



ONE-ACT PLAYS FROM THE YIDDISH

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Authorised Translations By
ETTA BLOCK



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TO
MY MOTHER
RACHEL BLOCK

THE PLAYS

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CHAMPAGNE
By **ISAAC LOEB PEREZ**

CHARACTERS

- GRUNA**, *the widow of a Scribe, a thin, nervous, little woman*
MIRIAM, *an old maid, somewhere in the twenties*
SARIL, *a grass-widow of twenty*
HADAS, *a dressmaker's apprentice, 16 or 17 years old*
DVORAH, *a tall, heavy woman without eyebrows*
- } *her daughters*

NOTES

Kav Hayoshir: Title of a book: "The Straight Road."

Kosher: Ritually clean; pure. (Hebrew.)

Nebich: Poor thing.

Yiddish-Deutsch: Judaeo-German translation of a Hebrew text.

It was customary to marry off maidens at a very tender age, so that a girl remaining unmarried at twenty was considered an "old maid."

CHAMPAGNE

SCENE

A poor cellar-dwelling with the entrance in the background. The corner at right is hidden behind a screen; when it is removed a rumpled bed is seen. In the corner, at the left, a little hill of potatoes and a handful of onions are strewn. Against the wall at the right are two beds. At the left is a wardrobe between two small, high windows looking into the street. In the center are a table and a few benches. Miriam, sad, wasted, sits at the table, her head in her hands, facing front.

GRUNA (*enters, knitting rapidly on a stocking*)
To collect anything from them—like pulling it out of tar! (*She sees Miriam—speaks sympathizingly*) Does your head ache? (*She receives no reply, sighs, goes around to the other side of the table, looks at Miriam and shakes her head.*)

MIRIAM (*in a hard voice*)
No. (*She rises and goes away behind the curtain.*)

GRUNA (*follows her sadly with her eyes, then listens at the door*)
Ah, Saril is here with the coal-oil. (*She goes to the table and prepares the lamp.*)

(*Enter Dvorah with a basket on her arm.*)

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH

Good evening.

GRUNA (*disappointed*)

Oh, it's you! A welcome guest!

DVORAH (*sets her basket down on the floor close to the door, and says ironically*)

A fine welcome I get! Well, let others bring you better tidings than I do, Gruna!! (*She approaches closer and stands still, looking at Gruna with reproach but compassionately. Pause.*)

GRUNA (*subduing her anxiety with an effort*)

You come from the village? (*Glancing at Dvorah's basket.*)

DVORAH

Shopping.

GRUNA

Just stopped in to rest? Well, sit down meanwhile.

DVORAH

I can stand just as well. (*She approaches the table, rests her hands on it and does not remove her eyes from Gruna's face. She speaks with lashing severity.*) You forget who your husband, may his soul rest in peace, was, Gruna? (*Gruna seems stunned. She tries to open her mouth to speak, but cannot find what to say. Her hand, with the knitting in it, droops heavily to the table; one of the knitting needles falls to the floor. Dvorah, not waiting for a reply, speaks on.*) A Jew! A scholar, Gruna! A rare honest man—a Scribe of the Holy Law. Before making a single letter of the Holy Torah he would purify himself—such was his piety!

CHAMPAGNE

GRUNA

Not true—but once or twice a week—that's the truth.

DVORAH (*piously*)

May his merits be turned to our account in Heaven and protect and shield us!

GRUNA (*hollowly*)

Well, they didn't protect us!

DVORAH

Because you are a sinner, Gruna.

GRUNA (*jumps up as if bitten by a snake*)

I?

DVORAH

You—the widow of a Scribe—and such a kosher scribe—should conduct herself otherwise. The children . . .

GRUNA (*pointing to the curtain*)

Shh! Keep still!

DVORAH

She isn't there!

GRUNA

Miriam's lying down. Her head aches. Speak—lower.

DVORAH (*approaches nearer to Gruna*)

A girl should be guarded—watched! I'd rend mine in pieces if . . .

GRUNA (*pleadingly*)

Don't tear at my veins! Speak to the point . . .

DVORAH (*cynically*)

Why so eager for the joyful news?

GRUNA

Don't tear my soul out, I ask you!

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH (*sitting down heavily on a bench, speaks in a hard and cutting voice*)

I went to the village. Passed the garden with the tavern—where the music plays. Do I even hear it? Music I need! Don't even look around—what garden? where garden? A garden I need! At home I have a girl growing a grey switch. From my business there'll be no dowery—so I trudge on! Not my eyes see, nor my ears hear . . . All of a sudden—a roar of laughter! I look around and see . . .

SARIL (*entering*)

Here, mama'she, coal-oil. (*As she starts to come forward, she sees Dvorah, and places the oil on the floor near the door.*) You will fill the lamp, mama'she? (*She is about to go back of the curtain.*)

GRUNA (*to Saril*)

Miriam is lying down. Her head aches.

SARIL

You'll cook potatoes, mama'she?

DVORAH (*snappily*)

And I don't get a "good evening"?

GRUNA

I'll cook potatoes. (*Saril takes a pot of potatoes and a knife.*) It's chilly outside, Saril.

(*Saril goes out without replying; there is a heavy stillness after her departure.*)

GRUNA

And what did you see, Dvorah?

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH

Would that my eyes had not seen! Chasing a hat—the chaste young lady—running from the restaurant along the whole length of the fence—munching candy and laughing—her dress flying all about her—he, after her—chasing her. She snatches up a handful of leaves and throws it full into his face—and laughs and laughs.

GRUNA (*ironically*)

And *you* looked on!

DVORAH

I knew her voice. (*Pause.*)

GRUNA

My Hadas'l, my little one!

DVORAH (*astounded*)

Then you know—what? A betrothed, a bridegroom was it, perhaps? What?

GRUNA

No.

DVORAH

No? And you—keep quiet!

GRUNA

Yes.

DVORAH

Gruna!

GRUNA (*places the lamp very deliberately upon the table and speaks bitinglly*)

Listen, now—you—and hear what I have to say. (*She catches Dvorah by the sleeve and motions her to be seated.*) I'm going to tell you everything, and one God in Heaven alone will hear us! (*Dvorah sits down.*) When my husband died— . . .

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH

How can you talk that way?

GRUNA

How then shall I talk?

DVORAH

Without even saying "of blessed memory". Or "departed this life" one should say!

GRUNA

All one—"departed this life" or "dead"! Bury him they did . . .

DVORAH

Gathered to his fathers . . .

GRUNA

Let it be *so* "gathered to his fathers." But me—he left with three little orphans—daughters . . .

DVORAH

What a pity, *nebich*, to die without leaving to the world a son!

GRUNA

Three daughters. The oldest . . .

DVORAH (*with a glance toward the curtain*)

Miriam.

GRUNA

Was nineteen years old . . .

DVORAH

Among decent folk such a one is already a bride.

GRUNA

But with us—there was no bread—to say nothing of cake.

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH

How strangely you talk today, Gruna!

GRUNA

I'm not talking. My sorrows talk. She was the prettiest girl in the town . . .

DVORAH

Today, too, no Evil Eye!

GRUNA

Today she's a soured lemon—a grey-head! But at that time she shone like the sun and I was the pious scribe's widow! I guarded her as one guards the one eye in his head. I knew that nowadays there were all sorts of strolling musicians about, tailor boys, Germans, old bachelors and such like. Even religious students would hang about the window. But what is a mother for? A marriageable girl, I knew, must be kept like a mirror—spotless, and I guarded mine! A breath didn't touch her! And I guarded her—watched—not an eye did I take off her! She didn't make a step out of the house without me, and always I preached: "Don't look here, don't look there; don't stand there, don't mix here. Don't dare to even raise your eyes to the flying birds."

DVORAH

Very good, as it should be.

(Miriam and Saril, unnoticed by Gruna and Dvorah, come in, but seeing Dvorah still there, they withdraw quietly again behind the curtain.)

GRUNA *(bitterly)*

Good as the world! But how does she look to-

CHAMPAGNE

day? A truly honest girl, *only* twenty-six! Skinny—you can count every bone! A wrinkled skin—like parchment! Eyes, with the light gone out of them! Her face—sour—without a smile. Lips, forever bitten together! At times the dulled eyes do flash. At such times hatred burns in them—a hatred as fierce as Gehenna! And do you know for whom? Do you know whom she hates—whose bones she curses, as she goes about moving those silent lips of hers?

DVORAH

Whom?

GRUNA

Me! Me, her own mother!

(Miriam crosses the room. As she does so, she looks with revulsion at her mother and goes out. Both the women look after her.)

GRUNA

Did you see?

DVORAH

But why?

GRUNA

Perhaps she herself does not know why. But I know. I stood between her and the world, between her and the sun. I hid the sun from her! I—oh, how shall I say it—I allowed no warmth or light to reach her body! I have lain awake whole nights through figuring it all out before I could understand it all. She hates me! She *must* hate me! Every cell of her body must hate me!

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH

What are you talking about?

GRUNA

What you hear, Her own sisters she hates—
they're prettier and younger than she. (*She
breathes hard.*)

DVORAH

Lord of the World!

GRUNA (*hoarsely*)

The younger one, Saril, I didn't keep at home
when her time came. I sent her out to serv-
ice . . .

DVORAH

I cried out against that myself. Everybody
was stirred up—the daughter of a scribe, a
servant!

GRUNA

I wanted at least to marry *her* off. Let *her* get
together a bit of a dowry at least. From the
potatoes and the handful of onions *I* deal in,
one can't accumulate much of a dowry. And
her I guarded, also. Her mistresses' husbands
threw eyes at her. More than one of their sons
was ready to trifle with her.

DVORAH

May their names be blotted out!

GRUNA

But what is a mother for? I wore out my feet.
Ten times a day I ran to her into her kitchen.
I preached, cried, implored, fainted . . .

DVORAH

Children must be beaten. I give it to mine, too!

CHAMPAGNE

GRUNA

Whole nights through I didn't sleep. I pored over the Kav Hayoshir and other holy books in Yiddish-Deutsch, and in the morning I would run and repeat it to her—and add some of my own to it, God forgive me the sin!

DVORAH

Why forgive?

GRUNA

For the lies! Out of three devils I made ten, from one lash, a whole whipping-post! I poured fire like a furnace broken loose! And a weak child it was, anyway, a weak, pure, helpless little thing. It allowed itself to be led. She is her father to an eye,—pale, without a drop of blood, and so good; such soft, moist eyes—only then she was prettier, much prettier . . .

DVORAH

You speak, God save us, as if she were dead!

GRUNA

And you think she's alive! I tell you she doesn't live! She scraped together a little dowry, and I got her a husband. She cried, poor little thing; she didn't want him, he was too coarse, too crude for her. But a learned man doesn't take a servant girl, especially with thirty rubles dowry. I thanked God, whoever it was! A tailor boy is a tailor boy. Well, he lived with her a year, took her little money with the rest of her strength, and off he went. Bare and naked he left her—with a lung sickness. She spits blood. It is nothing but a shadow already—not a human being at all.

CHAMPAGNE

At night it cuddles up to me like a little baby—like a little lamb it lies there close to me, and whole nights through it cries. And do you know over whom she cries?

DVORAH

Over her husband, may his name be blotted out forever, good God!

GRUNA

No, Dvorah, over *me* she cries! (*She goes over to the oven and makes an unsuccessful attempt to rekindle the fire. She blows on the embers.*) I have made her unfortunate! Her tears fall on my heart like hot lead! They poison my own tears! (*She remains very still for a time, worn by her exertions.*)

DVORAH

In short?

GRUNA

In short . . . (*blowing the embers feverishly*) in short, I said to myself: "Enough!" Let my third daughter live! She shall live as she wants to. She earns her living with her needle—sixteen hours a day she works. She hardly earns enough for bread! She wants sweets, too? Let her eat! She wants cake, mischief, fun, to kiss? Let her! You hear, Dvorah? Let her! I can't give her good things! A husband, surely not! Make a sour lemon of her, I will not! A lung sickness give her—no, no! Let one daughter at least not hate me—not cry over me!

DVORAH (*cries out aghast*)

But, Gruna, what will people say?

CHAMPAGNE

GRUNA

Then let people have pity on poor orphans—
not work them like mules for nothing. Let
them have hearts like human beings and not
squeeze out the poor like lemons!

DVORAH

And God, praised be He, what of Him?

GRUNA (*suddenly stiffening, screams out as if she
wanted Heaven itself to hear her*)

He should have provided, then, for my fatherless
little ones!

*(There is a tense silence, both women breathe
hard—both stand opposite each other with blaz-
ing eyes.)*

DVORAH (*screams*)

Gruna, God—God will punish you!

GRUNA (*suddenly fearful*)

No, no, He surely wouldn't do that—not me—
not my children. God is just! He will punish
others—someone else . . .

*(A voice is heard outside the door, singing
"Tra-la-la tra-la-la".)*

GRUNA

My little bird—my sweet, my little song-bird!

HADAS (*bursts into the room lively, but a bit befud-
dled*)

Tra-la-la. (*Seeing Dvorah.*) Ah, Dvorah, the
busybody, the gossip, the bath-woman—ha-ha-
ha, ha-ha-ha!

CHAMPAGNE

DVORAH (*striding toward her threateningly*)
Quiet, you hussy! (*She draws back suddenly.*)
You smell of—whiskey, you smell of . . .

(*Gruna tremblingly creeps to the table and gropes for it to keep from falling.*)

HADAS

You lie! Whiskey! That's what your daughter drank with her beggarly peasant. That's what she's come to—whiskey!

DVORAH

Will you shut up, hussy!

HADAS

No! She drinks whiskey—with that Russian clown. A thick throat he has like a wine-cellar—wears a coarse blouse . . . (*She chuckles softly to herself.*)

(*Dvorah runs to her basket, snatches it up, spills her wares in her excitement and hurriedly gathers them together again.*)

DVORAH

I'll kill her! (*She goes.*)

GRUNA (*pitifully broken*)

Not that did I mean! Not that! God—not that! Not so far! (*Reproaching God.*) Ah! You had no pity! Punished! Punished! And so hard—so hard!

HADAS (*chuckling to herself very softly*)

Cham-pag-ne!!!

CURTAIN

MOTHER AND SON
By J. HALPERN

CHARACTERS

MALKELE, a Rabbi's widow

MOSHELE, } her sons
AARON, }

GITELE, her granddaughter

THE FAMILY PHYSICIAN

***Place:* A small Polish village**

NOTE

39° C = 102.2° F.

MOTHER AND SON

SCENE

A room in the house of the old rabbi, which during his lifetime served as a chamber of justice, where he decided disputes between his people and rendered ritual opinions. In the background are two small windows, hung with white curtains. At the left, is a door leading into the hall; another door farther back leads to Gitele's room. At the right, is a door leading to other parts of the house.

The apartment is furnished with a long, plain table, at the head of which stands a very large wooden armchair. Near it is an old upholstered armchair. There are also long benches, a large doorless closet, whose shelves are lined with old, well-worn books, an altar, a holy ark, and so forth, in appropriate positions. Over the table hangs a huge chandelier and upon the walls are brass candleholders. Between the windows hangs a large portrait of the rabbi, who has been gathered to his Fathers. The walls and the low ceiling of the room are whitewashed. Over the entrance door, however, a bare patch has been left—a reminder of the destruction of the Temple. Large charity-boxes, upon which are pasted labels bearing the inscription: "Reb Maier, the Worker of Miracles, Jerusalem, etc.", are nailed to the door-posts. On the table stand two large brass candlesticks, the candles in which are partly

MOTHER AND SON

burnt. At the head of the table lies a closed book between the pages of which is visible a handkerchief; next to it is a small, silver snuff-box. In one corner of the room stands a walking-stick with a silver knob. A long pipe hangs near it.

When compared with its surroundings, the portrait of the old rabbi seems modern, but the silver-haired patriarchal head, with its pale, stern visage, harmonizes well with the austere environment, and the whole scene is pervaded with a death-like chill and dignity. One feels as if here a cold, scholarly spirit had lived on for decades, had here thought and pondered and suddenly become stilled forever.

Upon the rise of the curtain the scene remains unoccupied. Moshele enters hurriedly, but stops short as if overcome with the death-like stillness of the room and the train of old memories, which the familiar surroundings have awakened in him. He is clean-shaven, dressed in the prevailing European fashion for traveling, and carries a small traveling-bag. He looks about—slowly, humbly and a happy satisfied calm spreads over his face. Suddenly his glance falls upon the portrait of his father, and a tremor runs through his body. He approaches it hesitatingly, and as he gazes at its expression of frozen sternness, he stiffens and gradually the happiness fades from his face.

The door at the right opens quietly, while Moshele is thus absorbed, and Gitele comes in. As she sees him, her face becomes radiant and a soft, glad cry escapes her. She runs to him.

MOTHER AND SON

GITELE

Moshele!

(He turns, sees her and cries out, trembling with emotion. They embrace, then he holds her from him, peering into her face with happy eyes and quickly strains her to himself again.)

MOSHELE

Gitele! My Gitele!

(She frees herself from his arms and casts a nervous glance at the door, right. She gestures with her finger on her lips for him to be very still, then tip-toes to the door, closes it softly, and comes back to him.)

GITELE

Shh!

MOSHELE *(uneasily)*

Who is in there?

GITELE

Bobbe is asleep in there.

MOSHELE

Was she really so seriously ill?

GITELE

Yes, but the danger is past now. Since yesterday she is feeling better again.

MOSHELE

What was the trouble?

GITELE

Didn't the doctor tell you? He was to meet you at the train and bring you here.

MOTHER AND SON

MOSHELE

Yes, he did meet me. I asked him not to come back with me. I felt so—I didn't want a stranger by on my home-coming. But what could have happened to her so suddenly? In your letter, just two days before, you mentioned nothing about mother being ill.

GITELE

One can never tell with her. You know her trouble—and at her age. The doctor says the slightest exertion, the least excitement, may prove fatal to her. And now, we can't find out just how it all happened. Sunday morning when I awoke, the maid told me that the bobbe'-she had gone away. Where? No one knew. I asked every member of the family. I ran over to Uncle David's—no one knew anything. After a great deal of trouble and inquiry we finally found out that she had taken the train. It was impossible to find out anything further. She didn't return until Tuesday and took immediately to her bed.

MOSHELE

And you do not know where she was those two days?

GITELE

No. When she returned her fever had already risen to thirty-nine degrees and it was impossible to find out anything from her. Afterwards, when she felt stronger, I tried several times asking her, but I noticed that she didn't like being questioned, and so I did not force it. The doctor thinks something must have

MOTHER AND SON

affected her greatly on the way. In her delirium she spoke such strange words. We couldn't make anything of it. She cried constantly that she had to stand like a beggar, like a thief—and then she would plead with someone—to be forgiven . . .

MOSHELE

One can't make anything out of that. High fever is apt to cause such a disorder of the mind that the words spoken at that time would have no particular significance. But it is difficult to understand where she could have gone that she need keep it such a secret. Is there no longer any danger?

GITELE

No. Today she is almost herself again. She has already left her bed.

MOSHELE

And how is my brother?

GITELE

Very well. You wouldn't know him. He is so tall—a real man now.

MOSHELE

So? And does he still study as diligently?

GITELE

Yes, even more so. In the town he is known by no other name than "Aaron, the learned."

MOSHELE

Does he ever speak of me? (*Sadly.*) One becomes so estranged—it is almost two years . . .

GITELE (*embracing him*)

I am so glad you listened to me and came back.

MOTHER AND SON

MOSHELE

But it was so hard! (*He sighs.*) Even now—
I can barely . . .

GITELE (*sitting down beside him*)

You little fool! The first step was the hardest,
and that you have already taken. The rest
will be easier, you'll see. The bobbe'she will
be so happy.

MOSHELE

But just think of it, it is nearly two years since
we have seen each other! (*Taking her in his
arms.*) Did you at least think of me?

GITELE (*nestling like a little child in his arms—
teasingly*)

No, I didn't miss you! (*She kisses him ar-
dently.*)

MOSHELE

Do you really love me as much as ever? (*She
looks at him puzzled, as if she did not understand
him.*) Why, then, didn't you come to me?

GITELE (*quietly*)

I couldn't . . .

MOSHELE (*uneasily*)

You couldn't. To all of my letters, to all my
pleadings you always returned the same ex-
cuse—you couldn't. I could not move you!
You did not seem to care that I was consumed
out there with loneliness and friendlessness!
Two years! Two dreadfully long years you let
me yearn and suffer!

GITELE

Do you think it was any easier for me here?

MOTHER AND SON

MOSHELE

At the time I left, you were willing enough to go with me in spite of everything, and I could barely persuade you to remain here until I could prepare a place for us. But it seems that all that was necessary was for me to go out of your sight—and you couldn't tear yourself away from here . . .

GITELE (*tearfully*)

Moshele, why do you speak like that? You know very well that is not so. It wasn't very easy for me here, either, but—what was I to do? It was such a pity for the bobbe'she!

MOSHELE

And for me you had no pity? And for yourself—you had no pity?

GITELE

But just think of her condition—you, whom she loved best—gone . . .

MOSHELE

I didn't go myself. I was driven out . . .

GITELE (*unheeding*)

Two days later grandfather died. (*Moshele trembles. He begins to pace the floor.*) She is old and sick and has no one except Aaron and me. If she should find out that I believe as you do—love you—she would die. (*He continues to pace the floor; Gitele follows him with her eyes; then she rises, goes to him and puts her arms about him—very still and very tenderly.*) Why are you so disturbed? Are you angry with me?

MOTHER AND SON

MOSHELE

The atmosphere here oppresses me. It all recalls . . .

GITELE (*interrupting*)

You remember, I wrote you before you came back you should forget all that has gone before.

MOSHELE (*looking about him*)

Nothing is changed. The same stern deathly silence! Everything—just as it was! But this upholstered chair was not here before. How comes it in here? Isn't it mother's?

GITELE

Yes, she had it brought in here.

MOSHELE

Nothing—nothing changed. The snuff-box, the pipe, the walking-stick, even his favorite "Safer"—with his handkerchief inside—just as if he were still alive! (*After a pause.*) You should change things about. The air would seem freer, more cheerful.

GITELE

I would not dare. No one dare touch anything here. The bobbe'she herself looks after this room every day—puts everything in its exact place—as always, and stays here all day long. She has even had her bed moved in there—in the dining-room—to be nearer. And, often, she gets up at night and putters around in here for hours at a time.

MOSHELE

Then she is still dominated by his spirit.

GITELE (*chiding him gently*)

Moshele . . .

MOTHER AND SON

MOSHELE (*pointing to the portrait*)

When was this portrait placed here?

GITELE

Then—directly after the week of mourning.

MOSHELE (*looking about*)

Everything dominated by his tyranny—everything!

GITELE (*putting her arms about him soothingly*)

But do not speak such words! Remember he was your father!

MOSHELE

I cannot think of that. He ruled over me, not like a father, but like a Lord over his slave—over his property. Often have I felt the weight of his cold, heavy hand.

GITELE

Do not speak so, please, please. Believe me, he loved you and . . .

MOSHELE

He—loved me! Ha-ha-ha! He cursed me! (*He paces agitatedly about the room.*)

GITELE

But just remember the circumstances that provoked it. You were considered the wonderfully pious scholar, the sage. You were thought of by the world as God-fearing. He felt certain you would become a renowned rabbi—hoped you would some day fill his place, and then—suddenly—to see—such a thing! Consider his suffering—his fearful disappointment . . .

MOTHER AND SON

MOSHELE

But even before that, when I was still the splendid and willing pupil, the God-fearing, did he ever show me one fatherly glance—one sign of love? Did he ever speak to me other than as a stern master for whom I could feel only awe? *(He continues his painful pacing back and forth. There is a long pause. Suddenly he stops before the portrait, looks at it sternly, accusingly, and speaks, half to himself.)* Two years—and it is still before my eyes—as if it happened but yesterday! It was the Sabbath eve. Father was already asleep and I, as usual, stole in here to read. I became deeply absorbed and did not notice the time slip by. It was midnight and I was still sitting with a cigarette in my mouth, absorbed in my book. . . .

GITELE

~~What good does it do to dig up old memories?~~

MOSHELE *(painfully)*

I can still hear his voice thunder: "On the Sabbath—a cigarette!" I still see his thin, bony hand pointing to the door and hear his shriek "OUT! You are no longer my son! I deny you!" *(He is exhausted. Gitele goes to him and kisses him tenderly.)*

GITELE

~~Moshele . . .~~

MOSHELE *(sits down at the table, resting his head in his hands—sadly)*

And denied, I remained. He tore me away from all I loved—from all who were dear to me.

MOTHER AND SON

He tore me from their hearts—root and all—
and left me alone and friendless. (*She sits
down beside him and endeavors to soothe him.
Her eyes fill with tears.*) All marvel at my
songs—wonder at the deep melancholy which I
have poured into them! I have become famed
for my melancholy, but no one suspects that
the pains are my own pains—my own suffering
—my friendlessness. . . .

GITELE

Moshele, do not think about it any more.
You'll see, you will make up with the bobbe'she
and you will be with us once more.

MOSHELE

~~She will not forgive me! - She will send me away
again. Here, father will always be master!
In every corner you can feel his spirit. I am a
stranger here—disowned—forever.~~

GITELE

No. She will take you back. You will once
more be her beloved, her beautiful boy, as she
always called you. We will all be very tender
with you. You will see—as it was before with
your sorrow, so you will now become renowned
for your joyous singing. From now on the
world will rejoice in the irresistible joy
which will pour forth from your every verse.
We will . . .

*(While she speaks, he nestles closer to her and his
face grows as serenely calm as a child's when its
mother lulls it to rest. A light cough is heard from
the other room and the shuffling of old feet, too*

MOTHER AND SON

heavy and too weary to be lifted. Gitele jumps up quickly—frightened.)

GITELE

The bobbe'she! (*He jumps up and looks uneasily to right.*) Go into my room for a bit. I will prepare her and after I will call you. Go, now. (*He stands transfixed, looking toward the door.*) But go—do! She will be in directly. (*She kisses him quickly and pushes him out through the door, left.*) Don't worry; it will all be right.

(She closes the door after him, runs to the right and enters the dining-room. Presently steps and indistinct voices are heard from there. After a little, Malkele enters slowly. She is over seventy, a little above medium height. Despite her heavily-wrinkled face, there are signs of former beauty. She is very weak indeed, though she manages to hold herself rather erect. Her eyes are still very fine, with a splendid fire in them. Her voice, also, though old, is firm. In crossing the threshold, Gitele, who walks behind her, offers to assist her, but Malkele refuses this aid.)

MALKELE

No, no, let me, I'll walk by myself. (*Gitele pushes the upholstered chair forward and Malkele sinks down upon it.*) I forgot to take the little box along.

GITELE

I'll bring it right in. (*She goes to the dining-room and comes back directly, carrying a little*

MOTHER AND SON

handmade box and 'a pillow. She sets the box on the table and solicitously arranges the pillow behind Malkele.)

MALKELE (*tenderly*)

Why are you so hot, Gitele?

GITELE (*her face flaming up, puts her hands to her cheeks—confused*)

Who, I? I don't know, I suppose it is from the kitchen. The stove is so hot . . .

MALKELE

Why do you stand near the stove? How many times have I told you not to do it?

GITELE (*fussing nervously with the pillow*)

It is already late. Aaron will soon be home to dinner, and it won't be ready.

MALKELE

And did you have your walk?

GITELE (*placing a foot-stool under Malkele's feet*)

No, I didn't have any time.

MALKELE

What a disobedient child you are! You watched by me for forty-eight hours and now you sit still in the house. You may, God forbid, get sick. Then you'll have it!

GITELE (*who has finished adjusting the foot-stool*)

Who, I—sick? Ha-ha-ha! (*She stands very erect and spreads both arms out broad.*) Just let the bobbe'she look at me! Do I look sick?

(Malkele looks her over attentively. She is satisfied and pleased with her, and her sorrow-laden countenance brightens, but only for an instant.

MOTHER AND SON

She kisses her very tenderly. Gitele wraps a shawl about her.)

MALKELE

No Evil Eye! (*After a pause.*) I have been wanting to say something to you. Sit down here by me.

(Gitele sits on the foot-stool and looks up openly at Malkele. Malkele places her hands on either side of Gitele's head and affectionately scrutinizes her face. She kisses her tenderly. She appears to have something very serious to say to her, but hesitates how to begin.)

MALKELE (*at last with a little smile*)

Aren't you the least little bit abashed? Of course, you do not guess that I am just now considering you very earnestly. (*Gitele laughs freely, innocently.*) A match has been suggested to me for Aaron, and do you know—with whom? With you. (*Gitele trembles suddenly and attempts to rise. Malkele gently holds her down.*) No, Gitele—you do not need to be ashamed before me. I am a grandmother. (*She strokes the girl's head. After a pause she speaks musingly.*) If I could bring that about, then I would indeed be very happy. Both of you are good, capable children—no Evil Eye. I love you both. When your mother, may her soul rest in peace, died, you were just a mere swallow, and I, your grandmother, also became your mother. To see you both happy together is the greatest wish I have to ask of Him, blessed be His Name.

MOTHER AND SON

But perhaps, you may have something against it. . . . I want you to tell me. Force you—I would not want to. You are, no Evil Eye, already a grown girl and . . . (*Gitele makes a move to rise.*) You do not need to answer now, child. Think it over first.

GITELE (*hastily*)

I will bring you a glass of milk, yes, bobbe'she?

(She does not wait for a reply, but runs out right. Malkele gazes anxiously for a while at the door through which Gitele has passed, and her face resumes, more deeply now, its look of quiet sorrow. She rises and walks feebly across the room.)

MALKELE

As long as they are not safely married and living elsewhere, he must never return. *Them*, I must guard! (*Standing before the portrait and speaking up to it.*) I wonder do you know how much that resolution costs me? (*With spirit.*) Do you know that I had to stand for hours on the street like a beggar—just to be able to steal a look at him from the distance?

(She sighs heavily and returns slowly to the chair. From the bosom of her dress she takes a small key and fits it into the lock of the little box; Gitele enters with a glass of milk. Malkele, thoughtful and preoccupied, takes the glass of milk. Gitele seems distraught and moves aimlessly and nervously about, unable to make up her mind how to break the news of Moshel's presence to her grandmother.)

MOTHER AND SON

GITELE (*suddenly getting very red*)

Bobbe'she, Uncle David was here. He received a letter from Moshele. He . . . (*Malkele raises a startled face to Gitele before which Gitele stops short.*)

MALKELE (*forcing herself to be stern, her voice leaden*)

I have told you that you must never mention his name!

(*Gitele now becomes entirely confused and murmurs something unintelligible. Malkele rises and starts to leave the room.*)

MALKELE

You *know* that I do not want to hear of him!

GITELE (*firmly*)

But the bobbe'she will have to hear. (*Speaking very rapidly.*) He writes that he is coming . . .

MALKELE (*petrified, controls herself with an effort*)

Who gave him the permission?

GITELE

But . . .

MALKELE

Go, telegraph him not to dare! I do not want to see him here!

GITELE (*tearfully*)

But, bobbe'she . . .

MALKELE

Go, telegraph! (*Gitele stands confused. She looks with agonized pleading at the old woman.*)

Well, do you hear? Go, telegraph!

MOTHER AND SON

(Gitele walks slowly to the door, left, biting her lips to restrain her tears. Malkele appears to waver and struggles with herself to maintain her resolution.)

MALKELE

Or—wait . . . *(Strong again.)* Yes, go, go, telegraph! *(Gitele goes out. Malkele walks about greatly excited.)* I am so weak! . . . *(She stops before the portrait.)* Where shall I get the strength, Shimele? My sinful body draws to my sinful son . . .

(She stands awed before the portrait of her dead husband. The door of Gitele's room opens quietly. Gitele pushes Moshеле into the room, gently but firmly, closing the door after him, but leaving it sufficiently ajar so that she may listen and yet not be seen. Moshеле is nervous and agitated. He notices that his mother's gaze is riveted to the portrait, and his face hardens into a stubborn defiance. He takes a few steps nearer. At the sound of footsteps, his mother turns and sees him. She is rooted to the spot. They look at each other speechless. Moshеле is the first to break the silence.)

MOSHELE

Good morning, mother!

MALKELE *(casting a frightened glance back at the portrait—then to Moshеле)*

You dared—

MOSHELE

You are shocked that the disowned, the outcast

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son has dared to return? Ha, ha, ha! It would seem that it was destined I should return once again.

MALKELE

How did you dare to show yourself in such garb in a house filled with the Holy Torah and with Judaism!

MOSHELE (*looking down at his modern garb*)

Neither my clothes nor I fit the place. True. But it is not my fault. You would not have seen me here today if I had not been sent for.

MALKELE

You were sent for? Who dared write without my knowledge?

MOSHELE

They wrote me you were dangerously ill. If it were not for that I should not be here. You must surely know there is no great joy for me here in this house, which is dominated by his— (*pointing to the portrait*) tyranny.

MALKELE

And you still have the effrontery . . .

MOSHELE

This is no place for a man who would live. Here—*his* dead will reigns.

MALKELE

You dare! You dare to mock him after you have killed him!

MOSHELE (*growing pale*)

What! (*He moves involuntarily toward his mother—stunned.*) What!!

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MALKELE

Yes. You killed him! The sorrows you caused him have taken him from the world! He could not live down your fine doings! You are his—murderer!

MOSHELE (*terribly white—his face distorted and shocked, follows her, his voice choked and strained*)
What did you say?

MALKELE (*retreating*)

You killed him! Out of here!

MOSHELE (*still bearing toward her*)

What did you say . . . ?!

MALKELE (*still retreating*)

Out of here! You are a rebellious son! (*Pointing to the left.*) Out!

(*She is about to sink, but stumbles to a chair for support. Gitele runs in.*)

GITELE

Bobbe'she . . .

MOSHELE (*still bearing down on her*)

What did you say . . . ?

GITELE (*to Moshele*)

Go, away. You see how sick she is!

MOSHELE (*doesn't appear to hear—still follows Malkele up, reiterating, stunned*)

What did you say . . . ?

(*Gitele helps Malkele, who is now completely prostrated. She leads her gently out, right, closing the door behind them. Moshele stands motionless before the door, repeating automatically*)

MOTHER AND SON

"What did you say?" After a pause, he begins to pace the room feverishly. Gitele comes back, closing the door carefully behind her. She approaches Moshele.)

GITELE

You did wrong, Moshele. You shouldn't have spoken to her in that tone. *(He continues to pace the room.)* You should speak gently to her. She is your mother!

MOSHELE

I have no mother! She hates me! *(In a choked voice.)* She accuses me of my father's death! *(He stumbles to the table, hiding his face in his hands. Gitele goes to him, takes him in her arms and kisses him tenderly.)*

GITELE

Don't, don't, Moshele. Control yourself. *(She bends over him.)*

MOSHELE *(as if to himself)*

I am denied! Friendless! To all here I am as a stranger! *(Pushing her suddenly from him—angrily.)* And you, too! To you, also, I have become a stranger! *(He strides back and forth. She follows him with eyes full of tears.)* It was foolish, my coming. It arouses me to anger—makes me embittered. Everything here excites me! *(He relents, goes to Gitele and embraces her with painful fervor. His face expresses remorse. She nestles close to him and her tears flow silently.)*

GITELE *(very gently)*

Speak differently to her. Plead with her. Speak to her as to a mother.

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MOSHELE

I cannot any more. Believe me. When I recall how . . . I lose control of myself. The best thing to do is to get away from here as soon as possible. It would be better for her, too.

GITELE

No, not in this way. You must not. You must not go before you have become reconciled and—*(She becomes very shy.)* Moshele, I cannot remain here any longer, either. She wants—she wants to give me Aaron for husband . . .

MOSHELE

What! That, too! My last possession—the last and dearest thing she would take from me!

GITELE

But, Moshele, be just. The bobbe'she does not know about our love. She would not want to rob you wilfully of anything. *(He grows more subdued.)* Listen to me, Moshele, speak to her once again. Plead with her.

MOSHELE *(embracing her)*

Gitele, dear child, will you go with me today? Together we will tear ourselves away from this unhappy house. Yes, you *will* go with me . . . *(He lets her go suddenly and catches at her hands, pressing them tightly.)* Why don't you speak? You do not love me any more! You would . . .

THE DOCTOR *(enters from the left)*

Good morning! *(To Moshele.)* Well, have you seen your mother? *(He greets Gitele.)*

MOSHELE

Yes. *(The doctor questions anxiously with his*

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eyes. Moshele looks at his watch.) Doctor, when does the next train leave?

THE DOCTOR

You have plenty of time. The train does not leave before half-past four. If you have a letter to send off, I can post it for you.

MOSHELE

I am leaving.

THE DOCTOR

How so?

MOSHELE

I am leaving (*He goes to the back of the room and stands staring out of the window.*)

THE DOCTOR (*looks at him very quietly for a few moments, then approaches and speaks softly to him*)

Moshele. Of course, it is not my affair, but as the old family doctor, and even more so, as a friend, I would say to you that you are not doing the right thing. Under such circumstances one must . . .

MOSHELE (*greatly distressed*)

I beg of you, do not . . .

THE DOCTOR

Well, if you say not, I will not speak. (*He sits at the table. Quietly to Gitele.*) Let him calm down a little. (*Aloud.*) And how is our patient?

GITELE

She is fairly well.

THE DOCTOR

After today's excitement you had better give

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her a larger dose—at least twenty drops before retiring. Where is she now?

GITELE

She is lying down.

(There is a tense silence. The doctor drums lightly with his fingers on the table. He sees the little box.)

THE DOCTOR (*astonished*)

How is that? She forgot to take the little box with her? I cannot remember ever seeing her without this little box—at least of late. (*Looking at it curiously.*) I should like to know what there is in it. I have noticed that even touching it frequently comforts her. Merely looking at it seems to work like a charm on her. (*Examining it.*) Is it, perhaps, a family heirloom?

GITELE

I do not know. I do not remember ever having seen it during grandfather's lifetime.

THE DOCTOR

Moshele, you don't remember it, either?

MOSHELE (*coming toward the table*)

What is it?

THE DOCTOR

Perhaps you know where this little box comes from? It doesn't appear to be new any more.

MOSHELE (*examining it*)

Yes, it is my box. I made it when I was still a little fellow.

GITELE

Really?

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MOSHELE

For years it has been lying up in the garret. I wonder who took it down from there?

THE DOCTOR

So! It is your little box? Your mother does not let it out of her sight even for a second. She carries it about with her everywhere. Even when she goes to bed, it must be . . .

MOSHELE

What! (*He runs to it, unlocks it with trembling fingers and takes out two richly-bound volumes and a photograph of himself, handsomely framed. On the covers of the books in gold letters is printed "Moshe Kranz, Poems."*) My work! My photograph!

(*A small packet drops out from among the contents of the box. Gitele picks it up. It is a packet of letters, very carefully tied together with a silk ribbon. Moshele snatches it from her and glances them over hurriedly.*)

MOSHELE

My letters! All my letters! And I thought she did not even read them. She does love me! My mother loves me! (*He snatches up one of the books and shows it to them.*) See, the poems that only last week came from the press! To Vilna—where I live—she went! (*He embraces Gitele impetuously.*) I have a mother! She traveled specially to Vilna to get my books! You hear, Gitele? Gitele, my mother loves me! My dearest mother! (*He attempts to go to her, but the doctor bars the way.*)

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THE DOCTOR

Do not go in too suddenly and in such excitement. Remember she is far from well.

MOSHELE (*embracing the doctor*)

Friend, doctor, my mother loves me! Let me go to her! My good mother!

(He runs to the table, snatches up the little box, kisses it, presses the books to his cheek, runs right, turns back again, pulls Gitele to him, kisses her, cries, laughs, murmurs and is at a loss what to do next for joy.)

The door at the right opens and Malkele comes in. Her face shows the effects of keen suffering. Moshele pushes the doctor aside and rushes to her in one bound. He falls on his knees and clasps her feet. He kisses her hands, looks up eagerly into her face and hides his head in her dress. He cannot speak, and for a while all that can be heard are his incoherent mutterings.)

MOSHELE

Mother! Mother! Mother . . . Mamma'she. Forgive me—my good mother! I am wicked! Mamma'she, you do love me . . .

(Malkele stands motionless. Her face is calm, her eyes brilliant, radiant. Her lips and her eyelids quiver slightly. Aaron enters. He stops still in amazement—does not take in the situation at once, but as he recognizes Moshele, he runs to him with joy, and they embrace.)

MOSHELE

Arreh'le, you plead with her. You plead for

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me. Arkeh, ask her to forgive me. I am a wicked one . . .

MALKELE (*runs to Aaron fearfully*)

Him—you don't touch! Away! (*She tears Aaron away from Moshele and hides him behind her, as if to ward off some pollution.*) Away! Leave *him* to me, at least! Away!

MOSHELE

I will not go away, mamma'she. You do love me, mother dear! You do love me!

MALKELE

Him—you don't touch! At least *they* shall remain pious Jews! (*To Aaron.*) Come with me. (*Aaron stands still with his eyes riveted on Moshele.*) Come, I tell you! (*She leads him off quickly.*)

MOSHELE (*following them to the door*)

Mother dear . . . Mother . . . My good . . .

(The door slams in his face. Moshele is left standing with outstretched hands, pleading to the closed door. The doctor is looking out of the window; he coughs slightly to hide his agitation. Gitele, who has been standing aside all this time weeping silently, comes forward. She makes an emphatic little gesture, as if she has come to a final decision. She wipes her eyes and goes quickly to her room.)

MOSHELE (*very still, speaks to himself*)

She went away . . . Loves me—but went away . . .

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THE DOCTOR (*comes forward and takes Moshele's hand*)

Calm yourself, Moshele.

MOSHELE

Just think of it—how dreadful! She loves me—yearns for me, and I, wicked one that I am . . .
(*He runs up wildly to the portrait, wrenches it from the wall and kisses it fervently.*) My good father! How I have misunderstood you! I am guilty of your death! You have died for love of me . . . Oh, unfortunate am I . . .

(*He sinks into a chair and covers his face with his hands. The doctor replaces the portrait on the wall and paces to and fro. Gitele comes back, dressed for the street; she appears very agitated.*)

GITELE (*putting her arms protectively about Moshele*)

Moshele, come let us go. After she has put you aside today, I owe her no further duty. Come, Moshele.

MOSHELE (*rises unsteadily*)

No. I will not go away from here now. I will go to her, fall at her feet. Let her crush me with them! Let her beat me, if only she does not put me away from her. If only she will give her mother love to me. (*He takes Gitele by the hand and leads her to the door, right.*) Come with me, Gitele, together we will plead with her. She will . . .

GITELE (*holding back*)

Moshele . . .

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MOSHELE (*refusing to be swerved*)

No, come with me. She will forgive me. You will . . .

THE DOCTOR (*barring the way*)

Moshele, it is impossible. As her physician I cannot allow you to go in there just now.

MOSHELE

But I must go in. You will see she will not push me aside.

THE DOCTOR

Yes, but not now. You must both rest first. May we go to your room?

GITELE

Yes. (*To Moshele.*) Come, let us go in there.

THE DOCTOR (*leading Moshele, who is very worn*)

Why, you are still in your traveling clothes—just as you arrived from the train. Come in. You will rest a bit and afterwards you will . . .

(They go into the room, left, closing the door after them. The stage remains unoccupied a short time, but their voices are heard indistinctly. Malkele rushes in, she looks about anxiously, and, seeing no one, clasps her hands together agonizingly.)

MALKELE

He is gone . . . (*She runs to the door to follow him, but hearing the voices in Gitele's room, she turns and runs to that door. She stops before it and listens for a moment; her face relaxes, happy and relieved. She sees Moshele's photo-*

MOTHER AND SON

graph on the table. She clasps it to her heart and kisses it.) My son! My beautiful boy!

(She takes up his books and covers them with kisses. As she does so her glance falls, quite by accident, upon the portrait of her husband. She trembles, but controls herself with a great effort and speaks up to it with a measure of defiance and with a fine anger.)

MALKELE

Why do you look so angry? He is my son! My pride! I am as proud of his books as I was of your sacred works! You hear! Just as proud as I was of your sacred books! *(Suddenly conscious of her sacrilegious utterings—she covers her face with her hands and moans.)* What a sinner I am!

CURTAIN

THE STRANGER
By PEREZ HIRSCHBEIN

CHARACTERS

MORDCHA GADALIAH, *living in a
wood beyond the village*

FRAIDELE, *his little daughter*

AN OLD WOMAN

TWO MEN

NOTES

The original title of this play in the Yiddish, "Raisins and Nuts," is taken from the folk slumber song which Fraidele sings to her brother:

" . . . Father will buy
Nuts and raisins for you"

In translation it appeared more feasible, owing to the symbolism of the little play, to entitle it "The Stranger."

Leaving the house, or part of it—as a patch over the door—not whitewashed, denotes a house of mourning.

Mezuzeh: (Heb) A tiny parchment bearing an inscription from the Bible, usually rolled into a cylindrically shaped container, with a little peep-hole at the top, and attached to the door-posts of Jewish homes. Enjoined by Deut. vi. 9.

Bobbe'she: (Slav) Grandmother; granny. The suffix "she" denotes the affectionate diminutive, equivalent to saying "granny dear."

Sholem Alechem: (Heb) Greeting; "Peace be unto Thee."

Minshitzer: Persons often assumed as their surnames the name of the town in which they lived, in this instance, "M'nshitz;" "Er" one who; thus, one who lives in or comes from Mintshitz.

THE STRANGER

SCENE

A small room with tiny windows. The walls have not been whitewashed for a long time, and poverty peeps out of every corner. It is the end of summer, about midday. Fraidele is kneading the dough in a large tub, which stands on a log in the middle of the room. The work is far too hard for her and she stops to rest frequently without removing her hands from the dough. A wagon is heard driving up to the house. Mordcha comes in, carrying an armful of wood.

FRAIDELE

Where do you come from, papa?

MORDCHA

From the woods.

FRAIDELE

Are you taking wood to the city?

MORDCHA

Yes, my child. Here, I have brought you some dry wood. I'll put it right into the oven.

FRAIDELE

I can do it myself, papa. Better go now so you can come home early.

MORDCHA

I'll be home early today anyway. I promised to deliver the wood in time for the Sabbath.

FRAIDELE

When you come home late I get so—lonely.

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

You know, my child, I feel the same way. I get lonely, too.

FRAIDELE

Go in, papa, and see how Pinele is.

MORDCHA

Has he had anything in his little mouth today?

FRAIDELE

I put a fresh teat into his mouth. You know, papa, there's only one little piece of sugar left in the house. Don't forget to bring some sugar from the city.

MORDCHA

I can't bear to see you toil so, my child. You work beyond your strength.

FRAIDELE

It isn't too hard for me, if only Pinele would get well.

(Mordcha goes into the other room to see the baby. Fraidele continues her kneading. He comes back.)

FRAIDELE

Well, how is he? You know, I cried today. Maybe, if mamma were alive, Pinele wouldn't be sick.

MORDCHA

Maybe Heaven will grant he will get well.

FRAIDELE

He's asleep.

MORDCHA

His little face just burns!

FRAIDELE

If only mamma were alive!

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

Yes, mamma took everything with her . . .
(*Sighing.*) No more luck! No courage!

FRAIDELE

Will you ask someone in the city what to do
for him?

MORDCHA

Maybe he's cutting teeth.

FRAIDELE

I felt with my finger in his little mouth. They're
not showing yet.

MORDCHA

Enough kneading. Better heat up the oven
now. I suppose the bread will rise right away,
the flour was dry.

FRAIDELE (*a bit anxious*)

Maybe you had better not go to the city today,
papa . . . Yes, better go, I guess—only one
little piece of sugar left in the house.

MORDCHA

You're afraid to stay in the house alone, Frai-
dele? It is daytime. People are walking and
driving by on the road.

FRAIDELE

Our house is so far from the village.

MORDCHA

Foolish child! What's the difference? God's
world is everywhere. What can we do? Maybe
it had to be your mother should leave you so
young. (*Sighing.*) With her went everything!
There's no joy—there's no luck!

FRAIDELE

When may we whitewash the walls again, papa?

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

It is really very gloomy in the house. We may now, but would you have the strength to do it?

FRAIDELE

Why not, if only we may.

MORDCHA

Well, my child, I'll go now with the wood. I'll get back early today. We really must white-wash the house. It may be we'll take someone in with us—so you won't have to be alone.

FRAIDELE (*startled*)

Whom are you going to take into the house—someone to help me?

MORDCHA

Yes, of course, so it'll be a little easier for you. Mamma used to tremble over you so, and now—you have to work even beyond your strength

. . .

FRAIDELE

Don't do it, papa. It's good enough as it is. Let it be the way it is.

MORDCHA

I can't look on and see the way you have to work.

FRAIDELE

Mind me, papa, we don't need anyone. I'm big enough now. I'll raise Pinele, too, you'll see.

MORDCHA

Pinele, you see, needs a mamma, too.

FRAIDELE

I don't want it—that a stepmother should come into the house.

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

You think every stepmother is bad?

FRAIDELE (*beginning to cry suddenly*)

It isn't hard for me at all. I'll raise Pinele. I'll do everything in the house, just like mamma used to do. You'll see.

MORDCHA

You foolish child! Why do you cry? I only thought it would be a little livelier in the house. Maybe the luck would change.

FRAIDELE

Just let Pinele get well, then you'll see—I'll even help you, too. I'll take him in my arms and go to the woods with you. Just to show you—you buy a cow and I'll get up before daylight to milk her and drive her to pasture.

MORDCHA

But you look so badly!

FRAIDELE

If mamma were alive I'd look better. It's because I worry.

MORDCHA

I don't want you to worry. Na, only let the baby get well . . . Better heat up the oven now. I'll be going.

(He looks at her for a while in silence, then goes out. Fraidele goes to the window and looks after him. In the other room the child is heard waking up. She goes in there and immediately her soft crooning is heard:

"Ai-la-lu-la lu-la-lu—

Father will buy nuts and raisins for you."

THE STRANGER

She returns, covers the tub of dough, and prepares to light the oven. While she is thus busying herself, she frequently stops, overcome with heavy thoughts, and her hands droop. After the fire is lit, she sits down on the floor close to the tub and begins to cry softly and tremulously. In the open doorway an old woman appears, almost bent in two by the heavy pack on her shoulders.)

THE OLD WOMAN

A Mezuzeh on the doorpost—a Jewish house!
(*She kisses the mezuzeh.*)

FRAIDELE

Jews do live here. Come in.

THE OLD WOMAN (*beaming on Fraidele*)

Such a bright Jewish daughter! Why do you sit on the floor? (*She struggles with her load.*)
Na—can't take the pack off my shoulders at all . . . huh! . . . huh!

FRAIDELE

Wait, I'll help you.

THE OLD WOMAN

What a bright little daughter it is! Here we are! Ha—breaks my shoulder! Heavy—the bundle! Good people filled her up heavy for me.

FRAIDELE

We'll have to cut the rope—too heavy to lift over your head.

THE OLD WOMAN

Hah—that's the way they tied the pack to my shoulders! Stuffed it full of all the good things—and now pack yourself around with it! That's it—cut the rope. Don't save it.

THE STRANGER

(Fraidele cuts the rope. The pack falls heavily to the floor.)

FRAIDELE

Such a heavy load!

THE OLD WOMAN *(dropping down wearily on the bundle)*

Praised be the Lord—in a Jewish house at last!
Where's your mamma?

FRAIDELE

Mamma's dead. Passover she died.

OLD WOMAN

Was a pious woman, I suppose! Na—and left you so young! Where is your papa?

FRAIDELE

He took a load of wood to the city.

OLD WOMAN

And what are you doing?

FRAIDELE

I kneaded the bread and made a fire in the oven.

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu, did you look to see if it is rising? There, there, I'll give a look myself. Such a young thing your mother left you! Very young! *(Uncovering the tub of dough.)* M'm—not even stirring.

FRAIDELE

It isn't very long since I kneaded it.

THE OLD WOMAN

But you've already made the fire. You've been crying, too, I see. I suppose you've been crying into the bread, eh?

THE STRANGER

FRAIDELE

Yes, I cried. But only one little tear fell into the bread. (*Anxiously.*) Won't it rise now?

THE OLD WOMAN

We'll see. Bring me a pillow and a chopping-knife. (*Fraidele does so.*) That's it. Cover the bread with the pillow so it will be warm. (*She covers the tub with the pillow.*) And put the chopping-knife underneath. How comes a girl to cry into the bread?

FRAIDELE

Maybe you would like to eat something, bobbe?

THE OLD WOMAN

Your own lips look dry, I see. I suppose you haven't had anything in your own mouth today.

FRAIDELE

My little brother is sick—very sick!

THE OLD WOMAN

Tu-tu, and you have to be the mamma, too! Where is he?

FRAIDELE

He is in the cradle in the other room. His eyes are open and his little face burns like fire.

(*They both go into the other room. The old woman's voice is heard exclaiming: "Oi, what a baby! Oi, a baby like the shining sun! You—you—you! Open wide your little eyes. That's it, laugh a little bit. Laugh for the bobbe'she! So! So!" They come back.*)

FRAIDELE

Do you think he'll get well?

THE STRANGER

THE OLD WOMAN

Well, of course, well! He isn't sick. He is only cutting teeth. I have a wolf-tooth in my sack. We'll tie it round his little neck. And you—big, big girl—think you're the mamma already, and so you cry! (*She peers under the pillow at the bread.*) Aha! It stirs! Let's see what's doing in the oven. Nu—not enough wood. Go and bring in a few pieces of wood. (*Fraidele goes out. The old woman opens her sack and searches in it.*) Troubles everywhere! In the town little children die! In the villages the mammas die! Troubles everywhere—wherever you go! . . . Such a foolish little child to cry into the bread.

FRAIDELE (*returns with an armful of wood*)

Will four more pieces of wood be enough?

THE OLD WOMAN

Throw it into the oven. If it gets too hot we can cool it off a bit. No need to stint on the wood. (*Fraidele tends the fire.*) In already? Then, come here. Here's a wolf-tooth on a string. Go in and put it round his neck. Here.

FRAIDELE

Is it really from a wolf, the little tooth?

THE OLD WOMAN

From a she-wolf, the front tooth. Go in and put it on him.

FRAIDELE

I'll go right now. (*She goes into the other room.*)

THE OLD WOMAN (*searching in the sack*)

Measles are going round and pox is going round.

THE STRANGER

Where are you? Come here, I'll put a little red ribbon on your neck.

(Fraidele returns.)

FRAIDELE

I put it on him already.

THE OLD WOMAN

Now, come here. Sit down in my lap. I'll put the red ribbon on you. What a very, very thin, little neck! But you're already a marriageable girl! *(She kisses her neck.)* Oh, so sweet! So sweet! And a mother goes and dies and leaves such a child alone! Now wear it that way around your neck, pox and measles are going round in the villages.

FRAIDELE

Too bad papa went away.

THE OLD WOMAN

Is he away long?

FRAIDELE

No, not long. If you'll stay over night with us he'll be back before dark.

THE OLD WOMAN *(taking a little linen bag out of the sack)*

Been to a Rejoicing—good people gave it to me. Hold out your hands and I'll pour some into them. Nu—you know what that is?

FRAIDELE

The dark ones are raisins and the other—what is it?

THE OLD WOMAN

Foolish little one. They're almonds—real al-

THE STRANGER

monds. Hold your hands out and I'll pour some into them.

FRAIDELE

Enough, enough! You're giving me all of them!

THE OLD WOMAN

Just leave me a few raisins, but the almonds you take. See—lost my front teeth. Hard to chew.

FRAIDELE (*tasting*)

Has the taste of nuts.

THE OLD WOMAN

But other nuts haven't such a fine flavor, my child.

FRAIDELE

I'll leave some for papa.

THE OLD WOMAN

Ha-ha, you're a faithful child! But, do you know, you're already a marriageable girl! Troubles everywhere! A mother goes and leaves such a radiant child! (*Looking at the dough.*) Oh, it's rising! Fine! Fine!

FRAIDELE

I'll have to raise Pinele, too.

THE OLD WOMAN

His mother in Paradise will not let him fall!
(*A thunderstorm is heard coming on.*)

FRAIDELE

Oh, how it thunders!

THE OLD WOMAN

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, whose strength and might fill the

THE STRANGER

world"! Take, my child, and quick put a glass of water on the windowsill. (*Fraidele obeys.*)

FRAIDELE

It's going to rain and papa will get drenched.

THE OLD WOMAN

Always you worry.

FRAIDELE

I'm so glad you came here. You might have gotten wet, too!

THE OLD WOMAN

Tu-tu, what of it, then? When the sun shines you get dry again. Nu—go and eat the almonds.

FRAIDELE

I'll hide them away on the shelf.

THE OLD WOMAN

And shoes you have?

FRAIDELE

Made for Passover. They are brand-new yet. I want to save them, so I go about barefoot.

THE OLD WOMAN

Look and see what is going on in the oven.

FRAIDELE (*looking into the oven*)

The wood I threw in is just beginning to burn.

THE OLD WOMAN

Then come here. Here in the sack I have a dress for you with cute little ruffles and a jacket with lace. See! A bit wrinkled, but quite new.

FRAIDELE (*brightening perceptibly*)

Where did you get it?

THE STRANGER

THE OLD WOMAN (*measuring it on her*)

A little too big. You'll have to grow a little yet.

FRAIDELE (*a little disappointed*)

Oh, it's too wide!

THE OLD WOMAN

Till your wedding, if God wills, it'll be just exactly right. Now, let's see the little jacket. A bit broadish. You're a skinny girl—over-worked and worried. You'll have to grow yet.

FRAIDELE (*tearfully*)

I don't think I could stand it if papa were to bring a stepmother into the house!

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu-nu, don't cry. It isn't sure yet. (*Scolding her good-naturedly.*) Nu, enough, now! I don't like it when one cries. Musn't! Look, here's a ribbon. Take it. Before you bless the Sabbath candles, braid it into your hair.

FRAIDELE

Is it silk?

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu, of course, silk! Who braids anything else into the hair?

FRAIDELE

I'll run in and see how Pinele is! (*Calling from the other room.*) Pinele is asleep.

THE OLD WOMAN

Let him sleep. Please God, he will wake up strong and healthy. Are your ears pierced? I've earrings for you. Nu—show me your ears.

THE STRANGER

FRAIDELE (*bends her head down to the old woman*)

I don't know. I once had little threads in my ears.

THE OLD WOMAN (*feeling her ears*)

Yes, they were pierced once, but—grown together again. M'm—they'll have to be pierced all over again.

FRAIDELE (*timidly*)

Will it hurt?

THE OLD WOMAN

Of course, it'll hurt. But when one wants to wear ear-rings . . .

FRAIDELE

I'll get you a needle and thread.

THE OLD WOMAN

It'll hurt. It may hurt much.

FRAIDELE

I won't care.

THE OLD WOMAN

Have you a fine needle?

FRAIDELE

Yes, a very thin needle . . . Will it hurt much?

THE OLD WOMAN

If you're lively, it won't hurt.

FRAIDELE

Then I'll be lively. A white or a black thread?

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu, of course, a white thread. Don't make a knot, not necessary. But I'll have to find my spectacles—without spectacles . . . (*She hunts in the sack.*) Shah! Here they are! (*She dons a*

THE STRANGER

pair of heavy spectacles.) Ha! Ha! How many ears I've pierced! Come near the window.

FRAIDELE

Oh, I'm afraid!

THE OLD WOMAN

Then we needn't do it!

FRAIDELE

Oh, I promise, I'll not cry. Here's my right ear . . . (*Fraidele bites her lip and draws up her shoulders as the old woman pierces the ear.*)

THE OLD WOMAN

Does it hurt, ha? When one wants to wear ear-rings . . .

FRAIDELE

Ha—I hear the thread going through . . .
Oooh—phah!

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu, done! It won't hurt so much now. The other will go easier. Give the left ear here. (*She pierces the left ear.*) Now you've got it—safely over. In three months you can cut the thread and pull it out. And here are the ear-rings. They say they're gold. Hide them so you won't lose them.

FRAIDELE

Oh, won't it be pretty! I'll hide them on the shelf near the almonds.

THE OLD WOMAN

Where will you put the dress?

FRAIDELE

The dress? I'll wait till papa comes. I couldn't take it without him. He'll pay you for it.

THE STRANGER

THE OLD WOMAN

Paid, paid! I've rested myself here, so it's already paid. Who else will wear it, if not you, you foolish child? Why, you're already a marriageable girl. You need it.

FRAIDELE

I'm so ashamed!

THE OLD WOMAN

What is there to be ashamed of?

FRAIDELE

I'm only a little girl yet.

THE OLD WOMAN

Of course, you're only a little girl—a golden child! But that is the custom with us! You're a Jewish child! He, in Heaven, keeps an Eye on His orphans!

(Rain is heard outside.)

FRAIDELE

Papa will get so wet! Woe is me!

THE OLD WOMAN

Your father is not the only one on the wayside. I suppose it is necessary we should have rain.

FRAIDELE

The grain is already off the fields.

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu—then? The dust on the road will settle a bit. The horses won't have to be driven so hard.

FRAIDELE

The road from here to town *is* very dusty!

THE STRANGER

THE OLD WOMAN

And the horse, I suppose, a lean one!

FRAIDELE

A little horse. If you put on a log more she stops every little while.

THE OLD WOMAN

There, you see. He in Heaven knows what He is about.

FRAIDLE (*measuring the dress and jacket on herself again*)

Who wore them?

THE OLD WOMAN

Don't you see it's new! Just a bit wrinkled from the sack, but brand-new. Not even a wee speck on it.

(*Someone is heard driving up to the house.*)

FRAIDELE

Someone's coming and I'm barefoot! (*She gathers up the dress and runs into the other room.*)

THE OLD WOMAN (*chuckling to herself*)

The little heart tells her already when one should be dressed up.

(*Two strangers come in, apparently father and son, both wet through by the rain.*)

THE OLD MAN

God's help, bobbe'she. What a rain!

THE YOUNG MAN (*beating the rain off his hat*)

Ah, warm here in the house!

THE OLD WOMAN

A pouring rain, what?

THE STRANGER

THE YOUNG MAN

The lightning struck near our wagon. The horse reared up on his haunches.

THE OLD MAN

Where are the men-folks?

THE OLD WOMAN

Come out, my child, guests have come.

(Fraidele comes out. She has put on her shoes.)

THE OLD WOMAN

Ran to put on her shoes, ha-ha.

THE OLD MAN *(to Fraidele)*

Where is your papa?

FRAIDELE

He drove to the city.

THE YOUNG MAN

Maybe it was the man with the little lean horse, who carried wood . . .

FRAIDELE

Yes, that's my papa.

THE OLD MAN

And this is the grandmother, I suppose?

(The old woman laughs.)

THE YOUNG MAN

What are you laughing at, bobbe'she?

THE OLD WOMAN

Of course, a grandmother, how else?

THE YOUNG MAN

I've seen you somewhere, I think.

THE STRANGER

THE OLD WOMAN

A Jewish face, no? Like *your* grandmother, no doubt.

THE OLD MAN

A clever woman! A relation, I suppose?

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu, of course, a relation.

FRAIDELE

Passed by on the road, and so came in to rest.

THE OLD WOMAN

You see, a mere child yet and what a tub of bread she's kneaded! (*She uncovers the tub to show them.*)

THE OLD MAN

Take the pillow off or it will run over!

THE YOUNG MAN (*enthusiastically*)

That's kneading bread for you! Not for nothing is it running over!

FRAIDELE

I didn't knead it so very much!

THE OLD MAN

Ah! Ah! What bread, what bread!

FRAIDELE

Papa is going to bring home some whitewash and I'm going to whitewash the house. We weren't allowed to do it before, mamma died only last Passover.

THE OLD MAN

Is that so! Your mamma is dead! She was very young yet, I suppose? (*To his son.*) You hear, son, so young and already an orphan! And how she handles the household!

THE STRANGER

FRAIDELE

Maybe you'd like to eat something. I can put potatoes into the oven to bake.

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu—of course, they will eat!

FRAIDELE

I'll run and bring some potatoes from the barn.
(She runs out.)

THE OLD MAN

A girl—pss!—a fire! Left an orphan! What a pity! The milk is still wet on her lips!

THE OLD WOMAN

Growing up a fine little housewife, too!

THE YOUNG MAN

And see what a bread she's kneaded! Ha-ha-ha!

(Fraidele hurries in carrying potatoes in her apron. She throws them into the oven.)

THE YOUNG MAN

Enough, enough! Ah, a real Gehenna in the oven!

THE OLD MAN

It's clearing up outside. You can hop up on the wagon, granny, we'll give you a lift. I could take you to the village nearby where there are some Jewish folk.

FRAIDELE

You can stay overnight with us, bobbe'she. There's an empty bed. You can sleep in that.

THE YOUNG MAN *(teasing)*

And if we wanted to stay till morning, where would you put us, huh?

THE STRANGER

FRAIDELE (*laughing shyly*)

We have a garret with hay.

THE YOUNG MAN

Well, will you go along with us, bobbe'she?

THE OLD WOMAN

I can go on foot. I am going the other way,
my son.

THE OLD MAN

A pity to break old feet that way. It is even
hard for me to go on foot.

(*Mordcha enters wet and tired.*)

FRAIDELE

Here's papa! How did you get home so quick?

THE OLD MAN

This is he? Sholem Alechem.

MORDCHA

I left my daughter all alone in the house, and
now, no Evil Eye, I find the house full of
people. The rain drove you in?

FRAIDELE

How did you get back so soon? You haven't
been to town yet?

THE YOUNG MAN

We met you with a load of wood.

MORDCHA

The load was too heavy, so I broke an axle.

FRAIDELE

Oh, my!

THE OLD WOMAN

Never mind, people will help!

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

I saw that I couldn't make the town anyway today, so I unharnessed the horse and rode home. I thought to myself—I left her at home all alone and the little one isn't altogether well either . . . Nu—praised be God, I find a full house of our own people. Where do *you* hail from?

THE OLD MAN

We are not close neighbors. We come from quite a distance.

MORDCHA

That is easy to see. I am living here now nearly twenty years in these parts, and yet you are, somehow, not familiar to me.

THE OLD MAN

It isn't just convenient to travel by this road.

MORDCHA

But the bobbe'she *is*, somehow, a little familiar to me.

THE OLD WOMAN

A Jewish face, what?

MORDCHA

Perhaps you would prepare something for our guests to eat, my daughter?

FRAIDELE

I put potatoes into the oven already.

THE OLD MAN

I understand her mother is dead.

MORDCHA

The light has gone from the house!

THE STRANGER

THE OLD MAN

One mustn't lose hope!

THE OLD WOMAN (*to Fraidele*)

See that the potatoes don't get burned.

(*Fraidele busies herself at the oven.*)

THE YOUNG MAN

Did you hear the heavy thunder?

MORDCHA

It struck a tree and it fell into the middle of the road.

(*Fraidele rakes out the potatoes and brings them to the table. All rub their hands in anticipation of the warm food. They blow the hot potatoes to cool them, eating them skin and all.*)

MORDCHA

Come here, bobbe'she, nearer to the table.
Take a potato.

THE OLD WOMAN

Nu—I'm all right this way, too. (*Busying herself at the oven.*)

FRAIDELE

Let me, I'll scatter the fire.

MORDCHA

How are things up your way?

THE OLD MAN

Business is bad all over, but with me—may I not sin with my speech—I can't complain.

MORDCHA

It's just the same here. Hardly a chance to unload a wagon of wood.

THE STRANGER

THE YOUNG MAN

Is that your whole business?

MORDCHA

Somehow, my hands don't lift themselves to anything better.

THE OLD MAN

One mustn't lose courage.

MORDCHA

In what do you deal?

THE OLD MAN

We deal in grain.

THE YOUNG MAN

We carry on a *big* business.

MORDCHA

Yes, if one could only get that far.

THE OLD MAN

But times are bad. Business is falling off.

MORDCHA

And where are you going now, also on business?

THE OLD MAN

Yes. This time on his account—on my son's account.

FRAIDELE

Papa, I just threw in some more wood and I'm afraid it will get too hot in the oven.

THE OLD WOMAN

Sh! Don't disturb them. Let them talk there. We'll fix it between us, somehow. Just look after the bread that it doesn't run over.

MORDCHA

My little one isn't well—struggling along without a mother!

THE STRANGER

FRAIDELE

Do you know, papa, Pinele is better already.
He *is* cutting teeth

THE OLD MAN

Come, my son, we'll see what's going on outside. Seems to me it is clearing up. (*They leave the room together.*)

MORDCHA

Bobbe, did you see my little orphan?

THE OLD WOMAN

A radiant child! He'll soon be well.

(*Mordcha goes into the other room.*)

FRAIDELE

Stay with us, bobbe. I'll speak to papa.

THE OLD WOMAN

We'll be too cramped. What do you need such an old granny in the house for? An old person shouldn't take up too much space.

MORDCHA (*returns*)

He's asleep and the fever is gone.

THE OLD WOMAN

He'll be all right. No danger, he's only teething.

MORDCHA

If only his mother were alive!

(*The men return.*)

MORDCHA

Well, is it clearing up? My wagon with the wood will no doubt be out on the road over

THE STRANGER

night. I'll have to go to the village yet and borrow an axle somewhere.

THE OLD MAN

Maybe we'll turn back yet and you could take my wagon.

MORDCHA

Where were you bound for—here, really? Did you have some business here?

THE OLD MAN (*smiling slyly*)

Not certain yet. Maybe we can do the business here. What do they call you?

MORDCHA

Not familiar to you. Mordcha Gadaliah is my name—after a grandfather.

THE OLD MAN

And I am Benjamin Minshitzer.

MORDCHA

From Minshitz—as far as that!

THE YOUNG MAN

We left yesterday after midnight and have been on the way ever since.

MORDCHA

With my horse I wouldn't have gotten as far as that.

THE OLD MAN

How old is your daughter?

MORDCHA

Already sixteen years, no Evil Eye, and as clever and handy as her mother, may she rest in Paradise.

FRAIDELE

Why do you praise me so, papa?

THE STRANGER

THE OLD MAN

He is an only son. Yitzchack is his name—
after a great-grandfather.

(Yitzchack and Fraidele glance at each other shyly.)

THE OLD WOMAN *(chuckling to herself)*

Ha—forgot two potatoes in the oven—all
burned.

MORDCHA

Is that so? An only son? Helps you, I sup-
pose. If I had a big boy in the house it would
be a great help to me, too.

THE OLD MAN

I was just going to look at a bride for him.
It's ten miles from here yet.

MORDCHA

A bit far.

THE OLD MAN

That's what I say—it's too far. There's a long
story to it. I met at a Fair, around Pentecost,
a man—a bit acquainted with him. We got
to talking together, you know, like men will.
And here—just lately, he again inquired through
a relative of his. So I thought to myself: Times
are quiet, the horse eats the oats anyway, we'll
just take a run over there. But I'm thinking
myself it's a little too far . . . *(To Fraidele.)*
What do they call you?

FRAIDELE

Fraida Leah.

MORDCHA

After her mother's mother.

THE STRANGER

THE OLD MAN (*to Mordcha*)

You know what? The country around here pleases me very much—plenty of villages close, and the fields, seems to me, look a little better than in my neighborhood . . .

MORDCHA

The grain around here has a big name.

THE YOUNG MAN (*enthusiastically*)

If only I sat in these parts! Ah! Ah!

MORDCHA

I know it myself. But what can I do? I was left as on the water. My hands refuse to budge!

THE OLD MAN

I'll tell you what. True, the rain drove me in here. So I sit and think—maybe it's God will. You're a Jew I like. Well—poverty is no disgrace, and the main thing is after all—the neighborhood.

MORDCHA

I say, too, that the neighborhood is a fine one.

THE OLD MAN

What do you say, my son, ha? Maybe it is a pity to drive the poor horse another ten miles . . . You hear, bobbe'she, what we are talking about here? What do *you* say?

THE OLD WOMAN

What shall I say? Blessed be a Jewish home, ha-ha! (*Whimsically.*) Riches, poverty—all from God. Nu—blessed be a Jewish house!

THE OLD MAN

Ha-ha, a clever one, as I'm a Jew. All from God! Why should we fool ourselves here?

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

The whole thing is, somehow—a miracle—a wonder! (*Laughing.*) Something really—not to be believed! What can I say . . .

THE OLD MAN

I would like to locate my son in this neighborhood. He'll commence to do business here. When one has a good horse it really isn't so far to Minshitz. Well, what do you say, my son, are you of a mind to travel farther?

MORDCHA (*to Fraidele, who is standing near the oven with a flaming face*)

You hear, my child, what we're talking about here? . . . Maybe I could manage a bit of a dowry.

(*Fraidele droops her head shyly.*)

THE OLD MAN

What is there to make such a big talk about? Why should my son ask a dowry? We will remain the night here. Just come here once, daughter. Awt! Do you see? He is my son—an only child! He wants for nothing! His mother actually raised him on cream. He lacks for nothing!

MORDCHA

Her mother, may she rest in Paradise, trembled a lot over her, too.

THE OLD MAN

Well, why should we waste time over it—if it is a thing from God? Journeyed to look at a bride—nu—God gave I should save ten whole

THE STRANGER

miles to drive the beast. Give your hand on it, Reb Mordcha. My wife will be satisfied, too—cried because I was carrying her only child away such a great distance.

MORDCHA

Nu—we're all Jews. One can plainly see it's a thing from God!

THE OLD MAN

Maybe, I had better send for my old woman—well, give your hand on it, Reb Mordcha Gadaliah.

THE YOUNG MAN

I'll pull this house down and build a larger one near the road!

MORDCHA

The wood is still good in her. We might just add a room to it.

THE OLD WOMAN

The sun is shining at last! How quickly it has cleared off. Nu—now I can go!

FRAIDELE

Stay here, bobbe'she, till tomorrow.

MORDCHA

Really, where will you go? Stay over night with us.

THE OLD MAN

We'll give you a lift a little later on.

THE YOUNG MAN

I'll take you as far as you need to go.

THE OLD WOMAN (*gathering up her bundle*)

It's a pity to stay too long in one place.

THE STRANGER

YOUNG MAN

What is your hurry? Stay here.

FRAIDELE

Stay here, bobbe'she. I'll show them what you gave me.

THE OLD WOMAN

No, not now—later, when it is necessary.

MORDCHA

But you're hungry.

THE OLD WOMAN

What matter as long as the sun is shining! I'll reach a shelter somewhere by night.

MORDCHA

Well, then, go in health. (*He assists her with the bundle.*)

THE OLD WOMAN

Praised be God—the burden is a little lighter!

THE OLD MAN

An old person—could have given her a lift.

FRAIDELE

Wait. I'll put a few potatoes into the sack. (*She does so.*)

THE OLD WOMAN (*kissing Fraidele*)

Nu, nu—be well. Watch the baby. Praised be God, the burden is a little lighter! A good day to you. (*She kisses the Mezuzeh and takes a last glance into the oven.*) See, my child, that the oven doesn't grow too cool. (*She goes out, all follow her with their eyes and wish her God-speed.*)

THE STRANGER

MORDCHA

Yes, my child, look after the oven that it doesn't grow cold.

THE OLD MAN

And now we will really see Fraidele bake bread?

(Fraidele rolls up her sleeves and proceeds to rake the red coals from the oven. The three men stand by at a little distance and watch her affectionately at her work.)

CURTAIN

SMALL

1st Pass 2nd Pass

Comments

Book Details

- Scannable
- Unscannable

Details

- Fold-Outs/Unscannable material within book
- Tight Gutter
- Text in Gutter

FORM

ade merry!

IBEN

CHARACTERS

CHATCHA SHIMCHA, *a rustic*

RAYTZE YENTE, *his wife*

ZAYDE, }
PESELE, } *their children*

YOEL CHAYIM, *Chatcha's father, who
has passed the century mark*

URTCHA, }
KLAVNE, } *rustics*
VAVEH, }
SHMEREH, }

SHOREH MALKE, *Urtcha's wife*

FELTE FAIGELE, *their daughter,
Zayde's betrothed*

SHPRINTZE TZIREL, *Shmerek's daughter*

ALTAR BANISH, *Klavne's son*

NOTES

Kosher: Ritually clean, pure.

"Not one, not two, not three"; This negative method of counting persons is employed to mislead the Evil One, that it may not appear to him that there are too many, lest harm befall some of those present.

"Wanted to wait for Yom Kippur": On the sacred day of Atonement, all men are required to forgive those who have sinned against them, so that they, in turn, may be forgiven by God.

THE SNOWSTORM

SCENE

At Chatcha Shimcha's small farmhouse. It is winter and late at night. The windows are frozen over. Outside a storm is raging. Yoel Chayim, a very tall and a very old man with a very bent back, is sitting near the oven and has been picking feathers out of a sieve. His head nods sleepily and he dozes, waking at frequent intervals. During one of these little naps his head jerks suddenly upward, throwing his skull-cap into the sieve of feathers. He wakes up and feels on his head for his cap; he finds it missing and finally locates it in the feathers, chuckling softly to himself as he picks off the feathers.

YOEL CHAYIM

Did you ever hear of such a thing—a cap to get too small for one's head! (*Looking about him.*) Where are you, Pesele?

PESELE (*from the other room*)

I'm lying on the oven.

YOEL CHAYIM

You feel cold?

PESELE

I'm asleep.

YOEL CHAYIM

Have the roosters crowed yet?

PESELE

Long ago.

THE SNOWSTORM

YOEL CHAYIM

Then it is already after midnight.

PESELE

Of course. They crowed long ago.

YOEL CHAYIM

Come here. It's warm in here, too.

PESELE

Listen, grandpa, a dog is barking in the village. They must be returning.

YOEL CHAYIM

A driving wind! I'm afraid the snow will bury the road—and they've been drinking there.

PESELE (*comes in and sits down beside the old man*)

And they wouldn't take me along!

YOEL CHAYIM

If I live, at the wedding, please God, I'll not let them talk me out of it so easy, either.

PESELE

The wedding won't be till summer. We'll both go.

YOEL CHAYIM

Just look and see, my child, if they're coming.

PESELE

The panes are frozen over. I'll breathe on it and see if it will melt the ice. (*She breathes on the pane.*) Oh, how white outside! You can't even make the trees out.

YOEL CHAYIM

Just hand me the bottle. I only had one little glassful. I'm drowsy.

PESELE

Your cap is full of feathers.

THE SNOWSTORM

YOEL CHAYIM

Ha, ha! Was nodding a bit, so she fell into the sieve. (*She hands the bottle to him.*) That's good, my child. Bring over a glass, too, the little one—that's the one. Will you have a sip, too?

PESELE

I'm afraid it will make me drunk.

YOEL CHAYIM (*saying the blessing over the brandy*)

"Blessed art Thou, God, Lord of the Universe, who calleth everything into existence through Thy word." Ha—another year and you'll be a bride. In another year you will be sixteen. Did you know it?

PESELE

Give me a little bit.

YOEL CHAYIM

Say the grace.

PESELE

I did already. (*She drinks.*) Ah, I feel warmer.

YOEL CHAYIM

I'll take another glassful. You've had enough.

PESELE

Oh, my head's turning!

YOEL CHAYIM

Lively doings in the village tonight.

PESELE

But I wouldn't leave you alone.

YOEL CHAYIM

You did quite right. It isn't right to leave such an old grandfather all alone.

THE SNOWSTORM

PESELE

Will I live to be so old?

YOEL CHAYIM

Ha, ha! not every one lives to be a hundred.

PESELE

Father will live that long, too.

YOEL CHAYIM

If father can outwit Him!

PESELE

Whom do you mean?

YOEL CHAYIM

Ha, ha! Him, I mean—the Angel of Death.

PESELE

How did you fool him?

YOEL CHAYIM

Ha, ha, ha! He came and stood in the doorway with his great knife in his hand and searched for me with his thousand eyes. What did I do? I dressed up my knee with my skull-cap and extended it to him—and he slaughtered me in the knee. Ha, ha, ha!

PESELE

Did it leave a mark on your knee?

YOEL CHAYIM

A mark. It looked like a red thread on the skin. (*He drinks a glass of brandy.*) Even *He* can be fooled. Look and see if the folks are coming now.

PESELE

Now, I'm afraid to look out of the window.

THE SNOWSTORM

YOEL CHAYIM

You have nothing to be afraid of at all. Well, then, let us sing. Di-daw-dim-dim-dim. Oi veh, dim-dim-doim. At your wedding they'll all come *here*. A fine young scamp, Klavne's boy—the younger one.

PESELE

He won't take me.

YOEL CHAYIM

Why not? He'll be ashamed of your grandfather, what? You'll make him a fine wife and bear him kosher children. (*He walks about the room, singing a bit tipsily.*)

PESELE

Someone drove up.

(*Klavne and Vaveh enter with a lusty "Mazeltov".*)

YOEL CHAYIM

Here they are!

KLAVNE

What, the others not here yet?

VAVEH (*to Klavne*)

What did I tell you?

YOEL CHAYIM

Didn't you all travel together?

VAVEH

We started together, but their horse ran away and we got separated. I suppose they will soon be here. Let's get warmed through a bit.

PESELE

Better shake off the snow from your hat.

THE SNOWSTORM

YOEL CHAYIM (*to Klavne*)

Where's your boy? Let's fix up a betrothal right here.

KLAVNE

Of course—only let the young scamp grow a bit yet. But what a time we had there!

VAVEH

You know that wasn't full eighty-proof they had there.

KLAVNE

Urtcha believes in adding a little water, . . . To long life! (*He drinks.*) This *is* pure eighty! Better go out, Vaveh, and look to the horse that he doesn't stray away into the barn. Well, Pesele, grow up a bit and I'll take you for a daughter-in-law.

VAVEH

She's big enough.

KLAVNE

Let's be jolly, only jolly. Reb Yoel Chayim, why did you let yourself grow old? Hey? Straighten out your shoulders. So. Give us your hand. Vaveh, you sing. How does that tune go? (*He places his hand on the old man's shoulder and dances.*)

SHMEREH (*comes in*)

Mazel-tov! Where are the rest?

KLAVNE

Ha, ha, ha! you lost them, too? Never mind, they'll turn up. Give us your hand, Shmerah. Let us dance. Let us dance. Put out a foot, Shmerah.

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SHMEREH

We ought to look for them beyond the village.
Maybe they're lost.

VAVEH

Whoever heard of a Jew getting lost? Chatcha
Shimcha's horses know the way.

PESELE

Where is your Shprintze Tzirel?

SHMEREH

Crawled into the wagon with the bride and
groom.

RAYTZE YENTE (*runs in, more dead than alive*)

Woe is me, people, have pity!

PESELE (*anxiously*)

What is it, mamma? Where are the others?

RAYTZE YENTE

People, woe is me! Why do you sit here so
unconcerned?

VAVEH

Where are they?

RAYTZE YENTE

The horse ran away with the bride and groom!

SHMEREH

And my hussy is with them in the wagon.

YOEL CHAYIM

Then I suppose the horse is bound for home.
Dim-dim-diam-dim. Sing, children.

RAYTZE YENTE

I fell out of the sleigh into a hole. Lucky for
me it was full of snow.

THE SNOWSTORM

YOEL CHAYIM

You should have said a prayer then, in thanking for your lucky escape, my child.

RAYTZE YENTE

When I picked myself up, there wasn't a sign of them about.

SHMEREH

Did you trudge home on foot also? Ha, ha, ha! Come, Reb Yoel Chayim, let's give a look.

YOEL CHAYIM (*ignoring him, sings*)

Dim-dim-di-di-dim.

SHMEREH

Let him be. The old man seems a bit piqued.

RAYTZE YENTE

Come, Pesele, my child, come with me. I can't stand it. Come, we'll get into the sleigh.

KLAVNE

Where will you look? Wait, we'll all go. Sing, little Jews. Let's dance around. Oi-oi-oi! May there be only rejoicings among Jews. Come, Vaveh. Come, Shmerek.

RAYTZE YENTE

Pesele, my child, you go along too.

SHMEREH

Only take along a good whip. I broke mine.

PESELE (*hands him a whip*)

Here is a good one.

(*Klavne, Vaveh, Pesele, and Shmerek run out, singing.*)

RAYTZE YENTE

What do you say to my troubles, father-in-law?

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I begged them not to drink. I pleaded: We have to drive home yet.

YOEL CHAYIM

Don't cry, woman. They'll be found.

RAYTZE YENTE

And such a storm outside! Shah! I thought I heard the calf bleat in the barn.

YOEL CHAYIM

And to me it sounded like a sheep. Hear it?

RAYTZE YENTE

It is a sheep. (*Zayde enters covered with snow.*)
Here is the child! (*Falling on his neck.*) Where are the others? Where is the bride?

ZAYDE

I lost them. The sleigh turned over and the horses ran away.

YOEL CHAYIM

Had a bit too much, I guess. Ha, ha, ha!

ZAYDE

Urtcha showed them the whip, and away they ran.

YOEL CHAYIM

His horses dislike the whip.

RAYTZE YENTE (*desperately*)

I'll *do* something to myself!

ZAYDE

Where are the others?

RAYTZE YENTE

Klavne, Vaveh, Pesele, and Shmerch have gone to look for them.

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ZAYDE

Then *they* were here? They won't know where to look for them, though.

YOEL CHAYIM

Ah, they got drunk! Where's the bride?

RAYTZE YENTE

Felte Faigele, woe is me! I hope nothing will happen to her.

YOEL CHAYIM

I suppose they poured plenty into themselves!

RAYTZE YENTE

That's just my misfortune! Woe is me! I pleaded with them as one does with murderers: Men, have God in your hearts! Urtcha must have swallowed a whole keg of whiskey.

YOEL CHAYIM

Did they drink from the faucet, too?

RAYTZE YENTE

Of course.

YOEL CHAYIM

My! But that must have been some betrothal for my grandchild! Then, what are you worrying about, woman? As long as the groom is here, I suppose the bride will turn up, too.

(Urtcha, Chatcha, Shimcha, Klavne, Shoreh Malke, Felte Faigele, and Shprintze Tzirel enter covered with snow. The crowd is hilarious, all are singing.)

RAYTZE YENTE

Where's my child, Pesele?

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FELTE FAIGELE

Oh my, where is she?

VAVEH

I lost her right out of my hand.

ZAYDE

I'll go and look for her. (*He runs out.*)

URTCHA

Shouldn't have let the groom go out alone.

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Never mind, my son can handle ten devils
all alone!

SHOREH MALKE

What a man won't say!

FELTE FAIGELE

I'm so worried! Where is Zayde?

URTCHA

Don't grieve, daughter mine. Your groom
won't get lost.

VAVEH

Women, don't worry. I'll go with him. (*He
runs out.*)

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

What are you crying for, silly calves?

KLAVNE

Give us your hand, Chatcha Shimcha. Come
here, Shmereh. Where's the bride? Woe is
me, the room is going round and round! Sing,
little Jews, sing.

SHOREH MALKE

Your head is going round! Woe is me!

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Shah, people! Really, where *is* my daughter?

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RAYTZE YENTE

He's just realized that the child is missing! I can't stand it!

VAVEH (*entering*)

The dogs are barking in the village. That must be they—returning.

KLAVNE

People, are your heads clear? Bring me my household here—my old woman and the children. Reb Yoel Chayim, asleep? Wake up, Jews are rejoicing!

(Zayde enters. There is an immediate uproar. The women kiss him; the bride falls on his neck and weeps.)

RAYTZE YENTE

Where's Pesele?

ZAYDE

I haven't seen her. The horses ought to be led into the barn. The storm is fearful!

KLAVNE

The devil won't take them!

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Say, people, *really* where *is* my daughter?

RAYTZE YENTE

You're drunk, and you don't even know where you are in the world!

SHMEREH

Woman that you are! Never mind. She'll come back. The goat'll come home!

SHOREH MALKE

Come, Shmerah, let us drive home. Come, Tzirele, we'll go home.

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SHMEREH

Ha, ha, ha! who's going home? (*He sings uproariously.*) "Whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll always be." Sing, little Jews, sing! "Whatever we are, we are . . ." (*He runs out.*)

RAYTZE YENTE

It can't be otherwise. It must have been something in the parsnip stew!

SHOREH MALKE

What are you saying? I, myself, picked the parsnips over.

RAYTZE YENTE

You can't talk me out of it. It can't be otherwise—a crazy parsnip must have gotten into the stew somehow, or their heads wouldn't be turned now.

URTCHA

What other charge can you think up against my parsnip stew? I won't have it.

(*Pesele stumbles into the room covered with snow.*)

KLAVNE

Here she is! Let's be merry. Let's dance!

RAYTZE YENTE (*kissing her*)

Where were you, my child?

PESELE

Everybody here? (*She kisses the other girls.*)

SHPRINTZE TZIREL

Oh, woe! My father isn't here!

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Ha, ha, ha! Where's Shmerch?

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KLAVNE

He went to get my folks.

SHPRINTZE TZIREL

Come, people, let's find my father. Oh, I must go and look for him!

RAYTZE YENTE

Don't let her go out of the house.

CHATCHA SHIMCHA (*to Shprintze Tzirel*)

Shmerch went to Klavne's, I tell you. Let's sit down at the table. Wife, hand around refreshments. Folks, to the table!

(*Shmerch returns. The confusion and noise grow apace.*)

KLAVNE

Shmerch, where have you been?

SHMEREH (*counting those present*)

Not one, not two, not three . . .

KLAVNE

Everybody's here. What are you counting for?

SHPRINTZE TZIREL

Here I am, papa.

SHMEREH (*throwing his hat in the air*)

Here you are, my pure little daughter. Then why don't you all make a noise? Let's sing! Let's spring! Yes, "Whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll ever be . . ."

KLAVNE

Everybody, be witness. Though Chatcha Behr once crossed my path, I bear him no grudge! Where are you, Zayde? And you, Felte Faigele? Bride and groom, come here. May God give

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that your fathers and your mothers may know great joy from you. Come here, Chatcha Behr, or Chatcha Shimcha, what's the difference . . .

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

When did *I* ever cross your path? True, the animal had a defect. That's why I took her to market.

RAYTZE YENTE

What are you talking about, Klavne? Even if the animal didn't kick, I would have sold her anyway. She wouldn't let down her milk. Always had to stick a handful of straw under her nose to bribe her.

KLAVNE

Ha, ha, ha! woman that you are! I'm not talking about the beast at all. I mean, when my Altar Banish had an eye on Urtcha's girl—and I, too. But do I even envy you? People, be witness. I say: I wish the children all luck and prosperity.

SHMEREH

And I am not good enough for you to hitch up with? Then let's sing, fellow Jews: "Whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll ever be."

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

What's all the fuss about? I, too, think Klavne's boy is a likely enough young scamp.

KLAVNE

No harm, friends. I think I'll take Pesele for a daughter-in-law, anyway.

RAYTZE YENTE (*kissing Pesele*)

The milk is still on her lips.

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KLAVNE

What do you say, Reb Yoel Chayim?

YOEL CHAYIM

A pity to lose her from the house.

SHMEREH (*to Klavne*)

And with my girl it doesn't suit you to make a match?

KLAVNE

But she already has someone.

URTCHA

What's all the needless talk about? I say he's a likely enough young scamp. And you, Shmerek, don't need to quibble over the matter either.

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Shat! Shat! I'm not giving my daughter at all. Klavne, I'll not give you my daughter.

SHMEREH (*to Shprintze Tzirel*)

Don't worry, daughter. You'll get a husband. Sing, brothers: "Whatever we are, we are; but God we serve." Oh, oh, oh, how good I feel! How happy I am! Oh, oh, oh, what joy! Show them, daughter, how you can dance on the table.

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Show what you can do, Shprintze Tzirel.

SHOREH MALKE

Go, Shprintzele, show them what you can do.

VAVEH

Women, be quiet! Oh, my! People, how good I feel!

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RAYTZE YENTE

He who dances at the rejoicings of others will live to dance at his own. Oh, mother of mine, Shmerekh is really going to dance on the table. Wait until I take the glasses off.

SHMEREK

Ha, ha, ha! woman! Fill up the glasses to the brim and I'll dance between them. (*He throws off his boots and climbs upon the table.*) Well, sing for me: "Oh, whatever we are, we are; but God we'll always serve." Come up here, daughter mine, and help your daddy dance at the rejoicing of a Jew!

KLAVNE

Well, Shprintze Tzirel, get on the table. Father is calling you. Show what you can do.

(*Shprintze removes her shoes and climbs upon the table. She dances opposite her father. Shmerekh holds up the tails of his coat and dances lightly between the glasses.*)

SHMEREK (*singing*)

"Oh, Jews, precious Jews, whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll ever be."

KLAVNE

Vaveh, dear heart, jump into my sled and fetch my family here. Let us all be merry. Shmerekh, my son will take your daughter just as she stands. People, be witness: That Klavne gives his son to Shmerekh's daughter without a dowry . . . without . . . "Oh, whatever we are, we are . . ." Why don't you sing, folks? Take

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hands. Let's dance around and around . . .
Oi—oi—oi . . .

(Shmerek and Shprintze jump off the table.)

KLAVNE *(embracing Shmerek)*

Hear everybody. I was angry with Shmerek. Had a grudge against him. Wanted to wait for Yom Kippur, but I forgive him now. I forgive you, Shmerek. Ah, whatever we are, we are: but Jews we'll ever be.

(There is a knock on the window and a pane is broken out.)

RAYTZE YENTE

How the wind whistles!

SHOREH MALKE

Stuff the hole up with a rag, quick!

VAVEH

My horse did that—inviting himself in. When I go out, I'll wreck all my bad dreams on him.

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

Lead him behind the barn. The wind isn't so strong there.

URTCHA

Let us go out and see who is there. It seems to me it is not the horse's work.

VAVEH

Come, Urtcha. *(They both go out.)*

KLAVNE *(singing)*

"Whatever we are, we are . . ." What do you think, Shmerek, of my son? You can have him. And you, daughter, do you like the

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scamp? Take him. I give him over into your hands, Shmerek. Teach him how to hold a whip in his hand and, on the Sabbath, how to be a pious Jew. Sing, Jews! Let us dance around! Oi—oi—oi . . . And you, Pesele, does my younger please you? He will need to grow yet, and so will you. What do you say, Chatcha Shimcha?

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

I agree.

SHMEREH

He has a good head on him.

RAYTZE YENTE

My child has time yet.

SHMEREH

Chatcha Shimcha will give Pesele with a dowry, too.

KLAVNE

Well then, let's dance! Tzirele, my child, come here, Klavne calls you. Want to be my daughter-in-law? To live with us? You won't have to churn the butter at my place, or milk the cow, either.

SHOREH MALKE

Her mother didn't bring her up to be a fine lady. She'll turn the churn and milk the cow when it is necessary.

SHPRINTZE TZIREL (*shyly*)

What do you say, Felte Faigele; is it nice to be a bride?

ZAYDE

Do become a bride, Tzirele, then we can have both our weddings in one week.

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YOEL CHAYIM (*who has been dozing the while, wakes up, rubs his eyes and begins to sing*)

Oi dim, dim-dim-dim, oi doi, dim-dim-diam.

SHMEREH

Long live Reb Yoel Chayim.

KLAVNE

Shmerekh, give us your hand! Come, people, let's all go over to my place. Let my old woman know, too, that her son has become betrothed.

CHATCHA SHIMCHA

She really ought to be told—your old woman.

KLAVNE

Couldn't take her along. She's expecting . . .
Let her know too.

SHMEREH

I am going to tweak his ear—the bridegroom's! Come, folks, let's travel. And you, my daughter, Tzirel Shprintze or Shprintze Tzirel—what difference—both her grandmothers were pious Jewesses! Listen, people . . .

(Vaveh and Urtcha run in laughing loudly.)

SHMEREH

Come in, come in.

VAVEH

Do you know who broke the pane?

URTCHA

My ram. With his horns he broke it.

SHOREH MALKE

The barn door must have been left open, so he got out and ran after us.

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KLAVNE

Shat, that was it. He must have frightened my horse.

SHMEREH

Mine, too. Ha, ha, ha!

URTCHA

Had to lead him back to the barn by force—into your barn, Chatcha Shimcha.

RAYTZE YENTE

Is it really your ram?

URTCHA

Ha, ha, ha! woman!

SHOREH MALKE

Doesn't want to stay in the barn without the horse, I suppose.

RAYTZE YENTE

How does he come to the window, then?

SHMEREH

He heard Jews rejoicing—so he came.

(A knock is again heard at the window and a second pane is broken out.)

VAVEH

I said we should close the gate.

ZAYDE

He wants to be asked in.

SHOREH MALKE

Come, bridegroom, come away from the window.

PESELE *(looking out of the window)*

I don't see any one.

•

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VAVEH

Come, Urtcha, I am curious to see what there is out there.

KLAVNE

Come on, folks, let's catch him and tie him up.

YOEL CHAYIM

Take the whip along. I'd like to go, too.

(All run out but the women, who remain looking out of the window.)

SHPRINTZE TZIREL

The horse ran away.

RAYTZE YENTE

It's not right, you shouldn't stand by the window, child.

FELTE FAIGELE

They're chasing him.

SHOREH MALKE

You go away from the window, too.

RAYTZE YENTE

They're pretty jolly. Poured enough into themselves, no Evil Eye! Let them enjoy themselves out there, only they shouldn't stay out too long in the snow.

FELTE FAIGELE

See, see, how they chase him! Oh—grandfather fell down in the snow.

SHOREH MALKE

They shouldn't have let the groom go along.

SHPRINTZE TZIREL *(calling through the broken pane)*

Grandpa, grandpa, come in.

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RAYTZE YENTE

Come away from the window, my child. You'll catch a cold yet.

SHPRINTZE TZIREL

Our ram is so smart—as smart as a man, he is. The other day my father said to me: "Go, Shprintze, and put the ram in the barn and shut the door." So I took a whip and went after him. When he saw me, he threw his head back and ran away onto the lawn. That's how smart *he* is.

PESELE

Look, grandfather is lying in the snow. Come, let's lift him out. Come, Tzirele. (*She grabs Shprintze Tzirel by the hand and they run out.*)

RAYTZE YENTE (*sighing*)

What is old is not young. He took a glass too much, so he can't stand on his feet.

(*The girls come in, leading the old man.*)

YOEL CHAYIM (*barely able to stand on his feet—singing*)

Dim, dim, di—di—diam . . .

RAYTZE YENTE

After all, father dear, did *you* have to go out in such a storm?

YOEL CHAYIM

Where are the children—my grandchildren?

PESELE

They're all in the garden. They're chasing the horse.

(*All lurch into the room, singing noisily, all but Klavne.*)

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SHOREH MALKE

Where's Klavne?

SHMEREH

Still out there—running after the beast.

URTCHA

I told him it was mine, and still he runs after him.

SHMEREH (*sits and sings sleepily*)

"Oh, whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll ever be."

VAVEH

Sing, granddaddy. Oh, how good I feel! Oh, what joy! Chatcha Behr, you're asleep? Wake up, don't you know your son is a bridegroom already? Urtcha, you asleep, too? Come, let's all sing, all spring!

SHMEREH

Where's my new kinsman, Klavne? I'll go and hunt him up. (*He goes to the door.*)

SHPRINTZE TZIREL

Stay here, papa.

SHOREH MALKE

Don't let him out.

SHMEREH

Let me go, women. I'll go and search for my kinsman. Klavne, where are you? Come, Jews, let's look for him.

SHOREH MALKE

Better lie down. You can't stand on your feet any longer.

SHMEREH

"Ah, whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll

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always be . . .” How good I feel, Father, Lord of the World! Me, for the table! I must dance! Give us a hand, daughter . . .

RAYTZE YENTE

Don't do it. You'll fall down yet. Don't let him, Shprintzele. He'll fall down.

URTCHA

Wait, Shmerekh, I'm with you, too. (*He makes an unsuccessful attempt to climb upon the table.*)

SHOREH MALKE

God be with you! You'll kill yourself yet, carrying on that way.

KLAVNE (*rushing in with his arms spread like wings, fairly covered with snow. He looks about him*)

Ah, here they are! Ha, ha, ha! brothers! This is *my* celebration! This is *my* holiday! Help me to dance! Help me to spring—leap . . . So! So! (*He dances on the table.*)

SHOREH MALKE

You'll bring down the roof, dancing like that!

KLAVNE

Jews, let's prop up the roof! I must sing! I must spring. (*He dances with such force that the room shakes.*)

(*Altar Banish comes in looking like a pillar of snow. Everyone is convulsed with laughter at his appearance.*)

KLAVNE

My son! My Kaddish! Everybody sing: “Whatever we are, we are . . .”

THE SNOWSTORM

FELTE FAIGELE

Altar, did you know—you've become a bridegroom?

SHOREH MALKE

How is your mamma?

ALTAR BANISH

Mother just had a boy. Come home, father.

(There is a great to-do, everyone shouting "Mazel-tov, Klavne.")

SHOREH MALKE

Oh, woe is me! Mazel-tov, mazel-tov to you, Klavne!

ALTAR BANISH *(to Klavne)*

I rode the horse over. You can harness him to the sled—anyway so we can pull through the snow.

KLAVNE

Why didn't you bring mamma along?

ALTAR BANISH

I'm telling you—mamma just had a boy.

KLAVNE

Who—Shifroh? My wife? My pious wife? Then, why do you all keep so quiet, brothers? Shmerek, kinsman—"Whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll ever be . . ." Come here, son. Where is she—the bride? *(Looking around for Shprintze.)*

ALTAR BANISH

What are you looking for, papa?

THE SNOWSTORM

KLAVNE (*letting himself down from the table, clapping his hands in ecstasy*)

Oh, Shmerekh, what a son-in-law you're getting!
What a daughter-in-law I'm going to have!
Let's all dance, let's all dance, children!

(Everybody joins hands and dances around Klavne. Shprintze Tzirel climbs upon the table and dances there.)

RAYTZA YENTE (*pointing to Shprintze Tzirel*)

That's she, your bride-to-be, Altar Banish.

KLAVNE

My son, my Kaddish, climb upon the table
and dance with your girl!

SHMEREH (*kissing Altar*)

Ah, whatever we are, we are; but Jews we'll
ever be.

RAYTZE YENTE

He doesn't know what he is talking about.

ZAYDE

Give us your hand, Altar Banish. You're a
bridegroom now!

KLAVNE

Then why don't you all make some noise?
Out with your Mazel-tov!

(The confusion grows apace; each one shouts his "Mazel-tov", dishes are broken; some sing—"Whatever we are, we are," etc. while Shprintze Tzirel dances on the table.)

CURTAIN

III

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

An Idyl

By PEREZ HIRSCHBEIN

CHARACTERS

EZRA SALTZBERG

NACHOMAH, *his wife—both over eighty
years' old*

CHAIM FAIGEN, *their friend—paralysed*

SIMAH, *their housemaid*

ASHER, *Faigen's man*

NOTE

A Rendel: A gold coin.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SCENE

It is toward the end of summer, near nightfall. The scene is laid in the old orchard of Ezra Saltzberg. In the foreground, at the right, is an arbor. A path from the arbor leads to a large, old house, which can be seen through the trees in the background. Ezra and his wife are seen approaching, side by side, contemplating the old trees as they come.

EZRA (*calling irritably*)

Simah! Simah! (*He receives no reply; he strikes the trunk of a tree with his cane and calls again*)
Simah!

NACHOMAH

It may be that she is not in the house.

EZRA

She surely wouldn't leave the house alone.

(Ezra and Nachomah have now reached the foreground.)

NACHOMAH

You can expect anything of her.

EZRA

She hasn't enough to do, that is the whole trouble.

NACHOMAH

If she only wanted to, she could find plenty to do.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

EZRA

Everything is covered with dust in the house.

NACHOMAH

I took off a spider-web from the bed today.

EZRA

You should have shown it to her.

NACHOMAH

Do you know what she would answer? I showed her the dust on the cupboard, and do you know what she said?—"If you don't look for dust, you won't find any."

EZRA

Not a foolish answer that. Ha, ha, ha!

NACHOMAH

I ask her what she does out on the street so late. Says she—that she is walking with her young man.

EZRA

Who is her young man?

NACHOMAH

Do I know! Just answers so. She hates to owe any one an answer.

EZRA (*striking with his cane on the ground*)

Simah! Simah!

NACHOMAH (*laughing good-naturedly*)

She pretends not to hear you.

EZRA

Pretends not to hear when *I* call? I don't believe it!

NACHOMAH

What then? You can believe anything of her.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

EZRA

I'll give her a scolding!

NACHOMAH

Don't commence with her at all.

EZRA

You spoil her.

NACHOMAH

I? What a notion! How many times have I wanted to let her go?!

EZRA

Why send her away? She's used to the house now. Let her stay. But scolded she should be, anyway. I will scold her today yet.

NACHOMAH

You spoiled her yourself. I told her to dust the doors and the windows every day, and you said once a week was enough—then why should I be the harsh one?

EZRA

Ha, ha, ha! You're jealous—ha, ha, ha!

NACHOMAH

You are always asking her whether she has eaten. You can rely upon her. She takes for herself before she hands it to you.

EZRA

Well, well, now you *are* cross! Now you are *really* cross!

NACHOMAH

Because I'm right.

EZRA

Look here, in that you are not really right. She should eat. A young thing, when it works hard, should have plenty to eat.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

NACHOMAH

Do I begrudge it to her? Do I even look to see what she takes? I don't know what you are talking about at all.

EZRA

I am not angry with her really. What have I against her? Ha, ha, ha! But she's a clever one, a clever minx! Answers right to the point. I said to her: "Haven't you any respect at all for an old man? I am, anyhow, a sort of boss to you, am I not?" Do you know what she answered me? "You like it," says she, "when I'm saucy to you. I am only a child next to you." Ha, ha, ha!

NACHOMAH

She *is* really only a child yet.

EZRA (*whimsically*)

A little mischief—ha, ha, ha!

NACHOMAH (*pressing her hand suddenly to her side*)

Oh, my! . . .

EZRA

What, again a stitch in your side?

NACHOMAH

As with needles!

EZRA

You see! And I say it isn't right. She doesn't look after you properly. (*Calling testily*)
Simah! Simah!

NACHOMAH

Why do you call? She isn't in the house.

EZRA

No. Today I'll give it to her! I'll tell her if she doesn't like it here, she can go elsewhere!

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

NACHOMAH

She doesn't say she doesn't like it here with us.

EZRA

Well, what else is it then—when I call she doesn't answer?

(Nachomah again grasps her side in pain.)

EZRA

Now, I *am* going to get angry in earnest!
(Sputtering) Simah! Simah! Nah! I will not stand for it any longer! I'll drive her out this very day—I will—this very day, maybe . . . Nah, I'll tell her if—if—Now, I *am* angry! I'll not put up with it. . . .

NACHOMAH

Don't excite yourself so! You can speak to her quietly.

EZRA

But I won't stand it! *(Calling angrily)* Simah! —When I call she should answer!

NACHOMAH

She doesn't mind me, either. I cautioned her when she goes to sleep to close the window, and she replied that no one would steal her. And if any one crawled in through the window she would hear it.

EZRA

And you didn't tell me that! She could, God forbid, catch cold yet, and then—Ha! a bold one, she! She'll not keep the window open any more . . .

NACHOMAH

He talks of catching cold! And *I'm* thinking

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

some one could come in through the window and rob us.

EZRA

Yes, that, too. We could be robbed. No, today she goes! I have no more patience left, and serves her right. When one has a good situation, one should value it. One shouldn't play fast and loose with it.

NACHOMAH

A foolish girl. Doesn't know how good she has it here. She is like our own child.

EZRA

That *was* a mistake. From the first day we should have been strict. And I will begin right now—strict—only strict!

(Simah runs in laughing. She is a very blonde girl and joyously young. Her hands are full of ripe, red raspberries.)

SIMAH

Oh, here you are and I've been looking all over the orchard for you. Just see what I've found. Taste them, Herr Salzberg. Give me your hands and I'll pour some in.

NACHOMAH

Go, go. You're a naughty girl. He was already angry.

SIMAH

Woe is me! You needed me?

EZRA

And I'm still angry!

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

If I only knew it. I thought you were still asleep.

EZRA

Ha, ha, ha! She thinks that old people always sleep.

SIMAH

But you are usually asleep at this time.

NACHOMAH (*to Ezra*)

Now go an be angry with her!

EZRA (*in somewhat better humor*)

And I was already going to send you away.

SIMAH (*bridling*)

You don't have to send me away. I can go away myself.

NACHOMAH

Do I know what he's talking about. I got a stitch in my side—and he . . .

SIMAH

Better taste the raspberries. See, my hands are full.

(Ezra takes a few out of one hand and Nachomah helps herself from the other. Simah is on her knees before them with her hands outstretched, full of raspberries. She gazes into their eyes while they eat of the berries.)

EZRA

What a notion—to gather raspberries at this time!

NACHOMAH

One never sees her any more.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

I was looking all over for you. I know how you love raspberries.

EZRA (*teasingly*)

Ha, ha, ha! I've eaten them nearly all up and left nothing for you.

NACHOMAH (*putting a raspberry into Simah's mouth*)

Here—you little mischief, you.

EZRA (*to Nachomah*)

And then you say I spoil her! (*He steals some berries into her mouth.*)

NACHOMAH

And I say so still.

SIMAH

Why am I bad, tell me. I want with all my heart to please you. I know myself I have to look after you both. Your daughter told me that I must look after you, but I know that even better than she does.

EZRA

Of course, of course, my daughter wants you to look after us.

NACHOMAH

I have nothing against you. I love you as if you were my own child.

SIMAH

I know that you wouldn't send me away.

NACHOMAH

God forbid, who even thinks of such a thing!

EZRA

But a naughty girl you are, anyway! Why have

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

you sat yourself down on the ground? One would think you were feeding two old hens!

SIMAH

My feet ache. I've been standing on them a lot today.

EZRA

Then you must go to bed early tonight, and you don't have to get up so early in the morning, either.

SIMAH

When I hear you up, how can I stay in bed?

EZRA

You don't have to look what I do.

NACHOMAH

You see, it's all right with you, even if she stays in bed till noon.

EZRA (*to Simah*)

Ha, ha, ha! You've a bad mistress! Ha, ha, ha!

SIMAH

Would you like me to bring out anything from the house for you?

EZRA

Bring out my morning jacket. It's a bit chilly already.

SIMAH

And shall I bring you your shawl, madam?

NACHOMAH

Yes, my child. It is really cold now.

(*Simah runs off to the house.*)

EZRA (*reproachfully*)

And you actually scolded her!

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

NACHOMAH

I said I had nothing against her, God forbid!

EZRA

You're a cross-patch. You're cross with me, too.

NACHOMAH

What other accusations, are you going to think up against me?

EZRA

Look! Here she comes back again. How she springs! *(To Simah)* Don't run so. You will fall over the branches yet.

(Simah comes running in. She puts the coat on Ezra and the shawl around the old lady's shoulders.)

SIMAH

So. Now you'll be warm.

EZRA

When night approaches a cold dew falls.

SIMAH *(looking off into the distance)*

It seems to me Faigen is coming here

EZRA

Ha! Ha! Very good. Run and tell him we're in the garden. Open the gate for him and let him come to us here.

NACHOMAH

Yes, do. Bring him here.

SIMAH *(calling, as she runs to the gate)*

Wait a minute. I'll open the gate.

EZRA

Haven't seen him for three days.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

NACHOMAH

He may have been in bed.

EZRA

He might have been a strong man still!

NACHOMAH

If not for God's punishment.

EZRA (*sympathetically*)

A heavy punishment! (*Recalling Simah*) What a mischief—ha, ha, ha! Collected such a lot of tart raspberries . . . A good child it is.

(*Faigen approaches in a wheel-chair which is being pushed by his man, Asher. Simah follows. Faigen is gray and old. His feet are covered with a rug.*)

EZRA

You did well to come. Here in the garden the air is very fresh.

NACHOMAH

Why haven't we seen you for three days?

ASHER

Herr Faigen has been in bed.

NACHOMAH (*to Ezra*)

What did I tell you?

FAIGEN

My man, here, persuaded me that I was sick and should be in bed. (*He coughs.*)

NACHOMAH

Tu-tu-tu. You cough! You have a bad cold.

ASHER

You should not have gone out today, either.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

What shall I bring out for the guests?

FAIGEN

There's another kind person for you!

SIMAH

Of course, I'm kind!

FAIGEN

Yes, I know how kind you are. You can't even bear old folks.

(Simah winks at Asher.)

NACHOMAH

For nothing your scolding, Chaim. Here, I tell her to her very eyes—she's a big mischief! But I don't mean her any harm. She's a good girl, anyway.

ASHER

Herr Faigen is angry with me, too, because I'm quiet when I wheel his chair.

FAIGEN

This week I was nearly run over.

EZRA *(shocked)*

So! Nearly run over! Ha, ha, ha! you rascal, you! You forget you're wheeling a live man? If anything should happen, you could run away, but he, poor man . . .

FAIGEN

That's just what I say. Don't dream! Say a word. But, no—he walks along behind me there and I imagine he's been struck dumb.

ASHER

Well then, take Simah. She's kinder than I am.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

FAIGEN

If she only would come to me.

SIMAH

I'll come. Why not? Herr Salzberg wants to send me away, anyway.

EZRA

You foolish girl, you! Who said such a thing? Talked it into herself. You foolish girl.

FAIGEN

She is just pretending. I suppose I'll have to keep him, too, the pest! (*To Asher*) Well, now you're free. If you want to you can run along.

(Simah winks at Asher and they go off together.)

FAIGEN

Ha! I just pretend to scold him. One can't do otherwise. Really a good boy. Has a sharp head on him, too. In figures—he's fire and flame! I try to trip him up sometimes, when he's been particularly dumb there behind my chair. You'd think he was asleep there behind me, and I ask—all of a sudden like: "How much is one thousand times one thousand," and he answers, perfectly unconcerned. Even if you were to ask him how many stars there were in the heavens, he would tell you off-hand.

(Off in the background Simah is seen climbing a tree, Asher assisting her.)

NACHOMAH

She, too, a diamond! Cares for us as if we were her own father and mother.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

FAIGEN

I should have had one like her. She has a good heart. Are the apples ripe?

EZRA

They're falling. There is no one to pick them. If you like, I'll wheel you around the garden a bit. Help me, Nachomah.

(They both go off, pushing the chair. Simah runs in, hides behind a tree and beckons Asher to come to her. Asher runs in. They hide behind the tree and embrace affectionately.)

SIMAH

Just see how the little old ones push the chair.

(They look toward the orchard—off-stage—where the old folks have disappeared.)

ASHER

If you like I'll ask him to take you. You would have very little to do there.

SIMAH

No. I love my little old ones better. They look like two little white doves. A little while ago I was feeding them like doves—putting raspberries into their mouths. And the old man, how he loves me! Do you know he pretends to scold me sometimes. And I pretend I'm frightened and begin to cry, and then he grows so soft and pats me and says he didn't mean to be so harsh. Ha, ha, ha!

ASHER

Old age is not youth.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

Old age is not youth.

ASHER

And youth is not old. (*He kisses her.*)

SIMAH

Catch me. (*She runs off—he after her.*)

(*Ezra, Nachomah and Faigen return.*)

EZRA

You know, at times one doesn't seem so very old. One feels that he could really begin life all over again.

NACHOMAH

We've lived our lives well. Nothing to regret. Were I only as sure of a place in the next world.

FAIGEN

If I could only get off the wheel-chair, I could still accomplish worlds! But as it is—I sometimes think I am done with it all.

NACHOMAH

As long as one lives, one lives.

EZRA

Of course, as long as one lives, one is *still* a man!

(*The old ones pass on. Asher and Simah return stealthily and hide behind a tree.*)

SIMAH

I'm afraid my little old man will cry when I tell him.

ASHER

What have they to do with us?

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

Really, what have they to do with us? (*She takes his head between her hands and kisses his eyes, then says tantalizingly*) But if you could climb well, you could climb over the fence at night and you might really find my window open.

ASHER (*retorting*)

Well, I *could* climb and your window was really shut.

SIMAH

Is that so! You steal about at night in strange gardens? It's well I did not hear you. I would have made a noise, and you would have been caught! We have a watchman in the garden at night. Yes, and a strong watchman, too.

ASHER

But your window—you keep closed.

SIMAH

No. Open.

ASHER

No. Closed.

SIMAH

To which window did you go?

ASHER

There—to the window that extends out—over there to the left.

SIMAH (*bursting out into a peal of laughter*)

That is *his* window. They always keep their window closed. They're afraid of catching cold.

ASHER

Where is your window, then?

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

Come, I'll show you. Sh!—Here they come.

(They disappear behind the trees. Ezra, Nachomah and Faigen return.)

EZRA

Ha, ha, ha! When I married her, she was just a young goat. She was still playing with sand in her cap and with "jacks". Ha, ha, ha!—wouldn't let me out of her sight—she, the goat.

NACHOMAH

Ah, if one could coax those years back again! When I had my first baby, I was a mere baby myself.

EZRA

She didn't know what was growing there under her heart. You could have talked it into her that she had kittens in there. Ha, ha, ha!

NACHOMAH

Go, go. How then?—too young, of course.

FAIGEN *(laughing reminiscently)*

Ah, those young, happy years!

EZRA

They married me off. Didn't even know what it was all about. Thought it was like playing in "buttons" with the boys. And she—she was just a goat. *(He pinches her cheek affectionately.)*

FAIGEN

Tu-tu-tu! If one could but recall those years. The world is wiser now.

(They pass on. Simah and Asher return.)

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

Now show me how you would act if you were to get angry with me.

ASHER

I will never be angry with you.

SIMAH

No. I don't like it that way. One should get angry, so that one can make up again.

ASHER

If I ever did get angry, I never would make up again.

SIMAH

What do you mean?

ASHER

I ask you—what do *you* mean?

SIMAH

Why wouldn't you make up with me again?

ASHER

Why should you get angry with me?

SIMAH

Just so. A wife must get angry once in a while. She must! Now do you understand? Why, if I were never to get angry with you—Oh, go. You don't know anything . . .

ASHER

How do *you* know about such things?

SIMAH (*fills him under the nose*)

Get mad!

ASHER (*kisses her*)

I love you.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

And I hate you!

(She runs away. Asher stands perplexed. The old ones return. Asher hides behind a tree.)

EZRA

Ha, ha, ha! Do you know the trick she once played me? Got angry with me for a whole week. I never knew why or when.

NACHOMAH

Why don't you tell him why?

FAIGEN

It only happened once?

EZRA

But for a whole week! She wouldn't eat. Ha, ha, ha! She wouldn't come to me in my room—slept in her clothes for a whole week!

(They all laugh happily.)

FAIGEN

And did you make up?

EZRA

Come home for the Sabbath—the house is dark. Pitch dark! I had touched her honor! She wanted a new dress, so I said—just so—“Why do you need a new dress? It's after the wedding.” Ha, ha, ha! Just spoke that way. “Why you have a baby already.” Ha, ha, ha! So she gets angry—but for a whole week!

NACHOMAH *(laughing happily)*

When one is young, one is foolish. I thought

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

he had fooled me. And the tears I shed that one week—wet the pillow through.

FAIGEN (*to Ezra*)

And you made up?

EZRA

Of course, had to. Took out ten gold rendlach—I think ten—what do you say, Nachomah?

NACHOMAH

Of course, ten.

EZRA

Took out ten gold rendlach and put them into her cap.

FAIGEN

And did that mend matters any?

EZRA

Of course, in an instant.

NACHOMAH

Ha, ha, ha! They're still before my eyes—those ten gold rendlach.

SIMAH (*enters*)

You must be tired. Let me, I'll push the chair.
(*She takes the chair.*)

EZRA

Careful, careful.

FAIGEN

That's just the way I like to be wheeled.

(She pushes the chair off briskly. Ezra and Nachomah follow. Asher steals out from behind the tree and looks dejectedly after the retreating figures. He goes after them and takes the chair from Simah. She runs back and hides in the arbor, chuckling delightedly to herself.)

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

ASHER (*comes back—coaxingly*)

Simah, don't be angry with me! I couldn't help it.

SIMAH

I thought better of you than that.

ASHER

It wasn't my fault. I didn't understand.

SIMAH

What was there to understand? When one is in love, one should even permit his finger to be bitten off.

ASHER

Well, I'm willing.

SIMAH

It's too late now.

ASHER

Don't be angry with me. (*She remains silent.*)
Well, Simah—I am begging! I feel like crying. I don't believe I'll be able to sleep tonight, if you don't say that you are not angry with me. It happens sometimes that one drops a word that he doesn't mean. It just falls out. Does one need to take it so to heart? Simah, won't you? I am speaking, Simah.

SIMAH (*impetuously throwing her arms about his neck*)

Foolish boy. Foolish boy. Now, do you know why a wife must get angry with her husband sometimes? So that he won't get cross—and—so they can make up again.

ASHER

Then you are not *really* angry?!

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH (*drawing her words*)

Are—you—angry?

ASHER

Are you?

SIMAH

I wasn't angry with you at all. Come, come, dear foolish boy, give me your hand. I'll lead you through the garden and show you a lovely spot.

(They go out and the old people return.)

EZRA

As soon as night comes the dew begins to fall. *(He feels the grass and shows his wet hand to Faigen.)* See, my hand is wet. It isn't good for us to walk about here now.

NACHOMAH

Let us go into the house.

FAIGEN

I'll go home. When it is damp, my bones ache.

EZRA

It is warmer in the house. My good wife will make a warm drink. The nights are getting longer.

(They wheel Faigen toward the house, Nachomah calling, as she goes.)

NACHOMAH

Simah, come into the house.

FAIGEN (*testily*)

Asher, are you lost!

(Simah and Asher come back. She has his hat on.)

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

SIMAH

As night comes on I want to run wild in the fields and roll in the dew up to my neck!

ASHER

Tonight, yes?

SIMAH

Ha, tonight there will be lots of dew. See, the grass is wet. (*She stoops and touches the grass.*) See, how wet my hands are. Let me dry them in your hair. Before we have to go into the house let us have another race, yes?

(She runs off, Asher, after her. He does not catch her. She comes back panting for breath and drops to the ground. Asher runs in and throws himself down beside her.)

ASHER

Oh, I am so tired.

SIMAH

Put your hand on my heart. Do you hear how it beats?

ASHER

Do you hear mine?

SIMAH

Look, my whole dress is wet with the dew.

ASHER

Tonight we'll run out barefoot!

SIMAH

Along the field, behind the orchard. (*Calling.*) Whoo-oo. Whoo-oo . . . Listen to the echo—whoo-oo—whoo-oo.

WHEN THE DEW FALLETH

ASHER

Where are they?

SIMAH

Who?

ASHER

The old ones.

SIMAH

In the house. See, there's a light in the window. They've lit the lamp. They're already in the house.

ASHER

Let us run again.

SIMAH

Who first?

ASHER

You first.

(Simah starts to run, Asher, after her. Her little cries can be heard in the distance—"whoo-oo . . . whoo-oo . . ." and a little later on—already indistinct—their happy laughter.)

CURTAIN

THE ETERNAL SONG

A Picture of Labor Life

By MARC ARNSTEIN

CHARACTERS

GERSON, a factory hand

PESEH, his wife

CHANNAH, their daughter

DAVID, a factory hand, living with them

The action takes place in a large city.

Time: Past, present, or future.

NOTE

Chupah: Marriage canopy.

THE ETERNAL SONG

SCENE

A small garret room. A door is set in a deep recess at the back; there is another door at right. It is night. Several small children are bedded on wooden benches, and several more are asleep in an old, rickety bed, painted yellow. Channah sits at the right, sewing a dress by the light of a small lamp. At the left, on a sleeping-bench lies Peseh, rocking the baby.

PESEH (*crooning sleepily*)

Sleep my little bird,
Close each little eye,
Sleep my precious babe.
The Angels above
Will watch my love,
So sleep, sleep safe.

(The child starts to whimper.) Well, what fresh plague ails you now? What are you whimpering about, eh? Did your ship go down, or what? To all—the good years with you! Just listen to him, will you? *(The baby screams.)* He'll split himself yelling! Will you stop it?! I'll make a heap of ashes of you in a minute! *(She rocks the cradle energetically and sings.)*

The Angels above
Will watch my love,
So sleep, sleep safe.

CHANNAH

Mamma, the baby is hungry. That's why he cries.

THE ETERNAL SONG

PESEH

Well, what can I do? Of course, he's hungry. I know that. He's had a bit of milk this morning, and since then not a thing in his mouth. And just think of it—his dad, the good-for-nothing, may his name be wiped out, has been loafing about the streets all day! May a sudden death overtake him, good God! How late is it?

CHANNAH

It is already eleven o'clock.

PESEH

Eleven already—and no sign of him!

(David enters. He is a strong, sturdy young man of twenty.)

DAVID *(cheerily)*

Good evening. What, Reb Gerson's wife is sad again? Good evening to you.

PESEH

A good year to you. You haven't seen my old man, have you?

DAVID

We were at work together all day long. He left at seven with the other hands, but six of us were told to come back for overtime.

PESEH

You don't know where he went after leaving the factory, do you?

DAVID

Do I know? Maybe the others packed him off to a saloon.

THE ETERNAL SONG

PESEH (*furious*)

To a saloon, you say! Oh, if only the Angel of Death would pack him off, Heavenly Father!

DAVID

Ay—Reb Gerson's wife! Let be. It's a sin to curse a husband. Better bless him, then maybe God will bless him, too. He has enough to bear as it is! And why, I should like to know. There are others, too, who deserve God's punishment, yet they have it good, and still go on sinning. And here—all the ill luck seems to fasten to such a decent man. Only today . . . (*He stops short.*)

PESEH (*alarmed*)

Merciful God! What happened today?

DAVID

Ett! God forbid, nothing serious—still . . .

PESEH (*fearfully anxious*)

Well, tell. Tell—what happened to him today?

DAVID

The thing happened this way. Chaim came along and tried to take your husband's work away. Naturally, he wouldn't let him. So, I suppose, they struggled for it until the box came open and the stuff fell out upon the floor. Then the boss came along and fined Gerson two rubles.

PESEH

Two rubles fine! What a misfortune—two rubles! Now we'll have to go hungry for a week at least!

THE ETERNAL SONG

DAVID

That is why your husband took it so to heart and allowed himself to be led away by his comrades.

PESEH

My poor Gerson! How worried he must be.

DAVID

Naturally.

CHANNAH

Maybe father can beg off this time. He could explain it to him—that it wasn't his fault, and he might let him off this time.

DAVID

What are you talking about, Channah? You don't know them. They are like steel. That money is as good as lost.

PESEH

Lost! (*She sighs heavily, lost in thought. She goes on rocking the cradle, mumbling to herself, Ah—what sort of people are they? Two rubles! Oi! What sort of beings . . . two . . . (She dozes off)*)

DAVID

You aren't in bed yet, Channah?

CHANNAH

I have a few houzs' work still on this dress before it is finished.

DAVID

Then you will surely be working far into the night. Won't tomorrow be time enough?

CHANNAH

No. The dress must be finished today, David. Can't you see what is going on here?

THE ETERNAL SONG

DAVID

I know. I know. I dread to think where it will end. More and more he gets the cheaper work to do. More and more his work gets poorer and poorer, until he has come to be a regular botch. It couldn't be worse.

CHANNAH

God won't forsake us.

DAVID

Of course He won't. If He should—then it would indeed be bad!

CHANNAH

Perhaps I will be able to get something to do to help out. I'll scrape together a few rubles and buy a sewing-machine. Then I could get the work direct from the customers instead of the dressmaker. In that way I could earn more.

DAVID

That is easy to say. You and Reb Gerson together hardly earn enough to buy bread for the family. What does your father make?—Altogether five rubles a week.

CHANNAH

Maybe a little later he'll earn more.

DAVID

More and more he earns less and less, and as time goes on he works slower. Where another makes two thousand pieces a day, he barely makes twelve hundred. I, myself, make two thousand three hundred.

CHANNAH

Two thousand three hundred!

THE ETERNAL SONG

DAVID

Yes, yes. And if I wanted to rush I could make more. When I'll have a wife, I'll beat all the other workers.

CHANNAH (*startled*)

David—you are going to be married—then?

DAVID

No—that is—as for wanting to, yes—but . . .

CHANNAH

But, what?

DAVID

Do I know? They want to marry me off. Yesterday the matchmaker took me over to see a girl. A thousand gulden she has and a notion-stall on the market place.

CHANNAH (*catching her breath*)

And you went—to see?

DAVID

Yes. I stood on the street and looked. The matchmaker wanted me to go in and buy a packet of cigarettes as an excuse. He pushed me along by force. But I took it into my head I didn't want to because it happened to be a Monday. I can't understand how one can come to a perfectly strange girl with a matchmaker, and say to her—just off-hand—"Be my wife"—And done! How? When? What? Suppose someone said such a thing to you, Channah, what would you say, ha, what?

CHANNAH

I am a Jewish daughter. I would have to do as my father and mother said, only . . . I would be very unhappy!

THE ETERNAL SONG

DAVID

Of course, what then? Be a bride to a man you don't even know, and all at once belong to him entirely—go under the *Chupah* with him—him—and then sit with him alone in a separate room, eat out of one plate—and there you are—husband and wife! It's awful. (*He grows very thoughtful and slowly rises to leave.*) Good night.

CHANNAH (*with emotion*)

A good night to you.

(*David leaves. Channah grows very sad; she lays her head on her sewing and weeps—at first quietly, then sobs aloud.*)

PESEH (*who is awakened by the weeping*)

Hah—what is the matter, Channah? Channah . . .

CHANNAH (*controls herself and goes on with her sewing*)

What is it, mamma?

PESEH (*rising—startled*)

I thought I heard a child cry—Chaimke or Malke—seems to me. Did you hear?

CHANNAH

No, mamma, I don't think any one cried.

PESEH (*going over to the children to see if any of them is still whimpering*)

They're hungry, my poor, little worms, so they cry in their sleep. God have pity on them! . . . (*Looking at Channah.*) Why, Channah, you have tears in your eyes! What is it, my child, are you hungry, too?

THE ETERNAL SONG

CHANNAH

No, mamma. My eyes just ache. I don't sleep enough, I guess, so the tears just run over. It is two nights since I have had any sleep.

PESEH (*shaking her head dubiously*)

No, no, you have been crying, Channah . . .

CHANNAH

No, no!

PESEH

What are you telling me! A mother knows the difference . . . Yes, yes, it isn't your eyes, but your heart that aches, my poor child. A mother knows. Yours is a bitter life, my child.

(*Channah cries quietly.*)

PESEH

Don't cry, Channah, don't cry. Better sing a little something, so you won't fall asleep over the sewing, because the dress must be finished today. My Channah, my loving child, my one comfort! If not for you, I would surely have to drown myself! This world goes so hard with me . . . (*She wipes her eyes with her apron.*)
Death is better than such a life!

CHANNAH (*stops crying and endeavors to comfort her mother*)

Don't you cry, mamma. God won't forsake us! Things will be better bye and bye.

PESEH

May it be so, may it be so! I can't go on this way much longer!

(*She goes to the cradle to soothe the baby, rocking it and singing: "Ai—ai—ai—Sleep my little*

THE ETERNAL SONG

one, Close each little eye." She dozes off presently. David re-enters very quietly, unnoticed by Channah.)

DAVID (*timidly*)

Channah!

CHANNAH (*glad at his return*)

Why—David!

DAVID

Channah, I heard how you cried—there behind the door, I heard. You are not angry with me for listening, are you, Channah?

CHANNAH (*softly*)

No.

DAVID (*as if to himself*)

Channah's heart aches! I know, too, what it is to grieve. In the factory it sometimes happens that I injure my hand badly and it bleeds, or that I get a heavy blow somewhere else. Once a machine crushed my foot. But all of this cannot be compared with the grief of the heart. What pains can be like that?!

CHANNAH (*sympathetically*)

You suffer, too, David? What is it you want for? You earn plenty. You have enough to eat, then, what can trouble you?

DAVID

I am an orphan. My father I do not remember, and my mother died when I was barely four years old. I was eight when I was told that I must go out and earn my own bread. No one troubled about my life, still less about my heart. (*Both remain silent.*)

THE ETERNAL SONG

CHANNAH (*after a pause, falteringly*)

When you marry—you will . . .

DAVID (*interrupting vehemently*)

No! No! No! But what—what were you going to say? Married, did you say? (*Childingly.*) Ah, Channah, what are you talking about?

CHANNAH

You said yourself you had gone to look at a bride . . .

DAVID

The matchmaker stuffs my head full with his talk. Says he, "One should have his own little corner—someone to cook a spoonful of something warm for him." Maybe he is right. Only, I can't bring myself to do it in just that way. I can't, Channah . . .

CHANNAH (*eagerly*)

David . . . (*She is about to say something but suddenly becomes embarrassed—dumb.*)

DAVID

Tell me, Channah. I would really like to know what *you* think of all this. You are so clever. Oh, how I love to sit here and chat with you every night after work! I could sit this way all night, forgetting that five in the morning I must get up to go to the factory. I could forget God's whole world this way! (*After a pause.*) And when you tell me those pretty stories about the lovely princes and the bewitched princesses, then my heart grows so—so—so— (*He gropes for the word to express his emotion.*) Yes, Channah. And after that I

THE ETERNAL SONG

can't fall asleep any more. I don't want to sleep. I just keep thinking of the beautiful world—of things that are beyond the factory, far, far away from town—"Behind the seventh forest, beyond the seventh hill" . . . Channah, tell it to me again. (*He waits, enraptured.*)

CHANNAH

Behind the seventh forest, beyond the seventh hill, lived a fisherman—he was young and beautiful—and a wondrously lovely shepherdess, who herded a flock of young sheep, and was as poor as a little sheep herself. The fisherman fell in love with her and she loved him, and they both loved with a burning love. In the eyes of the shepherdess *he* was a prince, and the fisherman prized *her* as if she were a princess. But as he was so poor and had nothing at all, he grieved to think he could never marry her. But one day the fisherman went to the river, early of a morning, after a night spent in sleeplessness, after a night of worry and thinking and shedding bitter tears to the good God, who sees His image in all His living creatures. And as he cast his net into the river he prayed: "Grant, dear God, a good catch today. Give, dear God, a mess of golden fishes, with eyes of diamonds, scales of purest gold, and the little bones—the little bones should be at least of pearl!" . . .

DAVID (*with his mouth open in wonder and his eyes glowing*)

Yes, yes, of pearl . . .

CHANNAH

And he cast the net into the water. He then

THE ETERNAL SONG

threw himself upon the earth to wait, and for three long hours he wet the ground with his burning tears. When he finally arose and with a great effort pulled the heavy net out of the water, the net was full of—stones!

DAVID (*disappointed*)

Stones—just stones?!

CHANNAH

Yes. And again he prayed: "Grant, dear God, a good catch this time. Give, dear God, a mess of golden fishes with eyes of diamonds, scales of purest gold, and the little bones—and the little bones should be at least of pearl." And he cast the net into the river for the second time, and again he threw himself down upon the earth, and for three times three hours did he wet the ground through with his bitter tears. And when he rose, he could hardly pull the net out of the water, for there lay in it—a log, a rotten log! . . . The river and the birds had already sung their evening prayers, the sun had parted from the earth, but the fisherman still stood beside the sleeping river, by the outspread net. When he pulled in the net, for the third time, he felt it had grown as light as a spinweb, marvelously light, and by the light of the moon he saw that the whole net was of silver and the wet weeds that lay therein were of gold" . . .

DAVID (*joyously*)

Of gold! . . .

CHANNAH

Upon the golden weeds there lay a little angel

THE ETERNAL SONG

with white, pearly wings, who spoke to the fisherman thus: "At the bottom of the river I have lain for thousands of years—thousands of years, since the creation of the world! Not for my own sins did God banish me thither, but for the sin of Adam and Eve, who took not me, but the serpent, to abide with them in the Garden of Eden. And with the eating of the Apple they sullied me. That is why God banished me, for I was created to be the Angel of Love. And that is why men now love with the love of the serpent, with the love that disfigures, that poisons their hearts and their human emotions. The first, the holy love was cast aside, and nothing now remains of it among humanity but lust! Dear fisher, do not cast me back into the muddy waters! But carry me to your beloved shepherdess and I will reward you with such good fortune, the like of which none have ever tasted." "Will you give me a crystal palace for my beloved, for my dear shepherdess?" asked the fisherman. "Will you give me silver and gold so that I may make her happy, give her a life without hunger and need?" "My love does not require a palace within which to be happy. Neither does she know hunger nor plenty. Hunger and the lust for silver and gold—that is God's punishment, because the first lovers sullied love." The fisherman now understood what the Angel meant. He took him in his arms and pressed him to his heart forever! Forever! And the silver net and the golden weeds he cast back into the river.

THE ETERNAL SONG

DAVID (*charmed and fervent*)

I love you, Channah, just like that fisherman!

CHANNAH (*overjoyed*)

You—David!?

DAVID

Yes. And you, tell me, Channah, and you?

CHANNAH

I have loved you for a long time.

DAVID

And you will marry me?

CHANNAH

Yes, if father and mother are willing.

DAVID

And you will love me always?

CHANNAH (*timidly but with fervor*)

Always!

DAVID (*strongly moved*)

Oh, Channah, Channah, I will work for you day and night so that you may never need for anything—so that you may not have to work. And if I only have a little time for rest, I will sit down beside you—just like this—close, close . . . (*He moves nearer.*) Hand in hand, heart to heart, our souls in one! And we will be so happy!

CHANNAH

Oh, so happy!

DAVID

And when sleep will make my eyes heavy, I will lay my head here, in your lap and you will tell me again of far-away Bagdad, of the crystal palaces, of beautiful golden flowers—and

THE ETERNAL SONG

more—more—without end—always—always. . .
Are you happy, Channah?

CHANNAH

Oh, so happy!

DAVID

Do you love me much, Channah?

CHANNAH (*with a catch in her breath*)

Oh, so much!

DAVID

And will you never, never stop loving me?

CHANNAH

Never! Never while I live! Can one stop loving? What are you talking about, David?

DAVID

My golden Channah!

(He kisses her hands. She yields them freely. Gerson is heard outside, singing tipsily. As he enters, they start apart. She begins to sew quickly and David rises to meet Gerson. Gerson lurches in. He sees nobody. He removes his coat and flings it into a corner, then his vest; he now stands dressed in his blue working shirt, singing the while.)

GERSON

Hark! Ye Sons of Noah, hark!
Whiskey's King—it's power mark.
Quaff deep, quaff deep of Might!
You're joyous but you're tight!

DAVID (*approaching him timidly*)

Reb Gerson!

THE ETERNAL SONG

GERSON (*shamefacedly trying to hide the fact that he is a bit tipsy*)

Why, David, not asleep yet? It is already midnight. The factory whistle will soon call to work.

DAVID

I would like to say something to you, Reb Gerson.

GERSON (*putting him off*)

Tomorrow, tomorrow at work—when we're together at work. There's plenty of time.

CHANNAH (*pulling David's sleeve*)

Let it be. Tomorrow, David, tomorrow.

DAVID

Why tomorrow? Better now—now. At the factory the noise is deafening, and the thing I want to tell you is pressing.

GERSON (*surprised*)

Aha! What can it be?

DAVID (*stammering*)

I—Reb Gerson . . . You know me, I think—still—still—still, it seems to me . . . Here—

GERSON (*laughing*)

What ails you, David? Have you lost your tongue, or are you crazy, which? What are you talking about, what?

DAVID (*blurting it out in one breath*)

Listen, Reb Gerson, I love your Channah very much! Don't be angry with me, will you! It isn't my fault. You know that I'm a respectable fellow. It will love and protect her very much—very much

THE ETERNAL SONG

GERSON (*making an effort to understand*)

You—you—love my Channah, yes? (*He rubs his hand across his forehead.*) You love her? And she? (*To Channah*) And you, Channah?

CHANNAH (*with bowed head*)

I—I—

DAVID (*hastily*)

She, too, yes, yes—only she's ashamed.

GERSON

So? Then everything's all right! What more do you want?

DAVID

Are you willing, Reb Gerson?

GERSON

Of course, why not? (*David and Gerson fall to kissing each other.*) Good! Good! Does mamma know already, Channah?

CHANNAH

No.

GERSON

She don't know! Oh, won't she be happy! (*Calling loudly.*) Peseh! Peseh! Hear!

PESEH (*aroused out of a sound slumber*)

May you become dumb! Loafer, you! You've come home, huh? May all the bad dreams that I dreamed tonight and last night come down on your head, on your hands, on your feet, and on your whole body and soul! Did you ever hear! Just listen to his bellowing! The drunk! Forgets all about wife, children—let them die of hunger—so long as he can sit carousing with his companions, who drag him

THE ETERNAL SONG

off, the black year only knows where. Oh, if only they would bury us both together and done, so that once and for all there would be an end to my misfortunes with that drunk . . .
(*She begins to cry.*)

GERSON

A drunk do you say, Peseh? No! That's a lie? A Jew, I tell you, is not a drunk! True, it's the fault of my comrades—the men I work with. Seinwell is to blame. He wanted to cheer me up—wanted me to forget the two-ruble fine, so he ordered whiskey. After that Chaim tried to cheer me and ordered beer. Well, then again beer. Then Moses, with whiskey . . . Nothing more, I assure you! (*Whimsically*) But a Jewish head can't stand much, so my head began to turn, just as it does at the Rejoicing of the Law, excuse the comparison! (*He bursts out in song.*)
He, who helps the poor,
Will help us, too . . .

PESEH

Shut up! You'll wake up the children!

GERSON (*louder still*)

Never mind, Peseh, just for that we'll have a son-in-law, a sober one! Neither beer nor whiskey does our David take into his mouth!

PESEH (*who has not noticed David's presence, scolds as she rocks the cradle energetically*)

What are you talking about! Shut your mouth! David's in his room. He'll hear you and it will be a shame and a disgrace! You drunk!

THE ETERNAL SONG

GERSON

Drunk you are yourself, Peseh! Don't you see him sitting here? With his bride he sits—with our Channah!

PESEH (*who still has not looked about her*)

Gerson! Mercy on us, Gerson!

GERSON (*pushing David toward Peseh and prompting*)

Well, tell her what you told me. "Always—even from childhood . . . Here . . ." Go on! Shoot it out and have done with it—and an end! Don't be bashful! She is, after all, a relative of yours. Tell her you love Channah as you love life! Look at him! He's forgotten how to count two and two! I suppose that's why there isn't his equal at the shop.

PESEH

David! Is it all true?

DAVID

True, Reb Gerson's wife. I love your Channah. Your husband is not against it, and you surely will not stand in our way?

GERSON

What nonsense you talk! Why should she object? Ha, ha, ha!

(He pulls out of his pocket a quarter of a loaf of bread, which he lays upon the table. Channah spreads out a towel on the edge of the table, hands him salt, a knife and fork and a herring on a plate. Gerson washes his hands and begins to eat his supper, constantly teasing Channah, while Peseh talks quietly with David.)

THE ETERNAL SONG

PESEH

Object! No, God forbid! Only I thought—
(*Guardedly*) You want to marry her, hah?

DAVID

Right after the Sabbath if possible!

PESEH (*striking her hands together in joy*)

God, my God! Channah, Channah dear! (*She cries over her and kisses her.*) May it be in a fortunate moment, my child—in a lucky hour! You are both good children! There are not many such! (*She grows suddenly very sad.*) You know, of course, David, she has no dowry. Not even an outfit! Of course, with God's help we may manage to scrape together a little—of course, we'll have to get it—but, of course, it will be very, very little . . .

DAVID

That don't worry me. I don't need her dowry, God forbid—as long as I have strength and the health to work. And, perhaps, we may even be able to help you along sometimes, with God's help. I earn eight rubles a week! Eight rubles! And if God gives I can earn more!

GERSON

Yes, yes. Eight rubles! A golden worker! A golden worker is he! The work actually flies in his hands!

PESEH (*with pride*)

He has a golden heart, too. Nu—thank God, that *He* has not forsaken us at least! My mother, in her grave, must have interceded for me! God give you luck, with health and blessings, my children. (*She wipes away a tear.*)

THE ETERNAL SONG

Saturday night, if God is willing, we will write the betrothal contract, in luck, and after the holidays, if God grants us life, we will make the wedding.

GERSON (*singing out*)

After the holidays! Yes. Right after the holidays in a lucky hour!

PESEH

And now, children, go to sleep so that you can get up early for work.

DAVID

Please let me sit up a little longer with Channah. I won't be able to sleep anyway tonight.

GERSON (*to Peseh*)

Let him, Peseh, let him. He won't sleep tonight anyway! Ha, ha, ha!

PESEH (*generously*)

Sit with her as long as your heart desires. Talk it over. You are as good as bride and groom now, anyway. Good night, children.

DAVID

Good night.

PESEH (*reproachfully*)

Channah, dear, won't you say "good night" to your mother now?

CHANNAH (*kissing her mother*)

Good night, mamma.

PESEH (*shaking a reproving finger at her daughter*)

Your little head is already turned, eh, my child! Ha, ha, ha! (*Growing reminiscent.*) Ah, I know how it is. Never mind. I remember well!

THE ETERNAL SONG

(She moves to her bed and sits upon it deep in thought. David and Channah have become engrossed in each other. Gerson approaches Peseh dreamily. He sits down beside her on the bed.)

GERSON

You remember it, too, Peseh? It all stands before my eyes—as if it had just happened!

PESEH *(thoughtfully)*

It will be nineteen years, ha?

GERSON *(correcting her)*

Twenty at Chanukah.

PESEH

Remember what a biting frost there was?

GERSON

Poor thing, how you froze in that damp cellar where you lived with your father. Your poor, frozen little fingers refused to hold the needle any longer. Do you remember how I tried to warm your fingers in my hand? *(He takes her hand between his own and strokes it.)*

PESEH *(sighing heavily)*

I remember.

GERSON

Do you remember how I chafed your little fingers with my great, worked-out hands, so that your little bones crackled?

PESEH *(dreamily)*

I remember.

GERSON

And when that didn't help, I tried to breathe on them with my warm breath, just like this.

THE ETERNAL SONG

(He carries her hand to his mouth, and breathes upon it.) And then I kissed your hands, then your face, and then your eyes . . . Do you remember? Do you remember?

PESEH *(dreamily)*

I remember! I remember!

(David sits beside Channah, talking to her very softly. Her eyes are dropped on her work, but now and then she raises them and glances at him affectionately. She starts to thread a needle, but her hands tremble and she is unsuccessful. He takes her hand and warms it in his, then kisses it. She tries to stop him, but in so doing the needle falls to the floor. He finds it and threads it for her. She commences to sew again. The old people are engrossed in their own talk and do not notice the young ones.)

GERSON

In a week we were betrothed bride and groom, and four months later we were husband and wife. From the beginning your father lived with us. My earnings with yours were sufficient for all of us, and for a long, long time we were happy! For how long, Peseh dear?

PESEH

For a whole year. After I had the first baby, it went badly with us right from the start. I couldn't earn anything and our expenses became larger. Then I got sick, you remember?

GERSON *(sadly)*

Woe is me! Oh, do I remember! We thought then you would die! Your sickness ate up every-

THE ETERNAL SONG

thing! We were left without even a pillow for our heads. And right after that another baby came! And with it, greater poverty! A year later, a third child. Yes, Peseh?

PESEH

Yes.

GERSON

And so on, one after another. Every year a baby and poverty . . . poverty and a baby! Oh, my! Oh, my!

PESEH

Then father died. He never lived to see any joy! He died in the hospital!

GERSON (*as if to himself*)

Soon *they* will be singing the same song!

PESEH (*startled*)

Who?

GERSON (*pointing to David and Channah*)

They—our children!

PESEH (*fear dawning in her eyes*)

Gerson! What are you saying! (*She looks first at him—then at the children—helpless. She makes a desperate effort to still her fears.*) But before they feel poverty and want they will have known true happiness—love! Just as you and I . . . Do you remember, Gerson?

GERSON (*faltering sadly*)

Yes, yes—for one year!

PESEH (*sighing deeply*)

For one year!

(*The baby begins to cry.*)

THE ETERNAL SONG

CHANNAH (*sewing while she speaks to David, who is gazing at her with glowing eyes*)

Beyond the seventh forest, behind the seventh hill, in a stone cave, in a glass casket, lay a Princess in slumber bewitched!

PESEH (*soothing the baby, she sings sadly*)

Sleep my little bird,
Close each little eye,
Sleep my precious babe.

.
The Angels above,
Will watch my love,
So sleep, sleep safe.

.
(*Rocking and singing grow fainter.*)

The Angels above,
Will watch my love . . .

The curtain falls slowly.

THREE MODERN JAPANESE PLAYS

Translated by

Yozan T. Iwasaki and Glenn Hughes

THESE short plays, while different one from the other, are the direct result of Western influences and are representative of the new drama movement in Japan, which is, not supplanting, but very decidedly challenging the *No*, the *Kabuki*, and the *Doll-play*.

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