

Poverty and Hardship

Volume III from Gezamelete Verk

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A Hump on the Installment Plan

I don't have much to say about Schlome the Presser – With him it is a very short story: He is an over-worked, half-dead worker. Working fifteen hours a day he is killing his soul in a filthy, dark, close Jewish sweating shop and makes his usual five dollars a week. But there is also a problem with that, and that is, that the workers who toil in this blessed shop, must live in the houses, or better said, the pits that are owned by the Boss. And the Boss has as many of these pits as he has 'hands' working in his shop – For each hand, a pit! The pits are horrible! Narrow, dirty, old, cold without air and without light. It doesn't bother Schlome very much.

"I have one worry!" he says, "Who can see it with their eyes? When I come home for the few hours, I am so tired, that I am so to speak, not pleased with God's world."

His wife, his poor Kreyne is pitiful, – But without her, as it will! – To run away from this living grave. But she is a woman and not a fool, she understands that she has nothing to 'trade for a marriage,' as the saying goes, and doesn't say a word about it.

Schlome with his wife, Kreyne, have two children. Beryle is three years old at the time this story transpires, and Moishe'le is exactly eight months at the time this story takes place. He was born at the moment when his father had a steady job and was used to the grave they were living in.

I will not have much to say about Moishe'le. Beryle has lived through all sorts of times: Already in his life he has seen good times (that was three years ago, when his Father still had some strength and earned nine – ten dollars a week); Beryle had also experienced hunger (when his Father had, not thought of today, had slack time), but it doesn't matter – The hardest time of his life will soon come over him.

"Soon, soon," said his Father, "I will send my son out with papers, to be a peddler and he will be a help to me."

Reb Ber will soon conquer his world! We have nothing to say about him. But see, Moishe pains my heart! God knows what will become of Moishe! Moishe'le is, ever since he was born, a pale, sickly child. His little stomach is weak, nearly blind in his eyes, a cough with a bulging belly and feet and hands like birds. Moishe'le is always agitated, always crying, always ill at ease. He is always whining so loud, so heart breaking – a little like a sick old man.

The poor, weak, bitter Kreyne nursed with him day and night, she got no peaceful minute from him. He drew from her the last bit of strength. She was falling off her feet. Yet she petted the child, caressed, kissed and bathed him in motherly tears.

When there was a good, a happy moment, and Moishe'le was quiet for a minute, stopped crying, and whining, then poor Kreyne's face would light up from joy, from happiness; today and then, when the child would smile, the Mother would forget her misery and cares; she completely forgot that she was Kreyne, Schlome the Presser's wife.

Kreyne did for her child whatever she was able to do: What a remedy man told her to do, she did. A neighbor said to smear his heart with milk – Kreyne smeared; another said to rub him down with vinegar – Kreyne rubbed; even Meri the Presser, brought an ointment that she had made herself, and said to rub it in well on the baby's belly – and Kreyne reached for it with both hands. The child endured so much smearing and rubbing that you could no longer distinguish the color of his body, – and Moishe'le was still sick, whined and cried to break your heart. Another woman came to Kreyne and told her something new.

“Have you heard Mrs. Salomon?”

“Yes...” – that captured Kreyne's attention.

“All of us many years ago, my little Abraham was cured with baths.”

“With simple baths?” asked the surprised Kreyne.”

“Nu, certainly. Warm water does a good job of drawing out pains.”

Kreyne, herself, was a little skeptical, but she made Moishe'le a fine bath. The child was a little more happy, but only for a short time.

“God should have mercy,” Kreyne nearly wept, “It didn't help. And such a good bath! I tell you, the first water came out black and thick as glue.”

Kreyne was not finished with women's remedies. She often went to the free dispensary, and since Moishe'le had become sick, he had already ingested a whole pharmacy. And yet he did not get at all better.

And Kreyne's heart was torn apart with worry.

Once, when Moishe'le was in a very bad state, she brought a doctor to the house. She did it on her own, she, the poor Kreyne... She did not like to talk to her husband about the sick child, because she knew that he had a weak, bitter heart when he came home from the shop exhausted and agitated. She knew that for a long time Schlome had dismissed Moishe'le with a wave of the hand.

Sometimes he would, however, take the child in his hands, kiss him, hug him, try to play with him, take him and put him to bed; but if the child did not get still right away, he would get angry, put the child down and turn the Father in Heaven.

“Gewalt, Lord of the World,” he would cry out not with his voice, “Either here or there, either take the sorrow to You, or heal him!”

Kreyne's heart was crushed hearing this. She trembled as before a raging fire, and she tried to be better about handing the child over to her husband.

When the doctor came and looked at the child, he did not write a prescription. He simply told them to take the child outside more, and when summer comes she should take him to a nearby park, and if possible, to keep him there the whole day. The doctor's words were said in such an earnest tone that Kreyne, against her will, believed him, and in two days or so, when there came a beautiful, bright day, Kreyne carried her Moishe'le outside.

She went outside with him for a couple of hours. The child fell asleep. But when the weak mother came home, she felt dead tired. She couldn't feel her hands. She could hardly catch her breath, and then the thought came to her about a baby-carriage.

2.

It was a beautiful, bright early morning. The day was so beautiful and good, that even the good people in the middle of the Jewish Quarter felt some of the freshness and liveliness.

The sun shone, but didn't burn, and its golden rays broke through and penetrated every nook and cranny, and every hole, and smiled.

One ray with a great deal of effort sneaked into the dwelling of Schlome the Presser and shimmering, looked through the window and into the room... A sad room it was, dear brothers – there lived a poor Jewish presser.

And gloom... A sort of hopeless gloom carried over from the empty, dark walls; and gloom carried over from the black beams; and gloom arose from every little thing in the entire room. Some wooden chairs, a table, something resembling a sofa, a bureau which is standing with a support on one broken side, a part of a mirror – that was the furnishings in the room. Those were the contents of the front room. In the bedroom, the sun's ray was afraid to look...

On a chair sat a woman with a pale, yellow complexion. In her arms she held a child and rocked, and rocked him as usual... That is how Krenye the presser woman would get the sickly Moishe'le to sleep.

She sang him a song. From deep in her chest she brought out various tones, which came forth without any order: Her voice was so sad, so whining, so heartbreaking, and suddenly she let out a light note, a little bit like the ray of sunshine, which licked the wall, and wanted to enter into the old presser's wife's heart and illuminate it.

No one had composed the words to her song.

What words were not there! She promised her child shoes, a little hat, good things and a baby carriage; there she told him a story, that a little white goat stood under his crib, the white goat had gone to make a deal and would bring back a carriage full of almonds, and she promised him that his Father, the Presser, would become rich and Moishe'le would be good, and he would be refreshed and healthy...

The child fell asleep and his pale little face took on a sleepy look.

Kreyne took a cushion, laid it on the lounge, pulled up a chair and put the child down. She sat down on the chair, supported her head on one side, and became lost in thought.

A baby carriage – that is what her womanly thoughts centered around. A sweet fantasy came to her mind: A beautiful, warm evening, the sky is blue and strewn with silvery stars, a woman pushes a fine carriage, in the carriage is a baby.

"Where are you going?" asks a passing neighbor, "Where are you taking him, Mrs. Salomon?"

"To the park!" Kreyne answers.

And she is, indeed, soon in the park. Her Moishe'le lays there refreshed, healthy. He looks at his Father and smiles.

“What foolishness is this?” An unseen, angry, unpleasant voice broke into her fantasy, “Are you crazy? Carriages? And where is the husbands pants? Beryl'le's shoes? And the debt to the grocery store? The rent is due... You do not have a penny anywhere... What, carriage? Are you too sick to carry him in your arms?...”

A shadow passed over Kreyne's face and heart began to ache, ache...

“Ah, what, me?” Kreyne began to answer, “And what is my entire life? A sick child to carry in my arms?... I can't... I don't have the strength... I am sick...”

“Nu, but you have no money!” the voice continued, but a little weaker and tired now.

Kreyne thought for a moment how to answer these questions.

Long, long the poor presser's wife thought. She could not come to a conclusion. You could see how her face became darker and sadder... Suddenly it came to her, standing up... Her face became happier and her eyes lighter – The Mother had figured out a way to get a carriage for her little Moishe'le...

The way to do it was simply that Kreyne had decided to talk to a peddler about buying a carriage on installments.

“He will certainly give me one,” she thought, she won't rent it, she will give him a few cents more, and she will be able to pay it off. She will, somehow, put aside a quarter or as much as she can.

She will not tell her husband, – Kreyne continued to plan – he would for certain be against it. If he knew about it he would not let her do it. He would be certain to say that there were a lot of less expensive things. Ay, what, but he would see the carriage... Nu, she would find an excuse. She would say a neighbor loaned it to her... He knows very well! Nu, if God wills it, she does pay for it, then he can know.

It was not difficult for Kreyne to carry out the plan, because the peddler she had in mind came nearly every day to Mrs. Jacobson who lived in the same hallway two doors down. And sure enough that same day the peddler came and Kreyne brought him into her apartment.

The poor presser's wife laid out what she wanted from the peddler who would now decide her fate. Gewalt, she appeared so earnest when she promised to pay the money, she appeared with every word to come from her heart, her soul – and yet the peddler stood there somewhat cold, quiet, pretending not to understand. The poverty which was evident in every corner, the fact that Kreyne wanted the carriage hidden from her husband – that gave the peddler doubts, and he was reluctant to put out the money.

He remained silent – and Kreyne's heart trembled and pounded, and pounded...

The first sound from Kreyne, her promise, her speech, her pleading – That reassured the peddler that she would sell her shirt to pay. And yet...

“Nu... You... are afraid?”

“Very... Mrs. Salomon. What's what?”

“Why are you silent?”

“I know, one is silent...”

“Will you... Will you give me a carriage?”

“I know, eh... A carriage...”

The peddler didn’t know what to do. He did not want to lose a customer, but he also didn’t want to take the risk. Then, one happy thought loosened his heavy tongue. He remembered a few days ago seeing, in a famous store where they sold used furniture as he was wandering through it, an old baby carriage. “Good,” he thought, “I will get the little carriage, the merchandise will cost me nearly nothing, I will clean it up a little, some paint, some varnish and it will be all right. The gamble will be not much, and perhaps to win – is certainly good.”

“Yes, Mrs. Salomon... I have a little carriage... But a little used.”

“I don’t care!” said the happy Mrs. Salomon in one breath, “so long as my Moishe’le, he should live long, and be healthy...”

Both parted happy.

3.

The very next morning Kreyne had a carriage in the house, the very same one that the peddler had remembered.

The day was warm and bright, and Kreyne was in seventh heaven.

Since the warm spring days arrived, Berke was seldom at home. He was always running around outside. Today, however, Reb Ber was sitting at home, and that was because of the carriage.

Berke could not get enough of looking at the newly arrived object: he handled it with his little hands, studied it from all sides, pushed it around the room and called out from joy.

Kreyne dressed her schlimazel in the best rags she had; For Ber Mama made an operation with which he was, unfortunately, not very happy with, namely: She took a little water in her hand, and washed his face, and with a rough towel she scrubbed his nose so that it caused poor Beryle to pop open his eyes. When Kreyne took the towel away from his face, the tip of his little nose was red from the friction, but under the nose the dirt remained, as if out of spite, unmoved.

Kreyne managed the carriage well, carrying it down the steps to outside, and placed Berke behind it. Soon she took Moishe and placed him in the carriage.

When she began to push it, Berke also wanted to ride. At first the Mama would not let him, but as Berke started to complain she satisfied him by also putting him in the carriage.

They continued on.

When Kreyne had gone a long way from home, she heard the carriage begin to creak.

“It appears that something has broken...” she said to herself, and her face turned white as chalk.

“Get out, my little genius, from the wagon!” said the frightened Kreyne to Berke.

A dark day! Berke did not want to hear the suggestion.

Wailing! - The carriage gave its last gasp, fell apart and collapsed. The two passengers fell to the hard sidewalk – Beryle’le on top and the troubled one on the bottom.

A whine, a cry..

“My children!” Kreyne screamed, and for a few seconds stood there like a dead person.

A small crowd assembled, and some of the people helped poor Kreyne. The people took up the children and one goodhearted boy picked up the broken carriage.

The children wailed from pain and from fright.

“Oy, what a misfortune! Oy, what a disaster!” Kreyne sobbed.

The boy hoisted the carriage on his shoulders, and so the sad procession turned back in the direction of the center of the Jewish Quarter, and to the calm of Schlome the Presser’s home.

When Kreyne came a little closer to home, she was a little more collected and remember that she had a husband at home that she would have to give an account to.

She put Berke down, and told the boy who had carried the carriage that he could leave her by herself.

The boy put the carriage down. He had knocked something together so that the carriage could still roll if you were careful. Kreyne thanked the good boy and carefully pushed the carriage toward home.

When she reached the right house, she covered the carriage with one of Moishe’s cloths, and quietly carried it into the building.

Berke was given a little piece of bread with sugar, and he was quiet.

When the Presser’s wife looked the children over, she found that Berke was all right, and had very little damage. Moishe on the other hand had received a blow on the back and it was red and swollen.

The frightened mother laid a compress on the wound.

She gave the hungry, sick child a breast and he was soon asleep.

Berke got restless and went out to play in the street.

When things got a little quiet, Kreyne took a good look at the carriage.

“That thing could have broken his heart, his body and life!” she cursed the peddler.

She soon sat down, wringing her hands, banged her head against the wall, gave out several deep sighs, and felt like she was going to cry.

Kreyne hid the carriage so that no one could see it.

Kreyne got done quickly with her husband. She told him a story that the children had taken a fall from the table, and that answered everything. Berke even tried to tell his Father what happened, but Kreyne smacked his head, and the Father thought that he was just babbling.

She treated Moishe'le's wound, and waited for the peddler to return. She would split his head open.

The peddler came, but Kreyne did not split his head open. When he opened his mouth, she stood there trembling.

The peddler yelled about two claims. First, why had she put two children in the carriage (Kreyne had told him about it), and secondly, that if she would not pay him, he would take her to court and demand payment from her husband.

In short, Kreyne came to terms with the peddler. She would pay him half. The peddler would take the carriage back, and when she had paid for it, he would bring her a good, new carriage.

In case you have forgotten, from the hit that Moishe suffered, he grew a hump.

Is He Guilty?

Rosenski has a candy and cigar store in a distant and low population corner of the Bronx.

It was a late hour in a pretty, mild, early summer evening.

Mr. Rosenski looked out over the avenue at the cigar store opposite his, and when he saw that the gas was turned off, he did the same in his own store.

But he did not close the doors, and did not go to sleep in the back of the store where he lived with his family. Instead he took a chair outside, sat himself down next to the store and lost himself in deep, deep thought...

Outside was deathly still...

After a while the stillness was broken by the barking of a dog, from the crowing of a rooster, which apparently from too much life, had forgotten the difference between day and night, and also from the roar of the trains which rushed by just a few blocks away.

“Terrible, terrible that there is no luck...” Rosenski murmured as he gave out a heavy, deep sigh.

Rosenski did, indeed, have no luck.

At home, on the other side of the ocean, in the old Minsk that he knew, he was an intelligent young man; here in America he became a kneepants-maker, and after eight years time he had five children – a wife he brought from the old country – and a lung disease.

Doctors told him to stop working, and if they hadn’t told him to stop, he would have stopped on his own. And that is because his feet refused to move and turn the wheel of the sewing machine.

Rosenski then turned to the whole world of country men, friends, relatives, ancestral merit and asked for benevolence loans. He collected a hundred and fifty dollars and bought a newspaper stand and for several years made something like a living.

A woman came to him in a big, torn, patched shawl, a fiery, debauched woman with a hateful face and an even more hateful mouth, and overturned a table with newspapers onto the sidewalk. Howling, she would block the way of the passersby and pull them to her. Rosenski felt like she was taking from his weak, pale children their last bit of bread, little by little...

He put up with it for a short while. Rosenski was forced to sell his news stand for a few dollars, and was once again without a means of making a living...

Weak in health, with five children, one after another on his neck, and without a business – such a state can only be understood by another businessman who has been through it.

Rosenski began to eat through the few dollars he got from his unlucky news stand... And the man set out like a burning flame...

He searched for a business. And he searched in every area where there were few people, where he should, God forbid, never encounter a woman in a big shawl...

The man arrived here, where we just met him, and he opened a candy store.

In the beginning the business went badly. There was nothing for a piece of dry bread, only enough for the rent for the store...

Rosenski's children became more and more pale... His wife turned black as earth... And he nearly went mad with his troubles. But little by little the store did better, and began to make him a living.

The unlucky Rosenski held his breath...

Across the avenue, a little farther, was a two-story, little wood cottage, with a store on the ground floor. The cottage had been occupied by a shoemaker who used the ground floor for his trade, and lived on the second floor with his family.

It happened that the shoemaker moved out, and the cottage remained empty.

"What would happen if someone were to open a candy and cigar store," Rosenski thought as he looked out at the empty store, and when he thought about it, he felt as though a jolt to his head... And his eyes grew dark...

And the weak Rosenski and his pale children, and his poor wife looked, with dead hearts, at the empty store, and there could not be now or ever a greater threat than the wooden cottage across the street...

That which had terrified the poor family, finally happened.

An older father with a picture-perfect daughter rented the cottage and opened a candy and cigar store.

If Rosenski would encounter dark, cold death, his fear would not be so great as the terrifying horror which enveloped him when he saw across the street the now candy store...

Gentlemen, nothing in the world can so frighten you; the dangerous enemy can not instill such horror, such dark terror, as the thought that your wife and innocent children should die from hunger...

One day Rosenski was beside himself, and looked like some one who had just arose from his sick bed.

Rosenski had comforted his frightened family with the hope, that nothing bad would come from that store... But in his own mind he thought otherwise... And at night, when he lay down to sleep, he would weep silently...

"What do people have against me, why do they hunt me like a wild animal? Why do they take from me with such cruelty, the food from my weak, hungry children?" Rosenski asked himself from his heart... And he felt as though he would go crazy from the pain...

Time passed... The new candy store, which Rosenski felt was competition, was still standing and Rosenski saw it was doing better and better.

There across the way was an old, greener man, who attracted customers through pity and respect; a picture-perfect young girl, who attracted customers through love, and Rosenski's store was quickly sinking.

Every day customers would leave Rosenski's and go over to the store across the street.

Rosenski felt as though people were eating him alive, his wife, his children, and he had to watch helplessly, and go mad with anguish.

Rosenski's situation got worse and worse until it reached a terrible stage.

The first of the month was coming – there was not a cent for the rent.

He owed money on the merchandise in his store, and he had to settle his bills... Where would he get it?

They didn't eat, they didn't drink, they were literally dying of hunger... And there, across the street, was the robber... The filthy robber... But what can one do?...

Across the street there were two people, an older father with a young daughter who were lying in wait for the unlucky Rosenskis, sliced them up bit by bit... Sapped their blood drop by drop... But what help is there for it?

And Rosenski sits there and watches one of his customers go across the street...

The same customer he had acquired so slowly, now tormenting him to death... The customer went in and Rosenski felt the pain, like someone was ripping him apart limb by limb...

*

It is late... Late in the night and Rosenski sits in the deep darkness, thinking bitter thoughts...

What to do? How could he rescue himself? The waters were rising up to his chin... He was drowning... He would suffocate... Next to him his wife was drowning... The children were drowning. They reached out their hands to their father, begging to be rescued... What can he do?

There came to him various desperate thoughts. The thoughts slung him around like in a fever, first cold then hot... They took hold of him, then disappeared... Only one thought, a frightful thought, held him fast and would not let him go...

He would take his life... He was insured for five hundred dollars. His family would receive the money and they would be saved... He had no other choice... There was no other way for him to save them... There was no glimmer of hope...

Rosenski imagined the scene when they would discover his dead body... How the children would scream and cry... A shudder went over his whole body... And he began to cry... And he wept in silence...

Instinctively, he cast his eyes over to the source of his misfortune. In the direction of that horrible store.

What is that? Smoke? A strange feeling took hold of him, a happiness it seemed... But it was a frightful, horrible happiness... He rubbed his eyes... Yes... Smoke... Rising from the store... Now he could see flickers of flame... The store was burning!!!

He is saved... His children swim to the shore... But then he remembered, that there on the second floor were two people... A old, gray father and a young girl. They would burn in the fire!

In Rosenski the humanity awoke in him... He forgot his whole situation... People were in danger...

“Run, Rosenski, break out the window... Wake them up quickly...” It was as though someone had let out a frightening cry, and he got up from where he was sitting...

“Someone will put out the fire, the store will remain...” A cold voice whispered in his ear, and Rosenski remained standing, frozen with at terrible feeling.

“They will burn, run!... Faster... Faster!”

“The store will remain... You would have taken your own life... No other way out.”

“They will burn... Hurry!! Hurry!! Hurry!! Run... Rescue... People burning... Run faster... Hurry!!!”

Rosenski shuddered.

The two voices quickly made a compromise: “He will wait a while... Until the store is lost... And then there will still be time to save the living.”

Rosenski quickly went into his store, and somewhat afraid of his own frightening “I” he ran to the bedroom... He threw himself onto the bed... Covered his head with a pillow... And trembling as from the cold, but without any sort of calculation, almost like his brain had turned to stone, he lay there... And waited...

And suddenly he came to himself, flung the pillow away and ran in his store...

A blood-red glow came to him through the window... Outside he could hear a commotion.

“Lost!” Rosenski heard a frightened voice... And he felt a cold sweat over his whole body.

“Fire... Fire...” He began to wake his wife and children.

“Where? Where?” His frightened children and frightened wife flew from their beds.

“Across the way... The store... Rosenski was a little afraid to show his face to his own family, and like a madman he ran from the store...

It’s burning!

The house was burning like a candle... Blood-red tongues of fire rose from the windows.

“There are people in there... There are people in there...” shouted the people in the street. You could hear the sirens of the fire company on its way...

Rosenski was calmer for a while... Then suddenly... Oh, a horrible, terrible scene!

The father and the daughter appeared at one of the windows... Both enveloped in flames... And then they fell... Among the flames...

The street was filled with the terrified, horrified screams of the spectators...

Rosenski's hair stood on end... For a while he stood there without being able to speak... But then quickly ran back to his store, pale as death...

"Lost, lost!" He cried out without much force, then he fainted...

Later, after the fire had been put out, they found the two burned bodies of the father and the daughter.

They were found with their arms around one another...

*

Is Rosenski guilty?

Lost the Boss?

Slowly, stopping periodically, the horse pulled the apple wagon. Walking behind the wagon was a man in his forties, and a young 12-year old boy.

The man was the owner, the boss of the wagon with the apples, and the boy was a paid helper, a barker and at the same time a carrier of apples to the customers.

It was the beginning of winter and the end of the day. The weather was very bad, turbulent; a cold, cutting wind was blowing and it did not stop spitting a cold, misty rain which penetrated through and through with the wet and the cold.

A light summer jacket and a pair of light knee-pants did not protect the boy very well from the gruesome weather. In many places the knee-pants showed through his bare skin, and his toes stuck out from his tattered shoes. He shivered and trembled from the cold... And also from hunger. His small sunken face was pale and blue, swollen from the damp, and frozen over from the cold.

"Five cents for a whole lot!" Called out the boss with a torpid voice.

"Ayy, apples!" The boy called after him with a high pitched, childish, heart wrenching voice.

But no one asked for apples, and the horse took another step forward.

"Are we going home soon?" the boy asked his boss, as his teeth chattered together.

On this bad day the boss's business was also bad, and he did not think it necessary to answer the boy's question.

"Five cents for a whole lot!"

"Ayy, apples!"

"Are we going home soon?" the boy asked again, and his childish heart tightened from the anguish.

The boss gave the boy a slow, sharp look, and on his face he showed a wild pleasure, one would think, that his wild displeasure from the poor business today, was dampened by the pleasure of looking at the painful agony of his hired boy.

"If I knew," the boss answered, "that you were such a lazy boy, I wouldn't have taken you for anything."

"I'm not lazy," the boy answered, "I'm cold," his voice trembled and there were tears in his eyes.

"Cold?" the boss mockingly imitated the boy, "What's it to me? A quarter you want to have."

"Five cents for a whole lot!"

"Ayy, apples!" cried out a voice full of tears.

And the horse slowly walked on and on. The boy felt like he was falling off his feet as he held on to the wagon.

Sammy (that is what they called the boy) had become an apple crier for the first time today. Prior to this day he peddled the evening newspaper. Sammy's father peddled suspenders; he is an unusual beggar. Sammy did not know his mother, she died five years ago – he does have a step-mother. Sammy has a seven-year-old, pale, sickly little sister from the dead mother and three little brothers from the step-mother with his father, the suspender peddler, a wife with five children, and all have swollen bellies from hunger. The worst of all was Sammy. In the first place he is the oldest of the children. And in the second place there was no one to take him in, his mother was dead.

Whenever Sammy's father became bitter in his heart, he took it out on his oldest offspring. When he comes home from his peddling, and his heart is bitter and agitated, he locks on to Sammy. He finds some pretext to beat him without mercy; he beats him, and beats him until the child kisses his hand, his clothing, until the boy stays under his hand... The step-mother observes this inquisition, remains silent, but her heart swells with pleasure...

"Emmy," Sammy's little sister, loves her brother very much. Even though she is still young, she feels it that she and her brother have no mother, that they are isolated in the family, and so held on to one another through the pain, almost as though they shared one soul, but what could Emmy do to help her brother?

When she saw Sammy being beaten, she would stand in a corner and wring her hands, her heart would die from the fear and pain, her eyes hidden under the tears, but she was afraid to cry.

Sammy peddled the evening newspaper late into the night and brought his earnings home... And woe to him, woe, if he brought home too little.

"Thief, you spent it!" his father would scream at him. He would beat him and send him to bed without supper.

When autumn arrived and the bad weather came with it, Sammy's situation got a lot worse. In the first place, when his father would come home after peddling all day, frozen and soaking wet his heart would be more agitated and bitter, and Sammy would get an extra portion. Secondly, in rainy weather Sammy would sell a lot fewer newspapers and therefore have to give himself over to judgment and accountability.

Yesterday evening Sammy peddled his newspapers as usual. The whole evening and late into the night it did not stop pouring down rain. Sammy's business was very bad, he barely, just barely made expenses. When Sammy got home he quietly laid the left-over papers along with the few pennies he made on the table, and quietly tried to hide himself in a corner. Sammy was soaked to the bone, and freezing cold. He was pale as death.

His father didn't beat him, but he cast an angry, evil look his way. When Sammy had warmed up a bit his father said to him:

"Sammy, come here!"

Sammy went to his father with a bowed head.

"Sammy, what is this?" his father pointed at the newspapers.

“It poured down rain,” Sammy stuttered.

“Silence!” his father yelled, “You’re still talking?!”

Both stood there still.

“If you do the same kind of business tomorrow,” the father said, “I will kick you out of the house. I can no longer feed you, go, earn money, you are healthier than I am.”

Sammy shuddered.

He did not sleep the whole night. The mean words from his angry father did not stop ringing in his ears. Sammy thought about the coming day – Ach, how he wished that tomorrow would be dry, and no rain would fall. But the wind was about to lift the house from its foundations, and the rain lashed at the windows and the roof. He could not go to sleep. He began to think about a better business, about a better living. He decided to totally dump the newspapers, and become a crier for an apple wagon. The job was more certain, and there would be apples to eat. Sammy thought about it and wondered why he didn’t do it a long time ago.

At the break of day Sammy was up and out on the street. He did not have to wait long. In just a few minutes a wagon came down the avenue with apples. A man was driving the wagon and no boy was to be seen. Sammy’s heart stopped and he went to the boss of the wagon. Soon Sammy was a happy, lucky boy running upstairs and told his father that he got the job.

“Be a mensch,” his father said.

“See, bring us some good apples,” his step-mother added.

Sammy grabbed a piece of bread, and like lightning he ran to his new boss...

The horse walked slowly step by step.

“What, have you fallen speechless?” the boss yelled, “Sammy, why aren’t you crying out?”

“Ayy – apples!” Sammy yelled.

“Here, go to that house” the boss pointed out a specific house, “knock on door after door, if you sell out come right back for another pail of apples, if not, go over the roof to the next building... Hurry!”

And Sammy hurried off to the indicated house. The hall was covered in carpet from door to door. But no one needed apples... In the tenant’s rooms fires already burned, from some apartments one could hear happy children babbling and laughing, and from one the sound of a piano.

Sammy knocked on one door, it opened, parents sat together with their children at the table and drank tea.

“Apples?” asked Sammy.

“No,” someone answered and angrily slammed the door.

In a second place Sammy saw the children sitting and eating. The hungry Sammy took in the smells of the food, and the knot in his heart hurt even more. In another place the door opened quickly to reveal a cheerful, prettily-dressed young girl.

“Annie, come here,” he heard behind her a woman’s voice, “Don’t run around the hallway, you will get a chill.” The woman soon came to the door and took the girl away.

Sammy saw all of this and it made him jealous, and made him feel bad. Sammy worked his way to the top floor and did not sell any apples. Sammy went up the stairs which led to the roof. He heard how the rain pounded on the tin roof, and he stood there a while. In the hallway it was warm and dry. Sammy, the exhausted, cold boy, wanted to rest.

“How would the boss know?” the boy thought, “He will think it just took me longer.” Sammy sat down as though his legs had been pulled out from under him, and rested his head on the apple pail...

Sammy thought about the children, who were eating dinner; about the children who had something to drink; about the children who were playing... He began to try and imagine that he was also one of them... And ate, and drank and played like one of them... In the hallway it was dry and warm... A dream began to take hold of Sammy’s wet, cold limbs... He gave himself a frightened slap, but soon was asleep once again.

The boss did not wait long for the boy; he had made his calculations, the day was nearly over, he was about to send the boy home, he owed him a quarter, and the pail with the apples was not worth that.

The apple boss let slip a harsh word from his lips, and drove on – He headed back home.

Who knows how long Sammy would have slept if a tenant in the building didn’t come to the roof to see if the wind had blown away the washing she had hung out on the roof.

Sammy felt someone give him a good kick with their foot... He didn’t know if he was living or dead; with alarm he looked all around. Next to him stood big, fat, sturdy woman.

“Get away from there!” the woman yelled, “You do-nothing, that is no place to sleep.”

“Apples!” Sammy stuttered, hastily getting up and he began running down the stairs. When Sammy exited the hallway it was already dark.

“Ayy, apples” he cried out searching for the apple wagon with his eyes. – But the wagon was nowhere to be seen.

Lost and afraid, the boy began to run. He ran into the avenue, from there to the street, and on to another avenue... The wagon with the apples had disappeared. In that moment Sammy imagined his home, his father, and he understood fully the horror of his situation. He stood motionless in total confusion. He did not know which way to run. Above all he was terrified of going home... And the rain pounded harder and harder...

The Accountant

My heart aches for you, you pale child, you poor child from the Jewish ghetto...

Deep in thought he crossed over Ludlov Street.

"Good evening, Mister," someone called to me.

I turned around. Walking next to me was a Jewish peddler with a big basket hanging from a strap around his neck. The foreign face of the basket carrier seemed to be familiar, but I could not remember where and when I had seen it.

"You don't recognize me?" he asked me with a smile.

"No," I answered, "I don't think so."

"But I know you."

"How so?"

"You rescued me once from danger," the peddler informed me. I was curious as to why I wouldn't have in my memory a record of such a heroic action, as rescuing someone from danger.

"It seems you have made a mistake, uncle," I answered in all earnest.

"Never mind," the man answered, "I am, as you know, a peddler, and when I see a person I will always remember them."

"But when? Where? And how?" I was beginning to get interested.

"It was in the beginning of winter," the peddler answered quite slowly, "It was in the evening, and I was walking with my basket along Ketrin Street. Earlier there was a fresh, wet snow and for the do-nothings they were doing a good business... As I walked, suddenly a crash! Someone hit me in the head with a hard snowball. My heart stopped from the pain... I looked around. A whole gang of do-nothings were throwing snowballs at me... They were trying to kill me, but then you came along, and they took aim at you; and I was able to get away."

Well, now I could see that it was very possible that the peddler did not make a mistake, and to continue denying the fact that I had saved him from danger, from my side would be too great a slight, so I answered him:

"You see, that is very possible, my friend."

"I recognized you!" the peddler answered, pleased with his victory.

I remained silent; I walked on, and the man whose life I had saved, walked by my side.

The peddler began to sigh.

"Why are you sighing?" I asked.

"I have troubles. A man must curse the day he was born," the peddler said, and again gave out a heavy, heavy sigh.

"What is the problem? What is the problem? Why are you so angry?" I asked.

"It's this," the peddler answered, "Nothing, a person not a person, I am poor, no one thinks about me and I eat dirt."

"You aren't making a living?"

"Nah, one makes a living like it is, more than the do-nothings, the pests eat up the living, but that doesn't matter. I am a peddler in the world and everyone knows that when one wants to live in the world one has to work to exhaustion, fling gall and spit blood, everybody knows that, but I have another problem, God is punishing me for another reason."

"Nu, and what is that?" I asked, "Some trouble with the license, with the police?"

"No," the man answered, "One is accustomed to dealing with those things; I have problems with children."

"With children?" I asked automatically.

"Yes, with children, or better put, with one child, my oldest son..."

The peddler was quiet for a while, I gave him a good look, his face was lost in sorrowful thoughts.

"Listen," he suddenly said, "Who are you?"

I introduced myself.

"Please don't take offense," the peddler quickly remarked, "You, also, do not appear to be a wealthy man."

"A poor man," I let him know.

"We're brothers," the peddler said happily, "I will pour out my heart to you. You see this heavy basket, it is nothing, it is light as a feather compared to the black troubles in my heart... If you knew... Oy, what a wound I have!"

The peddler let out a heavy sigh.

"Listen!" he hastily asked, "Will you hear me out?"

"Certainly, why not?"

"As I have already said," the peddler began his story, "I have big problems with my son. For a poor man luck should not have cleverness come into play... When one has children they should be children without cleverness, children who will go out and earn something once they get a little older. A clever child is by a poor man, a great misfortune. Take my Abraham for example. By now he should be a help to me, he is, thanks to God, twelve years old. Nu, he has a good little head... He is an accountant and a nothing... And I eat dirt from him... It is, a pity on him, and a pity on me..."

"An accountant?" I asked out of curiosity.

“Yes, an accountant, just like I told you. My Abraham’ele is from my first wife – I now have a second. When he was five years old he lost his mother, and since then he is an orphan with me. When I came over here to the Golden America, he was eight years old. In the old country he was a good student, only here I quickly saw that in Kheder he was making ‘monkey business.’ I wanted to quickly harness him in a yoke, and teach him how to earn a penny. But first, he is by nature a fragile child, and still looks like a baby. In the second place, he is, as one says, green, and in the third place I was told right away that I could get in serious trouble if I didn’t keep him in school. You surely know already that there is a strict law that one must keep children in school!”

“I know, I know,” I confirmed the peddler’s last words, and he continued with his story.

“Columbus is no fool. What’s it to him that children learn to know black dots on paper? Should the fathers get headaches over it? In short, I sent him to school and let him stay for three years. And that from a poor man, like I am! In the local school and in Columbus’s school, it did not go as well as it could have, not, God forbid, because he had a bad brain, or because he is lazy, God forbid! Just the accounting, the unlucky accounting took him off the path. What a bitter misfortune it is! That he only wanted to learn accounting, it took him over like a magic spell, and all of the other subjects went to hell, such that in the school they were not at all pleased with him. – Calculating, accounting, that is his life! There he feels like a fish in water. Counting, counting always, counting by day, counting by night, preoccupied, oblivious, mixed up, a little like an old man, a little like he had a mountain of work to do. A slate he had then, and still it is not enough. Whenever he can find a scrap of paper he fills it with numbers also. In every apartment we have lived in, the walls have been covered in calculations. And not just the walls, the chairs, the tables, the wash tub, everything is covered with numbers, as I said to you, we should both have many lucky and healthy years, listen to me, no matter how many blows are inflicted, it doesn’t help, it is a true curse! Except for accounting, the wide world means nothing to him. What I haven’t done to him, since I took him out of school?! I tried giving him out to work in a grocery store for a dollar a week and something. Nu, what could I do since I am a poor man, and have, God’s name be blessed, three other children, little snouts that beg for food, only one has to push them back, it’s no use. In the beginning he was like gold, a kosher neck. But at first he was, unfortunately, weak, and second he was preoccupied, oblivious, not thinking from here to there... And in what is he preoccupied? In accounting! Nu, isn’t that a dark misfortune!

“I tried to send him out as a peddler, a dark day, can’t make a penny, just gets sick. I tried sending him to the shop to the sewing machines. To the shirt makers, to my wife’s brother to work under his hand. Nothing, even at the shirt shop he could do nothing! He sat by the machine thinking, grabbed a pencil and even there in the shirt shop, by the sewing machine, he wrote down numbers and calculations. I begged my brother-in-law, he should take pity on him, he should be like his own father and beat him. Well, he did not spare any blows, I also gave him my share, and what? Nothing! Nothing came of it... The boy was like a dead person, and I didn’t listen to my wife, and took him out of the shop... I am after all a father, a dark, bitter, poor peddler... And yet a father and also ... a mother. He is after all an orphan by me...”

The peddler’s voice trembled and it seem to me that he was crying.

“He could have been a good boy,” he went on to say, “If it weren’t for the counting, he cares for nothing else, not for food, not for clothes, quiet, calm, like still water, doesn’t care for friends, doesn’t joke, perhaps he would have become a good boy, if he didn’t fall into accounting... I should know? You understand, he must have a brilliant head on his shoulders, but what does that do for my dark poverty? In the right hands one might be able to make a respectable person out of him, but for me he is a curse in the house, and believe me, I often wish that he would just die...

“Calculating! Nothing, ask what, ask who? Counting... He get books about it and sits over them for a long time, day and night, and goes out like a light... And other times he is in such deep thought, lost in accounting such that you could burn him with hot irons and he wouldn’t notice, it is funny to tell it – At times when I see that my Abraham’ele is absorbed, going around without his head, thinking about a difficult calculation... I begin to scream at him, yell, beat on him. He looks me in the eye, and pleading somewhat, he says to me: “Father, go ahead and hit me, but get it over fast, then leave me alone.” Nu, how do you like that?

“Calculating, accounting, I scream, instruct, hit, rip him apart, the mother yells, curses, and sometimes gives him a slap, and nothing, no one can break him... And it is a great problem... In other times he is so happy, so well adjusted, the eyes glow, his face looked peaceful... Lively... What happened? He worked out a calculation. But when I get angry, he become pale as death, and begins to plead:

“Father hit me, kill me, but don’t do that... If you burn the books, I will also set myself on fire...” I was shocked and frightened by that.”

The peddler looked around.

“Nu, what am I doing, what am I doing?” He looked me right in the eye, and his face looked distraught, “What am I doing? What can I do? How do I break him? And he must be broken...”

The peddler said something else but I did not hear it very well: Abraham’s appearance... The young accountant with the glowing eyes, with the pale, martyr’s face, was materializing before my eyes and I considered him.

“What did you say,” I gave myself a shake.

“One must break him!” the peddler muttered, almost to himself.

“Break him?” I asked and wanted to talk about it further.

“Good night to you,” the peddler said suddenly and disappeared into the entrance of a tenement house, with a lot, a lot of fire escapes...

“One must break him, one must break him!” I kept hearing over and over the last words of the peddler, and my heart clenched in pain...

Who?

It is May; It is a beautiful morning. I don't have any work to do, nu, sit by the window and look out into the narrow yard.

If I lift my head a little, I can see a little of the pretty, blue sky... My heart is full of troubles and wounds and this little bit of blue, clean sky strokes the wounds so pleasantly, but stroking agitates it and makes the pain more evident.

The little piece of blue sky speaks to me in a silent language of a beautiful, sweet, but for me, an unending sad story... It tells me, that somewhere far, far beyond our little yard, behind the tenement house, far, far from our suffocating, crowded street, one does not see just a little piece of sky... Rather wide, deep, expanse like the sea, and at the distant edge it descends and touches below the joyous, and clad in green, earth in its arms... And there it is so good... So free and sweet...

Ach, how uneasy I become!

I tire myself out looking up, and lower my head... Fire escape... Poles, lines... Lines and lines of washing...

My eyes fall upon a fire escape. Spread out on one is an old, half-gutted mattress with a torn sheet, a heap of dirty books, brushes, clothes pins and filthy rags. And between this filth can be seen a flowerpot with fresh earth, from which springs a fresh, green bloom...

I look at it and it seems to me that the young blossom dreamed of a nice, open lot, where, it told me, there was some clear, blue skies. And it seemed to me that the bloom had a heart, a childish, innocent heart and this heart was yearning and would go... Yearning for life, air, light and freedom... And go out, go out just like my own sick heart. And it seemed to me, that the blossom cried with quiet tears...

"Is this my place?" it seemed to me it asked me with reproach, "I will rot before I can bloom..."

And it pained me, it pained me!...

One of the neighbors raised the window blinds and opened a window... I could see a shimmering, brass cage, and in the cage was a napping canary. At a nearby window sat a cat who cast a bloodthirsty look at the poor, frail bird.

The bird awoke and looked up into the sky... Perhaps it saw the same little bit of blue sky which looked down on us in the yard and teased us who were suffocating, robbed of life and luck.

The bird dunked its head in a small, dirty cup of water which was in its prison... It gave a shake, flapped its wings and began to chirp.

It seemed to me that the bird cried and begged to be away... Away where there were the green trees grew... Grass... Roses... Flowers. Where the beautiful skies were free... Where the air is sweet and fresh... Where there sang... Danced... Played, many, many free birds... And it cried and spoke, spoke and cried and poured out so much longing, so much sadness...

No use, my poor bird, to be there... Where your home should be... In such a free place, for which God had created you and sent you down from the heavens...

No use, don't cry, it won't help! You have been purchased and must stay in the shimmering cage, without air and without light... Perhaps they will protect you from the evil cat... Who thirsts to kill you... But they will protect you only to have you die a slow death...

"Take care of the child," my wife says to me, and I take my sweet baby in my arms.

Deborah'nu, my dear, frail, pitiful, sickly child... Thin, pale skin, small bones... Goes out like burning candle... Oy, how my heart pains me.

The mother says, "She is teething."

But it seems to me, my child, that you are feeling the same things felt by the crying bird and the young bloom, which sprung up beside the filthy mattress.

There in a free place... You would become plump and healthy. You cheeks would be full and rosy... You would bloom and happily laugh with a silvery laughter.

Oy, my child, my child, I can't help you... You father "lies in a grave..." and must rot there beside us in this living tomb, far from air and light...

The bloom will dry out.

The bird will expire.

And my child?

Oy, I am afraid to think about it.

But who?

Who planted the bloom?

Who imprisoned the bird?

Who robbed from my child the air and light, these two free gifts from nature? Who?

Ay, a Picnic!

If you want to have some fun, invite Schmuel the cape-maker to a picnic. He will jump away from you like you wanted to send him to a hanging... That happens to him, not because of you, but because of his wife: A while back his Sarah gave him a picnic that he would not forget for the rest of his life.

It was a Saturday in the last week of August. Schmuel came home from work and said to his wife:

“Sarah, love.”

“What, my husband?” Sarah asked.

“I would like to make for you a pleasure,” Schmuel answered with a little dread.

“What? You are going to take a bath tomorrow?” Sarah asked again.

“Et! What’s with the baths!”

“Nu, what then? You want to order ice water with your dinner?”

“Not that.”

“Seltzer bottle, then?”

Schmuel shook his head: “No.”

“What then,” Sarah asked half-surprised.

“A pint of beer to bring perhaps?”

“What’s with the beer?”

“Sleep on the roof?”

“Not that.”

“Nu, what then, dinner plates from heaven, chicken milk?” asked Sarah, getting a little peeved, “What has your head thought up?”

And Schmuel said:

“Sarah, you know that we belong to a lodge.”

“Why would I not know that?” Sarah looked at him half-surprised and half-afraid, “I know very well that eight days ago you lost a member and had to pay another dollar. Nu, what, you have to give them more money?”

“Something else?”

“So, what then?”

“I... would like, Sarah,” said Schmuel, “that we should go on a picnic.”

“Nothing but picnics, Schmuel’ke,” yelled Sarah, “please you now?”

“We work, toil,” said Schmuel, “a whole year. We see nothing more in our eyes than melted troubles... What do we know of a life, what sort of pleasures do we have?”

“Nu, what can one do?” said Sarah a little calmer.

“The summer is almost over and we haven’t even beheld green grass with our eyes; we sit here day and night and sweat in the darkness.”

“Ach, ach, ach,” sighed Sarah, and Schmuel continued to talk with a stronger voice:

“Let’s go, Sarah, let’s have a little enjoyment from life; let our children find a little fresh air; let us for a moment clear our eyes.”

“What will it cost?” Sarah suddenly asked. And Schmuel quickly gave her an accounting:

“A family ticket only costs 30 cents; for Josele, for Rivele, for Hannah’tske, for Beryl, for Reyzele, and for Doletske we don’t have to pay carfare. So, for you and for me 10 cents going and 10 cents coming back – that makes 50 cents. In addition I figure it will cost 30 cents to take with us refreshments: a pineapple, for another five cents some bananas, a piece of watermelon, a bottle of milk for the children, and couple of buns... A total of 80 cents will this amusement cost us.”

“Eighty cents!” Sarah slapped her hands together, “Eighty cents! For eighty cents one can live for two days, for eighty cents you have to work nearly a whole day, eighty cents! For eighty cents one can buy a used icebox, for eighty cents you can buy yourself a new pair of pants, eighty cents!...”

“Enough with your craziness,” Schmuel interrupted her, “Eighty cents will not halt our poverty, with it or without it. But one must for one day in the year live like a mensch. Sarah, let’s go; there we will be among people, we will see the world, we will see how respectable people behave... We will travel a bit, see the world; nu, tell me Sarah, have your eyes seen a proper sight in America? What do you know from the Brooklyn Bridge, from Central Park, Baron Hirsch’s baths?...”

“From what, should I know?” Sarah interrupted him, “Do I have the time to go there?! I would know better how to get from here to the pig market.”

“And what do you know,” Schmuel called out, “I would be such a greenhorn like you, if I didn’t have to take the train to work. Now, because of that, I know that America is a big country. The slack time, not thought of today, showed me where Eighth Street is, One Hundred-Thirtieth Street with a tin factory and at Eighty-Fourth Street a match factory. I know everybody around the Wollers Building. I know where the cable car stops... But you, my wife, know nothing – And it is like you just got off the boat... Let’s travel, Sarah – It will not grieve you.

“I know,” said Sarah, finally with a smile, “Let’s make the trip...”

And, thus, Schmuel and his wife decided to go the next morning on the lodge picnic.

The next morning the Schmuel family got out of bed much earlier than usual.

Already that early there was a commotion: Sarah and her husband washed their children without mercy. Sarah made a bath for Doletske, and Dole screamed so to make the world stand still. Schmuel took Josele to wash his little feet, but because Josele always runs around barefooted it was impossible to get

to the bottom, Schmuel took his little feet and put them in a wash-basin to soak... And Josele yelled... It wasn't until noon that the children were fixed and ready to travel. And for her husband Sarah had to straighten his trousers, rub out the stains on his coat with kerosene, and sew buttons onto his vest. Afterwards by herself she had to: put on her old wedding dress... By two o'clock Schmuel's family was ready to set out. They sat themselves down in the streetcar.

"We haven't forgotten anything?" Sarah asked.

Schmuel quickly did a count of his bloodline and said:

"Nothing, Sarah!"

Doletske went to sleep. The children sat very quietly. Sarah also dozed a little bit – such a nap. After a little while they heard someone speaking, and they wanted to sleep. She was very tired from getting the children ready to go. Everything was quiet until they were way uptown. Sarah suddenly started.

"Something is not right with me.... My head is dizzy," Sarah said to Schmuel.

"I don't feel altogether right either," Schmuel answered uneasily. "It could be the fresh air has done us harm."

"It could be," Sarah said, "I am afraid for the children."

Almost as if he had heard that: Doletske woke up and began to scream and spit up. Josele look at him intently, and then began to cry. The Father got angry at him. Then the other children began to cry. The conductor looked at Schmuel with deadly eyes; poor Schmuel let the basket with all of their food fall from his hand. Schmuel knew that must have caused an awful mess in the basket, and felt that he was lost. Sarah began to take control of the children. Schmuel said nothing to her, but her face flashed with anger, and Schmuel knew very well that as soon as they descended from the streetcar, he was going to get it; and it happened just as he predicted: When Schmuel and his crowd got off the streetcar, Sarah immediately fired:

"The lord of the house insisted on picnics! Picnics you had in your mind! You are a worker, and you should stay in one place!..."

Schmuel was very peeved about the whole situation and kept silent... But he felt a tightness in his heart...

He took Josele in one hand and Rivele in the other. In addition he took the food basket with the mess inside.

"Quiet, my children, quiet my little babies, quiet! Your mother will soon give you sugar with bread, quiet," Schmuel continued to repeat those words to sooth the children who would not stop crying...

Sarah was holding Doletske and rocking him. By her on either side were Beryl and Hannah.

"They have torn my ears off," Sarah said, "His ears should be torn off also..."

And Schmuel's brood was soon in the park.

"Let's find a tree and sit ourselves down under it," Schmuel said to his wife, "Come, Sarah."

"I don't have the strength to carry myself, robber," Sarah answered, and sat down like a rock at the right side of the entrance. Schmuel wanted to say something, but a glance at Sarah's face, told him that she was exhausted... He was tired also, and without a word he sat down beside his wife. Sarah nursed Reyzele. The children began to roll in the grass, play and laugh, and Schmuel began to breathe a little easier.

All over the park walked young girls, immaculate in their holiday best, and elsewhere under the trees sat people in groups. Around a pretty young girl swarmed a lot of young men, and around a handsome man danced a gaggle of young women.

Somewhere in the distance under a tree a voice could be heard all over the park, a sad song from a worker's heart. A little closer someone played on a fiddle. Sarah looked at all of that and thought. Her anger evaporated... Her heart even began to ache a little... But it was an ache not from anger. She started to unravel her situation in life... And she became bitter... Looking at Schmuel, she felt a tightness in her heart. She took his hand off her knee.

"Oh, my dear!" he sighed... He wanted to say something to Sarah... But then it started to rain. Schmuel did not have enough time to get up, a pounding rain began to beat down on them... There was an uproar in the park... Schmuel just stood there in total confusion...

"Schlimazel, get the children!" Sarah gave the command. Schmuel grabbed a couple of children and Sarah got a couple, and they ran to a house. Doletske began to wail again...

"Mama, food!" Beryl began yelling...

"Food, food," whined Josele, "I want food."

Schmuel reached for the picnic basket, but saw the mess inside... The bottle had broken and the milk had spilled out into the basket, and soaked the bananas and the bread rolls... The pineapple had developed an open boil... Sarah got her first look at it... She was so angry she did not know what to do with her husband. Yelling and cursing came to mind, but she was ashamed to do so with respectable people around. She went to him and whispered a secret in his ear:

"You should have such a mess in your kishkas, husband!"

The children had not stopped demanding to be fed.

"I will go to the buffet and buy a glass of milk with a couple of rolls," Schmuel said to his wife.

"You have money, then?" Sarah asked, "It looks like you are going to completely empty your wallet for your picnic."

"I have exactly five cents left over."

"Nu, then go quickly," Sarah said, "Can't you see that the children are languishing."

Schmuel went to the buffet and asked how much it would cost for a glass of milk and a couple of bread rolls.

"Twenty cents, Mister," the buffet person answered.

Schmuel jumped back as though he had been scalded. He returned to Sarah with his head sunk low.

“Nu, what, schlimazel, where is the milk?” Sarah asked.

“He wanted twenty cents...”

“Twenty cents for a glass of milk and a roll... What, are you one of the Montefiores?” Now Sarah was not holding herself back, “They want to drive us to abject poverty! Go again on a picnic and we will have to sell the remaining rags we own.”

The children had not stopped begging to be fed...

“But what can one do?” Schmuel asked, totally lost.

“What do you mean, ‘what’?” Sarah was now yelling, “Home! Right this minute, home!”

Schmuel gathered up the crying children... And they left the park... Traveling back, Sarah did not curse her husband; But she did say to him, that when they got home there would be reckoning.

“I will make you pay for the satin dress, for the hand basket, for the pineapple, for the bananas, for the milk, for the whole picnic, for our whole bitter life...”

“Scream, scream, my wife!” Schmuel answered, “You are right! The demons knew what we wanted... A picnic!... Ask, what, when?... I am a dark, bitter worker... I shouldn’t think about anything but the shop...”

Arriving home, Sarah made good her words. Schmuel would have to eat like they did during the slack time, but he did not come to dinner. He lay in bed hungry, and the whole night muttered in his sleep:

“A picnic, ay a picnic!...”

Moving

In this house one wants to scream “Shema Israel.” Barrels of excrement, dirt, ropes... A mountain of ropes! I have never figured out where so much rope came from... Old papers, towels, rags, shames, dust... The woman, drunk, wearing rags and filth – goes around, yelling orders and is angry as the devil; the baby is having a good time, no one is paying any attention to her and she is sitting next to the spittoon dips her hands in, getting a lot of enjoyment from washing her face... They are Jews... Soon the express wagon will come and men will load my guts...

I move yet again.

Master of the World, True God, perhaps you have an obvious plan, and can let me know how many times I must move from one apartment to another until they move me there to that best, quiet apartment where no one will even ask me to pay rent?...

Ten years I have been in the happy land of America – How many times have I moved already? Ha? How many times? Let’s count them up right now.

I came to America at the beginning of summer, right after Passover. I traveled to my friend, who was very pleased to see me arrive... That was in 61st Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues. In three days I found work and moved downtown in Rutgers Street... I lived there for a month, bought an overcoat in Hester Street with a burnt spot in the lap for five dollars, and moved again to 61st Street with my friend with this goal of helping her with her newspaper stand... In a few weeks I moved to Columbus Avenue; and in about a month to Amsterdam Avenue. From there to 60th Street in Amsterdam Avenue... There I had trouble with my friend and in the middle of the night fled downtown.

I took a tub and moved in with a man I knew from the Old Country, a peddler of old clothes.

I lived there for a good four – five months. For a long time I did not move. Only my space changed, because, for a variety of reasons, I moved from the front room to the kitchen, from the kitchen to the fire escape in the hall next to the door, and from the hall next to the door to the top of the roof. That’s all!

In the same lodging I bought a second-hand suit and I sought a lover – a green young woman from the Old Country, who is now my wife, who would think it?

I declared my love to the greenhorn young lady in my building, on the roof behind the chimney next to a clothesline with wet wash hanging on it. I received the happy response from her in her room in the middle of the night by the melancholy light of a smoky lamp... Cockroaches, flies, and bugs were, you will excuse me saying, the holy witnesses... The bugs ran about excitedly, perhaps moved by the romantic scene, and perhaps because I had not given them so late the required sacrifice – My beloved...

The next move I made together with my wife. At that time I had a wooden chest with black cornices. She – a straw chest with a handle. We took a long, small room with green walls, for which we paid six

dollars a month. It was in Monroe Street. I don't remember the house number. All I remember is that the building was between two stables, and it happened that, nearly always there was next to the sidewalk a dead horse.

After about two months my wife got into a conflict with the lodging Misses and we moved to Cherry Street, in the barracks, to a landsman – a shirt maker – in a separate room with yellow walls and a special door.

In this apartment we finally had a little luck – I had a job and my wife also earned money. We were able to save a little money for a business.

And we made it happen. We have that business to this very day.

After about a half year we bought a little newspaper stand in 109th Street. – That was the business, we were striving for... and obtained.

We bought three front-room chairs, two kitchen chairs, a small table for the kitchen, a drop-down table for the front room, a bureau, a rocking chair, some rugs, glasses, knives, plates, a washboard, a large pail to store waste, and a broom... All of our schmattes, our old clothes, we kept in a separate room – and we moved to 109th Street next to our business, with our own place.

Between the last lucky apartment and the rooms in 109th Street there was another apartment. We only lived there two weeks... This was the story: Our lodging Misses, the shirt makers wife, knowing that we were going to get our own place, sought out another border to replace us. She found a border, but he wanted to move in soon, the same day. We hadn't yet purchased our business, so we did not know how and when we would have to move, so we took a room for a short while. In that room we only stayed two weeks, and what I remember about that short stay, is that it was very cold, because the lodging Misses under-filled the heat, and one evening there was a wet snow. I soaked my shoes while out walking looking for a business to buy. In the morning there was a frost. I had to go out again the next day and my shoes were still completely wet clear through... The rooms were not heated, and I had to dry my shoes using a kerosene stove that I had bought for myself... The leather burned through and in the morning when I put them on they fell to pieces. – That is all I remember about the two-week apartment.

In 109th Street we had three rooms, a dark kitchen with green walls, and a dark front room to the back with blue-white walls... From 109th Street we moved to 110th Street in a new building with gas and wash tubs – There we took in the first borders, and for the first time in my life experienced the border swindle.

From 110th Street we moved to 108th Street to the front. There is where I got the first moving bill.

Sha, the express man is gone – I can no longer do the calculations!... No time. One has to move.

It was three years since I had been in America. It is now seven more long years that I have been here and still a long, long series of moves, moving expenses, borders, troubles, anguish, and having children... raising children... and moving and moving... move and move... and move yet again.

Good bye! The express man arrived, they are carrying my schmattes – I am moving... Now I am moving from the Bronx where I have four rooms, a bathtub and paintings. I am moving to 50th Street

where I am taking three rooms in the back... They have promised to give hot water, but they will give me a fever, those enemies of Israel. I know all about the swindle with the hot water...

Good bye, I'm moving! In the new apartment I will, if God permits it, buy oilcloths.

When things quiet down I will calculate the cost. Adieu. They are carrying out the mattress – The momzer bastard doesn't leave and falls to pieces...

Good bye! Hooray! I'm moving!

The Quiet Couple

His name is Mayer Braynin, his wife's name is Grune, and people called them by these names only when they were talking with them personally, but people knew them under the name, "The quiet, calm couple."

They were simply man and wife, and they had no children, so they were able to live a quiet and calm life. While, since they had been married, nearly eight years, they had still not spent one single minute together in their home, not counting, naturally, the several hours in the day when they were asleep together. If they were still and calm there, only God knows!

But the surrounding neighbors were jealous of Grune. Her friends and relatives sadly shook their heads and among themselves questioned whether anything good could come of the match.

Mayer was a slower working and could not nourish his own sinful soul. And Grune? Grune was some one that you could not very well depend upon. She was a single woman who, for ten long years, had worked by a sewing machine; she had not thought of anyone, experienced great inner pain, and one could not under any circumstances expect more work out of her – This is what people whispered about her match: It was like two dead people going dancing.

But in America, no one fails, hooray for Columbus!

During Grune's ten years of working, she never looked at the clock, and continuously set money aside in the bank. She had saved as much as 144 dollars in healthy coin. She had a black, silk dress, a small gold ring and other stuff.

With these belongings she went to the chuppah on her wedding day. Mayer, on his side, had absolutely nothing, except a wooden chest, a pair of shirts, a silk scarf, and a new suit – That's all!

The forty-four dollars Grune spent on the wedding expenses, and a little on herself. For the hundred dollars she shared with Mayer, because the money belonged to him now, as well as her. Together they bought a business in New York.

This business to this very day enabled them to make a quiet and calm life such that God and other people were made jealous.

The business was a little stand on a corner next to a saloon, under an awning. From the stand they sold candy, tobacco, a little stationary, soda water, stamps, post cards and newspapers.

Operating the stand required two people: One from 5 o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock at night, and a second just to take over the stand for a few hours during the day.

In the summer, because of the soda water, the stand made a fine income, in the winter the business was a little slower, but on average Mayer Braynin made seven dollars a week.

And Mayer and his wife made a fine, respectable living!

In the morning, at precisely ten minutes before five, Mayer would wake up. It would take him five minutes to get dressed and five minutes to walk to the stand, and at exactly five o'clock he was at the stand.

The stand also had a little outside trade, that is to say, Mayer had to deliver papers in the morning and in the evening to customers at their houses, and that is where Grune was useful.

Grune came to the stand at six AM and Mayer would leave with the newspapers. By seven o'clock he was back, and Grune would go straight home, make coffee, a little something to eat, and return to the stand so that her husband could go back home.

The fellow would eat and drink, then lay down for a half hour, and by nine o'clock he was back at the stand, and Grune returned home.

At noon Grune was back at the stand, calling on Mayer to eat dinner, and he would go home. He would eat what God had given him and Grune had prepared, took a light nap for ten or fifteen minutes, and close to one o'clock he would be back to his business, and Grune headed home.

The wife would eat her dinner, then attend to her wifely household chores. At four PM she would be back at the stand, and Mayer would quickly run off carrying the evening newspapers. By five he was back in place, and Grune ran back home to make supper.

At seven Grune returned to the stand and Mayer went home to eat supper. He ate supper, rested a few minutes, then went back to the stand, and Grune went home. Staying at the stand for a while together is neither where or what, the corner is a busy corner, the stand is tiny, and there is not room for two people, and why should they both be there?

At midnight Mayer closes the stand, and heads home. When he has a good day, that is when things go well, he enters the house with a light step, does not light the fire, goes into the bedroom, gets undressed quietly, and lays down to sleep beside his wife.

When he has had a bad day, that is when things go badly, he enters with a heavy step and murmurs angrily under his breath.

Grune gets up. She knows the signs very well, and she begins to sigh, they exchange a few words, there is no time to talk a lot, and Mayer lays down to sleep.

And so goes their life. They have no children, and for them that is very fortunate. A child would take Grune away from the business. Mayer would have to hire a helper, and he would have to eat dirt, because the stand barely makes a living, and there would be nothing left over to pay a helper.

They do not save any money, but they make a calm life, and it has gone on for eight years: No arguments, be it summer or winter, be it the middle of the week or Sunday, always one and the same: Grune at home, Mayer at the stand; Mayer home and Grune at the stand.

Sundays bring a small change: Mayer and Grune both put on a change of clothes – That's all.

During the Slack Time, They Sleep

Not paying attention to the fact that the winter nights are as long as the dark, Jewish exile, the Khroypkins lay down to sleep as though it were dark outside.

It doesn't hurt that they have it in mind, that when it does begin to be evening, the Khroypkins house will already be partly in the night, and that is because, the Khroypkins live in a basement apartment separated from the rest of the world by a high, narrow, air shaft, and in the evening when the sun begins to call together its children – the rays of light – to come home, it calls each of the poor rays, which were in the narrow air shaft next to the Khroypkins' window, a good hour earlier because it takes longer for them to clamber out.

For the same reason the early morning in the basement, when it is already broad daylight, and people are getting out of bed and the light is bright, it happens that the Khroypkins sleep away a good portion of the day in addition to the long, long night.

If you ask me: How can they do that without laying on their sides? I will answer: That they get out of bed with sick sides. If you ask me: How can people be so sleepy? I will answer: That they do not lay in bed for the pleasure of it.

Enemies of Zion should live like these people sleep. How can someone sleep so much? And you and I both should have as many good years as this man and wife give each other curses at the same time that they lay in bed.

But why do they lay there if they are not sleeping?

Therein lies the whole bad deal. It is a product of the economic situation.

The Khroypkins are poor wretches and must fight a hard battle against poverty, now they have come to the conclusion that the best way to combat poverty, especially in the winter, is to remain hidden under a huge mountain of schmattes and old clothes and be quiet.

Khroypkin is a painter and from Christmas to Purim, for example, work is dismally slack. And he is forbidden to earn a broken penny. So, what can one do?

One has to live off cash, that is, from the few dollars one saved during the 'season.' One has to see that the expenditures are smaller, if not, the saved capital will not suffice and one might as well put their teeth in the attic.

If one doesn't eat, one doesn't live, but that is minor, it is winter, and if you don't eat and drink and live, it still costs money: It is cold and you must have heat, the nights are long and you must burn a lamp.

And the Khroypins saw that their saved capital would not last until Purim, and they would have to make a too long "Fast of Esther." Coal was in heaven and kerosene was more expensive than wine, but how can you save on those items? You must have heat, it is cold, you must burn a lamp, it is dark, and the Khroypins fell upon an idea.

Why sit around in the evening looking at the oven and the lamp burning? One can just lie in bed, wrap up in schmattes and lay there, and poverty can just go plotzen.

Doing it is nothing, but what does one do during the long winter night? Nothing, the heart is bitter, the anger has to be expressed, one gets upset, one swears, one can practice these skills laying in bed, and you will be saving coal and kerosene.

And when it is dark outside, Mr. Khroypin and his wife turn down the covers and put their three-year old child to bed. Beryl'le still does not understand why they go to bed so early, but he doesn't ask questions. The house begins to get cold, and the poor little bird is happy to snuggle down under the schmattes.

They turn out the light in the lamp, the oven soon goes out by itself, and at the Khroypin's all go to sleep.

They sleep, they battle with poverty, lying in a world of troubles.

A cheap means.

When they have slept through their first sleep, Khroypin turns to his wife:

"What time do you think it is, Judith?"

Judith listens for a moment and answers:

"It must already be eight o'clock."

"What makes you think that?" Khroypin asks.

"Can't you hear the clinking of spoons on plates? People are eating their supper."

"In the 'season' we are also eating supper at this time." says Khroypin and in saying he gives out a deep, longing sigh.

"We will soon forget the good times," answers Judith, and man and wife drift back into the world of dreams.

A few hours pass and one hears Khroypin groan.

"What is it, dear?" asks Judith.

"My side is sore laying here."

"Me too," answers Judith, and both begin to yawn.

"What time do you think it is now?" Khroypin asks, and Judith listens for a moment.

"It must be nearly ten o'clock," Judith says.

"No more?" Khroypin is surprised, "It can't be, it must be much later."

"Just listen," Judith replies, "You will hear the housekeeper upstairs as she turns out the gas in the hall."

"Oy, veh iz mir, how the night moves along!" Khroypin said as he turned to his other side.

And Judith continued to listen, and said, mostly to herself: “There, upstairs, people are living their life, and we sleep.”

“Veh iz mir, veh iz mir,” sighed Khroypin in agreement, and it was quiet once again.

The night moved on.

“Are you asleep?” Khroypin asked his wife.

“Am I meshugge, what? Judith answered, “Who can sleep through such a long night; I lay here and my brain breaks.”

“On what?” asked Khroypin.

“Oh, I am anxious to know something,” Judith recounts just what is occupying her mind, “What am I going to make for breakfast tomorrow, that will cost nothing and fill us up.”

“Oy, veh iz mir, veh iz mir!” sighed Khroypin, and did not know what to answer.

“I would love to know what time it is now,” Judith asked this time.

“It must already be close to daylight,” answered Khroypin.

“Go on, go on, you’re meshugge,” Judith was not in agreement.

“It must be nearly daylight...” Khroypin would not give up on his opinion.

“You want it to be daytime,” Judith said good-naturedly, “You think it is nearly day, and I think it is not even midnight.”

“What are you saying, then?” Khroypin did not believe her, “That I’m going meshugge?”

“You know, don’t you,” said Judith, “that around midnight Beryl’ll cries, and right now he is sleeping soundly.”

“No, Mama!” Beryl spoke up.

“Oy, my luck, he is not sleeping at all!” Judith reached for her child.

“The pitiful little thing is cold,” said Khroypin.

“Are you cold, dear son of mine,” the mother asked the child.

“Cold, Mama!” answered Beryl.

And Judith wrapped more and more of the bedding around Beryl and drew him closer to her.

The night moved on and on.

“Oy, my side is killing me,” groaned Khroypin.

“Me too!” complained Judith, and they continued to talk.

And once again they talked about the neighbors, and again they tried to calculate how long it had been since their wedding, or how much they were spending on average each week, or how much Beryl’s birth had cost them...

Rarely when they calculated these costs, while they were talking there in the basement, the light would begin to flow into the room, and the Khroypins would spring out of bed as through from a dangerous situation and they both, with a great rush would light the oven.

Menachem's Business Day

It was a winter afternoon. It had snowed the whole morning long, and now it had begun, little by little to stop; the sky was bedecked with white clouds; the weather was warm and damp and the snow was still underfoot.

On the sidewalks of New York there was good cheer, it was lively and busy in spite of the quiet afternoon hour, it seemed as if the fresh snow called forth a fresh storm of life.

The storekeepers, the housekeepers were out clearing the snow from the sidewalks and the fronts of the stores and the houses clanged with the sound of shovels, with brooms and that made the streets cheerful and busy.

The children began to be let out of the schools. Aha, that gave the world a turn! A fresh snow, and the snow was moist and soft, perfect for making snowballs, a brilliant effect of the New York atmosphere. To the Jews... It percolated, it lived, a chaos, a noise, and snowballs flew from all sides, in every direction, one couldn't walk the streets.

Menachem, the customer peddler, sad, and deep in thought headed home to Ludlow street.

The heart of the poor Jewish peddler, unfortunately, was very, very much not cheerful, he walked deep in thought and quietly sighed: "Oy, what tsorris, what troubles!"

Avram'ke Zeyger is very sick, hoarse as a wall, he must go to a doctor; Basye'le goes around completely naked, barefooted; a gas bill remains unpaid; Steinman is demanding the three dollars that he, Menachem, had borrowed for a couple of days and held on to for a half year and can in any case not repay. Today he will certainly be seeing him, how can he look him in the eye?

"Oy, what tsorris!"

And he walked with pain in his heart, sighing quietly.

Today was a bad day. He did not sell any merchandise, and had not collected a single broken penny: One was not at home, one was indeed at home, but he would not open the door and let him in – Do something! Another one put him off for another week, and Menachem had to go home without a penny, with a pain in his heart, sighing quietly.

One customer left him today, a second heaped reproached on him, and a third had moved and cheated him of two dollars...

Two dollars! Two dollars! What blood money that is! One must have a heart of stone not to pay up, yet with every footstep pay out to bloodsucking, special money-wasters who hit on such a bitter peddler, borrow from him, suck out the last bit of blood from a bitter, poor man, and then run and move away to who knows where. And one must loan... How can one help it? If not you can't have customers.

Two dollars! How hard, bitterly he has to work for it! How many stairs he has to climb? And how many doors does he have to knock on? Two dollars, two dollars! Veh, veh... And the peddler's heart

tightened in his chest and pained him. He walked on thinking in silence and sighed... He did not notice how a band of do-nothings were preparing snowballs, stalking and watching their victim.

Menachem had been in this country for ten years, but could not speak English. From whom would he learn it?

The whole time he was in New York he lived in Ludlow Street. He lived among Jews, and dealt only with Jews, who only spoke Yiddish with him, and what's more he was always occupied and worried about making a living. It rarely came into his head to learn the language of the land! But the trouble was, when the peddler had to, whether he wanted to or not, have dealings with do-nothings on the street, that forced him to Americanize himself a little bit: He trimmed his beard a little, wore a high green-black Irish hat, smoked a pipe sometimes, and so on, and so on.

Possibly, that afforded him so to speak, a practical value, but this time the hoodlums saw in him a green, Jewish peddler...

Watch out!... A snowball knocked Menachem's high hat off... Another snowball in the back... Another in the neck... And the snowballs were made very carefully, they were hard as a rock, and hurt an awful lot...

Fear and pain pressed on the peddler's heart. He picked up his hat and looked around – a whole band of hoodlums stood there ready to renew the attack.

He just stood there for a while, not knowing what to do... Blam! A snowball from behind his back... Menachem began to run and run and run, and good friends of the delinquents ran to them and the band of hoodlums grew and grew, and the snowballs flew and flew. There, the peddler's hat was knocked off again... Another snowball, and another snowball...

The hoodlums hollered and laughed, and passersbys looked on and smiled... Another Jewish peddler passed by, he knew Menachem, but he acted as though he didn't recognize him, and slowly turned in to a side street. Another snowball, and another snowball... Menachem's eyes filled with tears. Upset, scared, confused he continued to run and run, and from behind him the snowballs continued to fly hitting him in the head, neck and back... The peddler stopped again and looked around like a frightened animal, ran to a store and huddled against the store window. The hoodlums stopped throwing snowballs at the peddler for a while, afraid to break the store window. But they stood there with snowballs in hand, ready at any minute to let fly. The storekeeper who was standing in the doorway was alarmed by the trouble and drove the peddler off.

Menachem looked, with wide open eyes full of fear and pain, at the storekeeper. He was driven off and began again to run...

When Menachem arrived at his own building, his wife was holding little Avram'ke in her arms.

"How is the child?" the peddler asked in one breath, and he looked with fear at his wife.

"Better, better, thanks be God!" Menachem's wife answered.

The peddler took the child in his arms, took him feverishly and quickly began to cover him with kisses, and his eyes were full of tears...

Will She Keep Her Word?

A large, bright, clean and elegantly appointed room.

In a soft, plush rocking chair sits a young woman nursing a baby. The baby is clothed in silk, it has a healthy, pretty, rosy face, and good, laughing eyes. It is holding fast with its rosy lips to the breast and with a soft, pure hand it plays with the same breast.

The nurse looks from time to time at the child, sometimes at the room and all that surrounds her. But on her face there is no trace of motherly joy, her looks are sad and somewhat longing, and mirrored in her face is a whole ocean of pain.

She observes herself and remains sitting as though frozen. Her eyes look at a fixed point without purpose and without seeing.

She is deep in unhappy thoughts, because her face is from minute to minute more sad and dark.

Suddenly she gives a shudder.

“Oh, my sweet Enele...” The woman said with a choked sob, and her eyes filled with tears.

This woman was nursing another person’s child. She was a wet-nurse and it was only two days since she had taken on in this position.

She sold her breast, she had shed her blood, which nature had converted inside her to milk. She was a wet-nurse.

A wet-nurse – that is a simple word, and everyone understands the meaning of the word. But nearly every wet-nurse, every woman, whose fate forces them to sell their breasts, carries in their heart a sort of wound, that not everyone can grasp, not everyone can understand what kind of a poisonous pain this word engenders.

It is an incredibly great pleasure for a mother when she holds her breast between the warm lips of her own child, and dreadful and bitter is the situation, which steals away from the mother this pleasure of hers!

Mrs. Braun – that is the name of the wet-nurse – has two children of her own. One is two years old, and the other is two months. The second child is named Eni.

Six weeks after Eni’s birth, the child’s father died.

The deceased Mr. Braun was a poor worker, who lived by his daily earnings, and he left his wife and children in a desperate situation. The widow had come to the point of taking her two children and plunging to the ground with them from a tall building. By chance she was given the opportunity to take this position as wet-nurse, and she accepted it.

Mrs. Braun gave her two children over to another woman, also a widow, who had her own three children, and made her living by taking in other children to watch as well as doing laundry for others.

The private child care establishment along with the laundry were conducted from her two rooms without air or light, for which the woman of the house paid seven dollars a month.

The little Enele was fed with bottled milk, while her mother served as a wet-nurse...

Mrs. Braun sat in the rocking chair, suckled the baby and thought about her own child.

She looked at the richly furnished room in which she was now sitting... And she brought to mind the narrow tomb in which her children lolled about.

She looked at the child, she was suckling, and she thought about her unlucky little orphan, about her tiny Enele. She had ripped her breast away from the innocent child and stuffed a bottle in her mouth... She gave a shudder, a sharp pain clenched her heart, and her eyes ran with tears.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps in the room and recognized the steps of her employer, the mother of the child. Quickly she wiped the tears from her eyes with a handkerchief, and forced a cheerful smile to her lips.

The mother of the child entered the room.

She went to the window and opened it a little more.

"It is so nice outside," the woman said, "Why shouldn't the window be opened all the way?"

The mother went over to the child and looked at it with love and pleasure.

"It seems to me that my child is a little pale today?" the mother turned to the wet-nurse.

"Not at all... I don't see it..." answered Mrs. Braun.

The mother of the child cast a glance at the wet-nurse. She noticed the weepy eyes and the sad face, ignoring Mrs. Braun's attempt to appear cheerful.

A dark shadow covered the mother's face.

"You are longing for your own children?" she asked, and her voice had a nervous quiver.

"No... Why ask? I am not missing my children at all," the wet-nurse answered.

"You are looking somewhat upset."

"Who, me? No!... You think so..." the wet-nurse answered and laughed.

The laugh was forced and from deep in her chest came an involuntary sigh.

"No, Madam Greenberg," the wet-nurse continued, "I don't care a hair, and I have nothing to long for."

"The child must be a little sick," Madam Greenberg answered, not believing the wet-nurse's words, "Something with his breathing, it seems, labored... Nu, what can it be, that you always worry, and long and weep... And my child suckles your milk."

"You think so, Madam Greenberg..." the wet-nurse answered and a sharp pain shot through her heart, "Just look at him, the child, kayn ayn hore, no evil eye on him, is beautiful, fresh and healthy... Also my En..."

The wet-nurse caught herself and her voice cut off with a trembling.

“What is wrong, you are really crying?” Madam Greenberg, nervous and unsettled, asked the question.

“God is with you... You are dreaming...”

But in Mrs. Braun’s eyes the tears were obvious.

Madam Greenberg bit her lip.

“Mrs. Braun...” Madam Greenberg began talking in a dry and earnest tone, “I must tell you for the last time, it can not go on like this... When you live like this, and upset yourself, and think about your children... and long for them... and cry – You milk is spoiled, you are wasting away my child, and I will not allow it. If you can be fresh, cheerful and happy, that’s good, if not – it can not go on.”

“Madam Greenberg, she answered her, “for me today was something of an outpouring... I don’t know what is wrong with me... But you will see, that it will not happen again... I have cried for the last time.”

“Remember that.”

“Nu, certainly, I will not do that any more... I know that if I am not a wet-nurse, I will drown myself.”

“So then, you understand,” Madam Greenberg answered a little more calm, “Come eat dinner.”

And the woman of the house and the wet-nurse soon went to the dining room table.

Will the wet-nurse keep her word?

A Tale of an Overcoat

This overcoat belonged to Abie the shoemaker. And he had experienced a whole story, exactly, you should pardon the comparison, like with a living person. The overcoat was already as old as Abraham's teacher, Terach. Abie obtained it as an inheritance from his father many years ago. Abie had also been in America, already, nine years.

A glance at this aged garment, would cause anyone to say, that it was time for the item in question to go to its eternal rest. Every one of its slats, every rip, its worn out appearance – This all clearly showed that it had already survived a long, long battle in life. Abie, naturally, also knew that quite well. Every time that he put on that old overcoat, it made him feel good, as though it were more of a well-used schmatte rather than a garment. He surely felt it, but at the same time Abie felt that he was a fine poor person, that he had no need to buy a new overcoat, and he pretended not to notice.

Abie's wife, Yachne, she should live long, acknowledge the fact that she and her husband were economically dead, but that which is to God, is to God, and that which is to people is to people. It was three years that she was in a battle with her husband and she made it clear that she was against his old, ancient overcoat.

"Gewalt, Abie," Yachne constantly argued, "make an end to this rag. It is contaminating my life. When you put it on, it is like taking poison. People think you just got out of the grave."

Her speech did not help much. Abie would just dismiss it with a wave of the hand, as though to say, "Talk with a Jewish woman, what do they know?" Then he would do his own thing: Pull the rag on and wear it again.

But Yachne had not lost her courage and she held fast to the decision to continue the battle, and make use of more drastic means if it became necessary.

It was a Sunday, in the beginning of summer. Abie and his wife were very busy: They were clearing winter items out of the house.

Yachne had collected a big pile of garbage in the kitchen, and asked Abie to put it into some sort of order. Abie opened his mouth wide, stood there and looked at the pile and did not know what to do with it. Yachne in the meantime was occupied with something in the bedroom.

"What are you thinking to do with your winter overcoat?" he heard Yachne's voice from the bedroom.

"With my overcoat?" asked back.

"Yes, yes."

"What should one do?" Abie answered, "Hang it up; another winter will come."

Yachne did not answer. While Abie was standing next to the pile of trash, something flashed past his eyes and a dark object appeared on top of the trash pile.

When Abie looked around, he saw his Yachne next to him and his overcoat in the trash.

“Crazy woman!” he yelled, “Why are you playing around like this? What are you throwing around? You don’t know if you will have a better one... Throwing things!...”

Yachne, herself, was shocked by what she had done, and for a few seconds she just stood there, but she soon came to herself.

“I’m responsible,” Yachne answered, “It is worthless.”

“Don’t be foolish,” Abie said in anger, “You are so lofty? While the children are barefooted, and you have nothing for a dress?

“I don’t care, I don’t need one... I can not watch you put on a rag to wear. It makes me want to cry out “Shema Israel!”

“Why does it bother you?”

“What do you mean, why does it bother me? Yachne answered, “Tell me right now, who is it that goes blind sewing patches on that schmatte, if not I, and secondly, you are my trouble... Do you think my heart was not pumping blood, last week when Hannah, the ironing lady, said to me: “Jachne, you should live long, what is wrong with your husband? Can’t he earn enough to buy another overcoat? It makes one sick to see how he goes around.”

Hannah the ironing lady, had not, in fact made a comment to Jachne about her husband. Jachne told a lie. She was playing politics with her man, and it did, indeed, have an effect.

“To hell with her!” Abie said with chagrin.

“Yes, yes, now you are mad”

“And to hell with the schmatte also!” Abie went on to say from the heart.

Jachne had won.

“It will be all done,” Jachne began to talk with enthusiasm, “You will show your strength. When the old rag is no longer there, you will, so to speak, have to wrap yourself in a new garment.”

“What do you mean?” Abie said as doubt crept in.

“Listen, to what I am saying, my husband: I know, praise God’s name, like a brother to us. Without a struggle, you get nothing. With a struggle, don’t you remember, two years ago we got for Beryle a suit.”

“No, no,” Abie chimed in.

“And if not with a struggle, remember, that our Bashele got her coat?”

“I know, I know...” Abie sighed.

“And with some effort will you, if God allows, have a coat when winter comes.”

“But... But, one can leave it to cover onself,” Abie added in like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

“Oh, stop it!” Jachne answered, “There is, thank goodness, a closet full of rags. The hunchback’s wife sat with me for a long time, when the clothes closet was open, I thought she would be buried alive.”

“Well, it will be as you wish.”

In about a half hour Abie the Shoemaker’s overcoat was thrown out in a barrel with other trash.

Dear reader, do not despair over the fate of this well-used garment. An Italian soon retrieved the overcoat from the barrel, and the overcoat once again appeared out in the wide world, and as you will soon see, it will not have a bad end.

The summer wasn’t interested in business and continued on its way. The month of September came face to face with the summer. By day it was still warm, but the early mornings and the nights were cold. And that is when Abie began to long for his old overcoat, and more and more reproached himself for not still having it. Once, coming home from work when it was quite cold he began to shiver. He was even more upset about the tossed out overcoat and he could see no means of acquiring a new one.

“What, was I meshugge, crazy?” he said to himself as he walked, “Did I have to do what she said? What? When?”

Abie got angry about his wife, and he now thought that when he got home he would give her a piece of his mind.

Jachne would certainly have been separated from her husband, if she did not have a safeguard. And she had a safeguard.

The whole summer, in the time when Abie, her husband, had totally forgotten that he did not have an overcoat, and that, inevitably the winter would come, during that time Jachne never stopped thinking about it. She thought about it, but didn’t only just think about it, she worked hard on the problem.

Where and when she had even the slightest opportunity, she would hold out a penny from the family expenses. She saved on food, saved on drink, saved and saved, saved on herself, saved on her husband, saved on her poor children. She stuck a penny to a penny – thus, by the end of the summer, she had accumulated five dollars.

“It is already so cold outside!” were Abie’s first words when he entered the house.

“It must be, indeed...” was Jachne’s coldblooded answer.

“Abie was chagrined that his wife had said that so coldblooded, and was ready to fire off his reproaches.

“I was so cold walking!” Abie went on speaking, “I was completely frozen.”

“You should go and buy an overcoat...” Jachne answered in the same coldblooded tone.

“Really, I should?...” Abie said as he gave his wife a sharp look.

“Nu, certainly you should.”

“Nu, and what about money?” Abie fired a shot at his wife.

But it did not strike home with Jachne. Instead, her face became somewhat more happy and cheerful.

“Not a big danger...” she answered with a smile.

Abie looked at his wife with shock and surprise.

“Tell me, my wife,” he drew the words out slowly, “Tell, me, are you acting like you are meshugge, or have you really lost your mind... Why are you smiling so?”

Jachne did not answer a word, she just smiled and went into the bedroom.

Abie’s heart died in his chest... He was truly frightened for his wife.

Jachne was soon back from the bedroom... And, oh, what a wonder Abie beheld! Jachne set on the table a cup with banknotes in it...

“Count it...” she said to her husband, and her face and eyes were filled with joy.

Abie did not know what kind of a world he found himself in. His mouth fell open, his eyes protruded and he just stood there like an idiot.

“Count it...” Jachne repeated, “It’s money, count it, why are you just standing there, what?”

Her voice trembled with great joy.

Abie counted the money.

“Five dollars, how did we get it?”

“Didn’t I tell you?” Jachne said in triumph, “Did I not say to you that you would have a coat?”

“But how?”

“Who cares?”

“It worries me; but yet, how?” Abie wondered.

“Saved.”

“Eh, from where?” Abie couldn’t believe it.

“From where? From there! For the whole summer I have put one penny next to the other.”

Abie happily hugged her shoulders.

“Listen, Abele, take two dollars from your next pay,” Jachne said, “And go buy yourself a coat.”

“Nu, I will buy one,” Abie answered.

The next Sunday Abie had seven dollars in hand, and left the house to go and buy himself an overcoat.

“Listen, my husband,” Jachne stopped him, “I beg of you, be a mensch.”

“Nu, what do you mean?”

“Just this, haggle... See to it, God protect, that they don’t cheat you.”

“How would they cheat me?”

“Don’t rush to a cheap price.”

“Nu, for the seven dollars... That is what I have and that is what I will spend.”

"I know, they shouldn't, God forbid, cheat you and sell you used merchandise."

"But I have eyes..." said Abie somewhat offended, and he opened the door to leave.

"Listen," Jachne stopped him once again, "Keep in mind that the money is our blood, and, khalila, God forbid, don't let yourself be cheated."

"Enough already from you, you beast..." Abie said to his wife lovingly, and he was out the door.

Imagine a happy, cheerful man with the idea to buy himself a good, new overcoat; that was Abie as he left the house. With this thought he marched over to Canal Street and looked into the show windows of a number of clothing stores. But with so much looking and hunting through Canal Street he became something like sadder and sadder in his heart.

"You are going to buy a new overcoat?" a voice spoke to him from deep in his heart, "A new one? And for seven dollars? For such a thing with money? And a second-hand coat would make you sick to wear?"

"Right!" Abie murmured to himself.

"You go around in tattered shoes," the same voice spoke to him, "And your wife? She is nebech, unfortunately, going around bare and naked... And you? And you allow it?"

"An indulgence..." the words pushed past his lips.

"Your Berke, a sick child, nebech, also goes around naked!" the voice said.

"A murder..." Abie answered the voice.

"And your Basele? And your Tuvie'le? Better for them some little clothes, a pair of socks... And you? You? A new overcoat?" Abie gave out a sigh and his heart ached.

"Et!" and he made a gesture with his hand, "I will wear a used one... Even better... A couple of dollars will be left over, they will be needed.

Abie had decided, and immediately turned into Hester Street. There he was much more comfortable, and his conscience had stopped gnawing at him.

Coming right toward Abie was a Jew with a coat over his shoulders. Abie stopped and looked at the man.

The wearer of the overcoat was experienced enough to realize that he had to do with a good customer.

"Mister," the man ran to Abie like someone who had been poisoned, "Do you need some merchandise, a good overcoat, a pair of socks... A jacket... I have everything you need."

"An overcoat," Abie answered.

"Oh, may God bless you, as many as you want."

"Come. Come in the store," the man took Abie by the arm and pulled him into the store, "Come, may you be healthy, merchandise like gold."

The man pulled Abie into something like a basement, obscured in a sort of Egyptian darkness.

In the first minutes Abie was frightened, but when the man lit a gaslight and Abie saw that he was actually in a clothing store, he calmed down somewhat.

“Nu, Mister, an overcoat?” the salesman said, “In what price range?”

“In five dollars,” Abie answered.

“That means you want inexpensive and good.”

“Nu, exactly!” Abie answered.

“We have here a nice piece of merchandise for you,” the salesman said, “Here, a used, but an atonement for a thousand new overcoats. Strong, good looking and new.”

“And how much money?” Abie asked.

“Let’s measure it on you first,” the salesman said, “then, if you like it, we will talk about the price.”

“No,” Abie said, “first I want to know how much it will cost, I told you before that I will not spend more than five dollars. I am not going to bother with it for nothing.”

“Here, forgive me, try it on...” the salesman brought to Abie an overcoat.

“Is that for my price?”

“Don’t be a greener, try it.”

Abie put the item on.

“Nu, what do you have to say about it?” the salesman said with admiration, “As though it was tailored for you. I tell you the garment is gorgeous.”

When Abie felt on himself the whole “new” overcoat, he was fully lost in joy, he did not know what to say.

“Nu, how do you like it?” the salesman asked Abie.

“As... Good... But... It seems.”

“It seems what?”

“A little tight in the arms.”

“Let your hands fall relaxed, lower... Eh, the way a man holds his hands! You have never worn a fine garment, Mister.

Abie let his hands fall.

“Nu?” the sales man asked.

“Now it’s better!” Abie answered.

“Certainly it’s better!” the salesman agreed, “I will not deceive you, I can see that it is like it was ordered just for you.”

“How much does it cost?” Abie asked.

“This piece of merchandise will cost you seven dollars.”

Abie wanted to make a counter offer of five dollars, but he did not have the courage in him to do it.

“Get me a cheaper one,” he said with a sigh.

“This piece is extraordinary!” the salesman began praising the overcoat.

“I see, but I can not spend that much.”

“Can you spend six dollars?”

“Six?... I think...” stuttered Abie.

“Shall I wrap it up?”

“Can you let it go for five?” a fearful Abie asked quietly.

“I should live for five happy years,” the salesman swore, “if it cost me more.”

In short, he paid for the overcoat six dollars, and he was now happily leaving the basement with the overcoat in a package under his arm.

“A dollar well spent!” he said to himself, and he hurried home.

“Bought something?” Jachne, very pleased, met him when he came in.

“Bought!” Abie answered.

“A new one?” Jachne asked.

“A slightly used one... But real merchandise.”

“Give me a look right now...” Jachne said, a little shocked.

Jachne took the overcoat in her hands, and studied it. Suddenly, she gave herself a shake; her face turned a deathly white.

“Veh iz mir! Woe is me!” she yelled, trembling.

Abie’s eyes opened wide, and he did not know what was wrong with his wife.

“What is it?” he asked in a state of shock.

“What it is, is your overcoat!” Jachne yelled at him again. She wrung her hands and began to run around the room.

“What do your mean by ‘mine’?...” Abie stammered.

“Yours... Your schmatte, the one you threw in the trash last year.

“Are you meshugge?” Abie yelled back, but his soul was up on it’s tip toes.

“Yours... Yours... Yours... Veh! Veh! Veh! Were you asleep? Na, just look!” Jachne showed her husband to the overcoat he just bought. There are all of the marks: There is the last tear that I fixed... There is another mark on the lining, where our little Chaim’ke, years ago ripped it... Oy veh, veh!...”

Jachne was at the highest level of despair, and Abie stood there as if he had been struck by lightning...

“How much did you pay?”

“Six dollars.”

“Who told you... Schlim-schlim-schlimazel! Veh! Veh iz mir! Six dollars! Every penny cost me blood...”

Jachne sat down and began to bang her head on the wall.

“Sha, don’t be insane...” Abie bitterly stammered, “I’ll go and return it...” He left the house right away, and went back to the same basement, where he had haggled for his bargain.

What happened with Abie there with the storekeeper is hard to say. But the fact is that in an hour Abie dragged himself back home, half-dead, with the same overcoat under his arm that he had haggled for earlier.

A Child's Questions

It was a winter night...

Outside there was a stinging frost and a cutting wind... Outside it was "Siberia"... And in the room?
In the room it was New York!

And it was just as cold as outside, because in the room lived a worker, a Jewish pants-maker, and in every corner could be seen sad, bitter, stifling poverty, because the pants-maker was on strike.

The striker was not at home – He was at a meeting.

The wife was sitting by the oven and sewed something with a needle – She was fixing something in her neighbor's wash to help her husband out during the strike.

The fire in the oven went out.

As soon as the striker's wife felt the cold, she opened one of the oven lids and looked into the oven.

She let out a hard, deep sigh, and cast a sad look at the empty coal bucket. She sat back down thinking and deeply troubled.

It was quiet in the room, only the wind rattled the frozen window panes, and occasionally ran down the chimney to the mantel piece and whined, so heart wrenching, so sadly, as though it also had the bitter heart of a pants-maker on strike...

"Mama," a childish voice was heard coming from the bedroom. The mother dropped the needlework and ran to the bedroom. There her Tsirele slept, her only, three-year-old, child.

Tsirele was covered in a sea of rags. She had thrown them all aside and wanted to get out of bed.

"Where are you going, my child?" as she tried to cover the little girl back up.

"Mama take me to the oven, I'm cold," asked Tsirele.

"It is also cold next to the oven, my dear soul."

And the mother covered the child with yet another rag, and sat beside her trying to get her to go back to sleep.

"Sleep my child, sleep my dear little soul."

"Take me to the oven," Tsirele asked.

"It is cold there, Tsirele."

"Put coal in it," the child offered a suggestion.

"None, my joy, no coal," sighed the striker's wife.

"In the bottom."

"No, my life, I will show you the coal bucket."

And the mother went to the kitchen, got the coal bucket and showed it to Tsirele...

Tsirele looked into the coal bucket and gave out deep, child's sigh.

"No more coal," said Tsirele and her childish face was earnestly sad.

"No more!" confirmed the mother.

"Go bring," advised the child.

"No money, my heart."

"No pennies?" the child asked.

"Yes, my soul, no pennies at all."

"Father is not bringing some?"

"Yes, Tsirele, Father is not bringing any."

"Why?"

"Because of the strike, my daughter."

Tsirele looked at her mother who was so longing, so sad, but the child did not understand what the mother had just told her. She did not know what a strike was.

"Sleep Tsirele"

"I want something to eat, Mama."

"You're hungry, my poor little bird?"

"I want something to eat, Mama."

"Soon, my child."

And the mother went into the kitchen and cut a slice of bread, looked into the pantry, and found nothing. She gave out another silent, but deep sigh, and went back into the bedroom to her hungry child.

"Here my child."

"What is it?"

"A little bread!"

"With butter?" asked the child.

"Yes, my daughter, with butter," the mother said hoping to fool the child.

Tsirele took the little piece of bread in hand, and immediately saw the sad swindle. She didn't eat it and shook her head.

"I don't want it, Mama."

"Why not, Tsirele?"

“Smear it with butter.”

“None, my joy. Tomorrow you will have a smear, until then eat it like this.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Nu, I can’t help it.”

“Give me supper.”

“No supper.”

“Give me some meat and soup.”

“None, my child, none,” the mother swore to her. She kissed the child, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Then give me butter,” the child repeated her first request.

“My child, I would give you anything you asked, if only I had it, my little foolish girl!” the mother said to her child.

Tsirele would not believe it and pointed to the pantry.

“Ot, come see, I will show you,” the mother said going to the pantry. She took the empty butter bowl and showed it to the child...

And Tsirele looked at the empty butter bowl with such a longing look, and the little child... The poor little bird of a poor striker again gave out a silent, heartrending sigh.

“Give more butter, Mama,” the child said so sadly and reached out with her little hands.

“No more, my life,” answered the mother, and in her voice you could hear the tears.

“No pennies,” explained the young Tsirele.

“Yes, my daughter, no more pennies.”

“Father will not bring them?”

“No, my soul, he will bring nothing.”

“Why Mama?”

“Like I told you, dear as eyes in my head, he is on strike.”

The child was silent for a while. Then suddenly she asked a question:

“What is that, Mama?”

“What, my child?”

“Why Papa doesn’t bring pennies?”

“He is on strike, my child.”

“Who is that?” Tsirele asked again.

“No one, my child, it is a strike,” explained the mother. Tsirele still did not understand and asked again:

“What is that, Mama?”

“A strike, my soul.”

“A boogeyman?”

“No, my child, you can not understand... You are still too young. When you are older you will understand...”

The wind became stronger... It began to savagely rattle the window panes... The whole house shuddered... A violent howling could be heard... Tsirele pressed closer to her mother and trembled with fear...

“Foolish little girl, don’t be afraid, my life...”

“Is that the strike, Mama?”

“Foolish child, that is the wind...”

Tsirele listened, nestled closer to her mother and began eating the piece of dry bread...

And from the mother’s eyes, tears fell on her child’s little head. Also from Tsirele’s eyes came a pair of child’s tears which fell on the piece of dry bread...

“Mama!” the child suddenly cried out...

“What is it, Tsirele? Veh iz mir, why are you crying, darling?”

“Where is Papa?”

“He will soon be coming, foolish little girl...”

The child went to sleep with the little piece of bread in her hand. And the striker’s wife wept silently...

Both

The month of July with its burning heat had brought to Rainach the Expressman's house misfortune upon misfortune and trouble upon trouble.

In the shops business was slack, as a result Rainach the Expressman's business was also reduced, because his income was dependent upon transporting orders from several shops.

Rainach's wife, who had been an invalid for several years, got worse and worse as the days grew hotter and hotter.

A week earlier the expressman called to the house a doctor, and the medicine man spoke great words and mountains, great discourses, from which Rainach only understood that his wife was in danger, and any day could bring her death... But that was as nothing, the greatest misfortune, the biggest trouble befell him yesterday; when his horse, his provider, his only source of sustenance, suddenly got sick due to the burning heat.

The last misfortune had completely beaten down the poor expressman!

He was used to the slack months during the summer: This trouble repeated itself every year.

The wife had also been sick for years. In truth, up to now she could still schlep around the house, but now she just lied in bed half-dead, but that made little difference. She was of no use, as it were. The boss in the house was his oldest sixteen-year-old daughter.

But the horse!

Without the horse, he could not exist, he had to tend to the business. Should he not work for a few days, he could lose the whole trade, then he would be without bread, and a sick wife on his neck and with five children, not one of which earned a cent.

The oldest daughter could earn herself a little bread, but she had to tend the house.

That is why the sudden illness of the horse hit our poor expressman so hard.

The horse lay in the stable... The veterinarian explained that the situation was not very good, and the expressman trembled.

Business must be tended to. The next day Rainach had to rent a horse, and had to pay two dollars in advance. In paying out the cash he felt even stronger how much the horse meant to him, and his heart was even heavier and more bitter.

Rainach could not sleep the whole night, and laying next to his sick wife, he did not notice, that his wife was preparing to bid farewell to life.

Early the next morning Rainach got ready to go to work.

"Rainach" his dying wife called to him.

Rainach went to the sick woman.

“Rainach, how is the horse?” the dying woman asked in a weak voice.

“God should have mercy,” Rainach answered, and remained standing silent there for a moment then said:

“And how are you feeling?”

“Bad,” answered the sick woman, “Bid me farewell before you leave... When you return, I may no longer be here. – And the dying woman took her husband’s hand in her cold and half-dead hands.

“Sei gesund, Rainach...”

The expressman’s eyes suddenly filled with tears. He sadly lowered his head, and sat down next to his wife.

“You’re crying, Rainach?” the dying woman asked with a little smile, she had turned and laid her head on the expressman’s knee. From the expressman’s eyes fell a couple of tears.

“Don’t cry, Rainach... Go to work... It is getting late... Tell the children... How to take care of the horse” the sick woman said.

“Sei gesund, my wife.”

“Go in good health.”

Rainach went to the stable once again to take a look at the horse, and gave the children some instructions on how to deal with the poor creature. He also told his ten-year-old that at two o’clock in the afternoon he should run from shop to shop where the expressman expected to be and tell him if there was any news about the horse at home.

“Also take care of your mother,” Rainach said finally, and headed off to work...

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At three o’clock in the afternoon Rainach was near to the shop where his boy was to give him news from home, and driving to the agreed location, the expressman tried to meet his destiny.

“Perhaps the boy will say,” Rainach thought, “that everything is good with the horse,” and the expressman felt very heavy in his heart.

“What would one do then?” he continued to think, and shrugged his shoulders in despair.

The horse is not insured, and he did not have the savings to buy another. Renting a horse is a complete waste, there would not be enough for the horse and for him.

“What to do? What to do?” whispered Rainach and he became so upset, so bitter, and it seemed to him that the whole world was ending.

“And perhaps the news will be that my wife has died,” Rainach thought... And his heart remained still and calm.

There will be no change in the household, the situation will be easier, because the sick woman is an extra person in the house, and only creates trouble. Rainach did not forget, that the sick woman was insured for a hundred and fifty dollars, and from the funeral expenses there would be some money left over... The expressman foresaw a big picnic, and his heart grew lighter.

Far, far in a deep, hidden corner of the expressman's soul, there could be heard a weak voice from his conscience in the form of a quiet, longing ache. It reminded the expressman how at one time his old wife had been young... The sick woman was healthy, the dying woman was pretty and flourishing... Memories came to mind of scenes and images of how the sick woman has spent her years, her strength, being a true wife, a gifted manager of the household and one who worked day and night, hard and bitter for him and the children...

Vaguely, Rainach had an obscure feeling that his calculations, his earlier arithmetic concerning his wife was a wrongdoing. Something pressed on his heart... But it did not last long, the cold, dry interest, stifled the voice from his conscience, and when the expressman went into the shop, it was very clear, that it would be better to hear that his wife had died, rather than to learn that the horse was dead.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rainach," the friendly voice of the shop foreman greeted the expressman.

The expressman bowed and answered with the same friendly greeting. Rainach had also understood that in the foreman's friendly greeting there was also an element of compassion, and he knew that there was sad news to come.

"Has my boy been here?" the expressman asked with a trembling voice.

"He has."

"What is the news from my home?"

"Unfortunately, no good news," the foreman answered.

"Is my horse dead?" Rainach asked, and for a moment his heart stood still.

"Unfortunately, yes."

Rainach's face turned white as a corpse.

"How is my wife?" Rainach asked, almost mechanically.

"Have courage, old man," the foreman answered sadly.

"Dead?"

"She is now in heaven."

Rainach wrung his hands; but he did so to appear respectable. In his heart he felt freed by the last news, because in his mind already ran the thought of the insurance policy on his wife, by which he saw himself rescued.

"Go home to your dead wife, to your children," the foreman said to Rainach and looked upon him with pity.

“Yes, I must go,” Rainach answered, and turned to go to the door.

“One minute,” the foreman stopped him.

Rainach remained standing.

The foreman took from a cabinet a bottle of whiskey, poured out a glass and gave it to Rainach, “Drink, brother!”

Rainach drank it down.

“Don’t lose your courage,” the foreman comforted the expressman, and offered him another glass.

Rainach drank the second glass, and with a foolish voice he said:

“This is how God punishes me.”

“One should not sin,” the foreman said from his side, “With one hand God punishes, and with the other He is merciful.”

“True, true,” Rainach agreed, and he left the shop feeling free and light.

Myer the Presser's Bundle

After Passover, when the sun began to warm and the beloved summer came on, Gosie selected a day when her husband, Myer the Presser, would not go to work, and the both of them would clear out winter from the house.

Gosie collected the winter clothes, her husband's hats, her own winter garments, both of their torn, wool socks, warm schmattes, wadded clothing and so forth. She laid everything in a heap on the floor, stood next to it assuming a dramatic pose and called out in a thoughtful, but ringing voice:

"Myer, come here right away!"

Myer showed up immediately.

"What do you need from me" he asked his wife.

"What do we do with this?" Gosie said indicating the heap of winter clothes.

Myer went over to the pile of winter clothing, stood there for a while, thinking with penetrating looks at the objects... His face became more and more serious. After a while he shrugged his shoulders, sort of using them to display considerable doubt, then he gave himself a shake and said fast and dismissively:

"Throw them out to a clean place!"

"A shame," Gosie said calmly.

"Rags," said Myer.

"Nevertheless," answered Gosie.

Myer got on his knees before the heap of clothes and looked them over again.

"To a clean place," he said again with more conviction.

"And I say that it is a shame," Gosie held to her opinion.

"Rags that one can no longer wear."

"Do you have others?" asked Gosie, and in the tone of her voice was a reproach.

"For the coming year we have a good God," hoped Myer.

"One may hope," Gosie allowed, "Nevertheless, I know about your bitter livelihood... For a dry piece of bread you have, but otherwise for a shirt you have nothing."

"Nu, but one can no longer use it," said Myer, a little offended, "That a person must have others is not an opinion, one has to afford it."

"Does one have to take it all just as it is and throw it out?" Gosie did not believe that at all.

"No, not just like that, first have a funeral," Myer smiled good-naturedly.

"At the very least take them by a ragman," said Gosie acting the boss.

“Nu, do it, go call a ragman,” Myer found no reason not to.

Gosie went toward the door, but then she gave the schmattes another look, turned around and remained standing there.

“No, Myer,” Gosie said decisively, “I won’t throw them out.”

“We don’t need them,” answered Myer.

“I will bundle them up and carry them to the cellar.”

“Do it then,” Myer didn’t care.

Gosie made them up into a bundle and Myer carried them to the cellar.

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The beautiful summer continued on its way... It was hot, stuffy, Myer perspired and was deathly miserable in the shop. Gosie exhausted herself at home... They went around half-naked, they would have gladly shed their skin... And neither the cloth ironer, nor his wife gave a single thought to the poor bundle in the cellar.

The bundle, however, did not despair, he already knew from years of experience what had happened to him and what was going to happen.

Myer the Presser’s business progressed as usual.

Myer ironed and the boss tailored. Myer went on strike and the boss remained silent. Myer had slack time and the boss waited. Myer relented and the boss laughed... As so it went during the lovely, warm summer...

During the day, when the sun beat down, it was warm; only in the early morning and at night was it nice and cool.

When Myer ran to work in the morning, he caught a chill, and coming home from work it was like a cauldron.

Gosie also froze to bits.

She chose a day when her husband was home, and began to talk about taking on the winter clothes in the house.

“Myer,” asked Gosie, “What is going to happen?”

“What should happen?”

“It is nearly winter,” said Gosie.

“I see,” answered Myer.

“It is already very cold,” said Gosie.

"I feel it," answered Myer.

"What should we do?" asked Gosie.

"What can one do?" asked Myer from his side.

"There is not a warm cloth in the house," Gosie shared the bitter news.

"I know," Myer answered quietly, and lowered his head sadly. Both thought about the bundle in the cellar, but neither wanted to mention it.

"Go right away into the cellar," It broke Gosie's heart.

"Ha?" asked Myer, slow to understand.

"In the cellar, the bundle," repeated Gosie, and both gave out a deep, hopeless sigh...

Myer did not have to be asked twice, and headed to the cellar. Soon there was a guest in the house; the bundle with the schmattes, which they had wanted to toss out at the beginning of summer.

Myer and Gosie fell to their knees with great respect before the bundle with the rags, they untied it, and both began to regard the items.

"Still a good overcoat," said a pleased Myer.

"One can wear it one more winter," added Gosie.

"A winter, not a winter, until God helps us with a new one, I can still use it," Myer made the compromise.

"And my garment is also still good," said Gosie as she showed it to Myer.

"One will have to do some fixing," Myer made the compromise.

"And the socks are still good enough," said Gosie.

"They will be good," answered Myer.

"Each scrap will come to some use," said Gosie.

"Everything is good for winter," added Myer.

They took the bundle, and each item took its old place in the closet...

And so the bundle traveled from the house to the cellar, and from the cellar to the house, and again from house to cellar, and back from the cellar to the house... Already for long, long years...

Sitting Shiva on the Roof

Where he found himself during the whole, big day I can not reckon, but when the long, boiling hot summer days began to leave the sinful world – (The time of year when this scene played out is the month of July) – when the sun began to stay in the western side of the sky, and the soft evening shadows grew wider and longer, then he came.

He rang any doorbell, because he did not have his ‘own’ bell in the apartment house, and any inhabitant in the building whose bell he rang, opened the door for him.

After a weak, almost pitiful ring, every one of the tenants knew that it was him – “Our Roof Border.” With a good-natured smile, they hit the electric button and let him in.

He went through all of the levels, right to the roof, as though going to an old home, there he stayed nights; and disappeared again during the day.

He did not have a dwelling in the apartment house. He had no lodging, no relatives, no landsman from the Old Country, no friends.

The roof – that is his place for the night. He kept his bed coverings there, which he slept under when the night was nice and warm, and he covered himself with the same bed coverings when cold nights came or when it rained.

In the early morning he spread the bed coverings out to dry or to air out, and our roof border sallied forth.

Where he went and where he came from we don’t know, and no one cared enough to find out. We understood that he looked for work, but the fact that he came back to the roof at night indicated that his search for work was not successful, so we didn’t have to ask.

Our roof border had a name, Mr. Bludin.

To answer the question of how Mr. Bludin came to our roof, one must recount a short but simple story.

At one time he was a border in the apartment house. The benefactors who give him lodging were old, good residents, and our roof border lived with them for several good years.

For these long years in our tenement he had earned a good reputation.

A quiet, calm, helpful young man of thirty-something was our roof border. His pale, earnest face, his quiet demeanor, called forth respect and all of the residents without knowing him and knowing nothing about the man respected and liked him... Even the housekeeper would always give him a cheerful “Good-morning,” even though Bludin was just a border in the house... And the housekeeper looked upon borders as parasites.

Later people began to notice in Bludin’s face, that the man was not at his best. Naturally, everyone knew the secret that for a half-year he had not paid for his lodging.

The hosts who gave him the lodging did not have the courage to force him to move. They let it be known that they just couldn't bring themselves to do it because he was such a fine man. But the people muttered to one another, that the hosts did not have the mettle to make him move because in the good years when Bludin was earning money, he never cost them a penny and they did very well in the deal. According to the story, the hosts played an evil trick on him; On one fine day, when Bludin was not at home, they moved. They did not give out a forwarding address, and Bludin's suitcase with his few belongings, the jokers left behind in the empty rooms. Out of pity the housekeeper took the belongings, and in the evening when poor Bludin came home, the janitor handed them over to him and broke the sad news, that he was no longer a border in the building, and had no reason to go upstairs.

When Bludin comprehended the trick that had been played on him – so our housekeeper told us – he turned white as a corpse. He smiled bitterly, and his eyes filled with tears.

Bludin's good reputation helped him out in this unfortunate situation: The housekeeper was very sympathetic to him.

"Do you have any money?" the housekeeper asked the unlucky, deceived border.

"I have none," Bludin answered in short and honestly.

"Do you have friends, countrymen here in New York?"

"None at all," answered Bludin in despair.

The housekeeper thought for a moment, and for the first time since he had been a housekeeper in America, so he himself said, he had pity on a border, and gave him permission to stay the night, but only to spend the night on the roof, until his situation improved and he was in a position to secure real lodgings.

We, the neighbors in the apartment house, out of pity for the poor, kindly Bludin, had nothing against the arrangement, and that is how our tenement building got its roof border.

Two days ago our roof border received a letter from home.

In the evening when Bludin returned to the roof, one of the neighbors gave him the letter.

Bludin looked at the envelope.

"From home," he muttered to himself, and his cloudy features lightened somewhat.

"You see," he turned to me while at that moment I was also on the roof near him, "You see, it is from home... I once had a home... I have there a dear, young sister, I have there an elderly mother."

Speaking those words, Bludin tore open the envelope and began to read the letter from home...

"Oy!" Bludin suddenly cried out.

The letter fell from his hands. His face turned white, struck his head with his hand, and sat down on the roof as though his legs had been chopped off, and began to weep loudly.

Everyone who was on the roof at the time gathered around him.

“Bludin, what is the matter?” someone asked.

“Bludin, what has happened?” asked another.

“Some misfortune?” a third person asked.

“What did they write to you?” asked a fourth person.

Bludin didn’t answer...

Bludin wrung his hands and wept.

He looked around with a strange look in his eyes... As long as I live I will not forget that look. Big, burning eyes... Full of despair... Full of pleading...

“Leave me alone for a while... Take pity...”

He said nothing more.

We all moved away from him, the roof was big enough... But even from a distance, we could hear how he cried... With a stifled voice, but we could hear it.

Later we found out that the letter brought him the bitter news that his mother had died. That is what his younger sister wrote to him, and asked that he should bring her to him in America, because now she was an orphan, and he was her father and her mother...

In the coming week Bludin did not go out to seek work. He sat shiva on the roof.

The housekeeper was a pious Jew, and he allowed it. And we tenants were not against it. In fact, all of us helped him out financially all through the week.

We took pity on him. Everyone talked about his dead mother, and even more about his little sister.

Little Albert's Punishment

Albert is nine years old. He is small in stature, thin and pale. There is no place for him in school, so he remains at home. One could say that it is a blessing from on high that Albert remains at home because he can be useful there.

Albert's father is a button hole maker, but he will soon forget his trade because the work stopped a long, long time ago.

Day and night he goes around seeking work, he schleps himself around from early morning until night, it shouldn't happen to you – no work can he find.

He is already black as coal, his life gives him no satisfaction.

Albert's mother is a wage earner. She takes in washing, she gets pants to finish them, but – What can I say? Women's business can't afford dry bread!

Albert has a little sister, Emily. She is not yet a year old, and when she wants something to eat, or when she is cold she cries to high heaven. Albert loves his little sister very much, and when he has a spare minute, he plays with her, kisses her, and warms her little hands, which are always blue from the cold, with his breath. In the evening Albert peddles newspapers, and in the early morning he gets coal and wood for the family.

Early every morning since the cold winter arrived, Albert goes out with a basket in hand. He goes through the streets with his eyes on the ground, and when he finds a lump of coal or a piece of wood he picks it up... Often, very often the little Emily freezes waiting for Albert's little basket.

When Albert comes across a standing coal wagon – he watches for his chance. He waits until they finish dumping, then he goes with his little basket and usually he is able to collect several pieces of coal all at once.

Albert comes home broken to pieces; but his mother kisses him, and makes a fire. He sits next to the oven with little Emily and he is happy.

But the last foray left Albert very, very unhappy.

It was a cold, cold winter day. The sun did shine, but the frost just laughed at it – and over ruled it. The frost bit and ripped it to death.

His mother would have, perhaps, not allowed him to go outside in such cold to collect coal, but that morning little Emily was getting a little sick. She hiccuped and trembled like a leaf. It was very cold in the house. They did have a little bit of coal, but too little to warm the room. They also did not have any money to buy more. Nu, the mother dressed her good, little son in a mountain of schmattes and let him leave with his little basket.

Albert left to go outside...

The cold penetrated the schmattes, and tenderly embraced him, he began to shiver in all of his limbs, but he did have some good luck: He came across more than one standing coal wagon, and each time

the take was not bad. His fingers and toes began to sting, and he ran toward home, carrying a nice haul of coal.

Ach, how cold he was! He felt like he was frozen; but there before his eyes was another wagon; they had just dumped a load of coal, and he did not have to wait long.

Albert stopped. He began stomping his feet.

The coal was unloaded; Albert immediately ran with his little basket to collect the pieces of coal left behind... Suddenly, someone gave him a sharp kick...

The shocked boy jumped back, trembling.

Next to him stood a big, blackened, Italian coal hauler yelling something at him.

Albert wanted to start running, but the coal man had got hold of him, and snatched the little basket from his hand, and flung the contents of the basket over a half block. The little boy's heart clenched in pain and his eyes filled with tears.

He picked up the little basket, made a wide curve around the angry Italian, and went home crying...

Ey, there where the little Emily was freezing...

Back in the Dispensary

Nachum was a baker, that is to say he was living in hell, baking bread for strangers to eat. On average Nachum earned five dollars a week. He has, it shouldn't happen to you, a wife with three children and has a fair amount of troubles.

Nachum wife is named Gitel.

Gitel is a tall woman and bony, with weak cried-out eyes.

This Gitel, Nachum the Baker's wonder woman, was a habitual patient in the local dispensary, because that, which feeds a worm under a stone, had together with poverty dealt out to Nachum a pack of sicknesses. For as long as Nachum could remember everyone in his family, big and little, were on the verge of death. He himself was rheumatic. It attacked him and hurt his feet. He felt weak in all of his limbs. His Gitel has a heart murmur, a weakness in her limbs; ringing in her head, and her eyesight is getting darker and darker.

Nachum's oldest son, Albert, would be a very fine boy, if he were bigger and more healthy.

His age is, keyn enore, ten years and his height is of a six-year-old, – and he breathes with difficulty. And above all, it shouldn't happen to you, his little head is not clean, pardon my French.

Tsirele, a fifteen year old girl, she should grow up in happiness, – says her Mama – would be a “regular doll” if she were not flawed. The end of her nose is always red, and something is always running from her ears.

The youngest boy, Berke, is a very fine boy but weak in his stomach. If he didn't have such trouble with his stomach, he would be a happy blessing in the house.

Once, in the good years, Nachum would go to doctors in the dispensary about his rheumatism; but he stopped and turned to home remedies.

But Gitel had not yet given up hope. To this day, whenever she had a spare minute, and a few pennies in her pocket, she ran to the dispensary, either with Albert, or Tsirele, or little Berke, and on occasion for herself.

Gitel had taken an ocean of remedies, and gone to several dispensaries. Last week Berke began to take ill. Gitel immediately was off with him to the nearby dispensary, took the remedy and full of hope gave it to the sick boy.

In the middle of the night Gitel got up from bed neither dead or alive. The child was getting worse. He started vomiting. He lit up like a flame, and was completely wasted.

As Gitel endured that night she became stronger than steel.

In a day the boy was somewhat better, and was able to sleep.

When Nachum returned from the baker's pit, he saw his wife sitting next to Berke's place crying. The poor father trembled. His legs were about to give out.

“Gitel, what is it?” he could hardly get the words out, “What is wrong with our Berke?”

“Sick... very sick. May God show mercy on him,” – Gitel wept even more.

“What is going on? What happened?”

Gitel told him what had gone on that night.

“What can we do? What can we do?” Nachum wrung his hands.

“I should know? My head is splitting...”

“Should you take him back to the dispensary?”

“I should know? What do I know about such evil?”

“Nu, what, then, should we do?”

“I don’t know either... Perhaps... Perhaps... We should try a doctor?...” Gitel said with a trace of fear in her voice.

“A doctor?”

“I will tell you the truth, that I am really afraid to carry him out into the street.”

“Nu, will you call a doctor to come here?” Nachum was slow to understand.

“I should know?...”

“That could cost a dollar...”

“I know my misfortune!...”

“Even if it costs a dollar... Our poverty is so great that we can hardly keep body and soul together. I have five dollars right now. What are you going to do with them? What hole are you going to plug with them?”

“I should know? I should know?” Gitel said, “You go around naked; I am always sick. We hardly have shirts on our backs. The children are in tatters and rags, but it is like – God is punishing us. But see, Berke has to be so sick...”

“Bitter troubles...”

“Berke, my dear child, veh iz mir, what has happened to you? Such a child, such a child!...” Gitel began to weep again.

“Nu, shush, meshuggene... He will be whole again... It is passing, it is nothing.”

“Yes?” Gitel gave out a heavy sigh, almost as if a heavy stone had been lifted from her heart. – “Oh, if only, if only! But nevertheless I want it confirmed by a doctor. But people say, if you call a doctor to your home it is a happy blessing.”

“A wonder!,” Nachem answered, “A dollar is a dollar...”

“Nu, what can one do? So it is with the dollar, so without the dollar; And I will tell you the truth, that it will not cost a dollar.”

“How so?” a surprised Nachem asked.

“I will tell you,” Gitel made the calculations, “With Albert and with Tsirele I will have to, just like one has to live in the world, take them to the dispensary. With Tsirele her nose has been glowing all week like it is on fire, and with Albert his little head has gotten worse. Nu, if I take them and little Berke to the dispensary it will cost more or less thirty cents, you understand, but if the doctor comes to the house for Berke, then we can ask him about the other two.”

“Nu, it is a great pity!” Nachem answered.

“And would you like me to tell you a secret?” Gitel went on, “It won’t hurt anything if you ask the doctor about your feet. You are groaning all night long. It is horrible.”

“No, no!” Nachem answered, “And also your eyes you should ask him about.”

“I will see how it goes.”

“I am afraid...”

“Of what?...”

“I don’t know. Perhaps he will say nothing?”

“Nu, enough, nu,” Gitel assured her husband, “Once he is there, he will not do something so bad as that.”

“Nu, should someone already make a hole in their heart... but who shall we call?”

“Ah, that is a problem! We can get the best doctor. For a dollar any doctor will come. Just call.”

“No, my wife!” Nachem said with a determined voice, “One like that would be an old expert in the profession. – No, one needs to know with whom we are dealing. Another can make for you such a wedding, if you have a little something to scratch with.”

“What is that?”

“Seriously, you don’t understand? They heal, and heal and heal in such a way that you have to keep calling them.”

“Don’t think that, meshuggener!” Gitel countered.

“Don’t think that, don’t think that ten times over...” he spit back.

“Only eh...” Gitel said.

“What eh?”

“He will see that it is not the place. Poverty, bless the Name, shows in every corner. He will see that such a trick will not work.”

“Yes, but nevertheless...”

“I’m telling you, call the doctor.”

“Who?”

“Altermanen. Mrs. Weinstein says that he is a good one, and a respectable doctor. To her Chaim, he should be with us for many long years, the doctor treated him for a long time.”

“Where do I find this Altermanen?”

“Go to Mrs. Weinstein, she will tell you.”

Nachem left to call on the doctor.

The sick child continued to sleep. Only from time to time did little Berke let out a deep sigh in his sleep.

Gitel started straightening up the house in honor of the doctor’s arrival.

Nachem soon returned home.

“Nu, what?” Gitel asked.

“He will soon be here.”

And in about a half hour there was a hasty knock on the door. And, indeed, a man came in with a pointed beard. That was the doctor.

“Does Nachem live here?” he asked in a loud voice.

“Yes, yes!” Nachem answered and brought the doctor into the front room.

“Where is the sick person?” the doctor asked.

Nachem brought Berke to the doctor.

The doctor examined the sick boy, listened to him, tapped on him all over, then he assumed a serious face, looking as though he needed to save the sick boy. He let out a sigh, sat himself down, took out a pencil and a slip of paper, on which his name was printed, and I don’t know what else, then another name of a pharmacist and then he stopped to think.

Then he wrote something on the paper.

“This is a medicine for him. Every two hours a medicine.”

“Is this something serious?” Nachem asked quietly.

“No,” the doctor said in truth, but soon corrected himself, “But you can not let it go, you must get him well.” and the doctor recommended that they have him come back a second time.

The doctor took his hat, but Gitel quickly stopped him.

“See, you should be healthy,” she said to him in a somewhat frightened tone, “See, what is wrong with my Albert’s head.” And Albert suddenly appeared in front of the doctor.

The doctor laid his hat back down, and to Gitel's delight the doctor looked at Albert's head.

"Well," the doctor said, "That will take a long time to heal, but he will be healthy again. I will write a prescription for him."

And Altermanen wrote two prescriptions for Albert, a salve to smear on the area and a mixture to take.

"Oy, the children, the children..." Gitel said somewhat stealthily, "I don't understand what kind of a discharge is coming from my Tsirele. Think what a dear child she is, nu, something is running from her ears, and her nose is so red."

Nachem had done his job during this time and placed Tsirele before the doctor.

The doctor let out a deep sigh, and turned to Tsirele. He wrote a prescription for her also.

"Listen," he turned to Nachem, "Take this prescription to Blofman, there on the corner. I will go ahead and tell him that for each of the prescriptions he should write the name of the patient in Yiddish so that there will be no mistakes."

"Danke schoen!" Nachem answered, thinking that with the doctor one should speak in the German manner.

The doctor put on his hat. Nachem put his hand in his pocket for the dollar, and while appearing to fish around for the dollar, he said:

"You know what? I am also sick. I hurt in all of my bones, to the point where I can hardly stand it. I know, perhaps I shouldn't ignore it, perhaps I should do something about it..."

Gitel was standing nearby and was pleased to see how well her husband was able to sneak another request in on the doctor.

But the doctor understood that they were trying to work in another free consultation and he answered:

"No, no you should not let the condition go; Come to my office between five and seven, and I will examine you."

Nachem and his wife went cold in their hearts, Gitel remained silent, and Nachem, slow to understand, said:

"Yes, one should..."

"This is for your trouble, doctor."

The doctor looked at the money, and a bitter smile appeared on his lips.

"No, dear friend," he said, turning to Nachem, "No, that is not what it comes to..."

"Ha?..." Nachem said, and his soul sank to the bottom of his feet.

"My fee for a visit is one dollar," the doctor explained, "When I treat one patient. But here I have treated three. I have been here for over an hour... The fee will be three dollars... But... Well, I will reduce it to two."

Gitel turned white as chalk, and Nachem heard nothing but "three" and then "two."

“We are poor people...” Gitel said with a sigh.

“What can I do?... Your husband gets paid for the work he does.”

“But silence!” Nachem shot a look at poor Gitel, and with that something in her heart died. The doctor stood there like an oak, and did not budge from the spot. Nachem did not wait to be asked, he took out a second dollar and gave it to the Herr Doctor.

“Well, goodbye!” the doctor said and left by the door.

For several seconds the two stood there as if dumbstruck.

“Nu, Gitele,” Nachem was the first to speak, “You still want to call doctors?... Two dollars... Two dollars... When some one gets sick they must go to the dispensary... Nachem the Baker who fills an entire week of work for four and a half dollars, gives two dollars to a doctor... Gitele... Ha, Gitele? ...”

“How could I know?” a trembling Gitel wrung her hands.

“Now go to the pharmacist and make a deal with him... Nothing will remain in the beggar’s sack.”

“What should one do? What should one do?”

“What? What...” Take the prescriptions and rip them to pieces, then bundle up the child and take him to the dispensary.”

Little Berkele began to cry.

“Veh iz mir over you! Veh iz mir, my little Berke, veh iz mir, my little son!” the mother began to weep.

Nu, nu!..” Nachem said. He buried both of his hands in his hair and just sat there.

Later Gitel and her sick Berke went again to the dispensary.

In the Jewish Street

When I get take the train and the doors open wide at the station, the passengers go outside, and hardly am I up the steps but I am met with the first troubles and misfortune.

On the little platform on the steps sits a crippled man. A man with amputated feet. In his hand he holds a hat – he begs for alms.

Two Jews with dark, worried faces who came on the same train, are walking ahead of me and I hear how the two of them are talking about the man with the amputated feet.

“How much can he make in a day sitting there in the stairway?” one asks the other.

“That’s easy!” answers the second, “In the course of a day thousands of people pass by there – it is a goldmine!”

“And others are worried about their livelihood...” the first one says.

I catch up with the two men, and cast a glance at their worried, dark faces. I meet their eyes, and it appears to me that both of them envy the man with the amputated feet, because he has a good income...

I go down the stairs.

“Mister, buy a newspaper from me,” a woman by the pole stops me, “I am a widow with little children.”

“I don’t need one,” I answer.

She holds on to me and tries to speak with me:

“What do you mean, you don’t need a newspaper? You are perhaps going to get one from someone else... Give to receive... Have pity!”

And before I had time to answer she stuck a newspaper in my pocket.

“How do you know which newspaper I read?” I asked the woman.

“What? Aren’t they all the same?” asked the woman in all earnestness, “All newspapers are equal; but if you want you can exchange it.”

I kept the merchandise and continued on my way.

Once more a dark encounter:

From out of a restaurant came a star actress from the Yiddish theater. From a distance, toward her, came a Yiddish playwright. On the author’s worried face was a timid smile, he nodded to the performer, once, twice, greeted her, made a heartbreaking grimace, and she ignored him... She ignored the poor writer... A blind woman one would think, could at least acknowledge the greeting, but she, a star actress cast her clear, innocent eyes, and walked right past the poor creator and the writer was left standing there.

I recognized them both the star and the author... She had performed many of his plays, and earned money and fame from them... And now she probably doesn't need him... Pretended that she did not know him... And when I looked at the writer's saddened face, I quickly saw, that the writer was not looking at the actress, but at the bitter, dark, need which was pushing him deeper into the abyss.

I went past him... I caught up with the actress... A contented smile played on her brightly colored lips... Horror and disgust gripped my heart!

"A piece of good candy, Mister!" someone pulled at my arm.

I looked around: Standing up against an empty store was a woman with a little basket of candy... The face of the candy seller was dark and worried.

And on her face and on the face of the playwright who was left standing, and on the face of the woman who had assured me that all newspapers were the same, and on the face of the man with the amputated feet, and also the two men who had pitied the beggar because they were worried about their own income – on all of these faces as varied as they all were, I observed something common, some misery – something as though an invisible hand had stamped all of these faces with one and the same signature...

The candy seller was holding a small child by the hand. A pale child, dirty, wrapped in some sort of schmatte, and on his head he wore a big, floppy hat of Russian origin – God knows how the baby came to have this outfit... Here comes a young boy, filthy and naked. On his head is a sort of bandage, but it is so filthy that it is hard to tell what it is. A young girl comes by... About seven years old, with a deformed side arrived and joined the group, all huddling around the mother smiling at her. They smiled with pale, bloodless little lips – And these smiles caused my heart to clench, and in the same heart a heavy sorrow, a sorrow which chased from my heart the smile of the actress with the brightly colored lips.

"Mister, a suit, cheap!" Someone by the pole drew my attention...

I looked around – A nice, well appointed store, which drew the eye! And next to the store a man with a shopkeeper's smile on his face, a "puller-in." He stopped me and covered me in flattery.

"Come in the store, Mister, are you afraid? It's a sale, you can get merchandise for a nothing..."

And when I got peeved and countered with, I don't need anything, the man's face took on another aspect: The flattering smile was exchanged for another smile – A smile of bitterness and scorn. He cast a laughing look at the way I was dressed, and his face spoke to me as though with these words:

"To hell with you the way you are dressed!..."

Angry, I went on my way.

"A shine, Mister?" A little Jewish boy came toward me, about eight years old with a pale little face with sparkling dark eyes. A torn cap, torn stockings, torn shoes, and on his shoulders he carried his tools.

"A shine, Mister, only two cents..." He looked at me with a flattering smile; with his eyes he indicated my shoes, and he was already taking his cloths from his tool box...

"I don't need it," I stopped the boy.

And the boy's face changed just like the man in front of the large clothing store. And also the boy gave me a laughing look and he cast a roguish glance at my shoes as if to say:

"My shoes either!"

"Mister, a little glass of lemonade!"

"Ice cold orange water!"

"A penny, a penny a glass... Refreshes the soul..."

I give a look.

All along the sidewalk there are long, long rows of pushcarts. On this pushcart is a high, glass basin, with some yellow liquid, and swimming in the liquid are slices of lemons, and next to that pushcart stands the seller – a Reb Jew with a beard, with a dark, sunken, worried face.

"A penny a glass! A cent a glass!"

"Ice cold!"

"It refreshes the soul!"

It gave me an appetite. I go over to a pushcart, purchase a glass of lemonade, and begin to drink.

"You're good business, Ahasuerus!" said a passing peddler of lemonade to the man, I bought the drink from.

I was interested in the name the peddler called out for my lemonade seller, and I asked:

"Mister Leben, why did that man call you Ahasuerus?"

"Because his wife has on her forehead that which Vashti had," the passing peddler answered my question, and then laughed: – Then they talked about lemonade.

I stopped in the middle of drinking and stepped away from Ahasuerus.

The young boy who had stopped me for a shoe shine ran to the lemonade peddler and said to Ahasuerus:

"Mister, give me something to drink..."

"Do you want to buy a glass of water?" asked the peddler.

"No," said the young boy, "Let me drink what the Mister left behind."

"Go to hell, you ruffian!" Ahasuerus drove away the young boy, and he poured out a little water from the glass I left behind and quickly drank the rest himself.

The young Russian Jew ran past me. His clothes were still half foreign, the face pale, tired. I could swear it was from hunger. Under his arm he carried two books. He ran and hummed under his breath a Russian tune.

I listened – The words to the song were Nekrasov's verses.

And I thought to myself: A Jewish Nekrasov had to come to the Jewish downtown... But who will sing his songs? Gentiles – No, nor the Jews either...

Ah, there is my refuge – and I entered my home.

Out of a Shower Dry

Mister Gergel is no greener in America. It is just about six years since he came over to this land. Not once in that whole time has he taken a bath since he has been a New Yorker.

If you think of him, that he does not like bathing, you would be wrong in your suspicion. At his home on the other side of the ocean, in Lithuania the town of Karmelava, Gergel would go to the baths every Friday. And on those times when a holiday fell in the middle of the week, Gergel would be no less meticulous and would run to the Karmelava baths twice in the same week.

Gergel did not have to go a great distance, he actually lived window to window with the baths.

And he also had enough time. In truth, he was a tailor, not a lazy man, but it was Karmelava, not New York and he did not yet know of the beggerman's wages he would be earning in Mr. Dardick's sweatshop.

When Gergel came here, a friend from the Old Country, a landsman, who he visited took him to the baths.

When Gergel got out of the baths, he was not pleased at all.

"It is all ni-be ni-me ni-kukureku," Gergel said, "It is only for rich people, not for a tailor from Karmelava."

When Gergel found out that a bath cost twenty pennies – forty kopecks from back home, he was enraged, and on the spot swore that he would not go to the baths again as long as he lived.

Later Gergel went to work at Mr. Dardick's sweatshop. For two years he worked as a greenhorn twenty-one hours a day, and the thought of taking a bath, or some other way of washing his body, could only be characterized as a fantasy among Dardick's greenhorns. For Gergel during these two years he considered it a holiday if he had a chance to not sleep in his clothes.

Times changed. Gergel's situation improved. In those two years of hard work, he managed to save a little money, bring his family over and become the head of the household.

Now the fellow was only working eight to ten hours a day. On the Sabbath he didn't work at all, and he had time to take a bath. It is, in the first place, a shame the couple of pennies, when there were better uses for twenty or fifteen pennies. One must, understand me, support a family with Dardick's wages, and secondly, there was in the house a large wash tub, and when it was necessary one could crawl into the tub and help themselves.

This went on for six years. Gergel's wife had, during this time, grown out of being a greener, and she knew about Baron Hirsch's shower bath. Once, on a Friday afternoon, when it was a little slack in Dardick's sweatshop, and Gergel came home while the sun was still shining in the sky, he shared with his wife that his bones were aching.

"What can you do about it?" asked Deborah, Gergel's wife.

"I'm thinking to climb into the wash tub!" Gergel answered.

“Spend a nickel, try!” Deborah said, almost begging.

Gergel remained undecided for a while. It wasn’t so much the nickel but the bother. “Go schlep yourself, I don’t know where, and find a shower bath.

Deborah had convinced her husband, and gave him clean clothes. Gergel wrapped them in an old paper, and he was away to the shower baths.

“Just don’t be late,” Deborah called after him in the hall, “Because I won’t know what to think.”

“Nu, what would delay me there, what?” Gergel reassured his wife.

“It should be a remedy for you...” Deborah wished for her husband.

“Thank you,” Gergel answered, pleased, and he was off.

After several hours Gergel still had not returned. Deborah became more and more worried. God knows what sort of thoughts ran through her mind. She was about to go out and run after him, when she heard his footsteps in the hall.

“Praise be to God...” she said happily, and began to make a glass of tea for her husband.

Gergel came into the apartment.

“To your remedy, my husband!” Deborah greeted Dardick’s workman.

But then she turned and took a good look at her husband. She stood there with her mouth open and with bulging eyes... Gergel’s face was sweaty and blotched, just as he look when he left Dardick’s sweatshop.

Deborah could see that he did not go in any bath, and in her surprise she yelled:

“Gergel, you didn’t go?!”

“I went!” said with despair, and angrily flung the bundle with the clean clothes. The paper came apart and Deborah could see Gergel’s dirty cloths. She was even more bewildered.

“There now, why didn’t you wash your face while you were in the baths?” Deborah asked her husband.

“My face?... And my whole body I washed, what?”

“So, you did go...”

“Certainly I went...”

“Nu?”

“Nothing, it is America!” Gergel answered in anger, and sat down.

“What happened there, tell me!” Deborah looked at her husband and wondered.

“Ha, let it alone,” Gergel didn’t want to talk about it.

Deborah stood there, shrugged her shoulders, and said to herself:

“Just dismisses me. I don’t understand what is going on. He’s gone for four hours and comes back dirty, changed clothing and totally dry.”

“It is just America,” Gergel said, “Why are you surprised?”

“Nu, what do you mean, it is just America?” Deborah did not understand her husband.

“Go complain to Christopher Columbus.”

“But what is it with the bath?”

“I came out of it totally dry.”

“But how?”

“Have you every been in a shower bath?” asked his wife.

“But you already know...” Deborah answered.

“Nu, listen to me, and I will explain. And the daemon will know what a trap it is.”

“But people go there all the time...,” offered Deborah, and Gergel impatiently interrupted her:

“Just listen, you greener beast, I went there... Bought a ticket. Nu, everyone else did, me too... I went to the number indicated, nu, I had to wait... I waited and waited – The spirit left me as I waited. Thank God, they waved to me and guided me to a sort of little room. I looked around. A fine little room with a little mirror, with a steel comb on a small chain, and there was a small bench where one could sit, or place things, or undress. Above was a sort of apparatus with wheels and two chains hung down, nothing. I got undressed, slowly, I did not rush – How should I know? Then I sat down on the bench, gave the chain a pull – It nearly killed me... Ice cold water! I took hold of the other chain, and good, it was a miracle that I was cautious and tested the water with my hand – Cooking water, boiling, fire! If I had let it touch my skin, I probably would not have survived. Nightmares in your head, I thought to myself, stay on the bench and think what to do... Right now, think! Someone knocked on the door of the little room. “What is it,” I asked.”

“Leave now,” they answered.

“I quickly grabbed the chains... I worked them... I pulled on them... Nothing – either cold or boiling... Think harder!”

“Leave,” they yelled at me, “Mister, leave, if you don’t I will take you out by the collar.”

“Nu, I got out. Like I had a choice...”

Gergel was silent for a while and Deborah said with chagrin:

“But people go there and they come back satisfied?”

“If I would have had more time,” Gergel answered, “If I had of had more time, perhaps I would have figured out how one must work the shower. Nu, but they did not give you enough time to take a breath.”

“What are you going to do?” Deborah asked.

“I expect I will use the wash tub.”

“Oy, a piece of trouble!” Deborah said to her husband. She prepared the wash tub for Gergel.

The Apartment of Death and the Apartment of Need

These were the two most remarkable dwellings I have ever seen in my life.

They were two flats on the ground floor of a run-down tenement on Forsythe Street.

The flat on the left side was known in the neighborhood under the name of: The Need Flat.

The second flat on the right side was known as: The Death Flat.

People moved into the Need Flat only when they were driven to it by bitter poverty.

It is on the ground floor, it has a window on the street, and it could be used for business. And when one was by chance forced to find as fast as possible a pit with a window to the front for some sort of business, they would know about the Need Flat and run to it there.

When one makes a living from a whatever-it-is little store: a barber, a watchmaker, a tailor, a shoemaker and so forth, and when one is forced to quickly move out, for example, when the landlord raises the rent by double, and you are sent without warning an eviction notice and the knife is at your throat – one must, one way or another, get away, one must in a minute, one way or another, grab something... One remembers the Need Flat and runs there first thing!

The flat could not be rented to the usual tenant who was in a calm mood...

I have had the opportunity to see this flat. A horrible pit!

Dark, the darkness of Egypt!

The window on the right looked out on the wall of the building next door and plunged the flat into eternal night... The air was heavy, damp, suffocating; the walls old, ugly, stained brown; the ceiling low overhead; everything broken, suffocating, old, dirty, destroyed – a tomb!

But the flat earned the landlord good money... The rent was high. It was a flat for those in need! The landlord knew very well that when one came to take the flat, probably the flat seeker was at the end of his rope and could be fleeced!

If for some reason, or by mistake or through simple curiosity an average person looking for a flat came to see this place – the landlord would not want to even say a word to them. He wanted a needy tenant!

And the landlord or the housekeeper would know the right customer. – They were experienced... For example, when you came around asking about the flat, they would look you all over. Then they would judge how deep your need was.

“Do you have to move in right away?” they would ask appearing totally innocent.

If you answered that you had time to wait, they would not talk to you any more.

If you answered that you needed to move right away, they would probe deeper and say to you:

“The flat must be completely fixed up.”

If you answered that you were willing to wait until the flat was finished and ready to move in, they would consider you unfit and not haggle with you any more. But if you answered that you couldn't wait, that it didn't bother you to move into the pit just as it was, and they could see that you were hot to move, and they understood that you were ready to jump into the fire, only then were you welcomed... Then they would state a price that you cause you to stop in your tracks stunned, and when you came to your senses and asked:

“Really? For such a plague pit? Why is the rent to pay so high?”

They would stand there cold as stone and answer:

“That is what it is!”

The landlord knew very well that the tenant would not stay very long. As soon as one moved in, they would quickly look for another apartment. That is why they would demand a high rent and two months in advance... And besides, they would not let you stay... When you were there for two months, they would send you an eviction notice. In the event that you had in this time frame not found another suitable dwelling, they would run to you with a knife in hand:

“Pay your rent or move!”

Delay in paying the rent for this flat is not something that one would want to risk. They promised to fix up the flat, but everything remains the same. The landlord will not spend a single broken penny on this flat... The thief knows that be it as it may the Need Flat tenant will not be staying long, and the more the flat is neglected the more it decays... But the landlord will invest nothing in the upkeep of the place. New York is a city without mercy. There are enough needy neighbors, there are enough of such people who are often forced to quickly find another place and take this horrible pit...

This is the flat on the left. On the right, the second flat, is even worse, more horrible. Here people even in the greatest need avoid moving in... Here a person moves in only when they are about to die... This is the Death Flat!

For example, you are burdened by a misfortune, a father-in-law, a mother-in-law, a mother or a father is sick. It is an illness which can not be cured and can not be helped, such as a cancer, a swollen spleen, a weak heart, exhaustion, and so forth. For these reasons you can not take them to a hospital, or a 'home,' or institution. It is hard and bitter for you to bare. You know that the invalid must sooner or later pass on to the next world, but it is very unpleasant, very hard for you to wait for the end. – In this situation you know about the Death Flat in Forsythe Street. This flat has a wide spread reputation, and in these situations people come not just from the surrounding neighborhood, but from the whole area.

The Death Flat is provisioned with all of the 'comforts' for the moribund... There is a small bed, a little table, and some other little things which are in the flat, so when you rent the flat you do not have to worry about moving furniture in... Everything is there... Give the housekeeper a couple of dollars, and he will watch out for the dying person... The brown stained walls, the perpetual darkness and heavy atmosphere shortens the dying person's agony, and quickly brings the desired death.

In the rooms you will find the book of the Torah, borrowed by the landlord from the local shul. And when the person dies and people need to pray for a week with a minyan, everything is already prepared.

The rent in the death-flat is very high... But people pay! In such a situation who would take in into their head to haggle? People pay whatever is asked!

If you have need right now of whichever of the two remarkable flats on Forsythe Street, you can't get them: both are taken.

In the Need Flat lives a clock maker who formerly had his business on a high 'stoop' in Eldrich Street. The landlord who noticed that the clock maker was making a living, doubled his rent, and when the clock maker had not wanted to pay the impossible rent, he received an eviction notice and the poor man in his bitter need moved here into the Need Flat on Forsythe Street.

On the right, in the Death Flat her children installed their elderly mother who suffers from stomach cancer...

Both flats are occupied!

The Tea Drinker

Binchik is his name and he is a book agent.

In order to get customers for books, he schleps the whole day in offices of dentists, doctors, lawyers, and so forth and to people like this who have professions and want to have shelves of books.

When Binchik gets tired and exhausted schlepping around the professionals, he goes to a restaurant.

And the restaurant serves Binchik as a sort of market, where he runs his business and brings out his merchandise.

In the restaurant Binchik sees his regular customers. There he finds new customers.

When one sits in a restaurant, one needs something to read. New York is a city where no one lives for the next world, and when one sits in a warm, bright restaurant on a chair at a nicely set up table, the restaurateur wants that one should 'take something.' And if one does not fulfill the restaurateur's desire, there are waiters in the restaurant... And the waiters will continually remind one what they have to do.

In the good times, when books sold, Binchik would not turn away for the sake of a dollar, and the agent was a good customer for the restaurants. He would regularly have dinner in a restaurant. In the next one he would have supper; there he would only have a bite, and if he did not want food, he would have a glass of wine, a good cigar, and from time to time a glass of coffee to drink and finish up with a fine piece of cake, and so forth. In a word, he never left a restaurant with nothing – Always at the cash register he paid a respectable bill, and often delighted the waiter the way it should be.

And Binchik felt very, very comfortable in a restaurant, almost like being at home. On entering a restaurant he would meet the restaurateur with a friendly, bright "Blessings to you." As he left they would accompany him with a friendly smile. The waiter would always hand him his hat, his cane, help him with his coat and jacket, and in a friendly, subservient manner offer to light his cigar, which Binchik held ready in his mouth. In a word, everyone was happy, Binchik, the restaurateurs and the waiters.

But then the bad, bitter times came and the book trade fell on hard times.

When does one buy a book? When there is enough money around to throw about.

For the most part in New York one buys books much like they buy a piece of furniture – It is a kind of ornament, it is fashion. Who has time to actually read books in New York! If one wanted to sell books just for reading, the publisher would have a very bad business, and Benchik would not be an agent.

People buy books for decorations – and who would take it into their head to buy a 'decoration' when times are bad and business is not the best?

People stopped buying books and Binchik's business got worse and worse...

Out! No one wants to buy books!... If you just mentioned the word 'book' the customers would laugh at you.

The old books are good enough. No need for new ones. And if they didn't have any old books, this is what they would do. A couple of dentists from among Binchik's steady customers, hid the 'nakedness' of their empty shelves with pretty, but not see-through curtains... They are hung high, and who can say what is going on behind the curtains...

One new doctor who was opening a new office, and who Binchik thought he could make business with, fell upon a better means than using curtains. This fellow did, indeed, install a nice-looking bookcase, and he filled the shelves with wooden, well-worked spines of books... To the eye it looked right, and gave the impression that the book shelves were filled with rare and expensive books. And in New York, what is inside another won't know...

Meanwhile, Binchik was in a lot of trouble.

He had nearly given up canvassing the professionals. Useless to break your feet for no purpose. Now he sits in the restaurants like he did in the good times, but more often than before. In the first place for the agent the restaurant now remains the one place where from time to time he might meet a customer. It is where he gets a little rest, and on rare occasions he can make a sale, and it is not very pleasant to go home – because in New York when you have earned nothing during the day it is not OK to just go back to your own home and your own wife.

So now Binchik's days as well as his nights are in the restaurants. But he doesn't order food – he can't afford it!

In the early morning when the agent has to leave his house, he has a little to eat, which his wife prepares for him. With that little bit he goes out until supper which he also eats at home together with his family... Now Binchik can not manage to have a meal in a restaurant, but one has to order something when you are in a restaurant and sit there for hours – Binchik simply orders a glass of tea, and he drinks the tea only by the drop because it has to stay next to him for a long time and he can not appear to be a 'sponger.'

In the whole world poor Binchik did not feel to have fallen so low as in the restaurants. Pride is gone! Binchik is now just a tea drinker!

When the agent enters a restaurant he tries to get past the counter where the restaurateur takes in cash without being noticed... Next he settles himself in the farthest corner of the restaurant where the other tea drinkers sit...

When the waiter comes to him it tears his heart apart and he feels like he has sunk ten fathoms in the earth...

"Would you like something, Mr. Binchik?" the waiter asks.

The poor agent breaks out in a cold sweat...

"A glass tea," answers Binchik quietly and beaten-down, not able to look at the waiter.

In the restaurant it can be hot, but Binchik does not take off his overcoat – he is afraid that when it comes time to leave no waiter will come over to help him... Before, he took great pleasure in this

mark of respect. Now he does not have an extra nickel to tip the waiter and rather than suffer the embarrassment, he sits in his clothes, even though he is dripping with sweat.

And the restaurateurs no longer smile at Binchik, they ignore him, don't even see him – a tea drinker!

The waiters have stopped bothering with him. They go right past him, as though past a table where no one is sitting. They know, already – a tea drinker...

And when Binchik calls a waiter over, and opens his mouth to place his order, the waiter says under his breath:

“A glass tea!!”

And the agent is left just to shake his head, “yes.”

And the waiters know Binchik very well as a tea drinker, and once when the agent was dead with hunger and ordered for ten cents a little piece of herring, the waiter immediately forgot Binchik's unusual order and brought him as usual a glass tea...

But the poor fallen agent could not summon the courage to carry on the business with the waiter. Ordering with a glass tea a piece of herring – the agent did not have enough money for the second glass tea and a piece herring – and he had to still his hunger with the usual little glass of tea...

It is Good for Her

On a summer evening I returned home from work. When I arrived on the block where I live, I saw my building surrounded by a crowd of people. After taking a few more steps nearer to my building, I saw an ambulance sitting close to our house.

The ambulance gave several sharp klangs then drove off down the long street. The crowd began to break up.

You already know that in America people only care for themselves. When I got to the house if my family was home, I would have certainly been very frightened, the thought would have come to me, a horrible thought, that, perhaps, some misfortune had befallen someone of 'mine,' and like a crazy person I would have begun to run to my home, but since my wife and children were at this time in the country, I was not frightened, and since I was very tired from my day's activities, I didn't make the slightest effort to rush home. And when I did get there the crowd was gone. Only a few women, inhabitants of the same building where we live, were standing around talking.

No frightening thoughts came to me, that is the truth, but I was curious to know what had happened. I went over to the women and asked:

"What happened?"

"Nothing, nothing..." one of the women hurried to assure me, "Nothing bad happened."

And the woman who spoke those words to me, exchanged a meaningful look with the other women she had been talking with earlier, and an odd, mocking smile came to the lips of the women.

"What do you mean, 'nothing?'" I asked, growing even more curious to know what had happened,

"What do you mean, 'nothing?'" An ambulance just pulled away from our building?"

"A young woman threw herself out of a window!" another one of the women let me know in horrible, coldblooded voice.

"A women from the window?" I cried out, "Where? Who? When?"

"From the second floor." the woman said calmly.

"From the second floor? Who is it?"

"From the back."

"But who is the woman?"

"The Bronbach's maid!" they answered.

The woman that they were talking about was someone I had hardly met. About a month before when my wife was at home, Mrs. Bronbach sent her to us on an errand, and that was, it seems to me, the only time I had ever seen her.

I would never have given a thought to the young woman. But now, after people had told me about her misfortune, her image appeared before me lifelike: a tall, thin figure, thick blond hair, like a crown around her pretty, round head, noble face, clever eyes, which she held half closed, sort of like she were somewhat ashamed. I also remembered that when I got a look at the young woman, I wanted to say, that she really didn't look like a maid.

I stopped and thought for a few seconds, then I asked the women who had shared the sad news:

"How is she? Will she live?"

"Either way, it's good for her!" one of the gathered woman said.

"What do you mean?" I didn't quite understand what she was trying to say.

"It's good for her..." the woman repeated her extraordinary answer.

"What do you mean?"

"If she dies it's no great tragedy, and if she lives it's good for her. The fall from the window will help her..." explained a second woman, and all of the women smiled and exchanged meaningful glances. I looked at them and could not figure out what was going on.

I went into the entrance of our tenement. On the stairway I met another neighbor.

"What happened here?" I asked all over again, in the hope that this time I would get a clear answer to my question.

"The Bronbach's maid jumped from the window," I heard the same bit of news.

"Is her situation dangerous?" I asked.

"Who knows?" answered this woman just as coldly as the others.

"Why did she do it? What drove her to throw herself out of the window?" I didn't stop questioning the woman.

The woman to whom I had been speaking looked at me as though I were a big-shot and with a slow, penetrating, cold look she said to me:

"What would your wife say if she knew you were asking questions about such a woman?" Her lips contorted into an approximate smile, and without another word my neighbor left me and went on her way.

I continued on to the top floor, where my apartment is located, and I ran into two more neighbors. I talked to them about the situation, but from both of the women I encountered the same dry, vague, hostile answer.

One had answered:

"It is none of my concern."

The other gave an answer which I had already heard:

"It is good for her."

A few hours later I spoke with another neighbor in the building. It was the husband of the woman who threatened me with the danger to my reputation in having my wife find out that I had been asking too many questions about the unfortunate situation which occurred in the building.

From this man I learned a little bit more. I learned that the Bronbachs had gotten this girl as a bargain. They paid her nothing, she worked just for a piece of bread, and because the girl was carrying under her breast the fruit of a forbidden life. She was known to the Bronbachs from the Old Country. They knew about her sad story, how she had been deceived and taken advantage of, and they took the unfortunate young woman and kept her in their home out of pity...

That is all I learned about the young woman, who threw herself from the window. The cold, hostile, sharp, vague answers from my dear neighbors were not clear... Only now did I understand them.

Where is She Going

An early winter morning. Outside the snow was up to the knees; a strong wind, a freeze – A Siberian morning! The oven in my apartment won't burn; heat heats, but he remains cold as though he doesn't understand how that works. It's as though he is mad that people are making a fool out of him and stopped giving him coal, but with the devil knows what... But I sit next to the oven and try without success to warm my frozen bones.

Someone knocks on my door.

"Come in!"

In comes Mrs. Robinson, a widow, thirty-something years old. A tall, thin Jewish woman with a bad cough and poor health.

"Mrs. Robinson, God be with you, in this weather?" – I wondered and took a good look at the woman.

"Troubles drove me from my room..." Mrs. Robinson answered. She began to knock the snow from her shoes and I saw how they were torn.

"Sit down, Mrs. Robinson!"

She sat down, and from a basket she withdrew a slip of paper and gave it to me.

My heart told me right away it was an eviction notice – and I was right. I sadly shook my head, and sat there in silence.

"Nu, what do you have to say about it?" the widow asked me with a sad, heartrending voice.

What could I answer her? I had all the time been expecting the notice every day...

I fell silent again. I thought for a while about the pack of troubles of this poor woman.

Two months ago her husband died and left her with four children and no means to make a living. Robinson was a cigar maker and he did not die of prosperity. He had a steady place and, therefore, had to live in one of his boss's tenement buildings.

For years and years he worked for the same boss, and for almost his whole life he lived in three dark, narrow little rooms, for which he had to pay rent at twice the rate that one would normally pay for such a place. Now, with her husband dead only two months, the boss sends her an eviction notice to the widow and the orphans...

I had thought about her situation and at that moment I wanted to run out of the house grab someone stab, beat, strangle them to still the fruitless despair which pained my sick heart.

"Nu, what can one do?" the widow asked again.

"Listen," I answered, "In the morning go to the court."

"Nu, what will come of that?" the widow asked quietly and distraught.

“Tell the judge your story.”

“Nu, what then?”

“He will issue a stay... He will allow you a certain time to stay in your rooms, and in the meantime we will see what can be done...”

You can laugh at me, but take pity... Clumsy me, I understand as well as you that my advice was foolish, that to await pity from a judge is not practical. But in this moment I felt that this eviction notice was such an unholy crime that I was almost certain that Mrs. Robinson would actually get permission to stay in her rooms for a little more time.

“Should I go to the court?” the widow asked with a trembling voice.

“Without a doubt.”

“At what time?”

“As early as possible.”

“God should also have pity on me... I already have enough troubles... The children are all cold... All are pitifully sick... He will have to wait until the weather gets a little better...”

The woman began to weep...

Two days later in the day when her “trial” was to take place, I went to her apartment to see what news she had.

I knocked on the door.

“Come in!” answered a childish voice.

Cold... Dark... Narrow... Dirty...

“Who is there?” asked the same childish voice coming from the bedroom.

I went into the bedroom!

Dark... You couldn’t see anything... After a while I could make out four children sitting on the bed, wrapped in rags.

Pale, emaciated, exhausted with sickly eyes... Sitting still... Uneasy... Huddling close to one another... And the youngest, a baby of two years, sat and sobbed... Faces crying and my coming had interrupted their crying.

I very much wanted to throw myself into the bed with the poor orphans and weep with them.

“Where is your Mama?” I asked.

“In court,” the older girl explained, “We got an eviction notice.”

“Have you had anything to eat today, children?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“What?”

“Bread with cold tea,” the girl answered.

“When did your Mama leave?”

“While it was still dark,” the girl answered and sighed deeply.

“Mama cried when she left,” added the girl’s younger brother, a little soul of four years.

I heard Mrs. Robinson’s cough.

“Mama comes, Mama comes!” The poor children in the bed stirred themselves.

The door opened and I went into the kitchen to meet Mrs. Robinson.

“Nu, what happened?” I quickly asked.

“Happened...,” she answered quietly and sadly.

“Nu, what is the news?”

“I didn’t go to the court,” the widow answered.

“Where then?” I said looking at Mrs. Robinson.

“Why should I go to the murderers? In America there is no mercy!” the widow answered.

“So you didn’t go anywhere?”

“I went to visit my husband,” the widow answered.

I looked at her closer.

“I cried out my bitter heart; I recounted my troubles...”

“But what good will it do?” I asked.

“Why should I have to carry the whole yoke?” answered Mrs. Robinson in a very earnest tone, “Left alone with four little children in the world and he lies there peacefully like a prince... He should also know of my troubles...”

She fell silent and I did not know what to answer her.

“Mama!” the baby called out to her mother and the widow went into the dark bedroom.

Someone rapidly pounded on the door.

The sheriff entered with two helpers-----

The end of this portrait will have to describe itself – I can not...

My fingers tremble and the pen falls from my hand...

An Undeserved Blow

What can one do when one meets a peddler you know while traveling on a train?

Normally, one has a chat.

“So, what’s up with a fellow Jew?” I turned to the peddler and opened with the traditional greeting.

“Yesterday I received an undeserved blow!” the peddler let me know.

“From a hoodlum?” I asked.

“A hoodlum, or not a hoodlum, what’s the difference for what I got.”

I wondered at that. That a peddler should receive a blow from a hoodlum, I didn’t know why such a thing should even be news. And that the peddler described it as being “undeserved” I would have hardly thought. Why would any peddler say that a blow he received from a hoodlum was undeserved?

Nothing. I remained silent. But since I wanted to chat a little more I said:

“The New York hoodlums are a scandal, brutes!”

“And the Jewish landlords?” – the peddler suddenly blurted out – “They are even greater robbers!”

That the peddler expressed his negative opinion of Jewish landlords was not surprising. I was only a little surprised at the suddenness of the response. It appeared to me that the peddler had fallen like a Greek in a Sukkah, and I asked:

“But how are they the same?”

“Because I received a blow because of a landlord, who was a Jew...” the peddler answered.

“How so?”

“He raised my rent, which also raised troubles and anguish.”

“Amen!” I answered, “but who hit you?”

“Ah, hear me out,” the peddler said. Then he took a goodly dose of snuff, cleared his nasal passages, and gargled his throat a few times. Only after I had endured these preparations did the peddler begin to recount the whole story. I still had a good way to travel. I made myself comfortable, and attentive in order to listen to the peddler about how his rent had been raised and how he took a blow.

And the peddler began to pour out his bitter heart:

“I am living in the Bronx. I have four rooms, but the rooms are small like mouse holes, you will pardon the expression. What’s more, the whole building is constructed with straw and kindling. Cracks and holes like a sieve. Holes under the windows, holes under the doors, holes in the walls. From the floor such a wind blows, that the whole building trembles like an old sinner facing death, and from each hole the wind blows and whistles, like it is afraid, – the landlord’s soul should blow and whistle like that.”

“Amen!” I interrupted the peddler.

The man gave me a thankful look, and continued on with his story:

“I withstood a whole Winter in the rooms, great troubles, enemy of Zion. It was so cold, that one nearly froze to death, and for coal I paid out as much as Korah’s riches. As if the rooms weren’t bad enough, there was the oven – Nu-nu, such an oven! It gobbled, it gobbled coal! It swallowed two bushels of coal every day, it would burn like in hell, and nothing, next to the oven the heat would take your breath away, but only one step away it was cold like in the street, what is the wonder? The whole house was riddled with holes. Such holes our landlord should have in his heart. For a whole winter we closed up three rooms, and stayed in the kitchen. Because of that, enemy of Zion, I suffered misfortunes. My children were chilled and became sick. One is still in the hospital, a second is sick nearly to death. But nothing, we wept in the rooms, we exhausted ourselves nearly to death, and we just waited on summer. It is after all the Bronx. In the summer you can catch a little breeze, it is not far from the park. My children, may they live and be strong, were unfortunately very weak... pale, it would not be possible to move with them during the summer downtown. Nu, we had been sick all winter waiting for summer. In short order it became warmer, the hellfire in the kitchen had stopped gobbling coal. We reopened the three rooms, we began to live again. Then we were told that the landlord had raised the rent three dollars a month... I can not express to you the heartbreak that my wife and I experienced. In short, the next evening I came home from my peddling. I walked from the station to home, and all of a sudden, bang! I get hit with a stone in my back. I turned around to look where it came from, and I saw Tommy had picked up another stone and was about to offer me another serving, I was astonished.”

“Who is Tommy?” I interrupted the peddler.

“Ah, there is where the joke lies,” the peddler went on. – At our building, actually on the same floor where we are, lives an Irishman, it is his son. But we are, God forbid, not enemies, quite the contrary, we get along with the Irish very well. I go over to the ruffian and ask him: “Tommy, what is the matter with you?” In short, he was ashamed, and begged me to excuse him. Because he didn’t recognize me, and thought it was a different Jew. I asked him: “In short, you wanted to hit another Jew?” In short, the little ruffian talked to me and said that it was in revenge for the landlord raising the rent to his parents. So then, understand me, they had raised my rent, and I had suffered through the winter planning to move, because who can afford such high rent? That would be enough, but then add to it getting hit with a rock in the back...”

“Yeah, that is, indeed, an undeserved blow,” I added after hearing out the peddler.

“He should be struck by lightning, the landlord,” the peddler said with all his heart.

“Amen,” I answered, but I am not sure the peddler heard my last “amen,” because the train had stopped at the station where the peddler had to get off, and with great haste he ran from the train.

A Hammock in Ludlow Street

A summer evening in the suffocating, narrow-walled, pestilent downtown.

Hot, still air, suffocating, a Gehenna!

I see, people running – I run also. All of the people who were running turned into Ludlow Street, so I ran into Ludlow Street.

I see in the middle of the block, next to a building a crowd of people, and the crowd was growing and getting thicker. Soon I was part of the crowd looking around like a rooster among humans, without any idea as to why I was there, or why the others were there.

“What is going on?” one of the people in the crowd asked me.

“I don’t know,” I answered truthfully.

“Why are we standing around?” I asked, turning to another Jew in the crowd, with a long yellow beard, and a pair of thick yellow eyebrows.

“Why are you here?” the yellow Jew asked me.

“Everyone else is standing around here, so I am too,” I answered.

“That’s the case with everyone here,” my yellow Jew said, and disappeared into the crowd.

“For the second time a person in the building has had a misfortune,” a second man said to me.

“What sort of a misfortune?” I asked.

“Two weeks ago a young woman on the second floor fell from a window.”

“Was she killed?” I asked.

“No, she was saved.”

“How?”

“You see?” the Jew pointed with his finger, “You see?”

“What?” I asked.

“There, the high pile of manure?”

“Yes, so?”

“It is still there, the young woman landed on it when she fell, and lived, but not even for a year...”

“Ha?” I responded to the man, “She actually died?”

“Not from the fall; last week she died of scarlet fever.”

“And what is the misfortune now?” I asked again.

“You see,” he said and made a gesture with his hand high in the air, “A hammock.”

“A what?”

“A hammock.”

I lifted my head, looked at the throng of people and looked where they were looking. In the direction of the fire escape on the fourth floor, was suspended a hammock, and in the hammock was a child...

“A policeman is going... a policeman is going...” was the commotion, circulating through the crowd.

I pushed my way to the building where the first misfortune occurred.

The policeman had called out to the housekeeper, said something angry to him, the housekeeper immediately went into the hallway of the building... Soon a woman appeared in the window with a pale, anguished face. She climbed onto the fire escape and snatched the child from the hammock... The child cried and its head fell back lifelessly...

“A sick child,” I heard a murmur go through the crowd.

The mother kissed the child and carefully climbed back through the window.

Then a man appeared on the fire escape, took down the hammock and went back into the building.

The crowd began to break up. Only a few small children remained on the spot.

I heard the children talking.

“Poor, poor sick Emily,” said a little girl, about six years old, “Do you see her?”

“She is dying,” another child said.

“Last year her mother was with her in the country,” the first little girl continued to recount the story.

“This year she couldn’t go, her father is out of work,” a ten-year-old girl said.

The children took each other’s hands and made a circle. They turned in a circle together and sang:
“Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha!!”

I couldn’t tear myself away from the spot. My gaze wandered to the fire escape, where the hammock hung with little, sick Emily, and the high pile of manure where the young woman was saved from death, but later died of scarlet fever... And then to the circle of children singing: “Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha!!”

Pale little children, worn down, dreary, skin and bones, limbs like sticks. Child-like skeletons, turning and dancing next to a high pile of manure, which is always there, always...

Oy, a horse has bolted... It is running right toward the children, my heart freezes with a cold fear...

Screams of children... Screams of grown-ups... Children run in all directions... The horse runs through them...

None of the children are hurt!

“Yankee Doodle, ha, ha, ha!!”

Your New Address

It was an afternoon hour in a blazing hot, summer day, as I crossed over Ludlow Street deep in thought.

“Hey, Mister,” someone called to me. I looked around. Next to me stood my old friend, Mister Raphael, the furrier.

“Hello friend Raphael!” I greeted him.

“Hello, hello, what brings you to our neighborhood?” Raphael the furrier asked me.

“Well,” I answered, “You certainly know that when a Jew runs, he is looking for a livelihood and behind him he is being pushed by bitter poverty.”

“I know, I know,” Raphael answered.

“Nu, how are things with you?” I asked.

“One works and makes a miserable living.”

“How are your children doing?”

“All right.”

“How is your wife?”

Raphael sighed deeply.

“How is your wife?” I asked again.

Raphael shook his head sadly. But he said nothing.

“What is it?” I asked him again growing uneasy.

“It should happen to no one.”

“Died?”

“The Almighty should have mercy... She lives, but she is, unfortunately, very sick.”

“When! What befell her?”

“Health,” Raphael answered earnestly, and let out another deep, deep sigh.

“What disease is she suffering from?” I asked.

“At first she complained about her heart,” Raphael began the story, “My wife complained about everything, that her heart was going on her... Women told her she should drink roasted barley... She drank it and it did not help anything... Later she began to complain that she was having trouble with her breathing, and picked up a nasty cough. I immediately took her to a doctor. Nu, I felt like some one had laid heavy stones on my heart.”

“What did the doctor say?” I interrupted the furrier.

“What? The doctor figured that it was a sort of lung infection... I went to a second doctor, and heard the same answer... Nu, people suggested that I should send her to Colorado... Or in another good places where the air is clear... Nu, but how could I manage that? My poor Goldunie, how can I help her, with me living in such dark poverty?...”

The furrier’s voice faltered as he tried to stifle his tears... He was silent for a while, sadly shook his head, then continued speaking.

“I had at least wanted to get her out of Ludlow Street and rent an apartment on the other side of the Harlem bridge. They say that there the air is cleaner, but I could not move us there.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“What are you saying? I have to live where I am, it is the boss’s house. If I leave it, I lose my job... I would have to search for another position... I have four small children... They have to eat every day... I can’t rely on miracles.”

The furrier stood there still and silent, and what could I say to him?

“Listen, where do you live?” My friend, Raphael, suddenly said to me. “I seem to remember you are somewhere on Seventieth Street.”

“It is Seventy-second,” I gave my address.

“You could, perhaps, see my Goldie there,” the furrier said to me.

“You have *after all* moved?”

“That is not possible. I still live as I have in the boss’s building in Ludlow Street.”

“And your wife is living elsewhere?”

“Like I could pay rent on two places, what are you thinking?”

“But you said?” I said looking at my friend.

“She is in Central Park,” the furrier answered curt and sharp.

“Oh, she goes to the park?”

“Yes, every day I send her there... She sits there until evening falls... I ask you, go and see her there... She is unfortunately miserable there... It will revive her soul, to see another person.”

“But where will I go to look for her?” I asked the furrier, “Central Park is very big.”

“She is always in the same place.”

“Where?”

“Actually in the same area where you live, 60th Street.

“All right, I will visit with her,” I promised the furrier.

“I will give you a few signs to look for,” Raphael continued, “You will be able to find her as easily as if I gave you an address.”

“Nu, tell me.”

“You surely know where to find the aquatic animals?”

“I know.”

“There is the aquatic animals, and next to the aquatic animals is a bench. That is where she sits, my Goldie.”

“Can’t she find a better place than in the stench of the animals?” I asked the furrier. He explained it to me thus:

“In the first place it is close. She was afraid to go much farther, deeper into the park, the air too sharp. She tried going farther, but she became dizzy... And here the quality of the air pleased her...”

* * *

A couple of days later I made a sick call on Raphael the furrier’s wife, and found her at exactly the spot he had described: On a bench, not far from the aquatic animals (hippopotamus). She was sitting there pale, yellow complexion, breathing with difficulty as though on her deathbed...

The poor woman nearly cried when she recognized me.

“Oy,” she said to me, “You make me feel alive. My husband made me come here to regain health, and, enemy of Zion, my soul is dying from sadness.

He Sold His Luck

(A Sweat-shop Scene)

The shop was cooking with work.

The cutter was cutting, the shredders were running their machines, the basters were pulling cotton, the pressers were broiling next to their irons, and even the boss, Mister Root, was also busy packing the boxes.

Maloch, one of the operators, had received a bad, heavy load of work. He was nearly dying, and not at all happy, and did not cease to murmur under his breath.

“What are you grumbling about?” the boss turned to the unhappy operator.

“Who, me?” Maloch asked him.

“Nu, of course you.”

“I’m not grumbling,” Maloch answered.

“What are you saying under your breath?” the boss asked again.

“Like I said, nothing at all.” Maloch thought himself lost, “I was only saying...”

“What?”

“I was saying that I have dark, bitter luck...” Maloch answered in a sigh.

“Dark luck?” the boss asked him.

“Nu, for sure!” Maloch offered.

“One shouldn’t talk like that,” the boss said, “No one should complain about their luck, you never know what that can bring.”

“Eh,” Maloch dismissed the comment with a wave of his hand, “I have nothing to hope for.”

“I read in the newspaper,” the boss went on, “of a poor man who received a big inheritance.”

“I won’t be getting one,” Maloch answered, “my whole family lives in sheer poverty.”

The hands had stopped work and were listening in.

“Nevertheless, you shouldn’t sell your luck...” the boss said to Maloch.

“I would give it away for a bit of tobacco,” Maloch answered, “What kind of luck do I have? If I didn’t work, I would swell up from hunger.”

“And when you work, you have enough to eat?” one of the workers remarked, and figuring that he had given the boss a dig, he lowered his eyes, turned red with shame and started back to working.

“Nu, sell me your luck!” the boss turned to the operator and pushed the joke even farther.

“Why not?” Maloch said with a smile.

“How much do you want?”

“How much will you give me.”

“A dollar!” the boss called out.

“Oh, that’s fine!” Maloch answered, taking the whole conversation for a joke.

“All right.” Mr. Root answered. “You are all witnesses,” the boss said to the other workers as he walked over to Maloch’s machine. He took from his pocket a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote a few words.

“Listen up!” the boss spoke again turning to the other workers, and he read what he had just written.

“I, the undersigned, Maloch Bratkin, sell my luck to my boss, Abraham Root, and in the case I should come into an inheritance, or if I will win some money, or if there is another stroke of luck, it will belong to Mr. Root.”

“Are you happy with that? Are we agreed?” the boss asked Maloch.

Maloch felt a little troubled in his heart. But he thought the whole story was nothing more than a joke, and he answered:

“With my worries, agreed, why not?”

“Sign here,” the boss said, and handed Maloch the pencil.

Maloch took the pencil and smiled.

“What are you laughing about, varmint?” the boss asked in all earnestness, “What do you think, that you are having a joke with me? Sign here.”

“You think that I am afraid?” Maloch said, and his heart in his chest suddenly died.

“Nu?” the boss asked.

Maloch signed his name on the slip of paper that the boss had written on.

The operator’s hand trembled, he smiled at everything, but with a nervous, convulsive smile.

The boss took the signed slip of paper and put it in his wallet.

“Cha! Cha! Cha!” all of the workers burst out with loud laughter, and poor Maloch felt as though ants were marching over his whole body.

“Nu... nu... and where is the dollar?” Maloch asked, after still not believing that the trade was in earnest.

“Yes, yes,” the boss answered, “What is right is right. The merchandise is with me and the money goes to you.”

Mr. Root took out a dollar and laid it on Maloch’s machine.

The shop workers had another good laugh.

Maloch's eyes bugged out and he remained sitting neither dead or alive.

The boss went back up to his office and the workers came to their brother Maloch Bratkin.

"What have you done?" one of them said and laughed in ridicule right in Maloch's face.

"How can someone sell their luck?" a second co-worker said, "Who knows what can happen to a person?"

"You poor unfortunate! Now you are really unfortunate, a regular unfortunate, a man who sold his luck..."

Everyone laughed even more. Maloch also smiled, but it was a bitter smile, an anguished smile. He looked so unhappy, so frightened, as though he had lost something that was as dear to him as life itself.

"What's with you? You don't have a wife, you don't have children that you would sell your luck? Another continued scolding Maloch.

"Have you experienced so much in your world that you no longer have any hope?" a second man said, "You seem to still be a young man."

"Who sells their luck? Who does that?"

"And just see," yet another man said, "if the boss doesn't know something... If he bought your luck, he must know what he is doing."

Maloch did not know from who or when he might have some luck, but he was growing heavier and heavier in his heart. He began to think that the boss just might know that he, Bratkin, was due for some luck. He couldn't sit still in his place.

"Do you own anything besides your luck?" the cutter said to Maloch, "that you could offer him? You are a poor man, a dreary working man, why would you sell your luck? Don't you have any pity on your children?"

"Oh, to hell with it!" Maloch said trying to console himself. But everyone could see that he wasn't very happy.

For a whole week the other workers didn't cease to tease poor Maloch, and he was walking around like he had lost track of his own head.

Finally, the operator broke down. With tears in his eyes, he begged his boss for the signed slip of paper where he had sold his luck.

The boss gave him back the slip of paper, but the operator had to pay him a fine of five dollars. To raise the money they gave a supper in the shop. Everybody was happy – the boss, the operators, but more happy than all of them was Maloch the luck-seller.

The Treyf Street

What's all that's happening on our block! It is the beginning of winter. Our candy stores and grocery stores have laid out in their show windows whole mounds of Chanukah lights, yet when people look on the feverish activity throughout the whole neighborhood, you would think it wasn't Chanukah, but the start of Passover!

The hardware stores and the cracker businesses are doing a golden business. Our wives are busy buying new scissors, new forks, knives, spoons – in a word everyone is fixing themselves up like new, just like at Passover.

Peddlers of crackers, remnants, hardware goods and other household items have sensed that something unusual was happening on our block and our street is buzzing with pushcarts.

With strange calls the hurrying peddlers yelled out the various aspects of their merchandise:

“Ladies! Plates, glasses, saucers, for half of nothing!”

“Bargains! Bargains! Bargains, ladies!” yelled another.

“Forks, knives, spoons, true, good steel, Warsaw silver, Rodger's are number one... A cent a piece, cheap, cheap!” – calls out a third peddler.

“Remnants ladies, bargains in remnants!”

Whole hordes of women crowded the pushcarts buying merchandise. For the peddlers it was delicious, like a fair on our block... It was like the calendar, enemy of Zion, had gone crazy, and Passover had fallen on the beginning of winter!

And all of the tararam and confusion centered around Shmeyke the Expressman's wife, or as we called his wife on our block, “Beylke the Redhead.”

Shmeike the Expressman, a healthy, settled young man with a small yellow beard, went around both winter and summer dressed in the same flannel sweater, and the same warm winter cap. Shmeyke on our block is a prominent personage.

In the first place this same Shmeyke is the one who helps our neighbors move from one building to the next – He knows everyone and everyone knows him. In the second place the expressman is, on our block, a long-time neighbor. There on the corner next to the saloon stands his express wagon, with his harnessed mare. He lives there with his redheaded wife and family. He is a true mensch, and we all know him like a brother.

A good young man is Shmeyke: Strict in business, his word – is like a gold coin. Only one flaw has the expressman – he beats his wife. He batters his redheaded wife without mercy, almost as though she were not a living being.

The expressman doesn't beat her all of the time, only during certain seasons.

Redheaded Beyle becomes pregnant every year, and every year with the expressman there is a celebration, a mazel tov, or a bris. And every year, when Beyle is in the last months, Shmeyerke becomes homicidal, and begins beating his wife... After she gives birth, the expressman's heart grows soft again, and man and wife live like little turtledoves.

And we neighbors on the block know the signs. As soon as we notice Beyle the Redhead growing thicker, we know in advance, that Shmeyerke will start beating his wife, and everyone on the block becomes happy.

And here comes Chanukah. Beyle the Redhead grows thicker and thicker, and now begins the season for Shmeyerke to start beating his wife.

And Beyle takes action: She gathers up her children, leaves her home and her husband, and goes to live with her sister in Brownsville.

When the news spreads through our block of Beyle's flight, we begin to make a little fun of Shmeyerke the Expressman. Every one of us neighbors, when we want to have a little fun, we have a go at Shmeyerke:

"Shmeyerke, your mare has run off," says a nice young boy.

"Shmeyerke, when is your redheaded wife coming home?, a second person asks.

"Shmeyerke, your old lady has turned a Turkish trick on you..." a third laughs.

"Who are you going to beat now?" asks a fourth.

"Shmeyerke, a calamity for you, where is your wife?

And Shmeyerke remained silent. He was not angry. He stood on the corner next to the saloon, smoked his pipe, and warmed himself in the sun with a friendly smile to all the good kids who were making fun of him. Obviously, the expressman was pleased with what his wife had done.

This lasted for a few days. Shmeyerke's contentment disappeared. He became agitated and unsettled, and early one morning he let everyone know he was done being Shmeyerke, that he was going to break up his home and sell everything in it. On our block everyone came alive.

Shmeyerke started to really sell off all of his household goods. Our wives rushed to catch the bargains: One haggled for a couple of dinner plates, another – two glasses, a third neighbor a cup, fork, knife, spoon, jugs, pitchers, clay containers, iron, brass.

Everyone on our block valued Shmeyerke's household items: All of the neighbors got some real bargains...

My Shmeyerke sat on his express wagon, gave his one-eyed horse a flick of the whip, and was gone...

Our block did not get to enjoy Shmeyerke's bargains for long. A few days later Beyle the Redhead returned to our street along with her children.

Beyle opened the door to her empty flat (she had taken a key with her), and when she saw the destruction, the poor woman began to make a big lament... And when Beyle realized what a wretched

end her Shmeyke had made to her household, she took her lament from one neighbor to the next to ask for the return of the sold items...

When the neighbors hesitated to return the bargains, Beyle fell upon the clever idea to make an announcement to the world that she had not conducted herself in a Jewish manner... That in her home she had never separated dairy from meats...

Hearing such a story, our whole block was shocked! No one wanted treyf, non-kosher utensils, even if they were free, and Beyle the Redhead got everything back. However, even with the return of the treyf utensils, the troubles were not over.

During the couple of days that our neighbors had used Shmeyke's bargains, the treyf utensils were mixed in with their kosher utensils, and our whole street was simply made un-kosher.

Gewalt, what could we do?!

In fact a pair of good New York Jews went about a kosher scrubbing of everything.

The more pious did not take advantage of the kosher scrubbing... They destroyed, got rid of all of the utensils in the house... And they bought everything new...

And that is why it was so lively on our block. By all of the other Jews in the world it was Chanukah, but by us on our street it was Passover eve!

A treyf street!

Some days later Shmeyke's express wagon appeared again on our street... And our lost threesome, Shmeyke, his express wagon, and his one-eyed horse had come back to us...

It is obvious that the whole crazy scene was done by Shmeyke as a trick, because we had made fun of him... Nevertheless, that is why it was so busy on our block.

The Young Girl Plays the Piano

When the young girl played the piano, Papa and Mama loved to sit nearby and listen to the child's playing...

Papa and Mama sat with mouths agape, with eyes drinking in the sight of their beautiful little daughter. Both of their faces glowed with joy, with pleasure. And often both parents would sit deep in thought, their gaze would wander off somewhere into a vague distance, and a deep unease would show on their faces. The Papa and Mama would remember back their mothers and fathers, and their own childhood years.

The girl who is playing the piano is ten years old. They call her "Deborah."

Deborah is a dark-featured, pretty girl, a talented girl. She does well with her learning in school, bringing home good grades every month. And the piano teacher assures the parents that their clever daughter has very good musical abilities.

Papa and Mama sit and listen while their daughter performs her music lesson.

What a beautiful picture!

The front room was beautifully decorated; a Turkish carpet covered the floor, fantastic, pretty curtains hung on the doors. Next to the fine piano, on a pretty bench, sits their beautiful daughter. She looks at the music and her fingers fly over the ivory keys. And throughout the beautifully appointed room float the various musical notes!

Deborah's father is not a rich man. He is an agent in a life insurance company. He makes a living, but that is about all!

Deborah's mother on the other hand is a great money manager, and protects her husband's money like the eyes in her head. And that is why even with his modest income they can afford to fix up a nice house.

And that house, their own quiet corner, is the agent's greatest pleasure, his greatest joy in the world.

There is not a single piece of bread left over; it comes from hard work every day each cent is earned with hard and bitter work. It is often hard to convince new customers to buy, and also hard to collect the pennies from the old customers. Often he is humiliated in the office by the superintendent and his assistant. But when he comes home, he forgets about the business and is a mensch like everyone else.

That was his own little corner, no one could open a door in his face, there he couldn't be upbraided by the superintendent of his company, telling him he had to do a better business. There he was in his own home with his beloved wife, next to his only child, his beautiful, clever daughter.

The agent was not rich, it was only the daughter who was the object of his extravagances. A stranger would figure that she was the daughter of a wealthy man... Always well dressed, only the best. Deborah wanted for nothing!

And Deborah was Papa's and Mama's greatest joy in the world!

Mama and Papa sat and listened to their daughter play the piano; their mouths agape, agape from joy, from pleasure. And their faces shown as though illuminated by a thousand suns.

But then the parents would think back. Their thoughts carried them back to their own childhood years, and both of the faces clouded over with intense sadness.

The Mama thought back... While looking at her own beautiful little daughter, she remembered the time when she was also a young girl of the same age.

Her parents were poor, horribly poor! Her father, a tailor, a Jewish tailor in a small Lithuanian shtetl, an angry Jew. He still had sisters and brothers, both older and younger than he; A small, dirty room, crowded, destitute and impoverished. The mother, angry and sick, agitated, frequently beat them, always yelling at the children... And the father? – He was also prone to hand out beatings! She remembered herself as a pale, sickly girl, always going around in torn clothes and torn shoes... Always upset, always crying... When she was ten years old her father, the tailor, died, and she, the little orphan, was sent to a seamstress to earn her bread. – And that was her childhood.

And when Papa looked at his beautiful daughter, he remembered his childhood. His father – a teacher, was extremely poor. In addition to him, his father had four children; They always lived in a small room rented from strangers; The mother was sickly. She always had a bad, deep cough and was often in her bed. The father would beat the children severely, and he beat his wife even harder. He went around naked, barefooted, always hungry. Once – the Papa remembered, – one of his sisters was sick, and his mother spent a kopeck for a cookie for the sick child. The father took the cookie and ate it himself. Afterwards he gave his wife a particularly vigorous beating.

So, when the parents sit and listen to their beautiful daughter play the piano, the thoughts come back to them of their own childhood, and a heavy sadness sticks in their hearts.

A Conversation with a Shop Girl

I became acquainted with her eight years ago, when she first arrived in this land, when she was still a greener.

She was a healthy, strong young lady twenty-something years old. Healthy, happy, lively, bright, with clear eyes, and a fair complexion.

She was working in a shop – that's all!

I often ran into her at nearly every Socialist meeting. Whenever I came I would encounter her. Frequently, I would see her again after the meetings in a restaurant, sitting with a glass tea as company until two or three in the morning.

Once when I saw her in the restaurant, I asked her:

“Are you a worker?”

“I have never stopped,” she answered my question – “Since I have been in this country I have never had even one day of slack time. It is already eight years that I have been working for the same boss and at the shop there is work all year long.”

“How late do they work in your shop?” I asked.

“Until six in the evening,” she answered, and after a short pause she added: “And it takes nearly an hour for me to arrive home.”

“And when do you start work?”

“Six in the morning.”

“What time do you have to get up?”

“Four in the morning.”

“You do that every day?”

“Every day except Sunday, every day for eight years.”

“How many meetings do you attend each week?”

“Certainly no more than six,” she joked, “But also no less.”

“How do you sleep?”

“Almost never!” she answered in all earnestness.

I looked at her and shrugged my shoulders. She gave a slight smile, and mimicked me.

“I am used to it.”

“All of it?”

“All of it. I am so used to not sleeping that it doesn’t bother me. I can go from Sunday to Sunday without closing an eye.”

“Is that just a habit?” I asked.

“Just a habit,” she answered earnestly.

I looked at her.

Her whole face was pale and yellow, the cheeks thin and sunken, the eyes shown – but something about her reminded me of someone who was sick with a fever, deeply etched creases... Oh, how old she looked, how old and worn out!

The image ran through my mind of what she looked like eight years ago when she was a greenhorn. It gave me a catch in my heart, without realizing it, I gave out a deep sigh.

She looked at me with a bitter smile. My heart told me that she understood what I was thinking. I was not very subtle.

“I don’t look my best?” she said to me with the same smile.

“Really? What then?” I answered.

“There was a time that I looked better, yes?”

“I would know?...” I stammered.

She sat a while in thought.

“You know,” I said to her, “I would guess, that doing away with your habit of not sleeping, might, perhaps, be better for your health.”

“Not perhaps,” she corrected me, “It is absolutely certain.”

“And so?” I asked.

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“I can’t just let go of my livelihood!”

She again lapsed into thought. Then she gave me a long, slow look. She smiled, took a deep breath, and began to talk very seriously, very heart rending:

“The daytime, the best hours, when the sun shines brightly, are used up by the boss in the shop with the sewing machines. The only free time is the night time. So, what should one do? Eat and lay in bed? In the beginning that is what I did. But was it possible to do more? The shop had not yet expanded... But now I can’t do it! I can’t... Oy, the shop, the machines... The boss... The lady supervisor... Who knows, who can understand how it consumes you! Always the same identical thing. Always, always, always, always the same. Sewing waists, waists, waists... No, I can only sit the whole day in the shop, while my thoughts go outside the shop. I can only endure the day because I think of the night... The whole day my soul sits in a jail, a prison and it would die if it did not get out at night... I live at night!

I am with people, I am interested in things, and life is not so horrible, not so hateful, not so deathly sad... I know that it is not good for my health, my inner flame burns out too fast, I know, I know! Nu, and if I slept? – I would go crazy from boredom... Perhaps I would live a few years longer, but that would not be a life...”

She was silent for a while.

To the waiter’s very meaningful look, I answered: “Two glasses of tea.”

He brought us the tea.

She took two spoonfuls of tea then said:

“I can’t do it! The shop can not make me happy... I have always loved people: Talking to people, chatting with people, spending time with people... I can’t live through a day, I don’t understand at all how people live through it, if one does not have something to interest themselves in... I look bad to you? Nu, I have cares! As long as I have strength, I will work, and when I can no longer work – I will no longer live...”

She fell silent again.

“However,” I said to her, “not all shop girls have your opinion.”

“Nu. What’s that to me?” she answered, “Everyone has their own mind.”

“Young girls have hope beyond the shop...” I said.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“To love and be loved.”

“That means get married?”

“So it should be.”

“Well,” she answered, “I have my own ideas about marriage. I believe that a husband is more of a rogue than a boss.”

Two more chairs were empty at the table where we were sitting. Two men came in and sat down at the empty places. We halted our conversation.

I just want to add one thing:

She coughed, and with her handkerchief she wiped her lips. I noted a drop of blood on the handkerchief.

Longing

It Saddens Me

(Memories)

It was foolishness... Yet it saddened me, and caused a pain in my heart that I didn't commit this foolishness... And when I remember it, it seems to me, that my dead mother rises up from her grave and looks at me so tenderly, so kindly... With so much love but with a concealed reproach, and something clutches at my heart and tears it apart... Ach, the looks from dead loved ones, can drive you insane...

Mama, my unhappy, my poor, my dear mother!

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In an hour or so I would be leaving... In an hour or so I would be leaving my homeland, the tiny, isolated little shtetl, where the friends of my youth ran about... Acquaintances... Brothers... Sisters... Many dear ones who are rooted in my heart... Instinctively I felt that I was leaving something that I would never be able to regain in my life... Deep in a hidden corner of my heart something gnawed at me and caused me pain... But, then, I was young... And I didn't listen to it.

It was a beautiful, warm summer afternoon... Our little home was overflowing with people... They were all people who had come to say goodbye to me and to wish me luck on my journey to America... Ach, they were all dear, beloved faces... People talked... They chatted... It was a tumult and an atmosphere of happy sadness. The older folks among the visitors, the relatives, the brothers, the sisters were sad and thoughtful.. A few silently wept... And some were ashamed... And actually cried openly... The younger friends, the tovarishes, those, who hoped to quickly get what they felt they deserved... Oy, if you only knew, how the older people laughed at you, and tried to look cheerful and happy... But also on their faces was a hidden unease, also in their eyes did I see tears... These held-back tears soothed and comforted me...

The minute, the last minute was coming nearer and nearer... I took my leave of each and everyone who came... Oh, Aunt Beyle has come to me, my dead Mother's sister who looks remarkably like Mama, her eyes were flowing with tears, we kissed... She wept without apology... I smiled... But my breath was taken away by the tears...

"Zalman'ke," my Aunt turned to me, "You have taken your leave with me, but you have forgotten your Mother... Ha?"

I gave her a smile, but something tore at my heart.

"Follow me, my child," my Aunt continued, "say farewell to your Mother, you were very dear to her... She deserves it... Oy, if only you knew how dear you were to her."

"But, Auntie," I answered, "Mother has passed away." But I felt that the words I spoke did not come from my heart. However, I said them, because what else could I say?

“Nu, is death an excuse?” my Aunt answered in all seriousness. “So, you don’t need to go to her and say farewell?... What’s happening is that you may be going away forever... You don’t want to go to your Mother’s grave?”

“I have already told him that a couple of times,” remarked my older sister as she wiped tears from her eyes with her handkerchief.

“One doesn’t go away like this, without visiting a mother’s grave,” another one of my relatives remarked.

“Such a good mother deserves that one should visit her grave.”

“She will pray to God for you and for your success...”

“You were, after all, her whole life...”

“You must go.”

My Mother was very dear to me. It was over two years now that she died, and I would still quietly cry when I thought of her. But to go to her grave? Me, a man who doesn’t believe in death, a young man, a free thinker... Foolishness! Laughable! But something, I have no idea how it happened, tore at my heart, and in my mind I suddenly saw myself standing next to my Mother’s grave.

“I looked around... My friends looked at me and smiled.

“Don’t say anything foolish,” I answered them, “If my Mother had lived, I would have, perhaps, not gone away, and if I did go away... I would have hugged her, kissed her, kissed her hands and her fingers, but since she is dead, little fools... You are...”

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We departed, and the little shtetl was far behind us. We were twelve people and we were packed in the small wagon like herrings, but I felt good! I imagined that I was the hero, I was headed to America, and one of my friends sat together with me. She would travel with me to the train station. We sat and talked, fantasized – With words we built such beautiful, such wonderful castles in the air. Ach, how sweet, ach, how good it was! The blue, clear sky sparkled with brilliant silver stars. The air was so sweet, so fragrant, fresh... The fields on both sides which we could see through the darkness of the night, together with the heavens were something fantastic to behold, so mysterious... And, there, a well-known sound, the whimpering of the waterfall at the mill... There, there is the cemetery... In there lay my Mother sleeping an eternal sleep. Something clutched at my heart... My friends were cheerfully chatting with one another. I no longer heard what they were saying. I was being drawn to my Mother’s grave... I suddenly wanted to leap from the wagon and run there where the silent tombstones stood, to run to my Mother’s grave, fall to the ground and kiss the earth covering her. My Mother appeared before my eyes as though she were alive. I was seized by a sweet fear. I shuddered.

“What is with you? What are you thinking about?” I heard someone asking.

“Ha?” I gave myself a shake, “Nothing at all, uh, nothing at all.”

We continued on our way. The cemetery remained behind us...

Many years have past since I lost my homeland, and you may laugh at me, but I am still sad that I did not visit my Mother's grave... And when I think back on it, it presses upon my chest like a bad nightmare, and I see before me my Mother with her soft look, in which I see somewhat of a silent, but heartbreaking reproach...

His Wish

Poor, poor Mr. Sagalov! Today he tore my heart apart.

Mr. Sagalov, who lives in the same building as I do, will soon depart. He lives on the floor above me. He was a cap maker and lives with his wife a very respectable life. Except, that in the sweat shop he contracted tuberculosis. Now his wife works and he sits at home and awaits death.

Often, when I have free time, I go to check on him... His frightful sunken face, his pale yellow complexion, his bitter illness, arduous torment... The poverty, the extreme, bitter want, the misery, which envelops the dying cap maker, all of that does not make for a cheerful picture, and provokes tears from all sides. I was accustomed to this image of misfortune. Seeing it very often before my eyes and spending time with the tubercular Sagalov, I only felt a bit of a dull ache... But today – Today the man tore my heart apart.

The dying workman today expressed his last wish... Poor, poor Sagalov!...

He stopped in the middle of our conversation. He suddenly cast a look at me, such a strange look...

“Listen to me?” Sagalov suddenly turned to me, interrupting what I was saying, “Listen, I want to ask you something.”

“What, for example?”

“If I would want to go home, would Eighth Street cover the expenses?”

“I don’t know,” I answered, truly not knowing what to answer. We both remained silent for a while.

“Yes, “they” would give,” Sagalov answered his own question, “Yes, send them home, people say, send them to another time.”

“You want, then, to go back home?” I asked my neighbor, without knowing why I asked that. A thought came to me immediately that my question, perhaps, that in speaking about his terminal condition, I may have hurt him, and had annoyed him with the question.

“You are wondering?”

“Indeed... That is...?” I answered in my confusion.

“Going home... Home, to our little Litvak shtetl, and do you know what draws me home? What I am longing for? Guess!”

“About what?” I wanted to say, but the words stayed on my tongue, and I just gave him a questioning look.

“About our cemetery,” Sagalov answered.

Something tore at my heart from his short answer.

“Behind our shtetl,” the sick man began to speak, and his voice trembled, “Behind our shtetl lies our cemetery, surrounded by an old park. That is where my parents are buried, many of my relatives, many

friends... I have yearned for them... I am not a pious man, I am far from being superstitious... I know that after death everything is ended and it is little difference where they bury the body... But I am drawn to that cemetery. It is dear to me, the old wooden head markers, which stand there, the old trees, the quiet graves... I have such a longing for them, like for good, old friends... At times I had thought of returning home to live there... Now, instead, I want to travel home to die... I don't want to lie in an American grave... In a strange, depraved land... Something tells me that, back home, in our cemetery death won't be so bad... It seems to me that there among the people of my home it will be better in the grave... More homey, warmer...

Sagalov was quiet for a while. I, also, was silent, after all, what could I say?

"I do recognize..." the weak-sighted cap maker continued speaking, more to himself than to me, "I do recognize... I know, that if I pressed it they would send me back home, but one thing holds me back."

My neighbor looked at me. Like he was wondering why I was not asking him what was holding him back. But he quickly went on with his talk.

"I am very sick... I can die at any moment... I am afraid that I would die on the ship. People say, that when someone dies on shipboard they toss the body in the water... That is something I would not want... I should have gone earlier... Now it is too late..."

"Oh, I know what you are saying!" I wanted to interrupt my neighbor's sad speech. But he did not hear me and said with a quiet sadness:

"Others long for happiness; Mountains of gold... I just want a grave in my distant home, in a cozy cemetery... And..."

Someone rang the doorbell.

"My Fenny has come home from work, I recognize her ring," Sagalov said and listened for her to enter...

Fenny, Sagalov's wife entered the room. I stayed sitting with the sickly worker for a long time... We talked and talked, but the cap maker did not say another word about his doleful last wish. It was clear that he did not want to talk about it in the presence of his wife.

When I left the cap maker's home I continued to think and think about his last wish.

A strange wish... Perhaps a foolish one – But oy, how sad, aye, how heartbreaking!

Autumn

It is already autumn outside, and the harbinger of the long, cold winter was feeling good.

The miserable, green tree, which for some sort of unusual reason remained in our narrow yard, shivered from cold and fright. The cold, uncomfortable autumn wind shook and tossed about its limbs horribly, unmercifully, and the ugly, yellow leaves fell onto the yard.

It is cold in the house.

It is cold and uncomfortable!

Who knows what the long, cold winter will bring!

Oy, if only someone could predict for me, how the beautiful, bright springtime will come! How it will be to meet again the bright, beautiful month of May, not only me but those who are also dear and beloved by me. Those who so pain my heart...

Why is it so heavy in my heart? What wearies and plagues so me so much, what dull premonition?

Will my weak children get better? Will they all survive until the coming spring?

My God, how heavy is my heart!

On our block we hear about various childhood diseases. Across, on the other side of the street, a child died of diphtheria. In the next building a school girl got a chill and is now very sick with a lung infection. Downstairs to the back the children have measles. The doctors in our neighborhood are already busy. The druggist and his wife are breathing free, their faces shine. And on Sunday early morning one sees the funeral wagon drive by... Ach, I fear the oncoming winter!

Will there be work?

Can anyone assure me that bread will not be lacking on the table during the long, long winter?

And my heart grows heavier, and heavier. It seems to me that the cold, cloudy autumn has become a part of my soul.

My God, what will happen?

The people around me with their poison have poisoned my courage.

In vain I search around me for a friend who, with a warm, good word would chase the cold autumn from my soul. Nowhere is there any such person around me. All of them are hard, petty souls, flatterers, sycophants, false as falseness itself. If they see someone wanting to lift their head a little higher than them, it lights in their twisted souls the fires of jealousy, and they want to trample them underfoot, just for wanting to lift themselves up a bit.

How I hate those who pretend to be my friend! I do not like them one bit, because I understand what is going on in their hearts.

And the whole society that I deal with covers me with horror and cold. What reprehensible people!
Not a single honest or upstanding one among them!

Lairs and betrayers!

If they need you, they bow down to you, bow down to the ground, without a tiny bit of worth, without a tiny bit of self-respect. But as soon as they feel they can do without you, they become bitter as the bitterest critical disgust. They cruelly push aside today, those they bowed down to yesterday.

Everything is calculated to the penny. If you can bring them a penny, they will smile at you for a penny. If you are able to make them richer by a dollar; the smile will spread all over their false faces for a whole dollar. If you can not bring them anything – then you do not exist for them. Such people as they, are the ones who surround me! Coarse, hardened hearts. Small souls – cheap and dark as night. Disgusting, loveless people. They no longer have any trace of human feeling. Their last remaining ambition is to make money. They work under a single influence and that is – hold stiffly closed the fist one one hand, and give out the least saved dollars. Hold open the other hand outstretched to snatch more dollars. There, that is their life, that is their soul, that is their whole being. And such people are the ones I have to associate with! With these people I have to deal, I have to do, from them I have to extract my pay... And I lose my courage and – my life is very hard!

And there is no one or no thing that inspires me. There is no longer anyone to call forth the slightest thrill in my frozen soul. I can't lift a hand, and I can't do a thing – I can't work!

It is pushing me toward naked poverty. The fear, that my little children may go hungry – that is the only whip, which drives me back to the shop... Not a tiny bit of soul, no trace of holiness!

And I do not know what will result from it, and my heart is heavy and frozen.

Outside it is autumn, cold and dark. The golden leaves are falling from the miserable, lonely tree in our yard. The exhausted tree limbs tremble from cold and fear.

Veh iz mir, what will the long cold winter bring?!

When May Comes

(A Letter of Disappointment)

My dear friend!

You know already, that whenever something strikes my heart, when a feeling of unease plagues my soul, and I must talk it through with someone, then I write you a letter. Also now, my friend, I write to you because I want to talk and talk. My heart has stumbled into a net of a sort of wasteland. I have to talk it out, if not I will be stuck in its web.

The first of May is coming!

Those, who know about such matters, are predicting that on this first of May there will be in New York demonstrations by enlightened workers. There will be big protest marches, tens of thousands of workers will march to the city squares. It will be a sparkling parade!

We know that in advance, and we can feel it in the air, something big is coming. I can imagine the glorious, full picture:

Several thousands of workers will come together in the squares with flaming eyes, with enthusiastic faces. The assembled workers will show themselves in orderly ranks, and will form long, long unending rows. A hundred red flags will flutter in the wind... Flags which signal and call people to the struggle for rights and freedom. Thousands of torches will be lit and over the heads of the marchers will flow a sea of fire.

The musicians will play the “Marseillaise,” and the air will be brightened by the enthusiastic tones!

And the rows of workers will go on and on and on... We are so many in number! If only all, all of us show ourselves... The world will shudder from our great numbers!

And so I have described the fantasy of my glorious full picture, but my heart remains calm and cold... My soul does not flutter with excitement, does not shudder like it did once, once, years ago in such cases... Something is there in the deep recesses of my soul, something there has been extinguished forever, something has died there and a heavy void has taken its place, the place of this small, sputtering fire!

And I wonder, and I think, how has that happened?

Since when did its destruction settle in my heart? What invisible hand made it, so icy cold, so heavy and dark?

I leaf through my diary... I read the written impressions of the “First of May’s” of those days, and it seems to me as though they were written by someone else... Not me!

What a holiday feeling... What enthusiasm! What enchantment! What a fire glowed in my soul!

Something drew me to the May demonstrations, just like a loving father is drawn to his child’s wedding, and when the march began, how happy I was! What could compare to that?!

I was drunk with joy!

What a feeling of purpose I had while marching in the rows surrounded by the others... And if I happened to be one carrying the red flag, my heart would be filled with a sort of religious fervor... I felt something like a high priest, a high priest who marched along with his true believer brothers to the holy temple to holy prayers.

And as the music played the “Marseillaise” it shocked my whole being. It felt strong and powerful. It seemed as though I was part of a victorious army that was going to take over the world...

That is what I felt once... Now I can not make myself feel that way... Now my heart remains cold, dying...

And I ask myself: “Who has spread this winter over my heart?” Who and what has covered my heart with such profound unease?

Perhaps it is nothing more than just ordinary time, time which lays on everything its cold stamp of death? Time, which kills all that lives, which extinguishes all that burns?

Is it the cold voice of age? Is that the early breath of approaching death?

Or, perhaps it is the practical necessities of life, the eternal, eternal battle for a little piece of bread, which has frozen the heart?

Is it, perhaps, for once not the earlier impressions with its sad examples?

Perhaps the persistent unease in my heart is due in part to a friend of the past, a once dear friend, who is now a wealthy real estate agent, who extracts rent from poor wretches and laughs cynically and rudely at all that once we all felt to be sacred and dear?

Is that, perhaps, the revolutionary leader who once inspired and enchanted us all with the ire from his soul, and who now is installed in a calm, comfortable corner, stacking one dollar upon another and thinks only of how to care for himself in his old age with a good and sure income? – Such an example is enough for my eyes...

It that, perhaps, the sick, the cynical laughter that I hear so often around me, the laughter from the sick people who have a sick habit of mocking, laughing, flinging into the mud everything which is clean and holy? Was it this sick laughter which slipped into my soul the seed of doubt, disappointment and cold?

My friend, every week life is difficult, crazy, unbearable, if it were not for the occasional holiday to interrupt it! I no longer have any holidays in my weekly life... My heart, my frozen soul is no longer able to conceive of a holiday, and when a time of the year comes when I should have a holiday, I only feel a heavy, stifling unease, a dark hopeless unease which plagues and tortures the soul!

That is how I feel now with the coming of the First of May!

In my childhood years, I was very pious. I would daven, I would keep the sabbath and religious holidays, and the holy fear of the high holy days would penetrate the deepest hidden corners of my soul. Years later when I had lost my faith, the God of my fathers, the God of my childhood, and the

evening of Yom Kippur arrived I would still go to a Jewish shul and see everyone in robes and talises, listen to the cantor and choir sing Kol Nidre from the podium.

Now when I go to shul my yearning heart feels no joy. The Jews in long robes seem strange to me... Their cries of anguish do not move my heart... Their Kol Nidre does not fill my heart with sweet fear... And much later when the years had passed one after the other, I was no longer moved to go to shul, even the simple curiosity had died, and when it happens that I unwillingly have to pass by a shul on Yom Kippur the atmosphere from my one-time holy place fills me with unease and cold...

That is how I feel now when the First of May arrives!

A while back I had a little, handsome boy, a sweet child, who I loved very much. He made my life sweet, with his cheerful, silver laughter which filled my whole soul with happiness and shivering enchantment. – Along came dark death and took my child away.

Years passed and the corpse of my child lay in the grave, yet in my heart he still lived... I thought of him often, and remember him. My heart spilled bloody tears over him... But from these tears I got a certain pleasure; it seemed as though in the deepest part of my soul there remained something of my lost happiness.

Now my son has completely disappeared from my thoughts. When someone reminds me of my dead son, my heart remains cold and indifferent, but this cold, this indifference pains me, exhausts me much more than the bloody tears that flow from my heart. If the remembrance of my son were still fresh and alive in my memory...

That is how I feel now when the First of May arrives!

Purim

The children of the proletariat are running around with clackers and noisemakers in their hands...

Purim is here.

Soon they will make you, children, learn the Megillah... They will make you recite a wonderful story from the past. In the past there was a bad prince named Haman, who wanted to destroy a lot, an awful lot of innocent souls... And you will learn how this Haman was, himself, destroyed. You will listen to the story and when the name of "Haman" is spoken you will make noise with your clackers...

Clack, children, clack!

Clack, and listen to this story! It happened more than once. This story is repeated very often; It happens in our time before our very eyes.

Always, always, children, it happens and there are bad, evil, wild Hamans who arise above our poor proletariat. These Hamans want to choke us, strangle us, and in the end it is those Hamans, themselves, who are strangled and choked...

Listen, then, children, listen and clack with your clackers! Children of the Proletariat, you must become accustomed to this work, you must know to clack at the Hamans, because it will bring nearer the happier times, when the true happy times will come for the proletariat in gladness and joy...

Children, then you will be bigger and stronger, and once this Purim comes, you must clack at the remaining Hamans, first this one then that one who are sitting on your shoulders and the shoulders of your parents. Hamans who suck, and drain from you your blood, like evil vampires, who exhaust you, who choke you, who rob from you your life, your happiness, your freedom... Who make of the proletariat's life not a Purim, but an everlasting, bitter fast... Those are the Hamans you must clack at... Get used to it, children, clack at the Hamans.

Clack, my dear children, clack!...

When will Springtime Come?

(A page from my diary)

It is already summer...

It is already hot, and the soul creeps along!

It seems like just a few days ago it was winter. We were being tortured by a damp cold, people kept their ovens hot and the needy cried out, "Gewalt, where will we get money for more coal?" And now it is already hot, June, and the poor cry "Ice! Ice! We must have ice."

And where is he, the beautiful, mild, lovely spring?! Something did not please him in our location. In our Jewish New Yorker mite-pit did somewhere the ground bedeck itself with green grass? Did somewhere roses and flowers spread themselves out? Who and when were these great holidays celebrated? When did spring happen?

The cold changed places with the heat. The humidity from the streets – sweat on the body, the bucket of coal – A bit of ice in the ice box – that's all.

Who saw the springtime? Who saw, who wondered at the divine, childish smile of newborn nature?

When did it happen? I plead with you, tell me!

A remarkable thing!

In our narrow, baking, scalding neighborhood, you can meet everything in the world, tears and joy, misfortune and good fortune, poverty and wealth, brutal, dark ignorance; the highest education, work, manual and mental, business, commerce. It hustles it bustles, only one thing is missing, there are no young ones!

How many times I have failed to see them, how many times I have searched for the beautiful, innocent, carefree faces from the holy youths, I have not found them anywhere.

I have not come across a single face, that would breathe with youth. Everyone is hurrying, busy up to their ears. Their whole soul is occupied with the struggle to make a living.

Poor, rich, young, old, it makes no difference, on every face I see the same stamp of cold seriousness, haste, and unhappy struggle.

There you see one whose whole being is wrapped up in the world of books... It is a cold calculation that troubles him, just to arrive at a small result. Now you see one write and read, and learn full of energy – That is not the bright fire of youth – He wants to be famous, he wants to gain a name... It is not youth!

Everything is practical, everything is calculated, everything is old – No youths are to be seen!

Little children are already peddling merchandise in the streets, they are already careworn, troubled, already become old people...

Children go to school and wonder what the point of learning is... What happens next? What will they achieve? What use will they get out of all the learning?

Already old people!

Love, art, enthusiasm – All of them have some prospects, nothing will be done with the pure, carefree striving of youth... It seems to me, that people are becoming old before they are born... And when I look at an infant in his cradle, it appears to me that its little face is contorted already with the anxiety of making a living.

And it is the same with nature.

The sweet youth of nature, people will not see, people will not notice.

High, dark buildings, small, narrow streets, stones, stones, and stones, and you don't feel the gentle, fresh, spring breezes. Young, green grasses do not begin to sprout. And in the dark, narrow sweatshops, and in the crowded interiors of the tenements, one finds only then, that something in nature has changed, then, when summer has spent its gentle, sweet youth, when it gets really hot...

Instead of coal, people need ice!

No where is there springtime!

No where is there anything holy, no where is their youth, no where is their spring!

Ice, dollars, business!

And every heart carries coldness with it and falseness. Everyone is sly and petty and that is why an important role is played by lies, flattery, dishonesty, commonness, and resounding, empty slogans...

On a Blood-Strewn Path

It is something like a dream, but a waking dream... I haven't been able to sleep. I have been sitting with wide open eyes, but like I was made of stone, like someone paralyzed, and I saw as in a dream...

It happened to me traveling in a trolley car in the Bronx, on a certain summer evening.

The car was packed to the point of suffocating... Packed together under pressure, I was sitting and looking at a newspaper... Suddenly the car shuddered... I heard from under the car a horrible childlike scream... In an instant I understood what had happened. I was overcome with a chill... In the car there was a terrible commotion. Women were screaming... crying... fainting... The car came to a stop, and quickly from under the car they pulled from under the wheels the bloody limbs of a five or six-year-old child. My gaze fell on the face of the child. One eye was open... A horrible, childish smile was frozen on his lips, and beyond that I saw... Blood... Blood... and blood... On the rails blood... They carried the dead child to a nearby store... And the whole way that they carried the little soul left a trail of blood... The passengers were out of the car. People were running about... A shout, a clamor, a commotion... A policeman took hold of the shocked, distraught motorman... I hear... The clamor, the commotion grow, more horrible... People shoved one another... They made a path for someone... I see a woman running... My eyes went to the woman... "The mother," I hear the murmur in the crowd, "That is the mother." Yes, one could clearly see that it was the mother... She was not crying... She was not screaming... but her face! Describe it? Impossible!... She was running here... To the child... Soon I heard a horrible scream from the woman... "She has seen her child," someone said to me. I felt as though my heart had stopped, everything went dark before my eyes... But soon everything was over... In twenty minutes time... And our trolley car continued on... I was sitting in the car and I could see we were traveling across the blood-strewn path.

I sat there like a stone, frozen. I tried to go back to the newspaper I was reading earlier... My eyes looked at the pages, but all I saw were black flecks... And my brain could not understand what the black flakes meant... Suddenly I imagined that a bloody lake had had flowed over the street... Blood... Blood... And the trolley car was driving through the blood... I no longer saw the passengers who were sitting all around me... I no longer saw the page that I continued to stare at... I saw nothing around me... Before my eyes only blood flowed... Then I heard a horrible, ice-cold, but remarkably clear voice said to me:

"And you are riding over a blood-strewn path."

I shuddered, and the voice continued to speak:

"Your path, and the path of every other one, is strewn with blood... Not just now, but always, always your whole life passes over blood-strewn paths. And when you sit, you sit upon cadavers, when you walk, you tread upon the dead... Your way is sprinkled with blood... You don't see it, because you will not lift your eyebrows, your eyelids, because you do not have the courage to look around you with your eyes wide open.

If you were to look around yourself, you would see this frightful blood-strewn path.

“When you sit in your room, that you have paid rent on, and you reckon that you have every right to sit there, you have your eyes only half open... If you gave a good look around you, you would see how many others are lying about in the streets, dying under the clear sky. They, too, want to earn money, pay rent, but they don’t have the possibility to do so... And so, they are on the streets. When you eat your, well-earned, kosher slice of bread, your eyes remain half-closed. If you were to better look around you, you would see how many, many at the same moment are going hungry. Perhaps you would see how many, many small, innocent children, with open mouths, look into your eyes. They are hungry... Their little hearts reach out, counting each bit you take... They reach out from hunger, at the same time that you feel full. Always, always it is so. Your whole life path is strewn with blood, but you don’t see it, or you refuse to see it. When you eat, others die of hunger and fall into your path. When you sleep in a warm room, others are freezing outside, and on your path in life lie mounds of the murdered, the dead... Innocent, murdered little children... Such innocent dead, just like under the trolley car that you were riding on... Now you saw it, you don’t always see it.”

And the whole time that the voice spoke, I saw a bloody lake before my eyes.

When I shook myself back to reality, I saw that I had long missed my stop. The trolley stopped and I climbed down, and I headed back to where I had to go.

On the way back I did not think of the dead child. Personal issues took over my whole mind. It was only when I came to the place where the accident took place, that my heart gave a jump...

Now everything here and there was quiet and peaceful. Life in the street was going on as usual. Nothing reminded one that here, a child died, only next to the store where the child was lying there were still traces of blood... And suddenly I heard again the horrible, cold voice: “You travel on a blood-strewn path.”

The Mirror Remains

When I married my beloved, young, beautiful Shifra, we immediately moved into a small household and became perfect homemakers.

It is now eighteen years since we married, and I remember quite well, very clearly how we fixed up our first family dwelling.

For the whole eighteen years of our married life we have probably lived in a hundred different apartments. But no other apartment has remained as clear, as solidly imprinted in my memory as our first apartment: The three rooms to the back on Hundred and Ninth Street. It was there the beginning of my family life.

The exact date that my wife and I moved into our first apartment, I don't recall. I do remember that it was a winter day; I remember the weather on that day. It was right after a three-day blizzard had occurred, and the streets were full of wet snow. The first night of our life together was a beautiful winter night, and in our first apartment, which was on the top floor, looked out into a beautiful, clear, star-studded sky.

I remember where we bought our first furniture. In a cellar on Ludlow Street is where we obtained our first furnishings. Three chairs, solid wood, a little varnish, and with straw seats; a rocking chair with a straw backing, a three-legged front-room table, slightly damaged. We got a bargain haggling for a lounge, a kitchen table, a bureau, two kitchen chairs, an iron bed with all of the necessary parts to it, and a little mirror for the front-room, a nice, tall mirror.

Eighteen years have passed since my wife and I married. There were many times that we bought new furniture. From our original household nothing remains... I can not recall when our first furnishings disappeared. It happened little by little: Once a chair broke, another time the lacquered straw rocker was thrown out. A third time, forgive me, but the corner table went. -- Nothing is left of our original household, no memory, besides our mirror which we bought in the Ludlow Street furniture cellar. Our first mirror, which graced our first-front room. This mirror remains, and grows old along with us.

A hundred times we moved with the mirror from one apartment to another and the demon did not take it from us – It is whole. The children did scratch the wood frame a little bit, the white marble stone on the underside of the stand is a little cracked. Some of the attached engravings are broken and lost. But the mirror itself is completely intact and crowns in its full brightness the eternal, eternal front-room.

In the current front-room the wood tables we once had are no longer there, nor the broken front-room table. A piano is there, a nice desk, a fine bookcase, a soft parlor set. But the mirror does not fall by the wayside and it looks out upon the surrounding furniture with all its previous greatness... And once again I think of something, as though the mirror were a living thing and would speak with these words, "I have outlived many pieces of furniture, and I will outlive many more, I am the first mirror!"

And I think to myself: Who knows? Perhaps the mirror will outlive even those who bought it in the Ludlow Street furniture cellar for our first front-room, in the first days of our love, the first days of our happiness?

Ach, how many memories flood into my mind often when I look into my mirror, into my first mirror!

In the morning after our wedding, the first early morning in our first apartment, I remember, my, then, young, beautiful, blossoming, Shifra regarded herself in the mirror. Half-naked she stood there, her round, bare arms, her full, high, well defined breasts reflected in the mirror. She combed her beautiful, long hair and I took her in my arms and kissed her with burning passion. The mirror saw that. Afterwards we both laughed joyfully, and we both looked at ourselves in the mirror. Two young faces, full of happiness, glowing with love, glowing with hope... That same mirror saw it all!

Where is that couple? Where is that joy? Nowhere! A dream! Only the mirror remains!

To this mirror on a particular morning went my wife with our first-born in her arms... It was her first time out of the birthing bed, and with the baby in her arms she gazed into the mirror... And I, too, looked into the mirror filled with excitement from the joy and delight...

In a certain front-room across from the same mirror stood a baby's bed... And in that bed my first child died... My wife fell half-dead upon the dead baby in the bed, and I saw the horrible scene reflected in the same mirror!

My God, how many memories, good and bad, bright and glowing, and also heavy and dark! An entire life!

Now I stand before the mirror and gaze at an old man... The head is gray, the face is old... Where is the man that looked at me from my first mirror? Am I already not the same, as the one who looked back at me in my first apartment in the first early morning of our marriage?

Ach, what heavy, what pestilent thoughts pain my soul oftentimes, when I look into that mirror... I am fearing my mirror... It seems like the mirror is my silent life-partner, who waits patiently, and surely for my last day...

The Sun Sets

The sun sets...

I sit in my room and through the open window I watch how the sun goes down.

How beautiful, what a splendid picture!

The heavens on the horizon are a fiery red. A sumptuous illumination in honor of a great, all-powerful, proud queen, who has lost her realm and goes quietly below the horizon, behind the line which joins heaven and earth in an eternal fantastic mystery.

How lovely the queen looks as she bids farewell! In her full greatness, in her full red glory and flame in a beautiful, soft pride!

“A good night to you! Softly I go!

“A good night, soon I will disappear, heaven and earth will close behind me, the dark night will take over my domain... Dark shadows will give you these tidings:

“The sun has gone!”

I look around. It grows darker and darker around me. Dark, mysterious shadows are already creeping from every hidden corner... More and more their number grows... There, all around me they fill the room...

The sun sets!

I become uneasy and my heart grows heavy, and heavy, stifling thoughts creep into my head and plague me and pain my bowed soul...

Everything must set! Everything must come to an end! Everything must disappear under a black cover of eternal night!

There, standing before me is a great, famous actor. He is always the king of the stage. He always enchants his audience and is showered with brilliant applause.

But he is already an old man. Another year, or the next year he will have to leave the stage... And I think about the day when he will no longer be with us...

He will no longer enchant us with his performance... We will no longer applaud him.

The sun sets!

And now comes to mind a writer, a warm, a loving heart. Now he is the king of the pen, his writings fill our souls with charm, with enthusiasm, he always calls to us, he always awakens us to struggle and to striving.

He is an old man! It is already the evening of his life, and I think ahead to the day when the pen will fall from his fingers... Cold and inert will lie the lively, warm heart. He will transition into the past, the eternal, eternal past.

The sun sets!

And the thought comes to me of the many yet brilliant, radiant souls, with heads already bedecked with gray hair, and I think of the day when all of them will no longer be with us.

Ach, what heavy, what unsettling thoughts plague and pain my soul in the bitter, black time between sunset and sunrise when I look out as the sun sets.

Before Me and After Me

When I sit in a restaurant, I think: Who has sat here in the same spot before me, and who will sit here after me?

Who has eaten off of this same plate, with the same spoon before me, and who will eat with it after me?

Never mind, who will come after, doesn't bother me. But I think, who might have taken this place before me?

Who knows? Perhaps someone suffering from a contagious disease? Perhaps?... Who knows? Who can know who might have eaten from the same plate that I am eating from?

And when I think so, I am envious of them all, who have their own corner, who eat from their own table, from their own plate, and always know who has sat in the same place, and who will sit there later.

Who knows? Perhaps someone who suffers from a contagious hotel. When I lay myself down in an unknown feather bed, it takes a long time to go to sleep. Something makes me uneasy, something makes me afraid, and I think to myself: Who knows who slept in this bed the night before, and who knows who will sleep here the next night, when I will have gone? I wish the silent bed would talk to me and tell me about each person who slept here.

How many souls were plagued by grief and worries, and rested from them in sleep? How many stifled tears did these pillows absorb? How many cares, how much misery, how much unhappiness were eased by sleep in this bed?

And, perhaps, in this bed lay loving couples, men with women they did not know, women with men they did not know? How much passion, how much love, how much happiness had inhabited this same bed that I lie in now? Who knows, who slept here before me, and who will sleep here after me?

Perhaps in this same bed slept sick people or a dirty person? Who knows? Who knows? The bed can not talk.

And when I think so, I am envious of all, who have their own corner, who sleep in their own bed, and who are certain that the bed keeps no secrets from them.

When I caress and kiss my beloved, my beautiful, sweet Rachel, and when she looks at me with her child-like, innocent eyes, when she swears that it is only me that she loves, and that I am the first and only – I think to myself: Who has caressed and kissed my Rachel before me, and who will caress and passionately kiss her after me? How many men has she assured and sworn that they were the first and only, and to how many will she yet give her solemn oath? Who knows, and who could know?

And when I think so, my heart becomes uneasy, but I am not envious of anyone.

Pictures of the Deceased

The pictures of your deceased friends, of those, who were treasured and loved by you. This, the remaining remembrance of they who exists no more. How many painful thoughts fill your soul.

In a special box I keep the pictures of the deceased whom I knew so very well in life.

And many time, when the thought comes to me, when I think of times past, I look in the box where the pictures of the deceased lie.

A shudder goes though my whole body, a cold fear clenches my heart.

Oy veh, so many pictures! It seems to me as though the whole world is dead.

Veh, so many pictures!

And they look back at me with their silent gaze... It seems to me as though they want to speak to me... The dead want to speak to me. They are, however, dead... They are no more!

Gewalt, at first, I think to myself, they all lived... With each one of them here and there I conversed... Their voices still ring clear in my ears... That one, just a short time ago, shook my hand... With all of them in the past, I spent time... And him? He had then... When was that? Something about once telling me his plans for his future...

My God, where are they all? Not so soon are all of them dead?...

But those are pictures of the dead. How terrible that is! How terrible to look upon the pictures of your dead friends!

Who is the One? (*)

The trolley car which was traveling from New York to West Farms, Bronx, made its last stop, and two passengers climbed down. Both were young men, roughly in their 30's.

No trolley traveled any farther, and the two men continued on their way on foot.

It was a summer evening...

The way was quiet, secluded, green lawns were on both sides, overgrown with high grass, mixed with wild flowers. Farther to the sides were woods, and it seemed that there the trees united the heavens with the earth. The sun had just begun to hide behind the trees, and high above the wildflowers could only be seen a half-round stripe of its beautiful, red face. And all around the sky was streaked with fiery tracks. The whole path strewn with long shadows. Right from the woods, there where the sun was setting, earthward between the trees was a golden light, and it seemed that there in the woods it was still broad daylight.

Our two foot travelers walked through this landscape. Each walked completely alone and each deep in their own little world.

Separate, two separate worlds were there. One of the walkers was very unhappy, the other very happy. The unhappy one was a very sick man. His face was pale yellow, his eyes deeply sunken, troubled and dull. He breathed with difficulty, and it seemed that with every breath he felt unbearable pain.

He was in the last stages of tuberculosis. He had just come from New York, where the doctors had read him his death sentence, and he knew – that he would soon die. He knew that the cold, dark autumn, which would bring death to the green grass, to the beautiful flowers that grew there by the side of the path, this autumn would also bring with it his own death.

He walked thinking about death – his little world was in this moment the dark grave.

Lost in this world, he had no one. He was miserable, he had, in the whole world, not a single living soul who would grieve for him.

He is “single,” has no relatives, no friends, no enemies and there was no one who would even be inconvenienced by his death.

It is difficult to die when one must part with their children; it is bitter to leave behind a living and beloved wife; death is horrible, when your mourners have to be your father and mother, living brothers and sisters... Many times it is hard to leave behind surviving friends – And those who must leave the world under these conditions, leave under the impression that death will not be so hard, as if they didn't have people who would be pained by the death.

(*) The idea for this sketch came to me while reading the story “The Lady or the Tiger.”

This thought is not always right. Many times the thought of death is horrible, when one is miserable, when one knows that there remains no one who will remember you even with a sigh, or with a single word..

In the bruising sea of life there will always be those who swim up into the heights, distinguishing themselves, showing themselves, but also by falling, they will not be ignored. The foolish bitter end is not without thought, not painful when you know that you will remain after your life with someone in their words, by another in their thoughts, by a third in their heart...

Our unhappy walker thought about death, he also thought about how miserable he was, and he was so bitter, so cold, so sad... He thought to himself, that if only someone would lament his passing, if after his death even one person would talk about him, it would be easier to die.

And all around him nature was so beautiful...

The thick green grass, the fantastic, dream-like woods, the pure colors in the sky... But our walker cast his eyes down... He only looked at the uneven, sandy path beneath his feet... It frightened him looking down... It was agonizing, because in his mind it reminded him of a grave...

A few steps away to his side walked the second man – His world was filled with happiness.

He was excited to be headed home. There, awaiting him, were his wife and child. His wife was as beautiful and fresh as a May morning... And he loved her with his whole soul. The child was a little two-year-old angel, and for a kiss from him, the man would give anything in the world.

This man was young, healthy, and it seems like he breathed life and strength.

He was coming from New York and had some happy news for his wife:

He is a foreman in a certain firm, and today his boss expressed great satisfaction with him, and raised his wages...

Ach, how happy he is.

He appeared so happy, so lively. How happy his wife would be when he gave her the good news, and he was hurrying home...

All around him everything was so wonderfully beautiful, and so delightfully good... Because of that he did not walk as fast and took time to enjoy the surrounding, enchanting beauty, and his eyes shown with happiness and with love...

In his hands he carried two bundles: A gift for his wife, and a gift for his child, and he imagined in his mind what it would be like when he arrived home...

His wife would come to him, his beautiful, young wife, and his little child. He would embrace them both and give them heartfelt kisses. He would give them the gifts he brought, and his wife would give him burning kisses, and the child would dance for joy.

And he hurried home, the unceasingly happy man...

And so went the two men walking next to one another, each enveloped in their own little world: One flooded with unhappiness, hopelessness, despair, and the other in a bright world of hope and happiness.

The two came to a railroad crossing. The beautiful, green fields were cut by the crossing and four rails stretched out in both directions and disappeared into the distance...

Not far from the rails, over the green field walked a woman with her child, a little girl of about four or five years-old. The woman and the child were deeply involved in collecting wildflowers.

In gathering the flowers, the child was getting farther and farther away from the woman, who was apparently the child's mother... The child was close to the railroad tracks... Now the child began to cross the tracks... A train approached... It was bearing down on the child...

The woman saw the child in danger from the train... It was already too late for her to run to the child, she was too far away, and the air was rent by a horrible scream:

“My child!...”

Our two men were nearer the child... With a nimble, heroic bound, placing his life in danger, it might be possible to rescue the child.

One of the two men took on the heroic task – he hurdled toward the tracks and pushed the child away from the tracks and the rushing locomotive. The child was saved. But the rescuer was torn apart by the locomotive...

But the story itself did not tell us which of our two men ran to the rescue: the sick, unhappy man who had nothing before him but dark death, or the healthy, happy man who held his life so dear.

Who was the one?

Riding on the Train

“When I am flying on cast iron rails I think of my Duma” Nekrasov

Every evening when I go home, I ride the train from downtown to the Bronx. And often when the weather is nice, I stand on the platform and look around me. Before my eyes the streets change one after the other. Those changes as we go past the streets, bring up various memories, and those memories taken together make up the entire history of my life in New York.

The streets change quickly one after the other and it seems to me that it is like turning the pages of the book of my life.

On some pages are signs of happiness, there is written the days when love warmed my soul, when hope had brightened my heart... And when the page changes, my heart becomes strangely bitter. But there are few such happy pages in my history. There are more black, dark pages full of cares, full of worries and on some pages beats a sick heart, like a sharp stone, and time passes in pain.

The train passes another street. There... There is my first apartment after I got married. Three rooms, two totally dark, not more than eight dollars a month did I pay, and even though at first the rooms scared me, then I got used to it. For me the rooms became good and bright, I wanted to stay there forever. The day became small, and the night too short.

The rooms were brightened by love, because they were full of hope and striving.

My wife was young and beautiful, free of troubles and cares. Healthy, cheerful, happy, full of hope, full of love. How happy, how good it was to be together with her. It would not bother me to sit with her all day long. How much did we talk together, we never ran out of things to talk about. I never once missed other people, my home was my Garden of Eden...

And how many sweet plans we made for the future were built in my fantasy, how much courage and ambition... Oy, how good it is to be young, to love and be happy!

There is another street. There I ran a newspaper stand and gained an “opposition.” There for the first time did someone forcefully, tear morsels of bread from my mouth. There did dark poverty forge the first ring of the heavy, terrible chain, which later bound all of my limbs.

But who looked upon it?! Who was turned by poverty? I laughed at my troubles with a cheerful, carefree laughter. I hoped to work through it, and get past it.

There goes another street. In the distance one can see a hospital... My heart trembles... In that hospital I cried for the first time in New York... There I left my wife who was about to be a mother. I was too poor to call a doctor to our house. I kissed my wife, bid farewell... The doors of the hospital closed behind me... It was late at night... I arrived home, and a feeling painful misery filled my heart, -- without her the house seemed dark, and there was a terrible unease in every corner of every room... I had hope... I would survive it... My wife would come back to me... I will become a father also... So many fantasies! So much hope! For he who has hope, it is always good.

There is yet another street. Shall I also remember this street? There I did not cry, there nothing happened – except in a winter day when I was delivering newspapers, some hoodlums nearly killed me... That, is hardly worth mentioning, I have a lot of streets like that!

Oy, I got a stitch in my heart on passing that street... Oy, that is a terrible street. That is where black, merciless death crossed the threshold of my house... There is where my first, sweet two-year-old little son... That is where my life was shattered. From that street left the funeral procession of my life's happiness.

My wife grew old and sick... I grew old and sick myself...

Every time that I travel past the old streets, it irritates my heart.

There is yet another street. Here is where we gathered following the death of our son.

It was in the springtime. All around us things were blooming, growing, coming to life – Just my wife and I suffered the death of one limb after another. The life all around us made our pain unbearable. We kept the shutters in the front-room closed. We did not want to see the life in the streets... We closed ourselves in a back room so that we did not have to hear the lively activity in the street...

Dark, desolate, terrible was our house.

There is another house, another apartment. There was heard another child's voice... I lived in that apartment for a number of years. Poverty became more and more the master of the house. Privation became more and more acute... It devoured the last little bit of courage, the last little bit of energy... Troubles, privation, suffering, sickness, doctors, fear, anxiety... Another child came to us... More troubles, more doctors and the poverty grew stronger and stronger... Many times we did have some pleasures, naches from the smart, sweet child, but the fears which arose from them, the suffering, the troubles which they engendered were a thousand times worse...

There is another apartment, yet another, a second one, a third, a fourth... I moved very frequently... In one the rent was too high, in another the child became sick and it seemed that he would be better in another location. There we moved because life had consumed one, because one is broken, tired, sick and a sick person thinks that making a change will make them better.

Every apartment recalls another memory, and the memories are so unsettling, lifeless, so ordinary... Another child sick, but again a child sick, more poverty, another family scene, again a family scene... There we run from a home, then run from another home... There a scandal, here a scandal... Fights... Tears... Everywhere, everywhere the same... Now we are at the last station... I see my home, my current apartment... And I think: What is going on in the house, which child will need a doctor today? To little Sammy, to little Hannah, to little Feygle or to Ytele?

I imagine before me my sick, old-before-her-time, wife, agitated and angry... The house is not straightened up, not in order, clutter, rags, old clothes, dust, pouting... Dark, somber... Love is dead, hope is stifled... Dead is my happiness!... And not more than ten years ago did I live in my first apartment, where I was so happy...

How quickly life passes in New York! How soon one becomes old, broken, lost and forgotten!

Running Over East Broadway

(A portrait)

In great haste, deep in dark thoughts, worried, Mr. Schvemel ran across East Broadway.

It was Sunday evening.

It was the beginning of the month of October, and the evening was very cool. It was nice outside, pleasant and fresh. The sun was already hidden behind the high walls of the New York street, and in the clear sky were beginning to show streaks of clouds like an imaginary beach.

On the sidewalks of East Broadway flowed streams of pedestrians, men and women decked out in their Sunday best.

Many of them wore winter garments, others were still in their summer clothes – It was the good time of year, when everyone could wear whatever they wanted, and what they could afford. If one has a “Spring overcoat” that is certainly good. If they have a good winter coat they can also wear it, especially at night. And if they do not have an overcoat they might shiver, but there is no shame in that. That person should not bother about others who stare. In this time of the year one can still go about without an overcoat. It is a good time of year for those who have, it shouldn’t happen to you, trouble with seasonal clothes, and one can believe that in the area around East Broadway there can be found a lot of people for whom the question of a winter garment is very important, and very pressing. But, be that as it may, it was a beautiful summer evening, and the crowds of people were happy to walk.

And between all of the walkers, Mr. Schvemel, in great haste, made his way through the crowd.

One could easily see that Mr. Schvemel was not out for a stroll. He was walking too fast. Often he would bump into someone, and at times would jump from the sidewalk into the street in order to get past others who were in his way and were holding him up. One does not stroll along like that.

Schvemel, indeed, was not strolling along. The man had come all the way from Harlem to East Broadway looking for a man he knew, who was a business broker.

Things were going badly for Schvemel in New York. Many of his friends, his friends who came with him at the same time, had, over the years, come to a fine purpose: They became doctors, dentists, lawyers, real estate dealers, and, excuse me saying, landlords, bosses, such big businessmen. Only he remained with troubles and chewed the dirt up until this very day.

As a greener, Schvemel tried being a news dealer, but nothing, it went badly for him, and today he has a wife with four sickly children, and for sustenance he had to draw from a sweet, and at the same time bitter trade. That is to say, he owned a little candy store which barely covered the expenses for rent and gas – that’s all!

Schvemel bought the business a month or two ago. He bought the business from a certain Mr. Kornosov, an acquaintance of his, and what sort of acquaintance? A very close friend! And what kind of a friend? A friend from his childhood.

He gave the business to Schvemel as a great bargain, a Klondike. But when Schvemel paid for the store, he quickly found out, that he was buried under it.

Schvemel made a fuss:

“What have you done to me, Kornosov? You have murdered me, buried me alive!...

Kornosov answered:

“Don’t be a fool, and shut up.”

“What do you mean shut up?! You have buried me!...”

“Someone also buried me, I buried you, and if you are smart, you will quickly find another to bury...” That is how Kornosov answered the despairing complaints from his friend, from the friend of his childhood.

Schvemel yelled until he couldn’t anymore, then ran off to find a business broker in East Broadway, to bury him, the way he had been buried.

Schvemel ran, and ran, and ran and made his way through the pedestrians until he came right up against, face to face, a young couple. A boy of about twenty-two or three, and a girl a bit younger. The boy wore glasses and the girl wore glasses. The boy wore an embroidered Russian shirt and the girl was also dressed in a Russian outfit. Both carried books and were deep in conversation, which they carried on in Russian... Something went through Schvemel’s heart like a shock. He completely forgot about his store and why he was in such a hurry. He began walking slower, various memories slowed him down.

Twelve years ago it was a clear, cool, beautiful summer evening, and among the sidewalk crowds that day on East Broadway, together with a young girl walked Schvemel. He was a greenhorn, and talked no differently, like Russian, and walked over the same East Broadway, with a pretty, young girl. They carried on a conversation about the future, not about themselves, but of all of suffering humanity. Who put it into their heads to think about their own self!

How much seething ambition burned in their blood! How much bright hope warmed their hearts!

Beautiful, magnificent fantasies, good thoughts, healthy ideas! And the young girl who was walking with him shared everything, everything with him. Oy, how much he loved her...

A dream! It is all gone! Others now walk along East Broadway. He, Schvemel, ran around with a case for lawyers.

The young girl from that time is now his wife, a mother of four children, a weak, melancholy woman, beaten down by poverty, such that she can hardly stay on her feet.

The fantasy, the hope, the ambition, the ideas, the love, all is consumed by the battle for a piece of bread. All that remains is black, hateful, cold murder.

With a slow look, Schvemel walked, and the sea of memories flowed clearer, farther, farther and deeper. He weak heart drank in this sea, and gave out, gave out a deep pain from deep, deep longing! Then the sea disappeared and Schvemel's heart, exhausted, half-dead, changed with thoughts of dry, cold reality.

A candy store in Harlem, which only supports rent and gas – From what could one make a living? A weak, sickly wife... Four children... Crowded, suffocating, want, poverty and the store sold to him by a friend of his, a friend from his childhood. A friend who had, years and years ago had walked together with him on East Broadway and debated lofty, important life questions – that friend had buried him... And now he ran to bury another.

And Schvemel now had the burning desire that the whole world, together with him also, should have one face, and he should good, really good spit in it...

Naturally, that didn't happen, and the storekeeper from Harlem went into the office of the business broker that he had sought out and found.

Love

What is love?

Who doesn't know what love it?

What poet has not sung about love? What author has not written about love?

The god of love is pictured as a lovely, innocent child, who plays with a bow and arrow.

Holy, holy is love!

Love – It is the mother of all lofty ambitions... That is love, which drives men to great heroism, to sacrifice one's self for the suffering fellow man.

Love makes men kings, gods. What is more holy, pure, bright than love?

I have heard, heard all of this... But when someone asks me what love is, I want to answer:

“Poison! Fire!!”

A hellish, devilish fire, a terrible, deadly poison!

A poisonous, painful feeling, that only Asmodeus, the king of Gehenna can bear, which he uses to plague poor humanity!

When someone burns and roasts you over a slow fire, when one cuts, and rips from you one limb after another, -- How can one not feel the pain, how can one not suffer, can one not feel the poisonous pain, which love engenders.

I myself have burned with love, when I was still a kid, and from then on I have felt in my heart the Gehenna, and on another occasion I thought that love played a devilish joke on me. She hung me out on a gallows and condemned me to hang half-strangled not alive and not dead.

As a kid, so far as I can remember, I loved my mother, my poor, poor, sickly, good mother. Veh, how I loved her, and veh, how I suffered!

My mother was always crying. Not crying out loud, just quietly, with stifled tears. Only her little children could see her tears...

She cried, because she was poor and could not give her children enough to eat. She cried, because my agitated, sick father behaved brutally, and evilly. She cried because her whole life was a punishment, a constant, painful, sorrow...

Dear mother, how I loved you! Your tears poisoned my childish soul... Your sad, bitter tears lit the bitter hellish fire which burned from then on in my sick heart!

I suffered greatly in my childish years.

Constant hunger, cold, sickness – I won't speak of that. I was often beaten! The teacher beat me, my angry father beat me, the gentiles beat me when I left cheder, people had hit me so many times, that even today it seems to me, that at any minute someone could strike another blow.

But I have forgotten all of the old blows... My mother's tears – I will never forget!... My mother has rested for a long, long time in her grave. I, myself, have become a father of children, and have worked in New York on a dear, dear child's grave – But I still think of my mother's tears. They flowed like poison in a wound, which were only healed by a little bit of fresh earth, which cured all of the wounds.

Growing older, I loved again. That was the romantic love of women.

Small in stature, beaten, weak minded – the girls did not love me... More wounded, poisoned, pained, and in my heart the Gehenna spread deeper and wider.

But also on my street came a holiday. Love had for a moment shown me her beaming, bright face... I became in love with a woman.

The woman was young, pretty, tender, blooming, full of life, full with ambition, love and hope... With her love this woman answered my needs – We got married!

And... And... Oy, if only this bright moment could be erased from my memory, if only I could forget this moment...

Believe me, when I think about that moment, the earth should open under my feet and burst into fire...

Where is that woman? What happened to her? Is that the same woman who sits now and cries next to the little bed of my sick child? Is it possible? It is not more than ten years gone by! She was then so young... And now she sits there an old woman... Old, sick, and exhausted from worries!

A skeleton covered with skin, her face sunken, yellow like wax, old, wrinkled, not a spark of life. On her face a hard, sad, hopeless cloud... The eyes dull, cried out... Has it gone so quickly from early morning to night? Is it so quick that life's days are over? So quick? How did it happen?

And why do I love her still? And why can I not for a minute forget that moment, that woman, that bright dawn? Why does love make my heart suffer so?

The night would not cast upon me such a cold fear, if I did not think about the dawn. The winter, the sad, hateful, winter, would not chill the blood in my veins, the marrow of my bones, if I could forget the spring, the summer... Oy, how it burns, the Gehenna of love!!...

Children – A beautiful gift in a sorrowful life! A bright ray of light in a dark, stale cellar. A Simchat Torah joyful goodness in the midst of the sorrowful, heart-rending Song of Neilah on Yom Kippur!

My children! How I love them! A burning so hot, so painful! How gladly I would give up my soul, my life for them. Oy, how I love them!

When one laughs, I forget all of my troubles. When one of them jokes, plays, I am happy... I forget the weekly senseless life, with the eternal, eternal dog-eat-dog struggle for a little piece of bread... Out with work, out with bosses, out with landlords, out with rent! Down, down with the whole eternal,

eternal mountain which bends our backs, which stifles the heart... Out with want, out with poverty – I am happy... Everything is good with me, I am joyful...

Don't be jealous! I count my pleasures dear. Love has presented to me a big bill, and I have paid it... I pay! Oy, how dearly I pay!

And when I am crazy with the bill, my head explodes, and everything goes dark before my eyes, night! A frightening, horrible night!

Have you ever had one of your children die? A little one, innocent little angel, which you had loved to distraction! Have you watched night and day, while the child suffered? Do you know the taste of it? You are lucky, if you do not know! Lucky... Lucky...

And when the horrible death had torn from you your child, and a second child remains with you, you remain hanging on the gallows half strangled, not living and not dead...

And then the second child takes sick and the black, cold death spreads his black wings over the innocent little head of your dear, beloved child.

You know then for certain, that in our blessed New York it happens too often that parents lose more than one of their children.

Cramped, impoisoned homes, built and maintained by evil spirits, the rent, the narrow, dirty streets, people crammed together like herring in a barrel, no air, no light, poverty, want, and the first victims are those, the weak, innocent little children... How many child cadavers does New York see delivered to the cemeteries each winter?!

And you sit next to the little bed of your sick child half crazy from pain.

Blocked is the childish laughter, and over the whole house is fallen a quiet, black sadness.

The lips which should cover you with kisses, are contorted in pain... The little eyes look at you... Begging for mercy: "Papa, Papa, help me."

And your love burns like a hellish fire, it sticks you with a thousand needles, and pours out a hellish poison into your bleeding wounds.

And the Gehenna of love becomes more horrible, terrifying

Love – It is poison. It is a hellish fire!

Men and Women

And He Pushed Her

In a moment of recklessness and burning passion she violated her vows and was untrue to her husband...

In a similar minute, if her husband was next to her – and if he had loved her – she would have kissed him, held him tight against her, until the tender feelings which seized her like a wild storm would reach its natural outcome. -- Her husband, however, was seldom at home. By day he was occupied and taken by business, and in the evenings he was gone, who knows where...

If she were a mother, she would have pulled her child gently to her breast until the running stream of love would have flowed out... But she did not have any children.

If in such a minute she had been alone in her room, she might have dreamed up exciting fantasies, perhaps she would have thrown herself into some housework... She would have sung... Cried... Laughed, would have imagined exciting scenes until the little fire, which heated her blood, would have burned itself out, and slowly extinguished itself. But she was not alone... With her was sitting a “He” in the room. A friend and a frequent visitor to the house. The friend had a habit, when he wanted to talk to her, of often making use of words with a double meaning. He would fix her with his penetrating eyes, and often while looking at her he would give her a strange smile...

She on the other hand would laugh, and freeze with her innocence, with her coldness.

But there was one frightful minute... He sensed it and became more free with her, and in his demeanor...

Her face flickered, her eyes shot sparks... He understood her thoughts, and he drew nearer to her until her breath began to burn him.

She gave him a light push, and in pushing him she touched him lightly and he felt how she burned.

He took a step nearer to her: She said something, but her words had a strange waiver to them.

Like an aroused animal he suddenly threw himself on her and gave her a wild kiss.

She gave out a little cry...

He held her in a tight embrace. For a while she struggled. He used force, but soon her struggling became weaker... For a while she was helpless... But soon she was again burning... But not to struggle, but rather to live and feel...

She forgot everything in the world... She became drunk with love...

Later she realized what she had done. She understood that she had made love with someone that she did not love, and she had been untrue to her husband.

She was disgusted with herself... She began to suffer, terrible sorrow... She became crazy with a guilty conscience...

She couldn't look her husband in the eyes. She looked at him as though she was a common, lowly criminal, and often, when she was alone, she cried with bitter tears...

She decided to confess to her husband.

She felt that she could not live without doing so.

And she confessed...

It was a winter night.

He, whom she wanted to confess to, had closed his office – He was a young real estate man – And he headed home. On the way home he stopped at a hotel, sat at a table and ordered a glass of wine.

A young woman that he knew came over to him. The woman worked at the hotel. Very soon there were two glasses of wine on the table and the pair were having a cheerful and lively conversation, and it was obvious that they were old acquaintances.

She invited him to come to a room, and she didn't have to ask him twice...

After an hour of unbridled lovemaking, he left for home. When he arrived there, he tenderly hugged his wife as usual and wanted to give her a kiss. She tore herself from his arms, stepped back and turned pale.

The thought came to him that she knew about his lovemaking and was going to make a scene.

"What is it?" he asked, a little frightened, but ready for a fight, and he prepared to answer her with: "None of your business," and clip her wings.

She began to cry.

"What is it?" he asked again.

"I am a common criminal..."

And crying with earnest, bitter tears she confessed everything... Blamed only herself in her transgression.

"You common..." -- He spoke a terrible word. And he also went pale, and his eyes burned.

She fell at his feet and begged forgiveness.

He remained cold, heartless to her moving pleas... And then he pushed her away...

In the court room where he sought legal separation from her, she once again confessed everything... And everyone looked at her with disdain... He, on the other hand, received pity and sympathy as a deceived man, and they granted the legal separation.

A Wife's Revenge

She hated him like death.

She despised him with a bitter, biting hate, because she knew that he did not love her.

She knew that he counted himself to be happy, only when he knew that he could get away from her for a few minutes. She was able to take revenge on him with that, by following him around like a shadow. She saw that she plagued him with her revenge, and that made her happy.

She often heard their friends and acquaintances say about him and her that they were in love like two turtledoves, and deep in her heart she laughed with a dark laughter...

She had become evil, and made him suffer, and he became weak and endured it.

Once a suspicion came to her that he loved another.

She bit her lip... For a while kept it to her self. Her eyes suddenly had an evil gleam in them and she soon laughed.

She followed him even closer and more cruelly.

She worked in the same shop where he worked. Wherever he wanted to go, she offered her company. She saw that he suffered more from it, and she rejoiced and did not let him out of her sight for a minute.

The poor man was nearly crazy meshugge from his troubles.

Every minute he was ready to give up half of his life to free himself from his dearer half. -- But he did not have the courage to carry out his ardent wish.

His happiest, his favorite fantasy was to see himself for just one night without his wife... And yet, she was with him always, always together.

He became weary of his life... He felt as though Gehenna was in his heart... She saw it, and it became her life, her happiness. Her revenge became her soul...

His patience began to fail, and little by little he began to show his feelings.

Her hate became more poisonous, stronger, deeper... But she pretended that she did not understand him, and made herself even more and more bound to him, and he felt that he was being smothered by her...

Finally, he found the courage to make the decision and said to her, that he loved another, and that they must part...

"You idiot!" she laughed after she heard him out – "And what do you think? That I love you? I hate you. Veh... Veh... to death..."

"All the better," he answered, and shook from emotion.

“You can go,” she answered, and she simply spit on him.

It was late at night, and the two went to sleep in separate rooms...

The wife’s revenge was not yet over!

Several times she got up from her bed, and with flaming eyes and with silent steps like a cat she went to his room and looked to see if he was asleep.

When she was assured that her husband was in the world of dreams, she went into his room, looked with hate at her sleeping husband, and opened the valves to the gas, then, with a terrible smile, she slipped out of the room...

The wife’s revenge was still not yet over...

Later she went back to her husband in his room, laid down beside him, took his already cold hands and put them around her... Embracing him, she brought his closed lips to hers...

And in this pose they were found the next morning dead...

In a note left behind she asked for herself and also for her husband that they be buried together in the same grave.

Friends fulfilled the wish: They also erected a headstone on which was chiseled the moving inscription:

“Beloved and happy in their life, and in their death they were not parted.”

And no one knew that this was a wife’s revenge.

Since that Night

Since that night David stopped preaching and even talking about free love...

David Hamburger's friends and acquaintances called him by his nick-name: "The Free-Lover."

You would reckon that David Hamburger is a dangerous bird that makes love to a different woman every day – You would be wrong. He is a person who lives his life the way God and people have decreed. Perhaps David has maybe once given a kiss to a different woman besides his own wife, perhaps he has from time to time made some sinful calculations, but that is all!

On the topic of free love David is only sort of a theoretician. He only talks about it with his mouth – That's all! To everyone and on every occasion David preaches free love, and often people hear how David expressed himself, for example with phrases like this:

"That which is related to love, has no words such as "One must not." One can do anything, anything! Nothing is forbidden!"

"And when one is married?" Some people ask David, "When one is married is there also no "One must not?"

"No! No!" David cries out, "No, men and women must be so free, just as though they were not married! A man may love whomever he wants, and as many as he wants, and the woman also!"

"Jealousy," David preaches, "Jealousy is a bad, lowly emotion!" That is how David likes to talk. Now, suddenly, he has grown silent... Out with preaching free love!...

Since David Hamburger got married – And that is about ten years now – It has never come to pass that he has ever failed to spend the night at home. It happens that David Hamburger might go where there is a party, in a theater, to a ball, come home late at night, sometimes he comes home a dawn... But to sleep, he sleeps at home – A homebody man.

And it happened that, David had to travel, and for the first time in ten years the homebody man had to spend a night not in his own bed.

On the day when David peacefully returned from his journey, it was already late in the evening, that is to say the next night, because altogether he was only gone for one night.

When the door was opened for David, it was not his wife, as it always was when he came home late at night. This time at the door was his oldest daughter, a seven-year-old.

David was not immediately concerned. He had the suspicion that his wife was angry with him because he was a little late returning home. He was supposed to be home much earlier in the day, instead of in the middle of the night. David did, indeed, feel a little guilty about it and he suspected that his wife was mad at him and did not want to answer the door.

David was a little annoyed in his heart. He was expecting to see before him his wife in her pretty nightgown. He was looking forward to a nice receptive face, after for the first time in ten years being

away from home for almost two whole days. -- A full night not being at home. Thus, the disappointment. And the father hid his chagrin and asked his sleepy daughter:

“Look here, a little daughter! And where is Mama?”

“Mama has just gone to sleep,” the little girl answered.

“What, so late?”

“The baby was very sick and only now sleeping,” the little girl explained to her father why her mother went to bed so late.

This explanation more or less calmed David. He gave the little girl a kiss and said:

“Nu, go, little mother, go to bed.”

The little girl went back to her room.

David really wanted to spend a little time with his wife. He went to his wife’s bedroom and over to her bed. His wife and the baby were sound asleep. There was little he could do about it, so he went to the second bedroom and found that his older daughter, the one who had opened the door for him, was sleeping there, the room where he usually slept in the folding bed.

David undid the folding bed. When he began to make the bed, he noted a strange change. First, there was a clean, white bed-sheet, and a white pillowcase on the pillow, and the quilt was also wrapped in a bed-sheet. That had never happened before.

David’s wife was still occupied with their little baby, and she did not look after his bed. She had other priorities. When he needed clean bedding for his bed, he would get it himself. And now his wife had suddenly gone and placed the washing on his bed. And above all David found it hard to understand why the quilt was wrapped in a sheet... His wife only did that when a guest came to stay over night and had to sleep in his folding bed... David suddenly understood that someone must have slept in this bed the previous night.

David suddenly felt uneasy and heavy in his heart.

“Papa,” the little girl called to her father, “Do you know who slept with us last night?”

“Who?” A startled David answered.

“Mr. Buzavski.”

“Who?”

“Mr. Buzavski!”

“Why now?” David asked his daughter with a trembling heart.

“Two aunts came to visit the Buzavskis,” the girl answered, “Buzavski sat with us and said that he had nowhere to sleep, so Mama invited him to stay and sleep in your bed.”

The Buzavskis and the Hamburgers were next-door neighbors, and they were very friendly with one another. Ten weeks ago Buzavski’s wife had typhus fever. A nurse came to the house, and Buzavski

complained to the Hamburgers over and over that he had nowhere to spend the nights, because he had no place to sleep. If David wanted to think about it, he would have had to see that this was a normal, completely natural event... His neighbor had a problem for the last ten in that he had nowhere to sleep. Now, as his daughter told him, two aunts had come to visit and his neighbor would certainly have no place to go. Nu, he, David, was not at home, his bed was empty, why would his wife not invite their stranded neighbor to sleep in the empty bed? Very simple, and very natural!

But David's common sense was blinded by a dull, stifling feeling of jealousy, and dark suspicion.

A suspicion that his wife had spent the night with the neighbor in lovemaking, had obstructed his thinking... He felt the blood pounding in his temple... His whole soul lit up with a hellish fire!

He went running straight to his wife's room to make a great scandal.

However, poor David remembered that he had a tongue in his mouth, and this tongue was always speaking such words, that had no relation to what he was feeling now...

David lay down in the bed... Suspicion and jealousy tormented him the whole night, and he suffered the agonies of Gehenna.

And since that night, David Hamburger has ceased to preach, and even to utter a single word about free love...

Two Sad Hearts

Becker and his friend, Bach, both had very sad hearts, and the cause of both their oppressive sadness was two nicely made beds.

Becker and Bach were friends and neighbors. Becker was a married man, had a pretty little wife and three children. Bach was an old bachelor.

When the beloved summer came, Becker's fine wife began the story: In the small bedroom it was very hot and suffocating. She removed the beds from the two bedrooms, and moved them to the front-room.

And this time when Becker and his friend, Bach, who was a frequent visitor to the Becker's, sat in the dining room at the big round table, his eyes were struck by the sight of the two nicely made beds in the front-room.

And Mr. Becker looked on these beds, and Mr. Becker's friend looked upon the beds and their hearts were, unfortunately, weighed down by a black sadness.

Since the beds were moved into the front-room Mr. Becker had no hope for his salvation. Earlier, when the beds were in the bedrooms, his oldest two children slept in one room, and in the second bedroom slept – he himself, his pretty wife and their little, neat baby. He and his wife took the bed and the baby was nearby in a small, neat little cradle. Now, with the two beds in the front-room, the mother slept with the baby in one bed, and in the other slept the two older children. He, Becker, flopped in a folding bed in one of the bedrooms.

Sleeping with all of the others in the front-room was not really acceptable to him, and it was actually, simply impossible. In the first place the baby was sleeping with the mother, because there was no place for the cradle in the front-room...

If he did want to lie down, the second bed was wide enough... But the two children were sleeping there. If, perhaps, he wanted to get up from the bed when the children closed their eyes to go to sleep, the front room was open on all sides, you could just laugh!

His pretty wife had taken down the curtains in the front-room for the duration of the beloved summer... The window blinds were out of order and would not turn down... Two windows, two big open eyes! That was on one side. On the second side of the front-room it was separated from the dining room by a wide passageway. It was almost like a room itself. In the winter this passageway was hung with a pair of heavy curtains. In the summer these curtains came down... And in the dining room slept, to all tsuris, a female border.

For poor Becker there was no hope of salvation... He sat in the dining room at the big round table, looked into the front-room at the nicely made beds, and thought about past good times, and his poor heart was enveloped by a deep, deep sadness.

And when Becker's friend, old Bach, looked at the beds, he, also, became very, very sad.

Some time ago, when Becker's pretty wife was still a single girl, Bach was very much in love with her... Deep in his heart harbored a sweet hope that sooner or later he and she would get married. He held this dear hope in his heart for so long until he was undercut by his friend, and, indeed, Mr. Becker, who was quicker and luckier than him, took from him, under his very nose his beloved maiden, and the poor, poor Bach remained until this very day an old bachelor.

In the beginning, when Bach saw what Becker had done to him, he would put on airs a little, and the friendly relationship between the two would be affected. At best, this did not last a long time. The old friendship swam back like pure oil on water.

And Bach was a frequent visitor to his married friend, took a warm part in all of his troubles, played with Becker's children, enjoyed his friend's parties, lost his head when one of his friend's children were sick, and was in his neighbor's family counted as a family friend.

Sometimes, when he looks upon the pretty and well kept, stable home of his friend, on his pretty wife, who could have been his, a worm would eat at his heart... But how often did that happen? Very, very seldom!

Only since the beds were placed in the front-room was the old bachelor's fond soul plagued with heavy feelings, heavy thoughts..

So, there sits Bach by the big round table and his eyes are blinded by the sight of the two nicely made beds together in the front-room.

Whether he wanted to or not, the old bachelor thought, and a flood of ideas painted a picture: It is night, and it is dark in the front-room. The beds are readied for sleeping, and laying there together are his friend Beck and his wife like two turtledoves, Becker and his pretty, neat little wife are in love.

And the old bachelor's heart is crushed by a heavy, heavy, unbearable sadness.

"The beds are right in the front-room?" said the old bachelor, and in his voice one could feel a hidden, deep displeasure.

"My wife's idea!" answered Becker, and in his voice you could hear a painful chagrin. And the two sad hearts together let out the same deep sigh.

An Ugly Disappointment

Evening time, when Drabkin left his house, he said to his wife that he was going to an important meeting, and thereby gave his wife to understand that it was possible that he would be away until dawn.

Drabkin had told his wife a lie. He was not going to a meeting, but rather traveling deep into the Bronx to visit a widow he knew. He thought up that lie about the meeting because he was expecting to be with that widow until early morning.

The widow to whom he was going was a woman who gave out her age as thirty-eight years, an appetizing woman with a not ugly face. Her name was Mrs. Bookman and Drabkin was under the impression that Mrs. Bookman believed in free love and was above all a woman, who was easily persuaded by men.

Drabkin, a man, who is at this time a big master of running illegal business with different women, had taken a strong liking to Mrs. Bookman. But at that time the god-like Mr. Bookman, was a big man, a gleaming model of good health and strength like an elephant. And when the passionate but physically weak Drabkin happened to cast a look at the tall, healthy Bookman, every foolish thought he had of Mrs. Bookman flew out of his head.

Then came dumb, dumb death and took away the healthy, powerful Bookman and Mrs. Bookman became a dismal widow. A widow with three growing orphans.

Two months after Bookman's death, Drabkin went to visit the widow. The good man went to her, apparently, to give her words of comfort, but he was thinking of something quite different.

The healthy, strong Bookman was no longer in this world. Drabkin no longer had anyone or anything to fear. His thoughts ranged free concerning the widow, and played in his mind like a little devil, and the sinful thoughts drove him to the widow.

Drabkin traveled to the Bronx, and in his mind he pictured how he would approach the widow... She is alone in the house – The children found themselves somewhere in Harlem with the father's sister – The sweet widow is completely alone in the house, she greets him, he takes her hand, then he comforts her over her great sorrow, over the loss of her husband, and in so comforting the unhappy woman, he would take her tenderly by her arms and give her a kiss on the forehead – a burning, passionate kiss.

She would look at him with a reproach.

“What is it with you, Mr. Drabkin?”

“What a sweet, beautiful woman you are...” he would answer and look her directly in the eyes and take her tightly in his arms.

“Mr. Drabkin, stop!” she would begin to resist, “What are you doing, Mr. Drabkin? You are a father with growing children.”

“Nu, so what? Where is the law that says a man must bury himself alive when he has children?” he would reproach her in answer, and he would kiss her again.

Her cheeks would redden, she would push him away, he would continue to talk to her.

“You know... I have always loved you... More than one sleepless night have I spent over you...”

“Oy, stop speaking such foolishness,” she would respond, “It is not very nice of you!”

“Why not nice?” he would argue, “Why not nice? Is there a law that says when a man may love and when he may not? And if there is such a law, it is a made up story from old wives and pious priests. The whole “one must not” is an ugly, stuffed hump.”

“Veh iz mir! Woe to me!” she would say to him again, “What you are saying, I don’t understand... Something you are forgetting is that it is only a month since my husband died... That I am a mother with grown children. What you are saying... Think about it...”

“Foolishness,” he would answer, “empty words. He who has passed away is dead and he, who lives must live.”

And he would talk and talk about free love until she became passionate like he is, until he conquered her.

And so Drabkin thought without noticing the time passing, and he was already at the last station... Here is the correct address. He rings the bell. The door to the hall opened.

She is at home, thought Drabkin and his heart beat faster and faster.

Now he knocks at the door.

“Come in!” he heard her voice, and he felt a warm shudder over all of his limbs.

He opened the door. There, Mrs. Bookman came toward him.

“Oh, what a guest! Mr. Drabkin!”

“How are you doing, Mrs. Bookman?”

And they greeted one another.

How beautiful and charming she is, the widow! Her cheeks blushed so strange, and her vest was so transparent that you could see her milk-white form, and the short sleeves of the vest showed the lines, the lines of her round arms.

In one second Drabkin’s blood was aflame with a burning desire.

She took him by the hand and guided him to the dining room.

“Sit, Mr. Drabkin.”

Drabkin wanted to answer her with something, but the words stuck in his throat – In the front-room on a lounge was a man, also a big man with a book over his face... The man was laying there half-dressed. One was quick to see that he was very much at home...

The over-heated Drabkin felt like he had been doused with cold water.

“Who is that?” Drabkin asked, pointing to the man in the front-room.

And the widow's flushed cheeks became even more red, and on her lips was a strange, smile which spoke volumes.

"I will introduce you," the widow answered the guest's question, and without further explanation, the good woman called into the front-room.

"Aibe, Aibe dear, come here!"

And Drabkin saw getting up from the lounge chair a very big man, wearing pants and a long shirt, and the big man was soon in the front-room and was standing there like a solid oak before Drabkin's eyes.

"This is Mr. Drabkin," the good woman introduced the two men, "and this," she said indicating the big man, "This is..."

She didn't say it, and again turned to her guest, and said:

"You, Drabkin, are your own man, a good, true friend of mine. You are not like those other fools, that one has to keep such things from. Before you one can say the whole truth – That is my, my... my dear, sweet Aibele."

"Very pleased, very pleased..." stuttered poor Drabkin, and when he took the hand of the widow's second husband, only one thought came into his head:

"Again such a tall one, such a big one."

* * *

Drabkin came home from his meeting very early, and this night he was unusually true and loving to his wife.

Her Girlish Dress

Eighteen years ago, when Zarkhin was in love with the beautiful, young, darkly charming Sophie, who is now his wife, she was very simply dressed.

Sophie was then a greenhorn in America, and she went around in greener clothing, a red vest with black polka-dots and wide sleeves. And over the vest a simple fringed skirt. On her head she wore a simple yachting cap.

That was Sophie's standard outfit, and that is how she was dressed when Zarkhin first met her, and how she was dressed when he declared his love for the greener maiden.

The Zarkhin's were now well off and Sophie always dressed in the latest fashion, and as she grew older in years, the more she paid attention to the way she dressed.

Who can count the number of beautiful dresses, really good dresses, jackets, expensive fur coats, silk and plush fabrics, various expensive seasonal hats which Mrs. Zarkhin had worn for the past eighteen years since she married?

In many of the stylish dresses Sophie looked beautiful, like a princess. Each new hat gave her a certain charm, of course Mr. Zarkhin did not remember even one of all of the dresses that his wife wore since they were married, not a single one of the various stylish hats, which almost always delighted him when she first put them on new. The man, however, could under no circumstances forget the simple fringed dress with the vest that his Sophie wore when she was a greener, then, when he fell in love with the maiden, when she became his bride. There was no way he could forget the simple, blue yachting cap, which made the simple, young, greener girl so charming and beautiful.

As Mrs. Zarkhin grew older, the more she became involved with clothing...

In sewing Madam Zarkin a dress, the dressmakers would be yelled at by her... It is true that she was not stingy about spending an extra dollar on her dresses, but until her tailor earned that extra dollar she would come on with bitter gall. In fitting a dress for Madam Zarkin one must know that there better not be a single wrinkle, not a single mistake, it must lie like it had been poured out... And the result was always that every one of Sophie's new dresses made her look like a brand new person.

And every time that Sophie put on a new dress, her husband was enchanted with his wife. Nevertheless, when looking at her in her new dress, the image of her in the simple dress would float into his mind, the one Sophie wore when she was a greener. And it would seem to him that that dress was the prettiest, sweetest garment in the world.

When Madam Zarkhin bought the latest new hat, it was quite a hat!

She knew what she wanted to find on the new hat: Feathers, flowers, and all of the best quality, and always when Sophie put on a new hat, Mr. Zarkhin would think that his very own wife was little by little becoming a new person, and his Sophie gained in his eyes a new interest. Yet, he remembered the simple blue yachting cap that his Sophie wore when she became his bride... And he had a strange longing for that little hat, for the simple clothing, and it seemed to him that he dreamed them, that if his

Sophie would now dress just like she dressed then, when he first met her, she would be exactly as beautiful, exactly as sweet, as loving as she was then... Then, when he fell in love with the greener maiden, then when she became his bride.

And Zarkhin liked to talk about it with his wife, and often he would say to her:

“Sophie’nu, remember when you dressed like a greener, when we first met?”

Sophie knew quite well what her husband was talking about. She knew what time her husband had in mind, she knew how she dressed then. But she liked this sort of conversation to go on longer. It filled her heart with a warm, pleasurable feeling when her husband carried on talking about that time, when she was so young, so pretty, and in order to prolong the conversation and not miss the opportunity to recall that sweet time, Sophie would ask:

“What time do you mean?”

“When you were still a greener...” Zarkhin would think, “Remember, Sophie’nu, when I fell in love with you, when you became my bride? Remember, Sophie’nu, how you were dressed?”

And Sophie’s ideas flowed through her how she looked when she was a greener: Young, pretty in her simple garments! A thousand sweet, pleasant memories excited her thoughts, her whole soul trembled with pleasure. Her face glowed, as if the memories of her young years would spread across her face a bit of her long past youth. She sat a while in thought, then said:

“Who can remember how I was dressed then? I have already forgotten...”

Sophie only said those words, in reality she remembered very well how she looked then. She remembered every detail very clearly, even better than her husband, but she wanted that her Zarkhin would describe how she looked then, and that is why she answered that she didn’t remember.

“Remember, Sophie’nu, your red vest, red and black polka-dots, your simple dress, and your blue yachting cap? A little to the side is how you wore the hat, held there by a long pen.”

“Yes, I remember, I remember!” said Mrs. Zarkhin thoughtfully.

“How well that suited you!” said Zarkhin, excited by the memory, “What a marvelous young woman you were.”

And the husband and wife remained sitting, surrounded by thoughts of the years of their youth gone by, filling their heart with a pleasant longing.

* * *

One time, when Madam Zarkhin was planning to go to a masked ball, the idea came to her to go disguised as “A Russian Girl” and to dress exactly as she did when she was a greener, in her girlish years. And she put on a vest with red and black polka-dots and a fringe, and simple petticoat, and from somewhere got a blue yachting cap, just like she had when she was a greener. And when she had finished putting it all together for the masked ball, she told her husband.

“Then you will have a chance to see me, the way I looked as a greener, when you fell in love with me,” Sophie said to her husband coquettish and excited.

Zarkhin was very curious to see his wife those garments, which had always remained in his memory. He was so curious that he couldn’t wait for the masked ball, and he begged Sophie to immediately put on the ensemble of her greener years.

Sophie followed his wish, and in her room she changed clothes and was soon standing before her husband, exactly as she was as a greener... She even had on the little hat cocked a little to the side as she had worn it when she was still single.

The clothes were the same, but Sophie was not the same. No longer the marvelous, young maiden in whom her, now, husband had eighteen years ago fell in love with.

The costume of the young girl did not flatter the middle-aged woman... Something about it made Sophie look a little foolish... Foolish and much older than she looked in her usual wardrobe. It gave the impression of a bubbe wearing her grandchildren’s clothes.

And so, looking at his wife, in Zarkhin’s heart there spread a heavy, pressing sadness... He suddenly understood that that Sophie, that young, pretty maiden whom he fell in love with was no more... Something beautiful, something sweet in the depths of his soul died!

In seeing the change in her husband’s face, she understood to some extent what he thought and what he felt, and she, too, felt a strange feeling in her heart.

Sophie silently, but very quickly, took off her “greener clothing,” prettied herself up and “fixed” herself back to the way she should be. And when she had transformed herself and again appeared before her husband, he embraced her and kissed her...

And both husband and wife let out a heavy sigh.

A Man's Pleasures

A man in the past told me about himself:

If people should talk about me saying that I was a little man with a small heart, a man with little character – It won't bother me, let them talk!

No one forces me to tell such stories about myself. If I want to, I could put myself before you as the best person on earth. If I wanted to, I could tell you invented stories about myself that would make me into a great hero. But if I want to tell the pure truth, if I had no fear to look around with open eyes into my own heart, then I could not tell you any invented stories.

And I am not afraid of what opinion you might have of me. I talk to you open and true: This I have done, thus and so have I behaved, thus and thus I have felt, thus and thus I feel now. Thinking think I, that I have not been a favorite son with God. Many, many if not all men, have dealt with and acted in the same circumstances exactly as I have, as I have felt. Except they fool themselves, refuse to understand, or at best they keep quiet about their deeds. I am an exception in that, I speak the truth.

That was several years ago. I was at that time, like now, a married man, a father of three neat, sweet children, and loved my wife, and held dear my children. Nevertheless, without my wife finding out, I was going around with another young woman.

Sophie was the name of that woman, a blonde of 26 years.

I told this woman a hundred times that I loved her, but they were all lies. My outpouring of love did not come from my heart, only from my mouth. It was something very pleasing for me to declare myself in love. And it made little difference to whom or why...

The various people who encountered me with Sophie thought that between Sophie and I there was something serious. They knew that I was a married man and they regarded my relationship with the blonde as a secret, stolen love... I could see that without seeing their faces. Their very meaningful looks, their furtive smiles made it clear what they thought of me, and I got from that an indescribable pleasure.

Not paying attention to what kept me in an eternal fear – That my wife should, God forbid, find out about my “dark business,” I continued to make a point of more and more people seeing me together with Sophie, so that people would talk more about me, and how I was going around with another woman.

The secrets from my wife, the sneaking around, the thought that I was dealing with “forbidden merchandise,” and above all that what others were thinking – this brought me a remarkable pleasure, and I didn't for a minute think about what consequences could arrive for Sophie from such an unclean love.

When my lover would, for example, speak with me often and advise me that I should publicly declare my love, and forsake my wife for her, I would take my feet in my hands, and I would run to where the Turkish pepper grows...far away. I always knew that, I always had that in mind. However, I strove to

tangle Sophie even deeper in my net. And if it came to driving her away, I would have not put myself through it. There was only one thing I feared, and that was the prospect of having trouble with my wife. And regardless of the not-pretty love of my Sophie, I was jealous, and if I had even a thought that she gave any of her attentions to another, I would have been ready to scratch the eyes out of her together with the other guy.

* * *

I used to know an old fellow, an old bachelor, a completely inconsequential person, and old bachelor well up in years. K---n was his name.

And my friend once complained to me about his hardships, and his wasted bachelor life:

“No home, not even a little corner, no wife in my life. It is a bland life without any flavor.”

“Yes, that is true,” I teased the old bachelor, “One just has to get married! There is no more comfortable corner in the whole world than in the home with the wife, next to your children.”

“Nu, yes, I know that,” sighed the careworn bachelor.

“So, why did you not marry?” I asked with an ostensible reproach for my friend.

“Yes, one can marry, that is not difficult,” answered K---n, “but the trouble is, with whom?!”

“What do you mean? There is a whole bunch of single women!”

“Possibly there are enough, but how do you find the right one, the one that won’t make you tear your hair out later?” said the frightened old soul.

I knew that K---n knew Sophie, and this simply slipped from my tongue:

“Why not marry Sophie?”

“Is she really a proper lady?” the old bachelor gave me a mischievous look.

“Such a year for the two of us!” I swore to him.

How it occurred to me to propose a marriage contract with my own beloved, I can not, to this day, explain. In any case I didn’t do it out of generosity, because deep in my heart I did not want that Sophie would marry whomever, and I would lose her. Perhaps it was because, I didn’t expect that anything would come out of it, because I didn’t really reckon K---n to be a real person... Be that as it may, to my good luck a happy marriage contract was made, and soon the happy news came to me that my Sophie and my old bachelor friend were engaged.

I felt a pain in my heart. Ach, how I didn’t want Sophie to marry!

But Sophie did not ask me and she did marry him, with K---n, with the old bachelor...

Veh, how the whole story disappointed me!

At first I even thought that even as a married woman all was not lost. One can carry on a love affair behind a husband’s back, but that was a very weak consolation. I was afraid to have anything to do

with a man's wife. Later I saw that Sophie was no longer what she was – The new wife quickly made me to understand that she did not take her husband as a plaything, that she intended to very earnestly live and act with her husband, and with sharp pain in my heart I had to step aside.

Time passed. I had cast my eye to other women, and played with the thoughts, with plans to make a new novel, but I still suffered because Sophie had married another.

Very often my fantasies would create images of how Sophie made love to her husband, with the former old bachelor, and my heart would suffer with the true agony of Gehenna.

Only now do I have some satisfaction. Ach, how much pleasure I have!

People tell me that my Sophie lives a lamentable life. People say: That she does not love her husband, she only stays with him because there is a child on the way, and because she has finished lodging and a little piece of bread with it... Only, she does not love him...

And when people share with me that news, I feel a little more healthy.

And when people tell me that Sophie is living a bitter life, it is sweet news to my heart!

One time I saw her – Sophie and her husband. K---n looked pale, beaten, pitiful, unhappy and Sophie was not the same as she was before.

She had become old, abandoned, sad!

No more the fire in her eyes! No more the previous charm on her face and her pretty blond hair had lost its magnificent, silky color. It looked to me as though it was run through with dark streaks...

Seeing that, something clutched at my heart... I remembered how I used to stroke and kiss her hair... And for a while I was painfully sad... Only after she was out of my sight with her husband, it was suddenly good with me, very pleasant in my heart...

And my beloved's dark face brought me joy!

I knew very well, dealing the way I did is not proper. I know the feeling I feel is not pretty, I know only that it is true!

Why the Man became OK with It

He is a tall, healthy, wide-shouldered man. She is a short, thin, pale woman. It is already eight years after their marriage, and they do not have any children.

Both equally, man and wife, were certain that the cause of them not having children was her – the weak, short wife. He often freely expressed that opinion. She kept silent about her suspicion, but in her heart she was convinced that she and she alone was the unfortunate cause.

When the conversation between man and wife arose about going to consult a professor the husband would pass up going with a light heart:

“You can go,” he would say to his wife in a lighthearted mood, “I don’t need to go to any professor.”

“Why me, yes, and you, no?” the wife would ask, “You don’t want to have any children?”

“You can be assured that I am all right...” The husband would answer so convinced, so meaningful, that the wife began to suspect that her husband secretly lived with another woman with whom he had children.

“How do you know that you are all right?” the wife asked with a trembling voice.

“Because I am a healthy man... A man like every other, and you are a fragile soul, weak, hardly alive.”

“Nu, and weak women can’t have children?” the woman would defend herself, “I know women who are much weaker than I and have children year after year, beautiful children, healthy children.”

“All right!” the husband would put a quick end to the issue, “I am saying to you, go to the doctor and ask.”

“And you?”

“I have nothing to ask about.”

The wife continued to want that only both of them, she with her husband, should go to a professor, but since her husband was not interested, it remained just talk.

And perhaps it was just a false explanation, that she continued to want her husband to go with her, because she knew he was not at all interested in going to a professor. Therefore, though, perhaps, it was a false explanation that she told her husband that she was afraid to go alone because deep in her heart she believed that she might be the one who could not have children, and the thought of going alone frightened her. Be that as it may, the years passed and the man and wife never went to the doctor to ask why they never had children.

Once the husband became acquainted with a man who was more healthy, even more strong than he, and the husband knew that his acquaintance also did not have any children, and that he had gone to a number of famous professors, and the medical authorities all agreed that he was not able to bring children into the world.

This acquaintanceship resulted in the husband ceasing to feel certain that not he, but only his wife, could be the cause of their childlessness. But he did not tell his wife of his doubts, and when his wife once again brought up the subject of going to a doctor, the husband answered her as usual:

“I have no reason to go!”

But the tone of his voice was not the same as before. It did not have the previous conviction – the previous certainty was missing. Now the husband simply feared that the doctor would say that it was he and not his wife who was the cause of not having children... And to hear that report in the presence of his wife, who he had always dominated with his importance, was something this egotistical man wanted very, very much to avoid.

And now, when someone asks him if he is childless, the question would give him no rest, and once when his wife was away, he quietly went to a professor, and found out for sure that he was the cause of their childlessness.

The husband did not share the results with his wife, he kept the whole affair quiet. Now when the wife got the courage and brought up the subject of going to a professor, the husband had quite another argument.

“What professor? When a professor?” the husband answered the courage of his wife to bring up the subject of going to a doctor, “What will the professor do? If you have a child, it’s all right, and if not, no great loss, my little wife is good just as she is. One can have a happy life without a children...”

And the wife, who was sure in her heart that she was the childless one, was very happy that her husband had become OK with it.

Women

(Extracted from a diary of one who never had any luck with women)

May the 29th

It is already so late in the night, it seems to me that it will soon be morning, and yet I can not sleep.

For two hours I have been laying in my bed, trying whatever I could to go to sleep. I have changed my pillow ten times, from head to feet, and from feet to head, tried covering myself well, and throwing the covers off altogether, tried holding my feet together, spreading them wide, thrown myself in bed from side to side... And in spite of all of that, I can not go to sleep.

I have gotten up and started writing my impressions in my diary.

Tonight I do not sleep, because this night is very hard for me, very unpleasant thoughts: The whole night this image swims before my eyes, how Madam G... and Mr. Z... find themselves in such a close love relationship now in this hour, with them, with Z... at his place.

And this unpleasant thought has driven away from me my sleep, my rest.

I am with Madam G..., God forbid, not in love, and I have never even dreamed of loving her, in me speaks only the feeling of petty jealousy, of insulted egotism. I am painfully disappointed that this woman has not even cast a look at me, and is now there with Z... and so willingly. And.. The devil knows what an ugly image it invokes in my troubled mind.

G... was with us at our house, and when she said that she needed to go, like a cavalier in a story, I proposed to accompany her to the elevated train station, where she had to take a train to travel down town to her home.

I got the impression that G... was not entirely happy with my kind offer. It was a late night hour, allowing G... to go alone to the station would not be acceptable, secondly I thought that, G... not wanting my company, groundless, and I did accompany her.

In going it was difficult for me, because I was very sleepy when I assumed my gentleman's job.

And there is the station.

"A good night," I took leave of her, whom I had accompanied to the station.

"I see," she stood there as though undecided.

"What is it?"

"Accompany me a bit more, we can go together. Let's walk to the next station."

"Good!"

And we walked farther on.

The night was nice, very pretty! The way was secluded, and to the side was a lovely park, and my sleepiness left me.

And G... walked so close to me. I felt the warmth from her half-naked arms, and a sweet excitement made me more and more alert.

I took my friend under the arm, and toyed with her bare shoulder.

And G... jumped back from me, as though she had become the greatest modest person in the world, and casting upon me a pious, almost righteous look, she said to me:

“Get back, Mister, you are a married man.”

“Nu, and a man can’t get married?”

“Certainly not. I can tell your wife everything.”

In my diary I have undertaken to write the truth, I must say, that I am afraid of my wife. And later when accompanying G..., I behaved very, very good.

We arrived at the second station. I could see that G... seem undecided again and I innocently asked:

“Do you want to continue walking?”

“It seems to me, G... said somewhat reluctantly, “that there in the next block lives Z...”

“That’s right.”

“Let’s go to his place.”

“It is very late,” I answered.

“Perhaps he is not yet asleep.”

“And his wife is not here,” I told my friend.

“We will just be in and out.”

“All right!”

At Z...’s window the fire still burned, and we went upstairs.

Z... is a good friend of mine. He is always glad to see me when I visit with him. But this time I saw that he was impatient with my presence and wanted to be alone with G... I also saw that G... wanted to be done with me.

I felt saddened and pained. I made up an excuse, and I left them alone. I went home feeling like I had been discarded.

And I could not sleep all night. She should go to the devil, Madam G...

To me she was so pious and cold, and to Z...? The devil take her!

This is not a case of love. I know that. Not in me nor in him is she in love, yet she pushed me away, and him?...

How is he better than me? She herself, many times, had made it clear that she thought me more capable and smarter than him, and yet?

He is much taller and much more broad-shouldered than me, he has broad bones, and nature did not spare him any flesh.

The devil take them, the women, those who love bones and flesh.

* * *

June 10th

Today I feel good in my heart, very good. I made the woman, H..., cry. I had a strong wish to tease her, and I teased her for so long until her eyes filled with tears. And I won't deny it, from her tears I derived great pleasure!

I have been angry at Mrs. H... for a long time.

Mrs. H... is an acquaintance of mine. She is married and the mother of a pretty daughter. She is separated from her husband. She left her husband because he was a bad wage earner... But that is not why I am angry with her...

Mrs. H... hurt me once. It happened like this:

I had a conversation with her once. We talked about love. And I told her that a number of women were in love with me.

"In you?!" H... cried out and with it gave out a rude and cynical laugh.

Her laugh was like a stream of cold water poured over me. And from that point on I carried in my heart a stifling anger.

Today I ran into H... She looked to be in a good mood and happy. And that made me even more bothered.

I wanted to cause her pain and I began a lecture on morality:

"Your husband torments himself greatly."

"What can I do about that?" she answered, indifferent.

"He is suffering because you left him."

"I can't do anything about that."

"It is not very nice to leave a man just because he does not earn enough," I lectured my acquaintance.

"It's not your worry," she laughed.

"You are a bad person."

"Is that so?!" she laughed again at me.

“You are not a good mother to your child. You are not paying attention to your poor child, because in your head you are only thinking of men.”

I could see that I was saying the wrong things: My words where not hitting H... It bothered her like talking to the wall.

“You are a nothing. You love to run around empty.”

And H... laughed even more at me.

“Why do you go to so many concerts? Why do you never miss going to a ball?” I asked H..., meaningfully and pointedly.

A rude smile played on her face and she answered:

“Not your bubbie’s worries.”

“You are trying to catch a man in your net.”

And H... stuck her tongue out at me.

“But your efforts are useless. Men don’t turn to you,” I struck her with the first arrow in her heart, and on her cheerful face there spread a shadow.

“Men can’t look at you.”

“That is a lie!” yelled H..., painfully struck.

“There is something in you that drives men away.”

She went pale, the Mrs. H...

And I pushed farther:

“A man can sometimes get some relief from you, but only from a woman, like from a sack... And not more than once, after that you become unbearable...”

Her eyes filled with tears. I could see that the woman was on the point of throwing herself on me and tearing me to pieces.

However she remained sitting, powerless and beaten. My shots had hit home on Mrs. H...’s weak side. And today I feel so good in my heart!

Just a Girl

Across from me at a side table sits a young couple, and I can't take my eyes off of them.

How young and beautiful they both are. How much happiness, how much enthusiasm and love flows over their beautiful, young faces. -- I don't know them, but I think to myself: They must be fiancés. Their faces glowed with the pure, bright rays of the first passionate, but innocent young love. How pleasant, how sweet it is to look upon them!

Their cheeks are afire like two beautiful roses. And he – pale, a thinker, looks tenderly into her eyes.

"How beautiful you are in your youth, and how magically grand you will be when love flows over your sweet, radiant charms."

Across from me at a side table sits a young couple, and I can't take my eyes off of them.

Next to me sits an acquaintance of mine, and, captivated and enthusiastic, I said to him:

"Look over there in the corner by the little table, see the beautiful, young couple."

"I see them."

"Look, look how their pretty cheeks blush... See what a sweet, childish, innocent smile hovers on their beautiful, charming lips."

"Yes, I see."

"How happy is the young man sitting near to her," I show my enchantment, "Apparently they are fiancés. How happy he is when he kisses those childish, charming lips."

My friend cast a laughing look at me, and said to me with a meaningful cynical smile:

"Don't be so jealous, you can easily achieve such happiness..."

"What?" I looked at my friend.

And my friend whispered a secret in my ear.

"Get away, what are you babbling about?" I jumped up, hurt and shocked, "You know her, then?"

"And how? I know her from Warsaw, I know her from London, an evil creation!"

"And who is the young man? Not her fiancé, not her lover?"

"Such a youth, all day long he schleps after other girls. For him it doesn't matter who or what, just a girl!"