

# Chaim the Customer Peddler

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## 1. He goes to fulfill his civic duty

Since election day had come, the day for voting, I began to feel festive. Benele my youngest, seven years old, had hung an American flag in our window, and said to me, that today is a great holiday for all citizens, because on this day we witness the equality of America, namely: that I am equal to the President of the United States, because he has only one voice and I only have one voice, it is called a 'vote.' We are truly on the same level.

Friends, let me explain: There really is between us a little difference, a substantial one, so to speak, but I hate to contradict a child. Benele said it is so, so let it be so. What purpose would it serve to eat his little heart out?

Enough aggravation have we had in the house in the weeks leading up to the elections. The whole house by us had gone *hodorom*, the peace of the household wrecked, and neither I nor my wife could have a minute's rest.

This is why: My son, Shlomeh'ke, a boy of 15-years, supports the Republican candidate. My second son, Jackie, who is already a bar mitzvah boy is steel-and-iron for the Democratic candidate, and my youngest, Benele, who is a real scamp, was behind the Socialist. That is all the kids talked about. But I have three daughters, who are older than the boys, and they also mix in with politics. My oldest daughter, Betsy, who is a school teacher (an educator in a city school), said to me that I should vote for a Mr. Randell. I asked: "Who is this Mr. Randell? Nobody is talking about him." She explained to me, that Mr. Randell is from the Prohibition Party, which wants to close all the beer saloons. I said: That is a good thing indeed, if my Irish customers would stop getting drunk, they would be able to make regular payments on the merchandise they buy from me; but how can one vote for a man that no one has heard from and no one knows? My second daughter, Flossie, works in women's hats, and she wants that I should vote for somebody called Mr. Jackson. I ask: "Who is he?" She tells me that he is also a Socialist, but the right kind of Socialist, not like Mr. Chase, that Benele is always screaming about. And my third daughter, Jenny, a half fool and a little anarchistic, she wanted me not to vote at all. She gave me to understand, that voting is a Capitalistic swindle, to fool the poor people to get into the sack, – the poor should think buto-boo that they are making the government, but in reality the government is listening to them like they would a tomcat. Nu, so be it, with such a fool there is no reasoning.

As I told you, the battle in my house went on for several weeks before election day. Only as the day got closer it was like my children were on a knife edge. I said to them: Why are you getting yourselves so excited? My enemies should benefit that the candidates can get by with all your talking. You, girls, can't even vote. And you, foolish boys, are too young to even have an opinion! Stop making all this commotion! But my speech didn't help a bit, and they continued to squabble.

It continued like this: Flossie with Benele clamored for their Socialist candidates. Benny said that Flossie's Socialist wasn't a Socialist at all; Flossie said that Benny's isn't a Socialist. Benny said: "Yours is a faker!" Flossie said: "Yours is a demagogue!" Then the voices of Shlomeh'ke and Jackie chimed in. Jackie yelled: "Aha! You are for the blaggard trusts and corporations!" Shlomeh'ke yelled back: "You are for them that are ruining the credit of the land!" Jackie got angry and yelled: "What is worse than the coal trust, and the milk trust, and the meat trust and the Panama Canal?" Shlomeh'ke waved his hand and said, "Dats easy tok." I could see that my bar mitzveh boy was getting hot and it

was coming to blows. Only now my oldest daughter, the teacher, mixed in, took one boy by the ear and the other by the other ear and told them they had to behave, that is, be a little more stately. After that she herself began to fuss with Jackie, and they fought, and yelled, and cried, and sobbed, and gasped, just like over a dead person, God forbid!

The night before the election I came home exhausted, *fermatert*. Such a day it was, a bad one. Wives buy things from me on credit, but when they get a little money, they carry it away to the dressmaker or the department store. And when I came home I met my wife in the kitchen, and she said to me a little shamefully:

“Chaim, I want to say something to you, but I am ashamed.”

“What are you ashamed of?” I asked, “Are you a little girl?” So, be a Mama of six children, they should live.”

She said, “Nu, Chaim, he has persuaded me.”

I looked her in the eye a little puzzled, and said angrily:

“Yidene! What are you flapping about? Who is he, this *HE*?”

She said, “Our Benele, a child, took me to the side, as I should support the Socialists, and Betsy on the other side, begged for mercy as I should support the ones who wanted to close the beer saloons. Nu, I didn't know what to do. My heart felt like it would stop – I wanted to make both of them happy. Then I said to Betsy, “You are a grown-up, don't make Benele eat his own heart, he is just a child. Let me be on his side. It is obvious, if men have enough to eat they will stop getting drunk.” And Betsy said: “I don't care. I will see to it that Papa will vote the way I want.”

Since it is your supper time, I ordered the children they should not say one word of politics at the table. But Jenny could not hold herself back. She had gotten from Shlomeh'ke a book, Lots of Gags, which had a picture of a candidate in it and threw it into the soup tureen. Benele and Jackie laughed. Shlomeh'ke got mad and ripped off his campaign button and also, voilà, into the soup! That made me really angry and I said I was going to vote for Mr. Randall who wanted to shut down the saloons.

I saw Flossie turn pale and she said she was not going to eat supper: “Why should I give in, especially to Betsy? Because she, Flossie, had worked very hard in the shop so that Betsy could go to college? Now Betsy works by just talking. And I sew only using tools,” and she yelled: “I am not going to vote. I am going to follow Jenny.”

“Hurray for the social revolution!” Jenny called out, jumping up onto a chair. 'Down with voting and the corrupt capitalistic gangs with their followers, the seducers of the people!”

“G-d in Heaven!” screamed my yidene, “Sit yourself down, *meshugene*! What are you screaming about? People will come running from pure evil curiosity, you foolish girl!”

To have lived through that night I must be stronger than iron. The whole night the children wouldn't let me get any sleep. They fought and yelled and even tried to talk Mama into taking their side. Early the next morning I saw through the window that it was light in the street, and that the neighbors on the block were going to vote. My children remarked what a big deal this was, what a good citizen I

was, and how lucky I should feel that I was in America.

I said to them: "I would, indeed, feel lucky, if you, my children, wouldn't shorten my years with all your squabbling."

Betsy came to me, dressed up as for a holiday, it was a joy just to look at her, and she whispered a secret in my ear, that Mama was on her side, and that I should be a good Papa, I should join her, and vote against schnapps and drunks.

I thought to myself: "With you, my daughter, things are good. You have a good job, today is a holiday for you, but Flossie and Jenny unfortunately have to work today, and they have harder work than you; should I vote for your Mr. Randall and embitter their heats?"

Shlomeh'ke, Jackie and Benele would not let me go and said they would accompany me to the ballot box, and each one pounded me in the head with their arguments. I shooed them away and put the thing off for later – I wanted to ponder things a bit more; and I looked into my heart: would it be a bad thing to follow my Jenny's wish and not vote? Its always a mistake to follow a fool.

In the end I took heart and made myself ready to go vote. How to vote, I still didn't know. But I thought, in the last minute the Almighty would help me and put into my head the thought of how to act like everyone else.

When I got there (it was in a real estate office), and told them my name, they looked at me like I was a greenhorn and said to me that in their book it says that I had already voted.

I said to them, "How can it be written there? I haven't left the house today until now!" But he just smiled, the clerk that was sitting there, and the fat policeman smiled also, and a man with a ribbon on his lapel took me off to the side and said to me in Yiddish:

"Too late, Mister, you have been swindled. Someone came in here a little earlier and voted in your name."

"Good health to him!" I said, "A blessing on his head. He spared me from a very unpleasant business, and the children will have no arguments with me!"

I left and heard how the man with the ribbon laughed. He should laugh in good health.

## 2. He goes to the opera

My daughter Betsy, the teacher, she should live long, gave me and my wife tickets to the opera house.

My yidene and I gave it considerable thought: What should we take with us to eat? There one could get weak in the heart and want to eat something. My yidene asked me if I would like marinated herring, a little cheese, preserves, and if I wanted her to take along a challah, or rolls? I said to her: “Go already, yidene! You are still green! What are you thinking, you are taking something into a Yiddish theater? A yenta you are? In the opera house come all of the aristocrats from uptown, and if you sit there with a herring and cheese in a paper sack, they will laugh at you. It will be better to take wurst. Salami and tongue and make from them sandwiches, or cook a half a hen and make chicken sandwiches. The sandwiches you can put into two small parcels and we can eat from the parcels, like one eats at a picnic.

My yidene, Tsipe Yenta, she should live long, made ready the sandwiches and smeared them with chicken fat. She made two equal packets from the sandwiches. One I put in the right pocket of my overcoat and the other in the left pocket. In addition she took along two lemons tucked in her muff in case you get a little weary in the heart. A lemon can be useful. If you heart gets sour, you can just suck on the lemon and it will get lighter right away. Sour chases away sour.

You shouldn't think, heaven forbid, that me and my yidene are such big gluttons and guzzlers. Only a few provisions to nibble on the way, is an old Jewish custom. It is true, that the Jew is not all that much on eating, that is to say, he does not believe in stuffing himself, like a gentile, but the Jew does believe strongly in nibbling, tasting, supporting the heart, and other such things that don't cause you to get over-full, but just something to keep the stomach from crying out, “eat!” That is why you see that the custom now to nibble and snack is playing a bigger role with the Jews. Even in synagogue (usually among the Chasidim) one takes along a little schnapps and a snack. And even in the presence of a corpse the Jewish Burial Society-man in the middle of the preparations, has a little schnapps and a bite. Is it then a wonder that this custom has eaten its way into our lives, and is carried with us into the theater?

Therefore, you shouldn't wonder when you see Jews sitting in a theater eating roasted chicken on challah and sour pickles from a paper bundle. It is an old, historic custom, rightly said, a tradition, an ancestral tradition, come down to us generation to generation from the *yarzeit* schnapps, to the Burial Society snack, and from the *mah berekhus* [one hundred blessings] that a Jew is bound to recite to heaven above every day, as a tax to the Master of the people. But I have digressed a little – back to the matter at hand.

Blessed be the Name, we are finally at the opera house. We wanted to go in the front door, but they had us go in to one side. From that side they sent us farther on. From there at last we got, it seemed, to the right place. A man looked at our tickets, and twisted his face as though we were bad customers, and he put us out again in the street, to a different door.

Coming to the last door we showed the man our tickets, he bid us to go up. We climbed and climbed until our feet were swollen, going until we reached the highest balcony. A young man came up to us and asked if he could take my coat, and I said, “All right,” giving him my coat, and he gave me a little piece of tin with a number on it. Then another young man led us to our places.

My eyes were blinded by what I saw there. It was a regular museum. On the stage people were

already working, but who had it in their head to pay attention to singing and acting? Everyone was looking at the lodges, because every lodge looked like a jewelry store, and every woman was hung with diamonds. And in the middle of this I heard my yidene say to me:

“Ptuy-ptuy! Disgusting, Feh!”

“What feh?” I asked.

“There, everyone, take a look,” she said, “Everyone of them is naked!”

“Go on, yidene,” I said to her, “It just seems like it to you. They are only naked on top, on the bottom they are clothed. Besides from where we are sitting you can only see a head with shoulders. What are you thinking? It is something obscene? They won't let naked people in here. It is against the law to go to the theater naked, except on the stage.”

Nevertheless, my yidene can not take her eyes off the naked shoulders. She looked and I looked also. I looked at the strings of pearls, at the bracelets, precious stones and diamonds that were hanging from necks, and she looked and wondered at it all, and how they had no fear of the evil eye or of getting a chill. I looked and tried to calculate how much value there was in total from so many women with jewelry, and my yidene looked – and I noticed how much it bothered her that I looked.

The smartest man in the world can not understand the thinking of a woman. When one talks with a man you can understand him very easily, even if everything he says is not clear. From a word you already understand a quart, from a hint a whole story. But a woman has an entirely different machine in her head. She says one thing and means something totally different. She talks of rubble, and means Hotseplotse [*a mythical land*]. With the tongue it is day, and in her heart it is night. She says that she is not angry, but she is really angry. She says it is not your bubbie's business, and eats her heart out because of it. She says she is not jealous, yet she is jealous.

I noticed that the way I looked and the way my yidene looked were of two different sorts. Mine was the look of a businessman, who was interested in merchandise, that is to say, jewelry. But her look was a strange one, as though she suspected me of unclean thoughts. For twenty-eight years I have lived with a yidene, not failed to come home in the evening one single time, never gave her the slightest care, and she is still suspicious that I am looking around with an evil design. Be a genius and try to understand women!

But you can not blame my yidene too much, because among all of the men who were there, not all of them were looking at the jewelry. By a lot of the couples, I believe, the story was reversed: the women were looking at the jewelry and the men at the naked shoulders. And that made me very disappointed – not in the men, but in the women. Only they, the women, like to dress up so, to flirt, and to tickle the men's evil inclinations, and then when a lighthearted young man returns the coquetterie, they curse him, for the effrontery. Is it a wonder that young people fall into lewdness?!

About the opera itself there is not much to say. It was Romeo and Juliet. Which, had I not already seen in Yiddish theater? But in the opera it was very different. You could not hear a word. Everything was sung with notes and great emphasis!

As I was sitting there, I saw not far from us a Jew who did not take his eyes off the singers. I saw as he tapped his foot slowly, and bobbed his head and in his hand was a tuning fork. It could be that he was

trying to learn the melodies. After that I looked around me some more, and saw more Jews tapping their feet and trying to learn the melodies. I knew one of them – it was my friend's cantor. From that I understood that there were a lot of cantors who were preparing their songs for the coming High Holidays.

By the end of the second act I asked my yidene if she wanted a bite of the things we brought with us. In reality, I was the one that wanted a little something, but it wouldn't do to be the only nasher. My wife said, “With pleasure.”

I left my wife sitting in her place, and myself got up and went to the room where my overcoat was hanging. I said to the guard that I only needed to get from the pocket a packet wrapped in paper. I told him that he could go into my pockets without worry about responsibility and take out the packet for me. In a moment he gave me the packet, but when I got back to my seat and opened it I found that it was just a flask of schnapps.

It was clear that the guard made a mistake and went into the pocket of some stranger's coat. Now, what should I do? I saw people looking at me and smiling. I took the flask of schnapps and headed back to the guard. On the way I ran into our cantor. I told him the story and showed him the flask.

“That is my flask!” He said out loud and laughed, “Go get your snacks and we will make toasts together.”

After he had taken a little from the flask, and after I and my wife toasted “L'Chiam,” the little flask made a circuit of the other cantors who were sitting around us. It was a treat to see the Jews around us making themselves merry.

The end of the opera strongly affected my yidene. The tragic death of two lovers, Romeo and Juliet, brought out a fountain of tears from her eyes. She was still crying even after we got home.

“What is the reason that G-d punishes with such misfortune?” she reasoned as we were riding home on the streetcar. “It's because the world has fallen into lewdness and women go to the theater like hussies, naked as the day their mothers bore them. Ptui! May G-d not punish me for saying these words!”

### 3. He takes in a lady boarder

One day when I came home, my yidene greeted me with a smile. She only smiles like that when she knows she has a wonderful supper for me. On the other hand, when the supper is not successful, when the pot overflows, and the meat is burnt, then she greets me with an evil look on her face as though somehow it is my fault. I sniffed the air with my nostrils, and with my sense of smell I detected that aroma of borscht. There was also something else, but it was hard to tell if it was strudel, varenkes or gribenes.

All of the children were already home and they were sitting in the front room. I go in and see that sitting with them is a stranger, an elegant lady, and my nose was hit with the strong smell of perfume. Since I already had a little bit of a cold, I immediately sneezed three times.

“Gesundheit to you, Chaim!” my yidene said to me. She gently took my arm and drew me off to the side: “The lady has come to us to be a boarder.”

“But what kind of a woman is she?” I asked. “She is made up like a doll and smells like drug store --- Achoo! (I sneezed again.) Tell me, what does she do? How does she keep herself busy?”

“She is a manicurist – she cuts fingernails.”

“By women?”

“No,” answered my yidene, “By men in a barber shop she sits.”

Na-dir, a profession, I think to myself, she cuts the nails of strange men. Who would think of making nail cutting a profession? What is there in that for a skill? One just takes a little knife and one cuts. A pious Jew knows that nails must be cut by skipping a finger: First you cut the thumbnail, then the middle finger, after that you do the little finger, then the forefinger and you end with the ring finger. Once the fingernail cutting is done, you cut some wood chips and put them together with the fingernail parings and wrap them in a piece of paper. Then you put that away somewhere or you burn them. There, that is the whole art of cutting fingernails. But the rascals of today only want their nails cut by a women – Men should cut them properly.

The nice supper that evening didn't do anything for me. I couldn't taste a thing, because every aroma from the food was covered up by the smell of perfume. And my head cold wouldn't give me any peace: Achoo! Achoo! I could not stop sneezing.

A few nights later a story unfurled like you could have seen in the newspaper on the front page in big letters. I was laying in bed and could not get to sleep. I kept thinking of my customers and how much money they owed to me... I calculated, and calculated, then, I made another calculation and got it mixed up with the first, and went back and recalculated from the beginning. In the middle of all this I remembered that I had left a small box with jewelry out in the front room where the boarder sleeps. I thought: No telling! It can be that she is a completely honest boarder, but a burglar could creep in through the window and steal my jewelry. I woke up my yidene, she should be so good as to go into the front room and get my jewelry box, while it wouldn't be proper for me to do it, an adult Jew, to go into the room where a female stranger was sleeping. My yidene got up, put her slippers on slowly, and



went into the front room. Suddenly, she ran back out shocked and trembling like a leaf and clutching at her heart. I saw that she could not catch her breath.

“What is it? What is it? What happened?” I asked and shook her gently by the shoulders to calm her down. “Is the jewelry gone? Already gone, huh?”

“Murder!” She could hardly say it. “Someone has slaughtered our boarder, and dismembered her alive! --- Not a bone was left whole. --- *Oy, weh iz mir!* --- Chaim! Go already, sound an alarm --- Bring police --- The boarder has been slaughtered!”

I shook her again, harder this time. Seeing that she was in a faint, I splashed some cold water on her face. --- “Tell me already, what happened?” --- I asked her again.

“Our boarder, slaughtered,” she began saying, sobbing deeply, “Murder, bandits are in the house, they cut her up and ripped her apart limb from limb. It is horrible --- just like a pogrom! Her limbs tossed all around the room: Her feet are lying on the big table; her head on the small table; her teeth on on the chair, and an eye ripped out and flung on the plate with the picture of the Western Wall.”

I could see that this was a dangerous moment and I did not have time to reason with a woman. I quickly put on my robe and rushed to the front room. I was frightened by all that had happened and I was shaking like a leaf, because the big question in my mind was whether the murderer was still in the house and waiting for me with an ax.

I came into the room and from the glow of a small gas flame I could, indeed, see that on the big table was a foot made from pumice wood; on the small table there wasn't a head, just a wig of false hair; on the chair were other small items and on the plate, which I had purchased from a Jew who came from Israel, was a glass eye. Suddenly, as I was standing there looking over the anatomy of our boarder, there arose from the bed a bald head, and a mouth without teeth began to scream at me:

“What kind of nerve is that from you, Mister? How dare you to come into a room where a young lady is sleeping, huh? Get out of here, or I'll make a scene!”

I did not delay and immediately ran out. I only had time to snatch my jewelry box. My yidene was just beginning to calm down when I recounted to her my great discovery, but she really began to feel bad when she realized how much humiliation the boarder had suffered. I felt the same way. It is, indeed, a pity to make a person feel such shame.

When we got up the next morning the boarder was already not to be found. She had gotten up before us all, packed all of her things and was gone without even saying a, “Good-bye, stay healthy.”

## 4. He gets another boarder

A woman can do a lot of screwy things, but sometimes when she does something smart, is it really smart, smarter than the smartest man.

My yidene took in another boarder, and I was very pleased about it. Would you believe us? Even I wouldn't believe it either.

The second one is not a bad one to my mind, it was only four weeks ago that we had a bad experience. I met in the street a rather fashionable woman and she asked me if I sold jewelry on credit. "I sell everything," I said to her, "jewelry, clothes, furniture, bedding, and do you have nice clothing for your little children? I have great bargains."

"I don't have any children!" she said somewhat angrily, "I am still a Miss."

"Excuse me, Miss," I begged her pardon, "I made an error. In American can anyone tell who is a Miss and who is a Missus?"

"How old do you think I am?" She asked me with a smile.

"I would know?" I said, "Maybe twenty, maybe forty years. I am already an old man, and I don't look very often at wives and young women. If only your credit is good, you please me already."

Soon the Mademoiselle asked me to come with her to her lodging, which wasn't far from where we were in Grand Street. I followed her and thought to myself, what sort of woman is this? As we were climbing the steps she told me that her name was Lilly Kanadik and she was an actress in a concert hall, and that she made forty dollars a week in salary. She led me into the parlor and said that she wanted to purchase a small diamond watch for forty or fifty dollars. In a couple of days she had the watch, and I got five dollars right away, and she promised to pay me a dollar a week for thirty-five weeks following.

But when I came the next week to collect my dollar, the Missus of the house told me that my Lilly Kanadik had already moved out. Where? She didn't know. She only knew that Miss Kanadik sang every evening in the concert hall. And she gave me the address. I went straight there and found out the following three facts:

First, Miss Lilly Kanadik is not a Miss and has already had three husbands.

Second, that Miss Lilly Kanadik was making six dollars a week not forty.

Third, that Miss Lilly Kanadik had already been let go and was now singing someplace else. Where?...they did not know.

That struck me like a lightning bolt. To be taken so badly – and people think of me as an experienced customer peddler, a careful one! And since this hit me so hard, it spawned in me a great hate for actresses, dancers and singers.

Imagine my agitation when I made my way home and my yidene greeted me with the news that she had taken in another female boarder, and that this boarder was an actress.

“I will throw her out of here,” I yelled, “I won't have any singers or dancers by us in this house!”

“Sha!” My yidene hushed me, “Don't yell so loud. She is sitting right now in the parlor writing. You should hear how she sings, just like a canary.”

That word, 'canary' made me even more upset, but at the same time it caused me to think.

“What does she call herself, this canary of yours?” I asked.

“Lilly Kanadik,” my wife answered, “She sings in a concert hall and earns forty dollars a week. She is still a Miss.

“You think so? If you thought she was already a Missus, I'm telling you, you wouldn't be making a mistake. She will get really mad if you call her a Missus.”

Blessed be the Almighty who gave the rooster, that is: men, the gift of intelligence so that he can bargain tactfully. And, also blessed be the Almighty that I am not a yidene and know how to control my mouth, and not to say outright to my wife what kind of a connection Lilly Kanadik had with me.

“*Azoy?*” I said, “Lilly Kanadik she calls herself! – Nu, that is something altogether different. Did she bring her things with her?”

“Yes,” said my yidene, “She brought with her two cases for her clothes and she has a lot of jewelry.”

“Good,” I said, “I am very pleased with Miss Kanadik. I would like to get a look at her.”

With that my yidene gave me a strange look as though she suspected me of having suspicious thoughts. And seeing me smile made her suspicions grow even more.

“Why do you need to see her?” My yidene asked me.

“Miss Lilly Kanadik is an old acquaintance of mine!,” I answered, “Just take me to her, you will see her throw her arms around me. Oh, I know her! I have been looking for her like with a searchlight for a long time.”

I wanted to have a little fun with my yidene. She deserved to be punished a little. She was no longer looking at me bewildered, but with fire in her eyes.

“You looked for her with a searchlight, ha?” She said with each word sticking in her throat, “Nice, very nice! A father with six children looks with a searchlight for an actress, a dancer, who slinks around with who knows who. I will drive her out of the house, in an instant.!”

“Calm down,” I said, “I have my reasons!”

I went into the front room on tiptoes with my wife behind me. As I entered the room Miss Kanadik was sitting at the table writing.

“Good evening, Miss Kanadik!” I said.

She turned her head and when she glanced at me recognized me and began to tremble. She was speechless.

“My watch, now!” I yelled at her.

Miss Kanadik took off the watch which was hanging from her and handed it to me.

“Now get out of here,” she said, “and don't ever bother me again.”

“Miss Kanadik,” I said, “There must be a big misunderstanding, you must apparently not realize, that you are my boarder.”

“Oy!” she cried out grasping her head, “I had forgotten your name. There are so many of you peddlers...”

“Aha!” I said, “You must know more of us peddlers. What a nice business. Please be so good as to find another dwelling in the morning.”

By eight o'clock the actress was gone. In about an hour she came with an express man and picked up her trunks.

Ten o'clock at night as I was preparing to go to bed I heard a knock at the door.

I went and opened the door and found standing there, three acquaintances of mine, all customer peddlers, and a fourth man, a complete stranger.

“By you a female boarder moved in who we have been searching for urgently,” all three said at the same time.

“I'm looking for her too!” The fourth man cried out.

“You can keep looking!” I said, “I already made her move out, and I don't know where she went.”

“Thief! Robber! You deserve to be ripped limb from limb!” The fourth man screamed.

“Sha, don't get angry,” I said to them and recounted the whole story from beginning to end.

Then each of the peddlers told their stories: One had lost thirty dollars, the second twenty and the third lost a whole fifty dollars. All in the value of jewelry.

“And how much did you lose?” I asked the fourth man.

“I lost a woman. She was my wife.”

“Sha,” I comforted him, “Why are you eating your heart out, Mr. Levin? These guys here have lost more than you.”

They all said “Good Night” and left.

“Listen to me, my wife,” I said to my yidene, “Although this time you did well in getting a boarder, if you catch another customer that I am hunting for and can't find, I will buy you a new hat for Shabbes.

## 5. He toasts “L'Chaim” with a Society-brother

This happened on Shabbes evening. I came home late at night from a meeting. Obviously, after the meeting, we, that is to say me and the other 'brothers,' went to a saloon to patronize the establishment of another society-brother, and there we had a little taste – a little schnapps and a bite. The night was dark and my head spun a little, and my stomach quite a bit more than my head. Our society-brother, the saloon keeper, always said, that he gave us the best schnapps, and though the schnapps is very good it doesn't wait until it gets to your head, it begins to spin as soon as it hits the stomach. With me it wasn't just the head and the stomach that were spinning, so were the streets and the houses, and all of the men that I was with.

Blessed be the Name, I soon got to the house where I lived, put the key in the lock and tried to open the door. I turned the key this way and I turned the key that way but it would not open the lock. But in the middle of this a neighbor came by, he opened the door for me and said, “What's with you, Mister, with a cigarette you want to unlock the door?” I looked closer, it was true: I was holding a cigarette instead of a key. I stood there a while and searched my pockets for a key, but there was no key to be found. “Perhaps,” I said to myself, “I smoked the key.”

And as I climbed the steps I remembered that the secretary of our club had asked me for a cigarette while we were in the saloon. Perhaps, by mistake, I gave him my night key. But what can I do now? How am I going to get into the house? I asked myself this question and sat down on a step to think. Because this new key was of the new type where one side of the key was the same for everyone and opened the hall door, but the other side was different from all the others and would only open the door to your dwelling. As I was sitting there on the step, I heard someone coming toward me, and before I had time to get myself up, the man fell over me. I grabbed him in my arms and the two of us went tumbling down the stairs.

For a while we just lay there groaning. From his groaning I could tell he was a Jew. That calmed me. After that I felt him try to free himself from my arms. I asked him, “Hu iz dat?” He was silent. I asked him in Yiddish, “*Ver zeit ihr?*” He still said nothing and tried to get up. I held him tighter and pressed him to me and caught the whiff of schnapps. The same booze, I thought to myself, I recognize that smell. “Mister, who are you?” I asked. “I won't let you up if you don't tell me who you are. We are after all both Jews, what do you have to be ashamed of, ha? Where were you going tonight, to a wedding? To a *mitzvah* celebration? Tell me who you are, let's introduce ourselves to each other: I am Chaim the customer peddler. With whom do I have the honor of laying here with, ha?” But he kept silent and said not a word. The two of us lay there in the hallway, in the dark, and he said nothing. He tried to get up again, but I held on to him. “Eh, Mister!” I said to him, “you are so full of pride!? And I have already had the great honor of running into you, at least let me know your honorable name.”

It the middle of this I heard steps – someone was coming. My Jew tried once again to get up, twisted around like a snake, but I held onto him even harder, like one holds onto a treasure in a dream. Suddenly there was light in the hallway, and over us stood two women and two young ones, who must have just come from a wedding, and they laughed, and they guffawed over the state they found us in. And I did not laugh one bit. Because by the shine of the gaslight I could see that in my arms was the secretary of our society, who was probably in my house with the key which I had mistakenly given to him instead of the cigarette. And next to him I saw my jewelry box laying on the floor. That upset me terribly and I began picking up the scattered items up with both fists and putting them back in the box,

in my excitement I stumbled down more steps. When I was done, the secretary had run off, but half of the apartment house had run toward the ruckus in the meantime. Men, women and little children were all around me in night-shirts, robes and in big scarves, sleepy and shocked, and everyone was screaming and no one knew what for.

That is the fate of anyone who goes to patronize a society-brother's saloon and drinks so much schnapps to cause his stomach to spin. So that is what I think, and finding my door open I went strait to my bedroom and went to sleep.

## 6. He salts without his wife, and she – without him

On the morning after that incident, already the whole story was known to my wife and children, and we were ashamed to look one another in the eye. I swore that I would never again patronize a society-brother, even if it came to me leaving the club.

After a few days my wife said, that she had decided to move and had found a dwelling with five nice rooms in the Bronx, where we could live comfortably without boarders. I thought: Moving is moving. It would not do to stay in this place after that terrible story. Truth be told, I was not guilty, but people have evil minds, and they would not forget such an event.

I took the address of the house in the Bronx from my wife and set out to see the dwelling.

I looked inside, the janitor told me that the rooms were already as good as rented. A lady had seen them last night and said that she would surely take them. I quickly hurried home, and told that to my yidene. And when my yidene heard that she clapped her hands to her head: “A fool I was,” she said, “I should have immediately paid a deposit.”

She said to me, “Do what I say, Chaim, go back over there and promise the janitor a present so that he will hold the apartment for us.”

So I made my way back to the Bronx to talk with the janitor. As he listened to me and as he got the scent of a half-dollar or a dollar, he promised that he would make sure that the apartment would be mine.

I left him and went back downtown, came home and told my yidene the whole story that we had the rooms for sure.

“A foolish mistake,” said my yidene, “You should have for sure given him some earnest money, then we would be certain to get the apartment.”

“Just try dealing with a yidene!” I yelled angrily, because this business had already cost me a half day's work, and on top of that it was Tuesday – one of the best days of the week for customer peddlers.-- “If you would,” I said to her, “You go over there and give the janitor a deposit, and let that be an end to it!”

“And who will make supper?” she asked.

“It will be all right,” I said to her, “You just put the pots on the oven, and I will mind them.”

Fast as a whirlwind my yidene flew to the pots. In a half hour she had the pots cooking, and my yidene was off to the Bronx.

“Chaim,” she said to me, “When the soup starts to cook, you should try it, and if it needs salt you should add some.”

She left me with the pots. Thank G-d, everything went properly. I tried the soup three times, but each time I tried it I thought it still needed more salt so I salted it with a full measure. For an hour I had



been sitting like that by the pots, then my wife came home, sad and dejected.

“What is it,” I asked.

“Ay, it is useless,” she said with a sob, “the janitor will not take a deposit, he wants to give me a different apartment with six rooms, but these five are going to another man. Such beautiful rooms, these five! As though they were built for us! Nu, and the oven is going all right?” she asked.

“All right,” I said, “Except I am sure that with supper today you will find something wrong.”

“Oy, a curse on my enemies!” my yidene cried out looking into the pot with the water, pepper and onions, “I forgot to put the meat in the pot!”

I saw immediately that this was not the place for me to be, nor the time, so I looked for an excuse to get away. But before I had time to say anything, my yidene caught me by the arm and pleaded:

“Listen, Chaim! As I understand it, somebody paid off the janitor. I'm telling you, follow my advice, go back over there again, and give the janitor two dollars, a present, and give him five dollars on the rent. I will tell you, I don't care so much for the rooms as for the fact that someone beat us out of them. How can it be that I schlep myself around a whole morning and an afternoon to search for rooms, and another comes and takes them out from under my nose.”

I immediately set out again for the Bronx. I came to the janitor, he greeted me in a very friendly manner. I pressed two silver dollars into his hand and said to him, “That is for you.” and he said to me, “Tank yu.” After that I gave him a five-dollar banknote and said to him, “That is a deposit for the landlord.” The janitor took me into the house and gave me a receipt for the deposit.

“There was a woman,” he recounted to me, “who very badly wanted the apartment. She came back three times. Today she wanted to give me a deposit, but I didn't want to take it, because I had already promised to hold it for you. I keep my word.”

“Tank yu,” I said.

“The woman actually broke down in tears,” the janitor went on, “She told me that her husband was a customer peddler and she had left him to watch the cooking., he-he-he!”

All my limbs grew cold when I heard that, because suddenly the whole story became clear to me. My wife and I were competing for the same apartment without one or the other of us realizing it. And the janitor was totally innocent, he thought he had to do with two different candidates as tenants.

When I got home to my wife and laid out the whole story, all the children laughed. My wife did not have it in her head to laugh. The meat was raw, I had salted the soup and she had salted the soup, and we had to make a dinner out of herring and wurst.

Nu, at least we had the apartment and would soon be moving.

## 7. Troubles from a new apartment

Blessed be the Name, I and my family have already moved to our new apartment in the Bronx.

The first thing that I did, when, with *mazel*, I arrived at the new apartment was to change the name on the mailbox in the hall. They read one after another like this: Jan Milton, Adolf Sebalos, James Jeffreys, Christian Gold, Theodor Calvin and other such names. I thought to myself: People can't fool me. I am no greener. I know that Jan Milton was almost certainly at one time called Jankel the Milkhiker, Adolf Sebalos is certainly an alias for Avromtshe Tsibulnik, James Jeffreys had surely been named Zushe Schapiro, and Christian Gold I would swear was once known as Yudel Goldstein.

We moved on Monday, and after everyone had a chance to put our household goods in order, our new neighbors began to make visits. A knock at the door – and a Jew came in, and said that he was Jan Milton, who had a dairy store in the block and invited us to come see him. After him is coming Mr. Adolf Sebalos and informed us that he runs a grocery store two blocks over and expressed the hope that we would come see him. After he left another came to the door and that was Mr. James Jeffreys a peddler of Yiddish newspapers and he suggested that I have the “*Tagblat*” and other Yiddish papers delivered to the house. Mr. Christian Gold also honored us with a visit and gave us his card with the address of his “Kosher Wurst and Delicatessen Store,” which happened to be located nearby. Besides all of them, we also were visited by two butchers, and both were looking to have me as a customer.

I promised each one that I would do as they wished, and each promised that they would not forget me, and all agreed that I offered items with very reasonable prices. And when I was done with them, there began to appear dairymen, grocers, butchers, newspaper peddlers, insurance agents from the blocks in the surrounding area. And I had to promise one after the other. I couldn't help it.

Monday toward night and again on Tuesday everyone in the house helped me put all of our furniture in order. When we were all tired and just laid down to go to bed, it soon became still in the house, and I went to sleep.

I don't know how long I was asleep, when suddenly I heard yelling, “*Gevalt!* Help! Save me!!” The yenta's voice I recognized. It was the voice of my yidene. In an instant I grabbed the matches that I keep on a chair next to my bed, and as I lit the match, I saw standing in the room a young man, thin, pale, consumptive. In one hand he held a key, in the other hand a valise. I could tell that this was not a terrifying robber. I called out to him, “You good-for-nothing! How dare you come into the bedroom of a married couple? Tell me, what do you want, if you don't I will shoot you dead!” I pretended to look under the pillow for a revolver. Then my match went out and I quickly lit another. At that the young man went down on his knees and begged:

“Don't shoot, I am a Jew not a thief, not a robber; just hear me out, I will clear everything up.”

At that minute the door flew open that led to the other rooms in the flat, and in came my three sons and my three daughters. The youngest, Jenny, had a burning light in her hand. All were in their nightshirts, sleepy and startled. It was a bit like a scene from the fifth act in a theatrical play.

The young man shook like a leaf and pleaded:

"Let me explain how I came to be here. I used to be a boarder here, in this apartment, and this was my room. See here, I have a key to this room. Two weeks ago I went on a business trip to Philadelphia. I didn't know that the people that I rented the room from were so low as to move out after they had accepted two month's rent from me in advance."

"And what makes you think we should believe that what you say is true?" I asked the young man.

"That will be very easy to do," he said, "By Mr. Milton next door, he's not asleep yet. Let me go to him, he will tell you if he knows me or not."

I put on some clothes and went with the young man to our neighbor. They did know him and offered him a place to stay as a boarder.

I went back to my place and gave my wife and my children my report. My children laughed and went back to bed. Only my yidene remained unhappy.

"You see," she said to me, "what kind of luck we have. If somebody becomes a boarder, he goes to a neighbor and not to us."

I did not answer her at all, and soon I was asleep. I was sweetly asleep until 9 o'clock in the morning.

Around ten o'clock, when I was just ready to take my pack and go to business, I heard a knock on the door. A man came in, and after he gave us a "Good morning" in a deep tone, but very perfunctory, he said:

"I have been sent from the credit company, to collect for the jewelry. We have already sent three different collectors. You are already 50 dollars behind in your payments. What is it with you? We are going to have to take you to court."

"To whom are you saying this?" I said with anger and a little fear also.

"I speak," the man said with complete calm, "to Robert Robertson, who received from our firm 200 dollars worth of jewelry on credit, and only paid back 25 dollars."

"Nu," I said, "Please be so good as to find Mr. Robert Robertson and tell him that. I am Mr. Chaim Karp, Chaim the customer peddler."

"Is dat so?" he answered, "Excuse my mistake. Can you, perhaps, tell me where Mr. Robert Robertson is?"

"I don't know," I answered, "And please leave us in peace."

In the evening when I came home I found my yidene very upset. She had spoken with the children and complained to them in a very agitated tone. This is what I learned from her:

During the day a policeman came by and said that he was here to collect 70 dollars for the police captain. My yidene didn't know for why or for when. She was frightened and started to cry. The policeman left but came back with a man who seemed to be a detective. The detective spoke Yiddish.

After he had asked my yidene about where we had lived before, about everyone in the family, and when we had moved in, he went and found the janitor. Finally, he determined that we had absolutely nothing to do with the former tenants. The detective told my yidene that she should not worry and that if she would keep this incident secret the police would not bother her any more.

At the dinner table we talked about nothing but the visit from the police. From the detective's explanation we learned that there, in the rooms where we were living now, the other family maintained a den for card players. Just as we were talking about it, we heard a knock at the door. "Come in," I said, and in came a blond, young man and in his hand he carried a bouquet of flowers. Once he was in the room he began to dance around the room and sing:

Pretty maiden come to me,  
I will give you whiskey and beer,  
And come, let me kiss you!

We all sat there like we had been turned to stone. The young man, so it seemed, was a little tipsy. He threw himself into a chair and said:

"Where is Lizzy?"

"What Lizzy?" My wife asked.

"Ach, Lizzy, Lizzy!" The young man sang like a poet. "Lizzy with the black, curly locks, with the black, flaming eyes, that set fire to my heart with the fiery flames of love. For five hundred dollars worth of jewelry have I sent her one month ago today, and she said to me: 'Come to me in a month to the very day and I will give you my heart and my hand together.' I followed her, the sweet angel. I waited a whole month, and not bothered her. And now I have come to take her hand and her heart. Lizzy! Lizzy! I have brought her a bouquet of red roses, and a new watch have I also brought! Come to me, Lizzy!"

"Young man," I said, "You have blundered into the wrong house. The people who lived here before moved out two weeks ago. Leave in good health."

The young man did not hurry to leave. And in the mean time there was a knock on the door, and in came six men all at once.

"What is this?" One of them said, "Some new people. What? Robertson sold his gambling business? So you are the new bosses?"

"Sha! Don't talk so loud!" I begged them, and tried to explain that I had nothing to do with the previous tenants of the apartment, and I didn't know what else to tell them.

The six men excused themselves and left. Then I saw that the young man who had rejoiced over "Lizzy" had fallen asleep in the chair, and his bouquet had fallen to the floor.

I woke him up with great difficulty and begged him to leave. He left singing "Pretty maiden come to me."

Today, however, we decided not to wait for the end of the month, but to move again as soon as we could find a place.

## 8. He tattles on himself to the landlord

Blessed be the Name, I have finally settled in my new apartment, and I think I can live in peace here.

But when a Jew says, “Blessed be the Name” he means, that he has maybe another little trouble befalling him. Blessed be the Name, we Jews have become used to all things going bad. Blessed be the Name, we Jews go astray more than any other people. Blessed be the Name, if a Jew is destined to be a poor man he is, blessed be the Name, worse off than a poor man who is a gentile. And no sooner had I finally, blessed be the Name, settled in my new apartment, than began the real troubles, the epic ones.

After the very first night I could see that in the apartment I had just moved into, no one was going to get any sleep. There were pianos in every dwelling. Upstairs, immediately above my flat, there was a kind of club where people every night yelled, argued, debated. Every night there was a gathering of Zionists, as distinct from the Socialists, as distinct from the those who were Socialist-Zionists, and they insisted on arguing over their plans and never giving us a chance to close an eye, until one or two in the morning. Once when I had lost all patience, I got up from bed and said to my yidene:

“Listen, Tsipe Yenta, right this minute I am making a vow, and you are my witness: I vow that if the Socialists make a new system, out of spite I will stay with the Capitalist system, and if the Zionists take Erez Israel, out of spite I will stay here in the Bronx.”

“All bad dreams to my enemy's head!” called out my yidene, “for what do you have to swear? Let's move and that will be an end to it.”

“That is an easy thing for you to say: move!” I complained to my yidene, “What do you think, that maybe I'm a millionaire? A Rothschild, maybe, or a Jacob Schiff can pick up and move all the time; however if I keep moving I won't be able to keep challah on the table.”

And my heart was burning with anger, and I thought, how can I find a way to get back from the landlord the rent, so that I can move. I thought here and I thought there and finally I came upon a plan.

In the morning I sat down and wrote the following letter to the landlord:

Mister Landlord:

In your house there is a tenant who calls himself Chaim the customer peddler. He is a bad tenant, and likes to whistle past landlords. He pays for one month, the second month he skips paying then moves away. Besides that, he will make of your place a home for greenhorns. He takes in whole families from Ellis Island and keeps them in his flat. Protect yourself from Chaim the customer peddler. Give him his rent money back and demand that he move immediately. You should not wait until the first.

I didn't sign the letter. I put the letter in an envelope and wrote on it in English: “For de landlord.” Then I put it in the janitor's letter box. I thought it out like this: If the landlord is a Jew, he will read my letter outright; if he is a goy he will give it to someone else to read.

In the evening when my family and I were eating supper, I heard a knock on the door. "Come in!" And guess who came in – the landlord! The same landlord, the same one that once, five years ago, I lived with downtown.

I was very happy to see him and he with me also. He forgot why he came here in the first place, and I forgot all about the letter too. We asked each other how business was going and other things.

"I thought I recognized your name when I wrote out the receipt for the janitor," the landlord said, "but I couldn't believe that an old tenant would come back to me after so long a time. I will tell you why I came here to you. An enemy of yours, undoubtedly, sent me a letter telling me that you were a bad tenant, and that you invited in a lot of greeners. I came to see about that. I couldn't imagine that you were my old tenant. But now I see, that it was written by an enemy. If only all my tenants were honorable, upstanding people like you, then I would have no problems at all. Good night! Excuse me for having disturbed you."

The landlord went home and we were all left us all very surprised over this strange meeting. But my yidene and my children could not bring themselves to understand it, and were very upset over the *chutzpah* of an unknown enemy who had informed on me to the landlord.

My yidene was very upset, and her rage grew with every minute.

"His hands should go dry and brittle, wherever he is and whoever he is!" she cried out.

"Sha, don't lay a curse on him!" I said to her.

"What? No curse?" she responded with disappointment, "What do you think, that I have a gall of iron? A cholera in his bones for his insolence, the liar, the scoundrel!"

"Sha!" I yelled becoming angry, "Shut your mouth, yidene, at night you should not make curses even on the worst enemy."

"Na-dir, something new: one **must** not!" said my yidene, "Nu, so already, G-d should curse him, the varmint, he should get sick and never get up."

It goes without saying that this curse did not sit well with me. The truth to tell I am not one of those who believe in women's curses, but a heart is a heart, and when I hear someone make a curse, I think to myself, that out of a thousand times one may stick, and the curse be fulfilled, and my heart took fright in me. I was afraid that something might strike me.

Five days and five nights passed. The nights went by very slowly, and there was no more talk of moving. I met with the landlord and complained about the debates upstairs and about the pianos that played until midnight.

"About the pianos, I can't do anything," the landlord answered, "What bothers you, the pianos help one to go to sleep. But in regards to the debates, I have attended to it. Thursday the marshal is coming to throw the club out with all its furniture with ax and packs into the street."

Thursday when I came home from work, I saw by the door of the house a mountain of furniture tossed there. When I saw that even from a distance I began to dance about with joy. Only when I got closer

did I see my yidene standing over the furniture crying.

“Why are you crying?” I asked her.

“Why shouldn't I cry?” she asked, “Can't you see that this is our furniture? Today they threw us out of our apartment.”

“Who threw us out?” I asked.

“I should know?...Some sort of policeman came with two Irishmen and they carried everything out of the house. They were all drunk. I ran to the landlord, but today he had gone downtown.”

“There must be a mistake,” I said, “The marshal made a mistake. He was supposed to throw out the family that live above us on the third floor.”

Around this time the landlord showed up, someone had sent for him, the landlord sent for the marshal. The marshal was sober now and brought with him two sober Negroes. They carried our furnishings back in. Not until the night was half over did we and the children get to sleep.

In the morning the marshal came back and threw out the right people.

## 9. He becomes a real estate agent

I was sitting a while in the evening at home, when a young man came by, done up like a dandy and with a colored vest, I recognized him right away as a real estate agent, because who but a real estate agent would be wearing such a garish vest in the middle of the week if not a real estate agent.

He introduced himself to me, he is James Pussée. I said, "I'm pleased to meet shoo Mister Pussée," and in my heart I thought to myself, perhaps in Yiddish his name is Zushe Katz. Mr. Pussée sat himself right down, soon pulled out a pencil from behind his ear and a paper from his pocket, and began to talk business with me without asking me any questions.

"I have heard," he said to me, "that you have had a lot of problems with apartments. You have moved from one apartment house to another and can not settle in one place. The reason I am coming to you is to give you a real address, some counsel on how you can settle in to an individual house. Stop paying the landlord money, you will be your landlord, the boss of your own house. Tell me, how much money do you have that you can invest?"

"How many houses do you have to sell?" I asked him.

"Never mind," he said, "You shouldn't get testy when one asks you a question, that is to say an inquiry. I have come to you with a business proposition. This week I sold a house on Madison Avenue for 50,000 dollars, a double tenement house in east 103<sup>rd</sup> street for 65,000 dollars, an entire parcel in Brooklyn, and about sixteen or seventeen lots with thirteen houses here in the Bronx.

"You are making a lot of money!" I called out with great enthusiasm.

"What then," my yidene mixed in, "People are making money working like that, and you remain a customer peddler. What? Can't you go into real estate too? What? For everyone else there is a place, but for you nothing? Ha?"

"Sha," said Mr. Pussée with a smile, "You shouldn't fight about that. We will be better off talking business. If you can invest a couple of thousand dollars, I have a house for you, a peach, a *tsatske*! If you have more to invest, I have for you thirty houses and you can chose whichever one you want."

"Listen, listen, Chaim!" My yidene barged in, "He has thirty houses and what do you have?"

Her talk annoyed me and I yelled at her:

"Yidene, quiet! The houses don't belong to him, he is just a real estate agent. He trades in them. Someone who owns a house is a landlord."

"And I will, indeed, make of you a landlord," said Mr. Pussée, "Tell me how much you want to invest."

"I should know?" I said, "Let's first hear what you have in the way of merchandise."

He started writing with his pencil and calculated things for me like this: Bargain number one, bargain number two, bargain number three – some eight bargains all together, all such investments, which one



had to pay a couple of thousand dollars, and which of the remaining ones would require a mortgage. One could live on one floor, and there would be a floor or two to rent to neighbors.

My wife was also interested, pulled herself up to the table, asked questions, dickered, and in the course of a half hour was already talking like a real estate agent. The real estate agent stayed with us for two hours, drank tea with us and was very friendly. Afterwards he gave us his card with a list of all the bargains. We promised to tell him as soon as we had made a decision.

When he left, my yidene said to me, “You know what, Chaim, what has just occurred to me? – A Nu, guess!”

“I should know what ideas a yidene will get in her head? As much as a cow can fly over the roof and lay a dozen eggs.”

“Go, already, go!” said my yidene, “You all love to laugh at us women. I have just gotten a good idea, why don't you become a real estate agent yourself? Today you have already learned a little bit about the business, and I can help you. I understand, already, the business.”

I felt all the blood drain from my face, for what can be a greater embarrassment for a man than when his yidene falls upon a great plan and he doesn't go along with it?”

“Yes, Yes,” I said to her, “You are a genius! I was thinking the same thing myself. You don't have to help me. See, ha?...” and I coughed. The truth to tell, I am not given to tell lies, and when I do it sticks in my throat.

In the morning my yidene had already beat the drum up and down the block that I was in the real estate business, and that I bought and sold houses.

First thing in the morning I received a visit from three new real estate agents all at the same time, and each one offered me new bargains. I listened to their bargains and made note of them in a little book, one bargain after the other, how high the house, how big the lot, how much is the first mortgage, the second, and how much one would have to pay in cash, and in addition all of the details about the taxes, repairs and other expenses, asking prices for rent, and above all the address where the house was located.

Afterwards, I gave them a list of my bargains. They heard me out and made notes in their little booklets.

On the third evening I had six more real estate agents, but I got rid of them quickly, because on this evening I wanted to go out and try to find customers for houses.

I went off to a fellow countryman, a pushcart peddler, who I had a hunch had saved a couple of dollars. I showed him my bargains and told him he could be happy with them. He listened carefully to me and wrote everything down on a scrap of paper. I saw that I was not going to make a customer out of him. I asked him, “Why are you writing all of this down in your notebook?” He said, “Well, perhaps I might find a customer for the houses, and will maybe make a deal. I'll give you a share as a commission.”

I left him and went to see another *landsman* [fellow countryman], who had a grocery store. But when I just started to tell him about my bargains, he stopped me, “That you call bargains? Eh, sit down a

while, I will figure some real bargains for you. I have better bargains than yours. I have been in real estate already a half year,” and he came up with five different bargains, and I wrote them down in my notebook.

I went home exhausted, hoarse from talking so much. As I walked I was sunk in thought: They are a strange folk, the people of Israel! Whatever one trades in, they all trade in it. Always the same: At one time everyone dealt with old clothes, rags. After that it was the fashion to have a newspaper stand, and now – with houses. The succession is logical: From rags you make paper, from paper you make houses. Take a look at all the tenement houses and see how they are built. Thin walls, with tiny rooms, just as though they were, indeed, made of paper, and it seems like a strong wind could blow them away. And that reminded me of the story, when the old men came to David the King and said: ‘The people need to make a living.’ David the King answered: “They can make a business one with the other.” Nu, didn't he mean the real estate business?

Without a doubt that is what he meant.

When I got home, who do you think I found there – go ahead and guess! Of course, the Mr. Pussée, only the first real estate agent, through whom I got the thought to go into real estate. I see that with my yidene he has become a new big shot, and they were talking about parcels and lots.

He showed me, the real estate agent, that he had new bargains for me. I said, “Give them to me!” And he talked and I wrote them down in my book.

“Aha!” he said, “You already have a full account book, what is that?”

“I have also become a real estate agent,” I said with pride.

“Have you already sold something?” He asked me with a smile.

“No,” I answered him, “It appears that I am not yet proficient in the business. In addition I see that there are a lot of people selling houses, but as far as buying houses, there are not many interested parties. Whoever you talk to is ready to sell, but when you offer him something to buy, he runs away.”

“If you talk like that,” the young man said to me, “then you are a true real estate agent. You already know the entire business. That is the absolute truth, just as you put it, all of Israel are real estate agents, but only to sell. So it is. Have your self a good evening.”

And he left.

Dear reader, perhaps you are looking to dabble a little in real estate? I can sell you whatever you want – even half of New York!

## 10. He prays for deliverance

As we are sure to be visited by troubles, it is the case that they are not always caused by our wives, they can also come from strangers. I have caught some bad troubles from a someone else's wife, a stranger, and it shames me to tell about it.

But if I don't recount the story, then you will suspect me in who knows what, it is, indeed, better if I tell you about it so you will know the real story, rather than my enemies spreading their lies.

I have a lot of enemies – What customer peddler doesn't have enemies?

I was walking down the street, with my satchel and with my watch, when I met a young woman, a pretty one I thought, milk and blood, but I did not want to stare. A pretty one, not a pretty one – What difference does it make to me? Am I a young boy who is searching for love? By me business is the main thing. When she stopped me, I wasn't afraid to talk with her on the street, because my peddler's pack and my watch were my sign that I was talking business and not foolishness, flattery, love, nonsense. She told me a story, the young lady, that she would buy from me some trinkets for the house on credit, but she wanted that her husband should not know, because her husband did not like to have business with customer peddlers and to buy things on credit. I said to her: “We can make it so he doesn't know, your credit is good.” You must realize that the best credit from a woman, is those who buy on credit without their husband knowing, because she *must* pay. – She would not want a scandal to get out, and her husband find out. She said to me: “I really mean it, I will buy things from you but my husband must never know. I will tell him that I bought the items with trading stamps. You can tell a husband anything. I will pay you from my money bit by bit. But to collect you can only come during the day when my husband is not in the house”

She bid me go upstairs and I followed her. She led me into a pretty room and invited me to sit. She talked to me about an album that she wanted to have, and we talked about the price and conditions.

In the middle of this we heard heavy footsteps in the hall. The woman jumped up frightened: “Ai, my husband is coming!” She said, wringing her hands. Suddenly, she grabbed me with both hands and said to me quietly, with a halting voice: “I will hide you in the wardrobe.” The wardrobe was, indeed, nearby. With her hands she stuffed me inside along with my peddler's satchel. She closed the door to the wardrobe, and I was left standing in the darkness, between coats, pants, clothes and *shmates*. I couldn't even see my nose.

It goes without saying, that I was more than a little scared. Because what would happen, if her husband stayed in the house all day? Then I would have to spend the night standing in this tiny closet. Soon I could hear the man's voice, and her voice also. I will repeat the conversation just as I heard it:

“Hello, my little dove!”

“See, Jack! What is going on with you? So early?”

“I don't feel good, my little dove! A headache, a bad one, I have the grippe. I had to get away from work. Get some rest! Make me a little tea, my little dove, after that I will lay down for a while.”

“When one had a headache, one should not drink tea, it goes better if one takes a walk in the streets.”

“Go on, little foolish one, it is the grippe. I need to stay at home for a couple of days, and not go

outside.”

When I heard that, I thought I would faint on the spot. I had to think of something to do. But what could I do? Nothing with nothing. All I could do was promise a quarter to Rabbi Myer the Master of Miracles that I should come out of this alive.

Then it occurred to me: Perhaps this whole story is an act, a plan to fool me into a sack and force some dollars out of me? Such things happen in America. But I soon saw that I really had fallen into it and the wife is really innocent like a young calf.

“What kind of a hat is that on the lounge?” I heard the husband ask.

A misfortune! When I came into the house, I took off my hat and placed it on the lounge chair. And when I climbed into the wardrobe I left it sitting there.

“Whose hat is that?” I heard the same voice ask again.

“I should know whose hat that is? The wife said, “Perhaps it is one of your old ones that you left laying about.”

“Such a Bohemian hat! Such a greasy hat! What are you talking about?”

He laughed to himself and I was getting even more upset. What *chutzpah* to say that my hat was a Bohemian hat! Greasy it is, I bought it second-hand, but to say that it is a Bohemian is *chutzpah*. But what could I do? I must just stay here and keep quiet.

After a while I began to feel that it was getting hot, I could feel the air, almost like I was in a beef stew. I began to think that I would not be able to hold out five minutes, and that very soon I would jump out from the wardrobe and surrender, like a soldier, when he see that he has lost any chance in the battle.

“Who has been smoking cigarettes here?” Suddenly called out the same man's voice.

“Nobody,” the wife answered.

“What are you saying, Rosy? Right there in the ashtray is a little piece of a smoked cigarette, a revolting cigarette. The ones that one can buy four for a penny.”

“I should know?” The wife answered. “No one has been here.”

“See!” The man yelled, “Don't make me any monkey business. Somebody was here! There are two chairs pushed together to face one another. Somebody was here. Listen, Rosy, with me you shouldn't make any monkey business!”

His voice was becoming more high-pitched and angry.

“Jack, calm yourself down!” The wife said, “You are sick. I just remembered, the grocery man was here, we settled his bill.”

“And he forgot his hat? How does a man forget his hat?”

“I’ll ask him,” the wife said.

“Rosy, you are bluffing me!” The man yelled.

“Jack, ah Jack! How could you say that? You know how true I am to you, how much I love you!” – I could hear how the wife was sobbing.

It was getting frightfully hot. I began to fan myself with a pair of pants that were hanging near me.

Everything was quiet for a half minute. After that the wife said, “Go and drink your tea.”

“Bring the tea to me, and get my sleeping robe for me from the closet,” he said.

“Why do you need your robe? Sit in your jacket,” she answered, and I got a strong sour taste in my mouth.

“I didn’t ask you,” he said with a mean voice, “If I say I want my sleeping robe, then I want my sleeping robe.”

At that moment I was blinded by light. The door of the wardrobe had opened, and there I stood, soaked in sweat, with a red face and trembling like a leaf.

I slipped and fell to the ground and nearly broke my foot. The wife came and stood between me and her husband and she pleaded:

“Jack’ele, dearest, darling, leave him be, the peddler, he is innocent. I called him up here. I wanted to buy some things from him without you knowing. Hit me as much as you wish, but not him. Beat me, Jack’ele, slap me, call me names if you want, but leave the peddler alone.”

She cried like a little child. The husband stood there in total confusion.

“Mister!” I said, protecting myself from him, “Be merciful toward your wife, today she has already suffered enough. If you need to punish someone, punish me. I am a Jew who can take a beating. I take hits every day from rogues – I don’t mean you, G-d forbid. You can beat me, you can rip out my beard, but have mercy on your wife – leave her alone.”

“Ha-ha-ha!” the man laughed, “A true love scene just like they play in the theater. All right, Mister,” he said, “Take your greasy hat and get out of here. As for my wife, don’t worry about her. Dat’s my business. Go on!”

I didn’t wait for ceremonies, I got out. When I got home, the first thing, I threw a quarter in Rabbi Myer the Master of Miracles donation box to fulfill my vow.

I got out of it all right, but it could have gone very bad. Shabbes in shul I prayed the Blessing of Deliverance.

## 11. Passover Eve Troubles

Today's generation loves to laugh at that which we older Jews believe; that Passover makes every Jew, even the poorest man, a king. They should come to my house and they would see if it is the truth or not.

You will see it though. Who needs a bigger slave than customer peddler, who is a whole year a vassal of such poor people, beggars, who the more fortunate should, indeed, have mercy upon. The customer peddler during the whole year works as a slave, a slave among slaves, and yet when it comes the time of Passover, he becomes a free man.

And you will ask me a, "so what has changed?"

What has changed: what is the matter with a customer peddler? For a whole year he goes from house to house, stays on his feet climbing from basements to the top floors, stands out of breath panting on the step, he is always pounding on doors with this hand, and remains without money always giving away his merchandise on credit. – and when Passover time comes, so do the peddlers who come to the customer peddler and they knock on *his* door, they seek *him* to peddle matzah, wine, honey, mead, Passover tea, Passover sugar, Passover coffee, Passover cake, and everything in the world that can be made Kosher for Passover.

I have fourteen different customers who peddle matzah. Their wives have taken from me various albums, rugs, tablecloths, rings, bracelets and clocks for a mantel piece, and how can one not give these customers a show? It is, after all, America! If one gives you a show, you have to give them a show. If you don't there will be a crisis and a panic in Wall Street, and the whole business will go kaput. I have eleven customers who peddle with wine and with schnapps. It costs me a pretty penny – How can I not give them a show? I have also a pair of customer *minyans* [minyan: A group of 10 Jews are required for worship] that peddle with various Passover articles. They are none of them rich men, their credit hangs in the balance, what I buy from them is like found money. How can I not give them a show? The only question is which one to choose. It is not possible to give to all of them.

And so as I come home one day as usual, before night, my yidene said to me, "Chaim, do you know who was here? Here was Shlomeh the Tall, he wants we should buy from him matzah.

"What did you tell him?" I asked.

"I told him that we have a preferred source. Shalom Yossel is a *landsman* and a little bit of a distant relation, a horseshoe, as we say in the old country, he is preferred.

"Preferred today, preferred tomorrow," I said, "Neither Schlomeh nor Shalom Yossel will leave me in peace about the matzah. I have my own preferred. I have a customer who peddles with matzah. He owes me eight dollars and the matzah will be a little bit of a payment on the debt."

As we were talking, Mr. Kider came by, a society-brother who prays with me in shul for the past five years. He is a handsome Jew and a little bit of a cantor. He occupies himself with making raisin wine.

"Good evening to you," he said. I invited him to sit down. Sit? Who has time to sit? Thank you. So-and-so can sit. I came here to ask you how many pounds of matzah you will take from me?

“Mr. Kider,” I said to him, “First off, your business is with wine not with matzah, and secondly I am already supplied with matzah.”

“You should have a good year,” said Mr. Kider, “So with the wine there is nothing to talk with you about. By who would you buy wine if not from me? That is like it was already in your pocket. All the homeowners in our *minyana* buy their wine from me. Only, I thought, for once I could also sell you matzah. Why wine yes and matzah no? Whoever sells wine also sells matzah. And by who would you buy if not from a society-brother.”

“But I already have a supplier of matzah,” I said to him, “I already promised to take some from one of my customers who owes me money.”

But Mr. Kider would not stop talking about it. He insisted that I should take 20 pounds of matzah. I had to bend, and after he was done with the matzahs he ripped from me an order for a gallon of wine.

“And would you like to get some tea from me?” he asked.

“We already have tea,” called out my yidene and showed him a packet of tea that was labeled “Kosher for Passover.”

“May the Almighty save and protect you if you drink this tea!” Mr. Kider called out, “That is without a doubt boiled and the Kosher is never boiled, and the rabbi who declared it kosher is not a rabbi at all, he is a bath-keeper! I will add in for you a pound of the best and the most kosher tea together with the matzah and the wine. A good night to you.”

And he took off from the house, before I could say another word.

A half hour later, when we were sitting and eating supper, a neighbor came in who lives two doors down from us.

“I would like to make a request of you,” said the neighbor, “A *landsman* came to me he is an old man. He can't work anymore, today what can such a greener do? I thought to myself: Since it is close to Passover, he should peddle a little with wine, with matzoh with tea, with sugar – and what not! What Jew doesn't make those purchases at Passover? Everyone is doing it, he should do it too. What, is he not a Jew? I am asking you, for sure, that you should give him a show.”

“But how can I?” I pleaded, and I explained my whole situation.

“That doesn't matter,” said the neighbor, “Give him something, like a recommendation somewhere.”

“All right,” I said, “A recommendation I can do. But not a purchase How can I purchase anything?”

As we were sitting there talking, a stranger came in and brought to me a slip of paper with the following:

Mr. Chaim!

Since you are known to me as a fine man, a gentleman, I am asking that you should give him a show and buy from him matzah, wine and other things for Passover. The man is by me a *landsmen*.

Avram Kudilski

Avram Kudilski the store keeper that I buy my wares from. He has a big peddler supply store and is a wealthy Jew. Since he sends a man to me with a recommendation, I have to buy something from him, if not it might damage my credit line that I have with Mr. Kudilski. I say to the man he should bring me 20 pounds matzah and a half gallon wine. The fellow thanks me and leaves.

“And what about my *landsmen*?” asks my neighbor.

“What can I do?” I asked him back, “You see already that I have too much matzah and too much wine, more than I can use. My children aren't big eaters, and me and my elderly wife can hardly chew the hard matzah, the Almighty shouldn't punish me for saying so.”

From that evening on my house was besieged with Jews who were seeking to sell me bargains in matzah, wine, schnapps, tea and other Passover items. They came with claims that they were a *landsmen*, a half-*landsmen*, a little bit related, an acquaintance. Others came with recommendations from a *landsmen*, a close or a distant relation. And I am a *mensch* with a soft heart, and many of them I could not deny.

Mr. Kider, who is my Society-brother, sent me, instead of 20 pounds of matzah, 40 pounds.; instead of one gallon of wine he send me 2, and beyond that he sent me 2 pounds of tea and things which I had not talked to him about: Passover plums, Passover apricots Passover raisins and nuts. I protested strongly but he comforted me by reminding me that nothing will be thrown out because in a home everything will get used. In short, it was a done deal and my bill would cost me a pretty penny.

A week before Passover my flat was overflowing with bottles, and jugs of wine and schnapps, with boxes and sacks of tea, plums, raisins and other things – a regular grocery store.

A lot of my customers were angry with me because I did not deal with them. Among my *landsmen* and acquaintances I gained a number of enemies, and even those that I did buy stuff from were upset with me because I did not order as much as they expected. My next door neighbor won't speak to me.

I sought a way to go against the world, and now the whole world is against me.

“What can I do?” I asked my yidene, “ What can one do with so much matzah, wine, schnapps, tea and other vegetables?”

“Beats me, Chaim,” said my yidene, “Don't eat your heart out, and be a man. Put your business aside for a week and start peddling matzah, wine, schnapps and tea. Go out into the street, knock on doors and where you see a *landsmen*, a relative, a distant relative or an acquaintance don't let him go until he buys a little bit from your stock. Don't forget there is still a whole week until Passover, and there will still be a lot of Jews coming and you have debts to cover. Go into the business, or you will lose a lot of money.



“Tsipe Yenta,” I said to her, “That is the first time in your life you have said such a thing, and this is the first time since we have been married that I am following your advice. Your advice is like a man's idea. Therefore, when its over, I will treat you to a big piece of matzah.

## 12. He buys a piano for his daughter

I have long promised my oldest daughter, Betsy the teacher, that I would buy her a piano. She has earned it. First, she is a blessed child, a good one, a decent one. Second, she is a good earner, and gives me her whole salary, except for a few dollars that she holds back for petty expenses and clothes. And it is after all a pleasure to have in the house a piano and hear from time to time a little music.

I was away at Mr. Nudilski, the store keeper where I buy my merchandise, and I asked him he should give me hint on the rules for buying a piano. Mr. Nukilski told me that it is best to buy a piano through a friend. You ask the friend to ostensibly be the agent, the broker. An agent gets 25 dollar commission for each piano, And this 25 dollars you get back from the friend and goes into your pocket. It is simply a way of saving 25 dollars.

The day when they brought the piano into the house, there was a group of people, old and young, who looked with envy to the floor, from which long thick ropes were hanging. The neighbors in the building looked at me like I was a millionaire, and all my children looked at me with such pride that they could not even talk to one another. Even my yidene began to get puffed up and every day told the butcher he should be so good as to deliver the order to the house, rather than to shlep herself to him with her basket. She had already become a real lady!

My Betsy already knew how to play a little piano from earlier. She had already taken some lessons, and at night, after supper, we should get together in the parlor and Betsy said that she would play us a little something on the piano. She laid out a page with notes on it and began to work with her fingers. But work today, work tomorrow – The piano began to screech just like a wagon wheel that someone had forgotten to grease. And even though even I didn't understand notes, nevertheless I quickly saw that the piano had diphtheria, and needed a doctor.

“Papa!” said my Besty, “Somebody tricked you. This must be an ancient piano, with just a little varnish to make it look new.”

We all gathered around the piano. Each one of us petted it, tickled it, picked at the keys, we also tried being tough with it: Smack! Smack! But it did no good! The piano would not work. Even my yidene tried working the keys. She also wanted it to work.

“Yidene!” I yelled out, “Where there is two, you have to be three. What are you doing, like you know what a piano is? A piano is a unique machine. It is a machine with a soul. Every key has in it its own tone. One sings, “Do,” the other sings “Re,” the third “La,” and after them goes “Me,” “Fa,” and “So.” And then they go back: So, Fa, Me, La, Re, Do. Isn't that true, Betsy? And you, yidene, want to teach us piano playing!”

“Ai, you are such an expert! Called out my yidene, “A genius, a genius and everybody calls for you. Ah nu, be an expert now and see to it that they give you your money back. Or, another piano.”

“I'll show you that I am an expert!” I said. I threw my coat on and ran off to the piano store on the avenue.

I ran more than I walked and my heart pounded inside me because of the big scandal. How can it be, to

fool me so badly and give me a piano that is dumb. When I got to the place, I saw that the store was closed. It was already about 10 o'clock at night, but I thought that they had closed early just because of me.

On the door of the store I saw a card where it was written the address of the storekeeper's home. I was off in a shot, it wasn't far. I rang the bell. A sleepy servant came to the door and asked me who I was looking for.

"Mr. Taplitski will I see," I answered.

"He is already asleep," said the servant.

"Wake him up, it is very important," I said to him.

In about ten minutes Mr. Taplitski came out in his night-clothes, and when he saw me he called out, "What is with you?"

"The piano I that I bought from you will not play," I said.

Mr. Teplitski stared at me for perhaps two minutes, and then he asked:

"Mister, are you in your right mind?"

"Yes," I answered him, "Now I am in my right mind. "I have just realized that you dumped on me a worthless, second-hand rag."

"See, Mister," said Mr. Teplitski full of anger, "You should know that I am a man with a reputation. Most likely no one at your place knows how to play the piano, or there is another cause. Whatever the story is, in the morning I will send a man and see what is going on. Indeed, why are you making such a tararam? All together you have only put out six dollars – today, why are your hands trembling? Go home and tomorrow we will fix everything. Good night!"

When I got home, I was greatly surprised: Besty had played the song "Rozhinkes mit Mandlen" so good, so beautifully, it was a joy to the soul. In the time that I was gone, the piano had suddenly healed itself.

"So already, its all right?" I asked greatly surprised.

"Everyone laughed, when I came in with this question. Only my yidene did not laugh.

"What happened," I asked.

"If you won't scream at Mama I will tell you," answered Betsy.

I had to promise, that I would not yell. Then Betsy explained everything:

"Nothing at all, Papa, It was just a small thing. Mama opened the top of the piano and hid there a bag of apples and a bag of fancy cakes, so that the children wouldn't find them and eat them.

“Yidene!” I yelled, because I couldn't hold myself back. But Betsy gave me a look, and I shut myself up.

A couple of days later there was another story, that we just had to laugh at, and the guilty party was the piano.

Since we moved the piano into the house, everyone began to look askance at the sewing machine, which we had owned for a few years. Earlier the sewing machine was kept in the parlor. Due to the piano the sewing machine was moved to one of the bedrooms, and in the end my yidene decided that we should just sell it.

On Betsy's advice I looked in the newspaper advertisements, to see if there was someone who was looking to buy a sewing machine.

I found an advertisement from someone who said that he was wanting a sewing machine, that was a little bit underused. He asked that if anyone had such a machine they should write to the newspaper at box number 23.

I got a post card and wrote the following:

Mister dear sir, Box Number 23:

Come to me in the evening. I have for you a real gem that will please you. You will be grateful to me.

Chaim the Customer Peddler

There I added my address.

Only one thing went wrong: When my postcard arrived at the newspaper office the bookkeeper made a mistake and put it in the wrong postal box.

The box where he threw my postcard actually belonged to a young man, who had advertised that he was seeking a bride, a maiden from upstanding parents.

Now imagine this: When this young man received my postcard, it never occurred to him that there was a mistake. I had written that I had “a real gem that would please him,” meaning a sewing machine, but he thought the gem was a bride.

That evening a young man came to my house he was 28-years old, done up like a dandy, in a cylinder hat, and a flower in his lapel. He said that he wanted to talk with me in private.

“With the greatest delight,” I answered him, “How can I be of service to you?”

“I have received your postcard,” he answered me, “and I have come to see the 'gem' that I had mentioned.” At that he cast an eye toward our front room where my daughters were sitting.

“With pleasure,” I said, “She is almost a new one.”

“What do you mean a “new” one?” He asked.

“I mean the she is still in good condition. She sews beautifully.”

“By what, for a job?” He asked.

“By everything, she does it all, she sews everything in the world,” I said.

“That's fine,” He said with a smile, “But, thanks be to G-d, I don't need her to work.”

“Well,” I said, “She can also serve as an ornament in any house. She is a 'beaut.' She is just like new. She has been with me in my home for four years.”

“I don't understand,” he said, “You keep harping on her being 'new.' What do you mean by that, that she is 'new?’”

“I mean, that she is not old,” I explained to him.

“Ha,” he said and smiled, “And where was she before? You said that she has only been here four years.”

“I should know where she was before? – In the factory.”

“What kind of a factory?” he asked.

“A factory where they make sewing machines.”

“And what is she doing now?”

“She just sits there by herself. That's why I want to sell her.”

“What do you mean 'sell?' he asked, surprised.

“It means,” I said, “for ten dollars you can have her. But you are going to have to pay for a wagon to take her away.”

“What's going on here?” The young man called out rubbing his forehead, “I don't think we are understanding one another.”

“I understand you completely,” I said, “You want to buy a sewing machine and I want to sell one. Come and take a look at her. And if you like the machine, just give me ten dollars and she is yours.”

“Oy,” The man slapped himself on the chest. He looked at me with a strange look, and I couldn't tell if he wanted to laugh or cry.

And after he told me why he had come here, we figured out that there was a mistake made at the newspaper office.

The sewing machine in the meantime is still in my house.

### 13. He goes to a “vecherinka” and comes home hungry

Ai, was that a vecherinka! It overflowed over your ears, as the saying goes, but nothing came into the mouth.

But let me tell you the story in the order it happened, right from the beginning.

One of my customers got me a ticket to a vecherinka. In the beginning I did not know what it was, a vecherinka, and what one did there. He explained to me, my customer, that in New York is come a new hero from the homeland, and to honor the event there would be a little party, a concert along with a dinner, where the hero would eat and speak.

I asked, “What is he for a hero? What has he done? Did he become president of a provisional republic in Berdichev? Was he subject to a letter with Nicholas' black signature at the top? Did he assassinate a minister of state?”

“No,” answered my customer, “This is the kind of hero he is. He has come to raise money in America.”

I was really curious to see such a hero, and when the vecherinka evening arrived, I went to the designated place for the event. It goes without saying that I have taken with me my yidene because the ticket was for a gentleman and his lady. I thought: She might as well come along, in either case it was still going to cost me a dollar.

By eight-thirty the hall was already totally packed, and around the hero a crowd was churning with people who had come to shake his hand. You could see that everyone was happy. I also went to grab his hand, and he gave it such a powerful squeeze that I had to cry out “Stop!” I was forgetting that he was a greener in America. After that my yidene was afraid to go to him to shake his hand. About that time I saw one of my customers. “Nu, you have already shaken the hero's hand?” I asked him. “Yes,” he answered me, “I have been to him twice and shook his hand two times. He didn't recognize me.”

“Who are you talking about, the hero?” A third person mixed in. “I spoke with him for a full two minutes. He is a true Russian. In the past he was an anti-Semite, but now he says that he loves Jews more than his own life. Once when he was speaking, he let slip the word, “*tsede* [kike],” but he quickly caught himself and used, “*yevrey* [Jew].” I spoke with him for a full three minutes, maybe four.”

“I talked to him for, perhaps, six minutes,” a fourth person called over to us as he came into the group.

“And I came he with him in the same streetcar!” He said loudly with great pride.

“I don't quite understand how that is such a great privilege?” My yidene broke in, “Who is he? Is he the millionaire who married a Jewish girl?”

I gave a pull on my yidene's arm, but it was already too late. She had already said her foolishness out loud, and everyone laughed.

“Yidene!” I said to her as I steered her off to the side, “I have already told you that he is a hero, a new

Russian hero, right off the boat.”

“He is not so much of a hero,” She said emphatically, “Look at him, just a short *sheygets* [gentile].”

“Yidene!” I said to her with a lowered voice, “One shouldn't say *sheygets*, he is a hero, a lover of Israel; haven't you heard what everyone is saying: His heart goes out to it. It doesn't matter that sometimes he is still saying “*tsede*,” that's nothing more than an old habit.”

The chairman called the meeting to order, and the hero had begun speaking. He spoke about money, and nothing else, and made his remarks very short. Several ladies soon came out with plates and began collecting donations exactly like Yom Kippur evening in shul. I had a nickel on me which was worn down on both sides. I thought to myself, if he is really a hero he will quickly squander it. I tossed it in the collection plate.

“What are you?” A young man sitting next to me suddenly asked.

“A customer peddler,” I answered him.

“That's not what I mean,” said the young man, “I mean: Are you a Socialist-Zionist, a Socialist-Territorialist, or something else?”

“I have a lot of different customers,” I answered him, “If they pay regularly, I stick a little with one and a little with another.”

“Then you are a bourgeois,” the young man answered me.

“And what are you?” I asked him a little peeved, because my heart told me “bourgeois” didn't mean 'a fine man.'

“I am a Decadent,” he answered me, “I am one of the new Hebrews. I have translated the famous Russian “Eight Blessings” into modern Hebrew, and I have freely reworked the Kamarinskaya in translation, and soon I am going to dramatize the telephone directory in the Hebrew tongue.”

The collection had brought in a pretty sum and the hero climbed back up on the platform and explained, in Russian, that in order to express his pleasure he would be allowing another collection.

For the next collection I had to give away a good nickel.

After the second collection the chairman explained that in order to make a similar tally they would need another five dollars. He asked a lady to go around again among the people with a collection plate.

When the chairman had counted the money, he said that the third collection had brought in more than the wished for sum, and that in order to match that sum we needed another eight dollars.

The third and the forth times when the lady with the plate came to me, I shut my eyes and dreamily napped.

After the fourth collection the chairman said that now everyone should go downstairs into the basement where some food had been prepared.

"It is certainly not kosher," my yidene said.

"Well," I said, "We in that case we simply will not go to the table. They will undoubtedly charge a quarter for a sandwich, ten cents a banana, and the whole pocketbook for a little glass of wine. You have seen that for nothing they take your money, how much do you think they will take for food?"

During this time people were pushing and shoving to get to the basement, me and my yidene remained in the hall.

Soon the janitor came by to turn out the gaslights.

"Why aren't you going down to eat?" he asked us in Yiddish.

"We are afraid that it's not kosher," I answered him.

"Well," the janitor called to us, "There are a lot of things prepared that every Jew can eat: sardines, herring with olives, Swiss cheese, anchovies, and it is also there plenty tea."

Since I was ashamed to say to him that we didn't want to spend any more money, we went down to the basement.

There we sat down to one side, and no one even invited us to come to the table. They all clustered together and ate until I thought they would split in two. They were grabbing four and five pieces of bread and made from them multi-layered sandwiches. Apples, bananas and oranges they stuffed in their pockets. It didn't take long until the table was empty.

"Go, get a sandwich," my yidene said, "Just a little piece of bread with herring. You are going weak in the heart. How much will they take from you for that? Certainly not a whole dollar."

"I'm not hungry," I answered, because I understood that she meant that she was hungry and I should buy her something. And I went over to the table.

"Too late, Mister!" The Decadent said to me, "There is already nothing left to eat!"

"What would it cost for the leftover pieces of bread laying there on the plate?" I asked him.

"It costs nothing!" he hollered back to me, "Go ahead and take it."

"What do you mean it doesn't cost anything?" I asked, surprised, "Is this a free meal?"

"It's not free," the young man explained, "You have already paid for the ticket, and the ticket price is for the meal too, for the tea and the sandwiches, everything."

I took the bread fragments along with the head of a herring and carried it back to my yidene. When I explained to her what kind of an error we had made and missed a good meal, she said:

"It was inevitable that everyone should eat on our dollar."

"What are you talking about?" I said, "It cost a dollar with ten cents!"



“Yes, it was a vecherinka that I will never forget. And whenever I get hungry, I will remind myself about the vecherinka, and in my ears I will hear the melody from “Dubinushka,” the song that I heard there.”

## 14. At a *bris* in Brownsville he saw great wonders

A while back I received an invitation to a *bris*. When I looked at the invitation to see from whom it came, I was very much surprised. It came from a customer of mine who always held himself to be a great heretic – and what a heretic! Truly a man who believed in absolutely nothing and made a wreck of Jewish culture.

I was very interested to go to this *bris* to see how such a heretic would fulfill this commandment. When I arrived I already found there a huge crowd. I was a little late, as usual, due to the darned business I'm in. The *mohel* [Rabbi who performs circumcisions] had already prepared his knife, and the other Jews, relatives from the father's side and relatives from the mother's side were talking quietly among themselves. Since I could not hear what they were saying I stood to one side and waited for the wedding to begin – the *bris* I meant to say.

The father of the boy, when he spotted me, came over to me and shook hands. “I don't put any stock in *brises*, I don't believe in them,” he said to me, “It was only because of the family that I had to give in. They all ganged up on me, and because of them I had to give in.” I thought to myself, “Aha, friend, when a man does not fear G-d, He sends him a family: A father-in-law, a mother-in-law, close relatives, distant relatives – a good punishment!” That is what I thought to myself, and in the meantime I saw that they had picked up the infant.

What can I tell you about that? It was a *bris*, like all *brises*. The friend of the family who was delegated to bring the infant to the ceremony handed the child over to the godparent, the *mohel* did what he was there to do, and the new little Jew howled – and how he howled! From the way he was screaming you could easily believe that he agreed with his father and did not care for circumcisions either. Nu, I thought to myself, nevertheless, little one, you are now in our hands. When you grow up you can say what you want. But you will always be a Jew. That is already a done deal. Even if you end up forgetting every word of Yiddish; even if you change your name; present yourself as a Frenchman or a Tartar; even if you renounce everything that is bound up with Jews and Jewish culture, you will always be a Jew! Today we had you fixed.

And just as I was thinking these thoughts, they brought the baby back and I ran to the father to wish him “*Mazel Tov!*” I wanted to be among the first. He is by me a good customer. However, one of the family members took my arm, and whispered into my ear: “It is still going on, wait a moment.” I looked at him with surprise, because I did not understand what he meant. But in the next moment I realized what he was talking about. It was only a minute and a different godparent took a place at the table, and at the door appeared a new family friend, and needless to say, a new infant.

A twin – I thought to myself. It is bestowed on him, the heretic, a doubled obligation! When the Almighty wants to settle accounts with someone, He does it up right. It was a repeat of the same ceremony with all the trappings and even the same howling. The *mohel* sang the blessings with great enthusiasm, and the passage “..I said unto thee, in thy blood live.” The near and the distant relatives joined in the singing as is the custom with Jews: Each wants to show that they have a little of the cantor in them, a bit of a song-smith; everyone hummed along, chimed in with a word here a word there, in order to show that knew the whole thing. Soon, after everyone had finished fussing over the second baby, I mean to say, after the ceremony came to an end, the same family member whispered in my ear again, “That's still not all.”

"I don't mean to put the evil eye on things," I said to him, "but could you perhaps tell me what is going on? I read something in the newspapers about a kindergarten, I am not sure I know exactly what that is, but seems like in America there are, perhaps, such gardens where kids grow like trees and beanstalks."

"Don't talk foolishness, dear sir!" He said to me a little peeved, "It's triplets, they should be healthy and strong. My relative is a little bit of a fool. The whole time his wife was pregnant, he went around telling people that if it was a boy he was not going to have him circumcised. Nu, so the Master of the Universe sent him three, and he had to have all three circumcised. What then? A choice he had? Where is the family?"

The third baby howled even louder than his two brothers. But I payed no more attention than I would to an alley cat. When they finished up the triple *bris*, we all sat down at a big table, and the ladies brought out one course after another. It was an incredible feast.

Directly across from me I noticed a man that did not seem to have a Jewish face. I asked, "Who is he?" Someone answered that it was the landlord of the building, a Christian, A German, that they had invited to the supper because he happened to come today to collect the rent. I saw that the German did not seem to like the gefilte fish, nor the gefilte helzel [stuffed chicken neck skins]. A German is not a Russian and he does not have a taste for Jewish delicacies. I saw how he chewed, just like the devil had violently stopped up his throat, and I noted that he held his breath so as not to smell the odor of the onions as he chewed. I thought to myself, there lies revenge on the gentile, revenge for all of the non-kosher things that stick in our throats, oysters, crayfish and other vermin. I can just imagine how our non-kosher food would sit on the stomach, and how the gall would churn, but it would be a good lesson on morality if we ate vermin such as reptiles. But now let me sate my eyes with revenge and watch a gentile eat chopped fish filled with onions, steamed chicken with garlic, and chicken neck skins stuffed with a completely mysterious filling – (Could I even guess what the gentile suspects the skins are filled with!) So it is, my dear German, I thought to myself, swallow and let your gall churn the way it churns for our oyster-eaters and crayfish-eaters. Oy, revenge, how sweet you are!

We had eaten and toasted "L'Chaim," and wished the heretic that he should raise his children in the Torah, both in their marriage and in their actions.

"That is to say: In equality, liberty and brotherhood," answered the heretic.

"Certainly, that too, why not? Equality is after all a Jewish trait. All Jewish children are the sons of kings, princes. Freedom, nu, if not today – then when the Messiah comes, and all Jews are friends, brothers. You are also a brother. Ai, while you are not a believer, you are a heretic? Nu, you are still a Jew!

"That is to say: You are for equality, freedom and brotherhood." – said the man sitting next to me.

"Yes, that I am," was my answer to him.

"I want to talk business with you," he said to me quietly, "Here in Brownsville a club for young people has started up that has for its goal to marry only *shiksas* [non-Jewish women]. I can recommend to you a few among them who are in need of household furnishings. But first I want to make with you a little business."

“Are you also from this group, I mean to say, from this club?” I said.

“Yes,” he answered, “And I have already married a *shiksa* at the courthouse. Come visit me. I live in this block, and if you deal with me fairly and give me some good bargains, I will recommend you to other customers.”

After the dinner I went with him. And I'll tell you the truth, I was curious to see his *shiksa*. On the way he told me that his *shiksa* can speak Yiddish and speak it quite well. So well that one would think that she was a Jewish girl.

“Maybe she is a Jewish girl?” I asked him.

“Oh go on, you foolish guy!” He said a little peeved with me. “Jews think everybody is a Jew. Whenever they see a famous man they cry out that he is a Jew. For every great actress, they claim that she is a Jewish girl, and you want to convince yourself that my Florence is a Jewish girl. A foolish Jew, that's what you are! Her name is Florence McCarthy. Nu, can that be a Jewish name? Have you ever met a Jew named McCarthy?”

“Occasionally, among the Jews there are Sheffields, Joneses, Bartletts, Tracys, John Kellys, and even MacLevys, but from a McCarthy I have not yet heard.”

“You see,” he said to me in a tone like “Aha.”

We continued walking. He was in front and followed behind him. When I entered the house and saw his *shiksa*, I recognized her as an old acquaintance and I wanted to cry out, “Bailke!” But my new customer got in my way and began introducing me, “This is Mr. Chaim the Customer Peddler – This is Miss Florence McCarthy.” And with that he made it clear that even though she was his wife, it was the fashion now that the wife be referred to using her own maiden name.

And me – I was hardly listening to what he was saying to me – I couldn't take my eyes off of the woman. What was he telling me, Florence McCarthy? But that's Bailke, Bailke Avremel the hat-maker's daughter from Kopyl. I would have recognized her anywhere! She had worked for a while with my Jenny, my youngest daughter, in an office, and she often came to our house. Now, if you please, a Florence McCarthy!

The woman also recognized me, and she gave me a wink, and gave me a sign by putting her finger to her lips. I understood that I was supposed to keep quiet, and I simply said, “I am pleased to meet you Bail' – Miss McCarthy. Mazel tov to you.”

At that point he laughed and said to her:

“He can't speak English. He says “mazel tov” that means he congratulates you on your marriage.”

I didn't say anything, but in my heart I thought to myself: Ai, Bailke, you are very accomplished! You could teach a hard lesson to a club member who insists on having a *shiksa*! He will soon be getting his just deserts in this world. Ai, and in the next world also. In this world he will have troubles from a Jewish daughter who will boss him like an Irishwoman, and in the next world she will flog him. Because, for as long as he thinks he is living with a *shiksa*, the rule is, it is the same thing as actually living with a *shiksa*.

Naturally, I only thought those things, in speaking I only spoke business. She ordered from me some curtains and two tablecloths, and I made a deal that they should pay me 50 cents a week.

Miss Florence McCarthy accompanied me a little way into the hall. "Good bye," she said to me. "You are a very smart Jew, a genius. I was afraid you would say something. Give your family my greetings, and when you come collecting bring me some Yiddish newspapers, and maybe a storybook to read. I will pay you for it. But just make sure my husband doesn't find out about it!"

I assured her that she had nothing to fear, and I left.

## 15. A queen on Shavuot

This is how the story went: One evening my Betsy was playing at the piano something of an overture and the entire family was sitting in the parlor. A young man came to us and said that he wanted to talk business. I had to ask him to come sit in the kitchen. Where else could I put him? I saw right away that he was a greener. In Strashele or in Budrovne would he have seen a better kitchen? And incidentally, my kitchen is also my dining room, and my library because in the parlor are sitting always the children and for me the kitchen is always quieter, and there a body can, after supper, read a newspaper, smoke a cigar, and the children won't bother me. Soon, the young man asked me if I could sell him an engagement ring with a diamond in it. I asked, "How much do you want to spend?" He said, "A dollar and a half a week." Said I, "For two dollars a week I can give you a fine ring, that is worth 130 dollars for 100 dollars. It's a bargain."

I asked him some questions to find out where he came from and what he did for a living here in America. He told me that he is from Borisov, and that he works at the smoke shop and had just gotten a beautiful bride with a dowry of a few hundred dollars. And that is just how he talked about his bride and about himself, right out of his mouth as though to say – Listen, listen!

"I make there good wages, and often send my wife 50 rubles at a time --- --- ---"

When he said that he caught himself and said:

"Pew, what am I rambling on about? I am so much in love that I am talking as though Goldetshke was already my wife."

I didn't hear anything he said after that. His words, that he blurted out just a moment ago, ran hard right up my nose. It caused me to remember what the Baal Shem Tov [Jewish mystical rabbi who lived 1700 – 1760] once said: When someone does something they shouldn't do, they have to talk about it. The story with the Baal Shem Tov was this: The good, holy Jew was traveling with his students in his coach. In the middle of the trip he took out a flask of whiskey and toasted "L'Chaim." To eat they had some onions, but they didn't have any salt. They searched for the salt in their travel bags. The Baal Shem's coachman called to them: "Give me here an onion, by me it is all right that it has no salt." When the Baal Shem Tov heard that, he hollered back: "That Jew there eats non-kosher food, his wife doesn't salt the meat."

You see, in this story lies a deeper wisdom. And the minute the young man spoke the words, "I send my wife 50 rubles," like lightning a thought came into my head, and the whole story became clear to me. Yes, I said to myself, you are a real playboy to have at home a wife and here a marriage contract with an innocent young girl. You need to learn a lesson.

I promised to bring him a ring in a couple of days. Also I asked him who the young lady was and where she lived, and a few other things I needed to know.

That same evening I went off to visit with "Goldetshke."

Goldie Kronbart was her name. She had lodgings with a Missus who came from the same town. I had a little chat with Goldie and I told her the whole story.

The young lady cried bitter tears when I told her what was going on. However, I calmed her down and told her not to worry because here in New York prospective bridegrooms were everywhere like dogs in the street, and much finer and handsomer grooms than the one she had, and they were single to boot.

The young lady and I agreed that she should accept the engagement ring and keep it, since it will be a tin ring with glass stones. Ai, what, you think he will notice before he gives it to her? – Nu, that is something I will fix right away. I can get such imitations in Broadway that would fool even an expert as to which one is real. Ai, what, you think he will notice? Nu, to hell with him! Let him have me arrested. I'll get some shots in first.

“The most important thing is,” I said to the young woman, “is that you must act as though you know nothing about what is going on and behave toward him as though you are going to take him as a husband. We must play a comedy for him.”

When I left the young woman, I made my way to a clockmaker, a smithy from back in the homeland, a healthy guy with hands like iron, and a natural propriety, like G-d gave him. On top of that he is a smart boy, full of imagination and playfulness. He always love to settle up with people who do shabby tricks or act like a louse. I knew that he could help me with this business. He and I agreed on a plan of action.

The clockmaker the next morning went to the young man's apartment, Mr. Krupnik was his name, and had a private talk with the Missus, by whom Mr. Krupnik ate his boarding house meals.

And a few nights later a really wonderful thing happened. Listen carefully:

Mr. Krupnik received the ring from me and immediately took it to Goldie, who he still thought was going to be his bride. Not suspecting anything wrong, he sat with her until 11 o'clock. After that he left and went home. As soon as he got there he undressed and went to bed.

He turned the gaslight down and laid down in total darkness.

As soon as he laid down in bed, he heard a sound as if someone made a movement in the corner. He got up to take a look, but in that instant there stood before him a huge figure wearing a prayer shawl and burial shrouds. “Hear oh Israel” sputtered Mr. Krupnick. He did not even have the strength to cry out. The “Deadman” walked up to him and closed both hands around his neck and began to choke him and how he choked him! And at the same time the Deadman said to him with a heated voice:

“I am the father of the young girl, the orphan Goldie, who, you son of a gun, want to deceive. I am going to strangle you right now and carry you off to stand trial in heaven, unless you, you greenhorn you, promise me to send a ticket to your wife in Borisov then I will leave you alone this time. But next time I will finish you off.”

The “Deadman,” (that is my friend, the clockmaker), gave Krupnick an extra squeeze with his iron grip around his neck, and without waiting for an answer the Deadman left through the door which opened by itself. That is to say, it was opened from the outside, where I was standing along with the Missus of the house and her husband.

I left right away with the Deadman who had pulled off his shrouds in the hallway. “How did you like my acting?” He asked me. “I could be a great actor, huh?”

“Everything,” I said, “went all right, but as a spirit from the next world you shouldn't have said words like, “son of a gun,” “greenhorn,” and “finish you.” Her father never came to America, how would he know such words? The playboy could think about that and figure out it was a bluff.”

“Never mind,” the clockmaker comforted me, “He won't figure it out. I scared him so bad, he will be afraid to doubt anything.”

Four or five days after this event the same Mr. Krupnick came to me. The minute I saw him I was astonished. He himself looked like a dead person – I mean, really, like a dead man. His face was pale, sunken, his eyes red and sleepless, and on his neck were still visible deep finger marks.

“I have come,” he said to me, “to ask your advice. I have fallen into trouble, and I will never forget the favor if you rescue me from the trouble.”

“Aha,” I said, “You used the word 'trouble.' Are you no longer a greener?”

“Trouble? Trouble is a Yiddish word,” he said to me, “By us in Russia every Jew knows what is trouble. What Jew doesn't have his own trouble? Yes, but for the moment I want to ask you about something. It is, maybe, something foolish – but I want to know – – – just don't laugh at me. I want to know if the dead can speak all languages.”

“Yes,” I said, “The dead can speak in any language in the world: German, French, Tartar and even modern Hebrew.”

“And English also?” Krupnick asked.

“Certainly English. English is soon to become a Jewish language, already. A lot of Jews speak English. Even Jews that don't know it speak it. But say, you came to tell me about a trouble.”

“Here is the story,” he said to me, “I was a little untruthful with you. Made a mistake, as you would say... Back home I left a woman, and I thought she would be content to get divorced from me. During that time I got my head mixed up with a marriage contract the way you do things here in America. – As soon as one ends one business he starts up another business. Now I am taking pity on my wife, she has brought my two children into the world! Meantime I have bought a ring from you on credit and I have given it to a young woman that I am engaged to.”

I wanted to jump on the young man and tear him apart like a herring, but I decided that I had best be a politician.

“I understand what you are trying to say,” I said to him, “You want, first, to cancel the marriage contract, and second, you want to get the ring back and give it back to me. Don't worry yourself, I will get the ring back from the young lady. You can get it back from me for cash or on time.”

“I have already mailed the steamship tickets,” he answered.

“Too bad,” I said, “I was counting on you to earn a few dollars. But perhaps you can give me a show for other items that you will be needing like furniture and housewares.”



“I will certainly want to talk to you about that,” he answered me, and we settled right down to talk business.

When we finished, I said to him, “Go in peace back to your lodgings and don't worry about anything. You will have the furniture and all the accessories; take comfort that even though you did not have a queen for Passover, you will have a queen for Shavout.”

And indeed just this week his queen arrived, and I furnished five rooms for them, and Mr. Krupnick will have to pay me two dollars with fifty cents per week.

## 16. He moves out to Blotetown

Wish me Mazel Tov – I am, already, a landlord.

Why so suddenly out of the clear sky? Don't ask questions. I have a house that is registered in my own name. I have a first mortgage, a second mortgage, and a third mortgage. I will have to pay and pay. But, I will be paying that out for my own house, for my lot (40 by 100), and I am a landlord! I have a tenant below, I have a tenant above, and I live in the middle like a slice of salami in a sandwich. I get rent from above and I get rent from below, and get enough to pay the builder, two mortgage companies and a rich Jew, a moneylender, may G-d not punish me talking about it.

Now I will tell you how it came about that I became a landlord.

There came to me an agent for a real estate company a couple of weeks ago, and said that he had a house to sell to me in Blotetown [Mudtown], a 30-minute trip from New York. The house could be bought from a Christian. It is very evident and clear that from a *goy* [gentile] you can always get a bargain, because what does a gentile know, a stopped-up head, a donkey? Esau sold a birthright for a pot of lintels and Jacob made from them a fortune, a kingdom, with a Torah and with matzos. And that is the way it has been up to the present day. Christians sell their houses for next to nothing, and Jews make of them a golden deal, and become powerful, wealthy men.

“Let's give him a deposit right away,” my yidene said to me when I told her about the house, “Not everyday do you have the chance to buy a house from a Christian. A gentile – whatever you give him is by him all right. A gentile doesn't know what a house is worth. We should grab it quickly.”

“I will tell you a joke,” the agent mixed in, “In Flatbush a Christian had a little house with a big lot around it, and in the middle of the lot was a small lake with fish in it, and trees were nearby. A real estate agent from Harlem, a real gambler, cast his eye on the big lot and went off to the *goy* to talk about a purchase. The gentile at the beginning did not want to hear a word about selling. His father and his grandfather were born on that land, and his children loved the lake and the woods. They liked the fishing and playing ball and tennis. Shortly, the real estate agent offered him a price – a price it was like a pot full of lintels. The gentile thought about it and went to talk it over with his father. The old man told him to demand a better price. In short they asked for a few more lintels, and the birthright, that is to say the whole lot, with the woods, with the lake, and with the house came into Jewish hands. And since it was now in Jewish hands, it was no longer a woods, a lake, a house – it became a business. The woods were chopped down, the lake was filled in, the house became lumber and junk. Then the Harlem real estate agent divided the huge piece of land into small lots and started building houses. While he was in the middle of all this building he was approached by an American millionaire, a sport, it goes without saying he was a Christian, and he took a liking to the place. Why? Because it was on a hill! Ha, ha, ha! By a *goy* to climb up a hill is a great pleasure. In short, the rich *goy* went to have a talk with the Harlem real estate agent: “I will give you so much and so much if you close the deal with me right on the spot. The Harlemer said to him: “Do you want me to finish building the houses, or do you want to finish building them?” The answer from the gentile, the millionaire: “To hell with your shanties. Stop the work immediately. I am going to make there a palace to live in. In a short time, here – there, the Jew earned five times as much as it cost him, and now he is a wealthy, powerful man. Guess what the *goy* did with the place. A nu, guess!”

“I would know?” I responded, “Who knows what a *goy* might think up?”

“The *goy*,” the agent went on to say, “first off tore down the half-built houses. Then he brought in maybe a hundred workers. He brought in diggers to dig out a lake bed, gardeners to plant little gardens and flowers. The *goy* had from the expensive lot once again made a forest, and all the real estate agents laughed themselves silly.

“Nu, you see, Chaim, how a gentile is a fool,” my yidene mixed in.

“But wait,” said the agent, “that is not all. Let me tell you what happened next: When the *meshuganah* [crazy] *goy* was done with his little lake, his little gardens, his flowers and trees, and the place began to look like a true forest, and he had already laid the foundation for a big palace, he suddenly once again gave his matted hair a spin. Why? He wasn't happy about the fact that Jews were moving into the area. In the middle of a Wednesday he stopped all work on the place, and a big sign went up, “Lots for Sale, cheap.” Anyhow, why should I draw the story out? The place once again came back into the hands of our brothers. They had to again spend a pretty couple of thousand dollars to fill in the lake, chop down the woods, and clear out all of the foolishness. Now there are house built there of three and four floors, with stores under them and basements. – It has become a business street! There is where you can see what can happen when you deal with a *goy*. All Jews should only do business with the *goyim*.”

I said: “Unfortunately, the rule doesn't always hold. I am a customer peddler, I know. A *goy* can also fool you. A *goy*, if you are not paying attention, can also cause your head to spin right off. A *goy*, for the most part are like dumb animals and you can get real bargains. A *goy* is a naïve creature, and a gentile that is innocent can be believed.”

“And I say to you,” my yidene mixed in, “You should not make any delays. To buy a house from a Christian you are sure to get a bargain. Yenta Avromche's husband, bought a house from a Christian and he had it two weeks and sold it, and says that he made 500 dollars profit. He could have made more but he was in a hurry to sell. He won't say why.”

“One has to be very careful with such bargains,” said the agent, “because today there are a lot of real estate agents who bluff that they are Christians so that people should think that they are getting bargains. If I give you a Christian, it will be a real gentile, not someone from Minsk or Berdichev who makes like he is a Yankee.”

“But Avromche Yenta's bought from a real Christian,” my yidene called out, a little peeved, “Yenta told me herself that he was a German.”

“Probably from Kalvarija [Lithuania],” answered the agent, “A fake! I know many such fakers. Write on a sign, “This lot for sale, inquire Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick,” and when you go to see the seller, you meet Yenkel ber Baruch, a *landsman* [fellow countryman] from Kapulea. But that's enough of that. We'll do better to talk business.”

We started to talk business. The house costs 7 thousand dollars. On four thousand there is already a first mortgage, on two thousand is already there a second mortgage, and a thousand you must pay in cash. But were does one get a thousand dollars cash, while the little cash I have is with my customers, they should be torn apart – no. I don't mean that at all. That is just the way things are. But the agent had some advice for me: He knows a man, a fine gentleman, where you can get money on a third mortgage. He will want a small percent, and perhaps no percent at all. How do they say it in nowadays? It is worth it to give the shirt off your back in order to become a landlord!

He recalculated once again how much the expenses would be on the house in the first year, interest, taxes, repairs, insurance, all and all, *vidmoye ni vidmoye*, as we used to say in the old country. He took me right away to the moneylender and he agreed to give me a five hundred dollar mortgage, provided he only gives me four hundred dollars and therefor doesn't charge me a percent.

“It is all right,” the agent said to me, “in any case you won't be paying off the mortgage in full. You will probably find an interested party soon who will give you a thousand dollar profit, and he will be the one to pay the difference. A lot of people do it that way.”

I wasn't entirely happy with the plan. But the agent was so insistent that I couldn't hold out against him. Also I wanted to end this business quickly, and meet with the *goy*. Because a gentile is after all a gentile – one can give him just a dollar more and he will close a deal with anyone.

In two days time I completed the whole business. The man who sold me the house was, indeed, a real Christian. He even said 'sheenys' all the time and wanted to kill all the Jews because of them he had to sell his house and move elsewhere where he wouldn't have to see them. I'm thinking: Bill, you Balaam, you. You are sick at heart because you have to move? What do you know, when the *goyim* forced us from our homes? OK, we may sometimes make you move. But we are more honorable than you gentiles – We pay you for your moving; so drag yourself away, my gentile, and forget about us just like we are going to forget about you. That's how I dressed-down the gentile – It goes without saying that I said those words in my heart and not out loud to the gentile. The papers were all made out, I managed to handle the remaining money. And for sure, a week later with *mazel* and with my family we moved into our new house, – What happened after that I will tell you in the next chapter.

## 17. He has business with a plumber

I am a landlord and live in an individual house.

Day and night I walk around and repeat to myself: "I am a landlord" a little bit as though I don't believe my good luck. Such a thing can only happen in a lucky America. The house I am living in, it seems, is not mine, it has on it three mortgages, yet it is my own house, my own property.

I have a tiny garden in the yard, that is, it used to be a garden. The gentile had time to devote to it. I can't take a bath. I have a bathtub in the house, a big bathtub, but I use it to hold my stock: rugs, wall clocks, fancy tablecloths and albums.

I am a landlord, and my two tenants say to me "Good morning," and "Good evening" every time I meet them in the hall, and they pay me rent.

On the third floor lives by me Mr. Sheftelson, "Peaceful Socialist." That is to say, he has a lucrative business in a Jewish neighborhood in New York, and he says, that one can change the world with goodness. He is a member of our *shul* "Temple Jacob" and the gossip is that he will soon be vice-president. My other tenant who lives on the ground floor, is named Lipkinson and is a Culture Zionist. He does not hold by Yiddish culture and not for a Jewish homeland, – only for Jewish culture. When I ask him: "What is Jewish culture?" He answers me: "The Jewish culture is a unique culture and differentiates itself from other cultures." And I don't go any farther. I am afraid to ask him any more questions. I am ashamed, being his landlord, that I don't know what culture is.

It is good that I am staying in the middle, on the second floor. Because if my two tenants were closer to each other wild animals wouldn't be safe. Every time they meet with each other a debate immediately ensues, and quickly escalates to a battle, and soon you are hearing name-calling like, "hypocrite, antagonist, empty-slogan maker, dreamer, and idiot." These wars continue even when each is sitting by himself in his own little corner through phonographs. Each one has a phonograph, and when Mr. Sheftelson starts to play the Marseillaise, Mr. Lipkinson puts on the Hatikvah [National Anthem of Israel]. If Mr. Sheftelson plays "My Papa is a Socialist," Mr. Lipkinson stops the Hatikvah in the middle and put on "There where the Cedar Blooms." An afterwards from the third floor you hear, "The Oath," then from the ground floor you hear, "Israelites come home." When the concert plays itself out, the two of them stick their heads out of their windows and fling questions at each other:

"Eh, Mr. Comrade Sheftelson, who's going to be the last person to read the Torah in a Socialist society?"

"How can you have a Jewish homeland without land and without Jews?" Mr. Sheftelson answers back. And so the war goes on through half the night.

Tuesday one of my tenants came to me and said that a pipe was running in his flat. I told him to cut a piece of soft bread and stop it up. He laughed at me and said that I should send for McNally. I asked him: "Who is this McNally?" He said: "Why, you don't know? McNally is the plumber for Blotetown. He fixes all of the pipes." In short, I sent my youngest boy, Benele, after Mr. McNally. The plumber gave a look at the hole, took out a steel probe from his pocket and worked it into the hole, and it became a little bigger, and the water ran out faster. I said: "Mr. McNally, what will the job cost?" He

said: "It will be all right. By me all charges are reasonable." He left, saying that he would come right back with the tools, and all the while the water kept running and soaked the floors over my apartment. I saw my ceiling get soaked and begin to crack. I sent Benele again to Mr. McNally to tell him to hurry. After a few minutes, Mr. McNally returned with a horse and wagon on which were loaded his drills, pieces of lead, pumps and all sorts of equipment. – A whole hardware store. With him also came three young apprentices. I thought to myself this must be a big job. Mr. McNally lit his pipe, stuck his hands in the back pockets of his overalls and said to himself three time, "g-d damn it," spit into the rafters, watched how the water ran, and ran and spurted like a flood. Then he went down into the cellar. The water stopped running.

"Already fixed?" I asked.

"No," answered McNally, "I have totally shut off the water. Now I will start to fix it."

Then the apprentices began to unload the equipment. Mr. McNally then asked for a pitcher. I asked: "What sort of pitcher?" He answered: "Any pitcher, a tin one or a glass one, but a big one that can hold several pints of beer." Someone brought the beer and Mr. McNally sat off to the side on the floor and began to slurp the pints. Then he got a wrench in his hand and began to work. He worked fifteen minutes and two seconds then he stuck a big piece of chew tobacco in his mouth, another spit into the rafters and repeated, "g-d damn it," and started giving orders to his apprentices. One he told to go home, another to go back to the shop, and the third that he should take all the tools and load them back on the wagon. After about five minutes Mr. McNally reported to me that in the cellar he had found another leak, but a new one, that wasn't there before, and that the job was going to take another day, and maybe two, because he had a lot of appointments and could not finish all of them in a single day.

Meanwhile he had cut off all the water, and in the morning we had to *schlep* water from our neighbor, until Mr. McNally came back to finish the job.

This time he came alone. He brought with him only some lead and a piece of iron. He turned on a flame and one, two three – the two leaks were sealed and the water was once again flowing properly. "A job like this," Mr. McNally explained to me, "usually takes four or five days and sometimes a whole week. But I am so busy now I rushed this job up. You owe me eight dollars and seventeen cents."

"Seventeen cents?" I asked. I didn't even hear the eight dollars. I couldn't believe what he had said.

"Eight dollars and seventeen cents," said Mr. McNally quite calmly while smoking his pipe, and stuck his hands, as was his habit, in the back pockets of his overalls.

"It is too much," I said, "It is too big a price for such a small job."

"Look here," said Mr. McNally, "I had to put three people to work, and come here with horse and wagon and with tools. My expenses are very high. The seventeen cents is my whole profit. Do you think it is a little nothing to have leaking pipes in the house? I will show you – see?" With that he took the steel probe and flipped the lead patch off of the pipe and water began to spew out like a great river.

I stood there shaking. I didn't know what to do. I could see that I was in the plumber's hands.

In the middle of this I heard a clatter, a clap, a crash! My yidene ran up the stairs sobbing, out of breath, and screamed,: "Chaim! *Gewalt!* A big piece of the ceiling has fallen on the dishes in the

kitchen. All of the cups and all of the saucers are smashed! *Gevalt*, a catastrophe!”

“Stop the Water!” I begged Mr. McNally.

“Eight dollars and seventeen cents,” he said, removing the pipe from his mouth, and replacing it with a piece of chew tobacco.

“I’ll pay, I’ll pay!” I said, “Stop the flood. My whole house will swim away.”

In a minute’s time the pipe was once again made whole. I paid up and Mr. McNally was gone saying: “I hope to meet you again soon.”

Within a half hour a man came to the house and asked: “Are you Mr. Chaim Karp, the customer peddler?”

“Yes.”

“I am Callahan. McNally told me that you needed a ceiling fixed. I’m here to do the job.”

“How much will that cost?” I asked.

“We’ll work it out,” he answered.

“I want to know the price beforehand,” I said, “I have learned a lesson.”

We worked it out. The job was finished. We have water once again, and on my ceiling is a big patch that cost me two dollars and eighty cents.

## 18. He has business with two lawyers

Wish me “*mazel tov*,” I have become a member of the “club.” What club? Don't ask, already. By us in Blotetown when someone says “club” everybody already knows what that is, because there is really only one club, beyond that is just congregations, societies along with lady's auxiliaries. About the lady's auxiliaries, I will tell you another time. Now I will only explain to you what the club is, because it must be described to you since you have never been to Blotetown.

To this club belong all the landlords in Blotetown. And since in Blotetown nearly everybody lives in their own house, with their own mortgages, it follows that the club consists of all of the homeowners in Blotetown. The goal of the club is, as it states in the constitution: “To promote the welfare of the population: (in Yiddish one would say: “To cry out to everyone that Blotetown is a Garden of Eden.”) To create social and friendly relations between the residents; to lift the value of the real estate, and so on and so on.

I will now cite for you a few paragraphs from our constitution:

Paragraph 23, first part:

Every member of the club is obliged to praise Blotetown and to speak of its strengths, in order to lift the price of real estate and to awake an interest in people to invest, and to settle here.

Paragraph 18, third part:

No member has the right to invite guests from New York during the Winter months from December to April, when the mud in Blotetown is deep and mushy.

Paragraph 13, fifth part:

In nice dry weather it will be the duty of every member to bring from New York relatives and friends who have money, and take them around town and show them houses that are now worth double what the owners paid for them a couple of years ago, and the houses which are currently for sale as bargains.

Paragraph 7, ninth part:

A member who falls for a bad bargain shall not complain about it to himself or to others, just be quiet and not say a word. It is better for him and for others.

Paragraph 8, the same part:

No member shall, above all, complain about holes in the pipes, about holes in roofs, holes in walls, mice, rats, mold, mud and any other things that might scare people away from settling in Blotetown.

Those are the most important points in our constitution.



Nearly all the members of our club are Jews, because all the *goyim* have already moved out of Blotetown. There is only left, McNally, the Plumber, who patches all of our water pipes, Callahan, who fixes our ceilings that get damaged by water when the water pipes break; Fitzpatrick, the alderman, and a couple of other Christians who are very quiet people, if only all the *goyim* were like them. These Christians live with us very well, brotherly, they make up the whole leadership of the club. They make all the motions during the meetings, and they also second the motions, and all we have to do is call out “Aye,” that means we vote, or we raise our hands, when they have to count how many are voting “Yes.” McNally is our District Leader, the lead politician, and every election he nominates Fitzpatrick to be our alderman. Yes, I almost forgot, Mr. Fitzpatrick is a builder, that is to say, he builds houses. Someone told me, that when the new congregation had a housewarming, the alderman came with his wife to the shul and made a speech. He said that Jews and Irish went hand in hand: The Irish built houses, and the Jews bought them all. Afterwards the president, Mr. Pupikovitz, honored the alderman with the first Torah procession and McNally with the second. And McNally offered to fix the pipes in the shul for free as long as the members of the congregation would vote for the right ticket. He is a big sucker, but a great lover of Israel – so says everyone.

I have been rambling on. I wanted to tell you about something totally different. However, in the club I hear so much news that I get mixed up when I want to tell a story, and I don't know where to start and where to finish. I want to first tell you a nice story about some business that I had with the Comptroller's office. Until I became a landlord, I did not know that there was a Comptroller in America. As one makes their way in the world he finds that things can go from bad to worse.

A while back the letter carrier brought me a letter, addressed to my mane, and written in English. I showed it to my oldest daughter Betsy, the teacher, she said, that it is a letter from the Comptroller, who said that I should report to his office “At my earliest convenience.” I said: “Ai, my daughter, you speak Yiddish, *kayn enore* [may there be no evil eye] fluently, but how does the Comptroller know me? Perhaps someone denounced me, or something of a new second business.” My Betsy said: “Go there and find out. Why break your head for nothing: Go and find out.” I said: “With such cleverness I shouldn't ask you for advice. You think that because you are a teacher you already know everything. And I say to you, that one should immediately get a lawyer, because without a lawyer in such matters you can't get a resolution. Who knows, G-d forbid, what kind of trouble, may the Almighty save and protect, can come out of all this. I am going to New York and hire a good lawyer.

And, indeed, in short order I was off to New York. I knew that in Rivington Street there were a lot of Yiddish-speaking lawyers. I walked around and looked at all the signs, until I saw a big sign: “Notary Public.” I thought to myself, that must be the same thing as a lawyer, but I wasn't sure. I went to the ground floor, where the office was located, I asked the young man who was sitting there drinking tea: “Are you a lawyer?” The young man looked at me and said: “Yes. I take on law cases of all sorts. I, myself, am a notary public, but I am associated with the greatest lawyer in the United States, and I know all the judges, and I can fix you up with whatever you need. You can depend on me.” I took out the letter from the Comptroller and showed it to him. “I live in my own house in Blotetown,” I said to him, so that he should know that I wasn't just anybody, a simple customer peddler. “Right, what do you want from me?” the lawyer asked. “I want you to take on the case,” I explained to him.

“Let me know what the case is about,” he said, “You haven't told me anything about it yet.”

“What should I know about it?” I asked him, “You are the lawyer, you should know. There is the letter, read it over again, and let me know what the affair will cost.”

The lawyer read through the letter again. Afterwards he looked at me with his piggy eyes and said:

“That will cost you a hundred dollars.”

I thought to myself: This must be a bitter affair, but still I had to haggle him down. Incidentally, it wouldn't hurt to see another lawyer. I said to him that I would come back another time and give him my answer. I said to him: “Good bye” and left.

I walked about a half block, and from a distance I saw a big sign with the Yiddish word, “Lier.” When I got a little closer I saw that the word was really “Lawyer,” not “Lier.” The accent mark under the aleph [א] was a little scratched out. [לאַיער \ לאַיער]. When I went into the office I found a young man, something of a little snail without a sign of a beard. I asked him: “Where is your boss?” He answered me: “You need a lawyer? I am the lawyer.” I said to him: “See here, don't make fun with me, I need to see a lawyer about some urgent business.” He got mad and said: “See here, Mister, where did you come from?” When I heard that he was speaking German, I figured, perhaps, maybe he is indeed himself the lawyer. I showed him the letter. He read it through and asked me: “Why did they call you into the Comptroller's office?” I said, “If I knew why, then I wouldn't have to come to you.” The little snail laughed at me and said, “A strange thing with these Jews! They think that a lawyer is seer. Go first to the Comptroller's office and ask them what they want from you, then come back here and I will make everything all right and do it for an cheap price.”

One would think that he was just a child, I thought to myself, but he talks like a wise man. I asked him where the Comptroller's office was located, and he told me which streetcar to take and where to go. Blessed be the Name, I soon came to the office, that is to say, I went up in the elevator. When I got inside, I took my hat off. I saw that men were standing around in their hats, so I put my hat back on. I stood around like an fool and had no idea what to do.

I gathered my strength, girt myself with courage, took the letter out of my pocket and handed it to the clerk. He took the letter, did not say a word, and looked into a ledger book. After that he wrote something on a little piece of paper and turned the book toward me, I should sign my name in it. I took it and signed it. And suddenly I regretted the whole affair. Why did I have to so quickly sign my name in the book without knowing why? Perhaps with my signature I have done something that will bring misfortune, and now I no longer have a house – am no longer a landlord. And the clerk – He was writing something more in the book, just like a cold-blooded robber, and he wasn't the least concerned that I stood there shaking like a leaf. I felt as though I had been cut off at the ankles. The clerk rubber-stamped my slip of paper and gave it back to me. “Is dat all,” I asked him, and my teeth were clattering, you can believe me. “Yes, sir,” he answered, and turned away from me as though he had not done anything to me, as though he had just eaten a bagel, and that's all.

I left and took the streetcar back to the young lawyer, the little snail that spoke German. “Look at this *mein Herr*, this is what the Comptroller gave me.” The little snail gave it a glance and laughed. “What are you laughing about, *mein Herr*?” I asked him. “It is nothing,” he said, “Go home and relax.” I asked, “What is in the summons?” He said, “It isn't a summons, you foolish Jew!” He explained half in German and half in English, that the Comptroller discovered that the State government made a mistake in taxing me for a pipe that ran under my house, and because of the correction the State had to refund me the amount they had overcharged.

“How much?” I asked with joy, “How much do I get back from the State?”

“Eight cents,” he said and laughed again.

He should laugh in good health. I'm laughing also. Delivered from a trouble!

## 19. He goes to a girl's Bar Mitzvah

By Mr. Pupikovitz, the president of our congregation, a girl had a Bar Mitzvah. Don't laugh, that's what really happened. – his daughter had a Bar Mitzvah. I didn't believe my ears the first time I heard it, that a young girl should have a Bar Mitzvah, that because of that people should have a ceremony, and that because of that a lot of people should be invited to participate. All of Blotetown was invited by Mr. Pupikovitz for the big celebration.

I will tell you the whole story with all of the particulars, not on the installment plan, but the whole story all at once. In the new congregation that is called “Temple Jacob,” there is a Reverend Doctor Hotzmech, and this Reverend Doctor Hotzmech has a Sabbath School, where the children from the temple, boys and girls together, learn to say, “Adun Olam” [Lord of the Universe] and “Shema Israel” [Hear Oh Israel] in English. I think the whole thing is ridiculous. Because, I ask you, how can one say “Shema Israel” in English? How can one draw out the “echad” in English? In English 'echad' is 'one.' – Now do me a favor and try to draw out “oooooooooooo!” And how can one spit in English? While Jews always spit on the ground, and Americans always spit toward the rafters?

In short the Reverend Doctor from Temple Jacob had decided that young girls should also be Bar Mitzvahed just like young boys. True, the girls did not have to put on tfillin, nor did they wear a talis [prayer shawl], but a speech, a sermon – that, yes. He didn't actually call it a Bar Mitzvah, rather “confirmation,” nu, so its a confirmation. A gentile name was more to his taste.

When the invitation to the Bar Mitzvah came to me, I told my yidene about it, because on the invitation was “and lady.” My yidene got angry and yelled, “What *chutzpah!* [audacity] And to the old days, ha? I said: “Quiet, why are you yelling?” She yelled even louder, “I want to know who is the lady. Listen to me, Chaim, tell me now, who is the hussy? I am going to slap her face.” I gave out a yell louder than hers, “Yidene! They mean you! You are the lady. That's the fashionable way to say it now. In an invitation the wife is referred to as “Lady.””

If only you could have seen how my lady puffed herself up, such dignity, such pride showed in her face! She took the invitation and held it to her bosom where she kept her pocketbook. She asked, “What is that, a confirmation?” I explained it to her thus and so. “What do you mean a girl will be Bar Mitzvahed?” my yidene asked, “Watch it, Chaim, perhaps they are making a joke on us. By us in the shtetl [village], Sheftel the healer, do you remember? Remember how one time he invited all of the households along with the rabbi and the mohel to a bris, and it turned out it was for a girl? Remember your uncle Mote Bines was chosen to be the godparent; perhaps here Mr. Pupikovitz is making a similar joke.” I said to her: “Go on, you foolish yidene. In America people don't make such foolish practical jokes. Here everything is strictly business.”

The dinner was in the evening in Mr. Pupikovitz' house. A very beautiful house with a garden in the yard. For the third time Mr. Pupikovitz had planted tomatoes in the garden but all he got there was cats. They came from the whole neighborhood. That is because in Mr. Pupikovitz' yard there is always a big puddle, and it is there that his two servants toss meat bones and fish bones. And all of Blotetown's cats have their restaurant there. Soon, after everyone had arrived it was a big crowd, indeed, all the households in Blotetown, even a number of prominent Christians, that is to say all of the seven Christians in town. McNally was there, the plumber who fixes our pipes; Callahan, the man who fixes our ceilings when the leaking pipes soaks them through, and – last but not least – our alderman,

Mr. Fitzpatrick, who made a fortune there and is a lover of Israel. It was truly a pleasure to see the Christians drinking Jewish wine and eating baked goods, ginger, and shaking hands with everyone. I sat and contemplated it all, and made my yidene understand many things that she did not understand. I wanted her to understand the meaning of it when a Christian alderman comes to a Bar Mitzvah for a Jewish girl. She should understand that this is an honor for Jewishdom.

“Who is he,” she asked.

“What do you mean, who?” I asked her back.

“Who is this Jewishdom? Where is he sitting?” she asked.

“Sha, yidene,” I said to her, “Don't talk so loud. People will hear you and laugh at you. What then, you don't understand? See that one who is dressed like a Catholic priest? That is the Reverend Doctor.”

“What do you mean,” asked my yidene, “He is both a reverend and a doctor? I am afraid that from the two professions he could get a fever. Probably, if he can't study, he can get a sickness.”

That comment amused me immensely. A foolish yidene can on occasion say something very clever; but to say it out loud to her that she had said something clever, that I won't do. She can overdo it.

Then the ceremony began. The Bar Mitzvah girl herself arrived. She was dressed in a short white dress with white socks, and her black pigtails were still wet from washing. In her mouth she had a piece of chewing gum and chewed it with enthusiasm. From time to time she stuck her fingers in her mouth and pulled the chewing gum out like a rubber band. The Reverend Doctor Hotzmech went over to her, bent down and whispered something in her ear. Miss Pupikovitz took the chewing gum out of her mouth and stuck it on the underside of a chair. Then she sat down on the chair and began her sermon.

I did not understand everything that she said, but I could see that Mr. Pupikovitz was very pleased and by Mrs. Pupikovitz there were tears in her eyes. The little girl during the speech gestured with her hands up and down like Americans do, not the way we gesture with our hands. She thanked her parents and the Reverend Doctor, probably because he had taught her the Jewish religion. She promised to be faithful. I couldn't understand who it was that she was promising to be faithful to, and true to what because there the English got mixed up, tangled, with big words which is something in English like High German. Then suddenly she said something in the Holy Language: “And come unto Zion,” jumped up from the chair, retrieved the piece of chewing gum from under the chair and started chewing like before. Mr. and Mrs. Pupikovitz rushed to her and started kissing her. The crowd applauded, and many shook hands with the Bar Mitzvah girl.

Afterwards, two speakers made speeches: the Reverend Doctor and Fitzpatrick the alderman. Both spoke on the same theme: They said that Jews are a good folk and a great folk. And except for praising all of Israel, they both praised each other. Reverend Doctor Hotzmech said that the Honorable Paddy Fitzpatrick is an example of honorable politics. The Honorable Paddy Fitzpatrick ddy said that Reverend Doctor Hotzmech is a dear shepherd to his sheep. Reverend Doctor Hotzmech said that the Honorable Paddy Fitzpatrick is the greatest friend to Jews on Earth, the king of friends to Jews. The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick said that Reverend Doctor Hotzmech is a liberal man and a *damned good fellow*. It was a pleasure to hear how they praised one another. Even I got no little joy out of all of this because everyone said this was an honor to all Jews, and I thought, an honor is an honor, and I applauded the alderman and the Reverend Doctor so long that it felt like ants were dancing in the

palms of my hands.

The people attending were all pleased and wished the parents to raise their daughter in the Torah, in marriage and in good deeds.

## 20. A little radish grows in his garden

Wish me mazel tov. Why a mazel tov, you would like to know? Well, nothing is different in our house, our family has not grown any bigger, my daughter is not getting married, but nevertheless in our house there is a big celebration. About what? Listen, I will tell you. In my garden, which is by us in the yard, is growing...a radish! Since I bought the house, my three daughters, Betsy, Jenny and Flossie have been working the garden: plowing, seeding, but up to now nothing has grown. Have you ever seen anything grow in a Jewish yard? Have you ever seen there, anything green, a bloom, a rose? No, nothing more than blankets and quilts being aired in the sun. Today, imagine the joy of my oldest daughter, Betsy, the teacher, when she saw a radish in our garden! I can't describe to you the celebration. To do so one would have to be a poet.

I came home tired, exhausted from my day at work, schlepping around with my watch and my satchel all over the whole of New York. And when I came home into the house, all of my children flung themselves on me "Papa, Papa our garden is blooming!" Betsy was glowing with great pride, and she grabbed me and kissed me: "Papa'le, it's blooming, it's blooming. We will have a real garden – some radishes, some tomatoes!" With that she took me by the arm and led me out into the yard, and showed me with pride the garden. Oy, a garden you want to see, I would wish it on all the enemies of Israel – a little grass, that is all! And the grass is so thin, like the fuzz on a peach. "A nu, Papa'le," my daughter said, "there are the radishes!" I looked and looked, then I said, "Go, bring me your opera glass the one I gave you for your birthday." Betsy ran inside and brought me the opera glass. I took the glass in hand and looked, and searched with the eyes – I didn't see any radish. But I saw my daughter's face glowing with pride. The other children had also come out from the house, and laughed and squealed as I searched for the radish. And I – I had nearly forgotten about the radish as I looked at my children's faces how happy, how lively they were. In the city I had never seen them this happy. Just looking at them brought joy to my heart. "Nu, Papa, where is the radish?" they all asked at once and laughed. In the middle of all this my yidene came out, and wanting to amuse my children, I grabbed her nose and said: "There! There is the radish!"

"Get away! You scoundrel, you!" Yelled my yidene with anger (she was putting on an act) – "Aren't you ashamed in front of the children? A man of your age making a fool of yourself like a youngster!"

"Come here, Papa, here it is!" said Betsy, in order to interrupt the war that my yidene was about to start with me.

I gave a look: Under three green leaves one could see a little radish, as big as a bean.

"Slowly, Papa, don't pull on it, you could rip it from the ground," Flossie warned me when I put my finger on the wonderful little radish, our baby, our first born from the garden.

"Papa!" my Benele called out, who knows all the gossip from Blotetown, "By President Pupikovitz in his garden last night there grew a tomato. It is as big as my rubber ball."

"A lie!" yelled my oldest son, Jack. – "I saw the tomato myself, it is maybe as big as a walnut, not any bigger."

"By us will also grow tomatoes," Betsy called out, and her voice rang with hope, as though she wanted me to say a prophecy about happy times. "See Papa, these green shoots, those are the tomatoes. They

will come. It will take time. What do you say, Papa, about our beautiful garden?"

We all sat down to eat supper and I don't have to tell you that we didn't stop talking about the garden. I hardly heard the talk. I was thinking about something else. A Jew can not be happy for long – Some gloomy thoughts began to bore their way into my mind and into my heart: What has happened to us Jews, and what has living in the big city made of us! Why is it that by the *goyim* everything blooms? Why is it that by the *goyim* in their gardens they have radishes, potatoes, tomatoes – and if a Jewish girl sees a little radish in the garden it is G-d's miracle and she is ready to make a blessing! Poor children of mine! Their whole lives have been darkened by tenement buildings, bricks and stones they have seen everywhere they looked, and mud and manure and darkness. Now even though we have no shortage of mud, at least it is free mud. Once a wind blew and brought to us the smell of new-cut grass, and the aroma met our noses and smelled so sweet, that it made us want to say a blessing, "Blessed be the Creator of spices." One would see a great tree in bloom – although it bloomed in a gentile neighbor's garden, but one could look upon it, and take pleasure in it from afar, and take comfort: That in time there would come a day when our own gardens will also bloom like all the other gardens. --- ---  
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"Chaim, what are you thinking?" asked my yidene.

I cut my thoughts short, and saw that the supper had ended, the children had gone, and I was left there in the dining room with my yidene.

"Chaim, what are you thinking?" asked my yidene.

"What do you mean?" I asked back, "What little bit is there to think about? Such a mixed-up business as a customer peddler... One asks me to come in the morning; another says he can not pay, he is out of work. There is plenty to think about!"



## 21. He makes a surprise party

My garden, Blessed be the Name, is slowly growing. Sunday we saw four more radishes, some more had sprouted new shoots, that my daughters pointed out as tomato plants, beets and heads of cabbage. If only from their mouth to G-d's ear. This summer everything is late, even the mosquitoes are late. All right, that I can forgive.

In Blotetown everything is going along as usual. Everything just like before, no more – President Pupikovitz was in shul on the Sabbath along with this Polish *shiksa* who carried his talis [prayer shawl]. Earlier, to carry his talis he took his boy, Lincoln Abraham Pupitovitz (He was born on Lincoln's Birthday and so they named him after Lincoln.). Now Mrs. Pupikovitz decided that the *shiksa* should carry the talis so that everyone could see that they had a servant.

Monday the watchman came to collect his dollar. You will probably want know who the watchman is, and who he watches? I will introduce him to you. Our watchman is named Tim O'Brian, and he is a second cousin of our plumber, McNally. His duty is to collect a dollar every month from each house, and for that he guarantees that nobody will be robbed. Robbers even hit us in Blotetown well enough: Last week three houses were robbed in a single night. But that was not the watchman's fault. He swore that he was no where near the break-ins and that if he had of seen them he would have stopped them. You can believe that he would not have let them go. There are people who say that the watchman is a complete bluff, because no one has ever seen him watching anything. They also recount that not long ago he made a little bit of a bluff: He entered a house through the window and made a lot of noise, as though he were chasing a burglar, and got smacked by a Polish *shiksa* who didn't know what a watchman was. But back to the story, he comes around every month to collect his dollar – and everyone gives it to him. Firstly, because no one wants to be different from the rest, and secondly, if there is a watchman, the heart is calmer.

Once, on a Tuesday, my yidene said to me:

“You know, Chaim, Thursday is your birthday, you will be forty-five years old, you should live a hundred and twenty years.”

“Yes,” I said, “forty-five. Just think.”

“You know, Chaim,” she went on, “The children want to make for you a surprise party for your birthday.”

I asked, “What is a surprise party?”

“A surprise party,” she explained to me, “is when someone makes a big celebration for someone without telling him about it. He comes in unsuspecting and finds a whole table set up with a lot of guests, and everyone shouts for him “hooray,” and he is surprised.”

“Foolish yidene!” I said to her, “How can I be surprised when you have just told me everything?”

She answered, “I am telling you in secret. I'm telling you so you can come home a little early on Thursday and clean up a little to look nice. Then you will leave saying it is for business and come back

around nine o'clock, pretending you don't know what is going on, and when you come in and see the guests and the table prepared, you should look surprised."

I said, "All right, I understand the plan. I am not a greener."

"On your way," my yidene said to me, "since tomorrow you will be in New York, you should bring to me three dozen good schmaltz herring, five boxes of salmon and some boxes of sardines from Essex Street. I will need that for your surprise party."

A few days before the party, in my house there were great preparations being made. I saw every evening how my children spoke among themselves quietly, and they fried, and they baked and they were very busy. I asked: "What is that? What are you doing there? For whom are you making such preparations?" – But my Betsy explained to me with a smile, "Nothing, Papa, it is nothing. Don't ask. Go into the front room and read your Yiddish newspaper."

So, like a good father I went to the front room, and soon my yidene came to me and said:

"Chaim, since tomorrow you are going to be in New York, bring a smoked tongue, ten pounds dried wurst, and a quarter's worth of pickles. Here we can't get fresh wurst. We want to make for you a surprise party that will be respectable."

In short, every day I had to *shlep* a package for my surprise party, and even on the day of the party itself, Thursday, I had to bring three loaves of "home style" cornbread with olives. When I came home my yidene made me change clothes and told me to go away and come back at nine o'clock. And she told me the whole program, how I should come in, and how I should act surprised, as though I had no idea what was going on.

I changed my clothes. That is to say, put on a white shirt with my Sabbath overcoat, and stuck in my necktie a new diamond pin, that I had ordered for a customer, and I left. I wasn't more than thirty steps away from my house when I heard my yidene calling: "Chaim, ah Chaim! Come here!"

"A misfortune has struck me!" she called out, "I have a head like a cat. I forgot to tell you that you should go to Lakshman and tell him that he should the beer and the seltzer bring around six o'clock, not at eight o'clock. Earlier is better."

After I completed my errand with Lakshman, I thought to myself, where should I go now, and how could I spend the evening up until nine o'clock? I walked around and looked at the empty lots that were for sale, and the new properties that were under construction. I wandered around like that until eight o'clock. I had grown hungry as a yeshiva student on Wednesday, that is to say, a yeshiva student who doesn't have a Wednesday. Because, you understand, with the big busy, with all the preparations for my party, my yidene forgot to ask me if I wanted something to snack on.

So I walked among the green trees which were quite numerous in Blotetown. I walked and thought various thoughts. I stopped to look up at the heavens and count the stars. And the time passed slowly.

I looked at my watch – It was only ten minutes after eight. I was hungry from the walking through the mud in the street, and I was also tired.-- It was a little thing, but I had been on my feet walking all day! I thought to myself, I could head home and sneak into the yard. There I could sit in the garden until nine o'clock. Think it – done. In the yard I found an old box as though someone had left it there for

me. I moved the box up against the wall of the house into the shadow of my “property” with the three mortgages.

Suddenly, something jumped out at me, I didn't know if it was a demon, or a man, and whatever it was grabbed me around the neck with both hands and strangled me with the fingers, and shook me like a doll. From fright I didn't know what to do, the breath was out of me, only one thing, one thought was working in my head: The Hands of Esau – the hands were gentile. I wanted to use my Voice of Jacob, but I had no Voice of Jacob – I was struck dumb.

“I gotcha!” A voice called out, and from that I realized that Esau had a voice also.

“I got you, you G-d damn thief!” he yelled, “You want to rob this house, I know. I'll send you to jail.”

With that everything became clear to me. I took a look at my assailant – It was the watchman from Blotetown, Tim O'Brian! In the darkness he did not recognize me, and thought that he had caught a robber.

“Mr. O'Brian!” I said to him.

“Shut up, you dog!” He screamed at me and strangled me harder.

“Mr. O'Brian, please,” I said to him, “Dis is a surprise party.”

“A surprise party for you, ha ha ha! Here is another surprise!” and he gave me a punch in the head.

“Gewalt! Gewalt!” I started yelling.

From my “gewalt” the watchman was shocked. It was a Jewish cry for help, not a cry from a normal thief. A thief doesn't call out, he doesn't call for help.

A minute later from out of the house came my yidene, my children, relatives from New York, neighbors from Blotetown, all done up in their Sabbath best, dressed up in my honor, in honor of my celebration, and there I stood shaking like a leaf, and the watchman had hold of my hands like he was arresting me.

I won't spend a lot of time telling you how this all ended up. Everything was easily explained, Tim O'Brian asked me to excuse him, and he was invited to come in and join the party. We all amused ourselves very well and me and, to make a distinction, Tim O'Brian ate and drank more than all the others. That is to say, I ate and Tim O'Brian drank. Before each glass he asked me if I had any “hard feelings” toward him, that is, if I held anything against him, and when I said “no” he downed the glass in one gulp.

Forty-four times he asked me if I had any “hard feelings” against him. A precious man, a diamond of a man!

## 22. He has his picture taken with his family

Yet another Jew has moved into Blotetown. He is a wealthy New Yorker and moved into the white house on the corner not far from us. The house was built by Alderman Fitzpatrick, who is the 'builder' in Blotetown. The new resident is a man who puts on airs, always has his nose in the air just like a shoemaker who just won the lottery or stole a Kaznatsheystvo. When he sees someone in the distance walking toward him, he turns his head upward and doesn't look toward them, G-d forbid, someone should say "good morning" to him and he would have to answer. And if he does once get a "good morning" unexpectedly, he doesn't answer right away. He just sort of growls something under his nose, and you don't know if he said "good morning" or if he said: "Go to the demons." That's the kind of man he is.

The new neighbor, Mr. Kaban is his name, has decorated his front porch with woven chairs and flower pots. At the present time there are only the pots. Expensive pots they are – I know about such things. Not a single flower is in any of them; two expensive lamps are to be seen on each side of the front door, and every day you can see next to the house express wagons from the big stores delivering expensive furniture, gilded and polished. Last Sabbath when the express wagons began to arrive, a large crowd came together to look and gossip about how much each table must cost and what each chair and bench is worth. I was also standing and looking, not at Mister Kaban's house with the highly decorated front, rather at the house of a machinist, not a rich Jew, who lived nearby. I couldn't get enough of looking at the machinist's old, poor little house which had one side covered with green leaves, and the front porch loaded with young tree saplings, interwoven branches, red flowers, white flowers that smelled like a delight for the soul – As though the whole house were hidden by greens and blooms. In each stem and each bloom you could see the busy hand of the worker who dug in the earth, turned the soil, who seeded, who fussed around the shoots and flowers as though they were children, part of them, their very own. Before daybreak, often I would see him, the machinist, before even the sun had begun to dry our mud, he was tending the flower buds like a mother washing her children's little faces. He removed thorns, trimmed with a scissors, in order to make the shoots look the same, all the same size, so that, G-d forbid, they should be jealous of one another. He surrounded them with stakes and latices so that the blooms could climb and entwine themselves higher and higher. That is how he worked whenever he had a free hour. Is it a wonder that by him there was such a Garden of Eden? When one seeds and plants so it grows, you get something to enjoy. However a pot by itself will never give blooms. It doesn't matter how much money you have for decorations. And bought flowers don't last very long, they are like children without a mother, who are raised by strangers.

You can see that this machinist is totally different. When one walks past his house, particularly when he is occupying himself with the gardening, you will note how he waits for you and is always the first to say "good morning" or "How do you do." His whole face lights up because of you, as though, who knows what sort of a distant relation you might be, and as though he had not seen you for many years. He stops you and talks with you in such a friendly manner, that it is hard to get away from him. In my heart I'm thinking (A Jew is always thinking): What sort of a relation am I to him? One would think a total stranger, and yet with every word that he speaks, he becomes more baked into your heart. I will tell you the truth, I don't even know for sure his name. I heard it once and forgot it. Now I am ashamed to ask. It seems to me, as though he is an old acquaintance for years now and it is a sin that I do not know his name.

You may say that I am a foolish Jew, but I will tell you my opinion, that there must be something in this sort of work that makes a man more capable than others, nobler, friendlier, loving and kind hearted.

A fleeting question: What kind of flowers are those? It is not an animal, not a wilderness, just a plant, that's all. Nevertheless, when I watch my children working in our little piece of a sparse garden, I think to myself: Children it is better than playing the piano, healthier for you and healthier for your soul.

But enough philosophizing for today! You most certainly want to hear from me a story, and I have a fine story for you today, even though it is short. Listen to what happened:

Monday evening while we were all sitting on the front porch, two young men came by, photographers, with a camera and asked if I wanted a picture of all of the family and the house together with us sitting on the porch. I thought to myself, since the Almighty had already helped me to live in my own house with my three mortgages, then we should have a picture as a keepsake. And in case someday I should live in a nicer house, I would have a souvenir of this one. I was already ready, but my yidene and the girls ran into the house to spruce up a bit. My daughters came out in ten minute or so, only my yidene took longer. I sent Jenny, my third daughter, to hurry Mama up a little, and soon she came out, my yidene, dressed like for the Sabbath.

"Mr. Photograph-chik," she said to one of the photographers, "you should me a little fix in the picture, so I should come out looking respectable, because I will want to send this picture to a brother in Russia."

The two photographers smiled, ordered us where we should sit, told us to hold still and look in the direction they showed us. What we suffered in the next ten minutes was not suffered by the wicked in hell, because sitting still for ten minutes while a mosquito sucked on your ear, milked your nose, is not a pleasant job. But we got through it. The photographers had us pay in advance one dollar, they gave us a receipt and promised us that we would get the pictures on Wednesday.

On Wednesday we didn't get anything, as is typical, it was Thursday, to my great surprise, that the pictures arrived. The children were not in the house when the letter carrier brought the pictures, only me and my yidene. She was the first one to grab the pictures. She gave a look and was very pleased: "See, Chaim," she said to me, "See how the photograph-chik fixed me. A string of pearls have they painted around my neck, and bracelets on the arm, and see, the dress, they have fixed for me a new one, more stylish than mine. He is an artist! Take a look, Chaim!" In the picture I looked twenty years younger than I am. And an even younger wife, believe me, on my word. "And you, Chaim, in the picture look a lot younger, more filled out and heavier, and your beard he cut out, the photograph-chik. And where are the children? Our daughters are not there at all!"

I took another look at the picture and said, "I am afraid that there has been a mistake. That is not your picture and not mine. It must be mixed up with some one else."

"How you just chatter on," complained my yidene with a disgruntled tone, "What you don't understand is that I asked the photographer as he should fix us better. You know how Aunt Raizl had a bent nose, but in the picture the nose is straight. You know also how Uncle Mariashes was so old, and in the pictures he looks young. The American photograph-chiks can do anything."

"Yidene!" I yelled, because I was out of patience, "But where are the children? Where is Betsy, where is Flossie? Where is Jenny? And the three boys who are there in the picture don't look anything like ours. I think I recognize one of the faces, but I can't say for sure who it is." I looked deeper into the picture to try and figure out where I had seen that face before.

“That is my picture,” she said with fast determination and ripped the picture from my hands so that I could not study it any more. “Don't talk nonsense, Chaim, there I am, that's me.”

As soon as she had uttered these words we heard a knock on the door. A young girl came in and said:

“I work for Mr. Kaban. The Missus sent me with this picture. It must be yours. The letter carrier brought it. It came in an envelope with Mr. Kaban's name on it. Perhaps you received their picture?”

In that minute everything became clear to me. Obviously, if they were good photographers I could have recognized Mr. Kaban from his nose, which doesn't come to a point. However the photographs were fuzzy. I'm not going to hold a grudge that when my yidene got our photographs and saw them, she wouldn't under any circumstances show them to anybody.

The moral to the story is that with women you should never take any pictures.

## 23. He goes to a Torah Conclusion

Our lady's auxiliary society, called, the Lady's Gallery Union, from our shul "Temple Jacob" donated a Scroll of the Law, and the Torah Conclusion celebration would include a big parade. It was a "Grand Rally" as the Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick, who never missed a Jewish celebration in Blotetown, expressed it.

My yidene is one of the most able members of the auxiliary. She became a member of the of the lady's auxiliary a couple of weeks after we moved to Blotetown. She attends the regular meeting every Wednesday evening, and she already knows how to ask to speak and make a motion. It is interesting how quickly she learned how to do it. At home she never stops talking about parliamentary rules. Without rules, by her, nothing can proceed. She runs the whole household by parliamentary rules. "Chaim, a point of order, you are leaving, already, for business, leave me a few dollars for expenses." Or: "Chaim, I make a motion that you should bring from New York two dozen milk herring to marinate." Or if I ask her sometime to cook potato noodles, she answers me: "Chaim, that is not on today's agenda; I cook potato noodles on Monday." When I bring the two dozen milk herring from New York, I ask her to cook a few of them with potatoes. The children like the plan. Then my yidene says to me: "Chaim, your motion has passed with a unanimous vote – Tomorrow we will have herring with potatoes."

A couple of weeks before the Torah Conclusion she became a member of the finance committee. A few days before the celebration she began to make great preparations. "Chaim," she said to me last week, "Next Sunday evening they will complete the reading of the entire Torah. We have to buy some things. We have to look respectable. They have put notice out to all of Blotetown that it is not nice to come looking like beggars. Give me a little money and I will buy you an new hat and a necktie, you should come looking like a somebody."

Five days we spent in preparations for the Torah Conclusion. All of Blotetown prepared as though they were going to a rich man's wedding.

The Torah Conclusion was indeed a "spiritual and corporal pleasure," as it was advertised in the newspapers and handbills. A music band was there from the orphan asylum and also a lot of individual musical talents from Blotetown itself who played solos, duets and trios. President Pupikovitz's daughter, who had recently been Bar Mitzvahed, that is to say, she was "confirmed," played on the piano some nice pieces of cantorial music. I asked someone, a young man: "What is she playing?" He answered me: "No Wedding Bells for Me." I thought to myself, it is a nice melody, it goes very well with "Today We Struggled."

But let me tell you more:

At first the worthy public, the honorable members of our congregation, gathered at the house of President Pupikovitz. From there the men of the Torah Conclusion marched to the shul. The President of the lady's auxiliary, Mrs. Pupikovitz, rode in a carriage with her husband and with the Honorable Alderman Fitzpatrick. The carriage is was drawn by three horses: a Zion horse, an American horse and a Jewish horse. After them rode Reverend Doctor Hotzmech with the Scroll of the Law and after him came several more carriages. The rest of the attendees went on foot, with the music band leading until they all reached the shul.

The shul was decorated with flags and with a lot of lights, which lit up all of the empty lots around the shul. The Scroll of the Law was spread out on a table in the middle of the great hall of our Temple Jacob. Sitting next to the table was a scribe, Reverend Doctor Hotzmech, President Pupikovitz, Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick with McNally the plumber, another pair of prominent Christians who had come to honor Jewishdom and to worship real estate, because by us in Blotetown Jewishness and real estate go hand in hand.

They held a regular auction for the letters which had been left blank in the Torah. The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick bought a “פ” for five dollars with 75 cents. That was reduced from ten dollars with a quarter which President Piter (Passover) Pupikovitz had earlier paid for a “פ” Mr. McNally, the plumber, was envious and asked if they would sell him a “T.” The auctioneer didn't know if an English “T” was the equivalent of a “ט” or a “ת”. Reverend Doctor Hotzmech ruled that a “T” is a “ת”. Tim McNally paid eight dollars and got his “ת”.

Then along came Mr. Kaban, the rich New Yorker who just moved into Blotetown and he called out: “Hurry up, give me a “J,” my automobile is waiting for me outside!” The auctioneer was again put in a situation. “In the Torah there is no “J,” he explained to Mr. Kaban, “You can buy a yod.”

“I don't want a yod!” Yelled Mr. Kaban, “My name is Jack and I want a “J” You can charge me a dollar more. It is all right. I can afford it.”

The auctioneer looked over at the Reverend Doctor, and Reverend Doctor Hotzmech simply shrugged his shoulders and didn't know what to do.

“See here, I am talking to you!” Mr. Kaban turned toward Mr. Pupikovitch, “You give me a “J” and charge it to my account. If not, I resign.”

“Resign, G-d damn it!” Yelled out the Honorable Alderman, who was a lover of Israel and defended Jews.

Mr. Kaban left a crushed man. He no longer belonged to the Temple. The “yod” that Mr. Kaban refused to purchase, was bought by my yidene for four dollars as a special bargain. Her name is Tsipe-Yenta. A “צ” she had already bought earlier.

After the auction the music played “Home Sweet Home,” and everyone went home very pleased, and everyone shook hands with the Honorable Alderman.

Yes, I forgot to mention that the Reverend Doctor Hotzmech and the Honorable Alderman made an outstanding speech, wherein they praised the noble deed of the lady's auxiliary society. They were enthusiastically applauded.



## 24. Blotetown has a funereal procession

Mr. Buchbank is dead. What? You have never heard of Mr. Buchbank? He was one of the greatest people in Blotetown, even richer than Mr. Pupikovitz. He was a very wealthy Jew, with big businesses, wide ranging speculations, land, houses. He had half of America in his pocket! Luck had simply stuck on him and never left him for a minute, not an instant. Whatever he put his hand to became a valuable business, and suddenly – no more Mr. Buchbank!

Mr. Buchbank loved to live big. I mean big! One summer he went to the Catskills and found himself in a hotel with two other wealthy New Yorkers. As was their custom, they put together a game of poker. And what a game of poker! They sat down to start playing on a Friday afternoon and they were still playing the next day after Havdalah [the close of Sabbath at sundown]. When they realized that it was already after Havdalah, one of them said: “Nu, now we can smoke our cigars.” He took out a cigar and a five-dollar bill, lit the five-dollar bill from the gas lamp and used it to light the cigar. The second rich guy lit his cigar with a ten-dollar bill. When Mr. Buchbank saw that, he wanted the two other fellows to know that they were beggars compared to him – He wrote out a thousand-dollar check and lit his cigar with the thousand-dollar check! That's how rich people do things!

In the midst of all this good luck, he developed a sharp pain, a sort of pressure in his innards. He got into his automobile and drove to the greatest professor in New York. The professor told him that he must immediately stop all of his businesses and go to the country, take care of himself, eat regularly, slowly, and only light foods and when he recovers his strength the professor would consider an operation – there was something wrong with his liver. In short, Mr. Buchbank was too busy to think about his liver, that day he had a deadline to finish an important contract. When he finished the contract, the pain let up somewhat. Then he decided that he would listen to all the doctors like he would listen to the tomcats howling, and he immersed himself once again in his businesses. Soon, what can I say, a couple of weeks later he was bedridden, they called in doctors, the doctors called in an ambulance which took him away to the hospital, and there he died under the knife!

But even after a rich man is dead, he still does well. For his whole life he is busy and is always saying, “business before pleasure,” and after he is dead that is when he gets his pleasure. You should see such a great funeral! Forty carriages, a crowd that looked like a field of poppys, flower wreaths, mourners, resolutions, delegations from various societies. It was a Mardi Gras, not a funeral. Enemies and opponents were crushed. I was walking among the attendees and thought: Na-dir, that is man! He is riding in his automobile so fast the spirits can't catch him, and now he is being carried slowly in a closed casket and he is no longer worried about what time it is. One minute his is busy with no time to catch his breath, and the next minute he is laid out and will never get up! A strange thing is man! He gives no thought to the purpose, to the goal he is pursuing, to driving himself, or from eventually being bedridden and never getting up.

This is nothing like a funeral, I say to myself. It is more like a party with invitations. Yes, they actually sent out invitations with black borders, and it was advertised in all of the newspapers just like a picnic. Even musical instruments were included. The Reverend Doctor from our Temple Jacob allowed it. Too bad the poor deceased did not live long enough to witness this great honor.

The casket was carried from the deceased's house by the cream of Blotetown society. Among the casket bearers were the Honorable Alderman Fitzpatrick, our plumber, McNally and, totally different from them, Reverend Doctor Hotzmech from Temple Jacob. Eulogies were given, fourteen of them

one after another. They were regular speeches. Alderman Fitzpatrick mentioned that the dearly departed, Mr. Buchbank, even in the busiest times never forgot to come out and vote for him. Did I tell you that the casket was brought to the Temple? No? I will tell you now. The widow was also in the Temple. President Pupikovtz led her in on his arm, and he was assisted by the Honorable Alderman, who had her taken her other arm. Reverend Doctor Hotzman said the “Filled with Mercy” prayer, and the widow gave a nice donation to the Temple, which worked out to ten dollars for each word in “Filled with Mercy.”

Delegations there were, perhaps twenty of them, or maybe thirty. The deceased belonged to all of them. He was a member by the Republicans and the Democrats. He was in the habit of sending contributions to Zionists and to the Socialists. Whenever someone came to him and asked if he wanted to be a member, he never asked what sort of a society it was, what sort of a party or platform they had, he just took out his checkbook and simply asked: “How much the dues?” When they told him he quickly wrote a check and said: “Here are my dues for the next three years in advance and don't bother me. I am a busy man.” There you have the secret of his popularity.

Among the delegates was also my yidene, who along with Mrs. Pupikovtz were appointed as delegates from the Lady's Auxiliary of Temple Jacob, to lay a flower wreath on Mr. Buchbank's sarcophagus. (That's casket, not cares. [*Sarg, nit sorg*] Mrs. Pupikovtz at that point gave a speech that the Reverend Doctor had her memorize. Here is the full speech:

Dear Brother! We, the worthy delegates from the worthy Auxiliary Society from Temple Jacob, have come to accompany you to your everlasting rest, that is, to your eternal peace, and we lay this wreath as a sign of our deep sorrow and deeper respect. Peace in your ashes. Amen.

Leaving the funeral I saw among the delegates, my two tenants. Mister Sheftelson was wearing a red armband on his overcoat, and Mr. Lipkinson – a Zion button. I saw them walking together, their heads bowed down to the ground, quiet, earnest, thoughtful. Death is the best peacemaker.

## 25. A cantor comes for an audition

It is already summertime here in Blotetown. The mosquitoes are starting to move in little by little. Even though we are getting some very hot days. In my garden we are starting to see tomatoes and green cucumbers. G-d knows where they are coming from. I would have never believed that anything would come up decently there. The couple of radishes that grew there are long gone. And I was sure that it was all over with the garden. But G-d is good. He has sent us frequent rain and that refreshes the plants, the sun does the rest of the work, and things sprout and grow. The Earth has a power within it!

In our congregation Temple Jacob we are deeply involved the the question about a cantor for the High Holidays. Also in the Club, to which all of Blotetown belongs, everyone is talking about it. Everyone is agreed that we should not spare any expense and get a real cantor, because a good cantor is a good advertisement for the place, and a beautiful voice at morning prayers can help spark a real estate boom. All the people in New York should know that in Blotetown a great cantor prayed and and made a great success. The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick, who is the biggest builder by us in Blotetown and has a lot of real estate there, is also very interested in the question. We have already had auditions for a few cantors, but they were not outstanding. One was really outstanding, but the Alderman found out that he wasn't a citizen and said "no." And when the Alderman says "no" – its "no." We want that we should give a citizen a show. That is patriotic.

I will tell you the truth, that to me it seems a little odd, not a smooth story. That they should let the Alderman mix in with Jewish affairs. I don't understand, what a *goy* has to do with a Jewish shul? But I am afraid to say such a thing in Blotetown. It is an old custom by Jews to call "prominent Christians" to lay corner stones, to housewarmings at shuls. To a circumcision celebration, to a redemption of the firstborn ceremony, to a bar mitzvah and to religious celebrations. One takes pride that the gentile has come "to honor Jewishdom." Soon we will come to the point where we share the Reading of the Torah on the Sabbath with "prominent Christians." One will honor a city mayor with Tuesday's prayers, a chief of police with Friday's prayers, or a borough president with the *mafter* reading of the Torah. It may have already happened.

However, by us in Blotetown, as I have already told you before, Jewishdom and real estate go hand in hand. Whenever anyone makes a Jewish ceremony, a shul housewarming, or a Torah Conclusion, they invite "prominent Christians," and also reporters from English newspapers. And in the morning there is a notice in the "Blotetown Weekly Review" and in the Blotetown columns in the New York papers the the Honorable So-and-so gave a speech by the Jews in Blotetown, and that is an advertisement, I mean a honor, both for Jews and for Christians. It helps in real estate and it helps in politics.

I will now tell you how it went with the audition for the cantor that we had last Sunday in our little town. The audition was not held in the shul, rather in the house of our President Mr. Piter Pupikovitz. To the audition came heads of households in Blotetown, and also several prominent Christians, among them: The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick, the plumber McNally, and the watchman from Blotetown. No women had been invited to the audition. The only woman who was at the audition was Mrs. Pupikovitz, who was wearing about six pounds of jewelry. It was a very hot day and when the cantor took out his tuning fork and his music sheets to get ready for his audition, Mr. Pupikovitz turned toward his wife and said to the assembled guests:

“Ladies and gentleman! It is too warm in the house. Let's take our chairs and sit in the empty lot that I bought last month next to my house. I got it as a bargain, already I have been offered a thousand dollar profit. Come to the empty lot, it is more of a breeze there.”

The empty lot where we carried our chairs and sat, wasn't really empty, it was littered with pieces of paper, bones, little feathers, mounds of clay, mud, wood chips, rags, burned out coals and ash. By us in Blotetown empty lots are a great convenience: we throw everything in them – even dead cats. Friday all of our housewives come to the empty lots and dump the picked-over Sabbath chicken carcasses. It comes from there a stink to the high heavens. As long as the empty lots are in *goyishe* hands, it is a diaspora. The *goyim* make a big fuss over the empty lots. They plant little saplings all over, with flowers, different types of myrtle, and they plant grass, then they give the lots a shave so that the grass will grow thicker. When the lots come into our hands, we give them freedom, equality and brotherhood. The signs with the English ukases that no one should walk on the grass, are torn down. The myrtle saplings get stripped and made into brooms, and whomever wants to can walk on the grass, bring ashes, cinders, rags, and anything else they want to throw out of the house. Even the Christians clean out their houses and throw the filth into our lots.

So, we have all seated ourselves in one of these empty lots. The cantor took his music sheets in his hand, placed it in his hand to his throat, in the manner of cantors and belted out:

## **Ha Melech!**

“Holy gee!” called out McNally the plumber, “He is a corker!”

“What does it mean?” asked the Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick.

“Ha melech, dat meens de king, de tsar,” explained President Pupikovitz.

“To hell with the tsar!” yelled the Alderman in anger, “Why do you want to cheer the tsar? This is the United States. Cheer the President!”

“**Ha President!**” – The cantor sang out with the same voice he used to sing “Ha Melech.”

Here the Reverend Doctor mixed in and explained to the Honorable Alderman that “Ha Melech” does not refer to a king, but to the “King of Kings,” the Almighty.

Sheftelson, the peaceful Socialist, who is my tenant and a member of our congregation, mixed in at this point and said that it would be better to refer to the Almighty as President rather than King. Our times are more democratic and the democratic spirit must have certainly penetrated into Heaven by now.

But Mr. Sheftelson was overruled. The Honorable Alderman is against reforms and took the Reverend Doctor's side. They would stick with the old term, with “Ha Melech.”

“Sing it again,” the Honorable Alderman said to the cantor.

## **“Ha Melech!!!”**

This time the cantor sang the phrase out so loud that his beard fell off and only hung by a string.

We were all shocked and stood there amazed. Tell me, indeed, have you ever seen or heard of a beard falling off of a man's face a just hanging by a string? The prominent Christians, that is, the Alderman, the plumber and the watchman, laughed heartily. "He has got false whiskers" they said to each other. But the cantor wasn't flustered. He reattached the beard to his face, and began singing "Kol Nidre."

"This is great!" said the watchman.

"It sounds like Italian opera," said Alderman Fitzpatrick.

We all agreed that the cantor is 'All right.'

During this time a big crowd had gathered around the empty lot were we were sitting. The mosquitoes were also arriving because next to President Pupikovitz' house, as I have mentioned before, is a big puddle. Mr. Kaban, the rich Jew from New York, who recently moved into Blotetown and fought with our congregation over the Torah Conclusion celebration, drove up in his automobile. He stopped not far from the rest of us and was listening to the audition also. The smell of his automobile drove the mosquitoes toward the gathered crowd.. Afterwards, Mr. Pupikovitz ordered beer and schnapps and marinated herring. The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick also tried a little piece of herring. Then he asked when Yom Kipur would take place and we told him.

"I will come to your temple with my wife," the Honorable Alderman said, "Please hold two tickets for me."

"Hooray!" We all cried out.

"Who is all right?" asked President Pupikovitz.

"Alderman Fitzpatrick!" we all yelled. That is to say they all yelled and I followed, because I was ashamed not to be part of the crowd.

## 26. The Lady's Auxiliary has an affair

Our Lady's Auxiliary from our Temple Jacob recently had a big “affair.”

Every congregation has a lady's auxiliary, but a lady's auxiliary like ours is an exception. In our lady's auxiliary you will find the aristocracy of Blotetown. You should see for yourself what sort of dresses, what sort of diamonds come together at a meeting. And a meeting by us is not just a meeting, but it is always associated with a whist party, an entertainment, a reception or some other affair.

The main purpose of our auxiliary is – charity. But since in Blotetown there are, thanks be to the Almighty, no poor people, our ladies have very little to do. Therefore, they don't worry too much that their affairs earn very little money, and often the expenses are greater than the income. Once, they put on a strawberry festival in the middle of winter, with the goal of funding a Yiddish Sunday school. The strawberries were extra expensive. Imagine: strawberries at Hanukkah time! It worked out to about 20 cents per strawberry. The decorations, the cakes and the other refreshments also cost a considerable sum. What was left in the end was a pure profit of a dollar with 75 cents. That was the first time one of our affairs ever made a profit. The ladies were so excited by the result that they decided to make a noble use of the dollar with 75 cents profit: They made a collection on the spot, added 25 dollars and bought a pen for our worthy President's wife, Mrs. Pupikovitz, as a symbol of their recognition of her great contributions to our congregation and to the auxiliary.

Evil tongues whispered that the whole strawberry party was a stunt by Mrs. Pupikovitz so that she could show off to all of Blotetown's ladies the lavalier that her husband bought for her at Tiffany's. The diamonds, people said, were worth 2,000 dollars.

A short time after the Strawberry party it became known that there actually was not a profit. The mistake came when they realized that they neglected to count the 12 dollar invoice from the florist for the flowers. That is to say, the affair showed a loss of 10 dollars with 25 cents.

The ladies of the auxiliary worried for a long time that they could not find a poor person in need of rescue. There are a lot of real estate brokers by us, but they are just tramps and beggars. They don't need donations. So our ladies have to make charity affairs to raise money, but there is nothing to do with the money.

Not long after this there came to the Lady's Auxiliary a great salvation. A year earlier a young couple moved in to a place next to the cemetery. It happened that the young man lost his job a couple of weeks before his wife gave birth to a child. As soon as the Lady's Auxiliary heard about it they quickly began to send heralds from house to house: G-d has helped us and sent to us a poor person in Blotetown. The ladies called a meeting and decided that they would make of the birth an 'affair,' a sort of benefit for the impoverished parents.

A committee, consisting of Mrs. Pupikovitz, Mrs. Kaban, my yidene, Mrs. Tsipe Yenta, and Mrs. Gogelich, went through the town collecting money. They soon had a considerable sum, a lot more than the strawberry party, or a whist party could bring in. They had tickets printed up for a raffle for the honor of being the godfather and for being the friend of the family who presents the child. Mr. Pupikovitz bought all of the tickets. He chose to be godfather and as friends of the family, he chose my Benele and his own daughter, Miss Nelly Pupikovitz.

The bris took place in the afternoon with a small group in attendance. An additional reception was held in the evening, to which all of the ladies came done up as though for a ball.

Mrs. Gogelich was dressed in a black satin gown which was a bit worn. The bodice was made with yellow satin and it was trimmed in black beads. She wore yellow shoes which were a little too small for her. jewelry she had without limit: a lavalier, and medallion on a heavy chain, 14 strings of pearls, bracelets and 28 rings on her fingers. She had to hold her fingers straight and couldn't bend her hands. In her hair she had a comb with diamonds, and also a lot of feathers.

Mrs. Pupikovitz wore a purple silk dress. The bodice was made from a white lace, the sleeves were puffed in such a way that her neck was hardly visible. She wore white shoes. The jewelry she had was worth three thousand dollars.

Mrs. Kaban came in a red dress, covered in flowers. But by her the dress was a little too open, you understand. Everyone said so. By Jews that is not good. Beyond that she was so soaked in perfume that whomever came near her got a catarrh in the nose and started sneezing. She was wearing jewelry worth five thousand dollars.

My yidene came in a new dress. The dress was white silk with green and yellow horizontal bands. Just like my yidene is short and wide. With these horizontal stripes she looked even shorter and wider. With her jewelry she had nothing to be ashamed of. I had her wearing my entire stock.

The one thing that really surprised me was that Mrs. Pupikovitz came with blond hair on her head. I am almost certain that the last time I saw her she had black hair. When I asked my yidene about that she made fun of me: "Ai, you are such a greener!" she said. "Don't you know that blond hair is now the best style? Mrs. Kaban is also going to go blond."

Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick came in his red automobile. He came in for a few minutes left a package of diapers for the baby then left because right now he is very busy.

Afterwards, Mr. Pupikovitz advised that we should give a report about the bris to the Yiddish newspapers, so that all of America should know what our revered sisters from the Lady's Auxiliary have done, and that it should be a good example for others.

Mr. Shafrinski, the secretary from our congregation, took out his fountain pen with some sheets of paper from his pocket. He sat down to write the report. He is a very smart man and writes very quickly. He can write in one hour what it would take me a week to write. And after he wrote, he read it to us in this manner:

### ***Noble Women of Blotetown***

*"The noble women of Blotetown have given a good example to the entire world. The Lady's Auxiliary of Congregation Temple Jacob, to which they belong, has long been known for the good deeds which the worthy sisters of the organization have done.*

*This week the noble ladies from our Auxiliary Temple Jacob once again demonstrated what noble hearts they have, namely: When Mr. and Mrs. Baranovitch's son was born and they were in a difficult situation, the ladies of our Auxiliary got together and held the bris at their own expense. The best servers: The worthy President Mrs. Pupikovitz and the worthy Treasurer Mrs. Kaban."*

“And where am I?” Mrs. Gogelich yelled out, “Why do they get the best thanks? Did I work any less?”

“Add Mrs. Gogelich,” Mr. Pupikovitch ordered.

Among the other women you could hear murmuring. One could see that we were on the brink of a revolution.

“Add in Mrs. Fusbenkel,” my yidene called out, “She prepared almost all of the food. She deserves that her name should be mentioned in the paper.”

“We should all have as good a year as we deserve!” Held forth Mrs. Shafrinski, the Secretary's wife, “And what about your name? As I live, you have put in the work, and I have too. On my honor, I would not be ashamed, if my name was in the newspaper together with Chaim the customer peddler's wife.”

“Bravo! Hurray for our sister Mrs. Shafrinski!” Yelled all the other members of the Auxiliary. “Everybody has put in the same amount of work, and all deserve the same credit.”

“Take my name off the list,” Mrs. Kaban said, “Also for me an honor! To be in the Yiddish newspaper! I don't want it.”

“Take my name off also,” Called out Mrs. Gogelich.

“My name too! My name too! I don't need it!” You could hear from all sides.

“So, we don't need any report at all,” Mr. Pupikovitz decided. The Secretary tore the report into little pieces and threw them under the table.

I collected the little shreds of paper and put them back together for you, the reader, so that you could see the noble work of our noble ladies of the Auxiliary.



## 27. He loses his atonements

About three months ago my yidene made it known that she wanted a chicken coop, that is, a hen house. There are a lot of housewives in Blotetown who keep their own hens, and have fresh eggs every day. Nu, she wanted the same thing. The coop cost me a whole fortune – something around twenty dollars. Afterwards we bought three hens and they became tenants in the coop. In the morning we found the three tenants dead. The suspicion in the three murders fell on the neighbor's dog. But since we did not have a good eyewitness, the dog remains free. We bought more hens and kept a sharp eye on them. A full month went by and early every morning we went to see if the hens had laid any eggs. We got nothing. We went to the grocery man to get some advice, to the butcher, and even by the iceman and by the milkman had we also asked. Each one gave us different advice. One advised us, we should feed the hens peeled potatoes, another said we should give the chickens salted water to drink, a third told us to let them fast for a couple of days, a fourth suggested that if we wanted eggs, we should go and buy them at the grocery store. We tried everything they said, even the last suggestion, but we got no satisfaction. Then my youngest son, Benele, called down (my rascal son, you already know him) and said:

“Papa, you have forgotten to buy a rooster!”

We all laughed, and indeed it was laughable. Such a simple thing never occurred to us. Benele is only around nine years old. But an American *boychik*, a smart one!

Nu, we bought a rooster. And you should see this rooster – a true gentleman, a cavalier. As soon as he arrived he enjoyed himself with the ladies, and became with them a real big shot. The ladies, that is, the hens, took to him in a very friendly manner, like a long-awaited guest. It was a joy to watch the rooster walk among the hens and puff himself up like a great hero, and then suddenly sing out: “Ku-ku-ru-ku – hu-u” ... All of the chickens in the world have one language. “Ku-ku-ru-ku” is by them sort of like the Esperanto that people write about so much in the newspapers. It could be that Mr. Esperanto took the idea of a universal language from the chickens. The rooster sang out and the hens joined in the choir “Kvow-kvow,” which in chicken-talk must mean: “Bravo, well done!” My Benele amused himself by interrupting the rooster in the middle of his crowing. But I snatched his ear and made him promise to stop it.

When it finally happened that we got our first egg, we carefully put it away in the icebox and decided to use it for the Sabbath challah.

The rooster is a white one and we reserved him for the eve of Yom Kippur. We bought more wives for him and he was living like a Turkish sultan, not knowing that the 'children of Adam,' as it says in the prayer book, awaited him.

In the house he acted like he was privileged. He jumped up on the tables and often did damage: broke lamps, glasses, knocked platters off, plates, and no sooner would we chase him out that he would come back in.

In addition to that, I started to suffer persecution from the neighbors. His crowing was disturbing their sleep. Also that of the dog, who belongs to a Christian, and when he heard the crowing he would howl all night. That didn't bother him, because a dog that belongs to a Christian is a huge big shot. All of the Jews from the neighborhood threw the dog sugar cubes and tiptoed up to him with their hearts

pounding with fear, and were happy if the dog let them pet him. It was considered a great honor that the dog accepted the cube of sugar and didn't bite their hand. Whomever could brag that the dog gave them a sniff or a lick became renowned all over Blotetown just as though they had taken the city of Port Arthur in battle. But an innocent Jewish rooster is – an atonement he will become – an incidental item, a calamity in the world. Respectable people will not tolerate his crowing, his clucking, his squawking, his proud strutting, his virtues or his faults. I won't draw out the story any longer, and simply say that McNally's dog, that is to say, my neighbor's dog, hated my rooster with his whole being, and when the dog lay stretched out on the ground next to my house with his chin on his paws and the eyes half shut as though they were dreaming, I could see in those eyes signs of murder, and these signs were directed to my hen house.

I took comfort that soon it would be the eve of Yom Kippur and my rooster and my hens would have a kosher death, and would climb the 'staircase' straight to heaven.

However, during the night of the Fast of Tzom Gedaliah something terrible happened. A pogrom, a regular blood bath! In the middle of the night I heard a great ruckus in my yard. A dog howled and the howl was mixed with the flapping of wings and a “kvow-kvow” which was full of sadness and despair, and which in Esperanto-speak must have meant: “Gewalt, Lord of All the World, save us!” I looked outside: My hen house was open, my hens were laying stretched out with their heads down. And the rooster was still floundering and gasping. He fell like a hero for his life and for the honor of his family!

McNally's dog was standing there filling his eyes with the death throes of the rooster.

And that was the end of my chickens! They atoned before they could live long enough to be an atonement.

## 28. An emissary comes to Blotetown

A guest has come to Blotetown. It is a emissary of an organization that helps orphans in the west. He has come to give a lecture along with stereo optical pictures showing how the orphan's home will be run. By us we have already organized a committee with Mr. Pupikovitz as chairman, and they have already organized an evening at the Blotetown clubhouse. The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick has agreed to hold a talk. McNally and also Mr. Callahan have consented to be among the vice-presidents for the evening. Everyone paid in what they wanted to and were seated wherever there was a place.

In Blotetown there is no theater, and so when a speaker comes, an emissary, a delegation and gives us a chance to get out of the house for a little while and spend an evening socially, we are happy to do so. But with the stereo optical presentation something of an accident happened. We heard it said later that the boy who travels with the emissary mixed up the glass slides by mistake and they did not display in the proper order.

The emissary, a Jew with a short beard, like mine, and very short-sighted, had, so it seems, not realized that the slides had been mixed up and climbed up on the stage with his face to the audience and began his lecture.

It was dark in the meeting hall and on the white bed sheet there was a view that showed several nice cows.

“That, ladies and gentlemen,” the emissary explained, “Is a meeting of the Executive Committee of our Lady's Auxiliary. They are the most noble women on G-d's earth. Consider the goodness, the honesty to be seen in their faces, and you will understand the noble ideas that fill their hearts and minds.”

This view was quickly replaced by another that showed several women, young and middle-aged, sitting around a table as though they were in conference.

“And that, ladies and gentlemen,” explained the emissary, still standing with his face to the audience, “are cattle from our own farm, who give us fresh milk every day for our orphans. Our cows are a wonder to all of the farmers near us. Two cows have won prizes at the county fair. We have been offered a lot of money for them, but we do not want to sell them.”

The third slide showed a huge, fat ox.

“I have the honor of making this presentation: This is our Superintendent.”

A number of us were already smiling, but there were many who had not yet figured out what was going on. They were sitting there with their mouths open in astonishment.

Then on the bed sheet there was an image of a gentleman with full cheeks and a thick neck.

“And that,” the emissary explained, “Is an ox from our own farm. The photo was taken of him just before he was sent to the slaughterhouse in order to supply our orphans with fresh meat.”

Now on the bed sheet appeared a picture of a large chicken coop.

“That is our new building which includes all of the modern improvements.” said the emissary, “This building this the result of several years' work and a source of pride for all Jews everywhere.”

“And that is the large stall for our livestock,” While on the bed sheet appeared a beautiful, large house.

“Our school!” He called out when on the bed sheet a picture of a stall came up. “There we follow the latest methods and instructional systems.”

“Our children amuse themselves,” the emissary said, but on the bed sheet there was nothing to see. It stayed blank.

At that point the emissary realized that something was wrong.

“Vot iss de matter?” He yelled to the boy who was sitting by the lantern fixing the glass plates.

“Just a minute,” the boy said, “I have to fix something.”

The next instant a shadow appeared that looked like the silhouette of a goat chewing a cud and working his tongue.

The whole audience exploded in laughter.

I looked and saw that my Benele had slipped over to the lantern and was working his hands. He had only recently learned to make several figures with his hands and make shadows on the wall from a lamp or light, and animate them with his fingers. The goat grew horns and lowered his head. I sprung from my seat and angrily seized my little scamp by the ear, and drug him home.

“Tell me, you little do-nothing,” I asked him when we got home, “What should I do with you? What sort of a punishment should you get?”

Benele lowered his head and was silent for a while. Afterwards, he asked:

“A big punishment, or a little one?”

“A big one,” I answered.

Benele thought for a moment then said:

“Give me ten cents and tell me I can't spend it for a whole week.”

How do you like this little do-nothing? He is growing into a businessman!

## 29. Shul elections and a Torah celebration

Around the Sukkot holidays we had our election of officers for our congregation Temple Jacob.

We all knew in advance that Mr. Pupikovitz would be reelected President, and that Mr. Bulke would be reelected Vice-president, and all the other officers would be reelected along with Mr. Shafrinski as Secretary. Yet, on Sukkot Sabbath evening when the meeting took place we all arrived on time. Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick also came, because wherever an election takes place he is there like an in-law.

The Protocol Secretary read a report from our worthy brother President, detailing the good work that the officers of the congregation did in the past year; and the noble work of the Lady's Auxiliary who in the past year had donated a Torah scroll. He extended thanks to the members of the congregation and to Reverend Doctor Hotzmech, our spiritual 'guide,' who leads us down the righteous path of civilization, humanism, Americanization ---

“And real estate speculation!” Pointed out Alderman Fitzpatrick.

Everyone applauded. I don't know which they were applauding for, the President's report or the joke from the Alderman.

All of the officers were reelected. It was easy to see that all of the office-holders were confident to be reelected, because each one came with a prepared speech. The first to speak was President Pupikovitz. He stumbled through it a bit. But Reverend Doctor Hotzmech, who was seated on the platform, quietly whispered to him what to say next. It was not a secret to any of us, that all of the speeches Mr. Pupikovitz made, were taught to him by Reverend Doctor Hotzmech. The problem is that Mr. Pupikovitz does not have a strong memory, and he gets himself confused. So, for example, by this meeting toward the end he said:

“It is by me an honor and a pleasure, no, excuse me, I meant to say that it is by me a pleasure and an honor to take on the position of President because you have so favored me ----- (here he coughed) I mean, with this you have demonstrated your sorrow [*trauer*] in me, excuse me, I meant to say your confidence [*zutrauen*]. I have been in America a long time, and when I have to speak in the Jewish language is difficult for me, you know. I tank yu very mutz far yur kind attenshun.”

The Vice-president, Mr. Bulke then got up to speak. He spoke fluently.

“Worthy brothers!,” He began, “This is the happiest moment in my life. This day will forever remain in my memory.” –

“That is my speech!” Interrupted, Mr. Burik, the First Trustee of our congregation.

The Vice-president, Mr. Bulke, stopped in the middle of his talk, trembling like a leaf and looking up at the ceiling.

“Order! Order!” Screamed President Pupikovitz, and clapped his hands together.

“That is my speech!” Screamed the First Trustee, Mr. Burik – “He stole my speech. He has no right to

give that speech!”

“Order! Order! Let him speak!” Screamed President Pupikovitz.

“I will not let him give that speech!” Screamed the First Trustee, “I spent my own money on Professor Zelikovitz's book for Yiddish Speakers, and I memorized an entire speech from it, and this beggar came into my house and stole the book, and memorized the same speech! Blood will flow. I will have him arrested, the thief!”

The Vice-president, Mr. Bulke turned red as a beet, and the First Trustee, Mr. Burik became white as a bread roll. [In Yiddish: bulke = bread roll; burik=beet] The brothers of the congregation began to whisper among themselves. Many of them laughed, quietly to themselves, naturally. President Pupikovitz also smiled and explained to the Alderman what was going on. The Alderman went over to the First Trustee, slapped him on the back and said:

“Go ahead, Burik! Stand on your rights!”

The Vice-president then came down from the platform, and the First Trustee gave the same speech from beginning to end.

But all of these troubles were forgotten when it came the happy day of the Torah Celebration. In our congregation there was a regular illumination. All of the ladies came dressed as for a ball. One thing hit me right in the eyes, and that is, that Mr. Kaban was right when he said that “In Blotetown there were women without end.” It is true. Young ladies by us are without limit and without reckoning. A Jew who moves to Blotetown with grown daughters has no hope of getting them married off. It is a dead town for young girls, a cemetery, and they will sit here until their pigtailed turn gray. Very often someone will sponsor a ball, and every woman who has a grown daughter in the house and G-d in her heart sends her daughter to the ball. But other than the young girls, no one comes. The boys seek their pleasures and company in New York. After supper they take a tram and soon the boys are there where there are bright lights, where it is dry, where they have theaters, a club, and they can amuse themselves. Our daughters stay here alone. The boys get married and settle in Harlem, in the Bronx, in Brownsville and the young girls stay here with us in Blotetown.

So, when you see someone who has a house in Blotetown, you will know that buried in the house is not only his money, but also his daughters. He can not sell his house nor can he marry off his daughters – no buyers and no husbands. And therefore it is no wonder that whenever there is a celebration in Blotetown there come young girls without number, and if someone spots a boy they say over him the “Prayer of Renewal.”

The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick came with Mrs. Fitzpatrick. The Torah procession made its way around to him like everyone else. When it came to the “Uzer Dalim,” he asked what it was. “Help the poor,” explained Reverend Doctor Hotzmech. “Cut it out,” answered the Alderman, “In Blotetown there are no poor!”

Tim McNally the plumber, Tim O'brian the watchman for all Blotetown together with his assistant and Jenny Mulligan the saloon keeper who wanted to be a lover of Israel, had also come to the celebration and guzzled everything in the world.

It was a festive holiday!

### 30. He makes a party in honor of Betsy's birthday

A while back on the Sabbath, my yidene said to me:

“Chaim! Do you realize that next Wednesday, G-d willing, is Betsy's birthday?”

“How old will she be?” I asked.

“Twenty-two,” my yidene answered me.

“She was twenty-three last year,” I said.

“You foolish Jew, you!” objected my yidene, “What has our daughter done that she deserves such a foolish father? Where is it heard of that a such a young lady, pretty and clever, should sit until 24-years old and not have a husband? What had she done wrong, that her father should force her to move into such somber mud, may G-d not punish me for saying so? Listen, Chaim, let me be the Papa, and I will run the whole affair. We will make a party for our daughter's birthday. She will be twenty-two years old next Wednesday. You hear? Twenty-two – not a day more!”

“So be it, twenty-two,” I said, “You have convinced me.”

We began to talk about the party: What to prepare, who to invite, and also whether we should order ice cream to have with supper or not. (The last time we did this it was swell.) We soon had to make a list of the guests we wanted to invite. Aunt Reyzl with her daughter and son-in-law is not three\*; Mr. and Mrs. Tsirilson, is not five; Mr. Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, the young man engaged to our second daughter, Flossie, is not six; Mendel Bak, is not seven; Mr. Gudliski with his wife is not nine. They are all New Yorkers. From Blotetown we invited two young men with their parents, something of a distant relation, makes already not thirteen. (We had our eye on the young men – one had already visited Betsy once.) From Blotetown itself we invited fifteen people. In the end it came out to a total of 28 guests.

My youngest boy, Benele, I sent to the drug store and had him bring back 28 post cards, and Betsy herself wrote out the 28 invitations.

Don't think it is easy writing out 28 invitations. The job took her until well into the night to complete.

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(\*) When making a list like this it was considered bad luck to name each person and, thus, identify their whereabouts at a specific time. An evil spirit or demon might overhear and show up to do mischief. So, to counter this you would say that the person would not be there.

Sunday is when the real preparations began. My yidene began to marinate the herring. By her, without marinated herring you don't have a party. The president likes to eat them. Nu, when you marinate herring, you also have to bake cookies, because herring without cookies is like a walking-stick without a walk. And my yidene makes such cookies, they could take the place of all your American crackers and biscuits. She makes them daily – and even every day it is a blessing, and to eat them, a devotion. Anyway, what else should I recount for you? The amount of food she prepared was enough for a wedding. My yidene is just like other wives: With the husband and the children they get what they get, but with guests she would rip her own skin off and give it to them. When a guest comes, she shows off her complete mastery of the home: The house is quickly cleaned up, the windows washed, we see a new tablecloth appear, napkins, a knife and fork for each person, and something to eat also. And that's just the incidental details.

Monday and Tuesday were consumed in cooking up various jellies, compotes, and snack foods. Wednesday itself is when the real work took place – roasting several chickens. With today's high prices the whole story is costing around 35 dollars, because of the schnapps, wine, beer and seltzer which have to be added in. But we have figured that it is all worth it. First off, because our daughter will receive presents that should be equal to the money we are spending, and secondly – perhaps; the Almighty might show mercy. There will be a couple of young men, and something may come of it.

When it got to be around six o'clock, we were all in the house dressed up for a party. In the invitations we had written, that the supper would take place at seven, but really we figured it wouldn't start until eight. I memorized a short speech to give before the guests. I wrote it myself on a little piece of paper, and learned it from start to end. Every time I was alone for a moment, I rehearsed the speech so that I wouldn't forget it.

“Why are you sitting there, Chaim?” My yidene said to me, “Go to the station and wait for the New York and Brownsville guests. It is dark outside, and it will be hard for them to find the house.”

I went out into the street. It was muddy and dark. The station is not far from my house, but in the block between us and the station the mud is the worst in Blotetown. Everything is mud! It is like pitch, sticky pitch. When you put a foot down in it, you can't pull it out, it catches you and down you go and come back up covered in mud. One time I went through this mud in rubber boots, when I got home I found mud in my pockets. That will give you an idea how deep the mud was.

I stood at the station and watched every train that arrived. Not one of my invited guests! How long I stood there, I don't know. Later my Benele came by and said:

“Papa! Mama sent me to find out where you were. No one has come yet. It's already half past seven. Mama wants you to come right back to the house. Papa, you hear?”

I came back home and found my wife saddened.

“Chaim,” she said to me, “There is something wrong.”

“What could be wrong?” I asked, “When you invite people to come at seven, they never arrive until eight or nine.”

“But Aunt Reyzl?” she said, “We asked her to come earlier.”



“Nu, she is a little behind schedule,” I comforted my yidene, “You know, when people are leaving New York at this time of day there are crowds, especially around the Brooklyn Bridge.”

“There is something wrong, Chaim,” she repeated, “My heart is telling me that nobody is coming tonight.”

“What makes you say that?” I asked, “A yidene, if she doesn't have a reason to eat her heart out, she thinks up who knows what. They will come, they will come – They won't give up their portions.”

“But, see Chaim,” my yidene complained again, “Why in this whole time have no presents arrived for our daughter? The fashion is that when you invite people to a birthday party, they send presents.”

“Nu, perhaps they will bring the presents with them.”

“Papa, it is almost eight o'clock. Our clock is a little slow,” said Betsy.

For a long time we sat there saddened without saying a word. Then the clock began to strike bim, bom, bom, bom – up to eight.

“It is already twenty minutes past eight,” Betsy noted, “The clock is slow.”

I went over to the mantle piece to fix the clock.

“You found a time to tinker with the clock!” Yelled my yidene in anger.

I pretended not to hear. I knew that you are not supposed to turn a clock back. I was turning the hands forward. Let the clock strike the half-hour after eight, then nine, the half-hour after nine, then ten. Bim, bom, bom, bom, bom, bom – that took up a full five minutes to get back around to eight. I let the clock strike eight times, then set the minute hand to twenty-five minutes after eight.

“Oy, my head is splitting from the clock,” called out my yidene.

She went back into the kitchen to check on something. The children were in the parlor. I stayed in the dining room reading a Yiddish newspaper.

In the middle of reading the paper I heard the doorbell ring. I got up. The children ran out from the parlor. Everyone ran to the door.

There was Mr. Shafrinski, the Secretary from our congregation.

“Thank G-d,” my yidene called out, “One is already here. Now, perhaps, the others will come. How late is it by your watch?”

“It is a quarter past nine,” Mr. Shafrinski called back, taking out his silver pocket watch, “But what is going on at your house? Who are you waiting for? What kind of a feast are you having? I see so many plates on the table! What is going on tonight, maybe an engagement party?”

“Mr. Shafrinski! What is wrong with you?” We both said at the same time, my yidene and I, “You didn't receive our invitation? Today is our Betsy's birthday. We are having a party!”

"I didn't receive any invitation." said Mr. Shafrinski, and with it winked his eye in a devilish manner, "Perhaps you didn't want to invite me, only just now that I happened by you are saying that I am invited, he-he-he!"

"What are you saying, Mr. Shafrinski?" my yidene countered, and she grabbed him by the lapels. – We should both live in good health if my husband didn't, with his own hand, send you a post card. Chaim, when did you put the postcards in the mail?"

"Friday," I said, "No, let me remember exactly – Sabbath, no, not Sabbath – It couldn't have been the Sabbath, perhaps Sunday –"

At that point I was struck speechless. My head I felt as though it was hit with a hammer. In my eyes everything went dark, and I felt as though my legs would not hold me up. I collapsed into a chair.

"What is wrong?" asked Mr. Shafrinski, "Are you not well?"

In that instant everything became clear to me, clear as crystal: I forgot to mail the invitations! After my daughter had written out all the invitations, I took them and put them in the box on the table, with the idea to put them in the letter box the next day. But the next day I forgot about them like you forget about the dead.

This was bad. There was only one glimmer of hope: Possibly, possibly this was only a bad dream. But there stood my yidene looking at me with such eyes. Oy, such eyes, that spoke to me saying: "You hoodlum, you have murdered me!"

The eyes continued to stare at me making me go all hot and cold, then suddenly I heard my yidene's voice:

"Hoodlum, you murderer of your own daughter! Now I understand everything – You didn't send the invitations!"

"I – have – not – sent," I could barely stammer the words, "I – for – got. Forgive me Tsipe Yenta – children – forgive your old father."

"Look, he's crying!" called out Mr. Shafrinski, and looked at me askance, "Feh! Like a woman! A man shouldn't cry. Only women cry. That's their job."

"Oy, I should be the one crying and complaining about such a trouble, such a misfortune."

I don't have to tell you that I what my yidene said.

"So, why are you getting so upset?" Mr. Shafrinski comforted us, "You have the party a week from now. No one will know. Meantime let's have a bite, and make a little party right now."

We took his advice and all sat down at the table. You can imagine that there was enough to eat. Only Mr. Shafrinski ate, because a Secretary of a congregation or any Jewish organization, is always hungry. From the troubles, I just drank. The alcohol made me more lively, it made me a new man. Mr. Shafrinski pushed one glass after another to me, and as it felt good on my heart, I slapped my hand down on the table and started giving the speech that I had prepared for the party:

“Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen! Today is the happiest day in my life. Today is the birthday of my dear and loved daughter, Betsy, she should live long. I am happy that you have all come here to take part in our great joy, and the joy of my wife and children. It makes me happy to see you all sitting around the table. I thank you all for the wonderful presents you have brought my daughter and for your good wishes. G-d willing, we will experience parties like this for your children and your children's children.”

“Bravo!” Yelled Mr. Shafrinski.

“Go to sleep!” My yidene called out, “Go sleep it off a bit.”

I followed what she suggested, and when I woke up in the morning I couldn't find my shoes and socks. I searched for them for quite a while, until I noticed them on my feet. That night I had fallen asleep before I had time to take them off.

## 31. Blotetown by night

People say that time is money. Maybe you could give me change for an hour in five one-dollar bills? Of course not! Above all, Blotetown time is not worth a doit. Time is a cheap commodity and everyone is trying to unload it.

When evening comes an uneasy feeling descends on our little village, and it will always permeate you. Simply walking down the street is nearly impossible because it is so dark. A real estate agent once told me: "It would be good if it was also dark during the day, people wouldn't see all the mud!"

What do people do when the time passes so slowly? I'll tell you what they do – they gamble! They play everything in the world, from okey to baccarat. The main one is "hakol shuchkim" – everyone plays. Everyone, young and old, men and women – everyone gambles. The Polish maid plays in the kitchen – she gets bored also. Even babies play and fall asleep with cards in their hands. My tenants Lipkinson the Culture-Zionist, plays. He has special cards with a Zionist stamp on each card.

Last Monday I was alone in the house. My wife and my daughters were gone to visit various neighbors. My wife has lately become quite a gambler and has cost me a pretty penny. She is something of a society lady and an important person in the Lady's Auxiliary. My two older sons had gone to New York, and my youngest, Benele, was in the other room doing his homework. I was sitting alone and thought to myself: It is probably not a big deal for me to drink a little tea.

I said to myself: Nu, Reb Chaim, put out a little effort in the kitchen. Put the kettle on the gas, and you will have tea. What you are not up to the task? It's not so bad, a Blotetowner head of household who has a society lady for a wife, can cook a little tea for himself. And that's just what I did, cooked the tea, found a clean glass, and served myself fine, with a little lemon and a little cake. When you are doing for yourself you have to be a little outgoing.

But when I stuck my hand in the sugar box, I touched something with hair. I jerked my hand back in fright with such speed that I knocked over the glass tea. The hot tea spilled on the table and into my lap. It burned me and I gave out a holler, "Oy!"

My youngest, Benele, ran into the room and asked: "Papale, what's wrong?"

"You can see," I said to him as I danced around a bit from the pain, "I put my hand in the sugar box – What do you think is in there? A living animal – It scared me, scared me to death."

The sugar box is made of Warsaw silver, with a lid on it. Benele lifted the lid and peeked inside.

"Ka-ka-ka-ka!," he broke out laughing, "Ka-ka-ka-ka-ka!"

"Why are you laughing?" I asked.

"Ka-ka-ka! Ka-ka-ka!" He went on laughing.

"You brat! I'll give you a slap in the face! Tell me, why are you laughing?" (I was really angry.)

"Papa! Ka-ka-ka! That is only Mama's puff. Ka-ka-ka!"

“What sort of puff?”

“The switch. Ka-ka-ka!”

“What sort of switch?”

“Haven't you seen, Papa, how Mama combs her hair high on her head in a pompadour? She just recently bought it. It is very much the style. She keeps it in the sugar box so the cat doesn't carry it away to play with.”

“All bad nightmares to my enemy's head!” I said, “Go, Benele, find me the sugar.”

I poured myself another glass tea, and Benele brought me a little granulated sugar in a plate. After that he left and went back to the other room to do his lessons, and I waited for the tea to cool down.

In the middle of this, my doorbell rang, and a guest came in: Aunt Reyzl from New York.

I greeted her with a “the scamp arrives.” But then I saw that she looked angry. I pretended not to notice and I gave her my glass tea, then went into the kitchen to pour myself another tea. Then I sweetened her tea and mine. I didn't hold back on the sugar because I know that she likes hers very sweet.

“Fine relations you are!” Said Aunt Reyzl, not directly to me, more as though she were talking to the lamp. “You make a party for your daughter and you don't invite your old aunt. That's not the right thing to do! Things go good for you, *kein ayin hara* [no evil eye], and you no longer know your old aunt!”

“G-d be with you, Muminke!” I said to her, “and have some lemon and some cakes. Don't you know the misfortune that befell us?”

I told her the whole story from beginning to end. I told her how we decided to honor Betsy with a party for her birthday, how my wife had marinated the herring, baked cakes, fried chicken legs, made all sorts of pastries, roasted chickens, prepared wine, schnapps and seltzer. I told her how we sat and waited for the guests, and how, above all, we wondered why you, Aunt Reyzl, did not come. I told her how I stood and waited at the train station, and how we all counted the minutes and continued to wait for someone to come. And in the end I told her how we realized that we had completely forgotten to mail the invitations, and there was no one to wait for.

Aunt Reyzl smiled and then she said, “Ai, you're kidding me!”

“As I should live!, I called out, “if everything I have told you isn't true.”

“Why do you have to yell?” said Aunt Reyzl, “Be it a party or not a party. Be it invitations or not invitations. I won't be a fool, and I won't ask you about a wedding. So be it.”

“Come on, Muminke,” I encouraged her, “Drink your tea. It is getting cold.”

Aunt Reyzl took a long drink from her glass, and quickly turned her eyes on me, brought herself up to her full height, and began to pound on my chest with both fists screaming:

“Hoodlum! Murderer! You have poisoned me! You want me poisoned!”

“What are you saying, Muminke,” I yelled, “I am drinking the same tea!”

I put the my glass to my lips and took a big sip. The minute I put that little bit of tea in my mouth, I ran into the next room, grabbed my little mischief-maker by the scruff of the neck, laid him across my knees and started pounding some sense into him.

“Na-dir! Na-dir!” I said as I worked on him, “You are not going to be a prankster any more, ha? Na-dir! Na-dir! When your father asks for sugar, you give him salt, ha? Na-dir! Na-dir!”

My Benele pitifully screamed, cried and swore that he did not know what to say, that he really thought it was granulated sugar. In my heart I also thought that he was innocent, but Aunt Reyzl had to be given a little satisfaction, and therefore, I thought, the spanking would not hurt him.

“Enough; let him up, the little scoundrel!” Hollered out Aunt Reyzl, and I let my youngster go. He went back into the next room, and I could hear how he was still sobbing.

“I am going home,” Called out Aunt Reyzl, “I did not come here to stay. I was going a few stations a little farther away from you, and I just thought I would stop in here. I will come and stay longer some other time.”

“All right, Muminke!, I said, “One minute. I will get my hat and accompany you to the station. It is very dark.”

I went looking for my hat and finally found it in the kitchen. How it came to be in the kitchen, I have no idea. I put the hat on my head – Guess what happened! – I was suddenly covered with sugar from head to foot. Like a thick snow it fell all over me and covered me in white.

Aunt Reyzl laughed, as I shook the sugar out of my hair and my beard. You probably understand what happened. My yidene wanted to take off her pompadour. What did she do? She poured the sugar out of the sugar box into my hat, and the pompadour she put in the box. Ai, why didn't she put the pompadour in my hat? Nu, that was obvious. Because the sugar box had a lid, and my hat does not have a lid. Perhaps you are asking yourself why the sugar box has a lid and my hat doesn't. – Nu, for such a story, don't ask questions.

Leaving the house with Aunt Reyzl, I noted that it was so dark – It was nearly impossible to walk. After we walked a few steps from the house, I could no longer see my house or the station. Before nine o'clock you could still see a glimmer of light from the grocery store, or from the butcher shop, or from a house, and that made it a little easier. But after nine o'clock it was so dark, that you could bite the darkness with your teeth. I felt my way with my feet. I knew that near my house was a shallow hole. I stepped out of the depression and my foot struck a stone. That told me that I was on the right path. Then I stepped in some wet mud, after that some thick mud. – I knew I was still on the right path. After that I felt us go down in a little valley. – I knew I was on Mr. Pupikovitz's empty lot. That meant I was still going in the direction of the station. Good angels were guiding my steps, and Aunt Reyzl was holding on to me by the hand. Suddenly, my face smashed into a wall. That meant we were a little off the track. We backed off a bit and walked a little farther, in G-d's hands, and found ourselves again in thick mud. – That meant, I was back on the trace.

We slowly walked farther with halting steps, and we crept on to a little bridge made of boards.

“Slowly, Muminke!” I said, and I could feel my liver in my mouth. I knew, that there, for the past year, a hole had been dug to install a new sewer pipe, then they forgot all about installing the pipe, and they forgot to fill in the hole. On the little bridge, we bumped into a group of people. They jostled us and we jostled them.

“Who is that?” one asked.

“Who is that? I asked.

“Let us go through!” said one of them.

“Let us go through!” I said.

Nu, as we jostled one another, since the others were Jews, we weren't afraid. They pushed us – we pushed back. Suddenly, I was separated from Aunt Reyzl, and we got all mixed in together like a bowl of kashe. I tapped around with my hand – and, viola, there she was. I took her by the arm and got her steady, and we soon were over the bridge.

I walked several steps then realized, that I was not walking with Aunt Reyzl, but rather an unknown woman. Just then I heard Aunt Reyzl hollering in the distance: “Chaim, Chaim, you left me behind, that woman is not me!”

I heard laughter. I couldn't see who was laughing. I struck a match. Over there someone also lit a match. It made a little more light, and I rescued my Aunt Reyzl from the stranger's hands and led her to the station. – It was not very far from this point.

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Mendel Bok, Mr. and Mrs. Tsirilson, from New York; my cousins from Brownsville and several acquaintances from Blotetown, told me that they were very upset with me. They heard that I had a party and they were besides themselves because they were not invited. It will take me another three months before I can make it right with everyone, and explain to them and convince them that it was a misfortune and not my fault.

## 32. A German confusion

A new grocery opened next to the station. Now we have so many groceries, that a visitor would think that all we do in Blotetown is eat. The truth is, that it is not the customers that eat so much, rather it is the grocery store people who are eating each other. It is a competition like a knife fight: Today one gives away eggs for half of nothing, tomorrow another gives them away for nothing, the day after that comes a third and pays you, so you should be his customer. I'm sure you think that I am all talk, but I assure you that is the way it is. I will explain to you.

A day doesn't go by that we do not find on our doorstep a circular offering bargains on eggs, butter, flour, soap, tea, sugar and so on. Often the circulars come with free samples: A little bar of soap, a small sack of flour, a package of oatmeal, a container with a piece of cloth to clean the oven, brass and other metals, that they send us to try out. A lot of the things that are necessary in the household we never have to buy, because we can get along quite well with just the samples. The day before yesterday we got from a store a sample of tea, which will last us until another sample comes from a different store. Sometimes we get samples of various medicines to cure headaches, toothaches, stomach aches – We give most of them away. We keep some, in case, if, G-d forbid, don't bother the devil, we do catch something. The drug stores not only compete among themselves, but also with the groceries: Everything you need in a grocery store, you can also get by us in a drug store.

Flossie, my second daughter, is very adept at obtaining samples. She searches in all of the newspapers for any article offering free samples, and immediately sends them a postcard. Every day the letter carrier brings us boxes and packets of various products, dyes, powders, booklets with pictures, small bottles with licorice-water and other remedies, also candy. One time Flossie sent a postcard to a stranger who promised to send us free a book with pictures. Instead of the book, there came a big, healthy young boy with two long, black mustaches. The boy was so persistent with her that it took her three hours to be done with him. He was an agent of the book company and was trying to convince her to buy from him a book, which contained all of the Seven Wisdoms and cost seventy dollars, to be paid at the rate of three dollars a month, and the first three dollars he would pay out of his own pocket as a discount, because he didn't want her, G-d forbid, to miss out. Finally, she hit upon an idea and told him that she must go, and that she would write him to tell him when to return, and that got rid of the boy.

The housewives work by us with a complete system, just like a big organization. They know already which grocery is featuring soap today, and which would be featuring oatmeal tomorrow, and who, the day after tomorrow, and where you could get a little sack of sugar free, and where you could buy a pound of coffee, and where you could get a pound of coffee for free and who was selling sacks of sugar. And they knew also where and when you could earn extra trading stamps and coupons. Everything by our Blotetowner housewives was accounted for and managed in a business-like manner.

The trading stamps and coupons are treasured by our housewives the way a pious Jew treasures his afternoon prayers. My yidene has four different types: One is of the sort that for 5,000 you can get a little table for the kitchen which is worth, maybe, 75 cents. She gets the coupons in a delicatessen store, a coupon for every 10 cents she spends there. She already has 13 coupons. She would have more, but she doesn't like to shop there because everything costs more than elsewhere. Another type of trading stamp she gets from the man who brings us seltzer. With every dozen siphons he gives a stamp. For a hundred dozen he will give you one siphon free. The third sort is from the drug store: A stamp for every five cents spent. For a thousand stamps she will get either a mirror or a bottle of perfume. The fourth type is from my son, Shlomeh'ke's cigarettes. He finds a coupon in every box and gives them



to his Mama. For a thousand of these coupons the company will give you a doctor's appointment. If you don't need a doctor, you will get a machine to polish your fingernails.

The competition with the stamps and the discounts is so intense that it is no wonder that in the middle of the week you see even in a grocery store an unexpected sign hanging outside that says, "To Let." The week after that you see a candy store open in place of it, which starts a competition with the drug stores, the grocery stores and the delicatessens all around. When the candy store closes its doors, its place will be taken by a shoe store, a tailor shop. – What it comes down to is that it is normal to see: "To Let" here, "To Let" there. So goes business in America.

In the morning at breakfast we tried the newest breakfast food. It did not have any taste or smell. They gave me the first plate as usual. I tried it, and immediately spit it out. It had the taste of cardboard. I put a little salt on it. The children laughed at me and said, that it is supposed to be eaten with sugar. I added sugar, but it still had no flavor. I watched the children try it. They didn't want to eat it either. But still they laughed at me because I can not accustom myself to American delicacies. Even though they are Americans and can't eat it either. I thought to myself: Let me show them how I can manage myself and go ahead and eat it. And I ate in spite of everything and, indeed, ate every bit on the plate. My yidene looking at me, also ate a full plate, but she made an observation: It has no flavor, perhaps it is good for your health."

Just as we were finishing up breakfast we heard the doorbell ring, the German came upstairs. How far away is a German from being declared crazy? I ask you, have you ever seen a German with a clear head? And the Germans speak so fast, my head is always chasing after the words: *hatte gehabt, sollte wollte, werde werden, donnerwetter, kashe, klein, dummkopf* – Just try to make sense of it! I said to him: "Mister, speak slowly." He asked, "*Was?*" I said, "*Speaken sie nit so hurry-up, ich kann nit understanden.*" With that he finally understood me, and he began to speak to me in English. I say to you, even though I am not a great Englishman, it is still easier to talk to a German in English than in German, because in English we are both on the same level – He can't and I can't.

The story that he had come to tell us, I can tell to you in a few words: The grocery man had some sawdust on hand to throw on the floor when it rained and was muddy. He kept the sawdust in a couple of boxes where he used to keep breakfast foods. His grocery boy had to fill the samples and filled some of the the boxes with sawdust, thinking that it was the breakfast food. Since the German did not know who received the samples with the sawdust, he thought it best to go around to all the customers that he had sent samples to.

"The ghost of your great grandfather!" I yelled in German, "You have poisoned me, *ferpoizent!* An epilepsy on you!"

The German tried to calm me. Perhaps I had received the correct sample. He took a little bit from the package, put it on his tongue, and chewed.

"It is hard to say," said the German, "Whether it is real oatmeal or the sawdust."

"Why are you standing there?" My yidene hollered at me, "Go call the doctor, we've all been poisoned."

The German left, saying that he had to visit the other customers, and I comforted my yidene:

“What is the rush? Right now, I am feeling nothing; perhaps it is breakfast food.”

I felt around with both hands my stomach. – I didn't feel any pain. It appears that I am all right. Only my throat is a little dry. I asked for a glass tea.

“Tea he wants!” Hollered my yidene, “There we stand, enemies of Israel, the Angel of Death before our eyes, and he asks for a glass tea! You scoundrel, if you have no mercy on your wife and the children, at least have mercy on yourself.”

The children also said that we did not need a doctor, and ran off to the train because they were getting behind time. However, I gave in and stayed behind to go to the doctor. As I entered the doctor's office I did not find him there. His wife told me that he is very busy, having received 45 telephone calls from 45 different houses. Half of Blotetown had been poisoned. She didn't know with what.

I went back home. I was now sure that we were in no danger because I had seen that the danger was in the other households. I tapped my stomach again and again, and everything was all right. I took out my pocket watch and took my pulse – It seemed my pulse was also all right.

Coming back home, I ran into to the doctor in my house. My tenant, Mr. Sheftlson, who had been searching for the doctor for the same reason, ran into him in the street and brought him back to the house. My yidene brought him to our flat. He wrote out for her a prescription for a powder, and for me a bottle of magnesia.

In all of the drug stores there was a big “run” on magnesia and castor oil. Everyone came out of this safely, and for all those who ate the sawdust it didn't seem to do them any harm. The doctor tested several of the samples and said that they all tasted the same.

### 33. A prospective fiancé comes to visit Betsy

Tuesday came by me, Shafrinski, the Secretary of our shul, on account of a very important matter. Shafrinski is from time to time also a marriage broker as it happens. Nu, he came to talk about a marriage contract for my Betsy. The prospective groom is from New York, a fine young man with all of the best qualities, cultured and a gentleman. For a dowry he wants in total a thousand dollars. Shafrinski says it is a bargain. The young man started with two thousand, but due to the bad times he dropped the price. I thought to myself, if he is cultured and a gentleman, he will also take less. The main thing is that he and my daughter should be pleased with one another. Because my Betsy is not exactly a young maiden. She is after all a school teacher, and she is also pretty, and a good girl. The women are in our exile very good by us men, because with such young girls like Betsy, the young people have to pay!

I told my Betsy about the bargain, I mean the offer of marriage, and told her that Wednesday she should get a little dressed up because the suitor was invited to supper. Betsy said, “Ach, Papa, I don't want to get married.”

“What does that mean?” I asked, “How could a young girl not want to get married? Where has anybody ever heard of such a thing?”

“I don't want to, Papa.” She said, “I don't like the men. Ach, Papa, the men are no good! Bad! Spoiled!”

“What difference does it make to you, my daughter, if men are good or if they are bad? Are you going to marry all of them? You need to select one, a good one and marry him, and the Mother and the Father will have a little *naches* [joy] from that.

That is how I tried to convince her. But she just turned her head. She would not get married, she said. Then she explained to me how she came to this decision.

“Listen, Papa,” she said, “I will tell you a little something: Two weeks ago, Sunday evening, I went to New York as you know to a friend. She is also a teacher. On the way back when I was walking in the street to get to the train to come back home, I was followed by five young men. Oh, Papa, you should have seen what sort of young men they were! They were all dressed like gentlemen, and looked like the sons of well-to-do people. I crossed over to the other side of the street, but they whistled at me and they also crossed the street. Where I made a turn, they still followed me. And when I finally got to the station, one of them blocked my path, took me by the arm and said: “Hello Dearie”! I told him that he should be ashamed of himself, and that if he has a sister then he is not worthy to be her brother. And if he ever showed himself to me again, I would smack him in the face.”

“You answered him well, my daughter.” I said to her, “You showed that you are a very smart girl. But what does this have to do with getting married? I doesn't matter that there are some immoral people in the world.”

“Listen, Papa,” she continued with me, “After that Sunday I have given it a lot of thought. I have concluded that the young men today are all immoral. They go around dressed like gentlemen, people take them to be respectable, they have mamas, they have sisters that are proud of them, and these young men in reality are immoral, spoiled, filthy, – And such young men can come after a pure, innocent

young girl and obtain a dowry!”

I was shocked. Such words I would never have thought to hear from a young girl. Truthfully, I knew that my daughter was educated, but what she had to say was brilliant, something she wouldn't have learned in college. The words came from her own head, from her heart. She had figured that all out with her maiden's good sense. I had the feeling that she was right, very right, but I still had a hard time getting it into my head. There are a lot of things which seem to be true, simple, but you can't get them into your head.

In short, I continued to dispute with my daughter and said to her that the world is not yet in ruins, and you just can't think that everyone in the world is guilty merely because of the sins of a few young men. There must certainly be a lot of good and honest young men who can make a Jewish girl happy. And, incidentally, just seeing the young man can't do any harm. If the young man doesn't please you, you don't have to take him.

Wednesday evening my yidene made an extra fine supper, and put napkins on the table. She put platters on the table with two compotes, two glass trays with fruits and celery. Everything was very festive and all the children were cleaned up and wearing their best clothes. And on Betsy, it was a joy just to look upon her. Shafrinski was to come with the suitor.

After the table was fully prepared, my yidene put on her scarf with the muffs.

“You are leaving?” I asked her.

“No,” She answered a little miffed, “I can't wear the muffs for a little while? When the suitor comes, he should see that we are respectable people.”

Arguing with my yidene does no good. She can be very close-minded. We waited, waited about a half hour then we heard the doorbell ring. The maid went and opened the door, and in came Shafrinski with the young man.

Before I even had a chance to take a good look at the young man, the fellow uttered a cry and jumped, and ran out of the house. Shafrinski was left standing there with an open mouth, and we all just looked at one another. Betsy had turned pale, and her teeth chattered.

“He must have been frightened by your muffs,” Shafrinski said to my yidene, “We should go and bring him back.”

Shafrinski went outside. Betsy came over to me. Her hands were trembling. I was frightened to see her like that.

“My daughter, what is wrong?” I asked. She answered me:

“Papa, that's him! That's the man that followed me last Sunday night. He saw me, recognized me and ran away.”

From outside we could hear Shafrinski screaming, “Come back in here you idiot. What are you afraid of? It's just muffs not a wild beast. You dumb brute! Come back!”

Amidst the screaming another voice mixed in, stammering, frightened: "Leave me alone, let go of my lapels. I don't want to go back in there. I won't! Let go, let go, let go of me!"

After a few minutes Shafrinski came back in, exhausted, perspiring, and sitting down at the table he began to talk, took a bite of the compote and said:

"Did you hear all that? From New York I brought him out here without a problem, and when he gets to Blotetown he goes out of his mind! You should have seen how he tore himself from my hands, and how fast he ran away! That's life, Betsy. Don't worry, I will find you another suitor."

## 34. Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich come to supper

“Chaim,” my yidene said to me yesterday morning, “You know, Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich are coming to us the day after tomorrow for supper.”

“What is with you?,” I asked, “Right in the middle of the week?”

“Well,” she said, “You start right in with asking foolish questions! I invited them and that's all! Never mind if it is a great privilege to have Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich come to our house.”

Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich first moved into Blotetown only a month after we did, and they immediately began to play a great role. Mrs. Gogelich wore such diamonds as Blotetown had not seen since Blotetown was Blotetown. You should have seen the diamonds. Every diamond was a property. Since the Gogelich's moved in the women have not spoken about anything else except Mrs. Gogelich's diamonds, her hats and her furs.

In our congregation Temple Jacob is Mr. Gogelich one of the foremost members and he receives a great deal of respect. Once he came to shul right at the same moment as the opening of the Torah cabinet. When everyone stood up, he thought they were standing up because of him and he called out:

“Sit down, gentlemen, sit down! Don't make such a tararam because of me!”

In the Ladies Auxiliary of our congregation, Mrs. Gogelich plays an important role. A couple of weeks ago the Ladies Auxiliary held a bazaar. They said that every member should bring a little something they could spare from their house to sell at the bazaar. Mrs. Gogelich brought her husband.

I must confess that when I heard that Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich were coming to supper with us, I was somewhat pleased. Everybody gets a little foolish when it comes to some little honor. I knew that everyone in Blotetown would be talking for a week about how Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich came to have supper with us. And, such an honor, I didn't want to miss.

It goes without saying that my yidene began preparing a feast fit for a king. Grapefruit she bought, and celery, and green cucumbers (15 cents a piece it costs in the Winter months). And all sorts of torts and nuts. In addition to that she cooked, and fried, and baked until there was enough for a party. Then she borrowed silver candlesticks, silver forks, spoons and knives. – Maybe around five hundred dollars worth of silver she borrowed from neighbors, aside from the little bit that we owned, thanks be to G-d. My yidene wanted to show Mrs. Gogelich that she is not just anyone.

Wednesday I came home a little earlier than usual, I needed to clean up and put on my Sabbath wardrobe. My yidene said to me:

“Chaim, I don't like your coat. At a supper where respectable people have been invited, one must wear a tuxedo.”

“What is that?” I asked.

“A tuxedo,” she answered me, “Is a short, black jacket with large, flat lapels and a silk lining. The

same sort of jacket that Mr. Pupikovitz wears on the Sabbath in shul.”

“All right,” I said, “ I will go over to Mr. Pupikovitz and borrow his tuxedo. We are just about the same size. – I am sure his jacket will fit me.”

And I started off for Mr. Pupikovitz' house just the way I was standing there in my house, in my *arbe-kanfes* [ritually fringed undergarment], after merely throwing on an overcoat. At Pupikovitz' house I encountered Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick with a big group of real estate agents. They were sitting around drinking tea and sipping schnapps. They had just concluded a deal with the Alderman who was sitting in the middle of them but only drinking schnapps.

When I saw such a big group, I lost my courage. How could I stand before them and ask Mr. Pupikovitz if I could borrow his jacket?

But Mr. Pupikovitz invited me to take off my overcoat and have a seat. Then I recalled that under my overcoat I wasn't wearing a jacket or a vest, only my *arbe-kanfes*. I had to sit down still wearing my overcoat.

“Take off your overcoat,” Called out Mr. Pupikovitz who was feeling quite jolly.

I said nothing and sat there like a boiled potato.

Mr. Pupikovitz came over to me. Also Mr. Shafrinski, the Secretary, came over. The two of them took hold of me like a couple of groom's best men, and forcibly removed my overcoat.

You can imagine how my face turned red as fire, as I was left standing there in my costume. The Honorable Alderman Fitzpatrick laughed so hard I thought he would get an apoplexy, and Mrs. Pupikovitz, who was also nearby, ran out of the room. But Mr. Pupikovitz gave me back my overcoat. I put it on and said:

“Mr. Pupikovitz, I came to you on an important matter and did not have time to dress properly. I just need to speak to you for a minute.”

He excused himself from his guests and took me into a side room.

“I came as you should loan me your tuxedo,” I said to him.

“I am very sorry,” he said to me, “I just loaned it to someone else only an hour ago.”

“To whom?” I asked, totally disappointed.

“Well,” he said, “I will tell you, but you must keep it a secret. My tuxedo I loaned to one of our wealthiest neighbors, Mr. Gogelich.”

“Mr. Gogelich?” I asked, shocked.

“Yes,” said Mr. Pupikovitch, “We thought he was invited to your house tonight for supper.”

I stood there without any idea what to do.

"If you want," said Mr. Pupikovitch, "I can loan you my full-dress."

"What is a full-dress?" I asked, "Is that more sophisticated than a tuxedo?"

"Sure!" he answered me, "A tuxedo compared to a full-dress is an intermediate holiday compared to a full holiday. A full-dress is a long, black coat with two long tails in the back."

"Give it to me," I said.

He wrapped the coat in a newspaper and at home I put it on and dressed myself up like a gentleman.

"Your vest doesn't go with the coat," said my yidene, "But it doesn't matter, you still look respectable. Get dressed quickly, they are coming soon."

Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich arrive on time, around seven o'clock, and they showed a good appetite at supper, though it appeared that at home they did not eat such good things as we had prepared for them. They only tried the grapefruit and after the first bite left it alone. Mrs. Gogelich was afraid to touch the table celery. She made a face as though it was bitter. Only Mr. Gogelich tried it. He ate the green leaves from the soft side and the white part he put back on the table. Neither of them made use of the napkins. They wiped their mouths on the tablecloth.

"Ai," I thought, "If Mr. Gogelich only knew that I knew where he got the tuxedo that he was wearing!"

But both, he and his wife, sat there and devoured the feast. Mrs. Gogelich sparkled like a Christmas tree. She shown from head to heels. And every time she moved her head I thought I saw a flash of lightning, and I wanted to say a prayer "Maker of Creation."

The next day in the evening I went to take the coat back to Mr. Pupikovitz which he had lent to me. I saw that Mr. Gogelich was coming toward me also with a package under his arm.

"Hello!" I said.

"Hello, good evening!" he said.

"How are you?"

"Very good, thank you. How is Madame?"

"Very good, thank you."

Then we just stood there not knowing what else to say.

"Where are you headed?" I asked.

"I'm going....I'm going...", he began to stammer, "I'm going to the tailor to have my coat pressed. I got it a little wrinkled."

"And you? Where are you going?"



“I,” I answered him, “I also gave the tailor a job to get the kinks out of my coat. I just picked it up. When I go by Mr. Pupikovitz' I am going to stop in because I have something to say to him. Goodbye!”

He went on and I went to Mr. Pupikovitz and gave him back the coat with my thanks, and I stayed there an hour talking over shul business. Just as I was getting ready to leave, Mr. Gogelich's daughter came in with a package in her hand, and said to Mr. Pupikovitz:

“Here, Papa is sending your tuxedo back to you, and he wanted me to tell you that he is very much obliged.”

“Ai, what a foolish girl!” said Mr. Pupikovitz once the girl was on the other side of the door.

## 35. He makes a trip to New Rochelle

Gentlemen, today I have a story to tell you, that you can call “*The Travelogue of Chaim the Customer Peddler; wherein he travels from Blotetown to New Rochelle and falls into “hotze-plotze.”* How would you be pleased with a tale like that with such a long title?

The letter carrier brought me a while back a postal card that was a invitation from a customer of mine to come to a bris in New Rochelle. The customer had only recently moved there. I asked my tenant, Mr. Sheftlson, the peaceful Socialist, how one gets to New Rochelle. He answered me “One rides there.” I thought to myself, a genius like that, I can be too. I took a train to New York and gave myself over to the conductor's hands, he should do with me what he will. In short I met a policeman, a conductor, and another fellow who answered my question and simply said to them “New Rochelle” – And with these two words I soon found myself in Grand Central Depot and on a train headed to New Rochelle. I thought that everything was all right. I took off my overcoat, folded it into a pillow and laid down for a nap. I thought that when the train got to New Rochelle, someone would most certainly wake me and tell me to exit the train.

But – as you have already figured out – I made a big mistake. I slept and the train traveled on and on. It stopped in New Rochelle the continued on it's way. I slept and the train kept going. I finally woke up and looked out of the window, saw the train was still going so I went back to sleep. I woke up again later and saw that the train had stopped and people were getting off. I will tell you the truth, I was still sleepy and wanted to nap some more, but I got off the train.

Stepping off the train onto the platform I saw about ten Jews, like the Jews from the homeland, some with beards, some without beards, a whole committee. They greeted me with a “*Shalom Aliechem*” and I responded “*Mazel Tov*,” and in my heart I thought it was the idea of my customer, the father of the infant, to send the Jews to meet me at the train to save me trouble of having to search for him in this wilderness, and the mud – which, as I am a Jew – was deeper and thicker than the mud in Blotetown.

They asked me, “What is the news in New York?” I told them all the latest news of the Sunday prohibitions, and about the competition going on now on Broadway among the Jews who sell kosher blintzes with cheese and potatoes for a penny a piece, and other such things.

As we walked on together, that is, me and the committee, we came across another committee, a couple of nice homeowners with odd, black handkerchiefs around their necks, and they greeted me with a “*Shalom Aliechem*,” and one pulled me to the side and said:

“I am the President of the congregation. My name, as you already know, is Schmelkovitz. I would like it if you would mention me in your speech a little, something like without me there wouldn't be a congregation.”

“Aha,” I thought to myself, “People were expecting me to make a speech at the bris. These country Jews are strange people. – They think every New Yorker is a speech-maker. On my honor, if I have any idea what to say at a bris. But I will have to say something. The Almighty will lay a few words in my mouth.”

The committee led me into a large shul. – A new one, fresh built, not even completely painted. I thought to myself: “That is just fine, a bris in the shul. Just what you would expect from wealthy Jews

from the homeland.”

In the shul there was a huge crowd. Men and women. I asked: “Where is the infant's father, Mr. Zalutin?” They just looked at me as though I were drunk. I said nothing – And I started to get scared. I was starting to understand, that I had stumbled into a stranger's celebration.

The President, Mr. Schmelkovitz, took me by the hand like the groom's best man and led me to the Holy Ark. I stood there like a frightened rooster, who had been interrupted in the middle of crowing. I didn't know what they wanted of me. The President opened his mouth and he started introducing me to the crowd with these words:

“Honorable gentlemen, brothers and ladies! I have today the great honor, the great pleasure and the greatest joy, ladies and gentlemen, to make this introduction. It is my great duty and my great obligation because you all know what the Holy Bible said, I do not have to build it up for you, because you know quite well, brothers and sisters, order, order, please, ladies and gentlemen. So, what I wanted to say to you, that you know very well, is how I have worked for you to build a House of G-d with a temple-servant. I will not praise myself, but I will introduce to you the so-named world famous speaker, patriot, the lecturer known to everyone, Reverend Doctor Yokelson from New York, who was, unfortunately, a little delayed, to our great dismay. So, I will not boast before you – – – “

At this point I couldn't hear any more of what he was saying. Everything was spinning before my eyes. It seemed to me that all of the men and women were turning in a circle around me and the shul turned upside down. It took all my strength just to stand in place, and say quietly to the President: “You have made a big mistake.”

“It is possible I have made a mistake,” answered the President, “I am not from very educated people. It is very rare that I speak words like this. I never learned grammar. Never mind, you can give your speech now and tell the crowd that today is the consecration of our shul, because in my speech I forgot to mention it.”

As he said these words a man with a short, trimmed beard entered the shul. He wore a stove pipe hat and a white necktie, a real Reverend. He went straight to the Holy Ark and asked who is the President and then said mostly in German: “Ich am, ya, a little late. Ich have gemissed mein train and had to take another. Und dats why I am late. Please forgive me.”

“Are you Reverend Doctor Yokelson? I asked him because the President had lost his voice.

“Ya wohl, that I am. I am honored to meet you.”

“He says that *he* is Reverend Doctor Yokelson,” the President said, pointing at me when he finally found the strength to speak.

“That is false!!!” thundered the rabbi, “Send someone for the police. The swindler should be arrested! Police!”

A murmurer arose among the assembled crowd. But one of them who was standing on the platform, a young man with round glasses, went over to the rabbi and asked him to be patient and to give me a chance to be heard. The young man spoke in English and the rabbi when face to face with him was a somewhat taken aback. I showed the rabbi my invitation and recounted how I was coming to a bris and

not to a temple consecration. The rabbi took from me the invitation to the bris, and after he read through it, he gave a hearty laugh. "You are completely lost," the rabbi said, "You ended up in the wrong town. Now you have to travel back to New Rochelle."

By then I had fully realized my mistake. In this town no one knew the Reverend Doctor Yokelson personally. They only knew about him from the Yiddish newspapers. And since they wanted to have him as a speaker at the temple consecration, they invited him to come and promised him ten dollars for the trouble. But the committees sent to greet him mistook me for the rabbi, and in error took me back to the shul.

It goes without saying that everyone had a good laugh. However, I had nothing to laugh about. I wanted to go to New Rochelle.

The young man who took up for me, took me by the hand and led me out of the shul. He told me that I only had to wait one hour for a train that would take me back to New Rochelle. The town that I had fallen into had a rather unusual name. I only know that it was somewhere in Connecticut.

I sat at the station and waited for my train. As I was waiting I thought to myself: No, I won't travel back to New Rochelle, but rather go all the way back to Blotetown. I must surely be too late for the bris by now.

I arrived home tired and hungry. It was already past supper. I asked my yidene to make me something to eat.

She got mad and said:

"That a man should be such a glutton! Gone for a whole day, carouses, eats and drinks, then come home and has the nerve to ask for food; All my energy is gone out of me from doing the wash, and all he wants is to eat some more. Has anyone ever heard of such a stomach as that?"

Nu, go tell a yidene everything that has happened to me! She would never believe me. I didn't say anything to her. I read a little *Kriat Shma*, got undressed and went to bed with a weakened heart.

So ends my travelogue of my trip to New Rochelle when I ended up in "*hotze-plotze*."

## 36. He breaks a finger

*Mazel tov!* My wife's new dress, that she had made to order, is already ready.

The '*mazel tov*' I am giving to myself. If you are a Jew, a head of household, and if your wife has ever had a dress made to order, then you will know the taste of this exile.

Yes, it is a diaspora, a bitter exile.

To make the dress it took all of three weeks. And since the dressmaker lived in New York, my yidene had to make several trips there.

The first week she went every other day; the second week – she every day; the third week – again every day.

To travel there she left at eleven o'clock in the morning, and came back at ten or eleven o'clock at night. New York is an evil place. When a Blotetowner Missus goes there for any length of time she falls under a spell. Once one is done with the dressmaker, they notice that not far from the dressmaker lives a former neighbor. One has to go visit the old neighbor – One can not be so rude as to not stop by. And when they visit the neighbor, they remember that not too many blocks away lives some people from the homeland. Nu, how can you not go to see those people, whom you have not seen for several months? Leaving them you remember that not far from there lives a cousin, an aunt, or some other relation – And how can you deny your own blood?

The next time you go to New York you remember other old neighbors, good old friends, relatives, distant relatives and so on. For appearances sake you have to include everyone, or they could, G-d forbid, think that in Blotetown people are too proud, and don't want to acknowledge others.

You can imagine what sort of exile the children and I had to bear due to the business with my yidene's dress. We had to wait for her a long time until we got supper, until everything was overcooked, burnt and dried out. The children did not want to eat without their mother, and I didn't want to eat without her either. So we had to wait there with the table set, every so often looking out of the window, and sitting like on pins with impatience.

That is why you can imagine that when my yidene came on Wednesday (Wednesday before last) back home, later than ever, around 11:30, after two of the children had already gone to bed with empty stomachs, and when the next day the dressmaker would bring to the house the dress, I could not help but to dance with joy.

The next day on Thursday when I came home, I found my wife in a happy, lively, joyful mood for herself and for the whole world. She told me first thing that the dress was on its way. The second thing she told me is that we were having fried flounder for supper. For me, when someone says fried flounder it is like someone telling me that I won the grand prize. In short, we sat ourselves down to eat, and I'm telling you, it was a very festive table. My yidene was pleased with her dress, and I with the fish.

After the fish dinner, I became sleepy. Because after I had gobbled up the fish, I took to drinking a couple glasses of beer. I am not a drinker, but it felt good on my throat to pour a little something down

it to make it better. It is a rare thing that a Jew feels good in the throat.

We all got ready to go to bed. My yidene first checked all the doors to make sure they were locked. You can never be too careful, perhaps a thief got wind that she has a new dress and wanted to come and steal it. Her dress was laid out on the lounge in the front room covered in papers.

I was asleep before her, and I was sleeping soundly. In the middle of the night I awoke and heard a faint sound. I thought it was the wind. I gave a look, my yidene is not in the bedroom. I rubbed my eyes – really, she was not there! A horrible thought came into my mind: Possibly, G-d forbid, burglars had taken her away, killed her and took her dress. I began to tremble in all my limbs. But, I thought to myself, one shouldn't be so frightened. I got up from the bed, turned on the gaslight, and went into the dining room. I heard someone moving in the front room. I thought: Perhaps the thieves are still there. I went slowly into the kitchen. I took a cleaver in one hand and a poker in the other, and I went into the front room.

Try and imagine what was happening, it is impossible. One would have to be a great writer. Who do you think I found there in the front room? – Right, my yidene! She had taken in her head to put on the dress and see how looked on her. Now imagine how shocked she was as she stood there in her dress in front of the mirror, and saw me come into the room with a cleaver in one hand and a poker in the other! She almost fainted. It was lucky she didn't scream for help, and bring the children running.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“What are you doing? I asked.

“I wanted to try on my dress.”

“And I thought burglars had killed you.”

She laughed.

“Aha,” she said, “Now you understand how a man should value his wife! What would you do if the burglars had killed me?”

“I don't want to think about what would happen,” I said, just to get a rise out of her. “The ladies in the neighborhood wouldn't leave me alone.”

“Libertine!” She called out angrily, “Who would take you? Don't you know, an old Jew like you??

“Don't get angry, yidene of mine,” I said to her, “Now is not the time to fight. Tell me, why did you put on your dress with the front of the dress to your back?”

“Oy, you greener,” she called out, “This is the style. These dresses button up the back.”

“A-nu,” I said, “Let me see the great wonder, how you can button such a dress.”

“You fool,” she said, “Such a dress you don't button by your self, you ask someone else to button it for you. A-nu, be a dear, let's see if you can do it.”

“What?” I said, “Me? Feh!”

“What feh? How feh?” She argued, “It's not so hard, you will get used to it. Would you like the job?”

“Where are the buttons?” I asked, “I don't see any buttons here.”

“An old fool you are!” She called out, “It works with hooks and catches. Don't you see the loops?”

“Aha!” I said, and set to work.

“Not like that,” she said, “From the top then down is the way you must do it.”

I started over again from the top then down. The first one was easy, the second, not so much so, the third - hard, the fourth – hard, the fifth wouldn't go at all.

“I am afraid,” I said, “This is not your dress. The dressmaker made a mistake. She brought you the wrong dress.”

“Oh, go on, go,” She laughed at me. “This is my dress. When I tried it on at the dressmaker, it fit me like it was poured on. No more. A man can't do the job. A-nu, put a little more force into it. Try another hook.”

She let out a little breath, and I took the fasteners in both hand, gave a grunt, and the fifth one was then all right.

“You are an expert,” she said, “Now go to the sixth one. All together there are twenty-four.”

“I don't see,” I said, “How you are ever going to get into this dress. Either we are going to ruin the dress, or, G-d forbid, you.

“Try! If you will only try, you will see that it is an easy job,” she commanded me.

An honest reproach, I thought to myself, a Jew of my age should give up such foolishness, and all due to the caprices of a yidene who wanted a dress in the latest fashion. A nice thing it would be if people could see me now in the middle of the night in my nightclothes, standing here laboring over the hooks of my wife's dress. People would think I was out of my mind.

In short I started working on the sixth fastener with all my might. Sweat was pouring off my forehead, my fingers were cramped. But I did get it fastened, because in spite of everything, I was going to finish the job. Suddenly I felt a sharp pain. At first I felt the pain in my finger, from my finger the pain jumped through my arm and right into my heart.

“What is wrong with you?” She asked, “Why are you dancing about?”

“I broke my finger,” I said, as I slowly danced around the room.

It started to feel like my entire arm was swollen. The pain I could even feel in my cheeks, in my ears, it went over my whole body.

With great difficulty I got my clothes on, and went to the doctor in the next block. I kept ringing his doorbell until I woke him up.

The doctor worked on me for a half hour, until he straightened out the finger. It was the second finger on the left hand.

A miracle it was a finger on my left hand and not my right. Otherwise, I would not be able to recount to you this story.



## 37. He 'swaps' his house for another

I have swapped my house for another. Now, swapping is very much the fashion, because nowadays purchasing is too hard – no one buys. That is why the trend to toward swapping, that means, trade a house for a house. Usually, one has to pay the difference.

I got into this a little too hastily, because I was afraid someone might beat me to the deal. I knew for example that Mr. Gogelich had cast an eye on the same house, and President Pupikovitz was also sniffing around. The property was a *schmaltz*-pit [*schmaltz* = chicken fat]. That was the word going around. A two-family house with a store. The store was rented as a paint shop, one apartment was also rented, leaving just one apartment empty where I could live with my family. All the rooms were big and bright, near the station and open on all sides. On a sunny day there is light in all the rooms. The agent who informed me of the deal reckoned maybe having to add a hundred to the cost. Very quickly I got excited about it, and I paid out the money and signed the contract. I had to add in 500 dollars to my house. My house became his, and his house became mine.

I will tell you the truth, I can't explain why I rushed into this deal, why I didn't wait a little. As soon as I had executed the contract, I found out that Mr. Gogelich was not looking at the property, and President Pupikovitz was not aware that the house was up for sale or for a swap. The agent was bluffing me a little on those points. Nevertheless, a bargain is a bargain. I am sure that in spite of all, I was not acting foolishly. The agent assured me that in a couple of months or so, that is in the Spring, he would get me a deal that would get me two thousand dollars profit on the house.

It was an evil urge. The evil urge talked me into the deal. You think that the evil urge only speaks to things that you are already inclined towards? No. The evil urge often likes to talk men into eating challah smeared with *schmaltz* [chicken fat] when they already have a stomach ache; The evil urge will talk men into poking a sick tooth with their finger, making it hurt more.; the evil urge makes you scratch an open wound, even though the doctor has forbid you to do it, and the evil urge talks men into eating all sorts of rancid foods, vermin and insects that sicken them and churns the gall, comes back out the stomach and for which a man earns the punishment of the world. That is the same evil urge that talked me into crawling with a healthy head into a sickbed.

Oy, it was difficult to leave the old house that I had put so much sweat into, so much toil. In the old house I had invested my first dollars, which I made in America peddling with a basket from house to house for a long time before I became a customer peddler of jewelry. It was hard to move on from that first house, and it was even more difficult to move into the new house. Everything seemed so strange, weird. I felt like a stranger in my own house.

Just after I moved into the new place, the man, who rented the store on the first floor and sold painter's supplies, moved out. The tenant that lived on the floor above the store informed me that he was going to move out a few days later. That's when I realized what sort of troubles I was in for! They had sold me a property with bluffing tenants. Do you know what it means, bluffing tenants? Ask any real estate agent and he will tell you what it is. It is the eleventh plague. You should protect yourself from it. When one has a house that is standing empty and he wants to sell it, he fills it with bluff tenants and that makes it easy to make a deal. Because who wouldn't want a house that has a store and a flat that bring in a regular rent?

There are agents that run large offices for this sort of business. They supply all sorts of tenants for new

houses that need to be 'filled.' The tenants get their rent free until the house is sold. Afterwards they move into other new houses that need to be 'filled.'

But a deal is a deal. When the real estate agent came by, he did not make a fuss, he didn't complain, he didn't have a unsettled manner. Quite the opposite, his face indicated that he was happy, completely content, and acted as though one had made a thousand dollar profit. I don't want to tell a lie, but in real estate you have to.

When we had finished with the move, it was already five o'clock in the evening. My yidene and the children were occupied with putting everything in order. I wanted to help them but, when I tried my yidene yelled at me, "Go away, schlemiel, don't mix in, don't trip over your own feet!" I didn't know what I should be doing. My yidene said to me, "You know what, Chaim, it is a little chilly in the house, go down in the cellar and heat up the furnace, we need a little steam."

I went down to the cellar. We had enough coal stored down there to last the entire winter. I started preparing the furnace. I lit it and added coal. I didn't stint on it because I did not want to give my yidene any reason to complain. I took an empty seltzer box, sat down on it and watched as the fire flickered. And I sang quietly to myself:

Flicker little fire, flicker  
Crackle cheerfully for us!  
The farmer in his field  
The shepherd with his flock.

"Papa, did you already light it?" That question came from my youngest, Benele, who jumped down into the cellar with a big ball in his hands.

"Sure, I lit it," I said, "Can't you see, my child, how the furnace burns?"

"But it is still cold in the rooms," answered Benele, "Mama sent me to tell you not to be stingy with the coal. We are cold."

Then the kid bounced the ball through the door. The ball flew and the kid disappeared after it like a spirit, for example, an elf, and was gone.

I shoveled more coal and the furnace glowed, like a coke oven. The flames danced, and it became so hot the I couldn't stand near it. There, I thought to myself, any minute there will spring out of the fire the famous salamander, that if you mash it and smear the blood on yourself, you can sit on hot coals without harming yourself. But instead of a salamander springing out of the fire, my yidene sprang from the door with sound and fury: "You piece of trouble, you! Where is the steam? You heat and heat and it doesn't get any warmer in the house, not even by a hair!"

That got me mixed up. I looked into the oven to see if the pathway the heat follows was blocked up. But it was open. I went into the house. The radiators were open. That left a question: If the furnace was hot, where was the heat going? I thought to myself: I will try shoveling a little more coal, maybe that will do the trick. I went back downstairs and began shoveling as much coal in as would fit. Afterwards, I went back upstairs into the house. – No steam, not the least bit warmer. From the vent in the radiator came a cold wind, as though someone was blowing cold air out of spite.

Suddenly, I heard a knock at the door. "Come in," and in came our tenant, the one who was going to move out in a few days, and he said:

"I thank you for your kindness in lighting the furnace, but it is already too much. You can stop shoveling coal. We have too much heat. It is like a bath."

The neighbor left immediately without waiting for an answer, and I was left standing there as though I had been swept aside. I was afraid to turn around to look at my yidene, I already felt her eyes boring through me.

"Chaim!" she yelled, "Do you know what you have done?"

I was silent.

"Chaim, do you understand now what sort of a stump you are?"

I didn't answer.

"Chaim, I'm speaking to you! Do you know what a piece of trouble you are?"

I held my head bowed down and did not answer her.

"Chaim, you schlemiel, you! See what a bitter schlimazel you are? You go to heat a furnace and you don't look around to see if it is our furnace or the one that belongs to the lower floor. Do you finally understand, that you lit the furnace that belongs to the store and the first floor?"

Not a word from me.

"Ha, you say nothing, ha? It is good that you don't say anything. Now go tell everyone that your wife is a terrible person, and she quarrels with you for no reason, that she makes up stories about you!"

I sat myself down and stared into a newspaper.

"So why are you just sitting there?" she asked angrily, "Go downstairs and heat our furnace. Shovel the coal out of the neighbor's furnace into ours."

I went downstairs to do my wife's bidding. After all, she was, indeed, right. The two furnaces were standing one next to the other. Why didn't I think to figure out which furnace belonged to our rooms?

But this was not the time to philosophize. I got down to work. First I got our furnace lit, then I shoveled the hot coals from the neighbor's furnace into mine. It was not an easy job. I wish it on my enemies to have to carry hot coals.

After supper I went straight to bed. I was tired, broken. We all went to bed early in the evening, because we were all tired from the move. But, no sooner had I gone to bed and closed my eyes than I heard a tararam, a knocking and on top of that swishing a whistling and screeching that caused me to jump up in alarm. What do you think that was? – A train! My new house was right next to the station, and it never occurred to me that a station might disturb our sleep. A whole day I watched the trains coming and going and they did not bother me. It never came to mind that it might be something of an

annoyance. What difference a train clatters? What difference a train roars, screeches, shrieks? Who would be bothered by that?!

It was only that night when I laid down to go to sleep that I saw that this was hell, a punishment for the sins of the world. I hardly closed my eyes the entire night. Each time I was about to go to sleep another train would come by and the whistle and the screeching would make me wake up again. Once I woke up and wanted to run out into the street – The blood in my veins was beginning to simmer! I had to do something: Turn the train over and murder the motorman and the conductor. Ai, the passengers also? Yes, them too! They shouldn't be traveling when respectable people are laying down in bed to rest from their labors.

No one by us got any sleep that night. People comforted us by saying that after a while we would become accustomed to it and be able to sleep again without hearing the noise from the clanking. But we didn't believe them.

## 38. His daughter, Flossie, moves into his house

(Between the 34<sup>th</sup> and the 35<sup>th</sup> chapters I left out an important event. Namely: Flossie got married privately to her fiancé Thomas Barkley (Tuvia Baer) Tshaprinski, without asking for her parent's blessing. The groom wanted to avoid too much tararam. After they had their wedding within the religion of Moses and Israel by a rabbi, they came to visit the parents. Chaim the customer peddler forgave them, but he could not forget the unpleasant happening. That is why I left the chapter called "The Elopement" out of the preceding narrative. – Y.Y. Zevin)

As you can see, everything by me is going hurry-up. Last week I moved into my new house, and this month, very early, my daughter moved in. The same evening a large express wagon, as big as a house in a small village in the old country, was needed to bring all the household items belonging to my Flossie and her husband, my son-in-law Mister Thomas Tshaprinski, who had settled in the Bronx after their wedding.

The express wagon left the Bronx at seven o'clock in the morning and did not arrive in Blotetown until night.

We all pitched in to help the young couple to get everything settled. I helped too, and also went downstairs to light their furnace. Flossie had promised my yidene that she could sit quietly and not exert herself and that caused my yidene to motion to me. I glanced at Flossie and saw that her cheeks were glowing red, she was ashamed, turned her head away looking out of the window.

I was taken by a strange joy. I wanted to sing, to dance, but I didn't want to shame Flossie. I went over to my son-in-law. I gave him a slap on the back, as though to say: "Give me a cigar. You smoke cigars, don't you?"

"With the greatest pleasure." he said, and gave me a cigar but a fine one, an expensive one that cost five cents a piece strait, and if you were a steady customer you could get them six for a quarter.

I smoked one. – It is a treat for the soul. I immediately had a coughing fit.

"That's something you need to do, to smoke!" said my yidene, "Anytime someone offers you a cigar. Look, look how he coughs! Stop smoking and stop choking yourself!"

"Too strong for you, too heavy? – My son-in-law asked me, "Take a lighter cigar."

"Tenk you," I said, taking from him another cigar. – "I will first finish the strong one, then smoke the lighter one."

The young couple enjoyed supper with us because that evening they could not prepare anything in their kitchen. It was a great pleasure to see my dear daughter once again at my table. Our little bird had come back to the nest and found her usual place waiting for her. I can not describe to you the feelings that I felt sitting there with my daughter knowing that from now on she would be with us under the same roof and she would be saying "Good morning, Papa" and "Good evening, Papa" every day in the morning and in the evening. Why can't it be the case that parents and children never have to separate, never have to tear a piece of out of their hearts and be forgotten? Ai, the world today, life today! Once,

in the good years, the father's took the sons-in-law as boarders. They had them with them in the same house and gave shelter to the children and the grand-children; the grandfather, the grandmother, the father the mama all lived and grew old together like a herd of sheep, and lived in the assurance of the watchfulness of the Shepherd, the Leader who led the whole world. Together they were happy and together they comforted one another when, G-d forbid, a misfortune befell them. One's joy – everyone's joy; one's misfortune – everyone's misfortune. When the house became too small they would spread out into neighboring houses and little by little there would be narrow streets and neighborhoods inhabited by family, with uncles, aunts, cousins, second-cousins, relatives and in-laws. If a grandfather passed away his funeral procession would be followed by ten daughters, ten sons-in-law, four sons, four daughters-in-law over a hundred grand-children a couple of *minyans* [one *minyan* = 10 men] of great-grandchildren and with G-d's help, maybe the great-grandchildren would come to the funeral with their children, youngsters who would already be learning their prayers with Rashi. That his how the Jewish families lived in the good old days! But enough already, with the way things were in the past!

All luck comes to one after he had given up the last hope. I had long given up hope of renting out my empty store – Now I have suddenly gotten two offers at once.

Just a little more than two weeks ago a young man came to me and asked if I would partition the store in half. He wanted to open a dairy store, and he only needed half the space. I asked, “What can I do with the other half?” In a short while after a little back-and-forth, we settled things, and the next morning he brought to me another young man who took the other half of the space as a wurst and delicatessen store. The wurst-man also wrung out of me a month's free rent.

How can one help it, when a store is for rent, it tugs at your heart as you walk by and see the bare windows and know that it is empty inside. But a Jew in Blotetown is not destined for any joy. After both of the storekeepers had time to fix up both their stores, they started right away to compete with one another, and then to fight and punish each other.

Imagine, can you, what the competition was? One sold dairy the other – meats. So, what does one have to do with the other? What does milk have to do with wurst, cheese with pastrami, smoked tongue with sour cream? But if you even ask that question you show that you are not a businessman, and you don't know what business is.

It all started out with crackers. The milk-man saw that the wurst-man had a few boxes of crackers on his shelves.

“What kind of an in-law are you with crackers?” he asked.

“Crackers belong in a delicatessen store,” the wurst-man answered him.

“No!” – screamed the milk-man, – “Crackers you eat with milk. And if you are going to stock crackers, I am going to sell sardines.”

And, sure enough, a few days later the milk-man had sardines, and what's more, caviar. The wurst-man cursed and made a big fuss.

He drug me down into the store and laid out his complaint, but the milk-man made the counter-complaint that nearly every dairy store sold sardines, caviar and in other dairy stores one can buy lox,

dried fish, sturgeon, nuts, beans, peas and all sorts of grapes. And that was, indeed, a hint that he was going to stock all of those things.

You can surely imagine what a heartache I was getting from my two merchants who were eating out my lung and liver with their competition and their squabbling. Meanwhile, I still had not seen the first penny out of either of them, and it was beginning to look like they would move out before the end of their free rent period.

### 39. An early crop

It happened Friday, the eve of Shabbos. I came home from business a little earlier than usual. In walking from the station to my house I sensed something in my nostrils, a sort of freshness that reminded me somewhat of Passover, of Spring. The air had a little warmth and the grass which remained with a little green in it and in spite of that frigid thief, the snow, was giving off that first summer sweat. And this sweat had traveled from the grass to my nostrils and it reminded me if we didn't want to have a beginning of the year, then we wouldn't have a Passover, and after Passover a Jew felt happy: One was already thinking about getting out of his heavy overcoat, warm hat, and the warm long-johns. Honestly, it was indeed summer, I thought to myself, and I was breathing in the smells of the fresh grass which was just coming up resurrected. Full of these thoughts I came to my house, and when got up close to it I got the idea to take a look at the garden in our yard to see how the little bit of grass was doing there – Eh, what did my eyes see? Is it a dream, or a blindness from a conjurer? Listen, listen! On this little empty place behind the house, where my yidene hangs out the wash, there where I never till, never seeded, never planted, a whole bunch of things had sprouted, a flower garden! There were red flowers, white flowers, blue flowers. Do you think there were only flowers? Flowers were just the beginning. There were also cherries, there were plums, and there were peaches. In my great surprise I forgot to stop and think how plums and peaches would be growing on the ground like fruit of the earth. I ran into the house, up the stairs and seeing my yidene I called out:

“What do you say about them?”

“What should I say about them? About what? About when? About who?” she asked me.

“To our flower garden,” I said, “To our orchard. It is the greatest wonder in America – So early in March!”

“Chaim!” she yelled out with a little impatience in it, “What are you babbling about today? What is wrong with you? What orchard? What flower garden?”

“Aha!” I said in victory, “From your yelling I can see that you don't know yet. Nu, if you don't know, then you shouldn't yell. Go, take a look in the yard, all sorts of flowers have sprung up, cherries, plums, grapes, peaches.”

My yidene looked at me as though I was a *meshuggener*. But she couldn't hold herself back and went down into the yard, and I followed her. Behind me came Betsy, my oldest daughter, and Jenny my third daughter. Benele was already on the way and ran over to us.

Once we were down into the yard, a disaster occurred. Instead of delighting in the flowers and fruits, my yidene wrung her hands and made a yammer to heaven above. Betsy and Jenny began picking the flowers and the cherries and the other sweet fruits, and along with them pieces and scraps of women's hats. My married daughter, Flossie, also came down from her apartment. She clapped her hands together and hollered out:

“That is McCarthy's dog! I could swear that that's his work!”

At that point the whole story became clear to me: My yidene and my daughters had bought Spring hats and the dog got into the house, snatched the hats, took them outside and chewed and ripped them into



pieces and spread them all over the yard. So those were the flowers, the cherries, the peaches, the grapes that I had seen in my garden!

My yidene unleashed all of her anger on me. She said that I knew from the beginning that the dog had done all the damage, but I didn't say anything about it, just to get a rise out of her and pour salt into the wound. Very soon, I had had enough!

## 40. Blotetown has a kosher Passover

On the eve of Passover the German, who every day brings us bottled milk, brought us the same number of bottles as usual, but with Passover labels. After him, came the seltzer man who brought us Passover seltzer. The seltzer man is an Irishman. He told me that a Jewish Reverend Doctor sold him the '*Shel Pessach*' [For Passover] labels and got for them twenty-five dollars. For that he also got 'made kosher' his soda water and his cider. My son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, had a little fun with the Irishman and pointing to the '*Shel Pessach*' label asked him if he knew what it meant. "It means good luck," the Irishman said. Probably that is how the Reverend translated it for him.

Say what you want about America, we like this land more and more. When I see how the *goyim* [gentiles] concern themselves with our religion, how the Germans supply us with Passover milk, and how the Irish supply us with Passover soda water and Passover cider, I am proud to be a citizen of such a free and happy land. But my son-in-law is not pleased with it. He is a young man, a little of a hothead and likes to cook things up: "It's a low-down swindle!" He hollered at me once the Irishman left. "Jews don't have a hair of self-respect. I could swear that the that the Irishman laughed at us in the hope that we would be blinded in our eyes by a label. Damn, what is going on with our rabbis! Where is their self-respect? Aren't they ashamed to make such deals with the gentiles, and sell kosherness on milk and water? Are we fooling ourselves? You know quite well that the milk is not kosher for Passover, no soda water kosher for Passover, no potatoes kosher for Passover, and no furniture for Passover! Feh, terrible! I am shamed up to my eyes to show myself before the *goyishe* milkman."

I let him talk and talk along these lines so that he got a little more heated up. And as he was about to boil over, I said to him:

"Ai, you are a hot one! Just like all young people. Little fool, do you think that we older Jews understand nothing? Never mind, we know and we understand everything. But then – we keep silent. Why are we silent? Because we have weak hearts, because we want things to go better. We know, you don't have to explain it to us. But therein is another story, an old story, and the short version is: "The people of Israel must make a livelihood," Jews must make a living. What right do we have to criticize our rabbis when we have never given them a means to become independent? Have you ever seen a rabbi that did not need support from side-jobs, from wine, or other Jewish occupations? Besides writing divorce papers and declarations of kosher? No, my child, the rabbis are not the guilty ones. We are not the ones to demand more of them."

"That's just the way a Jew would talk!" said Flossie as she came to us smattered with flour and her fingers covered in matzo meal and honey (She had been helping my yidene make *teiglach*). "You, Thomas, enough already with you! What do you want from my Papa? And you, Papa, don't eat your heart out. Thomas doesn't mean it. He is a good person!"

Flossie began stroking her husband with her finger. He took her hand and lifted it to his mouth and started licking the honey off her fingers.

"Nibbler!" she said.

I was jealous of her. Young people, they joke, they are happy, and they love one another. I went into the kitchen. My yidene was standing there with the maid (for Passover she hired a Polish *shiksa*

[gentile woman]) and they were discussing the knadels [light matzoh balls]. I took my yidene's hand and also wanted to lick the honey from her fingers.

“*Meshuggener!*” she yelled and rubbed her fingers all over my face. My whole beard was smeared with honey. I ran straight to the sink, turned on the hot water and began to wash my beard so that it would not get clotted from the honey.

A dinner we had, a really fine one. Flossie with my son-in-law were invited to eat with us through Passover and it was a joy to have both of them at our table for the meals. Benele had already during the day asked me the Four Questions and extorted from me a quarter to do so – otherwise, he threatened to go on strike and refuse to ask the Four Questions. He also threatened that he was going to organize a union of all the boys in Blotetown and they would all strike.

He asked the Four Questions like a gentleman in the American fashion: “Papa, I vill esk you four qvestions. De first qvestion is She-b'khol ha-leylot in de necht fun all year round essn mir chameytz v-matzah – chameytz and metzah, but ha-leylot hazeh, tonight kulo matzah – ve eat matzah and dats all.” And that's how he also destroyed the other three questions. But when I wanted to begin reciting the *Tirutz evrim hainu*, he said to me:

“Papa, I have a fifth question.”

“Enough,” I said, “more than four we don't need.”

“But I want to ask,” he said very insistently, “I vant to esk a fifta qvestion.”

“All right,” I said, “ask.”

“Papa,” he asked, “Why can't we see Elijah the Prophet when he comes in?”

“*Evrим hainu lepreah bemitzrim*,” my son-in-law and I began reading from the Haggadah and my son-in-law whispered in Benele's ear that tonight he would show him Elijah the Prophet. He would be able to see him with his own eyes. When it came time to recite the Ten Plagues and everyone spritzed a little wine with their finger for each plague, Benele did it a full eleven times.

“There were only ten plagues,” my son-in-law said to him.

“Eleven!” Benele said to him.

“A-nu, where is the eleventh?”

“Blotetown!” Benele hollered out.

At dinner my son-in-law told Benele that in order to see Elijah the Prophet he would have to sit in a dark room next to a big mirror, and don't be shocked in case Elijah the Prophet give you a tickle under the arm, or he pulls your ear. Benele was told to go into the front room when we opened the door for Elijah the Prophet, and to wait there until the Prophet made his presence known.

However, when it came to the “Pour out your wrath” passage my Benele lost his courage. He went into the front room where the gaslight had not been turned on and where the big mirror stood, but quickly

came back into the dining room. He was scared. My son-in-law tried talking him into going back into the front room but Benele, so it seemed, was afraid to meet up with Elijah the Prophet who tickled people under the arms or could pull somebody's ear if he wanted to.

My yidene and Betsy went to open the door. My yidene had earlier done her hair and put a new shaw around her shoulders. Benele looked with both eyes toward the door. My son-in-law bowed deeply and said "Blessed be you," just as through he had really seen Elijah the Prophet. Benele's teeth chattered and when we finished saying the "Pour out your wrath" and started on the "Reasons" Benele asked:

"Did he go already?"

"Yes, my son," I answered him, "He is already gone. Don't be afraid. Elijah the Prophet is good, he does no harm to anyone."

"Unless one is a bad boy who sickens the dog on the neck of the greens peddler," added my son-in-law.

Benele was already not completely with us. Something of a melancholy mixed with a little fright had taken him over. But the Four Cups had made him a little sleepy. He went to bed. (He sleeps in a little room next to mine.) A little later we all went to sleep, when I heard like in a dream: "Papa! Papa!" It was Benele's voice.

"What is it?" I asked him, as I went to his little bed.

"Papa! Somebody is here!"

"Who is there?" I asked.

"I donno," he said, "Somebody – Elijah the Prophet, maybe."

"What makes you think so? Did you dream that?"

"No, but I tink dat Mama forgot to let him out. He is there, for sure! I saw him going into the dining room and then he crawled under the sofa."

During this my yidene got dressed a little and came into Benele's room also, where a gaslight was burning. (Benele was afraid to sleep in the dark.)

"What are you doing there?" asked my yidene.

"Do I know what with the youngster turning my brain!" I said, "He has convinced himself that Elijah the Prophet is still here. See how he is trembling with fear."

"My child, what is with you?" said my yidene to calm him down, "Come into the dining room, let's see."

Jenny and Betsy came out of their bedroom with a candle in their hands, and we all marched into the dining room. When we were all inside the room, something jumped from out under the sofa, a bottle.

My yidene, Betsy and Jenny ran out of the room with a scream. Benele also did not keep quiet. I will tell you the truth, that I myself was also frightened. Tell me, have you ever seen a bottle jump from under a sofa?

My son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tcharprinski, with my daughter, Flossie, came down from their floor and were knocking at our door and calling out: "What is going on in there?"

I grabbed the burning candle from Betsy and with great self-sacrifice I rushed to open the door for my son-in-law and my daughter.

The minute my son-in-law came in, from under the sofa came another bottle. Afterwards, a glass, and after that a whole pitcher.

"Who is there?" my son-in-law asked.

"I don't know," I answered, and I could feel my teeth chattering.

My son-in-law bent down, ran his hand under the sofa and pulled something out from under it. At first I saw a shoe, then a bit of a dress, then a second shoe, a second sock, and then we saw the whole article. – It was our Polish maid! And after he had pulled her all the way out, she started singing in Polish an ode to vodka.

She kept singing until my yidene gave her a good shake to stop her.

Immediately after Passover we sent the drunk lady away.

## 41. Benele makes money on a spanking

I have already said that when my Benele grows up he will be a big businessman, and now I will tell you how I have come to this conclusion. In order to tell the story properly, I have to go back four months to when the story I am about to tell you began.

My Benele, he should be healthy, as you already know, does very well learning in school, but in *cheder* [Hebrew school] he is not so ai-ai. Earlier he was enrolled in Reverend Doctor Hotzmech's Hebrew School in Blotetown. But he never got past the "Ma Tovv." song. Reverend Doctor Hotzmech is a little bit of a Reformed, and the Reformed are a little strange: They once started with the "Ma Tovv" and didn't want to go any farther. I once asked my Benele: "A-nu, little scamp, what did the Reverend Doctor Hotzmech teach you today?" And the scamp struck a pose like a soldier at attention and sang in a musical voice, first with a German translation, then with English like this:

How goodly how schön sind  
great deine zelten  
Yekv, Oh, Yakov!  
Great deine Wohnungen  
Ishrael, Oh, Israel!  
How goodly how beautiful  
Great de tents  
Yekv, Oh, Jakob!  
Great de dwellings,  
Ishrael, Oh, Israel.

About a month later I grabbed him, that little rascal of mine, and asked him: "Nu, what did you learn today you do-nothing?" And my little do-nothing struck a pose like a soldier at attention and recited:

How goodly how schön sind  
great deine zelten  
Yekv, Oh, Yakov!

And so on until he had ended the whole passage with the German and the English.

Another six weeks went by. My head was spinning from my business, and I didn't even think to ask what my son was learning and what he had already learned. What businessman in America has the time to bother his head with what the children are learning? But then, on a Sabbath afternoon, when I had laid down on the chaise lounge to take my usual nap, I called to him, my rascal, and asked him what he had learned in Reverend Doctor Hotzmech's Hebrew School. My scamp became very impatient. He was headed outside to the street to play his usual pranks. He stood in the doorway and with half his mouth he started reciting:

How goodly how schön sind  
great deine zelten  
Yekv, Oh, Yakov!

And as soon as he got to the end of the passage, he ran out of the house.

“He should live to be a hundred and twenty years old!” – my yidene called out, “*Kina hora* [no evil eye], what a great memory he has. He remembers it and recites it exactly the same, not even a hair off.”

But I was not so pleased by the story. The next morning I told Benele not to go to Reverend Doctor Hotzmech's Hebrew School any more. Benele began to dance with joy. “Don't dance, you little do-nothing!” I yelled at him. “If you are not going to the Hebrew school, you will be going to a different Yiddish school. Perhaps you will learn a little Yiddishkeit.”

I went to Brooklyn to a famous teacher who ran a private *cheder*, and we made an agreement that he should teach my little Benele. By Benele, he was very pleased that every day he would get to ride a streetcar all the way to Brooklyn. I heard later that he bragged to his sister Betsy that he could ride the streetcar for free and use the money I gave him for candy and ice cream. How then, can someone ride the streetcar for free all the way to Brooklyn from Blotetown? At 39<sup>th</sup> street one can get a transfer. Sometimes you can jump down when a train comes, and the man who gives out the transfers can't tell if you were on the train, or if you fell from heaven. A little boy ducks down behind some grownups, puts out his hand, and gets a ticket. Sometimes if the man doesn't hand out the transfer, you can go out in the street and look around on the ground for transfers that people have tossed away and were carried by the wind over the tracks. In this case, my Benele is very pleased with the arrangement.

With his learning things are going much better. He has had enough ice cream and candy. I am just happy that he is learning something finally. But then Benele came home one day a little depressed and ashamed. I immediately sensed that something was not right with the youngster. I asked him: “Nu, little do-nothing, I see you have something of a bellyache. Have you eaten too much ice cream again?”

“No, Papa,” he answered, “Mein belly is all right, but the Hebrew teacher wants to beat me. Twenty swats he told me were coming, with a punishment.”

“Ehe!” I said, “Ehe, you are getting swats; Nu, if they are coming to you they are coming to you. You can believe it. But tell me, what did you do there? Twenty swats is rather a big accounting. Tell me, say something, rascal!”

“With the fountain pen that you gave me, I made pictures on the teacher's prayerbook. He said, either twenty cents for a new prayer book, or twenty swats for spoiling the prayer book.”

There my little rascal sobbed. Tears as big as beans began to pour down his cheeks. My heart seized-up looking at him, and my yidene, she is indeed a yidene, took him in both hands and kissed him.

“Stop it, my child, stop crying. I'll give you twenty cents, I give you a quarter, pay the rabbi for the prayer book. The twenty cents is an atonement for me, for you and for all Israel. Na, my child, na, an extra nickel for you. Stop now your crying.”

Benele took out this handkerchief, wiped his eyes and calmed down. The money he put in his pocket.

The next day I came home a little later than usual. My yidene and my children were already sitting at the dinner table waiting for me to come to supper. I quickly washed my hands and set myself down at the table.

While we were eating I noticed that Benele was again, a little distant and not quite with us, and was sitting crooked as though his chair was not level.

“What's up with you, rascal?” I asked him, “Are you not feeling well?”

“No, Papa, I am all right,” he answered.

“So why are you sitting like that?” I asked.

“I am tired of sitting,” he said, “In school I sit, in *cheder* I sit, when I come home and do my homework I also have to sit. I'm just tired of sitting.”

“If you are so tired of sitting,” I said, “Go lay down in bed.”

Benele took a couple more bites, then went to his room to bed.

A week went by. It was Monday. Benele came home again depressed. “What is wrong with you,” my yidene asked him. Benele sobbed, just like the last time, and told us that in *cheder* he was playing with a ball and broke a lamp. The rabbi told him either pay one dollar for the lamp or get a hundred swats with a strap. I'll make a long story short. I even said: “That is very fair, for a do-nothing. That someone should give him a hundred swats, he dealt with you in a kosher manner.” But a yidene has a soft heart, she gave him a dollar, and even a extra nickel so that he would stop crying.

The next day when I came home I found a scene of utter disaster. Benele was laying on the chaise lounge, half uncovered, face down and my yidene was applying an ice bag to his swollen body. The other children were standing around and very upset.

“What is this?” I asked, “What is going on?”

“He won't say,” answered my yidene, “I have a suspicion that the rabbi took the dollar from him, but gave him the hundred swats anyway. See, he is bruised and raw. Perhaps we should call a doctor?”

“We don't need a doctor,” I said, “It will heal by itself. Tomorrow I will go to see the teacher, I will ask him what happened.”

“You can't do that, Papa, ask,” said Benele, “Please, Papa, don't ask, it is all right. It's not swats; I just fell and hit my bottom.”

“Who are you trying to deceive, little fool?” My yidene put forth to him. An with a gentle hand she pulled down his trousers. And as the trousers came down, dimes, nickels and some pennies poured out and scattered all over the room. We collected all the money. It totaled exactly 87 cents.

“What is that for money?” I asked very severely.

Benele was silent.

“I asked you what is that for money? Where did you get it?”

Benele was silent.



“Papa!” my oldest daughter, Betsy, who is a teacher, called out, “Papa, I understand now. Benele kept the dollar for the broken lamp in his pocket, and let himself get the whipping.”

“Azoy? Such a player you are?” I said, “Then it serves you right!”

“Stop getting yourself worked up about the kid!” my yidene hollered at me, and she hugged and kissed and sang to him until he went to sleep.

In the morning I did not waste any time getting to Brooklyn to see the teacher, and asked him for the whole truth. He let me know that Betsy had guessed right. Benele had wanted to make from his spankings, a business. He chose to take the spankings and keep the money for himself.

Nu, now tell me, is that not a sign that he is growing up to be a big businessman, a Rockefeller?

## 42. Blotetown fills up on sausage

You can wish me *mazel tov*. I am done with my storekeepers, both of them, the milkman and the delicatessen man.

If you have a bad memory, I have to remind you that I had the empty store in my building divided in two and rented half to a dairy store and half to wurst and delicatessen store. And I have to remind you that to one I gave a month's free rent and to the other two month's free rent.

After the first week I could see that I was not going to get a cent from either of them, and if I could just get rid of them that would be better.

Then I had a sudden stroke of good luck – I was able to get rid of them both at the same time.

Here is the story:

As you will remember an intense competition began between the two storekeepers because of crackers. The man who ran the delicatessen store started selling crackers, and the milkman insisted that crackers belonged in a dairy store. And from crackers the competition moved on to sardines, lox, mustard, flea powder, sour apples, pencils, candy and similar stuff. For every five cents a customer spent they would get coupons, prizes until the delicatessen man had a stroke of good luck, and after that came bad luck and he had to flee Blotetown.

One evening Benele came running to me out of breath, and told me the news that the delicatessen man was stuffing his wurst with money.

“What is that for a *mishegoss* [craziness]?” I asked, “What are you saying, Benele?”

“Don'tshu understand?” Benele said, “When you buy a bag of candy you find a prize inside: sometimes a button, sometimes a pin, sometimes a sugar man, sometimes a cent, and sometimes two cents. That is a scheme to get everybody to hurry and buy a bag of candy. Nu, the delicatessen man has begun putting prizes in the wurst. Mrs. Gogelich bought wurst today and found inside a quarter.”

When my yidene heard that, she sent Benele to buy a half pound of salami, and to tell the delicatessen man not to slice it. The piece of salami we cut lengthwise and chopped it into tiny pieces but we found nothing inside.

I went down to the delicatessen man myself to ask him if it was true that he put prizes in the wurst. I found the store packed with women who had bought whole wursts, half wursts, Vienna salami, and also frankfurters. The news that Mrs. Gogelich had found a quarter in a wurst had already spread all over Blotetown.

How does a quarter get into a wurst? – To this day I can not understand it. Perhaps it was an accident. What don't you find nowadays in wurst? People find nails, matches too, and sometimes a piece of metal that has broken off of a horseshoe. Today, why shouldn't someone find on rare occasion a cash quarter? It could be that the worker who cut the meat could have bent over and a quarter fell out of his vest pocket, and afterwards went with the rest of the stuff into a wurst. And it was simply the good luck of Mrs. Gogelich to buy a piece of this lucky wurst and find the quarter.

By the Gogelich's in their house, wurst is a great treat. They are stingy people. Wurst is both tasty and satisfying. You should see Mr. Gogelich eat wurst: he cuts a piece of bread that is as big and thick as a city directory, he smears on so much mustard that it flows over the sides then finally lays on a small slice of wurst that is as thin as a cigarette paper, and on top of that he lays another piece of bread, and that is what he calls a sandwich. By the time he gets to the wurst, he has already been chewing bread for ten minutes, and when he is finished with his sandwich, his black mustache is yellow – with mustard. That's how he does it, Mr. Gogelich, and so does Mrs. Gogelich and all the little Gogeliches.

And such people as that should have all the luck – to find a quarter in a wurst!

From the beginning Mr. Gogelich had wanted to keep the thing a secret. He wanted to act like a businessman. It goes without saying that when one finds a quarter in a wurst, there is a chance that you will find another. It is like a goldmine. If you find a little gold, you can be sure that you will find more, that is, if you continue to dig in the place where you found the first bit of gold.

Acting like a businessman, Mr. Gogelich immediately went back to the delicatessen man and bought two dollars worth of sausages all at once. My storekeeper couldn't figure it out. Only a half hour earlier Mrs. Gogelich came in and bought seven cents worth of sausages, and now in comes Mr. Gogelich and buys two dollars worth all at one time. Then, just as soon as Mr. Gogelich walked out of the store, he turned right around and came back in to buy yet another dollar's worth of wurst. And he took all of that straight home.

Have you ever seen a Jewish woman who could keep a secret? Mrs. Gogelich could not help herself and told the secret to a neighbor – and that's all you had to do, now two women had the secret! By the time I got downstairs to ask my storekeeper about the wurst, the store was packed with women. All of them wanted wurst, and each wanted to be the first to be served. My storekeeper and his wife were so busy that neither had the time to say a word to me. They didn't even have the time to wrap the wurst in paper. Every housewife was carrying away the piece of wurst she had bought in her bare hands.

In two hours time there was not to be found a scrap of sausage. Women and even men were still coming in and calling out: “Wurst, wurst!” The rumor was out that the factory that makes the wurst was trying to advertise by using cash prizes stuffed in the wurst. Even the storekeeper cut a little piece of wurst for himself, but found nothing in it. I advised him to catch a train to New York and bring back more wurst, because I knew the demand would keep up for a couple of days yet.

Well, that was a happy two days. Four times my storekeeper had to order wurst transported from New York and he sold and sold. For every fool who was disappointed because he did not find anything, a new fool came forward who wanted to try his luck, and buy sausage in the hope that he would find something. Business was going splendidly. Blotetown had given up dairy, meat and fish and only ate wurst. The atmosphere was filled the smell of garlic. Things went on like this until Mr. Pupikovitz, the President of our congregation Temple Jacob, who had also invested a couple of dollars in wurst, found in a piece of salami – guess what! He found some hairy thing that looked like the back end of a cat. He immediately sent an inquiry to Reverend Doctor Hotzmech, and the Reverend Doctor declared that the wurst was *trayf* [not kosher]. Sales suddenly stopped and my storekeeper was still fully stocked, with full cases of wurst that he couldn't sell.

The delicatessen man took his wurst business to Coney Island where he set up a stand, and his competitor, the milkman, gave up his dairy business and also went to Coney Island to keep the competition going. That is how I got free of both of them.

In the meantime I did not see even one penny in rent, and my store is again “For Lease.”

### 43. Benele becomes a Chinaman

My store is only half a worry now. A Chinaman has rented half the space as a laundry. His name is Ching Li. Benele quickly became like an in-law to him. The Chinaman understands almost no English, and no matter what you say to him he answers, "Yes, sir!" Benele says to him, "Chinky, a curse on your head." The Chinaman answers, "Yes, sir." Benele says to him, "Tishy-chang, go to hell." The Chinaman answers, "Yes, sir." And Benele holds his sides and doubles-up with laughter. When a customer comes in to the Chinaman, Benele is the translator. He understands the Chinaman with a wink. Benele even brags that he can speak Chinese. If someone doesn't believe him, he will start talking Chinese at them, and just let them try and catch him in an error! He will bet you ten cents, that you can not catch him in an error. Benele even speaks Chinese to the boys in the street. When he sees a little kid, one of his friends in the street, he starts out: "Cha cho von ka lo djin." If someone asks him what that means, Benele answers them, that it means, that perhaps it would be a good deal if each us put up one cent and together go and buy a two-cent ice cream sandwich. When he gets sent to the grocery store or to the dairy store to bring something back, he speaks Chinese. He points to a loaf of bread, for example, and says: "Cha cho von ka lo djin," and the grocery man understands. By us in the home, Benele speaks only Chinese to us. My yidene is afraid that he will soon forget how to speak Yiddish. A couple of days ago he came in and to my yidene he said: "Cha cho von ka lo djin." My yidene answered, "What do you want, my son?" Benele explained that he was trying to tell her that he wanted a sour pickle. The next day he said to her again: "Cha cho von ka lo djin." She asked him again, "What do you want, my child?" He answered that he wanted two cents to buy peanuts. The entire Chinese language, Benele explained to us, consists entirely of the words, "Cha cho von ka lo djin." With those word you could live a full life. With those words you could run a laundry, a grocery, a bar, a restaurant and even dictate or write books. My oldest daughter, Betsy, said that Benele was bluffing us a little. But Benele stood up and said that, "Cha cho von ka lo djin," is, indeed, the entire Chinese language. It is just that you have to know how to say it. The meaning was expressed not simply in the words, but in the melody. Betsy pinched his ear and said, that when he grew up he would either sit in Congress or in jail.

In the meantime Benele continued to have a lot of fun with the Chinaman. Tuesday he brought him a cigar. "Chinky, do you want a smoke?" The Chinaman answered, "Yes sir." He took the cigar from Benele and lit it. As soon as he lit it the cigar exploded. The Chinaman wiped his face while uttering curses. Needless to say, Benele earned quite a few swats from me for pulling this trick. That did not stop him from putting on another prank the very next day. When the Chinaman wasn't looking, Benele soaked a sponge in piping hot water and set it on the bench where the Chinaman would sit to make an entry in his book when he received a new packet of dirty clothes. Benele set it in just the right spot and when the Chinaman sat down on it, he immediately leapt up and cried out. He could not sit down for the rest of the day.

Nevertheless, the Chinaman was very good to Benele. He treated him with Chinese nuts, and taught him to write in Chinese. Benele bragged that he could now write everything in Chinese. He even composed a song in Chinese. The words were the same, "Cha cho von ka lo djin."

In the evening I brought Benele into the parlor and had a talk with him. I warned him that he had to stop bothering the poor Chinaman. I tried to explain to him how unfair it was. I told him that the way people treat Chinamen is the same way people treated Jews in Russia, and it is not right to mock someone just because he does not speak the language and is in exile.

Just between us, I can not understand what sort of a cursed nature men have, that the stronger people love to cause pain to the weaker. That those who are on horseback love to kick those who are on foot. I have seen how little Jewish children have run after a poor Irish tramp, and threw filth and pebbles at him. They would surely have bloodied him if a couple of grownups hadn't driven the wild children away. How does it happen, I ask myself, the Jewish children, sons of merciful beings, children of the exile, themselves oppressed and pursued, that they come to such evil feelings and want to harm a poor man, a miserable wretch?

And even to this day I have not found an answer to that question.

## 44. Chaim becomes a grandfather

We have had a very happy week and a lot of guests from New York. The blintzes were extra good and Benele took a plate of them to the Chinaman who runs the laundry in the store on the ground floor of our house. The Chinaman was afraid to touch them. He knew one thing. If Benele gives you something you have to be very careful. Benele took one of the blintzes from the plate and ate it himself. When the Chinaman saw Benele eat one, the he felt he could trust him and started eating one after another.

In the time it took the Chinaman to eat the blintzes, Benele was able to get behind him and tie his pigtail to a rope that was used to hang clothes. When I went down to the laundry later to pick up a clean collar that I needed, and the Chinaman went to go to one of his shelves to see where my wash was located, he gave out such a yelp that I thought he was having a seizure. He had no idea that his pigtail was tied up and when he got up his pigtail pulled down the whole clothesline with the clothes. I snatched up my little brat, laid him over the Chinaman's bench and took off my leather belt and gave him a whipping – and a really good one at that! He should know it, the little prankster!

For Sunday supper we had fried flounder. I already mentioned to you once before that for me, fried flounder is my favorite delicacy. You might say that it is not right for a Jew of my age to be so enthused about eating and to only want fried flounder. To that point I would ask you in return: Where is it written that it is not right for a Jew to cook good foods? Don't you think that from the time we Jews received the Torah from Mount Sinai to this very day that we haven't been busy with good food, with what one can eat and what one can not eat? Huge, thick books, whole libraries of Jewish Law, fearful people seeking questions and answers about meat and milk and kosher have been collected since Moses gave us some rules about goats that shouldn't be cooked in their mother's milk. Therefore, the huge, thick books – they make up our national cookbook. Since the writing of the Talmud, a period of thirteen or fourteen hundred years, the sitting rabbis, day and night, have done nothing except make and write down rules for what to eat, how to eat and when to eat. And now can you say that eating is not a Jewish preoccupation?

Each time my yidene makes flounders, it is for me a celebration. Then we invite our Flossie and our son-in-law and we all eat at the same table. I put on the table a little of my finest liquor, and my son-in-law brings me a fine cigar. I really love his cigars. They are the real ten-cent cigars, only he knows where to find them three for ten. A young man, without children, simply with a little thing of a wife can afford such luxury. If I can, G-d willing, marry off all of my children, then I will begin to smoke such cigars. In your old age, for G-d's sake, you have to live a little. If not in your old age – then when?

We are all sitting at the table and we are down to the last two pieces of fish. I say that one should go to my yidene and the other to Flossie. My yidene says she doesn't want one, and Flossie says she has already eaten too much. I took one and laid it on my son-in-law's plate, and the last one I took for myself. I knew it was going to work out that way, but at the dinner table you can not act like a hog. When you want something you should first offer it to others. The others, naturally, should not act like hogs and should understand and it simply comes from hospitality. And afterwards when they say, "Thank you," and refuse the food, then you can eat it yourself. That is what one calls "table etiquette."

And after my son-in-law and I finished off the last two pieces of fish, Flossie stood up and said that she did not feel well.

“Did you really overeat?” I asked jokingly. But my yidene gave me a signal with her hand that I should keep quiet. My yidene led Flossie downstairs, and quickly came back and said into my son-in-law's ear, “Go telephone for the doctor. But fast!”

She told the children to stay calm, not to play the piano or talk too loud. Jenny and my two oldest boys went out to sit on the porch. Left in the dining room were myself, my oldest daughter, Betsy the teacher, and my rascal Benele.

“Tonight,” I said to him, “You must be on your best behavior. Flossie will soon have a baby, and you will become an uncle.”

Benele was very happy, and started peppering me with questions. When Benele starts asking questions you never know when it is going to end.

“Papa, where do babies come from?”

“An angel brings them,” I answered.

“Where does the angel get the baby?”

“He gets it from heaven.”

“Papa,” my little rascal went on, “Mama once told me that the doctor brings the babies. Why are you telling me today that it is an angel?”

“Well,” I said, “If it is a boy an angel brings him, if it is a girl, the doctor brings her.”

“Gee, you are smart!” Benele called out, “But you can't fake me! I know more den dat!”

“Be quite, you little do-nothing!” I yelled at him. “What nerve you have to talk to your father like that. Go to bed!”

Benele went to his room, and I was left alone with Betsy.

“What do you say to such a rascal when he makes your head spin?”

Betsy answered, “Well, Papa, one has to speak differently with today's children. The world has changed. Today's children are not like yesteryear's. To today's children you have to speak honestly, like to adults. You can't feed them foolish excuses. You have to explain things truly, if not they will look upon adults with suspicion and lack of respect.”

“Is this a new philosophy?” I asked.

“For many people it is still new.” she answered me, “It will take a lot of time until the parents will understand that children have the right to know, to understand the mysteries of life. And to make their heads spin with foolish explanations will not make them smarter and not make them better.”

I remained silent. I should have such a year as she has being in the right, my child, my dear child! It is true, true that we do not know how to speak to our children. How many parents speak nonsense to their



children, that babies are brought from heaven by angels, or people buy them in department stores? And these same parents are not careful about talking of things in front of the children that children absolutely should not hear.

And as I sat there lost in my thoughts, I suddenly heard from the first floor a voice – How can I describe to you what the voice sounded like? It sounded a little like a “Shalom Aleichem” from a tiny angel just arrived from heaven. Betsy threw the book aside that she had been reading and ran downstairs to where the little voice was heard and I held on to the table with both hands to keep myself from jumping up and following her. Over my heart ran an intense feeling of joy, such as I had not felt for years and years – not since my Betsy was born. I wanted to dance, leap about, and embrace the whole world with love.

“Mazel tov to you, Chaim, it's a boy,” said my yidene as she came into the dining room with her face shining. I cast a look at her and saw that she was glowing, and looked about ten years younger.

“Mazel tov, live long, Tsipe Yente,” I said as I took both of her hands in mine, “Now you are a bubbie and I am a zayde.”

We both laughed together as though we were back in time as a young man and a young wife.

“Bubbie!” I said and touched her cheek with my fingertips.

“Zayde!” she said and gave my beard a gentle tug.

We gazed into each other's eyes as though we had just stepped out from under the marriage canopy. We both wanted to speak, to say to one another words of comfort and of love, but we were embarrassed – We were too old, already, for that.

A zayde with a bubbie!

“Chaim, he is like a little onion!” she said to me, “but he is handsome, kayne hora, like the seven sons. He shines like a monarch. He has Flossie's eyes, Flossie's nose. He and his mother look identical, like two drops of water. Though, I must say that he has two ears like his father's – a little big. He should grow to be big and healthy. You can see him soon.”

“Tsipe Yente!” I said, “My heart tells me that our grandson will one day be an important person, that all of America will be proud of. Something of a prophecy is speaking to me.”

“True. True. It is a true prophecy,” she said, “When you look upon him, Chaim, you will see that he will grow up to be wise, a leader's mind, kayne hora. A forehead he has, and a pair of eyes, kayne hora, your eyes will light up just looking at him.”

“Papa, come down!” we heard Betsy's voice calling. And I went to look upon my grandson. I didn't walk, I ran.

## 45. A parade in honor of his grandson's bris

Nu, we had a bris – the nicest bris there has ever been in Blotetown. Everyone said so. Mr. Pupikovitz was the godparent and my Benele along with Mr. Pupikovitz' daughter were the 'friends of the family' who presented the infant at the bris. My grandson was given the name, Moses, but we call him Max.

Now I will tell you how the bris was celebrated.

In the invitations we wrote that the bris would take place around one in the afternoon, but we figured that it would really happen around three. It goes without saying that you write one o'clock in the invitation in order to hurry the people up. And the people, all of whom know that one means three come around three or four, or even later. But by us a bris goes the other way around. We invited everyone at one o'clock and the guests began arriving before noon. Sunday is a free day, even among the Jews who keep the Sabbath, and people sort of float around with the wind. It was a warm day, and people ran from New York like they were in a panic. People came both young and old, kith and kin. My house was transformed into a kindergarten. By two o'clock such a crowd had assembled, that my yidene began to worry that there wouldn't be enough food for everyone. She quickly sent our children out to the grocery stores and delicatessens in the neighborhood. Several of them were closed, and in the ones that were open we bought them out of their breads, all of their herring and all of the crackers that they had in their stores.

“A misfortune upon me,” complained my yidene, “There will be nothing to eat. Such a crowd, *kayne hora*. We calculated for a hundred people, and there are at least that many just counting the children, *kayne hora*, more than a hundred.

Regardless, the children did not want to wait until the banquet started. We had to start right out giving them pieces of challah bread spread with butter, or with jelly. My oldest daughter, Betsy, who was a little peeved, was going around a little upset. “Such savages, wild Indians!” she said. “Civilized people would not come into someone's house with so many children and make so much trouble. Indians, real Indians.”

“Daughter, mine,” I tried to calm her, “who are you calling Indians? When have you ever seen Indians at a bris?”

At three o'clock we wanted to begin the bris, but the Reverend Doctor Hotzmech had not yet arrived. The Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick was already there. He is always a punctual person. But Reverend Doctor Hotzmech never comes at the appointed time, as is the norm for our rabbis and holy men who like to keep people waiting. It is the same at every Jewish celebration, in case you never noticed. Everyone was there, everything was ready. Only we had to wait for the rabbi, for the 'clerical' people. We waited and we waited, it tested everyone's patience, everybody kept looking at their watches. To pass the time people recalled gossip about the past life of the clerics, and talked to each other on the sly, telling secrets and smiling. And finally, in came the handsome teacher, who was playing a clever tactic – He made all the people wait for nothing in order to demonstrate his importance, his stature, as though to say, “Without me and my stovepipe hat, you all are nothing – the skin off an onion and that's all!”

But as we were waiting, we were also waiting for the Reverend Doctor. Reverend Doctor Hotzmech arrived and sat down next to the Honorable Alderman Fitzpatrick. And then the ceremony could begin.

The ceremony did not disturb the invited guests. For them a bris was a rare event! During the ceremony the young men stood in the hallway talking to the young wives, but, of course, not to their own. The older folks, during the blessings, talked among themselves, told jokes, like Jews do in shul when the cantor prays, when someone reads from the Torah, and at other religious ceremonies when one is supposed to be 'attending' to G-d and we use the time instead to indulge in idle talk. Only when it came time to eat did everyone follow directions with enthusiasm. I am telling you, G-d forbid I should exaggerate, they took to the food with all their heart. I am recounting this exactly how it happened. It goes without saying, that many had to eat standing up because we did not have places for all of them, but the ones who were standing made out better than the others. They were the first to grab from the plates everything they wanted, before the plates got to the table.

Also coming to the bris was my relative Tsirilson, from New York. He is a Jew who does not have a clean mouth, even when he is sober, but when he takes a little sip, he can talk like a Russian soldier. I am always afraid that people will be offended by his rude talk. I went to him three times and begged him to have pity, quietly in his ear, that he should stop the ugly talk, but he wouldn't listen to me. However, no one complained about being offended. Quite the opposite, the crowd made a fuss over him and the women who were standing around the tables laughed hardily out loud. They got a real kick out of the dirty words, just like the men did.

I still can't understand that: how such Jews, honest people, honorable members of the community, not common folk, G-d forbid, could tolerate such gross talk in mixed society. And yet, at every religious gathering you will find such a 'wise-guy,' who lets loose with his ugly mouth, telling awful, dirty jokes and there is not one person who will stand up and say that it is not nice. The only one who protested against Tsirilson was his own wife who was like a devil in his path. She would cut him off in the middle a sentence, and yell at him. But with her yelling it only made the crowd laugh harder.

In the middle of the banquet I realized that we had run out of bread. The crowd was very hungry and had eaten all of the bread with the herring and the soup. In the few grocery stores that were open Sunday we had already bought out all of their bread. Some guests, seeing that the bread was about to run out, had grabbed a half loaf or a quarter of a loaf, and dealt it out only to their own wives and children. A great cry arose: "Bread! Bread! We need more bread, more challah! What kind of a dinner is this with no bread?" And others cried out: "Come here Phenie, come here Sadie, Soche Deborah, here is a piece of challah. Here Jackele, here Simcha I will give you a piece of my challah, see that you don't run out." In addition to the yelling they tapped their plates with knives and forks. It was like a wedding. They had to eat their steak with pie, or a pastry, since all the bread was in the hands of only a few people and they were holding on to it with both hands.

Then it came the time for speeches. Mr. Shafrinski, the president of our congregation, appointed himself toastmaster, and he called upon Reverend Doctor Hotzmech for the first speech.

Reverend Doctor Hotzmech stroked his cheek whiskers, stuck his chest out like a soldier and began a speech in English. He made use of quotations from a Mr. Shakespeare and from another Mr. Milton and the only Yiddish words we heard in the whole speech was "*bris meloah*" [covenant of circumcision], "Abraham," "Issac and Jacob" and "Moses." I understood that the quotes he used from Mr. Shakespeare and Mr. Milton were for the benefit of the Alderman. The Reverend Doctor had bragged all last week that he had prepared a speech that would beat the Alderman. The Alderman has a reputation as a good speaker.

After him, the Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick was introduced and he said that he was not going to make use of quotes from Shakespeare and Milton, because the Torah was good enough for him. “The bible is good enough for me,” he said in his own language, and we all applauded him.

Can you believe, that we understood the Alderman better than we did the Reverend Doctor? It is very simple – because the quotes he used from Shakespeare and Milton had nothing to do with the matter at hand; but the Alderman recounted a story from the bible. And even I, who am no great Englishman, also understood him, because one word is enough to remind me of the whole story. The Honorable Alderman pointed out what impact a bris has on Jews, using Moses himself as an example: When Moses came into the land of disobedience, he gave the appearance of being an Egyptian, not as a Jew, but then, the Jewish sign which he carried on his person showed him as being bound to his people, and he later became their liberator.

He spoke like a real teacher, and spoke directly to the point. And when he finished, our toastmaster, Mr. Shafrinski, said that our Alderman is a great expert in scripture.

“I read the bible every day,” the Alderman responded, “I have one in my office.”

The crowd thought about that for a while. How long had it been since they took a look in the scriptures?

The *mohel* [person who performs the circumcision] hardly waited until the speeches were over before he began the “He who blesses..” portion of the ceremony. One after another the blessings flew by – eight in one minute. I counted them while looking at my watch. For each blessing he earned nothing less than a quarter, that works out to at least two dollars a minute. That is almost as much a Rockefeller. The Alderman tossed into the collection plate a two dollar bill; Mr. Pupikovitz a dollar; Mister Kaban, the same. But when it came to Mr. Gogelich, he looked the other way. The *mohel* stopped as though he were declaring a strike, and everyone began to look at Mr. Gogelich. Then Mr. Gogelich took out a ten-cent piece and dropped it into the plate. The *mohel* started to cough, and looked at Mr. Gogelich as he would a thief.

While the *mohel* was occupied with the “He who blesses..” business, some other business took place between Mr. Kaban and Mr. Pupikovitz. Mr. Kaban had brought from Mr. Pupikovitz his white horse. Once the deal was completed Mr. Kaban called out to the *mohel*:

“See, Mr. Mohel, make another “He who blesses..,” please, for my horse, Fiddlesticks, he is called.”

The *mohel* hesitated a moment. He looked at the crowd then at the Reverend Doctor. But the Reverend Doctor was standing by the door talking with my youngest daughter, Jenny, and pinched her cheek. The crowd smiled and waited to see what would happen.

“G-d damn it, I'm paying! Make a “He who blesses..” for Fiddlesticks. He is a white horse.”

Mr. Kaban had already had a little in his head, that was very clear. When he laid down two dollars in cash, the *mohel* began “He who blesses..” Rebe Fiddlesticks, and he wished that his master raise him in the Torah, marriage and good deeds.

The crowd laughed. We laugh at all of the foolish and rude jokes! The holiest things are mocked by us, even in the shuls and at religious ceremonies.

## 46. President Pupikovitz sends a present

It is good to be a zayde [grandfather]! I can't get my grandson out of my head, even for a minute. It's not just me, everyone in our house looks at the tiny baby as though he were our whole life. We talk only about Maxele (that is what we have named him), and we don't have any other thought in our heads.

It is like if the President gave away the White House and came to stay with us as a boarder. Everything turns around him, everybody serves him. When I come home from business, the first thing I do is go to Flossie's to look at my grandson. And when I come in, I find there either my yidene, my Betsy, and often the whole family, they should be healthy. Betsy get a pillow out for him, Jennie get a little shirt, my yidene sows for him a pair of baby socks, and Benele bought for him a gun to shoot on the Fourth of July. I immediately took the gun away from him, and my yidene ripped patches of skin from him. A question on a story – a good-for-nothing – To keep him from doing harm, the Almighty should watch and protect.

Mr. Pupikovitz had already sent us his present. Coming from him was a doubled present. Firstly, he was chosen as godparent, and secondly his daughter was chosen to be 'friend of the family' who presented the child to the rabbi. The present arrived the Tuesday after the bris. It is a baby carriage, purchased from the Tzigel-Migel Company in New York. We saw the name on the express wagon that delivered it. When my yidene saw that, she tensed up and said, "You surely can see from that, that he is a pig." I said, "Why would someone say that about him? It really is fine of him to send a present. Why would one talk badly about him?"

"You above all people should know!" my yidene yelled, "I would send back to that pig such a rag. It cost maybe seven or eight dollars."

"And I will bet you that it cost more than twelve, and maybe fourteen," I said.

"I'll bet you," she said.

"I'll bet you," I said.

And we made it a five-dollar bet. We shook hands on it and my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, wrote it down in his notebook.

It was left to me that first thing in the morning when I went to New York I was to stop by the Tzigel-Migel Company and find out how much such a baby carriage would cost. I will tell you the truth, I was very annoyed by the whole situation. Oy, I hate the ugly side of presents. Long live those who hate gifts. There is nothing worse in life than to await a present from someone, a present that is not sent because they want to send it, but because they must send it. It comes like it has been ripped out of them by force. It is wonderful when a young couple get married, or a child is born, or some other celebration, I say, it is wonderful when people send a present as a show of friendship, of participation, of happiness and the like. But the fashion in which gifts are given by us Jews is too much, already. It doesn't engender friendship, it brings hard feelings, hatred, envy, and often curses. People act like a miserable beggar who accepts alms and gives back a curse. Those who give the gift look at it as a robbery, a theft. And he who received the gift gets angry that the giver didn't spend more money. We treat a present like it was a debt that someone owes us and has to repay with interest.

As far as I am concerned I wish that Mr. Pupikovitz never sent us the baby carriage, because I know that in the end it will cost me dear. The next time there is a celebration in his house (He is coming up on his silver wedding anniversary) it will cost me much more, because I am not as wealthy as he is, yet I will have to pay a lot to give him a better present than he gave us. It is the same throughout the world. When a rich man sends a cheap present, everyone shows respect. Under their breath they call him “pig,” but to his face they honor him. A rich man may be a miser. He is allowed to be a pig. That is how a wealthy man makes his money. But an average head of household, like me for example, it's economizing, borrowing a dollar, and people will scream: “Beggar, bum, tramp.”

So, the very next morning I am off to the Tzigel-Migel Company's store looking for the same baby carriage to see what it cost. I wanted to show my yidene that she was doing a great injustice to Mr. Pupikovitz, the beloved president of our congregation, Temple Jacob. I roamed around there perhaps a half hour until I found where the baby carriages were located. I don't know if in all of America there are as many babies as I saw baby carriages there. I searched for another twenty minutes, looking around – then, finally, I spotted a whole row of carriages just like the one Mr. Pupikovitz sent us for my grandchild. Above the baby carriages was hanging a placard, on which was written the price. A nu, be a genius and guess which one of us was right: me or my yidene? Well, neither one of us was correct! She said that the baby carriage would cost seven or eight dollars, and I said that it would cost twelve or fourteen, and on the placard in big numbers it read:

## 5.69

That is: Five dollars and sixty-nine cents.

When I brought that news home, my son-in-law made the judgment that neither of us had won the bet and that the bet was null and void. My son-in-law is a sportsman and knows all the rules of betting.

“Do you know, Father,” Flossie said to me, “that Maxele made a smile today. Really, an actual smile.”

“Kayne hora,” said my yidene, “The American babies smile when they are three weeks old. By us back in the Old Country, in the old days, they used to say that a child would begin to smile when it was six-weeks old. Just remember, Chaim, our Betsy started to smile when she was six-weeks old.”

“I smile now also,” Betsy called out, and took my head with both hands the way she does. And as she turned away from me, she gave my beard a tug. It hurt and I called out in pain.

When I cried out, Maxele, who had been sleeping in Mr. Pupikovitz' baby carriage, heard it, and he started to cry.

“Oy, a misfortune upon me, you frightened him!” yelled my yidene and ran to the grandchild, “Whatever befalls even a hair on his head, should roll off and befall that old fool.”

Later when I was alone with my yidene in the dining room, I said to her:

“Our Flossie, kayne hora, is even more pretty and young after having the baby.”

“Yes, she shines, *kayne hora*,” said my yidene.

“Would you believe me, Tzipe Yenta,” I said to her, “You are also a lot more beautiful. Often it seems to me that you are a young newlywed and I am a young man. You know what, Tzipe Yenta, I wanted to say something to you, but I forgot what.”

“Don't say anything,” she said, “If you forgot, then I don't want to know.”

“I remembered it, Tzipe Yenta,” I said, because I wanted twist out of it and not to look like a fool anymore, “When I was at the Tzigel-Migel store I saw some lovely hats. If you want, you can buy yourself a hat. I think that I really lost that bet.”

My yidene suddenly became another person when she heard such talk. Women and bureaucrats need to be greased often, otherwise the years are hard on them.

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We are now looking for a cohen, a rabbi, because soon we will be celebrating the redemption of the first-born son.

## 47. Troubles from children

“Chaim,” my yidene said to me, three weeks after the bris – “We must send our Betsy away to the country.”

“For health's sake, I said, “What would that do? Blotetown is much nicer than the country. It is a country in itself. You can not find better air than in Blotetown.”

“Air?” she said, “Whose talking about the air? Our Betsy is a healthy girl, kayne hora, she doesn't need air. She needs a husband.”

“Aha,” I said, “Now I see what you are aiming at. You are saying she should travel to the country to catch a man.”

“You need to chew on that and let it rest in your mouth a while,” said my yidene, “A Jew of your age should already have a little common sense. But, what then? You are acting like you don't want to understand. The truth is, if you don't bother you don't start to bother yourself. By us, who has ever heard of a such a pretty young lady, a smart one, upstanding, and educated, she should sit around unmarried until she is 22-years old!”

“Pardon,” I said, “She is already 25-years old.”

“What?” my yidene yelled angrily, “*Meshuggener!* [Crazy person] What else would you think to say about your daughter? Accuse her of being a bastard? You really think she is 25? And you say it so cold-blooded, just like you were simply eating a bagel. What do you mean Betsy is 25? *Meshuggener!* How old am I today?”

“48-years old,” I answered her.

“What???” my yidene leapt up from the rocking chair. She was so upset, that she could hardly speak. For a while she gasped for breath, then finally she said:

“Chaim, you have, you enemy of Zion, simply lost your head. You are making out of your daughter an old maid, making of you wife an old lady. I don't understand why you think of us as enemies. Listen, Chaim, when we got married, how old was I?”

“Twenty-something. I don't remember exactly.”

“You don't remember exactly?” she said, “Nu, I will remind you. I remember that my mother, may she rest in peace, used to say, that I was born on the same day that Aunt Dreyze got married. We all thought that was a sign. Nu, indeed, when we got married there was a conflict between my father, may he rest in peace, and my mother, she should have a bright garden of Eden. My father said that I was 19-years old and my mother said that I was 18. They had to ask Aunt Dreyze, and Aunt Dreyze said that Papa was right. Now, how long have we been married?”

“Twenty-three years,” I said.

“*Meshuggener!*” she shouted, “That would mean according to your calculations that I had Betsy two



years before we were married, you contemptible fool!”

“Excuse me, Tzipe Yenta. I spoke too soon. I shouldn't have said that. Wait, wait, let me try to remember – We were married 26 years ago. Do you remember a year ago you wanted to celebrate a silver wedding anniversary, then decided not to. Yes, and Betsy was born a year after we were married. That means that she is 25-years old, she should live to be 120.”

“But I am no 48-year old woman!” She cried out in victory, “According to Aunt Dreyze's reckoning, right now I am no more than 44.”

“What difference does it make?” I said, “Who cares if it's 44 or 48 – It is all the same to me.”

“It is not all the same,” she said, and went over to the mirror – “What, do I look like I'm 44? I don't look any older than 40.”

“To me you look just like you did on the day we married,” I said, and gave her a tug on the arm. But she pushed me away and said, “Go on then, go.”

Just at that moment Betsy came into the room.

“You see,” Betsy said to the both of us, “When one speaks of an angel, and angel arrives. I overheard that you are very worried that I can not get a husband. Don't worry Mama; don't worry Papa. If I were like other girls who only think of getting married, and don't think about their life after marriage, then I would have been a wife a long time ago. Its not much of a trick to turn a young man's head.”

“If so, my daughter,” my yidene said, “Why don't you catch a good, young man and make your mother happy?”

“What do you mean, “catch?”” asked Betsy, “What is a man, a rooster, a goose or a tomcat that someone has to “catch” them? I only want to marry a man that I can be in love with.”

“You will love him, never mind, you will love him,” said my yidene, “First get him, then afterwards, you will love him, already. I didn't love your Papa until after the wedding. And yet, afterwards, I wish on all Jewish children that they will have a love like ours.”

“I wish!” I interrupted, “Such years on me, as your mother is right. What good would it do me, daughter, your whole philosophy with love, with equal rights, with full freedom because a truly peaceful home, true family happiness comes to us from the older generations, and by you is nothing. Who in the olden times ever heard of divorce or women trapped in an unhappy marriage? Philosophy is a beautiful thing on paper, but as a practical matter in life you can't bake a bagel with it. Listen, my daughter, I am reading in the newspaper now a complete work about 100 philosophers, and I see there, how the Greek philosophers racked their brains for five or six hundred years to explain the ways of Nature, and in the end they came to the conclusion that philosophy is worth an onion. You know, of course, my daughter, that I am not much for philosophy, but you the young people, are often in your ways more fanatical than me.”

“But Papa, you know what Papa,” said Betsy, and laughed with her beautiful, bright eyes, “You know what, go out into the street, get me a husband, I'm ready to get married.”

With that we dropped the subject. Betsy has the ability to laugh with the eyes, and when she laughs with her eyes she can chase away the greatest sorrow, the deepest sadness. She is such a sweet girl! There is no way I am going to part with her and give her into the hands of some stranger.

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In Blotetown we have been having a drought. It has not rained for quite some time. All of the mud, and even the big puddle next to Mr. Pupikovitz' house has dried up. And in Blotetown when it is dry, there is no end to the dust. Whenever a wagon rolls through, it kicks up huge clouds of dust, and the dust gets into the houses, on the furniture and the gas lights and in your ears and eyes and it sticks in your throat and on your heart.

Every Blotetowner head of household has in the house a long length of rubber hose and uses it to wet down the dust around the house and in the little gardens. I, too, went out and bought such a hose. I waited from day to day, but finally on Tuesday I made the purchase.

“What a schlimazel!” said my yidene, “As soon as he buys a hose, then comes the rain. It has already rained a little bit, and soon it will likely rain some more.”

“So what,” I said, “There is still enough dust. The garden still needs water. A little spritz of water won't hurt a thing. Even if it does rain a little more it won't hurt.”

Benele came to help me hook the hose to the spigot. After that I turned the hose on. It gave out on gush, then stopped.

I laid the hose down and went to the spigot. Everything look to be in order. I went back to the other end of the hose and tried again. The same thing happened: It gave up one gush of water then stopped. I thought to myself: Nu, Chaim, they sold you a hose that is like a stopped-up *shofar*. I went to the spigot and asked Benele to hold the other end of the hose. An odd thing happened! With him it worked like it was supposed to. Water came out of the hose like a fountain. Great streams of water came out of the hose and high into the air, and Benele made the water stream dance in various patterns. He wrote his name in the sand, and wet down a dog who was on the other side of the street. He did some other things and showed that he could even get water onto the roof of our house.

But why wouldn't the hose work for me? The question really bothered me. Benele laughed at me and said: “See, Papa, one had to know how to work this thing.” I was very disheartened that he was making of me a do-nothing. I pushed him aside and took the hose over again. Again the same thing: It gave out a little water, a spritz and then it stopped. The hose acted like it was broken. I began to shake it, turn it, hit on it – but nothing helped. Something must be stuck inside it. I thought I should take a look. I closed one eye and with the other eye I peered into the hose – a gusher! The water flowed out a whole bucket full at once. Right into my face! There was water in my mouth, in my, in my ears, in my nose. It soaked my collar along with my shirt and I was wet to the skin. Only then did I understand what was happening. It was all Benele's little joke. He fixed me good. Each time I tried to do the watering, he was behind me and turned the spigot off so no water would come out. In the end when I looked into the hose he suddenly opened the spigot and soaked me from head to foot.

Needless to say he got a spanking that will have him thinking about it for the next two weeks. After I was finished with the watering it started to rain hard and my yidene said:

“So, after you finally decide to buy a hose, it starts to pour down rain. Ay, what a schlimazel!”

## 48. Redemption of the firstborn, his grandson

We have finally, with good luck, finished with the Redemption of the First-born for my grandson, Maxele, he should live long, and I am hurrying to tell you how the ceremony went so that it can get into the morning newspaper.

I thought it would be a harder job to get a Cohen priest in Blotetown, but once it became known that we were going to have the ceremony it began to rain Cohens from all sides. Cohens came from Blotetown, from Brownsville, from town, from Harlem, from the Bronx and from Flatbush. Every Cohen tried to make with my son-in-law another business. From the five dollars some offered to back down 40 percent. Another, 50 percent, and there was one who was willing to go 65 percent. That was because he was a single man and could afford to work cheaper. My son-in-law wanted to hire him, but in the meantime another presented himself as a High Priest.

“What is a High Priest?” I asked him along with my son-in-law, “Is there such a thing as a High Priest among Jews?”

“Certainly!” answered the High Priest, “Have you never heard of the “Temple Model,” that has services in a hall in Huston Street? I am the man who sings the services there and plays the role of the High Priest.”

We hired him because he promised us to sing the service and all of the songs of the Blind Cantor. But the day after we engaged him, a young man stopped by who introduced himself as a walking delegate for the Cohen union, and informed us that the man we hired was in the first place, not a union member, and secondly was a phony Cohen. If we wanted a true Cohen then he would get us one with a guarantee from the union.

We didn't want split away from the union and we asked the walking delegate to send us the next Cohen in the rotation. The union Cohen arrived. He explained that according to union rules we would have to pay the full rate, with no reductions.

We decided to have a quiet ceremony, no parade, and only invite Blotetown neighbors and close friends. The big parade that we had at the *bris* was very expensive. A lot of distant relatives, friends from the old country, and good friends that lived in New York fell in love with Blotetown and they got in the habit of stopping by on Sundays on their way to Coney Island to visit. It goes without saying that when they stopped by, they forgot about Coney Island and ended up staying late, and naturally, when people visit late you have to feed them and give them something to drink. I could tell that the summertime troubles were already starting, and there would be more aggravation than last year. So many guests began coming that we did not have enough places for them. My son-in-law, however, is a genius and figured out how to deal with them. He had my yidene bring in a lot of herring, not tenderized, but with salt on it, and add to that the salami, corned beef and other smoked and salted meats and pickles to boot. Then he removed all the ice from our icebox and threw it outside where it melted in the sun. My guests started eating the herring and the salted meats but they had nothing to drink with it. The beer was warm, the seltzer was warm, even a glass of cold water they couldn't get by me, because we didn't have a single ice cube. To quench the dry throats, my guests went for the pickles and sucked the juice from them, but that only made them thirstier. It was a pity to see them torture themselves. Well, this Sunday not one of them stopped by to visit us. Either they went straight to Coney Island or they stayed home.

My yidene said that we should repeat this tactic a few more times until we were finished with all of the uninvited guests who come by seeking their pleasures on our head and our pocketbook.

That is why we did not want to make a big parade for our ceremony. We only invited about ten people from Blotetown. It was a more intimate gathering.

Benele was unsettled the whole time. He was always worried that someone was going to harm Maxele. When I named over the whole guest list, he calmed down.

But I noted that Benele never took his eyes off of the Cohen. And when the Cohen priest seated himself and my son-in-law began to read from the prayer book: "This, my first-born, is the first-born of his mother..." Benele suddenly jumped up and yelled:

"Raizuli!"

Raizuli? What is that? We all were asking ourselves as we looked at one another. And the priest, it seemed to me, turned as white as the ceiling.

The priest got so confused that he lost his place and instead of asking the father, "Which wouldst thou rather give me..." he said the father's answer, "I desire to redeem my son..."

"Raizuli! Sure you are Raizuli, I know you!" Benele yelled out directing it to the Cohen.

"Shaaaa!" and I gave him a poke in the side, "Shaaaa! Don't be a bother! Get out of here! What do you want?"

Benele left still glaring at the Cohen.

Immediately after the ceremony the priest left, not even waiting for the following dinner. He said that he had another job. Then I went and got Benele to have a talk with him, and I asked him what was going on between him and the Cohen.

"Do you know him?" I asked.

"Sure, Pa, I know him. I've seen him at Coney Island. You know the show in Dreamland? That is where Raizuli appears. He is the chief of a ... a ... I don't know how to say it in Yiddish. A chief of a band of robbers, who jump people on the highway and take their watches and money. He comes from Morocco."

That cleared everything up for me. A while back I read in the "Daily News" that an American traveled to Morocco to bring Raizuli back. The famous leader of a band of robbers would appear in a show at Coney Island. Apparently the American did not manage to come back with the real Raizuli, so he got a Jew from Rivington Street, or from East Broadway to take on the role. And Benele recognized him at our Redemption of the First-born ceremony!

"What do you say, father-in-law? Bad, very bad," my son-in-law said to me after the ceremony.

"What is so bad?" I asked him.

“The whole story of Jewish businesses, with the holy begging, with the welfare money, with collection plates, alms boxes, with the *mohels*, with the Cohens.”

“Jewish businesses you call it?” I said to him, “What is Jewish about it? And the Christian religion is free from business? By them they also make collections. By them you can even buy your way out of sin with money. By them people go begging all around the world for churches, missions and other foolishness. What's more, they are better businessmen than us, especially in religious undertakings. There where we make a hundred dollars, they make ten thousand. It is, as I have already said to you, the fault of poverty; that we are a poor people, that is why everything that we do is not pretty. It is time that you and young people like you, begin to understand.”

“Well,” my son-in-law said, “Let's leave this discussion for another time; I don't want to argue with you today.”

We left it at that.

## 49. He spends a day in the country

I went for a day in the country, only one day, and lost 18 pounds. Listen to the story, you will get a good laugh.

As you know, I am in the jewelry business. I peddle nothing else now except jewelry, and sell mostly to customers on installments. Sometimes I will catch something at an auction that is a good bargain, and sell it for cash to someone who can afford pay money out right on the spot. Just last week I happened to purchase a diamond ring, a huge bargain, and I knew that Mr. Pupikovitz, our President, is always eager for such a bargain. He has often told me that if I came across a good bargain on a diamond ring, I should keep him in mind.

I bought the ring, and since Mr. Pupikovitz was staying in the town of Hunter in the Catskill Mountains together with his family, I sent him a letter and asked him if he wanted to buy a diamond ring worth 400 dollars for 250 dollars cash. I mailed the letter on Sunday. Monday I received a telegram saying that I should come to Hunter with the ring.

It is pretty common for me to travel for a couple of hours to see a customer. But to take a trip that will last six hours was a first for me. My yidene had me take along a satchel for my things.

“What for?” I asked, “Why do I need to take any stuff along? I'm only going to stay over the night and come right back in the morning.”

“It is not nice to travel to the country empty handed,” she explained to me, “How will it look to people if you arrive without a satchel? People will think you are running away from your wife.”

“Alright, I will take a satchel,” I said, “But what should I pack in it? No one is going to look inside to see what I am carrying along.”

“You have to put something in the satchel,” my yidene said, “It happens from time to time that a waiter or a maid in the hotel will pick it up to move it from one place to another. They would notice if it was full or empty. Mrs. Pupikovitz, when she departed, took along six trunks and eight satchels. Do you think all of them were full? Perhaps all winter long she saved newspapers and grocery bags in order to fill up the trunks and the satchels.”

I could see that my yidene was right, so I took a satchel, and filled it with my winter underwear, woolen socks, said goodbye to my family, gave my grandson a kiss, and set out for Hunter.

The trip out was very cheerful. The train car I was in was full of Jewish children who were headed to the country, not for business like me, but for pleasure. There were mothers with children and also men. Right after the train started to go, the men got some little boards from somewhere and made small tables of them. They used them to play cards and other games.

The women had conversations, talking about the various Summer activities and the different hotels they visited the previous year, the previous two years, for three years and even from eight and nine years ago. They also talked about doctors and operations. Each described the doctor who took care of them, how good he was to her, what compliments he made to her, how she did in the hospital, what a nice private room she had and what good nurses. Nearly every woman had a similar story. When they

got tired of bragging about their good times in the country and their operations, they started bragging about their diamonds. At that, I could hardly stay in my seat. As a man who is in the business, I could not bear the bluffing. I saw one, a fat lady, who took off a bracelet and said that her husband paid 175 dollars for it. I took a look at the woman and recognized her right away, and in that instant she recognized me too. She became a little unsettled, but I made as though I didn't notice her. She was a customer of mine. Her husband owns a grocery store, and he bought that bracelet from me for 35 dollars. In truth, it was a real bargain. It's worth 40 dollars.

The children danced on the seats and littered the floor with peanut shells and popcorn. Then they would run to and from the ice water and their mother's would give them a good, hard pinch to let them know they shouldn't yell so loud.

Blessed be the Name, we finally arrived in Hunter. At the station we were awaited by young girls, wives and children. As we descended from the train there were hugs and kisses. I stood there with my satchel in hand, not knowing what to do, and felt like a lost soul who had no one in the world. I saw some people who were climbing into carriages and others got on a scale to see how much they weighed. I thought to myself: I'll weigh myself. I got on the scale and put a cent in the slot, the needle began to spin and then it stopped. Then I saw that I weighed 148 pounds. That is pretty good for a man like myself, since I am a little short and rather thin.

A coachman with a whip in his hand asked me where I was going. I gave him the name of the hotel. He said that it would cost me a half dollar. I sat myself down in his wagon and we were off. In a minute and a half he brought me to the hotel.

Mr. Pupikovitz was on the porch. He was in the middle of a hand of cards. But when he saw me, he put down his cards and came over to meet me face to face.

"Why did you take a carriage?" he asked me, "At the station there is a carriage from the hotel. Why did you make an expense for yourself?"

"I didn't know," I said, and I took out a half-dollar and gave it to the coachman.

"What?" yelled Mr. Pupikovitz, "A half-dollar for a one-minute ride! It's a robbery! Your place is in jail!" he shrieked at the coachman. "I'll fix you, you son of a gun! Give him back a quarter! If not, I'll fix you!"

The coachman looked to be rattled and gave me back a quarter.

"Now, get away, quick!" Mr. Pupikovitz yelled at him.

The coachman gave the horse an angry smack as though it was all the horse's fault, and was off.

"He should be arrested, such a swindler!" Mr. Pupikovitz called out to his friends after he told them how he deftly handled the coachman, what a victory he had over him.

"You see," he said, "I believe in fair play. Honesty is the best policy. I hate swindlers. I make my money fair and square. No one can ever show that I have ever taken a penny that did not belong to me!"

He said that with great pride and then finished the hand of cards. At the end he excused himself from the other men, saying that he had to talk a little business with me. He took me to his room, and Mrs. Pupikovitz was also there.

“How are things going with you?” Mrs. Pupikovitz asked her husband.

“I skinned them all alive. 180 dollars I took from them in an hour's time. They are all big talkers, and have no idea how to play. See, it doesn't pay to leave from here. This business is better than real estate in Blotetown. By Tsimerson alone I got 110 dollars.”

“Have pity on him!” said Mrs. Pupikovitz, “Yesterday, his wife was crying bitter tears in front of me. She told me that it has only been a half year since they were married and already he has gambled away her whole dowry. A pity.”

“In card playing there is no pity.” answered Mr. Pupikovitz.

My business with Mr. Pupikovitz was quickly completed. He gave me 35 dollars – all that he could. With the business done, we could sit down and chat. We talked until they rang the bell for supper.

At supper things were very lively, even more so than on the train. A hundred voices at a time called out to the waiters: “Here with the pickles! Over here with the potatoes! See, waiter, what? Is my money not money?” People did more yelling than eating. By me, as a new guest, it was all very unseemly, that respectable people should behave that way at the table. Today their table manners were not dignified, it was more like what you would see at a wedding. Everyone grabbed at the pickles, the tomatoes, and anything else they could get. And they did not bother with anybody else.

After dinner people began to talk about the weight scales. It seemed like everyone came here just to add a few pounds of flesh to their body.

“I have gained ten pounds, and my wife six pounds,” Mr. Pupikovitz said to me.

“What are you saying, Piter” Mrs. Pupikovitz called over to him, “I have put on seven and a half pounds. I weighed myself this morning at the drug store. There scale is very accurate.”

“All of the scales are wrong,” said a thin woman who was sitting next to me.

“My Nelly gained a pound,” called out a middle-aged woman with big diamonds in her rings.

“Something of a pretty daughter, your Nelly?” I asked, because I wanted to get into a conversation about her diamonds, just in case I might be able to make out of her a customer.

Everybody laughed at my question. The “Nelly” she was talking about was her dog.

“We are coming to the end of August when we will be going back home,” she called to a young man who was as thin as a straw.

“Did you weigh yourself,” Mr. Pupikovitz asked me.

“Yes,” I answered, “ I weigh 148 pounds.”



“Tomorrow before you leave weigh yourself again,” he said to me, “You can gain weight over night.”

The next morning I had to catch a very early train, not waiting for breakfast and not waiting for Mr. Pupikovitz to wish me, “Travel in good health.” I said my farewells to him and his wife the night before.

As I was leaving the hotel I weighed myself, and was shocked to find that I weighed no more than 130 pounds. I tried dancing on the machine and in the time I was hopping about the needle swung back and forth. But in the end when it stopped it came to the same mark: 130 pounds – not a whit more!

It scared me. I thought to myself: “To lose 18 pounds just over night! What would happen to me if I took a vacation for a whole week?”

I went to the train station on foot. On the way I saw a scale next to the drug store.

Let me try this scale, I thought, remembering that Mrs. Pupikovitz had weighed herself near the drug store and added a few pounds.

The scale at the drug store gave me back two pounds.

So, I had not lost more than 16 pounds. And maybe the scale at the train station is the most accurate of all, and on that scale perhaps it will show that I have not lost any weight at all.

But the scale by the station the is same one that a day before gave my weight as 148 pounds now showed only 129 pounds.

That meant that I had lost 19 pounds!

No, I would be better off believing the scale at the hotel, I thought trying to comfort myself. It is possible that I only lost 18 pounds. 18 is, after all, not 19.

With these thoughts I traveled toward home. I got in around mid-day. But I wasn't in the mood to go anywhere. My yidene and my children noticed that my mind was elsewhere, but I assured them that it was nothing, it would pass. I was just a little tired from the trip, nothing more.

In the evening I played a while with my grandchild. But he was getting sleepy.

It goes without saying that I could not sleep that night. I could think of nothing but the 18 or 19 pounds that I had lost.

Surely, I thought, the mountain air did not agree with me. I should go see a doctor. And I made the decision to go to the doctor right after breakfast.

The clock struck two and I still was not asleep. My mind was still busy.

Suddenly, a thought struck me like lightning, and I leapt from the bed with joy. Happiness flooded my heart.

When does a poor man rejoice? When he finds that which he has lost. I had recovered my health and my peace of mind.

I remembered – Listen! Listen! – I suddenly remembered that – when I first weighed myself at the station I had my satchel in my hand, and the scale gave me the weight of both me and the satchel.

The other times I weighed myself it was without the satchel.

I had the feeling that I just had to wake someone and share with them my great joy. To keep a great joy to oneself is much harder than to keep to yourself a great sorrow.

“Tsipe Yenta!” I said, and gave her a poke in the side.

“What do you want?” She said, and from the tone of her voice I could tell that she was angry at being awakened in the middle of the night.

I was suddenly afraid to talk to her.

“The wind is blowing,” I said, “and you are only covered by a thin blanket. Get the woolen cover.”

## 50. He makes a second trip to Hunter

Thursday I received a letter from Mr. Pupikovitz, the President of our congregation Temple Jacob, who was away on vacation in the mountains. It said I should come to Hunter and bring with me a ring for his daughter. It should cost about a hundred dollars; but in front of any strangers that I might meet there, I should say it cost two hundred.

I really did not want to travel so far away from home now, because my grandson, it shouldn't happen to you, was sick with a cold and was coughing terribly. But I took courage and made the trip, because Mr. Pupikovitz wrote me and told me to bring more rings and he will give me some customers. In this season whatever you could get would be found money.

“You can go, Chaim,” my yidene said to me, “He is over the head cold. It is gone, kayne hora. On Sunday McNally's wife gave him the evil eye when Flossie took him out into the street in the baby carriage. You can go, Chaim, I have already packed your satchel.”

The satchel she gave me was the same one as last time: Old shirts, torn underwear, sock with holes in them, but just a small burden. As I rode, I thought. It is a long trip and I can't read on a train, therefore I became engrossed in thought. And I thought about everything. I have the ability that when I have to think hard about something, it leads me to think about the next thing, and that leads me to something else. I can go on like that until the sixth millennium.

First I began thinking about my grandson, then – about the evil eye. And I starting thinking about where this belief came to us Jews about the evil eye. I came to the conclusion that the belief had some basis in fact, a point of depart. In my time I have seen a lot of evil eyes. You can see them everywhere. You get into, for example, a packed streetcar and immediately you see the evil eyes. It seems as though every eye wants to pierce you with their look because you dared to get on and make things even tighter. You go to a well-to-do man and ask him for help for yourself or a relative and he gives you a evil eye that you feel in your seventh rib. I know a lot of men, where you never see on their face a trace of a smile – they always go around with an evil eye. We have demanded so much from them, and we still offend them. Oy, my brother, you should only go to a summer resort. There you will come up against a lot of evil eyes that burn with envy over the clothes and the diamonds that our Jewish women wear. And all over America they scream about Jewish competition and Jewish business acumen.

From these ruminations on the evil eye and Jewish wealth, I moved on to other thoughts. I started thinking about the satchels, suitcases, and duffel bags in the railroad car. It is already an old indication, that wherever you see packages in a railroad train, you know, that there you will find Jewish passengers. To travel, to wander from one place to another with all sorts of packages around them, is something we have become accustomed to in our long diaspora. Who knows, I thought to myself, if all the satchels I see there are just for show, packed with rags and tatters just to give the appearance that they were traveling respectably, just like the rich people travel, the rich Jews.

So that is how I stayed lost in thought until I reached the hotel. I placed my satchel in the room belonging to Mr. Pupikovitz and his family, then I went out onto the porch. Everyone was talking, arguing, some in English some in polished Yiddish in heated discussions. Something had happened in the hotel, and because of that everyone had taken sides, even the poker players, and people talked about nothing else but the news of the split in the local *shul*.

Here is the story: A couple of years ago two nice Jews, both good people with good hearts, got together and gave the summer boarders a *shul*. One gave the land the other gave the building. Time passed. Everything went along with perfect satisfaction, unity and peace. But suddenly arose the devil: controversy. One of the nice Jews got the idea that the women's gallery should have curtains to further separate them from the men's area. Where he got that idea, nobody knows. It could be that he was angry with his wife. The other partner in the *shul* argued that they didn't need a curtain. Very quickly there were two sides taken in the *shul*. A curtain party and an anti-curtain party. And the battle was now raging at full power. It was playing out like a political campaign, with meetings, speeches, and resolutions.

The two founders of the *shul* sent one another ultimatums. The who who build the building argued: "Move out of my *shul*!" The one who donated the land responded: "Get that *shul* off of my land!" This reminded me of the story about the first two brothers in the world – Cane and Abel. To keep the peace they made a partition: One took the whole earth and the other took everything that was on the earth. Later, when they fell out with each other one cried out: "Give me the clothes you are wearing, they belong to me." The other cried out: "Jump up and remain hanging in the air, so that you do not tread on the land – it belongs to me."

The women also took part in the battle. And how! All of the women stood in the anti-curtain camp. The women absolutely did not want a curtain. There is not a woman in the world that would agree that men should hide her face.

I saw that there was no possibility of me doing any business in the middle of such turmoil. I quickly settled the matter with Mr. Pupikovitz, and returned the same day in the evening back home.

Even with all the tumult I didn't forget to weigh myself and I was careful not to make the same mistake and get on the scales with my satchel in my hand. In the five hours I was in Hunter I gained a quarter of a pound. Everyone was envious of me.

When I finally got home it was very late, after eleven, and everyone was asleep. I entered the house very quietly, leaving my satchel in the dining room, then going into the bedroom and to sleep.

I slept very heavily. My yidene woke me around half past seven.

"Chaim! Get up, its already half past seven."

"All right," I said, and started getting dressed.

"Chaim," she said again, "Tell me the truth, where did you go yesterday?"

"To Hunter, you know that already," I said, "Would I keep something from you? I should have secrets? Why are you asking such a question?"

"Well," she said, and looked at me with an evil eye, "I can not imagine why in your satchel I should find a corset."

"What do you mean a corset?" I asked.

My yidene didn't answer me. She walked out of the bedroom and came right back with the satchel.

She opened it and threw on the bed: women's things, a bundle of hair that belonged in a pompadour, a red jacket, a box of powder, and a number of other little things like that. I felt the blood rush to my face. What kind of an excuse could I give my yidene? There stood all of the evidence against me.

"I think," I said to her, "That I switched satchels with Mrs. Pupikovitz. I stored my satchel in her rooms."

"Go on, go!" yelled my yidene, "That is not Mrs. Pupikovitz' corset. She wears a size 38 and this is a size 34. It's not her daughter's either."

"Tsipe Yenta," I said and I felt the terror rise in my heart, "Tsipe Yenta! I swear to you, that I am clean of sin. I am innocent!"

"You *golem* [idiot]!" she shrieked at me, "What are you saying? Do you think I am suspicious of you? Do you think that I think that you had some business there with another woman? Old goat, who would want you! I'm just mad because you left behind your satchel, and somebody will have to open it and see it full of rags and that will be a shame and a disgrace! Mrs. Pupikovitz will get all of Blotetown cooking over it. What a misfortune! Why didn't I think to put something better in the satchel? All rags and tatters I packed in the bag. Oy, how can I bear the shame? Chaim, go now and telegraph Mr. Pupikovitz. Tell him that you got the bags mixed up and have him send your bag by express delivery."

Betsy wrote a telegram and laughed a little as she was writing. Our children took the whole situation as though it were a joke. From early morning until late that night they were laughing at me.

I sent the telegram. In the morning we received a letter from Mr. Pupikovitz and this is what it said:

Mr. Chaim Karp

Dear Sir,

I can't understand what a tararam you are making over your satchel, which you mixed up with the satchel of our Polish maid. The maid opened your satchel and found it to be full of rags. I had no idea that you were also in the rag business. But it is not worth sending expensive telegrams over it. That telegram cost you more than the rags are worth. I am shipping the satchel back to you by express, as you requested.

Yours respectfully,

Piter Pupikovitz

So, that is what happened to me. Disgraced, money spent for a telegram, money spent for an express delivery. All that for a satchel! Nu, I will think a long time before I consider another trip to Hunter.

## 51. A mistake in the dark

I still can't understand the young men of today. The young women, I don't understand either.

As you know, since you have gotten to know me a little, I am a Jew who has gotten somewhat accustomed to the new world. Even though I belong to the old world, I have learned how to get along peacefully with the new generation. I do what I want, the children do what they want and we take care to work things out peacefully without getting angry with one another, without giving, G-d forbid, too much grief.

And, yet, I must say that I do not understand today's young men, and I do not understand today's young women.

Always the same. Let me begin with my own two unmarried daughters. Betsy is the eldest, Jenny – the youngest, in the middle is Flossie who is already married and a mother, *kayne hora*. Nu, when I start to think about the differences between Betsy and Jenny I can't help but be filled with wonder at what an amazing creature man is where a mother and father can produce two children who are total opposites.

Listen to me gentlemen, I am rejecting all the bad illusions of your philosophers who give out advice on how to raise children. You can act as smart as you like, but you will never be able to explain why some children turn out good and some turn out bad, why some are clever and some are fools. There is something in the nature of a child a goodness or a badness that is in them at birth. So says Chaim the Customer Peddler, a simple Jew and not a philosopher, but not a fool either.

Betsy is a girl already 26-years old (My yidene wants me to say she is only 23). A lot of young women when they get to this age, have already looked at the world with some apprehension. They are looking more closely at the young men, to matchmakers and think about how to speed up becoming a wife and not an old maid. But my Betsy doesn't seem to have a suitor, not even one tucked away in the corner. *Gevalt*, how can a young woman not have a suitor? What could be the reason? When I ask her, me and my yidene, she just laughs as though the whole matter is just a joke to her.

“Why should I get married?” she counters us, “I make a good living, have everything I need, have time to read good books, to go from time to time to the theater with friends. I can spend money on clothes and enjoy life – So, why should I marry?”

“But things can't go on like that forever!” I argued, “You can't stay a teacher your whole life.”

And she answers me:

“If I find a man that I can love, then I will marry him.”

My wife and I have given up hope of getting any gratification from her. How is she ever going to fall in love when she distances herself from the young men? When she goes out, it is always with her female friends; and with a young man, she goes out maybe once a year. What chance does she have to get a suitor?

My Jenny is a very different girl. We don't have any complaints with her. Almost every evening she has some place to go. Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach, and often to the theater. She

costs the young men over 100 dollars a week. Every night she goes out with a different one, and each one spends on her 15 or 20 dollars during the evening. There are so many young men coming around for her, that we can't keep all of their names straight. We are always surprised at how she knows all of their names. She must have a head like a minister. Only once did she get a little confused. The story happened like this: A young man came by, a brand new one, to take her out somewhere. She introduced him to me: "This is Mr. Goldstein, and this is my Papa." The young man said, "I beg your pardon, it is a mistake, my name is Mr. Koltunovitch." Jenny has it in her character to get mad when people point out her mistakes. "I beg your pardon," she said to the young man, "I don't make mistakes. You are Mr. Goldstein, and we have an appointment to drive to Manhattan Beach." And as she said that she ran to her desk which stood in the parlor, and took from it a letter and started reading it. But she quickly calmed down. "Excuse me," she said to the young man, "You are, indeed, Mr. Koltunovitch; with Mr. Goldstein I have an appointment tomorrow."

And with that everything was good between them again.

One thing I wonder about is: Why are the young men so hot for Jenny, and seem to avoid Betsy? In truth, Betsy is older by a couple of years. With that she is strong and healthy. Her face is not so pretty, nevertheless, she is attractive enough, and smarter than ten men. And what do they see in Jenny? She is frail, skinny, from her habit of constricting and compacting herself in corsets and narrow shoes, and her face (one can tell the truth about one's own daughter) dried out from using so much powder. What's more, Betsy dresses herself very simply; neat and clean, but simple. – and Jenny has ten dresses, with two dozen jackets, with a half dozen Merry Widow hats. When she gets dressed she is like a doll with collars, trains, and beads everywhere. And when she walks or runs she wants to make sure that everyone can hear her and see her. So, that seems to please the young men a lot more.

Recently, a young man has been coming around to see Betsy, also. He comes very seldom. Once a week, never more. And it appears that he only comes just to kill a little time. But, maybe, perhaps something will come of it, you just can't tell. He is a fine young man. He has some sort of position in a bank.

Monday my yidene said to me:

"Chaim, what will be his intentions?"

"What should his intentions be," I asked.

"You are after all a Papa," she said.

"And also a grandfather, Blessed be the Name," I said.

"You laugh, ha!" she said, "By respectable people, the father would want to know what is going on. There are so many young men coming to this house, sometimes one gets a chance to talk with them, one tosses in a word here and there, then a second time, until you find out if the young man means business. Or if he is only coming for some foolishness. Although, by Betsy it is agreed. She will not permit anyone to mix in with her affairs. However, with Jenny's boyfriends you can talk. She will allow it. I will work it out with her myself."

My yidene talked it through with Jenny, and it was arranged that when Mr. Koltunovitch comes the next time, I will pull him to the side and have a chat with him. With Mr. Koltunovitch, Jenny has

already gone out three times. And it looks like she likes him also.

Wednesday we had two guests at the same time. Mr. Koltunovitch came to visit Jenny and the other young man, who works in a bank, came to see Betsy. Both ate supper with us. After supper I looked for an opportunity to talk to Mr. Koltunovitch about the matter at hand.

The opportunity presented itself when everyone went out onto the porch to get a little air. To get to the porch we had to pass through a darkened hallway. That is where I got my chance. I took the boy by the arm and said:

“Wait here a moment, young man, I want to speak with you about something. Understand, I am a father, and my mind turns around my children. I would like for you to tell me the absolute truth. What do you think of my Jenny? Tell me, don't be ashamed.”

Before the young man had a chance to answer me, my yidene came up to us. She grabbed my arm and gave it a strong shake and pulled me into the parlor.

“You *golem* [idiot]!” she hissed between her teeth, “What have you done? Are you blind, or something? That is Betsy's young man, not Jenny's!”

This was not good for me. I ran downstairs to my Flossie, and stayed there until both of the young men had left.

It is a miracle that Mr. Laks kept it to himself, and Betsy knew nothing about it. I am sure that he will never come back. One thing bothers me! That is that this was a real waste, a useless nutcracker.

In order to make my yidene happy, I promised to speak to Mr. Koltunovitch once again, and not make a mistake this time.



## 52. A slap for nothing

'The world is like a stormy sea' – I read that in a book somewhere. It is true, today's world is like a stormy sea. One means by that, as later when the storm subsides, that is, when the children get older, then will you get a little peace, but the storm doesn't abate for the parents. The bigger the children grow, the bigger grow the problems.

My yidene simply rips the flesh from me, that I should have a conversation with Mr. Koltunovitch and make him clarify what he thinks of our Jenny. What purpose does it serve to allow a young girl to run around with so many boys? It is kind of a strange luck we have with our children: One has all the boys and the other has not one!! I promised myself that I would speak with Mr. Koltunovitch the very next time he came to visit in our house.

As for Benele, he is unstoppable. He is putting all his efforts into becoming a cantor. By us in Blotetown, every Sabbath another cantor comes to us to audition. Last week came to us the thirteen-year-old cantor, who I had heard in Russia over 16 years ago. Then he had first come to public attention as the "thirteen-year-old cantor," and he has stuck with that title right up to today. And in order to keep this title, he doesn't let his beard grow, wears knickers and children's socks. This cantor made my son, Benele's, head spin. Since Benele heard him sing in our Congregation Temple Jacob, he got it in his head to become a cantor. He learned a couple of religious melodies (he doesn't have a bad ear for them), and from early in the morning until late at night we hear him tralala, and bimbom, and tiririr, and he doesn't give us a minute's rest.

On top of everything, he has stopped talking to us in human language. Whatever you ask him, he answers with a melody. Sunday I said to him: "Benele, go downstairs to Thomas (that is how I refer to my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshapirnski, just within the family), and tell him I would like a cigar." The little scamp goes downstairs, and in a few minutes he comes back and sings to me like a chanteur to the tune of Kol Nidre:

"Ah-ha-ha, Papa, Thom-as a-way in New York, ahahah!"

Early Monday morning my clock ran down. I sent him down to Flossie to get a look at the time on her clock. Benele came back and sang this to me:

"Ti toh ti toh, ti-todritoh, ti-toh-toh, a quarter past seven, ti-todritoh, ti-toh!"

Ah, if only I could write music notation, I would give you a better idea of how melodic he sang in his upper register.

Between him and my yidene it is no wonder that one has to be patient, and that bad things can happen to me like the story I am going to tell you now:

One evening my oldest son, Jackie, did not come home to supper. He is a boy of 17 years, and works in a hat store as a salesman. He always comes home on time and always acts responsibly. This time when he did not come home according to his usual habit, we did not know what to think. I had to start thinking about what to do in this situation, when he did come home: Should I forgive him or give him a smack? Something in my heart told me not to give a smack to an older boy, it could make him arrogant. Here and there, I thought and thought and decided that a strong hand was necessary – a

couple of good slaps on the cheek would do him good. A boy of his age is still a child, a sapling and should come home on time, and if I don't act, that will show him a way to get around me. My yidene also goaded me on, and said, we should not let him into the house when he did come home. He should spend the night in the yard or in the cellar. In short, I thought to myself, when he does come in I will have it out with him. But the time passed and he did not come. Then a thought came to me that perhaps, G-d forbid, something might have happened to him. My heart began to get weaker and weaker. I glanced at Betsy and saw that she had guessed what I was thinking. And just as though she wanted to answer my thoughts, she said to me: "Nothing, Papa, don't worry. You will see that he is not to blame for anything, and nothing bad has happened to him." And I could see that my yidene also weakened, and stopped talking about making him spend the night in the yard.

Suddenly the doorbell began to ring. I can not begin to describe to you what I felt when I heard the doorbell. At first I was happy that it was a sign that my son still lived and was there. Then I began to feel more forceful – now I can teach him a lesson, give him a smack just to let him know that he has a father.

"Where are you going?" I asked Benele, seeing him run toward the door.

"Tai-rai-rai-rai. I go to open the door. Rai-rai-rai today we sturggled. The bell rang."

"Stay here!" I shouted at him – "Don't move from that spot! You are not going to open the door. I, myself, will go and open it, that is as it should be."

"All right," said Benele, and continued sing to himself the song, *Today We Struggled*."

"Quiet!" I shouted at him again. "Be quiet for a minute!"

For a minute it was quiet. Then the doorbell rang again.

I did not stir from my spot.

"Dat's right," said Jenny, "He should stand and wait a little. Such a slug! He must be hanging out with girls!"

Another half-minute passed and the doorbell began to ring loud and repeatedly. I could hear from my Flossie's apartment below, someone going to answer the door. I rushed to block the way.

In the hall I met my son-in-law.

"It is Jack," I said to him, "I want to leave him standing in the street for a while, the good-for-nothing. He needs to learn a lesson for coming home so late."

Two more minutes passed. I sat down in the hall on a step and waited. Benele also came down, but he stood quietly by.

Again the doorbell began to ring. Between the ringing I could hear knocking on the door.

I thought that was too pushy. I rolled up both of my sleeves and with one hand I opened the door, and with the other hand I let loose with a slap to one cheek then the other.

“Bamamam-Bam! Bamamam-Bam, bamamam-bam. And again, bamamam-bam Father, harder,” Benele sang to a Hasidic melody.

And there, outside in the dark stood the boy. For a half-minute he could not get a grip on himself. When he did come around, he began to yell:

“Murder! Murder! Help! Help! Police!”

I was seized with fright. It was like my feet were cut out from under me, when I recognized the voice. Benele was still in the hallway singing again to the tune of Kol Nidre:

“Ha-ha-ha, it is not Johnnie, Papa, ha-ha-ha, it is Mr. Koltunovitch, oy veh, oy veh, oy, oy! De-in-dar-nu ai-ai-ai.”

From the house people began to run downstairs: My yidene, Jenny, Betsy, my son-in-law and Flossie with the baby in her arms. And I stood there completely upset, holding Mr. Koltunovitch with both hands and begging him to be merciful and forgive me. I made a mistake, a bitter mistake.

Jenny cried, Betsy reasoned with him and he let himself be convinced. Jackie got there five minutes later. It wasn't his fault that he was late: His boss asked him to work a little overtime in order to fix some new stock.

A half-hour later or so, neighbors began ringing the doorbell and asked if we heard someone in the neighborhood yelling “Murder! Police!” To keep the peace, we told them that we heard nothing.

## 53. He has a lawsuit with a photographer

By us here in Blotetown things are very lively at the moment. Mr. and Mrs. Pupikovitz have just come back from Hunter. Mr. and Mrs. Kaban are back from Tannersville. Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick has begun campaigning in earnest, and Reverend Doctor Hotzmech is preparing his speeches for the High Holidays. By my daughter Jenny it is a little slack. Because the weather has been so much cooler, she hasn't been so busy going out in the evening with boys. Mr. Koltunovitch is the only one who comes to visit her regularly once a week, and he has already forgotten the slap that I gave him by mistake.

Now I will tell you a story about how I had pictures taken with my wife. That is the third time already, since we have been living in Blotetown, that we have had pictures taken.

A couple of weeks ago my yidene said to me: "Chaim, we should have some pictures taken with the New Year and send them to our family back in the Old Country. They should see that we are still alive. I saw in Canal Street how people were taking pictures with New Year written on them, with shofar's, with little birds, and bells, and it only costs three dollars a dozen. And a thirteenth you get for free – the whole package is worth five dollars. The thirteenth is a big photo with color, all the colors of the clothes you are wearing, and if you make a deal with the photographer, you can get some extra colors. Three dollars is a *metsye* [bargain]. What do you say, Chaim?"

"I should know?" I said, "It can't hurt."

"Just you and me together," she said, "It would be a big bother for the kids. Just us alone will be enough."

"Yes, just us," I said and I laid my hand on her shoulder, and drew her closer to me.

"Foolishness!" she said to me, "Foolishness, Chaim, what puts such ideas in your head? You are playing with me like a bridegroom a blushing bride. Feh!"

There is an odd evil element in taking pictures. There is a pride-fullness in people's nature to want to see themselves in a picture, a photograph, it is as though to say: There I am in a nice jacket with a top hat, dressed up for the grand occasion, standing at attention like a soldier with a happy smile on my lips. But in truth, that is the true me, the Chaim from the rest of the year goes around in a short, thin coat of black burlap, a hat that is bent out of shape, a dirty necktie and with a wrinkled forehead and a back that is a little bent over. If friends should look at the picture and see me wearing a Prince-Albert, a stove-pipe hat and a smile on my lips, they would think that I own America.

In a whole Sabbatical year I might not write a single letter to send back to the old homeland; even to send them a picture so they should see how me and my yidene are living, *kayne hora*, in America. So, we thought the photos would be worth the three dollars.

Sunday before last we got together to go to New York to a photographer. My yidene was wearing all of the jewelry I had in stock, and in addition she was bedecked in every possible color: A black dress, a blue vest, a yellow belt, a green hat with red bananas, gray cherries and white peaches on it. I was also wearing a black Prince-Albert with a white vest with little blue stars. A red necktie (my son-in-law's) and yellow gloves (my Jackie's). We wanted the large picture that came with the set should have in it a lot of varies colors.

After arriving at the photographer's, the first job was to straighten ourselves back up. My yidene stood maybe a half hour in front of the mirror, spitting in her hand and flattening the hair on her head – and finally she was ready. The photographer sat her on a stool and had me stand next to her with one hand supported on the stool and the other hand on my watch chain.

“Perhaps you will want to put on some medals or badges from societies or orders?,” the photographer asked us.

“Ay good, Chaim,” my yidene whispered to me, “Go ahead and take some medals and badges. It will look nicer.”

“But I have never received a medal from a society, and never got a badge from an order,” I responded.

“It doesn't matter,” said the photographer, “Everybody does it. When some one gets their picture taken they want to look like a respectable person and not just ordinary.”

The photographer hung five medals on me, with three badges and then added some sort of broad chain around my neck like an official in a lodge would wear.

After he took the picture, I paid him the three dollars, gave him my order and told him to send us the photos through the post.

A week later, it was a Friday evening as I was coming home, my yidene ran up to me with a picture in her hand and said: “See, Chaim, look what sort of a picture he sent us! It is us but we are not recognizable. Tell me, do I have such a long, sharp nose? And by you it looks like you have a patch on your jacket, and you are missing an eye. It makes me nauseous to look at it.”

I took the picture from her hand and studied it. It is, so it seemed, me with my yidene, but not me. Perhaps we looked like that when we stood in front of the camera, nervous, scared, holding our breath. One of my eyes was, indeed, missing. That is, where my eye should have been there was only a white stain, but even higher on my forehead, was another white spot. It made me look like I had three eyes. My yidene's nose appeared far too long and pointed. A nose is not always straight – it changes depending upon if you looked at it from the front or from the side.

“It would be a shame to send such a picture,” my yidene said, “Tomorrow you need to go to the photographer and get our money back. If not you should take him to court. He is a swindler. The large picture that he promised, he didn't even send.”

First thing in the morning I was away to the photographer. I arrived at seven AM and had to wait in the hall for two hours, since the studio first opens at nine. The photographer only had to look at my face and the package I held in my hand for him to figure out what was going on.

“What do you want,” he asked.

“Where is the large picture, the one with colors?” I asked him.

“You will get that one shortly. Right now I have a lot of jobs.”

“But the pictures you sent us are not our pictures. My wife is not at all pleased with them – me either.

I want my money back.”

“I don't give refunds,” said the photographer, “And I am asking you to leave me alone. It is a misfortune to have to make a living among Jews. They are always unhappy.”

That left me very disappointed. I left and went directly to a well-known lawyer on East Broadway.

I told the lawyer the whole story. He looked at the pictures and shook his head. Then he asked me:

“So then, what do you want? Retake the pictures or your three dollars?”

“My three dollars,” I said.

“It will cost you ten dollars to collect the three,” the lawyer said, “Less than ten dollars it doesn't pay for me to take on a case.”

“I will be happy to spend ten dollars to get satisfaction from the photographer,” I said, and I laid ten dollars on his desk along with the pictures.

“Come here to my office tomorrow in the afternoon and you will get your three dollars,” the lawyer said.

“So quick?” I said, very surprised, “I would have expected it to take several weeks.”

“I hate long drawn-out cases,” he said, “I do things one-two-three. I will go to the judge and say: “See, Mike or Jim, I am in a hurry.” He will put aside all other trials and attend to my case.”

“All right,” I said, “I will come tomorrow for the three dollars.”

“If you want,” said the lawyer, “I will give you the three dollars now. That is to say I will give it to you out of my own money. I am certain that tomorrow I will collect it in court.”

The lawyer gave me three dollars, and I went back home. For the first time in my life I saw a lawyer who was so sure of himself.

When I got back home I did not recount the story of the lawyer because neither my yidene nor my children would have thought it worth it to spend ten dollars just to get satisfaction for three dollars. What do women know? What do children know? I read somewhere in the newspaper that one American made a court case against the government over twelve cents. The case went on for 43 years and it cost the American fourteen thousand dollars. He would have gotten satisfaction if he had not died before the case was concluded. Now there is a good example of business honor.

I simply told my yidene that I had given the photographer a good piece of my mind and I threatened to have him arrested. That scared him and he immediately gave me the three dollars back.

“Chaim, now I see, that you are something of a real man,” said my yidene, “But I have been thinking about it and if the photographer will give us the pictures for a dollar and a half, we should take them.”

Right away, I didn't not want to hear about it. But my yidene would not let me alone for two days

running. Wednesday I went back to the photographer to make a bargain with him.

“Well, what do you want this time?” he asked when he saw me.

“I am come to make a peaceful settlement with you,” I said to him, “In the beginning I was very upset and I got a lawyer.”

“I care about your lawyer like I care about a tomcat,” he interrupted me.

“But the lawyer collected my three dollars from you, ha? And you had to go to court, ha?”

The photographer looked at me like I was crazy.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I asked.

“What are you rambling on about?” he asked, “Say some words, explain it to me. I see that a lawyer has bluffed you.”

When I heard the word “bluffed” a new thought went through my head like lightning. Did the lawyer really bluff me? It is a true as day that he bluffed me! He took ten dollars from me and from that money he gave me three dollars back.

The lawyer had made a clean profit of seven dollars without going to court and without doing any work! And I lost ten dollars and not even any pictures to show for it!

“You are a greenhorn, mister,” the photographer said to me.

I quietly withdrew from his office and slowly descended the steps.

I wanted to go back to the lawyer, but I was ashamed, ashamed of myself. That a Jew of my years, and a businessman, should be such a fool!

“What's the news?” my yidene asked me when I came back to the house.

“He will not hear or see,” I said, “He is angry.”

“You taught him a good lesson,” my yidene said, “Chaim, you are a real businessman!”

## 54. Benele becomes an artist

It has been a long time since I told you anything about my Benele. Recently he has been minding his own business, and when Benele is still, then Blotetown is peaceful, and I don't have any stories to tell about him. But this week I have plenty of stories, worlds that he has overturned, and I have a lot to tell so that you will know what an operator he is growing up to be. I am certain that even though he is a little brat, he will grow up to be a respectable person. He will be famous.

The first thing I want to tell you is that my Benele has begun to show talent as an artist. And I have to thank for that my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tsaprinski. My son-in-law has recently become interested in models of clay figures. Once he brought home an idol with closed eyes and a bow in its hand.

“Why do you need such a trifle?” I asked him.

“Trifle?” he repeated, “This you call a trifle? This is art. This figure is of the Greek god Amour. He is the god of love. He has his eyes closed to show that love is blind, and that love shoots at a target not knowing where the arrow will strike. Because when a man falls in love, he loves without a goal and without reasoning.”

“Look,” I said to him, “Already in that is a Jewish thought. It shows that love is something that is predestined, and even if a man does not take aim, he still will only hit that which is intended for him.”

“You are starting up again with the Jews,” my son-in-law called out, “As though everything you see by the *goyim* [gentiles] which is good and intelligent you scream out that they stole it from the Torah!”

“Don't get angry. Rather, just tell me what is that?” I asked him as I saw him unwrap another figure from the paper.

“That there,” my son-in-law answered me, “is Venus, the goddess of Beauty.”

“That is what you call Beauty? It's not as good as your love idol. Take a look, she is an amputee, not something for us, not for any Jewish girl. She is missing both hands. Some beauty she is!”

“What are you saying,” my son-in-law explained to me with a little laugh, the way one laughs at a greener, “That is the famous Venus De Milo. This is the story: There are many different figures of Venus. Every Greek artist had his own vision of Beauty and each one made their own version of Venus. About ninety years ago an Englishman dug up on the Greek island, Milo, a figure of Venus which was buried among the ruins perhaps two thousand years ago. The figure did not have hands. The Englishman brought the figure to Paris and there all of the experts declared that even though the hands were missing, it was the most beautiful of all of the statues of Venus. Then, several artists, sculptors, stone-cutters tried to affix hands to the statue, but their efforts were to no avail. They could not create hands that were in harmony with the original. It was decided that the statue should remain in the museum without hands. People began to make copies of the statue, also without hands. So, this little statue is a copy of that Venus De Milo without the hands.”

“That is quite a history,” I said.



“Ah-nu,” my son-in-law asked jokingly, “Perhaps you have found something like that in the Torah?”

“No,” I answered him, “You only find such foolishness by the *goyim*.”

The whole time that my son-in-law and I were talking, Benele, was standing there with his mouth agape. He looked like the whole story went right up his nose. By children the power of imagination, of fantasy, is very strong and I could see that his little brain was working on something.

After dinner I read the newspaper and afterward I went to bed. But before going to sleep the story came back to me about the Beauty without the hands. I have a strange trait that at night before going to sleep all sorts of foolishness spins around in my head. Such fool things that, as a serious businessman, I would not entertain at any other time. But at night when I am trying to clear my head to go to sleep, because I have to get up early: “Pu, pu! Bad dreams to my enemies!” I think to myself, “What is coming into my head? A clay idol without hands! Ach, what a world where crazy people get so worked up! But, but when so many people get excited about something, maybe there is something to it!”

By morning when I got up I had forgotten about the whole thing. But in the evening when I came home I was met by the whole household, they should be healthy, downstairs on the first floor by my daughter Flossie. I went inside and saw that everyone was there, and on the table was the statue, but – with hands! With both hands! As though they had grown there overnight.

I stood there in wonder and they stood there smiling. I was ashamed to question anyone, because they have a way of laughing at me when I ask something. Children always laugh when an old Papa asks them anything – they are the geniuses, the intelligent generation; the Papa is an old fool. Even my yidene was laughing with them. She stands by the new generation. The only one who was not laughing was my daughter Betsy. For a short while they stood and laughed and I stood and wondered. Finally, Benele broke the silence and said something asking me:

“Well, Papa, how do you like it? I fixed her; I made them hands. Ain't she a peach?”

“Azoy,” I said, “You are the one who made her hands? You are, indeed, an artist! What did you make them out of?”

“From challah I made it,” he answered me. You know that from challah I can make all sorts of *tsotchkes*.”

“Little brat!” I yelled at him, “I have told you that you are not to make *tsotchkes* out of challah. It is a great sin!”

“There you go again with the Jews!” my son-in-law called out, “By you is art something non-kosher! You should know that in your son there is a great talent. One day he will shine like a great star in the heavens of the Art world. He will be a second Antokolsky!”

“Calm down a little,” I said to my son-in-law, “The youngster will take it too far. A child shouldn't be praised too much in the eyes.”

“Papa, I heard what you said!” Benele called out, “Pooh, pooh, I heard it!”

“You little brat! You say “pooh, pooh” to your father? Get out of here!” screamed at him my married daughter, Flossie.

Benele left, but before he went he had just enough time to yank on the cat's tail waking up the baby. Benele hates to let a scolding pass. He seeks immediate vengeance.

During this evening, Tuesday, he got the greatest revenge.

My yidene was away at a meeting of the lady's auxiliary of our congregation Temple Jacob. Betsy was sitting and reading a book – she is always reading! What perseverance she has! After reading so many of our books, she could already have been a doctor of religion. Benele and the other children were outside on the street, and Jenny, my youngest daughter, was getting spruced up because Mr. Koltunovitch, the young man that she has been going out with, was coming to spend some time with her.

In the midst of this, while I was sitting in the dining room with Betsy, I heard a yell and then Jenny came running through the room wrapped in a hand towel and with a bundle of hair in her hand and screamed:

“*Oy, gevalt!* Murder! How could mother do that to me? She put on my poofs! Oy, oy, oy – I can't stand that!”

“What's a poof?” I asked.

Jenny didn't answer. She went to Betsy ask and show her:

“You see, one would have to be blind not to see that these are black poofs and mine are blond. What do you think of our mother? She put on my poofs and went to her meeting. What will I do now? Mr. Koltunovitch will be here soon, and I can't do my hair properly. Oy, oy, oy! I can't stand it!”

Now the story became clear to me. My yidene and my daughter Jenny put such extra hair cushions on their head. My yidene has black hair and my Jenny has blond hair. And since my yidene is a little short-sighted, she picked up the wrong hair.

Jenny cried and sobbed.

“Shush, don't cry,” I said to her, “I will go get your Mama.”

I called my yidene out from her meeting. She almost fainted when I told her about the mistake she had made.

“Now I understand it, already,” she said to me, “why the ladies of the auxiliary looked at me the way they did. Tell me, Chaim, what does my hair look like?”

“Just like a field in summer,” I said, “Black rows and yellow rows like a garden bed.”

“A misfortune has befallen me!” she complained, “I am afraid that Benele switched the poofs. If you were a good Papa you would cut the skin off of him in little pieces.”

“He will get from me thirty swats.”

When I got back to the house, Mr. Koltunovitch was already waiting in the parlor. Jenny stayed in her room until my yidene gave her her poofs. She kept silent because she was ashamed to yell where Mr. Koltunovitch might hear her.

The young man stayed until midnight. Benele came home around eleven. The thirty swats I had to put off for another day. How can one spank a kid when there are guests in the house? But the next morning, Benele promised to be a good boy, and the swats were delayed for an undetermined time.

## 55. He finds a treasure

Sunday when I came to Mr. Gogelich's house to get an address I needed, I found him alone in the house, very busy, rubbing down a tarnished five cent piece.

“What is that,” I asked him.

“I found it in the cellar,” he answered me with a smile, “Perhaps here is a treasure. Someone had to dig the cellar.”

I looked sharply into his eyes and thought: Is this true, or is he looking to sell his house and bluffing me about the treasure so that I would buy him out?

I took his story as a joke. Mr. Gogelich is not the type of person who would make up a story if he really found a treasure. However, the idea of a treasure did get up my nose a little.

By the time I got home I had forgotten about the whole story. But later in the evening something happened that put me in mind of it again.

I happened to walk through our parlor and since no gaslight was burning I stepped on a board in the floor and nearly fell. By us in Blotetown the floorboards are not made for walking, but rather to rock back and forth. No one else was in the house except Betsy who was drinking coco with a friend in the dining room. I figured: I should be a good homeowner and get a hammer and nails and fix the board so it doesn't move.

First I turned on the gaslight. Then I took off my jacket. After that I pulled the board free. But...what did my eyes see?

A tin box and in the box was stuffed a woman's stocking.

My heart skipped a beat. I wanted to cry out loud. It took all my strength to hold myself back.

With trembling hands I removed the stocking from the box, and gave the stocking a shake. From the stocking spilled out paper money and silver coins. I locked the door and began to count. I counted it once – it totaled sixty dollars with forty cents; I counted it a second time – this time I counted forty dollars with sixty cents; I counted a third time – There was thirty-eight dollars with a hundred and five and twenty cents. In short: I bumbled and stumbled, my hands flew away, my head was spinning, and in the end I couldn't count the money correctly. Finally, I just put the money in my pocket. The tin box and the stocking I put back where I found them and laid the floorboard back as it was. Then I went to see Mr. Pupikovitz.

I found him at home, wearing his fur coat, he was getting ready to go to New York. I told him that I had come to him because of important business. When Mr. Pupikovitz heard 'business' he put aside his trip to New York, and ushered me into the private office that he has in his house.

“What do you have good to say?” he asked me.

I told him the whole story from the beginning, that is to say from the five-cent piece that Mr. Gogelich

found in his cellar, to the treasure that I found in the parlor under the wobbly board. Mr. Pupikovitz didn't want to believe me right from the beginning, only when I showed him the cash and swore on my word of honor did he think it over and say:

"It can be that in many of the houses in Blotetown there are treasures. In the past *goyim* lived here, and *goyim* hate to put their money in banks. They prefer to keep it elsewhere, to bury it in the ground."

"And it can also be that that is not the case," I said.

"It can be not the case." Mr. Pupikovitz said, and I could see in his eyes that plans were churning in his head.

"Listen, dear friend, if you want to make a business with me, we will both become rich from it. It is possible that there is a treasure. We can manage it in the American way. By us in the Old Country if one found a treasure the entire village would soon know about it, the news would run from kith to kin and from that it would come to nothing. Here in America when one finds a treasure it is handled in a business-like manner: First you buy out all of the claims on the land, then the treasure is found. Then one creates a company, then you sell shares. Once all of the shares have been sold, then you grow the company and print more shares. And then, even if the treasure turns out to be nothing, the shares will turn out to be a nice treasure. Do you understand?"

"I understand," I said, "but I don't understand what you are getting at."

"You see," Mr. Pupikovitz continued, "It is so. We must bring Mr. Gogelich into the business, because he might have already stumbled into it. The dog has already sniffed out where he might find a dollar. And then we must organize a company. The company should be called "The Blotetown Mining Company." The purpose will be to buy houses and mine them for money. We could become millionaires. Who know how much money the *goyim* have buried here. Don't forget, for the last ten years only *goyim* have lived here."

Mr. Pupikovitz telephoned Mr. Gogelich. When Mr. Gogelich arrived, Mr. Pupikovitz laid out before him the entire plan for the Blotetown Mining Company. Mr. Gogelich grabbed at the plan with both hands.

"However, you must not forget," said Mr. Pupikovitz, "Until we incorporate our company, and until we buy the surrounding land, this must remain a secret. Because what would happen if Mr. Kaban got a whiff of this and started his own mining company? Everyone would be doing it! Everybody would be making mining companies. There would be as many mining companies as grocery stores and soda water stands. One needs to be careful – not a word to anyone. Even to our wives we should not say anything. Not a word! Let's shake hands on it – word of honor!"

In the middle of this my Benele came in visibly upset and with his hat on crooked, out of breath he said to me:

"Papa! Mama is sick. She has a terrible headache. She is screaming that her head hurts, she is cold, she is hot. Betsy is going for the doctor."

"Go," said Mr. Pupikovitz, "Let's meet tomorrow evening. I will have the lawyer there to explain to us how to proceed according to American law."

I quickly headed home, practically running. Benele could hardly keep up with me.

As I came in I ran into the doctor. He was holding my yidene by the hand, and she was sticking out her tongue.

“You have had a fright, that is all,” explained the doctor, “You will get over it. Lay down and be quiet. Here is a prescription for something to calm your nerves.”

After the doctor left and I was alone with my yidene, she said to me:

“Chaim, I want to tell you something.”

So tell, Tzipe Yenta,” I said, “Tell me what has frightened you so.”

“You won't get mad at me?” she asked.

“Why should I get mad?” I asked.

“I have...I have...” she stammered, “I have lost some money.”

“The five dollars I gave you early this morning to pay the grocery man?”

“No,” she said, “Not that money, not the five dollars. I lost a lot of money. Someone robbed me.”

“What money then?” I asked, puzzled, “Where did you get a large sum of money?”

“Ay, Chaim, you don't understand, – I am a wife like all the other wives. Every wife has a stash. Nu, I had forty dollars put aside. I was foolish: Why should I hide money from you? It is just that as wives it is in our nature. We like to hide things from the men. It is a sort of bad habit. I didn't want to put it in the bank, I preferred to keep it in the parlor under a floorboard. – – – “

I didn't hear anything after that. My head started to buzz, as though all of my blood was rushing to my brain. I felt as though someone laid hands on me for being a thief. Not knowing what I was doing, I reached my hand in my pocket, grabbed the money and tossed it to my yidene in bed. Dollars, half-dollars, quarter-dollars and small change – all of the treasure I had found in the parlor.

“My stash!” my yidene called out with joy, “How did you get it?”

I told her how I came to discover the stash. But about the mistake I made with Mr. Gogelich and Mr. Pupikovitz, I was ashamed to tell her.

The next evening I wrote a short note to Mr. Pupikovitz and had Benele take it to him. In the note I wrote:

Mr. Pupikovitz!

The treasure that I found I had to let go of since it was my wife's stash. Look in your own house, under a floorboard, or in a featherbed and perhaps you will find a similar treasure. But be careful not to take any of it or it could cost Mrs. Pupikovitz her health, and you – doctor bills. Respectfully, Chaim.

## 56. Alderman Fitzpatrick becomes a Zionist

In Blotetown now things are heating up, there is a lot of commotion and its stormy. The Honorable Paddy Fitzpatrick has become a Zionist. Not a Culture-Zionist, like my old neighbor Lipkindson, not from the type of Zionists who say that the point of Zionism is only the ideal of it, the discussion of it, no, our Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick has become an “A-1” “18-carat” Zionist.

He came to it in an unusual manner. A Brownsville real estate broker, who is also an lawyer and a writer, came to the Alderman a few weeks ago about business. Because, as you know, our Alderman is the largest builder in Blotetown, and he has sold very many houses and lots. As the lawyer and the Alderman talked, the Alderman said to him:

“You know, I am the greatest friend of the Jews in America. And I tell you that it pays to be a friend to Jews. Particularly if one is in the real estate business. Here in Blotetown I am the one who has a monopoly on Jewish friendship. You could call it a trust.”

The lawyer was very pleased to hear that, and because the lawyer is a Zionist, and he advised the Alderman to buy a Zion shekel.

“What is that?” asked the Honorable Paddy Fitzpatrick.

Then the lawyer recounted the whole history of the Zionist movement. He explained that now that Turkey has a constitution it is much easier to settle Jews in Palestine.

The Alderman listened carefully and asked a lot of questions about all the details, and once he understood it all, he called out:

“That is the biggest real estate scheme I ever heard of. Bully! Give me five hundred of those shekels, give me a thousand! No, give me ten thousand!”

You hear, ten thousand shekels the gentile wanted to buy, and when the lawyer told him that he did not have any more than twenty, the Alderman was interested to know how many Jews in America had bought shekels. When the lawyer answered him that the number was not more than ten thousand, Alderman Fitzpatrick could hardly believe it.

“If only,” he said, “In New York alone there are a hundred thousand customers for shekels. Where is Chicago today? Where is Philadelphia? And were are the other cities in the United States? By golly, I thought Jews understood business!”

Afterwards, after the lawyer left, Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick called Mr. Pupikovitz, the ex-president of our congregation Temple Jacob, on the telephone. The Alderman asked him if he was a Zionist and if he bought shekels.

“Eh, I don't believe in the whole damn thing,” answered Mr. Pupikovitz.

“You are a big *khamur* [donkey]!” the Alderman told him. Our Alderman knows a lot of Yiddish words. “I tell you this is a great scheme. Gee! There is a fortune in it! Take my word, Pup.”

Our Alderman has the habit of calling people by nicknames and without using the title, "Mister." For example Mr. Pupikovitz he calls "Pup;" our current president, Mr. Scheftelson, he calls, "Scheftie;" Mr. Kaban he calls, "Kab," and Mr. Gogelich – "Gogie."

The telephone in the office of Paddy Fitzpatrick & Co. was busy all day. He called all of the important home owners in Blotetown and even to the pharmacist. The pharmacist was the only one who was interested in Paddy Fitzpatrick's Zionism. No one else got excited, no one else took interest. Later he tried my old neighbor Lipkindson, but Lipkindson explained to him that he was only a Culture-Zionist.

"What is that?" asked Alderman Fitzpatrick.

"Culture Zionism," Lipkindson explained to him, "is simply and ideal. Our goal is not to buy colonies, make real estate booms in the Holy Land, but rather to found there a spiritual center."

"You are not a businessman, Lip" Alderman Fitzpatrick said to him, "You are a bigger *khamur* than Pupikovitz."

The end of the story is that Alderman Fitzpatrick called a mass meeting of all of the Blotetown residents, and held it in the shul. Our president, Mr. Scheftelson, who is a peaceful Socialist, did not want to hold the meeting in the shul and told the Alderman so. "You are still a bigger *khamur* than Lipkindson," Alderman Fitzpatrick answered him. And President Scheftelson gave in to him.

The meeting was attended by big and small. Alderman Fitzpatrick made it known that a speaker at the meeting would be a famous priest, who had written books about Jews. The Alderman doesn't understand our Jews. He thinks that they would run across the Rocky Mountains to hear a gentile speaker. The priest was the first speaker and Alderman Fitzpatrick introduced him like this:

"Ladies and Gentlemen! I want to introduce to you a man who claims to be as big a friend to the Jews as I am, but since he is not in the real estate business, I don't care!"

The priest gave a very nice speech about Jews. He said that Jews were good patriots in time of war, and good citizens in times of peace. He spoke fine, good, tastefully. But not a word about Zionism. The Alderman reserved that for himself. Someone said that he talked it over with the priest in these words: "You give them a little jolly, and I'll talk business."

"Dear Friends!" the Alderman began, when it came his time to speak, "Fellow citizens, neighbors! I have for you a scheme that requires the smallest of investments and can bring a great fortune. You once had a land, Palestine, and now you have a chance to get it back. Lots can be bought cheap there and chances for speculation are great. I can see that a boom is about to start there that will beat everything in the world. But you Jews, you are not pioneers. You can only make business when an Irishman starts it up. An Irishman lives in a shanty on a big lot, and no Jew sees what a chance that is, until along comes another Irishman and buys the shanty with the lot, divides the lot into smaller ones, builds first-class buildings, then come the Jew real estate brokers and makes a business. And I tell you, dear friends, that the Jews will never go into Palestine unless the Irish lead them. It is my plan that we will found a Zion association and invest money in the business. You know that when I, Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick, say Israel. And when I say to you that this is a good scheme you know that you can trust my word. No Jew ever went bankrupt when he made a deal with an Irishman."

Alderman Fitzpatrick was enthusiastically applauded and 75 members signed and founded a Zionist



Association. It only missed by a hair that Alderman Fitzpatrick was elected president of the association, but he stood back in favor of Mr. Kaban.

What can I say to you and what can I recount? In Blotetown now no one talks about anything but Zionism. Even my Benele is interested in it and wants to know if in Israel there are Indians. At all the whist parties people talk of nothing else than Alderman Fitzpatrick and Palestine. All the ladies wear Zion buttons. In short things are very exciting in Blotetown. And we all have our Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick to thank for that, the man who has a trust on Jewish friendship.

Let's hope that keeps up!

## 57. A high price for Germans

Until the Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick leads us into Israel, a lot of water will flow under the bridge. Meantime, we are still in exile.

The Jewish diaspora is like manna – It is a delicacy that has many different tastes. A Jew lives, so it seems, in Blotetown, in his own house, in a free country that one calls America – and yet he is in exile. He is in exile to the loan societies for the mortgages, by his wife he is in exile, even by the maid he is in exile.

I am talking about Mr. Kaban's maid and also Mr. Pupikovitz' maid.

Mrs. Kaban and Mrs. Pupikovitz are, as I have already told you, the two grande dames of Blotetown, and they compete fiercely with one another. If Mrs. Kaban makes a whist party tomorrow, Mrs. Pupikovitz will make a whist party the next Thursday. You want to know what a whist party is? It is very simple: Women get together and play cards.

“Whist,” is what they call it just to be stylish. They drink a little alcohol, just like the men, and they bite with their tongues, that is to say they gossip.

Nu, Mrs. Kaban wanted a luxury that no other rich lady in Blotetown up to this point had allowed themselves, namely: A maid, a German Fräulein, a real Christian maid who spoke a true Berliner German.

And from the day that the German maid arrived in Mr. Kaban's house everyone there become Germans. They have stopped speaking English, they have stopped speaking mame-loshin [mother tongue ie, Yiddish], they only speak German. Both Mr. and Mrs. Kaban have become Germans. Now one only hears them say, “Ya, ya,” and 'nicks,' and 'hat,' and 'hatte,' and 'sollte werden. – It simply makes the skin crawl. They have become Germans right down to their bones.

When Mrs. Pupikovitz saw the big tararam Mrs. Kaban made in Blotetown with her German maid, she went to an employment agency in Brooklyn and ordered, “I must have a German girl, dig one up out of the ground if you have to, but the girl must be German!”

With money you can get anything in America. Mrs. Pupikovitz got her German girl, a big girl, a plump girl twice the size of the maid that works by the Kabans. A couple of days later, when I ran into Mr. Pupikovitz in the street heading home from business, I did not recognize him – The voice is Jacob, the voice is from Mr. Pupikovitz, but the language was not his. Out of the blue sky he had become German. He spoke only Ashkenaz, as though he had never known Yiddish.

I said to him: “Good evening Mr. Pupikovitz!” He answered me: “Guten Abend, Herr Chaim.” I said, “It is working up to a blizzard.” He answered, “Ya, es ist ganz möglich dass wir ein furchtlich sturm werden haben.” As he spoke these words I saw how his face contorted, as though he was forcing the words out. I said to him: Mr. Pupikovitz, what is with you, are you not well?” He answered: “Ach, Gott behüte, bin ich wohl, sehr wohl.” I asked him: “Today why are you making such grimaces when you speak?” He laughed and answered me, already, in perfect Yiddish: “Vell, Mr. Chaim, I will be with you confidential and tell you that I am in exile. Since my wife took on a German maid, she gave out an order that no Yiddish word should be uttered in the house. We all speak German. It comes to us

with great difficulty, and with green gall [bitterness], but we are speaking German and only German. Even the children, who always speak English, also have to speak German. By us it has become a German home, like the Kabans. We are in exile with our German maid.

Mr. Pupikovitz sighed, the whole time we traveled together until we reached the Blotetown station, we only spoke *mame-loshen*. But as soon as we arrived in Blotetown, Mr. Pupikovitz reverted back to German, and when we got to my house he said to me: “Ich wünsche Ihnen ein gute Nacht, Herr Chaim!”

So, that is how the fashion spread all over Blotetown. The German maids became stylish. Those who could afford a maid, only sought out German women. Even those who could not afford a maid, made a mighty effort and took on a German, even if was a elderly gentile, but always a German. Blotetown became a little Germany. Whomever one met, they spoke German. It seemed like one day you would meet someone and speak perfect Yiddish, *mame-loshen* like in the Old Country, then the next day you would meet him and he was no longer a regular person, but a German. Everyone was hacking German and no one was understanding the other. We had become like the people at the tower of Babel. One said, “Was” and the other answers him, “Kvass,” one says, “Lager bier,” and the other answered “A Klag tsu dir.”

Once in the evening as I was coming home, I ran into someone new in the house. Listen, listen to me – my yidene had taken on a German maid!

She was a old, tall, thin woman with trembling hands and a constant cough. My heart seized up when I got a look at her. Who would have the heart to make such an old lady work in a house? Such a woman belonged in an old age home. I wasn't ashamed to say that to my yidene.

“You want a young one, huh?” my yidene yelled at me angrily, “A young German girl is what you want, ha? This one is too old for you, ha? Go to Mrs. Kaban, there is a young one there. German maids have become very expensive. You should be happy we were able to even get this one.”

I didn't want to talk to her any more about the maid. I could see that it was better if I just kept quiet.

In two day in my house everything turned upside down. We all became Germans. My yidene began speaking German; Jenny, German; the other children, also German. Even Benele began speaking a sort of German mixed with English. For example Benele came from school and said to my yidene: “Mama, Ich möchte like to haben etwas ei bite,” or if he wanted some small change, he would say: “Papa, Ich möchte haben some mazuma.”

At that point I felt the bitterness of exile. I myself began to break my teeth stammering German.

But G-d is good and he freed me from exile. Once, in the early morning as I was getting ready to go to business, the maid stopped me and asked:

“I would like to ask you something: Do you have a *luakh*? [Hebrew for calendar.]

When I heard the word “*luakh*,” my mouth opened so wide that I thought I would break a jawbone. And she, the maid, spoke more and told me that the fifteenth of Shevat is the *yahrtzeit* [anniversary of death] of her husband, and she wanted to know what day that fell on in the Christian calendar.

In short, why should I prolong the story for you? It turned out that our German maid was a kosher yidene who was born and raised in Germany. She knows how to pray, she can recite psalms, and also has a woman's prayer written in pure German with Yiddish letters. The Lady's Auxiliary from our congregation Temple Jacob, where my yidene is an important person, later worked it out for our maid to find a nice place in a old age home.

## 58. Blotetown looks for a new Reverend Doctor

Several times already I have started to tell you that Reverend Doctor Hotzmech has left our congregation Temple Jacob and moved out of Blotetown. He left because our congregation felt that he was too old fashioned and we wanted someone who was more “modern” as they call it.

It has been four months since Reverend Doctor Hotzmech has gone. Since then we have turned over perhaps a dozen Reverend Doctors who have given us sample sermons. On Friday evenings they 'deliver' a sermon in our temple and Sabbath evening we have a meeting to decide whether to give the doctor a contract. Throughout the whole day on the Sabbath rumors fly around the town as people try to figure out the people's opinion in Blotetown. And there is no doubt that if we want to have a Reverend Doctor, Mrs. Pupikovitz and Mrs. Kaban will have to be in agreement on it. But how does one get Mrs. Pupikovitz and Mrs. Kaban to both agree on the same person?

I have seen one thing, that a Reverend Doctor in America must be as handsome as a dentist. If he is not handsome, he will not be successful, especially in a congregation like ours, which is totally supported by the efforts of the Lady's Auxiliary. Specifically, if a Reverend Doctor pleases Mrs. Kaban, then Mrs. Pupikovitz will find in him a flaw such as he has an ugly nose. If it happens that a Reverend Doctor pleases Mrs. Pupikovitz, then he won't please Mrs. Kaban, because he goes about in a coat that is a little worn, or his ears are a bit too big, or his mouth is somewhat crooked, or his shoes are not shined. Also my yidene doesn't stay silent, she also has an opinion. By her it is only right that every Reverend Doctor should wear glasses. A Reverend Doctor without glasses, she can not imagine.

And those aren't the only opinions. There are other opinionated people who have to be reckoned with. Like our Honorable Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick, who put forth that our Reverend Doctor should be “A true blue Democrat,” and Mr. Pitsha, a new resident who only recently settled in Blotetown also has opinions.

This Mr Pitsha has been an influential person from the very first day he arrived. He is a clock manufacturer in New York, and he would become a wealthy man if he would mind his own business and not get involved in the Blotetown real estate market. But he is still an influential person because he married a Christian woman. Because of his Christian wife he has become arrogant, and even though he is very short, he walks with haughtiness, as though Blotetown is too small for him.

From the day that he moved in the people in Blotetown only talked about him and his Christian wife. She converted to Judaism, everyone knew that. But she would not speak Yiddish, and only spoke English. People whispered that she was a Polack who was born in Galitzia and came to America when she was a little girl. She was a house servant and Mr. Pitsha fell in love with her when she was still just a cook. By us in Blotetown she is considered to be a well-born woman. They immediately took her into the Lady's Auxiliary, and they took her around to all of the wives' whist parties. She possessed as much power as our Alderman Paddy Fitzpatrick. If she simply showed up at a meeting, or at a social gathering, everyone became quiet and still. People shushed one another: “Shush, be still, behave yourself a little, Mrs. Pitsha is here. Se can't stand the Jewish habit of talking loud and yelling at the top of their voice. Speak more softly and don't say anything blasphemous!”

Now you won't be surprised that Mr. and Mrs. Pitsha have their own big ideas about selecting a Reverend Doctor. It was enough that Mrs. Pitsha only had to say about a Reverend Doctor, “He is not my style,” for Mrs. Pupikovitz and Mrs. Kaban to quickly agree, that the Reverend Doctor had come

here for nothing.

Last Sabbath we had another Reverend Doctor come for a try-out. The ones who recommended him said that he is a great teacher, a Hebraic, and knowledgeable in other areas. I came with my yidene, my son-in-law and with my daughters. I will tell you the truth, that I did not understand everything that the Reverend Doctor said, but I understood that he came down hard on Jews who fawn on Christians, crawl to them on hand and foot, and abase themselves before them. I saw how a lot of people in the audience stiffened. I understood that the Reverend Doctor was kaput, he had himself, with that sermon, thrown away any chance he might have had.

I noted that the crowd started moving toward the door. By the time the Reverend Doctor had finished there were hardly enough people in the hall for two *minyans*, even including the wives.

The Reverend Doctor felt as though he had be badly beaten.

“Papa, invite him over for a while,” my eldest daughter, Betsy, the teacher, said to me, “It will be a mercy for him.”

He latched on to my invitation like a drowning man to a straw. When we got to my house we talked about many things, then suddenly I asked him a question:

“Tell me, Doctor, why did you give such a sermon like that to our congregation? You are certainly not a businessman. Not in a first sermon should you give the people such a sharp admonition. You drove everyone out of the shul.”

“I am a businessman,” the Reverend answered, “but the best businessman sometimes makes a mistake. Nowadays it is hard for a Reverend to please a congregation. In America each congregation is very different: True old-world orthodox, American orthodox, half orthodox, three-quarters orthodox, a little reformed, half reformed, and so on without limit. A rabbi must be very careful when he gives a try-out sermon. He must first find out the spirit of the congregation.”

He took a little sip of seltzer and then continued.

“Nu, because of that we have “spotters,” a sort of rabbinical detectives who go out ahead of us and take a measure of the congregation so that we will know what sort of a sermon to give. Nu, since tomorrow I have to give a try-out sermon in Brooklyn, I sent out my spotter, he should find out for me the spirit of that congregation and of yours. But I mixed up the reports. He reported to me that the Brooklyn congregation worried about Irish hoodlums who threw stones at Jews, and I thought it was happening in Blotetown. So that is how it came about that the sermon I was going to give in Brooklyn I gave instead in Blotetown.”

I comforted him, saying that he would certainly succeed in the other congregation, and that he would surely not make any more mistakes.

DON'T FORGET: The name of the Reverend Doctor is Liderkrantz.

## 59. Betsy has a fiancé, but shush! - It's a secret

My daughter Jenny, who I was already considering to be engaged to Mr. Koltunovitch, is no longer engaged and is once again a maiden. We were all wondering why Mr. Koltunovitch stopped coming over to visit, then we heard the news, that he was engaged to a girl in Brownsville with a five thousand dollar dowry.

“Well, I never really cared for him,” said my daughter Jenny when she heard the news.

“Don't worry, my daughter,” my yidene comforted her, “the Almighty will send you a better match.”

“Best to keep quiet!” Jenny snapped back, “Listen to me! You are not comforting me! Who asked you to comfort me? I never wanted him. I don't need him.”

“Nu, nu, my daughter, don't attack your mother,” I said to her and in my heart I felt sorry for her. I knew that in her heart she wanted Koltunovitch, wanted him very much. On the nights when he was in the habit of coming, she would get dressed up in her best outfits. She would write letters to him every day and received letters from him. The more Jenny tried to hide that she was not bothered, the more it became apparent to me that she was sick at heart. Even my yidene and Betsy understood also. When Jenny saw that we understood, she tried to make herself appear happy, to sing, and to go out with other boys, just to beat us over the head with it that we should forget about her pain.

Tuesday, I was brought up short. I heard Flossie speaking, “I tell you that a young girl who gets married is a fool. I often think to myself: Why did I get married? To be a young single girl, independent, earning my own money, dressing the way I want to, going to the theater and the opera. The boys – I could indulge myself going out with them. I lived, and got real pleasure from living, and from cares I knew nothing. The only care I had was – if tomorrow would there be good weather? Would it be raining when I left the theater? And now? – A slave! I have to cook, wash clothes, nurse a baby. True, it is my child. I love Maxele. But it seems like he is torturing me to death. Such a cranky child! Feel my hand – so ruff! Once it was as soft as velvet. Now I am ashamed to shake hands with people. And I always have worries on my head. A grocery man must be paid, a butcher, a milkman, a laundry man. The dollars only creep into the hand. Ay, a life! You are lucky, Betsy, you are smart – better never to get married.”

“Ha, don't say that Flossie,” Betsy answered her, “I do want to get married but only if I meet a man that I can love and who knows how to value me. Know what else I want to say to you? Because I am not at all particular, if the man really loves me, or I him. The only thing that I want is that he be intelligent enough to understand me, and that there should be something in him to value, something to respect. Later I will come to love him – and him, me. He should be my friend, and I should be his friend. We will love one the other: First comes friendship, then comes love.”

“You speak well, Betsy, but that's is how one talks before they are married. Only one problem, I am not going to make you sour on your heart, not now, when you have a fiancé.”

“What do you mean?” Betsy asked.

“I mean the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz. I noted the effect he has on you, and you on him.”

“Go on, you fool, you!” Betsy said out loud, “What does it matter if he looked at me!”

“But it was a look. Ha, I know that look!” Flossie answered. “I have more experience with boys. I'm telling you, Betsy, this is your chance. You can call him your future husband. My heart tells me that the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz is going to be my brother-in-law, and I am going to have a sister who is a *rebbetzin*. Ay, a *rebbetzin*.”

A moment passed in silence.

“Flossie,” Betsy said out loud, “If you can keep a secret, I will tell you something.”

“Certainly I can keep a secret. My sister's secret especially.”

“You won't even tell your husband.”

“Now what! I can't tell my husband! You must have a great secret! Listen, Betsy, do you want to know how to get people to keep a secret. You know my husband's cousin from Brownsville, who came to visit us on the Sabbath. Nu, she recounted me something about – Nu, about things that happen between a man and wife. You are still a maiden and one can't talk to you about such things. And I, foolish woman, told my husband, and warned him to keep it secret. What was the first thing he said? When he saw a friend, he told the whole story. The men told their wives, and now everyone knows and has had a good laugh! Now, go and trust a man with a secret!”

“Alzo, I will tell you: (Betsy began talking very softly, and I had to strain to hear what she was saying.) Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz wrote me a nice letter. He has secured a position, and Sunday he is coming here for a visit.”

“Show me the letter.”

It was completely still for a while. I understood that Flossie was reading the letter. When she finished reading, I heard her say out loud:

“Such a sweet letter!” Isn't he a dear?”

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Early the next morning as I left the house to go to business, my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, chased me down and said:

“Father-in-law, soon we will be wishing you '*Mazel Tov*.’”

“And you should live with *mazel*. What for?”

“Your daughter, Betsy, will soon become a bride. Shush! It is still a secret. Flossie entrusted me with the secret last night, that your Betsy had received a love letter from Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz. He is coming Sunday to visit. Ostensibly he will just be passing by and stop in. But he is really coming to see Betsy. Don't forget, father-in-law, you have to act like a carcass – excuse me, I didn't mean that. I mean, you have to act like you know nothing to say. It is a secret.”



“All right,” I said, “I will keep it a secret.”

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But I, when I was coming home in the evening I found that it was raining and snowing at the same time. When I got to the station I saw my youngster, Benele, waiting for me there as usual in bad weather, with an umbrella.

“Pa,” he said to me, “I have a secret to tell you that's worth a nickel.”

“All right,” I said, “Cash on delivery. Tell me your secret.”

“No, Pa, it is worth a dime.”

“Regret is not business-like.” I said, “But you get a dime.”

“It is worth a quarter, Pa, but I am giving you this secret for a dime. It is a bargain. Do you know – Betsy has a feller, a young man.”

“Who did you hear that from?” I asked.

“I heard it when Flossie told Mama and Jenny. It is a secret, shhhhha! They don't know that I overheard. You know who the young man is?”

“Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz,” I said, “You see, I knew it before you. There is no dime coming to you.”

Benele's head drooped. I couldn't bear to see his sorrow and I gave him a ten cent piece saying:

“Here, take a dime, but you shouldn't be telling secrets any more.”

When I came into the house, my yidene called me into the bedroom, closed the door, and shared the same secret with me that Flossie had told her. I pretended that it was news to me.

“Nu,” I said, “We will soon be getting *naches* [joy] from our daughter, she should stay healthy.”

After supper when Betsy was elsewhere, Flossie came in and called me over to the side to tell me something. My yidene called over to her:

“He knows already, he knows already.”

Flossie was a little put out that she had been cut short.

## 60. Jenny plays politics against Betsy

Sunday we had a guest. It was the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz. He came in the evening just after we had finished supper. He told us that he happened to be traveling through our neighborhood and thought it his duty to stop and give us a visit as recognition of the friendship that we had shown him during his first visit when he had come to try out for the Reverend position at our congregation Temple Jacob.

Betsy acted as though the visit was a surprise to her. What can one do, that is the way the world works! The most honorable men are forced to put on a mask and play a role. Every one of us this night played our role. We all greeted the Reverend Doctor as a guest, whom we had not expected.

“What a sweet surprise!” cried out Jenny, my youngest daughter who had not long ago lost her “feller,” Mr. Koltunovitch.

After a short while, my yidene brought tea, wine, fruits, and I sent Benele to my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski to ask him for cigars for our guest. (My son-in-law smokes ten-cent cigars, but he buys them by the box making it ten for a quarter.) It turned out that the Reverend Doctor did not smoke.

When Betsy heard that, she was very pleased, and said to him, “Good for you!” I was happy too and smoked the cigars all by myself. Betsy belongs to an organization that works against smoking and drinking.

The Reverend Doctor became very much at home. He got along well with everybody. He even tried to amuse my Tsipe Yenta with little stories, with witticisms. For Benele he has other stories. He talked about Lincoln and about George Washington. But we all saw that regardless of who he was talking to – his eyes were always on Betsy, and his eyes were very business-like, not like one who only came to chat, *hacken a chinik* [talk nonsense], but one who means business.

I also saw how the whole time the he was with us, Jenny kept trying to talk to him. Betsy held herself back somewhat, shy. She only spoke when he was not talking to another. But Jenny often interrupted him speaking and handed him food, cake and in the middle of it all peeled an orange and gave it to the Reverend Doctor on a plate. The Reverend Doctor blushed red in the middle of his story. Betsy lowered her eyes, and my yidene gave me under the table a kick in the left ankle, and she winked her eye at me, and that was all as if to say: “Nu, Chaim, did you see that?”

The Reverend Doctor stayed with us until eleven o'clock. Then he said goodbye to each of us and prepared to go.

“Come back again when you are in the neighborhood,” my yidene said to him, and she gave me a wink that I should also say something.

“You don't have to ask,” I said to him, “You will always be a welcomed guest by us.”

“I thank you very much,” he said, casting a glance at Betsy, as though he wanted to speak with her in a silent language.

“Come next Tuesday!” blurted out Jenny. She invited him just that fast! We were all shocked. “Thank you, I’ll surely come,” the Reverend Doctor answered, and he left.

Tuesday the Reverend Doctor came a little early, just after we ate, and we invited him to the table to try Tsipe Yenta’s *floden* [A Jewish-Hungarian flat cake].

Earlier in the day Tsipe Yenta said that when the Reverend Doctor came we should all go into the parlor and Betsy should play the piano. Then Tsipe Yenta would call me out of the room as if she wanted to speak with me about something. Then one by one we would call the other children out until Betsy was left alone with the Reverend Doctor. That way they could talk without being disturbed.

That is just what we did. My yidene and I were the first to leave the parlor. Next it was my married daughter, Flossie, with her husband, who got up, and also Benele was pulled away. Last in the room were the Reverend Doctor, Betsy and Jenny.

“Jenny!” my yidene yelled from the dining room, “come here! Your father needs you.”

But Jenny didn’t budge from the spot. My yidene gave me an order, that I should go into the parlor and call Jenny out of there. I went in and said:

“Jenny, come, your Mama needs you.”

She followed me. Coming into the dining room she asked, a little irritated:

“What do you want?”

The ‘you’ was directed at me and my yidene.

“Sit here a little while with us,” my yidene said with a soft tone and a wink.

“Leave me alone, you foolish people!” she said angrily, “I was in the middle of a conversation and you didn’t let me finish. It’s disgraceful in front of him!” – With these words Jenny went right back into the parlor.

Ay, this is bad, I thought to myself. And my yidene looked at me with such eyes, that can speak more than a mouth can say.

When the Reverend Doctor left it was already half past eleven. We all accompanied him to the door. Flossie and my son-in-law also came up from their rooms to say good night to our guest. And Jenny behaved more nervy than everyone else. She asked the Reverend Doctor to come back as soon as his time would permit. As though the Reverend Doctor was coming to see her instead of Betsy.

I walked him to the station. When I got back to the house, it was dark except in the bedroom. It was apparent that my yidene had turned off the gaslight, sent the children to bed and that she went to bed also. But I as I walked through the dining room I heard in the parlor a quiet conversation between Betsy and Flossie, which was probably due to questions about how she felt about the Reverend Doctor.

“If you can keep a secret,” I heard Betsy’s voice, “I will tell you something.”

“What are you asking!” Flossie called out, “If I can keep a secret! Have I ever told anyone your secret about the letter from the Reverend Doctor that he sent you? You can be sure, dear sister, that by me a secret is a thing buried in the ground. Even to my baby I would not entrust it. Tell me, already, Darling, how is it with you and the Reverend Doctor?” Is he already attached to you?”

“I’ll tell you, Flossie darling, the whole truth. But remember, not a word to anyone! Jenny – – how should I say this? – – Yes, Jenny has made up her mind to catch him. To take him away from me. Tonight she didn’t let him say one word to me.”

“And you think he will turn to her? What’s the big deal, Betsy? You are jealous for nothing. How could a distinguished man like that go for Jenny? He needs to have a wife like you – an idealist. Jenny is our sister. But one must tell the truth: She is nothing more than a done-up doll.”

“Men are a great riddle, a puzzle,” Betsy said, “I am not going to get into a competition with Jenny. If she wants him – good luck to her.”

As I stood there in the darkness listening, I had the feeling that something was moving near me. I took a couple of steps forward and stepped on someone’s toe. They let out a cry: “*Gevalt!* Help me!!” That voice there was Tsipe Yenta – that cry came from my yidene. She had also gone into the dining room and was also listening and we didn’t know the other one was there.

Betsy and Flossie ran out to us. The lights quickly came on. The other children also came running.

“It’s nothing children,” I said to calm them, “I just came into the house, and in that same moment Mama came through and in the darkness we ran into each other and it frightened her.”

Wednesday evening, when I came home, Benele was waiting for me outside.

“Papa!” he said, “I have a secret that’s worth a half-dollar.”

“I already know the secret,” I said, and wanted to show him that I did know, “The secret is that Jenny wants to take Betsy’s boyfriend.”

“Papa, that is only half the story,” Benele said, “If you give me a half-dollar, I will tell you the other half.”

“Ten cents,” I offered.

“Cash!” he said sticking out his hand. And as soon as he got the coin he said:

“Today Jenny got a letter from the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz. I know his handwriting from the other letters that he wrote to Betsy. I was the one who took it from the letter carrier and gave it to Jenny. It is a thick letter with two stamps on the envelope.”

“Quiet,” I said to him, “Don’t say another word to anyone about this.”

My head began to spin and my heart began to pound. I felt sorry for my one daughter and anger at my other daughter – Only someone who is a father can imagine my heart in that moment.

## 61. Tsipe Yenta philosophizes on today's young people

Sabbath evening, just as I had made up my bed on the sofa in the front room, my yidene came in wearing my ancient sleeping gown and she sat down.

“Nu, what do you have to say, Chaim?” she asked.

“What should I say?” I asked.

“You are something of a father,” she said.

“Nu, what can I do?” I replied, “How can I help it if the Reverend Doctor likes Jenny better than Betsy? Who can judge! Such a man, distinguished, a Reverend should be so feeble minded. At first he went for Betsy, then when Jenny started buzzing around him, he lost his senses. Tsipe Yenta, I am so befuddled that I am ashamed of myself! I am ashamed of my folk, the men. They are a foolish folk. Women are smarter than us!”

Tsipe Yenta smiled, probably because the compliment pleased her.

“But,” said my yidene, “How is it that our Betsy is so philosophical? A maiden should herself be simple! Wear simple clothes, her hair parted in the middle, like a little girl, wear big shoes almost like men's, and her walk so still, so majestic, exactly as though she were still going to school. Today's young men don't go for young girls like that, who when they talk measure their words. Today they only take out the girls who know how to be stylish. The hair has to look like a tower on the head, with a lot of steps, and since you can never have enough hair, they put false hair under it. Betsy laughs at the girls who wear false hair! Today even the prettiest girls wear makeup. A plain face is not not a face. Take a look around sometime at a wedding, you will see that the young men don't gather around the pretty girls, but rather around the girls who are powdered and stylish. The young men like the girl with the pretty dress, and those who move, who talk, who laugh and squeal. That's who they like. Then they like the girls who are a bit fresh with them: Give them a slap on the back, a smack with the hand, a tweak on the nose – By them that makes for a lovely girl. Fools! Beauty today is nothing; intelligence is worth an onion! The main thing is that a girl must be peppery! Betsy wants to be philosophical, she wants to be uncomplicated. She will suffer for it.”

“Don't worry, Tsipe Yenta,” I comforted her, “with a little anger in my heart, “Betsy will find a husband on her own. She will find someone who knows how to treasure her. You think, if not the Reverend Doctor, then there aren't any more husbands out there in the world. An ardent man will find our Betsy. Don't worry, Tsipe Yenta!”

“It's easy for you to say, 'don't worry!'” called out my yidene, “What are you doing for your child? It is a scandal to say it in front of people! Betsy is no longer a young girl. Oy, a curse on my enemies! How did we earn such ridicule?”

In the house we heard a ringing several times in a row. In Blotetown to ring someone's doorbell after eleven o'clock is not a light matter. A neighbor would not come to visit so late, and a guest from New York would not come so close to midnight. I was still in my night-clothes. I pulled on a fur coat over my night-clothes and went downstairs to open the door.

“Be careful, Chaim!” warned my yidene, “First ask who it is, then let him in. For once take the hatchet with you.”

With the hatchet in one hand and a light in the other, I stood by the door, and altering my voice to a deep bass I yelled out:

“Hey! Who is dat?”

He was shocked by my deep bass voice and was afraid to answer. Through the glass in the door I could see that it was a Jew with a beard, but I could not see his face. I thought to myself, if it is a Jew with a beard, what do I have to fear? I opened the door a crack. The man took off his hat and said:

“Excuse me, Sir, I – I – I want Chaim the customer peddler. I made a mistake.”

“It seems to be Tsirilson,” said my yidene who was standing on the steps.

“Ah, indeed, Tsirilson!” I said with relief and let him in.

“Ay, you frightened me!” Tsirilson said, “I thought that I had blundered in the wrong house. I didn't recognize your voice at all.”

“What good year has brought you to our house so late and in such rain?” I asked him.

“Come with me upstairs, and I will tell you,” said Mr. Tsirilson.

We began climbing the stairs. It was quite a parade: First was my yidene wearing my oldest night-shirt, after her, my *landsman* [from the Old Country] Tsirilson, wet as a roasted hen, then I came along in a fur coat and underwear, with a light in one hand and a hatchet in the other. By chance Benele was awakened by the doorbell, and came face to face with us in his night-shirt. When he saw our parade he got out front marching in step like a soldier and making with his hands as though he were beating a drum.

Tsirilson had come for a very important thing: The lodge, that we both belong to, was having a benefit and Tsirilson was bringing me tickets to sell.

“I should have come earlier,” he apologized, “I had to visit so many members. You are out of the way, so I left you until last.”

“When is the benefit,” I asked.

“The 24<sup>th</sup>,” he answered.

I got from him 20 dollars worth of tickets. Some for me and my family, and the rest to sell to neighbors in Blotetown.

In the morning, Sunday, the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz came to visit us as a guest. Betsy knew that he was coming in the evening, and from shame she stayed away at a girlfriend's. I didn't know if I should ask her to stay home or let her go. It happens sometimes that you want to do something for someone, but you don't know what to do.

Jenny this evening got more dressed-up and more powdered than ever. She danced and jumped around and the young rabbi was delighted.

A few times when they were sitting in the parlor talking, and laughing, an odd impulse came over me to go in there and slap them. But, what good would that do? There are many large and small injustices that one must hear, see and yet remain silent. – Even if the gall rises because of them. Oy, the large and small injustices that we see every day and must avert the eyes pretending that we see nothing!

I started to be afraid for myself, and I went outside for a little while, and wandered over to Mr. Pupikovitz' house. There I found Mr. and Mrs. Kaban, Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich, Mr. and Mrs. Pitsha, and some other Blotetown notables, and I sold them the tickets for the benefit at my lodge.

“Dat's right!” said Mrs. Pupikovitz, “We will have a theater party. We will all sit together.”

“I like Yiddish theater,” said Mrs. Pitsha, the Christian, “I know the song “Husband, Bride, Good Luck, Good Luck!” – And she started sing it with the melody.

“Bravo, bravo!” everyone yelled out, “Three cheers for Mrs. Pitsha!”

I had five tickets left over for myself. They were for me and my wife, for Benele for Flossie with her husband, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski. Betsy agreed to take care of Flossie's baby, Maxele, until Flossie got back from the theater. Betsy is that good a person!

The 24<sup>th</sup> was a rainy evening, but we already had the tickets and could not return them. On the way, traveling to New York, my yidene was all worried about her dress getting wet; Flossie was worried about her hat, and I was worried that we were going to be late because all of their womanly preparations had us leave the house a little late.

But my fears came to nothing. We got to the theater ten minutes before eight. The show started at half past eight. That meant we had forty minutes spend in the theater, see our *landsmen*, go to the box seats a while to shake hands with the president of the lodge, and with the other officers.

However, when we arrived and I gave my tickets at the door, they handed them back to me.

“No, Mister, you can't come in. It is too early. Come back later.”

“What do you mean come later?,” I asked, somewhat unhappy with such a reception, “Where can I wait with my family in such a rain? Over there people are going into the theater. We also want to wait in the theater.”

“You will have to wait four weeks,” the man said, who was standing by the door, “Your tickets are for the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, and this is the 24<sup>th</sup> of February. Come back later – in about four weeks.”

I was startled and amazed! I, Chaim the customer peddler, a Jewish businessman, should make such a mistake! Jews have it in their nature to not come to complete understandings, and when Tsirilson said to me that the tickets were for the 24<sup>th</sup>, it never occurred to me to ask him, or glance at the tickets to see if they were for this month or another month.

My yidene was beside herself with rage. Benele was peeved. My son-in-law laughed and said it was a

good joke, and he now had material that would make a good story. Flossie did not know if she should take sides with her Mama or her husband.

Meantime the rest of our theater party arrived: Mr. and Mrs. Pupikovitz, Mr. and Mrs. Kaban, and the others.

They had taken the next train, right after us. When they heard about my mistake they began to laugh so hard, that my yidene had to join in with them also. It did not occur to any of them either to look at the tickets. They were all sure that the benefit was in the evening that I mentioned when they bought the tickets.

We all went back home. With such rain no one had any desire to stay in New York and then schlep back to Blotetown in the middle of the night.



## 62. He goes to a bazaar and wrangles a bargain

Blessed be the Name, everyone is getting ready for Passover. We already have Passover tea, six different kinds, bought from six different peddlers, who pounded on our door. For matzoh we have already given an order, and for wine we have already received nineteen different samples from nineteen different peddlers.

But all of that is small stuff compared to the preparations my yidene and my daughters make in honor of the holiday. Now everything is out of fashion that, up to now, used to be in fashion. You should see my yidene's mushroom hat and my Jenny's bucket-hat. The both look like kettle pots. A whole day they run around to dressmakers and department stores. The dollars fly like wood chips. I am afraid to count them, it would make my head dizzy. It is healthier not to count.

Jenny bought by the Tsigel-Migel Company a scarf. It is the type of neck scarf that you wear around the neck and can bring up over the head. She got it for seven dollars and thirty-seven cents. It was a bargain. She bought it during a sale. The salesman that sold it to her said that the real price was eleven dollars with thirty-eight cents. Women have a lot of faith in sales and in salesmen in department stores. They believe everything that they tell them. Try being a heretic and tell them that department store sales are fixed, a bluff – That is where you will get a berating. You will have disturbed the holiest principle of their faith.

One Sunday I said to my yidene:

“Tsipe Yenta, I want to treat you today. I will take you to the Zionist Bazaar, in Grand Central Place.”

“You are a gentleman, Chaim,” Tsipe Yenta answered, “Sunday evenings are for me always a little gloomy. The children go to parties, to balls, and there is nothing for me to do, no one for me to say a word to.”

When Betsy heard that we were going to the bazaar, she said that she wanted to give us a bundle of things to take with us and donate to the bazaar. Betsy had in her room a box with her own handwork, little table cloths, napkins, children's caps, and other such things that she made herself to give away to various charities and bazaars.

“Papa,” she said, “It won't be any trouble for you, I will pack everything in a little box. It won't be heavy to carry. I will put the box in the parlor and put your silk hat on it so you don't forget it.”

In the evening the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz came to visit, and Jenny took him into the parlor. Betsy had already left. Every time she knows the Reverend Doctor is coming, she makes some excuse and goes out somewhere.

My yidene got dressed-up like for a holiday, and I put on my black Prince Issac coat and a white tie. Once I was ready to go, I went to the parlor to get my hat and the little box.

Jenny came out to meet me and said:

“You are most likely here to get your silk hat and the little box. I have them with me in the bedroom.”

Jenny and Betsy have a bedroom together. I went in there, it was dark, but with my hands I felt for the box. Then in the dark I looked for my hat. My yidene had already gone downstairs and was waiting for me on the street.

It was already half past eight when we arrived at the bazaar. The concert had begun. I had given my little package to a young man who had a blue ribbon on his lapel and a badge from the arrangement committee for him to place it in the bazaar. Then I started to look around for two empty seats for me and my yidene to listen to the concert.

I will tell you the truth. The concert did not please me at all. A French singer sang in French; a pianist played German, Russian and Italian pieces; someone also sang in English – but not one single Yiddish tune. I thought to myself: This is a Zionist evening? What a strange people we are! I remembered what I read once in a Yiddish newspaper that said that the Jewish aristocrats, true Jewish yankees, got together in a large hall for a Jewish concert in which people sang “*Rozinkes mit Mandlen*” [“Raisins and Almonds,” a popular Jewish lullaby], “*Amol is geven a malach*” [“There once was an angel”], and other Jewish songs. And here where our true Jewish Jews were gathering one doesn't hear a single Yiddish word! We hear French, English, German, Italian – *tolko nie po yevreiski!* [Russian for: No Yiddish words.]

The concert got to me very quickly. I took my yidene and started over the booths at the bazaar. We saw some antiques from Israel and from America. We picked up a few things and asked prices. Then my yidene gave my arm a tug and said:

“Look, Chaim, that is such a scarf, like our Jenny's. Let's ask what that costs.”

We went over and asked. The woman who was tended the booth said that we could have it for three dollars.

“Let's buy it for Betsy,” said my yidene, “It is a huge bargain. Jenny paid seven dollars with thirty-seven cents for one in a sale. Betsy should also have a scarf like that.”

“Maybe it is a cheap copy?” I asked.

“I'm telling you, Chaim, it is the same.”

“Sold,” the lady at the bazaar said, “It is worth three times that amount. We sell everything at low prices because the merchandise doesn't cost us any money. It is all donated.”

I took out three dollars and paid. The lady packaged the scarf in a little box. I looked at it and saw that it was the same box that I had brought Betsy's things in.

I suddenly felt a rip in my heart. A horrible thought came into my mind:

Perhaps in the darkness I picked up the box with Jenny's scarf in it instead of the box that Betsy prepared for me?

My teeth started to clatter.

“What is with you, Chaim?” my yidene asked.

“Nothing,” I said and held the little box so that she couldn't see it, “Come home with me, I feel sleepy.”

“I am afraid that you have the grip,” said my yidene, “Come let's go.”

On the way home she said to me:

“You know, Chaim, I have stopped believing in the honesty of the big stores. I had thought that seven dollars with thirty-seven cents was indeed a bargain for such a scarf. Now I see that the exact same scarf can be had for three dollars. I will show Jenny that she is not as smart as she thinks. She always teases me that I overpaid for my hat. She will know better than to laugh at her Mama.”

On the ride home I did not sleep. I couldn't sleep. The more I thought about it the more I was convinced that I had made an awful mistake, and that the scarf I was taking home to Betsy, was really Jenny's that I had taken to the bazaar and ended up buying back. I knew that when I got home I was going to get it from all sides.

When I got home I found Betsy and Jenny sitting together in the dining room. The boys were asleep and the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz had already gone.

“Ah, Papa has brought your scarf back!” Betsy said to Jenny when she saw me come in with the little packet in my hand.

From that I knew that Jenny had already figured out that I had taken her scarf with me to the bazaar.

“This is for you,” my yidene said to Betsy, “It is a scarf for you, just like Jenny's. We bought it at the bazaar. It cost a little less than at the Tsigel-Migel Company. Less than half the money. Three dollars it cost. Na, look and see if it is not the same. Chaim, give me the box.”

My yidene took the box from my hands, opened the box and took the scarf out.

“But that is my scarf!” Jenny yelled out.

“What do you mean, yours?” asked my yidene, “We bought it at the bazaar for Betsy.”

I am not going to draw the story out for you. I would not want any of my enemies to be in my place for those minutes that followed, until the whole story was made clear. And when the whole story was explained, my yidene fixed two mean eyes on me and screamed:

“You are a *schlimazel* from here to Egypt.”

Betsy and Jenny laughed until tears streamed down their cheeks. And when all of us went to sleep, I could hear how they were still laughing in bed.

## 63. He gets a telephone in the house

A couple of weeks ago an agent set my head spinning that I should have a telephone in my house. It cost a pittance: three dollars a month, and for that one can telephone all over Blotetown as much as your heart desires. My Tsipe Yenta was extremely happy. She immediately called Mrs. Pupikovitz and let her know that our telephone number is: “2, 3, 0, 0, Blotetown.” She called the butcher and gave him an order for meat. She did the same with the grocery man. Then, finally, she called Mrs. Kaban and asked how her little dog, Rex, was faring health-wise. The little dog was *nebekh* [unfortunately] sick in one eye.

“Papa,” Benele called out to me, “You know, when one has a telephone in the house one can call 'central' and ask what time it is and what the weather will be tomorrow. And it doesn't cost a penny extra.”

No sooner said than done, he stood on a stool and put the receiver to his ear and asked the question in the telephone:

“Central, what time is it?” – You should have seen with what assurance he asked that question. You would have sworn that it was a millionaire's son that was talking.

And when he received the answer from 'central,' he stuck his tongue out at her.

“You little loafer!” my yidene yelled at him while giving him a good swat, “You stick your tongue out at a lady, ah?”

We sent out postal cards to all our acquaintances in Blotetown and New York and let them know our telephone number.

The first week we were sick at heart because no one called us. The telephone just stood there like a shy orphan. Miserable, like some one who came to a party then just stood alone in the corner, lost and forgotten by the whole world. Every night as I was coming home, the first thing I did was to ask if we had anyone call us on the telephone. And my yidene would answer: “Ay, not one!” Then she would let out such a sigh that I thought her heart would break.

Once I took pity on her and thought that even though it would cost several cents I would call her from New York. Going through Third Avenue in New York, I went into a store where they had a telephone. I stuck a cigar in my mouth to disguise my voice then called 2 3 0 0 Blotetown.

My yidene answered on the first ring.

“This is Tsrilson,” I answered, “I want to remind you that Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup> is the benefit for which you bought tickets from me. You shouldn't forget to come.”

“Thank you, Mr. Tsrilson,” My yidene answered me, “You are talking a little under the nose. Do you have a grip? Ah? It is going around now. And how is your wife?”

“Healthy and strong, kayne hora,” I answered, “She is only missing a little common sense.”

“Go on, already, go on!” said my yidene, “All men laugh at their wives. And who knows what my Chaim says about me when I am not around?”

“Aha,” I called out, “Your Chaim is completely *mesuggah* [crazy] for you. He says that no one in the world is as clever, good and pretty as you. He is proud of you like a diamond. Goodbye.”

“Wait a minute, Mr. Tsirilson,” she requested, “Why in such a hurry? Tell me a little more about what my husband says about me.”

“What more could I say?” I answered, “He says you are a great housekeeper and know how to conduct yourself with style. More stylish than all the young wives and single girls.”

“Thank you, Mr. Tsirilson,” she answered.

When I came home, my wife greeted me with a very pleasant expression on her face. She told me that Mr. Tsirilson called us on the telephone and reminded us of the benefit. She didn't tell me any more than that about the conversation. But at the table she was very good to me, and stuffed me like the last day of Passover. After supper, at tea, she opened for me her jar of raspberry jelly, which she keeps only for guests, and she let me pinch her cheek.

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The benefit of our society was a huge success. All of the old countrymen were there. I saw countrymen there that I had not seen for ten years. People said that the actors performed badly and that they skipped whole sections of the songs, and, besides that, the 'stars' did not come to the performance, and that the stand-ins took over their roles. But who was bothered by all that? Who was thinking about the songs, the stars, the acting? For my sake they didn't need to perform. All of us couldn't wait until the end of the next act so that we could circulate and visit with folks. We talked about old times, asked about news from Kapolia, talked politics, business, and I gave everyone little cards with my telephone number.

If the actors had of asked us after the first act if we wanted them to keep performing, we would have answered in one voice, that we were sorry, but we would rather schmooze among ourselves. Each time the curtain went up and we were obliged to return to our seats we cursed all the actors and the theater, and when they ended an act and the curtain came down we applauded with our whole hearts.

My son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, was not happy. He said that the *goyim* behaved much better in their theaters, and even when Jews go to a *goyishe* theater they sit still, quietly, and not a peep do you hear out of them, not a rustle, they might only cough.

“You are a fool,” I said to my son-in-law, “Why do we have to compare ourselves to the *goyim*? The *goyim* are, after all, in exile, and we Jews are a free people. I will tell you something, my son-in-law. The Kelmer Maggid [Moses Isaac ben Noah Darshan 1828-1900] once said: It is written that G-d said to the Jews that they will be a kingdom of priests, kings of kings, a people of great leaders, that means that every Jew will be a king. Today how is it, asked the Kelmer, that the Master of the World did not keep his word and sent us into exile and made us slaves of the *goyim*? Alzo, what then? Said the Kelmer, the truth is indeed, that we Jews are kings, and the *goyim* are in exile by us. And let us look at the evidence for that: The *goy* tills the soil, carries water, he heats the ovens of the Jews, he builds houses for us, and a little piece of fish or challah that is left over on the table of the Jew is for the *goy* a

great delicacy. One can see that it is obvious that the Jews are not in exile, but rather the *goyim*, and the Master of the World has kept his word. Thus spoke the Kelmer Maggid.\*\* And that, my son-in-law, is still true even in our times, and especially in America. Just look at how our Jews really take such pleasure in our Yiddish theater, and think back to what sort of an exile the *goyim* are in when they pass the odd hour in their own theaters. What do the *goyim* know about lodge benefits? What do they know from the pleasure of visiting people between the acts of the show and seeing their old countrymen? And take a look, my son-in-law, when the *goyim* ride in a street car, they are afraid to say a word out loud, and we Jews, we are in a street car just like we are by ourselves in our own home. Summer in the park, it is the same thing: The *goyim* walk quietly on the sidewalks and are afraid to step on the grass, and we Jews seek out the thick grass, make ourselves comfortable and cook tea and hard-boiled eggs. I could give you a hundred such examples to show that it is not we Jews who are in exile, but, indeed, the *goyim*.”

“You are all right, father-in-law,” my son-in-law said, “You are a great kiddler. But I wouldn't advise you broadcast such witticisms to just anyone. There are people who would think you were in earnest.”

“Don't worry,” I said to him, “We Jews understand a joke. We may make out to be simpleminded, but we are not fools. All of the busybodies, the public servants, social workers, political fakers who stand on their platforms and think that they can spin our *spodik* [round fur hats worn by some Hassidic groups] are very mistaken. Our Jews will hear them out, nod our heads, smile to ourselves and say: The devil take you, we know what is going on! No, my son-in-law! We Jews are a clever folk, many years to me, to us both.”

“Chaim, what are you preaching about?” my yidene mixed in, “You would do better to go give out more of the cards with our telephone number to our old countrymen.”

“What do you want?” I said, “I had sixty-something of those cards and have already given them all out.”

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The next morning I had a very busy day with the telephone. Now I am beginning to believe in advertising. The sixty some-odd cards I gave out have brought me countless calls.

The trouble began early in the morning. At six in the morning I got a call from a *landsman* (acquaintance from the Old Country) asking if I would give him a show and buy from him tableware for Passover. He had just opened a crockery store in Brooklyn. A second one called me about ten minutes later. He offered me a great bargain in Passover plums, dried peaches, nuts, almonds and other good things. Such good bargains as make it worthwhile to go to Harlem. Right after him another asked me if I needed wine, Passover wine. He had for me the best. I quickly left for my business, because I did not have the nerve to refuse all of them. But, unfortunately, my yidene had to deal with them all day.

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\*\* My friend, Chaim the Customer Peddler, must excuse me. This foolish passage, although it is accord with his sense of humor, was never spoken by the Kelmer Maggid. The Customer Peddler made an error. He must have read this passage in the old book, “The Heart of the Hebrew,” which was written by a wild fanatic against Moses Mendelssohn and his students. This book is full of such error-riddled sermons. – Y.Y. Zevin

“Chaim,” she said to me when I got home that evening, “I went deaf listening to that telephone, deaf and crazy together. The whole day it did not stop ringing. We need to ask the company to disconnect the telephone at least until after Passover. I won't be able to stand it. Oy, it's ringing again already. Go, Chaim, see who it is.”

This was a phone call from a *landsman* who offered me baked matzoh with charoset at wholesale prices.

“Yiddish culture progresses in America,” noted my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tsaprinski, “They sell baked matzoh with charoset by telephone, and next Yom Kippur perhaps we will see ritual flagellation done with an electric whip.”

How do you like my son-in-law?

## 64. Jenny becomes a bride, good luck wishes to her

America – It is a whirlpool where the water turns and turns without pausing or stopping, and it takes people down with it, the strong along with the weak, and they churn with the power of the whirlpool and are carried off to I-don't-know-where. For seventeen years already I have been spinning around in this whirlpool, and I still don't know where it is taking me and what will happen to me tomorrow. For seventeen years I have not felt as though I was living according to my own will, according to my own plan, but rather that things were just happening to me. I plan something out thus, and it comes out completely backwards. I am just a little spider who has fallen into the whirlpool and am being spun around by another force, a stronger, more powerful one.

I came here from a tiny shtetl where the living was in my time quiet and peaceful, where one lived from G-d's hand to our mouth. The gentile worked in the fields. The Jew prayed for him dew and rain and the gentile brought us wheat and corn. Every day was a holiday: Half of the day was spent in shul the other half of the day in business. Even in business one did not forget the Mishnah or the Ein Yaakov.

From such a place, from such a peaceful life I fell into this whirlpool known as America, and began spinning in this great circle. I have been in such tumult from the constant “busy” and from the “hurry-up” that I never have the time to stop and think about where I stand in the world. Nothing can have any affect on me. I see poor people suddenly get rich; I see rich people suddenly become paupers; I see healthy, active people suddenly carried out of this world, – A great fire, a horrible explosion – nothing amazes me because I have lost the ability to be amazed. An earthquake could come beneath my feet and I would not be amazed.

And that is why I was not amazed one evening when I came home from business and my wife told me the news that our daughter, Jenny, has, with good luck, become a bride, and right after the holidays there would be an engagement.

“Mazel tov,” I said to my wife, “Where is the bride?”

“She is away with her bridegroom,” my yidene answered me, “and you haven't asked who the bridegroom is?”

“What is there to ask?” I said, “It goes without saying that it is the Reverend Doctor Liederkrantz.”

“With the Reverend Doctor she cut it off a week ago. It is somebody else. Can you guess who?”

“One would have to be as *meshugge* as our Jenny in order to guess. Who's head has she set spinning? Why did she have to take the Reverend Doctor away from Betsy then throw him away and take on another?”

“Chaim, you don't know us women,” and my yidene laughed as she said it, “Chaim, we women are an interesting folk. We always want what we can't have. Just because someone else wants it, we want it too. It could be a hat, a dress, a piece of jewelry, or even a bridegroom. I knew from the start that Jenny would not stay with the Reverend Doctor for long. He was not to her taste. It was in her just a caprice to take him away from Betsy just to show that she could set his head spinning even though he was a Reverend Doctor. Now she has traded him for another. Do you know who? It's Moyerstein.”



“The boss where she works?” I said in wonderment, “the charlatan? But, he has a wife!”

“He has already divorced his wife.”

“This match doesn't please me at all,” I said, “Moyerstein is a charlatan, a wild young man. He will divorce Jenny just like he divorced four other women. It is frightening to think that our daughter will be the fifth wife of this debaucher.”

“Don't fret, Chaim. He won't throw our Jenny away,” my yidene comforted me, “Don't forget that our Jenny is not just any young maid. She will lead him by the nose. She is a young girl who knows all the tricks to lead a man by the nose. I'm telling you, a woman who lets a man get to her, only has herself to blame. Perhaps, she lets him get to her. Jenny will not let anyone get to her. She will wreak revenge on him for all of his first four wives. She will really let him have it if starts any monkey business with another woman. I know her better than you do. We don't have to worry about her.”

I could see that this was already a done deal. My wife told me that the bridegroom had already given her a ring with a stone that cost 500 dollars and a medallion with his picture. The medallion is set with cut diamonds and also costs, perhaps, 500 dollars. Moyerstein I only know from a distance. But I have heard very unpleasant stories about him. He is a man that is only interested in this world and is loaded with money. He is a jewelry manufacturer and Jenny works for him as a stenographer and typist. It never occurred to me that he might take a shine to her. I thought, as a businessman, when he is working he would not have any time for such foolishness.

“Why do you have to worry yourself?” said my yidene, “It will be all right. You should be happy that she will be a bride. I will tell you the truth, a girl like Jenny is like having *chametz* [leavened bread that must be removed from the house before Passover] in the house. The sooner we have the wedding the better. It's going to be Moyerstein, so away with the worries. A young girl like her conceals a threat. I'm telling you, this is not such a bad match. She needs to have a rich husband. A girls who dresses herself using her entire salary, eighteen dollars a week, needs to have such a rich husband as Moyerstein.”

And so did Jenny finally become a bride!!

## 65. Tshaprinski wants to become a millionaire

Everyone is envious of me. All of the mothers and fathers in Blotetown who have daughters of marriageable age look at me as someone who has had the greatest of luck.

“Chaim,” my yidene said to me a few days later, “Now we must forget what Moyerstein used to be. Now he is ours. We must forget everything about him. Four wives, five wives, six wives – It is no longer our business. None of it should ever pass our lips again. Now by him there is only one wife. Never mind, he will be with Jenny now. He will kiss the ground she walks on. She is the right sort for such a man.”

“If only...,” I said, “If only, later we will not suffer any disgrace.”

“Don't worry yourself, Chaim,” Tsipe Yenta comforted me, “Jenny has already started managing him. Do you know what she has done? Now that she no longer wants to work in the office with her fiancé, she took it upon herself to find a replacement typist for him. You should see her – an accident, may G-d not punish me for saying so. An Irish old maid. Perhaps 45 years old. She has a face like a cheese grater, and odd eyes – like two dried plums. I tell you, it is something you can only see in a museum. And Moyerstein has to sit with her in his office all day. Jenny got herself some good insurance. She is not the fool you imagine her to be.”

The engagement was kept private, but Jenny still received a lot of engagement presents from neighbors and friends. She now has six cut glass pitchers, eight tea services, and four chocolate services. In our house we speak about nothing but Moyerstein's wealth. It goes without saying that we only talk about that when Jenny is not within earshot. However, Betsy also does not like to hear us talk about Moyerstein's capital. She looks askance at the marriage contract, but she doesn't mix in. Obviously, it would not do for her to mix in. I can't believe that Betsy would be jealous of Jenny. She is not that sort.

Mr. Moyerstein comes almost every evening in a red automobile, and he and Jenny take a leisurely drive. Every time he comes he brings a present for her, a bouquet of flowers, or a box of candy. He brings so much candy that we all are walking around with stomach aches. There is no doubt that he is a very wealthy man, richer than Mr. Kaban and Mr. Pupikovitz put together.

All the talk in the house about Mr. Moyerstein's fortune, has awakened in my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, the desire to become a rich man.

“You know, father-in-law,” he said to me one Sunday, “America is not yet played out. One can still make a lot of money, if one wants to. There is still room for another millionaire. One just needs to be smart and come up with a plan for a new business scheme. Once that is done, then one is sure to make a fortune.

“Go on, you fool,” I said to him, “What is to be figured out has already been figured out by smarter men than us. What can we figure, already?”

“You will have to excuse me,” answered my son-in-law, “but you are talking like a greener. You think it is all about being smart? If so you are making a big mistake. A good idea, a good scheme can occur to someone who is not a great artist. It is about having good luck. An good idea can pop into your

head in a lucky moment, and you can make from that a Klondike. You just have to keep thinking, think until something gels. Never mind, father-in-law, I will yet become a millionaire. I just have to give it a lot of thought."

"If only..." I said to him, "I wish you luck."

"You know what, father-in-law, has just occurred to me?" he said, looking at the presents that Jenny had received, "An idea for a new business. If one would open a big department store where one could trade the presents that one doesn't need for the things that one does need. Look, Jenny has received eight tea services. Wouldn't she give away the extra seven tea services for, let's say, a rocking chair, or a nice clock to sit on the mantle piece? I believe that if one opened such a business, he would make a fortune. One could name it, "The Present Exchange Store." It is a sure thing!"

"There is already such a business," I said, "just exactly the way you describe it. You don't need a store to house it. Smart housewives trade presents using customer peddlers."

"You are starting up again about the Jews!" my son-in-law called out, "You question everything I say, then conclude that it is nothing new. Perhaps you will still find an allusion in some Yiddish book? Wait, I have another plan. It just came to me today. What would you say, for example, to an insurance company that would insure household maids? Every housewife could insure themselves against the bad time they would have when the maid left their service. That's because the housewives of today are not comfortable going even a day without a maid. They would surely pay, shall we say, ten cents a week to a company that would insure them and supply a man to do the housework until they could hire another maid."

While he was telling me this, in came Bendet the Grocery-Man to take our order. And since Tsipe Yenta was not at home, he sat down with us and mixed in with our schmooze.

"In order to make money, I have a plan, a good one!" said Bendet the Grocery-Man, "This came to me when I went to my mother-in-law to help her out. There I saw a Jew who was saying the *El malei rachamim* [a funeral prayer]. I asked him how his business was going. He said to me: "Not very good. Today I made five or six dollars." It goes without saying that the business in the course of a week brings in a pretty penny. A thought occurred to me: What would happen for example if someone formed a company that would pay the cemeteries for the privilege to say the *El malei rachamim*? And the company hired its own *El malei rachamim*-sayers in uniforms with badges and no one else could charge? Of course many people would begin to cry out: It's a trust, a monopoly! But we would pay attention to them like last year's snow."

"The plan is not a bad one," said my son-in-law, "but, in Summer would the *El malei rachamim*-sayers keep their uniforms on? They might try to steal a little something from the company."

"It is all right. We can fix it so they can't steal," Bendet answered, "In the first place we will have inspectors like the streetcar companies, and secondly, we will have registers at the cemeteries and the *El malei rachamim*-sayers will have to register each *El malei rachamim* just like the streetcar conductors ring up each car fare."

"That makes sense," I said.

The whole time I did not notice that Benele was sitting close by and listening to every word we were

schmoozing there. After Bendet finished speaking, Benele called out:

“I've got a scheme and it is a dandy!”

“Ah nu,” I said, “Let's hear it.”

“I am too smart!” said Benele, “Do you think I am going to give away my scheme for nothing? I can make money from my scheme.”

“He is already speaking like a businessman,” Bendet called out, “If only we were that smart.”

“Will you give me ten cents?” asked Benele.

“I should know?” I said, “Maybe you will take a nickel? Take this nickel and give us your scheme.”

“I have a scheme,” said Benele, “to manufacture playing cards that are all aces. You could make a million dollars from that in one year!!”

“Shhhh!” my son-in-law said to him, “Don't say that out loud to anyone until you have hired a consultant.”

## 66. Tsipe Yenta becomes a blond

By me in the house it really is like before a wedding: No one eats, no one drinks, everyone is busy, no one has any time, everyone is getting themselves ready for the joyous wedding of my daughter Jenny, who will, on the Sabbath following Shavuot, become the fifth wife of the rich jewelry manufacturer Mr. Irving Moyerstein.

Jenny, unfortunately, has become as thin as a spindle, dehydrated and exhausted. It is no small thing to stand for hours at a time by the dressmaker like a manikin, a dress on a dress off. There it is a sixth of an inch too wide, there a fold in the hat is suspect and must be evened out. There it is not enough padding, over there is another flaw. My Tsipe Yenta always has a saying, that making a good dress is more difficult than childbirth. Today it appears that my daughter Jenny has to endure eight dresses being made and also a cape. Monday, unfortunately, she fell into a faint under the dressmaker's hand.

My yidene, Tsipe Yenta, and my daughter, Flossie, have also been very busy. My son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, has already had to come to me for a fifty, a charitable kindness, since there is little hope that he will be able to pay it back. My son-in-law earns 25 dollars a week. A lot of fine, young heads of households, from good families and with the best upbringing can get by on 25 dollars a week. But not in Blotetown where everyone tries to live a little bit beyond their means, where everyone wants to be stylish and live off a wide foot. My son-in-law came to me with an appeal. He said that now that I am going to acquire a rich son-in-law, Flossie can't be going around in an old dress. It would not look good for the family.

Even Betsy got for herself two summer dresses. But she paid for them with her own money.

Tuesday, when I came home, I had a little scare. When I came in and went to the dining room I saw a woman sitting there. I thought it was one of my yidene's friends. I nodded to her as I continued on into the parlor. Then I heard the woman call out to me:

“Chaim, you don't recognize me?”

I looked again. It was Tsipe Yenta's voice. – The voice was hers, the face, it seemed, was also hers, but the head, I mean the hair on the head, belonged to Mrs. Pupikovitz. I stood there mesmerized, not knowing what to think.

“I sat over there on purpose to see if you would recognize me,” said my yidene.

“Tell me, Tsipe Yenta,” I asked her, “Are you really Tsipe Yenta?”

Just as I said that, Flossie came in and said with great joy:

“Nu, Papa, what do you think of Mama? Is she not a beautiful Mama? Blond hair flatters her, ah? She is once again a young lady! Papa, you might fall in love with her all over again.”

“Why did you do this?” I asked, and I felt my face turn red from shame, “A Jewish woman in your years, already a *Bubbie*! Going and making yourself a blond. You look like an Irish woman!”

“Old-fashioned man!” she answered me, “You should have stayed back there in your Kapulia.

Blotetown is no place for you. How much older do you think I am than Mrs. Pupikovitz? Mrs. Kaban is, perhaps, even older than me and both are blonds. Do you remember that two years ago Mrs. Pupikovitz had black hair like pitch? She spent a month in Atlantic City and came back a blond. It's OK, you will get used to it. It is the style nowadays.”

I didn't argue with her any more after that. What's the use? For her, Mrs. Pupikovitz and Mrs. Kaban stand higher in the world than anyone else. And whatever they do is for my wife like noodles straight from the Torah.

Terrible, terrible! We are living in a crazy world!

## 67. Jenny has her wedding

The groom danced. My youngest daughter, Jenny, is now Mrs. Moyerstein.

The marriage canopy was put up in my house, very private, Sunday, mid-day. From the Blotetown people were invited only Mr. and Mrs. Kaban, Mr. and Mrs. Pupikovitz with their daughter Nelly, Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich and Reverend Doctor Hotzmech who came with the *shammash* [sexton] Mr. Kabtsianski.

From New York came Tante Reyzl who lives on garlic, my *landsman* from the old country, Mr. Bok, who has nine measures of words, Mr. and Mrs. Tsrilson, and also Mr. and Mrs. Nudilski. Mr. Nudilski is the shopkeeper by whom I sometimes buy assorted peddler supplies. That was from before I became a customer peddler of jewelry only. Mr. Tsrilson, perhaps, you will remember. He is a childless man. He likes to talk about things in front of women that other men only talk about when women are not around.

The wedding ceremony was very quick. Reverend Doctor Hotzmech pronounced the holy matrimony service, and Tsrilson spoke a few learned words at the table. He took from the Gemora [a section of the Talmud] some stories and sayings about the sorts of things that go on between men and women and he salted his talk with verses from the bible. Mrs. Tsrilson interrupted him several times: "Shut your nasty mouth!" "Stop your barking!" she yelled, even though she didn't quite understand everything he was talking about in his speech. Mrs. Tsrilson had a rule: When her husband said something, it was probably something obscene. "I know him, already," she said to us.

Tsrilson has the good luck that when he speaks, people laugh. I believe that if someone else said the same foolishness, people wouldn't even listen to the end. Rather they would dive him out of their house. Tsrilson has something like a patent, a license to say whatever comes into his head, to jabber whatever he wants. There is nothing else like it in the world. There are always men who are more privileged than others, and the world gives them a license to do it. One, for example, takes the privilege to tell filthy stories and they listen to him with gusto even in respectable society. That is because the world has given him a license. Another, a businessman, is known to never keep his word, and yet he plays a big role. So what if he doesn't keep his word? Everyone knows it, and he has a license to lie. Another, a very rich man, is privileged to be a big wheel in a number of societies, express his opinions, and at no time does he donate even a dollar or pay any dues. He has a license to be an abominable person. Yet another takes the privilege (like Mr. and Mrs. Gogelich) that when they come to a party to take food from all the platters onto their plates, stuff themselves with everything in sight, then afterwards argue with the hosts. Such people have a privilege to be gluttons. And more and more there are such people who take the privilege to be evil, to say and do every boorish thing in the world, and the world gives its consent.

In the evening Moyerstein's automobile arrived, and the newlywed couple made themselves ready to go on a trip. "We are going to drive to Washington, and from there a little farther," my new son-in-law said.

"If you go to the White House," I said, "Greet President Taft for me. Tell him that he should not think ill of me because I didn't vote for him. He got elected anyway, without my vote. I knew that he was going to be elected, that is why I wanted to give my vote to Bryan so that he could take comfort in one additional vote."

“Papa!” Benele called out, “Don't you know that your ballot is a secret, and that no one is supposed to know who you give your vote to?”

“Useless!” said our *shammash*, Mr. Kabtsianski, “The President knows already who voted for him and who did not. He has already found out. He has a bureau full of machinery, and by him he has everything before him in black and white.”

“Don't worry, father-in-law,” my new son-in-law comforted me, “I will soon make peace between you and Mr. Taft.”

The newlywed couple got themselves seated in the automobile, the guests left and the children also went out. I and my yidene were left alone.

Then Tsipe Yenta began to cry.

“What is with you?” I asked.

“I don't know,” she said, “I'm just crying.”

“Perhaps it is because we made the wedding private?”

“Yes,” she said, “It seems it is not our destiny to have *naches* [joy] from our children like others have. Other people rent out a hall, hold a banquet, and Professor Balaganski's orchestra plays. A huge crowd comes, people dance, it is lively and people have *naches*. And by us – Flossie runs off and has her wedding in some strange place. I couldn't even give her my blessing under the wedding canopy.”

“Go on, little fool,” I countered her, “Why recount old histories? Why do you need a hall, with a banquet, with Balaganski's orchestra? It is money thrown away. It is about time, I say, that we Jews become smarter. You have to understand that Moyerstein is no youngster. He could be Jenny's father. Such men don't like too many ceremonies. By him is it any sort of novelty to have a wedding?”

It is in my nature that when I have a bright idea, I can't keep it to myself and have to say it out loud. From this bright idea, however, my wife just cried all the more.

Only now did I understand what she was crying about. Her heart had spoken to her, and had made a bad prediction.

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Tuesday evening, as I was riding the train home from business, I ran into my first son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski.

“Have you heard the news, father-in-law?” he said with a worried look on his face.

“What has happened?” I asked.

“You know him?” he asked, and showed me a picture in an English newspaper.

“That looks like our Alderman, the Honorable Paddy Fitzpatrick.”



"Look closer," said my son-in-law.

"That is Moyerstein! As I am a Jew, it's him!" I said happily. Naturally, I was glad to see my son-in-law's picture in the newspaper.

"You are being glad for nothing, father-in-law," said my son-in-law, "Look at the picture next to Moyerstein's."

"It is some woman," I said, "What does she have to do with Moyerstein?"

"She has a great deal to do with him," my son-in-law explained, "Look, see there? It is a picture of a little boy. That boy is Moyerstein's son, and the woman is Moyerstein's wife number three. She has filed a complaint in court, that he is not supporting the child."

"Aha," I said, "So now it is starting with the American sucker-business!! When you divorce a wife, you still have to pay her alimony."

"It is a good law and just," called out Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski, who has always been steel and iron in favor of America.

"What can one do? What can one do?" I asked, "Now it is a disgrace to show one's eyes in the street."

"Where were your eyes before," asked Tshaprinski, "You know what people said back home: If you want to go for a spin, you better like driving the sled. You wanted a rich son-in-law; Now you have to put up with everything that comes along with rich people."

"Don't say anything about this at home," I begged him.

"What difference does it make?" said my son-in-law, "If they don't hear about it today, they will hear about it tomorrow."

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But at home everybody already knew. When I arrived there, I found my wife in tears, and the children around her comforting her.

Looking at her, I felt as though I was about to start crying myself, and I ran into the parlor to hold back my tears. It just doesn't do for a man to show his tears, because tears are a womanly thing.

Coming into the parlor I saw Jenny's picture. Never had she looked more dear to me than now. It seemed to me that she was looking back at me and saying: "Papale, why did you let them rob me from the nest? Come, Papale, come, rescue me, come bring me home. I pine for you, Papale, for Mama, for the sisters, for my brother. Come Papale, it is not good by me!"

It was like it was true that Jenny's picture was talking to me just like that. I took the picture from the wall and pressed it to my heart, kissed it and bathed it in my tears. *Gevalt*, what have I done! I sold my daughter, sold her for money. I, Chaim the customer peddler, who dealt fairly with the whole world, sold my own daughter for money!

No, gentlemen, don't try to comfort me. Don't tell me that I am not guilty, that I didn't intend this outcome, that I was against this match. I should have spoken up, argued, begged – no, I have been a sinner and now punishment comes to me, a big punishment.

## 68. Tsipe Yenta is now named Henrietta

Jenny with my son-in-law, Mr. Moyerstein, have just come back from their honeymoon trip, and just as they came back everything quieted down. Moyerstein 'settled' with his wife number three.

America is a golden land. More trouble did not come, they settled. And whomever has a dollar, he can whatever he needs to. You can settle with a simple policeman, you can settle with a captain, you can settle with any one – from an alderman to a congressman. Who has the coins, has no fear of any trouble. He crawls through the thickest mud, because he knows that at some point he can settle. It is a valuable word “settle,” and it can't be translated into any other language. Settle is settle. Just like *tspikhs* is *tspikhs* [a flat, sweet cake].

“Settle” is a true American product, and it is protected with a high tariff.

“It is all right, father-in-law,” Mr. Moyerstein said to me, “You don't have anything to fear. There won't be any more trouble. Bet your sweet life! In my life I have already settled worse troubles than this, he-he-he!”

The young couple spent several hours with us. Then they drove off to New York, and settled into Moyerstein's private house.

“Another daughter off of my mind,” said my yidene, “May the Almighty grant that she have a better lot with him. Ay, Chaim, Chaim, I am still very fearful, perhaps – perhaps.”

My yidene did not say this out loud, but I could read her thoughts.

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“Chaim,” my yidene said to me a week later, it was a Sunday evening as we were sitting on the porch, me on a bench and her in a rocking chair, “Listen, Chaim, to what I am going to say to you. But you shouldn't get hardheaded. You always think that you are a great wise man, but I say to you, if only it comes to me in good health, that you are not so wise as you think. Hear me out: We are already, thank the Almighty, as one says, very fine homeowners, everyone sees you as a businessman and a gentleman, and I have nothing to be ashamed of compared to all the Blotetown ladies; Nu, it has occurred to me, that is I have wanted for a long time to talk to you, but tell me you won't get mad.”

“Master of the World,” I said, “If you spoke that long on the telephone, your speech would cost a whole 20 cents. Why the long introduction? Do you want a new dress, shoes, or a hat, just go ahead and say it. You know that I don't stint when it come to you, I have a choice!”

“Chaim, I don't want any money. I want something that doesn't cost a penny. I want to change my name, Chaim, I am a lady and I don't want people to call me Tsipe Yenta.”

“What, then, should they call you?” I asked.

“I want to be called, Henrietta,” my yidene answered, “It is nicer than Tsipe Yenta. And you, Chaim, you can change your name.”

“I thank you very much,” I answered, “I like Chaim very much. That name was given to me at my *bris*, and I will die with it. I do not want to carry a *goyishe* name.”

“Who says you have to take on a *goyishe* name?” said my yidene, “Take a Jewish name, but one that is not so green as Chaim. Chaim smells of the boat – feh! There are plenty of other Jewish names that are better than Chaim.”

“Namely?” I asked, “Which Jewish names do you have in mind?”

“Well,” she said, “Charlie is a nice name. Jack is also a Jewish name. But you can't call yourself Jack because we have a son named Jack. The best thing would be for you to be called Charlie. It is respectable, and it is better for business also. Everyone does it. Why should you do otherwise than the Reverend Doctor Hotzmech? He calls himself, Arnold, though his name is Issak. And even our *shammash*, Mr. Kabtzanski, certainly and old-fashioned Jew, calls himself Sam though his name is Shmeril.”

“A nice job I will have,” I responded, “I will have to go around to all my acquaintances and tell them that I am no longer Chiam, now I am Charlie. In this heat that would be hard work. Perhaps I could put that off until Winter?”

“It's a strange man you are, Chaim! – I mean, Charlie.” – my yidene informed me, “I am talking with you in earnest and you are making jokes. It is not at all such a hard job as you think. You just keep it in your head that I am named Henrietta, and I will call you Charlie. We will grow accustomed to it as will other people. The only hard part is starting it. After that, it's nothing.”

My yidene spent a long time trying to convince me until we made a compromise, namely: Among my own class of Jews I would remain Chaim as before. But for 'society,' that is to say for such society people like the Pupikovitz' the Kabans, the Pitshas and people like that, I would be called Charlie.

“But from now on I will be Henrietta for everyone!” my yidene added a paragraph to our contract.

Now I go around day and night repeating the name: Henrietta, Henrietta, Henrietta.

## 69. He throws out his telephone

Out with the telephone! You can beg and scream for central to give you “two three oh oh Blotetown” but you will not reach me. Central will answer you with, “Disconnected.” In Yiddish that means that I have cut myself off from them. Out with the telephone and out with the troubles.

You can laugh at me, gentlemen, but I'm telling you that the telephone was invented by an anti-Semite to make the Jewish people suffer.

From the beginning, as you know, we got a lot of pleasure and respect from having a telephone. I had new business cards printed with my telephone number on them, and I and everybody in our house, they should be healthy, gave them out everywhere: To neighbors, to *landsmen* from the old country, to customers, to friends, to acquaintances – I even gave one to a streetcar conductor. My neighbors in Blotetown who live close to us even helped us to advertise our telephone number.

But here comes the trouble, as my son-in-law, Thomas Barkley Tshaprinski says. When my telephone number became known in New York, downtown and uptown, and also in Brownsville and in East New York, that is when my trouble started. And I wasn't the only one to have trouble, also my yidene and my children were affected.

My telephone became something like a *shammash* [sexton], who is obliged to serve the entire community and everybody occupies themselves with him. Strangers whose names we have never heard of before, were giving us errands to do. The whole day my yidene was encumbered with them, enemy of Zion, torn apart. One caller wants us to bring to the telephone a neighbor of ours, and my yidene has to run, or send the maid. At night it fell to me to run to the neighbors. Here, I will give you an example of how I would pass an evening at my house.

In the middle of supper the telephone bell rings. I go to it and hear a woman's voice. She asks me to call Mrs. Pitsha to the phone. I forget that I am in my house slippers and go out into the street and immediately lose my right slipper in the thick mud. I drag my slipper out of the mud, go back to the house and send Benele out. Benele wants a whole dime for his trouble. By him there is a phrase he learned from a Chinaman, “No tickee no washee, no monee no collars.” I have no choice and give him a dime. The little conman comes straight back and says that Mrs. Pitsha will come soon, she has to make herself presentable. After ten minutes Mrs. Pitsha arrives, and as soon as she hangs up the telephone rings again. I go to it and say, “Hello,” and a man answers saying, “Hello, Dearie.” I ask, “Who is this?” He answers, “It's me, sweetheart.” I answer back, “Thank you for the compliment, Mister, but what is your name?” I hear him say, “Excuse me,” and he hangs up.

For five minutes everything is quiet. Then it starts to ring again. It is a woman's voice again and she says she wants to speak to Mrs. Kvitsh. I ask, “Who is Mrs. Kvitsh and where does she live?” Meantime my yidene gives me a tug on the arm and whispers: “That is the young wife who moved into the new house.” My yidene went herself to get the young wife, and that led to a long schmooze on the telephone about hats and dresses. The two women made a rendezvous to meet tomorrow morning at the Tzigel-Migel Company.

The next phone call was for our maid, a young lady from Bishush. Her fiancé, (he is a butcher boy) called her to make an appointment to take her to Coney Island. Next came a phone call for Mr. Gogelich. At this point I was a little out of patience, because Mr. Gogelich lives six blocks away from

us, but I hate to shout and it wouldn't do with Mrs. Gogelich. The call was from a second cousin from the Bronx to tell her that his wife had given birth to a baby boy.

After that came a call for Mr. Lipkindson, my old tenant, the Culture Zionist. This was the news about his wife's aunt from Stamford who has come to New York and is staying with her cousin in Brownsville. From my supper I had gotten very little pleasure. And after supper, when the children had gone and Tsipe Yenta went out, I set myself down in the rocking chair to read a newspaper. After only getting to read for five minutes, the phone rang again. This one wanted to talk to Mr. Jack S. Moses. I threw on a jacket and ran off in my slippers to get him.

Mr. Jack S. Moses (His full name is Jack Sinclair Moses, but he shortens it to Jack S. Moses.) is a new resident in Blotetown. And since up to this point I have not introduced you to him, I want to take advantage of the occasion, as one says in literary fashion, and tell you about him.

He is not a rich man. He has some sort of position in a store that sells automotive supplies. In the beginning when he came here, everyone shunned him. By us in Blotetown the residents are divided into two classes: aristocrats and *shnorers* [beggar, mooch, sponge]. The aristocrats for the most part hold themselves separate from the *shnorers*. When a new resident moves in it is quickly determined which class he is in. The situation will generally be determined at a meeting of the ladies auxiliary. The neighbors of the new resident will give a report on the quality of the furniture that the new resident brought, and whether the furniture came in an express wagon or in a moving van. A resident who does not bring a piano is quickly designated a *shnorer*. But in addition to the piano he must have a mahogany parlor set, and a big brass bed for the bedroom. If the new resident is delegated to the *shnorer* class, he will not be invited to Mr. Kaban's poker night, and his wife will not be invited to any whist parties.

Mr. Jack S. Moses did not bring any piano or any mahogany furniture. So they immediately placed him with the *shnorers*. The Blotetown aristocrats shunned him, and when Mrs. Moses ran into Mrs. Pupikovitz, with Mrs. Kaban or with another aristocrat they appeared not to notice Mrs. Moses. They pretended not to see her.

But along the line they found out that Mr. Jack S. Moses was a Christian! A born American! "Holy gee!" called out Mr. Kaban. "It beats Coney Island!" called out Mr. Pupikovitz. Everybody in Blotetown flipped over. Who would have thought that Moses was a Christian, a born Christian!

And since then Mr. and Mrs. Moses have become people of distinction. That is why I ran with such urgency to call him to the telephone.

Things were quiet until eleven o'clock. When everyone was already in bed, the ringing started all over again. A voice from Brownsville wanted to know why her sister-in-law, who lives three blocks from us, did not come to the party. She was very worried and wanted to know if anything had happened.

I knew that the sister-in-law was healthy and strong, because I happened to see her earlier.

"But more telephone calls will I not answer," I said to myself, "Enough working all evening for strangers!"

As soon as I had the time to return to my bed, the telephone began to ring with such haste that I thought something had broken inside it. I answered it and said, "Hello, who is this?"

The voice was not at all clear, and I couldn't hear the name very well.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“What is with you?” asked the voice, “Why didn't you come? This is the third time, already, I have called you. My wife is not doing well. The nurse is already here. The nurse says its a matter of minutes.”

I understood that they were calling about a childbirth.

“This is Chaim Karp, Chaim the Customer Peddler!” I answered him, “You undoubtedly want to be calling for a doctor. This in not the right number –“

But they did not hear me.

Wednesday the company took the telephone out of my house, and now I am a free man.

The End