Tales of Yesteryear

and

An Introduction to Our Family History

by

Charles Rubinstein

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INTRODUCTION

My efforts in writing *TALES OF YESTERYEAR* were well rewarded in so far as personal gratification is concerned. During my writing I lived through every episode more intensely and realistically than my pen could express in words. My second major effort was to acquaint my children and the children of our widely spread *mishpocha* on the American continent with the life of their forebears and the world they lived in. In this undertaking I was fortunate enough not only in having the encouragement of my beloved three daughters Clara, Bella, and Bernice, and my beloved son-in-law Morton Gordon, but also in having Bernice and Morton take over the care of the successful emergence of this book. My thanks to them and to all friends and relatives who contributed information and corrections to make these tales as factual as possible.

Chas. Rubinstein

Atlantic City, Sept. 1966

HOMECOMING

Somewhere along the highway of life, whence one can look back at his past with contemplation, I became aware of an impelling inner urge to relive, in written pictures, my childhood years; to go back to the time when the impact of every incident and every occurrence in and outside the home implemented the shaping of my character, leaving an indelible mark on the evolving personality that reflected on my future thinking and my way in life.

Not everyone so moved will resort to the pen! There are many other mediums of expression. Music, painting and sculpturing are only a few. However, I consider it a privilege that, after threescore and ten years, I have the leisure and urge to relive my early childhood, and much of my adult life, in written pictures. Crude as the writing may be, or blurred as the picture may appear, in my heart I feel the excitement of a homecoming; seeing again the old places, the people that inhabited them, and above all, breathing the pure, fresh air in the morning of my life!

RABBI SIMCHA'S HEIDER

My world opens up in 1898, at the age of five, in the City of Cherkassi in the Ukraine.

Up to this time, my world was solid, secure and orderly. At my age children already knew all the don'ts and musts of daily Jewish life, from the minute of awakening until bedtime. One gets up in the morning, washes up, and says the prayer *Modi Ani*; then to eat, one must wash one's hands, make a *Motze*, and after the meal the *Benshen*; before bed, the *Sh'ma* is recited. Also, one must observe *Shabbos*, Holidays, and the strict, orderly things of *milchiks* and *fleishiks*. These were a child's preliminary disciplines that made his world safe and meaningful. But comes a day when his world is suddenly jolted!

It happened when Father, Mother and I were walking one Saturday morning to the synagogue. We had to pass the row of barber shops. On Saturday, they were closed, because all the barber shops were owned by Jewish people. As we were passing, a door opened and a young man, a barber, stepped out smoking a cigaret. I looked at him in bewilderment. It was the one who had cut my hair twice already. Was it possible that he was not Jewish? Of course, he could not be Jewish if he smoked on *Shabbos*. On the other hand, he spoke to me in Jewish. He must be Jewish. But how could he be Jewish if he smoked on *Shabbos*? The more I pondered on the barber, the more confused I

became. I wanted to forget it, but the face of the barber with a cigaret in his mouth followed me all day. The unanswered questions, "If he is a Jew, how could he smoke on *Shabbos*? If he is a *goy*, why did he speak Jewish like a Jew and work in a Jewish barber shop?" left me in a state of bewilderment. This jolt at my world must have taken days to wear off, but it was also the natural beginning of awakening and growth.

I had been going to *heider* now for over two years. Home life for children in terms of play was restricted, but outside, it was different.

When one compares the life of children in America today with those of sixty or seventy years ago in Eastern Europe or the Ukraine, the picture would indeed be bright as the sun on one side, and dark as the night on the other.

Yet, children did play. They did not have the lavish toys of the American child, but they played games with homemade toys, even imaginary toys. Children got together, they fought, and created mischief and got the kick of their lives when someone pulled a trick on the rabbi.

I remember an incident when, at the age of seven, I went to a *heider* conducted by a prominent teacher--Rabbi Simcha. The room could hold about thirty to thirty-five children, ages five to ten. The rabbi was a tall, broad man, with a patriarchal beard, very strict, yet kind and sympathetic, something unusual with rabbis at that time. The *rebitzen* was just the opposite. She was a woman only four feet, ten inches tall, thin as a stick, and with a name that, by the longest stretch of the imagination, did not belong to her. *Sheine* (beautiful) was

her name. The *rebitzen* had a cow. She fed her, milked her, and sold the milk all by herself. She also cooked every morning a large pan of *mundlach* (sun seeds fried in honey) and sold it to the children at one *kopke* a cut. When we came in the morning, the sweet aroma of fried honey was irresistable. But how many boys were so lucky as to have a *kopke*? I did not have it. Some children who did not bring their lunches, had a *kopke* to buy a bagel, but instead they invested the *kopke* in a *mundel*, and made partners with one who had lunch. When I saw the boys eating the *mundlach*, I was overcome with desire and envy. How I mustered up courage enough to ask the *rebitzen* for credit, I still don't know --but I did, and the credit of one *kopek* was granted. I got a *mundel*. It was delicious. The trouble was that I could not pay the next day, nor the next, and I wanted a *mundel* everyday. I had to ask for more credit. The *rebitzen*, Sheine, was not too enthusiastic about this credit business, but never refused. Somehow, I managed to eat a *mundel* almost everyday, but was never out of debt to the *rebitzen*.

Rabbi Simcha and the *rebitzen* had three daughters, Alta, Dvossi, and Surka. All three were children of our ages, and were sitting in the various classes as if they were part of the class. One morning, when we came to school, we noticed a change in the faces of the girls. The air was tense; no doubt something was going on. Dvossi, the middle daughter, was crying. The rabbi was very agitated. There were no *mundlach* that morning. Something had happened, but what? About ten o'clock in the morning a mother of

one of the children came in and unceremoniously began to yell at the top of her voice, "Is this what it came to? Your daughter and my children involved in such a hideous affair?" The woman was almost hysterical.

The rabbi, after some effort, finally succeeded in calming her. Then in a low voice he told her, "Mrs. so and so, it is not only your child or anybody's child, it is also my child. We are going to find out here and now what happened, and the whole truth."

"Dvossi, come here!" he commanded his daughter. "You are to tell us the whole truth of what happened. Do not be afraid. Nothing will happen to you. We only want to know the truth."

Dvossi, pointing her finger at four boys, and calling their names, said, "They got a tent in their yard. They put me and Sonka (one of the boy's sisters) in there." Then she pointed to one of the boys and said, "He stood at the open side of the tent and sang like this:

A kopke a keek, a kopke a kish
Ich nem a kopke du gib a keek."

In English it means:

A *kopek* a look, a *kopek* a kiss
I take a *kopek*, you give a look.

When Dvossi sang out the song, all the children, the *rebitzen* and the woman burst into laughter. Only the rabbi did not laugh. "Then what happened?" asked the rabbi. "Did anybody come in?"

"Yes," answered Dvossi.

The rabbi asked, "What did they do?"

Dvossi: "Nothing."

Rabbi Simcha: "But you said that for a *kopke* one could look and so on.

What of it?"

Dvossi: "They did not have any money so they looked at us for nothing." Dvossi said it in such a straight and innocent way that she had to be believed.

Next, the rabbi called the boy that masterminded the show and composed the poetic advertisement.

"Now you tell us the truth about what happened." The rabbi's eyes were penetrating and fierce, but the boy was mum, and in the best American Fifth Amendment tradition, would not answer. But the rabbi meant business. He shook the boy by the ears and slapped him on both cheeks with his large hands. Tears and sweat covered the boy's face, but he still would not talk. The rabbi repeated the one-two slapping but finally gave up, without extracting a single word from the youngster. The rabbi then called the other boys, with the same result. They all received the same sound beating and that ended the public trial of the perpetrators of the ill-fated "Zigfield Follies Show." It also exonerated Dvossi and Sonka, and, above all, Rabbi Simcha --who was really the only one who did not "look for nothing."

RABBI ITZIE BUNIM'S HEIDER

In my eighth year I entered Rabbi Itzie Bunim's *heider*. This was a promotion from Rabbi Simcha's elementary study of Hebrew reading with a touch of *Chumash* to a full scale curriculum, starting with *Chumash*, advancing to Rashi, and Prophets, up to the never-ending study of the Talmud. In addition to these studies, one hour a day was given to the three R's by a teacher who instructed us in Russian. Here, for the first time, I was introduced to the world outside the *heider*. My earliest recollections of this revelation go back to the time when I began to write Russian. The page had to begin with the date. I remember writing out January, 1901. This was my first lesson in the worldly calendar, since the Jewish calendar was already known to me.

Rabbi Itzie Bunim was not as big physically as Rabbi Simcha. He was of middle size with large soft eyes, a high forehead, sandy hair and a wavy red beard. Besides being considered the best teacher in and around our Cherkassi area, he was also the official and paid reader of the Torah in the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh*. The name of this synagogue indicates that it was not only the largest prayer house in size, but also the most prominent one, where even the *pid shamos* was regarded with respect.

The *heider* was about the same size and setup as Rabbi Simcha's. It differed, however, in that it was curtained

off on one side; the space made into a sleeping room. There were two narrow tables, lining two sides of the room, with benches around three sides. The children were all seated, and the rabbi would either sit at the corner of one of the tables or walk about the room.

About ten o'clock every morning *Rebitzen* Freida would announce the rabbi's breakfast was ready. It is hard to mention the *rebitzen's* name without describing the valor any industry of this woman. The *rebitzen* was like the rabbi, from Lithuania, but the rabbi soon learned to speak the Ukranian Jewish dialect. The *rebitzen* never learned. We could hardly understand a word of her Lithuanian Jewish. Fortunately, she seldom spoke more than one or two words. *Rebitzen* Freida was tall and proportionately built. She was good looking, but somehow, it was not Jewish *chein*. Her working capacity was prodigious. I can't remember ever seeing this woman when she did not work. There were six children, four boys and two girls. They were always neatly dressed and fed well, according to the standard of the times. *Rebitzen* Freida washed clothes outdoors, summer and winter. During the bitterest cold weather, to the dismay of the neighbors, she would be out with buckets of water in her bare hands, dressed in boots and fur pelts, her head covered with a babushka, defying the elements. She also raised geese as a side business. This kept her busy all summer. During the winter the geese were slaughtered and processed into *shmaltz* to be sold for Passover, *grieben* to be sold at the

market, and feathers for bedding, needed to complete the two daughters' dowries.

Friday sessions in *heider* were not only short but also light; a brief review of what we learned during the week was all we did. On Fridays the *heider* itself did not look like a place of study. Up to this day, I can't remember a home atmosphere that has expressed more the glory of the oncoming Sabbath than that created by *Rebitzen* Freida.

When we entered the house Friday morning, the *heider* was completely transformed. The first thing we noticed was the white sand on the earthen floor. The walls and ceiling had a coat of whitening. The benches and tables were thoroughly washed. One table was covered with a white tablecloth and four or five candlesticks placed on the edge. In the corner on a small cupboard, stood a brightly shined samovar. But when was all this work done? To add to the spirit of *Shabbos*, the sweet and delicious aroma of baking and cooking left no doubt that the holy Sabbath had already settled in Rabbi Itzie Bunim's house.

Rabbi Itzie Bunim used to eat his breakfast walking around, while teaching. One of his favorite breakfasts was not potato *latkes*. The *Rebitzen* Freida served them piping hot because that is how the rabbi liked them. Many times it was rather comical to watch the rabbi throw the *latke* from one hand to the other, blow on it, take a bite, and throw it again from hand to hand, until he finished it. He used the same process with his tea. He would carry a hot glass of tea in his hand, take a sip, and change it from hand to hand, and go on like this until the glass of tea was emptied.

There were several groups or classes in *heider*. Some classes consisted of five or six children, and some as few as two in a group. In my last year at Rabbi Itzi Bunim's *heider*, I and the rabbi's son, Zurach, remained as the two most advanced students. The rabbi would read for us from the *Gamorah*, pointing out the various commentaries. We would then retire to study. Zurach found it convenient to go beyond the curtain into the bedroom to study. It was only natural that I would go with him. There we studied aloud for about one-half hour. After a while Zurach would produce a pack of cards which were given as a bonus when one bought a *kopek's* worth of candy. We would play a few games of *Durack*, something like Gin Rummy. We would again start studying loudly and end up with another game of cards. This almost became standard. The rabbi caught us a few times but blamed Zurach for killing valuable time. However, it was too good a pastime to last indefinitely. The rabbi's suspicion was aroused. One Friday morning the rabbi decided that we were not immune from the usual week-end review. For several months Zurach and I regarded Friday a free day. The rabbi did not read the *Gamorah* for us, so we either played cards or I helped Zurach with some of his chores around the house. This Friday the portion of the week was dealing with the specifications of the *Mishken* (Tabernacle). It is one of the very difficult portions, as it deals with hardware and crafts. The rabbi thought I knew the meaning of these difficult items and, frankly, I thought so myself, but when I got stuck on a word I could not translate, Rabbi Itzie Bunim called

over Zurach. He asked him if he knew the meaning of the word. Zurach did know. We proceeded further. Again, I got stuck. Zurach was now sitting along side of me. Again the rabbi asked him and, sure enough, Zurach again knew the word. When I got stuck the third time, the rabbi, who was always so good to me, lost his patience. For the first time in all my *heider* experience, a rabbi slapped me. After this revelation, I lost all my privileges. Rabbi Itzie Bunim went after me as hard as he could. At the end of the semester he told Father and Mother if Shayah wanted higher learning he should go to the Yeshiva.

When I left Rabbi Itzie Bunim's *heider* my friendship with Zurach held on for a long time. At the end of the summer after I quit the *heider*, a few days before Yom Kippur, Zurach came to our house to ask me if I would help him take the *kapores* to the slaughterhouse. *Kapores* is a substitute sacrifice for our sins, offered by Jews on the eve of Yom Kippur. Of course, I did not refuse.

The next day, Zurach, his older brother Joel who was hard-of-hearing, and I went to the slaughterhouse. I took two roosters, Zurach had a rooster and a chicken, and Joel had a goose. The legs of the chickens and goose were properly tied and we had no difficulty carrying them to the slaughterhouse. After obtaining the needed tickets we got into the crowd and began to push the people in front of us, as we were pushed by people in back. Finally, we reached the counter where the *shochet* stood. Joel was first with his goose. The *shochet* got hold of the bird, put it between his legs, turned up its head, and as he put

the knife on its neck, the goose somehow gained its feet and wings and broke loose. It began to flap its wings. It jumped; it flew with blood coming out of its neck; it stopped, wobbled as if it were drunk, but it could not be reached. Near a high fence, it half-jumped, half-flew over and disappeared. Joel rushed after it. By the time he got to the fence, the bird was already lost from sight.

Zurach, seeing what happened, deposited the two chickens with me and gave chase after the goose. When Joel and Zurach finally came back without the goose, they were totally exhausted, with despair and panic in their eyes. How could they go home without the goose? We finally had the four chickens slaughtered and went home. I went with them, braving the ordeal that was to follow. And an ordeal it was, indeed! For the first time I heard *Rebitzen* Freida really talk. I could not understand all she said, but I well understood the grief that had overtaken this good, hard-working woman and the letdown the entire family suffered.

YANKEL THE REBEL

The year was 1902. Home atmosphere was such that it began to disturb my peace. I don't ever remember fighting or scrapping with my two older sisters, Freidel and Chayah. I always admired them for their beautiful handwriting, for their knowledge of words in French and German, and also for their lady-like behavior. But with Yankel it was different. Yankel was the rebel of the family. He was a scrapper. He had his own way in relation to the immediate family, and even to things and people outside the home. When he wanted a thing, he took it. Anyone trying to stop him had to use force. If one called him names, he would give in exchange tenfold. When Yankel picked up a stone outdoors, it meant only one thing--it had to be thrown, not exactly into a window, but more often than not, it hit a window. Many were the complaints that ended in apologies and disputes. But his antics to satisfy his rebellious nature deserved admiration even by those who suffered from his unconventional activities. More than one of his exploits are worthy of description. Let me try to relate just a few.

Yankel was now about seven years old The time was between Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur. Madam Dashevsky, a member of the Shivotovsky family, and the elite of Jewish society, was our tenant. One day she came over to my mother and told her that she had obtained a secret strudel recipe

from Lemberg, that the Jews used when they made a birthday present for their beloved Kaiser Franz Joseph. Now that she had the recipe, she was very eager to have the strudel baked. She proposed to Mother a fifty-fifty partnership, on the condition that Mother would do the baking. It was a challenge and a privilege for Mother. She agreed, and immediately began to assemble the ingredients. In a couple of days the pastry was baked. We all knew about the transaction. Our appetites for the pastry were the more sharpened as the aroma pervaded the kitchen during and after the baking. Because of the buildup, the strudel became the object of the keenest expectation. When the baking was finished, Mother gave one-half to Madam Dashevsky --the other half she hid someplace, and locked it under seven locks. The great treat was to be dished out on Yom Kippur night. That would be symbolic of the best and sweetest year we had ever had.

Came the great day of Yom Kippur. Children under eight were not expected to fast. So Yankel would from time to time come home from synagogue for a bite to eat. Freidel and Chayah were also home most of the day. To the children that did fast, the end of the day brought them nearer to the time when they would taste the mysterious pastry. Finally, Father, Mother, Yankel and I came from the synagogue. The girls prepared a boiling samovar, and of course, Mother immediately went to bring in the pastry. A minute, another minute passed. Mother was not back with the pastry. Everyone was hungry. But where was Mother? She had hidden the strudel somewhere, but only she knew where!

At last Mother came back. "*Vey is mir*, somebody stole the pastry!" she cried. "The only thing they left was the empty pan."

The letdown was indescribable. Who could have done such a thing? The girls had been home. Had they seen anybody around the house? The pastry had been hidden in the attic. The only one who might have gone up would be Yankel, for he was the only one around the house during the day. Could someone have broken in at night to steal the pastry?

"Yankel, did you eat up the pastry?" Mother asked him.

"Who, me? I should die if I even saw it," he replied.

"Yankel, you were home today--no one else--tell the truth as a Jew must tell the truth, particularly on Yom Kippur night. Tell the truth!"

"Should I get blind if I saw the pastry, should I break my hands if I took the pastry. What do you want with me? Why don't you go after Shayah or the sisters? I did not see or eat the pastry!"

Mother and Father kept up the barrage of questioning, but Yankel with his protestations of innocence bested them. Finally, Mother turned to Father and said, "Wowa, let up. If such swearing came from a *goy*, we would have to believe him. Such protestations of innocence cannot be ignored. *Noo, gut* Yankel, we believe you. Let us go to the table." Yankel won the day!

Meanwhile, the mistery of the disappearance of the pastry came out in the open. It became the latest and most puzzling news in the immediate neighborhood. It took several days until things quieted down.

One day, the sisters came home with several fancy colored pictures. Yankel took one look, and made a dash for them. But the girls held on and he could not get at them. However, Yankel was intrigued by the colors and beauty of the pictures. So Yankel proposed a deal. He would tell them who ate up the pastry, if they would give him a picture. The sisters considered it a bargain to know the mystery of the last pastry. "*Noo, gut*, you tell us, and we will give you a picture," they said. Yankel made sure that he was going to get the picture, then he told them in detail how he had found the pastry and how, after tasting it, he could not stop until he ate up the last piece.

Another episode that sunk deeply into my memory is the incident with the *heider*. When Yankel reached the ripe age of seven, he had finished the elementary studies in Rabbi Simcha's *heider*. The next step was Rabbi Itzie Bunim's *heider*, where I had already been studying two years.

Yankel began to learn *Chumash*. During the day he would study with his class, but there were also classes of advanced studies. Yankel had a remarkable ability to memorize what he studied. When he came home at nightfall from *heider*, Yankel had to release some locked-up energy from a day's sitting in *heider*. So he would commandeer a horse, in the form of a broom between his legs. But Yankel rode it as if it were really a horse, and started repeating what he had learned during the day in his class, and also what the older class learned during the day. When Yankel did this, he was the happiest youngster in the world. The more he galloped, the

louder and noisier he became. The house was much too crowded to hold a family of six children, Father, Mother and two workmen, who in the winter evenings brought home work, and would hammer away as lustily with their mallets as Yankel with his mouth. Night after night the crescendo of noises had become unbearable. Something had to be done. So Mother asked Rabbi Itzie Bunim not to send us home in the afternoons at five o'clock, but to keep us until seven o'clock. When all the children left *heider* at five o'clock, Yankel and I were told to stay until seven. I was outraged. At first I was thinking of the cruelty imposed upon us, but what could we do? We had been condemned and punished for something we did not do. We did not know about the plot behind the scene. After awhile, I put my arms on the table, and buried my head in them. While I was thinking and rethinking about this outrage, I was seized with a fit of hysterical crying. Yet I was ashamed to cry aloud or raise my head. Nor would I utter a word in protest. Yankel was sitting alongside of me, but he did not cry. Apparently Yankel decided that somebody was going to be sorry for perpetrating this stunt on him. At seven o'clock we were let out.

The next morning I got up, and went through the usual morning routine. After breakfast, Mother packed our lunches, and I was ready to go. But Yankel was not ready. After waiting a few minutes, Yankel announced he was not going to *heider*. This was an unheard-of act. Not going to *heider*? Mother came over and felt his head. Sure enough, Yankel said he was sick. Well, Mother was not going to send a sick child to *heider*. That

morning, I went to *heider* alone.

Meanwhile, Yankel had to discharge some of his accumulated energies in the good old Yankel style. It did not take long, and Mother realized that Yankel was not sick. She ordered him to *heider* at lunchtime, but Yankel asked for a leave of absence until tomorrow. Came tomorrow, Yankel did not budge. So Mother let that day pass too, but she told him if he made any excuses the next day, she would ask the rabbi to come and pull him to *heider* by his ears. Came next morning, Yankel again refused to go to *heider*. Around noon, Rabbi Itzie Bunim asked me to come with him. He wanted to talk to Yankel. When the rabbi came, Yankel did not want to see him. Finally, Rabbi started to talk to him. Why did he not come to *heider*? He was one of his best students. How could he let him down? "Come Yankel," he said, "Let us go."

"No," said Yankel, "I am sick."

"But your mother says you are not sick," said the rabbi.

"I have no boots," said Yankel.

"But you have good shoes!"

"No, I want boots!"

After arguing back and forth, the rabbi took off his boots and said, "Here are my boots, I will use galoshes. Just come to *heider*."

"I don't want your boots."

This thing went on for about half an hour until the rabbi could take it no longer. He took Yankel by the ears and shook him. Then he slapped him good and hard over his cheeks, while Mother was standing by. When she saw what the rabbi did to Yankel, Mother became hysterical and said, "Rabbi, you are a *rozeach* (a

brute). How can you do this to a child? No wonder he does not want to go to *heider*."

The rabbi protested that he had never touched Yankel, but Mother was now on Yankel's side. Yankel won the day. He never went to Itzie Bunim's *heider* again. He also had the satisfaction of having avenged the wrong done to him and his brother, even though the poor rabbi paid for a sin he did not commit.

* * *

When I look over the storm and stress years of Yankel's childhood, I am moved by questions and speculations of whether a child under more favorable conditions would have emerged on top of life's ladder, or would degenerate into a spoiled, mischievous individual? In Yankel's case, adverse conditions in and around the house worked in his favor. These were the years when Mother began to show signs of illness, Father went through a merciless depression in his business. The overcrowded house became unbearable. Apparently, a child that was capable of unorthodox behavior was also capable of thinking straight. At the age of ten, as I remember, Yankel was still difficult, but a noticeable change began to shape the growing-up Yankel. Help around the house was needed from every child, and Yankel began to contribute his share in full. His *heider* career ended on a quiet note. At the age of twelve, he was apprenticed to a bookbinder. Instead of learning the trade in four years, Yankel decided after one year that he knew all that was to be learned in the trade. He left town and got a job

as a full-fledged mechanic in Solotonosh. When he came to America, he was the ideal brother of whom I was very proud. He was witty and could pick up English words and convert them into the funniest Jewish and Russian word caricatures. People were fond of him, and he loved people. Up to this day, he reamins a gentleman and scholar, and is respected for what he made of himself and for what he is.

This is the saga of my brother Yankel. From a bold and rebellious childhood, to a position of richly deserved respect and fondness. At this writing, Yankel is known as a devoted husband, excelling as a loving and beloved father, grandfather and brother to the Rubinstein family.

May he live long and prosper, my beloved brother Yankel!

GORODNITZKY'S PRIVATE RUSSIAN SCHOOL

In my eleventh year, I entered Gorodnitzky's private Russian school. At that time, the newly born Jewish intelligentsia realized that the *heider* was pitifully inadequate to prepare a Jewish child to face the modern world. The *heider* may be good for elementary Hebrew instruction, but after the age of eight or nine the child must be armed with a worldly Russian language education. Such a school was undertaken by the well-known young Jewish teacher Gorodnitzky, whose father and entire family of brothers and sisters were teachers.

The school was started with pomp and high expectations, but with not enough pupils to make it a going concern. The backers of the project finally concluded that to make this type of school prosper, the curriculum must include Jewish topics, such as the Prophets and Talmud. This was done. To produce the proper impetus to the revised project, the two most prominent teachers in our area were hired. The names Schlosberg and Gross were enough to bring in children of the most sophisticated parents.

Besides arithmetic and Russian reading and writing, we were taught Russian grammar, which is by all standards a difficult subject. The most interesting hour was right after lunch, when we played games and indulged in sports.

Until we came to this school, playing ball was a matter for *shkotzim*. Jewish boys didn't play ball or any games. Here I actually played the Russian version of baseball. We engaged in races and calisthenics. During the day, one-half hour in the morning and one-half hour before we went home, Mr. Gorodnitzky's wife, Jennie, conducted singing classes. We all loved this singing. Once a month she would muster us out in parade-like fashion and lead us five miles into the famous Dachnovka Forest, where we spent the day singing and playing games. She was not the most attractive woman as far as looks go, but if anyone every made children happy and inspired them to advance, it was Jennie Gorodnitzky.

In the afternoon from three to four o'clock the two teachers of Jewish subjects conducted their classes. Mr. Schlosberg was a famous Jewish scholar who wrote books in Russian and in Hebrew. He settled in Cherkassi because of his health. He needed the air of the Dachnovka Forest. Teaching was a side line, and he was available at a high price. He was dressed elegantly in a Prince Albert coat and a low stove-pipe hat. With his golden pince-nez and squarely trimmed beard, he really looked distinguished. I was in his class. I already had had the part of Talmud Mr. Gross taught, so I did not have the benefit of Mr. Gross's teaching.

We were about thirty to forty students in Mr. Schlosberg's class. The room was big and not too crowded, but on a hot summer afternoon it was very stuffy. Usually half of the class would fall asleep during the lecture. While I

was extremely interested in the subject, I can't truthfully say that I have not, sometime, succumbed to the poisonous air. However, the method Mr. Schlosberg used in teaching was so novel and unorthodox that, at first, he appeared to us not as a teacher, but as an actor.

In most *heiders* the *Tenach*--this is what we called the Prophets--was taught with a certain melody. It was unthinkable that one would recite a sentence by the Prophets without singing it out, as if the very greatness of the prophecies lay in the beautiful sing-song intonation. Not so with Mr. Schlosberg.

He opened his lecture by telling us the history and background of the period. He then quoted a sentence straight, as if the Prophets were ordinary human beings, and talked to the kings or the people in ordinary fashion. As he warmed up to the subject he began to give emphasis to every word, every sentence, until it began to make sense. There were quite a few children to whom his teaching was an ordeal, but those who wanted to learn and could defy the oppressive air certainly did learn considerably.

During the summer we used to have government raids on the school. The school was ostensibly for the purpose of teaching Russian subjects only, since the government would not issue licenses to a private Russian school that would include Jewish instruction; however. Jewish people had long since learned how to deal with the Russian government. The school was only one more example that a bribe could rectify any prohibition. Usually the local official would notify the school that there would be an inspection on a certain day. When such an alert came at

short notice, disaster threatened. But, when there was enough time, the Jewish teachers used to run to the outhouse and spend an hour or more there until the inspection was over.

One time while Mr. Schlosberg was conducting the class, Mr. Gorodnitzky opened the door and yelled, "Inspection!" He pointed to Chatskel Volodorsky and said, "You be the *Dijurney* (monitor of the class in the absence of the teacher)." Mr. Schlosberg ran to the outhouse. Chatskel was always appointed monitor because he was feared by all the children. He was bigger than any of them, but his fame for beating up bigger boys than himslef was enough to make him feared by his classmates.

During the inspection it was imperative that the class should be quiet. However, one of the boys turned to talk to a boy sitting next to him. Chatskel hit him with his yardstick so hard that the boy's ear began to bleed as if it were cut off. The boy ran out of the classroom screaming at the top of his voice. When Mr. Gorodnitzky saw what happened, he ran into the classroom and yelled to Chatskel, "*Merzavitz* (rascal), sit down!" He turned to me, saying, "Shayah, you are *Dijurney*." I picked up the ruler and began to act as the guard of the class.

No sooner did Mr. Gorodnitzky leave the room when Chatskel stood up and yelled, "Boys, let us all yell." As he began to yell, most of the boys followed. Pandemonium took over. I stood with the ruler in my hand, not knowing what to do. Meantime, the inspectors were in the building. When Mr. and Mrs. Gorodnitzky heard this ungodly noise they both rushed in, pale

as ghosts. The first thing I knew was that I was being beaten up by Mr. Gorodnitzky himself. He hit me in the face several times. I thought he would never stop. I was dazed for awhile. When I came to, Jennie Gorodnitzky was in the class. They were all singing patriotic songs. I felt the hurt on my face very keenly, but the shame and humiliation was such that I could neither leave nor remain.

When I finally came home, hurt and dejected, I could not tell my story to anyone. Usually the assumption was: "A boy that was beaten by a teacher deserved it."

Thus ended my first sweet taste of a modern school, outside the *heider*. The bright horizons unveiled by novel instruction, by games, hikes and songs, suddenly turned pitch dark, as if staged and masterminded by an evil genius.

MY LAST YEAR IN SCHOOL

The semester in Gorodnitzky's private Russian school ended a week before High Holidays. I quit school two weeks before the holidays. Father frankly did not like the idea of my acting with such reckless independence. After all, I was not twelve years old. Father read the liberal Jewish press. An intensive campaign for Jewish worldly education was then in progress. Russian education for a Jewish child had become a life's necessity. Even in business a modern Jew had to know Russian. Father decided that I should continue with my studies. I agreed, but not in Gorodnitzky's school. The only other good teacher in Russian subjects was the elder Gorodnitzky, father of the Gorodnitzky at whose hands I suffered that unforgettable indignity.

For the next five months I walked five times a week to Mr. Gorodnitzky's house to receive a one-hour lesson every morning. I remember very little of what he really taught me but vivid in my memory are the impassable roads I had to negotiate every day to reach the house of the Gorodnitzky's. It was a small house, situated on a hill above a larger hill. To get to this place from our house I had to make the descent of the steep road of Beregovoy Spusk to the Evreisky (Jewish) street; then walk up the first hill and from there to the next hill. The first several weeks during the rainy season, the mud was deep and slippery. Walking to school was no

pleasure. After the rainy season was over winter settled down with its deep and frozen snows, making the descent and ascent of the Beregovoy Spusk and the hills almost impossible. It was a usual and normal sight to observe, as I was traversing Beregovoy Spusk, the drivers of wagons, loaded with wood or other provisions, beating their horses, urging them on along the frozen, slippery and steep road. The horses would work up a sweat and foam around their mouths, their bodies steaming like a boiling kettle. Some horses made it--others were less fortunate. They would fall down in their harness, stretch out and die. There were no societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals; a horse was only a horse. But the loss of the horse to the owner was more tragic that the loss of life to the animal.

Even more tragic was the sight that used to greet me when I entered the house of my tutor. The classroom was the bedroom at night, the living room and dining room by day when there were no pupils to take lessons. The Gorodnitzkys had five grown sons who were on their own and away from home. The only one at home was their eight-year-old daughter. I would come in the morning and find Mr. and Mrs. Gorodnitzky, both frail people, in their overcoats, the little girl bundled up and shivering, with the parents forcing her to take cod liver oil. The girl was miserable and could not take it. They held one spoon with the oil and one spoon with jelly, praying and begging until they finally forced the oil down her throat.

The Russian houses were built with a brick oven that would give a certain

amount of heat, but during spells of zero weather, even water in the house would freeze. Somehow the Gorodnitzky house held less heat than other houses. After the little girl was finally induced to take the oil, the mother took over and Mr. Gorodnitzky and I would sit down, both shivering with cold, and proceed with the lesson. I can't say I was too happy with this manner of schooling, but I was not too unhappy either! All around me life was hard and merciless, and there was so much that was worse than the unpleasant things that crossed my way that I took most events in stride and considered them as normal as day following night.

All winter, after school, I would either help Mother or stay with Father in the tinshop. As far back as I can remember, there was always one man, sometimes two, working at home during the winter months. They prepared tinware for the Passover market. I never felt I had to learn the trade; it just came to me as naturally as speech. A child hears people talk, he begins to talk. I saw the men make up things from my earliest childhood, so I knew the craft.

With the arrival of summer and no more school, I began to consider myself an adult. I worked when I chose and I took time off when I wanted to meet boy friends. It was easy living for about a year. However, during this time things were happening. The *pogrom*, Mother's illness, and the help Mother needed that I could render kept me busy. Time was marching on and I was growing up!

THE RABBI'S BETH MEDROSH
and
COMBELE THE SHOEMAKER

Looking back on one's childhood, it is natural to dwell on people who contributed to the influences that shaped and developed one's individuality. However, there are other agents that make their contribution with as much impact as the individual personality. In my case the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh* and its courtyard exerted a considerable influence on my later development.

The Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh* was not only a synagogue where people came to pray three times a day, nor was it only a place of study where the Yeshiva was conducted; the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh* was surrounded with a whole complex of Jewish institutions.

The synagogue, one of the largest, seating about one thousand people in the main section and half as many in the women's part, was situated in the center of a large court. In front of this court was the *Talmud Torah*, where the orphans and very poor received an elementary Jewish education free. Here was the public kosher kitchen, where the *Talmud Torah* children got one meal a day free, and all other poor could get a meal for two *kopeks*. Here were the Jewish public bath, the wine cellar, the old age home and the forum for the upcoming intelligentsia. The bath house I remember well because up to the age of eleven, I

used to go there every Friday afternoon with Father, Yankel and Yossel. It was an old brick and stone building. I can't recollect the kind of roof it had but the walls were of brick and green with age. Inside, the walls and ceilings were also of brick. Several times I was witness to a brick coming down from the ceiling. But the one time it really aroused my anger and protest was when a brick came down from the ceiling and hit *Reb* Feivel, the water-carrier, on the head. Feivel was way past eighty. Those who saw it thought that it surely killed the old man. But Feivel, undaunted, showed up next Friday as if nothing happened. This bath house, like all other Russian bath houses, had as its main feature the benches that were built like steps until the highest bench reached close to the ceiling. Since heat rises, one had to be especially receptive to heat to occupy the top bench very long. However, most everybody made the attempt, but few stayed long enough to use a broom for the massage. But hot and steaming as it was inside the bath house, the dressing room had no heat. In winter, it was, in the light of present day comforts, plainly inhuman to leave a hot steaming bath room and step into an unheated room in zero weather. I can still see myself shivering with cold and teeth chattering out of control. Yet we did it year after year, will no ill effect.

I became aware of this blessing in the guise of an ordeal, when I came to America and began to develop colds, sinus and throat ailments.

The Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh* courtyard was the assembly place for ordinary and extraordinary occasions. I remember the

day when news reached Cherkassi about the death of Dr. Herzl. Somehow the news spread like wildfire. Everyone was running to the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh*. Nothing was organized. Nothing was prepared, but here were dozens of speakers on chairs, addressing the milling crowds. The synagogue inside was jammed to the doors. Speaker after speaker came up, addressing the public. Finally, when the speakers were finished a call came for a cantor to make the *El-Mole-Achmim*. There was no cantor! But there must be a cantor! It would be unthinkable to close this extraordinary memorial meeting without commemorating Dr. Herzl in proper style.

After several frantic calls a voice was heard--"I will make the *Mole*!" It took some pushing and heaving to get the volunteer cantor to the pulpit. When the noise subsided and the cantor opened his mouth, the assemblage was treated to one of the most touching *Moles* they had ever heard. A rich, sweet and vigorous voice, chanting in the tradition and style of a master, delivered a *Mole* befitting the occasion.

"Who it it? Who is it?" Everyone was anxious to know. It was, to everyone's surprise, Combele the Shoemaker.

Combele was a nickname, because he was small and had a peculiar gait. He lived with his wife and five children, all girls, in a damp basement. What were his horizons and his hopes? What future was in store for him and what could he expect? What chance had he with five girls except *dallas* and more *dallas*? But here it happened! A realization of his wildest dream! He had the distinctive privilege of delivering the *Mole* to a packed synagogue for the modern Jewish

Messiah, Dr. Theodor Herzl.

Fortune, oh Fortune, not always hast thou been choosy with your handouts, but when you smiled on Combele the Shoemaker even the angels in heaven must have sung Halleluyah!

DAYS AND NIGHTS IN OUR CROWDED HOUSE

It was in the year 1899, about Purim time, when Grandma Tzirel officiated for the last time as midwife at the birth of my sister Devorah and her short-lived twin. Grandma died a few weeks later. About one year afterward, Grandpa Yeedl followed her in death.

During this period Freidel and Clara went to one of the finest private Jewish schools. Both obtained a fine Jewish and Russian education. Aside from reading and writing in both languages, they also had some arithmetic. But Freidel was now twelve years old. It was time to think of *tachless*. So she was sent to Solotonosh, to Father's Cousin Shifra Berenstein, to learn the craft of dressmaking.

Meantime, the store was vacant. The death of Grandma and Grandpa left a vacuum in the house. There was too much room. The family was now three people less, and five children and two or three workingmen did not seem to Mother such a burden that she could not attend to a store too, particularly, when the store was right on the premises.

We moved into the front house with the store. Here Clara and I, eleven and nine years old, were the mainstay of the business. In the evening we would go to the wholesale store and get the merchandise needed. In the morning we would go to the bakery for bagel and bread. I still can't figure out how we did it. It was beyond our strength, but it never

occurred to us that we should protest.

It was here that Celia and the three youngest boys, Dan, Nathan and Lou, were born, and it was here that Mother, due to overwork and exhaustion, became ill and was sick until after Yeedl's (Dan's) birth. Yet all these hardships were like a pattern of normal life.

After a year in Solotonosh Freidel came home a full-fledged dressmaker. Grandpa Avram brought in a sewing machine (a used one, of course) and Freidel was in the dressmaking business. Little by little she developed a going business.

Meantime, the Russo-Japanese War was in full swing. Cherkassi was a military base. Here the recruits were outfitted and from here they were sent to training camps all over the country. The army provisioners needed supplies besides guns and ammunition. Among the goods they needed and could get in and around Cherkassi was underwear. The army supplied the cotton fabric, buttons, thread, and sewing machines. Anyone who could undertake to deliver fifty or more shirts a day could get a contract at seven cents a shirt. Freidel got such a contract.

She hired five girls, paying five cents per shirt. Our house became a virtual factory. Six sewing machines were going constantly; the chatter and the many people in a house consisting of one large room, two bedrooms and a kitchen with a store in front really made this a "Paradise Lost." But the fun came at night. The five girls were supposed to turn out ten or more shirts a day. Some did, but some did not. To meet the quota, it was decided that once a week everyone must work till two o'clock in the morning.

In order to be able to stay up that late and not fall asleep, they were singing at the top of their voices. I still remember the songs and the sleepless nights of that period.

How Freidel, a youngster barely fifteen years old, went on like this for a whole winter is beyond anyone's comprehension. She finally stopped eating, and become so touchy that Mother stepped in and stopped this madness, even though it meant the loss of so much profit.

Whatever the discomfort and crowdedness the family endured, no one complained. In the morning Mother would get busy with the samovar. The second chore would be carrying around the house a grilled shovel with red hot coal topped with an onion and a piece of sugar. This was the method of fumigating before the house would explode from foul air combustion.

Here in this blessed America it is hard to conceive of the degree of crowdedness to which people can be subjected without complaint. If only it would not get worse! Here is an example of how things could be ever worse.

As I mentioned before, Cherkassi was a military base. It was the law that every home-owner must quarter one recruit for every room in the house, including the kitchen. Every winter a government representative would come into our house and assign us four recruits. Well, for the bribe of two *rubles*, he would reduce the number to two recruits. The next day he would bring in two big husky soldiers with boxes and smelly fur coats, and place them in the living room where Freidel had her shop. During the day the recruits were away, but at night when they returned it was impossible to find a

place for oneself. They stretched out on the floor, taking up half of the room. The girls had to seek refuge. The boys were afraid to stay with them. The local atmospheric conditions were combustible enough, but mixed with that of the invading air blast, there was nothing to do but grin and bear it. On one such night the recruits and everyone else came in early. The temperature was forty degrees Centigrade, about ten below zero Farenheit. Some of the articles that would freeze in the store were taken into the house.

However, the Dvoriansky Oil (a very expensive oil) would not survive unless it were placed on the brick flat top above the oven. This place was the sleeping place for our two working men. But now that we had the recruits, there was no room for me in the main room where all the children used to sleep. So I went to sleep on the top of the oven. This warm top could hold two people, but the oil, and my presence made it more than overcrowded. As we fell asleep, someone kicked the can of oil and, lo and behold, the warm oil splashed the walls and flooded the floor. As it froze, this valuable liquid looked like an apparition.

In the morning, everybody looked at it and turned their heads away as if there were a dead body lying there. It was a real tragedy. The biting cold, the uninvited guests, the crowded conditions, and now, this loss of money filled the cup of bitterness to overflowing. Yet of all the causes that forced Jews to flee Russia, crowdedness was one of the least oppressive.

MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE RELIEF OF MOTHER'S CHILDBIRTH

When I reached the age of ten, my world was still well organized. There was law and order in the Universe, under the complete rule of the Creator above. When man and beast suffered from heat or intense winter cold, it was normal; when children worked beyond their strength or limit of endurance, that too was normal. Hardship, misery, sickness and pain were the fate of men; that is how God created the world and that was it!

The important thing in life was to be good in the eyes of the Almighty, who in His loving kindness rewards the *tzadikim* (righteous) and in His wrath punishes the *reshuim* (wicked). Such was my world when I faced my first crisis and needed the help of God!

Sister Clara, two years my senior, and I were busy youngsters. One of the daily chores we had to perform was helping Mother in the grocery store which was adjacent to our front room. Sister Clara was now out of school and the store was her full-time occupation. I helped before and after *heider*.

For several weeks now Mother's stomach was daily growing larger, until it reached such a size that it became evident to us children that the new arrival might be expected any day.

One day when I came home from some errand, *Meema* Chave was in the kitchen

busying herself at the oven. Her presence suggested that the time had come for Mother to be delivered of the baby. I also recalled that during the previous two childbirths of Mother, *Meema* Chave assisted--first our grandmother, *Baba* Tzirel, then another midwife.

Meema Chave was a younger sister of *Baba* Tzirel, who was an expert and the most prominent midwife in the Cherkassi area. *Meema* Chave, however, had neither the skill nor the self-reliance for such a responsible profession, but *Baba* Tzirel in her declining years had engaged her sister as her assistant. *Baba* Tzirel was now four years dead. The previous baby had been delivered under guidance of another midwife, but *Meema* Chave was there assisting as before.

It was a warm summer afternoon couple of days before Rosh Hashona. Mother was sitting on the edge of the bed, rolling up strips of cloth which she had cut off from an old, but cleanly laundered, bed sheet. The room was dark. It had three walls without windows, the fourth wall consisted of a gray curtain. Faint light during the day entered from the top of the curtain. Such an arrangement was necessary to make room for a passageway between the kitchen in the rear and the main room in front.

This front room served as a dining room, living room, bedroom and now, since our fifteen-year-old sister Feidel had become a full-fledged dressmaker, this room also served as a dressmaker's shop with two sewing machines and two girl workers.

Amidst the doings of the store, the din and clatter of machines in the shop, the noisy shouting of six children in

that compact area, what could be more ideal than to receive a newly born member of the human race?

As dusk set in, the midwife, a middle-aged woman, appeared. She put on a white apron, pulled the curtain tight and began to order *Meema* Chave around. For several hours we heard the women talk. At times we heard Mother's outcry of pain --little by little, the cries became more frequent.

It was now about ten o'clock--more than three hours since the midwife and *Meema* Chave started doing what they could to comfort Mother in her labor. The small children were put to bed. Father, the two sisters, Yankel, two years my junior, and I were standing in the passage way beyond the curtain listening to Mother's groaning and continued exclamations of *"Oi Gottenue! Oi Momenue!"* We were all huddled up in this tense atmosphere where each and every one of us was sharing in Mother's pain and agony.

By this time the moaning and crying assumed desperate proportions. We plainly began to fear the worst. We looked at each other in desperate helplessness. What could we do? Her yelling became louder and more agonizing. We were now really scared.

Suddenly, I began to yell at the top of my voice, *"Vus shtein mir? Vus schweigen mir? Vus tuen mir nit epes?"* ("Why are we standing? Why are we silent? Why don't we do something?")

Father seeing the despair in my eyes realized this was neither the time, nor the place to discuss the subject. So he meekly said, *"Noo, vus can men tuin?"* ("Well, what can we do?")

"Vus can men tuin?" I shouted.

"Lamur sugen Thilum." ("What can we do? . . . Let us recite the Psalms.") I said it in a most commanding tone.

Father did not argue. He said, *"Noo, lamur sugen Thilum."* ("Well, let us say the Psalms.")

The prayer books were on the window sill. Father, Yankel and I grabbed the prayer books and began chanting the Psalms at the top of our voices.

Mother was still writhing in her agony, but we raised our voices as loud as we could to convey the message to Mother that we established direct communications with the Source of ultimate compassion.

Amidst our chanting and Mother's yelling, a thin shrill outcry electrified the air. Even before we finished the second chapter of the Psalms we heard the voice of *Meema* Chave and the midwife -

"MAZEL TOV, MAZEL TOV, AN YEENGEL!" ("A boy!")

Like a sudden beam of sunshine and the cheer of a band of music, the atmosphere in the house changed. Smiles appeared on every face. A feeling of relief left everybody happy. Mother was comforted and I was proud as a peacock of my timely contribution, via the Psalms chanting, to the speedy relief of our dear mother. The only fly in the ointment was: Why did't I think of the Psalms sooner?

MY AUNT TOUBI

Whenever I think of my Aunt Toubi, I also think of Sholom Aleichem. He immortalized Tevye *der Milchiger* (the dairyman). Should he have met my Aunt Toubi first, I am sure Tevye would have come in a poor second. I can't remember Aunt Toubi in any pose, or under any condition, where she did not talk or did not direct someone as to what to do and how to do it! Her manner of speech was not conventional. It was not in her character to call a spade a space. To her, a spade would probably be a black cupola or any other picturesque description. She was a born poet, although she never learned to read or write. Her memory was prodigious and her stories, whether true or out of her imagination, if put together, would fill volumes!

Of all the stories she told none excelled the freshly baked stories about her two brothers, Motel and Nuson. Both brothers were illiterate. The older, Motel, was a salesman; he could sell anything sight unseen. For a long time his exploits of meeting wealthy and prominent people and the transactions he promulgated, that is, according to Aunt Toubi, were like stories from the *Arabian Nights*. In the end, he got embroiled in an undertaking that he not only could not finish, but which finished him. He committed suicide at the age of forty.

The other brother, Nuson, although illiterate, had the gift of gab and boldness that brought him in contact with

prominent and influential people. As there were always people who needed favors from higher-ups, particularly from government personnel that could do favors for a price, Nuson soon became a go-between man. This was only the first rung on his way up to prominence. He became an attorney without knowing how to read or write. People, when they hear this story, can't believe it. However, this is how we heard it, and it could very well be true!

In Russia, in the days before the revolution, all civil cases between two contending peasants could be settled by a justice of the peace, without the help of a professional lawyer. Each party brought forth his claim or defense, their witnesses, and the judge himself tried the case and pronounced judgment. However, in cases where one was too timid or frightened to stand up in front of a judge in open court, one was allowed to have a neighbor or friend represent him. This is where Aunt Toubi's brother, Nuson, came in. He started to represent the peasants in court. Soon he began to visit the courts where he learned the fine art of trapping witnesses. He won case after case for his clients.

Nuson now went a step farther. He hired a scribe, one who could write the Russian language correctly, and dictated to him appeals to higher courts in behalf of his clients. His appeals were of such a persuasive nature that in many cases he actually wrested out pardons for his clients. When I left Russia, Nuson was already past his prime, but was still going strong.

Aunt Toubi used to tell about the

involved cases he tried against prominent lawyers--the tricks he played on the opposition and their witnesses. Every story was a thriller when told by Aunt Toubi!

Before proceeding with my story of Aunt Toubi, I deem it necessary to tell something of the events that led up to her taking title of being my aunt.

Her father, Levi, and my grandmother, Tzirel, were cousins. Levi lived in Kamenka, a typical Jewish *shtetel*, forty miles from Cherkassi. They had not seen each other in years, but Grandmother knew that Levi's oldest daughter was now reaching the age of fifteen. Tzirel's son Avremel, a boy of eighteen, had begun to sprout a beard. So, one day Grandmother Tzirel and Avremel got into a covered wagon and boldly proceeded into the land of Cousin Levi.

Without much ado the children were to take a look at each other, and to save time and expenses, while they were already together, to break plates and set a date for the wedding. Avremel was a husky youngster, six feel tall. Toubi was about five feet tall, with plenty of time to grow. Her feminine charm had yet to emerge. Avremel was not overly enthusiastic about the *shiddach* but he was not even consulted. Such matters were left to the old and the wise.

Within three days after his arrival in Kamenka, Avremel's fate and life with Toubi was packaged, wrapped and sealed. After several months they were married. It was rather a pleasant surprise, soon after their marriage, to see Avremel, flushed with married bliss, talking of his love and happiness with his "woman of valor"--Toubi.

Avremel was by trade a glazier. Soon after their marriage Toubi prevailed upon him to open a glassware and crockery store. Toubi had now become a business lady, and from that day on, Uncle Avremel never moved or did anything that was not directed or prompted by my Aunt Toubi.

Uncle Avremel was a hard-working man. In addition to the minimum Hebrew education he could write Jewish, but no more. This was enough for Aunt Toubi to exploit his superiority over those who could not even write Jewish. Apparently, there were many businessmen who did business via the Jewish written word. Under Aunt Toubi's direction, Uncle Avremel, besides working as a glazier and carrying on his shoulder a box of glass weighing some sixty to eighty pounds, and walking an average of ten to fifteen miles a day, was also a glass and glassware merchant.

When Uncle Avremel had made a little money, Aunt Toubi became a banker. She loaned money at more than prevailing interest rates, half of which she never collected. But Aunt Toubi said that only with money can one make money. She thought it was a good and respectable business, in spite of what others thought.

Uncle Avremel became a manufacturer of matzos under Aunt Toubi's urging. Uncle brought the first matzo baking machinery to Cherkassi. Uncle Avremel had also become, with the full participation of Aunt Toubi, a hotel keeper, a grocery man, but never for one working day have I known him not to carry his heavy glazier's box on his shoulders, except when he was laid up with a broken leg or was a guest in the penitentiary. Yes, I said penitentiary!

For the bolder Aunt Toubi's adventures

developed, the greater were the risks. It was only natural that somewhere along the line Uncle Avremel and Aunt Toubi would slip with disasterous consequences. But this is a chapter by itself, to which we will return in due time.

In the field of banking, Aunt Toubi did not do so badly. Her clients were mostly army officers and small business men. The interest rates were high enough to ease the shock of any loss. She was alive to all the tricks and pitfalls inherent in the financial world. She, therefore, demanded and got loans properly secured by notes or other means. All transactions were carried on with the assistance of her uncanny memory and the abacus, that was as much part of her as her clothes.

When a slick customer appeared, Aunt Toubi would send him to Avremel, her husband, who would say he had no money presently, but if Bunim has, he could have it. This was Aunt Toubi's trump card when she could not refuse outright. But who was Bunim? And how did he enter into this financial setup?

Bunim was Uncle Avremel's youngest brother. He grew up a giant of a man over six feet tall and, like the other two brothers, raring to go after hard work and bring home the earnings to help support the family. Strong people could earn money with their strong shoulders as carriers. In a good day one could make as much as a *ruble*, enough to support a family. Bunim was a carrier. At the age of nineteen he married a neighbor's daughter named Gitel. When their second child was on its way a tragic accident overtook him. One winter day while carrying a two hundred pound sack of flour on

an icy pavement, he slipped and broke a leg. In those days the method of dealing with an accident was not to call a doctor, but rather to call the *feldsher* (male nurse) who could give first-aid. Such a man was called in. He immediately ordered the leg to be put in a cast. After several days in the cast, the leg developed gangrene and had to be amputated above the knee. Bunim remained a cripple.

As big and as strong as Bunim was, with one leg he could not earn a living to support a wife and children. The relatives did everything they could to keep him and his dependents provided with food and shelter, but after a while outside aid came to an end. Bunim and his family were actually starving. In those days there were no artificial limbs or wheelchairs. A cripple had to either crawl or move haphazardly on crutches. Bunim was now desperate. There was nothing left for him to do, but to go out into the street on his crutches and beg alms. He would not do that. Relatives got together and fixed up a stand in the bazaar for Aunt Gitel to earn a living for the family. After two weeks the venture proved a failure. One morning when the children were crying for food, Bunim picked up his crutches and made his way into one of the prominent business corners on the Kreschatic. Here most people knew him as the son of Yeedl the *Usem* and *Baba* Tzirel. He told everyone who knew him that he came out not for exhibition, but for alms. "Yes, my friends," he said, "A cripple can't work, but a wife and children and he himself must eat to live." The fact that he was the son of two outstanding personalities, a prominent scholar and the best-known midwife in and around

Cherkassi, brought an unexpected outpouring of sympathy. Bunim went home that day well rewarded. From that day on Bunim took his stand on the same corner year after year. From that corner he not only maintained a respectable home, but he soon began to accumulate a little capital! With a brother a banker, there were no difficulties investing in a project that would accumulate *naden* for his three growing daughters.

Among the customers who were often knocking at the door of Aunt Toubi was Henzel Moshenski. He was the owner of a pastry shop. In Cherkassi there were three such shops; one owned by a Greek, one by a Turk, and one by Henzel Moshenski. A pastry shop in Cherkassi was regarded as a highly specialized and well-paid business. To pass such an establishment was a gourmet's delight. The sweet smell of pastry baking was like an aroma from heaven. The display of shapes and colors in the window was an aesthetic treat to the eye. Many of us youngsters would dream of the time when we would come into possession of our first three *kopeks* to satisfy our keenest desire for one of those pastries.

Henzel Moshensky's shop was on the Kreschatic. The family consisted of his wife and three daughters. They were living in the rear of the house, while the bakery was in the basement. The store was attended by the wife and daughters. Upon entering the store, one could see the people in the rear, also hear their voices. It seemed to have been a house of happy people where singing and piano playing was part of the whole pastry shop setup. Two of the girls went to the gymnasium. The oldest daughter dressed

as if she were the daughter of a millionaire. They all, of course, spoke only Russian.

Henzel Moshensky was tall and proportionately built. He had no beard and wore modern clothes. In our Jewish community Henzel assumed the role of spokesman. Whether he was appointed, elected, or not, he was always in the right place at the right time to assert himself.

In the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh*, Henzel Moshensky was *gabai* and was looked upon with respect. But when a Jewish pastry baker would try to establish himself on the Kreschatic, Henzel would make it so hard for him, that he would have to give up the project as hopeless. When asked, "*Reb* Henzel, how can you do it to a Jewish man with a family and children?" he would reply, "I am afraid of him. This man is a *kobtzen* (poor man); he does not know how to live and has no requirement for a decent living. How am I and my family, who do have a decent standard of living, I am asking you, how am I going to compete with him?" Invariably the Jewish community gave him a sympathetic ear. He never had a Jewish competitor on the Kreschatic!

Thus Henzel Moshensky enjoyed the full measure of respect from his community. He had a nice business and a fine family; the only thing he did not have was money, and money was what he always needed. So Henzel Moshensky and loans became synonymous.

It was also only natural that Henzel Moshensky would find his way to Aunt Toubi's door. In time he became a steady customer. He paid a fat interest and would get a new loan only to pay off an old one. This was the arrangement, and

it worked for a long time. But Henzel knew that Bunim had some money with which Aunt Toubi was very careful. She did not cherish too much losing her own money, but Bunim's money was sacred--it must be guarded like the pupil in her eye. Only on short term was his money available and with the full knowledge of the borrower what kind of money it was.

Well, one time Henzel Moshensky was in critical need of money. The terms he offered were so attractive that even Aunt Toubi fell for them. Henzel Moshensky obtained a three hundred *ruble* loan on condition that when Bunim's oldest daughter Hinke would become engaged, he would produce the money, whether it was next week or next year. Meantime, he would pay the interest monthly. Well, Henzel got the loan but Hinke did not become engaged next week or next year. After Henzel Moshensky paid enough interest to cover the amount of the loan, he stopped paying interest. However, Henzel was in debt to Aunt Toubi on a smaller interest rate that he kept up.

Aunt Toubi was now in trouble with Henzel Moshensky, but more so with Bunim, her brother-in-law. She paid the regular interest, not the fat interest, to Bunim from her own money and she told Bunim that if Henzel Moshensky wouldn't pay when Hinke became engaged, she would pay it. This kept peace in the two Rabinovitz families. But there was yet another Rabinowitz brother whose family would become involved with Hinke's dowry.

When Shayah, Avremel's brother, four years his senior, was fourteen years old, Grandmother Tzirel decided that none of her sons would matriculate into the Rabbinate. They would be hard-working people

and nothing else. So, if they had to be plain working people, it was still better to rub one's self around a full and fat pot. Inasmuch as the only place where the pots were full and fat was the village Medviedivka, where she came from, and where she left her family of brothers and sisters, she decided to send her oldest son, Shayah, to Medviedivka to work with her family in whatever enterprise they were engaged. Shayah settled in Medviedivka. There he was married at the age of eighteen to a village girl named Bessi. She bore him five children: two sons, Meyer Selig and Yankel; and three daughters, Leah, Rivka, and Lubka.

Jewish girls in villages were excess baggage. As soon as a girl became of age she would be sent to the city, either with relatives or as a servant girl. Leah was now fifteen years old. She was hired out to a well-known Jewish family. At the turn of the century, Goldfaden and his troupe of actors and actresses became very popular in Russia and all over eastern Europe. It was only natural when Goldfaden visited Cherkassi for a week's stay, that everybody sang the popular folksongs they heard at the theater. After the performance the well-to-do Jewish families customarily invited the actors to their homes for refreshments. During one of these evenings Leah was in the kitchen and, while preparing the samovar and refreshments, she was singing the very songs the theatre personnel sang that evening. Sitting at the table, the guests became aware of a competition that could not be ignored. Who was the singer? Where was she? Leah brought in the samovar and her appearance immediately stole the show. One of the actors, who was also

the director of the show, would not let her go back to the kitchen. He was overcome not only with her singing, but more so with her looks. "She is," he said, "the sum total of a whole troupe."

That week Leah left with the theatre people who left a written paper with the rabbi that nothing detrimental would happen to her except that the director himself would marry her. She became a famous actress under a pseudonym that I can't recollect. When she visited Cherkassi many years later, she was already a well-known actress and the proud wife of the director of the theatre.

The second daughter, Rivka, was a beauty. She was not hired out as a servant girl. She used to stay with the different relatives, sometimes in our house, sometimes with Aunt Toubi, and at times in Aunt Chayah's home. She fell in love with a Jewish soldier from a fine Warsaw family. The soldier was wounded in the Russo-Japanese War, but she nursed him to health and married him.

The third daughter, Lubca, also had a nice voice. The older sister took Lubca with her, and she became a participating actress in the dancing and singing group.

The family was satisfied that Shayah had good *mazel* with his daughters; however, with his sons he was not so fortunate. Meyer Selig, the oldest one, was the terror of the village. It was a usual sight to see a *goy* drunk and acting wildly, but not a Jew. However, Meyer Selig did get drunk and quite often. When that happened the whole village, Jew and gentile, would run for cover. On Mondays, when Cherkassi had

its fair of the week, and Meyer Selig was in town, there would invariably be some excitement involving him. He could not come to our house as neither Father nor Mother would put up with him. His stop-over was with Aunt Toubi. Only she could understand him, and to her he poured out all his troubles.

During the season of the matzo baking, Meyer Selig would give up his business in Medviedivka and settle for several months to manage for Uncle Avremel the fabrication of matzos. When he was sober, he was efficient and was feared. No nonsense when Meyer Selig was there. He and Aunt Toubi got along very well. But Uncle Avremel warned him that we would not tolerate a Jew *ashikker* on his premises.

Well, one Saturday afternoon Meyer Selig came in drunk while Uncle Avremel was sitting at the table reciting the Psalms. One look at Meyer Selig and Uncle Avremel got up and with his two oversized (twelve inches by twelve inches) hands delivered two blows on Meyer Selig's face. Heaven help Uncle Avremel! Meyer Selig's beastly nature came into play. He seized a chair and made a rush at Uncle Avremel. Luckily, Aunt Toubi was in the other room. She came in just in time to put herself between Uncle's head and the chair. "Meyer Selig," she screamed, "Sober up!" It was too late to save the chair. He smashed it into splinters, but Aunt Toubi saved Uncle Avremel's head and maybe his life!

The youngest of Uncle Shayah's children was Yankel. Unlike his older brother, he looked rather respectable. He grew up in Medviedivka, "tall, dark and handsome." When he was twenty years old, he became a favorite among the women. For a few

years he lived with relatives, but mostly with Aunt Toubi and Uncle Avremel where he learned the glazer trade. He dressed well and was fully aware of his standing with the ladies, but was wise enough to keep out of any entanglement with women.

During that time there were large construction projects going on in Kremenchuk where glaziers were in great demand and were earning two and three times as much as in Cherkassi. Glaziers from everywhere were rushing to Kremenchuk, and so did Yankel. He spent some time there in the company of two local glaziers who had a young beautiful sister. She soon fell in love with Yankel. Uankel, who knew his worth with women and who insulated himself against them, apparently met his master in this girl. He remained in Kremenchuk. After several months the girl became pregnant and Yankel found himself trapped. He had no intention of marrying her for several reasons, mainly because she had seduced him and she was the sister of two notorious characters known as killers. On the day she informed Yankel of her pregnancy, the two brothers approached him with the choice of either marrying their sister or forfeiting his life. Yankel was now confronted with the bitterest crisis of his life. He hoped to escape the trap, so he told them he wanted to go to Cherkassi, where he could obtain some money from friends to start life with their sister in a proper manner. They agreed that this was a very fine gesture on his part, and that he should have some cash to start a home; however, they sent a trustworthy "killer" with him--just in case. Yankel was now so hopelessly entangled that life and death lost their meaning.

In a few days the two emissaries from Kremenchuk arrived in Cherkassi in quest of friends and money. But where could Yankel get money? And what could he do with this "killer" at his side? In his desperation Yankel hit upon a devilish plan. He knew that Hinke, his Uncle Bunim's daughter, had three hundred *rubles* laid away with Uncle Avremel for her dowry. There was no other way. Like a trapped animal, he would now risk anything.

The next morning, bright and early, he came over to his Aunt Gitel, Uncle Bunim's wife, and told her that he had decided to get married and settle down. He thought that Hinke was a very beautiful girl and that if it was all right with Hinke and Uncle and Aunt, he would be a very happy man to become Hinke's *chuson*. When Aunt Gitel and Hinke heard this, they were in seventh heaven with excitement. Of course, they would agree. However, said Yankel, he knew that Hinke had three hundred *rubles naden*. He would like to have the engagement party right away and if possible, the three hundred *rubles* too. Hinke and Aunt Gitel agreed. Naturally, Aunt Toubi was notified about the deal with Yankel. When she heard this bizarre story she nearly hit the ceiling. She immediately sensed a brazen swindle, but by whom? Yankel? She wanted to talk to him. But Yankel with the grim companion at his side did not show up.

That evening Aunt Gitel, Uncle Bunim, and Hinke came to Aunt Toubi's house to demand the money--the three hundred *rubles* Henzel Moshensky never paid back, and that Aunt Toubi had promised to pay out of her own money. Aunt Toubi said, "No, never." She would put away the three

hundred *rubles* with anyone, anywhere, but she would not see Yankel abscond with Hinke's *naden*.

"Well," Uncle Bunim said, "here we stay until the money is produced!" Aunt Gitel and Hinke started to cry at the top of their voices that if they missed this chance Hinke might remain an old maid. They wanted their money, and now!

Finally past midnight Uncle Avremel brought the three hundred *rubles* and gave the money to them. In a few days Yankel obtained the money with the understanding that he would be back in three days, when the engagement party would be celebrated.

Yankel returned to Kremenchuk where he went through a wedding ceremony, but it might have been anybody's. His heart and his thoughts were not there. One week after the wedding Yankel took sick. He stopped working. He could not hold any food and became indifferent to all and everything around. In about six months his wife died in childbirth. That year Joe Rabinowitz, Uncle Avremel's and Aunt Toubi's third son, on his way to Kriborog stopped over in Kremenchuk where he located Yankel. He hardly recognized him. In front of him stood a shadow of a man, shabbily dressed, bearded, with hollow cheeks. His eyes, dull and extinguished, looked far into the void and his pale lips mumbled something incoherently. Of all the relatives, Joe was the only one who caught a glimpse of the enormity of the tragedy that had befallen this once handsome, happy-go-lucky Cousin Yankel. Within a year of Yankel's last appearance in Cherkassi word was received from Kremenchuk that

Yankel had passed away.

When Yankel failed to show up in Cherkassi after three days it became apparent that Aunt Toubi was right. Yankel had betrayed and shamed his own flesh and blood. The city was rocked by this unheard-of depravity. Hinke was terribly hurt, and so was the entire *mishpocha*. How could we have harbored such a monster?

* * *

In Cherkassi, like in many other Jewish communities, there was a class of people who were looked down upon as people of a lower strata in society. This group was not quite at the bottom of the social scale, but still anyone of low intelligence was often labeled a *balagula* (expressman). But even the *balagulas* had someone below them. That was the *shmeiser* (driver), the man who would work for a *balagula*. Usually the *shmeiser* was one of low intelligence or an orphan of fifteen or sixteen years who had no home, no friends, and was left to shift for himself.

Such a youngster circulated in Cherkassi under the name of Hershel Yavlinsky. The first time I knew him was when he was about twelve years old and I must have been about six. He worked for our tenant, who kept a candy and cigar store in front of our property.

One day Hershel was cleaning the samovar. To do this type of work one puts a salve in his hands and rubs the brass metal until it begins to shine. The tenant, Mr. Sigalovitz, was not at home that arternoon, but before he left he assigned work for Hershel. If he did not finish

his job as ordered, it sometimes meant a beating. While Hershel was doing the cleaning, he discovered that there was no water in the house or in any house in our entire courtyard. There he was with his hands full of the salve, with no water to wash off the salve from his hands or the samovar. What could he do? In Jewish we say, "Where there is Torah, there is *hochmah* (wisdom)." But Hershel did not go to a *heider*. He was an unfortunate orphan with no parents, no relatives, and no education. He thought hard for awhile, then he called me over and about two or three other little boys and said, "Children, I'll give each one of you a piece of candy from the store, if you will 'pee' in my hands, so I can get the salve off from my hands and the samovar." We, of course, obliged him. We got the candy and he saved his skin!

The next time I met him was in Aunt Toubi's matzo baking shop. During most of the year he was a *shmeiser*, but in the matzo season he made out better at the matzos. Hershel grew up in an atmosphere where only the strong and courageous survive; he was tall and garrulous--the type who claimed, "If you can do it, I can do it better." Particularly when it came to drinking or eating, he took on all comers, whether he was physically equal to the test or not.

He was working for Aunt Toubi when the news of Hinke's betrayal became known. He could not lay his hands on that "so and so," but he would do something to compensate the shamed Jewish daughter. He asked Aunt Toubi if she would agree to have Hinke accept him as a *chuson*. Aunt Toubi saw in Hershel a more decent man than many pretenders of well-to-do

families. She would accept him with pleasure if Hinke would. Well, Hinke did, and an engagement party was celebrated in great style under the direct supervision of Aunt Toubi. After the celebration, the thought turned to *tachless*.

So now, after four years of dodging, Mr. Henzel Moshensky's time of reckoning had come. Aunt Toubi had already paid the three hundred *rubles* but Henzel Moshensky had not. Right after the engagement party Hershel announced that he would like to have a wedding for Hinke in great style. He had three hundred *rubles* for the affair. That is, he did not have the three hundred *rubles* on hand, but the money was due to Hinke, and if he couldn't collect it from Henzel Moshensky, then his name wasn't Hershel Yavlinsky. In a couple of days Hershel paid a visit to Henzel Moshensky. He came on a cold evening. He left his leaky galoshes in the vestibule and stepped into the house as if he were an old lost friend. He sat down to the table and introduced himself. He told them his story, which was true.

Inasmuch as Henzel Moshensky owed the three hundred *rubles* he came to collect them, plus the interest that Henzel had not paid for four years. "And Mr. Moshensky," Hershel said, "I intend to get married in several weeks and I am here to ask you as a Jew and a gentleman not to cause me any difficulties." Henzel looked at him long and in silence. After awhile the conversation was resumed. Henzel did not say yes, but he did not say no. Hershel left, taking along from the vestibule the best pair of galoshes there.

The next day Hershel came again. This time he came to return the galoshes, but also to tell Mr. Moshensky that he must have a definite date, and while he did not like to threaten him, he wanted it to be known that Mr. Moshensky was now dealing with Hershel Yavlinsky.

"By the way, Mr. Moshensky, do you know who Hershel Yavlinsky is? If you don't you will soon know. I want the three hundred *rubles* with all the interest--now--this week, and no *foile teritzim* (empty promises)."

Well, this aroused the anger of Mr. Moshensky. "Go on! Get out of here! I don't know you and don't want to know you. Who are you to threaten me, anyway? Get out!"

Hershel took this tyrade calmly. "I will go," he said, "but you will pay me the three hundred *rubles* and the interest. Don't forget the interest."

The next time Hershel took Bunim with him. When Henzel Moshensky and his family saw Bunim he must have looked to them like an apparition. Here stood an oversized, bulky body, leaning on two crutches. Bunim's face, with its wild hairy growth and eyes that cursed and begged at the same time, either scared them or disgusted them. Henzel Moshensky and the family ran out of the house and left the two guests there alone, slamming the store door locked behind them.

Hershel and Bunim made themselves comfortable. Hershel stepped down into the pastry store. It was a great thrill, if only to look at the beautiful and delicious pastries, but now Hershel could also help himself to his heart's content. He filled a tray with the finest pastries

and placed it on the table for Uncle Bunim and himself. Well, Uncle Bunim would not eat pastry. It might be *treif*, but Hershel feasted that night on the choicest pastries he ever ate. Late at night the Moshenskys returned. Hershel and Bunim were still there, reclining in comfort. Henzel told them he did not care if they would sleep in his house. He had no money anyhow, so they could sleep there if they were so disposed. But this was no answer for Hershel. They left.

Came Saturday, Henzel was *gabai* in Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh*. That morning Hershel and Bunim appeared in *Beth Medrosh* early. Right after the Torah was brought into the Ark, Hershel was on the pulpit. He hit the table on the pulpit with his hand and in a clear and ringing voice he began, "Gentlemen, you see this cripple Bunim? Henzel Moshensky, your *gabai*, the fine respectable *balabus* borrowed three hundred *rubles* from this unfortunate cripple--three hundred *rubles* that Bunim saved as *naden* for his oldest daughter, Hinke. She cannot get married until Moshensky pays the debt!" Pandamonium broke loose. It took awhile before order was restored. But Hershel won his fight. On that Saturday night the rabbi called in Hershel and Henzel. Hershel got three hundred *rubles* cash, but no interest.

In about a month, Hershel Yavlinsky and Hinke celebrated a wedding in true traditional style with music, drinks, a banquet and all the trimmings!

* * *

As previously mentioned, Uncle Avremel's business interests were many and varied, and under Aunt Toubi's direction, nothing was hard or impossible.

In the early years after their marriage, Aunt Toubi had to divide her time between bearing and nursing the children and the conducting of business. As the children, four boys and three girls, began to grow up, Aunt Toubi left the conduct of internal home affairs to the daughters. She herself began to devote more time to external or business affairs. The time came when the older daughter, Leika, now eighteen became engaged to be married. Two boys, Michel and Moshka, sixteen and fourteen, had by this time become full-fledged glaziers. The intended son-in-law had no trade, nor did he understand business. Aunt Toubi, surveying the field, struck upon a bold idea. They had some money--also enough manpower. Why not venture into an enterprise that everybody was talking about, but no one in Cherkassi had the enterprising spirit to undertake? The undertaking was nothing less than the manufacture of matzos with machines, instead of the old tiresome method of baking matzos by hand.

Two months before Passover Uncle Avremel went to Kiev and bought the machines. A big warehouse was rented and the manufacture of matzos began.

This new venture required a bigger investment than appeared on the surface. Aunt Toubi began to manipulate with *vecks-lach* (notes). Her credit was good. As the Passover holiday was about a month away, two shifts had to be worked, doubling the need and management of the personnel. Uncle Avremel attended to his glass work, but Aunt Toubi had her hands full.

The matzo production season was over. Aunt Toubi had good reason to celebrate the Passover *sedurim* in a happy mood. The venture was a huge success. Tired as they were, they were filled with the thrill and joy of success. They even had enough stamina left during the *Pesach* half-holidays to stage an elaborate wedding for their oldest daughter, Leika, right in the same warehouse where the matzos were baked.

Flushed with success, Aunt Toubi began to look ahead into the future. The matzo business was a seasonal business--three months a year. What was she going to do with her manpower for the rest of the year? She finally solved her problem by expanding her business, so that she would always be sure of her help when she needed them and be kept busy in a year-round business.

She rented a large businesshouse, a *chaina* (tea house). A tea house in Russia also meant a flop house (a place for sleeping) where for three *kopeks* one could sleep over night on the floor. This house had even enough room for the manufacture of the matzos. It also had living quarters for Uncle Avremel's large family and space for a grocery store.

Aunt Toubi was now in big business. The help that was employed at the matzos usually came from flop houses. These were the people who had finally settled down to the very bottom of the social deck. Rapists, murderers, thieves, with a mixture of lost souls, were the usual inhabitants of *chainas*.

Uncle Avremel's *chaina* was immediately filled with creatures of the deep. However, Aunt Toubi knew how to go about these characters. To her, none of her

customers were bums! They were God's forgotten children. In her calm and sympathetic way she had befriended the murderers and the simpletons alike! They thought so much of Aunt Toubi that nothing was ever missed in the store or house. When I think of her and her attitude toward these God-forsaken people I see her acting out the now famous words of Emma Lazarus inscribed on the Statue of Liberty:

Give me your tired, your poor,....
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me.

Aunt Toubi was far from being a beautiful woman, but when she opened her mouth to talk or smile she was transformed into a living, warm-hearted mother. Inasmuch as she loved to talk, our Aunt Toubi often beamed with this rare feminine loveliness.

* * *

The mainstay of Aunt Toubi and Uncle Avremel's business was matzo baking. Next came the *chaina*, and in front of the house they fitted out a grocery store. But there was still room left in the rear of the house. This space was acquired by Michel, their oldest son, now nineteen years old. Michel had taken after Aunt Toubi's brothers who were possessed with an inborn instinct to venture out into daring exploits. Very early in his teens Michel gravitated into the revolutionary movement. He was entrusted with several daring missions, and because of his suc-

cessful accomplishments for the cause he ranked high on the list of trusted workers. Cherkassi was a clearing station for transient revolutionary personnel. It was Michel's responsibility to keep them in hiding from the Tzar's *Ochranke* (secret police) who had their spies and counterspies all over the place. Since his parents' premises were taken up by a matzo baking plant, a *chaina*, and a grocery store, the vacant space was ideal for Michel's manipulations. He established a sort of speakeasy, an illegal place for drinking, thus using the space to the hilt for his revolutionary purposes.

Came the next matzo season. Everything went smoothly on the surface, but the police knew about the speakeasy. They tried hard to expose what they called the Jewish plot--mixing kosher matzos with *treife* vodka--but they could get no stool-pigeon among Aunt Toubi's guests. One day, a new guest slept over night. In the morning he asked for a job on the matzos. The pay was eighty *kopeks* for a day lasting twelve hours. It was considered a good day's pay. The labor was hard and required extraordinary strength and endurance. There was always a hardened element that could do it. When the stranger has hired he was given the job of turning the wheel of the kneading machine.

There were two four-foot wheels, one on each side of the roller. Two men turned the two wheels, first slowly then faster, until the speed was uncontrollable. This was done with little rest between one chunk of dough and another, for three hours straight. At twelve o'clock there was a rest period of two hours.

On the first day the new man worked,

He came into the store at twelve o'clock and bought a glass of milk and a bagel. He went back to a corner, sat down on the floor, and as he drank half of the milk the glass fell out of his hand. He keeled over and died. When the police came on the scene, they found documents on the man from which they traced his identity. It turned out that this man, who from his appearance looked rather distinguished, was really an aristocrat, a humanitarian who ventured out to live with the people in order to learn how they could be best helped. His family suspected foul play. The police could not pin anything on Uncle Avremel, but the house became a target for police antagonism.

The next winter two of the most notorious characters in the Cherkassi area and dwellers of Uncle Avremel's *chaina* were playing cards. It was a cold winter night and Peter, the seven foot giant, a murderer with a reputation, lost a game to Yuri, a smaller man but as big a murderer as Peter. Well, the two started to argue and Yuri plunged a knife into Peter's belly. Yuri now ran for his life. He ran out of the house, jumped a fence with Peter hot in pursuit with a knife in his hand. He too jumped the high fence, but this was as far as he could run. He remained lying on the other side of the fence, dead.

The police were now exasperated. The house had become the sorest spot in the city. Yet they could not find sufficient evidence that would point a finger on either Uncle Avremel or Aunt Toubi.

It was now the third year since Aunt Toubi was running the *chaina*, the grocery store, the matzo factory, with Michel running the speakeasy on his own. The

police made several raids without success. They tried trapping a customer who was drunk. However, drunk as he was, he would rather take the consequences than give Toubi away.

One summer night a tremendous fire broke out next door to Uncle Avremel's *chaina*. Geniodski's printing and stationery store was burning beyond control. The fire and police departments were there in full force. The chief of police Mr. Tegin, who was considered the most decent and respectable police officer the city ever had, was there. In the excitement of the fire he attempted to do what his best detectives could not do; he went into the *chaina* through a back door and right into the place where a meeting of important party workers was on. A bottle of vodka and half-filled glasses were on the table and Michel stood at the center. Well, Michel was caught in the act. But Michel had presence of mind. He put out the lamp and in the dark delivered a smashing blow into the face of Mr. Tegin that knocked him out cold. When Mr. Tegin came to, every revolutionary worker was safe and Michel was on his way to Argentina.

That night Uncle Avremel slept in jail. Suit was brought against him by the police and the city, and he was sentenced to six months in jail, five of which he served.

After he came back from jail Aunt Toubi did not want to remain in Russia. They decided to sell out and go to Argentina. In the last act of Aunt Toubi's exploits, I was a participant.

It was just a week before they left. The whole family stayed in our house. Aunt Toubi had last minute business to finish before leaving. One project was

to collect a *vecksl* (note) that a certain Mr. Naidin held. This happened to be a note promising to pay three hundred *rubles* that Father had given Uncle Avremel to help him out with a loan. Uncle discounted the note with a well-known flour dealer, Avrum Naiden, who was by all standards a trustworthy man. After Uncle Avremel paid the three hundred *rubles*, Mr. Naidin said he would bring him the note. But Mr. Naidin did not bring the note in a month, nor in a year, nor in two years. It was now three years later and Father had not received his note. There remained little time to lose.

One morning Aunt Toubi in her picturesque speech said to me, "Shayah, today we are going on a hunt for big game. I need you."

About eleven o'clock we went to Mr. Naiden's store. Aunt Toubi approached Mr. Naidin, and in a calm but firm voice said "Avrum, Wowa's *vecksl*!" She stretched out her hand and in the same voice said, "Today!" with such emphasis that left no doubt in anybody's mind that she meant it. Mr. Naidin knew how to get away with excuses. He attempted to tell her how sorry he was, but he could not produce the note on a moment's notice.

Well, my Aunt Toubi opened up like a volcano. "You! You swindler! You have paraded all these years as an honest business man. You have been lending money and borrowing money under the guise of your honesty. Now listen here. Here is Shayah, Wowa's son--he will be here tomorrow at eleven o'clock in the morning. If he does not return home by twelve o'clock with the note, I will go from store to store. I will alarm the whole city as to what a swindler you are, and

that all those who have trusted you should know it. Furthermore, this Saturday I will send Hershel Yavlinsky to the synagogue to give you the same *aliyah* (honor) he gave Henzel Moshensky!"

"Now, don't forget the time, tomorrow at eleven o'clock. Shayah, *kum* (come)!"

That did it. The next morning at eleven I got the note!

As my mother would have said: "Aunt Toubi, may she have a *lichtegen ganeden* (well-lit paradise)!"

SHALOS SEIDOS IN RABBI'S BETH MEDROSH

Of all three *Shabbos* services, particularly vivid in my memory are the *Shalos Seidos*, the third meal on *Shabbos*, as conducted in the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh*. After the *Mincha* services some two or three hundred people would assemble in the women's half of the synagogue. A long table covered with a white tablecloth was dotted with little *challas* and portions of *gefilte* fish. Along the two sides of the table were seated on long benches men who looked forward to the meal as one of the few good meals of the week. Lined up along these benches were two or three rows of standing participants who came in to observe the *mitzvah* of *Shalos Seidos* in the spiritual sense --by listening to the discussion of the Torah and singing *Shabbos* songs.

At the head of the table sat one of the prominent Yeshiva heads of the town, who was actually teaching and commenting on the portion of the week. These Saturday evening sessions have become a cultural institution.

In my time the discussion was dominated by four people. First was *Reb* Mordche Todresh, the head of the Cherkassi Yeshiva. He was not only greatly learned in Torah but was a great teacher. When he finished with his weekly portion of the Torah, there was a hush of appreciation and admiration for the man who was so divinely gifted in explaining seemingly difficult subjects so clearly.

The second man was *Reb* Motel Sloan. This man was also one of the Yeshiva teachers. He, too, claimed attention, but took second place to *Reb* Mordche Todresh.

The third man was *Reb* Nachmenke. He was a man about seventy-five years old, blind, but with as sweet and vigorour a voice as that of a young man. As one half of the *Shalos Seidos* services was taken up with singing, *Reb* Nachmenke led the assemblage in singing. I can still hear his clear sweet voice and remember most of his songs.

The fourth man was Zeidel. This man had a rich tenor voice and could have been a professional cantor. His singing was exceptionally pleasant and on a higher level than mere folk-singing. When Nachmenke ended a song Zeidel would pick up the leadership, and so it would go on until it was time for *Mariv* services. The only fly in Zeidel's ointment was that during the summer hot months, Zeidel would disappear from sight. When he did appear, he was either altogether naked or had one shoe on, a smashed hat, no shirt, and sometimes no trousers. Year after year the same process, the same pattern, followed. There were no private funds to help, nor were there any public institutions that would come to his aid. It seemed as normal as poverty itself.

Zeidel was a tailor by trade. When he came out of his illness he would go back to work, as he had a family to support, but was ashamed to go back to the synagogue for the *Shalos Seidos*. Every year a delegation used to be formed to bring Zeidel back to the *Shalos Seidos*. Very seldom do I sing *Shalos Seidos* songs

now, but when I do or hear anyone sing them I still think of these four men, particularly of Zeidel.

THE RISE AND FALL OF RABINER GOLDENBERG

On a certain hot summer day at exactly eleven o'clock in the morning, all Jewish stores on the Kreschatic closed; all Jewish businesses and labor in the city stopped. Young and old came out to pay their last respects to their beloved *Rabiner* Zimmerman who, after thirty five years of dedicated service, had passed away.

A *Rabiner* was a rabbi who administered the civic relations of the Jewish community for the government. The *Rabiner* had to be a graduate university man, regardless of his Jewish learning or background.

After the death of the *Rabiner*, a call went out for a new *Rabiner*. When a candidate presented himself, the thirteen synagogues of the Cherkassi area sent six delegates each to interview the candidate and judge his qualifications. Father was a delegate from the *Litvishe* (Lithuanian) synagogue, and he used to take me along.

The meetings took place in the forum building in Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh* Court. There were five applicants. The first and second were fine polished gentlemen. They spoke mildly and nicely in a scholarly manner and either one would probably have been acceptable in the absence of any better candidates. But the third candidate was Mr. Goldenberg. He was, as the saying goes, tall, dark and handsome, about thirty-five years old, with an irresistable oratory power. He made

a favorable impression. If it had not been for the remaining two candidates that were to be heard, the delegates would have agreed on Mr. Goldenberg.

Came the fourth candidate. He was no match against Mr. Goldenberg. The fifth and last candidate was a man about forty. He, too, was tall and dark with an impressive shiny black beard and glittering black eyes. His name was Litvakov. As the custom was to address the delegates in Russian, this candidate stood up, looked everybody in the eyes and uttered one word, "*Brathya* (Brethren)!" He stopped, waiting for the word to sink in. To address the delegates as Brethren was something new. The usual was was *Raboisai* in Hebrew or *Gospoda* in Russian.

Brathya carried a meaningful message of nearness to the cause of his people. It meant more than merely pleasing the government. His address was impressive and learned. Although his Russian accent was somewhat less than perfect, the word *Brathya* struck. The delegates formed two parties--Goldenberg supporters and Litvakov supporters. There were seventy-eight delegates, but only sixty came to cast their votes. Mr. Goldenberg won the election, thirty-two to twenty-eight.

To get acquainted with the Jewish population, the new *Rabiner* announced that he would, from time to time, deliver an address in Sklovsky's Synagogue. This synagogue was a modern version of the orthodox prayer house; it had balconies for the women so that they could see the services as well as hear them.

After several such addresses *Rabiner* Goldenberg became the most popular and talked of man in town. Particularly popular was he among the learned and intel-

lectuals. During one of his addresses in Sklovsky's Synagogue, a child on the balcony began to cry. *Rabiner* Goldenberg looked up and remarked, *"Al Olulim Veyonkim Hissadtu Oz."* This is a passage from the Psalms meaning, "O God, on children and infants hast thou founded the world." This went over so big, that for days people did not stop talking about it.

After a few months' sojourn in town, Mr. Goldenberg announced that he would deliver a lecture entitled "Ancient Civilizations" in the Yaroslavoi Theatre. This lecture was meant for the benefit of the Russian intelligentsia as well as the Jewish.

The kiosks carried large announcements of the place and date. The Russian response was surprisingly favorable, and after the lecture he was asked to favor the city with a series of more such learned lectures. The Jewish population was very proud of their *Rabiner*.

Meantime, the Zionist movement, after Dr. Herzl's death and the *pogroms*, had become very popular with the nationalist Jewish intelligentsia. Meetings were arranged, speakers came and went. The leading Zionist figure, Mr. Chayotin, had left for Palestine after the *pogroms* about a year before. At that time a prominent Zionist from abroad arrived to address the Jewish community in Cherkassi. The place, of course, was the Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh*, as it alone could hold the huge crowds. It was a winter evening and bitter cold, but the synagogue was packed.

The speaker did not speak from the pulpit, which was in the center of the synagogue, but from the far east wall where the Ark stood, so he could face all

the people.

The speaker was just about warming up in his flowery Yiddish when someone near the door began to heckle him, first with short remarks, then calling him a liar, a falsifier, a man who is talking nonsense. When the public turned around to see who it was that was so bold and persistent, they saw an old man in an old dilapidated overcoat, full of patches, with white spots where the white cotton showed through the seams. His head was covered with an old worn-out fur *shapko*. His face was hardly visible under the heavy cover of a wild growth of hair. Only his glittering eyes and thick lips were noticeable.

It did not take long before this mysterious heckler was recognized. It was none other than Mr. Chayotin himself. The speaker finished his address under forced draft. However, Mr. Chayotin's bombshell remained smoldering, challenging the leaders and advocates of Zionism. Mr. Chayotin had come back from Palestine a bitter and disappointed man, broken physically and spiritually. He was, however, still in the front ranks of those who would deliver the Jews from the diaspora, but not into Palestine. There were many wide open spaces that were waiting for people to come and settle there. Why try an inaccessible mountain peak, he argued!

"The Turk is strong and treacherous; the Arabs are hostile and murderous; and the land itself is nothing but a stony desert." He knew what he was talking about. He was there! "Territorialism, only, is the answer. Galveston, Uganda and many other places are within reach, and the exodus can be started at once!"

Chayotin now advocated territorialism, as against Zionism. Finally, a public debate was arranged in Sklovsky's Synagogue between Mr. Chayotin and the proponents of Zionism. To add importance to the affair *Rabiner* Goldenberg was invited to chair the meeting, but as a *Rabiner* who is also, in a certain sense, a government man, he could not accept, but he agreed to sit on the platform and direct the debate unofficially.

On the announced date, Saturday night, Sklovsky's Synagogue was jammed, including the balconies where the women, mostly young, turned out in full force. *Rabiner* Goldenberg was there. The chairman--after a few words--presented the speaker. While Mr. Chayotin, the first speaker, held the audience spellbound, a child on the balcony began to cry. The chairman stood up, looked to the balcony and said, "Quiet, please." The child was hushed up but in a few minutes began to cry again. The chairman stood up once more, looked up to the balcony and said, "Please, quiet there." The child was hushed up again for several minutes. It did not take long and the child began to cry again. This time *Rabiner* Goldenberg stood up. He turned to the balcony and burst out, *"Molchat! Cherti takie."* (Shut up, you devil!) Well, this outburst from the *Rabiner* struck the audience like a thunderbolt. It was almost unbelievable that the man who only a few months ago thundered from this same pulpit, *"Al Oilulim Veyonkim Hissadto Oz,"* could succumb to as low a level as calling a crying Jewish child, *"Cherti"* (devil).

As the *Rabiner* sat down, the audience became noisy. In a few minutes the

noise became louder and louder until the speaker could not go on. The chairman closed the meeting before both sides of this most interesting debate were heard.

The next day Mr. Goldenberg was asked to resign. He refused. At the expiration of the year Mr. Goldenberg, who entered the Cherkassi scene as an idol, left a sad and humbled man.

OUR FAMILY HISTORY

Wowa and Chana Rochel Rubinstein: Highlights of Their Origin, Marriage and the Widespread Family They Brought Forth on Two Continents

RUBINSTEIN ORIGINS

All names ending with "stein" are often common Jewish names. Like the Levins and Cohens, the Greensteins, Bluesteins, Bronsteins, etc. indicate Jewish nationality. But unlike Levin and Cohen, "stein" denotes east European or German origin.

The name Rubinstein, although typically Jewish, may have had its origins in Germany where a small town with the name "Rubinstein" is still on the map.

However, Rubinsteins of my generation can trace back our origins only as far as Lithuania. Lithuania was a province of Poland until its partition in 1795 when Lithuania was included in the portion taken by the Czars. Up to the 1917 Russian Revolution Lithuania was one of the poorest regions between Poland and the Ukraine. It was a province surrounded my marshes and abounding in forests, but its arable land was poor and did not produce enough to feed its population. Hunger, therefore, was the common lot of most of its inhabitants. There were years when scarcity was bearable, but also times of famine that drove its inhabitants to desperation.

There was no industry except *panschisna*, the Russian version of slavery. The Jewish communities in this barren land had no well-to-do *goyim* to make a living from, except the rich barons who were few and far apart. Here the Jew had his cup full of misery.

It was during one of those years when the famine became unbearable, approximately 1850, when our great-grandfather Jacob Moshe and his wife Chayah, in the company of many other relatives, boarded a raft and left Lithuania.

The Rubinstein family consisted of the parents and (from what knowledge we have) four sons. The oldest, Menasha, remained in Lithuania. The other three, all teenagers, Reuven, Avram and Berle, went along.

The journey from Minsk in Lithuania to Cherkassi in the Ukraine is by itself a bold and heroic adventure. They boarded a *galioro* or a raft, a kind of river boat used for transporting logs cheaply, well known in lumber producing countries. Thousands of logs from nearby forests are tied together into a solid deck, a shed is constructed for a small crew, and the package is let down into the swift waters of a river.

In the 1850's the large spaces on the rafts were leased to passengers, who were to devise their own means of protection against chilly nights, the burning sun by day, and the driving rains and winds that were the natural companions on long open journeys. The rafts moved slowly down the river with the current, but when they struck flat areas, the raft had to depend on favorable winds. Thus a journey of some three hundred fifty miles used to take many weeks, sometimes

months, under most trying conditions.

This is how Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Moshe Rubinstein and their three sons arrived in Cherkassi, where food was plentiful and could be obtained for money or exchange of goods and services.

JACOB MOSHE'S OCCUPATION AND FAMILY

Jacob Moshe was by trade a copper and silversmith. The economic life of most Russian provinces at that time was based on slavery or later on the feudal system. The few barons lived in luxury, the great majority in dire poverty. Any demands for copper or silversmiths were to be found among the barons and so the Rubinsteins had to offer their services to them. Right after the Easter holidays, Jacob Moshe and his three young sons would get into a covered wagon and travel around from one estate to the next offering their services. When they were accepted, the terms were agreed upon and they settled down to a summer's work, which by contract terminated before the Jewish High Holidays. When their work was finished they returned home. They usually brought home the products of the "plantation" and enough money, according to the standards of the time, to live through the winter in somewhat better style than the stay-at-home people.

We have no dates when our great-grandparents departed from this world or when their sons married and became self-sustained. We do, however, know that Wowa (pronounced Vova) was the second child born to Avram (Abraham) and Shifra Rubinstein around the year 1865. A daughter Reise was born two years prior

and a son Kalman about three years later. The mother Shifra died when Kalman was an infant and Wowa was hardly three years old. Until our grandfather remarried, the children were cared for by relatives on the maternal side.

Soon the children were taken back by a scheming and cunning step-mother. In spite of her wiles she cared for them well. But with *her* children and *his* children and *their* children, things were very hot and strained. Kalman, the youngest could not take it and he ran away from home at the age of ten. Reise was married off at the age of fourteen, a tragedy that bore tragic fruit.

The only one who persevered and stuck it out was our father Wowa. He enjoyed, by the standards of the time, a normal Jewish education. He learned the trade of copper and tin smithing in his father's shop. Around the age of eighteen Wowa was granted a red ticket, which released him from military service, and soon after he married Chana Rochel Rabinowitz, the seventh child in a family of eight children.

RABINOWITZ FAMILY ORIGINS

The name Rabinowitz denotes in slavic languages the son of a rabbi or stemming from a rabbi. The Rabinowitzes of the Cherkassi area constituted a whole clan of rabbis, who followed the *Hasidic* movement. Each rabbi had his specific orientation and his followers or *Hasidim* who would swear by him. The sons and grandsons used to branch out as rabbis with their own brand of *Hasidism*. The Cherkassi area abounded with such rabbis.

One of their offspring has become world famous; the renowned Sholom Aleichem, whose name was Rabinowitz and who came from the Cherkassi area Rabinowitzes. My grandfather, Yeedl Rabinowitz, was the son of an Hasidie rabbi, who was either a son or a grandson of a family of rabbis.

YEEDL RABINOWITZ AND HIS FAMILY

Yeedl Rabinowitz was known until his death as Yeedl *der Usem* (the orphan). His father was a rabbi who, at the age of seventy or eighty, remarried for the third time and fathered two children, a son Yeedl and a daughter Freidel. When the old man died, Freidel was six, and Yeedl, four years old. Soon after, the mother followed in death, hence the name, Yeedl *der Usem*. The two children were taken over by an uncle, Chatzkel Gott, a great scholar and an authority in Jewish matters. He refused to follow the Rabbinate, but the name Chatzkel Gott meant rabbinical authority in the Cherkassi area. Yeedl grew up under the strict eye of Chatzkel Gott and under his guidance received his diploma for the Rabbinate. When Yeedl was seventeen years old, a fortuitous marriage was arranged.

In those days parents arranged marriage with or without the consent of their children; however, the matchmaker, too, had his place. But there were other methods for well-to-do parents who were really choosy in picking a husband for their daughters.

Among the Jews, class and nobility rested with the learned men. This type could be found in the Yeshiva, the academy for learning. Well-to-do parents

who could promise a prospective graduate of a Yeshiva many years of board and keep for himself and his future family would proceed in the following manner. The father would come to a Yeshiva and ask the schoolmaster to recommend an *anticle*, a young man with outstanding qualities. The prospective father-in-law had an opportunity to interrogate several candidates and there and then make his choice.

In the village of Medviedivka, state of Politava on the other side of the river Dnieper, lived a Jewish family by the name of Manusov. This was before the Jews were driven out of the villages by the 1880 Decree of Expulsion. The village Jews in the Ukraine fared much better economically than the city Jews. However, culturally and spiritually they suffered greatly. There was no Jewish life and their children grew up like the surrounding children--rough, tough, and ignorant.

Now the Manusov children began to grow up and Tzirel the fourteen-year-old daughter was in line to become a *kallemoid*. So *Reb* Manusov, a well-to-do villager, went to the well-known Cherkassi Yeshiva and picked Yeedl the *Usem* as the ideal husband for his daughter Tzirel.

Conditions for the marriage were life support for Yeedl and his future family. As far as Yeedl was concerned, it was an ideal proposition at face value. It would give him an opportunity to indulge day and night in the pursuit of Torah learning. He and Tzirel were married and Yeedl settled down in the village Medviedivka to pursue the study of Torah.

It did not take long before *Reb*

Yeedl (after marriage a man is addressed as *Reb*) began to realize that village life may be good for some people, but surely not for a scholar and a potential rabbi.

The couple, after one year in Medviedivka, moved to Cherkassi. Grandma Tzirel came from hardy stock. She said she would keep her father's promise, "support for life." She sent Yeedl back to the Yeshiva and she became the breadwinner for the family. As a son and a grandson of a long line of rabbis, *Reb* Yeedl was offered the Rabbinate of a nearby *shtetl* but refused on the ground that he might soil his hands with money, the beginning and end of all sin. And so it was that he remained in the Yeshiva for many years.

Meanwhile, Tzirel took over the management of the household. She became the breadwinner, the mother and father of the children, while Yeedl devoted his time solely to the study of the Torah in the Yeshiva.

The first three children were girls, and what does a man have to do with girls? The next three were boys and the last two were girls, eight children in all--sons, Shayah, Avram, and Bunim; daughters, Sara, Leah, Golda, Chana Rochel, and Chayah.

By the time the last two girls arrived, Tzirel was the total and undisputed educator and bringer-upper of the family--sons and daughters alike.

To feed eight children was a tremendous task. Tzirel made a good living for the family. She was a midwife, and famous far and wide in the Cherkassi area. But this was not enough and when the time came that help was needed, *Reb* Yeedl undertook to help. He would go away for a

summer and winter semester, each lasting about five months. There were wealthy villagers who would pay generously to have their sons tutored in Jewishness. This he did for many years.

But the needs of the growing family were such that help had to be sought even from the young sons. Instead of going to the Yeshiva, they went to work. They grew up very pious, as artisans and tradesmen, but far from scholars. The five girls, like their mother, were the *Ashes Chail*, women of valor, of the household. None received any education. None of them learned how to read or write. Chana Rochel, the seventh child, was the only daughter who, by her own efforts, learned to read the *Siddur* and *Machzur* and the Yiddish translation, but no more.

THE SHIDDACH

Chana Rochel, at the age of seventeen, must have been the outstanding belle of her circle. She was red-headed, tall, slim and beautiful. She had all the assets for a *kallemoid*, but being poor and lacking a dowry was also a great stumbling block to acquiring a desirable *chusen*. Thus at the ripe old age of seventeen, we find Chana Rochel still in the column of available *kalle* prospects. That was rather a little belated and quite discouraging.

Wowa was now twenty, and it was time to think of *tachless*. The matchmaking profession in those days reached its highest state of proficiency. A prospect of either sex was money in somebody's pocket. No occupation was so respectable or profitable as match-

making. So the spiel started!

Chana Rochel's parents had nothing to offer by way of a dowry, except rabbinical distinction and a beautiful *kalle*.

On the other hand, the Rubinsteins came across with a most attractive offer. The *chusen*, besides being the son of a respectable father, *Reb* Avram, was himself well known as a pious and wonderful craftsman. He could provide a wife and family with sustenance and was free of military service. Also, instead of asking for a dowry, he was being sent out by his father and step-mother with three new suits, two overcoats (one for winter and one for spring), a fur overcoat with the finest mink collar, and a fur *shapko* of finest caracul. In addition to all these and many other articles to wear, the *kalle* would be presented with gifts of gold and silver, far exceeding her expectations.

Wowa, too, might have been a prize, but he had his drawbacks. He was the typical good and obedient son, who adjusted himself to a life under a step-mother. In physical stature he was short--barely five feet tall. But he had a sense of beauty. He refused to meet any other prospects but Chana Rochel. His step-mother, who loved to play up to the world, took up the pursuit. "Why not?" she said. "We are as good as any of the scholarly blue-bloods."

The best *shadchon* in the area produced the desired results. The proposal was accepted. All the promises were made good. I, Charles, ought to know, for twenty-five years later, I arrived in America with the suit that was made over from Father's spring coat!

Wowa and Chana Rochel were married and "lived happily ever after." Twelve children were born to them. The oldest, a girl, died at the age of one year. One other, a twin sister to Devorah, lived only a few days. Ten children survived.

The following is a list of the children in order of age:

Freidel - (died in the late 1950's)
Clara (Chayah)
Charles (Shayah)
Jacob (Yankel)
Joseph (Yossel)
Devorah (Dvora)
Celia (Tzirele)
Daniel (Yeedl)
Nathan
Louis

LIFE OF WOWA AND CHANA ROCHEL IN CHERKASSI

As was the custom in those days, a young craftsman, after marriage, set out into his own business. Wowa Rubinstein opened a shop offering mechanical service for locks, keys, metal work and copper smithing. For a young couple the earnings of such an interprise were enough to get by, but in two or three years, as the family began to increase, Mother persuaded Father to go into the tinware manufacturing business.

The capital for such an enterprise would be about ten to fifteen *rubles* worth of tin, and a good mechanic who could produce en masse. The business was started. Production was good, and Mother went into the marketplace to sell the manufactured products. It was not long before Mother realized that business was good enough to rent a store. Business exceeded expectations. Mother became a business woman, while Father was in charge of the manufacturing in the basement, the customary place for such enterprises.

True, business was good, but it was different from selling at a stand once a week. To attend a store six days a week was in itself a full time job. What about the house? The children? Cooking? Baking? Making *Shabbos*, maintaining a family, with workers to feed and attend to? All of a sudden the prospect became too much to cope with. After a year or so the store was sold, and Pop and Mom went back to first principles. Father

manufactured tinware, and on Monday, the weekly day for the bazaar, the merchandise was placed on a stand at the bazaar, and Mother attended to it.

From the store venture they came out with a tidy sum of over one thousand *rubles*. In those days it was so much money that all kinds of propositions were made to Mother and Father. However, they decided to buy ground and build a property that would provide a dwelling for themselves and Grandfather and Grandmother Rabinowitz, with a side income to boot.

They purchased the land and built three buildings, consisting of three apartments, a store, and an office building in front of a sizeable lot that was used as an agricultural display area. The property is still there under management of brother Yossel, and ownership of the U.S.S.R.

By the year 1908, Mother was through with child bearing. Louie was the last child. Shortly before that blessed event, our oldest sister Freidel was given in marriage to a very fine young man Leibel Titiunick, a dealer in livestock. He was tall, good looking, forever smiling and out-yelling the loudest talker. He was the type that claimed, "If you can do it, I can do it better." Freidel lived very happily with him. When he was killed in 1919, Freidel's happiness went with him. They were the parents of one daughter, Celia.

Freidel remarried for convenience, but the marriage was short-lived. The husband died of cancer a few years after their marriage. Freidel's life can be characterized as ten years of happy married life, and the remainder as a life of tears, misery and loneliness.

Sister Clara had a stormy girlhood. She read books, Russian books. A child of an awakening generation, she refused to follow the beaten path of *shadchonem*. After breaking up one engagement, she fell in love with a relative of ours, Wolodia. This love adventure extracted a high price in terms of tears and suffering, but finally she succeeded in marrying him. They brought into the world four children, one daughter, and three sons. They all follow professional occupations in the Soviet Union. They lived most of their lives in an oil producing province in Tashkent. The family is well and going strong.

Shayah, Jacob and Yossel all enjoyed a normal education in *heider*. We were sent to the most outstanding schools and to the best teachers in Cherkassi. There was also a Russian class where we were instructed in Russian and the three R's. After the age of twelve we went to work. Yankel and I could not be left in the same cage, so I worked with Father, and Yankel was given into apprenticeship to a bookbinder.

* * *

In 1911, I, Shayah, came to America, and Yankel arrived in 1913. The outbreak of the first World War in 1914 had its tragic impact upon the Rubinstein family, but all escaped with their lives except Leibel, Freidel's husband. In 1923 Wowa and Chana Rochel Rubinstein with the four youngest children arrived in America, leaving in Russia almost half of the family--Freidel, Clara, Dvora, and Yossel.

In telling this story, there might have crept in errors in names and dates,

but, by and large, the facts are true and reliable, as I have drawn heavily on the information obtained from our family historian, my Aunt Chayah--may she rest in peace.

FATHER'S PROPERTIES AND HIS TENANTS

When *Zeida* Yeedl and *Baba* Tzirel reached the age when they could no longer care for themselves, Father and Mother decided to do something about it. Inasmuch as they had recently sold their tinware store, they now had enough cash to invest in a lot, upon which they would build a house big enough to house their growing family and an extra room for *Zeida* and *Baba*.

Father had little experience in real estate, so he persuaded Uncle Berle, his cousin, who was a man of affairs, to go into partnership of buying a lot and building two homes for themselves. They bought the land, but shortly afterwards Uncle Berle had a change of heart and Father remained with the lot.

It was not so easy for Father to enter the new world of finances--planning and building. However, it was also a challenge. Besides, *Zeida* Avram was always available. *Zeida* Avram considered himself an architect and builder. He could point with pride to his creations. He had built the *Litvishe Shul*, the warehouses at the river front, his own home, and many other homes.

It was not too long after that Father obtained a mortgage and *Zeida* Avram laid out a duplex apartment deep inside the courtyard and a dwelling and store in the front. Each apartment consisted of two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen. Of the two bedrooms, one was intended for *Zeida*

and *Baba* Tzirel.

Within one year *Zeida* Avram went through with the entire building program and right after *Pesach* we moved in. Father and Mother had good reason to be satisfied with their accomplishment. Not only had they done the right thing by their now helpless parents, but the property would bring in enough revenue to pay for the mortgage, taxes and other expenses.

Little did they think or little could they have known of the heartaches and disappointments, also of the more happy experiences and the life-saving potential this successful venture brought on in its wake.

The impact of the new enterprise on Father brought out much of his yearnings toward what he considered a life of fulfillment. As a landlord he was a complete failure. Instead of going after his rent when it was due or became overdue, he acted with his tenants as if he owed them rent. In his choice of tenants he always wanted to have someone of Jewish nobility, regardless of their ability to pay the rent. He preferred a man he could chum with--someone with whom he could sit down evenings, read the Jewish paper together, and discuss the Jewish questions of the day or local and world affairs!

When such a man chanced to become our tenant, Father was in his element. Father could never forget that he was the son-in-law of *Reb* Yeedl *der Usem*. True he was a *balmeloche* (manual worker), but he was no ignoramus nor was he devoid of all the fine observances of tradition and piety; even though he was not learned in the Talmud, he nevertheless

belonged to the *Chevro Mishnais* and *Chevro Thilim*. He took an active part in community life, being one of six in a committee representing the *Litvishe Shul*.

It was Father's habit to get up at five o'clock in the morning every day to say *Thilim*. This was a ritual that I can remember still ringing in my ears. Father used to finish the one hundred fifty chapters of the *Thilim* twice a week. The *Thilim* is commonly chanted in various tunes but mainly in the sing-song chant. However, even when reading the Torah there were variations in tunes. There are chapters where the chanting reaches a crescendo that is both beautiful and elevating. Father's soul-stirring chanting of the *Thilim* used to wake me up early in the morning, and it also lulled me back to sleep.

In *Zeida* Yeedl's eyes, Father met all expectations. But that was not enough for Father. He could not sit down with a Talmudist like Uncle Gershon and feel comfortably oriented. Yet Father yearned for self-expression; to read, to discuss current events, to share views with some one he could call a *chaver*. This was a big order--and does not spring from life's warehouse by mere wishing. There may be rare opportunities when a chance presents itself, and it was such a chance that Father was always in search for. When it did present itself, he seized upon it, regardless of cost.

OUR TENANTS

The first tenant for the extra apartment was an army officer, a gentleman with a fine family, of the Russian aristo-

cracy. After eight months his regiment was transferred and so was our tenant.

When it became known that there would be a vacancy within a month, a rush of applicants descended upon Father. At the same time, we received a *Bsiro tova* (a happy message) from Rabbi Shneyerson's *gabai*, *Reb* Mordechai Itkes, which said in substance:

"*Reb* Wowa! We have decided to honor you by using your vacant apartment for the Rabbi and his family during the renovation period of his house." --Signed, *Gabai Reb* Mordechai Itkes.

Father and Mother were both flushed with this sudden development. Indeed, it was an honor. It would be wonderful for *Zeida* Yeedl, too. There would be a *minyan* everyday. There would be rabbis and great talmudists who would visit the rabbi and surely Zeida would want to see them, talk to them *Divre Tora* (Torah matters).

Of course, the rent would not be paid on time--maybe in years--but eventually everybody is paid, so we, too, will not be neglected. This was Father's reaction and Mother agreed.

Right after *Pesach* on a sunny warm morning, the gates of our courtyard opened and a stream of horse-drawn wagons entered the front of the yard. Our yard was quite sizeable, but not large enough for all of the wagons. The overflow went to the rear of the house. Some wagons were loaded with bedding and furniture, some held sacks of flour, barrels of wine, jars of preserves, etc.

Later came the *shamos* who began to order the *balegules* (expressman) around, telling them where to put what. A couple of carpenters appeared with some lumber

and tools loaded on a wagon. They commandeered the *balegules* to cleam out the three stables. The stables were partitioned one to each apartment. They were big enough to house a horse and wagon, that is, if one owned such a luxury, and also firewood for cooking, baking and winter heating.

The carpenters did not ask permission, nor any questions--they needed space, needed plenty of it, and here it was! When the stables were cleared, shelves were built. Benches for kitchen use and benches for sitting inside and outside the house were made. One of the three stables was converted into an outside kitchen that was to feed dozens of people daily. The other two served as lodging space for dozens of people all through the summer.

During the afternoon several women appeared, giving orders to men and women in no uncertain terms. They invaded the *leodneck* (ice cellar). Whatever was there was carefully placed into a corner, and the rest of the space appropriated by them. After the moving was over, the horse and wagons withdrawn, the yard cleaned, *Reb* Mordechai Itkes appeared.

Reb Mordechai Itkes the *gabai* was a man about forty of medium height, but stocky. He had a moon face with a small beard. He wore a shorter coat than the usual *copote* with a round clerical hat that rested on top of a *yarmulke*. Not only was he the general manager of Rabbi Shneyerson's household, he was also the rabbi's personal representative, his mouth-piece, his advisor and public relations man.

The rabbi knew nothing of the household's economics, neither did the *rebitzen*,

yet his home was a going concern, requiring not only a steady and substantial income, but skilled and professional management; bills to be paid for food, salaries to a staff of cooks and servants, expenses incidental to a large aristocratic family, all these worries were of little concern to the rabbi or the *rebitzen.* The *gabai, Reb* Mordechai Itkes, was the man who carried the entire load on his shoulders.

Rabbi Salman Shneyerson himself was the pride of the Cherkassi Jewish community. He was either a son or an *einichel* (grandson) of the great rabbinical dynasty of the Shneyersons. He was the one and only rabbi over fourteen *shuls.* There were never any grumblings or opposition to his spiritual or religious position. His advice and rulings on religious matters were sought from far and wide around the Cherkassi area.

No wonder Father and Mother were congratulated when the news hit the town that Rabbi Schneyerson would be our tenant. When *Reb* Mordechai Itkes was satisfied that everything was in order Rabbi Schneyerson and the family moved in, followed by a host of men and women that made up the personnel of the household. From that moment on #56 Suvorovskoya Ulitza became a boiling volcano; by day and by night, the coming and going of people did not stop. Nor did the delicious smells of baking and cooking ever depart from these premises, except on Saturdays.

Besides the rabbi and the *rebitzen,* the family consisted of seven children--three boys, two teenagers and a seven-year-old, and four girls, one married, one engaged, one teenager, and Chanele,

five years old. The Shneyersons' daughters were beautiful women, even as the *rebitzen* was. They were tall and shapely, with large eyes that nestled in beautiful faces. The Shneyerson women had one characteristic common to all. When one of them hiccuped, the sound was like the end of a factory whistle and could be heard for blocks away.

These were the people that slept inside the house. The servants, and there were many, slept where space was to be found. In addition, it was the custom that when a wayfarer came to the rabbi, he got a meal and a place to sleep, inside, outside, or wherever he could stretch out. The next day he was politely sent on his way. This system prevailed at the regular household where there were about ten extra rooms, a large kitchen and the wherewithall to take care of the usual and steady guests. It was a terrible ordeal for the *gabai* to feed and lodge the stream of comers, particularly in the summer, when the flow of guests reached the highest peak. Our yard was large, and this took away some of the crowdedness inside the house.

However, the members of the family were seldom seen outdoors. The son-in-law was studying for a doctorate abroad. During the summer he came home. Every morning at dawn he appeared in the yard with a book in his hands walking up and down studying by heart.

The only time we saw the *rebitzen* and her daughters outdoors, was when the season arrived to make preserves. This was a delicate operation, almost a ritual! The *rebitzen* would not entrust the job to anyone. For weeks the *rebitzen* and her daughters were busily engaged in this

delicate pursuit of preparing preserves for the coming year. The yard and the entire surrounding area was wrapped in a delicious aroma.

Rabbi Schneyerson himself was seldom seen or heard. The first time I ever heard him, I was overtaken with surprise. The circumstances were thus:

The property owner next door was the ill-famed Hershel Gumberg. He was well known for two things--first for his stinginess and second for his *chutzpa*. He was the son-in-law of one of the richest men in Cherkassi--Berle *der Roiter*, who was so rich that he built and maintained a synagogue wholly at his own expense. Hershel Gumgerg married Berle's daughter, but not for love! As a result of his marriage he claimed some of the honors shown his father-in-law were also due him. Because of these traits, he became known as an ingrate in the Jewish community.

Now, this Hershel Gumberg decided to build a warehouse for his furniture store in his yard. The building was to consist of a deep basement and an upper structure. Whether by miscalculation or sheer brazenry, the foundation was dug a foot past our property line and under our house.

One morning Father tried to open the front door, but it did not open. Simultaneously, he noticed that the door frame, the ceiling, the floor, everything was out of joint. The whole side of our house facing Gumberg's was sinking.

Father was shaken with anger and indignation. There was no doubt that only a Gumberg could so flagrantly disregard other people's property and other people's rights.

Zeida Avram soon appeared, and both he and Father approached Gumberg, demanding that he stop the operation under our house and restore the damages he had incurred. Gumberg, instead of answering in a civil manner, turned away, merely saying, "You are lucky I am not suing you. You built your property on my ground."

Father was desperate. He hated to start up with him. It would mean lawyers, court expenses, etc. It was not in Father's makeup to indulge in such pursuits. What could he do? A thought struck him. "Why not ask Rabbi Schneyerson? After all, here is a man whose renown for scholarship and wisdom is known far and wide." Maybe the rabbi will prevail upon Hershel Gumberg to settle the case like a good Jew should, before it goes to the *goyishe* court.

Father brought the case before the rabbi. A meeting was arranged at the front porch of our house where the damage was plainly visible to the naked eye.

Rabbi Shneyerson, Hershel Gumberg, and Father sat down on two benches facing each other. The rabbi looked at Father and said, "Wowa, *derzeil* (tell what happened)." When the rabbi thus addressed Father, it sounded odd to me. In my world, bearded men did not address each other with the intimate *"du"* meaning "thou." It should have been the more formal *"yeer"* ("you" plural). *"Derzeil"* is the verb form following *"du."* I thought he should have said *"Derzelt,"* which follows *"yeer."*

Well, of the three men, Father looked the youngest. Maybe, I thought, this was the reason. When Father finished his story, the rabbi turned to H. Gomberg,

"Nu wos host du tzu sogen?" (What hast thou to say?) When I heard the rabbi address Gumberg *"du"* I was flabbergasted.

Here was Hershel Gumberg, a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a long and broad grayish beard, a half cylinder on his head, dressed in modern clothes. The man was towering over the rabbi, who was himself a tall man, but not as tall or broad as Hershel Gumberg, nor was the rabbi's beard or face as imposing. The rabbi's face was not of the hairy kind. There was more face than beard.

To address Hershel Gumberg as *"du"* bothered me. It took a little while before I learned the significance of it and the first lesson in human relations.

The second time I saw and heard the rabbi in action was during a divorce case. The court convened in the dining room of our apartment. At the head of the table sat Rabbi Shneyerson and *Zeida* Yeedl. Along the two sides of the table were seated several bearded men. In the kitchen stood some elderly women with the young woman who was sued for the divorce. In *Zeida's* bedroom was the husband and his witnesses. I watched the proceedings from our living room. I heard the accusing husband, the bashful and weeping woman who had lost the case, and the rabbi questioning, advising, and finally pronouncing judgment in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel.

For *Zeida* Yeedl and my father this summer was one of spiritual fulfillment! Many rabbis and learned men who came to see Rabbi Schneyerson also stopped in to see and talk to *Reb* Yeedl. Students for the Rabbinate would on the advice of the rabbi come in for an endorsement from *Reb* Yeedl for a *Smichas Harabunen*

(Rabbinical Diploma).

My father was witnessing and observing these events with pride and a sort of divine blessing. For while *Zeida* Yeedl's function was to graduate students for the Rabbinate when he was head of the Yeshiva, the proceedings were outside Father's reach. In his declining years *Zeida* was not well and half-blind. The Yeshiva administration spared him the effort incidental to graduating rabbis. But, now, with the whole apparatus almost at home, *Zeida* Yeedl enjoyed the duties and chores imposed upon him, the light of which also fell upon Father.

During Rabbi Schneyerson's sojourn in our apartment, our family consisted of one suckling infant, two girls, Freidel eleven and Clara nine, and two younger boys. I was in my eighth year. The sisters, in their own way, developed an intimate relationship with the female half of the Schneyerson family. The only relationship I had with the family was my intense love for the five-year-old little Chanele. She was an exact replica of the *rebitzen* with big black eyes, red cheeks, and a beautiful complexion only found in young children.

She was the only one who was allowed to be out all day. Whenever I chanced to see her my heart stood still. Even then I knew that I did not have a chance to ever strive for her hand. It nevertheless gave me a feeling of gladness just to look at her. It was, however, different with the youngest son Sholom who was my age. He would come out once a day between *Mincha* and *Mariv* in company of one or two other youngsters, usually slightly older than himself. To this company I had daily access.

While the other boys were not always dressed in traditional *hasidic* garb for youngsters, Sholom always appeared as if he just came out from the steam bath. His earlocks, well curled, his freckled face almost transparent, he looked like a miniature of a grown-up *hasid*. He wore a round little hat, a *capotkele* over his *taliskoten*, with the *tzitzis* prominently shown; also knee pants, white socks and low shoes. During the summer there was about an hour and a half daylight between the two afternoon prayers--*Mincha* and *Mariv*.

It was during this time that I would join the boys under our pear tree. This tree we were told was now living through its second childhood, because there were still some *gdoilum* (big pears) high up in the tree, a reminder of its past glory. Now, in its declining years it could only produce small pears. While there were only a few large pears that we could never reach, the little ones were plentiful. We would gather on a log under the tree and wait for the sickel pears to bombard us with their abundance. There was no question of any of us climbing the tree. What are we, *shkotzim* (gentiles)? So we had lots of fun testing our luck as to who would catch more of the falling pears.

One afternoon a young boy, a little older than any of us, appeared with Sholom and his boy friends at the usual place under the tree. Naturally, I, too, came over to play the usual game. The new guest, while not dressed as lavishly as some of the other boys, assumed the role of big brother. He immediately captured our attention with his fantastic stories which he insisted were true.

Every story started with *"Amul is given"* ("once upon a time"). As he was talking, we looked into his mouth. There were times when he dramatized a story to a pitch that brought tears into our eyes.

We were, however, mostly overjoyed with the happy ending of the stories. During the sojourn of this gifted story-teller, he once told us of a poor shepherd who, after seeing a princess in her royal regalia, fell in love with her. Because he knew that such a love could never be attained by a shepherd, he became so sick that he stopped eating, he could not sleep and he was just waiting for death to redeem him. Suddenly he heard the voice of an angel--disclosing to him the secret of how to win the princess as his wife. The angel told him, no more and no less, that he should go out in the evening and catch a bat, but not kill it. It must be alive! Then he should bring it home, put a hat pin through it just in the middle and quickly place it in the right hand side of a table drawer. After three days if the bat was still there, he could go out and claim any wish he wanted. But only one wish!

Well, our shepherd could not ignore such a revelation. He caught the bat, went through all the rituals and sure enough, it did not take long and the princess came in search of the shepherd who was decreed to be her husband even before he was born.

The several evenings I spent with this story teller opened for me new worlds! Never did I hear such fantastic stories, but the story with the bat struck me like a thunderbolt!

Now, maybe I, too, can realize my secret love for Chanele? If it is only

a bat I need, why can't I catch one and do all the things the angel instructed the shepherd to do?

After a couple of days and very distrubed nights, I made up my mind to launch my project "BAT." I knew that bats sometimes make their way into houses at night, around lit lamps. They even got into women's hair! Why couldn't it happen in our house?

The first thing I did was get a half dozen hat pins. Secondly, I had to stay home during the warm summer nights, so as not to miss my chance. For a few weeks I was all "bats." I ate "bats," I slept with "bats," and I dreamed "bats." It was hard to part with such a beautiful dream, so easily attainable.

With the cool fall winds and cloudy skies, the doors and windows were now shut and so were my hopes and dreams of ever marrying the lovely Chanele!

One morning, two weeks before the High Holidays, the gates of our courtyard again opened and a flow of horses and wagons invaded all available space in the yard. The moving out was much faster than the moving in.

A strange calm settled down on our courtyard and its environs. When Father and Mother entered the vacant apartment, they were dismayed by the wear and tear brought on the walls, windows, floors, and doors in the short space of four months. It was not only that the rent was not collected, but, whatever and whenever it would be collected, the monies would have to be spent on repairs. Besides the loss of rent, it would be a while before the apartment would be ready for a new tenant to move

in. It was with bitter irony that they remarked, "*Gliken fon Imuschestve* (the lucky breaks of property)."

But this was not the only reverse suffered that year from the properties. Hershel Gumberg left the meeting with Father and Rabbi Schneyerson angry, and defying the rabbi in a most insulting manner. There was nothing left for Father to do, but engage an attorney.

As this was a case in the higher courts, a Jewish lawyer could not try such cases. Father hired one of the prominent Russian lawyers, Gregoria Volgin. He had to put up ten *rubles* as a deposit, and twenty-tive *rubles* when the case would be decided, one way or another.

Usually, such cases would come up once every three months. But Gumberg also hired a lawyer--Mr. Krinsky, a Pole,the leader of the Black Hundred in Cherkassi. He owned a large piece of property on our block bordering on the side of Hershel Gumberg. His horses and coaches were the finest and the talk of the town. The coachman, the servants, even the dogs, were all like their boss, rabid anti-semites. This Mr. Krinsky was the secretary and clerk of the court. He became wealthy from this key position as the dispenser of the law.

When Father's case was entered, Krinsky put it away "on ice" so it would never be tried. When Father learned that Krinsky was Gumberg's lawyer, he immediately became resigned to the inevitable. He said, "It is hard enough to fight one *rushe* (evil man), but now I am confronted with two. It is an impossible task!"

After a year Mr. Volgin advised

Father to sue Krinsky for not trying his case. He asked him to sign some papers, so another lawyer could expose Krinsky and his tampering with the law.

Father refused to start up with the leader of the Black Hundred. He did not sign. The financial loss was heavy enough, but the cost in aggravation and heartaches was truly disheartening--the *Glicken fon Imuschestve* was now constantly on the lips of Father and Mother.

Our yard was large with a nice open frontage. One day two enterprising men came to Father with a proposition. They would pay the cost of putting up a warehouse and office in return for the use of the new buildings and the use of the front yard for display of agricultural machinery. Father accepted this proposition at a satisfactory rental. The office was built, the machinery displayed and Father and Mother were glad of this windfall.

After a couple of months the town was shaken with one of the largest robberies in years. The fine parts of the agricultural machines and leather belts, worth about two thousand *rubles*, were stolen from the newly built office of the agriculture enterprise. Robberies in Cherkassi were not news. It was as constant as the flow downstream of the Dnieper. But a haul of two thousand *rubles* was shattering news. The police and city fathers came to inspect the place. For two or three days our property made the news! It was the sensation of the year!

To the front, in line with the newly built office, we had the house, and by this time a well-established grocery. The tenants were young people with ambition to look for a better business in

a marketplace. They sold the store to a middle-aged couple, who had a twenty-year-old daughter. After the deal was consummated, the new tenant presented himself to Father and Mother. His name was *Reb* Mendel Resnick. He came from Kremenchuk, where he conducted a factory of cigaret paper. As proof, he exhibited some of his products printed with his name.

No doubt, he must have been a somebody. His father-in-law was the famous Horovitz, manufacturer of a popular brand of *machorka* (tobacco). However, the father-in-law went bankrupt and with him went the entire family. *Reb* Mendel Resnick was an *eidem aff kest* (a son-in-law who because of his scholarship was promised a dowry of maintenance for himself and his family for many years with all necessities of life). As such he was established in the cigaret paper business. But *Reb* Mendel was no businessman. After the collapse of his father-in-law's empire, *Reb* Mendel and his family remained destitute. They had jewelry, some of which they sold and bought the store.

Here they settled down, with the two women as the business captains and *Reb* Mendel pursuing his happy-go-lucky life.

He was a tall man with a small grayish beard and laughing eyes. Nothing bothered him. He studied the Talmud. He knew what was going on in the world by borrowing Jewish and Hebrew newspapers. He was wise, warm hearted, with a ready smile and a pointed joke. Father took to him like to a long lost brother. From the day *Reb* Mendel appeared on our premises Father's world distinctly brightened.

Father was a busy man during winter weekdays, but on *Shabbos*, particularly

after *Havdola, Reb* Mendel would come into our house or Father would go into *Reb* Mendel's house and spend a couple of hours talking of current events.

During the summer evenings, Father and *Reb* Mendel spent almost every evening together. What they read, what they heard and what they thought! Most of these discussions culminated in a wholehearted agreement on how God's world should be run.

Business in the store was bad. The family was eating up the store, literally speaking. They could not afford anything besides the barest, most elementary necessities for subsistance. On Saturday mornings we used to drink *tzikorie*; this brew was a concoction of chicory and milk that was put away in a jug, with the *chulant*. When it was poured into glasses Saturday morning, it filled the immediate surrounding area with an exotic and sweet aroma. It really tasted delicious!

Well, *Reb* Mendel could not resist the tingling aroma of the chicory and he would invite himself under the most amusing pretexts. Everything that concerned the preparation of the brew, its neighbors in the oven, even the jug, acquired flesh and blood with mouthpieces, who were arguing among themselves claiming priority of their beneficiaries and, of course, *Reb* Mendel would bring forth his rights as a benefactor by virtue of the appreciation he bestowed upon them.

Reb Mendel paid the first two months rent. For the next ten months he had no money and, of course, he did not pay. It would be out of Father's character to even intimate to *Reb* Mendel

about rent. However, *Reb* Mendel himself felt very keenly about the burden he imposed upon people who loved him and respected him so dearly. Sometimes he would meet Mother, and forestalling the possibility of Mother saying something about the rent, he would, in his characteristic joking manner say, "Chana Rochel, I have a message for *Reb* Wowa."

"Noo, noo, vus?" Mother would say.

"Tell *Reb* Wowa not to worry about a new tenant or rent. Tell him, if he will pay me the money I owe him, I will remain a tenant for another year."

After this wonderful family had eaten up all the groceries in the store and all their jewelry had been sold, they went back to Kremenchuk.

Somehow our relationship with these people was on a different plane than usual. I remember the parting of the women. They kissed and they cried as if they were sisters. But to Father, *Reb* Mendel's departure was the loss of a *chaver* (a buddy). I doubt if he ever enjoyed the company of another man as much as that of *Reb* Mendel Resnick.

MY TRIP TO EKATERINOSLAV

During the 1880's the Jewish youth in Cherkassi began to stir. A trend developed to break out of the ghetto. While my father did not pin his sights on any stars and was content to be a good mechanic, to "do justice and walk with God," his cousins Berle and Yossel at the early age of fifteen left Cherkassi. They went to Kiev to learn the new trades of plumbing and steam fitting. The trade was so new, competent learners so few, that even Jews, if they could only show ability and intelligence, were allowed in the forbidden-to-Jews city of Kiev. Berle and Yossel learned the plumbing trade, and with their stay in Kiev, became enlightened men. They learned Russian, they read books and magazines, and carried themselves with an air of superiority befitting representatives of the new progressive generation.

When they returned from Kiev, Father was already married. Berle, being of Father's age, was now in line for marriage. In those days parents still retained the power of selection and decision in such matters as marriage. It was, therefore, decided that Berle and Tzirel, Father's step-sister, should be joined in marriage. Tzirel was a beautiful girl. When the *shiddach* was first proposed to Berle he was furious; not because he did not like Tzirel but because this business of deciding the match for him in the old style was below his dignity. He held out for a few months, but finally gave up the

struggle and married his cousin Tzirel. Now cousin Berle was more than a cousin. He was also Father's brother-in-law. It was, therefore, only natural that the two cousins, now also brothers-in-law, should become even closer than ever before.

As was the custom in those days, after marriage Berle opened up his own shop. It did not take long for his plumbing business to prosper. Father had a little money from his store venture. Berle also had some capital. It was, therefore, fitting that the two cousins, brothers-in-law, should begin thinking of *tachless*. They decided to buy a parcel of land on the high ground of the new city, where the city of the future was to be built. Together they paid down three hundred *rubles* as a deposit, and two hundred *rubles* were to be paid on the day of settlement. All the transactions were performed by Berle, as he was a man of the world and knew where to obtain mortgages and deal with banks and builders. Suddenly, something happened!

Berle did not think it was such a practical idea to build the two homes so close together. Either he or Father would have the ground. Father was greatly put out by this development. True, he did not know as much as Berle about real estate, but if the choice was between him and Berle he would complete the transaction himself. Father returned one hundred and fifty *rubles* to Berle, completed the transaction, and immediately proceeded with the financing and building of the house. The two cousins, brothers-in-law, had a falling out, and the two families became estranged, even beyond speaking terms.

When the house was finished, Father

and Mother invited the *mishpocha* to a *chanicas habais* (a house warming). Berle and Tzirel did not come. They were irreconcilable. Their hostility began to border on hate.

During this time Grandmother Frumeh Chayah came down with a fatal illness. Frumeh Chayah was Grandfather Abraham's second wife and Aunt Tzirel's mother. Frumeh Chayah was known in the family either as a "woman of valor" or the personification of an evil and scheming woman, depending upon each individual's dealings with her.

As children, we only knew the negative side of this step-grandmother. I can relate some facts about her only as told to me by our family historian, Aunt Chayah, my mother's sister. Following is one of the stories.

When Grandfather Abraham was in the fifth year of his first marriage, a young widow with two small children appeared in the marketplace in Cherkassi. She was merchandising notions and bric-a-brac to the peasants. Grandfather's home and tinshop was in the marketplace. It was not long before this woman began to pursue Grandfather in a fashion that aroused the displeasure of the family. It became the talk of the town. When it reached the ears of Grandmother, she was already the mother of three children. The humiliation broke her physically and mentally. She died within one year after the affair became known. Grandfather married this woman, Frumeh Chayah.

There were many episodes in the life of this strange woman that brought her name for praise or condemnation, but now I will continue with the story of what happened before her death.

Grandfather never had cash in any considerable sums. Cash and finances were the province of Grandma Frumeh Chayah. She kept money in *kniplach* (small bundles)--how many, she probably did not know herself. But when an occasion arose and money was needed, the *kniplach* were inexhaustible. Her two daughters, my father, and Aunt Reisi were married off in great style with doweries that rivaled much wealthier people in town. The only thing Grandfather had to his name was the real estate. That, according to Russian law, was a man's prerogative and was in the name of the man. Grandfather's real estate consisted of a house that was old and sunken into the ground down to the windows. However, there was a corner lot adjoining the house that was a valuable asset.

Before she died, Frumeh Chayah decided to deed the lot to her daughter Tzirel, Berle's wife. Grandfather did not like it, but he was helpless. He could not say no to this woman who ruled his house with an iron hand.

When Father and Aunt Reisi found out about this plot they raised such a rumpus that the whole *mishpocha* was shaken. Meantime, Berle, realizing that the upsurge in the *mishpocha* might stop Frumeh Chayah's bequest, rushed into the house with legal papers, with a notary and witnesses, and made Grandmother sign on the dotted lines. When this happened, Aunt Reisi and Father were grief-stricken. This was the first time I ever saw Father cry.

But this was not the end. It was decided that means must be found to undo this unholy scheme while Frumeh Chayah

was still alive. The matter must be brought for judgment to some authority whose decision would be binding on all concerned.

Such an authority was Uncle Hershe Leib. He was not only an outstanding scholar, but was also a merchant prince. As a rich importer of masonry materials, he did business with important government officials in Kiev and Moscow. People used to seek his advice, and business men accepted his decision in disputes as binding.

Uncle Hershe Leib agreed to call in Grandfather, Berle and Tzirel, Father and Reisi to hear the case. Grandfather, Reisi, and Father came. Berle and Tzirel refused to come!

Well, the breach in the family was now complete and beyond recall. During all my childhood, and in later years, until I left for America, Uncle Berle's or Aunt Tzirel's name was never mentioned. They were our bitter enemies. Their children and our children had never met or spoken to each other. Only Yankel, who was two years my senior and their oldest son, broke the rule and made friends with me.

Yankel was odd from his early childhood. He was a stutterer. He could not stay in any *heider*. The children made fun of him and called him *Yantete*. The rabbi gave him individual attention but Yankel refused to open his mouth. The only way Yankel could be taught was by private tutoring. Yankel grew up a queer individual. He could read, write Russian and Jewish. He knew arithmetic. He knew what was going on in the family. To a stranger he made the impression of a swell chap except for his stuttering.

But something did miss in his make-up, and this is why I am telling this story.

It was the year after my *Bar-mitzvah*. I was now a regular mechanic in our tin shop. Yankel worked in his father's shop, one-half block away from ours. I was never in his father's shop, but Yankel would now and then come in to show me how much money he had (he always had money), or tell me some gossip he heard somewhere. During the past winter, on several Saturday nights, he had come to the house with a horse-drawn sled, fitted out with bells and driver, Russian style. Yankel loved sledding and I enjoyed it too.

Father and Mother were not too pleased with this sport, but except for a few dry remarks about my company, they said nothing.

One day a couple of weeks after Passover, Yankel came over to the shop and told me that he was leaving home for good. He was going to Ekaterinoslav (Dniepropetrovsk now). He was going first to stop for a visit with our Uncle Berle, then he would find a plumbing job and be on his own. Should I decide to go with him, he would help me find a job and finance my trip till I got established and started earning money. While he was talking he took out four gold, and five *ruble* pieces, remarking that his real money was in paper bills. I don't know what dazzled me more, the gol' pieces, his paper money, or the idea of leaving home.

He said he was leaving on the five A.M. *parachod* (steamboat) on the day after tomorrow and that I would have to act quickly if I wanted to go. There and then I made up my mind I was going.

We agreed that at four o'clock in the morning he would call for me in a *droshka*.

When I broke the news to Father and Mother, they were upset. Mother's argument was more tears than good reason. But Father said that I did not realize the difficulties that were awaiting me. However, he was not going to hold me by force. "You want go go? Go." I told him I needed traveling expenses. He took out two silver *rubles*, handing them to me with a feeling of resignation. Inasmuch as Yankel was going to pay for everything, I thought I had more money than I actually needed.

When the morning of departure came, I had not slept all night, but about three-thirty I unwrapped Father's *tfillin* and left them on the table; this was supposed to prove that I was still the good and obedient son. My own *tfillin* were already packed with two pairs of underwear and one pair of socks.

What I can't figure till this day, is the way Mother let me go. I, who was her first son, who was so dedicated to her and the family--how could she let me leave home with so scanty an outfitting? Did she guess right, that just as she could not let me go, I could not stay away?

Yankel and the *droshka* were at our house promptly at four o'clock. Yankel did have a small trunk. It was still dark when we reached the steamboat.

At the ticket office, Yankel asked me how much money I had. I told him I had two *rubles*. He said the ticket cost two *rubles* and five *kopeks*. He gave me the five *kopeks* and I paid for the ticket. I was a little disappointed, but I did not think much of it. As we entered the

boat, the smell of the boilers and sleeping humanity nearly toppled me over. I had never been in a steamboat. This was my first experience seeing what makes a *parachod* move. The stench of human bodies and their clothing was so strong that I kept thinking that if Mother had to run a *parachod* she would probably know how to overcome this unpleasant problem. She would have Father make a large pan, load it with red-hot charcoal, add that magic recipe of onions and sugar, and presto! The place would smell like delicious cutlets. But what did these sailors know about the fine arts of deodorization?

It was hard to find a place to stretch out on the floor. The best we could do was to lean against a warm pipe in a sitting position. We fell asleep immediately. When we opened our eyes the place was swarming with peasant men and women. Most of them carried teakettles with hot water. It was about eight o'clock in the morning. We were hungry. Yankel said, "Stay here. I will be right back with something to eat." After about ten minutes I began to wonder what was taking him so long. Another five minutes and I became alarmed. Maybe he got lost. It was a big place. He might be looking for me!

I could not leave for fear that I might get lost. So I waited. After a half hour my impatience and my fear prompted me to start a search for Yankel. I began to look into the boiler rooms, dark corners, compartments with and without windows--Yankel was not there. There were stairs leading to the upper level of the boat.

At first I was afraid to venture up,

but dire necessity urged me on. I must find him. When I came up I discovered that the top floor was reserved for first-class passengers. Here was a different class of people. There were wicker chairs and hammocks. Under the bright sun it felt most delightful! But where did I come in? I would probably be caught, and who knows, maybe they would have me arrested? Well, I was on a mission to find Yankel. What difference did it make whether I was arrested or I lost Yankel?

I began to walk along the nicely decorated lounge rooms. Next I saw a sign "Buffet." Of course it was idle to look there. But I could not help just taking a quick look, and lo and behold! Yankel was sitting, one leg thrown over the other, a bottle of wine and a filled glass in front of him. When he saw me, he merely signaled to me with his hand that I should scram.

Well, that did it! Now I knew I was in trouble. Yankel came down after awhile. He gave me two *kopeks* to buy a bagel for breakfast. I did not dare throw it into his face for I remembered the old saying, *"As men zugt meshuga zol men gloiben."* (When one is said to be crazy, it should be believed.) Yes, Yankel was *meshuga*.

The boat was to arrive five o'clock the following morning. All day I did not let Yankel out of my sight. I followed him no matter where he went. By evening he got hungry. I told him if he should go to the Buffet, I would go with him. He would not take me to the Buffet. He finally stopped at the counter of the lower deck. Here be bought a herring and a loaf of bread. This was our supper.

I was afraid to fall asleep for fear Yankel might disappear. However, sleep took the best of me. When I woke up, about midnight, Yankel was not there. But he was back at five o'clock in the morning when we arrived at Ekaterinoslav.

As we came off the boat we were met my a Jewish woman who was imploring us to go to her hostelry. Five *kopeks* per person, and we could stay twenty-four hours a day. We accepted. When we got there, the woman showed us a place on the floor in one corner of a room. The other corner was rented, she said, to a very fine man. We put away the small trunk and went out to buy breakfast. Yankel again bought a dry smoked fish and a large loaf of bread. We ate the breakfast, put the remaining bread into the trunk, and went to explore the town. However, first things come first!

We set out to visit our Uncle Berle. We had his address. After several hours walking we came to the address. But Uncle Berle and the family had left Ekaterinoslav for America over a year before.

Now we had one prospect down, and one more to go--to find a job. Yankel said that he would not try for a job with me trailing him. He would try for himself and I should try for myself. Well, there was logic in it. We parted with the understanding that we would meet in the evening in the lodging place.

At home in Cherkassi I was advised that most tin shops in Ekaterinoslav were located on the side streets of Nevsky Prospect. This is a most beautiful street, and as famous as the Kreschatic in Kiev. I therefore had no difficulty in finding Nevsky Prospect, or the location of the well known tin shops. I did not have the

courage to enter any of the big shops; the smaller shops were like those at home--in basements. It looked familiar and almost inviting to come down the steps. As I came down, the smoke of charcoal was the same as ours. I saw the same tools and the same tinware we made. I asked for a job. In the two places I visited I got no encouragement. This time of the year there was little work. In the fall they would be glad to accommodate me with a job.

It was a hard and discouraging day. Yankel came to the lodging place before I did, but he would not tell me anything --where he had been or what he was going to do. I was hungry. I suggested we go out to look for a place to eat. No, he would not go out. If I were hungry, there was half a loaf of bread I could eat. I realized that Yankel wanted to get rid of me. At this point I was not too eager to remain with him. I told him to buy me a ticket to Cherkassi, I would go home tomorrow morning with the five o'clock *parachod*.

"I have no money," answered Yankel, neither for a ticket nor for lodging nor food. Here is the piece of bread that is left. You can go tomorrow morning. I will pay the five cents lodging."

"But, Yankel," I said, "How can I go without a ticket? They won't let me on the *parachod*."

Well, he couldn't help it!

Finally, after much dickering, Yanket gave me thirty *kopeks* to buy a ticket to the nearest station on the way to Cherkassi.

The next morning, I boarded the boat with a very heavy heart. The prospect of being arrested for riding to Cherkassi on

a thirty *kopek* ticket was real and gloomy, but what other choice did I have? However, the idea of going back home gave me enough moral fortitude to face almost anything! About nine o'clock in the morning the passengers on the boat became lively. It was breakfast time. The teapots were seen all over the place. I was hungry and thirsty, but more than the piece of bread I did not have; even so, I had to stretch this piece, about one pound of bread for twenty-four hours. Somehow I managed to eat my bread so as to make several meals of it.

Meanwhile, I discovered a corner on the boat taken up by Jewish travelers. About ten or twelve young Jewish merchants and one middle-aged woman gathered around a table. They ate there. Every now and then they were drinking tea!

They spoke Yiddish and sang Jewish songs. To me it was a godsend. I was lonely no more. As the day progressed, the woman noticed that I must be hungry. She offered me food several times, but I declined. It was not in my nature to accept a handout. Finally, in the evening I accepted a glass of tea. The stimulating effect of the tea made me talkative. I told the woman my troubles. "Well, sonny," she said, "your troubles are over. We are going to Kiev. When we stop at Cherkassi my son will go out with you. He will take my ticket to lead you out, and everything will be kosher " And so it was!

At five o'clock in the morning I was in Cherkassi. Happy to be home? Of course! But happier to have shaken off Yankel as a bad nightmare.

Meantime at home my experience with Yankel had become known. His parents

would not stop to ask what happened. In about two weeks Uncle Berle went to Ekaterinoslav to bring Yankel home. What really happened remained a secret until the next Yankel episode came to light. This is what really happened.

To induce his parents to let him go to Ekaterinoslav, Yankel told them that I, Shayah, was going to Ekaterinoslav. He wanted his parents to let him go with me. There was no way of checking his story, as there was no communication between the two families. However, it appeared to Uncle Berle and Aunt Tzirel that going with Shayah might be good for him. They fitted him out in grand style, as was becoming Berle Rubinstein, the rich, influential contractor. About three or four days before leaving, Yankel went to three of Uncle Berle's good friends and told them that his father had sent him for a *gmilas chesed* (loan) of fifty *rubles*, for one week. No one asked questions. They extended the loans. This is where Yankel got his gold pieces and paper money. After a week, when Uncle Berle did not return the loan, he was made aware of what happened. Uncle Berle was shocked, but swallowed it without telling the creditors the true story. It was an oversight and that was all! However, covering up the first swindle only led to a scandal that shook not only the family, but even the police had to be brought into play.

Yankel was now eighteen years old. The Jewish underworld found out that there was a *sindel* (playboy) whom they could exploit to the limit. They planted a young Jewish girl as a servant maid with the Shivotovskys who had already acquired plumbing installations. Yankel

was often sent there to do plumbing repairs.

It did not take long and Yankel was caught in the net of this girl. One nice day he was whisked off to Moshno and was married off to the "planted" girl. However, before he absconded, he visited every man he could reach with whom his father did business. He used the same ruse for all: "Father needs five hundred *rubles*, a *gmilas chesed*." If he couldn't make it five hundred--why four or three hundred would do. Well, Yankel got over two thousand *rubles*. In those days two thousand *rubles* was a stupendous amount of money. It could break even as rich a man as Uncle Berle!

For a few days things were quiet. Then a man appeared as the girl's father. He presented himself before Uncle Berle as Yankel's father-in-law, a *mechuten*. He came to ask for enough money to fix up the young couple with a business and a home. He would need two thousand *rubles* to start with!

This was the first Uncle Berle knew of what had happened to Yankel. Before long the creditors began to call for repayment of loans. Well, the sky descended on the heads of the Berle Rubinstein family. The scandal was out in the open.

The underworld had a good thing and began to capitalize on it. The price for releasing the son was two thousand *rubles*. The police official in Cherkassi, who often negotiated with the underworld, was brought in, for a price, of course, to mediate between the underworld and the Rubinsteins. After some dickering and payoffs, Yankel was delivered home.

When he stepped into the house, he was bound hand and foot, placed into a

box, and turned over to the custody of a travel agent who undertook to deliver Yankel to his uncles in Argentina. After two months in Argentina, his uncles bought him a ticket to New York, and there he remained.

After the incident in Ekaterinoslav I did not see Yankel again until the 1920's when he came to Atlantic City asking me for a job. I gave him a few dollars and sent him away.

In the 1940's he paid me a visit again. He came with his wife, with whom he said he had two sons. He looked prosperous, but who knows? It was still Yankel!

MY FIRST LOVE

After my odyssey in Ekaterinoslav I would not go back to Father's tinshop. On the other side of our shop was a row of glaziers' basements. There were occasional tinshops too. I rented a corner of one such basement, with all privileges of working there and displaying my ware for sale. Rent was three *rubles* per month. I borrowed the usual tinsmith's block from Father's shop, also a few tools, a firepot and solder irons, and I was in business. In about a week I had enough tinware to make a fine display and enough sales to give me a sense of success.

But there was a fly in the ointment. Very soon I noticed the mysterious disappearance of half the made-up tinware. Every morning things were missing. True, two other businessmen occupied the basement. One was Mr. Schukin, the glazier, who subletted to me one-third. The other third was leased to a man from across the Dnieper, who stored bacon and lard in the basement. The man across the Dnieper could not have taken anything except on Mondays, when he used to come to the weekly fair. The only man whom I suspected was Mr. Schukin himself.

Well, one evening I left the place early. The basement remained open because the glaziers were still there. However, instead of going home I hid myself, prepared to wait all night, to see who really was that persistent thief. I did not have to wait long. In about one-half hour, Mr. Schukin and one of his sons came out of

the basement with two big sacks. There were some teapots and tinware and several chimney smokepipes. The tinware could not be seen but the pipes were too long for the sacks and the tops were exposed.

The excitement of having caught the thieves made me come out of my hiding place, which was about one hundred yards away. For some unexplained reason, the old man Schukin looked back and saw me. The next morning, as I entered the basement, Mr. Schukin roared out, "I give you till tonight to clear out from here, you so and so. You spied on me! Don't let me get too angry or I'll break every bone in your body. Get out of here!" Inasmuch as I intended to get out anyway, his tirade meant little to me. Father sent two of his workmen, and in a couple of hours I was out of the basement and out of business!

My next move was to try to find a basement for myself without partners, even if the rent was more than three *rubles* a month. Such a place was hard to find. When I did find a suitable basement, the rent was eight *rubles* a month. But it was in a new section of the market, and in a new brick store. I moved in and opened for business. The first thing I had to do was manufacture a supply of tinware, then put it out on display and sell. After two weeks I was again the proud owner of a going business.

Meantime the home front was now engaged in the serious occupation of obtaining a suitable *shiddach* for Freidel. She was already seventeen years old. *Shadchonim* were coming and going. Three prospects were brought in. They, the prospects, agreed and liked the *shiddach*, but Freidel did not accept. She wanted

to fall in love with somebody, but so far none reached her heart. About a week before the Passover holidays a *shadchon* came to the house proposing a *shiddach*. "This," he said, "is not an ordinary *shiddach*." The man he had in mind might not even accept, but he thought, with God's help, he might succeed! The man he had in mind was a textile manufacturer who was doing business with famed firms abroad. He had made an appointment for the Sabbath evening immediately after Easter. At the appointed day and hour the *shadchon* and his prospect presented themselves. The reception on our part was one of unusual expectation. A textile manufacturer! The word "manufacturer" commanded respect. The young man was tall and unusually handsome. He did not speak much; Father had difficulty finding out whether he spoke better Yiddish or Russian.

After the evening was over, Freidel declared that, at last, she had met a man with whom she could actually fall in love! The impression he left with everybody was favorable!

Soon after this meeting Uncle Kalman arrived from Odessa. He had made up his mind to go to America. He did not have enough money to take the whole family, so he came to Cherkassi to the *mishpocha* for assistance. His plan was that Father should get him a loan in the *actzies*, the old version of loan corporation, which he would, of course, repay. With this money and the money he had, he would be able to go to America with his oldest fourteen-year-old daughter Tzirel. His wife, Esther, with three children, he would bring to Cherkassi. They would be quartered in Grandfather Abraham's house.

The only problem was how to provide Aunt Esther with enough means for food until he would start working in America.

It was agreed after several meetings with Aunt Reisi and Grandfather, that each one of them would give Aunt Esther one *ruble* a week. Three *rubles* a week ought to be enough to keep her in food during the summer months when fruits and vegetables were plentiful and cheap. Uncle Kalman was thankful! After all, he was among relatives who were really eager to help.

By this time Uncle Kalman heard about the *shiddach*. He thought the proposition was very interesting, but advised that before we break plates (a symbolic ceremony at an engagement party), we should find out a little more about the family background of the prospective bridegroom. Father and Mother were agreed that such an investigation could not hurt. But whom could they entrust with such an important mission? Maybe Uncle Kalman would undertake the task of traveling seventy miles to the place of this textile manufacturer? He would, Uncle Kalman said, if it were a place one could get to by railroad or boat, but this place could only be reached by horse and wagon. It was a tedious and long journey. After some persuasion Uncle Kalman accepted. In four days he came back to report. Yes, the young man was a manufacturer, but instead of textiles, he and an older brother were manufacturing common rope from which manufacture they both starved to death. The brother was so poor that his wife and four children were without shoes or a decent dress to cover their bodies. The house where they lived was nothing but an old shack

with three windows and two doors. One of them was broken and stayed open.

When Uncle Kalman asked the prospect how he dared to represent himself as a textile manufacturer with connections abroad, he denied that he misrepresented himself. It was all the work of the *shadchon*. Well, that turned a sweet and short dream into a heartbreaking disappointment for sister Freidel.

Immediately after this episode, Uncle Kalman left. In about two weeks Aunt Esther with three children arrived in Cherkassi. It was not easy to pay a *ruble* a week, but Aunt Esther, after a couple of weeks, began to complain that she couldn't stretch three *rubles* a week to buy the barest necessities. As she was not the type that could press her case hard enough to be effective, she settled down to a life of want and misery.

When I opened the second basement shop and it became known that Shayka was doing a nice business, Aunt Esther came over one morning and started to tell me how bitter her life had become since Uncle Kalman left her with three *rubles* to feed herself and three growing children. Before she left she asked me if I could lend her twenty-five *kopeks*. It was early and I had not made a sale yet. I told her I would be glad to, if she would wait till I made a sale. In a little while I made a sale for fifteen *kopeks*. I gave her the fifteen *kopeks*. She thanked me in the most endearing terms--Shaykele, Shaykenue, and so on! The next day Aunt Esther came again. She sat on top of the stairs while I was inside the basement, hammering away in the making of tinware. This time I had already made a sale. I remembered that

she had asked for twenty-five *kopeks*. I had only given her fifteen the day before, so I came up and gave her the ten additional *kopeks*. She thanked me, and after a few minutes she left. On the third day she came again and sat at the top of the stair. I realized that Aunt Esther would come every morning for a loan, so I told her, "Aunt Esther, you know what? You can have every morning the *pechatock* --the first sale." When I said that she took me around, squeezed me to her bosom, and kissed me, while tears rolled down her face. From that day on she came over every day and I saw to it that she should always leave with not less than fifteen *kopeks*!

One morning an army officer and his orderly stopped at the basement while Aunt Esther was sitting in her usual place. He wanted to know the price of a charcoal cooker. I told him sixty *kopeks*, expecting an offer of thirty-five, which I would have gladly accepted. To my astonishment, the officer paid me the sixty. What a surprise! "Here, Auntie, is sixty *kopeks*," I said. "It is all yours. A bargain is a bargain. This is a *pechatock*, and it belongs to you." She protested, she would not take more than twenty-five *kopeks*, and so it was. Since Aunt Esther had embraced and kissed me I began to look at Aunt Esther differently. In the morning when she was a little late, I missed her. I wanted to talk to her, although I had nothing to say, but she would always have something to say. Suddenly I became aware that Aunt Esther was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. There were beautiful women in Cherkassi. The colonel's wife was really a beauty.

Whenever she appeared with the colonel on the Kreschatic she was followed by five or six couples, officers and their wives, and a string of single officers. Her dresses, and her large hats with the beautiful feathers that she wore at an angle, the rare perfumes that heralded her presence, all these created an unforgettable sight. This heavenly beauty did not last long. She fell in love with a young army officer. When the colonel apprehended them, the young officer shot her and himself.

There was another beauty in our town. She was the common-law wife of another army officer. This woman was a peasant girl, but a rare beauty. She was rather slim and delicate but her bearing and refined face was such that it was an aesthetic treat to look at her. This woman lived on our block. She fell ill from a boil under her arm that developed into a carbuncle, from which she died. She was mourned by all those who ever saw her.

I began to compare Aunt Esther with those beauties, but she was even more beautiful in her babushka than the others in their glamorous hats. The half-hour or the hour that she sat at the top of the stairs was a time of bliss--I felt very happy when she appeared. I stopped working. I stayed at the top of the stairs, listening to her talk. When she left, I remained watching her gait and bearing, again thinking that those beautiful women never possessed the grace and bearing of Aunt Esther. Did I fall in love with Aunt Esther? Of course, I did! But for a youngster of my age it was too much bliss.

After about a month working in the damp basement I contracted laryngitis.

Whether Mother knew of Aunt Esther's visits to my basement or not, I will never know, but as soon as I came home with the cold, Mother became panicky. "You will contract consumption and rheumatism in that damp basement," she said. "What happened to you anyhow? Did your wife and children beset you that you must gamble with your life to make a living?" She would not allow me to go back to that basement. If I must have my own shop, there was the store that used to be the grocery. I could start a shop there. This ended my second business adventure. I had to give up the basement and started a new shop at home.

Meantime, Uncle Kalman began to send money. Aunt Esther needed money and knew how to spend it. She came to life. She began to dress better and looked even more beautiful. I could not see her or talk to her, as she was living at Grandfather's; but even if I could, what excuse would I have had for coming to see her?

After several months she left for America. Not only did I miss her, but she ingrained herself in my mind and consciousness to such a degree that I began to view Aunt Esther as the ultimate in womanly charm and beauty. Her image followed me for a long time. In the presence of beautiful women Aunt Esther was the measuring stick. In all my bachelor years I did not come across the equal to Aunt Esther until my Esther appeared.

The first look at her told me that I finally found the Esther that could match the one of my first, innocent as it was, yet, most profound love!

THE POGROM

It was a hot and humid mid-July night. About forty pupils were crowded into the classroom. Mr. Chayutin was lecturing in Hebrew about the mysteries of our physical world. Most of us did not understand Hebrew well. But we knew that the subject concerned "sound," and how, through air-waves, it reaches the ear.

In the oppressive, humid air, concentration was difficult. Many of the pupils could not keep their eyes open, and I was one of them. When the class was dismissed, we all experienced a welcome relief. At the door, on the way out, a woman's hand touched my shoulder. She said, "Rubinstein?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Mr. Chayutin invites you to his house Tuesday at one o'clock," and she handed me a piece of paper on which was written, in Russian, the address of his residence.

To receive an invitation from Mr. Chayutin was more than an unexpected surprise. It was an honor! In Cherkassi, Mr. Chayutin was the "Mr. Zionist," the great speaker, the writer, the poet.

For what purpose did he pick me? True, times were very disturbing. Foreboding rumors were circulating. Only yesterday, two of my boy friends stopped me in the marketplace. "Well, did you hear the latest? Everybody expects a *resnia* (massacre) next week."

"My brother joined the *Samo-ochrano* (self-defense organization)," the other

told me, almost crying. "How am I going to protect my mother and baby brother? We are doomed!"

At home the air was charged with the same foreboding mood. Everywhere one went the same spirit of resignation and hopelessness prevailed. "What will be with all the Jews, will be with us Jews. We will rely on God!" Mother and Father used this quotation so often that it became standard when the threat of the impending *pogrom* came close to home. The feeling was: "Who knows if we will still be among the living next week?"

Going home from the Hebrew night school, I did not discuss the invitation with anybody. I felt as if I had found a precious jewel, which I would not want to share with anyone!

During the several days of waiting, I tried to figure out the reason for the invitation. "Would he want to sent me to a higher Hebrew school? But I was not such a brilliant student. Would he want me to join the singing class? I had no voice. There is only one thing in which I could be useful, as errand boy in the *Samo-ochrano*.

In my heart I felt that this was the only reason for singling me out. In my mind, I already saw myself performing as a trusted scout. A boy of eleven years could not fight, but I knew of boys and girls who were scouts for secret meetings in the revolutionary movement. The thought that I might become a somebody among grownups thrilled me. The feeling of gloom gave way to a feeling of elation!

The several days before the visit were exultant days, though they dragged on like an eternity!

At last the day came--a typical warm, summer day. It took me sometime to locate the Chayutin residence. The address led me to the gentile section of the town. The house did not front on the street, but was deep in a court that looked more like an orchard, and it was situated on the edge of the hill overlooking the grandeur of the mighty Dnieper and its beautiful surroundings. When I finally reached the house, I was met by the same young lady who had extended the invitation to me.

I was led into a room. The furniture consisted of a chair and a rough table. She pointed to the chair. I sat down. "Your first name is Shayah?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Well, Shayah, Mr. Chayutin thinks you have a wonderful handwriting, and he is entrusting you with the job of copying one of his latest Hebrew poems. Here is pen and paper, and the poem. I will be back in half an hour."

Suddenly, the girl, the walls, the windows--everything turned upside down. I must have blacked out. When I came to, I realized the extent of my disappointment. I felt letdown, crushed.

My first thought was of running out with an angry slam of the door. But what would Father and Mother think when they found out that I had rejected such an honor? They would feel worse than I did. Besides *I was* picked by Mr. Chayutin, one out of forty students. I sat down to work!

The day was bright, the windows were wide open, and a cool breeze was patting my face. The sight of the wide Dnieper and the whole panorama of green sloping mountains, the houses and streets below

was overwhelming. I took a rest after every completed page, and let my eyes feast on these beautiful sights.

Suddenly, I reminded myself that the young lady said she would be back here in half an hour. It was now much more than two hours. Half of the poem was already completed, and she did not appear. Besides, when I first started to work, I heard loud-voiced talking, singing, and laughing. There had been a group of men and women under the trees. Where were they now? A strange silence!

I listened. No sound! They must be somewhere around, but where? I knew the trick of how to get distant sound from the earch. I put my ear to the ground. No! No sound anywhere. The Chayutins and their company were not around.

But this strange quietness--what was it? Little by little noises began to reach my ears. First an outcry, *"Gvald!"* Then many cries. *"Rativeh!"* and so on. In a few minutes the air was filled with the shrill noises of the closing of metal store windows and door shutters. More noises and more outcrys of humans in distress convinced me there and then that this was "it." It was the long awaited *POGROM*.

I started to run, repeating to myself, *"pogrom, pogrom!"* I was running toward the Kreschatic where Father's basement shop was. When I reached this area, I found all the stores had been closed. Our basement shop and all the other shops were closed. Where were my father and the workmen? Where was everybody? I ran through the open marketplace. The entire area was full of men. I looked around. Stores with wooden

doors and windows were broken into and ransacked. Most of the open stands were broken and strewn with their contents. From the corner of the market where the expressmen had their stands came yells and shrieks resounding with a fearful intonation!

Feathers were in the air. In one corner of the marketplace where Jews were known to live, from far away I saw a bearded man kicked and beaten, then thrown to the ground. The man looked like my rabbi, but was not.

By this time, the reality of the *pogrom* shook me up. I became frightened. I kept running through the marketplace on my way home. I noticed that the men in the streets were not local people, or from surrounding peasantry. They were not all drunk. They were coming down by the hundreds and thousands from the barracks outside the city limits. They filled the city like a seventeen-year locust plague.

Somehow, as I was a small boy, nobody molested me or stopped me. I finally reached home. Our house was in the upper new city, and was set deep in a court. The open front of the court was fenced-off with a high wooden fence and an impressive high gate. When it was locked, it was hard to gain entrance. I reached the gate, looked inside the court. Silence prevailed! The window shutters were closed and locked. Nobody was in sight. I began to yell, "Open up! It's me, Shayah." Father came out and let me in.

"Where are the children?" was the first question he asked me.

"Which children?" I asked.

"Chayah, Dvora and Tzirele," he said.

What had happened to them? Mother and Father were tearing themselves to pieces. Where could they be? They had gone to Aunt Chayah for a visit. They should have been back long before this. Besides, the worst of the *pogrom* would probably take place in that area.

Meantime, we were out of our house. We were in hiding in back of the woodshed. Between our woodshed and the fence belonging to our neighbor's property, there was a twelve inch space. This was the legal requirement between two properties. As the shed was about forty feet long, the space of twelve inches by forty feet was our hiding place. It was so situated that it made an ideal hiding place for cats and other small animals, but how grown people, let alone children, could squeeze in there and remain for any length of time is something only fright and the will to survive can answer! There we were, all in a standing position, Mother with a sick child on her hands, Father, Freidel, Yankel, Yossel, and I.

After a few hours it became unbearable to remain in the twelve inch space. I was sent out to make a survey in the Shivatovsky Court. This was an L-shaped estate fenced in the front with tall trees. There were a half-dozen brick houses surrounded with flower beds, stables and fine vehicles.

This luxurious property had come into the possession of a Jewish family by the name of Shivotovsky. They were the elite of Jewish society. I jumped the high wooden fence only to be greated by the well-known unfriendly watchman, Sergei. "What do you want?" he growled.

"I want to see the Shivotovskys,"

I said.

"Come, we'll take a look to see if they are there."

We both entered the house. There was some food on the table, but no one was in the house. I went back. My report was discouraging. It meant we could expect no help or food from those quarters.

Maybe we could find refuge in Berle the *Stoliar's* Court on the other side of the Shivotovsky L-shaped Court? A priest was living there. Perhaps he would give protection to Jews? We heard that most priests were in the avant-guard of the Black Hundred, the Jew-hating organization. But this priest lived in a Jewish court, he surely must be different. I made the journey over two high fences. When I jumped down the second fence, I was greeted by my boyfriend, Leibel, and his father, Berle the *Stoliar* (carpenter). "Are you all safe?" he asked. I told him about our predicament in the twelve inch space with no food.

"Tell your father and mother to come here at once," he said. "Hurry, before the night sets in. The worst is yet to come, so the priest told me. Look, there are several families here."

I went right back. It did not take much persuasion to convince Father and Mother. We immediately started out, with just a few blankets.

The high fences presented a great obstacle for the women and small children. For them we needed a ladder, but there was none to be found. Somehow, Father climbed the first fence after I went over. Mother handed over the children, and she was to scale the fence last. But Freidel was a problem; she could not climb

so well. Since she was a grown girl, she could not be handed up like the other children. Mother had a hard time before she had seen her over the first fence. But the carpenter's fence was just as high. However, the first shock of the difficult task was over. The fence climbing and jumping felt less formidable. Again, everyone made it except Freidel. She remained on the other side with Mother.

Up till now, the Shivotovsky estate was quiet. We crossed the yard with no one in sight. Even Sergei, the watchman, was not there. Suddenly we heard loud voices coming from the far side of the court. There was no time to be lost. Mother picked up Freidel and placed her on her shoulder. From Mother's shoulder Freidel negotiated the top of the sharp pointed ridges of the fence. She threw one leg over and when she was about to bring the other leg over, and jump onto the shoulders of the waiting men, she fainted and plunged down on the side where Mother stood. Luckily, as she fell her dress was caught on the pointed ridges of the fence. After a few tense moments, Freidel was revived. Strong hands brought her up and over the fence.

Berle the Carpenter improvised benches and tables. At first glance, the setting was rather pleasing. The children were fed. Later, the samovar appeared. It felt more like a social get-together, except for the sobbing of Mother and the deep anxiety of Father about Chayah and the two small children, Dvora and Tzirele. Where could they be? Were they alive? Were they hurt?

It was now getting dark. The noise in town was still loud. Now and then a

desperate outcry, *"Rativeh!"* chilled the blood of those within hearing. Mother could not be silenced or comforted about the children. It was decided that early the next morning, I should go down to the old city to Grandfather's house. The children would not be there, but if there was anybody there alive, maybe they would know something about the whereabouts of the children.

It was a tough night. There must have been about fifteen or more people, men, women and children, sleeping on the floor of the carpenter's shop. The choicest places were those where there were wood shavings. While there was quite a good bit of these shavings, there was not enough to take care of all those who most needed them. Mother's crying and sobbing disturbed everybody's sleep. It was a terribly long night.

With daybreak, again came the pounding in the street of walking feet. A loud chatter of men, some sober, some drunk, brought back to the waking refugees in Berle the Carpenter's court the dire realities of the situation.

There was no food or drink. The adults did not care. But the children? If the priest were home, he would get food for everybody. But he was not seen all afternoon yesterday. His house was closed. Yet, the greatest worry was neither food nor comfort. Were we safe under the protection of the priest, if he himself was not here? Should the mob break in, we were all doomed.

Meantime, a council of war was held. Where to go in search of food? There might be some food in the *leodnecks*, the deep cellars, filled with ice to keep cold all summer. Mother knew where to find it.

So Mother and some other brave souls made the difficult journey to the *leodneck*, while I went down to Grandfather's house.

I did not have to jump fences this time. I went through a hole in the rear fence that took me into a yard where an old rich Russian widow lived. Her dogs were famous for their ferocity. But during the summer, she and the dogs were away to her *datcha*.

I made my way easily to the street. With my broad Russian *kartuz* (hat) and shiny visor, I did not look Jewish enough to be molested. I mingled freely among the men. There were no women. Imagine a long, wide street, men walking on the pavements and the middle of the street. They walked lesiurely in both directions. Some were sober, others were drunk. Most of them were dressed in peasant attire. The only thing that gave them a military appearance was that they all wore boots with either a military hat or a military jacket. They looked grave when sober; desperate and loud when drunk.

Our street, Suvorovska Street, was the main artery leading to the center of the city with the market and shopping area. This street and the marketplace were now full of men. I made my way to the marketplace. From there I reached Beregovoispusk. This was the main thoroughfare leading to the old city where Grandfather lived.

It was a wide street about a mile long, but so steep that in winter the ascent and descent was a most daring undertaking by horse and wagon. From the top or entrance into this thoroughfare, one could see the houses and buildings on both sides of the street, and a

good deal of the old part of the city. It was the old section of the city that housed most of the Jewish population. There it was where the greatest atrocities and ransacking took place.

When I reached Beregovoispusk, I was greeted with an appalling sight. True, it was early in the morning, but the strange silence was almost sickening. No sound was heard. Not a soul in the street. Everyone was in hiding.

Looking down, I saw this wide street strewn with feathers, torn sheets, shirts and rags; broken fences, doors and smashed windows. But there were also stretches on this long street untouched. I reasoned they must be gentile. I rushed down into the old market street where Grandfather's house stood. Here, too, some houses were broken into, others untouched. Most houses that were exposed to the street had been broken into and ransacked.

Grandfather's house had a sunken front. At one time it was a regular house, but as the rains came down the steep hills surrounding the old city, they brought down sand and pebbles in such masses that in time the street level was raised and the houses were half-buried.

Grandfather's house was one of these victims. While the house was somehow livable, it did not appear so. There was a high fence surrounding it. When I reached the fence, I began to knock on the gate. There was no response for quite a while. I began to yell, "It is I, Shayah!"

"What do you want?" a voice, weak and unpleasant, responded. I recognized the voice of Aunt Reisi. I told her about the children who got lost. I also

told her that we were safe in Berle the Carpenter's court where there was a priest to protect us.

As we were talking, Grandfather somehow got his head up to the top of the fence, and in a most commanding voice yelled, "Shaike, go back home. Quick, run!" Before he had time to finish, a loud noise came from the side of the corner. Somebody was being beaten. A mob of teenagers with sticks in their hands appeared.

Two young rough-looking men with iron chains in their hands led a young Jewish man. The teenagers kept hitting him with their sticks, but the two huskies took turns hitting him with the iron chains over his ankles and bare feet. His face was covered with sweat and blood. The youngsters kept up the barrage on his body, and the two big fellows used the chains on his feet. Everytime they hit him, in unison the mob sang out, *"Bey zshidov i spasai Russia."* ("Kill the Jews and save Russia.") This was the popular slogan used by the Black Hundred!

I recognized the unlucky Jewish young man. I knew him as one of the popular revolutionary leaders. He was the son of a well-to-do harness maker. I could not follow the mob for fear of being recognized as a Jewish boy. I sped home, excited and shaken.

It was now late in the afternoon. The streets in the new city were still full of people, but I did not see anybody or hear anything. The sight of the beaten Jewish man, who, I knew, would not survive the beating, paralyzed me with fear.

When I finally reached home, I must

have looked as I felt. Mother and Father had good news for me, but instead of telling me outright, burst out with, "*Got is mit dir.* (God is with you.) Where have you been? What happened to you? Were you beaten? Chayah and the children are safe!"

Well, this news was really something to cheer me up. It was overwhelming. "How do you know? Where are they?" I asked.

I had to tell them my story first--what I had heard, what I saw, and what had sickened me. Then they told me the story of Chayah and the two children.

When Mother went to the *leodneck* in search of food, she found a note on our door, written in Russian. It stated that Chayah, Dvora and Tzirele were all safe and sound at the Russian Public School, that they were all under the personal care of the Director of the school and his wife, and that as soon as the disturbance was over they would be brought home. The note was signed by the Director of Schools, who was known as a liberal and reasonable man. The news brightened the outlook of all the refugees in Berle's court and the talk centered around the belief that as long as there were people like the priest and the school director, things were not hopeless.

But again, what about food? There was none to be found. It became apparent that it was impossible to remain another night in the carpenter's court. People began to think of getting back to their houses during the night, and running out of town in the morning. The reasoning was that the city would be occupied by this mob of reservists for days and weeks, and who knew where and when the axe would

fall again?

The kind Berle made a ladder, and we moved back home overnight. There was no food in the house. There was no place to buy food. Yeedl was the youngest, and the greatest problem was food for him. The rest of the family would somehow get by. Without too much thinking, Father and Mother decided to go down to the waterfront at daybreak. There they would catch the early morning *parachod* and go down to Ekaterinoslav.

We all started out at daybreak, but did not take along as much as a handkerchief. Father picked up Yeedl in his arms, and we began the march to the waterfront on the Dneiper. It was not exactly dark, but neither was there enough light for comfort. Since it was midsummer, we wore very light clothing, but the early morning air was cool, and we were all shivering. So now, clothing became a problem too, but not the major problem. What really mattered now was getting out of town in the swiftest possible time, before we would be overtaken by the *pogrom* mob.

So far, Suvorovska Street was quiet. There was not a soul in sight. After about a half an hour we reached Beregovoispusk. Here we came upon the strangest sight. It was breathtaking! Both sides of this steep and long thoroughfare were lined with soldiers, about ten feet apart. Soldiers in battle uniforms, with guns in hand, ready for action. The red, white and blue uniforms, the disciplinary order of an army spread out almost shoulder to shoulder, all this looked to us like a dream. We had never seen anything like it.

We entered the street. Regardless

of this unbelievable sight, we kept on walking for a few minutes. No one stopped us. Suddenly, we heard a commanding shout *"Stoy!"* ("Halt!") We stopped. A middle-aged officer in full uniform appeared, and, in the mildest possible voice, said, *"Starichok* (little old man),* where are you going?" Father turned pale, and could not answer. Mother took the stand, and told him in her most refined Jewish Russian that we were going to Ekaterinoslav to escape the *pogrom.*

"You need not do it," he said. "Nothing will happen to you. The city is under martial law. You see these soldiers? Do you think those law-breaking scoundrels will dare fight the Czar's army?"

He wanted to know where we lived and what Father did for a living. He told us to go back, to open the shop at once. He told Mother to go to the marketplace and buy food for the children. He patted everyone of the children, and made everyone feel as if he had met *Eliohu Hanovi* (Elijah) himself. We returned home and started life anew.

* * *

*Father was then thirty-nine years old. His beard and *pogrom* experience made him look like an old man.

MARYASSY'S LAUGHTER

One day a few weeks after Passover, Father sat down to the dining tables in a very happy mood, telling Mother that today he would recite two extra blessings, one, *Boruch sheputranu* (Blessed be Thou who rids me of a burden), and the second, *Shehecheyonu Vehigionu* (Blessed be Thou who hast brought me up to this cherished time). The first referred to the notorious H. Gomberg who for five years caused him untold heartaches and worry, and the other blessing was for the privilege of having a new neighbor of extraordinary distinction, the prominent merchant prince Mr. Dubnicov.

Not only did Dubnicov own the largest dry goods store in the Cherkassi area, but he was an exporter and importer and a candy manufacturer of national fame. He spoke several languages, and was a frequent contributor to the Russian-Jewish monthly, the *Rassvet*. Moreover, he was a self-made man who had acquired wealth and prominence by his uncanny intellectual and enterprising achievement.

His immediate family consisted of his wife, three boys, and three girls corresponding to the ages of our older sister Freidel down to five-year-old sister Dvora. From the minute the Dubnicovs moved in, the house took on flesh and sinews; it was constantly vibrating with life--people came and went, but on Saturdays and evenings it was especially a house of joy and laughter. Singing and music particularly dominated

this house. We often heard the piano, but the phonograph, playing cantorial records of the famed Cantor Quartim, once started, would go on for hours. It did not take long for us to learn that the celebrated *Ober*-Cantor Quartim was actually Mr. Dubnicov's brother-in-law, and that Mr. Dubnicov had discovered him after Quartim married his wife's sister. Mr. Dubnicov sent him abroad to study music where he perfected himself as a superior cantor. Mr. Dubnicov took great pride in his brother-in-law with no less satisfaction in his own good judgment.

Cantor Quartim had visited the Dubnicovs in Cherkassi on several occasions. Needless to day Quartim sang and we were uninvited listeners to the finest concerts of Jewish and operatic music. All the boys in our courtyard could sing Quartim's records that were played on the phonograph, but nobody sang them as thoroughly as my younger brother Yankel. Furthermore, as soon as he sensed there was a gathering at the Dubnicovs, Yankel would get up on the high fence close to a window and sing anything the phonograph played.

Everytime he finished a song, it was received with a handclapping from the Dubnicovs. Yankel felt as if he outdid Quartim himself. That summer Yankel dominated the musical scene in the Rubinstein domain and, "Who was like unto thee, O Yankel?"

During that year the new tenant who occupied one of our apartments was Mother's distant relative, a widow with two grown daughters and a son named Seauma, two years my junior. Seauma and his sister Anita had beautiful voices. They sang mostly popular and classical

Russian songs. Yankel and I soon began to sing most of the Russian songs along with them. One day Seauma told me that Rabbi Yechial the *Chazen* had hired him as a chiorboy in his choir for the High Holidays. I was overcome with envy. I could not sing either as Yankel or as Seauma, but thought maybe I could learn singing in choir. Seauma was a good-natured *chaver*. He never refused us anything he could do. In fact, when it came to Russian songs, he taught us literally word by word. I asked Seauma if I could join the choir. "Sure," he said. The rabbi had asked him if he knew of any boys who would like to join. The next day Seauma and I went to the house of Yechial the Chazen who was also a *melamed* and conducted a *heider*. I knew that among the girls in this *heider* was Maryassy, the daughter of Yankel the *Stoliar*. Her mother was deaf and dumb, yet she had given birth to six children. They were all well and of the girls, it was said one was more beautiful than the other. All the children grew up talking as normally as most other children. Of course, this was due to their father, who was regarded as a model husband and father.

I had seen Maryassy several times. She was indeed very beautiful. Somehow I hoped she would not be in *heider* that morning. As we entered the *heider*, the children were sitting on two long benches on each side of the room. On my left were boys, and on the right the girls. I just had time to look to the right and saw only one face--Maryassy's. I did not see or hear anything else until I heard *Reb* Yechial say, *"Noo, Noo, kum aher Shaika."* ("Well, well, come here,

Shaika.") I stepped forward and came to the corner of the table where *Reb* Yechial was sitting with a pointer in his hand. I did not look straight into his face, but I could not miss his curly red beard as almost half of it was spread on the table. He said to me, *"Kook off mir!"* ("Look at me!") I did. He seemed so good natured he at once won me over! *"Noo, tzi a tone."* ("Sing a tune.") He started and I followed. On the second try, I hardy had time to get started when he threw his pointer on the table and exclaimed, *"Gei shon. Gei, du bist a drung!"* ("Go on, go, you are nothing but a dried out twig!") As he said that, I felt stunned, as if the ceiling had fallen on my head. Both rows of children burst out in laughter, but Maryassy's laughter was louder than anyone else's. Humiliated, and dejected, I somehow found my way out, but Maryassy's laughter pursued me all the way home and for days after.

Thus ended my musical ambition with a bang! There were times when opportunities presented themselves on the American soil to join a choir, but Maryassy's laughter was still ringing in my ears. I respectfully declined!

MOSHKA

Moshka was two years my senior and a cousin who always sought my company. He was the third child and the second son born to Uncle Avremel and Aunt Toubi. My childhood years were closely tied up with him as far back as I can remember.

When I was about five years old and sister Chayah seven, we used to look forward to the winter nights in Uncle Avremel's house. On *Shabbos* evening, right after *havdola*, we would spread out soft bedding on the earthen floor and about a half dozen children would plunge under the covers, falling asleep in sweet dreams in anticipation of the dramatic midnight event.

At two o'clock in the morning, in the deepest depth of our sleep, loud voices and much ado woke us up. In short order, while we were still in our sleeping shirts, we were fed tea and bread and soon all the children found themselves in a "ring around the roses" circle, on a pile of powdered chalk and crude smelly oil kneading the substance with our little feet into the finished product of glazier's putty. After half an hour, tired and happy, we were sent back to sleep and the older folds took over.

Uncle Avremel in his glazing business required putty, particularly in fall and in winter. There were no manufacturers of this product. Each glazier had to manufacture his own required amount of putty. It was a hard, back-breaking job.

But, under the wise direction of Aunt Toubi, this tedious job was dressed up in a colorful, poetic mantle for children. Even the grownups were sometimes carried away by the children's joy and enthusiasm in making putty.

Until we grew out of it, this annual midnight performance was our most thrilling experience of the winter season.

As we grew older, Moshka, as ever, kept close to me, but his presence and his influence I began to feel strongly at the age of twelve or thirteen. At that time Moshka was already taller than ordinary youngsters his age, but he was too thin for his height. He was of light complexion, with blue eyes and sandy colored hair. But, if in stature he grew like his father, in his nature he turned out to be like his mother. Like her, he was a gifted talker and had a vivid imagination.

Moshka was an inquisitive fellow. Few things happened in Cherkassi that Moshka did not know. Besides, he liked to visit the places and see for himself exactly where and how things happened.

Among his favorite topics of conversation were the exploits of his two uncles, Nuson and Motel, as lawyers and maniputators. I heard these stories from his mother, but to Moshka they were more than stories of ordinary people; Motel and Nuson were his heroes, to whom he ascribed deeds that were attributed to heroes long in the memory of generations before.

Moshka loved to go to the courthouse whenever the circuit court convened. This court was conducted by three judges and a jury. On several occasions, Moshka took me away from work to witness a celebrated

case. The last time, we both visited court proceedings was when a Jewish man was on trial charged with exortion and blackmail.

The courtroom was large, the benches and furniture setting not unlike an American courtroom. All the benches were occupied. The three judges, the jury and the lawyers were in their places. The defendant was brought in by a police officer and the trial got underway.

There were handwriting experts on both sides. When the defending lawyer announced that the defense rests, Moshka jumped up as if a bullet had struck him, and cried, "What! Is this all the defense attorney could do for his client?" If his Uncle Nuson were here, he would make monkies of the experts and the accusing lawyers, but, on the other hand, who else had the wisdom and cleverness of his Uncle Nuson anyway?

* * *

About a week after Purim, Mother came home from the marketplace with the sad news of the near-drowning and rescue of her *Feter* (Uncle) Avrum.

Feter Avrum was a waterman, acting in the same routine as a milkman or iceman here in America. A horse was hitched to a barrel on two strong wheels; the barrel would be filled several times a day at the Dnieper and the water distributed among the customers.

In winter, getting water from the frozen Dnieper was no easy job. Just to go up and down the snow-covered frozen roads was a most difficult task, but to

cut the thick ice and fetch the water into the barrel, sometimes in zero weather, was really an ordeal.

After Purim, the change from fierce cold to balmy weather usually comes suddenly. This day, the weather was not too cold, but the Dnieper was still solidly frozen. *Feter* Avrum got his horse and barrel on the ice along the hole he cut. While he was filling the barrel the ice broke. The horse and barrel fell into the water, but *Feter* Avrum remained standing on solid ice. The horse and barrel went down so fast that there was no chance of rescue, but instead of being thankful that he so miraculously escaped drowning, *Feter* Avrom exclaimed for all to hear, "Without the horse, I need not live," and jumped into the icy water. Other watermen, present during this dramatic performance, jumped after him and saved his life. He was then seventy-five years old.

When the news of the near-drowning and rescue reached Moshka, he had to see for himself where and how it happened. During the week, he was busy in the matzo-baking establishment, but on Saturday afternoon he came after me and we went down to the frozen Dnieper to the very place where *Feter* Avrum and his horse went down.

It was a warm and sunny afternoon; there were a great many people who were alerted that the ice on the Dnieper might crack at any hour and start moving down the current, thus creating a spectacle of rare beauty.

Moshka and I did not know about this expected event. We noticed cattle traders hiring men at fabulous cost to take them

across the now dangerous ice-covered Dnieper. There were people who had to go across the river for important business, and there were the specialists, with many years experience, who led their customers safely across. Looking at the river, we saw dozens of small groups of people walking on the ice, following a leader with a pick in his hand, probing the ice.

Here and there they ran back, looking for harder ice; in other places, we saw men jumping as if they had struck open water. It became apparent that the men were risking their lives in their dangerous intent to cross the Dnieper.

Suddenly, we heard a deafening crash--an ungodly noise--as if mountains had clashed in an uproar. We had never heard noises like this before. The whole width of the icy Dnieper was on the move. As the roaring continued, we also noticed terrific jams building up fantastic towers, castles, walls and mountains.

Moshka and I stood there paralyzed, and captivated by the spectacle! The grandeur and terrifying power of nature on display seemed like a dream! We stood there quite a while, our eyes feasting on the greatest show on earth!

Our next excursion into the unknown was not so happy. It ended in a tragic climax that almost cost Moshka's life--and all because of his unquenchable curiosity.

There were three public bath houses in Cherkassi. Anshel's and the one in Rabbi's *Beth Medrosh* Courtyard were purely Jewish establishments. Skolnick's bath house was integrated. However, except for the army, very few Russians used the public baths. Admittance was three

kopeks. The army used the bath four days a week. The Jewish people used it on Friday. Mr. Skolnick, due to the massive use by the army, prospered and he built a new addition--a *dvoriansky* (luxury) bath house; the admission price was five *kopeks*.

In the new bath house one undressed and dressed in a heated room. There were more benches and spigots and it was not so crowded. Only the better class could afford to pay five *kopeks*. One day Moshka came to my shop, telling me that Skolnick's new *dvoriansky* baths had opened that week. It was only natural that Moshka would want to have a taste of a *dvoriansky* bath. On a very cold Friday afternoon, Moshka made the proposition of going to the *dvoriansky* bath and I accepted with pleasure.

We, the two big sports, paid five *kopeks* each. This alone made us feel as members of the upper class. We entered the building. Everything was new and so different from the old bath house. We were thrilled with this new creation in the art of bath house construction. The floor of the dressing room was covered with fresh field-smelling straw. We undressed and turned our clothes over to a check man, who placed them in a numbered box, which number we were supposed to remember.

We then entered the hot bath room. It was spacious and well-lit, but almost empty. First we looked around. We counted the spigots and tested every one, the hot and cold. We examined the wash-buckets, the benches and counted the stairs starting from the floor up to the one beneath the ceiling. We went up to the highest level to test the degree of

heat. We found the heat at the height tolerable enough to remain there for almost two to three minutes.

Moshka said he knew how to bring up the steam so high that we could not remain on the highest bench even half a minute. However, he first had to find the oven and the rest would be easy. After a few minutes we found the heating room.

The room was small, but it was much too hot to linger there more than a few minutes. Moshka took me by the arm, led me right to the front of the wide oven and showed me the large, round, red-hot stone, surrounded by curving red tongues of flame.

"Now," said Moshka, "you, Shayah, step aside and I will show you how steam is made." I stepped out of the way. Moshak filled a bucket of water, came over to the center of the oven and threw the water flush on the red-hot stone. Back rushed a curling cloud of boiling steam striking Moshka like a thunder bolt. It stripped and shriveled his skin from head to foot and left in its wake patches of raw flesh.

"Oi," a groan so agonizing that it is still ringing in my ears was all that I could hear. But Moshka had presence of mind. Quick as a flash he rushed out to the clothes shelf and began to dress. So fast did he put on his clothes, that by the time I came into the dressing room, Moshka was almost dressed. I could only see the shrivelled skin and the raw flesh on his face. He rushed out in the bitter cold, jumped into a *droshka* that was fortunately present and ruched to the nearest *feldsher* (male nurse) for first aid.

One look at him and the *feldsher* rushed him to the hospital. When I reached home, I told Mother what happened, and that I was going to Uncle Avremel to see Moshka and see how he was getting along. Mother, knowing her brother, advised me to wait a while before I go, for Uncle was a man of few words, but when he was aroused in anger his huge twelve inch by twelve inch palms were his most eloquent way of settling an argument. This was the winter after I came under the cultural guidance of Borra Rothstein. I was already reading books. Courage and self-sacrifice were some of the qualifications that made a modern intellectual rise above the common herd. I considered myself heading in that direction. Here was my first opportunity to display moral courage. I knew that to face the displeasure of Uncle Avremel would be like going into a lion's den. Well, I went.

Friday afternoon Uncle Avremel tended the grocery. Aunt Toubi and the girls were busy cooking, baking and cleaning to bring in the Holy Sabbath. It was about time for candle lighting when I entered the store. There were still some customers, but as soon as Uncle saw me he yelled, *"Dvoriansky hot sich sei farglist"* (nothing but *Dvoriansky* would please them), and made a rush for me. For a second I saw myself torn to pieces, but Aunt Toubi had come out to tell Uncle Avremel that it was time to close the store, when she saw him lunge at me.

She shouted, "Avremel!" Uncle, though boiling mad, stopped! Aunt Toubi took me by my hand, tears in her eyes, and said, "Shaika, tell me. How did this happen?--this *imglick* (misfortune)?"

Meantime, I learned that the *feldsher* had brought Moshka to the hospital and that the doctors did not think he would survive the third degree burns covering half of his body. I wanted to go to the hospital to see him, but the hospital did not admit anybody, even the parents. Moshka was in the hospital over five months. He came out with a body full of "ugly patches" as he used to say, but, fortunately, his face healed well and was "as good as new."

When Moshka came out of the hospital he went right back to his usual activities. The court and its proceedings were still his favorite haunting grounds and for sheer curiosity he often went to the *dvoriansky* bath to reconstruct over and over again the terrifying moments of his first *dvoriansky* visit.

LEIBEL

When sister Freidel first heard that Leibel Titiunick had sent a *shadchon* to propose a *shiddach* she covered her ears. She would not hear of it. What! Leibel, Surka the shrew's son? Why, she had so many proposals from far more distinguished families whom she refused, should she now settle for Leibel, whose only claim to distinction is his mother's reputation as a shrew?

Father and Mother were not too eager about the *shiddach* either. Why should they go with a *gesinten kop in a krenken bet* (a healthy head into a sick bed)? But, Leibel centered his eye on Freidel.

One Saturday afternoon Leibel showed up to a *furshpiel* (prewedding party) to which Freidel was invited. Freidel and Leibel were neither introduced nor spoke to each other. But, of all the *kavalieran* (young men) no one showed himself more brilliant than Leibel. Besides, he was a handsome young man.

Freidel now had an opportunity to review her situation regarding the selection of a spouse. Those who had proposed thus far were either unacceptable physically or disappointing socially and economically. Leibel met almost all specifications.

He was handsome. He would be a good provider, as he was already known as a successful trader in livestock. The only objection was his mother, Surka. Freidel decided she would brave the hazards of a mother-in-law, a shrew. The *shadchon* was

notified to proceed with the preliminaries of *sich unkikem* (first visit of the would-be-groom).

After the first visit, Freidel accepted and a *knosmul* (engagement party) was celebrated where the traditional *teller* were broken, and plans and dates for the wedding were completed.

During the intervening months, between the engagement party and the wedding, we children came to know and love Leibel.

At the age of twenty-one Leibel somehow obtained a *greenem billet*--a green ticket which provided a release from military service on the grounds of ill health. Not only was he a well man, but he was known among the people he circulated around with as "the strong man." He would challenge anybody on anything--if one could lift two hundred pounds, Leibel could do better. If one could drink strong vodka, he could drink *chandja* (spirits used in cooking lamps), and so on and on it went! Whatever one could do, Leibel would do it better!

Leibel was born with a smile on his face. Even in his anger, he could not bring his face to express it. He had a full mouth--his upper lip somehow curved upwards, ending in two dimples on the sides of his mouth. He was of fair complexion, with mild eyes that complimented his sunny and smiling face. His most outstanding characteristic was his loud boisterous behavior. When he opened the door to come into the house, it was as if a storm had blown in, his loud, cheerful voice heralding his coming. His presence actually filled the house with good cheer.

Right after the engagement party,

Leibel made it his habit to come to see his bride-to-be at least once a week on Friday, before *licht bentchen*--lighting of the sabbath candles. His visit would last about an hour, as he would have to be home for the *Shabbos* services and the *Shabbos* meal.

He would come dressed in a long black *serdut*, something like a Prince Albert coat, that was still used by the orthodox Jews. He were a nice, modern hat and lacquered shoes. To Father and Mother he looked only half modern, for his *serdut* was of the same style as the one Father still wore from earlier times.

During that hour he sang Jewish songs that were new and fascinating to us children. He would also say something nice to Mother and Freidel, although he usually missed Father at that time of day. But, when he did see Father, he could talk of news he heard. And Father would tell Leibel of the news he read. Leibel did not read newspapers.

One weekday evening, Leibel came dressed in his business clothes and high boots. He had no time to dress as he was getting ready to set out for a *yarid* (fair). He had bought a golden brooch for Freidel and he wanted her to have it at once. He also wanted to talk to Father about one of our apartments that would become vacant that month. Father could not take him seriously. First, the wedding was three months ff; second, what would he do with such a large apartment? The apartment contained two bedrooms, a large living room, an oversized dining room. It was just unrealistic, but Leibel did take it seriously. For his Freidel, no house was too large. As for the three months waiting time before

the wedding, so what? He is Leibel Tutiunick, and he could afford to pay three month's rent in advance, just to have the kind of apartment he wanted and when he wanted it. And so it was! Leibel rented the oversized apartment, and against Father's protests, he paid the three months' rent in advance.

Leibel was the second son in a family of five children, four sons and one daughter born to *Reb* Yankel and Surka Tutiunick. *Reb* Yankel was of middle height, with a red beard and soft eyes. He was a butcher; consequently Surka, his wife, was the mainstay of the business. In a world where poverty was the common lot, butchers stood a rung higher on the economic ladder. Besides, butchers ate meat; this diet built strong bodies and general well-being. As soon as the boys began to grow up, they were introduced to the trade. At first, it was the curiosity of children to see how cattle are slaughtered and turned into meat that attracted the boys; then because of sheer necessity the boys were put to work to utilize every available hand in processing and selling the finished product.

Under these conditions, there could have been no thought of preparing their children for academic careers. Such boys hardly had time to go through *heider*. But *heider* was a "must" and it provided the extent of the learning that Leibel and his three brothers received.

At the age of eighteen Leibel was one of the best butchers in town. The trade required certain skills--tieing a cow, throwing a cow for the *shochat's* knife, skinning, dissecting the carcass, preparing the meat for the market--

Leibel bested all the butchers, he could do all the tricks better and faster!

But when it came to profits, there were butchers who could show a greater degree of prosperity than Leibel. They were the butchers who also dealt in livestock. It was now Leibel's turn to show those *grosse fardiners* (big earners) what he could do.

Leibel set out on his own as a dealer in livestock. Soon Leibel began to bring livestock into town--big fat steers. The Jewish butchers could not afford the price of prime cattle. Leibel confessed later that he took great losses, so that *Yeeden* could eat good meat.

Anyway, Leibel's reputation as a straight shooter and reliable business man began to pay off. He really bested the *grosse fardiners*. Leibel was now making big money. With money he could buy himself a green *billet*, that made him a free man. As a free man, with money too, the world was his oyster! All he needed now was a *kalle* befitting as clever and successful a man as he was. However, his chronic superiority complex, his need to outsmart everybody in everything, had its decisive moment in his choice of a spouse.

His older brother Gershon's wife was regarded as one of the most beautiful women in town. It was said about her, "She must never walk alone in the street," for fear of abduction. Leibel had now got himself into a fix. He had to prove to a watching world that his bride would be even more beautiful than Gershon's wife.

Leibel knew that Freidel Rubinstein was regarded as the most beautiful girl in town. He also knew the suitors she

had rejected. How to reach her was his problem. He was aware that his mother's reputation would not help. Gershon had to go out of town to suit himself with a *shiddach*. So, Leibel set his heart on Freidel. He pondered hard on means and ways to reach her.

In his mind he was sure that he could reach the heart of Freidel, but his mother's reputation had now become Leibel's worry. So Leibel took stock of himself and his family fackground. He decided that although his mother had some drawbacks, he had a father any man would be proud of.

Leibel's father *Reb* Yankel *der Kotser* was known as a *voiler Yeed* (good Jew). Poor widows and poor women watched the time of day when *Reb* Yankel would be alone in his store. It was an open secret that *Reb* Yankel had made it his life's work to give to the needy. Surka might not have been regarded such a hard-hearted woman in a different setting where husband and wife were not compared. It was probably the radiance of one that threw abnormal shadows on the other. Actually, Surka might have sought to control a situation that was threatening if not checked. However, the reputation of a "shrew" stuck to Surka and at times she acted up so fully that she left no doubt that she was the genuine article.

Now, Leibel put up his father's goodness against his mother's reputation. Surprisingly, it gave Leibel a new sense of importance! In his characteristic way, Leibel dared to propose and was overjoyed with Freidel's acceptance.

After he rented the apartment, Leibel and Freidel ordered custom-made furniture and Mother got busy with all

the details required in the successful execution of the coming great event. They were occupied with hiring a hall, music, caterers and arranging the many other details of dressing up the bride and the family. Mother was now a very busy woman, but first things came first. She rented a hall across the street from our home. No sooner had Mother given a deposit on the hall when Surka, Leibel's mother, said, "that hall is a *treifer* hall because the owner is Krassnokutsky, that brazen *apikorus* (heretic) who shamelessly walks *Shabbos* in the street smoking a cigaret." She did not approve of the hall. Now it was Leibel's turn to assert himself. He was long looking for an opportunity to prove to Freidel that he respected his mother, but would not allow her to boss his or his wife's life. While Mother, upon hearing of the objection, was willing to hire another hall, Leibel stepped in explaining that this was his first opportunity to put his mother in her place. He would not allow any changes, and no changes were made!

Next came the musicians. Mother accepted a deposit from one of the two musicians, Burach the *Klesmer*. The custom was to accept a deposit as a guarantee that the musicians would be there on the date and hour specified. Surka did not want Burach. At the many weddings her family celebrated, it was always Berle Boss. To her son's wedding she insisted that Berle Boss should play. She informed Leibel that a good son pleases his mother. But to Leibel it was only another opportunity to ignore her wish--even when she threatened not to come to the wedding.

Came the day of the wedding! And here Surka the Shrew proved the validity

of her reputation, and the son, his, by trying to outdo even his own mother.

The wedding took place in Krassnokutsky's large hall, considered modern at that time, because it had oversized lamps for evening lighting and enough benches and tables to accommodate sizeable affairs.

Preparing and financing the wedding was then, as now, the burden of the *kallesad* (the bride's family). Mother, therefore, did not spare any effort or money to make this, her first daughter's wedding, as pleasing to the *chusen-sad* (groom's family) as she knew how. The ceremony took place in the afternoon. Immediately after, in the merry atmosphere of kissing and music, the guests were seated around long tables where food and drink were served in abundance. As the meal progressed, the *Bodchen* (a combination master of ceremonies and jester) began to announce in a humorous vein the guest presenting a gift and the monetary value of the article presented the newlyweds. Every announcement ended in a rhyme. The wedding was a huge success. Everyone had a good meal and plenty of drinks. Sweet Jewish music accompanied every announcement of gift and donor. The master of ceremonies excelled himself. Beautiful music, laughter and good cheer reigned supreme!

Suddenly, amidst this air of joy and merriment a discordant note broke in like a rasp in a symphony. On the side where the *chusen's* guests were sitting, rose angry voices. Surka was standing up, her face red, her eyes shooting fire, and her blue thin lips going full blast. What happened? *Chusen-sad* guests were insulted! When announcing the gifts the

master of ceremonies had made them look like *bittlers* (beggars). When the gifts of the brides guests were announced they were presented to look like Baron Potozky's. She would not take such an insult. She and her guests were leaving. It was a tense moment for Mother, but particularly for the master of ceremonies, who tried hard to compliment every donor in wit and rhyme, regardless which side.

The master of ceremonies was the first to try to apologize, but he was dismissed in a few words that sent him reeling on his heels!

Mother was advised to sit it out until Surka's anger would wane. But Surka left, not waiting for the *Sheva Brochas*, the seven blessings after the meal. Before the dancing resumed, Surka, *Reb* Yankel and one or two of their close friends picked themselves up, without the customary kisses and wishes, and left the hall.

Leibel saw and heard everything that was happening. Freidel, the *kalle*, and our family knew by this time that no one dared to talk about his mother in Leibel's presence. It was *his job* to berate her or criticize her, so they said nothing.

The wedding proceeded in a normal and orderly way. The dancing continued till late at night. Except for the one regrettable incident, with Surka's premature departure, the wedding was a success!

Next morning the newlyweds were awakened to the after-wedding breakfast that is usually prepared by the *kalle's* parents. This had been prepared in the newlyweds' large apartment, with just the immediate family attending.

As Leibel stepped out of his room

he began to roar like a lion about his mother's behavior. No one dared to say a work, but Leibel was going to show her that she could not do such a *podletstvo* (meanness) to him, putting her own son to shame.

He declared he would send for the whole band of music, and immediately celebrate a *nuchshpiel* (after-wedding party) at the apartment. He would call everyone to come who had the time to come--all this he would do without calling his mother.

"Shaike, *gey breng de klesmer* (go bring the musicians)." It was an order and I went. Sister Chayah and Yankel went to call the guests, his brothers, his sisters, his boy friends and whoever could be reached from the bride's side. The message went out to come as soon as they could, but that the party with music and dancing would be continued till late at night.

A celebration with music and dancing, drink and food was not too frequent an occasion. When it did occur, it was an event few could resist. No wonder the news spread like lightening. In a couple of hours the house was filled with people. When I reached the door of Burach the *Klˆsmer's* house, a ten year old smiling youngster met me, with a fiddle and bow in his hand. To my inquiry where his father was he played out the answer so clearly that I almost forgot what I went for. From all the musical answers he gave me, it was plain that his father, the head of the band, was not home and the boy didn't know when he would return. He might be playing a wedding somewhere out of town.

When I brought this news to Leibel

he nearly hit the ceiling. He would have music if he had to pull the musicians out of their beds!

In the meantime, most of the guests had already arrived except his brothers, who did not show up out of respect to Surka, their mother.

Leibel and his friends began to drink but Leibel's roar did not stop. He must have music and there must be dancing! It is his wedding day and he must prove to his mother that even she cannot spoil his fun. There was only one person that could save the day for Leibel. This was his younger brother, Itzhak.

Itzhak at the age of seventeen was well fed and strong like most butcher boys his age, but rather shy, distinctly taking after his father. To overcome his timidity, he hired a musician to teach him to play the guitar. He was a good and willing pupil and soon became proficient and popular with the boys and girls. In his despair Leibel decided, if he couldn't have the usual musicians, he would have a one-man band--Itzhak. But Itzhak would not come without his mother. Leibel looked around and saw among his guests two of Itzhak's boy friends--"Gdalie and Chatzkel, you must bring Itzhak and his guitar. No excuses, you must."

In about half an hour they came back with a reluctant Itzhak; one of the friends carried the guitar. Itzhak took a few drinks and began to play. Then Leibel and his friends set in motion the wildest dancing from a *cazatsky* to a polka. Leibel had triumphed over his mother.

Late at night, when the guests had long departed, Leibel's voice was still

heard claiming that no one could best him, not even his mother!

Leibel and Freidel had one daughter, named Celia. They had twelve happy years of married bliss together.

During the Civil War in 1919, the Ukraine was occupied by the murderous Petlurovtze whose slogan was, "Kill the Jews and save Russia." Want and misery were rampant. The whole Cherkassi area was starving. However, bad as it was for the general population, it was so much worse for the Jews.

The merciless cold of a typical Ukrainean winter kept most everyone shut in. The street and roads were covered with heavy snows. Starvation among the Jews reached a point of desperation. There were places where food in the form of livestock could be obtained, but only for gold or silver. Every other medium of exchange was worthless. The constant *pogroms* and despoiling from both sides, the Bolshevicks and the Petlurovtzes, left very little of value to the Jews.

Apparently, Leibel had hard cash. He decided to make a most dangerous and daring trip to the villages where he knew he could get enough cattle to revive the Jewish population with meat. All the pleading and begging by Freidel and the family against this almost impossible task, when every step outside the city was frought with death, did not prevail--"*Vu ich vil sich dershlugen vet keiner nit zukumen* (Where I will reach out, no one else will)."

Leibel was away for two days. On the third day his body was brought home, with a hole in the back of his head from a Cossack's spear.

MY HOMETOWN CHERKASSI

I was born in the city of Cherkassi, state of Kiev. In my time it was a large sprawling city of forty thousand inhabitants. It developed into two main sections, known to the Jewish population as *der Neier Mark* and *der Alter Mark* (the new market and the old market).

The old market was thickly populated throughout. The new market was compactly settled only in the central part of the city; otherwise, one or two houses on a block nestled in an orchard was the rule. Even small farms could be found clos to the outskirts of the city.

I was born in the old market, b t most of my recollections are of the new market, where I was brought up. The old market spread out lengthwise, between the water's edge of the swiftly flowing Dnieper and the high flat lands, some six hundred feet above. For centuries the old city flourished with one broad thoroughfare at the foot of the high grounds above. Here were the stores, the stands, the cattle sheds and all the paraphernalia that made up the elements of an Ukrainean market.

In time, the rains carried down from the high ground above ir nense quantities of sand and earth. Little by little the street level of the market area rose to a height that buried the stores and houses up to the windows, thus forcing the merchants to relocate on more permanent ground. Six hundred feet above the old marketplace there was plenty of

land, sparsely settled. There were at that time wide-awake civic-minded people who conceived the idea of planning a new marketplace as the nucleus of a new city. With vast areas of land at their disposal, they created a city-beautiful. Four wide streets surrounded the bazaar area. They were paved and used as public promenades. Brick business houses were built here, with the finest stores and most dazzling displays this side of Kiev. On the east side was the Kreschatic, the city promenade; to the west the Prospect, a street lined in the middle with trees and benches like a public park; on the south was the *Kolontza*, the fire tower, which was the highest structure in town; the north side was a mixed area of lodging places and small businesses. In the center of the bazaar grounds stood the high steepled and multi-domed city church, occupying about two hundred square yards.

The Cherkassi bazaar had very little to distinguish it from any other Russian marketplace. The picture was the same. Outstanding in these bazaars was not so much the sight, as the smell. The air around the meat and fish markets, the pigsties, and cattle compounds was sickening. No amount of carbolic spray or chlorine lime would remove it.

Yet, here were the multitudes of traders, buyers and sellers pursuing their business regardless of the immediate physical annoyances. It was here that many a personal or public drama was played. Even as rare a spectacle as a struggle for life and death between man and beast was played out here.

I recollect a dramatic episode with a dog that took place one morning in the

vicinity of the butcher shops. Rischi-wolk (red wolf) was a dog that lorded over all the other dogs that used to assemble around their hunting ground at the butcher shops for their daily ration of bones. Rischi-wolk was the biggest dog. She was red and furry, with two merciless eyes that sprouted fire--a mongrel that looked and acted like a wolf. No dog dared to seize a bone when Rischi was present. They were content to wait till the "Boss" got her first choice.

Rischi had a home and a master down in the old city. Every morning she would come up to the new market for her daily bone. She was a familiar character in town, particularly around the butcher shops where all the dogs assembled. The dog-catchers got their best catches from this area; however, Rischi could never be found in a position to be caught. She acted almost with human connivance to outsmart the catchers. Her wiles were so well-known that the owner of Rischi placed a bet, that any catcher that could outsmart Rischi would be treated to a drink.

This challenge was accepted by a father and his young son, both with many years' experience in the dog-catching business. It was skill and experience against brute force for survival. The contenders met when Rischi, in an unguarded moment, was caught ir the dog-catcher's loop.

It was the strong, tall son who outsmarted the dog. But catching Rischi in the loop was only the first round of the battle. The second and most difficult part was to place her in the dogbox. Here is where the real fight ensued.

Rischi was apparently very indignant about her being caught like a common dog. With eyes blazing and a voice befitting "her ladyship," she began to whine at the top of her voice, as if to say, "Let go or I'll cut your throat."

In the meantime, a mob assembled to congratulate the dog-catcher. But here the public was treated to a most unusual sight! Instead of the dog-catcher pulling the dog into the dogbox, the dog pulled the man. She would jump at him and getting enough leverage would pull him in the opposite direction towards her home, as if she knew that once she got him into her lair, she could summon enough help to avenge this indignity.

In about ten minutes it became apparent that it was not only a battle of life and death for the dog, but it also became a desperate encounter that challenged credulity in Homo sapiens as lord over beast. The dog and the dog-catcher were now about three blocks from the butcher shops, and that much closer to Rischi's home.

By now, the mob, instead of applauding the man, poured out their sympathy and encouragement to Rischi. By this time the dog-catcher began to tire, but not the dog. They were now close to the narrow trail leading from the high grounds down to the old city, to Rischi's home.

The dog-catcher's wagon was closing in for a last desperate effort on the part of the father to put an end to this unlucky encounter, when Rischi, in an all-out last try, jumped on the holder of the loop-handle and sank her teeth into his thumb, nearly amputating it. The loop and the rod fell to the ground

and Rischi, tired and bleeding, ran home with the loop on her neck, triumphant, in perhaps the bitterest struggle for survival in her life.

* * *

Der Neier Mark rose about six hundred feet above the Dnieper level, but not with even height or straight lines. There were places that rose higher, or recessed farther inland.

Some sections rose like a straight wall, others had gradual slopes or were formed in two or three elevations, rising hill upon hill. These various sections were cut by pathways, crooked and irregular, with tortuous ascents and descents.

In the center of the city, on one of the most exposed and highest grounds stood the public boulevard. The front was inaccessible as the ground here rose like a straight wall. The area comprised about one-half mile square, and was a veritable botanic garden. Trees, plants, and flowerbeds took up every available space, with promenading alleys, and benches for public use. It was a sheer delight to spend an afternoon or evening there.

The view from the boulevard, overlooking the old city and the broad Dnieper, with all the river traffic that seemed from the high elevation like toys, was a rare treat to the eye. Jewish people availed themselves of this extraordinary view only on Saturdays or during the daylight hours on weekdays. It would be a brave Jewish soul who ventured in on a Sunday or evenings. I was the recipient

of a memorable bump on my head even on a Saturday, in broad daylight, because I, a Jew, dared to breathe the holy air of a Russian garden.

On the right of the boulevard came most of the city's public buildings, the courthouse, the jail and many city and government offices.

The wealthy gentile citizenry had a taste for beauty derived from looking down and over the Dnieper from the Cherkassi heights. They dotted the entire area with gorgeous homes.

On the left of the boulevard across the Beregovoy Spusk, the only broad thoroughfare connecting the old and the new cities, stood the Government Gymnasium (high school) hidden in a forest of trees. To me, like the general public, this Gynmasium was a mystery.

I never saw the inside of the building. To be enrolled in this institution one had to belong to the "Ivy League" set. The gray uniforms trimmed with silver buttons, blue epaulettes and red lining, also ornamented with a small mantle over the shoulders, were worth a king's ransom. The school was exclusive, not only because of the expense, but because it was a government institution available only to the elite.

One September morning when the sky was clouded and a stiff northwest wind was blowing, the youth, mostly teenagers, of the Cherkassi area turned out for registration in the various schools. Girls in their trim white and deep brown uniforms, and boys of public schools and the large public gymnasium who wore no uniforms, but only an emblem in their visored hats to signify they were students, filled the pavements around the

schools.

Outstanding in this array of youth were the uniformed students of the Government Gymnasium. The uniforms made the wearers look bigger, healthier, and haughty. No doubt they were the eilte among the students!

Into this milling crowd, a most unusual, almost unbelievable, sight appeared. People rubbed their eyes in wonder, asking each other, "Is this true or are we dreaming?" What did they see? Nothing more than--Leiser *der Shneider's* pint-size, pale and sickly twin sons dressed in the full regalia of the Government Gymnasium uniform, standing at the gate of the mystery shrouded Gymnasium. As in the legend of the dead, who from time to time emerge from their graves asking, "Has the messiah arrived yet? Has the time come to arise?" Jewish people who saw this, asked, "Is it possible? Is it true that the doors of the Government Gymnasium have at last been opened to Jews?" They were not!

What did happen is a story by itself. Leiser *der Shneider* was a *shtatsky* tailor, one who worked for the army, navy and government officers of high rank. To become an acknowledged *shtatsky* tailor one had to possess not only skill, but real talent.

Such craftsmen were few and far between, even among the best Jewish tailors, but those who made the grade were a privileged class and financially secure for life. Leiser *der Shneider* was one of the few, and his master craftsmanship commanded the admiration of his customers.

The naval director of the Cherkassi waterfront was an appointee from Petrograd, equal in rank to the army general

of the Cherkassi area. His word was enough to place anybody's twin anywhere in his area of influence. Leiser *der Shneider* was his favorite and Leiser knew it. What favor could he seek from this high officer that no other Jew could? Inasmuch as the financial consideration was no problem, Leiser dared make the request and it was granted, but not before he dressed up the officer's wife with a most stunning white sable coat that had the admiration of the Russian elite society.

With the twins strutting in their resplendant uniforms, Leiser *der Shneider* had his life's ambition fulfilled!

* * *

Next to the Gymnasium, on a somewhat higher level protruding closer to the riverfront, rose the largest and most pretentious church in the area. There were clusters of cupolas, dominated by a large-bellied one in the center. Even its bells tolled the loudest and could be heard for miles away. There were many streets that led to this church, but the main street of entrance was known as Troyitsky Spusk. This street was short, about two ordinary city blocks, but it had the distinction of not only being the entrance to the largest church in the area, but also of having the newest and most modern synagogue.

On this street lived the *Ispravnick* (government civil head of the city), and a most distinguished priest who officiated in the great church. Furthermore,

Rabbi Schneyerson, the Chief Rabbi in Cherkassi, was living opposite the priest. It was no secret that the rabbi and the priest recognized in each other the high moral and spiritual values becoming men of the clergy. As a result, they developed a mutual respect that could only improve the relations between the two faiths. It was known that the priest assured Rabbi Schneyerson that no member of his congregation would ever raise a hand against his Jewish brotheren. Pranksters even exploited this mutual friendship by manipulating a photograph of both men, one with a *tallis* and the other with a cross and selling the pictures at ten *kopeks* each.

The *Ispravnick*, as a direct appointee of the government, was the last court of appeals in civil matters. Such men could create havoc with Jewish populations, or govern with reason and understanding. Our *Ispravnick*, a Tartar from the Volga regions--big and swarthy, but soft spoken and a man of rare tolerance, belonged to the new generation of intellectuals. No police officer, usually appointed by local authorities, who set out determined to clean the city of revolutionaires and undesirable elements could stay long.

The *Ispravnick* would not allow high-handedness. When the revolutionaries became too vocal or unmanageable, the *Ispravnick* would arrange a meeting through an intermediary and ask them to leave town, and to please spare him the unpleasant task of forcing him to turn them over to less delicate handling.

On Sundays the stores and businesses were supposed to be closed, but Jewish people did not observe these rules to the letter. One day the *Ispravnick* notified

the Jewish population that some Jewish small-businessmen had been ignoring the Sunday law and for the last time he was serving notice that on a Sunday, in the very near future, he would make a personal inspection. Let those who were habitual violators, beware!

Most business people honored the *Ispravnick's* warning, but Father, like many other small tradesmen, ignored the message.

I was in our basement shop that Sunday morning, when I heard the door bang. I came up to open the door and, lo and behold, the *Ispravnick* was standing in front of me with two policemen, all in their uniforms. Father was below, but right on the firing line. The *Ispravnick* seemed angry. Mincing no words, he gave Father a good and deserving tongue lashing. He turned to one of his officers, ordering him to write out a summons.

For a week Father was the most worried of men. He had been caught red-handed after a warning had been issued by the *Ispravnick* himself. How could he have taken him so lightly? And now he might have to go to jail. *"Oi, vei is mir!"* he moaned. Mother, too, was worried and so were most of the other tradesmen.

Luckily, they did not have to wait long for the trial. Close to thirty businessmen were given summonses. All of them appeared the same day. Each was sentenced to three days in a *Vesha*--a public hall, not a jail--with certain privileges!

All were to report on the same day. They brought their prayer shawls, philactories, prayer books, and other necessities.

Their wives brought them their meals and the prisoners had a real vacation, as befitted good Jews. Here they *davened* (prayed) three times a day in unison, they recited the Psalms together and some even studied the Torah. It was generally agreed that if Jews had to be punished, it should never be worse!

The *Ispravnick* held his precarious position until the 1917 Bolshevick revolution. When the liquidation of Czarist public personnel reached our Cherkassi *Ispravnick*, the revolutionaries remembered his many favors. They spared his life and, in addition, they made him a useful citizen who could earn his livelihood as an honorable worker. They gave him a large broom and as a member of the street-cleaners brigade, he cleaned the Cherkassi streets until the day of his death.

* * *

The other side of the city was populated by two regiments of soldiers in permanent barracks. Back of them were the wide open spaces of the Russian steppes. These steppes were used by the army as shooting ranges and maneuvering grounds.

As youngsters we would go out on Saturdays during the summer months to collect the exploded bullets and play in the trenches dug up by the soldiers during the week.

One time we were about five or six miles in the field when we spotted a soldier with a full grown beard in battle uniform. At first, we wanted to run back

for fear of being in violation of the law, but one of us detected that the soldier was walking listlessly, not in the manner of a healthy army man. We waited.

When he approached, he addressed us in a very weak voice, *"Kinderlach avu bin ich?"* ("Children, where am I?") We were stunned, hearing a soldier talking to us in Yiddish. We thought, "Maybe it is Elija disguised as a soldier to protect us." However, it was not! The soldier had been on maneuvers the day before. He neither spoke nor understood Russian, so when his company was separated, he did not understand the order of his superior and thus got lost.

He was hungry and thirsty and as lost a soul as one ever saw. We returned to the Czar's army its loss!

Close to the army barracks was a pond where children of the neighborhood used to bathe in summer, if it did not dry out, but in winter it was the city's best skating ring.

It was free and many Jewish people, particularly teenagers, who could afford a pair of skates used it on Saturdays and weekdays. I could neither afford a pair of skates nor would I offend my parents by skating on *Shabbos* like a *sheigets*, but Cousin Moshka loved to watch the skating, so we would spend Saturday afternoons at the skating pond.

One Saturday, after Purim, the ice was still firm, but prudent people stopped using it for skating. This provided an opportunity for the "have-nots," those without skates, to have their fun on the pond.

Boys between twelve and eighteen would form a chain and run across from

end to end of the pond. The day was warm, the sun was shining, and the process of running en masse on the ice softened it up and instead of cracking, it just bulged in places and fell back as the weight of the runners eased up. The thrill for the thirty or forty boys is indescribable.

I, being under twelve, and looking even younger, was not accepted in the chain, and thereby suffered a bitter disappointment.

The frolicking had gone on for hours when, right in the center, the ice broke and the entire chain of boys fell into the ice-cold water up to their necks. What happened afterwards is quite imaginable!

I left the pond with mixed feelings, pondering whether a fleeting moment of ecstacy was worth not only the consequences of a dip in ice-cold water, but the loss of face forever with my parents.

In any event, it was good lock imposed upon me against my will!

MY AWAKENING

After tasting success in business, I became somewhat over-confident in my ability to earn a living. I felt that when the time came to support a wife and children, I would be equal to the occasion. In the meantime, my obligation to help support the family was in no way diminished. On the contrary, I insisted on obtaining another man to work with me in my new shop at the converted grocery store where we manufactured tinware for the market.

There were four men working in Father's basement shop, two apprentices and two mechanics. The two mechanics, Meilach who was eighteen years old and Yeshica, twenty years of age, were hired by the year with board and lodging.

Meilach came from a big city, Kremenchuk. He considered himself "enlightened." The custom in our house was that upon rising in the morning all males above thirteen years of age had to put on the phylacteries and *daven*. Meilach would put them on, but would not open his mouth. He dressed like a *sheigets* and spoke Russian like a *goy*. One year of him was all we could take.

Yeshica came from Korson, a typical *shtetl*, which was about forty miles from Cherkassi. He was a first-class mechanic who could have earned a living in Korson. However, the big city had a magnetic lure for him. In Korson he read Russian books, but there was no progressive library there. He joined

the revolutionary movement, but there was not enough activity for him. Cherkassi was the big city, where he could improve his education, meet people and become an enlightened revolutionist.

He was tall and lanky, with large, wise eyes. His greatest asset was his engaging way of talking with people. He spoke in a low voice, slowly and deliberately, contrary to the usual excitable manner of the young radicals. Yeshica did not argue or talk in slogans. Almost from the first day he presented himself, he became as one of the family. His relationship with Father was not that of boss and workman, but rather that of father and son, or two close friends.

It did not take long before Yeshica found his way into the councils of the social revolutionary movement. After a few months, the local revolutionary heads designated him as one of the leaders of the Jewish proletariat in the Cherkassi area.

Up to this year, we had often heard of *sabastovkas* (strikes). Every now and then the revolutionaries would call a strike of the various trades. In a few days the strike would be lost and some of the workers would lose their jobs. It was shadow boxing at its best. Why did they do it, knowing full well that it was a lost cause? Their answer was "the class struggle." They must show the bourgeoisie, the bloodsuckers, the exploiters of labor, that the workers would break the chains of slavery and that the social revolution was not far off. Who were the bloodsuckers, the exploiters, their arch enemies? The self-employed carpenters, the tinsmiths, the

hatmakers, shoemakers, tailors and so on.

Most of these exploiters, bloodsuckers, were themselves working sixteen hours a day, and seldom earned enough to make ends meet. However, for a wage earner to satisfy an employer, who himself could hardly satisty his wants, was almost a superhuman task!

One of the conditions in the long list of the strikers' demands was that apprentice boys should not be used by the boss's wife as a house maid, caring for the children and doing kitchen work. The other demand was that no more than six days a week, ten hours a day, should be the working schedule and no Saturday night work.

They also demanded an advance in wages, three *rubles* a month for mechanics and some monetary consideration for apprentice boys after two years, and so on. Few strikes were ever won. In my time, the tradesmen always prevailed. The traditional time for strikes was May first.

In the Ukraine, spring is the most beautiful season of the year. Nature is dressed up in its finest attire. In the fields and the city streets, trees and every living plant, from a flower to the smallest blade of grass, are on parade. The air is permeated with the aroma of tree blossoms and flowers.

At this time of year, the skies are deep blue and, except for an occasional shower, the bright warm sun adds its full magnitude to the glory of an Ukrainean spring day.

On the first day of May, the army, the police and most people who could afford it, changed into white summer

attire. Military bands played a welcome salute to a most pleasant change of the seasons. But the social revolutionists had seized upon the first of May as the symbol of their most glorious day of the year. This year, as usual, on the first day of May the "proletariat" called a general strike. On this day they also called a meeting in back of the big City Church in the marketplace for a "manifestation." There were factories and large industrial plants with massive numbers of workmen that would have made a strike meaningful, but that is a chapter by itself. This May first, the strike and "manifestation" were a purely Jewish affair.

As the day approached, we knew from Yeshica of the impending general strike. Inasmuch as our men were under yearly contract, we were not involved, except for the apprentices, whose conditions Father had met long before. Nevertheless, we laughed it off as the usual foolish play in "strikes."

Came the first of May. Noah, the man that worked with me, did not show up. That was an unorthodox breach of manners and daring. Was he not afraid of losing his job? Out of curiosity, I went to see what happened in Father's shop.

As I approached the basement, I saw the two apprentice boys standing a little distance from the shop, dressed in white shirts tied around the middle with red tasselled belts, and sporting hats with shiny black lacquered visors. They greeted me with an air of superiority that was almost insulting. Not that they said it in so many words, but I could not fail to catch the meaning, "What does he

know about a revolution or strikes?" My vanity was jolted.

I entered Father's shop. Yeshica and Meilich were not there. In an amused tone Father asked me to take a look in the next shop, about a block away, to see if the workmen were absent there also. I went and to my surprise I found all men working. Although ordinarily we were friendly, this time as I was standing on top of the stairs while *Reb* Motel, the employer, came up to see me, I heard one of them say, *"noch a sindel"* (another rich man's spoiled son). This struck me like a sledge-hammer blow over my head.

I, Shaika, who was regarded as a successful business youngster, who thought everybody was an admirer and friend, I a *sindel*? Even the apprentice boys were looking down on me! Suddenly I felt deflated--my vanity suffered a shattering blow!

In the afternoon I went out, as usual, to meet some of my boy friends on the Kreschatic. As I was walking on the pavement surrounding the large market grounds, I first heard agonizing cries, then I saw boys and girls running from behind the church, some still holding on to their small red flags.

They were running in every direction while mounted Cossacks followed in hot pursuit, wielding their weapons right and left, felling and trampling human beings with reckless abandon.

I ran for cover. I was trembling with fear as I ran to a hiding place. I remained in a state of shock for quite a while. When I finally regained my composure, I went back home where I learned the stark truth of the day's happenings.

The police knew every detail of this

"manifestation" meeting. They waited just until there was enough human flesh to cut up, and then started their massacre. There was no press to announce the number wounded or killed that day.

Those who suffered injury were afraid to expose themselves. All that was known or spoken of that day's happenings was that the social revolutionists dared the Czar and his Cossacks and staged the "manifestation."

That May morning I got up as bright and happy as ever. Towards evening I was seized with a feeling of frustration that made me very uncomfortable. I could not exactly define what happened with me or the world, but I sensed that the life I had known till now was definitely behind me.

Late that evening Yeshica, looking tired and worn out, was talking to Father and Mother about the happenings of the day. I was not in bed yet, so he asked me to sit and listen to what he had to say. He somehow learned how badly shaken I was at the sight of the "manifestation." He was talking of the new times that could not be ignored or laughed off. He said that the strike was not only against the *melkosobstveniki* (self-employed) shops, but was social revolution that must be expressed in whatever manner was at hand. We might as well get used to the idea. Whatever effect this message had on my parents was not important, but I was deeply impressed. Up to this time I had known Yeshica as another revolutionist, but after this enlightening discussion, he grew up in my eyes--as a wise and courageous man.

Gradually, I began to think of my own status. I knew that Russia was on

the threshold of revolution, but the only revolutionary movement of any importance to me was Zionism, and in back of my mind I had decided that when I grew up, I would be an active worker for Zionism.

At the age of fourteen, I did not really have to project myself into any cause. That night, confused as I was, I had begun to realize that I was living in a world that was vibrating with acts of heroism. Boys and girls braved the Cossacks for the sake of the revolution. Everything around me was astir. Even our apprentice boys felt superior to me. But where was I? The logical preliminary step for me was to ask Yeshica to enroll me in the revolutionary movement. The first chance I had to talk to Yeshica, I asked him to take me to a meeting, and explained that I would like to learn the requirements of membership.

Yeshica in his calm and deliberate way advised me not to join just out of curiosity. He said, "What you need is an education." He also said, "A boy of fourteen has all the chances in the world to study and acquire knowledge. Knowledge and maturity will lead you in the right direction!"

His words sunk deep into my conscience. Yeshica left Cherkassi a few months later. Looking back to that time, I still feel that not only did Yeshica stand at the gateway when I closed the door on the first and happiest stretch of my life, but he also pointed out to me the road which would ultimately shape the pattern of my future.

Life is generally regarded as a gift of nature. We come into the world

without our consent. We are tossed on the waves of time in cycles of black and white, with periods of bliss and happiness and times of stress and struggle.

Now with the first happy cycle behind me, I faced the new world as one launched on an uncharted sea. I had to grope with the problems inherent in change, with little assistance from outside. Wisely or not, from then on I considered myself the master of my fate, and whatever I did, I considered it the result of my thinking and my will to assert myself!

Cherkassi was the seat of three gymnasiums, one for girls and two for boys. Besides educating their regular students these institutions also served as examining boards for those who could not afford attendance or were not admitted as regular students due to their origin. As a result the city was never short of what was known as the *externick* (external students). As little as I understood the teaching profession, I knew that for my fifty *kopeks* a lesson, twice a week, I could have the cream of the crop.

I hired Borra Rothstein, the brother of our tenant, Madame Dashevsky. He had a reputation as a scholar since he was preparing to study at a university abroad; he was also known for his knowledge of the various revolutionary movements. The fact that he was an authority on so vital a subject had a special appeal to me.

For three years Borra Rothstein was my teacher. He was twenty years old, with no worries of military service as he was very nearsighted. He was short and stocky with a large head, but never-

theless a goodlooking chap. His dark wavy hair and high forehead gave him a look of distinction. He kept aloof, as if to add prestige to his teaching profession. While science was the ultimate goal of his studies, his favorite subject was Russian language.

It is no wonder then that, from the first day he took me under his wing, language and all the various facets it implies was the mainstay of my studies. I began to read Russian books and all about Russian history, but I soon discovered that there were also Jewish books, Jewish newspapers and above all, a Jewish intelligentsia with a forum where debates and lectures were held. I discovered that the daily Jewish newspaper, *DER VEG*, that Father read, had articles as radical and educational as any I found in Russian periodicals.

Here I came upon a series of articles by the great Hillel Zeitlin, *Nayeh brivelach zu der yeedesher yugend* ("New Notes to Jewish Youth") that was to me an eye opener. From this series I learned about natural history, the evolution of religions, and the status of the Jews among the nations of the world through four thousand years of Jewish history. By this time, I had developed a taste for literature, Jewish and Russian.

My studies under Borra Rothstein proceeded slowly, but in a way methodically. Mathematics, history, a smattering of chemistry and physics were the subjects I studied. I worked by day, and studied at night.

However, my mind was no longer on work or the business it implied. My course in life was now oriented, not on manual labor, but more on mental and

educational pursuits.

During this period, while my life was wrapped up with Borra Rothstein, the most decisive impact on my further development and the eventual course of my life was due to outside influence.

Cousin Oscar had now been in America over three years. He began to write long and interesting letters. Uncle Gershon was a learned man in Talmud and Jewish matters. Oscar, who remained a good, observant Jew his first two years in America, had suddenly begun to write strange letters. Uncle could not believe that his son Selig (Oscar) had succumbed to the common mob hysteria, to the ignorant upstarts at home, and to the gold idolators in America.

The letters Selig wrote his first two years in America were in line with the best and latest thinking of the orthodox Jewish press at home and in America. Oscar had a good head and soon began to reflect in his letters the new trends in Jewish learning. His Yiddish vocabulary had improved to such an extent that Uncle Gershon would carry along his letters and read them for people who could appreciate such brilliant writing.

But now, in his third year in America, something happened to Oscar. As he became acquainted with modern trends in philosophy, religion and literature, it was only natural that Oscar would indirectly touch upon subjects that were not only foreign to Uncle Gershon, but absolutely *treif* and repulsive. Uncle was unhappy about this.

However, when I began to correspond with Oscar, everyone of his Yiddish letters was regarded by me as a literary master-

piece! In my mind, I saw Oscar ascend the throne of the blue-blooded intellectual aristocracy!

At that juncture in my life, a writer was to me only one degree less than a divinely annointed prophet. Oscar intimated to me that since I had embarked on a course of learning, America offered every opportunity for ambitious men to go as far as their ability could carry them. I was now overcome with a desire to go to America--to be again as close to Oscar as we were in our early childhood.

On the fourth day of June, 1911, I left Cherkassi on my way to America. The journey took twenty-five days under the most trying conditions, even under the primitive standards of that time. The stench, the heat, the overcrowdedness in the rat-infested German tub, the BRANDENBERG, were only the unpleasant wrappings of the most precious gift God and nature bestowed upon men--hope eternal for a great and glorious future. I enjoyed twenty-five days of unbroken happiness, of dreams and glittering expectations; whether they were realized or not, it was those beautiful dreams, by themselves, that brought me the greatest measure of joy!

GLOSSARY

aliyah: An honor (usually the opportunity to take part in or lead the service) bestowed in the synagogue.

actzies: Small loan corporation.

Baba: Grandmother.

balabus: Head of a household.

balmaloche: Manual worker; artisan.

balegula: Expressman.

Black Hundred: Violently anti-semitic organization in Czarish Russia.

capote: Long coat, traditionally worn by orthodox Hasidic Jews.

capotkele: Diminutive of *capote*.

cazatsky: Lively Russian dance.

chaina: Flop house.

chanicas habais: A housewarming.

chaver: Chum; buddy; good friend.

chazen: Cantor.

chein: Charm.

Chevro Mishnais: Men who assemble to study the Mishnah.

Chevro Thilim: Men who assemble to recite the Psalms.

chulant: Potted meat and vegetables cooked on Friday and kept overnight in a warm oven for the Sabbath noonday meal.

Chumash: Pentateuch; The Five Books of Moses.

chutzpa: Arrogance; unmitigated gall; colossal nerve.

dallas: Abject poverty.

datcha: A summer house in the country.

daven: To pray.

droshka: Horse-drawn cab.

dvoriansky: Luxury.

Feter: Uncle.

Gabai: Treasurer or manager of a synagogue.

Gamorah: The Aramaic name for the Talmud.

g'milas chesed: A loan.

Gospoda (Russian): Term of address; Gentlemen.

Gottenue: Dear God; the suffix *nue* is added in Yiddish to express endearing intimacy; also, God is addressed this way by the pious.

goy (*goyim*, plural): Gentile.

goyish, goyishe (adj.): Gentile.

grieben: Small crisp bits left from rendered poultry fat, eaten as a delicacy.

G'Vald: Outcry; help!

Hasid (*Hasidim*, plural; *Hasidic*, adj.; also *Chasid*): Literally "the pious one"; member of a mystical sect founded in the 18th Century by Rabbi Israel Bal-Shem.

Havdola: The benedictions and prayers recited at the conclusion of the

Sabbath over a cup of wine, spices and a freshly kindled light (often a braided candle).

heider (also *cheider*): Elementary orthodox Hebrew School.

hochmah: Wisdom.

imglick: Misfortune.

kalle: A bride.

kallemoid: A girl of marriageable age.

kapores: Atonement for sins; refers to a substitute offering, usually a fowl, slaughtered on the eve of Yom Kippur.

klesmer: Musician.

kniplach: Small bundles.

kobtzen: Poor man.

kopek: Small Russian copper coin; there are 100 kopeks in a ruble.

kopke: Yiddish expression for *kopek*.

latkes: Pancakes.

leodneck: Ice cellar for storing perishable food.

Machzur: Holiday prayer book.

mazel: Luck.

mechuten: Relative; the father of one's son-in-law or daughter-in-law.

Meema: Aunt.

melamed: Old-style orthodox Scripture and Hebrew teacher.

meshuga: Crazy.

Mincha and *Mariv:* Afternoon and evening prayers.

minyan: The quorum of ten men necessary for holding public worship.

Mishnah: A compilation of oral laws and Rabbinic teachings, edited by Judah ha-Nasi in the early Third Century, which forms the text of the Talmud. It is obligatory for pious Jews to study it constantly.

mishpocha: Family, usually used in the widest sense, including uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.

mitzvah: Commandment.

Momenue: Dear mother; see *Gottenue*.

mundlach: Confection made from honey and poppy or sesame seeds.

naden: A dowry.

parachod: Steamboat.

pid shamos: Assistant shamos.

pogrom: An organized massacre of helpless people, usually specifically Jews.

Rabiner: A crown rabbi chosen by election, at the requirement of the Czar, to be an official functionary.

Raboisai: Respectful term of address; Gentlemen.

rativeh: Help! Save me!

Reb: Mister.

rebitzen: A rabbi's wife.

reshuim: Wicked men.

ruble: Silver coin of Russia, valued at about fifty cents in Czarist times.

shabbos: The Sabbath.

shadchon (*shadchonim*, plural): Marriage-

broker; matchmaker.

Shalos Seidos: The three meals of the Sabbath; usually the third meal eaten on the Sabbath afternoon.

Shamos: The caretaker of a synagogue; sexton.

shapko: Hat.

sheigets (*shkotzim*, plural): A gentile youth.

shiddach: Marriage arrangement; "match."

shikker: Drunk.

shmaltz: Rendered poultry fat.

shmeiser: Driver.

shochet: Ritual slaughterer.

shtetl: Ghetto-like village inhabited by Jews.

shul: Synagogue.

Siddur: The order of prayers; a prayer book.

sindel: Playboy.

stoliar: Carpenter.

tachless: The future.

tallis: Prayer-shawl.

talliskoten: "Small tallis," a four-cornered fringed undergarment worn by male orthodox Jews following the Biblical commandment to wear fringed garments.

teller: Plates; dishes.

Tenach: The Books of the Prophets.

tfillin: Philacteries; scrolls inscribed

with Biblical texts that are worn on the arms and head during daily morning worship.

Thilim: The Psalms of David.

trief: Not kosher.

tzadikem: Righteous men.

tzitzis: Fringes (see *talliskoten*).

usem: Orphan.

vecksl: Note used as collateral for a loan.

yarid: Fair.

yarmulke: Skullcap.

Yeeden: Jews.

Zeida: Grandfather.