## יקצאֵדךצם צםנצי זופ / Vide/Confession

## Author(s): Yente Serdatzky

Source: Bridges, Fall 1990/5751, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1990/5751), pp. 79-92
Published by: Bridges Association
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40358484

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms \& Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

 גאַנץ אומבאבקאֵנטצר פַאר מיר

 דאָם איז ניט וויכטיק, וחיַל דצרציילן וחיל איך איצט ניט פון זין זיך


 וויגשטול און די איבצריקע הנאהדיקצ קלייניקייטן מיט וחאָס צס צירט זיך גצוחיינלעך
 ״העלאָ, העלאָ״ - איז מיר די אומבאַקאַנטע אַנטקצגנגצקומצן און מיט



 גרויטצ, וחיטזוצענדיקצ, דורשטיקע און ווננדערלצך שיינצ.




 אַן אָרט, ווערט מיר שלעכט האָב איך מיֵנע מצדיצין, מיֵן בצטל. מיֵן דערציילן וחצט מיך געוויס אויפרעגן.



 אַן אַנדצר אֵרט אַרויסגעבן מיֵנע איבצרלעבונגצן, און געדאַנקצן!... זי האָט זיך פאַרקוקט אין דצר לופטן. איך האָב, מיט גצרייצטער ניבגעריקייט
 און זעצנדיק מיֵן אויפמערקואַמקייט, האָט זי אָנגצהויבן דצרציילן



 אירע קליינצ און גרצסצרע קינדצר. דערצויגן בין איך דורך שלעכטצר דערצרונג,
 אונדזער קוואַרטאַל זיינצן אָבצר אַזועלכע הייזוער קיין נייצס ניט גצווצן, דצרפאֵַר האָט צם מיך ניט צו שטאֵרק געאַרט.


 - איך בין גצוואָרן איינצ פוּן די צרשטע מיטגלידצר. קיין גרויסע חכמות האָב










 אַרצסטירן. די מאַמע האָט טאָג און נאַכט גצוויינט איבצר מיר. צוויי ברידער האָּב
 בין אַהצר גצקומצן. צוואָנציק בין איך דעמאָּלט אַלט גצוואָרן.
 איך ביי זיי ניט געוואָלט בלייבן, בין איך גצקומצן אין שטאָט. אָנגצהויבן גוט

 גצוואָרן טצטיק. איר ווייסט דאָך די טעטיקייט: אונטצרנעמונגצן, טיקצטס פֿאַרקייפן. שטייען ביַּם ,באַר' און אַזוי וויטיטער.

[^0]- און שפצטצר האגט זיך אָנעהוּיבן אין רוסלאגד די הייסע ציֵט. געלט איז


גרצסצר און גרצסצר.



די מצדיצין.




 געוואָּן"... איך האָּ דערוואבט וחצן מצרי איז שוין געוצסן אַנטקעגן מיר. זי האָטט דערציילם: - מיט דער שטילקייט פֿון רוסלאֵּר איז דא נאָך שטילער געוואָןן. דעמאָאט ביך
 געקלערט וועגן דצם. קין גרויסע איבערקלייבצרין בין איך אויך ניט גצווצן. אין דער







 געשוריבן האֵט צר מיר ניט, און צר איז ניט געווען מחויב, ווּיל קין פאַרשפרעכן איז נצֵך בי״ אונדז ניט געווצן.
 געוואָןן אומעטיק. איך האָב אָנגהויבן צו פֿיל קוקן איךף מין געשטאֵלט אין די



 בלייכע געיכט און מאֵכט עס וונידערבאֵר אינטערעסאַנט, און מינצ שוואֵרצע אויגן


- איך האָּב אָנגצהויבן זוכן אַ חתן. די רויטצ פֿלצקן אויף מצריס געוּכט האָּבן אויפֿגעפֿלאַמט, די אויגן האָּבן געגלאַנצט, זי האָט אָנגצהויבן רצדן אָפגצהאַקט ווי מירצדט ווצגן אַ זייצר ניט

אַנגצנצמצר זואךך.





 צוואָנציק מיידלעך אויף איין בחור, און אַלע, דאַכט מיר, זענצן שצנצרצ אוּ מון מצר ווצרטע

 מיאוס, מיאוס...
מצרי איז רויקצר גצוואָרן.






 אַלט קינד. מסתמא איז דאָך דאָס בצסצר. און גרויסע, קלוגע געלצרנטצ מענטשן האָּב

 דאָס גליק און תכלית אין לעבן... און דצם תכלית, אוי, האָב איך צס געוואָלט! - און אַזוי וועל איך איֵּך וויטטצר דצרציילן אַלמנה, האָט זי אַינף קינדצר. די עלטערע צוויי זיַנצן מיידלצך, וווילע, געראָטצנצ




 בלייכן, אַן איידעלן, גַ מאַדאָנען-געזיכט. גייט זי אויך מיט אונדז. קיין אונטצרנעמונג

לאָזוט זי ניט דורך... און בֵי אַא רוסישער פֿאַמיליצ קום איך אָפטט, אַן אינטעליגצנט הויו,
 איין זון. דצר זון שפּילט באָל און די טעכטצר גייען אויף פאַּרואַמלונגצן... איך האָב זי בייז איבצרגעשלאָגן:

- קומט אויס ביֵ איֵךך, אַו די פֿאַרואַמלונגצן, וואָם ווצרן געמאַכט, איז נאָר אַ מאַרק צו זוכן חתנים? מערי האָט מיט כּצס גצצילט צוריק:



 מערי הגָט געלייענט חרטה אין מיֵן בין בליק; איר קול איז ווייכצר גצוואָּן. זי האָט אָנגצהויבן דערציילן אומרויק און גיך: - מילא, ווו איך בין גצקומצן, האָּב איך אַלץ גצטראָפן מיידלצך און מיידלצך, און שיינצ, און גצראָטצנצ, און אינטצליגצנטצ. אומצטום - אין שאַפּ, אין די שי שטיבצר, אין


 דער גאַנצצר ווצלט ווצרן גצבאָרן מצר וויבבצר ווי מצנצר, וויֵל מענצר זיַינצן צו דצר
 שטאַרק... די סיבה אָבצר האָט מיר ניט געאַרט, וויֵל געליטן האָב איך נאָר פון פַֿקטט...
מערי האָט אָפגעציפצטט און אָנגצהויבן רעדן געלאַטן און אומעטיקיק




 , פאַרלאָר', די וויגשטול, פֿרוכט און צובייטן, דער פֿריינדלצכסטטער שמייכל, די שענסטע קאגמפלימענטן, דאָס וואַרעמסטע וואָרט. און אונדז? - אויף מיר האָט קיינצר ניט


 בילכצרצ פאַר מיר, קרובות, פלימצניצעס, - איך בין גצווצן אַן איבצריקצ זאָך...
 בין איך נָָך גצווצן אָן אֵ חתן, אֵ כּשרצ כּלה-מיידלל...

 איבצרהויפט די חברטצם... אַן צקל אַריַנצוקוקן אין אַּוֹן געדרוקט וואָרט, אַ שוואַכצר אַפצטיט, און שלאָאפלאָזע, ווילדע, אומרויֵקע נעכט... מערי האָט אַ הוסט געטאָן. איך האָב זי, מיט שווצסטצר-ליבצ גצנומצן ביֵּים


 איך מוז אייך צנדיקן דערציילן.


 האָב איך דעמאָלט ניט געטראַכט? אָּפט פֿלעג איך טראַכטן פֿון זיך נצמצן דאָּס לעבן

 איז ווייס, יונגפרוילצך, אַ שיינצ ברוסט... ,לעבן דאַרף איךי און לצבן האָב איך גצוואָלט.
 צימצרן. אומעטום האָב איך געפונצן חסרונות: - דאָ איז שטויביק, דאָ אָנגצוואָרפן, דאָ
 ריין. כ'פֿלעג אָנטאָן אַ שטובקלייד, אַ לאַנגס מיט ברייטע אַרבל, פללעג קוקן אין די שפּיגלען...
- איך וואָלט געווען אַ שענצרע, אַ בצסערע בעל-הביתטצ, - פֿלעג איך טראַטטן - כיווָלט מיך אימצר קליידן גראַציצז און נצט... די קינרצר וואָלט איך אָנגצטטאָן ווי פופן, דאָס בעט־גצוואַנט וואָלט גצווצן וויַטצר ווי שניי, דאָם בעט וואָלט זוּין אויסגעצירט מיט בלומצן... און... און אין קאָּפ פֿלעגט אָנהייבן שווינדלצן, און, אַ האַלב־טויטע, פללעג איך פֿאַלן אויפן דיוואַאן...


 גוט וואָרט געואָגט, אַ פֿונק האָפצענונג געגעבן... אָבצר ניט מער. חתונה האָבן האָּט זיך זיי ניט געלוינט, און באמת, מיט ווצלכצר פריצרו איינע איז בצסצר פון דער אַנדצרצר;

[^1] און נאָכדעם האָט מיך אָנגעהויבן עגבצרן אַא געדאַנק. דורך די נעכט פלעגט עם בס מיך מאַטצרן און ניט לאָּן אָּנרירן מיֵן בצט...


 זיי... זיי ווצלן שוואֵרץ מאַכן דצם לעבן... אין דצר טונקצלצר נאַכט... אין גאַס, אַ ווילד־פרצמדן...

- און אין אַ וואָלקנדיקצר מיטן-נאַכט האָב איך מיך איין מאָּל אַרויסגעכאַפט פֿון שטוב.. כאַּכא, שרצקט אייךך ניט: כ'האָב צס ניט אויסגצפֹירט: דצר צרשטער מאֵן


 גצהאֵט זיי זאָלן מיר ניט פרעגן, אויב ס'לוינט...

> - איך בין גצהאָלפןן גצוואָרן.

 איר פֿאַרשטייט, אַּ סאיאיז גצווצן ליגן


 האָט מיר גליֵך גצשענקט זיֵן אויפמצרקואַמקייט.

- דער בחור הייסט היימאֵן. זוינֶע מענצרשע קליידצר, וואָלט שוין, פאֵֵר מיר הונגצריקצ, כמצעט גצנוג גצווצן...

 האָט גצוזנגצן שיינצ לידצר אויך, און שוואַרצע שיינצ האָר האָּט צר אויך, און שיינצ אויגן... און וועגן אידעצן און ביכצר רצדט צרו...
 מיר דאָ שוין צוריק געווצזן. מיר האָבן גצוווינט אין איין צימצר, און איך בין גצגאַנגצן אין שאַפ. - איצט הצרט ווי איך האָב געלעבט.




געאַרט; צופיל הונגצריק ביז איך גצווצן אין ליבצּ... און אויפןן הצכסטן שטאַפּל פון
 דער דאַרף מאַכן דצם לעבן. קיין אונטערשייד מאַן אָדער פֿרוּי.




 און מיִין בצט האָב איך מיט בלומצן ניט באַצירט: סיאיז זייצר צנג גצווצן, צוויי אין איין רום און ביכצר און קליידצר.

 אַז איך בין זאַט געוואָרן מיט ליבע, האָט אַן אומצופֿרידנהייט אָנגצהוּיבן צסטן מיֵין האַרץ. „איך וואָלט דאָך געווצן אַזואַ זצלטענצ מוטער, אַזוֹאַ גוטע, איידעלצ הויז-ווירטין"...
 טאָג צו טָאג. - און נאָכדעם איז גצקומצן די קראַנקייט. און נאָכדעצם האָט צר מיך פֿאַרלאָזט.



 ניט מאַכן? האָט מיר דצם צימצר גצשצנקט אַ ריַיכצ דאַמע, און צוואָנציק באַקאַנטצ





איך צס צוגעגליכן צו די לייכטנדע פעצנצטלער, ווצלכע סיווצט באַלד בלינד מאַכן די נאַכט... טונקצלע שאָטן האָבן זיך גצלייגט אויף די ווצנט. מיר איז גצוואָרן טרויצריק און אומהיימלצך.

מערי האָט זיך פֿאַר מיר אָּגצשטעלט. אירע שיינע, דורשטיקצ, וויַטזעצנדע אויגן
 עופעלצ, ווצלכצ בצט רצטונג ביי דצר צאַרטצר ליבנדצר מאֵמצן.




 דצנקצרין, זאָג דו מיר, שווצסטער, ענטפֿצר מיר, נצם אַראָם דצם שטיין וואָם דריקט מיֵן

האֵרץ...
זי האָט זיך אַראָפגעלאָּוט אין שטול, איך האָּב אַליין ניט געפּילט ווי איר קאָּפ
 האָב נאָר געפִילט הייסצ טרצרן בריצן מיֵנצ קני, און נאָך הייסצרצ - מיֵנצ אייגצנצ פֿאַלן אויך מיבנינע הענט איבצר מצריס קאָּפּ...








 פון שיינקייט, הייליקייט און גליק...

## VIDE/CONFESSION

By Yente Serdatzky

One day I received a letter inviting me to come to a specific place to talk. It was signed by a woman whose name was completely unfamiliar.

I set out with a tantalizing fantasy. I imagined that a long-lost, rich relative had suddenly turned up and only wanted to make me happy. But that's not important because I don't want to talk about myself.

My heart pounded as I crossed the room. With one glance I took it all in. A large, airy room, two wide open windows overlooking a grassy square. A bed, a white dresser, a table, chairs, a rocker, and the charming knickknacks which usually adorn the more intellectual Russian-Jewish woman's lonely apartment.
"Hello, hello" - a stranger came towards me and took my hand with sisterly warmth. I immediately understood everything. The fever pink in her face revealed the woman was a consumptive. I looked her over quickly: thirty years old, average height, delicate, charming gestures, long beautiful hair, and large, far-seeing, thirsty and extraordinary beautiful eyes.

She pointed to a chair. We sat down and faced each other.
"My name is Miss Mary Rubin," she began simply. "But I am a 'Mrs.' For a year I lived in one room together with my 'friend.' More about that later. I would apologize for asking you to come here since I don't know you, but my illness gives me certain privileges. I'm quite settled here. If I become unwell, I have my medicines, my bed. Talking will certainly upset me."

I looked at her curiously. She fascinated me. "It was necessary, very necessary that I confide in you. My story weighs upon my soul like a stone... Christians who have faith see a priest before dying. After all, everyone has so much to say before they die. Ah, if only I could express my experiences and thoughts through writing or some other art!"

She stared off into space. Excited and curious, I focused all my thoughts on her. She snapped back, looked at me sharply, and, seeing my attentiveness, began to speak.
"I must start with some biography. I come from Russian Poland, from an average-sized city. I don't remember my father. I was barely six when he died. But I remember my mother very well. Rough-skinned, old-fashioned, weak, she was constantly worried about feeding her younger and older children. I was raised under bad conditions: dense air - but, of course, you know the endless litany about poor homes. In our quarter, such homes were not news, so it didn't bother me very much.
"I grew up well and strong with a cheerful spirit and not a bad-looking face. By the time I was twelve, I was already a real wage earner. When the movement began in our city, I was seventeen. I became one of its first members. I had no grand ideas. One fact sufficed: I was forced to live oppressed and poor while I had a right to live well and free. This right had to be fought for and that's what I did.
"I did what everyone like me did: distributed leaflets, attended meetings, the birzhe... But you know all these things. Going to the birzhe gave me special pleasure. My lungs breathed in the fresh air, my face glowed, my eyes shone. I'd meet with Motke the Mason and with Shloyme the Tailor, and Henokh the Baker never left my side..."

Mary sighed and, after a short pause, continued: "This went on for three years. Then I was supposed to be arrested. My mother cried day and night. Two of my brothers were already in America. They sent a boat ticket, covered the expenses, and I came here. I had turned twenty.
"Once here, I adjusted quickly. My brothers were living in the country and I didn't want to stay with them. So I went to the city, began earning a good wage, and rented a room from warm, ordinary people. I also tended to my spiritual life. I joined the radical party and became active. You're familiar with this type of activism: attending events, selling tickets, standing at the bar and so on.
"And later came the turbulent years in Russia. Money was critical. The events here became more frequent and the excitement greater and greater."

Mary became lost in thought. The red spots on her face were now more visible. She began to cough, stood up and fussed with her medicines. I stared at her in amazement. It was now late afternoon. Sunbeams slipped in through the open windows (spring was just beginning). My imagination worked swiftly and spun out her later life: "Fell in love with a married man... was tricked by a scoundrel... loved but was not loved in return..." I snapped back to find Mary sitting opposite me. She spoke:
"As Russia grew silent, life here became
even more quiet. I was twenty-four then. I had always wanted to get married and had thought about it. I wasn't very picky either. In the old country, I would have picked Motke or Henokh. But a couple of years before I left, they'd married my girlfriends. I didn't care. Here I picked Leybke the Locksmith. We were supposed to get married, but then we quarreled. So Helen snatched him up. This bothered me. She was a good student and quite a pretty girl. But I didn't worry long. I started going with Shlomke the Carver. But then Shlomke left. (Perhaps you noticed at that time a kind of epidemic of restlessness infected all the young men and made them incapable of staying put in one place.) Shlomke didn't write, but then he really wasn't obliged to because we'd not made any promises.
"By the age of twenty-four, I still had no one. I was lonely. I was looking at myself too frequently in shop windows and they mirrored back that I was a bit too skinny, my nose a bit too long, my cheekbones a bit too thick. Filled with bitterness, I'd run home. I'd throw off my corset, unbraid my hair and feel somewhat happier: My thick hair framed my pale face and made it terribly interesting and my black eyes glowed. My teeth were like pearls. A sweet hope would envelop my heart... I began to hunt for a husband."

The red spots on Mary's face were now inflamed. Her eyes glowed. She began to speak haltingly as if discussing something distasteful.
"Hunting for a husband... Ha! Who knows its special flavor? You come home tired, have no time to eat, force your feet into high heels and a shabes corset and you run... Where? Who knows? You run to gatherings, lectures, meetings and the theater - anywhere where it's possible to meet a friend in trousers... Ha! How bitter and ugly that is... But still you do it... You do it because you have to, because you must. And you come home tired, bitter, disappointed: twenty girls for every boy, and every girl looks prettier and more worthy than you... And all the while you wear Cain's mark on your forehead: Everyone can see that you want a husband. Everyone despises you for it. The kinder ones laugh at you with a mean, cynical
laughter... Ach, ugly, ugly..."
Mary grew calmer.
"Now I'll try to 'paint' for you my true circumstances: I was an ordinary girl, not used to philosophizing, nor, like you in your writing, looking for the essence of life... I read Yiddish books and something drew me to those which passionately describe love and wedded bliss... My conclusion was simple: Nothing is depicted as beautifully as love therefore it probably must be good. The cleverest speakers and lecturers first make your head spin and then make you yawn. Yet no one ever tires of the wise prattlings of a one- or two- year-old child. So perhaps that's even better. I've seen how famous, clever, learned people play with children and how intellectuals generally preoccupied with lofty schemes, manage to build nests for themselves. So if they do it - then that is probably the essence and happiness of life... And that essence - oh, how I wanted it!
"But let me tell you more: I was living with a woman from my hometown, a widow with five children. The two older ones were sweet, able girls. One was twenty-four, the other - a couple of years younger. The mother's hair turned grayer every time she looked at them. They went to gatherings. I had a girlfriend, tall, slim - she looked like a court lady. She was lonely here. Though she earned a good wage, she too went to gatherings. And I had another girlfriend. Her name was Bertha. Small and thin, but her face was pale, refined - a madonna's face. She too came with us, didn't miss a single event... I frequently visited a Russian family - a home of intellectuals with a piano and carpets. An intellectual old couple, five daughters and a son. The son played ball and the daughters went to gatherings..."

I cut her off angrily: "So according to you, the gatherings which are organized serve only as markets for husband-hunting?"

Mary shot back angrily:
"I don't know your philosophical tactics," she said, her voice shaking with agitation. "I only know that three-fourths of those gathered at your 'holy shrines' are lonely girls and women. And it's foolish to force a holy weapon upon a person whose hands have been cut off and to order her: 'Go forth into
battle!""
Mary saw regret in my expression. Her voice became softer. She began speaking anxiously and quickly:
"The point is - wherever I went, I always met girls and more girls - all decent, pretty, and intelligent. Everywhere - in shops, in homes, in night school. And who speaks at these gatherings?... Statistics say that eight women show up for every man. You know how it is - when you become fixated on something, you start seeing it more often. I heard, I don't know where, that throughout the world more women are born than men because men are worn out by philandering and are weaker when they marry while women are still pure and strong. But I didn't care about the reason. I was suffering from the fact..."

Mary sighed and began to speak slowly and sadly:
"We knew a couple of young men.
Fortunate 'trouser wearers'! No matter where they went, the world was ready to receive them. Let's skip the usual banal complaints that a man lives more easily and freely. The point is he also has more friends. Every 'Mrs.' has a sister, a relative, a girl from her hometown for whom she's eager to do favors. My 'Mrs.' befriended these two young men. Wherever they went, the parlor was ready with a rocking chair, fruit and snacks, the friendliest smile, the prettiest compliments, the warmest words.
"As for me? There was no one to look out for me. To get a friendly reception, I had to sew the 'Mrs.' a dress, buy presents for the children, listen to every foolish story and sit in the kitchen because, after all, it would be a pity to wear out the parlor carpet. And despite all that my 'Mrs.' still favored others over me - relatives, nieces. I was just a leftover...
"Meanwhile months and years disappeared. At twenty-eight I was still without a husband, still an eligible virgin... It was spring - free, warm. My heart ached so, I thought I'd go crazy... the walls of my room pressed in... people seemed ugly - especially my girlfriends. I felt only disgust at the prospect of reading a printed page. I had a weak appetite... insomnia... feverish and


Russian Jewish woman, turn of the century. Courtesy YIVO Institute of Jewish Research. Natalie Rubenstein Collection.
anxious nights..."
Mary coughed. With sisterly love, I took both her hands. My eyes filled with tears. I begged her to be calm, to consider her health. Nervously, she pushed my hands away.
"Leave me alone. How banal those words: 'Consider your health.' If only I'd considered it then! I must finish telling you my story.
"I began to hide from my acquaintances. At work, I'd often jump up as if bitten by a snake... I'd find an excuse to leave the shop. For hours, I'd wander through the parks and streets... What didn't I think about during those times? I often thought of taking my life. But my whole being was against that. When I had such thoughts, I'd take off all my clothes (I was most tormented at night). My body was white, youthful, beautiful breasts... 'I need to live!' I thought. I wanted to live.
"Often, when no one was in the house, I'd wander through the rooms and find fault with everything: - Here things were dusty; there they were disorderly. The overall
arrangement was in bad taste and my "Mrs." baby wasn't kept very clean. I'd put on a long housedress with wide sleeves and I'd look in the mirror. I'd be a prettier, better housekeeper, I thought. I'd always wear graceful and well-tailored clothes. I'd dress the children like dolls. The bed linens would be whiter than snow and embroidered with flowers... And my head would begin to spin and I'd fall half-dead on the carpet...
"And so the days dragged on. Spring ripened and grew more tantalizing. It seemed to me that everyone was wild. The two young men ran from one house to another, dropping a good word to all the girls, giving each a spark of hope - but not much more. There was no advantage to getting married. Besides, who to pick first? Each girl was better than the next. And there were so many!
"During this period, I was obsessed with one thought. Night after night it tormented me , stopped me from even going near my bed... Shouldn't I just go on the street and pick up a man? I'd have a baby. So there'd be no father... a mother is enough. So there's no one steady. I'd do it again and again. Ha! Those young men! What a plague! They could only make a girl's life miserable. But on a dark night, on a street, a complete stranger...
"Once, in the middle of a moonless night I snuck out of the house... Ha! Don't worry. I didn't go through with it. The first man winked at me and I ran home... And afterwards - with sickly swiftness, I decided to move to another city. I didn't even say goodbye to my girlfriends. I was afraid they might ask me if it was worth it...
"I found help. I went to a girlfriend in another city. I explained that back home I had a steady job and earned $\$ 20$ a week. You realize it was a lie. That very evening I met a young man at my girlfriend's house. She was talkative by nature and managed to disclose everything about me and mentioned my $\$ 20$ -a-week job a few times. The young man immediately became attentive...
"His name was Hyman. His trousers alone would have almost sufficed for someone as hungry as me... Nu, nu, I had a bit of pleasure like you describe in your writing when a married woman feels herself on fire. Instinctively, I selected my 'weapons,' the
anger... Too vulgar? No matter... He sang pretty songs and had pretty black hair and also pretty eyes. And he talked about ideas and books. That first evening we kissed. A week later we were back here. We lived in one room and I went to work in the shop.
"Now let me tell you how I lived. Hyman was an ordinary, typical intellectual - that is, he did nothing at home, only occasionally looked into a book. He was delicate with pretty, white hands. My girlfriend had warned me that he'd already been 'in love' with two girls, both of whom had supported him. I ignored the warning; I was too hungry for love. Besides I had reached that highest rung of radicalism advocating that the stronger and the more able serve as the providers - no distinction between men and women.
"So began a life of hard work. I made $\$ 12$ a week. My fantasy was never realized. I couldn't run a household. We had to rent a room. I had to rush to prepare our meals in the 'Mrs." kitchen. And you know what that's like - the endless quarrels with the 'Mrs.' over a pot you forgot to wash. Nor did I embroider my bed with flowers. Our life was very crowded. Two in one room with books and clothes. Ach! But the worst of it - I could not bear a child. A wife, a provider... Ha! I had three operations that year... As I became sated with love, a dissatisfaction began to gnaw at my heart. After all, I could have been such an exceptional mother, such a refined housekeeper.
"The operations had made me nervous and day by day I began to lose weight. And after that came the illness. And after that he left. Just look how angry it makes you! You think him a scoundrel? - Nu, think what you will... I don't want to rage against people. It eats me up. I don't hold it against him. In business terms: 'Demand creates the market.' Ha! So what was he supposed to do?
"What do I do now that I can't support myself? A rich lady gave me this room as a gift and twenty acquaintances donate a quarter a week for my food. I've already gotten used to this too..."

Mary suddenly clutched at her heart, stood up and began to pace the room. It was almost twilight. The neighbors' windows
glowed red with the setting sun. Mary's face was aflame and I unconsciously compared it to the windows, which would soon go blind with night... Dark shadows spread across the walls. I felt sad and strange.

Mary stopped in front of me. Her pretty, thirsty, far-seeing eyes insistently held mine - like a sick infant's eyes which beg its gentle, loving mother for rescue.
"Dear one," she whispered in a trembling voice, "sister mine, what I need to know, what does not allow me to die is this question: What's to become of my whole group of girlfriends? How will it be for them? Will they take their girlhood and longings to the grave? Or will they become prostitutes and contract consumption? Or will it be different?... I am uneducated, not a deep thinker. Tell me, sister. Answer me. Remove the stone that presses upon my heart..."

She lowered herself into her chair. I don't know how her head came to lie upon my lap, nor when my hands began to stroke her silky hair. But I could feel Mary's hot tears burning my knees and even hotter ones - my own falling on my hands which covered her head...

Since then, I visit her frequently. I come at sundown, the most difficult time, when the sick heart yearns for a warm, comforting word. She sits opposite me - always silent. Her thirsty, wonderful eyes cling to mine and I talk. I talk about beautiful, rich worlds, about generous hearts which overflow with love for everyone, about sunlight and happiness, about glory and beauty, about harmony and beauty and many, many other good things. And little by little, my role absorbs me. I begin to have faith in everything - a strong, ardent faith. At twilight, amid the dark shadows in Mary's room, a new world rises before us both, a world of beauty, holiness, and happiness...


[^0]:    80/BRIDGES

[^1]:    84/BRIDGES

