FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

SHOLEM ALEICHEM:

# TEVYE

THE DAIRYMAN

and The Railroad Stories

Translated and with an introduction by HILLEL HALKIN

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#### INTRODUCTION

**▲** 1 **▲** 

A little over a century ago, in 1883, an aspiring writer of comic talents named Sholem Rabinovich, who was then serving as a "crown rabbi," a state-appointed clerical functionary in a small Jewish community in the Ukraine, published a satirical account of local politics in the St. Petersburg Yiddishe Folksblat and playfully signed it "Sholem Aleichem"—that is to say, "Hello There!" It was not his first alias. He already had, and would continue to assemble, a precocious collection of pseudonyms, including such curiosities as "Solomon Bikherfresser" (Solomon Bookeater), "Baron Pipernoter" (Baron Ogre), "Terakhs an Eynikl" (Terach's Grandson), and "Der Yiddisher Gazlen" (The Robber Jew). Compared with these titles, however, which had at best a slapstick humor, the ancient Hebrew salutation first employed in the Folksblat (its Arabic cognate of salaam aleykum can be heard today throughout the Middle East) was a prescient choice. Meaning literally "peace be upon you," the phrase is used in Yiddish not as an everyday greeting but as a more emphatic one that is reserved for either old acquaintances long unmet or new ones just introduced; thus, besides encoding in the form of a pun Rabinovich's own name of "Sholem," it pithily anticipated the career of an author who, over the next three decades, was to come and go in the Yiddish press from one newspaper and magazine to another, delighting an ever-growing audience with his unpredictable appearances before vanishing again until the next time. Gradually he used the new pen name more and more. It did not replace its rivals all at once, but by 1894, the year in which the first chapter of

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what is possibly the greatest of all Jewish novels, Tevye the Dairyman, appeared in the pages of the Warsaw yearbook Der Hoyzfraynt, it had become an exclusive trademark recognized by Yiddish readers everywhere. Eventually his own friends and intimates took to calling him by it too. Whereas Sholem Aleichem had once been Sholem Rabinovich, Sholem Rabinovich was now Sholem Aleichem, the private man subsumed in the public identity of the world's most famous Yiddish writer.

Yet if comedy seems to imply a sufficient degree of well-being to make laughter possible, the debut of Sholem Aleichem as a comic Jewish writer did not come at an auspicious time. Indeed, coinciding as it did with the drastic deterioration in the Jewish situation in Russia that began in 1881 with the assassination of Alexander II and the bloody pogroms that followed, it could hardly have come at a worse one. Today, it is true, when modern Jewish history is read backwards in the monstrous light of the Holocaust, it is difficult to be as shocked as contemporaries were by the plight of Russian Jewry in the last decades of the Czarist Empire, during which the number of Jews murdered by Christian mob violence did not exceed several hundred. But in the context of its own time and place, the era of 1881-1917 in Russia was an exceedingly black period, the most savage experienced by Jews anywhere since the terrible massacres of Khmelnitsky's Cossacks in the Ukraine in 1648-1649. Moreover, not only were the pogroms that took place under Alexander III and his successor, Nicholas II, actually incited and approved by the Russian government, they were part of an official policy of anti-Semitism calculated to render life so intolerable for the country's Jewish inhabitants that, in the notorious words of Alexander III's adviser Constantine Pobyedonostzev, a third of them would be forced to emigrate, a third to convert, and a third to perish from hunger. One has to go back to the Spanish Inquisition and Expulsion of 1492 to find a previous instance of a European government setting out on a deliberate course of first terrorizing and then eliminating its Jewish population.

Such were the times that Sholem Aleichem wrote about—and that, remarkably for a humorist, he wrote about without either ridiculing or rose-tinting, neither saying to his reader, "Laugh and be above it," nor telling him, "Come, it's not as bad as you think; let me show you the brighter side." On the contrary: it was

consistently his method, for all the near-manic exuberance of his prose, to confront the reader with reality in its full harshness, laughter being for him the explosive with which he systematically mined all escape routes away from the truth. Despite the exaggeration that is an ingredient of all humor, he had a reportorial passion for fact; more than one of his stories actually came from reading the morning newspaper. In the absence of other sources, one could infer much of the history and sociology of the Russian Jewry of his time from his work alone. And because, before one can fully appreciate this work's universal dimensions (of which he himself was well aware) one must read it as the specific anatomy of Russian Jewish existence that it was, a few more words about the latter may be helpful.

Russia did not develop a Jewish problem; it swallowed one whole. Unlike other European countries, whose Jewish populations were built up in medieval times by a slow process of migration, often initially encouraged by rulers wishing to benefit from Jewish commercial skills and contacts, the Russian state, which had traditionally barred Jews entirely, suddenly acquired large numbers of them, and without any desire to do so, by virtue of the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795, and the revisions of them made by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Overnight, as it were, the Jewish communities of eastern and central Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine found themselves on annexed Russian soil-beyond whose boundaries, however, the Czarist regime in St. Petersburg had no intention of letting them spread. And so by the end of the eighteenth century, there had come into being the human enclosure of the Pale of Settlement. that vast ghetto of western and southwestern Russia to which millions of Jews were confined by a jumble of confusing laws. Although it ran roughly along the lines of the new territories, the Pale as an entity was never clearly defined; its exact borders kept shifting as different parts of it were declared in or out of bounds according to the whims of bureaucrats, the outward pressure of the Jews bottled up inside it, and the counterpressure of anti-Jewish officials and Russian merchants fearing Jewish competition. Thus, for instance, the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, the "Yehupetz" of Sholem Aleichem's fiction and the city in which he lived for

many years, was first opened to Jews (1794), then barred to them (1835), then put back on limits for temporary visits only (1862), then gradually reopened to Jewish residence by special permit, which depended on the petitioner's profession and the connections he happened to have. Even more filled with reversals was the history of Jewish residential rights in the Pale's rural villages, as opposed to its cities and towns. Originally left to the discretion of the local nobility in 1797, rural residence for Jews was denied in 1804, temporarily restored in 1807, redenied that same year, restored again in 1808, partially revoked once more in 1823, and so back and forth until 1910, when a final wave of rural expulsions began. Not all the restrictions on the books, of course, were always put into practice; yet even when they were not, the everpresent anxiety that they might be was enough to make a nightmare of the lives of great numbers of Jews who, generally for reasons of economic opportunity, were domiciled illegally.

Confinement to the Pale of Settlement, however, was not the worst of Russian Jewry's problems. Far more onerous was the fact that within the Pale itself, where most Jews lived in grinding poverty, they were discriminated against at every turn by an imperial administration that, lacking Pobyedonostzev's inclusive vision, could never quite make up its mind whether it wished to starve them or assimilate them, and so alternated between the most oppressive features of both approaches. Jews were excluded from local councils and trade guilds, even in towns where they formed a majority of the inhabitants. They were made to pay special and frequently humiliating taxes—a head tax, a property tax, a tax on the slaughter of kosher meat, a tax on Sabbath candles, a tax on the right to wear their traditional clothes. They were barred at different times and places from a wide range of occupations—law, agriculture, tavern keeping, the production and sale of liquor, the retailing of manufactured articles, the employment of their wives as market vendors. They were harassed in the education of their children, now forced to send them to Russianizing schools and now confronted with a system of quotas that made a Russian schooling almost impossible. And they were subjected to especially harsh draft laws, being inducted into the army in higher percentages and for longer terms of service than other sectors of the population. This last affliction reached a horrendous extreme in the reign of Nicholas I, who decreed in 1827 that an annual

number of Jewish boys aged twelve and up should be taken to the army for premilitary training until they turned eighteen, at which time they were to be drafted for twenty-five years. These "cantonists," as the unfortunate children were called, rarely saw their homes again, and until its abolition by Alexander II in 1856, the institution of juvenile conscription struck terror into the hearts of Jewish families. Extortionate bribery, child snatching, and the physical mutilation of one's sons were some of the measures employed to ensure that the boy taken to the army was not one's own.

Under Alexander II, whose liberalizing tendencies were most prominently expressed by his emancipation of the Russian serfs, the condition of the Jews improved too; some of the discriminatory legislation against them was relaxed, and a more thorough removal of the rest was contemplated. Yet even before Alexander's assassination in 1881 by a bomb-throwing revolutionary, further progress had become mired in a welter of indecisive commissions of inquiry, and with the succession of his son, Alexander III, the anti-Jewish outlook of former years was revived with fresh vigor. There was now, moreover, a new factor that made this policy more brutal than ever: the desire to blame the Jews for the growing revolutionary movement, thus simultaneously discrediting the revolutionaries by painting them as Jewish conspirators, and deflecting the grievances of the Russian peasantry and working class from the government to the Jews. For the first time, government persecution of the Jews ceased to be a simple matter of social and economic containment and became a political tool. An idea of the cynical cruelty with which this tool was wielded can be gained even from an abbreviated chronology of the rash of anti-Semitic decrees and outbreaks that followed in the next several years:

1881/ Government-incited pogroms in Yelisavetograd, Kiev, and elsewhere in the Ukraine, as well as in Warsaw; the government officially blames them on Jewish economic exploitation of the masses, which have been driven to exact their just revenge.

1882/ Jews are again forbidden to settle in any of the rural sections of the Pale of Settlement (that is, in ninety percent of its area) or to buy property there. Jews already living in the villages are made subject to expulsion if they do not own their homes, if they move from village to village, or if they are absent from the village they live in for even a few days.

1883/ Pogroms in Rostov-on-Don; thousands of Jews living illegally in St. Petersburg are rounded up by the police and expelled.

1884/ Pogrom in Nizhni-Novgorod.

1887/ All high schools and universities within the Pale of Settlement (where Jews, though roughly a tenth of the inhabitants, form a majority of the literate population) are limited to a Jewish quota of ten percent of their student bodies.

1890/ Numerous towns in the Pale are reclassified as villages, from which Jews are therefore expelled; Jews are disqualified throughout the Pale of Settlement from voting for deputies in local elections.

1891/ Twenty thousand Jews are expelled from Moscow.

1894/ Jews are forbidden to change their names to non-Jewish ones; Jewish identity passes are marked with the word "Jew."

1899–1900/ More pogroms in the Ukraine; in Vilna a Jew is put on trial on the atavistic charge of attempting to murder a Christian girl in order to bake Passover matsoh from her blood. (This medieval "blood libel" was to be repeated in 1911 in the more famous case of Mendel Beilis, which attracted worldwide attention.)

1903/ The worst pogrom yet in Kishinev; forty-five Jews killed, eighty-six severely wounded, fifteen hundred Jewish houses and stores looted and demolished. Pogrom in Homel; when Jews try for the first time to defend themselves with arms, thirty-six are indicted for attacking Christians.

1904/ Outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war; Jews are called up in disproportionate numbers; the number of Jewish soldiers sent to the front is also disproportionately large.

Even the popular-backed Revolution of 1905, which broke out in the aftermath of Russia's defeat by Japan and led Nicholas II to grant a short-lived liberal constitution that aroused, among other things, extravagant hopes of a new age for Russia's Jews, only ended in the further shedding of Jewish blood: the ink on the constitutional manifesto had hardly dried when gangs of counter-revolutionary thugs known as "the Black Hundreds," organized with the complicity of the Czarist police, attacked Jewish neighborhoods all over Russia under the cover of nationalist slogans holding the Jews responsible for the country's troubles and accusing them of subverting the authority of the Czar in order to seize power themselves. The worst of these pogroms took place in Odessa, where over three hundred Jews were killed, thousands

injured, and tens of thousands left homeless. Another that occurred in Kiev was witnessed by Sholem Aleichem himself from the window of the hotel in which he had taken refuge with his family. Soon afterward he left Russia, never to return again except for brief visits until his death in New York in 1916.

In taking his departure, of course, Sholem Aleichem was joining a flood of Jews heading westward; it is estimated that between 1881 and 1914, when World War I shut the gates of emigration, nearly three million Jews left the Russian Empire, mostly for the United States. This mass flight, however, only partially relieved congestion within the Pale itself, both because of a high birthrate and because economic pressures and the rural expulsions led to an internal migration of Jews to the crowded quarters of the larger towns, where mass proletarization took place. Despairing of a future under the Czarist regime, many young Jews turned to the revolutionary movement. If at the time of Alexander II's assassination the specter of Jewish insurrectionism had been largely a red herring, by the first decade of the twentieth century it was an unassailable fact. Jews were active in large numbers in the two major underground parties, the Social Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats, and in 1897 they formed a clandestine Marxist organization of their own, the League of Jewish Workingmen, or "Bund." Jewish youth that was not politically active was becoming modernized too, so that a yawning gap developed between an older generation that still clung to the traditional ways and a younger one that was rapidly forsaking them. Russian began to displace Yiddish in daily speech (it is an astounding symptom of the times that Sholem Aleichem himself spoke Russian to his wife and children!) and the medieval culture of Orthodox Judaism that had remained intact for centuries was in the process of crumbling. Everywhere, battered from without and eroded from within, Jewish life was in a state of flux, disarray, decomposition.

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It has been commonly remarked that while in most humor the self, be it individual or collective, laughs at that which is unlike it and with which it does not identify, thereby proclaiming its own superiority, in Jewish humor it laughs at itself—the explanation for this presumably being that among a people with so long a history of persecution, the most pressing task of humor has been to neutralize the hostility of the outside world, first by internaliz-

ing it ("Why should I care what the world thinks of me, when I think even less of myself?") and then by detonating it through a joke ("Nevertheless, the world doesn't know what it's talking about, because in fact I am much cleverer than it is—the proof being that it has no idea how funny I am, and I do!"). There is doubtless much truth in this, provided one realizes that the type of humor in question is not historically very Jewish at all and first makes its appearance in Jewish literature in the course of the nineteenth century, especially in the second half. Before that, Jews reacted to hatred and oppression in a variety of ways—with defiance, with scorn, with anger, with bitterness, with vengefulness, with lamentation, with (and perhaps here the seeds of modern Jewish humor were first sown) copious self-accusation—but never, as far as can be determined from the literary sources, with laughter directed at themselves. This is strictly a latter-day method of coping (one prompted perhaps by the loss of the religious faith that had given meaning to Jewish tribulations in the past), and Sholem Aleichem is one of its great developers and practitioners.

The fact that the inner dialectic of such humor (which, despite its defensive function, can easily undermine the ego from within) became in the hands of Sholem Aleichem a therapeutic force of the first order is one of his most extraordinary achievements. It is a matter of record that the Jews of his time who read his work, or heard him read it himself at the many public performances that he gave, not only laughed until their ribs ached at his unsparing portrayals of their perversity, ingenuity, anxiety, tenacity, mendacity, humanity, unplumbable pain, and invincible hopefulness, they emerged feeling immeasurably better about themselves and their fate as Jews. His appearance in a Russian shtetl on one of his tours was a festive event: banquets were given in his honor, lecture halls were filled to overflowing, pleas for favorite stories were shouted at him from the audience, encores were demanded endlessly, crowds accompanied him to the railroad station to get a last glimpse of him before he went. Besides being a sensitive performer—contemporary accounts describe him as reading his stories aloud with great restraint and simplicity, never overacting or burlesquing them—he clearly touched his listeners in a place where nothing else, except perhaps their ancient prayers and rituals, was able to. He gave them a feeling of transcendence.

This feeling, as has been stated, had nothing to do with the sense of being "above it all," with that comforting assurance given us by a great deal of comic literature that life is ultimately so silly a business that there is no point in taking it too seriously. Quite the opposite: Sholem Aleichem's humor demanded of its readers that they take life seriously indeed—nor, in any case, with pogroms and hunger often at the door, were they in any position not to. His comedy did not lift them above the suffering world that they were part of; it lifted them together with it. The laughter his work evoked was not that of contempt, or of embarrassment, or of relief, or even of sympathy, but rather of identification and acceptance. "You who have been through all this," it said, "and who know that such are our lives and that no amount of self-delusion can make them less so-you who have experienced fear, and humiliation, and despair, and defeat, and are aware that there is more yet to come—you to whom all this has happened and who still have been able to laugh—you, my friends, need no consolation, because you have already prevailed." Those who rose at the end of such an evening to give him a standing ovation were also paying tribute to themselves.

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Readers of Tevye the Dairyman who are familiar with the play or movie Fiddler on the Roof will notice that, in more ways than one, there is scant resemblance between Sholem Aleichem's novel and the charming musical based on it. (Indeed, this is true even of the musical's name, which does not come from the work of Sholem Aleichem at all but from the art of Marc Chagall with its recurrent motif of a sad-gay Jewish fiddler playing upon the rooftops of a Russian village.) To begin with, there is the tone: unlike Fiddler which, whether sad or gay, keeps within the range of the safely sentimental, Tevye has a giddy energy, a recklessness of language and emotion, a dizzy oscillation of wildly funny and wrenchingly painful scenes that come one on top of another without letup. In addition, the dramatic plot of Fiddler on the Roof is culled from just four of the eight Tevye episodes, the third, fourth, fifth, and eighth, so that Chapters 1, 2, 6, and 7 have no bearing on it. Lastly, in Fiddler Tevye has only three daughters, Tsaytl, Hodl, and Chava, whereas in Tevye . . . but how many daughters Tevye

has in *Tevye* is a question we will come to in a moment. Suffice it to say first that, quite apart from the pointlessness of comparing two such different treatments simply because one derives from the other, similar departures from the text of Tevye (except for its being set to music) were made in 1914 by Sholem Aleichem himself for a dramatized version of the book that had a long stage life of its own. In fact, his cannibalization of the novel was even more extreme than the musical's: essentially it utilized only Chapters 5 and 8, and Tevye's daughters were reduced to two, Tsaytl and Chava, the plot revolving entirely around Chava and her marriage to and ultimate break-up with Chvedka, the Ukrainian villager, leaving Tsaytl in a mere supporting role. In sentimentality, too, Sholem Aleichem's play, written as it clearly was with one eye on the box office of the highly commercial Yiddish theater, is every bit the equal of Fiddler on the Roof, which is without a doubt the more stage-worthy of the two.

But how many daughters does the original Tevye have? As Professor Khone Shmeruk has shown in an absorbing study, the uncertain answer to this question casts considerable light on the composition of the book as a whole. In its opening episode, "Tevye Strikes It Rich," which first appeared in 1894 and was revised in 1897, the number of Tevye's daughters is given as seven. In Chapter 2, "Tevye Blows a Small Fortune," and Chapter 3, "Today's Children," which is about Tsaytl, Tevye's oldest daughter (both were published in 1899), no count is given at all. In "Hodl" and "Chava" (1904 and 1905) we again read of seven girls—yet in Chapter 6, "Shprintze" (1907), there are only six, the two youngest of whom are Beilke and Teibl, while in Chapters 7 and 8 (1909 and 1914) Teibl has vanished and only Beilke remains. What can be concluded from this? Clearly, it would seem, that Sholem Aleichem planned Tevye in several stages, each representing a modification of his previous conception. Indeed, the first episode, which was based on his acquaintance with an actual milkman whom he befriended one summer in the resort town of Boyarka near Kiev (the "Boiberik" of the novel), was no doubt written as an independent story with little or no thought of a sequel, its figure of seven nameless daughters being no more than a way of saying "many." Also probably meant to stand by itself was the second episode, in which Tevye meets Menachem Mendl, who was already the comic hero of another, epistolary work of fiction that Sholem Aleichem

was working on at the time. By the third, or at the latest, fourth chapter, on the other hand, Sholem Aleichem had evidently decided to write a series about Tevye's daughters, which meant producing seven more stories, one for each of them; yet in Chapter 6, either tiring of the subject or feeling he was running out of material, he reduced their number to six, and in Chapter 7, he cut it again to five. This chapter, in fact, was evidently intended to conclude the Tevye cycle with Tevye's departure for Palestine. since in 1911, with Sholem Aleichem's authorization, it was printed together with the first six episodes as a book called Tevve the Dairyman—the first time such a title was used for the series as a whole. The eighth and last episode, added several years later, was apparently written as an afterthought (one motive, Shmeruk conjectures, being the desire to return Chava to the bosom of her family). Having written it, however, Sholem Aleichem must have planned at least one further installment, because he did not give this story, "Lekh-Lekho," a coda-like ending, as he did Chapter 7. and only subsequently sought to make up for the omission by adding a brief fragment that was published shortly before his death.\*

\*This fragment, which was given the tongue-twisting Hebrew name of Vekhalaklakoys, after the verse in Psalms 35:6, Yehi darkom khoyshekh vekhalaklakoys, "Let their path be dark and slippery," was written in 1914, the same year as "Lekh-Lekho," but not published until two years later. Though it seems to have been begun as a genuine sequel to "Lekh-Lekho," that is, as a ninth episode of Tevye, it is less than a third of the average length of the other stories, repeats much of the material in Chapter 8 without adding anything essentially new, and has a rather tired quality that contrasts with the sparkle of the rest of the book. Still, one cannot call it unfinished; on the contrary, it contains precisely the "finale" that Chapter 8 lacks. In the absence of explanatory biographical material, of which there appears to be none, one can only speculate what this fragment represents. My own guess is as follows: while Sholem Aleichem indeed intended to write a full-length sequel to "Lekh-Lekho" and began it immediately after finishing the latter, he soon, whether because of failing health or because he realized that the book had reached its natural conclusion and had nowhere else to go, gave it up-though not before hastening to write a proper end for it, his main concern being that Tevye should have one. Unhappy with the results, however, he refrained from publishing this, possibly hoping to revise and expand it; yet ultimately, seeing this was not to be, he consented to its publication in the days before his death. Subsequently, in all the Yiddish editions of Tevye printed after Sholem Aleichem's death, the Vehhalaklakoys fragment has appeared as its last chapter.

As the translator of Tevye, I was in a dilemma. On the one hand, Vekhalaklakoys was published by Sholem Aleichem himself in his lifetime, and without it Tevye has no real end; yet on the other hand, apart from its last page, not only does it add nothing to the remainder of the work, it qualitatively detracts from it. What was one to do? In the end I

Can a work of fiction begun with no overall plan, written in installments over a twenty-year period, and ending more than once, be called (as it has been here) a novel at all? There are critics whose answer is no. The noted Sholem Aleichem scholar Dan Miron, for instance, has written that the structure of Tevye is more "mythic" than novelistic, each of its episodes consisting of a pattern of rise, fall, and recovery that can repeat itself endlessly; Sholem Aleichem, Miron argues, could have brought Tevye to a close after its seventh chapter or gone on to write a tenth and eleventh—in terms of the book's form and thematic contents, it would hardly have mattered. But though it certainly is true that each episode of Tevye can be read as a story in itself (which is undoubtedly how some of its original readers, not all of whom were familiar with what came before, did read it), and true too that each shares basic patterns with the others, it is equally clear that each builds on the previous installments and that there is a definite development from one chapter to the next. Indeed, if what perhaps most characterizes the novel as a literary form is the flow of time in it, the fact that more than in any other artistic medium we see human beings exposed to time,

decided to follow the example of Frances Butwin's 1948 English translation of Tevye and to omit most of the fragment, some six pages of Yiddish text in all, retaining only the final coda, which I spliced on to the end of "Lekh-Lekho," adding several lines of my own to make the transition smoother. Though taking such a liberty in translating a classic of world literature may seem presumptuous to some readers, I would like to think that Sholem Aleichem might have welcomed it. Besides always being open to criticism of his work, frequently revising it as a result, he encouraged his Russian and Hebrew translators, whom he personally helped and advised, to be extremely free in their renditions. Anyone comparing his Yiddish with the Hebrew translations by his son-in-law Y. D. Berkovits, for example, and especially with Berkovits' translation of Tevye, in which Sholem Aleichem was an active collaborator, will be struck by the enormous differences between them. (Berkovits himself omitted the Vekhalaklakoys fragment entirely in his complete Hebrew edition of the novel, which he ended with "Lekh-Lekho," but this was apparently his own decision, made after Sholem Aleichem's death.) There will no doubt come a time for variorum editions of Tevye in which the full text of Vekhalaklakoys can appear alongside whatever ending the translator cares to give the book.

Apart from this fragment, I have departed (as did Berkovits) from the standard Yiddish text of *Tevye* in one other place. When the first episode of the book, "Tevye Strikes It Rich," was published in 1894, it was accompanied by a brief preface, purporting to be a letter written by Tevye to Sholem Aleichem, the literary purpose of which was to introduce Tevye to the reader. Though this preface was later republished as part of the novel as a whole, it was clearly written for "Tevye Strikes It Rich" alone, makes no reference to any of the stories that come after it, and cannot possibly be construed as applying to them. I have therefore omitted it.

shaped by time, worn by time, then *Tevye* is a novel *par excellence*, perhaps the only one ever written in real time, that is, according to a scale on which time for the author and time for his characters are absolutely equivalent. Sholem Aleichem and Tevye age together: a year in the life of one is a year in the life of the other, and twenty years in the life of one is twenty years in the life of the other. Even as Sholem Aleichem sits at his desk writing down Tevye's stories, Tevye continues to grow older by the amount of time that writing takes.

It is in part this aspect of Tevye that makes him so real a character, for despite the great misfortunes that befall him and his extraordinary resilience in confronting them, the years affect him much as they do most men: slowly, subtly, almost imperceptibly in the course of any one of the book's episodes—in which, as in the short story generally, time is not a significant factor—but enormously when regarded over the whole span of them. Le plus ça change, le plus ça reste la même chose is only one side of Tevye and of us all; le plus ça reste la même chose, le plus ça change is the other. He is, as Miron says, always Tevye; but who, meeting him in 1894 and again in 1914, would not be shocked by the difference—and not only because of the gray hairs? Tevye has changed internally—and with these changes, the novel's three internal levels of meaning all reach a climax too. Let us consider them.

The first of these is the story of Tevye and his family as a paradigm of the fate of Russian Jewry. It is a measure of Sholem Aleichem's great artistry that Tevye, Golde, and their daughters—and with what a bare minimum of strokes these last are sketched!-are all wonderfully alive and individualized human beings who never strike us as being anything but themselves. Yet this should not obscure the perception that they are also, like most of the other characters in the book, representative types of Russian Jewish life who, taken together, tell the tale of its destruction. Indeed, each of Tevye's daughters falls in love with and/or marries a man who can be said to embody a distinct historical force or mood, and if Tevye himself is the very incarnation of the traditional culture of the shtetl, then beginning with the novel's second chapter, every one of its episodes illustrates another phase of this culture's helpless disintegration. In "Tevye Blows a Small Fortune," for example, we see in the person of Menachem Mendl the economic collapse of a community that has been driven by the

unnatural conditions imposed on it to seek its livelihood in the most pathetic kinds of nonproductive speculation. In "Today's Children" we read of that undermining of parental authority which, though still relatively mild in Tsaytl's case, will eventually bring Tevye's world crashing down on him. "Hodl" deals with the defection of Jewish youth to the revolutionary movement, and "Chava" with its loss to intermarriage. Shprintze's suicide is the outcome of a situation that at first resembles Tsaytl's and her other sisters', i.e., she has fallen in love with a young man whom Tevye originally disapproves of as a match for her—but precisely because of this parallel, the difference between Tsaytl's and Motl's behavior, on the one hand, and Shprintze's and Ahronchik's, on the other, shows how dramatically the lines of communication between generations have broken down in the space of a few years. In Beilke's story, "Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel," we meet yet another new Jewish type, the contractor Podhotzur, a vulgar nouveau-riche assimilationist ruthlessly intent on climbing the social and economic ladder of a society making the transition from rural feudalism to urban capitalism. And finally, in "Lekh-Lekho," what is left of Tevye's life literally falls apart: expelled from the village in which he and his ancestors have lived since time immemorial, he is forced to become a homeless wanderer. Coming in the final chapter of the novel, this expulsion is the ultimate concretization of the ruin of an entire world.

In all this, Tevye's role is essentially passive; he schemes, he fantasizes, he makes a great fuss over things (although less so as the years go by and he grows more aware of his powerlessness) yet each time the events, like his own unruly horse, simply run away with him, leaving him aghast and uncomprehending. And yet, as the Yiddish critic Y. Y. Trunk has perceptively observed, what makes him a genuinely tragic figure and not just the comic victim of a world beyond his control is that in every case it is he himself who brings about his downfall—a theme that comprises the second level of the book, that encompassing the relationships in Tevye's family, especially between him and his daughters. With his wife Golde, all in all, Tevye's relations are simple: they might be defined as those of a harmonious conjugal antagonism, a common enough modus vivendi among East European Jews that is composed on Tevye's side of equal parts genial misogyny and husbandly loyalty to hearth and home. This misogyny, however, runs only skin-deep, because, despite his protestations to the con-

trary (it is when he protests, in fact, that he most reveals his true feelings, a more direct expression of affection not being in his vocabulary), Tevye clearly loves his daughters to distraction. Nor does he just adore them; he admires and respects them with that unconventionally unsnobbish openness, that basic inclination to judge everyone on, and only on, his merits, which, beneath his facade of patriarchal autocracy and middle-class pretensions, is one of his most endearing traits. It is just this openness and capacity for love, however, that prove his undoing, for without his quite grasping the fact, these are the qualities that, absorbed from him by his daughters, make them act as they do in the face of his own apprehensions and objections. As is so often the case with parents and children, Tevye's daughters are much more like him than he is willing to admit; they are, in fact, the actors-out of the fantasies and values that he has transmitted to them. Does Tsaytl, disappointing her father, refuse to marry the rich Layzer Wolf and choose the poor Motl Komzoyl instead? But Tevye cannot stand Layzer Wolf, he truly likes Motl, and he himself has told Sholem Aleichem: "Money is a lot of baloney . . . what matters is for a man to be a man!" Is Tevye devastated because Hodl has linked her life with the young revolutionary, Pertchik? But besides having brought Pertchik into his home (for which, it is true, he blames himself-he just does not go beyond this), who if not Tevye has sat on his front stoop imagining what it would be like to trade places with the rich Jews of Yehupetz, living in their dachas while they bring him milk and cheese each day! Has Chava done the unthinkable, married a goy? Why, Tevye himself has wondered in the solitude of the forest, "What does being a Jew or not a Jew matter?" It is Tevye who in his fondness for Ahronchik has introduced him to Shprintze, and Tevye who, in his anger at Beilke for selling her soul to marry wealth, forgets that this is exactly the arrangement that he planned for Tsaytl long ago. Tevye knows that Beilke has sacrificed herself for his sake-yet it does not occur to him that she has done so because of the vision of magical riches that he himself has handed down to her.

In short, whether he is simply a natural democrat, or whether, staunchly traditional Jew though he is, he has unknowingly been affected by the liberal winds blowing in Russia, Tevye has fathered the daughters of his deepest dreams. Trunk puts it well when he writes of the man and his children, "Though consciously they have different outlooks on life, unconsciously they

share the same sense of it." It is only in the novel's penultimate chapter, the story of Beilke, however, that Tevye achieves a belated insight concerning this fact, for then, seeing Beilke's unhappiness in her stultifyingly opulent surroundings and recalling the vivacious child who lived with him in semipoverty, he articulates at last what at heart he has always known, namely, that all that really matters in life is human love, warmth, and intelligence, thus realizing the pitifulness of his one great conscious obsession: to have a rich daughter. Fate, he tragically learns, not only mocks a man by withholding his desires, but also—and sometimes most of all—by granting them. And like any tragic hero's, Tevye's fate, as Trunk reminds us, is his character.

But what a disproportion between the two! What a character and what a fate! Surely no man, and most surely none as good as Tevye, deserves to see his daughters stricken, as he says, by a curse worse than any in the Bible . . . and this conviction of injustice, the subject of Tevye's running debate with God, forms the novel's third and most profound level of all. Sholem Aleichem, it is true, is not often thought of as a religious writer. Religious observance, though constantly referred to in his work as part of the everyday fabric of Jewish life, does not play an especially important role in it, and genuinely spiritual figures are rare there. Indeed, this was one of the reasons that Y. L. Peretz, his leading rival among the Yiddish writers of the day and the author of much edifying fiction, dismissed Sholem Aleichem as a basically lowbrow figure who never grappled with ultimate Jewish issues. Humor in general, though by no means an illegitimate medium for serious religious expression, is not commonly put to that purpose. Yet having said all this, I would submit that Tevye the Dairyman, the comitragic historical account of the death of an ancient culture and psychological analysis of a father's unhappy love for his daughters, is also one of the most extraordinary Jewish religious texts of our own, and perhaps of any, time.

Tevye is a God-arguer: as such he belongs in a long Jewish tradition that starts with Abraham and runs prominently on through Moses, through Job, through the Tannaitic rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (who refused to accept a heaven-backed interpretation of Scripture even though it was supported by divine miracles), through Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, the saintly Hasidic master who is said to have held a trial at which God was the absentee

defendant, accused of having inflicted undeserved suffering on His people. Other religions may have their folktales about men who debate with and even rebuke God, but only in Jewish tradition, I believe, are such stories taken with high seriousness, the behavior in question being regarded—provided, of course that it comes from a spiritually ripe individual—as the highest form of religious service. Though it is Job's friends who keep telling him to accept God's judgment and Job who insists that he will not because that judgment is unjust, God Himself, after finally speaking to Job from the whirlwind, turns to his friends and says, "My wrath is kindled against you . . . for you have not spoken of Me what was right, as My servant Job has." And what is right, apparently, is to hold God to the highest standards of a man's conscience, even if He does not seem to behave by them.

It is worth considering this for a moment, for it presents an oddly paradoxical alternative, and by no means the main one adopted by Judaism either, to what have commonly been the standard responses of advanced cultures to the problem of innocent suffering in the world. Basically there have been three of these:

- 1. God exists, is good, and is all-powerful; what appears to us His injustice is either a legitimate testing of our character, a just retribution for our sins, or an illusion created by our inability to understand the workings of the Divinity.
- 2. God exists, is good, but is not all-powerful; beside Him are other, evil forces that contend with and sometimes best Him, thus gaining power over the world.
- 3. God does not exist and suffering is the result either of blind chance or of immutable laws working themselves out in the lives of men.

The first of these answers has been the one most often given by the major monotheistic religions; the second by Manichaeism, Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, and various other dualistic beliefs; the third by modern science and, essentially, by Buddhism.

But there is also, as we have seen, a fourth possible response: God exists; He is good; He is all-powerful; therefore He must be just; but He is not just; therefore He owes man an explanation and man must demand it from Him.

This is Job's response. And it is also Tevye's.

Job is not one of the religious texts that Tevye is always quoting from, nor would it be likely to be. On the whole it was not a part of Scripture widely read by East European Jews, both because it was not linked to specific prayers, rituals, or holidays like other books in the Bible, and because its Hebrew is extremely difficult. But Tevye knows its story and, in "Shprintze," on his way home from his humiliating meeting with Ahronchik's uncle, when it seems to him that nothing worse can happen (little does he know that he is soon to receive the most terrible blow of all), his identification with it emerges. And yet though his suffering is truly Jobian, as is his reaction to it, how much more lonely and isolated a figure he is than Job! Job has his three friends, who despite their aggravating piety are a comfort merely by their presence, and he has his God, who finally speaks to him in a blazing epiphany that rewards him for all his anguish; Tevye, however, has no one. Alone in his village, without a Jew to speak to, without a synagogue to go to, without a God to be spoken to by, he must carry on the dialogue of Job all by himself, now being Tevye demanding to know what he has been punished for, now being his comforters patiently explaining that whatever God does is for the best, and now being God Himself threatening to blow him, little Tevye, away with a puff of His breath if he does not stop his tiresome complaining. All around him the world is as silent as the forest in which he has his deepest thoughts. There is not a consoling word. Man says nothing. God says nothing. The Messiah is a policeman with an eviction notice. And Tevye, who will not take nothing for an answer, goes on arguing with them all!

Did Sholem Aleichem think of this side of Tevye in more than just comic terms? Of course he did. Listen to what his son-in-law Y. D. Berkovits has to say about him at the time he was writing "Shprintze":

It goes without saying that none of these externals [Berkovits has been discussing Sholem Aleichem's attitude toward Jewish religious observance] had very much to do with the inner religious feelings that existed in him and that frequently stirred him greatly. For that Sholem Aleichem had in his own way a most religiously sensitive personality—of this I have not the slightest doubt. On the table by his bed always lay a small, open Bible that he would read now and then, especially at night when he had trouble sleeping. I suspected that he was mainly reading the Book of Job, and once indeed, when he began

to test me on my knowledge of it, I was astounded by his familiarity with it, especially when I thought of how hard we had found it in the schoolroom when we were young.

One more word on the subject.

Not long ago I gave a talk on *Tevye the Dairyman* to a small audience in the town in Israel where I live. A lively discussion ensued, during which one of the participants, a professor of the history of science, exclaimed angrily, "But Tevye is a fool! Instead of realizing once and for all that there is no God, and that his own life is the best proof of it, he goes on wasting his energy on a God who doesn't exist." It was a perfectly natural comment and it led to an even more animated exchange, but as that went on, I kept asking myself, where have I heard those words before? And then it came to me: Job's wife! "And then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God, and die!' "

For Job—and for Tevye—to curse God is to die, because neither can live in a world without Him. Even if God never answers, even if He never will, Tevye must go on debating with Him, for the minute he stops, his life has lost its meaning. And besides, who is to say when God answers and when He does not? In Job's case, you say, it was obvious: "And then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." Yes: but had you or I been present in that whirlwind, would we have heard anything but wind? "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. And he also had seven sons and three daughters." Tevye has exile and the road beneath his feet—and the daughter he loves most, Chava, restored to him from the dead. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. And what shall Tevye call that which sometimes giveth again?

Tevye's habit of peppering his Yiddish speech with endless quotations from sacred Hebrew sources is his most distinctive verbal quirk and, on the whole, the thorniest problem he presents to the translator. It does not, however, make him unique. The tendency liberally to cite Scripture and liturgy was widespread among speakers of Yiddish, as it must always have been among observant Jews everywhere, who, merely in the course of their daily prayers and their weekly and yearly rituals, commit to memory an enor-

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mous number of texts. It was and is not unusual, for example, for a simple, uneducated Jew to know by heart the three daily Hebrew prayers, which even recited at breakneck speed would take a good half hour to get through, plus various other devotions, blessings, and bits of the Bible. In the work of Sholem Aleichem, too, Tevye is by no means the only chronic quoter, even if he is an extreme case for whom chapter and verse, depending on the situation and the person he is talking to, can serve any conceivable purpose: to impress, to inform, to amuse, to intimidate, to comfort, to scold, to ridicule, to show off, to avoid, to put down, to stake a claim of equality or create a mood of intimacy, and so on. He has, as his daughter Chava says, a quote for everything, and sometimes one quote for several things, for his stock is ultimately limited and he has to make the most of it.

In traditional Jewish terms, that is, Tevye is not nearly so erudite as the uninformed reader, or some of his own unversed acquaintances, may think. (Of course, such things are relative; there are not a few American Jewish congregations today in which he would have to be considered a highly learned Jew, second onlyand not even always that—to the rabbi.) An analysis of his quotations shows that nearly all of them come from four basic sources, each read and heard year in and year out by the average Orthodox Jew: the daily and holiday prayer book; the Bible (especially the Pentateuch, portions of which are read every Sabbath; the Book of Esther, which is chanted on Purim; and Psalms, which observant Jews often recite as a paternoster when troubled or in their spare time); the Passover Haggadah; and Pirkey Avot or "The Ethics of the Fathers," a short Mishnaic tractate of rabbinic sayings that is printed in the Sabbath section of the prayer book. Óf the rest of the Mishnah and of the Talmud, to say nothing of the many commentaries upon them—the real bread and butter, as it were, of a higher Jewish education—he appears to know next to nothing. Indeed, when he wishes to quote a line of Talmud to Layzer Wolf, he has to make it up out of whole cloth.

Yet if Tevye is no scholar, neither is he the Yiddish Mr. Malaprop that others, overly aware of these limitations, have taken him to be. To be sure, he does occasionally clown, deliberately inventing, confusing, or misattributing a quote in order to mock an ignoramus who will never know the difference, thus scoring a little private triumph of which he himself is the sole witness. On

the whole, however-and certainly when directly addressing Sholem Aleichem, who is his superior in Jewish knowledge and whose approval he desires—his quotations are accurate, apropos, and show an understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew words, if not always of their exact grammar. Sometimes they are even witty, taking an ancient verse or phrase and deliberately wrenching it out of context to fit the situation he is talking about, as when, at the beginning of "Hodl," in discussing how hard it is for a Jewish youngster to be accepted by a Russian school, Tevye says, "Al tishlakh yodkho:\* they guard their schools from us like a bowl of cream from a cat." The words al tishlakh yodkho mean "lay not thine hand" and are found in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Chapter 22 of Genesis, in which, at the last second, just as Abraham is about to slaughter his son, an intervening angel cries out, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." Tevye knows perfectly well where the phrase he is quoting comes from (the highly dramatic chapter is not only read once a year on the Sabbath like the rest of the Pentateuch, it is chanted a second time as a special selection for Rosh Hashanah)—but this does not keep him from putting it in the mouths of Czarist officials telling Jewish applicants to keep their hands off Russian schools!

Here too, it must be stressed, there is nothing particularly original about his method: Jews have been "deconstructing" biblical texts in this way practically since the Bible was written, and the vast corpus of rabbinical exegesis known as the midrash is based precisely on the enterprise of pouring new wine into old Scriptural bottles. Though these reinterpretations are not generally humorous, there is definitely a creative playfulness in the activity of midrash per se, which was, one might say, the ancient rabbis' chief form of recreation—and to this day, if one has the good luck to be among a group of knowledgeable Jews who are in a "midrashic" mood, one can witness this fascinating interplay of encyclopedic recall and wit in which biblical and rabbinic texts are caromed around and off each other as though they were billiard

<sup>\*</sup>Tevye's Hebrew is transliterated here, as it is throughout, according to the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Eastern Europe, which is quite different from the way Hebrew is pronounced in Israel and by most Jews today.

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balls. Tevye is not quite in this league, but it is one he aspires to, for a religiously educated Jew in the traditional culture of Eastern Europe belonged to a universally recognized aristocracy of the spirit, regardless of his economic status. The riches Tevye dreams of are a mirage; yet the opportunity to rise above his station by a vigorous display of a body of knowledge that, while not large, he is in total command of, is a subjective and objective reality that he exploits to the utmost, and sometimes a bit beyond.

How, though, can this reality be translated into English? Theoretically, the translator has four choices:

- 1. He can give Tevye's quotations in English instead of in Hebrew.
- 2. He can give them both in English and in Hebrew, the latter transliterated into Latin characters.
- 3. He can give them only in Hebrew (as in the original Yiddish text).
- 4. He can omit them entirely.

I have in fact utilized all these approaches. In some places, where a quotation of Tevye's is neither especially striking nor crucial, and where leaving it out does not adversely affect the tone or the significance of his remarks, I have done so. At a few points in the text I have translated his quotes into English, sometimes retaining the Hebrew as well and sometimes deleting it. In the great majority of cases, however, I have chosen Option 3 and, like the Yiddish text, given only Tevye's Hebrew, translations of which will be found in the glossary and notes at the back of the book. Though this may be the solution that seems at first glance to be the most inconvenient for the English reader, I preferred it for several reasons.

The first of these is that many of Sholem Aleichem's Yiddish readers also failed to understand some or all of Tevye's quotes. Sholem Aleichem had a mass audience, much of it composed of working men and women with little or no religious education, and if they did not mind being stumped by Tevye's Hebrew, neither need the English reader today.

Secondly, most of the characters in *Tevye the Dairyman*—in fact, nearly all of them—are simple Jews themselves who complain that they can't follow Tevye's quotations, from which they keep begging him to desist. For the English reader to be told what these

mean at the same time that Tevye's family and acquaintances are baffled by them would create a rather odd effect.

Thirdly, translating Tevye's Hebrew in the text itself almost always results in the wrong tone, since the biblical and rabbinic passages that he cites have an archaic sound in English, which is not at all the case in the original. On the contrary, even when a Yiddish speaker did not know the meaning of a Hebrew verse, the feeling it suggested to him was generally the warm, homey one of religious rituals and synagogue services that he knew well.

Finally, as far as Jewish readers are concerned, modern Jewish history has ironically reversed the composition of Sholem Aleichem's public. Once he was read by Jews who knew more Yiddish than Hebrew; today he is mostly read by those who, if they know any Jewish language at all, know more Hebrew than Yiddish. It is my hope that many such readers who cannot read Sholem Aleichem in the original will nevertheless be able to enjoy Tevye's Hebrew wordplay in this English translation.

For those who cannot, there are two consolations. One is the glossary, which the reader is free to consult not only for the meaning and pronunciation of Tevye's Hebrew quotes, but also for explanations of historical references and Jewish customs that may elude him. The other is the fact that there is no need to skip over the Hebrew quotations just because one does not understand them. Read them aloud; savor them; try saying them as Tevye did. There is no way to reproduce in print the exact sights, smells, and tastes of Tevye's world, but a bit of the sound of it is in these pages.

#### **▲** 3 **▲**

Though there is only one Tevye, there was also only one Sholem Aleichem, and, as readers of the twenty *Railroad Stories* will notice, as prolifically creative as he was (the first posthumous, incomplete edition of his work ran to twenty-eight volumes!)—indeed, it would seem, as a prerequisite for such productivity—there are in his work certain basic themes and situations that occur again and again. Thus, one is reminded by the story "Eighteen from Pereshchepena" of the comic scene between Tevye and Layzer Wolf in which the two carry on a single conversation that each thinks is about something else; by the narrator's attitude toward women in "High

School" of Tevye's antifemale posturing; by Berl Vinegar's fast-talking of the priest in "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah" of Tevye's handling of Ivan Paparilo in the pogrom scene of "Lekh-Lekho," etc. Even Tevye's rampant quotationism has its parallel in the narrator of "Burned Out"—who, however, is even less of a "scholar" than Tevye and wildly throws Hebrew phrases about without always knowing what they mean. Such recurrent elements served Sholem Aleichem as modular blocks out of which he was able to construct an amazing variety of characters and plots.

Although The Railroad Stories, first assembled in book form in 1911, are contemporary with the Tevye episodes, their composition was not widely spaced like that of Tevye but rather concentrated in two intense bursts of activity, one in 1902 and one in 1909-1910. In the first period were written "High School," "The Automatic Exemption," "Burned Out," "Fated for Misfortune," and, though it was later slightly revised to form the collection's closing story, "Third Class." With the exception of "It Doesn't Pay to be Good," which dates from 1903, all the other stories belong to the second period. It was only then, indeed, that Sholem Aleichem decided to write a book of tales all told to or overheard by a traveling salesman on a train, which explains a fundamental difference between the 1902-1903 series and the 1909-1910 one; for in the latter group trains and train rides are generally intrinsic, whereas in the former they are not. The 1902-1903 stories, in other words, were not originally written with railroads in mind, to which they were adapted after the fact by the simple device of adding a brief descriptive opening paragraph placing them on a train. As for the order of the stories in the book, it was determined by Sholem Aleichem himself. While it does not strictly reflect the sequence in which they were written, it does have a chronological basis, the first eleven tales dating from 1909-1910, the next five from 1902-1903, and the next three from 1909-1910 again.

Like Tevye, nearly all The Railroad Stories are monologues; this was Sholem Aleichem's favorite form and one he repeatedly returned to. At first glance it may seem that the traveling salesman who records them is a more active party than the Sholem Aleichem who merely listens to Tevye, since he describes what he sees and occasionally participates in the conversation—yet this is but one side of the coin. Though Sholem Aleichem never speaks to Tevye, Tevye is always conscious of speaking to Sholem Alei-

chem; his idea of the educated, cultured, sophisticated author he is talking to colors all that he says, and more than once he insists that he would never confide such things to anyone else. The commercial traveler of *The Railroad Stories*, on the other hand, is simply someone to whom his fellow passengers can tell their tale, at times revealing to the book's readers aspects of themselves that he himself is 'naïvely unaware of. (Such as the fact, for example, that the "Man from Buenos Aires" is really a rich pimp engaged in the white slave trade, the shanghaiing of girls to Argentina to work as prostitutes there.) Who he is does not interest them in the least. A Jew meets another Jew on the train and straightaway begins to talk about himself.

Nevertheless, though the notion of trains running through Russia with almost no one in their third-class cars but Jews who tell each other stories may seem like an artificial literary convention, this is actually not the case. The Russia of Sholem Aleichem's day, especially in the provincial Pale of Settlement, had a relatively small Christian middle and lower-middle class. The great bulk of the population belonged to either the peasantry or the landed aristocracy, and of the two groups, the first rarely traveled, and the second never traveled third class. Jews were often merchants, but mostly petty ones who preferred to travel as cheaply as they could—and the fact that Jews, when traveling, tend even today to talk nonstop to each other is something that can be vouched for by anyone who has ever taken a crowded flight to Israel.

Nor is this the only example in *The Railroad Stories* of the way in which our distance from the times may mislead us into thinking that Sholem Aleichem was deliberately exaggerating for literary or comic purposes. Take, for instance, the seemingly surrealistic plot of "The Automatic Exemption," in which a father must run endlessly from draft board to draft board because a son who died in infancy still appears in the population registry; "the [Russian] government," writes the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, "refused [in drafting Jews] to consider the fact that, owing to inaccurate registration, the conscription lists often carried the names of persons who had long since died, or who had left the country to emigrate abroad"; even the three hundred rubles that a lawyer tells the distraught father he will have to pay as a fine was the exact sum stipulated by Russian law for such cases! Or take the apparently farcical section of the story "High School" in which a

Jew must get a Christian drunk so that he will agree to send his son, at the Jew's expense, to a commercial school together with the Jew's son. Here is Dubnow again:

In the commercial schools maintained by the commercial associations Jewish children were admitted only in proportion to the contributions of the Jewish merchants toward the upkeep of the particular school. In private commercial schools, however, percentages of all kinds, varying from ten to fifty percent, were fixed in the case of Jewish pupils. This provision had the effect that Jewish parents were vitally interested in securing the entrance of as many Christian children as possible in order to increase thereby the number of Jewish vacancies. Occasionally, a Jewish father, in the hope of creating a vacancy for his son, would induce a Christian to send his boy to a commercial school—though the latter, as a rule, offered little attraction for the Christian population—by undertaking to defray all expenses connected with his education.

This is not to say that there are not elements of farce in these stories, but they lie far more in the reaction of the characters than in the situation itself. Always a stickler for getting the details right (even the fabulous Brodsky of *Tevye* and "Go Climb a Tree If You Don't Like It" was a real Jewish sugar magnate of that name who lived in Kiev), Sholem Aleichem became even more so after leaving Russia in 1906, for he was afraid of being thought out of touch with the world he continued to write about. The Soviet Jewish critic Max Erik quotes a revealing letter written by him to an acquaintance in the White Russian town of Homel at the time that he was working on these tales:

Perhaps you would consider doing something for me: I would like you to send me raw material from Homel, from Vitebsk, from Bialystok, from wherever you care to, as long as it is subject matter that I can use in my "Railroad Stories." I have in mind characters, encounters, anecdotes, comic and tragic histories, events, love affairs, weddings, divorces, fateful dreams, bankruptcies, family celebrations, even funerals—in a word, anything you see and hear about, have seen and heard about, or will see and hear about, in Homel or anywhere else. Please keep one thing in mind, though: I don't want anything imaginary, just facts, the more the better!

Two more examples of such (on our part) unsuspected factuality in these stories are of particular interest.

One concerns a matter of language. In the first of *The Railroad Stories*, "Competitors," we are presented with a woman train vendor who, when her tongue is unleashed, turns out to be a stupendous curser—and by no means a rote one, but a talented improviser who can match every phrase she utters with an appropriate imprecation. One of a kind, no? No. In a chapter devoted to curses in his *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, Maurice Samuel writes of what he calls the "apposite or apropos" curse in the Yiddish of Eastern Europe:

The apposite or apropos curse is a sort of "catch," or linked phrase; it is hooked on to the last word uttered by the object of the curse. Thus, if he wanted to eat, and said so, the response would be: "Eat? May worms eat you, dear God!" Or: "Drink? May leeches drink your blood!" "Sew a button on for you? I'll sew cerements for you!" If the person addressed does not supply the lead, the curser does it for herself. "There runs Chaim Shemeral! May the life run out of him!" . . . "Are you still sitting? May you sit on open sores! Are you silent? May you be silent forever! Are you yelling? May you yell for your teeth! Are you playing? May the Angel of Death play with you! Are you going? May you go on crutches."

Indeed, in his autobiography From the Fair, Sholem Aleichem describes his stepmother as being just such an "apropos curser" and confesses to having modeled several characters on her—one of whom is no doubt the woman vendor from "Competitors."

Finally, there is the story "Elul," whose ending, if we do not know what lies behind it, must strike us as rather forced. After all, it does not seem quite credible for an apparently normal girl, even if her father is a smirking bully, suddenly to kill herself just because a jilted and possibly pregnant friend has done the same. But there is a clue here, and that is Mikhail Artsybashev's novel Sanine, which the two girls have been reading in secret. All but forgotten today, Sanine was a literary sensation when it appeared in 1907 (the shopboy Berl's "summary" of it, of course, is a hilariously garbled version of the story). Written during the period of Czarist reaction that followed the abortive Revolution of 1905 by an author who was himself a professed anarchist, the novel, with its curious combination of (for then) daring erotica, world-weary cynicism, and obsession with death, led to a wave of youthful suicides in Russia, comparable to that caused in Europe by The

Sorrows of Young Werther over a century before. The times were ripe for it; they were what Tevye's youngest daughter calls the disillusioned "Age of Beilke" as opposed to the idealistic "Age of Hodl"; and Etke, the daughter of the narrator, was patterned on cases of actual youngsters swept up in an adolescent death cult.

INTRODUCTION

Apart from the fact that they are all monologues, The Railroad Stories do not fit into any one mold. Some, like "The Miracle of Hoshana Rabbah" and "Tallis Koton," are sheer hijinks; others, like "High School," have an aspect of social satire; still others, like "The Man from Buenos Aires," "A Game of Sixty-Six," "It Doesn't Pay to Be Good," and "Fated for Misfortune," belong to that ironic genre of gradual exposure wherein the reader comes to realize that the speaker is not the kind of man he is pretending to be. "The Automatic Exemption," "Burned Out," and "Go Climb a Tree If You Don't Like It" are comic studies in hysteria and mania; "The Happiest Man in All Kodny" is a piece of pure pathos with few comic lines in it; and yet another story, "The Tenth Man," is a single brilliant joke whose punch line is withheld till the last moment. Indeed, there are perhaps only two things that all these narrators have in common: each has his distinctive verbal tic or tics, one or more favorite expressions that keep recurring as a kind of nervous identification tag, and each has an obsessive, an uncontrollable, an insatiable, an almost maniacal need to talk.

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This obsessive garrulousness is common in Sholem Aleichem and is in effect a precondition of the monologue, which can hardly be based on taciturn types. The speakers of his stories talk when they have something specific to say and they talk when they do not; in his famous monologue "The Pot," for example, a woman, whose nagging voice is all we ever hear, comes to see a rabbi about some minor matter of Jewish law, chatters on and on about one unrelated subject after another without ever coming to the point, and stops only when the rabbi, still not having gotten a word in edgewise, finally faints from exhaustion. . . . There is something of this pot woman in many of Sholem Aleichem's characters, who seem to be saying, "I talk, therefore I exist." Nothing frightens them so much as silence—most of all, their own.

Jews have perhaps always been a highly verbal people, certainly since the time when their religion became centered on a growing number of sacred texts and the constant exposition and reexposition of them; the vast "sea of the Talmud" itself, as it is called in Hebrew, is but the edited record of endless oral discussions and debates among the early rabbis, and for centuries, down to the yeshivas and synagogues of Sholem Aleichem's Eastern Europe, the most common method of studying the Law was to talk about it aloud in groups of twos and threes and fours. Here the spoken word is still a functional tool of analysis and communication. In Sholem Aleichem's world, however, it has become something else—or rather, many things: a club, a cloud, a twitch, a labyrinth, a smokescreen, a magic wand, a madly waved paper fan, a perpetual motion machine, a breastwork against chaos, the very voice of chaos itself.... His characters chute on torrents of words and seek to drag others into the current with them. And succeed. When the storyteller in "Baranovitch Station" breaks off his unfinished tale because it is time for him to change trains, his fellow passengers cannot believe that a Jew like themselves would rather stop talking in the middle of a sentence than miss his connection.

No one understood better than Sholem Aleichem that this astonishing verbosity, this virtuoso command of and abuse of language, was at once the greatest strength and the ultimate pathology of East European Jewish life. Reviled, ghettoized, impoverished, powerless, his Jews have only one weapon: the power of speech. And because it is a weapon that has come down to them honed by the expert use of ages, they wield it with the skill of trained samurai, men, women, and children. (One of Sholem Aleichem's most wonderful long monologues, the picaresque Motl, Peysi the Cantor's Son, is narrated by a ten- or elevenyear-old boy.) What can a Jew not accomplish with his tongue? He can outsmart a goy, bury an enemy, crush a wife or husband, conjure up a fortune, turn black into white, turn white into black . . . and believe it all has happened, so that the very sense of reality becomes distorted and defeat turns into victory, humiliation into triumph, grimy wretchedness into winged flight. Don Quixote would have felt at home in Kasrilevke and Anatevka. He might even have learned a few tricks there.

Yet can we be so sure that this defiant quixotism, when all is said and done, does not represent a real triumph of sorts? In a discus-

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sion of Sholem Aleichem's story "Dreyfus in Kasrilevke" (in which, being told by a fellow Kasrilevkite, who has just read it in the newspaper, that Dreyfus was found guilty, the town's Jews refuse to believe it), Professor Ruth Wisse writes:

Here, too, the oppressed replace the world's reality with the reality of their argumentative concern. But the Sholem Aleichem story equates the Jews' far-sightedness with faith. . . . Dreyfus in Kasrilevke is judged by God's law; and is God's truth to be sacrificed for journalism?

And she quotes the final lines of the story:

"Paper!" cried Kasrilevke. "Paper! And if you stood here with one foot in heaven and one foot on earth, we still wouldn't believe you. Such things cannot be! No, this cannot be! It cannot be! It cannot be!" Well, and who was right?

"It cannot be": such is the true human voice of Sholem Aleichem's world and the only one he really cared about. For a great writer, he was in some ways oddly limited: he rarely wrote more than cursory descriptions of people, places, and things and was not outstandingly good at them; abstract ideas did not interest him; and even his dialogue reverts quickly to monologue or peters out in misunderstandings and cross-purposes. As a consequence, those of his novels that are not monologic do not rank with the best of his work, and, when their comic thrust fails, they often lapse into sentimentality. (As all cynics are said to be wounded idealists, are not all humorists wounded sentimentalists?) The solo voice was his specialty: he had an uncanny ability to mimic it, to catch its rhythms and intonations, to study it as the mask and revelation of inner self. (Y. D. Berkovits relates how, upon emigrating westward in 1906 and first stopping in Austrian Galicia, whose Yiddish was quite different from that of Russia, Sholem Aleichem imitated the natives so well that soon they could not tell him from a local!) This voice is indomitable. It keeps on talking. It will not be stilled. "It cannot be!" is what it says, and in one way or another it is right.

Human speech, of which nearly all the fiction in this volume is composed, is both the easiest and the hardest language to translate: the easiest because it is usually syntactically so simple, the hardest because it carries the greatest freight of those localisms and culture-bound words of a community that can never have a

true equivalent in other languages. And this is especially so of Yiddish, that Jewish tongue woven on a base of middle high German and richly embroidered with Hebrew and Slavic, whose syntax is far simpler than German's but which is culturally more remote from the languages of Christian Europe than any of them are from each other. True, one needn't exaggerate the difficulties: professional translators are used to insoluble problems, and they generally manage to solve them. There are, however, two aspects of Yiddish speech that, because they have no real parallel in English and cannot be satisfactorily approximated in it, deserve to be mentioned.

The first has to do with formulas for avoiding the evil eye. Superstition and the fear of provoking or attracting the attention of hostile forces, or simply of causing offense, are of course universal; but in Yiddish (perhaps because it was the language of a culture in which aggression, given little external outlet, was always felt to be threateningly close to the surface) this anxiety is so extreme that it dictates the use of a wide variety of appeasing expressions in daily speech. Thus, one should not mention a dead person one has known without adding olov hasholom, "may he rest in peace"; one does not boast of or express satisfaction with anything unless one says kinnehoro, "no evil eye" (i.e., touch or knock wood); if one mentions a misfortune to someone, one tells him nisht do gedakht or nisht far aykh gedakht, "it shouldn't happen here" or "it shouldn't happen to you"; if one makes a remark critical of somebody, one prefaces it with zol er mir moykhl zayn, "may he forgive me"; if the criticism is aimed at Providence, one says zol mir got nisht shtrofn far di reyd, "may God not punish me for my words." Moreover, such expressions cover only the specific case; if a person is talking about a deceased relative, for example, and mentions him ten times, it is good form to say olov hasholom after each. The result is that one or several sentences of spoken Yiddish can contain a whole series of such phrases that break the speech up into a sequence of fragments punctuated by anxious qualifications. The translator can and should retain some of these, but being overly faithful to them makes the English tiresome, and I have left quite a few out. Wherever the reader sees one such expression in the English, he can assume there may be more in the Yiddish.

Secondly, there is the widespread use in Yiddish of Hebrew, not in the form of quotations, as with Tevye, but of idioms that have

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become rooted in popular speech, commonly transplanted there from religious texts and prayers. These occupy an ambivalent position: on the one hand, they are understood and used even by uneducated speakers, yet on the other, their Hebrew etymology continues to be recognized and their sacral origins are not obscured, so that they often produce ironic or comic effects. For example, when the arsonist who narrates "Burned Out" relates his neighbors' suspicions of him, he does not say that they accuse him of "setting fire" to his house and store, but rather of "making boyrey me'oyrey ho'eysh." Literally these Hebrew words mean "He Who creates the light of fire," but they belong to a blessing ("Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who creates the light of fire") that is said every week in the havdalah, the ritual of ending the Sabbath on Saturday night, part of which involves lighting a candle (an act forbidden on the Sabbath itself) and holding one's hand up to the flame. What can the translator do with such untranslatabilities, which are not uncommon in Yiddish, and especially not in a comic Yiddish like Sholem Aleichem's? Shut his eyes and hope to think of something! And in this case I did, because suddenly I remembered a snatch of a comic ditty that I knew as a boy in New York about a Jew who burns down his store for the "inshurinks," just like the narrator of "Burned Out." It was sung in a Yiddish accent to the tune of the Zionist anthem Hatikvah, and one stanza of it went:

> Vans I hed a kendy store, business it vas bed, Along came a friend of mine, vat you tink he said? "I hear you got a kendy store vat you don't vant no more; Take a metch, give a skretch, no more kendy store!"

And so "to make *borey me'oyrey ho'eysh*" became "to give the match a scratch"—not an ideal solution perhaps, but certainly a passable one. One does the best one can. Sometimes it's a matter of luck.

I have been translating fiction for many years, but from Hebrew, not from Yiddish, and this volume is the first full-scale Yiddish translation I have attempted. I wish, therefore, to express my deepest thanks to the editor of this series, Ruth Wisse, both for trusting and encouraging me to undertake this translation and for going over it with a fine-tooth comb. She was the safety net above which I felt free to be as acrobatic as I liked, knowing I would always be caught if I fell. This book is hers too.

I also wish to thank Michael Stern of Washington, D.C., for kindly letting me use an unpublished paper tracing the sources of Tevye's Hebrew quotations, thus sparing me much arduous spadework; and my sister, Miriam Halkin Och, of Haifa University Library, for her generous help in obtaining bibliographical materials.

HILLEL HALKIN

Zichron Ya'akov, Israel 1986

# 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 behhartonu! 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 pitchdark. 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 ofor, Who keepeth 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 yearkindly 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 chatting, 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 . . .

TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN

"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 for?"

"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 bank-rupt 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 . . .

TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN

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

R aboys makhshovoys 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 cockand-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 Tevye, 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,

"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 highand-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 oymer 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, Tevve!"

"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 scram 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 dubin 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'haleyl 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

Day 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 floor-boards, 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 yohyet 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. Hakoyl 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 save a few "I" for the same of the same

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 Kropeve; 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 dreamcustom-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 having 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 as eep. 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 toy, we'd better say mazel toy 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 veroymamti: 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 feebleminded, 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 whathave-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 leyisro'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 Boi-

berik. 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 heyn 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 ship-wrecked 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 rog-shu, 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**

 $oldsymbol{H}$  oydu 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 allbut 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 lezakoys, 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 Paparilo, 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 boso 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 lasehhvi 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," 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."

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"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 ov 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..." Tevve, 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'aloy 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 hagodol—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)

## SHPRINTZE

Why, Pan Sholem Aleichem, what a pleasure to run into you! I haven't seen you in a dog's age. My oh my, the water that's flowed under the bridge since we last met! What you and I and Jews everywhere haven't been through these past years: pogroms in Kishinev, riots, troubles, the new Constantution—dear Lord, it doesn't stop... Don't take it wrong, but I'm surprised to see you haven't changed a bit, there's still not a gray hair on you! I only wish you could say the same of me. Harey ani keven shivim shonoh—I haven't even turned sixty, and just look how old and gray I am. It's no laughing matter what we go through with our children,

and who has less to laugh about than me? The latest nightmare with my daughter Shprintze is worse than anything that came before—yet here I am, still alive and kicking, as if nothing had happened at all. Be'al korkhekho atoh khai—how does that little song go?

What do I care if the weather is sunny
When I'm all out of luck and all out of money . . .

In a word, rotsoh hakodoysh borukh hu lezakoys-God wanted to do us Jews a favor and so He sent us a new catastrophe, a Constantution. Believe me, that's all we needed! You should see what a panic the rich Yehupetz Jews are in, how they're all running abroad—that is, to the baths in Germany to take care of their nerves, their stomachs, their livers, their whoosywhatsis . . . And what with everyone leaving Yehupetz, you'd think, wouldn't you, that all the fresh air and green trees and dachas of Boiberik couldn't keep it from going to the dogs. You know what the good news is, though? That there's a borukh merakheym al ha'orets, a merciful God up above Who looks after us poor country folk and makes sure we keep our noses to the grindstone. Have we ever had a summer season here! They've come flocking to Boiberik from Odessa, from Rostov, from Yekaterinoslav, from Mogilev, from Kishinev-thousands of them, Jews filthy with money! It seems that the Constantution is even worse where they are, because they haven't stopped heading in this direction. But why, you ask, are they all running here? For the same reason, I tell you, that we're all running there! It's an old Jewish custom to pick up and go elsewhere at the first mention of a pogrom. How does the Bible put it? Vayisu vayakhanu, vayakhanu vayisu-or in plain language, if you come hide in my house, I'd better go hide in yours . . . Which is why Boiberik, I want you to know, has become a real metropolis, bursting with men, women, and children. Now children, mind you, like to eat; to eat you need cheese, cream, and butter; and where do you get such stuff if not from Tevye? Like it or not, Tevye's all the fashion nowadays. It's "Tevye, come here," and "Tevye, go there," and Tevye, Tevye, Tevye all day long. If that's how God wants it, who are you and I to object?

Well, vayehi hayoym—once upon a time not very long ago, I brought some produce to a new customer, a wealthy young widow

Shprintze

from Yekaterinoslav who had come to Boiberik for the summer with her son, a fellow named Ahronchik. Needless to say, her first acquaintance in all of Boiberik was me. "You've been recommended," she says, "as being the best dairyman around." "And why shouldn't I have been?" I answer. "It's no coincidence that King Solomon said a good reputation is louder than a trumpet. If you have a minute to spare, I even have a nice little midrash . . ." But she didn't, because she was, she told me, a widow, and such things were not her cup of tea. In fact, she wouldn't know what to do with a midrash if I were to put one on her plate; all she wanted was good cheese and fresh butter. Just try having a serious talk with a woman . . .

In short, I began coming around to that widow from Yekaterinoslav twice a week, every Monday and Thursday like clockwork, without her having to order in advance. It got so that I was practically one of the household; I poked around in it a bit, saw how things were done there, and even gave a bit of advice. The first time I did that, I got a good chewing out from the servant: who did I think I was, sticking my nose into other people's business? The second time I was listened to, and the third time the widow actually asked my opinion about something, having seen by now who Tevye was. The long and short of it was that one day she approached me with her greatest problem: Ahronchik! Although he was, she said, over twenty years old, all he cared about was horses, fishing, and bicycles, apart from which nothing mattered to him. He didn't have the slightest interest in business or making money, or even in managing the handsome estate he had inherited from his father, which was worth a good million rubles. His one pleasure was to spend it, and liberally at that.

"Tell me," I said, "where is the young man now? If you let me have a few words with him, I might talk to him a bit, set him straight with a verse from the Bible, maybe even with a midrash..."

"If I know my son," she laughed, "a horse will get you further than a midrash."

We were still talking about him when—speaking of the Devil!—in walks Ahronchik himself, a tall, handsome, ruddy-faced young man with a broad sash around his waist, a pocket watch tucked into it, and sleeves rolled up past his elbows.

"Where have you been?" asks his mother.

"Out fishing in the skiff," he says.

"Can't you think of anything better to do?" I say. "Why, back in Yekaterinoslav they're Constantutioning the pants off of you, and all you can do is catch fish?"

I glanced at my widow—she turned as red as a beet and every other color of the rainbow. She must have been sure that her son would grab me by the collar and give me the heave-ho in a hurry. Which just goes to show how wrong she was. There's no way to scare Tevye. When I have something to say, I say it.

Well, when the young fellow heard that, he stepped back a bit, put his hands behind his back, looked me up and down from head to foot, let out a funny sort of whistle, and suddenly began to laugh so hard that the two of us were afraid he had gone mad before our eyes. Shall I tell you something, though? From then on he and I were the best of friends. And I must say that the better I knew him, the better I liked him, even if he was a bit of a windbag, the worst sort of spendthrift, and a little thick between the ears. For instance, let him pass a beggar in the street, and he'd stick a hand into his pocket and fork up a fistful of change without even bothering to count it! Did you ever hear of such a thing? Once I saw him take a brand-new jacket off his back and give it away to a perfect stranger-I ask you, how dumb can you get . . .? I felt good and sorry for his mother, believe me. She kept asking me what she should do and begging me to take him in hand. Well, I didn't say no to that. Why refuse her a favor when it didn't cost me a red cent? So from time to time I sat down with him and told him a story, fed him a parable, slipped him a verse from the Bible, even let him have a midrash or two, as only Tevye can do. I swear, he actually liked it and wanted to know if I talked like that at home. "I'd sure like to visit you there, Reb Tevye," he said.

"Well," I said, "anyone wanting to visit Tevye only has to get to Tevye's village. Between your horses and your bicycles you can certainly make it, and in a pinch you're a big enough boy to use your own legs. Just cut through the forest and you're there."

"When is a good time to come?" he says.

"You can find me at home any Sabbath or holiday," I say. "But wait, I have an idea! The Friday after next is Shavuos. If you'd like to take a walk over to my place then, my wife will serve you such blintzes fit for princes as lo blintzu avoyseynu bemitsrayim!"

"Just what does that mean?" he asks. "I'm not too strong on chapter-and-verse, you know."

"I certainly do," I say. "But if you'd had the schooling I did,

you'd know enough to be the rabbi's wife."

He laughed at that and said, "All right, then, you've got yourself a guest. On the first day of Shavuos, Reb Tevye, I'll be over with three friends of mine for blintzes—and they better be hot!"

"Hotter than hellfire," I promised. "Why, they'll be jumping right out of the frying pan at you!"

Well, as soon as I came home that day I whistled up my wife and said to her, "Golde, we're having guests for Shavuos!"

"Mazel tov," she says. "Who are they?"

"I'll tell you everything in good time," I say. "Just make sure you have enough eggs, because butter and cheese, thank God, are no problem. You'll be making blintzes for four extra mouths—but such mouths, you should know, that understand as much about eating as they don't understand about the Bible."

"I might have guessed it," she says. "You've been to Hunger-

land again and found some new slob of a Hungarian."

"Golde," I said, "you're nothing but a big cow yourself. First of all, even if we did treat some poor hungry devil to blintzes on Shavuos, what harm would it do? And second of all, you may as well know, my most Esteemed, Honored, and Beloved Wife, that one of our guests will be the widow's son, that Ahronchik I've been telling you about."

"Then why didn't you say so in the first place?" she says.

What money doesn't do to some people! Even my Golde becomes a different woman as soon as she gets a whiff of it. But that's the world we live in—what can you or I do about it? As it says in the prayer book, kesef vezohov ma'asey yedey odom—money can dig a man's grave faster than a shovel.

In short, Shavuos time came around. I don't have to tell you how green and bright and warm and beautiful our village is then! Your richest Jew in town should only have such a blue sky above him, such a green forest all around, such a good smell of pine trees, such a carpet of grass that the cows smile at you when they chew it as if to say, "Just keep us rolling in clover and we'll keep you swimming in milk . . ." No, say what you will, I wouldn't swap places with you in town if you promised me the best job in the world. Can you also promise me such a sky there? *Hashomayim* 

shomayim ladoynai—why, in the village the sky is God's own! You can crane your neck in town till it breaks, what do you manage to see? Walls, roofs, chimneys, but never a single tree! And if by some miracle one grows there, you have to tend it like a sick child...

In a word, our guests couldn't get over our village when they came to visit on Shavuos. They arrived riding horses, all four of them—and I do mean horses! Why, the nag that Ahronchik alone was sitting on was such a thoroughbred that you couldn't have bought it for three hundred rubles.

"Welcome, my friends," I said to them. "I see no one bothered to tell you that a Jew doesn't ride on Shavuos. Well, we won't let that spoil the holiday. Tevye's no saint himself, and if you're whipped for it in the world to come, it won't be any skin off my back... Golde! Put up the blintzes and have the girls carry out the table and put it on the grass—our house isn't such a museum piece that we have to show it off to visitors... Shprintze! Teibl! Beilke! Where are you all? Let's get cracking..."

I stood there giving orders and pretty soon out of the house came the table, benches, a tablecloth, plates, spoons, forks, and saltshakers, and right on the heels of it all, my Golde with the blintzes—and such piping-hot, mouth-watering, straight-from-the-frying-pan, sweeter-than-manna-tasting blintzes they were that our guests couldn't stop eating or praising them . . .

"What are you standing there for?" I said to my Golde. "Don't you know that since Shavuos has two days, everything else about it has to be doubled too? Bring some more blintzes and we'll have a second round!"

Well, in a shake of a lamb's tail my Golde filled the platter with more blintzes and my Shprintze brought them to the table. Just then I glanced at Ahronchik, and what do I see? He's staring at my Shprintze, his eyes are glued to her so hard he can't pull them away. What did he suppose he was looking at? "Eat up," I said to him. "Why aren't you eating?"

"Why, what does it look like I'm doing?" he says.

"It looks like you're looking at my Shprintze," I say.

Everyone burst out laughing at that, my Shprintze too. We were all so gay, so happy, enjoying such a fine Shavuos . . . how was I supposed to know it would end in such a nightmare, in such a tragedy, in such a horror story, in such a punishment from God

that it's left me a wreck of a man? I'll tell you what, though. We men are fools. If we had any brains to speak of, we'd realize that things are the way they were meant to be, because if they were meant to be different, they wouldn't be the way they are... Doesn't it say in the Book of Psalms, hashleykh al hashem—trust no one but God? Just leave it to Him: He'll see to it that the worms are eating you like fresh bagels, and you'll thank Him for it too. And now listen to what can happen in this world of ours—and listen carefully, because you haven't heard anything yet.

Vayehi erev vayehi voyker—one evening when I came home from Boiberik, bushed from the heat and from running between dachas all day long, I spied a familiar horse tied to the gate by the house. In fact, I could have sworn it was Ahronchik's thoroughbred that I had priced at three hundred rubles! I went over to it, slapped it on the rear with one hand while scratching its head with the other, and said, "Well now, old fellow, what brings you to our neck of the woods?" To which it bobbed its chin quite handsomely and gave me a clever look as if to say, "Why ask me, when I happen to have a master?"

Well, I went inside, collared my wife, and said to her, "Golde, my dearest, what is Ahronchik doing here?"

"How am I supposed to know?" she answers me. "I thought he was one of your crowd."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"He went for a walk in the forest with the girls," my Golde tells me.

"What on earth made him do a thing like that?" I wondered out loud, and asked her for something to eat. When I had had my fill, I sat there thinking, Tevye, why are you so nervous? Since when is a visitor dropping by any reason to be so on edge? If anything . . . but I never finished the thought, because just then I looked outside and saw the bonnie young lad with my girls, who were carrying wild flowers they had picked. Teibl and Beilke were walking in front, and Shprintze was bringing up the rear with Ahronchik.

"A good evening!" I said to him.

"And to you, too," he replied. He stood there a little awkwardly with a blade of grass in his mouth, stroking his horse's mane; then he said, "Reb Tevye, I have an offer to make you. Let's you and I swap horses."

"Don't you have anyone better to make fun of?" I asked him.

"But I mean it," he says.

"Do you now?" I say. "Do you have any idea what this horse of yours is worth?"

"What would you price him at?" he asks.

"He's worth three hundred rubles if a cent," I say, "and maybe even a little bit more."

Well, Ahronchik laughed, told me his horse had cost over three times that amount, and said, "How about it, then? Is it a deal?"

I tell you, I didn't like it one bit: what kind of business was it to trade such a horse for my gluepot? And so I told him to keep his offer for another day and joked that I hoped he hadn't come just for that, since I hated to see him waste his time . . .

"As a matter of fact," he says to me, as serious as can be, "I came to see you about something else. If it's not too much to ask of you, perhaps the two of us could take a little walk."

He's got walking on the brain today, I thought, but I agreed to go for a stroll in the forest with him. The sun had set long ago; the woods were getting dark; frogs croaked from the river; and the smell of so many green, growing things was like heaven itself. Ahronchik and I walked side by side without exchanging a word. Suddenly he stopped short, let out a cough, and said, "Reb Tevye! What would you say if I told you I'm in love with your Shprintze and want to marry her?"

"What would I say?" I said. "I'd tell them to move over and make room for one more in the loony bin."

"What is that supposed to mean?" he says, staring at me.

"It means," I say, "exactly what it sounds like."

"But I don't get it," he says.

"That," I say, "just goes to show that you're even less of a genius than I thought. You know, there's a verse in the Bible that says, 'The wise man has eyes in his head.' That means you can talk to him with a wink, while the fool must be talked to with a stick."

"I'm speaking in plain language," he says, beginning to get sore, "and all I'm hearing from you is jokes from the Bible."

"Well," I said, "every cantor sings the best he can and every preacher toots his own horn. If you'd like to know how well you're tooting yours, I suggest you have a talk with your mother. She'll set you straight in a jiffy."

"Do you take me," he says, "for a little boy who has to get permission from his mother?"

"Of course I do," I say. "And your mother's sure to tell you you're a dunce. And she'll be right."

"She will be?" he says.

"Of course she will be," I say. "What kind of husband will you make my Shprintze? What kind of wife will my Shprintze make you? And most of all, what kind of in-law will I make your mother?"

"If that's what you're thinking, Reb Tevye," he says, "you're making a big mistake. I'm not an eighteen-year-old, and I'm not looking for in-laws for my mother. I know who you are, I know who your daughter is, and I like what I see. That's what I want and that's what I'm going to—"

"Excuse me for interrupting," I say, "but there's one thing I still have to ask you. I can see there's no problem on the groom's side, but have you bothered to clear this with the bride's side?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he says.

"I'm talking about my daughter Shprintze," I say. "Have you talked this over with her? And if so, what does she say?"

Well, he gave me an insulted look but said with a smile, "What kind of a question is that? Of course I've talked it over with her—and not just once, either. I'm here every day."

Did you ever hear the likes of it? He's there every day and I know nothing about it! Tevye, you two-footed animal, I told myself, you deserve to eat hay with your cows! If that's how you let yourself be led about by the nose, you'll be bought and sold like the donkey you are! . . . I didn't say anything to Ahronchik as we walked back, though. He said goodbye to the girls, jumped on his horse, and holakh Moyshe-Mordekhai—away to Boiberik he went . . .

And now, as you writers like to say in your books, let's leave the young prince on his horse and get back to the princess in her castle, that is, to my Shprintze. "Tell me, Daughter," I said to her, "there's something I want to ask you: how could you and Ahronchik have discussed such a matter without even letting me know?"

Did you ever hear a tree talk? That's how my Shprintze answered me. She just blushed, stared down at her feet like a newlywed, and didn't open her mouth. Mum's the word! . . . Well, I thought, if you won't talk to me now, you'll do it later. Tevye is no woman; Tevye can wait. But I kept an eye out, looking for a chance to be alone with her again, and as soon as I found it one

day outside the house, I said to her, "Shprintze, I want you to tell me: do you think you really know him, this Ahronchik?"

"Of course I do," she says.

"And do you know that he's a penny whistle?" I say.

"What's a penny whistle?" she asks.

"A penny whistle," I say, "is something hollow that makes a lot of noise."

"That isn't so," she says to me. "Arnold is a fine person."

"Arnold?" I say. "Since when is that phony called Arnold?"

"Arnold," she says, "is not a phony. Arnold has a heart of gold. It's not his fault if he grew up in a house full of vile people who only think of money all the time."

"Well, well," I said. "Look who's the philosopher now! I suppose you think that having money is a sin too . . ."

In a word, I could see that they both were too far gone to be talked out of it. I know my girls. Didn't I once tell you that when Tevye's daughters, God help us, fall for someone, they fall with everything they have? And so I told myself, you fool, you, why must you always think you know best? Why can't you admit the whole thing may be providential? Why isn't it possible that quiet little Shprintze is meant to be your salvation, your reward for all your hardship and your heartache, so that at last you can enjoy yourself in your old age and live like a human being for once? Suppose your daughter is fated to be a millionairess—is that really so terrible? Is it such a blow to your dignity? Does it say anywhere in the Bible that Tevye must always be a beggar who spends his whole life hauling cheese and butter to keep the rich Jews of Yehupetz from dying of hunger? Who's to say that God hasn't fingered you to do a little good in His world before you die-to give a bit of money to charity, to take someone needy under your wing, even to sit down with educated Jews and study some Torah . . .

I swear, those were only some of the sweet thoughts that ran through my head. You know what it says in the morning prayer: raboys makhshovoys belev ish—or as they say in Russian, a fool can get rich just by thinking . . . And so I stepped into the house and took my wife aside for a little talk. "Just suppose," I said to her, "that our Shprintze should become a millionairess?"

"What's a millionairess?" asks my Golde.

"A millionairess," I say, "is a millionaire's wife."

"And what's a millionaire?" she asks.

"A millionaire," I say, "is a man who's worth a million."

"And how much is a million?" she asks.

"Look," I say, "if you're such a cow that you don't know what a million is, it's a waste of time talking to you."

"So who asked you to talk to me?" she says. I couldn't argue with that.

In a word, another day went by in Boiberik and I came home again. "Was Ahronchik here?" No, he wasn't . . . Another day. "Was he here today?" No, he wasn't . . . Though I could have found some excuse to drop in on the widow, I wasn't keen on it: I didn't want her to think that Tevye was fishing for a match with her—and one that she needed keshoyshanoh beyn hakhoykhim, like a wagon needs a fifth wheel . . . (Not that she had any reason to be ashamed of me, mind you, because if I wasn't a millionaire myself, I would at least have an in-law who was, while the only in-law she'd have would be a poor beggar of a dairyman; I ask you, then, whose connections would be better, mine or hers?) . . . To tell you the honest truth, though, if I wanted that match at all, it was less for the match's sake than for the feeling of satisfaction it would give me. "The Devil take you all!" I'd be able to say to all the rich Jews of Yehupetz. "Until now it's been nothing but Brodsky, Brodsky, Brodsky, but now you see who Tevye really is . . . "

So I thought, driving home from Boiberik. As soon as I walked in the door, my Golde met me with a bombshell. "A messenger, a Russian, was just here from Boiberik, from the widow! She begs you to come for God's sake as quickly as you can, even if it's the middle of the night! Harness the horse and go, it must be something important."

"Where's the fire?" I asked. "Can't it wait until morning?" Just then, though, I glanced at my Shprintze—and while she didn't say a word, her eyes said it all, everything! No one knew that child's heart the way I did—which was why I had sounded off to her about Ahronchik, because I was afraid that nothing would come of it. (Not that I couldn't have saved my breath, since for the past three days my Shprintze had been wasting away like a candle!) . . . And so I harnessed the horse again and set out that same evening for Boiberik. What can be so urgent, I wondered as I drove there. If they want to shake hands on it and have a proper betrothal, it's

they who should come to me, because I'm the bride's father ... only that was such a preposterous thought that it made me laugh out loud: who ever heard of a rich man going to a poor one for a betrothal? Did I think that the world had already come to an end, as that scamp of a Peppercorn said it would, and that the tycoon and the beggar were now equals, sheli shelkho and shelkho sheli—you take what's mine, I take what's yours, and the Devil take the hindmost? People were born with brains in this world and yet, oh, my goodness—what jackasses there were in it! . . .

I was still trying to figure it all out when I arrived in Boiberik, drove straight to the widow's dacha, and parked my horse in front of it.

"Where is the widow?" I asked at the door.

"The widow's not here."

"Where is her son?"

"He's not here either."

"Then who asked me to come?"

"I did," says a round tub of a man with a stringy beard and a fat gold watch chain on his stomach.

"And just who are you?" I ask.

"I'm the widow's brother, Ahronchik's uncle," he says. "I was cabled to come from Yekaterinoslav, and I've just arrived."

"In that case," I say, sitting down in a chair, "welcome to Boiberik."

"Have a seat," he says.

"Thank you," I say, "but I already have one. So how's the Constantution in your parts?"

He didn't answer that. He just settled himself into a rocking chair with his hands still in his pants pockets and his stomach sticking out beneath his watch chain and said without wasting any words, "I'm told they call you Tevye."

"They do indeed," I said. "And when they call me to the Torah in the synagogue, it's even Reb Tevye the son of Shneyur Zalman."

"Well, then, Reb Tevye," he says to me, "listen here. Why beat around the bush? Let's get right down to business, as they say . . ."

"And why not?" I say. "There's a time for everything, as King Solomon once said—and if it's business time, it's time for business. And a businessman is what I happen to be . . ."

Shprintze

"I can see you are," he says, "and that's why I'll get down to brass tacks with you. I want you to tell me perfectly honestly, just what is this going to cost us?"

"I can tell you perfectly honestly," I say, "that I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Reb Tevye!" he says to me again, his hands still in his pockets. "I'm asking you in plain language. How much is this affair going to cost us?"

"Well, now," I say, "that all depends on what sort of affair you have in mind. If you're thinking of the fancy wedding that folks like you are accustomed to, I'm afraid it's a bit beyond my budget."

"Either you're playing dumb," he says to me, giving me the once-over, "or else you really are dumb. Only, how dumb can you be to have set my nephew up in the first place by pretending to invite him over for blintzes in order to introduce him to a young beauty who may or may not be your real daughter . . . I won't go into that now ... and who got him to fall for her and maybe even-it's easy to see how she could-fell for him? Of course, I don't mean to imply it wasn't kosher . . . she may be a perfectly respectable girl, for all I know . . . I really don't want to go into that. But how could you have allowed yourself to forget who you are and who we are? Where does a sensible Jew like yourself get off thinking that a dairyman, a common cheesemonger, can marry into a family like ours? . . . He's given her his word, you say? Then he'll just have to take it back again! It's no tragedy, believe me. Of course, it has to cost something . . . there's breach of promise and all that . . . and I assure you, we're prepared to be reasonable. A young woman's honor is not the same as a young man's, even if she isn't your real daughter . . . but I would definitely prefer not to go into that . . ."

Good God, I thought, what does the man want from me? He didn't stop chewing my ear off. I shouldn't imagine for a minute that making a scandal by claiming his nephew was engaged to my daughter would get me anywhere . . . If I thought I could bilk his sister, I had another guess coming . . . Although with a bit of good will on my part, she was certainly good for a few rubles, for a charitable gesture, so to speak . . . I was, after all, a fellow human being, they would be glad to lend a helping hand . . .

And would you like to know what my answer to all that was? My

answer, the shame of which I'll never live down to my dying day, was nothing! My tongue clove to my mouth, as the Bible says—the cat had got it but good. I simply rose from my chair, went to the door—and exit Tevye. I ran from there as fast as I could, as though from a fire or a prison, while the man's words kept buzzing in my ears: perfectly honestly . . . who may or may not be your real daughter . . . bilk a widow . . . a charitable gesture, so to speak . . . I went over to my wagon, laid my head on it, and—but promise not to laugh at me!—I cried and cried until I had no tears left. Then I climbed aboard, whipped my poor devil of a horse to within an inch of his life, and asked God an old question about an old, old story: what did poor Job ever do to You, dear Lord, to make You hound him day and night? Couldn't You find any other Jews to pick on?

Well, I came home and found that gang of mine merrily eating supper. Only Shprintze was missing. "Where's Shprintze?" I asked.

"What happened in Boiberik?" they all wanted to know. "What did they want there?"

"Where's Shprintze?" I asked again.

"What happened in Boiberik?" they said again.

"What happened in Boiberik?" I said. "What should have happened there? Everything is quiet, thank God, there isn't a sign of a pogrom yet . . ."

Just then Shprintze walked in. She glanced at me and sat quietly down at the table as if none of this concerned her in the least. You couldn't tell a thing from looking at her, but that silence of hers was too much, there was something unnatural about it . . . And in the days that followed I didn't like it one bit, either, the way she went through the motions of things without seeming to have a will of her own. If she was told to sit, she sat; if she was told to eat, she ate; if she was told to go, she went; if she was told to come back, back she came. It made my heart ache to see her. I was burning up inside without knowing at whom . . . ah, dear God, I thought, Master of the Universe, whose sins are You punishing me for?

Well, would you like to hear the end? It's one that I wouldn't curse my worst enemy with, that I wouldn't curse anyone with, because there's no curse in the whole Bible like a curse on your own child. For all I know, in fact, someone may have put one on me... You say you don't believe in such things? Then maybe you'll explain to me why it happened. Go ahead, I'm listening...

But what good will all the philosophy do us? You may as well hear the end of it. One evening I was driving home from Boiberik in my usual grand mood: the shame, the humiliation of it all, to say nothing of my feelings for my daughter! . . . (Whatever happened, you ask, to the widow and her son? Just go try finding them! They skipped town without so much as an adieu. I'm embarrassed to tell you, but they even stuck me with an unpaid dairy bill. It wasn't that riled me, though—no doubt they simply forgot; it was their not having bothered to let me know. Why, to think of their picking up and leaving like that without even saying goodbye!) . . . What she, my daughter, went through, no one knew but me, because I was her father and a father knows in his heart. Don't imagine, though, that she ever said a word to me about it. Do you think she complained? Do you think she cried even once? If you do, you don't know Tevye's daughters! She just flickered out like a candle, without a word of protest, keeping it all to herself except for a sigh now and then-but such a sigh, I tell you, as could break a heart of iron . . .

In short, I was driving home with my horse, thinking about the whole miserable business and asking God all kinds of questions that He kindly let me answer for myself. My problem wasn't God, though—with Him I had somehow made my peace. My problem was men. Why did they have to be so bad when they could just as well have been good? Why did they have to ruin their own and other people's lives instead of being happy with what they had? Could God have created them on purpose to make them miserable? But what good could that possibly do Him . . .?

Just then I drove into our village and saw a crowd of people down by the dam on the river, men, women, and lots of children. What could have happened? There wasn't any sign of a fire—it must be a drowning, I thought. Someone went for a swim in the river and didn't come out. You never know where the Angel of Death will make a date with you . . .

And then all of a sudden I saw my Golde running toward the river, her arms waving in the air and her kerchief falling off, and after her Teibl and Beilke, all three screaming, shrieking, "Shprintze!" I jumped out of that wagon so fast it's a wonder I'm still in one piece and ran to the river myself, but it was too late to help my Shprintze anymore . . .

What was it I wanted to ask you? Oh, yes: have you ever seen a drowned man? Never? Well, mostly one dies with one's eyes shut, but a drowned man's eyes are always open. I just thought you might know why that was . . .

I hope you'll forgive me for taking so much of your time. It's not as if I had nothing better to do myself, because I have a horse and some merchandise waiting. The world hasn't changed any. You still have to think of the next ruble and put the past behind you. What was, is dead and buried, and a living man doesn't spit out his soul because it hurts. You can't outsmart fate. There's no getting around what it says in the morning prayer: koyl zman shehaneshomoh bekirbi—whatever breathes has to eat, so giddyap, Tevye!

Be well, and if you should ever happen to think of me, I only hope it isn't too badly.

(1907)

## TEVYE LEAVES FOR THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Why, if it isn't Reb Sholem Aleichem! How on earth are you? What a surprise, of all places! I never would have dreamed it, would you? How I've wondered why I haven't seen you in ages, neither in Boiberik nor in Yehupetz. I even thought you might have cashed in your chips and left us for that world where we'll never hunger or eat again, not even a radish with chicken fat . . . except that then I said to myself, "Since when would someone like Sholem Aleichem go do a dumb thing like that? He's an intelligent man, after all, if nothing else . . . " And now here you are, alive and well, thank God! How does the saying go? Turo beturo—two mountains never meet, but a man and a man sometimes do . . . Only, why are you looking at me as if you didn't know me, Pani? It's me, your good old friend Tevye! Al tistakeyl bakankan—don't let my new coat fool you: I'm still the same old schlimazel, there's not a hair more or less of me. It's just that a man seems more of a somebody when he's dressed in his Sabbath best, he can even make you think he's in

the money—and one has to look presentable when traveling, especially on a long journey like mine, all the way to the Land of Israel. That's not an outing to sneeze at, is it? I suppose you must be wondering how a small-timer like Tevye who spent his whole life selling dairy can afford to travel like a Brodsky in his old age. Well, if you don't mind moving your suitcase a bit, I'll sit myself down beside you and tell you a story about what the good Lord can do.

The first first of all, it should never happen to you, is that I'm a widower now. My Golde, God rest her, is dead. She was a simple soul, subtle you couldn't call her; but you won't find a greater saint anywhere. I only hope she puts in a good word for her daughters where she is, because the Lord knows she went through enough for them. In fact, they may be the reason she's there now, because she couldn't stand their being scattered from east of the sun to west of the moon a minute longer. "So tell me," she would say to me, "what will I have left to live for one day when there won't be a mouse in the house? Why, even a cow grieves when her calves are taken away . . ."

Those were her very words, my Golde's, and you should have heard her cry when she said them. I felt so sorry to see her pining away in front of me that I said to her, "Eh, Golde, my dearest. It says in the prayer book, im kevonim im ka'avodim—it's no different without children than with them. Either way there's a great, kind, merciful God above. I only wish I had a ruble for every dirty trick He's played on us . . ."

But my wife, may she forgive me, was a female through and through. "It's a sin to talk that way, Tevye," she said. "You mustn't be sinful."

"What did I say wrong?" I asked her. "Did I say anything against God? I'm sure that if He chose to make a wonderful world like this in which children aren't children anymore and parents are nothing at all, He knew exactly what He was doing . . ."

She didn't follow a word of that, though, because she only said to me in a whisper, looking at me with two eyes that could have crumbled a stone, "Oh, Tevye, I'm dying. Who'll cook your supper when I'm gone?"

Well, Tevye is no woman. I came right back at her with a saying, then with a verse from the Bible, then with a midrash, then with my own two cents. "Golde," I said, "you've been a good wife to me

all these years. Please don't go playing jokes on me now that I'm old."

Just then I took a look at her—uh-oh! I didn't like what I saw. "Golde," I said, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," she says to me, barely able to talk. But she didn't look long for this world, so I harnessed the horse, drove to town, and came back with the best doctor I could find. We entered the house . . . oh, lordy! My Golde was lying on the floor with a candle burning by her head, looking like a pile of dirt that had been covered with a black cloth. I stood there thinking, ki zeh koyl ha'odom—so this is all a human being is! Dear God, what have You done to Your Tevye this time? How is an old ruin like me going to live out his years now?

Well, I threw myself down on the floor beside her—and a fat lot lot of good it did. Do you hear me, Pan? Once you've looked death in the eye the way I have, it's hard to have faith anymore. You can't help wondering, mah onu umeh khayeynu—what's the point of the whole circus, this whole big yackety racket of a world on wheels? Why, it's nothing but vanity, one big zero with a hole in it!

In short, I hired a Jew to say the mourner's prayer every day in the synagogue and paid him the whole year in advance. What else could I do if God had punished me with no sons, only daughters, one female after another—it shouldn't happen to a living soul! I don't know if everyone goes through hell with his daughters or if it's just been my own rotten luck, but you can't really blame either, because the luck came from God and my daughters meant me no harm. In fact, I'd gladly settle for half of all the good things they've wished me. If anything, they were too devoted to me, and too much is as bad as not enough . . .

For example, take my youngest, Beilke. You simply have no idea what a gem she is! You've known me since before the Flood, as they say, and you know I'm not a father who goes around bragging about his kids—but on the subject of Beilke there's a thing or two, or even three, that I have to tell you, because while God may have made a lot of Beilkes in His time, He never made another Beilke like mine. And I'm not even talking about her looks, though if each of my daughters is a famous beauty, Beilke can put them all in her little pocket. Still, beauty isn't the word for her, because King Solomon had it right when he said that Charm

is a liar and Beauty a cheat—no, what I'm talking about is character, pure and simple . . . and when it comes to character, my Beilke is pure gold! She's always thought the world of me, but ever since her poor mother passed away I've been the apple of her eye. Why, she wouldn't let a speck of dust fall on me! I've often thought that God is just like He's said to be in the Rosh Hashanah prayer, a makdim rakhamim leroygez—He never hits a man over the head without first sending him the right medicine for it. The problem is that it's not always clear which is worse, the blow or the medicine. How was I to know that Beilke would sell herself down the river so that I could live out the rest of my life in the Land of Israel? Mind you, that's only a manner of speaking, because she's no more to blame for it than you are. It's all his fault, her Prince Charming! Far be it from me to wish him ill, but I wouldn't mind it one bit if a whole armory blew up beneath his feet. And yet to tell you the truth, when I think the matter over, the real guilty party may be me. Why, there's even a saying in the Talmud . . . but it's a pretty pass we've come to, Reb Sholem Aleichem, when I have to quote the Talmud to you!

In short, I'll try not to make it a long story. A couple of years went by and my Beilke grew into a young woman, while I carried on with my business as usual, taking my cheese, cream, and butter to Boiberik in the summer and, in the winter, to Yehupetz—may it end up like Sodom beneath a sea of salt! I can't even bear to think of that town anymore . . . that is, I don't mean the town, I mean the Jews who live in it . . . that is, I don't mean them either, I mean Efrayim the Matchmaker, may his grandfather break a leg in the grave! Just listen to what a Jew, and a matchmaker yet, can do to you.

Vayehi hayoym, one day after the summer season I'm on my way to Yehupetz with some merchandise, when who do I see but Haman in person—I mean Efrayim the Matchmaker. I believe I once told you about him. He's the sort of terrible pest you can't help stopping to talk to, that's the strange power he has over you. And so I said to my horse, "Whoaa, there, old fellow, pull over and I'll give you a snack," waved to Efrayim, said hello to him, and straightaway began to gab. "How's business?" I asked.

"Business," he says, letting out a juicy sigh, "is terrible."

"How come?" I ask.

"No customers," he says.

"None at all?" I ask.

"Not one," he says.

"But how can that be?" I ask.

"That can be," he says, "because matches aren't made around here any more."

"Where are they made, then?" I ask.

"Abroad," he says.

"And what happens," I ask, "to a Jew like me whose great-grandmother can't afford to travel?"

"For a Jew like you, Reb Tevye," says Efrayim, handing me a pinch of snuff, "I have a special offer, local goods."

"Which is?" I say.

"Which is," he says, "a childless widow, a cook in the best houses, net worth five hundred rubles."

"Reb Efrayim," I say, staring at him, "who do you think this match is for?"

"Who do I think it's for?" he says. "Why, for you!"

"The Devil take you!" I say, flicking the whip at my horse to start him up again. "May my enemies have as bad dreams all year long as I'll have of your widow tonight."

"No offense meant, Reb Tevye," says Efrayim. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Who were *you* thinking of?"

"Who?" I say. "Of my youngest daughter, who else?"

"Why, of course!" he says, jumping a foot in the air while giving himself a box in the ear. "What luck you've reminded me of her! She should live to be one hundred and twenty, Reb Tevye."

"Amen," I say. "So should you. In fact, you should live till the Messiah comes. But what's all the excitement about?"

"Reb Tevye," he says, "do I have something good for you! Do I have something sensational! Do I have something you won't find better anywhere!"

"And just who might this gift from God be?" I ask.

"Do I have," says Efrayim, "the perfect match for your youngest daughter! He's a steal, a catch, a rare find, a colossus, a prince among men, a millionaire, a second Brodsky, a contractor named Podhotzur!"

"Podhotzur?" I say. "The name rings a bell from the Bible."

"What Bible?" he says. "Leave the Bible out of it for once. He's a contractor! He builds houses, bridges, factories! He was out near Japan during the war and came back from there with a fortune!

He rides around in a droshky with two horses faster than greased lightning! He has more doormen in front of his house than you have buttons on your shirt! He has his own private bathtub! He has furniture from Paris! He wears a diamond on his pinky! . . . And he's still a spring chicken, a bachelor, straight off the shelf, the genuine article! All he's looking for is someone with looks. He's willing to take her barefoot and naked, but she's got to be a raving beauty."

"Whoaa!" I say to him. "If you don't stop for breath, we'll end up in Hotzenklotz. If I'm not mistaken, you once offered me the same bill of goods for my second daughter, Hodl . . ."

Well, when he heard that the man hugged his ribs and began to laugh so hard that I was sure he would get a stroke. "Good Lord," he finally managed to wheeze, "that's such ancient history that my grandma was in diapers when it happened. The fellow you're thinking of went bust during the war and ran away to America."

"May his memory be a blessing," I say. "And suppose this contractor of yours should decide to follow in his footsteps?"

That got his dander up. "What are you talking about, Reb Tevye?" he says. "That first case was a crook, a swindler, a bankrupt! My man Podhotzur is a builder. He has army contracts, companies, an office, a staff, a . . ."

What can I tell you? Efrayim pulled me out of the wagon in his enthusiasm, grabbed me by the collar, and began to shake me so hard that a policeman came along and almost jugged us both for disorderly conduct. It's a good thing I remembered my Bible. Lanokhri toshikh, it says. Why are some palms like bridges? Because they have to be crossed when you come to them . . .

In a word, I don't want to bore you. This Podhotzur was engaged to my Beilke and *loy orkhu hayomim*—after a while the wedding was held. What makes me say after a while? Because Beilke would sooner have died than had Podhotzur for a husband. The more he showered her with presents, gold watches, diamond rings, the less she could stomach him. There was no need to put it in writing—it was written all over her face, which was wet with the silent tears she cried. Finally, I made up my mind to talk to her. I tried to be casual. "Listen, Beilke," I said to her, "I'm beginning to think that you're as much in love with this Podhotzur of yours as I am."

"Why do you say that?" she says, turning red as fire.

"Because you're certainly not crying for your health every night," I say.

"I'm crying?" she says.

"Well, I wouldn't exactly call it crying," I say. "It's actually more like weeping. Do you think that sticking your head under the pillow is enough to hide your tears from me? Do you think your father was born yesterday, or that his brains are so addled he can't see that you're doing all this for his sake? Do you suppose it's your job to see to it he has a place to lay his head in his old age so that he needn't go begging from door to door? You're a fool if you do! God's still in His heaven, and Tevye is no charity case and no sponger. Money is a lot of hooey anyway, just like the Bible says. Why, look at your sister Hod! She hasn't a penny to her name, she lives in a hole in the wall at the far end of nowhere—and yet she keeps writing us how happy she is with her schlimazel of a Peppercorn . . ."

Shall I give you three guesses what my Beilke answered me? "Don't go comparing me to Hodl," she says. "In Hodl's day the world was on the brink. There was going to be a revolution and everyone cared about everyone. Now the world is its own self again, and it's everyone for his own self again, too." That's what she said, my Beilke—just go figure out what she meant!

Well, if you think that by now you're an expert on Tevye's daughters, you should have seen Beilke at the wedding—a princess! I stood there feasting my eyes on her and wondering, can this really be my Beilke? Who taught her to stand like that, to walk like that, to carry herself like that, to wear a dress like that, as if wedding gowns had been invented just for her? It wasn't much of a feast, though, because at 6:30 p.m. on the day of the wedding the two of them waved goodbye and holakh Moyshe-Mordekhai—off they went by night express to Nitaly, or Italy, or however the Devil that place is called that everyone goes to these days.

They didn't return until Hanukkah, when I received an urgent message from them to please, please come to Yehupetz at once. However you look at it, I thought, if they simply wanted to see me, they could have said as much; why the double "please" and the "at once"? There must be a special reason . . . but what? And I began to imagine all kinds of things, some good and some bad. Suppose, for instance, that they were already fighting like alley cats and had decided to get a divorce . . . Right away, though, I told myself,

Tevye, you dumbbell, why must you always imagine the worst! How do you know what they want you for? Maybe they miss you... Maybe Beilke would like to have her father nearby... Maybe Podhotzur is planning to take you into his business and give you a nice fat job...

One way or another, I had better go, so I harnessed up and vayeyleykh khoronoh-off to Yehupetz I went. On the way my excitement got the best of me and I began to imagine leaving the village, selling my cows, my horse, my wagon, the whole kit and caboodle, and moving to Yehupetz, where I would first become Podhotzur's foreman, then his bookkeeper, and finally a partner in his business who rode around with two bolts of greased lightning, one a chestnut and one a dapple-gray . . . at which point, though, I caught myself and thought: mah zeh ve'al mah zehwhere does a small potato like Tevye get off being such a big shot? Who needs the rat race, the hullabaloo, the night life, the rubbing elbows with millionaires, the whole lehoyshivi im nedivim, when all I want is to enjoy a peaceful old age in which I can study a bit of Mishnah now and then and recite a few chapters of Psalms? It's about time, Tevye, I said to myself, that you thought of the next world too. King Solomon knew what the score was when he said that a man is nothing but a jackass; he forgets that no matter how long he lives, there comes a day when he doesn't anymore . . .

I was still mulling it all over when I arrived safe and sound in Yehupetz, right at Podhotzur's door. Believe me, if I wanted to boast about his royu godloy veroyu oshroy, his house and all its trimmings, it wouldn't be hard. Suffice it to say that while I've never had the honor of dining with Brodsky, finer than Podhotzur's his place can't possibly be. You'll get an idea what a mansion it was if I tell you that the doorman, a lummox with silver buttons down his chest, wouldn't agree to let me in for love or money. What was I to do? The door was made of glass, and the lummox, damn his hide, stood on the other side of it brushing off his clothes. I winked at him; I talked to him in sign language; I put on a whole pantomime to tell him that the lady of the house was my own naturalborn daughter . . . none of which meant a thing to that dumb Russian, because he sign-languaged right back to me that I could go take a powder. What a schlimazel I felt like: imagine needing a letter of recommendation to get to see your own child! A sad day

it is, Tevye, for your gray hairs, I told myself, when this is what things have come to . . .

Just then, though, I looked through the glass door again and saw a girl bustling about inside. That must be the chambermaid, I thought, because she has the eyes of a thief (all chambermaids do—my business has brought me to a lot of rich houses and I've seen a lot of chambermaids in my day)—and so I winked at her too as if to say, "Open up there, my little pussycat . . ."

Well, she noticed me, opened the door a crack, and asked me in Yiddish, "Who are you looking for?"

"Is this the Podhotzur place?" I said.

"Who are you looking for?" she asked again, raising her voice.

"When you're asked a question," I said, raising my voice louder than hers, "it's considered polite to answer before asking one of your own. Is this the Podhotzur place?"

"That it is," she says.

"In that case," I say, "you and I are practically related. Please be so kind as to tell Madame Podhotzur that she has a guest; her father Tevye has arrived and has been standing outside like a beggar for quite some time, because he failed to pass muster with that silver-buttoned sheygetz of yours, who isn't worth the nail on your little finger . . ."

The girl burst out laughing like a shiksa herself, shut the door in my face, ran upstairs, ran back down, opened the door again, and let me into a palace the likes of which my ancestors never saw in their dreams. There was silk and satin and crystal and gold all over, and you could hardly feel yourself walk, because wherever you put your big feet they sank into carpets softer than snow that must have cost a small fortune. And the clocks! There were clocks on the walls, clocks on the tables, clocks everywhere; Father Time himself wouldn't have known what to do with so many of them. I began to cross the floor with my hands behind my back, taking it all in, when suddenly, in every direction, I saw other Tevyes with their hands behind their backs just like me. One was heading this way, another that, another toward me, another away . . . the Devil take them, there were mirrors all around! Leave it to that fat cat of a contractor to wallpaper his house with clocks and mirrors . . .

The thought of that fat, bald, whinnying loudmouth of a Podhotzur reminded me of the first time he came driving his two

speed demons to visit us in the village. He sprawled out in a chair as if he owned it, introduced himself to my Beilke, and then took me aside to shout a secret in my ear that could have been heard on the far side of Yehupetz. What was it? It was that my daughter had swept him off his feet and he wanted to marry her "pronto." His losing his footing was only natural, but that "pronto" of his was like a blunt knife in my heart. What kind of way was that to talk about a wedding? Where did I come in? And where did Beilke? I was about to pin his ears back with a verse or two from the Bible when I thought, *lomoh zeh anoykhi*—what's the point, Tevye, of butting in between these children? A lot it helped for you to think your other daughters' marriages were your business! You made more noise than a kettledrum, you quoted the Bible forwards and backwards, and who came out looking like a fool? Why, Tevye, of course!

But let's get back to the prince and the princess, as you writers like to say. I came to Yehupetz and was received with open arms. "How are you? . . . It's so good to see you! . . . How have you been? . . . Sit down, sit down! . . . " In short, the usual routine. You can be sure I wasn't going to be the first to ask mah yoym miyomim. why the rush invitation, because Tevye is no woman, Tevye knows how to wait. Meanwhile a servant in white gloves came to announce that food was on the table, and the three of us rose and went to a room that was all solid oak: the table was oak, and the benches were oak, and the walls were oak, and the ceiling was oak, all painted and lacquered and varnished and stained and carved and chiseled and paneled. The oak table was set for a king, with tea, and coffee, and chocolates, and pastries, and the best French cognac, and the most expensive pickled herring, and all kinds of fruits that I'm ashamed to admit my Beilke never saw in her father's home in her life. I was poured glass after glass of cognac, and I drank toast after toast, and I thought, looking at my Beilke, why, it's just like the prayer book says: mekimi mi'ofor dal-when God decides to help a poor person-meyashpoys yorim evyoyn-He goes the whole hog. That's certainly my Beilke that I'm looking at, but it's not like any Beilke that I've ever seen before.

As a matter of fact, when I compared the Beilke I knew to the Beilke I saw, I had the sinking feeling that I had driven a bad bargain and was left holding the bag. Do you know what it was like? It was like swapping my trusty old nag for a newborn colt

without knowing what would come of it, a real horse or a wooden one. Ah, Beilke, Beilke, I thought, just look at you now! Do you still remember sitting up nights by our smoky oil lamp, sewing and humming an old tune? Plunking yourself down on a threelegged stool and milking a cow faster than it could shake its tail at you? Rolling up your sleeves and cooking me a good, down-toearth borscht, or a dish of bean fritters, or a platter of cheese blintzes, and calling, "Papa, wash up and come eat"? Those words were such music to my ears—and now here was this woman sitting like a queen with her Podhotzur while two servants waited on the table, making a great clatter with the dishes, and where was my Beilke? You see, she didn't say a single word; Podhotzur was talking for the two of them, he didn't stop blabbing for a minute! In all my life I've never seen a man run on at the mouth like that about the Devil only knows what, and all the time with that highpitched whinny of his. It's not everyone who can be the only person to laugh at his own jokes and still go right on telling them . . .

Apart from the three of us, there was another diner at the table, a man with red, jowly cheeks. I hadn't the vaguest notion who he was, but he was no mean eater, because all the time that Podhotzur kept talking, he kept putting it away. You know what the rabbis say about *shloyshoh she'okhlu*, three men who eat at one table? Well, with someone like him you didn't need the other two...

In a word, I'm being eaten at on one side of me and talked to on the other—and such talk it was, too, as went in one ear and straight out the other: construction contracts, tenders, specifications, government ministries, Japan . . . The one thing that interested me was Japan, because I took part in the Japanese war myself. That is, back then, when horses were in such short supply that the army was beating the bushes for them, some quartermaster came around to me, took my nag for a physical, measured him up, down, and sideways, put him through his paces, and gave him an honorable discharge. "I could have told you that you were wasting your time," I said to him, "because it says in the Bible, yoydeya tsaddik nefesh behemtoy—a righteous man knows the soul of his beast, and Tevye's horse was never meant to be a hero." But you'll have to excuse me, Pan Sholem Aleichem, for getting sidetracked. Let's go back to our story.

Well, we wined and dined and asked the Lord's blessing, and when we rose from the table Podhotzur took me by the arm and steered me into a special office that was done up like all get-out with guns and swords all over the walls and little toy cannons on the desk. He plumped me down on a sofa soft as butter, took two big, juicy cigars from a gold box, lit one for himself and one for me, sat down facing me, crossed his legs, and said, "Do you have any idea why I sent for you?"

Aha, I thought, now he's about to talk turkey! I played innocent, though, and answered him, "How should I know? Am I my son-in-law's keeper?"

"I have something of a private nature to discuss with you," he says.

It's a job for sure! I tell myself. To him, though, I only say, "If it's something good, I'll be happy to hear it."

Well, he took the cigar from his mouth, did Mr. Podhotzur, and began to deliver a lecture. "You're an intelligent man," he says, "and so you won't mind my speaking to you frankly. You know that I run a big business, and that when one runs a business as big as mine—"

This is where I come in, I thought—and so I said, interrupting him, "That's exactly what the Talmud means by marbeh nekhosim marbeh da'ogoh! I suppose you're familiar with the passage?"

You couldn't say he wasn't honest. "To tell you the truth," he says with that little whinnying laugh, "I never studied a page of Talmud in my life. I wouldn't know what a Talmud looked like if you showed me one."

Do you see who I was up against now? You'd think, wouldn't you, that if God had punished him by making him an ignoramus, he would at least keep his trap shut about it!

"Well," I said, "I thought as much. You didn't look like much of a Talmudist to me. But why not finish what you were saying?"

"What I was saying," he says, "is that with a business like mine, a reputation like mine, a public position like mine, I can't afford to have a cheesemonger for a father-in-law. The governor of the province is a personal friend of mine, and I'm perfectly capable of having a Brodsky, even a Rothschild, as my guest . . ."

I swear, I'm not making up a word of it! I sat there staring at that shiny bald head of his and thinking, you may very well be palsy-walsy with the governor and have Rothschild over for tea, but you still talk just like a guttersnipe! "Look here," I said, trying not to sound too annoyed, "I can't help it, can I, if Rothschild insists on dropping in on you!" Do you think he got it, though? Loy dubim veloy ya'ar—it just sailed right by him.

"I would like," he says, "for you to leave the dairy line and engage in something else."

"And what exactly do you suggest that I engage in?" I asked.

"In anything you like," he says. "Do you think the world is short of things to do? I'll help you out with money, as much as you need, if you just agree to give up your cheesemongering. Come to think of it, I have an even better idea: how would you like to go pronto to America?"

And he sticks his cigar between his teeth again and gives me a shiny-headed look.

Well, you tell me: how does one answer a young whippersnapper like that? At first I thought, why go on sitting here like a golem, Tevye? Pick yourself up, walk through the door, shut it behind you, and holakh le'oylomoy—goodbye and good riddance! That's how hot under the collar he made me. The nerve of that contractor! Who did he think he was, telling me to give up a perfectly good living and go to America? Just because Rothschild was about to ring his doorbell, did that mean Tevye had to be sent packing to the other side of the globe? My blood began to boil; I was getting angrier by the minute, and now I was good and mad at my Beilke, too. How can you sit there like the Queen of Sheba surrounded by a thousand clocks and mirrors, I thought, when your father Tevye is being dragged over hot coals to the whipping post? May I hope to die if your sister Hodl isn't better off than you are! What's true is true: she may not live in a castle full of gewgaws, but at least that Peppercorn of hers is a human being-in fact, too much of one, because he never thinks of himself, only of others. And the head on that boy's shoulders . . . it's not a shiny pot of wet noodles like some people's . . . and the tongue on him . . . why, he's solid gold! Try polishing him off with a quotation and three more come flying back at you! Just you wait, you Putzhoddur, you, I'll let you have such a verse from the Bible that you'll see fireworks before your eyes . . .

And having thought it all over I turned to him and said, "Look here, I don't hold it against you that you think the Talmud is mumbo-jumbo. When a Jew sits in Yehupetz expecting Rothschild

any minute, he can afford to keep the Talmud in his attic. Still, even you can surely understand a simple line of Scripture such as every Russian peasant boy knows. I'm referring, of course, to what Onkelos has to say in his Targum about what the Bible has to say in the Book of Genesis about Laban the Aramean: miznavto dekhazirto loy makhtmen shtreimilto . . ."

"I'm afraid," he says, looking at me sideways like a rooster, "that that's a bit over my head. What does it mean?"

"It means," I say, "that you can't make a fur hat out of a pig's tail."

"And what," he asks, "am I supposed to understand by that?"

"You're supposed to understand," I say, "that I'm not being shipped off to America."

Well, he laughed that whinnying laugh of his and said to me, "All right. If America is out, how about Palestine? Isn't that where all the old Jews like you go to die?"

The minute he said that, I felt it drive home like a nail. Hold on there, Tevye, I told myself. Maybe that's not such a weird idea. There just may be something in it. With all the pleasure you've been getting from your children, why not try your luck elsewhere? You're a jackass if you think you have anyone or anything to keep you here. Your poor Golde is six feet under, and between you and me, so are you; how long do you intend to go on drudging?...And by the way, Pan Sholem Aleichem, you should know that I always had a hankering to be in the Holy Land. I would have given anything to see the Wailing Wall, Rachel's Tomb, the Cave of the Patriarchs, the River Jordan, Mount Sinai, the Red Sea, the Ten Plagues, and all the rest of it with my own eyes. In fact, I was so carried away thinking of that blessed land of Canaan where the milk and honey flow that I had all but forgotten where I was when Podhotzur brought me back to it by saying, "Well, how about it? Why not decide pronto."

"I can see," I said, "that everything is pronto with you. Make haste while the sun shines, eh? Still, if you ask me, there's a small problem here, because one can't get to Palestine on an empty pocket . . ."

Well, he gave his little whinny again, rose from his seat, went to his desk, opened a drawer, took out a billfold, and counted out a very tidy sum. I must say I was no slouch myself: I took that wad of bills—the things one doesn't do for money!—stuck it deep in

my pocket, and began to set the record straight with a midrash that interested him about as much as a cat's miaow. "That," he said without even letting me finish, "should get you to Palestine with plenty to spare. If you need more once you're there, just write and I'll send it to you pronto. And I trust I needn't remind you to catch the first train you can, because you're an honest, responsible fellow."

That's what he said to me, Mr. Hodputzer, whinnying so hard that I felt it right in the gut. Why don't you crack him on the snout with this wad of his, I thought, and tell him, begging your pardon, to stick it up his honest, responsible you-know-what, because Tevye is not for sale! Before I could open my mouth, though, he rang for Beilke and said to her, "Guess what, my sweet! Your father is leaving us. He's selling everything he owns and setting out for Palestine."

I tell you, it was like a bad dream! I looked at my Beilke, waiting for her to say something, to bat an eyelash at least. But she just stood there stock-still, not a drop of blood in her cheeks, glancing back and forth from her husband to me without so much as a word. I stared at her without saying one either, so that there we both were with our tongues stuck to the roofs of our mouths. My head was spinning, pounding away as though I had been breathing coal gas. What can be wrong with me, I wondered; if it's the cigar I smoked, he's been smoking one himself, and talking nonstop in the bargain, though his eyelids keep drooping as if he were itching to snooze. "You take the express train to Odessa," he says to me, "and from there a ship sails to Jaffa. The best time to go is right now, because later there are winds . . . and snow, and . . . and storms . . . and . . . and . . . " He was so sleepy he could barely get the words out, but he didn't stop jabbering for a second. "Just don't forget to notify us when you're ready to leave . . . We'll come to say goodbye at the station . . . Who knows when we'll meet again . . . " And he yawns in my face, gets up from his chair, and says to my Beilke, "And now, my sweet, you spend some time with your father while I go lie down for a while . . ."

I swear, I thought, that's the first sensible thing you've said; now at last I can get it all off my chest. And I turned to my Beilke to let out what had been building up in me all day—but before I could even begin, she threw her arms around me and started to cry. Did I say cry? My daughters, bless them, are all the same; for a while

they manage to put on a brave face, but sooner or later every one of them gushes like a geyser. Take my second oldest, Hodl, for example; at the very last minute, just as she's setting out for Siberia with her Peppercorn, she breaks down and bawls like a baby! Only there's really no comparison, because when it comes to crying, Hodl can't hold a candle to Beilke.

TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN

I'll tell you the honest truth: I myself am no weeping willow. The last good cry I remember having, in fact, was when I found my poor Golde dead on the floor, and before that, when my Hodl left me standing in the station, all alone like a fool with my horse. There may have been a few other times when my eyes were a wee bit wet, but that's all; on the whole, it's not like me to blubber. But Beilke's tears threw me so that I couldn't hold my own in any longer, let alone say a cross word to her. I'm not a man who needs things spelled out for me: my name is Tevye. And I knew why she was crying: it was for kheyt shekhotosi lefonekho, for the sin of not listening to a father—so that instead of letting her have what she deserved and giving that Hodderputz hell, I tried cheering her up with some story or other, as only Tevye can do. She listened to me, did my Beilke, and said, "No, Papa, that's not why I'm crying. I'm not blaming myself or anyone. It just breaks my heart to know that you're going away because of me, and that there's not a thing I can do about it.'

"There, there," I told her. "You're talking like a little girl. Have you forgotten that God is still in His heaven and your father is still a young man? Why, it's child's play for me to travel to Palestine and back again, just like it says in the Bible: vayisu vayakhanu-and the Children of Israel knew not if they were coming or going . . ."

Yet the words were no sooner out of my mouth than I thought, Tevye, that's a big fat lie! You're off to the Land of Israel for good-it's bye-bye Tevye forever . . . She must have read my mind, too, for she said to me, "Please, Papa. It's no use trying to comfort me as you would a child with some fairy tale that ends happily ever after-although if you like fairy tales, I can tell you one myself. I'm warning you, though, Papa, that this fairy tale is a sad one."

That's just what she said, my Beilke; Tevye's daughters don't mince words. And with that she began to tell me a story, a case history, a tale from the Arabian Nights, about how her Podhotzur was a self-made man who had pulled himself up from the bottom rung by his own bootstraps and now only wanted to hobnob with all the Brodskys of the world . . . Money, she said, was no object to him; he gave it away by the barrelful; only money, it seemed, was not enough, one needed a pedigree too-and Podhotzur was determined to prove that he wasn't just some rich upstart but the last of a long line of famous Podhotzurs and the son of a wealthy contractor himself. "And that," says my Beilke, "is though he knows that I know that his father was a fiddler at weddings. Worse yet, he goes about telling everyone that his father-in-law is a millionaire too . . ."

"Who, me?" I say. "Well, I always thought that someday I would get to be one."

"I can't tell you how I blush, Papa," she says, "when he introduces me to his friends with the most outrageous lies about my distinguished father, and all my uncles, and my whole family and I have to sit there and put up with it, because he's eccentric that way."

"By you," I say, "he's eccentric. By me he's a charlatan and a fraud."

"But he's not, Papa," says my Beilke. "You don't know him. He's not such a bad man as you think. He's just unpredictable. He has a big heart and he's generous. If you catch him in the right mood, it's enough to make a long face for him to give you the shirt off his back. And I'm not even talking about myself—for me the sky's the limit! You mustn't think I have no influence with him. Why, not long ago I made him promise to do all he could to free Hodl and her husband from Siberia. He swore to me that money wouldn't stand in his way. His one condition was that they go to Japan when Peppercorn gets out."

"Why to Japan?" I asked. "Why not to India, or to Mesopotamia, or to Timbuktu?"

"Because," she says, "he has businesses there. He has businesses everywhere. He spends more on telegrams in a single day than it would cost us to live on for a year. But what good does all that do me if I can't be myself?"

"The rabbis," I said, "put that very well. Im eyn ani li mi li—if you can't be yourself, don't expect me to be."

And I tried to make a joke of it with a quote thrown in here and there, though my heart bled for my daughter to see what unhap-

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piness money had bought her. "Your sister Hodl," I said, "would never have gotten into such a—"

"I already told you, Papa," said my Beilke, interrupting me, "not to compare me to Hodl. Hodl lived in the Age of Hodl and Beilke lives in the Age of Beilke. The distance between the two is as great as from here to Japan."

I ask you, is that Japanese or not?

Well, I see you're getting off at the next station, Pani. Just give me two more minutes. I left my lucky youngest daughter's house with a bellyful of her sorrows, a shattered, a devastated man; flung my cigar, which had only given me a headache, on the ground; and yelled at it, "You should go straight to hell, you and your father and all your uncles!"

"Whose uncles did you say, Reb Tevye?" I heard a voice ask behind me. I turned around—why, it's Efrayim the Matchmaker, the Devil take him and keep him!

"Well, well, a fellow Jew!" I say. "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" he asks.

"Visiting my daughter," I say.

"And how is she?" he asks.

"How should she be?" I say. "Not everyone has luck like hers."

"I can see you're happy with my merchandise," he says.

"Happy," I say, "is not the word. You should only be as happy yourself."

"Thank you for your kind wishes," he says. "Perhaps you'd like to add a small remittance to them."

"Are you trying to tell me," I say, "that you never were paid your matchmaker's fee?"

"That Podhotzur of yours," he says, "should only be worth as much as he paid me."

"You mean he short-changed you?" I ask.

"Not at all," he says. "What he gave me just wasn't enough."

"Why not?"

"Because there's not a kopeck left of it."

"How come?"

"I married off a daughter myself."

"Mazel tov!" I say. "May God grant you pleasure from her."

"A fine lot of pleasure He's already granted me," he says. "I wound up with a gangster for a son-in-law. He beat my daughter black and blue and ran away with all her money to America."

"But why didn't you stop him?" I say.

"Why, what could I have done?" he asks.

"Well," I say, "you might have salted him away in a pickle barrel."

"I see you're in a gay mood today, Reb Tevye," says Efrayim.

"It would be a fit punishment for God," I say, "if He had to feel half as gay as I do."

"Is that so?" he says. "And here I was thinking how lucky you were to be a rich Jew. Well then, how about a pinch of snuff to cheer you up?"

I took the snuff, said goodbye to the matchmaker, drove home to my village, and began to sell all the worldly goods I had accumulated over the years. Mind you, that's easier said than done. Every pot and pan, the silliest little item, cost me a year of my life; if it didn't remind me of my poor Golde, it reminded me of my daughters, may they live. The cruelest blow of all, though, was getting rid of my horse. I felt like a traitor to him. You see, we had suffered together for so many years, slaved together, been through so much together—and here I was, putting him on the block! In the end I sold him to a water carrier, because dealing with coachmen was too aggravating. You should have heard the guff I had to take from them. "God help us, Reb Tevye," they said to me, "do you call that thing a horse?"

"And what does it look like to you," I say, "a chandelier?"

"Not at all," they say. "A chandelier doesn't have four legs. In fact, for a horse we'd give him ninety-nine out of a hundred."

"You would?" I say.

"Yes," they say. "He'll live to be a hundred and he's already ninety-nine. His lips are gray, there's not a tooth in his mouth, and his ribs shake like an old woman's on a cold winter night."

That's coachmen's talk, in case you didn't know. I swear to you that my nag understood every word of it, just like it says in the Bible: veyoda shor koyneyhu—even a dumb beast knows when it's been put up for sale. And the proof of it was that when I slapped the water carrier on the back to congratulate him, my horse turned his old head to me and gave me a silent stare that said, "Zeh khelki mikoyl amoli—is this how you thank me for all I've done for you?" I took one last look at his new owner leading him away and beginning none too gently to teach him his new trade, and I thought as I stood there all alone, God Almighty, how cleverly

You run this world of Yours: here You create a horse and here You create a Tevye, and one fate is enough for them both! The only difference is that a man has a mouth and can grumble till he's hoarse, while a horse can't grumble till he's man. That's why he's only a horse.

You see the tears in my eyes, Pan Sholem Aleichem, and you must be thinking, how Tevye misses his horse! But what makes you think it's just my horse? I miss everything, there's not one thing it doesn't grieve me to think of. I miss my horse, I miss my village, I miss its elder, I miss its policeman, I miss the dachas of Boiberik, I miss the rich Jews of Yehupetz, I even miss Efrayim the Matchmaker, may the cholera carry him off! When you get right down to it, he's nothing but a miserably poor Jew himself who's out to make a living like the rest of us. Don't ask me what I'll do in the Land of Israel if I get there safely, God willing, but I do know one thing for sure, and that's that right off I plan to visit Mother Rachel in her grave. I'll pray there for the daughters I'll probably never see again, and I'll think of him, too-I mean Efrayim the Matchmaker—and of you, and of Jews everywhere. Here, let's shake on that! Be well, and have a good trip, and give my very best to any of our friends you may happen to meet on your way.

(1909)

## LEKH-LEKHO

Greetings, Pan Sholem Aleichem, greetings to you and yours! I've been looking for you everywhere, because I have some fresh goods for you. Where have you been? Why haven't I seen you? I've been told you were traveling all over the world, to all kinds of far places, each of the hundred-and-seven-and-twenty lands of King Ahasuerus...But am I imagining it, or are you really giving me a strange look? You seem to be trying to make up your mind if it's me or not. It's me, Pan Sholem Aleichem, it's me—

your old friend Tevye in person, Tevye the Dairyman! That is, I'm still Tevye, though I'm not a dairyman any more; I'm just a plain everyday Jew, and an old one too, as you can see, though to go by my age, no older than it says in the Haggadah: harey ani keven shivim shonoh—why, I'm not even pushing seventy yet . . . So why, you ask, all the white hair? Believe me, my dear friend, I didn't grow it for fun. It's partly from my own private sorrows— God forgive me for putting myself first!—and partly from those of Jews everywhere. What times we live in! What a miserable time to be a Jew! . . . I can see, though, that you're itching to ask me something. I suppose it's because you remember having said goodbye to me as I was leaving for the Land of Israel. You must be thinking that I'm back from there, and you can't wait to hear news of the Wailing Wall, Mother Rachel's Tomb, and all those other places. Well, let me assure you that if you've got the time for me, I've got the news for you. In fact, if you listen to me carefully, with a real shmo'eyni, as Father Abraham says, you'll soon say yourself that God's in His heaven, man is a jackass, and all is right with the world.

In a word, what Bible reading are you up to in the synagogue this week, the first chapter of Leviticus? Well, I'm a bit behind, because I'm still back in the third chapter of Genesis. That's the chapter of Lekh-Lekho, you know, where God shows Abraham the door. Lekh-lekho-get thee out, Tevye-meyartsekho-from your land—umimoyladitkho—and from the village you were born in and lived in your whole life-el ha'orets asher arekko-to wherever your legs will carry you . . . And when did it occur to the powersthat-be to tell me that? Not a minute before I'm so old, weak, and lonely that I'm a real al tashlikheynu le'eys ziknoh, as it says in the Rosh Hashanah prayer . . . Only I'm getting ahead of myself, because I was telling you about my trip and what's new in the Land of Israel. Well, what should be new there, my dear friend? It's a land flowing with milk and honey—if you don't believe me, you can read up on it in the Bible. There's only one thing the matter with it, which is that it's there and I'm here . . . and not only am I still here in Russia, I'm still a schlimazel in Russia, and a schlimazel I'll be till I die! Just think of it: there I was with one foot practically in the Holy Land already—I had only to buy a ticket, board a ship, and heigh-ho!-when what does the good Lord decide to do? It shouldn't happen to you or to anyone, but one night my

son-in-law, Motl Komzoyl, the tailor from Anatevka, gets it into his head to go to bed well and wake up dead in the morning. I don't mean to say he was the picture of health before that. He was a workingman, after all, who spent day and night al hatoyroh ve'al ha'avoydoh, patching pants with his needle and thread. Well, the long and short of it was that he came down with the dry cough, and coughed and coughed until he coughed his lungs out. Nothing helped him one bit, not the doctors with their medicines, or the quacks with their snake oils, or the goat's milk, or the chocolate with honey. He was a fine young man; a bit simple perhaps, without any learning, but also without any guile; and was he ever crazy about my Tsaytl! He lived his whole life for her and her children, and he would have done anything for me, too . . .

In a word, vayomos Moysheh—Motl passed on and left me with a pretty kettle of fish to fry. How could I even think of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land when I had a house full of little pilgrims myself? You can't just let your widowed daughter and all her orphans go hungry—although on the other hand, I was about as much use to them as a sack full of holes. I couldn't bring Tsaytl's husband back to life for her, or restore the children's father from the dead; I was a mere mortal myself, and an old one at that, who wanted only to rest his weary bones and feel for once that he was a human being and not a donkey. I had had enough of this workaday, dog-eat-dog world; it was high time to start thinking of the next one. And besides, I had already held a clearance sale of everything I owned; my horse, as you know, was given his walking papers, and every one of my cows was sold too, except, that is, for two little calves, who needed their victuals if anything was to come of them . . . and now, all of a sudden, here I was running an orphanage in my old age, the father of a house full of children! And do you think that was all? Don't jump to any hasty conclusions. The real music hasn't begun yet, because it never rains in Tevye's life but it pours, like that time a cow of mine died and another cow thought it such a grand notion that the next day she went and died too . . . Well, that's how God chose to make this world of His, and that's how it always will be. Why spit into the wind?

In short, I told you how my youngest daughter Beilke struck it rich by landing that fat cat of a Podhotzur who made a pile as a war contractor. He heard of her from Efrayim the Matchmaker, damn his soul, fell for her head over heels, and went down so hard on his knees to ask me for her hand that he nearly split his shins. And he took her without a penny's dowry, and rained pearls and diamonds on her too—you'd normally call that a stroke of good luck, wouldn't you? Well, all that luck, let me tell you. went right down the drain in the end-and what a drain it was, God save us all from such a filthy mess! When He decides to give the wheel of fortune a spin so that the butter side is down, it's like reciting the hallel prayer: you can't say mekimi, "He who raiseth the lowly," without adding mi'ofor dal, "from the dirt"—and bang, that's just where you find yourself, right smack on your bottom again! Oh, God likes to play games with us, He does. He's got a favorite He plays with Tevye called Oylim Veyordim, which means in plain language Upsy-Daisy-now you're up, and now you're pushing daisies . . . which is exactly what happened to that contractor. Perhaps you remember my telling you about his seventeen servants and his little mansion with its mirrors, clocks, and toys. La-di-da! You may also remember my asking my Beilkebegging her, in fact-to make sure he bought the house outright and registered it in her name. Well, she listened to me the way a dead man listens in the grave. What does a father know about such things? Nothing times nothing, of course! And do you know what happened in the end? Exactly what you'd wish on your worst enemy! He not only went so broke that he had to sell every last clock and mirror, even the pearls and diamonds he bought my Beilke, he had to run for dear life from his creditors too, and light out for never-never land-I mean for America, where else do all the hard-luck cases go? And don't think they had it easy there, either. They ran out of what little money was left, and when the larder was empty they had to go to work-and I do mean work, the worst sort of slave labor, just like we Jews did in Egypt, both him and her! Lately, she writes, things are looking up, thank God; they're both making socks in a sweatshop and doing well; which means in American that they're breaking their backs to keep the wolf from the door . . . although the lucky thing is, she writes, that there are only two of them, they haven't any little mouths to feed. What doesn't go by the name of luck these days! I ask you, doesn't his great-aunt's grand-uncle deserve to break a leg?... No, I don't mean that Podhotzur, I mean Efrayim the Matchmaker, for palming off such a match on me and getting us all into this pickle! Would it have been such a tragedy if my Beilke had married a workingman like my Tsaytl or a tutor like my Hodl? Not that they're sitting on top of the world themselves . . . one is a widow and the other is in Outer Nowhere . . . but these things come from God, a man can't do anything about them. Would you like to know something? The most sensible one of us all was my Golde. She saw what was coming and decided to clear out of this ridiculous world in time, because she knew it was a thousand times better to be breakfasted on by the worms than to go through what her Tevye has gone through with his daughters. Well, you know what our rabbis said: be'al korkhekho atoh khai—no one asks you if you want to live or not, and neither would you, if only you minded your own business . . .

I can see I've digressed, though. Nakhzor le'inyoneynu harishon, then—let's leave the prince on his horse, as you writers like to say, and see what the princess is up to. Where were we? Yes, in the chapter of Lekh-Lekho. But before we get to Lekh-Lekho, suppose we have a look, if you don't mind, at the story of the Amalekites in the Book of Exodus. I know that the way things are done in this world, and the way they always have been, Genesis comes before Exodus, but in this case the Amalekites came first. And I suggest you listen to the lesson they taught me, because it may come in useful some day.

In short, let's go back to the days after the Japanese war, when the Constantution was in the headlines and we Jews were having a fine old time of it, first in the big cities and then in the smaller towns to which the pogroms spread. They never reached my own village, though, and they never could have. Would you like to know why not? For the simple reason that I was the only Jew among Christians and on good terms with every one of them. Why, Uncle Tevel was king of the roost there, a friend in need and indeed! Did someone want advice? "Let's go ask Tevel." A remedy for baldness? "Tevel's sure to know." A little loan to tide him over? Try Tevel again. Why be afraid of a silly thing like a pogrom when my Christian neighbors had promised me over and over that I had nothing to worry about—they simply wouldn't allow it. And in the end they didn't. Listen to a crazy story.

One day when I came home from Boiberik—I was in my heyday then, selling cheese, cream, butter, and such stuff—I unharnessed my horse, gave him some hay and oats, and was about to wash up

and have a bite myself when what do I see in my front yard but a big mob of peasants. The whole village was there from top to bottom, from Ivan Paparilo the elder to Trokhim the shepherd, all with an odd holiday air. For a second my heart skipped a beat, because I knew there was no holiday in sight. They've come to give you a Bible lesson, I thought, and "Then came Amalek and fought with Israel" is their text... only then I thought again: shame on you, Tevye! They may be Christians and you may be a Jew, but you've lived your whole life peacefully among them without a hair of your head being harmed. And so I stepped outside and acted my friend-liest. "Welcome!" I said to them. "What brings you here, dear neighbors? What's the good word? What's new in the world?"

"We've come to you, Tevel," says Ivan Paparilo, stepping forward and getting right down to it, "because we want to have a pogrom."

How's that for an opener? There's nothing like breaking it gently!

Well, I don't have to tell you what I felt like. Don't think I let them see it, though. Far from it: Tevye was no crybaby. "Congratulations!" I said to them in my cheeriest voice. "What's taken you so long, though, my children? Everywhere else the pogroms are already over."

But Ivan Paparilo was in no mood to joke. "You see, Tevel," he said, "we've finally made up our minds. Since you Jews have been beaten up everywhere, why let you get away with it here? We just aren't certain what kind of pogrom to have. Should we just smash your windows, should we tear up your pillows and blankets and scatter all the feathers, or should we also burn down your house and barn with everything in them?"

This time my heart did a flip-flop. I looked at all those good people whispering to each other as they stood leaning on their staffs and I thought, Tevye, this is serious! It's bo'u mayim ad nefesh for sure, just like it says in the Bible—you're in for it this time, all right. You'd better watch what you say, because who knows what these pigs' snouts might do to you! And you'd better say it fast too, because this is no time to play guessing games with the Angel of Death . . .

Why make a short story long, my dear friend? It was a miracle from God that I kept my wits about me, got a grip on myself, and said, not sounding the least bit put out, "Listen to me, dear neigh-

bors and villagers. If that's what you've decided, who am I to object? You must have good reasons for thinking that Tevye deserves to see his life go up in smoke. I just hope you realize, though, that there is a higher power than your village council in this world. You do know there's a God above, don't you? Mind you, I'm not talking about my God or your God—I'm talking about the God of us all, He who sits in His heaven and sees every low-down trick that we play on each other here on earth . . . It may very well be that He wants you to punish me for being guilty of nothing at all. But the opposite may also be true, my dear friends, and He may not want you to lift a finger against me. Who can know what God's will is? Is there anyone here who would like to explain to us how God makes up His mind?"

TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN

Well, they must have seen there was no outtalking Tevye, because he said to me, did Ivan Paparilo, "Look, Tevel, it's like this. We have nothing against you personally. You're not at all a bad sort for a kike. It's just that that has nothing to do with it. A pogrom is a pogrom, and if the village council has voted to have one, then that's what must be. We'll have to smash your windows at least, because if anyone passing through here sees there's been no pogrom yet, we'll be in hot water ourselves."

I swear to God and hope to die, those were his very words! You're a Jew who's been all over, Pan Sholem Aleichem, you tell me: is Tevye right or not when he says there's a great God up above?

That's the story of the Amalekites—and now let's get back to Lekh-Lekho. You see, I was only recently given a lesson in its real meaning, against which none of the commentaries I knew helped one bit. Let me tell it to you exactly as it happened, blow by blow ka'asher ohavti, the way you like a story told.

Vayehi bimey Mendel Beilis—it happened back at the time of the Beilis case, when Mendel Beilis was atoning for all our sins by going through the torments of hell and the whole world was talking of nothing else. One hot summer day I was sitting on my front stoop, the wheels spinning round in my head. How can it be, I thought, how is it possible that such a thing can happen in times like these, in such an intelligent world full of smart people? And where is God in all this—where, oh where, is our old Jewish God? Why doesn't He do something? Why doesn't He say something? Why, why, why, why, why . . .

Well, once you get on the subject of God, you beat your brains out about other things too. What was life all about? Was there more of it after death? Why hadn't the Messiah come yet? Ai, I thought, wouldn't it be clever of him, the Messiah, to come riding down to us on his white horse right this minute! Just think how grand that would be! Why, we've never needed him so badly! There's no knowing what goes on in the mind of a rich Jew, of a Brodsky in Yehupetz, for example, or of a Rothschild in Paris the Messiah may be the furthest thing from it; but we poor Jews of Kasrilevke, and of Mazapevke, and of Zlodeyevke, and even of Yehupetz, and yes, of Odessa too, can't wait for him any longer no, we absolutely can't wait another day! The only hope left us is for God to work a miracle and send us the Messiah right away . . .

There I sat thinking all this when I happened to look up—and what do you suppose I saw? A white horse with a rider on it right in front of my house! "Whoaa," he tells it, jumping down and tying it to the gate, while to me he says, "Zdrastvoy, Tevel!"

"Zdrastvoytye, Officer, Zdrastvoytye," I say, giving him a friendly greeting. It seems I only need think of the Messiah for Haman to appear right away-I mean the village policeman. "Welcome, sit down," I say. "What's the good word? What's new in the big world, Officer?" Believe me, my heart was in my throat—what could he possibly have come for? He took his time telling me, too. He lit himself a cigarette slow and easy, blew out the smoke, and spat on the ground before saying, "Tell me, Tevel, how much time would you say you needed to sell your house and everything in it?"

"But why," I said, staring at him, "should I sell my house? Is it in anyone's way?"

"No," he says, "it isn't. It's just that I've come to expel you from the village."

"Is that all?" I say. "And what good deeds have I done you to deserve such an honor?"

"It's not my doing," he says. "It's the provincial governor's."

"The governor's?" I say. "What does the governor have against me?"

"It's not against you," he says. "And it's not just here, either. It's in every village in the area, in Zlodilevka, and in Rabilevka, and in Kostolomevka, and even in Anatevka, which has been considered a town until now. You all have to leave. Every one of you Jews."

Lekh-Lekho

"Even Layzer Wolf the butcher?" I ask. "And lame Naftoli Gershon? And the rabbi? And the slaughterer?"

"Everyone," he says, knifing the air with his hand.

Well, that made me feel a little better. Tsoras rabbim khatsi nekhomoh, as they say—misery never minds a bit of company. Still, I was burning up inside. "Tell me, Officer," I said to him, "are you aware of the fact that I've been living in this village longer than you have? Do you know that my father lived hereabouts too, and my grandfather before him, and my grandmother also, rest her soul . . ."

I didn't stop there, either; I went on to list every member of my family who had ever lived and died in those parts. I must say he heard me out, but all he said when I finished was, "You're a smart Jew, Tevel, and you've got the gift of the gab. But what do I care about your grandmother and your grandfather and all their old wives' tales? They flew away to heaven long ago, and you had better pack your things and fly away to Berdichev."

That made me even angrier. It was bad enough to get such wonderful news from that big goy in the first place without his making a joke of it. He could fly away somewhere himself! "Officer!" I said. "In all the years you've been the law around here, have you ever heard a single soul in the village complain that I stole anything, or pilfered anything, or cheated anyone, or took the smallest item that didn't belong to me? Go on, ask everyone if I wasn't on better terms with them than their own next-door neighbors. In fact, how many times did I come on their behalf to ask you to stop being such a brute to them . . ."

Well, that didn't sit too well with him, because he got to his feet, snuffed out his cigarette with his fingers, threw it away, and said, "Listen, I don't have time to chew the fat with you all day. I have a written order, and that's that. Here, this is where you sign. I'm giving you three days to clear out. That should be enough to sell all your things and pack."

"So you're giving me three days, are you?" I said, seeing it was a lost cause. "Well, for each of them I wish you a whole year of as much happiness as you've brought me. May God pay you back with interest for being the bearer of such good tidings." And I proceeded to give him a good tongue-lashing, as only Tevye can do. What did I have to lose? Had I been twenty years younger, and still had my Golde—had I been, that is, the Tevye I once

was—oho, I wouldn't have taken it lying down: why, I would have settled his hash in a minute! But the way things stood . . . mah onu umeh khayeynu—just take a look at me now: I'm a shadow of myself, a walking corpse, a decrepit shell of a man! Dear Lord God, I thought, wouldn't You like to play one of Your jokes on a Brodsky or a Rothschild for a change? Why doesn't anyone give them a lesson in Lekh-Lekho? They could use it more than me. In the first place, it's high time they too had a taste of what it's like to be a Jew. And secondly, let them see for once in their lives what a great God we have watching over us . . .

In a word, it was one big waste of breath. There's no arguing with God, and you can't tell Him how to run this world of His. When He says *li hashomayim veli ha'orets*, I'm boss of heaven and earth, all you can do is listen. No sooner said than done with Him! . . . So I went inside and told my daughter Tsaytl, "Tsaytl, we're moving to town. Enough of this country life. It's time to look for greener pastures . . . You get busy packing the linens, the samovar, and everything else, and I'll take care of selling the house. We've just gotten a written order to be out of here in three days and find another roof for our heads."

My daughter burst out crying, and as soon as they saw her, the children began howling so loudly that you might have thought it was the day of mourning for the Temple. That was already too much for me, and I let it all out on her. "What do you want from my life?" I asked her. "What in the world are you wailing for, like an old cantor on Yom Kippur? Do you think I'm God's only child? Do you think He owes me special consideration? Do you think there aren't lots of other Jews who are being expelled just like us? You should have heard what the policeman told me. Would you believe that even a town like Anatevka has been declared a village, glory be, so that the Jews can be kicked out of it too? Since when am I less of a Jew than they are?"

I was sure that would cheer her up, but my Tsaytl is only a woman. "How are we going to move in such a hurry?" she asked. "Where will we ever find a town to live in?"

"Don't be a sillyhead," I said. "When God came to our great-great-great-grandfather, I mean to Father Abraham, and told him *lekh-lekho meyartsekho*, get thee out of thy land, did Abraham ask Him where to? God told him exactly where to, *el ha'orets asher arekko*—which means in plain language, hit the road! We'll go

where all the other Jews go—that is, where our two feet take us. What's good enough for them is good enough for us. What makes you think you're more privileged than your sister Beilke the millionairess? If sweating for a living with her Podhotzur in America isn't beneath her dignity, neither is this beneath yours... Thank the good Lord that we at least have something to fall back on. There's some money that I saved over the years, there's what we got for the horse and cows, and there's what we'll get for the house. Every little bit helps—why, we ought to be counting our blessings! Even if we didn't have a penny to our name, we'd still be better off than Mendel Beilis . . ."

In a word, after managing to convince her that it was pointless to be obstinate and that, if a policeman comes along with an eviction order, it's only sporting to sign without being piggish about it, I went off to the village to see Ivan Paparilo, an ox of a man who had been dying to have my house for years. Naturally, I didn't breathe a word of what had happened—any way you look at it, a Jew is still smarter than a goy. "You must have heard, Ivan, old man," I said to him, "that I'm about to say goodbye to you all."

"How come?" asks Ivan.

"I'm moving to town," I say. "I want to be among Jews. I'm not such a young man any more—why, I might kick off any day . . ."

"But you can kick off right here," says Ivan. "Who's stopping you?"

"I believe I'll leave that to you to do," I say, thanking him all the same for his kind offer. "You can even have my turn. I myself would rather die among my own. I just thought, though, that you might like to buy my house and garden. I wouldn't dream of selling them to anyone else, but for you I'll make an exception."

"How much do you want for them?" he asks.

"How much will you give me?" I say.

Well, we haggled a bit back and forth, I driving the price up by a ruble and he knocking it down by two, until at last we shook hands on it. I made sure he paid a good chunk in advance so that he couldn't back out—I tell you, a Jew is smarter than a goy!—and, the whole shebang sold in one day for hard cash, although for a song, of course, off I went to hire a wagon for what little we had left in the house. And now listen, Pan Sholem Aleichem, to what can happen in this world. Just bear with me a little longer, because I don't want to keep you, and it won't take but a minute or two.

It was time for the last goodbyes. The house looked more like a ruin than a home. The bare walls seemed to have tears running down them, and there were bundles all over the floor. The cat sat on the mantel above the stove looking like a little orphan . . . I tell you, it made me so sad that I had a lump in my throat; if I hadn't been ashamed to be seen by my own daughter, I would have sat down and sobbed like a child. Why, I had grown up in this place, I had died a thousand deaths in it, and suddenly, out of nowhere—lekh-lekho! Say what you will, it was a depressing situation. But Tevye is no woman. And so I pulled myself together, kept my chin up, and called to my daughter, "Tsaytl, where are you? Come here for a minute."

Tsaytl came out of the other room, all red-eyed and runny-nosed. Aha, I thought, she's been weeping like an old woman at a funeral again! I tell you, it's no joke with these females; tears are cheap with them, they cry before you even know it. "You little ninny!" I said to her. "What are you crying for this time? Can't you see how foolish you're being? Why, just think of Mendel Beilis . . ."

She wouldn't listen to me, though. "Papa," she said, "you don't even know why I'm crying."

"Of course I do," I said. "How could I not know? You're crying for the house. You were born here, you grew up here—it's upsetting. Believe me, even if I weren't Tevye, even if I were someone else, I would still kiss these bare walls and empty shelves, I would get down on my knees and kiss the ground! It hurts me to part with every nook and cranny as much as it hurts you, you silly thing, you. Why, just look at that cat sitting like an orphan over the stove. It's only a dumb animal, it can't talk—but how can you help feeling sorry for it, being left all alone without a master . . ."

"Papa," she says. "There's someone you should be feeling even sorrier for."

"Why, who's that?" I say.

"It's the one person," says my Tsaytl, "who'll be left behind like a stone by the roadside when we're gone."

I had no idea who she meant. "What person?" I asked. "What stone? What are you yattering about?"

"Papa," she said, "I'm not yattering. I'm talking about our Chava."

I swear to you, hearing that name was like being dowsed with

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boiling water or clubbed on the head! I turned to my daughter in a fury and said, "What the devil does Chava have to do with this? I thought I told you that I never wanted to hear her mentioned again!"

Do you think that fazed her? Not my Tsaytl! Tevye's daughters are no pushovers. "Papa," she says, "instead of being so angry, why don't you think of what you yourself have always told us about human beings loving and pitying each other as a father does his own child?"

Did you ever hear anything like it? That made me see so red that I really blew my top. "You're talking to me about pity?" I said. "Where was her pity for me when I groveled like a dog before that damn priest and all but kissed his feet, with her sitting, I'll bet, right in the next room and hearing every word? Where was her pity when her poor mama, God rest her, lay here dead on the floor? Where was she then? Where was she all the nights I couldn't sleep because of her? Why, it makes me sick to this day just to think of what she did to us, of who she threw us over for . . . When, I ask you, did she ever pity us?"

I was in such a blind rage that I couldn't say another word—but don't think that scared Tevye's daughter! "But you've always told us, Papa," says my Tsaytl, "that even God must forgive a person who's honestly sorry for what he's done."

"Sorry?" I say. "It's too late for that! Once the branch tears itself from the tree, that's the end of it. Let the fallen leaf rot where it fell. I don't want to hear another word—ad kan oymrim beshabbes hagodol."

Well, when she saw she was getting nowhere, because there's no outarguing Tevye, she threw herself at my feet and began kissing my hand. "Papa," she said, "I'll die if you turn her away again, like you did that time in the forest when you practically drove your horse over her and rode off . . ."

"What are you doing to me?" I said. "Why are you sucking my blood like this? Why are you torturing me?"

She wouldn't give up, though. She just kept clinging to my hand. "I'll die right here and now," she says, "if you don't forgive her! She's your daughter as much as I am!"

"But what do you want from me?" I say. "She's not my daughter anymore. She died long ago."

"She did not!" says Tsaytl. "She did not die and she is your

daughter as much as ever, because the minute she heard we had to leave, she made up her mind to come with us. Whatever happens to us, she said to me, will happen to her too—if we're homeless, so will she be—and the proof of it, Papa, is, that's her bundle right there on the floor . . ."

She said it all in one breath, did my Tsaytl, pointed to a bundle tied with a red kerchief, and, before I could get in a word edgewise, threw open the door to the other room and called out—I swear to God she did, as I'm sitting here before you!—"Chava!..."

What can I tell you, my dear friend? It was just like in one of your books. Out of the other room she came, my daughter Chava, as unspoiled and beautiful as ever—a little more careworn perhaps, a little less bright-eyed, but with her head held high, like a queen. For a minute she just stared at me, the same as I did at her. Then she held out her hands, though all she could say was a single whispered word:

"Pa-pa . . . "

Please don't think any worse of me for having tears in my eyes now. If you suppose I shed any then, though, or was the least bit sentimental, you have another guess coming. Of course, what I felt like inside was something else. You're a father of children yourself, and you know as well as I do that no matter what a child may have done, when it stands there looking right through you and says "Papa" . . . well, go be a hero and tell it to disappear! Still, the blood went to my head when I thought of the fine trick my Chava had played on us . . . and of that Chvedka Galagan, may he roast... and that damn priest... and all my grief... and my poor dead Golde . . . You tell me: how, how can you ever forget such a thing? And yet on the other hand, how can you not? A child is a child . . . kerakheym ov al bonim . . . when God Himself is an eyl erekh apoyim, a long-suffering Lord, how can a man harden his heart? And especially since she was sorry for all she had done and wanted only to return to her father and her God . . .

What do you say, Pan Sholem Aleichem? You're a Jew who writes books and gives the whole world advice—what should Tevye have done? Taken her in his arms, hugged her and kissed her, and told her, as we say on Yom Kippur, solakhti kidvorekho—come to me, you're my own flesh and blood? Or turned a deaf ear

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as I did once before and said, *lekh-lekho*—get lost and stay lost! Put yourself in Tevye's place and tell me honestly, in plain language, what you would have done . . .

Well, if you can't answer that right off the bat, you're welcome to think about it, but meanwhile I have to be off, because my grandchildren are getting impatient. Just look at them looking at their grandpa! I want you to know that grandchildren are a thousand times more precious and lovable than children. Bonim uvney vonim, your own children's children—that's nothing to sneeze at, you know! Be well, then, and don't hold it against me if I've run on a little too long—it will give you something to write about. If God has no objections, I'm sure we'll meet again someday...

What did you say? I didn't finish the story of the Amalekites? I never told you if they smashed my windows? Well, as a matter of fact they didn't, because it was decided to leave that up to me. "They're your windows, Tevel," said Ivan Paparilo, "and you might as well smash them yourself. As long as those damn officials can see there's been a pogrom . . . And now, bring out the samovar and let's all have tea. And if you'd be so kind as to donate half a bucket of vodka to the village, we'll all drink to your health, because you're a clever Jew and a man of God, you are . . ."

I ask you, Pan Sholem Aleichem, you're a person who writes books—is Tevye right or not when he says that there's a great God above and that a man must never lose heart while he lives? And that's especially true of a Jew, and most especially of a Jew who knows a Hebrew letter when he sees one...No, you can rack your brains and be as clever as you like—there's no getting around the fact that we Jews are the best and smartest people. Mi ke'amkho yisro'eyl goy ekhod, as the Prophet says-how can you even compare a goy and a Jew? Anyone can be a goy, but a Jew must be born one. Ashrekho yisro'eyl—it's a lucky thing I was, then, because otherwise how would I ever know what it's like to be homeless and wander all over the world without resting my head on the same pillow two nights running? You see, ever since I was given that lesson in Lekh-Lekho, I've been on the go; there hasn't been a place I could point to and say. "Tevye, we're here; now sit down and relax." But Tevye asks no questions; if he's told to keep moving, he does. Today, Pan Sholem Aleichem, we met on the train, but tomorrow may find us in Yehupetz, and next year in Odessa, or in Warsaw, or maybe even in America . . . unless, that is, the Almighty looks down on us and says, "Guess what, children! I've decided to send you my Messiah!" I don't even care if He does it just to spite us, as long as He's quick about it, that old God of ours! And in the meantime, be well and have a good trip. Say hello for me to all our Jews and tell them wherever they are, not to worry: the old God of Israel still lives! . . .

(1914, 1916)