Woe to the people whose history is written by strange hands and whose own writers have nothing left but to compose songs of lament, prayers and dirges after the fact.

Therefore, we turn to our people that is now and evermore being dragged into the global maelstrom, to all members of our people, men and women, young and old, who live and suffer and see and hear, with the following appeal:

BECOME HISTORIANS YOURSELVES! DON'T DEPEND ON THE HANDS OF STRANGERS!

Record, take it down, and collect!

See to it that nothing is lost or forgotten of all that happens in our life during and because of the war: all the upheaval, the sacrifice, the suffering, the acts of valor, all the facts that illuminate the attitude of Jews to the war and of others toward us; all the losses and philanthropic efforts—in short, record everything, knowing thereby that you are collecting useful and necessary material for the reconstruction of Jewish history during this horribly important and vitally important moment. Whatever can be recorded should be recorded, and whatever can be photographed should be photographed. *Material evidence* should be collected, and all this should be sent (C.O.D., if necessary) to the Jewish Ethnographic Society in Petrograd [address supplied in Cyrillic letters], either directly, through a Jewish newspaper or through one of the undersigned.

We hope that our appeal will not be a call in the wilderness but will resound within every Jewish heart and that it will awaken the activity that can only be hoped for.

I. L. Peretz
(Warsaw, aleje Jerozolimskie 83)
Yankev Dinezon
(Warsaw, Mila 15)
S. Ansky-Rapoport

[Published in the Warsaw Yiddish daily *Haynt*, January 1, 1915]

53 The Destruction of Galicia

S. ANSKY

I

At the very outbreak of the war, when the Russian army occupied Galicia—so swiftly that within two or three weeks it stretched from Prague in the West to Hungary in the South—news began to arrive, unclear, as if it had been stifled, about gruesome acts of violence that the Russian military, especially the Cossacks

and Cherkassians, were perpetrating against the defenseless local Jewish population. In retaliation for a provocative gunshot, a large part of the city of Brody was burned down, the Jews were robbed, some killed. Austrian Husiatyn and Belz were razed to the ground, and there had been a bloody pogrom with many victims in Lemberg. Rumors spread about violence in many other cities and towns. It also appeared that the Jewish population within the conquered territory, devastated and cut off from both their own land and from Russia, were simply dying of starvation.

The most horrible thing about all the reports was that they arrived by chance, like obscure rumors, and had an alarmingly indefinite quality: a letter from the front that slipped accidentally past the censor, a tale of a wounded and emaciated Jewish soldier and the like. All other routes for news from over there had been closed. No private person could enter or leave Galicia. Even the random letters and stories represented a cry of despair rather than a systematic transmission of facts.

"My hands lose their strength and my eyes become red with tears of blood," writes a Jewish soldier, "when I remember the horrors it has been my lot to see in Galicia, when I remember the acts of savagery that the Cossacks have carried out against Jews. There is murder and robbery, women are raped in the streets, the breasts of old women are cut off and the wretched people are left to die. . . ."

A second soldier writes:

"We came to a small Jewish town in Galicia. The military discovered a wine cellar, broke it open and began getting drunk. I also drank and became drunk like the others. But when I left the cellar and saw what was happening in the town, what the soldiers were doing to Jews, I soon became sober."

And nothing more.

A third, a soldier who later lost his sanity as a result of what he had seen in Galicia, relates:

"Wherever the army passes through, the Christians place icons in their windows and on their doors. Where there are no icons, the house is Jewish and can be pillaged with impunity. When our company was going through some village, one of the soldiers spotted from a distance a house on a hill, and told the captain that he thought it was a Jewish house. The captain allowed him to go and look. He soon returned in high spirits with the news that Jews lived there. They opened the door and saw that there were as many as twenty Jews in the house, half-dead with fear. The Jews were led out of the house and the captain issued a command: *'Koli! Rubi!'* (Stab! Chop!). I didn't see what happened next. I started to run, until I fell in a faint."

These and dozens of other cries of despair gave the impression that in Galicia something was happening that went beyond the human imagination. A great Jewish territory with a population of a million Jews, who only yesterday had all human and civil rights, was surrounded by a fiery ring of blood and iron: cut off from the world and delivered to the full power of Cossacks and soldiers who were enraged like wild beasts. It seemed that a whole Jewish tribe was perishing!

Our first pressing need was to come into contact with the Jews of Galicia and above all bring them whatever material help we could. But this was not easy. During the first months of the war, our rich men weren't willing yet to consider organizing a broad campaign for the Jewish war victims. They wanted to make

do with the large donations that they were giving for the general requirements of the war, and they maintained that the Jews "should not separate themselves" from everyone else—that this could appear "unpatriotic." With such an attitude toward the sufferings of the Jews, and with such "patriotic" fervor, they naturally did not want to hear about the Jews of Galicia. When an important Russian official, coming from Galicia, approached a Jewish millionaire of Kiev, well known for his civic work, with the question: "Why aren't you organizing any help in Galicia for your brothers who are dying of hunger?" the millionaire replied:

"Your Excellency! We look upon the Jews of Galicia not as brothers, but as enemies, against whom we are waging war!"

But I must add that within a short time there was a change in the attitude of even the patriotically minded rich Jews toward the Jewish war victims, even toward the Galician Jews.

When the news from Galicia showed clearly what kind of holocaust [*khurbm*] was taking place, I determined to make every effort to get there, somehow or other, to travel through the ruined towns, establish the extent of the catastrophe and the magnitude of the need and, returning with factual data, no longer to request but demand help for the Jews of Galicia.

It was not easy for me to carry out my plan. For three whole months I had to knock at different doors before I obtained legal permission to travel to Galicia.

At first I hoped to obtain a pass as a merchant, planning to journey with the wagons of flour that Brodsky° was sending to Galicia—and later, with a party carrying sugar. When this did not work out, I approached the then-mayor of St. Petersburg, Count Ivan Ivanovitsh Tolstoy, and asked to be taken along with whatever medical division was being sent from there to Galicia.

Lev Brodsky (1852–1923), Jewish industrialist and philanthropist.

Tolstoy, a true friend to the Jews, responded very warmly to my request. As there was at that time no detachment leaving St. Petersburg for Galicia, he gave me a letter to the mayor of Moscow, Tshelnokov, the head of the All-Russian Municipal Union. Tshelnokov sent me with a letter to the head of the Union of Provincial Councils [Zemsky Soyuz], Prince George Lvov, who was, for his part, also unable to be of assistance to me, and advised me to get a letter from Tolstoy to Gutshkov,° who was then in Warsaw and able to give me a special mission pass for Galicia. Upon returning to St. Petersburg, I received a telegram from Moscow, saying that Prince F. D. Dolgorukov was organizing a detachment to Galicia and agreed to take me along. I traveled once more to Moscow—but Dolgorukov's detachment had been given an order not to go to Galicia, but to Riga. Another detachment was formed by Konovalov, but for bureaucratic reasons Konovalov would not take me with him. In short, everyone professed warm sympathy with my task, expressed his readiness to help me—and sent me to someone else.

Russian minister of war.

Finally I decided to make my way to Galicia via Warsaw. With a letter from Count Tolstoy to Gutshkov and a recommendation from Prince Lvov to the Chief of the Warsaw Branch of the Provincial Union, V. V. Virubov, I traveled to Warsaw on the 21st of November.

2

The devastated Jewish population, which had no possibility of fighting either the cruel persecutions and murders or the most shameful libels, responded as it had in the past—by weaving from its own sighs and tears legends that afforded it strength and comfort. In one place it was whispered that "the Rebbe is writing a megillah about the war, which will surpass everything that has been written until now, and when he ends it, redemption will come for the Jews." In other places there was much talk about the *kets* [end of the Exile]. It was looked for in old sacred books, and it was calculated that these were, indeed, the days of the Messiah that were drawing nigh. Most of all, legends were created about the espionage libels. The people's imagination worked in the same way as in the case of blood libels. In each blood libel the people saw not a made-up story, but a crime committed by others in order to put the blame on the Jews. Of course, the legends were, like all folk legends, suffused with a deep optimism—that eventually the truth would be revealed.

The most widespread libel was about secret telephones, through which Jews were supposed to be passing all the information to the enemy. The people's creativity responded to this with a series of legends, which were partly associated with Zamosc. One legend told simply that as the result of a libel about a telephone, several Jews were hanged and several more were about to be hanged. But a priest with a cross came to the judge and swore that not the Jews but the Poles were guilty. And as soon as he had proved this, the Jews were set free and the Poles were hanged—sixteen in all.

The second legend was more poetic:

The Poles in Zamosc [falsely] informed against the Jews, saying that they were helping the enemy. Several Jews were arrested. When the magistrates sat down to try them and the Jews were on the point of being sentenced to death, a Russian woman teacher and a Russian civil judge came up, fell on their knees and begged that the sentence not be carried out until they had been heard. The magistrates consented. The judge and the teacher swore that the Jews were not guilty. "If you want to know who is really guilty," they said, "then come with us." So they went with them. They led the magistrates to the Count's manor house and led them down into a deep cellar. There they found the Countess Zamioska standing and talking on the telephone to the Austrians. She was hanged at once.

This legend I heard in Minsk. I heard another, similar one in Lublin, which concluded as follows: They went down to the Countess Zamioska in the cellar, and found there a whole group of Jews in long coats, in skullcaps, with long earlocks, standing and talking on the telephone to the Austrians. The magistrates were surprised. It certainly showed that the Jews were guilty! But the Russian judge cried out: "Take them in for questioning!" This was done, and it appeared that they were Poles who had put on the Jews' clothing so that, if they were caught, suspicions would fall on the Jews.

There were still other legends, about a commander (in another variant, a governor) who found out that a Polish soldier was urging other soldiers to make a pogrom against the Jews. He called the soldier to him, tore off his insignia and said: "I would shoot you, but I do not want to soil my hands with unclean blood."

Another told that a Polish officer drove all the Jewish soldiers out of the trenches

into the field that was in the line of fire. One Jewish soldier grabbed the officer's sword and wounded him. When the commander found out about this, he ordered the Jewish soldier to be released and said he was right.

The legend most widespread about Jews in the present war concerned the meeting of two Jewish soldiers on the battlefield. One ran the other through with his bayonet and heard him cry out as he died, *"Shma Yisroel!"* [Hear, O Israel . . .].

While traveling before the war through Volhynia and Podolia to collect folklore, I encountered a very widespread legend about a betrothed pair whom Chmielnicki had murdered while they were being led to the wedding canopy. In fifteen or sixteen small towns I was shown a small grave near the synagogue, and everywhere I was told the same legend about the betrothed couple. This is almost the only legend from the time of Chmielnicki that is still so widespread. After the persecutions of 1648, the existence of the Jewish people was endangered, the whole Jewish people was on the point of being massacred and the people symbolized this in the legend of the betrothed pair who were murdered at the moment of their union, which was to have perpetuated their families and generation. A symbol, as it were, of a tree cut down in its moment of blossoming.

In the present war, the people is not threatened with disappearance; but it is one of the terrible tragedies that can occur in the history of a people, that brother should fight brother. And from the first moment, the people dwelt on the tragedy that was symbolized in the legend of the *"Shma Yisroel."*

I heard this legend in all kinds of variants: without exaggerating, in eight or ten localities, in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Minsk, Kiev, Warsaw; in short, everywhere I met Jewish soldiers or homeless people. It is typical that almost everywhere it was told not as a story but as a fact, which had happened to such and such a person.

3

In Moscow I visited a Jewish "lazarette" [military hospital], which, it seemed, was the only one in all of Russia. It was Jewish not only because it was run with Jewish money but principally because almost all the wounded soldiers who were looked after there (ninety to ninety-seven) were Jews, as were the doctors, nurses and orderlies.

The lazarette was founded by Shoshana Persitz. She instituted a kosher kitchen for the few Jewish soldiers who were there originally. As it became well known, the doctors and orderlies of other lazarettes began to send Jewish soldiers there who ate no *treif*. Thus a Jewish lazarette was gradually formed.

It was a big wooden house. Clean, well lit, large rooms with dozens of beds. A number of severely wounded soldiers are still in bed. The rest, in robes and shoes, walk about. Elderly Jews, bearded, with bent backs; young men, youths, with pale sickly faces, with bandaged heads, arms in slings, on crutches, look like old men. Only two or three are tall, sturdily built and fresh in appearance. Some walk deep in thought from room to room; others stand in knots chatting; still others sit by their little tables, writing letters or reading. A young man sits apart, immersed in a Gemara. The young man was a rabbi in a small town.

At first glance they are not recognizable as soldiers. Ordinary but sick Jews, in pain; shopkeepers, artisans, teachers, sons of good families. But as I looked, I

noticed—or more correctly, felt—something new about them, something unusual in their movements, in the tone of their speech, in their glances. A stern hermetic look, as if they bore a heavy secret. It was as if all of them were swathed in a deep, silent grief.

And I remembered that all these ordinary Jews, the young rabbi, the storekeeper with the red beard, the carpenter, the Hebrew teacher, had all seen before them the Angel of Death, endured the storm of death, received in their bodies its poisonous bite, themselves sowed death around them, and took into their souls something of "the other side" that cannot be grasped by thought or expressed in words but that leaves an eternal mark on the soul.

They answer my questions willingly but quietly; reserved, serious, without superfluous words, without complaining at all about the inhuman sufferings that they have undergone.

I asked if they experienced fear during the battle.

The rabbi answered with a sad smile:

"We were frightened by the terror of war, but not by the war itself. As soon as the battle started, bullets flew and we ourselves had to shoot, run, pursue. Then the fear would vanish. In any case, terror cannot last for long, you get used to it. To such a degree that I slept soundly at the moment when the battle was raging. And when I awoke, two dead soldiers were lying near me.

"Once," he relates further, "when I was in a place in the trenches, about twenty Jewish soldiers gathered, deliberated among themselves, and under the enemy's very eye put on *tefillin* and stood up to pray with a *minyan*. The commander of the regiment approached, but when he found out that we were praying he exclaimed to the Russian soldiers: 'See how Jews pray under fire! God will surely listen to such a prayer!' "

Stories are told of bloody battles, fields littered with dead, rivers of blood, screams, sighs of people and groans from the earth. Stories of burned, destroyed, ruined villages, cities and small towns. About the Jewish population, which was writhing in mortal fever between two conflicting armies.

A soldier tells how his regiment was positioned for four days near his native townlet where his parents, brothers, sisters and relatives still lived. The Austrians occupied his town, and his regiment fired on them. They saw the town from a distance. They could see where the shrapnel fell. He knew every house in the town, who lived where, and he saw how one house after another, one street after another burned, was shattered. When the Austrians were chased out and the Russians entered the town, he found nothing but ruins. Of his father's house only the walls remained intact; he found no living being either in his house or in the entire town, and to this day he does not know whether they went to join the Austrians or whether they are wandering about, hungry and helpless.

Then stories are told about the war in Galicia. What terrible things have happened there, what terrible sights it has been their lot to see.

The soldiers begin to tell their tale and break off halfway, wave their hands in a gesture of resignation: it is difficult to conclude, difficult to convey the dreadful impressions.

4

In Lemberg Dr. Hoyzner told me about a gruesome incident: it is difficult to relate it, impossible to remain silent about it.

Once someone came to him from a Russian lazarette and summoned him to a fatally wounded Jewish soldier, who wanted to make a confession. He went to the lazarette and found the soldier already dying.

"Rabbi," said the soldier to him, "I cannot die. . . . I have a great sin on my conscience, and I beg you to grant me forgiveness for it."

"What does your sin consist of?" asked the rabbi.

"Our regiment occupied a small Jewish town," the dying man began to relate. "As usual, a pogrom started. The soldiers broke into a wine cellar and began drinking. I drank with them, got drunk and went through the town with them to rob Jews. I ran into a house and found there an old man with a *shtrayml*[a] and long sidelocks. As I later discovered, he was the rabbi. I grabbed him by the *grud* [chest] and yelled: *'Zhid, davay horoshi'* ['Kike, gimme money']. He replied that he had no money." The dying man fell silent.

Fur-rimmed hat worn by hasidic men.

"What happened next?" asked the rabbi.

The soldier was silent for a while and then said quietly:

"I stabbed him to death."

He began to sob and beg: "Rabbi, grant me forgiveness, so that I may die in peace."

Rabbi Hoyzner was so shocked that he did not know what to reply. He promised the dying man that he would think about it and give him an answer later. But in two hours he was told that the soldier was dead.

This dreadful deed that Rabbi Hoyzner told me about was of course out of the ordinary, but unfortunately not unique. In the terrible atmosphere of war-maddened instincts there could not but occur such nightmares, that the weaker and less ethically developed of the Jewish soldiers gave in to the general intoxication of savagery, and, along with their Russian comrades, perpetrated the most shameful deeds—even against Jews. I was told the following by Dr. Lander:

In a small town that their troops entered, a pogrom began. Lander went to the colonel and insisted he take measures to stop the pogrom. The colonel sent an officer and several soldiers to accompany Lander. They went to the town. Hearing voices from inside a house, they went in and encountered two soldiers who ran out of the house with plundered objects. The soldiers were at once arrested. To his great shock, Lander saw that both soldiers were Jews!

But however many such deeds occurred, they represent, of course, a rare exception. From everything I heard and saw during my travels through Galicia, I can state with perfect confidence that the attitude of the Jewish soldier to the Jewish population in Galicia was almost always brotherly, and often steeped in true self-sacrifice. The Jewish soldier was the only element that could defend the robbed and plundered Jews during the invasion of the Russian military. As devoid of rights as the Jewish soldiers were in the Russian army, they were often able to save a small town, or individuals, from pogroms and violence. Into an atmosphere of deepest despair, the Jewish soldier brought to the population a certain moral support, and often material support as well.

In spite of the stern prohibitions against meeting and having relations with the

local Jewish population, the Jewish soldiers, risking their lives, visited Jews on the sly, gave them advice on how to behave and helped them in every way they could. In many places Jewish soldiers became family friends in Jewish households. I know of cases in which Jewish soldiers sacrificed themselves for their Galician brothers. When the maddened Cossacks raped Jewish women in a small town, in the middle of the street, several dozen Jewish soldiers scattered behind the houses, shot at the Cossacks, laying many of them out on the ground.

Another incident: During the pogrom in Sokol, Jewish soldiers either took goods from the stores together with the Cossacks or asked the Cossacks for part of the plunder and quietly, via back streets, returned them to the robbed householders. In some places where the population was suffering severely from hunger, Jewish soldiers shared their last crusts of bread with the local Jews. In the small town of Lukhatov I was told a great deal about a Jewish soldier name Yisrolik Vaysbard, who supported almost the whole town for half a year, providing it with money and foodstuff. Entire legends about this soldier were created in the town. Some told that his father had come to him in a dream and commanded him to give all he had to support the town. Others simply expressed the opinion that this was the Prophet Elijah.

To my great regret, I cannot say the same about Jewish military doctors as about Jewish soldiers. In the Russian army there were several thousand Jewish doctors. Their position was incomparably more privileged than that of the Jewish soldier. Not a few Jewish doctors have the rank of colonels and regimental commanders. They were always in the company of officers and had access to the generals. The could, indeed, greatly help the persecuted and unprotected Jewish population. Unfortunately, however, as I became convinced, in many cases they displayed appalling indifference to their Galician brothers. I do not, of course, wish to accuse all Jewish doctors. It is sufficient to mention the name of Dr. Lander—who for an entire four years worked with the greatest self-sacrifice on behalf of the Galician Jewish population—in order to see that there were exceptions to this. Apart from Dr. Lander, I met only two or three doctors in Galicia (Dr. Helman, Dr. Szabad and a few others) who took some interest in the condition of the local Jews. All the other doctors whom I met during these few years in Galicia showed absolutely no interest in Jews. Some of the doctors simply made an effort to conceal their Jewishness and swallowed in silence all the insults and slanders that were rained upon Jews in their presence. I met a Jewish military doctor, Shabshayev from Orenburg. He related with great enthusiasm his deeds of military heroism. He had saved a whole division from captivity and performed other heroic deeds. The general liked him very much and had awarded him several medals. He had even been written up in the newspapers. When I asked him about the relationship of the military to Jews, he said that he knew of no terrible facts about this but added straight away:

"In any case, I wouldn't know much about it, because I avoided meeting local Jews in the occupied territory. I was even harsher to Jews than to Christians, so that I would not be suspected of sympathy with Jews."

He knew of no "terrible acts," and yet he himself related how they had removed all Jews from administrative offices, quarantine hospitals, military transports and other institutions and sent them to the trenches at the front. They had made a survey of Jewish soldiers, and there were, of course, few officers who dared to say

a good word for the Jews. The following questions were in the survey: "Do Jewish soldiers have close relationships with the local Jews? How many of the dead, wounded and captured were Jews?" In Shabshayev's regiment there were 10 dead, 40 wounded and 190 captured Jews. The number of captured was proportionately not greater among the Jews than among the Russians. But no survey was made of the latter, and the number—190 Jews who surrendered—astonished everybody. The following incident occurred: ten soldiers were sent on a reconnaissance mission, and they were all captured. An ordinary matter. But among the ten soldiers was one Jew, so the whole blame was put on him, and the company commander is said to have been severely punished for sending a Jew on reconnaissance.

At the close of our conversation Dr. Shabshayev made this request: "Don't tell anyone what I have told you. Don't even say that you met me and, in particular, that we talked about Jews. That could do me harm."

Other doctors did not hide their Jewishness, but they had so little concern for the condition of the Jewish population that I could not get any information about it from them. Some doctors spent many months in Jewish *shtetlekh*, where their hospitals were stationed, and during this time they showed no interest in the condition of the local Jewish population. After great effort I was able to obtain from some Jewish doctors copies of official orders about edicts against the Jews. They knew how important it was to let the Jewish communal activists in St. Petersburg know about these orders but were afraid to let them get out in case, God forbid, it should become known who had informed about the document. More: upon meeting some doctors who were stationed with their hospitals in remote Jewish *shtetlekh*, where there was great hardship, and to which I could not travel, I asked them to accept several hundred rubles from me, take them to their shtetl and distribute them among the needy or give them to the local committee or the rabbi. Most of the doctors refused to do this. And those who agreed to take the few rubles did so unwillingly, as if they were thereby making a great sacrifice.

5

In Khoroskov I met two Jews, Rabbi Frenkel from Husiatyn and Reb Lipe Shvager. Both of them had had a great business in books, especially in old *sforim* [Jewish religious books], rare books and manuscripts. This was the greatest book trade in old *sforim* in Galicia. During the pogrom and the fire their whole book business was completely destroyed. They were able to save only a small quantity of manuscripts and old *sforim*. I took some of them with me and brought them to Petrograd, to be kept in the museum.

Miracle Tale

Reb Lipe Shvager, an intimate of the Rebbe of Kopyczynec, told me a wondrous story, which has the character of a mystic, symbolic legend. In fact, the legend has already taken shape and entered the cycle of Hasidic miracle tales.

When the war began, the Rebbe of Kopyczynec was in Hamburg, where he was taking a health cure. His whole family was there with him. Lipe Shvager was there too. When the Russians invaded Galicia, the Rebbe summoned Shvager and said to him:

"You should know that I have two letters handwritten by the holy Ba'al Shem himself. Now, in wartime, they could, God forbid, be destroyed. Go at once to Kopyczynec and save the letters. If you cannot return, hide them in a safe place. Know that many dangers lie in wait for you on the road. You could be killed by a bullet or executed on a libel charge, may Heaven preserve us, but the peril must not deter you from carrying out the sacred mission of saving the letters."

Shvager at once agreed to go, and asked the Rebbe:

"And what will happen to your property, Rebbe, the gold and silver and precious objects that you have in your court?"

It was said that there was property in the court in the value of several million crowns.

"All of it can go," replied the Rebbe calmly, "but the Ba'al Shem's letters must be rescued."

Shvager set off. He came to Kopyczynec several hours before the Russians entered the town. Obviously there could be no question of going back. But he had just enough time to save and conceal the letters. He put them in a box and buried them two meters deep in the wall of a cellar in the Rebbe's court. In the same cellar he buried some of the Rebbe's gold and silver. For three or four months after that he had no opportunity to go to the cellar. During this time he narrowly escaped death several times and was arrested on suspicion of spying. When he finally had a chance to get to the cellar, he found none of the precious objects that he buried there. Everything had been dug up and stolen. The wall in which the box with the letters was hidden had been demolished, and the box had disappeared.

The effect this had on Shvager can readily be imagined. He almost died of grief. But a few days later, when he again began to dig and search in the wall, he suddenly discovered the box intact. But when he opened it, he found to his great astonishment that all the characters had vanished from the letter, which was written entirely in the Ba'al Shem's hand (the second letter was only signed by him), and only a blank piece of paper remained.

To tell the truth, I didn't believe this story at all. I thought this was one of the common legends that were easily invented in time of war. So I asked Shvager to show me the letter. The letters were in Kopyczynec, hidden in an inner sanctum, and Shvager did not want to display them. But when I met him a few weeks later in Kopyczynec and was very insistent, he agreed, rather unwillingly. He brought the letters into the synagogue. They were wrapped in several papers. Shvager, with the greatest awe, not touching them with his hand, unwrapped them. I saw two very old sheets of paper laid together. One of them consisted of text written on both sides in a thin, close script—according to Shvager, in the handwriting of Reb Gershon Kitever° (the letter has already been published). On the second page, on the very edge, one could just detect the signature in sharp, long, thin characters: "Yisroel Ba'al-Shem." The second letter, which was half decayed (both were written in 1753), with soft spots from dampness or tears, was blank, without a trace of characters. Shvager gazed at the letter with a look of mystic contemplation and said quietly:

The Ba'al Shem Tov's father-in-law.

"They say the characters have disappeared because of dampness and can be restored by chemical means. But we Hasidim think differently, quite differently. . . ."

Looking at the letter of the "flown away" characters, I remembered the shard of the broken tablets [with the ten commandments] that I had found in the ruined and desecrated synagogue in Dembits. On it there remained only the words *TIRTSAḤ . . . TIN'AF* [thou shalt kill . . . thou shalt commit adultery]. Both sym-

bolic occurrences came together for me in the rabbinic phrase: "broken tablets and flying letters."

The whole life of the Jewish population in Galicia appeared to me as a moral explanation of these two symbols.

On my first journey through Galicia in 1915, I followed closely in the path of the war, wandered among smoldering fires and saw fresh traces of the most horrible pogroms. The terror of death ruled in every corner. The mark of a drama lay on every town, every house, every object; and steeped in yet greater tragedy were the people who had recently lived through that deadly terror: they were shattered, almost mad with despair. At that time, the Jews [of Galicia] seemed to me like broken tablets, with blood flowing from every crack. Yet then the tragedy was still external, a consequence of the war. Hundreds and thousands of lives were cut off, fortunes ruined, great cultural treasures destroyed; but the storm had not yet touched the depths of the soul, not destroyed human dignity. When a former rich man or respected householder suddenly became impoverished and was dying of hunger, the thing that was as hard as death for him was to ask for alms, and many such people were indeed ready to go hungry rather than seek the help of strangers. The tragedy of the bleeding, ruined and degraded population was great, but in its greatness, in the sharpness of the pain, there was a harsh beauty, which elevated human suffering to the level of an epic folk tragedy.

Now, as I journeyed through towns big and small that were relatively intact, I no longer encountered this once lofty and beautiful drama. What had previously been a tragedy had now become an everyday phenomenon. The former heroes of folk tragedy had been transformed into professional beggars. People had forgotten the past, were afraid to look into the future and lived with the petty mendicant interests of today, worrying about a slice of bread, a handful of grits. People had become used to continual hunger, to the rags on their bodies, to standing for hours at the food stations. People wandered around, neglected, silent, sunken in despair, indifferent to their dreadful condition. The few intellectuals left had also become used to being isolated from culture, social life or intellectual fulfillment. And all these living corpses appeared to me no longer in the image of broken tablets, but as tablets whose letters had flown, tablets that had been stripped of the highest sanctity.

6

From Tlutsi I had to travel in Bukovina: to Zoloshtshik, Snyatin, Czernowitz. But Homelski, whom I met, suggested that I travel with him to Buczacz, where he had business to settle. I agreed.

The ranges of the Carpathians begin in this region: mountains and valleys. When we had traveled about halfway, we saw from far off, on a high mountain, a large, extremely massive and magnificent building. Drawing a little closer, we noticed that it was an old ruin, of which only the walls remained. As we later discovered, it was the ruin of a monastery.

I was arrested by this thought: why do ancient ruins, many hundreds of years old, possess such magnificence, such dramatic beauty, while new ruins look rejected with nothing dramatic about them? This is because around a new ruin there

are random bits of half-burned, not quite ruined sections, which strike the eye, create a dissonance and blur the intrinsic drama. Old ruins that have survived hundreds of years preserve only those parts that are indestructible and that can stand up to time and all the elements of nature.

The same is true of human tragedy. At the moment when it occurs, there is much in it that is fortuitous, glaring, that drowns out and obscures its mysterious tragic core. Only when years have passed and all the trivialities and accidents, everything that is temporal and unimportant have been washed away by time, does the tragedy crystallize its true, splendid and tragic visage and become a theme for artists who create the great immortal tragedies of the world.

As we crossed the mountain, a frightful scene opened up before us. In the valley lay a dead town—a great town, with many streets and houses. But *all* the houses were burned down and smashed to pieces. They stood like battered, fossilized corpses. A kind of Pompeii stood before us. I had seen ruined towns before, but never had I seen the panorama of such a catastrophe.

We paused for a while. Neither I nor Homelski nor our waggoner knew of a big town on our route. Had we made an error in counting the kilometers? Was this already Buczacz, which was, indeed, a total ruin? Homelski, who had been to Buczacz before, looked and began to recognize it: yes, Buczacz.

We drove up to the town. Empty and dead. There was not a living creature to be seen anywhere. Then near the entrance we saw two soldiers coming out of a half-fallen little house that stood below the mountain, looking like a mountain cave. We stopped the soldiers and asked them the name of the town.

"Yazlovits," they replied.

And seeing us look at the ruins, they added:

"There were fierce battles here. In retreat our artillery pulverized the town."

"And what is that little house that you came out of?"

"A shop."

We entered the little house and there found a Jew and his household. The house was tiny, low, with an earthen floor. In one room was the household, five or six souls, and the second room was a kind of store. Soldiers bought cigarettes, rolls and notions.

We asked for something to eat. At first the storekeeper said he had nothing but rolls. But when he found out we were Jews he invited us into the other room. It was the Sabbath eve, and the mistress of the house was getting ready to bless the candles.

Sabbath stew.

"On the Sabbath we also have a little pot of *cholent*,"° she said. "We will give you half of it; you need to eat too."

In Jewish folklore, a giant.

We would have refused, but when we saw the "little pot," which was as huge as the head of Og, King of Bashan,° we stopped feeling embarrassed.

While we were eating the householder came in.

"Are there many Jews in this town?" I asked him.

"There is only one Jewish household—mine," he replied. "During the bombardment and the fires all the Jews ran away. Now they are not allowed back. I was favored, permitted to settle. This counts as outside the town. So we stay here, I buy and settle and earn my crust of bread."

"And the soldiers do not hurt you?"

"No. On the contrary. They are very glad to have a place where they can buy something in the town. Everything is dead, so to speak."

Part of the town could be seen through a small window in the house. Among the ruined and burnt houses I recognized a large, splendid stone synagogue, which was also ruined, roofless, with empty burnt-out windows.

"The synagogue burned too?" I automatically asked the householder.

"Yes. . . ." He sighed. "All the *sforim* were burnt." "What a synagogue that was," he resumed and paused. "Six hundred years old. They say it wasn't built; it was found already fully built under the earth."

I had already heard, in Volin and elsewhere, the legend about old synagogues, that they had been found fully built under the earth. But the householder added another feature to the legend.

"When they had unearthed the synagogue and gone inside, they found an old man there with a gray beard reaching to his belt, who was sitting and studying."

We came to Buczacz late at night. The appearance of the town was almost the same as in Yazlovits; dozens of large streets were thoroughly ruined and burnt. The few houses that remained intact were occupied by the military staff and hospital. The light of the big electric street lamps gave the dead town a yet more tragic look.

There were still Jewish families in the town, living in the cellars. I had no time to make inquiries; I had to start my return journey at dawn. But at night, on my way to the military hospital where I had lodging, I encountered an elderly Jew. I stopped him and began asking questions.

"What destruction [*khurbm*] there has been in your town!" I expressed my sympathy.

"Anything can be called 'destruction' [*khurbm*]," he answered with a sigh. "What you see is nothing, in comparison."

"With what?"

"With what! They destroyed the cemetery and scattered gravestones that were six hundred years old; they burned down the tombs of great scholars. In our town, you know, the Oreh Hayyim is buried."

I felt that for this Jew the destruction of the cemetery was a greater tragedy than the destruction of the town itself.

7

For many years Sadigure was the residence of a family of Hasidic rebbes who trace their descent to the Ba'al Shem's greatest pupil, Rabbi Ber of Mezritsh. The founder of the Sadigure dynasty, the grandson of Rabbi Ber, Rabbi Sholem Shakhne of Pogrebishtsh was a great kabbalist and a remarkable personality. He dressed in European style and led an expansive aristocratic life, in the style of the Polish magnates of the time. His son, the well-known Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin, who was the first of the dynasty to settle in Sadigure, excelled his father in both personal greatness and behavior. His court was like an emperor's; a band of twenty-four musicians played constantly near his table; he never went out to drive without six horses abreast. His son and grandson also adopted his way of life, and the court of Sadigure was renowned as the wealthiest and noblest of rebbes' courts.

The war, which laid waste so many Jewish treasures, also destroyed the court

of Sadigure and its unique way of life, with its great antiquities that generations had collected—antiquities both material and spiritual.

Before the war, Sadigure had a population of about ten thousand souls, three quarters of them Jews. When the Russian army occupied Sadigure for the first time in September 1914, a terrible pogrom took place there. All the Jewish houses and stores were plundered and many Jews were wounded and murdered.

I traveled to Sadigure in a military vehicle, together with Dr. Ratni, a Jewish military doctor from a hospital in Czernowitz. I also took a Jew from Sadigure with me, a *melamed* [teacher] who had been in Czernowitz the whole time and never dared to enter Sadigure, since he was afraid of the soldiers and local gentiles. This Jew offered to sell me some old *sforim* that he had hidden in Sadigure. He knew that his little house at the end of the town had not been burnt, and he did not doubt that his books were still intact.

"I have hidden them in such a way that the Destroyer [Devil] himself would not find them," he boasted.

His little house was indeed undamaged but stood without doors and windows. Inside were straw and horse dung. The Jew looked in bewilderment at this house. He could hardly recognize it.

"Where are your books hidden?" I asked him.

"In the loft . . ." he answered in a subdued voice.

We got hold of a ladder and climbed up into the loft. Books? Even the chimney bricks had been taken.

The Jew stood in the loft, discouraged, depressed, and looked at a corner where he had hidden his books. He had covered them with bricks and not doubted that no one would find them there. He was badly shocked. His head bowed, he returned to Czernowitz on foot.

I went to the Rebbe's court, which is almost at the end of the town. Two castles in a medieval Moorish style, with round turrets at the sides, were ornamented artistically with ridged, pointed cornices. Their massive doors looked like gates. Both castles, one facing the other, were in exactly the same architectural style and of the same size and painted red. One was the Rebbe's dwelling, the other the synagogue.

Both buildings were still intact, but only the shells of the buildings. Inside, everything had been stolen, spoiled and horribly dirtied. A military hospital for typhus patients occupied both buildings.

A typical comic Russian incident happened to me there. As soon as Dr. Ratni and I drove up to the Rebbe's court in our military car and got out, both military doctors from the hospital rushed to meet us, together with several nurses and orderlies.

The doctors greeted us and showed great deference and willingness to be of help to us, especially to me. I couldn't understand why. But as we were driving away, Dr. Ratni burst into loud laughter and said: "What do you know! They took you for the new divisional general and were sure you had come to inspect the hospital. The senior doctor told me so before we left."

This was because my officer's epaulets resembled those of a general. Whatever the reason, the doctors took me everywhere, explained and showed everything to me.

We entered the building that had been the Rebbe's house. I shuddered at the

destruction I saw there: empty, desolate rooms, hideously muddied, walls that had been spat upon and broken. In the biggest room there were benches near the walls. Here sick Rumanian soldiers who had just been brought in from their posts sat or reclined. Gaunt, dark, melancholy shadows of men, in torn, wet, muddy greatcoats, half barefoot, sitting hunched up, shivering with fever and groaning. In the next room the injured were having their wounds bandaged, and those who were sick with typhus were being completely shaved.

The third room was being used as a bathroom. A water heater had been installed, heated from below. In a dense steam and suffocating stench, dozens of naked, emaciated, sick soldiers wandered about.

As we stood in the first room, where the sick Rumanian soldiers had just been brought from the front, the senior doctor pointed at them and addressed me with an ingratiating smile:

"What do you say to these heroes, our brave allies? Ha, ha! No doubt they imagined that waging war is as simple as playing in a Rumanian band in an outdoor cafe."

And he added a little more quietly, as if telling me a secret: "Do you know what the Emperor said about Rumania? He said Rumania is not a nation but a profession. Ha, ha! A brilliant remark."

When we went outside the doctor stopped, pointed at the buildings and began to relate: "You see these palaces? Wonderful architecture, genuine castles! They belonged to a very great Jewish 'rabbin,' a kind of bishop whom the Jews worship. He was frightfully wealthy, owned hundred of millions, which he removed to Austria at a timely moment.

"This house" he indicated the Rebbe's dwelling, "is historic. Here a few years ago, the famous Beilis trial that shook the world was held."[9]

A ritual murder trial against Mendl Beilis (1911–1913) that raised an international outcry against the tsarist regime.

"What do you mean, Beilis's trial was held here?" I asked in surprise.

"Here, here!" he replied with a confident smile, like a person to whom a mystery is known. "I am quite sure of it."

"What are you talking about! The trial was held in Kiev."

"In Kiev," he gestured contemptuously. "That was just a performance. Puppets danced there, whose strings were pulled from here. The real trial was held here."

"How?" I began to listen with interest.

"The greatest Jewish 'rabbiners' and the richest bankers in the world met here, and under the chairmanship of the local bishop, the whole trial was carried out here, all the details were worked out, a large sum of money was agreed on for the necessary costs. Then all the directives and orders went from here to Kiev. And what had been decided on here took place there."

He said this with such certainty that I had no doubt that this old Russian intellectual, who even had a medical degree, seriously believed this fantastic legend.

"Here, in the other building,"—he pointed to the synagogue—"there was a Jewish temple. We have set up a hospital here, with all of eighty beds."

I entered the synagogue, which was large and very high. The first thing I noticed was the row of beds where, under military greatcoats, the sick and dying lay. The air was heavy, choking. Our entry attracted the gazes of the sick men—suffering, pitiful, imploring gazes that turned to us for help. From other beds we were met

by gazes that were heavy, earnest and cold, already hopeless, sunken into themselves. A whole gamut of gazes!

I looked around. Bare, cracked dirty walls, on which there no longer were any of the traditional pictures, lions or leopards or musical instruments. A costly but broken chandelier hung from the ceiling.

But then my glance fell on the eastern wall, and I trembled at what I saw. The rich decoration around the Holy Ark, with the tablets above, remained unharmed. But a large Eastern Orthodox icon had been placed inside the empty Ark.

Mishnah Taanit 4:6; cf. Against the Apocalypse, pp. 16–17.

Tselem beheikhal, "an idol in the sanctuary,"[10] flashed through my mind. And this startled me more than all the pogroms I had seen. An ancient feeling awoke in my heart, an echo of the destruction of the Temple. I stood and could not tear my eyes from the grotesque sight. I felt that a dreadful blasphemy had been perpetrated here, a desecration of both religions. The brutal hand of a crazed soldier had exacted the same reprisal from God as from man.

The doctor told me something, but I did not hear what he said.

When I returned to Czernowitz, I met a Jew from Sadigure, a Hasid. I told him what I had seen in the Rebbe's synagogue, but this did not surprise him. The same cold, stony expression remained on his embittered face.

"What is the synagogue, compared with what has been done to the Rebbe's grave!" he said with a sigh.

"What happened to the grave?"

"You don't know? They destroyed the whole cemetery. Dragged and broke the gravestones to bits. They tore down the tomb of Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin, dug up the grave and scattered the bones. They had been told that Jews bury money in graves, so they were looking for it. . . ."

Thinking about what I had seen and heard at the court at Sadigure, I remembered a legend I had heard about Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin. As is well known, the Ruzhiner was arrested on account of a libel (he was accused of ordering or permitting the murder of two Jewish informers), and even after he was set free he was still fiercely persecuted. When he escaped to Austria, the Russian government demanded that he be surrendered to them. With the help of Metternich and with great effort, he was able to persuade the Austrian government not to turn him over.

Against this background a legend grew about a gigantic battle between the Ruzhiner and Tsar Nicholas I. It tells that Nicholas was a bitter personal enemy of the Ruzhiner and persecuted him all his life. This greatly surprised the Russian ministers, and they once asked Nicholas:

"Why do you persecute the Ruzhiner? Is it worthy of a great monarch like yourself to spend his whole life chasing after a contemptible little Jew?"

Nicholas leapt up and shouted in rage: "What do you mean, contemptible little Jew? All my life I have been bending the world one way and he has been bending it the other. And I cannot get the better of him."

And Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin used to say: "I was born on the same day as he, but three hours later, and I cannot catch hold of him. If I had only been born a quarter of an hour earlier I would defeat him."

The Ruzhiner did not want to be revealed or to sit on the Rebbe's throne as long as Nicholas was Tsar. He made a condition: "Either I or he!"

There was an uproar in the heavens, and Nicholas was about to be cast down from his rule. But then Nicholas's angel intervened and began to protest:

"What is this—no law and no judge? If both of them were contending for the throne at the same time, there would be room to argue about who should cede to whom. But now, seeing that His Majesty Nicholas is already Tsar, how can he be deposed?"

So the heavenly court decided that Nicholas would remain king and that the Ruzhiner would yield and allow himself to be revealed. But in order to conciliate him, the Ruzhiner was allowed to go through all the heavens and take whatever he wanted. As he went through the Heaven of Song he took the most beautiful melody from it.

Nicholas has long been dead and forgotten, but the war between him and his opponent has not ceased. He has stretched his dead hand across three generations of Tsars. He has destroyed the Ruzhiner's court, desecrated his synagogue and cast up his bones from his grave. In their evil deeds "dead hands" are as terrible as living ones.

1914–1917

54 Tales of 1001 Nights

SHOLEM ALEICHEM

So we're at the point, aren't we, where my son Yekhiel was made mayor of Krushnik, and was running things, as they say, with an iron hand, and the Poles were scraping and digging, looking everywhere for lies to tell, spreading Haman's slanders against him and against all of us. Well, they kept at it, those Poles, may their names be blotted from memory, until finally the Germans began making "forays" into town. That is, they began searching and scavenging and shaking up people. And God helped them—they actually found something at Aba the *shoḥet*'s,° some hidden circumcision knives, along with a packet of circumcision powder, which looks a bit like gunpowder. And then the fun began—God Almighty!

Ritual slaughterer.

First off, they took the *schlimazel* (the *shoḥet*, I mean) and threw him into jail, solitary confinement, so that God forbid no evil should come near him, and no one disturb his rest. And the whole town became, what should I say, a very pit of desolation and bitter lament. And all at once they came running to me. "What's going on?" they said. "Yankel, why don't you speak up? Your son," they said, "is the mayor, isn't he? And you," they said, "you're such a big shot, if you said the word, that *schlimazel* (the *shoḥet*, that is) would be a free man."

Well, I tried to reason with them. "Get off my back," I said. "You're making a bad mistake, my dear friends. In the first place," I said, "I'm not the big shot you think me, and even if I am, let's say, that's no special advantage. On the contrary.

Just because," I said, "my Yekhiel is mayor, and because I'm pretty important around here—a big shot, as you say—just because of this," I said, "I'd do more harm than good. Because if you knew the Germans," I said, "like I know them, you wouldn't talk that way. I'll tell you exactly what a German is," I said. "A German hates flattery as much as a kosher Jew hates pork. A German won't stand for empty words, and as for bribery," I said, "forget it. A German's not a Russian who'll watch your hand to see if you've got a bribe there for him. A German," I said, "needs delicate handling, if you see what I mean."

You'd think that that would do it, right? But you're dealing with Jews. You say salt, they say pepper. So you say pepper, they say garlic. And all the while the *shoḥet's* wife and her children were standing off to one side, weeping and wailing, tearing their hair out. I don't know about you, Mr. Sholem Aleichem, but I have an odd habit—when I see tears, I'm struck dumb. I can't stand to see someone crying. I can't, that's all. I'm not bragging that I'm good-hearted; it's the power of tears, if you see what I mean. But in the long run all that made no difference anyway. As it turned out, I didn't have to be begged. The authorities ordered me to come. And not only me, but our rabbi too, and the *rabbiner*,° along with all the other first citizens of Krushnik. Our hearts sank, I can tell you, but we gathered up our courage and got ready to go. That is, we dressed in our Sabbath best, with top hats—very elegant, very fitting and proper. It was as if we weren't being sent for, but had decided on our own to go as a delegation.

The rabbi appointed by the government.

Meanwhile, my wife saw me all decked out on a Wednesday afternoon. "Yankel," she said, "where are you off to?"

Naturally I didn't tell her they'd sent for us. Does a woman have to know everything? So I made up a story that we were going as a delegation to the Germans, to the commandant I mean, in order to save a poor Jew from the gallows.

Well, she wrung her hands and started wailing, "Yankel, you mustn't do it!" There was a terrible pain in her heart, she said. Lightning, she said, had struck her. Evil days were coming upon the children of Israel. . . .

As you'd expect, a wife. What does a woman know anyway? Though to tell the truth, my wife (may she rest in peace) was not as foolish as other women. In fact, she wasn't foolish at all. You might even say the opposite. She was clever, quite clever; and sometimes she could talk like a wise woman, a wonderfully wise woman! I don't say it because she was my wife or because she's now in heaven. After death, as they say, you become a saint on earth, but that's not why I praise her. I'm not like other men. Here's an example—if you'd go to Krushnik and ask around about Yankel Yunever's wife, Miriam Mirel, you'd hear only praise and praise and more praise! First, she was pious, and not just "respectable," God forbid, like other women who won't move an inch from the letter of the law. Besides that, she was religious, very religious! But who's discussing religion? We're talking about kindness, about the meaning of character. This was a woman! A vessel of goodness! A person without a gall!° Well, maybe not *without* gall. Everyone has a gall, naturally, and if you step on it, it's got to burst, because a human being can't be more than a human being, if you see what I mean.

A good-natured person.

But I don't want to mix things up, and as you know I hate to brag. So I'll get right to the point. We are going, I and the rabbi and the *rabbiner*, and the other good men of Krushnik, to the head authority, the commandant, to hear him out. And we went confidently. After all, we made quite a show, as they say, with the

father himself of Krushnik's mayor there—you can't just dismiss something like that with a wave of your hand! And on our way we discussed what we'd say to the commandant. We decided that I would begin and address him in the words of Moses: "O Lord, you have begun to show your servants your greatness[o]—that is to say, you have been gracious toward us, Herr German, from the day you set foot upon our land." And more of that kind of high talk. Why should we wait until he'd start? It would be best to get in a few words first, and then by the way, if you see what I mean, we could throw in something about the *shoḥet*—explain who the *schlimazel* was, why he'd hidden the ritual knives, just what that packet of circumcision powder meant—a regular lecture.

Deut. 3:23–24.

But as they say, if it's fated to be a disaster, you lose your tongue. That's where my real story begins. When I think of it even now, it makes my hair stand on end. . . .

In short then, we arrived at the commandant's headquarters, and there we found the *schlimazel,* Aba the *shoḥet* himself, tied up in the courtyard, and two soldiers with loaded rifles, one at each side of him. The *shoḥet* was trembling like a leaf and muttering something, probably his last confession. We were going to cheer him with a word or two, something like "Aba, God is with you!" But the soldiers gave us a nudge with their rifles—meaning one word to him, the *shoḥet,* and we'd be shot dead. And if a German says he'll shoot, trust him, especially when the whole world has gone crazy. At the slightest whim they'd shoot. Do you see what I mean or not? For example, someone comes by and says, "Got some tobacco, pal? If you do, all right. If not, I'll shoot." He doesn't give you time to think it over, let alone to defend yourself, to explain that you never use tobacco. Your life wasn't safe, that's the kind of world it was—try and do something about it.

To make a long story short, I don't have to tell you how we Krushniker Jews felt when we saw the *shoḥet* tied up and making his last confession. You can imagine it for yourself. I could only think, great God Almighty, what's going to happen to this Jew? And what will happen to his wife, the poor widow, and to his children, the orphans, if God forbid we can't get them to listen?

As we were standing around like that, thinking, out came not the commandant, but some other devil—a redhead, fat, well-fed, a cigar in his teeth. He'd just had a good supper and apparently more than a few drinks to wash it down. Along with him came two other officers. They looked at us; we looked at them. We examined each other, that is, without words for a while. No one knew what would happen. Now if it had been the commandant himself, and if he'd received us like human beings in his house, not outside there in the courtyard, then it would have been a different matter altogether, and quite a different sort of conversation. But this way, nothing. We stood and were silent—I and the rabbi and the *rabbiner* standing right up front, in the firing line, if you see what I mean. The other Krushniker dignitaries were standing behind us and pushing us from behind to say something. But how can you say something if you can't talk? Besides I was waiting for the rabbi to start—he was older. And the rabbi was waiting for the *rabbiner—he'd* been appointed by the government.

When they saw what they had there—a speechless delegation, a feast without food—the fat one yelled out to us, "Who are you?" So I stepped forward, let happen what may, and introduced him to the old man. "This is our rabbi," I said. "And the younger one, he's the *rabbiner,* the rabbi appointed by the government, and as for me," I said, "I'm Yankel Yunever, the father," I said, "of the lord mayor of Krushnik."

You'd think, wouldn't you, that he'd be impressed? Not at all. He didn't move a muscle. So seeing that reputation didn't work, I began to plead, putting first things first, as they say. "We, the foremost citizens of Krushnik," I said, "come before you as a delegation," I said, "with a request, to beg mercy for this Jew"—and I pointed to the *schlimazel,* to Aba the *shoḥet,* that is.

The fat German heard me out, then motioned to the soldiers to take us away. So they took us, if you see what I mean, and put us into prison like real criminals, each in a separate cell. It all happened in a minute, much less time than it's taken me to tell you about it. Did they let us send word at least to our wives and children? No, they shoved us in, locked the doors, and that's that. Should we have asked them why? Useless! First, a German won't answer. That's one reason. Another is it could make things worse, God forbid. Wartime's a powderkeg. You have to watch what you say, if you see what I mean, because who knows which side will win and what the result will be? It could be that the top dogs will be turned out into the cold, and the winners wind up six feet below.

In short, we were in a tight spot. Although if you look at it another way, what could they have against us? After all, we were dealing with Germans, with gentlemen. But then again, this was a time when Germans weren't really German, or Frenchmen French, or Englishmen English. They were wolves, not men—human beings acting like animals, like wild beasts, a plague on them! It was worse now than at the time of the flood; it was the end of the world. You probably think they fined us or beat us with whips. Well, think again. But you'd never guess, not if you'd live nine lives, so don't trouble yourself. Give me a minute or two to catch my breath, and I'll tell you a pretty story. Then be so good as to tell *me* what it was—a joke? the real thing? or a dream? . . .

Let's call it a story about the new moon—I mean, a story about how we Krushniker Jews prayed to the new moon. You remember, don't you, where we left off? They had kindly seated us in prison, me and the rabbi and the *rabbiner* and the other good men of Krushnik, the town's pride and joy, because of the crime we'd committed—we'd taken the part of Aba the *shoḥet,* pleaded on his behalf, if you see what I mean, and tried to save a Jew from the gallows. So there we sat, each one of us in his own cell, not studying Torah and not sitting at work for ten rubles a week, but just sitting, like common thieves and drunkards, in prison. What could we do? We'd been seated, as they say, so we sat . . . sat one hour, sat two hours, sat three hours. . . . Soon it would be night—what were we sitting there for, I ask you? At home they didn't even know where we were, that's where it hurt! And besides, everything has to end sometime, as they say, so let it come, I thought, one way or another!

I tell you, my head was ready to burst. I kept thinking and thinking, and only of evil things, and of worse to come. I imagined, first, that they'd condemn us as criminals and sentence us according to the laws of war. Next they'd politely line us up—the finest Krushniker citizens, including the rabbi and the *rabbiner,* all in a row, and twelve soldiers would stand ready, rifles loaded, waiting for the good word. And then the commandant enters in person, so I imagine, and asks us to say our last prayers—he's a German, after all, a gentleman! At this I get a bit hot

Bril Judah standing before Joseph

Gen. 40:18.

under the collar and I think, "Yankel, the end's approaching. It's only a minute to death anyway; why not ease your conscience, as they say, and give him a piece of your mind?" And I begin in the language of our fathers, speaking as Abraham spoke before the gates of Sodom: "My Lord, harken to me, and hear me out. Do not take offense, O German, but let your servant's words find favor in the ears of his lord and master"[°]—and so on, without putting the least emphasis on the fact that he's a German and a commandant and the conqueror of Krushnik.

And as I'm arguing with him (in my imagination, that is), the door opened and who do you think came in but a soldier with a loaded rifle. Once inside, he winked at me as if to say, "Be so kind as to follow me." Well, I could see there wasn't much choice, so I went. Outside it was pitch black. I looked around and saw the others were there, too—all of Krushnik's finest, the rabbi and the *rabbiner* included. Behind each of them stood a soldier, armed to the teeth.

Then the captain shouted "Forward!" and we went, the whole delegation, quietly, no words spoken, because talking wasn't allowed—strictly forbidden, as they say. Only sighs and groans that would break your heart, just like at Rosh Hashanah, during prayers before the *Shofar* is sounded. Did you ever hear the groaning then? My heart ached, especially for our rabbi, an old man seventy years old. What am I saying, seventy? He must have been then, according to my calculations, at least seventy-five, and if you really want to know, maybe even eighty, because I can still remember him at my wedding in Yunev. I was married in Yunev, you know. They brought him down from Krushnik, and by that time he was already an old man. I mean, not an *old* man, but gray-haired. And since then it's been . . . let's see, to be exact . . . no doubt as much as—actually, I don't remember; and anyway, I don't want to get off the track. That weakens the point of the story, if you see what I mean. I might forget where I'm at. Though as for my memory—God keep it always as clear as it is now. And to prove it, I'll tell you where I left off.

The shofar is blown in three sequences during the musaf service, and forty blasts conclude the entire morning service.

I was telling you about the old man, our rabbi, how he was walking out in front, and we Krushniker dignitaries were walking behind him, sighing and moaning and not allowed to speak a word. If only our families knew where we were—if only we ourselves knew where they were taking us! But nothing doing; like sheep to the slaughter, as they say. No sign they might be taking us to something good, because if so why wouldn't the Germans tell us where we were going? And certainly no one was waiting there to heap honors upon us, because then they wouldn't be pushing and shoving us—"Forward, march! Forward, march!" Before we could look around we found ourselves on Death Street, which leads to the new cemetery. I say the new one because in Krushnik we had two cemeteries, thank God, an old one and a new one. Of course, the new one was already old enough, and well populated, one grave set snugly beside the other. Pretty soon we'd have to find space for a third cemetery, if only God would let us live, and put an end to the war, and let Krushnik remain Krushnik and Jews, Jews.

Well, I won't drag this out. As we were going along the moon came out, and we could see that we were at the cemetery. What was I to think? Had someone in town died, some important person, or were they bringing some dead person here from another town, to be buried in a Jewish grave? But then why should *we* be here, and why, for that matter, a funeral with soldiers? But then again what other reason could there be for marching us suddenly, in the middle of the night, to the burial grounds?

As we were thinking this over, we looked up and saw—there he was, too, the *schlimazel*, Aba the *shoḥet*, I mean. He, and two soldiers with him! What was *he* doing here? Nothing much—just standing there with a shovel in his hands, digging a grave, and weeping, tears streaming down his face. Well, we didn't like the looks of it. In the first place, who was he digging a grave for? Second, what sort of a gravedigger was Aba the *shoḥet?* And besides that, what was he weeping about? Any way you looked at it, it was a puzzle, if you see what I mean, a mystery of mysteries, incomprehensible.

But it didn't take long—maybe as long as it's taking to tell you this, maybe even less—and all questions were answered. The captain gave an order and there emerged from out of nowhere a group of soldiers carrying shovels, and they took us, if you see what I mean, and stood us several steps apart from each other. Then they handed each of us a shovel and asked us to be so good as to dig graves, every one on his own private plot, since in two hours at most, so they gave us to understand, we'd be shot.

You want to know how we felt when they told us the good news? I can't speak for the others; that's their business. But for myself I can say absolutely, and give you my oath, that I felt—nothing. Simply and truly nothing. What do I mean *nothing?* Take a healthy person, strong and able, with wife and children and suddenly put a shovel in his hand and order him to dig his own grave since he's about to be shot. I ask you, Mr. Sholem Aleichem, think it over carefully—do you have any idea of what that means? No, you have to go through it yourself. It's a waste of time to explain. Though actually it wasn't so complicated. If a person had brains and was level-headed and could think around and about, he could see it all plainly for himself and stop worrying himself so much. "After all," I said to myself, "what's so special here? It's the old story. As they say, if God wants you to die, don't be a smart aleck; you've got to die. You're not the only one. People are dying in the thousands, tens of thousands, falling like flies, like straws in the wind. So just imagine, Yankel Yunever, that you're a soldier and in the heat of battle. Fool! Who thinks of death in the heat of battle? Or rather who thinks of anything *but* death? Because if you get right down to it, what's war if not the angel of death? And what's the point of telling the angel of death, if you see what I mean, to fear death?" Think it over, Mr. Sholem Aleichem. You'll soon see how deep that is!

Still, what's the good of philosophy? You want to get to the point, right? Well, I can tell you this much—I know as much about what happened next as you do. Suddenly confusion broke out, a clamor from heaven, a drumming of drums, a chaos of soldiers running and horses galloping. Great God Almighty, I thought, what's going on? A revolution? The earth opening under Sodom and Gomorrah? The end of the world? In an instant the soldiers vanished, and we Krushniker Jews remained all alone on the new burial grounds, shovels in hand, and—silence.

It was then we understood—not that we *understood* anything (why should I lie to you?), but we felt with all our five senses, if you see what I mean, that something extraordinary had happened, a true and genuine miracle from heaven, and we'd been saved from disaster. But for all that, we just couldn't say a word to each other, not a word! We'd lost our tongues, and that was that. And like one man, as if we'd decided on it beforehand, we threw down the shovels, pulled ourselves

together, and hit the road, as they say—slowly at first, then a little faster, and then we ran, but really *ran*, if you see what I mean, like you run from a blazing fire.

Where did we get the courage? And especially the old rabbi, where did he get the strength to run like that? But he didn't last long, poor thing, and when he couldn't go any further he stopped short, with his hand on his chest, barely breathing. So we stopped too—it's not decent to leave a rabbi by himself in the middle of nowhere. We still couldn't say a word, and we still didn't know what was happening. But we could hear the drumming and the galloping and the shooting. Something was going on, God only knows what, but as it's written, "God will provide, so keep quiet."° Quiet we were—we couldn't speak.

Literally, " 'The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!' " (Exod. 14:14).

The first to say something was the old rabbi. "Children," he called to us, looking up toward the bright moon. "I can tell you that it's the Almighty," he said, "the Creator of heaven and earth who has done these things. God Himself," he said, "has taken pity on our wives and children and saved us from disaster. And so we owe it to God," he said, "to give thanks to His moon; it's the right time of the month." And without another word, he turned his face to the new moon—the rabbi, I mean—right there in the middle of town, and we stood around him. And the rabbi started chanting, "Hallelujah," cheerfully, and we all followed him, growing livelier as we went along, chanting, clapping, and leaping. By the time he got to "Let us dance in praise of His name," we were really dancing! Such a prayer to the new moon, believe me, Krushnik had never heard of since Krushnik was Krushnik. Never had and never will again. It was, as they say, a once-in-a-lifetime prayer to the new moon.

Climax of the prayer for the New Moon; it also means "how do you do."

You can imagine we didn't know where we were, whether in this world or the next, when it came to the *"Sholem aleichem's."*° I heard someone blubbering, right into my ear, *"Sholem aleichem."* I answered, *"Aleichem sholem!"* and looked around. It was him, the *schlimazel*, Aba the *shoḥet*, I mean. How did *he* get here? Had he also been with us there at the burial grounds? A curse on it all! I'd completely forgotten—he'd been the first one! We must have been out of our minds, if you see what I mean. I only wanted to hug and kiss that *schlimazel*, and at the same time I wanted to hug the rabbi (may his memory stay with us always—he's now in another world, a better one). And the way he died! God Almighty! May it happen to all our enemies! You'll hear about it, don't worry; I won't leave out the details. That was a Jew! Where can you find Jews like him today?

But just think what a rabbi can do. Once we'd finished our prayer to the new moon, he wanted to say a few more words. He decided, if you see what I mean, to explain a passage from the Song of Songs. "The voice of my beloved," he began. . . . I hope he'll forgive me for saying this, but he had one fault, our rabbi: he loved to hold forth, to give lectures. So we took counsel and decided nothing doing. A prayer to the new moon was one thing, but a commentary on the Song of Songs, with interpretations and illustrations and exhortations, in the middle of town, late at night, after such horrors and such miracles and wonders—*that*, brother, we could leave for another occasion. So we tucked in our coattails, as they say, and ran for home, each one of us. And there we met with another happy scene, I mean a real celebration. By comparison, everything we'd been through was mere child's play. You'll say that yourself when you hear the story. . . .

You know, Mr. Sholem Aleichem, Jews brag about the town of Kishinev.

Kishinev, they say, was world-famous for its pogroms and its hooligans. Ha! I'd laugh at them if there were any Jews left there to laugh at. Kishinev! You call *that* a town? Kishinev was a dog compared to Krushnik. Do you hear me? Kishinev wasn't worthy of washing Krushnik's feet. Concerning the treatment of Jews, the Kishinever hooligans could have learned a lesson or two (if they don't mind me saying so) from our Russian Cossacks. To begin with, they didn't even have the right weapons. In Kishinev, if they felt like smashing a house, they'd have to gather up a hundred people, along with sticks and rocks and pebbles. But what good are such weapons?—if you can call them weapons. By the time you get something going, smash up a house or two, all the excitement's gone out of it and the party's over. Now in our town in Krushnik, there were dozens of good guns, or if you preferred there was a fine cannon. A few blasts of that cannon, and you've shot up the whole area, wiped out the marketplace with all its stores and stalls and the houses all around to boot. Do you see what I mean, or don't you? With one blow they wiped out all of Krushnik, didn't leave a shred behind, not a trace! They rooted us out from the bottom up, demolished everything Jewish, just as if it wasn't their own country they were in but the enemy's. As if Krushnik was some kind of fortress, another Paris, or a Warsaw! Though I must tell you that Krushnik was always, what should I say, a helter-skelter town, a town thrown open to the wind and the rain, without courtyards, without orchards, without gardens, without fences or walls—only houses and shacks, naked, bare Jewish homes; and these they smashed up, cut down, hacked apart, split in pieces, ground up, wiped out. Finished, no more Krushnik!

And was it only Krushnik, you think? The way it was with Krushnik, that's how it was with Rakhev, too, and with Mazel-Bozhetz, and with Bilgoray, and with every other Jewish town all around as far as Lublin. But not Lublin, of course—that was the provincial capital, and Poles lived there as well as Jews; and it was they, the Poles, who unleashed the furies. If not for them, if they hadn't poured oil on the fire with their lies, then maybe nothing would have happened.

The first to show up was the Honorable Mr. Pshepetsky, head of the administrative council. The morning after our prayer to the new moon, he ran to tell the Russian officials, personally, that we Krushniker Jews were hand in glove with the Germans. Proof was, he said, that no one wanted the job of mayor; only my Yekhiel, he said, would take it on.

Well, the Russians didn't have to hear more. They were furious, beside themselves with rage against all Jews, and especially against the mayor himself, against my Yekhiel. A summons was issued from headquarters that he should be taken—my Yekhiel, that is—dead or alive! And not only him. They were to take all of us, if you see what I mean, all the first citizens of Krushnik, along with the rabbi and the *rabbiner*, and bring us to Ivan, dead or alive—he desired to see us.

Don't you think I knew beforehand it would turn out that way? I knew! My word as a Jew I knew, and the proof is that I warned everyone. "Jews," I said, "as you love God, let's get out of here!" I told them in good time, too, that night, just as soon as we heard the Germans running and Ivan coming on with his Cossacks. Because I knew that where Ivan set foot no grass would grow. So I told them, "Let's get out of here, wherever our feet will carry us. Anywhere in the world," I said, "but not here."

Well, I almost convinced them—all but one. That was the old man, the rabbi.

He just dug in his heels and refused to budge. He didn't want, he said, to run for the sake of running. "If the God of Israel wants to preserve us," he said, "He'll preserve us, as He has up until now; and if not, God forbid, then it's a sure sign," he said, "that that's our fate. And if so," he said, "then let it at least be as it's written, 'I shall sleep with my ancestors,' "° In short, all he wanted was to be buried like a Jew and remain forever in his own Krushnik. The world's full of evil temptations. But he couldn't have even that satisfaction. Man thinks and God winks, as they say. He forgot to reckon, our rabbi, with those two-legged beasts.

Gen. 47:30.

If you remember, the whole business began during the night of the new moon. Ivan and his Cossacks set out to ransack our homes on the pretense of looking for runaway Germans, and in the course of things they did what they always do—what they did, for example, in Kishinev, in Bialystok, in Balta, in Kateri-Neshov, and in other Jewish towns. The only difference was that there they beat people and robbed them, while here they very methodically emptied our pockets, inquiring of each one of us, "*tshasiki? tshasiki?*" ("watches? any watches here?"), not meaning watches in particular: watchchains, rings, earrings, and money-purses would also do. Then when they'd taken it all, everything finished and done with—as the text has it, "emptied out Egypt,"° carried off all its treasures of wealth—then they proceeded to the people: bound them, beat them, stabbed them, shot them, and hanged them. Especially hanged them. They hanged so many of us there weren't any trees left for hangings. They had to place logs over the rooftops, and there on the logs they continued hanging the Jews of Krushnik, one by one.

Exod. 12:36.

Their first victim was our rabbi, the old man, blessed be his memory. The Cossacks broke into his house early, just at daybreak. He'd already put on his prayer shawl and phylacteries and was starting to pray, when they tore in like a flood. "Vodka!" they shouted—meaning they wanted whiskey. Why whiskey at daybreak? Simply out of hunger, if you see what I mean; they were faint and famished, poor men, and so they needed a drop of whiskey. But how would an old rabbi come by whiskey, especially at a time when it was, as they say, strictly forbidden? So he gestured with his hands (not wanting to interrupt his prayers) that he had no vodka to offer them. For that he received a healthy curse, along with a slap for good measure, so that his prayer book fell from his hands. When he bent to pick it up he received another blow to the head from behind. Then the Cossacks lifted him, unconscious, from the floor, wrapped him neatly in his prayer shawl and phylacteries, tied him to a horse (to the horse's tail, I mean), and dragged him through town into the marketplace. There they hanged him from a tree and set guard over him, with orders that he must hang like that for three days and three nights. No one should dare take him down.

So he hung there, the old rabbi, wrapped in his prayer shawl, beaten and bloodied, in the middle of the marketplace, swaying back and forth in the wind, as though standing in prayer. Whoever passed by stopped to look, then ran off shuddering to tell his neighbor, and the neighbor told *his* neighbor, and soon people all over town were whispering the news to each other, and then the crowd came running to see. Cows! Cattle! Why were they running? What was so special here? Hadn't they seen a hanged man before? And for that matter, what about me, old fool that I was—why did *I* run to see it? Don't ask how much health it cost me, how many sleepless nights. To this day I see him when I close my eyes—wrapped in his prayer shawl, his face petrified, blue and streaked with blood, swaying back and forth as he stood there saying his prayers. What am I saying? He wasn't standing, he was hanging, if you see what I mean, hanging in prayer!°

Hengt shimenesre; the moment of most intense devotion is the Eighteen Benedictions, the so-called Standing Prayer.

But let's not talk about it anymore. Silence is best, as they say. Let's talk of happier things. Wasn't there a pogrom in your town? Didn't they hang Jews there? And by the way, what country are *you* running from, Mr. Sholem Aleichem?

1915

55 A Night

MOYSHE-LEYB HALPERN

I

Ohay, oho—
Who calls this way? Who is the man who rode the slopes
At midnight down the mountain? At the wildest gallop
He came straight down the mountain, arms stretched long and wide,
As a host of horsemen hunted him down the cliffsides,
A nation of riders with whips held high in the air,
Flashing from clouds of smoke, sharp as lightning. Here, there,
Flames rose through the night like wild birds taking flight,
And echoing, echoing, the wild call crisscrossed the valley—
Ohay, oho, oho, ohay—

III

And bringing us all a world of rest and peace
Will come a king mounted on a snow-white steed.
Whether as a blessing, whether as a curse—
Thus it stands written in the sacred verse:
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

While stars glowed and flowers into blossoms burst
And the bird lifted its song in the forest,
Life hung on, waiting an eternity
To make the king welcome when he rides by.
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

This earth was brought to ashes through blood and fire.
And who among us has the sword ever spared?
On whom will his most holy radiance shine,
Pure and lucid as the sun, when he rides in?
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

And you, my King, hallowed by generations,
For whom is your rest? For whom is your peace meant?
The blood spilled for you across these long centuries
Will come forward, demanding an answer for me.
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

VIII

My eyes open wider. My head,
it becomes heavy as lead.
I don't know what I'm crying for.
Mentshele, homunculus. The little man° comes once more,
And he's crying as I am.
He calls me over to him.
Who is to blame, my brother,
For your pain? he asks in whispers.
You yourself have been longing
To see how your father's hanging.
There he is before you, dangling
Soundless before your eyes, swinging.
You believe this is a dream?
Then put a finger on the tree
And touch your father's hands and feet.
You'll feel how cold he is. Feel.
See his eyes, how they bulge out,
And his tongue hanging out, bloated.
Pull the hair out of his beard,
He won't let out a word.
Take out your pocket knife, drive
The blade up through his belly.
Knock out the last of his teeth.
Set fire to his sunken cheeks.
Burn and broil him, pluck and pull.
No matter: he'll still dangle
On the rope, and at your pleasure
He'll swing one way or the other.
Why cry, brother? What do you gain?
Who is to blame for your pain?

X

When I yearn for my childhood,
Now some thirty years gone, out
Comes the little man, *mentshele,*
and he rises up on his heels.
My brother, he whispers to me,
Whatever you want shall be.
He spreads the neck of his sack
And pulls out an ancient cloak,
Long and wide, purple and red.

A couple of wings hang on it,
Dirty as old snow. *Mentshele*
crawls inside the cloak, wraps himself
Up, takes a shapeless *shtrayml*° *A fur-trimmed hat worn by Hasidic Jews on the Sabbath and festivals.*
Trimmed with a wreath of green laurel
And puts it on, pulling it down
Over his ears. On the ground
Nearby he sets a red-stringed harp
Crusted with rust and dirt.
Tearful, gazing toward heaven,
His eyes pious and stricken,
He begins that old lullaby
Sung at my cradle long years gone by.

XI [The Lullabye]

If you pay your dues, brother,
You'll travel in fine phaetons,
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.
If you don't pay up, brother,
You'll foot it on thorns and stones.
So make with the shut-eye, you.
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.

You'll be driven from doorways
Like a dog, like a stray.
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.
Wherever you pass your day,
In the night you won't stay.
So make with the shut-eye, you.
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.

If you slouch down on some rock,
Blaming yourself, flailing away,
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu,
Cf. Jer. 31:15. Mother Rachel will take stock°
And weep for your black fate.
So make with the shut-eye, you.
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.

Her wailing will put an end
To the Messiah's patience.
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.
He will shatter his chains,
Then hit his head on a stone.
So make with the shut-eye, you.
Ay lyu-lyu, lyu-lyu.

XII

Lyu, lyu, sings the little man,
And my eyes will not stay open.
I see myself a little kid

Inside my father's shoes and coat.
I don't want to go to heder;
I'm caterwauling on the floor.
Mama shoves me out of the house.
I stand by the wall. The wind blows
The cold snow all over me.
I feel the snow, how coldly
It melts, drips down along my face.
With my sleeve I wipe it away.
Probably the boy's lunch money. From my hand falls the groshen.°
In the snow by the wall I lie down,
so sorry that I can't be ill.
The porets, Polish squire. The landowner° comes from the mill.
His dog barks at me. I sneak back
Into the house and steal some bread
For the dog, who leaps, takes it in his teeth.
Then Mama comes out and screams—
Screams and curses me with death
For stealing the piece of bread
While my father goes off to work,
Slaves to the bone at the market,
Freezing in the ice and snow, poor fool,
Just so his son can go to school.

XIII

I hear how Mama swears at me,
How the dog barks as he leaps,
And the landowner laughs at the sight,
And it seems to me that it's night
And the landowner roars
Like an angry black bear
Spinning around and around
And dancing back and forth and
The landowner leaps and roars,
Dancing, singing with my mother.
Into their circle leaps the dog
And they dance leg to leg to leg.
A Jew comes running down the road,
Blood dripping from his head.
I see how he leaps with pain
As he weaves into their dancing.
Jews come one after the other
Bleeding with broken heads and arms.
Synagogue. Men come dancing from the *shul*°
Small synagogue or study-house. And the *kloyz*,° and women too,
Feathers flying from their bellies.
An old Jew on fire whirls before me,
a Torah cradled in his arms.

Into the round dance swirl the others
Not dead yet, not properly slaughtered.
In her arms a murdered child,
A raging woman comes flying,
Hair loose in the wind, eyes large and green.
The street dances with *kloyz* and house,
The river dances and overflows
Its banks with waves of blood and sludge.
The tree dances on the river's edge.
Red flags of the socialist revolution. My father dances on the rope.
In leap long-dead corpses
Parading with their red flags,°
Blue and white flags of the Zionist movement. And mice with blue and white flags,°
Hordes of mice, heaps of mice follow,
Leaping from the outhouse wall.
Whirling with their feet in blood,
Smoke and flame about their heads,
They surround me, all of them.
I want to scream, but I am dumb.
When I try to lift my hand,
I scratch a cold wall. Again,
I hear someone playing a harp,
Someone singing. My eyes open up.
By my bed stands *Mentshele*
In ancient cloak and *shtrayml*,
Rocking himself to rest, to
And fro, and singing lyu-lyu.

(15-18)

XVI Sacrilege; sarcastic vision

A travesty of "The Sermon on the Mount." And spinning three times, the little man stands
Aloft on a table in preacher's threads.
And pointing at me he pours out his wrath:
An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,
And when they have torched your roof and your bed,
Go wail by the porch like a dog on edge.
Worms devour the earth and birds devour the worms.
So, dog, go nab a bird in a snowstorm
Flapping frozen wings, hopping on frozen feet,
And split it with your brother, piece by piece.
And if he has no hands, as happens sometimes,
Chop an arm off your shoulder and give it to him.
And if your sister bears a bastard, shout
That the soldier's name was "Holy Ghost,"
And that the bastard is really a god-to-be
Who, like Jesus, brings us but love and mercy.
If they won't believe you, take the cross from your heart
And also the prayer shawl—half black and half white—
And set them together and spit on them both.

Then order all flags to be gathered on the spot
And braid them together like horsehair and hide
And hang yourself at your father's side
And swing in tandem back and forth, him and you,
Until the braided rope rots through,
Until a gentile buries your two corpses
In the ground with his dead horse.

(19-22)

XIX Historical allegory → Apocalypse

An overview of Jewish history.

I'm at my wits' end,
Don't know where I am.
The whole world—town and field—
Whirls in a fire-red wheel.

Sabbath stew.

Up springs a *cholent*° pot
And an ancient head crawls out,
Its beard, it seems, and its hair
Have seen a thousand years or more.

A mouse creeps from the floorplanks.
It grows as big as an elephant,
Nibbles the beard, gulps down the hair.
Someone gives me a flag to bear.
My father stares from the tree,
In his mouth the foam seethes,
And he beckons me with a wink.

Pushke, symbol of the requirement to give charity.

The holy almsbox° jingles,
A funeral cortege
Stretches a thousand leagues.
Alms clink, feet plod forward,
Tired as their thousand years.

Prayer shawl.

It seems to me that someone sits
In a blood-spattered *tallis*°
On a burial stretcher
And burns, a Torah in his arms.
As he rocks back and forth, afire,
I ask, "Who is this and why?"
It seems to me that it is I
Who rock on the stretcher and cry.
I wonder where I am and who
And where I'm from, where I'll go.

The golden chain of Jewish tradition.

A chain stretches, glows
Like a snake wrought of gold.°
The chain spins, winding
Round my arm seven times.°

Like the strap of the tefillin.

I spring up by the Nile
Where dwells the crocodile.°

Like Joseph in Egypt.

There, I am undressed,°

Like Joseph, stripped twice: once by his brothers and once by Potiphar's wife.

Taken to the king's palace.
I hear the king yell—
Slaves and courtiers fall
On their faces before him.
He kicks them, beats them
With the flat of his sword.
A slave comes forward
With meat and wine on a tray.
He spits into the tray.
A naked woman is brought—
He whips her, cuts out her heart,
Sucks the blood from it. He sucks it dry
And still he is unsatisfied.
I am brought before him then
As sorcerers spin around his throne.°

The enslavement of the Jews under Pharaoh.

—King, if it's health you desire,
Have him beaten like a cur.

—King, if happiness you'd recall,
Brick him into a wall.°

According to rabbinic legend, babies were used instead of bricks to make up the Egyptian quota.

—King, for a joke and a smile,
Throw him into the Nile.

—King, a man of grace would
Draw a bath from his blood.
They brick me into the wall,
They throw me into the Nile,
They suck my heart dry.
What to do? I shout, I cry
And plead for death and leap
Into the sea to be free
From these straits and this pain.°
I must be caught, the king ordains.
His men leap into the waters
With their swords and daggers,
Their horses and chariots of iron.

Exod. 13:9–31: crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh's army.

I watch them sink like one great stone.
This is awful punishment—
I await the same end.
A wave spirits me away
To a desolate place
Where there is no water
And the red earth is parched
And yields no sustenance.°

Retelling of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

My wandering drags on and on
For years across mountains
And steppes. I will turn to stone,

And I will never again
Reach a valley of men. . . .

XX

They come to a halt in a snowy field
And leave me by myself.
Here comes the little man again, on crutches,
Head bandaged, but it's still *mentshele.*

He kneels before me and calls me his king,
Asks me my wish and my desire.
I tell him, "Don't you see that I'm alone
And can't move a finger."

He gives a wink—presto, soldiers in hot pursuit
Corral a naked skeleton.
It raises its legs like a whore in a bar
At work in the middle of drunks.

It raises its legs and dances around me,
Dances and bellows and sings:
"So may death itself whirl around you,
Round and round in an endless ring."°

A grotesque version of the Mosaic Curses (1).

A host of women rises from the earth,
Laying a child on the fire like a log.
They divvy up its roasted hands and legs
And leave the head for the dogs.

Divvying done, they raise the bones
Aloft, then toss them to me:
"So may your flesh be eaten away
'Til all that's left is just as clean."

Trees huddle in on every side,
Corpses swinging high and low.
The wind throws itself against the branches,
Plasters the corpses with snow.

The corpses gather together in arcs
As if before a throne.
"May the same wickedness happen to you,
The same evil, as we have known.

"And may the earth go forever barren
Where you've been weaving your dream.
Each night, without a thread of explanation,
May a new corpse hang from your tree.

"And should you stretch your hand out longingly,
May the palsy strike your hand.
May you choke to death in the midst of the word

Ps. 137 (3): here the homeland is Galicia.

Should you invoke the homeland.°

"And may you stray and wander in your dying,
Your death always just around the bend,
For your daydream of a king drags us on
And on, from this land to that land."

When the corpses have done with their curses,
I curse myself up and down.
Their final AMEN tumbles over me
Like stone upon stone.

Comes a dray horse as white as the snow,
Pulling an empty wagon.
Icicles of blood hang from its muzzle,
Ice gleams from its mane.

I stretch out my hands toward the little man
Who gives me a look so cold. . . .
I see the wagon sinking in the snow,
And the horse as it drops and folds.

A voice drifts in through the wind, through the night,
Calling: Ohay! and Oho!
When I squint into the distance, the rustle,
I don't see a thing. Zero.

(23–25)

XXV Conclusion, Death

O hoist me high when I'm a corpse
And bind me tight upon a horse,
And let me ride the road alone
As dead as death, with no companion.
Then step by step I will decay,
Fall toward grass and stone and clay.
And you, who spent your life on me
So wastefully, so uselessly—
Up-end the last few signs around
Of one who can no longer be found.
Let's just say for the hell of it
A night-mare's come and gone. That's that.
No one's seen me here, ever.
I've not been here, never.

1916–1919

XII

The Self Under Siege

The violence of war, revolution and pogroms was intense and unforgiving. In the five-year period between 1914 and 1919, the Jews of Russia experienced all three in such rapid succession and over such a vast stretch of territory, that there seemed to be no escape. Palestine, too, was the scene of warfare between the Turks and the British. To the extent that Jews faced the knowable, organized violence within a communal setting, the communal structure itself could still absorb some of the blows. (This is the subject of the next chapter.) To the extent that Jews faced the ubiquitous, anarchic violence as *individuals,* whether as Red Army soldiers, Zionist pioneers or survivor-emigrés in some faraway European city, they had nothing but their own physical and psychic resources to fall back on. In the Literature of Destruction, a new genre was adopted, the psychological short story, to convey the impossibility of that contest.

For this genre to work, a new type of hero was needed as well. Certainly no stranger to German, French and Russian literature, this "dangling man," or *talush,* made his first appearance in the pages of Hebrew and Yiddish fiction in the last decade of the nineteenth century. His social-psychological profile—an alienated urban intellectual with nowhere to go, no one to love and too many competing ideologies to believe in—made him the perfect vehicle for conveying the embattled mind of the modern Jew. Even when directly involved in combat, these anti-heroes were acted upon but did not initiate any meaningful action. Even when identified with some ideology, their ultimate behavior belied the party line (recall the man with the cross on his forehead [**50**]).

In the modern Jewish scheme of things, who could be more heroic than

a member of the Second Aliyah to Palestine? These were the architects of the Zionist infrastructure, the swamp drainers and road builders extolled in so much of the literature. Yet Brenner's portrait of a Zionist teacher in a pioneer settlement (**56**) was anything but rosy. While the war between the Turks and the British was drawing to a close, the teacher was engaged in his own struggle to reconcile the interests of the Jewish settlers with the needs of the Jewish refugees, the rules of hygiene with the dictates of conscience. In this ultimately futile arena of human endeavor, the best a person could do was bring an emaciated child to burial and face one's own senseless death with equanimity.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, another venue of heroic action was political assassination. Of all the unavenged crimes of that era, uppermost in Jewish minds was the wave of pogroms during the Civil War of 1918 to 1919 that had been carried out by the Ukrainian nationalists under the leadership of Simon Petlura. Would the nervous young man who appeared in the home of the celebrated author in Bergelson's story (**58**) be able to perform such an act? Judging from various signs, beginning with the young man's cheeks, he seemed incapable of overcoming even his own psychological fixations. Here, on closer inspection, was a man motivated solely by spite: "And for spite," he admitted to the writer, "you can do something ugly. For spite, you can do something lovely—it's all the same, as long as it's for spite." So much for the long-awaited act of national retribution.

How, indeed, could a normal, civilized human being become an agent of death? Nowhere in the Literature of Destruction was this question answered more brilliantly than in Lamed Shapiro's "White *Challah*" and in Isaac Babel's stories of the *Red Cavalry*.

For the first time in Jewish literature, Lamed Shapiro wrote a pogrom story from the vantage point of the non-Jew, a speechless and historyless peasant named Vasil (**57**). Note that Vasil was not born without feelings. As a child, when he saw the sharp edge of a bone pierce the skin of an injured dog, he cried. But soon thereafter his brutalization began—first at the hands of his family, then at the hands of his army officers, and finally in the throes of battle. Throughout his life, Vasil had one overriding passion: the Jews, "people who wore strange clothes, sat in stores, ate white *challah* and had sold Christ." When the war brought him face to face with the "real" enemy, he demanded his final due and closed both circles by turning cannibal. Had Shapiro merely wanted to present a case study in human pathology, the story would have ended here; instead he drew a universal landscape of desecration officiated over by the high priests of death who, in a horrible reversal of Christianity, now used the flesh of the Jew to substitute for the Host.

Unlike Vasil, the bespectacled narrator of Babel's stories came to the job endowed with analytic powers and fine ethical sensibilities. In the first

story (**59**), later excised from *The Red Cavalry*, his allegiance was clearly on the side of the innocent victims, even if he depicted the Jewish P.O.W. in a grotesque light. In "The Rabbi's Son" (**60**), the new revolutionary ethos, which spared no one and nothing, was brilliantly conveyed by the grab bag of relics that Bratslavsky left behind, while the heightened, almost confessional tone of the narrator's voice bespoke his strong ties to traditional values. But there was one more story to go in the canonized version of *The Red Cavalry*. In that story, the Jewish intellectual narrator achieved his most fervent desire: to become a Cossack in every respect.

Through the prism of the mind, these writers dramatized the impossible contest between the individual will and the blind force of historical violence. Yet these stories were more than carefully crafted works of psychological fiction. Behind their descriptive approach there also lay a prescriptive program. By exposing the enormous psychic and cultural obstacles faced by the modern, politicized Jew, these anti-heroic stories could also inspire—or prefigure—real heroic action. Simon Petlura, the real-life counterpart to the man who lived behind door number five in Bergelson's story, was assassinated in Paris in May 1926, two years *after* the story was published. The assassin's name was Shalom Schwarzbard. At his trial, the atrocities were brought to light, and Schwarzbard was acquitted.

56 The Way Out

YOSEF HAYYIM BRENNER

I

Each morning, day in, day out, when the tiny train was due to arrive from Tulkarm to fetch wood to stoke the engine, the old pioneer teacher would go out onto the balcony of his attic room on the farm. Shading his eyes, he would peer into the distance to see whether they were coming.

They were sure to come. They could be expected any day now.

They would be on that little train that came to fetch the wood. They would be arriving from back there, from that nightmare-ridden waste, where the soil lay desolate, the trees hewn down and the dwellings in ruins; from that dead region where the handful of farmers who were left paid the soldiers billeted in their houses to chop the remaining almond trees into firewood; from the place where the only food was unground millet, to fill the belly and still the pangs of hunger; from the place where damp huts, infested with mice and vermin, soggy with filth and permeated with the accumulated stench of months, gave sorry shelter to women and children who were chilled to the marrow and contorted with disease; from the place where out of the surviving hundreds, half a dozen dead were carted away daily for burial; from the place where there was no longer any room to lay the scores of new victims that succumbed daily to the disease, nor a garment to cover them, nor even a sheet to spread under them; from the place whose denizens did nought to alleviate their plight—all they did was to listen to the guns firing, argue among themselves about military tactics, groan and grumble: "Oh, that Evacuation Committee has been our undoing! . . . it has been the end of us!"; from the place where those versed in the art of trickery and theft accumulated napoleons° and made a fortune, and the privileged few healthy young men who had come down from the north ate eggs and jam, played cards round the clock and merely waited for the "liberation" that was so late in coming.

The French gold twenty-franc piece was used as legal tender in Turkish Palestine.

"Did you hear that? They're shooting again!"

"It's our side° shooting. . . ."

I.e., the Turkish army.

"What are you talking about? Those aren't our guns. . . ."

"Then where do you think our side is stationed, and where is that shooting coming from. . . ?"

"And even if it is ours, it means that they° are advancing. . . ."

I.e., the British forces under General Allenby. This was no indication of their sympathies, however, for they were eagerly awaiting the British victory that would deliver them from their desperate plight.

"The planes have been flying around here all day. . . ."

"This morning there was one flying around for almost two solid hours. . . ."

"And did you see the *golem*? . . . I saw it. . . ."

(The golem, or dummy, was what they called the military observation balloon.)

"It's the weather that's holding them back. . . ."

"No doubt about it. As soon as the rainy season's over, we'll be going back to Jaffa!"

But the rainy season went by, and Passover too, without unleavened or even leavened bread, and the wretched exiles, instead of returning to the south, to Jaffa,

were again forced to pack their miserable rags and chattels and drag themselves wearily in the opposite direction, to the north.

What was going to happen to them? How would it all end? They were all broken in body and spirit, worn out, naked and starving, ravaged by contagious disease, and they would be coming here; they would be disgorged by the train to lie around out in the open, exposed to the scorching rays of the sun by day and to the chill and the dank dew by night, to be consumed by malaria, the dread swamp fever. Broken hollow shells of humans, hardly able to move, unable to do anything for themselves . . . who was going to feed them, give them drink, tend to them? What was going to happen to them?

II

As the days went by and they failed to arrive, the rumor went round that they had been sent straight to the Galilee and would not show up here. People began to breathe more freely and gradually went back to their everyday matters.

All of a sudden, one sweltering morning in June, the news struck like a thunderbolt:

"Forty-two of them!"

"Where?"

"Over there. Don't you see? In among the tree stumps, that's where they're lying around. . . ."

"In that case," it was the old pioneer teacher. "In that case," he stammered, confused, "surely we have to do something . . . water. . . ."

"They're filling a barrel with water already . . . take it out to them over there . . . they mustn't come here to drink our water . . . we've got our children to think of . . . the doctor from the colony said we mustn't have anything to do with them before everything's been disinfected first. It's only that the horses haven't come back yet . . . there's nothing to carry the water in. . . ."

But the old man in his excitement hardly heard what he was being told of this latest setback. "And what about bread?" he said. "We have to fetch them some bread, at least a few loaves for the meantime . . . something for breakfast. . . ."

The farm was small and had only one oven, and there was very little bread to go round. The teacher himself had two loaves. He put one loaf into a basket, broke a chunk off the other one and put it into the basket too, then went round to each of the houses on the farm—there were five in all—to "borrow" some loaves or even a few slices for the newly arrived refugees; there were forty-two of them after all. . . .

The housewives could not refuse, hard as it was to leave their families without any bread, for had not the exiles been breadless all through the long winter, and had just come in from their arduous trek, starving, thirsty and in a sorry state. The basket was soon filled with the loaves, half-loaves and crusts that the women scraped together, and the old man hurried to bring it to the newcomers. The drum of water had not yet been carted over; there were unaccountable delays.

III

Ghastly shadows. Old men and old women, sprawling inert near their meager bundles. Women in tattered blouses, their emaciated breasts exposed. Young girls, their shriveled faces long devoid of the bloom of youth. Seven or eight sickly orphans.

"Folks, don't snatch, don't crowd around him!" a short, yellow-bearded fellow rose to his feet and hurried over to the old man who had come up with his basket of bread. "It's got to be divided out properly, everyone gets an equal share, according to the list of names . . . sh . . . sh . . . here's the list . . . now let's share it out . . . not like that . . . you'll tear the old man to pieces. . . ."

"Why, there's bread!" An old woman refugee was jubilant. "This must be England, they're giving us bread."

"What about the wagons?" demanded a red-headed man, his hair providing the only spot of color among the exiles. He was standing next to a pile of five stout crates reinforced with steel hoops. "Is that all the committee sent us, the rogues? They're all rogues in that Evacuation Committee, everyone of them, damn them! In Kfar Sava they made us a lot of fine promises, and here they let us lie out in the open. Aren't they ever going to transfer us to the colony?"

The old pioneer teacher patiently explained that he was not from the Evacuation Committee of the neighboring colony, but had brought the bread on his own initiative from a nearby farm. He would be going into the colony very soon to notify the local evacuation committee of the new arrivals.

"And what can we get in the colony to go with the bread?" a young woman asked. "I myself divided out the bread in Kfar Sava . . . but they say there's honey here, plenty of honey . . . and butter . . . and how much would a pound of meat cost?"

"Suppose I wanted to settle in this colony?" asked the red-haired man's wife after receiving her ration of bread. She volunteered the information that she was the sister of the young woman who had doled out the bread in Kfar Sava. "Would I be able to find a place to live, nothing much, just a room with a ceiling over it? I don't want it for nothing, God forbid . . . I'm quite ready to pay whatever they might ask for it. I'm just sick of having no place to live. . . ."

"Oh, dear," complained the woman distributing the bread, "everybody knows I had such a fine flat in Kfar Sava."

motif of mother/child

Another woman fastened herself onto the old man. "A doctor," she said, "a doctor is what we need here. Please come and see for yourself . . . a baby's dying . . . can't eat any bread . . . two years old she is and looks like two months . . . her father stayed behind in Petah Tikva . . . hasn't even had a spoonful of water for two days . . . her mother hasn't eaten a thing, can't suckle the baby, has nothing to nurse her with." She begun tugging the old man. "Please come and see for yourself."

A young woman of about twenty sat alone among the trees apart from the others. She was barefoot and as thin as the dry twigs that lay around her. In her arms she rocked a naked child whose white body was covered with the bites of mosquitoes, lice, fleas, and other vermin and with festering sores. Inert and silent, the child stared out of wide-open glassy eyes.

"If only . . . a drop of milk . . ." the mother articulated the barely heard syllables.

"What we need here is a doctor, a doctor," insisted the woman who had called the old man over.

"D'you hear that!" A woman nearby flared up. "A doctor and milk they need, if you please, and my child hasn't even got any water. . . ."

"There's no milk to be had on the farm," the old teacher stammered in embarrassment. "But there's water there and they'll be bringing some very soon."

He turned to the harping woman, "Have you got a pot, or some other container? Come along with me and I'll let you have some water. It's only ten minutes' walk. . . ."

"There's water to be had much nearer," spoke up the officious little man with the list. "Over there near the bridge."

"Heaven forbid!" the old man exclaimed in alarm. "Don't you drink that water, it's swamp. On the farm we have good water . . . who's coming along with me to fetch some?"

Nobody offered to go with him. Who was going to walk all that distance? Furiously the young woman thrust a kettle into the hands of an orphan who had volunteered for the task and sent him over to the bridge to fetch some water for her baby. The water there was nearer.

IV

The office of the village council, which also dealt with refugee relief, was closed, but all around, throughout the colony, life went on as usual. Sitting on the veranda outside the office, the old pioneer teacher sensed, to his alarm, that the enthusiasm which had prompted him to run from the "station" near the farm into the colony was now beginning to wane, sobered by the closed door of the office. Not so long ago he had seen himself pounding the council table with his puny fist, shouting at them, even plunging his nails into the council chairman's beard, fulminating: "Murderers! Why don't you do something!" But now that he had been waiting outside the closed door for half an hour, he felt a kind of numbness creep over him. The janitor, who had passed by a little while ago, had told him that the head of the council was asleep but would be along shortly. But even when the head of the council came, what would he, the teacher, tell him, and what could the council actually do?

The head of the council arrived an hour later.

"I've come to tell you," the old man began in a low voice, "that some refugees, forty-two of them, have arrived. . . ."

"I know that," the head of the council replied curtly.

"Then what's going to happen?" the old teacher was embarrassed.

"Whatever's got to happen. I've given instructions that they aren't to be allowed into the colony before they've all undergone disinfection. Altogether, they'll be moving on from here . . . they've got nothing to do in the colony."

"Good, so they'll get the wagons today?" the teacher was pleased.

"I'm afraid it's a bad business about those wagons," said the deputy council head who had just come in. "It's the peak of the season right now, and who of the farmers will want to hire out his wagon? A wagon's worth its weight in gold at this time of the year."

"In any case, by tomorrow morning we'll have requisitioned two carts," said the head of the council importantly.

"Two carts for forty-two people?" protested the teacher.

"Well . . . to carry their belongings. The people will have to walk."

"But most of them are ill, diseased . . . there are children. . . ."

"We know all about that," the deputy broke in. "A wagon if we can get it, means a hundred and twenty gold francs."

The council head kept silent.

"And they'll spend tonight out in the open?"

The deputy did not reply. After a few minutes' silence he began telling the council head about his phone call to the central office of the Evacuation Committee. As there were Turkish Officers in the post office while he was making his call, he didn't want to say over the phone exactly how much money he wanted the committee to send to cover the cost of feeding the new arrivals, but he hinted at it by saying "twice as much as you sent the day before yesterday," which meant a hundred and fifty napoleons. The money had already arrived by special messenger.

"So we can buy the millet now?" asked the council head.

"They're asking thirty-nine medjidahs a bushel."

"Is that so?" exclaimed the head of the council. "Never mind, we've got to buy. We can't afford to be particular about the price right now."

"If I'm not mistaken," the deputy said to the council head, "you must also have a few bushels of millet for sale."

Very soon, the room was crowded with grain merchants and brokers. From time to time, the deputy would plunge his hands into his pockets and pour out streams of gold napoleons. One broker cracked a joke:

"Never mind. The refugees aren't pigs. They'll even eat this millet."

"But it's half sand!"

"*Malesh*, no matter!"

The old teacher tried to make himself heard above the din of the transactions. "So it's all decided then. They're to spend the night out in the open! And we'll be able to say" he quoted from the Bible, " 'Our hands have not shed this blood.' "[o]

Deut. 21:7: the ritual of the red heifer.

Receiving no answer he flung another verse at them: " 'How have their hearts turned unto stone!' "[o]

Not an actual verse.

"But they're used to it by now," one of the farmers who had been called in to see about hiring the carts tried to set his mind at rest. "They have spent the whole winter at Kfar Sava."

The head of the village council was apologetic. "As long as they haven't been disinfected, we mustn't have anything to do with them . . . doctor's orders. . . ."

"In that case you'd better be careful of me," shouted the old teacher. "I've been there, and I haven't been disinfected. I'm carrying all the germs!"

"That wasn't very clever of you," the deputy grew dead serious and stopped jingling the gold coins. "You shouldn't have come here, really."

"One doesn't play around with these things. . . ."

"You mustn't go against the rules of hygiene. . . ."

The negotiations were at an end.

V

The teacher stayed in the colony overnight, unwilling to go back to the farm. He was not at all sure that the carts would be sent in the morning, and if he was not there to push things, who else would?

At midnight the whole countryside was blanketed by a chill, dank mist. For a long time he stood outside watching the swirling vapors and shivering slightly, unable to go inside. No, he would stay out. All night long he roamed about the slumbering colony, and dawn found him standing outside the closed door of the village council office.

It was nine o'clock by the time the two carts set out for the timber-loading station. The mist had not yet lifted completely. Sitting on one of the lumbering carts, he reflected: if a new batch doesn't arrive today, those who came yesterday will manage somehow. The poorest ones will be packed off. Those who are better off—if they insist on staying and particularly if they indicate that they won't become a public burden—will probably be allowed to enter the colony after undergoing disinfection. But if a new batch should arrive today, what with the general mismanagement and indifference prevailing in the colony, all's lost!

As he drew near and peered through the mist at the shivering people, he saw to his relief that no new ones had arrived. His heart seemed to contract in a spasm and tears welled up in his eyes.

The red-haired man was ensconced in a makeshift hut he had thrown up with the help of two Yemenites; the hut was made of his crates, some canvas, and eucalyptus branches. All the others—men, women and children—lay huddled in the damp open field, panting with thirst and shivering.

"Sodom, that's what this colony is!" spat the little yellow-bearded fellow. He seemed to have shrunk even smaller during the night.

"And what are you going to feed us today?" the old teacher was accosted by the woman who had been so impressed by "England" the day before.

"They'll be bringing you some bread," the old man promised, feeling obliged to add "millet bread."

He looked about him for the sick child (he had brought her a can of milk, about half a pint, which he had finally managed to procure in the colony), but he did not see her anywhere. He was told her mother had taken her into the colony to the doctor, without being disinfected first, in defiance of the orders.

"What do you advise us to do?" the old man was bombarded with questions on all sides. "Should we stay here or go on?"

In the meantime, the red-haired man's crates had been loaded onto the carts with the help of the carters and the officious yellow-bearded little man. The crates, which contained bales of cloth, were extremely heavy and it was only by dint of a great deal of heaving and straining, grunting and puffing, that they were finally hoisted onto the carts. A new difficulty now arose. One of the carters, a Jew from the colony, stubbornly refused to accept any additional load, not even as much as a straw (there were only two crates on his cart). In the ensuing argument, the orphans were placed on the cart and removed a dozen times. The carter remained obdurate: he was not going to kill his pair of mules for the refugees, there were plenty of other carts in the colony, the Evacuation Committee could jolly well hire as many as were needed. The other carter, an Arab drayman, who did not understand all this talk about the all-powerful Evacuation Committee, was more amenable: he agreed to take, in addition to his three crates, a few bundles and an impatient old couple, who, in their eagerness to get away at all costs, boarded the cart like martyrs ascending the scaffold.

The carts lumbered off.

"Aren't they going to send us any more carts?" the refugees who had been left behind looked at one another in blank amazement.

"What about me and my children? Aren't we going to get a cart?" The woman who had demanded water the day before did not yet grasp what had happened.

Very soon there was a storm of protests, oaths, recriminations, and gnashing

teeth, with violent plans of action followed by witty rejoinders, but all the refugees remained out in the field in the end.

A squabble broke out over possession of what was left of the red-haired man's hut. "I had it first!" "No, I did!" and as the argument raged hotly, the few poles and branches were pulled down and strewn about. The orphans sat playing with the branches and squirting water at one another—the good water that had at last been brought over from the farm.

The old teacher returned to the colony to report on the situation. Some of the younger men of the colony had not gone to work that day, having undertaken to see to the disinfection and to put up tents for the refugees in the colony, so that they should not have to spend another night out in the open. There was a serious hitch, however. The village council claimed that the authorities would not permit the refugees to be brought into the colony: this was an army depot—the deputy head of the council explained—and the authorities did not want the soldiers to catch the disease carried by the refugees. The tents were therefore left unpitched. The bathhouse-keeper firmly refused to allot his premises for the disinfection and another large boiler was not to be had at any price.

The refugees remained where they were and the old teacher stayed with them, tired and helpless. Exposed to the night's dew, he was seized by a violent fever. Next morning, the train from Tulkarm brought a new batch of 174 refugees. There was no way out.

VI

With the attack of fever still on him and overwhelmed by a sense of great loss, the old man rushed away from the refugee encampment in the direction of the colony. The way out lay across his path.

On the rise overlooking the colony, in among the trees, stood a knot of people—including some tattered, hungry scarecrows of Turkish soldiers—looking down at an emaciated woman who sat barefoot on the ground, with her dead child at her side.

The body of the child, stark naked the day before yesterday, was now dressed in a little frock.

"The doctor tried to pour a spoonful of milk into her mouth, but she couldn't swallow it. It was plain there was nothing to be done," said one of the bystanders.

The mother sat silent for some time. She looked just the same as she had looked two days ago. When she finally spoke, she said she wanted them to bury her dead baby, and that they should not forget to bring her the day's millet-bread ration. She was hungry, she said, and wanted to eat.

The child, too, apart from the frock it was wearing, looked the same as it had looked when alive: the mouth was closed, the eyes wide open, the cheeks just as hollow, and the sores still festering.

"Why don't they bury the child?" one of the bystanders protested.

"They've been over to the village council three times already," answered another. "There's nobody to talk to . . . nobody wants to call the burial society . . . they keep putting it off. . . ."

"I'll bury her," the old pioneer teacher announced. "Who can give me a hoe?"

They waited while some of the people went into the colony to fetch a hoe, asked for one at every house, and came back empty-handed.

Someone noticed that one of the soldiers carried a trench tool. Wordlessly, the old man took a bishlik° out of his pocket and held it out to the soldier, as if to say: "Will you come along with me?" The soldier nodded. The old man picked up the little corpse, and carrying it in front of him laid across his outstretched arms—the way a godfather holds a child at circumcision rites—he began walking in the direction of the cemetery.

A small Turkish coin.

For half an hour they trudged through the deep sand, the soldier with his tasselless tarbush in front, the malaria-racked old man dragging after him, his strength flagging. No longer able to bear the child's body in front of him, he placed it under his arm, where the tiny corpse sagged and dangled limply.

The cemetery fence had been pulled up, and where the railings had been, the earth was now pockmarked with deep, narrow potholes.

The old corpsebearer was drenched with perspiration, as if he had taken a large dose of quinine to force the fever down. He could hardly carry his load any farther, though the tiny frail body weighed far less than the basket of bread he had brought to the refugees two days ago. He looked around him, eyes sightless with exhaustion. Hugging the little body, he murmured: "My little girl, my child. How beautiful you are. What a beautiful woman, a loving woman, you could have grown up to be. Who knows what happiness you are taking with you to the grave today? My little girl!"

His foot caught in one of the potholes. He extricated it without noticing that he had sprained the large toe of his left foot, and went on. Suddenly he stopped. "Here!" he said to the soldier.

The soldier unshouldered his trench tool and set to work simply, without asking any questions. He dug steadily for ten minutes, very much like an overgrown child playing in the sand, then raised his childlike eyes questioningly to his new commander, the old man who had given him the bishlik. The latter, who had meanwhile laid the body on the heap of sand, motioned him to dig deeper. "We can't have the dogs getting at the body," he thought.

The soldier obeyed, and when the grave was ready, he straightened his back and stood, waiting. The old man did what was necessary. Removing the child's frock, for some reason, he placed the poor little body, ravaged with starvation and mosquito bites, in the ground and began shoveling the damp earth over it with both hands. The soldier picked up the discarded frock and placed it under his tassel-less tarbush as an additional headgear, but immediately removed it from his head to tuck it into a gaping rent in his tunic where there had once been a pocket, and then helped the old man shovel the earth into the grave. With a strange devotion, he joined in the burial of this child of a faith alien to his.

They returned to the colony, now as comrades, united by the bond of their shared deed.

The old man was limping badly, the excruciating pain in his toe turning each hobbling step into torment. But he felt that his task was still unfinished, that he could not simply say good-bye to his dark-skinned friend, the Turkish soldier, without some further token of friendship. He wanted to offer him a glass of wine, drink with him, say to him: "Your health, fellow sufferer! Your good health, Anatolian peasant, who has known so much hardship!" But there was not a drop of wine to be had in the colony's only store: The Mukhtar° had taken it all for the Mudir° who was billeted in his house.

Village headman.

Turkish local military governor.

"That's all to the good!" thought the old man, remembering that Moslems are forbidden to take wine and that the soldier might have felt embarrassed if offered some. Instead, he bought him a packet of cigarettes and a chunk of hard cheese, pressed another bishlik on him, and warmly shook him by the hand. Full of gratitude and high spirits, the Turkish soldier went his way, the child's frock peeping out from the erstwhile pocket of his tattered tunic. The old man, however, was now unable to walk a single step. The jagged stump of the rail which had been torn out of the cemetery fence—for military purposes, no doubt—had made a deep, serious wound in his toe. Night had fallen by the time one of his laborer-students came to take him back to the farm on a donkey. At his request, the laborer-student brought a bowl of cold water to his room and then left.

He lay alone in the dark room. He had tried bathing his toe in the cold water, but the throbbing pain had become unbearable and he was no longer able to move, not even to ease himself. Yet he felt strangely relieved, completely absolved of all his obligations toward others. Relief had come.

He dimly made out the half loaf of bread lying on the table amid his books and soiled underwear, reminding him that he had not eaten a thing for three days—but the agonizing pain in his toe drove out all thought of eating. Obeying some obscure impulse, he stretched out his hand to finger the bread, saw that it had gone stale and hard, and was swept by remorse at not having taken the two whole loaves along with him. "What a great pity," he thought, "to let even a crust of bread go to waste right now. . . ." His sorrow quickly passed, however, to make way for the sense of relief that flooded him. Ten minutes' walk away, the ruthless night spread over the third batch of refugees. They had arrived unexpectedly that afternoon, his pupil told him on their way to the farm, sixty-nine of them. But they were no longer his concern, he would not go to them, he was unable to go. He felt relieved.

1919

57 White *Challah*

LAMED SHAPIRO

1

One day a neighbor broke the leg of a stray dog with a heavy stone, and when Vasil saw the sharp edge of the bone piercing the skin he cried. The tears streamed from his eyes, his mouth, and his nose; the towhead on his short neck shrank deeper between his shoulders; his entire face became distorted and shriveled, and he did not utter a sound. He was then about seven years old.

Soon he learned not to cry. His family drank, fought with neighbors, with one another, beat the women, the horse, the cow, and sometimes, in special rages,

their own heads against the wall. They were a large family with a tiny piece of land, they toiled hard and clumsily, and all of them lived in one hut—men, women, and children slept pell-mell on the floor. The village was small and poor, at some distance from a town; and the town to which they occasionally went for the fair seemed big and rich to Vasil.

In the town there were Jews—people who wore strange clothes, sat in stores, ate white *challah*, and had sold Christ. The last point was not quite clear: who was Christ, why did the Jews sell him, who bought him, and for what purpose?—it was all as though in a fog. White *challah*, that was something else again: Vasil saw it a few times with his own eyes, and more than that—he once stole a piece and ate it, whereupon he stood for a time in a daze, an expression of wonder on his face. He did not understand it all, but respect for white *challah* stayed with him.

He was half an inch too short, but he was drafted, owing to his broad, slightly hunched shoulders and thick short neck. Here in the army beatings were again the order of the day: the corporal, the sergeant, and the officers beat the privates, and the privates beat one another, all of them. He could not learn the service regulations: he did not understand and did not think. Nor was he a good talker; when hard pressed he usually could not utter a sound, but his face grew tense, and his low forehead was covered with wrinkles. *Kasha* and borscht, however, were plentiful. There were a few Jews in his regiment—Jews who had sold Christ—but in their army uniforms and without white *challah* they looked almost like everybody else.

winter

2

They traveled in trains, they marched, they rode again, and then again moved on foot; they camped in the open or were quartered in houses; and this went on so long that Vasil became completely confused. He no longer remembered when it had begun, where he had been before, or who he had been; it was as though all his life had been spent moving from town to town, with tens or hundreds of thousands of other soldiers, through foreign places inhabited by strange people who spoke an incomprehensible language and looked frightened or angry. Nothing particularly new had happened, but fighting had become the very essence of life; everyone was fighting now, and this time it was no longer just beating, but fighting in earnest: they fired at people, cut them to pieces, bayoneted them, and sometimes even bit them with their teeth. He too fought, more and more savagely, and with greater relish. Now food did not come regularly, they slept little, they marched and fought a great deal, and all this made him restless. He kept missing something, longing for something, and at moments of great strain he howled like a tormented dog because he could not say what he wanted.

They advanced over steadily higher ground; chains of giant mountains seamed the country in all directions, and winter ruled over them harshly and without respite. They inched their way through valleys, knee-deep in dry powdery snow, and icy winds raked their faces and hands like grating irons, but the officers were cheerful and kindlier than before, and spoke of victory; and food, though not always served on time, was plentiful. At night they were sometimes permitted to build fires on the snow; then monstrous shadows moved noiselessly between the mountains, and the soldiers sang. Vasil too tried to sing, but he could only howl.

They slept like the dead, without dreams or nightmares, and time and again during the day the mountains reverberated with the thunder of cannon, and men again climbed up and down the slopes.

3

A mounted messenger galloped madly through the camp; an advance cavalry unit returned suddenly and occupied positions on the flank; two batteries were moved from the left to the right. The surrounding mountains split open like freshly erupting volcanoes, and a deluge of fire, lead, and iron came down upon the world.

The barrage kept up for a long time. Piotr Kudlo was torn to pieces; the handsome Kruvenko, the best singer of the company, lay with his face in a puddle of blood; Lieutenant Somov, the one with girlish features, lost a leg, and the giant Neumann, the blond Estonian, had his whole face torn off. The pockmarked Gavrilov was dead; a single shell killed the two Bulgach brothers; killed, too, were Chaim Ostrovsky, Jan Zatyka, Staszek Pieprz, and the little Latvian whose name Vasil could not pronounce. Now whole ranks were mowed down, and it was impossible to hold on. Then Nahum Rachek, a tall slender young man who had always been silent, jumped up and without any order ran forward. This gave new spirit to the dazed men, who rushed the jagged hill to the left and practically with their bare hands conquered the batteries that led the enemy artillery, strangling the defenders like cats, down to the last man. Later it was found that of the entire company only Vasil and Nahum Rachek remained. After the battle Rachek lay on the ground vomiting green gall, and next to him lay his rifle with its butt smeared with blood and brains. He was not wounded, and when Vasil asked what was the matter he did not answer.

After sunset the conquered position was abandoned, and the army fell back. How and why this happened Vasil did not know; but from that moment the army began to roll down the mountains like an avalanche of stones. The farther they went, the hastier and less orderly was the retreat, and in the end they ran—ran without stopping, day and night. Vasil did not recognize the country, each place was new to him, and he knew only from hearsay that they were moving back. Mountains and winter had long been left behind; around them stretched a broad, endless plain; spring was in full bloom; but the army ran and ran. The officers became savage, they beat the soldiers without reason and without pity. A few times they stopped for a while; the cannon roared, a rain of fire whipped the earth, and men fell like flies—and then they ran again.

4

Someone said that all this was the fault of the Jews. Again the Jews! They sold Christ, they eat white *challah*, and on top of it all they are to blame for everything. What was "everything"? Vasil wrinkled his forehead and was angry at the Jews and at someone else. Leaflets appeared, printed leaflets that a man distributed among the troops, and in the camps groups gathered around those who could read. They stood listening in silence—they were silent in a strange way, unlike people who just do not talk. Someone handed a leaflet to Vasil too; he examined it, fingered it, put it in his pocket, and joined a group to hear what was being read. He did not understand a word, except that it was about Jews. So the Jews must know, he thought, and he turned to Nahum Rachek.

"Here, read it," he said.

Rachek cast a glance at the leaflet, then another curious glance at Vasil; but he said nothing and seemed about to throw the leaflet away.

"Don't! It's not yours!" Vasil said. He took back the leaflet, stuck it in his pocket, and paced back and forth in agitation. Then he turned to Rachek. "What does it say? It's about you, isn't it?"

At this point Nahum flared up. "Yes, about me. It says I'm a traitor, see? That I've betrayed us—that I'm a spy. Like that German who was caught and shot. See?"

Vasil was scared. His forehead began to sweat. He left Nahum, fingering his leaflet in bewilderment. This Nahum, he thought, must be a wicked man—so angry, and a spy besides, he said so himself, but something doesn't fit here, it's puzzling, it doesn't fit, my head is splitting.

After a long forced march they stopped somewhere. They had not seen the enemy for several days and had not heard any firing. They dug trenches and made ready. A week later it all began anew. It turned out that the enemy was somewhere nearby; he too was in trenches, and these trenches were moving closer and closer each day, and occasionally one could see a head showing above the parapet. They ate very little, they slept even less, they fired in the direction the bullets came from, bullets that kept hitting the earth wall, humming overhead, and occasionally boring into human bodies. Next to Vasil, at his left, always lay Nahum Rachek. He never spoke, only kept loading his rifle and firing, mechanically, unhurriedly. Vasil could not bear the sight of him and occasionally was seized with a desire to stab him with his bayonet.

One day, when the firing was particularly violent, Vasil suddenly felt strangely restless. He cast a glance sidewise at Rachek and saw him lying in the same posture as before, on his stomach, with his rifle in his hand; but there was a hole in his head. Something broke in Vasil; in blind anger he kicked the dead body, pushing it aside, and then began to fire wildly, exposing his head to the dense shower of lead that was pouring all around him.

That night he could not sleep for a long time; he tossed and turned, muttering curses. At one point he jumped up angrily and began to run straight ahead, but then he recalled that Rachek was dead and dejectedly returned to his pallet. The Jews . . . traitors . . . sold Christ . . . traded him away for a song!

He ground his teeth and clawed at himself in his sleep.

5

At daybreak Vasil suddenly sat up on his hard pallet. His body was covered with cold sweat, his teeth were chattering, and his eyes, round and wide open, tried greedily to pierce the darkness. Who has been here? Who has been here?

It was pitch-dark and fearfully quiet, but he still could hear the rustle of the giant wings and feel the cold hem of the black cloak that had grazed his face. Someone had passed over the camp like an icy wind, and the camp was silent and frozen—an open grave with thousands of bodies, struck while asleep, and pierced in the heart. Who has been here? Who has been here?

During the day Lieutenant Muratov of the fourth battalion of the Yeniesey regiment was found dead—Muratov, a violent, cruel man with a face the color of parchment. The bullet that pierced him between the eyes had been fired by some-

one from his own battalion. When the men were questioned no one betrayed the culprit. Threatened with punishment, they still refused to answer, and they remained silent when they were ordered to surrender their arms. The other regimental units were drawn up against the battalion, but when they were ordered to fire, all of them to a man lowered their rifles to the ground. Another regiment was summoned, and in ten minutes not a man of the mutinous battalion remained alive.

Next day two officers were hacked to pieces. Three days later, following a dispute between two cavalrymen, the entire regiment split into two camps. They fought each other until only a few were left unscathed.

Then men in mufti appeared and, encouraged by the officers, began to distribute leaflets among the troops. This time they did not make long speeches, but kept repeating one thing: the Jews have betrayed us, everything is their fault.

Once again someone handed a leaflet to Vasil, but he did not take it. He drew out of his pocket, with love and respect, as though it were a precious medallion, a crumpled piece of paper frayed at the edges and stained with blood, and showed it—he had it, and remembered it. The man with the leaflets, a slim little fellow with a sand-colored beard, half closed one of his little eyes and took stock of the squat broad-shouldered private with the short thick neck and bulging gray watery eyes. He gave Vasil a friendly pat on the back and left with a strange smile on his lips.

The Jewish privates had vanished: they had been quietly gathered together and sent away, no one knew where. Everyone felt freer and more comfortable, and although there were several nationalities represented among them, they were all of one mind about it; the alien was no longer in their midst.

And then someone launched a new slogan—"The Jewish government."

6

This was their last stand, and when they were again defeated they no longer stopped anywhere but ran like stampeding animals fleeing a steppe fire, in groups or individually, without commanders and without order, in deadly fear, rushing through every passage left open by the enemy. Not all of them had weapons, no one had his full outfit of clothing, and their shirts were like second skins on their unwashed bodies. The summer sun beat down on them mercilessly, and they ate only what they could forage. Now their native tongue was spoken in the towns, and their native fields lay around them, but the fields were unrecognizable, for last year's crops were rotting, trampled into the earth, and the land lay dry and gray and riddled, like the carcass of an ox disemboweled by wolves.

And while the armies crawled over the earth like swarms of gray worms, flocks of ravens soared overhead, calling with a dry rattling sound—the sound of tearing canvas—and swooped and slanted in intricate spirals, waiting for what would be theirs.

Between Kolov and Zhaditsa the starved and crazed legions caught up with large groups of Jews who had been ordered out of border towns, with their women, children, invalids, and bundles. A voice said, "Get them!" The words sounded like the distant boom of a gun. At first Vasil held back, but the loud screams of the women and children and the repulsive, terrified faces of the men with their long earlocks and caftans blowing in the wind drove him to a frenzy,

and he cut into the Jews like a maddened bull. They were destroyed with merciful speed: the army trampled over them like a herd of galloping horses.

Then, once again, someone said in a shrill little voice, "The Jewish government!"

Inversion of the Exodus from Egypt.

These are mostly fictional place names.

The words suddenly soared high and like a peal of thunder rolled over the wild legions, spreading to villages and cities and reaching the remotest corners of the land. The retreating troops struck out at the region with fire and sword. By night burning cities lighted their path, and by day the smoke obscured the sun and the sky and rolled in cottony masses over the earth,° and suffocated ravens occasionally fell to the ground. They burned the towns of Zykov, Potapno, Kholodno, Stary Yug, Sheliuba; Ostrogorie, Sava, Rika, Beloye Krilo, and Stupnik° were wiped from the face of the earth; the Jewish weaving town of Belopriazha went up in smoke, and the Vinokur Forest, where thirty thousand Jews had sought refuge, blazed like a bonfire, and for three days in succession agonized cries, like poisonous gases, rose from the woods and spread over the land. The swift, narrow Sinevodka River was entirely choked with human bodies a little below Lutsin and overflowed into the fields. On the ruins of Dobroslawa sat a madman, the sole survivor of the town, who howled like a dog.

The hosts grew larger. The peasant left his village and the city dweller his city; priests with icons and crosses in their hands led processions through villages, devoutly and enthusiastically blessing the people, and the slogan was, "The Jewish government." The Jews themselves realized that their last hour had struck—the very last; and those who remained alive set out to die among Jews in Maliassy, the oldest and largest Jewish center in the land, a seat of learning since the fourteenth century, a city of ancient synagogues and great yeshivas, with rabbis and modern scholars, with an aristocracy of learning and of trade. Here, in Maliassy, the Jews fasted and prayed, confessing their sins to God, begging forgiveness of friend and enemy. Aged men recited Psalms and Lamentations, younger men burned stocks of grain and clothing, demolished furniture, broke and destroyed everything that might be of use to the approaching army. And this army came, it came from all directions, and set fire to the city from all sides, and poured into the streets. Young men tried to resist and went out with revolvers in their hands. The revolvers sounded like pop guns. The soldiers answered with thundering laughter, and drew out the young men's veins one by one, and broke their bones into little pieces. Then they went from house to house, slaying the men wherever they were found and dragging the women to the marketplace.

7

One short blow with his fist smashed the lock, and the door opened.

For two days now Vasil had not eaten or slept. His skin smarted in the dry heat, his bones seemed disjointed, his eyes were bloodshot, and his face and neck were covered with blond stubble.

"Food!" he said hoarsely.

No one answered him. At the table stood a tall Jew in a black caftan, with a black beard and earlocks and gloomy eyes. He tightened his lips and remained stubbornly silent. Vasil stepped forward angrily and said again, "Food!"

But this time he spoke less harshly. Near the window he had caught sight of another figure—a young woman in white, with a head of black hair. Two large

eyes—he has never before seen such large eyes—were looking at him and through him, and the look of these eyes was such that Vasil lifted his arm to cover his own eyes. His knees were trembling, he felt as if he were melting. What kind of woman is that? What kind of people? God! Why, why, did they have to sell Christ? And on top of it all, responsible for everything! Even Rachek admitted it. And they just kept quiet, looking through you. Goddamn it, what are they after? He took his head in his hands.

He felt something and looked about him. The Jew stood there, deathly pale, hatred in his eyes. For a moment Vasil stared dully. Suddenly he grabbed the black beard and pulled at it savagely.

A white figure stepped between them. Rage made Vasil dizzy and scalded his throat. He tugged at the white figure with one hand. A long strip tore from the dress and hung at the hem. His eyes were dazzled, almost blinded. Half a breast, a beautiful shoulder, a full, rounded hip—everything dazzling white and soft, like white *challah*. Damn it—these Jews are *made* of white *challah*! A searing flame leaped through his body, his arm flew up like a spring and shot into the gaping dress.

A hand gripped his neck. He turned his head slowly and looked at the Jew for a moment with narrowed eyes and bared teeth, without shaking free of the weak fingers that were clutching at his flesh. Then he raised his shoulders, bent forward, took the Jew by the ankles, lifted him in the air, and smashed him against the table. He flung him down like a broken stick.

The man groaned weakly; the woman screamed. But he was already on top of her. He pressed her to the floor and tore her dress together with her flesh. Now she was repulsive, her face blotchy, the tip of her nose red, her hair disheveled and falling over her eyes. "Witch," he said through his teeth. He twisted her nose like a screw. She uttered a shrill cry—short, mechanical, unnaturally high, like the whistle of an engine. The cry penetrating his brain maddened him completely. He seized her neck and strangled her.

A white shoulder was quivering before his eyes; a full, round drop of fresh blood lay glistening on it. His nostrils fluttered like wings. His teeth were grinding; suddenly they opened and bit into the white flesh.

White *challah* has the taste of a firm juicy orange. Warm and hot, and the more one sucks it the more burning the thirst. Sharp and thick, and strangely spiced.

Like rushing down a steep hill in a sled. Like drowning in sharp, burning spirits.

In a circle, in a circle, the juices of life went from body to body, from the first to the second, from the second to the first—in a circle.

Pillars of smoke and pillars of flame rose to the sky from the entire city. Beautiful was the fire on the great altar. The cries of the victims°—long-drawn-out, endless cries—were sweet in the ears of a god as eternal as the Eternal God. And the tender parts, the thighs and the breasts, were the portion of the priest.

Korbones—can also mean "ritual sacrifices."

1919

58 Among Refugees

DAVID BERGELSON

Returning home from the streets of Berlin one hot July day, I found my family tense and agitated. Their faces looked pale and very frightened.

They promptly informed me that a stranger had been waiting in my den for over three hours, a young man . . . a Jew.

"He's sort of. . ."

"Very impatient . . ."

They had informed the young man that I wouldn't be back before evening, but instead of replying, he had gone right into the den and sat himself down. They had made it clear to him: it would be better if he came back later on. At first he didn't take it in; then a bewildered look came over him. He had answered coldly:

"No, it's much better if they don't see me coming here and leaving too much. . . . You might have trouble with the police."

I went in to have a look at the young man. But he was a stranger to me too.

He seemed about twenty-six or -seven. He was sitting hunched over in a corner, in the farthest easy chair, as if drowsing.

His eyes were narrow, the shoulders hunched. His whole body reminded me of the gray dust on the far roads of small towns, and he seemed like someone who had breathlessly traveled a long distance.

I asked him whether he really wanted to see me. Not fully awaking, he answered as if in rebuke, "Of course, otherwise I wouldn't have come here. But please don't tell anyone. I have to do something here in Berlin. . . . I'm . . . Well, how shall I put it? . . . I'm a Jewish terrorist."

I didn't understand.

"Are you in a political party?" I asked.

"No," he made a face. "I hate political parties."

I clearly was dealing with someone who had come to me along confused and crooked roads. What could have brought him to me? I left him alone for a while. But, sitting at the table in the dining room, I couldn't put his face or his appearance out of my mind for even an instant. I couldn't help thinking what my family had said to me upon my return:

"He's sort of. . ."

"Impatient . . ."

There are people who look dusty even though you won't find a speck of dust on them—the young man was such a person: he had high cheekbones, which were uneven and made his cheeks look dissimilar. The right cheek was the same as on all faces—a cheek that wants to enjoy the world, that says, "I want to be with people."

And his left cheek was crooked; it looked as though it were his and yet. . . . It was like a cheek at war with the world—it had fallen out of favor with life, and therefore life had fallen out of favor with it. The left cheek made the young man look ugly, but apparently he had sided with it. He reminded me of a mother who

now that I've told you everything, you are as responsible as I am, and even more than I am, because you're a writer. . . . I've been sitting with you here, in this dark room, and for a long time now I've been wanting to ask you, Please turn on the light. I want to see your face. . . ."

Almost in a daze, I stood up to turn on the light. I did it as though the young man's last few words were no more than a joke, than the words of an eccentric with peculiar ideas. But I forgot these feelings the moment I turned on the light and saw the young man's face.

His crooked left cheek was burning as though with a dark steely fire. His right cheek was drowsy right up to the eye and was practically out of the running. It seemed lifeless; the burning left cheek was in control with its entire crookedness. And the young man himself was no longer speaking simply. It was as though he were quarreling with me, demanding his due from me. And the thing he was demanding was minor: a gun.

Staring at me with the fire that was in his drowsy left eye, he was arguing, fairly screaming. And I kept looking at the fires that were in his eyes.

The young man told me, "Listen, if you want to refuse, then don't refuse right away. Think it over first. I'll give you all night. If you decide to do as I ask, then send me the gun. I'll give you my address. I'll wait."

A few days later, I received a note from the young man with the crooked cheek:

"I've found a solution. Behind the mirror that hangs in my room, number three, in the rooming house, there is a hook. The rope on which the mirror hangs will be sufficient. . . . I understand the whole thing now: I am a refugee . . . among refugees. . . . I don't want to be one anymore. . . ."

1924

59 And Then There Were None

ISAAC BABEL

The prisoners are dead, all nine of them. I feel it in my bones.

Yesterday, when Corporal Golov, a worker from Sormovo, killed the lanky Pole, I said to our staff officer that the corporal was setting a bad example for the men and that we ought to make up a list of the prisoners and send them back for questioning. The staff officer agreed. I got a pencil and paper out of my knapsack and called Golov. He gave me a look of hatred and said, "You look at the world through those spectacles of yours."

"Yes, I do," I replied. "And what do you look at the world through, Golov?"

"I look at it through the dog's life of us workers," he said and, carrying in his hands a Polish uniform with dangling sleeves, he walked back toward one of the

prisoners. He had tried it on, and it did not fit him—the sleeves scarcely reached down to his elbows.

Now Golov fingered the prisoner's smart-looking underpants. "You're an officer," Golov said, shielding his face from the sun with one hand.

"No," came the Pole's curt answer.

"The likes of us don't wear that sort of stuff," Golov muttered and fell silent. He said nothing, quivering as he looked at the prisoner, his eyes blank and wide.

"My mother knitted them," the prisoner said in a firm voice.

I turned around and looked at him. He was a slim-waisted youth with curly sideburns on his sallow cheeks. "My mother knitted them," he said again and looked down.

"She knits like a machine, that mother of yours," Andrushka Burak butted in. Burak is the pink-faced Cossack with silky hair who had pulled the trousers off the lanky Pole as he lay dying. These trousers were now thrown over his saddle. Laughing, Andrushka rode up to Golov, carefully took the uniform out of his hands, threw it over the saddle on top of the trousers, and, with a slight flick of his whip, rode away from us again. At this moment the sun poured out from behind the dark clouds. It cast a dazzling light on Andrushka's horse as it cantered off perkily with carefree movements of its docked tail. Golov looked after the departing Cossack with a bemused expression. He turned around and saw me writing out the list of prisoners. Then he saw the young Pole with his curly sideburns, who glanced at him with the calm disdain of youth and smiled at his confusion. Next, Golov cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, "This is still a republic, Andrushka! You'll get your share later. Let's have that stuff back."

Andrushka turned a deaf ear. He rode on at a gallop, and his horse swung its tail friskily, just as though it was brushing us off.

"Traitor," Golov said, pronouncing the word very clearly. He looked sulky and his face went stiff. He knelt down on one knee, took aim with his rifle, and fired, but he missed.

Andrushka immediately turned his horse around and charged right up to the corporal. His fresh, pink-cheeked face was angry. "Listen, brother!" he shouted loud and clear and was suddenly pleased by the sound of his own strong voice. "Want to get hurt, you bastard? Why the fuss about finishing off ten Poles? We've killed them off by the hundreds before now without asking your help. Call yourself a worker? Make a job of it, then." And looking at us in triumph, Andrushka galloped off.

Golov did not look up at him. He put his hand to his forehead. Blood was pouring off it like rain off a hayrick. He lay down on his stomach, crawled over to a ditch, and for a long time held his battered, bleeding head in the shallow trickle of water.

The prisoners are dead. I feel it in my bones.

Sitting on my horse, I made a list of them in neat columns. In the first column I numbered them in order, in the second column I gave their names, and in the third the units to which they belonged. It worked out to nine altogether. The fourth was Adolf Shulmeister, a Jewish clerk from Lodz. He kept pressing

up to my horse and stroked and caressed my boot with trembling fingers. His leg had been broken with a rifle butt. It left a thin trail of blood like that of a wounded dog, and sweat, glistening in the sun, bubbled on his cracked, yellowish bald pate.

"You are a *Jude,* sir!" he whispered, frantically fondling my stirrup. "You are—" he squealed, the spittle dribbling from his mouth, and his whole body convulsed with joy.

"Get back into line, Shulmeister!" I shouted at the Jew, and suddenly, overcome by a deathly feeling of faintness, I began to slip from the saddle and, choking, I said, "How did you know?"

"You have that nice Jewish look about you," he said in a shrill voice, hopping on one leg and leaving the thin dog's trail behind him. "That nice Jewish look, sir."

His fussing had a sense of death about it, and I had quite a job fending him off. It took me some time to come to, as though I had had a concussion. The staff officer ordered me to see to the machine guns and rode off. The machine guns were being dragged up a hill, like calves on halters. They moved side by side, like one herd, and clanked reassuringly. The sun played on their dusty barrels, and I saw a rainbow on the metal.

The young Pole with the curly sideburns looked at them with peasant curiosity. He leaned right forward, thus giving me a view of Golov as he crawled out of the ditch, weary and pale, with his battered head, and his rifle raised. I stretched out my hand toward him and shouted, but the sound stuck in my throat, to choke and swell there. Golov quickly shot the prisoner in the back of the head and jumped to his feet. The startled Pole swung around to him, turning on his heels as though obeying an order on parade. With the slow movement of a woman giving herself to a man, he raised both hands to the back of his neck, slumped to the ground, and died instantly.

A smile of relief and satisfaction now came over Golov's face. His cheeks quickly regained their color. "*Our* mothers don't knit pants like that for us," he said to me slyly. "Scratch one and give me that list for the other eight."

I gave him the list and said despairingly, "You'll answer for all this, Golov."

"I'll answer for it, all right!" he shouted with indescribable glee. "Not to you, spectacles, but to my own kind, to the people back in Sormovo! They know what's what."

The prisoners are dead. I feel it in my bones.

This morning I decided I must do something in memory of them. Nobody else but me would do this in the Red Cavalry. Our unit has camped in a devastated Polish country estate. I took my diary and went into the flower garden, which was untouched. Hyacinths and blue roses were growing there.

I began to make notes about the corporal and the nine dead men. But I was immediately interrupted by a noise—an all-too-familiar noise. Cherkashin, the staff toady, was plundering the beehives. Mitya, who had pink cheeks and came from Orel, was following him with a smoking torch in his hands. They had wrapped greatcoats around their heads. The slits of their eyes were ablaze. Myriads of bees were trying to fight off their conquerors and were dying by their hives. And I put aside my pen. I was horrified at the great number of memorials still to be written.

1923

60 The Rabbi's Son

ISAAC BABEL

Do you remember Zhitomir, Vasily? Do you remember the River Teterev, Vasily, and that night when the Sabbath, the young Sabbath crept along the sunset, crushing the stars beneath her little red heel?

The slender horn of the moon bathed its darts in the dark waters of the river. Queer old Gedali, the founder of the Fourth International, led us to Rabbi Motale Bratslavsky's for evening prayers.° Queer old Gedali shook the cock's feathers on his top hat in the ruddy haze of evening. The predatory eyes of lighted candles blinked in the Rabbi's room. Broad-shouldered Jews groaned dully, bent over prayerbooks, and the old buffoon of the Chernobyl *tsaddiks* jingled coppers in his frayed pocket.

The name is evocative of Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810), the only tsaddik who left no heirs.

Do you remember that night, Vasily? Beyond the window, horses were neighing and Cossacks shouting. The wilderness of war yawned beyond the window, and Rabbi Motale Bratslavsky prayed by the eastern wall, digging his emaciated fingers into his talith. Then the curtain of the Ark was drawn aside, and we saw in the funereal candlelight the Torah rolls sheathed in covers of purple velvet and blue silk° and, bowed above the Torah, inanimate and resigned, the beautiful face of Elijah the Rabbi's son, last prince of the dynasty.

Either a memory lapse or poetic license: The Torah is not read at Friday night services.

Well, only the day before yesterday, Vasily, the regiments of the XII Army opened the front at Kovel. The conqueror's bombardment thundered disdainfully over the town. Our troops faltered, and mingled in confusion. The Political Section train started crawling over the dead backbone of the fields. And a monstrous and inconceivable Russia tramped in bast shoes on either side of the coaches, like a multitude of bugs swarming in clothes. The typhus-ridden peasantry rolled before them the customary humpback of a soldier's death. They jumped up on to the steps of our train and fell back, dislodged by the butt-ends of our rifles. They snorted and scrabbled and flowed on wordlessly. And at the twelfth verst, when I had no potatoes left, I flung a pile of Trotsky's leaflets at them. But only one man among them stretched a dead and filthy hand to catch a leaflet. And I recognized Elijah, son of the Rabbi of Zhitomir. I recognized him at once, Vasily. And it was so heartrending to see a prince who had lost his pants, doubled up beneath his soldier's pack, that we defied the regulations and pulled him up into our coach. His bare knees, inefficient as an old woman's, knocked against the rusty iron of the steps. Two full-bosomed typists in sailor blouses trailed the long, shamed body

of the dying man along the floor. We laid him in a corner of the editorial office, on the floor, and Cossacks in loose red trousers set straight the clothes that were dropping off him. The girls planted their bandy legs—legs of unforward females—on the floor, and stared dully at his sexual organs, the stunted, curly-covered virility of a wasted Semite. And I, who had seen him on one of my nights of roaming, began to pack in a case the scattered belongings of the Red Army man Bratslavsky.

His things were strewn about pell-mell—mandates of the propagandist and notebooks of the Jewish poet, the portraits of Lenin and Maimonides lay side by side, the knotted iron of Lenin's skull beside the dull silk of the portraits of Maimonides. A lock of woman's hair lay in a book, the Resolutions of the Party's Sixth Congress, and the margins of Communist leaflets were crowded with crooked lines of ancient Hebrew verse. They fell upon me in a mean and depressing rain—pages of the Song of Songs and revolver cartridges. The dreary rain of sunset washed the dust in my hair, and I said to the boy who was dying on a wretched mattress in the corner:

"One Friday evening four months ago, Gedali the old-clothesman took me to see your father, Rabbi Motale. But you didn't belong to the Party at that time, Bratslavsky. . . ."

"I did," the boy answered, scratching at his chest and twisting in fever, "only I couldn't leave my mother."

"And now, Elijah?"

"When there's a revolution on, a mother's an episode," he whispered, less and less audibly. "My letter came, the letter B, and the Organization sent me to the front. . . ."

"And you got to Kovel, Elijah?"

"I got to Kovel!" he cried in despair. "The kulaks opened the front to the enemy. I took over the command of a scratch regiment, but too late. . . . I hadn't enough artillery. . . ."

He died before we reached Rowno. He—that last of the Princes—died among his poetry, phylacteries, and coarse foot-wrappings. We buried him at some forgotten station. And I, who can scarce contain the tempests of my imagination within this age-old body of mine, I was there beside my brother when he breathed his last.

1925

XIII

The Rape of the Shtetl

The shtetl (the Yiddish word for small town) was presumably the last bastion of tradition in Jewish eastern Europe. There everything was still governed by Jewish law—time and place, home and market, not to speak of the myriad houses of prayer and learning. There the strict demarcation between the Sabbath and weekday, the sacred and profane, the Jews and the gentiles seemed utterly immutable. The less that was actually known about the shtetl—its demography, history, economy and collective mores—the more readily it functioned as a mythical place, as a *kehillah kedoshah* (holy congregation) bearing witness to God's presence in exile. The first to exploit this image of the shtetl were, as usual, the secular writers in Yiddish and Hebrew who, beginning in the 1860s, recognized the shtetl's potential as a fictional shorthand for the fate of the Jewish collective. Abramovitsh (**40–41**) laid the groundwork with Beggarsburgh, Foolsville and Idletown, parodically modeled on the sacred triad of Worms, Speyer and Mainz. Sholem Aleichem's Heysen (**49**) and Krushnik (**54**) were no more real for being locatable on the map. Their inhabitants still placed their faith in the power of language to rescue them from disaster. Weissenberg's nameless shtetl (**48**) exploded the myth of Jewish solidarity by exposing the violence and class conflict that lay just beneath the surface.

After World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, when the physical collapse of the shtetl became visible for all to see, the writers seized anew on its symbolic landscape to convey their sense of utter desecration and upheaval. Oyzer Warshawski (**61**), a young protégé of Weissenberg's, reopened the assault on the myth of the shtetl with *Shmuglares* ("smugglers"

The Literature of Destruction

Jewish Responses to Catastrophe

EDITED BY **DAVID G. ROSKIES**

THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY
PHILADELPHIA · NEW YORK · JERUSALEM 5748/1988

XIII

The Rape of the Shtetl

The shtetl (the Yiddish word for small town) was presumably the last bastion of tradition in Jewish eastern Europe. There everything was still governed by Jewish law—time and place, home and market, not to speak of the myriad houses of prayer and learning. There the strict demarcation between the Sabbath and weekday, the sacred and profane, the Jews and the gentiles seemed utterly immutable. The less that was actually known about the shtetl—its demography, history, economy and collective mores—the more readily it functioned as a mythical place, as a *kehillah kedoshah* (holy congregation) bearing witness to God's presence in exile. The first to exploit this image of the shtetl were, as usual, the secular writers in Yiddish and Hebrew who, beginning in the 1860s, recognized the shtetl's potential as a fictional shorthand for the fate of the Jewish collective. Abramovitsh (**40–41**) laid the groundwork with Beggarsburgh, Foolsville and Idletown, parodically modeled on the sacred triad of Worms, Speyer and Mainz. Sholem Aleichem's Heysen (**49**) and Krushnik (**54**) were no more real for being locatable on the map. Their inhabitants still placed their faith in the power of language to rescue them from disaster. Weissenberg's nameless shtetl (**48**) exploded the myth of Jewish solidarity by exposing the violence and class conflict that lay just beneath the surface.

After World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, when the physical collapse of the shtetl became visible for all to see, the writers seized anew on its symbolic landscape to convey their sense of utter desecration and upheaval. Oyzer Warshawski (**61**), a young protégé of Weissenberg's, reopened the assault on the myth of the shtetl with *Shmuglares* ("smugglers"

in Polish-Yiddish dialect). He chose a family of teamsters as his chief protagonists: Pantl, an inarticulate man of brute passions, and his two sons Mendl and Urke. With an eye for the comic, Warshawski showed how Pantl introduced a new economic order to the shtetl—this time without the help of paid agitators from Warsaw. In fact, the shtetl in wartime was in a favorable position vis-à-vis Warsaw, where there was no escaping the German war economy. In the isolated shtetl, the profit motive still reigned supreme. Respectable artisans and merchants joined forces with the low-lives; Jewish men went into business with gentile women. And as for the Germans—they were bought off with sexual favors.

Having totally disavowed the hallowed image of the shtetl, Warshawski provided a countermyth instead, a self-contained culture of smugglers, sentimental tales of the Good Ole Days and even a homegrown (Polish) anthem. The two new settings of Jewish solidarity were Pantl's wagon en route to Warsaw and the shtetl bedrooms where Jewish smugglers shacked up with their gentile "partners."

Warshawski's method answered to the dictates of critical realism, with its focus on the animal in man. He transcribed vulgar speech; he focused on mass behavior instead of on a central hero; and he followed a naturalist determinism that saw heredity and environment governing all of human behavior. For the Jewish reader of the 1920s (and probably for present-day readers as well), the most shocking scene comes in chapter 15 when Raytshl is caught naked, wrapped in pieces of raw meat, a more lucrative contraband than flour or salt. This is a pivotal scene because now it is one human body being exploited for profit; soon outright forms of prostitution are to be introduced into the shtetl. More profoundly, it is an image of nakedness beyond the skin, an exposé of civilization itself.

In Warshawski's story, the shtetl survives, by hook or by crook. But in the revolutionary upheaval that followed, east of the new Polish-Soviet border, no amount of internal change could save the shtetl from extinction. Despite the efforts of the younger generation of Jews to establish a brave new shtetl world, complete with its own commune and militia, the enterprise was doomed from the start. This, at any rate, was the verdict of twenty-six-year-old writer Hayyim Hazaz (**62**) who, like Warshawski, launched his career by exploding the myth of the shtetl.

In one corner were the spokesmen of traditional society—passionate old men who had only their wit and rabbinic writ to hold on to. Once the chief providers of the shtetl economy, these petty merchants were now deemed parasites by the new Soviet regime. In the other corner were their sons and daughters, armed with guns and an unshakable rhetoric about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Because the revolution had just begun and Russia was still at war with Germany, there were competing revolutionary tactics to choose from. Polishuk stood for the iron will of bolshevism, and Soroka the anarchist (whose name means "magpie") went around setting fire to the manor houses of the old aristocracy. Only the sworn counterrevolutionaries would not be countenanced, namely, the Bundists, the original standard-bearers of socialism among the Jewish masses of eastern Europe, because the Bund was aligned with the Social Democrats and fought for the "parochial" interests of the Jewish working class.

What makes *Revolutionary Chapters* so unusual as a work of shtetl fiction and as a chronicle of a particularly violent moment in Jewish history is Hazaz's way of breaking down the oppositions he has just drawn so forcefully. This happens on several levels at once. Read as a historical parable, the pivotal moment in the story comes in chapter 9 when Soroka's Jewish militia successfully thwarts a pogrom and immediately thereafter is forcibly demobilized by the army. Thus, Soroka's sudden return at the end of the story to announce the German approach is that much more ominous. The shtetl now stands defenseless before an enemy that does not differentiate between petty bourgeois Jews and revolutionary Jews.

One character in the story does try to bridge both worlds: Motl Privisker, the passionate Hasid who left his wife and children and begins to prophesy the End of Days. As the only character who reacts in a complicated way to the rapid course of events, Motl commands our attention, if not our sympathy. Just as there is no going back to a world of simple faith, so there is for Motl no real possibility of ever becoming a Bolshevik, much less of catching the eye of Reb Simcha's daughter, Henya, the romantic center of the story. Motl's despair and his flights of prophetic clairvoyance thus embody the madness of a revolution that would ultimately swallow up the world.

Despite the language of the story, an ornate and incongruous Hebrew, there is no single consciousness here to hold all the disparate parts of that language together. In a sense, the language epitomizes Motl's dilemma, for on the one hand, biblical and rabbinic locutions are used in bold juxtaposition with modern, colloquial expressions, and the sheer energy of the prose holds out some redemptive promise. On the other hand, this rapid linguistic montage throws even the most traditional-sounding phrase out of context, and the very foundations of Jewish culture seem to have been permanently uprooted.

The half-crazed characters in Hazaz's story inhabit a self-destructing world. Everything is in a state of turmoil, from the howling winds to the men in uniform. The judgment of history is still an open question. But with the knowledge of hindsight and from the perspective of his new home in Israel, Hazaz revised the story completely, once in 1956 and again in 1968. (For an English translation of this final version, see *Gates of Bronze* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975].) It is precisely the finished quality of these later versions and the consistent narrative viewpoint that rob the work of its original vitality. In *Revolutionary Chapters*, style *is*

content, and no style captures the apocalyptic frenzy of the Revolution as well as Hebrew Expressionism.

Itsik Kipnis's lyrical novella *Months and Days* (**63**) provides the very opposite viewpoint. On the surface, the work is a throwback to a prelapsarian image of the shtetl, to a place of social integration, eternal summer and abiding love. In opposition to the official Soviet line on the shtetl ("an ugly anachronism inimical to the interests of the working class"), Kipnis draws a vibrant, loving portrait of the shtetl that made this book a runaway bestseller among Soviet-Yiddish readers. The secret of Kipnis's success is the façade of naïveté he manages to maintain even while writing an extraordinarily detailed chronicle of terror.

To begin with, the twenty-two-year-old narrator named Ayzik resembles no one so much as Sholem Aleichem's child-hero Motl, the son of Peyse the Cantor. Unlike Motl, however, Ayzik is capable of growth, and as the terror mounts, we watch Ayzik literally and figuratively take over the reins in his desperate attempt to save the lives of his family.

The hero's struggle between innocence and awareness is brilliantly underscored by the dual nature of time. There is idyllic time, which is measured in months: the endless holiday of the newlywed couple, a time of fullness and joyous expectation. And there is tragic time, the time of encroaching terror, when every minute could be the last. The pogrom itself is referred to euphemistically as a "holiday," so that even the language maintains the façade of innocence. It is through the desecration of time—night and day are reversed, the pogrom reaches its peak on the Sabbath, and the hero finally loses track of time altogether—that the reader experiences the full impact of the violence.

Writing under Soviet rule, even Kipnis could not get away with rehabilitating the shtetl as a meeting ground between Jews and God. Without God, therefore, Kipnis had to look to human intervention to restore the moral order. And so he had the Red Army wreak vengeance upon the Ukrainian murderers, and he had Buzi give birth to a girl to compensate partially for the loss of so many lives. This last was the only fanciful touch to an otherwise faithful account: the "real" Buzi (Kipnis's young wife) died of typhus soon after the pogrom.

Today Kipnis's novella assumes the status of a classic in the Literature of Destruction for both literary and historical reasons. By drawing selectively on the Sholem Aleichem tradition that preceded him, Kipnis placed the Ukrainian pogroms within the recognized sequence of modern Jewish catastrophes. By approaching the horror through the innocent eyes of a man-child, Kipnis looked ahead to such works at Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Uri Orlev's *Lead Soldiers* and, most recently, David Grossman's *See Under 'Love.'* Historically, the story he tells anticipates the fate of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of Jews who, under Nazi occupation, sought refuge among their erstwhile friends in the Polish and Lithuanian countryside. There are Holocaust memoirs, such as Leyb Rochman's *The Pit and the Trap*, that read like a replay of *Months and Days*, except that the scale and duration of the murder are so much more vast that almost no one comes out of the Holocaust alive. And because Soviet Jews were eventually silenced and because no one within their boundaries was allowed to mourn the Great Destruction, Kipnis's modest work must stand as the lone monument to the Jewish national catastrophe, made more terrible still by the singular barbarism of Soviet totalitarianism that robs a people even of its past.

Taken together, these three novellas show that the shtetl, portrayed realistically or idyllically, still held its own in the collective memory as the place where Jewishness was played out. In a sort of spiritual archeology, the shtetl became the last site (until the ghettos of World War II) where one could dig up the *kehillah kedoshah*. It was the site, also, at which the choice of covenants (old, new or none at all) was made with most pathos and in the increasing absence of God; wherefore the Chosen People came to mean not People Chosen by God as much as people victimized by the rest of the world.

61 Smugglers

OYZER WARSHAWSKI

7

Yitskhok-Yoyne was a patch tailor, but not like the others with their eager little laughs and their abusive melodies. He was a man with a fine gray beard and wore a cloth hat with a wide brim perched on his gray head. He always had a somewhat preoccupied smile on his bearded face and a packet of tobacco almost always in his hand as he recited a chapter from the Book of Psalms or hummed a prayer from the Days of Awe.

Yitskhok-Yoyne was also a prayer-leader in the town synagogue. When he came home from the synagogue, he washed his hands and wiped them slowly. And he took a full hour to eat. His two sons and a daughter, a young woman with red cheeks, worked in the front room.

The place fairly buzzed with work. The young people filled the house with their fine songs, and their voices mingled with the hoarse rattling of the machines that sounded like someone with seriously damaged lungs.

That, however, is how things used to be once. Once upon a time, during the good years when there was peace in the world and a pound of white bread cost five groschen. "Once upon a time there was a king." But, with the outbreak of war, that all disappeared, like magic; like a bad dream. "For our many sins," as Yitskhok-Yoyne, the patch tailor, put it. Today? Who has work to do today? Who earns anything? Dead—business of all sorts. Merchants sold their goods for practically nothing so that they might have the wherewithal to buy bread. As for working men—working men went about searching for peasant customers with lighted candles. Things were really as bad as they could be. One went about with nothing to do. The last ruble had been long since devoured. So, what was to be done? You considered one scheme, and then another, and the conclusion was that one had to make a still. This was all discussed in secret—all very hush hush. But no matter how softly it was whispered, it nevertheless reached the ears of Rattling Pinye, who always knew absolutely everything going on in town.

By some miracle he did not himself understand, Yitskhok-Yoyne turned out to own a barrel, which he scoured out carefully. Then he had the tinsmith make him a boiler and various utensils and wheels; and then he bought a pressure gauge, and then on one fine cloudy night he began to cook. Yitskhok-Yoyne, on his own, would not have understood how to go about the business. The barrel was all that he owned, and it was a long and laborious task to scrape together the money for the boiler. And sugar, just then, cost twenty rubles a *pood*. So he discussed the matter with Yosef the Doll, and in good time they became partners. But on that very same day, Rattling Pinye showed up and informed them that he too meant to be a partner in the business. The other two, outraged, shouted in unison, "Crook! What do you mean? How can you even think of it? We've gone to a lot of expense; had all the utensils made. And there won't be any profit if there are three partners."

He hemmed and hawed, but he was not to be budged. Without him, he said, the business would not work.

This drove Yosef the Doll into a rage. He grabbed one of Pinye's hands and squeezed it with the strength of a pair of tongs. "Ah, Pinye you lowlife. You want to use force to become a partner? Not if I can help it!"

Pinye was furious. His nose sharpened, and the pouches under his eyes turned yellow. Tearing himself loose from Yosef the Doll's grasp, he shouted, "I'll teach you," and then ran off.

A couple of days later Yitskhok-Yoyne's son Leybl was squatting before the boiler adding wood to the fire. Above the glowing boiler, the vat was boiling. The rising steam entered a pipe, pushed its way through various brass valves, then entered once more into a pipe that ran through a cooler. And there, the distillate dripped through the pipe and into a pot that Yitskhok-Yoyne had under it.

"The first distillation," he said formally, and his face glowed. And when he took the temperature of the mixture and the thermometer showed eighty-five, he opened his mouth wide and said happily, "Ah ha, a fine distillation. An eighty-fiver. Ah ha!"

And it was just then that Yosef the Doll came in, taking the steps in three bounds. He flung the door open, snatched the kettle from the fire, disconnected the tubes and, as if speaking a single breathless word, said, "Quickly, quickly. Landsmann and Jaeger are on their way."

There ensued a mad bustling. No one knew what to do first. Think of it: in one corner there was a kettle full to the brim. They grabbed it up, and it began to slosh over. And droplets, like tears, continued to flow from the disconnected pipes. There was still vapor in the pipes, and as it condensed, the droplets fell and soaked into the muddy floor. Leybl said sadly, "Eighty-five," as, sweating like a beaver, he dragged and carried things about.

But his father was white as chalk, and his mother, that little woman, shoved bottles of brandy into a basket; then, covering them with an apron, she ran to hide them in the home of a neighbor. The Doll's nose had grown thin and pointed, like that of a corpse. "A fortune," he thought. "an entire fortune gone to hell." And Brayndl's red cheeks turned even redder. She grabbed, dragged and buried what she could. Then, as she was standing on a wet barrel cover, she slipped and fell, and as she fell, her dress caught on a nail that was protruding from the wall. She fell, revealing a silk ribbon tied around one of her stockings just above the knee.

What a disaster. One can hear those hounds already. They're watching, like murderers.

And in came the Germans.

"What kind of factory is this?" asked the sergeant major as he looked around the house.

"A tailor lives here," Yitskhok-Yoyne replied, trembling like an autumn leaf.

"A tailor," said the sergeant major, with a sly smile on his face. "A tailor? Then where's the machinery?"

"Here they are, dear sir," burst from Tshippe, who could no longer contain herself. She plucked at the German's uniform and, giving free rein to her tongue, said, "Him . . . my husband, Yitskhok-Yoyne, is a tailor. A patch tailor. But there's no needlework to be done, so the machines have been put away in a corner. But

you, gentleman, are such a nice gentleman. Be good enough to sit down," and she thrust a moist, filthy chair toward him.

"What a dirty place," Landsmann said to the man with him, a tall, thin fellow with high cheekbones, a flaccid mouth and a nose like an archer's bow. The round, brimless hat he wore gave him the look of a dog with a docked tail.

"Have a look and see what's in that barrel."

The tall man bending over to look looked as if he would break in two at any moment, like a stick.

"It's empty, Herr Sergeant Major. But it has a terrible stink."

"What kind of barrel is this?" said Landsmann turning toward the others threateningly. "Yes. It's brandy."

"Oh, no sir. What . . . brandy? Brandy? Where? How? It's the smell of sauerkraut." But when she saw the expression on his face, she cried out, "Pity. O please sir, pity us."

Now Landsmann inspected a vat. "And this, too, is for sauerkraut?"

"Yes, yes. Sauerkraut."

He continued to look around, then he saw Brayndl in the other room. And suddenly he was completely transformed. The look on his face cleared and his eyes shone more brightly.

"Do you live here, *Fräulein?*" He made a gesture toward Jaeger. "A pretty girl, eh," and, not contenting himself with that, he went up to her and pinched her cheek. "So, you are the daughter of this Jew? I've seen the young lady at the magistrate's. I've been at the magistrate's." And again his eyes glistened. He took out a notebook and wrote down their names. As he was leaving, he said to Brayndl, "You must come see me today, at six o'clock. There will be a fine."

When the Germans were gone, the Jews seated themselves on the moist chairs and assessed the damage, like mourners. "Who knows whether the troublemaker will be good to us?"

"There's a hole in the boiler."

"Where are the brass valves?"

"Here they are, in the cellar."

"We took it apart well. They didn't find anything."

Then Yosef the Doll approached Yitskhok-Yoyne's daughter. "Brayndl," he said in a beggar's voice, "you'll go to him. Give him a little smile. You know how." Turning to Yitskhok-Yoyne, he said: "Those fellows—they'd cut their own throats for a Jewish girl."

Brayndl, hearing this, turned red to her eyelids and ran into the other room. And yet, she was pleased: to be favored by the sergeant major.

"Who knows whether this wasn't the Rattle's work?" the Doll said, voicing his suspicion. But Yitskhok-Yoyne got angry, "Eh? What are you talking about. The Rattle's a Jew!"

Just the same, it was agreed that they would take Pinye in as one of their partners. And, though no one could say exactly why it was so, things got better after that. For one thing, the still was no longer kept in the house. They rented some out-of-the-way empty hut in an orchard just behind Pantl's courtyard. And in addition to that, they enlarged the still. Two boilers were set going, yielding whole barrels of brandy. But there was difficulty getting water. The well was far off in the orchard, and carrying the buckets back would reveal that the factory was at work.

So they got Zerekh-Donkey who treated the name with which the town had honored him with respect. And Zerekh did nothing else for whole days at a time but haul water up from the well, loading it into his wagon and pouring it into the empty barrels that were arrayed along the wall inside the hut. Ah, if he only had an extra pair of hands. Even on Saturday, his arms were stiff and crooked, as if he were still carrying the buckets.

9

It was a day at the end of winter. One of those days that are both windy and sunny. On such days, people in the towns open all their doors and windows. Children crawl about on the doorsteps, taking the air.

Our smugglers, waking from their sleep at noon, were delighted to see the friendly rays of the sun streaming into their houses. They left their beds gratified and refreshed and went out into the street where they made ready for their journey.

On the way into town, it had rained all the way. The tarpaulins had been soaked through and through. Now in their dry clothes, the smugglers felt rested, and they looked toward the sky, where great masses of white clouds drifted—endlessly drifted.

It was six o'clock in the evening. Shadows were beginning to lengthen along the eastward-looking walls as the wagons left the courtyards and turned onto the road.

The smugglers walked along the sides of the road, near the houses, their bundles in their coats and in their shawls, their heads bent as they kept a wary eye out until they were well past the crucifix, past the first little bridge and onto the main road. Then they quickly threw their bundles in the wagons and jumped in themselves. The wagon drivers lashed the horses, crying , "Up, up, Giddap."

It was then that they heard a whistle and a shouted "Halt!"

The smugglers poked their heads out of the wagons, and seeing who was running after them, they turned pale. The livelier ones grabbed up their bundles, jumped from the wagons and ran across the fields and into the wood so swiftly that it would seem that they were carrying chips in their hands instead of sacks that weighed two or three *pood*. The German, seeing how many were escaping, pointed his revolver into the air and shouted, "Halt! Not another step. Stop!"

They were all petrified. Old Shayke stood, one foot in the wagon and the other on the ground, unable to move one way or the other. His hands holding the bundle trembled and twitched, and he looked imploringly at the German, who was now beside the wagon shouting angrily. He ordered Mendl to throw down all the bundles and to see whether anyone was carrying contraband.

Pantl stood beside the horses, his contracted body trembling. "Ah, if I were to 'bless' his teeth, he'd have something to remember me by."

Mendl threw the bundles down from the wagon. They bounced and lay on the pavement. But when the German stuck his head into the wagon to see that nothing was overlooked, Pantl, behind his back, grabbed up seven of the bundles and threw them into the ditch where they could not be seen. Those in the other wagons, seeing what Pantl had done, did the same. The German, seeing the smug-

glers disappearing with their bundles, cocked his pistol and fired into the air. The smugglers, terrified, stopped in their tracks. Well, what would be, would be.

Now the German counted the bundles and set Mendl to stand guard over them. "See that none of them is missing," he said. And he repeated the same thing at Kopl's wagon. As the bundles were being thrown, one of the seams split, and a stream of white flour flowed into the dark, like a fluffy snow. The German gave a mocking laugh, "What is it? Eh? What?"

A stout young peasant woman ran up. It was Mateusz's wife. She spread her apron under the stream of flour to keep it from falling to the ground. She wept, "Jesus. Ah, God. My whole fortune. Dear Jesus."

"So," the German cried, seeing that the flour was hers. "Gather it up quickly." Then to the others, "There are thirty bundles here. Put them in the wagons, and off to the station house."

A racket ensued. Gimpl's daughter, Khanna, ran up. She was bareheaded because, in her haste, she had lost her headkerchief somewhere. She knelt to kiss the German's hand and wept, "Lord, great lord, have pity on a poor Jewish woman. Don't take away our bit of bread."

Without taking his eyes from the Mateusz woman's plump shape, the German thrust Khanna away. Then he smiled under his mustache. Riding to the station, he whispered something to Mateusz's wife, then tickled her. Though she did not understand a word of what he said, she understood his meaning. He pointed to her bundle and said, "You'll get your contraband back. All of it." Then he winked broadly at her.

When the wagons reached the Great Marketplace, such a crowd gathered that the horses could not drive through. But a single word from the German, and a look from his flashing eye was enough to scatter everyone into the side streets. That was the sort of power the German had.

And when the wagon was in the courtyard of the station, all the smugglers hurried up to the second floor where the commandant had his office. But only the deputy commander was there, and the bespectacled scribe. The commandant had gone for a stroll. The smugglers gathered around and made such a turmoil that the deputy commander did not know what they wanted of him. It was not until Jaeger came and drove them out that they had a chance to talk things over. It was left that the police would keep half of the contraband and return the other half. Only Mateusz's wife got her entire bundle back. But she had to go immediately with Jaeger and the bespectacled scribe to a private room in an upper story of Mayerl's inn.

11

Pantl was getting confused. Ever since the customs agents had taken the several hundredweight of flour from him he had gone about like a mute bear. He never left his pregnant wife, who was approaching her time, out of his sight. He preceded—and followed—everything he said with a curse. Nor did he spare his sons, though he did not risk troubling Mendl, the oldest one. Mendl took after his mother: he was tall, broad—a giant. He looked like two of Pantl. But he picked on the younger son on every occasion.

And something was always being taken from him—mostly from his wagon. Kopl, on the other hand, was doing well. Fayfke was riding with Kopl again, and he was still hanging out with Mateusz's wife. They bought goods together, and when they came to the customs agents, she claimed his goods were hers, and the fact is that then they took nothing from her. Old Shayke joked that Mateusz's wife was "Fayfke's bride." But Fayfke had the last laugh, not only on him but on the whole world. Pantl thought, "If I had had such a 'bride,' they wouldn't have taken anything from me. Not then, and not now. And she's certainly a help in one way. What can you do in Warsaw? There's no food, no rest. As for my wife, is she any help to me? Even at home? She walks about—a great nothing—with her big belly. She's going to have another boy; a boy—nothing else will do. I can't stand to look at her ugly face." Such were the thoughts swirling about in Pantl's head. He did not yet know where they would lead him. That would come later.

And when he came home at dawn from his travels and tried all frozen as he was, to go to sleep, his thoughts gave him no rest. He kept starting up angrily out of his sleep and cursed his wife and went out into the orchard to Yitskhok-Yoyne's place, where he asked for ninety proof, which he drank, one glass after another.

But there were times when those thoughts left him—disappeared as if into the ground. That only happened occasionally—and only on a Sabbath. That's when he and his pals got together. Sometimes they came to his house. Lozer, Khayim Kaiser's father, used to say that in the old days when Pantl and the others were fiery young men, if they had any business in hand, they exchanged looks and it was done: one, two, three. Or else he told the story of the peasants. "Ah, old pals; old pals. Those times will come again." And at such times a look of confidence spread over their faces. Their eyes, their pulses gave off such fiery heat that it could be felt from a distance.

On one such Sabbath, as they sat in the house, Lozer Kaiser was telling a tale (how many times had he told it already?) and stroking his white beard. "It was on a Friday night when a few of the peasants came into the town. Railroad workers, intent on making trouble. It got dark, and they started to beat up Jews who were on their way to the evening service in the synagogue. And wasn't it just like old 'Kaiser' to grab up a wagon crossbar and leap right into a crowd of peasants swinging away with the bar, now left, now right so that they fell like flies. Just then some tall peasant with an iron pole came within an ace of splitting 'Kaiser's' head open, except of course that Pantl leaped in front of him and gave him such a blow on the head with his fist that he stretched the peasant full length on the ground."

Little Urke was one of those who heard this tale, and it made him gleeful as a puppy so that he began to pound his father's back with his fists. Pantl, it appeared, did not welcome such a show of affection from his son and gave him such a box on the ear that the boy rolled completely over and landed on the floor. And it was at that moment that Pantl began to understand what it was he had to do. Because that blow produced the following developments: When little Urke fell to the ground, he began to shake in a way that could make one think he was having an epileptic seizure. It was then, when he lay quiet, his eyes open, gazing at his father as if nothing had happened, ready to pound his shoulders once again, that Glike shouted, "What have you got against the boy? Pantl, you might have killed him—may the Lord punish you."

And it was at that moment that Pantl, feeling guilty and unable to pour out his wrath on anyone, blushed, stood up and, turning his furious eyes on his wife.

whom just then he hated, started toward her. But he was embarrassed by the presence of his buddies, so he merely spat in her direction and went out of the house toward the stable and slammed the door behind him. There, as he passed his hand over the stallion's hide, he calmed down little by little and began to think over what had just happened. And it was clear to him at once that his wife was the cause of all his misfortunes—even the share of his goods the customs agents took from him. "Damn her father to hell, the old chaser. Gentile young women!" he thought as he thwacked the stallion's side. Then he took the animal's long tail and tied it into a knot. "Pantl, damn you if they take a cut of your goods one more time. You won't deserve to live." Then he went up to the roan and thrust a handful of feed into its mouth. Then he climbed into the loft, crawled into the hay and lay there for a while, thinking. And what he finally concluded was this—though how he would do "this" he could not yet be sure. Still, the heart of the matter was clear. A partnership with a gentile woman. Though he couldn't just walk up to any woman he might meet by chance and say, "Hey, come ride with me." But one thing was clear. He ought to get started on the matter right away—and be done with it.

And shortly thereafter a lucky chance brought Pantl together with the right woman—a woman whom even younger men envied him and who was the occasion of more than one quarrel.

15

Fayfke was prospering as a smuggler. From the time that he entered into partnership with Mateusz's wife he had not had any of his goods taken by the customs officers, and people guessed that his profits could be written in large numbers. And so he ordered a suit for Shavuot and ordered it, as a matter of fact, from Ahrele Quarter-Master, Itshele's father. There he explained that he wanted the trousers with broad bell-bottoms and the cuffs with double buttons. He had himself been a tailor before the war, earning four rubles a week in Warsaw. And he specified that the jacket pockets should be in the German fashion, opening from the top.

The minute he woke in the morning, he went right over to Ahrele.

"Well, how's my suit doing?" he asked.

"Have to measure one more time," replied Itshele for his father.

So Fayfke got out of his smuggler's linen trousers, and they measured him for the whole suit once more.

"Just take a look, this isn't quite right," he said to Itshele, inwardly proud, as he peered in the mirror. "Though it's not bad."

"Eh, never mind. No harm. It's nothing," said Ahrele, passing his hand over Fayfke's shoulder, smoothing things out.

Then it was out into the street where he met Bertshe, Kaiser's friend, as well as Muli and Avromtshe, Velvl's son for whom all the young women, Jewish and gentile, would willingly have died. And since they had found each other, it was only natural to look for Mendl, after which they all went to Elye's tavern and undertook to drink their fill.

"Ah, old friends," said Mendl, his mouth loosened by the third glass, "You ought to have seen those three gentile women—pure cream!" he said, smacking his lips.

Which ones do you mean?" Bertshe said, laughing because he [illegible] was drunk.

"Fayvl, tell him which ones I mean. He's burning to know."

So Fayvl told the story of last night's adventures—how they had come upon the three young women, and what they had said to them.

The young men listened intently. Bertshe's mouth stood open, and he drooled.

"Now you've heard it," Fayvl concluded. "Hot stuff, eh?"

Avromtshe, Velvl's son, raised his eyebrows and downed one glass, then another. "If they were still here," he said, "It might be worthwhile. . . ."

"Impossible," burst from Itshl.

And so Avromtshe turned on him. "What do you mean? There's nothing 'impossible' for me. Don't you know, my little tailor, who Avromtshe is?" But all the others were on Itshl's side. "Come on, it's Itshl talking. Is there a book that he hasn't read? As for his recitations. . . ."

But Avromtshe, who by now had more liquor in his head than was left in the bottle, insisted on opposing them. And who knows how it would have ended if it had not all suddenly changed. Because just as Avromtshe grasped the bottle by its neck and, all atremble, started toward Itshl, the door opened and Blind Grunim looked in. With a single bound, he was beside Fayvl and, grabbing him by the collar, began to shake him the way one shakes a *lulav*° in the synagogue.

The palm branch that is carried and waved in the synagogue during the Sukkot holiday.

"Listen, my friend. I'll cut your liver out, damn your bloody guts."

For a moment, they were all confused, but then, seeing what was happening, they undertook first to get Fayvl out from under Grunim's paws. The fellow could bend an iron rod.

And Muli, whom the whole town called "The Tough Guy," said quietly, "What's your trouble, Grunim? Eh?"

"And what the goddamn hell business is it of yours?" replied Grunim, and his blind eye trembled, and there was a liquid red glow behind the lid.

"Come on, Grunim, what kind of talk is that?" put in Mendl and poured him a glass of beer.

Grunim took it, sat down and drank the beer. Mendl poured him another glass, which Grunim drank. Mendl filled his glass again. He drank the third and then the fourth.

But the blonde Muli stood by as anger turned his nose pale. And his eyes narrowed as if his lids were suddenly puffed up.

"What is it you want, friend?" Fayvl, who was the occasion for the quarrel, finally spoke up. He was pale as chalk. Grunim was no child, by any means. But as he watched Grunim filling his glass and saw the foam spilling from his mouth and the tremor of his skin at the wet coldness, Fayvl calmed down. "Never mind. I, Fayvl, won't abstain, either." Then, to Grunim again, "Why did you blow your top at me?"

Grunim, who had been pouring beer down himself, had by now cooled down. He said, quite affably, "The devil take your mother. When are you writing out the articles of engagement?"

The crowd, hearing these words, burst out laughing and started in to thwack Fayvl. Fayvl's eyes narrowed.

"Well, my friend, you know the song: 'The Two Poor Went Dancing, Without a Penny, Without a Cent.' So you understand it all."

"May you burn in hell," laughed Blind Grunim, and his thin-lipped mouth twitched fearfully as he laughed. "They should know that Raytshl is making preparations. She's bought cloth from Dzierdiew." He put his arm around Fayvl's shoulder and looked deeply into his eyes.

"Why are you staring at me like that? Don't you know me?" asked Fayvl, whom Grunim's look had chilled.

"Why don't you talk to Raytshl about being engaged?" he said, angry once again.

"Who? Who says? . . ."

"Who? My sister says it herself."

"Alright, let's go ask her."

"Let's go."

They stood and left, their arms about each other's shoulders. Left without a glance at their friends, who stayed behind as if they had been spanked.

"Raytshl isn't here?" Grunim asked, poking his head into Kopl's house.

"She's just gone upstairs to get dressed," shouted Kopl's wife.

They climbed the stairs quickly and opened the door. Fayvl, in sheer surprise, let his hand fall from Grunim's shoulder and stood as if he had been shot. The lid of Grunim's blind eye rose, revealing a dreadful gleaming red abyss.

Raytshl stood naked with her back to them. She was wrapping bits of meat from which the blood was still dripping. She wrapped them around her breasts, her belly and her feet. The flattened bits of cool, moist meat adhering to her warm skin sent up a vapor. As she kept winding the bits of meat, binding them to her with strips of raw flesh, she looked like someone who has been flayed alive. Fayvl could not help shuddering. But he was also illuminated and awed by Raytshl.

Grunim shouted to Fayvl, "Raytshl! D'you see what a money-maker she is, damn you."

Raytshl, embarrassed to be seen this way by her destined bridegroom, grabbed up some article of clothing and covered herself.

"Raytshl," said Grunim again, "has Fayvl talked to you about being engaged?"

"Leave me alone," she said, still embarrassed.

"Well, well," said Grunim. Seeing that they were both upset, he was willing to let the matter drop. "You're not carrying flour any more?"

"Yes, flour usually. But meat pays better."

Fayvl was suddenly overwhelmed with respect for Raytshl, who seemed to him a quite different being from himself. A being of some higher order. "Who would think to do a body search?" Enraptured, he said to Grunim, "We'll write out the engagement agreement at the first of the month."

Grunim was delighted. His eyelid twitched, and he embraced Fayvl and kissed him. "Damn you to hell. D'you see what Raytshl can do? And Raytshl, just look at him. Well, you're practically bride and groom."

And grabbing his sister, he shoved her into Fayvl's arms. The powerful smell of raw meat made Fayvl nauseous. At that moment, he regretted the words he had just spoken. And when Grunim, laughing his horrid laugh, tried to push him and Raytshl closer together, he felt a constriction in his throat and felt that he might vomit. Seeking for some excuse to get away he cried, "Listen, I have to make one more trip before Saturday." He tore himself away and fled from Raytshl's embrace as from the plague.

new shtetl myths

heavy irony

were betrayed by other Jews

-8-

The town breathed a little more easily. Bakers, distillers, soap makers, cigarette sellers, tavern keepers, butchers and every sort of smuggler celebrated a Sabbath in praise of the Lord, who does not overlook a worm; and because Haman had had his comeuppance. "It was becoming unbearable."

And indeed, the lame commandant deserved his nickname. In the few weeks that he was in power, he had brought misfortune on half of the town. When he first arrived, the town thought, from the way he looked, that he was by no means a bad gentile. He was tall and limped from a wound he had received to his left foot. But the very next morning all the smuggled goods were impounded from the wagons. After that he turned his attention to the distillers. He had a bloodhound's nose. Standing at the magistrate's gate, he could detect the smell of a still in a street at the town center.

He had exposed Dovid-Yitskhok and Yenkl Beder. And he had taken some fifteen hundred marks from Reb Yidl. Only Yitskhok-Yoyne had escaped detection. Yosef the Doll had indeed boasted, "We work in the orchard, and so long as The Rattle is one of us, we have nothing to fear."

And so they "cooked" almost in broad daylight. And Donkey dragged the buckets of water, and there were strips of hard encrusted sweat on his forehead that he washed away once a week, on Friday evening. And it was on one such evening that the commandant, together with Landsmann and Jaeger, all of them in full uniform, went to the orchard by a roundabout way.

(It was rumored in town that on that same evening, only an hour after Yidl's still was discovered, that one of his sons or daughters was seen strolling in the vicinity of the two-story house in which the sergeant major lived. But that's neither here nor there.) What matters is that Yitskhok-Yoyne was once again "an absolutely poor man," without a penny to his name. "What's to be done? What else is there to do?"

Aggravation turned Brayndl's red cheeks pale. But Leybl was utterly untroubled by the misfortune. He continued to go about smiling, laughing into everyone's face.

As for The Rattle . . . poor fellow. He was in no way responsible for that first search on Yitskhok-Yoyne's house. Because he had felt a revulsion against distilling. He had only meant to work on for another couple of weeks so that he could rent a small orchard somewhere. And there was money to be earned without an orchard. And the point was that it was legal.

The Rattle's nature was essentially fearful. It was just that he liked to talk. For instance, what good had it done him to threaten them then? But that's the way he was. The truth is, he could not restrain himself whenever he heard anyone talking. Ah, how often had his wife dressed him down because of that habit of his. But it did no good. Whenever there was talk of great deeds, of heroism, then he was inflamed by heroism. And when he chanced upon a newcomer to the town or some younger people, didn't he say that during the battles with the Great Russians he was among the first to attack? Or, when there was a fire, for example—that's when he most demonstrated his skill. How? By running about with his cap on backward.

Poor fellow. He had everything he owned invested in the still. He had even

borrowed money. He bought a few hundredweight of sugar, expecting the price to go up.

But that fellow, that lame commandant had had a sudden death. And he had been replaced by a fresh officer, also young. A wonderful man. Why should he worry about smuggling or bootlegging? He had his fiddle; he sat and played on it. It happened one day that the soldiers in the round hats without visors impounded some goods on their own authority and brought it to the "Commandant." He just laughed and returned the bundle. A cheerful young fellow. He strolled about, or rode his bicycle and chatted amiably with everyone. . . .

And thus God had sent a salvation to his Jews. And everyone brought their machines and their kettles and barrels out of hiding and set them up distilling again that product on which the world turns.

smuggling = great equalizer

There were disconsolate times, and people lowered their heads as if to say, "Go on, then. Beat away as much as you like." And the smugglers who had become accustomed to changes in the weather: suns, moons, clouds, snows, rains were suddenly enveloped by something that seemed suspended in the air—and that "something" seemed to trail invisible strands of grief that entered into their smuggler's hardened hearts. At such times, the boys put their hands over the rails of wagons they followed, and walked silently, accompanied by the groaning melody of the turning wheels. Old Shayke sat in the wagon, deaf and silent, his eyes closed as he recalled old thoughts, the way a cow rechews her cud. Recalling, rechewing for the hundredth time a particular thought about his children: his grandson was still sick; and he had had no word from his son. And what's to come? What's still to come? "How much longer can I keep wandering?"

And Dovid, too, was snoozing as he sat, his head rocking until he slumped all the way down and lay with his head on good Stasha's lap—she who was such a help to him, either at hauling goods or at talking their way out of a scrape. And then he dreamed strange dreams in which strange things were revealed to him. Sometimes the dreams frightened him and he woke and did all he could, though it proved difficult, to drive them away. He had first to remind himself of his grandmother who had died three years ago; then of his dead father; and of God in Heaven. But finally, he could not rid himself of those thoughts no matter what he did. Which proved, he thought, that he was far gone in sin and that Hell would be the least of his punishments. Because why else would a boy—a thirteen-year-old—dream such awful dreams. And now he touched something soft; something that sent warmth coursing through every vein in his body. Something smooth after which he felt something sweet, so sweet. He begin to feel about, more and more quickly flushed with heat. He lowered his head and felt how his mouth touched the softness. His lips widened, and he kissed the warm place joyfully the way he once kissed whatever was holy. But nothing he had ever touched before had created such heat in him; such a bright fire. And why was it happening to him? He seemed unable to think clearly; he seemed to have forgotten everything. He forgot and kissed again and again. . . .

Such dreams. Dovid had such experiences on those sad, dark, rainy nights.

Once, when the three young gentile women had first taken to riding with Pantl, he woke and, still half asleep, thought he was home. And it seemed to him that his mother called him, and he got up and tried to go to her but he kept bumping into various seated people. Then he fell. All around him it was dark, pitch dark, and there was a storm outside and rain was coming down in torrents. As in a deluge. And he heard the young gentile woman saying, "What is it?"

And Pantl's voice, "Are you asleep? Are you asleep?"

And he held his breath, like a thief. And though it was pitch dark he kept his eyes shut so that it would be seen that he was asleep.

And then there was another time, when he was getting down from the wagon in Warsaw, when it was already daylight. He was standing on the ground and was just reaching for his bundle, which had been on the seat. Just then Nacia,° starting to get down from the wagon, put out her foot, which made tentative movements as it searched for the ground. And he saw a portion of her naked leg and felt his heart racing and the coursing of something soft and caressing through his blood.

One of the three Polish whores brought from Warsaw to act as sexual bait on the road.

But Raytshl, wrapped in the wet strips of meat, looked off into the distance like a *golem*. She was remembering the bit of cloth from Dzierdiew that she had bought, anticipating her wedding; and the six shirts she had bought at a bargain from Minke, who sold needlework; and she was thinking what sort of shoes to buy for the holiday.

Sometimes, too, a tall, respectable Jew, with a long white beard, wearing a merchant's topcoat and a stiff hat traveled with them. He sat among the smugglers, never taking his eyes from the traveling bag he held in his hand. Everyone asked himself the same question, "Who is the fellow, and is he also a smuggler?" Everyone felt constrained by his presence. But he paid his way, and in advance; and never said a word throughout the trip. A royal figure, but nobody knew that his children, doctors and engineers, had left the country. Only one daughter remained. She still had an infant at her breast, and her husband was off in the war. They had been struggling for more than a year, using up the capital of their business so that they finally sold everything they had in the house. Side boards, tables, chairs, sold for trifling sums. What was there left to do? The children did not write. They had to do something. "What the others can do, you can do." So he had put on his stiff hat, like one going on some honorable business and, on a market day, had gone to get some eggs or butter, or flour, and brought it to Warsaw. Quietly, calmly, he went into a little shop and sold what he had and brought the profits home. The smugglers knew nothing of this, and yet they were respectful of him, though why they could not have said.

Sometimes on a moonlit night old Shayke sat about telling tales of rabbis and wizards. Everyone listened, and as the tales were being told, they looked out of the wagons toward the silent fields. Their eyes wandered. There was a gleam of silver hovering over the night. And when the old man stopped talking, they felt themselves overwhelmed with lassitude, with such a sense of generosity that if someone were to come by just then who needed money, they would have given him a twenty-fiver at his first word.

But when they arrived in Warsaw, all of that vanished at once. Young men and women raised their heads alertly and did what they could to get rid of the "corpse" as they called their goods and to get their hands on "live" jingling coins.

And when they get back to town, everyone rushes home, leaving Pantl, his sons and Nacia beside the wagon. Each of the wagoners by now has his own "bride." Right from the start Blind Grunim, who rode with Yenkl-With-the-Sheepskin-Cap, brought his "bride" into his home. He told his wife to get out of bed. "Enough lying about," he said, and his gentile woman went to sleep in her bed.

At first, this created a scandal in the town. "Well, young folks," people said, "Young folks are young. But married men with wives, fathers of children—ugh."

Grunim's wife raised the roof. Tore her hair and tore at him—insulted and shamed him until one day he said, "You don't like it? Then you can leave the house."

To which she replied, "God damn you to hell. And what about the children?"

"Then stew in your juice and don't say a goddamn word."

And it was said that he beat her. That he had beaten her black and blue. When people started to interfere, he turned his blind eye on them so that they felt their blood curdling in their veins. "Who wants to pick a fight with that gangster, Grunim?"

His wife's brother, a shoemaker, grabbed him by the throat one day and said, "You can choose to live or die. Are you going to get rid of that gentile woman?"

And didn't Grunim just grab a knife and drive it into the shoemaker's hand. The fellow's still wearing a bandage.

And if even the older married men had "brides," why should the younger men feel any embarrassment? And Pantl felt none. One day he said to his wife, "Listen. Don't you dare say a word to me about it."

She did him one better. When the gentile woman came to the house, Pantl's wife got out of bed herself. "If I hadn't, he'd have put her into his own bed."

And that's how it was. When Glikl heard the horses snorting and shaking their manes, or the clatter of their hooves as they were being led into the stable; or simply when she heard the wagon pulling up before the house, she was already standing there wearing her slippers and her short velvet skirt. "No point in discussing it with her. . . ." And they would go to bed: Pantl in one bed and the gentile woman in the other, covering themselves with the bedclothes. Sleeping soundly.

Sometimes the pregnant Glikl was overwhelmed with shame when she remembered that she was approaching her time. And an unusual pain tugged at her heart when she remembered the early days when they had just begun smuggling. So she ran to her father's house and complained to him, pouring out her bitter grief.

The old man listened and then said angrily, "Ugh. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. To say such things about your own husband. What do you want him to do? He supports you, doesn't he? Is there food in the house? You're not running out of potatoes? Then what do you want? There are many women who would give a lot to be in your shoes. To have such a breadwinner."

So she sat there looking like a fool. The old man stood up, looked at her and laughted, "Ha, ha, ha. You'd best say nothing at all. Do you see? Who do you expect will pay for the baby's circumcision feast? Eh?"

She burst into tears, and he was touched. Old Dovid took his knotted walking stick and, bent double, he went to see his son-in-law to talk things over with him. He went into the kitchen and sat down at the table and looked around. "Ah, ah, a prosperous house, God be thanked." But when his daughter pulled at his sleeve, gesturing, he stood up and went to the bedroom door, opened it slowly and went in. What he saw there, no one knows because he never said a word about it. What he did was to run from the room back into the kitchen. He ran as fast as he could. Then, slamming the door, he stood leaning on his stick, as if he meant with his own body to prevent anyone's entering. He made no reply to his daughter, who had just asked him something. He put his finger to his lips and said, "Shhhhhhh."

A moment or two later, he put on his hat and, with his finger still at his lips, he went away. Only when he was out in the street did he say, "Oh my, what a young man can do. Oh my—with his own wife in the house. Oh my, my . . ."

But Glikl got used to it. Sometimes when Pantl was out and she needed money, she would go to the gentile woman and get from her what she needed. And when some of the smuggled goods were confiscated, she would sit down and talk with her about what had happened and how much had been confiscated and what was taken from whom.

The young woman described it all at great length and Glikl listened, nodding her head, "Yes, yes."

In the evening—the gentiles are sitting in the house. Outside there's still plenty of daylight, but inside the house the cheap lamp is already burning and there are shadows of men and bundles on the wall. And the gentile men and women lie down together in the shadows, and there is the sound of giggling from their direction. Pantl comes in and says that the wagon is ready. Only the seats need to be readied. Then everyone gets up, and they prepare the bundles to go just as Fayfke and Jurek° come in, arm in arm and drunk as can be, singing some strange song and stamping their feet. Behind them, sounding the refrain, harmonizing with them like a choir, come Itshele in the lead and all of their friends. Mendl hears them in the courtyard and stops working with the seats, leaves the wagon and comes running into the house to slap his friends on the shoulder and they have to start their song from the beginning°:

A non-Jew.

This song is in Polish.

We drive out of town,
Contraband in the wagon's our own.
Refrain: We drive, we drive on in fear. . . .
On the road, the watchmen stand,
In Warsaw there's money to spend,
Money to hold in our hands.
And happy, we drive till we sing
At home with one voice in a ring:
Refrain: We drive, we drive on in fear. . . .

That was the song of the smugglers, more or less, as Fayfke and Jurek sang it—with the lead singers on one side and the chorus on the other. . . . The song went on as all of the smugglers, laughing and whistling their approbation, crowded

around, falling over gentile men and women. That song that captured within it the smugglers' thoughts and deepest feelings. The song that Fayfke and Jurek had made themselves.

1920

62 Revolutionary Chapters

HAYYIM HAZAZ

I

The war went on and would not be stopped. On the contrary, it proved futile to hold it to any schedule or limit. At no prearranged time would the land be quiet, not at harvest time not near winter, and not in the spring.

At harvest time, and near winter, and also in the spring it was as if the war had just begun setting to work in earnest.

Like a pot left on the fire: the water starts simmering and is about to come to a boil.

In short, all the filth and noxious scum rose to the surface. Rasputin, secret spies, a wireless hidden in a Holy Ark in the House of Study, alas, a windmill somehow waving its sails and transmitting signals to the Germans, Jews driven out, old Jews hanged on trees as spies . . .

And the whole country, from one end to the other, full of war, darkness, poverty and the fear of sudden death.

Man and all his generations perished!

Sons called to the army shortened their years as much as possible, violating their faces and shaving their whiskers very, very close every day, to remain boys, absolute youngsters, while the fathers added on years and grew older and older—

But to no avail!

The war visited fathers and sons together, old man and youth—no one was exempt.

Old and young, fathers and sons, all together joined the army! Everyone in the world took up a gun, shaking arms and legs, walking from the barracks to the bathhouse, humming tunes.

"No end to her, damn her!" men shouted to themselves and to their comrades. "What's to be done about the bitch?"

Eventually, but not necessarily at the appointed time, when the Revolution occurred, the dream came true at last. Then everyone was like a dreamer°: joyful, surprised, a bit apprehensive, as one is sometimes surprised and apprehensive after a dream.

Ps. 126:1.

Even the heavens and earth seemed to have been created only to assist the dream: blue skies, sparkling and fresh. . . . The snow melted outside, and the heavens were planted in their waters, the roofs were scoured and dripped bright drops of water. A cool breeze blew. And people were drawn outside, walking in crowds, bright, glowing, like throngs of blind men, singing, raising their voices, shouting, and yelling—they truly withdrew their souls from their bodies! Weeping, they hugged and kissed each other, red flags fluttered in the breeze above their heads and the wheel of the sun shone and rolled above them, and it seemed as though the throngs led the wheel of the sun wherever their spirit happened to take them. . . .

War had not yet fallen silent in the land. But now it was of another degree, another degree and a different flag.

"War with no annexation or confiscation," the formula passed from mouth to mouth.

This was the motto of Kerensky, who headed the provisional government.

"War to the final victory!" some said.°

School children learned how to deliver those proclamations and spread them throughout the world.

The deserters, who had hidden in corners all during the war, became human again and emerged into daylight.

A huge mass of people marched through the streets toward the railroad station, all of them bearing rifles with a song on their lips:

"Arise, ye workers of the people! . . ."

The deserters made a great name for themselves in town. . . .

Nevertheless, the benefit proved to be flawed. How is that?

The reason is, to borrow from Torah cantillation, that *darga*, the rising note, precedes *tevir*, the falling one.°

Thus said Reb Simcha Horowitz.

Reb Simcha was an expert Torah reader, a true connoisseur of notes and signs.

Then the word got out: the soldiers have mutinied. . . . They've had their fill of war. . . . Impossible to keep them in the trenches . . .

"Of course! They aren't laying hens, and who could get them to hatch these?"

Conspirators pressed and insinuated themselves into the crowds, grumbling:

"An end to the war! True liberty!"°

This was Lenin's position.

Also Henya Horowitz, Reb Simcha's daughter, had plenty of demands:

"An end to the war! Enough!"

"Everyone will immediately stop what he's doing and listen to you," Reb Simcha chided his daughter. "Don't mix into other people's business!"

"Let them put an end to the imperialist war!" Henya spoke in denunciation.

That is just the phrase she used: "the imperialist war!"

Henya had an infernal spirit, a rotten pest, not a maiden, an agent of destruction! Since the confusion of tongues,° no tongue was ever found like Henya's.

After the Tower of Babel.

"Do you really think," Reb Simcha asks her, "that since I never studied geography and Sherlock Holmes, I lack all understanding?"

Why, she couldn't see the strength of his position at all! . . .

Round and round revolved the wheel. Events took a bad turn and sprouted up like weeds in the land. The front collapsed and soldiers flowed up out of all the fields and the paths over the mountain crests, they and all their hordes—horror! The whole land rumbled before them.

As though through an open door, they passed through the town.

Generally speaking: the war was abandoned.

"It must be because the town is situated in the center of the earth," says Reb Simcha, "right in the middle, and that's why those passing through here are so numerous they cannot be reckoned up in real numbers, with no end to them. . . . And perhaps the soldiers have lost their course, and they go back and forth, back and forth, because the earth is round, and since those marchers have no set and determined longitude, they come back again and again."

Yes, that brigade had already been through once, like a rat trapped in a maze, without officers or military equipment, with only a large cooking pot, on their way to their home country somewhere. . . . Then, the first time around, they had stood, perishing with empty bellies. They broke into all the ovens and removed the *cholent* and all the Sabbath food, without the tiniest leftover, cleaning everything out spotlessly, and they sat in the center of the marketplace and ate away their hunger and pain, even dancing and celebrating. Now the brigade came back, the very same one with the same quality—as borne out by their looks: without officers and without military equipment, only a large cooking pot. . . .

"What's this?" the townsmen explain to them. "We are of the opinion that you have already gone through here once."

"No, no, not us," the answer. "That is, we have not yet gone through. We are considered another brigade, so to speak."

As it seemed, they spoke the truth. Since they left without breaking into the ovens.

Such righteousness!

"Happy are we and happy our lot," says Reb Simcha, "that surveyors are not commonly found amongst us. For if that were not so, those splendid orators and all the public speakers who have risen up over us would propose and demand miles and long miles and plots of land. . . . Now, since we have only storekeepers, those speakers will offer up their deceitful arguments and claims and all their imaginary assurances according to the length of their own yardstick.

"They have one title—Bolshevik! Such a sect. Jewish sinners. Blast their souls for having studied the Revolution with Rashi's commentary! Not the literal meaning, but the homiletic meaning: what's mine is yours, and what's yours is mine. . . . And their ulterior evil intention is visible to everyone who is at all knowledgeable about them."

In one swoop like the tail of a comet, in the wink of a single eye, the plague spread through the world: bolshevism.

"The world is holding a memorial service," says Reb Simcha, "and so all the minors with parents still living have been set loose!"°

All the young people and boors have usurped the birthright and begun ruling, even Henya has been made a commissar. A regular commissar.

The worms in the earth would wreak less destruction than they!

"Absolute redemption!" Henya girded her loins against Reb Simcha and mixed things up. "Now redemption has come to the proletariat! . . . The rule of workers and peasants . . . Wars will cease, poverty and slavery will be no more, no oppressors and no oppressed."

In short, the whole world is grace, mercy and peace. And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb. . . .°

According to custom, those with parents still living exit the synagogue during Yizkor, the memorial service for the dead.

Isa. 11:6.

A rotten pest, not a maiden! The spirit of redemption throbs in her breast! . . . Just get a load of her theories and doctrines! Try and plead a case against her!

Bad, bitter, helpless. There is no restoration in the world, no one setting things right. What has come to pass! . . .

"Where are you going, comrades?" Reb Simcha shouts, confused and distraught. "What are you doing for the bitter sorrows of our soul?"

The comrades, armed to the teeth, reply:

"Remember this, old age, and pay heed: the whole land is in the hands of the aroused people. Don't you wish to go along with the people in their uprising?"

"Have pity and mercy, comrades, for you are murderers, armed robbers, oh Lord of the universe."

"Spare us your poetry, comrade Reb Simcha, your Lord of the universe has created a new spirit within us—to raise the edifice, to give it an upper story."

Those are the words of Henikh the carpenter to Reb Simcha, and as he speaks, he raises his hand high and calls out:

"True, comrade! . . . We agree!"

"The Holy One blessed be He created a will in us, to submit our will to His blessed will!" Reb Simcha shouts to Henikh.

"Look, look!" Henikh thrusts his callused, soiled hands in Reb Simcha's face. "Did you see? We don't know how to study the Mishnah! Since the start of this imperialist war, I haven't set eyes on a book. Understand?"

Another "sinner" like that went up to Reb Simcha, stared at him with murderous, robber's eyes, as though to slay him:

"You old dog's nose, where are you sticking yourself, eh? If I step on your foot, you'll be lame. If I crush you in my closed fist, you'll no longer exist. Old louse!"

A second sinner walked up to Reb Simcha, yawned in his face as if he were a dog, took his hand and pushed him to the side, saying:

"Get out of here."

To be sure, Reb Simcha left. By the skin of his teeth, you could say, he slipped away from the murderers and hid in a cellar beneath his house.

Nothing restrains those heretics! All who are compassionate have compassion for Israel. All dwellers in the dust will beg for mercy.°

Cf. Isa. 26:19.

The next Sabbath Reb Simcha was called to the Torah and made the benediction for escaping death.

II

The world is mad, the world is satanical, torn to shreds. Band after band, piled up and confused, quarrel with each other, speaking in floods of words. Life is enveloped with hunger and blood, dread and darkness. And the mainstay, scattering hunger and blood and dread and darkness from one end to the other, is comrade Polishuk.

The winds snatched up that fine comrade and brought him to the town!

"Authorization," people reported. "He has one in his pocket from Petrograd itself, to put things right.

And people even found it amazing: a young man of short stature, skin and bones, tattered and worn, and he sets out to conquer towns and cities—what a man! People tried to avoid direct encounters with him. They knew that he had an

authorization from Petrograd itself and that he came swooping down in a train bearing a sign in red letters: "Death to the Bourgeoisie!"

Comrade Polishuk took up residence in the home of Reb Simcha. Henya herself brought him.

Reb Simcha was secretly fuming, grumbling to himself about the comrades, men and women, and their evil seed. Finally he became reconciled: "Very well, let him stay. What can we do? Eventually he'll probably go away. Perhaps a spirit from on high will be aroused in him, and he'll go. Perhaps the blessed Lord will grant that his days be short."

So he stayed. He stayed in the large *zal*. He slept on the old sofa. He folded his coat beneath his head and slept. At his head, on the wall, hung his rifle, and on the table the pistol and several deadly pellets scattered about.

"I wouldn't make room for anyone else in the *zal*," says Reb Simcha. "Only for you."

Comrade Polishuk smiled as if to say: "As though it depended only upon you and your wishes."

It was evident right away: fine fruit! . . . A vicious foe, inside and out!

"What is the main reason for your coming here?" asks Reb Simcha.

Reb Simcha wants clear and straightforward information.

"To put things in order," Polishuk answers vaguely.

"Well," Reb Simcha offers advice, "put things in order so those bastards won't be bastards!"

"That's not my job," Polishuk says with a sneer, the words trickling drop by drop, even freezing.

It looks as though he himself is quite a bastard. If only the house would vomit him forth forever.

Thus thought Reb Simcha, putting his hand over his mouth.

But what comrade Polishuk left obscure during the day, he clarified at night. His sleep told the story. Night, darkness and silence—suddenly he was hauled from his bed as though a fire had broken out in the house, perish the thought, and he paced irregularly back and forth in the room looking for some kind of bomb.

"It's me . . . me," Henya takes him by the hand every now and then. "It's me, comrade Polishuk!"

"Happiness at last!" Reb Simcha was annoyed at his daughter. "It's me, it's me! . . . Leave him alone, please."

In short, that was the only telltale sign of who that person really was.

Day by day the town declined, oppressed in low spirits and heavy with melancholy and mute silence, like a deserter.

"No doubt," says Reb Simcha, "Like a deserter, like a number of deserters all in the same place.

"Now these are the three categories essential to a person's needs: children, life and food. None is quite in the shape it ought to be; quite to the contrary.

"The children are bastards, criminals, sinners, Amalekites, not children. Life is nothingness, absolute zero, inimical to the heart and soul. And as for food, it's extremely dear when it's to be found at all!

"But it is known to those who know, and the truth is, as it is written: behold the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him. . . .°

Ps. 33:18.

"Only the problem is known too: where did those Jewish sinners come from, who at first were neither seen nor known at all?

"Since the souls of all the Jews come from the same place, and things taken from the same place are a single entity through and through, it follows that every Jew is implicated in his fellow Jew's sin, for they are a single building. Like the body, for example, if the feet rush off to do evil, isn't the evil in the whole bodily frame?

"The difficulty: where were all those cruel, evil bastards and sinners taken from? And Thy whole nation is righteous?°

Isa. 60:21.

"*Gevald!*"° Reb Simcha shouts to himself. "Robbers, murderers! Yet all of Israel are responsible for one another,° so what are you going to do?"

Yiddish for "Help!"

Shevuot 39a and elsewhere.

Daily they came to the town. Some in sheepskins and others in greatcoats and still others in leather jackets. What they all had in common was that they were all bastards. . . .

Daily they came to the big stores owned by Brilliant and by Margolin and that of Hayyim Zelig the blacksmith, and they loaded wagons full of goods. Then they went their way.

"Anarchy! The world is lawless! Liberty is abroad in the world," grumbled Reb Simcha. "Only there's no freedom from robbery and theft, only there's no freedom from the enemies of the Jews, from 'thou shalt murder,' and from 'thou shalt steal,' and from 'bear false witness against thy neighbor.' "

"Are things good this way?" Reb Simcha challenged Polishuk. "How does it seem to you, comrade Polishuk, is it good this way?"

"Thank God," answered Polishuk. "Nothing's wrong. One could even say it's good . . . a Bolshevik doesn't know how to complain."

Reb Simcha cannot bear it any longer. His heart is hot within him. He cannot simply stand there because of his anger and the coursing blood.

"Good? Good? Get out of my house! . . . Right away! Get out! This is my house! Mine! M-i-n-e."

Polishuk measured Reb Simcha with his eyes, at his own pace, slowly, with his eyelids and eyebrows, slowly, as though wishing to root him out of his sight and remove him seven cubits from the face of the earth. Then he looked at Henya and gave another glance at Reb Simcha, turned his back, and left.

"You get out too, you hussy!" Reb Simcha was boiling with angry rage. "Bolshevik! . . . I won't stand for it! . . . Not for a single minute! . . . Get out! . . . May your names and memories be blotted out, sinners, boors, carpenters' and shoemakers' apprentices!"

That very day Polishuk returned, took up his rifle and went to live in the bathhouse.

Fear then seized Reb Simcha to hear about such a person—a madman like that, God in heaven!—going to live in the bathhouse! Then Reb Simcha even regretted the whole affair. But regret is not the stuff of a merchant. "Let him break his skull and neck! To the bathhouse—the bathhouse, the devil take him! And may everyone else 'from his abode'° be equally blessed!"

Liturgical appropriation of Ezek. 3:12.

A good man is comrade Polishuk, and a better one is comrade Soroka—so similar looking!

With the town like a wide open door, if you please! Some leave, some enter:

disturbers of the peace, ruffians, their unsavory faces skinned, their eyes mad and evil. . . .

On foot came comrade Soroka on the road leading up from the woods. Walking, sheepskins on his head, a military coat hanging on his back and dragging a small machine-gun behind him by a rope held in his hand. . . .

That very night, in the stillness of the dark, came a shriek from the steam power station in the village of Svirodovka, and on all sides the sky turned fiery red.

Dread and fearful silence spread through the whole town.

From mouth to mouth: "What happened? What happened? What happened?"

From mouth to mouth:

"Fire in Czupowski's manor."

"Fire in Kowalewski's manor."

"Fire in Count Branicki's manor."

The whole town was surrounded by fire on all sides and stood hiding with its face covered as though by a crow's wings.

The steam power station shrieks. The church bells strike with a great din. Dogs howl at their masters' heads, and a storm rolls through the air, raising itself ever higher and piling up like a huge mountain, flying and passing by with a howl, pulling the treetops after it. . . . And suddenly, in the meanwhile, an oppressive silence, the peace of death . . .

Now the sky was bright and clouds of smoke and flames wander and roam. Comrade Polishuk went down on his knees before the snowy plain, stretched his arms before him and cried out:

"Revolution, behold, Ha-ha-ha!"

"Revolution, ha-ha-ha!" Henya repeated after him.

They looked at each other and leapt into each other's arms. . . .

Night after night the sky burned around the town. Night after night the sky was red, flaming and smoky, without stars or constellations.

It was as though comrade Soroka wished to uproot not only the stars and constellations, but also all the angels, as it were, the seraphim and heavenly host.

For nights and weeks the sky was wrapped in flame.

All those weeks Soroka was never seen in town. Until once he came and went through the street: sheepskins on his head, a military coat hanging on his back, and his fingers were reddish blue as though uprooted, pulling behind him a small machine-gun on a rope, and so he walked, clanging with an iron key:

"Arise, ye workers of the people!"

Of all the huge quantity of booty stolen by the peasants from the noblemen's estates, Soroka took for himself only an iron key that had fallen from a smashed door.

Soroka's voice was heard from the street. Immediately all the comrades, men and women, leaped up and went out, shouting, "Hoorah!" "Long live the rule of the workers and peasants!" With a waving of hats and hands in the air, they raised their voices in the "Internationale."

At the sound of the song, comrade Soroka stood at attention, stretching his whole body upwards, turned his stern face to the side and raised his hand in a salute. . . .

The crowd took hold of comrade Soroka by his arms and legs, picked him up in the air, carried him in their hands, bearing him to the council building.

A mass of men pressed at the entrance, and Jews from everywhere were drawn after them as though to a circumcision or bar mitzvah.

Soroka stood in the middle of the room, extended his hands to all present and spoke:

"Ha, shake my hand, but hard! . . . Even though you're no Bolshevik, as I can see, and not at all different from a bourgeois, nevertheless, shake, as I am a Jew."

That evening, in comrade Polishuk's residence, in the bathhouse, festivities and celebration.

The whole band of comrades from the town, men and women, gathered at the bathhouse.

Polishuk kept the commandment of offering hospitality in proper fashion. Nothing necessary for a celebration was lacking, neither food nor drink.

By candlelight all the comrades, men and women, sat in a circle on logs and inverted tubs, indulging themselves with lard, pickles, brandy and tea. They drank tea in famous fashion: wrapped in towels till the seventh degree of sweat°—one slurping from a cup, another from a soldier's mess tin and yet another from a plate with Hebrew writing in red letters on a white background: "Bread and salt shalt thou eat, and reap the truth."

A Russian custom, to order a towel along with the tea.

At midnight, when their hearts were gladdened with eating and drinking, they shook the benches and beams of the bathhouse with their mighty dancing, as much as their legs could dance.

From the hole in the oven, flames reached out and licked the sooty bricks. The stones heaped up around the boiler turned black, and splinters of flame flickered. Above the boiler a thick column of steam rose to the beams of the black ceiling and veiled the benches. Heels pounded. The bodies were linked in a single chain, spinning, rocking, a chain of whirling skirts, red shirts and gun-belts, boots, wild hair, shouted song, whistles, sudden outcries and guttural, throaty sounds. . . . Everything in the bathhouse danced dizzily: the boiler and the stones, the ritual bath and the regular bathtub, old bundles of twigs, piles of full sacks and even comrade Gedalia hopped on his crutch.

Then the poor bathhouse, torn in roof and ribs, saw joy, one joy for all the days to come! The homes of rich landlords and officials in their glory were never honored with even a sixtieth of that honor from the time that the temple—the temple of the bathhouse—was a bathhouse. Truly that was a happy occasion!

But what was even more marvelous was the end, the end of the celebration!

The festivities, the singing and dancing were like the air all around, invisibly filling up space, like something not properly understood.

At the end of the night, when everyone was acting in his own way and dancing according to his own nature: one prancing on an upper bench and another hopping inside the empty, steaming bathtub, someone shouting: "Help! Help!" and someone else had made himself into a wagon and rolled along the floor on his belly—comrade Polishuk fled outside as though mad with worry and anger. He ran to the river and plunged in through a crack in the ice.

The other comrades noticed immediately and raised a panicked outcry. The women wept and wailed, the men ran with iron tools, laboring to crack the ice, some hastily smashing it, others peering into the black water. . . . Shouts all around, then suddenly a dreadful silence, the howl of the snowstorm, fear and

dread and the sound of breaking ice. Suddenly Polishuk's head gleamed on the rushing water. . . . Hubbub, racing about, shouting, shoving . . . Polishuk was stuck between chunks of ice. Looking about him, supported by the arms reaching to him, he jumped up out of the river, healthy and strong, running to the bathhouse on his own feet with the whole crowd behind him—in a noisy, rushing tangle.

In the bathhouse all the comrades pressed around the one standing there, trembling in all his limbs, everyone astonished and enjoying the sight.

Soroka stood above him, gave him brandy to drink, hugged him and kissed him on his blue lips, asking how he felt:

"Is your soul restored? Is your soul restored, tell me, hey!"

Henya cried and laughed, wrung her hands, cried and laughed, and all the others hastened to do something, making loud noises to each other.

"*Mazel tov! Mazel tov!*" cried out Polishuk and enthusiastically animating his blue face and leaping into the steam room, with Henya after him. Henya was nearly crushed between the door and the frame.

The whole crowd wandered around the room in little groups, everyone by himself, but all together in a single mass, dark, moving, singing in joy and enthusiasm:

"*Mazel tov! Mazel tov! Mazel tov!*"

Nothing like it had ever been heard.

Only Soroka stood at the door of the steam room and shook his head from side to side, clapping to the sound of the singing and shouting:

"To kill the lion in the well on a snowy day!"°

Such a high level of devotion.

Apparently the lyrics to a Russian song.

III

Deeds that make the heart soar, not sermons or clever speech and the like, truly inspiring actions, at the sight of which a person might even forget to rub his own flesh—such were Soroka's. Fire!—Here it is, ho! Fiery flames and the sight of torches . . . The noise of war—that too is good, you might say!

But Soroka's spirit fell, and he sat in front of his machine-gun, ripped a page from a Menshevik° pamphlet and rolled himself cigarette after cigarette.

A Social Democrat who, after November 1917, was officially opposed to the policies and methods of the Bolshevik Party.

"In this world every dog is stuck to his own tail," Soroka argued with the machine-gun. ("In this world every dog is stuck to his own tail.")

For a few days the little machine-gun listened to that general observation, which was spoken and reiterated a hundred times or more, until Soroka stood up, shook his head as though shaking a heavy burden from his shoulders, spat in his palm, and said:

"May the seven spirits be in your navel!"

He girded his loins with his pistol, left the bathhouse, and went out into the street. He passed by as though to say, "I am a king and worthy of it!"

People saw him walking in the street that way and cursed him roundly:

"President, stones in his guts! . . . Look how he's walking! . . . A parade like that. . . . Lord, may such a presidency collapse, ha? Nu? . . . Is there still any reason to live in this world?"

Where did Soroka go that way, standing erect and taking straight steps? Impossible to say he knew clearly where he was going, in any case, not to the council building, certainly not. . . .

in the council building they're always giving speeches, scheming in speeches, death to them! Quickly get yourself a pair of ears and stand and listen. . . . Soroka avoided speeches like poison!

Nevertheless, Soroka did go to the council building. An important reason brought him there. He came with something to say:

"Yes, comrades, there will be a union of Jewish soldiers—that's all there is to it!"

No words, no arguments, no putting off were of any avail.

Soroka was not one to scatter his words to the winds.

"Yes, comrades, there will be a union of Jewish soldiers, and not only that! This is how. . . ."

Councils of counselors met to take counsel, discussed, argued, pondered and debated, squabbled with each other in good order.

"Well, comrades!" Soroka stood at their head. "Have you decided yet? Yes? . . . I want to be allotted five hundred rifles immediately, twenty machine-guns, three hundred hand grenades and five hundred pistols! . . . Is it signed yet? Comrade Polishuk, it seems to me you have all the qualities needed to become a clear-minded Bolshevik. Is it signed yet? Comrade Polishuk, don't tell me stories from when your grandmother was a bride. Is it signed yet?"

The mandate was written out and signed and delivered to Soroka.

The union was established.

A staff and duties and sergeants were appointed.

The head of the union, comrade Soroka, rode like a hero, as is proper, mounted on a fiery steed.

The assistant to the head of the union was comrade Gedalia, the man with the crutch, and like comrade Soroka he rode on a tall horse, tied into the saddle with ropes, proud and glorious, edifying the entire assembled crowd with looks from his black eyes.

In vain the astonished people wondered:

"Who made an army out of the Jews?"

Not only that, Motl Privisker the teacher instructed Reb Simcha that Shamgar Ben-Anath, who smote six hundred Philistines, did so with an oxgoad,° and was redeemed through him, Motl Privisker, the teacher of young boys. For the word "oxgoad," *malmad habakkar*, can also mean a *melamed*, a teacher of young oxen, who hits his pupils to make them learn. And those six hundred were an esoteric reference to the six Orders of the Mishnah. . . .

Judg. 3:31.

But when that force of Jewish soldiers passes through the street, ordinary mortals had better pay up in good coin and regard that pleasurable spectacle—

That is what Motl Privisker himself says.

"Comrades," Soroka spoke to his army. "Take heed: Like a drum major, look! This is how you should march! . . .

"One two, one two!"

After much labor and effort the job was finished and Soroka was idle again.

Soroka had only to sit and wait for coming events.

But such conduct was foreign to Soroka's way and nature.

And events did not tarry.

One snowy and sunny day, the market was stunned. The Jews laid aside their business and fled: they were prepared, anticipating a pogrom.

"Because of the flour," they reported, "because they supposedly give the Jews the finest, and the gentiles get only dura flour."

The council members arose and tried to address the gentiles who had surrounded the cooperative store, using soft language:

"Comrades! Comrades!"

In response, the roar of the mob:

"Can't we eat bread fit for humans? . . . The Jews get fine flour! . . . A Jewish kingdom! . . . Clobber him, that dwarf! . . . He's a bourgeois, you can tell by his pockets. . . .

"Comrades! . . . Comrades!"

Then Soroka went through the market with his band. Not to make war against the goyim, but just to show them how soldiers march in good order and how they sing. . . .

The goyim immediately noticed it and fell silent. At the same time everyone was made to comprehend perfectly well, visibly and palpably, the yellow dura bread that the Jewish women brought out of their houses for proof.

"Dura bread too, for example, so what do you have to say?" The goyim kneaded the crusts of bread with their hands and put it in their heavily bearded mouths, milling it between their molars.

A reference to the curse that turned into a blessing, Num. 22–24.

Go remove Balaam from their mouths,° a thorn in their sides!

IV

Wrapped in their cloaks, Reb Simcha in a tattered fox-skin coat and Motl Privisker in a balding cat-skin coat, the pair of them tried to make a place for themselves at the side of the oven and warm up.

They were both long in years, having completely forgotten how they once were their fathers' and mothers' little boys, yet they still remembered the Garden of Eden well, the angels singing, the Tree of Life in the garden,° and the incorporeity of the Holy One blessed be He. For all that, neither of them knew what "the end of days" might bring.

Based on the folk belief that the unborn soul resides in Paradise.

Motl Privisker sat and crossed his booted legs, placing one foot on the other, flourishing a bottle of brandy now and then, squinting at it, pouring some into his cup, and from there into his mouth, wiping the remnant from his black beard with his sleeve.

The brandy goes down into him like a fiery torch, till it reaches his very heart, making a hot conspiracy with his stomach. A sprite, not brandy! . . .

Reb Simcha likes to sit with Motl Privisker, and each time he honors Motl with these words: "May the blessed Lord help us, may every man take pity on his fellow and may we all be saved soon, amen."

Good taste and discernment has Motl, weighty teachings and wonderfully wise sayings, interpretations of the Bible that delight the listener. . . . A mighty lion in Hasidic wisdom! . . . A rose of esoteric learning!

When Motl Privisker opens his mouth, Reb Simcha can sit and listen to him day and night. All of Israel, the holy nation, each according to his capacity and virtue, will then stand before the eyes of Reb Simcha.

"The Master of the Universe and the Divine Presence are in exile, right and left, flushed and pale with judgment and mercy, the wings of the dove, the wings of the commandments, the matron and the bird's nest, the Jews lie in prayer shawls and phylacteries in exile, and Jannes and Jambres the sons of Balaam,° Remus and Romulus,° the tortuous serpent, the piercing serpent,°° and the two lips that are called flames, and the two apples between which the spirit of the Messiah emerges, and the king bound in stocks. . . ."

In rabbinic legend, magicians who opposed Moses and fashioned the Golden Calf.

Mythical founders of Rome.

Names of the Leviathan in Isa. 27:1.

"Now, Reb Simcha, lay aside the worries that concern you. . . . Lay them aside, I tell you. . . . For when I reflect, Reb Simcha, that I never committed adultery nor murdered, nor did I steal from my fellow, I put on my prayer shawl and phylacteries every day and wash my hands and behave according to the laws of the Torah as ordained by our rabbis of blessed memory and the earlier and later halakhic authorities, and have even exceeded the requirements, no matter what, I am happy with my lot! What do you have to say, hm? . . . *Lekhayim*, Reb Simcha. . . ."

"Ech! . . . E-ech! . . ." Motl Privisker shuts his eyes, stretches his jaws and wags his head. "A sprite, not brandy!"

Tsav in Hasidic usage is brandy with 96 percent alcohol.

"A *Tsavele*,° fine, fine, delightful. . . . It truly gives wings to the soul, E-eh! . . ."

Reb Simcha rubs his shoulders against the stove and says nothing.

Motl Privisker puts the tail of a salted fish in his mouth, chews and slowly pours another cup:

"Fish like to swim.

"Reb Simcha, why? Why are you so down in the dumps?" he continued, "Speak up, foolish man! . . . Vanity of vanities, mud of mud . . . Have a drink and don't let your wings stink! Hm? . . . A glass of brandy is a weighty matter, a matter of ritual purity. . . . It cleanses the filth, the ugliness from the heart, very much so, oy, very much so! . . . Drink a *lekhayim*, I tell you, and return to your proper state."

Motl Privisker empties the cup into his mouth, wipes his mustache with his sleeve, raises a crust of bread up in his hand, leans over to Reb Simcha and whispers in his face:

Motl is quoting bits and pieces from Ezek. 7:5–12.

" 'An evil, behold an evil is coming. . . .° The end is coming, the end is at hand, putting an end to you. . . . It's coming. . . . The designated hour, inhabitant of the land . . . The time is come. . . . The day is close. . . . Turmoil and not the echoes of mountains . . . Let the buyer not be glad nor the seller grieve. . . .' Choice words, Reb Simcha, precious words, deep, deep . . . They should be kissed with great kisses. . . . The whole matter . . . Drink a *lekhayim*, I tell you, and don't be a fool. Ezekiel—brother and friend, I shall make thee learned and wise—is the most remarkable of the twenty-four books of the Bible. . . . Ezekiel is the soul of the twenty-four. . . .° Drink a *Lekhayim* and don't let your body dry out!"

The twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible.

From time to time Motl Privisker empties the cup into his mouth, turns around and hums in Aramaic: "Children, life, food."

Inside, darkness rotted in the dreariness and silence. Outside the wail of the embittered wind could be heard. All of a sudden the winds fell from on high. The house groaned with the crash of the wind, and the howling snow pounded the windows.

"Henya, Henya!" shouted Motl Privisker. "Another piece of bread!"

"Henya! Give me a piece of bread."

"Henya, a maiden reaching those years, an evil spirit in your bones!"

Motl Privisker walks through the room on his soft boots, walks to the window, and stands still.

Outside the window, a deep, broad night, full of drunkenness and turgid whiteness.

"Henya, may a pig gnaw you."

Outside the window—a white orchard, stormy and spinning dizzily in rage, moons and planets, with spirits and angels . . .

"True is it, ha?" Motl Privisker leaps and stands as an adversary to Henya, who has entered with a piece of bread in her hand. "That the world is on the path of truth, hmm?"

"Go away, go, you Hasid, you drunken Jew!"

"Hold your tongue, hussy!" Reb Simcha sits upright. "You'll talk yet!"

"In truth, ha, a maiden reaching those years, an evil spirit in your bones! . . . The truth, eh, is it yours? Does it belong to you? . . . The truth belongs to the Holy One blessed be he, stu—pid! . . . The Lord's seal, youuu shrewww! Ri—ight! . . . *She* discovered the truth! . . . And you are unaware of your foolishness, that you only found the pudendum of truth! . . . And who sent you this face eh? . . . The shape of your mouth and forehead and cheeks, eh?—a maiden reaching those years, an evil spirit in your face!

"My soul is tossing within me," Motl Privisker cries out to Reb Simcha, waving his arms and making a strange motion, "the whole of my inner being!"

He paces back and forth in the room, fumbling in his trouser pockets and talking to himself:

"The pupil of the eye is a mirror . . . a mirror . . . even though it's black. . . . When it disappears, it's an impenetrable thought. . . . And when it appears—at the same time the heavens open and I see divine sights!"

Motl Privisker paces back and forth, returns to his seat, sits next to Reb Simcha, lowers his head and speaks, saying he very much wanted to travel to Ger to see the Rebbe.°

Travel to Ger (Gora Kalwarja) in western Poland was impossible at that time.

Then he says:

"If I had a violin in my hands and could play now . . . I would play such a melody, gathered from running brooks and set with precious stones!"

And then he empties the bottle into his mouth, sitting and speaking incomprehensible words, sketches, drawings, shades of color, toward which he is headed, as it were. . . .

Beriah (creation), yetsira (creativity) and 'assiya (action) are Kabbalistic terms.

"By way of secret," he speaks "Adam . . . Adam of *beriah*° rode on a lion. . . . Turning to the right he sketched roads; and paths—

"And to the left, Adam of *yetsira* rides on an ox and takes fire from his mouth and draws pictures—

"Adam of *'assiya* rides on an eagle, and the spirit in his mouth makes shades of color."

Motl places his hand over his eyes and sits in silence, then he speaks again for a moment:

"Lord of the universe, Lord of the universe! . . . Give my heart wisdom and knowledge to persevere! . . . In what path shall I start upon and persevere? Where shall I begin my effort? What can I do with my soul? Lord, Lord, Lord of the universe, I don't know the meaning at all!"

"Forget it, Motl, forget that confusion," said Reb Simcha. "Leave it be! . . . You've imbibed and gotten drunk like a goy. . . . You'll only dishonor yourself, feh! . . . Tell me, why don't you go back to your wife and children?"

"Leave me be, leave me be. . . . I'm doing something great for the whole Jewish people, and this isn't the time to deal with personal matters."

"Motl, now nothing's stopping you from going home. They aren't conscripting men for the army any more."

"Simcha, Simcha, Simcha! . . . Why are you mixing me up? . . . *Gevald*, why are you disrupting my train of thought!"

Motl Privisker leaps to his feet and starts staggering drunkenly, circling the room.

Then he lies on the hard, narrow bench and speaks to himself.

With an old, shaking hand Reb Simcha pulls down his hat and covers all his gray hair. For long moments they plunged into the depths of oblivion.

Covered with crushing layers of snow, the town stood: veiled, sinking.

Snow—infinite in breadth and height . . .

All around the winds race in brotherhood and friendship, singing in wails.

Above the empty space of the world hangs like a silver lamp, and a storm comes flying and lights up stars and fiery flames in it. . . .

A hairy beast, frightfully white, walks to and fro in the air, grasping the town the way a man might take a nut in his hand, screaming, terrifying with its voice.

As when the Ten Commandments were given at Sinai.

No bird flies above, no man walks below.° The wind comes and picks up the snow like a curtain above, and there, shot through with silver and carried along by the storm, are Polishuk and Soroka on the street.

"Hey, hey, snowstorm! Here we are! Come out, comrade Henya!—Yoo hoo!"

Winnowing storm winds blow, hills are thrown up, white darknesses are flattened.

"Hey, hey, hey!"

White darkness blocks the eyes. Frost plucks at faces.

"First, where to?"

From within the storm:

"There's no first, comrade Henya, and no last!"

"Comrade Henya, the heart exults, the heart is happy, bursting in fiery sparks, hey, hey!" Jumbles of wind whip out and pound from face to face.

"Comrade Henya," Soroka calls from within the storm, "Comrade Henya, tell me: Who am I?"

"You are married!" Henya laughs.

"Comrade Henya, I can't sleep. . . . Do you love me? . . . Do you love me? . . . Tell me!"

"Whom?"

"Me, nu!"

"No . . ."

"Nu, love someone, it's all the same, all the same!"

Henya's eyes, in their coquetry and their laughter, glowed over the field of snow and looked lovingly. Like white columns of smoke the snow flurries rise above Henya's head.

"And the Revolution, eh?"

"Ah—my daughter!"

"Hey, hey! . . . Revolution . . . A-ho-ho!"

The storm rises up and hangs over them.

Pulling each other by the hand, the three of them race into the eye of the storm, in the brilliant wheels of snow, between white, winged fires.

"Hey, hey, hey, my white darkness!"

Henya throws her hands up in the air on both sides.

"Hey, hey—he-hey! . . ."

Roaming towers formed in the air, white sheds journeyed, sheaves of wind flew about and whacked one's face, sharp black things rocked in the whiteness of the opaque space: the storm was set dancing wildly, the one that put eternal generations to sleep, the order of creation, emperors' and kings' sons, houses of study, beards, the Torah, the commandments, and the King of kings, and which raised white tablets between heaven and earth. . .

"Listen, listen—until the soul is lit with pain and light!"

"Hey, hey, as fierce as the revolution."

And from the heart and soul:

"Henya!"

With a loving voice, melting the heart:

"Polishuk!"

"Not that way. I don't want it at all!" cried out Soroka, turning his shoulder and leaving.

"Why are you acting that way, comrade Soroka?" called Henya, and stood in anticipation.

Polishuk began to chuckle.

"What happened to him?" asked Henya.

The white storm whirls and whirls, scattering flames in every wind. The world leaps, screams.

From within the turning storm:

"A third part of thee shall fall by the sword round about thee—and I shall scatter a third to every wind—the evil arrows of hunger—and plague and blood—and I shall bring a sword upon you—.'"°

"Hey, who's there?"

Polishuk and Henya stood still, leaned their heads into the darkness, looked hard, looked and saw: staggering through the snow, a single man, falling and rising, waving his hands, walking, and on his shoulders something like the starry sky all poured out.

"Who's there?"

"It's I, have no fear, I! . . . Wait!"

The wanderer drew near them. It was Motl Privisker.

"Where are you coming from, comrade Motl?"

"From where? . . . From the prophet Ezekiel . . . Yyess!"

They didn't understand what he was talking about.

"From whom?"

"Didn't I tell you? . . . Just now he came . . . You didn't recognize him, ha-ha-ha. I'd never seen Ezekiel in my life. . . . He came and asked: 'Who are you, my son?' 'I,' I answered, 'I'm a certain Reb Motl. . . .' 'Give me an interpretation of my verse, "A third part of thee shall fall by the sword." ' Then I understood right away."

"Nu?" asked Polishuk.

"Nothing at all. I said . . ."

"Nu?" Polishuk asked again.

"Nu? . . . Nothing at all."

"Ezekiel, Ezekiel," laughed Henya. "For the extra glass of brandy he took."

"You, don't laugh!" Motl turned to her. "You, don't laugh! You would do better to go home. Your father doesn't know what to do. He's sitting and crying, crying."

V

It was a bright morning, rough, bristling with frost and snow.

The trees stood drawn like Sukkot palm branches decorated and veiled with marvelous playthings and ornaments—of pure silver.

The houses were sunk in snow and the bright glow.

With joy and song like sharpened knives the snow creaked underfoot.

The frost burned with flames and searing.

On an upturned tub, without raising his head from the ground, sat Soroka before the flaming hole in the furnace.

He had returned to his seclusion with his little machine-gun.

He passed several days just in thought and cogitation.

That day Polishuk transferred his residence from the bathhouse to a room he rented for himself. It was a fine room in every respect. A room that was a house in itself, sitting in a large courtyard, peaceful and quiet.

"Join me," Polishuk spoke to Soroka. "The room's big, and there's only Henya who'll come and live with us."

Soroka delayed his answer, as though weighing his words very very carefully before speaking.

Hardly was the crunch of the snow under Polishuk's feet heard as he went away from the bathhouse, before Soroka sat down and repeated his motto:

"In this world every dog is attached to his own tail."

Soroka hadn't managed to repeat that saying a hundred times before going out and heading for the staff courtyard.

In the staff courtyard Soroka reviewed his men, went out before them, strutted and paced back and forth, stood, and with his second in command, comrade Gedalia at his side, he called out:

"Comrades! At this moment I still have the power to give you orders! Therefore, first: drum major! . . . Second—always remember this: the force of the union of Jewish soldiers has no right not to be hanged, not to be shot, not to be burned and not to be buried alive! . . . Now, friends, as you have heeded me, so shall you heed the head of the union, comrade Gedalia."

The troops were bewildered. A secret voice of complaint passed from one end to the other.

"Comrades!" Soroka made a circle in the air with his arm, "Obey the order! Now your chief will be comrade Gedalia, and I leave you to go to my work and my activities, and the like. . . . I thank you, comrades, for your work and your assistance, may you be well."

"*Kru-gom marsh!*"° comrade Gedalia spoke out after Soroka.

Soroka turned his back and left.

Soroka disappeared, he and his machine-gun together, as though the wind had taken him away, a silent wind, and no one knew where he went.

In Russian, "About face!"

3/4 Motl / Reb Simcha

VI

In Reb Simcha's house, silence and barrenness—enough to make you burst!

Reb Simcha angrily paces about his house, wandering here and there like a colt blasted with rain and wind. Conversation between him and Henya has ceased. He but sees her and turns his head away so as not to look at her impure face.

Sometimes Motl Privisker comes and has a heart-to-heart talk with Reb Simcha:

"If the blessed Lord can sit and see the troubles of the world and keep silent, then we, Reb Simcha, can suffer in silence. Anyway . . ."

He also spoke to Henya:

"Tell me, Henya, wouldn't you ever think: 'What's happening to me?' You're stuck far away, absolutely distant!"

As for Henya, nothing touches her soul, and today passes like yesterday: beautiful as though drafted with a compass, her mouth reddish and her cheeks white. Beauty and splendor.

Grief, grief. Reb Simcha restrains himself. He sits with his feet up in front of the oven, burning logs, and sighing to the oven:

"Oy-oy-oy."

If only Motl Privisker could stifle that grief of his! If he could but be silent or pour his heart out like water in a humble voice and spirit submissive to the very center of his heart! Tears flow from both his eyes without cease.

"You're stuck far away, absolutely distant!"

"Henya, tell me what in the world you're doing? . . . Do you know what in the world you're doing!"

Motl Privisker spoke, giving Henya a look, a look of Reb Motl Privisker's sort, till Henya became completely ill at ease and didn't know where to turn or what to say.

"I ask you, what are you actually doing?"

Motl took large steps and walked across the room, sitting in his chair, putting his head on the table, then raising his head and putting it down again.

"The world is destroyed. . . . The world is destroyed. . . . Oh Lord, Oh Lord . . . The world has gone mad, mad . . . What can we do? What can we d-o-o?"

He stood up and shouted:

"Henya! Henya!"

Then he went back and resumed where he had stopped:

"The world has gone mad, mad. . . . And I'm mad . . . completely. . . ."

"Motl, I am very surprised at you." Reb Simcha broke in. "I'm astonished! What idea have you fixed in your mind?"

"That I shall cut them to pieces!" Motl put a hand over his mouth and turned away from Reb Simcha.

"Motl," Reb Simcha spoke sternly. "I don't understand. What do you expect? Why won't you return to your home and your wife?"

"Not me, not me, teach your *daughter!*" shouted Motl, and his eyes glowed like fire. "There you have someone to instruct!"

Reb Simcha fell silent. He gave up. Motl's eyes almost turned white, but Reb Simcha would not say what should be said at such a moment.

The logs didn't burn. Reb Simcha sighed. He mumbled the first words of the afternoon prayers and dealt with the furnace. He pulled himself together and dealt

A bluish light surrounded the room.

Motl Privisker stood in the corner, swaying and moaning a weepy chant, saying his afternoon prayers. During the central portion of the prayers, when he reached, "Forgive us, our father, for we have sinned," he secretly wept, and tears flowed ceaselessly from both his eyes.

weeps over sin's

VII

Nature proclaims abrogation of divine order

The storms spread out—long, dangling, crooked, smooth and round—and they blasted and blew about freedom on earth and about the end of redemption; about Amens once answered with voices loud and joyous that had since grown silent; about the trilling song and psalm with which congregants, once upon a time, backed up their leader of prayer; about festival feasts that had been disrupted; about grooms and marital honors that had been abrogated—about the Jewish pulse that had gone dead.

The heavens and the earth whistled evening prayers with all the vowels and points of the Torah, but slightly obscure: Je-ho-va-ha—ha-ha! . . . And answering with a "Jee-hee-vee-hee—He! He!" Others echoed, "Jo-ho-vo-ho—Glo-o-ory!"

burying the contraband

And this at the door:

"Knock knock!"

"Who's there?"

"I, Reb Simcha. Open up!"

And before Reb Simcha could close the door:

"Close the door! . . . Close it!"

Reb Simcha closed the door.

"That?" Reb Simcha pointed to a small, loaded sled.

"Where's the axe?"

"Right away, right away."

Motl Privisker's lips were twisted, and his face was pale. His ears were full of the trumpeting and fanfare.

"What are you looking at? Rip up the floor, Reb Simcha!"

"Is everything there?"

Cryptic use of Hebrew titles to describe the contraband.

"Everything except the *Handful* and *The Devil's Skin*."°

"Shh . . . Shh."

In the large *zal*, where the tiniest memory of the goodness and grace of broad, peaceful life still remained, the floorboards were ripped open.

A cold, wet smell wafted up from the bared earth.

Motl Privisker and Reb Simcha bent down over the bared earth like hungry wolves during a storm.

Outside a kind of wolves' howl was heard.

The axe struck softly like teeth.

It was as though they, Motl Privisker and Reb Simcha, were sitting and howling and gnashing their teeth.

19

Boxes of textile well wrapped up were buried.

The work was finished.

The floor was repaired, once more becoming what it was.

"How will it be found? eh, Reb Simcha? How, I ask you, will it be found? No! It will never be found."

Reb Simcha hurried over to the furnace, sat and struggled to make the fire blaze up in the wood in the oven, to heat the house, which had become chilled

Motl Privisker roamed about the room, briskly moving his legs and body.

"The famine years are over, over. . . . What hunger have we, hm? . . . What hunger, I ask you, have we? What is the wickedness of the evildoers for us? Nothing, we shall bear it and suffer! . . . It's nothing. . . ."

The furnace blazed. The wind sent little fiery candles flying.

The fire burned higher and higher.

"Ah, what has been done? What has been done! . . . Tell me, Reb Simcha! . . . What is the Revolution like? . . . Seven times a revolution, and seven times a malignancy! . . . Have no fear, Reb Simcha, my friend, my brother. You have great plenty, great plenty. We lack nothing. . . . Motl is no liar, eh?"

A candle with multiple wicks used at the conclusion of the Sabbath.

The fire of the furnace lit the wall. On the splinters of wood rose budding flowers, braided Havdalah candles, and above them all—a single flame like a large golden censer. Below the wood, on the bottom, coals glowing like bars of pure gold.

"Ah, what has happened!" crowed Motl Privisker and grasped Reb Simcha's belt. "It is not in the heaven . . . nor over the sea . . . not the entente, and not world capital . . . but close, close . . . beneath our feet!"

From outside the snowy window the storm howled about the entente, about world capital, about the worldwide revolution and about the Internationale.

In the howl of the storm could be heard the sound of Henya's triumphant laughter.

"Did you hear? Oh-oh, a girl who's come of age! . . . Ah, why's she laughing, that evil thing."

"Nu-nu?!" Henya's voice came from outside. "Ha-ha-ha."

"Are you coming? . . . Come!" Polishuk's voice.

"Ye-he—he, he!" the sound of the storm.

Reb Simcha was bewildered. He didn't know what to do. He ran about the room, back and forth, sat down again in front of the stove, ran about again.

"Ye-he—he! he!" the sound of the storm at the window.

VIII

By the window, near the place where the wind raged, dresses and shawls floated up, old rags, and felt boots and threadbare, hairy coats, fur caps wandered on the whiteness. The snow gleamed with the cleanliness of teeth, Reb Simcha sat with his white beard falling down over his blue hands, and his spectacles, fixed with strings and iron wires from old "Fialka" bottles,° mounted on his nose.

Perfume derived from flowers.

The wind trumpeted and whistled outside about freedom in the world and the end of redemption, loudly about the silenced response of "Blessed is He and blessed be His name, amen," about Sabbath hymns and *cholent* and *kugel* that had been suppressed, about the study of Torah, which had completely ceased, about the reciting of psalms, which the old men nevertheless continued, the remaining old men, each one in the bitterness of his heart, and his torn voice, and especially about the eleven psalms one says for a sick person. . . .°

E.g., Pss. 6, 20, 25, 30, 32, 38, 41, 51, 86, 91, 102, 103. Traditions vary among Ashkenazic communities.

Motl Privisker wandered about the room like an angel of destruction, not as was his wont, but with frightfully big steps such as were never seen, standing before Reb Simcha like a tree pleasant to look at, with the secrets of the Torah, from which wise teachings flourish, for a few moments he stood still before Reb Simcha like that, as though planted there, looking him over with his eyes, and in that too—the likes of which had not been seen, with those eyes in Motl Privisker's famous fashion, saying:

"What is it, Reb Simcha, that Rabbi Akiba said to his disciples? 'When you reach the place of the pure marble plates, do not say, "Water, water," lest you endanger yourselves'—ha?'"°

B. Hagigah 14b. In Merkavah mysticism, refers to the dangers confronting the mystic in his ascent through the seven palaces of the seventh heaven.

Afterwards Motl sent his legs, may the all-merciful preserve us, all over the room—and that was an affair in its own right!—Revolving around a pole wondrous to heart and soul, when we see him with our own eyes, turning and talking to himself secretly with a soft, crestfallen voice, weakening the mind:

"That is a high secret, more elevated than can be borne . . . a high secret . . . high. . . ."

With enthusiasm and ardor and waving his hands upwards:

"Ex-al-ted!"

Reb Simcha already heard disturbing noises outside, hu-ha and hu-ha, the sound of people pursuing and running.

Outside there was also order in its own right.

Dr. Yukel the Bundist crawled, beaten and wounded, on hands and knees through the snow. . . . A red flag that proclaimed, "Long Live the Constituent Assembly" spreading in the wind and rolling . . . The student, Cahan, and Reb Aharon Shapira's son fleeing, and Polishuk and his people running after him and crying and shouting out loud . . .

Motl still paced about the room, not seeing or hearing anything, turning around and around and talking:

"*Bereishit*, the beginning . . . in the beginning . . . Listen, daughter, and see . . . listen, daughter, and see. . . . In the beginning, there in that passage—*shim'i* 'listen,' there—*bat* 'daughter,' there—*re'i* 'see' . . . 'Listen'—the same letters as in 'the beginning,' 'daughter'—there it is, the same word in the first part and at the end of the word, . . . 'see.' And here is the word in the middle. . . ."

"Motl, Motl!" shouted Reb Simcha in a voice not his own. "Murderers . . . Murderers . . . What are they doing! What for! Motl, Motl, go tell them. . . . Motl! They'll slay him. . . ."

Motl turned about, preoccupied with his own thoughts and spoke to himself:

"Listen, daughter, and see. . . . Listen, daughter, and see. . . ."

Outside the wind caught up with the sun and the sun with the wind. Lights interwoven flew up. Veils. Handfuls and handfuls of pure white curls.

On the windowpanes, decorated with scepters and palm branches, rainbows stuck each other in all their colors.

Bearing a day like a copper column and wind.

IX

Like a green wave, pushed back and leaning into the distance, lay greenish the layers of snow, and the crimson of the sunset was on and around them.

Among the columns of smoke rising from the chimneys of the houses the wind hung as though among the masts and shrouds of ships in the heart of foamy seas.

Suddenly a rumor was heard, noise, a tangle of voices, massive and fearful:

"They're coming."

"The murderers."

"Murderers."

Polishuk flashes through the street garbed in the flames of the sunset and, with his right hand, drawing the pistol at his side:

"Toward the enemy! . . . Toward the enemy!"

Like a spirit he went by the House of Study, contemplated the three old men who had come to say their afternoon and evening prayers:

"And even to defend," he shouted from his throat, "this House of Study!"

Outside, flight and hubbub.

They ran away from Polishuk to the right and left, hopping and running and limping and groaning.

Not two were left together.

Silence blanketed the street and houses.

Sky blue and white.

As though no human soul had been there for many days.

The snowy wasteland, an abandoned salt mine . . .

Red the sun sets. The snow soaks up its dark blood.

Leaving the courtyard in front of the Union of Jewish Soldiers' headquarters, at an hour when the eye can no longer distinguish between one thing and another, on his horse, bound to the saddle by ropes in pride and glory, was comrade Gedalia, and behind him, like a river, flowed the files of armed men.

The snow gleamed.

Chill and darkness floated up into one's eyes.

The footsteps whistled in the dark blue of the snow.

Row upon row, two by two, in good order, the armed and silent men went up.

They all passed under Polishuk's critical eye, as he stood at the side, supporting and fortifying them with his voice:

"One two, one two!"

"Who brought you here?" Polishuk raised his voice against a few of the men coming up. "Wh-who took you out? I order you to stay behind and guard the town!"

"Comrade Polishuk, are we one-armed or one-legged cripples, that we must sit in the rear?"

"Wh-what? . . . Are you still arguing with me? . . . Follow my orders! . . . On the double, march!"

"Ah, may his guts collapse!" the ones left behind muttered, wrinkling their noses and turning to the side like whipped dogs.

In a moment they lifted their feet and raced after the camp.

The files moved over the snow like black stains.

From a distance they were visible, near the old cemetery, which they passed with loud singing, the new and carefree life disturbing the ancient dream of those lying in the earth.

Then they were swallowed up in the darkness.

In the town life stopped.

The silence of death.

Darkness.

All night the dead town was silent.

In the morning the soldiers returned, with the sound of singing and joy they returned.

"It's a brigade of soldiers on their way back from the front, not murderers!" the returnees announced.

The town came back to life.

In the afternoon the soldiers entered the town. They went to the council building and began speaking:

"Comrades, regarding the Jewish brigade with you in the town, let them lay down their arms, comrades."

"What's this? Comrades, you . . . "

"Now, do as we said: lay down your arms, no more!"

"How can you say that, comrades?" Polishuk negotiated with them out loud. "They are in favor of the rule of soldiers and workers."

"Don't argue with us, shorty! See this?" They waved grenades in the air.

As ashamed as a jilted bride removing her jewels, the members of the Jewish brigade were humiliated, walking with their heads down, quietly cursing and swearing, each man to himself, with filthy and vile curses, returning their weapons to the armory.

Actually only a few returned them. Most hid them in the bathhouse, in the poor-house and in potato pits.

They returned their weapons, and they were all summoned, all the members of the union, to the courtyard of the council building and ordered to stand against the wall.

Their faces turned black, their eyes went dark, as when the stars come out.

"Low, low," they whispered quietly.

"We have failed."

Ten soldiers with angry faces, silent, stony, looking and waiting, stood in the middle of the courtyard. Every one of their movements, every blink evoked the fear of death.

The courtyard was barren, full of snow piled up, pink and blue.

Silence fell. Then Polishuk appeared at the gate, with his hair and eyes wild, running into the courtyard with a single breath and stood at the wall among the rest.

The soldiers went up to each of the men standing at the wall, searching him.

No weapons were found.

The men standing there moved away from the walls.

To the sound of laughter and cries of contempt the fighters were dismissed and sent away.

Near the fence stood one of them, all dressed in black, weeping.

That was a day of utter defeat, of humiliation. Every heart burned like fire. Every heart cried out against the injustice.

That night the soldiers left the town.

X

Every house is heavy with melancholy and worry.

Every eye expects enmity. All the lips are bluish—you mustn't speak out, only curse and cry out against injustice silently.

Driven from the house is every favorable sign, all cheerful expressions and grace. Oblivion and expiration whisper, fasting and cold rustle about. . . .

No more is the woman of valor who nurtured and raised her children as commanded by the blessed Lord.

No more is the active householder with his sharp eye and quick pace, searching here and pecking there, dragging a grain and bearing a bundle, urgently rushing, reading the cantillation marks vigorously and gloriously like a rooster, disagreeing with God. . . .

No more are the maidens, preparing dowries with skillful hands and waiting for bridegrooms.

The women of valor lie still, exhausted, like sick goats, mourning, with dried dugs.

The sons die untimely.

The solid citizens race about like roosters with their throats extended, slaughtered, dripping blood. . . .

And the maidens—

"May you know a good year!"

The world has gone mad. Heartbreak! . . . Heartbreak . . . And the blessed Lord knows! There is nothing left to do but "get up and lie in the street and laugh!"

In the month of Shevat,° the name of which is related to the word for severe judgment according to Motl Privisker, Henya left her father's house and went to live in Polishuk's room.

The fifth month in the Jewish calendar, usually coinciding with parts of January and February.

That made no impression in the town. The town had seen so much lawlessness and wild living that it had become used to it.

The town was silent. It saw and was silent.

Not her alone, but another one too:

For comrade Polishuk also opened his room to Nechama, the daughter of Reb Meyer the slaughterer, and Leyzer Potashnik's Shprintsa, also to comrade Gedalia and comrade Henikh the carpenter, and they all lived there together:

"A commune!"

"They strung up a rope," it was whispered in town, "from one wall to another across the room: dividing the women's beds from the men's!"

The town looks for similarities between Sodom before it was destroyed and Polishuk's "commune." The deeds of the former are like those of the latter. . . .

"The daughters of such righteous men, ah? Will you split their bellies, Lord of the universe!"

"Reb Simcha," people whispered about him, "has gone completely mad!"

That seemed quite likely. . . . True, one could go mad.

"Reb Simcha," they whispered, "is sitting in mourning, nodding his head ceaselessly and whispering, 'I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter!'—nothing more."

On Friday Motl Privisker visited Reb Simcha and told him an interpretation of the verse: "Because thou hast forgotten me and cast me behind thy back."° "How is it possible that a daughter of Israel could be cast away? . . ."

Ezek. 23:35.

"I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter. . . ." Reb Simcha sat on the floor and nodded his head.

Motl Privisker turned his face away from him and remained standing there.

"Reb Simcha, Reb Simcha! . . . You are a father, are you not? . . . shouted Motl in a tearful voice. "Are you not a father? . . . Are you not a Jew, and the Lord is in heaven? . . . Why are you silent?! . . . Why are you silent and doing nothing?"

"I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter. . . ."

"Why are you silent!" cried Motl in tears. "Lord, Lord of the world, why are you silent, oy, oy! . . . Why don't you watch over your children, for they are in great misery."

"I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter. . . ."

"Simcha!" Motl Privisker jumped, raising his head and hands in the air. "I want to break the law! . . . I want to curse. . . . To violate the Sabbath in public! . . . I want to be an adulterer! . . . I will transcend my nature! . . . Master of the whole world, master of the whole world." He grasped both his earlocks, "May I not be given a Jewish burial! . . . I'm a Bolshevik!" He pounded the table with his hand till the windows rattled. "Now, now the time has come. . . . Enough! I want to be a Bolshevik!"

"I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter. . . ." Reb Simcha's desolate voice was heard.

Motl leaped up onto his long legs. The hem of his jacket fluttered in Reb Simcha's face, as he sat and whispered, "I have no daughter. . . . I have no daughter. . . ." And as though stones were being split, the door slammed against the doorpost, and the corners of the room shuddered—Motl was gone!

XI

Lying in the snow, shoved and pressed together, the humiliated houses crouched. The winds wept bitterly over them. The barren, red sun set over them.

On the surface of the snow runs a purplish shadow.

Silence outside.

No one is to be seen. No one greets his friend, no one wishes anyone well. Silence and snow. As though the snow had covered the towns and settlements forever. Neither good nor evil will ever find that place.

Just one man, who appeared drunken in the full, pure whiteness of the snows, was Motl Privisker. He too was like a soul that had already died, whirling and wandering in the world of chaos.

Nightfall in the silence and snow. An encrusted city preserved in the sinking red sun . . .

The snow whistles and whistles beneath one's feet, making a sound like a radish being sliced.

Spread before one's eyes is snow, near and far, sparkling on the ground like a bridegroom's prayer shawl.

Is this a dream or reality? Is it Motl Privisker there in the snow or some lone, forgotten, derelict out after the curfew? Who is it? Is it a poor teacher who lost his way, or some crazy man whose brains have been addled? Is that silence only apparent? Or are they voices, calling loudly, and after them the silence came? He is not clever enough to understand. . . .

The snow sparkles and sparkles like crates and crates of candles lit all at once to make a great light! . . .

No matter, for he is weary unto death! No matter, for he has been beaten into silence! No matter, for he is bereft of kindness or joy, of motive or interest. . . .

He walked slowly and heard a kind of silence, voices calling. Slowly he walked and looked at the moonlit snow, glowing under his feet.

Motl Privisker walked slowly by himself, until the voices of nearby people overtook him, real voices. They were Polishuk and his bunch, who appeared in the street. As if they had come outside just to rule over the silent snows. Motl Privisker was alarmed. He looked at Henya walking, dressed in a leather coat, a pistol belted around her waist, booted, and his heart wept within him. In a moment his heart returned and was joyous. Motl spoke to himself:

"I was meant to suffer, and I have suffered already."

He looked again at her reddish mouth, her cheeks and forehead, and he said again: "I was meant to receive suffering, and I have received it already."

"Ah, comrade Reb Motl," Polishuk greeted him. "Where are you going?"

The people crowded around him, standing there and stamping their feet.

"Comrade Motl," Polishuk continued. "Come with us! Be a Bolshevik, ha-ha. . . ."

Motl Privisker raised his eyes toward Henya, who was standing at the side, and he said:

"If I am destined to go to hell, I wish to do so as a kosher Jew!"

"Ha-ha-ha! . . . Ha-ha!" the people raised their voices in laughter.

The silence returned to what it was. No one was visible. No one greeted his friend.

Silence. A silvery round moon overhead. A long shadow on the snow below.

"I was meant to suffer, and I have suffered already."

And sometimes:

"For it is forbidden to look her in the face, forbidden, forbidden!"

XII

Time passed, bringing other skies to rise over the town. A young sun with lovely rays melted the snow and opened spots of light outside. The winds chewed up the snow by the mouthful, and with every bite they wandered on, full of thoughts and melodies of spring.

The houses shed the white piecrusts from their shoulders and stood warming themselves in the sun, dark, old and a little distant from each other.

The roofs wept before the glowing sun like little children.

Bit by bit the snow yellowed and fell into its water.

Puddles spread in the street like big clouds spread in the heavens.

Before the gates calves jumped, wild-eyed with tails erect.

Crows moved in the boughs of the trees, calling "krak-rak."

Motl Privisker was covered with his prayer shawl and phylacteries—and lo: no oppression or injustice in the world, no evil and malicious joy, but everything was as in earlier times:

"The Lord is one. . . ."

Then, during prayer, while he was standing and acknowledging the Creator as King, proclaiming "The Lord is one!" in came two soldiers and shouted:

"Citizen Mordukh Karasyk, in the name of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia, you are under arrest!"

As though preparing himself to study it very thoroughly, Motl Privisker took the paper that was handed to him, and all his eyes saw on the paper was the signature: Henya Horowitz.

Afterwards Motl Privisker turned to face the soldiers and said,

"That's how it is."

"That's the way it is. Come with us!"

They didn't offer to content him by allowing him to finish his prayer.

Motl Privisker removed his phylacteries, took off his prayer shawl, draped himself in his balding cat-skin coat and went. All the time he was walking in the street between the two armed soldiers, the image of Reb Simcha, the floorboards ripped up, and Henya never left his eyes. . . . His throat was warm with the heat of sated thirst, and his heart beat within him as at a time of arousal and desire.

Many days passed, days and weeks.

But, could it be that many days passed, and yet comrade Soroka is walking down the street!

The days that passed were not many—many were the deeds done by comrade Soroka! Many are the nests he burned and many the fires he lit in the country he went through!

From the end of the street, which was darkened with gunpowder, went forth Soroka.

It was a debilitating spring evening.

Saturated silence, thick and dark, as it is sometimes in the depths of one's heart.

Swallowed in a gullet, the berry of a blue night is seen.

The town crouched in its mud like a sick, mourning goat with dried dugs.

Following footsteps stamped in the mud, large and small footprints of men and women, Soroka walked till he reached Polishuk's house.

When he opened the door and went in, his eyes saw a rope before him, stretched from wall to wall, and two beds on either side of the walls, full of bodies, bodies like cadavers.

Soroka placed himself in the center of the room and shouted:

"Are you asleep, you devils! . . . Get up: the Germans are coming!"

1924

63 Months and Days

ITSIK KIPNIS

Ayzik, a young tanner, and his newlywed wife Buzi have just spent the first night of the pogrom hiding in the wheat fields near their home in the shtetl of Sloveshne. The next afternoon, they and their family set out with horse and wagon for the neighboring village of Petroshi, where they hope

to take refuge for the night. Along the way they meet a group of unfamiliar peasants heading for the town.

And we get out of their way; we move in the opposite direction, toward where they've come from, toward Petroshi.

And you see, they do not forbid it. And it may be that in Petroshi, where they live, we will be permitted to spend the night somewhere. After all, we are "Sloveshne Jews." Isn't it true that they have a high regard for "Sloveshne Jews"? Haven't we often heard them say so? And indeed, my father is going to one of his clients there, a fellow who brings hides in to be cured.

"That fellow," my father says, "will welcome us. Arkhip is his name. He'll give us the best food that he has."

And my hope is that all of these Jews may have a client like him in Petroshi who will welcome them; who will give them the best food that he has.

My father brags about his clients. And his one-horse trap is already rolling into Petroshi.

Ah, were we ever stared at in Petroshi!

The whole family sat together in the wagon and a crowd of Jews who arrived earlier is already there. Now we are a considerable group. And we move on.

There are swaggerers among them who bum cigarettes, who light them and smoke unconcernedly, the way they would on a fast day.

And there are already a number of Jews at Avrom's house in Petroshi. (I'd seen Avrom's house filled with Jewish men and women once before. But that was when he was marrying off his older son and the whole town gathered to celebrate.) Perhaps there was no guard at Avrom's now.

The priest was talking with Avrom at a fence facing the house. He was talking about Jews and Sloveshne.

A fine priest in Petroshi. A man in his thirties, good looking. He made clucking sounds with his lips and wondered why the Jews were suddenly suffering so much in Sloveshne. "A pity, a pity, a pity."

And perhaps he was not being hypocritical. It's possible that there is one priest in a hundred who doesn't meddle.

The brim of Avrom's hat was pulled down on one side. "So many guests. God save us." And, "May God keep everything calm."

A fine Jew, that Avrom. Tall and stocky, bearded, with a gentle, freckled face and large expressive eyes. He wore an alpaca jacket and was friendly to everyone. He could be a pal even with the children, though he was himself already the father of five grown sons. Furthermore, he was by no means shy when he talked; he spoke loudly, giving his words a village pronunciation. That was Avrom of Petroshi.

Father got down from the wagon, and whispering into Avrom's ear, he asked where a certain Arkhip lived. And Avrom told him what he knew and we drove to Arkhip's house. We were followed by two other families, who carried with them children, a cat and small pitchers of milk. "The milk is to shut the mouths of the little ones in case they wake at night."

But since there was no law that guaranteed that Arkhip had always to be at home—he could, after all, be away in the woods or on a trip somewhere—it was just our luck that he turned out not to be at home and one of his younger sons talked with us—a boy some fourteen years old. A shepherd.

"I won't allow it without my father."

"Don't be a child. Your father brings me hides to be tanned every year. . . . Your father is an old pal of ours. If you try to keep us out, he'll be very angry with you."

"I can't do anything by myself. Without my father."

"Well, when will your father be back?"

"I don't know. Perhaps tonight."

"Well, that's fine. Let us into the barn until he gets here."

Willingly or unwillingly, the shepherd boy brought out a large wooden key and unlocked the barn. We unharnessed the horse (the others had rented wagons and sent them back to their owners), and we spread out sackcloth and carpets and lay down.

We were three families in the barn, and each family had some additional people. And if a child whined, it was given milk. There was a sick child, not a member of a family, who lay there and wanted nothing. And older children, because they had nothing to say, just sat there and were silent.

As I went out to cover the horse and to give him a bit of fresh hay, an old neighbor woman, barefoot and wearing a linen blouse and a dress made of two aprons, one in front and one behind, came up to the wagon. She was weeping.

She wept because she had lived to see what she was seeing. "Think of it. Just think of it. What a desolate and bitter generation has grown up. Is it likely that they'll live to enjoy the property of strangers? No, such things were once unheard of. Maybe it's the damned war that has so spoiled the people."

A while later, she wiped her eyes, pulled a wisp of straw from the wagon and tried chewing it with her rotten teeth and mused, "There is one thing in which you are a little bit at fault, my dears. You shouldn't have hidden the salt. You ought to have known how the people lacked salt. Well, I won't ask you why you had to do such a thing. There's nothing worse than food without salt. We even add salt to a cow's drinking water. What else needs to be said? Even a cow. Ah, my dears, how bitter it is for us without our bit of salt. It may be that that's the reason the people are angry. It's searching for salt."

"Yes," I said to her. "The people are angry. They're looking for salt."

"God preserve us and those we love from such behavior. Just wait a bit, dearie, I'll be right back." And in the space of two minutes, she went a few doors down and returned with a bowl of eight or ten roasted potatoes. "Give it to the children. Give it to them, my dear." And she wiped her old eyes with an apron.

And hour or so later, daylight was almost all gone. And the evening made every eyelid heavy despite all efforts to keep one's eyes open. The scent of green grass reached us from the other side of the barn where there were kitchen gardens. Gardens, passionately alive. Every blade of grass unashamedly immersing itself in the cool dew.

The floor in the barn where we were was dry and smooth. There was room for all three families. Buzi was already dozing, and I was anxious to take off her shoes before she fell asleep, but I did not want to wake her. Mother was also dozing and the children as well. Father, apparently, was not yet able to get to sleep. He

wanted just to lie still without disturbing anyone. There was silence all around him. All that one heard was the steady, monotonic sound of the horse's chewing. I had already removed one sweaty, sticky sock from one foot and was removing the other. Someone opened the door. In barns, the doors are very wide. And the moon over the village was full and low in the sky so that the entire barn was filled with moonlight. But who was coming into the barn at such a late hour? After all, it was bedtime. It was the shepherd once again.

"Jews . . . Jews . . . go away. I don't want you here. I'm scared."

"Who are you afraid of?"

The boy didn't know and couldn't say. He was still a kid. "I'm scared they'll burn the barn." And he wept.

Evidently there was nothing to discuss. The matter was simple. We had to go. The question, however, was, Where?

Little by little, the people in the barn came awake. They looked into each other's faces. Questions were asked. Everyone said what everyone else was saying. That they had just settled down and were getting cozy—and now, this. There was no rest for the weary. But slowly, the situation became clear, though no one offered any suggestions. It was not really their business. A couple of men discussed what to do, as if it was up to them. They would decide what to do, and whatever they decided the others would do.

And that, if you like, is where the trouble lay. Because the men had no idea what to do either. Perhaps one ought to leave and then later sneak back in. Perhaps they ought to harness the horse and ride off—but now that would be hard—and spend the night somewhere in a field, in the open. (But that might be dangerous, eh?)

Maybe this. Maybe that. Return to Sloveshne (we all know the way). But that won't do either.

Father went to the village. It turned out that the Jews in Avrom's house also didn't know where they would spend the night. Perhaps they would hang around the house. We, for our parts, had little children with us. Well, what to do?

And Father had a discussion with Esther of Petroshi. "She's already placed two families with little children among the peasants. She'll advise us, too. Come on."

Esther led us into a garden that was wet with dew. "Sit here for a while." And she went off somewhere.

We sat there, some ten of us of varying ages (dark Hershl was six and Father was forty-five). Each of us responded differently to the wet garden and to the moist, sandy rye. But what would have been best of all would have been just to lie still. Hershl wanted to do something, but we pleaded with him to stay still and not to creep about. And, in reaction to so much sorrow, we had an impulse to laugh; but not far away there came the sound of young men stamping their feet, like horses, and leaping over fences. On their way to an evening party. They have no notion that families of Jews are sitting in the rye; that the Jews are terrified of the sound of their stamping feet.

And there was no Esther.

She's been gone for so many hours. And she's left us here among the cultivated rows. Perhaps she won't come back at all. That's it. She's not coming back. The peasants talked her out of it.

Mother tore off a blade of grass and studied it. She was thinking something over. She would gladly have told us what she was thinking, but now was not the right moment to talk aloud.

"Well, people, come on."

It was Esther who had returned and was calling us. Esther was a coarse speaker. When she said "Come," one could hear every letter in the word as she pronounced it. But it didn't matter. "May she live long, that Esther . . . ah, what a service she's doing for us—at a time like this."

Mother thanked her, then everyone, adults and children, as best as they could, climbed over a strange fence. And she was surprised that we hadn't stolen anything.

"Sleep well," she said. The place belonged to good peasants. They had set out a bed where, usually, a young couple slept. A clean, well-carpentered little stable.

Mother thanked Esther and wished for her all the good fortune she deserved, and we entered into a well-prepared haven whose owners we had not yet seen, and whom we might not see for several days.

How close are we to dawn? (It was, after all, a summer's night.) And we parceled out and divided the space, as well as the bed belonging to the young couple. But several of us were beyond falling asleep. And there was someone knocking on the other side of the wall. Not knocking, exactly, but more as if someone was climbing on the walls.

Who could it be? What if it was young peasants with knives. Oughtn't we to have sticks nearby?

Everyone thought his or her own thoughts, but hardly anyone said a word. And what's happening now in Sloveshne? Is it calm, or are the goyim living it up? While now, on the other side of our wall, there was neither knocking nor climbing on the wall. Perhaps it was some unlucky peasant lad of seventeen, some weak-minded orphan who wasn't smart enough to come in out of the rain but who now wanted to attach himself to a Jewish family in the little stable. "You'll see. I'll split his head open with a stick. That miserable idiot orphan."

Buzi was lying down with the girls. Perhaps she had fallen asleep, too. And my mother has to be shunted from pillar to post, from one stable to another. And Hershele . . . What wouldn't I give to keep Buzi and my mother and Hershele from being shoved about like this? And my father . . . and my sisters. The other mother and her children were far away. Where were they spending the night? In a stable or in a house? And in Radomishl, how are they spending the night? And in Proskurov?

It can't be possible that they could massacre three thousand Jews in Poskurov? Three thousand is an exaggeration. Meanwhile, the knocking on the other side of the wall continued. If it's a lone peasant youth, I'll kill him. Even if there are two or three. But if there are many, I won't budge from my place.

Young peasants are on their way to some celebration. They talk loudly and laugh.

. . . Better let them pass. Good. They're gone. . . .

Now, I would really like for it to be dawn, or to fall asleep.

Does the passage of every night take up so much time before dawn comes? And perhaps it wasn't peasant youths banging on the other side of the wall. Perhaps it's just a pen for sheep.

"Sheep," I whispered so softly I could hardly be heard. "It's a pen for sheep. And they're making the noise on the other side of the wall."

If anyone had chanced to be awake, they would have heard me and would certainly have been relieved by what I said.

And, evidently, I too fell asleep. Because I did not get to see the arrival of the dawn.

It was a lovely morning in Petroshi, and we were safe and sound. What did we lack?

Ayzik in the reins

"Let Ayzik drive into town and find out what's happening there." And if Ayzik goes, you must know that Buzi is going too. She feels uncomfortable without him.

Somehow or other, our horse and harness turned out to be safe at the old inn. So, let's get harnessed and go. Hershele wanted to come too. Then someone else wanted to come, and someone else as well. Everyone, in short. Finally, no one but the two of us went. And when we brought back news, everyone else would be able to go.

At any other time, what we did would have been called "taking a coach ride," something we very much liked. But we had never had a horse.

Father's horse was a good one. We would be in Sloveshne in less than twenty minutes.

The wagon rolled downhill. The horse moved along amiably. The world was alive. What a pleasure. On the outskirts of town we met a herdsman with all kinds and colors of cattle.

"Cattle, you spent the night in Sloveshne. Maybe you have something to tell us. Maybe you can give us some news about the home we left behind in strange hands on a dismal night?———"

Hush. There goes Naum and his oxen. He's on his way to the forest for wood. You see him there, a short little peasant. His face is shaven, and he has a pair of long Ukrainian mustaches. An unhurried fellow. Whatever you may be thinking, he has thoughts of his own. He's not interested in any one's else's business.

"Naum, what's going on in town?"

"Phoo! In town? What's going on? Nothing. There were beatings last night. Banging and breaking."

"And in general, what's happening in town?" And the sun, meanwhile, dapples the red-colored backs of his oxen and makes a different design on my horse's ash-colored hide. We're riding *into* town, he's riding *out* of town. "In general, what's going on in town, Naum?"

1st known victim

"In general—nothing. They brought four dead Jews from Gorodishche.° All but Khitrik's son-in-law were strangers."

The site of the pogrom memorialized in Markish's "The Mound" (64).

"Khitrik's son-in-law? The tall one?"

"Yes."

And Khitrik's son-in-law was a tall, well-built fellow, like a pine tree. Mordkhe-Leyzer Gershteyn! If they could overcome a fellow like Gershteyn and kill him, things must be pretty bad. "Wait a minute, Naum. When did it happen? When were they brought in?"

"When were they brought in? Yesterday. It seems to me they were put away yesterday. It's too bad—Khitrik's son-in-law. He was a good Jew."

"And now, what's happening in town?"

"Now it's quiet. I think. Gee up!"

"Giddap."

It's a lovely sun. The window panes gleam in the school on the outskirts of town. And the morning looks just as it would if it were cheerful.

Buzi holds on to my hand. She's very unhappy because they killed Mordkhe-Leyzer, Khitrik's son-in-law. She lived with them in the same apartment for a year. In a room in Mordkhe-Leyzer's house and with his lovely children. The two older ones were now grown up.

Buzi looks into my eyes and asks, "Ayzik, is it that simple to cut someone's throat with a knife? Like a cow or an ox at the slaughter?"

"I've never seen anything slaughtered."

"And a cow? You've seen a cow slaughtered?"

"No."

It was a calf that Buzi saw being slaughtered in her garden. Its legs were bound, and it made a terrible death rattle. She didn't want to say any more. She felt nauseated, remembering. For more than a week she had been unable to look at their neighbor, the ritual slaughterer. It had seemed to her that he was a very ugly creature. Ugh . . .

defamiliarized shtetl landscape

Our streets were crisscrossed with threads of fear. But as we moved along them, they became familiar again, our streets. And dear to us. It was hard to turn off into another street or lane. Until you passed over the threshold of gloom, after which it was easier once more. And our streets had a look that was neither like Purim nor like the Interval Days° of Passover and Sukkot. The shops were neither closed nor open. The shopkeepers were not doing business. The shoemakers were not hammering. Everyone sat scattered about on earthen mounds as if drying in the sun. Or perhaps taking the air. Or perhaps neither the one nor the other, and they were merely keeping warm.

During the Passover and Sukkot holidays, the intermediary weekdays between the first two and last days of the holiday.

It was quiet in town. Whatever had happened at night had happened. Now, the town was quiet. Buzi will walk about. It may be she'll hear news of her mother and the children. Meanwhile, I'll get our people.

We moved spiritedly. It was bright, sunny. Easy.

Thursday is Thursday, and people are people. Our situation was not what anyone would call good, but by now that was nothing new for us. It had been a long time since we had slept in our own beds. And a long time since we ended our days where we began them. It should be no surprise to us that our local peasant boys teased us. They teased us and we were silent. Because for each five of us there were thirty of them.

go to friendly peasant women

"Go, children. Go to Sokhvye's Hane and drink your fill of milk." It was Mother sending us to Hane, Shmayle's wife. Our milk was there.

So we went to Sokhvye's Hane. She spoke to my sister as to a friend. Talked about household matters; housewifely things. Her stove was hot, and she gave us milk to drink. If we liked, we could drink right out of the jugs. Hane had a square face, a square jaw and white teeth and intelligent eyes. When she laughed, it was with her whole face, including her intelligent eyes and her white teeth. And, it may be, that this was not the first time that we had been beggars. And so we drank half sour milk at Hane's. The upper part of the milk was buttery and smeared

one's lips and nose. Then all of a sudden there was a gush of the thinner sour milk that spattered one's clothes. Nothing to worry about. The clothes were not made of silk, though perhaps it was unpleasant for Hane. We could take our own jugs home with us; to our tumbled, our abused home. And there we would . . .

"Hane, may we?"

"All right, then. Take them. But bring the jugs back so that I'll have something in which to put your cow's milk." (We still had a cow.)

"Hane, how come you have the little red chair and the two stools?"

Hane crimsoned. Was there any reason for her to be embarrassed before us? She would have liked to make a different answer, but she would say what she could. Enough said.

"I thought I would carry something away. If you came back, it would be yours again. And if not—well why should strangers have it? Here are your forms, too. Your forms and your baking tins."

Hane is red-faced, embarrassed. She is a bit confused. But she is right. What she did is good. We carried the jug with the half sour milk home with us.

"And bread. Just see how we've forgotten. We don't have any bread."

Tonight, we made more intelligent preparations. Tonight, we even scraped the starter dough out of the kneading trough. There was not a bit of breadstuff left in the house.

Khvedosia, who lives near Yisroel-Dovid's house, was carrying buckets from the well on a yoke over her shoulder. She wanted to pass us by as if she did not see us, but Mother stood in her way.

"Khvedosia, you're on your way home. Lend me a bit of bread, for the children's sake."

"Bread?"

She hadn't baked bread for our sakes, Khvedosia. Bread. She is Adamke's sister. Adamke who lives right next door to Zeydl. And she's really wicked. But she can't be an utter pig. After all, she lives right next door to us.

"Mama, Khvedosia gave us a cake."

"May God punish her. The cake is moldy."

We break the old cake apart. It's true. Its innards are all mold. How did Mother know it would be? But it had to be eaten, moldy or not.

What puzzles me is why we didn't lock the door yesterday when we went away.

"So that they wouldn't break the windows," says Father. And Motl, Feygl's son, wonders why I'm wearing such tattered trousers.

"So that I won't be left wearing only underpants," I explain. And Buzi and I go into town. There it is being said that the furrier Yeshue had hidden himself and his family and that people broke into his barn—it was early in the evening—and killed his wife and two sons.

One of them, the older one, Dovid, is also a tailor. A man about my age.

Dovid Frenk.

Yeshue's family was considered one of the best in town. And it was said that Dovid was survived by a wife and child.

Buzi was very anxious. Her mother and the children had gone off in the same direction. Buzi wept, but there was nothing to cry about. If, God forbid, something had happened, we would have heard about it. There were some thirty people in their group.

"Buzi dear, don't cry. And let's think a bit about Dovid Frenk. Of his mother and his brother Khayim-Leyb. It was not long ago that he wanted to buy himself a violin—Khayim-Leyb. He wanted to learn how to play it."

And it was neither Purim nor the Interval Days on the street. Jews sat on hummocks or on their porches. And various of their peasant neighbors sat around, doing nothing too. Some of them talked to Jews; some of them sat before their doorways. All at once, we heard a woman's musical voice. Everyone flushed, and one's hair stood on end. Some woman was wandering about, singing. Her hands hung at her sides. Her scarf was flung negligently across her shoulders. And its fringed ends hung down on both sides. That's how her hands dangled. That's how she wore her scarf. So that her movements would be freer; so that she would not be put to trouble on its account. And the way she walked was also like that. Not near the walls nor along the sidewalk but out in the middle of the street, where the wagons drive. That's how she walked, her figure loose, unbound. She came from Dolnye, past the marketplace. Now she was walking in the dead middle of Listvene Street. Singing.

What a fool I am. What a downright idiot. Who's singing? She's not singing. That's Dovid's wife. Dovid Frenk. Who was murdered last night in Behun. Together with his mother and his younger brother. This is Dovid's wife. And she's not singing. She's preaching like a priest. No. She's declaiming in a hoarse, careless fashion as if she were in a theater. And indeed she does sing a little bit, too. In a moderate tone, as if she were talking to someone. And she walks slowly, with her hands at her sides, as if she had nothing at all to make her hurry. As if by walking she would disappear. And she sings.

Of course you all know Dovid,
Dovid Frenk of Dolnye,
Yeshue the furrier's son.

He was a furrier, too.
But he was dearer to me than a prince.
Dovid . . . that Dovid . . . was my husband.

Of course you all know Dovid,
There was no reason to look into his face.
Murderers killed him in Behun.

He was vibrant and lively
When they tore him from my arms.
I begged them:
Murderers, kill me too.

Murderers, have you no human heart?
You must also have wives and children.
Murderers, kill me too.

I kissed their feet. . . .

I humbled myself before them,
And I begged:
Murderers, kill me too.

Dovid, you can't go. . . .
You can't go without me.
And what shall I do with your child?

Ah, Jews—if you only knew. . . .

She goes, meandering like water, and she sings; and we can feel our blood curdling. Buzi and I stand near a wall. The two of us are still whole. And she will come and demand her share.

And what will I do if she sees me and comes up to me.

"Ayzik, you knew Dovid Frenk. Ayzik, have you any idea why they killed Dovid Frenk yesterday? He was so good looking; so warm; and now he lies there, rigid. Come now and look."

And my blood chills. And Buzi turns as pale as a wall, and my impulse is to go up to Dobe and ask, "Dobe, do you happen to know whether they are going to kill Jews tomorrow, too? No doubt you know what's going on. If they're going to kill again, then tell me, so we can figure out ways to escape."

To give birth.

It was with great difficulty that I got Buzi home. She was nearing her time,° and she wasn't supposed to cry.

We already knew who the most important celebrants were at our grim little festival. They were Kosenko (Klim's son), the captain of the guard and Maritshko Lukhtans—our neighbor, the poor Gypsy, the liar who loves Jews.

Maritshko is unbelievable. There he was on Thursday, standing at the fence beside his grapevines, popping grapes into his mouth, actually shouting at a couple of peasant women, "Ah, what sort of idiot business have you gotten yourselves into? Do you expect to have Jewish bodies and to wear Jewish clothes?"

The peasant women replied that they hadn't meant any harm. They had simply come to look around in Sloveshne. But he had jumped down from the fence and, unbuttoning their swollen jackets, he removed several children's sleeveless shirts, an old waistcoat and a pair of children's shoes. He looked them over quickly, gauging their value.

pgromist returns stolen clothes

"Here," he said to Yisroel-Dovid's Feygele. "Give these back to poor Jewish children so they can wear them."

"Bravo Marko, bravo! That's how to pay the bloodsuckers." And the two peasant women, one young and pretty and the other a mother-in-law, crimsoned and beat a retreat to the accompaniment of his jibes. "Go on. Go home, you foolish donkeys. There's nothing here for you. If we should need you, we'll send for you."

"Right, Marko." And Feygele thought, "How nice it would be if there were many such peasants, but preferably arrested and condemned to hard labor."

monarchist sympathies

Evidently Feygele knew something. She had been in his house last night where she had seen several visitors of the sort that made her wonder how she had escaped from his house with her life. The portrait of Czar Nicholas hanging on the wall had taken on a quite different appearance, glowing red, and there was such a Christian holiday atmosphere in the house that no sane Jew would have entered

it. Feygele had backed slowly out of the house. Then she had seen how Marko had been sent off to ride through the village on horseback. Yes, that had been a truly close call—and she had just barely escaped with her life. And Marko's tall liar of a wife, her dress tucked in at the waist, had cheerfully confided to Feygele that, "They've been asking about brandy. The soldiers, the commandant and various other strangers." And she was pleased to be hosting such distinguished guests. Kings for a day. And the oven gave off a holiday fragrance, and the portrait of Czar Nicholas had a festive glow.

Feygele looked on with admiration mixed with fear at the way Maritshko stood there beside the fence, plucking grapes and popping them into his mouth even as he drove the peasant women away. Perhaps, it suddenly occurred to her, it was a form of magic: The number of grapes he popped into his mouth represented the number of Jews whose heads would be bashed in today by those guests of his. Then she rejected the thought at once. There was no need to think such foolishness. No doubt nothing would happen. Nothing at all.

peasants from neighboring towns arrive for the kill

Meanwhile, crowds of young peasants from Levkovich, Mozharia and Verpia kept crossing our fields. Young peasants who wore their shirts over their belts, who were barefooted and had beady eyes. Ugly, filthy young peasants. The hems of their shirts were wet as if bepissed. They looked uglier than carrion birds. And now they were here. In Mikita's lane, it had already been clear that they were drifting this way. Ugly folk. And by no means bold. One loud shout would scatter them all. But I was not about to do it. There were many of them. Like locusts. And it's said that even mice, if they attack in their numbers, can kill a man.

The peasant boys crept about our attic, searching. In our attic; in my aunt's. Searching. Whatever they found would be pure profit.

The young peasants teased us. Behaved boorishly toward us. They were angry with us because we had taken many things of ours back from them. We had called our neighbors together and instigated them to scold the ugly young fellows.

And, of course, our neighbors had to do what we told them; they had driven them away and taken things away from them. And, as a joke, they had even locked a couple of the young men into a locker in my aunt's house.

looting

A flock of peasant women as well as boys and girls found their way into the lower courtyard of the tannery. It was a group that had come to town carrying various vessels in their hands on the chance that they might find some gasoline or grease. In short, they were ready for anything that might come their way.

Evidently they had asked directions to the tannery and started off, some fifty of them. They moved with slow deliberation. They were women, after all, and who knew what might happen?

"I'm going to drive them away."

"No need," said Mother.

"I won't let you," said Buzi.

"Let them choke on the grease," said my sisters and our neighbors.

But I very much wanted to scare those peasant women. Not just because I was angry, but for the sheer fun of it.

"I won't let you," said Buzi.

"There's no need to do it," said Mother. I searched for and found a splintered log—there was no stick available, and I started toward the "Philistines."

"Hey, the devil take you all." And the women, poor things, like frightened hens fluttering their wings, leaped first to one side, then to the other. "God help us," and they ran. But a couple of them managed to find their way to the Holy of Holies.

"I only meant to find a little grease," one of them said, climbing down from a window.

"Damn it to hell, what you meant can get you killed," I said. "You didn't find any grease." And I swung at her with the bit of log. The second woman fell into a tub, while a third made her way out of the window and ran off.

"Damned mares! The devil take you and your filthy faces." Then, like a gander after a fray with a cat, I turned to my women, glowing with the joy of victory.

And Buzi said, "I didn't tell you to do it. They'll call their men and tell them that you beat them. It'll be worse for us, then."

Buzi, as if she were talking to Yosele or to Meylekh, talked to me like a teacher and proved, with examples, that I would have done better to follow her advice.

But I noticed that my family had laughed when the peasant women and girls ran off like wet hens. And Buzi had also laughed. And so I bragged a little about my exploits against the women who, I said, would be afraid to show their faces here again. And I was very pleased with myself.

Meanwhile, we had news from town that eight families were getting ready to go to Turov.

"Smart, very smart. Because who knows where it will all end?"

"Maybe we ought to harness up and drive to Turov, too?"

Mother would not agree to that. Well, we didn't go.

The news from town was that the families had decided not to drive to Turov. Why not?

Because all at once the wagon drivers made excuses and said they could not go. They had, evidently been threatened by the pogrom committee. One way or another, they would not be permitted to drive out of town.

The news from town was that the pogromists wanted a meeting. They wanted to try the Jews. The priest would make a speech. The rabbi would be there too.

The men went off to the gathering. My older sister and Buzi wanted to come too.

It was a strange trial. It was a day that was neither a working day nor a holiday. A little like a fair in the center of the marketplace, and yet no business was conducted. The priest and the rabbi stood at the center of the crowd. The rabbi was bloodstained, but he neither wept nor groaned. He did not wince, but it was clear from the way that he sweated that his strength had been sapped. There was no trial here of equal strengths where, at some point, one could call a halt and an authority would say, "Right. That's right. Right. That's right."

The priest spoke first. "We will have to persuade the people to restrain themselves. To stop its turbulence: or the Jews will have to be careful (about what?). The Jews will have to (what?) . . ." The priest spoke guardedly, ambiguously. He was still in his right mind and knew that power was not with the church now. In church he could speak quite differently. Here, he had to be a bit careful.

Now it was Stodot's turn to talk. The name Stodot may not mean anything to those who are not acquainted with that bumpy-featured murderous bastard with the gray, protruding eyes. A huge man in his forties. Perhaps because he had neither children nor prosperity, he devoted himself to finding ways to bathe in Jewish tears. Jews, he said, were foreigners; they were harmful. Jewish cattle devoured the pastures. Jews cut down whole forests in order to make brooms. Jewish geese spoiled the wheat fields, so that the community was put to the trouble of rounding up Jewish livestock every year. And, if Stodot was in charge of the roundup, any Jewish woman who owned a cow had a hard time of it. Now it was Stodot Popak who spoke. And, as far as Jews were concerned, there were things that he loved to say loud and clear. And he was saying them.

"And Jews have always been like this. They even sent noodles to the Germans during the war. Now, we don't want them to be communists."

"What? Communists? Who?"

But hold on a minute. Stodot is right, after all. During the night, when Velvl, the senile shoemaker's windows were being broken, people shouted, "Communist. You're a Jew and a communist. Just wait. We'll kill you. If not today, then tomorrow."

Ugh. Ugly words.

And Marko, our neighbor, was there and said, "Jews, give money. Our brothers need money. And let that be the end of the matter."

And so the Jews met in the synagogue and collected money.

And later, Marko advised the Jews, "Since the people are rebellious, let the Jews gather in one place at the center of town and we'll put an armed guard around them. But I can't guarantee the safety of those who don't come to the center. The populace is restless."

Have you got the picture of Marko? He counts the money. He issues commands.

"What do you think, Marko? Ought we, perhaps, to go to Motl, the commissioner?"

"A good idea. All of you go to Motl, the commissioner's house."

Motl's childless daughter-in-law lived in the upper painted houses. Below them lived Motl himself. Motl's place was like a railroad station and not a place to live. People constantly coming and going. Jews as well as peasants. And his wagon drivers were all fond of Motl and his house.

"Whatever happens to anyone else, no one's going to kill Motl."

And Motl's daughter-in-law was fat. Perhaps the fattest person in town. She had been raised in a big city. She was enormous, and she wanted to have a child.

Perhaps tonight Yokheved, Motl Rattner's daughter-in-law, will be friendly to the ordinary folk whom she will meet. Usually, she behaves as if she were doing common people a favor, but tonight she will be on the same plane as them all. They will all have to hide together.

The news was already known in town: people were spending the night at Motl's.

And those in the forward houses could rest easy. As for other Jews, if they had any sense, they would spend the night with peasants because Motl Rattner's house was filled to overflowing.

Father brought good news: "It will be quiet tonight. One can even spend the night at home. But if we don't want to do that, we can go to Motl Rattner's."

Yes. Father had paid not only for himself but for others as well.

For such news, Father no doubt deserved well of us. It was no trivial matter.

her intuition

But it was hard to believe that the pogrom's black maw would be shut so mechanically.

"Choose your rooms, people. Lower the shutters; shut your doors and sleep well."

Mother did not want to go to Motl Rattner's. She had no faith in such good luck.

"Well, then, where shall we spend the night?"

even their own home is alien

Opposite our house and opposite our door there stood Yisroel-Dovid's stable. Shoulder to shoulder with our house, as it were. There were oak logs piled before the stable. Some were already squared off, and from the beginning of the pogrom, it was among these logs that we spent our time. We lay there, taking the sun: it was there that we received news from town. That's where we had our quarrel with the peasant youths. That's where we argued about the peasants. Nor did we feel like going inside the house. It felt eerie, and it smelled musty there. The rear legs of the table had been twisted off because one of our neighbors (we knew who it was) had suspected that there was money hidden in the table's locked drawer.

What if that's where his wallet is—the one he keeps large sums of money in? What then? The table drawer is locked with a lock. Well there's a remedy for that. Twist the table legs around. And if necessary, lose your temper a little.

And indeed, the slob lost his temper and twisted the table's hind legs about.

And left satisfied.

Not that there was any money in the drawer. Only Father's packet of cheap tobacco, cigarette papers and his passport.

table = beaten pig

Well, too bad. And the table lay sprawled in the house, like a pig that spreads its hind legs out when it's being beaten on its back. Perhaps you've seen how it does. Though mother was constantly after us not to beat the pigs. A pig's back is its most tender part.

Well, where are we going to spend the night?

Mother and the children to Avdei's barn and father to Rattner's house?

no way to buy oneself ought of being murdered

When will my father be smarter in such matters instead of always choosing what is not good for him? This is not a time for families to part. In money matters perhaps it's alright to hide things in various places. If it's dug up in one place, there's still some hidden someplace else. But money is not to the point in this case. Money is something altogether different.

Zelik, Borukh Isaac's son, came and sat on the squared logs with us. He was all dressed to travel. It was possible that a nearby wagon driver might take on some passengers. Which is why young people from town came to us, all dressed and ready to travel.

Zelik, we could see, was also ready to go. He was not even thinking of going home. He had forgotten nothing there.

Yes, Zelik, you're right. You're right in every way. Still, no wagon driver is going to drive by here. Ah, come with us, we'll find someplace to spend the night together.

That pleased me. Zelik was one of Buzi's friends. And it would cheer her up to have one of her friends nearby in the open field.

"Where shall we spend the night?——"

"Yevrosi of Listve. My father is working on a hide for him." He came by and sat next to my father and talked with him. A peasant who only recently returned from military service. A large young fellow and, it would seem, an intelligent one. With a twisted and sporty blond mustache.

I might as well overhear what he is saying to my father.

"When will you be finished with my hide?"

"On such and such a date, perhaps. The disturbances are dying down."

"They are? I haven't heard that they're dying down."

My father explained to him that it was certain. As certain as could be.

What was his reason for coming to us? "Maybe you'd like to hide your horse and wagon with me? The stables are certain to be robbed at night."

I was mistaken to think he was intelligent. He thought that we would keep the horse in the stable so that he, Yevrosi, could come to steal it at night. But the horse has been in a stable since yesterday, and perhaps Yevrosi knows in whose.

"No," said Father. "Nobody will take the horse. I don't have to hide it, not even with a fellow like you."

"And the cow?"

"No one will take the cow either."

How do you like that? However cleverly starched Yevrosi's mustaches may be, he was still far from intelligent. Because he was truly a fool if he thought he could deceive us with quiet flatteries and with favors.

He hemmed and hawed for another quarter of an hour and left with what he had come with. But he was very, very unhappy.

"See to it, Panye Leyb . . . see to it that my hide is whole. Because . . ."

"As for your hide, for the time being no one will touch it. You may be certain of that. Go home and eat supper."

And he left, hardly bothering to say good night.

We do not spend the night in Motl Rattner's or at Avdei's house. We'll stay in clearings in the woods. All we have to do is go quietly and one at a time so that the neighbors don't notice us. And if things are quiet in town, then the worst that will have happened is that we will have spent the night in the clearings whose fences border our property a thousand yards from our house.

An hour or so later, our whole family sat clustered in a tree-enclosed clearing. My aunt's family was with us, and her daughter Brokhe had her little children with her. My aunt was angry. She said that the little good-for-nothings would endanger us all.

"Stop their mouths with something or other and keep them quiet." What is it that makes my aunt so angry? And against her own grandchildren?

And the wooded clearing suddenly had visitors. Unexpected and suspiciously silent.

Little wood, I'll tell you what. Don't bother us, and we won't bother you. Just leave us alone, and we'll get through the night quietly.

How fine it will be . . . how fine if the night passes like a quiet yawn. And may the night pass as quietly as a yawn at Motl Rattner's house as well.

At sunset, Pugatshov (he's a Lederman), his wife, who is better looking than he, and their children crept in among us in the wood. The older boys, seven and nine, were all girt up in their overcoats. They were eager and willing whenever

an older person needed their help. "Come, adjust that thing on my shoulders," and the small-fry were always ready to help. "Here, let me do it." "No, let me."

It's good that you're here. But more quietly, please. More quietly.

And the evening approached. A lovely Tammuz° evening. And when little birds ready themselves for sleep, they must first sing their little bit of song.

The tenth month in the Jewish calendar, usually coinciding with parts of June and July.

Well, why not? Sing, little birds. Sing and enfold us in the web of your song as with thin strands of distant violin strings. Enfold us and protect us here in our cool and unfamiliar beds.

Certainly all will be well when this night is done. But I feel that I have not done well by my mother or Buzi or Hershele or my sisters. I should have provided them with a better and a safer place to rest. Yes, it all devolves on me.

The smaller children are already asleep, but the adults are still whispering among each other. They assure each other that it will be a peaceful night. My father and Pugatshov are the ones who are most convinced of it. They are merchants, and they know how much was paid to whom and for what.

traditional strategy: there's safety in numbers

"We were foolish not to have gone to Motl Rattner's instead of lying about here."

No one would let me go into town to see what was happening. If I had binoculars with me, I would have been able to see at least from a distance. I was very anxious to know what was happening at Motl Rattner's house.

Ayzik implies Motl Rattner's: physical distance imp. cf. vs. strong emotive tie

Motl's was a wooden two-story house. And now it was packed with Jews, with their wives and children. All sorts of people, including, perhaps Dobbe Frenk and Mordkhe-Leyzer's wife. I was very anxious to know how they were all getting on in such crowded conditions. All jammed together as on Atonement night. And what was Motl Rattner's big-city daughter-in-law doing? Is she perhaps saying "*Pardon*" and "I'm sorry?" Eh? And I'd like to see how many people were in Motl's house for the first time. And most of all, I'd like to know what was happening above in the painted ~~houses~~ rooms. I hope they're not feeling out of place. It's clear, too, that the Ovrutshev families made a big mistake—those who live in two towns.

What? The Ovrutshev pogroms weren't enough for them.

erotic reverie

And I'd like to see how the women at Rattner's give their children suck. It's a crowded house, God bless it, with men in it. And many young mothers who have to suckle their babies. And it must be so hot at Motl Rattner's that the closeness will put the lamps out. Just think of it—how crowded it is. And how do they pass the time there in Motl Rattner's house? The house has many rooms. Perhaps there's a different group in each of the rooms.

class distinctions

Have the workingmen gathered together in the kitchen because they're embarrassed to be with the middle-class young people?

ironic

And, if I had a pair of binoculars, I would be able to see how they blessed the wine at the head post office. . . . There were Jews who had asked to be let in and were gathered in the director's cellar. And they could hear the sounds of merriment, of drinking, singing and dancing going on above them. Who was the object of the toasts of those drinkers: of the director, the military commandant, various clerks and four or five other young people? Marko drinks toasts to the noblemen and is on intimate terms with them. He makes them in Russian, and he sings lovely songs in unison with them. The Jews in the cellar are not calm. They are by no means calm.

And I very much want to meet that short fellow, Klimko, Uncle Zalman's neighbor, and I want to tease him. "Proud as you are of your son and though you are the best-informed slanderer on the military staff, and the first to know whatever it is that's going on, you'll rue the day you were a drinking companion of the director's. You stand staring like an owl with your sly eyes into the dark of Antonovitch Street, conceiving new schemes in your liar's sly head.

"But there's no one to tell them to. Old Zalman is no longer in his house. And there are only scorched holes where his windows were.

future flash

"Stare, owl. Stare. And do you know what, Klimko? It doesn't even occur to you that I'll live to see you dead. Your death and your son's. Though now you stand all alone looking out at the dark Antonovitch Street. Lonely and with a sense of expectation in your filthy heart that something will happen.

"Klimko, damn your ugly mug. You're waiting for something, aren't you?"

priest covering his ass

And if I had binoculars, there are many things I would have seen. How mother and the children were spending the night, and groups of village Jews who are wandering about from pillar to post. But they are the most likely to be safe from all danger. Though Dovid Frenk was killed in one of those villages. Dovid Frenk with his mother and brother as well as Osher Gershteyn's father. No, mother and the children must by now be far away. And there are Jews spending the night in the priest's attic. So that if there should be a reckoning he can say, "On the contrary, I hid Jews."

And Jews are spending the night in various peasants' stables. Though who knows whether the owners of those stables will spend the night in their homes?

= center of the vortex

What's being said? There ought to be a radio antenna on Motl Rattner's house because Motl Rattner's house is now like a train station and the house is the very nerve center of a number of worlds.

But I don't have binoculars with me. I sit in the dark, hidden among trees, and it is dark all around me. And there is grass growing near me. Yes, grass.

What's that noise beside me. What?

Maybe it's a beetle, or perhaps a young bird in its nest stirring in its sleep, shifting from one place to another.

Almost all of my people are asleep.

"And Ayzik, you sleep too. When you wake up all the evil will have disappeared, evaporated into the empty fields and the dry woods. It'll all enter into stones and logs." I desperately wanted someone to whisper that to me. And I wished to be a child again, even younger than Hershele and Yosele. As young as the child sleeping in my aunt's daughter-in-law's lap. And Buzi is sleeping not far from me. I can feel her shoe with my hand and I think, "Buzi dear. Your hands and feet are cold because of the freshness of the evening. Your thin dress isn't much of a blanket for you. But I can feel—ah how I feel it—how your young blood courses back and forth endeavoring to keep you warm."

It's well, my dear, that I can feel your blood moving about. Because, from that point of view, it's all over for Dovid Frenk.

And I have an impulse to wake Buzi. To let her know, even more urgently, that she is here. That she is mine.

Beside Buzi's shoe, I feel something like coarse cloth. It's rough grass and not fragrant, crumbling earth.

I'm glad to be getting sleepy. And I'm glad that it's quiet in town. It'll be daylight in a couple of hours. And then it'll be true. . . . And Yevrosi wants to take the horse . . . and peasant girls . . . a townful of peasant girls . . . at Motl Rattner's house. . . .

Then I dream of a bright courtyard filled with glowing people. Transformed people, not from here. And they are not really people. Rather, they are heavy sheep and cattle on a green pasture. So heavy the earth can hardly hold them. So heavy . . . And the wealth of it all makes one swell with pride and the lightfooted evening sun wearing a veil of grace is strolling about. Suddenly, the cattle begin stamping their feet, and there is a dense cloud and then thunder and lightning. I woke up. There was no rain. It was dry. There was a strange feeling in the air. Dogs were howling. Countless dogs. A multitude of them howling in all parts of the town. I tried to open my eyes; to test whether I was dreaming or whether what I was hearing was real. . . .

Vrrroooom. A grenade exploded somewhere; and the thunder continued to rumble, exploding over the earth. You could hear its echo for perhaps half an hour.

Yes, it was happening in town.

Our families—half of them wake up. They wring their hands; they turn pale. And those who are still asleep—would that they would stay asleep.

Vrrroooom. Thunder again.

There are explosions on all sides. Our hair stands on end. And dogs!! Where did so many dogs come from?

We are on a hillock. The town is below us, and we can hear screams and cries. They're not drunken cries. They are the cries people make at the point of death.

There is a banging of crowbars and the rattling of tin. Maybe there's a fire. Maybe the town is burning. And again we hear cries and shouts. Who can be screaming like that? Jewish children? I've never heard them cry like that.

Then someone comes to us from out of the trees.

Don't be frightened. Don't be frightened. It's Shmuel-Yankl, the shoemaker's son and his family. They've spent the night near us. And none of us knew the others were there.

Who else is coming out from among the trees? Ah, it's Mikhl the baker and his wife. They didn't want to stay in the peasant's stable, and they crept here. Good. Good. But quieter, please. As quiet as possible. The children are waking up. Then let their mothers do what must be done. And again, the outcries from the town. Girls are being dragged by the hair. Girls and young mothers being dragged from their beds.

"Down with communists and Jews. Hurrah!"

And Sloveshne shrieks and chokes itself on blood.

What's going on in town? Streams of blood are flowing. Ah. Blood is pouring. It's pouring. And in Motl Rattner's house the blood is flowing perhaps from the upper-story windows. Red streams. Oh Lord, why are they shrieking like that in town? And we stand there, a silenced cluster, with wives and children and people staying with us.

"Yankl," I say to my former boss, "we've no weapons in our hands. Let's at least go and find some axes. It's not far."

"Be still," Yankl replies. "Be quiet. We won't go."

"But what if Kosenko comes here? Kosenko or Marko? Let's at least have a stick of some kind."

"Be still," Yankl begs. "We won't go."

And Buzi kneels before me, and her eyes are lifted to me, she whispers so low she can hardly be heard, "Ayzik, you won't go anywhere. I won't let you."

Now where did Buzi suddenly acquire the look of a madonna? And why does her voice tremble as she pleads? Is it because she loves me; is it because she's scared?

"Both, Ayzik. Both," I make my own reply.

Why didn't we take an axe with us yesterday? A couple of axes? We could have carried them under our clothes. We believed what Marko and Kosenko said. We trusted them. And I look at Shmuel-Yankl's wife—at Sarah, Shmuel-Yankl's. There she is in our crowd, with daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren. She says nothing to anyone. She is simply pale. Waiting. Listening very attentively.

No, I'll not turn her over to Kosenko—to that wormy Kosenko. He'll not get any of these sleepers. I'll crush him like a bedbug. I don't care if he's got a gun, I'll crush him like a bedbug. A couple of weeks ago he announced that he was a watchmaker. Aha! He wanted to deceive his own brothers. What a peasant can think up. That all the Jewish watches in town would find their way to him. To him at his father's house. Some watchmaker he is.

Well, what about his partners? What will they steal? Kosenko, you're too smart.

And it's two weeks now since he's been driving about among the villages on Jewish business. And now he's running about the town with a gun in his hand. All infected. No, he's too young to be so exalted. To have priests and headmen and whole villages consulting him on Jewish matters. He is too young to be riding around on a horse maligning me in the villages. I'll stomp him!!

Is it daylight yet? Yes, it's daylight. And there's no sound of shouts coming from town. No shrieking. Only dogs bark one after the other. Evidently a great deal happened while we were asleep. While we slept, our town was convulsed.

Yisroel-Dovid is here, bringing us the news from town.

"There was a great slaughter at Motl Rattner's house. The rabbi is at his last gasp, he's been stabbed in the heart. The daughter-in-law was killed. Many people were killed in Motl Rattner's house, though it's not yet clear who they were. There's a great bloody pile of them."

"Is it likely they'll come here?" some women asked uncertainly.

"When there's more light, we'll leave this place. All of us . . . all of us will leave," someone says with determination.

We put our faith in daylight as if it were a powerful guardian. It might reveal us, but it would not turn us over to our enemies.

We hear the cries of Jews running across the fields. And someone is chasing them, crying, "Stinking Jews, don't crush my oats; I'll cut you down like dogs."

"It's Shmayle," says my sister. "That's his voice." Well, if Shmayle is in the game, then everyone is in it. So that's how it is. Jews run, but they have short feet. And Shmayle pursues them, his features contorted with rage. But perhaps he won't do anything. It's daylight already.

Baran's Yisroel is here.

"People, let's go. Nisl the Beech has been killed. He's lying near Yekhiel Dorfman's house."

"What do you mean, killed?"

"Killed with a scythe. One of his neighbors from below the river."

"Yontl's Hershke also killed. By the same peasant."

Yontl's Hershke, my boss? He recently came back from the war and was just gathering his family together. He had curly hair, like a young ram's. Curly and very black. That curly hair must have been smeared with blood. He didn't know where to run to and, seeing a ladder next to the widow's house, he started to climb it when the peasant pulled him down and killed him with a scythe across his throat. The same thing happened to Nisl the Beech.

A tall, dark fellow, that Nisl. In middle age. A furrier.

Dovid the grocer, also killed. Mikhoel stabbed. Naftoli-Yoshke's daughter killed. Zisha Guretske's wife . . . the old market woman . . . .

"Naftoli-Yoshke's daughter? The one who lived beside the river. The seamstress?"

"Yes. She was engaged to be married. She's lying not far from the church."

(It all happened so quickly, I wasn't even able to ask, "When will we kill peasant girls? And young peasant women? Women as simple as Naftoli-Yoshke's daughter, the seamstress who lived beside the river—or any others who may come to hand and whom no one ever expected to kill.")

Rokhl, Baran's daughter, lost a two-year-old child as she was running. The child's marrow spilled on a stone not far from her house. Rokhl, with her other children, kept running. Now you could hear her calling her husband, "Shloyme, my dearest love. Where are you? Shloyme, my dear. My darling, where are you?"

A quiet woman, that Rokhl, and now she is confused, calling as loudly as she can. She's no longer in town, but calling aloud in the fields. Hoping that her husband will respond to her. She now has only one thing on her mind, and she keeps on calling.

All of us in our hiding place among the trees can hear her. We recognize her voice, and we don't know whether we ought to call out to her or not.

"People, come."

And mother says, "Come, let's get away from here."

And we do what she says. We go.

See, now we are out in the bright sunlight.

Kosenko, here we are.

We scramble over the most distant of the fences and we go. There are many Jews near us. And we go.

And the Jews! Just look at them. There's hardly any difference between the living and the dead.

Just look at them. Zisl has been killed. Zisl who was talking to you is now dead. I'll believe it. Because the very least thing separates those of us who live from the others.

I cannot believe that the tormented ones are dead. And those who speak—I cannot believe that they are alive.

And on whom does the mark of the scythe show? Can you tell? Because a single nighttime hour or an expelled daytime breath can achieve that which an entire century will not erase. Look, then, at our living and at our dead.

But mother is exhausted. Worn out. Every five steps, she has to sit down. She says, "Go ahead, children. Go with the others. I'll stay here. God's will will be done."

Mother says it very calmly. But we don't leave her.

"Do you know what?" I say. "I'll just run over to the peasant's house and harness up our horse; then mother can ride. I looked them all in the eye. None of them dared to say "Yes". And in fact, that's what I did. I ran to Avdei's to get the horse.

And someone seems to be whispering in my ear, "What you're doing Ayzik is good. But quickly. Move quickly. Every minute counts. An instant's delay and the way there and back will be closed to you. Quickly, Ayzik. Quickly. It's well that you aren't scared; that you aren't depressed; that you are alert. There's reason to be depressed, but put it off until later. For another ten minutes; for half an hour. Hurry."

And I feel that I am treading the earth on the other side of the border. I have stolen into a strange country, and I may be betrayed at any moment. I may be caught at any moment. And I cannot rely on any of these moments.

At my right, I recognize my father's house. Opposite it, Yisroel-Dovid's house. Yes, I recognize them. It's been so long since I've been here, the place where I grew up. And I recognize things, though I have no time to stay.

But I've come here in stealth, and without permission.

I turn left into Avdei's lane to get our rig.

Avdei's wife, a tall, powerful peasant woman, has trouble recognizing me, but I go at once to the stable and start to harness "my" horse.

"Where are you planning to drive at a time like this?" And I know her two daughters whom nobody is just then about to betray—and that grieves me deeply.

"You'll find out later where we're going," I say. "Bring out some bread." And I put the harness on.

"What kind of bread? I've only just begun to bake."

"Old woman, bring out a loaf, and don't delay."

She turns unwillingly toward her house door. I've given her an order.

Suddenly, bang, bang! Someone's cracking nuts. There's gunfire in town. Gunfire.

I've hooked up the last strap of the harness. The very last one, and they're shooting in town. It's hot in town once more. One hundred degrees for everyone.

A neighbor from two doors down brings me a loaf of bread. Evidently she heard my dealings with the witch.

"Neighbor, open the gate."

She is more responsive to my requests and drags the broad pine gate open. And puts her hands fearfully on her heart as she says, "Ah, dear God. They're shooting again."

"Yes," I say, "they're shooting again. Giddap."

"Wait a minute, here's a cake for you." Avdei's wife, after a bit of agonizing, had decided to put off doing penance until next year.

"To hell with you. Giddap."

trying to domesticate

I hear the sound of cracking nuts right behind me. They're shooting, the way children play. Erratically, like the leaping of fleas.

Giddap.

My horse only now begins to move. I woke him out of his doze. A horse, it would seem, is always a horse. It makes no difference to him where he finds his oats.

The shooting in town seems to have no preconceived plan. My horse puts his ears back. Evidently he's not pleased that there's scatter shot behind us. His nostrils expand, and he lifts his head.

"Giddap. There's nothing to hear." The trouble is that we're still a bit below the hill. "So there, giddap. A touch of the whip, and giddap. Get a move on. Giddap."

I may meet a neighbor peasant who will ask me where I'm going . . . my neighbors are, today, ten times better and ten times worse than usual. Their eyes are sealed, and they seem unable to see people. And Nisl, the leather worker, a black corpse, lies beside Yekhiel Dorfman's house. . . . Giddap. Perhaps we ought not to leave town. Perhaps we should stay for Nisl the Beech's funeral. And that of Yontl's Hershke. And Naftoli-Yoshke's daughter. And that of other Jews. Young people, women and children whom Kosenko wanted dead.

What was it like for Yontl's Hershke under the scythe? For the rabbi under the point of the spear? I don't know. I've never in all my days felt the blade of a knife at my throat or had anyone want to kill me or been at the point of death. I'd like to know what that's like. Giddap. You won't get there until tomorrow. And the old market woman—all of her children are in America. And she lies murdered all by herself in her little house. And I owe her some money, the old market woman. I owe her some money.

Ayzik, Ayzik, hurry.

You see a shorn lamb. And a pregnant ewe is stumbling about alone in the bare wheat field weeping.

"What's the matter, Buzi? Come dear, get into the wagon. Quickly."

And Buzi says tearfully, "Let's get away from here. . . . They began shooting again, so I said, 'Why have you sent Ayzik to town? Why have you sent him away? You hear? They're shooting. Who'll go get Ayzik? They're shooting. Who'll go get him?' And none of them replied."

I'm really angry at my father for letting such a child, such a little lamb, wander about in an empty wheat field in search of her Ayzik. She's still a child, and the firing over there goes on without letup. With no beginning or end. Like the bells in the church on the first day of Easter. Morning, noon and night, children pull at all sorts of bells without stopping.

Buzi would not tolerate my standing in the wagon as I drove. "Let's sit down. Let's hide from the fact that wicked spirits are shooting in town."

"Where is mother?"

"Oh, dear. We've driven past her. We have to drive back. We have to turn into the field of clover. That's where she is."

To turn around, to have the wagon's wheels roll over the wheat . . . now that's a reason to kill a Jew. If I'm caught doing it, I myself would justify him.

"This time, neighbor, you're entirely right. I've crushed somebody's wheat with one of my wheels. That's because I turned the wagon around so that I could go in search of my weak mother who is waiting for me in the clover field."

confrontation w/ Yevrosi

"Hey, stop!"

Eh, who is it? Wait a minute, let me think it over slowly. Is it Yevrosi? With the curled mustaches? Who urged us to leave our horse in his stable last night? His face is all scratched and bruised? He stands there now with his eyes narrowed, his features all twisted. He's got his hand on my horse's bridle.

I'd ask him, "Yevrosi, who's scratched your face? Yevrosi, have you any idea who'll be at the rabbi's funeral? At the rabbi's, at Nisl the Beech's; at the funeral of Naftoli-Yoshke's daughter. Who'll be at their funerals, since we're all going away?"

But I don't ask him that. Instead, in a stern voice, I ask, "What is it, Yevrosi?"

"My hide. I've lost one of my hides because of you. So I have to unharness the horse."

He's right, of course. Though it may be he's making a mistake. He's entitled to three horses for one of his hides, not one.

"Listen to me, Yevrosi. There are sixteen hides in the attic of the house. Don't take all sixteen, Yevrosi. Take three to replace your one. And good day to you. Let go the reins."

"No. I have to take the horse. The horse is mine. I've lost one of my hides on account of you."

So you see, he is being reasonable.

"Yevrosi, in the house, in the attic, there are sixteen hides. Tell me, Yevrosi, do you understand me, or are you pretending? And who scratched you up. And are you, too, a highwayman?"

I saw a couple of young peasants just then on the road. They were leading horses in from their pasture. The peasant youths were from Hantsharske Street. I knew them. They had done by night what Yevrosi was doing now. But now it's daylight. Now they were just simple folk. I called them by name and, speaking in a confident voice, I asked them to judge between us.

*

"Do you see what a pain in the neck he's being. I've told him, 'There are sixteen hides at our house in the attic. Go take three in place of the one you've lost. But remember Yevrosi, no more. If you do, it'll be the worse for you.' "

Jewish integration into peasant society

If Nisl the Beech were to see me just then, he would say, "Ayzik, how did you get to be so clever? You know, it's not wise to say too much to a peasant. Listen, I know what a peasant is. (How many years is it since I've been sewing pelts for them, wandering about from village to village, hardly making a living?) This time, I hardly said ten words, and see what they've done to me. I'm a furrier. I have a wife and children. . . . Ayzik, at least do what you can to see that I'm properly buried, so that the pigs won't drag my body the length and breadth of Sloveshne."

"You see what a pain in the neck he's being," I said to the peasants.

"Yeah, you're right," said the young peasants leading the horses. And that was all they said.

Poor Yevrosi had not counted on such an end to his adventure. To lose such a horse in a single instant. As if it had escaped from his stall.

How long had it been since he set his mind on acquiring the horse, and now the end of it was that it was gone.

And Yevrosi has no clear understanding (since he's still confused) that if he doesn't get it now, it will, most likely, be never.

"Giddap!" I'll get even with him. The devil's hindmost is what he'll find if he goes searching for cowhides in the attic. Our neighbors are certainly smarter than he is. They've already stolen them. A rock flung in his teeth is what he'll find if he goes there. "They" have the preference. "They" are neighbors. And he's a dog of an outsider. Giddap. And here's my family.

"Now, mother, get into the wagon. That's it. Now. Giddap." Mother and my sisters and Hershele . . . my father was too impatient. He went off with the other Jews.

Buzi told mother and my sisters about Yevrosi. They clasped their heads, astonished.

"Giddap, Kosye. So what if it's up hill? Once in a while you have to make an exception. Giddap. We'll soon catch up to the other Jews. It'll be more cheerful with Jews. Giddap."

No one knows what day it is today. One cannot imagine a day in the week with today's color or today's name.

But the others say that today is Friday. Simply Friday.

That's droll.

And where are such contented Jews going on this Friday? Packed together in a flock: men, women and children.

Or it may be that they are not quite so contented. That's one thing. Where they are going is another. They're going. But they don't rightly know where they are going. Because there's still the question whether anyone will welcome such unlucky folk who have been beaten for three days and there's still no end to them. And, moreover, it may be that wherever there is a community of them in the world there will be a Kosenko or a captain of the guard. And it's said that our neighbors are bragging that they will follow us anywhere in the world. Our neighbors have condemned all the Jews to destruction. Perhaps they say what they say because they know something.

The shoemaker Leyzer's daughter is in her ninth month, so she has to get into the wagon. And let Shmulik's daughter Khane, a widow, put her children in, too. And are there other children?

"Come. Please get in the wagon."

I've driven my sisters off the wagon. They were tired, and it didn't occur to them that little children had a higher priority. Even when I shouted at them, they couldn't understand it. Even when they got down from the wagon, they weren't finished with my scolding. Is the "scolding" any better in Sloveshne?

"Anyone with small children, on the wagon, please."

It may not be nice to scold and shout this way on the road between the fields.

And my six-year-old brother, Hershl, understood that he was a man and got gravely down from the wagon, his hands in his pockets. All the men were on foot.

Giddap. I pass open-sided wagons. And I've left my depression somewhere else. I hope it stays there until we've reached a town.

It's clear to everyone now that today is Friday. But let me ask you, if you were in our place and you came to a point where there is a fork in the road and you knew that if you went in one direction no one would let you pass, and if you went in the other the same thing would be true, which direction would you take? Left or right?

We stopped. We considered what to do. Informed suggestions were made, roads mentioned, predictions made as to what might happen. The end of it all was that we could not agree. Some of us went to the right. We turned left, toward Velednik. There we would see what we would see.

My father had left the horse and the householder's role to me and had gone off with the others. Wheat was ripening in the fields on both sides of the road. Barley was ripening, and buckwheat was just springing up in other fields. The sun kept the dew from the fields. A true Friday sun. Pale. And bees hovered above the rows of grain in the fields. And there was a swallow darting about the horse's feet. Now low, right near its feet, and then suddenly darting upward through a shaft of air to hover above us once again. I didn't know whether it was teasing us or whether it meant to console us. And my wagon was filled with bleating children.

Children, children. We'll avoid danger, and you'll grow up to be healthy adults. And then you'll remember that there was a Friday on which you were all packed into a wagon, and that some fellow, Ayzik, drove the horse and walked beside the wagon. Ah, children, I could not stand the way you were packed together; and I could not stand your bleating. Just like lambs. And whenever the wagon swayed, your cries swayed too, and they became a strange sort of music, never heard before.

And other children, standing and weeping, nevertheless fell asleep. . . . Giddap, Kosye. . . .

A foolish Jew, newly arrived, rides along with us. He describes how Yekhiel Dorfman was killed. Old Yekhiel Dorfman. For most of the night he hid in the garden of the church, among the beanpoles. Then he went back to his house and sat down at the head of his table. Then when the town grew jolly, murderers came into the house and stabbed him. And there he continued to sit, at the head of his table. It may be he's still sitting there. . . .

A woman says that there was a great deal of butchery in our town last night. There was a particularly heavy butchery in Motl's house. And among others who were killed, she included Nayditsh, a foreign student, and Natan Granadyor. Each of them about twenty-six years old. And I find it hard to believe that they could rest in peace. Such young and handsome folk. And in what attitude are they now? Strong young shoulders, hands and feet, all together. How do they lie there in that bloody tangle?

Then, the woman told how some twenty men at Avrom-Ber's house survived though others died. They were not found—but theirs was not a good resting place, under the groans of the dying, under corpses, with streams of blood flowing down to find a hiding place. "Don't faint. Don't move. Hang on. It may be that you'll survive." No, such living is nauseating. And Haykl's head is split open. Kosenko opened a window and told the Jews to run, to save themselves. Meanwhile, he stood there and chopped at the head of anyone who looked out of the window.

But others who were lucky got away, despite their wounded skulls.

Hershl-Gedalikh's wife was killed, but Hershl and his son-in-law escaped with

head wounds and ran through the streets like chickens that have not been properly killed.

And Keyle-Esther, the widow, has a broken arm; and Itsl's Yosl, who works at the tannery, has a stab wound in his hand.

The woman telling all this is very lucky. She saw them all as she was looking for her children. Now she is alone. She says that Kosenko ran about waving a revolver; the soldiers had rifles; while the others had scythes, others had guns, and some had ordinary iron rods. Pashkovski grabbed the butt of a gun from an old man and broke the same old man's hand with it. No doubt this upset the old man. And Alter Krayzman, Alter the harness maker, stood before the door of his house, an axe in his hand: "For every pair of feet that comes close, there'll be a head lying on the ground."

Alter is a brave man, but Alter's wife and children, unwilling to be left widowed and orphaned, pleaded with him to do what other Jews did until finally, in the midst of the turmoil, they managed to escape to Dyakon's stable, where they hid.

And the woman had also seen a woman from Ovrutsh who was killed and lying in the street. But she had no time to pause beside the body.

"Giddap."

My women in the wagon neither hear nor see anything. They are terribly confused and frightened. And if they think of anything at all in their lethargy, it is this: whether they have been rescued yet or not.

"Giddap."

And the Jews are stumbling about. They are talkative, as if it were an early Sabbath morning when they go to bathe. They seem to be satisfied with something. This is especially true about the stranger, the newly arrived and foolish Jew. He had been in Sloveshne only a week, and yet he had managed to save his life.

"Uncle, I am in no way more respectable than you. And I have nothing against you. But I'm upset because Nisl the Beech is lying exposed and sprawled in Yekhiel's house. Benyomin-Leyb's Yekhiel. And because Yekhiel is sitting there with the point of the spear still in his heart. And because his shutters are drawn, at midday. If the shutters weren't drawn, perhaps he would nod at Nisl the Beech, or give him advice or counsel. He's a wise fellow, this Yekhiel. And I'm upset, too, that the rivulets of blood have cooled on Motl Rattner's walls and on the other side of his windows. On the steps, on the table, on the beds, on the furniture and everywhere else.

What do you think? Will Motl Rattner's house ever be a house again, or do you think it'll be burned down? Burned one board at a time. And the ashes hidden, along with the dead.

And you, my faithful peasant neighbors, though you have wiped the scythes and knives, have you taken them home with you along with my blood? Peasants, faithful neighbors, may you rot. You and your wives and children. Wherever you may be. Because. Because I can't abide the fact that your children walk the streets sniffing at the boots that belonged to my dead.

Here!

We are already in the village on the outskirts of Velednik. Several of us make inquiries of the village peasants. They express sympathy for us, cluck their tongues, but they could swear that last night the same thing happened in Velednik. A peasant woman says she'll call her husband and that he'll tell us.

And indeed, he does tell us. He says that demons came to Velednik. But he thinks they were driven away.

"Giddap." We have to move on, because there's no turning back. And what's ahead is not so clear, either. Perhaps those who turned back to Yevrosi's village made the better choice. And the peasants sympathize with us. Even the dogs stop their barking. Curious, they watch us, their tails in the air as they stand beside their masters.

Nevertheless, it's kind of the peasants to let us pass.

"Good day to you."

"Go in good health. A good day to you."

"Giddap," and we're on our way again.

It's four versts to Velednik.

There is an uplifting scent of green hay in the gardens. For my horse's sake, I'd like to spring into one of those gardens and gather a bit of clover for him (it would be the perfect crime). In the streets of Velednik, one can smell fresh groat cakes. The inhabitants of Velednik behave like simple Jews. We don't. You can see it at once. We're different. No longer simple.

Well? We're not quite respectable: the moment they saw us, we frightened the Jews of Velednik. They didn't say much, but they wrapped their baskets in towels, and their children in shawls. They grabbed wagons and hurried off to Ovrutsh.

"What's it all about?"

It's all simple matter. There were people here during the night, but the local peasants drove them away. Indeed, one of the band who was slain and another who was wounded are still in town. The others scattered like a band of mice. Who they were and where they came from, nobody knows. Now, when the local Jews have seen what misfortune has overtaken us, they harness their wagons and hurry off to Ovrutsh.

It would seem that the Velednik Jews are using their heads. But why are they in such a hurry? It would be better if they exchanged a word or two with us. Though perhaps there's not much to say. Too bad.

And so, we drive on.

We unloaded the wagon and were left only with a girl who had lost her mother.

"Don't cry, child. We're driving to Ovrutsh, and your mother is there."

And, since father knows the way, and the wagon is now empty, all of us sit in it. Our horse moves at a crawl, and we're on our way to Ovrutsh. But why didn't all of Sloveshne go to Ovrutsh after the first day?

"Because no one knew . . ."

Franz Finkl of Volost had said, "Where are you going to go, since there's nobody left, even in Ovrutsh?"

And now, who knows whether there is anyone in Ovrutsh or not? We know nothing at all. He was a new arrival, that Franz Finkl. From Volost.

And it seems to me we'll get to Ovrutsh in 1925, but my father says that it's twenty-five versts to Ovrutsh. Is he telling the truth, or did he say that merely to keep our courage up?

We are overtaken by wagons from Velednik filled with entire families. Perhaps they curse us for making them drive off so abruptly.

When the road is sandy, we get down from the wagon. And there's stinking mud in the villages. The horse has a hard time dragging his way out of it.

"Daddy, is there always this much mud in the villages?"

And young people nearby are roofing a stable. They stand there with axes and boards in their hands. Young, indifferent folk who laugh at us.

"Sons of bitches that you are. You stand there laughing with axes and boards in your hands. Throw them at us. Throw your axes and stop laughing."

But they don't talk to us. They talk to the wagon drivers of Velednik.

"Where are you driving them? Why don't you just turn the wagon over and be done with them?"

The wagon drivers know who they are, so they make no reply and keep driving. "Giddap."

The horses strain, the mud stinks. We still have three such villages before we come to Ovrutsh.

One wonders whether we'll be allowed to drive into Ovrutsh? Whether anyone wants us there? And when will we get there? I'm beginning to think it will be never. Just think how long it's been since we first started.

Night is coming on. Blumele, who lost her mother, has been uneasy all along the way.

"Just after we pass this village, it will be Ovrutsh," says father.

"I hope we can eat *kreplakh*," says Buzi.

And indeed, we drive onto the cobbled road. The wagon begins to rattle. That's no fun for Buzi. Better for us both to get down.

It's candle-blessing time, and the Ovrutsh cattle are returning home from the fields. Do you see? In Ovrutsh, people are behaving as usual.

A freshly bathed, cleanly dressed Jew comes toward us. Perhaps he has already heard the news?

"From Sloveshne?" he asks father.

"Sloveshne," comes the reply from several voices on the wagon.

"Come to my house," he said simply and pointed our way for us as if he had found what he was looking for.

It was a heart-wrenching moment. . .

The Jew's house was twenty paces away. Candlesticks were already on the table there, and a woman, either his daughter or a daughter-in-law, was still washing the kitchen floor.

Our people climbed stiffly and carefully down from the wagon, as if this was precisely the inn toward which we had so long been driving.

"Come into the house," came the fresh voice of a shy young woman.

Fortunately for me, I still have things I need to do so that I don't have to go into the house just yet.

I have to find a place for the horse.

The householder's boys show me where to put it.

"Youngsters, be good enough to go now. I'll feel better left to myself."

The horse is wet, tired and hungry. His sides are contracted. He whinnied at me when I took his harness off. And what'll happen if, following my impulse, I put my arms around his neck and burst into tears? Because of the great shame; and because of all the other things that are pressing on my heart and that I cannot express in words. To weep sweetly . . . to weep, to weep; and perhaps to indulge myself and simply dissolve into my tears. For them. For where we've been. For the great and miserable shame.

The End

On that same Friday night, Jews still lived in Sloveshne. In the morning, their roads were blocked. In the morning, they were driven back from every road by armed local peasants who, mad and red-eyed and murderous, drove them back along the roads.

They were driven into the center of town, to the church where they were told to kiss the cross. One of the peasants, as a joke, threw a grenade, but fortunately it fell into the mud.

Then Kosenko said, "In order to avoid cholera, we'll have to bury the dead. Let the Jews first go bury their dead, and after that we'll finish them off at the cemetery." Yankl the Wallachian harnessed up his wagon and heaps of dead were carted, gently or rudely, to the cemetery. Men and women, youths and maidens. And if it chanced to be a child, it was grabbed by the leg and thrown like a bundle onto the wagon.

Those who were half dead were left to lie in their torment and were not taken to a grave. "Wait until they die."

And those live Jews who lay under the bodies, when they heard quiet, exhausted Yiddish voices and finally risked opening their eyes to see what was going on, were nevertheless petrified lest Kosenko should become aware that they were playing dead.

The Jews in the burial party counseled them, "Roll up your sleeves and pretend that you're in the burial party. That'll explain why your clothes are bloody."

And the dead lay in a variety of poses and in various sorts of garments. And the dead were everywhere.

And so wide ditches were dug. One ditch was intended for men. Another for women. The young with the young. The old with the old. And they busied themselves about the task.

Young and old, all of them perspiring, worked until evening. Fifteen-year-olds had to show that they were good grave diggers; that they were fully experienced and could be permitted everywhere and to see everything. And that they could be trusted at the boundaries between life and death.

They worked until evening (as of early morning, no one had kept track of time), and then they all sang *Lekhu neraneno*° at the cemetery. Then each of them found the most densely overgrown graves that they could find among the huts and hid themselves until midnight, until dawn, until broad daylight. Until help arrived from Ovrutsh: a detachment of Bolsheviks. (Yitzkhok Ber Helfand, wearing warped boots, his feet rubbed raw, had, on Friday, escaped to Ovrutsh along with the others who were fleeing from the villages near Sloveshne and, with the same raw feet and still wearing the same warped boots, he returned to Sloveshne on Saturday morning with the detachment. For some reason, he showed no fear.

The opening prayer of the Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday evening.

Perhaps because he was not from Sloveshne. He was not a local inhabitant. He was a teacher who himself came from Ovrutsh.)

In the middle of the marketplace, the detachment caught a young peasant carrying things he had picked up. They killed him on the spot. Poor fellow, a foolish young peasant. Luck was against him. He had really had nothing much on his mind. Poor fellow, he came late to the scene. . . . later than absolutely everyone and he had gathered up a few things in a tablecloth. They killed him on the spot.

Then the entire townful of peasants gathered up their bedding, tossed them onto their wagons and, driving their cattle, went into hiding in the woods.

Then four tall, handsome, but somewhat angry young peasants were stood up before the little jail and shot. Among them, Zeydl the tanner's neighbor—Adamko. A tall, smooth-shaven, red-scarred fellow. And his sister and mother and father wept.

Then those with broken bones and the wounded of all sorts (so long as they were still breathing) were taken to the hospital. And the doctor who arrived an hour before the Bolsheviks had been made to undress in Volost. No one would believe that he was not a Jew.

And in fact, he was not a Jew.

Then it was commanded: "Gather up everything that was stolen. If you don't, we'll burn your houses down and you will burn."

Then Mamma Khaytshik, who had been stabbed, was brought back from a village; Yosele and Malke, both stabbed; and the murdered Aunt Freydl and her twelve-year-old Yankl; and old Avrom, who had been stabbed; Aunt Rasle, who had been wounded, and her two frightened daughters from the village, Malkele and Esther. Stabbed, both of them.

You want to know, "What will Yoylik in America say about all this? A packet of his letters just recently arrived."

And you'll want to know, "What good did it do Yosele to hide his toys in the same hiding place as Hershl?" And, "How will Hershl inquire about his friend?"

I don't know. I know nothing. All I know is that my soul, my heart and all of my limbs are in pain. And I would gladly take Aunt Khaytshik's place in the wide rectangle of her grave. And that I would be very frightened to wipe away the foam from Malke and Yosele's lips. Rokhele says that she remembers very little; but what she does remember is that there was white foam spewing from Yosele's mouth—and from Malke's too. And that they twitched and groaned.

Saturday, Saturday during the day, when help was only an hour away, her mother and family had a very disagreeable experience. They separated themselves from the larger group—thinking they would outwit God and would hide in the vicinity of the dairy.

Rokhele remembers very little. She remembers Yosele and Malke and that her mother, still alive, tried to crawl into a garden and that peasant women betrayed her and she was dragged out and stabbed again.

Well for Rokhele that she remembers so little.

Rokhele remembers less and less, because it's all dreadful.

She remembers very little, even about herself. She remembers that it was hot. She was going somewhere when she met a peasant. He asked her, "Where are you going all by yourself?" She made no reply. Because she was angry, she made no reply.

The peasant took her by the hand and led her to his home. "Do you want to eat something?" he asked. "Do you want something to drink?" She said nothing.

Early next morning, he led her to the outskirts of Sloveshne and said, "I guess you can find your own way from here." Then he left.

She ran home but found nobody there. She was very thirsty. Taking an earthen cup, she went into the cellar where there was water. And she drank. After that, she remembers nothing.

Then things took their usual course.

Somebody passing by Borukh-Ayzik's house heard groans and went inside and found Mother Khaytshik's daughter Rokhele lying on a rag. From all indications, she had been lying there for three days. She was taken to the hospital.

I found Rokhele in the hospital, lying on the ground. She lay in a corner of the corridor, covered with lice. There was a half-raw egg near her, moldy and covered with hair, and a smeared crust of bread.

The peasants, it was said, were bringing milk, eggs and bread. Transformed into good peasants.

"Where is Buzi?" Rokhele asked, her voice coming as if from underground.

"See, here she is Rokhele." And Rokhele turned her eyes in the direction I indicated, but she did not move her head and asked no further questions.

Rokhele had two blunt stab wounds in her shoulder. Perhaps they were not dangerous.

And someone told me, "Ayzik, your beds are in the district office. Go get them. Timofeiko dragged them back. He meant to inherit them from you. Timofeiko."

And someone else said, "Ayzik, some pig of a peasant in Listve has your black cow. His name is Yevrosi. He's just back from his military service so he thought he might as well graze your cow."

At Mother Khaytshik's house I found Rokhele's clothes, caked with blood. I hid them someplace where I could find them again. And I searched for the two fresh (for that day) mounds in the cemetery. Nearby there was a board on which was written, "Here lie three martyrs: Avrom, Elimelekh and Yoysef." And on the board just opposite was written, "Here lies four martyrs: Freydl, Khaya, Esther and Malke." Do you see how none of them is paired? Neither the men nor the women.

Then the detachment of Bolsheviks put twelve peasants into a great wagon and bound their hands to its sides. All twelve were large, well built—and angry. Nine were local men, and one from the workers' settlement, as well as the dark little traitor and Franz Finkel (the one who had said: "Where are you going to go since there's nobody left, even in Ovrutsh?").

That makes three.

Nine and three usually makes twelve.

Just yesterday, they chose to bathe in blood. But that was Jewish blood. As for them, what did anyone have against them? And their faces again look strange. Stodot knows what was done to four of the young peasants. He knows that they licked the ground. And Stodot knows that he, too, will do the same: he and the dark little traitor, and Timukh Lukhtans (the tall, handsome militiaman) and his brother, and white-bearded Maxim. But the chief culprits are not here. Missing

are Kosenko, Marko and the head man. And there are others missing. But where is one to find them?

In the morning, justice was done to the twelve. Timukhei excepted. He hid himself and managed to delay things for two months.

The mothers, wives and fathers who traveled to Ovrutsh described all that happened there. "It was all very simple. They hired Mongols. Many Mongols. They filled them full of brandy and then led them to the cemetery where they were told, 'Be good enough to kill these Russians here.' For the Mongols, this was a small matter. They spat once and it was done. As easy as eating bread."

Well, now they lie underground in the Ovrutsh cemetery—our lords.

Later, Mordkhe-Leyzer's older son (Osher Gershteyn is his name) enlisted as a volunteer in the Red Army. He could find no rest, and he could not understand why his father had been killed. He enlisted in the army promising that he would "do something." Osher Gershteyn.

Then, slowly, there was repayment: an eye for an eye. And peasant daughters-in-law and young wives had reason to weep. Some sixty, as against sixty victims. Then old Zalman's neighbor, Klimko himself, came back from prison and was taken up that very night. By morning, he lay newly washed beneath the sacred images. His wife and daughter were taken that same week.

After that, there were many who stopped weeping in two towns.

Crushed, wounded, we returned to heal our bruised Sloveshne.

And we had a doctor to care for Rokhele. And nothing more. What will we say to Osher and to Shoyel if they should come to inquire about their mother?

After that, the peasants in our neighborhood flattered us. "None of us thought it would end that way. We were told that there were no more Jews. And that no one would take their part. Well, too bad. It's been paid for. An eye for an eye. But enough already. It's a pity to kill such fine healthy peasants. And the Jews who were killed were not in the best condition. Old folks, women and children. Only here and there were there any healthy young men."

Well, certainly they are right. Is it their fault that they were deceived? They had only hoped for the best. They had believed that they could get on without Jews. And, as they say, possible consequences harm nothing today. Well, so be it. So they would divide up the bit of Jewish goods: the houses, the cattle (about which they had in some cases even quarreled). And then, just see! In the very midst of it all, along come the Bolsheviks. And besides, Sloveshne was getting a bad reputation. "Bandit country." Wherever you go, the minute they know you're from Sloveshne, they shout "Bandit" at you.

And I'm supposed to console myself with that. And we're supposed to take pity on them and say, "Blessings on you—too bad that you hungered after Jewish property."

Then Buzi gave birth to a lovely daughter. We wept, we laughed. And we named her Khayale.

Then the Bolsheviks called a meeting at which they said, "Comrades, peasants and citizens of Sloveshne. Wipe the stains from your reputation and send your sons to the Red Army. Who will fight for the power of the workers and peasants if not the workers and peasants themselves?"

And they said to the Jews: "Comrades, artisans and citizens of Sloveshne. Do you not see that you have delayed paying your debt to the Red Army for far too long? Other Jewish towns are being made to suffer by gangs and counterrevolutionaries. Come, join the Red Army."

And hard as it was for me to leave my two girls—one of them twenty-one years old, the other two weeks old, still, Buzi and I had long whispered consultations about it. And Buzi wept silently, and I promised her that I would not be gone for long.

And since, with the approach of winter, there was the threat of a plague of Polish bands heading toward Sloveshne, we young men girded up our loins and entered the Red Army. Entered the hungry, courageous, lousy and sunny Red Army.

Six years have passed. Six whole years, knotted and bound with considerable bloody suffering and the joys of eternal acts of courage.

Now I live in a large town, far from Sloveshne. And I'm not sure whether I am wise or foolish to have written these lines as a memorial, today, the twentieth of October, 1925.

Ayzik Leyb the Tanner of Sloveshne

A Brief Observation

And Marko Lukhtans, that beggar, that Gypsy who loved Jews, was also killed.

It happened in the middle of the day. Suddenly three shots were heard on the outskirts of town, and then a wagon drove in on which were Marko, his handsome brother Timukhei and his brother-in-law whom the town called Yakov-Kakov.

Three of Lukhtans's daughters-in-law were left widows. And when an orphanage was built in Sloveshne and snotty-nosed children went there for food carrying their own earthen bowls . . .

Why there they were, the orphaned Jewish children and Marko's orphaned children. Marko murdered Jews, and the Jews killed Marko. And orphan children come running to the kitchen, their bowls in their hands. And the children think nothing of it. They just raise their eyes and their mouths toward the food. The older folk find this a bit strange. Very strange.

1926

The Literature of Destruction

Jewish Responses to Catastrophe

Defining a Genre
Neotraditional mode, driven by "history"
retraditionalization; counter-emancipation
reengaging "God" in a metahistorical dialogue
Hist. crisis generates a certain rhetorical strategy
Q: Who is this God who suddenly reappears? Why?
"Return to a liturgical mode of writing"
"Reconsecration of language"

Molodowski – [illegible]
UZG – jeremiad / Jobian rebuke / elegy / [illegible]
IBS – recycling of pop culture, folklore; creative betrayal
Parody of Peretz: [illegible]; triumph of the Devil
ends w/ [illegible]
Agnon – Lyric AB: Buczacz / Talpiyot → mystical revelation

EDITED BY **DAVID G. ROSKIES**

THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY
PHILADELPHIA · NEW YORK · JERUSALEM 5748 / 1988

< Should have included Paul Celan >

DGR

IX

Broken Tablets

Anti-covenantal counter-commentary

1) Destruction, in the liturgical scheme of things, had always been paired with redemption. That is why the rabbis instituted seven Weeks of Consolation following the Ninth of Av; during this period, the most breathtaking prophetic visions of restoration were rehearsed in the *haftarot* (supplementary synagogue readings), and that is why poems of Zion by Judah Halevi and his imitators were tacked on to the end of the *kinot* (dirges) for the Ninth of Av. Such automatic pairing, as we have seen, broke down when the secular intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth 2) centuries began to challenge the traditional theology of sin-retribution-restoration, forcing their readers to focus on the brute reality of violence in a world devoid of God. To be sure, many of these same writers were sustained by a secular faith in national self-determination or revolutionary struggle, but the redemptive part of the equation was almost always removed from the description of violence. One can hardly infer the political commitments of Brenner and Bergelson based on the despairing portraits of their "dangling men" **(56, 58).** Even the Red Army's intervention at the end of Kipnis's *Months and Days* hardly compensates for the bloodbath that has just transpired. Only in the work of the Expressionists (Lamdan, 3) Greenberg and Hazaz) was destruction itself seen as a redemptive act, as the combined force of historical and technological upheaval that would usher in a new age of human creativity.

4) Remarkably, it was the ghetto writers who reversed this trend. Desperately they tried to restore the redemptive possibility in the face of all that negated it, whether through armed revolt, a faith in the eternalness of Israel or the very act of writing. More than anything else, this attempt to

piece together the broken tablets of the Covenant defines the dominant Jewish response to catastrophe, and it is this that differentiates those post-war writers who continued to work within the tradition from those who abandoned it.

5) Whether or not one stayed within the tradition had less to do with biography—whether one experienced the war directly or vicariously, in a ghetto or in a death camp—than with the audience one chose to address. The most traditional audience, because it was the most traumatized and devastated, was the Yiddish-reading public. Its faith in utopian solutions had crumbled in the face of the Nazi genocide, much as Glatshteyn had predicted. Hebrew readers, meanwhile, were now divided between the Old Timers, whose roots were still in Europe, and the Sabras (natives to the land), who had nothing but disdain for the Diaspora and whose own experience of destruction and redemption was soon to absorb all their psychic energies. Then there were Holocaust survivors who adopted new languages, notably French, German and English, to record their sagas, and in each, the literary expectations of their host culture determined what they wrote or, at least, what would get published. These are the best-known writers on the Holocaust—Romain Gary, Anna Langfus, Primo Levi, Jakov Lind, Arnost Lustig, Piotr Rawicz, André Schwarz-Bart, Elie Wiesel—writers who represent a new beginning, who share no common assumptions and who project no coherent vision of the present and past, let alone of the future.

It is to the bereaved writers in Yiddish and Hebrew, then, that we must turn, if we wish to see how the greatest collective Jewish trauma was "worked through" by means of internal codes and archetypes. Though the available literature is so vast that its bibliography alone fills several volumes (with much of it produced before the Eichmann Trial), it is still possible to isolate a single, recurrent pattern: a return to a liturgical mode of writing. Suddenly, the addressee of Jewish poetry—composed by avowedly secular writers—becomes, once more, the God of Israel. Through these dialogues with God, modern Jewish poets express the full range of their emotions: anger, despair, remorse, pride, joy and awe. And because God now presides over history once again, one can address all historical and metaphysical complaints directly to the source—thus, Kadia Molodowsky's plea that God (temporarily) choose another people **(94)**. In the world of Yiddish, where the human addressees have all but vanished, the presence of a listener-God is especially poignant.

Uri Zvi Greenberg's cycle "To God in Europe" **(95)** is part of a massive (385-page) volume of visionary and lyrical poems called *Streets of the River: The Book of Dirges and Power* (1951). These are not easy poems to digest or, for that matter, to present to "the world," for they reveal the poet in his rhetorical, fiery mode rather than in his moments of personal anguish (for an overview of the latter, see Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], pp. 171–202). Yet it is precisely in his self-dramatizing poems of prophetic reckoning—with Israel and the Nations, with God, with himself and his audience—that Greenberg explores the redemptive possibilities in a world still thirsting for Jewish blood.

Greenberg's Jewish response to catastrophe was one of unreconcilable oppositions: Because those who dreamed of redemption had all been destroyed, the nations were left to make their own choice between "Sinai, the Tablets of the Laws, the God of Israel" and the pagan blood lust of Christianity. But in order for the opposition to hold, the poet himself had to rouse God from His passivity: God, "the Shepherd-Seer," had to face the full extent of the horror. And if God refused the role of Avenger, then the poet's pen was the only weapon that could "rip the clouds apart" and turn the wayward back to Zion.

Unlike Bialik, Greenberg was not tormented by the loss of faith; the poet could rouse the people even in God's absence. What's more, living in the Land of Israel was itself redemptive, for it meant being part of "the returning time of greatness" ("I'll Say to God"). What could not be purged, mediated, redeemed or transmuted was the incalculable loss of life. The death of the millions was unassimilable; it admitted of no analogies ("No Other Instances"). That was the cumulative force of Greenberg's massive lament.

The return to liturgical forms was a way of reopening the dialogue with God, of exploring the possibilities of redemption and of finding a vehicle for mourning. It was also a way of reconsecrating language. For the Holocaust had destroyed both the physical heartland of world Jewry and the spiritual heartland of the Enlightenment, the movement that had birthed and nurtured the Jewish cultural renaissance. While mourning their losses, postwar Yiddish writers—notably Yankev Glatshteyn, Chaim Grade, I. B. Singer and Aaron Zeitlin—also lamented the failure of secular humanism. In their estimation, it had not only failed to redeem the Jews but also led to their eventual destruction. All that might be salvaged from the ruins was a language of tradition that would reaffirm the bond between Yiddish and *yiddishkayt*.

In "The Last Demon" **(96)**, Isaac Bashevis Singer places the argument against the secular heresy in the mouth of a demon—a highly articulate Jewish demon who, we eventually realize, is really a stand-in for the author himself. The plot, too, is merely a pretext, for what could be more conventional than a tale of a young shtetl rabbi being tempted by the devil? The important feature of his story is that the third and last temptation never happens because the petty foibles of Yiddish-speaking demons are forever eclipsed by the evil that German-speaking humans unleash.

The erudite and witty demon-narrator is rescued from madness (or suicide) by recalling the counting-out rhymes that Jewish children would

use in eastern Europe to figure out who was "it." In the demon's hands, these irreverent rhymes are turned into a kind of liturgy, a language of innocence that tries to wrest some meaning, if not from the culture as a whole, then at least from the letters of the alphabet. It is a solitary, self-reflexive act designed to redeem no one but himself.

Yet when all is said and done, the recourse to liturgy remains a rhetorical device for the majority of postwar Jewish-language writers. However affecting, it remains an affectation. The notable exception to this rule is S. Y. Agnon, who decided in 1924 to combine orthodox Jewish practice with the profession of writing. It is a measure of his greatness that he refused to adapt the content or obscure the context of the Tradition to make the marriage work. Whenever Agnon has recourse to the liturgy, which occupies an ever greater role in his writing, it continues to mean the orthodox liturgy as prayed by young and old alike in his native town of Buczacz before World War I. This liturgy is sacred and immutable.

For Agnon, the world of faith was irreparably destroyed in World War I. It is all the more striking, then, that his elegy for the Great Destruction seems almost optimistic. The narrator of his story "The Sign" **(97)** is a God-fearing and synagogue-attending Jew, whose own life is neatly packaged into a story of destruction and renewal in which the murder of his townspeople is but a momentary disturbance. Everything in the story seems to mitigate the loss: the fact that his own house in Jerusalem has already been rebuilt; the arrival of the terrible news on the eve of Shavuot, which allows the festival liturgy to shape the nature of his late-night reverie; the narrator's distance in time from the events described (the original version of the story, which corresponds to chaps. 35–36, 40–42, appeared in 1944); and, of course, the epiphany at story's end. Yet in several subtle ways this lyrical reminiscence conveys an acute—and distinct—feeling of loss.

Despite the narrator's professed religiosity, he sees a pattern of rebirth-in-destruction that depends exclusively on human factors (chaps. 19–24). He recalls those who worked the land out of true idealism versus those who speculated on its commercial value; those who gave their lives to protect it versus those who came to destroy it. The Zionist endeavor is sustained by a flawed messianism; even in peacetime, the residents of the Talpiot quarter of Jerusalem, where the narrator lives, lack the resolve to build a proper House of Prayer. "We . . . build great and beautiful houses for ourselves," says the narrator ruefully, "and suffice with little buildings and shacks for prayer."

In contrast to this less than perfect present is the luminous past, but the town of his youth exists only in the writer's imagination and can be teased out of him only on certain occasions. What's more, as a *modern* Jewish writer, he uses tools that are by definition inadequate to the task of memorialization. His language is tainted; his faith equivocal. No modern writer can match the timeless power of an Ibn Gabirol, the great Hebrew liturgical poet of the Middle Ages, or can ever elicit the selfless devotion of the old *ḥazzan* of the Great Synagogue in Buczacz.

This story, then, is a plea for the *past* to be redeemed and its sorrowful ending is profound: the only adequate memorial to the dead is a liturgical poem that only Ibn Gabirol could have composed, but such a poem is too awesome for a surviving Jew to remember, and even were he to remember, the surviving community would not be a worthy guardian. Whatever new form the destruction/redemption equation must take, it must be mediated by an experience of the past, for only in the past was there a direct, unmediated connection to God.

94 God of Mercy

KADIA MOLODOWSKY

O God of Mercy
~~For the time being~~
Choose another people.
We are tired of death, tired of corpses,
We have no more prayers.
~~For the time being~~
Choose another people.
We have run out of blood
For victims,
Our houses have been turned into desert,
The earth lacks space for tombstones,
There are no more lamentations
Nor songs of woe
In the ancient texts.

God of Mercy
Sanctify another land
Another Sinai.
We have covered every field and stone
With ashes and holiness.
With our crones
With our young
With our infants
We have paid for each letter in your Commandments.

God of Mercy
Lift up your fiery brow,
Look on the peoples of the world,
Let them have the prophecies and Holy Days
Who mumble your words in every tongue.
Teach them the Deeds
And the ways of temptation.

God of Mercy
To us give rough clothing
Of shepherds who tend sheep
Of blacksmiths at the hammer
Of washerwomen, cattle slaughterers
And lower still.
And O God of Mercy
Grant us one more blessing—
Take back the divine glory of our genius.

1945

95 To God in Europe

URI ZVI GREENBERG

I I'll Say to God

God, I as one of the many beheaded of father and mother,
the heaps of whose slaughtered lie heavy upon them,
stand before you in the prayer-line of my slain ones,
I replace them in the world as a man replaces his comrade in battle,
lest, one link lost, their chain of eternity
drop from the hand of the living:
the chain of the race whose latest link I am,
the chain leading to me,
to the end of the day of my night, and to
the returning time of greatness,—
for which the generations forged the chain.
In every circumstance, under every rule, they taught their children this,
who learned it by heart and wrote it down,
eye to eye and heart to heart.

Dumb are the slaughtered, the dust of seventy exiles stops their mouths:
I pray their prayer for them—and in their cadences.
Though my heart break, their Hebrew words are mine.
I believe in the continuity of this, I know completely
the earthly coast, its boundaries in dream,
where the pain of longing ends and visions wake with dawn.
In my mind I am close to all these, and I can touch them.
I am different from my forefathers: they indulged their longings, they prophesied right things,
but did not utter the Command of "Do" to the-people's-religion-of-longing.
God, therefore do I come to utter
in laws of song
this positive command,
since in Jerusalem there is not yet
ruler or commander for my people.

As I idly walk on my bounded path each day,
one of many along street and boulevard,—

the fragments of my people's disasters within me,
their weeping which is my blood,
and my legs, feelings, thoughts,
give way beneath the grave-stones of my dead—
and I walk my little path as if
I had been walking all my days
enormous distances, and in the warm flow of my blood.

I see the powerful armies of the barbarians, their wagons, chariots, their bolts and swords
and my intermingled tribes in the mingle of their babble:
their splendor and their darkness, the dispersal in exhaustion of their powers
though a bull is potent within them;
I see the brewers of mischief, the traitors, fools, sages among them:
and Satan walks among them, *but my songs, too, are among them,*
and I laugh then in my heart:
the sadness is here, true enough,
but soaring above all this, there soars the eagle of song,
carrying in his beak the crown-of-the-universal-kingdom°:
All, without knowing, go
to the great palace of power,
as my will directs them,
this way or that:
in my songs is the magnet to which they are constantly drawn.

Keter malkhut, God's royal crown, is an image borrowed from Solomon Ibn Gabirol (circa 1021–1055).

II To God in Europe

You are God, and You don't have to get
a permit to move freely around (made out in Your name)
from the Army commanders in the occupied areas,
the wide and rotting fields of Israel, Your flock.
By day the sun, at night the stars still blaze:
a bell and organ psalm of blood for the chief musician, for the conqueror.°

Patterned on the opening line of many psalms of David, e.g., 13, 19, 20, 21.

Go then and move among the gentiles there,
the crosses and the dogs. They will not bark or stab or madly rage,
their ears will never hear Your footsteps' sound:
sergeant and gentile, chariot and cart, will pass as easily through You
as through the air of their street, the wind of the day, the shadow of a tree.

Your path is the path of a being bodiless; nevertheless,
Your vision encompasses all,
including that which is under the layers of grave-soil;
nothing is hidden, nothing can hide from you: not
six million bodies of prayer—mind pure, heart warm with song.

You are He who knows the beginning of Abraham and the days of the Kingdom,
the Jews of many exiles in song.

And you know their end: that death, that terror beyond all thought, beyond the moulds of words;
making clear: the time has come to disperse all parchment words, all letter combinations
so that they stand in uncombinable isolation
as before
the giving from Mt. Sinai of the Law . . .

All sensible survivors of the people dwell with their grief, while I must gnash my teeth,
grinding words that are the children of the writ of lamentation.
But the words are not capable of expressing that deep pain when the need is lamentation
for every square with its item of horror in terror's mosaic.
Never before had our nation known such terror, darkening gradually and closing
around it, as around a tree, the ring of bereavement; and now
all light is ending. The future holds no rustle of a silken hem, no violin that sings
on wedding evenings in our street . . . About us a field teems
with graves and wells of Babylon and the streams.

Go wander about Europe, God of Israel, Shepherd-Seer,° and count Your sheep:
how many lie in ditches, their "Alas" grown dumb:
how many in the cross's shadow, in the streets of weeping,
as if in the middle of the sea.
This is the winter of horror,
of orphanhood's sorrow, and of the fifth bereavement:
everything, everything is covered by the Christian, the silent snow of the shadow of death,
but not the sorrow, the orphanhood, the bereavement, the mourning,
for we have become, among the *goyim,* ashes and soap—dung for the dung heap.

In Hebrew, haro-'eh-haro'eh.

You will count the few forsaken ones, those who have survived,
fugitive, whispering.
And they who light the smallest candle of hope in their darkness
will be heartened.
You will not cry aloud in lamentation—
God has no throat of flesh and blood, nor Jewish eyes for weeping.

And so You will return to heaven, a dumb Shepherd-Seer, after the shepherding and the seeing,
a shepherd staff in Your hand,
leaving not even the shadow of a slender staff on the death distances of Your Jews
where Your dead flock lie hidden . . .

A lying poet can poeticize: that after entering Your heaven
Your useless shepherd staff will shine, a rainbow in the sky.
Not I—who see within the vision the divided body of the bird.

I know very well that You will take the shepherd staff with You,
and wait till the battle subsides of Gog and Magog, who are also Your peoples,
and our inheritors,
till the survivors assemble in the illusion of safety,
and once again there are synagogues, men praying to Your heaven,
societies again for chatter, platforms for speeches,
and again a pathway of roses for Your heretics,
And You will be the shepherd of them all.

And Jews will give their sons and daughters to the Moloch of *goyim:*
to seventy tongues—hands grasping pen, wheel, and banner;
give diligent agents of kingdoms: officers, soldiers;
give dreamers and fighters; inventors and doctors and artists;
those who turn sand into farmland and civilized landscape;
and those performing wonders—even for Albania—with their mastery of crafts;
give whores as well for brothels and clowns for stages,
dictionary compilers, grammar book sages
for languages still lame,
and spoken by barbarians who cannot write their name.

And there will be among us those loyal and dedicated
to all that is not ours; to the cultures that murdered us,
inherited our houses and all that they contained.
And moss will cover our racial mourning, and the sadness be hidden
of the knowledge of our people's bereavement.
Only a man like me will come with his pen in his hand
to beweep this moss-covered mourning, remembering always
the sorrow since pagan Titus's days
of an ancient race.

My rebuking pen, ripping the clouds apart,
shall make a flood descend!

Who listens to me will forsake his father and his mother and his friend,
he who shares his laughter and she who shares his heart,
the girl of dances and the woven wreaths—
and he will take the path my poem traces
to the lair of leopards in the mountain places.

III No Other Instances

We are not as dogs among the gentiles: a dog is pitied by them,
fondled by them, sometimes even kissed by a gentile's mouth;
as if he were a pretty baby
of his own flesh and blood, the gentile spoils him
and is forever taking pleasure in him.
And when the dog dies, how the gentile mourns him!

Not like sheep to the slaughter were we brought in train loads,
but rather—
through all the lovely landscapes of Europe—
brought like leprous sheep
to Extermination itself.
Not as they dealt with their sheep did the gentiles deal with our bodies;
they did not extract their teeth before they slaughtered them;
nor strip them of their wool as they stripped us of our skins;
nor shove them into the fire to turn their life to ashes;
nor scatter the ashes over sewers and streams.

Where are there instances of catastrophe
like this that we have suffered at their hands?
There are none—no other instances.
(All words are shadows of shadows)—
This is the horrifying phrase: No other instances.

No matter how brutal the torture a man will suffer
in a land of the gentiles,
the maker of comparisons will compare it thus:
He was tortured like a Jew.
Whatever the fear, whatever the outrage,
how deep the loneliness, how harrowing the sorrow—
no matter how loud the weeping—
the maker of comparisons will say:
This is an instance of the Jewish sort.

What retribution can there be for our disaster?
Its dimensions are a world.
All the culture of the gentile kingdoms at its peak
flows with our blood,
and all its conscience, with our tears.

If for the Christians of this world there is
the repentance that purifies,
it is: confession. They have sinned.
They desire *the grace, the pain:*
to be Jews with a Jewish fate: the thorn bush without end—
from the king on his throne to the peasant in the field:
to raise on their staff David's banner and sign;
to inscribe the name of God on the jamb of their doors;
to banish their idols from their beautiful houses of prayer;
to place the Ark in the heart of soaring Westminster,
in St. Peter's, in Notre Dame, in every high house of God;
to wrap themselves in prayer shawls;
to crown themselves with the phylacteries
to carry out strictly the 613 commands—and to be silent:
so as not to pollute their lips with their language soaked in blood.
Perhaps their blood will then be purified, and they be Israel.

If they do not desire this with their being's full awareness,
and if they go their way—the way of Wotan and the Christian way—

5761

a wild beast in their blood,
in the still-living-forest, night-of-beast, darkness of their heart—
then not the facade
of their courteous religiosity, the majesty of their churches,
their splendid festivals, their handsome art work,
head-halo, flower garland,
not the wonderful achievement of their best minds,
will save them
from the terrible passage
to the abyss;
not with a Jerusalem Christianity,
with such a Bible
that Wotan has not been able to digest,
so that Christianity turns in each of their bellies,
into a dish of dead sacrifice;
in every mouth, into a poisonous wine.
Wisdom and conscience sink within those rising vapours;
all notions of compassion
(as with the journeymen of scaffolds)
are confounded.

Either Wotan, the forest, the spit, the axe,
the roasted, bleeding limbs of the living;
or Sinai, the Tablets of the Laws, the God of Israel.

Wotan and Christianity are the secret of the disaster!
The world does not know.

V God and His Gentiles

It wasn't for nothing that Europe's faithful Jews
did not raise their heads
to study with their eyes the pride of her cathedrals,
the beauty in them: arch and spire and carving.
As if seared by their shadows the faithful Jews went by them—
not for nothing, not for nothing!
We know this clearly now.
From within them the horrors came
and came upon us.

If God in Europe should descend
to the thresholds of cathedrals
and ask His Christians, those who enter there
to pray to Him and praise Him:
"Where are My Jews?
I do not hear their voices in the heavens,
and therefore have I come to seek them here . . .
What is the meaning of their sudden silence?
Where have they disappeared?
Has there been an earthquake?
How is it then
That they've been swallowed up and you survive?
And if the beasts came from their forest to devour men
and ate them only, sparing you
are they then so wise?
You have raised up in the city to My glory
splendid cathedrals—
and if in My name you have raised them,
your God stands on your threshold.
Where then are My Jews?"
The gentiles would answer fearlessly:
"There were Germans here and we saw eye to eye.
We killed them. All your Jews,
old and young alike!
We killed them, sparing them no horror,
until they left a space,
as the felling of trees in a forest leaves a clearing.
We had hated them for so many years,
ever since you were nailed to the cross, Pater Noster!
And thought You hated them as much.
Thus, from our childhood, had we been taught
by father, priest, and book.
We saw as well that You had given us field and rulership—
them, not even the shelter of the sky.
They were the vulnerable. The despised. The to-be-trodden-on.
And then the Germans came and said: 'Among you there are many Jews.
Let us make an end to them.'
And this is the end, Pater Noster!"

And then, leaning His back against the gate,
God would look at his Christians—
voiceless, speechless.
And the gentiles would see in Him the likeness of a Jew:
wild ear-locks, a beard like a mane before Him,
the very eyes of a Jew;
and see that the cathedral resembled a synagogue,
and that there was no cross now at the entrance.
And the Christians would roar like beasts of the forest:
"Is there still one Jew left among us?
Does a synagogue still stand in our city?
Hey, boys, let's start a little fire.
We'll need kerosene, crowbars, axes."

1951

Robert Friend

578/

96 The Last Demon

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

I

I, a demon, bear witness that there are no more demons left. Why demons, when man himself is a demon? Why persuade to evil someone who is already convinced? I am the last of the persuaders. I board in an attic in Tishevitz and draw my sustenance from a Yiddish storybook, a leftover from the days before the great catastrophe. The stories in the book are pablum and duck milk, but the Hebrew letters have a weight of their own. I don't have to tell you that I am a Jew. What else, a Gentile? I've heard that there are Gentile demons, but I don't know any, nor do I wish to know them. Jacob and Esau don't become in-laws.

I came here from Lublin. Tishevitz is a God-forsaken place; Adam didn't even stop to pee there. It's so small that a wagon goes through town and the horse is in the market place just as the rear wheels reach the toll gate. There is mud in Tishevitz from Sukkot until Tisha b'Av. The goats of the town don't need to lift their beards to chew at the thatched roofs of the cottages. Hens roost in the middle of the streets. Birds build nests in the women's bonnets. In the tailor's synagogue a billy goat is the tenth in the quorum.

Don't ask me how I managed to get to this smallest letter in the smallest of all prayer books. But when Asmodeus bids you go, you go. After Lublin the road is familiar as far as Zamosc. From there on you are on your own. I was told to look for an iron weathercock with a crow perched upon its comb on the roof of the study house. Once upon a time the cock turned in the wind, but for years now it hasn't moved, not even in thunder and lightning. In Tishevitz even iron weathercocks die.

I speak in the present tense as for me time stands still. I arrive. I look around. For the life of me I can't find a single one of our men. The cemetery is empty. There is no outhouse. I go to the ritual bathhouse, but I don't hear a sound. I sit down on the highest bench, look down on the stone on which the buckets of water are poured each Friday, and wonder. Why am I needed here? If a little demon is wanted, is it necessary to import one all the way from Lublin? Aren't there enough devils in Zamosc? Outside the sun is shining—it's close to the summer solstice—but inside the bathhouse it's gloomy and cold. Above me is a spider web, and within the web a spider wiggling its legs, seeming to spin but drawing no thread. There's no sign of a fly, not even the shell of a fly. "What does the creature eat?" I ask myself. "Its own insides?" Suddenly I hear it chanting in a Talmudic singsong: "A lion isn't satisfied by a morsel and a ditch isn't filled up with dirt from its own walls."°

B. *Berakhot* 3b.

I burst out laughing.

"Is that so? Why have you disguised yourself as a spider?"

"I've already been a worm, a flea, a frog. I've been sitting here for two hundred years without a stitch of work to do. But you need a permit to leave."

"They don't sin here?"

"Petty men, petty sins. Today someone covets another man's broom; tomorrow he fasts and puts peas in his shoes. Ever since Abraham Zalman was under the illusion that he was Messiah, the son of Joseph,° the blood of the people has congealed in their veins. If I were Satan, I wouldn't even send one of our first-graders here."

Based on a local legend from the actual town of Tishevitz.

"How much does it cost him?"

"What's new in the world?" he asks me.

"It's not been so good for our crowd."

"What's happened? The Holy Spirit grows stronger?"

"Stronger? Only in Tishevitz is he powerful. No one's heard of him in the large cities. Even in Lublin he's out of style."

"Well, that should be fine."

"But it isn't," I say. " 'All Guilty is worse for us than All Innocent.' It has reached a point where people want to sin beyond their capacities. They martyr themselves for the most trivial of sins. If that's the way it is, what are we needed for? A short while ago I was flying over Levertov Street, and I saw a man dressed in a skunk's coat. He had a black beard and wavy sidelocks; an amber cigar holder was clamped between his lips. Across the street from him an official's wife was walking, so it occurs to me to say, 'That's quite a bargain, don't you think, Uncle?' All I expected from him was a thought. I had my handkerchief ready if he should spit on me. So what does the man do? 'Why waste your breath on me?' he calls out angrily. 'I'm willing. Start working on her.' "

"What sort of a misfortune is this?"

"Enlightenment! In the two hundred years you've been sitting on your tail here, Satan has cooked up a new dish of kasha. The Jews have now developed writers. Yiddish ones, Hebrew ones, and they have taken over our trade. We grow hoarse talking to every adolescent, but they print their *kitsch* by the thousands and distribute it to Jews everywhere. They know all our tricks—mockery, piety. They have a hundred reasons why a rat must be kosher. All that they want to do is to redeem the world. Why, if you could corrupt nothing, have you been left here for two hundred years? And if you could do nothing in two hundred years, what do they expect from me in two weeks?"

"You know the proverb, 'A guest for a while sees a mile.' "

"What's there to see?"

"A young rabbi has moved here from Modly Bozyc. He's not yet thirty, but he's absolutely stuffed with knowledge, knows the thirty-six tractates of the Talmud by heart. He's the greatest Kabbalist in Poland, fasts every Monday and Thursday, and bathes in the ritual bath when the water is ice cold. He won't permit any of us to talk to him. What's more he has a handsome wife, and that's bread in the basket. What do we have to tempt him with? You might as well try to break through an iron wall. If I were asked my opinion, I'd say that Tishevitz should be removed from our files. All I ask is that you get me out of here before I go mad."

"No, first I must have a talk with this rabbi. How do you think I should start?"

"You tell me. He'll start pouring salt on your tail before you open your mouth."

"I'm from Lublin. I'm not so easily frightened."

584/

during the night,
he knocked only
twice.

Singer begins with
a traditional
rhyme:
Alef—an odler,
an odler flit.
Beys—a boym, a
boym blit.
Gimł—a galekh,
a galekh knit.
A—an eagle
flies.
B—a tree
blossoms.
C—a priest
kneels.
Then proceeds as
follows:
Dalet a dorn, der
dorn brent.
Hei a henker, a
henker hengt.
Vov a vekhter,
der vekhter
shenkt.
Zayin a zelner, a
zelner shist.
Khes a khazer, a
khazer nist.
Tes a toyter, a
toyter mest.
Yud a yid, a yid
fargest.
D—the thorn
burns.
H—a hangman
hangs.
V—the
watchman boozes
it up.
Z—a soldier
shoots.
Kh—a pig
sneezes.
T—a dead man
dies.
Y—a Jew
forgets.

should he come? Messiah did not come for the Jews, so the Jews went to Messiah. There is no further need for demons. We have also been annihilated. I am the last, a refugee. I can go anywhere I please, but where should a demon like me go? To the murderers?

I found a Yiddish storybook between two broken barrels in the house which once belonged to Velvel the Barrelmaker. I sit there, the last of the demons. I eat dust. I sleep on a feather duster. I keep on reading gibberish. The style of the book is in our manner: Sabbath pudding cooked in pig's fat: blasphemy rolled in piety. The moral of the book is: neither judge, nor judgment. But nevertheless the letters are Jewish. The alphabet they could not squander. I suck on the letters and feed myself. I count the words, make rhymes, and tortuously interpret and reinterpret each dot.°

Aleph, the abyss, what else waited?
Bet, the blow, long since fated.
Gimel, God, pretending he knew,
Dalet, death, its shadow grew.
Hei, the hangman, he stood prepared;
Wov, wisdom, ignorance bared.
Zayeen, the zodiac, signs distantly loomed;
Het, the child, prenatally doomed.
Tet, the thinker, an imprisoned lord;
Yod, the judge, the verdict a fraud.

Yes, as long as a single volume remains, I have something to sustain me. As long as the moths have not destroyed the last page, there is something to play with. What will happen when the last letter is no more, I'd rather not bring to my lips.

When the last letter is gone,
The last of the demons is done.

1959

Martha Glicklich & Cecil Hemley (1983)

97 The Sign

S. Y. AGNON

1

In the year when the news reached us that all the Jews in my town had been killed, I was living in a certain section of Jerusalem, in a house which I had built for myself after the disturbances of 1929 (5629—which numerically is equal to 'The Eternity of Israel'). On the night when the Arabs had destroyed my home, I vowed that if God would save me from the hands of the enemy and I should live, I would build a house in this particular neighborhood which the Arabs had tried to destroy. By the grace of God, I was saved from the hands of our despoilers and my wife and children and I remained alive in Jerusalem.° Thus I fulfilled my vow and there built a house and made a garden.° I planted a tree, and lived in that place with my wife and children, by the will of our Rock and Creator. Sometimes we dwelt in quiet and rest, and sometimes in fear and trembling because of the desert sword that waved in fuming anger over all the inhabitants of our holy land. And even though many troubles and evils passed over my head, I accepted all with good humor and without complaint. On the contrary, with every sorrow I used to say how much better it was to live in the Land of Israel than outside the Land, for the Land of Israel has given us the strength to stand up for our lives, while outside the land we went to meet the enemy like sheep to the slaughter. Tens of thousands of Israel, none of whom the enemy was worthy even to touch, were killed and strangled and drowned and buried alive; among them my brothers and friends and family, who went through all kinds of great sufferings in their lives and in their deaths, by the wickedness of our blasphemers and our desecrators, a filthy people, blasphemers of God, whose wickedness had not been matched since man was placed upon the earth.

Cf. Isa. 4:3.
Eccl. 2:5.

2

I made no lament for my city and did not call for tears or for mourning over the congregation of God whom the enemy had wiped out. The day when we heard the news of the city and its dead was the afternoon before Shavuot, so I put aside my mourning for the dead because of the joy of the season when our Torah was given. It seemed to me that the two things came together, to show me that in God's love for His people, He still gives us some of that same power which He gave us as we stood before Sinai and received the Torah and commandments; it was that power which stood up within me so that I could pass off my sorrow over the dead of my city for the happiness of the holiday of Shavuot, when the Torah was given to us, and not to our blasphemers and desecrators who kill us because of it.

3

Our house was ready for the holiday. Everything about the house said "Shavuot."

The sun shone down on the outside of the house; inside, on the walls, we had hung cypress, pine and laurel branches, and flowers. Every beautiful flower and

during the night, he knocked only twice.

Singer begins with a traditional rhyme:
Alef—an odler, an odler flit.
Beys—a boym, a boym blit.
Giml—a galekh, a galekh knit.
A—an eagle flies.
B—a tree blossoms.
C—a priest kneels.
Then proceeds as follows:
Dalet a dorn, der dorn brent.
Hei a henker, a henker hengt.
Vov a vekhter, der vekhter shenkt.
Zayin a zelner, a zelner shist.
Khes a khazer, a khazer nist.
Tes a toyter, a toyter mest.
Yud a yid, a yid fargest.
D—the thorn burns.
H—a hangman hangs.
V—the watchman boozes it up.
Z—a soldier shoots.
Kh—a pig sneezes.
T—a dead man dies.
Y—a Jew forgets.

should he come? Messiah did not come for the Jews, so the Jews went to Messiah. There is no further need for demons. We have also been annihilated. I am the last, a refugee. I can go anywhere I please, but where should a demon like me go? To the murderers?

I found a Yiddish storybook between two broken barrels in the house which once belonged to Velvel the Barrelmaker. I sit there, the last of the demons. I eat dust. I sleep on a feather duster. I keep on reading gibberish. The style of the book is in our manner: Sabbath pudding cooked in pig's fat: blasphemy rolled in piety. The moral of the book is: neither judge, nor judgment. But nevertheless the letters are Jewish. The alphabet they could not squander. I suck on the letters and feed myself. I count the words, make rhymes, and tortuously interpret and reinterpret each dot.°

Aleph, the abyss, what else waited?
Bet, the blow, long since fated.
Gimel, God, pretending he knew,
Dalet, death, its shadow grew.
Hei, the hangman, he stood prepared;
Wov, wisdom, ignorance bared.
Zayeen, the zodiac, signs distantly loomed;
Het, the child, prenatally doomed.
Tet, the thinker, an imprisoned lord;
Yod, the judge, the verdict a fraud.

Yes, as long as a single volume remains, I have something to sustain me. As long as the moths have not destroyed the last page, there is something to play with. What will happen when the last letter is no more, I'd rather not bring to my lips.

When the last letter is gone,
The last of the demons is done.

1959

97 The Sign

S. Y. AGNON

I (1-10) Shavuot in Talpiyot

1

In the year when the news reached us that all the Jews in my town had been killed, I was living in a certain section of Jerusalem, in a house which I had built for myself after the disturbances of 1929 (5629—which numerically is equal to 'The Eternity of Israel'). On the night when the Arabs had destroyed my home, I vowed that if God would save me from the hands of the enemy and I should live, I would build a house in this particular neighborhood which the Arabs had tried to destroy. By the grace of God, I was saved from the hands of our despoilers and my wife and children and I remained alive in Jerusalem.° Thus I fulfilled my vow and there built a house and made a garden.° I planted a tree, and lived in that place with my wife and children, by the will of our Rock and Creator. Sometimes we dwelt in quiet and rest, and sometimes in fear and trembling because of the desert sword that waved in fuming anger over all the inhabitants of our holy land. And even though many troubles and evils passed over my head, I accepted all with good humor and without complaint. On the contrary, with every sorrow I used to say how much better it was to live in the Land of Israel than outside the Land, for the Land of Israel has given us the strength to stand up for our lives, while outside the land we went to meet the enemy like sheep to the slaughter. Tens of thousands of Israel, none of whom the enemy was worthy even to touch, were killed and strangled and drowned and buried alive; among them my brothers and friends and family, who went through all kinds of great sufferings in their lives and in their deaths, by the wickedness of our blasphemers and our desecrators, a filthy people, blasphemers of God, whose wickedness had not been matched since man was placed upon the earth.

Cf. Isa. 4:3.
Eccl. 2:5.

2

I made no lament for my city and did not call for tears or for mourning over the congregation of God whom the enemy had wiped out. The day when we heard the news of the city and its dead was the afternoon before Shavuot, so I put aside my mourning for the dead because of the joy of the season when our Torah was given. It seemed to me that the two things came together, to show me that in God's love for His people, He still gives us some of that same power which He gave us as we stood before Sinai and received the Torah and commandments; it was that power which stood up within me so that I could pass off my sorrow over the dead of my city for the happiness of the holiday of Shavuot, when the Torah was given to us, and not to our blasphemers and desecrators who kill us because of it.

3

Our house was ready for the holiday. Everything about the house said "Shavuot."

The sun shone down on the outside of the house; inside, on the walls, we had hung cypress, pine and laurel branches, and flowers. Every beautiful flower and

everything with a sweet smell had been brought in to decorate the house for the holiday of Shavuot. In all the days I had lived in the Land of Israel, our house had never been decorated so nicely as it was that day. All the flaws in the house had vanished, and not a crack was to be seen, either in the ceiling or in the walls. From the places where the cracks in the house used to gape with open mouths and laugh at the builders, there came instead the pleasant smell of branches and shrubs, and especially of the flowers we had brought from our garden. These humble creatures, which because of their great modesty don't raise themselves high above the ground except to give off their good smell, made the eye rejoice because of the many colors with which the Holy One, blessed be He, has decorated them, to glorify His land, which, in His loving-kindness, He has given to us.

4

Dressed in a new summer suit and new light shoes, I went to the House of Prayer. Thus my mother, may she rest in peace, taught me: if a man gets new clothes or new shoes, he wears them first to honor the holiday, and goes to the synagogue in them. I am thankful to my body, which waited for me, and did not tempt me into wearing the new clothes and shoes before the holiday, even though the old ones were heavy, and hot desert winds ran through the country. And—if I haven't reached the heights of all my forefathers' deeds—in these matters I can do as well as my forefathers, for my body stands ready to fulfill most of those customs which depend upon it.

5

I walked to the House of Prayer. The two stores in the neighborhood were shut, and even the bus, which usually violates the Sabbath, was gone from the neighborhood. Not a man was seen in the streets, except for little errand boys delivering flowers. They too, by the time you could look at them, had disappeared. Nothing remained of them except the smell of the flowers they had brought, and this smell merged with the aroma of the gardens in our neighborhood.

The neighborhood was quietly at rest. No one stopped me on the street, and no one asked me for news of the world. Even if they had asked, I wouldn't have told them what had happened to my city. The days have come when every man keeps his sorrows to himself. What would it help if I told someone else what happened to my city? His city surely had also suffered that same fate.

6

I arrived at the House of Prayer and sat down in my place. I kept the events in my city, as they appeared to me, hidden in my heart. A few days later, when the true stories reached me, I saw that the deeds of the enemy were evil beyond the power of the imagination. The power of the imagination is stronger than the power of deeds, except for the evil of the nations, which goes beyond all imagination.

In Hebrew, piyyutim.

I opened a *Maḥzor* and looked at the evening prayers for the first night of Shavuot. People outside the Land of Israel generally add many liturgical poems,° especially in those ancient communities which follow the customs of their forefathers. Although I think of myself as a resident of the Land of Israel in every sense, I like these *piyyutim* which prepare the soul for the theme of the day. Our teachers, the holy writers of the *piyyutim*, are good intermediaries between the

°מערבות = פיוטים של תפילת

hearts of Israel and their Father in Heaven. They knew what we need to ask of God and what He demands of us, and they wrote hymns to open our lips before our Father in Heaven.

The people who come to the House of Prayer began to gather. Even those whom one usually doesn't see in the synagogue came, to bring their children. As long as a child is a child, he is drawn after his father and draws his father with him. That is, he is drawn after his Father in Heaven, and draws with him the father who gave him birth. In my town, all the synagogues used to be filled with babes like these. They were good and sweet and healthy; now they are all dead. The hand of the enemy has finished them all. There is no remnant, no one left. And if a few of them do remain, they've been captured by Gentiles and are being educated by Gentiles. Let's hope that they too will not be added to our enemies. Those about whom it is written "I shall bear you on the wings of eagles and bring you unto Me"° are given over to others, and are trampled under the feet of human filth.

Deut. 19:4.

7

Although on the Sabbath and Festivals one says the evening prayers early, on Shavuot we wait to say *Ma'ariv* until the stars are out. For if we were to pray early and receive the holiness of the festival, we would be shortening the days of the *Omer*, and the Torah said: "there shall be seven full weeks."°

Lev. 23:15.

Since they had already finished *Minḥah*, and it was not yet time for *Ma'ariv*, most of the congregation sat talking with one another, except for the children who stood about in wonder. I know that if I say this people will smile at me, but I'll say it anyway: The same thing happened to those children at this season of the giving of our Torah as happened to them when their souls stood before Mount Sinai, ready to receive the Torah the following day.

While the adults were sitting and talking, and the children were standing about in amazement, the time came for the Evening Prayer. The gabbai pounded on the table and the leader of the prayers went down before the ark. After a short order of prayers, including neither *piyyutim* nor "And Moses declared the festivals of the Lord,"° they greeted one another and went home in peace.

Formula for the Festival kiddush.

8

I came home and greeted my wife and children with the blessing of the holiday. I stood amazed to think that here I was celebrating our holiday in my home, in my land, with my wife and children, at a time when tens of thousands of Israel were being killed and slaughtered and burned and buried alive, and those who were still alive were running about as though lost in the fields and forests, or were hidden in holes in the earth.

I bowed my head toward the earth, this earth of the land of Israel upon which my house is built, and in which my garden grows with trees and flowers, and I said over it the verse "Because of you, the soul liveth."° Afterwards I said *Kiddush* and the blessing "Who has given us life"° and I took a sip of wine and passed my glass to my wife and children. I didn't even dilute the wine with tears. This says a lot for a man; his city is wiped out of the world, and he doesn't even dilute his drink with tears.

Gen. 12:13.

Hebrew, Sheheḥeyanu, recited on the first day of the festival.

I washed my hands and recited the blessing over the bread, giving everyone a piece of the fine challahs that were formed in the shape of the Tablets, to remember

the Two Tablets of the Covenant that Moses brought down from Heaven. The custom of Israel is Torah: if the bread comes from the earth, its shape is from the Heavens.

We sat down to the festive meal of the first night of Shavuot. Part of the meal was the fruit of our soil, which we had turned with our own hands, and watered with our own lips. When we came here we found parched earth, as hands had not touched the land since her children had left her. But now she is a fruitful land, thankful to her masters, and giving us of her goodness.

The meal was good. All that was eaten was of the fruits of the land. Even the dairy dishes were from the milk of cows who grazed about our house. It is good when a man's food comes from close to him and not from far away, for that which is close to a man is close to his tastes. Yet Solomon, in praising the Woman of Valor, praises her because she "brings her bread from afar."° But the days of Solomon were different, for Solomon ruled over all the lands and every man in Israel was a hero. And as a man's wife is like her husband, the Women of Valor in Israel left it for the weak to bring their bread from nearby, while they would go to the trouble of bringing it from afar. In these times, when the land has shrunk and we all have trouble making a living, bread from nearby is better than that which comes from afar.

Prov. 31:14.

9

The meal which the land had given us was good, and good too is the land itself, which gives life to its inhabitants. As the holiday began, Jerusalem was freed from the rough desert winds, which rule from Pesaḥ to Shavuot, and a soft breeze blew from the desert and the sea. Two winds blow in our neighborhood, one from the sea and one from the desert, and between them blows another wind, from the little gardens which the people of the neighborhood have planted around their houses. Our house too stands in the midst of a garden where there grow cypresses and pines, and, at their feet, lilies, dahlias, onychas, snapdragons, dandelions, chrysanthemums, and violets. It is the way of pines and cypresses not to let even grass grow between them, but the trees in our garden looked with favor upon our flowers and lived side by side with them, for they remembered how hard we had worked when they were first beginning to grow. We were stingy with our own bread and bought saplings; we drank less water, in order to water the gentle young trees, and we guarded them against the wicked herdsmen who used to send their cattle into our garden. Now they have become big trees, which shade us from the sun, giving us their branches as covering for the *sukkah*, and greens for the holiday of Shavuot, to cover our walls in memory of the event at Sinai. They used to do the same in my town when I was a child, except that in my town most of the greens came from the gardens of the Gentiles, while here I took from my own garden, from the branches of my trees, and from the flowers between my trees. They gave off a good aroma and added flavor to our meal.

10

I sat inside my house with my wife and little children. The house and everything in it said "Holiday." So too we and our garments, for we were dressed in the new clothes we had made for the festival. The festival is for God and for us; we honor it in whatever way we can, with pleasant goods and new clothing. God in Heaven also honors the holiday, and gives us the strength to rejoice.

I looked around at my family, and I felt in the mood to tell them about what we used to do in my city. It was true that my city was dead, and those who were not dead were like the dead, but before the enemy had come and killed them all, my city used to be full of life and good and blessing. If I start telling tales of my city I never have enough. But let's tell just a few of the deeds of the town. And since we are in the midst of the holiday of Shavuot, I'll tell a little concerning this day.

II (11-16) Shavuot in Buczacz

11

Ethnographic

From the Sabbath when we blessed the new month of Sivan, we emerged from the mourning of the days of *Omer*, and a spirit of rest passed through the town: especially on the New Moon, and especially with the saying of *Hallel*. When the leader of prayer said "The Heavens are the Heavens of God, but the earth hath He given to the children of men,"° we saw that the earth and even the river were smiling at us. I don't know whether we or the river first said: "It's all right to swim." But even the Heavens agreed that the river was good for bathing, for the sun had already begun to break through its coldness; not only through the coldness of the river, but of all the world. A man could now open his window without fear of the cold. Some people turned their ears toward the sound of a bird, for the birds had already returned to their nests and were making themselves heard. In the houses arose the aroma of dairy foods being prepared for Shavuot, and the smell of the fresh-woven clothes of the brides and grooms who would enter under the *ḥuppah*° after the holiday. The sound of the barber's scissors could be heard in the town, and every face was renewed. All were ready to welcome the holiday on which we received the Torah and Commandments. See how the holiday on which we received the Torah and Commandments is happier and easier than all the other holidays. On Pesaḥ we can't eat *what*ever we want; on Sukkot, we can't eat *where*ver we want. But on Shavuot we can eat anything we want, wherever we want to eat it.

Ps. 115:16.

Wedding canopy.

The world is also glad and rejoices with us. The lids of the skies are as bright as the sun, and glory and beauty cover the earth.

12

experience of children

Now children listen to me: I'll tell you something of my youth. Now your father is old, and if he let his beard grow as did Abraham, you'd see white hair in his beard. But I too was once a little boy who used to do the things children do. While the old men sat in the House of Study preparing themselves for the Time of the Giving of the Torah the following morning, my friends and I would stand outside looking upward, hoping to catch the moment when the sky splits open, and everything you ask for (even supernatural things!) is immediately given you by God—if you are worthy and you catch the right moment. In that case, why do I feel as though none of my wishes has ever been granted? Because I had so many things to ask for, that before I decided what to wish first, sleep came upon me, and I dozed off. When a man is young his wishes are many; before he gets around to asking for anything, he is overcome by sleep. When a man is old he has no desires; if he asks for anything, he asks for a little sleep.

Now let me remove the sleep from my eyes, and I'll tell a little bit about this day.

Nowadays a man is found outdoors more than in his house. In former times, if a man's business didn't bring him out, he sat either in his house or in the House of Study. But on the first day of Shavuot everybody would go to the gardens and forests outside the town in honor of the Torah, which was given outdoors. The trees and bushes and shrubs and flowers which I know from those walks on the first day of Shavuot, I know well. The animals and beasts and birds which I know from those walks on the first day of Shavuot, I know well. How so? While we were walking, my father, of blessed memory, would show me a tree or a bush or a flower and say: "This is its name in the Holy Tongue." He would show me an animal or a beast or a bird and say to me, "This is its name in the Holy Tongue." For if they were worthy to have the Torah write their names, surely we must recognize them and know their names. In that case, why don't I list their names? Because of those who have turned upon the Torah and wrought havoc with the language.

13-15
Narrators artistic striving as a child

13

I saw that my wife and children enjoyed the tales of my town. So I went on and told them more, especially about the great synagogue, the glory of the town, the beauty of which was mentioned even by the Gentile princes. Not a Shavuot went by, but Count Pototsky didn't send a wagon full of greens for the synagogue. There was one family in the town that had the special rights in arranging these branches.

I also told them about our little *kloyz,* our prayer-room. People know me as one of the regulars in the Old House of Study, but before I pitched my tent in the Old House of Study, I was one of the young men of the *kloyz.* I have so very very much to tell about those times—but here I'll tell only things that concern this day.

On the day before Shavuot eve, I used to go out to the woods near town with a group of friends to gather green boughs. I would take a ball of cord from my mother, may she rest in peace, and I would string it up from the roof of our house in the shape of a Star of David, and on the cord I would hang the leaves we had pulled off the branches, one by one. I don't like to boast, but something like this it's all right for me to tell. Even the old men of the *kloyz* used to say: "Fine, fine. The work of an artist, the work of an artist." These men were careful about what they said, and their mouths uttered no word which did not come from their hearts. I purposely didn't tell my wife and children about the poems I used to write after the festival; sad songs. When I saw the faded leaves falling from the Star of David I would be overcome by sadness, and I would compose sad poems.

Once my heart was aroused, my soul remembered other things about Shavuot. Among them were the paper roses which were stuck to the windowpanes. This was done by the simple folk at the edge of town. The respected heads of families in town did not do this, for they clung carefully to the customs of their fathers, while the others did not. But since the enemy has destroyed them all together, I shall not distinguish between them here.

I told my wife and children many more things about the town and about the day. And to everything I said, I added: "This was in former days, when the town stood in peace." Nevertheless, I was able to tell the things calmly and not in sorrow, and one would not have known from my voice what had happened to my town, that all the Jews in it had been killed. The Holy One, blessed be He, has been gracious to Israel: even when we remember the greatness and glory of bygone days, our soul does not leave us out of sorrow and longing. Thus a man like me can talk about the past, and his soul doesn't pass out of him as he speaks.

14

Following the Blessing after Meals I said to my wife and children, "You go to sleep, and I'll go to the syngagogue for the vigil of Shavuot night." Now I was born in Buczacz, and grew up in the Old House of Study, where the spirit of the great men of Israel pervaded. But I shall admit freely that I don't follow them in all their ways. They read the Order of Study for Shavuot night and I read the book of hymns which Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol,° may his soul rest, composed on the six hundred thirteen commandments.

(1021/22–circa 1055).

There have arisen many poets in Israel, who have graced the order of prayers with their poems and strengthened the hearts of Israel with their *piyyutim,* serving as good intermediaries between the hearts of Israel and their Father in Heaven. And even I, when I humbly come to plead for my soul before my Rock and Creator, find expression in the words of our holy poets—especially in the poems of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, may his soul rest.

I have already told elsewhere how, when I was a small child, my father, of blessed memory, would bring me a new prayerbook every year from the fair. Once father brought me a prayerbook and I opened it to a plea of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol. I read and was amazed: Was it possible that such a righteous man as this, whose name was written in the *Siddur,* did not find God before him at all times and in every hour, so that he had to write "At the dawn I seek Thee, my rock and tower."° Not only did God make him seek Him, but even when the ppet found Him, fear fell upon him and he stood confused. Thus he says: "Before Thy greatness I stand and am confounded."°

This liturgical poem is recited at the beginning of the Shaḥarit service in the German Ashkenazic rite.

A verse from the same poem.

As I lie down at night I see this saint rising from his bed on a stormy windblown night. The cold engulfs him and enters into his bones, and a cold wind slaps at his face, ripping his cloak and struggling with its fringes. The *zaddik* strengthens himself to call for God. When he finds Him, terror falls upon him out of the fear of God and the majesty of His presence.

For many days that saint wouldn't leave my sight. Sometimes he seemed to me like a baby asking for his father, and sometimes like a grown-up, exhausted from so much chasing after God. And when he finally does find Him, he's confused because of God's greatness.

After a time, sorrow came and added to sorrow.

15

Once, on the Sabbath after Pesaḥ, I got up and went to the great House of Study. I found the old *ḥazzan* raising his voice in song. There were men in Buczacz who would not allow the interruption of the prayers between the Blessing of Redemption and the *'Amidah* for additional hymns. Thus the *ḥazzan* would go up to the platform after *Mussaf* and recite the Hymns of Redemption. I turned my ear and listened to him intone: "Poor captive in a foreign land."° I felt sorry for the poor captive girl, who must have been in great trouble, judging from the tone of the *ḥazzan.* It was a little hard for me to understand why God didn't hurry and take

For an English translation, see "A Song of Redemption" in The Jewish Quarterly Review 8(1896):269–70.

his head bowed, begging and praying for her. I also wondered at the men of my city, who were doing nothing to redeem her from captivity.

One day I was turning the pages of the big *Siddur* in my grandfather's house, and I found those same words written in the *Siddur*. I noticed that every line started with a large letter. I joined the letters together, and they formed the name "Solomon." My heart leaped for joy, for I knew it was Rabbi Solomon from my *Siddur*. But I felt sorry for that Zaddik. As though he didn't have enough troubles himself, searching for God and standing in confusion before Him, he also had to feel the sorrow of this captive girl who was taken as a slave to a foreign country. A few days later I came back and leafed through the *Siddur*, checking the first letters of the lines of every hymn. Whenever I found a hymn with the name Solomon Ibn Gabirol written in it, I didn't put it down until I had read it through.

16

I don't remember when I started the custom of reading the hymns of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol on Shavuot eve, but since I started this custom, I haven't skipped a year. It goes without saying that I did it while I lived in Germany, where they like *piyyutim*, but even here in the Land of Israel where they don't say many of these poems, I haven't done away with my custom. Even in times of danger, when the Arabs were besieging Jerusalem and machine-gun fire was flying over our heads, I didn't keep myself from the House of Study where I spent most of the night, as has been done everywhere, in all generations, in remembrance of our fathers who stood trembling all night in the third month after going out of Egypt, waiting to receive the Torah from God Himself.

III (17–24)
Talpiyot from
1890s – present

17

My home is near the House of Prayer; it takes only a little while to get there. You walk down the narrow street on which my house stands, and you turn down the wide street at the end, till you come to a little wooden shack which serves as a House of Prayer. That night the way made itself longer. Or maybe it didn't make itself longer, but I made it longer. My thoughts had tired out my soul, and my soul my feet. I stopped and stood more than I walked.

18

The world and all within it rested in a kind of pleasant silence: the houses, the gardens, the woods; and above them the heavens, the moon and the stars. Heaven and earth know that if it weren't for Israel who accepted the Torah, they would not be standing. They stand and fulfill their tasks: the earth to bring forth bread, and the heavens to give light to the earth and those who dwell upon it. Could it be that even in my home town the heavens are giving light and the earth bringing forth its produce? In the Land of Israel, the Holy One, Blessed be He, judges the land Himself, whereas outside the Land, He has handed this supervision over to angels. The angels' first task is to turn their eyes aside from the deeds of the Gentiles who do evil to Israel, and therefore the heavens there give their light and the earth its produce—perhaps twice as much as in the land of Israel.

19

I stood among the little houses, each of which was surrounded by a garden. Since the time we were exiled from our land, this area had given forth thorns and briers; now that we have returned, it is rebuilt with houses, trees, shrubs, and flowers.

Because I love the little houses and their blossoming gardens, I'll tell their story.

A young veterinarian from Constantinople was appointed to watch over the animals of the Sultan. One day he was working in a village in the midst of the desert sands. On his way home, he stopped to rest. He looked up and saw the Dead Sea on one side and the Temple Mount on the other. A fresh breeze was blowing, and the air was better and more pleasant than any place in the Land. He got down from his donkey and began to stroll about, until he found himself making a path among the thorn-bushes, briers and rocks. "If only I could live here with my wife and children," he thought. "But to live here is impossible, as the place is far from any settlement, and there's no sign that anyone lives here, nor is there any form of life, except for the birds of the sky and various creeping things." The doctor remained until it began to get dark, and the time came to return to the city. He mounted his ass and went back to the city. A few days later he came again. A few days after that he came once more. Thus he did several times.

It happened that a certain Arab's cow became sick. He brought her to the doctor. The doctor prepared some medicine for her, and she got well. After a while, another one got sick. She too was brought to the doctor. Again he prepared some medicine and she became well. The Arab heard that the doctor wanted to build a summer house outside of town. The Arab said to him, "I have a piece of land near the town. If you like it, it's yours." It turned out to be just the spot the doctor had wanted. He bought thirty dunams of land from the Arab, built a summer house, dug a well, and planted a garden and an almond grove. All the clever people in Jerusalem laughed at him and said, "He's buried his money in the desert." But he himself was happy with his lot, and whenever he was free from work he would ride out there on his ass and busy himself with planting. Sometimes he would take along his young wife and small children to share in his happiness.

The word got around. There was a group of people that worked for the settlement of the Land. They went and bought a piece of land near his. They divided their section up into lots, and sent messengers to other lands, to offer Zionists the purchase of a share in the inheritance of the Land of Israel. A few among them bought.

The Great War came, bringing death on all sides, and destroying in one hour that which had been built up over many generations. If one was not hurt bodily by the war, it hurt one financially. And if neither one's body nor one's money was hurt, it damaged one's soul. The War was harder for the Jews than for anyone else, as it affected their bodies, their money, and their souls. Thus it was in the place we are discussing. Turkey, which also entered the war, sent her legions to wherever she ruled. One legion came to Jerusalem and camped there, in this place, on the land of the doctor. The soldiers ripped out the almond trees to make fires to cook their food and to warm their bodies, and turned the garden into a lair for cannons.

From out of the storm of war and the thunder of cannons, a kind of heralding voice was heard°; a voice which, if we interpreted it according to our wishes and

The Balfour Declaration, November 2, 1917.

5941

desires, heralded the end of troubles and the beginning of good, salvation, and comfort. The war, however, was still going strong. Neither the end of the troubles nor the beginning of salvation could yet be seen.

Slowly the strength of those who had started the fighting wore out, the hands of war were broken, and they could fight no more. The bravery of the heroes had been drained, so they left the battlefronts. Behind them they left destruction and desolation, wailing and tears, forever.

20

After the war Jerusalem awoke, bit by bit, from her destruction. A few people began to think of expanding the city, for even if there were a few places left which had not been damaged by the war, they were crowded and overpopulated. Even before the war, when Jerusalem lay in peace, and her inhabitants were satisfied with little, the air had become stifling. How much more so after the war. Even before the war there was little room left in Jerusalem; after the war, when the city was filled with new immigrants, how much more so.

People formed little societies to buy land in and around Jerusalem, and began to build new neighborhoods. These were small and far from town, and the sums owed were always great. People ran from bank to bank, borrowing in one place to pay off in another, paying in one place and borrowing in another. If it weren't for the bit of peace a man finds in his home and garden, they would have fallen by the way.

21

That stretch of barren desert also had its turn. They remembered the lands the doctor had bought, and asked him to sell them part of his holdings. He liked the idea, sold them a section of his land, and helped them to buy from others. The news got around, and people began to flock. They bought twenty-one thousand dunams, each dunam equalling a thousand six hundred Turkish pik, at the price of a grush and a half a pik. Some bought in order to build, and some bought in order to sell.

Now I shall leave the real-estate agents who held back the building of Jerusalem. If a man wanted to build a house they asked so much money that he was taken aback and went away. And if he agreed to come the next day to sign away his wealth, it would happen that overnight the lot had been sold to someone else, who had more than doubled his bid. The agents used to conspire together. Someone would ask to have a house built, and either they wouldn't build it for him, or they'd build it in the wrong place. So his lot stood empty, without a house, along with the rest of the fields to which the same thing had happened.

The neighborhood was finally built, but its residents were not able to open a school or a post office branch or a pharmacy or any of the institutions that people from the city needed, except for two or three stores, each of which was superfluous because of the others. During the disturbances it was even worse. Since the population was small, they could not hold out against the enemy, either in the disturbance of 1929, or in the War of Independence. And between 1929 and the War of Independence, in the days of the riots and horrors that began in 1936 and lasted until the Second World War began, they were given over to the hands of the enemy, and a man wouldn't dare to go out alone.

Of the Zionists outside the Land who had bought plots before the war, some died in the war, and others wound up in various other places. When those who were fortunate enough to come to the Land saw what had happened to the section, they sold their lots and built homes in other places. Of those who bought them, perhaps one or two built houses, and the rest left them until a buyer would come their way, to fill their palms with money.

22

Now I shall leave those who did not build the neighborhood, and shall tell only about those who did build it.

Four men went out into the dusts of the desert, an hour's walking distance from the city, and built themselves houses, each in one spot, according to lots. The whole area was still a wilderness; there were neither roads nor any signs of habitation. They would go to work in the city every morning and come back an hour or two before dark, bringing with them all that they needed. Then they would eat something, and rush out to their gardens to kill snakes and scorpions, weed out thorns, level off holes in the ground, prepare the soil, and plant and water the gentle saplings, in the hope that these saplings would grow into great trees, and give their shade. As yet there were neither trees nor shrubs in the neighborhood, but only parched earth which gave rise to thorns and briers. When the desert storms came, they sometimes lasted as long as nine days, burning our skin and flesh, and drying out our bones. Even at night there was no rest. But when the storms passed, the land was like paradise once again. A man would go out to his garden, water his gentle young trees, dig holes, and add two or three shrubs or flowers to his garden.

From the very beginning, one of the four founders took it upon himself to attend to community business: to see that the Arabs didn't send their beasts into the gardens, and that the garbage collector took the garbage from the houses; to speak with the governor and those in charge of the water so that water wouldn't be lacking in the pipes, and to see that the bus would come and go on schedule, four times a day. What would he do if he had to consult his neighbors? There was no telephone as yet. He would take a shofar, and go up on his roof and blow. His neighbors would hear him and come.

After a while, more people came and built homes and planted gardens. During the day they would work in the city, and an hour or two before dark they would come home to break earth, weed, pull up thorns, plant trees and gardens, and clear the place of snakes and scorpions. Soon more people came, and then still more. They too built houses and made gardens. Some of them would rent out a room or two to a young couple who wanted to raise their child in the clear air. Some of them rented out their whole houses and continued to live in the city until they paid off their mortgages. After a time I too came to live here, fleeing from the tremors of 1927, which shook the walls of the house where I was living, and forced me to leave my home. I came to this neighborhood with my wife and two children, and we rented an apartment. Roads had already been built, and the buses would come and go at regular times. We felt as though this place, which had been barren since the day of our exile from our land, was being built again.

23

Automobiles still came but rarely, and a man could walk in the streets without fear of being hit. At night there was a restful quiet. If you didn't hear the dew fall, it was because you were sleeping a good, sweet sleep. The Dead Sea would smile at us almost every day, its blue waters shining in graceful peace between the gray and blue hills of Moab. The Site of the Temple would look upon us. I don't know who longed for whom more; we for the Temple Mount, or the Temple Mount for us. The king of the winds, who dwelt in a mountain not far from us, used to stroll about the neighborhood, and his servants and slaves, the winds, would follow at his feet, brushing through the area. Fresh air filled the neighborhood. People from far and near would come to walk, saying, "No man knoweth its value." Old men used to come and say, "Here we would find length of days." Sick people came and said, "Here we would be free from our illnesses." Arabs would pass through and say, "Shalom"; they came to our doctor, who cured them of their ills. The doctor's wife would help their wives when they had difficulty in childbirth. The Arab women would come from their villages around us, bringing the fruits of their gardens and the eggs of their hens, giving praises to Allah, who, in His mercy upon them, had given the Jews the idea of building houses here, so that they would not have to bring their wares all the way into the city. As an Arab would go to work in the city, taking a short-cut through these streets, he would stand in wonder at the deeds of Allah, Who had given the Jewish lords wisdom to build roads, mend the ways, and so forth. Suddenly, one Sabbath after Tisha b'Av, our neighbors rose up against us to make trouble for us. The people of the neighborhood could not believe that this was possible. Our neighbors, for whom we had provided help at every chance, for whom we had made life so much easier, buying their produce, having our doctor heal their sick, building roads to shorten the way for them, came upon these same roads to destroy us.

24

By the grace of God upon us, we rose up and were strong. As I said in the beginning, I built a house and planted a garden. In this place from which the enemy tried to rout us, I built my home. I built it facing the Temple Mount, to always keep upon my heart our beloved dwelling which was destroyed and has not yet been rebuilt. If "we cannot go up and be seen there, because of the hand which has cast itself into our Temple,"[9] we direct our hearts there in prayer.

Recited in the Musaf 'Amidah.

Now I'll say something about the House of Prayer in our neighborhood.

Our forefathers, who saw their dwelling in this world as temporary, but the dwelling in the synagogue and the House of Study as permanent, built great structures for prayer and study. We, whose minds are given over mainly to things of this world, build great and beautiful houses for ourselves, and suffice with little buildings and shacks for prayer. Thus our House of Prayer in this neighborhood is a wooden shack. This is one reason. Aside from this, they didn't get around to finishing the synagogue before the first disturbance, the riots, or the War of Independence, and at each of those times the residents had to leave the neighborhood. It was also not completed because of the changes in its congregants, who changed after each disturbance. That's why, as I've explained, our place of prayer is a shack, and not a stone building.

Now I shall tell what happened in this shack on that Shavuot night when the rumor reached us that all the Jews in my town had been killed.

II (25-84) Reverie, Memory, Nightmare

25

I entered the House of Prayer. No one else was in the place. Light and rest and a good smell filled the room. All kinds of shrubs and flowers with which our land is blessed gave off their aroma. Already at *Ma'ariv* I had taken note of the smell, and now every blossom and flower gave off the aroma with which God had blessed it. A young man, one who had come from a town where all the Jews had been killed, went out to the fields of the neighborhood with his wife, and picked and gathered every blossoming plant and decorated the synagogue for the Holiday of Shavuot, the time of the giving of our Torah, just as they used to do in their town, before all the Jews there had been killed. In addition to all the wild flowers they gathered in the nearby fields, they brought roses and zinnias and laurel boughs from their own garden.

26

I shall choose among the words of our Holy Tongue to make a crown of glory for our Prayer Room, its candelabra, and its ornaments.

The Eternal Light hangs down from the ceiling, facing the Holy Ark and the two tablets of the Law above it. The Light is wrapped in capers and thistles and bluebells, and it shines and gives off its light from between the green leaves of the capers' thorns and from its white flowers, from between the blue hues in the thistles, and from the grey leaves and purple flowers around it. All the wild flowers which grow in the fields of our neighborhood gather together in this month to beautify our House of Prayer for the holiday of Shavuot, along with the garden flowers which the gardens in our neighborhood give us. To the right of the Holy Ark stands the reader's table, and on the table a lamp with red roses around it. Six candles shine from among the roses. The candles have almost burned down to the end, yet they still give off light, for so long as the oil is not finished they gather their strength to light the way for the prayers of Israel until they reach the gates of Heaven. A time of trouble has come to Jacob, and we need much strength. Opposite them, to the south, stand the memorial candles, without number and without end. Six million Jews have been killed by the Gentiles; because of them a third of us are dead and two thirds of us are orphans. You won't find a man in Israel who hasn't lost ten of of his people. The memorial candles light them all up for us, and their light is equal, so that you can't tell the difference between the candle of a man who lived out his days, and one who was killed. But in Heaven they certainly distinguish between the candles, just as they distinguish between one soul and another. The Eternal had a great thought in mind when He chose us from all peoples and gave us His Torah of life. Nevertheless, it's a bit difficult to see why He created, as opposed to us, the kinds of people who take away our lives because we keep His Torah.

27

By the grace of God upon me, those thoughts left me. But the thought of my city did not take itself away from me. Is it possible that a city full of Torah and life is suddenly uprooted from the world, and all its people, old and young, men, women,

and children are killed, that now the city is silent, with not a soul of Israel left in it?

I stood facing the candles, and my eyes shone like them, except that those candles were surrounded with flowers, and my eyes had thorns upon them. I closed my eyes, so that I would not see the deaths of my brothers, the people of my town. It pains me to see my town and its slain, how they are tortured in the hands of their tormentors, the cruel and harsh deaths they suffer. And I closed my eyes for yet another reason. When I close my eyes I become, as it were, master of the world, and I see only that which I desire to see. So I closed my eyes and asked my city to rise before me, with all its inhabitants, and with all its Houses of Prayer. I put every man in the place where he used to sit and where he studied, along with his sons, sons-in-law, and grandsons—for in my town everyone came to prayer. The only difference was in the places. Some fixed their places for prayer in the Old House of Study, and some in the other synagogues and Houses of Study, but every man had his fixed place in his own House of Prayer.

28

After I had arranged all the people in the Old House of Study, with which I was more familiar than the other places in town, I turned to the other Houses of Prayer. As I had done with the Old House of Study, so I did with them. I brought up every man before me. If he had sons or sons-in-law or grandsons, I brought them into view along with him. I didn't skip a single holy place in our town, or a single man. I did this not by the power of memory, but by the power of the synagogues and the Houses of Study. For once the synagogues and Houses of Study stood before me, all their worshippers also came and stood before me. The places of prayer brought life to the people of my city in their deaths as in their lives. I too stood in the midst of the city among my people, as though the time of the resurrection of the dead had arrived. The day of the resurrection will indeed be great; I felt a taste of it that day as I stood among my brothers and townspeople who have gone to another world, and they stood about me, along with all the synagogues and Houses of Study in my town. And were it not difficult for me to speak, I would have asked them what Abraham, Isaac and Jacob say, and what Moses says, about all that has happened in this generation.

I stood in wonder, looking at my townspeople. They too looked at me, and there was not a trace of condemnation in their glances, that I was thus and they were thus. They just seemed covered with sadness, a great and frightening sadness, except for one old man who had a kind of smile on his lips, and seemed to say *''Ariber geshprungen''*; that is, we have "jumped over" and left the world of sorrows. In the Conversations of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, of blessed memory, something like that can be found. He heard about a certain preacher in Lemberg who, in the hour of his death, gestured with his fingers and said that he would show them a trick. At that moment he passed from the world of sorrows. And the Zaddik enjoyed those words.

29

Bit by bit the peple of my town began to disappear and go away. I didn't try to run after them, for I knew that a man's thoughts cannot reach the place where they were going. And even if I could reach there, why should I prevent them from going, and why should I confuse them with my thoughts?

I was left alone, and I wandered back to former days, when my town was alive, and all those who were now dead were alive and singing the praise of God in the synagogues and the Houses of Prayer, and the old *ḥazzan* served in the Great Synagogue, while I, a small child, saw him standing on the platform intoning "O poor captive," with the old *Siddur* containing all the prayers and hymns open before him. He didn't turn the pages, for the print had been wiped out by the age of the book and the tears of former cantors, and not a letter could be made out. But he, may God give light to his lot in the world to come, knew all the hymns by heart, and the praise of God together with the sorrow of Israel would rise from his lips in hymns and in prayer.

30

Let me describe him. He was tall and straight-backed; his beard was white, and his eyes looked like the prayerbooks published in Slavita, that were printed on blue-tinged paper. His voice was sweet and his clothes were clean. Only his *tallis* was covered with tears. He never took his *tallis* down from his head during the prayers. But after every prayer of love or redemption he would take it down a little and look about, to see if there was yet a sign of the Redemption. For forty years he was our city's messenger before God. After forty years he went to see his relatives in Russia. The border patrol caught him and threw him into prison. He lamented and begged God to take him out of captivity and return him to his place. God did not let the governor sleep. The governor knew that as long as the voice of the Jew was to be heard in his prison, sleep would not return to him. He commanded that the *ḥazzan* be set free and returned home. They released him and sent him to our town. He came bringing with him a new melody to which he would sing "O Poor Captive."

31

The first time I heard that hymn was the Sabbath after Pesaḥ when I was still a little boy. I woke up in the middle of the night, and there was a light shining into the house. I got out of bed and opened the window, so that the light could come in. I stood by the window, trying to see from where the light was coming. I washed my hands and face, put on my Sabbath clothes, and went outside. Nobody in the house saw or heard me go out. Even my mother and father, who never took their eyes off me, didn't see me go out. I went outside and there was no one there. The birds, singing the song of morning, were alone outside.

I stood still until the birds had finished their song. Then I walked to the well, for I heard the sound of the well's waters, and I said, "I'll go hear the water talking." For I had not yet seen the waters as they talked.

I came to the well and saw that the water was running, but there was no one there to drink. I filled my palms, recited the blessing, and drank. Then I went to walk wherever my legs would carry me. My legs took me to the Great Synagogue, and the place was filled with men at prayer. The old cantor stood on the platform and raised his voice in the hymn "O poor captive." Now that hymn of redemption began to rise from my lips and sing itself in the way I had heard it from the lips of the old cantor. The city then stood yet in peace, and all the many and honoured Jews who have been killed by the enemy were still alive.

32

The candles which had given light for the prayers had gone out; only their smoke remained to be seen. But the light of the memorial candles still shone, in memory of our brothers and sisters who were killed and slaughtered and drowned and burned and strangled and buried alive by the evil of our blasphemers, cursed of God, the Nazis and their helpers. I walked by the light of the candles until I came to my city, which my soul longed to see.

I came to my city and entered the Old House of Study, as I used to do when I came home to visit—I would enter the Old House of Study first.

I found Hayyim the *shammas* standing on the platform and rolling a Torah scroll, for it was the eve of the New Moon, and he was rolling the scroll to the reading for that day. Below him, in an alcove near the window, sat Shalom the shoemaker, his pipe in his mouth, reading the *Shevet Yehudah*,° exactly as he did when I was a child; he used to sit there reading the *Shevet Yehudah*, pipe in mouth, puffing away like one who is breathing smoke. The pipe was burnt out and empty, and there wasn't a leaf of tobacco in it, but they said that just as long as he held it in his mouth it tasted as though he were smoking.

See 30–33.

I said to him: "I hear that you now fast on the eve of *Rosh Ḥodesh*" (something they didn't do before I left for the Land of Israel when they would say the prayers for the "Small Yom Kippur" but not fast). Hayyim said to Shalom, "Answer him." Shalom took his pipe out of his mouth and said, "So it is. Formerly we would pray and not fast, now we fast but don't say the prayers. Why? Because we don't have a minyan; there aren't ten men to pray left in the city." I said to Hayyim and Shalom, "You say there's not a minyan left for prayer. Does this mean that those who used to pray are not left, or that those who are left don't pray? In either case, why haven't I seen a living soul in the whole town?" They both answered me together and said, "That was the first destruction,° and this is the last destruction. After the first destruction a few Jews were left; after the last destruction not a man of Israel remained." I said to them, "Permit me to ask you one more thing. You say that in the last destruction not a man from Israel was left in the whole city. Then how is it that you are alive?" Hayyim smiled at me the way the dead smile when they see that you think that they're alive. I picked myself up and went elsewhere.

World War I.

33

I saw a group of the sick and afflicted running by. I asked a man at the end of the line: "Where are you running?" He placed his hand on an oozing sore and answered: "We run to greet the rebbe." "Who is he?" I asked. He moved his hand from one affliction to another and smiling, said: "A man has only two hands, and twice as many afflictions." Then he told me the name of his rebbe. It was a little difficult for me to understand. Was it possible that this rebbe who had left for the Land of Israel six or seven generations ago, and had been buried in the soil of the holy city of Safed, had returned? I decided to go and see. I ran along, and reached the tsaddik together with them. They began to cry out before him how they were stricken with afflictions and persecuted by the rulers and driven from one exile to another, with no sign of redemption in view. The tsaddik sighed and said: "What can I tell you, my children? 'May God give strength to His people; may God bless His people with peace.' "° Why did he quote that particular verse? He said it only about this generation: before God will bless His people with peace He must give strength to His people, so that the Gentiles will be afraid of them, and not make any more war upon them, because of that fear.

Ps. 29:11.

I said, "Let me go and make this known to the world." I walked over to the sink and dabbed some water onto my eyes. I awoke, and saw that the book lay open before me, and I hadn't yet finished reciting the order of the Commandments of the Lord. I went back and read the Commandments of the Lord as composed by Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, may his soul rest.

34

There was nobody in the shack; I sat in the shack alone. It was pleasant and nicely fixed up. All kinds of flowers which the soil of our neighborhood gives us were hung from the wall between branches of pine and laurel; roses and zinnias crowned the Ark and the reader's table, the prayer stand, and the eternal light. A wind blew through the shack and caused the leaves and flowers and the blossoms to sway, and the house was filled with a goodly smell; the memorial candles gave their light to the building. I sat there and read the holy words which God put into the hands of the poet, to glorify the Commandments which He gave to His people Israel. How great is the love of the holy poets before God! He gives power to their lips to glorify the Laws and Commandments that He gave to us in His great Love.

II (35-42) Revelation

35

The doors of the Holy Ark opened, and I saw a likeness of the form of a man standing there, his head resting between the scrolls of the Torah, and I heard a voice come forth from the Ark, from between the Trees of Life.° I bowed my head and closed my eyes, for I feared to look at the Holy Ark. I looked into my prayer-book, and saw that the letters which the voice from among the scrolls was reciting were at the same time being written into my book. The letters were the letters of the Commandments of the Lord, in the order set for them by Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, may his soul rest. Now the man whom I had first seen between the scrolls of the Torah stood before me, and his appearance was like the appearance of a king.

Torah scrolls.

I made myself small, until I was as though I were not, so that he should not feel the presence of a man in the place. Is it right that a king enter one of his provinces, and he not find any of his officers and slaves, except for one little slave?

But my tricks didn't help any. I made myself small, and nevertheless he saw me. How do I know he saw me? Because he spoke to me. And how do I know that it was to me he spoke? Because I was alone in the House of Prayer; there was no one there with me. He did not speak to me by word of mouth, but his thought was engraved into mine, his holy thought into mine. Every word he said was carved into the forms of letters, and the letters joined together into words, and the words formed what he had to say. These are the things as I remember them, word for word.

36

I shall put down the things he said to me, the things he asked me, and the things I answered him, as I brought my soul out into my palm, daring to speak before him. (But before I say them, I must tell you that he did not speak to me with

words. Only the thoughts which he thought were engraved before me, and these created the words.)

And now I shall tell you all he asked me, and everything I answered him. He asked me, "What are you doing here alone at night?" And I answered, "My lord must know that this is the eve of Shavuot when one stays awake all night reading the Order of Shavuot night. I too do this, except that I read the hymns of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, may his soul rest."

He turned his head toward me and toward the book that stood before me on the table. He looked at the book and said, "It is Solomon's." I heard him and was astonished that he mentioned Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol and did not affix some title of honour before his name. For I did not yet know that the man speaking to me was Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol himself.

37

Now I shall tell the things that transpired after these former things. The memorial candles lit up the shack, the thronged flowers which crowned the Eternal Light before the Holy Ark and the other flowers gave off their aromas, and one smell was mixed with another; the aroma of the House of Prayer with that of the roses and zinnias from the gardens. A restful quiet was felt on the earth below and in the heavens above. Neither the call of the heart's pleas on earth, nor the sound of the heavens as they opened could be heard.

I rested my head in my arm, and sat and thought about what was happening to me. It couldn't have been in a dream, because he specifically asked me what I was doing here alone at night, and I answered him, "Doesn't my lord know that this night is the eve of Shavuot, when we stay awake all night and read the Order of Shavuot eve?" In any case, it seems a little difficult. Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol is the greatest of the holy poets. Why did he see fit to descend from the Palace of Song to this shack in this neighborhood to talk with a man like me?

38

I took my soul out into the palms of my hands, and raised my head to see where I was, for it was a little hard to explain the things as they had happened, though their happening itself was witness to them, and there was no doubt that he was here. Not only did he speak to me, but I answered him. Maybe the thing happened when the heavens were open. But for how long do the heavens open? Only for a moment. Is it possible that so great a thing as this could happen in one brief moment?

I don't know just how long it was, but certainly not much time passed before he spoke to me again. He didn't speak with his voice, but his thought was impressed upon mine and created words. And God gave my heart the wisdom to understand. But to copy the things down—I cannot. I just know this; that he spoke to me, for I was sitting alone in the House of Prayer, reading the Commandments of the Lord, as composed by Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol. For ever since I was old enough to do so, I follow the custom, every Shavuot eve, of reading the Commandments of the Lord by Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, may his soul rest.

39

I was reminded of the sorrow I had felt for Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol because God made him search for Him, as he says, "At the dawn I seek Thee, my rock and my fortress," and when he finally found Him, awe fell upon him and he stood confused, as he says, "Before Thy greatness I stand and am confounded." And as if he didn't have enough troubles himself, he had to add the sorrow of that poor captive girl. I put my finger to my throat as the old Cantor used to do, and raised my voice to sing, "O Poor Captive," in the melody he had written. I saw that Rabbi Solomon, may his soul rest, turned his ear and listened to the pleasant sound of this hymn of redemption. I got up my courage and said to him, "In our town, wherever they prayed in the Ashkenazic rite, they used to say a lot of *piyyutim*. The beauty of each *piyyut* has stayed in my heart, and especially this 'Poor Captive,' which was the first Hymn of Redemption I heard in my youth." I remembered that Sabbath morning when I had stood in the Great Synagogue in our city, which was now laid waste. My throat became stopped up and my voice choked, and I broke out in tears.

Rabbi Solomon saw this and asked me, "Why are you crying?" I answered, "I cry for my city and all the Jews in it who have been killed." His eyes closed, and I saw that the sorrow of my city had drawn itself to him. I thought to myself, since the Rabbi doesn't know all of the people of my town, he'll weigh the glory of all of them by the likes of me. I bowed my head and lowered my eyes and said to him, "In my sorrow and in my humility, I am not worthy. I am not the man in whom the greatness of our city can be seen."

40

Rabbi Solomon saw my sorrow and my affliction and the lowness of my spirit, for my spirit was indeed very low. He came close to me, until I found myself standing next to him, and there was no distance between us except that created by the lowness of my spirit. I raised my eyes and saw his lips moving. I turned my ear and heard him mention the name of my city. I looked and saw him move his lips again. I heard him say, "I'll make a sign, so that I won't forget the name." My heart melted and I stood trembling, because he had mentioned the name of my city, and had drawn mercy to it, saying he would make a sign, so as not to forget its name.

I began to think about what sign Rabbi Solomon could make for my city. With ink? It was a holiday, so he wouldn't have his writer's inkwell in his pocket. With his clothes? The clothes with which the Holy One, blessed be He, clothes His Holy Ones, have no folds, and don't take to any imprint made upon them from outside.

Once more he moved his lips. I turned my ear, and heard him recite a poem, each line of which began with one of the letters of the name of my town. And so I knew that the sign the poet made for my town was in beautiful and rhymed verse, in the holy tongue.

41

The hairs of my flesh stood on end and my heart melted as I left my own being and I was as though I was not. Were it not for remembering the poem, I would have been like all my townsfolk, who were lost, who had died at the hand of a despicable people, those who trampled my people until they were no longer a nation. But it was because of the power of the poem that my soul went out of me. And if my town has been wiped out of the world, it remains alive in the poem that the poet wrote as a sign for my city. And if I don't remember the words of

the poem, for my soul left me because of its greatness, the poem sings itself in the heavens above, among the poems of the holy poets, the beloved of God.

42

Now to whom shall I turn who can tell me the words of the song? To the old cantor who knew all the hymns of the holy poets?—I am all that is left of all their tears. The old cantor rests in the shadow of the holy poets, who recite their hymns in the Great Synagogue of our city. And if he answers me, his voice will be as pleasant as it was when our city was yet alive, and all of its people were also still in life. But here—here there is only a song of mourning, lamentation, and wailing, for the city and its dead.

1962

XX

Return

Less than sixty years after Abramovitsh called on Russian Jews to meet their catastrophes with stoicism and self-help, the children of these Jews were on the verge of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. But it was their grandchildren who would have to die fighting for it. All hopes now focused on these young men and women, many of whom were already Sabras (natives to the land), supposedly the first "free" generation of Jews. Although they were required to read Abramovitsh's work as part of their high school curriculum, his world of beggars and peddlers might just as well have been on the moon. Instead, a new literature was created that linked the Zionist endeavor directly with the biblical past and fashioned a new myth out of their day-to-day lives. Natan Alterman now emerged as the national bard. "The Silver Platter" **(98),** his ballad to the young pioneers who died for the state, was soon to become part of Israeli civil religion.

Even without the knowledge of hindsight—that there would still be many wars to fight; that the specter of a new Destruction would suddenly resurface one Yom Kippur day; that the Jewish state would regalvanize anti-Jewish hatred—one can see very clearly how ancient and modern traditions of Jewish response were absorbed by those who claimed to be striking out on their own.

Abba Kovner's life and work can be said to embody one line of continuity. As a leader of the left-wing Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatsair in Vilna, Kovner represented the best that secular Jewish culture had produced: someone equally at home in Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish who trained himself and others for the rigors of agricultural life in Palestine

31. Our discussion here should be compared with Moshe Idel's presentation of weeping as a "participation mystique" whose reward is a visual revelation of the *Shekhinah*. See *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 80-88. The difference between the experiences described by Idel and the perspective of Rabbi Shapira here is that for the most part, the suffering of the earlier Jewish mystics is self-induced (e.g., a voluntary wandering away from home to imitate the exile of the *Shekhinah*), whereas for Rabbi Shapira the desolation ecstasy was an act of investing meaning in calamity, a posture of faith in response to the catastrophe within which he found himself. (The term *desolation ecstasy* is that of Marganita Laski, cited by Idel on p. 88.)

89 Rabbi Kalonymus Shapiro

From *Fire of Holiness*

Parashat Mishpatim [*Exod. 21:1–24:18*]
(Shekalim [*additional reading of Exod. 30:11–16*])

Exod. 21:1. NOW THESE ARE THE ORDINANCES WHICH YOU SHALL SET BEFORE THEM.° We find a passage in *Berakhot* (3a):

Rabbi Yosi says, I was once [traveling on the road], and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah of blessed memory appeared [and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer,] he said to me: [Peace be with you, my master! and I replied: Peace be with you, my master and teacher! And] he said to me: . . . My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied:] I heard a divine voice,° cooing like a dove, and saying: Woe to Me° for I have destroyed My house and burnt My temple and have exiled My children [among the nations of the world.] He said to me: [By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim,] but thrice each day does it exclaim thus! And more than that, whenever the Israelites go into the synagogues and schoolhouses and respond "May His great name be blessed!" the Holy One; blessed be He, as it were,° shakes His head and says: [Happy is the king who is thus praised in this house! Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their father!]

Inspect this passage at its source. We have already raised the following point about the passage. Why did Rabbi Yosi hear the voice only when he prayed in the ruin? Does not the Holy one, blessed be He, speak thus [as specified in the passage] three times every day?

Now the Israelite who is tormented by his afflictions thinks that he alone suffers, as if all his personal afflictions and those of all Israel do not affect [God] above, God forbid. Scripture states, however, IN ALL THEIR TROUBLES HE WAS TROUBLED (Isa. 63:9)°; and the Talmud states: When a person suffers, what does the Shekhinah say? 'My head is too heavy for me, My arm is too heavy for Me.'° Our sacred literature tells us that when an Israelite is afflicted, God, blessed be He, suffers as it were much more than the person does.° It may be°° that since He, blessed be He, is not subject to any limitation—for which reason no conception of Him is possible in the world—therefore His suffering from Israel's troubles is also boundless.° It is not merely that it would be impossible for a person to endure the experience of such great suffering, but that even to conceive of His suffering, blessed be He—to know that He, blessed be He, does suffer, to hear His voice, blessed be He: 'Woe to Me for I have destroyed My house and have exiled My children'—is impossible, because He is beyond the confines of the human. It is only when Rabbi Yosi entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem so that his selfhood was further° annihilated, and the constricted, bounded aspect of his being was further destroyed, that he heard the voice of the Holy One, blessed be He.° Even then he only heard a bit of it: he heard a divine voice that merely cooed like a

In Hebrew, bat kol.

1 *The words "to Me" were omitted from all standard editions of the Talmud; they do appear in the Ein Ya'akov and Menorat Hama'or.*

2 *In Hebrew, keveyakhol, if one could say such a thing.*

3 *Following the keri of the Masoretic text.*

4 *B. Sanhedrin 46a.*

5 *No such source has yet been located.*

6 *Here Rabbi Shapiro begins his own interpretation.*

7 *Note the radical twist on the concept of divine transcendence.*

8. *Further may mean that prior to this incident Rabbi Yosi had already attained a level of self-annihilation.*

9 *As the borders of the self recede, the mystic perceives the divine suffering.*

dove, whereas Scripture states HE SURELY ROARS OVER HIS HABITATION (Jer. 25:30)—like the roar of a lion, as it were, over the destruction of the Temple.°

I.e., if God roars like a lion over the Hurban, then to hear a voice cooing like a dove represents but a partial revelation.

See 14.

This explains why the world remains standing on its foundation and was not destroyed by God's cry of suffering over the afflictions of His people and the destruction of His house: because His great suffering never penetrated the world. This may be what underlies the passage found in the Proem of Midrash Lamentations Rabbah [which speaks of God's weeping at the destruction of the Temple].° The angel said:

"Sovereign of the Universe, let me weep, but don't You weep." God replied to him, "If you don't let me weep now, I will go to a place where you have no permission to enter, and weep there," [as Scripture says, BUT IF YOU WILL NOT HEAR IT,] MY SOUL SHALL WEEP IN SECRET (Jer. 13:17).

Citing the passage from memory, Rabbi Shapiro added the attribution to an angel.

Inspect this passage at its source. Furthermore, in *Tanna debe Eliyahu Rabbah* [chap. 17], we find that the angel said, "It is unseemly for a king to weep before his servants."° But if the issue was merely that of the unseemliness of a king weeping before his servants, then the *angel* could have gone away; then [God's weeping] would no longer be 'before his servants.' In light of what we've stated above, however, the passage suggests the following: what the angel meant to say was that it is unseemly, with respect to the king's servants, for the king to *need* to weep. Rather, since His suffering, as it were, is boundless and vaster than all the world—for which reason it has never penetrated the world and the world does not shudder from it—therefore the angel said, "Let me weep so that You won't need to weep." In other words, since angels are also messengers of God—for it is through them that He performs His actions, that is why the angel wanted the divine weeping to be manifested *in the world;* the angel wanted to transmit the weeping *into* the world. For then God would no longer need to weep; once the sound of divine weeping would be heard in the world, the world would hear it and explode.° A spark of His suffering, as it were, would penetrate the world and would consume all His enemies. At the [parting of the] Sea [of Reeds, Exod. 14–15], the Holy One, blessed be He exclaimed [to the ministering angels who wished to chant their hymns], "My creatures are drowning in the Sea, and you wish to sing hymns!"° Now that Israel is drowning in blood, shall the world continue to exist?! [So the angel said,] "Let me weep, but don't You weep"—in other words, You will no longer need to weep.° But since God wanted to atone for Israel's sins, and that time was not yet a time of salvation, He answered, "I will go to a place where you have no permission to enter and weep there."° Now the suffering is so great that the world cannot contain it; it is too sublime for the world. He causes His suffering and pain to expand, as it were, still more so that they would be too sublime even for the angel, so that even the angel would not see. In the Talmudic tractate Ḥagigah (5b), we find that this place [where God weeps] is in the inner chambers [of heaven]. There weeping can, as it were, be predicated of Him. In the commentary of Maharsha° [ad loc.] we find that the term *inner chambers*, understood kabbalistically, refers to the *sefirah* of *Binah*°; inspect this statement at its source. In light of what we've said above, the significance of Maharsha's statement is that *Binah* is a state in which questioning, but not knowledge, is possible;° it is

Here Rabbi Shapiro's own voice breaks through the literary convention.

B. Megillah 10b.

I.e., the angel was asking permission to transmit God's pain to the world, thus precipitating a cataclysmic explosion.

Rabbi Samuel Eliezer ben Judah Edels (1556–1631).

"Understanding" the third of the ten divine emanations.

See Zohar I:1b; III:193b.

1 Medieval self-censorship removed the word Me, replacing replacing the anthropathetic tone w/ moralistic one

Part I:
- Annihilation of self intensified by ambience of the ruin
- mystician of catastrophe
- achieved not thru mortification of the flesh but by History itself (= the ruin)

Infinite magnitude of divine suffering

Here his int. begins

Apocalyptic tension

They may lose their attachment to their own suffering in the contemplation of His

Gods distress = so great that he is forced to escape even domain of the angels, so as to weep in secret

- Precisely from catastrophe that a new revelation may emerge
- Hurban internalized

The concept of *hester panim*—divine concealment—is here turned around completely. God is indeed not visible, but His occultation is due not to callousness or indifference; rather, it is a result of the depth and intensity of His involvement in Israel's destiny. God's pain and anguish are so great that He desires to weep in seclusion. But knowing this, we can—by means of the Torah—burst into the inner chamber, and commune with God in His sorrow.

At this point in *Esh Kodesh*, then, the emphasis has clearly shifted from human suffering to divine suffering. Whereas rabbinic sources describe God as suffering *along with* Israel, here in *Esh Kodesh* the primary focus has shifted to the "inner chamber," and the weeping God Who is to be found there. Rabbi Shapira's final move in this direction appears in the penultimate *derashah* of *Esh Kodesh*, delivered on July 11, 1942:

beyond conception. In this state, therefore, His suffering is, as it were, hidden from the angel and from all the world.

February 14, 1942

Parashat Haḥodesh [*Exod. 12:1–20*]

. . . The Talmud states in Ḥagigah [5b] that, concerning God's outer chambers, we may apply the verse STRENGTH AND REJOICING ARE IN HIS PLACE (1 Chron. 16:27), but in His inner chambers, He grieves and weeps for the sufferings of Israel. Therefore, there are occasions when, at a time of [Divine] hiddenness—meaning, when He, may He be blessed, secludes Himself in His inner chambers—the Jewish person communes with Him there, each individual in accord with his situation, and [new aspects of] Torah and Divine Service are revealed to him there. We have already mentioned how the Oral Torah was revealed in exile, and how the Holy Zohar was revealed to Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai and his son Rabbi Eleazar at a time of acute suffering, caused by the terror of the [Roman] government. †

At times the individual is amazed at himself. [He thinks:] "Am I not broken? Am I not always on the verge of tears—and indeed I do weep periodically! How then can I study Torah? How can I find the strength to think creatively in Torah and Hasidism?" At times the person torments himself by thinking, "Can it be anything but inner callousness, that I am able to strengthen myself and study, despite my troubles and those of Israel, which are so numerous." Then again, he will say to himself, "Am I not broken? I have so much to make me cry; my whole life is gloomy and dark." Such a person is perplexed about himself; but, as we've said, He, may He be blessed, is to be found in His inner chambers, weeping, so that one who pushes in and comes close to Him by means of [studying] Torah, weeps together with God, and studies Torah with Him. Just that makes the difference: the weeping, the pain that a person undergoes by himself, alone—they may have the effect of breaking him, of bringing him down, so that he is incapable of doing anything. But the weeping that the person does together with God—that strengthens him. He weeps—and is strengthened; he is broken—but finds courage to study and teach. *It is hard to rise, time and again, above the sufferings; but when one summons the courage—stretching the mind to engage in Torah and Divine service—then he enters the inner chambers where God is to be found. There he weeps and wails with Him, as it were, together, so that he even finds the strength to study Torah and perform acts of Divine service.*

March 14, 1942

Parashat Mattot [*Num. 30:2–32:42*]

. . . How can we lift ourselves up at least a little bit in the face of the terrifying reports, both old and new, which tear us to pieces and crush our hearts? With the knowledge that we are not alone in our sufferings, but that He, may He be blessed, endures with us [as Scripture states], I AM WITH HIM IN TROUBLE (Ps. 91:15). But more: there are some sufferings that we suffer on our own account—whether for our sins, or as sufferings of love in order to purge and purify us—in which case He, may He be blessed, just suffers along with us. There are, however, some sufferings that we just suffer along with Him, as it were. These are the sufferings of *Kiddush Hashem*. [As our liturgy states,] "Our Father, our King, act for the sake of those who are slain for Your holy name."—They are killed, as it were, for His sake and for the sake of sanctifying His holy name. [As our liturgy states,] "Save, please, those who bear Your burden."—Israel also bears His burden [besides its own]. The sufferings are basically for His sake, on His account; in sufferings such as these, we are made greater, raised higher. As a consequence, we can strengthen ourselves a bit more. [As our liturgy states,] "Save those who study Your Torah, whose cheeks are torn of hair, who are given to the floggers, who bear Your burden." . . . How is it possible to study Torah when "our cheeks are torn of hair," when we are "given to the floggers"? Because we know that we "bear Your burden," and we thereby strengthen ourselves a bit.°

From Isa. 50:6—the Suffering Servant.

How can we tell if the sufferings are only on account of our sins, or whether they are to sanctify His name? By [noticing] whether the enemies torment only us, or whether their hatred is basically for the Torah, and as a consequence they torment us as well. Regarding Haman's decree, the Talmud asks, "What did the Jews of that generation do to deserve destruction?,"° whereas regarding the Hellenic decree [against the Jews that resulted] in the miracle of Hanukkah, the Talmud does not raise the question, despite the fact that thousands of Jews were killed, nearly all of the Land of Israel was conquered, and the Temple was invaded. The difference is that Haman's decree was directed only against the Jews [not their religion]; it follows, then, that the decree [against them] was on account of some sin. However, with respect to the Hellenic [persecution], [our liturgy] states: "In the days of Mattathias, when the wicked Hellenic kingdom arose . . . to make them forget Your Torah and transgress the statutes of Your will. . . ." So it is not appropriate to ask "for what sin [did the sufferings come]," since, while they did purge them of sin, they were [essentially] sufferings of *Kiddush Hashem*. . . .

B. Megillah 12.

July 11, 1942

90 Zelig Kalmanovitsh

Three Sermons

Sunday, October 11, [1942]

Jacob Gens.

On Simhat Torah eve at the invitation of the rabbi, I went for *hakafot* in a house that had formerly been a synagogue and was now a music school. The remnants of the yeshiva students and scholars were assembled, as well as some children. There was singing and dancing. The commandant° and his assistants were also there. I was honored with the first *hakafa*. °. . . I said a few words: "Our song and dance are a form of worship. Our rejoicing is due to Him who decrees life and death. Here in the midst of this small congregation, in the poor and ruined syn-

One of seven processional circuits around the bimah, with members of the congregation carrying Torah scrolls.

agogue, we are united with the whole house of Israel, not only with those who are here today and with the tens of thousands of the pure and saintly who have passed on to life eternal, but with all the generations of Jews who were before us. In our rejoicing today we give thanks for the previous generations, the noble generations in which life was worthwhile. We feel that with our song today we sanctify the name of Heaven just as our ancestors did. And, I, a straying Jewish soul, feel that my roots are here. And you, in your rejoicing, atone for the sins of a generation that is perishing. I know that the Jewish people will live, for it is written: 'As the days of the heaven upon the earth. . .'° And even if we were the last generation, we should give thanks and say: 'Enough for us that we were privileged to be the children of those!' And every day that the Holy One, blessed be He, in His mercy gives us is a gift which we accept with joy and give thanks to His holy name."

Deut. 11:21.

Sunday, [December] 27, [1942]

7 A.M. to 6 P.M.

This morning I was in the children's nursery. Women who work leave their children from 7 to 6.° There are 150 children between the ages of three months and two years, [one group] from two to three years, [one group] from three to six, and another group that studies reading and writing. Speeches, dramatic presentations, the children march in line. But the Jewish flavor is missing. In ghetto circumstances the order is remarkable. What vitality in this people on the brink of destruction!

From here on, the entry was recorded in Yiddish.

Who mourns the destruction of East European Jewry? The destruction is a hard fact. Undoubtedly also those who predicted it did not envisage it in this form. Three or four years ago the central Zionist organ was writing of a Jewish center in the Diaspora parallel to the center in Palestine. But the catastrophe was nevertheless a definite thing, its contours so visible. Indeed, the innovative horror for our human consciousness is the personal destruction of human lives: old people, children, blossoming youth, weak and old men, but also those in full vigor. There is no doubt, it tears the heart. But millions of people are losing their lives in all parts of the world in the war. Not only combatants, but also infants and old people. The war has put its face on our destruction. But the destruction was certain even had there been no war. It proceeded on its way in an expansive manner. No one attempted to stem it. On the contrary, whoever attempted to convince himself and the world that he was erecting a defense, actually collapsed. The full proof came in the East [in the U.S.S.R.]. Everything was swallowed up in one great endeavor to disappear.° The apparent life of culture was pure nonsense, arid. When the East came here, no one as much as raised his voice.° All was happiness. All found a place, a sense of belonging. Undoubtedly here and there someone thought: something is missing. Another reflected: Judaism is disappearing. But all this was glossed over by the fact of mere existence. There is no discrimination. One amounts to something, particularly something in the apparatus. One can have his say. Had the thing continued in existence, nothing would have been left of the enemies of Israel anyway, except, of course, the youth that yearns thither [Palestine]. Could they actually have got there, they would have been saved for our people, and the people through them. But the rest? The individuals would have remained intact, but would have been lost to our people. Jewry in the East is disappearing. The final result is the same as now.

A reference to the Soviet policy of forcibly assimilating the Jews and to the conformist Communist culture in Yiddish.

A reference to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania from June 1940 to 1941.

What is better? Better for whom? The individuals who are saved are saved individuals. There are two billion people in the world, two billion people + x. For our people—the Jewish people—had constructive elements in East European Jewry. Those that yearned thither,° if they actually succeeded in coming there, they strengthened our people. Otherwise, our people will mourn them. Great will be the sorrow and mourning, the joy of redemption will be wrapped in black. But the same sorrow is also for the parts that disappeared through apostasy. And if you wish, the sorrow is even greater. Here the evil beast came: "Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces."° But how Jacob would have wept if the first plan, God forbid, had been carried out!° In that case the Jewish people would have been justified in feeling that sick, impure blood courses in our veins. No external enemy tears off our limbs. Our limbs rot and fall off by themselves. And a page of history will read: The grandchildren were not inferior to the grandfathers. Only fire and sword overcame them. A curse upon the murderer! Eternal glory to the innocent victim! But here, where comfort lures people into the camp of the mighty, it is of no interest to history. It will not condemn, but silence means condemnation. You are no longer. Like all of them—Ammon, Moab, Edom, the hundred kingdoms of Aram . . . an object for excavations and students of epigraphy. History will revere your memory, people of the ghetto. Your least utterance will be studied, your struggle for man's dignity will inspire poems, your scum and moral degradation will summon and awaken morality. Your murderers will stand in the pillory forever and ever. The human universe will regard them with fear and fear for itself and will strive to keep from sin. People will ask: "Why was it done so to this people?" The answer will be: "That is the due of the wicked who destroyed East European Jewry." Thus the holocaust° will steal its way into world history. Extinction by means of a loving caress creates no sensation and means nothing to anyone.

Palestine.

Gen. 37:33. The plan to kill Joseph.

In Yiddish, khurbm [hurban].

Eventually the Jewish people itself will forget this branch that was broken off. It will have to do without it. From the healthy trunk will come forth branches and blossoms and leaves. There is still strength and life. Dried up and decayed—this happens to every tree. There are still thousands of years ahead. Lamentation for the dead, of course, that is natural, particularly if they are your own, close to you. But the Jewish people must not be confused. The mourning for close ones—some people bear their sorrow long; most find comfort. Human nature—such is the world. Whatever the earth covers up is forgotten. In the ghetto itself we see how people forget. It cannot be otherwise. It certainly is not wrong. The real motive in mourning is after all fear of one's own end. Wherein are we better than those tens of thousands? It must happen to us, too. If we only had a guarantee of survival! But that does not exist and one cannot always be fearful, then the feeling of fear is projected into mourning for the fallen, and sorrow over the destruction of Jewry. Spare yourself the sorrow! The Jewish people will not be hurt. It will, it is to be hoped, emerge fortified by the trial. This should fill the heart with joyous gratitude to the sovereign of history.

Friday, [April] 30 [1943]

Passover is over. There were *sedarim* in the kosher kitchen. . . . At the second *seder* I spoke briefly.°

Kalmanovitsh recorded this speech in Yiddish a month after it was delivered.

"A year ago some intellectual circles in the ghetto searched for an answer to

the question: What is a Jew or who is a Jew? Everybody was tremendously preoccupied with this question. Formerly the majority of these people had never given much thought to this question. They felt that they were Jews. Some more so, others less. Some, perhaps, did not feel so at all. And if someone suffered because of his Jewishness, he somehow found a remedy for it and, in general, occupied himself with other more substantial matters, rather than speculate about such an 'abstract' matter. Now these diverse people were herded together and imprisoned within the narrow confines of the ghetto. People of diverse languages, diverse cultures, diverse interests and beliefs, of diverse and, at times, conflicting hopes and desires were assembled together in one category: Jews. Confined as if being punished for that; that is, they committed a crime and the crime consisted in being a Jew. Many of them actually did not know what to say about the 'crime.' They did not know what it means 'to be a Jew.' To be truthful, practically nothing resulted from all these speculations and reflections. It was impossible to find a clear and definite answer to the question: Who is a Jew nowadays? For only now, in our generations, in the past 150 years, has the concept of Jew assumed so many meanings. Earlier, 'Jew' was a clear concept that had only one meaning. A Jew was one who observed Jewish law and belonged to the Jewish community. Now various kinds of people are considered and consider themselves Jews, even such as do not observe Jewish law or even respect it, or have no idea what Jewishness is. But also in this case I obtained an answer to the question 'who is a Jew' from a child in the ghetto. The truth of the verse, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has Thou found strength,'° was again confirmed. A teacher of religion in the ghetto school told me the incident, from his own experience. Children attend who are totally alienated from Jews, who had never heard at home, in school, in the street, anything of the Jewish past, of Judaism. Now in the ghetto many of these children listen eagerly to the stories of ancient sacred history, of the Bible. One such child, who had once attended a Polish school and spoke Polish at home, studied with great interest the stories of the Bible. When, in the weekly portion of *Toledot*, they studied the story of Jacob and Esau, this child suddenly called out: 'Teacher, we are indeed the descendants of Jacob and they (i.e., those who do evil to us) the descendants of Esau. Isn't that so? It's good that way. For I really want to belong to Jacob and not to Esau.' I reflected on this story and discovered that I could deduce from it a method to decide who is a Jew. This is how: Man's imagination is after all free, no bonds can confine it. A ghetto person can then sometimes imagine that he has the freedom to choose: he can divest himself of his fallen and defeated Jewish identity and assume the identity of the ruler over the ghetto. Now I ask: What would he do? If he wanted to change, if he was eager to assume the identity of the ruler, we could suppose that he is not a Jew. But if by free choice he wishes to remain a Jew, then he is a Jew. Reflecting further: the Jewish child instinctively chose to be a Jew. He naturally feels at home among Jews. As for the adult who I imagine chooses freely to be a Jew, is instinctual feeling a sufficient ground or are there also rational motives?

Ps. 8:3.

"I think so. To be a Jew means in every instance to be on a high plane. The temporary suffering and blows that descend upon the Jew have a meaning, are not merely oppressions, and do not degrade the Jew. For a Jew is part of the sacred triad°: Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One, blessed be He. That means the Jewish people, the moral law, and the Creator of the universe. This sacred triad courses through history. It is a reality that has been tested countless times. Our grandfathers clung to the triad, lived by its strength. And now too: the Jew who does not cling to this triad is to be pitied. He wanders in a world of chaos, he suffers and finds no explanation for his suffering; he can be severed from his people, that is, he can wish to change his identity. But the Jew who clings to the sacred triad needs no pity. He is in a secure association. To be sure, history rages now, a war is waged against the Jews, but the war is not only against one member of the triad but against the entire one: against the Torah and God, against the moral law and the Creator. Can anyone still doubt which side is the stronger? In a war it happens that one regiment is defeated, taken into captivity. Let the ghetto Jews consider themselves as such prisoners of war. But let them also remember that the army as a whole is not defeated and cannot be defeated. The Passover of Egypt is a symbol of ancient victory of the sacred triad. My wish is that together we shall live to see the Passover of the future."

The sacred triad was first conceived by poet, kabbalist and ethical philosopher Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707–1746) and was later popularized by the Gaon of Vilna and the Maggid of Mezritsh.