

*translated from the Yiddish
by Jacob Sloan*

A Day in Regensburg

short stories by

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The ponderous synagogue doors, bearing the forged and beaten emblem of the Shield of David, stood wide open. The cool shadows within extended to the plastered entranceway, where cooing doves rocked on their small red feet.

On the pulpit stood old Yekel, who had passed along the office of sexton to his son. The old man's feeble face was wrinkled and sunken with age. Tangled and matted, his white beard grew to his very eyebrows, creating the grotesque impression that his face was garlanded by a wreath of garlic.

Yekel regarded the red carpet spread between the pulpit and the Holy Ark, the embellished candelabra and glass lamps, the scrubbed, white pews, the freshened walls decorated with paintings of deer, musical instruments, and verses from the Book of Psalms. The old sexton was pleased: the Ark curtains and the mantles covering the Torah Scrolls within the Ark had been thoroughly aired, and not a speck of dust was visible anywhere in the synagogue. He sucked in his lips, sniffed as though on the verge of sneezing, and said to his son in a high voice:

"Praised be the Name of the Blessed Lord,

when will we have such a marriage feast here again? Such an event happens once in a lifetime. To think that our most eminent man, our own mettlesome Samuel Belasser, should be arranging a marriage with his peer, wealthy Elijah Margolis of Worms! It would do you no harm to listen to me, Berl!”

“I *am* listening, Father.” His son moved his gnome-like, bell-shaped gray hat, and continued cutting the burned tips of the tallow candles.

“How runs the old saying, Berl? ‘It’s one thing to talk and another thing to act.’” The old man pulled up his knee trousers above the long woolen stockings. “Remember, these two communities, Regensburg and Worms, long the most prominent in all of Ashkenaz,* have not been on speaking terms the last few years. But now, Berl, we will have peace, for Regensburg is betrothing Worms. We will be having a merry time, I tell you; there’ll be drumming and humming aplenty. They say the Prague jesters are coming to the wedding, and our own Leib of Regensburg has been readying for the event since Passover. He has songs to sing and stories to tell. The one thing which surprises me is that the beggars haven’t turned up yet. They’re not fond of synagogue-going, but those folk are always first to arrive at these affairs.”

Berl, scrawny and stunted in growth, suddenly straightened up and grew lively, his sparse blond beard thrusting out with the sense of its power, like the tail feathers of a cock about to crow.

* Germany

“Is it true, Father, that Samuel Belasser has already squandered ten thousand reichsthaler on the wedding?”

“He could squander twenty thousand.” His father thrust two fingers in the shape of a pincer at his son, missing Berl’s jutting beard by a hair.

Eyes sparkling, a smile on both their lips, father and son stood thus with heads raised for a full moment.

Old Yekel gazed at the colored panes above the Holy Ark. The burning rays of the sun, filtering through the panes, merged with the happy twittering of sparrows to echo in the corners of the empty synagogue. As a boy, Yekel had believed that the chants of the prayer leader ascended to heaven through these floral panes set deep above the Holy Ark. And who could gainsay it?

With measured steps the old man left the synagogue.

In the vestibule, dark and cool as a cellar, stood a round, dented, copper wash basin. Around the taps and pipes, where Jews by the hundreds had dipped their fingers, the copper was worn away.

Out of habit, the old sexton wiped his hands on the damp copper, and his lips began to murmur. For Yekel, the laver was no broken vessel. Here, at the worn taps, had stood generations of families, households. All of Regensburg surrounding the synagogue courtyard came to his mind at that moment—buildings named “The Crown,” “The White Deer,” “The Sun”; buildings over which to this day hung signs depicting a Black Bear, a Green Door, a Red Door, a Spring Well; all of Jew Street, the

mortuary of the chapel, the graveyard on the hill—all of these came to life for a moment in the consciousness of the sexton; they were all waiting for him outside, flooded in sunlight. Certainly, the seventy years of Yekel's life had not been in vain. The years lived on in the synagogue, at the laver in the vestibule, in the Golden Lion, where Yekel dwelt, in every object in his home, even in the sand under his feet.

The sexton went out into the courtyard. His weak ears could barely discern the singsong chanting that issued from the yeshiva next door to the synagogue. He sat himself down on a bench next to his six-year-old grandson, a barefoot lad who was basking in the sun.

"How came you here, Daniel?" The sexton loosened the high collar of the short, pleated coat that fell to his waist. "Should you not be in the schoolroom?"

"The Master has set us free for the day," replied the lad, sidling over to his grandfather. "No lessons today, there's a wedding in town."

"Indeed there is—you are right, my lad," said the old man, embracing the youngster.

The day turned blue and gold.

The sun stood overhead, its flames engulfing the clouds. The synagogue, with its arched roof and walls of rough-hewn stone crumbling with age, seemed veined with silver and gold. All things appeared to be reaching up toward the sky to enjoy the heat; every secret nook and cranny basked in

the benevolent eye of the sun. The church spires of Saint Amram shone brilliantly above the synagogue cupola.

Embracing his grandson, the old Regensburg sexton pointed out the church, and went on to inform him that the city of Cologne had from days of antiquity been renowned for its yeshiva. Many, many hundreds of years ago, Rabbi Amram, one of the saints of Ashkenaz, and a great cabalist to boot, had been the head of the Cologne yeshiva. It was he, Rabbi Amram, who by invoking combinations and permutations of the Ineffable Name, had called up Messiah, the son of Joseph. The Messiah had been ready to destroy the entire universe. But, Rabbi Amram, in his compassion for all living things, man, and beast, and bird—why, his compassion was such that he never in all his life tasted food until his birds had first been fed. . . .

As Yekel spoke, his grandson stretched out on the bench. He sent his arms and legs sprawling, content with the warm sun, with the old man's hands cooling his cheeks, curling his earlocks, stroking his forehead.

The words falling from Yekel's sunken mouth rose in a singsong, and circled before the lad's eyes. He had heard this tale more than once. But now, as always, with the very first words, Daniel felt his body grow lighter and lighter, soaring from the bench to pursue the words, the melancholy cadence that fluttered overhead, to mingle with the twitter of the sparrows and the cooing of the doves.

The lad anticipated his grandfather, urging him on with his shrill voice:

"And when Rabbi Amram's last hour was about to expire . . ."

"Yes, dear child," and Yekel chose his words carefully, as though pronouncing them aloud from a manuscript. "When Rabbi Amram's last hour was about to expire, he sent for his disciples. And he said to them: 'My dear disciples, when I am dead, purify my body according to the ancient usage of our people, and lay me in a coffin, and lay the coffin in a small vessel, and set the small vessel on the river Rhine. Then let the vessel sail where it lists. It will bear me to the place where my father and mother lie buried.' And just as soon as the disciples laid the coffin in the vessel on the Rhine, the vessel moved, against the wind, sailing until it came to Mayence. There the whole city—Jew and Gentile—came running to see the wonder. Now, when the Gentiles tried to lay hold of the vessel, it evaded them. But when the Jews approached the shores of the Rhine, the vessel made straight for them. From which it was clear that it belonged to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles. Then the Gentiles were filled with a cruel rage, and they beat the Jews in their wrath—and the bishop ordered a chapel to be built over the coffin. That, my child, is the place of desecration known to this day as 'the impurity of Amram.'"

"And the head of the yeshiva?" inquired his grandson, opening wide a pair of clear blue eyes, as though ignorant of the story's end. "Does the head

of the yeshiva still lie in that place of desecration?"

"No, Daniel. That night, his disciples took Rabbi Amram's body out of the coffin and brought it to our graveyard for a proper burial."

"And you, Grandfather, do you know where the grave is?" The lad slipped a bare foot into one of the slippers that had fallen off Yekel's feet.

"No one knows, dear child." For Yekel was the only one who knew that secret nowadays. Tomorrow he would take Berl with him to the cemetery and show him where Rabbi Amram lay buried. He, Yekel, had been told the secret, receiving it as an inheritance from his father; his father had heard it from his, and his from his, and thus it had been transmitted from generation to generation. He would make Berl take an oath to keep the burial place a lifelong secret. And when Berl grew old? Why, God be praised, there was the grandson, Daniel.

Torn and tattered, yeshiva boys shot out of the academy. They could not resist running after the long hours of confinement.

"I haven't had a bite to eat today!"

"I've been on a fast since yesterday!"

"I'm dead sleepy. All today and yesterday I've been copying the Master's latest scholarly commentary!"

"That makes you an author overnight!"

"Not I, Moshel. One author is enough—you preening yourself with the borrowed feathers of other people's ideas in your collection of notes."

"But first I have to eat!" Moshel held his belly.

"What a cavity!"

"And what a paunch!"

"There's none as big as Moshel's in all Regensburg!"

"He is fixing to gorge and swill!"

"Lemeline the caterer says," Moshel pretended innocence, "there are all kinds of good things to be served at Belasser's—roasted meat and broiled meat, stuffing and Italian macaroni, fish in sweet and sour sauces, and herring in wine."

"Then what are we hanging around here for?"

"Let's be off!"

"Here is Yekel, Yekel the sexton."

"Sitting here as though nothing was up!"

"Well, Yekel," one of the boys sat down next to the old man. "Getting ready for a true feast?"

"Too early!" The old man's scraggly beard shook. As the boys crowded around him, he held out his two palms, like scales, in mock consternation. "What's all the to-do? Where's the hurry?"

"We have to greet the bride and groom properly!"

"Ride out on horseback to greet them!"

"The whole company!"

"Is that so?" The sexton plunged a finger into a huge rip in a boy's coat. "With these royal garments you can go on foot—you don't need horses."

"We're changing our clothing, Grandpa!"

"We're going in disguise!"

"With swords!"

"In armor!"

"True knights!"

"And I, Yekel, am Prince Bova," a lad said,

striking a pose. He was as long and lean as a post marking the Sabbath boundary.

Next to the lanky boy suddenly sprang up a short fellow, round as a drum. Running his fingers down his friend's long back, as though plucking the strings of a harp, he burst into song:

"Ne'er, ne'er in all my life

Have I beheld so valiant a knight.

Why look ye at this strutting cock

That needs must battle round the clock.

I wean, 'tis Dietrich of Berne, with his mighty
sword,

Or Hildebrandt, or some other renowned
lord!"

Laughing fit to burst at the comical antics of the yeshiva boys, Daniel flung himself into a series of cartwheels; next he spun like a top all over the courtyard, the spectacular display of his youthful prowess ending with a long "Whee—ee-ee."

"And where is the beauteous damsel Drusiana?" someone asked.

"You mean darling Sarah, the headmaster's daughter?" winked the fat boy.

"Heaven forfend that I should taste the dainty bridal flesh!"

"Heaven forfend that I should choke on her!"

"She looks like a flat cake!"

"Pooh, this is nasty talk!" The sexton shooed the yeshiva boys away, like a flock of birds.

A boy with a hunched back and no neck stepped forward.

"And I, Yekel, am Joab, the son of Zeruiah."

"And I, gentleman, am David, King of Israel," bowed a boy with flaming hair and red earlocks.

Drum-belly fell to singing again:

*"David stripped the giant of
His harness, sword, and spear.
Quoth he: I'll sell it all in town—
'Twill bring me in a thousand crown—
All this useless gear!"*

"And you, roly-poly, are always playing the clown!" exclaimed the sexton to the crowd, pointing disparagingly. "He can recite, that one, he has the real gift of speech."

"And there's something else he can do, too, Yekel!"

Moshel of Cracow, a fifty-year-old superannuated yeshiva "boy," who had been to every yeshiva in Ashkenaz and France, thrust himself forward with the self-important air of one about to read the prayers before the Holy Ark:

"And I, gentlemen, am Master Hildebrandt himself!"

"A lie, a lie! The Gentile Hildebrandt observed the ban of Rabbi Gershom! He never espoused more than one wife at a time!"

"And I?" Moshel goggled like a simpleton who could not count past two.

"You?" cried several lads at once. "You're always available! At every yeshiva, you're in the espousal business!"

"Moshel," one of the boys pointed to two lice strolling underneath Moshel's collar, "you are a caitiff knight-errant!"

"Nothing but nasty talk!" The sexton pulled a small book out of his pocket. He held it close to his eyes. "What doth Rabbi Yuda the Pious teach us? Yes, here it is. 'If thou shouldst observe a louse on thy fellow's garment, accuse him not before a stranger's eyes: shame not thy fellow, for that is sinful.'"

"These are a plague one can't escape, dear Yekel," smiled middle-aged Moshel. "I conjure them with oaths, I anathematize them, I banish them with all kinds of permutations and combinations of the Divine Name—but nought avails! You lie down to sleep and they carry you out of your bed. The very straw heaves to their tramp, tramp, tramp!"

"We've delivered funeral orations over their graves but nought avails!"

"May the marriage be in a lucky hour!" someone cried, clapping his hands.

"For the bride's family, and for the groom's!"

"Look, here come the honest-to-goodness in-laws!"

"That's not the in-laws—'tis a cloudburst! God be with us!"

From all sides the synagogue was invaded by a legion of beggars—limping, lame, blind, humps on their backs and humps on their chests. They came with their wives, their children, their packs. With a rat-tat-tat of peg legs and walking sticks and flaying hooks, they spread through the synagogue courtyard like an excrescence, young and old thundering all at once:

"We're starved to death!"

"We've had nothing but bad luck!"

"Where is the espousal house?"

"There's a good meal due us!"

"With meat!"

"Where's that sexton?"

"There he sits, outside!"

At sight of the beggars, the yeshiva students forgot the fine dinner waiting for them, forgot the wives and children waiting for them somewhere in Ashkenaz, forgot the comfortable rabbinical posts waiting in their futures.

Full of mortal danger and uncertainty, the roads that led abroad stretched alluringly before their mind's eye. They could not sit still; there were learned "innovations" to carry into every corner of their known world, together with the profane "romances" in their packs. However little or great their learning, driven by a longing for freedom they would wander from Poland to Ashkenaz, from Ashkenaz to Italy, thence to France, where they could at long last loosen the restrictions that generations had fastened on their gaunt bodies.

II

The synagogue courtyard turned black with the companies of beggars that descended on the earth like crows. The air was loud with voices—long-drawn-out and choppy—whose sound fell on the ear like the screeching of storks flying home in the spring.

Three beggar-chiefs pushed forward and looked about for a fourth. First came a man who had lost an eye; the second had a beer-barrel paunch; the third, a twisted mouth. They yelled for red-headed Sender.

"Hey, Red!"

"Where have you disappeared to?"

Sender's red beard, glowing in the sun, flamed in a circle around his open mouth and lapped his tanned cheeks. As he strode vigorously forward in his wrinkled boots, his fathom-wide shoulders, capable of lifting up a wagon-load, evoked respect.

"Here I am!"

The four set out for the watchroom, where sexton Berl was sitting with his father, waiting to take down the beggars' names and places of origin.

"Sholom aleichem, Master Yekel, peace be with you, Master Berl!" the four beggar-chiefs cried in unison; the salutation rang like an oath.

"Aleichem sholom, with you be peace," Yekel intoned the traditional response, his white beard nodding. Had not his son been present, he would have given each of the newcomers his hand in greeting.

For Yekel, who never in his life had set foot out of Regensburg, never made light of beggars. To the contrary: he was powerfully attracted to these venturesome fellows who moved to and fro across God's earth. They were familiar with all manner of men; it was said that their travels took them to the very edge of the sacred river Sambatyon, behind

which live the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. They always had much to recount.

But Berl did not reply to the beggar's "Sholom Aleichem." Chasing little Daniel away, he fixed his eyes suspiciously on the hustlers' nimble fingers and asked angrily:

"You are the chiefs?"

All four shook their beards in the affirmative.

"How many of you are there?"

"Over a hundred."

"Tell me exactly, it has to be put down."

"One hundred and five—damn the plague! Is that enough for you?"

"More than enough, more than enough." Berl's beard jutted defiantly. "But don't you play games with me! How many of your kind are there?"

"We haven't had a chance to catch our breath." The one-eyed fellow stepped forward. "Nought to eat, nought to drink, and you start in on us, Master Berl. Why are you so wroth?"

"That's the truth, why all the wrath, Master Berl? You're not a so-and-so like the Worms servitor," Crooked Mouth blurted out. He grabbed his fellow-chief with the big belly. "Well, Hershele, how go things? Tell me the world isn't all topsy-turvy! True, we're beggars, but when that Worms servitor started up with us—what happened, Hershele? Tell him!"

Hershele didn't wait for a second invitation. Crossing his short arms on his immense belly, he shut his eyes and remained stock still for a moment,

as if carved of stone. Then he fell to singing in a voice that issued from deep in his belly:

*"Hearken to me, O all ye dear folk
That languish in this world so wide
When we at Worms-town did arrive—
Oh, what a world this is, dear folk!*

*"Invited guests, we marched into Worms
But they closed the doors upon us:
Then up strode the servitor of Worms
And brandished his stick agin' us,*

*"One by one to the watchroom he hails us.
'How long doth thou stay? And what art thou
called?'*

*And with such questioning assails us
That wormy servitor of Worms!"*

"That's enough, enough!" Yekel put his hands over his ears.

"Let him finish, Father."

"Yes, please let him finish, Grandpa," pleaded little Daniel.

"No, no," the old man clutched Hershel's coat. "How can a Jew indulge in such filth? First *you* talk against the servitor, then the servitor talks against you, and between the both of you the Name of God is profaned."

Hershel danced about the old sexton.

"And is it nought, you say, that the Worms councilors, all of them, the parness included, do abuse poor folk—that is nought, you say?"

"Listen to me, fellow-Jews," pleaded the old man, "go along quietly to the dance house."

"We're going, we're going! But tell us, if you don't mind, where are we to eat?"

"In the bakery in the dance house cellar, where tables have been set for you."

"And what news of the jesters?" Red Beard inquired, as a kind of afterthought.

"Nought's been heard or seen of them as yet." Berl went to the corner of the watchroom for some sand to dry what he had written.

Red Sender followed, and whispered in his ear: "If 'tis needful, we can do anything."

"What things can you do?" Berl spread the sand over the ink with two fingers.

"Anything and everything—we can play the flute, walk on stilts, sing and recite, swallow snakes, juggle beer and wine flasks, play pranks—as good and better than professional jesters! Just say the word, and we'll pull our bag of tricks out of our sleeves!"

"It will have to be fifty-fifty," Berl straightened up, and his cleft, swallow-tail beard jutted at the hustlers.

"Our word for it!"

"And do you have something special for the lasses?"

"We've a new song that will quicken their spirits: 'Where They Sleep All Four.'" Red Beard laid his hands on his bare, hairy chest. "Hershele! Where the devil is he? Hershele! Let's have that song, the one where the lass flings the rogue out the window!"

As though he had been waiting for the word of command, Hershel threw his head back, and took a deep breath that swelled his beer-barrel belly to immense proportions. Assuming a piteous expression, he began pleading with some invisible person standing in the corner of the watchroom:

*"I came before my dear love's door—
The door was bolted tight.
O dear love, dear love, let me in,
Lest I freeze, tonight.*

*"Yes, I shall let thee in
Lest thou freeze tonight."*

Hershele sang on, in fine voice, stanza after stanza. He was at the very climax of the tale, where the rogue refuses to remain true to his dear love and the lass binds him hand and foot and flings him out the window.

Suddenly, the words stuck in Hershele's gullet. There at the door stood the head of the yeshiva, a tall man wearing a black garment that buttoned at the neck, like a woman's cloak.

"What's this—ballads! Jester's ribaldry and abomination in the synagogue courtyard? So a rich man's having a wedding—well, what of that? Does that mean everything's permissible? Off with you, off to the dance house! Sing your harlot's songs again, and out of the city you march! And you, Yekel—a decent old Jew like you, to sit and listen to such ribaldry!"

Yekel and his son rose guiltily before the head of the yeshiva. Little Daniel hid under the table.

The four beggars shuffled to the door. But Red Beard's eyes were burning, his nostrils flaring. One leap would carry him to the throat of his ancient enemy, the head of the yeshiva.

"People need luck in all things, even in the poor God sends them," said the old sexton to the head of the yeshiva. "What says Rabbi Yuda the Pious? 'We must ever beg the good Lord to send us decent poor folk.'"

"But you have forgotten, Yekel," said the head of the yeshiva, somewhat mollified. "Rabbi Yuda the Pious also said: 'Take no joy in Gentile dancing and prancing, fencing and tourneying, and you shall be found worthy to rejoice in the feast of the Leviathan!'"

"Golden words, Master," the old man nodded.

"But we are no Gentiles," the broad-shouldered beggar-chief mumbled nasally, imitating the outlandish speech of the Spanish-born head of the yeshiva, whose accent was was that of neither Jew nor Gentile.

"You're worse than Gentiles!" shouted Berl. "As for you, Red Cutpurse—take to your heels!"

"But wasn't it you," the beggar-chief thrust out his hairy chest, "weren't you the one so anxious to go partners with this 'worse-than-a-Gentile?'"

"I?" Berl prepared to hurl himself at Red Beard, who could nonchalantly have rolled the young sexton up into a ball and shoved him into the sack that hung over his right shoulder.

Before Yekel and the head of the yeshiva could move to separate the two mismatched com-

batants, the synagogue courtyard shook to the loud music of the flute, the sound of dancing and the jangling of bells. A personage with a peg leg hobbled into the watchroom.

"Mazel Tov! Good luck! The Prague jesters have arrived!"

Red Beard lightly brushed the young sexton out of his way. His thievish eyes gleamed at his fellows, who stood still, taken aback.

"What are you standing about for, whoremongers?"

The beggars rushed through the door like a wind; the next moment the door reopened. First Hershel's potbelly appeared, then his open maw with what seemed to be a hundred teeth:

*"We beg by night, we beg by day
May the devil take you all away!"*

"Wretch!"

"Rapsallion!"

"I'll have him arrested straight away!" cried the head of the yeshiva, whose shoulders were bent from study, like a well-pole under buckets of water. Nervously, his long white fingers twisted his collar button, as he repeated rapidly. "I'll have him arrested at once, the cutpurse!"

Delighted at the furor, little Daniel crept out from under the table and did a handstand. Unobserved he stuck out a small red tongue at the head of the yeshiva. Then he stared at his father. Berl was struggling to break free from Yekel's hands, shouting:

"Let me go, Father, let me at him! I'll slay him, the rascal, I'll trample him to the dirt! The beggar! Let me go, Father, let me go!" But with all his protestations, he made no attempt to move from the spot.

III

The covered wagon with its harnessed horses stood in the middle of the synagogue courtyard. The cloth covers were tied back and the flute and jew's harp incessantly proclaimed the tidings of the arrival of the jesters from Prague.

A crowd quickly gathered, spilling out of the houses and the narrow courtyards. Here and there, small windows were opened. Young and old, men and women, leaned out over the sills, resting on their stomachs and elbows, to stare with fascination at the synagogue courtyard; down below, the concourse was so dense the wagon was almost invisible.

The sound of the flute and the drum blared out in the hot afternoon air. One by one, the beggars, who had welcomed the jesters with curses and threats, grew silent. They forgot about the meat meal that awaited them in the dance house. Throwing off their packs, they sprawled out near the synagogue walls and steps, and around the cool stone well, scaring off a flock of sparrows bathing in the sand.

Benignly, the sun shone down upon the beggars, warming their chill bones, baking the vermin from off their hairy bodies, tangled beards, and louse-ridden heads.

In the midst of the jesters strolled a sunburned girl, her dark eyes wild and restless. Small, firm breasts pushed forth like hillocks under the bodice of her short, tight-fitting dress, which flared out at the knees with pleats, ruffles, and pockets. Her slim, nimble feet, cased in slippers with bells, tapped even when she was still.

"There's a firebrand for you!" the yeshiva boy with red earlocks pointed to the wagon.

"I'd love to be lying with her tonight," Moshele Cracower smiled in his beard. "A delicious tidbit, fit for a king."

"You would only nibble, only tickle, like a kingleet."

"Which is what women prefer." Moshele elbowed his way toward the wagon. "And you, Saint Zalman, you are staring at the lass with your mouth open as though a roast dove had fallen into it!"

"Off with you and your filthy mouth," Zalman reprimanded the superannuated student. "Tell me: who is that elongated palm branch dancing attendance on her?"

"I gather, from his dress and gait, he's a stilt-walker."

"Moshel, I've an idea." Zalman felt his breast pocket, to make sure his opus *Amnon and Tamar* was still there. "Perhaps here's a chance for business. What do you say to our having a little talk with the jesters about my song-play—and getting to see that pretty little dancer at the same time?"

"Now you are thinking!" Moshel was delighted. "It's the blessed Lord who sent you a 'Tamar' with bells on for the occasion!"

The stilt-walker, a tall, thin man, hopped down from the wagon. He passed through the crowd pleading:

"Masters! Make room for us, masters!"

The crowd opened up to form a semi-circle around the wagon. The stilt-walker good-humoredly lifted his long stork legs. His jester's face was distended in an expression of rascally trickery. His thin, drawn lips whistled replies to the crowd's questions:

*"What are we here to do?
To sing and laugh for you.
Laugh and sing for you.
That's why we have come—
To make things hum!"*

"Zalman," Moshel whispered to his comrade, "if all goes well, I have a foot in the jesters' door."

"Tell me about it!"

"You see that fellow over there?"

"The one holding a goat mask in his hand?"

"He and I were school chums, studied together under Rabbi Leibush of Prague. You have to go far to find another such prankster. 'Pon my word, it is him—Fishel, the tosspot!"

"Should I call to him?"

"Wait a moment. You've got that pretty thing on your mind. If it really is Fishel, I'd not like to become the butt of his sharp tongue. In Prague everyone shivered when he opened his mouth, even the head of the yeshiva. And when Fishel set about mocking the women at the Hanukkah and Purim

plays, it was sheer impudence and scandal! Their ears fairly burned with shame and humiliation—and yet, despite everything, the women loved him for it, even slept with him, that brazen creature."

"The Talmud says in the tractate *Sotah*," Zalman cried happily, "Every woman desireth a measure of frivolity."

Making a sudden leap, all at once the stilt-walker sprang up onto the floor of the open wagon. He stretched until he was a head taller. A sharp curving nose stood out on his longish face like the beak of a predatory bird. With mincing steps he walked twice to and fro over the wagon floor. Then, as the synagogue courtyard grew quiet, he turned to face the jesters. His long, narrow hands hung limp at his sides, as he both sang and whistled:

*"Tell me comrades, masters,
What kind of folk are ye?"*

Some dozen mouths opened wide and the synagogue courtyard rang with the reply. The dancer's voice piped high above the men's voices, as the jesters' reply resounded above the heads of the audience.

*"Ah yes, an' yes, an' yes,
We sing and we play,
We dance and sport the livelong day—
Brave folk is what we are.
Brave folk are we!"*

The stilt-walker moved to a corner of the wagon; his voice and long beard inquired:

*"Don't you hail from Prague,
From the scholar's side?"*

The jesters rocked around the dancer. She clapped her hands, tapped her feet; her eyes, deep and dark, flickered with stormy flames:

*"Ah yes, an' yes, an' yes,
We hail from Prague, we do,
From the scholar's side.
We are jesters out of Prague,
Brave folk is what we are.
Brave folk are we.*

*"Ah yes, an' yes, an' yes,
We are jesters out of Prague—
Tralalalalala."*

The crowd, which had joined in the response, fell back, making room for the dancer, who ran among them with outstretched tambourine. She laughed with her white teeth, with her eyes, with her oval face, smooth as dark olives. From every side coins flew into the tambourine.

"What's the dancer's name?"

"Rosa is my name, throw your coins into the tambourine, throw them in my hand; it is all the same, I will understand." The dancer's eyes sparkled. Even the most staid householders smiled in their beards, their round-brimmed hats shaking with delight.

"Rosalein, sing us the song: 'In Austria a Castle Stands.'"

"Too tired, too tired, masters." Rosa flung

back her head; her heavy black braids trailed on her graceful shoulders. "After the marriage, I'll sing to harps and flutes, fiddles and drums."

The smell of freshly baked ginger and of sugared almond cookies assailed them. It was followed by the smells of stewed goose and beet soup and thimble-dumplings. Faint with hunger, the jesters languished at the delicious odors.

Chayim the baker arrived, covered all over with flour, as though he too had just been taken out of the oven. After him, two apprentices hurried up with tins of fresh baked meats for Master Samuel Belasser's wedding.

The baker caught sight of the dancer and stood stock still. The apprentices peered at their master thievishly.

"What good things have you here?" The dancer was at the baker's side, her delicate, small hand laid on his. "Won't you treat a hungry dancing girl?"

"The best and the most beautiful!" The baker circled the dancer, taking her around the waist with delight. "Come, my pretty actor-girl, shall we leave the bride and groom for a while and have ourselves a good time?"

The apprentices squatted; they crouched with lowered heads. The dancer stuffed handfuls of cookies and dumplings into the pockets and pleats of her skirt. An almond cookie crumbled under her sharp teeth; her little tongue dexterously licked crumbs from her lips.

"Chayim, do the Jew dance!" someone clapped.

"The Jew dance, Chayim!"

"What, here in the synagogue courtyard?" chided an elderly Jewess. But no one paid her any heed.

Rosa raised her tambourine. Her firm breasts fluttered under her tight dress like palpitating birds. She stepped back, one foot keeping time. The bells on her bodice and the bells on her skirt tinkled, and the tinkling set the crowd's feet going. One of her braids, loosened by the movement of her head, swung in the air before her. Rosa's every movement, every turn, sang with her:

*"A fair young wife am I
And have an ancient hubby.
Snow-white is my body, O,
But no one ever sees it."*

Beside himself, the baker slapped his thighs, and a cloud of flour flew into his eyes. He ran after the dancer, who artfully escaped his outstretched arms. Bursting with laughter, the crowd derided the baker:

"Chayim, what do you plan on baking? White Sabbath twists?"

"Almond cookies?"

"You have to know how to dance, Chayim!"

The baker lads, with the tins of bake-meats still on their heads, squatting on their broad haunches, moved their shoulders in rhythm. An elderly beggar woman sprang forward from the edge of the crowd.

She raised her ragged dress with both hands; naked, unspeakably filthy legs burlesqued Rosa's dance.

When finally the dancer permitted the baker to catch her, he was all out of breath, and pale as a ghost. Every one joined in the song with Rosa, tapping their feet and clapping:

*"A fair young wife am I
And have an ancient hubby..."*

IV

The dancer stopped singing. She drew two fingers across her loose braid like a bow across a violin, curtsied briefly to the crowd, and jangled her bells. She remained standing on one leg, and every movement of her lithe body was like the crack of a whip. Her even teeth flashed in her small mouth. Her glance swept from face to face through the crowd with such intensity that they held their sides in laughter. Cries rose from their open mouths:

"Rosalein!"

"Hurrah Rosalein! Hurrah!"

The older and more respectable householders, like shamefaced boys, hid their laughter in their beards and in the bellies, big and small, that protruded from their broad jackets and short, tight coats. Walking with slow and measured steps, they went each his separate way, one into a house, another into a side street. Vastly amused, they left the jesters behind, as though seeking shelter from a sun

shower whose droplets glisten under the sun's rays.

In the open wagon someone strummed a jew's harp. The drum played accompaniment. The rhythm crackled like chestnuts in a copper frying pan.

"Where is that Fishel of yours?" Zalman demanded of Moshel.

"He has disappeared." Moshel's head turned this way and that, as his eyes sought Fishel in the covered wagon.

The goat mask still in his hand, Fishel had crept into the back of the wagon. He threw the mask among the packed barrels and sacks, and stood in a corner, depressed. The pretense of jollity melted from his face; pain and hurt lay in his restless eyes and tight-knit mouth. He shuddered and gritted his teeth; the shouting and hurraing of the crowd was intolerable to him.

That's all they cared for—song and laughter, laughter and song. It was he, Fishel who composed the elaborate harangues, the madcap pranks, the songs, the verse plays—but the others who performed them, were skimming off the cream of the glory. That he had lived to see this day! It used to be that when a parness or rich man had a wedding, he would call on Fishel first. When the local Gentile gentry were invited, the princes and counts, Fishel could always be counted on to loosen his facile tongue. He would offer them a "romance," a pretty song or two, some sayings in the priestly Latin tongue. The "lords and masters" would perk up their ears and, lifting beakers of wine, would sing

along with Fishel, "setting the brass platters on the wall a-rattle."

"Vivat, long life to the player!"

"Hurrah! Vivat!"

But nowadays? Nowadays, it was "short on talk and long on action." The vulgar had no appreciation of the finer things. It was always "Rosalein! Rosalein! Vivat Rosalein!"

Fishel parted the cloth hanging over the back of the wagon and lightly slipped down into the courtyard. Pulling his pointed cap down over his forehead after the rapscaillon fashion, he whistled softly. He had a yen to catch a glimpse of what was happening at Belasser's. That was a home where you could still find an appreciative ear for a keen morsel of peppery dialectic, even if it were slightly off-color. The company of jesters had simply become intolerable to him.

Fishel was short of stature. His pale face was framed by a small black beard, heavy around the chin, but sparse, almost bare, on the cheeks. Fishel's nervous hands seemed always to be engaged in a conversation with one another. His eyes were hungry, piercing; they darted about as he sought a path through the horde of beggars. But he could not help casting an occasional glance at the crowd, which was by now past the stage of laughter, and had gone wild with merrymaking.

Fishel was completely out of sorts. Now nothing pleased him—neither the blinding, hot afternoon, nor the crowd's high spirits—no, not even the prospect of the wedding.

Not knowing what to do with himself, he circled about the synagogue courtyard alone. What was it that gnawed at his heart: hunger or melancholy? Whichever it was, life tasted bitter.

"Where shall I go from here?" He stopped and stood with open palms, as though to balance the choices before him. "Exchange the jester's cap for an ordinary hat and attend the Regensburg yeshiva?"

Unconsciously, at the thought of the yeshiva, his lips recited the words he had composed about the Prague penitent. A smile formed on his small, carelessly trimmed beard:

*"Lo amut, I shall not die, I wish to live and love,
To give all honor to the Blessed Name above."*

A packman appeared from the direction of Jew Street—a full-fleshed personage, big as a "long summer Friday." His beard, of which you could count every hair, was yellow; his short, thick earlocks were blond; his cheeks, red. His blue, kindly eyes seemed incongruous with the rest of his body, which resembled that of a Hollander rather than a Jew.

First off, the packman set down a knobby stick, whose broad top was shaped like a seat, so that he could sit on it. He removed the arm bands from his shoulders, and slipped the pack off his back; even before he had spread out his books, a crowd began to collect.

The packman was a stranger, and yet a figure perfectly at home in Regensburg. Alien, he traveled

from country to country, had been all over the world, had seen everything, heard everything. Though you sat with him listening for a year and a day, you could still not exhaust his treasury of stories. Packmen arrived in Ashkenaz in the summertime together with the migratory birds returning home. Dispersing the winter sadness, they recounted how fellow-Jews lived in Stamboul, in Palestine, and even in the lands behind the Dark Mountains.

Fishel regarded the full-fleshed personage and was delighted.

The bookseller wiped the huge mustachios concealing his mouth, and sang out:

"Brand new! Brand new! Come running to my stall, come running one and all! A fine prayer book, together with an up-to-date translation! Not only for pious wives and maidens,—but for young men too, and for husbands—don't be dismayed! Here's something for every Jew, be he man or wife, so long as he can read aright. Masters and mistresses, I deem ignoramus those who hear the words of the Holy Tongue, but understand not a single one!"

"Very well sermonized," a Jew prodded his neighbor. "There's a tongue no healer need shorten!"

"I envy no one an encounter with him in the dark!"

"What a face for a Jew to be wearing!"

"They're not content printing 'romances' in the spoken tongue." The Regensburg slaughterer leafed through a prayer book with the honed index

fingernail he used to test the sharpness of his knives. "Now they're also printing prayers in the common language. Who needs it?"

"Where did you say this was printed?" a customer showed the bookseller an open prayer book. "There's no sign of where the press is."

"Where the press is?" The bookseller's blue eyes fell to laughing. "You understand, nuncle, the press is where I press it, and that is where I am pressed. As for me, I am known to fame; Joseph Tannhauser's son is my name."

"Why are you wasting your time gabbing with scholars?" an elderly Jewess clutched the bookseller's sleeve. "People like that won't buy your merchandise anyway! But I appreciate you! You have earned your share in the hereafter! Every matron who can read and buys your prayer book can become an honest-to-goodness cantor; she need not merely be an 'out-loud reader' for the illiterates. We'll no longer need tap on the pane of the woman's section to ask the menfolk, 'Where are you up to in the service? Where d'ye hold?' And what would be the price of this prayer book of yours?"

The bookseller paid almost no heed to the Jewess. He had his eye on the crowd fingering his merchandise, for he knew full well that even a holy prayer book was not beyond pilferage. With one eye on the Jewess, he sang out his packman's chant:

"Here's a prayer book for all year round, 'tis well translated, true and sound. So come and buy, ladies and misses, don't you pass this prayer book by. Books like these don't grow on trees, they're

bound to instruct and bound to please. 'Tis not too much for any purse, one crown buys it, to read and rehearse!"

"Too dear! Too dear!"

"What is it—a precious stone? A jewel?"

"There is a glut of this merchandise—God preserve us!"

"Can be gotten at half the price!"

"Did you hear that? A whole crown!"

"One crown too dear?" The bookseller laughed so heartily his beard shook. "This prayer book would be a find at ten. Compare it with any other—'tis as different as an old jade is from a fresh lass!"

"Well done! Well said!" Fishel pointed to the prayer book. "Here's a lass one needn't bother to sin with!"

"That's sacrilege!" The packman regarded Fishel's garb.

"He's one of the jesters," a voice from the crowd called out.

"If that's the case," the bookseller wiped his hand on his beard, "I have special merchandise for you—Italian ware. But you have to be a connoisseur to appreciate it." He pulled a pamphlet of sewn pages, not yet covered, out of a side pocket.

"Look at this script! 'Twill brighten your eyes! There's no broken or heavy type can compare with this script! You know who it was that wrote it? Gimpel the scribe, no lesser person—a master whom the world acclaims."

"I know him."

"And do you know Gimpel's brother-in-law, Elijah Bochur, who turned the Italian Bova Book into Yiddish?"

"Of course, Elijah is in Venice now." Fishel grew more cordial. "His father, Asher of Ipsheim, taught me Hebrew grammar, and his mother, Hindlin—there's no prankster her match for a hundred furlongs around Nuremberg!"

"Since you know the whole family, perhaps this is ware more to your taste!" The packman pulled out still another pamphlet and handed it to Fishel.

Fishel intoned:

"A marvelous tale of the doings in King Arthur's court, of tourneys, dalliance and sport, and of the famous knight Sir Gawain, he that fought with might and main, in rhyme both elegant and plain.

"I have two manuscript copies of this," Fishel returned the *Tales of King Arthur's Court*.

Moshel Cracower arrived, with Zalman at his heels. Taking Fishel by the shoulder, Moshel regarded him roguishly, his eyes flashing, yet uncertain of his former comrade's reception: "Fishel, don't you remember your old friend anymore?"

"Why, it's Moshel!" Fishel spun the fifty-year-old yeshiva student about like a top. The crowd roared with delight. "Still a virgin, my lad? Come here, Moshel, give me your hand, give me your kiss! Damn, are you bashful?" Fishel pointed to a girl standing nearby with a bevy of friends. "I'll kiss her instead!"

The girls put their hands over their mouths,

huddled together like lambs and, choking on their giggles, fled across the street.

"Still having fun, eh Fishel?" Moshel was vastly pleased to be recognized. In his mind he was going over the names of all the yeshivas which they had attended.

"Yes, I'm still a connoisseur when it comes to a fine wench or an honest quaff." Fishel looked around him, to make sure he had not lost his audience. "Is there a tavern in this town where a man can quench a thirst?"

"Michel's Golden Deer is the place for you." Moshel pulled Zalman forward; the latter was on tenterhooks. "Let me introduce a friend: this is Zalman—he writes playlets full of pepper and ginger."

"Comrade is the proper word." Fishel shook hands with the lad, and was delighted to see him blush like a girl.

"What tidings do I have to report?" Moshel grasped his beard, as though contemplating a difficult passage in the Talmud. "Our own Leib of Regensburg has composed a new work, called *Tales of King David's Court*."

"Leib—you mean that wretch, that sot?" Fishel immediately flew into rage. "Even if he were the incarnation of Samuel the Singer, or Cosi, or Caplan, he could never write anything half as good as *Dietrich of Berne* or *Apprentice Hildebrandt*, or that wondrous lovely and melancholy tale, *King Sigmund and His Beloved Magdelene*. Leib's writ-

ings please no one but pious old women and tale-mongers!"

Moshel lowered his voice and spoke very low and fast.

"Good or bad, the head of the yeshiva told me that only pious tales will be sung and recited at Belasser's wedding." This was something for Fishel's ears only—the Regensburg citizens were not meant to hear. "The head of the yeshiva said explicitly that there was to be no *Dietrich of Berne* or *Pretty Glick* at the espousals—none of that 'filth and abomination.'"

"That's a lie! Falsehood and defamation!" Fishel clenched his fists. "Who is the head of your yeshiva?"

"The author of *Shield of David*."

"That Sephardi? Why, he speaks Yiddish like a Gentile! I know him well, I know him from way back, from the old days in Prague! Yes, and I know his famous lineage too—he is a descendent of the renowned Nachmanides." Fishel shook his head in anger. "I swear, these Sephardim despise everything about us Ashkenazim, including our language! Inflated peacocks! As for me, I maintain that any one of our saintly rabbis is a finer and a better Jew than all their learned scholars put together!"

"That's what I say," interjected Zalman. "They think everything has to give way to their 'philosophy.' I don't know which the academy head respects more—the Doctrine of Aristotle, or the Torah of Moses. For my part, the Ashkenazi Rashi is more important than all those fancy scholars."

"He's all right, that lad of yours! Bless him, he's got a head on his shoulders." Fishel chucked Zalman under the chin. "One would judge from your accent that you are a 'Hittite'; from Vienna perhaps, or from Neustadt?"

"Why a Hittite?" Zalman smiled.

"You can't hide from me. I can recognize a Neustadter even when he keeps his mouth closed. Come on, now, let's hear you say 'Opmekken.'"*

"Opmekhken."

All three of them laughed goodnaturedly.

Moshel was encouraged by Fishel's familiarity with Zalman. "My comrade Zalman has a bit of merchandise for your inspection. He has written a song-play fit for a king."

"And he says nary a word, the rascal!" Fishel cried, tickling Moshel between the ribs. "What's it called?"

"*Amnon and Tamar*," Zalman replied breathlessly.

"Do you have it with you?"

"Yes."

"Then let's away to the tavern. Away! But wait," Fishel turned back to the wagon and both whistled and shouted: "Rosa! Ro-sa!"

"Coming, coming!" the dancer came running up.

"First of all, the introductions," Fishel cried in high spirits. "Two comrades—Rosa. Rosa—two

* The Yiddish word *Opmekken*, "to erase," could conceivably have derived from the German *ab* (from) and the Hebrew *mahok* (to rub off).

comrades. Now, Rosa, we must use our heads. This lad has written a play. It's called *Amnon and Tamar*. Let's all repair to the tavern for liquid refreshments—he'll read it to us there. Come along, my Tamar."

"I take the author," Rosa joined Zalman.

"You like him?"

"I do!" The dancer slipped her arm into Zalman's.

"Now Rosa, none of your brazen ways," Fishel whispered into Rosa's ear. "Leave the lad alone, or they'll expel him from Regensburg."

"Just to make you burst with envy, I'm going with him!" laughed Rosa, embracing Zalman in the middle of the street.

Zalman slipped out of Rosa's arms. Looking around, he encountered large black eyes fixed on him, and his face blanched, his earlocks flaming all the more.

Near the Ghetto portico a woman in black was leaning out of a window. The visible upper half of her body seemed to be growing out of the triangular sign fixed to the wall.

Fishel read the legend aloud:

MADAME LOPEZ

DOCTOR OF THE FREE PROFESSION

PHYSICIAN

IN RESIDENCE AT REGENSBURG

He bowed: "I, madame physician, am a jester, and this pretty personage (pointing to Rosa) is an actress."

"And the lad with the red earlocks?" The lady physician shook the amber earrings that fell to her shoulders.

"The lad?" Fishel smiled. "He is looking for magic specifics, roots, and mushrooms."

"What, would he win the actor-girl through means of magic?"

"Yes, my precious madame physician."

"He will never win her that way," Rosa winked.

"Right and true, actor-girl, right and true," the lady physician burst into laughter. "And where do you lodge tonight?"

"Under the open sky," Fishel lifted his eyes to heaven.

"I have lodgings for two or three."

"Thank you, we thank you from the depths of our hearts," Fishel bowed profoundly. "And now let us leave the good madame physician and away to the tavern."

V

At the Golden Deer, hard by the Jew Street gate, the air throbbed with the strong smell of beer, whisky and wine. Three slippery steps led down to the tavern in the cellar. In the damp, dark vestibule, Fishel took Moshel Cracower aside. Slipping his arm around his old schoolmate's thick waist, he said: "O my sworn brother-in-drink, my nose tells me that this is a place where a man can get a goodly

pitcher of ale. Tell me, comrade, do you happen to have an extra reichsthaler on your person? As for me, God preserve me, I am a pretty pauper!"

"And I, brother mine, am a still prettier one!" Moshel spread his elbows like bat wings in the darkness. His pockets were empty.

"No coins, comrades? Trust me—I'll see to it." The dancer ran down the steps to the door, which she opened impetuously—only to recoil, as though she had banged into a drum.

In the open door stood a tall, thin personage, his lips red and fleshy, his beard and eyes black as a thief's.

"What's the to-do? Where are you running?" Angrily the man stepped back from the door and measured the newcomers with a glance so hard that they all retreated.

The stranger's dark eyes frowned at Moshel. But as they settled on the dancer, his anger evaporated. Instinctively, he felt his bulging pockets. Then, pointing a finger at Moshel Cracower, he asked:

"Who is she? The actor-girl from Prague?"

"You guessed right, Sachse," Moshel said flatteringly; he liked to be of service to wealthy men.

"And who is he?" Sachse pointed to Fishel but kept his eyes on the dancer. "He has the appearance of a wandering minstrel or jester."

"You are right again." Moshel took Fishel aside and whispered into his ear. "Sachse traffics in precious stones. Look at his pockets—they are stuffed with jewelry. Rich as Korah, and a great fancier of the lasses."

"Well then, since you have guessed that I am a wandering minstrel," Fishel thrust his head into the rich man's face, with all the bravado of the jester, "promise me, by mouth and by hand, to listen to a peppery dialectic composed by a poor wandering minstrel, who needs a drink and hasn't a penny to his name."

"No preliminaries, jester, no preliminaries." The rich Regensburger saw a jest at his expense in the offering. "Where is your bit of pilpulistic* by-play?"

Fishel tugged at his pointed cap, extended his hands in opposite directions and asked:

"Which kind of pilpul do you prefer—the Regensburg kind, or the Nuremberg?"

"The Regensburg—by all means!"

"There is an explicit text in the Talmud," began Fishel. "To wit: Purim is a holiday. At which the sages of Regensburg rise, take their stand, and pose their profound question, to wit: Seeing as Purim is a holiday, and Rabbi Judah the pious has ruled that the recital of the Kiddush prayer sanctifying the day is obligatory on every holiday, and seeing as the Kiddush can only be recited over wine—well then, where does Pauper Dalfon secure the wine for Kiddush? Ah, but suppose a jester from Prague appears and makes answer that Pauper Dalfon must borrow the money for the wine, for the Kiddush, for the holy day of Purim, why then, the same iron-clad question remains: What idiot would lend money to a pauper? Along comes Rabbi Drop,

* *Pilpul* means "pepper," and is also applied to sharp-witted talmudic argumentation.

may his reward be sorrow and sighing, and makes answer, to wit: Purim is ever a holiday. As to what manner of idiot would lend money for wine? The answer is Dalfon's brother Vaisasa!"*

"What are we drinking, beer?" Rosa interrupted Fishel, hugging him so hard he lost the breath to finish his pilpul.

"The drinks are on me today," the Regensburg Maecenas shouted to the innkeeper. "Michel, two pitchers of sour wine and one of sweet—immediately!"

"And something to eat, too!" Rosa laughed into Sachse's face. Overwhelmed with delight, he offered the dancer a bracelet.

But Zalman was downcast. The intervention of the complete stranger, who had attached himself to the dancer, had driven Zalman and his song-play out of everyone's thoughts. No one was paying the lad any heed.

The square, wood-beamed taproom was almost empty. In front of the large clay oven in the middle of the room several wagoners were stretched out, mouths open, beards disheveled. Flies ran over their coarse faces and buzzed round their legs and big noses, unintimidated by the rumbling of the wagoners' bellies and the snores issuing from their throats.

Nearby, two fattened geese padded about in a

* In Jewish folklore, Haman's son Dalfon was a synonym for pauper—the Hebrew word *dal* means "poor"—and Haman's tenth son, Vaisasa, was considered the personification of stupidity.

large, wooden cage, raising a cloud of dust whenever they spread and fluttered their wings. Oat husks, feathers, and down floated through the air.

In one corner of the taproom several personages were sitting over a pitcher of beer and a bowl of food. In a second corner a postillion, leaning on the handle of his sword, which was taller than himself, was watching two comrades throw dice.

Mine host, Michel the innkeeper, held a wooden bung between his teeth as he tapped wine from a big-bellied barrel into a container, whence it ran with a bubbling sound into a tin pitcher. With a movement of his eyes and the bung between his teeth, Michel gestured to his wife in dumb show, to serve the pitchers. She was sitting with uncovered breasts on an unmade tester-bed, suckling a baby. The infant attacked his mother's teat with his small mouth, delightedly kneading the breast with his fist. The inn-keeper's wife pulled herself away from the child, who began to cry bitterly.

Buxom and barefooted, the innkeeper's wife grasped the foaming pitchers and set out for the table where Fishel and his comrades were sitting. In her haste, she had neglected to button her dress, and the brown nipples of her breasts protruded from the white softness of her body like baked raisins.

"And what do you think of this ethrog tip?" Moshel nudged Fishel, laughing up his sleeve.

"Bite it off, you silly ass!" Fishel took a swig from the pitcher. He laid his hand on that of the lady of the house. "How does it happen, dear hostess," he

inquired innocently, "that meat and dairy dishes are served together in a Jewish taproom?"

"Heaven forbid, sir!" she cried, opening a pair of large, innocent eyes.

"And what is this, pray?" Fishel pointed to the bare nipples oozing milk. "Isn't this meat with milk?"

Moshel bleated like a sheep. The Regensburg Maecenas doubled over; too far gone for laughter, his face was drenched with tears. Beside himself, he rumbled in a deep baritone:

"Oh, that's good! Oh, is that good!"

The dancer took Fishel first by one ear and then by the other, and rushed to the defense of her sex.

"Little Fishel, with his waggery! You vulgarian! You. . . . Just see how the poor creature is blushing!"

And indeed the mistress of the tavern was aflame with embarrassment. Though she found it difficult to button up, she was not at a loss for a reply:

"No one asked you to be a glutton!"

"Nor a pig, either!" the dancer chimed in.

"You needn't have flesh with milk, like a Gentile," the innkeeper's wife added, warming to the business of her reply.

"But what if a person has an overpowering urge for food, mistress mine?"

"Then there's roast hen, and there's goose." The mistress' dark eyes grew playful as she entered into the jest. "We'll never let you leave the Golden

Deer hungry. Well, masters, what will you have?"

"On the rich man's account," cried Fishel, pointing to Sachse, "a roast goose!"

Sachse, still wiping his tear-filled eyes, was busy chatting with the dancer. He had a foot in the door at the Elector's court, he informed her confidentially. Since he was purveyor of precious stones to the castle, there would be no difficulty at all in worming the dancer into court.

"What say you, Master Lemelin Sachse?" The mistress was impatient to go; her child had been crying ever since she left. "Shall I fetch a goose?"

"If the jesters wish goose, there's nothing more to say." Drinking down a beaker of wine, Lemelin sat back, ungirdled, and at his ease. "Now, Prague folk, don't you put Regensburg to shame! All week the wealthiest folk and rabbis from all Ashkenaz have been arriving for the wedding."

The odor of freshly roasted goose filled the taproom, and the crowd sniffed with pleasure. Fishel tapped out the Death Dance tune on the table with his fingers. In a low, very low voice, he pleaded with Rosa:

"I'm not frightened of this world, but of the hereafter.

*For here my lot is hunger, need, and disaster.
O, shoot a wrathful arrow from your lovely
bow,*

*And send me off to Paradise, as fast as I may
go."*

Rosa sank her teeth in the browned goose skin, and answered in an even lower voice:

"Paradise is full of such fools as thee.

Thou must stand without—there's no room for thee.

If thou'rt cold in this life, my fair,

Off to Hell with you—'twill be hot enough there!"

One of the two dice-players rose and left. The other stood up and pulled his loose cloak tightly about him, narrowing his shoulders. He pounded the table with both fists, sending the empty tankards leaping. Then he opened wide the mouth in his shaven, wrinkled face, and shouted words in the priestly Roman tongue like a battle cry:

"*Meum est propositum in taberna mori.*"

"Rosa, a comrade!" Fishel stood up. "Let's invite him to join us at table."

Fishel slipped from behind the table and approached the Latinist. He bowed:

"In the name of the Nine Muses, O comrade. . . ."

"Who never desert us joculars, faithful servitors of the true words," replied the stranger.

"O comrade, honor and grace our table, sparkling with wine, odoriferous with roast goose."

"I never refuse a poet." The stranger took Fishel by the hand. "I shall gladly accompany thee, comrade."

The newcomer did not wait for a second invi-

tation. Lifting the glass of wine that was handed him, he bowed to the dancer:

"To your health, lovely actor-girl, the only joy in this wanderer's life of ours. Your health—and the health of my little sister, Sabina, whom I have just removed from a nunnery and enrolled in a whorehouse. In the nunnery my sister became a whore, while remaining a holy woman. In the whorehouse, they will beat her and starve her—there, I trust, she will repent and mend her ways. Let's all drink to her health. My sister Sabina! Vivat, comrades!"

"Vivat! Vivat!" clinked the tankards and cups.

VI

Word spread through Jew Street immediately that rich Lemelin Sachse, that amateur bon vivant, was sitting in the Golden Deer taproom, munificently treating the Prague jesters to drinks and food. The news traveled from one frame house to its neighbor, reaching even the walls of Lemelin's own home.

In every street, wealthy, well-to-do, and ordinary common folk stood half-dressed at the open doors of their homes, showing various items of dress, presumably consulting about what to wear at the marriage ceremony. One woman held a silk dress, another a sleeveless velvet cloak, a third a pearl-embroidered collar. Actually, they were all amazed and quietly resentful at the patroness of

Regensburg, Master Samuel Belasser's wife, Gimchen. Here it was long past noon, and the wedding invitations had not yet been delivered by the invitation-bearer. Weren't her own townfolk good enough for her? Just because, as it was bruited abroad, pieces of cloth and tapestries had been imported from as far off as Stamboul for the wedding? Just because her husband, the Regensburg parness, had dealings with princes and kings? Was that the reason for this affront?

But not a word of this speculation passed their lips. Instead, they chatted about the Prague jesters; from this subject, they naturally passed to pretty Rosa, who had turned the heads of all the menfolk. In passing, the ladies demolished the reputation of half the town. Their mouths, eyes, fingertips, bodies flashed as they spun elaborate cobwebs of rumor and gossip with fierce delight—cobwebs so involved they could not extricate themselves.

"Here she comes!"

"The invitation-bearer is coming!"

The women recognized who it was from the tapping of her clog shoes. The invitation-bearer was a bent old woman, wearing an old-fashioned black cloak with a white ruffle around the neck. The ruffle was fastened to the cloak by a tin pin. Leaning on a crooked staff, the old woman opened her toothless mouth:

"Mistress Gimchen, our patroness, doth invite ye one and all to her daughter's espousal."

The old woman opened a kerchief, full of small coins, which she had been holding in her bony

fist. As each woman threw in a coin or two, the invitation-bearer acknowledged the gift by opening and shutting her mouth like a fish, repeating time after time the formula:

*"For this work of charity
May you live to a hundred and twenty,
With the help of God, keep your children in
plenty,
And marry them off in prosperity."*

With a sigh of her whole sunken pious face, the old woman pointed her staff at Lemelin's door, where a wooden mezuzah in the shape of an ark hung on the doorpost.

"That such a lord and master as this may yet become parness of Regensburg—one that doth guzzle and swill with rogues and strolling actresses!"

"Our Lemelin?" inquired a neighbor.

"The very same Lemelin, 'tis a shame and disgrace." The old woman raised her voice in a loud Lamentations keening. "And the pretty actor-girl from Prague—may God strike her lame—doth amuse herself at Michel's inn."

"That apostate's gullet!" a woman cried out.

"Forgets all about his wife and children the moment he sniffs a thrashing young carp!" another interjected.

The neighbors huddled together, their feminine tongues wagging furiously. Ah, the pretty deeds Lemelin performs in Venice, where he busies himself purchasing amulets and precious stones for the Elector! And his wife, Rechlin—that puffed-up slut

—the airs she puts on! Not ashamed to brag that she is the apple of Lemelin's eye, that he keeps her in finery and jewelry, that he bedecks her with silver belts and gold stuff!

"Only Venice?" A well-fleshed Jewess with a mighty bosom pulled the knitted night cap down over her blond hair. "Lemelin consorts with girls, both Jewish and Gentile, in Regensburg, too! And when he has no other wine to bless, he makes do with a silly wench from Prague!"

"Is she a good-looking little woman, this Rosa-lein?" inquired a neighbor.

"Good-looking?" The invitation-bearer took offense on behalf of the female sex. "The actor-girl from Prague is a piece of baggage! She's a good-looking trundle-bed!"

At which all these pious-faced women, forever preaching morality, held their sides and breasts in vast amusement, their laughter pealing up to the sky. The well-fleshed Jewess pounded on the closed door of Lemelin's home, shrilling in a high-pitched voice quite out of keeping with her broad-limbed frame:

"Rechlin! Rechlin!"

A bolt creaked, and the door opened a crack, Rechlin put out her lovely face with its peaches and cream complexion. At the sight of the neighbors surrounding the invitation-bearer, her transparent, wine-colored eyes laughed sympathetically. The small double chin above her pearl-covered white neck trembled.

"Ha-ha-ha! What good tidings from the invitation-bearer?"

There was a moment of silence. The women wiped tears of laughter from their eyes with their fingers and aprons. Each waited for the other to begin. The old woman turned around, leaning on her staff, and resumed the Lamentations keening, as though she had not been interrupted.

"Dear children, you will do well to hearken—when a woman, be she actor-girl, or witch, or the very Queen of Sheba herself, steals a husband's love from his wife, there is a charm to employ—it is tested and proven. . . ."

"I should like to hear this," Rechlin whispered down to a neighbor, with a short laugh.

"Do tell us, Grandmother!"

"Make it worth my while, and I'll enjoy the telling." The old woman pointed to her money kerchief.

Rechlin felt for a coin in the deep, satin charity-pouch that hung from her waist on a silken thread. She gave the coin to the old woman, as to a fortune teller. The old woman spat three times. Then, her tongue moving up and down between her lips like a bell-clapper, she recounted her tale of magic:

"When the she-devil Lilith desires to break up a happy marriage, she dresses herself as an actor-girl, or as the Queen of Sheba, if necessary. Thus disguised, she can lead a very saint off the straight and narrow—much less a lively youth or an idler. The pious wife who finds herself in this unhappy state must take a mirror, and go off to the fields. There, when the sun is shining and butterflies dance and flutter about her, she must bury the mirror deep in

the ground, like a corpse. And so doing, she must recite three times:

“With this mirror I bury the love that Mistress Venus bears for Tannhauser. And I pray Almighty God, blessed be His Holy Name, to restore peace to my home and my husband’s heart.”

“That very thing happened to Fulda,” one of the women cried out.

“And in Worms, too, the town where I was born.”

The old woman leaned more heavily on her crooked staff. “Listen to my tale:

“In a house near the well-spring, named Devil’s Head, lived a pitiful pauper. Once upon a time this pauper went into his shop, which was in that house where he lived, and shed bitter tears of woe. As he was thus weeping over his dire poverty, who should appear but the Queen of Sheba herself. No lovelier woman had he ever seen in his life. Her hair was pure spun gold.

“She said: ‘If you agree to sleep with me every noon when the clock strikes twelve, I will take you as husband, and make you rich beyond compare.’

“So the poor man allows himself to be seduced. Every noon when the clock strikes twelve, the Queen of Sheba appears. Two virgins follow her, carrying a golden basin filled with her gold and jewels. When she lies with the poor man, they place the basin on the ground near the bed. The virgins leave. The Queen of Sheba forbids the poor man to inform any living soul, on pain of death. Every day he does her will. And the Queen of Sheba keeps her

word to the poor man. She brings him an abundance of gold and silver. He becomes rich and dresses both himself and his wife in a style befitting rich folk. His wife’s hands sparkle with rings on Sabbaths and holy days.

“Once it came about that his wife asked the former pauper: ‘Tell me, my dear husband, what is it you do in the shop every noon when the clock strikes twelve?’

“Replied the good man: ‘I have grown accustomed to a noonday nap.’

“The wife asks no more about it. But she thinks to herself: ‘There must be some reason why he goes to the shop the same time every day.’ So, at the first opportunity, she slips the shop key from her husband, and has a locksmith fashion another just like it. Then, shortly after her husband has entered the shop, she follows, slowly opening the door with her own key. She enters, and beholds her husband lying with the Queen of Sheba. She also sees the gold basin with gold and jewels. Slowly the woman creeps out of the shop, slowly she closes the door behind her, so as not to wake them.

“Still and all, when the Queen of Sheba awakes, she says to the man: ‘Now you must die. For you have revealed our secret. Someone has been here and has seen us sleeping together.’

“The man swears he is innocent, he knows nothing about it. He falls at her feet and the Queen of Sheba spares his life. But she declares: ‘You shall never see me again, and all you wealth will disappear. You will become even poorer than you were

before. I have borne you two children. I shall strangle them by the neck until they die. In three days, you must go to the bridge over the Rhine, and you will see a coffin drifting in the water. Therein will lie the children that I bore you. I shall bury them hard by the Rhine.'

"On the third day the man goes to the Rhine and sees the coffin floating on the water. And soon thereafter he turns into a woeful pauper again.

"And so, Jewish daughters, let none of you permit yourself to be seduced by money. The Lord, blessed be His Name, allots everyone the fortune proper to him."

The women had formed a ring around the invitation-bearer as she told her tale, listening with mouths and ears wide open in delight. Now, gulping down the old woman's words as gospel truth, each begged the good Lord to keep her husband from being seduced by a strolling woman.

"The things that happen!" one woman said with a sigh.

"At this moment, I wish I had my husband at my side," another remarked, and immediately became shame-faced.

"Is it true that Rosalein, the actor-girl from Prague . . ." Rechlin began. She stopped in the middle of her thought, twisting the rings on her fingers, reversing them.

"True, true," a neighbor cried out. "Rosalein sports with strange men."

"She's at Michel the innkeeper's now, drinking, singing, and dancing," added a second woman.

"And your Lemelin is there too," a third woman finished.

"My Lemelin?" The color fled from Rechlin's fair face. "I'm going straight there! And if I see them in the taproom together. . . ." She raised a monitory fist.

No one spoke. For a moment Rechlin regarded her neighbors, uncertain as to whether they might not be poking fun at her. She turned and swept into her home through the open door.

The heavy door banged shut. There was a screeching of the iron bolt. Rechlin's neighbors regarded one another apprehensively, as though sharing the common guilt of having trampled on a living creature. The old woman who had borne the invitations to Master Samuel Belasser's wedding ran two fingers along the wooden mezuzah on Lemelin's doorpost, and began to leave, her heavy clog shoes tapping as she shuffled off. Her sunken mouth mumbled:

"Good, good. Let the silly woman know about her saint Lemelin, too—can't bake cookies without fire. . . . You can bake nothing without fire, nothing at all."

VII

Michel of the Golden Deer ran his sticky hands over his sweating forehead and wet face, leaving marks behind. Then he wiped his fingers in

his yellow beard; one corner of the beard, unkempt, stuck up.

He was standing in the cupolated alcove, pulling bungs out of barrels and tuns, tapping wine and beer into pouring vessels, thence into pitchers of tin and earthenware. When the liquor overflowed the pitchers, Michel dashed the foam off with a practiced thumb, and shouted the length of the room to his wife:

“Ready, Pessel, ready!”

In the happy confusion of business, Michel was so distraught he never noticed that one of his stockings had rolled down from his knee pants, uncovering a hairy shin.

It was a long time since business had thrived so. The leather pouch that hung on a strap over his shoulder was bulging, and could not be closed. And the take, the real money, was just beginning to roll in. Confused with the problems of making change, he ceased even to worry about his wife, who was chatting with strange men, drinking toasts in the company of the wealthy, pale-faced Sachse, and sporting with the jesters, despite their filthy, lewd speech.

In-laws from half of Bavaria, who had ridden into Regensburg for the parness' daughter's wedding, sat around tables large and small, enjoying the food and drink.

The jesters' small table was surrounded on every side by curious onlookers.

Rich Sachse had put a coral necklace around the dancer's neck; now, holding her hands tight, he

was far gone in his cups. His thievish eyes glowed like live coals; his curly beard was pitch-black; red, fleshy lips protruded from his beard's darkness, in complete incongruity with his long, thin face, pale, drained of color.

First he told the dancer of his journeys, his great wealth—of Venice, of Mantua. Then he went on to tell of the Elector, ever on the lookout for dancers and musicians to lend fame to his Bavarian court. Personally, Lemelin Sachse was sure that Rosalein would please and captivate the Elector. She surpassed all the court girls in her ability to sing and dance. Access was all that was needed—and he, Lemelin, the Elector's purveyor. . . .

“But how could *I* ever be accepted in a royal court—just a common dancer without manners—and Jewish, besides?” Rosalein asked softly, raising her face to his.

Through the open window the rays of the sun shone ripe with the afternoon heat, bearing the smell and taste of honey. Sunbeams passed over Rosalein's lovely face, so lovely. . . . Her cheeks took on a pinkish tinge in the sunlight, like the skin of fresh, ripe peaches.

With a certain suspicion, Rosa accepted the attentions of this strange person—this dark-skinned, red-lipped giant who held her hands in his vise-like grip. It occurred to her that Fishel must be angry; he was drinking furiously, and gritting his teeth. But who knew? Rosalein had had a companion, a dancer like herself, who had gained entry into a prince's court, and had been elevated.

"Why so sad, Rosalein?" Little tongues of flame flickered in Lemelin's eyes. "Was not Anselmo del Pomis a jester, who recited and sang at feasts and weddings? And did *he* not gain entry to the Mantua court? Had it not been for the noble lady Benvenida Abravanel, who introduced him at court, he would still be a jester today! I, Lemelin, the Elector's purveyor, will present you, my child. Do you hear, Rosalein? My lovely girl!"

All at once, the entire company of jesters appeared in the taproom. First came the stilt-walker, hopping on his long stork feet. He was followed by the flutist, the fiddler, the jew's harpist, the fire-swallower, the hydrocephalic dwarf. Last appeared the fortune teller, leading a monkey by the chain. He muttered:

*"Pumay, you monkey, show what you've got
To make the decent folk laugh a lot."*

"Fishel, who is treating?" inquired the stilt-walker, pointing to the scraps of the food on the table.

"Not me," grumbled Fishel.

The hungry jesters descended on the table like vultures. In the flash of an eye they had cleared off the scraps, gnawing the meat around the bones, cracking the bones and sucking the marrow. They were all thirsty for a glass of wine or a tankard of beer. The tin and clay pitchers on the table gleamed empty. Everywhere in the taproom, at side tables, well-fed rich folk sat, eating portions of carp or

goose-quarters and washing them down with gallons of wine. Their stomachs were bursting.

"Well there, jesters," cried one of these well-satisfied in-laws, as he rose to loosen his waist girdle and jovially pushed his four-cornered hat down over his ears. "How about a song?"

"Let him who drinks sing," retorted a jester angrily.

"Here, now, you over-filled drinking companion . . ." the in-law extended a hand to the jester, "don't get so angry."

"Since I've had nought to drink, I'm no drinking companion," the jester replied, somewhat mollified.

"Right you are!" The in-law cordially came over to join the jesters. "One good deed deserves another. We have a song coming to us, and you have wine and dice coming to you."

"Fishel! Fish-el dear!" Rosa sang out coaxingly, eyeing Fishel so tenderly he squirmed in his seat.

"Fish-el dear!" The dwarf in short silk trousers stood up on the table and grimaced in imitation of the dancer. "Fishel, Fish-el dear, don't be so proud, I've been Jewished too!"

The crowd roared with laughter:

"Good for him! Bravo!"

Fishel turned over an empty pitcher, mouth down, and clapped on the empty tin for them all to be quiet. His melancholy eyes swept from face to face, finally coming to rest on the well-fed in-law, who had been talking all the while.

"Master in-law, instead of talking so much, treat the jesters to wine and beer!"

When it grew quiet, Fishel hugged the empty pitcher to his breast. His clear, deep voice filled the taproom:

*"Good wine, old wine, strong wine,
Has been subdued by water.
No song can fill this mouth of mine—
'Tis full of water, water!"*

The company of jesters opened their dry mouths and the taproom echoed to the refrain:

*"I have no wine—these eyes of mine,
I have no wine—these eyes of mine
Are full of water, water!"*

The crowd paused, mouths open, waiting for Fishel to continue; but he stood mute, trying to catch Rosa's eye. When she finally raised her eyes to his, he shrugged, swept the empty pitchers toward him, and sang to them:

*"I cannot swallow my food dry;
Bread has not taste with water.
I raise the beaker to the sky—
Filled with water, water."*

Now the whole taproom joined in the chorus, tapping the beat with pitchers and legs:

*"I have no wine—these eyes of mine
Are full of water, water.
I have no wine—these eyes of mine. . . ."*

"No water! Wine, the best wine in the house!" The ungirdled in-law called to the innkeeper's wife.

She was standing flushed, mouth agape. Though the singing had stopped, she continued to wave the empty pitchers she held in both hands to the rhythm. Her eyes were fixed on Lemelin, who held the dancer tight as he continued to whisper promises in her ear. In her abstraction, the innkeeper's wife did not hear the cry for wine.

The in-law jovially embraced the innkeeper's wife, and pulled her to him:

"Wine, mistress! The crowd is thirsty for some wine!"

Abashed, the good wife squirmed in his arms. Lifting the empty pitchers, she defended herself from his advances, a blush spreading over her face. But he would not let her go, and bending over her body, tried to kiss her; ludicrously his own beard got in the way of his eyes and mouth.

The crowd stamped their feet, clapped hands, and whistled:

"Listen to him panting!"

"Ha-ha-ha—what's that he smells?"

"The goodwife is no lily of the valley!"

The crowd waited with delight for the innkeeper to come running up. But at that moment, Rechlin, rich Lemelin's wife, swept into the taproom. It was some time before she caught sight of her husband, in close company with the dancer. The words sprang from her tight lips:

"His hour is up!"

Little Rechlin assailed the couple with such

impetus that Rosalein had no time to rise, much less to defend herself. Clutching fingers tore at her hair as she sat paralyzed. The words flamed before her eyes:

"Brazen creature! Fond of strange men, are you, hussy? Adulteress!"

Lemelin sobered up on the spot. He moved back, trying to put as much distance as possible between himself and his wife. Fishel appeared on the scene, yelling to his comrades.

"Ignoramuses! Idiots!" He cried in priestly Latin. Then he passed to their Yiddish mother tongue. "Oxen! Cattle! Why do you let them fight? Do you want our Rosa to be murdered!"

But before the knot of jesters could gather just what was happening, the dancer was standing with hair disheveled, disdainfully watching the little woman stride to the door, her lanky, overgrown husband shuffling after her.

"But what's this?" Fishel lifted Rosa's arm, which was dripping blood.

"'Tis nought, Fishel, nought." Rosa looked at the dark red drops, her eyes smiling. "This is my payment for a string of beads. In this world of ours, you get nought for nought. . . . Nought."

Fishel took Rosa into the forehouse. There at the faucet he washed her scratched arm, feeling as he did so that his own skin was bleeding.

Impetuously, Rosa suddenly embraced Fishel; the peaked cap fell off his head. She kissed him on the eyes, the mouth, the beard. Before he could re-

cover, she was gone, leaving only her breath behind, the whisper:

"Fishel, Fishel, my dear Fishel."

VIII

Jew Street, leading to Master Belassar's courtyard, was impassible. The iron gate stood wide open. On either side of the gate were stationed two knights wearing short coats, creased pants, and bell-shaped hats, all of red velvet. Swords hung over the coats. These knights, Belassar's servants in costume, held back the uninvited crowd that pushed and shoved in an attempt to enter the courtyard.

The house, constructed of square, rough-hewn stones, with a tower at each corner, stood deep in the courtyard. Overgrown with moss, its crumbling walls gave the building the appearance of a deserted old castle.

The crowd had been gathering since early morning. Like vultures, poor folk attacked the watchroom and dance house. The townsfolk, jostling one another, gathered in front of the iron gates. Everywhere men, women, and children stood about, watching and waiting.

So magnificent a procession, so rich a display of precious stones and wealth had never before been seen in Regensburg. There were in-laws from Worms, from Frankfort-on-the-Main, from distant Vienna, and even from far-off Stamboul.

Wherever you turned your eyes, you saw vel-

vet and silk. Everywhere you looked, you caught sight of gold- and silver-embroidered cloaks, wide Spanish sashes in black, white, and scarlet. Doors were continually opening and shutting. The womenfolk, particularly, came and went—young girls, matrons, grandmothers, with diamond earrings that fell over their spangled shoulders, with tight-fitting sleeves circled at the elbow by gold bracelets set with emeralds and rubies. Neck after neck was adorned by pearls, or amber beads with dangling golden guilders coins.

"Pessalin!" A girl embraced her friend. "What is it, darling? Why so sad?"

"I, sad?" Pessalin raised a pair of melancholy, dark eyes. "Do you think it's envy because I have no money, no diamonds, no silk, no satin? Or that all my clothes are old rags?" She ran her hand over her knee. "That doesn't trouble *me!* But Yentele, I have such a longing for beads—red, bright red corals, like the kind Master Hanover's daughter Faygelin is wearing."

"Corals?" Yentele's red lips were a thin line of deprecation. "I have no worries about corals! No joking, Pessalin! If I merely said the word, Belasser's servant would give them to me!"

"Who—that fine fellow Zalman?" Pessalin pointed to one of the "knights" guarding the gate. "You ought to scratch the servant's eyes out!"

"The rascal would dearly love to pass the time with me," Yentele laughed decorously. "But—nought, nought! She who wishes to break a maiden-

head may do so with him—that worn-out capon! But not I—not Yentele!"

The head of the yeshiva arrived, dressed in a black cloak. He was leading a young man covered in a white silken garment that reached down to his ankles. The young man's wide sash was white, the turban on his head vermilion red. His eyes, beard, and earlocks—all were pitch black.

Suddenly it grew still on Jew Street, as the observers held their collective breath, and pricked up their eyes and ears. The silence was broken by the howling of an infant.

"What's the screaming about? Sounds like a woman in labor!" Complaints poured in on the terrified mother from every side. "Either give the babe to suck, or off with you!"

"Hush, hush," someone called out. "The poor thing has the whooping cough."

"Then take him to a doctor!" came the advice. "Cupping will do him no harm!"

In anxious desperation, a short, thin woman thrust a dry breast into the infant's mouth. Her small black mouse eyes stared in confusion at the stranger accompanying the head of the yeshiva.

Everyone's glance was directed at the fascinating stranger.

"Who may he be?"

"Master Yekel," the crowd stopped the old sexton, and pointed at the stranger. "Who may he be, Master Yekel?"

"He? Why, that is Rabbi Kalman! Our own Rabbi Kalman of Regensburg."

"That is he?"

"The cabalist? Who lives in Stamboul now?"

"Why, he is still very young!"

"What noble features!"

"And he comes of good lineage!"

"And wealth!"

"Wealth?" Master Petachiah, a famous pauper who had been to the Holy Land twice, burst into laughter. "This Rabbi Kalman would have been renowned for wealth in the very court of King Arthur!"

A small circle formed around Master Petachiah, and a still larger circle around the first. Someone inquired:

"Is it true, Master Petachiah, that Rabbi Kalman is carrying a writ from the King of Turkey to the Jews throughout Ashkenaz?"

"It's true, it's true!"

"A lover of Israel, the Turk!"

"Why not?" Disheveled, his clothes in disarray, Master Petachiah raised his hairy hands in enthusiasm. His dark eyes glowed. "These are the days of the Messiah, come at last. The simple man who wishes a bit of land of his own, or to traffic in commerce undisturbed, or to reside a stone's throw from the Holy Land, need but let our sweet Ashkenaz rot where it is and remove to Constantinople."

"What do we have here, anyway?"

"Here?" Everything about Petachiah fell to laughing—his careworn face, the very patches of beard on his cheek. "Here? Here we have poll tax

and protection tax. If a Jew makes a profit, he must give every third pfennig to the German sot. Go to the Square on business, and you aren't sure of your life. Everywhere, scoundrels, rascals, dunces, tricksters, villains! And at nightfall, when the ghetto gates are locked, the women strain their eyes with longing to see their husbands return in peace. It's a shame and a disgrace! And they say," Master Petachiah whispered the rumor, "all the Jews in Regensburg, over five hundred households, are to be deported!"

"God be with us!" sighed a Jewess.

At the word "deported," they forgot that Regensburg was wedding with Worms that day, that in-laws had come hither from all of Ashkenaz, that the Prague jesters had arrived. Weeping and shouting echoed in their ears—not that of Regensburg alone, or the town of Speyer, but the suffering of cities and towns from which Jews had been driven out in the recent past. In their imagination, they saw terrified and helpless eyes, the eyes of those wakened by a fire in the middle of the night. . . . But the trepidation of the people of Regensburg was short-lived, Happiness at the wedding, joy for the bridal couple—perhaps it was the festive occasion, but whatever the reason, they immediately discovered a bright side in the threatened catastrophe. Well, what if they should be driven out of Regensburg? There was a Creator in Heaven, and he had already opened wide the gates of Constantinople for them, crying, "Come, come, dear children, and see how I have elevated the Jew! Muhammed the Second has

made place for all three faiths next to his throne—the mufti, the rabbi to the right, the Greek Orthodox patriarch to the left.”

Next to arrive was a man in a loose black-and-white striped garment, resembling a tallith, whose collar came down over the shoulders, and whose sleeves ballooned out. He wore a sable hat at an angle. Pouches of herbs and bags of amulets hung from his black sash. Plying his elbows and staff, this individual pushed through the crowd. He wiped his black, wide, long beard, and licked his thick lips. The striped, loose sleeves of his gown flew through the air, and his thin white hands fluttered accompaniment to a deluge of words that had a foreign ring to the Ashkenazic ear. “Finds, pious ladies, finds—I have finds for you!”

“This must be the healer!”

“No, ’tis the Ripper—the doctor!”

“The Pole?”

The words came rushing forth, in a long string:

“Amulets handwritten in Safed, handwritten in Jerusalem. Tried and tested herbs from the grave of Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai. Good for gall stones, jaundice, constipation. Black deer-horn cramp thimbles, guaranteed to drive pain from aching loins and joints. Meteorites. . . .” The healer’s voice turned soft and deep. “All colors: sky-blue, rainbow, blood-red. A charm to ease childbirth—no Jewish daughter need abort, heaven forbid! Red shooting stars are seen falling no more. When the Holy Temple in Jerusalem stood in flames, the

blessed Lord sent down a hail of shooting stars. That, O pious women, is where the redness comes from—the flames. Should it go hard with a woman in labor, just lay the meteor stone on her naked body, and the stone shoots sparks, and it’s ‘Welcome and farewell’ to the demon Lilith and her daughters. Come pious women, come running and buy, while they last—I have finds, finds, finds!”

As the young women gathered around the doctor, he bent over to a young woman who was far gone in pregnancy and, in stage whisper that set everyone smiling, said:

“And if a young wife has a husband with a roving eye, here’s a red shooting star to win his heart back again.”

Meanwhile, some women brought the sick child to the healer for him to examine. Regarding the child’s crooked little legs and swollen belly, he asked the mother:

“What’s wrong with the child?”

“He has the whooping cough.”

“Whooping cough?” The doctor quickly drew a flask of schnaps, a glass, and a lancet from his sash. He extended a hand toward the sympathetic women. The coins fell into his palm as he declared reassuringly:

“Lancing is a complete cure for whooping cough. A complete cure! There’s nought bad in it at all!”

The doctor scratched the lobe of the child’s left ear with his lancet. A drop of blood oozed out. The doctor placed the drop in the glass of schnaps and

stirred with a finger. With his wet finger he wiped the child's lips. Then the doctor rubbed the potion over the child's swollen body; but the child screamed so, jerking and squirming with pain, that the mother gathered him in her arms and fled home.

The words flew through the air:

"The jesters! The Prague jesters are coming!"

Small fry emerged from every nook and cranny. Spinning like tops, they broke into song:

"Flute

Trumpet,

Actor-girl—

Here they come!

Here come the jesters from Prague!"

The jesters played jokes on the small fry. The stilt-walker strode over the children's heads, shooing them away:

"Off to the schoolroom, mousies! Off to the schoolroom with you!"

Leering at the crowd, the dwarf sang:

*"My lords and masters, such things I'll show to
ye,*

As will make young and old laugh with glee!"

The folk from Prague passed through the gate. Close on their heels a company of beggars pressed to enter the courtyard. They battled the two liveried servitors, who drove off the beggars with the taunt:

"Off to the dance hall with you, counts and ragbags! To the dance hall! You'll be served hens and fish at a covered table!"

"Hens and fish!" A yellow beggar, whose dress showed him to be a Pole, grimaced at one of the servitors, and flung an empty sleeve in his face. "Tells us guests where to go, does he? Conniptions take him!"

"A cramp in your innards!" cried a second beggar.

"Worms eat you!" added a third.

The servitor spurred his white horse, which reared on its hind legs and struck its forelegs out at the beggars. They retreated to the servitor's angry shout:

"Off with you, tatterdemalions! Off with you, dogs! No cursing here! No ranting! No foaming at the mouth!"

The yellow beggar fled with the rabble to the other side of the street, his empty sleeve waving in the wind. Irrepressible, he opened a gap-toothed mouth and mimicked:

"No ranting! No foaming at the mouth! Dogs, are we? We'll shit on your grave! And on your master's grave, too!"

The folk from Prague swept through long, arched corridors, climbed dark, dizzying stairs, and opened door after door until they entered the Belaser apartment. The rooms were wide and bright, some long enough for a four-wheeled, spanned wagon to turn a complete circle. Yet from the street, the building looked so narrow that the observer would have deemed such expansiveness and spaciousness unimaginable.

In one hall the menfolk were gathered, in another the women and girls. The Prague jesters practised on their instruments in an alcove near the women's hall; rehearsing their skits, they prepared to surpass their local Regensburg fellows. The Regensburg "forces," for their part, gathered in the alcove near the men's hall. There, Master Leib and his troupe rehearsed pieces from the "Samuel Book," in loud, singsong tones.

The last bright rays of sunlight shone through the open, narrow windows. The people, the tapestries, the dramatic gestures—all glowed in the gentle warmth of the setting sun. Heavy silver candelabra standing on corner tables were already lit; their silver branches reflected the small candle flames, faint in the sunlight.

Moshel Cracower moved busily from room to room, beside himself with the importance of the task of bringing Leib and Fishel together. Both performers were reluctant. Master Leib refused to dignify the Prague players with any term other than "that band of jesters," or "those rogues from Prague."

Fishel, for his part, made a great show of having forgotten Leib's name—he referred to him as "that braggart who writes chit-chat for old women." Still, at bottom, Fishel was eager to be introduced to Leib.

When Moshel took his former schoolmate by the shoulder, Fishel pretended ignorance as to where Moshel was taking him. As they approached the other alcove, Moshel called out:

"Master Leib!"

Leib, with the impressive mien of the head of a yeshiva, came into the hall. The pleated black coat that reached down to his knees was fastened at the neck by a bone button the size of a reichsthaler coin. His white face with the transparent skin was framed in a silken black beard in which every hair fluttered at the slightest breeze.

"May I introduce Fishel Singer of the folk from Prague," said Moshel hurriedly, terrified lest the two come to words on the spot.

"I've heard of him, I've heard of him." Leib negligently put out his fingertips to Fishel. "What have you brought with you, Prager? Any fresh bake-meats?"

"No bake-meats at all," little Fishel drew himself up to his full height, on a level with Leib. "No bake-meats, Master Leib. We bear old wine—good old Hildebrandt, good old Dietrich."

"Hildebrandt, Dietrich—old wine?" Leib grimaced. "They're old hens, that yield neither eggs nor flesh!"

Fishel's color changed. He lost his tongue in the presence of the comrades who had gathered round. Here stood Rosalein and the stilt-walker, and Zalman, the red-headed boy who had written *Amnon and Tamar*. What right had Leib to stick his nose up in the air? What if he *was* a head taller than Fishel? Fishel could always be Leib's match. He clenched his teeth, to hold back the biting, harsh words on the tip of his tongue. And the longer Leib talked about King David, and Judah Maccabeus,

and Bar Kochba, the less inclined Fishel was to loosen his sharp tongue. Seduced by Leib's words, Fishel listened open-eared.

In essence, all Leib really wanted was for Fishel to concede that the old Jewish heroes, men like King David and Judah Maccabeus, were warriors as valiant as any German kings or princes. And what about Bathsheba? Did not the lovely Krimhilde, and the still lovelier Brunehilde, pale in comparison with our Bathsheba? In the words of King David, as reported in Master Leib's own "Samuel Book": "Bathsheba—I have seen no lovelier personage than thee in all my days!"

"But Fishel swears that *I* am the loveliest!" Rosalein's eyes sparked.

"You *are* the loveliest," cried the dwarf instantly, and the company burst into laughter.

Fishel did not reply. His customary bravado had left him, and he felt himself in truth shorter than Leib, like an apprentice in the presence of his master. Leib, refusing to be interrupted, and sensing all the comrades on his side, ended his speech with an indignant outcry:

"Since that is so, comrades, and we all agree that we have such wealth in our own midst, what need have we to make a Hildebrandt and a Dietrich into Jews—we have our own David, our own Judah Maccabeus, our own Bar Kochba!"

"Right!"

"Master Leib is right!"

"Vivat Master Leib!" And Rosalein embraced the new hero.

Berl the sexton called out:

"Make way for Yosilman Roseheim, our parness and leader!"

The men's hall filled with excitement at the unexpected announcement. The rabbis, the head of the yeshiva, the in-laws from Stamboul, the bridegroom and attendants, the respected in-laws and affluent citizens—all rose, one by one. Young girls, dressed in colored silk dresses, rushed out of the other hall, like birds in full plumage. Belasser, in his capacity as the main in-law, lifted a burning candelabrum from the table and set out for the entrance to greet this most important guest. His wife, Gimchen, took his side, dressed in a costume of white silk and still whiter satin, whose folds and pleats rustled as she moved; sparkling, her deep, black eyes brought distant lands to mind. On her neck, white as milk, hung strands of pearls—pearls small as poppy seeds, pearls like tear drops, pearls like grapes, upon which blue-white flames shone with the colors of the rainbow. Husband and wife regarded each other with satisfaction. Belasser's eyes, his thin, grayish beard—everything about him shone. He had not expected so exalted a guest. Lifting the candelabrum higher, Belasser thanked the Lord for having granted him the great honor of having in his own house Master Yosilman Roseheim, the Jewish leader and parness, one who stood before kings, before emperors.

Yosilman's body servant, a huge individual, was about to remove the loose traveling cloak from his master's shoulders. But Yosilman retained his

cloak, on which the yellow wheel—the Jewish sign—was conspicuously absent. The fringe of curls around his cheeks lent importance to the youthful face, whose gray eyes, with their expression of tenacity and endurance, expressed lofty amazement:

“Why all this honor for me?”

When the servant had removed the candelabrum, Yosilman let it be known that he was in haste, that he had not time, that he could remain in Regensburg only for an hour, or at the most an hour and a half—for he was traveling with the young Elector to Bavaria. He, Yosilman, had barely been able to persuade the Elector to make the stop in Regensburg; the espousal was but a pretext. There was serious talk of a deportation from Regensburg. Sinister powers were at work: the Princess Kunigunde, priests, converts, as well as run-of-the-mill anti-Semites. So Regensburg required an ally. And Elector Karl might well become king tomorrow or the day after. Therefore, let Belasser see to it immediately that a table fit for a king was set: the best exotic wines, the rarest fruits. And, most important, have the players perform a Death Dance. The Elector dearly loved the Jewish Death Dance.

A tumult arose. Forgotten were groom and bride, who stood forlorn among the agitated crowd—she, black of hair and black of eye, in white satin; he, blue of eye and light of hair, in black velvet. Slender, very slender—a blossoming twig—she leaned toward the groom, whispered in his ear, and gave him a small bag of salt, a charm to avert the

evil powers. His smooth cheeks reddened, like a child's.

Light flowed from the oil lamps and candelabra, and was reflected on the walls, which were covered with leather embossed with dark-red floral patterns. Above the leather were long, narrow tapestries which pictured Moses bending barefoot before the burning bush, and Ruth falling at Boaz's feet.

No one noticed when Berl the sexton carried in the bridal canopy, nor when he fetched the communal shears to cut the sealed pouches wherein lay the dowry from the groom's side and the dowry from the bride's side. No one wondered why the rabbi was not writing the marriage contract.

All eyes were turned to the entrance, where a young knight, supple as a snake, swept into the room. His blinding, silver-scaled armor sparkled, his sword clattered. He was followed by a second knight, then by a third, and a fourth. The body-guard stood at attention for the Elector, a very tall young man, with the long face of a thoroughbred. After the Elector came the officials of Regensburg, and after them the Jewish worthies: Yosilman the shtadlan, then Master and Mistress Belasser, then bride and groom, rabbis, and the in-laws from Stamboul.

Lemelin Sachse, who was often abroad on business and had knowledge of the ways of the world, was the first to remove his hat. All but the rabbis stood bare-headed as the knightly hall resounded to the cries of vivat:

"Hoch! High!"

At the head of the room stood the Elector, flanked by his bodyguard. Their swords glistened overhead, forming an arch. Under the lifted swords bride and groom walked, to the click of spurred boots, to bow before the Elector:

"Hoch! Hoch!"

Swords, candelabra, silverware, glassware, all shimmered. Mouths gaped, hands pressed together, eyes shone. Wine overflowed silver beakers, overflowed polished glasses, raised to toast the bride and groom. To the music of the flute, Fishel sang:

*"I open my lips to sing my sweet lay
In honor of groom and bride today.
Ho-hoch! Ho-hoch!"*

The bars between the men's hall and the women's hall were down. Knights and lords, lads and lasses, all moved easily from table to table, drinking, eating, joking, and laughing, in jubilation, in forgetfulness.

Almost unobserved, the sexton set up the bridal canopy and wrapped the narrow-necked "good-luck" glass in a piece of white linen. Almost unheard was his cry:

"In-laws on the bride's side, in-laws on the groom's side—now you may count the dowry in the best of spirits!"

The in-laws from Regensburg and Worms regarded one another dumbly, and concurred that there was no need to count their respective dowries

at this time and place—they agreed to trust one another.

Braided waxen candles flickered.

"To the canopy! To the canopy!"

First came the music—fiddle, flute, jew's harp. Then the two fathers-in-law leading the groom. Then the two mothers-in-law with the veiled bride. Bringing up the rear, the drum with a skip and a beat. The fiddle wept, the flute wept, the jew's harp wept—all to drive off the evil spirits, the devils and demons that come from the north.

Knights drew swords from scabbards with a clanking. One cabalist rejoiced, quoting: "*Makshin befarzela*—there is beating on iron." Another cabalist rejoiced with another quote: "*Lehagen min hashedim makifin bebarzel*—to defend against demons one should beat on iron." The rabbi rocked to and fro as he recited the benediction—the spun-gold sacramental ring sparkled and trembled in the light. Wine flowed. A cabalist rejoiced, quoting again: "*Mamshichin yayin, lifne chasan vekalah*—one should pour wine before a bride and groom." The groom bent his pale face to the north, shattered the narrow-necked glass on the wall—*Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!* Burnt wheat fell in a hail on their heads and faces. Now the fiddle laughed, the flute laughed, the jew's harp laughed:

Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!

The tables and floor rugs were removed. The knightly hall became twice as long, twice as wide. Near the red-leathered walls sat the guests. Forgot-

ten was the wedding, the canopy ceremony. Master and Mistress Belasser and the Regensburg dignitaries were impressed instead by the Elector's attentiveness to Yosilman, whom he pressed for the significance of each Jewish practice.

Lemelin Sachse captured the main in-law in a corner. He thrust a small gold watch set with diamonds into Belasser's hand:

"Only one thousand reichsthaler."

"That's too high, you ask too much." Belasser examined the watch.

"Too much?" Sachse's thievish eyes turned naïve. "This is a gift the Elector will never forget so long as he lives. Princes don't forget such things."

Belasser hesitated—should he or should he not make the Elector a present of the watch? Rapidly he said:

"In faith, I should be happy to do business with you. Would eight hundred reichsthaler be enough?"

Belasser's offer represented two hundred reichsthaler profit. Lemelin was delighted with the offer, but the merchant in him impelled him to say:

"Eight hundred? Offer one more hundred, Master Samuel, just one more hundred. I should like to get back my investment."

Belasser took the watch. Overwhelmed with delight, Lemelin ran busily to and fro—first to whisper in the Elector's ear, then to Belasser, then to the actor-girl, whom he hastened to assure that she was bound to please, the Elector would certainly take her into the royal court.

The folk from Prague were not at all happy with this turn of affairs. And Fishel, who was preparing to play the parts of the parness, jester, convert, and prophet in the Death Dance—Fishel, rummaging through the costumes, avoided Rosa. It did not matter to him at that moment that the local talent had been passed over and he, Fishel, not Leib, was to perform out front. He would happily have conceded everything—money, honor, applause—for one word from Rosa, one look, telling him that she would remain with him. He would gladly have left the wedding feast and the Elector, to go with Rosa, away from Regensburg.

He threw a side glance at Rosa, who was preening herself. She piled her black braids high, then tried coiling them around her lovely, small head. After ruffling through a half-dozen dresses, she stood before him in velvet, crying: "Fishel boy, which should I appear in, the velvet or the silk?" It was not every day that Rosa had such an opportunity. She was anxious to please the Elector and the "mighty" knights. Fishel ought not look at her with eyes so sad, as though the world were coming to an end. What if she did perform in the royal court? She would never forget him. And now, before they did the Death Dance, she was to present herself before the Elector and the counts. What did Fishel think? Why was he silent?

The fiddle burst into song. Then the flute. Then the jew's harp. Rosa ran into the hall like a gust of wind; suddenly, she stopped, and stood on

tiptoe in front of the Elector. Her small, dark head was thrown back; her heart fluttered under the tight bodice of the velvet dress which fell from her shapely hips in airy folds to her ankles. Her body, swaying restless and seductive, took away the breath of the audience.

Alone, Rosa danced the Jew Dance. There was no leaping now, no slapping hands on thighs, no snapping of index finger against thumb. There was no place for these distractions in the Jew Dance as performed in Ashkenaz. Rosa swept over the red floor and swayed, one step to the right, one step to the left. Every turn of her body, every bend, conveyed both joy and sadness. Her eyes were alight; from deep in her throat she sang softly:

*"High and noble Elector, would not ye
Desire to come dancing with me?"*

The young Elector reddened. Before he could reply, Rosa had gone on to the knights:

*"My gracious knights, would not ye
Desire to come dancing with me?"*

Sword and harness clattered. The knights—an armored wall—were ready for the dance. Rosa advanced a step, retreated, elusive—catch me, catch me, if you can!—and disappeared in the alcove.

The hall shook to the shouting:

"Rosalein! Vivat Rosalein!"

"Vivat!"

Behind the shouting and turmoil threaded a still, distant weeping. It was the jew's harp, mourn-

ing in a side room, setting the mood for the Death Dance. The atmosphere grew uncanny. Eyes turned to the closed alcove, where Fishel, in the costume of a parness, sat in a corner drinking wine from a flask. He knew that after the Death Dance, Rosa would be leaving him. She had been raised up, had obtained entry into the royal court.

And he, Fishel? The royal court meant nothing to him. What to him was Elector, what were knights to him, when a profound melancholy seethed and burned within him? Rosa was leaving him, and he was suffering. The same wine that deadened his sadness awakened dormant powers; these, seizing him like a storm wind, broke through every barrier.

Fishel drank, and waited for a miracle. Rosa came and pleaded with him. The stilt-walker and drummer added their pleas for him to stop drinking: another gulp and Fishel would collapse—and all the Prague jesters would be humiliated. Well then, since they were pleading, he would insist that Rosa—Rosa do what? What *could* he demand? The words stuck in his throat. Rosa took him by one hand, then by the other.

"Fishel, Fish-el boy, my parness, my jester, my prophet! Come, they are waiting for us. Don't you hear the Death Dance tune?"

He rose, tottering, and stood thus for a few moments. Then, against his will, the corners of Fishel's mouth turned up in a smile. A low, melancholy song trickled from behind his crooked white teeth:

*"I cannot dance, I cannot jest,
Your sun is rising in the East,
Away, faithless Rosa. Away from me!
I'll have nought to do with such as thee!"*

Rosa embraced Fishel. Facing him, breast to breast, she laughed in his face:

*"Wilt have nought to do with such as me?
Thou goat!
Thou art no prophet, art a rutting stoat!
Thou shalt get many a pretty maid
To lie with thee, nor be gainsaid.
So dance with me, my whiskered goat. . . ."*

She pulled Fishel to the door. Wordlessly, he followed her. A shiver ran down her body at the look in his eyes.

The alcove door opened.

Rosa stood on the threshold, in a white silken shroud. The jew's harp wept Death's song of lamentation. Slowly, Rosa raised her arms out of the loose shroud—they were wings, tapering wings. She flew through the hall, a bat. In the smooth, impassive face the eyes, black, smoldering, darted here and there.

The Parness appeared. Death, with one wing high and one low, pursued the Parness. A chill wind ran through the hall. Was it Fishel she was pursuing? Rosa was uncertain. The Parness' beard was pitch-black, his sensual lips red, his stature immense—the Parness was a black ogre. No, this was not Fishel. This was Lemelin, Lemelin Sachse.

The Elector looked at Sachse, then at the

jester, and burst into laughter. The whole hall laughed with him, as Lemelin, more concerned for the jewels in his stuffed pockets than for his own life, twisted and turned with trembling limbs, artfully avoiding the clutches of Death. The evil eyes flamed, shot sparks—the fire of his eyes threatened to singe Death's wings.

"Bravo!" shouted a knight.

"Bravo, vagrant! Bravo, strolling player!"

With outspread wings, Death thrust the Parness into a corner. He ran frantically back and forth, as in a cage, trying to escape. Angrily he cried:

*"Now is no time for me to dancel
I am not ready now to dancel
There's business waiting me outside.
The prince requires his body-tithe.
The people call. I must obey.
Let me be—I must away!"*

But Death, lifting one wing, then another, in preparation for the dance, took the Parness by the arm and sang:

*"Come, Parness, come and dance with me.
We'll twist and turn, so merrily.
Twisting is your specialty.
The people you have tended well
Your pockets lined. And so farewell—
Now let us dance, we two.
And so farewell, and say farewell,
All, rich or poor, must dance farewell
With me. And so must you."*

Death led the Parness in a circle dance, brushing the floor in front of him with her wings. In the background, the jew's harp and fiddle, strummed by 'invisible musicians, played accompaniment. The strings trembled to the rapid movement of unseen fingers. The highest note drew its last breath, and the music expired. Death moved alone now, one wing up, one down, weaving its song of mourning. Death bowed before the Elector:

"O, great Elector, mighty peer,

Your strength is known to all.

Come with me, and have no fear.

I am the end of all.

Yet serf of the Almighty, whom no one may gainsay.

When He commands, my mighty lord, great princes must obey."

The Elector rose, and after him Yosilman and the bodyguard. The hall resounded with applause and clapping. Swords flashed, spurs clicked:

"Bravo, Rosalein!"

"Bravo, actor-woman!"

"Bravo!"

Fishel, though he could scarcely keep his feet, was sobered by the applause. He retreated deep into the alcove, searching for an exit from Belasser's home. As he opened a side door, tall Leib came toward him.

"Whither, Fishel? Whither?"

Fishel did not reply.

They looked at one another as they listened to the walls resounding, the windows trembling, with the cries. Sadly they smiled in mutual understanding: this was but froth, ephemeral froth that comes and goes. Life, they knew, is no spendthrift. What it gives to one, it withholds from another. But eternity was theirs—Leib's and Fishel's.

Leib laid a hand on Fishel's shoulder:

"Stay with me, Fishel."

"Where? Here in Regensburg? In Ashkenaz?"

Leib walked a few steps with Fishel. At the stairs he stopped and talked freely of his plans. He did not intend to remain in Regensburg. For Leib, Ashkenaz meant far more than merely the cities on either side of the Rhine. To him, Ashkenaz was Italy, France, even Stamboul—wherever Yiddish was spoken. Leib had composed a "Samuel Book," and a "Bar Kochba Play," and was about to finish a play entitled, *Exile from Spain*. As Fishel could see, Leib was not setting forth empty-handed. Should there be need of a play-woman—Venice, Mantua, Rome could supply one. What was Rosalein compared with an Italian play-woman?

At the sound of Rosalein's name, Fishel's narrow body shuddered, his face contorted. Leib did not notice. He talked on. He would take Fishel, on one condition. There must be no poor rendering into Yiddish of Italian or German tales. If Fishel consented, they could take to the road tomorrow or the day after.

Fishel did not reply. The enthusiastic applause

within would not let him rest. He began going down the steps, Leib after him. When they left the courtyard, pushing with difficulty through the crowd, Fishel suddenly turned to Leib:

"We leave, we leave—the sooner the better!"

Ciechanow Melody

It was late Friday when Wolf Landau awoke, stretched, and lay in bed with his disheveled head thrown back.

Friday was his day of rest. The orthodox Jewish newspaper on whose editorial staff he worked was closed. That day he generally enjoyed the luxury of having breakfast in bed, reading poetry, and lazing about until afternoon. But this Friday he could not enjoy his day off. He had an oppressive obligation to meet.

Or perhaps it was not really an obligation at all. What difference should it make to Wolf Landau that the second son of the rabbi of Biala, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, had come from Poland on a visit to New York? What matter that Wolf was blood kin with Rabbi Manachem Mendel, and a great-grandson of the rabbi of Strykow? In Poland the kinsmen had never met. When Wolf arrived in New York as a sixteen-year-old boy, fifty-year-old Menachem Mendel had been a rabbi for years. He must be in his seventies now. And Wolf? The distance between the kinsmen was immense. Still, it often seemed to Wolf that he had been following in