TIGHT BINDING BOOK

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY
OU_212445
UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
Call No. 892.4/K92J Accession No. 21846
Author Kreilam, Morris, ed.
Title Jewish short stories of To
This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

JEWISH SHORT STORIES
OF TO-DAY

uniform with this volume

*

WELSH SHORT STORIES

SCOTTISH SHORT STORIES

IRISH SHORT STORIES

JEWISH SHORT STORIES OF TO-DAY

edited
with an introduction
by
MORRIS KREITMAN

★

FABER & FABER LIMITED
24 Russell Square
London
1938

FIRST PUBLISHED IN MAY MCMXXXVIII
BY FABER AND FABER LIMITED
24 RUSSELL SQUARE LONDON W.C.
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
WESTERN PRINTING SERVICES LIMITED
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

are due, and made gratefully, to the authors of the stories included in the present volume, and to : Messrs. Curtis Brown Ltd. for "Late Season," by Lion Feuchtwanger, and for "A Misunderstanding," by Andre Maurois ; Messrs. Allert de Lange, Amsterdam, for "Jack Oplatka Celebrates Mass," from *Geschichten aus sieben Ghettos,* by Egon Erwin Kisch; Messrs. Librairie Ernest Flammarion, Paris, for "Jeanne," from the book of the same name, by Henri Duvernois ; Mr. John Rodker and *New Writing* for "In the Town of Berdichev," by Vassili Grossman; Messrs. Martin Seeker & Warburg Ltd. for "The Bucket Rider," from *The Great Wall of China,* by Franz Kafka; Messrs. Methuen & Co. Ltd. for "Latifa," from *Palestine Caravan,* by Moshe Smilansky; Executive Committee of the Yiddish P.E.N. Club, Warsaw, for Stories by Members of the Club ; Messrs. Chatto & Windus for "Sole Mio," by Marcel Proust; and to Messrs. Cassell & Co. Ltd. for "Moonbeam Alley," from *Kaleidoscope,* by Stefan Zweig.

Should any name have been overlooked, it is hoped that such inadvertence will be excused.

CONTENTS

AUTHOR'S NAME	TITLE OF STORY	PAGE
KREITMAN, MORRIS	*The Jewish Short Story: an Introduction*	9
ASCH, SHOLEM	*The Last Jew*	21
BASHEVIS, I.	*Hail, the Messiah !*	35
BERGELSON, DAVID	*The Poor Rich*	52
DOEBLIN, ALFRED	*The Lion and the Dog*	81
DUVERNOIS, HENRI	*Jeanne*	96
EHRENBURG, ILYA	*The Pipe of Peace*	125
FEUCHTWANGER, LION	*Late Season*	134
GOLDING, LOUIS	*I Slept with a Murderer*	156
GRINBERG, BERL	*Morning Breezes*	164
GROSSMAN, VASSILI	*In the Town of Berdichev*	174
KAFKA, FRANZ	*The Bucket Rider*	198
KAGANOVSKI, EPHRAIM	*Odysseyada*	200
KISCH, EGON ERWIN	*Jack Oplatka Celebrates Mass*	216
KREITMAN, ESTHER	*The Relic*	228
LEA, MARTIN	*Winter Death*	250
MAUROIS, ANDRE	*A Misunderstanding*	277
OPATOSHU, J.	*New York Tales*	293
PAPIERNIKOV, I.	*A Gift*	314

CONTENTS

AUTHOR'S NAME	TITLE OF STORY	PAGE
PASTERNAK, BORIS	*The Stranger*	318
PROUST, MARCEL	*Sole Mio*	367
RABOY, A.	*Alone*	373
ROSENFELD, JONAH	*Rivals*	382
SINGER, I. J.	*Professor Arkady Gritzhaendler*	401
SMILANSKY, MOSHE	*Latifa*	418
STAVSKY, M.	*The Watch-Dog*	423
TOLLER, ERNST	*The Inquisition*	434
WEISSENBERG, I. M.	*An Old Score*	437
ZWEIG, STEFAN	*Moonbeam Alley*	457

by

MORRIS KREITMAN

★

THE JEWISH SHORT STORY
AN INTRODUCTION

There is in our lives a sense of discontinuity—fostered by abrupt changes of the recent past and by the expectancy of more vicissitudes to come in the near future—which finds most effective expression in the modern short story. And it is perhaps this atmosphere of uncertainty which may be regarded as the quintessence of the modern short story. So strong is its influence, that it has also played a great part (at times, unfortunately, exaggerated to the point of incoherence) in the development of the latter-day novel, which in the hands of such widely different writers as Jules Romains, James Joyce and Marcel Proust has become almost like a collection of short tales assembled on a scarcely visible thread.

Now if a sense of insecurity is one of the most notable features of contemporary life, it has been a commonplace with the Jews for many long centuries. Harsh circumstance, and habit also, have continually driven the Jew from place to place; his history is a long repetition of fluctuations between cruel oppression and comparative freedom; the son has rarely lived as the father, except that the lives of both have been disjointed. And it would not be very astonishing, therefore, if we found a

large proportion of Jewish writers turning to the short story as their natural medium.

More surprising would be the discovery that the development of the Jewish short story as deliberate art coincides at many points in time and place with the birth and growth of the modern short story as such. But that this is so, is surely a symptom of the times. And for this reason the parallelism, while by no means absolute, is worth dwelling upon, for I believe that not only does it throw the history of the Jewish short story into bold relief, it also throws some light on the true essentials of the modern short story.

What are these essentials? A long time ago Edgar Allan Poe, recognizing the advent of the modern short story, wrote that this new form must have the force of "totality"—singleness of aim, unity of tone. In other words the modern short story, according to his dictum, must above all else be an organic whole. This idea gained wide currency, for it certainly contains a great deal of truth. And yet it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that had the masters of the modern short story made this attainment their ultimate goal, there would be no such thing as a modern short story to-day. By far the most important quality of the modern short story is surely the implied suggestion of its being a single link *torn bodily* from the endless and varied chain of happenings, both active and passive, which go to make up the whole of life. Thus—to change the metaphor—when we have finished reading, it is as though we have been led over part of a winding road, have stopped at one of the bends, but have seen enough to continue wondering about, or perhaps to catch a glimpse of, the as yet unseen meanderings of this road, whence it has come and

possibly where it is going. Suggestiveness of this kind is rarely, if ever, to be met with in the tales of the old writers, including the masterpieces of Poe himself. These were for the most part preoccupied with the extraordinary or with the supernatural, with bizarre incidents—often of human cunning and devilish mystery—which if they had the highroad of life as their starting point, always led up to a cul-de-sac. The important new element of suggestiveness, which I have endeavoured to describe, largely governs also the technique of the modern short story: it calls for a delicate artistic balance (which incidentally is not to be obtained by starting anywhere and finishing anywhere): this balance is determined by the theme on hand and by the writer's talent and temperament. (In this connexion, in case I have created a false impression of a penchant for exclusiveness, I should like to point out the obvious fact that rife though the sense of discontinuity may be in our lives, it is far from ubiquitous. Much depends on the writer's environment, and surely even in the most unsettled of times there will always be room for the flowing, *continuous* narrative of personal relationships that we find in the old masterpieces, such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* or Dickens's *David Copperfield.)*

If we can agree to the above definition of the modern short story, then we must further agree that its essentials appeared for the first time in the work of the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century. It was Nicolas Gogol, perhaps, who made the first beginnings with his celebrated story *The Greatcoat.* Yet, for my own part, I should choose Ivan Turgenev as the father of the modern short story. His work had in full measure the necessary suggestiveness, balance, tautness and tech-

nical perfection. The next important contribution came from Dostoyevsky, who wrote a number of short masterpieces to which the term modern in the sense set out above is certainly applicable. Tolstoy was less happy in this new medium. Then, of course, Chehov came along, followed by Gorky and many others, and by that time another master had arisen elsewhere—Maupassant in France.

Now it is in Russia that the greater part of Jewry was settled all through the nineteenth century. And it is here that the process of parallelism reveals itself in all its implications, demonstrating clearly how the clash between the old and the new in life created that atmosphere of uncertainty which best promotes the modern short story. Strange though it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that until the time of the first development of the modern short story, Jewish writers had, since the Middle Ages, held altogether aloof from "profane" literature. There were, of course, a few exceptions, especially in Central and Western Europe, where the Jews, being numerically weak, had all but merged with their neighbours, and were at pains to keep pace with them, often indeed marching a step ahead of them, as in the case of Heinrich Heine. But in Russia and Poland (then partly a Czarist province and partly incorporated in Austria), where the Jews were living in their millions, the Word of Jehova held complete sway, and creative **art,** whether in literature, the theatre, painting or music was strictly taboo.

The Ghetto existed in all its brutality, but it would be a mistake to imagine that this state of affairs was maintained simply by the application of severe measures from without. The Ghetto was perhaps even more effectively

upheld by spiritual individualism from within. Instead of yielding an inch to the external pressure, the Jews clung more firmly than ever to their old-established beliefs and customs. Certainly the doors were closed on them by the authorities from the surrounding life, but the Jews, instead of trying to force the lock, actually added more locks of their own making and were a completely self-contained community within a community. Their common bond was religion. (And how powerful this bond was, reinforced by rigorous laws of the Ghetto's own creation, it is hard to convey by a mere statement of fact. If the reader would wish to obtain an insight into the life of those times, he must acquaint himself with the artistic literature that has this subject for its theme. I. M. Weissenberg's tale, *An Old Score,* considered one of the gems of Yiddish literature and included in the present collection, will serve this purpose admirably.)

At the time we are speaking of there was no dearth of Jewish writers—on the contrary ; but the only legitimate subject open to them was the Talmud and the great philosophical works that had been written round it. Into this rigid vessel of formality they had to pour whatever artistic urge they possessed, and it is not surprising to find that in time the vessel became badly warped. The Jewish writer turned to mysticism of the most extreme kind, to Cabbala; and the movement of *Hassidism,* founded in the eighteenth century, was at its height in the nineteenth. When the natural flow of life is stemmed, it always takes the most fantastic, the most incredible turns. This, as we know to our cost to-day, is true of every community where culture is dammed by reactionary forces—where artistic impulses are turned

to barbarous fervour. In the case of the Jewish community, *Hassidism* was born with its "miracle-working" Rabbis and their all too zealous flock of believers. The movement overflowed with *living* poetry, which, deprived of its natural outlet, rose to great artistic heights in a setting of charlatanry and folly. Many readers will have seen performances in London and elsewhere by the Habima Company of Ansky's *Dybbuk* and by the Maurice Schwartz Company of I. J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb*, and will need no telling just how fantastic this mystic cult was.

At last, about the middle of the nineteenth century there arose among the Jews a strong campaign for cultural emancipation. The seeds had been sown much earlier in Germany by the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, but in Eastern Europe it was some time before they bore fruit. Perhaps they might have withered on barren soil, had not a great spirit of restlessness seized the intelligentsia. In Russia the ice was beginning to crack. The abolition of serfdom was the topic of the day. And people lived in expectancy of still greater and more convulsive changes to come, which, even though they did not materialize at the time, nevertheless wrought a big cultural upheaval that ended by tearing at least a small section of Jewry away from their Talmudic and Biblical moorings. Again, if we would wish to visualize this spirit of unrest and uncertainty, we must turn to fiction, and in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Possessed* we shall find a truly amazing picture of the mentality of the people at that time. Incidentally there is one character in the book worthy of special mention—a thinly veiled and highly ironical portrait of Turgenev, ironical because there was no love lost between the two writers,

but we are clearly shown how that expectancy of things to come was responsible for the bated breath with which Turgenev wrote, leaving that impress of modernity on his stories.

The emancipated Jews began by discarding the gaberdine that had survived from medieval days and by throwing off beliefs, superstitions and taboos that dated back to the days of Moses and perhaps earlier still. After a few years we find Jewish writers turning to serious fiction for the first time. Some wrote in the Russian tongue ; Jews living in Austria contributed to German letters ; many turned to Hebrew, but certainly the most important Jewish literature was built up in Yiddish, the vernacular of the wide Jewish masses.

Perhaps it would be as well at this point to distinguish between Hebrew and Yiddish, which are of course two entirely different languages, although this is a fact which does not seem to be widely appreciated. Hebrew is the classical tongue of the Bible—once the living language of the Jews in those far-off days when they had a country of their own, but soon forgotten by them when they turned wanderers, after which it was used only for religious ceremony and was mastered only by scholars, in much the same way as Latin is employed by the Catholic Church. And just as Latin was the language in which Sir Thomas More wrote his *Utopia,* so Hebrew was the language in which Talmudists composed their dissertations and in which a number of talented Jewish poets through the ages wrote their verses. For two thousand years the language seemed dead, but it was only sleeping, for of recent years it has witnessed a revival in Palestine where a small section of Jewry has settled again and where the Zionists are taking the most

energetic measures to convert Hebrew into their mother-tongue. The language has had to be modernized, *so* that it is now called Modern Hebrew. It has a growing literature, stronger *in* poetry than in prose, but everything rests with the future, for while Hebrew will be the mother-tongue of the coming generations in Palestine, it is not so with the contemporary writers (even Ch. N. Bialik, the supreme figure in Modern Hebrew literature, is said to have spoken Yiddish on his death-bed). A very great deal depends also on political issues, in which large Imperial interests are at stake.

Yiddish, on the other hand, is both a newer and an older tongue. It was first adopted by the Jews about nine centuries ago, if not before (research-workers are still delving into ancient archives to discover the real date of its origin), and it has been a living tongue ever since, moulded and re-moulded by the changing Jewish mentality, adapted to modern conditions by those natural processes which govern all languages. To-day Yiddish literature is voluminous and flourishing. Work of great literary merit and originality is being produced, and while the material position of the Yiddish writer is as bad as could be (his public being dispersed all over the world and greatly impoverished after the War), there is this advantage—at least from the outsider's point of view—it's no use writing for money, for there's none to be had! At various times various people have thought fit to call Yiddish a German dialect, a mere jargon, but there is really nothing to prevent anyone who is so disposed from calling French a Latin dialect or English a mishmash of dialects, and such accusations do not call for scientific refutation. The only true test of a language is its living strength, clarity and individuality. For

reasons already made clear above, there was very little serious literature written in Yiddish until about the middle of the nineteenth century, although the same factors that gave rise to unhealthy mysticism, were responsible also for a luxuriant growth of folk-lore, which is now being written down and preserved as one of the treasures of Jewish culture.

The first really big name in Yiddish literature is Mendele Moher Sephorim (1835-1918). He, like many of his contemporaries lacking in a precedent, first began to write in Hebrew, but as his work could not reach the wide masses in this way, he finally turned to Yiddish, and soon he was joined by Sholem Aleihem, Peretz and many other talented writers, who created a strong new literature, in which the short story was and still is of fundamental importance.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the short story in its modern form spread westwards, growing particularly strong in France and later still in America. And with the short story went the Jews. They were driven westwards to liberty by the pogroms in Russia and by the new spirit of emancipation which had at last reached the masses through the newly formed literature. The latter-day development of the modern short story has recently been the subject of several excellent essays in this country (where the atmosphere of uncertainty has come later and less pronouncedly than in other lands) and so I shall end my brief examination of the history of the modern short story at this point. As regards the Jewish contribution to the modern short story, it has been both considerable and important in American, French, German, Russian and English letters, and Jewish writers have figured also in many minor literatures, quite apart

from their extensive handling of this new medium in Yiddish, the language of their very own creation.

The present collection of contemporary short stories, by the very nature of things Jewish, bears more of an international than a national aspect, and so in its own way performs one of the important functions common to all literatures—the creation of a mirror to reflect the life and spirit of a people. (Needless to say, an anthology is at all times no more than a reflection of a reflection.) At the present time the Jewish people are in a more anomalous position than ever before in their history. More than ever they are dispersed over the entire face of the earth, the individuals are fast losing all resemblance to one another. How different is, say, the Jewish night club habitue of New York from the Jewish Talmudist in a Polish village who to this very day wears the medieval gaberdine and follows the even more ancient customs that have survived for Heaven knows how many centuries upon centuries! Perhaps no two humans could be more unlike. Only their consciousness of the fact that they *are* Jews ties them together into one firm community. Of different nationalities, with or without any religion, thinking different thoughts, leading different lives, this awareness is the one bond which forms them into a big fraternity. And perhaps one day people everywhere, all over the world, while retaining their colourful differences, will think in the same way But this is a diversion from the subject on hand.

In compiling the present anthology, I have not selected stories with an exclusively Jewish theme, for that would have created a very wrong impression of the modern Jew's contribution to world literature. To be sure, there is a fair proportion of stories with a Jewish

content, but I have not gone out of my way to exaggerate the Jew's preoccupation with himself. At the same time, I have endeavoured to include stories which shall, as far as is possible within the narrow scope of a single volume, show the development of the modern short story in all its diversity. Thus, the reader will find one or two stories little more than sketches; others which show a man's whole life crystallized in a few sleepless hours or in the events of a few consecutive days; others tracing the recurrence of a certain small incident throughout a long lifetime; other still—the swift, seemingly indirect disclosure of a drama where it can hardly be suspected to exist. Although recent experimental work in the modern short story has been of vital importance, I have thought it inadvisable to put in "unfinished" products which may be said to be still in the laboratory stage. Experiments must be judged by final results. However, there is in this collection one story which is certainly a large-scale innovation in style and treatment, but as it has, at one fell stroke, been pushed through to such a high level of artistic achievement, I am very happy to be able to present it to the English-reading public for the first time. I am referring to Boris Pasternak's *The Stranger*. In this connexion, my thanks are due to Mr. Alec Brown for his having undertaken to translate the story specially for this collection.

That the stories included in the present volume cannot possibly cover the whole ground in so short a space is a statement with which no one will have any quarrel, and it would speak ill of the Jewish contribution to literature were this not so. Nor can it be helped that many writers whom I should like to have seen represented here have unfortunately had to be omitted. It will for instance be

noticed that there are no stories by American authors (writing in English, of course; there are several translated from the Yiddish), but as the American short story already has such a very extensive circulation, I deemed it best to fill this space with work which has never reached the English reader before.

A goodly number of the stories in this collection have been rendered into English specially for the occasion, and it is my earnest hope that these, in company with the others, may, by attracting interest, add a little more impetus—no matter how little—to the development of the modern short story.

by

SHOLEM ASCH

★

THE LAST JEW*

His parents bequeathed a synagogue to him, and he was at a loss what to do with it.

First thing each morning, after he had swept the pavement in front of his shop, he would go round the block of houses, broom in hand, and do some more sweeping outside the synagogue. Then, unlocking the house of worship, he would load himself up with the boots, shoes and slippers—strung up on rods—that were stored in the vestibule, and he would carry them off to make a display in front of his shop. Next his wife and daughter came along to fetch the baskets of china and glassware in which they traded at a stall of their own and which were also kept inside the synagogue. In the evening, when the day's business was done, they took their wares back again, sometimes returning home for the night with a spare mattress or perhaps a couple of feather pillows or other household articles which had been dumped in the synagogue for lack of space elsewhere.

Occasionally, during the day, the town guide might arrive with a couple of gaunt, sallow-faced Englishwomen who had come to see the sights of the ancient French little town. Having done the church, the Roman ruins and all the other notable monuments, the guide

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

always made a point of showing tourists round the synagogue.

"Monsieur Crémieux, some visitors to see the synagogue!"

Monsieur Crémieux would turn a deaf ear and busy himself with his footwear.

"Listen, they'll let you have a handsome tip, you take it from me!" the guide would say, using all his powers of persuasion. "They've come down from Avignon."

If the party was made up of men, from whom Monsieur Cremieux could always expect a more generous tip, he would take the keys himself and personally lead the way to the synagogue, where he revealed all the mysteries of his inheritance.

If the visitors turned out to be well-dressed gentlemen with a car of their own; or, Americans, he would even show them certain faded old prayer-books, holy writings and the title-pages of a few medieval copies of *Slihus* published in Amsterdam, which he treasured in the shop-till together with his daily takings. Knowing no better than his visitors, Monsieur Crémieux usually held the books upside down, and as they curiously eyed the strange enigmatic lettering, he dilated on the worth of these documents, how great was their antiquity and how once some Americans had offered him a little fortune to induce him to part with them—ah yes, indeed! And proudly he would replace the stack in his till where he also preserved all his personal papers.

When the tourists were women, whom he thought mean—and they were never likely to give more than a few sous—he would summon his wife or daughter :

"Hi, show the ladies round the synagogue, will you!"

At such times the official guide would come into his own and assert full authority. He would point out the chandeliers, invite the visitors to join him on the pulpit and only then explain that it was a pulpit. Next he conducted them to the holy ark, drew aside the curtain and revealed a couple of desolate scrolls which reposed there in dusty old jackets; he drew attention to the strange Hebrew inscriptions to be seen everywhere, especially on the "eternal lights" which had once been lit in memory of departed worshippers and were now extinguished. And the better his prospects of beer-money, the more fascinating, weird and wonderful was the ritual of the Jewish faith as described by him.

As for Monsieur Crémieux, he observed all those religious festivals which his neighbours observed—that is, the Christian ones. He spoke of them as of his very own holidays, and his wife, in her preparations of them, was as assiduous as the best of Christian women. The only difference between him and the other townsfolk was, that whereas occasionally they went to church, he always stayed away, except that he would go to the funeral service when one of his very good friends passed away.

Monsieur Crémieux knew that he was a Jew, and no one reproached him for not attending Mass, although he would have gladly done so.

Monsieur Cremieux, in common with his neighbours, was a plain man fully preoccupied in the pursuit of a livelihood and of a little bit of enjoyment afterwards, and he had no time or use for ungodliness. If the others went but seldom to church, it was only because Sunday was their sole day of leisure when they could afford to sleep a little longer. As for God, Monsieur Crémieux

had no quarrel with Him whatsoever. On the contrary, he fully recognized the necessity for calling on God in times of trouble, when he himself was ill or his wife was taken bad. What with doctors and medicines so terribly expensive these days, the church and consecrated bread were cheaper by far. Faith also was a very useful thing for a man to have when he found himself involved in a lawsuit.

Like all plain men, when old age descends upon them, their livelihood is at last assured and they hold a certain place of esteem in their own immediate circle, he felt the need for belonging to the local church, for talking things over with the priest occasionally, and for mixing on an equal footing with all those worthies who go to divine service regularly every Sunday.

But Monsieur Crémieux knew that he was a Jew—and he was a member of a different "church". Of his church, not a single believer remained in the town, save himself. . . .

As though he had seen it in a dream, he had a hazy recollection of how at one time prayers had been offered up at the synagogue. All he remembered was a great many lights: all the antique Dutch candelabra which were hanging in the synagogue to this day and which all tourists agreed to be its finest feature—indeed a dealer had once offered him an appreciable sum for them—all these had been lit up, and a cantor had intoned prayers. He remembered himself as a small boy at his father's side wearing a sort of white shawl—white shawls, candles and song. Then, as time wore on, the services were held at ever rarer intervals. As the members died off one by one, or moved away to larger cities, the synagogue was frequented less and less. The sons took

Christian wives and abandoned their faith. The synagogue fell into disuse. Only two Jews remained in the town—himself and a cousin of his, whose name also was Monsieur Crémieux.

During his cousin's lifetime, on a certain Day of Atonement (the cousin always knew the precise date, for he went by a little Jewish almanac sent to him by the rabbinical authorities of Paris), the two of them would go into the synagogue at sunset, on the eve of the holy day, and would illumine all the "eternal" remembrance lights. Neither of them knew how to pray, but his cousin still possessed a praying-shawl, in which he would wrap himself up, and thus they would wander aimlessly round the synagogue, the one wearing a praying-shawl, the other without, until the scanty oil which they poured into the "eternal lights" was all consumed. So, snuffing out the wicks, they went home. Moreover, on the following day they kept their shops closed. And his cousin actually never tasted a morsel of food until noon, only satisfying his thirst, for, he explained, on the Day of Atonement Jews were not permitted to eat (until noon), but only to drink.*

When his cousin died, he did his best to go on observing the holiday. Left to his own resources, however, he did not know quite what to do, until on one occasion he omitted to send for the Jewish almanac distributed by the rabbinical authorities in Paris. Thereafter he had no idea at all of the date, and he had given up the practice ever since.

Only Monsieur Crémieux was a man who could not live without religion. Among the townsfolk he held a

*** According to Jewish law, of course, a strict fast must be observed from sunset to sunset.—Tr.**

place of esteem. He had a good commercial connexion : all the best housewives came to his shop for their clogs and to his wife's stall for their saucepans and crockery. The very priest himself was one of his customers. The local magistrate, all his acquaintances and friends went to church at least a few times during the year, and helped to support the priest. Monsieur Crémieux knew everything about the Christian holidays, everything about the church intrigues and goings-on behind the ecclesiastical scenes. His shop was a sort of bourse, where the womenfolk gathered to exchange their tit-bits of information and also to air their feelings. Even the priest would quite often come down to the shop in person, seat himself on a chair and confide all his troubles to Monsieur Crémieux, how the world was growing more wicked every day, how people were losing their religion. No one would even dream of going to church on a weekday. At best, they left it from Sunday to Sunday, when they showed up only to show off their new things. As for the confessional, that was being neglected in an altogether shameful way, especially by the younger people. And no one ever asked for the consecrated bread, unless it was a deathbed case.

Monsieur Crémieux was by nature a busybody, and having no synagogue or community of his own where he could fuss and meddle, he meddled in local matters of the church. He suggested to the priest ways and means of attracting more churchgoers. His was the inspiration that led to such a startling innovation as suspending a neon cross outside the church and later still to the engagement of an organist from Lyons. He actually helped to collect the necessary funds to cover the organist's expenses. He organized the now famous

bazaar for the especial purpose, himself contributing several new pairs of clogs of the highest quality and persuading his wife to donate a dozen plates and tumblers. Also he furthered the good cause by selling many raffle tickets, and presided over the draw.

Now one night Monsieur Crémieux lay in bed and though the hour was late, sleep would not come to him. He was no longer a young man, and the thought uppermost in his mind was—were he to die, and die a Jew, his body would have to be transported all the way to Lyons for burial, which would cause considerable expense to his heirs. And his heirs truly were decent, respectable people worthy of consideration. Now there was Monsieur Grave, the local electrical engineer, who was his son-in-law, and then of course his unmarried daughter who helped her mother in the crockery business. Why squander a farthing of their patrimony? He would give up his own religion, join the Catholic Church, and when the time came for him to die, he would be buried in the local cemetery amid familiar tombstones. It would be both cheaper and more convenient.

The only snag was the synagogue. What should he do with it? If he were to abandon his faith, he would have to part with the property as well. That would mean losing a splendid warehouse for his boots and shoes and clogs, not to mention his wife's china. And who would take care of the building? It would fall into decay.

"Never mind," he reflected. "I'll still be able to keep my footwear and china there ! Who's to prevent me? It's nobody's business! I've stored the things there all this time. The synagogue's mine. No one has any right to take it away from me. It was left to me by my parents."

On the following day he called on the priest, that very old friend of his, and acquainted him of his desire.

"Abbe Cruchamps, I have come to ask you to receive me into the Catholic faith. Even as I am, I'ma Catholic in everything but name. My own people are gone, and for a man to observe a religion all on his own is a very hard task. Besides, the nearest rabbinical authority is in Lyons, and I think it would be a good idea, Abbe Cruchamps, if I were to have my name entered on the Catholic register."

At these words, *Abbé* Cruchamps savagely bit his shaven upper lip, produced his snuff-box, helped himself to a mighty pinch of snuff and—quite unlike his usual self—omitted to offer any to Monsieur Crémieux, which signified that the Abbe was angry. And Monsieur Crémieux felt very hurt.

"Well, what about the synagogue? Who's going to look after that? Who's it going to belong to now? No man's property, eh?"

"The synagogue is mine. It'll remain in my hands as long as I live," Monsieur Crémieux stoutly defended his right of ownership.

"Never thought you were capable of it, Monsieur Crémieux. You such a decent man and all! Shocking, shocking!"

The Abbe shook his head sorrowfully.

Monsieur Crémieux stood there crestfallen, and before he could get a word in, the *Ahb6* had embarked on an endless tirade :

"On no account must you forsake the religion of the noble Children of Israel, the race chosen of God. *The remnant of Israel shall not perish,* it is written in the holy scriptures. And yet you have the face to come here and

make such a suggestion. I can hardly believe my own ears, I can hardly believe my own ears. You are a man respected in this town—how could it ever occur to you to desert the religion of your forefathers and to abandon the synagogue which this town is so proud to possess? No, Monsieur Crémieux, so long as you dwell in our midst, you must cling to your faith. In this town *you* are the remnant of Israel which shall not perish from off the face of the earth, as it is written in the holy scriptures. You cannot change your faith, you must remain a Jew and preserve the synagogue which your parents left in your charge!"

So spake the Abbe, holding aloft two fingers of his upraised hand, just as he would do on a Sunday when delivering his sermon.

Before long the news spread through the little town that Monsieur Crémieux had wanted to give up the synagogue and adopt the Catholic persuasion. And, much to his astonishment, Monsieur Crémieux noticed that in his relations with his neighbours a certain change had taken place—for the worse.

All the best people would look the other way when they went past his shop, to avoid greeting him. Many of the women transferred their custom elsewhere. And those who still patronized him shook their heads at him disapprovingly.

" You know, there's malicious talk going on about you in the town. The Abbe said last Sunday in his sermon that you had a mind to throw over the synagogue your parents left you. Just think of it—our beautiful old synagogue!"

Then it chanced that the mayor, the estimable Monsieur Cravan, encountered him in the street and when

the Jew offered his obsequious greetings, that worthy turned away and waggled his hand in the air as though to say :

"Fie, for shame! For shame!"

That was the last straw. To be slighted by the mayor in public was more than Monsieur Crémieux could stand. Quite beside himself, he caught up with the man, stopped him and asked :

"Monsieur Cravan, what is the matter? What wrong have I done?"

"Abbé Cruchamps has told me all about your visit to him. So you meant to change your religion, eh? I call that dirty business. You, my dear fellow, are the only Jew to have remained in our town, the only one we have for our beautiful old synagogue. And you were thinking of desertion. Terrible, Monsieur Crémieux, terrible!"

"But don't you realize that I can't even say my prayers in it. I've forgotten everything I ever knew. It's ages and ages since the last service was held there. I don't know the first thing about my own faith."

"That doesn't make any difference, not a bit! You're an official personage, the only Jew we have in the town. You can't run away from your post just because it suits you. It's your duty to preserve the synagogue as one of the outstanding monuments of our town. And while I'm on the subject, let me inform you that we're not a bit satisfied with the way you keep the place. The Abbé tells me that the holy writings are being profaned and the sacred vessels are in perfect disorder. It has fallen into neglect. And what d'you mean by turning the synagogue into a warehouse for your footwear and china? It's shocking, Monsieur Crémieux! The synagogue is the common heritage of this town !"

But this was too much for Monsieur Crémieux.

"It's nobody's business, Monsieur Cravan, what I do with my synagogue ! It's *my* synagogue "—here Monsieur Crémieux beat his chest—"which my parents left to me and to no one else, and I can do with it just as I please. If I feel like it, I'll pray there, and if I don't feel like it, I'll store my boots and pots and pans there—and it's nobody's business, see! Even if I do give up the Jewish faith, I won't part with the synagogue. Never! Why, I'd sooner see it razed to the ground, and as a matter of fact before I die I will raze it to the ground. No more Jews, no more synagogue—and you'll never lay your hands on it."

"Then we'll put you in prison."

"Oh no you won't! It's my synagogue, my very own! It was left to me by my parents of blessed memory, and I'd like to see anyone try and take it away from me!" Again Monsieur Crémieux beat his breast. "I'll defend my rights in the highest courts of Paris !"

Monsieur Crémieux returned home in a furious temper ; he quarrelled with his wife, scolded his daughter, and kept growling some incomprehensible remark over and over again :

" *Pas juif, pas synagogue !*"

Then he took the keys, went round to the synagogue, and lunging out with his foot at the goods that lay in his path in the vestibule, so that a few china bowls were smashed to pieces, he mounted the stairs to the gallery where the womenfolk would sit in the old days and watch the service. It was a large and lofty synagogue, with antique candelabra and with little windows round the gallery gazing downwards with such a forlorn air. The high pulpit stood empty, but somehow there was

something about it which suggested that just a moment ago it had been occupied by some secretive person who had hidden himself away at the unexpected intrusion. Out of doors the sun must have been on the point of setting, for here the shadows were gathering, creeping out stealthily from every nook and corner. The stained panes of the window above the holy ark were beginning to glimmer with deepening tints. Colourful threads of dust leapt from the glass to balance precariously in empty space.

Within the synagogue there was a great hush and void. All Monsieur Crémieux could hear was the clatter of his own footsteps resounding from end to end of the building like echoes from an empty cask. He wandered up and down, not knowing what to do with himself, nor what had brought him hither. He climbed on to the high pulpit, and climbed down from the high pulpit. Then he went up to the holy ark, drew aside the curtain, and as he beheld the neglected scrolls propped up in their dust-smothered jackets, they conjured up something of the past, pictures of his childhood stirred in his memory—lights and song and white praying-shawls. As they swam up before his eyes, he buried his face in the scrolls and wept:

" *Oh, Dieu d'Israël! Oh, Dieu d'Israël* !"

And he began to beat his heart with his right hand.

" It is my synagogue, my synagogue! Aren't I right, *Dieu d'Israël ?* I won't give it away to the Christians. No, *Dieu d'Israël !* My synagogue, my synagogue!"

When he descended from the ark, it had grown quite dark in the synagogue. The shadows, which lurked in the corners when one entered by day, had now crept forward and embraced the whole place in their dead,

invisible arms. All that emerged from the nebulous gloom were the massive old Dutch candelabra—and here and there an old gilded Hebrew inscription gleaming on the wall. Monsieur Crémieux recalled those peculiar evenings when, during the lifetime of his cousin, all the "eternal lights" had been lit up. What was the name of that Jewish holiday? Ah, now he remembered—"Yom Kippur". Si, *Si!* "Yom Kippur." Perhaps to-day was "Yom Kippur"? To-night, why not to-night? It always came round at the end of summer.

He swiftly made for home and told his astonished wife that he would have no supper that evening, only something to drink. It was a sort of Jewish festival, when one was not permitted to eat until *midi* of the following day, but only to drink. He took a bottle of oil, went back to the synagogue, filled all the "eternal lights", sought out a praying-shawl from an old chest. And Monsieur Crémieux, clad in his praying-shawl, paced up and down alone in the illuminated synagogue.

Thereafter he used to indulge in this practice with great frequency. Whenever the fancy took him, he celebrated the Day of Atonement. And the inhabitants of the town marvelled to see the old deserted synagogue illumined with many flickering oil lamps. Within, among the lit up "eternal" remembrance lights, the last Jew, wrapped in a praying-shawl, roamed about alone and kept murmuring to himself:

"*Dieu d'Israël. . . .*"

Monsieur Crémieux kept his word.

When he grew old and decrepit and knew that his time had come, one night he went off to the synagogue to celebrate what he called the Day of Atonement. On this occasion he poured more oil into the holders than

usual and inserted larger wicks. That night he wandered about the synagogue all alone until a late hour, clad in his praying-shawl and mumbling incomprehensible words. Before taking his departure, he gathered up the praying-shawl, dipped it in oil and draping it over the open ark, tucked the fringe well into the base of the "eternal lights", so that it touched the bottom of the wicks. That night he failed to extinguish the "eternal lights". He closed up the synagogue, locking it heavily, and went home to bed. On the morrow, when—through the open window of his bedroom—he beheld the synagogue in flames, he summoned his remaining strength for a gesture of the hand and said with a triumphant smile on his livid face :

"Pas de juifs, pas de synagogue—no Jews, no synagogue!"

Those were his last words.

by

I. BASHEVIS

★

HAIL, THE MESSIAH!*

In the year 5408,† in the days when the tyrant Chmielnicki and his hosts laid siege to the town of Zamosc, but were unable to capture it because of its strong fortifications, the Cossacks and the Tatars carried out great massacres in Tomaszow, Bilgoray, Krasnik, Turbin, Frampol, and also in Goray, that remote town-let lying in the hills. The Jews were slaughtered, flayed alive, little children were murdered, the women were raped, their bellies ripped open and sewed up again with cats inside. Some fled to Lublin, many were bap-tized or sold as slaves. Goray, which had a reputation for its scholars and upright folk, was left utterly deserted. The circular market-place, where once fairs had been held, became overgrown with weeds ; the synagogue and the house of learning were piled high with manure ; most of the houses had gone up in flames. For months after the holocaust corpses lay about the street and there was no one to bury them. The only living creatures were stray dogs which dragged around dismembered limbs, and flocks of crows sustained themselves on the carrion. The few human wrecks who survived, abandoned the

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**
† 1648 A.D. by the Christian calendar.

place and wandered over the countryside. It seemed that the town was fated to eternal extinction.

Only after the lapse of many years did the scattered townsfolk begin to return. Solitary members of what had once been large families came back. Young men were as grey as their grandfathers ; once-prosperous people were clad in sackcloth and bore their wordly belongings upon their backs. Some were not in their proper mind, others were a prey to melancholia. But it is the way of the world that, as time goes on, life picks up the thread where it has been broken. Shutters that had for a long time remained barred behind rusty bolts, opened one by one; the human remains sprinkled everywhere were borne away to the desecrated cemetery and interred in a common grave. Shops opened their doors again, bashfully—only half ajar; labourers repaired the tumble-down roofs, set to rights the chimney-places, white-washed the walls still showing smears of blood and spattered brains. The homecomers fiddled about with long poles at the bottom of the polluted wells, dragging them for human bones. Gradually the pedlars set out to tramp from farm to farm, bringing back corn and wheat, vegetables and flax. The peasants in the neighbourhood, for the most part Ukrainian settlers, who till then had feared to show their faces in Goray, knowing it to be haunted, began to drive up once more in their cumbersome carts to purchase salt and candles, lengths of cotton for dresses and jerkins, padded vests and earthen jugs, all manner of beads and trinkets. Goray had always been isolated from the rest of the world. Hills and dense virgin forest lay all round it for miles and miles. In the winter-time, bears, wolves and wild boars prowled on the roads. Ever since the massacres the savage beasts had multiplied.

At last, when Reb Bainish Ashkenazi, the venerable old Rabbi, who, as one of the greatest authorities of his time, had been asked to dispense the law in Lublin, came back to his home-town, the community, albeit depleted, was restored once more.

• • • • «

For some years now the Jews of Poland had been passing round the most wonderful stories.

Even when Reb Bainish had been living in Lublin, marvellous tales had reached his ears. Folks everywhere were discussing the rabbinical envoy Baruch Gad, who, journeying through the desert, had stumbled on the River Simbatyon, crossed over to the other side and brought back a letter on parchment given to him by the ten tribes of Israel. The letter was reputed to have been written by the Jewish King Ahitev Ben Ezriah and it held forth a promise that the Millennium was at hand. Copies of the missive were in the possession of several Palestinian Jews, who travelled from one end of the world to the other collecting alms.

The greatest Cabbalists of Poland and other countries revealed all manner of portents in the Zohar and in ancient volumes of the Cabbala that the days of exile for the Jews were numbered. Chmielnicki's massacres had been but the travail of the birth of the Messiah. According to secret writings, this travail was designated to begin in the year 5408 and would continue until the end of the present year 5426, when the redemption would come.

All these things passed from mouth to mouth, in whispers, to avoid creating any disturbance among the womenfolk and common herd, whose intelligence is mean and lowly. Notwithstanding, in their own way, even the humble discussed the coming salvation of the Jews.

I. BASHEVIS

Gradually the rumours of the Messiah's approach roused even the remote townlet of Goray, hidden away as it was among the hills.

A worthy woman, who had lost all trace of her husband and had for many years now been going from place to place in search of him, collecting alms on the way, was the first to bring the news. She related that people everywhere were saying that the end of the exile of Jewry was in sight. Trees bearing immense fruits had begun to flourish in the wildernesses of the Holy Land, and goldfish had suddenly come to life in the Dead Sea. From house to house this stranger went. Her face was crinkled like a cabbage-leaf, but her black eyes had a youthful and oily sheen in them. The satin ribbons attached to her tall, important-looking bonnet fluttered bravely in the breeze ; the long ear-rings dangling in the laps of her ears were for ever quivering, and her mouth —thin-lipped and exquisitely carved—heaped forth promises of succour and solace. At each home she savoured the preserves which industrious housewives had prepared in the summer-time from abundant wild berries ; loudly she blew her hooked rabbinical-looking nose ; she used her pleated silken sleeves to wipe away the tears that rolled resplendently down her faded cheeks ; and the beads adorning her roomy greatcoat glittered one and all. The woman exhaled an odour of honey-cake and festivity, of distant Jewish cities and glad tidings. She chatted about the Holy Land with as familiar an air as if she had only just been there herself; she stated that the soil, which had till recently been shrivelled up like the hide of a deer, was now stretching and growing vaster from day to day. The mosques vanished underground, and the Turks were in flight or else

adopted the Jewish faith ere it was too late, for afterwards no converts would be accepted. Even in Poland the squires were treating the Jews with greater leniency and indeed bestowed gifts on them, having heard that before long the Children of Israel would be exalted above all other peoples.

A swarm of women followed her about wherever she went, never tiring to question her, and she for her part answered patiently, using many Hebrew words, like a learned man. In the women's gallery of the synagogue she prayed aloud, and it was even rumoured that she had on her person ritual fringes, such as only the males of the community might wear. The more opulent among the townsfolk responded to her appeals by donating entire ducats, which she tied up in a handkerchief with a deliberate and pious air, as though she were collecting alms on other people's behalf. When Reb Bainish got to know of her, he sent word that she must come before him and give an account of herself ; but too late, for the woman was already seated in a sledge, taking her departure.

A large crowd had gathered to see her off. They tucked shawls all round her, and wrapped her feet in straw ; they bestowed on her little jugs of cherry-crush and slices of Sabbath cake for her to eat on the hazardous journey. Her nose, shaped like a ram's horn, glowed red with frostbite and godliness, and in reply to the beadle's command she said casually :

"Tell the Rabbi, will you, that soon, please God, we shall meet in the Holy Land ... at the gates of the Temple. . . ."

From then on, Reb Bainish was given no more peace, for more and more omens became known with each passing day.

A tramp, who used to come down to Goray regularly every year, to beg, even in the days before the terror, turned up again unharmed and he declared that in Wolyn Jews were dancing in the streets for joy. People had left off buying property and would not have any new fur coats made, because they knew the climate in Palestine to be mild. Weddings were being postponed, so that the nuptials might be celebrated in Jerusalem. In Narol, the young men had begun to study the Jerusalem Talmud, and in Szczebrzeszyn a rich man had parted with his fortune, distributing it among the poor.

An ascetic, who abstained from love, ate no meat, drank no wine, slept on a hard bench and wandered over the face of the earth on foot, related that in Southern Poland a prophet had arisen with the name of Reb Nehemiah the Priest, who wore on his naked body a coarse hairy cloak and who fell down with his face to the ground when he uttered his prophecies—in a voice that surpassed the strength of a human being. He foretold that before long the Jews would assemble from all corners of the world, and the dead would rise from the grave. The greatest of rabbis and scholars believed in him, and did pay homage to him.

But it so came to pass that the embers of hope were fanned into the flame of fury and violence by a certain missionary, who was a Sephardic Jew.

It was midwinter, in the month of December, and night was about to fall. All day long a gale had been blowing, piling up the snow in front of the houses—bluish, glassy, flaky mounds of snow such as drift about in the open country. Flocks of crows waddled about on their short legs, pecking away at a frozen cat, cawing softly through their hooked beaks, or flew low over the

rooftops, lazily airing their wings. On the rare window-panes the rime traced intricate patterns of overturned trees with broken branches—trees that had been uprooted in a storm. The low-hanging eaves drooped closer to the ground than ever, and from every chimney-pot a coil of smoke went up, white as milk, revolving as if it would bore into the very heavens. That night the trembling stars were more brilliant and larger than ever before, sparkling green and blue in infinite frosty space. Encircled by three mother-of-pearl haloes irradiating all colours of the rainbow, the yellow moon hung like a celestial eye gazing down upon the hurrying figures of Jews on their way to the evening service. All at once the shrill tinkle of a bell sounded in the market-place, and a long sledge drew up. A Jew got out, his beard encased in snow, his sidelocks long and curly, a red fez perched on his head and a huge fur coat with dangling tails muffling his stocky frame. He looked about him in every direction, the pupils of his eyes flashing, and he asked :

"Whereabouts is the house of worship?"

When the stranger reached the synagogue, the interval between early and late evening prayers was being observed. His appearance caused everyone to marvel greatly. Pausing on the threshold, he discarded his felt shoes and stood before the congregation in his bare feet. When he divested himself of his overcoat, he revealed a long white cloak underneath, with black stripes like a praying-shawl, girdled by a broad white silken sash that was trimmed with tassels. Assiduously the stranger washed his feet and hands at the copper basin, intoning the while a prayer in the tongue of the Targums. Then he mounted the pulpit, with a slow deliberate gait, turned his face to the orient wall and called out in a tremulous voice :

"Israelites, I come to bring you glad tidings . . . from Jerusalem, the holy city! . . ."

Forthwith a rumour swept the town, and there was a rush, helter-skelter, for the synagogue. Females mingled with the males; virgin youths and maidens clambered up on to the desks and tables, shoulder to shoulder. Everybody stood gaping, all ears were pricked up. And the stranger declaimed with a break in his voice, as if his throat were cluttered up with stifled sobs.

"Israelites," he said. "I have just come forth from the Holy Land. ... I am a pure Sephardic Jew, and I have been sent here to you by my brethren to proclaim that the Great Dragon which infests the River Nile has been quelled by Shabsi Tsvi, our Messiah, the holy king. . . . Soon his kingship will be revealed, and he shall remove the crown from the Sultan's head. . . . The Jews beyond the River Simbatyon are waiting in readiness for the war between Gog and Magog. The Great Bear in the skies above will come down and a seven-headed snake shall be the bit in its mouth. It will breathe fire from its nostrils, and mounted upon its back will the Messiah drive to Jerusalem. . . . Brace yourselves, Israelites, and prepare! Blessed shall he be who lives to witness these things! . . ."

There was such a deadly hush in the synagogue, that all at once the ancient clock with its long rusty chains could be heard to splutter and to commence ringing the hour. Women wrung their hands, their faces oddly distorted, so that there was no telling whether they were trying to laugh or to weep. Men stood with their heads thrown back, eyes goggling, mouths wide open. A buzz passed over the throng, such as is heard at the New Year's service during the silent prayer, when the ram's

horn is blown. The herald looked round him in all directions, with a pair of blazing thirsty eyes, as if he were seeking someone in the crowd.

"In Jerusalem the holy one has wrought miracles and wondrous deeds. In Miron a pillar of fire has been seen to go up from the earth to the heavens. . . . On it were inscribed in black letters the names of Jehova and Shabsi Tsvi. The women who soothsay by drops of olive oil have seen the crown of King David upon the head of Shabsi Tsvi. . . . There are some unbelievers so hard of heart, they refuse to turn back even at the portals of Gehenna. . . . Woe unto them! They shall sink into the lowermost abyss of hell! . . ."

"Save us, O Lord, save us!" someone suddenly uttered a piercing yell, as if he were being trampled upon in the crush.

The crowd shivered. It was the cripple Mordecai Joseph, a Cabbalist with a bushy, flaming red beard, with beetling eyebrows like brushes—a man given to fasting, to fits of anger and weeping. During prayers he would beat his head against the wall, during the liturgy he dropped on to the ground like the priests of old, and wailed at the top of his voice. It was his practice to make obituary speeches at the graveside, and on the eve of the Day of Atonement he thrashed the sinful in the porch of the synagogue. When he fell into a frenzy, he not only attacked the young, but would do violence also to old men, and as a consequence people were chary of incurring his wrath. He was an uncouth figure, with misshapen broad shoulders, madly dishevelled ginger sidelocks and eyes glinting green like the eyes of a tomcat. Now the cripple had suddenly taken it into his head to climb on to one of the tables, uttering deep, long-drawn

sighs as he struggled to no avail. A few bystanders lent a hand and lifted him up bodily on to the table. Reb Mordecai Joseph banged the board with his crutch. His tattered gaberdine had become undone, the tangled locks of hair on the crown of his head quivered as if moved by a breeze, and in a delirium of enthusiasm he began to snort and gasp in a muffled voice :

"Come, let us rejoice! Gome! The salvation of the world is at hand! . . . Redemption is at hand! . . . Oh, oh, oh! . . ."

He struck himself upon the head with his left hand and began to dance. The heavy oak crutch under his armpit beat a tattoo like a drumstick, his maimed legs in their immense top-boots wriggled as if they had become interwoven, and half-choking he cried without cease a single word which no one could understand. The herald turned his head and fixed his brilliant gaze on the cripple. The skirts of Reb Mordecai Joseph's gaberdine flapped in the air, his ritual fringe garment billowed out. His head, upon which was perched a crumpled skull-cap, fell back ; his arms spread out higher and higher, his fingers working as if they would clutch at something. All at once the women began to scream ; from all sides hands rose up to catch him. At that instant there was a dull thump. Reb Mordecai crashed down and lay silent now. The whole synagogue, the multitude and the clammy walls, shuddered. Someone yelled :

"Help! He's fainted!..."

"Heeelp!..."

. . . . .

Reb Bainish used to say his evening-prayers in solitude, in the rabbinical court-room. When he learnt of

the things that had come to pass that day, he hastened to the synagogue. But by then the place was deserted. After the missionary had made his declaration, the throng dispersed quickly to their homes, to talk it over with their families. A small procession accompanied Reb Mordecai Joseph to his hut, where they had to massage him with snow, prick pins into his body and pinch his flesh for a long time before he could be brought round. Now the cripple lay fully dressed on his tumbledown chair-bedstead, propping himself up on his elbows, and he was relating in a solemn voice how during his coma he had been visited by Shabsi Tsvi, who had cried unto him:

"Mordecai Joseph, son of Hanina the priest, be not crestfallen, for thou shaltst yet stand in the Temple and offer up sacrifices unto the Lord! • . ."

More than a score of men and women had squeezed their way into the tiny hut with its earthen floor; there was no lamp in the place, and Mordecai Joseph's wife, a decrepit old woman, laid a few dry twigs and coals upon the tripod under a hollow in the wall, and set light to them. The crackling flames sent sparks flying; reddish shadows danced about on the leaning whitewashed walls and on the criss-cross timbers of the low, sagging ceiling. In a corner upon a heap of rags, sat Mordecai Joseph's only daughter, a freak with a circular bloated face and big animal eyes. In the glow cast out by the embers, Mordecai Joseph's moist beard glistened like melting gold; his green eyes flashed like the eyes of a werewolf, and he uttered revelations of things mysterious in the feeble voice of a man on his deathbed addressing his dear ones for the last time:

"A great light shall flood the world ... a million

times more brilliant than the sun! . . . The infidels and the mockers shall instantly be struck blind. . . . Only the chosen ones shall escape. . . ."

That night Reb Bainish never slept.

The shutters in the rabbinical court-room were barred. Massive candles shed their light from two brass candlesticks bent with age. Reb Bainish strode back and forth with heavy tread, pausing from time to time to strain his ears, as if he were listening in to the rustling sound behind the walls. The wind tore at the roof, sighing every now and then like a human being. The branches outside the house crackled in the frost; the dogs in the neighbourhood kept up a long-drawn, persistent howl, then stopped, only to start afresh all together, full of animal forebodings. Reb Bainish picked out volume after volume from his bookcase, running his finger down the faded print, turning the pages, seeking for confirmation of the coming of the Messiah. His lofty forehead was furrowed in anguish, for the various texts contradicted one another. Each described different omens. From time to time Reb Bainish sat down at the table, rested his head on a key which happened to have been left there, and his breath came in gasps as though he were snoring. Then all at once he would lift himself to his feet, greatly perturbed, with a red scar imprinted crossways between his eyes. He began pacing to and fro swiftly, colliding with the furniture, oblivious of the huge twofold shadow that followed him about, now climbing up the walls on to the ceiling, now gliding over the floor and trembling as if it had the ague. Although the stove was heated and glowing, a chill kept stealing its way into the room. Only at daybreak did Groinim, the beadle, come and heap logs on to the fire. Reb Bainish

looked at him strangely, as if he did not recognize the man, and he bade him:

"Go and fetch me the missionary!"

The stranger had passed the night in a hostel, and Groinim was obliged to rouse him from his slumbers. It was quite early as yet, for there were still some stars showing in the cloudy sky. Thick snow, dry as salt, was drifting down and it lashed the face furiously as though it were being flung out of a bucket. Reb Bainish put on his fur-lined coat, went out on to the threshold to receive his visitor. Putting up his beaver collar and slipping his hands into his sleeves, he kept stamping about, turning this way and that, to keep out the cold. From the snowdrifts, as from a wilderness, emerged a man covered in white, who swayed to and fro, now sinking knee-deep, now rising up again, as though he were afloat. Reb Bainish glanced up at the twilit sky, and murmured:

"Help us, O Lord!..."

No one was ever to know what passed between Reb Bainish and the missionary—neither the searching questions of the one, nor the explanations of the other. Only one thing leaked out: straightaway after the interview the missionary drove away on the same sledge as that on which he had arrived. The morning was well advanced when his departure was discovered. It was Groinim, the beadle, who divulged the news in the synagogue, acting the simpleton, but with a roguish twinkle in his squinting left eye. The congregation could scarcely believe their own ears. Reb Mordecai Joseph, who had come that day to the synagogue before sunrise, as was his wont, and had settled down in a corner to study the Cabbalistic Book of the Creation, **turned**

sickly pale. He guessed at once who was to blame, and his broad hairy nostrils began to dilate in anger.

"I tell you, this is Bainish's dirty work!" he bawled, and raised his crutch as if to strike someone with it. "Bainish has driven him away from us!"

Reb Mordecai Joseph was the Rabbi's foe of olden times, hating him for his profound learning, envious of his reputation, and never did he miss an opportunity of vilifying him. Whenever there was popular unrest, he incited the mob to smash the windows in Reb Bainish's house; it was his everlasting cry that the Rabbi cared only for his personal dignity and held the community in contempt. What angered Reb Mordecai Joseph most was the fact that Reb Bainish would not permit the study of the Cabbala; hence he always called the Rabbi plain Bainish, without the deferential title of Reb. Now Reb Mordecai Joseph stood thumping his fist on the lectern, and instantly poisoned the air:

"Bainish is an unbeliever!" he yelled. "He spurns the God of Israel! . . ."

An old man of note ran up to Mordecai Joseph and smacked him on either cheek. The blood immediately began to spurt from the cripple's nose. A number of young men jumped up from their seats and removed their belts in readiness. The cantor rapped on the lectern to secure silence, but no one paid any attention. Jews with big black phylacteries strapped on their foreheads and arms, interrupted their prayers and began to push forward with lowered heads as if they would butt one another. An emaciated, dark-skinned man with a scraggy little beard, who towered head and shoulders above the congregation, swayed to and fro like a tree in a gale, and he shrieked :

"Sacrilege! Bloodshed in the synagogue! Ay, ay! . . ."

"Bainish is a freethinker!" Mordecai Joseph roared, and, swinging round, began to hop along with the help of his crutch at an amazing speed, as if he were hastening to meet someone. "Perish, Bainish! Perish! . . ."

On his flaming red beard gleamed drops of blood; in his low, yellow, wrinkled brow, like parchment, deep furrows settled, and his general demeanour was of a lion pouncing on its prey. Reb Sandel Jilkovker, another of the Rabbi's foes of olden times, called out suddenly:

"Reb Bainish can't trifle with the whole world! He was ever a man of little faith!"

"Rotter!" someone exclaimed, and there was no telling whether this referred to the Rabbi or to his opponents.

"Infidel!"

"Sinner and seducer!"

"Hellhound!"

"Unclean beast!"

"Heeelp! Satan has been let loose on us!" Mordecai Joseph bellowed, waving his hands frenziedly above his head. "The cur Bainish disbelieves in the Messiah!. . ."

"Shabsi Tsvi is a false Messiah!" someone called out in a shrill, youthful voice.

All eyes turned on the speaker. It was Hanina the Simpleton, a stranger in these parts who had left his wife to come to Goray and study, living on the charity of the community. He was one of Reb Bainish's most brilliant pupils—a tall, gawky, ailing fellow, with a bad stoop, as if he were about to break in half, with short-sighted eyes and a long pale face overgrown with little yellowish clumps of beard. His gaberdine was always undone, his vest open, a skinny hairy breast peeping out

from the shadows. Now he stood bending over his desk, blinking his purblind little eyes and smiling rather foolishly, as he waited for someone to challenge him and enter on a debate, when he would be able to display his great store of learning. Mordecai Joseph, who had always borne this youth a grudge for his ability to recite hundreds of pages of the Talmud by heart and for his meddlesome habits, suddenly hobbled up to him with that agility which comes to the halt when their temper is roused and they forget their disability.

"You too, you stinking carcass?" he shrilled. "Seize him, folks!"

Several young men dashed up, caught hold of Hanina by his ritual fringe garment and began tugging him each in a different direction. Hanina opened his mouth to scream ; he struggled, twisted his long neck and threw up his arms like a drowning man. His gaberdine was torn to shreds, his skull-cap fell to the floor, revealing an irregular, close-cropped skull from which two dishevelled sidelocks dangled like horns. Screaming for help, Hanina tried to defend himself, but youthful hands skilfully clamped his head, and flabby fists rained blows on him without mercy. Mordecai Joseph himself grabbed hold of the youth by one leg and helped carry him off; zealously he spat in his face and pinched large handfuls of flaccid flesh. Soon Hanina lay stretched out on a table, face down. They raised the skirts of his gaberdine. Mordecai Joseph was the first to strike.

"*Ze kaparusi,* this shall be my sacrifice ! " he said, rolling up his sleeve like a butcher, and down went his clenched fist with such force, that Hanina the Simpleton began to blubber all at once in a falsetto, like a schoolboy.

" *Ze halifusi,* this shall be my redemption!" Mordecai Joseph intoned, sighing, and delivered another whack.

" Ze hatarnagol yelech limeesa, this cockerel shall go to its death !" someone responded, and at this signal a veritable hail of blows descended from all quarters on Hanina the Simpleton.

Hanina uttered a rattling sound before losing consciousness.

When they lifted his prostrate figure off the" table, his face was livid, his jaws were interlocked. A youth ran out to fetch a bucket of water and drenched him from head to foot. Hanina quivered convulsively and relapsed again, lying motionless on the floor, all covered in blood, like a corpse. Everyone was seized with terror. The solitary woman saying her prayers in the gallery above began to howl and to wrench at the bars surmounting the parapet. Mordecai Joseph hobbled a few paces backwards, then thumped his crutch on the floor, and the fragment of his face showing from the immense growth of beard framing it was deathly pale.

"The sinner shall wither and perish!" he said. "And in his misery shall bear witness to the kingdom of heaven on earth!"

by

DAVID BERGELSON

★

THE POOR RICH*

"I'll be blowed! Look, there they go."

"As if they could help it!"

"Why, they've actually taken off their fur coats."

"See, they've stopped again. They're whispering to each other."

"Much good that will do them!"

Mean streets, shabby dwellings and damp basements—like bags turned inside out—were pouring their inhabitants out of doors in an endless stream. The main street was thick with people—on pavements, on balconies, on doorsteps. Everywhere smiling nostrils that seemed to be savouring the relish of some huge joke. The crowd were on tiptoe, gazing into the depths of the long street, everyone intent on seeing for himself the rich trooping off with their "dibs" to the Revolutionary Committee. The rich had turned the bank at the corner of the street into their headquarters, where they met to put their heads together. Outside, however, the onlookers were telling one another that it was worse than hopeless.

"Don't be barmy! They'll never wriggle out of it. Can't you see how they've got the wind up?"

Someone shouted out:

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

"My beauties! No more caviare and coffee for you!"

His voice from afar did not carry and he subsided into an awkward silence.

It was Purim time. The town—a medium-sized affair in the south—its cobble-stoned main street decorated gaily from end to end with red flags, bore a cheerful air, like eyes bright after weeping. Its people smelt of spring. At midday the late March sun would come out with unexpected warmth, thawing the snow that still clung here and there in the wrinkles of the surrounding hills; thawing it everywhere, even in the chilliest of out-of-the-way nooks. In company with the sun came a buzzing of insects in unclean courtyards and a continual dripping of water, which foretold the approach of the Passover. And not a single one of the ten thousand Jewish inhabitants could think of stopping at home, so animated and jolly was the scene out of doors.

Red Army men kept passing through the streets with an intent air (only yesterday had they delivered the town from two legions of Whites and from one of Petlurie's besotten divisions); new Red Army detachments were continually arriving.

"The cavalry are on the way," the news went round. "Two squadrons of them."

"Here come the field-guns. Just take a look at those guns!"

And the most important news of all: The newly formed Revolutionary Committee had imposed on the local rich a contribution of five million roubles. The townspeople were all agog to see what the upshot of this would be.

"What d'you think? Will they really fork out?"

"And then how! It'll break their poor hearts, but, by golly, they'll have to pay to the last farthing."

"I hear they've already buried their hoards in the ground."

"Well, well, that's too bad! They'll just have to dig 'em up again."

" Looks to me as though they're going to catch it hot."

"Here's Izzie. What has Izzie got to say?"

Izzie Javers, an out-of-work distiller's hand, a pock-marked and ginger-haired little fellow with a short tufted beard, who had on a loaned green overcoat a trifle too big for him, was busily darting about from group to group. Only recently, Vova Scrupnik, one of the local rich, had—in the middle of winter—discharged him from the distillery and put him on the street with his furniture and his family. Now, in his roomy loaned overcoat, Izzie was beside himself with joy, eyes twinkling. And in all that was happening he perceived the omnipotent hand of God.

"Lord love us, if this isn't . . . if it isn't just too good for words," he rejoiced, and further:

"Listen, folks. I'm a very poor man—you all know that—with more kids than I can afford to keep. And I have my mother on my hands. She's been ill and hasn't risen from her bed for two months. And yet, I don't care what you say, so help me God if this isn't the merriest Purim that has ever come to us Jews, save, of course, that first Purim when Haman was strung up."

His animated eyes kept prying everywhere for enthusiasts to share his merriment. Every now and again he buttonholed one of the local young Socialists, and whispered importantly into his ear :

" Now listen here ! What you ought to do is search the cellars of the rich. See? If you were to pass the tip on to the Revolutionary Committee. . . . See? See what I

mean? The rich always have a habit of burying their valuables—the deeper, the better."

That day, however, the Socialists—unlike their usual selves—were strangely reserved and nonchalant. By their sober demeanour, one might have thought that they had suddenly been converted to respectability and were piously observing the Fast of Esther. Like the rest of the townsfolk, they stood about, idly cracking sunflower seeds and casting sidelong glances. They were silent, oppressively silent, as if for the purpose of tantalizing the crowd. To make matters worse, the rich had begun to appear quite openly in the market-place, singly and in groups. When one of the loungers asked Moishele Klugman his opinion of what was going to happen, the rich man, as was his wont, did not even glance at the person who addressed him, and his answer came quite casually, as though he were unaware of anything unusual having taken place and still seemed to think that the whole world consisted of fools, with only one exception—himself.

"Happen?" he drawled. "Why, nothing!"

Just to show the crowd how little he cared for them, he at once began urging his wife to accompany him home.

"Come on," he said. "Don't let's waste our time here."

Izzie Javers nosed about from group to group. It annoyed him to see the throng in the market-place disperse. He was unable to keep still, and hastily, nervously, rubbed his hands..

The crowds grew thinner and thinner. They were all going to synagogue, to read the Book of Esther. Finally only one person remained out of doors—Izzie Javers.

With nightfall, a chilly wind blew up and a crackling dry frost set in, as it will do at Purim time. Lights flickered in the windows. The streets took on a weird expression.

With an uneventful air, a posse of Red soldiers passed through the town on horseback. Three members of the new Revolutionary Committee drove by in a swaying gig. They bore an intent yet faraway look. One might have thought they were not at all interested in what was going on in the newly captured town, did not even care about the contribution, notices concerning which were posted up at every street corner. Another man drove by with two Red soldiers mounted guard on the running-board—evidently the chief in person. Izzie Javers looked about him. It was quite dark by now, and not a soul was to be seen about, apart from himself and some stray dog which was sniffing at a wall prior to some nasty work.

With a sense of weariness and neglect, Izzie Javers slouched home. On the way, he stopped to look at a few of the large houses, where lived the rich. Beams of light were forcing their way out through slits between the shutters, with a calm and festive air, as if within a great many candles were lit and the Book of Esther was, as usual, being read to a gathering of womenfolk. From one of the back doors came a muffled stamping sound, like food being powdered with a pestle. Someone walked in, walked out. All as if nothing out of the way had happened. The rich were, as ever, rich, and perhaps—for aught he knew—they were now preoccupied with sending each other gifts by messenger, as is the custom at Purim time.

II

The next day. Belated snowflakes glistened in the air with a slow and lazy flutter.

Izzie Javers went out of doors immediately at daybreak, and found in the desolate market-place only one small group—five persons in all. They seemed to be still half asleep, a sour expression on their faces. And they were conversing with utmost reluctance, as though something painful had occurred overnight, their drowsy eyes being more expressive than their tongues. Whenever they did drop a remark, it sounded irritable, somehow, and incomprehensible.

"Now, whom did you say?"

They counted on their fingers.

"Moishele Klugman, is that right? And Yanovitch, the miller, and Feldman, the tobacco-manufacturer, and who else? Batchulis, is that right? Can't make it out. Batchulis went bankrupt about eighteen months ago."

"So what? Fat lot of difference it makes to *them* if a man says he's broke or not. If he's a man of property, that's good enough for *them"*

"Hold on. And Scrupnik, the distiller."

"Yes, Scrupnik was the first to get it in the neck. He was taken away at eleven last night."

"What's all this about?" Izzie interposed.

"The ten rich men," he was told.

"What ten rich men?"

"Who were taken to prison last night."

"They were taken to prison?"

There was an astonished look in Izzie's eyes as he scanned the wintry scene, all the surrounding gloom. He was even surprised by the drizzling snow, which fell

in such a deliberate, funereal manner, as though upon a cemetery; and he was surprised at those three members of the Revolutionary Committee who had driven by in the swaying gig last night with such a cold-blooded and humdrum mien, like strangers utterly unconcerned with whatever was going on in the town.

He returned to his own alley, home again—a large, dark and smoky basement. Here each of the numerous little beds with tangled bedclothes emitted its own odour of childhood, and in a corner, also, there was an aged ailing mother who had been bedridden for weeks.

Clad in an old cheap woollen *neglige,* his wife was stooping over the brightly glowing fireplace and was kneading reddish flour into small cakes, which she smeared with tea-leaves. And when she held them over the fire they immediately began to give off a truly Purim-like smell resembling stewed meat.

Izzie entered agitated, full of rejoicing.

"I say," he cried out. "They're in prison!"

His aged, ailing mother was sitting up in bed, with a soiled nightcap on her head, the skin of her wrinkled face deathly pale and her livid nose so desiccated, that—like parched earth—it seemed on the point of turning to dust. The old woman's dangling legs were wrapped in rags. Not wishing to create the impression of a worthless idler, a mere extra mouth to feed, she was in the habit of uttering her asthmatic cough at regular intervals, with greater frequency than she really had need of.

"Who's gone to prison?" she groaned, painfully and deliberately.

"Who d'you think?" Izzie gaily lifted his sagging trousers. "Why, the rich have gone to prison!"

"The rich (cough, cough!)? What wrong have they done?"

" They're trying to dodge payment of the five millions, so they've gone to clink."

His wife at the stove stopped scrubbing the trough for an instant, and looked round. Two angry eyes measured him from head to foot.

"Now, didn't I tell you to keep your nose out of this? Didn't I? As if we never had enough troubles of our own!"

"What have I done now?[5]' Izzie growled.

"Nothing!" There was a poisonous look in her eyes. "You take your coat off and stop indoors!"

" All right, all right, I'll stop indoors."

Izzie had no intention of keeping his word. He just waited for her to look the other way, and then was off again for the day.

Now everybody out of doors knew exactly when and how many of the rich had been imprisoned in the course of the night.

"Ten rich men, ten little dearies!"

As on the previous day, Red Army troops on horseback trotted with industrious mien through the streets of the town, inquisitively eyeing the crowds the while, which multiplied apace. Again the local Socialists stood about like unmindful outsiders, whistling softly and shrinking into themselves when approached, as though fearful of exchanging a word.

A few of the wives of the arrested men picked their way through the throng, always walking singly and clad in cheap coats and shawls that they had obviously borrowed from their maids.

"Look at her," the crowd pointed at Moishele Klug-

man's pretty young wife. "She's gone and left her Persian lamb coat at home."

Her face was flushed and puffy. Fearful of meeting the inquisitive eyes all round, she looked straight ahead of her with a peculiar embarrassment—the sort which men are quick to notice and smile at when Jewish women hurriedly leave the ritual bath-house after the menstrual cleansing. In the market-place she stopped to speak with two relatives and with some of the local rich.

"What are we standing idle for?" she asked in fright. "Why don't we try and do something?"

"What can we do?"

The speaker was Michael Shliamis, the wealthy cloth merchant—a youngish man with yellow, unshaven cheeks. He was never actually ill, yet always considered himself something of an invalid, and therefore spoke softly, huskily.

"What can we do?" he repeated. "We've sent word to the Revolutionary Committee to say that five million roubles is just perfectly ridiculous. And well they know it, so there you are!"

"But they've been taken to prison. My husband's in prison."

Michael Shliamis flared up.

"Well what of it? They'll be detained for a while, and then, when the Revolutionary Committee sees that there's nothing doing, they'll be released again."

"It's all right for you to talk. You'd sing a different tune if, God forbid, you were taken to prison."

At this, Michael flew into a rage.

"All right; if you like you can go and lay information against me. Maybe that'll satisfy you!"

Izzie's eyes roved eagerly from place to place. He

quitted the group of the wealthy to join a large circle of middle-class men who were engaged in a heated argument in the very centre of the market-place and were counting on their fingers the wealthiest members of the community. Baruch Hirsh, an unemployed bookkeeper, had just completed his own calculations.

"Twenty-four rich men, exactly twenty-four. Fleece them as much as you like, but you won't find five million roubles between the lot of them."

"That's what you say! You're a knowing one."

"You mark my words ; if I say so, it is so."

"What a headpiece you've got! What a brain!"

"Well, I suppose you know better!"

"It's not a case of knowing better. It's a case of bootlicking. You see, it all depends. Sometimes, to fawn on a rich man, you must say he's got pots of money. At other times, you must say he hasn't got a dime."

"In other words, you'd accuse me of bootlicking?"

"For sure, it's not *me* that's bootlicking."

"You hound!"

"Baruch Hirsh, have you taken leave of your senses? Baruch Hirsh, come away I say. I've got something to tell you, Baruch Hirsh!"

Izzie Javers tugged so persistently at the infuriated man's sleeve, that he finally succeeded in drawing him aside.

"Listen here, Baruch Hirsh! Didn't you get the sack from Feldman, the tobacco-manufacturer, same as I did from Scrupnik? So what sense is there in taking their part? Be reasonable. Just take a look at those tobacco hands. Tell me, why did Feldman lock them out, eh? Simply because they asked for a rise. So there you are!"

But Baruch Hirsh, with his pale, sharp-featured, long-nosed face perched on a tall and crooked body, was still tingling with the excitement of battle, still mindful of his cause with the group of middle-class householders, and he continually threw glowering glances that way, cursing vehemently all the while:

"May he drop dead on the spot, the filthy hound! To think that he called me a crawler. So he'd call me a crawler, would he?"

Izzie Javers soon gave him up as a bad job.

A little way off, the female hands of the tobacco factory were standing *en masse,* all wearing uniform cheap jackets padded with cotton wool. Izzie found his sister in their midst—an unmarried woman who was beginning to be talked of as an old maid. He went up to her,

"Well, any news, Henni-Malka? I hear the girls are going to lodge a complaint with the Revolutionary Committee against Feldman?"

"We were going to, but none of us has got the pluck to act as spokesman." She gazed ahead with a faraway look in her squinting eyes. She heaved a sigh. "They're afraid. No guts!"

Suddenly Izzie noticed that the crowd in a corner of the market-place were making a rush for the Jewish savings-bank. So he joined in.

"What's up? What's up?"

He was told:

"Nothing much. The rich have got together in the savings-bank. They're going to try and work out an arrangement between themselves."

III

At dusk a number of rumours began to spread.

"The rich have settled their differences."

"They're going to hand over half a million.''

"Where are they?"

"They've gone to see the Revolutionary Committee."

At a latish hour, the Revolutionary Committee accepted the proffered half million, without making any comment. Soon after, voices could be heard conversing in the darkness of the streets.

"Hallo, any news?"

"Yes, it's all right."

" All our troubles are over."

And early in the morning, the populace woke up to find newly posted bills staring down from every point of vantage in the town :

"The bourgeoisie are labouring under the misapprehension that sweet angels are having a little fun with them. Unless the outstanding four and a half million roubles are forthcoming by eight o'clock this evening, the first three of the ten magnates under arrest will be shot at dawn the next day, viz. Scrupnik, Feldman, and Klugman.

"{Signed) THE REV. COM."

Izzie Javers's wife brought the news home when she came back from her morning shopping expedition, and she at once took her husband to task, giving him a no uncertain piece of her mind,

"Didn't I tell you all along that no good would come of all this monkey-business? Didn't I? Dear me, as if we never had enough worries already. . . . More trouble!

So now it's come to shooting people. A nice thing, I don't think, with you having your finger in the pie. As if I wanted to see people shot!"

Izzie jumped.

" What's all this about shooting? What are you talking of? Have I ordered anybody to be shot? If the rich refuse to part with their 'dibs,' it's their funeral!"

And Izzie rushed out into the street.

The town, usually so sober at that early hour, was dizzy with excitement. People were dashing about in queer haste. In the market-place, opposite the two-storied house where the money-lending and savings-bank had its offices, stood a great crowd, hushed and expectant. All was solemn, as though at any moment a coffin containing a corpse would be borne out and then everybody would at once fall into the funeral procession and march away to the cemetery. From within, came such a chorus of yells, one might have imagined that at least a score of people were having their teeth pulled out simultaneously, or were perhaps being forced into a fiery furnace, and the intended victims defended themselves with might and main, shrieking, mad with fear. It was the local rich in conference since the small hours, at loggerheads over the new list setting forth the additional amounts to be contributed by each individual.

Izzie Javers pushed through a multitude of people thronging the steps, squeezed his way into a corridor and passed through the first door he saw, which led into a large front room. It was black with people. The confusion of voices was so complete, it sounded like an infuriated beehive. The onlookers kept chewing tobacco, spitting, and blinking. At the large table, around which the rich were seated, reigned pandemonium. They all

kept jumping up from their chairs, heaping curses on one another and brandishing menacing fists. At one end of the table, with a sheet of notepaper in front of him and a long pen in his hand, sat Baruch Hirsh, the book-keeper, all doubled up, his sharp-featured, long-nosed face expressing various shades of bewilderment, for he was at a complete loss whose instructions to follow.

" Cross it all out," first one and then another rich man would shout at him. "You'll draw that list up the way I tell you to."

By now, the yellowish, unshaven cheeks of Michael Shliamis, the cloth magnate, had turned perfectly corpse-like. His voice was terribly hoarse, his lips parched—the skin cracked and peeling. Every now and again he jumped up from his seat and thumped the table.

"Well, how much are you going to give?" he screamed, with flashing eyes, at Moise-Laib, owner of a chain of confectionery stores, who sat facing him at the table. "Why doesn't the man say something? My question to him is, how much is he going to give?"

Moise-Laib, an elderly man of gigantic stature, with a fiery red nape and a milky white beard, sat at his ease, akimbo, as before, continually blinking and working his lips as though he were rolling wine round his tongue. At last he placed his large puffy hands on his knees, nodded his head once or twice, and mentioned so negligible a sum, that it threw everybody at the table into hysterics. Yelling, they all jumped up from their seats once more, shook their fists, and as before Michael Shliamis outdid them all.

"What sort of fools does he take us for? He's worth millions, the miser!"

" Yisroel-David, Yisroel-David," cried Izzie Javers, prodding a man in the back, in whom he had recognized one of his close neighbours, a carpenter by trade. He was a broad-shouldered, evil-tempered fellow who both summer and winter wore a sheepskin jacket under his grey gaberdine and who always smelt of a newly planed plank of pinewood. " Yisroel-David, listen here, Yisroel-David!"

Yisroei-David paid no heed. At present Yisroel-David had on his mind a thought that he considered of importance for the community, and as was common with him on such occasions, not even the pincers he used for extracting nails would have been any use in extracting a bit of sense out of his head. He was scarcely aware of the fact that someone was jabbing him in the back, much less did he care who that someone was. With the strength born of righteousness, he battled his way to the table occupied by the rich, and brought his fist down with a right mighty thump.

"What d'ye mean by putting Iserlis's widow down on the list? What d'ye mean by it? You can't do that, just because she used to be well-to-do once upon a time."

His eyes glared at the assembly with a wild light in them. Oh, yes, he knew what he was talking about. He himself had a few roubles owing to him by the widow for work done months ago, and did he ever press her for payment? No, because he was a gentleman. . . .

Meanwhile, a little removed from the table, in company with the other rich men's wives, Moishele Klugman's wife, in her plain attire and coarse white shawl, was still wearing that strangely embarrassed expression on her face. She had already swooned twice in quick

succession, and twice had they brought her round with smelling-salts and wet towels, quite like the Day of Atonement. It was said that early that morning she had received a note from her husband in prison reading :

" M y case is desperate. Spare no effort. . . ."

Consequently, she was most profuse in her assurances that the three thousand odd roubles which she had subscribed represented all her remaining worldly possessions, without even making allowances for undischarged debts. Each time the colour returned to her cheeks, she began to weep anew and to relate how Moishele had not had the least suspicion of what lay in store for him, and how, when they came to arrest him in the small hours, she had implored him to take some food along, but he had refused and had departed only with a small pillow.

"A little pillow from one of the children's cots."

She had an idea that just these details—how Moishele had refused food, taking only a small pillow from one of the children's cots—these poignant details could not but affect her hearers. Anyhow, she herself was impressed by them beyond all measure. Each time she repeated the story, she was overcome and fit to go off once more into a dead faint.

"Yisroel-David!" Izzie tugged hard at the sleeve of his neighbour, the carpenter. "Tell me, why aren't they all taken to prison? Answer me that one!"

Yisroel-David still stood at the table, and glowered at the assembly with terrible wrath in his eyes. He was surprised at his own restraint.

"What's the matter with me? Why don't I box their ears for them, I wonder?"

Izzie himself was burdened with what struck him as

being a really brilliant idea, and he simply itched to pass it on. He began to squeeze his way out. But when he got to the front door and looked down from the top of the stairs, strangely enough he did not recognize the crowd before him. He gained the impression that he had left this multitude, not earlier in the day, but a very long time ago, certainly a few decades ago. He grew confused, and a new idea entered his mind, which was even more brilliant than the first—so he imagined. He sought out among the crowd one of the local young Socialists, Hatzkel, the cantor's boy, and began to prod him.

"Please, Hatzkel, tell me, d'you think that one rich man cares a damn if another rich man is shot? Does Moishe-Laib, the confectioner, care if Klugman is shot, eh? See what I mean?"

"Well, I suppose not, really." The young Socialist assumed a melancholy look and began to detach himself. "A sense of responsibility for other people isn't part of the bourgeois code."

"That's just it! That's just it! As you say," Izzie caught up his words in delight. "It's just as you say."

Somewhat later, he stumbled across Yisroel-David, the carpenter.

"Comeon," he urged. "Gome on, don't moon about like a silly ass. Let's go and tell the Revolutionary Committee that the bourgeoisie have no sense of responsibility."

Yisroel-David did not grasp these words at all. He imagined that they referred to Iserlis's widow, whose name had been put down on the list.—The blighters! To think that he, a poor man, was ready to forgo the few roubles owing to him for work done, while those

moneybags at the table were mean enough to put her name down on the list. Still agitated, he buttoned up his gaberdine and strode off with Izzie to the Revolutionary Committee.

There they found no end of people waiting in the antechamber. Every face bore its own gloomy, care-worn expression. Even the representative of the Revolutionary Committee who came out to interview the callers, had a worried, distraught look. He engaged in lengthy conversation with each of them in turn. In particular, he spent a long time talking to a certain grey-headed farmer, who owned six pigs and whose seventh, a sow, had that day been commandeered and slaughtered by Red troops. At last, when the representative of the Revolutionary Committee got to Izzie Javers and Yisroel-David, he knitted his brow, scratched the back of his head and neck, then shrugged his shoulders, while the two had their say out.

"I don't understand a word. What's that?"

He inclined his ear every now and then.

"What bourgeoisie?"

He finally began to question them about their personal status and occupation; learning that the one was a distiller's hand, the other a carpenter, he upbraided them for being miserable wretches and for interceding on behalf of the rich. He as good as showed them the door, simply threw them out.

Izzie Javers came away deeply offended, and with the conviction that the Revolutionary Committee was so much rubbish.

"What a Revolutionary Committee!" he said. "And to think that I believed they knew their business."

He lost Yisroel-David on the way back. The carpenter

was claimed by his wife, who was standing with folded arms over an upturned tub with broken hoops.

"Yisroel-David," she called out in a languid voice. "Don't you think you'd better get those tables finished. The customer has sent round twice for them."

It was already twilight.

Now groups were standing about even in the back streets. The latest information was that the wives of the ten arrested men had already parted with all the cash they possessed; that Moishele Klugman's wife had even given up her jewels and her pearls; that the Revolutionary Committee had again been approached and had issued a statement:

"The executions will be postponed for one day, but if the full five millions are not paid in by six o'clock to-morrow evening, all ten men under arrest will then be shot simultaneously."

Izzie Javers, like his neighbours, was now looking quite depressed.

"What does it all mean?" he asked in alarm.

The reply was:

"What do you expect? It's no joke. The way we all figured it out was that after they had handed over a reasonable sum, they'd be discharged. But by the looks of things now, they're really going to be shot."

"That's bad_____"

"Why, that's just what everybody's saying. Sure, it's bad!"

IV

The first of the ten men listed for shooting, Scrupnik, the distiller, was granted a last request: he might go home to take leave of his family.

Two armed Red soldiers escorted him home at a leisurely pace. A little way behind, two more soldiers followed on horseback, proceeding at what seemed an even more leisurely pace. It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Beneath the overcast sky, plain grey birds were flying low and were plainly filling the air with their cheerful song.

Scrupnik's escort avoided the town on the right bank of the river, and slowly trudged along the slippery, litter-strewn track on the other side, without exchanging a word. Viewed from a distance, they did not seem a specially interesting lot—a few men merely taking a stroll.

Scrupnik, a middle-aged corpulent man with an importantly puffed-up belly, like that of a respectable pregnant woman, with a few greying strands in his black mop of hair and with his wonted expression of deafness —the deafness of proud and busy men—walked in their midst aimlessly, without a thought in his head. His lips were pursed, as though he were about to utter a rude noise. He looked about him with a stupid expression. The only thing he was aware of was that his crumpled gaberdine, in which he had lolled about in his cell for the past two nights, had suddenly become quite roomy at the very place where it had always been most tight. When he now placed his hands in his two back pockets, and slithered them to and fro, his paunch did not strain away in front as he had always known it to do. For the rest, he was still perfectly composed, secure in the conviction that no harm would come to him. Stuff and nonsense ! They would not really shoot him.

It afforded him much satisfaction to note that he was not being led through the streets of the town, where he

had many enemies. He had recently been involved in a scandal, when the teacher at the Jewish school had publicly accused him of converting municipal funds to his own use. On that occasion, almost all the blacksmiths living in the neighbourhood of the bridge had loyally taken his part ; they removed their children from the school, and one dark night they cornered the teacher in the market-place and beat him up for all they were worth. Nevertheless, Scrupnik had been forced to resign from the town council, and after that fall, the number of his enemies had increased. Now he would have hated it, to be seen in his present plight and to be exulted over by his enemies.

At home he found a scene of desolation. No attempt had been made to tidy up the place for days. Unheated rooms, with beds all in disorder. Remnants of meals on the table, spreading an odour of dead mice. There was no one to meet him, except the barefooted, tousled-headed, and half-witted maid-servant. She uttered a bellow and threw up her hands, as though she had seen a ghost. With a weird, long-drawn shriek, she rushed straight out of doors, and soon a throng of women and children, sisters and relatives, neighbours, and even passers-by who were complete strangers, flocked into the room. The whole house swarmed with them.

All at once, they raised their voices in wailing and weeping, as though he were a corpse, stone cold, and they had gathered to pay him their last respects. As the crowd grew denser, the sound of mourning gained in volume. At first, Scrupnik took this dirge-like chorus in bad part.

"What the dickens d'you mean by kicking up such a

row?" he shouted at the crowd. "Stop snivelling over me, will you!"

But at this, they gave way to a renewed burst of lamentations, even more sorrowful than before. In a flash it all came home to him. If the crowd were bewailing him in that fashion, obviously his case was desperate. The townspeople were probably better acquainted with the real situation than he was.

"Does that signify," a new thought struck him for the first time, "that I'm really going to be shot?"

And suddenly he was overcome by pity for himself and for those around, who were mourning him so. His mouth gaped idiotically, and his eyes goggled. He was quite unaware of the fact that the Red soldiers were tugging urgently at his sleeve, impatient to be off.

"Let them have your jewellery," he exclaimed to his wife. "Hurry! Take it to the Revolutionary Committee."

"Oi," his wife moaned in a funereal sing-song, swaying incessantly to' and fro like a stricken mourner over a precious corpse. "Oi, they've got it all. They've got it all."

All this while, she never looked his way, but beat her head with clenched fists.

"Well, let them have the distillery," he said softly, as though absorbed in thought.

His wife, however, never ceased swaying to and fro, and she still moaned in the same funereal tones :

"Oi, they won't accept that. They won't accept that."

She blew her nose through her fingers like a common woman, and then, dropping the sing-song, said in her everyday voice :

"According to them, the distillery is their property in any case. That's been confiscated, they say, and is theirs."

Thereupon Scrupnik was struck dumb, and utter confusion showed in every wrinkle of his face. He raised his hand querulously, as though he were holding counsel with it and were asking it:

"What now? What else can I offer them?"

The Red soldiers began tugging him by the sleeve of his gaberdine with greater force.

"Come on! Your time's up."

"Good-bye!" he gulped softly and half tearfully.

And in response to this word of farewell, the chorus of lamentations rose on a new wave, until it reached a heartrending crest, which suddenly swept all his courage away. He again grew very confused. Afterwards he had no recollection of how his wife fell on his neck, nor how he reached the street with the two soldiers on either side of him. He heard, as though in a dream, the sound of running footsteps. A member of his family was trying to reach him, but the mounted guards allowed no one to approach. They levelled their rifles.

As for himself, a terrible calm had descended upon him. He neither thought, nor looked about him. Now he was being taken back by a short cut through the town, and indeed right through the main street, but even so, it was no concern of his. People flocked out from their houses to catch a glimpse of him. Someone at the back of the crowd cried with a catch in his voice:

"Oh, Lord, they're taking him away to be shot."

A frail little woman in a cotton skirt and cotton blouse darted across the road. She had not put anything on to protect herself from the cold, intending only to

run across the way. The woman suddenly wheeled round, as though caught in a whirlwind. She inclined her head to one side. With her cheek resting on an up-turned hand, she struck Scrupnik, in the turmoil of his mind, like some apparition of a young and slender goddess. He noticed that she was looking him in the face with great commiseration, and he recognized her—Esther-Rachel, the "lady of loose morals". (In the town it was common talk that she frequently visited him in the distillery on dark nights.) All around, a large throng pushed and scurried to and fro, but, apart from that woman, Scrupnik did not recognize a single face, as though he were passing through an entirely strange town—such indeed was his impression. When, however, he reached the many-headed assembly that was still stationed outside the savings-bank, he stopped and sobbed :

"Good-bye, friends! . . ."

The crowd turned his way and were petrified.

"Friends, forgive me. . . ."

Some weeping broke out here and there.

"Friends, don't be hard on me if I have wronged you. . . ."

The Red soldiers began to hustle him peremptorily. The crowd began rushing towards him. The mounted Red soldiers scattered them and galloped backwards and forwards to prevent anyone from getting past.

"Come on, come on!"

Thereupon the multitude resumed its former position outside the savings-bank, and gabbled away with all the tongues at its disposal.

"God punish the rich!"

"They're too mean to fork out, that's what it is."

"A plague on them! They could save Scrupnik, if they weren't such filthy misers."

"We ought to start a public subscription, to save him."

"Let's get together."

"Every little bit helps."

"The Revolutionary Committee accepts silver, you know."

"Come on, then! What are you wasting time for?"

"Let's spread out over the town in two's."

"Hi, Izzie Javers! Where's Izzie got to?"

v

Izzie, in his roomy loaned overcoat, tore down the alley to Yisroel-David's house, and looking in through the window, saw Yisroel-David in his sheepskin jacket hard at work at his bench, planing the edge of a long plank of pinewood.

"Yisroel-David," he called, attracting his attention by banging on the window. "Man alive, can't you hear me? Have you gone crazy? Here we are, worried to death by all these executions. And yet you stand scraping a plank. What on earth are you thinking of?"

"What can I do to help?"

Yisroel-David rushed out with a look of alarm, donning his grey gaberdine as he went.

"Come on, you silly ass, let's run round and tell everybody to drop tools. The blacksmiths have already stopped work. All the smithies on the riverside have shut down. The tailors have all come out too; they're in the market-place. They're going to make a collection of

twenty-five kopeck pieces, that's what they're going to do."

They dropped in on Sender, the cooper, who was busy hammering a cask outside his dwelling; they ordered him to take off his apron and join up. Then they told Jonah, the twiner, to cease spinning his wheel, and all four of them betook themselves to the market-place. There they ran into the female hands of the tobacco factory, who stood *en masse* in their uniform jackets padded with cotton wool, listening to an address by a young woman worker wearing a red shawl.

"They're a rotten, lousy lot! The blood will be on their own hands, if one of their number is shot. They've got the money, only they love it too dearly to part with it."

It was here that Izzie lost contact with his three companions. He searched for them for a while, then gave it up and began jostling his way once more into the beleaguered savings-bank. By now, the shouting was all being done by middle-class householders, workers, and nondescripts. The big table, around which the wealthy had cursed at one another all through the night, was largely occupied by the moderately well-to-do, who made the greatest possible uproar as they accepted contributions of twenty-five kopeck pieces and silver spoons from individuals among the crowd. In their midst, like a man forlorn, reclined the wealthy cloth merchant with the parched lips; every now and then, he leaned his yellowish, unshaven cheeks on his hand, dozed off and woke up with a sudden start, as though he were in synagogue listening to a sermon.

"Baruch Hirsh," a cry would go up from time to time, rousing the semi-prostrate book-keeper. "Baruch

Hirsh, put down fifty kopecks received from Ginger-locks, you know what's 'er name, Leah. A silver spoon from Alter, the hunchback."

Just then an aged and stooping woman, with a creased, livid face, tottered up to the table after a supreme effort —it was Izzie Javers's mother. The old threadbare shawl covering her deeply bowed back savoured of scorched feathers ; the skinny hands which she produced from under the shawl were even more livid than her face. Izzie Javers perceived in that hand a very old and very familiar wine goblet : it had been in the home so long as ever he could remember, for it was a family heir-loom.

"Shush!" a cry went up at the table. "We can't hear ourselves speak."

In the hush which descended for an instant, the old woman could be heard to groan and sob a little. As she spoke, she wrinkled up her nose plaintively, as though recounting her complaints to a doctor.

" Of course, he treated my son very badly indeed, did Scrupnik ; sacked him from the distillery in the middle of winter, he did. But all the same, I shouldn't like to see him shot. There! I've brought you my silver wine goblet."

Touched by her own words and by the loss of her one and only wine goblet, which she was sacrificing on be-half of her worst enemy, she again uttered a sob. After many long years of drought, moisture came again to her nose and eyes. Her face began working with emotion, and she squeezed out two tears. Suddenly a stray voice from without could be heard screaming what sounded like important news. There was a mad rush for the windows and doors, glass panes were splintered on the

way, and everybody ran out, as though the place were on fire.

"What's up?"

"What's up?"

"Nothing. It's Moishele Klugman's turn now. He's being taken back to prison. They let him go home, to say good-bye to his family."

When Izzie Javers, amid a confusion of many other people, reached the street, all he saw was a scattered crowd on the run. From all sides people were hastening down the road. In the distance he sighted a small force of Red soldiers vanishing over the bridge. They were Klugman's escort. A little girl, a daughter of the rich, with plump limbs and thick reddish hair flowing in the wind, rushed out of her house into the street, with arms outstretched, as though seeking to capture an escaped fowl. But, unexpectedly, she stopped short, rending the air with a maddeningly shrill and hysterical scream. Suddenly, about ten men on horseback appeared on the bridge, stemming the flow of people and drawing a cordon.

On that self-same evening, the ten rich men who had been thrown into prison were set free.

It turned out that all those notices about shooting the prisoners, which the Revolutionary Committee had posted up everywhere in the past few days, had been nothing more than an empty threat. Their only object had been to squeeze as much money as possible out of the wealthy inhabitants.

The entire populace felt that they had been made a fool of and were very sore about it.

"Why didn't we mind our own business?"

"Why did we create all that fuss?"

Izzie Javers in particular could not pardon his own blind stupidity.

"What a shame," he moaned. "My silver goblet! Too late! Oh, I could kick myself! Oh, what a fool I was!"

Even his aged mother, with her soiled nightcap, furrowed face and livid nose, sat up in bed with a very woebegone air.

"Bah," she said. "What a business! The light wasn't worth the candle."

by

ALFRED DOEBLIN

★

THE LION AND THE DOG*

(A Fable)

T hen they performed the longest, most beautiful and most moving play of all. On account of it, the strolling players were driven out of many townships. It was the *Fable of the Lion and the Wild Dog.*

The house of a chieftain was shown thatched with straw. In front of the door, sat the festively attired chieftain with a red-tattooed maiden, his daughter. The chieftain placed his hand before his mouth, cupped it and called out :

"This is my daughter Mutiyamba. I wish to wed her to the strongest and handsomest man. I am wealthy. I ask for no payment from the bridegroom of my choosing. Go ye, and call out everywhere, in the steppe, at the river, in the banana groves, on the sandy beach : 'The chieftain Kaffangi desires to give his daughter Mutiyamba in marriage to the handsomest and strongest male'."

Now there was a gentle youth, Liongo, an orphan, who loved the maiden. He wore a loin-cloth woven of straw; was unskilled in the art of throwing the lance. He too went forth into the steppe and along the river, into the banana groves and on to the sandy beach, to cry the news that Kaffangi wished to give the beautiful

* Translated from the German by Morris Kreitman.

slender Mutiyamba—alas, his beloved Mutiyamba—to the handsomest and strongest male. He preceded the other heralds.

At the rainwater ponds the gentle Liongo stopped to sing ; he sang between great trees in the bush and under butter-trees upon which monkeys leapt to and fro; everywhere, in the mountain gorges, whence came the buzz of fat wasps, and in the rank thickets of Sorghum, poor Liongo sang, ringing forth the praises of Mutiyamba in order to attract the strongest and handsomest male. He sang of the paint bedecking her body.

"Her breasts are like young bulbs. No tree bears so many fruits as the clothes she wears. On her head, her ears, her lips, her arms, hang as many jewels as there are flashes of lightning in a storm. Her glance is sweet and languid. Her legs are slender and brown as copper. Who can behold her without being consumed with longing for her? Your eyes must close bedazzled, as though you had peeped into a vessel full of hot vapours. And when you have closed them, you find no relief, for your eyes continue to burn. Whosoever sees Mutiyamba, must give proof of the stoutness of his heart. Stout his heart must be to surmount every obstacle to win her. Hundreds will aspire after her!"

A young yellow lion lay in the steppe. He heard Liongo's singing. And as Liongo stopped to extol the maiden in the ravine of the bats, a wild dog also crept out of his lair.

By the time the gentle envoy of the chieftain returned to the palace, many youths had already presented themselves and been rejected by Kaffangi. Accompanying poor, hoarse Liongo, were the lion and the wild dog. The lion met in combat and knocked down the two strongest

youths. At a bound he leapt over the highest fence of Kaffangi's homestead. He swallowed a pailful of palm-wine at a gulp and bore himself upright as before. To him did Kaffangi give his daughter. The magnificent, yellow-maned lion sat down beside her. Mutiyamba was alarmed at this savage beast having become her husband. But she was proud of his strength.

And for days after, they celebrated the nuptials. The wild dog, Kri, had not at first even dared to show himself to the chieftain. Now he ventured to crouch on the floor of the hall, beside the young lion, who was not at his ease among the humans at the table.

"You, lion, do not know the manners here. If you would eat, you must help yourself to all the porridge," the dog whispered up.

The lion reached out with his paws for the large bowl and swallowed its contents. The guests looked straight ahead of them in embarrassment. Kaffangi, the chief-tain, pretended to take no notice. He ordered a fresh bowl and set it before the bridegroom. Kri now rose on his hind legs.

"You being the bridegroom, you must give presents. As a souvenir, you must pour a spoonful of porridge into the hand of each guest."

The lion wiped his mouth, got up, pressed the large bowl to his breast and spilled some millet-gruel onto the hand of each guest. The first few kept still, the others did not wait for their turn, but fled. Ominously Kaffangi knitted his brow as he sat in his place. He summoned the attendants, ordered them to restore the guests to a presentable condition and to call in those that were outside. The repast then proceeded in utter silence.

"An absurd company," whispered Kri, as they sat in solitude. "Don't you care, though."

The bridal procession drove through the village. The magnificent bridegroom sat beside Mutiyamba on the oxen-drawn carriage, preceded and followed by a blast of trumpets and a mighty beating of drums. When they came up to Kaffangi's house, where the chieftain stood, surrounded by his wives, the wild dog suddenly jumped onto the carriage and clambered onto the seat, in between the couple.

"Mutiyamba, your bridegroom is so gloomy. Perhaps you have offended him. Caress me, I am his friend. It will cheer him up."

So she embraced Kri. She kissed his muzzle, gazing at him tenderly. A titter went up in the procession. Kaffangi, the father, and his wives, trembled. What had come over his daughter, what would her young husband think?

When he reached his room, the lion called the wild dog aside.

"Dog, what is your little game? I shall tear you to pieces. How comes Mutiyamba, my bride, to kiss you? I have never been kissed by her yet."

"Look here, lion, I sprained my foreleg as I was running along. Mutiyamba, the beautiful, noticed it. She is so kindly, so gentle. Out of pity, she gave poor me a kiss."

Kaffangi with the guests sat waiting for the bridegroom, to drink a toast. The door opened and in limped the young lion, that strong, magnificent beast. He wobbled to the right, he wobbled to the left. And when he stopped beside Mutiyamba, tears were starting from his eyes.

"While paying homage to you yesterday at the high jump, I dislocated my legs, both hind legs."

He looked at her dolefully. She, for her part, covered her face with her shawl. Followed by her two maid-servants, she swept out of the room. The pipe-smoking men turned up their noses. They all pulled scornful faces, and spat into the air. At this point, the chieftain proffered the pitcher to the bridegroom.

"Drink, lion. My daughter, Mutiyamba, the most beautiful of all maidens, has become yours. No purchase-money need you pay. Your legs, they will heal again. But now you must tender us gifts. It is our custom."

The lion on the matting took the drink. He bowed in silence before the chieftain.

He wandered through the village and into the steppe, in search of gifts. Kri, the yellow dog of the steppes, slouched along behind him.

"What shall I offer her, Kri? What presents ought I to give to her and to her father Kaffangi?"

"Don't you worry, lion. Only whatever you do, don't make a display of wealth, else you will put him and the whole village to shame. Anyway, why run so far out into the steppe? Here, on the ground, empty your excrement. That will be best and simplest. It will convince them of your modesty. I will weave a little basket out of straw in which to carry the gift, and I will tender it to Kaffangi and Mutiyamba."

The lion pondered at great length. He said, it could not be done. No, it was counter to all decency. The dog, however, talked him over. Let him but try. If it were not pleasing to the chieftain and his wives, then the lion could fetch something else. Thereupon the lion seated himself. Full of shame he lingered on a ridge dividing

two fields of yam. The dog meanwhile burrowed up tubers of yam from the ground, which had protuberances like human toes, raked up some leaves, stacked the gift upon the leaves and tubers, smoothed it down and covered it over with young leaves as a protection against flies. Then he wove a small grass basket, lifted the decorated excrement into it and strolled into the village. The lion followed, limping, his mighty yellow head bowed. From time to time, he gave way to a cry of woe. Growling with utmost dignity, the wild dog stepped over the threshold of Kaffangi's hall. Upon a sign from him, the lion halted at the doorpost and peeped inside with a squint in his eyes. With stern, inscrutable mien, Kri, his emissary, handed over the little basket to the chieftain.

Mutiyamba fell a-weeping. When the lion approached her tenderly, she fled before him. Full of wrath, the chieftain flung the basket away. Smiling and modest, the lion bowed. Uncertain of himself, he sat down upon his befouled seat and remained there even after Kaffangi and the guests had left the hall with shouts of abuse.

They deliberated outside, what steps to take against the lion. Arming themselves with spears, they determined to inform him that, according to the custom of the village, he must enter the lists once more. The first test had been invalidated. They imagined that the lion, being crocked now, had little chance of success. They turned to Kri. The latter said:

"Why distress yourselves, dear sirs? Hope is the pillar of the world."

He offered to defeat the lion himself—alone, unaided. They shook their heads, but Kaffangi said, "No harm in trying," and extended his hand to the estimable Kri.

And on the following day, when Kri and the lion left their tent, the lion was astounded to see everybody bow to Kri and make way for him. As for himself, he was ignored. The mighty lion contemplated the wretched dog of the steppes.

"Kri, what is the meaning of this? I am your friend. You cannot leave me in the lurch."

The dog led him into a space between two tents, where he stopped and began to shake and rock and sway his body convulsively. Amazed, the lion asked:

"What are you doing?"

"Haven't you noticed it yet? Listen, can you hear it?"

The lion came closer.

"I can't hear a thing, not a thing, Kri."

"Well, put your ear to my belly. Everybody can hear it. I have undergone such a change overnight, as to compel everybody to greet me like a king. You see, I now have a bell in my body."

"A bell?"

"Yes, a ringing bell. It strikes at each step I take. That explains why they bow to me."

The lion stood between the tents, lost in thought. He called Kri back.

"Tell me, Kri, could you also put a bell into my body?"

Kri dubiously shook his head; he did not think the lion capable of enduring the pain. The lion implored: he would destroy all the enemies which Kri had in the woods and the steppe. At this, Kri allowed himself to be persuaded. He would come that night with a few confidants and sink the bell into the lion's belly. Overjoyed, the lion continued on his way, with his companion, through the village high street.

At dinner, in the chamber, Kri declared that the lion must furnish him with positive proof before nightfall of his ability to withstand pain. Else he would not dare to bring the bell. The lion laughed. Whatever suffering Kri, the small dog, had borne, he too would bear. But Kri was adamant: he must satisfy himself.

And when the diners were assembled at the table, and the mats had been laid in the large hall, Kri called for a bar of red-hot iron. After whispering into Kaffangi's ear, to watch closely to what use he was going to put it, he bade the lion approach. Emitting a vicious bark, Kri slashed the red-hot iron over the lion's hind legs. For a brief instant, spreading terror all round him, the lion howled and snapped at the dog, who scampered away to the door. Then the lion crumpled up and smiled dully at Kri, who crept back cautiously. The guests, Kaffangi and his daughter watched the pair dumbfounded.

Henceforth the lion's mien was completely changed. He now let his large head loll helplessly, gasping for breath after every few steps. His legs trembled; full of apprehension and horror, he would look around him in all directions. And as for the dog, it was no longer the same Kri as of old. He now wore a purple cap, from which golden ribbons fluttered down over his ears and over the back of his head.

Quietly the lion crouched on the mat. He was offered food. With lips drooping, he had eyes only for Kri, who returned his stare. Mockingly, the company offered him yet more food. He longed to withdraw, in order to roar out his agony. He longed to drink. But, apart from the small pitcher, they gave him not a drop. No man, nor woman, nor beast paid any attention to him—him, the king of all beasts. Before the company retired, Kri

whispered to Kaffangi again. An attendant brought the red-hot bar back. The lion did not notice it; stupefied he sprawled over the mat. Then fire branded his fore-leg.

This time, so frightful was the roar he gave vent to, so mighty the thunder rolling from out of his throat, that the chamber was deserted within an instant. He made to leap. He could not. He struck out. Yet again he roared, and the hall quivered to the rumble of his thunder. His tail smashed up the table. Suddenly he re-called that this was a test to which Kri had put him. He bit his tongue, hobbled to the door and there sank down flat on his belly. The guests had all fled. Kri slipped in sideways. He harkened to the moans and whisperings of his friend. And what did the lion whisper?

"Kri, Kri! You must not be angry. Gome closer. I was not expecting it. Kri, rest assured!"

This was a point in the play at which the spectators waxed indignant. They stood up and shouted:

"Rest assured, Kri! Dog, dog!"

They took up threatening postures, their eyes sparkled. Part of the audience wept.

Kri yielded graciously. The guests in front of the door saw the lion rubbing his head against the grey cur. One after another they approached. Their fears subsided; once more they began to titter. The lion took no notice. He was thinking only of to-night and the bells. Then they would all, all of them, respect him. A little pain—what mattered a little pain? If only it were night now and the bell safely within his belly! Ah, the bell! And never must he betray that in reality he had not even heard Kri's bell. (As the play drew to a close, however, a bell was indeed sounded, softly and incessantly.)

With passionate anxiety the lion waited in his chamber for the arrival of the wild dog. The singer Liongo had brought him jugs of water in which to dip his paws to cool them. Darkness. The lion turned around. There stood Kri with a torch in his hand. He whispered from the doorway, without approaching :

"Lion! Hallo! How goes it, lion?"

"All right, Kri. I am waiting for you. Won't you come in?"

"I'm coming."

"Where are the bells?"

The dog staggered. He had been on the spree all afternoon with the guests.

"Why, here they are! The dear bells! It will be a pretty piece of work. What do you think, lion? Are your paws still hurting you?"

"Not much."

Kri laughed shrilly.

"So you see how well I did it for you. Splendid work. I took the bar, whoops—onto the paws : one whoops, two whoops, three whoops! Bet you enjoyed it, what?"

The lion kept on gazing at the bells. Belching, Kri patted him on the shoulder.

"Keep still, sonny boy. My dear, strapping sonny boy. We'll soon fix you."

And, intoxicated, he staggered about the room and sang, without bothering about the lion :

"Mutiyamba, Mutiyamba. No tree bears such fine fruits as the clothes you wear. Whosoever beholds you, Mutiyamba, must close his eyes, consumed with passionate longing for you, bedazzled, as though he were seated in front of a vessel full of hot vapours."

"How dare you sing of my bride?"

THE LION AND THE DOG

Drunk as an owl was Kri. What did that big fool mean by asking questions?

"No tree bears as many fruits as the clothes she wears. Her legs are slender and brown as copper," he went on singing. "Hallo, there, come in (hic !) and join me, your devoted friend."

He bustled about the place, depositing lengths of rope. The lion looked on uneasily. In tripped the others through the doorway, hugging the wall as they went.

"What business have they here?"

"These are my friends, every one of them. They have been drinking with me all day. Drinking, carousing, eating, and feasting. Say, didn't we spend a perfect afternoon?"

"Perfect."

"And now what a night we're going to have! Hey, lion, up you get!"

"How dare you talk to me so roughly?"

"Will that fathead tell me how to talk and how not to talk!"

The lion held his breath. What was the meaning of it? The lion roared aloud. The dog reeled to the door, the humans shrank into a heap.

"Fathead? Call me a fathead?"

Kri's tail drooped between his legs and he tottered up.

"Lion, lion, you must not be cross with me. I have had a great deal to drink. Now let us get started. But are you willing, lion?"

The latter stared hard at him.

"Yes."

The dog barked crossly:

"Well then!"

The visitors carried wooden plugs under their arms,

and hammered them with hatchets into the flooring of the hut. The lion shivered, his lips drooped.

"What is it they're doing?"

Kri mocked him: "What is it they're doing? Putting sticks in the ground, that's what they're doing!"

The lion drew his paws out of Liongo's pitchers. He dragged himself closer to the scene of labour. Kri sniffed at the pitchers.

"Who put these here?"

"Liongo."

"Ah, Liongo. Him! The scoundrel!"

Again the lion held his breath, then emitted a sinister roar. The room was deserted. Kri stopped at the threshold. Shame and anger pinned him down. He began to speak in a deceitful tone of supplication.

"Well now, these are the pegs for your little paws; these are the ropes into which you slip your legs. The idea is to keep you steady while I sink the bell into your body. You, over there, come on in! The lion knows you are pledged to secrecy. He will have bells in his belly, just as I have, which go ting-a-ling as he walks along. You will prostrate yourselves before him. And Mutiyamba! Oh, how she will love him!"

The torches flared in the room. The lion dragged himself along between the pegs. His thoughts were with Mutiyamba. She would kiss him; cunning, loathsome Kri, that wild dog, would contrive it. Had not the cur, in the carriage, won a kiss from her straight on the muzzle? Turning his head to one side, the lion whimpered. Where was Liongo? The lion stood between the plugs. He motioned the dog to lend an ear.

"Do not hurt me too much."

The dog grinned maliciously. Ropes were coiled

round the lion's legs. He laid himself resignedly on his side and rolled over on his back. Violently they tore his legs apart, forward and rearward. He snarled. He writhed in anguish. The visitors clucked for joy when they saw the white naked belly of the young lion. Tremors of anguish rippled over him. Intoxicated they threw their heads back. They made merry round the prostrate beast. So loud was their derisory laughter, that Kaffangi and Mutiyamba appeared in front of the house and put their heads in through the window. Krijumped about, whetting his knife. The lion, when he heard the whetting of the knife, asked distraught with fear :

"And what are you going to do next, Kri? And what are you going to do next? And what next?"

"Can't you see?"

"No."

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

By this time, the dog had his knife fully sharpened. At a bound he alighted upon the lion's breast, screeching :

"Now watch! Here it comes![5]'

And at that instant he plunged the knife with full force into the body, slashing and carving and slitting it open. The hot blood spurted up into his face, blinding him. Beneath him the lion struggled upwards, tugging to the right, tugging to the left. Liongo was at the lion's head.

"Lion, get up! They are killing you."

"He's killing me. It's true," a thought went storming through the lion's head.

He swung round, he broke the plugs, peeling the skin

off his feet. His roar of woe! Slay Kri! Maul Kri! He must slay Kri. Ropes and pegs trailing behind him, he crashed into the confusion of visitors. He pounced, crushed, tore, bit, and destroyed at random. As for the dog, he caught him at the door, pinned him down on the threshold and there tore him to pieces. It was pitch dark out in the street. Go on killing! Go on mauling! Kaffangi—yes, there was Kaffangi, fleeing. Snap, and he was sitting upon the man's back. Snap his teeth went through the squirming neck.

How the audience rejoiced and wept. Now away, lion, flee from the village and into the steppe.

An unbroken thundering roar. He raced towards the fence, but could not rise from the ground. Why was he unable to get over? What was flowing so hotly out of his body, what was he dragging along between his legs? In pain, in horribly grievous agony, he grew dumb. He trod upon his own entrails. He made yet one more terrible effort to leap. Gruesome his roar. It passed over into rattles. He remained impaled on top of the palisade. Moaning, he squirmed and struggled there. His eyes were unseeing. Javelins whizzed at him though the air. He bled to death.

The spectators wept as they saw the young, magnificent lion suspended in his death agonies upon the spikes of the palisade. They threw stones when the burial of the victims took place. Kaffangi was dead. The dog was dragged through the village by his tail. Asses' droppings had been stuffed into his belly, and the purple cap with the golden ribbons had been put on his mouth like a muzzle.

Mutiyamba appeared from her house. A new chieftain was now installed there, who had thrown her out.

She ran to Liongo. He took her into his hut. The chieftain's daughter never ceased weeping.

He sang :

"First you envenomed me, now I can eat of your sweetness. First you scalded my eyes, now I can gaze at you. You gave me no sleep. Now I sleep with you. I was tossed about like a boat, now you hold me secure. You have no more bracelets for your arms, no more pendants for your bosom, nor ear-rings. My mouth is for your ear, my mouth for your bosom, my mouth for your arms."

by

HENRI DUVERNOIS

★

JEANNE*

She had been his mistress for a month, when still she addressed him as *Monsieur* Andre. She would say: "Oh, Monsieur Andre, I love you terribly![55] He would smile, both flattered and scared, for he was vain but afraid of excessive emotions.

On the 18th of May, Saint Juliette's Day, he went out to get her a present, selecting at a small draper's shop a neckerchief made of plain cotton, but dyed sky blue. He meant to put by a purse in imitation crocodile leather with an artificial emerald clasp. On second thoughts, he abandoned the idea: two presents always created a bad impression, the one seeming to offer an excuse for the modesty of the other. He wrapped the neckerchief up in the following words: "From now on you may call me plain Andre and speak to me familiarly when we're alone[55]. And, strangely enough, she failed to faint for joy.

True, the occasions when they could be alone together were rare enough. At eight every morning Juliette descended from her attic on the seventh floor to start her day's work on the fourth floor, where lived Madame Fortune Savignolle, her lover's mother. This was in the days of long ago, when women used to wear bonnets

*** Translated from the French by Morris Kreitman.**

trimmed with artificial flowers. Madame Savignolle was without her equal in the reproduction of lilies of the valley and Parma violets. Juliette used to assist her skilfully, and she paid for her lodgings and keep by lending the charwoman a hand in the most menial of tasks. Thus, she would darn the socks of her employer's son. At that time, Andre Savignolle was a biggish youth, fair-headed, inclined to stoutness, placid and lazy as a snail. Madame Savignolle, who had been left a widow in the first year of her married life and wore mourning ever after, had at first brought her child up very strictly. Andre, by dint of his mother's importunacy, had just gained his bachelor's degree, when he happened to contract bronchitis. He made a rapid recovery, but afterwards whenever the possibility was broached of his doing some work, he went off into a fit of coughing for the benefit of his mother, who would start fussing around him immediately. She forbade him to get up before ten in the morning, stuffed him with new-laid eggs, tender steaks, mild wines, and kept him by her side. He wished for nothing better. Comfortably lodged in the best room of the flat, he went in for all those trifling occupations which help a young man, who is devoid of any vocation and lacking in all talent, to while the time away. He dabbled in water-colours, wrote a revue with the wrong sort of pornography, composed the music and words of various ditties which were never published, and rested assiduously. For her part, Madame Savignolle toiled without remission and economized fervently. She yielded everything to her son, except the keys. He had to be in before midnight, at which hour the widow put away her workshop tools, the brushes, the glue-pots and the brass-wires, and went to bed. On most nights, Andre,

having no friends of his own, would kill the time at a public-house. There he would slowly smoke a cigar chosen from among those of the weakest leaf, would sip a coffee sweetened with cream and remain always a spectator of the games in progress, for he was slow-witted and had never been quite able to grasp the finer points of the matador.

Finally, he became more or less contented with putting on fat and slumbering, when Juliette dropped into his life. She took the place of a sullen working-girl who had been called the Gipsy on account of her swarthy complexion, jet-black hair, and yellow eyes. The Gipsy had repulsed Andre's advances with a strange warning: " Mind now! If you get naughty, it'll make you cough!" He spied on her, discovered that she was keeping company with a man, on whose arm she would hang ardently as they went down the street, and he secured the immediate discharge of this wretched woman. The latter, pocketing her pay and signing the receipt, said : " Good-bye, my poor woman!" to the mother, and turning to the son: "Good-bye, snail-bones!"

"What did she mean by that?" stammered Madame Savignolle, when the Gipsy had slammed the door.

"Snail-bones? I suppose she meant to call me lazy-bones."

"Oh, the brazen hussy!"

"Here's a tip for you: don't ever engage a rough-looking woman again just because brunettes are supposed to be better workers than blondes. . . ."

Two days later, Juliette put in an appearance. Andre was still in bed at the time.

" Slip into your dressing-gown," said his mother, " and come and have a look. I think I've made my mind up.

Oh, she's not of the big, strapping type, just a petite blonde. But she's got a reasonable air about her. . . . Have a look at her references. Her name's Juliette Volcy. She's been doing lilacs and daisies for an old lady in Rue de Verneuil."

As they eyed each other for the first time, Andre decided that he had found a prey worthy of himself. Terms were agreed upon and Juliette started work on the following day. She made not a sound and tried to keep out of sight—she was so timid and bashful. Pretty, in spite of her being dressed like a poor orphan, she was industrious and managed to get through a considerable amount of work. She very soon settled down to the lilies of the valley and the Parma violets. She even conceived the idea of scenting them, which proved a great success with the clientele. The youngster would take breakfast with the mother and the son, when she was not waiting at table on them, but had her other meals in the attic, from which she never sallied forth in the evening. Touched with pity, Madame Savignolle took three tickets for a night at the circus and offered her employee this diversion. Andre found her ill-clad, but discovered that she had perfect teeth, and he decided to say a few words to her. As she made no reply except for an incoherent stammer, he thought her a fool. Towards the end of the show, a trainer appeared with a nervous lioness and a roaring lion at his side. The lioness seemed vicious, snarling as she jabbed at the boar-spear with which the man threatened her.

"I don't like the look of it," murmured Madame Savignolle.

Andre kept up a superior sort of smile, as though he were fully conversant with all these tricks. But Juliette

trembled. He took her hand stealthily. She let her eyelids droop, overcome with emotion. When she opened them again, the trainer had thrown away his weapon, and the lioness, pacified now, was licking his nose. The young girl felt as if all things were imbued with that sweet sensation which had taken possession of her. Innocent, but capable of looking after herself, she had always offered up an effective resistance. Andre she would not resist. Indeed, she had promised to yield herself to him when she acknowledged his fervent squeeze with a return pressure, which, imperceptible though it was, yet conveyed all the forces she could summon in her delicious state of torpidity. She waited for Andre till the dawn. He did not come. But she embellished her attic as best she could in view of this hoped-for visit. The awful wallpaper, rotten with tuberculosis, vanished behind Japanese prints and fans. The purchase of a red satin quilt, of a tea-service, and an arm-chair swallowed up her meagre savings. . . .

One morning, she found Andre waiting on the fifth floor landing. Just as she was about to say good morning to him, he sealed her lips with a kiss. In the afternoon, Madame Savignolle having gone out, he made his way into the workshop. He sought the girl's lips, then bade her:

"Leave your key in the door to-night!"

She replied:

"Very well, Monsieur André."

"I'll be coming up at five-past twelve. We'll have to talk quietly because of the neighbours. . . ."

She wished he would add: "I love you!" But he did not say it to her either on that day, or on any of the following days, or ever. . . .

He came back to her again and again. She would keep awake till midnight, waiting. She had to warn him off by singing if ever she noticed anything amiss. The room was separated by a corridor from the other rooms to which the few servant girls employed in the house would retire at an early hour. Before dawn Andre would leave her. They both feared that his mother might wake up at an awkward moment, but the old lady down below slept soundly.

One Sunday, Madame Savignolle having gone to see her sister at Senlis, the lovers had the day all to themselves. Andre hated his aunt, who took keen relish in flinging taunts at him: "Are you still looking for a job? Whatever you do, don't hurry!" He would hold his tongue, for this relative was wealthy and had no children of her own. But he did his utmost to avoid her.

At two o'clock, Juliette came down to see him.

"Let's go upstairs," she suggested.

"Plenty of time for that. . . ."

"You see, I've got something to tell you."

"And can't you tell it to me here?"

"Well, I'd rather____"

"Something unpleasant?"

"It all depends. . . ."

He frowned.

"You go first and see if there's anyone about-"

The Japanese prints, the Japanese fans, the red quilt, the tea-service, all these—in the daylight—had an air of wretchedness, which did not escape Juliette. She half drew the curtains. From the arm-chair, where he had installed himself, he commanded:

" Speak!"

"Hold me in your arms."

"All right, fire ahead."

"Andre! . . ."

"Well, what is it?"

"I believe . . . that is, I know for sure. . . . Andre, we've been careless, but really I'm not to blame. So long as you're not angry, I shall be so happy!"

He pushed her away and jumped up from the arm-chair, turning from pale to crimson.

"Well," he cried. "Now we're in a nice mess! . . ."

He wheeled round, rumpling his hair, and banged the table with his fist.

"Oh, no! No! Nothing doing, Lisette! Good heavens—a baby! Just imagine, what could I say to Mamma? Somehow you don't seem to realize it, but it would mean ruination—absolute ruination. And then, I'm in poor health. Don't count on me for accepting any responsibility, whatever you do. Listen, you're going to swear to obey me."

"I swear."

"By my life?"

"By your life."

"Don't move. Wait here for me. I'll be back!"

He went away without kissing her. He returned two hours later and extracted from his wallet a slip of paper with an address written on it.

"All you have to do is go along to this place. . . . Don't worry about the expense. I'll see to that."

Madame Savignolle did not straightaway notice the disappearance of a watch and chain which Andre had inherited from his father. She paid no heed at all to a

brief indisposition on the part of her employee. After a few days' absence the latter resumed her duties. Still looking rather pale, Juliette was given the benefit of sharing André's diet for a week. And life went on. The frequenters of the tavern " Imasse " saw young Savignolle back again in his usual seat. He had made his mind up to break off relations with Juliette, with a few precautions—he tried to replace the girl by a young woman of the neighbourhood; but the coarseness, the disgusting heaviness of his partner soon proved to be beyond his endurance. He went back to Juliette, who held up no reproach to him. Not the slightest allusion to the past in the course of their nocturnal interviews. A disagreeable recollection growing ever fainter—that was all it amounted to. Now Juliette no longer got up before Andre left, to find out if the coast was clear for him. In fact, one Sunday morning, when he paid her an unexpected visit, she asked him to light the stove and to bring her a cup of coffee in bed. She ventured to criticize his taste in the choice of certain ties. He shrugged his shoulders, but fell into the habit of asking her advice. Apart from these little nuances, nothing had changed. With business in artificial flowers flourishing, another hand was engaged—this time an old woman. . . .

One evening Andre found the attic adorned with a bouquet of white roses.

"What are these, patterns?" he asked.

"No."

He jested :

"A gift from one of your admirers?"

"That'll do! . . ."

"I don't understand."

"Let me explain: the birthday. . . ."

"What birthday?"

She blurted out:

"Of our little daughter. . . ."

"Eh?"

"She would have been one year old."

He was taken aback.

"Speak quietly, dammit!"

"I did speak quietly."

He resumed:

"That's crazy! ... In the first place, why a little girl?"

"One day you said in front of me that if you were ever to marry, you'd like to have a little girl. And I'm positive that that's what it would have been."

"You're mad!"

"D'you know, she's got a name? . . ."

"Raving mad!"

"Her name's Jeanne."

"Shut up!"

"You're not cross with me because I bought some roses for our little Jeanne, are you? A year. . . . She would have been a year old. When a baby girl gets to that age, why, she sometimes has something like thought in her eyes."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

But that day, when they fell silent, they heard in the silence—"Jeanne."

III

He thought: "Luckily, she adores me!" She hated him, as from that very instant when he had cried out: "Nothing doing, Lisette!" She was not herself really

aware of the depth of this hatred. She continued to serve and to submit to him, faithfully. But occasionally she would say: "I'm going to take a stroll." She would go to a distant neighbourhood, station herself in front of a house, gaze up at a window for a long time and say to herself: "That's the place where, on his orders, I killed my child." To her way of thinking, this was no longer the annihilation of an obscure germ, but the wilful murder of a baby who "has thought in her eyes", who smiles, who puts her tiny arms round your neck and pouts over her first kiss.

Andre imagined that a mental disorder of this kind was capable of bringing on disaster. Such goings-on were common enough and ended up in the police courts. But Juliette's gentle ways reassured him. He treated her in the approved manner for humouring lunatics, with a kindliness which finally shocked Madame Savignolle. Fearing a serious liaison, she sought a match for her son, settled her choice on a wealthy young lady and began by acquainting Juliette of these designs.

"It's a very good idea," Juliette replied indifferently.

Madame Savignolle next approached Andre.

"You're not getting any younger," she declared. "You would be provided for for the rest of your life."

When he declined in no uncertain manner, she added :

"I've spoken to Juliette about it. Her advice is usually very sound, and she agrees with me."

"Ah! . . . Well, there's no harm in having a look, anyway."

The interview took place at the house of the sister in Senlis. The wealthy young lady smoked Oriental cigarettes and was dressed in eccentric style. She coldly examined this candidate for her dowry, put various

questions to him and, after ten minutes, slipped away on some vague pretext.

"I guess there's nothing doing," said the sister, who had just seen the young woman out to the gate. "An heiress worth a million francs, just think of it! She doesn't quite know what she wants, but she does know what she doesn't want. Andre didn't impress her."

"She's got the manners of a street-walker," Andre pronounced in a fury.

"Why, I wouldn't even dream of having that person as my daughter-in-law!" Madame Savignolle backed him up.

But she could not help looking at her son as if she were seeing him for the first time. And for the first time also, this motherly look was lacking in tenderness.

"My boy," his aunt wound up, "hurry up all the same and get married, for you're beginning to go bald."

Till then Andre had thought himself irresistible. On the way back he harboured a furious temper, brooded over the bitter taste in his mouth, and was rude to his mother on several occasions. At dinner, he ate little.

"Stay here with us, Juliette," suggested Madame Savignolle, in distress. "You've got nothing to do with yourself once you go upstairs. It's such a lovely evening! We're going to make ourselves comfortable in the garden."

What she called the garden was a window in front of which some sickly nasturtiums were trying hard not to die. It was a summer twilight, alive with the cries of swallows. Some children were singing out in the street.

"There's a lovely scent in the air," observed Madame Savignolle.

She went into details :

"I should think the smell must come from the flowers in Montholon Square."

"Possibly!" said Juliette.

" I f you ask me, it stinks like hell!" André put in, frenziedly.

They said no more. The sky became suddenly overcast, with exaggerated swiftness, as on the stage. A heavy silence fell, at the end of which the old lady, who was becoming a little hard of hearing, exclaimed :

"What's that you're saying, Juliette?"

"She said 'Jeanne'! The devil only knows why!" Andre blurted out, turning deathly pale.

" Me? " the girl protested. "Why, I never said a word, Monsieur André !"

He flung back his chair and went off.

"Jeanne?" murmured Madame Savignolle. "Can that be his sweetheart? He must have fallen for her pretty badly if he can hear her name spoken when no one says a word. I hope to God that that Jeanne, whoever she is, is not a bad woman. . . . Anyhow, she can hardly be said to make him go out of his way for her, because he doesn't make a move from this place. Some married slut. . . . Gome to think of it, though, I notice that he's sold his father's watch and chain. . . . He must have given her a present or paid for a posh supper. I suppose he's gone off to meet her, what d'you think?"

She eyed Juliette narrowly, trying to pick on a telltale gesture of jealousy. Juliette remained unmoved.

"We had an interview with that young woman I told you about," the old lady went on. "But she doesn't suit us. She's very ill-bred."

"Let's discuss that some other time," said Juliette.

"Now that we've a moment to spare, would you like us to check up the invoices?"

In the mirror of the cafe whither he had betaken himself, Andre discerned that he had had a rush of blood to the head. He asked for a glass of water, and the proprietor brought it to him in person, observing that he would charge this glass of water at the price of a small beer. A few remarks which Andre passed on the subject of the matador were ill-received by the players, who answered harshly. He felt he was being hounded on all sides, and it nearly brought the tears into his eyes. He ordered a cognac, pretended to absorb himself in reading the papers till midnight, and creeping up the stairs like a thief joined Juliette. He found her in her petticoat, seated in the arm-chair—that arm-chair which hitherto she had reserved for him, and which she now occupied without as much as an apology. He trembled with anger.

"You------" he began.

"Well?" she asked invitingly.

He was going to add: "You are to blame for everything!" But the sentence he held in readiness choked in his throat, coming out like a sob. And he sank down before her. Dreamily she stroked his hair.

"I want you," he said, "to be gentle with me."

"I *am* very gentle with you. . . ."

"You see what I mean—very gentle. Because, you know, I don't feel well. . . ."

"Where does it hurt you?"

"All over!"

"You mustn't stay here. ..."

"I wouldn't move, not even if Mamma was to knock!"

He coughed. He coughed artificially.

"Spare my feelings, Juliette. ... I warn you. . . ."

"Is it the heart?"

"No, my chest. I'm very weak in the chest, you know it."

This thought affected him so deeply, that he took his mistress's hands and covered them with little kisses punctuated by sighs. Then he sought Juliette's lips. They were frozen. . . .

"Dear me, I think you're not feeling too grand either," he said in astonishment. "I'll take care of you, you'll take care of me. . . . Two's company, isn't it? Isn't it? Did you say anything?"

"No, nothing."

IV

"What's that?"

"The portrait of a child."

"Of what child?"

"I don't know!"

"What d'you mean, you don't know?"

"No. I came across it at Sain-Ouen, in a second-hand shop."

"And you bought it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Don't insist____

"I do insist."

"All right, if you want to know, this little girl. .. she's about the same age as our Jeanne would have been."

"Still harping on that? For three years you've wrecked my peace of mind with this madness of yours!"

"You questioned me, I answered you."

"How I'd like to knock that crazy idea out of your head."

"Let me keep it. It's all I have."

"So I don't count, eh?"

"Not that. . . . But what if it's stronger than anything else in the world. . . . I'm always thinking of it. . . . So much so, that sometimes you can hear me speaking of it, when I'm only thinking about it. Oh, she's not here among us, the poor little thing. She's *with* us. At times, when you are here and it's dark, I imagine that we are talking quietly because she's lying in her cradle, quite close. I see her growing up. I've thought out a little face for her, and I'm sure it's the one she would have had, ever so sad. Why, if I wasn't to check myself, I'd be buying toys for her. When I read in the papers that the measles or whooping-cough is about, it makes me shiver. I live in what you would call a sort of illusion. And I work as if I were working to save up a dowry for her. Don't get frightened. No one can hear us. If you only knew! Look at what happened yesterday. You called me a silly fool. . . . And that made me remember—the day you sent me to that place. . . . Of course, you had no other way out. But all I had to do was simply to refuse. It's funny, that didn't occur to me at all. I read the note you handed me : *Third floor up from the entresol, first door to the right . . . knock twice, don't ask any questions of the caretaker.* I obeyed. I did everything I could to obey, just as if that paper were the Gospel. It's unbelievable—all I thought of was you. I said to myself: 'It won't do for me to get the boy I love into trouble. . . .' It seemed to me as if it was only a matter between you and me, that there were just the two of us; but I was wrong; there were three of us, d'you get me? I knocked. It was then I saw

the woman. I imagined she'd be an old hag with a twisted mouth and filthy finger-nails. Not at all! Young and good-looking, that's what she was. She told me that she knew my case, and she tried to reason with me. You might just as well reason with a clock once it's wound up. I kept on repeating: 'I've got to get it over.' I was afraid of losing you, and that was the only thing I had on my mind. . . ."

She expressed herself very sensibly, with knowing little shakes of the head. He again took fright. He studied his mistress to see just how far this *idee fixe* held her in its grip ; he discovered a sort of distraction in the calmest of her smiles. During working hours she was as active and collected as ever. Her free time she consecrated to Jeanne. Nowadays they often passed the evening with Madame Savignolle. The old lady would very soon fall asleep, with her nose on her work. Andre would read his paper. On the sly he observed Juliette. She sat idle, her hands in her lap, her look far away. And with these hands, lost in shadow, imperceptibly, for the amusement of an absent little creature, she traced a continual movement for pulling the strings of a dancing doll. And at such times her smile appeared like the reflection of another smile which she alone could see.

V

The aunt at Senlis died. A month later, Juliette, surprised on arrival one morning to find Madame Savignolle not up yet, went into her bedroom and was just in time to hear the last sigh of the old lady and this last request :

" Don't forsake . . . don't leave . . . Andre. . . . He's

quite . . . help . . . helpless. . . . I can say it now. . . . Needs you. . . . Gaube and Simon owe me six thousand francs. . . . Look after Andre, oh, God! . . ."

Juliette murmured :

"Rest assured. . . ."

On returning from the funeral, Andre and Juliette found themselves alone and at liberty in that flat where they had so successfully concealed their affair. The servant put up a bed for Juliette in the dining-room. Andre left the door of his room open. He was terror-stricken at the thought of remaining alone. As it had rained a little at the cemetery, he feared he had caught a chill, and kept moaning. She had to prepare a herbal drink for him, and heat up a water-bottle. . . . He talked away till two in the morning. He envisaged the disappearance of his mother from a purely personal angle.

"Delicate people like myself are doomed when they are left without their Mamma. Of course, I know there's always you. . . . Oh, she wasn't hoodwinked about your devotion to me, and she no longer used to treat you like an ordinary hand. . . . What d'you think was her purpose in telling you that she always changed my flannel vest in May for a cotton one? Don't you see, without seeming to do it deliberately, she was giving you hints. Poor Mamma! She used to go right to the bottom of Rue Saint-Joseph to get me some jam which the doctor said was good for me. Say something ... go on, let me hear your voice. . . ."

Juliette said :

"It's the little one who would have felt really sorry!"

He was about to ask : "What little one?" Then he bit his lips. Juliette would have replied : "Jeanne." An argu-

ment would have sprung up and at the end of this argument—a fit of sulks, silence, which he wished to avoid at all costs. It seemed to him that words, no matter what words, helped to dispel the odour of death. He submitted.

"At five a child is capable of grief," Juliette went on. "Oh, not any real sorrow, to be sure . . . but the first tears which smart. I would have said to her: 'Your grandma's dead.' That would have made her realize that she had a grandmother and that she was dead. I would have said to her: 'Run along and kiss Papa!' I would have dressed her in white, because that's the proper colour for children in mourning."

He scrambled out of bed, savagely, bent on giving Juliette a thrashing. So the old story was beginning all over again, was it? But she transfixed him on the threshold with a look which made him blanch.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked. "What have you got out of bed for?"

"Move up a little."

"You'll make yourself ill____"

"You're forgetting that this is my first night as an orphan!"

His hair was thinning; his belly was coming out in comfortable proportions. Standing thus in his nightshirt, he presented a picture so diametrically opposed to the term "orphan", as to touch the scene with comedy.

"Come on in," she said. "I'll wake you up before the maid arrives."

He protested:

"I don't care a hoot for the maid. I've been a model son. And now, I reckon, I'm entitled to do just as I please."

The chamber was redolent of carbolic acid, of roses in

funeral wreaths and of the powerful scent, also, with which Juliette drenched the artificial flowers.

"I've got a little headache," sighed Andre.

He rested that stricken head on his mistress's bosom. He was grateful to her for bestowing upon him the cherished warmth of life at a moment when the thought of death filled him with horror. Without her, he would have been haunted by nightmares. A great flood of tenderness surged over him. His mind was made up.

"Don't worry about the future," he said without hesitation. "I'll sell the business. . . . All told, it ought to realize at least eighty thousand francs."

"What will become of me?"

"You'll look after me. How about us going to live in the country?"

"Yes, that would be all right."

"Not too far away, say an hour from Paris at the most. I've had enough of all this commotion. I'm just about fed up with going to that pub 'Imasse'. A rotten lot of gamblers and boozers ! If you want to lead a lady's life, we can go in for investments. You'll help me out over the figures. I think I shall have an income of about thirty thousand francs a year. Maybe more."

He was in generous mood.

"If you behave yourself," he announced gravely, "I shall marry you."

He concluded :

"And then we shall have a child together, so there!"

He lay waiting for an outburst of gratitude. She was silent. He observed irritably :

"You might at least thank me."

She stammered her thanks.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Are you crying?"

She explained :

" It's for joy."

VI

Thanks to Juliette's management, they became very well-to-do. Andre no longer spoke of marriage. But he had bought a villa in Normandy as their summer residence, and there they picked up with a couple, Monsieur and Madame Fuqui. Monsieur Fuqui held up for display, on his immense body, a head which was by turns vainglorious and troubled like the expression of a turkey. Madame Fuqui, plain-looking and genteel, dedicated herself to her wardrobe and her connexions. They had a son, a perfect little scamp of about ten. Thanks to them, Juliette and Andre made the acquaintance of a few seaside aristocrats and bathing financiers, being introduced as " Monsieur and Madame Savignolle". But one day Fuqui took Andre aside and said to him :

"Why the devil don't you marry your sweetheart? She's a charming woman, hard-working, never puts her foot into things, and absolutely worthy of mixing with our society. Otherwise you may one day find yourself in a most unpleasant position."

Andre was now very fat. He laid great store by his peace of mind.

" I ' l l fix that in September," he promised.

The marriage ceremony was of a purely formal nature and was kept secret. Fuqui acted as witness to Andre. Madame Fuqui attended on Juliette. The couple installed themselves in Paris in a gloomy and luxurious flat, where they gave solemn dinners and experienced a stifling *ennui.*

" You're always looking sad," Andre would reproach her. "Yet I think that, all thanks to me, you've done well enough for yourself. Have you forgotten what you were before you found me?"

"No. I was a young girl."

"A young girl without a farthing to her name. Don't let's mince words—a working-girl. What more do you want?"

"You know as well as I do."

He parried :

"There's nothing to stop you having a son by me now."

They exerted themselves in vain over a number of years. Then he lost interest in her.

"I've done all I can do," he would say to her.

She gave this explanation :

"Jeanne is jealous."

Savignolle burst out laughing.

"Hullo, our old friend! Really, I *can* see the funny side of it. The thing's become a perfect farce!"

He was going to joke on. At times, however, she would give him a look that made him cower. He was of quite a mild disposition—tame as a tabby cat. For his part, he was delighted to have no children of his own. Thus Juliette could give him her undivided attention. She took good care of him, by force of habit, watched over his food, prevented him from over-stuffing with pastries. She also managed his investments, kept the accounts, haggled with the tradesmen. He could afford to overlook a harmless obsession which tortured her, but from which he had nothing to fear. His responsibility in law had lapsed. The episode dwelt at the back of his memory like a youthful peccadillo, an adventure

common to many people. It took a romantic and rather crazy woman to keep such a remembrance alive and to water it, after so many years, with fresh tears. He was not of an amorous disposition. To his way of thinking, Juliette was still the promoted housekeeper whose nagging is pardoned for the excellency of her cooking and trustworthiness in handling money. He let himself be managed. In the morning, for example, on doctor's orders he had to do an hour's walking. She would take him along the Avenue du Bois. There she would draw his attention to laughing young girls in the early bloom of womanhood. Sometimes, meeting one who looked prettier than the rest, she jogged his arm, murmuring: "Jeanne." He agreed, inwardly treating her like a madwoman. Andre heard that Fuqui's son had just made off with fifty thousand francs from the maternal cash-box and had run away to America with an elderly cocotte. He communicated this scandal to Juliette with that particular relish which he felt whenever a misfortune, from which he was immune for all time, descended on others.

"What are you so worried for?" he asked. "You *are* pulling a face!"

"It's because in my own mind," she said, "I had betrothed him to Jeanne."

He left the room to give way to his hilarity unmolested. She noticed it and conducted him that same afternoon to the grimy street where the old crime had been committed.

"You pick on funny places for your walks," he said. "This neighbourhood gives me the creeps."

"Doesn't it remind you of something?"

"No."

"You see that window? . . . That's where——"

He arched his back under his fur-trimmed overcoat, and, with the end of his cane, vaguely tapped his shoe, his face gleaming with the pallor of a crook who has made good and whom chance has brought back to the scene of his first theft. He remained in front of the window until Juliette would come out of her reverie. Such might be the mien of an indifferent stranger accompanying a distraught bereaved mother to the cemetery.

There was also a "birthday". When that came round, he would leave home at a very early hour and return only in the evening. Juliette would lock herself up in a little room where she had assembled all her relics: the portrait of the child resembling the image which she had conjured up of Jeanne, a dried-up flower from the first bouquet which she had bought in commemoration, and the scrap of paper on which Savignolle had scribbled the address of the abortionist and the instructions. Once she looked for the paper in vain. It had vanished. Savignolle considered the document dangerous; he must have obtained a key, opened the bureau and burnt the paper. For a month Juliette never spoke a word to him and refused to go out walking with him. He took it in good part and pretended to regard this attitude as the caprice of a woman. One morning, however, he followed her. She went to the Madeleine. "Can she have turned religious?" he wondered. No, from a shadowy corner of the church she followed a marriage ceremony. He guessed that she was putting herself in the place of the blissful mother gloating over the bride in white and pink. On the way out, he doffed his hat to her in an ironic greeting and took her arm. She did not resist, and spoke of the ceremony.

"It was touching! But Jeanne would have been prettier!"

He decided to fall into a passion.

"If this comedy goes on any longer, I shall have you sent to a mental specialist, understand!"

"As you please. But you'll have to give him a full explanation. . . ."

He bowed his head. His frenzy was soon quenched. He would endure anything, if only she would break off this speechlessness which had made him miserable. A little while ago he had asked her: "D'you think I may eat pickled goose?" And she had not deigned to reply, leaving him on the horns of this terrible dilemma—suppressed gluttony or possible indigestion. He resigned: let her carry on with that shameful fiction of her daughter. There had been Juliette the imaginary mother. Next the grandmother. That filled the whole of their New Year's Day. Andre brought her a present which was accepted with indifference. Juliette went up to the window and looked out at the passers-by. She murmured:

"There are four of them, three little girls and a little boy. . . . Each has got his own bouquet! It's so pretty. . . . Why, they're going into the next-door house!"

As for themselves, the only visitors they could hope for were the Fuquis. But the Fuquis had left off coming. Their son had returned to the fold, crestfallen, having been set at liberty by the old cocotte. He was now on the point of marrying an orphaned millionairess who refused to have anything to do with the old friends of the family. The Savignolles lived in utter solitude.

"If only we'd known it'd be like this," Andre thought aloud, "we'd have stayed in business. It would have filled up the gaps."

She triumphed. . . .

"Ah, you admit it now! The gaps, the gaps!"

He hastened to change the subject.

He was ageing badly, becoming a hideous sight, with drooping lip and livid complexion. She remained charming with her Madonna-like face, so pale, and her eyes blazing with the light peculiar to people dominated by a single thought. She spent hours at a stretch reclining on an arm-chair—that arm-chair which they had preserved from the attic. And there she traced with her hands a continual movement for pulling the strings of a dancing doll. He longed to escape from this dreary spectacle, and he joined a club. Here, however, he encountered anew the old hostility of the frequenters of the tavern "Imasse". His meanness and ignorance were held in ridicule. He became the general laughing-stock. He noticed it, and resigned. He was sixty-seven. He sold his villa in Normandy. Juliette peopled the garden with imaginary grandchildren. From then onwards they lived in Paris in utter seclusion. In the evenings he went to the cinema by himself; his wife refused to accompany him. One day he came into Juliette's room, waving a letter in his hand.

"It's from Fuqui. They apologize handsomely. Their son's having a divorce. They're going back to their old friends. They ask us over to supper to-night. ..."

"I am sure," said Juliette, "that Jeanne would have loved him. Perhaps she would have waited for him. Here he is free at last. . . ."

"Hooray!" shouted Savignolle, who had no stomach left for argument. "With an imagination like that, it beats me why you haven't written any novels."

"But I am writing one, in my head."

"Anyway, we're going to the Fuquis."

"You go. ... I don't know about myself. I don't feel like getting up."

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Then why don't you want to get up?"

"What's the use?"

He went to the Fuquis alone. Two years later Juliette again replied, "What's the use?" when asked why she was keeping to her bed. The doctors declared that there was nothing wrong with her. When she was made to stand up, her legs gave way under her, and she had to be moved about on an invalid-chair. She no longer spoke of anything except Jeanne. Savignolle, tired to death, would take his meals in a restaurant and went touring the museums and exhibitions.

Then, he was struck down in his turn. His bed was wheeled up alongside that of his wife. There was a coming and going of doctors, who prescribed contradictory diets.

"Juliette, may I have some wine?" he implored. "Boudonneau says no and Stigmann says yes."

"Drink beer!" counselled Juliette.

"D'you think so?"

"What does it matter, anyway?"

"What does it matter! You're a fine one, you are!"

"Do as I do."

"We haven't a soul in the world. . . ."

"You haven't."

She took pity on him. . . . And all through the endless days and everlasting nights she would explain to him:

"We must pay without complaining. . . . We're paying the price. . . . It's no joke, you know, that scrap of paper on which you wrote down: 'Knock twice. . . . Don't ask any questions of the caretaker. . . .' It's all right having a servant, a nurse, a cook, and a parlour-maid, but believe me, Andre, there's nothing like a voice, in which you can catch something of your own voice, saying to you: 'Papa, it's time for you to take your medicine,' or 'Grandpa, I think you're better to-day.' "

"It's sickening, all this piffle!" cried Savignolle. "I bet if we had a son-in-law, we'd be angry with him, and our grandchildren would only be waiting for us to peg out, so as to collar the money for bicycles. ... I say, have I really got diabetes? "

Silence. He resumed.

"Are you deaf? Answer when you're spoken to! D'you think I've really got diabetes?"

No reply. He clutched at the bell and rang. The nurse appeared.

"See to Madame, I think there's something wrong with her."

"Hi, Madame," the nurse shouted.

"She won't speak. . . ."

"She's unable to. I was expecting it. I had just the same sort of case with a lady on Boulevard Malesherbes. It goes by a Greek name, and paralyses all the motors, including the tongue. I wonder if she can write. Look, Madame, here's a pencil and writing-pad. Go on! Don't give in! That's splendid. • . . I—I what? I want to drink? I want to eat? I want to make water? Ah, she's started again. *I—no* it's a J. J ... *e* ... *a*. ... Is that all? Do you know what she means, sir?"

"No," said Savignolle.

Well, she was silent. And in this silence he no longer heard 'Jeanne', as he had done formerly. All his thoughts were centred on himself, on his disease. He grumbled, indulged himself and went into a frenzy whenever he imagined that he had swallowed a pill too many or missed a spoonful.

And so it went on for three months. Juliette never looked his way again, never. She was waiting, it seemed, for a meeting that would afford her the only real joy of her life.

"She could eat," he stammered, "but she doesn't want to. I'd love to, but I can't."

He addressed himself to an imaginary witness :

"D'you think that fair? Tell me, yes or no?"

He would muster what pitiful strength he had and expend it cautiously, like an old miser, happy to be able to breathe yet a little and, after sleeping some few minutes, to find himself awake again. . . .

"The trouble with you, Juliette," he said reproachfully, "is that you've given up caring. I'm a lot worse than you are and yet I put up a fight. I've a good constitution, and I'm sure I'd pull through if I had something more than professional attention. . . . Unfortunately, I haven't got it. . . . What are you laughing at? Don't lie! I'm positive you're laughing! Good heavens! I'll smash you ... see if I don't! A pauper who owes everything she's got, to me! Juliette! Madame! Nurse! Help! Someone, quick!"

He choked, with anger, then came a rattling in his throat.

"**Just** a moment," said the nurse. "I'm going to 'phone up for the doctor."

"Juliette," pleaded Savignolle. "Juliette! I don't feel well. Juliette, I think I'm going to die."

She turned towards her husband a bloodless face—framed in two plaits of a whitish hue and so innocent-looking.

He repeated : " Going to die, like a dog," and his head fell back.

Then Juliette made a supreme effort. Her eyelids half-opened, and she pronounced clearly :

"Jeanne would have been here . . . to close your eyes for you. . . ."

by

ILYA EHRENBURG

★

THE PIPE OF PEACE*

A hose yonder rays—of which not a whisper can be heard—travel thousands of years from the stars to the earth, but the span of man's life is brief: childhood and games, love and labour, sickness, death. Powerful telescopes and calculated tables we have, intelligence and eyes, but yet who shall construct such a balance as would show the weight of our brief lives? On one pan put those rays of which no whisper can be heard, those endless figures, space eternal and the universe—and on the other that relentless cooling of our human seed, which comes up, fruits and is withered away.

There was a war. At some future date men will add this or that epithet to it—"great" or "little", for quick distinction from other wars, past or future. To men living at that time it was simply *the* war, just as a plague is simply *the* plague, and death—death.

There was a war, and at a minute point, one minute point among many others—near a confusion of stones once known as the town of Ypres—men who were not of those parts lay down to sleep, rose, ate, and died; died suddenly with windmill arms. They were known as the 118th Regiment of the Line, of the French Army. This regiment, formed in the south, in Provence, consisted of

*** Translated from the Russian by Alec Brown.**

peasant wine-growers or shepherds. For six months those dark, curly headed men ate and slept in pits dug in the clay soil, and shot, and died, with windmill arms, one after another, and this was recorded at the headquarters of the Army Corps in the form that the 118th Regiment was defending positions at the "Black Ford".

Opposite them, some five hundred paces away, were stationed other men, who also shot. Among them few were dark and curly-headed. They were flaxen-haired and pale-eyed, and in appearance they were stouter built and clumsier than the wine-growers, and they spoke a different language. These were wheat-growers from Pomerania, and another Army Headquarters knew them as the 87th Reserve Battalion of the Prussian Army.

These men were enemies, and between the enemies was land which both the wine-growers and the wheat-growers called "No-Man's Land".

This land belonged neither to the German Empire, nor the French Republic, nor the Kingdom of Belgium. Upturned by explosive shells, eaten into all ways by abandoned trenches, thickly manured with the bones of men and rusty metal, this land was dead and no man's. There was not a single blade of grass whole on that miserable surface, and in July afternoons it stank of burning and of blood. But never, not for the most blissful garden of luscious fruits and hot-house flowers, had men struggled as they struggled for that putrid waste. Every day men would creep out from the French land or the German land into that land called "no-man's" and admix their sticky brown blood into the yellow clay.

Some said that France was fighting for liberty, others that she wanted to acquire coal and iron. But Private

Pierre Dubois of the 118th Regiment of the Line simply fought because it was war. Before the war life was the vineyard. When the season was rainy or the vines were attacked by phylloxera, Pierre frowned and took a dry twig and thrashed his dog, because it was eating too much. And when it was a good year and he sold the whole vintage, he put on starched cuffs and paid a visit to the little local town. There, at the *Rendezvous des Princes,* he slapped the waitress's broad and solid rump and put a couple of sous in the machine and listened to the pot-pourri it played, open-mouthed. One year Pierre fell ill—he had a boil in his ear, which was very painful. When he was little he loved riding on the goats and stealing his mother's dried figs. Pierre had a wife, Jeanne, and he often gave her olive-skinned breasts, firm as grapes in a good sunny season, an affectionate squeeze. Such was the life of Pierre Dubois. Then France began this war for liberty or for coal, and he became a private of the 118th.

Five hundred paces away from Pierre Dubois was Peter Diebau, and his life was not at all like the life of Pierre, any more than potatoes are like grapes, or north like south, and at the same time it was infinitely alike, just as all fruits of the earth, all countries and all lives, are alike. Peter had never eaten grapes, he had only seen them in the window of an expensive *Delikatessen* store. He did not care for music, and on his holidays he played skittles. He frowned when the sun was scorching and there was no rain, because then his meadowland parched and the cows went dry. He never had a boil on his ear. One year though he caught a chill and spent a week in bed with high fever. As a boy Peter played with his father's badger hound and tried to catch reflections of

sunlight with his cap. His wife, Johanna, was as white as milk and as puffy as a floury potato. Peter loved that. Such had been his life. And then—some said Germany was fighting for liberty, others that she wanted to acquire iron and coal—Peter Diebau became a private of the 87th Reserve Battalion.

In No-Man's Land there was neither liberty nor coal—nought but bones and rusty barbed wire, but men wanted to gain possession of that no-man's land at all costs. This was the concern of general staffs and the substance of their reports. On 24 April 1916, the lieutenant called Private Pierre Dubois to him and instructed him at two o'clock that night to make his way up an abandoned trench known as "Tom-cat Walk", right up to the German positions and see where their posts were situated.

Pierre Dubois was twenty-eight. That of course was very little—those star rays, of which no whisper can be heard, travel for hundreds of ages of time. Pierre when he heard the order thought of the phylloxera which had ruined his vineyard and of the ills which can assail a man, and that now it was war, when one's life had to be counted no longer by years, but by the day. There were still three hours and fifteen minutes to go before two that night. He found time to sew on a button and write a letter to Jeanne, to tell her not to forget the sulphur on the young vines, and then he warmed his hands over his mug and drank his sour black coffee with noisy enjoyment.

At two that night Pierre crept out over the slippery clay soil to capture No-man's Land. The passage along the trench known as "Tom-cat Walk" took him some time, as at every step he stumbled on dead men's bones

and barbed wire. But at last he reached the end, and other abandoned trenches stretched to left and to right. While he was wondering which road to take, as both ways led to the enemy—in other words, to death—Pierre decided to have a rest, and he lit his pipe, a cheap common soldier's pipe, with mud caked on it. It was very quiet—there was usually a noisy exchange of shots during the day ; during the night they killed one another without any noise, sending out single men like Pierre to creep like snakes, or to mine spitefully.

So Pierre puffed away and gazed at the sky thick with stars. He did not measure or calculate or compare those worlds with his village in Provence. He merely said to himself that away there to the south it must be a clear night too, which was good for the vineyard, and good for Jeanne too, as Jeanne liked warm nights. He lay there smoking, with all the warmth of his hairy animal body enjoying still being alive out there in that dead No-man's Land, alive, breathing, smoking, able to move arm or leg.

But before Pierre had got his pipe well going, a man's face appeared round the corner. Somebody was creeping out towards him from the opposite direction. Pierre saw a broad fair face quite unlike the faces of the vine-growers and shepherds of Provence, a foreign face, a foreign helmet, foreign buttons. This was Peter Diebau, but to Pierre he was simply "the enemy", just as it was simply "the war", or simply "killed in action". He did not know that that evening a German lieutenant had called Peter to him and given orders to him too, or that Peter too had mended his coat, or that he had written to Johanna, to tell her not to forget what to do to the cows in calf, and that he too had munched and supped his

gruel. Pierre did not know anything of that, but even had he known he would not have understood, because on that little patch of earth, among so many patches, was it not war that year? To Pierre, Peter was simply "the enemy", and now he had come face to face with that enemy, creeping towards him, so near that he could feel the other's breathing on his own forehead. Pierre, like some primeval ancestor, like a wolf dwelling in the forest, prepared to spring at his prey and seize it. And opposite him, Peter, seeing "an enemy" so near that he could hear the other's heart beating, like a primeval ancestor, like a wolf, freed his arms and gathered foothold, and measured the distance for his spring.

For some time they lay facing each other, each waiting for the other to begin. Each could see the other's hands, and watched them intently.

Meanwhile smoke went on rising from Pierre's pipe. The two enemies lay facing each other, neither wanting to kill, but fully aware they would have to kill, and breathing loudly into each other's faces. They were like animals sniffing each other. The smell of each was near and familiar to the other; smell of sodden army coat, smell of sweat, smell of foul soup, and smell of clay.

They had come from distant parts, from Provence and from Pomerania, to this land, this No-man's Land, this foreign land, and they knew: this was the enemy, to be extinguished. They made no attempt to speak to each other; there are many foreign parts and foreign lingos. But they lay there thus, face to face, and Pierre's pipe smoked. Peter knew that he could not light up his pipe, because the least movement of his hand meant the life-and-death struggle, and his nostrils greedily drew in the other's tobacco smoke and his lips parted. Pierre under-

stood, and he reached his face still closer, Peter took Pierre's pipe, in his teeth, from Pierre's teeth.

When Peter had drawn deeply he returned the pipe to Pierre, and now, without any request from Peter, Pierre in turn drew deep and immediately offered the pipe to his enemy. And meanwhile not for an instant did their eyes stray from each other's tense, but seemingly relaxed hands. Thus they inhaled a number of times, sharing the relish of that soldier's pipe between them, those two enemies in No-man's Land, which at all costs had to be won. They smoked cautiously, slowly, very, very slowly. Those rays of which no whisper can be heard rush through space for thousands of years ; these men knew that for at least one of them this was the last smoke. Then came the misfortune ; before it was finished the pipe went out. One of those two men had fallen too deep into thought, and had not been timely enough adding his stifled sigh to that pipe's short life. Was it Pierre, fallen to thought of his olive-skinned Jeanne, or was it Peter, parted from his fair Johanna? One of them it was. . . . They knew that it was impossible to get out a lighter : the least movement of either hand meant the death struggle. But one of them was the first to make up his mind, either Pierre, defending the French Republic, in whose hip pocket was a flint lighter with long fuse, or Peter, who had matches and was fighting for the German Empire. One of them it was. . . .

They came to grips and strove each to strangle the other. The pipe fell and was buried in the clay. They strove each to strangle the other, a long silent struggle, during which they tossed about the earth, gathering sticky clay on themselves. Then, as neither could master the other, their teeth came into play, biting into

each other's harsh, unshaven cheeks and wiry necks from which came a smell homely and familiar, and so they worked their sticky brown blood into the yellow dough of the clay soil. . . . Then once again they lay in peace one against the other, only now with no pipe, and dead, on this dead No-man's Land.

Soon after this those rays passing from the many stars without the slightest whisper to this earth were no longer to be seen, and day broke, and as before, when the men who in the night crept through the mud and burrowed into the earth saw the sun, they began their killing of other men noisily, from rifles and guns. And in two army headquarters the names of two privates so unlike and so much alike were entered into the list of those "disappeared", and when night came again new men crept out into that No-man's Land, to accomplish what the night before neither Pierre nor Peter had accomplished; as that year it was "the war".

In a hamlet of Provence olive-skinned Jeanne wept for Pierre as she scattered her sulphur on the vines, and when she had had her fill of weeping she opened her door to a new husband named Paul, because there had to be somebody to cut back the vines and squeeze her breasts, firm like grapes in a good season. And very far away, but yet far far nearer than star is to star, in a hamlet of Pomerania, fair Johanna wept as she gave fodder to the cows in calf, and, as cows call for a great deal of labour, and her body white as milk could not live without caresses, at the farm appeared a new husband, whose name was Paul. That year, as other years, it was life.

In April 1917 No-man's Land, reeking of burning and of blood, ceased to be no man's. One warm clear-skied

day a great many men from various lands died on it, and the yellow clay, worked up with blood, became somebody's own lawful land. Then for the first time men walked calmly along that trench known as "Tom-cat Walk", without even bending their heads, where formerly men had crept on their bellies. At the corner, where the "Tom-cat Walk" ended, and trenches branched left and right, they saw two skeletons embraced, like happy lovers caught by death come of a sudden creeping to them slyly from afar, and beside them lay a little pipe.

There it is in front of me, as I write, a poor little soldier's pipe, which war made a "pipe of peace". In it a little ash still shows grey—trace of two lives, which were burned away faster than that plug of tobacco, lives which were beautiful and insignificant. And how shall we construct such a balance as will weigh that chilling of human seed, placing in one pan a thousand thousand years, and in the other just so much as that little soldier's pipe took to yield its last whiff of smoke? . . .

by

LION FEUGHTWANGER

★

LATE SEASON*

The little old gentleman with the stern face and the white, flowing hair, who might have been taken for an actor or a clergyman, walked along the Vortschau promenade. As he sauntered along, one hand behind his back, in his tidy, old-fashioned coat which was a little too long, with his wide tie and his broad-brimmed crushed hat, he looked like a person of consequence accustomed to consideration. He was no niggard, not too careful of his ten-shilling notes, and yet the natives made broadly humorous and hardly good-natured remarks behind his back. It had been a lean season, and the old gentleman alone would not bring much grist to the mill. Unlike its neighbour Germany, the little country of Austria had stabilized its currency, so that living in the popular summer resort of Vortschau had become expensive for Germans, and the town, generally frequented by them, had had fewer summer visitors than usual. Besides, there had been a great deal of rain, and the season had come to an end before its time. The Mangart Hotel had already dismissed most of its personnel and shut up the main building, leaving only the annexe open for meals. The cafe and the restaurant were closed. The bathing-pool was still available for

*** Translated from the German.**

visitors, but the attendants had gone, and the strangers had to look after themselves as best they could. The Vienna firms had shut up their Vortschau branches; hairdressers, musicians, waiters, and many of the other people employed during the season had returned, grumbling and discontented, to the capital.

The old gentleman walked along the beach road, which was covered with fallen leaves, past villas with closed shutters. Every day he went the same way. The bathing-huts were boarded up, the rowing-boats drawn up on to the shore, only the big motor-boat run by the shipping company sailed lazily over the sunny lake. The natives sat idly about and grumbled. It was adding insult to injury that the late summer should be so warm and so incredibly lovely. Who was going to pay for the beauties of nature now? There were hardly a hundred people left in the whole place.

The little old gentleman wandered, silent and dignified, through the comfortable warmth. The lake lay gently ruffled and softly coloured. The wooded hills, and behind them the peaks covered with fresh snow, rose clear-cut against the mild sky. A gardener tied up flowers with bast, a man in shirt-sleeves boarded up a hut with big nails. They greeted the stranger. It was a good excuse to stop their half-hearted work and gaze after him. They grinned at him, thought him ludicrous, small and serious as he was, with his frog mouth. They had discovered all that was worth knowing about him: it was not much, and there was really very little about him to discuss. He called himself Robert Wickersberg, and he took his meals in the Mangart Hotel, living in the Villa Kainzenhuber. There he had two rooms to himself, and paid without bargaining the exorbitant price

which Frau Kainzenhuber demanded. If he had not paid, the natives would have abused him; because he did so, they thought him simple and ridiculous.

The old gentleman, his soft hat in his hand, the wind blowing round his white-thatched cranium, with his prominent teeth sticking out like the slates of a roof, had meanwhile reached the end of the promenade. Here there was a little square, with seats and a bust of the well-known song composer, Matthias Laischacher, a native of the town. The old gentleman stopped in front of the bust and contemplated it. The composer Laischacher must have had a large, fleshy face with a big moustache : the bronze bust was not able to conceal the hopeless triviality in the countenance of its subject. The composer Laischacher had started a quartette of his countrymen, he himself had sung with them, and his quartette had become famous, appearing on both sides of the ocean and earning much money and many honours. The old gentleman, examining the bust solemnly, without a smile, pictured to himself how this man, with three others in dress-clothes, had sung his sentimental tunes in an over-crowded concert hall. Still without smiling he read the pompous inscription extolling in banal, bombastic words the emotional music of the popular townsman.

From the little square a side-path led towards the wood, mounting steeply, uncared for and quite solitary. The old gentleman climbed up the path. He had longed for solitude and now sought it assiduously. His name was indeed Robert Wickersberg, but though the people of the town had never heard of it, it was a very well-known name. For Robert Wickersberg ranked as one of the very few real national poets, and to many he was the

first of them all. He lived quietly and ascetically in a little town, surrounded by a circle of devoted admirers. It was a strain to live thus year after year, to express opinions every one of which mattered, to be always the leader and to behave accordingly, to make no gesture and utter no word without considering the consequences. Even if one had nothing but contempt for the opinion of the world, it still affected one, and though one never set eyes on a newspaper, disciples reported on their contents. One lived in an ivory tower, but the world was always just outside and the sight of it irritated the soul. One had to get a rest from it all, from the curious, secret despotism over the disciples, from the sight, even though distant, of a trifling, busy world. And so, unobtrusively, and without telling anyone his destination, he had come to this place, Vortschau, which would be one of the few places in the country where his name was not known.

He reached the top of the path, sat down on a seat and gazed out over the beautiful, placid landscape, looking at the mountains and the lake. This was his sixth day here. He walked about among people who were slow, rough, miserly, and naively cunning—a great gentleman of whose dignity everyone was unaware. He sat here and there on a bench from which he could get a view, lay in the wood, swam or rowed. Everything in moderation as though he were at home. This was just what he had expected to do, and yet it did not quite meet his expectations. At home no newspaper was allowed near him, here he had to restrain himself from taking up the little provincial papers which lay about the hotel. At home no stranger was admitted and his intimates were sparing of their words, so that he should not be irritated or

annoyed. Here he conversed in the morning with his landlady, Frau Kainzenhuber, and in the afternoon with the manager of the Mangart Hotel. As he was accustomed to drink tea, Frau Kainzenhuber explained to him how delightful and how good for him the Austrian coffee was. The hotel manager dilated on the Austrian wines, recommending especially their cheapness, on the bad season and the reasons and results of it, on the composer, Matthias Laischacher, one of whose original scores he possessed. It was a simple song telling of a pair of lovers sailing, faithful unto death, over the still, evening lake. Twice already the manager had shown him the score, expensively framed.

Robert Wickersberg, the poet, looked at his watch, stood up, and made his way to the hotel for lunch. It was not yet lunch-time but already the few guests had assembled, for here and at this quiet time there was nothing to do but wait after one meal for the next. Wickersberg looked at his fellow guests, a few respectable citizens, officials, better-class typists, a Jewish couple from Vienna, a clever, gentle-looking lawyer with his lively, florid wife, and a family with a Saxon accent consisting of a well-dressed man, a somewhat haughty wife, and a pretty, young, loud, impertinent daughter. They had probably all inquired about the gentleman with the curious face and had certainly been told his name, but they thought no more about it when they heard that he was Robert Wickersberg. He had always despised the opinion of the world, proudly refusing to be interviewed or photographed ; and yet it was a little mortifying that his name conveyed nothing at all to them.

After lunch he went to the bathing-pool. It was absolutely empty. He undressed. The skin of his well-cared-

for body was still very smooth. It was reddened by the bathing of the last few days and to-morrow it would be brown. Robert Wickersberg climbed up to the gallery, smeared himself over with oil and lay down on the wooden floor. He shut his eyes and, stretching himself at full length, baked in the hot sun. The lake plashed gently, from far away came the sound of the man hammering up the hut. An aeroplane floated at a great height, the hum of its engine could be heard very faintly. It was the regular service machine flying between Vienna and Venice. One might visit Venice again. No, there would be people there who would recognize him. The flight here over the mountains had been beautiful. Really, this was exactly what he had been looking for. The neighbourhood suited him, and he felt more vigorous than he had done for a long time. And his plans, too, would thrive in the pleasant dullness of the place. The play, *Asmodai,* of which he had already finished two acts, would be something worth doing. He had not written himself out, he was not an old man. Last century a man was old at fifty or sixty, but to-day that had changed. The normal age of man was rising, all the statistics showed that. He had lived healthily, perhaps drunk a little heavily. But he would not think of giving up, there was nothing at all in that. The colourful, select, austere art of which he was a master was said to be dead, but when the waters receded, it would be found that it was what had remained, everlasting. There were not many who believed in it, but their number was not decreasing and they were the very best. Even the newspapers noticed that The young, insolent generation who made fun of him would receive many unpleasant surprises. Admittedly he had had some difficult years, but

now he felt inspired again. It would be very dull if everything had been already attained. It was good that there were still difficulties to be overcome. *Asmodai* would astonish some of them—Franz the waiter among them.

Wickersberg's face hardened as he thought of Franz the waiter. He was the thorn in the poet's flesh. He was head waiter of the cafe in the little town which Wickersberg had visited for forty years and to which he went every two months even now that he was famous. Franz the waiter had been employed nearly all that time at the cafe, and had a good deal to thank the poet for—many clients, high tips, interviews in the papers. But Franz the waiter—and this was the worm in the heart of the poet—did not believe in him. Franz the waiter had heard sharp criticisms of the poet, there had been battles and wounds before Robert Wickersberg had won his place among the Immortals. Some still in that company and others who had been cast out, had criticized him in the crudest way. Franz the waiter had sometimes heard it said that Wickersberg's chiselled verses were affected and worthless. Had Wickersberg been able to believe that it was only the abuse of the rabble that had made Franz an unbeliever, he would not have minded. But he knew very well that Franz the waiter formed his own opinion, not without care, the opinion of a man of experience and a keen observer of human nature. He had never spoken of it in front of Wickersberg. He was a well-trained servant and knew his place. But Wickersberg could read it in the waiter's face, in the way he brought him his coffee. And though at times the performances of Wickersberg's plays ran into thousands, though they had been translated into every European language and had been

performed in Japanese theatres, too, Franz the waiter had not altered his opinion—had never modified his politeness, the excellence of his service, or his opinion. Both men knew this quite well, though no word had ever been spoken on the subject. Only once, after his fiftieth birthday, while the adulation of the whole literary world was still rising round the poet's knees, he had said to the waiter as the latter helped him on with his coat, "Well, Franz, still nothing in it?'[5] But the waiter had only looked at him sadly, and had regretfully shrugged his shoulders.

This then was what the poet Wickersberg was thinking of in the deserted baths of the summer resort of Vortschau, and the thought rankled. But his vexation melted in the heat. He thought of the verses about the desert in his play of *Solomon and Asmodai,* those verses in which the yellow vastness of the desert was embodied for all time. He lay on the warm wooden planks of the gallery, his body, no longer young, but well cared for, glistening with oil and gentle perspiration, and a great and agreeable indolence enveloped him.

Someone came into the enclosure. Robert Wickersberg half raised himself from the hot wooden floor and blinked over the railing. It was the little Saxon girl of the restaurant. She had run down in her bathing-dress and cloak. She looked up at him, smiled, and waited for him to speak to her. But as he said nothing, she stayed below and lay down in the sun.

The girl is pretty, dainty, and very slim. Her eyes are narrow and long and of a deep, rather stupid blue, and she laughs a great deal. But why think of her? He has this agreeable indolence now and besides, he has his plans. He is in good form and will be able to give his

detractors something to think about. These are good plans.

They are miserable plans. *Asmodai* might have come to something. The vision had been very clear, in strong, satisfying colours. It had been an original idea for the king to put the demon on the throne while he himself dived down amongst the last men on the edge of the desert so that he might experience the depths of human emotion. He had written the first act at a sitting. It was a good piece of work, drawn from a brimming spring, with no pumping required. He had seen it all so distinctly, blossoming spontaneously. But the rest halted. It had begun thin and dry and it had remained so. He had started it afresh three or four times, and once inspiration had come to him and the yellow song of the desert had been the result. But the rest was without melody, laboriously conceived, barren, lifeless. Probably nobody but he would notice it. He had the master touch, so that even the dull clay looked like marble and had an air of nobility when he modelled it. But clay it remained, and he knew it was clay.

Be that as it may, the desert verses were good, verses with his own hall-mark, the hall-mark of his good years. Let the young rabble do as well if they could. He stretched himself in the sun, mopped the healthy pleasant perspiration, oiled himself again, turned over on the other side and laid his head on his folded arms. These few days had done him good. The verses about the desert had come to him here. He had made a good choice, the little town of Vortschau was the right place for him. The people who lived here were coarse, stupid, miserly, hard, and slow-witted, but it was a good neighbourhood, and perhaps some day people would

say, "It was here that Robert Wickersberg wrote his play, *Solomon and Asmodai."*

He might really relax his austerity here a little. He would allow himself for once to look at the papers, could perhaps even make advances to the Saxon girl. He had so little desire as a rule for the lower things of life that, if he were to trifle with them here, it would only emphasize the healthy strictness of his days at home. He stood up and went to the railing. The girl still lay in the sun, slim and pretty in her swimming-suit. He went down the steps. She turned her head and eyed him from between half-closed lids. He passed her, and her gaze followed him lazily. He splashed the water over himself to cool him down, stepped carefully into the lake and swam about for a few minutes. Then he climbed the steps again and shook himself deliberately, mounted the stairs to the balcony, put on his bathing-wrap, leaned over the railings and looked down at the girl, who was still lying in the same place in the sun.

All at once, blinking lazily, she called up," Why didn't you jump in?" Rather stupidly he hunted for a reply and said at last, not exactly brilliantly—

"I think it's wiser to go in like that."

"It would bore me to creep into the water by inches," she said.

They exchanged a few more trivial remarks. She spoke with a pronounced Saxon accent and what she said was of no account. But the poet thought she was intelligently made and it was pretty to see how she enjoyed the sun. Without warning she took the offensive : "What are you doing here in Vortschau?" she asked. "A grown-up man must be terribly bored in a place like this."

"Perhaps I want to be bored," he answered.

"And that's why you talk to me? You aren't very polite," she replied quickly.

Wickersberg did not mind her accent. "If you find it so dull, why do you stay here?" he asked. She told him unaffectedly that she could not persuade her parents to go to a more lively place. Her father, a manufacturer in Dresden, wanted to rest and enjoy the beauties of nature during his holidays. She had managed to persuade them to go to Venice in a fortnight's time. Suddenly, very nimbly, she jumped up; she was getting too hot, she said, and dived into the water. She did not stay long, but came back to him shouting and splashing him.

Robert Wickersberg knew that as a rule women liked him only for what he had done, for his name, his success, perhaps too for his influence. He was gratified to think that to this girl he was merely a man called Wickersberg and that he pleased her even apart from the pedestal of his works.

She sat down confidentially beside him, very pretty in her wet swimming-suit, and told him about herself. Her parents were wealthy, but it was boring to live all the time at home, with the prospect of making a dull, respectable marriage. She was learning singing and wanted to get into musical comedy or, better still, into revue. She wanted to go to Berlin. She was pretty and would soon make her way there. Her parents would probably give in when they realized that she was really serious about it. She told him all this in her funny Saxon accent, and Wickersberg listened. She spoke quite sensibly, she did not think she had a great deal of talent, but she was sure she was up to the standard of the ordinary chorus girl. "Or do you think I'm not pretty

enough for a Berlin revue?" She really was pretty. Her name Was Use.

It was arranged they should go for a walk after dinner. Her parents would probably be tired, but if not they could trot along behind them. Then they would have privacy.

Wickersberg had gone in a mood of irritation to Vortschau. His own successes had not given him any satisfaction, he was not even entertained by the failures of the younger generation. He had no desire to write, no desire to read. The placid lake gave him no pleasure, nor did the clear-cut silhouette of the hills, nor did the feeling of his own vitality. Now he walked with a more rapid step through the place, started a conversation with the fruit-vendor woman, bought some Vienna newspapers at the little shop. He was interested as he read the gossipy pages, amused by a malicious anecdote about a colleague and by the respectful mention of his own name. He sat down on a seat on the promenade, beating time with his delicate, nervous hand to a melody which ran in his head. The passing townspeople shook their heads as they saw him and thought him crazy.

He returned home, shaved himself for the second time, changed his coat and his collar and made a few cheerful remarks to old Frau Kainzenhuber, so that she thought him quite elegant and approachable. During dinner he engaged in a long conversation with the hotel manager, and asked that flattered gentleman to show him Matthias Laischacher's original score again. He drank the excellent Austrian wine and said something to the buxom, lively serving-maid, which sounded from a distance like an old-fashioned compliment and which she accepted with a laugh, well used to such pleasantries.

Later on came the promised walk. After a little difficulty the parents were persuaded to trot on in front as they were meant to do, and he stayed with the girl in the darkness. But she had changed since the afternoon, and was moody and contradictory. He felt with annoyance that he was a white-haired, solemn old gentleman. She asked him what he did when he was at home. He did a little writing, he answered apologetically. "If you write for the papers," she said, "you might be able to help me." As he made no reply to this she probably thought he was boasting, and she became sarcastic.

He saw that he would not get on without mentioning his books, and was tempted to explain matters but was ashamed to do so. Had he come to this corner of the world to carry on a flirtation with a little girl exactly like thousands of others? The manufacturing father was quite right if he was laughing at the white-haired donkey. Wickersberg became silent. "You are tired and boring," decided the girl disapprovingly.

Next day he was again the morose, solitary old gentleman. He went for his walk, looked long and peevishly at the bust of the composer Laischacher, rowed on the lake. Sure enough he met the girl at the bathing-pool, but she was not alone. Beside her lay a young man in a bathing-wrap—arrogantly loud, thought Wickersberg. She was laughing and excited, obviously the two got on splendidly together. Wickersberg lay down on the balcony in the sun as he had done the day before. Probably she was making fun of him for the benefit of the young man. She had every right to do so. Anyhow he did not care in the least. He shut his eyes. It was very pleasant lying in the sun. It would be still more pleasant

to have the sun all to one's self. The chatter and noise of the young people disturbed him.

After a while he went down to swim. The girl called to him and they began a little conversation in which the young man joined harmlessly, with Austrian politeness. They talked about bathing, about the pretty little island just opposite. During the season there was a restaurant open there and many people rowed across, sometimes swimming part of the way. Would it be very exhausting to swim right across? The young man declared he would think nothing of it. Herr Wickersberg remarked that he himself was not a bad swimmer, though rather out of training. The girl looked at him out of her long, narrow, dark blue eyes, and then looked at the young man.

"It is easy to make excuses," she remarked.

"Do you think I couldn't swim across?" asked Wickersberg.

She looked at him again, then at the young man, and shrugged her shoulders. She was very pretty in her swimming-suit, slim and fresh.

Robert Wickersberg climbed down the wooden steps into the water. One step was broken and he plunged in somewhat inelegantly. The girl laughed. The poet swam a few strokes experimentally, then turned over onto his back. The afternoon was getting on. The water was not exactly warm, and there was a feeling of autumn in the air. The girl and the young man leaned over the railing and called something to him. He started off in the direction of the island.

He swam with easy, regular strokes, then lay on his back, resting. He was really a practised swimmer and had swum longish distances in the South Seas. Certainly

the water of this Alpine lake was less buoyant, and it was already confoundedly cold. He swam more quickly to warm himself, taking a purely animal delight in the movement and in the water. He had long ago forgotten the girl. Now he was very near the island. He turned over again on his back, lay with eyes closed, rocking gently, with a vacant, solemn, childish face, the white evening sky above him. Then he swam the short distance still remaining and stepped out onto the island with a feeling of pride, as though at last he had conquered *Asmodai.* Suddenly he felt very cold, and began to shiver violently. What a nuisance that the silly restaurant was no longer open. He ran up and down, swinging his arms strenuously. The stones and the gravel hurt his bare feet. He could not get warm.

Rather miserably he went back into the lake. It was getting dark and very cold. He swam rapidly, strongly, his chin deep in the water. Then he told himself he must harbour his strength. Forward! Outward! Quite slowly! Now he would count three hundred strokes and then try the crawl for a bit. But now, notwithstanding the cold, he had to rest for a while, otherwise he would not manage it. The little waves kept beating against his mouth and ears. The head-wind will cost him at least a quarter of an hour. The land seems to recede instead of coming nearer. It is probably a current that is carrying him away. Now it is quite dark, heaven knows how long he has been swimming. Hateful! Not too hurriedly! He must be sensible. No waste of strength or time. Head straight for that light there, never deviate an inch from the course, no unnecessary movement !

Regularly, calmly, breathing strongly, with his heart beating loudly, his head well forward, he struggled

through the cold and darkness. Blue with cold he clutched at the steps leading up to the baths and, shaking all over, with incredible difficulty pulled himself up by the railing. He stood with heaving sides, rubbed his limbs feverishly, his face stiff with cold. It was night, the baths were empty, the girl and the young man had gone long ago. The lake lay blackly dull. Most unpleasant. There was wind and no moon.

Robert Wickcrsberg dressed himself hastily and untidily. He went home, ordered some hot wine from Frau Kainzenhuber, who muttered disapprovingly, and went to bed. He slept badly that night, feeling hot and limp, and decided not to get up in the morning. Towards midday his temperature had risen so high that Frau Kainzenhuber became alarmed, and called in a neighbour. It was decided to take the old gentleman to the hospital in the neighbouring little town of Kaltenfurth.

In this hospital there was among the younger doctors one who read books. He knew the name of Wickersberg. He looked at the distinguished frog-mouthed head of the sick man and convinced himself that the patient was identical with the poet.

Next day the local paper informed its readers that the well-known writer and poet, Robert Wickersberg, who had been staying at Vortschau for his health, was lying seriously ill with inflammation of the lungs at the Kaltenfurth hospital. There was, however, great hope that the tested skill of the Kaltenfurth doctors would pull the celebrated guest through. In the evening the news was in the Vienna papers, and the next day in all the foreign papers.

Quickly the Vortschau people now forgot that they

had ever laughed at the curious old gentleman, with his frog-mouth and his protruding, slate-like teeth. Active gentlemen appeared in the hotels of the little town of Kaltenfurth, Viennese journalists, who nosed about in every corner, finding out what the ill man had been doing during the last few days, whom he had spoken to, why he had chosen to come to Vortschau at all. In and around the little hotel stood these gentlemen, snapping up bits of news as the fish at the edge of the lake snap up the crumbs of the visitors, each one anxious that he should not be an instant behind the others with news of the catastrophe. The doctors in attendance on the rapidly sinking man had to issue bulletins every half-hour, and the little post office asked for extra help from Vienna. Some of the journalists were humanly sceptical and cynical. Others really felt sorry when they made out their telegrams with the news that there was now practically no hope of keeping the patient alive. While others thought it high time that the old gentleman should retire from this life.

It was a glorious early autumn. Vortschau, which now appeared in the papers more than other watering-places, attracted visitors. The little cafe put out its tables on the beach again, the shipping company brought out the second large motor-boat, the lake was lively with rowing-boats. Who would have thought that the pavilion with the view, the Gloriette, would see so many visitors this year? The man in shirt-sleeves pulled out the nails he had used to board up his hut, the bathing-pool attendant appeared again. The combined choral societies of Kaltenfurth and Vortschau met together to practise certain solemn songs by the composer, Laischacher. The manager of the Mangart Hotel

felt himself of particular importance. In great haste he had had his second pair of striped trousers pressed, and incessantly, with expansive Austrian courtesy, he related with what understanding and interest the Master had conversed with him, how pleased he had been with the lake, the hills, the fine air, the excellent Austrian cooking of the hotel. In his guttural dialect he lamented at great length the unfortunate chance that the Master should have been carried off just as his health was improving. Much affected, he told how the Master had, time and again, asked to be shown the original score of the composer, Laischacher, and how, lost in thought, he had often lingered, an earnest expression on his face, before the bust of the great musician: The gardener, too, told each day with greater detail how interested the old gentleman had been in his flowers; he, the gardener, had felt at once that this could be no ordinary visitor, but must be some person of distinction. Indeed, remembering the words of one of the Laischacher songs, the gardener insisted on sending the ill man a bunch of asters and late roses. But Frau Kainzenhuber had most to tell. As she set before the interviewers her excellent Austrian coffee, she told how she had known at once that a great man had come to stay at her modest but well-kept and superior house. She had made him as comfortable as possible, and in spite of her opinion that coffee was better for the digestion, had taken particular care in preparing the tea which the Master had obstinately preferred.

All these details were repeated again and again in the newspapers. They had to be treated at some length, for the patient lingered excessively over dying—it was really too bad of him to keep them all waiting so long.

Robert Wickersberg, meanwhile, lay in the best room of the Kaltenfurth Hospital. He was conscious most of the time that this was the end, but he was in no hurry and refused to be harassed. His temperature was high, and he had all kinds of hallucinations. Once he even saw the missing part of *Asmodai*, just as he had seen it when the play first came into his mind. He was not sorry that the work would probably never be finished now, in spite of the clear vision he had of it. On the contrary, he smiled, almost a little maliciously, to think that theatre directors, actors, and agents would not be able to squabble over it, but that the work would leave the world with him, unknown to everybody. The only pity was that Franz the waiter would not know of it either, and so would retain his mistaken opinion of his capabilities.

Wickersberg's divorced wife arrived. She had hoped to get a good deal out of this death-bed scene, but she had deluded herself. The poet treated her coldly and refused to see her a second time. The journalists did not take her seriously. Frau Wickersberg had already unburdened her heart of her feelings against the poet in a gossiping and rather unpleasant book. So that was an old story now, out of date and uninteresting. The papers took more notice of the stories of Frau Kainzenhuber and the hotel manager.

Wickersberg lay feeling listless and rather irritable, occasionally too as though he had been cheated by God and the world. To carry on a flirtation, to appear scornful and satisfied before a submissive public, to sit beside a lovely lake and drink good wine—all those things he had reckoned lightly when they were within his grasp. Now he would gladly fill many days full of

such pleasures, trite though they were. Not to speak of *Asmodai.* How good it would have been to finish it! But the years of a man are three-score and ten, and if by reason of strength they be four-score, yet is their strength labour and sorrow.

Suddenly he knew how it had happened that he had nearly succeeded with the end *of Asmodai.* All at once he knew who the desert maiden was who shed a gentle radiance over the work. He had not seen the girl for decades, perhaps she had died long ago, but he knew exactly how she used to turn her head, very fine and narrow and a little pointed. He saw her in the long, old-fashioned blue frock in which he had first met her at some provincial ball. For he had been very young then and had gone rather scornfully and ironically with his friends to this middle-class, homely entertainment. But all the same he was far removed then from the austerity which had cramped his later life, and he had looked at the girl in blue with much more interest than, for instance, at the Saxon girl, Use. He had not met the girl in blue very often, but in spite of that he could remember now, in the Kaltenfurth Hospital, her damp little hand, her shabby brown shoes, her rather high voice, the whole, slender person that had seemed to him then so bright and demure. Probably she had been so, but she had not put in her appearance at the right time, she had come on the scene too early. Ten years later one might have made a study of her, or something of that sort. At that time she had had a small post in an office and probably she had grown sour there. The reason he had wanted to walk with Use was only that there was something about the way that slim, sharp person held her head which reminded him of the other. It was really

a pity that he had not concerned himself more with the girl in blue. No, it was not a pity. He would almost certainly have been disappointed. But now she gave him the gentle radiance of the desert maiden in his play, *Asmodai.*

It would be hateful if strange eyes were to read their own vulgarity into the desert maiden. He realized without anger how stupid and uncomprehending Use, for instance, would be towards her. He had his writing things brought, and there and then got the nurse to dig out all the *Asmodai* material. Then she had to write to Franz the waiter, in the little Rhine town, asking him to telegraph on receipt of the letter that he promised to tell no one anything about a packet which Robert Wickersberg intended to send him. Then she had to destroy the letter, and simply to tie up into a bundle all the sheets of *Asmodai* that she had dug out, to seal it up, and write on a sheet of paper : "To be given after my death to Herr Franz Klüsgens, waiter, at B.-on-the-Rhine." Robert Wickersberg signed the paper and pledged the nurse to secrecy. He needed no promise from Franz the waiter. He looked at the nurse's broad, dependable, calm peasant face, and rejoiced slyly that no hunter after posthumous works but only Franz the waiter would ever get hold of this successful play. It was a good moment, perhaps the best of his life, except for the time he had spent with the girl in blue; and it lasted a long time, almost a quarter of an hour. Only then did the death struggle set in, long and difficult.

Use was quite overcome when she heard who it was that had swum the lake in her honour. The old gentleman had been a great man after all, Robert Wickersberg the poet—not so famous as a boxer or a tennis champion

but well known just the same. Actually it was for her that he had died. For a whole afternoon she gave herself up to the confusion of her feelings, eating nothing, drinking nothing, seeing nothing of the young man. It saddened even more than disgusted her, not to have known who Robert Wickersberg was. Probably, if only she had set her mind on it, he would have made her his wife or at least his mistress.

by

LOUIS GOLDING

★

I SLEPT WITH A MURDERER

I slept with a murderer every night of my life for two years. The murderer is dead now. He died some weeks ago in Chicago. That is why I am free to tell the tale.

I was a small boy at that time. I must have been ten or eleven years old. We lived in a poor street in Manchester, which was blocked by a wire factory from the pitchy waters of the river Irwell. My father made his living by teaching Hebrew to small boys. One of these boys was named Benny.

Benny was alone in the world excepting for his mother. I never quite made up my mind what the two lived on. I think there was a father somewhere in America, who sent along a few dollars from time to time. Benny's mother couldn't do anything, she was so delicate. She died soon after.

The consequence was that Benny came to live with us, although we were pretty crowded already, and my mother had as much as she could do looking after the rest of us.

We put up a bed for Benny in the lodger's room on the first floor, though there wasn't much room left, what with the lodger and the bed and the table already in it. (The lodger wasn't really a lodger. He was just another down-and-out, a sort of elder Benny. That was the way

my father and mother helped themselves out with the rent.) I had a tiny attic all to myself on the top floor.

When Benny lived with us I began to realize he was a strange boy, quite unlike all the other boys I knew. He was extraordinarily refined and delicate in all his perceptions. He would stand at a florist's shop window and stare at one single bloom for half an hour at a time.

If a woman came to the house wearing a silk frock, it would give him intense pleasure to be allowed to pass the soft texture between his fingers or against his cheek. In other words, the boy had an acute sense of beauty. I was fairly sensitive myself in those days, but compared with Benny I was a lump of wood.

Benny had been living with us getting on for a year, when my father one day announced that a young cousin of his named Mottel was coming over from Russia to Manchester. He would, of course, live with us. That went without saying.

My father announced the news, and my mother received it with so much excitement and pleasure that there was obviously something very special about this cousin Mottel.

I myself didn't feel too well disposed towards any more cousins from Russia. The place was littered with them.

"What's he like?" I asked, rather surlily.

"What's he like?" my father repeated. He lifted his hands, but words failed him. He turned to my mother. "What's he like, he wants to know!" Then he found the word for it. "He's—he's beautiful!" he said.

"Yes," my mother corroborated. "He's beautiful!"

They went on night after night about how beautiful cousin Mottel was. There seemed to be no other word for it than that—beautiful. I've a vivid recollection of the picture of Mottel that built itself up in my mind, and a pretty shrewd one of the picture that must have built itself up in Benny's.

I had seen my first musical comedy lately—I think it was *Floradora.* There was a beautiful young man in it, tall and slim with wavy hair and dimpled cheeks. The girls in the chorus swooned when he came lolloping on to the stage in mauve flannels. That was how beautiful I thought Mottel was going to be.

Benny had saved up his weekly halfpennies and bought a book off a barrow. It had photographs of Greek statues in it. Benny studied them, and marvelled and worshipped. Benny's Mottel was like an early Apollo.

Then Mottel arrived. He wasn't a bit like a musical comedy star or a Greek statue. He was squat and dark and a bit bandy-legged. The hair on his skull was like black wire. There was still more hair on his cheeks and chin, which wasn't a beard, yet wasn't quite not a beard. He wasn't at all fair to outward view. He was, in fact, ugly.

Yet even in the first five minutes, after I had got over my first shock of disappointment, I began to have an inkling of what my father and mother meant when they said he was beautiful. To begin with, he had beautiful eyes, even though they were a bit watery. Or, if they were not quite beautiful, they were tender and had a sort of dewy glint in them. And though his face was rather awful, there was something charming in the set

of his mouth. Again, it was a kind mouth—really almost a beautiful mouth.

But I realized almost immediately that his face or his body hadn't anything to do with it at all, when my parents called him beautiful. It was something else, something I'd have to find out.

And I did find out, before many weeks had gone by.

Mottel was a very learned and pious person, and to old-fashioned Jews, that is the very pinnacle of beauty. It doesn't occur to them even to see the body when the soul is full of learning and piety. And I must say Mottel was really very nice about his virtues. He didn't thrust them down your throat, as some people not half so learned and pious do.

I quite liked Mottel, even though I'd have preferred it if he'd been a little easier on the eye. There was another reason why I got over the shock quite soon. I saw the joke of it. It really was quite funny.

But little Benny never got over the shock of it. He had no sense of humour at all. I turned from Mottel's face to Benny's the very moment I could catch my breath after the vision burst on me. I saw Benny's eyes distended with horror. There was a glaze on them. His face was as pale as a candle.

And then another expression came into Benny's eyes —an expression of implacable hatred. I realized he would never forgive Mottel for betraying the lovely Greek ideal he had built up in his imagination. He would never forgive Mottel for being so ugly. Poor Mottel! Poor Benny!

Benny was not an articulate boy. I don't think any-

body but me had an inkling of the way Benny detested Mottel, least of all Mottel himself. Mottel was so full of kindness, he couldn't begin to conceive how anybody hated anybody.

But there they were, sleeping a few feet away from each other night after night, month after month, with just a tiny table between them. (The earlier lodger kindly went next door to make room for Mottel.) It was a nightmare for poor Benny. Once or twice I saw Mottel pat Benny kindly on the back, up in their room or down in the kitchen. Benny winced as if something cold and horrible had touched him, like a toad or an adder.

Even if Mottel could have seen it, he wouldn't have realized what it meant when Benny shook all over at his touch, like a leaf. But Mottel couldn't see it. He had weak eyes. He washed them with lotion after lotion, but it didn't seem to make them any better. It was a pity, because, as I said before, they were quite beautiful eyes.

Mottel had been living with us for about a year when my cousin Hilda got married. It was rather a grand wedding, for cousin Hilda's young man was in business for himself, and, besides, he lived in Dalston, in London, which was particularly grand.

I don't quite know how my father managed it, but there were new suits for both Benny and me. It didn't run to a new suit for Mottel. He got his Saturday one pressed.

We went along in full strength to cousin Hilda's wedding. She was married from her own house. The festivities went on hour after hour ; it was fine.

You never saw such fried fish and ducklings and chickens and wine as they had at cousin Hilda's wedding.

Mottel got just a little bit muzzy as the evening went on, partly because he wasn't used to so much drink, partly because it is really a good deed to show how happy you are when a good Jewish boy and girl get married to each other.

I must confess it didn't suit Mottel to get muzzy. His lips protruded more and more, and they were just a little damp. And there was something parboiled about his face, too.

A pious Jew isn't allowed to shave, but he'd put some powder on his face that morning, which seemed to have destroyed the hair-roots for life. He really looked better with a bit of a screen round his cheeks and chin.

Now and again my eyes fell on Benny. Benny didn't look at the bride or the bridegroom or me, or anybody but Mottel. He stared at him in fascinated loathing. He got paler and paler as the evening went on, his eyes larger and larger.

He lifted a glass to his lips as if to appease his sickness, but the glass slid between his fingers to the floor. I saw beads of sweat running down his forehead on to his face. I went over to him.

"Benny," I said. "What's wrong? Let me take you out into the open air."

"I'm going home," he said faintly. "Will you get the key from Uncle?" (He meant my father.)

"You'll be all right, Benny," I assured him. "All you want is a bit of fresh air."

"I want to go home," he said. He said it in such a tone I knew he meant it. "I want to go to bed."

"All right," I agreed. "I'll go with you."

"No, no!" he shrieked. His face was white with fury. His eyes were quite strange.

"All right," I said quietly. "I'll get the key for you."

So Benny went off home alone. The rest of us didn't go back till a few hours later. Mottel wasn't at all a pleasant sight. He got to bed somehow.

Benny and I had to go to school as usual next morning. The gentleman we knew as the "School Board" wouldn't have excused us school merely because we'd been to a strenuous wedding the day before.

When we got back at midday we found a crowd in front of the house. There was also a bucket of water and a cup for you to wash your hands in over the pavement's edge. That meant someone was dead in the house. My heart jumped like a stabbing pin. "Mottel!" I heard them say. "Mottel! Poor Mottel! A saint in Israel!"

Poor Mottel had been so muzzy when he came in the night before, he had poisoned himself. He always had a glass of water on the table by his bedside, which he drank off last thing.

On the shelf above his head he kept his bottle of eye-lotion: a fearsome blue bottle it was, marked "Poison" very clearly. He had been so drunk he poured the lotion into his glass of water and drained it. He was dead, anyhow.

The next few days were a trance of horror which I prefer not to recall, not until that culminating last moment in which Benny was so strangely involved. Benny, whose existence had been as completely obliterated from my mind during those few days as if he'd been a raindrop fallen into a gutter.

They lifted the coffin-lid to let us have a last look at Mottel before he was wiped out for ever. I tried to turn

my head away, but I could not. I tried to shut my eyes, but I could not. Mottel easily and proudly commanded me to look at him. I looked.

A transformation had come over him. No, that is not right. The essential Mottel lay there revealed, the most beautiful thing I have ever set eyes on. His skin had the quality of marble, the loveliest smile of which the mortal mouth is capable lay on his lips. He had dignity, delicacy, serenity : he was more beautiful than any pagan Apollo.

My eyes turned from the dead face to a living face separated from me by the width of the coffin. I saw the beauty of dead Mottel impressed upon the eyes of the living Benny, as the sun is impressed upon a mountain tarn. His eyes were wild with beauty.

Then Benny turned towards me as if he had heard me call him. I looked into his eyes. I saw the glory go out of them and the desolation of a charnel-house extinguish them. I saw his lips quiver, his body shake. He broke down into a lugubrious howling, such as a lonely animal might make in an empty house.

They took him away, whispering: "Poor Benny. He is such a delicate boy.[55] He was a delicate enough boy, but I knew as surely as I knew that my heart beat, that Benny was Mottel's murderer.

It was considered unwise for Benny to sleep any longer in the room where Mottel had died. There was no place for him anywhere else in the house, so he came to sleep in my bed up in the attic. I slept with him every night for two years, knowing he was a murderer. But I did not feel afraid—at least, not very often.

by

BERL GRINBERG

★

MORNING BREEZES*

The train was made up of ten coaches ; of these, nine were first-class throughout and almost empty; but the one hitched on at the end, with second-class compartments, was crammed with passengers—for the most part petty traders going to the metropolis for cut-price supplies, and there were also a few labourers who had left the mountain settlements behind in the hope of finding work in the capital.

By and by the train ran into the half-light of a misty dawn, with the fleeting green pampas revealed on either side, and on it rushed, onwards to the as yet heavily blurred horizon. It left in its trail a cloud of smoke, and it rudely awakened the cattle which, having spent the night out, were startled at first, but soon discerned that a new day was breaking and that fresh crops of grass had sprung up overnight, which were waiting to be devoured.

At last the train burst at a mad pace into the suburbs of the great city, holding up traffic in street after street. White poles dropped hurriedly into position at the level-crossings, but a few dare-devils jumped off the delayed tramcars and, hurdling the barriers, gave desperate chase to the trams in front that had managed to get

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

across the railway line by a matter of seconds. As for those who stayed behind, they groaned wretchedly and exchanged significant looks—glum looks which told of their fear of being late for work at the factory, and many uneasy fingers itched to throw a stone or other missile at the passing train.

But no such thing happened, and proudly, attended by an enormous clatter, the train sped into the magnificent terminus station; with it came a whiff that was by no means magnificent, but this was the fault of nature, for on the previous day the train had travelled fifty kilometres through a dense swarm of locusts milliards strong. This crawling army had at the time lacked a breeze for flight and so had just been hopping along the ground at their leisure, the earth becoming transformed under the passage of the tiny green bodies. Where fields had been verdant and lush a moment ago, a yellow waste was left behind, as though the pampas had been ravaged by fire. There were some locusts, even, which seemed determined to eat up the steel rails, but of these the train made short work, grinding them into a yellowish thick fluid like the spittle of some awful monster. Down the rails this fluid dripped, spreading a sickly, disgusting stench for many a mile around.

In the course of the night, the passengers—without distinction of class—had more or less got used to the smell, and were now quite unaware of it. But the people on the platform who had come to meet the train, mostly ladies in costly finery, were quite overwhelmed. They held their noses tight in disgust, refused to kiss the arrivals; blushing and stammering, they pointed speechlessly at the dust-smothered train and hastened out into the street at a half-run.

Last of all to alight from the train was a pale-faced youth, who, in spite of his grown-up scowl, was little more than a youngster. He was the only passenger travelling without luggage, and consequently the porters ignored him. All he held in his hand was a newspaper, which he dropped phlegmatically as he reached the exit. Crossing the street, he turned into Railway Square with its lofty tower dominating the centre, and sat down on the first bench he came across. Having thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets, he fell a-brooding with hanging head, in a posture of utter despair.

To be sure, he had good cause to despair. His trip to the mountain settlements in search of work had been all in vain; so he had come back empty-handed to the city from which he had fled only a short while ago. And now he could guess exactly what lay in store for him. Not that it needed much imagination. There was only one thing could happen when a man had no money and no property—apart from a cheap little wrist-watch which, if it had not cost a fortune in the first place, was worth nothing at all now. It was actually a good timepiece, but he might just as well try and pawn his hands as pawn the watch. . . .

The position was hopeless, yet the youngster did not spend a great deal of time in brooding, for at the present day even the humblest of human beings has come to the realization that time is money and indeed he consulted his watch. Although he had two valuable public clocks staring him in the face—one surmounting the station and the other on the "Englishmen's Tower"—nevertheless he made use of his own absolutely valueless watch.

It was dinner-time by now and he penetrated into the heart of the city. He strode through all-too-familiar streets. Even so they had changed somewhat during his brief absence. He felt no surprise : he knew that life had such a way with it—all things must change.

On he went, with hanging head, and still he had no definite idea why he was hurrying so, for not a soul was expecting him and surely not a soul cared to see him ; not that he was without a friend in the world or disliked by those with whom he came in contact—on the contrary, he had a host of friends and acquaintances, but there was this to it : all he possessed was a valueless wrist-watch.

Whoever knew him, knew how much he owned. And the best they could do for him was pity him. But he hated those who pitied him. On many an occasion he had thanked them for their sympathy in the most insulting way he could think of. And now indeed he made his mind up to keep away from these people. But his feet betrayed him, or perhaps his feet were not really to blame, perhaps it was only the force of long habit. But, before he had time to reflect, he found himself on the threshold of the Japanese cafe, where for a matter of three years not a day had passed, but he had gone in there to spend a few hours in idle lounging. There was nothing very noteworthy about this cafe, but it was a good place for killing a few hours in, and there were some habitues who stayed there from morning to night. Quite a company of unemployed workers and down-and-outs like himself, had for some reason turned this café into their haunt.

He glanced around him and recognized most of the people, although he knew them only by sight; their

faces wore calm expressions, even though their plight was as bad as his. And he experienced a sudden pang: why couldn't he take it like a man?

He sat down at one of the smaller tables. Soon a waiter came up to take an order.

"Nothing, thank you. I've just had a drink at the other end. Thought I'd move over here!"

The waiter withdrew, leaving the youth smiling over this small success. But the smile ended in a light sigh.

He stayed where he was for hour upon hour. At nightfall, when the place became very crowded, he gave his chair up and went outside, strolling up and down in front of the cafe.

The hours sped swiftly. His watch, though worthless, accurately recorded the passing of true hours. His longing for food began to nag somewhat, until it turned into a dull but tangible pain, as though a hand squeezing his heart had begun to tighten its grip. He went back into the cafe. Now his eyes roved round desperately in search of some acquaintance. If he were lucky, he would find that very good friend of his, the treasurer of a local benevolent society, whose pockets were always bulging with money. . . .

By now the cafe was emptying again. He looked this way and that, and suddenly he rejoiced.

There in a corner, at a table all to himself, sat his friend the treasurer, engrossed in an evening newspaper. Hurrying up to him, he tapped him gently on the shoulder. The man was a little startled.

"What, back already?"

"Yes, here I am again."

The youngster sat down with an embarrassed smile, while his friend said:

"Well, well, what news have you got for us?"

" Nothing."

The treasurer turned confidential :

"Ah, I'm fed up with this sort of life! Really, I envy you. At least, you *do* see the world. All I do is stick in one place. It's so monotonous. . . ."

The youth made no reply, waiting for an opportunity to explain his position, to confess that he had nowhere to sleep and what was more, that he was hungry.

"It certainly must be interesting out in the mountains. Don't you agree?" the treasurer went on somewhat dreamily, pressing for an answer.

"Yes!" said the youth in a whisper.

"Well, tell us something about it," the other pleaded. And his eyes—under the thick lenses of his spectacles—grew moist.

The youngster was silent, listening only to the tingling of his own ears—they were flaming with anger. He had a good mind to wring the fellow's neck. But he mastered himself, summoned thought into his empty head, and began a description of what he had seen :

"...The scenery is something wonderful. Everywhere you go you can see a chain of mountains stretching away for miles and miles. Sometimes I used to get up at daybreak and climb up on to the rocks. I never wore a hat and, dressed any old how, I'd stroll about in the early hours and watch the sun rise. It comes up an immense glowing ball of fire. The tops of the rocks begin to look like burnished copper. And just then you can hear the morning breeze. It sounds as though the sea were breaking on the shore a little distance away. The breeze is so gentle and cool. When it blows, it makes you feel that you'd like to climb up on to the

highest mountain peak, spread your arms out like wings and jump for it. I don't mean to say that you want to kill yourself, but you feel as if you could fly if you wished to—the morning breeze would support you, prevent you from falling like a dead weight. You'd go fluttering down over the singing mountains, as gently as you please, and it's a fact you can hear the morning breeze singing when the sun rises. A poet would call the morning breeze the child in the mountains, and the sun—its father. . . ."

When the youngster had finished, his companion sat murmuring, as though in a dream :

"Wonderful . . . wonderful. . . . Pity I can't go there myself!"

And in the same breath he added :

"It's getting late. Got to go to bed. It's getting late."

And he yawned in a loud voice.

The youngster recalled how hungry he was. He opened his mouth to make some request, when all at once his friend stood up with a show of haste, shook hands with him and said abruptly :

"Good night to you! Got to get up early to-morrow. . . . Drop in on me some time to-morrow. Don't forget!"

"No, I shan't forget. Good night!"

And he was left all alone, utterly bewildered and forlorn. It was some time before he recovered from the shock. At closing-time he went up to the counter, asked for a glass of water, gulped it down and resumed his pacing of the streets.

The hour was late and very few people were abroad now. At one street corner a number of newsvendors had gathered and were abusing each other in no uncertain manner. Among them an elderly man was nursing a

bleeding nose. However, when a policeman approached from the other end of the street, there was a sudden hush and the group dispersed.

The youth made his way to a near-by plaza, and sat down on a bench, until with his head sinking lower and lower he dozed off. But no sooner had he had his first vague dreams, than a great chill took possession of him. He stood up, shivering, and moved on. He strode hastily and his footsteps now resounded loudly in the slumbering streets, as if they were uttering a protest to the slumbering world and wished to rouse it. However, he soon grew tired again, and noting his whereabouts he discovered that he was close to another plaza. It was one of those immense squares where the workers gather to hold meetings and demonstrate on proletarian festivals. Now the plaza was all deserted. The youth sat down on a bench hewn from the natural stone, which was rather like an altar left standing as the sole relic of some ancient bloodstained temple. Here it was that he lay down full length, with his arms for a pillow, and tightly shutting his eyes, waited for the night to pass.

From time to time he uttered a sigh in his sleep.

Early morning vehicles rumbled past the sleeping figure, but it was only when the sun touched his face that he came back to consciousness and stood up unsteadily. He felt very weary, all his joints were stiff. And the first thing he remembered was his friend's invitation. He would go along at once and rest for a few hours on a bed or couch. He would not take no for an answer.

He hurried away to his friend's place and almost ran into the courtyard of the building. Early though it was, his friend was dressed and fully wide-awake ; he sat at a

table beside the single bed of his furnished room, with an intent look on his face as he picked out various addresses of voluntary contributors from a card-index system—people whom he intended to look up that day.

On catching sight of his unexpected visitor he was taken aback :

"What brings you here at this time of the morning?"

"I've had no sleep to-night. Can't stand it any longer," the youngster answered in a feeble voice.

"All right, you can use my bed. Get your clothes off."

"No, I'll just take my shoes off. My feet are burning hot."

"Wouldn't you like to bathe them?"

"Yes!" he said, half weeping.

Before long the youngster sat soaking his feet in a bowl of water, and he groaned with relief, but his friend, whose pity had been roused, kept bustling around him.

"Here, take this pair of socks and put them on when you've had your sleep out. How's that, better?"

The youngster was quite touched.

"Say, I never knew you had it in you. You're a real pal. You treat your guests in proper Biblical style. Thanks. . . ."

He tottered up to the bed and fell asleep at once ; it was not a deep slumber, and his breath came gently, as though he were only a child.

When he woke up, his friend was still with him. As before, he was seated at the table, but now he was busy having a meal. He sat stooping over the platter, hastily gulping down the big mouthfuls, as if he had not eaten for years or as if he feared someone might come along and push him away from his food. At intervals the maid

brought in a new dish, which he set about instandy without so much as pausing for breath.

The youth sat up quietly, and sniffing the odour of food, he turned dizzy.

"How's the time getting on?" he asked feebly.

"One o'clock, but don't disturb yourself. You can go on sleeping."

These words had a sobering effect : they were like a douche of cold water. He lay down again and tried to go to sleep once more, but without avail. A little while later his friend inquired, without turning his head :

"Are you asleep?"

"No!"

"Want me to tell you something? All last night I dreamt of the mountains and the morning breeze. You're a lad, you are ! You'll be a poet one day !"

But now the youngster was silent. He feigned sleep, only inwardly he kept repeating :

"Splendid fellow! . . . A dreamer! He lives on morning breezes. . . . Morning breezes. . . ."

by

VASSILI GROSSMAN

★

IN THE TOWN OF BERDICHEV*

It was strange to see Vavilova's dark weather-beaten face turn red.

"What are you laughing at?" she said at last. "Don't be silly."

Koziriov took a paper from the table, looked at it and, shaking his head, burst out laughing again.

"Oh, I can't help it," he said, laughing, " . . . report . . . of the Commissar of the first battalion . . . forty days' leave because of pregnancy."

He became serious.

"Well, all right. But who will take your place? Perelmutter, of the political section?"

"Perelmutter is a staunch Communist," said Vavilova.

"You're all staunch," remarked Koziriov, and, lowering his voice, as though he were talking about something shameful, asked:

"Are you going to have the baby soon, Claudia?"

"Yes, soon," answered Vavilova and, taking off her fur cap, wiped the perspiration off her forehead.

"I would have got rid of it," she said in a bass voice. "But I waited too long: you know yourself that at Groubeshov I never got off my horse for three months.

*** Translated from the Russian.**

And when I went to the hospital the doctor refused to do it."

The corners of her lips drooped as though she were going to cry.

"I even threatened the damned fellow with my Mauser, but he refused—he said it was too late."

She went out, and Koziriov remained sitting at the table and looking at the report.

"So this is Vavilova," thought he. "Nothing very womanish about her—carries a Mauser, wears leather breeches, has led her battalion in the attack any number of times, and even her voice is not a woman's—yet Nature must tell in the end, apparently."

And for some reason he was resentful and felt a little sad.

On the report he wrote "Order", and waving his nib hesitatingly over the paper, sat frowning—how should he word it?

"Leave of forty days to be given from this day": he pondered a little and added "On account of illness", then above that scribbled in "woman's illness", swore to himself, and crossed out "woman's illness".

"Now make soldiers of them!" he said, and called his orderly.

"Our Vavilova, eh?" he said loudly and angrily. "You've heard, I suppose?"

"Yes, I've heard," answered the orderly, and shaking his head spat on the ground.

Together they condemned Vavilova and all women generally, made a few jokes, laughed, and then Koziriov ordered him to fetch the Staff Commander and said :

"You must go and see her—to-morrow, I should say; find out whether she is in a private house or in hospital, and how she's getting on."

Then he and the Staff Commander hung over the table till next morning, their fingers moving over the map, speaking in short abrupt sentences—the Poles were approaching.

Vavilova went to live in a room requisitioned for her.

The little house stood in the Yatki, as the market-place was called, and belonged to Chaim Abraham Leibovich Magazannik, whom the neighbours and even his own wife called Chaim Tuter, which means Tartar.

Vavilova's entry into the house was not effected without a scandal. She was brought to the house by an employee of the communal department, a thin lad in a leather jacket and Red Army helmet. Magazannik swore at him in Jewish: the youth was silent and shrugged his shoulders.

Then Magazannik went over to the Russian language.

"What impudence these whipper-snappers have," he shouted to Vavilova, as though he expected her to share his indignation. "That's all they could think of. Of course, there are no bourgeois in the town. There's only one room left for the Soviet, and that one belongs to the poor man Magazannik. Only from a working-man with seven children can they take a room. What about Litvak the grocer? And Khodorov the clothier? And Ashkenazi, the leading millionaire in the town?"

Around him stood Magazannik's children, seven ragged curly-pated angels gazing at Vavilova with their coal-black eyes. As big as a house, she was twice as tall as their father. They thought it all terribly funny and very interesting.

Finally Magazannik was pushed aside, and Vavilova passed into her room.

Such a concentrated smell of human beings coming

from the sideboard, the flat feather-beds which were as dark and flabby as the breasts of the old woman who had once received those feather-beds as part of her dowry, and the chairs with their gaping seats, assailed her nostrils, that she took a deep breath as though she were going to plunge into deep water.

At night she could not sleep. The Magazannik family snored on the other side of the wall like an orchestra composed of many instruments, from the droning double-bass to the high flutes and violins. The closeness of the summer night, the heavy smells—everything seemed to suffocate her.

What smells there were in the room!

Of kerosene, of garlic, of perspiration, of goose dripping, of unwashed linen. The odours of the human animal.

She felt her swollen, dilated belly; at times the living being within her kicked and turned round.

For months she had struggled with it, honestly and persistently: sprung heavily from her horse; at "Subotniks"* in the towns, silent and strenuous, she rolled about pine blocks weighing many poods; drank herbs and infusions in the villages; used up so much of the iodine belonging to the regimental chemical store that the surgeon thought of sending a complaint to the sanitary department of the brigade; scalded herself with boiling water in the bath-house until she was covered with blisters.

But it obstinately went on growing, preventing her from walking and from riding; she suffered from nausea, vomited, and was drawn down to the earth.

*** Saturday (Sabbath).—A collective voluntary effort to hasten the completion of some job. . . .**

At first she laid all the blame on that sad and ever-silent man who had been stronger than herself, and had found a way through her thick leather jacket and cloth tunic to her woman's heart. She saw how he was the first to run on the little wooden bridge which was so terrible in its simplicity, how the enemy's machine-gun crackled, and how he seemed to vanish: the empty greatcoat threw its arms up and falling, hung over the brook.

She flew past him on her ardent little horse and the battalion, as though it were pushing her, poured after her.

After this it remained. It was to blame for everything. And now Vavilova lay conquered, and it victoriously kicked her with its heels, and lived in her.

In the morning, when Magazannik was getting ready to go to work, and his wife was giving him breakfast, driving away flies, children, and the cat, he said, speaking in a low voice and glancing at the wall of the requisitioned room :

"Give her some tea, a plague on her."

He basked in the sunlit columns of dust, the smells, the children's cries, the cat's miaowing, the grumbling of the samovar. He did not feel like going to the workshop : he loved his wife, his children, his old mother, and he loved his home.

He went away sighing, and in the house only women and children remained.

The Yatki market-place seethed the whole day long. Peasants were selling birchwood, white as though it had been chalked all over; peasant-women were rustling their wreaths of onions ; old Jewish women sat over fluffy hills made of geese with their legs tied together.

Out of this luxuriant white flower the goose-seller would pull out a living petal with a sinuous neck and her customers would blow on the tender fluff between its legs and feel the yellow fat under the soft warm skin.

Dark-legged girls in coloured kerchiefs carried tall red pots full to the brim with wild strawberries, and timidly, as though they were going to run away, looked at their customers. Moist yellow lumps of butter wrapped in downy leaves of green burdock were being sold from carts.

A blind beggar, with the white beard of a wizard, wept tragically and as though in prayer as he held out his hand, but his terrible grief touched no one : everybody passed him with indifference. A peasant-woman tore the smallest onion off her wreath and threw it into the old man's iron basin. He felt it all over, and leaving off his prayers, said angrily :

"May your children provide for you like this in your old age," and once again started crooning his prayer, the prayer which was as ancient as the Jewish people.

People were selling, buying, touching, feeling, raising their eyes thoughtfully to the heavens as though they expected somebody in the tender blue sky to advise them whether they should buy a pike or whether it were better to buy a carp. Meanwhile everybody went on making a deafening noise, swearing, abusing each other, and laughing.

Vavilova tidied up and swept the room. She put away her greatcoat, fur cap, and boots. Her head was bursting from the street noises. The little Tuters were making a noise inside the house, and she seemed to be asleep and having an unpleasant strange dream.

When Magazannik came in the evening after work, he

stood amazed in the doorway; at the table sat his wife, Beila, and by her side sat a huge woman in a wide dress, with loose slippers on her bare feet, and a bright kerchief tied round her head; they were laughing together softly, talking to each other, and holding up tiny toy-like baby clothes in their big fat hands.

In the day-time Beila had gone into Vavilova's room. Vavilova was standing by the window, and Beila's sharp woman's eye saw her condition.

"I beg your pardon," said Beila with determination, "but you're pregnant."

And Beila, throwing up her hands, laughing and lamenting, started fussing round her.

"Yes," said she. "Children—you don't know yet what a misfortune they are," and she pressed and squeezed the youngest Tuter against her bosom. "They're such a misfortune, such a calamity, such a nuisance. Every day they want to eat, and not one week passes but one has a rash, or another the fever, or another an abscess. And Dr. Baraban, God bless him, takes ten pounds of the best rye flour for every visit."

She stroked little Sonia's head.

"And they're all alive—I haven't lost one."

She discovered that Vavilova knew nothing, did not know how to do anything, and understood nothing. She bent down immediately before Beila's great knowledge. She listened to Beila and asked her questions, and Beila, laughing with pleasure at the Commissar's knowing nothing, told her about everything.

How to feed and bath the baby and put him to sleep, what must be done to prevent his crying at night, how many napkins **and** shirts one must have, how new-born babies scream themselves hoarse, turn blue, and it

seems as though one's heart must stop beating for fear that the baby may die, how to cure diarrhoea, what causes the itch, how the spoon suddenly begins to make a noise in the baby's mouth and by that you can tell that he is beginning to cut his teeth.

A complicated world with its own laws, customs, joys, and sorrows.

Vavilova knew nothing of this world. And Beila condescendingly, like an elder sister, introduced her to it.

"Get out of the way," she screamed at the children, "out into the yard!" And when only the two of them were left in the room, Beila, her voice lowered to a whisper, started telling her about the confinement. Oh, this was not a simple thing. Like an old soldier, Beila told the young recruit about the great pangs and joys of childbirth.

"Giving birth to children," said she, "you think is a simple matter, like a war: bang-bang and it's all over; oh no, by no means, it's not nearly as simple."

Vavilova listened to her. For the first time, during the whole of her pregnancy, she had met a person who spoke about this accidental and unpleasant thing which had overtaken her as a happy event which would be the most important and necessary occurrence in Vavilova's life.

And in the evening discussion was continued this time with Tuter participating. No time was to be lost: after supper Tuter took a candle and climbed up to the attic and making a great din, dragged down an iron cradle and a bath for the new human being.

"Don't worry, Comrade Commissar,[5]" he said laughingly, his eyes sparkling. "Our business, which you are taking on, is in full swing."

"Be quiet, be quiet, you rascal," uttered his wife. "It's not for nothing that people call you the Tartar."

At night Vavilova lay in her bed. The heavy smells no longer oppressed her as they had done the night before. She had become used to them, and did not even notice them. She did not want to think about anything.

She seemed to hear horses neighing somewhere, and to see a long line of brown horses' heads: each had a white patch on the forehead. The heads were incessantly moving, nodding, and baring their teeth. She thought about the battalion, and remembered Kirpichov, the political instructor of the second company. All was quiet on the Front. Who was lecturing about the July days? The surveyor must be rated soundly for having delayed the arrival of the boots. And then they could cut up cloth themselves for puttees. In the second company there were a good many dissatisfied men, especially that curly-headed fellow who sang songs of the Don. Vavilova yawned and closed her eyes. The battalion went away far far into the distance, into the pink corridor of the dawn, between the wet stacks of snow. And her thoughts about it were somehow unreal.

It pushed her impatiently with its little heels. Vavilova opened her eyes and sat up in bed.

"A girl or a boy?" she asked aloud. And she suddenly felt how the heart in her bosom became big and warm and began to throb.

"A girl or a boy?"

The confinement began in the day-time.

"Oh!" screamed Vavilova hoarsely, woman-like, as she felt a sharp, all-penetrating pain seize her suddenly.

Beila put her to bed. Sioma ran gaily for the mid-wife.

Vavilova held Beila's hand and said quietly and rapidly :

"It's begun, Beila, and I thought it would start only in ten days. It's begun, Beila."

Then the pains passed away, and to Vavilova it seemed that they need not have sent so quickly for the midwife.

But half an hour later the pains started again. Vavilova's face turned quite dark and the sunburn on it looked dead : as though it had been laid on by accident. Vavilova lay with clenched teeth ; she looked as if she were thinking of something shameful and painful, as if she were about to jump up and cry "What have I done, what have I done?" as she covered her face with her hands in despair.

The children were peeping into the room, the blind grandmother was heating a large saucepan of water on the stove. Beila kept looking at the door : the expression of anguish on Vavilova's face frightened her. At last the midwife came. Her name was Rosalia Samoilovna. Her hair was cut short and she was stocky and red-faced. The house was immediately filled with her querulous penetrating voice. She scolded Beila, the children, and the old grandmother. Everybody started running around her. The primus stove in the kitchen started humming. The table and chairs were taken out of the room ; Beila washed the floor with as much haste as though she were putting out a fire ; Rosalia Samoilovna herself drove the flies away with a towel. Vavilova watched her and it seemed to her as though the Commander of the Army had arrived at Staff Headquarters. He was also stocky, red-faced, and querulous, and he used to come when something had gone wrong at the Front, and everybody would read the communiques and look at each other

and whisper, as though a dead or dangerously sick man lay there. And the Commander would brutally tear aside this veil of mystery and silence—shouting, abusing, giving orders, and laughing, as though baggage trains cut off and regiments surrounded by the enemy were none of his business.

She submitted to Rosalia Samoilovna's dictatorial voice, answered her questions, turned round, and did everything she ordered her to do. At times she seemed to be losing consciousness ; the walls and ceiling seemed to lose their sharpness of surface and outline, to be breaking and falling on her in waves. The midwife's loud voice would bring her to herself again and she could see her red perspiring face and the white tail-ends of the kerchief round her neck. She thought of nothing now. She wanted to howl like a wild beast and to bite the pillow. Her bones seemed to crack and to break, and the clammy sickening perspiration stood out in drops on her forehead. She did not scream, however, but only ground her teeth and, convulsively tossing her head about from side to side, gulped in the air.

Now and again the pains left her as though she had never had any, and in astonishment she would look about her, listen to the noise of the market, and gaze with wonder at the glass on the stool and the picture on the wall.

But when the child, furious in his desire to live, started tearing at her again, she felt the horror of the renewed pangs and a confused feeling of joy : let it be as soon as possible—after all it was inevitable.

Rosalia Samoilovna said in a low voice to Beila :

" If you think that I should have liked to have my first child at thirty-six, you're mistaken, Beila."

Vavilova did not hear her words, but she felt frightened because the midwife had spoken in a low voice.

"What, shan't I live?" she asked.

She did not catch Rosalia Samoilovna's answer.

Beila stood in the door pale and flustered, and said, shrugging her shoulders :

"Well, well. And who wants this torture—neither she, nor the child, nor the father, may he perish, nor God in Heaven. Who was the clever person who invented it for our misfortune?"

The confinement lasted for many hours.

When Magazannik came home he sat on the steps outside. He was as worried as though it was his Beila who was in childbirth. The twilight deepened, and the windows were lit up. Jews were returning from synagogue, carrying their prayer clothes under their arms. In the moonlight the empty Yatki market-place, the little houses, and the streets seemed picturesque and mysterious. Cavalry-men in riding-breeches marched about the brick pavements clinking their spurs. Girls were eating sunflower seeds and laughing at the Red Army men. One of them was saying in a quick patter :

"And I eat sweets and throw the papers at him, and I eat and throw the papers at him."

"Ay," said Magazannik, "we didn't have enough troubles of our own, but the whole Partisan Brigade must come and be confined in my house." Suddenly he began to listen intently and half rose from where he was sitting. From behind the door he heard a man's hoarse voice.

The voice was shouting such violent obscene oaths that Magazannik, after listening for a while, shook his head

and spat on the ground : it was Vavilova, mad with pain in the final phase of labour, fighting with God, with woman's cursed lot.

"That I understand," said Magazannik, "that I understand : a Commissar is having a baby ; while Beila can only say one thing 'Oh, mother, oh, mother !'"

Rosalia Samoilovna slapped the new-born baby on his wrinkled damp buttocks and announced :

"A boy!"

"What did I say!" exclaimed Beila triumphantly, and opening the door, cried out exultantly :

"Chaim, children—a boy!"

And the whole family clustered in the doorway and talked excitedly to Beila. Even the blind grandmother felt her way to her son and smiled at the great miracle. She moved her lips, her head trembled, her dead hands felt their way over her black kerchief. She was smiling and whispering silently. The children pushed her away from the door but she stretched out her neck and tried to get in : she wanted to hear the voice of ever-triumphant life.

Vavilova looked at the new-born child. She was surprised that such an insignificant bit of reddish-blue flesh could have caused such terrible suffering.

She had imagined that her child would be big, freckly, and snub-nosed, with a bristling red head, and that he would immediately start fighting and kicking, crying loudly, and trying to get away. But he was a weak little fellow, like an oat-stem grown up in a cellar ; he could not keep his little head up; his small crooked legs moved about as though they were dried up ; his whitish-blue eyes were blind ; and his whimper could hardly be heard. It seemed as though, if the door were suddenly

opened, he would be extinguished like the thin bent candle that Beila had fastened to the edge of the cupboard.

And although it was like a hot-house in the room, she stretched out her arms and said :

"He is cold : give him to me."

The little man whimpered, moving his head about. Vavilova was afraid to move, but she looked at him sideways and watched his movements.

"Eat, eat, little son," she said, and began to cry.

"Sonny, sonny," she murmured, and one by one the tears fell from her eyes, and the transparent drops ran down her dark cheeks and over the pillow.

She remembered the silent man, and felt pity for them both with a sharp maternal pang. For the first time she wept for him who was killed in the battle at Korosten: for he would never see his son.

And this tiny helpless creature was born without his father, and she covered him up with her blanket so that he should not feel cold.

But perhaps she was crying for quite a different reason. At any rate Rosalia Samoilovna, smoking a cigarette and sending the smoke through the aperture in the window, said :

" Let her cry, let her cry. That calms the nerves better than bromide. My patients always cry after child-birth."

On the third day after the baby was born, Vavilova got up. Her strength returned to her rapidly: she walked about a great deal, and helped Beila in the house. When no one was at home she would sing softly to the little man : the little man was called Aliosha, Alioshenka.

"You ought to see," Beila said to her husband, "this Russian woman is quite mad. She has already been three times to the doctor with him. The door mustn't be opened in the house, because he might catch cold, or be woken up, or he's feverish. In fact, she's just like a good Jewish mother."

"Well, why not?" answered Magazannik. "If a woman puts on leather breeches do you think she turns into a man?" And he shrugged his shoulders and closed his eyes.

A week later Koziriov and the Chief of Staff came to see Vavilova. They smelt of leather, tobacco, and horse sweat. Aliosha was asleep in his cradle, which was covered by a piece of muslin to protect him from the flies. Creaking in a most deafening manner, like two new boots, they went up to the cradle and looked at the thin little face of the sleeping child. His face was twitching in his sleep : the twitching was due only to movements of the skin, but these movements gave the face various expressions—sometimes of melancholy, sometimes of anger, and sometimes a smile.

The two commanders exchanged a look.

"Yes," said Koziriov.

"Yes, indeed," said the Chief of Staff.

Then they sat down and started telling Vavilova the latest news. The Poles had taken the offensive, and our forces were retreating. Of course this was temporary. The fourteenth army was rallying at Zhmerinka. Divisions were approaching from the Urals. The Ukraine would be ours. In a month's time a change would probably take place. But meanwhile the Poles were making themselves unpleasant.

Koziriov uttered an oath.

"Shut up," said Vavilova. "Don't make such a noise —you'll wake him."

"Yes, our blood is always up," said the Chief of Staff, and burst out laughing.

"You're always ready with your jokes," said Vavilova and added with the air of a martyr: "You might leave off smoking too: you're smoking like a chimney."

The two army men suddenly felt bored. Koziriov yawned. The Chief of Staff looked at his watch and said:

"We mustn't be late at Lissaya Gora."

"And his watch is a gold one," she thought to herself with exasperation.

"Well, good-bye, Claudia," said Koziriov, and got up. "I've ordered them to send you a sack of flour, some sugar and fat: they'll bring it to you to-day in a trap."

They went out into the street. The little Magazanniks stood round the horses. Koziriov climbed into the saddle with a groan. The Chief of Staff clicked with his tongue and jumped on his horse as it was moving.

When they came to the corner, they both unexpectedly, as though by common consent, drew in their reins and stopped.

"Yes," said Koziriov.

"Yes, indeed,[5]" answered his Chief. They laughed, struck their horses, and galloped to Lissaya Gora.

The trap arrived that evening. Magazannik dragged in the sacks of food, and going into Vavilova's room, said in a mysterious whisper:

"What do you think of this news, Comrade Vavilova: Tsesarsky's brother-in-law came to our workshop———," he looked about him, as though he were excusing him-

self before Vavilova, and said in a surprised tone of voice:

"The Poles are in Choudnov, and Choudnov is forty versts away from here."

Beila came into the room. She listened for a while, and then said with determination:

"What's the use of talking? The Poles will be here to-morrow. So I want to tell you this. Poles, Austrians, Galicians, whoever they are, you can remain with us. You have been sent enough food, thank God, to last you three months."

Vavilova was silent. For the first time in her life she did not know what to do.

"Beila," she said, and stopped.

"I'm not afraid," said Beila, "do you think I'm afraid? Give me five like them, and I'll not be afraid. But have you ever seen a mother who left her child when he was a week and a half old?"

All night long outside the windows there could be heard the neighing of horses, the rumbling of wheels, and excited angry voices. Baggage trains were going from Shepetovka to Kazatin.

Vavilova sat by the cradle. The child was asleep. She looked at the little yellow face, and thought to herself that after all nothing special would happen, Koziriov said that they would return in a month's time. Just as long as she had intended to be on leave. But if she were cut off for longer? Even that did not worry her.

When Aliosha became a little stronger, they would make their way through the front.

Who would touch them—a peasant-woman and a baby in arms? And Vavilova pictured how one early summer morning she would cross the fields, a coloured kerchief

round her head, with Aliosha in her arms, gazing around him and holding out his little arms. How delightful! She started singing in a thin voice :

"Sleep, sonny, sleep," and rocking the cradle, fell into a doze.

In the morning the market was busy as usual. People seemed particularly excited that day. Some were watching the unending chain of military carts and laughing happily. But soon the baggage train had passed. The streets were full of people. The inhabitants—"the population", as the commandants called them in their orders—stood at the gates. Everybody was talking in an excited whisper and looking over his shoulder. It was said that the Poles had already occupied the small town of Piatka, fifteen versts away. Magazannik did not go to work. He sat in Vavilova's room and philosophized to his heart's content.

An armoured car thundered past in the direction of the railway station : it was thickly covered with dust and it seemed as though the steel had become tarnished as a result of weariness and many sleepless nights.

"I'll tell you the truth," said Magazannik, "this is the best time for people : one rule has gone, and the other hasn't come yet. No requisitions, no contributions, no pogroms."

"It's only in the day-time that he's so clever," said Beila. "But when at night the whole town is in a hubbub shrieking for help from the bandits, he sits as pale as death and trembles with fear."

"Don't keep interrupting," said Magazannik, angrily.

He kept running out into the street and returning with the latest news. The Revolutionary Committee had already evacuated the town during the night, the Party

Committee had followed it, and the staff had left in the morning. The station was already empty. The last division had gone.

Suddenly cries were heard in the street. An aeroplane was in sight. Vavilova went to the window. Although the aeroplane was flying high, white and red circles on the wings could be seen distinctly. It was a Polish observation aeroplane. The machine made a circle over the town and then flew towards the station. Guns began to be heard booming from the direction of Lissaya Gora : shells flew over the town, and from somewhere in the distance, below the level-crossing, came the sound of exploding missiles.

First the shells wailed like the wind, then the guns sighed heavily, and a few seconds later the explosions rang out joyously. The Bolsheviks were hindering the advance of the Poles. Soon the Poles started replying : shells burst in different parts of the town.

Bang ! went the exploding air with a deafening roar ; bricks fell and scattered, smoke and dust hung over the shattered walls of houses. Silence descended on the streets, severe and deserted, as in a picture. Each explosion was followed by such quiet that the hearts of the inhabitants were struck with terror. And all the time the sun shone in the cloudless sky and radiantly lit up the town, which lay prostrate beneath it like a corpse.

The whole town lay hidden in cellars and basements, sighed and groaned with terror, shut its eyes, and held its breath without knowing why.

Everybody, even the children, knew that this bombardment was called artillery preparation, and that before entering the town, the troops would send out a few more dozen shells. And then everybody knew it

would become incredibly quiet and that suddenly, their horses' hoofs ringing, a reconnoitring party would gallop along the wide street from the direction of the level crossing. And then, dying of fear and curiosity, everybody would peep from behind their doors, curtains, and cracks in the shutters, and covered with perspiration, would come out on tip-toe into the street.

A detachment would arrive in the square. The horses would stoop and snort; their riders would talk excitedly to each other in a marvellously simple human tongue, and the Commander, delighted at the total submission of the prostrate conquered town, would shout in a drunken voice, discharge his revolver into the muzzle of silence, and draw up his horse.

And then from every direction infantry and cavalry would pour in ; dusty tired men, thrifty peasants in blue greatcoats, good-natured but capable of murder, would run about from house to house, searching greedily for the population's chickens, towels and boots.

Everyone knew this, because the town had changed hands fourteen times already, had been occupied by Petlura, Denikin, the Bolsheviks, Galicians, Poles, Tutunik's, and Maroussia's bands, and "nobody's" Ninth Regiment. And each time it was the same as before.

''They're singing!" cried Magazannik. "They're singing!"

And forgetting his fear, he ran out into the street. Vavilova followed him. After the stuffiness of the dark room Vavilova breathed the light and warmth of the summer day with particular pleasure. She had awaited the Poles with much the same feeling as she had experienced during her confinement : let them come quickly.

The explosions had frightened her : she was afraid they would awaken Aliosha; she brushed aside the whistle of the shells as she would have brushed aside flies.

"Be quiet, be quiet," she sang over the cradle. "You'll wake Aliosha."

She had tried not to think about anything just then. She had made up her mind already : in a month's time either the Bolsheviks would return or she and the baby would make their way to them through the front.

"I can't understand anything," said Magazannik. "Have a look."

Marching along the wide and empty street in the direction of the level crossing, from which the Poles were to have come, was a detachment of military Cadets. They were dressed in white canvas trousers and tunics.

"May the Red Flag be the symbol of the working people," they sang slowly as if sadly.

They were marching towards the Poles.

Why? For what reason?

Vavilova watched them. And suddenly she remembered : the great Red Square, several thousand volunteers of the working classes who were going to the front thronging round a hastily set-up wooden platform. A bald man, waving his cap, was making a speech. Vavilova stood quite near him.

She was so agitated that she could not understand half the words the man was saying in his clear though slightly guttural voice. The people standing near her listened to him and breathed heavily. An old man in a wadded coat for some reason or other was weeping.

What had happened to her in the square, under the dark walls, she did not know. Once in the night she had wanted to tell that silent man about it. She thought he

would understand. But she was unable to explain anything. But when they marched from the square to the Briansk railway station, they sang that song.

And as she watched the faces of these singing Cadets, she again felt what she had felt two years ago.

Now in the street Magazannik saw a woman in a fur hat and greatcoat following the Cadets and fitting an iron ring into her big tarnished Mauser as she went.

Magazannik followed her with his eyes and said :

" These were the sort of people who used to be in the Bund. These are real people, Beila. Are we real people? We're just scum."

Aliosha had woken up and was crying and trying to kick off his napkin. Coming to herself, Beila said to her husband :

''Listen, the baby is awake. You had better light the primus—I must heat up some milk."

The detachment disappeared round the corner.

by

FRANZ KAFKA

★

THE BUCKET RIDER*

Coal all spent; the bucket empty; the shovel useless; the stove breathing out cold; the room freezing; the leaves outside the window rigid, covered with rime; the sky a silver shield against any one who looks for help from it. I must have coal; I cannot freeze to death; behind me is the pitiless stove, before me the pitiless sky, so I must ride out between them and on my journey seek aid from the coal-dealer. But he has already grown deaf to ordinary appeals; I must prove irrefutably to him that I have not a single grain of coal left, and that he means to me the very sun in the firmament, I must approach like a beggar, who, with the death-rattle already in his throat, insists on dying on the doorstep, and to whom the grand people's cook accordingly decides to give the dregs of the coffee-pot; just so must the coal-dealer, filled with rage, but acknowledging the command, "Thou shalt not kill", fling a shovelful of coal into my bucket.

My mode of arrival must decide the matter; so I ride off on the bucket. Seated on the bucket, my hands on the handle, the simplest kind of bridle, I propel myself with difficulty down the stairs; but once down below my bucket ascends, superbly, superbly; camels humbly

*** Translated from the German by Willa and Edwin Muir.**

squatting on the ground do not rise with more dignity, shaking themselves under the sticks of their drivers. Through the hard frozen streets we go at a regular canter; often I am upraised as high as the first storey of a house; never do I sink as low as the house doors. And at last I float at an extraordinary height above the vaulted cellar of the dealer, whom I see far below crouching over his table, where he is writing; he has opened the door to let out the excessive heat.

"Coal-dealer!" I cry in a voice burned hollow by the frost and muffled in the cloud made by my breath, "please, coal-dealer, give me a little coal. My bucket is so light that I can ride on it. Be kind. When I can I'll pay you."

The dealer puts his hand to his ear. "Do I hear rightly?" he throws the question over his shoulder to his wife. "Do I hear rightly? A customer."

"I hear nothing," says his wife, breathing in and out peacefully while she knits on, her back pleasantly warmed by the heat.

"Oh, yes, you must hear," I cry. "It's me; an old customer; faithful and true; only without means at the moment."

"Wife," says the dealer, "it's some one, it must be; my ears can't have deceived me so much as that; it must be an old, a very old customer, that can move me so deeply."

"What ails you, man?" says his wife, ceasing from her work for a moment and pressing her knitting to her bosom. "It's nobody, the street is empty, all our customers are provided for; we could close down the shop for several days and take a rest."

"But I'm sitting up here on the bucket," I cry, and

unfeeling frozen tears dim my eyes, "please look up here, just once; you'll see me directly; I beg you, just a shovelful; and if you give me more it'll make me so happy that I won't know what to do. All the other customers are provided for. Oh, if I could only hear the coal clattering into the bucket!"

"I'm coining," says the coal-dealer, and on his short legs he makes to climb the steps of the cellar, but his wife is already beside him, holds him back by the arm and says: "You stay here; seeing you persist in your fancies I'll go myself. Think of the bad fit of coughing you had during the night. But for a piece of business, even if it's one you've only fancied in your head, you're prepared to forget your wife and child and sacrifice your lungs. I'll go."

"Then be sure to tell him all the kinds of coal we have in stock; I'll shout out the prices after you."

"Right," says his wife, climbing up to the street. Naturally she sees me at once. "Frau Coal-dealer," I cry, "my humblest greetings; just one shovelful of coal; here in my bucket; I'll carry it home myself. One shovelful of the worst you have. I'll pay you in full for it, of course, but not just now, not just now." What a knell-like sound the words "not just now" have, and how bewilderingly they mingle with the evening chimes that fall from the church steeple near by!

"Well, what does he want?" shouts the dealer. "Nothing," his wife shouts back, "there's nothing here; I see nothing, I hear nothing; only six striking, and now we must shut up the shop. The cold is terrible; to-morrow we'll likely have lots to do again."

She sees nothing and hears nothing; but all the same she loosens her apron-strings and waves her apron to

waft me away. She succeeds, unluckily. My bucket has all the virtues of a good steed except powers of resistance, which it has not; it is too light; a woman's apron can make it fly through the air.

"You bad woman!" I shout back, while she, turning into the shop, half-contemptuous, half-reassured, flourishes her fist into the air. "You bad woman! I begged you for a shovelful of the worst coal and you would not give it me." And with that I ascend into the regions of the ice mountains and am lost for ever.

by

EPHRAIM KAGANOVSKI

★

ODYSSEYADA*

I struck up an acquaintance with her on a public bench somewhere in Deribosovkin Street, on one of those evenings when the lavender bushes are abloom.

She gave me a long-drawn, pathetic look, and asked me in a suffering tone of voice :

"Have you any idea of the time?"

While I was taking out my watch, I endeavoured to promote our acquaintanceship.

"You'll pardon me, Miss, but I notice you look rather upset. I wonder if I could be of any help to you.[55]

"You couldn't be of any help to me.[55]

"I suppose there's someone in your life who could?[55]

"No, nobody.[55]

"A tragedy, I guess?[55]

"Aren't you in a hurry to know everything?"

I moved up closer.

"I wonder what it is that's troubling you and no one can be of any help?[55]

"Ah, people are so deceitful.... Anybody with a soul to call her own must go through such a lot of suffering. . . . Have you read Kuprin's *Yama?"*

"Yes."

"Tell me, what do you do for a living?"

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

The evening was far advanced when she rose to go. Naturally, I asked if I might see her home.

"Why should you? I don't approve of picking up chance acquaintances. Oh, no, I'd rather you didn't."

As we crossed the tramlines, I took her arm.

"I would ever so much like to meet you again, if you've no objection."

She damped my ardour with a cold, steadfast look, and then said reluctantly :

"I have a flat. If you wish, you can come up and see me one day."

" See you in your flat? Are you living on your own?"

" Of course not! I'm with my people."

"May I call to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? All right, make it seven o'clock in the evening."

"Very well, at seven then."

I attempted to raise her hand to my lips for a good-night kiss. But no, she did not approve of that sort of thing. I therefore made a low bow as she passed through the gateway.

She turned round.

"Well, to-morrow at seven."

"Yes, in the evening, at seven."

All at once she smiled, for the first time. I experienced a pleasant sensation, and asked :

"Tell me, what is your name?"

"Clara____"

Another smile, and suddenly she raised her tiny white hand to my lips.

On the following day, at half-past six, I was beauti-

fully groomed like a guest going to a fashionable wedding. Promptly at seven I knocked at her door. It was opened by a middle-aged Jewish woman with a benign and satisfied gleam in her large eyes.

"Is Miss Clara at home?"

"Why, yes! Walk straight through."

I halted at the next door, which stood somewhat ajar and through it I caught a glimpse of part of a polished ebony piano with a white candle on it, an oil painting in a heavy frame and the leg of a chair with a long white dust-cover. I was about to knock, but the woman, who was following me with beaming face, tugged at my sleeve.

"Don't stand on ceremony, go straight in."

Clara looked up at me startled, as though she had not expected I would come. She accepted my proferred hand and then passed it on to the elder woman, who first rubbed her fingers clean on her pinafore, before taking it. Clara said:

"This is Mamma."

The old woman happily nodded assent.

I sat down. We both of us smiled. I could not think of anything to say. But Clara relieved my embarrassment by speaking first.

"Well, I hope you recognize me?"

"As a matter of fact, it was so dark yesterday, I couldn't see your face properly."

She now looked extremely pretty, wearing a bright kimono, in the failing light of dusk. The old woman was no longer at our side. I ventured a compliment.

"I would have recognized you anywhere. All my life I have been dreaming of someone just like you. . . ."

I reached out for her hand.

"Let go!"

It was indeed an ill-chosen moment, for on the threshold of the next-door room stood a pretty young woman with seductive curves, like Clara: I guessed at once it was her sister.

I politely rose from my seat. I gazed sweetly at the young woman. It was getting most interesting. The appearance of a lovely sister had added a new fascination to my surroundings.

Clara introduced us. Her sister looked me over dryly, with that business-like air peculiar to women who have suffered disappointment.

"Clara," she said, "look at the way you're dressed!"

And then, turning to me:

"I don't think you ought to smoke, you know. You're health doesn't look any too good."

Not to be taken aback, I replied:

"A man has to do something."

She was not the sort to be contradicted, though, and retorted:

"If I were you, I'd drink milk instead."

Then she added in a cold tone of voice:

"I'm going out, and so I shan't be in your way."

This was a remark to which it was difficult to make any reply, and I remained silent.

She wandered about the room a little while, and spoke to Clara.

"I thought you were going to the theatre?"

She then took her leave. I remained alone with Clara.

"Well, are you keen on my sister?"

"I'm keener on you."

"Don't be silly. My sister is very pretty, and I------"

"You're prettier still."

I suddenly got up and went round Clara's chair. I stooped over her shoulder and for lack of something better to say, I murmured:

"Clara, Clara! . . ."

She turned her head and scrutinized me steadfastly. It seemed to me as though her gaze held something of love and sorrow in it. I could not think what to do next, and continued to murmur:

"Clara, Clara! . . ."

The passion I was compressing into that one word grew ever more intense. Yes, and a few minutes later I actually found myself, in that unfamiliar room, upon my knees, delivering myself of all the nonsense I could possibly recall from a novel I had just read. I swore—as far as I can remember—that gladly would I give up everything in life for her sake; willingly would I go away with her to live in some far-flung corner of the earth, in the tiniest of huts, in the loneliest of forests, only to be alone together with her, my adorable Clara; what unspeakable bliss, with nothing to disturb us, just the trees rustling and the birds—ah, the birds—singing. . . .

On the following evening, I was again seated in that selfsame room. My whole body tickled deliciously, as though angels were having a lark with me. Clara sat at the piano, singing couplets to her own accompaniment. To some of the words and to one line in particular she would impart a slight nasal twang:

"Handsome men, handsome men!"

And I thought that her singing was lovely. No one disturbed us. The door never opened, and every time I planted a lingering kiss upon her shoulder, I felt that I was going crazy.

After that, we went out for a walk. She changed in my

presence, saying "Don't look!" And before I had a chance of looking the other way, she stood before me half-naked. A wave of the hand—her nose turned into a blob of powder. Another wave of the hand—and her mouth developed into something like a large red wound.

At the cinema, she ate sweets to which she helped herself from my pocket, and on the way home we addressed each other with the familiar "thou".

Several days went by. At the end of each afternoon, I hurried off to Clara's place. The family received me well. Clara played the piano, sang couplets, and treated herself to my chocolates, while the old woman sat watching us with an air of rejoicing.

. . . . .

Late one evening—it was getting quite dark—Clara sat upon my lap, and said:

"I'm tired of living with my people. I wish you'd take me away. Have you got lots of money?"

She compressed my lips with a kiss.

I was engaged in slowly turning the pages of a picture-album, and replied:

"Don't speak like that. Money! Whatever put that sordid thing into your head?"

She burst out laughing, and childishly rocked herself up and down on my knee. I had a sudden suspicion that there were tears mingling with her laughter, and I began to feel most uncomfortable.

I continued to examine the photographs, and meanwhile became more and more conscious of the scent of powder in my nostrils.

The picture I was looking at showed Clara with a short skirt on, and a large reticule in her hand. Beside

it, there was another card—again Clara, but this time with bare arms folded behind her head like an actress. Next, a student with thick lips. I turned the page—only two pictures. One was of a trio of girls lined up behind one another, seemingly carrying each other pick-a-back; all wearing officers' helmets on their heads and with cigarettes in their mouths. The other—an elderly woman with many double chins and an expression on her face which seemed to say :

"That's it, go on, take my photo!"

Clara suddenly clasped her hands round me, drew my head towards her and looked deep into my eyes.

"Do you love me? Do you?"

I answered :

"Yes."

She kissed me, and asked me suddenly :

"Will you marry me?"

I smiled, and made as if to return to the pictures ; but she held my head fast.

"Are you going to marry me?"

I could not think of any reply. Then she looked straight into my eyes, and said :

"My people all know by now. . . . As far as I'm concerned, I don't care either way. If you're not particularly keen, say so!"

And she pressed me firmly to her bosom. A whiff of powder and eau-de-cologne gave me quite a turn. A pair of large, thirsty eyes devoured me, and my arms were full of a cool, breathing body. I was tired and intoxicated, and my lips murmured :

"Yes, yes."

Tender, delicious kisses overran my face and neck, and I murmured :

"Yes, yes."

The entire shadowy room seemed to be rocking to and fro; the piano changed places with the mirror; two plaster of Paris figures twirled round in the darkness, and I murmured :

"Yes, yes."

A few minutes later, we were both smiling. Clara stood beside me, stroking my hair. Hearing what I took to be approaching footsteps, I busied myself with the album again. I turned a new leaf and found a large picture, filling the whole page, of a youthful officer leaning upon his sword. However, before I could stop to examine it more closely, Clara's outstretched little hand had covered the picture protectively. I tried to remove her hand ; but, a scared, almost frenzied look coming into her eyes, she flung herself upon the album with all her weight. I did not realize what was wrong. Nevertheless, I struggled with all my might to wrench her away from the album. At this, she unexpectedly began to address me in formal fashion.

"Be so good as to hand me that album. I'm afraid you're overstepping your rights. I *don't* want you to see it."

"I'm going!" I shouted, jumping up, my legs shaky with anger.

Detaching the picture, she thrust it into her bosom, ran to the door and, trembling all over, fell a-weeping.

Suddenly the door opened, and her sister came in. She looked us both over and asked abruptly :

"What's going on between you two?"

I stood there shamefaced and scared. She went on :

"What are you in the dark for?"

She turned the switch, and the room was filled

with unwelcome light. Then she gazed at Clara pityingly.

"Ah, you silly girl. . . . Always crying! If I were you —but never mind! Now you tell me, what is it all about?"

I was terribly anxious to get away, only Clara's sister had taken her by the hand and was pulling her towards me, with a peremptory command :

"Now make it up! I hate to see young couples quarrelling."

I wished to make some remark, but suddenly I saw Clara's delicate hand outstretched towards me. In spite of myself, my heart overflowed. I caught hold of her hand and almost burst into tears. Clara held my hand, and her sister rapped out :

"Come on, now!"

I could not think what was the proper thing to do. So I merely said :

"Miss Clara!"

Thereupon she threw her arms around my neck, and I felt her moist lips upon my face.

"That's it," said her sister. "Oh, you men! Really, you don't deserve true love. . . ."

I wiped my face, still holding on to Clara's hand.

I stayed with Clara till a late hour that night. We sat in silence, eating supper, she and I, and her sister. The old woman served at table, and kept encouraging me in her amiable way to help myself.

I ate with a heavy heart, and as time wore on, I became obsessed with a feeling that never would I get away from that place. The beginning of the evening seemed far off: it stirred vaguely in my memory like something that had happened years ago. While the

piano, resplendent now in the brilliant light, struck me as having an odd look about it : somehow I felt that it had fooled me and knew it.

That night, Clara saw me home up to my very door. Here I was about to say something, but a kiss sealed my mouth.

"Till to-morrow," she said, and the gate closed behind me.

All day I went about my business like a man in a dream. When spoken to, I was incapable of taking anything in. My mind floated in a sea of doubts. Had I reason to be happy or downcast? Ought I to see Clara again, or had I better flee the town while the going was good? Yet there were times when I felt that, willy-nilly, my legs would carry me off to Clara, of their own accord. Towards evening, my mood had reached the depths of despair. It was then that the telephone rang. The call was for me.

I heard Clara's clear little voice sound so caressingly over the telephone :

"It's me. . . . I've been thinking of you and feeling lonely without you all day, darling."

I determined to remain silent.

"Why don't you say something? Are you cross with me?'[5]

I began :

"Anyone would think, the way your sister speaks to me——"

She did not allow me to finish.

" I won't hear a bad word against my sister. She loves us much too much. You don't know what it means to

her. I'm going straight home now, and I'll wait for you Don't be long."

I continued to hold the receiver against my ear, but she had rung off. What I heard was a strange noise stirring within, like hens bustling about in a coop.

Within an hour, I was again at Clara's flat.

This time, when the old woman opened the door and saw who it was, she ran inside with the announcement:

"It's him, Clara!"

Then, turning to me with a knowing smile, she said:

"Go on in, quickly. She wants cheering up. Poor thing, she's in such a low state. Ah, youthful follies, youthful follies!"

Still I hesitated, and my thoughts dwelt upon the strange incident of the album and upon the youthful officer's photograph. I was filled with a sudden desire to be stern and difficult. I said:

"Certainly, I'm not to blame."

The old woman edged up so close towards me, I could tell quite easily what she had had for dinner.

"Ah, you young people, you're so silly sometimes. You will have your tiffs over sweet nothing. I wonder why it is you can't be sensible and live in harmony? Poor little Clara, she's been crying such an awful lot. Now go on in, go on!"

Clara was reclining on the sofa, her head covered over with a shawl. I stood at her side, and from the way her shoulders were working, I guessed that she was crying.

"Clara... Miss Clara!"

She bared one tearful eye, gazed at me bewildered, and then buried her nose into the cushion once more.

"Clara!"

I was overcome with an urge to be dramatic.

"Clara, where is that picture?"

"What picture?"

Again she revealed that tearful eye.

"You know, the officer."

At this, she curled up entirely, and with quivering legs and heaving shoulders, burst into a restrained, but audible fit of weeping. I stood with my hand clasping my brow, like an actor, and noticed Clara's sister on the threshold of the next-door room. She beckoned me with her finger, confidentially.

"What is she crying for?" I asked.

"I suppose she has her reasons. Maybe she feels that way."

An unexpected smile wreathed her face.

"Has something happened to her?" I asked.

"I couldn't tell you," she said, with another smile, and suddenly waggling her finger in front of my nose, she vanished.

I sat down next to Clara on the sofa. She had stopped crying, and I gently rested my hand upon her head.

"Pull my frock straight," said Clara.

I did so, caressing her shapely little leg clad in a thin, transparent silk stocking. Then I did it again, without being asked. This time I did it in terribly clumsy fashion. . . .

Meanwhile the shadows were gathering in the room.

My recollections of what happened afterwards are only hazy. Something happened. Clara kissed me, wept, and murmured :

"We shall love each other so dearly. I will be so good to you. We shall live so nicely together. . . ."

My whole previous existence faded away in my con-

sciousness, and I now knew, as if for the first time, the real meaning of exquisite comfort, of bliss. I felt that the life I had led hitherto had been a worthless life. No longer did I have any inclination to return to my uncompanionable lodgings, and strangely enough the impression gained on me that Clara was weeping for my sake, out of pity for me. I grew very weary, and I longed suddenly for someone to give us his blessing.

Night had fallen when the door opened and Clara's sister reappeared. Dark though it was, I could tell that she was half asleep, and her voice was thick.

"Clara, will you go in. Mother wants to see you. I shall entertain your fiance while you're gone."

At the word "fiance", a hot flush entered my face. I itched to say something, only could think of nothing appropriate. I hastily made for the door, only to stop short. To my own surprise, an undeniable urge came upon me to express a feeling of gratitude, of endearment, to the whole place, even including Clara's sister. I fingered the switch, and turned the light on. Taken aback, Clara's sister raised her hands to cover her blouse, which was only half done up. But she soon let go again, saying :

"Just look at the state I'm in. It's a good job we have no visitors to-night."

So I switched the light off again, and Clara cried merrily, embracing me :

"No, you don't! I'm not going to leave you two alone in the dark. I'm jealous."

So I switched the light on again, and on my face hovered a curious simper, which I was conscious of, but could not suppress. Clara vanished, and I remained alone with her sister. She bade me sit down beside her

Her face was now serious, somewhat troubled, and she said:

"Well, what are your intentions?"

"What do you mean, my intentions?"

"I mean with regard to poor little Clara, my sister—poor girl."

"Why poor girl? What's the matter with her?"

She gave vent to a moan.

"Surely you know as well as I do what's the matter with her."

"No, tell me."

"Why, hasn't she mentioned it to you yet? That *is* pretty! Fancy her being that shy! Any other girl in her place would be kicking up a terrible row. And to think that she's such an innocent creature, she's actually too bashful to speak up!"

"But explain yourself, Madam. I don't understand at all."

"No, the only time you understand anything is when it suits you to. Oh, you men, you're all alike!"

Her eyes flashed at me with such indignation, I felt quite chilled.

. . . . .

Then came a day crowded with all sorts of weird and utterly incomprehensible incidents. Something or other was being celebrated, and, apparently, I was the cause of it all. Many people kissed me and congratulated me. But all I knew was that I wanted to run away.

I was surrounded by quite a crush of people, and was hustled off, as if there was some urgent business to be accomplished, for which we were late. Next I found myself face to face with a Rabbi and two bearded Jews,

one of whom looked like a corpse, while the other had ginger hair and trod heavily on my toe, excusing himself by saying :

"Never mind, that's all right!"

Strangers patted me on the back and smiled at me. For my own part, I would most willingly have shed any man's blood. Then I grew weary and wished I could see my mother. I was desolate, like a tiny tearful orphan sheltering on an inhospitable threshold where tit-bits are thrown to him by passers-by.

The candles were lit, and everybody sang. That convinced me that I was really a dead man, but did not know it. And all at once somebody gave Clara away to me. She was all in white and so beautiful. But there were moments when I forgot who she was and saw her as through a mist.

Her sister embraced me for a kiss, and as she did so, I felt a prick from a pin in her bosom. That little prick hurt bitterly and I boiled over with bitterness. I had a good mind to give her a punch on the nose.

There was some dancing. A girl approached me and said :

"You're looking your best to-day."

I fell for her immediately. I answered :

"May I see you home?"

She flushed all over and retorted angrily :

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Then I slept in a room together with Clara. The moon shone in through the window. In the next room somebody kept on coughing, and I was unable to go to sleep.

I gazed at the bright blue patches of light filtering in through the curtains, and imagined myself to be the

victim of some sorcerer's spell. Suddenly I noticed something stir on the floor in the blue of the moonshine : it slithered about like a little patch of soft grey shadowiness, dragging a thin tail behind it. It was a mouse, and I suddenly felt terrified. I raised myself feverishly and, with trembling hands, began to dress. I slowly put on my shoes and my coat, and took a cautious step forward. Then I heard Clara's voice :

"Where are you off to?"

Her voice sounded strangely harsh in the blue moonlight.

I sank down on a chair and stopped there till the morning.

. . . . .

I now have a little flat in Mala-Arnayutska Street. On the way up the crooked staircase, you will hear a baby, just a few months old, yelling at the top of its voice. If you open the door whence this howl proceeds, you will find me at home. Clara will be holding the baby in her arms and saying:

"Do you want Daddy to pick you up? All right, then, let Daddy hold you. Look how baby is staring at you all the time. You know, Yasha, baby is the very image of you."

"Of me?" I say, in a suffering tone of voice, like a man having the toothache.

"Yes, don't you notice it?"

"Yes," I agree. "A little."

And I realize that anon the lavender bushes will be abloom once more, and I have only one hope, one desire—to leave Odessa before that happens.

by

EGON ERWIN KISCH

★

JACK OPLATKA CELEBRATES MASS*

Even though the simile of the smashed *egg* may be said to lack originality, even though it may be called indelicate, for all that it *is* a simile. In the ordinary way, Jack Oplatka has no use at all for such figures of speech. In the ordinary way, the (ungrudging) account he gives of his conflicts and vocations is all to the point, and his story—richly spiced with technical terms and Americanisms—is strictly true, though highly incredible. Aware of its unlikelihood, he endeavours to back up all his statements with straightforwardness, expertness, terminology and precision. But—"There was my eye, lying on the floor, like a smashed rotten *egg."*

With this figure of speech, he always evades giving any definite answer to the question how his right eyehole comes to be empty. When did it happen? "In a fight. . . ." Yes, but where did the fighting take place? " Across the big ocean, that was."

He has in fact been over to America, as we could guess for ourselves from the liberal sprinkling of Americanisms in his chronicles, and he is proud of it. He was just a small lad when he absconded across the "big ocean" after an assault upon his teacher. He returned soon after. (Even now he is no older than

*** Translated from the German by Morris Kreitman.**

nineteen.) Ever since he has called himself Jack (previously his name was Kobi), has worn a parting down the middle, has favoured a clean-shaven neck, very roomy trousers with turn-ups, jackets with cotton-wool padding in the shoulders, and has frowned upon braces and walking-sticks. He often speaks of the far beyond, but never a word as to the why and wherefore his right eye once lay upon American soil like a smashed rotten **egg.**

It is safe to bet that it happened in a fight with an *Orl,* which is Yiddish for a Christian. Oh, not that he harbours any hatred against Christians ! On the contrary. He comes of a religious Ghetto family, and knows how to respect the piety of those professing a different faith. He reveres piety for its own sake and is—provided these words exist—pan-religious, all-pious. His cronies are all of them, almost without exception, Aryans, who consider him as one of themselves, and to be sure he is proud of the fact that he does not look a Jew, albeit he is proud of the fact that he is a Jew. At all times—that is, only when he is off duty, as will be seen later—he vigorously takes exception to being mistaken for an *Orl.* And how vigorously !

There is just one thing about the Christians that he objects to : they regard the Jews as cowards.

To correct this erroneous belief, to rid the world of this delusion—such Jack Oplatka deems to be his mission. If ever a remark detrimental to the Jews is dropped within his hearing, if ever a gesture of an anti-Semitic nature is manifested within his range of vision, then this provides him with a welcome incentive to revenge and retribution, to the roughest and readiest possible denial of the prevailing misconception con-

cerning the cowardice of all Jews. (Now whether this is the true reason for his having embarked upon a campaign of propaganda by direct action, upon his mission of palpable enlightenment, the terrorist in him being a deliberate outcome of his theories, or whether the motive is that of racial resentment or, simpler still, native pugnacity, with the ethical justification tacked *on a posteriori* —this is a problem that will sooner or later have to be decided by the court psychiatrists.)

Anyhow, by no means does he always wait for provocation to come his way: he has no particular need of it for his system of denial by direct action. For example, he will be sitting in a cafe and will suddenly get to his feet. He will stroll over to a red-faced sergeant-major who is peacefully holding his hand in his (lady companion's) lap, will come quite close and with the question, "Who's a dirty Jew?" will treat the unsuspecting fellow to a punch in the jaw, and the entire establishment to a rough-house.

Counter-attack. Free scrap. Party-splitting. Whizzing of beer glasses. Splintering coffee-cups. Waitresses shrieking. Alarmed pinning down by numerous hands of a none too seriously meant sabre. A little bit of blood. Ejections. A number of arrests. At least, the arrest of Jack Oplatka.

He is asked (or not asked):

"Why did you pick that quarrel? The sergeant-major never said a word."

"That's right. But the *Orl* needn't think we Jews are funky!"

As stated, in other respects he bears not the least malice against Christians and Christianity. Indeed, he is actually among its most faithful servants. A fact which

outsiders with middle-class ideas find difficult to digest. Herr Suss is one such person. Portly Herr Suss once happened to visit the Cafe Savoy in company with the journalist K., a friend of Jack Oplatka's.

Jack to the journalist: "It's a good job you've come. I've got something for you. You must put an article into your paper about the terrible state the *tumes* of Prague are in. . . ."

Herr Suss, intent on catching an article at its source, intent at not missing or remaining in the dark about a single word uttered by the notorious Jack Oplatka, breaks in:

"Excuse me, Herr Oplatka, but what are *tumes?"*

An empty eyehole, seemingly loth to believe such crass ignorance possible, turns contemptuously upon the questioning stranger. However, the latter is informed that *tume* is Yiddish for "church".

"Well, what's wrong with the *tumes* of Prague, Jack?"

"You see, it's like this. You know, I've been working for Janku these last eight months. ..."

"Father Janku. Yes?"

"O.K. At St. Heinrich's Church. I started Trinity Sunday. Before that, of course, I was *pompesfunebre,* only once the sacristan had a fit in the sacristy just before mass *pro defunctis,* so I put on his vestment and took his place. I've been the permanent sacristan ever since. Although Janku has the St. Heinrich school, with plenty of schoolboys to choose from, who would be glad to serve for nothing, just for the *koved* of the thing."

"So why doesn't he have the youngsters doing it for him?"

"As a matter of fact, he used to. But I ask you! Supposing he takes model boys, such pale little kids they are, what happens? Having to be in church every morning at six, they get ill after a few days, or go to sleep afterwards at school. And can you wonder at it? Always on the look-out for your cue, the whole Latin *siderl* on the tip of your tongue; you keep running around with a stiff body, the heavy missal under your left arm, or carrying the missal-stand or the boat or the thurible, from the epistle side to the gospel side. And the altar at St. Heinrich's is seven yards wide and it's got six steps. Up and down the whole time, with nothing but trouble all the way. 'Tain't fair for such a child. On the other hand, if he chooses hefty lads, then all they do is get up to mischief and pranks in the sacristy. After all, what sense has a young *Orl* got for respecting a holy place, a sanctuary?"

"So you'd like me to write an article protesting against the employment of children as acolytes?"

"Oh no, my boy, it makes no difference to me. Although it certainly ought to be prohibited. Not that any competition enters into it as far as I am concerned. Janku knows that he can depend on me. On weekdays, at low mass, I minister all on my own; on Sundays, I'm the superior sacristan and walk behind the priest, carrying the holy-water vat and the aspergillum."

"Pardon me, Herr Oplatka, but what is an aspergillum?"

Jack's sunken right eyelids throb with a flattered-suspicious-threatening mien at the questioning Herr Suss.

" Son of a bitch! If you think I'm going to stand much more of your backchat, you've made a big mistake.

First you don't understand the Yiddish lingo, then you don't understand the Catholic lingo. . . . What do you understand?"

But thereupon, proud of his office and knowledge, he condescends to explain.

"The aspergillum is a *lulev,* get me? A holy-water sprinkler! Well then. I follow the priest about with the aspergillum, and at the Sanctus, I light the Sanctus candle; when there is a mass *solemnis,* complete with the holy wafer, of the four sacristans on the job, I'm the chief, I carry the thurible. And when there is a burial or a procession, the others wear sleeveless white rochets and carry the candles, while me, I have on a dalmatic and lead the whole funeral with a cross in my hand. . . . Actually, I'm no longer a mere sacristan, I've become a sort of *shlattenshammes,* a proper old deacon."

"Well, what is it actually you've got against the *tumes?* What sort of article would you like me to put into my paper?"

"Right you are! Let's get down to business. Now yesterday Veverka, the verger of St. Heinrich's, says to me, will I go down to St. Andrew's Chapel to minister at mass. For this once he'd make do with two of the kids of St. Heinrich's school. What for, I ask him. So he tells me a long story, does Veverka. Some chaplain had been to see him, as belongs to the Strahow seminary, but says high mass at St. Andrew's on Sundays, and this here chaplain told him a sob-story as follows : The usual sacristan, a poor nitwit as had been serving there for thirty years, had gone and died this week, and things are in a mess, because the Chapel is minus a sexton, and the chaplain asked if Veverka would care to come over and straighten things out a bit. But of course, Veverka

hasn't got any time for making excursions, and so he promised the chaplain that he'd send me along. Would I oblige? 'O.K.,' says I, 'I'll oblige.' 'I guess I know what you'll do, Oplatka,' he says to me. 'You'll oversleep yourself, that's what you'll do. Mass is at half-past eight, you've got to be there at eight, and it's an hour's journey.' 'Don't you kid yourself,' I says to him. 'I shall be sitting up in Cafe Kagoj till seven in the morning, and I shall then start out. About the only time I might miss mass through oversleeping myself is in the afternoon.' "

"And were you out there this morning?"

"Yep! And more's the shame. *Halevai* I hadn't gone there! We were playing poker all last night, with that blighter Cohen having all the luck, and at seven in the morning I was just beginning to get a bit of my own back. It can't be helped, I says to myself, divine service is divine service. So up I gets, leaving all my cash in the saucer, and away I go to Scharka in absolutely lousy weather. The moment I came into the sacristy, I spotted it. The place was in a state, you've never seen anything like it in all your life. Everywhere dust lying half an inch think ! The mass vestments hadn't seen soap and water for at least two years. The flounces were unstitched and I had to fix them on with safety-pins, 'cos I was afraid they might go and fall off during mass. The surplice was all in tatters, 'pon my word of honour! The biretta was crushed in on one side. The lavabo towels had been folded and put away unwashed. The paten wasn't even covered up, and the spare consecrated wafers for the general communion were all dusty. How's that for hygiene, what? It gave me the biggest shock of my life. 'Sir,' I said, 'is this here place sup-

posed to be a house of worship? You know, saving your reverence, it looks more like a------"

"And the chaplain?"

"What could he do? He felt most uncomfortable about it. He tried to make me believe that it was out of pity that he never sacked the old *meshuggener* sacristan. And he spun me a lot of yarns, he did, how that old nit-wit used to mess things up even during high mass. At the last gospel, at the point where you're supposed to make the small sign of the cross, he'd go and do the large one, and when he passed the altar where the Blessed Sacrament is kept inside the tabernacle, he always bent both knees instead of bending one ; but sure enough, at the words 'Domine non sum dignus" he just made a medium bow, 'stead of a profound one. Why, he always put the missal down back to front. At the second 'Kyrie eleison', he was supposed to answer 'Christe eleison'. Of course, being the mug that he was, he *too* said 'Kyrie eleison'. At Levate he kneeled, at Flectamus he rose—just like that! And when he carried the the bell, he always went and tripped up, and------"

"Yes, but what about yourself?"

"Well, I ministered. There was quite a big crowd. Fact is, I noticed the mistress of the Schmukyrka Saloon there. She sat right in the front row. She remembers me when I was having that affair with Peptscha—I used to go dancing a lot at the Schmukyrka Saloon at that time. Honestly, I felt ashamed of myself letting her see me minister with such filthy appointments. Why, even the monstrance was tarnished. Too bad, and as soon as we got to ' Ite missa est',I went straight into the sacristy and started putting things into shape. I managed to find a tin of polish, but that wasn't much use without any

chamois cloth an' nothing. Then I had a brainwave—good for my Jewish headpiece! I cut up a torn cingulum, just an old woollen cingulum, and used that to rub up the thurible, the incensorium and the cover of the missal and the chalices. That done, I says to the chaplain, 'Look here,' I says, 'the monstrance has got to be given a real proper clean for once in a while. I'm going to do it for you right now.' "

"And did he let you?"

"Tried to lecture me, that's what he did! Said that the venerabile could only be cleaned by someone as had taken holy orders. So I turned round and said to him: 'Just because of a little bit of dust, I suppose, you expect me to enrol in the sovereign archiepiscopal seminary?' Now that made him laugh, and I polished up the monstrance till it looked a bit presentable. In the end, he gave the ciborium a bit of a rub himself, so as he could say *he* cleaned it. Well, he's welcome! And then I went back into the sacristy. I tied the ordnate and the pluviale up in a bundle together with the lavacrum and the lavabo towels, so that they could be sent on to the laundry in the convent at Brewnow. All done, all finished! So up comes the chaplain and—may I drop down dead if I'm not speaking the truth—he lays down fifteen bucks! . . ."

"What?"

"Yep, you heard me! Fifteen kreutzers, he offers me. At first I just looked at him—I thought he'd gone *meshugge*. 'What's the meaning of this?' I ask him. 'Fifteen kreutzers is what I get at St. Heinrich's, which is in the centre of the town, but you don't expect me to come out when it's still dark, travel an hour in the filthiest muck, interrupt my game of poker and leave

my cash behind me, and come down here to make everything nice and bright, all for fifteen kreutzers, do you?[5] So he says, he can't give me any more, fifteen kreutzers is the same as the old sexton used to get, and the chaplain has the sacristan's fee paid out to him a quarter in advance, and he can't give me *no* extra, and all he's going to pay is fifteen kreutzers. But I'd just about stood for enough. 'Any fool can *say* mass,' I yelled at him. 'You've got every word there in front of you in the book, not like the sacristan who has to know everything by heart. Why, if I was to give you a cookery-book, instead of the gospel, you'd be saying "Jam tart" instead of "Dominus vobiscum!" All you do is take it easy and have yourself waited upon, while the sacristan has to jump about like a bloomin' clown with his bells, and after all he does for you, you'd pay him a miserable starvation wage, would you? Call yourself a good Christian? Is that your idea of loving your neighbour? It's a swindle, that's what it is !' "

"And how about the chaplain? Did he take it lying down?"

"Of course, he began to shout too and to call me names. And when he did that, calling me names—it's sad for me to have to relate this about a pastor—I saw at once what a low-down character he was. Such plain words he used an' all—*bastard, dollop !* And what's more, he told me I was a busybody, and maybe I was kiddin' myself that he couldn't have got along without me, and if I wasn't satisfied with fifteen kreutzers, I could leave the money, and as far as he was concerned. . . . Damn my soul, I just about lost my temper, I was all set on giving him a couple of black eyes, when suddenly he shouts at me—and it was then I understood

why he'd been looking at me slantwise in that nasty way all along—he shouts at me, he's not going to stand for haggling with a stinking Jew merchant. When he said that—you don't know what those words mean to me....

"But I do, Jack! I know what you're like."

"Oh no, you don't know what I'm like when I hear something of that sort. When I hear something like that, I don't know what I'm like myself! When I hear something like that, ten men can't hold me down. If a copper comes up and bawls, 'In the name of the law!' he can go on bawling. I don't hear a thing. Believe it or not, at such times I can only see with my right eye, and funny noises come into my head. Well, when he said that bit about the stinking Jew, I grabbed hold of the heavy altar candelabrum . . . so just then he cries out: 'Sacrilegium immediatum!' And that simply worked wonders : it brought me back to my senses.

"The fact that he got the wind up in Latin—or maybe it was because that reminded me he was addressing me as a functionary of the Church—in fact, I don't know the reason why myself, but, by gum, I do know what a sacrilegium immediatum is, I do know that! Anyway, I instantly came to myself, and I saw him there standing in front of me with a face as green as the cloth of that billiard table, with his hand stretched out in fear. So I put the candelabrum back on the table and said in a slow sort of way : ' Give me another fifteen kreutzers.'"

Without another word he put the money down, I pocketed the thirty bucks, made the small sign of the cross (I know quite well I ought to have made the large sign of the cross, but I was in such a temper !) and I left."

With a single jerk, Jack empties his glass of beer.

"That's the whole story. But on my way back I made my mind up as follows : the next time I saw you, I'd tell you all about it, so as you could put it into your paper and tell the world what a state the *tumes* of Prague are in. It can't go on like that!

"See, this is what I want you to write: Every sacristan should be paid fifteen kreutzers per low mass, twenty kreutzers per high mass on Sundays or holidays, and when a mass for the dead is sung, the sacristans should share between them ten per cent of the proceeds of the donations, and a supplementary fee should be fixed for the chapels out in the cemeteries or in the suburbs, say ten kreutzers per mile. . . ."

Herr Süss, however, his Jewish sentiments outraged, exclaims in spite of himself :

"How can you serve the Church, when you're a Jew?"

An eyebrow—the one dominating the smashed egg—moves upwards :

"Look here, fathead, you don't imagine that when I minister at the altar I do it as a Jew? Blimey, don't you see, when I minister I'm an *Orl* !"

by

ESTHER KREITMAN

*

THE RELIC*

The Gliskers had lived in the open country, on the fringe of the forest, for ages. Yudel Glisker inherited a store which for generations had supplied the needs of the peasantry in the countryside for many a mile around. And he ran it quite single-handed. A tall and broad-shouldered Jew, who was well capable of standing his own ground, he held the respect of the peasants.

. Of an independent nature, he did not even allow his wife to lend him a helping hand, except at such times as he went to town to replenish his stock. A woman's place, contended Yudel, was in the home beside her children. It was safest for both parties....

However, Rachel, his wife, thought otherwise. Knowing full well, though, that when Yudel said no, he meant no, and he was by no means the worst of husbands, she left him to his own devices. To find some outlet for her dormant energy, she took to dairy-farming on her own account.

Yudel raised no objection. So long as she did not meddle in his affairs, she was free to do as she pleased. He was all the more willing to agree, because it would give those idle wenches of his something to do. He even

* Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.

went so far as to help her pick a few head of cattle, paying the peasants their due and chinking glasses with them over a bottle of vodka.

Rachel carried on business no less efficiently than Yudel. Like her husband, she refused to depend on others, doing everything herself. She milked the cows, heated the basins of sour milk, lifted the heavy stone slabs on to the cheeses, churned the butter—all unaided. She even sewed the cheese-bags herself.

Her daughters merely grazed the cattle in the meadows, seeking out the deepest and the lushest grasses. As a consequence, when the cows came home in the evening, their udders were fit to burst with milk. And it was with a sense of deep satisfaction that Rachel would seat herself upon the three-legged milking-stool and nimbly finger the rosy and brownish nipples, until the udders became as flabby and elongated as they had been in the early hours of the afternoon.

Gratefully the relieved animals would lick her hands with their moist, heavy tongues. The warm milk in the pails, the odour of manure in the barn, would infuse Rachel with even greater vigour than usual. At such times she felt herself capable of moving mountains.

As for her daughters, spending the livelong summer day in the meadows, under the untrammelled sky, caressed and tanned by the bright sunshine, they shot up tall and erect as the pines on the fringe of the neighbouring forest.

Visiting Jews from the surrounding villages, who drove up in dilapidated little carts drawn by decrepit old horses, for supplies of milk and butter and immense cheeses, could not but notice how remarkably carefree was this "wild" life led by the Gliskers. And it pained

them. These callers, who never even ventured near the cowshed, for fear of being tossed by the animals, could not endure the thought of Glisker's three daughters growing up robust and simple as peasant wenches, with the mother herself looking and behaving like a sturdy peasant woman, and with Yudel, the head of the family, wholly engrossed in earthly matters, without a thought for the eternal life to come.

Thus it was that whenever Rachel was adamant in refusing to reduce her prices, these excitable little fellows would turn their attentions to Yudel and point out the error of his ways.

"Think of your daughters, Reb Yudel! Where is this sort of life going to lead them? Here you are, a man of standing, and you allow your daughters to graze cattle in the company of peasant lasses and lads. Fine morals they'll learn in the fields, we don't think! You won't find it too easy to marry them off afterwards, when the time comes, Reb Yudel, and you such a fine man and all!"

Yudel was not a bit impressed, except that on occasion he felt greatly tempted to take hold of the speakers by the scruff of their scraggy necks and give them such a shaking, that never again would they make bold to poke their noses in other people's business. He saw through their harangues as so much empty, spiteful talk. Now, themselves without the slightest scruple about charging the poor of the nearby villages fantastic prices for a pint of milk or a few ounces of butter, they expected Rachel to part with her wares for a song, and were sorely grieved at her firmness. Their torrent of words was but an expression of personal sorrow, not a little inspired by the flourishing condition of his affairs, for which praise be to God!

Yudel, patient man though he was, would surely have ended up by throwing these irascible little fellows out neck and crop. And he might have finished his life peacefully in the cottage where his forefathers had lived before him, had he not one evening chanced upon his eldest daughter, Rosa, locked in embrace with the district chief's son out in the open fields—"for all the world like an animal," as Yudel afterwards told his wife.

Thenceforth, Yudel no longer treated the dairymen and their unasked-for advice with the same contempt as of old. Indeed he listened attentively to all their prattle, pondering and brooding over every chance remark that slipped their tongues.

And one fine day towards the end of summer, instead of going to town as mere visitors for the High Festivals, the Gliskers parted with their lonesome cottage, stowed all their belongings into roomy carts with latticed frameworks, and, the cattle roped up behind them, plodded into close-by Bojonitz, to make their home there for good.

Only when his old homestead was out of sight, and the procession of carts was passing through the cone-strewn pine forest, did the last lingering regrets pass from Yudel's heart, and stories he had heard long ago came back to him of Jewish lads and girls who, reared in solitude in the country, had become embroiled in love affairs with Christian friends and had brought shame on their parents—shame beyond repair.

These feelings caused him to seek the friendship of his new neighbours in the village and to place more confidence in them. It was in quite a new light that he now regarded those selfsame Jews who used to come to his cabin in the old days to purchase timber (that being one of Yudel's side-lines). In fact, he even modified his

opinion of the dairymen who had been in the habit of haggling so obstinately with his wife. Here in the village he saw that some of these men would spend their evenings in study at the synagogue. What it was they droned out of the huge yellow-leaved volumes, he did not know, but the beadle told him that one of the dairymen—the fellow with the scraggiest neck of all—was extremely pious and learned. As for the others, they knew a thing or two as well.

Yudel would peep furtively over their shoulders, and to his dismay, he found that not only could he not understand a single word, he was not even able to read the script. He experienced a sensation that was new to him—a feeling of inferiority. And in spite of himself, this humiliation of being a stranger, a foreigner, among his neighbours, clung to him and grew acuter the longer he dwelt in Bojonitz, until it became a veritable obsession with him.

He decided to take a tutor, only not a soul must know: it would never do for him to be thought a simple peasant. He had a reputation to live up to.

In the village it was common knowledge that Yudel was a man of means. And he was treated accordingly. On the very first Sabbath following his arrival, when he presented himself at the synagogue for the morning service, the beadle assigned to him a place of honour, which he occupied ever after.

Even so, Yudel was not quite happy. Honoured though he was, he had a disconcerting feeling that he did not fit in. It grieved him above all that alone among the worshippers occupying the front seats in the synagogue, he wore a woollen gaberdine, while the others were all clad in silk. With his great height and mighty

back, which concealed behind it a whole cluster of worshippers, he was surely most obtrusive in that woollen gaberdine of his, like some nonentity from the back rows who has pushed his way to the front so as to rub shoulders with the notables of the community.

On the face of it, it seemed a simple enough matter. He could certainly afford a new gaberdine, praise be to God! All he need do was order a few yards of silk, send for "Silly" Gimpel, the skilled village tailor, and that would be that! Surely nothing could be easier.

Nevertheless, Yudel, who was capable of overcoming the most difficult of obstacles, faltered over such a trifling matter, and allowed a secret yearning to come into his life for the first time.

So, on the Sabbath, instead of going straight home after the service as it had always been his custom to do, he would fold his toil-worn hands behind him, the ends of his red-spotted handkerchief clutched between his iron fingers, and, with cramped stride, would pace up and down the front seats of the synagogue like a frightened man who is bracing himself for a plunge into the unknown, and endlessly he would repeat in a wistful sing-song, partly to himself and partly to the notables all clad in silk and satin :

"Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings to you!"

Like most of the things Yudel did, this behaviour was ill received. On one occasion it evoked a slight, but visible sneer from one of the notables, who muttered an incomprehensible remark into his notable beard, added an equally incomprehensible remark through his notable nose, putting an altogether vulgar interpretation on Yudel's strange conduct.

And one lad of about thirteen, Simcha, the Talmud master's youngest son, was even quicker in the uptake than the grown-ups ; he construed without a moment's hesitation the meaning of that delicate twitch of a notable snuff-filled nose, A roguish smile on his pinched features, his fragile body erect, he placed himself behind Yudel, followed him up and down, chanting ever so softly :

"Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings to you, and yea, Sabbath greetings to all the eats we are going to have for dinner !"

After Yudel's departure, all the notables chortled mirthfully, reprimanding Simcha the while :

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Fancy making a Jew the laughing-stock of the congregation, especially on the Sabbath, you impudent brat !"

Never did Yudel hear their laughter. Nor was it in his nature to suspect it. Yet, somehow, it contrived to hurt him.

At home, too, his Sabbath comfort was both enhanced and disturbed. After dinner he took his weekly lesson—and who was his secret tutor, if not Simcha, the thirteen-year-old lad that had entertained the congregation at Yudel's expense? In the afternoon, when the village was always deep in Sabbath slumber, the boy would steal across to the new cottage on the outskirts of the village, to earn his weekly pay of two guldens.

Simcha usually found Yudel in the same posture: seated bolt upright in his bed, with a contented, restful look on his still sleepy face. And Yudel, pretending not to notice Simcha's entry, would address his second daughter, Faiga, with fatherly peremptoriness:

" I say, Faiga, hand me a glass of water, will you.

I want it clearrr as crrrystal—and mind there are no flies in it!"

These words invariably tickled Simcha. At the same time, they conjured up a vision of flashing crystal, of limpid water in a running brook, and side by side with it, another vision—of a stagnant pool with dead flies floating on top.

He felt all the more deceived, therefore, when Faiga returned with a ribbed tumbler of the most ordinary water, and he would mimic the man spitefully under his breath:

" I want it clearrr as crrrystal—and mind there are no flies in it!"

Only after Yudel had scrutinized the water, sipped it to the last and swept the palm of his hand over the glistening silvery drops that had settled on his beard, would he discover Simcha's presence, and, greeting him amicably, call to his wife :

" Wake up, Rachel, he's here !"

On the opposite side of the room there was another carved bed, an exact replica of Yudel's, and here Rachel lay, cross-wise and fully dressed, her feet resting on a scoured four-legged stool. She was very nearly as big as Yudel, and almost as well built.

Simcha could not help noticing how firmly her bosom heaved behind her white linen blouse, how numerous were the folds in her reddish tartan skirt. She certainly looked a peasant woman with that string of scarlet beads round her throat, and with that red kerchief on her head, from which—contrary to Jewish law—her natural hair showed, black and glossy.

She roused a confusion of feelings in Simcha, which he was afraid to examine, allowing only one to linger in

his mind. Was she truly a Jewess, he wondered. He was not alone in his perplexity. The whole village wondered. These strangers certainly gave themselves out as Jews—pious ones at that—and yet their ways were not the ways of Jews.

Simcha turned his eyes from the mother to the three daughters. Everywhere temptation. And he was obliged to cast his eyes on the sand-strewn floor. When Rachel had finished making the beds, he sat down at the table.

Yudel, clearing his throat, asked suddenly:

"I say, Simcha, how many yards of silk d'you think I'd require for a gaberdine, eh? Got any idea, have you?"—as if the lad were a tailor.

Simcha glanced up as though to measure Yudel, and it occurred to him that the man would need quite thirty yards.

"Why, I should say about fifteen," Simcha blurted out, flushing hotly.

Yudel said no more, only regretting his weakness in asking. He saw that he had made a fool of himself. Abruptly he went up to the bookcase, picked out a Pentateuch bound in calf-leather, with large golden lettering on its crimped back. Turning up the weekly portion, he carried the open book to the table reverently and with an air of importance.

The lesson began, with Yudel seated at the head of the table, Simcha beside him, and opposite them—Deborah, the youngest daughter, her elbows resting on the table, her closed fists firmly embedded in her fleshy cheeks, and not for a moment did her bright eyes stray from Simcha's pinched features.

Simcha pretended to be unaware of her presence, and nervously moved his tiny forefinger over the print:

"*Vayaitsa Yakov mibeer Shiba,* which means—And Jacob went out from Beer-Sheba, *vayelich Charana,* and went towards Charan."

That was simple enough, thought Yudel. Jacob left one place to go to another, just as he, Yudel, had left the open country to go and live in Bojonitz. The only difficulty was that he could not distinguish the meaning of each separate word. Reluctant to ask, he floundered badly, growing more and more confused, much to the dissatisfaction of Simcha, who struggled heroically to send the shafts of knowledge home, but all in vain. He talked himself hoarse, like a real grown-up tutor—the very image of his father! Yudel bore it patiently, trying again and again. When at last he contrived to get it right, he beamed all over, and Simcha was so heartened, he actually gave Deborah a triumphant look.

Deborah gaped back with her large simple eyes. She could not understand the cause of all this sudden rejoicing, much less why her father—fine man that he was—allowed himself to be taught by a mere slip of a boy.

Meanwhile Rachel came in from the kitchen bearing a large tray of sweetmeats, which Simcha became aware of, even though his back was turned. His slender forefinger began creeping ever faster and faster over the black print; errors were glossed over, and soon the lesson was ended.

"Well, well," said Yudel, his red face losing a little of its taut expression. "Well, well!"

When his wife had respectfully replaced the book, his features relaxed altogether, and with sudden gaiety he clapped his hands together with such a violent sound, that Simcha jumped, almost scared out of his wits.

"Come along now, let's all have a bite. Don't be backward, Simcha. You mustn't let yourself be beaten by the girls."

At such times it was wonderfully pleasant in that big dusky room, with the furniture a mass of polished shadows, the tiled stove gleaming, and with the dainties on a peasant-made tray vanishing rapidly into large healthy mouths. Simcha felt that assuredly Yudel's cottage was at the moment the happiest in the entire snow-covered village.

With nightfall, which was not far off, the Sabbath came to a close.

When Yudel returned from the evening service, he found a fire already glowing brightly in all four compartments of the kitchen-range, with a huge pot of potato-peel—the cows' supper—in position at one end, and another almost equally huge pot of potatoes—the family's supper—in position at the other end.

Rachel was already mixing the chicken food, while the hens came fluttering down from their shelves or emerged from under the beds, surrounding her like angry demons. They had gone without food all day, except for some crumbs off the table, and they clucked wildly, demanding their due. When she finally set the food down, they all started off on a mad pecking and gobbling race, often ending up in a fight—although there was more than enough to go round—with feathers flying thick and fast.

However, when Rachel began to scold, the fowls ceased their scramble, as though understanding her every word, and they settled down to eat more quietly.

Saturday night was the busiest time of Rachel's life, especially when Yudel made his mind up to drive to

town overnight, to replenish his stock, and she would be overwhelmed with work. She kept calling on her daughters to lend a hand ; but they were never at home. Immediately Simcha went, they all slipped out unobserved, and left everything to their capable mother.

But it was even more than Rachel could cope with. She always got quite flustered, and when Rachel became confused, she was never able to remember things by their proper names, and she would call all objects, both animate and inanimate, "whatsaname".

"Whatsaname," she cried, meaning Faiga, whom she hoped against hope to find somewhere about the place, "drain the whatsaname and give it to the poor starving whatsanames," obviously meaning: "Faiga, drain the potato-peel and give it to the poor starving animals.[35]

Yudel often wondered where those wenches of his got to of an evening. However, they must be somewhere in the village and would surely come to no harm there.

Immediately after supper he would harness his pair of horses and drive off towards the forest, with a large sum of money in his pocket. Rachel often protested it was foolhardy of him. A snowstorm might come on and cause him to lose his way. Then there was the real danger of bandits. But Yudel went unafraid, and he always returned the following day unharmed.

. . . . .

Winter passed, and Yudel, who never gave up when he set his heart on a thing, was so persevering in his lessons with Simcha, that finally the village marriage-broker, a man who knew everybody's business, got wind of it, and he at once had a brainwave. He would match Yudel with Reb Isaac, the Talmud master, and thus it

was that in due course a marriage was arranged between Rosa, Yudel's eldest daughter, and Mordecai, Simcha's sixteen-year-old brother.

No sooner was she betrothed, than Yudel discovered that" that wench of his" was rather a delicate girl, not a bit strong, in fact poorly, and must do not a thing in the house, as befitted a gentleman's daughter.

" Give her no more rough work to do," Yudel adjured his wife, "because she must not exert herself and will have to be well cared for. Besides, now that she's engaged to the Talmud master's son, she'll have plenty of dainty work to keep her busy,."

Perforce Rosa spent days on end tracing monograms on lace-fringed pillow-cases for herself and her husband-to-be. (Needless to say, Yudel was providing the couple's entire home at his own expense.) She knitted and sewed, embroidered and crocheted all for her future home, not forgetting numerous presents for her in-laws. Rosa toiled and moiled, while Yudel kept raiding his fat wallet, for Reb Isaac, the village Talmud master, was a most learned man, a most particular man, a most ill-tempered man and a most hopelessly penniless man.

In truth, it proved no easy matter to persuade Rosa that she was a delicate girl, in poor health, for she loved to be hale and hearty, as indeed she was, and she loved to do coarse work, even though she loved still better to give her mother the slip on a Saturday night and meet the district chief's son in secret at their tryst outside the village. She hated it like poison pricking her fingers over dainty needlework, she hated it walking about for ever dressed up like a mannequin, she hated being genteel, and she hated Mordecai, the Talmud master's

son, with an overpowering hatred. But gradually she grew accustomed to her new role (or so it seemed). After a time she began taking it for granted that not only her father, but she too, was a person changed beyond recognition.

Spring came and with it—floods, which drove the villagers on to the rooftops, where they stayed for almost a week. Then the hot weather set in.

Oppressive though the broiling sun was, Bojonitz was full of bustle, for the day of Rosa's wedding was drawing close, and no event in the village, neither death nor birth, was comparable to a wedding.

Yudel's affairs had prospered exceedingly in his new home. His stock of timber had multiplied, so that it overshadowed his entire cottage, and the cows had to graze far away, by the river; while the smell of resin rising in the sun from the sawn logs dominated the length and breadth of the village.

In the evening, when the womenfolk congregated on the benches outside the whitewashed walls of the cottages, under the shadowy eaves, to gossip, Yudel was their unfailing topic. Perhaps it was the odour of his timber which always brought him to their minds and tongues.

Or perhaps it was the sight of him passing through the high street on his way to the synagogue, accompanied by his new-found crony, Baruch "Headpiece", a man remarkable for his wisdom in matters of the Talmud and more remarkable still for his stupidity in everyday affairs.

They were truly an ill-assorted pair. Baruch, with his tiny head a mass of moist hair hanging over his ears, his beard reaching up past his cheekbones to his black little

eyes, above which the brows met in one bushy tangle, and his mouth extending from ear to ear, would trot along beside Yudel like a dressed-up monkey or a circus dwarf beside the circus giant. And their shadows in the setting sun—one huge, the other so tiny—would look positively grotesque.

At such times Hannah, the village shrew, often passed nasty remarks even before Yudel was out of earshot.

"Look at him. There he goes! D'you mean to tell me that he's a Jew? Ho, ho, what a Jew! May hair grow on the palm of my hand if that man was not born a Christian. . . . There!" she exclaimed, triumphantly displaying the palm of her skinny hand, as though that in itself offered proof of the truth of her words.

No one really believed her ; but the women, and even some of the men who were in the habit of hanging round the gossipers, listened with the most intense pleasure to Hannah's endless flow of words. Nimble feminine fingers manipulated needles in preparation for the forthcoming wedding, and greedy ears drank in envy-quenching words in the freshening evening air.

"They're a funny lot, those Gliskers. Got the luck of the devil. No harm ever comes their way. If they were real Jews, they'd have troubles and cares of some sort. No harm ever comes their way. No harm ever comes their way... ."

Hannah's words had a mournful ring in the evening air.

On the Sabbath of Consolation, only a few days before the wedding, Yudel experienced one of the happiest moments in his life. As he entered the syna-

gogue in the company of Baruch, no less a person than the Rabbi came forward to welcome him.

" Sabbath greetings, Reb Yudel !"

The sun was still high in the skies, and the little house of worship was steeped in sunlight. A golden beam of dust specks was pouring in through the closed window, playing upon the pulpit and ending with a glitter of splendour upon the candelabrum.

Yudel was enveloped by so joyful a sensation, that the vexation caused him in the past by malicious tongues melted like a cloud in a sudden burst of hot sunshine.

"Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings to you !" Yudel broke forth into an uncontrollable sing-song, overwhelmed as he was by the honour done him by no less a person than the Rabbi, and overjoyed as he was by the sight of the sunshine resting like a crown upon the candelabrum, which none other than Yudel himself had recently donated to the community. As fine and massive a piece of silver as was to be seen anywhere, and no wonder, thought Yudel, that the golden sunshine had chosen it as its resting-place. Indeed gold and silver always went well together.. . .

This feeling of triumph remained with him up to the very day of the wedding.

. . . . .

The moment had come. Yudel's large front room was bare of all furniture, except for a few long wooden benches lining the walls. Suspended from the centre of the newly whitewashed ceiling was a huge paraffin lamp, and hanging all round it were colourful Chinese lanterns. On the walls fluttered a multi-coloured assortment of paper ribbons, plain and curled, coiled and

crimped—a dazzling mixture of reds, greens, yellows and blues! The floor was strewn with fine golden sand.

Rachel was not wearing her usual red kerchief, but a luxuriant wig with a wide parting in the middle and a white silk bow fastened at the side, such as she used to put on only for the High Festivals.

Yudel was clad in a new and silken gaberdine, donned in honour of the occasion. Marrying into a family that was poor, but of high repute, he had found it in him to discard his woollen gaberdine and change into silk. Its silken rustle filled his ears. It was a sound he would have to get used to. Magnificent was the sheen on his bulky body, and bashful the rosy sheen on his peasant face. Having formed a connexion with a family of such refinement, he could at last afford to assert himself, and indeed, the new gaberdine suited him well. It rested on his broad back a perfect fit, and it bore an air of rejoicing—truly the gaberdine was rejoicing!...

Rachel was helping a hired woman to arrange the cut cake on the trays, also the other sweetmeats. She was not a bit flustered, and never lapsed into calling things "whatsaname". Faiga and Deborah were wearing yellow batiste frocks trimmed with innumerable frills and ribbons. They also had white bows in their hair.

Upon a white cushion on an upholstered arm-chair the bride was seated, all clad in white, her feet resting on a little stool. The guests were beginning to arrive. First the village maidens, their faces reddened by hard washing, bodies tightly laced up, stiff and starchy, in the company of their mothers—pious old women dressed up to the nines.

The musicians held their instruments in readiness:

"Silly" Gimpel (the village tailor) with his fiddle, Hersh Laib with his violoncello, little David with his flute.

The bridegroom was due to arrive any moment now. He would be accompanied by the most notable young men of the village and by fellow-students from the distant *yeshiva,* Simcha in their midst, lor he was over thirteen and considered a man now.

Yudel was unable to keep still, so full of happiness was he. He paced about the as yet empty room reserved for the menfolk, stopping now at the spread tables, now at the paraffin lamps, whose light he turned full on, then down again, to satisfy himself that the wicks were not smoking. He took out his red-spotted handkerchief to dust the place of honour where the bridegroom would soon be seated, then he stole into the women's room, to have another look at the bride.

But here was an unexpected sight. The bride was squirming unnaturally on her seat, and was groaning softly into her white veil. If there was anything amiss, none of the womenfolk had noticed it. For they showered profuse kisses upon her, embraced her and blessed her, drowning her piteous, muffled moans. Unmarried girls, especially the more elderly ones, were examining with much inquisitiveness her white frock, the veil over her head, the white shoes on her feet, and were blind to the agony distorting the bride's face, which changed from a white pallor to a livid green. And now the orchestra had started up, to the accompaniment of shouts :

" *Mazal tov !* Here comes the bridegroom! Now play us a merry tune. Here comes the bridegroom!"

Women clapped their hands to time :

"He comes, he comes, to fetch his bride,
The angel of joy shall be their guide."

Yudel left Rosa writhing on her arm-chair, and hastened forward to meet the bridegroom, who had only just crossed the threshold. A pale, thin, dainty young man, not much taller than his small brother Simcha, and with the same sort of pinched longish nose, he stood hesitating in the corridor, surrounded by a cluster of young men, all wearing silk gaberdines like himself.

The music played merrily.

Rosa was bent double. Nevertheless, she glimpsed her husband-to-be as he was conducted down the corridor, past the open door, towards the men's quarters—so miniature, a mere doll dressed up in silk.

She was seized all at once by a sense of pity for that slip of a boy, pity that mingled strangely with a towering rage. But a pain in the very pit of her stomach overwhelmed all other sensations, and she howled out aloud.

The womenfolk instantly surrounded her. A great uproar and tumult arose. The bride kicked out in agony. She wept like a small child. Hannah the shrew, pushing her way to the front, broke down completely and cried piteously. Rachel kept shouting "Call the whatsaname!" indicating the doctor, although she knew quite well that there was none to be found in the village.

The bridegroom, scared to death, was hustled into a back room. Someone ordered the musicians to join him there and to play up for all they were worth.

His mother was so distraught, that suddenly, while pulling at her hair, she tugged her wig off and stood

baldheaded amid a crowd of bewildered, jabbering, helpless guests.

The only person who did not lose his head was Yudel. As he watched his daughter, a terrible suspicion entered his mind, so terrible that he would have been glad to see the whole nightmare cottage collapse there and then, crushing to death his own flesh and blood and all the loathsome assembled guests.

The Rabbi advised him to have the bride put to bed, to give her a hot compress and to go on with the ceremony at the bedside, for by putting his trust in the Lord, he would assuredly be the witness of a miracle and a speedy recovery. Reb Isaac, the Talmud master, chose this particular moment for losing his notorious temper.

But Yudel paid no heed. Instead, still wearing his silken gaberdine, he ran off to the stable, brought out two black, sleek, rested horses, hitched them up, wrapped the bride in an eiderdown, carried her out in his arms and placed her in the cart. Before even Rachel could grasp the situation and join them, he had climbed up on to the seat, cracked his whip and was off in the direction of the forest.

An eerie silence fell on the cottage. All eyes were turned on the cart with its strange load, with Yudel, the back of his silken gaberdine glistening in the evening sun, whipping the eager horses like a man possessed.

A cloud of dust hid the cart, then that vanished too, leaving nothing behind. The forest in the distance stood motionless and unconcerned as before.

. . . . .

The forest was haunted. No one in Bojonitz doubted

that. Demons dwelt in it. In summer they revealed themselves in the form of witches floating over the tree-tops on broomsticks. In winter they disguised themselves as hungry wolves. Strange tidings were for ever coming out of the forest. But nothing was stranger than the tidings Yudel brought back with him after only half an hour's absence.

The tumult in the cottage was hushed, malevolent tongues struck dumb, when his cart reappeared, enveloped in the same cloud of dust as that in which it had disappeared.

Rosa was sitting beside him on the seat. The colour had returned to her face. She climbed down unaided.

"The wedding is off," said Yudel to Reb Isaac, quite simply and without any explanations.

The tumult which followed these words was such, that no one afterwards clearly remembered quite what happened. The demons, which the villagers all agreed had swayed Yudel to take this unprecedented decision, seemed to take possession of everybody.

But Yudel was not to be moved.

No one could make it out. Yudel kept his secret even from his wife, of what had passed in the forest. He alone knew of the thoughts that had tormented him as he had driven furiously away from his cottage. He alone knew how near to death his terrible suspicion had brought him. He alone had a vision of that bough upon which he had meant to hang himself. He laughed and wept at his own folly when he found that the suspicion had been unfounded.

That same night, when he had finally succeeded in driving the last of the guests off his premises, when he had said no to the Rabbi himself, he barred the door of

his cottage. He flung down his silken gaberdine and donned the woollen one again. The family ate their supper out of a common bowl as they had done in the days when Yudel had considered himself nothing better than a simple, happy peasant.

And to this day his silken gaberdine lies neglected in a heap up in the loft of his cottage. At sunset it catches the scarlet afterglow with the same sheen that tinged it scarlet on that memorable evening when he had driven Rosa off in the cart towards the forest. But it lies there in the loft motionless, forgotten, like the ghost of a folly that had once enveloped Yudel and that Yudel has discarded for ever. . . .

by

MARTIN LEA

*

WINTER DEATH

Mr . Hirsh was an old man when he died.

He died in the middle of winter, when the grave seems colder than ever. Each winter he was expected to die ; but he lived on. He survived the frosts, the fog and the damp, which were coldest and darkest in the large kitchen where he sat all through the day and slept at night. He dozed through the dark winter days, his head nodding or shivering with cold, hands deep in his torn pockets, his body shrunken into itself. With eyes narrowing, he would sit listening to the faint noises and clicks of life without, and slowly the day would pass, until when night had long fallen, it seemed almost that another day must be at hand, his daughter would come in from the shop and make supper. Often a leg of his would fall asleep, a hand, or sometimes both legs and a hand, and then he would sit attentively listening to the rusty motion of the blood wheezing through limbs that did not feel his own, humming through his aged flesh with the drone of a bluebottle on a hot summer's afternoon. But it was winter, and the world was blue and shivering with cold.

Every winter he was expected to die, but when spring and summer came he was still in the world, still there for the sun to shine upon him and warm his aged limbs,

and for the scents of a new world to force their way up his old, clogged nostrils, although the sun hardly had time to warm the large bare room after the long, long winter, and the stale smell of dirt, old age and mice became even staler. Still, in summer it really was good to be alive! Sometimes, towards evening, when the sun was low on the grey roofs of the houses it would send a shaft of light into the dark kitchen, spread on the wet table or dusty floor, and in it the old man would doze—but not like in winter. In summer he would doze peacefully, a sweet tiredness would ooze from his body. Sometimes, towards evening, he would stop dozing and watch the shaft of gold dust pouring in through the cracked window of the door leading into the tiny back-yard, and listen to the loud humming in the stillness of a large fly trying to fly through the winter-bespattered glass. With only one half-closed eye he would watch it bump continually against the pane, and sometimes the life of long ago would awaken in him: he would slowly shuffle up from his chair to the window, craftily watch the fly and shoot out an arm. Or he would get hold of the black cat that always dozed together with him and narrowed its eyes in the same manner as he, and he would pull its tail. In summer there was more life everywhere. More people would walk through the passage which started in the square and passed the back-yards of the dozen houses to which it afforded the entrance. A hoarse old cock in a neighbouring yard would crow oftener, there would be a flapping of wings, sometimes the croon-croon of a hen would drift in through the window.

But Mr. Hirsh did not spend his last years in dozing only. Twice a week at four o'clock in the morning,

summer and winter, he would rise and go to market for his daughter. He had a man to push the barrow for him, a tall, thin, cross-eyed fellow, with torn big boots, a dirty wet brow, a jerky cough and—up in some attic or down in some cellar—a wife and a horde of children. Twice a week through the empty morning streets they would go, the barrow rattling and scraping over the stones, to Spitalfields Market, where at that time of the morning life is thronging, dim yellow lights are burning, as if night was about to fall, and all is in full swing, the coffee-houses and stalls besieged. Two years ago the man fell ill, died, and since then his job had changed hands several times.

Everybody in the neighbourhood agreed that it was an outrage on the part of his daughter, Mrs. Gold, to allow such a very old man to rise so early and go to market in all weathers. They said it would kill him, and wondered it had not done so many years ago now. Not that anybody was going to grieve if he did die. The neighbours had as much love for the old man as they had for his sinister-looking cat—not the black one, which they never saw, but the grey one, the Tom that had had an ear bitten off in one of its numerous savage fights, the one that scared the life out of their own pets, killed their chickens, kept them awake at night with its awful howls and had no respect for stones, old shoes or slops; that ugly, impudent, surly creature that seemed to hate the world and slunk about with the furtiveness of its master, as though imbued with his evil spirit and fighting his battles for him. Everybody in the neighbourhood knew that Mr. Hirsh had money, that he was an old miser, and that even his daughter, although she guessed, did not know how much he was worth, and

that in order to keep the secret from her the old man went to market and lived such a wretched life. They knew that his daughter wanted him to die. Even the old pensioners sitting in the square, with knobby sticks and watery eyes and polished old boots, knew it, and would give Mr. Hirsh significant, glum looks on those rare occasions when his daughter persuaded him to go out and sit on one of the benches for a little fresh air. No one would say a word to him. People sighed at the wickedness of this world, and sighing, told each other what they would do if they had the old man's money, to how much better purpose they would put it. They often speculated how he had made his money—not in an honourable way, they knew. That could be seen by his face, in his silence! Others indeed knew how, but would not tell. Russia. Illicit traffic in spirits. Revolutionaries. Agent provocateur. ...

It was on a Thursday that he last went to market. What the neighbourhood had known for over twenty years would happen, happened.

. . . . .

Sunday evening Mr. Hirsh first felt a pain in his stomach.

The tops of the trees in the square had long become a dark mass when Mrs. Gold, his daughter, lit the lamp. The night had long been gripping small pale blots of light here and there, when a blot, paler than all, sickly green, suddenly fell over the dirty, marble-topped counter in the middle of Mrs. Gold's shop, on to small heaps of rotting fruit and vegetables. Having lit up, Mrs. Gold reseated herself on her high perch in the **open** shop-window and stared out at the darkness

of the square tinged yellow, at the torn shadows draping the pavement and falling over the kerb into the gutter.

The square was empty. Only the dull heavy head of a lamp-post opposite stared back at her. And above, high above by the tree-tops, a few tiny cold stars blinked feebly and miserably. Very few people had passed by that day. When one appeared, however, a few more would arrive from the other direction, the echo of their mingling footsteps would die away, and then quiet again. One or two people stopped to look at the small display in front of the shop, on a board, but as soon as she said, "Yes, please? What would you like?" they started back, as if in fright, and walked away.

"Here, Mister! Some nice apples, oranges? . . . Damn them!"

A shabby dog came trotting by, sniffed at one of the orange boxes on which the display board stood.

"Go away, you! Go away!"

The dog blinked with an air of great melancholy, turned round and cocked up his hind leg.

"Shoo!" Too late. "What a filthy swine! What a dirty dog!. .. Damn them!"

It was cold. The wind was cold. It blew toothlessly through the leafless branches of the planes, hardly lifted the dust in the road, caressed, but with a touch of death. And it forced its way through the purple knitted jumper smeared with potato dust that Mrs. Gold was wearing, through the green one and the red one underneath, hovered on the skin and pierced the huge layer of flesh round her bust, to the very bone. Booh, it was cold! And the wind tapped at the broken mantle of the gas lamp, tapped, tapped. The shadows in the corners

trembled with cold, the shadowy scales swept up and down the back wall.

When a church clock rang out seven, Mrs. Gold, after a very poor day, decided to close the shop, descended and called out :

"Father! Father!"

A passing couple, walking with hands tightly clasped like a two-headed and three-legged creature, stopped and asked for a penny bag of peanuts. Mrs. Gold handed them one from which most of the nuts had trickled out. She looked at the smooth coin, which was warm, and rubbed the blue, lifeless skin of her hands. Her father did not appear yet.

"Father!"

She stepped back to the kerb and surveyed her shop. Except for the fried-fish shop in the far corner, it was the only one in the square to be open. She glanced up at the upper part of the house. All was dark. The newly-weds living on the second floor had, of course, gone away on their motor-cycle to spend the week-end with the old folks in the country. There might have been a light in the attic, but she could not see. Several houses away, on the first floor, the windows were full of light, and through them the sound of a piano, a shrill voice and laughter reached the street.

The wind lisped in the trees. Booh, it was cold! Her father had not come yet. She looked up again at the dark row of tall narrow old houses, at the round-topped doorway of the passage, cutting a black, mysterious, cloister-like hole in the brickwork to the left of her shop. Just then a stranger walked out of this creepy hole and, putting up his collar, hurried away. One of Mary's visitors, may be.

She had no potatoes. Her father would have to go to market to-morrow.

"Ah, Solomons, may the cholera lay you low, a sudden death seize you!" cursed Mrs. Gold aloud in Yiddish, and peered into the dark shop-window which was divided from hers by the round-topped passage doorway.

Yes, she was a widow. She folded her hands on her huge bosom, bit her lip.

"Some nice apples, lady, sixpence a pound? A banana?.. ."

She stepped back into the shop.

"Father!" She listened. "Father! Father! Come on!"

She peered into the glass covering the green wall. It distorted her purple, fleshy cheeks; her thin lips, paler than her cheeks, withered away at one end. She moved about until she faced a spot in which the reflection was truer. But it was so weak, that the tiny slits of eyes, Chinese fashion, behind the dirty spectacles were hardly visible; the colour of her face and jumper was a faded mauve, and her massive bosom fell flatter. She blinked at herself, patted her thin black hair. The face staring back at her did not have a friendly look, yet it afforded her a little warmth and companionship on this cold and lonely night. Turning away she shouted "Father!"

Just then the handle at the back of the shop turned, and Mr. Hirsh, a small blot in the shadowiness, appeared, slowly descended the two steps, and with a short feeble gait walked up to his daughter.

"Ha?" he asked irritably.

"Been sleeping?"

He blinked and his tiny eyes disappeared into two wrinkles.

"Ye, ye!"

He scratched his thin beard and grunted.

They began closing the shop. As the old man helped his daughter to carry the board laden with small baskets of fruit and vegetables into the shop, a solitary tomato fell off and rolled, unnoticed, into the gutter. Mrs. Gold fitted the shutters. A policeman went by, then turned back and put his helmet in through the doorway.

"Good evening, Sophie!"

"Hallo, sir, cold this evening!"

"Good evening, Mister, how are you this weather, all right?" the constable asked Mr. Hirsh.

Mrs. Gold looked over her spectacles at her father and smiled to the policeman as if to say, "Yes, the old man's all right."

"Closing?"

"Yes." She laughed.

" Going to sit by the fire?"

"Yes." She laughed.

"Well, we'll take a walk for a change. Good night, Sophie, good night, sir!"

"Ha?"

" He said good night."

The old man shook his head, and wiped his nose on his sleeve.

Mrs. Gold fitted the door, the light became stronger, steadier a moment, then she turned the gas out. The darkness and stillness made the atmosphere suddenly feel rotten and stuffy, although cold.

"Where are you, Father? Got the jug?"

"Ha?"

"The jug!"

She slowly swept her hand across the counter. The

damp dirt and potato dust stuck to her fingers. A passing vehicle made the shutters shudder. One hand stretched outwards, Mr. Hirsh felt his way to the door at the back, and with the other hand sought his nose in the darkness.

On the other side a draught was rushing up the stairs, seemingly in a great hurry to get to the top. Whilst Mrs. Gold was clanking about with the shop door lock, Mr. Hirsh unlocked the kitchen door opposite. She stopped to listen whether there was any sound of life in the house. Muffled but angry voices were coming down from the attic. Husband and wife were at it again, always bickering. The cries became louder, as if a fight was imminent. But then they stopped suddenly, and all she could hear was the plaintive breath of the wind from the cellar, like a mewing kitten. She scratched her thin hair, again tried the padlock and entered the kitchen.

Here, in the big bleak room, the bent dozing shadows shivered as the door opened, but soon composed themselves, lay sleeping on the long streaked walls, hiding under the table, under the chairs and in the empty black grate facing towards the window. Mrs. Gold rubbed her frozen hands. This was home ! She fancied it was warmer in here. The air was still, heavy laden and stale, like something solid into which the biting cold could not penetrate. She rubbed her hands again, looked under the table, found no one there, and carried the meekly flickering candle from the high mantelpiece to the table. The shadows awoke as though from a nightmare, rushed away from her in fear, widened and narrowed, as if they had all gone mad, then, when the lamp lighted up with a pop, fled like so many ghosts,

leaving only behind them a mere shadow of their former selves. . . .

Mr. Hirsh pushed aside a heap of blankets and old coats on the sofa and sat down with relief. "Aah!" How his old bones were weary and needed repose, as if they had not rested since they had come into the world, or as if they were still blue from a severe beating. It was with a great sense of comfort that he thrust his hands into his torn trouser pockets, but as he shrank up into himself for warmth, he felt suddenly for the first time a pain in his stomach—nothing violent, just a twitch, but a twitch that was unearthly, a twitch that made him hold his breath, afraid even to groan. And as the familiar outlines of the kettle on the stove, of the backs of the chairs, of his daughter moving about preparing supper, crept dimly into his misty, half-closed eyes, he was afraid even to stir, just as if he were dreaming a pleasant dream, and on making the least movement he might wake up never to see it again.

Mrs. Gold rummaged in a cupboard, emerging with a big onion in one hand, a Dutch herring wrapped in newspaper in the other. Pieces of bread were on the table, and a knife lay under an unwashed plate. That was good enough for herself and her father. She felt tired and disheartened after the long day in the shop. And now there was a long evening ahead of her, with nothing in particular to do, and she would tidy up sooner or later. When she unwrapped the herring, she saw that the paper was not only stained green, but badly nibbled.

The mice, they had been at it again! What did they care if she kept two cats? Damn them!

If the fool up in the attic would not pay his rent

to-morrow, she'd throw him out into the gutter along with his red-nosed wife and his short-legged shrimp and his snivelling little cry-baby—why, she'd throw them all out! They thought she was a defenceless widow—so! —a widow! Ah, as for Solomons, God would punish him! God was just!

"Father! I say, Father, the mice have been eating the herring!"

"Mice? Eating? Nu, wash it!"

She cut the brown entrails out of the herring, skinned it, carried it to the sink and held it by its tail under the tap. The water splashed noisily, as if glad to escape, swivelled down the sink, and when she turned it off, it continued dripping with clock-like regularity, sadly, as if it were telling a tale of days past. Mr. Hirsh poked a finger into his fluffy earhole, and was about to return his hand to its customary resting-place in his pocket, when the pain came back again, very faintly this time, but as he held his finger in his ear, he could plainly hear the tweak within his bowels, as though a gentle finger had touched the string of a fiddle. Or perhaps it was only a memory of the first twinge. He shivered.

"Have something to eat, Father?"

"Ye!"

He rose, took a chair on which his old companion, the black cat, was curled up. By force of habit, he felt for its whiskers to pull them. After the cat had hastily sprung down, Mr. Hirsh seated himself, and the warmth left behind on the seat oozed through his threadbare grey trousers. It was good—so good that a trace of a smile appeared on his aged face. Life was pleasant. There in front of him were two rough, bluish but feminine hands nimbly peeling an onion. Now they were cutting up the

herring. But then, as he saw the gloomy head of the herring severed and pushed away to the end of the plate, all the pleasantness was gone in an instant and he groaned in pain :

"Oy ! Oy !"

"Wha's matter?" asked Mrs. Gold, looking up at him, but having at that moment stuffed a huge lump of bread into her mouth, her cheeks bulged out with a shine, and she could not say another word.

The old man replied by another groan. His tiny eyes like two deep wrinkles became curiously fixed, as if watching some insect visible only to himself hovering over mid-table. He also seemed to be listening intently to something. He did not groan again, yet Mrs. Gold felt that the mouthful of bread was beginning to choke her. A sickening irritation turning into anger mounted up within her, making the back of her short neck feel stiff and tense. She tried to catch his eye, but he was still watching that invisible hovering fly. It was the old man's helplessness that irritated her, so that she could have screamed. Suddenly the old man opened his mouth as if about to speak. His yellow tongue lolled against his gum : he seemed to be trying to shout at the top of his voice, but no sound came. When at last his mouth relaxed and he looked about him questioningly, she finished her mouthful and moved again. The old man's lolling tongue and three short brown stumps of teeth in his otherwise toothless lower gum had held her spellbound.

She ate no more and watched him closely. How pale his thin beard had grown and it looked less curly somehow. She was about to call for help, when he slowly brought a shaky hand out of his pocket, and picking a

few crumbs with his wrinkled fingers, actually began chewing them hungrily with his toothless gums.

"Are you feeling better, Father?"

The old man did not reply. He was busy putting more and more crumbs into his mouth with tremulous haste. She too went on with her supper, taking plenty of onion, till the tears came coursing down her face. At last she had had her fill. Meantime the old man had even placed a small lump of bread into his mouth, but he made no attempt to swallow it. He let it lie there on his tongue, and after a while it dropped out and the cat got up to sniff at it on the floor.

Mrs. Gold could not bear it any longer to see him sit so still, without even blinking, without a single hair of his terribly pallid beard stirring. She went round the table and shook him.

"Ha?" he asked in surprise, and he continued pinching, through his trouser pocket, a meagre piece of flesh on his thigh that felt quite lifeless.

She half dragged him off his chair—he was heavier than she had thought possible—and laid him on the sofa, covering him with the old clothes and blankets that had for the last twenty years been his bedding. She was just going to put the kettle on, to make him a hot drink, when there was a loud scratching sound at the door leading into the back-yard. She turned her head that way, and there was silence, as if the creature on the other side had seen her. But the moment she looked away again, there was a loud meow. So she unbolted the door and admitted first a draught, then another meow, and last of all a long grey Tom cat with ruffled fur and an ear missing, who strolled in with an impudent air as if angry at having been kept waiting.

The animal went straight up to a bowl standing in the shadow under the sink, but finding this empty, he tipped it up in disgust. Then he came up to his mistress and scratched viciously at her skirt, with a loud tearing sound. She gave him a clout, but as he was so insistent, she yielded and set his supper down at her feet, so that she could watch him eat. The smacking noise as he lapped up his bread and water was somewhat reassuring.

She covered her father up with another blanket, folded her arms on her bosom and she waited.

She waited, peering intently at the smeary window, on the other side of which hung a dim reflection of her kitchen, hanging quiet as a phantom there where the yard packed high with orange boxes ought to have been. ...

She forgot about her father, who lay dozing peacefully, forgot about the kettle, and still she waited for something—she knew not what—to happen. Every time that footsteps sounded in the passage leading in from the square, she shivered a little, as if the thing that she was dreading had come at last. Yet the sound was so familiar. First the heavy thump-thump on the wooden planks paving part of the way, then the sudden transformation into a shrill tap-tap on the concrete, as though the person passing through had, without stopping, changed shoes or had changed perhaps from one sort of being into another.

Strangely enough, when she had sat out in the shop all day, the square, with the houses and streets stretching away grey and unreal as smoke beyond the lofty planes, had seemed quite dead. Hardly a soul passed ; hardly a sound ; and even when the muffin man's bell had tinkled and the church bells afterwards had clanged, even

these sounds had floated dully through the air like so many dead leaves. Now that she was away from it all, penned up in her bare kitchen, the world without seemed astir, full of life, of mystery. There was a far-away chorus of drunken singing. Trams wailed importantly as they rounded the bend in the high street some distance away. A ship's siren moaned aloud. Something was going on. . . . And now a little dog barked and whelped in the passage. That, of course, was Mary the prostitute going out with her dog, both of them in search of love. But the dog would only be able to sniff at love from the end of a strap, while his big fleshy mistress would sooner or later be coming back with some drunken old lout. Always old, very old men, would she pick up—and only once in a while a youngster, very young, one who had never known love before.

Mrs. Gold fell a-thinking, with a wry smile playing on her lips, and still she stood waiting, listening very intently, although there was hardly a footstep she could not recognize with ease. Ah, there was Mrs. Johnson, coming back with her pint of beer and walking ever so slowly, because she was in the family way again, walking slowly because most of her eleven children would be at home, probably having a party, and they liked to see their mother out of the way—gossiping, boozing at the "Duke's Head", anything in fact except burdening them with her company.

Footsteps, footsteps, but none of them ever stopped outside her front door. Mrs. Gold rarely had visitors. And even the grey Tom, having licked his bowl clean, was wanting to leave her. With a great sense of loneliness she unbolted the door to let him out. She caught a glimpse of the sky, all black and marked by a few tiny

stars, like pinpricks of light in a vast umbrella that covered the world. The Tom strolled out with such a leisurely nonchalant air, it angered her. And she helped him out with a kick.

At last there was a sound in the house itself. Someone was coming down the stairs, but with so light a tread, that the rickety old staircase barely creaked.

That would be the little girl from the attic. She had stopped outside the door, but for a long while there was no knock and not the slightest movement. Losing patience, Mrs. Gold called out in a drawling sing-song, "Come in!" There was a hesitant fumbling, and a drowsy-looking little girl of about thirteen pushed the door ajar and then stood behind it, as though afraid to enter.

"Well, come in and shut the door!"

"Please, Mrs. Gold. . . ."

"Well, Sarah?"

"Please, Mrs. Gold____"

The little girl squeezed her way in and came forward, tugging nervously at her black stocking where it met the blue little knickers under the short upraised skirt. As she spoke, she never let go of that stocking, and Mrs. Gold peered at the strip of pale, almost bluish flesh visible at the top of the thigh. What thin little legs. What tiny knickers. What a slight little body—so slight, it was hardly human. Mrs. Gold suddenly grew aware of her own massive bulk, of the fat on her own thighs that made her walk with her legs somewhat apart. She had no love for thin creatures like that—they seemed to belong to an altogether different world. . . .

So engrossed was she, that she did not take in the meaning of the little girl's timid, faltering words, while

the tiny visitor from the attic stood waiting, relieved at having got it over and hoping against hope that the impossible would happen. Then she grew nervous again, began scratching a little at that pale strip of flesh till it flushed. Only then did Mrs. Gold remember Sarah's words.

"You want to borrow a few potatoes, Sarah?"

"Yes, please, Mrs. Gold, just two or three, please. Mum'll let you have them back to-morrow. . . ."

"Why didn't your mother come down herself? Speak up! Don't you know what to say?"

"She's gone to bed," whispered the little girl, edging back to the door and taking hold of the handle, as though she had had her answer and knew she must go back empty-handed.

"You needn't run away, Sarah. Will it be all right if I give them to you in the morning? You see, all my potatoes are in the shop."

"Well, we wanted them for supper," said the little girl, opening the door. She was more bold now, and even a little pleased—now that she knew for certain there would be no potatoes.

"Shut the door, Sarah. Don't run away. I'll have a look in the cupboard. If I've got any there, I'll give them to you. Let's see if you're going to be lucky. That's it, come right in. Don't be afraid. I won't eat you."

The little girl giggled. But still Mrs. Gold stood peering, without making a move for the cupboard.

"Why didn't your mother come down herself?" she asked again.

"She's gone to bed...."

"And your father?"

"He's in bed too. There's no fire, you see, so it's too

cold to be up," Sarah began to blurt out. "And we haven't got a penny for the gas either. So we're in the dark. And you can't sit about in the dark."

"Well what are you going to do with the potatoes, if you haven't got any gas?"

The little girl did not answer. A frightened look came into her pinched features. Her lips moved silently under her longish little nose. One lustrous dark eye began to grow big and bright; the other was hidden under her tangled black hair. She was going to cry.

"I tell you what," said Mrs. Gold, her compressed thin lips spreading into a slow smile. "I'll bake some potatoes for you to take up, and you stay here with me.

Now the little girl did begin to cry. Her square little shoulders curved inwards towards each other, heaving, and she began to blubber; then, as though ashamed of herself, she lifted her tiny hands up, but instead of hiding her face with them, she used the reddish fleshless knuckles to wipe two large tears away, and when she showed her face again, she was smiling brightly.

Mrs. Gold began to bustle about. She picked up some pieces of wood from a big heap lying in a corner by the grate, broke them noisily over her knee and lit a fire. Then she bent her head into the cupboard and picked out several huge potatoes, mostly misshapen, with knobs like unnatural swellings. There was one having exactly the same shape as her own face. It was broad and smooth, with just one very tiny knob like her chin and with two dark slanting slits filled with earth, which looked exactly like her eyes. So Sarah imagined at least, although she saw this resemblance for only a fleeting moment and forgot about it at once. Mrs. Gold herself

took a liking to that particular potato, and decided to eat it herself when it was done.

The fire in the grate crackled merrily, like hungry teeth gnashing and sharpening themselves in readiness for a meal. The scarlet, blue-tipped flames leapt about in a wild playful scramble, which sometimes turned from play to earnest struggle. . . . The glow illuminated the under-side of the mantelpiece, flickered upon the dark green walls, and even reached the other end of the sofa, where Mr. Hirsh's face showed from the blankets, and the aged yellow bearded features now became tinged with the healthy flush of a baby asleep.

Mrs. Gold sat down in front of the fire, her smeary spectacles gleaming with the reflected blaze, her little finger plunged reflectively into her thin black hair, and she made the little girl sit down opposite her. Sarah had at last let go of her stocking, and she now held her little hands clasped together and kept pushing them up and down between her skinny legs.

" Can you smell it ? " asked Mrs. Gold, her red button-like nose twitching at the as yet faint aroma of the potatoes in the oven.

Sarah shook her head. And her lustrous eyes gazed out of her pinched little features with the utmost gravity and solemnity, as though she could smell the odour with her eyes.

Mrs. Gold poked the fire and watched the sparks fly up into the chimney. She smiled her thin smile.

"Show me how Solomons next door goes down the street of a morning and smiles at everybody he sees, the lame stinking hypocrite," said Mrs. Gold to Sarah, resting her hands on her thighs in readiness.

The little girl got up, brushed the hair away from her

eyes; then, twisting one foot, hunching up her little shoulders, dropping her head and turning it a little to one side, she let a senile leer creep over her face, let her tongue loll inside the half-open mouth, and hobbled away, soaping her hands, to Mr. Hirsh on the sofa and back again, with a nod and a "Good morning!" to the blankets, another to the gloomy head of the herring that was still left on the table, and yet another nod to the black cat as it sat gazing into the fire.

"Good morning, my dear, good morning! God bless you, and how's the child? Ha, guess what Mr. Phillips said to me about you the other day . . . pip-pip-pip-pip-pip-pip. ... He! He!"

Mrs. Gold could see Solomons's figure so well and that cunning grin of his as he limped past her shop of a morning, that her mouth strained upwards to either ear for glee, and her tiny eyes disappeared altogether. But when she heard that cracked laugh, "He! He!" she almost thought for the moment that it was Solomons himself, and she began to curse aloud in Yiddish.

"A fire on you, Solomons! May you go to bed to-night and never rise from it again!"

"And now I'm going to do Mary going down the street with her dog," said Sarah, flushed from her exertions. "I'm going to be an actress when I grow up, a real one."

The child now pushed her shoulders well back, pulled her knitted little jumper out at the bosom, filling it with air as a substitute for flesh, then throwing her head back a little with a disdainful and swaggering look, and coquettishly tucking a lock of hair behind her ear, she strutted up and down the room, waggling her little hips ever so gently and calling to the dog—supposedly

under the table—in a mincing, lady-like, yet hoarse voice:

"Come here, Peter! Come here! Oh, that sodding dog, he will run after all the bitches!"

This time Mrs. Gold looked a little surprised and did not smile at first. But then, suddenly, she began to laugh so convulsively, that soon the tears were running down her fat purple cheeks. Her whole frame shook, and every time she tried to stop she gave an involuntary little gasp, like a sob, which sent her off again, till she was quite helpless. Sarah's pleasure at this success soon turned to fright. There was a touch of madness to this rollicking uncontrollable fit of laughter, as though this big woman had never laughed in her life before, did not know how to laugh, and her mighty bosom and short neck being unaccustomed to it, she would end up by choking. And indeed Mrs. Gold had only laughed once or twice in the last twenty years, and each time it had seized her like hysterics. . . . At last she came to and wiped the plentiful tears from her face.

"Oh dear," she gasped. "It's given me the belly-ache. You *are* a scream, Sarah! You'd be a very nice little girl, if you weren't always running about with the boys. And at your age too!"

"I like them!" said Sarah simply, hanging her head.

"She likes them!" Mrs. Gold laughed again; but this was only an echo of her previous outburst. "Oh dear! Oh dear! The potatoes must be nearly done by now. You'll eat yours here, and take the others up. I wonder why you make friends with all the naughtiest boys, Sarah? You know, that boy Jerry, he's always trying to steal apples from the shop. And that dirty little ruffian,

Harold, he never walks past once without forgetting to put his tongue out. May his tongue drop out!"

"Harold's sweet!" said Sarah.

"Harold's sweet!" Mrs. Gold said after her, and this time her laughter was even a fainter echo.

"Didn't you like the boys when you were a little girl, Mrs. Gold?" Sarah's voice was suddenly confidential and childish, and she even lisped a little. As there was no answer, she went on: "I can't fancy you as a little girl!"

Mrs. Gold bit her lip, and after a pause, answered back with her usual iciness :

" Of course I was a little girl. And very handsome too. Ever so big and plump and rosy. Why, you're no bigger than what my little finger was," said Mrs. Gold, holding up this finger, which was very little indeed.

"And was your father ever a little boy?"

"Don't be silly, Sarah. D'you think he was born at seventy? Everybody gets old. Even your little baby brother will get old and be an old man one day, please God! And my father, he was a big man in his time. Not like he is now. Tall and fat and strong. In Russia, where we lived, when a peasant got drunk—and they were always getting drunk—he'd start knocking the Jews about, but no matter how drunk he was, he'd know better than to start on my father. Well, the potatoes must be done. . . ." Mrs. Gold sighed.

"And why did you go away from Russia?"

"Everybody was hungry. All the wheat went rotten. Everybody was starving. My husband, of blessed memory, died. Father lost all his customers. And so we left everything behind and came here. He used to serve in the shop, you know. I was a very good daughter and

he was a very good father. When I was small, he never used to leave me without any supper like your father does. You know, I'm surprised at your father. A Jewish man and he doesn't seem to try. If I had a child. . . . My father____"

Just then Mr. Hirsh began to mumble as though in recognition. Then the mumble changed to an oft-repeated, monotonous, heart-rending moan.

"Oh!" cried Sarah, her eyes big with fright, and pushing her little fist into her mouth.

Mrs. Gold jumped up.

"Quick, Sarah, run for the doctor. Dr. Williams at the corner!"

The little girl ran out, but when she got to the landing she could hear her mother calling in a high-pitched, frail voice from the top of the dark stairs :

"Sarah! Sarah! Where have you got to? What's the matter with you, stopping down there such a long time? Gome on up!"

"Don't you! Run for the doctor!" whispered Mrs. Gold, and she put her head out of the doorway for a moment to watch the child go. She could not see the child's figure in that dark passage, but heard her scampering down the wooden boards as though a heap of small new potatoes were being dropped out of a sack. For a fleeting instant she had a vision of the square framed in the tombstone-shaped doorway. There was a swishing sound coming from the square like rain. Out of habit and in spite of herself, as she rushed back to her father, she reflected that the sound was not due to rain, but the wind rustling in the trees.

She found the old man wide awake, but now the scarlet flickerings of the fire, instead of playing on his

face with a ruddy flush, were themselves tinged a strange hue—were touched with a deathly green by the immobile features. The old man had his eyes wide open—wider than she had ever seen them before. And there was a humorous twinkle in them, such as had been there only in his young days. The eyes seemed to be struggling to convey something to her, but could not, and becoming desperate, started to bulge like two black beetles trying to force their way out of a narrow hole each. Then, without warning, as though giving up the attempt, they turned inwards and were lost somewhere inside the motionless head. Their place was taken by two unseeing films.

"Father!" she cried out, although she no longer recognized these strange mask-like features. "Father!"

She stretched her hand out towards him imploringly, as though to call him back to himself. She knew that his time had come. Let him die, but not as he was now, looking a perfect stranger to her. Let him die as her own father. But he died like a stranger and without uttering a single word.

His last moments had come and then it was that a strange thing happened. As she held her hand out over him, the old man, sightless as he was, brought his own hands out and gripped her by the wrist with a surprise movement. He raised himself to a half-sitting posture, and with those mask-like films now fixed upon the door, he clutched fiercely at her wrist, as though he meant to tear himself out of the room and would take her along with him wherever he was going.

She screamed.

The whole thing was over in a few minutes. When Sarah came scampering back from the doctor's house, she heard suddenly above the sound of her own running feet on the passage a hysterical cry. Stopping short, she recognized the cry. It was Mrs. Gold and it sounded as though the big hulking woman had been seized by another of her strange fits of laughter. It frightened the child, but though she would have gladly run away, in spite of herself she crept into the house and listened in behind the door. Overcome by her curiosity, she gently opened the door ever so little, and peeped in. But some stranger inside had seen her and whispered "Hush!" closing the door in her face.

From what she saw in that fleeting instant, the child began to weep softly, and then seized by dread she cried out "Mummy! Mummy!"

What she had seen in the kitchen was unreal somehow, like a nightmare. It did not seem the same room that she had left behind only a few minutes back, but an altogether different place, and all at once she felt as though she had not left it for such a short while, but long, long ago. There were a lot of strangers standing there, all very much at home, in shirt-sleeves and slippers, and every face was turned in one direction—to the old man on the sofa, who was lying on his side and seemed to be gazing back at them in surprise, quite astonished to see so many visitors in his home which they had all shunned before. The black cat too was astonished, but pleasantly so, and was rubbing its head against leg after leg. Never had the animal had so many legs to rub up against. And Mrs. Gold stood with tears running down her purple face, but now, instead of laughing, she was sobbing. And she nursed her wrist.

Her sobs sounded unnatural, and seemed as foreign to her as her laughter had been. A young woman stood with her arm placed sympathetically round Mrs. Gold's waist, but the arm did not reach round far enough. And Sarah's own parents were there too.

When they heard her calling, they came out to her. Her father was in his pants, barefooted, and his big ashen face with its tousled mop of black hair looked scared. But his sprawling toes looked even more scared. Her mother had a raincoat on over her underwear, and one of her high-heeled shoes was on, but the other foot, so small and gentle-looking, was naked. Sarah's parents, on hearing Mrs. Gold's screams, had rushed madly downstairs in a panic, fearing that something had happened to the child. Now they rejoiced to see her and were glad to escape from the crowded room with its dead body.

"Hush!" they said. "Come upstairs, Sarah! Where have you been all this time?"

Mr. Finkelstein put his daughter's head under his arm as they went up the dark rickety stairs, and the child was soothed by the warmth of his big breathing body.

She was herself again before they had quite reached the top.

"Did she give you the potatoes she had baked for us?" the child asked suddenly, with that innocent lisp which entered her speech at times.

"Hush!" said the mother, and they felt their way into the attic, where the only light was that reflected from the sloping ceiling illuminated so feebly by the lamp-post out in the square.

Down below the corpse had been laid out on the floor, with two candles burning at its head, and an old man from the burial society, looking rather like Mr. Hirsh, but with bigger eyes, a carefully trimmed beard and a skull-cap on his head, was chanting psalms, to keep the evil spirits away from the departed soul.

All night long this chanting went on. And when the first factory sirens moaned in the air; when footsteps rang out on the passage again; when the oncoming day mingled with the passing night even on the dark staircase—then the last psalms floating up to the top of the house were met by the cries of a newly awakened child wailing for food. The atmosphere of death hovering on the staircase grew stronger. And the baby would not be comforted. And in the twilight of morning there was a uneless mingling of hungry life and winter death. . . .

by

ANDRE MAUROIS

★

A MISUNDERSTANDING*

When I was just out of my teens I used often to visit an old friend of my grandfather, M. Neuville by name. It is uncommon for a youth to find whole-hearted and enduring pleasure in the society of an octogenarian, but it was neither pity nor selfish interest which made me seek the company of M. Neuville. It was the intelligence of his conversation and the authenticity of his anecdotes. As a diplomat, a favoured ambassador of the Duc de Broglie, he had known the figures of the Second Empire and served the founder of the Third Republic. Along with Galliffet and the Marquis de Lau, he had been one of the early friends in France of the Prince of Wales, and, like them, by giving precedence to national feeling over party bitterness, he had, in his later years as a diplomat, helped to build the bridge between the English heir-apparent and the new Republican leaders. No one could talk better about M. Thiers, or Marshal MacMahon, or M. Jules Grévy. Furthermore, it was a pleasure to look at M. Neuville, for I really believe that I never set eyes on a more handsome and vigorous old man.

My grandfather had told me that Edmond Neuville was a famous Don Juan in his day. Every period has its

*** Translated from the French by Hamish Miles.**

collector of conquests of this kind; and his triumphs become more frequent and more easy, as his attentions become to women a kind of badge of charm and beauty. Women overlooked by him feel affronted, and before long are making it a point of honour to be his. Such a man, in the eighteenth century, was the Duc de Richelieu, or Byron in the England of 1812; and in the France of 1860 there was Edmond Neuville.

When I knew him he had long retired from diplomacy, and lived in Paris in a small house in the Rue d'Astorg, with a courtyard in front of it, and packed inside with objects brought back from his successive posts. The plump, yellow satin ottomans were draped with Cashmere shawls, Chinese embroideries, white bearskins. The dim light from the windows was further dulled by claret-coloured velvet hangings, heavy with trimmings and fringed hems. On a rosewood table stood a row of yellowing photographs, showing handsome women dressed in old-fashioned styles, in frames fancifully decorated with precious stones. I would often pick up one of these and ask M. Neuville to tell me the story of its subject. "Ah—Maria Pavlovna!" he would begin; "a most likeable creature. . . ." And he would sketch a picture of the Russian Court about 1869. Or, as I touched another frame: "Lady Barchester?" he would murmur. "Yes, those were the days when women played a great and hidden part in English politics. . . ." And he would tell me about Lord Salisbury, with whom he had negotiated.

Over the mantelpiece hung a picture by Alfred de Dreux, showing Neuville himself on horseback, at the age of thirty or thereabouts. In the strong-willed, sensual face, with its frame of black beard, one could easily

recognize the features of my aged friend, which still had the same frame, now turned white. Wearing a soft straw hat, a short black jacket, a gold-coloured waistcoat and close-fitting white trousers, strapped under the insteps, this horseman was cantering in an Italian park. Below him, on the marble mantelpiece, Chinese jade and blue china framed a basket of artificial fruits.

Until 1907 M. Neuville seemed to be in very good health. During the winter I called on him at Hyères, where he had a villa, and he walked me through his orange grove at such a speed that I could hardly keep pace with him. But on his return to Paris in the spring there was a sudden change ; he turned disturbingly thin and was visibly feebler. One day, with the utmost simplicity, he told me that on the previous morning he had asked his doctor for the truth about his state of health, and that he had at the most only three months to live. He begged me not to alter my demeanour towards him, and to come and see him daily. But I was not to mention his illness, which was of no interest, as nothing could be done for it.

During the next few weeks I could see his suffering and his weakness increasing. He devoted himself to some mysterious work, and before long I discovered that he was himself writing addresses for the formal letters which would announce his death. With his systematic punctilio, he was afraid of some mistake or oversight in this last ceremony of social usage. He painstakingly selected the music for the funeral service, the details of which he arranged. His constantly revised will speedily became a manuscript of a hundred pages, for he was determined to leave a memento to each one of his friends, and that each one should have some object that

would give pleasure. In the end it seemed as if the approach of death, instead of inspiring him with a natural indifference towards the living, was actually reviving a politeness which had once been professional and had become an instinct in him.

As I was a witness of these mournful tasks, he associated me in them, and on several occasions I wrote to his dictation fragments of the famous will, which he subsequently copied out again in quite a firm handwriting. So it happened that one evening, after working with him later than I expected, I suddenly looked at my watch and was surprised at having lost count of the hour.

"Heavens!" I exclaimed. "I have to dress and go to dine with the Clermont de Sazy's... ."

" Where did you say? " he asked, leaning towards me, for he was slightly deaf in one ear.

I repeated the name.

"Madame Henri Clermont?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "The Clermonts of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré."

"I don't know where she lives," he said. "Is she still as beautiful as ever?"

"Who?" I asked in surprise. "Madame Clermont de Sazy? You know that she must be over seventy, sir ; but certainly she obviously must have been beautiful . . . ."

"But is she not very like Madame de Thianges?" he said, with a fervour which momentarily brought the grace of youth into his aged face.

I could not help smiling.

"Perhaps," I said, after a moment. "Of course the difference of age is such that any comparison_"

"True," he murmured, "true.... It is so hard for me

to imagine her as an old woman. What is she like? Do tell me. . . ."

" What can I tell, sir? Her eyes are youthful, and she has that indefinable roguishness, which I always find affecting, of women who have been pretty, and so have been used to getting what they want without effort, just by their physical presence ; even in old age they retain a free and fascinating ease of manner.. . . But you have more knowledge than I of that type of feminine old age. I remember you spoke about it yourself once—about Madame de Pourtalès."

"Is she really like that?" he said. "Well, fate must have treated her better as a woman that it did when she was a girl. . . . When I knew her she was adorably beautiful, but also poor, and very unhappy.. . . But you are in a hurry," he added, "and I've already told you too many old stories."

I told him that I would not let him overlook this one, and would ask for it some other day. I dined at the Clermont de Sazy's, and observed them more curiously than usual. The husband bored me. I knew that he owned factories in the provinces, made bicycles and sewing-machines, and was one of the richest men in France. It was his father who had built up the fortune ; and he, no doubt, was the conspicuous man of the family. Henri Clermont himself had always lived in Paris, an amateur in industry and in art, administering his factories at Montbéliard through engineers and remaining content with drawing his dividends, which were large. He owned a chateau in Touraine, a villa in the Midi, and a yacht in which he took an annual cruise in the Mediterranean. That evening he irritated me. Not that his features were unpleasing : his massive face

was still handsome, and well set off by his short stubble of white hair. But his purse-proud vanity was too blatant, his patronage too contemptuous, his air of authority too all-embracing. He prided himself on talking only about his pictures and his travels, and all his friends felt that "bicycle" was a forbidden word in the house.

Madame Clermont de Sazy was seated some distance from me, for the dinner-party numbered thirty; but whilst conversing with her grand-daughter, my neighbour at the foot of the table, I kept watching the look of mournful irony which was her customary expression.

Later on, when the couples of the dinner-table drifted apart in the drawing-room, I manoeuvred so as to isolate my hostess near the fireplace. To her I was a young friend of her grandchildren, and she seemed much surprised by my attentions, but amused. She made me sit down beside her, and after some commonplace remarks I said :

"I spent this afternoon, Madame, with somebody for whom I cherish a great affection and who talks of you with an admiration which would, I think, have touched you."

"With admiration! Of me! Really?" she said. "And who is this, so late in the day?"

"Edmond Neuville, Madame. . . . You remember—the former ambassador, the friend of Edward VII. . . ."

She flushed, but showed keen interest.

"Neuville! Talking about me! What did he say? You know, I can't have set eyes on him for------" She thought for a moment—"for over forty years."

"So he told me, Madame."

"But did he say why? Did he tell you our story?"

"No. But I will confess, Madame, that the few words he spoke, and the tone in which he said them, made me curious to know it."

She glanced anxiously over my head at her husband, who was showing off a Fragonard to the Minister of Finance, and beyond, at a group of men who were engaged in a loud argument and had been overlooked in passing round the cigars.

"Oh, I don't know why I used the word 'story'," she said. "There was no 'story'. And what became of Neuville? So long as he was an ambassador it was not particularly surprising never to meet him in society here. . . . But when I heard that he had retired from diplomacy, I expected to. . . . How is he?"

"Well, Madame, he is very ill. . . . His doctor says that he may live two or three months longer, but no more."

"How dreadful!" she said. "I didn't know about that. Do you see him often? Listen.... Tell him. . . ."

She paused, leaving the words in mid-air.

"No," she went on. "It is all so long ago, and so forgotten, that I don't know how a message from me would affect him. . . . But please try to find out what his feelings towards me are. . . . Come and let me know. But now, please excuse me—I must see to my guests.. . ."

When I saw M. Neuville again next day, I told him of this conversation, and saw, perhaps for the first time, a trace of emotion in one who was usually cold and aloof. I pressed him to tell me about Madame Clermont de Sazy, and this was his story :

"You know that throughout a great part of my life I

was styled, in the horrible phrase of the time, a 'lady-killer'. I can talk of that now without vanity, because I am old and near the grave, and also because I never understood women myself. My career took me to most of the great European capitals, and in each of them I became attached to women conspicuous for their charm and spirit. . . . Nothing else interested me, except perhaps horses and my profession. Perhaps it was because they realized the importance of love in my life that so many women responded by showing me kindness. A strange thing—the glamour and boldness engendered by love! The purest, the most chaste of women are not unresponsive to it. Several times, in Sweden, in Austria, in Russia, young women fell in love with me and, to try to marry me, committed countless follies, which to-day would pass as small-change, but in those days were very courageous. . . . For my own part, I held aloof from marriage in the way natural to a young man whose freedom brings him a continual procession of delights.

"I was thirty-eight, and first secretary in Vienna, when I happened to be spending a few days in the country with an Austrian family—the Breitenbergs. There I met a young French girl who had come to teach the Count's daughters French and music. From the first evening, when she appeared at the dinner-table between her two pupils, she made an extraordinary impression on me. Prettier women I might have known, but none more pleasing. Remember, a woman had to be very beautiful indeed to appear so then in a Viennese house. The Countess was famous amongst Austrian women for the glory of her golden-brown hair and the slimness of her figure, and her daughters were like her ; one of their

friends, a Hungarian, had those black eyes with oriental depths, that supple body, at once vigorous and womanly, which is rarely to be found outside that admirable country. But the young woman in the white dress, sitting unjewelled at the foot of the table, outshone them all by her air of fine pride and inimitable simplicity. After dinner I got her to talk. Her freshness and frankness, the grace of her bearing and gestures, instantly banished from my mind all my fairest mistresses of that time.

"This girl whom I admired so much bore a name which then seemed to me the loveliest in the world, and which I still love—Béatrice de Vaulges. I had known her grandmother, the Marquise de Vaulges, for she came of a very good family in Picardy, poor and forced to earn her living, but excellently brought up.

"Next day I asked whether I might ride with the young Countesses. Mademoiselle de Vaulges accompanied them. She sat her horse superbly.—Look! That is how I was dressed that morning—in that portrait!—Well, well, I did my best to please, and I fancied I was succeeding. We spoke of that charming city, which we both loved. Vienna then was a paradise. The Emperor Francis Joseph, still a young sovereign, had softened the rigours of the most stupid police of the older Europe. Morals were easy, love was counted a virtue. Those were the days when the little Viennese news-sheets said that you could without hesitation accost any young girl coming out from *La Belle Hélène*. The 'golden Sundays' were followed by 'blue Mondays' and 'green Tuesdays'. Mademoiselle de Vaulges told me that her time was quite taken up by her pupils, and so she only caught glimpses of these extravagances; but she admired the

youthful Empress, her Spanish thoroughbreds, her headlong gallops, the music which bathed Viennese life, the humorous kindliness of her people.

"After luncheon she went with the Breitenberg girls to feed the swans on the lake. I went too. The gleaming white of those three dresses, matching that of the swans, and standing out against the dark water of the pool is still one of the perfect memories that I conjure up when I wish to beautify my latter days.

"During the next winter I was a constant visitor to the Breitenberg Palace. Vienna declared that I was in love with the Countess, but I was in love with her children's governess. To the great surprise of a man accustomed to swift, almost mechanical triumphs, this love was luckless. Back in Vienna, Mademoiselle de Vaulges dropped the confidential tone of our first encounter. Within the solemn walls of the Breitenberg Palace, manned with its regiment of footmen, she had no freedom, and if I tried to see her elsewhere, she declined or evaded me.

"Even on Vienna's gay Sundays I could not manage to take her out on to one of those hills where Nature seems to be eternally rehearsing Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. To catch a glimpse of her I went to hear Mass in the Imperial Chapel, which was that of the Breitenbergs, and where the Countess sometimes sang the *Gloria* or the *Sanctus*. Fur-capped guards stood before the altar. The choir of boyish voices was a marvel. Sometimes, in a gallery, I could just see Mademoiselle de Vaulges's profile, and the music then plunged me into mystic contemplation. I enjoyed the very Viennese atmosphere of the Chapel's congregation coming out into the courtyard of the Hofburg, where comments

on the singing were mingled with devout remarks and whispered assignations. But Mademoiselle de Vaulges stuck close to her pupils, and slipped away at once if I greeted her. I invited her to a concert. She replied that she could not let herself be seen there with me. Life had taught me to have small belief in women's virtue. I thought that this one was afraid of losing her situation.

"An opportunity came of seeing her again and having quite a long talk when the winter weather hardened and all Vienna met on the ice. At night there was skating by torchlight—and a delicious spectacle that was! Hungarians in short frogged jackets and fur caps; officers in uniform; women whose long veils streamed backward in the wind, gliding amongst the elongated reflections of the torches. The Breitenbergs had brought Mademoiselle de Vaulges with them. She was a wonderful skater, and told me that she had acquired her skill on the ponds round Amiens. I helped to call up memories of that landscape of flooded meadows, scored across by long rows of willows. She accepted the support of my arm. One day I whispered in her ear that I had a pleasant and discreet apartment in a secluded street, the Metternichgasse. She gave me such an indignant look that I began to doubt the possibility of making her my mistress. The futility of my efforts to obtain even an out-of-doors assignation finally convinced me that her resistance was genuine.

"My temperament used always to lead me to extreme measures. After observing Mademoiselle de Vaulges for a few weeks longer, I realized she was the only woman I had ever wished to marry. The decision I took will seem to you rapid and, in a youthful cynic, astonishing.

She was not so foolish. As I told you, I knew the Vaulges, a model family. I was beginning to tire of a libertine life. I was rich and had no reason to worry about lack of money on her side. Obviously Mademoiselle de Vaulges would have been in an embarrassing position if she had found herself in Vienna as the wife of a diplomat, amongst people who had known her in a very different status, but I anticipated no difficulty in arranging a transfer to another post; and in any other city her birth, as well as her education, could leave no doubt as to her welcome. In the end I resolved to wait no longer, and without using friends or relatives to convey my desires (as the custom then was), I seized the chance of the first day when I could talk to her alone and set forth my intentions. I confess that I had no doubts of how she would respond, for I had all the fatuousness of a man who had never met with opposition, and who now, for the first time, was offering a woman the chance of sharing his life.

"Mademoiselle de Vaulges seemed surprised and moved, and asked for time to think it over. I can still remember my own emotion. I could not work. All day long I sat staring at the door of my room, waiting for a messenger who never came. At night I reproached myself for this anxiety. How and why would she have refused? No doubt she had wanted to write home, to her family in France, and was simply awaiting their reply.

"A few days later she sent me at the Embassy a short, almost harsh, note, telling me that, although grateful for my offer, she could not marry me. When I tried to see her again I found that she had left the Breitenbergs and returned to France. Well, I admit that now I was both stupefied and wretched. It was Goethe, I think, who

said: 'It is painful to be for ever searching, but still more painful to find and to have to abandon'. For the first time I had met a woman who seemed in my eyes to be the Sylph (as M. de Chateaubriand said), with whom every man longs to spend his earthly life. Perhaps I was wrong, but the illusion was obstinate, and all the stronger in its hold as its fancied perfection was untroubled by any reality. And this woman, whom I had chosen from amongst so many, was the one who had taken to flight from me.

"The adventure filled my thoughts for a long time. Residence in Vienna became so intolerable to me that I asked to be transferred elsewhere, and it was then that I left for Russia. There, of course, time, a total change of scene and setting, and Maria Pavlovna—whose portrait you were looking at just now—did their work. But I did not forget. And to be frank, my young friend, I have not forgotten to this day. It is forty-seven years since I saw that face, but it lives in my mind, as clear as ever. . . . When you see her again, take a good look at her, and tell me whether her nostrils still have that slight curve, so bold and finely chiselled, which I admired in La Tour's portrait of her ancestress, the Marquise de Vaulges, at Saint-Quentin.

"The adventure left me rather spiteful, and more invulnerable than ever. Some years later I heard that Mademoiselle de Vaulges had married Henri Clermont—who was still plain Clermont, not having then bought the property of Sazy—and the news hurt me all the more as my Sylph seemed to be marrying for money. I — I never married. And it was certainly on account of her. . . . Not that I ever took any romantic, consciously binding vow—no, it was nothing like that. But all my

life long, whenever the opportunity of marriage occurred, I instinctively drew comparisons between the girl or young woman whom I could choose, and my image of Beatrice de Vaulges; and every time I decided to remain unattached. As for Beatrice Clermont, I was constantly at pains not to meet her, and succeeded in never seeing her again—chiefly, I think, because I was so seldom in Paris. There you are. . . . And now, please tell me what you thought of her last night."

I described as well as I could the old lady's beauty.

"Yes," he said, "even then she had those eyes you describe—fond, kind eyes. But their kindness was deceptive. . . . Still, I should like to see them again."

I confessed that I had mentioned him to Madame Clermont de Sazy.

"Oh?" he said, with interest. "What did she say?"

" She said she hadn't seen you for over forty years."

"True, true. . . . And what else?"

"She asked me to try and find out what your feelings now are towards her."

"Well, tell her . . . tell her that they are very much what they were on January 12th, 1861, before a big log-fire in the drawing-room of the Breitenberg Palace."

. . . . .

Next day, of course, I paid a visit to Madame Clermont de Sazy, to bring her this next chapter in the story. She listened without interrupting me, and then, when I had finished, she exclaimed :

" Oh dear ! How strange life is !"

"Yes," I said. "I must confess that I should never have believed that a man—especially a man like M. Neuville, could have remained faithful for forty-

seven years to the memory of a young girl whom he had only seen a few times. . . . But would it be indiscreet, Madame, to ask, in my turn, what were *your* feelings in 1860 towards Edmond Neuville? Of course, you didn't love him?"

"Oh!" she cried. "But I loved him to distraction!"

And after a moment's thought she added, with a smile:

"And I still love him_____"

"Butthen—why... ?"

"Because at that time I did not for a moment believe that his offer was serious.... No, no . . .just think—why should I believe so? I knew M. Neuville's reputation, his love affairs. . . . When he first came to the Breitenbergs', Count Breitenberg said: 'He's a dangerous man. . . .' When he suggested taking me to a concert, I thought he was trying to compromise me and make me his mistress. . . . When he spoke so directly and bluntly about my marrying him—remember that in those days proposals were always made through parents—I thought that some cruel trick was on foot, or perhaps some ingenious device for dazzling a poor young governness, and so, to avoid being tempted by one who charmed me beyond words, I just fled. . . . Some years later I met my husband. Naturally, I can't talk about him.... But you must have noticed many things, as you seem to be interested in human beings. . .. And now you tell me that it is because of me that Neuville never married. . . . Oh, how clumsily life works! Sixty years gone, at the mercy of a moment's mistake, a glance misunderstood, a word. . . ."

I then told her that M. Neuville had more or less asked me to invite her to come and see him.

"I think you ought to accept, Madame. He has not long to live. . . . Don't you feel it would be satisfying, and rather desirable, that the misunderstanding which has spoilt the loves of you both should be put straight in the last days of one?"

She made no reply and fell into a brown study.

"I do not agree," she said at last. . . . "No: the memory must not be replaced by this old face, so very unlike it. . . . Do not hurt your friend. Tell him that I am ill and am kept indoors, that perhaps next week...."

But next week M. Neuville died, and so they never met again.

by

J. OPATOSHU

*

NEW YORK TALES*

I

MADAM MARCHESE

Tall and blonde; her two thick plaits of flaxen hair thrown back with a negligent air, as though in danger of coming undone and enveloping her shoulders at any moment; her eyes short-sighted, yet large and of a wonderfully deep blue; every movement of her body impressing a luxurious languor in the folds of her loosely fitting gown which dropped gently from her shoulders—such was Madam Marchese.

She was reclining upon a soft ottoman, with the pretence of reading a book, and her troubled eyes followed the movements of her mother-in-law, a tall grey-headed Italian woman, at play with her five-year-old boy.

All at once the old woman burst out laughing, drew her daughter-in-law's attention to the child, and making some incomprehensible remark, kissed him upon the head, upon the eyes. Unable to understand what it was the old woman was trying to point out, the mother shook her head, let the book slip from her hand and fell a-thinking.

She had no means of conversing with her mother-in-law, who had only lately come over from Florence,

* Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.

making the long journey for the especial purpose of seeing her children in her old age. They communicated with one another by signs and gestures, and were never sure of what the other was trying to convey. The daughter-in-law was astonished to see her boy Irving sit and listen open-mouthed to some story his grandmother was telling him in Italian. The old woman illustrated the tale with her hands, with her face, with the whole of her body, while the boy took it all in with an absorbed air, as though he understood every word. And who knows? Perhaps they were holding communion in a children's language of their own?

Young Madam Marchese turned over, and an ivory comb dropped from her dishevelled hair. She plunged it in again, like a fork into a bundle of hay. She snuggled up to the soft cushions, and gave way to a feeling of melancholy. Ever since her mother-in-law had come into the house, Madam Marchese had altogether lost touch with her home surroundings, as though the old woman were her conscience come back to prick her and make her yearn for the hazy past.

She was born and bred in a large house by the Black Sea. From childhood upwards she had been in the habit of avoiding people, always maintaining a frigid reserve. When she grew up, the brokers who were always in and out of her father's house began—unasked—to arrange a match for her. But she would hear nothing of it. She had dreams of her own—dreams that one stormy night Pechorin, tanned by the sun and wind, his black locks in disarray, would stop in his boat beneath her window, would steal her away in her sleep, and carry her off into the Crimea or Caucasus, where they would dwell amid high mountains, far from any human habitation.

The brokers and needy folk who had business with her father would also make frequent approaches to her when they had letters from their children in America. She used to read these letters to them, and came to believe that life on the other side of the ocean was surely lived on a far grander scale, until she made her mind up to go there. After a good deal of wrangling with her parents, she arrived in New York—a sixteen-year-old girl, by the name of Mary Stein. She started work in a factory.

Mary was disappointed with the New World from the moment of landing and, but for the humiliation of the thing, would have gone home again.

Meantime, she struck up an acquaintance, by an almost speechless language of signs, with Philip Marchese, a tanned Italian with hair so black and glossy, that it caught one's reflection. This Italian, with his black dreamy eyes and swift movements, took her fancy. But, above all, she was captivated by his name—Marchese! How beautiful it sounded. At the end of a hard day, which Mary spent with bowed head in a crowded dusty workshop, sewing buttons, he would call for her, immaculately groomed and perfumed. He took her out to a different place of amusement each night, gave her a good time, and at last the girl grew to love him, to regard him in the same light as her former hero Pechorin, and she married him.

Marchese owned several barber-shops, was a man of property, and he furnished their home according to her own taste. Every day she went out to a different place of entertainment, had a circle of admirers around her—mostly Americans and Americanized Italians. She had no time for introspection, almost forgetting that she was

a Jewess and that she had parents living in Russia. When Irving was born, it did indeed occur to her that the child ought to be circumcized, only she hesitated over telling her husband, in the belief that he did not know she was a Jewess. Meanwhile she decided to name the infant Abraham, after her dead grandfather. To call him Abe, would sound too Jewish. Christians never went by that name. So she made a compromise and called him Irving.

After her confinement, the matter slipped her mind: she simply had no time to think of such things. She wondered why it was that Italians were ill-thought of and had such a bad reputation for maltreating their wives. On the contrary, all the time she had been living together with Philip, he had not once raised his voice to her. But ever since the arrival of the old woman from Italy, an upheaval had taken place in her mind. It vexed her to hear the old woman speak to Irving in Italian, and on several occasions, for the first time in years, she found herself thinking in Yiddish. She did not know why, but whenever she remained alone with her mother-in-law, she trembled and imagined that the old woman was a witch, who might at any moment assault her with those bony knuckles of hers. At such times she was crushed with a sense of guilt, of sinfulness. Of late, her parents had begun visiting her in her dreams. They wept, implored her to circumcize the child, to divorce her husband. Always she woke up exhausted; looking about her and finding her husband at her side, she edged away from him to the rim of the bed, as though afraid of his presence.

Invariably, when her parents visited her in her dreams, she afterwards found blue marks on her arms

and legs, as if to confirm the Jewish superstition that the outraged dead pinch the flesh of the living in their sleep. She was certain the dead were all in a conspiracy against her, were lurking in every corner and under the bed and would, at the first opportunity, pounce upon her and castigate her.

She began to notice things which she had never seen before. When she went visiting with Philip, she could no longer stand his habit of telling endless yarns about the things he had done. It seemed to her that everything he said was coarse, that he was altogether a ruffian, that without any warning he might start treating her badly, become jealous, like all Italians, and slash her face with a razor.

For days on end she went about wrapt in thought how she might circumcize the child. At first, she meant to tell Philip. Then she decided that in the coming summer, when she would go away into the hills for her holiday, she would have it done without her husband's knowledge. She had heard that many Italians accepted the Jewish faith when they married Jewish girls. This thought brought momentary relief. Who knows? Perhaps, if she were to beseech Philip with all her might, fall upon her knees and weep—she always had her own way with him—he might even agree. Then she would ask her parents over. . . . What a wretched creature she was! For over three years she had not written them a single line. Her mother was surely aged by now—aged with anxiety, and probably always weeping. . . . And her father? A strange warmth filled her heart; she felt a lump coming to her throat and her eyes turning moist.

The old woman from Florence sat upon a soft divan, with Irving on her lap, and sang something to him.

Mary quivered, overcome by a desire to snatch her boy away, to tell the old hag never to come into the room again, to keep to herself in the kitchen, and she mentally mocked the gibberish of the old woman's singing:

"Capucello, stiletto, manzetto—old witch!"

She sat up and cried out:

"Irving, come here!"

Irving tore himself away from his grandmother and threw himself into his mother's arms.

"Mam-ma!"

His mother kissed him, cuddled him, and for the first time in years spoke to him in Yiddish:

"My darling son, Abraham, my pet, wouldn't you like to go and see your grandfather? You've got such a lovely grandfather, with a long white beard. Abraham, my pet!"

Irving seemed to take fright, and pushed his mother away with his hands. He did not understand what she was saying to him, and he looked at her in alarm.

"What are you saying, Ma? I don't understand."

"Do you love your Ma?" his mother asked.

Irving clasped his mother with his hands and his legs, kissing her all over the face, and she, half in tears, rolled over in his embrace on the ottoman, telling him, half in English, half in Yiddish, about herself, about her parents, and for the time being she was comforted.

II

A HOUSE IN GARRICK STREET

They lived in Garrick Street, occupying two small, badly lit rooms crammed with rags. Stuffed sacks, full of second-hand tailor's trimmings, were piled high,

reaching up to the ceiling. Braid, lace and ribbon lay about everywhere. Disentangled lengths of material hung on clothes-lines criss-crossing from wall to wall. And on first entering, one might have imagined that hirsute Reb Mendel, with his luxuriant black sidelocks like curly tresses, who paced up and down among the rags in deepest meditation, was a wizard.

On top of the rags sat Leah, Reb Mendel's wife, an emaciated little woman who wore on her head a kerchief that dangled over her eyes and revealed through the gashes in it that her hair had already turned quite grey. She was reading aloud, in a pious sort of sing-song, from a fat Yiddish novel.

Seated on her right was her only daughter, a wan-faced slip of a girl, pliant as a plant which has lost its way into a dark moist cellar and has there sprung up amidst rank weeds. She was engaged in sorting out mother-of-pearl buttons from a sack, and dreamily she listened to her mother's reading. Ensconced on Leah's left, was her only son, a twelve-year-old bow-legged cripple, who smiled idiotically as he attached "female" fasteners in rows on sheets of cardboard.

And it seemed as though all four of them had grown up in the midst of these rags, had never yet left the gloom of the tiny rooms, and it was hard to believe that they lived within almost a stone's throw of mighty Williamsburg Bridge.

Reb Mendel took a saucepan off the small gas-ring, poured some soup into a plate and ate it with bread. His long beard and moustache strayed into the plate, hampering him in his meal, and he swallowed the food hurriedly, without masticating, as though he could find no relish in eating. It was not long before he had

finished and was saying grace. He wrapped his face up in his beard, and through it issued a muffled, mournful chant.

Leah paused in her reading, to listen to her husband, and an inarticulate thought—irritatingly vague—flitted through her mind, that ever since she had given birth to the cripple, Mendel had kept himself to himself, remaining entirely aloof from her. He made little attempt to earn a living, spending all his time in the study of the Talmud and turning ever more pious with each passing day, while the family lived in dire need. Elsewhere, a big girl like her daughter would have been playing the young lady by now, with the best of them. What a hard struggle it was before a mother could rejoice in grown-up children! But what had she, as a mother, to show for all her hardships? Still, she had long since tired of trying to bring him back to reason.

With a wistful look, Leah followed her husband's movements as he resumed his pacing of the room from corner to corner, and in a voice full of bitterness she asked him for the hundredth time:

"Mendel, what about it?"

"What do you mean?"

Mendel halted all at once, with a jerk of his hand and his head, as though some midge, which he had driven off several times before, had suddenly bitten him again.

"I mean, it's no use fooling ourselves. Faigele is no longer a child. . . . She's turned eighteen. Yet you don't care a bit. You're her father, aren't you? Just look at other girls. They go to balls, go dancing, get to know nice young men. . . . But what is Faigele to do, if you won't even give her a chance to breathe. So well then, you must do something about it yourself. . . ."

Faigele flushed hotly at her mother's words. She tugged nervously at her apron, and almost broke into tears.

"What's the matter with you, Mother? Can't you understand that I don't want to get married!"

The cripple thrust a mocking finger in front of his sister's face, opened his mouth wide and screeched through his teeth :

"Ch,ch,ch!"

Reb Mendel, tall and stooping, with that great black beard of his that reached down to his waist, with his flaming eyes that were for ever downcast, made no reply. He lifted a sackful of trimmings on to his back, hesitated awhile with open mouth, as though about to say something, then gave a negative wave of the hand, kissed the *mezuza,* and went out.

Reb Mendel was in high spirits. The first two shops he had gone into had, between them, bought up all the contents of his sack. He now walked in the middle of the roadway, with the empty sack under his arm, and a premonition filled his heart that the present day would bring him good fortune.

A short, stocky Jew, with his beard tucked into his waistcoat, and with a sack slung over his shoulder, stopped him on the way.

"Hallo, Reb Mendel, how are you?"

"Hallo, Reb Moishe, I haven't seen you for a long time. They tell me you've moved out of the neighbourhood, is that so?"

"Yes, when my missus died, I went to live in Bronxville."

"Well, and how's business?"

"Thank God, I mustn't grumble! There's a good many people worse off than me, but"—here Reb Moishe passed his hand over his beard that snuggled up close to his bosom—"I must say it's hard getting along without a wife. Got no one to look after the children. The eldest, you see, is twelve. Of course, she's a clever little girl, but no more than a child and could do with mothering herself. If some decent match were to come my way, Reb Mendel—I'm not interested in money—I'd marry again."

"Let me see now, you've got four children, bless them, is that so?"

"Yes, that's right, I've got four grown-up children, bless 'em. The youngest is three. They can all run errands, do the washing up. . . . But I'll tell you something, Reb Mendel, America is a funny place. There's such a lot of people and riff-raff come over here, you don't know who's who. And if I get married, how am I to know what sort of woman I'm taking into the house? So what I'm thinking is this. Rather than take a leap in the dark, if I could find a nice girl from the old country. . . . You see what I mean!"

"I suppose you'll find one," Reb Mendel comforted him. "Why don't you ever come up to see us, when you're down-town?"

"To tell you the truth, I was thinking of looking you up only the other day. But somehow I didn't seem to be able to spare the time. Are you still at the same address?"

"Yes, in Garrick Street. We'll be expecting you then?"

"Sure, I'll drop in on you."

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Reb Mendel continued on his way in the middle of the road, deep in thought. He reflected that Leah was right in what she said—something ought to be done for Faigele. It occurred to him that Moishe would make a good husband for her—a trimmings pedlar with a large connection and, above all, an honourable religious Jew who was by no means ignorant of the Holy Word.

Leah sat with her daughter upon the rags. Faigele held on her outstretched hands a tangle of ribbon, in which her mother was undoing the knots, while on a mound all to himself crouched the cripple. He was busy catching flies, holding them up to his ear by their wings and listening intently to the way they squirmed and buzzed. In the next room, Red Mendel sat studying in the light of a paraffin lamp, and softly he chanted the words of the Talmud in a mournful voice. The quiet sing-song hovered all over the two small rooms, fastening upon the ear like an endless drone, and it was difficult to tell whence came the strange sound—was it the tormented flies, or Reb Mendel's melancholy chant?

Reb Moishe entered in his best Sabbath coat made of shiny alpaca.

"Good evening!"

"Good evening!" Leah and Mendel returned his greeting.

Leah let go of the knotted ribbon and stood up. Faigele kept her seat without stirring, still holding up

the skein on her outstretched hands, and gazing the while at Reb Moishe without a word.

She knew that this was her bridegroom-to-be, who had now come to fix the date of the wedding. She was all anxiety to say that she loathed him, that she did not want an old man with whiskers and a horde of children, for her husband, and that——She began to tremble, over-powered by nausea for Moishe's long beard, by a sudden hatred for her parents, and she dropped her eyes,

"Take a seat, Reb Moishe," said Leah, offering him a chair.

"Take a seat," Reb Mendel echoed, as he walked up and down the room in elation, rubbing his hands together.

He pointed at Faigele, explaining that she was still a child and, moreover, having been brought up in America, she probably found it difficult to express herself in Yiddish, which was the reason for her silence. He asked Faigele to pour out some tea; he gazed into her eyes, and was a happy man.

Faigele felt that she was the most wretched creature on earth; with a husband like that, she would never dare to show herself to her friends again. She sat down in a corner and her mind began to wander.

Now and again she ran across Sidney on the stairs. He was growing taller and handsomer every day. She noticed too that he had begun shaving. Ever since she had left school, she had left off speaking to him, although when they met on the stairs, they would both blush and greet one another. She loved him so dearly. She would tell him to-day that her parents were trying to marry her off to an old man with whiskers. . . . He would rescue her from under the very marriage-canopy. . . .

The mother embraced her daughter, kissed her upon the head, and asked :

"Tell me, dearie, before it's too late, are you satisfied? If not, say so, I don't want to force you."

"Quite, quite!" Reb Moishe chimed in hurriedly, his eyes goggling in fear lest some stupid idea should enter the girl's head.

Faigele made no reply, but burst into tears.

" Poor thing, she's too shy to say. I cried just the same when I was a girl. Never mind !"

They sat up till late that evening, exchanging memories of the old country, and just before taking leave of one another, they agreed on the day of the wedding. Reb Moishe went home radiant with joy.

The cripple was still busy catching flies and tormenting them, while the flies squirmed and buzzed. The father engrossed himself once more in a holy book, chanting even more softly and mournfully than before. The mother, petite and grey-headed, quietly approached her daughter, as if with a feeling of guilt towards her, embraced her and dumbly wiped the tears from her own eyes on Faigele's soft throat.

The low sing-song hovered over the two small rooms, fastening upon the ear like an endless buzz, and it was difficult to tell whence came the weird sound—was it the tortured flies, or Reb Mendel's sorrowful chant?

III

THE SALOON

After midnight, "Big" Willie's saloon was left almost deserted, and the proprietor, a tall hulking man with the air of one who is surprised at nothing, sat down to a

plateful of fish. With a knife clasped in one hand, a fork in the other, he finally resorted to his fingers to eat from the head of a boiled carp. Noisily he gnawed the fish-bones, washing his meal down with a drop of brandy every now and then, and looking on meanwhile at a game of *oka* played by four young fellows at the table opposite. There was quiet in the saloon. The only person to break the silence was a baker's hand with a moustache like Kaiser Wilhelm's, who sat at a table all to himself, with his back to the wall and his legs propped up on a chair, an unfinished glass of beer in front of him, and from his pursed lips issued queer noises reminiscent of a lid jumping up and down on a boiling saucepan.

A musty haze hung over the whole place, as though the liquors in bottle and cask were all evaporating, filling the air with a clammy mist.

One of the players jerked his cap down over his eyes, and slammed down two notes, saying:

"I'll chance a dollar and here's one more to keep it company."

"I'll see you!" responded another of the players.

Willie's wife, still a young woman, with a pair of deepset brazen eyes and glossy black hair clinging moistly around her temples, opened a door at the back and put her head in:

"Willie, closing time! It's getting late."

"All right, in a tick," returned her husband, continuing to chew his fish.

"No, not in a tick. Now!" she said, her tiny mouth working shrewishly, while she stamped her little foot in a pretence of anger. Then she joined one of the players.

"Well, Philip, I'm going to stand beside you and

bring you good luck. What are you worrying for? Go on, spades!"

"Who asked you to interfere?" Philip snapped at her, throwing down his hand and pushing the stakes across the table. "They're yours, Frank."

"All right, keep your wool on," she retorted with a laugh.

"Sadie, come next to me," said Frank invitingly, and he caught hold of her by the hand.

"Go to bed, go on," Willie growled at his wife from out of his platter.

The young woman released herself from Frank's eager grip, but she lingered on for a little while, to create an impression as though her husband had only been jesting. Then, again telling Willie that it was high time he closed the saloon, she withdrew.

The young men watched her departure. Then they shifted about restlessly on their seats, and for a long while after they were still being tantalized by something of Sadie's presence which she had left behind her in the musty saloon.

Philip was in a bad mood, and he talked to himself as he shuffled the cards.

"No luck at all."

"That's why you're so lucky at love," Frank jested cheerily.

"You bet!" Willie interjected, pushing away his plate which was now full of bones. "Say, Philip, how much have you lost? A lot?"

Philip did not trouble to answer. He dealt the cards, and asked:

"Who's having the next game?"

"I am," Frank responded with a smile.

"Well?"

"Fifty cents," muttered Frank, striving his hardest not to burst out laughing.

The others put their cards down. It was now between Philip and Frank only.

"I'll chip a dollar," Philip grunted surlily.

"I'll make it three," Frank smiled.

Philip pondered a while, wavered and turned pale.

"O.K. I'll see you!"

"Money down," chanted Frank, waving his forefinger knowingly.

Philip began rummaging in his pockets; he looked round bewildered and turned to the saloon-keeper.

"Willie, let me have two dollars."

"As if I had any money," Willie began plaintively. "Business is so bad, I couldn't spare a cent to-day. Honestly!"

Philip removed a gold signet-ring from off his finger and flung it down on the table.

"Now, what have you got?"

Frank inspected the ring in leisurely fashion, gave the onlookers a smile and answered Philip with a question:

"What *have you* got?"

"A 'full house'. Will that do you?" Philip spoke through clenched teeth.

"Nossir!"

Frank grinned and showed his cards.

"Philip, what's the matter with you? Your luck's out completely," Willie put in with a sigh, placing his hand upon Philip's shoulder.

"Lucky at love, unlucky at cards," sneered Frank, drawling the words teasingly.

"Shurrup!" Philip cried, scattering the pack of cards

all over the table. He got up, and planting his legs firmly on the floor, stretched himself.

"Say, what's the hurry? If you're cleaned out, I'll lend you some money," Frank turned to Philip, drawing out a handful of notes. "How much would you like?"

"I'm through for to-night," Philip returned angrily.

"Please yourself, boy."

Smirking, Frank stood up and examined the ring playfully. Then he tugged Philip by the sleeve.

"Say, fancy you losing the ring your sweetheart gave you!"

"But what about you? Fancy losing your sweetheart!" Philip answered back venomously.

"Oh, so you reckon you pinched my sweetheart from me," Frank cried out indignantly, as though an unfounded slur had been cast upon him.

"Well, if I didn't, who did?"

It was Philip's turn to smile.

"So you did!" Frank muttered tamely with sudden meekness.

Frank rankled under the general outburst of laughter that followed, and he searched his head for something to say which would turn the tide in his favour. Twirling the ring round and round, he finally held it out to Philip and said :

"Supposing I was to make a present of it to Betty, would you be jealous?"

"Me jealous? Don't you know she wouldn't touch you or your presents with a barge-pole?"

Frank made no reply, as though he had not heard these last words. He bit his lip with a sickly expression, and ordered four beers. Willie filled the glasses, blew the

heads off, and addressed the company at large as he did so.

"Say, fellers, I'll tell you a joke which'll make you roar. You know Alec, well he was here with that Indian chap last night."

"What, that coloured bloke Jack?"

"Yep! Having a game of dice, they were. And what a game! Alec trimmed the chap round till he'd even got his watch. Made me feel quite sorry for the poor guy. But before leaving, the Indian turns round and says, 'Listen, Alec, let's have one more go.' 'But you ain't got no more money left,[5] says Alec. 'Never mind, I'll stake something that's better than money. Are ye game to take a chance on Rosie?' "

"What, that blonde he's living with?" the company inquired.

"That's it," said Willie. "And what d'yer think? The Indian won all his money back down to a cent."

"You don't say so!" the company ejaculated in astonishment.

Frank hurriedly finished his beer, and rattling the money in both his trouser pockets with an air of bravado suddenly said offhand :

"Well, Philip, I'm willing to stake all my money. Are you game?"

"What the hell are you driving at?"

Philip gave him a close look.

"Let's gamble on Betty," Frank ventured, with a sinking heart. "You've got a chance to win now."

"You filthy rotten bastard, you swine!" Philip yelled. "Whatcher take me for, a nigger? Jews don't sell their women, you know. And anyway, it wouldn't be much use; she hates you like bloody poison."

"Don't take it too much for granted. We'd see about that," Frank retorted, and turning to the others, "I knew Betty before he did, and you needn't think I'm lying either. Just listen to this: Say, Philip, is that right —Betty has got a wart on her right breast?"

Philip landed a terrific slap on Frank's right cheek. Frank turned his head to find out what direction the blow had come from, and received another on his left cheek, making him see red. The two jumped at each other, using their hands and legs and teeth; over the slimy floor they rolled, pommelling one another for all they were worth and panting hard. The others tore them apart. Frank, looking a sorry sight, rubbed his hand over his pale face with its trickles of blood, as though to wipe the pain away, and then examining the blood coating his hand, smiled a sickly smile.

"You wait," he threatened, "I'll make you pay for this!"

The baker's hand, who had been roused by the uproar, and had witnessed the fight, put in humorously:

"Anyway, you've got what was coming to you already!"

Frank turned to go, but stopped at the door and took a parting shot at Philip.

"Go on, use your fists, you bastard. Use them as much as you like. A fat lot of good it will do you. Answer me this one: Who slept with your sweetheart, eh? I did! Frank slept with your sweetheart, before ever you did!" He beat his chest with clenched fists. "So you can't take it, eh? All right, I'll tell the world that it was me, Frank, as slept-----"

Philip made a rush for Frank. The others barred his

way, so he caught hold of a bottle and slung that. Frank ducked, and it missed him.

"Garn, you dirty son of a bitch!" Willie intervened, taking Philip's part. "What d'ye mean by throwing mud at a decent girl, eh? Get out, before I throw you out, and don't you ever dare show your ugly mug here again!"

"O.K. What about paying me the money you owe me first?"

"I don't pay for stolen goods!" replied Willie.

"No, but you receive stolen goods, don't you?" Frank hissed through his teeth.

Philip made another rush with a bottle in his hand. Frank darted out of the saloon, followed by the others. Philip lingered in the doorway, turned back and began striding up and down the saloon, beside himself, while he could hear Willie growling away:

"That's going to do my business a lot of good, I don't think! . . ."

"Now listen here, Willie," said Philip, coming to a halt.

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you personally believe what Frank said?"

"How should I know? Women are a funny lot," Willie returned, spitting in all directions as though a fly had got into his mouth. "There's no trusting the best of 'em! All you've got to do, is keep a sharp eye on 'em!"

"In other words, you believe what Frank said is true?"

Philip's eyes opened wide.

"Don't be a damned fool," exclaimed Willie. "Who said that I believe him? But you know what women are! That's why I wouldn't care to take an oath either way. There's no telling, that's all!"

Philip made no reply. He sank down on a chair at one of the deserted tables, on which he put his feet ; he stared blankly at the musty haze shrouding the saloon and, with a groan, let go of the bottle that he still had in his hand. The bottle resounded dully on the slimy floor and, without breaking, rolled up against the wall.

by

I. PAPIERNIKOV

★

A GIFT*

With the first gleams of the morning star—not that he could see it from where he slept—Jober rose and, as was his custom, dressed in the dark before dawn. He covered his head with a white knitted cap, donned an old brown coat, thrust his dusky feet into yellow slippers, tucked a small loaf of bread into his girdled-up bosom, and grasping a cage painted blue, with a little yellow canary inside, went out of doors.

Already at this early hour the long narrow street was astir with the bustle of noonday. All at once the rising sun poured its screaming light over the cluster of low and tiny houses, whose doors and shutters were being flung open against the painted walls, like outstretched arms waiting for whatever the coming day might bring—anything that might be left over after the excitement of petty trading.

In the doorways and windows, countless red fezzes and turbans appeared, perched on coppery bearded faces—unwashed faces that were still brooding with midnight drowsiness. Merchants and artisans hung their wares out or displayed them behind smeary windows, to attract the eye of passers-by, who came thronging into the bazaar, intent on picking up what bargains they

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

could, all eagerness to buy and sell any manner of article that might show a small margin of profit. On the narrow badly paved sidewalks stalls sprang up side by side with offerings of newly baked bread and cakes, vegetables and multi-coloured sweetmeats, which very soon began to melt and drip like wax in the fierce sunshine.

Drifting with the multitude came weatherbeaten porters, their backs bent under yokes bearing wooden and glass kegs of coffee- and gooseberry-coloured *barad*. Each man cried his wares in an endless sing-song, to his own accompaniment of two tinkling brass plates, which hands young and old, hands smooth and wrinkled clapped together with the skill of long centuries. The din in the bazaar was such, that everybody had to shout to make himself heard, and the air began to grow more oppressive and stifling with each passing moment.

Usually Jober would hurry away from this swelter of closely-packed, dust-smothered men with their melting flesh and melting melodious street cries, and leave the town behind to ply his trade in solitude and stillness.

With an artfulness that few fowlers could match, he would lie in wait for canaries and lure them down from the topmost branches by his imitative whistling of a canary calling its mate; then, with his keen eye and unerring aim, when the bird was close he would stun it with a pebble. He made his own cages, painted them himself, and peddled them himself, managing thus to make ends meet and even to put by a little for the purchase of a wife, for which the time—as he could feel in his blood—was more than ripe.

For the past three days, however, Jober had set out at daybreak and returned late in the evening with the same canary still on his hands. Things had somehow gone

badly with him of late. No doubt some wicked person, envious of his carefree livelihood, had cast the evil eye upon him and had turned his luck.

"I must," thought Jober, "I must sell it to-day. I won't bring this canary home with me again!"

Cautiously, as though he were bearing a lit lantern in his hand, Jober made his way through the teeming crowds, with the canary hopping about inside its cage of blue, and its twittering song drowned in the terrific din. On and on he went, till he lost count of all the streets and alleys through which he passed. Judging by his weariness and hunger, by the sun which had dropped and now seemed perched upon the glowing rooftops, by the light and shade which had now changed places in the roadway, Jober could tell that the afternoon was well advanced, and he gave up the last shred of hope. He decided to go home and to abandon his cursèd trade in canaries for ever.

"*Esma! Taal han!*" someone suddenly called out to him.

Jober turned back and a new ray of hope gleamed in his bloodshot eyes.

In the open doorway of a dark little shop stood a black-bearded man in a red fez, a sack over his belly by way of an apron, and a hammer grasped in one hairy hand, a shoe in the other.

"Kaduh?"

Jober approached and, like a charmer, raised the cage aloft, waving the canary temptingly to and fro past the cobbler's hirsute face.Then he stated his price. Endless bargaining followed, which attracted a cluster of curious passers-by, who attentively watched Jober negotiate and haggle over the singing-bird, listened to him gradually

lower his price and raise his voice, till he was swearing by Allah that he could yield no more. The bearded customer was stubborn. No and a thousand times no! Not a farthing would he give beyond his original offer. This sum was so trifling, Jober might as well have parted with his canary for nothing. All at once he felt degraded and spurned. A flush suffused his brown-skinned face, his glossy eyes flashed fire, and throwing the cobbler a look that was like the sudden lash of a whip, he began fumbling at the door of the little cage, wrathfully grabbed the tiny canary and raising it aloft and lowering it with both his hands, he screeched through his teeth :

" A gift for you, my friend, a gift !"

This he accomplished so swiftly and so unexpectedly, that before any of the onlookers had realized what had happened, they saw something fluffy flutter down to the ground, with yellow wing flapping; one convulsive shudder, then another, and in the pool of white dust beside the blue cage the little creature lay dead.

" *Charam !* " the group of onlookers cried out in chorus, scattering fearfully like a sheath of corn dissipated in a sudden gust of wind.

"Charam!" they repeated, gazing sorrowfully at the innocent little canary, and it was with a curse in their eyes that they followed the departing figure of Jober, as he tore his way out of their midst and mingled with the mighty throng of men, camels and asses, in which he vanished as though carried away by a colourful river pouring through the narrow tortuous streets.

by

BORIS PASTERNAK

★

THE STRANGER*

I

The Tatar infant was wrapped from head to knees in a thick woollen shawl and kept trotting about the courtyard like a little chick. Jean felt she would like to go and talk to that little Tatar girl. At which moment the shutters of a little window banged open and Axinia called "Kol'ka." The child, like a peasant's bundle with felt slippers stuffed into the bottom at the last instant, toddled quickly over to the concierge's little quarters.

Taking work outdoors always meant blunting any footnote to a rule till it lost all sense and then going upstairs to begin all over again indoors. Indoors, as soon as you set foot on the threshold, a special kind of gloom and coolness took possession of you and a special kind of unexpected familiarity, as if there each piece of furniture stood in a place that was allotted to it for all time. It was impossible to foretell the future. Yet somehow you could *see* it when you passed from the open inside; its course was laid bare—the course to which, for all its unorthodoxy in every other respect, it was bound to submit. And never a single one of those dreams, weft of the stir of

*** From *Lüvers' Childhood.* Translated from the Russian by Alec Brown.**

outer air, but would scatter under the impact of that stalwart and ominous spirit of indoors confronting her as soon as she reached the threshold of the hall.

This time it was Lermontov. Jean crumpled the little volume, covers folded inside. Indoors if her brother Seriozha had done that she would have been the first to attack such a "disgusting habit." Outside it was different.

Prokhor put the ice-machine down on the ground and went back into the house. When he opened the door of the Spitzyns' flat the hellish yapping of the General's naked little puppies came gambolling out. Then the door banged to with a sharp clang.

But the River Terek, leaping like a lioness, with her shaggy mane on her back, still roared away, as appointed, only Jean began to be a prey of doubts as to whether all that was on the Terek's back or neck. She was too lazy to look Lermontov's own words up, and the golden clouds from southern climes, from afar, had scarcely managed to escort the poet to the north, when there they were meeting the batman at the door of General Spitzyn's kitchen, bucket and mop in hand.

The batman put down the bucket and bent down, took the ice-machine to pieces, and set about washing it. The August sun brushed its way past the foliage of the trees and fell on the batman's rump ; it settled red in the faded army cloth and soaked into it like turpentine.

The courtyard was large, with all sorts of odd corners. A courtyard both whimsical and oppressive. In the centre it had once been paved, but never re-paved, and the cobbles were thickly covered with a curly low-growing weed which in the afternoons, after the midday meal, gave out a sour medicinal sort of odour such as hovers round hospitals on hot days. For a short distance,

between the porter's quarters and the carriage shed, the yard adjoined somebody else's garden.

It was here, behind the wood-pile, Jean made her way. She stayed the ladder on the ground with a flat log, wriggled it firm on the wood, which would give way, and then seated herself, uncomfortably but very interestingly, on the middle rung, like a yard game. Then she got up and climbed still higher and rested her book on the top rung, which was broken, and thought now she really would read *The Demon;* then, finding that the first place was the best to sit, she went down again, forgetting her book. She forgot all about it, because it was only now she suddenly noticed something on the other side of the garden which she had never thought was there and she gaped, it was simply enchanting.

There were no bushes in the strangers' garden, and the ancient trees raised their lower branches up into the mass of leaves as if up into a kind of night, leaving the garden below stripped naked, although it was always in a half light, an airy triumphant half light, from which it never escaped. Those forked, thunder-blue limbs, grey patched in lichen, permitted full view of the deserted unused little alley onto which that other garden opened. There was a yellow acacia, now dried up, shrivelled, leaves fallen.

Thus translated by the tenebrous garden into a new world, the silent little alley beyond was lit like events of a dream; that is, in detail brilliant but all very silent, as if there the sun had put on spectacles and was scrabbing about like a stupid old hen.

But what made Jean gape?—Her discovery, more interesting to her than the people by whose help she made it.

So the shop must be there, outside the gate, in the street. And what a street! "Lucky ones!" She was envious of the strangers. They were three in number.

They stood out black as the words "fair captive" in the poem. Three even heads, back view, hair neat under round hats, were bent over something, as if the end one, half hidden by a tree trunk, was leaning on something asleep, and the others were asleep too, leaning on her. Their hats were blackish-grey-blue and the sunlight played on them in little spots like insects. They had black ribbons. Then the three strange girls turned their heads the other way. No doubt something in the street that way drew their attention. They spent a minute looking that other way just as you look in summer when for a moment everything is dissolved in light and attenuated, so that you have to screw your eyes up and shield them with your hand—for that sort of minute they looked, then fell back to their former state of corporate drowsiness.

Jean would then have gone home, but she missed her book, and could not recall at first where she had left it. She went back for it, and when she had climbed onto the wood pile she saw that the three had got up and were going away. One after another they made their way to the gate; at their heels went a smallish man, walking with a limp. Under his arm he carried a huge book or atlas. So that was what they had been doing, peering over each other's shoulders, and she had thought they were asleep. They crossed the garden and disappeared behind the outhouses. The sun was now nearly set. Getting her book Jean disturbed a log; the wood-pile came to life and the whole thing moved as if it was alive. A few logs rolled right down and ended up on the turf with a dull thump. It served as signal, like a watchman's

rattle, for evening to be born, and with evening a host of sounds, tiny and wrapped in haze. The air began to pick out an old-time tune, a half whistle, from over the river.

The yard was empty. Prokhor had finished his work. He went out of the gateway, where, quite low down, right on the grass, was spread the reedy sad tinkle of a soldier's balalaika like a sheet, over which a swarm twirled and danced, broke away and fell, dissolved in the air, fell and dissolved, fell, and then before touching the earth soared high again—a thin quiet swarm of midges. But the tinkle of the balalaika was even thinner, even quieter, and swept lower towards earth than the midges, and yet was clean of the dust, and better, more aery, than the swarm, swept high again twinkling and breaking in the air, all little swoops, all leisure.

Jean went on her way indoors. "Lame," she said to herself—thinking of the stranger with the album—"lame, but a gentleman, no crutches." She went the back way. The yard air held the persistent pungent aroma of chamomile. "Lately Mummy's got a whole chemist's shop of little blue bottles with yellow labels." Slowly she made her way up the stairs. The iron banister was cold; her feet shuffled and the stairs creaked in answer. All of a sudden an extraordinary thought came into her head. She had just stepped two stairs at once, and now stood still on a third. What came into her head was that lately some intangible resemblance had appeared between her mother and the porter's wife. Something she simply could not make out. She stood still. It was somewhat like—she thought for what—was it like what people meant when they said "one human being's like another . . ." or "we're all anointed with

the same myrrh . . ." or " fate doesn't distinguish blood? . . ." There was a little bottle on the stair and she pushed it away with her toe, and the bottle went down and fell into the dusty matting and did not break. —Anyway, something that was very very very common to all people. But if that was so, why was there not the same resemblance between herself and Axinia, or, say Axinia and Ouliasha? It seemed to Jean the more strange since it was difficult to find two people more unlike. Axinia had something earthy in her, like gardens, reminding you of huge potatoes, or the greenery of wild pumpkins, whereas Mummy. . . . The very thought of that resemblance brought a scornful smile to Jean's lips.

Nevertheless it was Axinia and no one else set the tone of that insistent comparison. She got the best of it too. The peasant wench gained nothing; but the *lady* lost. For a brief space there was a very wild notion in Jean's mind : it occurred to her that some sort of elemental principle of the common people had entered her mother, and she imagined her mother even speaking with a vulgar accent and verbs all wrong ; and suddenly she could see the day coming when Mummy in her new silk gown, but beltless, like a barge, would be arms akimbo talking about "akeepin' t' doorpaost up!"

The passage reeked of medicine. Jean went straight to her father.

II

The house was re-decorated, and luxury appeared. The Lüvers invested in a carriage and kept horses. The coachman's name was Davletsha.

At that time rubber tyres were the very latest. When

they drove out all things turned round to stare at them : people, fences, church towers and barndoor cocks.

At the doctor's they were a long time opening the front door to Mrs. Lüvers, and while out of respect for her the carriage moved off slowly, she shouted after them "don't go a long way, as far as the railway crossing and back; and take care on the hill," while the pallid sun, removing her from the doctor's doorstep, continued on its way down the street, reached out to Davletsha's taut, florid, freckly neck and warmed it and made the little hairs stand up on end.

They drove onto the bridge, and the chatter of its loose cross-timbers rang out all round them, crafty and full and harmonious (cast who knew when, for all time,) cut short with all piety by the ravine beneath the bridge —by never forgettable sound of noon, of sleep.

Climbing the hill that overfed beast Vykormish stumbled for foothold on the slippery unyielding flint ; he strained his withers, it was more than he could manage, and suddenly, being in that scramble reminiscent of a grasshopper reaching out with its legs, he became dazzlingly beautiful in the futility of his unnatural efforts, just as are grasshoppers, by nature aerial creatures, and it seemed that any moment his patience would give out and with a furious flutter of his wings he would soar away. And so he did. Up went his front legs and he was off over the vacant ground at a canter, with Davletsha trying to draw him in by shortening the reins. A dog added its ragged shaggy uncomprehending bark, and the dust was like gunpowder. The road turned sharply to the left.

The black street ended blindly in the red wall of the railway goods depot. It was all alarm. The sun was

slanting and wrapped round the crowd of strange little figures and peasant women's wide blouses. The sun wrapped them in a stinging white light, which might have suddenly flooded from a kicked-over bucket, with the thin mortar streaming out of it along the ground. The street was all alarm. The horse was going at walking pace. "Turn to the right," Jean ordered. "We shan't be able to get through," Davletsha answered, and pointed with his huge whip to the red wall. "It's a blind alley." "Then stop, I'll have a look round." "Those are our Chinese friends." "I see." When Devletsha saw that the young lady was not going to discuss it with him, he gave a long drawn-out sort of whistle—tprrrou, and the horse stopped as if frozen to the ground, all a-quiver, while Davletsha set up a thin broken whistle, all little gushes and pauses, as fitted the instant.

The Chinese ran across the road with huge rye loaves in their hands. They were dressed in blue, like women in trousers. Their bare heads ended in knots on the nape, and looked as if made of twisted-up handkerchiefs. Some of them stopped to watch, and Jean could look at those properly. Their faces were pale, earthen, grinning. They were sun-tanned and dirty, like brass dulled by need. Davletsha took out his pouch and began to roll. And then from round the corner—from where the Chinese were making for—a number of women appeared. Also going for bread, no doubt. Those in the road began guffawing, made their way up to them, with their hands behind their backs, as if pinioned there. The writhiness of their movements was exaggerated by their being dressed, like acrobats, from head to heel in some kind of single garment. There was nothing really alarming in it; the women too stopped and laughed.

"Listen, Davletsha, what are you thinking about!" The horse had dashed off—dashed off.—He won't stand still, eh, won't stand still—and Davletsha tugged and shouted and lashed the horse with the reins. "Steady there, you'll tip me out, what are you lashing him like that for?" "I must." And only when they had got out into the fields and the horse had quieted down—it had begun to dance madly—the crafty Tatar, having sped the young lady like an arrow away from a shameful sight, took the reins in his right hand and tucked the pouch—which he had been holding all that time—back into the skirt of his coat.

They went back by another road. Mrs. Lüvers had seen them, from the doctor's little window, no doubt. She came out onto the porch at the very instant that the bridge, which had already told them its story, started it all over again as the water-cart reached it.

III

With Liza Defendov, with the girl who brought into class rowan berries gathered on the way to school, Jean made friends during one of the examinations. The daughter of the sacristan was being re-examined in French, having failed first time. *Lüvers, Jean* was told to sit in the nearest empty place. And thus, sitting together at the same phrases, they made each other's acquaintance—

"Est-ce Pierre qui a vole la pomme?"

"Oui, c'est Pierre qui vola, etc. . . ."

And the acquaintanceship was not ended by the circumstance that Jean was taught at home. They began to meet each other. Their meetings, by mercy of her

mother's overseeing eye, were one-sided. Liza was allowed to come to them, but so far Jean was forbidden to go to the Defendovs'.

This spasmodic nature of their meetings did not prevent Jean rapidly becoming very attached to her friend. She fell in love with her, that is to say, she became the suffering party in the relationship, the manometer, watchful and feverishly sensitive in the quivering of its needle. Every single mention Liza made of her classmates, none of whom Jean knew, awakened in her sensations of desertion and gall. Her heart would sink. First intimations of jealousy. Without any reason for it, simply by force of her mistrustfulness of conviction that Liza was deceiving her, outwardly so direct, but in her heart of hearts scornful of all in her that was Lüvers, and behind her back, in school or at home making mock of it—this Jean accepted as something which should be, residing in the very nature of affection. Her feelings were quite fortuitous in choice of object, in essence something fitting the demands of instinct, knowing no ambition and only able to suffer and immolate her to the glory of the fetish, while in the throes of first feeling.

Neither Jean nor Liza had the least influence one on the other, but met and parted unchanged, one passionately feeling, the other feeling naught.

. . . . .

The father of the Akhmedianovs traded in iron. In the year between the birth of Nouretdin and Smaghil he unexpectedly made money, and then Smaghil was called Samoilo and the boys were to be brought up as Russians. Papa did not omit one single trait of the "good old"

devil-may-care Russian landowner mode of life, and did more than his bit in ten years' desperate living in every direction. The children got on magnificently, that is, took after that fine example and inherited Papa's devil-may-care ways, loud, dashing, like a pair of flywheels set going and then left to the mercy of inertia. The most perfect fourth-form boys of all were the Akhmedianov brothers—a hurly-burly of crumbling chalk, shavings, gun shot, thundering desks, indecent swear-words and snub-nosed rosy-cheeked frost-chapped impudence. Seriozha made friends with them in August. By the end of September the boy was shameless. Quite normal. Being a typical schoolboy and also a somebody besides, meant being in tow with the Akhmedianovs. And there was nothing Seriozha wanted more than to be a thorough-going schoolboy. Lüvers made no attempt to prevent his son's friendship. He noticed no change in him, or if he did notice anything, ascribed it to puberty. Besides his head was full of other cares. It was about that time that he discovered he was ill, and that his illness was incurable.

IV

She was not sorry for him exactly, though nobody else had anything else to say but how extraordinarily untimely it was and aggravating. Negarat was too smart even for Jean's parents, and everything parents felt about strangers was hazily communicated to the children too, as to spoiled pets. Jean was only grieved because things would not be as they used to be, and there would be no more of his laughter.

She happened to be at table the evening that he

announced to her mother that he had to go to France, to Dijon, and do some kind of service. "So you must still be quite young," her mother said, and the floodgates of her pity were immediately opened, while he sat there hanging his head. Conversation dried up. Her mother said "The men are coming to-morrow to seal the windows," and she asked him if he wouldn't like them shut there and then. He said no, the evening was warm, and in his country the windows weren't sealed up at all, even in mid-winter. Shortly after that her father turned up, and he too poured forth his regrets at the news. But before he began his wailing he did raise his eyebrows and ask in surprise, "Dijon? But surely you are a Belgian, aren't you?" And Negarat then told the story of his "old folk's" migration, so interestingly, as if he were not their son, and with as much warmth as if talking about some strangers he had read about in a book. "Excuse me, if I interrupt you a moment," her mother said, "Jean, my pet, all the same, just shut that window, there's a dear." Then, to her father, "Vika, the men are coming to-morrow to do them up. But please do go on. Whatever you say, that uncle of yours was a real old scoundrel. Do you mean to say he really did *swear* to it?" "He did." And he returned to his interrupted story. And when at last he reached the point, which was the paper he had received the preceding day by post from the Consulate, he guessed that the young lady could not make head or tail of it all, so he began explaining, but so as not to show what he was about, so as not to touch her on the quick, explaining what military service meant. "Yes, yes, I understand. Yes, I understand, I do really," she assured him with mechanical gratitude.

"Whyever go so far? Be a soldier here, that is to say,"

she corrected herself, "study where the others do"—. and vividly saw in her imagination the green meadows spread out below the priory hill.

"Yes, yes. I understand. Yes, I do," the girl went on, and Mr. and Mrs. Lüvers, sitting there out of it, and thinking that this Belgian was overloading the child's head with unnecessary detail, every now and then put in their sleepy simplifications. And suddenly came the minute when she felt sorry for all who had even long ago, or even quite recently, been Negarats in any distant place, and then bidding farewell all round, had set out on that unwanted, unsought-for journey, to be soldiers in this alien city of Ekaterinburg. This man made it all so clear to her. Nobody hitherto had done this. A rush of heartlessness, a shattering rush of vividness, was stripped from her white-tent picture of companies, tarnished now and turned into a collection of individual men in soldier's clothes, who became pitiable the very moment that this reasonability suddenly introduced into them brought them to life and elevated them, so that they ceased to be a colourful picture, but became near and dear ones.

Good-byes. "I shall leave part of my books with Tzvetkov. That's the friend I have told you so much about. Please make use of them as hitherto, *Madame*. Your son knows where I live, he is often at my landlord's house, and I'm handing my room over to Tzvetkov. I shall tell him about the books."

"Tell him to come in and see us. Tzvetkov, you say his name is?"

"That's right, Tzvetkov."

"Tell him to come to see us. We shall make him welcome. When I was younger I knew. ..." and she

shot a look at her husband, who was standing right against Negarat with his hands tucked under his close-fitting jacket, waiting for a convenient gap in this exchange of politenesses, to make a final arrangement with the Belgian about the next day.

"Yes, tell him he's to come to see us. Only not just now. I'll send him an invitation. Yes, take it, it's yours. I could not finish it. It made me cry so. The doctor advised me to stop reading it altogether. To avoid excitement." And once again she gave her husband a look. He lowered his face and began breathing heavily, very anxious to see if both his boots were on and then if both were well cleaned,

"So there we are. Well, well. Don't forget your stick. We shall see each other again, I trust."

"Why, of course. I don't leave till Friday. What day is it to-day?" He showed that sudden fright of people who are leaving.

" Wednesday. It is Wednesday, isn't it, Vika? Vika it is Wednesday, isn't it?" And then her father at last got his edge in. "Wednesday. . . . *Ecoutez, demain.* . . ." and walked out to the landing with Negarat.

v

They strode on, talking, and from time to time she had to give a hop, skip and a run to keep up with Seriozha and get back in step with him. They were walking very fast, and her raincoat slipped down on her shoulders, because to help herself along she was working her arms, but she was also keeping her hands in her pockets. It was cold and the thin ice crackled merrily under her snow-shoes. They were on an errand for their

mother—to buy a present for the man who was to go, and they were talking.

"So they drove him to the station."

"Mhm!"

"And why was he sitting in straw?"

"How do you mean?"

"In the waggon. All in straw. Legs covered. People don't sit like that."

"I've already told you. Because he was a criminal."

"So they were taking him to hard labour?"

"No. To Perm. There's no prison department here. Watch where you tread."

They had to cross the street past the tinsmith's. All the summer the shop door had been wide open and Jean had grown accustomed to seeing the crossing dominated by that blast of general and friendly liveliness which the fierce gaping mouth of the workshop gave forth. All July, August and September, carts stopped outside it, blocking the crossing; peasants waited about, mainly Tatars; a confusion of buckets and guttering, broken and rusty. There more than anywhere the dense sun sank strangely into the dusk at the hour when over the next-door fence their neighbours cut the throats of young fowls; and as it sank transformed the crowd to an encampment and painted the Tatars like gipsies. Front axle-trees, freed from the hooded waggons, dipped their shafts with the smooth-worn harness hollows in the velvet dust.

The cauldrons and the scrap-iron were still there, left where they had fallen; only now patined with frost; but the doors were tightly closed, as if it was a holiday on account of the cold, and the crossing was a desert. Only out of a round ventilation hole came Jean's familiar

musty scent of burning metal, which hissed noisily, came acrid to her nostrils, and only then settled on her palate, prickly like cheap lemonade.

"Is there a prison department in Perm then?"

"Yes. A Prison Board. I think we'd better go this way. It's nearer. There is one at Perm, because Perm's a government town, and Ekaterinburg only a provincial centre. Too small."

The path along past the villas was paved with red brick and bordered with shrubs. There were traces of the hazy and enfeebled sun on it. Seriozha walked as loudly as he could.

"If you tickle this barbaris with a pin in the spring when it's flowering, it flutters all its leaves, just as if it were alive."

"I know."

"And you're afraid of being tickled, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"That means you're nervy; the Akhmedianovs say that if anyone is afraid of being tickled . . ."

And on they went—Jean trotting, Seriozha striding with astounding strides, and her raincoat slipping down on her shoulders. They caught sight of Dikikh just as they reached the turnstile. They caught sight of him from a good distance. He had just come out of the very shop they were now half a block off. Dikikh was not alone; he was followed by a man of medium height who tried to hide a slight limp as he walked. Jean could not help thinking she had seen that man somewhere before. They passed without seeing each other. They cut across the street, and Dikikh did not notice them. He had on high goloshes, and kept lifting up his arms with his fingers spread wide. He *simply did not agree* and all ten

fingers had to help prove that the other man . . . (But where was it she had seen that other man? A long time ago. But where? It must have been in Perm, *when she was a child.)*

"Wait a moment![53] How annoying, Seriozha knelt down. "Just a jiffy."

"Caught on a nail?"

"Of course. Idiots, don't even know how to knock a nail in properly!"

"All right?"

"Oh, do wait a moment. I can't find it. I know that fellow with the limp. Ah, there it is. Thank heaven."

"Gone right through?"

"No, fortunately. That's an old hole in the lining. I didn't do that. Well, let's get on. Half a moment, just clean my knee. All right, come on."

"I know who it is. He lives in the Akhmedianovs' house. Where Negarat lived. Do you remember I told you how people collect there and drink all night, you can see the light in their windows. Remember? Remember when I spent the night there? Samoilo's birthday. Well, one of those. Remember?"

Yes, she remembered. She saw she had been mistaken, as, if Seriozha was right she could not have seen the lame man in Perm, that was only an illusion. But still it seemed so to her, and being taciturn when she had ideas like that, turning over everything of Perm she could recall, she followed her brother, making this or that movement, holding on to this or that, stepping over this or that, and then looked round her and found she was in the half-light of counters and light cardboard boxes and shelves and over-anxious good-afternoons and attention—and . . . Seriozha was speaking.

The book they wanted the bookseller (who sold all kinds of tobacco) had not got, but he reassured them and averred that Turgeniev was definitely coming, in fact had left Moscow, was on the way, and that it was only a minute or so ago that he had been talking about it to Mr. Tzvetkov himself, that is to say, to their schoolmaster. His slippery tongue and the illusion he was under tickled the two children mightily and they said *good afternoon* and went out empty-handed.

Once outside, Jean turned to her brother. " Seriozha, I always forget to ask you, do you know the street we can see from our wood-pile."

"No. Never been there."

"That's a lie. I've seen you myself."

"On the wood-pile? You . . ."

"Why, no, not on the wood-pile, but in that street, on the other side of Cherep-Savvich's garden."

"Oh, that's what you're thinking of. You're right. You can see it as you go by. The other side of the garden in the background. Some sheds and then a wood-pile. I say, so that's *our* courtyard? That yard? Ours? Why, I'd never realized that! And how often I've been by there and thought how fine it would be to get up there once, on that wood, and then on the roof—I've seen a ladder up there. So that's our own yard?"

"Seriozha, will you show me the way there?"

"What, again? But it's our yard. What's there to show? You know ..."

"Seriozha, you never understand me. I'm talking about the street, and you about the yard. Show me the way to that street. Show me how to get there. You will, Seriozha, won't you?"

"But still I don't understand. Why, we've just been down it . . . and we'll be there again in a minute."

"You don't say so?"

"But of course. And the smithy; at the corner."

"So then that dusty street ..."

"Why of course, that's the very one you keep asking me about. And Cherep-Savvich's at the end, on the right. Oh, don't hang behind, we mustn't be late for dinner. There's crayfish to-day."

They began to talk of something else. The Akhmedianovs had promised to teach him to tin samovars. And as for her question about what tin was, tin was a kind of mountain rock, otherwise ore, like lead, only dull. It was used for lining cans and mending pots, and the Akhmedianovs knew how to do all that.

Then they had to run across the street or a train of waggons would have kept them back. That made them both forget—she her request about that little-used alley, and Seriozha about his promise to show it her. They passed the door of the shop, where Jean drew in a sharp breath of that warm greasy smoke which you get when you clean brass door handles and candlesticks, and then remembered where she had once seen that stranger, him and three strange little girls, and what they were doing. The next instant she realized that the Mr. Tzvetkov the bookseller had spoken about was that very same man with the limp.

VI

Negarat left by an evening train. Her father went to see him off. He did not get back from the station till late that night, and his appearance caused a tremendous

din in the porter's lodge, which did not subside for a long time. People went outside with lanterns, called somebody unknown. It was pouring with rain and the somebody's geese were loose and making a din.

Day rose gloomy and shaky. The wet grey street danced as if made of rubber, and there was a nasty drizzle fluttering down and spattering mud about. Waggon wheels sloshed and squelched as they passed. People in goloshes.

Jean was on her way home. There were still echoes of the night's disturbance about in the yard; she was not able to have the carriage. She had said she was going to the shop for some hemp seed, and ran round to see her friend; but when halfway there she felt sure she would never find her way alone from the shop to the Defendovs' house, so she turned back. Then she remembered that it was too early anyway—Liza would be at school. She was now thoroughly soaked and was shivering with cold. The sky was clearing under the stiff wind, but it was still raining. There was a cold white hard light which ripped down the street and clung to the wet paving-stones in sheets. The gloomy clouds were speeding away out of the town; at the end of the square beyond the three-armed street lamp, they grew panicky and piled one on top of the other.

To move like that he must have been either a very slovenly person or unprincipled. The furniture of a rather poor study was not packed on the dray, but simply stood on it just as it had stood in the room, and the castors of the arm-chairs peeping out from under the white dust-covers rolled to and fro every time the waggon tipped one way or the other. The covers were snowy white in spite of being soaked through. They were

so striking that you only needed to glance at them, for the cobbles, gnawed bare by the rains, for the shivering cold puddles against the fence, for the birds flying from the stables, for the trees flying after them, for the patches of lead, and even *that ficus* in the tub which swayed and bowed clumsily to all things flying by, to turn the same colour.

That was a crazy load. It made everybody look at it. There was a peasant striding beside it: the platform tipped right over as it moved a step forward and a wheel plunged into a pothole. And over all this croaking tattered thing hung a wet leaden-coloured word—*town*, which in her mind gave rise to a host of ideas as transient as that chill October light which winged past her and fluttered to the wet street.

"He'll catch cold; he'll only ruin his things," she said to herself, of the unknown owner. And she imagined the man—*an abstract sort of man, like a roller, step by step staggering about putting his bits of property in their respective places.* She had a vivid picture of how he got hold of things and how he moved, and particularly how he took a duster and poked about round the tub and wiped the wetted leaves of *his ficus.* After which followed sneezes, a cold, a temperature. That without fail. Jean could see that most vividly too. The waggon rumbled away up towards Isseti. Jean had to turn to the left.

. . . . .

It must have been somebody's heavy steps outside. The tea in the glass on the little table by her bed rose and sank again. The piece of lemon in the tea rose and sank again. The rays of sunlight on the wallpaper swayed to and fro, like pillars, like the little geysers with

coloured syrup in the shops behind the curtains with Turks smoking. Curtains with Turkains, Turtains with Curcains, Curcains with ... curtains . . . smoking. . . .

It must have been somebody's heavy steps. The little patient fell asleep again.

Jean had gone down the day after Negarat left, the very day she learned when she came home from her walk that Axinia had had a baby in the night : the day she had seen the waggon of the man who was moving, with rheumatism stalking him. Her fever lasted a fortnight; painful red pepper all over her, burning her, making her sweat, gumming up her eyes and lips. The steam all round her was troublesome, and her sense of taste was mixed up with a horrid feeling of fatness. As if a summer wasp had filled her with a flame which was blowing her up. As if the wasp's fine little sting, like a little grey hair, was still in her and she wanted to pull it out, over and over again, all ways. Out of her purple temples, out of her shoulder groaning in the fire under her little nightdress, everywhere. Now she was getting better again, and felt weak everywhere.

For example, this sense of weakness, it risked everything and showed itself in a strange geometry *all of its own*, which made her a little dizzy and sick at times.

For example, beginning from an episode on the counterpane, the sense of weakness set to piling on it layer on layer of ever-greater spaces, that were soon to turn—in that urge of the twilight—into a vast square, which was at the very foundation of that vagary of Space assuming incredible dimensions. Or else, starting out from a pattern of the wallpaper, it would drive broadnesses row after row up towards her, gliding as if greased, one replacing the other, and also, like all those

sensations, wearing you down by their steady and regular growth in sheer size. Or else it tortured her ill body with depths which went endlessly lower and lower, and revealed their bottomlessness from the very outset, from the very first thing in the parquet, then lowered her bed towards the bottom, gently, gently, and she with the bed. Then her head would be in the position of a lump of sugar cast onto the high tide of an insipid, terrible, empty chaos, and be dissolved in it, melting away in transparent whorls.

This was caused by heightened sensitivity of the oral labyrinths.

It was somebody's heavy steps. The lemon sank and then rose again. Also the sun on the wallpaper rose and sank constantly. At last she woke up. Her mother came in and greeted her for being better at last, and seemed to her to be able to read her thoughts. As she was coming to she had heard something about it. That was—the greetings of her own arms and legs and elbows and knees, greetings from them as she stretched her body. It was their greeting indeed wakened her. And now Mummy too. What a strange coincidence.

The whole household was now in and out, sitting on her bed a few moments and then off again. She put question after question, and they answered. There were things which had changed during her illness; others were unchanged. Those unchanged she did not bother about, but she could not let the others alone. Apparently Mummy herself was unchanged, and Daddy was quite obviously exactly the same. But these had changed : she herself, Seriozha, the distribution of light in the room, the quietness of everybody else, and still other things, ever so many things. Had the winter snow come yet?

No. There had been snow, then a thaw, then a bit of frost, nobody knew what they were coming to, everything was bare, no snow at all. She scarcely noticed whom she questioned, or about what. The answers got all tangled. Those who were well came and went. Liza came and they would not let her in at first. Then they remembered that you do not get measles twice, and let her in. Dikikh came. She scarcely noticed who gave her what answer. When they all went to dinner, and she was alone with Ouliasha, she remembered how they had all laughed in the kitchen at a silly question of hers. She then took care not to do the same again. She had put an intelligent business-like question—like a grown-up. She had asked if Axinia was in the family way again. That made the girl drop a spoon as she was clearing away, and turn to one side. "Oh, well I never. . . . Now do let her have a rest. . . . Jean, pet, she can't have them all at a go." And she ran out and shut the door firmly. And then Jean had heard the whole kitchen roar, as if the dresser had fallen down, and after the guffaws came a swirl of shrill chatter, the charwoman and Galim being the butts, and the din rising steadily till it seemed they had got to fighting, when someone came and closed the door which they had forgotten.

So that question she must not ask. That would be sillier still.

VII

What, surely not thawing again? So to-day again they would go out in the carriage, and still could not put it on the runners? Jean would spend hours standing at the little window, till her nose was cold and her hands

frozen. Dikikh had just gone. He was displeased with her now. She would like to see anyone learn there in the house, with the cocks crowing about the yards and the sky a-buzz, and when that died down, then again the cocks. Clouds dirty and tattery, like a moth-eaten sleigh-rug. The day thrust its snout against the window-pane like a calf in its steamy stall. Why was it not spring? But after dinner the air gripped everything in a hoop of grey cold, and the sky wrinkled and shrank, and you could hear the clouds' wheezy breathing. As if impatient for the winter dusk, impatient for the north, the flitting hours rent the last leaves from the trees, stripped the lawns bare, pierced through crevices and tore at people's chests. The nostrils of the northern bosom began to show dark beyond the house-tops : they were pointing directly at their yard, loaded with vast November. But still it was only October.

But still it was only October. There had not been a winter like it in living memory. People were saying the autumn wheat had perished and there was fear of famine. As if someone had taken a sceptre and waved it and passed it over chimneys and roofs and the winter boxes for the starlings, saying—smoke here, snow here, hoarfrost here. But there was neither snow nor frost. The desert, wilted twilight, pined for them. They strained their eyes, and the earth ached from early lighting in the streets and fires in the houses, just as one's head aches from long expectation and the misery of strained eyes. Everything was tense, expectant ; winter wood was stocked in the kitchens, the clouds had been bursting with snow for a fortnight, and the air was heavy with darkness. When would that magician who managed it all, whom one's eye could see, when would he swirl

his magic circles and pronounce his curse and summon winter, the spirit of which was surely but waiting at the door?

Yet how slack they had been, neglecting it so. It's true they never paid much attention to the calendar in the classroom. She tore the pages off her own. But all the same! August the twenty-ninth! Cunning, as Seriozha would have said. A Red-letter Day. *The Beheading of John the Baptist.* It came off its nail easily. Having nothing better to do she set about tearing the old leaves off. A monotonous job, so that after a while she simply forgot what her fingers were doing, though from time to time she would mutter: "Thirtieth—so now for the thirty-first."

" It's three days since she set foot out of doors !" Those words, heard in the corridor, wrenched her back from her daydream, and she saw how far she had got. Past the Presentation of the Virgin even. Her mother touched her hand. "Jean, what is the meaning of this. . . ." The rest of her mother's words might not have been said. As if wakening from a dream Jean asked her mother to say *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist.* Her mother said it, thoroughly puzzled, and did not say it at all like Axinia.

The very next minute Jean was astounded at her own self. What on earth was that? Whoever suggested that to her? Wherever was that from? Had she, Jean, really asked her mother that? Or was it possible she had really thought her mother? . . . How fantastic, how unreal! Whose invention now was that? . . .

All this time her mother stood looking at her, unable to believe her ears, staring at her wide-open eyes. This astonishing sally really puzzled her. The question looked

like mockery; but her little daughter's eyes were swimming with tears.

. . . . .

Those hazy presentiments of hers came true. When out for a drive she heard the air grow softer, saw the clouds melt inwards, heard the click of hoofs muffle. The street lamps were still not lit when the little grey tufts of dry down began to wander through the air. But they had not even reached the bridge when the few scattered flakes gave place to a solid wall of snow swooping down on them. Davletsha jumped down and raised the leather hood. Jean and Seriozha then found it dark and tight inside. Jean wanted to be furious like the furious storm without. They noticed that Davletsha drove them home simply because they again heard the bridge under the horse. The streets were unrecognizable; there were no streets left. Night had descended in an instant : the town lost its head and was one solid stir of countless thousands of pale lips. Seriozha leant out and supported himself on his knee and told Davletsha to drive to the Technical Schools. Jean caught her breath in ecstasy, beheld all the delights and charms of winter in the way Seriozha's words rang out in the air. Davletsha shouted back that they would have to go straight home, not to tire the horse too much, as the master and mistress were going to the theatre, and he would have to put the carriage on the runners. Jean then remembered that Mummy and Daddy would be out, and she would be alone. She made up her mind at once to make herself ever so comfy by the lamp and have a good long read at the volume of *The Stories of Pussy-cat* which were "only for grown-ups." She would have to get it out of Mummy's bedroom. And

some chocolate. And then read, and suck chocolate, and listen to the sound of the streets being swept outside.

Oh, but it was coming down properly now, and no mistaking it. The skies shuddered and from them came foundering whole white empires and continents, innumerable ; and they were both mysterious and frightful. It was clear that those worlds falling (who knew whence) had never heard either of life or of this world, and the earth, and being midnight things and blind they smothered it, because they neither saw it nor knew about it.

They were soothingly frightful, those empires ; absolutely satanically rapturous. Jean caught her breath as she gazed on them. And the air staggered to and fro, grasping at that falling universe, and far, far away, in pain, oh, in what pain, the countryside howled as if seared by whips. Everything was confusion. Night rushed at them, infuriated by that single grey hair, low fallen, which cut into it and blinded it. Everything was scattered far and wide, shrieking, no matter where. And hailing cry and wailing answer were both lost, never met, died, swept away by the blizzard over many roofs. Blinding.

They stamped and stamped in the hall, and shook the snow off their fluffy white short fur coats. And what pools of water running from the goloshes onto the check linoleum! The table was covered with egg-shells, and the pepper pot had been taken out of the cruet and not put back, and there was a lot of pepper spilt on the tablecloth, and on the yolk which had run out and in the tin with the unfinished sardines. Father and Mother had already had their supper, but they were still sitting in the dining-room, and trying to hurry the children, who

dawdled. They did not scold them, because they were eating long before their time, as they were going to the theatre. Mummy could not make up her mind now whether to go or not, and was ever so sad. When she saw her mother, Jean too remembered that really she ought not to be in the least happy herself—oh, at last she got that rotten fastener undone—rather, she ought to be sad, and when she came into the dining-room she asked what had been done with the walnut *torte.* Then her father looked at her mother and said nobody was forcing them, and so they might as well stay at home. "No, why," Mummy said, "after all I ought to have some amusement, the doctor gave permission." "Well, make up your mind." "But where is the *torte?"* Jean asked again, and for answer got the information that the *torte* would not run away, that there were other things to eat before she got to *torte,* that nobody began supper with *torte,* and the *torte* was in the cupboard—just as if she had never been in the house before, had just arrived, and did not know where things were kept—her father said all this, and then turned to her mother again and said "Make up your mind."

"It's made up, we'll go."

And, with a sad smile at Jean, her mother went to dress. While Seriozha, tapping his egg with the egg-spoon and taking care not to miss, in business-like fashion, as if very busy, announced to his father that the weather had changed—there was a blizzard, Dad ought to bear that in mind—and he burst out laughing; now his nose had thawed out it was not behaving as it should, and he screwed up his face, then got his handkerchief out of the pocket of his tight uniform breeches and blew it just as his father had taught him, "so as not to damage

the ear drums," then got busy with the egg-spoon again, and, looking his father straight in the face with his own, ruddy from the drive and freshly washed, said "Just as we were going out we saw Negarat's friend. You know." " Evans? " his father asked, absent-mindedly. " We don't know that man," Jean cried hotly. " Vika!" came from the bedroom. Their father got up and answered the call. In the doorway Jean came on Ouliasha, bringing her a lighted lamp. Soon the door next to hers banged to. That was Seriozha gone to his room. He was magnificent to-day, his sister loved the Akhmedianovs' friend to be a boy, and she loved to be able to speak of his wearing the high-school uniform.

Doors opening and shutting. Stamping about in snow-boots. At last *they* had gone, the master and mistress.

Then Jean applied herself again to the problem set for homework. She did not put the figures in brackets. She went on dividing away, copying out figure after figure. There seemed to be no end to it. Endless recurring decimals. "What if measles came again," she thought suddenly: "Dikikh to-day said something about infinity." She no longer knew what she was doing. She felt that that afternoon something of the same sort had happened to her, and she had also wanted to sleep or cry, but when it was and what was really the matter she could not make out—because she had not the strength to think of anything. The noise outside had subsided. The blizzard was gradually dying down. Decimal fractions were quite new to her. And then there was no more room on the right, and she decided to start over again, write smaller, and check every figure. Outside it was deathly silent now. She was afraid of forgetting what she had borrowed and not carrying the right figure over.

"The window won't run away," she said to herself, continuing to pour three's and seven's into bottomless space, "and I shall hear them in good time; it's quiet everywhere; they won't come up at once; they'll have their furs on, and Mother pregnant; but the point is, 3737 goes on repeating, I can either go on copying it out or . . ." And suddenly recalled that that was just what Dikikh had been saying only an hour or so ago—that she *need not divide out, but simply discard them.* She rose and went to the window.

It was a clear night. Only rare flakes swam out of the darkness into the light of the street lamp, then sailed round it and vanished again. In their place new ones floated up. The street glistened with the dignified snow-white carpet spread on it. It was white, bright and sweet like candied cakes in fairy stories. Jean stood some time at the window gazing at those circles and figures which the Andersonian silvery snowflakes performed. And then she went to Mummy's room for the *Cat* book. She went without a light. She could see without one. The roof of the stables filled the room with a ceaseless sparkle. The beds froze under the sigh of that huge roof and glittered. Here in disorder lay discarded smoky silk. Diminutive little bodices gave out an oppressive and stuffy odour of armpits and calico. There was the scent of violets and the cupboard was bluish dark, like the night outside, and like that dry warm darkness in which those freezing-cold glitterings moved. One of the knobs of the bed gleamed, a lonely bead. The other was extinguished by a slip thrown over it. Jean half closed her eyes, and the bead separated from the floor and moved towards the wardrobe. Then she remembered what she had come in for. Book in hand she went to one of the bedroom windows.

It was a starry night. Winter had arrived in Ekaterinburg. She looked out into the yard and her thoughts turned to Pushkin. She made up her mind to ask her tutor why he had given her that book about Onegin to read.

Seriozha wanted to talk. He said "You been putting scent on yourself? Give me some." He had been very sweet all day. He was very red in the face. And she could not help thinking that perhaps there would never be such an evening again. She wanted to be alone.

She went back to her own room and set about reading the cat stories. She read one and began another, holding her breath. She was so absorbed in it she did not hear her brother going to bed in the next room. An extraordinary sort of game now began of its own accord to play over her face. She could not recognize her own features. At one moment they swam out of shape and turned fish-face ; she let her lower lip dangle and her lifeless pupils, fixed by fear to the page, refused to rise, afraid of finding *it* behind the tall-boy. Then she suddenly began nodding to the printed letters, as if in sympathy with them, as if approving them, just as people approve something somebody has done and are pleased at the turn events have taken. She dawdled over reading the descriptions of lakes and rushed headlong ahead into the dense mass of nocturnal scenes with a fragment of guttering Bengal fire on which their illumination depended. In one place a character was lost and shouted at intervals and then listened carefully for a reply, but heard only his own echo. So intent was she then, her throat began to tickle and caused a fit of coughing. The un-Russian name of Myrrha brought her back to reality. She put the book on one side and lost herself in thought. "So that's what winter is like in Asia. I wonder what those Chinese are

doing now, so dark a night?" Her eyes fell on the clock. "How creepy it must be to be with Chinese in this darkness." Jean looked at the clock again, and was horrified. Any moment her parents might come home. It was well on the way to twelve o'clock. She unlaced her boots and then remembered she had to put the book back in its place.

. . . . .

Jean started from her sleep. She sat up in bed, eyes starting out of her head. It was no burglar. There were a number of people and they were running about and talking loudly, as if it was daytime. Suddenly somebody shrieked out as if their throat had been cut, and something was dragged along, chairs were knocked over. It was a woman shrieking. Gradually Jean recognized them all; all but the women. An extraordinary chasing-about began, doors banging. When the farthest door banged it seemed somebody was trying to stop the woman shrieking by putting a hand on her mouth. But she got free and scalded the flat with a burning knife-like cry. Jean's hair stood on end, because the woman was her mother; and *Jean guessed.* There was Ouliasha sighing and then after catching her father's voice once Jean did not get it again. Then Seriozha was being pushed in somewhere, and bellowing "You daren't lock me in." "There are no strangers"—and just as she was, barefoot in her little nightie, Jean rushed out into the passage. Her father nearly fell over her. He had not taken his coat off. As he ran past he shouted something to Ouliasha. "Papa!" She saw him come running back with the marble basin from the bathroom. "Papa!" "Where's Lipa?" she heard him shout as he ran, beside himself. Splashing water on the floor as he disappeared

inside, and when a second later he appeared again, coatless and in shirt-sleeves, Jean found herself wrapped in Ouliasha's arms, but did not catch what was being said in that desperate, deep, exhausted whisper,

"What's the matter with Mummy?" By way of answer Ouliasha kept on saying "You mustn't Jean, pet, you mustn't, darling, go to sleep, wrap yourself up in bed, lie on your little side, ah, O, Lord God Almighty!" *You mustn't, you mustn't,* she kept on saying, wrapping her away from it, as if she were a baby, and taking her away; you mustn't, you mustn't, but what she mustn't was never said, only Ouliasha's face was wet and her hair all tangled. The key turned in the door.

Jean lit a match to see if it would soon be daylight. It was only a little after twelve. That surprised her very much. Was it possible she had not been asleep even one hour? Meanwhile the noise in the other part of the flat did not die down. Howls broke, burst, riddled the house. Then for a short instant there would be an immense silence, eternity. This silence swallowed up hasty steps and quick, cautious speech. Then there was a ring. Then another. Then so much talk and disputing and ordering about that it seemed the flat would be burned away by those voices, like tables under a thousand extinguished candelabra.

Jean fell asleep. Crying. Dreamed there were visitors. Kept counting them and getting them wrong. Every time she got one too many. And every time she made the same mistake she felt the same horror that she had felt when she realized it was none other than her mother.

• • • • •

How could anybody help being glad to see such a

bright clear morning. Seriozha at once thought of outdoor games, snowballing, fights with the yard kids. They had their breakfast in the classroom. They were told the floor polishers were in the dining-room. Their father came in. It was obvious at once that he did not know anything about the floor polishers. He did not know a single thing about them. He told them the real true cause of this move. Their mother had been taken ill. She needed quiet. Rooks flew by over the white film of street, cawing—untrammelled and buoyant. A sleigh swooped past, pushing a miserable little horse in front of it. The horse was not used to the new thing behind it and missed its step. "You'll go and stay with the Defendovs, I've made all the arrangements. And you ..." "Why?" Jean interrupted him. But Seriozha had guessed why and before his father could speak he said "Because of the infection, of course." But the street outside would not let him go on, and he ran to the window as if someone had beckoned him. A Tatar, out in new rig, was a magnificent sight, like a cock pheasant. Lambskin high cap on his head. And his sheepskin overcoat, wool inside, blazed brighter than morocco leather. He walked with a roll, no doubt because that raspberry-coloured fish-boning on his white winter boots was completely oblivious of the construction of human joints; those arabesques sprawled all over the place, little caring whether they were on boots or tea-cups or roof guttering. But the most noticeable thing was—just at that moment the groans feebly coming from the bedroom grew louder, and Father went out into the passage, and told them they were not to follow him—the most noticeable thing was the track he made with them, a narrow clear-cut little ribbon across the smooth expanse. So clean and neat;

they made the snow look even whiter and more satin-like, "Here's a letter, which you'll give to Mr. Defendov. To nobody else. Understand? Well, come along, get your clothes on. Ouliasha'll be here with them in a moment. You'll go out by the back door. And the Akhmedianovs are expecting you."

"Ho, expecting me, are they!" Seriozha was saucy.

"Yes. Dress in the kitchen." He seemed absent-minded, as he led them slowly into the kitchen, where there was a heap of coats and caps and mittens on a stool ready for them. There was a gust of winter air up the shaft of the stairs. The sleighs swished past outside with a scroop and a sigh. The children were all in a hurry and they could not find their sleeve-holes. Their things smelt of chests and sleepy furs. "What are you doing!" "Don't stand it on the edge, it'll fall off. Well, how now?" "Still groaning."

The kitchen maid gathered her apron in her hands and stooped and grabbed some wood : as she opened the stove door to stuff it in, the fierce flame gasped. "Not my job," she said indignantly as she went back to her world. In a battered black old pail was a mess of broken glass and yellow prescriptions. The towels were soaked with hairy, lumpy blood. They blazed. They needed stamping out, like smouldering tinder. The stove was covered with saucepans of boiling water. All about the kitchen were white cups and mortars of shapes they had never seen, like at the chemist's. In the hall little Galim was crushing up ice. Seriozha wanted to know if there was still much of last year's ice left. "There'll soon be fresh ice," he said. "Give me some. What are you wasting it for?" "Whatcher mean, wastin' it? I gotta break it up for t' bottles."

"Now then there, are you ready?"

No. Jean had torn back into the house again. Seriozha went out onto the landing and while he waited for her, he drummed with a piece of firewood on the iron railing,

VIII

The Defendov household sat down to supper. Grandmother Defendov crossed herself and flopped heavily into her arm-chair. The lamp burned badly and was smoking ; first they turned it too high, and then too low, time and again. Defendov's bony hand was always reaching out to the screw, and when he slowly took his hand away from the lamp and sat back again his hand shook, not like an old man's, but with a tiny quivering, as if he was lifting a wineglass filled brimful. It was the tips of his fingers quivered, from the nail down.

He spoke in an even voice with precise enunciation, just as if his talking did not consist of sounds, but was built up out of separate letters ; he pronounced everything, even the dots on the i's.

The bulbous globe of the lamp glowed fierce among the whiskers of the geranium and the heliotrope. Cockroaches gathered close to the warmth and the hands of the clock reached cautiously over towards it. And time crept by in the way it does in winter. This was where it came to a head. Outside it was set rigid and foul-smelling. Just outside the window it was all fuss, poking about to one side and the other, doubling and trebling in little tongues of light.

Mrs. Defendov put the roast on the table. Clouds of steam rose ; seasoned with onion. Defendov made a little speech full of "I heartily recommend," and Liza's

tongue never stopped once, but Jean heard neither of them. She had wanted to cry all day, because of yesterday, and now the longing grew desperate. Cry in that blouse too, which she had made exactly as Mummy told her.

Defendov guessed what was the matter, and he did his best to take her mind off it, which meant that one moment he would try talking to her as if she were a babe in arms, and the next, fly off to the other extreme. His joking questions frightened her and made her feel awkward. He fumbled and fingered the soul of this little friend of his daughter, just as if he was asking her heart how old it was. As soon as he was *unquestionably* certain of any little trait, he harped on it to try and make her forget her own home and merely succeeded in reminding her that she was among strangers.

At last she could stand it no longer. She suddenly stood up and, shy as any child might well be, muttered "Thank you. I've really had enough. Can I go and look at pictures?" And then, blushing crimson when she saw the general astonishment on all faces, nodded towards the middle room and said, "Walter Scott's. May I?"

" Of course, dearie, of course, run along," said Grandmother Defendov's toothless lips, while with fierce brows she fixed Liza in her place. Then she turned to her son. "Poor little kid," she said, when the claret-coloured curtains had closed behind Jean.

A sombre complete set of *The North* bent one shelf down and on the bottom shelf was the dull gold of a complete Karamzin. A pink lantern hanging from the ceiling failed to light up a pair of threadbare little armchairs, and a small rug which vanished into complete darkness was surprising to the tread.

Jean thought she was going to go into that room, sit down and burst into sobs. But though tears came to her eyes they could not break through her grief. How was she ever to roll away the barrier which last night's misery had put there? Tears would not come and she was powerless to remove the obstruction. To assist her tears she turned her thoughts to her mother.

For the first time in her life, now she was about to spend the night in a strange house, she measured the depth of her attachment to the dear person, most precious thing in all the world.

Suddenly, through the curtains, she heard Liza's loud laugh. "Oh, you little imp, you . . ." And Grandmother Defendov coughed and rocked to and fro. Jean was astounded to think she had once thought she loved that girl whose laughter was ringing out in the next room and who was so far from her, so little use to her. And something in her turned right over and let the tears come at the same instant as her mother came back to her, suffering, lost away back there in the long chain of yesterday's events, which was like a crowd of people seeing her off, dizzily seen in the far distance as the train of time swept Jean away from her.

No, that keen look that her mother had fixed on her the day before in the classroom was absolutely, absolutely unbearable. It cut deep into her mind and would not leave it, and everything Jean was now going through became part of it. As if it was a thing she ought to have taken and kept great care of, and it had been scorned and forgotten.

She could have gone out of her mind through that feeling, its intoxicating demented bitterness and inevitability played such havoc with her, and she stood by

the window and wept copiously and silently, letting the tears flow unwiped, her hands not being free to touch them, though those hands were doing nothing else, merely stretched out furiously stiff, all stubborn spasm.

Then a sudden thought dazzled her. She had all at once felt how *terribly* like her mother she was. This feeling merged into a sensation of living infallibility capable of transforming concept into reality by the mere force of that staggeringly sweet state of resemblance. The sensation pierced her through and through till she could have cried from the pain of it. It *was the sensation of a woman inwardly or from within perceiving her own external nature and charm. Jean* could not deal with it; this was the first time she had experienced it.

She went back to the Defendovs drunk from tears, but illumined, and she walked with another walk, not her own, but with broad dreamily idle steps. When he saw her come in Mr. Defendov felt at once that the idea he had formed of this little girl while she was out of the room did not fit, and had the samovar not engaged his attention he would have formed a new one.

Mrs. Defendov went out to the kitchen for a tray, leaving him on the floor, with all eyes fixed on the smoking copper as if it was a live creature, whose miserable waywardness was bound to cease the instant it was lifted onto the table. Jean went back to her place. She made up her mind now to talk to everybody. She had a vague feeling that after this it was up to her to choose the topic of conversation, or they would keep her for ever in the isolated state she had been in before, and not see that her mother was there with her, in her herself. Such shortsightedness would hurt her, and, what was more, would hurt her Mummy. And as if her mother were

really there to encourage her, she turned to Mrs. Defendov, who was with some difficulty edging the samovar onto the tray. "Vassa Vassilievna..." she said.

. . . . .

"And can you have babies?" Liza did not answer Jean at once. "Shh! Don't shout, silly!" Then—"Why, of course I can like all other little girls." This was said in a jerky jumpy whisper. Jean could not see her friend's face. Liza was feeling about on the table, but could not find the matches.

She knew a lot more about all that than Jean. In fact, she knew *everything*—just as do all children who learn of those things from chance words dropped here and there. And then all those natures which are favourites of their maker rise in revolt and indignation and go wild. Through this trial they cannot pass without pathology. The opposite would be completely unnatural, and childish madness at this age is merely the seal of profound normality.

One day Liza had heard a string of foolish stuff and dirty nonsense about those things whispered furtively. Liza did not turn a hair, but kept it all close in her mind and carried it home. Not a detail of it did she lose on the way home, but preserved the whole mass of rubbish. Now she knew everything. There was no conflagration in her organism, no tocsin sounded by her heart or attack by soul on brain for daring to learn anything on the sly like that.

"I know too." ("No you don't know anything at all," said Liza to herself.) "I know," Jean repeated, "I'm not asking about that. What I want to know is, do you ever feel as if, one more step and you'd have a baby." "Do

come inside," Liza cried in a hoarse voice, stifling her laughter. "Fine place you pick to shout. Why, they could hear you, standing in the doorway."

This conversation took place in Liza's room. Liza spoke so quietly that Jean could hear the water dripping from the tap. She had found the matches now, but she did not want to light the lamp for a moment, as she could not make a serious expression. She did not want to hurt her friend's feelings. And she had mercy on Jean's ignorance because she was unable to imagine talking about those things in any other way but using expressions which she could not use at home, and in front of a friend who did not go to school. Then she lit the lamp. Luckily the bucket had filled and ran over, so Liza snatched at wiping up the floor, and hid a new fit of giggles in her pinafore and the swishing of her mop till she found an excuse and could laugh out loud. Her comb fell into the bucket.

All the while she was there she had only one thought —of her own people—and constantly longed for the hour when they would send for her. And it was part of this that every afternoon, when Liza was at school and she was alone in the house with Grandmother Defendov, Jean too dressed and went out alone to stretch her legs.

The life of that suburb hamlet was little like the life of any of the places where the Lüvers had lived. Most of the day it was deserted and dull. There was nothing for one's eye to dwell on. There was nothing to look at but materia] for birch rods or brooms. There was coal lying about. They simply tipped the black slops out into the street, where they immediately turned white, freezing.

At certain hours of the day the street did fill with people, common people. The factory workers swarmed over the snow like beetles. The doors of the tea-houses ran on rollers and soapy steam poured out of them like out of wash-houses. Strange, but it seemed somehow warmer in the street, as if they were getting round to spring again, when those sodden peasant shirts hurried by stooping, the felt slippers at the end of their thin trousers twinkling. The pigeons showed no fear of those crowds, but flew down the road for the food which was there. There was a good deal of oats and barley and horse droppings littering the snow. The meat-pie woman's stall gleamed with grease and warmth, and that grease and that warmth disappeared down cheap-brandy spattered throats. The grease brought fire to them, and then, on the way back, it came out of those fast-breathing chests. Was it not that which warmed the street?

Just as suddenly it would be empty again, and dusk arrive. Peasant sleighs went home empty, and low sleighs raced by with bearded men lost in fur coats and all laughter, bodies rolling back and embracing each other like bears. They left behind them little wisps of sad hay and the sweet endless melting of their sleigh bells. Shopkeepers vanished round the corner beyond the birches, which from where Jean was, looked like a ragged stockade.

And this was where those crows came who flew over their house with that untrammelled cawing. Only here they did not caw. Here they called a halt to cawing and tucked up their wings and squatted down on fences and then, all of a sudden as if at some sign, swept off in a cloud to master the trees and jostling one another settled about those vacated branches. Ah, how clearly

then she could feel what a late hour it was in the whole wide world! Such lateness as no clock face could ever tell you!

• • • • •

Thus a week passed, and towards the end of the second week, at daybreak on Thursday, she saw him again. Liza's bed was empty. Waking, Jean heard the wicket gate clatter to behind her. She got up and went to the window without lighting the lamp. It was absolutely dark. But she could sense that in the sky and the branches of the trees and the movements of the dogs there was the same heaviness that there had been the previous day. This was the third day of that overcast weather, and she no more had the strength to drag it off the dilapidated street, than to drag a heavy iron saucepan over a rough plank floor.

In a window opposite a lamp was lit. Two bright shafts of light pointed under the horse's belly and illuminated shaggy fetlocks. Shadows moved about the snow, and the arms of a ghostly figure wrapping its fur coat round it moved, and the light in the curtained window moved. The little nag stood motionless asleep.

Then she saw who it was. She knew him at once by his outline. The limping man took up a lantern and walked away with it. At his heels went two shafts of light, tipping to one side or other, lengthening and shortening, and behind them the sleigh, which swiftly flashed into sight and swifter still plunged back into darkness as it slowly went round the house to the porch at the side.

Strange that Tzvetkov should come across her path here too, in this hamlet outside the town. But it did not surprise Jean at all. She was not very interested in him.

Soon the lantern appeared again and moved steadily past all the curtains, then started back again, and then all at once was on the window-sill behind the same curtain, where it had started.

This was Thursday. On Friday, at last, they sent for her.

IX

When, ten days after her return home, and after more than a three-weeks' break, lessons were resumed, Jean learned all the rest from her tutor. After dinner the doctor got ready and left, and she asked him to give her greetings to the house in which he had treated her that spring, and to all the streets, and to the River Kama. He expressed a hope there would be no more need to send to Perm for him. She went to the gate with that man who had given her such shudders the very first morning when, after coming back from the Defendovs, while Mummy was asleep and nobody was allowed into her room, in answer to her question, what was wrong with Mummy, he began by reminding her that *that* night Daddy and Mummy had gone to the theatre. And that after the play, as the people were coming out, their stallion . . .

"Vykormysh?"

"Yes, if that's what you call him . . . well, Vykormysh, then, got restive and reared and knocked down and crushed a man who happened to be passing. . . ."

"What? Killed him?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"And Mummy?"

"Mummy had a bad shock," and he smiled, having

scarcely thought in time of that way of adapting his Latin *partus praematurus* to a little girl's ears.

"And then my dead little brother was born?"

"Who told you?... Yes."

"But when? Did they see? Or did they find him already dead? Don't tell me. Oh, how horrible. Now I understand. He was already dead, or I should have heard him without their help. Because I was reading. Late that night. I should have heard. But when did he live? Doctor, are such things possible? I even went into the bedroom. He was dead. He must have been."

How lucky that what she had seen from the Defendovs' house, at dawn, had been only last night, and that horror at the theatre three weeks ago! What luck she had recognized him. So much was clear to her—that if she had not seen him at all, after what the doctor had now told her she would have been sure to conclude that it was *he* who had been crushed at the theatre. And so, having spent so much time there and become quite one of the family, the doctor left. That evening her tutor came. It was washing day, and in the kitchen they were mangling the linen. There was hoarfrost on the iron frame, and the garden pressed close to the panes and wrapped itself in the lace curtains and came right up to the table. The jerky rumble of the mangle kept forcing its way into the conversation. Dikikh, like everybody else, found her changed. For that matter, she could see a change in him too.

"Why are you so sad?"

"Am I? Everything's possible. A friend of mine has died."

"You too have your grief? What a lot of deaths—and all at once!" She sighed.

But he had no sooner begun to tell her what sort of friend he had had, when something quite unexpected happened. She suddenly had quite a different view of the number of those who had died, and, evidently forgetting what support she possessed in the lantern she had seen that very morning, was terribly upset and said, "Wait a moment. One day you went to the tobacconist, the day Negarat left, and I saw you with someone else. Was it he?" She was afraid to say "Was it Tzvetkov?"

Dikikh was struck dumb when he heard what she said. He thought back and recalled that indeed they had gone to buy paper about that time and tried to buy a complete Turgeniev for Mrs. Lüvers, and it was true his dead friend had been with him. She shuddered and tears sprang to her eyes. But the principal thing was yet to come.

When, with breaks filled by the rumbling of the mangle, Dikikh had told her what a fine young fellow he had been, and of what a good family, and he at last lit a cigarette, Jean was horrified to see that now only this brief delay still separated her from a repetition of the doctor's story, and when he made an attempt and had got out a few words, including the word *theatre,* Jean suddenly shrieked out, beside herself, and rushed out of the room.

Dikikh listened carefully. There was not a sound in the house but the rumble of the mangle. He rose to his feet, he was like a stork. He stretched out his neck and raised one leg preparing to rush to her help. He made off to find her, being sure nobody else was at home, and she had gone mad. And while he was stumbling in the dark feeling at puzzles of wood, wool and metal, Jean was sitting huddled in a corner sobbing. He went on

fumbling round and searching, in thought already raising her dead body from the floor. He started violently when at his elbow he heard a low sob-broken voice cry, "I'm here. Do be careful, there's a whatnot right beside you. Wait for me in the classroom. I'll be there in a minute."

The curtains reached the floor and the starry winter night outside also swept the floor, and the low drowsy trees, waist-deep in the drifts, dragged their chains of bare branches through the deep snow towards the bright light in the window. And somewhere on the other side of the wall, taut with sheets, the hard rumble of the mangle persisted. And the tutor puzzled—how was one to explain that sudden outburst of sensitivity? Clearly the deceased occupied some very special place in this child's estimation. She had changed so much. He had been explaining repeating decimals to a little girl, but that young woman who had just sent him to the classroom. . . . And that was the work of one month? Obviously the deceased had some time or other made a particularly powerful and inerasable impression on her. . . . Impressions of that sort had a name. How extraordinary it all was. He had given her lessons every other day and had never noticed anything. She was *a frightfully nice* kid, and he was terribly sorry for her. But when on earth would she get that cry over and come? They must all of them be out. "I really am sorry for her. What a remarkable night!"

He was mistaken. The kind of impression he was thinking of did not fit the case at all. He was not mistaken. The impression at the bottom of it all could never be erased. It was far deeper too than he thought. . . . It was beyond the girl's own knowing, because it was

vitally important and significant, and its significance consisted in this being the first time that *another person,* a stranger, had intruded in her life, and it was of no account who this was, or what name the person had, or that neither hatred nor love were aroused; *it was the same person that you get in the commandment form,* when, in speaking to definite names and consciousnesses, it is said thou shalt not steal, and all the rest. Such commandments say, "You, you, particular living individual, do not do to *that hazy generalized person* anything that you, particular living person, do not wish to be done to yourself." Dikikh's most clumsy error was in thinking that impressions of that kind have a name. They have not.

As for her tears, they were because Jean felt she was herself to blame for it all. Was she not responsible for introducing him into the life of the family that day by seeing him across the other garden, and, once having thus noticed him, without need to or purpose or point constantly coming on him, constantly, directly or indirectly, even, as happened on that last occasion, contrary to all possibility?

When she saw which book Dikikh was taking from the shelves she frowned and said "No. I won't do that to-day. Put it back. Please excuse me."

And, without another word, the same hand pushed Lermontov's poem back into the little lop-sided row of classics.

by

MARCEL PROUST

★

SOLE MIO*

When I heard, on the very day upon which we were due to start for Paris, that Mme Putbus, and consequently her maid, had just arrived in Venice, I asked my mother to put off our departure for a few days ; her air of not taking my request into consideration, of not even listening to it seriously, reawakened in my nerves, excited by the Venetian springtime, that old desire to rebel against an imaginary plot woven against me by my parents (who imagined that I would be forced to obey them), that fighting spirit, that desire which drove me in the past to enforce my wishes upon the people whom I loved best in the world, prepared to conform to their wishes after I had succeeded in making them yield. I told my mother that I would not leave Venice, but she, thinking it more to her purpose not to appear to believe that I was saying this seriously, did not even answer. I went on to say that she would soon see whether I was serious or not. And when the hour came at which accompanied by all my luggage, she set off for the station, I ordered a cool drink to be brought out to me on the terrace overlooking the canal, and installed myself there, watching the sunset, while from a boat that had stopped in front of the hotel a musician sang "sole mio".

* Translated from the French by C. K. Scott Moncrieff.

The sun continued to sink. My mother must be nearing the station. Presently, she would be gone, I should be left alone in Venice, alone with the misery of knowing that I had distressed her, and without her presence to comfort me. The hour of the train approached. My irrevocable solitude was so near at hand that it seemed to me to have begun already and to be complete. For I felt myself to be alone. Things had become alien to me. I was no longer calm enough to draw from my throbbing heart and introduce into them a measure of stability. The town that I saw before me had ceased to be Venice. Its personality, its name, seemed to me to be lying fictions which I no longer had the courage to impress upon its stones. I saw the palaces reduced to their constituent parts, lifeless heaps of marble with nothing to choose between them, and the water as a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, eternal, blind, anterior and exterior to Venice, unconscious of Doges or of Turner. And yet this unremarkable place was as strange as a place at which we have just arrived, which does not yet know us—as a place which we have left and which has forgotten us already. I could not tell it anything more about myself, I could leave nothing of myself imprinted upon it, it left me diminished, I was nothing more than a heart that throbbed, and an attention strained to follow the development of "sole mio". In vain might I fix my mind despairingly upon the beautiful and characteristic arch of the Rialto, it seemed to me, with the mediocrity of the obvious, a bridge not merely inferior to but as different from the idea that I possessed of it as an actor with regard to whom, notwithstanding his fair wig and black garments, we know quite well that in his essential quality he

is not Hamlet. So the palaces, the canal, the Rialto became divested of the idea that created their individuality and disintegrated into their common material elements. But at the same time this mediocre place seemed to me remote. In the basin of the arsenal, because of an element which itself also was scientific, namely latitude, there was that singularity in things which, even when similar in appearance to those of our own land, reveal that they are aliens, in exile beneath a foreign sky; I felt that that horizon so close at hand, which I could have reached in an hour, was a curve of the earth quite different from those made by the seas of France, a remote curve which, by the accident of travel, happened to be moored close to where I was; so that this arsenal basin, at once insignificant and remote, filled me with that blend of disgust and alarm which I had felt as a child when I first accompanied my mother to the Deligny baths; indeed in that fantastic place consisting of a dark water reflecting neither sky nor sun, which nevertheless amid its fringe of cabins one felt to be in communication with invisible depths crowded with human bodies in bathing dresses, I had asked myself whether those depths, concealed from mortal eyes by a row of cabins which prevented anyone in the street from suspecting that they existed, were not the entry to arctic seas which began at that point, whether the Poles were not comprised in them and whether that narrow space was not indeed the open water that surrounds the Pole. This Venice without attraction for myself in which I was going to be left alone, seemed to me no less isolated, no less unreal, and it was my distress which the sound of "sole mio", rising like a dirge for the Venice that I had known, seemed to be calling

to witness. No doubt I ought to have ceased to listen to it if I wished to be able to overtake my mother and to join here on the train, I ought to have made up my mind without wasting another instant that I was going, but this is just what I was powerless to do; I remained motionless, incapable not merely of rising, but even of deciding that I would rise from my chair.

My mind, doubtless in order not to have to consider the question of making a resolution, was entirely occupied in following the course of the successive lines of "sole mio", singing them mentally with the singer, in anticipating for each of them the burst of melody that would carry it aloft, in letting myself soar with it, and fall to earth again with it afterwards.

No doubt this trivial song which I had heard a hundred times did not interest me in the least degree. I could afford no pleasure to anyone else, or to myself, by listening to it religiously like this to the end. In fact, none of the elements, familiar beforehand, of this popular ditty was capable of furnishing me with the resolution of which I stood in need ; what was more, each of these phrases when it came and passed in its turn, became an obstacle in the way of my making that resolution effective, or rather it forced me to adopt the contrary resolution not to leave Venice, for it made me too late for the train. Wherefore this occupation, devoid of any pleasure in itself, of listening to "sole mio", was charged with a profound, almost despairing melancholy. I knew very well that in reality it was the resolution not to go that I had adopted by the mere act of remaining where I was ; but to say to myself: " I am not going," a speech which in that direct form was impossible, became possible in this indirect form : " I am going

to listen to one more line of ' sole mio' "; but the practical significance of this figurative language did not escape me and, while I said to myself: "After all, I am only listening to another line," I knew that the words meant: "I shall remain by myself at Venice." And it was perhaps this melancholy, like a sort of numbing cold, that constituted the desperate but fascinating charm of the song. Each note that the singer's voice uttered with a force and ostentation that were almost muscular came and pierced my heart; when he had uttered his last flourish and the song seemed to be at an end, the singer had not had enough and repeated it an octave higher as though he needed to proclaim once again my solitude and despair.

My mother must by now have reached the station. In a little while she would be gone. My heart was wrung by the anguish that was caused me by—with a view of the Canal that had become quite tiny now that the soul of Venice had escaped from it, of that commonplace Rialto which was no longer the Rialto,—the wail of despair that "sole mio" had become, which, declaimed thus before the unsubstantial palaces, reduced them to dust and ashes and completed the ruin of Venice; I looked on at the slow realization of my misery built up artistically, without haste, note by note, by the singer as he stood beneath the astonished gaze of the sun arrested in its course beyond San Giorgio Maggiore, with the result that the fading light was to combine for ever in my memory with the throb of my emotion and the bronze voice of the singer in a dubious, unalterable and poignant alloy.

Thus I remained motionless with a disintegrated will-power, with no apparent decision; doubtless at such

moments our decision has already been made: our friends can often predict it themselves. But we, we are unable to do so, otherwise how much suffering would we be spared!

But at length, from caverns darker than that from which flashes the comet which we can predict,—thanks to the unimaginable defensive force of inveterate habit, thanks to the hidden reserves which by a sudden impulse habit hurls at the last moment into the fray—my activity was roused at length; I set out in hot haste and arrived, when the carriage doors were already shut, but in time to find my mother flushed with emotion, overcome by the effort to restrain her tears, for she thought that I was not coming. Then the train started and we saw Padua and Verona come to meet us, to speed us on our way, almost on to the platforms of their stations, and, when we had drawn away from them, return—they who were not travelling and were about to resume their normal life—one to its plain, the other to its hill.

by

A. RABOY

*

ALONE*

The sun forced an entry through the blind, stealthily, as if it feared to be caught in the act; but all was quiet in the tiny room; only the birds could be heard trilling their morning song on the other side of the window.

On the bedstead a shock of fair hair tossed restlessly, and beneath a silvery pale brow two eyes opened with a glitter which faded and then flared up again; she gazed around her in bewilderment, as if to seek a joyous dream that had oozed away from within herself. . . .

She started up, for she imagined that the hour was late and that she had overslept herself, although actually she could hear no voice bawling at her:

"Hannah! Han-nah!"

And she grew all flustered.

Directly afterwards, however, she recollected that the master and mistress had gone away to their country estate, and that she was herself mistress of the house for the time being, free to stay in bed a little longer, free to stretch her limbs this way and that, just as she pleased.

She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes: no, she was not dreaming, she really was alone in the house.

And it was round this awareness that all her thoughts

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

began to centre, merging after a weary uphill climb in the realization that she was alone—with *him,* the two of them all alone in the house, . . .

The day before, her employers had left for their estate. He, the dutiful son, had been there to see them off, and she stood at his side in the porch. The master and mistress, settling down comfortably in the carriage, turned their heads for the last farewell. Something within her began to struggle for expression. Should she say it, or should she not? At one moment the inclination to speak mastered her, at the next a feeling of reluctance gained the upper hand. And when the driver clucked to his horses, a cry rose up from her bosom :

"Don't leave me!"

But the cry was stifled in her breast. And when only a pillar of dust was visible, beyond which the carriage had vanished, he turned and exclaimed "There!" in a strange drawl, which set all the seethings within her into even greater agitation. All she did was heave a gentle but deep sigh: "Aah!" and he raised his eyes to her—with a flash like lightning in a dark night. It had been a heart-breaking task to go to sleep that night.

And now, on awakening, she at once recalled that troubled look of his. She did not want to understand its significance. And so as to forget, she transferred her gaze to the window, where the shaft of sunbeams caught her eye. How kind the sunlight was that morning, like a tender caress! Strange, how sweet it could be. Yesterday and all the many yesterdays before that, the sunshine had chased her out of bed ; ere she had fully opened her eyes, it came to rest upon the quilt, rousing her, curtly summoning her to her labour. Even if she got down and adjusted the blind so as to cover every chink, still the

sun succeeded in finding its way in, to remind her that broad daylight had come and that she must rise. But now, hark at the birds singing: how lovely their twitter was to-day! These were not the cussed creatures she had always known them to be. Yesterday and the day before that they had sounded as if they were gnashing their teeth at her, scolding:

"Get the samovar ready, you lazy idle wench! Lay the fire in the range! Dust the furniture! . . . Look, there's a spoon missing! Mind you don't break the crockery!"

To-day the selfsame birds were singing so joyously, it touched her to the quick.

So she burst into song herself, accompanying the birds.

And then again she saw that peculiar look he had given her yesterday in the dusky porch, and to expel this from her sight, she jumped out of bed, ran to the blind, raised it and capered about in her bare feet.

And the pillar of sunbeams caught her up in its embrace, hugging her tight. . . . She spread out her arms as though to return the embrace. A tremor passed over her fresh body. She kissed her clasped arms.

After that she put her clothes on, singing a mirthful ditty the while.

. . . . .

It was her intention to enter the front room, but for some reason she simply could not bring herself to cross the threshold, as though an invisible creature at her side were saying: "Stop! Stop!" When, at last, she parted the heavy curtains in the doorway, large beads of perspiration arose on her face.. . . Yes, to be sure, someone was whispering a secret into her ear, *He's there in the front room,* and again, but more faintly now, so that only her

heart could hear it—no, she refused to listen, it made her feel coy. . . .

She entered the room wiping the perspiration off her face and at a loss what to do with herself. Actually she had meant to get some work done, but in spite of herself she fumbled everything. Somehow her eyes just would not stay still. Now they were looking straight at him, gazing into his own eyes, reading their message. Oh dear, what things she saw written there ! . . .

He was silent—why didn't he say something? As if he really cared about smoking that cigar and examining the accounts ! The deceitful creature ! Indulging in a game of make-believe! His eyes were so strained, they kept blinking unnaturally.

She went out again, meaning to fetch some water to spray the flower-pots.

When she got back to her own room, however, she went up to her private box instead; flinging it open angrily at first, she quickly checked herself and lovingly rummaging in its contents, brought to light a red ribbon and a string of white beads. Having put the beads round her neck, and forming the ribbon into a rosette, she ran up to the tiny looking-glass, tucked the rosette into her hair above the ear, and after regarding her reflection for a while, burst into a hilarious peal of laughter.

She wandered about the front room. Now she was busy opening the windows; now she was closing the windows. She shut them always with a slam. After each slam, she paused as though waiting for something to happen; then she opened the selfsame window once more.

He sat making entries into a ledger, only pausing every now and then to take a puff at his cigar, having replaced which on the ash-tray, he would go on writing, open up his lips and let a column of smoke roll forth as if he were a chimney—all in utter silence. Never a word, never a peep—nothing doing. . . .

And yet when she had her back turned to him, she was aware that his eyes were raised and glued to her figure. She even sensed that his lips were moving, and soon he would venture a remark. She felt an uncontrollable urge to face him and let their eyes meet. But no sooner did she stir the least bit, than it was all over. Once more he sat with his eyes lowered, as before.

She had a good mind to prop herself up on the table and look straight into his face and ask him why had he spoken to her yesterday and the day before that, why had he always looked her way, even smiling at her sometimes, whereas now———

What now?

As a matter of fact her heart knew the answer, but she dreaded to brood on it.

She went out onto the balcony, and placing her hands on her hips, began to skip till the bunch of keys at her side were loudly ringing. And her gaze dwelt on the trees, on the playful flight of the birds and a wish-fancy took possession of her, which carried her far away : she was a tiny little girl Hannah, and he was a tiny little boy Isaac, and the balcony with the room behind it was her father's place. And little Isaac came visiting her and they both played at blind man's buff and "kings and queens"—and after that. . .. No, but really she was

Hannah, the daughter of poor humble folk, a maid-servant; and he was Isaac, the precious son of Mr. Solomon Trask—his father's book-keeper. And now she was going to go into the front room and sit down at the table opposite him. And he would gaze straight into her eyes, fondle her name:

"Hannah, Hannah! . . ."

There, someone was calling her indoors. With the master and mistress away, who could it be?

"Hannah! Han-nah!"

Could it be he who was calling for her? No, only her imagination!

"Chirri-ri-ri!" chirruped a bird, as it poised on a swaying twig opposite her.

So, indeed, the bird was mocking her, jeering at her:

" Chirri-ri-ri!"

Wearying now of the outlook, she went inside again, closed the door gently behind her, tiptoed up to the large mirror and stopped dead. And no sooner did she see the reflection of his face, his eyes, his smile, than she too melted into a smile.

Now she did not find the rosette over her ear quite so becoming; she therefore tucked it into her hair at the top of her head, just between her two plaits, and letting one plait dangle on her breast she took the other between her fingers, twirling it round and round. Again she saw his eyes, his face, and a thought crossed her mind that he was about to get up and join her. For a while she stood there motionless, as if petrified.

Then she heard a voice ripple through the air:

"You're looking very pretty to-day, Hannah. . . ."

And a great many more things did she hear in that bated breathing of the word "Hannah". And at first

she felt like telling him off. Next an urge came over her to run along and throw her arms around his neck. But some creature nestling under her bosom benumbed her desire; each time the temptation returned, she dissipated it with a jerk of the head—*No!* And furthermore that selfsame creature kept telling her that he was only in a teasing mood... .

. . . . .

The hour was late. So she lowered the blind to undress —no, to wrench the clothes off her body. Then she put the lamp out and got into bed, with the firm intention of going to sleep, thus, her eyes tightly shut! But the bed gave out a creak, and under her bosom something went pit-a-pat. . . .

In her tiny room all was dark and quiet. From his bedroom came a jangle of coins—a perturbing sound. That was him, throwing down his trousers. What did he mean by that? No, she had heard nothing—mere imagination. . . .

And when she at last began to doze off, she fancied herself a dead weight, beneath which the bedstead gave way, till suddenly it hit the floor. Rebounding in fright, she very nearly fell out of bed. Then, opening her eyes, she laughed to herself. How silly—only a dream!

She glanced all round the room, and when she got to the curtains leading into the front room, an uneasy misgiving took possession of her, for they seemed to be parting—ever so gradually. Perhaps she had really dropped out of bed and he, hearing the bang, was coming in to see what had happened.

Again she felt like laughing aloud:

''Hannah, you silly girl, you've only been dreaming!"

Nevertheless something kept pecking away at her brain. And from her bosom a cry went up :

"Who's there?"

But when the cry reached her throat, it was throttled, for surely she was dreaming again. Or maybe she had already cried out "Who's there?" and no one answered. And possibly someone had answered her, but she was unable to hear for drowsiness. . . .

At last the cry tore itself out of her throat *Who's there?* and rasped through the darkness. Immediately after she heard a voice say *Me,* in such a pleading tone of voice.

And she felt like screaming :

"Get away, or I'll cry for help !"

. . . . .

And she went on dreaming, and she fancied :

She had her eyes open. . . . She was reclining on the bed, and the tiny room was flooded with light. . . . He came in to join her. He approached the bed, smiling. . . . And he did not confess that it was he who had hidden behind the curtain. Only she guessed it from his smile. And this time she did not shriek : "Go away !"

She was running down the street. . . . And a horde of youngsters were chasing her, with pebbles in their hands. . . . On she ran, on and on, until she reached a fence. And at the fence someone had found a corpse. . . . And there was a big bloodstain. She fell with her face upon the stain. On her own face too was a stain. . . . And the ruffians behind her let loose with the pebbles, mocking her, shouting catcalls. . . . The stones piling up on top of her grew heavier, more oppressive, till she became a big lifeless mound. . ..

In her tiny room, in the very centre ... a large bedstead. . . . Someone on it was tossing about and sticking out a long spiteful tongue at her. . . .

She was all naked . . . and she pulled the quilt up. . . . But some weird and dreadful affliction hovered over her, tugging the quilt away. And now the affliction was strangling her, strangling her. . . .

And all the while, as she lay there, she knew inside of her that she was in dreamland. After each distinct dream, she fought to open her eyes, shake off the nightmare, but someone was stopping her, frightening her. Again a desire rose up within her, beseeching her to cry: "Isaac! . . ." And when this desire came surging up, she could have sworn that the dreadful affliction sensed it, and extended its hands towards her. . . . And again she was seized with terror. . . .

After that she uttered a shriek—"Isaac!"—which made the windows reverberate. . . . And straight away she opened her eyes, looked about her in search of the dreadful affliction.

And she saw him standing beside her bed. A little soothed now, although a flutter went palpitating through her breast, she lay silent. . . .

He gave her a caress. . . . How hot his hands were. . . . scorching. . . .

by

JONAH ROSENFELD

★

RIVALS*

Two iron bedsteads, a faded frameless mirror, a lemon-box used as a cabinet, a couple of chairs with rickety legs, and a table which refuses to stand up straight—that's my furniture.

A big mouth, bluish lips, a shrill voice and moist, for ever tearful, tiny eyes—that's my wife.

A sharp-spoken little girl of ten, with small foxy eyes —a creature all skin and bones and restless as a chick— that's my daughter.

And a wonderfully clever little boy, skinny and wizened like an old man—that's my son. He looks about five, but is really seven.

My third child is two years old. In size she's a dwarf, but she yells and shrieks just like a giant.

A little chap with a short sparse beard, small dark eyes—that's me, me in person, my wife's husband and the father of the three children. What is my business? I have no business. I merely do the work that my wife ought to do.

Very early in the morning, as soon as I get up, I lay the fire and put the kettle on to boil. Then I bring my wife a cup of tea in bed, and hustle her out into the market. Next, I turn to the kids, dress them, wash them

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Krcitman.**

and give them their food. Not that that is always such an easy matter. More often than not, baby cries for her mother and my little boy follows her example. At which I snatch the infant up in my arms, run to the window and start beating a tattoo on the panes. I drum on the table, I tinkle a tumbler, I click my tongue and while holding the infant in my arms, pacify my little boy too. I play gee-gees with him. Sometimes he is the horse and I the coachman: at other times we change places. Sometimes I play soldiers with him. He orders me about. I order him about.

"Left turn! Quick march! One, two! One, two!"

And when I have hushed them, I make the beds, sweep the floor and put the dinner on. And no sooner is it cooked, than I grab hold of a saucepan, pour a portion into it, I wash up a dirty bowl and spoon and—I'm off! (There being no such thing as a clock in the home, I am always under the impression that I'm behind.) And my heart is all a-flutter.

Here at last are the three-walled market-booths and the stalls in between the booths and around the booths. On the stalls and under the stalls and all round the stalls, lie great heaps of onions and radishes, beetroots and cabbages, turnips and carrots, potatoes and horse-radishes, and such-like vegetables—bitter, sweet, sour and tasteless. Beside one of these stalls laden with greens, I catch sight of my wife.

Very often, as I rush along, I spill the soup all over my coat. And when do I notice it? Only when my wife starts goggling at me with those sheepish eyes of hers, and she welcomes me with a muffled curse.

"What's up?" I ask.

"Look at yourself!"

I do, and find that everybody around us is chuckling merrily. One woman, in fact, with a weatherbeaten, healthy-looking face, who sits opposite my wife, laughs so heartily, that she holds on to her belly as she rocks to and fro. Meanwhile my missus slily pinches me in the calf of the leg.

Not that I always get let off so lightly. Quite often, when she's had her fill of pinching me in the rear, it's just the beginning of things. Why, if it's only pinching that she's going to do to me, I thank my lucky stars. Sometimes she bides her time and makes a proper scene when she comes home in the evening, because she simply prays to Heaven for some excuse to start on me. However, I'm no softling, and answer her back two to one, and occasionally this leads up to a real war: she gives me a push, so I give her a shove; she smacks me in the face, so I punch her in the ribs. That sets her shrieking, and the kids start keeping her company.

I take my hat and away I go as fast as my legs will carry me. But little by little, without noticing it, I slow down, till finally I come to a stop and gaze upon the ground and into the sky, at the houses around and at the passers-by. And just as I stopped without myself noticing it, so now, without being conscious of it, I turn back and, with a heavy heart and bowed head, trudge along, step by step, until I reach my home.

There I steal up to the window and peep into my basement, where I see my little wench—that is, my eldest daughter—hard at work, eagerly helping her mother undress the children, putting first one, then the other to bed. After which she dutifully helps her mother to remove those heavy boots of hers. And I think to myself: surely, here is a future rival of mine. There can

be no mistake about it, she's mighty pleased to see me out of the way, and I can tell that she is doing her very best to show her mother that the family can get along quite nicely without me.

When the light goes out, I press my face against one of the panes and look in. I see nothing and yet I see (in my imagination) a woman lying in bed, with a child beside her, and crossways, at the foot of the bed, a little girl of ten. And in the bed opposite lies her husband, a lazy dog, who is pleasing neither in the sight of God nor of his fellow men. And at his side lies a being who belongs both to him and her—a little boy. They are all of them skinny and dwarfed, so that moulded together they might form one goodly sized human being.

I grow tired of standing at the window, turn to the world behind me, releasing a long pent-up, hissing breath, and I look up at the stars. I brood over them and try hard to discover something in them—I know not what. The sky comes closer and closer to me, and now I seem to be level with it, so that I am no longer gazing upwards at the sky, but downwards at the earth. I begin to feel quite big.

But the instant I step across the threshold of my home, I get all crushed. Somehow I feel that my mouth has dwindled to a weeny stripe, and just like a silly little urchin I steal my way to the table and eat of the loaf of bread with a mighty appetite. Only my wife is such a terribly light sleeper, she wakes up at once and starts heaping upon me the foulest of curses. I go up to her and promise that it will never happen again, and that henceforth I am going to behave like a gentleman. She falls silent—that means forgiveness.

Having got so far, I undress and stealthily creep into

her bed. She feigns sleep, and I pretend that it is so. What difference does it make to me? Let her go on thinking that she deceives me. . . . And thus, drowsily, has she borne me three children. We get up the next morning on bad terms, as though neither of us knew anything about it.

Once, on a Thursday morning, I put a basin of hot water on the fire and, as usual, went up to my daughter, meaning to undo her pigtails before washing her hair. But suddenly, like a rabbit, she bounded out of my reach, and turned on me with a flushed sulky face. I asked her :

"What's the idea?"

She made no reply, but gave me a wicked look and sulked worse than ever. So I asked her again :

" What's the idea?"

Again she made no reply.

"Don't you want to have your hair washed?"

"I don't need you to wash my hair for me," she replied, dropping her head and playing with her fingers.

"What do you mean?"

" I can do it myself."

"You don't want me to do it for you?"

"No!"

"Why?"

"I can do it myself."

That was too bad! However, I wasn't going to waste any tears over it. I next turned my attention to the hearth and tried to get the water to heat up as quickly as possible, so as to wash the other two kids. And when the water was warm, I went up to my little boy and started to undress him. But she jumped in as though from

nowhere, caught hold of his hand and tore him away from me.

"What's the meaning of this?"

She held his little hand and said not a word.

"What's the meaning of this?"

She made no reply.

So I went up and tried to take him from her, but she held tight and, speaking through her nose, said :

" I'll wash him myself."

That was the latest !

"What do you mean, you'll wash him? "

I smelled a rat. I dragged the boy my way, and she dragged him her way.

I stopped to look at her for a while, and then asked :

" How did you suddenly get that idea into your head, of you washing yourself and washing him?"

"It's 'cos I feel sorry for Mother. 'S a shame!" she answered.

" 'Cos you feel sorry for Mother? "

"'S a shame! Mother has to work so hard and feed you."

"Go on, I'm listening!"

" And if I wash myself and dress Yankele and Mindel, then you'll be able to go out and earn a bit."

"What?"

She was silent.

"TOM," I said, "will dress Yankele and Mindel, feed them and tidy the place up?"

" Sure ! Nothing wonderful in that. And then you'll be able to go out to work and earn a living."

Indeed! Why indeed, nothing wonderful in that! And to think the way I have to slave all day, all the work I get through. What with baby for ever tearing

handfuls of my beard out and myself getting hoarse lulling her to sleep. . . . So she'd actually tell me there's nothing wonderful in that. Tell me to go out and earn my living. In other words, she meant that I didn't earn my food by the work I did in the home : I was just an extra mouth to feed, kept on charity. And she was trying to oust me.

Very well then, what would become of me? What would I do? Turn a professional nursemaid, maybe? A nursemaid ! As if I was fit for anything else. . . . But no, I wasn't going to stand for that sort of talk. Would a little brat like her drive me out of the home? Sooner than that, I'd drive her out of the home. Now that my livelihood, my daily bread, was in danger, I'd stand for no more nonsense. By God, I'd make a fight of it!

" I say, come here. Who put this idea into your head? Your mother?"

"No, myself!"

" Yourself?"

"Yes, myself."

"What do you mean, yourself? You thought of this yourself? Didn't your mother tell you to say it? "

"No!"

"No?"

"No!"

" In other words, you say it yourself? "

"Myself. Mother never told me to say it."

" In other words, you want to drive me out of the house?"

She made no reply. I caught hold of her by her pigtail.

"Are you aware," I said, "that I am your father?"

She tried to escape.

"Are you aware," I said to her, "that I am your

father? And a father can do to his child what he likes. I can kill you if I want to. Are you aware that it is a father's duty to punish his child, and if that child goes wrong, he can even murder it? Are you aware of that?"

Apparently I had been shouting at the top of my voice, for baby woke up. She tore herself out of my grasp, ran up to the cradle and began rocking it to sleep and singing it a lullaby—none other than the lullaby I always use. Now at this point I really lost my temper. What right had she to rock baby to sleep with a lullaby which I myself had thought out of my own head? It was absolutely the last straw. With firm tread, I went up to the cradle, bundled her out of the way and myself began lulling baby to sleep:

"Oy, lu-lu, my pretty rose,
Mother will buy you lovely clothes,
Father will wash you, put you to bed,
Mother will bring you newly baked bread,
She'll bring you a hot currant bun,
Now close your eyes, my pretty one!
Oy, lu-lu, lu! Oy, lu, lu!"

Honestly, I must say that never in all her life will she be able to lull a baby to sleep in quite the same way as **I do it.**

"You can get out of here!" she burst out suddenly. "I can rock baby to sleep myself."

Ah, so it had come to that! All well and good then, I would have to teach her a lesson!

I whipped the belt off my trousers and laid about me with all my might—over her head, over her face, over her shoulders.

"Take that, and that, and that! I'll show you, cheeking your own father. I'll show you! I'll show you! I'll

give you something to remember me by! I'll give you something to remember me by!"

At the sight of her, the other two kids started squealing too, and this was more than flesh and blood could stand. I went for all of them, lashing out right and left for all I was worth. Afterwards, I painfully plucked my own beard. I went up to the window, propped my elbows on the frame and had a good cry.

In the evening, when their mother came home, they flocked round her at once and began telling her, each in his own way, how I had beaten them, and they started crying all over again. Hearing this piece of news, my old woman sat down on the bed like a dummy, propped her elbows on her knees, sank her head in her hands, and from time to time gave me a bitter look, it made my blood run cold again and again.

"How is it all going to end?" she asked all at once, raising her head, with eyes brimming over like watercans.

I was silent.

"What's to be done? I'm talking to you. . . ."

What could I say?

"You know, you ought to be locked up in a lunatic asylum."

I was sorely tempted to ask her for what good reason did she consider me a lunatic. Was it so unusual for a father to beat his children?

"I ask you," she went on. "All this time I've been keeping you, giving you food and drink, clothes and shoes. Eleven years now, ever since we got married! Not once have you earned the price of a dinner. I'm so poorly, my strength is giving out. I just hang on to life by a thread. Why do you cling to me like a millstone

round my neck? As if bringing the children up wasn't enough, I have to provide for you too. Answer me, have you ever heard of such a thing?"

Tears actually started to my eyes. Never before had she spoken in that way.

"Mierela," I pleaded with her, "she insulted me so badly. She ordered me out of the house. I'm her father, after all, and it made my heart bleed. Fancy a child driving her own father out of the home! Really, have you ever heard of such a thing? Do be fair with me."

" Call yourself a father, a man? You stay at home and leave your wife to be the breadwinner."

" *So you* told her to say that? "

She looked at me woodenly, seemingly unable to understand my question.

"So you told her to drive me out of the house?"

She was silent with a deep silence, then sighed with a great sigh, and looked at me with such a look, that my blood froze.

" So it was you who told her to wash the children herself? As if she could wash them properly! As if she could hold baby in her arms without dropping her!"

"I can do it better than he can!"

"Stop telling lies, you filthy hussy! All you can do is cheek your own father!"

" And all *he* can do is beat her," my wife put in.

" Ah, so there you go! A pretty joke, don't you think, eh? You don't care a bit! Let me tell you, though, that afterwards she'll cheek you an' all! If you knew your duty as a mother, you would get up right now and smack her brazen face for her."

"For God's sake, leave me alone, will you!" my wife screamed at me.

And there the matter ended. She heaved a sigh or two, and went to bed.

And so I kept my position in the home. Never do I let my daughter go anywhere near the baby, nor do I allow her to do any housework whatsoever. I won't even permit her to wash her own hair. And when I comb it for her, I always tear huge clumps out.

Thank God! I have made things safe for myself for some time to come. My one hope had been that my wife might have a new baby. In that happy event, I would have nothing to fear at all from my rival. I see quite plainly that she has made her mind up to get rid of me. In fact, she has as good as told me the reason why. She asked her mother for a new cotton frock; mother probably said she couldn't afford it, and the little brat, young as she is, came to the conclusion that it was all through me. She figured it out that if she were to remain alone, in charge of the home, then her mother would jolly well have to get that new frock. Consequently, the little wench tried to give me the push. And, to speak the truth, deep in my heart I very much feared that she was going to succeed in the long run. But who takes any notice of her now? Now that my wife is with child, I am indispensable. Knowing that would be so, I saw to it. Not that it was by any means an easy task. She would not have me come near her. No longer did she pretend to be asleep.

"You old tramp! Want to give me some more children, do you? Haven't I got enough?" she would say to me, twisting herself all of a heap.

But no matter how it happened, the fact remains it did.

I feel big, even in the presence of my wife. I am

proud of myself when I see her standing there in front of me with her pointed belly. I am conscious that I am a man and she—is my wife. . . .

Being so pleased with myself, I go out for a stroll every evening after supper. I fold my hands behind my back, thrust my belly forward (I make believe that I have a big belly) and walk along slowly, taking tiny steps. Likewise: one, two, one, two! It makes no difference to me if it rains or snows or the night is moonlit, I don't care a bit. And even though it may be chilly, I take off my hat and give my head an airing. I am very fond of my headpiece, for it is no fool : it understands a thing or two.

Having had my stroll, I go back home, do not enter on tip-toe, but stride in with firm tread and station myself in the very middle of the room, where I survey my worldly goods: One, two, three—three little human beings—but for me, they would be non-existent. These three little human beings, who are now lying fast asleep, are mine, my very own, my flesh and blood. The three little human beings are part of myself. I am—part of them. And my missus is my own too. She belongs to no person other than myself. Within her womb lies a piece of me. Altogether then, we number: one, two, three; my wife, four; the unborn child, five; myself included, six in all. Therefore I am six—and the six are myself. To think that I alone fill up the whole of this room. So that's who I am! Well now, folks, good night to you all!

• • • • •

I am in tatters. For a long while now I have been summoning up courage to ask my wife to get me something decent to put on. For this is my golden oppor-

tunity, and it is now or never. Only I am always putting it off for to-morrow, and meanwhile time is running short. Any day now she may be in childbed, and then it will be too late.

So it came about that I worked my mind up into such a state, that one day I made a vow that, happen what might, when she came home in the evening, I would ask her. The moment she entered, I rushed up to help her off with her jacket and I shook the snow from it.

I may honestly say that never will a gallant, whatever his breeding, succeed in paying attentions to his lady love in quite the same style as I did to my wife that evening. However, I still said not a word. My tongue simply failed me.

Only when she had begun undressing, to go to bed, did I approach her and stand before her motionless like a sentry, and after keeping this up for a few minutes, all at once—in a mute language of signs—I drew her attention to the terribly shabby state I was in from head to foot. She gave me a stupid sort of look. Evidently she didn't guess what I was trying to convey to her. So I stood there another few minutes, and then tried again. I bent down and pointed out my footwear, then I patted my hat. Still she went on looking at me. Finally, I began to show her piecemeal. I raised first one foot, displayed my boot—then the other foot. After that I showed her my trousers, first the front view, and then, straight away turning my back on her without ceremony, the rear view. Next I thrust my elbows into her face, poking first one, then the other, through the holes in my sleeves.

"What's the idea? What are you standing on top of me for, like a dummy?" my wife asked suddenly.

I was silent.

" Stop those monkey tricks. Are you paralysed? "

I did not budge.

Just then, baby woke up and started to whimper. My rival and I both made a dash for the cradle. However, she got there first and began to lull it to sleep. I was neither here nor there now, and did not know which way to turn. To be sure, she was lulling baby to sleep excellently, like a mother of long standing. In a perfect frenzy, I rushed up to the cradle and snatched out the infant, although it was just on the point of dozing off again; taking me by surprise, though, my daughter tore it from out of my arms and ran up with it to her mother. At this point I gave up the chase, as though it concerned me not in the least. I went back to my former position, and stood quite motionless.

"Look at the way you're holding that baby," I yelled out suddenly, although actually my rival was handling it better than I ever did.

"Mind your own business," she answered me back.

The impudence !

"What do you mean, my business? You're twisting the child's arms out of their sockets."

" Never you mind !"

"What d'you mean, never I mind? I'm the child's father!"

"Never you mind !"

"What d'you mean, never I mind? Aren't I the child's father?"

" All right, all right," she answered me, sullenly.

"What do you mean, all right? Malka, my dearie, just come here, will you !"

"What are you going to do to her?" my wife asked. " Can't you give the girl some peace? "

"What do you mean, what am I going to do to her? She's twisting baby's arms out of their sockets. I'm the child's father, and it makes my heart ache."

"Well, don't take any notice."

"What do you mean?"

"Are you going to make a move, or aren't you going to make a move?"

" Look at the state of my clothes !"

"Are you going to get out of my sight? "

"Yes, but just have a look. . . ."

" I f anybody needs some new clothes, it's me," my rival put in. "I haven't got a frock to my back."

The little imp!

" Go to blazes !" my wife said to me.

"But just have a look how shabby I am!"

"For God's sake, clear out of my sight!"

I remained where I was.

She cut the argument short by jumping up and snatching the rolling-pin from its resting-place on the wall, and brandished it wildly over my head.

The children raised a hullabaloo. As for my rival, apparently she caught fright and let the baby drop. Ah, splendid! ... I forgot about my wife and her rolling-pin, I jumped up to my eldest daughter, caught hold of her by her hair, dragged her all over the floor as though she were a cur, and kicked her in the back for all I was worth. And meanwhile, like the devoted father I was, I shouted: "Take that, and that! I'll show you how to handle baby! I'll show you!"

The place was filled with squealing, like a live-stock market crowded with pigs. The baby and my eldest daughter sprawled over the floor, shrieking with all their might. My little boy buried his face into his skirt and

yelled into it. As for my wife, she stood stockstill like a perfect dummy, not knowing what to do first: ought she to beat me, or pick baby up from the floor, or pacify her boy, or see to her eldest daughter? Her eyes had a queer, crazy look in them. Suddenly she burst into tears and started pulling her own hair like a madwoman, and I, thinking that she had taken leave of her senses, raised the alarm, running up to the window and beating my fists on the pane, so as to call the neighbours in.

* . . . *

My good fortune was soon to pass. The new baby departed this earthly life only three months after its birth. Yes, when first I laid eyes upon that newborn creature, I at once felt a pang which foretold that my good fortune would not last, for the infant was born only to die.

The circumcision ceremony was delayed for a month after the baby's arrival. My rival was loath to touch the poor thing because it was uncircumcized. My wife left her stall in the market several times during the day, specially to come and give it suck, although none of her other children had ever been breast-fed, except for the few days of her confinement, after which I would give them the bottle.

How great was my happiness on the day of the circumcision ceremony! Was there anyone then to compare his bliss with mine? Hands were stretched out to me from all sides : "Congratulations, father! Congratulations!" I felt that it was good to be alive, that I too occupied a certain place in life. But my joy was not destined to last. After the circumcision, the child took a turn for the worse. Possibly, if it had not been for her—my rival—the infant might have lingered on for another

six months or so, but she worried him to death. She was always leaving the door open, walking in and out for no good reason at all, except to create a draught, and she wasn't shocked in the least when I would say to her now and again: "You little slut, are you trying to do the child in?" No, she was not taken aback at all, and would answer me back, brazenly: "Well, supposing I am? Who's afraid of you?"

All during its lifetime, I was the only person to give it any care and attention. No one would touch the thing. It really was a repulsive creature, nothing better than a freak. Its face was long and distended, looking like a squashed pickled cucumber. It never had an ounce of flesh on it, its skin hung down like an empty bag. When I held it in my arms, my fingers would get tangled up in its body, so that I had to place it on a cushion.

But the night it died, strangely enough, I saw it in an altogether more favourable light. I no longer thought of it as of an infant, but as of a grown man, who knows and understands all. And, as is customary, I began to feel afraid of it. Standing next to the child, I trembled lest it guessed my thoughts. I imagined that now it knew everything—knew that I had loathed it with an even greater loathing than had the others.

My family were all asleep. It must have been about three in the morning. It was a dark night out. A terrible wind hissed at the window, and every now and again hurled whole drifts of snow against the panes.

When the infant had reached its last earthly moments, I lit a candle and looked it straight in the face. It lay quite calm, save for its little chest heaving violently. Its eyes were closed peacefully, but an instant before its death, they suddenly opened wide—such clear, coal-

black eyes, and immediately rested their gaze upon me. "Forgive me!" I said to it. And no sooner had I spoken these words, than the eyes coated over with a film and remained thus open.

I covered the little corpse over with a black shawl. I took the candle and stuck it down at the child's head. And as for myself, I began pacing the room with heavy tread, my head bowed.

All at once I waxed indignant: Why should I alone bear this punishment of keeping watch over a corpse? I went straight up to my wife, gave her a shove and said: "Get up! The child is dead!" She roused herself all bewildered. Next I went up to my rival, and bawled at her: "Wake up, your brother is dead!"

The mother uncovered her child and wept over it softly. My eldest daughter stared stupidly and shivered for cold. I stood somewhat apart, watching the two of them and grinning. I then went up to my rival, took her by the hand, led her out into the centre of the room, and, taking a few steps backwards, began to stare at her, then to clap my hands and sing, ordering her to dance for joy in celebration of the event.

My missus screamed at me:

"Have you gone crazy?"

"No, I haven't gone crazy. She, she did the child in. It would have lived if it hadn't caught cold."

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? What do you think? She purposely left the door open."

I recommenced singing and clapping my hands to time.

"Help, save us! He's gone mad! Stop it, stop that handclapping!" my wife shrieked.

" Why should I ? Why should I ? No, let the dead child know who bears the responsibility for its death. But for her, he'd still be alive!"

I went up to the infant and said :

"May you always remember, Hershl, that it is your sister Malka, who is guilty of your death. She is your murderer. I, your father, Meyer the son of Itzhok, beg you to take revenge for your premature death !"

At this, there was a turmoil, just as though the corpse had already risen and was here and now setting about its job. The mother prostrated herself upon the dead child, shaking her whole body and stamping her foot and whispering something into the corpse's ear. My daughter dashed about the place like a demented creature, shrieking horribly. The two younger children woke up and joined in.

By now I was quite dazed. For a while I stood there absolutely unable to collect my scattered wits. And still so scatterbrained, I slowly began to pack up what linen I had. This done, I went up to the dead child and said :

"God give you a pleasant life in Paradise, my dear son! May you stand there, ever praying for your poor homeless father, who is now going out, all alone, into the world. . . ."

Then I took the bundle under my arm and, with a silent look, bade farewell to my two younger children. Slowly I walked out of the room and went out into the dark world. . . .

by

I. J. SINGER

★

PROFESSOR ARKADY GRITZHAENDLER*

Professor Arkady Gritzhaendler was seated at the ebon grand piano, playing Chopin's *Nocturne*—for the last time—in tones soft and lingering.

On the bedstead, which stood hard by the piano, sprawled Ber Braun, a youngish man with a Jesus-beard and a tender innocent throat fashioned for self-sacrifice. He was engaged in sorting out red and green slips of paper on the small table beside the bed and in making calculations with a pencil. From time to time a twitch passed over his brow, an intent and solemn twitch—with him an indication of grief.

He had good reason to be grieved. Of the thirty tickets which his fellow-lodger, Professor Gritzhaendler, had foisted upon him to sell in aid of his Chopin recital, Ber Braun had not—apart from giving two away to some young ladies of his acquaintance—disposed of a single one. To-night was the night of the recital. No escape from the green-hued announcement bill with its overwhelming enormous black print, glaring down from all four walls of the room. On that selfsame night, therefore, he would have to pay out a full week's salary for twenty-eight crumpled and soiled pieces of paper. So he went over his calculations again and again, although the sum

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman.**

was perfectly simple. And a tremor passed over his brow—with him an indication that he was agitated.

His agitation was twofold. In the first place, he had come to the conclusion that for the money he was wasting on those twenty-eight crumpled scraps of paper he might have bought Brem's *Animal Life,* with a handbook on botany thrown in. Almost daily on his way to work he was held up by a bookstall dealer who would show him the several gilt-edged volumes, as though convinced that it was Ber Braun, and none other than Ber Braun, who would sooner or later take them off his hands.

"Look here, young man, going cheap," he would beckon temptingly.

In the second place, Ber Braun was angry with himself for being a man without a backbone. He felt that, according to all the principles of ethics, he simply ought to gather up all those scraps of paper and fling them straight into the Professor's puffy face, crying :

"Here, keep your damned property! Nobody's going to pay for it."

For a while, indeed, a current of heat surged up from his heart to the roots of his hair, and in his fingers there was an uneasy tingle, an itch to do something rash. But turning his head towards the piano, he stopped motionless, as though his lips had been sealed.

Professor Gritzhaendler was lolling full length over the stool, his long legs outstretched. His fingers on the keyboard were all distended and glued down, like a veritable growth on the ivory.

Ber Braun turned over, displaying his soft sacrificial throat, with his Jesus-beard pointing upwards. Invariably he was confounded by those strange big eyes of his fellow-lodger. Whenever the Professor fixed his stare

upon him, Ber Braun had a vision of the waxen figures exhibited in panopticons, and a waft of cotton-wool, acid and hospital drifted into his nostrils as though by magic. Now, however, Gritzhaendler's eyes seemed to have grown to twice their usual size and were coated with so heavy a film, that he resembled those blind beggars whose eyelids never close and who consequently seldom receive alms from the womenfolk, for fear that they are shamming. His sickly face, which usually quivered somewhat like jelly, was now terribly drawn and coated with a dusky pallor—the colour of an unclean whitewashed wall; his shoulders, otherwise excessively straight and square, were at present hunched up, immobile and angular, like gables on a roof, and they produced an odd image in the ebon depths of the gleaming piano. And because a moth was hovering round the candle on the piano, because melted wax was dripping down the side of the candle, and because the circular dancing flame had enveloped Professor Gritzhaendler's bald head in a sort of halo, Ber Braun could not help imagining that a corpse—a familiar corpse—had suddenly seated itself at the piano and was, with bony fingers, playing a dirge. . . .

Ber Braun let all the tickets slip from his hand on to the floor. He wanted to shout out. For a while, an unuttered cry fought its way upwards from his chest, but when it reached his throat, it jammed, as though unable to pass through so narrow an opening. Soon after, however, the tangle in his throat was broken, and two hasty, staccato words, in a voice unlike his own, sounded in the gloom:

"Profess . . . Professor!"

Professor Gritzhaendler turned his **head,** his **face**

suddenly took on an animated expression again, and with that frozen little smile of his on his thick lips, he inquired in Russian :

"Chto tokoi, dorogoi, what is it, my friend ?"

Ber Braun had nothing to say, and so he stuttered aimlessly :

"Look, Professor, you've forgotten to turn over. You're still at page one."

Professor Gritzhaendler withdrew his hands from the keyboard, resumed a perfectly calm demeanour and, smiling in his deliberate way, replied :

"That's all right, my friend. I've known this music by heart for ages."

II

Towards evening, Professor Gritzhaendler took off his shiny threadbare surtout, his spotted velvet waistcoat, and donned a white Russian shirt with a narrow sash below the waist.

The shirt was well laundered and pressed, but surrounding the metal hooks were yellow stains of rust. And the sleeves—short sleeves, from which two hairy arms protruded frightfully long and overgrown—had a large hole each, through which poked his bare elbows and which spoke eloquently of much sorrow, solitude and wretchedness, no end of wretchedness. He soaked his huge clumsy feet in hot water, trimmed his toe-nails, and cautiously pared his corns with an ivory pocket-knife. The while he gazed helplessly at his uncouth big toe, with its funny bump at the side, which always gave him trouble when he changed from plimsoles to patent leather shoes.

PROFESSOR ARKADY GRITZHAENDLER

There were still a few hours to go before the recital was due to start. Nevertheless, Professor Gritzhaendler plodded on with his preparations with not a pause. Gravely he washed and cleansed himself, full of a quiet air of solemnity, such as might attend the ablutions of a cherished patient before an operation. The steaming water finally having blistered his feet, he dried them, and removed his shirt and vest. He put on his spectacles, brought the vest close up to his thick lenses, and gravely sewed on a button.

From a kitchen window across the way, a maid-servant's greasy eyes peered straight into Gritzhaendler's room, but he was oblivious of the fact. Naked, hirsute, spectacles on his nose, his lower lip thrust out, and his every movement marked by a loutish, erudite sort of clumsiness, he looked remarkably like an aged, well-trained ape which has come by a pair of spectacles and is busy imitating the humans. He sat there in a trance, absorbed in deep and ponderous meditations.

He reflected that if he were called upon to give an encore, he really should play one of his own compositions, a classical, semi-light Fantasia. He reflected that his colleagues, who always praised his qualities as a theoretician and advised him to abstain from public performances—these so-called friends of his—were nothing but rotters who feared his powers, feared them immensely. He reflected that, with the consent of the management, he might very well deliver a short lecture on Chopin before giving the recital. And he reflected, moreover, that he—and he alone—with his elegiac, melancholic, wistful temperament and *Weltanschauung*, was pre-eminently suited for the music of Chopin, especially the *Nocturnes*.

At last, he put his vest on again, followed by a roomy, snow-white dress-shirt. He fixed the detachable rubber collar and cuffs, which gleamed with a strange bluish and starchy frigidness, and finally donned his tight-fitting concert-hall frock coat. Only then did he approach his old wicker basket, and as he unlocked it, slowly, he was lost in thought.

That wicker basket held a great many of his belongings. There were numerous diplomas—long, half-decayed scrolls bearing huge Czarist eagles and many signatures. But that was not what he was after. Wrapped in suede and enclosed in a jewel-case he found a ribbon of silk—a decoration presented to him by royalty. That ribbon, he knew, went perfectly with his black frock coat. He also called to mind, however, that for the sake of the selfsame piece of ribbon he had been obliged to change his name from Aaron to Arkady, and he had broken off all relations and correspondence with his aged parents. For the sake of it, he had forsaken his people.

If he were to put it on now, he might make a laughing-stock of himself in this foreign land. No one would know its value, in any case. His mother had been dead a long time. And here, where no one knew he was an apostate, he actually performed at Jewish concerts occasionally. With a tremor, he threw the thing down like something repulsive to the touch. With his finger-tips he brushed down the lapel of his coat, as though anxious to wipe off every trace. Then he undid the bundle of photographs which rested in a corner of the basket. These photographs, he knew, would never lose their value. In them, his wife always stood at his side, petite, immersed in suffering, and nursed their child who, with his head

drooping back, gazed up so gravely and silently at his far too elderly parents.

Now they were far away, very far, and from a distance faithfully followed his fortunes, his every success and all the vagaries of his fate. And as he bore the pictures to his lips, one by one, he murmured:

"My only ones! How I pity you. . . ."

• • • • •

At eight o'clock, Ber Braun arrived in festive mood, and urged his fellow-lodger to make haste.

"We must be off, Professor."

Professor Gritzhaendler eyed the young man, now wearing an open-necked velvet jacket, and his face distended into something like a smile. When they were seated in the droshky and rolling over the uneven streets, Ber Braun produced a roll of bank-notes and, without so much as mentioning a word about the unsold tickets, quietly said:

"I shall settle my debts before I forget. . . ."

Professor Gritzhaendler counted the money slowly and unskilfully. With unsteady fingers he felt each note separately, and politely said:

"Thank you, *golubchik* (my dove). If you will now let me have half the droshky fare, we shall be quits. . . ."

III

Poised in front of the concert hall were two bronze figures of nude women, each brandishing a burning electric torch above a green-hued poster with enormous black lettering:

"PROFESSOR ARKADY GRITZHAENDLER."

A decrepit cab-horse raised its ponderous head from out of the nosebag, gazed slowly round the wide square dotted with drowsy-looking droshkies, and finally rested its filmy, bloodshot eyes upon the brightly illumined poster.

Professor Gritzhaendler ascended the broad marble steps, which radiated such an air of magnificence. He opened wide a big, massive door and was about to enter the foyer, when he ran straight into a person wearing a bowler hat and a large black moustache, and he stopped in confusion. He had not noticed that this door was marked for exit only. Raising his hand to his top hat in apology, he jerked the spectacles off his nose and let them drop to the floor. The man in the bowler hat pushed by impatiently, and to the accompaniment of the scraping hinges, flung out two scornful words :

"Damned idiot!"

In the foyer, Gritzhaendler observed that a student and his girl friend were being turned away from the box-office, and he heard them mutter as they went, oppressed with a sense of their own poverty :

"The cheap tickets are all gone. What a shame!"

His sympathy went out to them. Some phrase to the effect that "a king is the most subject of all men" came to his mind. And he perceived its inner truth. Now if these pleasant-faced young people were but to come and see him at home, he would gladly play to them all his Fantasias for the mere asking. But on this great day, the day of his glory, he was powerless to help them....

This sense of compassion filled him with tenderness, even bliss, and all at once he regarded himself in a new light, a splendid light. He pondered how that fellow with the moustache, who had behaved so infamously at

the door on this day of all days, was soon going to witness the applause of an enraptured audience, would then listen to his Fantasia and would feel ashamed, deeply ashamed, of himself for having used such abusive language. After the recital, the man would indeed wait for him at the droshky and beg pardon, hat in hand :

"I did not know it was you, Professor. I'm *so* sorry. . . ."

He even pondered what would be the most proper course for him to take : ought he to ignore the fellow, or better still forgive him, thus demonstrating the superiority of the spirit over bestial violence?

Just then, however, he was confronted with, and rather startled by, an elderly orchestral attendant clad in a red, gold-braided coat, who bowed and said pompously :

" If you please, Professor !"

So he proceeded up a winding staircase and was ushered through a narrow door into a small back-stage room.

Professor Gritzhaendler sat in the dusty room amid a confusion of props, and was overwhelmed by a sense of neglect. A hubbub floated in from afar. A wind-instrument sounded, a door slammed, a clock rang the hour. And Gritzhaendler sat huddled up on a low arm-chair, in a state of dejection. His stomach was having a sudden turn. He braced himself, but that fellow with the moustache rose up in his imagination once more and growled :

"Damned idiot!"

He grew aware of the fact that his rubber collar was exerting an unbearable pressure on his throat, that his shirt was cleaving to his armpits and that his hands had turned cold and tremulous. Down there, in the audi-

torium, a ceaseless buzz and hum went on; voices reached him, muffled and incomprehensible, as though somewhere or other the world was witnessing mighty deeds, and it had cast him away here, in solitude, unwanted. Maybe, a thought entered his mind, some calamity had happened; perhaps the place was on fire, they were all struggling to get out, to save their skins, and had left him behind. But at length he could hear approaching footsteps, firm steps, and a vigorous voice called peremptorily:

"Professor!"

He answered his call with heavy tread, in agony through that clumsy big toe of his. And he straightened out his frock-coat and adjusted the cracked lens of his spectacles.

From the platform, Professor Gritzhaendler beheld a multitude of heads—so serried and level, that he had a good mind to take a stroll over them.

He played the *Nocturne,* vaguely conscious the while of a naked feminine hand fluttering in front of his spectacles and turning the pages. No, it was useless, he could not recapture that entrancement, that haziness, which had taken so complete possession of him earlier in the day in the course of the final rehearsal. Now, he knew full well, that but for the feminine hand turning the pages at the correct times, he would not remember a thing and would have to stop playing at once. He heard applause. He rose and bowed. One pair of hands in particular clapped with great insistence, and a voice—a fresh, youthful voice—cried:

"Encore! Encore!"

He could tell that the voice belonged to Ber Braun. In recognition, he bowed again, baring his huge teeth in

a smile. He seated and re-seated himself, as though unable to settle down comfortably, and then, bringing his fingers down on the keyboard, thought to himself:

"God, did that fellow Chopin write boring stuff!"

So what on earth had induced him to give a Chopin recital, when it was common knowledge that he, Professor Gritzhaendler, was the master of Rubinstein's compositions?

For an instant he allowed his glance to stray to the audience, and then once again he dug his fingers into the keys. In the front row, where sat the critics, he fancied he could hear some whispering going on. Someone actually yawned, yawned aloud, displaying a mouthful of artificial golden teeth. But the ugliest sight in the front row was a large black aggressive moustache, altogether like the one he had encountered in the doorway : all through the performance it loomed large and menacing in a corner of his eye.

All in all, he decided not to play his Fantasia. And the music piled up in front of him now seemed extraordinarily voluminous ; it irritated him.

When he had finished, there was renewed applause. He stood there deathly pale, so pale, he might have been taken for a wealthy corpse dressed up in a frock-coat, feet encased in patent leather shoes, neck adorned with a white bow and limbs manipulated by wires, causing him to bow mechanically to his official mourners.

He was anxious to reach the privacy of his little room behind the scenes. But several ladies and gentlemen of his acquaintance were at his side and were presenting him with a huge basket of flowers in which nestled a visiting card. So he allowed his icy clammy hand to be pressed by dry, warm, little feminine hands, and mean-

time he felt that the basket of flowers with its great weight, was dragging him down bodily.

"A heavy basket," he murmured, and tightened his grip on it, to avoid all possibility of accident.

Ber Braun made haste to meet his fellow-lodger on the way out. He had prepared a little surprise gift for him—a nosegay of violets and two roses. But he was too late. He therefore hurried home, eager for a discussion of the recital, but when he got there, he found himself preceded—the door unlocked. In the corner, at the very threshold, stood the basket of flowers. The Professor's frock-coat and linen, still bearing within their folds traces of his handling of them, were lying in disorder on the piano, and the Professor himself was in bed, tightly wrapped up in a blanket and snoring aloud, in a strange hasty sort of way, like a mischievous youngster who has been out on a night-escapade and is trying to deceive his parents by feigning sleep.

IV

On the following afternoon, Professor Gritzhaendler bought copies of all the evening papers, and read them in bed.

"Exactly," he thought. "I could have guessed as much. On this occasion they *would* hasten to publish their reviews the following day."

It was the same story everywhere. Whenever he made a success of a recital, well might he buy the papers for the rest of the week: early editions, late editions, full of everything—sporting news, a notice about a lost dog, an appeal for funds in support of an aged widow—everything, but never a word concerning him-

self. This time, however, there was no waiting : there he was in every paper.

He subsided on his bed, perplexed. Granted that he had played badly. Well, what of it? Did that entitle them to mock him so cruelly, to torture him? Accompanying his own notices in all the papers there was a story under screaming headlines :

"MAN SENTENCED
FOR TORTURING FAITHLESS WIFE."

He read the report, and was lost in perplexity. Well, what about *them?* Could they torture him with impunity, make merry at his expense publicly, for all the world to laugh? And the reason? Only that he had mistakenly drunk milk on the day of his recital, thus upsetting his digestion and with it his pensive mood.

He went down into the street. That visiting card, which had been handed to him together with the flowers, had some writing on it, as far as he could remember. He must go back and see what it was all about.

"We shall be very glad to have you as our guest of honour at a little reception to-morrow night at eight, just an informal friendly gathering. Please do not fail to come."

He perused the invitation once more, then flung it away.

"First that awful basket of flowers, and now a 'little reception'!"

Later on, the maid put in an appearance, a robust blonde country girl with a retroussé nose which she buried at once into the flowers, panting :

"Ah, ah! Aaah! I must water them for you right away."

At this, Professor Gritzhaendler sat up in bed in protest, and put on his spectacles. His head ached and he had a pain in his side. And he was convinced that the flowers were entirely to blame. Their scent was so powerful, that he felt quite stifled. How he wished they would wither and let him have a bit more air. Now here was the maid actually proposing to water them. He rested his elbow on the rim of the bed and spoke in a hoarse voice :

" Nothing of the sort. Nothing of the sort. Why don't you go away ?"

The maid hurried out, dubiously shaking her head over the peculiarities of "learned folks", and as Professor Gritzhaendler watched the rhythmic sway of her supple hips, he experienced a feeling of envy. What would ail him if he were as carefree as she, just one of the crowd, who need not live in fear of meeting an acquaintance, nor tremble lest any of his colleagues bought an evening paper.

He pulled the blanket up over his head in concealment, to hide from his own self. He moved up to the chilly wall, and queer visions came to him. He saw his colleagues dancing all round him in a circle, and as they pranced they stuck out frightfully long, red tongues at him. From the ceiling his wife gazed down upon him. By her side was the man with the black moustache. And they cried in unison :

"Damned idiot! Damned idiot!"

His child loomed up from the basket of flowers, with drooping head. The flowers grew swiftly, visibly, to an immense size, and spread a stranglehold over the infant. They smothered him completely, and he began crying in a muffled little voice :

"Papa! Papa!"

When Ber Braun arrived home in the evening, an odour of discarded socks, bedding and fever met him at the door. He went up to the bed, felt Gritzhaendler's brow and said :

"Professor, I'm going to call a doctor."

Professor Gritzhaendler caught hold of his hand, enclosed it in his stiff bony fingers, and forcibly seated him on the edge of the bed. He raised himself on his elbow, gazed into the eyes of his fellow-lodger and murmured :

" *Golubchik* (my dove), you've made a study of botany. Tell me, how long are these flowers likely to keep? "

Ber Braun reflected, and replied :

" If watered frequently, several days ; but——"

Professor Gritzhaendler turned his face to the wall with a growl.

"Thanks!"

Every morning during the next few days, his first action on waking up was to glance across at the flowers, only to find them flourishing and more luxuriant than ever. And in his feverish state he grew to fear them like some supernatural force. He had given over thinking about the recital.

After all, he consoled himself, he still had his great store of theoretical knowledge to fall back on. He contemplated writing his monographs on all the world's most famous composers and performers. He knew himself to be unquestionably the greatest authority in that particular line. He had a most intimate knowledge of the life-stories of the leading figures in the music world, and without a moment's hesitation could trot out all the dates when they were born and when they had died.

Not a single one of his critics could hold a candle up to him in that respect. And meditating over their pettiness, their crass ignorance, he even began to pity them, to pity them profoundly. Nevertheless, his head did not cease aching, and his legs were numb as though he had had a pair of artificial leaden ones screwed in. The choking sensation was always with him.

Late one night he felt stifled altogether beyond endurance. There stood the piano, ponderous and massive, its profound blackness weighing down upon him. Discarded clothing lay about everywhere, and in the opposite bed was Ber Braun, fleshy, warm as toast, his regular breathing filling the whole place.

Try as he might, Professor Gritzhaendler could not go to sleep. The flowers gave him no rest. If Braun were to wake up now, he would ask him to look up his textbook on botany again. When he came to think of it, there were certain species of flowers which exhaled poisonous fumes. If Braun had not told him that the flowers would last only a few days, he would have thrown them out immediately. He wondered why this had not occurred to him before. Meanwhile there was nothing to be done. Here were the flowers in full bloom, and they were simply suffocating him.

In the middle of the night, he started up several times from an uneasy slumber and put on his spectacles. Something shimmered white before his eyes. He thought it was daylight. But after carefully looking all round him, he discovered that it was those flowers again, blossoming white.

Finally at daybreak, when a greenish strip of sky peered in through the window, Gritzhaendler clambered out of bed and toddled up to the table. He wanted

to satisfy himself that the whitish glow he had seen at night had not been a mirage produced by his spectacles. He approached his head to the basket, almost touching it with his eyes, and he stopped petrified. The flowers were straining outwards in every conceivable direction, jostling one another for space. Amid the profusion of white, a number of red blooms also raised their petals, as yet but half-open, languid with thirst and breath-taking.

"They are poisonous!" He was certain of it. " Poisonous!"

His fingers tingled with heat. He dug them into the cold earth of the basket and sought the bottom of the stems. But his nails encountered something hard and brittle. He peered intently into the disturbed earth and discerned the rim of a flower-pot. There were several of them concealed under the layer of grass. And he remained immobile, with outstretched hands.

Around him all was still and shadowy. Gritzhaendler turned to go back to bed. But he stopped short and contemplated his fellow-lodger. Ber Braun was reclining on his back, with his Jesus-beard pointing upwards. His rounded throat was enveloped in the greenish light of dawn.

Professor Gritzhaendler could bear it no longer. Barefooted, in oversized pyjamas, but the sleeves of his vest ridiculously short, he raised the flap of the piano and thumped out the opening bars of the *Nocturne* to rouse the sleeper. Himself alarmed at the clangour, he shook his finger at Ber Braun.

" My friend, they're in flowerpots. Pottsss!" he hissed, and went back to bed.

Slowly the vibrations in the piano faded. . . .

by

MOSHE SMILANSKY

★

LATIFA*

"If you never saw Latifa's eyes—you don't know how beautiful eyes can be."

So I used to say when I was still a lad and Latifa a young Arab girl, hardly more than a child.

And I still say so, for all the many years that have passed.

It was January, the rainy season.

I was in the fields with a group of Arabs, preparing the ground for planting my first vineyard. My heart was in a festive mood, which seemed to be shared by all my surroundings. It was a fine bright day. The air was clear and calm, warm and invigorating. The sun stood in the east, shedding a reddish early-morning radiance over all things; it was a pleasure to breathe, to fill the lungs to their utmost capacity. Everything around was green, and graceful and beautiful wild flowers nodded on the untilled hills.

Among the Arab women clearing stones and "injil" I saw a fresh face. It was that of a young girl of about fourteen, upright and agile, in a blue dress. One end of a white kerchief covered her head, while the other end fell on to her shoulders.

"What is your name? " I asked her, wishing to note it down.

Translated from the Hebrew by I. M. Lask.

A small face, brunette and coy, turned to me, while two black eyes sparkled.

"Latifa."

Her eyes were lovely—large, black, flaming. The pupils sparkled with happiness *and joie de vivre.*

"The daughter of Sheikh Surbaji," added Atala, a young Arab who was at that moment shifting a big stone. His remark was flung into the air as though casually.

"Like to two stars on a fine summer night. . . ." Atala began lilting in his rich, strong voice, glancing mischievously at me as he sang.

Henceforth my work acquired a fresh interest for me. When I felt heavy or dejected I would look at Latifa and my depression and melancholy would vanish as at a magic touch.

Often I would feel the gaze of Latifa as she watched me. Often I would feel the flashing of her eyes, and sometimes her gaze was sad.

Once I was riding to the field on my small grey ass. At the well I met Latifa, a pitcher of water on her head. She was bringing water for the labourers.

"How are you, Latifa?"

"My father will not permit me to go on working...."

The words came pouring from her lips, as though she were emptying her heart of something that had long been oppressing it. Her voice was sad, as though some misfortune had befallen her.

"Would you not rather stay at home than work?"

Latifa looked at me, her eyes becoming dim as though a shadow passed over them. For a few moments she remained silent.

"My father wants to give me to the Sheikh of Agar's son."

"And you?"

"Sooner would I die. . . ."

She was silent once again. Then she asked :

"Hawaja, is it true that your folk take but one?"

"But one, Latifa."

"And your folk do not beat their women?"

"Nay. How shall one beat the woman he loves and who loves him?"

"Among you the maidens take those they love?"

"Assuredly."

"While us they sell like beasts of burden. . . ."

During those moments Latifa's eyes were even more beautiful, deeper and blacker.

"My father says," she added a moment later, "that he would give me to you, if you would become a Moslem... ."

"To me?"

I burst out laughing in spite of myself. Latifa gazed at me, her eyes full of anguish.

"Latifa," I said, "become a Jewess, and I will take you."

"My father would slay me, and you too."

Next day Sheikh Surbaji came to my vineyard.

He was an old man with a fine white beard, a tall tarbush on his head, riding on a spirited white mare that pranced and curveted beneath him.

He gave greeting to the labourers, who on their side all bowed to him with great humility and became silent. At me he threw an ill-tempered look, and he greeted me with a snarl in his voice. I responded with equal coolness. There was no love lost between the Colony and the Sheikh, who bore a fanatic hatred towards the Jews.

When the Sheikh saw his daughter his anger grew to fury.

"Did I not order you to cease going to the Jew?" he stormed.

And to the labourers he said :

"Shame upon you, Moslems, who sell your toil to the unbelievers!"

The stick in his hand fell several times on the head and shoulders of Latifa. Thoroughly angered, I made a motion towards him, but the sad, black, tear-filled eyes of Latifa looked at me as though entreating me to be still.

The Sheikh and his daughter departed. The labourers breathed more freely.

"Sheikh Surbaji is pitiless," said one.

"He is furious because he can no longer get his labourers at half the wages and make them toil from morning to night. The Jews compete," said a second.

"And I know why he is in a rage to-day," said Atala, a cunning smile hovering about his lips.

Latifa did not return to work.

One afternoon a few weeks later, when I left the house where I was accustomed to take my meals, I met her. She sat on the ground outside offering chickens for sale. When she saw me she rose. Her eyes were more beautiful, and more sad than ever.

"How are you, Latifa?"

"Thank you, hawaja."

Her voice shook.

And Latifa often brought chickens for sale, and always at the noon hour. . . .

One day Atala said to me :

"Hawaja, Latifa has gone to Agar; the Sheikh's son has taken her—a small and ugly fellow. . . ."

To me his words were like a stab in the heart.

Afterwards I heard that the house of Latifa's husband had been destroyed by fire, that Latifa had fled to her father's house, and that they had taken her back to her husband against her will.

Some years passed. I was living in the house which I had built for myself. Other black eyes had made me forget the eyes of Latifa.

One morning I went out and found two old Arab women holding chickens.

"What do you want?"

One of the women rose from the ground and gazed at me.

"Hawaja Musa?"

"Latifa?"

Ay, this was Latifa; this old woman with her seamed and wrinkled face. She had grown old, but her eyes still retained traces of their former brightness.

"You have a beard—how changed," she whispered, not moving her eyes from me.

"How are you? Why have you changed so?"

"All things come from Allah, hawaja!"

She was silent. Then :

"Hawaja Musa has taken a wife?"

"Yes, Latifa."

"I would like to see her. . . ."

I called my wife out.

Latifa looked at her for a long time.

There were tears in her eyes. . . .

I have not seen Latifa since then.

by

M. STAVSKY

★

THE WATCH-DOG*

If anyone were to have asked Dunka, how had she spent the several years prior to her arrival at the timber yard, she would have preferred to remain silent, and, wagging her tail, would have contrived to change the subject. . . .

But concerning her present mode of life, she would have answered proudly that she had a home of her own, knew which was her kennel, was acquainted with her duties in the timber yard, and earned her keep—a pound of guts each morning, with scraps from the kitchen during the day—by entirely honourable means.

It was only by a lucky chance that she came to be there at all. A little while ago a vacancy had occurred, the former watch-dog having suddenly departed this life without so much as a thought for the question of a successor. And old Kostus, a hoary, lonely, little peasant, who had served in the timber yard with fair loyalty for a large number of years, had grown very perturbed and began to sleep badly of nights. No sooner would he doze off, than he dreamt that dark figures were climbing over the fence; they lifted planks and dragged them off, coming and going, coming and going, until the yard was left quite empty. He would then start

*** Translated from the Hebrew.**

up in fear, and run out in front of the door of his hut, overawed by the dumb, eerie darkness of the night, and trembling all over, he would not dare to penetrate deeper into the yard, but only beat his stick on the ground before him, and his aged, mumbling, tremulous voice would float over the yard :

"Stop, thief ! H o o ! H a a ! . . ."

During that period he went downhill with such rapidity, turning cross and unreasonable, that there was every likelihood of another vacancy occurring shortly in the timber yard.

. . « . .

Meanwhile, fate so willed it (every living creature having its own destiny), that at that particular time Dunka's wanderings took her into the timber yard, and when she caught sight of the old man she was not at all scared—no, not a bit—as if she had a presentiment that here was to be her saviour and protector. She faced up to him, gazing into his eyes and obsequiously wagging her tail, as though to say :

"Don't beat me. Believe me, I have done no wrong...."

This posture of hers was pleasing to the old man. And mindful of the horror of the past few nights, he reflected with pangs of uneasy hope :

" How nice it would be if that dog were to take a fancy to me and stay here for good."

He therefore put on a friendly air, fetched her a piece of bread, and made an attempt to stroke her. She allowed herself to be patted, but on the sly threw him a sidelong glance that was full of mistrust and misgiving. And thus, still with the utmost caution, they went on

tolerating each other's company, until the thing was accomplished.

In the early days, whenever the old man was roused from his slumber by Dunka's bark, he would pleasurably bury his head deeper into the bedclothes, and drop off to sleep again in a hazy sense of security ; and for a long while after, the homely sound of barking would reach him as though from a great distance, and would caress his ear like sweet music.

As for Dunka, she could hardly believe her own senses and was for ever looking about her like a creature bemused. And each morning, on receiving her portion of guts, she would gaze deep into the old man's eyes for confirmation that he really meant what he was doing. Holding the entrails between her forepaws—not a creature on earth would have dared then to take it away from her—she threw uneasy looks in all directions, a growl running through her like rumbling thunder, and her ears were cocked for the slightest sound.

As time went on, however, it all became matter-of-fact to both man and dog. Every night the old watchman made his bed with a sense of real comfort, crossed himself, said his prayers and went off to sleep with perfect calm. Dunka made herself familiar with the timber yard, learnt to recognize the people who frequented it, and each morning she accepted her food with pleasure, went off to a corner, placed it between her paws, and ate it up deliberately, with relish.

Thus they entered into the daily round, and their demeanour was such as to create the impression that they had been living together for ages, and could not indeed imagine themselves ever parted.

However, there was one thing which pained Kostus

deeply, and that was his employer's utter indifference and ingratitude towards such a fine dog as Dunka, just as if a good dog was of no consequence at all, just as if the neighbouring village were not largely built up from stolen timber, just as if there were not certain households where the practice of buying logs for fuel was a thing unheard of, and yet, in the winter—on entering—one found the place as warm and cosy as could be. • . .

He was even more annoyed with the labourers, for whenever they wished to spite him, they would throw things at Dunka and give her a sly kick in passing. That was more than he could stand. He would storm at them and moralize :

" Why molest the dog? Why strike an innocent, faithful animal, God's creation? Why offend a dumb creature which can't hit back? I had rather you kicked *me !"*

He would go about thus, raving and mumbling to himself through his drawn toothless mouth, until he slobbered all over and broke into a cold sweat.

The smiling workers would listen with perfect composure while he was having his say, and more often than not, when his back was turned, one of them would remark :

"See that, the old boy has fallen in love with the bitch ; he's having an affair with her."

And then Pannas, a youth with bright thievish eyes, would steal off on tip-toe, bend down, pick up a chunk of wood and aim it straight at Dunka's paw. She would leap up with a howl which rent the air and left her breathless; but catching sight of the group of labourers, with their assumed look of indifference and with Pannas innocently scratching his head, she would at once guess who was responsible, and as if anxious to afford them no

chance of crowing over her, she would fall silent, grit her teeth and creep away on three legs to her kennel, there to lick the affected spot.

On hearing her cry of agony, the old man would turn on her tormentors with a long-enduring, frenzied look.

" May the cholera lay you low, the whole lot of you !"

And still cursing, he would totter up towards the kennel, there to lie beside her until his anger had subsided and she had forgotten about the blow.

Many were the tales told about Kostus in the timber yard, none to his credit. It was said that he had never gone to the altar, because as a young man he had such repulsive, upturned lips, with brutish little eyes and an ugly receding forehead, that none of the girls would give him a second look. Again, others had it that he had once upon a time possessed a wife, but she left him in a hurry because he used to beat and starve her, and ever since he had lived all on his own.

Whichever version they believed, they all shunned him and were certain that God's curse rested upon him. It was related that in the dark nights of autumn, when demons descend upon the village from the forest and dogs bark through the livelong night, the "little folks" often assembled in the timber yard, went through a form of marriage with the old man, drank, caroused and made merry until the first sound of cockcrow, when they all vanished as into thin air. On the morrow, the old man would be very sullen, talking to himself all the time and pining for his bride.

And although they knew that apart from the kitchen scraps, which he shared with the dog, he never received any wages, still they were convinced that he had a hoard of old silver coins hidden somewhere at the back of the

kennel. More than one labourer used to dream of this treasure, and allowing his fancy free play, rejoice at seeing himself seated in a tavern with beer and fish, brandy and pickled cucumbers on the table before him.

These dreams, however, never came to anything, because nothing on earth would induce the old man to step beyond the precincts of the yard.

And to look at him, with his little head nestling between his shoulders, his tiny greenish eyes half closed and his livid, bony, monkey-like face ending up in a few grey hairs that gave no clue to his age; with his worn sheepskin jacket, which both summer and winter did service as a garment by day and a bedcover at night, and with his battered cap, there was no guessing how much truth there was to all the stories concerning him.

The old man and his dog would never leave the yard, except that on occasion Dunka might exchange sniffs with a passing dog just outside the gate.

Once, however, she left home for a few days (coming back at nightfall, though, and running off again in the morning). When finally she returned for good, remaining faithful to her master and to the timber yard, she brought a secret back with her—such an exquisitely joyful secret, she would gladly have had the whole world know, only the old man noticed nothing and suspected nothing. . . .

Later on, when he first remarked a certain change and was almost unable to believe his own eyes, a rosy flush, like that of a bashful maiden, suffused his yellowish, skinny face. On closer scrutiny, the last lingering doubt was dispersed, and as he watched her lying prostrate,

gazing at her own belly, he fancied he could see something alive within, something actually stirring. . . . At that instant, he felt like kicking her, but did not do so.

The old man was lost in thought: he leaned up against a post, and gave way to his misery. Some age-old grievance seemed suddenly to have risen up from the long-forgotten days of his youth and was filling his heart again with renewed pangs of mortification, while Dunka lay there before him brazenly, as though deliberately wishing to spite and mock him :

" You sterile old man, you barren wretch. . . ."

. . . . .

However, that which had so shocked and dismayed the old man, led to no ill consequences. Indeed, when he accustomed himself to the idea and thought things over, he imagined that it pleased him. Yes, of course it pleased him. Why shouldn't it?

Even the labourers changed their attitude so far as Dunka was concerned. And although her condition furnished them with a fine pretext for many fanciful jests, which grieved the old man, Dunka was none the worse off for that.

Whenever Pannas, by sheer force of habit, bent down to pick up a wooden rivet as a missile, she would not turn and run, but stood up to him with a firm and amicable look that seemed to challenge his conscience :

"No, you won't really do that, will you? In my condition, you wouldn't have the heart to."

And, strangely enough, Pannas never did have the heart to. The rivet would slither out of his hand, and he would turn away as though ashamed of himself and his wicked intentions.

Time never lingers or pauses on its way. One fine morning, therefore, after a night spent in uneasy squirming and moaning, to which Kostus alone was a witness, Dunka gave birth to six blind little puppies, and she at once set about licking them dry, trembling all over as she did so, as though in a fever, and yelping for joy.

No sooner had the labourers arrived, than the news began to spread, and when it reached the kitchen, it was there celebrated by sending out a plateful of bread and milk.

All during the day, Dunka never left her puppies for an instant, and when night fell—the gate was closed, and it grew quiet in the yard, the piled up timber and the kennel turning into a silent, shadowy mass—Dunka lay on her side, her heavy teats exposed, and, with eyes closed, listened to six precious little darlings crawling all about her, losing their foothold and climbing up once more; six blind heads nosing about eagerly until they found her nipples and mouthed them fiercely, when a pleasant, even joyful sensation of warmth took possession of her and she dozed off.

The old man never slept a wink that night; attentively he followed the faint noises stirring in the yard, and listened in the dark to the sound of Dunka's breathing and the persistent sucking of her pups—ts, tss! He seemed to be smiling to himself A smile hovered in the obscurity of his cramped little cabin, where twilight always lingered longest of all.

Thus passed several delightfully happy days. Not for a moment did Dunka ever leave the yard. During that period she was very ferocious, and, with the exception of the old man, allowed no one to approach. She suckled

the pups, washed them with her tongue, kissed them and rejoiced to see them growing up as though by magic___ As for the old man, he played about with them, stroked them, called them any number of pet names, and made it his business to see that Dunka was supplied in good time with all her needs and never went hungry.

Who knows, but that in due course they might have had reason to take the greatest pride in the upbringing of those pups, had not that occurred which did occur.

It so chanced that the old man was sent off on some brief errand. Dunka was meantime lured into the kitchen, and when the two of them got back to the kennel, Dunka found five of her puppies missing, while the old man had in less than a minute lost his hoard of a few silver roubles which he had saved up during a long lifetime and which he surely intended to put to some good use ere he died.

Dunka dashed out like mad and raced round the timber yard, many, many times, sniffing at every likely nook and cranny. Then, like a flash, back to the kennel she came and walked all round it. After that, she appeared to scent something at the gateway. To begin with, she was doubtful, did not know her own mind; but then, lowering her head and moving deliberately, as though following a thin thread, she went forward slowly.

Soon she stopped short. The thread was broken. Again she was doubtful, and turned this way and that, hunting assiduously on one and the same piece of ground, as though she were trying to catch a furtive living creature which evaded her. She retreated a few steps, and then forward once more, on and on, until she reached the edge of a lake, which was in spate at that

time of the year, far behind the timber yard. There she felt that the thread had snapped entirely ; it was torn by the lake. She shuddered and roused herself, as though from a deep trance.

Close by the bank, at a spot marked by recent footsteps, she halted to smell the ground and the water with the greatest care. Then she ran round the lake a great many times, sniffing the air and barking deliriously into the distance, her body extended to its full length, her belly almost touching the ground and her legs moving at a great pace, as though she were chasing a shadow which maddened her by continually vanishing and reappearing.

Again she stopped at the same spot, yelping and nosing about desperately. Suddenly she remembered the puppy which she had left at home; she wavered, but not for long and resumed her search with renewed keenness, scenting and digging up the sand with her muzzle.

She grew tired ; her tongue hung out, her breath came with difficulty and in gasps. So she lay down there, with her face to the water, where lingered the last trace of her children, and she fell to weeping bitterly.

Thus a day and a night passed, and then another day. Here it was that her children had perished—she knew it. Here it was that their scent vanished, never to be picked up again. And she could not tear herself away. Her heart was being crushed, till she felt fit to swoon. She had the shivers, and her howling grew ever fainter and fainter, as though it issued, not from her throat, but from between her teeth; notwithstanding, it was so violent, all the dogs in the world seemed to be weeping within her. Then, at last, she grew quiet. . . .

Still her eyes, wide-open, glazed and angry, were fixed on a single point, and from time to time a feeble growl passed between two rows of bared, gritted teeth. And thus she seemed to fall asleep. Her skin went on twitching; it twitched of its own accord, for Dunka was no more. . . .

• • • • •

Dunka lay still and restful on the water's edge, while in the timber yard she was awaited impatiently by two living beings who could not and would not believe that she was never going to come back. . . .

A yellow puppy floundered about the kennel. It stretched out its head, sniffing hungrily in search of its mother's teat, and with what nerve-racking obstinacy it squeaked and squeaked! The sound of it cut the old man to the quick; it drove him crazy. He endeavoured to pacify and mother the animal, snuggling it to his skinny old chest, warming it and giving it his finger to suck. He chewed bread and transferred it from mouth to mouth. And when he saw that it was breathing its last, he left the kennel, pottered about the yard and all round it, calling out in such a tender, pleading voice:

"Dunka, Dunka, my pet! Where on earth have you got to?"

And as he passed the labourers, he gave them a look so full of hatred and venom, it seemed he would fling himself at them and, drawn and toothless though his mouth was, bite them to pieces.

Before long there were two vacancies in the timber yard. . . .

by

ERNST TOLLER

*

THE INQUISITION*

"Is there anything you would like?" the dying youth was asked by the official of the Secret Police at Stuttgart.

The youth looked with vacant eyes at the barred window which broke up the sky into blue squares. In the courtyard a chestnut tree was standing, heavy with spiky fruit. There, he thought, the chestnuts are sweet, you can eat them; and when they are ripe they fall into your mouth; I could have eaten my fill—why did I let myself get caught?

"D'you understand what I'm saying to you?" repeated the official. "Is there anything you would like?"

Yes, there was one thing I wanted, thought the youth, or didn't want. I didn't want to go to prison again, I didn't want to be beaten and kicked and spat on by you: would I have jumped out of that window if I had? I suppose you think I did it for fun.

"Perhaps you would like your mother to see you before you die?"

That was the word: why must he go and say that? I don't need telling that I have to die: and to use the word like that to my face, it's a dirty trick, a dirty trick. . . . *He* won't be dying, he'll be going home.

*** Translated from the German.**

Yes, I'd like to see my mother now. Nice of the fellow to think of it ; he means well, perhaps. . . .

He looked at the official without expression and nodded.

"I have sent for her already. She'll be here any minute now. There is still one question we still want an answer to : Who was it gave you those leaflets? "

The official waited.

Exactly, thought the youth. The question brought a filthy taste into his mouth. Disgust. Once they had stuck a gag into his mouth to stop him shouting; now they wanted him to shout, to betray his comrades whom they'd been after for weeks past. That was filthy. Filthy. . . .

"I'm telling you nothing."

"Remember your mother."

The youth stared up at the ceiling.

He lived another four hours. In four hours you can put a great many questions.

Even at the rate of one in three minutes you can ask eighty. The official was a competent official, he knew his business, he had interrogated plenty of men before this, dying ones too. You had to know the game, that was all; you shouted at some, at some you had to whisper, others you had to threaten, others to coax.

"It's for your own good," the official said. But the young man heard no more questions, neither loud nor soft. He had died in silence.

Next day the following notice appeared in the press :

"Just as officials of the Secret Police were on the point of arresting T., a working-man of Stuttgart, for distributing inflammatory pamphlets, he fell from the window of his third-floor apartment.

"He was found lying in the courtyard, with a broken pelvis.

"A few days later he died in the police cell at the general hospital."

by

I. M. WEISSENBERG

★

AN OLD SCORE*

Late at night. The synagogue is empty. But in the women's annexe someone is groaning in between the stove and the wall. There, on two benches up against the stove, with a few old coats spread out by way of bedclothes, lies a *Jew,* an old man with a grey scraggy beard. His body—a withered trunk looking fit to fall to pieces. His face yellow, stoutish, only rather greasy. . . . While his eyes, showing from under the skull-cap framing his forehead, wander wearily over the quiet synagogue. The pendulum of the clock on the wall rocks gently: tic-tac, tic-tac. All in darkness hang the lamps above the long rows of tables. But under the pulpit a lamp is dimly burning, gazing pensively across at the sparkling "eternal light", which throws a dull bluish streak upon the ceiling in front of the holy ark. On the reading-desk, a remembrance candle—embedded in a tumbler—is burning and its flame quivers feebly on the half-consumed wick. Occasionally the flame shoots up tall and slender, standing erect for an instant as though curious to see what is going on behind the pulpit. . . .

From without, footsteps can be heard approaching, followed by a fumbling at the handle; the door opens and someone enters. The dark figure of a man, with only

*** Translated from the Yiddish by Morris Kreitman,**

part of his face showing, makes for the stove with heavy cautious tread. It is a Jew in a grey gaberdine. He folds up the fur cap from off his head and lies down sideways on a vacant bench in front of the stove, propping his elbow up under his longish face and pointed beard.

Reclining thus, he hears the sound of groaning and asks in a coarse voice :

"Reb Motke, what's the matter with you?"

The other continues to groan without any response.

The newcomer raises his head and, sitting up, takes a peep round the corner of the stove, repeating :

"Reb Motke, what's the matter with you?"

"Who is it?" the old man asks in a feeble voice.

"Me, Israel!"

"Ah, it's you, Israel. I'm all right."

"Then what are you groaning for?"

"Don't be silly, my child. It's hard for a man to be all alone in this world .. . hard even for him to die."

"You're not feeling worse to-day?"

"What if I am, what if I'm not! It's all the same. All the same now."

"What makes you say *now?* What about every other night? Aren't you always alone?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right. It's the same story every night."

Israel falls silent. It occurs to him that possibly he ought to fetch some help, for if the old man were dying, the corpse would immediately have to be washed and watched over. And with this in his mind, he goes up to the front table, picks up the dimly burning lamp from under the pulpit and squeezes his way in between the stove and the wall.

The old man looks back at him astonished.

"What are you doing, Israel?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to see if you were comfortable."

"Put it down, Israel. I'm not so far gone as all that."

"Why, of course not! God forbid! Only, you know, you said you were lonely, so I brought the lamp over for company, just so as we could sit and talk a bit, for company. ..."

"Well, have it your own way. But put the lamp back. We can just as well sit and talk in the dark, if you don't mind having a chat."

Israel goes back with the lamp in his hand, suspends it over the table and returns to the stove, where he sits down on his former place.

"Israel!" Reb Motke calls.

"What?"

"I wonder how the time is getting on?"

"The time? Let me see. Now when I started out on my beat it was half-past eleven. That was a good two hours ago, so—"

"That'll do, Israel," Reb Motke interrupts his deliberations. "Go and have a look at the clock."

"As if it matters," says Israel, talking to himself now. Nevertheless, he rises from his seat, goes up to the clock, peers closely at it, and counting the blotched numerals round the dial, returns to the stove.

"Just past two," he informs Reb Motke.

"That means still no sign of daylight."

"Why, of course not. Purim time, the sun comes out at six—same as at High Festival time."

"Well, what d'you think, Israel, it's a fine life, eh, having to lie awake all night and every night waiting for daylight!"

"There you are!" Israel shrugs his shoulders, and drops down again on the other side of the stove.

For a while there is quiet. Suddenly Reb Motke rouses him anew.

"Israel, Israel!"

"What is it?"

"Do you mind coming round."

Israel gets off the bench and squeezes into the corner behind the stove.

"Tell me, Israel, will I go on spoiling good bread for a long time to come yet?"

Israel again shrugs his shoulders, reflects awhile and answers:

"Really, Reb Motke, a man mustn't give way to sinful thoughts. You can't go telling God what His business is."

"Israel, please, over there in the bookcase you'll find a small saucepan, will you give it to me?"

Israel takes a step towards the cupboard, pulls out a saucepan, and handing it over, inquires:

"What have you got there?"

"Some woman offered it to me. It's the juice of stewed pears. I'm feeling a bit faint."

Reb Motke sits up, clasping the saucepan with his tremulous, emaciated hand, peeps in and takes a few sips. Then Israel puts it away again.

"Do you notice the draught, Israel, blowing this way?" He points at the door. "The women did that on the Sabbath, when there was that wedding. They broke the top hinge off as they made a rush to throw sweetmeats at the bridegroom."

"The chink ought to be stopped up," Israel replies.

"It ought to."

"What with, though?"

"Here are some loose pages lying about."

"But you can't use them. They've come out of the prayer-books."

" I tell you what, Israel, there's a torn vest lying mixed up with the pages in the corner there. Use that."

Israel finds the vest, and having stopped up the chink, inquires :

"What about me putting those coats straight for you?"

"No, no, my dear boy, thank you all the same. You needn't bother about me any more. God bless you!"

Israel returns to his bench and lies down.

For a while there is quiet. The clock can be heard going tic-tac, tic-tac. And Reb Motke's voice breaks the silence once more :

"Israel, Israel!"

"What is it?"

"D'you mind. . . ."

Israel gets up, and squeezes his way through.

"Well?"

"Did you know Mendel and David, Reb Psachia's two sons?"

"What, Mendel and David?"

"Yes."

"What a question ! I should say I knew them !"

"And did they come to a bad end?"

"Both died in the same epidemic of cholera (may we never see the like of such a one again). The leading people of the town they were."

"Their father, Reb Psachia—long before your time, that was—he was a fine personality, too. The head of the community."

"I don't remember him."

"And their house, fancy that now, eh, all in ruins___"

"Nothing remarkable about that. That's easy for God, that is."

"Ah, don't you make any mistake ! When I came back and saw the state it was in, I couldn't believe my own eyes. Reb Psachia's house ! Dear me ! I even remember when the first foundation stone was laid. Now that's harking back fifty years or more. Don't you see, it was before I left the town. By the way, Israel, how old are you? You're only about thirty-six?"

"Thirty-eight."

"There, and I remember it as though it were yesterday. For instance, I remember such a trifle as the carafe —a ribbed carafe it was. . . . Reb Psachia, all dressed up in his best, with his new shoes and white socks and Sabbath gaberdine made of the finest wool, distributing free drinks to the builders at work on the house. . . . One of them, Reb Pinya, was the contractor—he was a genius at his job, there wasn't a thing he didn't know. And to think that that selfsame house came to such an evil end. Tell me, Israel, tell me all about it."

"There's nothing to it, really. All I know is that I always used to keep an eye on that house as it was part of my beat. And all I do know is this : The brothers, who were partners, were always at each other's throats. And when it came to paying me my due, each of them would tell me to apply to the other. Let *him* pay! Let *him* pay! Meanwhile I had a fine job running backwards and forwards, I don't mind telling you. But that was nothing compared with what was going on the rest of the time. The proper trouble would start between them when there were any repairs wanted doing. Neither of them

would lay out a penny. They wouldn't even replace a tile, just think of that now ! And a house, let me tell you, is just like a garment, in its own way. For instance, supposing my missus wasn't to keep constantly patching my clothes up, I wouldn't have a thing to wear, would I now? That's just it. The same thing applies to a house. No repairs? All right! The rain comes through, decay sets in and the building goes to blazes."

"Misers, ha?"

"Don't you believe it! They weren't actually misers. But it's no joke, two brothers living in the same house and sharing the same property. That's where the trouble starts. It's a good job, I'm thinking, that we had that epidemic six years ago (may we never see the like of such a one again) and all their differences were soon settled. There now, a separate little piece of ground for you, and a separate little piece of ground for you, and hush! Stop jumping at each other's throats! And as for the house, it was in such a rotten state, the police condemned it and had the windows boarded up straight away."

Reb Motke heaves a light sigh of relief, and asks :

"And what about Reb Psachia, don't you know anything of his death?"

"How should I?"

Reb Motke falls silent, broods a little, and says :

" If you like, Israel, I'll tell you exactly what sort of person old man Psachia was."

"Goon, then."

"Well, if you don't mind sitting down on the edge here. . . ."

Israel sits down beside Reb Motke, and Reb Motke begins :

"Old man Reb Psachia, may the grave spew him up, was the head of the community of this town-------"

"What are you cursing him for?"

"That's my business. But listen. . . ."

"At that time I was about twelve. I had a brother of about eighteen, a tall fellow with a plump, rather pale face, and short sidelocks, but very manly. Really, it did your heart good to look at him. My father, he was a tailor, as was my brother, and they used to work together—that is, my brother helping my father. I was still kept at school, which was mainly my mother's doing! Now one day something happened. All at once a hue and cry was raised in the town: my brother had been caught staying the night with Reb Psachia's servant girl. Apparently it was true, because the girl—so folks said—ran away that same night and was never seen again. Her home was somewhere in the country near by. But my brother had no such luck. Where could he hide, seeing that his home was right here on the spot? Now I remember: My father walked up and down the room terribly upset, my mother cried, and my brother sat with his head down, ever so pale. In our street a lot of youngsters kept gathering outside the window; they banged at the panes and shouted in to my brother: 'Hallo, Aaron, Yentela wants to see you.[5] That was the wench's name. Anyhow, my brother took no notice, but as for me, I just couldn't stand it. So in the end I got up and went out of doors. But where was I to go to? School, I knew, was no place for me on that day. And the streets were not much better. So what was I to do with myself? In the end I went into the synagogue. Prayers were over, it was getting on in the afternoon, but I still found a number of people there. They were all in

a group at the orient wall, crowding round a table where Reb Psachia sat still wearing his praying-shawl and phylacteries. There he sat beside the holy ark, with his back to the window, unwinding the straps of his phylacteries, while the others all stood round, gazing into his pious face and watching him blink his eyes. Now at his side stood Hershka, the beadle, a tall man with a black beard and broad face with his eyes a terrible black and his eyebrows overhanging—a perfect fright! There he was with his elbow resting on the reading-desk and with his ear cocked up, as though there were something going on too good to miss. Well now, seeing that, I slipped across to the other side of the table and mingled with the rest. I didn't matter. No one was going to take any notice of me, a mere lad with torn trousers and bare knees and a cap with a cracked peak. I never mattered! So there I stood and meantime I heard Reb Psachia saying:

" 'Has ever such a scandal been heard of before in a Jewish town?'—and groaning—'Oh, God, have mercy on us!'

" 'Absolutely unheard of,' Hershka puts in. 'I wasn't born yesterday, was I, but in all my experience as a beadle I've never known anything like it!'

" 'Very well, then, Hershka,' Reb Psachia goes on, 'will you see to it that that tailor-fellow, that ruffian, that heathen attends at once at the rabbinical court-room.'

" 'Sure, sure,' everybody chimes in. 'There's a stop got to be put to such goings-on.'

" 'Always at your service,' Hershka replies grandly. 'If the community wishes a thing, it is for me to **obey.** Especially if you wish it too, Reb Psachia.'

" 'It's not what I personally wish,' Reb Psachia cuts in, 'but what the whole community wishes. Now get along, Hershka, hurry. Don't waste any time, for I shall be waiting soon in the rabbinical court-room.'

" ' Aren't you going home now?'

" 'Yes, but only to put my praying-shawl away. As a matter of fact, I fasted all day yesterday, acting as an arbitrator, and I'm perfectly willing to miss another meal in the service of God.'

"Herskha looks down at the ground in front of the reading-desk, picks up his cane and sets off.

"Hearing that this was their little game, I hopped out of the synagogue, grabbed hold of a brick-bat, ran up to the window behind which Reb Psachia was sitting and —bang! straight through the pane, to dash his brains out for him. Never stopping to find out the result, I flew off and in a minute's time I was home again, before Hershka with his jolly old cane had properly got started.

"I was so worked up, I never said a word, didn't tell them a thing, but just took hold of the iron pestle from our mortar and stood in wait at the door.' I'd like to see anyone try and get in !' Only my father and my brother rushed up to me. 'What are you going to do with that, put it down !' they shouted, dragging me away, and my mother joined in too. 'What's the matter with you?' I screamed. ' Hershka the beadle's coming. Do you want to take it lying down, do you?' 'All right,' says my father. 'No harm in that. Let's see what he's after. Let him come in, by all means.'

"Just then the door opened. Glory be! Hershka with his jolly old cane. Up went his eyebrows, and looking daggers at my father, he says : 'Melech, the Rabbi commands that you shall bring your son to the rabbinical

court-room.' Having had his say, he slams the door, and that's that.

"My father tore at his hair, my mother wept and fainted. Too bad! And there was my brother saying he wouldn't go.

" The beadle came again and again, warning him, but my brother refused to listen. In the end, along comes Hershka with two hefty porters and they take him away by force.

"At home our life wasn't worth living then. And out in the streets there was a sudden stampede. People shut their shops up and ran like mad. Me too. Crying my heart out, I followed my brother right up to the Rabbi's house. There they didn't let anyone in, and in front of the window the crowd was so thick, their heads looked like a swarm of bees stuck to the glass. In front of the door—likewise. . . .

" Suddenly the crowd started to push. They were making way for someone. It was Reb Psachia arriving. Very much alive he was: that brick-bat had missed him! Well, he was wearing his best Sabbath coat and his *colpic*—a sort of fur hat we used to have in the olden days. With him walked a couple of big pots, may the grave spew them up, and they all went into the court-room.

" What happened inside I don't know. But after about an hour's time, my brother was led out and taken straight into the synagogue.

"The whole mob followed—young and old, everybody—scrummaging for a view of the performance.

" In the synagogue my brother was taken up into the pulpit and there he was compelled to make a public confession. As if that were not enough, he was afterwards imprisoned in a cell in the vestibule of the syna-

gogue—they used to have things of that sort in the olden days. He was kept there a day and a night. The crowd spat at him through the little window, and mischievous youngsters, little bastards, threw in pebbles and sand.

"At the end of the twenty-four hours, my brother returned home looking black as midnight, his eyes all sunken—awful! But was he in a frenzy, like a perfect madman, you've never seen anything like it in all your life ! The first thing he did was to rush up to the shelf and snatching down the phylacteries, he dashed them on the floor and stamped on them with his feet until they were all in pieces. My father and mother tried to hold him back. 'Darling son, have pity on us. For God's sake!' But he tore himself out of their hands and went away. We never heard a thing of him for weeks, but one day the news reached us that he was staying with a Catholic priest somewhere in the neighbourhood. He had forsaken his faith and had married a Christian country wench. As a punishment, of a morning when the beadle went round the town to rouse the Jews and summon them to morning service, he always omitted to knock at our shutters. Mum and Dad were ashamed to show their faces, and Father died soon after of a broken heart.

"My mother started to take out other people's washing, and used to go down to the river with bundles of dirty linen like all the other washerwomen. As for me, I took to snatching rolls from people's shop-windows. Sometimes, on market-day, my brother would turn up with all the other peasants, and set up a stall, selling pork in the heart of the town. Whenever any of the Jews stopped to look at him, he used to stick his tongue out at them. So once Mother sent me up to him : would he take

pity on her and stop coming. He said he would for her sake, and seeing me all in tatters, actually gave me twelve guldens for me to get myself a new pair of trousers and a shirt. It just shows you that blood is thicker than water.

" And then once, at daybreak—it was in the summer—someone knocks at our door. Mother gets out of bed to see who it is, and it was him. He came in, offered her money, but she refused to take it. So he came up to my bed, helped me dress and took me by the hand. Mother would not let me go, but he begged her to allow me to take him to the spot where Father was buried in the cemetery. So I went with him and showed him the grave. Now I remember he never went close up to it, but stood at a distance with tears in his eyes. His face was pale, altogether Jewish-looking, only his clothes were different. Then he took out thirty guldens, stuffed them into my hand and told me to say that it was for the erection of a tombstone. But Mother never put one up, because it was tainted money. When he said good-bye to me, he kissed me, and he went off by a roundabout footpath, so as no one should notice him.

"By the time I was about seventeen, I was well able to make my way without bread-snatching. You see, the local squire, Werjbinski, held a monopoly of brandy, and you had to pay him a tax of half a gulden on each gallon. You weren't supposed to get brandy anywhere else, and if the squire caught you at it, you went to prison. But that didn't worry anybody. The well-to-do always managed to get contraband spirits here and spirits there and spirits everywhere. And me, I became such a cunning hand at the game, that the moment anyone got a secret supply in, I scented it out

as though by magic. And in return for me keeping my mouth shut, the owner would have to pay me some trifle or other. 'It makes no difference to me,' I used to say, 'You're breaking the law. Be obstinate if you like and I'll tell the squire.' Then I had another tack.

"Nowadays all that is changed. Why even the people aren't the same. The houses are different too. In the old days, every house had a porch of its own, and so on. Householders used to foregather on the porch, chat and yarn and make practical jokes, or they might settle their accounts, doing sums on the door with pieces of chalk in their hands. You couldn't see that sort of thing going on anywhere to-day, could you now? For the most part, a well-to-do householder would have a granary of his own, full of corn, or a garret stuffed with onions, and it would be so chock-full, that the timbers creaked. In by-gone days, that was! . . . Anyhow, there used to be certain well-to-do people who, supposing a serf stole a sack of corn, would take it off his hands for next to nothing. Now I soon got wind of it, and I'd pay the fellow a visit, usually on the Sabbath, may God forgive me for my sins. 'Look here, old man, so-and-so and so-and-so. What do I get out of it?' That did it. Not another word was spoken. Pretty often they'd square me just by giving me a piece of fish to eat or a loaf of bread.

"I went on making myself a nuisance for quite a while, until I found out that a plan was hatching to conscript me into the army. In those days it was no joke. As you know, under Nicholas I a conscript had to serve in the army for twenty-five years and especially for a Jew it was perfect hell. Now things were looking black. What was I to do? It was too risky for me to sleep in my own home, so I stayed away, sleeping one night here

and one night there as best I could. But it was no use, and once, when I couldn't stand it any longer and crept into my own bed for just a few hours, there came a knock at the door in the middle of the night. Mother was going to see who it was, but I just managed to stop her in time. Somehow I had a feeling that there was something wrong. I jumped into my clothes and I told my mother that the moment she opened the door, she was to run back into the room, while I hid behind the door. And that's how I got away. The 'bloodhounds' came in, I went out—good-bye!

"The next day my mother called on Reb Psachia. She cried and implored him to have mercy on her. He spoke to her like a gentleman, promised to let the matter drop and was so nice, he even tried to comfort her. She could rest assured, on his word of honour. All right, the same evening I came home again to sleep in my own bed. Suddenly, the night was not far gone when—without the slightest warning—the house was surrounded and I was trapped like a little birdie in a cage. There was a lock-up just outside the town and that's where they put me. 'Take it easy, you trusting fool!'

"That night I dreamt a dream, and I've never forgotten it. I saw myself setting fire to Reb Psachia's house, and I watched it go up in flames and blaze away. Suddenly, just as I was about to run away, I was caught and thrown into the lock-up. Funny, the things you dream of sometimes!

"At daybreak, as soon as I opened my eyes, I had a good look all round me. Sure enough, I was in the lock-up. So I got to my feet and looked through the bars of the little window. The guard, a big fellow in a great-coat, was lying in front of the door, sleeping like a log.

So I hollered out to him, until he woke up, and I asked him whose house was it that had been burnt down last night. 'What house?' he said to me, rubbing his eyes. There was no fire that he knew of. Good enough! I had only been dreaming. And my heart was fit to burst. It all came back to me, all of it, and I threw myself down on the ground weeping like a child—the Lord in heaven must surely have heard my agony. I was weeping for rage at having let myself be fooled so ridiculously. However, that wasn't going to help.

"During the day the whole town came flocking to my window. Revenge, at last!

"In the evening I asked the guard to fetch me a drink of water. 'I've got the fever,' I says to him, but he takes no notice. I happened to have a few groschens on me, so I gave them to him and asked him again. This time he was obliging enough to go into a peasant hut close by and borrow a pail. At that particular spot there used to be a well once upon a time. It's been filled in since. Also the lock-up, I notice, is no more than a pile of rubble now. Anyway, he took the pail and filled it at the well. But when he lifted it to the window, it wouldn't go through the bars. So he went to the door, to pass it in that way. But as soon as he had opened up—I was a strapping fellow at the time—he got such a wallop from my fist, it knocked him silly, and I was out. And I made straight for my brother's place in the country.

"I got there late in the evening. 'Brother, save me!' I told him the whole story. He went red in the face with anger, and tears started to his eyes. His wife, quite a young wench, cried when she saw the state I was in, and she carried on about the Jews and cursed them something awful. May God forgive me my sins!

"My brother went out to put the shutters up, so that no one might see me. Meanwhile his wife gave me something to eat and to drink. Then she put the children to bed—she'd already had two little heathens with my brother, she had—and my brother took me up into the loft. A nice stock of hay he had there. And he lay down to sleep beside me."

• • . . .

"At daybreak—you know how it is when the air is just turning bluish—my brother woke me up. I got up and we went downstairs together. His wife was already up and about. She was standing in front of the stove, with one of those peasant skirts on, in red and blue check, and she had on a flimsy blouse, which was so tight, you could see the teats straining from it. And her face was flushed and her eyes sparkling in the heat of the blazing fire, as she stirred a boiling saucepan. Seeing that I was down, she says to me, 'Good morning, brother-in-law.[5] All smiles! And she puts before me a saucepan of hot milk with bread in it. So I had a wash and something to eat.

"All this time my brother was busy out of doors. Through the window I could see him drive the cow out of the barn—a lovely animal she was. He soon came in again and sat down beside me. There was a long wooden bench next to where the children were sleeping, and there he sits himself down, and looks so thoughtful, so terribly pale—it was a real shame. When I had done eating, he remarks to me: 'Listen, you can't stop here for long. You'd better come along with me.'

"So we went out and walked along together.

"At the edge of a wood we stopped, and my brother started crying. Then he remarks to me, 'Listen, Mottel,

whatever you do, don't forsake your faith. Be a Jew, always. I am one too,' he says and shows me a Psalm-book which he has hidden in the hollow of an old tree. I'll tell you what I'll do for you,' he says to me, I'll drop you in a big city. I'll give you enough money to live on for a couple of weeks, and then you can make your way to the frontier and get out of the country.[5]

"I agreed, and he told me to wait for him in a copse. He was going to hitch his horse up and pick me up.

"My brother went back home and I remained alone.

"So there I sit in the copse, all alone, and think and think—what is going to become of me? Meantime my brother turns up. I climb into the cart and away we go to Lublin."

"In Lublin my brother gave me two hundred guldens, said good-bye and kissed me again and again for all he was worth. Then he returned home. As for me, they didn't have any railways at that time, so I made my way gradually from town to town, and I crossed the frontier into Galicia.

"In Galicia I picked up with some smugglers. Those were hard times, and how I longed for home! God alone knows how homesick I was. But it couldn't be helped, because at home I knew there was a gentleman, Reb Psachia, who was just waiting for me! To cut a long story short, I learnt my business, and later on I married.

"But that was another misfortune—my wife was barren. Somehow or other, before I knew what was what—not so fast as you might think, though, from the way I'm telling it to you—fifteen or sixteen years had gone by. Then I got a divorce and married another woman. But this time I made a proper mess of things.

She was an old woman, only youngish looking, and she had lied about her age and was past having any children. As a matter of fact, she died later on, but I was then about sixty-five. My hair had gone all grey, and I was as poor as a church mouse. Was any woman going to come and live with me then? So I remained all alone in the world—a lone wolf, with not a soul to keep me company. I thought matters over. What was there to tie me down to a foreign land now, eh? The children, I suppose, or grandchildren, which I never had! 'Ah well,' I said, 'God's will be done! I'll go home, to die there where I was born. Whatever happened, they wouldn't very well conscript me into the army now—ha, ha!' "

The old man heaved a sigh, lowered his eyes from Israel's face, and fell silent.

A little while later he suddenly rose from his resting-place, shuffled down on to the floor, rummaged for a pair of slippers under the bench, and picking up his cap and tattered coat padded with cotton-wool, put them on, as if about to go out.

"And how about your brother?" asked Israel. "Is he dead?"

"What makes you ask, Israel?"

"I was just thinking, he might have left you something in his will.

"Idiot!" retorted the old man with a shake of his head, and made for the door.

"Where are you off to, Reb Motke?" Israel called out after him.

"Oh, **I'll** soon be **back."**

"All alone? Let me go with you."

"No, no, Israel, thank you, but you needn't trouble."

. . . . .

Without, the moon was shining. Reb Motke stooped down, searching for something on the ground. He found a brick-bat and carried it off to the high street. There he stopped in front of a tumbledown house, which had its windows boarded up. At the top of the house, however, there was a garret window wide open, staring with a black look into the sky. The moon stood opposite and gazed into the dilapidated window as into a dark and endless abyss. Reb Motke gazed in too. There was quiet everywhere, all things slept, and Reb Motke lingered there, gazing. A fragment of the wall within was dimly lit up in the soft moonlight, and still Reb Motke went on gazing. He remembered a brightly lit up little window and Reb Psachia's voice floating from it in a pious sing-song. He remembered how the window had looked on those nights when the honorary officers of the burial society met to hold their annual banquet. He remembered it also at such times when the town council were in conclave there. But suddenly he raised his hand and threw the brick-bat high up into the air.

"Take that, Reb Psachia!"

In the attic, there broke forth a howling of disturbed cats.

* . . . .

The old man gave the high little window a final fiery look of triumph and contempt. Then he trudged back to the synagogue. There he returned to his usual resting-place. He breathed more freely, and from his aged, joyful heart a cry went up: "Now, God, that I have settled an old score of mine, you may settle your own score with me! . . ."

by

STEFAN ZWEIG

★

MOONBEAM ALLEY*

Stormy weather had delayed the ship, so that the evening was far advanced before she came to port on the French coast. Having missed the train which was to have carried me farther on my journey, I had a whole twenty-four hours on my hands. How could I best while away the time, marooned as I was in this unknown coast-town? There did not seem to be much doing. Melancholy strains of dance music issued from a dubious-looking haunt—not particularly attractive, I thought. The alternative would be to spend the interlude in desultory converse with my fellow-passengers. In the dining-room of the third-rate hotel where we put up, the air was thick with the smell of burned fat and tobacco smoke. Besides, it was an ill-kept and dirty place, its filthiness rendered all the more intolerable since for many days now I had enjoyed the pure ocean breezes and felt the salt, sweet taste of sea-spume upon my lips. I decided to go for a stroll along the broad main street leading to a square where the local band was giving a concert. It was pleasant to allow oneself to be carried gently along by the stream of idlers who, having done their work for the day, were taking the air after a wash and brush-up followed by a cosy meal at a pro-

*** Translated from the German by Eden and Cedar Paul.**

vincial fireside. After a while, however, the jostling of the crowd and its empty laughter vexed me sorely; I found it exasperating to be gaped at because I happened to be a stranger in their midst; the physical proximity of so many unknown human beings was nauseating in the extreme.

The voyage had been far from calm, and the movement of swelling waters was still in my veins. Underfoot, the earth seemed to be heaving and rolling, the whole street and the skies swayed like a see-saw. I felt giddy and, in order to escape, I ducked my head and plunged down a side street without taking the trouble to decipher its name. This led me into an even narrower thoroughfare, where the din of music and mob was muffled almost to extinction. One street opened out of another like the anastomoses of arteries and veins. They were less well lighted the farther I withdrew from the central square, which was brightly illuminated with arc-lamps. Overhead the stars could be distinguished, now that my eyes were no longer dazzled by the glare. How dark the intervening spaces of heaven appeared as I gazed upward!

This must be "sailor-town", quite near the harbour, for my nostrils were tickled with the stench of rotting fish and seaweed and tar, with the indescribable odour issuing from badly ventilated houses wherein the air remains stagnant until it is swept away by a health-bringing gale. Such twilight as hung over these alley-ways was healing to my mind. It was delightful to be alone. I slackened my pace, studied the narrow streets, each of which was different from the others, being here coquettish or amorous, there wrapped in inviolable peace. All, however, were dark, and filled with the soft

murmur of voices and music which arose from nowhere in particular, but from unseen springs deep within the houses. Doors and windows were tightly shut, and the only lights were red or yellow lanterns hanging from a porch at rare intervals.

I have a special predilection for such quarters in unknown towns, these foul market-places of the passions, filled with temptations for men who sail the seas and who turn in here for a night of pleasure, hoping to realize their dreams in one short hour on land. These places are obliged to tuck themselves away out of sight in the less "respectable" areas of the town, because they tell a plain tale which the smug and well-built houses of the elect hide behind a hundred veils. Tiny rooms are crowded with dancing couples; glaring placards lure into the picture-houses, square-faced lanterns twinkle in doorways and beckon unambiguously to the passer-by. Drunken voices clamour from behind the red-curtained windows of drinking booths. Sailors grin at one another when they meet, their eyes are greedy with expectation, for here they may find women and gambling, drink and display, adventure that is sordid or worth the risk. But these allurements are discreetly housed behind drawn blinds. You have to go inside to find them out, and the mystery only serves to enhance the lure. Similar streets and alleys exist in Hamburg and Colombo and Havana and Liverpool, just as in these cities the broad avenues and boulevards where the wealthy foregather are likewise to be found, for the upper stratum of life and the lower bear a close resemblance everywhere in the matter of form. These disorderly streets are strange vestiges of an unregulated world of the senses, where impulses continue to dis-

charge themselves brutally and without rein ; they are a gloomy forest of the passions, a covert full of manifestations of our instinctive and animal existence ; they stimulate by what they disclose, and allure by the suggestion of what they hide. They haunt our dreams.

A sensation of being trapped in this maze overwhelmed me, I had chanced to follow a couple of cuirassiers who, with swords clanking along the uneven pavement, were taking a stroll. Some women on the booze in a bar shouted coarse jokes as the pair sauntered by; shrieks of laughter, a finger knocking on the window, an oath from within—and then the men went on. Soon the ribald mirth grew so faint that I could barely catch the sound. Silence closed round me, a few windows were dimly lighted, the watery moon shone through the mist. I breathed my fill of the stillness, which was almost uncanny, seeing that behind it lurked a universe of mystery, sensuousness, and peril. The silence was a lie, for it covered the accumulated filth of a whole world. I stood listening, and peering into the void. All sense of the town, the street, its name, and even my own name vanished ; I was cut adrift, my body in some miraculous way had been taken possession of by a stranger, I had no activity in view, no reason for being where I was, no relationship to my surroundings—and yet I was acutely conscious of the seething life that beset me on all sides ; it flowed through my veins as if it were my own blood. Nothing that was happening was doing so on my account, though everything was germane to myself. An inexpressibly delightful feeling that I was not a participator was accompanied by the conviction that I was in for an experience which would bore down into the deepest springs of my being—a feeling which, whenever

it comes to me, suffuses me with a pleasure that emanates from communion with the unconscious.

As I stood thus expectant, listening into the void, a voice came to me from a distance, muffled by intervening walls, but unmistakably singing in German. A simple melody, indeed; the "Schöner, grüner Jungfernkranz" from Weber's *Freischütz.* A woman's voice, badly trained, but German, yes indeed, German. Strange to hear one's own tongue in so out-of-the-way a corner; and friendly, homely, at the same time. Poorly as the air was sung, it held a greeting from the land of my birth. Who can speak German here, who can be moved to hum this innocent refrain? Straining my ears against house after house, I reached one where there was a glimmer in one of the windows, and the shadow of a hand silhouetted against the blind. All doors were shut, and yet invitation to enter was to be deciphered on every brick and lintel. Nearer and nearer I approached the sound. This was the house! I hesitated a moment, and then pushed my shoulder against the door, having drawn aside a curtain which shielded the interior from draughts. On the threshold I encountered a man whose face was reddened by the hanging lamp, and was livid with fury. He scowled at me, murmured an apology, and thrust past me into the alley. "Queer customer," thought I, gazing after him. Meanwhile the voice continued singing; clearer than before, it seemed to me. I boldly entered.

The song was cut off sharp, as with a knife. A terrible silence compassed me about, giving me the impression that I had destroyed something. Gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the dim lighting, and I found that the room was scantily furnished with a little bar at one

end, a table, a couple of chairs—obviously a mere waiting-room for the true business of the establishment which went on in the background. Nor was it difficult to guess what the real business was, for along a passage there were many doors, some of them ajar, leading into bedrooms in which beneath deeply shaded lamps double beds were to be discerned. A girl was seated on a bench leaning her elbows on the table; she was heavily made up, and appeared extremely tired. Behind the bar was a blowzy woman, slatternly and fat, with a second girl, a rather pretty lass, at her side. My good evening fell flat, and was not echoed back to me for a considerable time. It was eerie to have stepped into this silence of the desert, and I wished to get clear away. Yet, since there did not seem to be adequate reason for absconding, I took a place at the table and resigned myself to the inevitable.

Suddenly remembering her business in life, the girl got up and asked me what I wished to drink, and I recognized at once by her guttural pronunciation of the French words that she hailed from Germany. I ordered beer, which she fetched and brought to me, shuffling her feet in slovenly fashion, thus betraying even greater indifference than did her lack-lustre eyes. Following the custom of such haunts, she placed another glass next mine and sat down before it. She raised her glass with a nod of greeting in my direction, but she gazed through and beyond me. I had a good look at her. A beautiful face still, with regular features; but it had grown like a mask, since the inner fires were quenched. There was a touch of coarseness about it, the skin and muscles were lax, the lids heavy, the hair unkempt, and two furrows had already formed on either side of the mouth. Her dress was disorderly, her voice husky from too much

smoking and beer-drinking. Here indubitably was a fellow-mortal who was weary unto death, and who only continued living out of long-established habit. Embarrassed and horrified, I asked her a question. She answered without looking at me and scarcely moving her lips. I guessed that my coming was unwelcome. The elder woman behind the bar yawned prodigiously, the younger girl slouched in a corner, as if waiting for me to call her. If I could have got away, I should have done so precipitately. But my limbs were like lead and I sat on, inert, chained by disgust and curiosity, for, to speak frankly, this indifference stirred me strangely.

The girl next me suddenly burst into a fit of shrill laughter. Simultaneously, the flame of the lamp flickered in a draught of cold air coming through the open doorway.

"So you've come back," said the girl in German. "Creeping round the house again, you mean skunk. Oh, come along in—I shan't do you any harm."

I turned first to the speaker whose mouth seemed to be spewing forth fire, and then to the door. Slinking in was the individual who had scuttled away on my entry. He was a cringing creature, holding his hat in his hand like a beggar, trembling under the douche of words that had greeted him, writhing beneath the torrential flow of mirthless laughter, and rendered even more uneasy by the way in which, from behind the bar, the hostess was whispering to the girl.

"Go and sit down beside Francoise," the young woman said hectoringly. "Can't you see I've got a gentleman customer?"

She spoke to him exclusively in the German tongue, while the hostess and the younger girl split their sides

with laughter though they could not understand a word she said. The man was evidently a habitué.

"Give him a bottle of champagne, Fran$oise, the most expensive brand," she yelled mockingly. "And if it's too dear for you, my man, you've only got to stay outside and not come bothering us. You'd like to have me for nothing, I know, and anything else you could get without paying you'd grab. Ugh, you filthy beast."

The tall figure crumpled under the lash of this tongue. Like a whipped cur, he sidled up to the counter and with a trembling hand he poured the wine into a glass. He evidently wanted to look at the slattern who was abusing him, and yet he was unable to lift his gaze from the floor. The lamplight caught his face, and I saw before me an emaciated visage, with damp locks of hair sticking in wisps on the brow. His limbs were slack, as if broken at the joints. He was a pitiable object, devoid of strength and yet not wholly lacking in a kind of vicious courage. Everything about him was askew; and the eyes he raised for a flash did not look straight, but were shifty and full of a wicked light.

"Don't bother about him," said the girl to me in her ponderous French and seizing me roughly by the arm as though she wanted me to turn away from my contemplation. "It's an old story between him and me. Doesn't date from yesterday!" She bared her teeth like a vixen ready to bite, and snarled: "You just listen to what I tell you, old fox. I'd rather fling myself into the sea than go with you. Got it?"

Again the sally was applauded by shouts of laughter from behind the bar. The pleasantry seemed to be a joy which was daily renewed. Then a horrible thing happened. The younger wench put her arms round the man

in simulated affection and caressed him tenderly. He winced under her touch, and glanced at me, anxious and cringing. At the same moment the woman next me threw off her inertia as if she had just awakened from profound sleep, and her countenance was so contorted with malevolence, her hands trembled so violently, that I could bear the scene no longer. Throwing some coins upon the table, I rose to go. But she detained me, saying :

"If he's bothering you, I'll chuck him out, the swine. He's jolly well got to do what he's told. Come, let's drink another glass together."

She pressed up against me with assumed ardour, and I knew at once that she was playing a game in order to torment the man, for she kept on glancing in his direction out of the corner of her eyes. Disgust filled me when I saw how, with every endearment she lavished upon me, the poor wretch shrank together as if branded with a red-hot iron. I could not take my eyes off him, and I shivered when it became evident what a storm of rage, jealousy, and desire was brewing within him. Yet every time the girl looked towards him, he ducked his head in fear. She sidled closer, and I could feel her body quivering with pleasure as she pursued her wicked game. The scent of cheap powder and unwashed skin was sickening and in order to keep her at a distance I took a cigar out of my case. Before I had time to light it, the girl was screaming.

"Here, you, bring a light, and be quick about it."

It was horrible to make myself a party to her machinations by allowing the man to serve me, and I made what haste I could to find a match for myself. But her orders had already whipped the poor devil into activity,

and he shuffled up to the table with the necessary kindling material. Our eyes crossed, and in his I read abysmal shame mingled with pusillanimous bitterness. This look touched a brotherly chord in me and made me vibrate in sympathy with his humiliation. I said in German :

"Thank you, sir; but you should not have bothered."

I offered him my hand. He hesitated for a moment, then my fingers were squeezed between his bony fists. Gratitude shone from his eyes during the second he fixed me, but soon he lowered his puffy lids. Defiance made me want to invite him to sit with us, and I had probably made a gesture of invitation for, ere the words dropped from my lips, the woman had said harshly :

" Back to your place, at once, and don't come bothering round here again."

I was nauseated by her strident voice and her whole demeanour. Why should I worry my head about this repulsive harlot, this weak-minded wench, this sewer of beer and cheap scent and tobacco-smoke? I longed for a breath of fresh air. I pushed the money towards her, stood up, and, when she tried to detain me with her endearments, I moved resolutely towards the exit. I could not participate in the humiliation of a fellow-creature, and I made it clear to the girl that her charms had no attraction for me. An angry flush spread over her face and neck, fierce words trembled on her lips ; but she did not speak. She merely turned to the man and looked at him so meaningly that with the utmost speed he sought to do her unspoken bidding. His fingers shot down into his pocket, and he drew forth a purse. He was evidently frightened at being left alone with her, and in

his excitement fumbled with the opening. I guessed that he was not accustomed to spending money freely, he had none of the generous way of a sailor who flings his coins carelessly about. This man was used to counting his money carefully, and to testing the pieces between his fingers before paying them away—as he now paid for his champagne.

"Look how he's trembling because he has to part with some of his beloved pence," she cried tauntingly, stepping nearer to him. "Too slow, I tell you. Just wait till I . . ."

He shrank back in fear. When she saw how frightened he was, she shrugged her shoulders and said jeeringly, and with an indescribable expression of disgust on her face:

"I'm not going to take anything away from you. I spit on your money. It is all counted beforehand, I know; never a farthing too much must be allowed to leave your purse. But," and she tapped him on the chest, "what about the bit of paper you've so carefully stitched into your waistcoat lining?"

His hand went to his side as if he were seized with a spasm of the heart. Having felt the place, his face, which had gone ashen pale, resumed its normal hue and his hand dropped away again.

"Miser," she screamed.

At this the martyr turned, flung the purse and its contents into the younger girl's lap, and rushed out as if the place were on fire. At first the girl gave a shriek of alarm, then, realizing what the man had done, she broke into peal upon peal of piercing laughter.

The woman stood for a moment rigid, her eyes sparkling with wrath. Then her lids closed, and her body

went limp. She looked old and tired. A forlorn and drooping figure swayed before me.

"He'll be weeping over his lost money, out there. May even go to the police-station and tell them we've stolen it. To-morrow he'll be here again. But he won't get me, no, that he won't. I'll give myself to anyone who offers, but never to him."

She stepped up to the bar and gulped down a glass of neat brandy. The wickedness still glinted in her eyes but it was misty now as if shining from behind a veil of tears. My gorge rose as I looked at her, so that I could find no compassion in my heart.

"Good evening," I said as I took my leave.

"Bon soir," answered the hostess, without a glance in my direction.

Shrill and mocking laughter followed me into the street.

. . . . .

As I stepped forth into the alley, it seemed to me darker than ever, closed in by the starless sky and the night; but soon the pale moon shone down again, bringing me infinite alleviation. I took a deep breath, and the horror left me. Now I could once more relish the amazing tangle of human destinies ; and a feeling of beatitude, akin to tears, filled me at the thought that behind every window fate was waiting, that at the opening of every door an experience was ready for the taking, that the multitudinous happenings of this world are ever present for those who choose to observe them, that even the foulest hovel is bursting with newly generated life like dung filled with the larvae that will become shining beetles. The unsavoury encounter was no longer repulsive to me. On the contrary, the suspense it had pro-

duced in my mind now relaxed into an agreeable sensation of lassitude, and my sole desire was to convert my adventure into beautiful dreams. I cast a searching eye up and down the narrow street, wondering which direction would lead back to the hotel. A shadow fell across my path.

"Beg pardon, sir," said a familiar whining voice in my native tongue, "but I'm afraid you will have some difficulty in finding your way out of the maze. May I act as guide, sir? Your hotel, sir?"

I gave him the name.

"Yes, sir, I know it, sir. Will you allow me to accompany you, sir?" he asked apologetically.

A shudder crept over me. It was horrible to have this slouching, ghostlike creature walking by my side, noiselessly, as if on stockinged feet. My perception of the gloom in the alley-ways of the sailors[5] quarter, the memory of my recent experience, were spontaneously replaced by a state of confused reverie. I knew that my companion's eyes still held the same meek expression, that his lips still twitched nervously, that he wanted to talk. But I did not wish to rouse myself from the inertia of mind which enfolded me, in order to take any active interest in the fellow. He hemmed, words choked in his throat, and I felt a cruel pleasure in not coming to his aid. Repulsion at the recollection of that dreadful woman spread through me like a miasma, and I was glad the man's shame should be wrestling with his spiritual need for explanation. No, I did not help him; but allowed a heavy curtain of silence to hang black and awesome between us. My footsteps rang out clear and youthful in contrast to his muffled and aged tread. The tension between his soul and mine grew stronger every

minute. The silence became strident with unspoken words. At last the string, stretched to breaking-point, snapped, and he blurted out :

"You have . . . you have just witnessed a strange scene, sir. I beg you to forgive me, sir, if I refer to it. . . but it must have appeared very peculiar to you, sir, and you must think me a ludicrous fellow, but you see, sir, that woman . . . well, she is . . ."

He had got stuck again. His throat worked. Then, in a very small voice, he said hastily :

"She's my wife, sir."

I must have shown surprise, for he hurriedly continued as if wishing to excuse himself.

"That is to say, sir, she was my wife, five, no four years ago, at Geratzheim in Hesse where I have my home. Please, sir, you really must not think badly of her. It's probably my fault that she has become what she is. She was not always thus. But I . . . I teased and plagued her. You see, sir, I married her in spite of her abject poverty. Why, she had hardly a chemise to her back, nothing, nothing at all. Whereas I am well-to-do, or, rather, I am comfortably off... at least I had a pretty competence in those days . . . and I was, perhaps—she is right—I was thrifty . . . yes, I was thrifty even before our great misfortune. But you see, sir, my father and mother were so, and the whole family a bit on the stingy side. Besides, I worked hard for every penny I earned. She was fond of pretty things, and, being poor, she had nothing but what I gave her. I was constantly reminding her of this. Oh, I know it was wrong of me—I've had time to learn that since the catastrophe—for she was proud, very proud. Please don't run away with the idea that she is naturally of such a disposition as you wit-

nessed this evening. Far from it, sir; that's all make-believe. She hurts herself in order to make me suffer, in order to torture me, and because she is ashamed of her own doings, of her present mode of life. Maybe she has gone to the bad, but I ... I refuse to accept such a notion ... for I remember how good, how very good she used to be, sir."

His excitement made him pause, both in speech and walk, while he wiped his eyes. I looked at him in spite of myself. He no longer appeared to be a figure of fun, and I was no longer annoyed by his constant repetition of the obsequious "sir". The energy he had put into phrasing his explanation had transfigured his countenance. We started forward again, and he kept his eyes downcast as if reading his story printed upon the pavement. He sighed heavily, and his voice took on a sonorous tone very different from the querulous sound I had come to expect from him.-

"Yes, sir, she was good—good, and kind to me as well—she was grateful for having been raised out of her misery. I knew how thankful she was . . . but I wanted to hear her say so . . . always and always again ... I could not listen too often to the verbal expression of her gratitude. You see, sir, it is so wonderful to feel that someone considers you to be better than you really are. I would willingly have parted with all my money just to hear her say those few words, everlastingly renewed . . . but she had her proper pride, and she found it increasingly difficult to acknowledge her debt to me, especially when I made a claim upon her in the matter and almost ordered her point-blank to pronounce the words I longed to hear. . . . And so, sir, I insisted that she ask me for everything she wanted, for every dress, for every

scrap of ribbon. . . . Three years I tortured her thus, and her martyrdom grew worse as the time went by. And believe me, sir, it was all because I loved her so desperately. I loved her proud bearing, and yet I wished to humiliate her. Oh, fool that I was! I pretended to be vexed when she asked for a hat, or any other trifle she took a fancy for; while all the time I was in the seventh heaven of delight at being given an opportunity to gratify her—and at the same time to make her eat humble-pie. In those days, sir, I did not realize how dear she was to me. . . ."

Again he stopped, and reeled in his gait. He had forgotten my existence, and spoke henceforward as if in a hypnotic trance.

" I only discovered how greatly I loved her on the day—the accursed day—when she begged me to give her something to help her mother out of a difficulty, and I refused. It was an insignificant sum. ... I had actually put the money aside for the purpose . . . but I longed for her to ask me again . . . and then, when I came home I found a letter on the table and learned that she had gone. . . . All she wrote was: 'Keep your damned money. I'll never ask you for another penny.' That's all. Nothing more. I was like one demented for three days and three nights. I had the river dragged and the forest scoured; indeed I paid hundreds over to the authorities in the hope of discovering her whereabouts. I even confided my troubles to the neighbours—but they merely laughed me to scorn. No trace, no trace at all. Months later, I learned that someone had seen her in the train, accompanied by a soldier ... a train going to Berlin. That very day I went to the capital, leaving my business to take care of itself. Thousands did I lose in the process.

My farm labourers, my manager, my . . . oh, everyone profited by my absence to line his pockets. But I assure you, sir, I remained indifferent to these losses... I stayed a week in Berlin . . . and, at last, I found her. . . ."

He panted slightly, and then continued :

"I assure you, sir, I never said a harsh word to her ... I wept... I knelt before her ... I offered her anything she pleased. . . . She would henceforward be the mistress of all I possessed—for I had come to realize that life without her was impossible ... I loved every hair on her head, her mouth, her body, every part and particle of her being. I bribed the landlady (she was, in fact, a procuress, what they call a 'white-slave trader') generously and thus managed to see poor Lise alone. Her face was like chalk ; but she listened to me, oh, sir, I believe she really listened to me as if pleased, pleased to see me. But when I began to speak of the money it was necessary to pay—and after all, sir, you will agree that we were obliged to discuss such practical issues—she merely called her fancy-man on to the scene, and the two of them laughed me out of countenance. I did not lose sight of her, sir, but returned to the charge day after day. The other lodgers told me that the cur had left her, utterly unprovided for. So I sought her out yet again ; but she tore up the notes I gave her, and the next time I came—she was gone. Oh, sir, you can have no idea of what I did to trace her. I followed her for a year, paying agents here and agents there. At last I discovered that she had gone to Argentina . . . and . . . and . . . that she was in ... a house . . . of ill-fame. . . ."

Again he hesitated, and the last two words seemed to stick in his throat. His voice became sombre as he went on :

"At first I could hardly believe my ears. . . then I reflected that I was to blame, I, only I, because I had humiliated her. And I thought how terribly she must be suffering, she so proud, as I well knew her to be. I got my solicitor to write to the consul out there, and I sent money. But she was not to be told from whom it came. The sum was more than sufficient to bring her home again. Soon I got a cable that the scheme had worked, and that the boat would reach Amsterdam on such a date. Well, so great was my impatience that I got there three days too soon. When I saw the smoke in the distance, it seemed to me I could not wait till the ship slowly entered port and came alongside the quay. At last I caught a glimpse of her at the tail of the other passengers, hardly recognizable at first, so heavily was she made up. When she saw me waiting for her, she blanched even under her paint, and tottered so that two sailors had to support her. No sooner had she stepped on to land than I was at her side. I could not speak, my throat felt so dry. She, too, said nothing, and did not look at me. I motioned to a porter to carry the luggage, and we started for the hotel. Suddenly she turned to me and said . . . oh, sir, if you could have heard her voice, so sad, I thought my heart would break . . . 'Do you want me still as your wife, after . . . ?' I could only clasp her hand. . . . She trembled violently, but spoke no more. I felt that now all would be well. . . . Ah, sir, how happy I was. When we got to our room, I danced for joy, I knelt at her feet babbling out the most absurd things—at least I fancy my words must have been rather funny, for she smiled through her tears and stroked my hair—hesitatingly, of course. Her endearments did me good, my heart overflowed. I rushed up and down stairs

ordering dinner—I called it our wedding feast. I helped her to change her dress, and then we went down and ate and drank, a merry meal I assure you, sir. She was like a child, so warm and affectionate, speaking of our home and how everything would start fresh. . . . Then . . ."

The man's voice became rasping, and he made a gesture as if he were strangling someone.

"Then . . . the waiter ... a mean and vulgar cur . . . believed me to be the worse for drink because I laughed so much and had carried on in such a boyish fashion—and all because I was so happy, oh, so happy. . . . Well, I paid the bill and he, as I said, thinking me drunk, cheated me out of twenty francs in giving me the change. I called the fellow back, and demanded my due. He looked sheepish, and laid the money by my plate. . . . Then . . . quite suddenly . . . Lise began to laugh. I stared at her perplexed . . . and her face was completely changed . . . mocking, hard, angry. 'The same as ever . . . even after our wedding feast,' she said coldly—and yet her voice was full of pity. I cursed myself for having been so particular . . . but I tried to laugh the matter off. . . . Her gaiety had disappeared ... it was dead and gone. . . . She insisted upon being given a separate room. ... I was in a mood to grant every request. . . and lay alone, open-eyed, through the night, thinking what I should get her on the morrow ... a handsome gift, that would show her I was no longer stingy ... at **least** where she was concerned. Early next morning I was abroad. ... I bought a bracelet. . . and took it to her in her room .. . but she was no longer there ... she **had** gone... as she had gone before. I looked round for **a** note . . . praying it would not be there, yet knowing that

it would inevitably be awaiting me . A and there it was, sure enough, on the dressing-table J. . and on it was scribbled . .."

He hesitated. I stood still, looking into his martyred face. The man bowed his head, and whispered hoarsely :

"She had written . . . ' Leave me in peace. You are utterly repulsive to me.[5] "

Our walk had led us to the harbour; and, in the distance, the silence was broken by the roar of the Atlantic breakers on the coast. The vessels, their lights shining like the eyes of huge animals, swung at their anchors. A song floated to me from afar. Nothing was very clear. I seemed to feel presences rather than see them. The town was sleeping and dreaming an immense dream. By my side I distinguished the ghostly shadow of the man growing uncannily large and then dwindling to dwarfed proportions in the flickering lamplight. I was not inclined to speak, or to offer consolation, or to ask questions. The silence stuck to me, heavy and oppressive. Suddenly he seized my arm, and said quaveringly :

"But I'm determined not to leave this town without her. . . . After many months of search I found her. ... I am invulnerable to the martyrdom she is putting me through. ... I beseech you, sir, to have a word with her . . . she refuses to listen if I speak ... I must get her to come back. . . . Oh, won't you tell her she ought to? Please, sir, have a try. ... I can't go on living like this. I can't bear any longer to see other men go in there, knowing she is giving herself to them, while I wait in the street till they come down again, laughing and tipsy. The whole neighbourhood knows me by now, and the people make mock of me when they see me waiting out on the pavement. ... I shall go mad, but I must keep

my vigil without fail. , . . Oh, sir, I do beg of you to speak to her. . . . You are a stranger, I know, but for God's sake, sir, have a word with her. Someone from her own country might influence her in this foreign land."

I wished to free my arm from the man's convulsive grip. Loathing and disgust alienated my sympathies. When he felt that I was trying to get away, he flung himself on to his knees in the middle of the street and clasped my legs.

"I conjure you, sir, to speak to her; you must, you must—or something terrible will happen. All my money's gone in tracing her, and I'm not going to leave her here . . . not alive. I've bought a knife. Yes, sir, I've got a knife. I won't let her stay here ; at least not alive ; I could not bear it. Oh, speak to her, sir, I beg and pray you to have a talk with her. ..."

He crouched like a maniac before me. At that moment two policemen turned into the street. I dragged him violently to his feet. He looked at me blankly for a moment, and then said in an utterly changed voice :

" Take the first turning on your right, and the hotel is about half-way down."

Once more he stared at me with eyes wherein the pupils seemed to have melted away into a bleak, white void. Then he vanished.

I hugged myself in my coat, for I was shivering. I was tired ; and sleep, a kind of drunken sleep, black and feelingless, claimed me. I wanted to think, to turn these things over in my mind, but sleep was ruthless and would not be put off. I got to my hotel, fell on to the bed, and slept like an animal.

In the morning it was hard to disentangle dream from

reality, and something within me *urged* me not to try and find out. I woke late, a stranger in a strange city, and visited a church far-famed for its mosaics. But my eyes were blind to such sights. The night's adventure rose vividly before my mind, and unconsciously my feet sought that alley-way and that house. But such thoroughfares do not become alive until after dark. During the daytime they wear cold, grey masks, and it is only those who know them well who are able to recognize one from another. Search as I might, I did not find the street I wanted. Weary and disappointed I returned to the hotel, followed by pictures that were either the figment of a disordered brain, or the remembrance of reality.

The train was scheduled to leave at nine o'clock that evening. I felt sorry to quit. A porter carried my bags to the station. Then, at a crossing, I recognized the street leading to that house. Telling the man to wait a minute, I went to cast a final glance at the site of my adventure, leaving the fellow smirking in a knowing way.

Yes, here it was, dark as last night, with the moonlight shining on the window-panes, and outlining the door. I was drawing nearer, when a figure emerged from the shadows. I recognized the German cowering on the threshold. He beckoned for me to approach. But mingled horror and fear made me take to my heels. I did not wish to be delayed, and to miss my train.

At the corner I turned for another look. As my eyes fell upon the poor devil, he sprang up and made for the entry. He pushed the door open, and a piece of metal shone in his hand. Was it money or a knife-blade that glittered so treacherously in the moonbeams?