” she answered, “in East 19th Street, by the couple who have to travel to Germany because of an inheritance. You read their advertisement.” She stammered over each word that she spoke.

“Did the man have a trimmed beard?” asked Sam, “Did he wear spectacles?”

“Yes, just as you say,” answered Goldie, “Tell me, do you know him, then?”

“That guy?” said Sam, “I have seen him several times, but I can't understand what sort of a wondrous creature he is. He must be one of the wonders of the world. One could write a book about all of the things he has done in just one month. His first wife ran away and left him only one month ago. A few days later he must have gotten married again, because in about a week he announced that he had become a widower and sold all of his household goods. He didn't even wait for the 30-days of mourning to pass before he married a third wife. Right after the wedding the third wife became sick and they had to move to Colorado for her health, but first they had to sell the contents of their house. It looks like his third wife died before they could make the trip to Colorado. And now it seems the schlamazel has finally caught a little luck. He has married a woman with an inheritance.”

Sam spoke fast, in quick succession, like one would recite a speech that he had learned by heart. It was hard to tell if he was speaking in jest or in earnest. Goldie listened to him with her eyes wide and with her mouth open. And suddenly she covered her face with both hands and began to cry.

“Why are you crying?” Sam asked in amazement.

“Sam,” she said, sobbing, “Sam! Do you know who he is, the man with the trimmed beard and the blue spectacles? That is our Uncle Hershel!”

“Your Uncle Hershel?” Sam yelled in anger, “Goldie, is that the truth I am hearing? Is it true that all of us have been swindled by that scoundrel, that swindler, that bandit, a daemon should enter his father!”

“Have pity, Sam, don't say such things!” Goldie pleaded, “Don't lay a curse on him, it is not his fault. He doesn't know you, he has never seen you before.”

“But he knows you!” thundered Sam and stomped his foot.

“Yes, he recognized me the minute I came in. He explained to me that this is how he runs his business. He comes up with a different story each time he holds a sale, but people really do get good bargains

with him. People, he explained to me, look to profit from other people's misfortune. And when they hear that his wife has run off, or that some other disaster has forced him to sell all of his household goods for little or nothing, they come running to catch the bargains. And after all, everyone, he said, is really getting big bargains, and for whatever I wanted to buy he would give me an additional three percent off the regular price. He asked about you and if you treated me well, and showed me what I should buy. As I counted out the money, he forgot to calculate the three percent. Ach, who would have thought that Uncle Hershel would have dealt with me like that!"

The whole time Goldie was talking, Sam was shaking his head, like someone shakes their head when they see a person who is utterly miserable. When she was finished he said:

"Listen, Goldie, what has happened is over and done. From today on, I am asking that you never mention the name, "Uncle Hershel" to me again. Do you hear? I don't ever want to hear that filthy name again, and if I ever meet him face to face, Joe here is my witness, I will make him a pair of blue eyes."

"Oh, Sam, don't take all of this so much to heart," Goldie pleaded, "We still have a couple hundred dollars in the bank, and we will now be a little more careful. Enough, Sam, let's not eat our hearts out, and you, Joe, why are you rushing to leave?"

"I have to go," I said, "I must go to the restaurant, my work shift begins soon. I hope you will forget about these little troubles. After all, you did buy a lot of nice items there."

"Oh, don't go," she begged, and took me by the hand. "Stay just ten minutes more and try my floden [raisin cakes]. I was so preoccupied today, but still found time to make a floden."

"Ai, floden! Floden!" Sam called out as he danced around the room. "Joe, floden! Floden! I have a wife, an expert in the house! To hell with the furniture! Hurray for my wife's floden!"

Once again the house was cheerful and lively, and the both of them were happy. And me, I was also happy in their joy, and I felt lucky in their good luck. Why? When? I can not understand. Maybe you understand? After all, you are a writer!

The End