Smugglers

A novel by

Oyzer ~~Ezer~~ Wershovsky Warshawski

Translated by Leonard Wolf

Represented by The Spieler Agency
154 West 57th Street / Room 135
New York, NY 10019

Contact: John F. Thornton
(212) 757-4439, ext. 203
Virtualjft@aol.com
Fax: (212) 333-2019

Book One

Chapter One

Pantl Furman thrust his hand out, stretched himself under the covers, turned from one side to the other, sat up and yawned.

The room was dark. Only a weak morning light penetrated a couple of slats in the shutters. "Still early, Pantl" he muttered, rubbing his eyes as he looked about the room which was enfolded entirely in darkness and cold; and, seeing the frost-flowers on the window pane, he felt strange and called out to the other bed, "Glicke! Glicke!"

"Eh? What?" said his wife waking with a fierce start. Then she sat up, her eyelids still gummy and her mouth open.

"D'you see? There's frost again," he said indicating the window, then putting both hands inside his cotton jacket in which, in winter, he slept. Then, with his right hand, he scratched at his chest energetically while, with his left, he scratched his shoulders.

"What are you saying?" she asked as with moist fingers she pulled her gummed eyelids open.

"There's no money," he replied.

Hearing that, she was suddenly wide awake. "There's some coal to be bought; and a rye loaf."

"What a frost," he said abruptly once more, as if he wanted to wave something away. Taking his hands out quickly from under his jacket, he lay back down then pulled the covers up to his nose. His wife, in the other bed, regarded him. Steam seemed to be rising from her face and body.

"Well, what'll happen, eh?" she asked, though she knew there was no answer he could give.

From the first room—the kitchen—a young voice was heard, "Move over. Just see how he's spread himself out. Can't you think of anything better to do than to lie on my shoulder?"

"Hmph. Shut your trap," came the coarse reply.

"Damn him. Damn him," came from the earlier voice.

"Damn them both," Pantl cried. "There's no getting any sleep here."

"But what'll happen? What'll happen?" Glickl said quietly once more. "The baker's wife won't let us have so much as a crumb of bread. And we need a bit of coal for the kitchen stove." Repeating herself this way, she began to scratch both her body and her head, rubbing the bed clothes back and forth over her, the way one grates horseradish.

Pantl, getting too warm from lying in bed with the covers up to his nose, lifted a corner of the quilt and felt a wash of cold air on his skin. He felt a pleasurable breeze blowing over his entire stocky body. But then, glancing up at frosted-over window, he snatched his chilled hand back under the covers, grateful for the feeling of warm air once more.

Immediately, his hands, first one and then the other, were sweating again. And then, his entire body. The bristling tips of hair on his head and face glistened as if coated with dew. He began moving his short muscular legs, contracting and stretching them as if, like a horse, he was about to start off to the meadow. This was followed by another contraction and yet another stretch.

"Damn you, Pantl," cried his wife, "you're tearing up what's left of the poor ragged quilt."

But "Pantl the Thief" was not listening . He kept wiggling himself into the bedclothes, feeling like a fish in water, engrossed , evidently, in thoughts about making money. Abruptly, he called out, "You ought to have a new jacket." He said it softly-- to the degree that Pantl's voice could *be* soft. "This one's entirely torn."

Then, since she was silent, he, too, lapsed into silence, drifting off into a brown study, thinking of all sorts of good things: about a better life, a better, more expansive livelihood.

transporting passengers

She, too, remembered that it was already high time to undertake to do something—not to sit passively—the train yielded nothing —water for porridge.

And here everything was ragged, frayed. They needed linens, shoes, coal and wood. They needed… they needed…"

And in Pantl's brain, an entire plan coalesced. "Never mind," he said. "With the help of God, it'll happen."

Entirely indifferent to the cold, he leaped out of bed. Wrapping long strips of rags, like towels around his legs, he pulled on his boots and, together with the daybreak, was in the stable giving water to the horses.

Book One

Chapter Two

In the morning, Kopl came in. The house was cold. The windowpanes were entirely covered with frost flowers. Glickl, seeing the patterns, thought, "They make some damn garden."

Pantl's two sons still lay on the wooden trundle bed.

Near the kitchen, there was an iron pot filled with water and several grates were strewn nearby. Pantl tapped one boot against the other, rubbed his hands then blew into his fists. "Good morning," he said, and, in the cold early air his voice sounded as if emerging from within a barrel. "Oh yes This is *some* cold." He came nearer to the table that stood near one of the windows and freeing his ears from under his large felt hat, he sat on a stool.

"Didn't go to the train," said Pantl, unable to restrain himself from interrupting his prayers.

Pantl, wrapped in a filthy, yellowing prayer shawl, walked about the room, good health emanating from his taut, small-boned body.

"If there was no one to go with," Kopl replied, then coughed, clearing his throat, having, evidently had a whiskey or two. "Who's going to go when it's so cold?"

Pantl speeded up the recitation of his prayers, bowed, spat once on each side, tossed his prayer-shawl and *tfiln* aside, rolled down his sleeve, pulled his peaked sheepskin hat down as low as his eyebrows and seized a lapel of Kopl's fur jacket.

"Do you know," he said, his nostrils flaring, his eyes appeared sunken, surrounded by the countless tiny wrinkles created by the contractions of his humorous face. "Ha, ha. I worked things out last night. Come. We'll look for Yenkl, then we'll go to Yellow Elye's."

Smugglers: a Novel

By

Ezer Vershovsky

Translated from the Yiddish by

Leonard Wolf

Once outside in the clear air, Kopl glowed as red a beet.. "Are you on to something?" he asked his guide quietly, but, because of the emotion in his voice, he could be heard on the other side of the marketplace.

"We'll talk about it when we're at Elye's," said Pantl, guarding his secret.

So that Pantl would not think he was being curious, Kopl chose abruptly to talk of the weather,"So that he won't think that I, Kopl, am curious."

"D'you see what a white frost we have?" he asked, pointing to a couple of trees that stood before a house, dazzling the street with their whiteness.

Pantl predicted that this summer, fruit trees would be blighted. Kopl, agreeing, nodded his great head, but his mind was on quite other things. "Maybe he's put his hands on a treasure?...Maybe a horse? Who knows?" and he opened his eyes wide, bulging them, and cast a sidelong look at little Yudl walking at his left, smiling under his moustache, his broad trousers twitching with every step.

The glasses of whiskey were on the table as well as , on a plate decorated with flowers, some yeast-risen cakes such as only Elye could make. Putting the glasses to their lips with their right hands they pressed their left hands to the backs of their necks then threw their heads back and the empty glasses were on the table again And now taking their places on the chairs, they reached for the cakes.

While Kopl and Yenkle sat, their mouths open, their hands on their knees, Pantl began outlining his plan, "The long and short of it is, this is how the matter stands. Where's the profit in taking the train? You search for the fellow and you get to eat your heart out before you see him. You go at night, knock at the shutters, wake them and they take their own sweet time before they

answer,Who's there?" Who are they? You tell me. May the devil take their mother's bodies.. We need them like a thousand plagues.

"We have three wagons and their tarpaulins, right? So let's go partners and make our own trips directly to Warsaw. And, as we live and breathe, the three of us standing here, whatever we carry will net us a profit. If we have one good month, we'll be on our feet again. What do you say, eh?"

Pantl was silent, and looking at his two friends tried to gauge the impression his words had made on them. Mostly, he regarded Kopl, who leaped up from his chair the moment Pantl stopped talking and clapped him on the shoulder so hard that the very floor vibrated. "Damn, damn you," he thundered. "No joking..., you're damned right."

"Absolutely right," said Yenkl who, normally, was not much given to talking though he was in no way backward when it came to blows.

"And there's no need to give up the train," said Pantl, excited either by his own plan or by Kopl's approval of it— especially by the latter because he counted on him. "We'll have to buy flour and bread." And Yenkl was as rich as he was himself!

He went on, "We'll have to divide the work up. One of us will stay here and two will take the trip. When the two come back, we'll trade places. "

"Good idea. Good idea," said Yenkl and downed his second glass of whiskey which, in the meantime, Pantl had refilled.

"Here's to us, and to good luck," said Kopl, downing another glass.

And so it went on, drink after drink and the warmth spread from their stomachs to the rest of their bodies.

The three wagon drivers shoved their chairs so close to each other that the brims of their hats touched and their breaths mingled. Once more they discussed the matter and when they got up to leave it was necessary to down another little glass and, once more, to wish each other good luck.

Book One

Chapter Three

Some time later a couple of sacks of flour and a pile of rye loaves were to be seen on Pantl's bed. Glicke ran about in her filthy lace-trimmed nightgown, sewing and repairing sacks and talking to Elye's and Kopl's wives, endlessly speculating about how much money the new venture would make.

Little Urke hopped after his mother, at intervals snatching up pieces of black bread stuffing them into his busy mouth where he tore them apart with his teeth. And his cheeks, too, were busy. Looking about the room, he was pleased by what he saw. What a wonderful life! Sacks of flour. Piles of bread. Hustle and bustle. Today he was not tempted at all to go sliding on ice.So he ran about with his mother. With a couple of threads of snot gleaming on his upper lip, he ran about, following his mother, covering himself entirely with flour, and it seemed to him that he was keeping busy; that he had not a moment to lose.

In the stable, Mendl, Pantl's older son was stirring the feed with his hand, pushing it steadily toward the mouths of the horses. Every few minutes, he darted out to catch a glimpse of the long, wide, tarpaulin covered wagon, checking to see if it was ready to have the horses harnessed to it. Just then, he saw Yuszshke, the watchman's gentile maid come into the courtyard carrying a bowl in her reddened wet hands. When he saw her bending over the drain to pour out the soapy water, he stole up beside her and pinched her wet hand, which turned pale for a moment, but, when the blood rushed back, was even redder than before. Angry with him, she stuck out her tongue. Then, turning sideways, she bent even lower. Mendl, however, felt in no way insulted. Instead, he leaned over her and slapping her on the behind, whispered in her ear, "I'm driving to Warsaw today."

At dusk, the wagon drivers climbed up into their wagons where everything was already packed and concealed with straw. On both sides of the wagons were poultry crates fastened on with iron chains. The chickens, poking their beaks through the wooden bars clucked and gabbled for all the world to hear.

The horses were already harnessed to the wagons. All but Mendl's. He was busy repairing one of the traces that would be tied to the shafts. Finally, he took up his whip, and flicked it across his horses' bare rumps crying, "Giddyup. We're off to Warsaw."

Glickl stood in her doorway for a long while looking after the wagons thinking, "Let's hope they've started off on the right foot." But when the wagons had disappeared into the dark and one could no longer hear the crunch of the wheels in the snow, she called Urke who had joined the other urchins in throwing snowballs at each other's heads. When he joined her, they went into the house and to bed.

The poor women peddlers who had been lingering before the door also went away, counting over in their minds just how much profit their would be in the venture and calculating how much each of the partners would make. But when they reached home, they turned to their husbands and, with their forefingers to their lips, whispered, "The wagon drivers are off—smuggling."

Book One

Chapter Four

That first "journey" stirred up considerable excitement in the town. Everywhere— in the synagogue, in every house, anyone with a mouth to speak, spoke of it. In the wealthy homes it was passed off "as though there's something new?" In the homes of the poor there was intense interest. There, people were strangely curious o know who was traveling and what were their goods and how much had they taken with them and whether all went well and how much would, finally, be profit.

They waited greatly impatient and looked out for the wagons as if they were expecting the Messiah. And, the next morning there were some who were enterprising enough to head for the highway to meet them.

Seeing that people were headed to the road, others gathered by twos and threes as, for example, at a funeral, women first, in their long shawls, then men and boys their heads, hunched in the cold, between their collars.

There was no lack also of mischievous urchins taking their pleasure on the road, throwing snowballs either at each other, as well also at those of the men and women who had cursed at them with heartfelt curses. Only Gimpl's Khanne kept one step ahead of them all, constantly blowing her nose and crying in her high piping voice, "Some are pretty, but I am smart. Didn't I say yesterday that the wagon drivers were going to do something. If not, why would they have needed Yenkl's flour?"

Also on the path, close to the ditch, was the seventy year old Shaykele. Gasping like a goose he asked repeatedly, "AtYenkl Meler's?"

"Yes,"Gimpl's Khanne said. "They carried home a full sack of flour. Then they went to Itche Baker."

"To Itche?" asked Shaykele once more.

"Yes. To Itche. Where they got three pood [120 pounds] of bread," she said, and blew her nose.

Then Urke, who was running about with the other mischief makers, took up a handful of snow and went quietly up to Khanne and flung it right at her nose.

When she cursed at him, he ran off, calling, "Gimpl's Khanna .. all her smarts are in her nose."

This produced laughter among the scamps and they went off, wrestling with each other. When one slipped on the ice and fell, he was instantly up and running again. Wrestling among themselves they grew so warm that the 12 centigrade cold lost considerable respect in their eyes. They ran about, their ears, their noses red as beets, wiping their upper lips on the sleeves of their overcoats.

Even old Shayke hardly felt the cold breeze that sought to creep in at every gap in his clothing;in his padded trousers, even into his house-shoes which, at every step opened mouths like whales; and most of all it toyed with his nose that was as long and slender as a pipe. "Oh my, oh my," he muttered, then his mind wandered off to thoughts of flour,of bread with dill seeds so intensely that he could taste them. Them, and other good things among which, as a man of property, he moved about. "Ah, what one has lived to see," he thought. "Things were different once."

As he remembered that "once" there appeared a gleam in his faded, seventy-year old eyes. "Then… ah then. Everything was sufficient then.

The image of his niece and her baby came to mind. He saw her withered breasts on which the child sucked and sucked without sucking anything except her skin. But that image was immediately replaced by that of great round loaves of rye bread flying toward him from all sides.

"Would it be better if I could no longer do anything? Eh, eh? Never mind.I That old God still lives and old Shayke is not a dotard yet. I, too, can buy some goods and take them to Warsaw. Earn a rouble; half a rouble—it's still money. "And he seized Beilke, a thirteen year old girl walking beside her motheer and pushed her into the street where he left her, crying after her, "Ha, ha, ha. Had you almost lying in the ditch, didn't I."

---------- ----------

Only Zalpeh was left at home. God only knows that when Gimpl's Khane came in to tell her that she was going to meet the wagons, Zalpeh had felt a surge of energy and started to get out of bed. But the good God in heaven is also omniscient, and she was unable to move. Now, sitting beside her was her only son, Dovidl, who, with tears in his eyes was regarding his mother, praying silently to the Holy One, asking Him how they had sinned more than others to deserve to be punished so severely.

Zalpeh did not sleep. Though she kept her eyes closed, she knew that her son was weeping. A mother—woe is us—a mother can see even with her eyes shut, and Zalpeh knew that the tears he was shedding were on her account. And she also knew that his lips were moving because he was begging God for health for his mother. For a moment, she felt a revivifying thrill coursing through her weak, sickly limbs and she felt as if she had recovered.

But almost at once she felt a sharp pain in her left side, in her shoulders and in her legs "Oh Lord in heaven! Lord in heaven!" she whispered silently. To her son, she said, "Why are you cring,

my little foool. Never mind. I'm feeling much better than I did yesterday. I think that by Wednesday… by Thursday… I'll be able to get out of bed."

She said that and, on her prematurely aged face, there appeared a benign, a motherly look. She studied him and saw how blonde he was. Not a drop of blood in his face. "What kind of dreadful mother am I. He hasn't had a thing to eat."

"Dovdl, Dovidl, get yourself some bread. Eat."

He nodded as if to she he would, but she didn't believe him and asked him to hand her the loaf on the table. He gave her the end crust and she saw at once that it hadn't been touched.

"But you haven't eaten anything. Is it right to fool your mother? Is it?"

"No, it's not right," replied Dovidl earnestly. "but you, Mama, you're so weak. I'm not hungry."

"Eat! At once, you little trouble maker. D'you hear?" And tried to sit up so she could break off a piece of the bread, but she could not even lift her head and the struggle to rise had made her dizzy. She pulled herself together, willing herself not to faint.

When her vision had cleared a bit, she sighed as, looking at her son she saw that his face had taken on the aspect of an old man. "Oh, oh! Some mother you are!" she accused herself. Then, trying to cheer Dovdl up by saying something positive, she said, "Listen, Dovidl, Gimpl's Khanah was here a while ago and she said that the wagon drivers have gone off and are already smuggling` So I thought that, God willing, when I get out of bed, right after the Sabbath, I'll start in, too. I can get half a pood of flour on credit from Yenkl. And so, with God's help, I'll start to earn something, and things will change for the better."

Her son heard her, but he knew that she was seriously sick. One could only hope that , two weeks from now, she might manage to get out of bed. So he listened to her with great sadness. Then

suddenly a fine thought came into his head and he said cheerfully to her, "Mother, do you know what I've just been thinking?"

When his mother looked questioningly at him, he went on, "*I'll* go to Warsaw. I'll smuggle. Seeing her look of surprise, he went on, speaking rapidly, enthusiastically. "Why not? Can't I do it? What's the big deal? You get some goods, get on the wagon and hold on to your basket all the way. Then you sell it all in Warsaw and come home with money. D'you hear, mother? For sure, that's how it's going to be. I'll be very careful, and I'll earn money."

That's how Dovidl spoke to his mother, and his eyes glistened like stars. He could already imagine himself coming into a warm home, tired from the long journey and hungry and his mother would put a plate of warm food before him as he spread out on the table the money he had earned and counted it.. and counted it.. until his meal grew cold. He jumped up from the bedside where he had been sitting , snatched the heel of the bread, cut off a piece and handed it to his mother. "Here, take it, and eat, mother."

She gazed at her son with her sickly eyes and she felt her heart surge with a mixture of delight and sorrow. Mutely, she took the bread from him, moistened it with her spittle, and bit off crust by crust several pieces with her toothless gums and, with difficulty, swallowed them.

The sun reached the window, and, with its rays toyed with the frost-blossoms on the panes, making them glisten as, little by little they began to melt creating tears that rolled down the edges of the glass.

'Chapter Five

Black Berl had a very weak heart. May it not happen to you, for any little thing , they applied heated pot covers to him which, sometimes, did not help;. Then they used to apply hot mustard. Which is why he said to his wife, "Ita, I'm going to go on the train. No doubt it will be a bit more difficult, getting to the station , buying a ticket, and, before all that, getting a travel pass. I'll have to go to the "Commandant" to tell him where I'm going, what I'm going for and for how long. And if you lose the pass while you're abroad you put your very life at risk. On the other hand, with the train you're in Warsaw in a matter of two or three hours, and you sit on a bench. And you're somebody. In short, I'm going to ride the train."

That's how Berl – the weakness of his heart to one side-- explained himself to his wife, all in one breath so that he could hardly hear his words. Ita, however, understood him well. Of course things had been different once, just after their wedding. Then, she had understood not a word and they had had quarrels. Now, all she had to do to understand what he meant was to look into his eyes. And indeed, his eyes darted back and forth, seeming strange, not attached to him; as if they had somehow blundered their way to him.

"Of course it's better with the train," said Ita. "You won't tire yourself out as you would drudging all night on the wagons."

And for Black Berl, sick though he was, what was no sooner said was done. His actions, like his speech – moved quickly. Because the sooner you got something done the sooner you could get started getting something else done. That was his witticism. And, indeed, when the secretary wearing glasses had written the word "business" on his pass and the "commandant" had signed it, Berl hurried off to buy some goods, packed them in a laundry basket that he locked with two locks and, in

addition wound it round several times with stout cords. Then he was ready to go, wearing his brown sheepskin coat in addition to which Ita wound a woolen shawl around his neck and there he was, sitting in the hansom cab like a lord.

En route, driving through the woods, he began to lose a bit of the courage with which he had girded himself before starting out. "Who knows...eh... eh... with them... with the Germans?"

"Hm...hm... hm..." he undertook to hum a tune. Then, he called to the driver, "Tell me, Ynkl... hm... hm..."

"What?" asked the driver, turning his head.

"I... no... what I mean... is the basket secure?"

"Yes," said Yenkl, and cracked his whip over his horse.

"Hm...hm...hm..." Black Berl hummed again.

Then a voice was heard that made the driver bring the coach to a stop; a strange voice that seemed to come from the side, from the direction of the field.

"Yenkl," said Berl, "Is there someone standing there, by the station?"

"Two people are there," said Yenkl. "There where the tickets are taken."

"Two! " cried Berl, feeling that something was clutching at his heart.

Seeing how anxious Berl was, Yenkl, to comfort him said,"But they won't bother us."

Berl subsided at once. But his courage had left him. He was no longer the same Berl. He was someone else. The other one had been left at home.

He trembled as he crossed the station platform, darting glances with his strange eyes in all directions, like someone who has robbed a church and is carrying his loot.

Not till he was inside the compartment did he wipe the sweat from his face.

Berl had put his basket on the shelf. He had tried to find a gap inside which to shove it, but there were only smooth walls. And the benches were made differently – like those of the Russians.

He stood on a bench, he tried moving the basket about, trying which way was better, first to one side then to the other. He saw that there were many such baskets and valises on the shelf as well as ordinary wrapped packages. And when he got down from the bench and sat down he saw that there were several people on his bench as well as on the opposite bench. Men like himself, with warm scarves around their necks; and they, too, looked about nervously, like thieves. When, at last, he caught his breath his eye fell on a man with a yellowish complexion, a short man with a high, with a very high, protruding forehead carrying a knapsack on his shoulders. The man was walking back and forth in the car, reciting the psalms in a voice so lachrymose it could wring one's heart.

Berl did in fact feel a pang in his heart and began breathlessly to cough.

"Is something wrong " asked the man with the yellowish complexion hurrying up to him.

"Nothing. Nothing. My heart," replied Berl, but when the fellow started in once more on his endless psalm singing, Berl felt so hemmed in that he grew more anxious and drained of energy. He got to his feet and in the same tone he had used to his driver, he said, "Tell me, please. What are you carrying?"

"Kerosene," the man replied, his voice trembling like a thief's.

"And flour?" Berl asked to reassure himself.

"Flour? No. There's no profit in it. You earn more with kerosene. But I was well and truly robbed on Sunday. They took away half a *pood* of kerosene.

"Who took it, uncle? Who had the authority?"

"It makes no difference," said a thin man with a scanty beard whose eyes were sharp pin points. "Any one of them who wants something, takes it. They took a *pood* of flour from me a week ago."

"A *pood* of flour?" said Berl, trembling once more. The sallow-complected man looked up toward a long valise and was instantly terrified. "Good lord!" he cried. What's to be done? It's soaking me through. He leaped up on the bench while the sparse-bearded,, fellow with the protruding eyes undertook , after every station, to stop up with rags and paper the holes in the kerosene tin , wrapping the bundles to make them unrecognizable.

In the meanwhile a cluster of men edged closer to them. They began telling tales of misfortune that they had experience; and each one had some sad story to tell about having their goods impounded; some tale of heartbreak and grief.

Berl, hearing those tales felt his heart constricting; and his eyes did not dart about as if they were not his own; they became round and glistened like steel.

When the last of the men had finished telling his tale, all of them resumed their seats quietly, each one near his bundle, murmuring a heartfelt prayer to the Lord in Heaven, a prayer meant to purge their fearful feelings; praying the lord to blind the eyes of the evil angels (?) MLAKHI HABLAH 23 of trains and train stations and that their bundles would, in their eyes become as small as dots and specks in their eyes.

Black Berl recited one passage of the psalms after another. And, whenever they came to a station and he saw a pair of Germans coming, as he feared, coming toward his window, he felt his heart squirming like a worm and came near losing consciousness.

Book One

Chapter Six

At mid-day, tall Yukl opened a tin box, took a needle out of it and inserted it into a gramophone, then turned the handle and, under the needle's tip, the metal platter began to turn and music and song quickly emerged. Neighbor women called softly to each other, "Damn him. Has nothing better to do than to start playing in the middle of the day. His funeral music That's what they ought to play."

When the march ended and, keeping time, he had marched about the room like a soldier, Yukl took the round, braided riding crop and hung it by its leather ear to the button of his jacket and went out into the street.

At city hall he ran into Malinovski. Together, they went into the courtyard where Yukl asked Malinovski, "Have you heard? They're smuggling."

"Heard it. Heard it," replied the gentile. "But what's to be done about it?"

"I think," said Yukl, his long hands in motion, "Let 'em smuggle, but we ought to get something out of it."

"Right,", came the low-voiced reply, and Yukl bent forward, delighted. "Can you live on fifteen marks a week? So there'll be some profit."

They continued to talk with each other until they saw in doorway, the broad disheveled head of the sergeant major of the gendarmerie. "Ah, ah. Good day, *Pan* Yukl, good day,*Pan* Malinovski," he said, addressing them in his Polish speech. "What's the news?"

"No news to speak of," said Yukl..

"But what are the Jews up to? Is it true that they're smuggling?"

"What's that you say, Sir Sergeant Major? We haven't heard that."

When the stations they passed lay behind them in darkness, he interrupted his psalm recitation and made a vow that, if he should overcome the perils of the present trip, he would never again ride the train.

But the"Sir" sergeant major was no longer listening. He was smiling at a passing girl. Stroking his thick blonde moustache, he called after her, "A pretty girl. A very pretty girl," and he let his bright eyes swim over the slender curves of the girl who herself moved with a swimming motion. "A pretty little lady," he said to them, and his eyes narrowed and glistened like a tom-cat's. As he walked off, he grumbled to himself, "Hm, hm. Have to look into it. How the Jews are smuggling."

When he was some distance away, the two policemen exchanged acute glances, then made their way to Pantl's house.

In his house, there were sacks of flour piled up. Pantl was just then buttoning his padded cotton vest and was advising his two partners on how to do the packing when the door opened and the policemen came in.

Their eyes on the doorway, the three partners immediately took up position in the room, their legs spread as if they were trying to hide the sacks of flour.

Looking sternly at the waggoners, Malinovsky, his voice level, said,"What are you putting into the sacks?"

"You're getting ready to smuggle," Yukly added in a low tone.

The gentile said angrily, "Don't you know it's forbidden?"

"Nothing to get excited about, Sir," said Kopl looking eagerly at him. Meanwhile Yukl, drawing on his trousers, gave Pantl a murderous look. "Ah, it's you again. You just had to bring him here, eh?"

"Don't talk, don't talk,", said the gentile sternly.

Trying again to soothe him,Kopl said, "Sir will you take a seat?

For his part, Yenkl said nothing, but he put both hands on the English scale and lifted it into the air. Kopl, seeing this stood in front of him and said through gritted teeth, "You're going to put that scale down, right?" Turning to the policemen he said "Sir, why don't you sit down? Everything will be alright."

"Certainly, certainly, everything will be alright," agreed Pantl.

The policemen took seats at the table, but Kopl stood, turning first toward Malinovsky and then toward Yukl.

Pantl, glaring stood as if his feet were nailed to the floor, thinking, "If he had only come here alone. He would have left us with smashed ribs."

But when the partners heard what the policeman said, they well and truly trembled. "How did he come to know about it?"

"Landsman himself?"

" What's he going to do?"

Such were the questions rapidly exchanged between Pantl and Kopl., but Yenkl stood silently, looking down at the floor, one hand still resting on the English scale.

"You don't play games with him," snapped Pantl.

"What if he has something in mind?" asked Kopl.

The gentile said, "God forbid. God forbid. You'd be doing something really stupid." But seeing the helpless looks on their faces he added, "Just count on us. We'll see. We'll keep an eye out for him."

The policemen stood, retrieved their jackets and went to the door. The waggoners followed them and Kopl slipped something into their hands.

"Yukl, remember. After all, you're a Jew. Let us know if you smell something."

The two policemen said, "Good. Good,"then they were gone.

"May the cholera gnaw their bones," thundered Kopl, shutting the door behind them,

Turning to Yenkl, he said, "What were you going to do? D'you think it's the way it was with the Russians?" he said, turning to Yenkl.

"Don't they deserve to have their throats cut?" Yenkl said abruptly. "Dead is dead, plague take them. A blow on the head with the scale,. That'd rip their seams, plague take them."

And who knows what other sorts of death Yenkl would have wished on the policemen if Glike had not just then burst in on them. She was pinching her plump cheeks.

"Oh Lord, what did those murderers want here?"

"Shut your mouth. What's all this crying 'Oh Lord' in the middle of the day?

"The cops. Didn't I see them leaving here/"

"Well, so what?" said Kopl, resuming his packing. "They were here and then they went away."

"May they be damned to hell. Didn't they do anything? May they..."

Pantl, in the midst of his packing stood, holding a sack by its mouth in one hand as he scratched his foot with the other.

Seeing that, Yenkl, , who had found his tongue today said, "Look at him standing there. He must think it's the day before a holiday. He, he, he."

But Pantl paid no attention. He kept scratching his foot . From the hint of a smile on his face one could tell he was thinking an important thought. That smile nearly turned into a laugh as he said, "Listen brothers to what has just occurred to me. We'll make double bottoms in our wagons, the way the Kalisz folk do... Then the cops can pop their eyes out and won't find a thing."

The notion pleased the two partners. But Kopl could not contain himself and, as before in the tavern, he clapped Pantl on the shoulder and roared, "May the cholera get them. They'll have some searching to do."

They went back to work in a sprightly mood. Sacks were filled and covered with rags and dishcloths. That done, they went off to Yitskhok-Yoineh's to have a little drink.

Chapter Seven

Yitskhak Yoineh repaired used clothes, but he was not like the others with their eager little laughs and their abusive melodies. He had gray hair and 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. He was a frequent prayer reader on the podium of 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 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 with lighted candles searching for peasant customers. 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 all the conclusion was that you had to have a hiding place.. This was all discussed in secret—all very hush hush. But no matter

how softly it was whispered, it nevertheless reached the ears of Pinye Greger, 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 known 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 he matter with Yosef Lyalke, and in good time they became partners. But on that very same day, Pinye Greger showed up and informed them that he too meant to be a partner in the business. The other two, outraged, shouted at him, "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 he hawed, but he was not to be budged. Without him, he said, the business would not work.

This drove Yosef Lyalke 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 tuned yellow. Tearing himself loose from Yosef Lyalke's 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 held 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 Lyalke 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 whiskey into a basket; then covering them with an apron, she ran to hide them in the home of a neighbor. Lyalke'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 guardsing, like murderers.

And in come 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 nput 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 the 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 whiskey."

"Oh, no sir. What... Whiskey? Whiskey? Where? How? It's the smell of sauerkraut." But when she saw the expression on his face, she cried out, "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 lacy at the city hall's. I've been at the city hall's." And again, his eyes glistened. He took out a notebook and wroted 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 pot is still good?"

"There's a hole in the boiler."

"Where are the brass valves?"

"Here they are, in the cellar."

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

Then Yosef Lyalke 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 know whether this wasn't Greger's work?" Lyalke said, voicing his suspicion. But Yitskhok-Yoyned got angry. "Eh? What are you talking about? Greger'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 whiskey. But there was a difficulty getting water. The well was some

distance from the garden and carrying the buckets,one could hardlymake it.. That was how the "factory" worked.

So they got Zerakh 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.

Book One

Chapter Eight

Tuesday, market day, Pantl stayed home and did not drive to Warsaw.

"The horse slipped on the way home," he told Kopl. "He's done something to his foot and can't walk."

Kopl made no reply. He and Yankele drove off to Warsaw.

To tell the truth, Pantl was seriously worried. A horse nowadays was no small matter. He had it trimmed and put salve on it. But nothing helped. Khaiml Kiser had even brought him a salve such as no one else had, and rubbed it on the animal so that it flung itself about in pain, but that too made nothing better. If only that had happened to the second horse and not this one. This was the one who did most of the pulling

Pantl accompanied the wagons for a certain distance, then returned home and went promptly to sleep. He woke in the morning at dawn, took from his drawer the the couple of hundred rubles he had saved from his smuggling, then borrowed another two hundred from Khayiml with whom then he went to the horse market.

There, they inspected all the horses that were for sale. But not one of them was satisfactory. Not one of them pleased Khayiml, though Pantl, who had some skill in these matters thought several of the horses were worthy of the honor of hauling smuggler's goods to Warsaw. But Khaiml invariably shrugged those broad shoulders of his on which he could put a sack of flour or of salt as securely as if it was placed on a table.

He was even ready to leave the horse market and go home without a horse when suddenly his eyes fell on Budlik, an old acquaintance of his from the SHVINITSES 36 who was arriving just then leading a huge stallion to the market. Khaiml approached the peasant at once, gazing at the horse with delight. A beautiful, an exemplary horse! A long, tall, black stallion with clusters of hair growing over its hooves. A strong horse. Khaiml peered into its mouth then said to Pantl, "He's four years old." Then he said to the peasant, "How much do you want for this horse?"

\The peasant, insulted, said, "That there horse is a good horse Give a thousand rubles for him, Leyzer." (The peasants still called Khaiml by his father's name)"

"What?" said Khaiml, looking puzzled. "A thousand rubles? Are you out of your mind?"

"If not, no deal,"said Budlik. "I wouldn't sell him for two thousand except that in the village they're saying that the Germans are going to take all the horses."

"Well, give me your hand," said Khaiml clapping his hands together, so loudly it could be heard from a distance.," Six hundred! Seven hundred!" And another handclap that made the stallion rear as if dancing on his hind legs. "Eight hundred!" But Budlik was stubborn as only a peasant can be stubborn. "Nine hundred. Pantl, take the horse." And he tore the bridle out of Budlik's hand and handed it over to Pantl.

First, they had to go to a tavern. They drank and again clapped their palms together. Out of one tavern and into another, drinking in each of them until the peasant sat, stupefied though he had remembered earlier to put the money in a safe place.

On their way, Khaiml clapped Pantl on the shoulder and tipsy, cried. "Pantl, you old thief, you've got yourself a horse. A lion of a horse, You'll be thanking me for him."

And Pantl, the "old thief" clapped Khaiml on the shoulder. Then they looked the horse over once more and, holding him by the bridle ran a little distance with him, after which they led him into the stable. Then to finish off they went into the orchard to the "genuine" little factory itself.

In the evening as Pantl lay sleeping fully dressed on his bed, Fayfke came in and whispered something into Mendl's ear.

Having listened to his tale, he ran at once to his father, shaking him, pulling him out of bed.

Pantl, waking from sleep, squinted against the lamp light. Mendl told him that Fayfke, having come by train reported that Kopl and Yankele, in Warsaw had had some sort of conversation about becoming partners.

Pantl, as if he had been drenched , got to his feet. His upper body trembling he bent left and then right, pulled on his trousers, drew his belt tighter. "God shrivel their guts," he roared. Then, "Fayfke, come on in."

Fayfke, a cheerful youth, came in. Smiling, he said, "Pantl. My name is Fayfke [whistle]. And they've out-whistled you.

"Who?"

"Kopl and Yenkl Tshop. 'What?' they say. 'He'll sit at home like a lord, and be a partner. And we're to serve him? He's got a long wait coming'."

"That's what they said?" Pantl asked, his eyes blazing. ,"

"Well, they didn't say it," Fayfke replied, with a laugh, but when he saw the serious look on Pantl's face, he added, even more seriously, "They talked about it."

Pantl brought his fist down on the table so hard it made the lamp leap up. It was a wonder that it didn't break.

"God shrivel their livers, the bastards. And I showed them the way!: He prowled the room like a wild beast., then he paused before the two youngsters looked into their eyes and burst into coarse laughter. "Damn and double damn their cleverness.They don't want to be my partners? But why the damn hell do I need them? My wagon is bigger and can carry more people than theirs. May they rot in hell."

Fayfke, hearing such words leaped toward him, his eyes twinkling and clapped him on the shoulder, "May they burn in hell, Pantl. Let me ride on your wagon. We'll teach them a thing or two, the devil take them."

And it was agreed that when those two showed up, he, Pantl, would act as if he knew nothing, but when they all started talking, he would order beer and whiskey for all of the comrades and that would be the end of their partnership.

Book One

Chapter Nine

It was a day at the end of winter. One of those days with both sunshine and wind. On such days, the people of the village opened their doors and windows. Children began to crawl out on the thresholds, breathing in the fresh air.

Our smugglers, waking toward noon, were pleased to see the benign rays of the sun shining into the houses. So they rose from their beds, rested and expansive and went out into the street to make ready for the road.

On the way there, it had rained all night. The tarpaulins had been soaked through . They all felt fresher in their newly dried and underclothes as they looked toward the sky where countless white clouds were gathering.

It was about six in the evening Near the east-facing walls, great shadows were advancing when the wagons left their courtyards and started to move slowly on the highway.

Walking beside the houses were the smugglers with their packages hidden under topcoats or shawls. Their heads bowed, looking warily about them, they moved steadily on till they had long passed the town cross and come to the first little bridge, and then the highway.

Then quickly they tossed their packages into the wagons and clambered in themselves. The wagoners whipped up their horses, shouting hastily, ""Up, up. Giddyup!"

It was then that a whistle was heard and a shout, "Halt!"

The smugglers stuck their heads out and, seeing who it was running toward them, turned pale with dread. The lively ones among them snatched up their heavy packages, leaped from the wagons

and ran into the open fields with such speed as if they had kindling in their hands, not sacks weighing two or three poods.

The German, seeing so many of them running, pointed his revolver in the air and shouted, "Halt! Don't move!. Stand still!"

Fear seized them all. Old Shayke stood with one foot in the wagon, the other on the wheel, unable to move one way or the other. The hands with which he held his package trembled and he looked beseechingly into the face of the irritable German who was already beside the wagon.

He ordered Mendl to throw down all of the bundles in the wagon to check whether any of them were smuggling items. Pantl stood beside the horses, occupying himself with them, his stocky body contracted.. "Ah... what if I gave him a punch in the jaw. Then he'd have something to remember me by?"

Mendl threw the bundles down from the wagon. The hit the road, bounced and lay still. But when the German poked his head inside the wagon to see if there was anything left, Pantl, behind his back, grabbed a couple of the bundles and tossed them into the ditch. from which they could not be seen. When the others saw what he had done, they followed his lead. When the German saw that smugglers and bundles were disappearing, he pulled the trigger of his revolver and shot into the air. This terrified them all and they stopped still. Well! What would be would be.

This time, the German counted the bundles and ordered Mendl to guard them. "Don't let a single one go missing!" And he repeated the same thing at Kopl's wagon.

As the bundles were being flung about, one of them seams split open , pouring white flour like downy snow out into the darkness.

The German burst out laughing and asked mockingly, "What is this? What?"

A plump gentile girl,the " Mateus's wife, ran up, spread her apron under the flour to keep it from pouring onto the road, then, weeping, "Ah, Jesus. God. My entire fortune. Dear Jesus."

Seeing that the flour was hers, the German said, "*So*. Gather it up more quickly." Then, to the others, "There are thirty bundles here. Put 'em into the wagons and on to the City Hall. 42

"There ensued a racket among them all. Gimpl's Khana , bare headed—because in her hurry she had lost her headshawl— bent to kiss his hand and wept, "Sir, great Sir. Have pity on a poor Jewish woman. Don't deprive her of her morsel of bread.." He shoved her aside, keeping his eyes on Mateus's wife's plump figure, on her entire erous body, smiling under his moustache. He whispered something in her ear on their way to the City Hall, then he tickled her. She, understood what he meant, though she understood not a word of what he said. He, pointing to her bundle, said, winking at her,"You'll get your stuff back. All of it."

When the wagons reached the main marketplace, there was so much crowding that the horses were unable to move. But the German had only to give one glance, to say one word, and the crowd of wagons melted away into the side streets. Such power the Germans had!

And when the wagon halted in the courtyard of the City Hall, then all of the smugglers rushed up to the second floor to the commandant's office, but all they found their was his secretary with his eyeglasses and his pen. The commandant had gone for a walk

So, they clamored around the secretary, shouting so tumultuously that he had no idea what they wanted. When the commandant returned and had driven them out, he and his underling decided to to keep half of the smuggled goods and give back the other half.

Only Mateus's wife was allowed to keep her bundle, but she was at once required to accompany Jaeger and the secretary with the eyeglasses to a private room at Mayerl, the innkeeper's place.

Book One

Chapter X

When the wagoneers were some twenty versts away from the town—in their lingo, some twenty versts "under" it, Kopl got down from the wagon and approached Pantl, letting the horses move on of their own accord on the familiar road.

"Pantl," he said, "you're still mad because the partnership ended?"

"What's there to be mad at? At that time, when it happened, had you been under my control, I'd have broken one of your ribs—but mad? Come on, brother."

Strangely angry, Kopl said, "D'you know that Mateus' wife got her whole bundle back?"

"Of course," Pantl laughed, "since she had been with Jaeger at Meirel's."

"At Meyerl's?" Kopl could hardly contain his surprise. "But he's a *khassid*."

"He sells liquor by the glass."

"So," Kopl shook his head. "So." As if Meierl selling liquor by the glass was the true reason that Mateus's wife had gotten her bundle back. Just the same, he said "So," several more because he could not quite understand the matter.

He walked quietly beside Pantl's horses. Taking the stallion's tale in his hand, he let the hairs ripple between his finger. Then, suddenly, he thundered, "May the cholera eat their guts. What are we going to do?"

"May the Germans survive this night if there is anything I think we can do." Having uttered that wish, Pantl struck the horses, who,were walking step by step and who, after the blow, began to run.

"Oh, it's bad; it's bad," interrupted someone, groaning as he climbed down from the middle of the wagon.

That was Black Berl's reply to Kopl's question and his words raced from him with such speed , all together, pouring out of him as if sealed together. The repetition of his few words lasted some while. Always the same words gushing from him until the wagon drivers were able to understand what he wanted.

Pantl took out some part of his anger on the horses. At every fresh blow the SHNYADER 44 turned his head and one would have thought that there hovered in his eyes the questions, "Why is he whipping? What does he want of us? Are we responsible for what the Germans have taken? Let him beat them."

Something like that was in the SHNYADER'S eyes. The stallion on the other hand paid no attention It was as though someone was brushing away the flies from him. And one could not know whether Pantl understood the look in the horses' eye. It was enough that he stopped whipping them, and snuggling into his wraps he continued to think about what there was to be done.

"One has to bribe them once and for all," he thought. "That way, may their heads swell, we'll get around all that hell on the road. Every few *versts* there's a checkpoint ." By now he had spent what was left of his anger against the stallion. "Four *poods* of flour." He could not shake that thought. "If you bribe them, then you'll be working for them. Something for this one; something for that one. And everything will go down their throats."

That's what tormented Pantl on the road. And not only him. All of them—all of the wagoneers sat immersed in themselves. Even to Fayfke, that cheerful youth, it did not occur to him to start up with Mateus's wife with whom he had gotten on so well when he was traveling with Kopl.. They

were all thinking... trying to find some remedy that would spare them a second time from what had happened today.

Even small Dovid did not sleep that entire night. He had the image of his mother before his eyes. She was so weak; she could hardly stand on her feet. And she was already thinking of making him a smock for Passover. Some smock he would have! They had taken fifteen rubles. Fifteen rubles.

It was some months since he had been traveling as a smuggler. And, truth to tell, he had expected something like what happened today. But he had supposed that, when the Germans approached him, it would be quiet. Very quiet. Then he would go up to them and speaking to them in their language he would talk to them, thus: "Sir Commandant, I know very well that it is forbidden to carry contraband. But what can I do? I have no father; and my mother is sick and there's no way for me to earn our bread."

That's what he had imagined he would say and the German would question him but Dovid would not be frightened and would reply to everything . And the German would take nothing from him... would not permit a hair of his head to be touched. . And perhaps... perhaps he might even give him a note for all the checkpoints forbidding them from interfering with him in any way. But what actually had happened had been quite different. Entirely different. Because when he had seen the German's wolfish face, he had become so abashed, so frightened that he had hidden himself behind the others, hiding himself in a corner so that he would not be seen.

Book One

Chapter Eleven

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 Pantl pecked at 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.l 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 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 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 made a complete somersault and 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 good the customs agents took from him. "Damn her father to hell, the old chaser. Gentile young women!" he thought as he whacked 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 bay 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.

Book One

Chapter XII

In Warsaw, three gentile girls lived in a large house a narrow street near the Eisengass. One of them, no longer young – thirty years old – years that had only ripened her womanhood, like that of an opened flower. She had milk white features, full lips and firm breasts. The second one had a narrow forehead, combed her hair straight back , rosy, but very elongated face, so that the tip of her nose was a bit too pointed. The third one, the youngest with bright permanented hair, and bangs on her forehead and twisted side curls, was the little"angel" among them.. She made her bed skillfully and always had a clean, embroidered pillowcase on the cushion lying on the colored quilt at the head of the bed.

From the time that the Russians left Warsaw, things grew worse and worse. Stasha, the middle woman, spent most of her time in the house, smoking cigarettes in bed. Not so long ago, she had fantasized that a prince, a count, or, at the very least, an officer would fall in love with her and would take her with him to his estates . "Haven't such things happened?" But when the Germans neared Warsaw and the Russians fled, she looked around and abruptly realized where she was in the world. Looking into the mirror she noticed that her wrinkles were more numerous and deeper. "I know I'll be old soon."

"On top of all that, life on the street came to a standstill. You could stare your eyes out in the dark nights… there was not a prospect to be seen.

And one needed clothes; proper stockings, not with darns in them. And a slip. Guests expected such things… Oh God."

Her two friends, already so be-powdered and be-rouged one could smell them from ten yards away, said, "Why don't you go out into the street? Why do you lie about in the house?" After which, they went out.

It sometimes happened that, when one of them came back with someone, she found Stasha lying in her bed, a cigarette in her mouth.

When that happened, Stefke, the older one, paid no attention to Stasha. "What do I care?"

But Natasha, the youngest of them, who had been in the profession for only some eight or ten months when the "season" was active and customers were clutching at them—Natasha did not feel entirely comfortable. But she said nothing. But later, when the guest had gone, she spoke to Stasha about it.

It was then that Stasha took Natasha's hand and seating her beside her on the bed, and looking into her eyes for a long time she said as follows: "Pay attention, Natasha, to what I'm going to say.

"I'm older than you, and I've been in this business longer than you. And where will it all end. When there was no war, there was something else. Now, they, the Germans, want your soul for free." Stasha deeply sucking her cheeks in, took a long draw on her cigarette. which displayed a fiery ring behind the ash. She licked the cigarette, then thrusting out her lower lip, she blew the smoke away. "With them, you have to work fourteen, sixteen hours a day to earn enough for a new hat or a pair of panties.The bloody dogs."

Natasha heard all this and hardly understood a hundredth part of what Stashke was saying to her. And even what she understood was ununderstandable to her.

Inwardly, she was thinking, "What's there to talk about? If that's how it is, then that's how it's going to be."Then, as before, she went back out into the street and recounted all that to Stefke who was standing under a lamp post..

Stefke, hearing Natasha's account, laughed. Blinking her heavily mascaraed eyes , she did not mince words. "Ha, ha,ha. So now she is a philosopher."

Natasha, seeing her aunt laughing, laughed along with her, though once again she had no idea what there was to laugh at. Now, when Antek, who was making passes at Stasha while her "cousin" went off to the reserves... when he came up and, grabbed Stasha by the foot dragged her naked out of bed, then one could split one's sides laughing. But when Stasha recounted how her "groom" used sometimes to beat her, that was something altogether different. Then Natasha turned very serious. "Why had he beaten her? Why had he beaten her?"

Stasha also described how he continually took all of her money to get drunk with, and how he called her all sorts of dirty names and beat her. Natasha, thinking of all this, concluded that he was not a particularly good person and it became clear to her why Stasha spoke of him the way she did.

"Besides, what is there to think about? Over there, it looks like there's a soldier casting glances at a passing young woman."

She made a movement to smooth out her bangs and side curls and, with her hands in the pockets of her jacket she danced over to him. He, seeing her walked toward her, looked closely at her and smiled. Evidently, she pleased him.

That day had been especially lucky for Natasha. Every half hour, up and down the stairs. And then up again. And, in the morning, when she counted her money there was enough to buy a loaf of bread and ham and to pay for a pair of half-soles and heels for her yellow house shoes that had become frayed from running up and down the stairs.

"Well? Wasn't I right?" called Stasha. 'Didn't I say that you had to work twenty hours a day for them. They're bastards, that's what they are. Bloody dogs." And she stretched herself out on her bed and puffed quickly on her cigarette.

Stefke, nevertheless, was also musing."Didn't I know that? Even before Stasha." And she gazed at Natasha. "She's still only a child. And she remembered her sister. Her brother-in-law had gone off to the war and her sister had died in a hospital. Everything was sold. All that Natasha was left with was two cushions, a cotton quilt and an iron cot. Where could she have gone? /A sixteen year old girl, an orphan, forlorn in a great city. So she had taken her in to herself.

And thinking thus, a tear came to her eye and she recognized that Stasha was telling the truth. God's truth. But what was one to do? Things were really bad.

Taking up a piece of lipstick she smeared her lips with it and, nonchalantly said, "My God."

Hearing her aunt speaking thus, Natasha put her elbows on her knees, put her head in her hands and repeated, "My God Oh my God.

Book One

Chapter Thirteen

There was no bread in Warsaw. White bread and rolls absolutely did not exist. More than that, in case anyone did have some, it was dangerous to display them, because,, it was rumored that the Germans confiscated everything, sending it back for themselves to their homeland. People clustered in the streets, talking, gesticulating. But when a police agent appeared in the vicinity, everyone disappeared, as if swallowed up by the earth.

The little house on the narrow street was locked. No one was in it now, All three of *shikses* strolled the streets, turned, looked about here and there, encountered each other, then avoided each other only to meet once again. "There's not so much as a dog in the streets," said Stefke.

"Who even thinks of *it* now?" Stasha said, making a philosophical observation.

"But one has to buy bread," Natasha said.

Coming to a little shop, they went in and asked to be given bread.

"There isn't… there isn't any bread," murmured the shopkeeper.

"What do you mean 'there isn't any?"

"Isn't any means isn't any. There's an order that says that if any bread is to be seen it will be confiscated—and on top of that, one will have to pay a fine. Well," said the shopkeeper, " one isn't eager to deal with them."

They went into another shop, and then a third. Everywhere, the same reply. But finally they got some bread when they had paid the sum the shopkeeper demanded, But given the high price they would have done better just looking at, instead of eating it.

As they were leaving the shopkeeper consoled them. "There'll be bread. There will be. /It will be ration cards."

"What kind of new news is that?"

"In all of Warsaw-- not, as you know in the upper section of the town—but in the lower section, there was talk, heated excitement, clamor. In many houses—especially in the darkly painted or entirely wooden houses, and in the dark cellars between infested walls lay children, their mouths parched; their tongues like bits of leather, plucking at their mothers, crying , "Bread, mama; a bit of bread." And the mothers—they no longer cared about their own parched mouths and withered breasts, so long as, for the youngest of the children, they might squeeze out so much as a drop of milk to moisten their lips. But squeezed or sucked, the breasts were dry.

Furthermore, in small dark rooms there came together young people who talked secretively with each other. There dark eyes glinted and one could feel that something troubling was going to happen. God know what was about to happen, because everything in those houses, in those streets was shrouded in a veil that covered the town like a dark, heavy mass.

A fearful spirit, like a sigh, pervaded the courtyards and the streets in the poor neighborhoods.

In the broad, wood-paved streets, crowds upon crowds of people strolled shoulder to shoulder. There were hastening automobiles and the endlessly resounding noise of the tramway mingling with the tumult of human voices.

And, from a palace somewhere that the Germans had taken for an administrative center, there could be heard cheerful sounds emanating from young healthy lungs.

And, toward evening, as the sun began its plunge to the west, , like a great, round, red eye over which night would set, like a dark hen with outspread wings, then, from the palace there could be

heard deafening the street, the sounds of the "victors'" music. Proud voices from there spreading outward far and wide with "The Rhine, the Rhine."

Not only did people by the tens, by the hundreds, pause to nod their heads in time to the music and it was not until its sounds subsided with the going down of the sun that the couples who had paused continue to the broad avenue and to their gardens.

Book One

Chapter Fourteen

Evening. People were already sitting in the wagons. It was warm. The tarpaulins were wrapped around the pole that extended the whole length of the wagons; and vertically up over the arches forming the wagon's roof. Then, unhurriedly, the reins were taken in hand. A pull to the left. A pull to the right, and a cry of "Giddyap, giddyap," and one started off through the streets of Warsaw on the way to the highway that led back to the village.

Mendl, wearing his fitted boots, his cloth jacket and the hat with the shiny visor, walked beside the horses, glancing at the same time from side to side, cautious lest a robber spring out at them.

Fayfke, whose bangs reached deep down over his forehead, nearly to his eyes, was walking near Pantl's wagon. He timed his steps with Mendl's and they walked along, chatting and clinking the money in their pockets.

Near a lamppost the three *shikses* stood, giving passersby the eye. Stashke's stockings were good and frayed; there was no way to repair them. And she would have died for a pair of new panties.

When the youngsters saw the three figures carved on the half-dark, they plucked at each other's sleeves. Then Fayfke leaped toward them and with a rascally wink said, "How much does the Fraulein want?"

Mendl, who was generally a bit more restrained with strangers, not wanting, God forbid, for Fayfke to think he was naïve. Chimed in, "Well, shall we go…"

Natasha laughed, practically wriggling with pleasure, she was delighted by the diversion, but the older *shikses*, the practical ones who had already agreed upon a price, seemed ready to go, Fayfke burst out with, "Ha, ha, ha, our wagons are already there, ha, ha."

And when the *shikses* seemed startled by the news , (and it really was too bad for them, a loss of earnings,) Mendl said, "Never mind. Come along with us, to the wagon."

And both of the youngsters burst out laughing, and Fayfke winked, lifting his right foot as if he was going to dance.

The wagons, meanwhile, had moved on a considerable distance. Seeing that they were going to make a turn into a side street, the youngsters told the *shikses* that they carried "contraband" to Warsaw, and that they came by three times a week and that each time they drove into the hotel at dawn.

That evening, the *shikses* did not stand in the street. They had loosened their clothes, unbraided their hair and, seating themselves on Stashke's bed they talked together for a long time.

Stashke had in some way been changed. She sat between her two comrades and, today, contrary to her usual manner, she listened to them without so much as uttering a word. She got up ,and, smoking a cigarette, walked several times back and forth about the room.

All at once she stopped, raised her head as her eyes seemed to fill with joy. She tossed away her still lighted cigarette, pulled up her skirt and with her back to the table hoisted herself up and seated herself on it .

"Girls," she said, "I have a plan. A devilishly good plan."

"Don't speak of the devil," said Stefke, laughing, but Natasha crossed herself.

"Sisters," Stasha began , her voice melancholy, "why are we killing ourselves here in Warsaw? Isn't it amazing that we've survived And isn't it getting uglier?"

She mused for a moment, moving her feet up and down, rubbing them over the thin knitted stockings through whose mesh her legs showed as through a sieve. Then she slapped her knee and, in the same tone as before she said, "By God—let's start smuggling. Everyone is earning something—so we will too. Well, what do you say?"

Her two companions thought for a while. It seemed to Stefke, who had until now been practically raised in the profession that was her livelihood that it might be a great waste to throw all that up to start smuggling… to go into business. But Natasha's blue eyes lighted up like a pair of round, sparkling blue skies. Her lips glowed in their natural, unlipsticked color, and in her imagination she saw fields scintillating with so many summer flowers. Something was beginning to draw her. She remembered how, as a child, she had been in a village in the home of one of her mother's friends and had run around over the fields surrounding the village; how she had searched for birds' nests in the branches of the trees . All that gleamed brightly in her memory. Above all, what she thought of was a new life, entirely new—though here, thank God, she was getting on well enough.

So she spoke up, "Yes sister. What you say is true. Ah, what a life we'll have. Riding on a wagon; singing on the way. Isn't that so, Steftshe? We'll be riding?"

And finally Stefke, too, thought it made sense. "What are we risking here, anyway?" she said. And then, a man may show up, too. Everything's possible. "

The three of them embraced and kissed each other. Then they got undressed and went to bed. Who knows how long it had been since they had rested so peacefully?

Only Natasha tossed in bed from one side to the other and could not, for the longest time, fall asleep. She got out of bed quietly, lighted the lamp and peered at the beds. Stefke woke, and wondered why Natasha, naked, was moving about. The girl crawled into her bed, pressed her body

against hers and feverishly kissed her breasts. For a moment or two, they talked to each other, and it seemed to Natasha that she had been transformed.

"What's happening to me?" she asked her aunt, who, already dozing off, said irritably, "Go to sleep. Go to sleep."

Natasha, embarrassed , raised herself up and looked out across the courtyard at the opposite wall bathed in moonlight and reminisced about the day just passed, and she remembered the two boys she had seen in the evening and she wondered how they would talk with together. When her thoughts grew onfused, she heard a rustling on the other side of the door.

She sat up quietly, not wanting to wake her aunt, and listened.

Someone was tapping on the handle on the other side of the door, and pressing it down, making a grating noise that woke the other two women who sat up and asked, "Who's there?"

"For the misses..." they heard a hoarse drunken, indistinct voice.

Once again they lighted the lamp and the women looked questioningly at each other.

"I don't want to," Natasha, the first one to speak, said self-indulgently.

"I don't either," said Stefke, remembering Stashke's torn stockings.

And Stasha opened the door.

Book One

Chapter Fifteen

Fayfke was prospering as a smuggler. From the time that he entered into partnership with Mateus's wife, he had not had any of his goods taken by the custom 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 are you doing with my suit?"

"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."

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

Then it was out into the street where he met Bertshe, Kaiser's hanger-on, as well as White Mulye and Avramtshe, Velvl's son for whom all the young women, Jewish and gentile, would willingly have died. And since the men 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 as "much as you like; as much as goes down"..

"Ah," old friends," said Mendl, his mouth loosened by the third glass, "You ought to have seen those three *shikses*. Pure cream," he said, smacking his lips.

"Which ones do you mean?" Bertshe said, laughing because he thought Mendl was drunk.

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

So Fayvl told the story of lat 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, arched 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 Avramtshe turned on him. "What do you mean? There's nothing impossible for me. Don't you know, my little tailor, who Avramtshe 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 Avramstshe, who by now had more liquor in his head than anyone else had in a bottle, insisted on opposing them. And who knows how it would have ended if it had not all suddenly

changed. Because just as Avramtshe grasped a 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 the *lulav* [palm branch] in the synagogue.

"Listen my friend,. I'll cut your liver out; I'll unravel 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 paw. "The fellow could bend an iron rod."

And White Mulye, whom the whole town called "The Tough Guy"spoke up, saying quietly, "What's your trouble, Grunim? Eh?"

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

"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. Mendl poured him another glass which Grunim drank. Mendl filled his glass again. He filled a third and then a fourth.

But the blonde Mulye, seeing this, stood by as anger turned his nose, too 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 regarded Grunim filling his glass and saw the foam spilling from his mouth and the tremor of his skin at the wet coldness, Fayvl acquired courage. "Never mind , I, Fayvl, won't lag behind 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 going to write 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 Folk 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, pokinghis 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 toward 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 embarrassed, he was willing to let the matter drop. "You're not carrying flour anymore?"

"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.

Chapter Sixteen

Just as Pantl's wagon had driven into the inn the three *shikses* came up immediately and inquired of the two youngsters wearing uniforms and the blue-striped Polish caps. Mendl, who was getting his pack ready to unload, recognized them at once and jumped down from the wagon. After a sleepless night, he looked much older than he was. His face was dirty, his hair was entangled with straw. . But just now, in their eyes, there was no one better looking than he.

"When does the gentleman drive out of here?" asked Stasha, to whom the whole matter had been turned over by her comrades.

"At five, or six," Mendl replied. Now, in the light of day he saw for the first time the round face, and the full lips of the youngest of the *shikses.* The perfume that reeked from all three of them completely enchanted him, and he became aware of how fatigued he was. He'd have given a "million" to be lying now in a bed.

"How much for each person would it cost to ride with you," asked the *shikse* again.

"What? You want to ride in the wagons with us?" Mendl wondered, and he was suddenly alert, as if he had not been sleepy before.

"Yes. We want to take up smuggling."

"So!" Mendl said, delighted by them. "Good luck to you. May you fare well," echoing a phrase of Itshl's.. They laughed in reply.

Meanwhile all of the people were down from the wagons and were busying themselves with their tasks.

Pantl called to his son, "What are you doing, standing there? Unharness the horses."

Mendl went toward the horses, then indicated the three *shikses* to his father."D'you see, father," he said. They want to ride along in the wagons."

"To whom do they want to go?" asked Pantl.

"To nobody. They want to be smugglers."

"Smugglers?

And Pantl, now suddenly alert, went toward them. "Where do you want to go?"he asked, and, regarding the youngest of them, he thought, "She's something, Pantl. If you had someone like her, you wouldn't need to worry even if you were hauling two whole sacks."

"We want to ride with you. Will you take us?"

"Why not—if you pay?"

"How much do you want?"

"Three rubles a person."

"Tsk, tsk. That's to say, nine rubles from the three of us? Eh?"

"Nine rubles," she tugged at Natasha's sleeve.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," Stefke said also."

"You want to smuggle?" asked Pantl.

"Just listen, sir," Stasha began. "We want to smuggle, but we don't know what, or how. We see that you are an honest man. We'll do whatever you tell us."

"Now my time has come," thought Pantl.

"Well, what does the gentleman think?" Stasha asked, seeing that he was hesitating about something. Her uneasiness showed in her eyes.

"Listen," Pantl undertook to answer them. But then, scratching his beard, he grew still. Then he decided to speak openly. "Listen to what I say. It may work out, very well. But, first of all, Do you have money? A lot? "

When they shook their heads, indicating 'no', he went on. "D'you see? On the road they take things away. That's no good. But I know how to avoid that. So that they don't take anything. D'you understand?"

"We understand, we understand," they replied though they had no inkling what he meant.

In the meantime,Golkop came up, wearing a leather jacket and lacquered boots, and began a conversation with Pantl about the day's price of flour.

"I've heard," he said slowly in his tough-guy manner, " that on Thursday, in Okoteh, you sold two *poods* of flour."

"Yes," Pantl replied, "for which he paid me with a great sum of pennies. Like you."

"But let that be the first and the last time," said Golkop, his voice rising. "D'you hear?"

"And if I don't?"

Golkop made no reply, but raised a hand, fingers outspread, ready to slap Pantl. But then Mendl came up (the horses were in their stall) and, at the critical moment, seized Golkop's hand and held on to it with all his might.

That set off a wrangling. Though they could see that something serious was happening, the *shikses,* unable to understand what was going on, were frightened.

In the meantime, people from the courtyard came up. Blind Pesakh from his room, Yossl Nito from the restaurant and a young man wearing spectacles, who had just then ridden into the courtyard. Everyone wanted to pacify both sides. To smooth things over. But Golkop, wagging a finger, threatened Pantl. "Here, in the courtyard,only I may sell anything to anyone. D'you get it?"

"What do you mean? You think I'm a kid?" Pantl could hardly contain himself.

But the end of it was that Pantl had to buy drinks and snacks for everyone.

Golkop had "guts".

A little while later, the courtyard grew quiet. Having eaten, Pantl seated himself on the shaft of the wagon to continue his conversation with the *shikses.* What he said evidently pleased him because his nostrils flared and all one could see of his eyes were two narrow slits.

When the *shikses* went home to ready themselves for the road, Mendl was already lying under a seat, snoring. Sleeping near him was Dovid, who had already sold his bit of flour, and had concealed the money in the sack that hung from the shirt under his four-cornered ritual garment.

But Pantl could not sleep at all. Partly it was because of Golkop. It was no laughing matter. Everyone here trembled before him. Partly, too, it was a little, a very little, because of his new people, the *shikses.* "Ha, ha, ha. Now," he thought" a whole new kind of driving begins." And when he remembered the youngest of the *shikses* he reddened and his tongue, as it used to in his bachelor days, stuck out. He smiled a delighted smile. "Ha,ha, ha. That's some little *shikse.*"

Later, he told Mendl to prepare a better seat. Mendl understood whom it was for but he could not understand how the girls had acquired so much favor in his father's eyes.

In the evening, when the *shikses*, with shawls on their heads , arrived, Pantle himself showed them their places. They climbed promptly into the wagon and settled down though there was still a good hour before they would start.

Mendl was busy with the horses and Pantl stood before the gate cracking his whip. Perhaps someone else might come.

Meanwhile, the regulars gathered. And when old Shayke climbed up onto the wheel and into the wagon to sit beside Dovid opposite the *shikses*, the smell that wafted from them prompted him to take out a snuffbox and stuff his nostrils with snuff.

Pantl circled about; ran this way and that., cast a glance into the wagon and with the first crack of his whip over the horses to start them on the way, he felt his hands tingling.

Book One

Chapter Seventeen

The town breathed a little more easily. Bakers, distillers, soap makers, cigarette sellers, tavern keepers, butchers and every sort of smuggler celebrated a Sabbath inn 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 hef irst arrived, the town thought, from the way he looked, that he was byh no means a bad gentile. He was tall and limped from a wound he had recived 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 city hall's gate, he could detect the smell of a still in a street at the center of the town.

He had ruined Dovid-Yitzkhok and Yenkl Beder. About the latter, there were stories circulating in the town. Yenkl Beder lived in a small house on a hill . The steps leading to his house were like those leading to a chicken coop. Some of them were broken so that one had to take a firm hold on the banister that had been nailed to one side of the stairs to keep anyone from falling suddenly through them. The entire room was not much more than a *succah* protruding from the rear of the house. It stood with its four corners resting on blocks. In that house, Yenkl Beder had his boiler and distilled whiskey. No matter how many times people came there meaning to learn what was cooking they never found anything in the house. But there were those who "were very troubled" by the matter: "What? He is cooking—and getting away with it."

Sometimes, when it was certain that Beder was cooking, the Sergeant-Major and his inseperable Yeger dropped in unannounced and the Sergeant-Major, while still on the steps, would begin to knock on the door with his sword.

Then, from within, one would hear "Who's there?" and the gendarmes had to wait a while before the door was opened. But once inside, all they could see was a fire burning in the stove. The lid of the stove was off and the flames were leaping to the ceiling. There was so much steam in the room that the faces of those who entered grew damp. They could tell that something was amiss and they began promptly to search. But where, alas, could they search, since the entire hut was no wider than the span of two graves. And the walls—try looking through them. They searched under the beds, under the table; lifted the few articles of clothing that hung on the door. They approached the single barrel that stood there, peered into it and saw kraut, sauerkraut. What more could they have done? There indeed was steam; a strange steam, and they smelled some kind of smell—the smell of whiskey; a smell of which the Germans had become connoisseurs.

On the stove, poured salt crackled and spattered and gave off an oily smell that covered the not clearly perceived odor of whiskey; and Yokel Beder's wife was slicing onions into a frying pan; her head bowed, her shoulders turned away, with her eyes tearing because of the onion's strength.

"Please don't take it ill," she said, "that there's so much smoke. We're making seared-onion soup."

And didn't the Germans leave with empty hands?

And "Haman", when the stool pigeons came to him and said, "Sir Commandant, you should know that Yenkl's cooking."

So off he went, and the stool pigeons rubbed their hands with anticipation. "Haman" will catch him."

And "Haman", when he found all the signs with which the Germans were familiar, was by no means perplexed. Indeed, he laughed contentedly as his nose smelled the whiskey, the way a bloodhound smells, and it would lead him to the heart of the matter.

Like the others, he began to search, opening the drawer of the table and found the thermometer. With that, he uttered a triumphant cry, "That's it!."

And now he began searching, slowly, step by step. He tapped on the walls, looked up at the ceiling, at the high window such as was to be found in every OFITSINKE 74, but he was not pleased to see that there was a stool under it and that the window was open.

He thought, "It's not that warm. And Jews are not that fond of fresh air."

So he went to the stool and climbed up on it. Yenkl Beder and his wife felt their souls flying out of their nostrils. Yenkel gave his wife a truly ferocious look. That glance cried,"Robber". Couldn't you have buried the thermometer as well. You put it in the table! May they put you..."

And he—that Haman—stood with his lame foot on the stool, sniffing with his nose above the sleeping-bench in front of the window, into the corners, through the bars at the steam escaping into the air.

He began to tap with his hand and, feeling a hollowness he lifted up the board.

The couple uttered a screech as if they were about to be throttled and the Commandant pulled out the pot which was still fully boiling,and a mug, bottles, and glasses. Then he descended. His whole body, including his clothes, was as if immersed in laughter so that even his lame foot tingled with laughter. He began now to search and to tap once more. He stuck his sword into the barrel of kraut and stood surprised.. Even high up, the sword stuck fast. He regarded nothing else., and, like a bloodhound at the ultimate moment before he flings himself at his victim, he rolled up

the sleeves of his uniform, and stuck his hands into the wet pickled kraut. He pulled out a fitted cover and saw the pot that more than half filled the barrel.

And he had also taken some fifteen hundred marks from Reb Yidl. Only Yitzkhok-Yoyne had escaped detection. Yosef Lyalke had indeed boastedquietly, "We work in the orchard, and so long as Greger is one of us, we have nothing to fear."

And so they "cooked" almost in broad daylight. And the 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 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-storey house in which the sergeant-major lived. But that's nothing. It's enough to say that Yitskhak Yoine was left once again an absolutely poor man, without a penny to his name. "What's to be done? What more was 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 Greger... poor fellow. He was no more responsible for that first search on Yitskhok-Yoine's house than it would be true to say that he is now in America. Because he had already experienced a revulsion to the whole distilling venture. He had only meant to work on it 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."

Greger's nature was essentially fearful. It was just that he liked to talk. For instance, what good had it done him to threaten others But that was his nature. 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 his own heroism flared up. And when he chanced upon a newcomer to the town or some younger people, didn't he say that during the battles with the Russians, he had been 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 his hiding place.. He had even borrowed money. He bought a few hundredweight of sugar, expecting the price to go up.

But that fellow, that lame Commandant died suddenly. 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 them 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.

Book One

Chapter Eighteen

No sooner had the new commandant arrived in the town than the streets were filled with people expecting him. To, "See how he looks. " The Khavoinarkis , the Christian tavern owner's two daughters rose early and got themselves decked out—the older one, the brunette—in a white dress, white shoes and a white straw hat; on the other hand, the younger, the blonde sported a short Krakow-style ruffled jacket with various colored ribbons, a Bordeau brassiere properly hooked tightly fitted and covered with strings of many-colored coral beads with a colored shawl wound peasant style around her head; with yellow high-heeled boots with sporty yellow brass eyelet hooks. Both of them, in all that get-up and carrying bouquets of flowers went, arm-in-arm to City Halld

On the street, hundreds of eyes followed them. Old folks turned their heads aside and spat: "Wantons" Younger ones looked after them, wide-eyed, and there was a twitch in every young man's heart—like one who, not having eaten for three days is shown a freshly baked small white loaf. Even young women looked enviously after them— Ah, what wouln't a Jewish girl have given to be allowed to dress like that—properly Polish! And then, dressed like that to walk out into the street! The young men seeing them would have burst. And Fayfke and Mendl and their friends were there. Inflamed! But Itshl repeated his favorite phrase: "The two little *shikses* have taste."

But a sinful thought suddenly occurred to Reb Vov, the great dealer in salt, who, from the time of the mobilization had done no business.—He had been for several years, an ailing man—may all Jews be spared the like-- But he had a daughter—a princess—lords were dazzled by her— the way one cannot bear looking at the sun-- And, indeed, in the summer before the war, Mangatski had seen her—he owned his own village, with fields and forests, who, for a long while was after him, insisting and insisting on having her converted.

And now, seeing the Khvoynarskis going to welcome the Commandant with flowers, the thought came to him that he should send his daughter, too, to the Commandant. It stands to reason that he would have to instruct her on how to look, and how to talk and walk and stand and sit. No small matter! After all, wasn't he a father?

That was what Reb Vove was thinking.; And in his mind's eye he could see how his daughter presented herself to the Commandant and asked him to give her father a permit to bring a wagon-load of salt. And how the Commandant would gaze into her eyes-- after all, they're ready to die for her—could not deny her request.

"Well, so be it," he said aloud, as if it was settled, "And what if he touches her, caresses her, touches her hand?"

The Khvoynorshtshankes came into City Hall with their bouquets in their hands, and, with their frank, smiling little mouths they asked, "Is the Commandant here?"

The commandant, who was brushing off dust, seeing them brightened up and asked them to come into his rooms.

"Please, please,"he said, speaking German to them. "Come in."

They followed him in, laughing and talking—but more laughing than talking.

"Are you the Commandant?" said the older one twinkling at him with her dark brown eyes. But the *younger*, the blonde one, laughing more wantonly, said the following words—more in Yiddish than in German, "Good morning, Herr Kommandant.".:

The German paused for a while, delighted by the few words, and his dissatisfaction at having been sent to such a small town, vanished, too. Well, why not? And he rang for punch and ordered tea.

The servant set out snacks, and a soldier also brought a bottle of cognac., which Khanah Winemaker sent just in time.

The Commandant laughed, and filled glasses for them; and he drank. But the little *shikses* did not immediately drink, but waited to be asked.. The Commandant put his arm around the brunette, bent down and poured cognac into her open mouth; and placing a kiss below her ear, he offered her snacks. Then he did the same thing for the blonde.

A while later, they drank tea and chatted. It was not properly chatting as chatting goes. Because he understood not a word of what they said; nor did they understand him. But in that fashion, they chatted. And the upshot was that they understood each other. A giggle; a glance; and something emerged. Mostly, the younger one laughed… it was evidently her manner. And perhaps because her mouth was small and her teeth were white, so that when she laughed she squinted her eyes and a hot passion radiated from her face.

Just the same, the older one, too, pleased him, perhaps even more. They chased each other around the room, playing Catch-Me-If-You-Can. Then they let each other go, and then caught each other again and from time to time in the midst of it all the sound of a swiftly stolen kiss could be heard.

Then he took his fiddle and played a lovely piece. Then he put the fiddle on the table and whispered something into the brunette's ear, but she did not understand him. He caressed her neck and stared down into her deep décolleté. Standing that way before her he did not himself know what it was he wanted. But then one of his knees cramped and his leg stuck out. Considering the matter, he decided to laugh and the laughter overwhelmed every angry thought. Then, too, the small young woman laughed, and then the brunette. And it was only then that he seized the opportunity to put his arms around the brunette's waist and squeezed her properly against him.

And the blonde *shikse*, at the window pointed to what was taking place in the market-square; the green door of her father's tavern and her father standing on the steps.

That pleased the Commandant enormously. And overwhelmed with delight he had no idea where to seat them. Sometimes he seated them on the field-cot, but that did not satisfy him; so he carried them over to seat them on the table. And behind the door there stood the non-commissioned officer, the writer wearing glasses; Jaeger, as well as a couple of other soldiers all of whom were delighted by what was going on and rubbed their hands with satisfaction.

"He's not like the other fellow, He won't interfere with anything," seeing it all as a good sign.

Book One

Chapter Nineteen

On the Sabbath, after the meal, all the young people gathered. Freshly washed and in their Sabbath garb, their colored shirts without collars showing their tanned throats , they went to the library.

First among them was Greger; and why not, since he had been the first one to give the district leader a request for a library Because, since the town was prospering, the young men, come the Sabbath , went around idle; and the same was true for the girls. And this way, with the library, at least there was someplace where a conversation could be had, and even, from time to time, as opportunity presented itself, a dance; because they had also wanted to create a separate space for musical events. And for whom would the music be playing? It had indeed been he, Greger, who had foreseen all that. Apart from that, news had also come from the various towns and villages with whose young men and girls they met on the highways and taverns who bragged about their *their* library. Which ones were getting stronger and bigger; and which had separate space for dramatic or musical events. And Greger had not been silent and now he was the first in line. He deserved to be.

All of the young people following him felt themselves taller, taut as violin strings, with their watches in their vest-pockets and the invitations in their envelopes; invitations on which were written each person's name; as for instance, "Fayfke, you are invited to the Sabbath meeting."

But Fayfke made a grimace, "May the writers' hands fall off. Couldn't they have written, 'Fayvl'. Not Fayfke."

What Fayfke felt was that he was not riding on the wagon. And therefore that his name, not his nickname ought to have been written.

Nevertheless, his irritation soon subsided, because he felt that he was about to enter a "society" and be a "member". So on they went, and when they came up and took their places they saw Shmuel Maytes, Aharon Layb's Berl, and Mekhl at the black table. The young folk looked each other over, exchanged glances, "Well, look at you. The devil take your mother."

And at the head of the table, stood Aharon Layb's Berl reading a report. He was figuring out how many members had signed up, how much money had come in, and how much had been paid out for rent, tables, chairs and books.

A young bachelor in a short jacket who was holding a cloth hat, in his hand, was thinking, "I think...well never mind...Shmuel...the same one who works with me at Moshe Shnayder. Still..."

An older girl was also thinking, "He's an important fellow. Respectable. They say he's going to marry Moshe Shnayder's older daughter."

The bell cut short her thoughts, and Mekhl once again informed them that they were now proceeding to "the general, direct, secret vote". They were going to choose a management team that would direct the work of the library for an entire year. He also let them know that they, the "presidium" that is, he, Maytes' Shmuel , and Aharon Layb's Berl, had, until today, only been provisional... temporary. But if the membership so desired, they could be elected to continue to serve.

Immediately, there was a murmur of conversation and bits of white paper were passed out on which could be written the names of the persons they wanted to be "directors of the general library and reading room."

Anyone who could not write, had only to mark a number—because each of the candidates had "his own number."

Near the table, the lively work went on,, the "pointing out"... Mekhl pointed out that only Aharon Layb's Berl and nobody else, was capable of being the secretary of the society . Aharon Layb's Berl, for his part, pointed out that only Mekhl and nobody else could be the treasurer of the union and both of them together were ready to swear that no one else could be found, no matter where you looked, who could be chairman except Maytes' Shmuel.

Greger, seeing this, did not keep silent. He ran about among his acquaintances—that is to say among the newly washed tan, young men with the colored shirts and urged them not to forget to inscribe his name, and if they could not write, then to remember the number eighteen. God willing, that too would be enough.

Until now, the few young people had behaved respectably. Fayvl, Mendl, Velvl's Avramtshe, and the pale Mulye, were beginning to sweat a bit. Their faces were turning red, just as if they had recently come from the army. Just the same, there was no harm in it.

Among them, stood Itshl, agitating. With each word that he spoke they grew hotter and hotter, and their eyes showed more perplexity.. Only Fayfke remained calm.

"Big shots. I'll show you", he said, with a wink to the girl Teme who was sitting on a bench. That wink of that eye terrified her. When she caught that wicked look, she turned as red as Passover cherry wine.

Seeing that that bit of mischievousness pleased Bertshe and Fayvle, Itshl struck them a blow on their shoulders just as if he was not at a meeting.

The chairman of the meeting began loudly to ring his bell, and, because a student was there visiting as a guest, the chairman felt it his duty,to give him some explanation, whispering in his ear: "You mustn't think that *this* is our membership—these fellows are like that-- entirely without fear....let them be." But what he didn't tell him was that Mendl in fact paid membership dues; and

that he also paid for book purchases. "And that's just how it is… the cash on hand is low. Deficit… business… stories… And over there, sit the intellectuals at the head of the table and choose the best portions of fish; and that, too is how it is. Again, entirely without respect. " After that explanation whisipered in his ear, the student felt satisfied. And the chairman, Ziger, had known how to "correct" the matter. And he looked around to the more intelligent of the girls behind his back, to see whether he had earned several dozen of their glances.

Mendl, for his part, stood, feeling sorrowful.."One can't even clap someone on the shoulder," he said to Fayfke."Come, Fayfke."

The ballots with signatures on them were turned over to Greger; as well as, without distinction, all the envelopes that were open at the top and that looked just like the powerful pliers used to pull nails out of horses' hooves. PROBLEM? PARAGRAPH They did not wait for the voting to conclude. It didn't matter. Greger himself would put things in order. They skipped down all the stairs and from there went directly to Elye's tavern.

Book One

Chapter Twenty

There were occasional 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, moon, 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 the smugglers' hardened hearts. At such times the boys put their hands to the sides of the ladder-wagons they followed, and walked silently, accompanied by the groaning melody of the turning wheels. Old Shayke sat in the wagons, 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 on wandering?"

And Dovid, too, was snoozing as he sat, his head rocking until he slumped all the way down and lay with his head—softly, softly on good Stasha's lap—she who was such a help to him, either at hauling goods or at talking hi sway out of a scrape. And then he dreamed strange dreams that led him about and revealed strange things 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 began 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 the holiest of things. 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 and kissed again and again...

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

Once, when the three young *shikses* 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 *shikse* saying, "What is it?"

And Pantl's voice saying, "Sleep? Sleep?"

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 Natasha, 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 though all his members.

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 departed children did not write Those left behind 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 them 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.

Book One

Chapter Twenty-one

And when they get back to town, everyone rushed home, leaving Pantl, his sons and Natasha beside the wagon. Each of the wagoners by now had his own "bride". Right from the start Blind Grunim, who rode with Yenkl Tchap , brought his "bride" into his home. He told his wife to get out of bed. "Enough lying about," he said, and his *shikse* 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 *shikse*?"

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 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 *shikse* 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 Glike 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 *shikse* 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 shame 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 laughed, "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, 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 own daughter who had just asked him something. He put his finger to his mouth and said, "Shhhhhh."

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 Glickl got used to it. Sometimes when Pantl was out and she needed money, she would go to the *shikse* 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 *shikse* described it all at great length and Glickl 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 set up. Then everyone rises and they prepare the bundles to go just as Fayfke and Yurek come in, arm in arm and drunk as can be, singing some strange song and stomping their feet. Behind them comes Itshele and all of the friends in tandem, sounding the refrain, harmonizing with them like a choir.. 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:

We drive out of town,
Smuggled goods in the wagons;

Refrain: We drive, we drive on in fear…

On the road, the customs men,
In Warsaw we get our money,
And hold it in our hands.
And we drive back singing
In a circle, singing.
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 Yurek 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 Fayke and Yurek had made themselves.

End of Part One

Part Two

Chapter One

Four young mares trod the grass with their never-yet shod hooves happily inhaling, with dilated nostrils, the fragrant meadow odors. All they had around their proud, gleaming brown necks were their leather bridles. Their entire bodies were smooth; not a one of them showed an indentation of a horse collar, or the mark of a saddle on their hides which glowed with firmness, cleanliness, and youth.

The peasants had tied their bridles to stout trees and were talking among themselves. "Pantl hasn't come yet," said an old peasant with long flaxen hair who, indifferent to the summer weather, was wearing a felt hat.

"He's sure to come soon," a young, also flaxen-haired peasant, evidently a grandson, replied. And indeed, they saw Pantl in the distance, and went toward him.

Pantl greeted them with firm handshakes and approached the horses. Young, glistening, they stood, their tails dangling, their heads bowed, displeased because they had been tied to trees, scraping the ground with their unshod hooves, making, under each of them, four hollows.

Pantl regarded the horses with pleasure; their round firm sides, their smooth bellies, their long, strong legs, their shorn napes bristling like a porcupine.. He opened their mouths, looked inside them then called out to the peasants, "You have good horses. As God is my witness, they're worth eight hundred rubles. "Wouldn't sell for a thousand," replied the old peasant. and took out a thin

cigarette paper, tore off a rectangular piece, poured some tobacco from a packet onto it, twisted its ends and puffed on the cigarette.

"And where is he?" said the younger one, unable to restrain himself. The older man looked around and said, "O look, there he is," " he said, squinting his eyes, trying from a distance to see what sort of stallion it was.

Mendl, riding it, slapped the horse's side with the reins, and the horse ran, leaving dust behind him. On a narrow path right next to the field, Urke ran after him, bending to snatch up stones that he threw after the horse.

Mendl, on horseback, called out, "Just wait, you little good-for-nothing. When we get home, I'll knock you flat." He jumped down from the horse and patted its neck. The horse shook himself as if he had just then stepped out of water. Then, lifting his head, he took in the four mares. His nostrils flaring, his eyes suffused with blood, he whinnied. Mendl held the reins tightly but when the horse pulled away, Mendl ran after him and pulled him back. For a moment, they stood restlessly, then chased each other back and forth on the meadow.

The peasants, regarding Pantl's horse said, "Hey, that's a damn good horse."

But Pantl bargained with them. They wanted to lower the price but he refused. He shouted, raised questions, pointed to the horse, "Look at that horse. A lion!" Thus Pantl and the peasants dickered. The mares, seeing the stallion, felt that something was about to be done to them, grew excited, hot-blooded, jerked away from the trees and tugged at their bridles. One of them tore her bridle and ran off swiftly on her unshod hooves over the meadow grasses..

Seeing that the stallion reared up with such energy that he yanked Mendl up from the ground. Mendl let the reins go, and fell down once more. The stallion, feeling himself free, leaped forward and started off at a gallop, chasing the excited mare.

Pantl and the peasants, holding their arms out, ran hither and thither in an effort to block the horses' way to the highway. The old peasant pressed his hands to his sides, as if to keep his guts from spilling out. His head twitched, he panted and, in his hurry, he dropped his cigarette. Bending to pick it up, he muttered, "Damn the son-of-a-bitch."

But the mare ran every which way. Hearing a whinnying, she looked behind her and was frightened at seeing the stallion, whose nostrils were steaming. She turned to one side, but there was a human wall there, barring her escape. So she extended herself, becoming half again as large as she had been, readying herself to leap into the air as the stallion, chasing her, bit her tail and thrust her down to the ground. When she was altogether on her side, he raised himself once more on his legs and with his front legs, whose hooves too were free of horse-shoes , he grasped her, whinnying at the same time as wildly as if he had been bitten by a mad dog. Sweat broke out on his entire black body.

The mare, meaning to thrust off the massive weight that pressed so hard on her, kicked out with all her might and tore herself away, but she could feel her bones cracking and could not think what to do. Then, suddenly, she felt a helplessness, a weariness, as if she had just completed a run of thirty versts without stopping. Now she stood humbly, quite still, her whole body trembling.Like someone entirely beleaguered, she bowed her head, her eyes narrowed, and glazed over .

Urke, wide-eyed, his tongue out-thrust, stood to one side taking in the entire scene. As he watched, he felt as if he had a piece of sugar in his mouth and a scarlet joy spread over his features. He stood among all the wagons, plucking and tearing blades of grass, moving ever nearer to the horses. He bent, then sat down, looking about here and there, his eyes as red as those of his father's stallion when suddenly he felt himself flung into the air by the stallion who sensing someone approaching him had lashed out with his hind feet. Urke made a somersault, then fell onto a mound of grass. He felt himself all over, then looked around. Seeing his father, already loosening his belt,

running toward him, he stood, still holding handfuls of grass then ran off with a terrified yell back in the direction of the town.

There, he ran just as swiftly through the streets, but this time, without fear. Sometimes, as he ran, he thrust out of his way a child who burst into tears. Paying no attention to the cries and yells behind him, he leaped, spreading his mouth wide with laughter, almost whinnying like his father's horse.

And when he got to his own courtyard and saw Natasha sitting on the front steps fanning her face with a towel against the heat, he thrust his hand into her bosom and began pinching her flesh, utterly indifferent to the fact that she was slapping his face and was nearly pulling an ear off.

Book Two

Chapter Two

"He nearly, nearly killed him," Pantl roared. "Where is he, then?"

"Who? What?" Glikl cried, raising her hands to pinch her cheeks.

"The little bastard, that scamp."

"What are you talking about? He was just here. Snatched up a piece of bread."

"He was here? I'll break every one of his bones . Urke!,"Suddenly, seeing the boy through the window he shouted loudly enough to make the earth tremble.

Urke came through the open door and walked quietly over to stand before his father.

Then the shouting and beating began, so that all of the *shikses* in front of the door came running in, trying to pull the father away from the son. More than one of them received a careless blow.

Urke's nose was already bloody. Pantl, seeing the blood grew even more excited, like a wild bull that has been shown a red flag. Glikl tried with all her might to pull the boy away from the father's murderous hands. Cursing, she threw herself between them, and received a haphazard, but so terrible blow on her belly that it left her standing like someone suddenly senseless.She shuddered. There was a snapping sound; her legs bent under her and her entire body fell to the floor.

She sat up at once and uttered such a scream as brought the entire household running to her side. It was at that moment that Pantl stopped beating his son.

They removed Glike's shirt, unbuttoned her bodice, and loosened her velveteen skirt. A thick vapor rose from her body as she screamed, holding her hands over her naked belly which by now

had swollen like a pillow. A barber-surgeon was sent for. Glike was put to bed and someone ran for the doctor.

Mendl, when he arrived and learned what had happened, planted himself before his father and cast baleful looks at him. Pantl, evidently unable to put up with that, asked him, in a smothered tone, "Why are you standing there like an ox?"

"Why am I standing here? And what have *you* done, eh?"

Just then fearful cries were heard coming from the room in which Glike lay. Mendl, who was usually a compassionate person, started toward the door. But there he stopped, then returned to circle about his father.

"D'you hear?" Pantl said, " I want you out of this house", and his eyes darkened.

"D'you hear?" Mendl also said, without knowing what else to say.

The doctor arrived. He asked for a bowl of water, a piece of soap and a towel. Then he told everyone to leave the room in which the patient lay. After that, together with Hodl, Glike's neighbor, who was holding the bowl of water as well as other things, he went into the next room.

The father and son were left standing there like a couple of roosters. It was clear that Pantl was restraining himself from flying at Mendl. But he was not entirely controlled. Through clenched teeth, he hissed, "May the cholera gnaw your bones."

Mendl continued to stand before his father like a worm that meant to bore into him. At the same time he heard the cries from the other room. At the sound of a louder outcry, he shuddered and could not keep from saying to his father, "D'you hear? May the devil take your father's father."

As the doctor was washing his hands, he ordered them not to talk to the sick woman, because her situation was critical. Pantl paid him for his visit, and Hodl followed the doctor out. When she came back in, she said that Glike was having a difficult miscarriage and—who could say?.

At that, Mendl felt like a dog that has snapped its chain. Raising his arm, he formed his hand into a fist and flung himself at his father.

A strange shriek from the patient brought him to a stop. He stood, his fist raised above his head loking first at the door of his mother's room and then at his father. His whole body began to tremble. Throwing himself down on the cot, he burst into tears and sobs.

Glike was having unusual pangs. It seemed to her that a blacksmith was in her belly equipped with hammer and tongs. Screaming continually, she tore herself from the bed. It was then that Pantl went to the door and, slamming it with a bang, left the house.

He started toward the stable but as he passed the gutter he stopped. Something within him was rumbling—in his throat, at his heart. He stood, looking down at the ground and saw mites creeping about there and it came to him that he had done a bad thing.

"What did I have against her? What did I want from her?" And there among the grasses, moving from one stone to another crept the mites.

He was unaware that the janitress was speaking to him. Once more she repeated, "Pantl. What happened to your wife?" It was only then that he became attentive and looked at her with eyes that seemed to her to be filled with tears. Leaning her head against the long handle of her broom, she thought, "By them, a man is a man." And she remembered that many times when her husband, the drunkard, used to beat her, she had not been permitted to show a single tear—he would have left her on the spot. So she stood there, her chin trembling and pitied herself.

That lasted for a moment, then she resumed sweeping the courtyard.

Once more, Pantl sank into thoughts that were not properly thoughts, but something… what they were he did not know himself—dark torn thought-pages. And then again, "What did I have against her?" The words clung stubbornly and would not leave himl. "Ah… I ought to go to hell.""

And, as he stood there, he noticed Reb Vov in the other courtyard waving his hand, signaling him to come near.

"Pantl, actually I'm just on my way to see you. Come over here."

Without looking directly at Reb Vov, Pantl went over to the other courtyard. What he saw—as he had the first time—was the man's fine smock and his silver-handled cane. Reb Vov started right in talking business.

"Pantl, will you drive over to the train station for a load of salt for me? I've got the bill of lading."

Pantl considered, "Tomorrow is Friday. There are no trips until Saturday." To Reb Vov he replied, "Yes, I'll go."

Reb Vov turned over the bill of lading to him then went off, self-satisfied, the silver handled cane in his hand, his head held high.

Pantl, holding the receipt, stood looking after him and did not know why he felt such an antipathy for the respectable Jew that he could have torn him to pieces. "*He* didn't beat on his wife's belly. May the chol…"

So things swirled about in Pantl's head and his face twitched as he regarded Reb Vov mincing away "What? Who? A Jew. A householder. Didn't *he* send his daughter to the Commandant? I saw her with him there myself.

"And what is Pantl? A peasant? A boor? A low life? A bridegroom?106" CHECK WHY BRIDEGROOM? May the cholera devour them all."

He folded the bill of lading, then suddenly his nostrils moved the way a belly does when one is breathing—a sign that something had occurred to him. "And what if one pulled off a trick on the way? Hmm."

He rubbed his forehead and wanted to go over at once to discuss the matter with "Kaiser". But on his way there he remembered that these were not former times when the Russians had been there. Nowadays they sweated you for a mere triviality. And he concluded, "No. Nowadays it's not as it was."

Book II

Chapter III

Natasha was getting ready to go stay with her aunt. In the present situation, she could not possibly sleep where she was. Pantl had actually thought that no harm would come of it, but considering her, he had seen that with his wife in one bed it was not to be thought of. And to be in the same bed with him, opposite his wife!? So she was moving to her aunt's, who, with Stasha had taken a room at Shmuel the Hunchback's—a sort of shoemaker—who always had room for a *shikse* or a traveling young woman.

It was disagreeable for Pantl.. He had gotten so used to her. Particularly because by now she knew more about his business than he did. She was familiar with all of the villages in the neighborhood of the town; knew all of the women in the district and several of the young gentile men who were in effect the proprietors of the farms because their fathers were now off in the war. They would sell her rye and flour at much lower rates than others paid.

Just the same, Natasha went to Shmuel Hunchback's and there, suddenly, she felt as if she was back in Warsaw as before.

"Ah Jesus," she said aloud as she entered the room in the cellar in which a half-dark reigned. Through the quilt that hung over a corner of the cellar she heard her aunt's voice and that of Stasha, Urek and a number of others. Slowly, on tiptoe, she moved toward them, lifted a corner of the quilt and saw her friends sitting or lying on the black cots drinking whiskey, smoking and kissing.

The small enclosed corner of the cellar was partitioned again into cubicles and from each cubicle could be heard a murmur as of bees. Mateus's wife sat on a board on the ground and Fayfke was tickling her armpits while she scratched at her foot.

Itshe, as someone who was a frequent visitor here, stood over Stasha and, in the manner of a dandy, lighted his cigarette from her's. In the smallest cubicle sat Shmuel Hunchback, the owner of the cellar, pinching one or another of the *shikses*, and laughing his high-pitched laughter, "Hee, hee, hee."

Natasha stood there a moment then, suddenly aroused, sucked in the filthy steamy cellar air which was made more humid by the smell of the cheap perfume that Stefke habitually poured over herself. To Natasha, it all seemed something pleasant, fresh, new and at the same time so familiar. Even Shmuel's head, the typical ridiculous head of a hunchback, which, even if his entire body had been covered, would still have revealed that he was a hunch-back, especially because of his narrow eyes and emaciated jaw.

He seemed to her now to be so sympathetic that she blushed, her eyes sparkled and she felt that that she was bound to this cubicle with chains. Then, as if she had been yanked, she flung the quilt aside, crying, "Stefke! Stashak", and leaped in, seated herself on the black cot and put her feet up on the table.

There followed a noisy tumult, as of animals. They embraced, plucked at each other, and kissed. They all had their blouses open, their skirts in danger of slipping down, their shoes unlaced.

Natasha was seized with a wild desire for a cigarette. Sitting up, she took Itshe's cigarette out of his mouth then, turning her head coquettishly she took a couple of drags from it and threw it away. Then she stood and, taking the bottle, shook it and, with a look of dissatisfaction, tipped it, bottom-up into her mouth.

Shmuel Hunchback looked on, delighted. "Ah! Now *that's* a real *shikse*." He gazed at her taking in how she walked, how she talked, how she smoked, how she drank, and he swore by all the world, "by the health of my children, *she* would make a man of me."

When he saw how she tipped the bottle again and again without getting anything from it, he took his glass, left the cubicle and returned at once with the glass full. In a commanding voice he said, "Here, girl, drink."

Pleased, everyone in the corner laughed. "The hunchback's in love with her," they cried, and seizing him, they dragged him mischievously toward Natasha. She stood, reddening, her eyes bright, then, laughing, she embraced him. He turned pale at once, his jaw twisted to one side. The others surrounded them and Fayfke pressed them against each other just as Blind Grunem had done to him and Raytshe a few months back. When Shmuel Hunchback felt the touch of Natasha's plump body his eyes grew bloodshot. . A vengeful flame! Ah, how he would avenge himself for all the years he had been the butt of mocking laughter. He, at whom everyone made faces; whom everyone hated; at sight of whom children fled—and all because of his flaw—which was not his fault.

So he clasped her with his slender fingers and flung himself down on the cot with her.

Now the laughter among the *shikses* grew nearly wild. They bent their heads and tears showed in the corners of their eyes.

But Yurke's face was crimson with rage. Springing forward he yanked Shmuel off the bed and shoved him back in his corner, crying, "You damned hunchback. You son-of-a-bitch."

The others slapped their sides, choking with laughter at the way Shmuel shrank into himself, like a worm.

But Natasha, tired after a day and a night of no sleep, and the effects of the whiskey and the miasmic cellar air was asleep.

Book II

Chapter 4

Mendl, his hands aching to do something at every turn was moving about the kitchen. He felt fatigue in all of his bones and yet a yearning for some action—or to get into a fight with someone.

He walked slowly, with careful footsteps, placing his heels down on the flloor to keep from making noise. Then he sat down on the cot and just stared at the walls. Then he stood and walked about a bit once more. Then once again, he sat down.

All sorts of thoughts passed through his brain. He recalled the night journeys when, out of the dark they heard the shout, "Halt! Stand still." But what mostly came to his mind was the image of his father with Natasha.

"Here come the guards!"

"D'you see them?" Pantl asked the shikse

" I see them."

"And you know...

"I know..."

And she laughed, her blue eyes sparkling and jumped down from the wagon and, with a hop and a skip, went to the guards.

Here, Mendl bit his lip and struck the floor with his foot . This made the sick woman utter a cry of fear and pain. He ran from the kitchen into the house where he began to think of ways of avenging himself on his father To teach him. To show him what he, Mendl, could do.

All sorts of thoughts came into his head. For example, "I'll sock him on the mouth.; I'll give him a swollen jaw." Or, "What if I don't ride to Warsaw with him? Let him struggle alone." Or, "What if, on the road, I turn him over to a German?"

But he was unable to decide what to do.

So he went out the door where he came face to face with Urek. "

"What is it?" the gentile said. "We're not going to go before the Sabbath? "

"Where'll we go now? Mother is sick."

"O, O," the gentile said and added, laughing," So Natasha won't be sleeping at the hunchback's?!"

Mendl, stood still, seized by a sudden thought as if struck by lightning. Turning away from the gentile, he went the roundabout way to the narrow little street where Shmuel Hunchback lived.

When Pantl came into the house, Mendl was no longer there. Urke, lying on an upright sack, was snoring, groaning. There was silence in the next room. Going to the bedroom door, Pantl looked through a crack and saw his father-in-law seated beside the bed, leaning against his knobby stick. Pantl could not tell whether he was dozing or whether he was simply sitting there.

Glikl lay with her eyes open and her teeth clenched. Her cheeks sagged; her nose looked pinched. Her arms, as if cramped lay on top of the sheet. She had a triangular head-shawl wound so low over her forehead that it emphasized her eyes making them seem like two black holes.

"She must be well and truly sick," the thought crossed Pantl's mind. He walked back a few paces then slowly and heavily sat on the sleeping-bench. "What have I done? What have I done?" He leaned his elbows on the table then pressed his opened eyes against his wrists. He remembered Hodl's words, spoken when the doctor left, "She's had a difficult miscarriage."

"Who knows? It might have been a girl."

He had intensely longed for a daughter. He would have given her a fine upbringing and would have provided her with a splendid dowry.

He stood and went once more to the door and looked in and perceived only now how high the bedcover was over his wife's belly. "What good's that belly now? She'd be better without it. Do I demand anything from her? Does she lack anything with me? Does she lack anything?"

His teeth clenched, when he heard a groan from the other side of the door."Murderer! What did you want from her?" He was now ready to fall at anyone's feet and beat his head on the ground, against the wall, against the stones outside. Perhaps that would be a relief.

He looked around the room. No one was there. No one. Suddenly Pantl felt as forlorn as a stone. As if, he had been abandoned all alone, at night on an empty road—and not a single person with whom to exchange so much as a word. With whom? With his father-in-law? The old consumptive? And it was then he thought of Natasha whom he undertook to compare with Glikl. "I... I..." He felt himself yearning, and there was a pain in his heart like the one he felt when, on the road his smuggled goods were taken from him He made a fist of his right hand and began to pound the table,slowly, softly. Little by little however, he pounded louder and more quickly till it sounded like a drummer beating a drum.

His father-in-law came in, groaning like a rusty hinge and said, "O, O, O. Would you stop banging. She can't sleep."

Pantl stopped drumming and, with a baleful glare, went toward his father-in-law as if he was the one at fault in the whole matter.

The old man went on, "She ought to have someone sitting beside her. To hand her things."

For Pantl, that was the last straw. He shouted, "Who'll I set down beside her? The rabbi?" And regretted at once that he had spoken that way. He took out a hundred ruble note and handed it

to his father-in-law. "Here," he said, "here's money. Take it. Do what needs to be done. Maybe you could get Hodl."

The old man took the money, looked it over on all sides. "A hundred rubles!" And when he was at the door, "See what you've done? Good, isn't it?"

Those good words depressed Pantl. And indeed, "what had he had against her"? Again, he made a fist and began to beat his breast. "I have sinned! I have sinned!"

Overwhelmed by remorse he was seized with an impulse to hack and to smash everything in the room into bits and pieces. Like a prisoner in a cell, he began pacing the room.

When his father-in-law and Hodl showed up on the threshold he ran through them with such velocity he nearly knocked them down. Looking after him, they said, "It must be he's gone out of his mind."

He ran from the courtyard to the garden, to Yitzkhok-Yoineh's where he began to drink, pouring down a qurter of a liter into himself. Then he sat down beside the stove where a great heat overwhelmed him. Feeling exalted, he called The Pipe and whispered in his ear, "You should see that belly—high as a haystack , may the cholera seize it." That last comparison produced a tickling sensation under his armpits and he burst into crude laughter. Then he pinched Brandl's leg when she sat down to add wood to the fire. She scolded him, but Pantl was by now in the grip of passion. There was something searing him, as if a glowing iron had been thrust into him.

Going out into the fresh air, but there, being unable to find a place to rest, inflamed his erotic hunger. He went into the stable, and mounted the stallion. Astride, he rose and fell, rose and fell until, feeling desperately confined and, filled with self pity, weeping, he nearly fell from the horse.

*

He did not have a clear view of things until he was in Shmuel Hunchback's cellar. It was dark there, and he was enveloped by damp; the damp that is to be found in cellars in summertime. There, he felt cooler. He stood there for a moment, looking around and seeing no one. He was about to go when he heard Shmuel's voice,"Who's there?"

He went over to the enclosed corner, pushed the hanging quilt aside, squinting his eyes on account of the greater darkness. Little by little he got used to the dark and his eye fell upon the black bed that was right before him. He stood, surprised. He took a step into the corner and stood still. The same wild gleam flickered in his eyes now as before and his body felt as if glowing irons were boring into it. Whinnying like a horse that was about to fling itself on an enemy, and, making a fist, he punched Mendl so hard that he fell to the floor where he lay, stunned.

A tumult ensued. Shmuel Hunchback stood, pulling at the youth and Natasha, waking from sleep and seeing Pantl was terrified. Anxiously, she asked, "Pantl, what's happened?"

Mendl who, in the meanwhile, had come to, gritted his large, white teeth. Getting to his feet, he flung himself at his father who, evidently meaning to move aside tripped over a stool he had not seen and fell to the ground with his head on a pile of paper and rubbish that lay under the table.

The noise of the four of them shouting brought the inhabitants of the courtyard and of the street running. Almost at once, the courtyard in which Shmuel Hunchback lived was black with people. It was thought that, God forbid, a fire had broken out or that someone had fainted. But those who went right into the cellar and raised the quilt (several of them lighted matches to add light) took in the scene in which the father and son were wrestling on the floor, tore at each other, thwacked each other about their heads. And near them, the *shikse*, her blouse open, doing her best to tear the two apart. Several of the bystanders burst out laughing, but there were those who felt embarrassed and who went away, their heads lowered.

Meanwhile, the two policemen showed up: Yukl and Malinovsky. Wielding their riding crops they first of all dispersed the crowd of those who had come down into the cellar. Then they stood there, laughing. "Ugh!," said Malinovsky. "What a disgrace! A father and a son!"

Both of the policemen approached the embattled couple and pulled them apart. But Pantl, made furious by drink, enraged tore himself from their hands and struck out with his fists.

"Do you want us to take you to the city hall's?" Yukl said.

Those few words sobered Pantl immediately. He looked about, now with a different perspective and saw the crowd of people behind the policemen. Gritting his teeth, he, too was embarrassed,

In the courtyard, a crowd of curious folk had gathered to customs me the "relatives" being led through the street by the policemen. In the meantime, they talked among each other about what had happened in the cellar.

"D'you see what the young folk are up to? A couple of good for nothings—father and son."

"What did you expect? Wagon drivers. Low class rogues."

"Too much prosperity," observed a third. "What do they lack? These smugglers."

"Meat every day," said the withered Nekhe, a tall woman who from the time the war began hadn't seen a piece of meat except for that which the "committee" provided for the homeless.

"And white bread."

"And on the Sabbath, a *khala.*"

" Became wealthy folk."

Thus phrases were uttered by different folk on every side. But when they saw that their waiting was in vain, many of them dispersed. The most patient ones stayed. And indeed, the longer they waited, the more intense grew their curiosity. They seated themselves on a log that had lain

forever in the middle of the courtyard. Some lolled on the bare ground. But one of them, a jokester, said, "A wonder that Greger isn't here?"

Book Two

Chapter Five

Mendl did not come home. Not that night. Not anytime on Friday; not on Friday night. He ate and slept at Fayfke's and he counted on riding with him on Kopl's wagon.

On Saturday morining, the young folk gathered together and started off to the house of study for their morning prayers. There, Mendl saw his father who was standing near the stove. He moved, with his friends, over to the other side where they seated themselves at the "poor" table, where, opening their prayer books, several of them began to recite their prayers.

On the other side of the room, Pantl, as he was about to recite his prayers, noticed that several small boys were pointing at him, laughing at his blackened and bruised eyes. The service, in the house of study, had not yet begun and several of the common folk were standing around the study table telling Reb Yidl and Reb Vov what had happened between Pantl and his son; why the two of them had fought. When those people saw Pantl, they lapsed into silence. On the other hand, the two Rebs turned their backs on him as Reb Vov said to his neighbor, "Just think of it, Yidl. On Thursday I gave him a bill of lading for a wagon-load of salt. Do you think he went?"

"You see how the world is, nowadays," observed Reb Yidl, the whiskey-maker .

"A debauched world, indeed. But a story like *that*. Unheard of, anywhere in the world. A father and son."

Hearing them, Pantl's mood darkened. He continued to stand beside the stove, his head turned aside.

"Dyou know what, Vovl?" said Reb Yidl, "He ought to be fined for such an ugly matter."

"Does he lack for anything?' Reb Vov replied. "I had forgotten. He lacks *marks?*."

Meanwhile other men were arriving who stood around the study table talking about the news. They all acted as if Pantl wasn't there. On the other hand the pious Jews in their silk frocks spoke louder than the others and at intervals looked directly at him. And some of them contrived to pass by him and looked him directly in the eyes. "He should feel deeply ashamed of himself. May his blood congeal."

Pantl, hearing all that, felt as if the earth had opened up beneath him and he would willingly have sunk down in it. Slowly, however, he gained control over himself; little by little he recovered his nerve. Turning gradually away from the wall, he raised his head and looked the"respectable" Jews directly in the eyes feeling a great hatred, a very great hatred, a powerful hatred for those who stood around the study table.

"Look at him, the one in the fur-trimmed hat. May the cholera take him. Wasn't he, when a young man... wasn't he caught in a barn with a gentile woman? And, before the war, didn't they discover hoarded goods in Zayndl the clothing manufacturer's factory?" Never mind. They're the respectable Jews. May the Vienna cholera choke them. Never mind. Never mind. He, Pantl... is hardly a pious man. If a bundle, a sack, a horse came his way... he never pretended to be pious. But they..."

Mostly it was Vov and Yidl who infuriated him. They were the ones doing most of the talking.

It seemed to Pantl that he was seeing nearby that glowing iron rod and he began to seethe from the heat that struck him in the face and he felt that at any moment he would fling himself at those two Jews to pluck out their respectable beards and smack their bastardly faces.

But suddenly, all such thoughts came to an end. Yitzkhok Yoyne had put on his prayer-shawl and going up to the podium he began to recite the prayer for a new house in a loud voice.

And the men rose from where they were and began to recite their prayers, loudly and melodically.

Pantl stood, as if he had been cut in two with a knife. He opened his prayer book and began moving his lips, murmuring just as if he was praying. His thoughts, however, were there—on the study table. Like wire snakes, they encircled the respectable Jews, winding around them.. He felt his hands and feet cramping, like those of a large courtyard horse that has been bidden stand and wait.

The prayer service proceeded. Kopl and Yenkl, who in the summer said their prayers in the corridor went up to Pantl and stood , near him. The prayer-shawls of the three of them were in constant motion. Kopl, however, was discussing rye which had become so expensive; and that he was thinking of driving out this very night as soon as the stars came out.

Mendl and his friends, who were sitting at the "poor" table, had spoken very little today. Mendl too, was infuriated, hearing what was being said about him and his father. But he sat still, though his teeth were clenched. A number of young men were moving about, back and forth casting glances at Mendl; then at Pantl. Some of them came up to the table, leaning on it, swaying with fervor. But they spoke not a word in prayer. They were simply curious to see him up close. Striking one's own father! Some of the more pious ones, turning their heads to one side looking askance at the two of them, their eyes were inflamed, glistening with sparks of lust; and, in their imaginations took pains to recreate more intensely, more vividly the story that had unfolded in Shmuel Hunchback's cellar. Some of these youths, their faces pale, and blue shadows under their restless eyes were very anxious to know who the *shikse* was--- whether she might not be the *shikse* with the blue eyes and the abundant head of bright hair. And just by thinking of her, the moisture appeared at the corners of their mouths, and they swayed more passionately in prayer, thrusting themselves at the lecterns that stood before them.

When the reading of the Torah began, there were, once more, clusters of men standing around the study table, still discussing the Pantl matter. By some of them, the idea of a fine blazed up once more. Going up to old Dovid, they said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, gross fellow. How can you permit such a thing?"

One of them, laughing, said, "Some father-in-law; some son-in-law."

Hearing this, Pantl's eyes turned red and he no longer heard Kopl's thunderous voice. The tingling in his bones intensified and he was seized by the impulse to tear at his own skin and that of the others.

He thrust his head forward like a war-horse smelling blood. He took a step forward but once again he stopped as if cut in two by the voice of Khaim Ben Tsion who began to recite the prayers for the *Musaf*, the additional service.

Throughout , Pantl felt it as if he was standing on glowing coals. He shifted his feet, as if they were stuck around with needles. And his entire body felt compelled, drawn to the study table, to the Jews there. And all this while, he also cast hidden glanced in the direction of his son, and it seemed to him, that what had happened on Thursday was indeed ugly. No, he felt no hatred for him. Not a drop of anger. And he did not notice that the congregants were taking off their prayer shawls, handing them over to the boys and getting ready to go. But in the midst of the hubbub that Jews make in the synagogue when the service is over, Vov's voice reached him . Pantl heard him say to the rabbi,""Yes, yes, rabbi. An ugly story. Very ugly."

It would seem that the rabbi had been told the entire story., because he only shook his head, rolled his eyes and said, "Ah, sinful, sinful, sinful."

Yidl-Whiskeymaker came up in a state of rapture gesticulating intensely, and cried, "Let's fine them. Fine them, Rabbi. They'll make the town sinful. God forbid, Lttle children will God for....."

He had not finished his thought when there was a disturbance. Men with haughty beards, their hands raised above each other's heads were jostling. Pantl, in a single stride, stood before the lectern and, raising a fist, shook it in the air.

"What!" he roared, his entire features savagely contorted. "Who makes anyone sinful? Children... children," he interrupted himself and stood still.

"Hush...sh...sh.., now. And put your hand down. It's forbidden to raise a hand against a learned man, " said the rabbi gently.

"You low life. You vulgarian, you insolent fellow. At whom are you raising your hand? You peasant *goy.* "

Hearing Yidl's voice again, Pantl's face turned crimson. He opened his mouth but was unable to think how to begin. Bending his knees, like one about to leap onto a horse. But he restrained himself and calmed down. Then suddenly he cried out, "Rabbi. I'm a low life. A peasant goy. But *he's* an informer." Delighted by the word that had issued from his mouth he cried, "Yes, yes, who was it squealed on Yitzhak-Yoine? Who?"

Mendl's comrades stood around him where he still sat at the table—uncertain about what they should do, whether to stay where they were or to move over to Pantl. Mendl, at the table, held on to the prayer-book page, restraining himself with all his might from springing up. At Pantl's last words, he could no longer control himself. Leaping onto the table, "Yes, yes," he cried, echoing his father's words."An informer. He's an informer."

The whole town had been saying this for a long while. The story they used to tell was that one of Yidl's sons had been seen coming away from the sergeant-major's; and someone else had seen his daughter coming down the Commandant's stairs. And every time, after such a "visit" one of the whiskey-makers was caught—and sometimes, more than one.

Now the young fellows found their tongues and they called out to Pantl, "Good for you. Give it to 'em. Show 'em."

Reb Yidl was dismayed. He bowed his head, and quietly murmured something. But Reb Vov came to his aid. Turning to the congregation he said, "Jews! You've heard what a rascal can say. Let's throw him out of the synagogue. Throw him out."

A couple of inflamed, black-bearded men made a move toward Pantl. But a mere look from him made them quail. Their hands and feet trembling, they stood dumbfounded.

"Rabbi, Rabbi. I don't know…I've sinned. Yes. I've sinned. But how are they any better than me? Rabbi…" he roared so loudly that the Rabbi's fur hat trembled so hard that it nearly fell from his head. "Rabbi. Doesn't Reb Vov send his daughter to the Commandant?"

There ensued a silence like that which surrounds the dead.

Reb Vov said, "What a disgrace!" then cried hoarsely, "Jews! Throw him out. Out. " And to Pantl, "You'll be sent away in chains. In chains. Jews! Why are you standing there?"

One of the men, behind Pantl, feeling courageous, gave him a blow on the nape of his neck. Pantl turned, and the next moment the man was lying on the ground, squealing like a slaughtered animal. Kopl and Yenkl were immediately beside Pantl. Yenkl said not a word. But the next moment, Blind Grunem, in whose eye there was now revealed its gleaming red abyss, appeared among them. . But Mendl manifested even greater heroism. He leaped from the table onto the reading stands and from there flung himself at his enemies' heads, crying out in his father's

defence. As at a conflagration, there followed more jostling, shouting and terror. Something in the air was burning ; people fell over each other, enraged, wounding each other, bruised. Those who were still on their feet, pushed, struggling with each other—each one aiming to get to the door before the others. To escape alive. Away from " Esau's" grasp. And Pantl stood, as if nailed down until the crowd around him thinned out. He called out to the last cluster of men who fled, leaving behind their silk hats, pulling their coat tails over their heads, "May the cholera choke you all."

That did not please Fayfke who called out, "One cholera isn't enough." But he said it with such a look on his face as pleased the young folk and made them laugh. And nobody knew what next might happen in the synagogue—laughter or tears.

Only Itshl stood to one side. Though he was not one given to battle, he stood there, feeling pleased that there were such battlers in the world.

Later, as Pantl, in company with his son was on his way home to eat, , he took from some hidden place a hundred ruble Russian note and gave it to Mendl. "Get a suit made for yourself," he said.

He also sent the weekly payment to the non-commissioned-officer and to the sergeant-major.

Book II

Chapter Six

After a sleep... risen from their beds... the window-blinds opened....the hot Tammuz sun, still high in the heavens, shining through... it was already four o'clock in the afternoon.

Old Shayke, in his cotton trousers and his large four-cornered ritual garment, his velvet cap on his head stood in the open doorway looking out at the bright earth; at its dazzling glitter. He picked up Shayndl's four year old child, went out with it through the door and seated himself on the threshold. He began to play with the child, smiling at it with eyes that had the look of faded, dull, discolored tin. "Oy, ts, ts," he said, shakng his little finger over the child's chest and belly. The child laughed and squinted at the too bright light. Touched by that, the old fellow became even more involved with the child and, all in one breath, said, ""Aiy, ts, ts, ts ." Hearing that old Shayke was sitting outside, the children who loved him, ran out of their houses, not even waiting for Sabbath fruit, and seated themselves around the old man. They plucked at his sleeve or pulled at his beard, but he did not get angry at them He seemed to take great pleasure at what they were doing. He plucked at a pants leg and when he succeeded in trapping one of the children in his lap—which they did not want to happen—.he pressed dthe child to the ground with one hand. Then, raising his right foot, he put it down on its body.. Holding it down that way he started to pat its little behind so that it cried out, though there was laughter mixed with its outcries. Nevertheless, the mothers came out of their houses , barefooted, still wearing their Sabbath slips and their nightcaps, talking in their manner.

"Had a bit of a look at the old man beating up the kids?! one of them said, pretending to be angry. " It's he who ought to be spanked ," said another, turning her head away to hide her laughter.

A third one, also pretending anger, said, "May our enemies have a dark, and desolate fate."

That's how things were. The children rolled about over the stones, laughing with all their might, some of them nearly weeping for sheer pleasure.

After that, what happened was that old "Kaiser", a relic of bygone days, went slowly by with measured steps.. He stopped at the threshold and said, "Good Sabbath to you," and began to ask how things were going; whether anyone was earning anything. And how was their health. In that way, the two old men formed a conversational bond about the good old days, the days gone by; those days gone by long, long ago.

Shayke got up from the threshold and, with the child still in his arms, he and the "Kaiser" dragged themselves along the sidewalk that passed right beside the houses and led to the end of the town, recalling good memories enthusiastically. Smacking his lips,he stammered, "Do you remember when a quart of whiskey used to cost eight groschen, and a quarter of a goose ten groschen."

Lozer "Kaiser"'s voice deepened as it used to thirty years ago, ""In those days a pal could offer food and drink. A barrel of beer was no big thing then. On the Sabbath, on a simple Sabbath, there would be a big barrel of beer. 'Drink, brother, as much as you can down.'"

"And a bit of a roast," Shayke did not forbear to add. "If you took a bite, it dripped over your chin."

And, because of his own words, Shayke became so inflamed that he completely forgot that it was now forty years later. He passed his tongue over his withered lips and imagined that he had the bit of roast between his teeth. A goose! Or, anyway, the gizzard. All the while he pressed it between his teeth; squeezing it slowly, so that it would drip even more. And into his faded eyes there appeared a hint of lust.

But old Shayke was punished for that passion almost at once. Because he remembered that the thing about which he was speaking had vanished long ago and that nowadays he received a barley loaf on the ration card from which the bits of chopped straw that were kneaded into it cut his old gums. And indeed he felt how nowadays his tongue in his mouth felt like a piece of dry leather and how there was no goose fat dripping over it. And how the rye bread and the little dumplings of the Sabbath feast were no more than a memory.

Lozer Kaiser,, taking his free hand, led him into the nearby house where his son lived..

Now *there* was life. Busy, as at a small wedding. Khaim Kaiser sat at the head of the table in a woolen housecoat (In this town even the Kaiser had a khassidic housecoat)and spoke in a loud voice that was not quite suitable with a housecoat. The pals sat on both sides of the table: Pantl, Kopl, Yenkl. Blind Grunem was also there.. And Bertshe stood at the window laughing toward a dark *shikse* near a gate who was scraping a black slipper in the sand and paying small attention to him. In a corner at a footstool sat Khayim's wife, Fat Bayle, rocking a little child with sparkling black eyes.. On a chair nearby sat Dobe, the butcher's wife, or, as she was still called, "the Woman Rider" . And they, the women, spoke of the war, about which the town, from the time that the smuggling began, had said not a word.

Dobe had come with news about her husband Pelte, who was in Odessa. The news she had was from a man in Warsaw who had come from being a prisoner of war and who wrote to her to come to Warsaw because he had greetings for her from her husband .

Khayim then got into a conversation about the war and a discussion ensued about people—about the pals—who were overseas and for whom, sometimes, one yearned— and about Pelte, indeed, the best of the pals..

So the conversation wound on, with a sort of yearning that expressed itself with fists pounding on the table and their eyes flaming. It was the kind of yearning expressed wth lungs of iron; with shoulders of iron. And there was a temptation to rise from the table, to make an outcry to the world at large, "D'you hear? May the devil take your mothers." Because that's the sort of yearning it was It looked as if they had been yelling about something; as if they had quarreled; as if they had beaten each other's heads, because every face had crimsoned and their eyes were almost entirely inflamed. They were responsive to that yearning, as if someone had thrust thick wagon shafts into their bowels and they were choking, choking, unable to think what to do.

In the midst of the pounding, Khayiml suddenly called, "Bertshe, go get a little whiskey."

Hearing that, Bertshe suddenly disappeared, but Kopl caught up with him, crying,"And bring a couple of marinated herrings as well."

That dissipated the mood of yearning around the table which now became exultant. And if they still talked a little about the war, it was only about smuggling.

Kopl spoke about the customs officers, a new one of which appeared every couple of miles, among whom you had to distribute bribes of eggs and butter. "May their lives be disturbed." And Khayiml talked of horses which the Germans were confiscating. And for a horse which should cost a couple of thousand marks, the Germans paid—what the Germans pay.

"But you, Pantl. You've grabbed yourself a stallion. If you wanted to sell him today, you'd get twice as much."

But Pantl did not reply. He sat the whole while with his mouth shut, staring at the table cloth. Every few minutes, he raised his head, looked out of the window into the street as if he was waiting for something, then looked again at the table cloth rubbing it with both of his thumbs at the corner of

the table in a way that made one think that it was not only the table cloth, but also the corner of the table itself in which,, by his rubbing, he wanted to create two holes.

Book Two

Chapter VII

When Khayiml's father came in with Shayke, Shayke looked about the room and seeing Bayle and the child, he was, reminded of something. Looking down at his arm as if he had forgotten whom he had there, he thought to himself, "There'll soon be some more fun."

Thinking this, he sat down at Bayle's feet and tickled first this childs belly and then that one's. "Aie, ts, ts, ts. Aie, ts, ts, ts." And both the children laughed together, laughing into each other's faces, their arms outstretched as if they were encountering a joy.

So, out of sheer satisfaction, old Shayke started to sing a melody that was somehow not Wallachian, not Turkish, not Tartar; but one that only Shayke knew

Meanwhile, Bertshe showed up bringing a barrel of beer with a tap. They removed the wooden bung, the tap was set up and there stood Bertshe, with the glasses, and there was circling and there was pouring.

Dobe, the "Woman Rider ", a glass in her hand, stood up and made a toast like a man. "May my Peltl be here very soon." To which everyone replied, "Amen."

Bertshe, at the tap, served beer and when there were no glasses available, he put his mouth to the tap and how much was spilled was his secret.

His face and neck reddened. As if he was trying to retrieve an emptied glass, his whole body was extended over the table. Meanwhile Grunem poured a little foam over his neck, then Berthse was up again, laughing, with the tap in his hand .

Through the open door of the second room—the bedroom—Khayiml's daughter, Tsivke, could be seen. A pretty girl with dark eyes and a sun-burned face. Facing her was a girlfriend named

Paulina telling her—sometimes loudly, sometimes in her ear--, about Yanke, the City hall's secretary.

Tsivke questioned her about something; Paulina repeated what she had said and their eyes sparkled and gleamed attractively. Their lips swelled, parted, glowed brashly and their breasts, together with their blouses, rose and fell as if there was something twitching there.. They themselves were not aware of any of this. They did not see the the flame in their eyes, how their faces had crimsoned, how their lips had swelled, and that their breasts were thrust upward. They talked on and on about the secretary as they braided their hair laughing their not-quite-achieved laughter, with ambiguous smiles in their eyes.

The one thing they did feel was a tingling that spread over their bodies and cramped their limbs with desire. It seemed to them both, without having discussed the matter, that they yearned to go out to the highway to meet mischievous boys there., to lay themselves down on the grass and to be unashamed before them..

But Bertshe was standing there. He was so sharp eyed that even as he kept his mouth against the tap, he could still see the two girls. He scratched his lips then nearly choked. There was was a great spurt of beer over his entire mug that almost deafened him. But,throughout it all he continued to laugh, and that laughter was soon echoed by everyone..

A moment later he was standing in the next room saying, "Tsivke, a glass of beer. Bring it in."

Both of the girls laughed and poked at each other with their elbows as if to say, "Some face! But the other one…". That was the meaning of their jostling which they understood. Then Tsivke, taking the glass of beer said, "And Poltshe? Why didn't you bring one in for him?"

"Why of course, replied Bertshe,, and Poltshe had a glass of beer in his hand at once. Tsivke bent her head and put the beer glass to her mouth, which made her teeth now look even whiter , and at every swallow, her bust moved up and down as did her white throat..

Something that just occurred to him made the youth unable to restrain himself. Laughing, he made a fillip at the bottom of her glass which made her gag so that the beer went down her throat the wrong way then spurted into his face. Her girlfriend laughed but she nearly wept for shame. Khayim, seeing that, gave Bertshe's wet cheek a resounding slap, so that he went immediately back into the next room and resumed running the tap.

Dobe, who had been made giddy by the beer, sat down at the table with the fifth glass in her hand and began, evidently for the hundredth time, to tell the story of how she and Pelte came to marry.

"My father was a butcher in Lodz," she said, "where there used to be the greatest market for kosher meat . Every day, cattle by the dozens were weighed. So one day, Pelte came there—he had fifty calves to sell—and saw me standing at the scale.

"I wasn't then like you see me now. My face sparkled like the sun. I had on a long white apron wrapped round and round. I could lift a hundredweight with ease.With a gaze not to be overwhelmed. REFERENCE TO PELTE NOT CLEAR. Amazing. And wasn't he stunned?"

That was how Dobe remembered the days when she and Pelte plighted their troth.

Everyone listened tipsily. And Kopl uttered this blessing for her, "May your bones break."

At this point, Bertshe, who had gone out for a moment, was heard at the door,"So? Then how many of them will be coming?"

Khayiml went to the window, and thrust his head out at the air vent and asked, "Who is it who's coming, Aharele?"

"Fifty Germans," Aharele Quartermaster, who had just come up was heard to reply. "And among them, you will find six officers and nine engineers."

Hearing such news, Khayiml called Aharele inside. A glass of beer was poured for him. Then Aharele told how he had received a document from the Commandant asking him to come to him. When he went, the Commandant asked, "Are you the quartermaster?"

"Yes," I replied, and showed him my papers.

"'Good. Good,' he said. 'You have to get fifteen lodgings for officers and engineers. There'll be thirty-five laborers sleeping in the Commandatura.'"

"'So. So." The listeners said and our wagoners wrinkled their foreheads thinking, "So many dogs at once."

And Aharele, warmed by the beer, started to tak about the war.

"What do you think? You think it's good? Listen to me. It's not good. I asked the Commandant, "Are they good people? He replies, 'I know one of them. A mad dog.'

"I say, 'My name is Ahrele and I have papers.'

"The Commandant was delighted with me. And why not? Isn't my name Ahrele?"

And suddenly Ahrele snatched up a handkerchief and hastily wiped his head and moustache, then, practically whispering into their ears, he said,"D'you remember who Ahrele is? D'you remember?"

Everyone shoved closer to him and though they all knew the story well, it could do no harm to hear it one more time.

Book II

Chapter Eight

"D'you remember when the 'mobilization' happened? That's when there was tumult everywhere. Well, when the Germans came—then things got bad. Gentiles snitched. Didn't "Matshizshak" tell the Russians that I, that *I,* Aharele, was a spy? As a matter of fact, they paid no attention to him. Later, when the order came to drive out the Jews—that very evening there was a patrol out on the street, and they heard a shot that came from Yenkl Feldsher's house. So they ran in and searched and dragged all the Jews out of there: Yitzkhok-Yoine, Zaynvl Melamed, Nute, Yenkl Feldsher and their wives and children, and they were going to shoot them all. In regular order—shoot them all.

"Yes, yes," the women agreed, and old Shayke remembering those days, stopped singing his little tune and stopped playing with the children, but sat quietly, quietly, as if the words that Aharele had uttered were alive and made imminent all those fears of the Russians.

"Then," continued Aharele, " the Commandant 's great coat got torn, so he asked the soldiers where there was a good tailor in the town who could put an invisible patch on the coat. So of course everyone mentioned me. So he comes in, the Commandant along with two soldiers and asks me, "Where is Ahrele, the quartermaster officer?"

"So, don't you think my wife doesn't start to faint? I, however, I say to him—you know me—without a bit of fear—'That's me, your excellency. I myself am Aherele, the quartermaster'."

"So he says—in a gentler voice—So, you have a long title," and he shows me the tear in his coat. 'Can you fix it so it's not noticeable?'

"'Of course' I reply.

"'Entirely unnoticeable?'

"'Of course.'

"So he takes off the coat and I myself sit down on the table. My sons thread the needles and I tell my wife to get the iron good and hot—so it will sputter. So she fills up an iron with coals, blows on them and sets the iron down on a brick near me.

"Laughing toward his soldiers, the Commandant put a hand out toward the iron—outside, it was good and cold. So I could see he was not a bad Russian. So I say to my wife, 'Khantshe, give His Excellency a cup of tea.'

"Hearing the Russian word, he asks me, 'What did you say?'

"So I say that I was asking her to make a cup of tea for His Excellency.'

"So he laughs with me and seats himself at the table and watches me repairing the coat.

"Meanwhile Khantshe has rinsed a ribbed glass, a Passover glass, with a saucer and a spoon—they gleamed. She set out the glass of tea with sugar, and four cookies—their smell permeated the room. He didn't wait to be asked.

"Outdoors, it had gotten good and cold. He drank, and then asked for another cup of tea. Then, he watched me working again. So I says to him 'Why are you watching my hands? You think they'll tremble and I won't be able to do my work right?'

"He laughed and said to the soldiers, 'Here's a good Jew,' then looked closely again, furrowing his brow as if he had grown angry. Then he asked me why I was playing with his coat instead of putting a patch on it. So I says, 'Your Escellency, what do you mean? Look, I'm just finishing the patch.'

"'Where are you finishing it?'he says. 'I don't see any patch.'

"Now I laughed out loud, and my sons joined me, so loudly that the Commandant might have thought that it was summer in the world, and that there was thunder in the heavens. And I say,'You're Your Excellency, you want to see a patch that Aharele quartermaster has made? A patch that Aharele quartermaster makes and draws the stitches together—well you may search for them with candles and you still won't find them.' And I show him the place where the patch was.

"He looks, searches but finds nothing—It was not until I took his finger and made him feel the stitches that he recognized just who I was.

"So he says to me, 'Aharele, you're a good fellow. What do you want for your work?'

"So I tell him it isn't ready yet? I have to resew the buttons.The last tailor sewed them on too weakly. And then I have to press the entire coat. So he says nothing more, but when I gave him the coat and he put it on and looked at himself in the mirror, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Tell me how much you want, and I'll give it to you.' And he's already got his hand in his trouser's pocket from which he takes out his wallet.

"So I says 'Your Excellency, I don't want so much as a kopek. Not so much as a groschen.'

"So he says, 'Tell me. Don't be shy. I'll pay you whatever you ask.'

"So I pluck up my courage—who knows from where the idea came to me, or the strength to say it—and so I say, 'Your Excellency, seventeen men have been arrested on a false accusation. A false accusation! They don't deserve to be shot. Completely innocent: Yitskhok Yoine, a patch tailor, who never so much as strikes a child of his own; Khetskl, a teacher... a teacher, Your Excellency.'

"And my sons are standing, astonished; and the two soldiers, like murderers, are looking at me, and my Khana, even as she's fainting away is making signs for me to stop talking—just to stop talking. But I pay no attention to anyone and I go on—may God's name be sanctified.

"I stopped only when I saw he wanted to say something. So he says to me, 'Aharele, you're a courageous man. Have you served in the army?'

"So I say, 'Of course, Your Excellency.. I served in the Siberian regiment, Seventh Detachment, Tailoring Section.'

"So he says, 'I like you.' Then again, 'You're a courageous man. Not many of them among the Jews. I'll ask about the men you spoke of. And if they're innocent, they won't be shot. They'll be turned loose—free.'

"We started toward him: I, Khentshe, my sons—to kiss his hand.

"He raises his hands and says, 'No need. No need.'"

Here, Aharele Quartermaster stopped to catch his breath and downed his glass of beer at a single gulp, then looked at his listeners. Looked silently, wordlessly, but the look in his eyes spoke more than words, more than all the languages in the world. He drank another glass, but there was no further narrative. Everyone knew, knew very well what had followed after a while. How the rabbi, of blessed memory, the rabbi with the long white beard, with his large fur-trimmed hat and his satin coat came to Aharele Quartermaster's house with the most respectable householders, bringing the nicest things. And how the table was laid with a white tablecloth . And how the rabbi drank *L'khaim* to Aharele. And how he put out his hand to him, and wished for him to be worthy of seeing the Messiah, because he had done such a great thing. Because seventeen people had been spared death on his account.

And how, later when all the Jews of the town were homeless in Warsaw, couldn't Ahrele have stayed in his own house as long as he liked; as long as his heart desired?

But he would not. 'Sometimes even bad things turn out well.' First, at the Community Committee, the best corner was Aharele's.Then he went to the prominent men. To the Petersburg

lawyers who sat in a palace in a suburb of Krakow. They questioned him closely about everything. They gave him a great deal of money and some sort of papers that were like a medal—which his son Itshele carries around in his wallet to this day and can't part from them for a minute—because he, too, is someone who's read books.

Then he was invited to someplace else—he himself doesn't know where. Everywhere, they were eager to see him; he was invited to sit on a plush armchair, and again he was questioned closely. And everything was written down in a book.

"You should know," he was told, "Your name will be known forever among Jews because of the miracle that happened because of you." And after the interrogation, they promised him that he would receive the best of everything from the Community Committee and then they let him go back to the homeless Jews.

And that was the story of Aharele Quartermaster that was widespread in that small town. And Yitskhak Yoine, to this day, has not forgotten that Aharele rescued him from a certain death. Every week—just as sure as God sends Friday—he sends him a quart of vodka, but Aharele hesitates to accept it..."I know... that it costs money."

When Aharele, having finished his story, turned to his beer it was already beginning to grow dark. Jews were leaving the late afternoon meal for their evening prayers. So his listeners got up. Only Grunem, having dozed off remained seated.

Kopl woke him. "May the cholera get your nose. You've fallen asleep."

Grunem started up and, seeing how dark it was out on the street he was, in a single stride, at the door from which he said, "Well, let's go to the wagons."

But Pantl would not be driving today. He himself wasn't sure. Maybe tomorrow.

Old Shayke got up, with the sleepy child in his arms. As he left, he covered the child with his ritual garment. "It's evening—and cool." And started off on the sidewalk, home to Faygele.

Book II

Chapter Nine

Srolke Biltz, the brother-in-law of Dobe, the butcher's wife, a young man, twenty-five or twenty-six years old, was already involved in several law suits over horses. They, the Germans, would not keep silent about such matters. With the Russians, if you swiped a horse, you slipped a ten spot to the gendarme and that was that. You were free as a bird. You could go on doing what your heart desired. Nowadays, however, they called you in… you put in time on a plank bed and sometimes you could find yourself with a rope around your neck for such a matter.

White Kasreal, had, right from the beginning when the Germans had just arrived, learned a lesson, and sat in jail for four months. And from that time on, his thieveries stopped.

Srolke, however, though he was indeed a butcher and had a butcher shop—in fact his mother-in-law's butcher shop, still, if someone came, between day and night and pointed to an unstolen animal—how was he to blame?. How can one ignore him and let him go away empty handed? And indeed,, for just such a reason he hadn't been seen for some six months out in the world's daylight. So Dobe stood in the butcher shop by herself and if there chanced to be a quarter of a kilo of meat for sale, one peered through the blinds to see whether there wasn't a requisitioning German around.

It was hard, very hard nowadays to be a butcher. When did you ever see a peasant come to market with a calf to sell. If you needed it, the peasant had suddenly turned into a nobleman, and wanted you to come to him. And, on the way, the calf was in danger, tenfold, hundredfold, a thousandfold. So you led it at night and through the field; and moving roundabout you led it into the courtyard, then you brought the ritual slaughterer and he slaughtered it.

On that same Saturday night when the two wagons, Kopl's and Yenkl's, had driven off, Pantl and the *shikses* had guided them a certain distance on the highway and on the way back they heard a terribly loud bellow of a cow, and saw people gathered in the street, as if at a fire. They ran quickly to the place and they saw happening what follows:

Srolke Biltz, as soon as it had grown dark, had led a cow across the fields. A cow weighing more than a thousand pounds, and so wild that only with the greatest difficulty was he able to bring her into town.

As he arrived in the courtyard, he was approached by a former employee of his brother's, now himself a butcher on his own, wearing a butcher's jacket that was entirely encrusted over with dried blood. When the blood smell reached the cow's nostrils, she tore herself out of Srolke's grasp and started running madly through the courtyard. They didn't have time to latch the gate and she was already on the other side running around and away from a fence that stood somewhere there and came out at the town marketplace. People ran after her, trying to catch her, but she ran into a house and from there into a small street and into the priest's garden.

There was a low paling around the garden over which she leaped, but her luck was so bad that she fell on the other side against the walls of a well. Because of the weight of her upper body, she fell so that her bent forelegs and her head landed in the well. There, after a convulsive shudder she slid further down until bellowing frightfully, she hung with her head over the water.

At that moment, Srolke completely forgot that he was not supposed to show himself and, along with everyone else, he pursued the cow. But when he caught sight of Yeger in the distance who was standing right in front of the Commandant's office, his brother's former employee poked him and said, "Srolke, d'you see Yeger? Disappear like a rabbit."

So Srolke disappeared. But he didn't leave the vicinity, instead he wandered about through various alleys until he showed up at the other side of the priest's garden. There, he sprang into a tree and from there narrowed his gaze, looking down to see what was happening to his cow.

The priest's garden was dense with people. Young and old, Christians and Jews. Everyone came to see how the cow would be pulled from the well. Thick timbers and ropes were brought from the slaughter-house. With the timbers they laid a scaffold; ropes were wrapped around a post both ends of which rested on blocks which turned on an axis. The ends of the ropes were lowered into the well.

Then what was needed was a strong man who would lower himself down; but it would have to be someone small, because there was not much room to move about. Pantl was, as it were, made to measure.

He lowered himself down and then and wound the ropes both around the cow's horns and her hind legs; then they began to turn the pulley, with Pantl helping, whether pulling or pushing or turning.

Though the men were of the strongest, the work was so hard that a couple of times they stopped to catch their breath.

The ritual slaughterer was already beside the well—because, in case her leg was broken, how could she be led to him?

It was a hard piece of work. But little by little, she was pulled from the well. And it was truly pitiful hearing how she bellowed and seeing the look in her eyes. Many of the onlookers, tears in their eyes, had to turn their heads away.

It was then that the thief, White Kasriel, suddenly felt that his hands, which, had for so long been at rest seemed to wake from their sleep. He understood that another such opportunity would

not happen so soon and did not deliberate long. He went off among the streets, made a quick check of various houses that came his way and stuffed whatever he could nto his pockets and under the skirts of his coat.

And, when the ritual slaughterer had finished his work with the cow and everyone had returned home – there was a terrible outcry in various houses with all sorts of tumult emanating from them.There were some who supposed at once whose work it was, because soon one could hear, "The White Head."

"Where is he?"

"Let's catch him."

But who knew where he was? And everything was hidden away at Shmuel Hunchback's who had already buried it somewhere so well that not so much as a rooster would crow knowing it. If they searched with ten heads—it was a lost cause. In any event, Kasriel was found and there were those who did not spare him blows, or jail. But what could come of it all, since nothing was found and since he brought witnesses in the morning who said he had been the last one to leave the well. So he was turned loose.

And Pantl, who had worked well and truly, went slowly through the market place, still feeling the rope burns on his palms. When he was nearly home, he saw Urke running toward him. Urke, seeing his father began to cry. "Poppa, I've been looking for you. Momma's screaming! Hodl says we have to send for the doctor."

So Pantl was distracted once more. After that entire Sabbath. Now what? Well, what's lost is lost.

He sent for the doctor. And there was activity all night in Pantl's house. Glike screamed, and the look in her eyes filled one with pity.

The doctor asked that the barber-surgeon be sent for and the two of them were in Glike's room into which no one else was permitted except Hodl, a couple of times.

Glikl's screams were terrible enough to reach the sky. Then all at once, there was silence.

But the silence was of the sort that provokes an even greater fear than the strongest, most lamentable of cries.

At that silence, old Du'ke who had fallen asleep sitting on a pile of logs, leaped up, half-dead, half-alive. The others listened intently, but all they could hear were the quiet footsteps of the doctor and the barber-surgeon. They thought, "Any minute now..."

It was then that Hodl appeared carrying a bowl that was covered with a towel.

There was a general movement toward her, but she put two fingers to her tight lips, put the bowl down and took two plates out of the cupboard, rinsed them and went silently back into the bedroom.

Pantl could hardly stand on his feetl. Those feet tugged and drew him there, toward the bowl. He went to it, bent over it, put his hand to the towel and lifted it from the edge of the bowl and saw something reddish, moist—but not something thin, like ordinary blood, but something else. Something else completely. He felt compelled to lift the towel up completely, but he felt that it was forbidden to do so. It was forbidden to look, though he did not know have any inkling of what it was that could be there. Just the same, he lifted the towel abruptly and saw an entire little person, red, moist, with little hands and little feet. A tiny head and face—the whole thing no bigger than one of the fingers of his hand.

Terrified by it, he uttered a roar, like a madman and ran to the door, opened it with a single movement and ran outside, his head bowed, as if something was hanging in the air above him; as if he was being pursued by demons.

At Shmuel Hunchback's, the *shikses* were getting undressed, talking about bygone days in Warsaw when there was no crumb of bread to satisfy one's hunger to be found. They were sincerely pleased with their present situation. There was food to eat; and money for clothes.

As they were talking this way, the kerosene lamp burned out and, through the upper window near the ceiling the summer moon shone in, a round, full, warm moon.

Stasha completely undressed, stretched herself out on her bed. She was smoking a cigarette and musing.

On the other hand, the conversation, and the moonlight together reminded Natasha of that night in Warsaw when they had decided to go with the wagons. She felt her heart stirring in some way. Whether something sad or joyful—she could not be sure what kind of feeling it was. And so, as before, she wanted to ask her aunt "What's happening to me?" But she did not ask. Instead, she pressed herself closer to her, put her arms around her and kissed her twice on each cheek and continued to lie there, watching the silver streaks of light drifting slantwise along the window-walls Then she fell peacefully asleep with a sweet smile on her lips and her arms folded over her bosom.

Thank God for that.

But Stefke was now in a mood such as she had not been in for a long time. Her eyes glistened as they had in the first… in the very first weeks. And perhaps even then not like now. She sat looking up at the high little window, and it seemed to her that she was suddenly experiencing a strange desire. And as she sat there that way, she felt herself enfolded by a peculiar and thoughtful silence. Through the window, she could see the street, the houses, the sidewalk.

And she imagined how the sidewalk unfolded until it came to an intersecting street where it broke off. There was a lantern there under which there was a broad shadow. In the shadow, there were girls moving about, winking, revealing their legs, the hem of a skirt, a glimpse of a slip. And the girls's dresses were short and wide, and light. And their hair was combed and permanented and moist. And from them, so it seemed to Stefke, there came a secret call; a command to her.

She looked at the darkened other bed and saw that her two colleagues were sleeping soundly.

Opening a box, she took out a bottle of perfume, sprayed it over herself, , then, with a bit of lipstick and a piece of kohl, she reddened her lips and darkened her eyelids then quietly left the cellar.

On the street which was the usual one for the town strollers, she hummed a little tune, lifted the skirt of her dress, and with her darkened eyes flirted in all directions, as she had long ago… as long, long ago.

Book II

Chapter Ten

The work, in Yitzkhok-Yoine's orchard, was progressing so well it was a pleasure to see. After the "Haman" was gone and the "good Commandant" had come, the work was carried on in broad daylight. Doors and windows were open and inside the room was airy and fresh. The long pieces of wood under the clay stoves, crackled and the flames shot out, licking the kettles over them. A half hour had to pass before the distillation was done. So, in the meanwhile they sat in the garden—or, better, not that nf they sat, they lay in a circle, stretched out on the green grass, their heads side by side and their legs off elsewhere in God's universe.

It was getting on toward evening. The sun that was going down directly across from the garden, threw its slanting beams through the branches of the trees, brightly mottling the grass. The fruit on the trees was ripe. From a broad pear tree with spreading branches huge pears that looked like women's breasts, dangled. Pinye, wandering about among the trees, regarded the fruit, picked up a branch, looked at its leaves, then approached the circle to show his expertise about this year's coming harvest.

Lyalke, lying on his stomach was in the course of telling a story about himself, when he was a bachelor and lived in Tchemalyev. People were deadly afraid of him. 3 He recounted with pleasure how he was walking out with a young woman there—actually talking about all sorts of other things—when, don't you know, a couple of good-for-nothings came up to him and asked to be paid protection money

"And what do you think? D'you think I paid so much as a groschen?"

A shaft of sunlight fell into the very middle of their circle, making the shadows shift with the movement of Lyalke's beard as it glistened when he raised and lowered his head.

"You're such a tough guy," said White Head, who knew all the hiding places. "So come with me. We'll fight, and we'll see who has courage."

"Good," Yosef replied, his beard fluttering in the mottled light and shade. "Let's fight." He stood, stretched out his long, slender arms until the muscles snapped, then put his hands together behind his head.

White Kasriel, a thick-set, man of average height, thrust out a foot before him and they started to wrestle, each one wanting to throw the other to the ground.

The onlookers who were lying down, turned over belly-up but, since the sun shone in their eyes, they sat up and watched the struggle going on between those two.

Laybele's face was completely flushed, but Urke, who had already downed a glass of ninety-proof, did not grimace. He stood, his eyes flickering with every movement of the battlers. His hands imitated their hand movements, as if he was taking part in the wrestling. He was completely engrossed, watching..

The two battlers spoke not a word. They shoved each other this way and that way. Yosef's shirt crept up around his neck, and, from the movement of his Adam's apple, one could see with what difficulty he was breathing His broad, four-cornered ritual garment, leaped and danced. Sometimes it seemed as if he was trying to cover his opponent's face;FARDEK ?153 give one of the two of them a FARDEK of his face, or lashing out he became entangled. That made the other one angry, Gritting his teeth, he yanked Yosef toward him, who— however unexpectedly—stood, with his feet planted , as if cemented in place. The leather belt that held up his trousers snapped under the strain, which made his trousers sag until, finally, they fell down. Urke, then, leaped forward and gave him a slap on his behind. There was an outburst of laughter and the battlers stopped fighting.

Lyalke turned quickly and grabbed the trousers with one hand and stretched his other hand out toward Urke's ear, who, not waiting for it to happen stuck his tongue out andstarted off, running over hillocks and ditches toward the gate.

Running, he encountered Brayndl, who was coming from the courtyard and who had something under her apron. He stopped, and lifted the hem of her dress, which started her cursing as he ran off, guffawing.

Now they all went back to the cabin; the kettles were already boiling. Now everyone sat or stood, resuming his work.

But none of this pleased Pinye. "What good is it doing me," he thought, "to work with the whiskey? It's true, I've earned back the money I invested. But I'm endangered once again."

So he stood thus, as his hands mixed the distillate. A dollop of brewer'syeast stuck to his fingers. Rubbing and squeezing it, he thought, "Yes. There's no point in talking about an orchard this summer."

Then, abruptly, he took his hand away from his belt, scratched a couple of times contentedly and seated himself beside the window and looked out at the evening descending from on high, growing darker and darker: and he concluded that he had had a good thought. "Yes, yes. I'll go partners with Mekhl. Yes. Yes."

And, since no sooner said than done, that was the end of his partnership with YitzkhokYoine and with Yosef. He had no sooner taken out his share, then he was off to Mekhl's and a partnership was concluded.

"Soap," Mekhl used always to say, "does not bring in as much as whiskey, but on that account, if one is caught—the fine is trivial, and most important of all, there is no punishment."

That's what Mikhl used to say. And Pinye had known that very well. Because, if he hadn't, would he have gone to "pour out the unclean in favor of the clean?"

Book II

Chapter Eleven

The smuggling surrounded the village like a fire that seizes everything and that creeps, smells and licks at every hidden place, every concealed corner.

Among those who "rode" there were not only those like Dovidl and Shayke but also a student who, if he needed to exchange or buy textbooks in Warsaw, created a package and covering it with his books earned his expenses.. Seeing how good it was to "ride" for textbooks, he rode three times a week. At home he would be sitting around any incase—"There were no lectures." The town's only teacher, who was hired by the community, and who, before the war, had kept the books of the credit union —which, since the outbreak of the war no longer existed; and whose wife, therefore, in aid of their livelihood, had to do sewing— he also "rode" .

Even one of the engaged daughters of the religious judge "rode." Because the judge, who had always had the right to sell yeast which an agent used to bring him from Warsaw and which he would distribute among the bakers. But nowadays nobody wanted to take on the task of bringing it because it was the most forbidden of the forbidden.

And the judge was sickly, or else, poor man, he would have "ridden" himself. So he could not, and neither could his wife. Poor thing, she was so fragile, alas, the wind would have blown her away. So the betrothed bride had to "ride", though it was not seemly—such a pretty, bright girl riding in Pantl's wagon? "But what can one do? " sighed the judge sadly. In any event, when finally she returned bringing with her the bit of yeast, then the eyes in his withered face lighted up and he raised them in praise of the Lord, blessed be He, who does not abandon so much as a worm

beneath the earth. Because if He had, God forbid, what would they have been able to do? Had the town ever paid him enough to get by?

On the other hand, it was not only the Jews who "rode", but the gentile women, too. At first, they went alone, leaving their daughters at home to clean up, to cook for the little ones; later, when things went well—and two hands are better than one—they took their daughters along, traveling by twos and threes. The mothers had done it as a practical matter, but the daughters, the young *shikses* , once on the road, crept down from the wagons, to put flowers and baubles in their hair. Those frivolous heads of theirs! And when they crept back into the wagon their eyes lighted up as they met the young fellows, or the gentile lads, who were hired to be in charge of Pantl's or Kopl's wagons. Even Dovidl had lost some of his innocence. He now knew how to unsnag a young *shikse's* skirt when she snagged it getting down from the wagons, catching a glimpse, in the meanwhile of a stockinged leg.

Sometimes, too, a young *shikse* would disappear with a youngster into a field where he helped her gather flowers.

Indeed, their mothers groaned when such things happened at midnight. They crossed themselves, "Ah, Jesus." And what it came to was that the mothers and their children were estranged from each other; because wherever there was a mother sitting in one wagon, her daughter was sitting in a different one. So they smuggled each on her own. And each of them had her own knotted handkerchief with money in it. The daughter had no notion what her mother had, nor did the mother know how much her daughter had. Ah, the young *shikses*, the young *shikses*! The pleasures they had brought to the road! And at midnight, if one was on the highway, one could hear the sounds of the smugglers' song.

It all ended well. That's how it was with the wagons, and the town could not remember when things had been as fortunate before. In the town, they said, "Such strange good luck." And they asked, "How long has it been since anything was confiscated?" And indeed, from the time of the arrival of the Commandant and his fiddle, the town had a happy time of it. Everything was entirely different. As the town put it, "There was fiddling by day; there was fiddling by night and work was being done on all sides. There were, indeed, ne'er do wells. But what mattered though was that if the chief was silent it was worthwhile for the underlings to shut their mouths. CHECK157 QUERY

But the wagoners were involved with more than the town. They encountered customs agents all along the way. And, at the end, the Warsaw agents. No small matter. Just the same, one rode, and, for the past couple of months, not so much as a penny taken from them.

The town, too, knew how to behave. When a ball was being planned for the district officers, and the Commandant, too, was getting ready to attend it, was he not sent a suit of clothes of Aharele Quartermaster's work? And was he ever pleased! It was then that he himself said that everyone could do their own work-- but it was understood, nothing was to be made too apparent; and if an informer should come to him, do you suppose he would be fooled? .

Especially for him, the wagoners had brought a watch with a chain, and a ring for his wife—because, after all, what was it that the smugglers did not know? Even that he had a wife in Germany. And so they bribed him with that. Now, neither the gendarmes nor the militia had anything to do except to stand watching the ration card committee, to maintain order and beyond that—nothing.

And Khavoinarski, looked well after the tavern. He did business with flour as well as whiskey; and it was said he was putting away barrels of money. His two daughters continued to pay their

visits to the Commandant, who did indeed have a wife, but he was after all, still a young man, and they could see that among the Schwabians, there were good looking and pleasing men.

The younger one, the blonde one dolled herself up every Sunday in the Krakow manner, so that the very stones under her feet burned. There were times when she was troubled seeing that the handsome Commandant paid more attention to her sister than to her. That bothered her and she was offended by him. When her sister asked her a question about a blouse—whether it was properly buttoned, or how it fitted—she replied by averting her head.

The word was "The blonde Khvoinarshtshike is jealous of her sister." In the town, there were all sorts of rumors concerning them. More than one woman had said said, regarding them, "Some are pretty, but I'm smart. I knew at once that the *shikses* were not proper folk." Such comments happened most often when one of the sisters was not well. But then, when, that fizzled out,— the town saw that tongues could wag about anything, even about *shikses,* even about respectable ones.

Just the same, the town could not avoid the malicious gossip which eventually affected the Jews.

Because, once, when the Commandant was sitting at the window looking down at the two sisters, he noticed that the younger one, the blonde, with whom, until now, he had been a bit distant, was beginning to please him more; and in some way the older one had an accusing look on her face —and she had become a bit thicker. He sat there, thinking: Is it my fault? Have I anything against her? Did I promise her anything.

And thinking that way, he came to the conclusion just the same to apply to the district chief for a transfer.

That very thing, then, is what affected the local Jews, like thunder in broad daylight. What do you mean? The Commandant is leaving? And nothing to be done. Everyone understood that it was the older sister's fault. That her face had turned somewhat weepy.

They all took leave of him; wished him well wherever he might go; and thanked him for his good treatment of them. The two sisters also came and it was seen that the brunette's eyes were now darker than before—evidently she had wept because he was leaving. But he could not stay any longer. His duty called him away.

Well then, he was gone. And the town began to anticipate the new Commandant.

The new one was an older man, and though they studied his face, trying to read his expression, they were unable to deduce anything from it. Then, a melancholy enveloped the town. The peaceful times were over. The seven good years were gone. Now was the beginning of a new order.

Then Yerukham, who from time to time liked to make an apt observation, said, "This Saturday, we read "Now there arose a new king…",meaning, a new Commandant has come.who will knead the Jews ."*Bekhomer v'balvanim* With mortar and with brick" With mortar means he will take away the contraband. 'With brick' means he will punish. "Someone else said angrily, "May your nose fall off.",

And experts weighed and measured and they came to the conclusion that, since there is more evil in the world than good, then the time has come, God forbid, for the evil now to begin.

That, as the town saw it, was the measure of the matter.

Book II

Chapter Twelve

It was a cloudy day. In the evening, a dismal fine sharp rain began to fall, it was so slanting, and so intense that it penetrated not only one's clothes and skin but it crept into one's very soul. So one wrapped one's self well in shawls and sat mutely that way. Buried or not buried within one'self. People looked, or did not look at each other; and no one knew what was wanted, or needed, or was lacking. A sort of chaos; of stumbling among shadows. And that's how it was sitting in the wagon which drove through the pitch dark. Nothing to be seen anywhere except at a distance and to one side, a glimmer that seemed to be an errant spark rather than coming from a specific place—some peasant's house.

For a while, now, there had been confiscations. Not, thank God, of everything. Small, but regular amounts. And it meant that every week one had to pay something out of one's pocket. That was another way to lose a fortune. Indeed, it was not good. But how would it be better if one did not drive? What was there to do? Could you get a job or what? So one drove.

It was even reported that the Germans were taking laborers to their country. Paying them well, but it was said that they slept in open spaces, in a sort of barracks and that they ate kicks and the peelings of kicks mixed with water, to be eaten along with a punch, a slap, a poke in the teeth. And hush, be still. Don't say a word.

It was indeed good, then, that there were Germans in the world who could nourish one. Then, which is more fortunate? Blows, or death, or to leave one's soul among the spawn of dogs, or to ride and put money away?

So one sat there, like mutes; despondently. But then a young man, a stranger, squeezed into the wagon, and between their knees. Not a member of the smugglers' clan. And he was eager to talk.

"Very well then. At least someone is talking."

He told them who he was. Until now, he had been riding to Plotsk. Not a bad district. You could be carrying as much as ten pounds—or twenty, if you like—there was no harm in that, so long as there were MALKI KHABLO 162. And so he rode on the steamship, and God, blessed be He, was helpful. There was a certain amount of blood-letting. The "chief" cost a couple of hundred mark every time; and at first, several small packages were made ready to be confiscated—that is, they were given to him. Because he could not return to the Commandatura and say that , 'The Jews had no "smuggle".'

"Well, never mind. So it cost us something.

And then one day it happened that, one day, the guard was changed. And the new fellow continually confiscated. Well never mind. We thought it would last another few days. And another few. And he would become like the others. But in the meanwhile, there is confiscation. Confiscation. Well, what do you think? They're confiscating, down to this minute. And it was getting particularly boring. To be constantly going to the same place." So he thought he would now ride with them.

The smugglers, hearing the of the lost smuggler, who, poor man, was searching for some improvement—shook their heads. It was their own affliction. What it came to was that the Germans had changed all the customs agents throughout Poland, because they had perceived that the rules were not being followed very diligently. Not as they should be. And yet, what would the Germans stand to gain even if they were not deceived? Nothing but that these new fellows would become

corrupt as well. Tasting, evidently, the taste of having one's palms crossed. But what's there to say? D'you think they cared about their own people, who were likely to be corrupted? /They only cared about the grain which, first of all, they would confiscate and then would send back to their homeland. *Their* homeland. Homeland.

"Woe, woe is us," cried a woman who was sitting in front of the wagon. But meanwhile, she was not visible and she seemed to be speaking from some dark place in the night. "Why are we guilty because they have a homeland?"

There was a general sighing and groaning and right after that, a silence that was greater and deeper than any silence in the world. "What and whose is the guilt?"

And the stranger recalled that this very morning the German had shouted "Thief" to him on the ship, because the Germans *were* stolen from. And the Germans retrieved it and sent it back to their home.

A whole crowd of thoughts jangled in the stranger's head about what constituted "mine" and "yours" and how, recently, everything had become mixed up; how his thoughts were not in their proper place and he could not think of an instance in which he could say of them "here they are—my thoughts." He had somehow acquired a head that was as airy as a windmill. But anyhow, if only he had something in his wallet...In fact, he had thrown it away too soon on the boat and run away until finally they had taken everything away from him , down to his last groschen.

That was the jangling in the young man's head, and he could not fix on a clear idea. Sitting thus, the poor fellow fell asleep, with his head bowed to his lap, like a quiet pullet. Shhh.

But that was not all. The Germans also had to take locks from doors, and the brass candlesticks on which candles were blessed. Then suddenly the young man dreamed— he did not know why—whether he had ever thought about such a thing before—that he was hanging a brass

bell in a bell tower, and then, in the midst of that, there appeared the German of today's ship who, with a violent shout, cut the chain of the bell which, with a clatter fell with him down from the tower. At which the young man woke up.

Feeling his shudder, everyone else nearly jumped out of their skins and, for the rest of the way, not a one of them could close his eyes.

Meanwhile, they arrived at a tavern and they stopped to water the horses. They all rested, sitting in the smoke-filled room, filling up glasses. "Troubles make us drink," said Pantl.

There, they met other wagoners, also smugglers from the same district. They chatted about this and that, and, though they were not asked, poured out their embittered hearts to each other.

When they went back outside, a shudder passed through their bones as they silently took their places in the wagons. The swaying of the wagons and the melody of the wheels rocked some of them into a deep sleep. But when toward dawn the sky began to pale and the rain, which had been dripping for three days, stopped, what manifested itself was a clear autumn day in whose air one could feel the silence and the softness of the snow that would be coming soon. At that, they all woke up to see the forest, seeming frozen, before them.

It was then that all of the smugglers felt themselves paralyzed. Their limbs as if snagged. A sort of white vapor came out of their mouths—not as if their mouths had been rinsed but as if their tongues were covered with fuzz and would not move.

And there was Pantl, who lived and slashed and whipped and poured out his anger at the horses whose hides, covered with dew glistened. Pantl's head, after nights of not sleeping , was busy with heated considerations of new routes to take that would outwit the guards; how by new ruses to safeguard his contraband.. And that was why he lashed his horses so fiercely.

Only Dovidl, then, was asleep. His head was buried more deeply than ever in Stashke's lap. Some of the time he was whistling through his nose and breathing through his mouth in time with her breath.

Book II

Chapter Thirteen

It was raining once again and the sky was dark as ink in the evening as they were driving once again toward Warsaw. Now they drove with greater wariness. Some went ahead to scout out the road. Those on foot took red, green and yellow lanterns with them, and in addition one simple lantern whose panes were clear. The colored lanterns had each a different meaning. If, for instance they caught sight of the customs men in the distance, they showed the red lantern. That was the sign that the larger bundles should be thrown from the wagons into the fields, into ditches, into water—anything except to leave them in the wagon. When the customs men came and searched, they had to go away empty handed.

If they saw a car, they showed a green lantern, then nothing was thrown from the wagon and everyone sat still, not so much as letting vapor escape from their mouths.

Tbere were times, too when the Germans gathered together in bands of twenty or thirty and went off to create an ambush.They went across the highway, across the fields, intent on surrounding the wagons from all sides. When the circle was set they started to close in on the wagons and, with every step their circle constricted. By then, there was no way to escape from their hands.

In such a case, those who were advance outriders showed their yellow lanterns. At that signal, the wagons would be hurriedly turned around, and they would drive with all possible speed back to town.

The smugglers drove slowly, feeling secure, because today, the lanterns they saw moving steadily forward and covering ground were those with transparent panes. They moved onward, peering into the darkness, as they left the *versts* behind.

Then, all heads suddenly turned. There was a sound that reached them from behind and the side of the road where the town was.

Looking back and seeing that the uncolored lamp was moving farther and farther, farther and farther away, they did not know what to think. And the sound from behind was getting closer and closer, and louder.What they soon understood clearly was that it was a wagon moving at high speed. Pantl was even able to recognize that the wagon was being drawn by more than two horses. They were puzzled and disturbed because, though they knew that it could not be the Germans who, when they rode out traveled either in a carriage or, simply on horseback, they wondered who it was who was driving so swiftly at night?

Then suddenly, they could distinguish two kinds of sounds: one was from an oncoming wagon; and the other, a little farther off than the wagon, the sound of horsebeats. This frightened them all and Pantl turned his horses and brought them to a stop right beside the ditch at the side of the road as he signaled to the outriders to come back because they might be needed in case they were dealing with robbers, though, since the coming of the Germans such things were no longer heard of.

And now Pantl recognized clearly the sound of a wagon coming closer and closer and drawn by a span of six horses. The noise was so loud in their ears that they could not hear each other speaking—or, even, yelling.

Pantl was utterly confused. He knew who it might be. He remembered the legend that was current about two brothers—men from Volye, a Warsaw suburb. Smugglers. But not exactly low fellows like Shayke, like Berel, like Fayfke, or, even, like Pantl. These people did not move without bullets or good daggers.. And whenever they rode out, it was with six horses harnessed. Speeding like devils. And what he could not understand was how they came to be on this road. "What are they doing in this district?"

He was not quite finished thinking that thought when out of the dark there emerged a strangely dancing creature, which it would seem had had no lights on until now when suddenly it showed white lanterns.

While their horses moved with lightning speed, the two brothers stood in a wagon on white flour sacks whose whiteness gleamed in the night. Seeing, in the revealing lamplight, the wagons at the side of the road, they brought their horses to such a sudden stop that both the wagon shaft and the horses' heads were lifted in the air as if thrust upward. . In the blink of an eye, Pantl was surrounded by a crowd of impudent young fellows , who had, evidently been hidden inside the wagon.

Pantl needed only a glance to know that the two on the wagon were the Gurtshitzkys, who rode with gang members, but whose faces he had never seen but about whom he had heard a great deal. They, the Gurshitskys, looking over the people in the wagons for a moment, said, "There are smugglers here. Good.".

And at once, they scattered on all sides. At that instant the sound of an oncoming rider who, hearing that the wagon had stopped, called out from a distance, "Halt, or I shoot."

As he approached, however, seeing that there was no one on the flour sacks , and hearing the sound of their voices in the field, he paid no attention to the wagon nor of the others that stood at the side of the road. Spurring his horse, he started off after those in the field, calling, "Halt, halt. Or I shoot."

It seemed that they did indeed stop. But in that moment, a shot was heard, that made Pantl tremble, thinking that the German had killed one of the youngsters; and he did not know what was better to do now—to stand still, or to run away.

Then, from the other side, a voice was heard, "Fellows! Quickly! Come here. Quickly." .

Again, Pantl did not know what had happened. But he felt as if his feet moved on their own. And when his outriders came back, they all ran off into the field in the direction the pursuing German had taken. As they ran the heels of their boots dug into the clayey soil, so that they arrived with difficulty at a dreadful sight. The outriders,stood, paralyzed, their lanterns in their hands, looking at the German who, his head bloody, hung down from his horse.

That scene, in the bright light on their side, enclosed by the deep darkness of the night that came from below the horse's belly on the other side and the shadows receding off into the distant world, filled them with a dreadful fear. Their skins crawled..

Many of them turned away meaning to go back to the wagons and run away, run away, the sooner the better, from this dreadful place. But they were stopped by a gentile boy's shout, "Bury him," he called as he showed himself nearby.

And, as if it had been planned earlier,a couple of scamps carrying lanterns appeared on both sides of the road, as lookouts, in case anyone might be coming to interrupt them. The others went to work, digging a grave, using , using sticks, iron rods, even their bare hands. And when they had hauled the German's body into the hole, they felt as if they had had a great deal of whiskey to drink. They kicked the corpse, shouting to him, "Lie there, Kraut.""",and someone else cried, "And shut up!"

And still another, "And don't take our goods any more. "

The two Volye brothers urged them on, and when it was all done and the earth had been trodden down as smooth as it had been before, they went back to the wagons.

Pantl felt that there was something wrong about all this. Who could say what would come of it?" Taking up his whip, which he had earlier let lie on the wagon—undoubtedly because he had been so disturbed, -- anxious, first of all, to get away from this place, from that dreadful grave, but

he was approached by one of the first of the two scamps, who, his eyes bright as two sharp knives, put his forefinger to his mouth and said, "Remember! Bite your tongue. Don't dare do anything. Remember."

And later, when two of the scamps boys had tied the German's horse to theirs, and had gone off with the same *éclat* with which they had come, as if they were on their way to a wedding or to a betrothal party, the sound of the boy's words echoed for a long time in Pantl's ears, and the memory of his piercing look also lingered.

It was then that they saw that Black Berl was fainting, and that Shayke's hands and feet trembled. Black Berl's eyes were closed, and he could not breathe, and there were moments during which they thought he might die. But with the help of God, he caught his breath, after which for a long while, he was silent, as if he had a bone in his throat that would move neither up nor down. Finally, he coughed himself clear and sat up, just like at the resurrection of the dead.

That made them all feel relieved, because they had thought he might never come to himself.

Pantl straightened out his harness. All the boys and the *shikses* resumed their places in the wagon. It was so dead silent, there was not so much as a dog there to watch them go. And they drove off.

Book II

Chapter Fourteen

Urek knew who the Gurshitskys were as did the Prague horse-merchants. If there was a risk to be taken or a special job to be done it was turned over to them and they took it on with with pleasure. But there was a time when they quarreled between themselves. There was once a quarrel between them and the Prague gang: Aharon Totter, Ber Dayzshe , Yoske Bik, Khaske Broder, Mayerel Zilberman, Shmelik Oyrenshnayder, Boydl Kotlet, Vadrinski, Yoel Boikh and others. So it was clear that when such a crowd goes off together and… and they come upon the two brothers" and two more of their pals, Yan, the blonde and Yuzshke—that when such folk get too close to each other, they start in first with sticks, and the sticks are steel-tipped as well as gnarled in the middle.

But the older of the Grushitskys got up and said, "Brothers, go home and get some sleep. You stink of whisky. You're all drunkards."

They say, "Then give us back the horse."

"Horse? What are you talking about?" he replies. "I know nothing about it; and neither does my brother."

They say, "We're not leaving until you give us back the horse."

He says, "In that case, it's not my problem. Beat your heads against the wall. I'm leaving. But be careful, lest one of you makes a mistake."

They say, "Well, we'll see."

Then there's one of them with a knife and another with an iron rod—and blood spurting on all sides. They were slaughtering each other. It was clear that more than one of them would end by lying there. Because when the Gurshitskys fight, they're not fooling. And in less than a minute, the

younger brother took out a pistol and laid out Rakhmael Bruzde. His goose was cooked and turning cold.

The Praguers, seeing that—and there stood Antik, his finger once again on the trigger—seeing that, they turned tail and ran off in all directions to their various mouse holes. But by then Rakhmael Bruzde was lying on the ground, and five minutes later he was dead.

That's what the Grushitskys can do. And the Praguers were wary of what might come. You don't fool with the Grushitskys.

Urek told all this as they rode on their way. When he was done the younger ones sat silent, their mouths open. And all of them felt a roiling in their guts, so that, out of respect, they were ready to prostrate themselves before those tough guys..

"Now that's what's called a tough guy." And the silence intensified as, evidently, they became engrossed in their thoughts.

It seemed to them that they, too, were tough guys.There was a Fayfke, or a this one or a that one , but what did that mean? And they felt small, diminished compared to what they had seen that night with their very own eyes.

There were, for example, tough guys to be found in the town: a Menashe, a Khayiml Kesar, a Pantl, a Kopl, and a Pelte! But come on! And they felt themselves seized by an inward spasm.

Except Pantl, who had not been asleep and who had also heard the story as it was being told. His thoughts about himself were different. These youngsters had been born in a bad time. They ought to have known him, Pantl, ten or fifteen years ago. Or when he was at the same age as his Mendl or Fayfke. He, too, could tell stories about himself. But what do they know, except to creep about with *shikses*? Or to go to the library to read a book, as their friend Itshl did. "In our days there were no libraries. To spend Saturdays in a library—that didn't happen then."

Yes, he too had enjoyed a bit of a dance. To *live*, brothers, they don't know how to live.

That was how an aspect of Pantl's past revealed itself to him, and it seemed to him that the world had gone backward, was not what it had been and was considerably changed.

Book II

Chapter Fifteen

Outdoors, it was still raining and the soaked tarpaulins were beginning to leak occasional drops of water. But those inside the wagons paid little attention to that. Who, just now, could think of rain? They told each other the kinds of stories that made their hair stand on end. And stories—by no means foolish ones… and when Yurok stopped his telling, then Fayfke, who was himself no miscarried child regarding such matters, . So he told about the Caucasus, some kind of story about a great assassin who called himself Khan and who, in the course of a single night had piled up on a man's doorstep some sixty slaughtered bodies of that man's family so that he would encounter them when he walked out of his door in the morning. And other such tales that made his listeners forget that they were simple smugglers, but rather, as they listened to the tales, that they were within a great forest ; in deep caverns and in frightful, very frightful deserts.

They became so deeply engrossed that they had no sense that they were in motion on the road. Who spoke of the raindrops that, one by one, were continually dripping down on someone or other's forehead? Certainly, they did not feel that. And so, when they had told narrative after narrative, and had been rocked like little children and lay, cuddled down, with their heads in the laps of the *shikses*, there was such a feeling of peace in their hearts, that they felt as if nothing at all had happened on that night. Just as if no German at all had been buried.

Not until they came to the tavern did they meet Yenkl's wagon which was already returning home. There, they were all cheerful and drank whisky to celebrate that they had "made it through."

Shayke, Berl, and Dovid took turns keeping guard over the goods in the wagon. The two older ones went into the tavern first. Then when they returned Dovidl went in. And they drank steaming glasses of tea.

Dovidl was very pleased to be indoors. Because it had been cold, he enjoyed being in the humid, smoke-filled room. And as he drank, he enjoyed seeing the gentile boys and the *shikses* who sat at the tables or near the stove which, was as large as a baker's oven. Some of those sitting there were already dozing off. When it came time to leave, the other stuck them with pins or put splinters up their noses.

As Pantl readied himself to drive on, Yenkl's people told him that there was talk that the customs men today was going to be very severe and advised him therefore to leave some of his "goods" there. The news made Pantl and his people very unhappy, but they would not think of leaving anything behind. In that case, one might as well drive back.

Then they all excitedly remembered what had happened a few miles back. And in their minds they saw a link between what had happened with "them" and their own "goods" which would not simply "pass through" because of those others. So they cursed the very bones of those "birds" who had come so unexpectedly their way. They knew that nothing good would come of it.

Pantl went on foot some distance beside the horses, thinking of the flour he had left in the inn. "May his head swell," he said, cursing Golkop, who had imposed limits on him, Pantl; who kept his hands tied and would not let him do what he wanted—just as if he, Pantl, was not Pantl but Golkopl\'s errand boy.

He asked Mendl, "How much flour was left with Golkop?"

"One hundred and sixty pounds,"

"And he's owed me fifty marks for a long time."

"Why do you do business with him?: Are you afraid you won't find any customers?"

Pantl did not answer his son's questions. He remembered very well his encounter with Golkop—when, at the inn, Kopl had sold a small amount of flour to someone else. Everyone was

afraid of Golkop. What he said was law. What he did was done. Still, Pantl felt that that could not go on much longer. It must not go on any longer. Could he, Pantl, be led by the nose like a boy? What? Weren't his goods as good as anyone's? When he, Pantl, brought some flour or grain that fellow took it away immediately and only paid for it that evening. And if Golkop had it confiscated, you stood to lose your money. It would be as good as stolen. And yet, he, Pantl, worked hard, risking his health to earn something by smuggling. Working night and day, without food or drink. No, no. From here on he would know what there was to be done.

And yet when he considered the matter he saw that there was nothing he could do. Now those youngsters and the *shikses* were free to do what they wanted; sell to whomever they pleased. But he, Pantl, was a a bound slave, because he had a wagon and a couple of horses. What if the fellow poisoned his horses? No matter what, no matter which way he turned things were in a bad way.

But when one glimpsed the Warsaw customs officers' fires such thoughts were cast aside and indeed, one stopped thinking altogether. The smugglers all gathered up their bundles, put them on their heads, carried them in their hands or on their shoulders and started off to the left or right across the fields in order to get around the officers so as to reach Warsaw by various side streets.

Moving across the field they sometimes tripped over stones they had not seen in the dark; or they slipped and fell in the muddy places. Then whoever was nearby would stop to help them up and put the packs back where they belonged. Sometimes they stumbled into one of the plentiful marshy spots on their way. And indeed, it was a wonder that they didn't catch cold, standing, as they sometimes did, up to their bellies in cold, filthy water. But smugglers could not pay attention to such things. It never entered their heads to say, "It horrifies me." If they fell, they got up again and continued to run though it was enormously difficult to pull one's feet out of the sticky mud. But one supposes that that didn't matter to them. To them, carrying sacks of flour weighing eighty

pounds or more was child's play. As Fayfke and the *shikses* ran, their heels tapped the ground as if they were dancing.

And now it was apparent how much more necessary for Pantl a "bride" was than for the others. If not Natasha, who would have picked up one of his bundles and run with it some seven or eight versts over such difficult terrain. He and Mendl had to stay with the wagon. He could not leave the horse and wagon to stand there, abandoned. Who would guard them? Old Sheyke? He himself needed looking after to keep from being robbed.

So, facing facts, he picked up two large packs, tied them together and tossed them onto Natasha's shoulder. She, too, as realistic as he, stood up, straightened her shoulders, and adjusted the two packs, putting one behind and the other in front and, along with the other smugglers, and, without so much as a scowl on her face, she started off at a run. When she started to get wet, first at her heels then above her heels, then still higher and so on until the wet reached her knees. At that point, what would be the point of scowling? That wouldn't be fitting for a smuggler.

Book II

Chapter XVI

On the other side of the customs men, in the suburb, they all met at Moishe Becker's. He bought their flour and he also helped them sell their grain. The smugglers caught their breath there, in the bakery, in the trench facing the oven, where they flung themselves down on the ground facing the blast of powerful heat that blew over them. In the course of ten minutes, they were entirely dried out down to the last thread of their clothing. And then they experienced a great lassitude which, it seemed to them, was so utterly fine, so sweet. The ylooked at the fire, seeing its red tongues leaping about with a hasty restlessness , crackling, flicking out in all directions, swallowing up more and more wood. And in the place where, a moment before there had been wood, there were now dancing fiery tongues.

Their eyes grew brighter, and they felt more at ease and they looked toward the windows which,the sky, was beginning to turn blue with the approach of day. And all at once they felt that there was indeed a God in heaven, and they felt their hearts expand and all of them the gentile boys and the shikses, in a corner, got down on their knees, and the Jewish young folk moving about back and forth in the room, as if they were saying their prayers.

But Shayke and Berel borrowed prayer shawls and *tfiln* from Moishe and went off to say their prayers to God.

Pantl was already waiting for them with his wagon. He had had a terrible fright involving the customs men, but It had "gone through". Though indeed they had shouted at him and been angry at him in their language. They had sent customs men out on the road. "No question about it, the smugglers are out their somewhere." But soon enough, the customs men returned having found no one. Not one.

The Germans had been perplexed. "With such small amount...was it worth while to come with a wagon? To Warsaw? It must be that they have outwitted us." So, with a sort of rage, they had flung themselves upon the wagon, and decided to confiscate whatever in the way of foodstuffs they found heaped in a pile. Pantl pleaded with them, "Please don't take the goods. . It's permitted to carry it. "

And old Sheyke, whose skill with German was famous in the town, said, "Eminent Sergeant, have pity on an old man. Have pity."

The Germans made no reply, but they began to talk so swiftly among each other, moving their mouths with such speed that that it sounded like caterwauling. No one could understand a word.

It was amazing that they could understand each other.

And they did not confiscate anything, except a small bundle of some ten pounds. So, as if he had had the best of that bargain, Pantl ran off and did not stop until he came to Moishe Becker's house.

His pals had already sold their stuff and that began to niggle at Pantl. To sell or not to sell. On the one hand, he could get a good price here; at least a five spot more on everything here than at the inn. And ready money. On the other hand, he was a bit afraid. Pantl Furman was afraid!

Mendl was troubled because his father would not sell and began to rebuke him. "Sell, so I can have the five spot."

And Natasha said, "What are you waiting for, Pantl? Sell and make an end to it."

"May the first thunder strike him," said Pantl and went to the baker not far from their and sold him all of the flour and the grain too. And now he would not have gone to the inn had it not been for some hardware that an iron dealer wanted him to transport home and to get the money that was owed to him.

They seated themselves, singing cheerfully on the wagon; each of them with his own money hidden, but the older folk kept their money in the pockets of their outer garments. At the gate of the inn, Mendl got down from the wagon, and, taking the horses' reins turned the wagon around, leading them over the gutter which, there, was considerably higher than the street. The horses strained, their legs on one side, their heads on the other. The wagon did a little dance over the gutter and Mendl leaped along with them. But he was no sooner in the courtyard than he received a blow and he felt his cheek burning like fire. As he tried to look around, he received a second such blow. He grew dizzy and fell and banged his head so hard on a stone that one might have thought that at any moment... any moment his skull would crack. Pantl was now on the ground, ready to fight with Golkop and he, too, received a blow like his son's. But Pantl, though half Golkop's size, was already flailing with his fists,growling at the same time like a wolf; he used his fists without seeing where they landed. He became more and more frenzied, energized by his own blows and it was evident that his force was increasing; that his muscles were hardening; that his veins like wires were swelling to the bursting point.

Had anyone ever seen the way Pantl fought? In the synagogue there had only been ordinary Jews. Someone like Urke. That did not matter.\Now, however, seeing him at a distance, and observing the powerful man with his short AYNGEBUNDEVTE hands, 182 and feet, his head thrust forward he was a bear on his hind feet who with his upper paws wanted to grind and rip apart everything his hands could reach.

Golkop, however, about whom one could not tell where his skull ended and where his neck began, Golkop's neck turned red and the bald pate swelled over his short fur collar . He did not fight with his fists. He was a real son-of-a-bitch. . He opened wide the flat of his hand and, without striking as swiftly as his opponent, but slowly, observing first where Pantl's blows would fall, and

warding them off with his elbows or hands, and guiding his own blows to their target, Each of his blows resounded as if they had struck metal. That was Golkop, and that was how he fought.

There were others who tried to mix in, but Pantl, his face red and swollen was so engrossed in his work that he would not hear of letting up; or indeed, he did not hear. Not until he was forcibly pulled away and he saw his son, all but dead, in the hands of the *shikses*, and the gentile boys, that he shook himself, like a horse, Then he looked again at his enemy whose glistening skull was covered with blue "entrails" and whose face had no fewer swellings—the size of potatoes-- than his own.

Golkop cried, "Son of a bitch. Devil. Scoundrel."May a growth grow in your arteries. He's going to sell in *my* inn?.May he burn in hell.

By now, Pantl was with his son who was soon after taken to a barber-surgeon who put KROPLES in his mouth 183. Mendl promptly opened his eyes and looked around as if not recognizing anyone, then closed his eyes again.

The barber-surgeon then washed away the blood that was beginning to clot, then he bandaged his whole head after which he told them to put him to bed, and to apply ice to his head because he was very concerned that there might be an inflammation of the marrow.

It was easy enough for him to tell them to put Mendl to bed. But where? With whom? Who, here, would give Pantl a bed? Whom did he know in Warsaw? So he considered making a bed in the wagon with straw and blankets and take him home that way. The barber-surgeon, however, warned sternly against doing that.

"Because," he said, "he's already lost so much blood, and the vibrations of the wagon will open his wounds again and you won't be able to get him home.

That frightened Pantl. But what was there to be done? One couldn't stay there. So Pantl poured out his heart to his "bride, who gave him a very good idea. "What's the problem? Can't you

leave him in our house. Hardly anyone comes there. And there are three beds." Hearing that, her two companions also said, "Of course, of course. You don't have a better idea." And indeed no one could think of a better idea.

They got a coach, and threw in all the coats and shawls and laid Mendl carefully on top of them. As he was being carried, he opened his eyes, but he was still unaware of what was happening to him. It was clear the youngster was languid, failing.

When he was installed in the bed, the doctor was sent for who wrote prescriptions and instructed them not to give the patient anything but those medicines. He too told them to apply ice to Mendl's head.

Pantl did not understand the meaning of the glass tube the doctor put under Mendl's arm. He said, "What? Let's put some cupping glasses on him; rub him down with turpentine to make him sweat. Nothing else." But Pantl grew frightened when Mendl spoke out of his fever,

He approached Mendl on tip toe and saw how his face turned alternately red, then dark, then yellow. He leaned against the bedstead and looked more closely at him. It seemed as if in some way he was begrudging him.

He could look no more. He turned his head away, engrossed in thought.

Book Two

Chapter Seventeen

It bothered Pantl that he had poked Mendl at night when he had wanted to trade places with him, to take the reins so that he, Pantl could go inside the wagon to rest for a while. What did he have against him? Wasn't he a hard worker for his age? And what was the reward for his hard work? Sometimes Pantl gave him a few marks for something or other. Well, he needed that, too. And—was their relationship like that of other parents to their children who look out only for themselves?

And Pantl felt depressed at comparing him to others. Not merely to other wagon drivers, but to children from genteel homes who had taken up smuggling and who put their money away for themselves. Among the pals, there was "your money is my money". But their parents could die and they would not turn over their earnings to them. As for him—had it ever occurred to Mendl to keep the money he had earned? If he needed a few marks, he took them. And even if he didn't need them, but said, "Papa, I need some." And if I had the money, didn't he get it. A suit, if he needed it. Or shoes? Reached into my pocket But to take it himself?

And thinking these thoughts, Pantl acquired respect for his own child, as well as a certain pride. "Pantl has a son. A truly proper son."

And wasn't Pantl right in thinking yesterday that the world was no longer the way it had been? Even someone like Berl, who, from the time he became a smuggler, was perilously close to death. Was he even beginning to be bothered by the mischievous ways the young men and women behaved? Then someone like old Shayke...and then there was the respectable Jew, Reb Yidl, who sent his daughter to the sergeant. And Pantl? Did Pantl, God forbid, have anything to be ashamed of as a wagon driver? Or of his Mendl?

But what was to be done.now? Mendl could hardly enunciate every tenth word. And suddenly it struck him that the boy was truly sick. And meanwhile, the night was advancing. And they had to drive home.

"What's to be done?" he asked Natasha. Leave him alone? Can one? He'll perish like a bird," he said suddenly, in a voice that caused a constriction in the throats off those who heard him. They cast pitying looks at him and one might have thought that they were about to cry. But Pantl said quietly, "It would have been better if they had taken the goods.. Then it wouldn't have come to this."

Then Natasha touched his shoulder, the way genteel people might have done and said, "Mendl is sick. Very sick. Everyone has to go back home; and he can't be left here alone. I'll stay here."

It seemed very natural to them all. That—and nothing else—was the right thing to do.

Pantl left her a supply of money so that she could pay for the doctor and for the barber-surgeon to visit, so that the patient would not lack anything, and so that she would not need to be sparing with money.

Then all but Natasha, left. Pantl sat sadly in the wagon, regretting that he had sold his goods to someone else. "What's done is done," he thought. "By us, in *my* town, I have the say and people obey me; Here, however, *he* has the say."

And, recalling *him* he felt as if all his bones were aching and, as if he had been attacked by bees, he felt shooting pains in his face and hands. Once again, he was silent.

It was not the pains that bothered him. What was constantly in his mind's eye was the image of his ravaged son, Mendl, whom he had left behind in a strange town in an unfamiliar house.

"Yes," he thought. "Now Urke will have to ride in place of Mendl. One can't ride alone. There's no other way to do it." All at once he had been left without his son and without his "bride". Pantl felt himself deeply grateful to the *shikse* . Who would have been willing to stay behind. To lose

money because one did not ride?. And he decided from now on to be a father. And not to beat Urke any more.

At the tavern, when h had downed several glasses for courage, Pantl's mood was considerably lightened and on the way home he kept thinking, "How was it that Golkop learned so quickly that I sold stuff at the inn? "

Some time later, he learned the simple way that that happened. Golkop had had one of his people posted at the inn who kept an eye out on all the wagons that stopped on their trip and he would report who had been selling and how much to Golkop by telephone.

But now, Pantl, thinking about the matter was perplexed and could not arrive at an explanation. In his mind, he thought over each of the gentile boys, each of the Jewish youngsters, each of the *shikses* and all of the adult gentiles. Maybe one of them had reported where he had made his sale. But he could not believe it was any of them. Because smugglers, whatever else might be said of them, smugglers were certainly not informers.

Book Three

Chapter One

Mendl lay ill and the blonde *shikse* had not left his bedside. She needed to go down to buy something but she was afraid to leave him alone. Only when he was distracted or dozing did she put her shawl on and, shutting the door without locking it, tiptoed silently down and bought quickly what she needed in the stores, then returned to the room. At first, the room in which she had lived for nearly a year made a certain impression on her as did the fact that she was alone in the room with someone sick. It reminded her of her mother who had lain ill in a hospital. Then, too, she had been frightened, when she had been allowed to spend the night there. And there, there had been many people in the same ward: some ten patients, perhaps more, as well as attendants.

That feeling so enveloped her that she sat frightened, facing the sick Mendl, not daring to turn her head away. And he stared at her with such strange eyes and spoke such strange words that seemed bizarre to her. Not only because they were fragmented or because of their tone—which were symptoms of fever patients, but the very words themselves that he spoke to her -- words in another language. In Yiddish.

At the beginning, he talked without stopping for a moment. He prattled on and on. Some of the words she *did* understand. She herself could speak the Yiddish words that related to smuggling. And he spoke of the customs men of flour, of his father and mother; and of all the smugglers. Once, when, evidently, he believed himself to be sitting in Elye's tavern with his comrades, he called out, "Bertshe, you ought to have taken a good look at those *shikses*. Pure gold."

And then, as if he was talking to Yurke, "D'you hear, brother? I tell you, that's some girl, that Natasha."

Then his words became addled—half Polish, half Yiddish. Words unrelated to each other. And then he wanted to get up. "I have to slap Urke about." She struggled with him then. And as she bent over to pick up the icepack meaning to put it back on his head, she found herself looking into his eyes. Terrified, she ran to the table, crying, "Oh dear God!"

And now Mendl was on the floor, tapping the walls and, not finding anyone, he ran about the room his fingers cramped, his face inflamed. His eyes were so bright, like a yellow leaf turning golden in the sun. Encountering Natasha, he pulled her close, plucked at her, giving off such heat that it interfered with her breathing. And he, as if he was in his right mind, kept crying, "Where's Urke? Where?"

Then he ran about, , returning once more to the bed crying—this time in a different tone—"The Germans are coming. The Germans. Grab the bundles. Quickly."

The sound of his voice made her flesh crawl, because it seemed to come out of a grave. So low; so permeating. And she was filled with a great pity for him. Such pity! She put her arms around him, and her hands turned immediately moist. Weeping, she begged him, "Mendl, come to bed. You're sick. Oh, Jesus. Oh, darling."

He looked at her, as if had understood something. Little by little, he lowered his head then, as if he was a child in pain, he said, "I'm cold."

And she could feel him getting colder and colder. The dampness of her hands holding him turned very cold. Terribly frightened, she put him back in bed and covered him with the quilts. She put his coat over the quilts; his trousers, a shearling and everything else that she thought might warm him.

He turned toward the wall, and lay there that way for a few seconds, then turned back around. Natasha, watching him, did not know what to do. She felt an urgent need to go for the barber-

surgeon. She saw how Mendl's teeth were chattering. Then all at once, he flung off the covers and he was hot once more. She stood, the tears running down her face, scared to leave him alone. No, she would not leave him alone. But he grew calm gradually and lay still, looking out of the window. Then she lighted a fire in the kitchen, a large fire. And the flames, and the heat that filled the room comforted her. She ate a piece of bread, then resumed her seat facing Mendl. She was no longer as frightened as she had been before. She was acquiring a certainty; a certainty that Mendl would recover. But when the barber-surgeon came and read the thermometer and saw that his patient had a temperature of 40 degrees, he ordered her to go at once for the doctor. She ran out, and, finding the janitor's boy told him to run for the doctor, then she came back to the room and stood at the window, watching until the doctor came.

The doctor knew that something had transpired. When she told him that the patient had left his bed and had run naked around the room, he grew very angry. Sternly, he told her that she dared not let that happen a second time. He wrote a new prescription and told her that with each dose, the patient should drink a spoonful of lukewarm tea with milk. Nothing else. Furthermore, she must take care to keep the icepack on the patient's head.

When the doctor was gone, she was left alone once more with her patient. She pushed a chair next to the bed and sat down, thinking she would sit that way all night—until morning.

It was a very restless night. Mendl tossed and turned feverishly and yelled so loudly that several times she felt like running out of the room to make an outcry for help. But just as she was about to do that, he quieted down, lay back on his pillow and in a little while was still. Then he began to sweat, and the heat of his fever became so strong, she had to push her chair away from the bed.. Then, once again, cold. Then heat once more. And so it went, all night long.

Book III

Chapter II

Just after the crisis, Mendl opened his eyes from which, all at once, the wild, bright look that had been in them from the beginning of his illness, had disappeared. He felt his head aching. Some sort of strange pain in his skull. He felt as if his head had been put in a vise and was being squeezed. He thought it would burst at any moment, and so he lifted his hand, meaning to touch it; to find out what it was; to pull the vise away. But all he could move were the fingers of his hand which had hardly moved at all. Falling back, he closed his eyes. Then he felt a lightness, something very pleasant caressing his face. And it seemed to him that someone had, very delicately, taken him by the hand. Opening his eyes once more, he saw Natasha who stood bent over him so closely that he could feel her breath on his face. He did not understand what was happening or where he was.

Perplexed, he wondered, "Why are there two more beds here? Where am I?And what's going on here?" What he understood was that he was very sick and very very weak.

He tried to sit up, but when his limbs would not move he thought, "I'm on fire. What's happening to me."

Little by little, he began to remember what had happened yesterday... today... at the inn. "Natasha," he said, "where is my father?"

"Your father's at home."

"He's at home?"

"He drove away?

"He drove away."

He considered further. Golkop punched me and I fell? Then, to her, he said, "Am I sick?"

"You're sick."

"Very?

"Very."

Each time she replied, repeating his own words as she passed a hand lightly over his forehead. Then she remembered the doctor's instructions. She poured tea into a spoon and carried it to his mouth.

Mendl was embarrassed. "Come on? Into my mouth? What am I, a child in his cradle?" He tried to take the tea himself and it spilled on the quilt.

Irritably, she said, "Lie still."

He thought, "Ah I must be truly sick."

Now he drank from the spoon she held, then he asked her whose room this was. She said it was her room. Then he asked about Stefke and Stasha. Seeing that he was now speaking clearly she looked into his eyes and what she saw delighted her. "Oh Lord. Oh Lord." She danced about the room making all sorts of gestures. His gaze followed her, this way and that. Here, there. There and back.

When he asked her something, she neared the bed and started to tell him all that had happened from that day to this. For two weeks he had lain here in a fever.

He refused to believe her. For two weeks?"

She recounted to him all the things he had said in the course of those two weeks. He thought she was fooling him.He raised his hand and felt the bandages that covered his entire head down to his eyes. "The Vienna cholera will seize him," he thought. "Just as soon as I can get out of this bed."

But he forgot that almost at once, and studied the *shikse* who talked on rapidly and without stopping. "Ah, Jesus," she said. "You're well now. There was the crisis. And I thought it was the fever that made you talk. "Where's my father?" "Father's at home?" "Am I sick?" "You're sick. Ah, when's that father of yours going to come?"

Mendl's strength returned gradually to him. He was able to sit up in bed . And he questioned his father who came frequently about what was happening in the town. And what was going on at home. How his mother was doing. And whether the smuggling trips were succeeding. And at every word he spoke, they kept making signs to him not to talk so much. And his father himself told him all that he wanted to know.

"Your mother is well," he said. "And now Yurke rides with me all the time. He'll be alright. And tonight, Yenkl had six *pood* confiscated. He tried to resist so they impounded the wagon and the horses and he was ready to pay two hundred marks if they would let him go."

And there was news of Pelte. "He's in good health," he writes, "and he hopes to see them all very soon." And last week, Grunem had a fight with Fayfke. Almost to the death. And now Grunem's wife rides with him in the wagon. "Why do you need a foreign *shikse*?" she argued, "I'll be the *shikse* myself." As for the story of the Vollye Grushitskys, Pantl himself had been nearly dragged into it. When he got home—having left Mendl in Warsaw… did not the gendarmes call him in? They locked the door and started in to threaten him.

"'We'll beat you to death,' they said. 'You'll have to tell us where Dienstmann is.' Dienstmann, as you know, is that dead German. Well, I kept saying that I knew nothing. 'My son has been badly hurt in Warsaw.' Finally they let me go.

"And they've caught Yidl again," he said, delighted.

And that was how Mendl was told about everything that was happening in the town. And Pantl also confirmed that Mendl had lain in a fever for two weeks, and who knew what, without Natasha, might have become of him. Mendl felt himself strangely grateful to the *shikse* who, now, seemed as lovely as an angel to him. He could not himself understand what it was but when he looked at her he felt at ease—and exalted. And she busied herself, looking about here and there, "Mendl, maybe you'll have a bit of meat broth? Maybe a bit of fish?"

He smiled at her and said he would have both. She laughed in the presence of those who were there. Pantl, studying Natasha's face could see that she was not well. He told her to lie down, because she hadn't had any sleep for the longest time. Or perhaps she would like to go home? He could bring someone else to look after Mendl. She asked him who that would be. "Riftshe," he replied. "My niece, who is match-making with Mendl, wants to come." Natasha was silent, but a minute later she said, "Will she know what to do for him? He's still very weak."

And Mendl felt himself growing depressed, he did not know why. But one thing he did know, he did not want anyone else. He said to his father, "I'm only going to be here for another few days. What's the point of having someone else look after me?"

"Very well,then," his father replied. "So be it."

Sometimes Mendl's pals came, bringing pomegranates with them. But Yurek brought a bottle of wine and handed it over to Natasha."A bottle of wine," he said. "you can drink some too. I paid for it.." With that he gave her a strange look.

What he did irritated her terribly. Terriblly. "What made him do such a thing today?" And she felt that, from the time that Mendl had lain ill in it, the character of the room had changed. It had become somehow sacred. And she, herself, as well. Urek's words seemed sinful to her. Like a

dreadful insult. Like some gross thing. So she wanted to give the wine back to him. He took it and handed it to Mendl, then seated himself beside him on the bed.

And then there were times at night, when the room was bright with lamplight and those in the courtyard below could see the light through the window. And didn't someone one night, at two o'clock, come up to knock at her door, and when she asked, "Who's there?" she heard the long-ago reply, "For the young ladies."

Mendl then was very feverish. He regarded her with his gleaming eyes; his eyebrows unmoving; It seemed to her that he was blaming her for something; or that she had offended him because she was carrying on her business today, as he was lying there ill, Though she understood that he didn't know what he was looking at she could hardly stand how ashamed she felt.

From that time on, something began to stir in Natasha's head. Something she had never thought before. She, who used to say on every occasion, ""Thank God", hearing the familiar sound at the door felt ashamed of herself. Small events that had happened to her floated about in her thoughts; and because of those small events she felt her head and her heart growing lighter, and her eyes brighter—as if she had been illuminated by dazzling sunlight.

Her patient disturbed her thoughts. When he moved his lips, she took a spoonful of tea, a second and a third and poured them into his mouth until he grew weary. Putting the glass aside, she sat down at the edge of the bed.

There was a delicate smile just touching her lips. Light as a little bird, she continued her musing.

She remembered her father. A tall man wearing a brown suit; her mother, short, stocky with beautiful yellow hair, but with no other special characteristics. When, sometimes, her father came home from the street—it must have been on a Sunday—downed a glass of whiskey, or beer and

came cheerfully into the room, he tossed his hat aside and caught his wife in his arms. "Mama..." That's what he used to call her when he was in a good humor. "Mama, Mrs. Stepanova has given birth to a son. D'you hear? A healthy boy. Ha, ha, ha."

And that's how it was all evening. "Mama", and "Mama". Until they went to bed and turned down the gas light. And after that there was still more.

And her mother. She lay upon a table in a white dress surrounded by wax candles. They put her into a coffin, and nailed down the cover. It was some distance to the cemetery. A considerable distance.

And now... the smile on her lips did not leave her face. Did not leave her lips It intensified, grew brighter.

Book Three

Chapter Three

Mendl got up from his bed. He tried to walk, but at his second step he had to lean on Natasha. She laughed and said, "Strong as you are, I could kill you."

"Go ahead, kill me," he said. And he wanted her to beat him. Inwardly, he felt that his strength was returning, and he felt better at every moment. He put his arm around her and lifted her. She tore herself away and, standing before him, shook a threatening finger at him. "Remember," then she added, wondering, "You are so strong."

They sat down and began to talk of very familiar things. The told stories about smuggling and laughed about various details. But inwardly, something different was happening to him. Something hidden was being woven between them. Weaving silently by night and day. Awake or asleep. But neither of them knew it was happening. All they knew was that they liked looking at each other and that both of them thought about what would happen when he was entirely recovered: when they would be able to run about and ARUMBROYEN 203 together.

A few days later, when Mendl was feeling very good, they left the house. Outdoors, it was a fine winter day. Walking along the *Eisengass*, Mendl, looking around, felt that everything he saw was new: the stores, the street, the snow-capped stones. Everything, everything he saw had a different aspect. Seeing some red-nosed boys throwing snowballs, he laughed delightedly and said, "Look,Natasha. That's health."

A thick set woman with dirty nose came his way. She remnded him of Fayfke's Madtyeevka. He asked Natasha, "Doesn't she look like Matyeevka?""

"Indeed, indeed," she replied q ickly, and he was pleased because he had guessed right.

A few gates before the inn, he stopped, unwilling to go into the courtyard. He did not want to, and yet he was intensely drawn to do it. Just to peer in. To see the couryard, the stones, the wagons. Even unfamiliar ones. He could not understand the temptation.

They crossed over to the other sidewalk, and, passing by,he could not keep his eyes from the open courtyard. He saw wagons with stripes on their sides. Those were from Sokhatchov. The others, with roofs and windows were from Kalizsh and the buses from Radom.

"Ah, ah," he sighed deeply. "Tomorrow,'ll be going home."

He was strongly tempted to go into the courtyard. To touch a wagon. A horse. To see whether there was anyone from his town, but the image of Golkop never left his mind and he thought, "May the Vienna cholera find him. May a fire burn his guts."

At the intersection, as they were getting ready to turn into another street, they saw a pushcart filled with potaoes. A boy wearing a jacket that reached down to his sides was harnessed to it., He was wearing tousers through which his body showed through. There was an elderly Jew wearing a cotton hat standing near the cart. The old man was talking to the boy, but they could not hear what he said, but the boy's voice reached them repeating for the second time, "I don't want to go any further. I don't want to."

The old man looked about, as if he was searching for someone, then, seeing a man in a short fur jacket and a cap with a visor, and a yellow boots,, he waved to him and called him over. "D'you see, Leibush," he said, "I rented this cart, so that he would deliver my potatoes, and he's stopped and won't go any farther."

Leibush turned at once to the boy, "What's going on, eh? Why won't you go?"

"Why did he trick me?" the boy said. "He said the house was at number fifty eight. But it's at fifty eight A, at the other end of the street."

"Drr ii ive!" cried Leibush. But when the boy continued to stand still, he said, "Do you know who I am? Here, from this intersection on, people do what I say. D;you get it?"

"He shouldn't have tricked me," the boy maintained.

"Matshe, come he ee re.."

When Matshe, who stood opposite them, also with a cart, came over, Leibush removed the harness from the first boy and put it on Matshe. "Now will you go?"

And when the boy stood, as if dumb, he punched him in the eye, "Now, take the harness." And he removed the harness from Matshe's shoulder and tied it on to the boy.

"D;you know who this man is for whom you don't want to go? D'you think he's going to argue with you over a few *pfennigs*?

The boy coughed and squinted.his eyes which had turned nearly as red as fire. He stood, uttering not a word. "D'you hee er, Reb Menashe? Don't give him so much as a *groschen.* I'll pay him," And to the boy he said, "Now d'you know who this is? Reb Menashe for whom you don't want to pull? Reb Menashe, whom all the religious schools know..Go to number thirty eight. And ask for Reb Menashe. D'you think he'll haggle over half a *mark*?"

That was Leibush's manner of speech, because he felt a little guilty regarding the boy. If only he had made some reply. Gotten angry. But this way...So he said again, "Reb Menashe won't haggle over a *mark.*"

The boy stared at him with his bloodshot eyes. His lips were parted but he was gritting his teeth. Again, he said nothing, but he bent his upper body forward, like a horse, pushed off from the curb and the cart started to move.

When the boy and the cart moved away, Mendl and Natasha too, started off. But inwardly, rt, Mendl felt an ununderstandable weight pressing on his heart like a stone. They went home, but as they went, the weight in Mendl's heart grew heavier, until it felt like the weight of an entire mountain. Leibush and Golkop became confused in his mind; the boy with the cart and himself. He too gritted his teeth, but the weight continued to grow. And he did not know that that was the feeling of abasement, the abasement that a boy feels facing someone stronger than himself.

In their room Natasha gave him something to eat. But he sat, silent, looking around the room. To Natasha he said abruptly, "I'm going to go home tomorrow.""

She came to a stop in the middle of the room with the pan o f fried eggs in her hand and, in a saddened voice, asked, "Then you feel entirely well?"

"Am I well? Strong as a horse." On his feet,, he stood hesitating which way to turn, and uncertain what to do with himself.

As he was eating, she asked, "Will you ride with the wagon?."

"No," he replied, "with the train." Then they had nothing more to say to each other. They sat down before the window and looked at the panes of the windows of the opposite wing of the building across the way and saw how they gleamed, a fiery color and the shafts of light vibrate in the panes just as if they were not flat surfaces but rather as if they were something deep, like the sea.

And the sound of a song reached them from somewhere. A soft, sad melody sung in the thin voice of a woman. They felt themselves permeated by some sort of stillness. They leaned against the window sill and Natasha too began the sad melody of some sort of Polish children's song. As she

sang, she took Mendl's hand and caressed it, so gently, so lightly. He did not know whether she was herself, the usual Natasha, or whether she was a new one now before him; with her blue eyes that were now dreamy and interwoven with the unknown weavings of the heart,and gave him the feeling that he was looking at a simple, respectable young woman, or a rabbi's daughter. Then he remembered all the words she told him he had spoken while he was sick. Two weeks! He had lain feverish for two weeks and she had never left his bedside. Cared for him; given him his medecine; was in all ways faithful as if she had been his own mother and perhaps even more than that. And it seemed to him that her face glowed brighter, though outside the evening light was failing. Gazing at her, with his head bent, he grew thoughtful.

Mendl remembered days and nights of smuggling. Images of people he knew and of strangers passed through his mind; of Germans who showed up in the dark and confiscated goods; or... or... and thinking of the Germans he became uneasy and began to shake his head. No, no. He could not bring himself to think about that. And he felt an ache in his skull "Maybe she's right," he thought, "and I'm still sick." He felt himself suffused with anger and would have scolded and cursed the entire world.

"Mendl," he suddenly heard her voice. "Do you know what? If we're going home tomorrow, then let's go to the movies."

That pleased him. Yes, to the movies. He'd been wanting to go for a long time. It was said that one saw lovely things there.

They put on their outer clothes and she put coals into the stove so that it would be warm in the house when they got back.

He paused at the door. The depression of the day had entirely disappeared and now he felt a joy in his heart as well as such a sense of goodness... No... he had to say something. "She stayed at my bedside for two weeks. An entire two weeks!"

"Natasha," he said, turning red. And he stammered the rest of the words. "You're a good woman."

She thought, "Who knows what he's trying to say? But, hearing his words—and even more his tone as he stammered them out, she too was delighted. Standing on her tiptoes she put her arms around him and kissed him on both cheeks saying, "And you're a good man."

They both burst out laughing and ran down the stairs, and went out into the street, arm in arm.

It was not cold outdoors. There were many *shikses* and gentile boys milling about. The *shikses* recognized Natasha and went toward her to ask her something. And the young men, too, wanted something. But they were kept from doing anything by the stranger with whom she was.

"She's walking out with her man," they said to each other.

Book Three

Chapter Four

The movie theater was a few steps away from their street. There, they stopped before the various pictures that were hung on the walls. Natasha bought two tickets at the box office and they took their seats in the large, humid room in which Mendl's attention was immediately fixed on the sheet on which as in most such movie houses, a movie was projected. A movie aswarm with women smoking in a tavern in which apaches suddenly came in and equally suddenly grabbed the women and started to dance, twisting about, revealing in the process various parts of the body. That affected the onlookers so that the young men pressed closer to the women who pinched the men's knees, and even higher. The air grew heated, poisoned by humid breaths, and often the sound of fleshly lips kissing a woman's thick, sweaty throat was heard.

Mendl and Natasha sat, sweating along with the others, but he was fascinated by the people running about and dancing on the screen. And it seemed to him that amazing things were taking place before his eyes. Somewhere, people, live people, were lying in wait in a room. Then again, in a garden. And then, an expanse of water with ships on it. Everything was so lively. Remarkable! He wanted to ask Natasha something but he was too embarrassed to say a word, lest he say something foolish. "I'm going to keep on going to the movies," he thought, and did not understand why his fingers were moving on her blouse. He kept watching the people on the screen and was interested to know whether the fellow with the black hair's first lover would find her with the dandy in the top hat in the garden. As he watched, he heard a neighbor of his saying to someone, "And that's a woman! The bitch!"

Mendl turned and saw that the man who had just spoken was pinching the shoulder of a *shikse* who was sitting in a row in front of them and who sat looking as absorbed as before, but was reaching her hand behind her to find a place where she could pinch in return.

Mendl grew more excited and he imagined that he was among his pals, and they were living it up, so he pinched Natasha. She took both his hands in hers and, laughing, whispered something in his ear. But then, suddenly, there was a burst of music, such banging and clashing of cymbals that it absorbed them all like water in a sponge—the sweaty kissing, the bold language of those in the theater. From all of that, and from every corner there reverberated a sound that, mingled with the images on the screen that enclosed everything: the sweat, the passion,and the excitement.

When they got back to the room they undertook to eat something again, and Mendl talked continually about the film he had seen. "When I tell my pals about it, they'll all want to go to the movies."

But she told him that the film they had seen today was nothing.. If, for example, they had seen "Zigomar" or "Zoschka Zlota Rontschka", then he would know what a movie was. But he could not understand how she could say such a thing about the film. "Nothing. What do you mean? The way that Apache grabbed his woman.and embraced her-- like this. "And as he spoke, he embraced Natasha . She laughed so hard she ended by gasping.

He was thinking, "Plague take 'em. This is what it means to be young? And this is what women are. Sit, go, stay."

On the other hand, she, looking at him was thinking, "Jesus! What a young man!." She said, "If you're going home tomorrow, you ought to go to bed now."

"You, too," he said, and began taking his clothes off.

She tidied up the room a little. She washed the dishes and put them away. Then she made her own bed and turned down the lamp. As she was taking off her blouse, she stood holding it for a moment and felt her bare arms and throat caressed by a pleasant warmth. She stood, entirely embraced by a soft delight and was seized by an impulse to wash her body. She turned the lamp back up and went to the faucet, sought a piece of soap, then set a towel and a colored head-shawl down nearby.

Mendl also grew warm seeing her wash herself. He left his bed and took up a stance near the kitchen from which a blast of heat reached him and said, "Do you know what? I'll wash myself, too."

She turned away from the faucet and, seeing him, cried, "You're standing on the bare floor. You'll catch cold. Go to bed."

But he grew stubborn and insisted on washing himself. She got him at least to agree to wash in warm water.

Now she dried herself with the towel., tied the colored head-shawl around her hair then filled a bowl of hot water for him. He washed himself, enjoying the spurting and splashing of the water and when he was done he went back to his bed.

Half naked, she stood beside the table,and waited for him to lie down so she could turn the lamp out. He got up and stood beside her and the movie that had filled his thoughts until now, was as if washed away by the water. In the pale light of the lamp, he stood looking at her body which gave off a moist freshness that reached him.

He felt himself clean and fresh, after the sweat that he had breathed in all evening long. And the thought reawoke in him that he had had earlier in the evening sitting at the window. He stood, musing thus, and she too was thoughtful standing there. And the lamp flame flickered and flickered

before their eyes. Then all at once he felt very uneasy. He stood in his shirt sleeves, his arms hanging down, not knowing what to do with them. He wanted to say something—so much as a single word-- but his lips could not arrange themselves to do it. Nor could he make a move with his feet.

He began to feel as if he was standing in a very rich man's room in which there were only plush chairs, a plush table and even a plush divan on the floor. He began to feel faint and could not stand straight. His hands and feet trembled. Natasha, frightened, led him quickly to the bed where he lay down as she kept asking, "What's the matter? Ah, holy mother. I hope you haven't caught cold."

He felt guilty where she was concerned, because he had not listened to her, but when she wanted to go to the lamp, he kept her from it, holding her hand. "Sit here a while," he said.

"I only wanted to turn out the lamp," she replied, standing there,not knowing which way to turn.

"Then turn it out, and come here."

She went to the table and bent over the lamp and blew it out.

And it grew dark.

Book Three

Chapter Five

When it was dark, Mendl felt himself growing dizzy and at that moment he seemed to see Berek, Yenkl the patch-shoemaker's son.

Berek? Why did Berek, come to mind just then? Berek was a convert to Christianity. Mendl remembered clearly how he, together with other children, used to chase after Berek and throw stones at him. But Berek's glare, if a child encountered it, would send him running away.

Berek had been Yenkl the patch shoemaker's son and he was that to this day. In the days when he was still called by his Yiddish name, Berek would often come to the priest's house, to deliver a pair of new shoes or, sometimes, those that had been repaired.. And often, the priest would stop to talk with him in the street—no small honor, especially for a shoemaker's son. Thus it was that he used often to go the priest's who conversed with him about shoemaker's work; about his father and mother and about his poverty. The conversations led to a moment when the priest asked Berek if he would like to be rich. Berek's eyes glowed as he replied, "Yes."

Then the priest said, "Berek, say nothing to anyone. Not a word. Not even to your father. I'll see what I can do for you."

And he introduced him to a buxom *shikse* who had an inheritance of sixty acres of land, her own house, two horses and a cow. Berek was stunned, and went about the town so deeply immersed in thought and a pallor that fairly gleamed from him. Thosee who saw him said, "Look, the shoemaker's son is growing into a half-wit."

That did him no harm. What matters is that the priest spoke friendly words to him and on Sunday when the *shikse* came to church, the priest, when the service was over, brought them together and left them alone in his house. She put her hand under Berek's chin and laughed. Then

she put his hand into her bosom, then seated herself on his knees. The long and short of it was that one day he came to the priest and said, "Sir priest, I want to convert."

And their marriage took place in center of town. All the bells were rung. He was baptized, and the priest in his white mantle had a certain smile on his face. The bride and the groom were led across the marketplace to church. Guests came to the wedding from surrounding estates. Noblemen gave them wedding presents: so many horses, harnesses, grains and watches that Berek became a rich gentile.

After the wedding, he came rarely into town. He was very embarrassed. Later, however, when his *shikse* had children and could not work as she had formerly done, the farm was neglected. He himself was not suited to that sort of work. He could with pleasure have undertaken to repair a boot or a shoe, But in the field, with a pitchfork or spade..."

So he began to drink, and from then on he came more frequently to town. He came to his father's house where he whiled away some hours, It was even said that he spoke Yiddish and that once, when he was good and drunk, he swore by Jesus, that he must convert to Judaism.

It was this Berek who now suddenly entered Mendl's thoughts.Now, why was he thinking of Berek now? What had he to do with him? Thus Mendl-- if he did not actually think these thoughts had an inkling of them at the moment when Natasha extinguished the lamp. And now that she was at the bedside, seated on the quilt he began to ask her who her parents were and where they had lived. She told him, growing expansive as she described her former life as a child. Her father had worked in a factory.

When she came to the moment when Stefke had taken her in—that, she felt, she could by no means tell him. She must not tell him.

Now Mendl repeated stories of his home. He had trouble telling a whole story in Polish, but she understood what he said. And they sat thus for a considerable while, talking and recounting.

It was good and warm in the room. And the light that came in through the window from other houses, from the sky, from the moon and the stars mingled with the warmth in the room and made Mendl feel cozy once more. Talking to her, he grew livelier. They began fooling around, then slapping at each other. She tugged at one of his ears; he grabbed one of her hands and pulled it under the quilt, under his arm as if under a press iron so that she was forced to sit with her face against his. He kissed her, then she kissed him. And now he drew her other hand under the quilt.

She tore herself away from him, and lifted her head, turning it this way and that, like a snake.

It was then that Mendl felt as if he was once again in the movie house. He was assailed by a great warmth and the odor in the movie house stung in his nostrils. He felt constricted, and he wanted to remove—to tear off-- whatever clothes he was still wearing.

Natasha now was feeling good. Better than she had ever felt before. Something drew her--- something compelled her to him—and she was very pleased by the way she was drawn, and the way she resisted. She experienced a desire to tease the good looking boy,and finally to be carried away by him. She moved her head, her legs and her movements generated such heat in her that she too felt like throwing off her clothes. Placing her lips against his cheek she seized a bit of skin with her teeth and bit it. A tiny bite with her small sharp teeth which did not hurt but which excited him more than the most intense pain. He became nearly wild. He took her up in his arms—so light, so quick--, feeling a surge of strength which, because of the expenditure of too much energy, rendered him as if helpless. She, in pain, cried out, because she felt as if he was breaking her arms. But almost at once she grew still and felt nothing else except his near presence. It seemed to her that she was a young

village *shikse* who knew nothing beyond her garden and her cow and who was so very curious and so very shy.

Then as they sat there the two of them looked at each other and they both trembled.

Releasing her hands, he said quietly, "Are you cold?"

And, in the same tone, she replied, "No. I'm not cold at all."

Once more they were silent. It seemed that they were once again as tense as they had been earlier at the table when they were washing themselves. Once again he remembered the convert Berek and the question he asked himself was, "And what, for instance, would happen if I too became a convert?"

But he could think of no reply to that question..He concluded that that would be a frightening thing. Much more frightening than the illness he had endured. And, remembering that illness, he felt how his head still ached. Ached, it seemed, more and more intensely now than before. He lay back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

Then he remembered the entire situation. How he had come into the inn; how he had been struck; how he fell; and how he came to after a long and tormenting sleep; he recalled once more the minute when he felt a delicate caress when she had stood bent over him. Once again, it felt good. He no longer felt any pain; his head felt the way it had before his illness. Even better than before his illness. Nothing hurt at all. And he felt so light... light.

"Maybe you'll go to sleep?" he asked her and he yearned for her to say "Yes"... and "No..." He had no idea what was wrong with him these last few days. Now, for example, had Fayfke been here... he would have hidden his smile with his hand. What was he, a *khassid*? A synagoguer?

"And you, why aren't you asleep?"

"Because I'm not sleepy."

"And I'm so used to waiting for you to fall asleep that I can't close an eye so long as you're awake."

"Since when have you been used to it?"

"What do you mean? Since when? From the beginning of the two weeks during which I did not even think of going to sleep."

She said that with great simplicity. Without any insinuation that she had done anything for him. And he accepted her reply just as simply. Still, he felt a surge of great gratitude for her. A gratitude he had begun to feel from the first moment after he woke from his illness.

"Natasha," he said, "you know, I was sick and you looked after me.... I don't know... something... do you hear?" Then, abruptly, "I love you."

Hearing his last words, it seemed to her that she was hearing them the way she had in "those days"from nearly a dozen mouths in the course of twenty-four hours. All of them saying, "I love you." And now, it seemed to her that she was experiencing that powerful stink of tobacco and sweat. She began to feel a certain nastiness, a powerful filth. But gradually a light shone from his words. The same light that had glowed when she was sitting beside his bed while he was sick and in the weave of memory had remembered her distant childhood days. Remembering that, she felt guilty toward him. So guilty that she would have liked him to beat her. Hard. Hard. She began to talk and the words she used seemed to her like whips with which she wanted to whip herself.

"Mendl," she said, "You know that in this room there lived my aunt, Stasha and I. When my mother died, I came here.I was hungry then. So hungry that on my way here I kept looking into the store windows wherever there was food. Here, in this room there were then a couple of young people and an older officer. They sat here and there was whisky and beer on the table. There were breadloaves—a couple of pounds—and ham.

And it was so warm here. And so good. Ah! Ah," she said in an altered voice and pressed her fingers to her eyes, producing red rings in them and dancing fiery circles on every side.

Then suddenly she sprang up and gazed at him with her blue eyes, her eyebrows arched so sharply toward her forehead that even in the weak light, they provoked fear and all but shouted, as she pointed to the other bed, "D'you see? In that bed. With the old officer."

Mendl heard and with each piercing word his heart gradually softened and melted as it had never done before. Overmastered by a great pity, he took her hand. He felt an impulse to cry but did not know for whom the pity was, for her or for himself. So, as he caressed her hand, he kept repeating , "I love you. I love you."

She, seeing how he took her account, and that he did not beat her for it, found herself in a strange situation and would not believe what he said, that he loved her. Because if he did, he would have beaten her. She pressed herself close to him. "Let whatever happens, happen." She was a lost soul in any case. And the desire grew in her for him to "take her" the way the others did. To speak gross words to her the way those did who stank of tobacco and sweat.

Her movements produced strange feelings in him. He had never experienced anything like it. Never in his life, had he ever expressed such feelings...that felt like tears. That, and her pressing herself close to him, produced a strange tenderness for her and for her tender young body. He knew that this was she, Natasha, who had stood over his bed for two weeks looking after him—neither eating nor sleeping.

"My dearest darling." And the feeling of gratitude which made him feel purer and cleaner grew in him. His head felt as if a clear, light streamlet was flowing peacefully in it and he became now aware of a great many things about which he had had no inkling. And that sense of lightness made him feel that the tears that he had shed earlier were now flowing slowly and warmly, drop by drop.

And so lightly, as if of their own accord. Then he put his arms out instinctively and embraced her with the same sense of lightness that now filled his head and he pressed a hot kiss on her face.

They lay still. Still.

Mendl's gentleness was of the sort that, had even the coarsest youth felt it, he could have taken the most delicate thing in his hand – the whitest of lilies-- without harm—and it would have left his hand unspotted. And perhaps, perhaps even whiter than before because it had been purified by a further tenderness.

Book Three

Chapter Six

In those days there was news that made everyone talk of it. Indeed, even a few weeks later there were those who, remembering it afresh, recounted it as if it were new. "Have you heard? Pelte has come back."

That was a time when the air itself was permeated with fresh news. When people snatched up the newspapers like hotcakes then flung themselves like ravenous wolves on the newsprint. When the Germans were said to be making peace with the Russians.

All the smugglers and all the wheeler dealers paused—thinking that the war was over, that it would no longer pay to do their business. " Perhaps no one would buy contraband." And one could say that many, a great many were not happy at the prospect. Even Yitzkhok-Yoine, our Yitzkhok-Yoine, the quiet patch-tailor who was different from all other patch-tailors. He, who did not move without uttering a little benediction, without his tin of snuff—he, too was not happy that peace was being made.

What is it with k Yoine? Had he too been seized by the war's evil temptation?

Everyone still remembered his modesty; how he had replied to his partner, "What do you mean? How can you bring yourself to say such a thing? You, a Jew."

Then, what had happened to him?

Had he, perhaps, made a fortune? He worked. His wife worked. The children worked, and what they earned was no small sum. There's an evil eye in money.

But no. That can't be. Yitzkhok-Yoine had indeed acquired somewhere around two or three thousand marks. But what is that nowadays? It doesn't mean much. Is that money? Just let him try

not working for three or four weeks, then after that… It was just as if, before the war, one had said "I have fifteen rubles."

Then what made him dissatisfied that the shooting and throat cutting would stop and the world would live in peace?

Had he gotten unused to his needle? Had he forgotten how to thread and to unthread it.. If so, why was it then, that when he had to do a bit of sewing, he sang so sweetly a melody from the service for the Days of Awe? Or of one of the psalms? Or with the eagerness of a just-weaned child put back to its mother's breast. Even his sons and his red-cheeked daughter never forgot those times when the house was filled with music; when the sewing machines Gregerd and they worked freely, in broad daylight, visible to all.

But that's how it was now. That's what had happened to Yitzkhok-Yoine and with a good many other Yitzkhok-Yoines. They did not themselves understand why. But they had somehow gotten so used to the "distilled" *groschen* that it had become a thousandfold charming. The work was done at night, in the dark. The whiskey dripped through the cooling pipes drop by drop—and, at every moment, you were in danger. But when it was done, you were somebody. And when a sale was made, every *groschen* felt like found money. As if a miracle had taken place and it had flown into your pocket. And that was why it was charming… a thousandfold.

They avoided respectable work, all those Yitzkhok-Yoines-- even if you had endowed them with the greatest luck in the world, and every prosperity that was not ill-gotten…"Sacrifice the *kosher* groschen in favor of the *unkosher* ruble." And one did not know how one was to live without an underground barrel. Even should the war end.

Today, then, if one had looked toward the marketplace in the morning and seen a flag fluttering and one asked what that was, the reply was "Negotiations with Russia." And, too, there were huge

paper placards pasted on the walls. And after that there were clusters of Germans smoking their pipes and talking about just that. And their faces looked proud—suffused with victory.

"Russia *kaput*." So one could imagine that smugglers and wheeler-dealers were beginning to show blue shadows under their eyes.

And it was said that in the large town—in Warsaw—there were many… a great many showing that same blue. Those who lived in the cellars; those who, when winter came had no clothes, no quilts; and those who were simply homeless, rolling about in the cold which had silenced and congealed all their cries and lamentations ; and there had ensued a silence like that of frost-stilled flies in autumn and everything was cramped and twisted and penetrated by its own congealing so that more than once a man might be sitting on the sidewalk and it would be hard to tell which was the more congealed, the sidewalk, or the heap of people. And those of them who were more fortunate made the street noisy selling their wares: .potatoes and beans. And who, to keep their wares from cold warmed them with the warmth of their bodies, pressing them to their breasts. Nor was it rare that one of them fell (not suddenly) to the ground and lay there because the last bit of their bodies' warmth had been dissipated.

And, once again, when it grew dark girls and women and even sometimes old women went out in the ill-lit or entirely darkened streets and carried on a trade—with other goods.

That's how it was at the beginning of the war with those who lived in cellars. But now people thought the time had come for the wheelers and dealers to have their turn. And those cellar people—those who still lived—would now be able to creep out to a Resurrection of the Dead and warm their dead bones in the light of the sun. And indeed there was restlessness. Signs of the Resurrection of the Dead made their appearance. It was feared that grasses that had had penetrated into the cracks in the walls and which had long been dead, would now sprout again. So little

groups... little groups began to gather at the town marketplace. Even shopkeepers with pointed beards gathered. And a sort of synagogue developed there for heated, very heated politics. Everyone had his own speculation; his own hypothesis. One speculated one way, another another.

And it was at that time that the news spread: Pelte had come back from Russia.

Book Three

Chapter Seven

He came with a woman from Odessa who wore golden rings on all of her fingers. She was tall, almost as tall as he. Her hair and eyes were as black as the blackest coal. She wore yellow shoes with white stitching in the form of a lozenge..

The sight of the two of them created a following of young and old. Children ran before them and on both sides, their heads turned to look back like dogs looking back at a horse. Pelte's companion must have seemed to them to be a strange looking housewife with her red hat and the blue veil over her face. Thought it was not yet summer, she wore a white dress and a short green woolen jacket.

Even the older folk did not at once recognize him: He wore a broad black hat with a stiff shiny brim, a long rose colored cloak with a green armband around the left sleeve. And, most important of all one leg, bent at the knee was in a wooden footbrace.

It was not until they saw him going into Doba, the butcher's wife's house, that they recognized that he was Pelte.

Can one imagine that Doba, would keep silent. Seeing the woman, Doba, before saying so much as "Good morning," snatched up the broom that usually stood beside the door and flung herself upon the witch from Odessa in the way that only an outraged woman can fling herself at her husband's mistress. But at this point, Pelte showed what he was made of. And Dobe lay on her bed screeching and wailing in the next room so loudly that, however many people had been there at the beginning, that many more came hearing her cries.

And now Pelte, once more, put things to rights. In no time at all all those who had come running in were on the other side of the door and with him in the room there remained only his pals and the woman from Odessa.

Having gotten rid of his wife and the people from the street, he seized the Odessa woman and shoving her under his friends' noses, said, "D'you see this woman? This is Mirke, the Odessa woman. 'Ts two years we've been living together. D'you see these rings? These are Mirke's rings. All of them forty eight karat gold Expensive rings. D'you know, I'd by now be there where all the cattle are, where they cut everyone's throat. And who was it who rescued me? She, Mirke. But—she said—I'd have to marry her. Well, don't you think I have to. What am I—a good looking fellow? Just look at that leg."He lifted his leg and they could all see where the entire foot was missing. "Mirke, let me ask you. Am I good looking?"

"Yes, Pelte, you're good looking."Those who were there heard her voice for the first time and it seemed to them that it sounded like a bell—though a little bit hoarse.. Just the same, like a bell.that had rung out her few words. Then she laughed, and the laugh was as if many bells-- also hoarse—had sounded in the room.

"May the devil take you," said Pelte, also laughing. And, to the listeners, he said, "And she's also a dancer. One of the best in Odessa. All the officers crawled after her. The way all of us used to crawl after the Novatshanke."

Remembering the Novatshanke, each of them winked his left eye and nodded toward Pelte. Someone said, "Damn your eyes."

"And after that... by them... by the Reds... what d'you think? Didn't they agonize after her footsteps? Once a Red came in. The thing was, my quarters pleased him. All he wanted were my quarters. But I wouldn't let him. So we began to quarrel. Evidently, he did not recognize me as

having been a quartermaster for the Czar. If you see me now alive… what do *you* think? If it hadn't been for Mirke, where would I be now?"

But what Fayfke liked better than anything was the dancing. Yes. Someone like her must know how to dance in a way that would knock your eyes out.

Fayfke did not care about her other virtues. What was it he was yearning for? Who knows?

That, then, is how Pelte greeted his pals and she, Mirke, sat on a chair, keeping one leg on one side and the second on the other, her head leaning against the railing .She sat, taking them in, laughing her laugh and revealing thereby a mouthful of golden teeth so that, seeing her you would think, "A mouth aflame with gold."

And our fellows were delighted with Pelte. But of them all , Khayiml Kaiser and Pantl were pleased the most. They were the best of pals. One would not take a step without the other. But Fayfke's delight was by no means backward, though it was not like that of the time-hardened friendship between Khayiml and Pelte. Still, it was a warm friendship.

And the town had things and things to talk about. All the businesses were closed, not so much because peace was coming and that there would in any case be nothing to smuggle but because it was a holiday in town—Pelte had come home. It was the talk of the town. But most of all, Fayfke who, ever since he had heard that she could dance, was going out of his mind .. What with one thing and another, he winked his eye and she, like a good pal, said little but if it went on like that much longer, then it would be *adieu* to this friendship and that would be that and Fayfke would forget being a smuggler--that's how infatuated he was.

Those in the town who were unhappy were the more pious ones. Suddenly, everything was topsy turvy. Russian women being brought in! And in the midst of it all, what came powerfully to mind was the library. Who could say whether the library was not the occasion for all these woes,

though nobody knew for certain that Pelte was in any way connected to the library. But anyhow, Pelte had brought a woman; and there, in the library, sat young men and women. It was all one.

Book Three

Chapter Eight

With the help of God, a new life began for the town with the first Sabbath after Peltl's return, He was constantly in the midst of his pals and his home was always open to them . They, harassed and overworked all week long were all the more pleased on a Sabbath to sit with a glass of beer which, from then on, had reacquired its former goodness, and to listen to the tales that Pelte told about Great Russia.

At the same time, he showed them his lame foot and, as was his way, he called upon Mirke to confirm his stories. She sat, as she had on the first day of her arrival, with her head against the railing She laughed agreeably when it was called for, displaying constantly her mouthful of gold teeth.

And in the tales Pelte told about Odessa where he had lately been, one felt emerging from them a great vitality. Pelte told his stories, and as he talked the smugglers could see clearly "reds" with banners and armbands and the way they shouted "Freedom! Freedom!" One could not say why, but somehow, hidden in his words there was a strength that both dazed and intoxicated his listeners.. And Pelte himself, who was the most highly esteemed among them, ended almost all of his tales with: "D'you understand? I myself make no distinctions. But among *them* nobody is great. Everyone, soldiers or just plain people, are all the same. All one, brothers. There are no superiors. All are equal."

He straightened up to his full height and stroked with two fingers the green armband on the left sleeve of his Russian coat, the indication that he had served in the military there. And at that moment among his cronies who had not been there, he felt proud because he had.

Having rested, Pelte began to think what to do. He said, "I could spend two whole years eating, Mirke has a huge fortune, but what's the point of sitting and stuffing one's gut? "

He talked the matter over and wondered whether he ought to go back to running a butcher shop or to take up smuggling the way they all did. The smugglers, hearing these last words were delighted beyond measure. He, Pelte, would ride with them!

Yenkl went up to him, put his hand on his shoulder and looked at him.

The others, seeing that, grew still because it seemed that "Yenkl was about to say something." Yenkl, however, just stood there, not moving his lips because... what...Yenkl? Seeing, however that the others were all standing around, he grew embarrassed, tossing his head back and forth and on every side and burst out with, "May we... may we all..." He stopped short, his eyes widening. Then, "Live... Pelte, the devil take you."

They all laughed and Fayfke winking mischievously toward Mirke, said, "Yenkl Tschap has spoken."

But Pelte replied, "D'you hear, Yenkl. May the devil take *you,* ha, ha, ha."

"Yes, Pelte," Mirke spoke up. "May the devil take *him*," she said, trilling her tongue close to her teeth.

Itshe and Bertshe were standing there (When the Kesar was there, Bertshe was silent). Itshe spoke a word in his ear, pointing at Mirke, "In Warrrsaw on Rrrrimarrrrsky Strrrreeet , there rrrrrode thirrrrty-thrrreee knights trrrrrumpeting trrrrrrrumpets."

She, hearing the words, turned her head toward Itshe and made a movement with the tip of her slipper—an indication that he pleased her.

But Yenkl was still feeling tense because of the few words he had spoken and he would have been glad to have had some sort of fight break out just so he could make a little use of his hands.

Doba, meanwhile, playing politics, had made peace with the "Odessa Plague", as she called Mirke and accepted , her though what sort of peace was it in which they gave each other sidelong glances. But there was no screaming now as there had been on that first day when the Odessa woman made her appearance.

The town, however, which had begun to confuse entire stories was now well and truly confused and was left as it were standing in the middle—neither here nor there. Nor was it any wonder. Because, where had such a thing been heard of?

Doba was in favor of her husband, Pelte's taking up his butcher's business. What would he accomplish with this smuggling? Wasn't it clear that even Pantl walked around in rags? " Husband, what's the point of looking for something new?" she argued. "The butcher shop is there. Thank God, there are customers too. And there'll always be someone to bring us an ox or a cow. What more do you need?"

That, it was said, was the argument she made. Inwardly she thought, "Let's just keep him in town. In the butcher shop. People will come in; pass by; ask for advice; And I'll think up some plaguey sort of thing for the Odessa woman.!"

That was what she was thinking. Pelte, however, had decided to smuggle and he chose to ride with Pantl, an old comrade of his. That was his choice, and that's what he did.

So Pelte rode in Pantl's wagon. The two were sitting in front and Pelte was talking about the extensive journeys-- about everything that had happened to him from the time he he was in jail in Russia, even before the war. How an officer came into town once to buy meat, so that he, Pelte, had to be released from jail.

In the entire region there was not his like as a butcher. He had only to look at an animal and he could tell you just what it would yield. And the same was true in the slaughter-house. Occasionally

there was an animal no one knew what to do with. No matter how it was tied up or locked in it flung itself free at the last minute. But when Pelte was there, he had merely to lean against it —and one could do what they wanted. It would not make a move.

As they rode, , Pelte told about the things that had happened to him as well as to others from the time when he had taken out a travel permit and ridden along as a quartermaster..

Pantl, in his turn, recounted all that had happened in the town since then. And, in the wagon, there sat other pals, listening with silent, but great respect to tales of events resembling those from behind the Mountains of Darkness. And sometimes they repeated the stories quietly among themselves and added minor observations as well as great, very great astonishment.

Book Three

Chapter Nine

They all sat in the wagon, but Mendl was absent. When his friends remembered him, their faces took on a look as if he was no longer in this world. Or, God forbid, the victim of a worse catastrophe.

"Such a young fellow," Fayfke would say. "There was someone who looked you right in the eye." And sometimes, angrily, "That Golkop, may a fire consume his mother, did for him."

As soon as, after his illness, Mendl returned from Warsaw, Pantl wanted to write an engagement contract for him. But Mendl put him off. "What's the hurry? Let me rest a bit longer."

And so he rested. And as the wagons were leaving town, he accompanied them for a few versts. Walking with them, it happened invariably that Natasha walked alongside him and they talked of a thousand things. He liked those conversations with Natasha, He cared for her a great deal and felt he had a tie to her.

Sometimes, when the weather was fine, and the horses were walking slowly, the two of them would leave the wagon and walk quickly into the field. There she plucked the still tiny, delicate Spring flowers that grew in the grass. Gathering them, they began to walk more and more slowly, and there was reawakened in her that yearning toward nature she had felt on that night when the moon had shown on the opposite wall and they had sat, a threesome, in the house talking for the first time about taking up smuggling. She began to have, even more strongly now, the feeling that she was a little girl, a peasant girl. Unbinding her blonde hair, she tucked flowers into it, and threw many of them at Mendl.

In a moment like that, when her hair was unbound and the flowers in it gleamed like tiny stars, Mendl was ready to do anything at all —to leap into fire—for her.

When he came home, he found his cousin who always met him with the same question:"How are you, Mendl?"

And, as her mother, Pantl's sister, had told her to, she wished him good health. Blushing and with downcast eyes, she sat, her fingers toying with her white apron.

He knew already that Khaim the boot-maker, was hanging around her. He asked her once, "Tell me, Rivtshe, what does Khaim want from you? What?"

Her eyes still cast down, she replied, "How should I know? He comes to us on the Sabbath and stands beside the dresser telling us that he's already earning seventy marks a week. Often, when I go walking with Kopl's girls he joins us. And always he talks about how much he earns. What do I know?"

That made Mendl angry with Khaim and he knew that some day he would stick a knife into him.

He asked her, "Tell me the truth, Rivtshe. Do you love him?"

She said, "What does that mean? Love.? I know I love you."

He took her in his arms and gave her a kiss.

But immediately, he remembered Natasha. Feeling completely at a loss, and covered with sweat, he went outside, into the courtyard where he stood for a long, long time, looking through the fence palings into the orchard until he had calmed himself. Then he went into the orchard where he sat on the green grass, immersed in thought.

And it was then that he recalled that he had once heard an entire story about love. The story of a boy and a girl who loved each other. And there came into his mind the image of an entire row of loving couples and their doings. "Yes, in love," he said, cutting short his musings. But why, if Fayfke had known what he was thinking, would he have laughed at him? And Itshl, too.

He sat there in the orchard on the green grass, thinking such thoughts until late into the night. Then he went back to his house and there another thought came into his mind: "If she were a Jewish girl. A girl..." And he felt that he could not long endure living without her and that he would have to return to Warsaw.

Once again, Mendl rode with his wagon, And once—that was at the very beginning of when he resumed riding— when they were already some distance past the crucifix, a German who had just arrived stepped out from behind a tree, (evidently someone they did not know) and stopped all the wagons.

"Yes," he shouted, "Caught you smuggling. Stop now. Turn around. Back to the town."

That they would not do. "What? He wants us to turn around?" It was then that a frightening thought occurred to Pantl. He remembered that night when they had met the Gurshitskis on the road. Pelte was already thrusting paper money into the German's hand. The German smiled, accepting it. But it seemed then that, as he looked around, the *shikses* pleased him. Twisting the ends of his moustache, he moved toward Natasha . Chucking her under the chin with one hand, he seized her arm above the elbow with the other.

Mendl, seeing that, was immediately beside the German. There, abruptly,he put his hands to his head, where he seemed to feel the blood pounding in his temples with a noise like a waterfall. In a moment, the German was lying on the ground, and Yenkl, who had been sitting on the wagon ready to drive on, seeing a fight, stood and, spitting on his hands, leaped down from the wagon.

It was all Pantl could do to tear Mendl away from the German and the German from Mendl. It was then that the German grabbed his pistol and fired a shot. The bullet missed Mendl's arm but tore a hole in his sleeve. Then Natasha went up to the German and they all pleaded with him.

The German, however, was adamant. "I'm going to shoot him dead like a dog," and he flung back the money that Pelte had given him and, aiming his revolver, he shouted, "Enough standing around. Turn around! March!"

Realizing that they were in big trouble, they turned on Mendl. "What have you done here? What did you want? Now see what you've done."

And they wrung their hands and pleaded with the German, shoving now twice as much money into his hands; four times as much. But he readied his rifle to shoot three times, signaling the town. Seeing that they were in danger, Pantl seized Natasha and thrust her in front of the rifle.

Seeing the *shikse*, the German relaxed, his anger dissipated and he smiled again. They could hardly believe that a German, once angered, could so quickly turn nice again. They would have expected more water to flow over the dam. But that is not what happened. And, since time was pressing—they had to drive on—they urged the German to go near to the ditch. And that's what he did. He put his rifle aside. And Pelte, still stood before him, still thrusting money at him.

It was then that Mendl shivering as if in a fever, turned and began to run. To run toward the town.

He stopped when he came to the first houses, wiped the sweat from his face and took the road to the train station. From there he followed the trees into the woods and to the pond where he removed his boots and put his bare feet into the water.

From that day on, he was ill again for several weeks. When, at last, he recovered, he was no longer recognizable. He was another Mendl. Completely different.

He seemed to be himself, but he sat at home, like an idler, watching the clouds go by, the trembling of the trees, and listened to the rustling of the leaves. When spoken to, he did not reply.

And when he did, his replies were curt. A word or two—as if he was no longer in the world. He was so quiet, so gentle, like a gentle myrrh. CHECK MIREL 240

He went into the woods, seated himself beside the pond, watched the pollywogs swimming; the ducks bathing, and the hurrying fish.

That was the transformed Mendl. "May Golkop's head burn in flames."

Everyone understood that. Everyone.

Book Three

Chapter Ten

Urke had taken Mendl's place. At first, the work he did was minimal. Seeing to it that the horses were fed on time. Later Pantle used his help with other things as well.

When they were sending lookouts, it turned out that Urke had an amazing talent for the work. Because of his size, he did not catch anyone's eye; nor was he as voluble as the other smugglers.

As they saw it, even in the worst in the most difficult of smuggling times— worse than bad-- what was the worst the Germans could do? Confiscate the contraband. As to that, each of them was tried and tested. Come on! Were they still boys who had begun smuggling only yesterday? As they saw it, confiscation happened—but not too often. Well, confiscation was confiscation.. Was that any reason to be silent as they went? Were they—God forbid—without tongues? Unable to speak a word? Clearly, the answer was "no".

It was a pleasure to see how Fayfke dealt with the lookouts. He walked in the middle of the roadway, bowed like a bent Hebrew letter *reish* and making the most mysterious face in the world. He walked, looking into the dark distance, making, as he went, such movement with his features that all those who went with him wondered any number of times what it all meant. Whenever he liked, , he came to a stop , still bent in his *reish* form and, with his arms outstretched in a straight line he began to make movements, this way and that, right and left, quickly and slowly with the tip of his nose and with his mouth, the way only Fayfke could do. It was then that they shuddered from the tips of their hair to the tips of their fingers. Then they stood stock still, as if on command and did not know what to do. Whether to bow with their arms outstretched the way he had, or to stand the way they were standing with their eyes on him. Because there was something in Fayfke at that

moment which, when they looked at him compelled them either to laugh, or to leap out of their skins with sheer terror.

Then, one fine night… a mysteriously rustling enchanting warm spring night, grasses and grain trembling murmuring, uttering secret words and sounds. The trees were in motion, alone or together with their own shadows as if they were dancing on earth… a shadow-dance, whose occasional movements turned it bright, brighter than light itself,… as if the distant stars had flung phosphorous over the shadows. It was then that Fayfke's legs began to move and he performed, as he went, every possible elastic movement. He was seized by an impulse to dance, which to him was as necessary as life itself. So they stopped in the middle of the road, the young men pairing off with the *shikses*, From time to time, someone produced a harmonica and they started in seriously to dance.

At such times, little Urke, too, was drawn into their midst. He too wanted to dance and to play. What a life!

On the other hand, when the weather was bad—ah, brother, it was bitter. Then, one could find no resting place anywhere. Now that was a winter-- thank the Lord it's over-- when the winds raged exactly like wild beasts. And the rains fell—so that you couldn't stick your head out of doors. They—the wind and the rain—took turns—when one of them paused, it was the other one's turn to begin, just like at a wedding; one couple has hardly finished its last step, then a fresh couple starts in to dance. And sometimes both wind and rain, ripped and gushed entire waves, making a music such as had never been heard before. Then dancing was not only not to be thought of, but one prayed to God to survive the night. The winds howled and whistled; and it made no difference whether you were under the tarpaulins or outside of them. Wherever you were you were soaked, and all the harnesses were swollen.

But what the hell!

If there existed a particle of humanity who was not affected by all this, it was Fayfke.

"Now," he used to say, "We can all hang ourselves out in the attics to dry. But first we have to go to the laundress to have her wring us out, otherwise we can hang there for a year and a day."

That's what Fayfke said then, and as he spoke, he turned to Mateus's wife and put his arms in their wet sleeves around her and squeezed her so that water, as from a leaking gutter, dripped down her face and neck. She, however, completely untroubled, just continued to sit as she had been, and did not even shake herself. Like her, old Shayke and Berl, long accustomed to the weather, were unbothered, though Berl wiped his face with his sleeve. Beyond that, they all sat like half-wits who had given up having feelings—beyond knowing that it was wet and that one was tempted to doze.

As it happened, it was at such a time that Urke's smuggling career began. He, when he was soaked for the first time by such a rain, crawled into a corner where he doubled up afraid to make a move. Around him, over him, under him, and on him, it was splashing and pouring down buckets, just as if all the people in the world were slurping with their tongues and everything—and in everything—there was a thin, pervading wetness. Even the sound of the horses' horseshoes, even the horses' occasional whinnying felt damp. Urke, his ears under a felt hat that looked like a soaked cat, lay in his corner, round as a porcupine, his chin drawn in, peering out through eyes that were narrow slits at a frayed rag that hung down over Gimpl's Khana's head. Water continually dripped from it, one drop at a time, soaking into her swollen shawl; then a second drop, moving slowly down to the end of the rag. And after that, another drop. And so on and so on, countless and without end.

Book Three

Chapter Eleven

The sentence, "You'll be able to count on Urke", that Pantl had spoken to the ill Mendl when he visited him in Warsaw, was now being repeated by all the smugglers. "What a cute little fellow," laughed a *shikse* around whom he hovered, pressing his head against her breast and giggling coarsely.

"He's going to out*fayfke* me," said "Fayfke, seeing how skillfully Urke could snatch a bundle from someone else's wagon while the horses were being grazed, or, even while en route.

When the dark earth was again revealed by the caressing rays of the springtime sun and the roads began to dry it was then that Urke, as the banner carrier of the smugglers showed himself in his glory. "That Urke..." or, as he was more simply called, "the little Pantl." The hat, the jacket and the boots he wore were his father's. Even the smugglers, seeing them from a distance had trouble telling who it was: the father or the son.

Seeing that there were daily confiscations, and that there was no place to hide the contraband, because double-bottomed wagons no longer fooled the Germans, who had found a quite simple solution-- to thrust a sword , the way the German Haman had into Beder's hiding place, measuring the distance between the inside and the outside... that let them know.: Little Urke.

It was little Urke, who had a head for hiding things, who had the idea that, "if you can't carry contraband, then carry furniture."

Pantl's wagon was the first to do that, and Kopl and Yenkl, hearing about it, went out their minds for joy. Urke, his cheeks flaming red, leaped down from one wagon and onto another, looking over, and touching various couches. "If you like," he said to one of the *shikses*, "you can lean against a *chaise longue."*

It puzzled the Germans mightily. "Why are the smugglers carrying furniture to Warsaw? Has a factory opened in their town that makes furniture and sends it away to be sold? "

That's what they thought, because, after all, what isn't a Yeke [a German] willing to believe. On the other hand, what *will* a Yeke believe? And so, they began to look more closely, and, after a certain amount of thinking about the matter, they suddenly realized that the smugglers were also carrying furniture *back* from Warsaw. In any case, this led them very soon to another conclusion: that the same sofas being carried *to* Warsaw were being carried back.

And once again, after considerable thinking and scrutinizing, they hit upon another contrivance and the smugglers—those of them who knew Hebrew— said the *rabnon kadish* that is recited on finishing a portion of Talmud study.-- for their "solution" and, very sadly, gave up the fine armchairs. And *adieu chaise longues.*

But the smuggling went on for quite a while before the Germans straightened their heads out. Later, another prank was played. As they approached the watch, the smugglers would set up a racket so loud that the very deaf could hear it. As they sang and whistled, the customs men came flying out of their sentry box, and saw an amazing sight, the way the boys were dragging clusters of sacks disguised as *shikses* with red scarves tied round their heads; and some *shikses*, playing the same trick, were dragging sacks disguised as boys with hats pulled low over their faces. The Germans, seeing all this, were delighted by the theatrics. But they were irritated when in the course of their searches of all three of the wagons they found some ten packages weighing between two and three pounds and after several confiscations, they grew very angry, shouted and scolded, because it reached them that the 'dumb Poles" were leading them about by the nose. Once again, they put their minds to work and, when, in the course of their searching a German was tempted to pat the behind of one of the "*shikses*" he went nearly out of his mind.

Such were the tricks that were being played, and for all of them Urke was the spark. On the way there and on the way back, he knew how to treat old Shayke with a hard-boiled egg. The old man reached into his pack and took out a piece of bread and butter and a pinch of salt and, with serious intent addressed himself to the egg. "It's somehow a very light egg.", he observed, weighing it in his hand.

"It's a fresh egg. That's why it's light.," Urke replied, thrusting his fist into his mouth to repress his laughter.. It was not until the old man had tapped the egg against the side of the wagon and discovered that it was empty, that Urke took his hand away from his mouth to emit a hoarse laugh that sounded as if it was rubbing on dry sand.

It was then that Fayfke,knew for a certainty—and called it out for a second time-- "Ha, ha. He's going to out*Fayf* me."

Sometimes, when they did not drive out, on a Saturday afternoon, Urke would drag about in the courtyards, into the back alleys, and, coming upon a child he would jump suddenly in front of him and punch him, so that the child began to weep.. Or, he would pay visits to all of the smugglers' hiding places, taking a little drink everywhere, and after that, hanging around the *shikses*.

Once, at the end of spring, on a Thursday evening, having returned from Warsaw, with two whole days and nights free, Urke, having fed and watered the horses, started off on his favorite stroll through the courtyards.

Because it was humid,, he was barefooted, wearing his father's broad canvas trousers over his shirt.. The gate of one of the courtyards was open. He went through it and found himself in a field that was entirely dotted with not yet fully visible blossoming potato plants. He had never been there before, so it all seemed new to him. His eye took in the bit of fencing that stretched before him on the left of the field.

Seeing the red house a low hill not far from him that was surrounded by a wall, he recognized it as the slaughter house by its unmortared bricks and the lath fence that surrounded it .

"They're slaughtering tomorrow's meat today," he thought. "I ought to go in to see what's going on."

But he continued to stand beside the tree where he had stopped. It was now getting good and dark, and a band of young *shikses* coming out of a wood were crossing the field leading by ropes a couple of bleating goats.. The *shikses* were helping the goats out, bleating along with them.

The girls were wearing long peasant dresses—the only clothing over their bodies.All of them were barefooted and their hair was disordered from running about in the woods. Some of them still wore the sharp prickly fragrant pine twigs in their hair and some of them carried "forest pillows" in their hands, which, if put under their cushions , would give them restful sleep all night and pleasant dreams.

As they went along, the girls both bleated and sang monotonous peasant children's songs. They held hands as they sang, like grown-ups., or flinging their dresses over their heads, they pushed and shoved and flung themselves down on the grass.

In the twilight which was rapidly turning dark, Urke watched them at their pranks, not so much because night was falling but because heavy clouds were gathering in the sky over his head. The clouds accumulated from all sides until the sky became a single cloud.. Night spread over the earth and the air turned humid, as before a rain. The girls moved along, lifting their dresses, singing , "It's going to rain."

It was then that he felt an impulse to unbutton his wide trousers, pull them over his head and, like them, to call out, "It's going to rain."

They passed by his tree without noticing him. One of them, Matshezshak's daughter, remained behind. He knew her. He had often helped Matshezhak catch doves. She stayed behind because she had dropped some of the forest pillows and she bent over, searching for them in the tall grass that grew beside the path.

Urke stuck out his tongue the way he had when his father's stallion was chasing the mare on the meadow. Slowly, he came up behind the girl, pulled her dress up over her head, then flung himself down, belly up, like a dog, then slapped her naked body. Terrified, she too fell to the ground, crying, "Mama, Mama."

The other *shikses* who by then were already at the gate, came running back, dragging with them their roped goats who, feeling the approaching rain, which, at any moment would come pouring down, were now bleating plaintively . The *shikses,* approaching Urke, heard him say, "Is it going to rain?"

It's what Urke said, evidently not knowing what else to say.

The *shikses* laughed, then flung themselves on him, spanking him good and hard, while the goats, terrified by all of the squealing, leaped around them while they, forming a roiling cluster of bellies, legs and heads smeared each other with mud and scratched each other's faces.

With that, the story, which could have turned out otherwise, ended.

To this day, when Urke remembers that night. He is embarrassed for himself—that *shikses* had triumphed over him and beaten him up. Because, was it right, that a boy should let himself be spanked by young *shikses*? The truth is, that before that he had unbuttoned his trousers himself. It was easy for them, therefore.. And it was also true that they were a gang. Just the same he was bothered. It was only when they let him up and started to run away, that he threw stones and clumps of mud after them. That, at least, made him feel better.

Sometimes it happened, on the road, that a gentile woman in her cups, after a good smuggling run, felt a surge of lust, and, if she could not seduce a young man, would grab Urke and draw him to herself, tickling and slapping him playfully while he giggled in his fashion—but love her? Not at all. Come on, didn't he know that she was old?

That's how Urke grew. And his intimates said, "Urke's going to be a real man."

Book Three

Chapter Twelve

Along with the first signs of summer, an acting troupe arrived in town, driven by a certain Yakov-Esau who drove a carriage, to the train. When it stopped before the church, half a dozen folded caps and three women's hats were seen. . So a crowd gathered around the carriage, like an honor guard to gaze at the new arrivals. They, on the other hand, were delighted to be the center of so much interest, and one of them, the director, a citified fellow with birdlike features and wearing a short jacket, sprang elegantly down from the carriage and helped the women to descend . Then, to the short-haired woman who was dressed in a strange sort of peignoir—evidently the *prima donna*, he said"I think we can perform this very day."

The woman, looking down from the carriage smiled, also pleased, while people in the marketplace pointed out the newcomers. And Yossl Koptshik asked, "What kind of people are they?"

"You're one to ask, You're supposed to be the smart one."

And Pinye Greger, moving closer asked the director, "Are you actors?"

"Yes," he replied, bending his chin so it nearly touched his neck, creating a look like a goiter. Turning to the short-haired woman, he said, "Perhaps this man knows about a hotel."

"There's no hotel here," said Pinye, pleased that they were seeking his help. "But I'll see to it that you get what you need."

Suddenly, the young woman with whom Pinye was already smitten, asked, "And a theater?"

"I'll uh… I'll uh…" he said. "Wait. I'll call Avraml Artist."

The actors, hearing that name, exchanged glances. "What do you know about that?" And they would have detained Pinye, but how? He was no longer there. A few moments later he and someone else came running back to the marketplace, and toward the carriage.

Meanwhile, the actors had paid Yakov-Esau and were strolling about the market, looking over the place where they would be working. The director let people know that the first play they would put on would be "The American Woman"in which the short-haired woman had a role,.

Avraml Artist, accompanied by Greger was looking them over (he knew how to do that) and arranged his face the way he used to when he had declamed, "It's Raining Now". He asked, "You're going to put on a performance for us?"

The company of actors, now aware with whom they had to deal, replied, "Of course."

And Bandl Litvak, the company's comedian, for whom somebody like Avraml was no more than a naïve fool, turned to a woman they called Black Anyuta who played mother roles because of her mouth , and said, "Just look at him."

But the director said matter-of-factly, "We're going to play the 'American Woman'.

"Yes," said Avraml. "A fine piece. And who's going to play the woman?"

"I will, colleague".said the short-haired woman, screwing up her face and looking him directly in the eye at the same time as she moved her leg, lifted her skirts together with her peignoir as if she was on stage, forgetting, evidently that they were in the marketplace.

"Yes, yes," said Avraml. "She likes to play that role." Leaving Greger behind, he went forward with the actors. On their way, he called up to a window in an upper storey to Barukh Pleitnik, the only true *klezmer* in the town.

His spectacles on his nose, he came running down, having broken off the violin lesson he had been giving to a wealthy student. Avraml introduced him to the actors and they went off to the

firemen's hall where a stage with three walls as well as a hole covered with boards that could serve as a prompter's booth, were also to be found. A real theater.

But on the way, Barukh Pleitnik was somehow confused: On the one hand, he was going there because he was going; and on the other hand, his wife was calling after him from her window, "Barukh! What are you doing? Going for a walk in the middle of everything. Your student's waiting here."

But Avraml was walking beside Rosa, the short-haired woman, talking with her about all sorts of plays. He was fond of historical drama. "Maybe you'll put on "Bar Kokhba?" he asked.

"Certainly, certainly."

"And 'Gold, Money and Shame'?."

"Certainly, certainly."

"And 'The Granmother and the Grandson'."

"You're from Warsaw?" she asked.

?No. I'm from here. Why do you ask?"

"Because you have a feel for theater. You know so many plays."

That pleased Avraml, and he hummed a song.

Examining the theater space and calculating how many people it would hold, the director asked by whom it could be rented.. Avraml excused himself to Roseanne and to the other actors and went with the director to city hall where they reported directly to the mayor.

The mayor said no, but after much cajoling he told them to go to the fire chief, Perhaps he would give them permission.

The fire chief-pharmacist asked what would be the language in which the plays were played.

"In Yiddish," replied the director.

"Then, no." he said.

"What do you mean? Is there a law against it?"

"No, there's no law against it. But it's a decision we made at a meeting."

Things were not good. They stood in the middle of the marketplace, puzzling.

Avraml's face took on a tragic look, his arms were crossed over his chest, like a true actor.. "Not good."

"What's to be done?"

So they did what is always done in other towns in the same circumstances. They played in a union hall. Young and old packed the place. And the new sergeant-major (may it be said without sinning.) was no worse than Landsmann. He was touched to the quick when the several boards that had been laid down to create the stage on which the artists were meant to act, shifted, perhaps because they were rounded,.

Bam!

Black Anyuta, who played mother roles—caught her foot in the crack, fell and lay there. Then, it appeared, God came to the rescue and the sergeant-major , himself, walked onto the stage that was now on a level with the ground.. He was very pleased , especially by the clear sight of the white bloomers and the plump legs that , sad to say, were spread eagled from under Anyuta's short dress. He went up to her and said, "Come see me tomorrow and we'll talk about a studio."

And the next morning, on the same advertising placards that were hanging out was added the information that the performance would be in the firehouse hall. And everyone,children and adults, young and old, provided themselves with tickets for the theater.

Book Three

Chapter Thirteen

Their efforts were successful beyond all expectations. Yesterday's performance, which evidently, was only a sample of their acting, was by no means a failure. Because, as it turned out, the young people of the town were also stirred by Anyuta's fall. And the very next morning one could see its consequences. Because even children were unable to sleep. They dragged and carried chairs; dragged and brought boards. And Pinye Greger was knocking himself out. One could hear his presence all over the marketplace and in all of the side streets of the town.

In this matter, even our whiskey makers were involved. Little Moshe said to himself, "Whatever else happens, I have to go to the theater today." The "cooking" of a full five liters was no sooner done then he went home and dressed himself in royal fashion and was off to the theater.

The hall was magnificently lighted. All of the water-pumps were in the courtyard, their wagon-shafts erect like soldiers. Inside, leaning right against the wall were the ladders on which there climbed or from which there clung mischievous boys. They had worked plenty hard that day and had earned their free passes to the ladders.

Tucked into a corner there was a small buffet tended by a girl, but it was hard to know which of the two was broader, the buffet or the girl.

There were benches in rows on which there sat the representatives of the three levels of the town's cultural interests: the Torah School; the Psalm Society; and the library. There sat, too, a variegated public which, as Itshl liked to say,ranged from honeycake to onions.

On the front benches there sat Fayfke, Velvl's Avramtshe, Bertshe, White Kasreal, and, before them all, surprisingly, Mendl, too, who, it would seem, had been brought there by force, though he was still the same, pensive man from before. And Grunem, and his wife. (Indeed, with his wife.) And Moshele and others, and others. But above them all shone Myrke, the woman from Odessa, with her golden rings and bracelets She was coiffed in a very strange manner. And the hair dresser who tended to the wigs of the town's women strained herself severely trying to fathom the secret of that way of combing. In the middle of Myrke's head—right in the middle-- there was a raised knot of hair that, like a cone of sugar, came to a point. Large combs and small; large pins and small were stuck around the knot, And from them all there glittered and glistened an endless number of diamonds and a variety of precious stones/ And directly above her neck, a large comb in the form of a half moon was thrust. That comb gleamed continually with red and green light.

She was wearing a large black pleated silken blouse, in each of whose pleats there was a white embroidered zigzag made up of diamonds. On her bare neck, she wore a broad silver band that was closed in front by a large lock which, too, was set with gleaming stones. Myrke sparkled and dazzled and, like the sun, she gave off beams of light on every side. She sat thus, on one of the front chairs before the stage and her dazzling light reached the farthest wall where the ladders were, and all of the young folk stood as if their eyes were nailed to the sight of her. Only Fayfke was indifferent to her. He could do without any of it—except for the dancing.

Little Moshe left his dark, moist hiding place and sat at her left hand ready to do—who knows what for her, when all at once everything disappeared. Abruptly, everyone's gaze was averted from the Odessa "sun"and turned toward the stage where the scene was about to begin. On the stage, Rosa, in short, tight trousers, and a wide colored belt as well as a colored blouse and a riding crop in her hand was moving about. Young folk, captivated seemed to fly about, like

birds over a lighthouse. Men forgot their wives, and Mekhl, the chairman, whose favorite phrase to describe something good was "if it derives from the oldest ones" kept repeating softly to himself, "everything old must be good. She must be one of the 'old'ones."

But Moishele was utterly enchanted. He no longer saw; he no longer cared for Myrke, the woman from Odessa. He no longer felt her arm which obstructed his view of half a face. And where was he now? Was he in the hall? In the firemen's hall? And in their town.?

And there were many others, too, whose feelings went out to Rosanne, on the stage. And she, seeing the degree to which the public was behaving the way it should behave, made no more than a slight movement with her head and rolled her heavily mascaraed eyes while her feet made whirlwind dance motions. Then was it any wonder they thought the sky was falling. And wasn't there an outburst, a bellowing as of oxen that in no way resembled the sound of bravo-applause? And didn't the two youngsters standing in their corners to raise and lower the curtain, didn't they have to raise it again? And didn't Rosa bow and bow again before the public, turning her right leg the way Fayfke had done the first time he spoke to the *shikses* under the lantern in Warsaw?

That's....that's what was happening here.

Moishele sat still, his eyes lowered,and, though the curtain had long been lowered, neither seeing nor feeling anyone except "The American Woman"... There she goes... there she stands...there she turns... now she's standing...

He forgot everything. His secret hiding place. His wife and children. He did not even hear Avraml's voice until Avraml lifted him up by the shoulders to ask him, "Why won't you go back stage to shake hands with the players?"He stood, wondering how it was that such a thought had not entered his head.

Now, "the American Woman" sat behind the curtain, crossing one leg over the other, tapping the riding crop on her knee, eating chocolate which Moshele had hastened to bring her from the buffet. Urke, early on, was zooming about there like a clever pony, getting closer and closer to "The American Woman", glancing at her lovely legs, then running off, looking back at her and whinnying.

The sergeant major was also there. Standing before her chair he said, "Yes, yes. That was fine. Yes, yes."And, at the same time, looking at her trousers, he twisted the ends of his moustaches and decided that, from now on, he would no longer invite the actress with the "mouth" to talk about arranging for a hall, but would ask the "American" instead.

Moishele, seeing the sergeant-major, moved off to the side, thinking, "Who needs him here?"Then he invited the whole troupe for drinks.

The director, who was an expert in such matters called Roseanne to him and, whispering in her hear said, referring to Moishe, "D'you see the fool? He's hot for you. Catch him quickly. He's got to be rich."

During the *entre acte,* the young folk sat in the theater singing at the tops of their voices the songs they had heard there. Itshl and Fayfke, together, led them in song, and one might have said that inside the theater there was now a second theater:

"Women, ah women
How delightful is your gaze."

Until Avraml Artist's voice was heard, "The curtain's going up." Barukh Pleitnik took the trumpet in his mouth, inflated both his cheeks till a frightful piping invaded every corner. Everyone grew silent at once, and all eyes were once more fixed on Rosa who, from that day forward, would be known as "The American".

It was then that a remarkable thought occurred to some of those who were there, chief among them Avraml…a thought which was very soon taken up by the library's executive staff:. On that very day, they decided to speak to the troupe's director about putting on a play using some local actors.

Pinye Greger stood there, watching the stage. But, no. He was looking where everyone was looking; he was seeing what they all saw. But even as he watched, there crept into his mind—he could not himself explain just why—the idea of salt. Salt, that was becoming so expensive. He turned over in his mind how much money he had, and he considered how fine it would be if, for a few weeks he traded in salt. Earn a few hundred marks. Putting them together with the money he had he could rent an orchard. He totted up the names of those who might be considered to be his partners, and could find no name more appropriate than Mekhl's.

"What?" he thought. "Well, what happened, happened. It's over and done with. Salt. That's a legal business. When you deliver it, you get paid, money on the barrelhead."

His considerations ended, he hurriedly caught his breath, "I'll… I'll…"

He stood for a while, pleased with himself. He adjusted the bow tie that he had that day tied solemnly over his collar, and no further thoughts entered his mind. Certainly not what was in everyone else's head.

Pinye Greger had in any case, a reputation as a eunuch. He moved about in the world, excitedly stirring things up, but when he came near a woman—he died. He did not feel as other young men did.

Book Three

Chapter Fourteen

After that evening in which "The American Woman was played, the actors saw that there was no need for them to hurry—no need at all to hurry their departure. So they rented the front section of Shmuel Hunchback's cellar. Using a paper curtain, they covered over the small window that, at ground level, looked out into the courtyard. And life rolled merrily along.

Little Moishele took up his distilling once again but it happened often that when he was supposed to be tacking care that there was sufficient wood in the stove or that the fire was not too intense, he abandoned it all and went to Shmuel Hunchback's cellar and seated himself beside "The American Woman". It was then that he took out a bottle and a glass which he filled; then he set out some pastries and took great delight in watching her eat one more morsel of food; and drink one more drink.

Sometimes, when he was powerfully moved by desire—and they were alone together, he moved closer to her; took her in his arms and kissed her. When she did not fend him off, he grew braver and, glowing with pleasure, he lifted her up and seated her on his lap. Once again, she did not fend him off; but when his eyes began to glaze over and the hairs of his thick moustache seemed to be making motions of their own; and when he stood up and looked warily around the cellar, then she got up and went over to the other side of the table, near to the window and started a conversation with him about theater matters; the roles she had played and the various towns in which she had played them, but did not—then,let him get near her.

The director, who occasionally walked in on the situation, was aware of Moishele's flaming passion and discussed the matter with her. "I see that this nobody of yours is hot for you. But,

Rosa, remember, you have to know how to manipulate him. Yield everything—but. D'you get it?"

"You go straight to hell. Just listen to you! I know very well what I have to do." And she turned away from him.

Irritated by what he had said, she thought, "Hey! What kind of money would he be making if it weren't for me?" And she decided to investigate Moishele, to find out just how much money he had. Perhaps she could create a troupe of her own. To be a director herself.

Having concluded that, she gave Moishele, from that moment on, much greater latitude than before. And he was maddened by her permissiveness. "She must," he thought, "she must be in love with me." And he was certain that any day now—maybe two…

So he undertook to feed her all sorts of goodies. Every evening, when she came from discussing the hall, he had a quarter of a roast goose ready and a loaf of white bread. It goes without saying that a bottle of whiskey was there too.

They ate and they drank, and the American Woman began to acquire color in her cheeks and there appeared in her face the the first thin line of a double chin.. Her breasts hardened and pressed against her blouses.

And the fellows, too, hovering nearby, got to gnaw at a bone or two. As when the first four pound loaf of bread had been devoured and they sent Fyodor, who wrote the troupe's placards for them, to the bakery. Fyodor, who did not bring change, brought more bread with it and when Moishele placed a bottle of cognac before Rosa, the fellows, too, were offered glasses.

That's how it was with Moishele. He was completely engrossed, until things came to such a pass that Yitzkhok-Yoine and Yosef Lyalke ended their partnership with him. After that, Moishele

never left the troupe at all. He ate with them; he slept with them; and went with them to the theater.

And Avraml Artist went about fantasizing that he would be traveling with them from town to town.; that he would appear on stage and sing songs—even songs he did not know.

Things went on like this for a while in the course of which these two were involved in "worldly matters." Until their wives started up from their sleep—the first of them with a rolling pin; and the second one with a rolling pin. Then, their shawls on their heads, and because they could no longer endure it, they joined each other and came to the cellar together. They looked through the little window but could not see anything because the paper curtain blocked their view.

They went at once, then, to the door, opened it, and, as they descended the few steps,they found themselves in the midst of a singing crowd.

What a gobbling; what sousing! What sitting together embraced so closely that it would be hard to find its like between husbands and wives.

The two sides became aware of each other and grew dizzy. Their faces turned as white as chalk. Because, why after all had the wives come there? To see a play? So indeed, the rolling pins were put into motion, flying at heads. And loud outcries passing through the open door began to be heard out in the street and in the market place where a crowd of marketfolk and a haphazard collection of young men and women was already beginning to gather— and a very strange scandal was about to take place.

But it did't happen. That it didn't, the men could thank the on-going quarrel between the prosperous Jews and the supporters of the library. It was a constant irritation to the pious folk that it had taken so little in the way of bribes for the Germans to give permission for the library to exist. And now the young folk had a place in which to waste their time. But what would the pious Jews

not have done in order to save the world from destruction—God forbid. And so they had presented petitions and requests and turned a stoolpigeon loose… so that, in the very moment of the blows… when the rollingpins were flying over the heads of the unfortunate men another divisive tumult began in the town in which both sides were prepared to cut each other's throats.

There were, for example, Fayfke, Bertshe, Yenkl, Itshl on one side and Reb Vov and the rabbi as well as the respectable folk on the other. Because just then, Meites's son Shmuel was called to the city hall, to the mayor's office where he received a command from the district chief to shut down the union hall personally and to bring the keys to city hall.

The resulting bitterness was extreme. And Pinye Greger, as only he and no one else could do, hastily sent out a call to all the union members asking them, first, to gather in one place. That done, Pinye spoke, uttering home truths. "I knew from the start that they were out to get the library, because what possible business could take Yidl Whiskeymaker, the rabbi and the town worthy, Uren, to the district center? I knew what they were up to. But they'll rot in hell before they get what they are after."

Evidently, he was ready to go on, to come to blows, to break teeth and so on and so on, when there ascended to the podium the sorrowful looking former chairman who said, "Yes, I have to confirm Pinye's words. At the same time, I must ask you to leave the hall. I have to lock it up and take the keys to city hall."

Such a tumult followed that announcement that no one could hear what his neighbor said. Shouts tore from dozens of throats at once and there was no way to know what anyone wanted.

"Hold a meeting," some cried.

"Send a delegation to Warsaw," others demanded.

"Yes. Yes. One needs to go to Warsaw."

"No, no. To the district center."

And Greger's excited voice sounded above the din, "Cut their heads off."

And Fayfke, even more excited cried, "What? They're going to close down our hall? May they burn in hell. I'll make them drink out of the other side of their mouths."

That's how the young folk went wild, ready for anything.

And the fact that Mendl was there was proof of the degree to which the young people had been moved. Mendl, who had not gone anywhere since the events we know of. Now, his face flushed a lively red, he, too spoke up, as was proper and in a way that made his comrades wonder. They would gladly have engaged in a conversation with him, but not now. There wasn't time enough.

"May misfortune overtake them, those respectable Jews. Look what a disaster they've created."

And Mekhl, the vice chairman who had rung his bell some twenty-two times, now spoke, "We know whose work this is. There were a couple of people who were *where* they needed to be and who said *what* needed to be said. In a word, 'stool pigeon'. Do you all agree that it was a stool pigeon?"

"Yes," they all replied.

"So we protest violently against stool pigeons. Against the sinister clicque. Do you all agree?"

"Yes, yes,"

"Then let us elect a delegation. The delegation must go at once to the district center to present a petition there demanding that the union hall be opened. And if that doesn't help, then we'll have to go to Warsaw to all of the unions to ask for advice. What to do. But before all else, I want to emphasize that none of our members should either say or do anything until the delegation returns. Then we'll see what we have to do. Do you all agree?"

"Yes, yes, yes," they all replied.

But Pinye made certain gestures to the young folk and they, for their part, looked mysterious.

But Mendl stood there, biting his lower lip.

Book Three

Chapter Fifteen

"Father," said Mendl, "They've shut down our library. Father, come on. Come out to the street."

"That's none of my business," Pantl replied. 'What's it to do with me?"

"It has something to do with me, father. A lot you know about unions. About sitting as an equal with respectable children or how to listen to a reading."

Pantl studied his son and could not understand what had suddenly happened to him. For some time now he had hardly said a word unless he had been asked something. "It must be," thought Pantl, "that he's recovering his health. But why is he talking about unions? They're not his problem."

Mendl went on, "They had nothing else to worry about. On the one hand they tremble at the slightest word and now they want to show how tough they are. Denouncing. Father, come out into the street."

"Oh, oh, oh." It was Urke who came running in. "Shiye's Khayal… there's been an arrest. At Shiye's Khayal. "

"So," said Mendl. "May they all go to hell. The union hall must be opened," he said, getting ready to go out.

"And Yidl and Vov," continued Urke, "They went right up to Fayfke and said, 'The devil take you all. How does it look to you now?'

"Fayfke replied, 'I don't know who you think the devil will take.' Then Yidl began scolding him. And then, did't Fayfke hit him so hard that he spat out a tooth."

"So, so," said Mendl interrupting.

"Well," Urke concluded, "they took Fayfke off to jail."

"So," Mendl said again, one foot already out the door.

"Stop!" His father put a hand on his shoulder to restrain him. "What did you say? Yidl and Vov? Wait," he said, pulling Mendl back. Mendl, thinking his father did not want to turn him loose struggled to get away. "Stop," Pantl said. "I'm going with you."

That pleased Mendl. And Urke, who was already imagining a fight, danced around the room, stood on his head against the wall and, while his father was putting on his jacket, did several cartwheels.

A moment later, the entire marketplace saw Pantl walking between his two sons. He came up to a cluster of people where he paused. They saw blind Grunem, who, having heard that his future brother-in-law had been arrested, also came running. Grunem kept his hands in his pockets. His entire face was aflame and his blind eye flickered like the wings of a bird held upside down.

He stopped near the the cluster of people gathered around Yidl. "Reb Yidl," he said, "Fayfke has to be freed, d'you hee ur."

Pelte, whose house was at a corner of the great market saw Pantl through his window and came down to butt in. He added, "Where..." he said, "Where would you see such a thing in Russia... in Russia? You'd better look out, Reb Yidl."

Then Yenkl Tchopp came up. Some distance away, he spat into his hands and rubbed them. After him, there came White Kasreal, and Mulye and Velvel's Avramtshe and Bertshe, the two of whom, lately had been very tight together. Then, from among them all, Pinye's voice was heard., "Listen to me. Blood will flow in the streets, What do you think? That it will pass by in silence?"

The respectable Jews, seeing that the "comrades" were growing in number, began to retreat, and now there were several of the respectable folk who argued, "Now what good is all this doing? Did we need any of it?"

And now, here came the bakery owners. Jews in fine coats and nicely trimmed beards who went to the rabbi crying, "Rabbi, the young people say that they're going to pour kerosene into the dough, or they will let the Germans loose on us. And now the dough has risen, rabbi."

And together with that the rabbi received the news of what happened to Shaya's Khayal... And that Beder was being searched again. Then the poor folk came running, crying, "Help! What did you want from us? Open their library. What harm will it do you if there is no bread.You have sacks full of flour. You can bake *khalas*, Sabbath loaves. All we want is bread.

The rabbi saw what a mess he had made with his few words. Because, what, after all, had he intended? That if their library nuisance was shut down then they might find their way back under the wings of the holyTorah. Voices uttering the Torah would rise unto the Lord from the synagogue once more.. Now, however, seeing what was going on, he sent his beadle immediately, on the first day after these events to call "their people" together: to hear what they had to say.

In the meantime, the delegation to the district center had returned from its journey. There they had been told that the reasons they had been given for why the union hall had been shut down was that what had been going on there was so ugly that the Germans could not bring themselves to speak of them. To that, the delegation had replied that that was slanderous and therefore they demanded an investigation of the whole affair.

But the other side, it appeared, had more clout because it was made clear to them that nothing further could be done for them.

In Warsaw, they were advised to write a petition, which they had done. And so they had returned with low expectations, and the uproar in the town had depressed them even more. They felt besieged and did not know what else there was for them to do. As far as "the powers that be" it was clear that the "other" side had the advantage. So their only option was to turn stool pigeon in their turn. But what a dreadful remedy that was.

So, in the meantime, they thought it best to say nothing. But the "comrades" under Pinye's influence, had already gone too far—burst out of their harness—and become impossible to restrain.

Then, when the beadle came to them from the rabbi, they went at once, leaving behind in the street several trusty persons to guard against stool pigeons. And, at the rabbi's, discussions were had regarding the whole matter of the library Why it was needed, and also about the theater. The discussions went on, heated at times and finally it was decided that the rabbi would try to get them to reopen the room.

In the street, in the large market, the crowd gathered around Pantl grew larger, and the one around Yidl smaller.Nobody could say how it was that Pantl triumphed over Reb Yidl though it would appear that Pantl was more appealing and Reb Yidl less so. Blind Grunem, seeing how Reb Yidl was backing away from him, kept repeating, "Reb Yidl, Fayfke must be freed." And the glint of an iron bar was to be seen in his hand. His voice, like an intoxicated man's grew harsher and harsher and his look fiercer. When he did not get an answer from Reb Yidl, he cried out for the third time, "Reb Yidl, Fayfke must be freed."

And then, didn't Reb Yidl go running off to City Hall, wiping his mouth and throat as he ran with the red bandana he removed from his neck? And when, at the City Hall gate, he found his wife and daughters crying, the one, "Where is my husband?" and the others, "Where is our

father?", did he not thrust them away? And did he not, in the space of a breath, go running up the stairs to plead with the Commandant to release the young man who was entirely innocent. As for the tooth, he had knocked it out himself with an accidental blow?

The first thing Fayfke did when he was released was to fling himself into Grunem's arms, knowing that if it had not been for Grunem, who knows how long he would have been squeezed in that jail. When, for a second time, he flung himself into Grunem's arms, he swore that this very summer, when there would be some free time, there would be a wedding. This was repeated so often that Grunem, for the third time, embraced him. Then both of them, arm-in-arm went off to the marketplace. The respectable folk, seeing them, shuddered and went home to hide some of their contraband—who had anything "kosher"? . After all, didn't they know what such people were capable of?

And the young folk, too, went their separate ways, having heard from the members of the union, what had been decided at the rabbi's. At the marketplace, there remained only Pinye, whose blood had not yet cooled down, and the quartermaster's Itshl, who had just then come out of his house after his mid-day dairy snack carrying a glass of milk. He wandered about, hither and thither and, to everyone he met, he announced, "A truce has been declared."

And indeed, when the marketplace was empty, those two stood looking like a couple of surviving generals on a battlefield.

Book Three

Chapter Sixteen

After these events, the town quieted down quickly. Thanks to the rabbi's effort and that of the towns' notables, an order was soon issued rescinding the closing of the library; and the young folk received the news in a celebratory mood. Though, if truth be told, the delight was no longer as intense as it had been on the day when the library was founded. Then, they had followed Boris Pleitnick's music through the streets; and there, in the library the voices of celebration had sounded like stormy waters. Nor were there now those faces; no holiday bow-ties; no flowers in their lapels—still, there was joy.

But what remained deeply felt in the town was the impact of the stool pigeons, who had been there in large numbers. And that , to some degree, spoiled the unity of the celebration.

Now agents began to make their appearance in the town. Because, before the coming of the stool pigeons, everything had been kosher. Which proved that the resident policemen were not worth a penny. And therefore, other kinds of police ought to be sent for. "Other kinds" was defined by the highest authorities in the places from which the stool pigeons had been sent. And this upset the local police greatly. Why had the town so besmirched them in the eyes of the authorities?

And so they undertook to tear the locals apart; to flay them. First out of anger; and the n because that's what they were sent to do. It reached such a point that the Jews might just as well have said farewell to their prosperity.

The German is, generally speaking , a calm creature, but he had been made to lose his patience. One could now expect to be buried alive. Every day there were new confiscations.

Every day, new misfortunes. The Germans were like wild beasts, with their rushing about; and their pursuits. Their eyes grew piercing, lying in wait and one's life was endangered.

And then, when one had taken some risk of confiscation, the new "catchers" caught on to them and once again they began to squeeze the marrow from their bones. They took away one's last groschen and squeezed the profit out of the smallest things. Life in the town became so constricted that it was as if a rope had been tied around each and every neck.

"What's to become of us? What's to become of us?" the Jews sighed. See what the stoolpigeons have brought us to. Each of us is burying the other."

And, as if a dark cloud had darkened over the sky, a cloud of nostalgia settled over the town, a nostalgia for former, peaceful times; for the years before the war when one had been able to do what was needed and people lived happily and in peace. Now everyone went about with downcast heads. Work came to a standstill as people chose to rest.. Even Pantl stopped driving.

In those days there appeared in the town a wandering musician. An old half-blind man led about by a little girl with a charming look in her eyes . The two stopped in front of a house where a couple of children were playing. There they began to sing a song that drew all of the inhabitants out of their houses, and soon the two of them were surrounded by boys and girls and by old folk. Little by little the crowd around them grew until all the town was gathered there. Those tears had lain under cover for a long time; people were not even aware that they were there until the coming of the wandering singer touched something in them and women, young and old, raised the hems of their aprons to their eyes; to their noses. The corners of their mouths twitched and writhed, sobs welled up in their throats and their thoughts, linked to the old man's words flew with them to some distant, distant place, to a bare field where there lay some mother's son who sang:

"Black bird, fly swiftly, oh my!
Black bird fly swiftly, oh my!

Tell my mother I'm well, oh my, oh my!
Tell my mother I'm well, oh my, oh my!"

And hearing that, there ensued a wailing like that which follows on a death. After that they restrained themselves and heard,

"No father, no mother, oh my!
No sister, no brother, oh my!
Between fields and desolate forests, oh my, oh my!
Soldiers lie slaughtered, oh my, oh my!"

Now there came a storm of tears.

"Between fields and desolate forests, oh my, oh my!
Soldiers lie slaughtered, oh my, oh my!"

It seemed as if the entire street had begun to vibrate. That even the children, who, until then, had stood with tears welling in their eyes, could no longer repress their feelings, and, their faces pressed against their mothers' dresses, they burst into tears.

Soon enough that song overwhelmed the entire town and everywhere that you went or stood, you heard it. Old grandmothers, on their sick beds, even as their eyes were glazing over, hummed it under their breaths, "Between fields and desolate forests, oh my, oh my!"

From then on, for the mothers, that first upwelling of weeping could neither be silenced nor calmed. If they came upon any object: a son's hat, a pair of boots, an overcoat, they took it up in their hands, went over to the window where they scrutinized every inch of it and drenched it with tears; and inwardly they felt a stone the size of the world pressing on their hearts.

When a prisoner-of-war arrived, people ran to inquire about a son or a brother, then went away, moistening their entire path with their tears.

On the Sabbath, seated at one's table, one was struck by how empty the room was: only old men and women who sat bent over as if they were grieving for something. In those houses where there had only been sons, there now sat a pair of grandparents. And when it came time to sing the

Sabbath songs, the old voices failed, began to falter while their eyes focused on a different time; on other sorrows, on distant seas and deserts where they seemed to see their sons running and carrying guns. Many times their Sabbath songs ended in lamentation and they rose from the table before the blessings were said.

For the aged, their lungs contracted so that not a particle of air could pass through. The eyes protruded from their deep sockets, and in the morning what was found was someone lying quietly asleep, like doves.

On Sabbath evening, the women sat whispering the God of Abraham prayer, keeping time with their nodding heads and, from a nearby congregation the most heartfelt, the most yearning notes of Sabbath evening melodies could be heard, enclosing, enmeshing, and cradling all their hearts. Then, without knowing what had happened to them, they stopped reciting the God of Abraham prayer and got up to look out at the western skies and saw hell fires burning and flickering there. And, in that crimson-drenched distance they seemed to see things that were at once familiar and unfamiliar. They recalled sleepless nights spent beside cradles; and hunger-filled days. And inside their heads, all of that mingled and became enclosed within a distant, distant veil.

They stand thus for a long, long time until they become weary and sink down into their chairs, their heads bowed as in a doze. But they are not asleep. In their heads there is a fluttering, like that of the wings of the Angel of Dreams, and fully awake, they see, like sleepers, things that are very distant and which, if they were normally awake, they could not see.

This is not sleep, but the hearts' dozing to the music of the love of children, the way the earth dozes in the month of *Kislev* when the first delicate snowflakes drift down upon it.

Book Three

Chapter Seventeen

Strange sound were beginning to be heard in Poland. There was something that wanted to be told about a certain officer who was said to have said that things would not be good—though what it was that would not be good he did not say. But it was understood that he meant that things were not good in Germany. No one talked about it. Nor was anything about it written in the newspapers. But it could be felt in the air. Meanwhile, everything was as it had been. The military marched on the roads of Congress Poland..and every Sunday afternoon military music could be heard in the capital city, Travel permits and other such things were issued in orderly fashion, as always. As were requisitions. With the same energy, and, it would seem, with even more than before. The Germans were somewhat at loggerheads with the populace; somewhat less rigid, less embarrassed—but nothing more was to be observed.

Here, in the town, times were better. Smuggling had resumed once again and business, too. If, anyone was caught he was fined. Yitskhak Yoine was caught once again, this time in Moishele's house. He still had to pay three instalments of two hundred marks each from the last time when he was caught in the orchard and now there was another fine of two thousand. in addition to the loss of goods and the damage to the barrels.And what was worse, now the Germans would no longer take installments , They wanted the whole amount brought in at one time. The sergeant major allowed him three days. Tomorrow would be the third day. What was to be done? Laybl Yitzkhok, Yoine's son was willing to take the entire guilt upon himself and do time, but how could one permit that? What? How was one to extricate oneself from their hands? If one was not to do time, one would have to pay. And where was the money to come from? It was bad.

Yitzkhok-Yoine had made a little reckoning for his wife: "One distillation will produce one liter;one liter will net ten marks profit. In twenty-four hours one can make four distillations. Then we have approximately ten times ten.—that is, one hundred. Then, four times one hundred, that makes four hundred.. That's how much one can earn in twenty-four hours.If one worked a full week without interruption, one could carry in the entire two thousand. D'you see?"

"But where will you work?"Tshippe asked. Not in your home. Not in Yosef's either. And it was at Moishele's that you were first caught. Maybe you'll have to go back in the orchard. But that's where we've always been caught:

"Ah," replied her husband softly, "As I hope for good health for us all, the orchard's where we could really set to work. Indeed, it's *because* we've been caught there a couple of times, that it won't occur to anyone that we're there."

"Not much it won't occur to anyone!" said Tshippe. "Yidl, may his eyes fall out of his head."

"Hush, woman. What are you saying?"

"What am I saying? Some Jew he is. May I live to take pride in my children as it's true that what happened at Moishele's yesterday is his work."

"Ah. What are you saying? And hasn't he been caught several times? What are you saying? That he would go to the German, to a gentile to say, 'So and So, Son of So and So is making whiskey. Only enemies would think that up."

That's what Yitzkhok-Yoine said, and by his words we recognized the old Yitzkhok-Yoine who was not like other patch-tailors but was our Yitzkhok-Yoine.

About an hour later, they were all sitting in the little hut, the shades drawn, crumbling a few pounds of yeast into the vats which Donkey had filled to the brim with distillate.

Toward evening clouds began to darken the sky.and by the time the sun had gone down it had grown so dark one could not see more than a few paces before one. They took the darkness for a good sign and were happily engrossed in their work. The hours flew by. Evening gave way to night. It was then that they set to work to cook the fermentation mix they had managed to rescue last night. (A mix has to set for two days before it can be cooked). The whiskey flowed, more than they had expected. Powerful. The last batch read fifty. . Apparently luck was with them. Discussing it, they decided that if it went on this way they could, in hardly a week, put aside the two thousand. They spoke softly, as if they were whispering; then abruptly, they were all still, locked in their poses, as if bewitched. Laybl, half seated and half standing at the kettle was just putting in some wood. Yitzkhok-Yoine stood before the lamp holding the thermometer up to the light. Yosef Lyalke lay stretched out on a bale of straw with his mouth against a cooling pipe getting ready to swallow. Tschippe, her knees bent was beside the basket, just getting up while Breindl,, sitting on a log was just tying a string around her stocking that kept sliding below her knee.; and Zerakh Donkey stood in the middle of the room., his hands hanging down like wood. So they all stood for a long minute listening as if they had been turned to stone. It seemed as if some sort of scraping sound in the courtyard could be heard. All at once, they roused themselves from their paralysis,utterly terrified.

"Help !Help! The Germans are coming."

"Maybe it's Pantl driving up?" Laybl speculated."

"Dummy" was the reply. "Would Pantl come at night?"

Only Lyalke, who was the coolest one in such situations, put his fingers to his lips and extinguished the lamp. It got so dark it was as if a black sack had descended over their eyes at the same time as the flame under the pot was extinguished. And because their eyes were still used to the earlier flames, it seemed to them that out of the darkness robbers and various wild animals with

horns and fiery tongues were coming, But the robbers and the wild beasts disappeared when the fire under the kettle flamed up illuminating the room, making it brighter than before, when the lamp had also been lighted.

The sound came nearer. They held their breaths as their fear mounted.

Suddenly somebody banged at the shutter and cried, "Scoundrels! You're distilling again."

Recognizing the sergeant-major's voice, Tschippe was so confused she thought that the Germans were shouting inside the room.

"What distilling? What sort of distilling, dear sir," Tschippe said, beginning a monologue, but she cut herself off when she felt Llyalke's finger at the same moment pressed against her mouth. But that was no help, nor did it worsen their situation because the sergeant-major, who was good and drunk, certainly did not hear what she had said. He was now banging with his Browning so hard against the shutters that the glass panes in the window shattered one by one. "Scoundrels, open the door or I'll shoot you down like dogs."

Yosef seeing that continued silence would be no use lighted the lamp and opened the door. The sergeant major came in at once followed by an interpreter who was also trembling with fear or cold. Seeing whom he had before him, the sergeant-major burst out laughing. He was so drunk, he wobbled. But he pulled himself together then put out a hand to touch the seething pot whose scalding touch so irritated him that, without aiming, he shot off his revolver. Luckily, there was no one standing before him., but the shot was enough for the distillers to understand that if they wanted to escape from his clutches they would have to recite the prayer of thanks for a rescue.

Those of them who had been working with the barrels, meaning in the dark to save what they could, became paralyzed , and the sergeant-major whose shot had cleared his mind a bit, was even angrier. He began by threatening Yitzkhok-Yoine, saying if that if he did not immediately pay the

2000 marks he would shoot him on the spot. But none of them had so much as a *pfennig*. What they had had until now was all borrowed money. So they fell on their knees and, shedding bitter tears pleaded with him to take pity on them and wait until tomorrow. Well in any case what would be would be.

But he wouldn't hear of waiting and he ordered his companion, to seize Yitzkhok-Yoine and take him to jail.

Yitzkhok-Yoine, trembling with fear, stood like one of the dead. The very word "jail" drove the blood from his face. Turning to his companions he said, in a voice as weak as a sick child's, "Let's sell everything--- the cushions, the linens. Just don't give turn me over to the Canaanites."

The sergeant major, in his great wrath did not sort things out. He poured the pots out with his own hands. He hacked at the barrels and the bottles and when he was nearly done with his work of destruction, Lyalke thrust a thousand mark note into his hand—though the Lord knows where or from whom in the middle of the night he could have gotten it, the sergeant-major threw it angrily back at him. Shaking Yitzkhok-Yoine he said, "All of it. I want to see the whole sum."

And he led away a pale and trembling man who looked as if he was dying. Everyone ran after them, stumbling on shrubs and thorns, or on mounds of sand thrust up from the surface of the earth into the light by moles.. And the hearts of the pursuers through the encroaching dark, were filled with grief.. The rustling of the trees reached their ears and it was only that that reached them from the surrounding world.

When Yitzkhok-Yoine and the two Germans disappeared through the gate of the city hall,within which there was also the jail, and the coach bearing them left the crowd behind, the people turned back, their heads bowed, and the tears drying on their eyelids, like people returning from the cemetery where they have left a close, a very close kinsman.

Overhead there were gaps in the clouds through which the moon, like a giant's great eye, cast glances at God's world, illuminating the spire of the church, and, for a moment lighting the way home for the returning crowd of distillers. After which, when the clouds had merged again, it disappeared.

Book Three

Chapter Eighteen

At dawn, the village woke from its sleep. During the night the sound of many footsteps had been heard near the city hall.. Later, the girl-friend of the Commandant's secretary told someone that headquarters kept ringing the commandant's telephone, and that the city hall had been in turmoil from two o'clock on. During the night, someone who had come from Warsaw reported that there were very intense conversations being held there. But nobody could say what it was they talked about or what the phone calls were about. It was enough that, as they opened their shutters early in the morning, and seeing that the Germans were running about from the Commandant's office to the Sergeant-Major's and back—and that their faces were flushed—the village knew at once that something suspicious was going on. In less than ten minutes, half the population of the village had gathered in the marketplace in clusters and were gesturing with their hands., as they had on that day in the marketplace when the great fluttering German holiday flag had appeared. And when, on the gate had been affixed the communiqué announcing peace with the Russians. But now there was nothing in the gathered villagers' conversation to indicate what had happened. The commandant's secretary, a young German wearing glasses, ran several times through the market without replying to any of the questions that several people put to him. Not only that, he took no umbrage at anyone.

Suddenly, the sergeant-major's half-covered wagon appeared. The translator sat on the front seat, driving the two horses. On the rear seat sat the sergeant-major and his helper. They stopped the horses before the city hall where the sergeant-major sent his helper in to ask a question. "Drive?

"Drive," was the commandant's reply .

The carriage then moved to the street that led to the highway to the district capital. As they moved past the clusters in the marketplace, the people there saw open-mouthed that there were

various packages of all sizes lying helter-skelter in the carriage. Seeing the Germans in the disappearing carriage, the onlookers exchanged questioning glances, then asked, "What? … What?"

Then, from the Train Station Street a peasant's cart drove up, and Matei Kozontshek, just arrived from the train station brought the news that "There has been a revolution in Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm has been thrust from his throne. All the Germans are fleeing Poland.."

He had no sooner spoken the words then there started up, as if out of the ground, groups of gentile boys. They grabbed up stones and threw them after the by-now disappearing carriage. One of the pursuing stones struck the sergeant-major's shoulder, while a second struck the carriage's side. The carriage, however, drove on while the sergeant-major did not so much as glance back, giving the appearance of a man sitting engrossed in a dream.

"Didn't shoot… didn't beat anyone… did not even order arrests."

The pace of the horses increased and, they, together with the carriage,began to disappear from sight.

The villagers stared. What was going on? Throwing stones at Germans! Jews stood, not only their heads but their entire bodies turned, ready for flight while he—the one in the carriage did nothing. It could only be that they, the Germans, had completely lost their heads.

Matei's words had disturbed the rest of the town. Now the gentiles came out: men, women and children. Those of them who were members of the fire brigade put on their yellow jackets and their brass helmets and took up positions on all the streets to maintain order. Among the gentiles a group of twenty formed, men between the ages of sixteen and twenty and marched to the marketplace and to the city hall where they stopped, formed into a straight line , like soldiers. Mateis' son Yanek , a gentile some twenty-three years old who had already served in the legions, made sure that nobody made any false move. And when he saw that nothing had come of the stone-throwing, he selected a

couple of tall fellows and,, with them formed a delegation to go to the commandant. Ten minutes later they returned carrying a cluster of rifles and daggers such as the Germans carried at their sides. Yanek immediately distributed the rifles. Some put them on their right shoulders; some on their left. When the distribution was done there were some rifles left over. It was then that a cluster of twelve and thirteen year olds came by. They too were given rifles, though some of them could hardly hold them with both hands.

Leaving four men behind to guard city hall, Yanek marched off; A little while later he came back carrying a different flag.that was soon set in the large ring sockets of the city hall gate.

When the flag was unfurled the villagers, seeing something set up a murmur When, like a small stream, the flag unwound, they asked each other, "What's the meaning of those letters?"

"They're "p", "o", "v".

No one guessed right. It was not until a while later that they learned the letters stood for *Polska Organizatsye Voyskova.* [Polish Military Organization].

Now the wagons returned from Warsaw, and the young folk who already knew the news spread out into the streets. They milled about the posted line of armed gentile boys, envying them their rifles, and who seemed, in their eyes to have been transformed. Fayfke could no longer contain himself. He had to approach the leader who was in charge of those with the rifles to say, "Yanek, give me a rifle, too."

But when Yanek, who was evidently busy, did not reply-- it was clear that he no longer saw Fayfke, no longer recognized him--, a downcast Fayfke returned to his own people.

The Germans made arrangements with the "soldiers" and they were guaranteed a safe departure from the town. They packed up quickly. The commandant's secretary who had laundry at a laundress's went to her house accompanied by a soldier.

Later, toward noon, several sequestered wagons gathered in the marketplace in front of the city hall from which all the Germans emerged, took their seats in the wagons and drove off in the same direction the sergeant-major had taken in the morning. A guard accompanied them some distance out of town.

When the Germans were gone, the soldiers started toward the commandant's rooms but Yanek restraining them said, "The place may be mined."

Tensely they descended the stairs and not until they were outside the gate did they breathe freely. But two of them, more courageous than the others went back through the rooms and took a basic inventory of them. Then Yanek was named commandant of the town. As commandant, he thought it necessary to issue an order: "Let everyone return home. Do not gather in groups. Order must be preserved."

The marketplace then emptied out, and a trembling seized the town. No one knew what to do or what to say.

Rumors coming from various towns began to fly. But none of the rumors were cheerful.

.....

People began to cluster in the houses, looking out of the windows, out of shop doors waiting to see what would happen later on.

The smugglers were sitting in Pelt's house and Pantl , was saying excitedly, "What's the point of driving, of putting money into the trips. So what if we rest a little while; wait out a week or two. Then we'll see."

Kopl spoke up, "I'm afraid it would be better to give over the idea of driving all together. What is there to smuggle? Everything's going cheap."

Like a splinter in the flesh, Grunem picked a quarrel with Fayfke. "May a fever plague your eyes, Fayfkele.Well?"

Fayfke, seeing that the "splinter"would not let him be and that, in any case, there was no point to the discussion , said "What'll I do? Drag myself about?" And he called out, "Grunem, slowpoke. Make a wedding! For my part, it might as well be today."

And Grunem, from whom Fayfke at any other time would have distanced himself from the compliment with which the village had crowned him... Grunem, , now hearing the word "slow poke", thought, "Well, anyhow, the iron is hot; strike brother." But the pals shook their fur-clad heads and Yenkl actually laughed, "A plague on them. A marriage, today! Ha, ha, ha."

But Grunem, did not hear Yenkel's words either. Whether it was that he misheard them, like Fayfke's "slow poke" or whether there was no sign of him anymore in the house. He was now off, running about from one prospective in-law to the next. And Raytshe, his sister, seriously undertook to prepare herself for her wedding.

But Pinye was left, stuck in the middle. The way times were, he felt himself entirely squeezed and he was left like a ship at sea without a rudder. Where was Pinye now? Who heard him now uttering a sound. Things were bad for Pinye. On another occasion, how he would have chattered on and on.

It had been bad luck that in the theater the idea to buy salt had come to him. What possible need had he had for it. Had he lacked salt? And to go into partnership? And with Mekhl of all people..

So, having sent Mekhl to town to buy a thousand marks worth of salt while he, Pinye stayed at home to find a customer for it when it arrived. If only *he* had gone to town and left Mekhl here. But

as fate would have it grief and loss were the result—so that his parnership with Mekhl ended—ended completely.

Who was at fault in the matter? Who could say? Mekhl bought the salt from a Jew, a merchant who, from before the war and for a dozen years was in the salt business. But the merchant, from whom Pinye had already received a deposit, said at once as they were unloading the sacks, "I think something smells here."

"What are you talking about?" Mekhl had said. "This is salt. Just salt, can't you see?"

But when they were unloaded and were in the cellar, the merchant cut the seam of a sack and tasted the salt. He spat it out, "Kerosene! It stinks of kerosene."

"Mekhel," cried Pinye, tasting in his turn, "What was it you bought?"

Mekhl had no idea what was happening. He tasted it once, a second time. And the strong taste of kerosene so severely nauseated him that he nearly vomited. "What's going on here? I know very well that this is supposed to be good salt."

And he, Pinye,had already become his usual self.. He pushed back his hat and, in his nasal voice, said, "I'll…" he said, holding his breath. "Once …once and for all. When I go into partnership with you this is what happens. But this time you're not getting out of it so easily. What could you be thinking?" And he grabbed Mekhl by the throat—but not in fun. Pressed him; squeezed him so that his eyes began to glaze to protrude—grew longer, broader. His face became engorged. He grew unsteady on his feet. Who knows whether Pinye might not have become a real murderer, because, as he was in the act of choking Mekhl, his own face became redder and redder, his eyes were suffused with a look of great pleasure . He had turned into some sort of devil, because he was seized by a great passion to see the other man's blood spurting from between his fingers now. This very moment.

Pinye was about to be far gone. Stabbing, burning, tearing at hide and arteries together would not have been enough if the merchant had not run up to tear his victim away from him. It took Mekhl a good few minutes before he came to himself.

That was the situation in which Pinye found himself when the world turned topsy-turvey.

At dawn, he, like the others, went out into the street. After that, following on Yanek's orders he went back home, but he went about in the house with his collar turned up And in their house there were several other Jews sitting around talking, frightening each other about what was likely to come. As for Pinye, there was not a peep to be heard from him.

Suddenly there was a tumult in the town. When the new Commandant was going through the jail, he asked the prisoners why the Germans had imprisoned them. Then he freed some of them. Among them, Yitzkhok-Yoine. He came home looking like someone who had been spared the gallows's rope at the last moment.

Now it was clear to everyone that God's finger was to be seen in the fact that the sergeant-major had refused to take the thousand marks that were being thrust into his hands that night.—so that, in a single night, a thousand marks had been earned.

So the village calmed down a bit after Yitzkhok-Yoine was freed and they were beginning to hope that the punishment, imprisonment and "requisition" times were over and that other such dealings were gone—vanished and, they wanted to believe, would never return.

Book Three

Chapter Nineteen

They had just gathered at Fayfke's wedding. They were all—except the one Jew who did not come— whiskey makers, beginning with Beder and ending with little Moishe who was still longing for... who could not forget... the American woman.... He had dreamed of her; he had sighed and grieved for her in his thoughts. He had been so close. Another day or two.

They were soap makers, most of whom were Hassidim. Real Hassidim, but none of them wanted to start up with Fayfke. They were his colleagues. There were others, from Grunem's wife's side of the family, all of them shoemakers. There were butchers there, carrying everything with them.. There were also to be seen several honorable householders who belonged to the family. But the most consequential of the guests were Pantl's and Peltl's companions, each of whom was MSHAKHMU VMELA except Pantl. And their words could be heard around the table, and more than one of the weak householders thought, "What a crowd."

Fayfke, the groom, wearing a linen hat sat at the head of the table, that looked down from the tip of his head and looked exactly as if the Shekhina was resting on it. Even Itshl himself could not recognize him.

The guests sat around the long table smoking cigarettes... the rich ones as well as the poor ones. After all, the cigarettes were free. They were in a big box in front of the groom. A delight to the youngsters. Every so often, one or another of them ran up, snatched a handful of cigarettes and ran off to a corner where the Jews stood who held plates in their hands on which to collect alms.

Blind Grunem wandered about holding a large cup and whenever a new guest arrived Grunem offered him a glass of whiskey and a bit of the honey cake which the bride herself had baked."Drink, brother," he said. "Drink to the groom."

Old Shayke showed up in an old cotton gaberdine coat which, because of its shine looked more like satin and his large silk broad-brimmed hat, and a red kerchief around his neck. At the door he called out, "*Mazel tov.* May you have good luck."

"Good luck to you," was the reply.

Then inseparables showed up: Velvl's Avramtshe and Bertshe. They were both good and drunk. Because they had drunk two full bottles at Yellow Ele's. Bertshe was bent like a half moon. But as he approached the groom, he straightened up, slapped Fayfke on the shoulder and called out, "You son-of-bitch.Got yourself hitched today?"

There was a murmuring among the middle-class gusests. "What is this? At a Jewish wedding? 'Hitched?'" And black Berl felt a bit guilty regarding them because, after all, he too was a smuggler, a wagoner. So he tried to smooth over his first insolence. Straightening up he put his hand out to Fayfke. "Groom, I wish you prosperity and good fortune. May you grow old together in honor and in wealth."

Fayfke was embarrassed by one of his pals. "Now here was a Jew. A Jew... wishing him well," Snatching up a piece of cake from Grunem's tray and, though Bertshe's upper lip was hardly moistened, Fayfke thrust the cake at him then, addressed him using the formal "You." "Take, take," he said. "Have a bit of cake."

"Well, brother. Down it goes." Slobbering, Bertshe, having drunk like a horse, turned his glass over and put his arm affectionately around Avramtshe's neck and, both of them nibbling, went off into the other room.

There, in that room, things were lively. Borukh Pleitnik was blowing away with all his might so that it looked as if his cheeks would burst. Tsodke Malarzsh who had served Nikolayev stood beside the bass and tall Yitske, the village grave digger banged away on a couple of cymbals that resounded and deafened as they kept time to the music. Girls danced, tripping from time to time on the outstretched feet of women and girls standing around closely pressed or they bumped into the outstretched haunches of Fat Khane-- a woman like a barrel who seemed to fill the room. There, it would seem, she stood, in the midst of a cluster of people so dense one could not drop a pin to the ground between them. But an instant later she found herself in the corner where the bride, who was wearing a white veil stood. Khane seemed to be asking Glike and Kopl's wife something. They were standing on both sides of the burning candles; their hands on their hips as pleased as if they had led a child of their own to the wedding canopy.

Today, the women were all in-laws. The bride, poor thing was an orphan, with no father, no mother. Grunem's wife, just as Grunem was doing among the men,was carrying a large tray with pieces of cake. But she had sweet liquor that she portioned out in small glasses. All the adults got a full glass; girls, half a glass.

Having danced their fill, being polkaed out, waltzed out, the girls, their mouths red as if they had been slapped, formed clusters and stood looking at the fresh couples dancing there in their place.

. Now, amid the weary, sweaty girls, Urke was "working." Just like plump Khana—but livelier. At one moment he was in one corner, the next he was gliding like a fish between a couple of girls in white pressed clothing. He ran about like a polecat among chickens. Some girls grabbed him and took to slapping him or pulling his ears, but he pressed up against them with his thick cotton jacket and his father's boots so that the girls immediately backed away from him worried about their dresses and their white slippers. But, given the press of bodies, they could not move far enough

away, and so they deemed it better to be bothered by him. Suddenly, all the girls turned toward the door where the men were and there was a murmuring so loud that Barukh Pleinick had to inflate his cheeks more strongly and Yitzke Kabrun gritted his teeth and banged his cymbals more loudly in order to be heard.

"Ah, ladies and gentlemen, will we dance! Ladies and gentlemen, oh how we'll dance."

Velvl's Avramtshe signaled to an entire band of young women wearing red blouses. But Bertshe did not chatter. He snatched up the "Passover Cherry Brandy" who was nearest him and danced with her, indifferent to the music—a waltz—that was playing. He sang to himself, keeping time with his boots, turning with her in a circle while her cheeks glowed and reddened, changing colors so quickly that no painter could replicate such color. The dancers had finished dancing once, twice, a third time and still Bertshe was whirling with Passover Cherry Brandy. And who knows whether she might not have died in his arms, because, as his dancing intensified, the red in her face deepened so much that one might have been able to light a candle from its heat, after which she began to have trouble breathing and turned paler. Then she turned blue, then green, then yellow—and, if Bertshe had not bumped into Khana's hip and fallen, bringing his partner down with him, who knows what might have happened to red Cherry Brandy. It was then that Urke left the corner to which he had just arrived, and, bending his head, and thrusting forward he made his way to the circle of dancers and to Passover Cherry Brandy.

The cluster of men, too was lively. Some youths clubbed together money enough to buy several barrels of beer. Among the men, several sextons of congregations set out their plates with tickets for sale in support of poor brides; in support of the poor; in support of Talmud scholars; of hospitals, burial societies and other such causes. The beer and the whiskey heated up the young folk so they got up to clamber across the table "to reach the women," to dance. Older society members,

and pals of the smugglers also took positions near the door, looking in to see how things were going. There were only two young men still with the groom: Itshl and Mendl. Pinye Greger was also there, but he was not to be counted. Velvl's Avramtshe who came running in to sniff the atmosphere for a moment insisted that Pinye, too should go in to dance. Seizing him by the shoulders, he lifted him up and flung him into the milling crowd of men and women. Pinye quickly started swallowing his words, "I'll...I'll..." but several of the young women undertook to talk with him about the library. They asked, "Tell us. Is there a meeting tomorrow?" And Yopantshik's wife, a lively, childless woman some thirty years old or more scratched his neck with a finger saying, "Pintshe, when will you have a wedding?"

The young women laughed and sought a place through which to thrust their heads in. One of them, making a serious face and waving a fan and said, "Let me ask. Are you engaged now?"

This produced laughter among the cluster of young people, a signal of liveliness that quickly spread to the room where the groom sat behind a table. First, he lifted one foot, then he was seized by a stronger desire to dance. But, no matter. Fayfke, if he wanted to could find a way to accommodate the evil inclination . With a tweak of the tip of his nose, with a twist of his mouth this way and that he was already listening to the Jews talking about the times of the Messiah.

Among the women, the younger ones were getting livelier. All, all of them were there. Mirke, the woman from Odessa had only just shown up. Urke hurrying beside her slapped her in a soft place and, seeing that she was not angry, said, "Mirke, you've got a plump..."

When all she did was laugh, he took a stance next to her and rubbed his hand over her dress while his tongue crept out of his mouth the way it had when he saw his father's stallion was chasing the mare.

Suddenly, Bertshe's voice was heard, "Fayfke, the devil take you. Come and dance. Mateus's wife is here."

The groom, once more was embarrassed. Irritated, he called on Itshl for help. "Go,," he said, "Tell him, 'May the cholera strangle him; may flames consume his mother.'""

Itshl went toward the second room and called out, "Fellows! How can you leave the groom alone? Fellows, come on in."

Leibish the soap maker, a man wearing a satin coat that had belonged to his father, or to his grandfather, interrupted his conversation about the Messiah, and, turning to Arele, he said, "You have a fine son. A proper fellow."

Arele swelled with pride. He thrust his hand into his breast pocket where there were "papers"in addition to those that his son carried about with him. And he was ready once again to begin the story of the commandant whose coat had been torn. But a great turmoil arose among the young people who all came in—not, God forbid—in response to Itshl's call—but because just then, though no one had expected them, the entire management staff of the library also arrived.

All the people's heads were turned to look respectfully at several young men in caps sitting down, tasting things, congratulating the groom who then began to sing. Some of the house-holders were pleased and sang along with them the melodies, which they quickly learned. Then Itshl undertook to show what he was capable of, and at Avraml's instigation, he, too, began to "recite", at which the men in the satin hats were mightily pleased. This went on until the "lively" man jumped up on a chair and began to celebrate the groom in song in such a "moral" tone that everyone turned sad immediately and the women who were now all clustered in the doorway wiped their eyes with their kerchiefs, sobbing loudly.

"Ah, bridegroom, bridegroom. From now on, your future life stands blind before you., and the life you have lived till now was filled with sin."

Thus the wedding entertainer sang of Fayfke. He who knew precisely which word to emphasize, which to attenuate, which to insinuate, which to utter with fervor so that under the cloth shirts a sadness grew and to our people it began to seem as if they, they themselves, were guilty of all the evil that existed in the world.... And this Leibush, what was he after all? A wisp of straw... a breath of air. And you? And you?

"Yes, yes. You've got yourself a little war. A smuggle. And if you don't want to, what, brother, will you do? Devour the few marks and eat the horses as well?

"Ah, bridegroom, bridegroom.

At every moment a man is in danger
At every moment
Of losing his life,
Of spilling his blood.

Ha, ha, ha. Who knows that better than they, the smugglers. Who else? Who else? Were they not, at every moment in danger? And did 'he'not do whatever his heart desired? He, the German. Then? And now? And later? What, brother, will you do? Devour your few marks, and the horses as well?"

And Mendl, from time to time, was seized by a pain somewhere in his head that, he felt, was diminishing with time. Yes, he was healed. Yes. He had often thought about such "things". Why had he not thought them through then, in Warsaw? Only now. Now he could see how sinful he had been. How much sin there lay in his head where thoughts are born, grow and are lost. Yes, yes, he now knew that thoughts too could be lost.

He stood now near the doorway from which the women looked in and saw Rivtshe who shone out from among them all. The pink glow of her face seemed to him like the color of the eastern sky

when the sun goes up at dawn. Her two chestnut braids that lay loosely in front over her shoulders seemed to resemble branches of the tall tree that stood a little distance beyond the edge of the forest through which the sunlight , in the dry days of Fall, flowed in streams of gold.

Mendl stood, feeling his eyes growing moist, though both his head and his heart were suffused with pleasure.

Suddenly… what's this? Was that not Khayim Shoemaker he saw? And in the midst of the song being sung for the groom a sudden cry was heard as Khayim the gaiter-maker, with a black eye, fell to one side.

In the ensuing tumult, an angry, excited Pantl approached Mendl. " Fighting, now, as the groom is being sung to? Aren't there sins enough? Eh?"

But Mendl flung his arms raround his father, saying, "Father! Let's write a marriage contract, today. With Rivtshe."

Momentarily, Pantl was delighted . "Ah. So that's how it is. Mendl's becoming a man! Until now he hasn't even wanted to hear of such a thing… Yes, brother… Yes."

"Malka," he called to his sister. "Malka, we're going to write a wedding contract. This very day."

There was a hubbub of voices among the young women. Rivtshe turned as red as she she had beem when she told Mendl that he was the only one she loved. And Pantl, now, was overcome by an exalted joy. Where, now was there even the memory of sin? Who? Who was sinful? And what's more… and what's more. Nothing to worry about. Nothing to worry about."

"D'you hear?" he thundered, "Today we're writing a marriage contract. As for business… business. Not to worry. D'you hear? I, Pantl, tell you. Smuggling will begin again soon. Proper smuggling. Until now it was child's play. Some trick, that smuggling was. Now, however, brothers.

"I... Pelte, Pelte." Abruptly, he embraced Pelte, and, his voice was suddenly enhanced with the brightest of colors. "I, brother Pelte..." The two of them stood, their arms around each other; then there was Grunem's head beside them, then Kopl's, then Yenkl's head; though Yenkl, his eyes half glazed over, seemed to be looking out of them as through a dream. "D'you hear, brothers?" And suddenly Pantl's voice was even louder. "I, Pantl, tell you/ Now, the real smuggling will begin. The proper smuggling."

Thus spoke Pantl, and it was spoken with a prophetic sparkle .so that even the householders cut short the anger that had overmastered them in the first moments when Mendl disturbed the song addressed to the groom—that anger was now cut short; and the younger folk, too, now raised their drunken heads; and their drunken eyes seemed to see Pantl as a wild creature speaking prophetic, secret great things, which, as yet were hidden from everyone. And they were overwhelmed by a feeling like the sort of excess of joy that can lead to blows, to making the blood run. And now, the groom too could not control himself. And, as if, now, he wanted to utter that which everyone understood, he burst out with the smuggler's song; he, the groom himself, uttering the song of all songs; the song of all the smugglers.

Only Mendl, now, as before—no one knew quite why, whether it was because of Fayfke and the smuggler's song which had somehow reminded him of something—seeing Natasha who was sitting in a corner of the women's room, dressed in Krakow style garb, with her little head bowed, buried in the tangle of many colored strands of ribbons and round coral beads, he suddenly woke to the memory of that time, those days, those evenings—so that he felt a pressure in his throat ... and he felt an impulse , with all his might, with his last strength to shout out loud, to cry, "Natasha! Natasha!"

He felt as if there was a pounding in his brain, then a boring, as if a drill was digging into his head. The light before his eyes began to fade, then it turned red, then it bgan to whirl, as in a dance, and everyone seemed to him to have their heads buried in a pile of ribbons and coral beads. Then it seemed to him that all at once everyone disappeared. And that there was nothing left in the room except clusters of ribbons and coral beads turning with terrible speed. That his observing eye became bewildered by all the brightnesses changing places with each other. Glistening, sparkling like blood suddenly spurting out from somewhere.

But now his face was pale as chalk, all the blood fled from it; and now he felt himself turning in a circle, and suddenly he himself was a pile of coral beads and ribbons.

But among the men, the smugglers' song sounded farther and farther away as with a clear gaze and upraised heads they looked toward the future.

Warsaw, 1920