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October 27, 1998

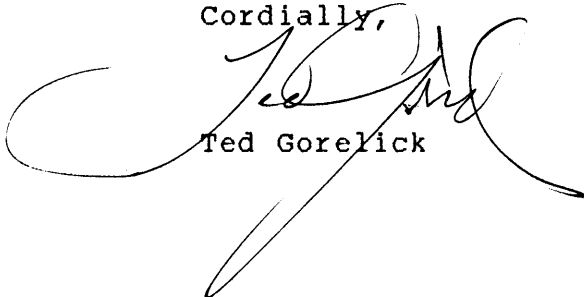
Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

Dear Sir or Madam:

In response to your circular of July 27, I enclose two copies
of my translation of Chapters 3 and 4 of Sholom Aleichem's
Stempenyu.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Cordially,


Ted Gorelick

TED GORELICK טד גורליק
Translation & Editing תרגומים ועריכה
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Oct 1998 cc: Hillel Halkin, Simone Harris, Jack Rosenthal

Sholom שלום
Aleichem עליכם

Stempenyu
A Jewish Romance

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סלעמפאניו
א יידישער ראמאן

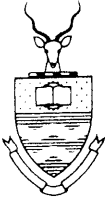
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(Sample translation, chaps 3-4)

Translated from the Yiddish
by
Ted Gorelick

Haifa

φ



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Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
NEW YORK, NY 10028
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

6 October 1998 ✓

Dear Organisers

I have pleasure in submitting herewith 2 copies of my translation of Chapters 3 and 4 of the novel *Stempenyu* as my entry in the current Contest for Translations of Sholom Aleichem.

If it is possible, I would appreciate receiving an acknowledgement of your safe receipt of this entry. Since the mail to and from South Africa is very erratic, I would be grateful to receive a brief fax at the following number:

27 - 11 - 403 - 7309

Very sincerely yours

Joseph Sherman
Associate Professor: Department of English

1 (stemp)

Sholom Aleichem

STEMPENIU

Chapters three and four

Translated from Yiddish by Joachim Neugroschel

Final revision: October 26, 1998

Joachim Neugroschel

447 Beach 136 Street

Belle Harbor, New York 11694

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On Translating Stempeniu

Like every complex literary work, Stempeniu provides the translator with a few enigmas that cannot be definitively resolved.

Aside from the major question of how to render the klezmer jargon, these two chapters alone bristle with a number of problems that defy easy solutions. One such instance is the word "shamosim," which normally means "beadles" but can also refer to the Hanukka candle used to light the other Hanukka candles. Within the context of the wedding in Stempeniu, I take the noun "shamosim" to refer to lit candles brought in by the servants to light the various candles around the room. While this secular use of the word "shamosim" may be quite unusual, the term "beadle" doesn't seem to make sense, since beadles are not mentioned anywhere else in these two chapters.

I don't necessarily insist on my solutions to this and other translation riddles, and if someone can convince me of an alternate solution, I'd be more than willing to switch.

CHAPTER THREE: STEMPENIU'S PREPARATIONS

What was all the excitement about in Mazepevke? Khaim ben-Tsion Glok was marrying off his youngest daughter, his fledgling, Rivkele. So why not celebrate and rejoice with him? The wedding was the place to be. After all, he was, so they said, one of the richest men in town. Everybody and his uncle would be there. Some out of friendship, some out of envy, some for appearance' sake, some to show off their wives' pearls, earrings, or the new necklace brought back from the country fair. But more than anything--the guests were here for Stempeniu.

In short, everyone attended the festivities! All of Mazepevke rejoiced at Rivkele's wedding. Not to mention Isaak-Naftoli and his wife and children, for Isaak-Naftoli was Khaim ben-Tsion's partner in the store and in the mill, as well as a distant relation--that is to say: Isaak-Naftoli's wife Dvosse-Malke was sort of distantly related to Rivkele's mother, a cousin once removed on her mother's side.

No wonder Dvosse-Malke was bedizened like a genuine member of the family. She bustled around and didn't do anything; but she did wave her arms and shout and make a racket as though she were doing something. And her beautiful daughter-in-law, Rokhele, stood next to the bride,

bedecked and bejeweled like a princess; her big blue eyes shone like two big diamonds, and her red cheeks glowed like two blossoming roses. Her one hand held the bride's loosened hair, which the women, copiously weeping, had unbraided for the veiling ceremony; and her other hand stroked her white throat. And she never noticed a pair of black burning eyes staring at her all the while....

The waiters and waitresses scurried about like chickens without heads. The in-laws were clamoring: "Oh, God! Oh, God! It's time for the veiling! How long can we torment the children, they've been fasting for a whole summer's day already!" Everyone shouted: "It's time! It's time!" But no one did anything.

Isaak-Naftoli wandered around in a velvet cap, his hands behind his back like a preacher, and Dvosse-Malke was raising the roof. The other relatives on both sides were dashing past one another, sticking out their hands as if they wanted to do something but couldn't get anything to do.

"Well, why aren't they doing something?" asked the groom's family.

"Why aren't they starting to do something?" answered the bride's family.

"Have you ever seen the like before? Making children starve that long!" shouted the groom's family.

"Have you ever seen the like before? Making children starve this long!" shouted the bride's family.

"Why's everyone running back and forth?"

"What's all this running around anyway?"

"Everyone's running, everyone's making a racket, and they're not even budging! A fine state of affairs!"

"Just running and raising a racket--and no one's willing to do anything!"

"Hasn't there been enough talking already? It's time for action! There's a limit to everything!"

"C'mon already! Stop all the talking! Let's get going! Isn't there a limit?!"

"Where are the klezmers?" asked the groom's family.

"The klezmers! Where are they?" answered the bride's family.

And the klezmers were busy getting ready. They polished the bows, they tuned the instruments. Yokel the Bassist yanked a boy along by the ear, warning him softly: "You little bastard! I'll teach you to tighten strings!" Mekhtshi the Drummer scratched the bristly half of his face, not deigning to glance at anyone. Khaykel the Jester was talking to an acquaintance, a teacher. He took a pinch of snuff from him with two fingers and poured out a cascade of jokes. And the other musicians, the boys with swollen cheeks and buckteeth like shovels, stood around Stempeniu, discussing an important matter with him in their klezmer jargon:

"Who's the chick next to the frau-to-be?" asked Stempeniu in musicians' lingo, staring at lovely Rokhele. "Hey, Rakhmiel!" he said to one of the swollen-cheeked apprentices. "Go and check her out, but snappy, man, snappy!"

Rakhmiel quickly came back with a clear answer: "That's no chick, man, she's already hitched! Dig, she's Isaak-Naftoli's daughter-in-law, and she comes from Skvirre. That's her hubby over there. The one with the velvet cap!"

"You're too much, baby!" cried Stempeniu cheerily. "You checked it out that fast? Man, she is really dynamite! A righteous chick! Dig those eyes!"

"If you like," the swollen-cheeked boy asked Stempeniu. "I'll go and rap with her...."

"Go to hell!" replied Stempeniu. "No one asked you to be my errand boy, dig! I'll do my own rappin' with her!"

"Hey, man!" cried Shneyer-Meyer in their jargon. "Just throw those big black eyes of yours out from the fiddle. Pull some Jewish guts out of those strings!..."

Stempeniu picked up his violin, nodded to the others, and they reached for their instruments.

CHAPTER FOUR: STEMPENIU'S VIOLIN

Now, the bride, with loosened hair, was seated in the center of the room, the girls and wives formed a circle around her, and with God's help Stempeniu began to play.

Ah, I feel how hard it is for my pen to describe what Stempeniu accomplished for the veiling! This was no scraping, no mere fiddling. It was like a religious service, a divine labor, with a lofty feeling, an utterly noble spirit! Stempeniu stood opposite the bride and played a wedding sermon on his violin, a long, a lovely sermon, a poignant sermon about the bride's free and happy life until now, about her maidenhood, and about the dark, bitter life in store for her, later, later. Gone was her girlhood! Her head was covered, her long, beautiful hair was out of sight, forever and ever.... No more joy! Farewell, youth. Now you're becoming a married woman!... How bleak and cheerless--may God forgive me!...

That was what came from Stempeniu's violin. All the wives caught the meaning of the wordless sermon, all the wives felt it. They felt it and wept for it with bitter tears.

"How long ago did I sit like that?" a young wife thought, swallowing her tears. "How long ago did I sit like that, with loose, undone braids, and I thought that angels

were playing with me, that I was the happiest girl in the world. And in the end, ah, in the end!..."

"Oh, God," prayed an old woman, the mother of grown daughters. "Oh, God, bring my eldest daughter her intended very, very soon, and with better luck than I had, and with a better life than I have with my husband--may God forgive me!..."

Such were the thoughts of the wives, and Stempeniu did his job. He played for all he was worth, and the violin spoke. Stempeniu drew forth a doleful melody, and the band backed him up. The people grew still, the noise petered out, the turmoil was gone. Everyone, everyone wanted to hear Stempeniu. The men fell to brooding, the women held their tongues, boys and girls climbed up on benches and tables--everyone wanted to hear Stempeniu.

"Quiet, everyone. Hush! Shush!"

And Stempeniu melted and flowed like wax on the violin. Throb, throb, throb! That was all that could be heard. A hand flew up and down. That was all that could be seen. And they could hear all kinds of voices, and the music struck every heart, it pierced every soul, it cut to the quick. The audience was dying, its strength was waning, its flesh was perishing. All hearts filled and overflowed, and tears came to their eyes. Jews sighed, Jews moaned, Jews wept....

And Stempeniu? Who cared about Stempeniu? No one even saw him, no one could see Stempeniu, no one could see a violin. They only heard sweet voices, divine singing, which filled the entire room....

And beautiful Rokhele, who had never heard Stempeniu play before, Rokhele, who had known that there was such a person as Stempeniu but had never heard such playing before, Rokhele stood and listened to the magical singing, to the exquisite voices--and she couldn't understand what was happening to her. Something pulled at her heart, something caressed her soul, but what it was--she couldn't understand. She raised her eyes towards where the sweet voices were pouring from, and she saw two wonderful black eyes, burning eyes, looking straight at her and piercing her like spears, like sharp spears. The wonderful black burning eyes stared at her and beckoned to her and spoke with her. Rokhele wanted to drop her eyes again--and couldn't.

"So that's Stempeniu!"

Such were Rokhele's thoughts when the veiling ceremony was over and the relatives began to think about leading the bride to the canopy.

"Where are the candles?" asked the groom's family.

"The candles? Where are they?" answered the bride's family.

And the same old hubbub resumed. Everyone ran and no one knew where. They jostled, they shoved, they trod on

corns, they tore dresses, they sweated, they cursed the waiters scurrying with lit candles, and the waiters in turn cursed the in-laws, and the in-laws argued with one another--it was, God be praised, a lively affair!

In the stampede away from the canopy, Stempeniu left the band, re-emerged among the women, right there, next to Isaak-Naftoli's daughter-in-law, beautiful Rokhele. With a dazzling smile he murmured a few words as he twirled his lovely black curls. Rokhele blushed, lowered her eyes to the ground, barely responding to anything he said. It wasn't really proper to stop suddenly and talk to a klezmer, and in front of all these people to boot!...

720 Fort Washington Avenue, #4K
New York, NY 10040

November 9, 1998

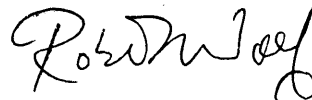
Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept the enclosed translation of *Stempenyu*, chapters 3 and 4, as my entry to the Sholom Aleichem translation contest. I have provided a second copy, as specified in your instructions.

If necessary (as I hope it will be), I can be reached at the return address or by telephone at (212)927-1209. In any case, I eagerly look forward to the results of this publishing venture and wish much success to all involved.

Sincerely,



Robert H. Wolf

3. STEMPENYU'S PREPARATIONS

Why such rejoicing in Mazapevke?

Reb Chaim Benzion Glock is marrying off his little daughter, his youngest, Rivkele—so why not rejoice with him? Such a wedding is well worth attending, especially as it's said that the host is one of the town's nabobs. Everybody will be at this wedding: this one for friendship, that one out of envy, this one for propriety's sake, and that one to show off his wife's pearls, earrings, or the necklace he brought her from the fair; and besides all this—they come for Stempenyu. In short, everyone's here at the wedding! All of Mazapevke is celebrating the nuptials of Rivkele, courtesy of Chaim Benzion Glock. Of particular note is Isaac Naphtali with his wife and children—Isaac Naphtali, who is Chaim Benzion Glock's partner in the store and in the mill and something of a relative to boot, that is, Isaac Naphtali's wife is distantly related to the bride's mother, something like a second cousin thrice-removed on the maternal side.

That is why Isaac Naphtali's wife, Dvosi Malke, is bustling about, veiled like a true in-law. She bustles about doing nothing, but she gestures with her hands and shouts and babbles just as if she were doing something. And Dvosi Malke's daughter-in-law, the fair Rokhele, is standing by the bride, primed like a princess, and her big blue eyes shine like two big gemstones, and a blush plays along her pink cheeks like two blossoming roses. With one hand she holds the bride's loosened hair which the women, with much weeping, are braiding for the "veiling" ceremony, while with the other hand she strokes her white throat, pretending not to notice that a pair of dark, smoldering eyes are gazing at her all this time without pause.... The waiters and the waitresses scurry about like poisoned mice. The in-laws raise a cry, "Oy, mercy! It's about time that the bride be veiled! What's the point of torturing these children, poor dears, by dragging out their fast on such a summer's day?" Everybody cries: "About time! About time!" But no one does a thing. Isaac Naphtali wanders around in his velvet cap, his hands behind his back, like a preacher,

while Dvosi Malke babbles on loudly. The other family members on both sides trip over each other with their hands held forward as though looking for something to do, but no task is assigned them.

"*Nu*, why isn't anybody doing anything?" asks the groom's side.

"Why don't they start doing something already?" answers the bride's side.

"Have you ever seen that the children should be kept hungry for so long?" shouts the groom's side.

"Have you ever heard that for such a long time the children should be kept hungry?" shouts the bride's side.

"Why all this running back and forth?"

"What's the point of all this running and rushing?"

"Everyone's running, everyone's chattering, yet no one makes a move—a fine paradox!"

"For all the running and chattering, no one wants to move from here to there."

"Haven't we had enough talking yet? It's time to do something! You know, eventually you have to get on with it!"

"*Nu*, enough talk! Let them do something already! Let's get on with it!"

"Where are the musicians?" asks the groom's side.

"The musicians—where are they?" asks the bride's side.

The musicians are busy with their work, rubbing the fiddle-bows with rosin, setting up the instruments. Reb Yokl the bass player pulls a boy by the ear and quietly explains to him: "Listen, you rascal, I'll teach *you* to pluck strings!" Mekhtshi the drummer scratches the bearded half of his face, looking at no one. Reb Khaykl the wedding jester chats with a schoolteacher of his acquaintance, accepts a pinch of snuff with two fingers, and scatters words as if from a sack. And the other musicians, the apprentices with their swollen cheeks and teeth as big as shovels, gather around Stempenyu and discuss an important matter with him in their lingo.

"Who's that doll standing by the bride?," asks Stempenyu in *klezmer*-speak, indicating the fair Rokhele with his eyes. "Hey, Yerakhmeil," he says to one of the swollen-cheeked apprentices. "Go get the scoop on her, who she is, but make it snappy, Yerakhmeil, make it snappy."

Yerakhmeil quickly returns with a clear answer:

"She's no doll, she's already hitched. That's Isaac Naphtali's daughter-in-law, comes from Skvira, and over there's her old man—see? The one milling around in the velvet chapeau."

"The devil take you, Yerakhmeil!," says Stempenyu quite good naturedly. "You got the scoop so quickly? Ah, she's quite a looker, this married lady! Just see how she's making eyes!"

"If you want," Yerakhmeil with the swollen-cheeks suggests, "if you want, I can go chat her up..."

"To hell with you," replies Stempenyu. "You weren't hired as a sexton. I'll chat this one up myself."

"Hey, make that fiddle throw off those dark glances of yours!," Shneur Meir calls out in their argot. "Pull Jewish *kishkes* out of that fiddle!..."

Stempenyu picks up his violin, gives the band a wink, and they get their instruments ready.

4. STEMPENYU'S VIOLIN

In short, with God's help Stempenyu began playing as the bride was enthroned in her chair.

Alas, I feel that my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu would play at the seating of a bride! It was not a mere scraping and a thrumming of the bow; it was a kind of holy service, a divine worship that was somehow very elevated in feeling, very refined in spirit! Stempenyu stood facing the bride and with his violin delivered a sermon, a long and beautiful sermon, a moving sermon, about the bride's free and happy existence up to this point, her life as a young girl, and about the dark bitter existence that awaited her later, later—a young girl no more! Her head covered, her long beautiful hair hidden forever...farewell to happiness! To your health, young woman, now that you are about to become a Jewish wife!...a condition that has nothing to do with happiness, may God forgive my saying so!

Such are the words that seem to issue forth from Stempenyu's violin. All the women understand the meaning of this unspoken sermon very well; they feel it, feel it and weep over it with bitter tears.

"How long since *I* was seated like that," ponders a young mother, swallowing her tears. "How long since *I* was seated like that, with my braided hair hanging down, and I believed that there really were angels sporting about me, that I was one of the happy few? To what end...alas, to what end!..."

"May you bring it about, God," beseeches an old woman, the mother of grown daughters, "may you bring it about, God, that my eldest daughter find her intended soon, but with more luck than I had, with a happier lot than what I had with my husband, and may God spare me for such talk!"

Such are the musings into which the women fall, while Stempenyu does his thing: he strains every muscle, and the violin speaks. It is a plaintive melody that Stempenyu,

Robert Wolf

accompanied by his orchestra, plays. All has grown hushed, no more fracas or noise. Everyone, everyone, wants to listen to Stempenyu. The men become thoughtful, the women fall silent, boys and girls scamper up on benches and tables—each of them wants to hear Stempenyu.

"Shhh! Keep it down! People, be quiet!!"

And Stempenyu pours himself into his violin and melts like wax: *tyok, tyok, tyok*—that's all you hear; a hand flying up and down—that's all you see. Yet all kinds of voices emerge, and all manner of song pours forth, and everything is so melancholy and sorrowful that it grabs you by the heart, tugs your soul, draws out your very life. The crowd is sapped of all its strength, the crowd dies, in every limb it dies. The heart becomes so full, so sodden, that tears well up in the eyes. People sigh, people moan, people weep...and Stempenyu?—Who Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? They don't see him at all, they don't see any Stempenyu, they don't see any violin; they only hear sweet voices, divine songs filling the entire room....

And the fair Rokhele, who until now has never heard Stempenyu play; Rokhele, who although aware of Stempenyu's existence has never before heard such playing, she stands listening to the enchanting songs, to the rare voices—but does she know what this is? Something is tugging at her heart, something caressing her soul, but what it is—she does not know. She raises her eyes to the place from which the sweet sounds pour forth, and discovers a pair of wonderfully handsome dark eyes, fiery eyes that look right at her and go through her like spears, like pointed spears. These wonderfully handsome, dark, fiery eyes look at her and wink at her and speak to her. Rokhele wants to lower her eyes—but cannot.

"So this is Stempenyu?"

Thus wonders the fair Rokhele, while, the seating ceremony having ended, the families make ready to proceed to the wedding canopy.

"Where in the world are the candles?" asks the groom's side.

"The candles—where are they?" answers the bride's side.

And so the former hubbub resumes. Everyone runs they know not where. They squeeze, they shove, they tread on each other's corns, they tear clothes, they sweat, they curse the waiters and sextons who return the curses to the bride and groom's relatives, and these same relatives fight amongst themselves—it is, praise God, quite a lively affair!

In the tumult that arises as people are exiting the wedding ceremony, Stempenyu steals away from the band and—here he is among the women, right here, near Isaac-Naphtali's daughter-in-law, the fair Rokhele. He tosses about a few words with her, smiling and twisting his beautiful long hair. Rokhele turns red, looks down at the floor and answers only his every tenth word. It is not proper, somehow, to suddenly start chatting with a musician, especially at a gathering like this!...

Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

Dear Sir or Madam,

Enclosed please find my original translation of chapters 3 and 4 of the novel Stempenyu. I am submitting two copies, as required.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Golda Werman

Dr. Golda Werman
1 Nachalat Zadok St.
Jerusalem 94548 Israel
Tel. (02) 623 4793
FAX (02) 623 2081

Sholem Aleichem **Stempenyu**

III

Stempenyu's Preparations

What's all the merrymaking about in Mazepevke?

Chaim Benzion Glock is marrying off his youngest daughter Rivkele and everyone is taking part in the festivities. After all, it's not every day that there's a wedding like this in the shtetl! Chaim Benzion Glock is a wealthy man, one of the wealthiest in Mazepevke, so everyone wants to celebrate with him. Naturally all have their own reasons. Some come out of genuine feelings of friendship, and some come out of jealousy or because they have to put in an appearance, and some come to show off their wives' pearls or earrings or the new necklace they purchased at the fair. But everyone comes for Stempenyu.

It goes without saying that Isaac Naftali and his wife and children are among the guests. Not only is he Chaim Benzion Glock's partner in the store and in the mill but Dvosi Malka, Isaac Naftali's wife, is a distant relative of the bride's mother, a cousin's cousin twice removed, if I'm not mistaken. She is all decked out in her best dress, as if she were an intimate member of the wedding party, and she acts as if she is one of the main organizers of the affair, waving her hands and shouting orders and generally making a fuss. Her daughter-in-law, beautiful Rochele, looks like a princess. She has big, blue eyes that sparkle like diamonds and cheeks as red as roses in bloom. With one hand she holds the bride's flowing hair which the women, with much crying and wailing, had unbraided before the veiling ceremony. With the other hand Rochele strokes her own white throat, unaware of the burning black eyes gazing in her direction.

The waiters and waitresses are running around like poisoned mice and both sets of parents are hysterical. "Oy, gevald," they cry, "it's time to bedeck the bride. How long can we keep the poor children waiting? They haven't eaten a thing yet this long summer day." And everyone agrees, "Yes, it's time, it's time," but no one does anything about it. Isaac Naftali, wearing a velvet cap, walks back and forth

with his hands crossed behind him like a preacher, while Dvosi Malka continues to create a hubbub. Both sets of parents run around with their arms extended, as if they are ready to do something, but don't know what.

"Nu, why don't we get started?" the groom's parents ask.

"Why don't we begin?" answer the bride's parents.

"Did you ever hear of keeping hungry children waiting so long?" groan the parents of the groom.

"Who ever heard of keeping hungry children waiting so long?" the bride's parents wail.

"What's the good of running back and forth?"

"What's the point of all the running around?"

"They hustle and bustle and run here and there but always end up where they started. There's no organization!"

"There's a lot of bluster and motion but nothing gets accomplished."

"Maybe the time has come to stop talking and begin to do something? There's got to be an end to this delay."

"Yes, enough of empty prattling! Let's begin! No more delays."

"Where are the musicians?" ask the groom's parents.

"The musicians, where are they?" the bride's parents echo.

As it happens, the musicians are busy preparing for the evening's performance, waxing their bows and tuning their instruments. Yekel the bass player is pulling a small boy's ear. "Listen you little bastard," he whispers, "I'll teach you to pluck the strings of my bass!" Mechtshi the drummer scratches his beard, oblivious of everyone around. Cheykel, the wedding jester, is talking non-stop to a teacher he knows, stopping for breath only long enough to accept a pinch of snuff which he takes between his forefinger and thumb. All the other musicians, the puffy-cheeked young men with the big teeth that look like oars, are talking with Stempenyu in their own jargon.

"Who's the good-looking chick standing next to the bride?" Stempenyu asks, his eyes fixed on beautiful Rochele. And turning to one of the puffy-cheeked apprentices he says, "Yerachmiel, go and find out who she is. Move it!"

Yerachmiel returns quickly. "She's a married woman, Isaac Naftali's daughter-in-law from Skvire. See that man over there in the velvet cap? That's her husband."

"Knock it off, Yerachmiel," says Stempenyu, teasing him, "you sure found that out fast. She's a real stunner. Look at her roll those eyes."

"I'll go and talk to her for you, if you want me to," says Yerachmiel.

"Drop dead! Who asked for your help? I'll talk to her myself."

"Come on, Stempenyu," calls out Shneur Meir, "wring those black eyes out of the fiddle, wrench out some Jewish guts!"

And Stempenyu takes up his fiddle, nods to his band, and they place their instruments in position, ready to serenade the bride as she sits in the bridal chair.

IV

Stempenyu's Fiddle

How can I describe Stempenyu's playing for the bride? How can my pen do him justice? For his was no ordinary playing, no artless strumming on the strings. It was a kind of benediction, a divine service, pure and reverent. Stempenyu stood opposite the bride and held a discourse with her on his fiddle, a beautiful, long, moving discourse about her free and happy life as a maiden and the dark and bitter future that awaits her -- later, later. Her girlhood has ended. Soon her head will be covered and her lovely long hair will be hidden forever. Farewell happiness! Goodbye youth! You are about to become a married woman, dull and cheerless -- may God forgive me for what I say!

These are the dark undercurrents of Stempenyu's wordless sermon. This is what all the married women understand and why they shed bitter tears.

"How long has it been since I sat in that bridal chair with my braids undone," muses a young wife, holding back her tears, "how long since I sat there believing that angels are watching over me, that I am one of the lucky ones? But the way it turned out, oh how it turned out...."

"God, please send my oldest daughter her intended soon," pleads an older woman, the mother of grown daughters, "but let her have more mazal than I had, let her have a better life with her husband -- God forgive me for what I say."

These are the thoughts that pass through the women's minds as Stempenyu plays his heart out on the fiddle. And when his band accompanies him in a melancholy melody, no one in the hall makes a sound -- the clamor ceases, the tumult grinds to a halt. Everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. Men listen in pensive silence, women become dreamy, boys and girls clamber up on the benches and tables to hear better.

"Sha! Everyone be quiet! Hush!"

Stempenyu merges with the music, melts with it like wax. The audience, drawn along with him, hears only the vibrations of the strings, sees nothing but a hand flying back and forth. The soft sad strains, the mournful melodies that flow out of the fiddle tug at their heartstrings and touch the very depths of their souls. They feel faint, their hearts fill to bursting, their eyes overflow with tears. They sigh, they moan, they weep.

And Stempenyu? Where is he? What happened to him? No one sees him, no one sees his fiddle. They hear only the sweet sounds and the divine melodies that permeate every corner of the room. And as beautiful Rochele listens to the exquisite sounds and the enchanting melodies something happens to her, something she doesn't understand. Her heart is aflutter, her soul soars. She looks up to where the heartfelt harmonies are coming from and sees a pair of dazzling black eyes, ravishing eyes, focused on her, winking at her, speaking to her, penetrating her like spears. Beautiful Rochele tries to look away, but she can't.

"So that's the Stempenyu I've heard so much about," she says to herself as the bedecking ceremony ends and the parents prepare to lead the bride to the wedding canopy.

"Where are the candles?" ask the groom's parents.

"Yes, the candles -- where are they?" the bride's parents repeat.

And soon the same tumult starts all over again. Everyone runs around helter-skelter, jostling one another, stepping on each other's bunions, tearing their clothes and working themselves into a sweat. They curse the waiters and the beadles who in turn raise their voices at the parents, and they begin to bicker among themselves. It is, God be praised, very lively.

In the commotion after the wedding ceremony Stempenyu steals away from his band, heads straight for the women's section, and stands next to Isaac Naftali's daughter-in-law, beautiful Rochele. He exchanges a few words with her, smiling and fingering his long curly hair all the while. Rochele blushes, lowers her eyes and answers in monosyllables. After all, how does it look to talk to a klezmer player, and in front of all these people, too?

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Monday
September 28
1998

Dear Madam or Sir,

I enclose my original translation of Chapters Three and Four of Sholem Aleichem's novel "Stempenyu". I wish to submit it for the contest that I saw advertised in "Jewish Currents", September 1998, page 43.

(A note about the "klezmer language" that appears in "Stempenyu" — I have translated it with mostly made-up English words, while being aware that there are other methods of solving this translation problem.)

Yours sincerely,
Elinor Robinson

iii
Stempenyu's Preparations.

(From the novel Stempenyu)

Why is the joy so great in Mazepevke?

Reb Khaim Ben-Tsien Glok is marrying off his youngest daughter, Rivkele, so why shouldn't people rejoice with him? It pays to be at the wedding: after all, he is, as they say, a rich man in town. Everyone wants to be at the wedding: some out of friendship, some out of envy, some for appearance's sake, and some to show off a wife's pearls, earrings or the new necklace the husband brought his wife from the fair, and still more--on account of Stempenyu. In short, everyone's here at the wedding! All Mazepevke is partying at Khaim Ben-Tsien Glok's house, at Rivkele's wedding! Not to speak of Ayzik-Naftoli and his wife and children--they certainly are, because Ayzik-Naftoli is a partner of Khaim Ben-Tsien's in the store, a partner in the mill, and also something of a relative: that is, Ayzik-Naftoli's wife is related in some way to the bride's mother, some kind of second cousin twice removed on her mother's side.

That's why people are clustering around Ayzik-Naftoli's wife, Dvosi-Malke, who is dressed in a veil like a real mother of the bride. She bustles about, doing nothing, waving her arms, shouting and making a commotion, just as if she were doing something. And Dvosi-Malke's daughter-in-law, the beautiful Rokhele, stands near the bride, dressed in all her finery like a princess, and her big blue eyes shine like two big diamonds. And there is a play of color on her red cheeks, as if on two roses in

bloom. With one hand she holds the bride's freely flowing hair, which the women have, with much weeping, unbraided for the ceremony of veiling the bride. With the other hand she strokes her own white neck, without at all noticing how a pair of black, burning eyes is staring at her the whole time, without cease... The waiters and waitresses race around like poisoned mice. Relatives exclaim: "Dear me! It's already time to veil the bride! How long will they make the children suffer? The poor things have been fasting such a long summer day!" Everyone shouts, "It's time already! It's time already!"--but when it comes to actually doing something, they do nothing. Ayzik-Naftoli roams up and down in a velvet cap, his hands clasped behind him like a traveling preacher, and Dvosi-Malke fusses in a very loud voice. The other relatives from both sides of the family run around, getting ahead of each other with their hands held out in front of them as if they want to do something, but they are not given any work to do.

"Well, why aren't they doing anything yet?" asks the groom's side of the family.

"Why aren't they beginning to do something yet?" responds the bride's side of the family.

"Did you ever see children kept hungry so long?" yells the groom's side.

"Did you ever hear of children being kept hungry so long?" yells the bride's side.

"Why are they running around, back and forth?"

"What's the point of all this running?"

"It's enough to run and to make noise--no one wants to stir

from here to there."

"Maybe there's been enough talk already? It's time to do something! This has to stop some time!"

"Well, we've talked enough! Let's begin to do something at last! This has to stop!"

"Where are the musicians?" asks the groom's side of the family.

"The musicians, where are they?" responds the bride's side.

And the musicians are busy with their work: they rub rosin on the fiddlestick, they tune their instruments. Reb Yokl Bass drags a boy by his ear and tells him softly: "Listen, little bastard, I'll show you how to tighten strings!" Mekhtshi Drummer scratches the bearded half of his face, not looking at anyone. Reb Khaykl Badkhn talks to a teacher whom he knows, takes from him with two fingers a pinch of snuff, and pours out proverbs as if from a sack. And the rest of the musicians, the swollen^{*} youths with the big shovel-like teeth, stand around Stempenyu and talk all they want to, in their argot, about an important subject.

"Who is that shemalion [1] standing next to the blusheree [2]?" asks Stempenyu in musician-language, indicating with his eyes the beautiful Rokhele. "Just zip over there, Yerakhmiel," he says to one of the swollen young musicians. "Just probble [3] she-be-who [4], but cuttle [5], Yerakhmiel, cuttle!!"

Yerakhmiel swiftly returns with a precise answer:

* "swollen youths" - perhaps swollen as a result of malnourishment? - TRANSLATOR.

In "klezmer-language": -

1. female 2. bride 3. find out 4. who she is 5. quickly

"That's no free-she [6], that's a foolessa [7]. That's Ayzik-Naftoli's daughter-in-law, from Skvire she is, and that's her foolio [8]--see him? There he is, going around in a velvet cattermajorum [9]."

"The devil take you, Yerakhmiel!" says Stempenyu, who is in quite a temper. "You found out so quickly? Oh, she's a really clovery [10] foolessa! See how she moths it [11] with her seekers [12]!"

"If you want," the swollen Yerakhmiel asks Stempenyu, "if you want, I'll go tiraddle [13] to her."

"Go to hell!" Stempenyu answers him. "You aren't being asked to be a go-between. I'll tiraddle with that-a-she [14] myself."

"Well, just fling from the fiddle a pair of black eyes!" exclaims Shneyer-Meyer in his lingo. "Just drag Jewish guts out of the fiddle!"...

Stempenyu picks up his violin, with a sign to the band, and they tune up their instruments.

"Klezmer-language" :-

6. unmarried woman 7. young married woman 8. husband 9. hat
10. pretty 11. looks 12. eyes 13. talk 14. the woman in
question

IV

Stempenyu's Violin.

In short, God helped, and Stempenyu began the ceremony of seating the bride.

Oh, I feel the feebleness of my pen to describe how Stempenyu seated the bride! It was no mere playing and scraping; it was a kind of holy work, a religious service with somehow a very elevated feeling and a very noble spirit! Stempenyu stood facing the bride and preached a sermon to her on the violin, a long beautiful sermon, a moving sermon, about the free and happy life of the bride up to now, in her status of an unmarried girl, and about the miserable, bitter life that awaited her later, later:--no longer an unmarried girl! Her head covered, her beautiful long hair hidden for ever... Happiness gone! Farewell, days of youth. Now you are becoming a married Jewish woman!... Somehow it's not at all jolly, may God not punish for these words!...

Words like these can almost be heard issuing from Stempenyu's violin. All the married women well understand the literal meaning of this wordless sermon, all the married women feel it; they feel this, and weep bitter tears over it.

"How long did I sit like that," a young wife thinks, swallowing back her tears, "how long did I sit like that with loose unbraided hair and think that angels were playing with me, and that I was a lucky one? In the end... oh, in the end!..."

"Send, God," prays an old woman, a mother of grown-up daughters, "send, God, to my elder daughter her destined partner

quickly, but with more luck than me, with a more beautiful fate than I have with my husband, may God not punish for these words!..."

Such are the thoughts that come to the women, and Stempenyu gets on with his task: he labors with all his limbs, and the violin speaks. Now Stempenyu plays a mournful tune, and the band backs him up. It grows quiet, the noise and uproar have stopped. All, all want to hear Stempenyu. Men become lost in thought, women fall silent, boys and girls climb up onto benches and tables--everyone wants to hear Stempenyu.

"Shhh! Quieter! People, be quiet!!"

And Stempenyu pours out his being on the violin, and melts like wax; throb, throb, throb--that is all you hear; an arm flies up and down--that is all you see. And you hear all kinds of sounds, and various kinds of tunes pour out, and always sad ones, mournful ones, and it grips your heart, it tugs at your soul, it draws forth your living spirit. The audience, with all its powers, is expiring; the audience, in all its limbs, is dying. Somehow the heart becomes so full, so waterlogged, and tears appear in the eyes. People sigh, people groan, people cry... And Stempenyu? Who is Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? You don't see him at all, you don't see Stempenyu, you don't see any violin; you only hear sweet melodies, divine melodies, which fill the whole house... And the beautiful Rokhele, who never heard Stempenyu play until now, who heard that there was a Stempenyu, but has not yet heard playing of this kind, stands and listens to the magical tunes, the rare tunes--and doesn't understand what this is.

Something pulls at her heart, something caresses her soul, but what it is--she doesn't understand. She lifts up her eyes to the place from where the sweet sounds are flowing, and perceives a pair of wonderfully beautiful black eyes, fiery eyes, which look straight at her, and pierce her like spears, like sharp spears; the wonderfully beautiful black fiery eyes look at her and beckon to her and speak with her. Rokhele wants to lower her eyes--and cannot.

"Is that Stempenyu?"

That is what the beautiful Rokhele thinks, when the seating of the bride has been completed, and the relatives are beginning to think about the leading of the bride to the wedding canopy.

"Where are the candles?" asks the bridegroom's side of the family.

"The candles, where are they?" responds the bride's side.

And so the same uproar begins as before. Everyone is running, not knowing where. People squeeze, they push, they step on other people's corns, they rip skirts, they sweat, they curse the waiters and the beadles, and they curse the relatives in their turn, and the relatives bicker amongst themselves--it's quite lively, praise God!

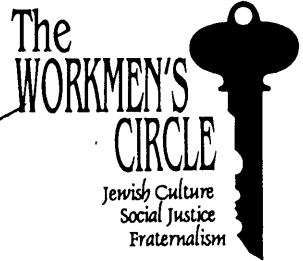
In the hullabaloo that starts up while people are walking back from the wedding canopy, Stempenyu slips away from the band, and here he is popping up among the women, right here next to the beautiful Rokhele. He exchanges a few brief words with her, smiling at her, and twisting his gorgeous long hair into curls. Rokhele turns pink, lowers her eyes to the ground and answers one

word to ten of his. It's not done, somehow, to come to a halt here all of a sudden and chat at length with a member of the band, and in front of such a crowd, too!...

Translated
from Yiddish
into English
by
Elinor Robinson

7
Joan Koppen

Nov 30 98



Dear Sidney

As you see, I made it,
under the wire (your letter
asked that it be sent out
before the end of November).

Got up beside - Thank for
patience. I've been short a
person since August due to an
unfortunate accident and
24 hours never seem to be
enough - especially since we
all take vacation after the
summer seminars are over.

Here, enclosed are your
pair of copies. Hats off to Lucy
Rauch, our Office Administrator,
who labored with me,

Best to bel - Chava.

Stempenyu - Sholem Aleichem

Ch. III

Stempenyu's Preamble

Why all this great excitement in Mazepevke?

It's that Reb Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok is marrying off his younger daughter, the "mizinke"*, Rivkele - so why not celebrate with him? Such a wedding is well worth attending: after all, as they say, a rich man in town. Everybody will be at that wedding: some out of good friendship, others out of envy, still others because it's expected, then there are those who come to show off the wife's pearls, earrings or the new necklace recently purchased at the county fair; and even more, because of Stempenyu. In short, everyone will be attending that wedding. All of Mazepevke is celebrating with Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok at Rivkele's wedding. And certainly Ayzik-Naftoli, with his wife and children - he's one of Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok's shareholders in the store, a partner in the mill and even a relative of sorts: that is to say, Ayzik-Naftoli's wife is related somehow to the bride's mother, twice or three times removed, on her own mother's side.

If for no other reason, Ayzik-Naftoli's wife, Dvosye-Malke, dressed to the hilt, is strutting hither and thither, as if she were actually a "mekhuteneste"*, a member of the wedding party. She promenades around without doing anything except wave her hands, holler and make a tumult as if she were really busy. And Dvosye-Malke's daughter-in-law, Rokhele the pretty one, is standing behind the bride, attired like a princess, her big blue eyes aglow like a huge pair of jewels, the blush on her cheeks fluttering as gently as rose petals unfolding.

* Appendix

In one hand she holds the bride's long fall of hair, the braids having been undone by the women, before *badekns**, with a lot of crying; and with the other hand she is stroking her own white throat, completely unaware of a pair of scorching black eyes trained on her unceasingly.

Waiters and waitresses scurry to and fro like hyperactive mice. *Mekhutonim* are clamoring: "For goodness sake, it's time to veil the bride! How much longer do these poor youngsters have to wait after fasting such a long summer day?" Everyone is shouting: "It's high time! It's time already!" - but nobody makes a move. Ayzik-Naftoli is circulating - sporting a velvet cap, hands folded behind his back, as if he were the town-preacher and Dvosye-Malke is cackling at high pitch. The other assorted family members from both sides are running into one another, arms outstretched in front, seemingly as if they were very ready to be used but nobody gives them a task.

- "Nu, why is nothing happening yet?" ask the groom's people.

- "Why haven't they started yet?" the bride's folks rejoin.

- "Have you ever seen hungry children held up so long?" his family shouts.

- "Did you ever hear of such a long delay for fasting kids?" - her kin challenge.

- "Why are they running back and forth?"

- "What kind of running is this, what's the running?"

- "Everybody's running, everyone is chattering, and all they do is stay in the same spot - great executives indeed!"

- "All they do is run around and make noise but nobody is ready to move from here to there."

- "Perhaps there's been enough talk now? Time to move it! This must end or else!"

- "Nu, enough talking! Let's start to do! This must come to an end!"

- "Where are the klezmer (musicians)?" - groom's side asks.

- "The musicians, where are they?"

Well, the musicians are occupied with their own chores: waxing the bows, tuning the instruments. Reb Yokl the bass player is leading a young boy by the ear, cussing him out in a low voice: "You listen carefully, you little bastard, I'll teach you how to yank at strings." Mekhtshi the drummer, busily scratching the bearded half of his face, is simply staring at no one in particular. Reb Khaykl *badkhn**, the tumbler, chatting with a local teacher he happens to know, helps himself to a pinch of snuff with two fingers and releases a torrent of couplets that pour out as if from a sack.... And the remaining instrumentalists, the bloated chaps with teeth the size of shovels, surround Shempenyu deep in discussion in their own jargon.

"Who is that broad, yonder, standing next to the bride?" Stempenyu queries in Klezmer lingo, pointing his eyes at Rokhele the pretty one.

"Hop over there, Yerakhmiel", he says to one of the bulging klezmer-fellows. - "Go over and ferret out who she is, but make snappy, Yerakhmiel, on the button!"

Yerakhmiel returns swiftly with a clear report. "This is no damsel, she's already a dame and that's her stud. See, out there? That's him walking around in velvet headgear."

"The Devil take you, Yerakhmiel" - says Stempenyu good-humordly. "How quickly you found out. Eh - she's a real smasher, this wifey. Just see how she ogles with those lookers."

- "If you like", Yerakhmiel the bloat suggests to Stempenyu, "I'll go and have a word with her"...

- "Drop dead!" Stempenyu snaps back. "Nobody's asking you to be my mouthpiece. I'll deal with that one myself."

- "Come on, toss a couple of dark eyes out of that fiddle," calls Shneyer-Zalmen, in klezmer slang. "Start pulling some Jewish guts out of your strings!"

Stempenyu turns to his instrument, winks to his band and they start to tune up.

Chapter 3 III

In no time, thank goodness, Stempenyu introduced the ritual of seating the bride. Ah, I feel that my pen is inadequate to depict the Stempenyu flair for this *bazetsn**. He wasn't simply making music, scratching out sounds. This was a kind of solemn rite, a divine service with lofty purpose, with noble passion. Facing the bride, Stempenyu preached a tonal sermon for her alone, a sermon beautiful and full, a moving sermon starting with the bride's happy and unfettered life until this day and the miserable bitter turn her life would take, later on; later on - a girl no more! Head covered, her gorgeous tresses obscured forever, her

earlier gaiety vanished. "Fare, thee well, youth! You are now becoming a matron!...a change not terribly optimistic, may God not strike our tongue."

This was the message detected out of Stempenyu's violin. Every one of the women listening in the audience fully understood the meaning of this wordless sermon, all the women were alerted, and promptly reacted by shedding tears of bitterness.

"How long is it since I was seated - like this" - a young woman recalls, swallowing her tears. "How long since I sat there, my hair unbraided, convinced that the angels were frolicking with me, that I alone was elected for happiness. And the outcome - ah, what an outcome!"

"May the destiny, dear God" - an older woman, the mother of grown daughters implores; "God, may the lot of my older daughter be to find a match soon enough, but with better *mazl** than mine, with a better lot than I drew with my husband, may God not punish me for these words."

While the women are immersed in thoughts like these, Stempenyu continues to do his thing: he drives the bow with passion and the fiddle proclaims with lust. Now, Stempenyu is playing a tearful tune and the band backs him in harmony. All grows quiet: no clamor, no noise. Every one is as eager as the next to listen to Stempenyu. Men stop to ponder, women grow silent, boys and girls climb up on benches and on to the tables - everyone wants to hear Stempenyu.

*Appendix

"Sh-sha. Quieter! People, let's be quiet." And Stempenyu overflows like hot molten wax on his violin. "Tiokh - Tiokh - Tiokh" - nothing else can be heard. An arm flying up and down - nothing else can be seen. Yet you perceive a blend of melodies, only sad and mournful melodies that capture the heart and suck at the soul, leaving you spent. Listeners are void of inner strength, grow limp, their limbs waning away. Hearts billow, soaked with pain and eyes brim with tears. Grown men moan, they groan, they sob. And Stempenyu? Who Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? He can barely be seen, nobody sees Stempenyu, nobody sees his fiddle. Only (the) sweet sounds can be heard, celestial song that permeates the entire room.

And Rokhele the pretty one who had never before experienced Stempenyu's playing, who had heard that there was a Stempenyu but had never been immersed in this kind of playing, stands fixed, listening to the spellbinding music, to the extraordinary tones - and simply cannot fathom what is going on.

Whatever is tugging at her heart is also caressing her inner soul but what that is baffles her. Raising her eyes in the direction from which these sweet sounds come flowing, she meets a pair of dazzling dark eyes, scorching eyes that look straight at her, piercing her like sharpened spears. Those magnificent, black, fiery eyes are staring right at her, winking to her, speaking to her. Rokhele wants to cast her eyes downward but can't.

*Appendix

"So this is Stempenyu?" Rokhele the pretty one mused when the "seating" ceremonial was over and the *mekhutanim* were busy contemplating the next move, actually to escort their children to the *khupe*.*

"Where could the candles be?" ask the groom's folks.

"The candles, where are they?" echo the bride's people.

Back to the earlier clatter. Everybody is running around, with no real purpose. People jostle and bump one another, step on corns, snag their dresses; they sweat, they swear at the waiters and ritual assistants who cuss out the *mekhutanim* in return, and the family members argue amongst themselves. Praise be, things are happening!

In the stampede that erupts as the crowd returns from the marriage ceremony, Stempenyu manages to slip away from the band and show up among the women, on the very spot next to Ayzik-Naftoli's daughter-in-law, Rokhele the pretty one. He exchanges a word or two with her, smiling all the while, twirling his stunning long hair.

Rokhele flushes, lowers her gaze to the ground and answers one word to his ten. Surely it is entirely inappropriate for her to be standing there, chatting with a mere entertainer in the band and in front of such a crowd!

*Appendix

Appendix

Glossary

badekn(s) - the ceremonial covering of the bride's head by the groom with a veil or pretty kerchief, once he had ascertained that she is indeed his intended, shortly before the actual marriage rite.

badkhn - a jester or tummler who entertains at weddings (or other events where appropriate levity may be permitted) with song, rhyming couplets and poems, even at the expense of the family and guests, with special dedications to the bride and groom.

bazetsn - the bride, escorted by female attendants, is led to a special chair prior to the "veiling" ceremony. The short interval bridging one to the other provides an opportunity for a skilled musician to display his talent and/or for a jester or badkhn to shower the bride with suitable quips and couplets.

Khupe - "Chuppah" - wedding canopy. Also used for the ceremony itself.

Mazl - fortune, luck; (generally positive but not always).

mekhutonim -(plural, *mekhutonim*; feminine, *mekhute~~meste~~*) - a member of the immediate family on either side. This term is sometimes extended to others directly concerned with the event.

mizinke - The youngest daughter.

Missing pages? F.K.

Rena Berkowicz Borow

Acquisitions Librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America since 1985. she is a graduate of Temple University, has a master's degree in library science, and has done graduate work in Yiddish language and literature at Columbia university. Her published translation work includes several short stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer. With Miriam Hoffman, she has co-authored the plays "Songs of Paradise" (produced by Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival and at the First International Yiddish Festival in Amsterdam) "Hold the Wedding," and "Mr. Singer and His Demons."

October 30, 1998

- According to David Rostkies,
it's not too late to submit
three

- Thanks for your consideration

Rena Borow

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RE BOROW at JTSA. EDY

III.

STEMPENYU'S PREPARATIONS

What's all the hoopla in Mazepevke

Reb Khayim-Bentsiyen Glok is marrying off his daughter, Rifkele, his youngest child.

So, why not live it up with him? This wedding will be worth going to – Reb Khayim-Bentsiyen is a real somebody around here. Everybody's going – some because they're friends, some because they're jealous, some because they're obliged to, some because they want to show off the wife's pearls or earrings or the new choker they brought home from the fair – but most of the them are going because of Stempenyu. So here we are - the entire town is celebrating Khayim-Bentsiyen's daughter's wedding. And no one more so than Ayzik-Naftule and his wife and children. Aizik-Naftule and Khayim-Bentsiyen are partners in a store and a mill and they're slightly related to boot. Their wives, it seems, are third cousins twice removed on the mother's side .

Because of this, Ayzik-Naftle's wife, Dvosse-Malke, is all decked out and struts her finery as if she were the mother of the bride. She fusses about , doing nothing, but flails her arms and makes a racket as if she were doing something. Her daughter-in-law, the lovely Rukhele, radiant as a princess, stands next to the bride. Her big blue eyes sparkle like two huge diamonds, her cheeks are flushed like summer roses. With one hand, she fingers a lock of the bride's hair, which had been unbraided by weeping women in preparation for the veiling ceremony; with the other hand she strokes her own milk-white throat, oblivious to a pair of smoldering black eyes riveted on her. Waiters and waitresses scurry about like mice that had nibbled on poison. The family frets "Isn't it time for the veiling ceremony? How long do the children have to suffer? They've already fasted the

length of a summer day.” Everyone chimes in, “It’s time! It’s time! But no one does anything about it. Ayzik-Naftule wanders about in his velvet cap, hands clasped behind his back like a preacher; Dvosse-Malke bellows and barks, and the rest of the wedding party trip over themselves, rushing around, hands outstretched, desperate for something to do with them.

-So, why don’t they start already? Someone from the groom’s side asks.

-Why haven’t they started yet? Someone from the bride’s side answers.

-Have you ever seen such a thing, letting the children go hungry this long? pleads a relative of the groom.

-Have you ever heard such a thing, starving the children like this? bleats a relative of the bride.

-Why is everybody running back and forth?

-Who’s running? Why running?

-Everybody’s running, everybody’s shouting, but nothing’s happening. A fine fettle.

-They’re all running, they’re all shouting, but nothing’s getting done.

-Maybe we should stop talking and start doing? We can’t go on like this!

-No more talking! Time for doing! This has to end!

-Where are the musicians?

-The musicians, where are they?

The musicians are puttering around, rosining their bows and setting up their instruments.

Yukl the Bass grabs a kid by his ear and hisses at him: “listen up, you little brat, I’ll teach you to pluck one of my strings!” Mekhtshe the Drum scratches the stubble that covers half his face. Khaykl the Jester buttonholes the local schoolmaster and grubs a pinch of

themselves in thought, women in silence. Boys and girls scramble onto benches and table-tops. everyone wants to hear Stempenyu.

Sh... Quiet down! Everybody, let's have quiet!

Stempenyu melts into his fiddle and becomes one with it. Zing-zing –zing – is all you can hear; the blur of a hand flying up and down is all you can see. Strains of melodies, fragments of songs - an outpouring of sadness and longing tugs at the heart, saps the soul, and robs the spirit. The crowd swoons, slumps, fades. Limbs go slack, hearts grow heavy, eyes fill with tears. A sigh is heard, a moan, a whimper... And Stempenyu? Stmpenyu is no more. He is nowhere, nor his fiddle. Only sweet sounds and heavenly tunes fill the air. And the lovely Rukhele, who until now had only heard about Stempenyu but had never heard him play, listens to the bewitching melodies, the heavenly sounds - and wonders why her heart is full, her soul soothed. She turns her eyes toward the source of the sweet sound and meets the gaze of a pair of wondrous, fiery black eyes fixed upon her, piercing her like arrows. The wondrous, fiery black eyes beacon to her, wink at her, speak to her. Rukhele wants to lower her eyes, but she can't.

“So this is Stempenyu?” Rukhele muses later, when the “enthroning” of the bride is over and the families prepare to lead the bride and groom to the canopy.

-Where are the candles?

-The candles, where are they?

And the commotion resumes. Everybody's running, no one knows where. Pushing and shoving and sweating, they step on bunions and trample hems. The guests berate the waiters; the waiters berate the hosts, and the wedding party bicker among themselves.

Praised be God, the party's on.

IV.

STEMPENYU'S FIDDLE

To make a long story short, God intercedes and Stempenyu proceeds to “enthroned” the bride. Alas, my pen cannot do justice to Stempenyu’s performance. His fiddle doesn’t play, it roars. His is a sacred offering, an exquisite exaltation, pure and lofty. Stempenyu stands facing the bride, raises his bow, and delivers a winding, heart rending discourse upon the carefree life she is about to leave behind, upon the loss of innocence and the dark and bitter future that follows. Gone will be her girlhood; hidden forever her long flowing hair. Good-bye to gaiety! Farewell to youth! Decrepitude lies in wait... unhappiness beacons... may God forgive us...

All this Stempenyu’s fiddle evokes in wordless discourse that goes straight to the hearts of the women in attendance. They feel it, they live it, and they shed bitter tears.

-How long since I sat there – laments a young wife, swallowing her tears – how long since I sat, my hair free and flowing, thinking that my life would be frolic with angels, that I was the most fortunate of women? And how did it all end? Ah, how it all ends!

-Grant her, merciful God, prays a mother of grown daughters, grant my elder daughter a good match, don’t delay. May her luck be better than mine, and may her lot be better than mine... may God spare me for saying so...

These are the thoughts that come to women’s minds as Stempenyu performs. He plays and the fiddle speaks, as the band accompanies its melancholy tale. The crowd has grown quiet. The din is no more. Everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. Men lose

In the confusion after the wedding ceremony, Stempenyu slips away from the band and surfaces among the women, next to IN's daughter-in-law, the lovely Rukhele. They exchange a few words. He flashes her a smile and twirls his curly locks with a finger. Rukhele blushes, and offers one word to his ten. It won't do, after all, to be seen talking with a musician, in public...

*Page
margin*

MIRIAM HARTMAN FLACKS
1603 GARDEN STREET
SANTA BARBARA, CA 93101

October 15, 1998

Translation Contest
Sholem Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

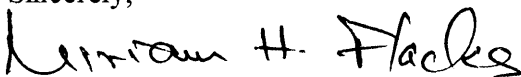
Dear Friends:

I am responding to the notice in the September, 1998 issue of Jewish Currents (p.43). Enclosed are two (2) copies of my translation of chapters three and four of "Stempenyu", which I would like to enter in your contest.

I was a mittleshul and "hekhre kursn" student of Prof. Itche Goldberg's, have taught Yiddish classes through University of California at Santa Barbara's Hillel, and have been translating various Yiddish materials — mostly for community groups — for many years. The University of California Press will, in 2000, be publishing "Remember the Children", a book of photographs of Jewish children in Eastern Europe taken in 1937-38 by Roman Vishniac, for which I have transliterated and translated some songs, poems, street-rhymes, etc. appropriate to the photographs. I will be happy to furnish any other biographical or bibliographical material that you might require.

Whether I win the contest or not, I would appreciate your keeping my name in mind for further translation work (assuming, of course, that you find my work satisfactory, even if not prize-winning). I look forward to hearing from you after the contest closes.

Sincerely,



Miriam Hartman Flacks

Translator's note: This translation was done from pp. 133-139 of "Yiddishe Romanen", Special Morgen Freiheit edition, New York, 1937. Some Yiddish words remain untranslated in the text, their meaning given in footnotes. These are words that are inherently Yiddish, and can only be fully understood in their Yiddish context; they have a particular cultural meaning, unique to the culture which produced them, and should, I believe, be rendered in their original language — even in a translation. The "klezmer language" words are rendered, somewhat anachronistically, in modern "klezmer language" — jive talk.

CHAPTER 3: STEMPENYU'S PREPARATIONS

What is Mazapevka's great joy?

Reb Chaim-Ben Tsion Gluck's youngest daughter, Rivkele, the mizinka¹, is getting married! Why shouldn't all share in his joy? It's worthwhile to be at such a wedding: after all, he is quite a worthy in town. Everyone will be at the wedding: some out of good friendship, some out of envy, some just for propriety, and some to show off the wife's pearls, the earrings or the new necklace brought from the market, and mainly — because of Stempenyu.

In any case, everyone is here at the wedding! All of Mazapevka is joyous with Reb Chaim-Ben Tsion Gluck at his daughter Rivkele's wedding! Especially, of course, Isaac-Naftali and his wife and children, since Isaac-Naftali is a partner of Chaim Ben Tsion's in the store and in the mill. He's even some sort of relative, also — that is, Isaac-Naftali's wife seems to be a second or third cousin (on her mother's side) of the mother of the bride.

That's why Isaac-Naftali's wife, Dvosi-Malke, is roaming around, in full regalia, like a real makhutenesta². She's wandering around, not doing anything, but yelling and making a racket as if she were doing something. And Dvosi-Malke's daughter-in-law, Rokhele-the-fair, stands near the bride, turned out like a princess, with her big, blue eyes shining like diamonds, and her rosy cheeks like two blooming roses. In one hand she holds the bride's flowing hair, which the women unbraided, midst much crying, for the "veiling"; with the other hand she strokes her white throat, not noticing at all that a pair of burning black eyes have been staring at her without letup... The waiters and waitresses run hither and yon, like poisoned mice.

The mekhutonim³ are yammering: "Oy, gevald⁴! It's time to veil the bride! How long can we torture the young couple, who are fasting, nebekh⁵, for such a long summer day?" All are yelling: "It's time, it's time!" — but nobody does anything... Isaac-Naftali is wandering around wearing a velvet cap, his hands pressed together like a preacher's, and Dvosi-Malke is screaming

¹Youngest daughter.

² Mother of the bride or groom

³ Parents of the bride or groom

⁴For heaven's sake!

⁵A pity!

her lungs out. The rest of the mekhutonim from both the bride's and the groom's side stumble over each other with their hands ready for some job to do, but none is forthcoming.

"Nu, so why isn't something happening?" the groom's side guests ask.

"Why aren't they starting?" the bride's side guests respond.

"Have you ever heard of keeping young people fasting so long?" shout the groom's side.

"Did you ever see young people being kept fasting for so long?" shout the bride's side.

"Why are they running around, here and there?"

"What are they running about?"

"Everybody's running, everyone's yelling and nothing is happening — a fine thing!"

"They're just running and yelling — but nobody wants to do anything!"

"Maybe it's time to quit talking? It's time to do something! This has to stop!"

"Nu, enough talking! Let them begin something — and there's an end to it!"

"Where are the musicians?" the groom's side ask.

"The musicians — where are they?" the bride's side answers.

And the musicians are busy with their tasks: they're resining bows, they're tuning instruments. Reb Yakel Bass has a youngster by the ear and murmurs quietly: "Watch yourself, scamp, or I'll show you what happens when you pull the strings!" Mekhtchi the drummer scratches his beard (which covers only half his face) and doesn't look at anybody. Reb Khaykl Badkhen is chatting with a well-known melamed⁶, accepts a pinch a snuff from him, and pours out words by the sackful. And the other musicians, the fat-faced fellows with the big teeth, pitted like shovels, are standing around Stempenyu and chatting with him on an important subject — in their own language:

"Who's that chick standing near the bride?" asks Stempenyu, in musician-language, indicating Rokhele-the-fair with his eyes. "Go on over, Yerakhmiel", he says to one of the fat-faced fellows, "go on over and find out where she's at — but step on it, Yerakhmiel, step on it!"

Yerakhmiel comes right back with a definite answer. "That ain't no chick; she's someone's old lady. That's Isaac-Naftali's daughter-in-law, from Skvire, and that's her old man — see him? He's wandering around in a velvet lid."

"Damn you, Yerakhmiel!" says Stempenyu angrily. "You found out already? She sure is a groovy looking chick! Look how she has big eyes for me."

"If you want", says the fat-faced Yerakhmiel to Stempenyu, "if you want, I'll go rap with her..."

"Go to hell, man!" answers Stempenyu. "I don't need you as a go-between. I'll go rap with her myself."

"Hey, man — swing a cool tune on that fiddle!" Shneyer-Mayer calls out in their language. "Move it with some Jewish soul!"

Stempenyu takes the fiddle, winks at the gang, and they begin to tune their instruments.

CHAPTER 4: STEMPENYU'S FIDDLE

Finally, God intervened, and Sytempenyu began to play to "seat" the bride. Ah, I fear that

⁶Religious school teacher

my poor pen is inadequate to describe how Stempenyu played to “seat” the bride! This wasn’t simply playing, strumming; this was a kind of divine service, a servant of God in a high state of passion, but with a noble, gentle spirit. Stempenyu positioned himself opposite the bride and intoned a homily on the fiddle, a long, beautiful oration, a moving speech on the free, carefree life of the bride until this point, of her maidenhood, and of the dark, bitter life that awaits her: no more maiden! Her head covered, her long, beautiful hair hidden, forever... no more joy! Farewell, youth, now you become a matron! Somehow, not at all joyous — may God forgive me for such talk!

These were the words that could almost be heard coming out of Stempenyu’s fiddle. All the women understood very well the meaning of this particular wordless homily, all the women felt it; they feel it, and weep, therefore, bitter tears.

“How long did I sit so”, thought a young wife, swallowing her tears, “how long did I sit so, with loose, unbraided hair, and actually thought that angels are carrying me, that I am so fortunate? And then...and then!...”

“God, provide for her”, an old lady prayed, the mother of a grown daughter, “Provide a match for my elder daughter, and quickly — but with better luck than for me, with a better lot than is mine, with my husband...God forgive me for such talk!”

Such thoughts enter the heads of the women, and Stempenyu does his thing: he’s playing with all his might, and the fiddle speaks. Stempenyu plays a mournful tune and the band accompanies him. It gets quiet, no more yammering, no more shouting. All want to hear Stempenyu play. The men become lost in thought, the women fall silent, young men and women climb up onto chairs and tables — the better to hear Stempenyu’s playing.

“Shh! Quiet! Everybody quiet!”

And Stempenyu flows into his fiddle, melting like paraffin: plink-plink-plink — and nothing else is heard; his bow flies up and down — and nothing else is seen. Many voices are heard in the music, many sorts of songs pour forth — all of them sad and lonesome — so one’s heartstrings are tugged, one’s very being is grabbed. The audience expires, the audience dies...with all its might. Their hearts are so full, so soggy, that tears rise in their eyes; they sigh, they moan, they cry... And Stempenyu? What Stempenyu, where Stempenyu? They don’t even see him, they don’t see Stempenyu, they don’t see his fiddle; they only hear sweet voices, heavenly songs that fill the entire house... And Rokhele-the-fair has until this moment never heard Stempenyu’s playing, only of Stempenyu’s reputation... She has never heard such playing; she listens to the magical songs, the incredible music — and does she understand what is happening? Something is tugging at her heart, caressing her soul — but what it is, she doesn’t understand. She looks up, toward the source of those sweet voices, and sees a pair of unbelievably beautiful, dark, fiery eyes staring directly at her, that pierce her like spears. The unbelievably beautiful, dark, fiery eyes look at her and wink at her and talk to her. Rokhele wants to lower her own eyes, but she cannot.

“So this is Stempenyu?” Rokhele thought as the “bride seating” ended and the mekhutonim began to prepare to lead their children to the wedding canopy.

“Where are the candles?” the groom’s side ask.

“The candles — where are they?” the bride’s side ask.

And so the clamor begins again; everyone runs around, no one knows where They’re

pushing and shoving, treading on one another's corns, tearing clothing, sweating, cursing the waiters and the Rabbi's assistants — who curse back at the mekhutonim — and the mekhutonim quarrel among themselves... It is, thank God, quite lively!

In the stampede that follows the wedding ceremony, Stempenyu sneaks out of the band, and appears among the women, right here, near Isaac-Naftali's daughter-in-law, Rokhele-the-fair. He approaches her with a few words, smiling and playing with his beautiful, long hair. Rokhele reddens, lowers her eyes, and answers one word to his ten. It doesn't seem proper to be seen suddenly conversing with a musician, especially in this crowd!

140 Harborview South
Lawrence, NY 11559
September 14, 1998

Committee of Judges
Translation Contest Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

Dear Members of the Committee:

Enclosed please find duplicate copies of my original English translation of chapters 3 and 4 of Sholom Aleichem's novel STEMPENYU, which I am entering in the translation contest sponsored by the Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation.

I look forward to hearing from you. You can reach me at my home address, or at (516) 371-6909.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Ginsberg". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

David Ginsberg, Ph.D.

CHAPTER THREE: STEMPENYU'S PREPARATIONS

What's the occasion for such rejoicing in Mazepevke?

Reb Chayim-Bentsiyon Gluck is marrying off his younger daughter, his youngest child, Rivkele--so, why shouldn't one rejoice with him? It's worth being at such a wedding: after all, as they say, there's a rich man in town. Everyone will be at this wedding: some out of friendship, some out of envy, some out of obligation, and some out to show off the wife's pearls, earrings, or the new necklace they brought her from the fair; and still more will come because of Stempenyu. In short, everyone is here for the wedding! All of Mazepevke rejoices with Chaim-Bentsiyon Gluck at Rivkele's wedding! And it goes without saying that Ayzik-Naftuli and his wife and children are here, since Ayzik-Naftuli is Chayim-Bentsiyon Gluck's partner in the store, and his partner in the mill, and to boot, somewhat of a relative also, that is, Ayzik-Naftuli's wife is somewhat related to the mother-in-law, a bit of a second or third cousin on her mother's side.

Consequently, Ayzik-Naftuli's wife, Dvusi-Malka, moves about, dressed to the nines, like a true relative by marriage. She wanders about, doing nothing but motioning with the hands, shouting, and making a racket, as if she were doing something of consequence. And Dvusi-Malka's daughter-in-law, Ruchele the beautiful, stands beside the bride, glorious as a princess, her blue eyes sparkling like two large diamonds, and her red cheeks adorning her like two blooming roses. With one hand she holds the bride's loose tresses, which the wives, crying loudly all the while, had braided before the "veiling"; with the other, she caresses her own white neck, unaware of a pair of burning black eyes looking at her the whole time, without end. . . . The waiters and waitresses run around, like poisoned mice. The relatives cry out: "Oh, for crying out loud! It's time to veil the bride! How much longer do we torment the children, who are fasting, unfortunately, this summer day?" Everyone cries out: It's time! It's time!" -- but no

one does anything. Ayzik-Naftuli walks around in a velvet cap, his arms folded, like a preacher, and Dvusi-Malka makes a din in the loudest of voices. The other relatives from both sides run past each other with their hands astir, as if intent on doing something, but no one gives them anything to do.

“So, why isn’t anything being done?” asks the groom’s party.

“Why isn’t anything starting?” replies the bride’s side.

“Have you ever seen anyone keep children hungry so long?” shouts the groom’s side.

“Have you ever heard of anyone keeping children hungry so long?” shouts the bride’s side.

“Why the running around, back and forth?”

“What reason is there to run?”

Everyone’s running, everyone’s making noise and standing in one place--what a paradox!

All they’re doing is running around and making noise--and nobody from here to there wants to do anything.

You don’t suppose there’s been enough talk, now? It’s time to do something! There has to be an end sometime!

So, enough talk! Let them start doing something! Let there be an end to this!

“Where are the klezmers?” asks the groom’s side.

“The klezmers, where are they?” replies the bride’s side.

The klezmers are preoccupied with their work: waxing their bows, and tuning their instruments. Reb Yukel the bass player is leading a boy by the ear and dishing out to him privately: “Listen, bastard, I’m going to show you how to tighten strings!” Mechtshi the drummer is scratching his overgrown beard, not looking at anyone. Reb Chaykel the entertainer, who is talking with a familiar schoolteacher, takes a pinch of snuff from him with two fingers,

and pours wisecracks, as if from a sack. And the rest of the klezmer, the gross young men with teeth as big as spades, stand around Stempenyu and chat with him in their language about an important matter.

“Who’s that chick, standing next to the one getting hitched?” asks Stempenyu in klezmer-language, inconspicuously laying eyes on Ruchele the beautiful. “Just go, Yerachmiel,” he says to one of the gross apprentices. Go and find out who she is. But fast, Yerachmiel, fast!

Yerachmiel comes right back with a clear answer:

“That’s no chick, that’s a missus. That’s Ayzik-Naftuli’s daughter-in-law, from Skvere, and there’s her hubby--you see? There he is, wandering around in his velvet hat.

“The devil take you, Yerachmiel!” says Stempenyu, rather cheerily. You found out so fast? Ah, she is indeed a foxy little wife! Look, just look, how she makes with her eyes!

“If you wish,” Yerachmiel, the gross one, asks Stempenyu--“if you wish, I’ll go chat with her. . . .”

“Drop dead!” replies Stempenyu. “No one’s asking you to be a go-between. I’ll chat this one up myself.”

“Ah, nu, just throw out a pair of black eyes from this fiddle!” Shneyer-Meyer calls out in their language. Just pull some Jewish guts from this fiddle! . . .”

Stempenyu takes up his fiddle, winks to the band, and they start tuning their instruments.

CHAPTER FOUR: STEMPENYU'S FIDDLE

In short order, God helped, and Stempenyu took upon himself the seating of the bride on her bridal chair.

Ah, but I feel my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu seated a bride! It wasn't just a glib, noisy performance; it was a kind of "worship service," a divine service with a rather lofty feel, with a rather noble spirit! Stempenyu positioned himself opposite the bride and lectured her with his fiddle, a long, pleasant speech, a moving speech about the free and fortunate life of the bride till now, about her girlhood, and about the dark, bitter life that awaited her later, later: no more girl! her hair covered, hiding her beautiful, long hair forever. . . . Gone is the liveliness! Be well, young one. Soon you will become a common Jewish wife, rather unhappy. May God not punish me for these words! . . .

Such words can almost be heard from Stempenyu's fiddle. All the wives well understand the meaning of this voiceless speech, all feel it; they feel it and weep over it with bitter tears.

How long ago did I sit that way? broods a young wife, swallowing her tears. How long ago was I sitting with loose, braided pigtailed, believing that angels would play with me alone, that I was a lucky one? In the end. . .oh, in the end! . . .

Grant her, God, prays an old Jewish woman, a mother of grown daughters, grant her, God, my older daughter, that she find her destined one soon, only with more luck than I, only with a nicer fate than I have with my husband, may God not punish me for these words! . . .

Into such thoughts drift the wives, but Stempenyu does what is his to do: he works with all his might, and the fiddle speaks. Now Stempenyu plays a mournful tune, and the band backs him up. Quiet ensues, no more racket, no more noise. Everyone, everyone wants to hear

Stempenyu. Jewish men become pensive, wives become silent, boys and girls climb on benches and tables--they all want to hear Stempenyu.

“Sh! Quiet! People, let’s have quiet!”

Stempenyu pours himself out on the fiddle, and dissolves, like wax: Tee-uch-tee-uch-tee-uch--nothing else is heard; a hand flies up and down--nothing else is seen. All kinds of sounds are heard, and various melodies flow out, all so sad, so mournful, that they seize the heart, tug at the soul, draw out the spirit of life. The audience expires forcibly, the audience dies, dies with all its limbs. Hearts become so full, so drenched, and eyes well up with tears. Jews sigh, Jews moan, Jews cry And Stempenyu? Who, Stempenyu? What, Stempenyu? No one sees him, no one sees Stempenyu, no one sees a fiddle; only sweet sounds are heard, divine melodies, that fill up the whole house. . . . And Ruchele the beautiful, who until now had never heard Stempenyu play, Ruchele, who had heard that there is a Stempenyu, but who had never before heard such playing, stands and listens to the magical melodies, to the exquisite sounds--and she doesn't understand what this is? Something here is pulling at her heart, something is caressing her soul, but what it is--she does not understand. She casts her eyes there, from where the sweet sounds flow, and spots a stunning pair of black eyes, fiery eyes, that look directly at her, and penetrate her, like darts, like sharp darts. These stunning, black, fiery eyes look at her and wink at her and speak to her. Ruchele wants to cast her eyes down--but cannot.

“Is that Stempenyu?”

This is what Ruchele the beautiful is thinking about, as the bridal “seating” comes to an end and the parents of the bride and groom start thinking about escorting them to the wedding canopy.

“Where, of all places, are the candles now?” asks the groom’s party.

“The candles, where are they?” replies the bride’s side.

And so the same uproar returns, as before. Everyone is running, to who-knows-where.

They push, shove, step on calluses, tear dresses, sweat, swear at the waiters and the help, who swear back at the marriage relatives, who wrangle with each other--it is, thank God, quite lively!

In all the tumult, which occurs during the departure from the wedding ceremony, Stempenyu escapes the band, and suddenly appears among the wives, right there, beside Ayzik-Naftuli’s daughter-in-law, Ruchele the beautiful. Smiling and curling his beautiful, long hair, he tosses a few words her way. Ruchele blushes, lowers her eyes to the ground, and almost doesn’t answer him. It seems improper to suddenly engage in conversation with a klezmer, and all the more so before such a crowd!

Hershl Hartman

3142 South Bentley Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90034
310/473-4323
e-mail: hershl@earthlink.net

October 9, 1998

Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

Dear Friends:

Enclosed are two copies of my translation of Chapters III and IV of "Stempenyu," submitted in conjunction with your contest.

Regardless of the outcome of the contest, I would very much wish to be considered as a translator in the Foundation's project to issue the entirety of Sholom Aleichem's work in complete, "unimproved" English translation. The project, as announced, seems to be fully in keeping with my own publicly-stated approaches to Yiddish-English translation and to the need for such efforts to preserve and transmit the content and creative style of Yiddish literature.

Sincerely,


Hershl Hartman

III.

Stempenyu's Preparations

Why all the great rejoicing in Mazepevke?

Reb Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok is marrying off his younger daughter, the youngest, Rifkele. Well then, why not celebrate with him? Being at such a wedding is worthwhile: after all, as they say, if there's a rich man in town... Everyone will be at the wedding: some out of close friendship, some out of envy, some as a formality, and some to show off the wife's pearls, her earrings, or the new choker necklace that he'd brought her from the fair, and most of all—because of Stempenyu. In short, everyone's at the wedding! All of Mazepevke rejoices with Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok at Rifkele's wedding! And not least of all, certainly, Ayzik-Naftoli and his wife and their children, since Ayzik-Naftoli is Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok's partner in their store, his partner in the mill, and moreover a bit of a relative, too; that is, Ayzik-Naftoli's wife seems to have some family connection to the groom's mother, some sort of second something thrice removed on her mother's side.

That's why Ayzik-Naftoli's wife, Dvosi-Malke, putters about, dressed up as if she were truly the mother of the bride or groom. She putters about and does nothing, but she gesticulates and shouts and carries on as though she were doing something. And Dvosi-Malke's daughter-in-law, Pretty Rokhele, stands near the bride, gussied-up like a princess, and her large blue eyes shimmer like two large jewels, and her two red cheeks become her like two blooming roses. In one hand she holds the bride's flowing hair which the women, with great sobbing, had unbraided before the veiling ceremony, and her other hand strokes her white throat as though unaware that a pair of burning black eyes keep staring at her all

the time, without ceasing... The waiters and waitresses run about like poisoned mice in their death-throes. The in-laws carry on: "Oh, for heaven's sake! It's past time for veiling the bride! How long will you torture the poor children who've been fasting all this summer's day?" Everyone's shouting: "It's time! It's time!"—but as for doing, no one does anything. Ayzik-Naftoli wanders about in a velvet cap, hands folded behind him like a preacher, and Dvosi-Malke carries on at the top of her lungs. The other in-laws on both sides run athwart each other with their arms extended, as if they wanted to accomplish something, but no one has given them anything to do.

"Well why doesn't someone do something?" asks the groom's side.

"Why doesn't someone start doing something?" replies the bride's side.

"Have you ever seen anyone holding up hungry children so long?" shouts the groom's side.

"Have you ever heard of hungry children being held up so long?" shouts the bride's side.

"Why all this running back and forth?"

"Why all the running that's running on?"

"Everyone's running, everyone's carrying on, but nothing's moving—a fine how d'you do!"

"Running and carrying on—that's all they want to do."

"Don't you think there's been enough talking? It's time to do something! There must be an end to this, after all!"

"Well, enough of talk. Let them start to do something! Let there be an end to this!"

"Where are the *klezmer*? asks the groom's side.

"The *klezmer*—where are they?" replies the bride's side.

And the *klezmer* are busy at their tasks: resining their bows, tuning their

instruments. Reb Yokl the bass player pulls along a lad by one ear and whispers quietly to him: "Listen, you little bastard, I'll teach you to pluck my strings!" Mekhtshi the drummer scratches at the sprouted side of his jaw, not looking at anyone. Reb Khaykl the rhyming jester chats with a teacher friend, helps himself with two fingers to a pinch of the other's snuff and dumps a sackful of jokes on him.

And the other *klezmer*, the pompous fellows with teeth the size of shovels, stand around Stempenyu and chat in their language¹ about an important matter.

"Who is that *shekhte* (female) standing by the *smisanke* (bride)?" asks Stempenyu in *klezmer* slang, directing his glance toward Pretty Rokhele. "Go over, Yerakhmil," says he to one of the pompous *klezmer* guys, "go over and *probe-oys* (find out) *mahtam* (who she is). But *khidke*, (quickly), Yerakhmil, *khidke*."

Yerakhmil returns quickly with the full story.

"That's not a *shekhtl* (maid) that's a *yaldovke* (young wife). That's Isaac-Naftoli's daughter-in-law. She's from Skvir, she is, and there's her *yold* (husband), you see? That's him wandering around in the satin *katerukhe* (cap)."

"The devil take you, Yerakhmil!" says Stempenyu, very pleased. "You got the whole lowdown so quickly? Eh, she's really a *klive* (pretty) *yaldovke*. Just look and see how she *matret* (looks about) with her *zikres* (eyes)."

"If you'd like," suggests the pompous Yerakhmil, "if you'd like, I'll go *tire* (speak) with her."

"The hell you say," replies Stempenyu. "You haven't been hired as a go-between beadle. I'll *tire* myself with *tsuzenikhe* (that one)."

"Let's see you pull a pair of dark eyes out of that fiddle," declares Shneyer-Mayer in their slang. "Pull some Jewish guts out of that fiddle."

¹Sholom Aleichem provided interpretive footnotes (shown here in parentheses) for those who didn't dig the Yiddish-Hebrew-Slavic *klezmer* jazz—*trans*.

Stempenyu picks up the fiddle, winks at his bunch and they prepare to raise their instruments.

IV.
Stempenyu's Fiddle

In short, with God's help, Stempenyu began to accompany the veiling of the bride.

Ah, I doubt that my pen has the power to describe Stempenyu's bride-veiling! It wasn't simply playing, fiddling; it was a form of prayer, a worship service with a kind of very elevated feeling, with a kind of very genteel spirit! Stempenyu placed himself directly before the bride and preached a sermon at her on his fiddle; a pretty, long sermon, a moving sermon, about the free and happy life of the bride until now, about her girlhood, and about the dark, bitter life awaiting her after, after... "No more a girl! Your head covered, your pretty, long hair hidden forever...joyfulness gone! Farewell, youth, you're about to become a Jewish wife! Not too joyful a thing, may God not punish such talk!"

Such words seem almost to be heard from Stempenyu's fiddle. All the women understand quite well the meaning of that silent sermon; all the women feel it; they feel it and weep over it with bitter tears.

"How long did *I* sit there like that," thinks a young wife, swallowing her tears. "How long did *I* sit there like that with flowing, unbraided plaits, and thought only that angels were cavorting with me, that I was uniquely fortunate. In the end, in the end...!"

“Send her, God,” prays an old woman, the mother of grown daughters, “God, send her, my elder daughter, her predestined one, quickly, but with a better fate than I’ve had with my husband, may God not punish me for such talk.”

The women fall into just such reveries, and Stempenyu does his thing: he pulls out all the stops and the fiddle speaks. Stempenyu plays a tearful tune and his gang backs him up. The crowd grows still, no more bustle, carrying-on. All, all want to listen to Stempenyu. Men become thoughtful. Wives fall silent. Boys, girls, clamber onto benches and onto tables—everyone wants to hear Stempenyu.

“Sssh! Quieter! People, keep it quiet!”

And Stempenyu’s fiddle-sound spreads and melts like wax: beat—beat—beat—nothing else is heard; a hand flies up and down—nothing else is seen. And one hears all sorts of sobs, and all sorts of songs resound, and all so lonely, sad, that it seizes one’s heart, it tugs at the soul, it draws out life itself. The crowd expires with all its might, the crowd dies, dies in every limb. Hearts are somehow so full, so painful, and eyes fill with tears. People sigh, people moan, people cry...and Stempenyu? Stempenyu who? Which Stempenyu? No one sees him, no one sees any Stempenyu, any fiddle; they just hear sweet voices, god-like songs that fill up the entire house...and Pretty Rokhl. who had never heard Stempenyu play until now, Rokhele, who had heard of Stempenyu, but who’d never heard playing of this sort, stands and listens to the enchanted music, to the rare melodies—and can’t understand: what’s happening? Something’s tugging at her heart, something’s caressing her soul—but she can’t understand what it is. She raises her eyes to look there, at the source of the sweet sounds, and sees a pair of wondrously handsome dark eyes, blazing eyes that stare right at her and pierce her like spears, like sharp spears. The wondrously handsome, dark, blazing eyes look at her and wink at her and talk with her. Rokhele wants to lower her eyes—but can’t.

“So that’s Stempenyu?”

So thinks Pretty Rokhele when the bride-veiling is over and the in-laws commence thinking about processing to the wedding canopy.

“Wherever are the candles?” asks the groom’s side.

“The candles—wherever are they?” replies the bride’s side.

And thus the earlier carrying on returns. Everyone runs about, not knowing where. There’s crowding, there’s pushing, there’s stepping on callouses, frocks are torn, there’s sweating, there’s cursing at the servers and the sextons, and they curse back at the in-laws and the in-laws squabble among themselves— it’s all, blessed be The Name, quite lively!

In the turmoil that develops after the recessional from the wedding canopy, Stempenyu ducks out of the band and now he appears in the midst of the women, right there, next to Isaac-Naftoli’s daughter-in-law, Pretty Rokhl. He exchanges a few words with her, smiling and twisting his long, attractive locks. Rokhl blushes, lowers her eyes to the ground and responds to one-tenth of his talk. It’s not fitting somehow to start suddenly conversing with a *klezmer*, and in the presence of this kind of crowd!...

Sidney Gluck
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Dear Mr Gluck,
Please acknowledge
receipt.
Yours,

Yetti
Kallas

(7 pages)

STEMPENYU'S PREPARATIONS

Why do they rejoice in Mazepevke? Reb Chaim Ben Tzion Glock is marrying off his youngest daughter Rivkele. So why shouldn't they rejoice? It's worth it. How do you put it? A rich man goes to town. Everybody who's anybody will be there. Some prompted by good will, some jealousy, some out of obligation, some to show off their wives pearls and other jewellery. All acquired at the fair, and much more - because of Stempenyu. In a word, all are present and accounted for. All of Mazepevke is overjoyed. And who is talking about the in-law? Not only is he a partner in the business in addition Ayzik Naftoli acts like part of the family. That is, his wife is a distant relative¹ on his mother's side. Moreover she waltzes about but does nothing, made-up like a real in-law. She turns about aimlessly, gesticulates with her hands and causes a screeching commotion just as though - she was doing something important. And Dvasi Malka's daughter-in-law the lovely Rokhele stands near the bride trussed up and her large blue eyes shine like two large diamonds and her red cheeks blossom like roses in flower. With one hand she holds the bride's loose flowing hair which the women braided before they laid on the veil. Sobbing grievously she strokes the bride's alabaster neck oblivious to the pair of black, burning eyes staring at her constantly, endlessly. The waitress and waitresses run about in a dither. The in-laws make a fuss, "Good gracious it's time to lay the veil". Aggravation knows no bounds for the children are fasting on a hot summer's day. All scream "It's true! It's time" - But they don't make a move. Ayzik Naftoli prances about in a velvet cap. His hands tucked under like a preacher's and Dvasi Malka stirs up a commotion at the top of her lungs. The rest of the bridal party runs around seemingly

wishing to be occupied but actually idle. So why aren't they doing something? Isn't it terrific asks the bride's party. Why don't they start moving? asks the bridegroom's party. Why don't they start moving? answers the bride's party.

Imagine! Starving the kids screams the bridegrooms side. Why are they running about? What's this running? Fuss and bother. We're stuck -a nice paradox! Nobody wants to move. It's about-time to maneuver. It's got to end sometime. Enough talk! Let's act. Finita la comedia. Where are the musicians? demands the bride's entourage.

And the musicians are occupied with their work rubbing rosin into the bows. They tune the instruments, Reb Yokel Bass pulls a boy by one ear and silently gives him what for! "Listen bastard I'll show you". Mechtshi Peykl scratches his five o'clock shadow ignoring everybody. Reb Chaikel Badchen speaks with a well known teacher, takes a pinch of snuff with two fingers and displays wisdom. And the rest of the musicians, the puffed up boy with the big teeth hangs around Stempenyu discussing an important matter. "Who is that broad standing near the bride", asks Stempenyu in musicians slang directing his eyes to the lovely Rokhl - Go Yerachmiel - he says to one of the conceited musicians. Go find out who she is. Quickly Yerachmiel comes back with a clear answer. She is no longer single, but already married. This is Isaac Naftali's daughter-in-law. She's from Skver. That guy is her husband. Do you see? He's walking about with a satin hat. A pox on you Yerachmiel says Stempenyu most cheerfully. You became aware of it so quickly. Ah, she's a beaut that one. See how observant she is. If you wish, asks

Yerachmiel the boastful one. I'll go speak with her. Drop Dead! Stempenyu answers him. We're not asking you to butt in I'll approach her myself.

We'll conjure a pair of black eyes jumping out of the fiddle calls out Shneur Zalmen in their slang. Coax some Jewish guts out of that fiddle! Stempenyu picks up the fiddle winks at his pals and they tune the in the instruments.

In short God helped and Stempenyu went to veil the bride.

Oh I feel that my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu performed the act. This wasn't simply orchestrated; this was divine worship. God's service with very high emotion with somewhat of a very gentle spirit concerning the free and joyous life of the bride until now.

From innocence to bitter knowledge. No longer a maiden a covered head, her long hair hidden forever.

Forgotten joy! Be well young spirit. Farewell happiness. Be well young lass. See you are becoming a woman!.. Not an ounce of joy. May God forgive us for our sins! There, such talk can practically be heard from Stempenyu's fiddle. All women understand well the quiet plaintiff notes. All women feel it. They feel it and say concerning it with bitter tears.

How long did I sit like this - thinks a young woman swallowing her tears. She remembers as if yesterday her loosely braided hair and the thought that angels were watching over her. That she was lucky. At the end...Oh at the end!

Let the audience be silent! And Stempenyu's fiddling melts like wax, skrip skrip skrip no more is heard a hand flies up and about.- No more is seen. And all kinds of songs are heard and different kinds of songs and all gloomy, all sad, it pulls at the heart strings; it pulls at the soul; it pulls at the guts. (The crowd is going wild with all its might, the crowd is going crazy with all its limbs.) The heart becomes so full, so soft and tears well up in all eyes.

Grant her God - prays an old Yidene. A mother of a grown daughter. Grant my older daughter a ready match soon, but with more luck than me with a finer lot than I have with my husband. May God not punish me for my words.

Stempenyu plays a tear jerker and the orchestra plays back up. It becomes quiet, no cries, no noise. Commotion over. All want to hear Stempenyu men are deep in thought women are silent, boys, girls, clamber up benches and upon tables - Everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. Shal! Quieter! Jews sigh, Jews groan Jew argue. And Stempenyu? Whither Stempenyu? He is neither seen nor heard. One only hears dulcet tones, sweet sounds godly music that fill the entire hall... And the pretty Rokhele who until now has never heard Stempenyu play. But she has never heard such magical tones - not

understanding what this is. Something's pulling at her heart, something is caressing her soul, but she can't make sense of it. She lifts her eyes, where are these sounds coming from? She spots a pair of wondrous black eyes, fiery, which pierce right through her. The eyes look at her. They speak to her Rokhele wants to lower her eyes but can't.

"So this is Stempenyu?" So thinks the lovely Rokhele when the veiling had already ended and the in-laws began to think about escorting her under the bridal canopy.

-Where are the candles" Asks the groom's party.

-Where are the lights - answers the bride's party. And so begins once more the same commotion as before. All run about randomly. They squeeze they push. Bring about luck. They step on each others corns while clothes are being torn.

They swear, they curse the in-laws back. And the in-laws wrangle amongst themselves thank God it's lively.

And the tumultuous riot on the way from the bridal canopy. Stempenyu steals from the group and see he is already a big shot among the women. See here near Ayzik Naftoli's daughter-in-law the attractive Rokhele. He goes over to have a few words with her smiling and curling his nice long hair. Rokhele blushes, lowers her eyes to the ground and responds to every tenth word. It's inappropriate to suddenly stop and talk to a musician, yet in front of such a crowd.

- 1) In the text the term sheni boshlishi is used. It is a term meaning a cousin twice and three times removed on the parent's sides. This is the case here. A marriage between first cousins is frowned upon in the Jewish tradition.

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Sept. 25/98

contest for translation of Sholem Aleichem
The Sholem Aleichem Memorial Foundation

1020 Park Avenue

New York, N.Y.

10028

Enclosed is my translation in duplicate
for your competition. I hope to hear
from you with information re when &
where the results will be announced.

yours truly
Miriam Dashkin Beckerman
MIRIAM DASHKIN BECKERMAN

CHAPTER III

STEMPENI'S PREPARATIONS

by
Shalom Aleichem

Translated by Miriam Dashkin Beckerman

What's all this festive occasion in Mazepevka all about?

Reb Chayim-Bentzion Glock is marrying off his youngest daughter, (the "Mizinka,") Rivkela, -- therefore, why shouldn't one and all rejoice with him? It's well worthwhile to attend such a wedding. After all, as we say, he's a wealthy man in the town. Everyone will be at the wedding; some because they are good friends, some because of jealousy, some out of a sense of duty, and others to show off their wife's pearls, earrings or the necklace which was bought for the wife at the market. Above all, because of Stempeni. Briefly, everyone is present at the wedding! All of Mazepevka is rejoicing at the wedding which is taking place at Glock's house! Of course, Izak-Naftoli, his wife and children too, because he is Chayim-Bentzion's partner in the store, in the mill, and also somewhat of a relative. That is to say, Izak-Naftoli's wife is somewhat of a relative of the mother of the bride, though removed two or three times, on the mother's side. She walks around but does nothing, only gestures with her hands and exclaims and makes a racket, as though she's accomplishing something. And Dvosi-Malka's daughter-in-law, the beautiful Rochela, is standing beside the bride, all done up like a princess. Her large blue eyes shine like two diamonds, and her two rosy cheeks look like two blooming roses. With one hand, she is holding the bride's loose hair which the women have braided before the veiling of the bride prior to the wedding ceremony (the "badekn,") with tears flowing, and with the other hand she strokes her white neck, not taking note of a pair of dark eyes that are looking at her steadily. The waiters and waitresses are running around like poisoned mice. The parents of the bride are calling out alarmed:

"For heaven's sake! It's high time to "badeck" the bride. How long must we inflict the fast on the young people on such a hot summer day? Have pity."

Everyone is shouting:

"It's time! It's time!" -- but nothing is being done. Izak Naftoli is pacing back and forth with a velvet cap, his hands clasped low, like a rebbe, and Dvosi-Malka carries

on in a loud voice. The other family members, on both sides, are tripping over one another, with outstretched arms, as though wanting to be of some use, but nobody gives them anything to do.

"Nu, why don't we start doing something?," comes the question from the bride's side of the family.

"have you ever seen hungry children kept waiting for so long?," shouts someone from the bride's side.

"Why is everyone scampering hither and thither?"

"What's all the scampering about?"

"Everyone is scampering, sounding off, but things aren't moving. A nice paradox."

There's scampering and noise, yet nobody wants to do anything."

"Surely there's been enough talk! Let's see some action! Let there be an end to all this!"

"Where are the klezmer?," Chanan's side asks.

"Where are the klezmer?," the bride's side asks.

And the klezmer are busy with their work. They rub their bows, they tune their instruments. Reb Yokel Bass drags a boy by an ear and tells him quietly: "Listen, troublemaker, I'll show you how to pull strings!" Mechtchi Peikler scratches the unshaven half of his face, not looking at anyone. Reb Chaykl Badchan converses with a teacher, an acquaintance, takes a sniff of tobacco from him, with two fingers, and pours forth sayings, as though from a sack. The remaining klezmer, the puffed up young fellows with the large teeth like spades, stand around Stempeni and discuss, in their own manner, a serious matter.

"Who is the female who is standing near the bride?," Stempeni asks, to the tune of a refrain, pointing with his eyes at the beautiful Rochela.

"Go Yerachmiel," he says to one of the puffed up klezmer. "Go and investigate. Find out who she is, but hurry, Yerachmiel, hurry!"

Yerachmiel returns quickly with a clear answer:

"She's not a single woman. She's already married. She's Izak-Naftoli's daughter-in-law. She's from Skvira, and that one there's her husband. Do you see him? He's walking around with a velvet hat."

"For goodness sake, Yerachmiel," Stempeni says, in good spirits. "You found out so quickly! She sure is a beauty! Just watch how she's casting her eyes around."

"If you like," Yerachmiel asks the puffed up one near Stempeni, "if you like, I'll go and talk to her...."

"Go to hell," Stempeni answers. Nobody is asking you to act as an intermediary. I'll speak to her myself."

"Okay. Let your fiddle play a Pair of Dark Eyes!" Shneyer-Maier calls out, in their manner of speaking. "Let's see you melt Jewish hearts!"

Stempeni starts to play on his fiddle, winks to his accompanists, and they start to get ready to play.

CHAPTER IV

Briefly, God helped, and Stempeni started to "bazetz" the bride.

Ach. I feel that my pen is incapable of describing how Stempeni veiled the bride! It wasn't merely child's play, for fun. It was a sort of "Holy Service," done with the highest feelings, with a noble spirit! Stempeni stood opposite the bride and through his fiddle, delivered a sermon to her, a lovely sermon, a moving sermon, regarding the free and fortunate life of the bride up to now, as a single young woman, and regarding the bleak, bitter life awaiting her in the future, later. No longer a maiden! The head covered, the long beautiful hair covered forever... No more joy! Farewell to youth. You are about to become a married woman!... Something not at all happy. May God not punish me for my words!...

It was words such as these that emanated from Stempeni's fiddle. All women understood very well the meaning of this silent sermon. All women feel it. They feel it and cry with bitter tears.

How long ago did I sit like that, thinks a young woman to herself, swallowing her tears. "How long ago was it that I sat thus with long braids, and thought that angels were playing for me, that I am one of the fortunate ones? But in the end... Ach. In the end!..

"May you bestow upon her, God," an old woman, mother of grown daughters pleads, bestow upon my eldest daughter her destined one in the near future, but with

more luck than I had, with a better fate than I have with my husband. May God not punish me for such thoughts..."

It was to thoughts such as these that the women succumbed, and Stempeni continues with his playing, working with all the instruments, and the fiddle speaks. Here Stempeni plays a mournful tune, and the accompanists back him up. It becomes quiet. There's an end to the racket. Everyone wants to hear Stempeni.

"Sh-Sha! Calm down! Let there be quiet!!

And Stempeni pours out his emotions on the fiddle and melts like wax. "T'yach-t'yach-t'yach. That's all that can be heard. A hand flies up and down -- That's all that one can see. All kinds of sounds can be heard, and all kinds of songs pour forth; all sad, mournful, so that it grabs at the heart. It draws out the spirit, the very joy of life. The crowd loses itself in the music, dies, dies with all its body limbs. The heart becomes so full, so soaked, and tears appear in the eyes. Men sigh, men groan, men cry... and Stempeni? Nobody sees a fiddle. One hears only sweet sounds, Godly sounds that fill the whole house... And the beautiful Rochela, who, up to now had not heard Stempen's playing, Rochela, who had heard that there is a Stempeni, but had never heard such playing, stands and listens to the magical songs to the rare notes -- and doesn't understand what this is. Something pulls at her heart; something touches her soul, but what it is she does not understand. She lifts up her eyes to the place where the sweet music is coming from, and sees a pair of wonderful dark eyes, burning eyes, looking right at her, and penetrating her like spears, like sharp spears. The wonderful dark fiery eyes behold her and wink to her and speak to her. Rochela wants to cast her eyes down, but cannot.

"That's what Stempeni is?"

That's what the beautiful Rochela thinks when the "bazetzn" ends and the parents of the bride and groom are thinking about leading bride and groom to the wedding canopy.

"Where are the candles?" the groom's side ask.

"Where are the candles?" the bride's side ask.

And so, once again the tumult starts, just as before. Everyone runs around, but they don't know whereto. There's pushing and shoving. They step on one another's coms. Clothes are torn. People sweat, they curse the beadle and the waiters, and,

they, in turn, curse the parents of the bride and groom who also bicker amongst themselves. It is, by God, quite jolly!

In the confusion which occurs while those under the canopy are leaving, Stempeni left the klezmer and appeared amongst the women, beside Izak-Naftoli's daughter-in-law, Rochela, the beauty. He exchanges a few words with her, smiling and curling his beautiful long hair. Rochela blushes, lowers her eyes to the ground and answers sparingly. It is not appropriate to suddenly engage in a conversation with a klezmer, especially in the presence of such a crowd!...

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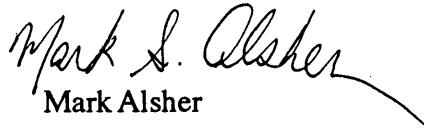
7612 Summerdale Avenue
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September 13, 1998

Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

Gentlemen:

Here is my translation of Chapters 3 and 4 of Stempenyu which I am sending as my entry in your translation contest. I hope that you like it.

Sincerely,


Mark Alsher

Stempenyu by Sholem Aleichem
(Translated from Yiddish by Mark Alsher)

Chapter 3
Stempenyu's Preparations

So, why the big celebration in Mazepevke?

Reb Khayem-Bentsiyen Gluck is marrying off his younger daughter Rivkeleh, his youngest child. And, why shouldn't people rejoice with him? It's certainly worth your while to be at such a wedding. He is, after all, a rich man of the town. Everyone's going to be at this wedding: one person because of friendship, and another because of jealousy; this one because he feels he has to, and that one to show off the pearls, earrings or new necklace which he brought back for his wife from the fair. But most of all because of Stempenyu. In short, everyone is at this wedding! The entire town of Mazepevke is rejoicing with Khayem-Bentsiyen Gluck at Rivkeleh's wedding! And especially Isaac-Naftuleh with his wife and their children, of course. Isn't Isaac-Naftuleh, after all, Khayem-Bentsiyen's partner in the business, his partner at the mill, and, what's more, a bit of a relative too. That is, Isaac-Naftuleh's wife is distantly related to the mother-in-law in some way, a second or third cousin on the mother's side.

Therefore Isaac-Naftuleh's wife, Dvosy-Malkeh, is spinning all around in her shawl as if she were the real mother-in-law. She's spinning all around and doing nothing. But she's waving her hands and shouting and making a tumult as though she were actually doing something. And Dvosy-Malkeh's daughter-in-law, the pretty Rokheleh, is standing next to the bride all dressed up like a princess, and her big, blue eyes are shining like two big diamonds, and her red cheeks sparkle on her like two blooming roses. With one hand she is holding the bride's loose hair, which the womenfolk had braided for her with much weeping preparing her for the ceremony of veiling the bride, and with the other hand she is stroking her own white neck without even noticing that a pair of black, burning eyes are looking at her the entire time, non-stop. . .

The waiters and waitresses are running around like poisoned mice. The in-laws are ranting: "Oy, gevald! It's already time to veil the bride! How long can you keep torturing these children who are fasting on such a summer day?" Everyone is shouting: "It's time! It's time!" - but no one is actually doing anything. Isaac-Naftuleh is spinning around in a velvet cap, his hands folded behind him like a rabbi, and Dvosy-Malkeh is shouting very loud. The rest of the relatives, on both sides, are running into each other with their arms in front, as if they wanted to do something, but no one is giving them any work.

"So, why isn't anyone doing anything?" asks the groom's side.

"Why doesn't anyone begin to do anything?" answers the bride's side.

"Have you ever seen such a thing, that hungry children should be kept waiting for so long?" shouts the groom's side.

"Have you ever seen such a thing, that hungry children should be kept waiting for so long?" shouts the bride's side.

"Why is everyone running around, back and forth?"

"Why all this running, why the running?"

"Everyone is running. Everyone is shouting, and they're staying in one place - a great system!"

"So long as they run and shout, but no one wants to do any little thing." "Perhaps it's enough talking? It's time to do something! There has got to be an end!"

"Nu, enough talk! Let's get started. Put an end to it!"

"Where are the musicians?" asks the groom's side.

"The musicians, where are they?" answers the bride's side.

Stempenyu by Sholem Aleichem
(Translated from Yiddish by Mark Alsher)

And the musicians are busy with their work. They grease the bows. They set up the instruments. Reb Yokel Bass is dragging a boy by the ear and is letting him have it quietly: "Listen, you rascal, I'll show you how to stretch strings!" Mekhtshi the drummer is scratching his unshaven face, not looking at anybody. Reb Khaykel the comedian is talking to a teacher he knows, with two fingers he takes a pinch of snuff from him and is spouting out clever sayings like a fountain. And the rest of the musicians, the puffed up boys with teeth as big as shovels are standing around Stempenyu and chatting with him in their musicians' slang about a very important matter.

"Who's that woman standing next to the bride?" asks Stempenyu using musician's slang while pointing with his eyes at the pretty Rokheleh. "Go Rakhmil," he says to one of the puffed up musician boys, "Go and find out who she is, but quickly Rakhmil, quickly!"

Rakhmil returns quickly with a clear answer.

"That's no girl.. she's already a married woman. She's Isaac-Naftuleh's daughter-in-law. She's from Skvir, and that one over there is her husband. Do you see? There he is spinning around in a velvet cap.

"Drop dead Rakhmil!" says Stempenyu very cheerfully. "You found out so quickly? Hey, she really is a pretty little wife. Take a look at how she looks with her eyes!"

"If you want," says the puffed up Rakhmil, "if you want, I'll go talk to her..."

"Drop dead!" answers Stempenyu. "No one's asking you to be a messenger. I'll talk to her myself."

"Nu, just shoot out a pair of black eyes from the fiddle!" says Shneyer-Meyer in their language. "Just pull some Jewish guts out of that fiddle!"

Stempenyu takes up his fiddle winks at the group, and they begin to play the instruments.

Chapter 4 Stempenyu's Fiddle

In short, with God's help, Stempenyu began to play for the bride.

Oh, I feel that my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu played for the bride! This was not just plain playing, strumming; this was a prayer, a worship of God with a very exalted feeling. With a very refined spirit. Stempenyu positioned himself opposite the bride, and delivered a sermon to her on his fiddle, a beautiful, long sermon, a moving sermon about the free and happy life of the bride up until now, of her maiden years, and about the dark and bitter life which awaits her later, later - no more maiden! Her head covered, her beautiful, long hair hidden forever. No more happiness! Goodbye youth. Now you become an old Jewish woman! Somehow very unhappy, may God not punish for such talk!

These kinds of words can be heard coming out of Stempenyu's fiddle. All of the wives well understand the meaning of this silent sermon. All of the wives feel it. They feel it, and weep bitter tears because of it.

"How long did I sit like this," a young wife thinks to herself while swallowing her tears. "How long did I sit like this with loose, braided pigtails, thinking that angels were playing with me, that I was one lucky person? In the end, oy, in the end!..."

"Send her, oh Lord, " an old lady, a mother of grown daughters, prays "send her, oh Lord, my older daughter, quickly, a husband, but with better fortune than me, but better than I have with my husband. May God not punish me for talking this way!"

III

"Stempenyu prepares to play"

What's the big celebration in Mazepevke?

Chayim-Bentzion Gluck is marrying off his little one, his dear youngest daughter Rivkeleh--so why wouldn't we all make merry with him? In fact, it's an obligation to be at a wedding like this, where, after all, the bride's father happens to be one of the richest men in the shtetl (or so they say).

Everyone will be there: some out of friendship; some driven by envy; some just for appearances' sake; and some men to show off the Mrs. decked out in the pearls, the earrings, the necklace brought back from last summer's fair. But even more will come just to hear Stempenyu.

So in the end everyone's here, the whole shtetl in a state of joy over little Rivkeleh's wedding; and, it goes without saying of course, Isaac-Naftali and his wife and children, for Isaac-Naftali is Chaim-Bentzion Gluck's partner in the store and in the mill, and beside that a partial relative, so to speak--and in this way: Isaac-Naftali's wife Dvossi-Malka considers herself kin to the bride's mother, something of a second or maybe third cousin on the mother's side.

And that explains why Dvossi-Malka is bustling around today trimmed out like a real bride's mother. She bustles around and does nothing--though she does wave her hands and cry out and make a tumult just like a person who is doing something. And at the same time Dvossi-Malka's daughter-in-law, Rachel The Beauty, stands beside the bride, adorned like a princess; and her great blue eyes shine like two enormous diamonds, and her cheeks glow like a pair of roses in bloom. With one hand she grasps the bride's long hair, which the women, weeping copiously, have unbraided and let down for the veiling ceremony, while with the other hand she strokes her own white throat, never noticing a pair of black and burning eyes gazing steadily, unceasingly, at her.

And meanwhile the waiters and waitresses are running around like mice that have taken the poison. And meanwhile the relatives clamor: "My God, it time to veil the bride! There has to be a limit on torturing poor children who've been fasting a whole long summer day already." And everyone takes up the cry: "It's time, it's time!"--while no one does anything. Isaac-Naftali walks about wearing a nice little velvet cap, his hands joined behind his back, as though he were a learned preacher, while Dvossi-Malka raises a commotion that could reach the Heavenly Throne. The rest of the relatives, meanwhile, both the bride's and the groom's side, run around past each other, their hands stretched out

like they were looking for work but no one would give them any.

"So why aren't they doing anything?" the groom's side asks.

"Why haven't they started doing anything?" the bride's side answers.

"Have you ever seen anything like this--keeping children hungry so long?" hollers the groom's side.

"Have you ever heard of anything like this--to keep children hungry so many hours?" cries the bride's side.

The groom's side: "Why's everyone running this way and then that way?"

The bride's side: "What kind of running around is this--the way they're all just running?"

The groom's side: "Everyone's running, everyone's yelling--and they all stand in one place while they do it. What a riddle!"

The bride's side: "They just run and yell but they won't do anything."

The groom's side: "Don't you think that's enough talk already? It's time something got done--there has to be an end to this."

The bride's side: "So, enough talk. Let's get started. It's time there was an end to this."

"Nu, so where are the musicians?" the groom's side asks.

"Those musicians--where are they?" the bride's side replies.

And the musicians are meanwhile very busy: they rosin their bows and set up their instruments. Yekl the Bass picks up a young boy by the ear and quietly shares a thought with him: "Listen, bastard, I'll teach you how to pluck strings." Mechshti the Drummer scratches the bristled half of his face, looking off at nothing. Chaykl the Jester talks with an acquaintance, a school-teacher, and snags a pinch of snuff with two fingers while jokes and witticisms pour out his mouth as from a sack. And the other musicians, the swollen-cheeked boys with teeth big as shovels, they stand with Stempenyu and--speaking in their musician slang--discuss a matter of deep importance.

"Who's the pretty bird standing next to the veil?" Stempenyu asks, his gaze directed at Rachel the Beauty. "Hey, Yerachmiel," he says to one of the swollen-cheeked apprentices, "go and see what key that serenade's written in--and quick-time, Yerachmiel, quick-time!"

Yerachmiel soon came back with a straight answer. "That's no bird, it's mutton. That's Isaac-Naftali's daughter-in-law, from Skvireh, and that's the goat right there, see him? He's the one strutting around with the velvet pot on his head."

"May you burn like a holy sacrifice, Yerachmiel!"

Stempenyu curses the boy cheerfully. "You sure educated yourself quickly! But isn't she a rich young thing. Look, just look at the way her jewels shine this way!"

"If you'd like," the swollen-cheeked Yerachmiel says to Stempenyu, "I'll go find out how the bird sings."

"I'll see you in the ground first!" Stempenyu answers, "I don't need you to be my messenger-boy. I'll go see for myself how she sings."

"Hey, it's time you pulled your black eyes out of the fiddle," calls out Shneur-Meir the second-fiddler, "and dragged some Jewish guts out of the thing."

Stempenyu picks up his fiddle, signals the band, and they take up their instruments.

4

Stempenyu's fiddle

In short, God lent a hand, and Stempenyu turned to the job of playing the Bride's Enthronement.

Ach, my pen is too feeble to record just how Stempenyu played for the Enthronement. This was not straight-forward playing, mere sound; rather, this was a kind of liturgy, a service to God, imbued with lofty feeling, with a spirit of

nobility. Stempenyu had taken up a position opposite the bride and was preaching her a sermon on his fiddle, a long and beautiful sermon, a poignant sermon about the free and happy life she'd lived to this moment--her maiden years--and of the black and bitter life that awaited her in the end, in the end: no more a maid--but her head covered, her beautiful long hair lost forever. Good-bye joy. Farewell youth; suddenly, you're simply another wife of a Jew. A very unhappy story (may God not strike us for such talk).

This is what flows from Stempenyu's fiddle, and all the women understand well the moral of this wordless sermon; all of them feel it; feel it and weep bitterly.

"How long has it been since I sat like that?" a young wife thinks, swallowing tears; "how long has it been since I sat as she is sitting, with flowing unbraided hair, and believed that angels were truly my playmates, that I was so fortunate. But in the end . . . dear God, in the end."

"God, may You ordain," an elderly woman, a mother of grown daughters, begins a prayer--"may You ordain a marriage and soon for my oldest daughter, but a marriage with more happiness than I've had, a better lot than I have had with my husband (may He not punish me for this kind of talk)."

These are the thoughts that overtake the wives. And Stempenyu does his part: he works with all the instruments, and his fiddle speaks out. With the band playing behind him,

he begins a melancholy tune. Stillness falls upon the gathering--no noise, no tumult. Everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. Men turn contemplative; women fall mute. Boys and girls clamber up onto benches and tables--everyone wants to hear. "Shah! Quiet! People, let's be still!"

And Stempenyu melts and flows on his fiddle like wax; the strings throb, throb, throb--nothing more can be heard; a hand flies out and back--nothing else can be seen. And tones sound and songs pour out--each one lonesome, each melancholy, seizing the heart, twisting the soul, choking breath away. The audience is sapped; people feel faint in every limb, their hearts so full, so perturbed, that tears rise and pool in their eyes. Jews sigh, Jews groan, Jews weep. And Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? Where Stempenyu? He can't be seen; no fiddler can be seen; but one only hears sweet sounds, divine songs that fill up the room.

And Rachel the Beauty, who had never before heard Stempenyu play, who had known that he existed but had never before heard such playing, Rachel stands and listens intently to the magical tunes, to the rare sounds--and understands nothing? Certainly something has touched her heart, has caressed her soul, but just what that something is she does not comprehend. She raises her eyes and turns toward the place from which the sweet sounds pour, and she spies two terribly beautiful black eyes, fiery, that look right at her

and pierce her through, like spears, sharp spears. The terribly beautiful black and fiery eyes look at her and beckon her and speak to her. Rachel wants to lower her eyes again but can't.

"So that is Stempenyu," Rachel the Beauty finds herself thinking when the Enthronement Ceremony finally ends, when the in-laws start thinking about leading the bride to the Wedding Canopy.

"Where then are the candles?" the groom's side asks.

"The candles--where are they?" answers the bride's side.

And so the same tumult begins just like before. Everyone runs but no one knows where to. They jostle, they push, they stomp on calluses, they tear clothes, they sweat, they scold the waiters and the ushers, who in reply scold the in-laws, who in turn begin to bicker among themselves--an entirely lively scene, Praise God.

In the stampede that ensues when everyone returns from the Bridal Canopy, Stempenyu separates himself from the gang of musicians and suddenly appears among the women, right beside Isaac-Naftali's daughter-in-law, Rachel the Beauty. He makes himself congenial with a few words, all smiles, while playing with his lovely long hair. Rachel turns red, looks at the ground and speaks one word to every 10 of his. It wasn't proper to stand chatting with a musician, and certainly not in front of such a crowd.

57 Hollybrook Rd.
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Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028


Dear Committee Members,

Enclosed you will find two copies of my translation of Sholom Aleichem's *Stempenyu*, chapters three and four, which I am submitting for judgement in the "Sholom Aleichem Translation Contest."

In the happy eventuality that you need to contact me, you may do so **until 15 October** at the above address in Ireland. Until that date, you may also reach me by phone at *011-353-1-833-8731*, or e-mail at weinerb@tcd.ie. **After 15 October**, you may reach me at *75 Prentice Rd., Newton, MA, 02159*; telephone: *617-969-1924*. I will inform you of my new e-mail address as necessary.

Thank you for your consideration. As you might imagine, I hope to hear from you soon.

hot mir a gut, gezunt yor,


Binyamin Weiner

Enclosures (2)

III. Stempenyu's Preparation.

What blessed occasion has Mazepevkeh so excited?

Reb Chaim-Benzion Gluck is marrying off his youngest daughter, his baby Rivkeleh—so why shouldn't everyone join in his happiness? It's worthwhile attending this wedding: a rich man, as they say, is coming to town. Everyone is coming: some out of friendship, some in envy, some just to put in an appearance, and some to show off their wives' pearls, her earrings, or the new necklace they've just brought her back from the fair. And others still—for Stempenyu. All in all, that means everyone is here. All of Mazepevkeh is celebrating Rivkeleh's wedding with Reb Chaim-Benzion Gluck. And it goes without saying, of course, that Isaac-Neftali is here, with his wife and children: Isaac-Neftali is Chaim-Benzion Gluck's partner in the store, his partner in the mill, and even a bit of a relative on top of that. That is, Isaac-Neftali's wife considers the bride's mother one of her own; something like a second cousin twice removed, on her mother's side.

That would explain why she whirls around and around, Isaac-Neftali's wife, Dvosi-Malkeh, all dressed up, like an actual relative. She whirls around and doesn't do a thing; but she wrings her hands and cries and hollers, just as if she were doing something. And Dvosi-Malkeh's daughter-in-law, the fair Rocheleh, stands beside the bride adorned like a princess, and her wide blue eyes shine, like two grand diamonds, and the blush playing upon her cheeks makes them seem like two blooming roses. With one hand she holds the bride's flowing hair, which the women, with great weeping, have unbraided for the "veiling." And with the other hand she strokes her own white neck, taking no notice of the pair of fiery, dark eyes that stare at her all the while, without cease it seems... The servants and the maids scurry about, like poisoned mice. The relatives clamour: "Come on! Come on! It's time to veil the bride! How long must we make the children suffer, the poor children who haven't had a thing to eat this whole summer-day long?" Everyone cries: "It's time! It's time!"—But as for doing, no one does a thing. Isaac-Neftali whirls about in his velvet cap, his arms clasped behind his back, like a preacher, and Dvosi-Malkeh hollers at the top of her lungs. All the other relatives from either side run one after the other, their arms flailing before them, as if they wanted to do something, if only someone would give them something to do.

"So, why doesn't anybody do anything?" asks the grooms side.

"Why hasn't anybody started doing anything?" answers the bride's side.

"Have you ever seen such a thing: that children should go hungry for so long?" cries the groom's side.

Stempenyu by Sholom Aleichem
Chapters three and four
Translated by Binyomin Weiner
Page two of four

"Have you ever heard of such a thing: that for so long children should go hungry?" cries the bride's side.

"Why is everybody running around?"

"What's so good about running, that everybody runs around and around?"

"Everybody runs, everybody shouts, and still we're standing in the same place—a fine state of affairs!"

"For all the running and the shouting, no one seems to be doing anything at all."

"Don't you think we've talked enough? The time has come to do something! This must have an end!"

"So, enough talk! Let's start doing! An end this must have!"

"Where are the musicians?" asks the groom's side.

"The musicians, where are they?" answers the bride's side.

And the musicians are hard at work. Bows are rosined, instruments tuned. Reb Yokel Bass grabs a lad by the ear and upbraids him in an undertone: "Listen, rascal, I'll show you how to stretch those strings!" Mechtshi Peyklech scratches his stubbled profile, not looking at a soul. Reb Cheykel Badchn talks with his friend the schoolteacher, takes a pinch of snuff between two fingers and pours out clever sayings as if from a sack. And the other musicians, swollen-faced, their big teeth shaped like shovel-blades, stand around Stempenyu chatting in their special language about a very important matter.

"And who is that honey, standing next to the veil?" asks Stempenyu in musician-language, motioning with his eyes toward the fair Rocheleh. "Get over there, Yerachmiel," he says to one of the swollen-faced young musicians. "Get over there and grab what she's about. But fly, Yerachmiel, fly!"

Yerachmiel is back in a flash with this crystal-clear reply:

"That's no freebird, she's caged. That's Isaac-Neftali's daughter-in-law. From Skvir. And that over there is her keeper. You see him? That one whizzing around in the velvet top."

"Choke on it, Yerachmiel!" snaps Stempenyu. "You had to figure it all out so quick? Ah, she's a fine sight in her cage alright! Look at her! Look at the rays in her gaze!"

"If you want," the swollen-faced Yerachmiel asks Stempenyu, "if you want, I can go over there and flap with her..."

"Go to hell!" answers Stempenyu, "Nobody's asking you to play the go-between. I'll fiddle this tune myself."

"Alright! Grab your fiddle and knock some black eyes out of that thing!" calls out Shneur-Meir, in their tongue. "Bow the people's guts out of that fiddle!"

Stempenyu takes up his fiddle, winks to the group, and they raise their instruments to play.

Stempenyu by Sholom Aleichem
Chapters three and four
Translated by Binyomin Weiner
Page three of four

IV Stempenyu's Fiddle

In short, with God's help, Stempenyu began to entertain the seated bride.

Ah, I feel as though my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu played to the bride! It was not simply a matter of playing, of making sound; this was a form of worship, of service to God, with a very elevated feeling to it, with a great nobility of spirit! Stempenyu placed himself before the bride and offered her a sermon on his fiddle; a long and beautiful sermon, a moving sermon, on the carefree and joyful life of the bride till now, on her girlhood, and on the dark and bitter life that waits for her, waits for her. You are no longer a girl! Cover up your head; hide away your lovely, long hair forever! No more merriment! Say goodbye to youth, now you become a wife! Something very unhappy, God should not punish such talk!

It is as if these very words are heard from Stempenyu's fiddle. All the wives well understand the simple meaning of his wordless sermon. Every wife feels it; she feels it, and over it she cries bitter tears.

"How long since the day when I sat there," thinks a young wife to herself, choking on her tears. "How long since the day when I sat there, with my flowing, unbraided hair, thinking I was in the company of angels, that I was so very happy? It's over...ah, it's all over."

"Destine her, God," pleads an old woman, a mother of grown daughters. "Destine my eldest daughter to find her match, only with better luck than I had. Give her a better lot than I have with my husband, I should not be punished for such talk!"

While the women fall into contemplation, Stempenyu continues on. He works off every instrument, and his fiddle speaks. Now he plays a weeping tune, and the band holds a harmony beneath him. All stills, no more uproar, no more clamour. Everyone, everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. The men grow reflective, the women silent, the boys and girls climb on top of tables and chairs—each one wanting to hear Stempenyu.

"Shhh! Quiet! People, be quiet!"

And Stempenyu pours himself out through the fiddle, melting, like a wax candle. The throbbing of the strings—no more is heard than this. A hand flying back and forth—no more than this is seen. And then a myriad voices sing, each with its own flowing melody, and all so lonesome and sorrowful that they take hold of the heart, tug at the soul and draw away life itself. All strength drains from the audience. The audience dies and their limbs slacken. Their hearts grow so full, are so stirred, that tears well in their eyes. People sigh, people moan and people weep. And Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? Stempenyu who? He is not seen at all. No one sees Stempenyu and no one sees his fiddle. They only hear sweet voices, divine melodies filling the whole room. And the fair Rocheleh, who had never heard Stempenyu play till now; had only heard there was a Stempenyu, but never yet heard such playing? She stands transfixed by the bewitching melodies, by the exquisite voices—and she does not understand what they are. Something pulls at her heart, something caresses her soul, but what it is—she does not

***Stempenyu* by Sholom Aleichem**
Chapters three and four
Translated by Binyomin Weiner
Page four of four

understand. She raises her eyes to the source of the sweet, flowing voices, and beholds a pair of wondrous, dark eyes, fiery eyes that stare straight into her and run her through like spears, like sharp spears. The wondrous, fiery, dark eyes look at her and beckon to her and speak with her. Rocheleh tries to lower her eyes—and cannot.

“So this is Stempenyu?”

So wonders the fair Rocheleh, after the entertainment has ended and the relatives are beginning to consider how they might steer the party to the wedding canopy.

“Where can the candles be?” asks the groom’s side.

“The candles, where are they?” answers the bride’s side.

And so returns the same clamour as before. Everyone runs and no one knows where. They press each other, they jostle each other, they trample each other’s corns, they tear each other’s clothing, they sweat, they curse the servants and the butlers and are by them cursed in return, and they bicker ceaselessly among themselves—it is, praise God, quite lively.

In the midst of the uproar that occurs as the crowd is returning from the canopy, Stempenyu slips away from the band, and pops up suddenly among the women; just there, beside Isaac-Neftali’s daughter-in-law, the fair Rocheleh. He says a thing or two, smiling widely and curling ringlets in his fine, long hair. Rocheleh blushes, casts down her eyes to the ground, and answers him in a few, quick words. It will not do to be seen suddenly talking with a musician, and in front of these people!

25 Stratford Rd.
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September 23, 1998

Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028
U.S.A.

Dear Editors —

I enclose 2 copies of my translation of chapters 3 and 4 of *Stempenyu*, as per instructions in Vol. 08.023 of "Mendele" (7/10/98).

Perhaps you may be interested in the following:- In your description of the projected translation project of the Sholem Aleichem Library I did not notice the inclusion of an important biographical work by Sholem Aleichem's brother, "Vevik":- Rabinowitz, Wolf, 1864-1939. *Mayn bruder Sholem-Aleykhem: zikhroynes*. Kiev: Melukhe-farlag far di natsyonbale minderhaytn in USSR, 1939. 233 p. : ill., ports. (Soviet orthography). It is a delightful work, and invites scholarly comparison with S.A.'s *Funem yarid*.

[(Cf. page 151, entry #1080 in the following:-)

A Garment Worker's Legacy: The Joe Fishstein Collection of Yiddish Poetry: the Catalogue, edited by Goldie Sigal, with a Preface by Ruth R. Wisse.
Montreal: McGill University Libraries: distributed by McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998 (Fontanus Monograph Series; v. XI)
ISBN: 0-7717-0511-5]

Works in the Fishstein Collection are unfortunately not available on I.L.L., but W. Rabinowitz's work could surely be found at YIVO and other major Yiddish libraries.

Sincerely,

Goldie Sigal

Goldie Sigal

email: gsigal@ibm.net
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Translator: Goldie Sigal

III

Stempenyu's preparations

Why is there such rejoicing in Mazepevke?

Reb Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok is marrying off his younger daughter, the *mizinke*, Rivkele - so why then should one not rejoice with him? It is worthwhile attending such a wedding: after all, as they say, a *nogid* - a wealthy man¹ - of the town. Everyone will be at the wedding - some out of good friendship, some out of envy, some for appearance's sake, and some in order to show off the wife's pearls, the earrings, or the new choker that one has brought the wife from the fair - and even more - on account of Stempenyu. In short, everyone is here for the wedding! All Mazepevke is rejoicing with Khayim-Bentsiyon Glok at Rivkele's wedding! Not to speak of Ayzik-Naftoli with his wife and with the children, of course; also Ayzik-Naftoli is a partner of Hayim-Bentsiyon's in the shop, a partner in the mill, and on top of that a bit of a relative as well; that is, Ayzik-Naftoli's wife is a bit of a relation to the *makheteneste* - the mother of the groom - a bit of something kind of twice or thrice removed on the mother's side.

Consequently, Ayzik-Naftoli's wife, Dvosi-Malke, revolves around decked out like a real *makheteneste*. She revolves and doesn't do a thing, but she gesticulates with her hands and yells and makes a to-do, just as if she were doing something. And Dvosi-Malke's niece, the lovely Rokhele, stands near

¹ [NOTE TO EDITORS:- I prefer incorporating the translation of a Yiddish word within the sentence, where it does not interrupt the flow. (The translated word could, of course, be given in a footnote instead.) Translations of words in the musicians' argot will be placed in square brackets after the italicized words.]

Translator: Goldie Sigal

the bride, arrayed like a princess, and her large blue eyes shine like two great jewels, and her scarlet cheeks appear like two roses in bloom. In one hand she holds the bride's unravelled hair, which the women, with great lamenting, have unbraided for the *bedekens* - the veiling of the bride - and with the other hand she strokes her own white neck, not at all noticing how a pair of black smoldering eyes have been gazing at her the entire time without a stop ... The waiters and waitresses run around like poisoned mice. The *mekhutonim* - the parents of the bride and groom - scream: "*Oy, gvald* - help! It's already time to veil the bride! How long is one to go on torturing the children, who are fasting, poor things, on such a summer's day?" Everyone yells: "It's time already! It's time already!" - but nobody *does* anything. Ayzik-Naftoli wanders around in a velvet cap, his arms folded beneath, like a teacher, and Dvosi-Malke makes a din at the top of her lungs. The remaining relatives from both sides run one over the other with arms outstretched, just as if they would like to do something, and they are not given a task.

"- Well, why is one not yet doing something?" asks Groom's Side.

"- Why has one not yet begun to do something?" replies Bride's Side.

"- Have you ever seen such a thing -- retaining hungry children for so long?" cries Groom's Side.

"- Have you ever heard such a thing - for so long to retain hungry children?" cries Bride's Side.

Translator: Goldie Sigal

"- Why is there such running around back and forth?"

"- What kind of running is this, that everyone is running?"

"- Everyone is running, everyone is making noise, and is standing in one place - a fine spectacle!"

" - As long as one runs and makes a noise - but nobody wants to do the slightest thing."

"-By any chance, could there be enough talking? It's time to *do* something already! There must, after all, be an end sometime!"

"- So, enough already with the talking! Let's start *doing* something already! Let there be an end to it!"

"- Where are the musicians?" - asks Groom's Side.

"- The musicians, where are they?" replies Bride's Side.

And the musicians are busy with their work: they grease the bows, they set out the instruments. Reb Yokel Bas propels a youth by one ear and gives him his due quietly: "Listen, bastard, I will show you how to pull strings!" Mekhtshi the drummer scratches the hairy half of his face, not looking at anyone. Reb Khaykl the *badkhn* - the wedding entertainer - speaks to a teacher acquaintance, takes a pinch of snuff from him with two fingers, and pours out sayings as from a sack. And the rest of the musicians, the swollen

Translator: Goldie Sigal

youths with big teeth, like paddles, stand around Stempenyu and converse with him, in their lingo, about an important matter.

"- Who is this *shekhte* [female] over here - that's standing near the *smisanke* [bride]?" asks Stempenyu in musician lingo, indicating with his eyes the lovely Rokhele. "Just go, Yerakhmiel", says he to one of the swollen musician youths, "Just go and *prob'e-oys mehatam* [investigate who she is], but *haydke* [fast] Yerakhmiel, *haydke*."

Yerakhmiel returns quickly with a clear answer:

"- It isn't a *shekhtel* [girl], it's already a *yaldovke* [young married woman], it's Ayzik-Naftoli's niece, from Skvire she is, and that one there is her *yold* [slob]. Do you see? There he is wandering around with a velvet *katerukhe* [hat]."

"-A plague on you, Yerakhmiel!" says Stempenyu quite cheerfully. "So fast did you discover this? Hey, she really is a *kliv'e yaldovke* - a beautiful young woman. See there, see how she *matret mit di zikres* [gazes with those eyes]?"

"- If you want", Rakhmiel, the swollen one, suggests to Stempenyu, " - If you want, I'll go *tiren* [chat] with her."

"-Drop dead!", answers Stempenyu. "You're not being asked to be a *shilaten-shames* - a flunkey envoy. I will chat with the *tsuzenikhe* [aforementioned] myself."

Translator: Goldie Sigal

"- Well then, just throw out from the fiddle a pair of black eyes!" remarks Shneur-Meir in their lingo. "- Just pull out from the fiddle some Jewish guts!"

Stempenyu takes up his little fiddle, gives a wink to the gang, and they set out to play the instruments.

IV

Stempenyu's little fiddle.

In short, God helped, and Stempenyu commenced with the *bazetsns* - the traditional seating - of the bride.

Oh, I feel that my pen is too inadequate to describe how Stempenyu "seated" a bride! That was not just playing, noise-making. It was a kind of *avoyde*, a divine service, with something of a very elevated feeling. With something of a very refined spirit! Stempenyu took his stance facing the bride and presented her with a sermon on the fiddle, a beautiful, a long sermon, a moving sermon, about the free and happy life of the bride up to now, about her girlhood, and about the dark, bitter life that awaited her later, later: Gone is girlhood! Covered is the head, hidden the lovely long tresses for ever ... No more gaity! So long, youth. Now you become a Jewish matron ... Something not at all happy, may God not punish one for such talk!

Translator: Goldie Sigal

Words just like these are almost heard coming out of Stempenyu's little fiddle. All the women well understand the spoken meaning of this mute sermon, all the wives feel it, they feel it, and cry about it with bitter tears.

How long ago did I myself sit like this? - a young matron thinks to herself, swallowing tears - How long ago did I sit like this with combed out, unbraided hair, and thought indeed that angels must be playing with me, that I was so happy. In the end ... oh, in the end! ...

Grant her, God - prays an old Jewish woman, a mother of grown daughters - Grant my older daughter, God, her mate soon, but with more luck than I've had, with a finer lot than was mine with my husband, may God not punish me for the words! ...

Into just such reveries do the women fall, and Stempenyu does his own thing: he exerts himself with all his might, and the little fiddle speaks. Stempenyu is playing something mournful, and the band supports him. It has become quiet, gone is the clamour, gone is the din. All, all want to hear Stempenyu. Jews become thoughtful, women become silent. Boys, girls clamber up onto benches and tables; each one wishes to hear Stempenyu.

Hush! Quieter! Everyone, let there be silence!

And Stempenyu pours himself out into the little fiddle, and melts himself like wax: *tyokh - tyokh - tyokh* - nothing else is heard; an arm flies up and down - more cannot be seen. And all sorts of cries can be heard, and and there flow out different kinds of song, always lonesome, sad, so that the heart

Translator: Goldie Sigal

is touched, the soul is drawn, the breath of life is caught. The crowd's strength ebbs away, the crowd dies, limbs lifeless. The heart becomes, somehow, so full, so drenched, and eyes fill with tears. Jews sigh, Jews moan, Jews weep ... And Stempenyu? - Which Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? One doesn't see him at all, one doesn't see a Stempenyu, one doesn't see a little fiddle; one only hears sweet strains, godlike melodies, that fill the entire house ... And the lovely Rokhele, who until now has never heard Stempenyu's playing, Rokhele, who has heard that there is a Stempenyu, but has not yet heard this kind of playing, stands and listens to the magical melodies, to the rare sounds - and does not understand what this is. Something is tugging at her heart, something is stroking her soul, but what that is - she does not understand. She lifts up her eyes towards the source of the sweet flowing sounds, and she encounters a pair of wondrously beautiful black eyes, smoldering eyes, that gaze directly at her, and pierce her like spears, like sharp spears. The wondrously beautiful black smoldering eyes gaze at her and wink at her and speak to her. Rokhele wishes to lower her eyes - and cannot.

"- This, then, is Stempenyu?"

So muses the lovely Rokhele when the *bazetsn* has already ended and the *mekhutanim* begin thinking about escorting to the marriage ceremony.

"- Where in the world are the candles?" asks Groom's Side.

"- The candles - where are they?" responds Bride's Side.

And in this manner does the original *din* resume as before. Everyone runs around and knows not where. They press against one another, push each

Translator: Goldie Sigal

other, step on calluses, tear dresses, sweat, swear at the waiters and the servants, who swear back at the *mekhutonim*, and the *mekhutonim* bicker among themselves - It is, blessed be the Name, quite lively!

In the turmoil which occurs during the return from the wedding ceremony, Stempenyu darts out from the band, and here he has already sprouted out amidst the women, over here, near Ayzik-Naftoli's niece, the lovely Rokhele. He tosses a few words around for her, smilingly, while twirling some of his fine long hair. Rokhele starts to blush, lowers her eyes to the ground and replies to every tenth word. It is not proper, somehow, suddenly to start up a conversation with a musician, and especially before such a crowd!

October 29, 1998

To: Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

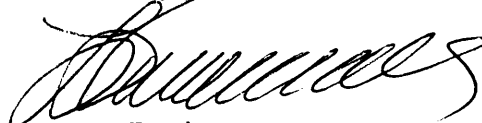
From: Irene Ronin
8939 Niles Center Rd.
Skokie, IL 60076

Dear Sir or Madam,

enclosed please find my translation of chapters 3 and 4 of the novel Stempenyu. I've also enclosed two photocopies of the original in case it is somewhat different from Folksfond edition. I would like to mention that it didn't seem feasible to me to try and give a full explanation of words like "badekens", "bazetzen", "magid", "melamed", etc. in the text, or to translate them literally, since in a published version footnotes or annotation could be used.

Thank you for your kind consideration and for helping to make the works of Sholom Aleichem accessible to a much larger audience.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Irene Ronin', written in dark ink.

Irene Ronin.

Stempenyu

Chapter III

Stempenyu's Preparations

What's all this excitement in Mazepevka?

Reb Hayyim-Bentzion Glock is marrying off his youngest daughter, his last child – Rivkeleh, so why shouldn't everybody celebrate with him? It's worthwhile to attend such a wedding. After all, as they say, he is one of the shtetl's rich men.

Everyone wants to be at the wedding: some out of friendship, some out of envy, some for appearance's sake, some to show off their wives' pearls, earrings, or new necklaces brought from the fair by the husbands, and most of all, to be here because of Stempenyu. To sum it up, all are here at the wedding!

The whole of Mazepevka is rejoicing at Rivkeleh's wedding at Hayyim-Bentzion Glock's house!

It goes without saying, that Aizik-Naftoleh, with his wife and, certainly, his children, are here too. Of course, Aizik-Naftoleh is Hayyim-Bentzion Glock's partner in the store, his partner in the mill, and a bit of a relative too: that is, Aizik-Naftoleh's wife is a bit of a relative of the bride's mother – some sort of a cousin umpteen times removed, on the mother's side.

On account of that, Aizik-Naftoleh's wife, Dvosia-Malkah, is running around the room without a veil, like a real mother-in-law. She is running in circles doing absolutely nothing, except waving her hands and screaming and raising racket, just as if she were doing something.

And Dvosia-Malkah's daughter-in-law, Roheleh the Beautiful is standing close to the bride, all dolled up like a princess, her big blue eyes shining like two big diamonds, and blush playing on her cheeks, two roses in bloom. With one hand she is holding the bride's flowing hair, that the women unbraided for her before the "badekens" with great weeping; and with the other hand she is caressing her white neck, completely unaware that a pair of black burning eyes has been looking at her the whole time, an unbroken stare.

The waiters and waitresses are running in circles like poisoned mice. The in-laws are clamoring, "Oy, gevalt! It's time for the "badekens" already! Where is the limit to making the children suffer? They have been fasting, poor things, and it's such a hot day!" Everybody shouts, "It's time! It's time!" but nobody actually does anything.

Aizik-Naftoleh, who is wearing a velvet cap, is running around, his arms folded behind his back like those of a magid, and Dvosia-Malkah is screaming at the top of her lungs. The remaining in-laws from both sides keep bumping into each other, arms outstretched, just as though they wish for something to do, but have not been given any work.

"Nu, why nobody is doing anything?" asks the groom's party.

"Why doesn't somebody do something?" responds the bride's party.

“Have you ever seen not letting children eat for so long?” shouts the groom’s party?

“It’s unheard of! Keeping children from eating so long!” shouts the bride’s party.

“Why is everybody running back and forth?”

“What all this running is about?”

“Everyone is running and yelling, and everything is at a standstill; fine customs we have here!”

“Just so they have a chance to run and make noise; but to do something!? Forget it!”

“Maybe we’ve had enough talk. It’s time to act! This must be over sometime!”

“Nu, enough talking already! Let’s start acting! There must be an end to this!”

“Where is the klezmer band?” asks the groom’s party.

“The klezmer band – where is it?” responds the bride’s party.

And the klezmer musicians are busy with their own work: preparing the bows and tuning the instruments. Reb Yokel the Bass, is dragging a small boy by the ear, lecturing to him quietly, “ I’ll show you, you momzer, how to pull the strings!!” Mentchee the Drummer is scratching the hairy half of his face and not looking at anybody.

Reb Hykel the Badhan is talking with his acquaintance, a melamed, he takes a pinch of snuff from the melamed with two fingers and he is pouring out jokes as if he had a sack of them. And the remaining klezmer musicians, the swollen youths with big shovel-like teeth, have surrounded Stempenyu, and are discussing with him in their klezmer language a very important matter.

“Who is that shechteh standing next to the smisankeh?” asks Stempenyú in the klezmer language pointing with his eyes to Roheleh the Beautiful. “Go, Yerachmiel,” says he to one of the swollen klezmer youths, “go and probeh-oys mahtahm, but hidkeh, Yerachmiel, hidkeh!”

Yerachmiel comes back quickly with a clear answer, “This is not a shechtel, she is already a yaldovkeh, she is Aizik-Naftoleh’s daughter-in-law, from Skvireh she is, and that is her yold – you see? There he is mixing with the guests, the one in a velvet cap.”

“May you perish, Yerachmiel!” says Stempenyu cheerfully. “You found out so quickly? Eh, she is, after all, such a kliveh yaldovkeh! Do you see how she matert with the zikres?”

“If you want,” suggests Yerichmiel the Swollen to Stempenyu, “if you want, I will go tiren with her...”

“Go to hell!” answers Stempenyu. “No one is asking you to act as a shlimazl-shahmes. I will tiren myself with tzuzenicheh.”

Translated into our language this means:

Stempenyu: “Who is this woman standing next to the bride? Go, Yerachmiel, go and find out what’s what, but quickly, Yerachmiel, quickly!”

Yerachmiel (returns): “This is not a girl. She is already a married woman. She is Aizik-Naftoleh’s daughter-in-law, from Skvireh she is, and that is her husband, you see? There he is, mixing with the guests, the one in a velvet cap.”

Stempenyu (cheerfully): “May you perish, Yerachmiel! You found out so quickly? Eh, she is, after all, such a beautiful woman! Do you see how she is looking with those eyes?”

Yerachmiel: “If you want – I will go talk with her...”

Stempenyu: “Go to hell! No one is asking you to act as a shlimazl-shahmes. I will talk to that one myself.”

“Go ahead, toss out of the fiddle a pair of black eyes!” calls out Shneyer-Meyer in the klezmer language, “Pull out of the fiddle the Yiddishe kishkes!...”

Stempenyu picks up the fiddle, beckons to the band, and they start tuning up the instruments.

Stempenyu

Chapter IV

Stempenyu’s Sweet Fiddle

In short, with God’s help, Stempenyu has started the “bazetzen” (the seating of the bride). Oh, my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu performed the “bazetzen!” It wasn’t just playing, making din with a musical instrument, but a kind of “avodah,” a divine service with a certain very exalted feeling, with a certain very noble spirit! Stempenyu stood facing the bride and held a sermon for her on his fiddle, a beautiful, long sermon, a moving sermon about the free and happy life the bride has had until now, about her girlhood, and about the dark, bitter life that is waiting for her later,

later – a girl no more! Her head covered, her beautiful, long hair concealed forever... No more merriment! Good bye, youth. Now you have become a Jewish woman!... Something very unjoyous, God shouldn't punish me for saying this.

One can almost hear these very words from Stempenyu's sweet fiddle. All married women understand well the simple meaning of this wordless sermon, all married women feel it; they feel it and they cry because of it with bitter tears.

"How long ago was I sitting like this..." reminisces a young woman, swallowing her tears, "How long ago was I sitting like this with the unbraided flowing hair, and thought I was in the seventh heaven, that I was fortunate? In the end... Oh, in the end!..."

"Please make it so, God," prays an old woman, a mother of grown daughters, "Make it so, God, that my oldest daughter finds her match soon, only with more luck than I did, and for a better life than I have had with my husband, God shouldn't punish me for saying this."

Thus, women are falling deeper into such thoughts, and Stempenyu does his thing: he is playing with all his might, and his sweet fiddle speaks. Now Stempenyu is playing a plaintive tune, and the band is playing harmony. It becomes quiet, no noise, no racket. Everyone, everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. The men become thoughtful, the women stop talking, little boys and girls climb up onto the benches and tables – each one wants to hear Stempenyu.

Sh-shah! Quiet! People, keep quiet!!

And Stempenyu pours himself out on his sweet fiddle and melts like wax: tioch-tioch – they don't hear anything else; a hand flies up and down – they don't see anything else. And all kinds of voices are heard, and various melodies come pouring out,

all of them full of longing, sad, so it touches the heart, it disturbs the soul, it takes the life out of you. The crowd is giving itself up to the music, the crowd is dying with all their body and soul.

The heart has become so full, so softened, and the eyes are filling with tears. Jews are sighing, Jews are groaning, Jews are crying... And Stempenyu? Who Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? No one sees him, no one sees Stempenyu, they don't see his sweet fiddle; they only hear sweet voices, divine melodies, that are filling out the whole house... And Roheleh the Beautiful who, until now, had never heard Stempenyu play, who has heard about Stempenyu, but has never yet heard such playing, she is standing and listening to the magical melodies. She raises her eyes, there from where come pouring sweet voices, and sees a pair of wonderful black, fiery eyes, that are looking straight at her and pierce her like spears. The wonderful black eyes are looking at her and beckoning to her, and talking with her. Roheleh wants to lower her eyes – and can't.

“So this is Stempenyu?”

That is what Roheleh the Beautiful was thinking after “bazetzen” was over and the in-laws started thinking about escorting the couple to the hupah.

“Where are the candles?” asks the groom's party.

“The candles – where are they?” asks the bride's party.

And so, there was again the same racket, as before.

Everyone is running, not knowing where to. They are shoving, they are pushing, they are stepping on the corns of each other's feet, dresses are torn, they are sweating, they are cursing the waiters and the shahmeses and they, in turn, are cursing the in-laws, and the in-laws argue among themselves – things are, thank God, very lively.

In the commotion that ensues while returning from the hupah, Stempenyu tears himself away from the band, and here, he has already appeared among the women, right next to Aizik-Naftoleh's daughter-in-law, Roheleh the Beautiful. He exchanges a couple of words with her, smiling and curling up his beautiful long hair. Roheleh blushes, lowers her eyes to the ground and hardly answers. It is not proper to, all of a sudden, stop to chat with a klezmer musician, especially before such a crowd of people!...

X
Rabbi Meir Berger
3 Horizon Road Apt. G17
Fort Lee, New Jersey 07024

Professor David G. Roskies
Editor-in Chief
Sholom Aleichem Library
1020 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10028

December 15, 1998

Dear Professor Roskies:

Enclosed you will find my English translation of Sholom Aleichem's *Stempenyu*.

I thank you very much for allowing me to submit this past the original deadline, and appreciate the opportunity to have my work be taken under consideration. I very much hope that I may participate in this important project, and look forward to hearing from you.

Kindest regards,



Rabbi Meir Berger
Tel: 201-224-8563 home
201-947-1555 study
Fax: 201-947-4701

This arrived too late to be considered. It is not very good. But his name ought to be added to the roster nonetheless.

DDR

Stempenyu

by *Sholom Aleichem*

Translation from the Yiddish by Meir Berger

And the street begins slowly to awaken with noises and excitement over the groom's arrival in the town. A grand entrance, along with half a hundred bachelors who traveled to the other side of the mill for the purpose of welcoming the groom. This is the custom when the groom arrives...his friends all come out to provide an escort. And the town of Yompele...the shtetel of Yompele, became alive with joy.

Sounds of joy were heard that had never been heard before. This is the custom in Yompele and this is the custom in Stritsitch and so it is in all the small towns that were given the opportunity to have Stempenyu play for a wedding. And so is it also in Mazepevke where Stempenyu has chosen to make his home. But Stempenyu's great and exciting reputation precedes him wherever he goes, throughout the world.

Stempenyu's Preparations.

Why is it such a great occasion in Masepevke?

Because Reb Haim Ben Zion Gluck is preparing for the wedding of his youngest daughter, the *mazinke* Rivkele.

So, nu, why should we not rejoice with him?

I'll tell you that a wedding like that is worth attending! It is like being a great man of wealth, a *nagid*, in the shtetel. Everybody wants to be at this wedding!

This one out of friendship...this one out of envy....and this one just to say that he was there!

And some to show off their wife's pearls, their wife's earrings .. or her new necklace that he had just bought for her in the market !

And, more importantly, because the great Stempenyu will be there. Everybody's here at this wedding...the entire town of Mazepevke rejoices with Reb Haim Ben Zion Gluck for his youngest daughter Rifkele's wedding.

And who is this murmuring under his breath?

Isaac Naftalai, with his wife and with his kids, of course. But then Issac Naftali is Reb Haim Ben Zion Gluck 's partner in the store, his partner in the mill, and therefore considers himself to be something of a relative. So we assume that Isaac Naftali's wife also considers herself as somewhat related to the wedding party, maybe like a second or third in-law from the mother's side.

Therefore, she hovers around the women encircling the wife of Isaac Naftali, D'vosha Malka, as if to say by her presence that she is a true relative of the bride's parents. She circles around them and gestures and screams and babbles as if to give the impression that she is doing something, but really is doing nothing at all.

And D'vosha Malka's daughter-in-law, Rochale, the beautiful Rochale, stands near the bride dressed like the daughter of a queen, her large beautiful blue eyes shining like two brilliants and her rosy red cheeks like two blossoming roses. With one hand she holds on to the bride's loose hair that has been curled by the women for this occasion, for the covering of the bride, while the women around the bride are tearfully involved in preparing for the ritual. With the other hand she caresses her own white pale neck, as if to indicate that she is unaware of the burning black eyes that have been ceaselessly observing her this entire time. The servants and the maids are scurrying around like poisoned mice and the parents of the bride and groom are screaming that it is now time to cover the bride's face.

“How long do we torture the bride and the groom... the poor children who have fasted all day...and a hot summer day, to boot?” Everybody chimes in ... “Its time, its time “..like a chorus. Except no one is doing anything about it.

Isaac Naftali is moving around in his satin hat . His arms are folded over his chest like a *magid* or wise man, and D'vosha Malka is babbling in her high voice and all the rest of the bride and groom's relatives from both sides are running around in a frenzy stretching their hands out in front of them, as if to say they would like to do something...something like that or something like this? But no one is giving them any chores to do.

“Nu, why aren't we doing anything?” asks the grooms side?

“Why don't we start to do something?” echos the bride's side....

“Did you ever see such a thing ? That we should allow the children to fast, to be hungry for such a long time?” yells out the groom's side..

“Did you ever hear such a thing? That we should allow the children to be hungry such a long time?” echos the bride's side.

Why is everyone scurrying around here back and forth?

What kind of a rumpus is going on around here?

Everybody is running ...everybody is babbling, but everybody is actually standing in one place like beautiful prima donnas.

What difference does it make that they are running around and babbling.. no one wants to do anything anyway !

Possibly its enough already with all this babbling...isn't it time to do something?

There must be an end to all this!

Nu, enough talking!! Let's start doing something!

“Where are the klezmer?” asks the groom's side?

“The klezmer, where are they ?” echos the bride's side.

The klezmer are busy with their work, waxing up their violin bows, and putting all their instruments together. Reb Yokel Bass carries a young boy by the ear and tells him quietly:

“Listen, you little bastard, I am going to show you how to put the strings together.”

Machtshey Pykler scratches his unshaven face, not looking at anyone. Reb Haikel *the Badchen*, the wedding jester, speaks with an old teacher of his and takes from him a bit of snuff with two fingers, and words keep pouring from his mouth, as if out of a sack, as he stuffs the tobacco into his nose. And the rest of the klezmer, big heavyset guys, with huge teeth like shovels, are surrounding Stempenyu and are engrossed in a discussion on a very important issue, in their own way.

"Who is this virgin standing next to the bride?" asks Stempenyu, at the same time continuing to gaze with his eyes at the beautiful Rochale.

“Come on, Yerachmeal,” he says to one of the heavyset klezmerim. “Come on and go find out! Who is she? Quickly, quickly !” Yerachmeal comes back with a clear answer ,“ This is not a virgin, not a girl...this is a woman. This is Naftali's daughter-in-law. She is from Squira and that is her dolt of a husband. You see him? There he is, walking around with his satin hat!”

Stempenyu is very put out by Yerachmeal's answer and he asks him: "You found out all this so quickly? She still is a beauty. Notice how she is looking at us with her beautiful eyes.”

“ If you want, “ replies the fat Yerachmeal, “ I will go over and talk to her.”

“Why don't you lie in the dust!” answers Stempenyu. “Nobody asked you to be a messenger on my behalf. I will talk to her myself!”

“So, nu, let's hear a pair of black eyes coming out of your fiddle,” says Schneir Meyer, in his own jargon. “Come on, pull out the Jewish kishkes from your fiddle.” So Stempenyu takes the violin, gives a wink to the rest of the band, and they all take up their instruments.

Stempenyu's Fiddle

In short, God intervened and Stempenyu began to enthrall the bride with his music.

Ah, I feel that my quill is too weak to describe how Stempenyu enthralled the bride! This was not just playing. This was just not reading music...this was the playing of a master. This was like a godly message, very spiritual, and with a delicate soul. Stempenyu stood facing the bride, and began to sermonize her with his violin. He held forth as if really preaching to the bride. A beautiful long speech about the free and happy life of the bride up to now, from her youth to this point, and then about the bitter life that would await her after her marriage. What would wait for her... later... later. No more a girl...a woman with her head covered, hiding the beautiful long hair forever. No more happiness. Farewell to your youth, now you will become just an old Jewish woman...an unhappy woman. God should not punish me for these words. These are the kind of words that the violin emits. All the women understand very well the meaning of this sermon in music...all the women feel it in their bones, they respond to it personally and they cry over it with bitter tears.

“How long did I sit like this?” thinks a young woman, swallowing her tears. “How long did I sit like this, a young girl with my curly braids, my only thoughts that angels are playing with me, that I am the only lucky bride? But in the end.... ach, in the end....”

“Please, God, make it come true for her,” prays an old Jewish woman, a mother of a daughter who is of age. “Make it come true for her, God, for my older daughter, bring her the destined one quickly, but be sure, God, that it is going to be with luck, don't make her destiny as mine has been. She should have a better life than I have with my husband. O God, don't punish me for these words.”

These are the kind of thoughts that are going through the minds of the women as Stempenyu does his work. He works with all his energies, with all his faculties and the fiddle sings. This is the kind of music that pours from Stempenyu's violin.

And the orchestra accompanies him as a deep, deep silence falls over the room. Nobody talks anymore, nobody speaks, nobody walks. Everybody is absorbed in Stempenyu's music. Men become lost in their thoughts. Their wives are silent. Boys and girls are hanging from the tables and the benches. Everybody just wants to listen to Stempenyu.

Shh...quiet, audience! Let's have quiet! And Stempenyu pours it out from his fiddle and begins to melt like wax, going into a trance. The violin wails like a human voice. You hear nothing else but the wail of the violin...you see a hand flying up and down. and then you don't even see it anymore. The hand moves so quickly that you cannot even see it. You only hear the many sounds, the different melodies pouring out of this violin, all very sad and tearful, that clutch at your heart and pull your soul from your body. The entire audience is immersed and enthralled. Everyone feels the music in every cell of their bodies. Your heart begins to fill with something and before you know it tears are pouring out of your eyes. Jews are sobbing and choking. Jews are crying. And.. Stempenyu?... Who, ..Stempenyu? .. What... Stempaenyu? You can't see him...you can't see Stempenyu. You cannot even see the violin. The only thing you hear are sweet sounds...spiritual songs which fill the entire house.

And Rochale, what of beautiful Rochale, who has never in her life heard Stempenyu's music, Rochale who only heard that there was such a person like Stempenyu, but never heard this kind of playing. She stands and listens to these emotional songs, to the many sounds, rare sounds, and she cannot comprehend what it is, but something is clutching deeply at her heart...something is caressing her soul. She does not understand what it is, and she lifts her beautiful eyes in the direction of the sounds, and all she can see are a pair of beautiful black fiery eyes that stare straight back at her and penetrate her like sharp skewers... beautiful wonderful eyes such as she has never seen, eyes that are speaking only to her. Rochale wants to lower her eyes and cannot.

"So this is Stempenyu?" This is what the beautiful Rochale is thinking when the music stopped and all are ready to take the bride and groom to the chupa.

"So where are the candles?" asks the groom's side?

"The candles, where are they?" replies the bride's side?

And so it begins again, all this babbling, as before. No one knows where they run. they push, they shove, they are tearing their clothes, they are sweating, yelling at the servants, and the servants are returning the insults to the bride's family and to the groom's family. And the two families are now having their own fights with each other. Thank God, it is becoming alive again.

In that chaotic state, and when people are departing the chupa, Stempenyu jumps out from the orchestra and then he is mingling with the women, and then he is standing next to Rochale, the beautiful daughter-in-law of Isaac Naftali, and then he is saying a few words to her with a smile, while twisting a lock of his beautiful black hair. Rochale begins to blush and lowers her eyes to the ground and answers him, from the last of the ten commandments, "You know it is not becoming to speak to a musician.....especially in the midst of such a crowd."

I chose to retain some of the Yiddish terminology concerning the personalities involved. For example: MAGID (A great scholar who travels from town to town regaling people with tales from the Torah and Talmud), NAGID (wealthy man who is treated like a zillionaire), MAZINKE (youngest daughter), BADCHEN (jester), KLEZMER (instruments of music).

October 29, 1998

To: Translation Contest
Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation
1020 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10028

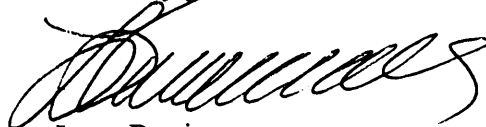
From: Irene Ronin
8939 Niles Center Rd.
Skokie, IL 60076

Dear Sir or Madam,

enclosed please find my translation of chapters 3 and 4 of the novel Stempenyu. I've also enclosed two photocopies of the original in case it is somewhat different from Folksfond edition. I would like to mention that it didn't seem feasible to me to try and give a full explanation of words like "badekens", "bazetzen", "magid", "melamed", etc. in the text, or to translate them literally, since in a published version footnotes or annotation could be used.

Thank you for your kind consideration and for helping to make the works of Sholom Aleichem accessible to a much larger audience.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irene Ronin', written in a cursive style.

Irene Ronin.

Stempenyu

Chapter III

Stempenyu's Preparations

What's all this excitement in Mazepevka?

Reb Hayyim-Bentzion Glock is marrying off his youngest daughter, his last child – Rivkeleh, so why shouldn't everybody celebrate with him? It's worthwhile to attend such a wedding. After all, as they say, he is one of the shtetl's rich men.

Everyone wants to be at the wedding: some out of friendship, some out of envy, some for appearance's sake, some to show off their wives' pearls, earrings, or new necklaces brought from the fair by the husbands, and most of all, to be here because of Stempenyu. To sum it up, all are here at the wedding!

The whole of Mazepevka is rejoicing at Rivkeleh's wedding at Hayyim-Bentzion Glock's house!

It goes without saying, that Aizik-Naftoleh, with his wife and, certainly, his children, are here too. Of course, Aizik-Naftoleh is Hayyim-Bentzion Glock's partner in the store, his partner in the mill, and a bit of a relative too: that is, Aizik-Naftoleh's wife is a bit of a relative of the bride's mother – some sort of a cousin umpteen times removed, on the mother's side.

On account of that, Aizik-Naftoleh's wife, Dvosia-Malkah, is running around the room without a veil, like a real mother-in-law. She is running in circles doing absolutely nothing, except waving her hands and screaming and raising racket, just as if she were doing something.

And Dvosia-Malkah's daughter-in-law, Roheleh the Beautiful is standing close to the bride, all dolled up like a princess, her big blue eyes shining like two big diamonds, and blush playing on her cheeks, two roses in bloom. With one hand she is holding the bride's flowing hair, that the women unbraided for her before the "badekens" with great weeping; and with the other hand she is caressing her white neck, completely unaware that a pair of black burning eyes has been looking at her the whole time, an unbroken stare.

The waiters and waitresses are running in circles like poisoned mice. The in-laws are clamoring, "Oy, gevalt! It's time for the "badekens" already! Where is the limit to making the children suffer? They have been fasting, poor things, and it's such a hot day!" Everybody shouts, "It's time! It's time!" but nobody actually does anything.

Aizik-Naftoleh, who is wearing a velvet cap, is running around, his arms folded behind his back like those of a magid, and Dvosia-Malkah is screaming at the top of her lungs. The remaining in-laws from both sides keep bumping into each other, arms outstretched, just as though they wish for something to do, but have not been given any work.

"Nu, why nobody is doing anything?" asks the groom's party.

"Why doesn't somebody do something?" responds the bride's party.

“Have you ever seen not letting children eat for so long?” shouts the groom’s party?

“It’s unheard of! Keeping children from eating so long!” shouts the bride’s party.

“Why is everybody running back and forth?”

“What all this running is about?”

“Everyone is running and yelling, and everything is at a standstill; fine customs we have here!”

“Just so they have a chance to run and make noise; but to do something!? Forget it!”

“Maybe we’ve had enough talk. It’s time to act! This must be over sometime!”

“Nu, enough talking already! Let’s start acting! There must be an end to this!”

“Where is the klezmer band?” asks the groom’s party.

“The klezmer band – where is it?” responds the bride’s party.

And the klezmer musicians are busy with their own work: preparing the bows and tuning the instruments. Reb Yokel the Bass, is dragging a small boy by the ear, lecturing to him quietly, “I’ll show you, you momzer, how to pull the strings!!” Mentchee the Drummer is scratching the hairy half of his face and not looking at anybody.

Reb Hykel the Badhan is talking with his acquaintance, a melamed, he takes a pinch of snuff from the melamed with two fingers and he is pouring out jokes as if he had a sack of them. And the remaining klezmer musicians, the swollen youths with big shovel-like teeth, have surrounded Stempenyu, and are discussing with him in their klezmer language a very important matter.

“Who is that shechteh standing next to the smisankeh?” asks Stempenyú in the klezmer language pointing with his eyes to Roheleh the Beautiful. “Go, Yerachmiel,” says he to one of the swollen klezmer youths, “go and probeh-oys mahtahm, but hidkeh, Yerachmiel, hidkeh!”

Yerachmiel comes back quickly with a clear answer, “This is not a shechtel, she is already a yaldovkeh, she is Aizik-Naftoleh’s daughter-in-law, from Skvireh she is, and that is her yold – you see? There he is mixing with the guests, the one in a velvet cap.”

“May you perish, Yerachmiel!” says Stempenyu cheerfully. “You found out so quickly? Eh, she is, after all, such a kliveh yaldovkeh! Do you see how she matert with the zikres?”

“If you want,” suggests Yerichmiel the Swollen to Stempenyu, “if you want, I will go tiren with her...”

“Go to hell!” answers Stempenyu. “No one is asking you to act as a shlimazl-shahmes. I will tiren myself with tzuzenickeh.”

Translated into our language this means:

Stempenyu: “Who is this woman standing next to the bride? Go, Yerachmiel, go and find out what’s what, but quickly, Yerachmiel, quickly!”

Yerachmiel (returns): “This is not a girl. She is already a married woman. She is Aizik-Naftoleh’s daughter-in-law, from Skvireh she is, and that is her husband, you see? There he is, mixing with the guests, the one in a velvet cap.”

Stempenyu (cheerfully): “May you perish, Yerachmiel! You found out so quickly? Eh, she is, after all, such a beautiful woman! Do you see how she is looking with those eyes?”

Yerachmiel: "If you want – I will go talk with her..."

Stempenyu: "Go to hell! No one is asking you to act as a shlimazl-shahmes. I will talk to that one myself."

"Go ahead, toss out of the fiddle a pair of black eyes!" calls out Shneyer-Meyer in the klezmer language, "Pull out of the fiddle the Yiddishe kishkes!..."

Stempenyu picks up the fiddle, beckons to the band, and they start tuning up the instruments.

Stempenyu

Chapter IV

Stempenyu's Sweet Fiddle

In short, with God's help, Stempenyu has started the "bazetzen" (the seating of the bride). Oh, my pen is too weak to describe how Stempenyu performed the "bazetzen!" It wasn't just playing, making din with a musical instrument, but a kind of "avodah," a divine service with a certain very exalted feeling, with a certain very noble spirit! Stempenyu stood facing the bride and held a sermon for her on his fiddle, a beautiful, long sermon, a moving sermon about the free and happy life the bride has had until now, about her girlhood, and about the dark, bitter life that is waiting for her later,

later – a girl no more! Her head covered, her beautiful, long hair concealed forever... No more merriment! Good bye, youth. Now you have become a Jewish woman!... Something very unjoyous, God shouldn't punish me for saying this.

One can almost hear these very words from Stempenyu's sweet fiddle. All married women understand well the simple meaning of this wordless sermon, all married women feel it; they feel it and they cry because of it with bitter tears.

"How long ago was I sitting like this..." reminisces a young woman, swallowing her tears, "How long ago was I sitting like this with the unbraided flowing hair, and thought I was in the seventh heaven, that I was fortunate? In the end... Oh, in the end!..."

"Please make it so, God," prays an old woman, a mother of grown daughters, "Make it so, God, that my oldest daughter finds her match soon, only with more luck than I did, and for a better life than I have had with my husband, God shouldn't punish me for saying this."

Thus, women are falling deeper into such thoughts, and Stempenyu does his thing: he is playing with all his might, and his sweet fiddle speaks. Now Stempenyu is playing a plaintive tune, and the band is playing harmony. It becomes quiet, no noise, no racket. Everyone, everyone wants to hear Stempenyu. The men become thoughtful, the women stop talking, little boys and girls climb up onto the benches and tables – each one wants to hear Stempenyu.

Sh-shah! Quiet! People, keep quiet!!

And Stempenyu pours himself out on his sweet fiddle and melts like wax: tioch-tioch – they don't hear anything else; a hand flies up and down – they don't see anything else. And all kinds of voices are heard, and various melodies come pouring out,

all of them full of longing, sad, so it touches the heart, it disturbs the soul, it takes the life out of you. The crowd is giving itself up to the music, the crowd is dying with all their body and soul.

The heart has become so full, so softened, and the eyes are filling with tears. Jews are sighing, Jews are groaning, Jews are crying... And Stempenyu? Who Stempenyu? What Stempenyu? No one sees him, no one sees Stempenyu, they don't see his sweet fiddle; they only hear sweet voices, divine melodies, that are filling out the whole house... And Roheleh the Beautiful who, until now, had never heard Stempenyu play, who has heard about Stempenyu, but has never yet heard such playing, she is standing and listening to the magical melodies. She raises her eyes, there from where come pouring sweet voices, and sees a pair of wonderful black, fiery eyes, that are looking straight at her and pierce her like spears. The wonderful black eyes are looking at her and beckoning to her, and talking with her. Roheleh wants to lower her eyes – and can't.

“So this is Stempenyu?”

That is what Roheleh the Beautiful was thinking after “bazetzen” was over and the in-laws started thinking about escorting the couple to the hupah.

“Where are the candles?” asks the groom's party.

“The candles – where are they?” asks the bride's party.

And so, there was again the same racket, as before.

Everyone is running, not knowing where to. They are shoving, they are pushing, they are stepping on the corns of each other's feet, dresses are torn, they are sweating, they are cursing the waiters and the shahmeses and they, in turn, are cursing the in-laws, and the in-laws argue among themselves – things are, thank God, very lively.

In the commotion that ensues while returning from the hupah, Stempeñyu tears himself away from the band, and here, he has already appeared among the women, right next to Aizik-Naftoleh's daughter-in-law, Roheleh the Beautiful. He exchanges a couple of words with her, smiling and curling up his beautiful long hair. Roheleh blushes, lowers her eyes to the ground and hardly answers. It is not proper to, all of a sudden, stop to chat with a klezmer musician, especially before such a crowd of people!...