

# הַאֵלֶב מֵעֲנִיטֵשׁ הַאֵלֶב אֶפְפֶּע

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ГДѢ ПРАВДА ?

разсказъ Н. М. Шайкевича.

1888.



*Julia Pastrana (1834 - 1860), the probable inspiration for this novel.*

*See also: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia\\_Pastrana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Pastrana) and <http://juliapastranaonline.com/>*

# Half Human Half Ape

Or

Where does one find the truth?

By

Shomer

Translation by Dan Setzer  
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## Forward

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The story that I am presenting to you, dear reader, is a true account that I received from an acquaintance. The tears he shed while telling this dreadful tale were the best evidence that the story was true. He also supplied me with documents and letters from important people who confirmed that he had sworn that this strange story happened, and that he had innocently suffered from it.

This true story can serve as an example of what corrupt men are capable of, and that no man can protect himself from the abyss that unscrupulous men dig for them. The heroes of this story are still alive. The pits and those who dug them are still there, and I believe that many of you, dear readers, will come in contact with them and will hear from their very mouths the dreadful tales and that will convince you that there is nothing left to say.

The Author

## To the Reader

Life in general is a great book, and every man's life is a part of this mammoth book. Each and every person if he can write and describe his autobiography, will certainly, even for the most insignificant person, produce a great novel of his life experiences, for everyone of us is subject in his few years to times of sorrows, aggravation and very little happiness.

How often have we made a huge mistake when, for example, we see an elderly general or an elderly rich man, and think that they must have wonderful stories to tell from their life. The general after all has been in many battles, he has seen death many times, and the rich man has seen the whole world with all of its pleasures, but believe me, dear friend, that is a mistake. Consider the starovesitznik (he who sells old stuff). The one who buys from you your old rags, ask him to tell you his life story and you will be so shocked at how much he has to tell you that you will no longer be reluctant to listen to him, because he has struggled his entire life against a thousand misfortunes, against terrible, frightening times, while the old general had many men under him and only a few times fought himself, and the old rich man can only tell you what he saw in the spas he traveled to during the summer. And what, after all, did he see there but other rich men like him. Only other women as coquettish as his wife, and as vacuous as they both were.

I am a little, insignificant person, not worth three cents. If you saw me you would see a normal, unfortunate Jew who has been plagued his entire life just for a crumb of bread. It would never occur to you to ask me to recount my life story, because you would not believe that such an insignificant person as I, could interest you with my tales. But believe me when I tell you that if I laid my biography before you, you would be beside yourself. It would not be an exaggeration if I were to say that from my biography one could make a hundred novels, and each one would be as big and thick as the Collected Afternoon Prayer Book that the Berdichtober Book Sellers just published. And just to show you that I am not telling lies, I will tell you a story of something that happened to me. I just ask you not to take it as pure fantasy. On my life I swear to you that it is true, and if anyone would be convinced of its truthfulness, they can ask the people that are still living, thanks be to G-d (\*), and I will pray to G-d for you to live a long life. In order for you to have confidence in my testimony in this story, that it really happened, I will place before you the meager remains of my possessions, the whole of my fortune which is left to me (which is to say, my good name), also lost. Is is only the ordinary people who have rescued my honor.

(\*) Herr Fiktel sent to me all of documents supporting his testimony, and I know all of them very well. For anyone who would like to examine them, I can make them available.

**Shomer.**

## Half Human Half Ape

In the year 18... during the month of June (the first day of Shavuot) as I was going to visit the famous writer, Kassinfeld in the big city of Trilte, I came upon a woman with him in his house who shocked me at first sight. You would have quickly thought: 'Orangutan' (an ape) rather than 'woman.' Never in my life have I seen such ugliness. Imagine a person tall, thin like an old fashioned fireplace poker, black as a Negro, with big cat's eyes, a nose (such a nose as one should not see in a Jewish home) where in each of the two nostrils you could drive a coach with four horses. The broad face was covered with pockmarks so big that a walnut would fit in them. In short if someone wanted to take these caricatures out in the world and show them for money, he would earn a fortune because such a strange sight is so rare to see.

“Herr Fiktel, do you know this young Miss?” Herr K... asked me indicating the caricature of a woman.

I had to stifle a laugh at the word “Miss.” The pretty 'Miss' had to be nothing less than 40-years old.

“No, I have not had the honor of making her acquaintance,” I answered.

“If that is the case,” Herr Kassinfeld said, “Then I will introduce you: “Herr Fiktel, this is Miss Fleden the author of the work, “Kosher Love, or the Cat Over the Sour Cream.” She wrote it in the Russian language.”

I bowed toward the author, and she did the same toward me as the current fashion demands.

We soon fell into a conversation among the three of us in which my new acquaintance sprinkled in Hebrew and Talmudic vocabulary and in which she philosophized and demonstrated her knowledge of all seven areas of world knowledge.

Even though all of her words were bland and without understanding, nevertheless I still felt respect for her because I saw that she could bring forth a little Hebrew and was well read. This was something that was rare among Jewish women.

As we separated, Miss Fleden said to me with a sweet smile, which showed two rows of foul, black teeth, “I hope, Herr Fiktel, that I will have the honor of seeing you in the neighborhood. I am staying at the Hotel Kazan, no. 13.”

“If I can only find the time, then I will certainly visit you, Mademoiselle,” I answered.

She departed and I remained with Herr Kassinfeld.

“Herr Fiktel, how did you like the author?” Herr K... asked me laughingly.

“I liked her very much,” I answered, smiling, “Too bad she did not live in Ahasuerus' time. She would certainly have been a queen. Ahasuerus would surely have fallen in love with her.”

“Yes, she is a ravishing beauty,” Kassinfeld said, “And what do you say about her philosophy?”

“What do you want me to say? For Jewish women it is also too much,” I answered, “It seems as though she has learned a touch German and Hebrew. She writes Russian not bad, I have read her novel.”

“So, you have read her novel. Did you like it?”

“If a man wrote it, I would say it was bad. But since it was a woman who wrote it, we must forgive a few faults.”

“Yes, on the grammatical errors one can forgive her because she is a woman, however the errors in morality can not be forgiven. Such impudent words should not flow from a woman's pen. Her heroine in the novel comes to the forefront like a woman of the streets who runs around through the night...

“And I say to you once again, I have excused her as a woman for not having an entirely good work, for where could such a woman receive the education. Where is she from and who does she belong to?”

“She is from the village, Gezler. Her father was previously a teacher, and afterwards he just dealt with houses.”

“But what do you want?” I said, “Isn't it enough for her to do what she can?”

Soon after that I left Herr Kassenfeld, and quickly forgot the authoress. But three days later as I was passing by the Hotel Kazan I remembered that Miss Flegen was living there. I also remembered that I had promised to visit her, so I went to her room.

She greeted me in a very friendly and coquettish manner. We sat down and were soon involved deep in a long conversation. I sat there until it was polite to leave, and I told her that I would be leaving.

“We have talked and talked,” Flegen said to me, “and I have totally forgot the main point to ask you. Where were you born?”

“I am from the town of Adenburg.”

“And where do you live with your family?” she continued.

“I am in Grestenthal in Faskule, and my two children are being raised by my mother in Adenburg.”

“And where is your wife?”

“My wife has embarked on a distant journey, the same journey that we all must take some day.”

“Is she dead?”

“Yes,” I answered with a sigh, “It is two years now since she died.”

“So, you are a widower?”

“Yes, I am a widower.”

“So, why are you silent. Why haven't you married again?”

“In my heart the wounds made by the death of my wife have not healed yet. Otherwise I would have married by now.”

“Since you speak like that and have, no evil to him, a child, you have remembered your wife's life with the greatest love. Barely had she passed, you should have, without her, forgotten her and married another.”

“I see no happiness in another marriage. First, don't forget that I have two children, and to marry so quickly would make my little orphans unhappy, secondly, I am not a rich man, and you understand, without a doubt that for a woman, poverty is being without two dresses.”

“No, I don't agree with you,” said Flefen with passion, “Such an educated man as you are can get a wife who would make you happy, a wife who would understand your words, and who would share with you your joys and sorrows, a wife who would be faithful to you and faithful to your children.”

“On that point King Solomon has already complained, “Who can find a woman of valor?” That is to say, where does one find an actual faithful wife,” I answered laughing, “On the contrary, tell me where does one go to get such a treasured gift as you have described?”

“It says in the Gemara “I will find and believe,”” Flefen said laughingly, “When one searches they find. If you search for such a woman you will find her.”

“In what land should I search for her?”

“You don't need to travel to distant lands,” she said with her sweet smile, “It could be that she is in this very city and nearby...”

I then understood that his intelligent woman meant by that, that she, herself, the orangutan, had the desire to marry me. In that moment I was seized with a feeling of disgust at the thought, and felt sick. I stood up said adieu and I needed to leave.

“Where are you running off to, Herr Fiktel? I find your company very pleasant. Sit a while longer.”

“Forgive me, Mademoiselle,” I said to her while taking up my coat, “I have many necessary stops to make, therefore I must go, adieu!”

“Adieu, Monsieur Fiktel,” she answered, and took care to pronounce “Monsieur” with the nasal sound just like a real French person.”

I felt as though I could breathe more freely as I left the room. Once I was on the street I laughed as I thought back to her hint that she would not refuse a marriage proposal from me.

## An Annoying Visit

There is nothing in the world that one needs more than wisdom and understanding. But to say to the world a practical word, in my opinion you can also add to it the word 'beauty,' We see that even the ugliest person thinks that he is handsome. The more they look at their image in the mirror the more beauty they find. We have all met at every step ugly people all dressed up like dolls. The high fashion makes them look more awful, more hideous. They are the only ones who think that they are enchantingly beautiful.

I would never have believed that Miss Flefen reckoned herself beautiful, because in her own novel she placed a pretty young girl and described her just as a pretty young girl should be. That is evidence that she understood, indeed, what constituted beauty. In the end I convinced myself that this caricature of a woman saw herself as a special type of beautiful, and in her head even a prince would fall in love with her. Regarding me, she had no doubt that I would have an undying love for her, because I was already a man of 35-years, and a widower on top of that with two children. Therefore, I would value her for her knowledge and philosophy.

Then, when I had left her behind and had a laugh over her remarks, it was only a few minutes before I had completely forgotten about her. I became very busy and had not time to think about such nonsense. Only a couple of days later when I was sitting at home did I think about her again. I was reading a newspaper when there was a knock on the door. And when I called out, "Entrez!" the door opened and Miss Flefen came in. She was dressed up like Queen Vashti in a brand new straw hat, a new dress with a huge bustle that three riders could have comfortably sat on. She had an umbrella in her hand and a pince-nez on her nose.

If I had seen her anywhere else dressed up like that, I would have certainly had a good laugh, but in my house I had to hold myself back. I had to be friendly and welcoming and ask her to sit. She is, after all, a woman and a little educated to boot.

"I am just coming from the post office," she said as she sat down, "I had to send a letter to Judge Turgenyev in Petersburg. He has entrusted me with a letter and I had to answer it."

"So, you are corresponding with Judge T...?" I asked.

"A good question for me," she answered with a laugh, "He was enchanted by my novel. If you want, I will show you the letter. He wants it translated into French."

"That is not necessary. I believe you, and am sure that once you received the letter from T..., you must have felt very proud."

"Proud? Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed, "If I looked at all of the compliments that the great writers have made to me I would have had to be as great as Haman, damn his name. I can show you letters from all of the great publishers, German, Russian and Jewish teachers. The editor from the Morning Star wrote to me in one of his letters that Russian literature has never had a work such as mine. And the editor from the Arbitrator said that he would be greatly honored if he could only meet me. The distributor of the Sermonizer wrote me that he kissed every word of my work, and all of the professors have thanked me for my novel."



Against my will, I couldn't help but smile on hearing her speech, and I asked, "Given the enthusiasm of the people for your work, have you sold many copies?"

"Don't you know that our Jews are not a thoughtful people?" Flefen answered seriously, "Do you think that they understand what quality is? For them the only good thing is a bubbe-meise, and for real works of art they are not mavens. If I don't throw in a lot of violence, no one buys that book. Ach, how unthinking, how dumb our Jews are."

"How much they value junk and trash, I have always thought to myself, they just annoy me with their work, and I don't have the time to argue with them."

"Will you be staying much longer in Trilte?" she asked me once she saw that I was not going to respond to her last statements.

"About eight days."

"No longer? Where will you be heading to from here?"

"I have to go to Fuklashd."

"I can not tell you, Herr Fiktel, how pleased I am to have met you. You please me very much because you are a respectable man, and in these times it is very difficult to find respectable people."

"I thank you for the compliment."

"No, I am not out to make compliments. I am telling you the actual truth. You please me because you are a brave, respectable man."

"I don't know what bravery you have seen in me."

"I don't have to see it," she answered with a laugh, "For me I only need a glance, a look at a man, then I know him right to the bones. That's why I am called Flefen."

Though I did not understand the logic by which being named Flefen would make one a good judge of people, the rest of her conversation held no spark of interest for me, nor her thoughts on things, so I did not pay much attention to the last words.

"It is too bad, Herr Fiktel, that we must part so soon," she said after a short pause, "I trust I have not inconvenienced you too much."

"Please don't worry," I said with a smile, wishing that she would just leave, "G-d will send you other respectable people."

"Where did you say you were going, Herr Fiktel, to Fuklashd?"

"Yes, in Fuklashd."

"Perhaps we will see each other there."

“Are you also going to Fuklashd?”

“It is possible that I will travel there, because I am traveling around distributing my work, and I expect that in Fuklashd I can do a good business. What do you think?”

“I can't give you an opinion on that because I don't know. I don't know anything about that area.”

“Yes, I have forgotten to tell you something important, Herr Fiktel,” she said suddenly and let out a strong sneeze such that she got snot on herself.

“What sort of important something?”

“I have thought of a match for you, a match I tell you that you will thank me for for the rest of your life.”

“But I have told you that I don't want a match.”

“I know you men, you always like to brag and say that you don't need a wife. But I know that there hasn't been a man born yet who doesn't want to be married.”

“But I have already explained to you why I don't want to marry.”

“That is all empty words, the bride I want to present you with will please you so much that you won't even look at any of the other considerations, and will rush to marry her.”

“And I tell you again that I do not want to marry.”

“In no case?”

“In no case.”

“And how would it be for example if a maiden like me wanted to marry you. Would you still refuse?”

“A dark and desolate nightmare on your head!” I thought, and with a smile I answered, “How would it happen that a simple, poor man like myself could marry an educated Miss like you, who has the greatest publishers falling for her.”

“You see, Herr Fiktel, I am not prideful, I seek exactly the type of man you are, because I know that a woman can be happy living with you.”

“You must forgive me Miss Fleden,” I answered, getting up from my chair, “I must ask you for forgiveness and to allow me to take leave of you, because I have other places I must be.”

“So, what do you answer to my questions?”

“We can talk about that later, I will not be leaving for another eight days.”

“That's fair,” she said to me extending her hand, “You appear to be one of those men who like to consider things thoroughly before you do something. That is a fine quality. Adieu Monsieur!”

“Adieu Miss Flefen!” I answered and thanked G-d that the ugly creature had gone away from me.

## She is Pregnant

Sometimes an untimely joke can become frighteningly serious. So said one of the old philosophers. No one is more convinced of the truth of these wise words than I. From the joke that I allowed myself to have with Miss Fleden, that is in the way I answered her foolish questions. I did not think much about what I said, but from that joke I found that afterwards I had, as one says, spit blood. And I became the most unfortunate man in the world, as the reader will hear later.

The words that I had uttered jokingly were taken by the educated caricature well to heart. She took them seriously and believed that I was going to give them serious consideration and make a decision. From that day forth she had no doubt but that I was going to marry her, and she began visiting me three times a day. I told her several times that it was not proper for a single woman to make a lot of visits to a young man in a hotel. Such conduct could damage her good name and mine. However, that did not help. The more I tried to distance myself from her, the more she pursued me. Finally it got so bad with her in town that I decided to leave earlier than I had planned.

I prepared to leave, and in spite of this, just a minute before I departed, the dear Miss Fleden came to my room.

“What? Are you going away?” She appeared shocked when she saw my suitcases packed and me in my traveling coat.

“Yes, I am leaving,” I said, joyful at the thought that I was seeing the ugly creature for the last time.

“Like this? And you did not say anything to me about leaving?”

“I avoided telling you, as you can see.”

“That is very disrespectful of you, Herr Fiktel. I would not have expected that of you.”

“I see you feel I have committed a great offense.”

“That is a terrible offense against me. You know very well that I am bound with you body and soul, and your departure will cause me great pain.”

“No, I was not at all aware of it,” I answered, smiling.

“All men are unfaithful people. Because of what you have done here, you can go away, but I will not say goodbye to you.”

“Well, that will be unfortunate.”

“I understand that it will make no difference to you, but we women are not like you thankless people. When we fall in love with someone, or if we are all good friends, we can not part from them with indifference.”

No sooner than she finished uttering those words than my dear friend Dr. Brund came into my room.

I had wanted to say goodbye to him a few hours ago, but did not find him to be at home. So I left my card on which I wrote a note saying that I was leaving town. When he got home and read my note, he hurried to the hotel to say goodbye to me.

“Good that I have found you still in the neighborhood,” the Doctor said, “I wanted to at least give you my blessing as you went on your way. I believe that a blessing from a righteous person like me will help you in your endeavors.”

“I thank you very much dear Doctor,” I answered, shaking his hand, “You mean to make a joke, but I say to you in all seriousness that the blessing from a good friend is greatly valued.”

“That is always what the Gemara has said,” Flefen mixed in.

And I saw the surprise in his face when he looked at this ugly woman.

I wanted to be alone with the Doctor. That is to say, I wanted to be done with the educated Flefen. So, I told her that before I departed I had some very important items to give to Herr Brund.

“Come out to the street, I can hand the items over to you there.”

“You don't have to go to the street,” Flefen said, “I need to leave anyway.”

“That is what I meant,” I explained.

“So, adieu Herr Fiktel,” she said to me, extending her big, black hand to me, “Travel in good health today. Can I hope for you to write to me?”

“I don't know what address to write to.”

“Write to Herr Kassenfeld's address. He will send your letter on to wherever I might be. He will be informed of my address.”

“Very good!” I answered, “I will write to you.”

Flefen once again wished me good travels, then left.

“Where did you catch such a devil?” Dr. Brund asked me with a laugh.

“I had the luck to meet her here in Trilte.”

“Woe is me, I would be afraid to be in the same room with a ghoul like that. Who is she?”

“She is a Hebrew writer. Her name is Miss Flefen.”

“Miss?” the Doctor asked with a hearty laugh, “She is a 'Miss'? She doesn't have a husband?”

“Yes, she is still called 'Miss.' It seems as though men have very little relish to possess such a treasure.”

"They have very little relish, yet she found one that has made her pregnant," the Doctor laughed.

I looked at him in amazement and said, "I don't understand what you are saying Herr Brund."

"What is it you don't understand? You didn't notice that she is pregnant?"

"That Miss Flefen is pregnant?" I was still beside myself with amazement.

"Yes, yes she is pregnant. When I say it, you can believe it. If you are a good friend of hers, you should help her find a good obstetrician."

"I still don't believe it," I answered, "I think this time you have made a mistake Herr Brund."

"A mistake, it could well have been a mistake," Brund said, laughing, "We have the good luck not to have to argue about it in these last minutes before your departure. Better just to tell me where are you heading to now?"

"I am traveling to Prussia, and I need to be in Tisfit."

"If you are going to be in Tisfit, and you should happen to see a certain Herr Aaron Shitzfitz, give him a hearty greeting in my name."

"Aaron Shitzfitz?" I answered, "I know him very well. I am planning to see him often, see him in Taskloa. But I don't understand how he comes to be in Tisfit. His family it seems lives in Königsberg."

"Yes, that is right. His family lives in Königsberg, but he also has family in Tisfit. His first wife, who was a near relation of mine, came from Tisfit. Her parents still live there, also his eldest daughter from his first wife is there with her grandparents who raised her. It wouldn't hurt for you to get to know the family, and Miss Shitzfitz is a real gem. You will be very pleased to get acquainted with her. Give her a greeting from me. And tell her I am very angry with her that it has been nearly a half year since she has written me a letter"

"Very well, I will do all of that. If I meet Herr Shitzfitz in Tisfit, I will certainly give him a hearty greeting from you."

I parted from the Doctor with a brotherly goodbye, and quickly went on my way.

The Doctor's words about Miss Flefen being pregnant did not come back to mind for quite some time. I didn't believe it anyway. That she was a coquette, I had seen for myself. And not any Jewish woman in the world would take her for a great fool, of that I was also convinced. That she would do such a thing is something that I never would have believed.

A smile came to my lips when I thought back on it and thought that, perhaps, it could be true. I laughed when I remembered all the things she had proposed to me. She wanted to be the smart one and turn my head. "Ai, ai," I said to myself, "You picked the right place to play a joke."

I did not know then the secret, that one could pull a fast one so forcefully. That there were some corrupt individuals who grasp a hair and make from it a chain of iron. I did not know that there were

such tyrants on the earth who, in order to better themselves, thought they had the right to throw innocent souls into the greatest misfortune.

Today I am a practical man. I know everything, but what good does it do...

## By Good Luck, I am a Bridegroom

I have already told you in the first chapter of this book that I am an insignificant person. I need a little bit of work with the goal to earning a few rubles, because, the truth to tell, I am a big schlimazel. That is to say that I have no luck. And why do you think I have no luck? Perhaps because I have no talent for business? No, quite the contrary, I have proved myself as a merchant and have often earned a lot of money because I am very energetic in business matters and totally honest. My only fault is that I believe everyone. To me all people are honest and respectable, and this fault on my part has been my downfall, because I have lent money to everybody who has asked me for a loan. And those respectable people have taken such pity on my money that they can not bear to part with it... And that is how my capital flies away to stranger's pockets, and my pockets remain empty as a page in the daily newspaper. Once upon a time I had thousands of rubles with me in my pocket. That bit of money I wanted to hold on to at all costs. I was looking for a real business, and for that I had to travel to Prussia, and also to several cities in Russia.

In the month of October 18.. I arrived in the town of Tisfit. I had with me a little merchandise that I wanted to sell in town. I had totally forgotten Doctor Brund's words about Herr Aaron Shitzfitz, and I settled in an inn. And soon after I got down from the carriage, got washed up and changed my clothes, I went to the post office to send off some important letters.

Walking down the street lost in thought, I suddenly heard a voice calling out, "Are you Herr Fiktel?" I looked around and was surprised to see Herr Aaron Shitzfitz standing in front of me.

We threw our arms around each other and exchanged a friendly kiss.

"What brings you here, dear Fiktel?" Shitzfitz asked me.

I told him about my business dealings.

"Ach, I am very happy that I happened to run into you," he said with great delight, "I, myself, just got back here a few days ago to see my daughter. Come, dear friend, I will introduce you to my father-in-law and his family."

"I must go to the post office."

"I will go with you to the post office, and from there we will go to my father-in-law," he said.

We went to the post office, and when I had finished we went to his father-in-law's house.

His father-in-law, already in his 70's, was a very intelligent man. He was born in Russia, but settled in Prussia many years ago. The old man was a great Talmudist, and therefore a true philosopher. He had already heard my name and was well acquainted with it. He was delighted to meet me and showed a sweet, fatherly feeling toward me. Shitzfitz introduced me to the rest of this honored family. And among them was his daughter, a young maiden of about 18 years, a charming picture-perfect young Miss.



They invited me to dine with them, and we had a very pleasant conversation. I can't remember when I have had a more agreeable time than this. I gave Shitzfitz and his daughter a greeting from Doctor Brund, and they were very pleased with the greeting, because the Doctor had stayed at their house before and they all loved him like a brother.

I was enthralled by this respectable family. In particular the daughter, Ana Shitzfitz, made a strong impression on me. I saw in her a pure, innocent being that one could truly call one of G-d's angels. I will not say that she was as beautiful as a goddess, but with her lovely charming face she could compete with the prettiest in the world. She spoke very little, but every word was brilliant.

I stayed in Tisfit for two weeks, and every day I had to be with Reb Zissele Shitzfitz. I tried to be there day and night, and I became so attached to the family that I did not want to leave them. They, too, had come to love me very much, and waited with great impatience for me to arrive. Once I arrived they did not want me to leave.

I know that the reader is waiting to hear a happy love story, because you have heard that Miss Shitzfitz had made a strong impression on me. That without a doubt a strong love had developed, and therefore an intrigue like a novel needs. However, I must say with great pain that I can not provide you with a happy love story. I must confess that the beautiful young girl pleased me very much, but I could not forget that she could have been my daughter. I was already a man of 35-years and she was just 18-years old. In truth I had a great deal of enjoyment being in her company, but it was the pleasure one has spending time with a good friend. To put it better, I loved to look at her like looking at a beautiful painting, but there was not a single moment that the thought came into my head to propose to her. Or, G-d forbid, to give her the slightest indication that I was in love with her. Then something unexpected happened that surprised me. Listen to the story:

Once when I was sitting in my room writing, the thought came to me to leave Tisfit. At that point the door opened and Aaron Shitzfitz came in.

I laid my paperwork aside, and occupied myself with my guest. We spoke about a variety of things, like two good friends do. The conversation turned to marriage.

"Tell me Herr Fiktel," he said suddenly, "Have you decided not to marry again?"

"I am resigned to live my last few years alone," I answered.

"Your last few years?" he laughed, "You talk as though you are already an old man of 100 years. Don't forget that you are still young. Among the Christians a man of your years is only beginning to think of marriage."

"That is because, while the Christian does not have a wife at 35-years, he is still a child. He has no children and is occupied with a business or with work. With us Jews, however, by age 35 a man is the father of a full family. Take me for example, I have already had a wife and she has left me with two children. In addition I do not have a real profession in hand. If I took a wife I would make her and myself very unhappy, for what can I do with the little money I have. Without that, G-d forbid, I would lose my inventory and nothing would be left for us to do but put on beggar's sackcloth and go house to house."

"You are not being practical," Shitzfitz answered, "All of today's enlightened people hold to the same

words, and they they pay no attention to how our young Jews, they should be healthy, live for the most part their years just fine without a work or profession. A Jew always has a profession in hand, his brain and his enterprise. With that he can always earn money and live quite happily, especially a man like you. You have a little money, and on top of that you are educated. You can, in short, marry a second time, and I am certain that you will be happy.”

I said nothing.

“If you wish, Herr Fiktel, I will be your matchmaker.” Shitzfitz said to me, laughing, “I will find you a match right here in town.”

“As a matchmaker you are too expensive for me.”

“I won't take a commission, because the bride is an near relation of mine, and I wish only that you should also become my kinsman.”

“I would very much like to be counted among the members of your family,” I answered in all seriousness, “But, I don't know...”

“What don't you know?” Shitzfitz said, “You don't know, perhaps, how one can find a young girl who would be willing to marry a man as old as you? If so, I can reassure you, and tell you that the bride that I have in mind would be happy to have you for a husband. She knows you very well and you know her.”

“I know her too?” I asked in surprise, “Who is she?”

“She is... She is my daughter, Anna,” he answered, smiling.

I looked at him in shocked amazement, wanting to assure myself that he was serious.

“Why don't you answer me? The bride doesn't please you? If not, we will still stay good friends just like we have been up to now.”

“If you really mean that, and if your daughter really agrees, then I agree to the match,” I answered.

“I mean it in earnest and my daughter means it in earnest. Just today I spoke to her about it,” Shitzfitz happily and cheerfully answered.

“I am agreed,” I repeated and offered him my hand, “And I will happily treasure being your daughter's husband and your brother-in-law.”

## I am in Seventh Heaven

I am the bridegroom for the beautiful Anna.

What an extraordinary hero Love is! It is truly in a position to make the old young again, and to turn a Hell into a Garden of Eden. Under these conditions the same person can look twenty years younger. The whole world which I was growing tired of and burdened by had suddenly taken on a fresh new charm in my eyes. I had begun to hope for a happy future, which I had never known.

Aaron did not lie to me. Anna really did want to marry me. She trusted me as much as she loved me. Was there ever, under heaven, a happier man than I?

We delayed the wedding for five months. I still had to travel to Berlin, and the time that I would spend in Berlin would give her time to sew her wedding dress, and put everything in order as it needed to be. We had already had the wedding invitations printed. I had sent them to my many good friends in Russia as well as Germany. Also, my relatives had sent letters to their good friends to invite them to the wedding.

Before I left for Berlin, I made my new in-law, Aaron Shitzfitz, a partner in business. We both were to invest a thousand rubles in the business. I gave him 500 rubles, and promised to give him the balance after the wedding.

I stayed another eight days in Tisfit near my bride. Then with the friendliest and happiest love we parted. We promised to write each other every day. Then I left for Berlin.

Also my new in-law, Aaron Shitzfitz, left town to visit his family in Königsberg and prepare them for the wedding.

Traveling by train to Berlin, I met another passenger who introduced himself as Herr Leon Steingald. He had seen me around Tisfit and knew that I was engaged to Shitzfitz' daughter. From his conversation I learned that he was a terrible enemy of my in-law Shitzfitz. Everything he said was full of disdain and mockery. In the end he could not restrain himself and said: "It surprises me, Herr Fiktel, that you would ally yourself with these scurrilous people."

"In the first place," I answered, "I have bound myself with this daughter, not with him. Secondly, I don't understand why you are making an effort to libel them before me when you know that I will soon be a son-in-law to him."

"If you are going to be a son-in-law to him, you don't have the right to speak badly of him, however I can freely say that he is a scurrilous person. I say that now and will always say it."

"Why are you such enemies?"

"Because he destroyed my happiness," Steingald said angrily, "He stole my capital, ten thousand thaler, and I will never forget it. As my name is Steingald I will get my revenge on him just like the Jews got their revenge on Haman."

“If you are going to speak like that to my face, then I do not want to be acquainted with you, and I will have nothing more to say to you,” I said as I turned away from him.

“You can talk to me or not talk, it's all the same to me. As soon as you become Aaron's son-in-law, I can no longer be your good friend, and if I get a chance to give you a punch in the nose, I will certainly do it.”

I could see that I was dealing with a hardened individual, and I did not want to talk to him any more, so I went to another rail car.

I arrived in Berlin, and immediately wrote a letter to my fiancé to let her know that I arrived OK.

On the third day I received a love-filled letter, and so began a daily exchange of letters as is normal for today's brides and bridegrooms. I also wrote to my in-law in Königsberg and received from him, his wife and children a letter full of tender affection.

Once I received a letter from my in-law, and how surprised I was to also find in the letter a note from who? From our acquaintance, Miss Fleden. She wrote to me in Hebrew the following:

Best friend Fiktel!

I have been in Königsberg for eight days now. By chance I met Herr Aaron Shitzfritz and learned that he is your in-law. Therefore, I took the occasion to write a “mazel tov” to you in my name. I wish you happiness dear friend. I hope that we will see each other soon...

I am delighted to have run into Herr Shitzfritz, because he is a very good man, and has done me many favors.

I hope you will not still be owing me an answer to this letter. Here I end my note.

I remain your eternal friend – Rachel Fleden

Out of courtesy I answered her in a letter I sent to my in-law. I thanked her for her blessing, and said that I hoped that soon I would be able to offer her a “mazel tov.”

Five months passed quickly. I had received letters from my in-laws in Tisfit, that everything was already ready for the wedding, I was the only thing missing. I didn't wait to be asked twice, and I set out for Tisfit.

I don't need to tell you, my reader, what sort of a humor I was in as I traveled to see my bride. I felt like a prince about to ascend a king's throne. I had seen for myself the Garden of Eden in full bloom.

And it was truly no small thing for a man such as I (who had for several years been tossed around by misery and hopelessness in the wide world), such a favorable change of fortune. I suddenly felt that I was a part of a respectable family which had joyfully accepted me into their midst. I had suddenly felt myself bound to a noble, good soul who loved me with the full fire of a first, pure love. And I believed any one in my place would be consumed with happiness.

I am not able to describe the joy with which my in-law and my dear bride met me, and my pen is to

poor to describe the feeling of happiness which filled my breast. I will leave that over to the sensitive reader. They can imagine it for themselves.

Everything was ready for the wedding. There was nothing left to do but for me and my bride to go to the chuppah, but unexpectedly a problem arose. I did not know that rule existed in Prussia that every bridegroom had to publish a notice in the newspapers three months in advance that he would be married on such and such a date. Therefor I did not make the announcement, and when my in-law went to the Rabbis to get a permission slip, they did not want to issue it because the law did not allow it since I did not make the required announcement in the newspapers.

We had to decide what to do. We decided that we should all cross the border and go to the town of Tirkalgen and put the chuppah up there, and that is what we did.

I can see that some of my readers are already yawning, and are thinking to themselves what a sorry story this is. The writer is telling how he became a bridegroom and got married. Such a story one hears every day, and it bothers us to have paid out money just to hear about it again.

Just have patience my honored friends. I promise you that after I have held you up with these boring words, you will soon see in me such vengeance that my greatest enemy would not wish on me. So, now are you happy? Have just a little more patience, you will see such things as you could never dream.

## The Devil Mixes In

My wedding was a schlimazel.

I am not going to make a long speech about the wedding. I am not going to tell you how it went. It will be enough to say that the wedding progressed like all wealthy Jewish weddings go. All of you readers will understand by that that people danced, flitted about, sang, ate and drank. We didn't even lack a wedding jester to amuse the guests with his songs and jokes. I won't bother to tell you how I felt like I was in seventh heaven, you can figure that out for yourself. If there were a hundred heavens, I would say that I was in the hundredth heaven. I could not believe that I had fallen into such good luck, that the beautiful Anna Shitzfitz was mine, that this valuable treasure had fallen into my hand. Yes, I couldn't believe it, but I had to believe it, because her beautiful eyes were always on me. Her sincere eyes full of pure, heavenly love and devotion.

Everyone passed the time very joyful and satisfied. The whole night after the ceremony people danced and caroused until they were exhausted and needed to rest a bit. Then they began to go back home to Tisfit. From Tirkalgen to Tisfit it was about a three hour trip. The clock said nine in the morning when we arrived back home in Tisfit. The folks who had stayed there, came out to greet us with burning lights in their hands, and with bread and salt we sat around the table, and the servants brought us coffee and butter cookies.

I was sitting with my beautiful bride chatting with one another.

"Ha! A guest! A guest!" I suddenly heard my in-law's voice. When I looked around, I saw, to my great surprise Miss Flefen.

"How did you come here, Miss Flefen?" my in-law called out cheerfully, extending his hand.

"I came here with my feet," Flefen answered laughing, "I came in to town yesterday, and when I was with the local Rabbi, he told me that Herr Fiktel was here, and that today was his wedding day. So, you can understand my decision to come here to wish the couple 'mazel tov.'"

And with those words she came to me and in a friendly gesture she extended her hand to me and said: "I wish you luck, Herr Fiktel."

"Thank you, Miss Flefen!" I answered as I shook her hand.

I introduced her to my bride as one of my best friends. Even though my dear wife was not inclined to grasp the black hand of the ape, she, nevertheless shook her hand and asked her to sit next to us.

I noticed how Flefen looked at my wife with a strange look. I suspected that in her look lie a terrible hate, but I couldn't believe it, and gave it no further thought.

"When can we speak alone, Herr Fiktel?" Flefen asked me, "I have something important to speak to you about."

"I am staying in the Hotel Fetersburg," I answered, "You can find me there a twelve o'clock, because I will want to lie down and rest a bit."

"Very good," she answered as she stood up to leave, "I will see you then, in the meantime, adieu!"

She shook hands with everyone then left.

After her departure the remaining people at the table made a little fun of the charming Miss Flefen. One said that she must be the daughter of an ape. Another said she was afraid to have her in the room because the cat was looking for something disgusting to carry away. A third said she could serve as a medicine to induce vomiting.

It was only my in-law who got angry because people were making fun of an educated young woman just because she was ugly.

After the coffee, I took leave of my bride and my in-laws, and went back to my hotel to get some sleep.

No sooner had I laid down in my bed and begun to dream a little, than I heard a knock at my door. I was quite agitated as I sprung to my feet, threw on a robe and opened the door. How aggravated I was to see Miss Flefen. I couldn't help myself and in a peevish manner I said: "I said to you, Miss Flefen, that you should come to me at 12 o'clock because I am very tired and need to rest a little."

"But I have an extremely important matter to discuss with you," she answered, "And you must forgive me for disturbing you this time."

"So, sit down and tell me your important matter."

"No, I can't tell you here. You know the old saying, "Walls have ears." You must come with me out into the street. Out in the open in the town, that's where I will tell you what I have to say. I am in an unfortunate position, and only you can rescue me."

"Perhaps this could wait until later this afternoon."

"No, every minute counts."

"If that is the case, then I will go with you," I answered.

I put on my coat, took my cane in hand, and left the hotel with her.

We walked in silence for a few blocks until we got to the big Tisfit bridge. There were no other people around. It was as quiet as a cemetery. The only sound was that of a carriage crossing the bridge to break the silence.

"So, Miss Flefen, now you can tell me everything, no one will hear us."

"Herr Fiktel!" she said after thinking a moment, "I must share with you a true story. You know that even the most intelligent person is a sinful person, and no hero can stand against nature. I have fallen into an unfortunate situation, and now I am the mother of a son."

"You are a mother?" I asked, surprised. Only now did I remember what the Doctor Brund had said, and now the question had been answered.

"Yes, Herr Fiktel, I am a mother," she said with a sob, "You will easily understand my situation. The situation of an unmarried Jewish girl being a mother..."

"Yes, that is very awkward, but what do you want from me?"

"You can rescue me, dear Fiktel, only you can tell me what to do.

"You understand, of course, that I only have one way out of this situation," she said after a short pause, "Namely, I must find a man who will take pity on me and give me a *get* [a religious divorce document] so that I can show to the world that I was married and that my child is legitimate."

"That is not a bad idea, but where will you find such a man?"

"That is what I wanted to talk to you about, Herr Fiktel. From the first moment that I met you, I was convinced that you were the best man in the world, that you would be willing to give your life to save another life. That is why I place all my hopes on you..."

"You want me to find a man who will give you a *get*?"

"No! You don't understand. I want you to be the man."

I jumped back as though I had just seen a poisonous snake at my feet. I looked at her with angry eyes, and finally said: "I don't believe, Miss Fleden, that you are in your right mind, or you are joking."

"I am very much in my right mind," she replied in a cold tone of voice, "Proof of which is that I have turned to you for help, and I have no doubt but that you will do this little thing for me."

I was so angry with her that I could have strangled her with my own hands, or thrown her in the river, but since I was not capable of doing either all I did was angrily answer: "I order you not to ever again make any such plans for me."

"This is also very awkward for me," she answered with her cold tone, "Such a thing to put on you, but don't you know that when one is drowning he grasps for anything that comes to hand. I must demand this sacrifice from you, and you must do this for me."

I was beside myself at this effrontery. Only in this minute did I understand that I was dealing with a reject of nature who was capable of embroiling me in the greatest of scandals. Therefore, I decided to speak to her more sympathetically.

"Hear me out, Miss Fleden," I said to her, "Just think what you are asking me to do, and you will convince yourself that you are asking the impossible. You know that only yesterday I got married, even if I wanted to fulfill your request, I couldn't do so because of my wife. How could I face the world if they heard that after my marriage I divorced another woman? I would be too late, and my wife would be shamed."

"You can give me a *get* with an earlier date."



“That is also impossible, because no Rabbi would write such a *get* . So, I ask you as a good friend, what have I done to you that you would ask such a thing of me? What do you have against me? How have I offended you? If you want to save your reputation you can find a man, somewhere, who, for a few rubles will give you a *get* , there are a few men in the world like that. And, why don't you turn to the child's father?”

“The child's father can not give me a divorce...”

“Like I just said to you, you must have some conscience such a terrible thing to ask of me. You will only offend me, and that will do you no good, because for no money in the world will I do such a thing.”

“Perhaps you are right, Herr Fiktel,” she said after thinking a moment.

“Do you now realize that it was foolish of you to turn to me with such a request?”

“Yes, you are right!” she said decisively, “Forgive me if I have made you feel bad. I must reveal to you the truth as to why I decided to turn to you and give you such pain. I must confess to you that I am desperately in love with you, and the words you spoke to me in Trilte that you would consider my proposal, gave me the hope that I would be your wife. Can you imagine my surprise and my pain when I learned that you had married another? I came here with the thought to make a scandal. But now I am more calm. I will not bother you. Only one thing do I ask of you, that you will loan me a few rubles so that I can leave town today.”

“With pleasure will I do that for you,” I answered and gave her all the money I had in my wallet.

She gave me a friendly goodbye and she walked away. I was able to breathe easier once I was quit of her, and I recited the Shepetarani Blessing, thanking G-d for reaching this auspicious moment.

## Troubles for the Couple

Many of my readers will be surprised at how I had the patience to talk to this caricature sans character in such a sympathetic manner when I should have at her first words spit in her ugly face. Or, give her heavy blows with my fists such that it would take a half year for her to recover. But, when you analyze my situation you will understand that I had no other choice but to handle her with caution, because we know the world, we know that when we hear something bad about someone, nobody will make the effort to find out if it is true or not. And the idlers who, blessed be G-d's name, fill every city jump on every lie and spread it around as though it were real news all throughout the city. I quickly realized that the damned Flefen would quickly make a scandal, and I knew quite well that, G-d forbid, someone should hear from her mouth that she had come to me to ask for a *get* that they would not make the effort to find out if it were true or not. And the whole city would be ringing with the news that Aaron Shitzfitz' son-in-law, the Litvak, has another wife.

The Lithuanians have such somber luck that people everywhere take them for evil, corrupt people. If by chance a Litvak does something wrong, all Litvaks will be hated for it. The few Jews from Lithuania have the same luck as Jews everywhere. We know that everywhere people blame all the Jews for the action of one corrupt individual. In Poland, Bessarabia, Volhynia the Litvaks are universally hated, because in recent years they have seen a lot of poor Lithuanian Jews settle among them. And there they remained under the dark shadow of their luck. Many of the poor Litvaks who arrived naked and barefoot became rich and play a large role in society. That has engendered a great amount of jealousy among the original inhabitants of the region, and they look for failings in all Lithuanians. If one Lithuanian goes to jail for being a thief, soon all Lithuanian Jews become known as thieves. If they find a Litvak without integrity who marries a woman without having divorced the first wife, people will quickly say that all Litvaks do the same thing.

In Tisfit it is the same for the Litvaks. The people in town say awful things about the Lithuanians, everything forbidden, because among them are found a few rich Lithuanian Jews. I knew that as soon as anyone said something bad about me, they would all get excited, and before I would have time to defend myself and demonstrate my innocence, it would in any case be too late. That thought gave me the patience I needed, and forced me to behave with sympathy.

“When it is your destiny to have troubles, nothing can help you,” goes the old wives saying. It seems that it is my destiny to be unhappy, and to drag down into the abyss the dearest people around me.

The proper Miss Flefen kept her word. That same day she left for the train station, and wanted to leave town. It was my great misfortune that at the train station she happened to meet Leon Steingald, who once traveled with me to Berlin, and at that time unloaded his wrath on my in-law. I don't know when Flefen got together with him, but they got into a heavy conversation. When the conversation turned to me, Flefen told him that she and I were married. She had a child of mine, and now she had unexpectedly learned that I had married another. She came to me begging that I should have pity on her and give her a divorce, but that I would not give her an answer.

Steingald didn't need any more than that. He was overjoyed with the news, just like he had hit a jackpot. He had found a way to take his revenge on my in-law. He used all his powers to convince Flefen not to leave Tisfit until he had secured for her the divorce. He swore that he would use all of his powers, and volunteered to support her by paying all costs for her accommodations at the hotel, and all

of her expenses. He managed to convince that damned woman to turn back.

I had no idea that I was on the edge of a yawning abyss, and went about cheerful and happy. It was only on the next morning when I woke up and got out of bed that someone brought me a summons from the president telling me to appear before him at exactly twelve o'clock.

I had no idea why the city president needed me, but my heart was telling me that it was not going to be about a happy business. With great impatience I awaited the noon hour, and ran to the president's office. Imagine my shock when I met Miss Flefen there.

"This woman," the president said to me, "Makes a complaint against you that you and she are married. She also states that she has a son by you, and that you have been a tyrant in your dealings with her in that you have allowed yourself to marry another woman. What do you answer to those charges?"

"My answer is very short, Herr President," I answered as my blood cooked in my veins from anger, "She has never been my wife."

"What proof do you have?" the president asked.

"I don't need witnesses or proof," I hastily answered, "She is claiming that I am her husband, I believe that she is the one that has to prove it. Make her show you a marriage certificate."

"You are right," the president answered and turning to her he said, "Madame, you must show me your marriage certificate indicating that Herr Fiktel is your husband."

Flefen went pale and answered: "I forgot and left the marriage certificate in my hotel room."

"Very well," the president answered with a smile, "Be so good as to bring me the certificate, then I will know what I have to do."

Flefen went out as though she had been whipped. I also left after her. When we were on the street together, I very angrily said to her: "Tell me, you devil, why have you burdened me with this pointless nuisance? You know that I am going to ruin you."

"Lay even one finger on me and you will have everyone in the whole town down on you," was her cold answer.

"You murderer!" I yelled at her angrily and tears came to my eyes, "What are you doing to me? Why do you want to bring unhappiness to me and my wife?"

"If I am unhappy then let everyone be unhappy, especially you, because you could rescue me from my misfortune if you would just give me a divorce."

"And if you forgive me, will I give you a divorce?"

"I should give a divorce to such a reject of Nature, just because one time in my life I looked upon your ugly face? I should give to you my name for eternity? What are you to me, and who are you?"

"My name is Flefen, and if I want something then it must be given to me."

I nearly raised my hand to slap her, but we were in the middle of the street and I was afraid of a scandal.

“What are you going to get for your efforts,” I said finally, “You can only cause me trouble for a few days before people find out that you are telling lies. Then I will bring a case against you for libel.”

“Do what you think, and I will do what I think,” she said smiling, and walked away quickly.

Where did I find the self-restraint to hold myself back from stomping on that snake? Even today I don't know how I did it.

I could see that a black cloud was hovering over my head that would darken my life forever. I stood there for a long time in despair. Finally, I took courage and said to myself that falsehoods have no feet, they can't run without legs, and most likely that will show the world my innocence, and I will remain the same Fiktel as before.

With that comforting thought, I went to be with my bride. She greeted me tenderly, and asked me why I had been so late in arriving.

I made some excuse, and we sat down to breakfast.

She could see that I was somewhat upset and agitated. Finally, she asked me what was wrong. I wanted to tell her what was going on, but I couldn't. I just could not describe those disreputable things into the ears of this innocent maiden.

As soon as we finished eating, a Jew came to the door and asked if there was an Itzak Fiktel here.

“That is me,” I answered.

“The Rabbi sent me to call on you, and have you come with me,” the Jew said.

“What does the Rabbi want with you?” my wife asked.

I realized that that damned Fleden was somehow behind this, and I did not know what to answer my wife.

“Tell me, Itza, why does the Rabbi need you?” my wife asked me again, alarmed.

“I don't know either,” I answered, “Perhaps he wants me because I had promised to visit him.”

“No, the Rabbi doesn't call for people just for visits,” my wife answered, “It is for a rabbinical court of justice.”

“When I am at the Rabbi's I will find out what he wants with me, but I don't know why you are so upset, they are certainly not going to call me a thief.”

“I am not upset, I am only asking out of curiosity.”

“When I get back, I will tell you all about it.”

I kissed her on the forehead and left for the Rabbi.

I was very surprised when I saw a group of people around the Rabbi's house. In this little town they call that a circle of men, all acting secretive. As soon as they saw me, they all stared at me with smiles on their faces. And one said, "Those Litvaks are no fools. They know that two wives are better than one."

I shuddered when I heard those words. I saw that the scandal that Flefen was making was no longer a secret. I also quickly understood who was behind it when I saw in the circle my in-law's blood enemy, Leon Steingald. He looked at me with a glance that said, "Aha, I have found the place to take my revenge on you and on your in-law."

The reader can imagine what I was feeling in my heart when I entered the Rabbi's office. You would have seen blood dripping from my eyes. The whole town was there.

I saw Miss Flefen. She was looking toward the Rabbi with tears in her eyes.

The Rabbi who was well known to me and a good friend, now gave me hard looks. He didn't even ask me to sit.

"So, Herr Fiktel," he turned to me with a dark look in his eyes, "You are capable of such a low act, marrying two women? That I would never have believed."

"And now you do believe it?" I said with an easy smile.

"I must believe it, I have before me a living witness."

"I am surprised you would say that Herr Rabbi," I answered, "You have a witness that you have not met and don't know. You as a Rabbi must in such a situation rely on facts. Miss Flefen has, perhaps, also told you that I married her."

"Yes, that is what she says."

"First ask her if she can show you a marriage certificate. You know, of course, that every married woman must have a marriage certificate. Secondly, she must tell you where we were married, and who came to the wedding, and where is our marriage contract?"

"What do you answer, Madame, to those questions?" the Rabbi asked, turning to her.

"The marriage contract along with the marriage license have been lost, and I don't know where they are," Flefen answered with a trembling voice, "But I can tell you all about our wedding. The marriage took place in the town of Liteiketz, the second station from Trilte. All of the witnesses to our wedding are still living."

"What are the names of the witnesses?" the Rabbi asked.

"I don't remember the names," she answered, "If I see them again, I will remember. They live in Liteiketz."

“With your permission, Herr Rabbi, I would like to ask her some questions,” I said.  
“Ask.”

“Tell me, Fleden,” I said to her, “How old is your child?”

“Our child is seven months old. He was born in October.”

“Where did we first meet?”

“In Trilte.”

“When did we meet?”

“Summer, in the month of May.”

“Herr Rabbi,” I said, turning to the Rabbi, “There you have from top to bottom the falsehoods. From May to October is five months, and I believe that even pregnancy takes more than five months.”

“Yes, you are correct,” the Rabbi said, and turning to her he said: “Herr Fiktel is correct. What do you have to say about that?”

“I made a mistake,” she answered quickly, “We first met in March, and I had the child in the seventh month.”

“Don't you see, Herr Rabbi,” I said, “That she is just trying to make me unhappy, and everything she is saying is a lie?”

“I speak the truth!” the shameless woman yelled, “You are my husband, I have witnesses still alive, and you must give me a divorce, if not, I'm telling you, this very day I will throw the boy into your house.”

“You will put the boy on me?” I yelled, beside myself with anger, “For your child, you have no better place? Toss him in an orphanage, or give him to the Catholic priests, they will make him an upstanding individual.”

As soon as I uttered those words, the Rabbi lept up angrily from his seat and said: “That is not acceptable, Herr Fiktel, to say such things in my presence. To suggest that a Jewish child should be placed in Christian hands. That is beyond belief, and you must make an end on it with this woman here or there...”

“When a Jewish Rabbi allows himself to give out such a sentence,” I said, equally angry, “Then you can take my place. I am her husband just as much as you are, and you can make an end on it with this woman here or there...”

I angrily stormed out out the Rabbi's house.

There I had a very ugly encounter. The street was full of people. They were all talking about me. They all cursed me, and as I tried to get through them, they yelled at me, “Litvak thief! Take a third wife!” Some bathhouse boys threw stones at me. I began running without knowing where I was going. I was nearly insane when I ran into my in-law's house, and there I saw an awful scene.

## My Ruined Garden of Eden

My wife was lying on the sofa, and her father and grandmother were spritzing her face with cold water. She was pale as death, even in her lips there was no blood.

As soon as I walked in, my in-law gestured to me to leave. However, I could not leave after seeing my dear wife in such a state, and therefore I went to her and asked what was the matter.

“Get out of my house you damned Litvak!” my wife's grandmother yelled at me in anger, “She how you have murdered my child. G-d will murder you for this, you fiend! ”

At the sound of the yelling, Anna opened her eyes, and when she saw me she tried to get up. Her eyes were big and frightening. She couldn't move, only her lips moved and with them she said only one word, murderer!

I understood what had happened. Undoubtedly, she had found out about the scandal that Flefen had made for me. I wanted to say something to her, but Aaron took me by the hand and sternly said: “Come with me, I have to talk to you.”

We went into another room. Aaron closed the door, and turned to me with fire in his eyes and said: “Tell me, Fiktel, what have you done to me, and what have you done to my daughter?”

“I have done nothing wrong to you or to your daughter,” I answered.

“You are still trying to defend yourself, even though all of your falsehoods are sitting right there on the plate?”

“What would you do if something like this happened to you, if a young woman should come up to you and scream that you were married to her?”

“Nothing like that could happen, because I didn't do anything like that.”

“And do you really believe that I did do such a thing?”

“I have to believe it, because it is impossible that a young woman would dump a mess like that on a respectable man.”

“What kind of evidence do you have to give?”

“Tell me, Herr Shitzfritz, when Miss Flefen visited you in Königsberg, did she know that I was engaged to your daughter?”

“Yes, she knew.”

“So, imagine for a moment that Flefen was really my wife, do you think she would have kept silent at the news that I was going to marry another? Wouldn't she have told you immediately that she was my

wife?"

Shitzfritz looked at me with astonishment. "You are right," he said, "Explain to me how it is that she has suddenly fallen out of the blue onto you with this false accusation?"

"With women like that there are no questions to ask. She accused me because she knows that in this town everybody will believe it, because everybody holds the Litvaks to be people without integrity. And if I had not already been acquainted with her, this would have fallen upon someone else's head."

"What did the Rabbi say?" he asked me.

I told him what the Rabbi said.

"We must both go to him, and decide there what to do. He is an intelligent man, he will give us intelligent advice."

"But you see, don't you, how smart he is, when he turned on me just for saying something out of anger."

"That doesn't matter," Aaron said, "His anger must have overtaken him, he is a really good man."

"So, let's go to him, but not right now. I am afraid to walk the streets. The whole town is boiling with the scandal."

"We will go to him in the evening. I only ask one thing, that you stay away from my daughter until your innocence is established."

"I don't understand, what right have you to separate me from my wife? While you already know that I am innocent."

"What I understand is not important. We need the whole world to understand it, and until everyone is convinced of your innocence, you can not be my daughter's husband. You understand, don't you, that I will not have people pointing their finger at my daughter, saying that my son-in-law has two wives. If you prefer, we can give you your full freedom."

"What do you mean, 'freedom'?"

"Simply, that you can separate from my daughter with a *get*."

"Just because some outcast has made a false accusation toward me?"

"False or not, our Jews will not believe it is just a false accusation. All they will hear from Felfen is that you are her husband. That is all they need to believe everything about you, and even if you show proof with signs and wonders that you are innocent, your name will be still be tainted forever. That is why I think it better if we put a complete end to it."

"And your daughter will also want that I should divorce her?"

"That will be my business."



“And this is how you talk? An enlightened man like you?” I said angrily, “Instead of having sympathy for me, you would rather pour salt in my wounds? That seems just to you?”

“What should I do? Sometimes one has to pay more attention to public opinion than to oneself.”

“If you can talk like that, and if your daughter is also in accord with your logical opinion, then I am ready to divorce her this very day. You just have to return to me the 500 rubles I gave you for our new business.”

“You are talking like a child,” Aaron answered in a cold tone of voice, “You are forgetting that my daughter's wedding clothes cost more than 500 rubles.”

“What, I owe that? You just want to get rid of me?”

“But without giving you money. It is enough that you have brought us such disgrace.”

“If that's the way it's going to be,” I said, heatedly, “Then there is no way I will grant a divorce to your daughter. We will go to the Rabbi and we will see what his verdict is. But will you let me talk to my wife?”

“No! Not for any amount of money in the world,” Aaron answered coldly, “I already told you, and I am telling you again that until your innocence is proclaimed to the world, I will not let you see my daughter.”

You now, dear reader, have a notion of what my life is like.

This gives you a good taste. The day after my wedding to hear such words? I am not able to write a description of what the world looked like to me at this point. I was convinced that respectable person could also be regarded as a murderer, a scoundrel, a fiend. I had seen that the world was blind, people were stupid. You can blind anyone so that they can't see what is just beyond their nose.

I cried bitter tears the whole day. I stubbornly remained in the room where Aaron and I had our discussion, and was afraid to go out on the street. No one in the house came to me to say a good word. The same Fiktel who just two days ago was a king, and who everyone looked at to see if, perhaps, he wanted something. The same Fiktel is now sitting like an imprisoned murderer locked in a cell, and his best friends did not even want to look at him. I had totally forgotten that I had not eaten all day. I just sat in the room and whimpered like a little child.

In the evening Aaron came to the room, and called me to go to the Rabbi, and we made our way by taking back alleys until we got to the Rabbi's house. There began a series of arguments and claims, until finally the Rabbi said: “I will tell you openly my opinion, that Herr Fiktel is innocent and in order to prove to the world his innocence, it is my advice that you should force Miss Flefen to travel with you to Liteiketz, and there she should be required to show you where the wedding took place, who the witnesses were who attended.”

We were pleased with his advice. Someone was immediately sent to call on Miss Flefen and the Rabbi gave her his opinion. Flefen shuddered, then, after thinking for a moment, she said: “Good. I will go and show you everything.”

I felt as though twenty boulders had been lifted from my heart. I was sure this would be the end of my troubles, because there everyone would be able to see that everything the damned Flefen said had been lies.

In three days we would travel to Liteiketz. A local magid [itinerant preacher] who was a relative of Aaron's and happened to be in Tisfit, volunteered to travel with Flefen, and I would travel with my in-law.

For the entire three days I remained locked in my room at the Hotel Fetersburg. I was ashamed to go out onto the streets. I was equally ashamed to go to a restaurant to eat, and I made do with bread and herring that the servants at the inn brought me. I was counting the minutes until I would be in Liteiketz and could prove my innocence. The three days seemed to me to be three years. You will understand how nice it must have been to be in a town where everyone is talking about me, and where everyone is curious to see the Litvak with two wives.

I would not wish these feelings on my worst enemy. With G-d's help, I finally left for Trilte with my in-law and from there on to Liteiketz.

Also Flefen was on her way with the magid.

## I Step in the Mud

It was three days before Passover. Everywhere one could see a favorable change. Nature was dropping her dirty winter clothes. The sky was becoming lighter and more cheerful. Everyone was smelling the first traces of Spring. People were all more lively. They, too, had tossed off their heavy winter clothes because already the month of March was warmer. Everyone's heart was more sprightly and cheerful. In every breast new hopes had awakened for better, happier days. My heart was the only one that was not cheerful. I sat in the railroad car crushed, beaten down and in great despair.

Three misfortunes there are in the world that are unbearable: 1) When a happy man suddenly falls from his happiness into a deep abyss. 2) When a respectable man is falsely accused of a crime, and everyone believes he is guilty. 3) When one is violently ripped away from the person he loves with his whole heart.

And all three had unexpectedly befallen me, and just as I was standing on the pinnacle of happiness, I was pushed off. People accused me of being a false, disreputable person, while I was as innocent as a child. And I was violently torn away from my dear bride, who I loved with my whole heart. Even today I wonder how I found the strength to bear it all. I wonder at my patience which held me back from murdering the authors of my misfortunes. I wonder at the energy that kept me from losing my courage. I am still a little proud of that.

Sitting in the railroad car I thought about all of this. I did not hear the chatting of the passengers around me. I was not interested in the battle going on between the conductor and a Jew who wanted to put on his tefillin and pray to G-d. Nothing bothered me, I was lost in my dark thoughts.

I can say, however, that I was not suffering as much from my unhappiness as I was from the unhappiness of my Anna, because a man can become accustomed to unhappiness. But she is a young girl who does not yet know of life's sorrows. A child for whom hope in all of its glory still beamed. How terrible was her situation! She really believed that her husband had betrayed her, that he had another wife. And besides that, it was gloomy and bitter for her to show herself in the streets, because we know what kind of eyes we Jews use to look upon such a misfortune. I could imagine the gossiping Jews, even though they believed that I alone was culpable, laughing at my innocent wife, and no sooner would she show herself on the street than everyone would look at her with a smile on their faces. I shuddered in all of my limbs when I imagined what this innocent girl must be thinking of me now. She had no doubt at this moment that everything that Flegen said about me was true. How could she have a good opinion of me? She considered me a devil, for a murderer, for the worst person in the world, and I can't blame her for it, because such an innocent girl does not yet know of any corrupt people. She must believe that all of it is true.

We arrived in Trilte exactly on the eve of Passover, and we had to put off traveling to Liteiketz until Chol HaMoed, the second day of Passover.

A dangerously sick person who is suffering unmercifully begs to be put in another bed, he thinking he might feel better there, but as soon as they lay him down there, he wants to come back because he thinks it makes him worse.

It was the same with me. As soon as I arrived in Tisfit, I began counting the minutes until I could be

back in Trilte, because I thought things would be better there in Trilte because in Trilte I had a lot of good friends. However, as soon as I arrived in Trilte I regretted it, because the first day we arrived that damned Fleden spread all around the news that while I was married to her I went off and married another woman. To whatever good friend I went to visit, they would hardly look at me and when they did it was with suspicion, because they had already heard the story. The wives of my good friends simply wanted to rip me apart like a herring. In the first place because they had taken pity on the poor, unfortunate Fleden who had told them her story with tears in her eyes. Secondly, because the wives were afraid that their husbands would learn from me how to marry another woman. In short I was in just as much trouble in Trilte as I was in Tisfit. I was hated by everybody.

Once as I was pacing back and forth in my hotel room, a good friend came to me, Avram Zimmerfeld. He is a very fine, respectable young man, and earlier he had liked me very much and respected me. He sat across from me with a sour look on his face as though he were angry.

“Why do you look so grumpy?”

“I must tell you, Fiktel, that I would never have expected of you such a wrong,” after a short pause, “Feh! You are not worth it that people should be talking to you.”

“So, who forced you to come?” I answered, very angrily, “I am fed up with having to defend myself to everyone. I didn't send anyone to go and bring you here.”

Zimmerfeld look at me with surprise. He knew me very well and and knew that I was not capable of answering a brother like that with such anger. He smiled and answered: “You did not understand me, my friend. You must think that what I meant by the word “wrong” is the same thing that others mean by it, that you have two wives. No! I mean something totally different. What you did “wrong” in dealing with that canaille was...not knocking out all of their teeth, that you did not cripple them all with your bare hands.”

I looked at him in wonder. This was the first time in this whole affair when someone has had a good word to say to me. Finally, I said to him: “Tell me how is it that you don't believe what everybody else does, that I am guilty?”

“But I did believe it up until recently. Only today did I convince myself that you are as innocent as a baby.”

“What convinced you?”

“I can tell you that I was very interested in your story, and I had decided that it was possible. I have to tell the truth, you know me, and that even though I am not an actor, nevertheless, I can play a role like the best of comedians. So, today I visited Miss Fleden and ingratiated myself in the most friendly way. I was so friendly to her that she simply was totally charmed by me. I praised her heroic courage, and told her that I had never seen such an artist as she is. Then I asked her cheerfully if there was any way I could be of service to her. She thought for a moment and finally said to me: “Herr Zimmerfeld, I can see that you are one of the finest men in the world, and since I am now suffering such adversity with no one to help me, G-d has sent you to rescue me.”

“Tell me, Miss, what can I do?” I answered tenderly, “I would run through fire or flood for you.”

"I only ask from you a trifle," she answered me with her sweet smile, "It is fallen on me to travel to Liteiketz in order to show the others the house where I was married and to name the witnesses. But I have forgotten both. I can't remember the house and I don't know the witnesses."

"But what do you wish of me?" I asked, very curious to know.

"I would like for you to travel to Liteiketz, find some homeowner and give him a few rubles to say that the wedding took place at his house, and that he along with a couple of other people (that he should also give some money to) should say that they were at the wedding."

"At that point I understood the whole scam," Zimmerfeld continued, "That is when the veil fell from my eyes, and I saw that the damned woman had dumped the whole thing on you. I was so angry I could not answer her. Finally, I promised to do as she asked, and immediately ran to you to ask you what I should do, and cast out of your head all of the evil nightmares that have made you so timid, such a schlimazel."

I threw my arms around Zimmerfeld and kissed him. Tears of joy poured from my eyes onto my dear, true brother, to the point that he, too, was moved and tears came to his eyes.

"I thank you, my friend," I said through my tears, "I thank you that you have taken pity on me and have come to help me. G-d will reward you for that."

"G-d will reward me for all that later, I will make a deal with him," Zimmerfeld said with a laugh, "But right now let's the two of us decide what to do, this is a shameful situation."

"Very simple," I answered, "Just you tell everything to the Rabbi."

"You are a big idiot!" he answered me, "What will you do if she denies everything, and says that she never asked me to do anything? And in the meantime she sends another good friend there to set up the phony witnesses?"

"Then, what would you advise?"

"I came to you to ask for advice."

"Hear me out, Zimmerfeld," I said to him after a short pause, "Do this, go to her, and explain to her that in such a tiny town like Liteiketz it will be very difficult to get phony witnesses. Therefore, your advice to her will be to say that she made a mistake when she said that the wedding took place in Liteiketz, and that she remembered that it took place in the Hotel Berlin. Assure her that there you have ten people who will testify, without having to be paid, that they attended our wedding. She trusts you and will undoubtedly believe you. With that the truth will come out."

"What makes you think she will believe me?"

"Prove it for yourself once you are there."

"I will follow your instructions, and go straight to her," Zimmerfeld answered, "You wait here for my return."

“I will wait,” I answered.

Zimmerfeld ran off, he was gone nearly two hours. When he returned to me, he was delighted to report that she was happy with the plan. “The foolish ape wanted to grab me and kiss me for the good advice,” Zimmerfeld said, “She said that as long as she lived, she would not forget me for this favor.”

“Will she regret that?”

“Be assured that she will say that the wedding took place in the Hotel Berlin, and that she has ten living witnesses, and I am one of them.”

“Oh, thanks be to G-d!” I said to myself, “My misfortune is about to come to an end.”

As soon as the first day of Chol HaMoed arrived, I put on a good face and went to my in-law to get him to go to Liteiketz. He went right over to Fleden to tell her that it was the time to go to Liteiketz. How surprised he was when she told him that she had misled him when she said that the wedding was in Liteiketz. She proudly told him that our wedding took place here in the Hotel Berlin, and that she had ten witnesses right here.

## The Turbulent Divorce

I would now like to be just a detached reader of my story so that I would know what kind of an impression it is making on my readers. I am very curious to know if you are maintaining interest in my little tale, because it has been a long time (and, perhaps, never) since you have read a true story where the hero of the story has written for you with the blood from his heart.

Yes, I write every word with the blood from my heart. I want to pour the blood from my heart onto this page because, in the first place, I have no other good friend that I can show this bloody wonder to. Secondly, I want to make my misfortune evident to all men, that one can never rely on good friends. As soon as one, G-d forbid, meets with misfortune, you should never ask a good friend for advice on how to save yourself. Your own intelligence, no matter how small it might be, is more valuable in an emergency than another person's massive brain. To prove the point I will adduce the justice of a few foolish rabbis, who, in order to demonstrate their power and casuistry, found it proper to make a man miserable.

Just imagine, dear reader, (I beg you once again not to look upon this story as fiction) imagine yourself there when Flefen, who had screamed at the top of her lungs that she and I were married in Liteiketz before witnesses, and that she knew the house where it took place, now tells you suddenly: "I made a mistake. I had forgotten that my marriage took place in Trilte in the Hotel Berlin, before ten witnesses." Then the innkeeper and all of his servants will say to your face that it is all falsehoods and lies, that they know nothing of any wedding, and of the ten witnesses that she talked about, she couldn't bring forth even one. What would you say? It seems to me that even a person with average intelligence would have chased that shrew out of the room, and scorned her for such infamy.

The Trilte Rabbi, however, had another view. Hear, brother, his idea of justice.

When Flefen began screaming that our wedding took place in the Hotel Berlin, my in-law took me, and her, to the Rabbi. We all went to him, and to the holy Rabbi we gave our arguments. The Rabbi sent for the innkeeper of the hotel, and also for all of the employees. He asked if they knew anything about my marriage with Flefen. They all looked at the Rabbi with surprise, and, laughing, they answered that they did not know anything about a wedding, but they did know how many of my good friends had visited me, and when it came to Fiktel's wedding canopy, even the other guests in the hotel would have known about it.

"Where are your witnesses?" the Rabbi asked Flefen.

"I don't know all of them, but the one I remember is Avram Zimmerfeld."

They brought Zimmerfeld forward, and he openly told the Rabbi that Flefen had asked him to be a witness for her and that he should find ten other men to be witnesses and say that they were at her wedding.

Everyone laughed. They were all convinced that the damned Flefen had made a false accusation against me. I thought that the Rabbi would revile the shameless woman and drive her from the room. But how surprised and shocked I was when the holy Rabbi said: Rabbis! I say to you openly that Reb

Itzak Fiktel is not guilty. He has never been married to this woman, and we can all see that her words were lies, but nevertheless, Herr Fiktel must give her a divorce, there is an interpretation of the Kiddushin where a woman says to a man that you have sanctified me, and he says that it is a lie, then she may not marry any of his relatives. And Rashi makes of these words that she may not marry anyone until she has been granted a divorce. You can see from that that Reb Itzak Fiktel must give her a divorce because this is the same case. She says they are married and he says it is a lie.”

Oh, you godly Moses, look down from heaven and see how our rabbis turn everything upside down that you have written. You said in your holy Torah: 'According to years, witnesses will arise' that only from two witnesses can a court validate a court case, and our rabbis don't even need one. All they need are the lifeless printed letters on a piece of paper of a commentator that they do not understand in the least. It seems as though the Trilte Rabbi's opinion was also that I was right, that I was innocent, and yet he joined in with a sentence that he did not understand at all. He joined in with the others in this horrible sentence, that I should give a divorce to a strange woman that I hardly knew. The blood in my veins boiled and I said:

“No! I will not follow you in this thing. I will not put a sword in my worst enemy's hand so that he can chop off my head. There is no way! This should not happen and it will not happen.”

With those words I ran out of the Rabbi's office.

When I told Herr Kassenfeld of the rabbi's sentence, Kassenfeld, who is one of the most educated men of our time, sighed and said: “I am afraid, dear friend, that you shouldn't have broken off with them. As soon as the Rabbi gave his judgment, everyone would have known that you were as pure as an angel. Everyone would have been very much on your side. If you would follow my advice, I would suggest that you give her the divorce. At least you would be assured that you were done with her. Don't you understand that as soon as that shameless woman heard such a sentence from the Rabbi's mouth, she would be separated from you?”

“You too?” I yelled in anger, “You also advise me to divorce a woman I hardly know, and soil my name forever?”

“I have just given you my opinion. You need to do what you think is best.”

In anger I left his house.

All of my best friends were telling me to give this woman a divorce just to be quit of the shrew. I did not do what they said. I prepared a complaint in secret requesting that I go to trial with Flefen.

It was refused. That is the jurisdiction of the rabbinical court, was the answer I received.

And I had already heard the verdict of the rabbinical court, and I had decided that, be it as it may, I would under no circumstances give her a divorce. It was self-evident that I was right in this case, and that every intelligent, respectable person understood and despised Flefen, and she was not welcome in any respectable household.

Then the damned Flefen found another way to persecute me. She followed me to a neighboring town, and made it known all over that I was married to her, and had taken another wife. As evidence she had the verdict which the Rabbis had given her with the decree that I should give her a divorce. As usual



everyone believed her, and I could not show myself anywhere. It was very bad for me to the point that at times I wanted to take my own life. And I would have done it, if one of my good friends, the famous Hebrew poet D..., didn't protect me. The good friend, when he saw that I was always unhappy, pushed me for a long time until he convinced me to go to the Rabbi from the town of Neiyushak and obtain the divorce and send it to my murderer.

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I allowed myself to be convinced, and have my name smeared forever. After a while Flefen began traveling around the world and made me an object of shame and ridicule. She showed the divorce papers to everyone, and none of them had the slightest doubt that everything she said was the truth. And I – you will understand – was, for everyone who did not know the truth, taken to be a murderer, a monster.

I have in my possession over 50 letters and documents from the educated men of Trilte which show the true story. All of them witness that I had fallen victim to a merciless tiger. All of them cry out that the Rabbi had with his erroneous verdict, made me profoundly miserable. But what good does that do. I can't travel all over the world with the documents and show them to each person. The word still goes around that Fiktel had two wives at the same time, and divorced the first while the second lay dying.

Yes, my readers! My dear Anna could not survive the blow. She contracted tuberculosis and died in the springtime of her years.

Two other people died because of it, my good, elderly father and Anna's grandmother. The two could not bear the shame, and flew to heaven, to the real and true world where such murders can not happen.

Miss Flefen married. She was considered to be a fine, respectable woman who had, unfortunately, once been led astray by an evil, corrupt man. Everyone thought of her as an upstanding person.

So then, where is justice? Tell me, brother, where does one find the truth?

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