

Zvi Preigerzon

When the
Menorah Fades

Translated from Hebrew by

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Edited by Alex Lahav

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Introduction

This book is a translation from Hebrew, the first time that any of Zvi Preigerzon's works are being published in English. The translation was done by Binyamin Shalom, who made every effort to preserve the spirit of Zvi Preigerzon's writing, his religious context, his irony, the wide usage of Hebrew and Yiddish expressions and songs, as well as metaphors from the Bible.

The name of the book "When the Menorah Fades" restores the original Hebrew title given by Preigerzon "בדעוך המנורה". The plot was inspired by the summer vacations that Preigerzon's family spent before World War II in Hadiach, the small town in the Poltava region of Ukraine, where the gravesite of Schneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe and founder of the Chabad movement, is located. The town was occupied by the German army during the war and the majority of its Jewish population perished. After the war, Preigerzon came back and conducted numerous interviews with survivors to reconstruct the story of the Hadiach Jewish community, giving it the Kabbalistic spiritual touch. The Perpetual Flame of the menorah at the grave of the Alter Rebbe symbolizes the very spirit of Jewish life, which it is said will persist so long as the flame is burning.

This book was written in 1962 and originally published in Hebrew in 1966 by the Israeli publishing house "Am Oved", under the title "אש התמיד" (Perpetual Fire). The author's name was given as א. צפוני (A. Tzfon) – literally, 'a man from the North' – a pen name chosen by the publishing house. At that time the author was living in the Soviet Union, and a handwritten copy of the book was illegally smuggled into Israel. It was impossible to publish the book in the Soviet Union at that time, and the very fact of its existence had to be kept secret from the authorities, due to the danger facing the author. Nevertheless, Preigerzon was able to hold the Hebrew edition of his first book in his

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hands while he was still alive, which was of great significance to him. Most of his other works were only published later, after his death, in 1969.

Zvi Preigerzon was born on October 26, 1900, in the village of Shepetovka, Ukraine. From the time of his early childhood, he had already developed a profound love for the Hebrew language. "The Hebrew thrill has poisoned my blood forever" – he later wrote in one of his short stories. His early writings impressed the famous Hebrew poet Haim Nachman Bialik, who recommended that he be given a solid education in Hebrew. Following this advice, in 1913, young Zvi was sent by his parents to attend the Herzeliya Hebrew Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv, Palestine, where all classes were conducted in Hebrew. However, this period of his life lasted only one year. After falling ill, he was sent back home for the summer holidays, but could never return to his beloved school, as on August 14th, 1914 World War I broke out, and the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire (which occupied Palestine at the time) became enemies.

Preigerzon continued his education in Odessa, but he never relinquished his love for the Hebrew language. After the Communist Revolution of 1917, he faced a major dilemma: the choice between obtaining a higher education, which he so desired, or emigrating to Palestine. His decision would shape the rest of his life, as he chose to pursue his education, acquire a profession, and only then depart for Palestine – not knowing that very soon Stalin's regime would make such a departure impossible. In 1920, Preigerzon moved to Moscow and was accepted into the Moscow Mining University and, in the course of time, he became one of the foremost coal-processing experts in the USSR. He and his family lived in Moscow from that time on.

However, Preigerzon's engineering and scientific achievements were not what made him a memorable figure in Jewish culture – his primary passion was writing in the Hebrew language. Over the next fifteen years, his stories and poems were published in several Hebrew language journals and magazines in Europe. Later on, with the Hebrew language being banned by the USSR, the proponents of Jewish culture necessarily adopted Yiddish as their alternative language. These changes affected Jewish authors as they were required not only to switch their language of trade, but also to abide by Soviet literary regulations due to the harshly enforced rules of censorship in the Soviet

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Union. Preigerzon ignored these mandates and continued writing in Hebrew, giving his characters simple Jewish names and complicated Jewish problems. The stories were about people trapped in the reality of revolution, war, and the destruction of their religious and cultural traditions. With the beginning of the Great Stalin Purge in the 1930's, contact with international entities became extremely dangerous, and Preigerzon was forced to stop mailing his stories and poems overseas, though he continued to write in secret.

After World War II, an important theme of Preigerzon's stories became the Jewish Holocaust. Such literary activity was very risky, as the Stalin regime withheld information on Jewish suffering due to the increasing governmental anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. His writings also contained a greater amount of spirituality, which was not present in the author's works prior to the war. An example of this spirituality is found in the story "Shaddai" (1945), where a talisman with a Kabbalistic inscription becomes the key device in saving the life of a Jewish girl. The characters in his stories return to the faith of their forefathers when faced with war and terror.

On March 1, 1949, at the onset of the government's anti-Semitic campaign, Zvi Preigerzon was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in Gulag labor camps for his Hebrew writing and educational activities. While in the camp, Preigerzon became the center of Jewish life, and taught many of his fellow Jewish prisoners the Hebrew language, songs, and literature, along with Jewish traditions. After the renunciation of Stalin's terror in 1956, Preigerzon was released from the Gulag, his conviction was revoked, and he was officially rehabilitated. He returned to Moscow, was reunited with his family, and continued his professional work as a scientist, along with his secret writings in Hebrew. At this time, he composed his "Memoirs of a Gulag Prisoner", describing his own prison experiences, as well as those of many other Jewish people that he had met during his time in the Gulag.

In his personal life, Preigerzon kept in constant contact with his Jewish friends, and his home served as a center of the Hebrew-speaking community in Moscow. He enjoyed Hebrew and Yiddish culture, traditions, literature, music, and songs. For his literary works, Zvi Preigerzon interviewed a large number of Jewish people who had suffered the atrocities of Stalin and the Holocaust, which required a lot of courage and persistence on his part. Having learned an important

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lesson through his imprisonment, Preigerzon wrote his books in complete secrecy, to the extent that he even hid his works from his own family.

Although Preigerzon was physically removed from the Land of Israel, his heart was always there. He was constantly following the developments in the newly established State of Israel, listening to the “Voice of Israel” on a short-wave radio, and obtaining Hebrew publications from the Israeli Embassy. He was always perfecting his knowledge of the Hebrew language, using all the means available to him, and keeping himself updated on the new words and terms that were constantly appearing in the Modern Hebrew vocabulary. His knowledge of Jewish History was extensive, and in his writings he often used expressions, allegories, and metaphors from the Bible.

On March 15, 1969 Zvi Preigerzon died in Moscow of a heart attack. After his death, three more of his books were published in Hebrew in Israel. His works were warmly accepted by the Israeli literary community and found numerous readers. When the gates of the Soviet Union opened to Jewish emigration in the 1970’s, Preigerzon’s family – his wife Lea, his children Atalia, Nina, and Binyamin, and many of his grandchildren – emigrated to Israel. In accordance with his will, his remains were buried in Israel. His children were instrumental in promoting his legacy and in the translation of his works into Russian, thus giving many Russian-speaking readers the opportunity to appreciate his writing. In recognition of his literary accomplishments, a street in Tel-Aviv was named after him.

Alex Lahav,

Editor and grandson of Zvi Preigerzon

Part One

Chapter 1.1

Solomon Feigin, Binyamin's friend, recommended that he spend his vacation in Hadiach, in the Poltava region, where Feigin's parents lived. At the time, Binyamin was a student at one of the universities in the capital, a young man at the age of twenty-three, a man of muscle and many dreams.

"In Hadiach I'll arrange all the private lessons your heart desires," Solomon said, tempting Binyamin with his words, "both among the regular residents in town and the vacationers at their summer residences. In addition, you'll be receiving a scholarship! In Hadiach you'll live the life of a prince: pine forests, swimming in the Psel River, an abundance of fresh fruit and fine girls..."

That was how Solomon put it as he depicted the veritable Garden of Eden in Hadiach and its environs in a range of enchanting colors. Splendor and beauty and the very blessing of God Himself! That's how Solomon was: if he was admiring something – he sang the entire "*Hallel*"¹ over it; and if he wanted to put something down – then he covered it with filth and dirt.

This time Binyamin heeded Solomon's call and made the trip to that town off in the Poltava region. He spent his vacation in the village of Vilbovka, about five kilometers from Hadiach, on the other side of the Psel River. Dark pines waved their tops over his head, as he sat there for hours on end, with a book in his hands, listening to the whispering trees. Later, Rachel, Solomon's sister, arrived in Vilbovka along with her

¹ Hallel - a prayer, which is recited on Jewish holidays as an act of praise and thanksgiving.

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daughter, Tamar.

Rachel Feigin was about thirty years old at the time. Her elongated face was lit up by a pair of grey eyes – non-Jewish eyes, you might say – along with two rows of solid teeth, a perfect set. She had gotten a divorce from her husband ten years ago or more. A little while after the wedding she had run away to her parents' house and there, she had given birth to Tamar. For a few years she had worked as an accountant's assistant in one of the offices in Hadiach. Her father, the former *shochet*¹, sold mead and wine in the market, and his stand had earned itself a reputation in Hadiach and the surrounding area. The drinks he offered were cool in the dog days of summer and warm in the heart of winter, they were a well-balanced sharp and sweet mix, and he had no shortage of customers.

Indeed, Binyamin was not at all sorry that he had heeded his friend Solomon's advice and come to Vilbovka. Day after day he would head down to the banks of the river. He would seat little Tamar on his bicycle and she was the one who would ring the bell as they went. And there they'd go, flying down the path that led to the river. There was laughter and bouncing and ringing of the bell all down the path, as the bicycle shone in all its splendor while they rolled along!

Rachel would head out earlier and make her way down to the river with that wicker basket in her hands. The basket was filled with bundles of fruit, hard-boiled eggs, tomatoes, and bread spread with butter. For hours on end the three of them would enjoy themselves along the banks of the Psel River.

The bodies of people that bathed all along the edge of the river were rather tan, clear-eyed and well-built! Day after day this wild crowd celebrated its ritual festival. There were those who would lie there sunning themselves in the light of day, turning one side of their bodies to the sun and then the other, lying face-down on their bellies or spread out on their backs, with their arms open wide, as though they meant to embrace the entire world. There were those who went for a swim in the river. The heads of the swimmers off in the distance would appear and

¹ Shochet - butcher (Yiddish), a person officially certified as competent to slaughter cattle and poultry in the manner prescribed by Jewish law.

disappear in the water, though the more cautious among them never dared to move too far off from shore. There in the shallow water they would raise their ruckus, swinging away at the surface with their hands and feet, sending silvery shards of water flying in all directions. Just another step from the shore – and they would freeze on the spot, as the soles of their feet went fumbling along the riverbed for a foothold. And here comes the mother of one of the young girls now, calling out as she goes: "Nina, come back in!"

The bathing girls present a rather silly spectacle: flailing away with their hands and feet, sprinkling one another with their watery spray – shouting and laughing, and God knows what else! Have you ever seen the like among the boys, those young men there? Do they hesitate at all before heading into the water? Here comes a little gang now, heading down to the shore, two or three schoolboys with their eyes of grey and close-cropped hair. And what does the little gang do? They are still quite a few paces off from the water's edge – and they already have their pants off in their hands. Just another moment and their shirts, too, have fallen to the ground along the sunburnt banks of the river. One, two – their tanned limbs fluttered in the air and the entire group is in the water! Here no one goes fumbling along the riverbed for a foothold – each one of them is an expert swimmer, as befits a real man's man. And what do the girls do? They sit for a long while along the edge of the river and play in the sand. Round sun hats cover their heads, , to ensure that the sun shouldn't, God forbid, beat down too forcefully. They dig ditches and tunnels in the sand, kneading bread rolls and cakes and a whole assortment of baked goods, engrossed as they are in this foolishness until their very souls give out. But when will the time come for a little dip, my dear girls? Here we are, thank God, the time has come for a swim. With measured steps, on tiptoe, one of the girls approaches the water. And what does she do when she gets there? She stands still! Just stands there thinking to herself. After a while she reaches out with one of her legs and enters the water. But what caution, what seriousness, what recognition of the utmost gravity of the moment!

*Mazal Tov!*¹ The soles of her feet have finally gotten wet...

¹ Mazal Tov – Good Luck (Hebrew).

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Binyamin explains all this to the little girl, Tamar, whom he is teaching to swim. Afterwards the three of them sit in the shade of one of the shrubs, tasting all the goodies hidden in the wicker basket. Sky blue is the color of Rachel's bathing suit, concealing a bit here and revealing a bit there. The hot sand slumbers underneath the August sun; there is a mixture of children and women, along with a few men thrown in, and the buzz of the crowd along the shore. And in the grass on the other side – there is a shepherd and his flock.

One evening, as little Tamar lay sleeping in town at her grandparents' house, Binyamin and Rachel spent some intimate time alone in the forest of Vilbovka. That evening Binyamin got to know this woman quite well. The tops of the pines were washed in the darkness of the heavens above, and somewhere off in the distance the swarm of stars winked in their direction. Binyamin poured forth all his vigor that evening into the attractive woman he had crossed paths with in that little village in Poltava. He listened to the words the woman spoke beneath the dark crown of the sky strewn with stars. The tone of her voice somehow resembled a speech of an actor upon the stage.

No, Binyamin was not sorry that he had spent his vacation in Vilbovka. A year later, in 1939, he once again made his way to Hadiach, and rented a room for himself and his mother in the house of old man Feigin. This house stood along the slope, down the Garden alley, about half a kilometer from the Psel River. And then once again the bright, shining days arrived, days filled with laughter and easygoing joy.

From time to time, in the mornings, Binyamin would head out for the market. There he would see the old man Haim Yakov Feigin sitting at his stand, pouring chilled mead out for the peasants. The peasants in turn would drink the mead and wipe their mouths on their shirtsleeves with a sigh of satisfaction. There was a great tumult always stirring there, from one end of the market to the other. The peasant women would stand before their baskets splitting seeds; white handkerchiefs whitened away in endless rows. The Jewish women would move around patiently, their piercing eyes carefully examining everything that was for sale – the chickens, the eggs, the variety of vegetables, the milk products, all the abundant bounty that filled the stalls.

And Binyamin, too, found himself among these Jewish women. His eyes were carefully tuned to the spinning motion of the market, and his ears absorbed the multicolored tumult. The blind men sat on the

ground in the shade, their collection plates before them and shepherd's pipes cooing in their hands. There they sang those sad songs of theirs.

After he had wandered around the market, Binyamin would purchase a few apples or pears and head for the office where Rachel worked. She would be sitting in the open window knocking around with her abacus. After a little while they would be sitting there chewing away on the pears along one of the benches in the neighboring public park. There would be laughter and silence and clowning around.

Had that night in the forest of Vilbovka from the year before indeed been erased from Binyamin's memory? How could anyone even think such a thing? In the student dormitory, lying on his creaking mattress, the shape of that woman's face had pursued him all throughout the year. There were sleepless nights and sinful thoughts in the mornings. And here they were sitting in the public park, silence and glorious light all around them, chewing their pears. Perhaps something had happened during this year, but at any rate, the woman's face did not shine in his direction as it had the year before, now she just laughed and glowered and sought to evade him.

Rachel goes back to knocking around on the abacus, and Binyamin heads for home. In the mornings, he heads out with little Tamar to the banks of the river. Along the way they are joined by Tamar's friend as well, Sarah Ginsburg, a swarthy girl with curly hair. From time to time they enter the gravesite of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe¹ in the Jewish cemetery in Hadiach. The Jewish cemetery is located along the incline leading down to the river, to the right of the road that leads out from Hadiach to Vilbovka. A wall of red brick surrounds the graves of the holy man and his daughter. A low wooden dome covers the grave – it is a place for prayers scribbled on slips of paper and the pleas of people suffering life's hardships. Sarah's father, Aharon Ginsburg, the cemetery attendant, sits in the second room, the *Shtiebel*², with a holy book in his hands. A deathly silence fills the Shtiebel. The Holy Ark is a sorry sight without its ceremonial curtain, and the prayer books is a sorry sight too – torn scraps of holy texts belonging formerly to the

¹ Rabbi Shneur Zalman (1745-1812), known as the “Alter Rebbe” (Old Rebbe) - the founder of Chabad, a branch of Hassidic Judaism.

² Shtiebel - small prayer room (Yiddish).

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community, piled haphazardly around the corners of the room – and the rolls of the Torah scrolls are a sad sight as well, folded up in a heap atop the long bench. Is this how things stood in bygone days too? Did this neglect and abandon reign a good fifty years ago as well? No, back then the house of Alter Rebbe hummed with life, and *Hassids*¹ would come from all over – from Ukraine, from Poland, from Lithuania. The cantor's voice rang out with solemn sadness on the Sabbath and Festivals. Through the windows of the Shtiebel the trees would stir above the graves of the dead, and the Alter Rebbe maintained his heavy silence in that neighboring pavilion of his.

And on weekdays the cemetery attendant would sit in the Shtiebel and the Jewish women would come to him, and he would write out their petitions on those slips of paper in a language that was part Hebrew and part Yiddish. The slips of paper were filled with the tears of the ill and the afflicted, the groans of orphans and the abandoned, the cries of widows and mothers who had lost their children. Once the petitions had been penned, the women would remove their shoes and enter the pavilion, before the holy grave. A tremendous silence reigned in the room. A *menorah*² was lighted on a little table over in the corner. Through summer and winter, day and night, for over a century and a quarter that menorah gave light without pause. Its modest glow illuminated a little pocket of the world, and it was in that little pocket that the soul of numerous generations of Jews had vibrated, from the time of Napoleon on down.

Now Aharon Ginsburg, the cemetery attendant, sits there in the Shtiebel, reading a holy book. A deathly silence reigns in the room, there are no visitors at all, no one comes to write out their petitions on little slips of paper, and no one comes to pour out all the bitterness in their heart before the holy grave. The menorah alone casts its weak light over the face of this little pocket of the world now. Aharon Ginsburg is in charge of the menorah, making sure that it does not go out, that the spark of light is not utterly consumed.

"Daddy!" calls Sarka. "I'm heading down to the river!"

¹ Hassids - members of Chabad movement

² Menorah - here referring to a lantern holding an eternal flame and lit with oil.

"Go ahead, go ahead, Sarahle!" Ginsburg says as he caresses her curly pate. "But please be careful dear!"

"With me the girl will be protected as though she lay in the very lap of the Good Lord Himself!" says Binyamin as he gazes fondly into the face of the dark-clad attendant. The latter is seated at the tattered table, and a smile freezes there across his face. And yet, what a strange sort of smile it is, at that, such a pale, shabby smile!

They exit the house. The girls' slender legs rush down the slope. It is the beginning of August. The thorn bushes are already covered with red berries, and their flaming color whirls there in space, even from quite a distance. Headstones stick out of the earth here and there around the cemetery. There are Hebrew letters carved into the stones, in remembrance of the Jews who bustled about these parts in the few years they had been allotted. Here's one now: so-and-so son of so-and-so, who died in the flower of youth, May His Soul Be Bound in the Bundle of Life.

"Uncle Binyamin, Uncle Binyamin!" you can hear the girls shouting from down along the shore of the river, as the two of them raise their ruckus in the water, with laughter and liquid shards flying all around them.

This year Binyamin was not giving private lessons. Day after day, in the afternoons, he would spend several hours doing illustrative sketches. His employer, Professor Edelman, a man whose vision was impaired, was spending the summer out among the pine trees of Vilbovka. He was at work on a technical textbook, and Binyamin was responsible for preparing the illustrative diagrams for the book, which had to be sketched tastefully on Whatman Paper. Binyamin received from ten to twenty rubles per illustration.

During these hours spent sketching the diagrams complete silence reigned in the room. Sarah Samuilovna, Binyamin's mother, would sit by the window knitting a long winter stocking. This year his mother had come to join him from Kharkov, the city where she lived. It was in Kharkov that Binyamin's eldest brother Shimon also lived, an engineer at a local factory, a husband and the father of a little four-year-old boy. Sarah Samuilovna was satisfied with her life in Hadiach, spent in the company of her bachelor son, Binyamin. But in Kharkov, too, her life was just as good. Her little grandson Sasha was a source of pride and

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satisfaction – the boy and his youthful banter. But have we not ourselves been witness time and time again to the nature of the relationship between a wife and her mother-in-law?

The mother therefore sits at the window knitting the winter stockings. The buzzing flies emphasize the weight of the otherwise utter silence. With his shirt sleeves rolled up Binyamin sits working at his drafting table. The windows are thrown open wide, and there is but a thin set of curtains separating the room from the Garden alley. Sunlight fills the alleyway. A lazy dog walks by, pausing by the fence as he yawns. Evening has not yet fallen, and the shadows have not yet stretched forth their dark fingertips.

And yet a slight ruckus can be heard rising from the landlord's rooms. First Haim Yakov comes home from the market. His footfall is absentminded, followed by the fragmented tones of a brief exchange between man and wife.

"Grandma, I'm hungry!" comes Tamar's voice, clear as a bell, as she bursts into the house. Rachel is next to return from work – Binyamin recognizes her light step as she enters. The slight sounds all make their presence felt in his room as well.

"I'm so exhausted today!" Rachel says, in a worn-out voice, and you can hear a chair being moved around in the neighboring room. Binyamin sketches circles with his compass in little, razor-thin lines. The work must be accurate and precise, and the tip of the compass makes its way cautiously over the white surface of the paper.

"Of course!" comes Grandma Pesya's voice. "It's so hot today! Haim Yakov, come to the table!"

A mixture of foods' fragrances and the chatter of Tamar's voice rises from the neighboring room.

"Perhaps you'd like to have something to eat too, Binyamin?" his mother says, as she puts aside her stocking and heads for the kitchen. An evening breeze comes in through the window, but the last rays of the sun still bathe the room, enveloping the flowery carpet in its arms of gold.

Little Tamar comes into the room for a talk. She gives a quick glance of an 'expert' at the sketches Binyamin has made and offers her opinion of his day's work. Then she stretches out on the daybed.

"Uncle Binyamin, I won't bother you. I'll be quiet, absolutely quiet!"

And there she goes unloading a whole nine yards of speech on his head, as suits her sex, while her tanned legs flutter back and forth atop the daybed. She is telling him some tale involving little Katya, the neighbor's daughter, who ate five whole tomatoes in a single mouthful – and the tomatoes hadn't even been rinsed off first. What, do you think she didn't warn her friend? I mean, Katya might come down with some sort of a stomach disease – isn't that right, uncle Binyamin?

Binyamin's little friend goes on regaling him with all sorts of silly stories of this sort. He finishes the diagram he is working on and cleans the Whatman Paper off with bread crumbs. His mother enters the room with a rather fragrant omelet. Tamar joins him for his meal. The day is now fading away, and a sort of sky-blue shell now encases the windows. The blue then begins to darken. A light evening breeze stirs the curtains. Rachel enters the room, bringing with her the delicate scent of perfume.

"Tamar, you're only now having lunch!" she says in amazement to her daughter and sits down on the daybed. The scent of 'Red Moscow' perfume fills the room. A light blue chamois belt accents Rachel's delicate hips.

"The Chevalier must certainly already be waiting for you, Rachel Yefimovna!" says Binyamin.

"And your *Baryshnya*¹ has already painted her lips and sits staring out the window..."

That's how Rachel responds, and then turns to Sarah Samuilovna with some question. Strange things have been going on between Binyamin and Rachel recently. Put yourselves in their shoes: the respectable young man comes to see the praiseworthy woman, comes from a distant city at that, and the time is summertime, in full swing, and the nights are magical, filled with attraction and longing – Ukrainian nights, in short. But then the praiseworthy woman says: No! What is the young man to do? Where is he to take his beating heart and all those lustful morning contemplations in the student dormitory, as the ice flowers blossomed in the windowpanes, in the silent hour, in the dark,

¹ Baryshnya – young lady (Russian).

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as the sound of snoring spread through the room?

No, no, everything recently was moving along right down the straight and narrow between the two of them. Indeed, Sarah Samuilovna understood these things, she understood and kept silent. Little Tamar continues to unload her story. It is a tale about a goat. Today the neighbor Harkusha's goat ate some big advertisement off the fence down the Garden alley. Uncle Binyamin, why would the goat eat an advertisement?

"Perhaps, because of the glue. There is flour and starch mixed into the glue. The glue is rather pleasing to the goat's palate. But what was written in the advertisement?"

"It was an advertisement for the cinema – for a movie called 'The Circus', starring Orlova."

"It seems the goat certainly doesn't care for Orlova," said Rachel. Tamar's laughter rings out in the room.

There is a knock at the door. Berman the barber enters along with Golda Ginsburg. Berman is a short young man at the age of thirty-five. He is tastefully dressed, but his hair – although he is the master of coiffures in Hadiach – is rather thin. His clean-shaven face is youthful and displays a faded tan, and it is only the cluster of tiny wrinkles near his dark eyelashes that attests to his true age. We therefore have before us a none-too-young bachelor, a mild-mannered man with a love of song.

"Greetings gang!" says Berman and sticks out his palm to shake hands with each of them. In all seriousness he even shakes hands with little Tamar. He then turns to Rachel. "Nu, Comrade Accountant, what's new?"

"What's new is black and blue," replies Rachel, using a Russian saying, as her teeth flash in the darkening room. Little Tamar jumps at Berman and leaps into his lap.

"Uncle Joseph," she asks him. "You haven't gotten married yet?"

The little girl has heard her share of witticisms concerning Berman's bachelorhood.

"As of today, I haven't gotten married yet," Berman responds. "You're getting bigger, Tamarka, little by little, so I must remain a

bachelor for quite some time still..."

"Did you all hear that?" Tamar announced in a festive voice. "Uncle Joseph is to be my groom!"

Sarah Samuilovna takes a bowl of toasted seeds from the pantry for them to eat. Tamar too takes a handful and hops outside. The roar of little children rises from the Garden alley.

"Your Chevalier is after all waiting for you, Rachel!" Binyamin says, as he peers out the window.

At the far end of the alley a Russian gentleman with a black mustache appears. He is walking back forth at a measured pace, and his figure can be made out as a huge shadow down the darkening alleyway.

"I'm heading out!" says Rachel, as she gets up from her seat. She lowers her head and waits a few seconds without making a sound. As though on tiptoe she makes her way out of the room, and the remaining members of the group watch through the window as she steps lightly away. The stars have come out. The Queen of the Night has enveloped Hadiach in her star-spangled robe. Dogs bark off in the distance, and there is the rustling of the trees.

Just then Golda Ginsburg speaks up. "*Meshugenas!*"¹ she says, with a pleasant Yiddish accent. "What are we doing sitting around the house?"

Now do take the trouble, if you all will, and have a look at Golda Ginsburg, the eldest daughter of the cemetery attendant. She is a girl of about twenty years old, with a fresh face, two long braids, and bright, shining eyes. In the lilt of her voice and the build of her frame you can sense she was made for motherhood. And indeed, without a doubt, if fortune smiles on this young lady, she shall enter the ranks of the Mothers of Israel. Her eventual birth pangs will bring forth a handful of little creatures into the world, and these creatures will open their eyes, gather strength and with all their might clamber up into the world ever higher and higher.

However, should fortune fail to smile upon her, then this young

¹ Meshugenas - crazy people (Yiddish).

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mother-to-be shall fall into oblivion in just two short years. This is the daughter, then, of the cemetery attendant, Aharon, who has ten children in all – six from his first wife, and four from her younger sister, whom he married after he was widowed.

"What's your hurry, Golda?" says Sarah Samuilovna. "Sit a little while longer."

She flicks on the light, takes out a book to read – Dickens' "The Pickwick Papers" – slips her glasses onto her nose and begins to read. A terrible shadow plays on the wall.

"Did you not go to see your lady professor today?" Golda asks Binyamin, with that Yiddish accent of hers.

He shakes his head. He did not manage to finish what he was working on and is afraid to show his face before the Professor. But what is the meaning of that reference to a lady professor, huh, Goldale?

She is referring, of course, to Lidia Stepanovna, the daughter of Professor Edelman. "He's still a bit young to be running after the ladies!" says Berman, as he recommends that they step outside. It is such a splendid evening! With a strange expression he takes hold of Golda's arm and turns to the door. But perhaps it not such an absurd gesture after all, as this none-too-young bachelor takes the arm of this young Jewish lady. Outside the moon glides through the heap of clouds. There is a treasure trove of fiery stars in the far heavens, trees decorated by the wind and the dark, the alleyway sealed beneath its cloak of silence, and the sound of a woman's voice singing off in the distance, some sad song filled with secret longings – that's how the evening is, and that's the scene down the Garden alley. Binyamin notes Berman and Golda walking arm in arm and senses that they can manage without his presence this evening.

"Run along, children, I'll join up with you in a bit," he says non-committally. The distance between him and the 'children' grows apace. A few more steps – and they are lost in the darkness.

Binyamin returns to the house and joins the group of elderly Jews. Nearly every evening the old folks get together at Feigin's house. The conversation leaves no stone unturned, covering events of the past and the future in equal measure – and at times, they even turn their attention to the administrative policies of the upper echelons.

But why is this old folks' club so sparse? What happened to Hadiach, that mother of all surrounding Jewish cities, in recent years? After all, quite a few people still recall the community of Hadiach in its glory days. The market was once filled with Jews from end to end, the synagogues and study halls hummed with life, the sound of young Torah scholars used to burst forth from the *Cheders*¹ and day schools, and from all four corners of the earth Hassids used to come, members of Chabad to wallow in the dust at the grave of the Alter Rebbe.

But that was before everything got turned on its head and fell into ruin. Albeit, Hadiach did not lose all its Jewish residents in a single fell swoop. It happened little by little – the young people slipped away and headed out for the larger towns, some headed for the factories and others headed off for the institutes and universities. And then the parents began following in the footsteps of the young. Whole families left, one after another, some heading for Kharkov, some even heading off for Leningrad and Moscow. Jewish communities began to sprout in the bigger towns and their surrounding environs and only about five hundred Jews were left in Hadiach. And there they sat, a few old folks, at the house of Haim Yakov Feigin, by the pale light of the lamp. The owner of the house emitted columns of smoke of biblical proportions from his pipe, and the clouds wound their way through the faint light in the room. Among the assembled Jews, Binyamin recognizes Berel Loytin, Ginsburg, and the old shochet, Reb Dovid.

All the men have beards, but Berel Loytin's beard is the longest of the lot. This long-bearded man hails from the Chernigov region from the town of Korop. He has five sons and a single daughter, and he lives in Kharkov with the two oldest sons and the daughter. One of the sons is a lawyer, the other son is the manager of the fabrics department in a large general store warehouse, and his daughter, who is married, is a doctor. In Hadiach lives his youngest son Ezekiel, surrounded by a veritable passel of kids and employed at the mill. The old folks – Berel and his wife Haya – come to spend the summer each year with Ezekiel and his family. They rent themselves a room either in Hadiach or Vilbovka and pass the time rather pleasantly and pleasurably. The old

¹ Cheder - a school for Jewish children in which the Hebrew language and religious knowledge were taught.

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lady Haya is quite the expert when it comes to culinary delicacies. Binyamin has sat more than once at the table in Berel Loytin's rented room. He has a crystal-clear memory of the old lady's gefilte fish, and he has had his share of her 'Tsimmes'¹, and was not at all turned off by her simple Ukrainian borscht, with its cabbage, beets, tomatoes, potatoes, and a variety of other vegetables, all mixed together in rather pleasing proportion. And once Berel Loytin was in a good mood, a bottle of vodka would often find its way onto the dining table.

But how old is Reb Dovid, the shochet – that old Jew over there, with his one good eye? He certainly can't be any less than eighty. The old shochet lives down the Garden alley, and in the mornings, Binyamin often sees him making his way feebly down the alley with his cane in his hand, though the old man's back is never bent. Indeed, despite all the adventures that Reb Dovid the shochet has been through in life, even though his children departed, and he was left behind, a lonely widower down the Garden alley – despite all this, he never lost his spirit, and his legs never buckled.

"We've still got our God up in Heaven!" is the saying you would often hear coming from the mouth of the old shochet. And indeed, the wheel continues to spin, the days pass on by, the string of years creeps past at its inexorable pace, and the baggage of the past grows heavier and heavier as we go – but fear not, my fellow tramps, we've still got our God up in Heaven!

Among the people sitting that evening at the table of Haim Yakov Feigin, there was also Aharon Ginsburg, the pale-faced, fiery-eyed cemetery attendant.

"Hey, Binyamin'ke, won't you have a seat with us?" says Berel Loytin, the veritable lion of the group. "What brings you here so early this evening? Did some bear break wind off in the forest?"

"Today is his day off from taking walks with the young ladies," offers old man Feigin.

Loytin turns to the lady of the house:

"Pesya, can we expect to see a bottle of wine on the table by any

¹ Tsimmes - a Jewish stew of sweetened vegetables and fruit (Yiddish).

chance?"

A few brief moments later the table has been set with suitable ceremony. There is a bottle of raisin wine, a bottle of honey mead, and a bottle of vodka. To finish off this communal meal, plates of salted fish, tomatoes, pickles, and home-baked goods grace the table. Old Pesya is quite the able homemaker! All day long her hands are busy at work, but when the time comes – everything is ready in the blink of an eye.

"Nu, *Le'chaim*¹, my fellow Jews! *Le'chaim*, Holy Mothers!" Berel Loytin begins. "May it be the will of God that we merit..."

Nearly every evening the old folks raise a little toast at the home of the Feigins. And not merely for the sake of the drink itself – God forbid! A glass of liquor leads to rather pleasant conversation, it opens and clears the mind. Did not the Alter Rebbe himself used to say that sadness is but a form of crude behavior?

That's how Reb Dovid the shochet puts it. We've still got our God up in Heaven!

A short while later the cheeks are all red and the tongues are wagging away without pause. Even Aharon Ginsburg, that modest, humble Jew, gets worked up a bit, grabbing Binyamin by a button of his shirtfront and regaling him with an ostensibly amusing story about a bridegroom who drowned in the Psel River on the day of his wedding, such that his wedding day turned into the very day that he was buried. The entire town was abuzz at the time – all this happened twenty years ago, mind you.

"Come with me, Binyamin, and I'll show you his grave and the tombstone over it. 'Died in the Flower of Youth', he-he..."

Binyamin stares at the old man, with his eyes open wide. And what does this guy do for a party? One would do well to keep an eye on that old Jew there.

Tonight, Berel Loytin turns his attention to politics. He reads *Pravda*² every day from A to Z. And he has a rather pretty outlook on

¹ *Le'chaim* - a toast meaning "to life"(Hebrew).

² *Pravda* - a newspaper of the Communist Party.

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things that's all his own. The ways of administrative policy are, thank God, entirely clear to him. Hitler would never dare go to war against the entire world. War, ladies and gentlemen, in our day and age, is a complex, complicated matter beyond all comprehension. War requires tens of thousands of tanks and airplanes, battleships and carriers, long-range cannons and anti-tank artillery, mortar shells and land mines... and you need professionals, real experts! You need infantry and tank crews, cavalry, sharpshooters, pilots, sailors. You need a tremendous navy, you need gasoline – where is Germany going to get the amount of gasoline you need these days?

That is the expert opinion of Berel Loytin, a man who knows his politics. The palm of his hand gets involved too, as it slices through the air while he speaks, and not just haphazardly, no, his hand moves in forceful, measured motions that leave no room for doubt or criticism. Loytin goes on to let every Western state have it too – no one escapes his wrath.

"So, we've got England in the world?" Berel Loytin begins to warm to his subject. "We've got France in the world? Nu, and the Red Army of ours – are they just going to stand by and let Hitler conquer the world?"

"In England we've got Chamberlain..." Binyamin tries to get a word in edgewise. But who is paying any attention to Chamberlain, or to Binyamin, for that matter?

"Nu, and America?" Berel Loytin and that hand of his continue to dive deep into the political waters. "Throw the militaries of the entire world into the scales, and the American military will still tip the balance..."

"Perhaps it will be God's will that there should be peace in the world!" says old Pesya with a sigh. She is a simple woman, a Jewish mother. "If only there would be peace and tranquility in the world!"

Haim Yakov Feigin sits spread out easily at the table, his yellow beard scattered to the wind, and the smoke from his pipe enveloping the faint light of the lamp. Only Reb Dovid the shochet, that Jew with his one good eye, has no interest in politics whatsoever. His fork repeatedly sallies forth into the bowl of pickles before him.

"At any rate, my fellow Jews, let's raise one last glass to the downfall of Hitler!" says the man of the house, as he fills the cups all

around. The women sip the honey mead and nibble on the baked goods; whereas the men, on the other hand, are more concerned with the vodka and the pickles.

Later on, they begin singing. There are traditional songs lifted from the liturgy, like '*Vetaher Libeinu*' and '*Adon Olam*', and there are also simple Jewish melodies taken from the days of old. Berel Loytin is the conductor. Even old Grandma Pesya joins in the singing, as drops of sweat get lost among the wrinkles in her brow and a pale smile flutters across her face. Sarah Samuilovna remains silent with a satisfied look of pleasure in her eyes. This old lady is from Sudilkov, in the Volyn region, and the version of '*Adon Olam*' that the group is now singing is not well known in that region.

"And now, Binyamin'ke, it's your turn!" announces Berel Loytin. "Let's have '*Fehren fehrst-du*'!". That summer, this song was one of the old man's favorites.

*Fehren fehrst-du von mir aweg,
Teuer leben meines...¹*

It was the song of a girl longing with desire for the love of her heart who was heading out to serve in the army. Sarah Samuilovna now surreptitiously helps her son sing – as this version of '*Fehren fehrst-du*' was well known over in Sudilkov. Thirty or forty years ago songs like these were heard throughout the town – innocent love songs, the hymns of the young Jewish girls.

"Oy, that's good! Oy, that's good!" sighs Haim Yakov, the man of the house, as he caresses his yellow beard. The old shochet has ceased digging away in the bowl of pickles. He starts in on a long story involving his son Shmuel and everything that befell the latter since he was enlisted for the army. Shmuel is lame – may you all be spared a similar fate – in one leg, he was born like that. What need was there to bother too much about the military draft. He'd get a white card – and that would be the end of it! He, the father, did not see any need to go handing out any money. But who would have thought that precisely this Shmuel of his, a child of the poor, would fail to find favor in the eyes of the doctors! In short, they examined him, looked him over every which

¹ You're going away and leaving me, / my dear beloved... (Yiddish).

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way, and gave their verdict: he was faking it, a '*simulant*'¹! Would you believe that? It just boggled the mind!

Here the story took a turn and began to involve hospitals, and travels, and various adventures, but other than Binyamin no one was listening anymore to the tale of Shmuel the Shlemiel. The man of the house and Berel Loytin were sunk head and shoulders in a conversation that bordered on a heated argument. Each man was entirely convinced of his position: that's not right! – and the thumbs wagged, the beards flew and fluttered in the air, the foreheads creased and creased again, and the cheeks turned an even brighter red – and what, do you think the whole matter wasn't worth a wooden nickel? When pigs fly! They were talking about *Chazzanut*²! Haim Yakov was of the opinion that Sirota was the king of all cantors, and Berel replied at once: Pini Minkowski, from Odessa – that was the true number one! Have any of you ever been to the Brody Synagogue in Odessa? The organ plays ever so sweetly, the choir hums away, and Pini Minkowski's voice rises to a crescendo above it all.

But the parties cannot manage to reach a compromise until Haim Yakov, in his excitement, breaks out with a stirring rendition of Sirota's '*Tsur Yisroel*'. And indeed, the tune twists and turns as it rises into the lofty heavens and bursts through the very depths of the earth down below. The old shochet falls silent and a hush falls over the room, as Sirota's melody makes its way into the very hearts of all assembled. But then you all clearly don't know Berel Loytin – he's not one of those who easily gives in! You call that a *niggun*?³ As he twists his lips in disdain and shakes his head.

No, Berel Loytin is not convinced. And he breaks into a rather pleasing rendition of Minkowski's '*Mikdash Melech*'⁴.

*You have sat long enough,
You have sat long enough in the valley of tears...*

¹ Simulant – malingerer (Russian).

² Chazzanut – liturgical prayers chanted in Hebrew by the cantor.

³ Niggun – a tune, or melody, usually accompanying a religious text (Hebrew).

⁴ Mikdash Melech – Temple of God (Hebrew), a psalm of Pinchas Minkowski, a composer and chief cantor of the Brody Synagogue, Odessa, Ukraine.

A blessed niggun in its own right!

And the songs soften the old folks' hearts, as the cups are filled once more. Le'chaim, fellow Jews! May we merit to see another year through!

"Amen, O Master of the Universe!" the women respond with a communal sigh.

And the ceremony cannot come to a close before all assembled break out in a lively Hassidic tune, the men and the women all singing together now in unison. And it is Aharon the cemetery attendant, of all people – that pale Jew with his own passel of kids – who starts them off with '*Tanzel*'¹.

A little while later Binyamin finds himself out in the Garden alley, accompanying Reb Dovid the shochet, to the latter's home. He holds the old man's arm, to make sure he doesn't trip along the way. Reb Dovid's idle chatter seems to come to him as though through a great fog. A sense of sorrow sifts through the alleyway, slicing through the silence of the night and rising unto the very stars above. The lone willow tree stands covered in dreams by the side of the house of the old shochet. A chicken stirs in its sleep in the neighboring coop, then slips back into the world of slumber. Binyamin returns home and sits down on the bench to the right of the wicket gate. The Ukrainian night seizes him in its grip. A light breeze brings on its wings a mixture of the scent of flowers, fresh grass, and ripening fruit. Binyamin fills his lungs with the air to the full.

The concealed figure of a woman appears down the alleyway. It is Rachel Feigin, that woman with her slender build and the eyes of grey.

"Binyamin, is that you?" she says, as she sits down beside him on the bench. The scent of her perfume arrives along with her and fills the space. Binyamin embraces her and carefully caresses her head with its soft hair.

She presses her head against his shoulder and begins to cry bitterly.

¹ Tanzel - Hassidic dance.

Chapter 1.2

Left, right, left, right!

Binyamin rises along the slope of the bank of the Psel River towards the road that leads to Vilbovka. He has just gone for a swim in the river, and the chill that follows is a tonic for his limbs. He steps firmly up the slope, nearly running along as he goes, with the tune of a military march on his lips. His tan chest is bare beneath the rays of the sun and his hair is wet. Joy and silence and light flood the morning all across the face of the earth!

Binyamin grips his briefcase with the diagrams tightly beneath his arm and walks along the road. He is headed for Vilbovka, to the summer residence of Professor Edelman. There are five diagrams in his bag, all properly prepared, and Stepan Borisovich will certainly be satisfied. Not a single cloud clutters the pale blue sky above. The August sun pours ample fistfuls of bright light down upon the scene. The road stretches its lofty track off into the distance. To the right and the left rows of low bushes sleep in long lines, and, beyond them, down the slope, wide expanses of grassy pastures are bathed in sunlight. The myriad branches of isolated trees shoot up here and there among the grass. An old shepherd sits beneath one of the trees with his staff in his hand. His flock is scattered around the field. Their necks crane, their jaws move as they chew fresh grass and cud, and the mooing, bleating sounds fill the translucent air.

Binyamin turns back and eyes the Jewish cemetery once again, with the brick wall around the Alter Rebbe's grave showing among the green of the trees. Quite a few generations ago our forefathers built that wall and lit the menorah over the holy grave. Some sort of great hidden secret seems to hover in the air around the distant house.

Left, right, left right... the river's ribbon winds off into the distance. Somewhere down there, men are bathing in the river, along with their horses, and the splendor of the sunlight flashes along the surface of the water. Women are doing their laundry along the shore, with the hems

of their skirts rolled up above their knees.

Stepan Borisovich receives Binyamin with a warm, expansive welcome, and has him take a seat out on the porch. The Professor's short, stocky frame is wrapped in loose-fitting pajamas, his feet are shod with white canvas shoes, and his entire being projects cleanliness and a certain polish, with that jet-black hair of his – Stepan Borisovich dyes his hair with a special imported tint. The Professor's father, who was a rather wealthy banker in Kiev in his time, a full-fledged Jew from birth, managed his household affairs with a certain largess. At the entrance to the house stood a doorman outfitted in rather regal livery, and inside there was an extensive entourage of male and female servants, cooks, and butlers. The old man's offspring were educated in a manner befitting the loftiest scions of society, and not a single stitch of Judaism was, God forbid, mixed into this general education. Stepan Borisovich – who was still Semyon Borisovich at the time – attended the technical high school in Kiev. After graduation he converted to Christian faith and changed his first name to Stepan. He then won admission to the University in Saint Petersburg.

Upon completion of the University he traveled to the United States and enrolled in a three-year apprenticeship with Allis-Chalmers, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When he returned to Kiev and at the age of twenty-seven married the youngest daughter of the extremely wealthy and particularly prominent Eliyahu Broder. This young woman, Klara Ilynishna, was a rather thin virgin, physically weak but well-cultured, who could pick out a tune on the piano and was thoroughly fluent in the French language. In the year 1914 Stepan Borisovich completed an important scientific paper and was awarded the title of Professor. He then settled in Saint Petersburg and served as a Professor at the University for twenty-five years. It was in Petersburg that he lived through the World War, the February and October Revolutions, the years of Military Communism, the years of the NEP¹ and the ensuing Great Turn and the Five-Year Plan that followed. The name of the city changed from Saint Petersburg to Petrograd, and then from Petrograd to Leningrad, but had any of that changed the awful climate in the city?

¹ NEP - New Economic Policy, an economic policy of Soviet Russia (1922-1928) that included elements of free market under state control.

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Rain, steam, fog... the climate in the city of Leningrad was hard on Stepan Borisovich. He would often come down with a cold, and even caught pneumonia twice, and he was recently afflicted by a rather suspicious cough. The doctors had advised him to head out to the pine forests of Ukraine.

And so, Stepan Borisovich had arrived in Vilbovka. He was a well-known expert in his field, and there was no limit to the talent he brought to his work. Here too, in Vilbovka, he continued his scientific work.

There he is now, spreading Binyamin's drawings and going over them with precise exactitude, discovering two spots that need to be corrected: instead of a straight line, a broken line is called for. He expounds for Binyamin's benefit on the laws of projection, and his voice takes on the tone of a teacher. The student listens attentively to the Professor's words, even though he is already thoroughly familiar with their content. When the lesson is over Binyamin scratches out the two mistaken lines with his penknife, cleans the sheet off with an eraser, and then hands the Professor the corrected diagrams. The old man then proceeds to describe his daily schedule to Binyamin in the utmost detail. Yesterday he woke up at seven in the morning, and this morning, too, he woke up at the very same time. He has long been in the habit of getting up at seven – after all, classes at the University begin at nine. He has a bath, gives himself a shave, and then goes for a morning walk.

The Professor sings the praises of his morning walk, as his dentures tremble away in his mouth. The morning walk is one of the central tenets of a healthy lifestyle whether one lives in the city or out in the country. In the city there isn't all that much traffic early in the morning, and the dust is not yet stirring in the air, so that you can take big gulps of fresh air into your lungs. The morning walk is exercise for the lungs, for the skin, for the muscles, for the circulation of the blood in the veins, for the nerves. And if the morning air is clean and clear in the city, how much more so out in the country! Here every breath you take brings a healing. No, at this point he would not trade Vilbovka for any Kislovodsk or Sochi in the world!

And the rundown of the Professor's daily schedule continues. Following breakfast, he sits down to work for four hours. Vacation is indeed vacation, but he would never dream of withdrawing his hand from his work. It is a matter of habit with him, all his life he has worked

like an ox, and during his three-year apprenticeship at Allis-Chalmers...

And here come the memories of America. With a few precise lines he sketches a portrait of the American businessman – his lifestyle, his daily schedule. The main thing above all – is order! Order – that is true culture! After all, what raised the life of man to a higher level? A rather simple thing, in the end – the clock. Yes, yes, the clock! "Time is money", said the professor, in English. The day is composed of hours, and the hours in turn are composed of minutes and seconds, and every second is a limited time span that has a real, specific, tangible value. In this field – *entre nous soit dit*¹, we Russians still have quite a bit to learn from the Americans. When the average businessman in America schedules an interview with you – you can be sure that he will adhere to the set time with the utmost precision.

But at this point a violent cough interrupts Stepan Borisovich's little speech. His face constricts and turns red, drops of sweat flash across his forehead, and his look becomes the look of any other old Jew suffering physical torments.

From the rooms of the house there emerges onto the porch the pleasant scent of roasted meat. Vera is in charge of the cooking – a servant brought along with the family from Leningrad. Klara Ilynishna is dozing in the forest in a hammock strung between two pines. There is a hush in the forest, with only the halting, hidden chirping of a bird cutting through the silence. Shade and sunlight reign alternately in the forest. Carpets of grass, leaves, pine needles and pine cones along with wild flowers cover the face of the earth. Shafts of bright light blind the eyes and the deep crown of the heavens covers the silent forest.

"And where is Lidia Stepanovna?" Binyamin asks the Professor, in the slight pause caused by the latter's cough.

"She went out this morning to gather berries in the forest," replies Stepan Borisovich, after he has regained the power of speech, as he wipes off his forehead and face with an extremely clean handkerchief.

Little by little the flow of the Professor's words returns to its former strength. At this point he is recounting his scientific work. He is

¹ 'Strictly between us, that is' (French).

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currently writing a textbook concerning all sorts of various machine engines. He has almost completed the description of the engines based on the principles of kinematics and dynamics.

And here he begins a detailed account of an accepted mathematical formula, in which he, Stepan Borisovich, found a mistake. Along the road that runs between Vilbovka and Veprik two young women appear, and Binyamin's heart begins to beat faster. Garlands of chamomile flowers adorn women's heads, and there are round baskets on their arms. For a moment they remain standing in place, enveloped in a mix of light and shade. Binyamin recognizes the two women. One, Klava Bobrova, Edelman's neighbor, is already a wife and young mother. The other is walking along and now approaching them as she goes, with her soft step, delicate legs, statuesque, flexible figure, and beautiful eyes.

She extends her small palm with its long fingers to Binyamin – that delicate, well-tanned hand – and asks how he is doing. The chamomile wreath adorns her face, lending her features an amiable, endearing quality.

"Klara, Lida is here!" Stepan Borisovich calls out to his wife, where she is lying in her hammock. "Nu, Lidochka, did you have success today with the berries?"

She presents her father with her basket, showing him the pile of dark blue, almost black blueberries and fragrant red strawberries. Today the girls came upon a patch of forest that had not yet been discovered by the other berry pickers. The blueberry bushes were full of fruit. They took rather abundant fistfuls of berries from every bush.

Klara Ilynishna now approaches the porch with her rather weary walk, a white woolen scarf wrapped around her neck. Klara Ilynishna's neck is always enveloped in a scarf. She suffers from Graves' Disease and has a swollen goiter in her neck. Her eyes also bulge as a result of her illness.

But what a pleasant voice the ill woman has, such a refreshing, crystal clear, feminine voice.

"Nu, Lidochka, did you enjoy your morning walk?"

Here the story about the virgin patch of the forest with berries is repeated. The parents lend an ear and take pleasure in the recounting.

Lida is the one who makes the rules in the Edelman household. She is also Binyamin's own personal goddess. How perfectly that garland of white and yellow flowers suits the delicate features of the young girl's face.

"Time for lunch!" decrees Stepan Borisovich, and Vera comes forth to set the table. The latter is a backwoods girl with a pockmarked face, who has been working for a few years in the Edelman household. The lady of the house is ill, and so it is Vera who oversees the comings and goings around the house, purchasing the necessary products at the local stores, or at the market, doing the laundry, cooking, and cleaning the rooms.

The strong scent of roasted meat fills the surrounding area. A white tablecloth has been spread on the table, covered with bowls, spoons, forks, sliced bread, salt, and mustard. An iron bowl has been hung from one of the nearby trees and the members of the household walk over to it one by one to wash their hands before eating.

"Nu, Binyamin!" says Stepan Borisovich. "Wash your hands and join us for the meal!"

However, Binyamin does not feel himself at such liberty in Professor Edelman's house. He slips away from the meal, heads down the steps of the porch and walks with great, wide strides through the forest. He sits down on a tree stump and relaxes all at once. There is a profound silence in the forest. It is noontime, and brief shadows rest at the feet of the trees, all turned in the same direction. The light blue crown of the heavens, strewn with soft, white clouds, blankets the tops of the lofty pines.

"Binyamin!" Lida's voice can be heard from afar, and Binyamin jumps from his seat at the sound, as though caught in the act of doing something naughty. The young girl comes up to him, a bowl full of blueberries in her hands.

She shoves the bowl into his hands.

"Did you think I wouldn't find you? You must taste these berries. I gathered them myself in the forest."

Binyamin bites into the juicy fruit, and his lips and teeth turn blue and black with the juice. The young girl bursts out laughing at the sight

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of his soiled face.

"Well let's see your teeth, then," he says.

She sticks out a rather blue tongue. Laughter fills the forest, like a silver bell ringing in the air.

"Are you going into town today to play?"

"Yes, I am."

"If that's the case, I'll accompany you!"

Two years ago, Lida finished her studies at the Conservatory in Leningrad, in the piano studies program of Professor Yudin. Now she works at that same Conservatory as an aspiring musician. She is primarily concerned with the Romantic movement of the previous century, Chopin in particular. But the old problem is, there are no pianos in Vilbovka, and so three times a week she heads into town to the home of the teacher Ivanchuk, who has a Bluthner piano in his house.

The two of them head back to the vacation home. The rope hammock can be seen between two pines, with Klara Ilynishna lying in its curve. Glasha, the landlord's daughter, is sitting on the steps of the porch. She is a fifteen-year-old girl, with a flashing, piercing pair of grey eyes set in a well-tanned face. Binyamin is familiar with this Glasha and those piercing eyes of hers from the previous year. That summer, it seems, she would lie in wait for him and follow his footsteps. More than once he came upon her in hidden corners of the forest, and those grey eyes of hers would giggle at the sight of him. She is a wild country girl, a raw forest flower whose breasts have already begun to bloom beneath her blouse.

She is seated on one of the steps and Professor Edelman is standing over her singing the praises of an education.

"But can it really be?" says Stepan Borisovich. "A big girl like you, at your age, and you still don't know how to read and write? Take a good look around you and see the tremendous changes that have taken place in recent years in the field of popular education."

Without really being aware of it Binyamin finds himself listening to Stepan Borisovich's harangue. Glasha casts a sly, sidelong glance in his direction.

In the field of popular education... where can you find illiterate people like Glasha these days – absolute boors, if you will? Especially, among the young people...

Another bout of coughing cuts off Stepan Borisovich's words. His short body trembles and his face turns red.

"Are you ill, Stepan Borisovich?" asks Glasha. "You spend too much time over those books of yours."

The Professor wrestles with the final throes of his cough, and Binyamin comes to his aid.

"Yes, Glasha, you're lazy when it comes to your studies!"

"And how would you know?" says Glasha, darting the shafts of her eyes in the young man's direction. A deep crimson spreads over her face, and she gets up from where she was sitting and disappears. Stepan Borisovich's hand flutters desperately. He retrieves a few pencil sketches from his study. Stepan Borisovich directs Binyamin's attention to the diagram of a steam engine, the motion of whose parts is different from all the other versions of this engine. Binyamin must draft the diagrams, six sketches in all, on Whatman Paper, with absolute precision. He has to approach the numbers and letters that explain the various parts of the engine with the utmost seriousness, for it is these very numbers and letters that are to be found in the text of the book. One must not overlook or underestimate these details at all. Order – that is the main thing, above all else, my dear Binyamin!

Binyamin places the drawings in his bag with the promise that he will not allow himself to veer even slightly from the necessary order.

A short while later Binyamin and Lida are walking along the road that leads from Vilbovka to Hadiach. The road rises and falls alternately. It is two o'clock in the afternoon. The early August sun stands above them in the light blue heavens. The Psel River makes its winding way alongside them. There is silence all around, and dusty vegetation by the side of the road.

"And what are you thinking of playing today, Lidia Stepanovna?" Binyamin asks, indicating the fancy black case of sheet music with a picture of a curved harp on one side.

"A Chopin Polonaise."

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A pair of tennis shoes and white socks set off Lida's well-tanned legs. She is wearing a light straw hat on her head, which adds a touch of charm and grace to her face, and the folds of her white dress, her sheet music case, the long, slender fingers of her hands, the hands of a pianist – everything projects an abundance of cleanliness, youth, and beauty.

Binyamin turns back, in the direction of Vilbovka, and spots a figure at the edge of the forest. It is a young girl shading her eyes with her hands, as though keeping a lookout on the road. Is that not Glasha?

"I can't say I understand Chopin!" says Binyamin, preparing himself for a long discourse about the composer. When it comes to speechmaking, there is a certain similarity between the father and daughter.

Binyamin and Lida cross the wooden bridge over the river. There is silence on the shore, broken only by the shouts of the young boys swimming in one of the hidden coves somewhere off in the distance. The peasant women are returning from the market in Hadiach with bags on their shoulders. There are some residents of Vepruk among them as well. They still have a way to go. The women's bare feet are covered in dust, and their skirts are rolled up. In the heat of the midday sun their soft Ukrainian lilt hovers in the air. And there is the former prison flickering off in the distance, surrounded by its high stone wall. It now houses the Agricultural Engineering School. The lookout tower of the local firehouse rises towards the heavens. Thank God, the post office is already behind them.

Lida is telling of the love between Chopin, the poet of beauty, and George Sand. She lowers her voice to a whisper, as though speaking in a dream. They are now standing in the shadow of the house of the teacher Ivanchuk. There are bright red cherries in the garden, the last of the season. Green apples weigh down the boughs of a tree by the side of the fence. Potato bushes are already turning yellow beneath the branches.

Lida opens the wicket gate.

"If you care to, come inside after a little while, Binyamin!" the girl announces, in a tone that brooks no objection, as she enters the teacher Ivanchuk's house. Binyamin heads off for the Garden alley.

"Uncle Solomon arrived! Uncle Solomon arrived!" is how Tamar

greet Binyamin on the doorstep of the house.

Indeed, it is Solomon, the fruit of Haim Yakov and Pesya's old age, who is arriving from the capital city. Binyamin and Solomon study together in the university and live in a single room at the student dormitory. Thanks to Solomon Binyamin had come to spend his vacation in Hadiach the year before, and it was Solomon who had arranged private lessons for Binyamin in Vilbovka. Thanks to Solomon Binyamin had gotten to know his friend's parents, sister, little Tamar, and the handful of old folks – yes, it was all thanks to Solomon that Binyamin had learned to love this little town in the Poltava region.

All the members of the Feigin family have gathered in the main room for the occasion of Solomon's arrival. A spirit of friendship and fellow-feeling reigns among the family. Haim Yakov came home early today from his stand in the market, as did Rachel from the office. Grandma Pesya is busy setting the table and her face is aglow. She has prepared a delicious meal for their special guest: Ukrainian borscht, a typical Jewish roast, with sesame cookies and pear compote for dessert. As she well knows, all these dishes are among her Shlomo'le's favorites. God knows what he eats over there, in the city, with no mother and no home!

"Welcome, welcome, Solomon! Why did you make us wait so long this time over there at the university?"

The two fellow students greet each other with a faithful, loyal handshake. It is about three weeks now that the Feigin family has been waiting with baited breath for Solomon's arrival, but Solomon kept delaying his trip. Binyamin suspects that the delay has something to do with some young member of the fairer sex. Solomon has a thing for the girls. Though he does not limit himself to them – he is a fan of all women, without making any distinction between religion or nationality, race or skin color, so long as they are not a bit too young, nor already faded into extreme old age.

And there he sits, that blessed Solomon of ours, with his bare head freshly washed, his flashing eyes, his clean-shaven chin, and those white teeth of his that lend him an air of strength and beauty.

Little Tamar shows Binyamin her new doll, a gift from her uncle Solomon. He brought her mother a silk dress, her grandfather – tobacco and a new pipe, and her grandmother – a white woolen scarf. Uncle

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Solomon brought gifts for all the members of the household. They are all rather attached to and fond of one another, in the Feigin family, and when one of them takes a fall all the others rush to the aid of the fallen member, offering support and assistance with a fatherly hand and maternal compassion.

"Join us for the meal!" Pesya says, turning to Sarah Samuilovna, with a shining look on her face. "In honor of Shlomo'le."

And so, the meal begins. Solomon begins telling them all the latest news from the capital. He went to see the Agricultural Expo the day it opened and got to hear Molotov's speech. There was so much beauty, comrades! It was unbelievable! It started with the sculptural group by Mukhina in the square before the entrance and went straight through the pavilions of every single republic. You could really get an overview of the massive output throughout the country – from Murmansk to Batumi, from Minsk to Vladivostok. There were sheaves and sacks of grain, fruits and vegetables, and all sorts of flowers and plants. And all the domestic animals – comrades! There were pigs there – prize-winning pigs that weighed up to half a ton. And the cows – cows who gave an endless amount of milk, and as for the percentage of fat in the milk – praise the Lord!

"But why did you get held up for so long in Moscow, Solomon?"

Solomon replies between sips of his drink that the main reason for the delay was the *Komsomol*¹. The Komsomol held him up for two weeks – and he is a man of discipline. The reason for the delay was the announcement by the State Bank of the third five-year plan. They needed to organize the distribution of the State Bank bonds.

"I also signed up for two hundred rubles," said Haim Yakov. "We have the Komsomol in Hadiach as well."

"And why not?" asks Grandma Pesya, as she serves the roast.

As far as Pesya is concerned, purchasing State bonds is an almost religious commandment that one must obey. For starters, you're hardly betting your money on a house of cards. You might well win the lottery – if not this time, then in one of the future drawings. And second, the

¹ Komsomol - a communist youth organization in the Soviet Union.

State needs the money.

"For my part," says Haim Yakov, "I would make do with the bonds I already bought during the previous campaigns."

Yes, at times the old folks tend to tease and needle one another, and the main cause of their arguments is politics. He swears in all honesty, for example, that no harm would come to the world if the *Bolsheviks*¹ would just get lost, scattered to the four winds, and let the little man get by as his heart desires. But then Grandma Pesya gets up and begins to claim sweetly that, with all due respect, her husband is talking like nothing more than an animal. Let him take the trouble for a moment to recall the state in which the ordinary Jew found himself during the days of the Czar, let him recall all those edicts and the troubles and hardships that they suffered. And what did the Bolsheviks do? The Bolsheviks declared that the Jew was a free man, like the rest of the gentiles. And there was Shlomo'le, thank God, attending the University and active in the Komsomol without any hindrance.

However, there was one point on which Grandma Pesya could not forgive the Bolsheviks – their denigration of all heavenly matters.

After the meal is over, Pesya makes Solomon lie down to rest from the wear and tear of the road, and Binyamin heads out for the house of Ivanchuk. As he nears the house the sounds of Chopin begin to rain down on him through the open windows. The man of the house, Roman Nazarovich, is out working in the garden, alongside a young, curly-haired Jewish girl.

"Ah, nu, ah, nu, comrade Student. Come here!" Ivanchuk calls Binyamin over with a snap of his fingers. He straightens up from the row of plants – a fifty-year-old man with plenty of flesh on his frame and a prominent moustache. For over twenty-five years he has been a teacher at the local high school in Hadiach. Many of his students went on to make a name for themselves: they became engineers, doctors, teachers, or farmers. And each one of them, upon returning to Hadiach, went to visit Roman Nazarovich. Solomon Feigin, too, had been one of his students.

¹ Bolsheviks - members of the Soviet Union Communist Party.

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Like Berel Loytin, Ivanchuk was fond of discussing politics. At the time of our tale it was August 1939.

"Ah, nu, Comrade Student, and what do you think of Poland?" asked Roman Nazarovich. "What are they saying out there in the wider world about Poland and Danzig?"

In Roman Nazarovich's opinion a world war was going to break out before the year was through. Binyamin, on the other hand, felt that France and England were not yet ready for war. Chamberlain and Daladier would give up the Polish Corridor, the same way that they had let Hitler have Czechoslovakia and Austria as a gift.

Roman Nazarovich patted Binyamin on the shoulder with a fatherly gesture.

"We'll just have to wait and see, Comrade Student!"

The young Jewish girl with the curly hair kept working among the rows of plants in the garden, as she took no interest in politics. The girl was Hasya Ginsburg, one of the daughters of the black-clad cemetery attendant, a student at the local Agricultural Engineering School. From the open window the sounds of Chopin continued to rain down. The notes would rise and storm forth, crowded and pressed together, chased and chasing after one another. They spread bitterly through space, living out those brief lives of theirs – the light gospel of the soul.

"And you, Roman Nazarovich, you're always hard at work on that garden of yours!"

The vegetable garden was the teacher Ivanchuk's weakness. He spent all his free days out in the garden – weeding, hoeing, plowing, digging, pruning, and watering the plants. His beds were clean, without a single thorn or weed, straight rows that were a real pleasure to behold.

Roman Nazarovich begins to offer Binyamin a brief lesson in growing vegetables. Hasya Ginsburg, that tight-lipped girl, stops working down one of the rows and listens in turn to the words pronounced by the old teacher. The main thing when it comes to growing vegetables is loose, plowed, well-fertilized dirt. The fertilizer has to be taken care of well in advance, during the preceding autumn. Once you have harvested the produce of your garden you have to dig up and plow the plot of land quite well. Afterwards – cover it with a layer of fertilizer. At the start of

the spring you must go back and dig up the plot once more – making sure that the dirt is soft and light as a feather. Then come the planting days. Every vegetable has its own proper planting season. And this is the order in which they go: first garlic, then carrots, followed by beets, potatoes, beans and peas, onions, watermelons, cucumbers, and pumpkins.

When he mentions the pumpkins, Roman Nazarovich gets a bit excited. When it comes to the matter of pumpkins he is a professional, a real expert. He is pretty certain that he will manage to raise a type of pumpkin that will truly stand out for its weight and size. He is thinking of calling it 'Tanya'. That girl there – and he points to Hasya Ginsburg – helps him out with his work in the garden.

"Now wait a minute, Comrade Student," Roman Nazarovich concludes, with another pat on Binyamin's shoulder. "Cultivating vegetables is not an easy work. Only if you do it with all your heart's desire will you realize your just reward and have potatoes and vegetables all year round, along with pickled cabbage, cucumbers, and tomatoes. And the pickling, too – that can't be done either as a mere afterthought."

And there was cause for concern that Roman Nazarovich was about to set off on a detailed description of the pickling process. It was absolutely necessary to avoid this imminent danger. Binyamin hurries off into the house. Maria Matveyevna, Ivanchuk's wife, is standing in the kitchen, drying dishes. The platters and bowls seem to dance magically through her hands, armed as they are with a linen towel. Absolute cleanliness reigns in the kitchen. The pots all stand in line on the shelf covered with see-through paper, the oven has been spotlessly whitewashed, and there are potted plants all along the windowsill. The green of the shady garden flashes through the open window.

With her facial features and the build of her body, Maria Matveyevna resembles her husband somewhat – average height, ample flesh on her frame, and kindhearted. A white headdress adorns her forehead, with the ends tied behind the nape of her neck. Her hands and mouth are occupied all day long with chores and various minor sundries, as is often the way with women.

Binyamin politely asks how she is doing, earning broad laughter in response, and passes on into the second room. Lida and Tanya – Roman

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Nazarovich's daughter – are seated at the piano. As we already mentioned, Lida goes three times a week to play the piano at Ivanchuk's home, and in return she offers free piano lessons to Tanya. Tanya, in turn, that big-boned, buxom Ukrainian girl, sits at the piano picking out exercises and scales. Lida is seated by her side keeping time.

"Sit down, Binyamin, we'll be done in a little bit!" she says, indicating a chair right next to her.

Binyamin sits down at the round table, covered with a velvet tablecloth, and sinks head and shoulders into a waiting newspaper. But it is not easy to focus on the contents of the boring newspaper. She is sitting right there, her head slightly inclined and her neck like the delicate stem of a lily. Tanya's hands move over the keys of the piano and a series of none-too-joyful sounds go wandering about the room. Lida follows the sounds with her ears while her lips go on whispering out the rhythm.

"Not like that, Tanya, not like that!" says Lida, as she herself plays the difficult piece. A sort of splendor now envelops the joyless sounds. Lida's fingers lend them beauty, power, and soul. "Do you get it now?"

Tanya repeats the difficult piece, and once more the lifeless sounds go wandering about the room. No, Tanya does not quite get it yet. She still has quite a bit of work to do. She will have to repeat the exercise over and over again.

Lida transcribes the next lesson. She assigns Tanya three more chromatic scales. "But you must really apply yourself, Tanya, no less than two hours a day!"

"Nu, Binyamin let's go!" Lida says, as she rises from her seat and gathers her sheet music up in its shiny black case. Binyamin sets aside the newspaper and asks Lida to play some Eastern music.

"Anything but Chopin. I've had enough of Chopin."

Lida sits lost in thought for a moment. Binyamin now observes her eyelids as they round up like two rainbows over those deep-set eyes of hers.

She begins playing Spendiarov's 'Haitarma'. She puts herself deep into the sounds, as they tremble and storm, slacken and expire, and then return to rage once more. For all the admiration that Lida shows for Chopin, it seems to Binyamin that her Jewish soul shows itself in the

melody, the soul of a young Hebrew girl from Kiev. But is Lida truly familiar with the Jewish niggun, Jewish song, with its sorrow and humor, the rhythm of the dance music that stirs the Hassid, when his heart is filled to the brim with its fair share of wine? As through a fog Binyamin recalls those years long ago when the sounds of the Jewish songs rang out through the town – the '*Shaleshudos Zemiros*'¹, songs of a young girl longing for her beloved, songs a mother sings by the side of her baby's cradle.

No, Lida is not familiar with Jewish music. She comes from Leningrad, and never had an opportunity to come in contact with the traditional way of life of the Jews.

"Come on, Binyamin," says Lida. "Sing us one of your songs for a change!"

Tanya seconds her request, and Binyamin begins with:

*Fehren fehrst-du von mir aweg,
Teuer leben meines,
Fehren fehrst-du sich zu dem Prizivo Stalin...²*

Lida's fingers start to hover over the keys of the piano. Soft sounds begin to accompany the sad Jewish tune.

"Ay, my Student Comrades, what is this lamentations for? Ah, nu, Tanya, give us a good old Ukrainian Dumka!"

So, says Roman Nazarovich, upon entering the room. Tanya, Ivanchuk's only child, was the apple of his eye, his sole comfort in life. He dedicated all his energies to her. With the few pennies he had managed to set aside over many years he had bought her a piano – and not just any old piano, but a world-renowned Bluthner. And there sits Tanya, that apple of his eye, at the Bluthner piano, and the '*Dumka*' from '*Natalka Poltavka*' goes leaping about the room. The Ukrainian tune brings a reflective mood, washing over the listeners with its slow pace, and speaking straight to the heart.

¹ Shaleshudos Zemiros - songs from the traditional Sabbath meal.

² 'You're going away and leaving me, / my dear beloved / going away to join Stalin's army...' (Yiddish).

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A true international committee of sound – from Chopin to Spendiarov, Jewish folk music to Natalka Poltavka, they all gathered together there that day at the home of the teacher Ivanchuk. The notes hovered in the corners of the room, got tangled in the leaves of the flowers, stuttered a bit, blossomed, and then faded away.

Chapter 1.3

It was a wet and rainy day. A moist wind moved through the market, bearing aloft the first green and yellow leaves of fall on its wings. The trees still stood verdant all around, and the moist wind moved through their leaves and made them tremble. And there went some sickly leaf, falling down from the tree to be carried away into the tumult of the market.

Binyamin wandered through the rumbling market examining the bounty of the land on display atop the long merchants' tables, piled in bags, wicker baskets, and in heaps and heaps all around. The merchants were women, old men, and children. The prices were cheap, but you were still expected to try and work them down some more.

From Veprik the peasants brought chickens, eggs, and vegetables, from Sary they brought fruit, milk, and cream, and from Andreevka they brought wheat, flour, and lentils. The peasants came in to Hadiach from all the neighboring villages.

A tall Jew with a prominent beard cuts a path for himself through the populous mass of people in the market. Binyamin bumps into him and says hello. It is Berel Loytin. There is a hint of concern today in the old man's face, and he lays out its cause before Binyamin. He received a letter from Kharkov. There was a theft in the fabrics department of the general store warehouse and his son, the head of the department, was arrested. A-rrested! He's locked up in the jailhouse like some worthless nobody! And all this – over a few dozen meters of simple fabric!

As they talked Binyamin was made aware that it was not in fact a case of theft over at the warehouse, but an unscheduled inventory that had turned up the fact of those dozens of missing meters of fabric. It was clear that someone had played the informer. Some party functionary had gone and informed on them, and the investigators had come down and examined their inventory – and there you have it, a few good years in jail! Did you ever hear of such a thing back in the day, before the various revolutions? Back then you had a store, and you had

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your merchandise in the store – and nobody ever came to investigate or ask about the inventory, you lived your life as you saw fit! You were able to earn a living without all this witchery and sleight of hand.

The heavens continue to darken overhead. A stormy, seemingly possessed wind moves through the market from end to end, raising columns of dust, hay, and bits of paper. The doors and shutters go banging away as they open and close. The women's hair and kerchiefs tremble in the wind. Green and yellow leaves are born aloft on the wind.

"Come, Binyamin, let us step inside Ezekiel's house for a moment!" says Berel Loytin. "We'll wait there until the storm passes."

And Binyamin continues to hear the old man's complaints, now concerning Ezekiel, Loytin's youngest son. Already in childhood this young boy set himself apart from the other four children. Just think about it – the whole world is aspiring toward some sort of goal – this one dedicates himself to Torah study, attends the Gymnasium, enrolls at the university, this one is a businessman – lumber, grain. But the boy comes out with: I want to be a master craftsman! I'll be a shoemaker, he says, or a tailor, or even a coachman! And there goes that shoemaker getting mixed up with the rabble and wastrels and involving himself in all sorts of stupidity. And what happened to him in the end? He went to work at the mill in Hadiach, chopping wood and drawing water. He's a smith now – Heaven help us – and his hands and face are filled with soot all the time like a chimney sweep; he works like a dog from morning to evening. And do you think he makes a living at that? Not a chance! His wife must go and raise pigs! Poo, what foolishness!

You can hear the rain begin to knock against the roofs. At first, isolated drops fall singly into the dust of the earth, getting swallowed up immediately and leaving tiny pits in their wake – the traces of the rain in the dust. Then, once the forerunners of the flood have been swallowed up, there comes the flood itself. The gates of heaven opened, and a pouring rain came down to fill every inch of space. There was a raucous scene throughout the market – shouts, and laughter, and general running about. Beneath every roof and shelter groups of people stood crowded and pressed together, with their bags on their shoulders.

Binyamin and Loytin rush off to enter Ezekiel's house right near the market. In the entranceway to the house, in a pen, an enormous pig lies

chewing on a pumpkin. Miriam, Ezekiel's wife, is clearly quite talented when it comes to raising pigs. She fattens them up with vegetables: pumpkins, turnips, beets, watermelon rinds – in short, vitamins! And the pig is a pig, after all, and says to himself: whatever, I'll take vitamins then! And he chews and chews away and grows fatter and fatter by the day.

These are the complaints old man Loytin expresses with a grimace as they enter the house. In the first room Yekel, Ezekiel's oldest son, about thirteen years old now, is on the daybed, somewhere between sitting and lying down, reading Maupassant's *Bel Ami* rather excitedly. In the next room the sickly youngest daughter Lea is lying down. This too is but divine retribution! The girl suffers from some sort of convulsions three or four times a year, and when they come, all her limbs tremble, she foams at the mouth, and she breaks out in a cold sweat across her forehead. In the wake of these attacks the girl is so weak that she must lie there in bed for a few good weeks.

"Do you understand Maupassant?" Binyamin asks the boy. "You're still a bit young!"

No, he understands Maupassant, he's read Tolstoy and Shakespeare as well – he spends days and nights engrossed in his books. Reb Berel groans. He derives no pleasure from his son Ezekiel. *He* works like an ox at the mill, she is busy all day raising pigs – who is left to see to the education of the children?

Through the murky windowpanes one catches a glimpse of the tiny world outside. The rain has stopped, though there are still heaps and heaps of clouds hung up there in the heavens. Binyamin steps out of the house. Transparent streams of water burst forth from the drainpipes into little standing pools; from there the water runs off into the rivulets that line the side of the street. The sound of flowing water can be heard all around. The market, which emptied out when the rain came down, returns to its former state. The entire surface of the market is one big glittering swamp. It is during moments like these that the random stones jutting forth from the swamp demonstrate their true worth.

We catch a glimpse of Binyamin among those wallowing in the swamp and skipping from stone to stone. He heads for home, going back to his work sketching illustrative diagrams. True, he has been thrown off his usual daily schedule, and there is no chance of going for a

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swim in the Psel on a stormy day like this. But as he passes among the stalls the rain begins to whip through the air once again. Binyamin finds shelter beneath one of the stands. Laughter and shouting once again rises on all sides, with bags held up to shield people's heads and shoulders.

"Binyamin, come on inside!" the firm voice of Haim Yakov Feigin can be heard from his stall through the pouring rain. Binyamin crosses the rainy space at a run and steps inside the old man's stand, literally dripping water everywhere.

"What's new Binyamin?" Haim Yakov asks, as though he has not seen the face of his tenant in ages.

Binyamin tells him the story of the incarceration of young Loytin. Feigin shakes his head in sorrow...

"Business these days," he says. "You've got to be careful. You have to know how to take and who needs to receive. Nothing makes you smart like experience."

Who would have thought that the time had come for Binyamin to hear Haim Yakov Feigin tell him the story of his life?! Later on, in our own story we will have occasion to refer more than once to the members of the Feigin family, and so the author must really set down in writing the personal history of the head of the family. Binyamin heard the tale directly from the mouth of Haim Yakov. Shafts of rainwater beat down unceasingly on the rusty iron roof. The rain then flowed off the sloping roof and covered the earth as far as the eye could see.

At first Haim Yakov Feigin was a shochet, a *bodek*¹ and a *mohe*² as well – there used to be such a catch-all profession among the Jewish communities in Russia. Don't get the wrong idea, he was no Korach³, and, in a completely different key, no Rothschild either. But he made a rather ample living all the same. He received forty rubles a month from the community, and he had other sources of income as well. Back in

¹ Bodek - Jewish ritual slaughtering inspector.

² Mohel - a person who performs the Jewish rite of Brit Milah - circumcision.

³ Korach, a wealthy Israelite, led a rebellion against Moses (Bible). In Jewish tradition Korach is a synonym to quarreler.

those days, a shochet-bodek such as him could not run his household in a limited fashion. First, there were the general household expenses – the wife and children, thank God. Second, he needed to have a rather roomy residence. There was no end to the guests who frequented the house. In years gone by Hassids used to come to Hadiach from all four corners of the earth, hundreds and thousands of them would come to visit the Alter Rebbe's grave – some would come to pray, some to petition for an intercession, and some just to pour out all the bitter suffering in their hearts. And where would a Jew stay when he came to Hadiach? By the shochet of course! And so, Haim Yakov would fulfill the commandment to show guests proper hospitality. In the large living room there were, '*bli ayin hara*'¹, about ten beds. It was exactly as it sounds – what living room? It was a veritable inn! And every single Jew, even if he was just coming to visit the holy grave, needed to ritually wash his hands, needed a clean towel, needed some sort of a meal. As that was the case, they had to hire a '*shiksa*'² to keep a cow in the yard. After all, though it was true that no Jew would refuse a good cut of kosher meat, the main source of sustenance were dairy products: a cup of cream, a little butter. And there were those who suffered from a sensitive stomach – may you not know of such things – and would say: for me nothing but soured milk. And thank God, down in the cellar, we always had jugs of soured milk – for anyone in need!

Among the Hassids who came to stay with them there were some who were rather poor and wouldn't even pay a wooden nickel for all the fuss and food. But after all, the man had come to Hadiach to pray at the holy grave, and it was your obligation to fulfill the commandment to show guests proper hospitality!

Aside from those forty rubles that Haim Yakov would receive from the community he also had other sources of income. First, there were the 'shochet's *kishke*'³, which he had a right to take from every head of cattle that he slaughtered. And since the number of guests and paupers had increased, thus increasing the amount of food needed to feed them, the members of the community decided that, instead of the

¹ Bli ayin hara - traditional expression meant to ward off the evil eye (Hebrew).

² Shiksa - a gentile girl or woman (Yiddish).

³ Kishke - beef intestine stuffed with a seasoned filling (Yiddish).

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kishke, he was entitled to two pounds of meat from every animal slaughtered.

Second – there was the money he made on *Shmura Matzah*¹. He was in charge of providing the Jews of Hadiach with their Shmura Matzah. Each member of the community, even the poorest of the poor, would purchase six Shmura Matzahs for the Passover holiday – three for each night of the *Seder*². The sack of flour used for the Shmura Matzah, in a beautiful package sealed with seven different stamps from various Rabbis and *Gaonim*³, was brought in from Odessa. And on the day set aside for baking the Shmura Matzah, the entire population of Hadiach would gather at his house, every man, woman, and child. They would roll out the Matzahs on the specially prepared tables, while reciting Psalms all the while. And it could get quite crowded and tight in the house – Heaven help us! And the day before Passover began all the Jews of the town would come to his house to receive their six Matzahs. With the appropriate mixture of awe-filled reverence and compassionate love, each Jew would take his Shmura Matzahs and wrap them in a clean rustling sheet, and carry them off ever so cautiously back home, making sure that the dark side shouldn't cause even a single Matzah to break along the way, God forbid.

Third – there was the money he made performing the *Brit Milah*'s⁴. Among all the shochets in Hadiach he was the only recognized mohel. His reputation spread to neighboring towns as well, and it once happened that, as sure as he is a Jew, they even invited him all the way to Konotop! When he, Haim Yakov the shochet, went to work, you could be sure that no harm would befall the little boy. He even had his own white robe and had every bit the look of a doctor in the surgical theater. The main thing was cleanliness. One must make sure that there shouldn't be even the slightest trace of filth when performing the Brit

¹ Shmura Matzah – Guarded Matzah (Hebrew). According to Hassidic tradition, the matzah, a thin, crisp unleavened bread eaten during Passover, must be guarded to ensure that it does not become fermented.

² Seder – Jewish ritual feast that marks beginning of the Passover Holiday.

³ Gaon - Talmudic scholar (Hebrew).

⁴ Brit Milah - the ceremony of circumcision (Hebrew).

Milah and *metzizah*¹.

This particular job, the job of the mohel, is one that he continues to perform down to this day, and he has lost count of the number of little Jewish infants that have entered into the covenant of Abraham our forefather at his hands. Back in the day this was a source of a rather decent income, particularly when the ceremony was being performed at the house of one of the rich '*Yishuvniks*'². A fancy carriage with a pair of fine horses would bring the mohel to the site of the celebration, and there he was given what to eat and drink as befit his station. Aside from the few rubles that they paid they would also present you with provisions for the return trip, as it were – half a dozen chickens, a hundred eggs, and things like that.

And Haim Yakov had had yet another source of income. As you all know, between Passover and *Shavuot*³, during the *Omer*⁴, it was forbidden for Jews to get married. Only during the last three days before the Shavuot holiday, the bonds were loosened, and – Mazal Tov! Brides and grooms were accompanied to the *Chuppah*⁵, and all the religious functionaries in the community were completely booked. When the wedding season came, there would sometimes be two or three marriages celebrated in a single day. Now let's say that on a particular day there would be a few weddings here in Hadiach, and yet another wedding at the home of one of the *Yishuvniks*. Now there was only one Rabbi in town – so who could be called upon to perform the wedding ceremony out in the countryside? It goes without saying – they turned to him, Haim Yakov the shochet! And anyone who hasn't attended a Chuppah at one of the *Yishuvnik's* homes has never known real joy in his life! And that was particularly the case when it came to Haim Yakov, the most honored guest in the crowd! "Reb Haim Yakov, come here, Reb Haim Yakov, over here, won't you have a taste of this dish Reb Haim Yakov, don't turn your back on this delicacy, Reb Haim

¹ Metzizah - ritual method of performing the Brit Milah.

² Yishuvniks - Yiddish term for those living out in the countryside.

³ Shavuot - Jewish Pentecost holiday.

⁴ Omer - a 49-day period of minor mourning and general abstinence between Passover and Shavuot.

⁵ Chuppah - Jewish marriage ceremony (referring literally to the canopy over the bride and groom beneath which they are officially married).

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Yakov" – in short, by the time you headed home, you were stuffed to the gills, and even a bit tipsy too – God have mercy!

Here Binyamin cuts into the flow of Feigin's tale.

"Yefim Issakovich! So why did you ever abandon all this abundance and get involved in selling mead?"

The rain has stopped, only a few isolated drops now fall away from the roof of the stand. The sky has cleared – yes, the sky is clear once again, and there is something lazy now in the sound of the running water. The hustle and bustle in the market begins to grow once more, as Binyamin hears the strange story of the wine – the raisin wine and fruit wine – directly from the mouth of Haim Yakov Feigin, the former shochet.

Among the various sources of income that he had once had, the final one was the money he earned selling Passover wine. One would buy a sack of raisins weighing a *pood*¹. And the raisins would all be pressed together and stuck to one another, in one big massive clump. First, you had to separate the sticky masses and crush the raisins, to ease and hasten the fermentation of the wine. Second, you had to know the exact proportions – no more and no less. Every pound of raisins required two and a half cups of water. Half a pood of raisins gave you a bucket, or fifty cups of wine. And what's more – it was absolutely imperative not to wash the raisins before beginning the fermentation. Since what did proper fermentation truly depend on? Proper fermentation depended on the minute bacteria that coated the surface of the raisins. If you got rid of the bacteria, the fermentation process was ruined.

Binyamin notices, to his amazement, that Haim Yakov is getting more and more excited as he talks – but what is so amazing about the rules of making raisin wine?

So, you take the crushed, unwashed raisins, you put them in a barrel, and you pour the first measurement of water over them – two cups of water for every pound of raisins. You have to place the barrel in a warm spot – near the stove, for example – in order to encourage the

¹ Pood – a Russian unit of weight, roughly equivalent to 16 kilograms.

fermentation. After three days you squeeze out the raisins, put them in another container, and add another half a cup of water for every pound of raisins. After this second fermentation you once again must squeeze out the raisins very well and transfer once again the remaining mass of raisins. But if you think that this is the end of the work, you would be making a serious mistake. You still have to filter the wine. This is not easy work, if you have set your heart on obtaining clear, refined wine. So how do you go about the filtration? First, you take a strip of cloth fresh from the laundry, stretch it out over the open top of the barrel, and pour the first portion of wine over the cloth. Now, since the 'pores' of the cloth have not yet been stopped up, you get a rather murky wine. You must go back and filter over and over again until the wine that filters into the barrel is clear and refined. In the end, you must go back and remove the cloudy wine from the barrel and filter it all over again. Only now, once the cloth has been properly primed and is prepared to yield clear, pure wine, can the true filtration process begin.

And as the tale about producing Passover wine becomes more and more boring, so Haim Yakov grows ever more excited in the telling.

"Yefim Issakovich!" Binyamin asks once again. "But, for the love of God, how could you have abandoned the work of a shochet and bodek to become someone who makes wine and sells mead?"

And so, the old man begins to tell the story of the Deputy Financial Inspector. This all took place back in nineteen twenty-three. One rather clear morning, as Passover was approaching, and the sun was moving through the heavens like a king on its throne, busy with drying out the swamps and bringing spring to the world – the door flew open and in comes the Deputy Financial Inspector, Sidorov. Sidorov walks in, with that briefcase of his under his arm, and takes a seat. "Feigin!" says he. "I've heard it said that you've got some fine Passover wine, wine you made with your very own hands. Bring us a glass and let's see for ourselves!" Now what does Haim Yakov do when he hears these words? It goes without saying, he took one look at Sidorov's briefcase and hesitated. In that briefcase, as he well knew, there were bundles of protocols, declarations, slanderous statements, and lists of all sorts of taxes, all concerning the Children of Israel. Feigin knows that, if this Sidorov here were to get up and go write out a protocol concerning the unsanctioned production of wine, then aside from a heavy monetary fine, he would also land in jail for three years. "Feigin!" says the Deputy

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Financial Inspector, setting aside his briefcase. "What are you worried about? Let's have us a taste of this red, red wine of yours!" And so, as though inspired by the very Divine Spirit itself, Haim Yakov cast all his doubts to the wind and placed a Kosher for Passover bottle of wine on the table along with a little something to nibble on. And what does the heathen do? The heathen goes and drinks off his first cup, licks his lips, and a look of amazement crosses his face. Since grape wine and proper vodka were not readily available in Hadiach at the time. They used to drink *samogon*¹, and the taste of samogon was about as far away from wine worthy of the name as the distance between east and west. So was it any wonder that after that first cup old Sidorov took quite a liking to the wine? "How much does a bottle of wine go for?" he asks. "Sixty kopeks." "In that case," Sidorov says, "with all due respect, you're nothing but a fool. You ought to set the price of a bottle at nothing less than a ruble!" And he pulled out three *chervonets*² from his wallet, and, just as sure as he, Haim Yakov, is a Jew, went and purchased fifty bottles of wine. The Financial Inspector deserves a discount, after all...

From that day forward the winemaking period began in earnest. People would drink the raisin wine and find it quite pleasing. The customers – from among the respectable gentiles in the area, as well as those Jews in Hadiach who were both connoisseurs and capable of paying – would essentially come to Haim Yakov's house and demand that he bring them that raisin wine of his – and they actually paid one ruble per bottle. This was all back in the days of the NEP...

"This was all back in the days of the NEP," Haim Yakov says, as he slowly strokes that yellow beard of his, "and life, as it were, went back to normal. There were the same old shops and the same old Jews sitting in the shops, the same market with the same Jews running around the market trying to make a living. But a living, Binyamin, is a fickle, fair-weather thing: it'll smile on one person and turn its back on another; it'll cling like a leech to one man but slip right through the fingers of another – may you never know such things – and stick out its tongue at him. When it came to the raisin wine, it was my time. There wasn't a single wedding in Hadiach, or even just a regular old party, where my raisin

¹ Samogon - Russian name for a homemade moonshine.

² Chervonets - Russian monetary unit worth ten rubles.

wine didn't grace the table. The wine was pleasing to the palate and the customers multiplied – this one wanted a bottle, this one wanted a bucketful, and there were even those who purchased entire barrels! And since the wine cost me thirty kopeks a bottle to make, and the customer paid me a ruble, you can just imagine the net profit that I was making. A real pot of gold."

And Haim Yakov lowers his head in Binyamin's direction, and his voice drops to a whisper, even though no one else can hear them. In the old days he used to earn up to three thousand rubles a month – just as sure as he is a Jew!

And in order not to let the moment slip away, he had to organize the production of the wine on the necessary scale. The members of the Feigin household girded their loins and went to work. Dozens of barrels, one on top of the other, stood there in the kitchen. Day and night their hands were hard at work – one would crush the raisins, another would measure out the water, a third would squeeze the raisins, and a fourth would perform the filtration. The main thing was the filtration. It was this part of the process that caused the wine production to be an immeasurably long and drawn-out operation.

"And you're asking me, Binyamin, what happened to my work as a shochet," said Haim Yakov, and Binyamin could see the trace of a smile disappearing in the folds of the old man's beard, and his entire look became the apologetic look of a man trying to justify himself. "You've asked me twice now. But put yourself in my shoes – how could I have continued to work as a shochet? What would have happened to the wine? I could not have possibly expected my dear Pesya and the children – who were still rather young at the time – to do all the work. And besides – strictly between us, mind you – I looked around and noticed that the community of Hadiach was gradually thinning out. A new spirit was blowing through our diaspora, and family after family started to pick up and move into the towns – some went for the jobs and the business, others went because of the universities and academies. A sort of plague of wanderlust broke out in all the Jewish settlements. People would pack up their things and move off to the big cities. And so, in my heart, I took note of the new developments. It was a raw deal! When the community was functioning normally – the shochet was the shochet and all was right with the world. But if the community continued to thin out? And what's more – what's a shochet

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for the Soviet authorities? The shochet is a worker belonging to the religious order, he is a man deprived of the right to vote, he is exiled and excommunicated in our country. The children of a man like that are not allowed to enroll in the institutions of higher education nor take a job at any government office. If that's the case, what will happen to them in the end? So, I turned to Pesya. 'Pesya!' says I. 'I must give up my work as a shochet.' And what, do you think, Pesya said to me in response? She said: No! 'Your father,' says she, 'Reb Isaac Feigin, was a shochet all the days of his life. And your grandfather, Reb Zvi Hirsch Feigin – may the memory of the righteous be blessed – also worked as a shochet. You have no right,' says she, 'to abandon your job as a shochet.' – 'If that's the case', I asked, 'what'll happen to the wine, Pesya'le?' – 'The wine,' says she, 'nothing will happen to the wine. You have to cut back production. And don't go making such a fuss over it all!'

That was what Pesya told Haim Yakov in that low, quiet voice of hers, as was her way. No, Pesya never raised her voice. Say what you will about that Pesya of his – she didn't have any of the vanity, or arrogance, or aggressiveness of many other women in the Jewish community, those who would stick their nose into all aspects of your business and block out the very light in your life. But you know what? Pesya has one small defect: she's stubborn. If she sets her mind on something, she won't budge from her position one iota. You can talk to her all the livelong day till you're blue in the face – she won't budge: she didn't think it was right for Haim Yakov Feigin to abandon his work as a shochet, that heritage of his forefathers, and devote himself to winemaking! And what did Haim Yakov do? Haim Yakov stood his ground – the man of the house must be the man of the house, after all! Ah, but the downside was that, to give up his work as a shochet and earn the right to vote he had to publicize this fact in the broader community. With a deep sigh he sent off a notice to the "Kharkov Proletariat" newspaper that went as follows: "I, Haim Yakov Issakovich Feigin, residing in the city of Hadiach, hereby declare publicly that I am no longer working as a shochet and that, from this point forward, I have no further formal attachment to the religious order". The newspaper came to Hadiach and found its way into his Pesya's hands – and oh, the mourning and lamentations that ensued! But the wine production was essentially successful, there were plenty of customers knocking on their door – and there was Pesya, burying her head in the pillow and crying bitterly over his work as a shochet!

Once Haim Yakov was finished telling Binyamin the story of how he gave up his work as a shochet it was as though he had gotten a heavy weight off his chest, and he moved on to more pleasant matters. But what can I say? – Thank God and thank the raisin wine. There had been plenty of rubles in his pockets, he had been able to run his household like a king, and even managed to save a few thousand more rubles, in the event of any unforeseen calamities.

And so, the wheel of time turned, and three years had passed on by, until things broke down, and the wheel abruptly stopped spinning. That's how it is with a man's luck! A new Financial Inspector came to Hadiach, a Jew of all things – Nisenov by name. One day he came to the Feigin home and found the wine production business in full swing, saw all the barrels of wine, and the mountains of raisins. The Financial Inspector Nisenov sat down at the table, opened his briefcase and wrote out a protocol. Then he put the libelous screed away in his briefcase and left.

What could he do? Of course, first Pesya began giving Haim Yakov an earful of I-told-you-so's, as women often tend to do. How much better off would he have been, Pesya said, if he, Haim Yakov, were still a shochet and bodek as before, and they would have lived in peace and tranquility, without the wine, and without the Financial Inspector, and without all that trouble and terrible hardship. But now, says she, I don't want to tempt the devil or anything, but his life was hanging in the balance, and who knows if the police aren't going to come and haul him off to the jailhouse – oy, poor Pesya, and oy, those haters of Zion!

At that very moment two peasants came up to Haim Yakov's stall, and he poured them each a cup of mead. The sky cleared, as somewhere off in the fields the freshly washed sun was making its way. The shadows of the clouds moved through the fields as well, sallying forth and retreating and tricking the eye in all sorts of little ways. There went the clouds running away in terror, revealing the splendid beauty of a patch of grain, ironing out a square of green vegetation and blooming flowers as they retreated. The luminous sun dominated all, chasing away the shadows of the clouds until they were completely routed. Ah but then the shadows once again claimed the upper hand as they went off on the attack all the way to the very edge of the horizon. Light and darkness dancing away like that off in the fields!

Binyamin has a tremendous amount of work to do today with his

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illustrative diagrams, but his mind is set on hearing out the story of the wine to the end. Haim Yakov is handling the mead, but that doesn't mean that he is going to interrupt his storytelling. That's how it is sometimes when a man is overcome with an intense desire to talk.

And so, the protocol... the protocol was written up and headed off on its journey, and it was like a sword dangling over the heads of all the members of the Feigin household. Although it must be said that Haim Yakov was on extremely good terms with a number of the government officials in Hadiach. The very Police Chief Sapronenko himself would extend his hand first to Haim Yakov and greet him regularly with: "Yefim Issakovich, greetings!" And the Public Prosecutor Pitrak was also hardly averse to a fine cup of alcohol. But what could he say? The protocol already had a life of its own, making the rounds from briefcase to briefcase, from official office to official office – signed and stamped with the royal seal, as it were. His friends were doing their best to delay the protocol's journey, but as the weeks and months passed, would they not finally haul Haim Yakov off before the judge? And besides, for the time being, he had been forced to shut down operations, and had moved the barrels from the kitchen out into the barn, and there were no more raisins in the house, no more fermentation and filtration and pouring out bottles, no more customers and no more livelihood. And it goes without saying, his heart ached.

In the meantime, the wine that Haim Yakov had had left over since before the protocol ran out. Dozens of customers regularly crowded into the Feigin home demanding to bring them that raisin wine of his! So, Haim Yakov said to the Public Prosecutor Pitrak: "Something must be done about the protocol!" In short, the Financial Inspector Nisenov was sent off to one of the villages, and the case was heard with all due haste. And there were iron-clad testimonies that bordered on the miraculous and a raft of witnesses who all attested to the fact that Haim Yakov had never in his life been involved in producing wine for commercial purposes, but that all the Financial Inspector Nisenov had found on his visit to the Feigin home had been nothing more than the family's supply of wine for personal consumption. The Public Prosecutor Pitrak threw out the claim.

Now Haim Yakov consulted with his wife Pesya at length and decided to go visit the lawyer Burstein to seek his advice in the matter of the wine production business. The lawyer Burstein said that he had to

get a permit, a license. And he furrowed his brow and shook his finger in the air, delved into his legal codes and added that, "You need more than just one permit, Yefim Issakovich, you need three: one permit for making the wine, a second permit for storing the wine, and a third permit for selling the wine."

A real cause for rejoicing, right? And not only did each permit cost thousands of rubles, but, thank the Good Lord, you also became a *nepman*¹, and were once again deprived of the right to vote, and your children could not enroll in institutions of higher learning, and there was a whole number of taxes that you had to pay, and no end to your troubles.

So, what did Haim Yakov do? He bid farewell to the lawyer and went back home – to seek the advice of his dear old Pesya. For that Pesya of his was not the type of woman to be concerned solely with complaints and arguments, or the latest fashions and meaningless do-dads, or just plain silliness and mindlessness. If you were going through a rough patch – talk it over with Pesya. You could rest assured that she would not be the one to spoil your supper.

And so, what did they decide concerning the permits? After discussing the matter, they concluded that they ought to file for the permits. Haim Yakov paid the thousands of rubles, received all three permits, and went back to the winemaking business. A month or two passed, and Haim Yakov looked around and saw that the business they had gone into was a real raw deal. The barrels were full of fine raisin wine, a thousand bottles were always ready and waiting in his home, and the shop was full of wine too – but there were no customers! The customers had run out and, with them, his livelihood had disappeared into thin air too!

But where had Haim Yakov's regular customers gone, why were they suddenly turned off by his wine? The reason was a rather simple one. Due to the permits and the taxes the expenses had gone through

¹ Nepman – business person in Soviet Union who took advantage of the opportunities for private trade and small-scale manufacturing provided under the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1928). Since NEP was seen as contrary to the revolution, being called a nepman was a grievous insult.

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the roof, and instead of the former thirty kopeks it had cost him to produce a bottle, each bottle of wine now cost him more than a ruble. Since that was the case, Haim Yakov had been forced to raise the price of the wine to two rubles per bottle. The customers took note of this and said to themselves proverbially: spare me both the carrot and the stick! And the merchandise just sat there gathering dust. But as for the Financial Inspector, he didn't care one bit about your excess merchandise, your customers, or your livelihood. The Financial Inspector just said: hand it over! You had to pay the permit fees and the taxes on time. And since you had earned the right to be a nepman there was no hope for you anymore. If you did not pay on time, then they would hit you with a fine three times the original amount – and that was the end of it!

So, Haim Yakov turned to Pesya and said to her more or less as follows: "Pesya, perhaps we ought to lower the price of the wine?" And Pesya replied: "But how? Then you would be completely doing away with any possibility of turning a profit?" So, Haim Yakov said: "Don't be silly, what if we cut down on the amount of raisins, or increase the ratio of water, such as adding three cups of water for each pound of raisins, then everything would be just as before, and we can all live in peace!" At the sound of these words, Pesya's face went livid from the shame and indignation, and she turned to Haim Yakov and said that such a thing just wouldn't be right, the company name had a reputation to uphold, and offering the customers watered-down wine was nothing more than base trickery, the lowest of the low...

That was how Pesya put it, and though she did not raise her voice when she spoke, her words were penetrating all the same, and that low voice of hers made its way into your heart of hearts and had its virtually silent effect. In short, the summer passed, winter came, it was time for the Purim holiday, and business was just as bad as ever. There was wine, thank God, a treasure trove of wine – but there were no customers! Once again Haim Yakov and Pesya consulted with one another and came to the conclusion that, as the Passover holiday was on its way, and our fellow Hebrews all needed four full cups of wine each in order to properly celebrate the holiday, and since there were many right proper Jewish communities in the big cities and towns throughout this wide land of ours, all of whom were on the lookout for Passover wine, without ever coming across any – what they had to do was take the wine in to town, and there they would find customers in

abundance. So, Haim Yakov went and loaded up a whole wagon full of wine, thousands of bottles in all, and sent the wine off to Leningrad. And on his way to Leningrad, while still on the train, there he was rubbing his hands together and counting out the thousands of rubles in profits that he could expect to make in the city. No doubt there would be a plethora of takers for his merchandise, and seven different buyers would leap at each bottle – one would grab it, another would block his path, a third would offer an even higher price – in short, his mind was filled with fantasies, dreams, and castles in the sky.

He brought his wagon full of wine in to Leningrad, and Leningrad, as you well know, is not Hadiach. In Leningrad nobody knows Yefim Issakovich Feigin, and there is no one there to extend their hand to greet him and ask how he is doing. The streets of the city are filled with droves of Financial Inspectors, appointees, clerks, treasury officials, and all sorts of authorities. And all those clerks and officials came down on his wagon full of wine like a pack of vultures, as it were, and they examined his certificates and permits down to the very last letter, ensuring absolute conformity with the law, to be certain that he, Haim Yakov Feigin, should not, God forbid, get away with anything. And since all the documentation was completely and entirely in order, one of the officials came out with: "Give me the wine and let me check the alcohol content! Since, in accordance with regulation number such-and-such, item so-and-so, the alcohol content of fruit wine is not allowed to exceed 'x' percent!" And the official took his alcohol meter and stuck it in the wine – and oy, poor Yefim Issakovich, Lord have mercy on his soul!

"Lord have mercy on my soul!" cried Haim Yakov. "The alcohol content of the wine was my downfall and they hung me out to dry. The official in charge of monitoring the alcohol content found that my wine was three degrees over the limit, and before I even had a chance to turn around, the wine had been confiscated by the government, and there I was signing some certificate, and receiving a written, stamped receipt, and heading out of town stripped completely bare, as naked as the very day I was born – with no wine and no customers, no merchandise and no means of making a living! Have you ever seen a woman like that Pesya of mine? 'The company name had a reputation to uphold'!"

That was what Haim Yakov said to his wife Pesya when he returned to Hadiach completely down in the dumps. And Pesya listened to the

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harsh words that he had for her and comforted him as only a woman can. Pesya said that, despite her ignorance, she was certain that the confiscation had had nothing to do with the alcohol content of the wine, for even if the alcohol content had been completely in conformity word for word with item such-and-such, the clerks would have found some other excuse, and the merchandise would have been confiscated all the same. What can you do? It seemed to Pesya that that government of ours – may it live long and prosper – had decided to cut back on the NEP, and they had better get out and save themselves while they still could, since their children were growing up, and what would be their fate? Since that was the case, Pesya said, they would have to give up the permits and stop producing raisin wine, and the Good Lord in Heaven would find them some other means of making a livelihood and provide a new hoe with which to till the soil, as it were.

Haim Yakov heeded his wife's words and gave up all the permits and the raisin wine business and his status as a nepman. But what does the Good Lord do? The Good Lord, who raises the fallen, provided the bandage before the blow and came to Haim Yakov's aid. That same year our Soviet authorities came out with a new law concerning raising crops. And it was officially set down in writing in that selfsame law that every citizen had the right to cultivate as many fruit trees as his heart desired, without any impediments, and that he would be free from all taxes thereon. Furthermore, the good citizen had the right to sell the resulting fruits either fresh, or dried, or preserved, or processed – in the form of a nectar, juice, or wine. And anyone involved in the sale of the produce harvested in one's personal garden was exempt from taxes for three years and would never have to enter the ranks of the nepmen.

Fruit wine! Indeed, where was it written in stone that Haim Yakov could only and exclusively produce raisin wine? How about cherry wine, for example, or pear wine, plum wine, red-and-black blackcurrant wine – even apple wine! But wait – did he have to become a gardener then, a farmer? There was a remedy for that as well.

What did Haim Yakov do? He leased a cherry orchard from one of the peasants, and the lease was, strictly between us, a mere fiction, and the payment on the lease – again, strictly between us – was half a bucket of wine. The peasant and his orchard were off in the village of Sary, and the members of the Feigin household had never even laid eyes on the orchard to this day.

Next, Ham Yakov headed off for Kharkov – his daughter Rachel was still married at the time and living in Kharkov. There he consulted with the wine experts and obtained books concerning the production of different types of fruit wine, with all the details concerning each wine's nature and nurture, and the relevant rules governing its production. And so, he returned to Hadiach, loaded up with advice and recipes. After looking through all the books and recipes the members of the Feigin household went to work. A short while later, fine fruit wine from the House of Feigin appeared in the market in Hadiach, and the price for a single bottle was fifty kopeks. The residents of Hadiach tasted the wine, and the wine was pleasing to their palates.

And once again Haim Yakov gradually grew more and more excited as he spoke, revealing to Binyamin the secret recipe. You start, for example, with cherry juice. But where do you get the juice? Let's say that you bought a basketful of cherries in the market. Now it's well known that when cherries are in season you can obtain the merchandise at bargain basement prices. So, you take your cherries and toss them in the barrel. You have to leave them in the barrel for two or three days in order that the skin of the fruit should get worn out. Next, you must pass the fruit between the two wheels of the press, so that they burst, and so starts the work of pressing the fruit. Now pressing the fruit is what gives you the juice, and that is the main material you need for making wine. The juice has to be mixed with water – at a ratio of fifty percent water to fifty percent juice. Then you must add sugar – eight pounds of sugar for every bucket – and then you have to place the barrel near the stove for the sake of the fermentation process. And that's it. A few days later you have your clear, refined cherry wine, and all the muck and lees in the juice settles down at the bottom of the barrel. In this respect cherry wine is much better than raisin wine. With the raisin wine you had to filter the wine, and the filtration process extended and delayed the labor of making the wine immeasurably.

Haim Yakov once again becomes excited, and the more excited he becomes, the more Binyamin's amazement seems to lessen and fade.

"Now I'm sure you want to ask me, Binyamin'ke," says Haim Yakov – though the question was as far from the young man's mind as east is from west, "I'm sure you want to ask me what I did during the rest of the year, once cherries – and all the other fruits, for that matter – were no longer in season. Where did I get the juice for making my wine?"

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And he went on to describe the matter to Binyamin in full detail and all honesty. Throughout the rest of the year, thank God, we have dried fruit. You just boil the dried fruit in water and prepare a nectar that is in no way inferior to the juice that you can obtain from fresh fruit.

At this point shafts of rainwater return to whip the surface of the tin roof. But the sound is somewhat light and muffled now, each drop with its own tiny voice. The sky is once again overcast, and the shadows of the clouds have ceased wandering about the distant fields. The fields are now covered with a thick mantle of darkness. The market empties out once again, but the sound of the general hustle and bustle and the crashing rain, along with the cries of young girls and women, rise all around them. And there goes some dog, walking along at its lazy pace. The dog cranes its head and lowers its tail, shifting its snout from side to side, on the lookout for any food. The rain floods the personal space of the dog, but then he stumbles on a bone rather worthy of being gnawed – so why should that old dog care about the rain?

Thank God, the part about the process of producing fruit wine has run its course, and now Binyamin is familiar with all the details of how to make the wine. At last the story moves on once again. If there was ever a sure thing in business in this world, then you can be sure that fruit wine is one of them. Just think about it: each bottle cost Haim Yakov no more than twenty kopeks to produce, and the wine was pure and fine and fragrant and found favor in the eyes of all those who drank it, and there were, thank God, plenty of drinkers, and there were no taxes and no permits and no Financial Inspectors – in short, God bless our Soviet authorities! During those three years, Haim Yakov had socked away a trove of tens of thousands of rubles. To this day he still has a solid amount of coin still hidden away from those years.

Haim Yakov sighed. But why are you sighing, Yefim Issakovich?

"Easy now, it's nothing. I was just thinking of those years there..."

And now he turned to a brief historical survey of the days of the NEP and the end of the NEP. You could feel it in the air for some time before it actually happened, and, as sure as he is a Jew, his wife Pesya had foretold the end of the NEP a few years before it actually happened, at the time when it was still robust and valid, as it were, and seemed like it would, in fact, last forever. But then the day came when the Party

announced that: the NEP was finished! Time for industrialization, collectivization... the *Kolkhozes*¹ began sprouting all over the place like wild mushrooms, and the nepman in the city was cast down into the very depths of hell, as it were. And so Pesya said: "Haim Yakov, we have to cut back a bit on the wine!" – "For God's sake, Pesya, why?" – "Because there is trouble afoot in the world" said Pesya. "And God forbid you should be seen as being one of the *kulaks*². Slow down, Haim Yakov."

And Haim Yakov once again heeded the words of his wife and cut back on the winemaking operations. And he kept on cutting back until he had completely shut down the business to wait until the angry clouds passed. Once again, the barrels and all the rest of the equipment were moved from the kitchen out into the barn, and the hustle and bustle of the wine disappeared from the house – and all was quiet! The nepmen came down in the world, losing all their money and their property, having to pay fines and taxes three to five times what was originally due, and they were even sent off into the wilderness of the labor camps – to Solovki, and Narym, lucky just to still be alive. Outside the blade was coming down, and the members of the Feigin household turned inward, folding themselves away like a turtle in its shell. The wine was completely eradicated from the house – there was not a trace of wine in sight. When customers would come Haim Yakov would put on an amazed face and say: wine? He was a simple man, a man who walked with God and in step with the Soviet authorities and he had never, God forbid, entered the ranks of the nepmen in all his days.

The Master of the Universe came to Haim Yakov's aid and the waters of evil flowed past and rushed on by, leaving him in peace. It was a miracle! No one laid a finger on him, nor was any of his property damaged in any way, shape, or form. But once the days of terror had passed, and a new sun shone on our Soviet countryside, and the years of hard labor had arrived for all and sundry, and the five-year plan of labor and construction was announced – his wife Pesya took him aside and said to him: "Haim Yakov, you've spent enough time being idle! You

¹ Kolkhoz - a collective farm in the Soviet Union.

² Kulak - a wealthy peasant. The kulaks opposed collectivization of land and were persecuted by the Soviet authorities.

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must go to the authorities and inform them that you too wish to join the labor movement!" Haim Yakov replied that he had no desire to do backbreaking work for a mere coarse slice of bread given the fact that, thank God, the money, all that money from those years of making wine had not yet run out, and he could still afford to sit back and wait for better days than these. But Pesya was not one to sit around just twiddling her thumbs and so, as though she had been stung by a bee, she began telling Haim Yakov all sorts of strange things: "Our government," she said, "is concerned about the welfare of the masses, and we, the citizens of this land, must join in the labor." In short, there's really no need to repeat everything she said. What, aren't you already familiar with the power of a woman? Haim Yakov Feigin, the former shochet and bodek and nepman, went over one morning to see Comrade Maiboroda, the head of the Cooperatives in Hadiach, and said: "Nikolai Afanasyevich! The time has come for us to set up a cooperative factory in this town of ours to produce fruit wine." And he went into full detail with Comrade Maiboroda, revealing all the secrets of the various recipes and techniques, and running the numbers, and demonstrating, in short, that the business was a golden opportunity. Comrade Maiboroda called a meeting of the board and Haim Yakov came to the session dressed in his Sabbath caftan and gave his speech about the winemaking process, going into full detail concerning profits and expenses, including an estimation of the eventual balance sheet. After a brief round of questions and answers the board decided on a budget and appointed Yefim Issakovich Feigin as the Director of the Wine Factory – and he is the Director and in charge of all sales down to this very day, with five workers under his command over at the factory.

No, Haim Yakov does not regret having made the move to the Cooperative Factory. Thank God, he can make a living, even if the money is nowhere near as plentiful as it had been back in those earlier years.

And he sighed once more and fell silent. His tale is finished. There you have it then, the life of Haim Yakov Feigin, in all its glory. At this point you could even observe how the mighty have fallen, and that he is just glad to still be alive. But take a closer look: the wheel of time continues to turn, a spark of light shines off in the darkness, and Haim Yakov picks himself back up, dusts himself off, and continues on his way.

They sit there in the stall in silence for a little while. The rain has

ceased and Binyamin, at last, heads home to go to work sketching his diagrams. Today he must draft the illustration for a rather strange, complex machine.

The image of Lida, that girl of his heart, suddenly shuts out the rest of the world. The puddles of water stir slowly, and the shadows and light once more chase each other through the streets of Hadiach. Binyamin walks through the streets of Hadiach, in that light-filled, freshly-washed world, enveloped in a cloud of dreams and joy. He walks along singing soundlessly as he goes – the old song the young men used to sing to their girls.

The rain has now stopped completely. The sound of the rushing water dies away, and it as though a sort of festival has descended across the land, lighting up the splinters of wood that float in the puddles, and the drops of water that drip intermittently from the roofs – drop after drop, till they lazily stop, and then begin dripping once again. The sun comes out and beats down with all its might on the joyous moisture out in the world. And there is the Garden alley once again. Here too life is all astir, if on a somewhat smaller scale. Aharon, the son of the shoemaker, a twelve-year-old boy, is, as ever, raising quite a ruckus in the garden-filled alley. He has organized the entire gang, Tamar included, in a single line. They take turns standing with their heads bowed and leaping, until they reach the head of the line, at which point they, too, bow their heads in turn. Little Katya, the neighbor's daughter, does not take part in their game. She stands there barefoot in one of the watery puddles, no wider than an olive, with a look of sheer happiness and contentment in her eyes.

Chapter 1.4

The members of the Feigin household are preparing a true holiday celebration in honor of Solomon's arrival. Old Pesya's hands have been busy at work since the morning: baking, cooking, and frying. Sarah Samuilovna and Tamar are pitching in right alongside her. There is something of the exalted spirit of the eve of a real Jewish *simcha*¹ in the house. There is a bit of impetuous haste and confusion, the sound of the doors creaking open and closed, wood being chopped out in the yard, the dustpan smacking away off in a corner, the sound of the water bucket being emptied into the barrel, meat and vegetables being sliced and chopped, the pleasant fragrances of baking and cooking, and Tamar's little legs running back and forth – for she, at any rate, has her hand in everything and is busy disturbing everyone.

Lida Edelman has also been invited, at the recommendation of Rachel. And to be sure that Lida felt comfortable, Binyamin was charged with inviting her friend from Leningrad as well, who also lived over in Vilbovka. Binyamin tried to convince them that these girls had never found themselves in a Jewish environment, and there was reason to be concerned that the party would not go over all that well. But Solomon overheard these words and began to raise quite a fuss: bring on the girls! And since Solomon was the one being feted, and it was his opinion that decided things, Binyamin did as he was asked, against his better judgment, and invited Lida and her girlfriend. To his amazement the two girls accepted the invitation at once, without the slightest hesitation.

Lida's friend, Klava Bobrova, was a married woman, with a one-and-a-half-year-old baby boy. The members of the Edelman household knew her from Leningrad. Her husband was an engineer, and a former student of Stepan Borisovich's, and her father was a Lecturer in Chemistry at the same institution of higher education where Lida's

¹ Simcha – joy, happiness (Hebrew).

father taught. Klava had a certain hidden flame in her that excited men, and her light eyes flashed often, while her mouth always seemed to be on the verge of breaking out in laughter. The laughter would widen her mouth and reveal those pink gums of hers, and any man still worth his salt would pay quite a bit of attention to that laugh of hers. That was Klava, and that was the way the Good Lord had made her – her and that upturned nose of hers, and her braids, and her attractive body.

And so, the evening came, a mid-August evening. One by one, couple after couple, the invitees gathered at the Feigin home, dressed as for a holiday. The men's shoes were polished, their shirts were white, there were fancy ties around their necks, and the legs of their trousers were neatly creased and well-ironed. The women and young ladies were also all dressed up rather tastefully. Let's look, by way of example, at Golda Ginsburg. Her dress is a regular cloth dress, though it looks as though it was just now freshly washed and ironed, but the strand of coral around her neck lends her face a touch of charm and grace. Golda's face is covered in foundation, but the candor of her features flickers through the makeup, and she is the only one of the young women who has not painted her lips. Or let's have a look at the daughter of the man of the house, Rachel Feigin. She goes from room to room with her back erect and those slender hips of hers, with the flowery embroidery of her collar surrounding her face like a delicate wreath. It is only the rather attractive woman's hairdo – a perm with its abundance of curls and waves – that strikes Binyamin as a bit strange and somewhat out of place.

The tables have been set in the main room, but the meal has not yet begun. The young people have all gathered in Binyamin's room. Lida and Klava have not yet arrived, and Binyamin, who is working the record player, is in charge of the needles and recordings. Solomon and Golda get up to dance. Golda is not quite as expert as she ought to be when it comes to these types of dances. Solomon dances as though it is a mere afterthought. No, the look on Solomon's face is not at all focused, but on the other hand – just look at that festive expression on Golda's face! She steps mincingly and cautiously around on the tips of her toes, giving herself over to her partner with every one of her 248 limbs¹. She is like

¹ 248 Limbs – Jewish tradition numbers 248 bones in the human body.

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clay in the hands of the potter, and the potter spins her around this way and that, takes one step forward and another step back. And Golda whirls around on the tips of her toes, and the glow in her face spins all around her.

Now Rachel Feigin enters the room as well – she comes and goes by turns attending to the various domestic chores – and Binyamin now asks her to dance. He locks her in an embrace that is perhaps a bit tighter than it ought to be. There is a serious look in those grey eyes of hers.

The dance comes to an end. In joyful disappointment the couples break up. Binyamin spots Tamar sitting on Amnon Berman's knees.

"Who did you play with today out in the alley?" asks Amnon.

"With Aharon. We raced each other."

"Let me race him!"

"Who?"

"That little Aharon'chik of yours!"

Berman puts on a threatening face. Indeed, there is no reason to envy Aharon if Amnon is about to go to war with him and demand revenge. Tamar gives her blessing to her man of war.

"Let him have it, let him really have it, uncle Berman!"

The young women from Vilbovka have not yet arrived, and Binyamin steps outside to receive them. Solomon joins him. They are greeted by the silent wings of the darkening evening. Solomon takes Binyamin's arm in his and walks by his side humming a lighthearted tune. They head out towards the road that leads to Vilbovka and immediately bump into Lida and Klava, who are coming up the hill. Lida's outfit is rather modest and barely catches the eye, with a black skirt, a blue flower in her transparent blouse, and a little straw hat that suits her head rather beautifully. By contrast, what a splendid impression Klava makes! Dressed in silk and black muslin, with black leather high-heeled shoes, painted lips, light flashing eyes, a tanned, shapely neck, and those attractive gums of hers.

"Bobrova!" says Klava, in a deep, feminine voice, as she extends her hand to Solomon, wrapped as it is in a partially rolled-down glove. Lida also gives her family name, and the little group continues on its

way, enveloped in the soft evening. A few minutes later Solomon has linked arms with each of the girls, one on either side of him, and now comes the chatter, and laughter, and light banter. No, Solomon is never at a loss for words, whether he comes across two girls or two dozen – thank God, the ways in which a man ought to handle himself with the delicate sex are quite clear to him.

Binyamin walks along by the side of Lida, but their arms are not entwined – those in love don't have that same courage. But at the same time, he does not bow his head nor go groveling in the dust. When necessary, he manages to emit a few fragmentary phrases, and certainly joins in the laughter, at any rate, wholeheartedly.

And now they are greeted by the sound of the herd – a mixture of bleating and mooing and the crack of the whip, the beating of the hoofs, and a rising cloud of dust. The dust hides the herd and rises on the horizon to the very heavens. From time to time a single cow will move off from the herd and head for home. The cow stands there with a pensive look in its eyes before the locked gate to the yard, mooing away, and it is a rather deep, sorrowful sound, that carries far off into the distance. A barefoot girl comes out to open the gate and the cow enters the yard. With tremendous affection the barefoot girl pats the cow on the back, with:

"Nu, Man'ka!"

The cow has returned home to be milked and get some rest – so welcome home! What a beautiful evening! What a warm breeze we have here, as it goes rustling away this way and that, bringing with it the fragrant scent of milk and flowers.

And the herd keeps plodding along on its way – a mixed mass of mooing, trumpeting, and shouting, with the crack of the whip, and the rising columns of dust.

"C'mon, let's make a run for it!" says Solomon, and the little group dashes off to safety – back to the silence of the Garden alley. There they stand around for a brief moment, having escaped the herd, and they look over the devastation that the dust has left in the animals' wake. Klava sighs at the sight of her shoes, those patent-leather shoes of hers.

The sound of the record player comes to them from the house, as the tango "The Rain is Falling" plays.

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"Oh, it's been ages since I last danced!" says Klava, and there is pain and expectation in those light eyes of hers.

But Klava Bobrova is not capable of sustaining a pained look for long. Those light eyes of hers are once again smiling. In the main room the tables are all set and awash in a rather festive air. A few of the old folks have already arrived – Berel Loytin and his wife, Ginsburg the cemetery attendant. Grandma Pesya and Sarah Samuilovna are tending to the tables, arranging the dishes and bottles, the bowls and the glasses. The little group of young people steps into Binyamin's room. There are handshakes all around, and a few scattered words are exchanged... Golda turns completely red in the face, all the way out to the very tips of her ears. Berman quickly comes to her rescue. He slips Tamar off his knees and busies himself a bit with the two new lady guests – the very picture of wit and proper manners.

And so, the cracked voice of the record player can once again be heard in the room. This time three couples step up to dance – with Solomon and Klava taking the lead, followed by Golda and Berman, and then Binyamin and Lida. The fingers of Lida's chilly hand are entwined with those of Binyamin, and her other hand rests on his shoulder. This is the first time that he has held Lida in his arms. God bless the dance! And God bless all those people, wherever they may be found, who choreograph dance steps, and compose music to dance to, with their furrowed brows, as they hum their original tunes to themselves and jot down the score!

Lida steps lightly, seeming almost to hover over the floor without touching the ground, as the scent of a delicate perfume wafts from her hair. No, Binyamin would not dare to embrace her any tighter than he ought to. He holds the girl off at quite a safe distance. The sounds of the dance music leap about the room – sounds of a violin and cymbals, piano and a saxophone.

Rachel Feigin, the young lady of the house, is now the one seated at the record player. Once again, the sounds of the tango "The Rain is Falling" fill the room. It is a drawn-out cadence, like a broken sigh, the sigh of a melting, moving clarinet. And now an intimate male voice can be heard – singing about the falling rain and the girl with the sad eyes. Solomon and Klava once again lead the dance. Perhaps something has happened between the two of them, with those bold, white teeth of Solomon's, the wonderful teeth of an animal stalking its prey, and that

towering stature of his, and his dark eyes! Oh, and Klava, the tempting young mother, dressed in her silk and muslin with those fancy leather shoes on her feet – is it to be her lot to remain a mere housewife, a fruitful vine and woman of valor, until the end of days?

They dance their tango, slowly stepping about, turning left and right, moving in and then stepping back in the rather narrow space, and their feet tap out the melody of that man and woman in the song. Solomon no longer wears that indifferent look on his face. His partner has also fully given herself up, heart and soul, to the dancing that she so loves, and a rather seductive smile seems frozen across her face, revealing those pink gums of hers. It is a good long while since she went dancing – not since the days when she was still a virgin, back when her girlfriends used to get together at her father's house, the Chemistry Professor in Leningrad, or at one of the movie houses, before the bell rang, as the jazz music thundered off the stage and the young people all got up to dance. And what, then, do you think that back in those days she didn't have herself a few close acquaintances, well-bred – albeit slightly ridiculous – young men, aside from that Bobrov there, who clung to her like a leech until she gave it all up? And now she is a married woman – Klavdia Nikolaevna Bobrova, with a little boy on her arms, Seryozhenka, a sweet, talkative boy, and it is as though she has been literally chained down.

The intimate baritone voice continues to sing of the falling rain and the sad girl. Binyamin and Lida are also among the dancing couples, but how distant the young woman seems from him! Through the window the evening darkness enters the room. But not a soul gets up to turn on the light – let the darkness come on, let it fill the room, let the shadows sally forth from the corners, let the stars peek in through the lattices, let the crowded points of golden light stand there at the threshold, and keep your curious eyes and attentive ears open and alert.

Pesya appears in the doorway and invites the young people in for the meal. But look at Solomon now, the loyal son! He jumps up and embraces his mother, that old Jewish woman, and brings over the two gentile girls.

"Allow me to introduce my mother!" says Solomon, with a touch of pride in his voice, as though there is what to be proud of in this average woman, Pesya Feigin, with that kerchief wrapped around her head, busy all day about the house with her domestic chores.

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Rachel gets up from where she was seated – tall, graceful, with that strange hairdo on her head. What was Rachel doing off in the corner, why didn't she join in the dancing? She sat there winding up the record player, the young lady of the house, and not even one of the men asked her to dance. Though in that respect, if we are going to be truly precise about things, she is no longer really all that young, as the years go marching on by one by one – and even her little girl is getting older now...

"Nu, friends, let's head in to dinner!" Rachel invites the rest, and despite it all, she lets a strong, emotional laugh flutter through the air. "We can still dance to our hearts' content later!"

The little group heads for the main room of the house. Two tables have been set up there – one for the old folks and another for the young people. Both groups have come to the house today for the celebration in honor of Solomon. Perhaps this time the young people outnumber the old folks. The leaves of the table intended for the young people have all been pulled out, providing ample space for both the dishes and the guests. A vast array of food and refreshments has been set out on the tables this evening. There is vodka and a variety of wines; salted fish, and gefilte fish, dripping with its gelatinous sauce – all sorts of specimens from the watery realm; there are even red fish eggs; salamis and cheeses; bread and *challah*¹ – all homemade and baked by Pesya herself; there is a multicolored vegetable salad, in which the red color seems to stand out – in tribute to the beets; there are sliced tomatoes and zucchinis, both raw and pickled. In the kitchen there is still a host of baked goods and main dishes just waiting to be served. May old Pesya yet live long and prosper, for all this splendor and abundance has come from her own two hands.

The guests sit down at the two tables, the young people and the old folks each at their own table. Binyamin sits down next to Lida, with Golda to his left, and Solomon – Solomon sits down next to Klava. Ezekiel Loytin and his wife Miriam have also come to the party. At the head of the table sits Berman, and little Tamar has taken a seat right by his side. Rachel Feigin sits at the other end of the table – for the young

¹ Challah - a loaf of white leavened bread, traditionally baked to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath and holidays.

lady of the house is obligated to serve the guests.

One of the men gets up from his chair, with a glass of wine in his hand, and it seems that he intends to start the meal off with a short speech. It is our old friend Berman. We must raise the first glass in honor of Solomon Yefimovich, our good friend. Here, in this little town, he was born and grew up, and he was just another one of the boys, and a regular prankster. Later, he left his parents' home for the big city, finding himself among people who had never even heard of the existence of Hadiach – that small, forgotten town off in Poltava. But now the day has come, and Solomon Yefimovich has once again returned home, to his place of birth and origin. Here he is among us once again, our good friend, and once again we have the chance to enjoy ourselves in his company. Have a look around: there he is sitting with us at the table, with a host of young ladies surrounding His Majesty, and his face is all aglow. As such, let us all raise the first glass in his honor, and may he be a source of pride and pleasure to his father and a comfort to his mother who gave him life.

Glasses clink all around, there are cries of 'Le'chaim', and shining eyes throughout the company.

All assembled begin to eat and drink as they see fit. Those who are fond of good drink have themselves a glass, or two, or three, and even Binyamin joins their ranks this evening. Amidst the joyful tumult all around him, the ringing spoons, forks, and glasses, the buzz of the diners and the broken fragments of their conversations – through all this Binyamin has eyes only for Lida and that blue flower in her transparent blouse. Shafts of golden light seem to crown her blue flower.

This evening, Binyamin fills himself with a proper dose of both wine and courage. Courage and fearlessness! A few minutes later Binyamin rises from his chair. From the old folks' table comes the sound of someone rapping on the tabletop. It is Berel Loytin rapping away with the palm of his hand, the very image of a synagogue attendant quieting the congregation at the house of prayer.

"Hush, my fellow Jews, it is Binyamin's turn to speak!"

"Alas, my tongue is somewhat heavy now – I can't quite claim to count myself among the great drinkers of the world – but I must nevertheless say a few words, and so I ask all those present to forgive

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me. The honorable speaker who rose before me already drew our attention to how one of our own goes off and leaves the town in which he was born for the big city, attends some university and forgets all about that distant little town of his, but the town goes right on living its life in the meantime. A few years pass, and the young man returns home. But what have his mother and father been doing all those years? Why are their backs a bit bent and why has their hair turned somewhat silver? They kept on living in the little town, wallowing in the swamp when the rains came, fasting on Yom Kippur, and shedding a tear from time to time for their children, scattered to the distant winds. But then one fine day the young man comes home, and his mother trembles in anticipation, as her heart leaps for joy: oy, Shlomo'le, at last he is coming home! And she goes to work, preparing all her finest dishes, baking Sabbath cakes and holiday cookies, inviting a few choice guests from among her friends and true soul-mates – bless the Lord, Shlomo'le is at last coming home! And so, friends and fellow citizens, let us raise yet another glass and say as one: Le'chaim! Le'chaim, all you parents! Le'chaim, all you old folks! All you fathers and mothers off in your forgotten little towns, Le'chaim!

Binyamin sits back down. But what does he see? There are tears in his mother's eyes. She too, the aging widow, has her own sorrow. Her children have all been scattered to the four winds, and she sits waiting for the mailman to bring her some news – but none arrives. Le'chaim, my good mother, Le'chaim, my fellow Jews!

At the second table as well, the old folks' table, not a soul has drifted off to sleep. God forbid! The bottles continue to empty out, and the forks and spoons clatter away – Le'chaim!

*Let us all get together as one
And go out to greet the Rebbe!
Let us raise a glass – Le'chaim!
Let us raise a glass – Le'chaim!*

Everyone assembled, young and old alike, begins to sing the old tune. After the Rebbe they head out to greet Solomon, the guest of honor, then the man and woman of the house, and then each guest in turn. In the meantime, steaming bowls of soup have been served to each guest, along with the roast meat. The sound of Klava's ringing laughter can be heard rising above the rest. Solomon is telling jokes – jokes and anecdotes drawn from the lives of Jews and their animals.

There is the story of a Jew who bought himself a cow only to discover that it was a bull. When a disease broke out among the cows, the bull caught it too. So, the Jew said to himself: as far as milking is concerned, he's a bull, but when it comes to catching a disease – then he's a cow...

Warmth and laughter fills Solomon's *daled amos*¹. Klava's hands fly up helplessly, and one of them slips down and lands on Solomon's knee. Lida also overhears the witticism and begins to laugh.

Yet another member of the party stands up to give a speech – hush, friends! It is the lion of the group, Berel Loytin. He and that palm of his intend to give a little speech of their own as well. We are all gathered here today, parents and children, at the house of our good friend, and we are rather pleasantly enjoying the moment. Who in the world is there better than us, the mothers and fathers, with more than a few wrinkles in our brows and quite a few inches on our beards (and the palm of the speaker caresses his own beard at this point), who knows better than us, dear friends, the pain that is involved in raising children? Behold the newborn child as it emerges into the world, blinking its eyes and waving its hands and feet all around. The years go by – and the baby becomes a child, and the child – the child becomes a man. There is plenty of hardship along the way, and a small drop of pleasure. At any rate, these are our children, the products of our loins, and you fear for their well-being and watch over their every step. And as we gather here today at our good friend's house and enjoy the moment rather pleasantly – we must remember to raise a glass to the lives of our children. To the lives of the children that are here with us in this room, and to the lives of the children who are scattered around the world, wherever they may be at the moment, the old and the young, boys and girls alike! *Le'chaim! Lechaim tovim u'leshalom!*²

The tumult only grows from there, as each member of the party says whatever comes to mind, their faces all flushed from the celebration. Reb Dovid, the shochet, gets up and informs them all that,

¹ Daled amos – literally, four cubits, a religious phrase that refers to a person's private space.

² Lechaim tovim u'le'shalom! - traditional Hebrew toast, literally: 'To a good life, and peace'.

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indeed, my fellow tramps, we have not yet lost all hope. Despite all the revolutions and the universities and the lying books that they bring us from the big cities, even though you are all quite wise to the ways of the world, well-educated experts who know just which way the wind will blow – despite all this, we still have our God up in Heaven! And even if you go and stand on your heads and wave your feet in the air, raise a royal ruckus and throw down the gauntlet at every turn – even if you do all this, you won't have accomplished a single thing. Because we still have, yes, we still have our God up in Heaven!

And so all assembled also heard this rather strange speech from the mouth of the old man. There was no stirring round of applause to greet the speech when it came to a close. But had not these words too come straight from the heart of the elderly man, that man of prayer and war?

The women, the housewives, were busy doing their thing. Tea was served, along with baked goods, jam, fruits, and all sorts of delicacies. May old Pesya live long and prosper! Binyamin and Solomon are also doing their thing. Binyamin is courting Lida and filling her plate with all the bounty on the table. Perhaps Rachel Feigin also takes note of this. Solomon is still telling jokes, and the witticisms are growing a bit more heavy-handed as the evening goes. Ezekiel breaks out in a Ukrainian song.

*Unharness the horses, boys!
The time to rest has come...*

Everyone seated around the table of young people joins in the song – let the old folks hear it and keep silent! Binyamin spots Berel Loytin, wagging a finger at him as if to say: Oy, Binyamin, what a '*shegetz*'¹ you are! But what's with the wagging finger? Everyone is singing the Ukrainian song, including Miriam Loytin, Ezekiel's wife. There she sits, with a decent layer of grey in her hair, though her face is still filled with the glow of youth.

Unharness the horses, boys!

Indeed, we will have occasion to speak of Miriam a bit later on. In

¹ Shegetz – a pejorative term for a non-Jew (Yiddish).

the meantime, the noise continues to grow louder. No, the old folks have not fallen asleep at their table. They too break out with the age-old Hassidic tune about the fight between the devotees of the Rebbe, and those a bit more devoted to the bottle.

*The Hassids went to see the Rebbe.
It was winter, and snowing,
And all was covered in ice.
The chill could crack your bones.*

*They came across an inn on the road.
The Hassids stepped inside the inn,
And raised a glass once or twice,
And split into two camps,
As they sat warming their bones.*

The old folks are clapping their hands, raising their eyes up to the heavens, spinning the old melody and spicing it up with a chorus of *chiri-bum-bum*, that is at once filled with both joy and sorrow. This time they are led by the cemetery attendant Ginsburg – perhaps he too has had himself a glass or two, that grave-keeper, whose true nature Binyamin has not yet managed to discern. He is getting worked up and fairly losing himself, waving his hand into the air on high and raising quite a din.

*The first camp said: it is the Rebbe for whom we pine.
The second camp replied: What's the fuss? Don't whine!
The first camp said: let's head back out on the road!
The second camp replied: we've not yet wet our throats...*

And once again that simultaneously joy-filled and sorrowful *chiri-bum-bum* follows. But what is Solomon doing over there? He has his arm around Klava's chair and is still telling jokes. Solomon's treasure trove of witticisms is filled right up to the brim! Now it's time for a round of Armenian riddles.

"What's *gas*¹ all around and *cholera*² in the middle? – A woman wearing a lace dress. – And what's *cholera* all around and *gas* in the

¹ Gas – in Russian slang also means a transparent fabric.

² Cholera – In Russian slang also means a 'scoundrel'.

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middle? – A man after drinking a glass of soda water..."

There is laughter, laughter and shouts of joy all around Solomon and those ancient jokes of his. Klava is all aglow. At her father's house she never heard any jokes; she was raised on hard work and the Bible. But did anything change when she became a married woman? That Vanya of hers – he is a serious man, busy night and day at the Kirov factory, where he oversees one of the more important divisions. But Klava has a certain spark in her that won't let her rest and keeps pulling her out of the house and off into the world. And there she is sitting in the main room at the home of Haim Yakov Feigin, and Solomon's jokes have her laughing so hard she is shedding tears. A pleasant evening! What a very pleasant evening!

"Let's go dance a bit!" says Lida. This time she did not join in the laughter at Solomon's jokes. Perhaps there is some difference between Lida and Klava, and the former finds the environment somewhat foreign. From time to time at the house of Stepan Borisovich in Leningrad friends and acquaintances get together for dinner and a glass of wine. There is light conversation, someone plays a bit on the piano, another tells a heartwarming story, and there is silence and tranquility – perhaps a bit of polite boredom even. At that house, no two people speak at the same time. Yet what has the Professor's daughter found here at the Feigin home? A general tumult, everyone shouting at once, a crowd filled with laughter, wild singing and superficial jokes; in short, a gang of drunks – to some extent a part of the culture.

Look there, for example: the old cemetery attendant, Aharon Ginsburg, rises up from his chair, with that jet-black beard of his and his flaming eyes. Has he, too, gone and gotten drunk this evening? At any rate, his legs don't seem to be steady as he makes his way over to the table of young people. He sits down next to Solomon Feigin, the hero of the day, and proposes a competition between the two tables, between the old folks and the young people. He, Ginsburg, will represent the old folks, and he is hereby inviting any one of the young people to stand up and accept his challenge to a round of arm-wrestling.

"Surely you must be kidding, Reb Aharon?" asks Berman. "You're sure that's not the wine talking on your behalf?"

No, Aharon Ginsburg is not kidding at all. The group of old folks wishes to put their strength to the test. And on the other hand, it isn't

all that clear just yet which group will have the upper hand.

The cemetery attendant's tongue has grown somewhat thick and heavy. At this point we ought to take a look at Golda, who is seated there at the table. Do you think that she is embarrassed by the thick speech of the cemetery attendant or the challenge he has thrown down before the young people? Not at all! The daughter has a caressing look in her eye, a real loving look of pride. She does not at all try to persuade her father to stop with these childish games. The face of the young woman is shining.

There is laughter and confusion. Everyone gets up to clear off that end of the table, removing all the dishes and glassware. The old folks come over and surround the two chosen warriors – Solomon, the emissary of the young people, and Aharon Ginsburg, the old folks' representative.

The two men set their elbows on the table, and their raised palms take hold of one another – and the wrestling has begun. The eyes of all assembled are fixed on the two arms. For a moment they are steady there, with rather considerable effort expended on both sides. Ginsburg does not have an easy job, but Solomon too must gather all his strength. Take a closer look: Solomon's mouth is open wide, his brave teeth are glinting, but his eyes are no longer smiling – no, Solomon is not joking around now, he is girding his loins with all his might. After all, Klava Bobrova is among those assembled.

But look at that valorous combatant, Ginsburg! Was this man not a champion arm-wrestler back in his youth? Ginsburg has his own little strategy: at first all he does is resist defensively – the offensive attack will only come later! And Solomon – Solomon is like a young horse whose reins have been loosened, there he is galloping fiercely away, trying with his last ounce of strength to bring down the cemetery attendant's arm. Just a little bit more, just one more little push!

But all his efforts are in vain! The battle of defensive resistance has run its course, and now Ginsburg flips his strategy and goes on the offensive. Look out, Solomon, you're dealing with Hassids here!

There is no escape for Solomon. Ginsburg steps up his efforts, and there goes Solomon's arm – which had just about put Ginsburg's down – rising and rising, crossing the midpoint, and now beginning to come down itself, until it lies there, beaten and embarrassed, atop the table.

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There is laughter and a round of applause. All hail the victor! Solomon wipes the sweat from his brow. Go try and figure out in advance just where the stumbling block lies in wait for a man! It goes without saying that the old folks' group is stirringly celebrating their victory. There are jokes and wisecracks, pithy sayings and senseless swagger, and God knows what else! Golda's face too is all aglow, with that caressing look in her eyes and the Yiddish lilt in her voice – what a pleasing lilt, what a wondrously pleasing lilt it is!

Another man comes over to the table and sits down in Solomon's place. It is Ezekiel Loytin, the mill worker, representing the young people's camp.

"Ah, nu!" says Ezekiel. "Let's put my strength to the test too!"

And so, they sit there facing one another – Ginsburg with that black beard of his and Ezekiel Loytin, the wayward son, with that clumsy-looking face of his. Once again the arms are raised and ready to do battle. Ginsburg once again employs his former strategy: at first, defensive resistance, as he gathers his strength and even allows himself a certain retreat. But perhaps he overdid it a bit this time, perhaps he allowed himself just a touch too much of a retreat in this case. Ezekiel Loytin is a simple man, lacking any subterfuge, and he just keeps pressing away, and it feels like he has an iron fist.

And then a kind of communal groan rises from the old folks' group. Defeat! Ginsburg the cemetery attendant has been routed thoroughly, cast down to the utter depths of defeat. On the other side now, the young people are all applauding and hooting and hollering with all their might.

The record player bursts into a Boston Waltz – "Evening Star". The Hawaiian guitar weeps, coos, and sighs. The sigh rises from the very depths, a sort of prayer to the evening star. A few couples get up to dance, with Binyamin and Lida among them. The hearts are flooded with youthful longing, happiness and alcohol. Lida's delicate features shine in the midst of the light, piercing fog. Binyamin cautiously embraces the shoulder of the young woman and cuts a dance path between the chairs and the guests. One, two, three – one wide, then two small steps.

But the old folks have not calmed down in the wake of Ginsburg's

defeat. Indeed, the blood still runs in the veins of that ad-hoc family, don't count them out just yet. The old folks have a life of their own. After all, isn't a simple Hassidic dance ten times finer than all those Boston Waltzes?

No, the old folks have not calmed down – not in the least! There they go breaking out once again in that same old Hassidic song, booming their *bim-bum*, clapping their hands, their eyes raised up to the heavens. The moment of true *devekut*¹ is near. Just another moment – and there go the hands on the shoulders, the feet begin to dance off by themselves, and the heads begin rocking back and forth this way and that. The old folks have a life all their own, and they sing and dance and go conquering the entire world. Even the women get up to join in with the group – just take a look, for example, at Grandma Pesya. Her left hand has picked up her skirt just a bit and her right hand is waving a handkerchief in the air, as though sending out a greeting to those distant years gone by. And there goes old Haya too, Berel Loytin's wife...

The Hawaiian guitar is just too weak, its chirping sound is no match for the raised voices of the Hassids. The Tanel swallows up everything else. Solomon was the first one to give up on the Boston and join the old folks' circle. But what's this? Is Klava Bobrova also joining him? Solomon leaps at Klava and grabs the palm of her hand – by the very God of Israel! Klava's feet step out mincingly, there is laughter and light in her face, and that black dress of hers sings of tears and sin as one.

Aharon Ginsburg, all worked up and rather excited, dances his way over to Binyamin and Lida.

"Binyamin!" says the cemetery attendant, a bit out of breath, as the alcoholic fumes envelop the man. "What are you two doing standing around like strangers? Come dance the Tanel with us too!"

He takes hold of Lida's and Binyamin's hands and pulls them into the circle. Lida tries to resist with a laugh. The Hassidic dance is foreign to her. But Ginsburg won't take no for an answer – Lida must join in the dance, and that's all there is to it!

¹ Devekut - religious fervor, originally associated with ecstatic Hassidic prayer.

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"Let it go, Reb Aharon!" Binyamin tries in vain to coax Ginsburg to give up. Lida gathers all her strength, pulls free from the vise-like grip of the strange cemetery attendant and makes a run for the door. Nobody pays her any mind.

Lida opens the door and disappears.

Down the Garden alley Binyamin catches up to the girl – as the night has already opened its yawning jaws, it follows that it will swallow her up as well.

"God Almighty Lida, why did you get so spooked like that?" says Binyamin, taking her by the hand. She pushes him away and continues walking rather hastily down the alley. The noise of the Hassidic dance at the home of Haim Yakov Feigin dies down in the distance. The sounds come to them as through a fog, the voices melting away, and then there is only silence. The wondrous Ukrainian night covers all Hadiach with its veil. A thin cloud hides the face of the moon. The trees stand there all wrapped up in silence and darkness. A light breeze brings the chill and a certain sense of longing on its wings.

Binyamin and Lida head down the slope, heading towards the wooden bridge over the Psel River. In one of the yards nearby a dog's bark slices through the silence; one of his friends responds with a distant tearful sound that splits the very belly of the night from the opposite pole. There is dust and dew along the road, with dewdrops lining the strips of grass to either side of the path. But no one even sees the path beneath their feet – tucked away in its hiding place in the night it goes on dreaming its extended dream. There is a light fog spread out over the river, and the stars are reflected in the water, where they heap tremors and splendor one on top of the other. The cloud high above suddenly slips away from the moon, and the latter reveals its face, pouring its glorious light down over the entire face of the earth. The bushes by the side of the road stand out in relief, and the empty pasture down the slope also appears in the light. Amid the pasture a lone tree stands drowsing away, enveloped in its silvery mantle of darkness.

"And I went and got scared off – how pathetic!" says Lida, almost apologetically. Binyamin hears the words as they emerge from the mouth of the young woman, and it is as though he has been moved by some mighty hand, and he begins to spout a few words himself, and one thing follows the other until they all join together into a little prayer,

baring his heart in rather ridiculous fashion.

The last thing he wants is to scare her off a second time, but quite often lately he finds that his mind is consumed with thoughts of her. He is from a little town, and relationships there are a pretty simple matter. There a young woman runs into the man she desires along the path and a crimson waterfall floods her cheeks, as she lowers her head and her fingers go playing about with her braids. Passersby take note of the girl, nod their heads and say: oh yes, she's got it bad. And there he is, sitting all day at his drafting table, sketching lines and circles on the Whatman Paper, humming some senseless tune under his breath. But after a few short minutes his eyes drift to the window and he sits there frozen in his seat for a good long while. His mother sits nearby knitting a long woolen sock. "What are you thinking of?" she asks him.

"I'm cold, Binyamin," Lida cuts him off. "You'll have to warm me up a bit."

He removes his jacket and wraps it around her shoulders.

"Perhaps the things I'm telling you are a bit strange, Lida?"

"No, they're not strange."

"Here I am chattering away this time, and I guess you'll just have to put up with it. I see you in my dreams night and day, and then that foreign thought flickers in my heart, the thought that there is still hope for me, some small ray of hope..."

The edges of the horizon in the east begin to light up slightly, and Binyamin can feel the chill breeze moving along the road.

"You must still be cold, Lida?" he says, trembling himself. "Let me put my arms around you a bit."

He embraces the girl, trembling all over from head to toe.

"We better start to run and warm ourselves up a bit!" she says, slipping from his arms, leaping away like a bird and beginning to run uphill where the road leads off. And there are the houses of Vilbovka, with their blind windows, glittering in the pale morning light. The edges of the horizon off in the east continue to grow lighter, as the stars seem to fade out one by one. Lida runs along the forest path as though her life depended on it.

"But hey, you're running away from me, Lida!" Binyamin says,

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catching his breath, as he takes her hand in his. And so, they go running down the path together. There is Lida's summer home, with the wooden porch and the slumbering windows.

"Thank you for accompanying me, Binyamin!" she says, as she hands him back his jacket. "And here I forgot my hat at your house!"

The girl's face is brilliant in the dawn, with the forest shrouded in darkness and silence, and those last remaining stars in the distant heavens high above. Do you recall, dear reader, those magical nights, the brief nights of summer, with the first light of dawn, that moment when the sad laughter of your girl would flicker at you through the darkness, and she would come up to you and throw herself down on your very heart?

"I'll bring you your hat!" Binyamin says. And as he sees that the young woman is turning to go, and he is about to be shrouded in the dawn, he adds: "Is there nothing else you want to say to me, Lida?"

She brings her face right up to his, and by the light of the last remaining stars she pronounces those harsh words:

"Binyamin, you have to erase all this from your heart, you understand? I have a boyfriend back in Leningrad..."

She takes a few steps in the direction of the summer home, knocks lightly at the window, and there is the sound of the door swinging open – as Lida disappears inside.

I have a boyfriend back in Leningrad, just don't forget my hat. Enough! No more pining away, no more sleepless nights, no more prose poems. And you, poor old Binyamin, you went wallowing in the dust on this silent night, spreading out your beating heart to be trampled underfoot...

The figure of a young girl suddenly appears out of nowhere and stands there before him.

"Uncle Binyamin, is that you?"

"Glasha? Where did you come from, Glasha?"

"I keep an eye on the vegetable garden here. I even have a couple of squirrels in one of the trees, I'm on my way to pay them a visit."

Glasha no longer had that piercing look in her eyes. Two little

mounds, veritable gifts of God, hid beneath her blouse. Her flaxen hair shone in the weak light of dawn, and her face and bare legs were tanned almost black.

Binyamin stands there in silence, but the sight of that shining flaxen hair is pleasing to him. The light of dawn floods it with its murky silver sheen. The chirping of a bird comes to them from on high like a town crier calling everyone awake. The fog of slumber gradually melts away – good morning all!

"Uncle Binyamin, you really ought to meet my yellow squirrels. You see these nuts here?" and she shows him a handful of nuts in her outstretched palm. "The squirrels already recognize my step. All I have to do is approach their hole and they come out to eat the nuts straight from my hand. Come on, uncle Binyamin!"

"I'm so glad I ran into you, Glasha! I was like a blind man feeling my way through the forest, and now here you are."

The girl suddenly asks:

"Did she hurt your feelings?"

"Who?"

"Aunt Lida."

"Take care of yourself, Glasha! You ought to learn to read and write. It isn't fitting for a big girl like you to be illiterate."

"And who is going to teach me?"

"Are there no schools for big kids here in Vilbovka? At any rate, I'll try to find you a teacher."

The morning light takes over the world. A mighty round of early chirping rains down on them from all sides. Binyamin turns to head home. Take care of yourself, Glasha!

He heads out on the road that leads back to Hadiach. The light of dawn greets him on the road, along with a pale moon and the last remaining stars. And now the sound of muffled laughter reaches his ears, a woman's laugh, and he catches sight along the slope of the silhouette of a couple holding each other tight. He turns off the road and hides beneath one of the bushes. Yes indeed, it is Solomon and Klava, with a single coat covering them both and their stumbling legs.

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They are holding each other tightly and crossing the path, and Binyamin once again catches snatches of yet another anecdote. Oh yes, the overflowing well has not run dry quite yet.

There is more laughter – laughter and lips meeting along the road. At the eastern edge of the horizon strips of fire appear, the tentative fingers of the great sun shooting forth. Across the river you can make out the Jewish cemetery. It is partly hidden from view, and the holy building flashes there between the trees. A faint light, the slight glimmer of a small flame, flickers through the window. Down through the generations that little flame has flickered over the Alter Rebbe's grave.

Binyamin heads down to the banks of the river and dives into the chilly water.

Chapter 1.5

On the First of September, in about ten more days, studies are to resume at the University. There will be an end to the vacation, a farewell to the forests of Vilbovka, to going swimming in the Psel, and to the racing heart. Binyamin's mother is returning to Kharkov, to the house of his brother Shimon. The members of the Edelman household will also be heading off in a few days for Leningrad. Binyamin must still prepare five more diagrams for Stepan Borisovich.

But the summer has not yet passed, the rainy season is still quite far off. The partly whitewashed trees stand there in the gardens, weighted down with heavy fruit. One's eye cannot get enough of looking at the orderly rows in the garden. The vegetables have all ripened. The stems of the potatoes have begun to turn yellow. Heads of cabbage lie there in their beds, as their leaves have begun to open – looking very much like elephant ears. The carrot blossoms, those delicate sprigs, rise in row upon row, hiding their pinkish, juicy roots in the very depths of the earth.

No, the summer has not yet passed, there are still a few days of grace left over here in Hadiach; the sky is still clear, and the sun continues its caress, nor has the tumult died down yet along the banks of the Psel. There are quite a few people swimming in the river. Binyamin and his two young friends are there too. He has been teaching the two girls to swim, and Sarka Ginsburg is clearly the more talented of his two pupils. This summer Binyamin has looked after Sarka quite a bit – that curly-haired daughter of the cemetery attendant. She would regularly join Tamar and him on their way down to the river. Little by little Binyamin managed to rid them of their fears. And here comes the countdown: one, two, tha-ree! Binyamin and the girls leap into the water rather close to shore, there where the little children and tiny fish are working away. They swim for quite a while in the very heart of the river, practicing the front crawl in all its particulars. When they begin to run out of breath they lie there on their backs along the surface of the water, their eyes turned up to the heavens. Even Tamar has learned

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how to swim quite properly at this point.

The sun moves through the clear sky, casting light over the fields and the river. There is the usual tumult along the shore, as tiny waves lap the sand. How transparent the water is! You come out of the water after your swim, and the chill runs through your limbs, as your flesh rises all over in goose-bumps. You rush over to stretch yourself out on the surface of the warm sand and lie silent for a little while. The sun whips your back with gentle lashes of splendor.

But what has happened to Solomon? Since the night of that party Binyamin has only seen his friend occasionally. For whole days at a time the latter lay sleeping the sleep of the dead, not showing his face anywhere in town. He lay there in his bed all curled up inside his summer blanket, with its design a mixture of white and pale blue. Silence reigns in the house, broken only by a deep, desperate snoring sound that rises from time to time from the young man's bed.

Grandma Pesya walks around on tiptoe and sighs. Some impure energy or wicked woman has gotten hold of her Shlomo'le – Oh, Lord have mercy! The time has come to sit down to lunch, Haim Yaakov will be back any minute from the market, and Rachel will be home from the office as well – and he is just beginning to wake up, rolling that white and pale blue blanket off his face, and still lying there a little while longer, stretching his limbs, and yawning, and smoking *papirosas*¹ one after the other.

"What are you doing drifting around like a lost soul, Solomon?" Pesya asks him. "It's time to wash up and sit down to eat. The day is almost done already!"

Solomon wakes up and gets dressed. The moment has come for his shave. Every day Solomon shaves his shadow of a beard, sprucing himself up to look good and putting on cologne. The meal is already over, and the evening shadows have barely begun to come on – but Solomon is nowhere to be found. Grandma Pesya continues with her household chores and sighs. Evening falls, the stars have come out, and a few more hours pass, hours filled with silence and anticipation. The

¹ Papirosa – a cheap, unfiltered, Russian cigarette consisting of a tube of paper with a short section at one end filled with tobacco.

house is now sunk in slumber, as groans and dreams go wandering about the corners of the home. It is then that a cry of pain and sorrow rises from one of the beds – the very bed of the mother, no less. But Solomon is nowhere to be found! The first grey light now appears in the window, and there goes the call of the rooster rising out in the yard. A rope creaks, one hears the sound of buckets banging and rushing water out near the well, as a wagon drags its way down the alley – a new morning is rising to make its way in the world, and then, only then does the young man appear, with the look of a thief on his face, walking along absent-mindedly with dark rings around his eyes. He swallows down his breakfast disinterestedly, like a man possessed, slips out of his clothes, and covers himself once more with that summer blanket of his, curling up into a ball and falling silent. Sleep will do you good, Shlomo'le.

But ah, my good friends, what has happened to Solomon? Is Klava Bobrova indeed the reason for his downfall? Yet, she is a married woman – a married woman, and a young mother too.

Her husband, the engineer Bobrov, has been given a month's vacation at the factory and is on his way to Vilbovka, to see his wife and baby. Today, early in the morning, he has arrived in Hadiach – Klava went out to the station to meet him.

Solomon tells all this to Binyamin while the latter sits there working on his diagrams. At last Binyamin is getting a chance to see Solomon. His friend sits there telling him about how the bonfire got lit between man and woman.

That same night of the party he had walked her home, and that was when it all got started. She had had a bit too much to drink. Perhaps she was also intoxicated by the dancing, the general tumult, the fading stars up there between the treetops, and the chill of the early morning breeze. After the party ended they had gone for a long walk in the forest, heading deep into its heart until they came upon a hidden spot among the bushes, laughing all along the way at every little thing – as young people will often do, when they are filled with desire and a bit too much alcohol. Every tree seemed to hail their passing, every flower seemed to extend its blessing as they walked by. And there was this little patch of the forest hidden from view. He spread out his coat in the soft grass. "Let's sit down here and rest a while." She laughed at that too – every little thing seemed to make her laugh. She sat down on his

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coat, and a mighty round of birds' chirping rained down on them from the treetops. "It's true, my feet are a bit tired," said Klava, as she removed her pointy patent-leather shoes. At that moment, it would seem, he was telling her another little anecdote. There was muffled laughter in the forest, laughter and that tremendous chirping sound – the forest birds' morning prayer. The patent-leather shoes stood there off on the side like two orphans, and he took one of the shoes in his hands and caressed it, with his heart all aflutter. Then he placed his hand on that married woman there too, that woman with the light eyes and attractive gums. "What are you doing, Monya? Is that a polite way to behave, Mo-nya? You really shouldn't..." And now she was not laughing anymore – she pushed him away and tried to resist. But was she really putting all her strength into that resistance of hers? Was there not some brief moment there when she forgot that she really ought to be resisting and pushing him away?

Afterwards there were a few wondrous nights, August nights off in the forest, with the stars falling like leaves between the tops of the pines, a seductive chill in the air and burning whispers, more anecdotes, laughter, and kisses as light as the very ephemera of summer.

Solomon told all this to Binyamin. Yet now, her husband had arrived. He was in Vilbovka at this point, and the time to pay the piper had come. Solomon, that sinful soul, could laugh broadly, curse a bit, and tell some rather worn-out anecdote – and that would be the end of it. He wasn't the one who had to render a full account of his actions to the husband. Klava would find a way; women had their fair share of tricks and stratagems.

But no, Solomon did not resort to some old anecdote – it seemed that he was the last person interested in foul language this time around. There he sits at Binyamin's place, his brown eyes ringed with dark circles, and his face is fallen, and his words are rather strange. He and Klava seem to have decided that they will tell her husband everything! Klava has decided to give her husband a bill of divorce. She and Solomon were in love, they couldn't bear to be separated from one another. He would transfer to the university in Leningrad and finish up his studies there.

The young man turns to the mirror, with a crestfallen look on his face. He picks up the razor, soaps up his chin, and shaves away his shadow of a beard. Does he in fact intend to head for Vilbovka this

evening as well, on the very first day of her husband's return? Wouldn't it be better to let the storm break without him?

Binyamin appeals to his friend's heart, tries to convince him otherwise – but it is all in vain! Something has gotten hold of this young man, has grabbed him by the hair and is yanking him away. He knots a blue tie around his neck, combs his hair, puts on some cologne, and steps out of the house.

Binyamin continues to work away at his sketches – he must bring the diagrams over to Stepan Borisovich by tomorrow. His mother has been at work in the kitchen since the morning: cooking up a batch of plum jelly. There are already jars of cherry, blackcurrant, and pear jelly all ready for the journey. Today's fruit of choice is plum. Binyamin will be taking some of the jars with him, and his mother will bring the rest of them with her to his brother's house in Kharkov. For three years now, since his father died, his mother has been living with his eldest brother in Kharkov, and there is what to be said for the complexity of the relationships among the folks in that house there. A few jars of jelly, at any rate, certainly won't do the dynamic in the home any harm. A half-*poed* of noodles would not be out of place either. That's how Sarah Samuilovna puts it, and she intends to invite Esther, the noodle maker, and her daughter to stop by the house tomorrow for that very purpose.

With her face all flushed from her work over the stove, Sarah Samuilovna brings the copper basin into the room, filled with black plum jelly, see-through and sparkling, along with a separate bowl of foam – that very sweet and fragrant foam skimmed off the jelly, which no one in their right mind would ever turn down. That, at least, is the opinion of little Tamar. She walks into the room as though as an afterthought, and Sarah Samuilovna takes the opportunity to offer the girl a little bowl of foam.

"Why don't you care for the foam, Tamar?"

"I love the foam, uncle Binyamin!" Tamar replies, wholeheartedly digging into the little bowl.

It will soon be time for the young girl to go back to school. Tamar will be entering the fourth grade, and fourth grade at school is not something to be taken lightly.

"Do you have all your schoolbooks ready, Tamar?"

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No, she will receive her new books at school on the first of September. Her mother bought her ten notebooks, pencils, and a new school-bag. Tamar's little collection of school supplies is all ready to go. Her books and playthings each have their own separate drawer in her desk – books for pleasure go in one drawer, and school books go in another.

Rachel Feigin walks into the room, and Sarah Samuilovna invites her to sit down and have a cup of tea. Rachel sings the praises of the new batch of jelly, and the old woman's face lights up with pride and pleasure. The conversation turns to Solomon. The sister does not care for Solomon's behavior this time around. For nights on end he has been running about without rest, chasing after the wind and mere vanities, while his mother's eyes are clearly suffering.

"I'm afraid that some young girl must have her hand in all this," says Binyamin. "Solomon has a weakness for the fairer sex."

No, Rachel is not at all happy with Solomon's behavior. All throughout the year he can go chasing the skirts to his heart's content, but when he comes home for a few days, he ought to set those mere vanities aside.

Sarah Samuilovna agrees with the young woman's words. Children these days... Sarah Samuilovna has a heart filled with sorrows of her own. We give birth to them through all sorts of pain and hardship, we nurse them and care for them, concerned for their well-being night and day – and then the day comes when they just scatter themselves to the four corners of the earth. You sit there waiting for the mailman to arrive, like the very Messiah himself, but the days pass, then weeks, and months – and all you must show for it is your disappointment and despair. And so, you lie there in your cold bed at night with your eyes wide open – a lonely, old widow.

"Children these days..." says Sarah Samuilovna and falls silent. But then she is not fond of talking all that much, she knows a thing or two about the world, and prefers to remain silent. Even her letters are brief and rather ordinary. "My dear Binyamin, I have received your postcard. Everyone here is the very image of good health. I have put away your night shirt – which you forgot when you were here in Kharkov – in a safe place, and you shall find it in perfect condition, when the time is right, God willing. Each one of your letters is truly a source of comfort to me

in this life. So please do not fail to remember, your loving Mother."

Tamar steps out into the alleyway to tend to her own affairs. Sarah Samuilovna gathers up the dishes from the table and heads back into the kitchen. It is seven o'clock in the evening. Binyamin gets back to work on his diagram – he has about another half hour in which he can still work by the light of day.

At that point, Rachel's voice can be heard in the intervening silence. She intends to leave Hadiach and go live in the city. What does her life amount to here, after all? True, during the summer months life is not all that bad here, there is still a bit of action around town. But during the winter? Snow lines the roads, covering the roofs and trees, and the streets are desolate – the days and nights are equally hard.

"God Almighty, Rachel! But don't you have some boyfriend who is dear to your heart? Are you really that lonely out here all the time?"

No, she doesn't have any boyfriend here that is close to her heart. She had one a few years back, but he went off to Kiev and got married to some woman there. And what will become of her in the end? The years are passing by, after all, and a woman's youth is rather short-lived. Binyamin must find her a position in the capital, no matter what. She has heard that an accountant can manage to get by quite well over there. True, she is not all that experienced in the profession, but she has been working at it for quite a few years now here in Hadiach. She asked Solomon to help her out as well. But Solomon refuses to agree to help her move. And what are the reasons for his refusal? It would be a veritable sin, in Solomon's opinion, to leave their parents all alone like that out in Hadiach.

"And the old folks themselves?"

"My mother thinks that I ought to leave this place. 'Do as you see fit, my child,' she says. 'That is a mother's fate. The little chicks grow up and fly the coop, heading off into the wide world out there'."

"And what will happen to Tamar?"

"I'll leave Tamar here in Hadiach for the time being. I have discussed that with my mother as well."

Two tears hang there from the young woman's eyelashes. Binyamin hastens to promise her his assistance. No, no indeed, things are not all as they should be in the Feigin household. The members of

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the family are quite attached and close to one another, and it would seem that peace and tranquility reign in the home – but let us take a closer look at what is going on behind the curtains. The son comes back from the distant city and every heart rejoices at his arrival – Welcome home, Shlomo'le! There is a minor holiday in the house, days of light and joy. The mother prepares all his favorite delicacies, and then come the family get-togethers, and easy heart-to-heart conversations. But just a few days go by and then – where is Shlomo'le to be found? Vanished into thin air! There he goes wandering around all night long outside the house, chasing after some non-Jewish skirt in the area. His face is getting thinner day by day, and the mother's face is turning colors from the shame and suffering as well.

Or, for that matter, let's have a look at the daughter. Here too, we do not discern any great satisfaction for the family. The daughter got married to some man, at a time when she was still of a rather tender age, and light on her feet. A short while later, the young woman came back home – with a terrified look in her eye, and almost barely breathing. The husband turned out to be a boor, a coarse, stingy man, and God knows what else! But perhaps he was not such a bad husband after all, perhaps he just failed to understand the young girl's nature. I mean, he was a good ten or twelve years older than her, and perhaps the girl had simply been taken with all sorts of empty fantasies that disturbed her peace of mind – when all she found at her husband's house was the routine of daily life, her husband's complaints, and her mother-in-law's petty nitpicking. And so, the daughter returned to her father's home with that terrified look in her eye and gave birth to Tamar. A few more years went by, and now she finds herself all alone at her parents' home – completely alone in the world.

No, no indeed, all is not as it should be in the Feigin household!

The twilight settles in out in the Garden alley. Binyamin finishes up his work for the day and puts away the tools of his trade. His mother's voice comes to him as she says:

"Come, Binyamin, let's step out for a bit – I must go see Esther about the noodles."

Now, my knowledgeable reader, don't go putting down the art that goes into making noodles for those who spend their summers in Hadiach. People stream into the summer homes in Hadiach and the

surrounding area from cities throughout the land. And the summer days, those days of slacking off and relaxing, are coming to an end, and the people have begun removing their white summer pants and are donning their crumpled weekday slacks, and the women have once more put on their ordinary aprons. The work of cooking, frying, and baking has begun, along with packing up and bundling away all of one's belongings. The bags and suitcases have been stuffed with the very best the countryside has to offer, to be brought back in to town. And amid all this bounty, there is not a single proper housewife in the group who has not tucked away a package of Yiddishe noodles, handmade by old Esther herself.

And there go old Esther and her daughter, making the rounds from house to house all through the heat of the summer, preparing those noodles of theirs. This too is a decent way to make a living in the community – Oh Master of the Universe! And if you think for an instant, my dear friends, that the labor involved in making *lokshen*¹ is easy work, or that it can be performed as a sort of afterthought – well you would be making a serious mistake!

First, for example, you must crack the eggs... have any of you out there ever worked at cracking eggs in your lives? Indeed, the author, in writing these lines, can already see, in his mind's eye, the smiles on the faces of all his readers, men and women alike: cracking eggs! A truly important profession in the history of mankind! A real science that must be studied at the university! Ah, but then the author has come along to fulfill his minor obligation to the reader and says: just a minute! Don't go dragging this profession through the mud! When you pour the cracked eggs into the mixture, even the slightest little error can destroy all the previous work that you've done, right along with that gentle crown of yolks and egg whites. Look here, for instance: the damage has been done, one of the eggs was rotten and so, with all due respect, the mixture, despite all the other fine, tasty eggs it contains, has gone bad in its entirety. If you pour just a single rotten egg into the mix – well, the author would be the last one to envy you your noodles. The stench of rotten noodles – no thanks! At any rate, when old Esther and her daughter prepare the dough for the noodles, they know quite well,

¹ Lokshen – noodles (Yiddish).

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thank God, just how to go about cracking the eggs. First you split the shell of the egg, then you pour it into a little bowl, and there you inspect it from every possible angle. And then and only then, if the egg is truly deserving, you can add it to the rest.

The previous year Binyamin met up once with the two women. And he talked at length with the younger woman, the daughter, who is already seventy years old. And so, he got to know the secrets of putting together a successful batch of noodles. Aside from his weakness for books and images, which he got from both his fine father and good mother, perhaps he also inherited his fair share of good old Jewish curiosity. Since after all, what has he got to do with lokshen, why should he be concerned at all about noodles?

The main thing – is kneading the dough! That's what Nechama tells him. And if you think that Esther and her daughter take fifteen rubles for a day's work as some sort of a gift – just wait until it's time to start kneading and it will be like a real slap in your face! On the contrary, go ahead and see what you yourselves are made of, step up to the dough and put your own strength to the test! And all this at the height of the summer, mind you, in the heat of the day, with all the flies and mosquitoes flitting through the air, along with all those other little stinging creatures that are so fond of Jewish dough, and faces covered in sweat, and naked hands and legs. You try to kick at them, you shake your shoulders – just like any old horse – but it's all in vain! They're stubborn creatures, and there they go buzzing away, and sucking your very blood, and then buzzing some more. Now if you add to all this the labor of rolling out the dough, and folding over the sheets, and then chopping it all up into long strands – well, perhaps you will have some small idea of just what it takes to make the noodles, and exactly how the work is truly done.

That's how Nechama put it to him. And now we see Binyamin and his mother heading over to Esther, the noodle-maker's house. They cross Poltava Street, then head down Romny Street, and then enter one of the alleyways, which brings them to Esther's rickety house. The old woman is sitting as usual on the bench out in the yard with her cane in her hand. The fading heat of the early evening covers the woman's copper face. There are many wrinkles etched in that face of copper. Each line has its own winding course that branches off in turn into all sorts of further little pathways; and these pathways, too, go winding

along on their merry way and get lost in the shadows.

"Good evening!" says Sarah Samuilovna, as she sits down on the bench facing the old woman.

"Good evening!" says Binyamin, as he too sits down on the opposite bench. Old Esther gives them a piercing look and nods her head.

"We've come about the noodles..." says Sarah Samuilovna.

The old woman turns her head in the direction of the house.

"Nechama!" she calls out to her daughter. But what a firm, energetic voice the old woman has. Perhaps that is the secret behind her ninety years – that selfsame energy and strength, and the commanding voice that a person has. Is that not what has energized Esther the noodle-maker and given her the strength to live so long and rule her little kingdom with such a firm hand?

Every evening, during the summer, for more than seventy years now, Esther the noodle-maker sits on that bench out in the yard. True, in years past there were quite a few women who joined her as she sat out here, along with little children, mere chicks with those miniscule heads of theirs, who went and grew up in their own turn from year to year. Then those years passed, and time left its mark on Esther's face, as one by one all those old Jewish women who had previously sat on the bench with her of a summer evening passed away, and the little children got scattered all over and it was as though the world around the old woman had literally emptied out. But through it all, Esther the noodle-maker still sits there on that bench as she ever did, with her cane in her hand, as the fading evening heat strikes the wrinkles in her face.

"Where are you both from?" Esther asks Sarah Samuilovna.

"I live in Kharkov, and my son here studies in the capital."

The old woman asks a few more questions, in that thick voice of hers, the commanding voice of a sovereign. And so, Sarah Samuilovna is forced to tell her life's story, including the fact that she was widowed three years earlier, and that her children have been scattered among the big cities, and how she followed her married son to Kharkov; then she told of how she came to Hadiach. Suddenly another question emerges from the mouth of the elderly Esther, and the conversation

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turns now to the friction between Sarah Samuilovna and her daughter-in-law back in Kharkov. How amazed you would have been to hear Sarah Samuilovna, who was not much of a talker by nature, pouring out her heart into the bosom of that old woman. Is women's nature not a rather wondrous thing? Here they are talking about the little things as well, those little things that poison a person's very life. Her daughter-in-law gives her four hundred rubles a month for household expenses. Can such a meager sum really manage to pay for feeding four people? Where does the rest of the monthly salary go? That Shimon of hers, her eldest son – may he live long and prosper – is an engineer and makes one thousand two hundred rubles a month. But that salary seems to disappear like a mere dream. All the daughter-in-law seems to be interested in is the theater, parties, and fancy dresses. And then the day came when she even went and bought some painting with which to decorate the walls for one hundred and fifty rubles – a painting of a stormy sea with some ship being tossed on the waves. A hundred and fifty rubles! That's how the money gets spent on all sorts of senseless items. And if the day should come when you dare to let slip any remark – all you'll get is silence! At least her daughter-in-law has this one good feature. When she gets angry she does not get resentful or abusive, as ordinary people do, but she just purses her lips – and hush! She says absolutely nothing and offers no response, all that you hear is the mother-in-law off crying out of sight.

Esther the noodle-maker listens to what Sarah Samuilovna is saying and nods her head. Sure, there is nothing new under the sun, old Esther has heard things like this before. Perhaps it was twenty years ago, perhaps it was sixty. There have been so many Jewish women who sat on this bench here down through the various generations. Who is not familiar with the lot of the widow and her bitter sorrows? Esther is also well aware of how aggressive a mother-in-law can be, and she can recall more than one daughter-in-law in tears – that formerly free bird, who just a little while after her wedding found herself tending to that little nest of hers, with a splendid melody ever on her lips. How wonderful the world seemed, what a glorious life we lead, Oh Master of the Universe! That is, were it not for the mother-in-law, that old, strange woman, whose hands are always busy at work, and whose face is all wrinkled and always turning colors in anger, a face that never smiles, never shines even the slightest bit of light. All she has to offer are grievances and demands that are enough to repulse even the most

innocent soul...

Yes, during her life on earth the old woman has heard her fair share of stories. She sits there on that bench of hers, with her cane in her hand, and nods her head.

"You have to give in a little, my child!" old Esther says. "That's how the world is. The young girls come up to the podium, and we must make room for them. Just a few years later there will be another batch of young girls who will come along to take their place. It is a wheel that never stops turning."

"Nechama!" the old woman calls out once more, as she turns her head in the direction of the house, with that thick voice of hers, a domineering, tyrannous voice. She furrows her eyebrows in anger and says, with a rather furious tone: "She must be making dinner in there. Just crawling along as usual – may the worms crawl like that through her gut."

"I'll just step inside a moment to talk to her about the noodles!" Sarah Samuilovna says, as she gets up from the bench. Binyamin is left outside with the old lady. Little by little the latter's anger gradually dissipates. The soft evening bells ring out in the darkening air. The first star comes out overhead, but the sky is still rather bright, and a mixture of lights and colors plays, growing dimmer off on the western edge of the horizon.

"Grandma Esther!" Binyamin says, choosing his words rather cautiously. "Rabbi Schneerson was buried in Hadiach quite a few years ago. Perhaps you recall the people who were here then when the Alter Rebbe was brought to town to be buried?"

The old woman remains silent for a little while. The question flutters in the air without seeming to find a foothold. The light evening breeze once again enters the alleyway, brushing against the tops of the nearby trees. You can hear it whispering among the branches. The crown of heaven continues to darken, and sad Ukrainian melodies can be heard hovering through the air as they rise on all sides.

No, the question has now found a foothold after all.

"I remember it," Esther the noodle-maker says. "Why wouldn't I remember it? My grandmother was a young girl at the time, and I heard the story straight from her mouth..."

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That evening the elderly woman told Binyamin a few of the ancient stories concerning the Alter Rebbe, Rav Zalman Schneur. It was an August evening in Hadiach. The voices of children playing in one of the nearby streets at first continued to ring out with laughter, but then those sounds too died down, and the night swept over the noise of the gentle town. The only movement was somewhere off in the distance, down Romny Street, the main street in town, where young men and women went walking near the movie theater, eating seeds and tossing away the shells.

Binyamin stored away a few of the little stories that he heard that evening directly from Esther, the noodle-maker, including: "The Death of the Rebbe", "For the Sake of All the Little Children", "The Burial", and "Go Forth, Avigdor".

The Death of the Rebbe

When the time of the troubles came to the land and the army of Napoleon invaded White Russia and came to the town of Liadi – where the Holy Rebbe had his residence at the time – Rav Zalman Schneur gathered up all his followers and they fled before the invader, heading south. In one of the villages, namely the village of Pena, the Rebbe took to his deathbed and turned his face to the wall, with only his old attendant in the room. All his followers stood outside, beneath the heavens, reciting Psalms. It was a winter day, and the frost was rather severe at the time – it was the end of *Tevet*¹.

When the pure soul of the Rebbe departed a holy voice could be heard emerging from the heavens – the deep sigh of the very Blessed One Himself, as it were. A great tremor shook the assembly outside from end to end, and there were cries and groans, mourning and lamentations. A fierce wind carried on its wings an ample helping of whimpering, whistling sounds, as snowflakes began to swirl all around and cover man and nature with a thick blanket of white.

That same day the bitter news arrived in the towns near Pena and a tremendous crowd rushed over from Pryluky and Konotop, Sumy and Romny. Representatives of the various congregations began debating

¹ Tevet - Hebrew month that usually falls out around January.

fiercely about where the Rebbe should have his final resting place. But then the old attendant emerged before the raging assembly and said: "Silence! Before his holy soul departed, the Rebbe said but one word: Hadiach."

And so, they removed the Rebbe from the peasant's house where he had his last breath and they laid his body down in the sleigh, lined with straw, and brought him to Hadiach. The crowd of people accompanying the body continued to grow along the way – until it became a rather tremendous multitude. When the procession would arrive in one of the towns, the shopkeepers would close their stores, and the teachers would close their Cheders, the tailor would put aside his needle, and the shoemaker would set down his hammer, and they all stepped out to follow the sleigh. And everywhere the funeral procession came, there would be fasting, tears, and eulogies.

And outside the frosty chill grew stronger, the heavens were overcast, and a fierce wind went whipping through the fields and along the roads.

For the Sake of All the Little Children

When the funeral procession arrived in Romny, the entire town, men, women, and children, came out to receive them. And there was one young boy among them, by the name of Leibke, the son of a poor widow, who was not yet bar-mitzvah age. When the procession arrived in Romny, the boy slipped out of his room and stepped outside and heard the footsteps of all those Jews walking along in silence; and all the faces were pale and twisted in anguish, and every heart seemed to weep and suffer. The funeral procession came to a halt before the main synagogue in Romny, and the body of the Holy Rebbe was brought inside and laid out on the *bima*¹. A tremendous number of candles were lit and the *hazzan*² tearfully sang '*El Malei Rachamim*'³. All the people gathered around the bima pressed and crowded together – it was a huge congregation – and there was not a dry eye in the crowd. But the

¹ Bima - Raised platform from which the cantor traditionally leads the services.

² Hazzan – Cantor.

³ *El Malei Rachamim* – God full of Mercy, a traditional Jewish prayer for the departed.

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synagogue could not accommodate all the people who had accompanied the Rebbe's body this far, and so there were thousands of people who had not been able to enter the synagogue and remained standing around outside. But little Leibke had always been a rather agile boy, and he had squeezed his way inside the synagogue, and he had his eyes and ears wide open – and he heard what there was to hear and saw what there was to see.

After '*El Malei Rachamim*', the Holy Rebbe's bier was taken back out of the synagogue, and the crowd continued on their way to Hadiach. And so, the caravan wound its way from town to town, from village to village, and from community to community.

In the town of Romny the little boy Leibke had joined the procession, as he was among those wild urchins who do whatever they like in life. He swore to himself that he would accompany the Alter Rebbe all the way to his final resting place. Now Leibke was the son of a widow, and his coat was worn and torn and virtually falling to pieces, and on his feet he wore no more than a pair of sandals with more holes in them than intact leather.

When the funeral procession had gotten just a few miles outside of Romny, the frosty chill began to seize the boy's feet in its viselike grip. Leibke leaped about every which way, began hopping up and down in a rather strange manner, and struck his feet against one another, but it was all to no avail. The stubborn frost had made its way into the very flesh and bones of the young boy, stretching out its chilly palm and slipping it beneath his threadbare coat. Leibke's bones began to tremble and his teeth began to chatter. He could not take it any longer and he started to cry out loud. One of the Jews in the procession, a man walking right behind the sleigh as it wound its way through the snowy path, looked at the boy. "Why are you crying, my child?" the Jew asked him. "I am cold!" Leibke responded and broke out in another round of rather bitter tears.

The Jew fell silent for a bit, and just cast a glance at the huge congregation that was following in the wake of the sleigh – a tremendous assembly of downhearted, deeply suffering Jews, with every face the picture of gloom, and every back bent in pain. The Jew noted the stormy gloom in the heavens as well, and heard the murmuring sound of the wind, and then he once more turned his eyes to the little boy Leibke. Then he walked up to the sleigh, where the holy

departed soul lay.

"Father!" said the Jew. "Do something for the sake of all the little children!"

As soon as these words left the mouth of the Jew the wind seemed to rage even more strongly, as though the image of the *Sitra Achra*¹ could be seen off on the edge of the horizon, gnashing his teeth and doing battle, he and all his followers, waging war against the very entourage of Heaven...

And after a few moments the storm suddenly died down and Leibke saw that the world was now lit up all around, and a warm breeze began to blow through the fields.

And that Jew there was the son and heir to the mantle of the Holy Rebbe, being none other than the *Admor*² Dovber, *the Mittlerer Rebbe*³.

The Burial

When the Alter Rebbe's holy soul departed, a tiny flame began to flicker and rise from the cemetery in Hadiach, in the royal forest along the banks of the Psel River. The flame burned day and night, and a fierce wind sallied forth from the forest and covered the flame, and heaps of snow piled high above it – but that flame held its ground and no power in the world could put it out.

And there are those who say that it was a spark of the light of the *Ein-Sof*⁴ that had come down to mark and sanctify the spot where the Rebbe ought to be buried.

When the Rebbe was lowered into the grave and the tomb was sealed, the sound of thunder suddenly rang out in the heavens. The earth broke open wide and a sort of cave suddenly extended itself from

¹ Sitra Achra - Literally, 'The other side', a Kabbalistic term referring to the evil forces of the world.

² Admor - a honorific title given to scholarly leaders of a Jewish community.

³ Mittlerer Rebbe - Rabbi Dovber Schneuri was called the "Middle Rebbe" in Yiddish, being the second of the first three generations of Chabad leaders.

⁴ Ein-Sof - Literally: 'The infinite', a Kabbalistic concept related to the original creation of the world.

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the spot of the gravesite all the way down to the banks of the river. A tremendous, bitter scream rose up as one from the huge crowd in the cemetery, and quite a few of them went running for their lives, shouting: The end of the world has come!

Later they erected the *Ohel*¹ over the holy grave and built that wall all around, which still stands to this day, and they took fire from the sacred flame and lit the eternal Menorah.

And there is an age-old tradition among the Hassids of Chabad that the light of that Menorah will not go out or fade forever, for it is the very heart and soul of the Nation. And on the day that the light of the Menorah shall, indeed, fade, tremendous troubles and hardships will be visited on the Nation of Israel – evils such as they never experienced, and the Nation's flesh will be trampled by scorpions, and they will no longer be able to find refuge anywhere.

Therefore, the Hassids take great care ever since to ensure – and it has been hundreds of years now already – that the meager light burning over the grave of the Alter Rebbe should never fade.

Go Forth Avigdor

Avigdor the informer went and denounced the Rebbe from Liadi before the royal authorities. The Rebbe was bound in chains and thrown in prison. A tremendous tumult then rose among all the Jewish communities and a few of the Hassidic leaders traveled to Saint Petersburg to try to convince the authorities to release the Rebbe. And the Blessed Lord came to their aid, and the Rebbe was released from prison and brought before Czar Pavel. The Rebbe found favor in the eyes of the Czar because of his great wisdom, candor and honesty, and the Czar was filled with anger at Avigdor the informer and handed the latter over to the Holy Rebbe as a lifelong servant. But the Rebbe simply sent the informer on his way, merely glancing at him and saying:

"Go forth, Avigdor! But once a year, each year, on the twentieth day of Kislev, you shall come to see me!"

¹ Ohel – Literary 'tent' – here, a structure built over a Jewish grave as a sign of prominence of the person buried within.

Now the twentieth day of Kislev, the day on which the Rebbe was released from prison, is a day of rejoicing for all his followers all over the world.

At this point, we must digress a bit to tell the story of Zerah the coachman, Esther the noodle-maker's first husband. On the day our story took place – it was the twentieth day of Kislev, as it happens – Zerah was traveling from Zinkov to Hadiach, sitting atop his perch and nodding off a bit, being slightly in his cups as he was. The horses were moving along lazily, when suddenly a rather old, elderly Jew appeared along the road, with his sack over his shoulder and his walking stick in his hand, looking for all the world like a pauper going from door to door seeking alms.

But the man was no beggar, no pauper seeking alms.

Zerah turned his head around and saw that the old Jew had crossed the bridge and turned left, heading in the direction of the Jewish cemetery. A sort of madness suddenly took hold of Zerah, and he leaped down off his perch and left the horses to their own devices, given that the beasts were quite familiar with the road home. Zerah proceeded slowly in the footsteps of the Jew. This all took place as the evening fell, and the roads were all covered in snow.

And behold, the Jew passed by the cemetery and continued on his way along the banks of the river. Then he stood still for a few moments, with his sack over his shoulder and his walking stick in his hand. Zerah the coachman turned this way and that – but the Jew had simply disappeared and was nowhere to be seen!

A tremendous fear and utter darkness seized Zerah, but as he had already begun to try to determine the true nature of that Jew, he decided that he would try to get to the very bottom of the matter all the same. He went down to those same bushes and began feeling around this way and that until, there among the shrubbery, he found the mouth of a cave hidden from view. He poked his head in the cave and saw a sort of long tunnel, and he saw the old Jew too, making his way deeper into the cave, with his head bent, and groaning from time to time: "My Lord, my Lord, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

And Zerah went and followed in the footsteps of the Jew, taking great care as he proceeded. Was not all this some sort of witchcraft? But there up ahead was the other end of the cave. The Jew went up to a

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little door and knocked on it three times. "Who's there?" came a voice from a great distance. "It's me, Rebbe – 'Go Forth Avigdor'."

Zerah the coachman was terrified and quickly rushed out of the cave. But when he arrived home he fell rather ill, and he did not manage to live out the year.

"...He was a violent man, but a kosher Jew, that Zerah of mine," says Esther the noodle-maker. "He was simply fond of the bottle, and that was his downfall."

The old woman fell silent. For a little while the two of them sat there listening to the rustling murmurs of the night down the alleyway. Somewhere off in the distance flames flicker in a few neighboring windows, but most of the houses have already gone dark and fallen fast asleep.

"Mother, time for dinner!" Nechama calls out into the yard.

Binyamin saw his mother coming up to them now. The son and his mother head off for the Garden alley, and their path is wrapped in silence and darkness. Even down the main street, Romny Street, a hush has fallen now. Only over by the movie theater a few young men and women walk back and forth, eating seeds and tossing away the shells.

Chapter 1.6

At last Binyamin managed to get away from the hands of the mischievous little girls and swam up to dry land. It was the work of the devil! A young man floats gently in the river, dreaming his dreams. And the two young girls, Tamar and Sarka, are making noise and splashing in the water, without a care about how deep it is. The other girls at the shore eye them with suppressed envy, sitting there with those round hats on their heads and amusing themselves with those silly games of theirs in the sand. Suddenly the two girls are seized by a veritable fit of joy, and they attack Binyamin, pushing him and squeezing him, pinching and tickling too, spraying him with shafts of water, trying to literally blind him and fill his lungs with water, and God knows what else! And the women and children see it all from the shore and start to laugh. Binyamin is forced to push away those dreams of his and counter-attack the two girls – and the shafts of water go flying through the air, and there are slaps, and pushing and shoving, and laughter, in all honesty! At last Binyamin manages to get away from the two little devils, but when he leaps up onto dry land he finds that he is rather short of breath and his heart is beating pretty hard in his chest. He quickly throws on his clothes and, immediately, his good mood and well-being return, and he starts to sing a little song, a happy song that seems to want to throw its arms around the whole world. The very universe seems to be spread out at his feet. The summer morning is wondrous down along the banks of the river: the heavens are light blue above and all around, the sun is layering the world in joy and splendor, and a light-blue wreath seems to stand out off on the horizon.

Binyamin quickly gets dressed – he has no time for child's play. He has an important job to do today – today he is going to inspect the cave, no matter what! If he does not have a tall-tale on his hands with that story of Zerah the coachman, and if old Esther did not simply lose her wits, then the cave of 'Go Forth Avigdor' must certainly be somewhere down there along the riverbank.

Today Binyamin is an explorer, a real man of science! He walks by

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the Jewish cemetery and makes his way along the riverbank. He can still hear the shouts of the children in the bathing spot, but quickly the voices die down and fade away. Here the signs of vibrant small-scale life can only be found in the flowers and tall grass. A butterfly flits among the tops of the flowers and the many colors of its wings shine as it flies silently through the air. Locusts and their larvae are also hard at work beneath the sun. A great sense of relaxation now washes over Binyamin. He takes a deep breath of the crisp, fragrant air; chamomile flowers and white and yellow dandelions, scattered through the green grass, are a refreshing sight, and the waves of the river off to his left make the water lilies sway, there where the reeds raise their stiff heads. A light breeze moves through the grass...

Binyamin arrives at the spot of those very bushes. Enough with all the silliness – he must get to work at once and he must do his job thoroughly. He splits up the area to be surveyed into set plots, dividing each section along its length, and then further splitting up the strips of land widthwise. Each section measures two meters by two meters.

Binyamin removes a notepad and pencil from his pocket and sketches the area in accordance with all the principles of proper geodesy. Then the search begins. He starts moving among the bushes, feeling around and examining every outcropping and bend in the ground, delving deep among the bushes and leaving no stone unturned. After about half an hour – or perhaps it was really two hours – Binyamin was still in a perfectly good mood. He moved from section to section with the same seriousness and purpose as at the outset. There was only one stand of bushes left now. If the mouth of the cave did not turn up there either, then it was a sign that Zerah the coachman had been good and drunk at the time the story took place and Go Forth Avigdor had merely appeared to him in an alcoholic vision.

The last stand of bushes covers a miniscule plot of land along the upper bank of the river. With a great effort, Binyamin clammers up the steep patch of land, and for the first time all afternoon his forehead is covered in sweat. He wipes off his brow and plunges into the stand of bushes.

Suddenly he spotted the mouth of the cave.

A mixture of plants and bushes hung over the cave, hiding the entrance from view. No sunlight would ever penetrate its interior, nor

would the stars ever catch a glimpse of it in the night.

Binyamin pulls out a hand-cranking dynamo flashlight from his pocket and squeezes his way inside the cave. It is dark, damp, and chilly. He starts cranking and the shaft of light falls along the walls of the cave. The hum of a small motor has a calming effect. He lowers his head and moves deeper into the cave.

He begins counting his steps. Three steps equal two meters. Every hundred and fifty steps amount to a hundred meters. Every hundred steps Binyamin bends one of his fingers down as a marker. He has already bent two fingers down and now counts another seventy-seven steps, at which point he arrives at the far end of the cave. The length of the cave is therefore approximately a hundred and eighty-five meters.

The illumination from the humming flashlight comes to rest on a little door hidden in the wall. He knocks three times at the door.

Silence. Not a single sound in response. Once again there are three knocks at the door.

"Who's there?" Binyamin hears his mother's voice, as though coming to him from some other world. He opens his eyes and sees the figure of a woman in the window. There is the first light of day and Binyamin finds himself in his bed. Who is knocking at the window at this early hour? Is that really Vera?

He leaps out of bed, quickly gets dressed, and steps outside.

"What is it, Vera?"

She has been sent to get him by Lidia Stepanovna. He must come at once to Vilbovka. Bobrov had beaten up the student, Solomon, and they had to bring the latter in to town, to the hospital.

Vera's angular features do not display any sorrow or pain. She even raises her fist up to her mouth and bursts into a bout of restrained laughter, which grows and turns into an outright fit of wild exultation, at which point the servant girl grabs her basket from the ground and heads off on her way. She had just stopped in to see him on her way to the market. The two men had squared off against one another like roosters, but Bobrov had been sly and crushed Solomon's leg with a thick wooden log, and then trampled him with his boots and broken the young man's teeth.

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Binyamin steps back inside the house for a few minutes. But the early dawn hour has not completely dissipated yet and the members of the Feigin household are still deep in sleep. Binyamin washes his face and quickly heads outside. The streets of Hadiach are empty and silent, there are only cows moving around lazily, heading for the enclosure from which they will be taken out to pasture. The eastern edge of the horizon has just now begun to turn red, and the chill of the night still dominates the vault of heaven. Scattered bits of hay and layers of dust lie in the streets, covered in the morning dew, and silence wraps its way around the fences and the houses.

Mordechai the coachman, who was formerly a butcher, is standing in his yard hitching up his horse to the wagon. The train arrives in Hadiach from Romny first thing in the morning, and Mordechai must get up early every day and drive his horse over to the station.

"Good morning, Reb Mordechai! We must go to Vilbovka!"

"What's the fuss?"

"I have to bring a patient to town, to the hospital."

And the wheels of the carriage begin spinning along the road to Vilbovka. The horse takes the first half of the way, which is all downhill, at a run. Mordechai the coachman moves along on the side of the road, so as not to shatter his bones, or the carriage wheels, along the stony path. But once the wagon has crossed the bridge, the road begins to climb upwards, and the horse's zeal evaporates, as he begins to proceed rather slowly, and not even the crack of the whip can get him to step up his pace.

And with the horse thus stepping along absent-mindedly, its hooves sinking into the dew-dappled dust, perhaps this is the place for us to sketch a little lecture about crime and punishment, or about the love and jealousy that lie in wait for the soul of the innocent man, like a bird of prey waiting on a chicken, or a story about a reckless young man, who gets to know a married woman and takes her and amuses himself with her, in the belief that he is actually doing right by the husband. And the rigorous author, whose every thought is focused on the bumpy road of his strange nation through the valley of tears, should perhaps make use of this fitting moment to turn his attention to Jewish people and their future.

The author could note all sorts of things while the horse drags along on its way. But given the fact that this entire story is a faithful chronicle of real events, the author has no desire to start running around in circles and intends to relate the events exactly as they occurred. The reader must therefore now imagine the road that leads from Hadiach to the village of Vilbovka in the early morning hour and the lazy horse, Pavlik, who takes no orders and scorns both the snap of the tongue and the crack of the whip. Mordechai the coachman seats at the perch atop the wagon, with the whip in his hand. His face has pleasant, almost noble features; indeed, it is hard to imagine that they are the features of a former butcher, a man who spent years in his butcher shop, letting out a 'hunh' from the very depths of his soul each time he struck the meat with his cleaver. The tip of the sun has just now appeared at the edge of the horizon in the east, bringing joy to all of existence, every single tree and blade of grass, every flower and blossom, every animal and lowly living thing. Even Pavlik forgets himself for a moment in honor of this appearance of the great orb of the sun and begins swinging his tail from side to side. The white fog is still spread over the surface of the river and down in the valley, but as the rays of sunlight slip into the fog and it begins to dissipate, rising from the surface of the river and floating up into the heavens, where it comes together as a light cloud with a rather peculiar shape. Drops of dew still coat the grass, but the sunlight glints off the dew as well, the dew and the dust, striking the valley and the meadow – and there is light and splendor throughout the world!

Three figures rise along the incline – Mordechai, the horse, and Binyamin. The latter two are the silent members of the group. On the other hand, Mordechai has begun to let loose, chattering away, spitting and making that sucking sound with his lips, and cracking his whip, and then talking some more, as is the way with coachmen. Mordechai is not one of those empty-headed young vanity-seekers – he is a man of the people and has gotten to know quite a few of them in his day. He has a sharp eye, too, a piercing, inquisitive glance, and he observes the world around him from morning to night. But does his spirit sag at the sight of all this disorder and neglect in the world of the Blessed Lord? God forbid! Mordechai the coachman has a full beard, and a suppressed smile hidden in its folds, and he can often be seen smoking a papirosa and letting fly a joyful gob of spit. Dear God of Mercy and Forgiveness, how much outrage and ugliness there is in this world of yours!

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Mordechai the coachman is quite familiar with the nature of women. His dealings have primarily been with the fairer sex – both earlier at the butcher shop, and even now, once he traded in his butcher's cleaver for the coachman's whip. Every morning he runs his horse over to the train station – that is his first job. But once he has brought the travelers into town and has had his breakfast, he then heads for the market. Women come to the market in Hadiach daily from the summer homes of Vilbovka, they purchase supplies for the entire week, shoulder loads that are all too heavy for them to bear, and then two or three of them get together, place their burdens in Mordechai's wagon, and have him take them back to Vilbovka.

In all honesty, the sight of those summer residents in the market is quite a funny one, the way they go about their dealings, do business, and even their very walk. And do you think they haggle over the prices? Perish the thought! They throw money around in grand fashion, and all at once the wagon is loaded up with bundles of eggs, and chickens, and cream, and butter, and fruits, and vegetables – the wagon is filled to the brim, and you have to make quite an effort to arrange all the baskets, and bags, and chickens with their feet bound, and then you still have to find a free spot in the wagon to just barely squeeze in the women, and then the horse sets out on its way to Vilbovka. But all at once one of the women will let out a mighty scream: she forgot to buy onions! And so, you must come to a standstill once more, and the lady leaps off the wagon to correct her mistake. A few minutes pass, then a half hour, even an hour – but the wagon and its inhabitants are still sitting there waiting for the lady and those onions of hers!

Mordechai the coachman lets fly one of his joyful gobs of spit.

"Nu, Pavlik!" he turns to his horse with a reprimanding tone, making that sucking sound with his lips and cracking the whip across the horse's back. Pavlik flicks his tail with evident pleasure and just keeps dragging along. He too is quite familiar with his master's nature, and the time for running and galloping along has not yet arrived.

And so, the wagon stands there all loaded up in the middle of the market, the women and chickens all raising a ruckus and groaning away in the carriage – but that lady has completely disappeared, as though the very devil himself snatched her away! The fellow-travelers begin to voice their complaints and resentments, as though it was not already hard enough for them to just stand there waiting for her in the heat of

the day. But there, at last, the lady is back, looking like she had just returned from the battlefield. She is clutching the onions in her hand like some hard-won booty, and her face is all aglow. But why is she shining like that, and what took her so long? This time she decided to haggle over the price.

There is another round of spit, that sucking sound of the lips, and the crack of the whip. "Nu, Pavlik!" This time Pavlik does not turn a deaf ear. A completely flat road stretches out before the travelers all the way to the horizon. The horse shakes his head and shoulders, raises his forelegs, and gives the wagon a vigorous shake. There is the edge of the forest now. The morning chill greets the travelers square in the face. Mordechai the coachman is silent – but not because he has run out of things to say, God forbid! If a man has a perceptive eye, then there are more than a few telling little facts that such a man might observe from morning to evening. But the well-experienced coachmen, who have spent many years traveling back and forth along the same road, have a habit of doing things in their own way. As they travel along this road, they and their horses know when there is a time to run and a time to stop running – yes, quite the contrary, to even go crawling along at a rather lazy pace; there is a time to smoke a papirosa and a time to just sit there sullenly on one's perch; a time to talk, and a time for sitting there in absolute silence.

As they approach the summer home of Stepan Borisovich, Binyamin leaps down from the carriage. There is a wooden folding bed set up next to the porch, and there, on an embroidered pillow, rests the injured, bandaged head of Solomon Feigin. Lida is standing by the side of the folding bed with that flexible body of hers bent over the invalid. Binyamin is seeing her face now for the first time since the night of the party. Stepan Borisovich comes out onto the porch, and he is dressed in yellow pajamas with rather fancy buttons, all spiffy and polished. Perhaps he is on his way out for his morning walk – that selfsame walk that is so very valuable to the life of the cultured individual.

"What happened?" Binyamin asks. "And how are we going to tell his mother?"

Stepan Borisovich pulls Binyamin aside and tells him all the details of just what transpired about two hours previously, by the first light of dawn, between Solomon and Bobrov. Glasha is the one who first saw the battle taking place. Who would have ever imagined such a thing?

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Ivan Dimitrievich Bobrov, whom Stepan Borisovich knew well from Leningrad, was a serious man, a highly educated man! But now it seemed that he had fairly lost his mind for a moment and cast aside all the trappings of polite behavior and gone out to do battle with some Jewish student like any other lowly nobody! At least if it had been a true boxing match, that was still somehow acceptable. In foreign countries it happens from time to time that two gentlemen will remove their jackets and engage in such a fistfight. More than once he, Stepan Borisovich, had been a witness to such encounters. There too he had seen wounded chins and the flow of blood. But those boxing matches had been carried out in accordance with a certain set of rules, and it was not at all proper for a gentleman to violate those rules in even the slightest degree. But what had Bobrov done? He had taken a thick log and rained down a deadly round of blows on the student – exactly as it sounds, he went swinging away and crushing the student's bones without any regard for the rules of engagement! There was reason to be concerned that the student's leg had been broken – he couldn't even move! And Glasha, who had been an eyewitness, says that even after the student had fallen down Ivan Dimitrievich had continued to hit him, striking him in the face, breaking his teeth, and inflicting wounds about the student's head. No, say what you will, but when it comes to the matter of boxing and one-on-one confrontations between two men, we Russians have yet what to learn from the cultured nations of the world! And what was the cause of all this wildness and savagery? Had he caught some bug, this Bobrov here?

Stepan Borisovich clapped Binyamin on the shoulder and a brief laugh revealed his dentures. It can only be that this is the work of a woman – that is his definitive opinion, and no one is going to change his mind even the slightest bit.

"Father!" Lida can be heard saying. "We must transfer the injured to the wagon!"

The men carefully lift Solomon, Binyamin and the Professor taking the head and Mordechai the coachman taking the feet, and they lay him down in the wagon.

"Binyamin!" says Lida. "After you bring him to the hospital come straight back here. They have all lost their minds – both Klava and her husband too. They might well send him to prison!"

Binyamin notes the look of fear in her eyes. Despite all his disappointments his heart is still drawn to this pale young woman.

"Okay!" he says, in a hoarse voice. The wagon begins to move. From one of the neighboring houses a young woman bursts forth, with a knotted kerchief covering her disheveled hair. She rushes up to the wagon and walks along accompanying it for a bit, looking all the while at Solomon with those light, piercing eyes of hers. The woman was Klava Bobrova.

"Monya!" she says. "Monichka!"

Solomon turns his head in her direction and makes a desperate gesture of submission with his hand. He pursed his lips and remained silent – in the first place, because of the pain; and secondly, because missing teeth do not really lend a very handsome look to a young man.

"Klava!" comes a rough man's voice – the voice of Bobrov. With a terrified look in her eye she comes to a standstill. Mordechai the coachman understands just what he must do. This time he makes a sucking sound with his lips and cracks the whip in such a way that Pavlik immediately grasps their meaning without another word or sound. The horse leaps from his spot, pulling the wagon and the pine trees of the forest go flying by the travelers as they pass. Vilbovka has already disappeared, and the horse is still mustering all his might and galloping along down the slope with wide, loping strides. The wagon is shaken back and forth, and Solomon's face is fixed in a painful grimace. Then there is a light pull on the reins, and Pavlik understands the sign and, in an instant, switches to a rather mincing, cautious trot. It is at that moment that Mordechai the coachman is once again inspired to speak freely.

"If I am not mistaken," Mordechai the coachman says, indicating Solomon with a sidelong glance, "this is a son of Haim Yakov the shochet. His parents' pride and joy..."

"Let him be, Reb Mordechai! He isn't doing well."

But in all his days, Mordechai the coachman never learned the art of diplomacy. He sits there on his perch, taking pleasure in rolling up a papirosa, and from time to time lets fall a series of remarks that are anything but honeyed. Boys these days! Those cut-ups of ours! They've got no religion, no wisdom, and are never up to any good.

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No, Mordechai does not beat around the bush – he is quite in the habit of simply slicing away with that cleaver of his without any preliminaries, and without any clever tricks.

"Reb Mordechai!" Binyamin tries to take the coachman's mind off Solomon. "You would do better to continue telling me that story about the women who come in to the market from their summer homes."

He is currently smoking a papirosa (for the moment has now arrived for a smoke for Mordechai the coachman), and he begins talking again. No, he does not harbor any tremendous affection for those fattened cows, even if they are the very source of his livelihood. All they bring to the market are high prices and the hatred of the heathens.

Take a look, for example, at the tremendous bounty piled up in Mordechai's wagon on one of these summer mornings, in the heat of the day. There are sacks of flour, and barley, and peas, and beans, and whatnot; there are wicker baskets of all kinds filled with bowls of butter and milk, eggs and meat, tomatoes and all sorts of other things that require caution and demand serious attention; the watermelons and cantaloupes must be kept separately; and above all, there are the chickens! All those chickens and roosters crowing and cooing away, raising a ruckus or just sitting there in silence, with their open beaks and parched throats. And finally – the women! Those women weighed down by the weight of their own flesh and their massive backsides, whose worlds consist of nothing more than wasting money, senseless chatter, and all sorts of stupidity. "Madame Rabinovich!" one of them says. "I believe that your chicken there has loosened its cords..." – "Oy, oh no!" the Madame in question cries out, and before she has a chance to clap her hands and have a look at that chicken of hers, the bird has gotten up and jumped out of the wagon. There are shouts and cries of confusion. "Stand still, you chicken!" And all three of the women get down from the wagon and lend a hand in the hunt. But the chicken is a stubborn one, and it manages to slip through the hands of the women as they grab away. The women are a rather laughable spectacle at that moment – they truly look like some comedy up on the stage! They encircle the chicken round about, trying to coax it with all sorts of strange sounds, clucking their tongues and entreating and pleading with the chicken in every which way. They try to ambush the chicken, and then run after it, cursing as they go, spreading out their hands and skirts to trap the chicken. At last, as the circle tightens around the chicken, one of the

ladies rushes the bird to grab it and bind its feet once more – but the chicken opens its beak wide and lets out a shriek, cranes its neck, lifts its feet off the ground, and dashes off sideways, slipping between the women's legs – and the bird is gone.

The wagon crosses the bridge, and the horse's hooves clop dully along the wooden planks. The road then begins to rise and, once more, almost as a mere matter of habit, there comes another round of spitting, sucking the lips, and cracking the whip. "Nu, Pavlik!" But Pavlik flicks his tail back and forth and makes believe that he cannot hear a thing. The tangle of fog has lifted from the river, and the morning shoots through the air like a trumpet, as the bright sun spreads its pleasing light all around. Solomon's eyes are closed, he is sleeping now. The wagon drags its way up the incline and finally arrives in the center of town. However, the bellybutton of Hadiach is hardly the scene of any hectic action. The hotel is hidden in the shade, all two stories of it standing there erect. The doors of the shops are open wide, but no one is walking in and out. A woman is there walking along with her basket on her arm.

There is peace and tranquility in the heart of the town of Hadiach, peace and tranquility and the very blessings of the Lord.

The wagon arrives at the far end of Romny Street. The hospital is there. Binyamin steps into the infirmary and turns to the doctor on duty. A short while later two orderlies take Solomon down from the wagon and bring him inside the hospital on a stretcher. Binyamin is quickly informed of the results of the examination. The left leg was badly injured – it may well even be broken. They will only know after performing an x-ray. There is some concern about one of the ribs too. The head has been wounded in two places – one temple was lightly damaged, but there is a deeper gash near the base of the skull. He has two broken teeth. The patient will have to remain in the hospital for a few days.

It is eleven in the morning. On his way home Binyamin stops off at Rachel's office. They sit down on the bench in the public garden and Binyamin tells her everything that happened. At this point he is no longer responsible for taking care of Solomon, and he has handed off the problem to the members of the Feigin household.

At the house Binyamin runs into Esther the noodle-maker and her

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daughter Nechama. Old Esther is sitting on the bench out in the yard with her cane in her hands, but Nechama is standing over the wooden board and kneading away. For a few years now Nechama is the one who does all the household chores, including the work of making the noodles. However, Esther is still the lady of the house. As long as she is still breathing, she remains the sovereign ruler.

Binyamin's mother serves him breakfast. From the landlord's room comes the sound of a slight tumult. There is the sound of a woman crying – it is the voice of Pesya, the mother. Binyamin can hear another woman's voice offering words of encouragement. Then the door opens and in walks Haim Yakov as well, the head of the family – every one of them, all the members of the Feigin household have gathered at the home somewhat early today, and they quickly set about giving advice, licking their wounds, offering words of comfort and encouragement, and trying to develop a strategy.

Binyamin sits down to begin working at his sketches. The house has been enveloped in mourning, only the sound of the noodles being kneaded comes from the kitchen. This can only mean that all the members of the Feigin household have gone off to the hospital. About two hours later some rustling noises can be heard in the neighboring room, the soft sounds as of people walking around on tiptoe. Then once again there is the sound of subdued tears, of a woman's voice crying. Sarah Samuilovna, who had what to do in the kitchen, was coming and going with a distracted look on her face.

"Binyamin!" Rachel calls to him from the other room, and he goes to join in the family meeting. Pesya, the mother of the house, is standing off to the side and busy with some work, but her lips are trembling. Rachel is walking up and down the length of the room. Haim Yakov is sitting in his chair at the head of the table and smoking his pipe. But how pale his face seems this morning.

They went to the hospital, but they were not able to see Solomon. Binyamin is forced to tell them all the details of what transpired. Well, once upon a time, there was a girl in the world named Klava Bobrova...

Rachel: "We must take him to court!"

She is walking around the room and splitting the air with her fists. No, we must take him to court, that Bobrov there, no matter what! We still have our Soviet authorities in this world! Klava must also be held

accountable for her actions.

"We must have them thrown in jail!" Rachel decides rather energetically, as she continues walking up and down the length of the room.

"What good will throwing them in jail do you?" Old Pesya asks. "I mean, Solomon is already laid up in the hospital."

No, she continues to insist on throwing them in jail! We must grab hold of them, imprison them, throw them in chains!

Pesya: "We have to first hear what Solomon has to say about all this."

"Lida Edelman is also interested in the outcome," says Binyamin. "She asked me to return to Vilbovka today."

Rachel comes to a standstill.

"We'll go together. I want to get a look at this Bobrov!"

And so, the family meeting is adjourned, although Haim Yakov did not utter a single word.

It is five o'clock in the afternoon. A few people are sitting around on the porch at the summer home of the Edelman's. Everything is drenched in politeness with perhaps a slight dash of boredom. The table is covered with a fresh tablecloth, the boiling *samovar*¹, cups, and spoons all sparkle, and the strawberry jam from the garden is translucent. Klara Ilynishna, the sick lady of the house, is seated at the table with her neck cloaked in a woolen kerchief. A pine cone rustles as it falls from the tree, and the brief cry of a bird is torn loose and then fades, but other than these random sounds the garden stands there in profound silence. The trunks of the trees drowse there on their feet, as the treetops shoot up into the heavens. By the side of the pines the grass and tiny flowers seem frozen in place. The elongated shadows have found a spot for themselves at the foot of the pines. Even they observe a certain regular order in their lives. The mosquito has not yet begun to buzz about, the cricket has not yet begun to chirp, even the

¹ Samovar - a heated metal container traditionally used to heat and boil water in Russia.

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cicada has yet to set about its vocal labors. All is silent in the garden.

A group of people sits around on the porch, drinking tea and listening to Stepan Borisovich's lecture about life in the countryside. In all honesty, what is life like for all those people living in the big cities? What force draws these people to their cramped homes, the foul weather, and a life of dejection and abandonment? It is always the same oppressive stony regime, the same noise of the streetcars, the whine of the trolleys, the rattle of the cars and the fumes of gasoline; the same murky sky overhead, the same sparse green along the boulevards... and then behold, one heads off to a small town, to one of those heartwarming cottages, surrounded by a fence and a garden. One tends to the garden, the trees and the vegetables, and everything is blooming and full of life – even the flower beds that are the very love of your life: with its colorful lilies, violets, and chickweed. The days of your life pass on by slowly, without any running about or confusion. But what do you have back in the city? One might mention the theaters, museums, and exhibitions, which one goes to see once in a blue moon.

No, Stepan Borisovich is not at all content with what the big cities have to offer. People are seized by a herd mentality and they go crowding themselves in to the cities, escaping from the open spaces of nature to seek refuge in those little stony crevices, without a forest, or any vegetation, or the expanse of the sky overhead, or the vibrant breeze that blows past.

At this point that scourge of a cough assails Stepan Borisovich once again, and he turns red in the face and cringes, as he wipes his brow with a clean handkerchief.

" Syoma!" says Klara Ilynishna, and her voice is like the trembling sound of a violin. "There is no need to go talking so much!"

She gets up from her seat and brings out a cup of warm milk from the kitchen. Stepan Borisovich takes little sips from the milk and continues to lament his bitter fate. This time his words are intended for Rachel Feigin alone. It seems that his lungs have indeed suffered some damage. This cursed cough! The Edelman family has been vacationing for two months now in Vilbovka, but the results of their stay are not at all comforting. True, the cough has gotten a bit better. But now he must return to Leningrad, and he will once again have to suffer the awful climate, all the pollution, the rain, and the fog.

"I am going to see Klava!" says Lida, as she gets up from her seat. She stands there for a moment without moving, and her face is turned in the direction of Stepan Borisovich. Perhaps there was also a hint of something in her eyes, intended for her father. Then she was crossing the little patch of forest that separated the two summer homes – ever light on her feet and with that delicate physique of hers.

All eyes are on the young woman as she goes.

"As such, let's see what we can do about Bobrov!" says Stepan Borisovich with a touch of resentment, as though he is undertaking this move against his better judgment.

Rachel cuts in to the Professor's words. She must forewarn him that her wounded brother has decided to take Bobrov to court! He will seek a three-year jail sentence.

Stepan Borisovich raises his hand, and it is a restrained, calming gesture. He himself is a scientist, and he is used to analyzing every problem, examining it from all angles. What do we have here, if we put it under the microscope and really try to get to the bottom of things and see how it all developed? First – there are the facts. He himself, Stepan Borisovich, is a realist. He dealt quite a bit with this problem today and lost no small amount of time over it. Bobrov told him everything that happened, pouring out his heart to him as a man would to a colleague and equal. And strictly between us – his own daughter had had a hand in all this as well. He is now the one playing the mediator, his daughter Lida thrust him into this difficult role, even though it is all rather unpleasant for him.

But let's have a look at what happened from the point of view of Bobrov. The man goes and travels from Leningrad to Vilbovka. He has been given a month's vacation from his job at the factory and he travels by train for two or three days, and he is just bursting with joy. The train finally arrives at the station in Hadiach, and the man emerges from the car with his suitcase in his hand. His young wife has come to meet him. They take their seat in the carriage and head for Vilbovka, but the woman's face is downcast and dejected. The carriage arrives in Vilbovka, and the servant girl comes out of the house with the baby in her arms. The father gives Seryozha a little attention, then washes his hands and has himself a cup of tea. The young wife sits out on the porch, gloomy and bewildered.

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"Cut to the chase, Syoma!" says Klara Ilynishna. "The evening will be upon us in another little bit!"

No, as far as Stepan Borisovich is concerned all these details are hardly superfluous. He had a long talk with Bobrov today, and he knows all that happened from the very source itself.

"Yes, but you only know one side!" say Rachel. "The other side is lying wounded right now in the hospital."

That was how Rachel put it, in her capacity as the official representative of the Feigin family. But it is not all that easy to get Stepan Borisovich's back up against the wall. After that cup of milk his cough has eased up, and he is now talking and talking away without a single break. His words are intended for Rachel alone; at this point the negotiations are taking place between the Professor and the victim's sister.

True, he is only familiar with one side of things. But let's first analyze the events from the point of view of the husband; objectively, first and foremost...

As such, the young wife is seated out on the porch, and she is downcast and bewildered. The evening is coming on and the figure of a young man appears among the trees in the forest. Who is that young man? Whom is he waiting for? Klava notices him, gets up from where she is sitting, and rushes up to him, and they go walking together for quite a while in the forest. The young man reaches out and caresses the woman's head – and Bobrov sees this too, and he is a rather perceptive man. The young student sits down on a tree trunk and Klava returns to the porch. "Who is that young man?" – "My husband..." Klava replies, and she is rather worked up. She loves the young man, and it is more than she can take. There is only one way out – she must separate from him, from Bobrov. That's what the woman says, as she bursts into tears. Bobrov goes out to the young man sitting on the tree trunk. "Go away!" says Bobrov. "I'm sitting on public property," the young man responds, "and what's there to talk about? All words would be superfluous!" Bobrov approaches the young man silently, only his lower lip is trembling. The young man steps back, turns away, and disappears into the forest. Then comes the bitter talk between Bobrov and his wife. His head is lowered, his words are pleading, there are complaints and tears. It was only then that Bobrov grasped the extent of his disaster.

All the people gathered around are listening to Stepan Borisovich's words, and Klara Ilynishna does not try to get him to hurry up this time. But why are the Professor's words now so different from what he told Binyamin in the morning? Did he not previously speak in rather fiery terms? Did he not drag through the mud all those uncouth men who, when a fight breaks out between them, fail to remove their jackets and set about confronting one another in a boxing match worthy of highly educated gentlemen?

The Professor continues speaking, and this is no lesson in mechanical science, nor some lecture intended for his students. No, the Professor is now cutting away at the living flesh with that scalpel of his, he is now going to work on those heavy stones that burden the very soul of man.

It is nighttime now, and Bobrov is lying in his bed but his heart is wide awake – it is that manly jealousy which is eating away at him to the extreme. Klava is getting ready to go out. "Where are you headed, Klava?" – "I must go..." and she steps out into the darkness. Little Seryozha's lips are sucking away in his sleep. The pendulum of the clock swings back and forth and its ticking sound fills the sleepy house. Bobrov is lying there in his bed. What a night of bitterness! A night of bitterness and painful sorrow! He imagines his wife in the arms of that young man. They are making fun of him, of Bobrov, rolling with laughter and clowning around... He sees all these foolish images in his mind, nightmares brought on by that evil wind! The man's heart struggles in the middle of the night and thoughts of murder seem to steal their way into his mind. Now the horizon is beginning to turn light grey. In the windows he can just make out the base of the pines. But what does he hear from the forest? Soft voices, the echo of voices, whispering and low laughter, a sigh, a few words of support and encouragement: "Just don't lose heart, Klava!" Somebody opens the door and sneaks into the other room like a thief – it is Klava. Bobrov leaps out of bed and heads out to the forest. Indeed, there is the young man sitting on that tree trunk and smoking a papirosa. Bobrov grabs that big log and goes after him.

"God forbid I should try to justify such an act of hooliganism," says the Professor, turning to Rachel Feigin. "But did your brother not do everything he could to ensure that he would not escape those very blows? What drove him on to come here at that hour?"

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"It was jealousy that made him do it."

Stepan Borisovich looks at her with wide wonder in his eyes. If there are such crazy people as this in the world, then he, the Professor and scientist, is washing his hands of any analysis of the concatenation of events.

Rachel explains what she meant, and she seems to hesitate this time:

"Perhaps he suspected that Klava would be intimate with her husband. Perhaps my brother was aware of how easily a woman's heart can give in. It is often rather difficult for a member of the fairer sex to close off the road that has already been conquered."

Two young women and a rather tall man appear in the forest. Stepan Borisovich calls to them:

"Ivan Dimitrievich, please come up!"

The three people approach the porch. They are Lida, Klava, and Bobrov. Binyamin recognizes Bobrov and looks him over, but Klava rushes up to Rachel and begins to ask her about Solomon. How is he doing? What did the doctors say?

Binyamin continues to look at Bobrov, and he notes a rather tall man, about thirty years old, with a thin face and flashing grey eyes behind a pair of glasses – an exhausted, bewildered set of eyes. Only the nape of the man's neck and his voice are awkward and rough. But what a caressing glance Lida, that pure dove, tosses the way of this bespectacled intellectual! She even leans over towards him and removes some black thread that clung to his embroidered shirt.

Bobrov steps over to Rachel to make her acquaintance, but Rachel does not see his outstretched palm. She is completely consumed by her conversation with Klava. They did not yet get a chance to see Solomon. His condition is rather serious, although it does not seem that his life is in any real danger.

Everyone assembled noted Bobrov's outstretched palm. But the man is still breathing, he has not yet been tossed out onto the trash heap. From the opposite end of the table Bobrov's bass voice bursts forth, as he regales Lida with some ridiculous story that happened to one of their acquaintances in Leningrad. The sound of Lida's laughter can now be heard – like a ringing silver bell.

Rachel suddenly gets up from her seat. All eyes turn to her erect form.

"Let's go, Binyamin!" the young woman commands, and she descends the stairs of the porch without saying goodbye.

"What's the rush?" Klara Ilynishna can be heard saying.

Everyone gets up from where they were sitting. Lida can be heard whispering in Binyamin's ear. Stepan Borisovich and Bobrov step down to accompany the departing members of their group.

Indeed, Lida is the one who makes the rules and lays down the law in the house of Professor Edelman. She has tricks of her own, various stratagems and strategies. It can all only mean that she has decided in her heart to rescue Bobrov from this dire situation, and she is the one who has prohibited all-out war.

The three men and the young woman walk along the road that leads to Hadiach. The light of day is fading, but as they emerge from the forest they can still see the illusive flames of the orb of the setting sun off in the west. The final bonfire is still raging off on the distant horizon, lighting up the treetops, sparkling in the windowpanes of the houses, striking even the faces of the little group as they walk along. And here comes a drove of mosquitoes, a veritable nation flying in utter confusion, as it descends on them and begins to dance its evening dance by the light of the dying bonfire of the sun. The deep azure heavens are pure and enchanting – the world's curtain that covers all of life's longings and deep desires. But just a few minutes later one raises one's eyes and gazes upon that curtain. The first star has appeared. It seems like a magic trick, or some sleight of hand. Yet just a short while later there are tens of thousands of little fiery points of light strewn throughout the dim azure curtain.

"Ivan Dimitrievich!" says the Professor. "To my mind, you must admit that you did not act properly. You must apologize to that student there."

Bobrov then made his voice heard, and it was a rough, masculine voice:

"True, I may well have overdone it a bit. But you want me to apologize?"

No, he had no intention of apologizing to anyone, even if they

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hauled him off to prison. That student there had gotten what he deserved.

"You're also going to get what you deserve!" said Rachel, as she stepped up her pace. But what a sorry figure Stepan Borisovich cuts – it is truly the look of a downtrodden Jew! All that work of his, all his efforts at making peace, have gone down the drain. Indeed, perhaps there is some difference between mechanical science and the science of the suffering human soul! Had Stepan Borisovich ever had occasion in his life to get to know the storms that life can bring, the vicissitudes of human emotions and desires, the collision of those dark forces, that seem to be dormant for so many years, and then, all at once, they break loose from their bonds and wreak havoc and devastation everywhere?

Rachel and Binyamin head along the road as it slopes down towards the Psel River. The mixed multitude of colors is disappearing off on the edge of the western horizon. Tens of thousands of stars flash in the dark curtain, and no one even noticed when they sallied forth. It is true wizardry, the miraculous work of God! All at once the buzz of the dancing mosquitoes melts away, and at long last, somewhere off in the distance the sound of the hidden cicada has burst forth. The darkened banks of the river have emptied out, even the young lads and the very ducks have gone off to rest for the night.

There is silence and desolation along the riverbank.

"Bobrov's big love is that Lida of yours..." says Rachel in an angry voice, and then Binyamin notices a slight change in her, a change which drove him to take her by the arm and even veer off the road with her to head down to the banks of the river. They remove their clothes and go for a swim by the fading light of day. The light dies down, evening comes on, and then the thick darkness touches the ground and covers all the desolation all around. But Binyamin and Rachel did not notice this desolation. Once again, the two of them were like a single, happy, trembling bend in the river, the kind a man might dream of in the night in that cold bed of his.

Chapter 1.7

The season of departures from Hadiach is now in full swing. The Edelman and Bobrov families have already left Vilbovka. With every passing day the summer vacationers fill the train cars departing from Hadiach, and it is not all that easy to secure a ticket.

But how could Klava Bobrova have left Solomon, wounded and broken as he is, to follow her husband back to Leningrad? The ways of life are truly a source of wonder! After all the experiences and the blows Klava simply took Seryozhenka in her arms and returned home with her husband to Leningrad when the summer was over. As if the events that transpired among Solomon, Klava, and Bobrov, were nothing more than the worn-out adventures of a summer vacation?

Bobrov's month of vacation had not yet finished, but he had begun to loathe Vilbovka. They decided to spend about two weeks in Sestrozsk, along the shores of the Gulf of Finland.

Yes, the summer vacationers were all emptying out of Vilbovka. No colorful young girls' kerchiefs fluttered anymore among the pines, no white woman's blouse shone, even the sounds of laughter had gone silent everywhere. And yet the August sun continued to do its thing, still filling the forests, fields, and roads with its floods of splendor. The blessings descended on the Psel River as well – there was fire and light in the water, along with the light blue of the sky and the white candor of a bank of clouds. A lightweight boat cuts through the waves, as the oars rose and fell in turns, spraying shards of foam as they went. To either side of the boat the banks of the river stand in utter silence, along with the shrubbery, the sand, and the green pastures.

Rachel Feigin sits in the boat tending to the rudder, and Binyamin is in charge of the oars. Tamar is in the boat too. Today is Sunday and Rachel has the day off from the office. Little by little Rachel and Binyamin were seized by a great sense of restlessness in recent days. Every evening they go out and spend a few hours along the desolate banks of the river, but they cannot seem to ever get enough. The river

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lies at their feet somewhere between waking and sleeping. The stars, the darkness, and the silence are all reflected in the water. Off in some spot hidden from view, in the shade of one of the bushes along the riverbank, the two of them sit together every evening. The riverside shrub covers them with its tiny wings, and they can sometimes even hear the calming whisper of its leaves.

They make use of every possible excuse to get away from the prying eyes of their neighbors. It is now Binyamin's turn to shave himself every day, and put on cologne, comb his hair down, and check himself quite often in the mirror. Then he goes over to his mother.

"I'm going out for a little walk, Mother!" he says in a downcast voice, his eyes lowered to the ground. But there is a smile playing about his lips, and a world of joy in his heart.

"Go, my son, go!" his mother replies with a sigh. Go try and figure out the true nature of young people! All through the summer they resent each other – nothing but hurtful, harsh words, and needling. The boy goes off and finds himself some young lass among the summer vacationers in Vilbovka, and the girl goes around with some clumsy guy, Heaven help us. Then, with just a few days remaining before they must separate – behold, a completely different spirit seems to have taken hold of the two of them...

"Go, my son, go!" Sarah Samuilovna repeats herself. For a few nights already, Binyamin has been spending time with Rachel Feigin. At last they seem to have located the path that leads from one person's heart to that of their fellow human being.

But today is Sunday, and they are sailing along in that boat by the light of the sun. The boat slices through the surface of the water, yet the slit it leaves in its wake is easily repaired – only a blurred line marks their passing, along with the lazily rising and falling waves. Rather against their wishes Tamar has joined them for the day – the little girl cried and made quite a fuss, and even a round of chocolates and a ticket to the movies were unable to sway her heart this time. And so, she is sailing right along with them at this point. On the floor of the boat, beneath one of the benches, a none-too-small basket is tucked away, filled with the provisions that Rachel prepared with her very own hands. As she had gone about these minor preparations you could hear a joyful hymn rising in the kitchen. There is light and sun in Rachel's face – what

a wondrous thing it is indeed, to see how festive those features of hers now seem! Look there at the bend in that delicate neck of hers, with its shade and its warmth – Binyamin is quite familiar with that warmth, he has more than once drawn his fair share of it himself.

The oars rise and fall in turn, but at times they also just stick out from the boat for a little while, and the vessel just cruises along without their assistance. The oars stand there like upturned palms, as drops of water fall from their tips, creating gentle, round waves along the surface beneath. But then the boat begins to slow down little by little and get stuck along the way, and so the oars are once again pressed into service, rising and falling in turn.

"Are you worn out?" Rachel asks, and Binyamin can hear in that question of hers the woman that she has always and forever been, hears the flutter of her sheltering limbs as they manage the household affairs, or as she gives herself up to him in those dark nights.

No, he isn't worn out just yet, there is still plenty of strength left in those muscles of his. The oars rise and fall by turns, and the lightweight boat cuts through the patch of water – shedding shards of water, foam, and blinding light in its wake.

Binyamin and Tamar are dressed in nothing more than linen shorts. Rachel, the respectable mother, is dressed in a skirt and blouse and all sorts of other cumbersome and oppressive articles of clothing. The sun strikes the tanned, naked flesh, but Tamar and Binyamin are not at all concerned about the searing sunlight. Already at the start of the summer they went through that moment of light skin and blisters and a sunburnt back and chest. At this point they are quite immune to the antics of the sun.

"Can I go for a swim, Mom?" Tamar asks. Rachel does not hear the question, seated as she is at the rudder and lost in her own thoughts, with a smile playing about her lips.

"Yes..." Rachel replies at last, as though just waking up from a dream. "When we get to shore, Tamar!"

There is a splash in the water. The mother lets out a terrified scream. Without waiting Tamar had leaped from the boat into the water. There is grim foreboding and a knocking of the knees. Rachel is not aware of all the time Binyamin and little Sarka spent working on

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their swimming. And as she leaped from the boat, Tamar dove into the water headfirst. Now there are nothing but rings of water expanding along the surface – but Tamar is nowhere to be seen!

Rachel lets out yet another scream. Binyamin cannot bear the look of terror in her eyes, so he lets go of the oars and jumps into the water himself. But there the head of that mischievous little girl appears off at a reasonable distance, and she throws her mouth open wide and lets out a tremendous laugh. Now the two of them will show that terrified mother of hers just what they are capable of when it comes to the front crawl.

"Tamar!" Rachel can be heard calling from the boat, but her voice gradually dies down and fades away, until she has completely fallen silent. Binyamin and Tamar now get down to work.

Now I, as the author, hope that there may well be a little group of experts among my readers, people who are familiar with the various swimming styles. It is to this group, this band of experts, that I would like to pose the following question: what is preferable – the breaststroke or the front crawl? My modesty will not allow me to express my own opinion on the matter. If I had the audacity to seriously deal with the swimming styles, those experts would be completely in their rights to stand up and tear me to pieces like a fish – like a stuffed fish, properly salted and peppered on a bed of onions, that would be rather pleasing to the taste of every Jew.

Now Binyamin trained the two little girls, Tamar and Sarka, to practice the front crawl. And at this point I, the author, can see the devotees of the breast stroke assailing me as one and asking me derisively, with their fists clenched tight: who went and put this hero of yours in charge of ruining two perfectly fine Jewish souls? Yet as I sit here at my desk behind lock and key, I have no fear of that derisive tone or those clenched fists and so, I hereby reply to my accusers with the following answer: My dear friends! My brothers and fellow devotees! Let us take up this little scalpel of ours and examine the breaststroke in all its details. For example, let's have a look at the arms movement – what do they do? A. They are spread out to either side; B. They are gathered together under the chin; C. They are crossed and straightened out in front; D. There is a brief pause, and then repeat, etc. Now do we find any similarly laborious process when we turn to the front crawl? Or let us consider the work of the legs, for that matter...

At this point I can see my readers, those who are not expert swimmers, shouting at me at the top of their lungs: Enough! All those little minor details about the swimming styles – it's all about as interesting as yesterday's weather, as far as we are concerned!

And so, with a deep sigh that rises from the very depths of my soul I must return to the main thrust of my story. It is all a matter of luck, after all, and a man can negotiate, and strive, and drench himself in sweat, and still get nothing in return.

As such, Binyamin and Tamar now get down to work – the work of the front crawl, that is. We will yet have occasion to talk more about the young girl Tamar, Tamar and her adventures in the valley of tears. But for now, it was a festive day for the three of them, that Sunday towards the end of August, 1939. Rachel, as woman and mother, was seated there in the boat, and the two little devils – big and small – were swimming all around in the water right before her eyes. Their tanned arms and bodies flew by, their heads turned now to one side, now to the other, taking a deep breath, keeping the rhythm with their legs, and throwing off shards of water and stormy waves, as all sorts of sounds burst forth from the light blue surface of the river, the echo of voices, and other illusive visions. Overheated and filled with joy the two exhausted little devils get back in the bobbing boat. Rachel, woman and mother, is there to receive them.

"You wild girl!" Rachel rages. "Come here and let me give you a slap!"

And the mother embraces her soaked daughter and kisses her on the eyelids. Binyamin does not move over to receive his own reward, but he too is handed a hearty laugh, a truly wonderful laugh – wondrous and filled with soulful joy. Binyamin once more takes up the oars. There is might and daring in those muscles of his. The boat flies like an arrow across the surface of the water – dear God, how beautiful life is! They turn for the shore, pull the boat up out of the water and walk across the dry land. Their refuge is off hidden from view – a secluded, silent spot, and the three of them spread themselves out beneath the sun and lay there for a little while. Now Rachel has been rescued as well from the burden of all those clothes of hers and is left wearing just her bathing suit – a black satin suit with red stripes. At this point it is her turn to go for a swim. But look at that little Tamar of hers. She is giving her mother a lesson in the front crawl!

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Soon the basket with its provisions has been brought forth from its hiding place. A linen tablecloth has been spread on the grass, with light blue flowers embroidered along the edges. There is bread and butter, roasted meat and fruit, and even a bottle of homemade wine – truly a little feast down by the banks of the river, a day of wonder and shouts of joy, a day of splendor and magnificence! Tamar's prattling does not in any way bring anyone down this time, and even the adults let their tongues go wagging away as well. The cup of wine passed from hand to hand, and even Tamar was given her due. The light blue of the sky seemed to stand out even more strongly now, along with the glorious light of the sun, the green of the grass and the bushes – every one of their 248 limbs seemed to truly feel the shining world all around them.

As they headed back to Hadiach the evening was already coming on. The arms of the mother and daughter are filled with bunches of flowers. Rachel presses the flowers to her heart, and her step is light, but Tamar is exhausted from all the day's activities, and she is dragging along behind.

"You're asleep on your feet, Tamar, your eyelids are already stuck together!"

She protests weakly and continues to fall behind. Binyamin spies Roman Nazarovich Ivanchuk in his yard and bids farewell to Rachel and Tamar and steps in to see the old teacher. Roman Nazarovich is working on his garden, watering the heads of cabbage and the tomato plants.

"Ah, nu, ah, nu, Comrade Student!" says Roman Nazarovich as he straightens up to his full, albeit short, height, over the vegetable beds. Indeed, this man always has both feet on the ground, without any clever tricks or fantasies. He has a weakness for the vegetable garden, and in the spring, he sows his seed, all summer long he tends to the plants – and now autumn is here, and the plants have set down solid roots, taken hold and shot forth, and are currently yielding their produce.

Binyamin lays out his request before the man. There is a young girl in Vilbovka that he has known for two years now, and she is illiterate. He had promised to find a teacher for her.

But Roman Nazarovich changes the topic and begins talking about matters of state. Does Binyamin read the newspapers? At long last things have exploded. Ribbentrop came to Moscow, and a non-aggression pact was signed between the Soviets and the Germans. The

document caused quite a storm in countries around the world.

"No doubt about it, Comrade Student, interesting times await us in the coming days."

"Interesting in what way, Roman Nazarovich?"

"War! Germany is going to go to war with the countries of Europe. The Polish Corridor... but we won't be taking part in the war, we've exempted ourselves from this dizzying dance."

And he pats Binyamin on the shoulder with a fatherly look on his face. That's how Ivanchuk is. He is a longtime reader of the newspapers and has a realistic mindset. He is quite familiar with the ways of the world and international developments. And so, he has arrived at his conclusion. What grounds does he have for that conclusion? For quite a few years now Germany has been developing its industrial production, and the entire purpose of that industrial process has been geared towards war. Guns instead of butter. And this will not be some minor battle, but an all-out war.

"And what will that Red Army of ours do, Roman Nazarovich? Will we just stand off at a distance and let Hitler conquer all of Europe?"

"At the present moment, we have exempted ourselves from the game. After all, what does Chamberlain want? Chamberlain and his cronies want to get us mixed up with Germany and then topple us both. Chamberlain wants to fight right down to the other guy's last soldier. And now here we have this pact that we signed with Germany. True, we ourselves do not have any great love for Hitler, but there is no choice. State policy demands realism and caution, caution and realism."

That was what the old teacher, Roman Nazarovich, had to say, as he continued watering the tomato plants. At that point Binyamin, that true scion of the Jewish people, gathered his strength and pulled out the concept of international fairness and honesty. Where was international fairness and honesty in all this? How could the cultured German nation, the nation of Goethe and Beethoven, put Hitler and that party of thieves and murderers of his in the saddle? How could we have gone and signed a pact with such a bunch of hooligans?

Roman Nazarovich is silent for a moment. Then he bursts out with the laughter of an elderly, good-natured man. International fairness and honesty? Ha-ha. When it comes to matters of politics there is no

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fairness or honesty, there is only the confrontation of forces, and might makes right. International fairness and honesty! It all tends to go in various different directions, that international fairness and honesty, it takes all sides. Hitler has his own interpretation of fairness and honesty, so do Chamberlain and Daladier – and each one of them is ready to go to war over their fairness and honesty. The earth has been drenched in blood over all that fairness and honesty...

Yes, Roman Nazarovich truly has both his feet on the ground. He does his work at the day school in Hadiach, he has his house, and his garden, and that Bluthner piano. He is not losing any sleep over the concept of international fairness and honesty.

"And what about the young girl, Roman Nazarovich?"

The old man invites Binyamin to step inside the house and writes out a note for Mitrofan Petrovich Gavrilenko, the Principal at the day school in Vilbovka.

"Mitrofan Petrovich will find a teacher for the young girl."

Binyamin takes the note and steps outside. The evening shadows have fallen. With their tramping hooves and columns of rising dust, mooing and bleating as they go, the herd has returned once more. The two shepherds, an old man and a young lad, with long whips in their hands, are accompanying the herd and cracking the whip at any cows that have fallen behind. Indeed, there haven't been many changes in town. In the early morning the herd heads out to pasture and in the evening, it comes back to town, and the distinct scent of milk and those rising columns of dust follow in its wake. But now even the herd has passed on by, and the columns of dust have calmed down and settled. A chill breeze blows up from the banks of the river, brushing up against the edges of town and announcing the arrival of the dark.

Binyamin returns to the Garden alley and spends the evening with his mother. The day after tomorrow they are to depart from Hadiach. Sarah Samuilovna will be going to Kharkov and Binyamin – will be heading back to the capital. They have already secured their tickets, but they still have quite a bit of work to do packing up everything. After all, they too have spent their summer vacation here, and it is no small share of packages that awaits them.

That evening Binyamin sits in his room until midnight talking with

his mother. And what does the conversation between the son and his mother revolve around? Distant figures from childhood days, including a few relatives, and homes and gardens back in their hometown, old folks and young people and what has become of them – this particular story that has now faded away, and those pages there that have long since been turned.

A fairly meaningless conversation – memories from days long gone by! It is after midnight now and they are already each lying in bed, but fragmentary remarks continue to emerge between the mother and her son, and distorted faces continue to rise from the depths of those distant days off in the town of Volyn.

"Mother, do you still remember the teacher Meshulem Pupik?"

"Of course, I remember him. Why wouldn't I? There was a truly kosher Jew."

"When he would laugh he used to raise his chin, and his beard would rise along with the chin, that goat's beard of his – he used to laugh so hard with that hoarse voice of his."

Good Lord in heaven, what's so interesting about that goat-like beard of Meshulem Pupik? But the moment for wandering down memory lane has come, and the shadows are rising from way off in the distance.

"And how about Noah the water drawer, Mother, do you remember him?"

She remembers Noah too, dressed as he always was, in summer and winter, in that threadbare sheepskin coat of his.

And now the mother suddenly embarks on a tale of the simmering samovar that was once stolen from their home back in town. There the samovar stood on the stool in the kitchen, and she stepped in to pour herself a cup of tea – but the samovar was gone! As though it had been swallowed up by the very earth itself.

But that samovar turned out to be a stumbling block for Binyamin. He became confused and sank down into the depths. But even way down there he could still make out his mother's soft voice.

"Binyamin!"

Silence.

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"Goodnight, my son! May you have a restful night and sleep well!"

The universe has fallen silent. But upon opening his eyes and glancing at his watch Binyamin leaps out of bed with a confused shout. Ten in the morning! He has so much work to do! He must fetch Solomon from the hospital – that is first. Second – he must go and see Glasha. Third – he must see to the preparations for their journey. After all, tomorrow they depart!

He gets dressed in a hurry. There is no one else in the house other than old Pesya. She is pattering around the rooms as is her way, 'looking well to the ways of her household'. But this morning, Binyamin notices some sort of uncertainty in the house. The rooms seem to be caught somewhere between the bright sheen of a celebration, and the gloomy cloud of a fast day. Today Shlomo'le is to return from the hospital, but there will be no trumpets or *shofar*¹ blasts accompanying him this time. He went wandering along the roads and through the forest and drank his fill of bitterness and wormwood. No, indeed, it is no conquering hero that is returning today to the home, and no flowers will coat his path, no laurel wreath will crown his forehead.

"Did the coachman get here yet?" asks Binyamin.

Mordechai the coachman had already been asked the day before to bring Solomon home, and the task of accompanying him has fallen to Binyamin, since both the father and the daughter are busy off at work. No, Mordechai the coachman has not yet arrived. Binyamin quickly jumps in the shower and then grabs himself a bite to eat for breakfast. It is then that the pleasant old sucking sound rises out in the yard, followed by the cry: "Nu, Pavlik!" Greetings, Mordechai, ye friend of the womenfolk! Good morning, Pavlik, you lazy old horse! It goes without saying that Tamar would not miss this opportunity for the world, and she is already sitting in the wagon, mischievous little girl that she is, and conversing with Pavlik in that horse's tongue of his. She too will be riding with them to the hospital.

The morning was a cloudless morning, and the dust barely stirred in the light breeze. The streets of Hadiach were silent and empty, bathed as they were in chilly splendor. The only sound, from time to

¹ Shofar - a ram's-horn trumpet used in Jewish religious ceremonies.

time, was the rustling of the branches in the trees as they were brushed by the gentle breeze, sending their leaves into a slow dance of their own.

At the hospital Binyamin encounters the smell of medicine, the silence of the hallways, and the doors all painted white. There is Solomon, as well. He is seated in the hallway on a bench, ready to leave, and his head is wrapped in a white bandage. But who is that woman sitting next to him on the bench? Oh, you merciful Jews! It is a none-too-young nurse, a merciful nurse, who sits there with him, dressed as she is in a white gown with a bright white kerchief holding back her rather attractive hair. Binyamin just manages to catch the fragments of an anecdote: "A Jew and a young female student are riding on the train..."

There is repressed laughter, glittering eyes, and low murmuring in the white hallway.

"Allow me to introduce Anna Dimitriyevna!" says Solomon, and Binyamin shakes the warm hand of the nurse. Solomon's eye winks through the layers of the bandage. God Almighty, was the lesson that he learned beneath Bobrov's wooden log not enough for him? True, there is no corner of the earth where Solomon would fail to find a suitable soul-mate for himself. Suddenly this one here has begun to cling to him like a leech and is wreaking her havoc. Indeed, if there are to be any amusements in the world to come, then it would be safe to assume that even in that big pot in hell where Solomon's sinner's flesh is to be roasted, he will manage to find a chance to get close to some member of the fairer sex. And if – and there is some doubt on this score – the defending angel should have the upper hand, and the Garden of Eden should end up being Solomon's final place of refuge, then there too he will find some fine young girl, and he will load her plate with choice cuts of the Leviathan and fill her cup to the brim with that special wine reserved for the righteous, and there shall be no shortage of jokes and witticisms, Heaven forbid!

Anna Dimitriyevna is holding Solomon up by one arm, and Binyamin is holding him up by the other. They walk the invalid out to Mordechai's carriage that is waiting out in the yard. Solomon is limping a bit – his leg suffered a tremendous blow, but the bone was not broken; in another few days he should be walking around just like anyone else. His head too is no real danger, even though it is all

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wrapped up in that bandage. That is how life is. People get beaten down and voice their complaints, then they get better and head back out into the world, girding themselves and rushing off to receive the very next round of blows that fate has in store for them.

In the front yard of the hospital the chill, bright morning shines, carriages stand around lined with straw, and the horses stand over by the fence rather leisurely chewing their fodder.

"I'm quite sick of the hospital!" Solomon says, as he takes a rather deep breath of air.

As he speaks he opens his mouth, and it is strange to see those two missing teeth of his. That is the biggest blow that he received from Bobrov – those teeth that he offered up on the altar that is Klava. But no matter, in the capital the dentist will fix him up with a new set of teeth, and no steel ones at that, but teeth of gold. Indeed, there is tell of folks in America – the fancy ones among them, that is – who break a few of their teeth on purpose just to exchange them for golden ones – for the beauty of it all.

Binyamin seats Solomon in the wagon and Pavlik heads out on his way. The nurse waves to them with her hand. She stands there quite a while waving away. Binyamin notices her attractive hair and that graceful kerchief of hers. But what do we see aside from the attractive hair? We see a woman of medium height, with a round face and grey-blue eyes, who is about forty-five years of age. It seems that Solomon was unable to control his desire even in the face of those forty-five years. That's how it is with lofty love, twenty-five or forty-five – it is all one and the same...

The wheels of the carriage are slowly rolling along, and Tamar is prattling away, but Solomon remains silent. A woman passes by with a basket in her hands. A bicycle whistles down the path, with a green knapsack tied on to the back. The rider is wearing dust-covered boots and his face is filled with sweat. An average, everyday array of people and things.

And now the Garden alley. Binyamin helps Solomon get down from the wagon and supports him as he walks along. However, as they open the door to the house Solomon slips from his hands. He conceals his pain and his eyes shine as he approaches his mother. Whatever might befall this young man here, he remains a devoted, loving son towards

his mother Pesya. And so Solomon attempts to hide the limp in his leg as well, as he clenches his fists in pain and walks up to his mother without a crutch. But old Pesya claps her hands as that reckless son of hers approaches with his head all wrapped up. No, no one is going to fool the heart of a mother, a mother's eyes see all!

"Oy, Shlomo'le!" says old Pesya, as she embraces her son with tears in her voice.

"What are you crying about, mother? It's just a little scratch on the head."

Solomon waves his hand in a dismissive gesture. You call that a beating? Don't be silly, it's nothing at all.

"Won't you lie down a bit, Shlomo'le?" Pesya asks. "Lie down and I'll bring you breakfast."

But Shlomo'le refuses to lie down in bed, he is quite sick of lying in bed. But as for breakfast – he has no intention of trying to avoid that. On the contrary.

Pancakes! Pancakes with cream in the middle of the morning. Pesya has prepared this heartwarming culinary encounter for her lost son, and Binyamin accepts her invitation to join in the meal. But after doing some serious labor in the pancake field, he turns once more to his day's work. Time is of the essence.

He heads out on the road leading to Vilbovka. Here he is joined by the two young girls – Tamar and Sarka. On their way down to the river they turn off in the direction of the Jewish cemetery. Binyamin must say goodbye here too. In the Shtiebel he spots the face of that black-clad attendant, Aharon Ginsburg, seated at the table bent over his book. There is the silence of the cemetery in the room. Previously, this was once a minor Holy Temple for Hassids of Chabad. In the cemetery, just outside the Shtiebel, the trees rustle away, and rays of light cut a path for themselves between the leaves and enter the room through the skylight. A sort of square frame of light is spread along the floor, and a confused mixture of shadows of branches and their leaves flutters there in the frame, as splotches of light go dancing about among the shadows. But what is that book that so consumes the attention of the black-clad

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cemetery attendant? It is either a copy of the '*Likkutei Amarim*', or the '*Tanya*¹, and the spirit of the Holy Rebbe is closely bound up in those pages there.

Does that strange cemetery attendant indeed spend all his days there hunched over words of Torah? Won't he ever get up from his seat and step over to the window and have a look up at the broad expanse of the heavens, the dancing light, and all the green that swells out there in the cemetery?

"Reb Aharon!" say Binyamin. "We're heading down to go for a swim in the river. Perhaps you'd like to join us as well? The summer is almost over, after all!"

The cemetery attendant smiles that wan smile of his.

"No, I won't be going for a swim today," he responds. "I haven't yet liberated myself from the hands of the *Sitra Achra*."

A rather puzzling, peculiar response – and what a strange man! Binyamin tries to strike up a conversation with the man, but aside from a few garbled snatches of speech, he can't get a word out of the attendant. The young girls are urging him to leave already, but Binyamin steps inside the Ohel. He removes his shoes and opens the door that leads inside the sanctuary of the Alter Rebbe – he must say goodbye to him as well. There is a serene silence in the Rebbe's sanctuary. Two marble tablets have been affixed to the wall – and on the slightly smaller one there is a Hebrew inscription etched in gold letters dedicated to Friedel, the pious daughter of the Rebbe.

"Here the Holy Ark has been hidden away... The Lord desired his holy presence, and his soul returned to be with God..."

These words are part of the inscription on the tombstone dedicated to Admor Schneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe. To the right of the tablet, in a corner, there stands the lit Menorah upon its little table. The faint, weak light is the tiny vestige of the light of the *Ein-Sof*, the light of all the upper worlds, a minor greeting from the great throne of

¹ Likkutei Amarim or Tanya – alternate names for a book of Hassidic philosophy, by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (Alter Rebbe), the founder of Chabad Hassidism.

the Holy One Blessed Be He. That was how Esther the noodle-maker had described it, that elderly Jewish woman. The wooden Ohel has been erected over the grave, and the bones of the Rebbe are hidden away there in the grave – that man who lived and labored and sang his Niggun, and even stood face to face with Czar Pavel in Saint Petersburg...

Fare thee well, oh room of refuge, thou holy sanctuary and silence so serene!

Binyamin is back on his trail of farewells that now leads to Vilbovka. Once again, he is walking along this road in the very heat of the day. Green vegetation and dust are spread at his feet and the horizon is clear. From time to time a crisp white cloud covers the face of the sun, and light and shadow reign in an even mix. The days of vacation are now over, and tomorrow Binyamin will be uprooting himself from this blessed land. The autumn is certainly already waiting for him in the capital city – those chilly mornings, the steam off the river, the janitors in their aprons, sweeping the courtyards and sidewalks, the yellow of the leaves crushed down the boulevards and all along the tracks of the trolley cars; the hustle and bustle of the youth at the university, classes and textbooks, laboratories and exams, and then hitting the books once more through sleepless nights.

A restrained sense of parting's sorrow floods the face of the forest of Vilbovka. The forest has a unique hue as the summer fades, stripped as it is of all its summer vacationers, as the joyous tumult melts away, along with the cries of women and children. Between the forest and the deep vault of heaven silence has arrived. As though bound by some invisible hand they stand there facing one another, with the ephemera of summer stretched out between them.

Binyamin steps into the house of aunt Nastasya, Glasha's mother. Just two or three days ago the Edelman family was still living here. The muslin curtains and the carpets on the floor lent the rooms something of the color of the city. But today, Binyamin finds nothing more than a common peasant's living room, with a stand of icons in the corner of the room – one of Jesus and another of Nicolay the Miracle Worker. Rays of gold encircle the faces of the saints. Aunt Nastasya stands in the kitchen before the tub and is doing a load of whites. Her sparse braid flicks back and forth. All through the days of summer aunt Nastasya walks around with her head uncovered and her hair braided. She too has the soul of a

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sinner. In her youth she was rather simple-minded and hit the bottle quite hard. Even now, at the age of forty, aunt Nastasya can empty a bottle of vodka with a single swig, and she doesn't even lose her balance, only her cheeks turn red. In the secluded section of the yard wild songs can be heard on Sundays and holidays, along with loud shouts, and twirling tunes on the harmonica. From time to time she disappears for days and nights on end, then returns all crumpled and exhausted and takes care of the household chores.

"Where is Glasha, aunt Nastasya?"

She pulls herself up to her full height and Binyamin sees the sweat in her face. But what a thin face it is – no more than skin and bones and those flaming eyes!

"She must be out in the vegetable garden, love."

And indeed, Binyamin comes upon Glasha lying in the garden in the shade of the fence with nothing but a slip covering her skin. She is nibbling on a carrot and her bare legs are smacking against one another. When she notices Binyamin, she jumps up on her feet and fixes him with that piercing gaze of hers.

"Uncle Binyamin?"

"I have come to see you, Glasha, about that teacher. We must go over to the day school."

He shows her the note written by Roman Nazarovich. She turns the note over and over and stands there a moment as though uncertain of what to do.

"And will you be back here next year, uncle Binyamin?"

"I'll be back."

What a strange girl she is – in an instant the look in her eyes can change, and you can find all colors there. At times her gaze can be angry and piercing, and then at times they are the clear eyes of a child.

She steps inside the house and returns a few minutes later wearing a coarse, heavy pair of Sunday shoes, and dressed in a colorful dress. Her flaxen hair has been well-combed, and only her ears are showing. And so, Binyamin brings the grown-up young girl to the day school.

They come upon Mitrofan Petrovich in the Principal's office. In just

another few days the school year will begin. One woman is whitewashing the walls in the hallway, and another woman is washing the floor in the classroom. Mitrofan Petrovich is overseeing the work. He is a man of about thirty-five years of age, rather tall, clean-shaven, and with a prominent Adam's apple. He sits down at his desk and at once turns into a Principal. He then takes Roman Nazarovich's note from Binyamin's hands.

"And so, you are not familiar with the shape of even a single letter?"

"I never learned..." the girl replies.

There is silence.

"Fine. Come down tomorrow, at six in the evening. The teachers will get together, and we will decide at that point what to do with you."

He gets up from his desk and ceases to be a Principal. Before Binyamin there now stood a man with a prominent Adam's apple and a wart on his chin. His importance and self-worth seemed to vanish like chaff on the wind.

He sees them to the door. Glasha's shoes clatter away as she walks down the hall. The paintbrush is moving back and forth along the wall, and flecks of white paint fly off to either side.

That's done. Glasha accompanies Binyamin to the edge of the forest. There they bid each other farewell, and their eyes meet for a brief moment. The eyes of the young girl are now astir, and there is chutzpah in them, the chutzpah of a grown woman. There she stands in those big shoes of hers as though expecting something, as though listening to the sounds all around them. Binyamin is the first to awaken from the reverie.

"Farewell, Glasha!" he shakes her hand warmly and heads off on his way.

That's done too! He says goodbye to the forest of Vilbovka, its darkness, its chill, and the talk of its trees. The entire day, from morning on, has been one long extended farewell for him.

We will yet have occasion to speak further of this girl Glasha later in our story.

Back at the house Binyamin once again runs into a family meeting.

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Rachel is pleading with her brother, and her pleas concern Bobrov. She is once again singing the same old tune. He must be taken to court, he must be thrown in jail! Dear God of Abraham, she wants nothing less than the man's soul!

But Solomon is lying there in his bed wrapped in his white and light blue blanket, and there is a bored look in his eyes. As far as he is concerned, the confrontation with Bobrov is an episode that has already lost its flavor. A shameful thing happened, there is no denying that, but life goes on, and what good would a trial do him? Klava Bobrova had a rather attractive energy, and he had not failed to seize the moment. Afterwards he had gotten what was coming to him – a rather exaggerated recompense – though in this matter he had behaved quite like an ass. But life goes on. Look here, for example – a new comet had appeared in Solomon's world of women: Anna Dimitriyevna, with that beautiful hair of hers. What did he care about Bobrov? Bobrov's time had come and gone...

No, all the young woman's pleas were in vain. Solomon lets out a yawn. He opens his mouth as wide as his bandage will allow and yawns away. But there is a certain discrepancy in the gesture, as when a young man ordinarily opens his mouth wide, the teeth flutter there like a 'flock of sheep even shorn'. But if there is an unseemly gap where the front teeth ought to be, it is a rather shameful thing for the young man.

Sarah Samuilovna urges Binyamin to hurry up, and he goes to work straight through to the evening packing up all their things. The train departs from Hadiach tomorrow evening. Lokhvytsia, Romodan, and Kharkov are the railway junctions along the way. His mother will be getting off in Kharkov.

In the evening a rather sizeable group got together at the house in honor of Solomon – *Bikur Holim*¹. There was Berman, Golda, and Reb Dovid the shochet. There was old Loytin too, with a copy of 'Pravda' in his hand. He is, as ever, interested in politics, and even with one foot in the grave, he will be busy with politics. This time there is also a new face in the crowd at the Feigin family home: Shlomo Shapira, a shrunken, old

¹ Bikur Holim - the Hebrew term for the good deed that consists of visiting those who are ill.

invalid, who spends most of the year sitting at home due to his illness. He is a tall, lean man, with a sparse beard that, for many years now already, no force in the world can make grow any better. That evening Binyamin saw him for the first time, but only a little while later he had already run into him again, and he was able to familiarize himself a bit with the soul of the man. Shapira was sixty-five years old, and he had spent all his life sitting at home and nursing his illness – consisting of both a heart ailment and a kidney disease. His wife, Berta Abramovna, was both a housewife and the primary breadwinner. Students would come to their home and she would give them lessons in foreign languages and piano playing.

Yes, the majority of Shlomo Shapira's years on this earth had already passed, his flesh had grown lean and shriveled, and his entire being seemed to be wasting away. That was the fate of this son of man. But let's take a step back in time a bit and have a look at Shapira the man as he was thirty or forty years ago. His beard did not grow any better back in those days – he has forever suffered from this defect – but despite this fact he was once among the leading citizens of Hadiach, a real figure and financial force in the town. As Solomon tells it, he was once the leader of the local Zionists, those who paid their annual membership dues for the *Zionist Shekel*¹ and got together for official meetings, at which Shapira was always the main speaker. He even once traveled to Basel and took part in one of the Zionist Congresses, and then went on to visit Israel, where he spent about three months. It was then that he saw, with his own eyes, the communities that our brethren had established in Petach Tikva and Rehovot, in Rishon LeZion and Zichron Yaakov, and his feet had even walked along Herzl Street and Rothschild Boulevard in the budding city of Tel Aviv.

Binyamin was told all this by Solomon, that member of the Komsomol. Two years later Binyamin was on quite close terms with Shlomo Shapira, who had become both a father and a teacher to the young man.

In the meantime, Berel Loytin and that thumb of his are once again dealing with political matters. No one is going to trick him or pull the wool over his eyes – no, the man has not yet been born, not even

¹ Zionist Shekel - dues paid as membership in the Zionist movement.

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among the most senior diplomats, who might compete with Berel Loytin when it comes to the laws that govern politics. After all, what is the nature of the pact that we signed with Germany? It's not worth the paper it's written on, it's nothing but a sleight of hand! Germany and Italy are at war with England. We too have certain claims against England. And what are they, you might ask? We demand that they treat us with decency and proper decorum, such as becomes a major world power. We've had quite enough of their typical English arrogance.

Pesya: "But what about the war, Reb Berel?"

Old Pesya is concerned solely that this calamity should not come to pass – war, that is. O Lord of the Universe, if only there would be peace and tranquility in this land of ours! All those lofty political discourses are meaningless as far as Grandma Pesya is concerned.

At this point Berel Loytin lets out a loud laugh. War? What war? There'll be nothing of the sort! The diplomats will rush about, flying from London to America, and from America back to London, and there'll be fear and trembling in China, and the cannons will roar in Greece and Africa. They are all sunk knee-deep in matters of their own, whereas we have adopted a policy of neutrality for many years to come.

"When the children play around," said Shlomo Shapira, "it means hard times for the Jews."

All those games with Hitler – they're like a troublesome thorn as far as Shapira is concerned. Hitler is an awful beast of prey and playing games with such a beast is to be considered a dangerous matter.

There is the sound of laughter right near Solomon's bed. The young people have gathered there – Berman, Golda, Rachel, even Binyamin is among them. Is all that talk going to spoil the party? You should be ashamed of yourselves! In this little gathering there is absolutely no recognition of the importance of political events. Solomon is telling his anecdotes, and he has chosen some of the greasiest. Golda is not laughing out loud, she is just turning very red – from her chin to the very tips of her ears – and casting an embarrassed glance in Berman's direction.

Pesya now places bottles of wine on the table, along with refreshments to accompany the wine. This evening there seems to be a double helping of everything – perhaps in honor of the important guest,

Shlomo Shapira, or perhaps in honor of the return of Shlomo'le – albeit crushed, wrapped up and bandaged, but, all the same, it's still Shlomo'le.

Berman gets up from his seat and gives Golda a look full of affection. They are about to leave, the lunatics! Grandma Pesya asks them to stay, but they refuse to heed her request.

"Why didn't your father come?" Pesya asks the girl.

Golda: "He's not feeling well today."

Pesya does not inquire any further. A sort of black cloud sometimes descends on the cemetery attendant, and then he tends to stay close to home, spending his days and nights in the Shtiebel. Berel Loytin continues to swim volubly through the length and breadth of the political sea. The man of the house fills everyone's cups, and Reb Dovid the shochet has already armed himself with a fork. Berman and Golda step out into the Garden alley, and Binyamin and Rachel follow them – to keep them company. But a few moments later the two couples have gone their separate ways. Rachel and Binyamin continue on their well-worn path down to the banks of the Psel River. Stars and the chilly air move through the waters, and silence and darkness crown the soundless couple, broken only by a few distant barks and the croaking of the frogs. Beneath the sheltering wings of the shrub – their old friend – Rachel presses up against Binyamin. She presses up against him quite tightly and behold, she laughs, yea, she weeps.

Chapter 1.8

The tranquility of the forest is gone now, there is no longer the soft, fragrant silence of the small Poltavian town.

In the capital city Binyamin encountered the autumn, the fog and chill of the mornings, the crumpled, falling leaves all along the trolley car tracks, the doormen sweeping away in those aprons of theirs, and the feverish pulse of the city. At the university his studies and classes awaited him, along with the textbooks and laboratories. But he was not lamenting his fate. He loved the university, and it was with pleasure that he prepared himself to get back to work. Perhaps there are those hard-luck cases under the sun that prefer the Cheder to vacation, prefer the teacher's lash to the pleasures and delicacies of the Sabbath. If such madmen exist in this world then it is safe to say that they were fostered by the People of the Book.

However, the first evening after his arrival Binyamin was assailed by memories of Hadiach. He lay there on the iron bedstead with his eyes closed, all wrapped up in warm memories. He lay there in the student dormitory, in room number 224. It was here that he found the two cold iron bedsteads intended for him and Solomon. The room was small and sparsely furnished: there was a closet for dishes, books, and clothing, a table, two chairs, and those selfsame iron bedsteads.

Binyamin lay there with his eyes closed and took an inventory of the bounty he had amassed over the summer in Hadiach. He had managed to get to know the group of old folks – becoming familiar with each member, and their life stories and aspirations. Reb Dovid the shochet still had his God up in Heaven, Berel Loytin was concerned with politics, Haim Yaakov Feigin, the wine man, raised children both in theory and practice, and Professor Edelman sat there ever hard at work, and always coughing. And there was the black-clad cemetery attendant as well, that Jewish monk, warring in the hidden recesses of the Shtiebel against the tricks of the *Sitra Achra* and looking after the tiny light of the Menorah as though it were the apple of his eye.

What else had Hadiach given him? There had been a few young women – each one with her charms, her warmth, and her sharp edges. Lida Edelman, who was taken with Chopin and given to hardening her heart. He once had a vain encounter with that young woman. Then came those burning nights, and Rachel Feigin began to reign supreme in his world.

Ah, the sorrowful memories, that life lived out in whispers and shame!

Binyamin lies on the iron bedstead in the student dormitory, and his eyes are closed. He sees Pesya Feigin standing before him, that old Jewish mother. Her wrinkled face is awash in the shadow of some minor sanctity. She and her children are swept up in this tumultuous life, and she stands there ever on her guard, that Hebrew mother, and she shelters them with all the strength she has in those frail hands of hers – she shelters, and comforts, and holds them close to her heart.

The next morning classes began again at the university, and Binyamin was seated on his bench and listening to the lecture by the professor. Little by little he gave himself up completely to his day's work, and the memories of Hadiach were cut off and melted away.

Solomon Feigin was still staying in Hadiach. The marks of love on his head and leg still seemed to require the attention of a doctor and necessitated remaining hidden behind a screen.

But all things pass in the end. The day finally came towards the end of September when Solomon returned from Hadiach, and his head was no longer bandaged, he no longer walked with a limp, and only his two front teeth were still missing. He stormed in with his usual bluster, bringing various packages with him and all sorts of delicacies, all prepared by old Pesya herself. In Room 224 the two friends sat at the table and tasted the delicacies of Hadiach. Solomon responded to all of Binyamin's questions. No, Berman and Golda were still progressing without any tangible results, but those results were bound to come. Berel Loytin and his wife had left Hadiach for Kharkov. Rachel, his sister, sends Binyamin warm greetings. Tamarka is attending the fourth grade. The marketplace in Hadiach was buzzing with people, and the prices were low. In the evenings the old folks would often get together at the house, including Reb Dovid the shochet, Aharon Ginsburg, and Shlomo Shapira. From time to time there was also a little drinking – all nothing

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new under the sun. Only that little by little, step by step, everything was aging and fading away.

"And what about that merciful nurse, Solomon – the one you were following around at the hospital?"

At this point Binyamin gets to hear the sad tale drawn from the book of chronicles and adventures of Solomon. It is the tale of Anna Dimitriyevna, the merciful nurse – Solomon's latest sacrifice. True, the sacrifice was not entirely innocent herself, but Solomon does not shy away from a bit of self-flagellation all the same. Anna Dimitriyevna, that good-hearted, rather experienced woman, had a pleasant room of her own in Romny Street, and Solomon would go and visit that room two or three times a week. Anna Dimitriyevna would receive him with a happy look on her face and prepare dinner for him: fried salami and eggs, and fruit. There was usually also a bottle of wine and some jokes and anecdotes. Anna Dimitriyevna was hardly a thin woman, God forbid. Her body was soft and fleshy, the body of a forty-something woman, who was more a mother and grandmother than some childhood sweetheart. Her hair too, once she removed that white kerchief from her head, was not really all that pretty. But Solomon was not a choosy fellow. And so, they would sit there facing one another in that pleasant room in Romny Street. Slices of salami and a few eggs sunny-side up hissed away in the frying pan. They took a sip from their glasses of wine – and cheers! The oval face of the merciful nurse turns red, and Solomon uses a bit of foul language in telling a rather spicy anecdote, and the nurse laughs and lets her palm fall on Solomon's sleeve. Outside the autumn evening moves through, and a moist wind hovers over the face of the swamps. But here, in this woman's room, all is warm and white. White curtains cover the windows.

The dinner comes to an end. Anna Dimitriyevna clears the table – through all the adventures of her life she has always been accustomed to having a proper tablecloth and flowerpot ever in place. At that moment Solomon is telling her some joke of his, and the laughter arrives at the appropriate spot. Suddenly the lady of the house steps over to the lamp and turns down the light, and darkness reigns in the room.

We will now leave the two of them in privacy – that grandmother and her young man. But when it is all over we see Solomon, dragging himself along through the swamp of Hadiach, as he heads back to the

Garden alley. The autumn night is spread over the face of the swamp, and the stars flicker among the patches of clouds. A moist wind smacks the bare branches of the trees, hitting the few passersby in the forehead, along with some abandoned shutters. A heavy sense of weariness takes firm hold of Solomon's legs, eyes, and mind. In moments like these he is sick and tired of Anna Dimitriyevna, with those swollen, parched lips of hers, her soft body, and that nursing strength of hers, the strength of a woman. He tried to take his mind off her, and he spits scornfully as though he has done something shameful, as he deludes himself with his word of honor, for the umpteenth time, into believing that from this day forward he will no longer set foot over the threshold of that room. But a few days pass, 'and the morning and the evening', and Solomon takes a bottle of wine and heads over to Romny Street. The aging nurse receives him with that pleasant look on her face, and once again the salami and eggs start frying away, and the ancient anecdotes can once more be heard in the room.

Solomon told Binyamin all this in a single breath the very first evening he came back. Then he lay down on his iron bedstead, and life went back to normal. A few days passed, and Solomon too was immersed in his studies and the Komsomol. Solomon was not one of those who rested on his laurels, he was a lively, rather active young man. Take, for instance, the case of his missing teeth. They too got fixed. About a month later a fancy construction appeared in Solomon's mouth – a bridge made of ivory and gold. From that point on he could open his mouth again just like anyone else.

And so, life went back to normal. There were classes, laboratory sessions, sketches to be drawn, and homework to be done. There was the hustle and bustle of youth at the university and in the dormitory. But in the wider world great changes were taking place, and much blood was being spilled. Hitler had invaded Poland. The World War had broken out. However, in our land peace and tranquility reigned supreme. Over six hundred thousand students attended institutions of higher learning in our country, and Binyamin and Solomon were among them. On Sunday, the seventeenth of September, Molotov delivered his speech concerning Ukraine and western Byelorussia. The Red Army had arrived in those countries, and the Chief of Staff declared the occupation of Molodechno, Baranovichi, Rovno, Dubno, and Ternopol.

Somewhere off in the distance there were shots and explosions,

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fire and blood and refugees, and lives were trampled underfoot. But the heroes of our story went about their daily labors as usual, and the World War seemed so very far, far away from them. On the sixth of November, the eve of the holiday commemorating the October Revolution, Binyamin received a letter from Hadiach. The memories of summer swirled up at him once again from the lines of the letter.

"Life is boring in Hadiach – the letter said – there is the swamp, the gloomy heavens overhead, and this boredom. One by one the days crawl on by – grey and lazy as they go. In the evenings I can't find any peace. It is then that I see before me those few nights, with the silent shore, and the hidden waves of the river. Have you forgotten, Binyamin?"

At the end of the letter the lady reminded Binyamin of his promise to help her transfer to the capital city. And then there was the signature: R. Feigin. The letters were small and round, the handwriting of a woman. Once again, Binyamin could sense the distant fragrance of her perfume right nearby.

The eighth of November was a holiday, and Binyamin went to the home of Epstein, his acquaintance from back in Pashutovka, who lived in Obolensky Alley. This Epstein here was a nimble-minded Jew, bespectacled, with a tiny bald spot, and worked as the head engineer at the government agency for the supply of firewood and other heating materials. Binyamin would go to see him from time to time. All the residents of Pashutovka in the capital city maintained mutual relations. Perhaps this was the final bond that held the Jewish nation together in this land of ours – the bond of the distant small town. Binyamin felt quite at ease at the house of his hometown acquaintances.

This time Binyamin had primarily come to see Epstein to ask for work for Rachel Feigin. But Maria Abramovna, Epstein's rather pleasant, big-boned wife, fixed Binyamin with that awful cross-eyed look of hers and forced him to stay with them for lunch. Afterwards he sat down to play a game of chess with the man of the house. True, in matters of chess the two of them were more amateurs than experts. Despite their furrowed brows, the drumming of their fingers on the table, and their tense posture as they faced one another, despite all their stratagems, serious efforts, and the intense desire they each had to topple one another – in the end blind chance was the deciding factor between the two of them.

Epstein and Binyamin sat before the chess board, drumming their fingers and setting traps for one another. This time it was Binyamin's turn to crumble. His queen was trapped, the bishop and rook were in danger of a 'fork', and there was serious concern about the position of his king. Binyamin furrowed his brow. After taking quite a long moment, he seemed to have hit upon the only escape available to him: a leap with his horse. This was like seeing light at the end of the tunnel, an opening for his trapped queen, protection for his king, and a suitable response to the problem of the 'fork'. But before Binyamin touched his knight, he turned to Epstein with his request.

There is a young woman, about thirty years old, an expert in accounting, who intends to come to the capital city from a small town in Poltava. She needs an assistance in getting a job.

At this point Binyamin picked up his knight and executed the saving leap. But this jump grabbed all of Epstein's attention. His fingers stopped drumming on the tabletop, he put his forehead in his hand, and he sank head and shoulders into the vicissitudes of the chess match.

However, Binyamin's request regarding Rachel Feigin hung for a little while in the silent air of the room, before it reached the ears of Maria Abramovna. At that moment a tremendous abyss opened at the feet of that large woman, an abyss whose existence not one of the three people assembled there even remotely suspected, as this particular kindness is still given to mere mortals – that they do not know the future nor what harm it has in store for them. Maria Abramovna asked Binyamin a few questions concerning the accountant, and he told her the young woman's life story little by little. Then Epstein moved his bishop and joined in the conversation as well.

That day Binyamin suffered defeat at the chess board, but in exchange Epstein promised to help him out, and at the end of 1939 Rachel came to the capital city.

Another Jewish soul had therefore left their small town behind. Solomon was not at all happy to see his sister. How could she? – To go and leave behind their aging parents, all childless and frail now? The brother, sister, and Binyamin are seated in Room number 224, and Solomon has a gloomy look on his face. But Rachel has her reasons for what she has done. She talks, and pleads, and pacifies, and little by little the overcast skies fade away from Solomon's forehead. A bottle of wine,

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hand-made in Hadiach, also appears on the table, along with delicacies prepared by old Pesya. This is followed by a quiet conversation and news from Hadiach.

For a few days Rachel has been living in the dormitory now. Indeed, this seeming problem was hardly the cause of any confusion in the young men's room. The very next day, when they got back from the university, they found, to their amazement, that the room had been cleaned, polished, and put in order – right down to the muslin curtain on the window.

For all those readers of mine who still count themselves among the bachelors of the world, that's how it is with a woman's touch!

In the evening Binyamin and Rachel headed over to the Epstein home. The four of them sat over a cup of tea, and Maria Abramovna was just as pleasant as ever. She was a tall woman, somewhat awkward, with close-cropped hair, who worked at one of the chemistry research institutes. At any rate, she was a fine soul, but childless. Now if those readers who have a proper grasp of things were to look around, they might see things that would appear downright perplexing. For example, who forced Epstein to marry this enormous woman, who may well be rather pleasant – God bless her soul, with all that pleasantness of hers – but who is at least one and half times larger than him. Now, those who understand the ways of the world might say that this strange couple has its roots in the very nature of man. Even the daughters of giants can dream, and they desire a little chick of a man for themselves, that they might shelter him and draw him close to their bosom. For it is this very gesture that constitutes the deepest desire of a woman, that mother of all creation.

Yet Binyamin noted that Epstein, that little man, nimble and balding as he was, who had turned forty already a few years back now, got a bit excited in the company of Rachel Feigin. Everything he said was polite, clever, and slightly ironic. Rachel was quite beautiful that evening, and her teeth shone brightly as she laughed.

After that evening Rachel began working at the agency for the supply of firewood, and Epstein promised that he would provide her with a room of her own in one of the company buildings. At that time, Rachel was still living in the student dormitory. Once, when Solomon was out, Binyamin came up to her, with his face on fire and his heart

open wide. But he found an iceberg waiting for him, resistance and rejection, followed by anger and even a slap on the cheek...

What a disillusion! What heartache and severe disappointment!

Having no other choice, Binyamin swallowed the insult and went back to his books. Soon, at the start of 1940 he had to leave the capital city. That was how the course of studies went at the university. From the third year on the students would spend time each year at one of the industrial factories for the sake of perfecting their knowledge of their chosen profession. Binyamin said goodbye to Solomon and his sister and left the capital city to spend three months in Kirov.

When he returned he found his studies, classes, and laboratory sessions once more waiting for him. Rachel Feigin was already living in a single room, and she seemed to be progressing from strength to strength. Only three months had passed since she had begun working at the agency for the supply of firewood and she had already been appointed head accountant! After all the missteps and mistakes Rachel still had a healthy practical sense about her, and she had now gone and conquered her own little plot of land in life. It seemed that she quite took pleasure in tending to that little room of hers – Binyamin found that everything there projected cleanliness and a warmth that truly touched the heart. And at the table covered in a white tablecloth sat his old acquaintance from Pashutovka – Epstein himself.

The two of them received Binyamin quite pleasantly. Epstein invited Binyamin to sit down at the chess board with him, and once more the fingers went drumming along the tabletop as they began to devise their various strategies. However, this time Epstein's queen was trapped without any hope of redemption.

Binyamin: "Whoever is lucky at cards is unlucky in love."

"Cards and chess are not quite the same thing."

That's what Epstein said as he removed his jacket. The head accountant at the agency for the supply of firewood, she never suffered any shortage of heating materials, and the little room was quite warm. Binyamin rose in a hurry and headed back home, to the student dormitory. Following that first evening he returned several times to Rachel's room, and each time he found warmth and cleanliness there – along with Epstein.

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One evening Binyamin dared to go visit Epstein's residence in Obolensky Alley, but this time, other than Maria Abramovna, there was not a soul there. The tremendous height of that housewife seemed to be bent over double, her entire body seemed to have shrunk. For many nights now Epstein spent his time at Rachel's place – what more was there really left to say? The chick of a man had slipped away from the bosom of his big woman, and she was now left with empty days and that oppressive loneliness.

Binyamin saw that he had lost Rachel. But he did not fall into a black funk. The spring came – little by little spring came on, and those heavy stones were rolled off the soul, as the heavens cleared up overhead. The lilacs and hawthorn emitted their fragrances, young heartwarming patches of green appeared along the boulevards, and everywhere a brand-new world fluttered in the air, seeming somehow freshly washed.

No, Binyamin did not fall into depression. One day he received a letter from Leningrad, from Professor Stepan Borisovich Edelman, who had been his employer the previous summer.

"If you intend to once again spend your vacation in Hadiach, I can offer you regular work as my secretary and personal assistant. I am under contract with a publishing house, and must complete the third volume of my book, 'Dynamics' by the first of November. The following are my conditions: work hours – from ten in the morning until three in the afternoon, not including Sunday; responsibilities – drafting, copying my sketches, and preparing them for publication; salary – six hundred rubles a month. I shall await your response by the first of June."

Without hesitating, Binyamin accepted Stepan Borisovich's proposal. With great pleasure he began preparing himself to spend his third vacation in Hadiach. Despite all his disappointments the small town had become something of a second hometown for him. That too was a link in the chain, as it were – he was a small-town boy, taken with its little homes and gardens. He had spent his childhood in a small town, his parents and grandparents going back to the beginning of time had all been from a small town. The hustle and bustle of the city had not yet enslaved him, no, the big city was still no more than a stepmother to him. It was for the small town, that true abandoned mother, that his heart still secretly pined.

Binyamin had spent his childhood in Pashutovka, in the blessed countryside of Volyn. You must be familiar with this small town, located as it is between Slavuta and Sudilkov, between Berdichev and Rovno. True, at the time Rovno was still across the border, in Poland, and the author is not familiar with the way of life of the Jews who lived and suffered over in that country. But Slavuta, and Sudilkov, and Berdichev were all on this side of the border, and Pashutovka too was part of the country – and Binyamin's soul was entangled with all the other souls that lived and flourished there.

His father was an artisan and a simple man. Before the Revolution he wove *tallits*¹ - cloth and woolen tallits. Shmuel Steinberg, the shopkeeper with that extensive beard of his, would purchase everything his father made and distribute it to all four corners of the earth. Steinberg's shop was full of fine things. There were *Siddurs*² and *Machzors*³, there were *Techinot*⁴ and *Kinnot*⁵, *Haggadahs*⁶ and *Megilahs*⁷, Shofars and *Tsitzits*⁸, pictures, and postcards – particularly illustrated postcards from the Levanon Publishing Company. Shmuel Steinberg supplied all this sacred merchandise to his clients in Pashutovka and throughout the country, and Binyamin's father's tallits were among those sacred items.

It goes without saying that there was also a considerable department in Steinberg's shop dedicated to Hebrew books, including sacred texts and fine literature of all types. Uncle Hanich Alper was one of the regular customers for this Hebrew merchandise. Hanich Alper,

¹ Tallit - a fringed garment traditionally worn by religious Jews during prayer.

² Siddur - a Jewish prayer book, containing a set order of daily prayers.

³ Machzor - prayer books used on the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

⁴ Technot - traditional women's prayers for pregnancy.

⁵ Kinnot – prayers traditionally recited by Jews on Tisha B'Av to mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temple in Jerusalem and other tragedies in Jewish history.

⁶ Haggadah - a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder.

⁷ Megillah - Book of Esther, a story of Purim.

⁸ Tsitzit - a rectangular piece of cloth with fringes at the four corners and a hole in the center for the head, worn under the clothes by observant Jews.

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Binyamin's uncle on his mother's side, was both a Ben Torah¹ and the descendant of a fine family, one of the last remaining members of the previous generation – and he was a devotee of both the Hebrew language and Hebrew literature. His bookcases were lined in neat, orderly fashion with '*Shas*'², '*Poskim*'³ the *Ein Yakov*⁴, Isaac Erter⁵, both Levinsohns⁶, along with '*Ha'Dor*', '*Ha'Shiloach*', and '*Ha'Tekufah*'⁷. Binyamin loved his uncle Hanich and the latter's wife aunt Pearl, as well. A sort of pleasant tranquility reigned in their home, with its clean, serene light, low voices, and soft footsteps. The couple's son, Lipa, was Binyamin's age and the two of them became good friends. This was all just a few years after the Revolution. After a short NEP period the Shmuel Steinberg's shop was no longer in existence. Binyamin's father had ceased weaving his tallits, and had gone to work in the cooperative shop weaving towels and tablecloths for the sugar industry. The tallits and postcards were no longer considered viable merchandise.

However, uncle Hanich's bookcases were full of many fine works, containing a true treasure trove of Hebrew literature, both religious and secular. His uncle spent all his days working at his office, but in the evenings and on holidays he would don his reading glasses and delve into those books of his. He too was a man of the Book, a true representative of the People of the Book. Perhaps in secret he even composed some poetry and literary works of his own, he may well have suffered from this little weakness. And so, uncle Hanich dedicated himself to educating Binyamin, and taught him the Hebrew language, the Bible in the original Hebrew, helped him wade, ever so slightly – just getting his feet wet – in the Sea of the Talmud, and taught him Hebrew grammar in accordance with the three volumes of S. L. Gordon's

¹ Ben Torah – a Torah scholar.

² Shas - abbreviation the six orders of the Mishnah and Talmud.

³ Poskim - rabbinical treatises dealing with ritual law.

⁴ Ein Yaakov - collection of and commentary on Talmudic Haggadah.

⁵ Isaac Erter - Jewish satirist associated with the Haskalah movement.

⁶ Levinsohns - father and son, the son being Isaac Baer Levinsohn, a prominent author and reformer associated with the Haskalah movement.

⁷ Ha'Dor, Ha'Shiloach, and Ha'Tekufah - Literary weekly, monthly, and quarterly publications that focused primarily on Hebrew literature, but some of which included world literature and social commentary as well.

'*Ha'Lashon*¹, and then threw open his bookcases before Binyamin. In those days, more than ten years ago now, Binyamin was first seized with that mania for reading. He would literally devour all of uncle Hanich's books. In just a few years he had read the majority of those works – from '*Ha'Tsofeh Le'Beis Yisroel*² to the various volumes of 'Ha'Tekufah'.

But why had Binyamin wasted all those years? After all, knowledge of the Hebrew language was not at all a common phenomenon back then in our country. It was a dead language. Indeed, all that ancient culture that our forefathers had absorbed right along with their mothers' milk in the various Cheders and Study Halls, in the Yeshivahs and schools, had fallen into oblivion. The droves of Hebrew teachers and instructors had also been wiped out, along with the intellectuals and poets, and those authors who once took up their scribe's quill and related sacred items. A deathly silence reigned over all, and it was only those few last remnants, the stubborn devotees, who would still delve into some Hebrew work in the privacy of their own home – refugees from days gone by. That nation that had been through so many trials and tribulations was now scattered far and wide. The gates of this great country were thrown open wide and Jews began to leave their little towns en masse for faraway places, leaving behind their tallits and tefillin, their *arba kanfos*³, and their *mezuzahs*⁴ – and Hebrew literature had gotten left behind right along with all those other items.

As such, why should we deceive ourselves? All those years that Binyamin wasted over those dead books might as well be considered lost years. The fate of the author is the same as that of Binyamin. However, on the other hand, the years pass on by, and the day may well come, when the author shall sit in his locked room, and his hand shall carve out those crowded letters from right to left along the page, and his soul, like a wounded bird, will hide itself away between the letters.

In Pashutovka Binyamin attended the local high school. The two of

¹ Ha'Lashon - Hebrew textbook.

² Ha'Tsofeh Le'Beis Yisroel - Isaac Erter's collection of satires.

³ Arba kanfos - alternate traditional name for Tsitzit.

⁴ Mezuzah - a parchment inscribed with religious texts and attached in a case to the doorpost of a Jewish house as a sign of faith.

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them – he and Lipa Alper – were in the same class. They even did their homework together. Every day Binyamin would go to the house of his uncle Hanich, and there he would engage in conversations ranging from Torah matters to general chatter. Their studies were divided into two main topics: there were chapters in Mathematics and Geography, and then there were chapters in Hebrew Grammar and the Old Testament. Lipa enjoyed more the Math, Geography and general chatter, whereas Binyamin preferred Hebrew Grammar and the Old Testament. Lipa took after his mother, aunt Pearl. She was a beautiful woman, a simple woman who treaded softly. Binyamin, on the other hand, was a true scion of the Alper family, those People of the Book, with their illustrious ancestors.

Every evening uncle Hanich would spend about two hours with the young men. Lipa would yawn and only pretend to be paying attention, whereas Binyamin would thirstily drink in the strong wine of the lines from the Old Testament, and he was often chased by the images and dreams therein.

In the meantime, life went on around them as usual. With all its magnificence and indifference, the wheel of life continued to turn. The vault of heaven spread over the town of Pashutovka, and the wind swept through the streets and the forests. Sometimes the vault of heaven was crowded with piles of thin, white clouds, and the sun in all its splendor would dive in and bathe in the clouds. In the evenings the western edges of the horizon would burn with bright colors of sunset, and later, a few stars would come out here and there, and the young men and women would head out for their evening walks.

That was how life went in the small town.

Uncle Hanich attentively observed the course of life and the wheel as it spun through Pashutovka, and all these little matters left their mark on him. In utmost secrecy he used to commit his impressions to paper, composing poetry and literary works – the fruit of his pouring out his heart, in brief, rhyming lines. Sometimes the poet would dedicate the fruits of his soul to the tremendous contrasts that reigned everywhere one looked in life, even out in the small town of Pashutovka – including such dichotomies as light and darkness, life and death, Jews and Gentiles, wealth and poverty. Several none-too-thin notebooks were also dedicated to life pleasures, charming women and love. The love full of sadness, that reins in all corners of the earth, even among the

residents of the small town of Pashutovka.

All this came out in the open after uncle Hanich's death. The poems and literary works were found among the papers of the departed soul. Throughout those poems the narrow horizons that enveloped Pashutovka trembled and vibrated, along with the sorrows of the soul and those innocent, unspoiled emotions.

After uncle Hanich died everything began to unravel, as it were. aunt Pearl, that gentle, comely woman, was forced to take up a profession. She went to work in the same Cooperative Factory where Binyamin's father was employed. Lipa became a member of the Komsomol and devoted himself to the work with all his Yiddishe powers of devotion. They were about fifteen years old at the time, and Binyamin was left on his own. His father was a simple artisan, an innocent man, and he loved him. However, Binyamin inherited his great love for those dead books from the Alper family, the lofty family on his mother's side, a family of Rabbis and Gaonim who had disseminated Torah among the Children of Israel for many generations and had fought the good fight. It was never easy to see the Jewish people through the many harsh trials they were faced with, braving all sorts of threats and profound stumbling blocks. In each generation there were a few men who rose up and seemed to know the secret of just how to conduct the ship safely from the edge of one generation to the next. The Alper family had had a few of those men in its ranks as well. All their strength and might was bound up in texts, tradition, and the courage in their hearts.

But now thousands of years had passed, and all that was left were printed letters and shadows, and it was now Binyamin's generation's turn. But this time no man had stepped into the breach, and only life itself was left to drag the people along in its wake.

Is it not rather strange that, after uncle Hanich died, Binyamin felt that he had an obligation to look after all those papers and books and ancient heritage? He transferred the Hebrew books from uncle Hanich's bookcases to his house, all those books covered with dead flies and dust. Inside those books a dead world was all bound up, and Binyamin would go walking in that world for days and nights on end.

And that was how he came to be afflicted with this plague, the plague of texts and images. His eldest brother was not like that. The

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brother took after their father, the simple man of action. When he finished his high school studies in Pashutovka he left for Kiev and enrolled in the University. Now he was an engineer at a factory and constantly perfecting his knowledge of his trade. Meanwhile Binyamin delved into these strange books, a world of fantasy, imagination, and mere vanities.

The figures did battle and suffered, with pale faces and flaming eyes, screaming to him from the midst of those dead lines on the page. Yet life – that life which surrounded him on all sides, did not give him any respite. Life was harsh and cruel, and it lay in wait for him, gnashing its teeth. During the very year that Binyamin finished school himself, his father suddenly died. It turned out that he had suffered from a latent heart disease that was hidden in the very depths of his being.

All at once the fantastical visions came to an end, along with all the images and dead books, and Binyamin became just like any other person. The period of life in Pashutovka came to a close. His mother moved to Kharkov, to the house of his brother Shimon. Binyamin enrolled in the university in the capital city. What was left, then, of Pashutovka? There were the graves, and the little homes and gardens; and bookcases lined with dead books, visited only by flies and dust.

There followed years of wandering and exile. But what is exile to the Jewish soul, and where is the country in which he might establish his homeland? Exile, rather than a permanent place of residence, was the natural state of the Jewish soul. In a short amount of time Binyamin learned to adapt, a power that was also a part of his inheritance from his ancestors. The new books, studies, and exams, the shouts and cries of the city – none of these things weighed heavily on him.

But deep down inside, his heart still longed for the small Jewish town. Exile – that is the great tragedy of the Jewish soul. The Jewish soul too longs for a homeland.

Chapter 1.9

But let us now examine the members of the Feigin family, particularly the young branch of this rather fine family. Let's have a look at their pluck and playfulness, their pretty ways and manners.

Solomon, the apple of his parents' eye, was afflicted by a sort of disease, the malady of the ladies, which had already caused him his fair share of wounds and scars in the course of his days on earth. And yet now the sister seemed to also have joined the hunt.

What a scandal for the Jews! Along comes this woman with those shining teeth of hers, arriving from that small Poltavian town, and she goes and ensnares that balding, little husband in her net, trampling her big-boned rival underfoot.

Their room was on Dubinin Street, right next to the factory named after Vladimir Ilyich¹. But would this love-nest prove to be a lasting one? The head accountant at the agency for the supply of firewood, that thirsty woman who had only recently been torn away from her depressing life in a small town, from her family home, had moved to the capital city and become a free woman. And the head engineer Epstein from Pashutovka, that old, clever Jew, who had a certain weakness for all things related to fairness and honesty, was perhaps losing some sleep over the huge, suffering shadow of Maria Abramovna. And yet fate had decreed that the two of them, Rachel and Epstein, were to build their nest in that little room on Dubinin Street.

However, Solomon has his own opinion on this matter. Ah, my friends! We can clearly state right at the outset that this couple is not going to know success. As far as Solomon is concerned, they are living in a house of cards, and the slightest breeze will blow the whole thing down.

¹ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin – Soviet communist leader (1870-1924).

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Now perhaps a bit of a fight has broken out lately between the siblings – for a few weeks now they have not seen one another. It looks like a new interest has arisen in Solomon's life, and he is continuing his rather fertile labors among the representatives of the fairer sex. Every evening he spends quite a while before the mirror shaving and putting on cologne – and then staying out after midnight.

Spring is here.

Now we must turn our attention for a bit to Solomon – and the author suspects that perhaps the ladies among his readers have already begun to complain that he continually gets lost in tangents, leaving Solomon behind and concerning himself with elderly Jews and dead ritual fringes. These delicate readers harbor a certain slight weakness for Solomon – which is quite understandable. But what will the enlightened male reader have to say – the father and husband in the audience? As far as he is concerned Solomon is nothing but an empty young wastrel of a man chasing the wind and having bad influence on others. The enlightened male reader would never allow his grown daughter to find herself in Solomon's company. And if we really care to delve into the matter fully, then we might add that the daughter's mother would likewise not be granted such permission. Ah, yes, but that's precisely the trouble, for if we were to ask the opinion of the daughter or the mother themselves, then we might see a barely concealed smile hovering over their features and hear the soft reply that goes: On the contrary!

And as for the author, who finds himself between the hammer and the anvil, as it were, he is forced to include some minor portion of the adventures of Solomon. Now the farseeing reader will come along with his assumption that the text is once more going to delve into matters that concern the ladies. And why try to deny it? This assumption can certainly be said to have legs.

Spring is here.

But can you say that you truly know Solomon? Do you have a clear view of him from head to toe? First, he is a member of the Komsomol, a rather disciplined member, who fulfills his obligations with the utmost diligence. If there is a need for some propaganda event, or to give a lecture, to sit at the head of an assembly, or to deliver a speech, to vote for or against something or someone – then Solomon Feigin is ready

and willing. Second, as a student he can hardly be considered among the duffers. And if he sometimes falls off into the abyss, particularly during the examination period – in the end he still manages to advance in his studies from year to year and can thus be said to be fulfilling his obligations as a citizen in this respect as well.

Now, the punctilious reader may well remark that we also ought to note Solomon's lack of seriousness – yes, his lack of seriousness, his tomfoolery, and his crude jokes. In short there is nothing more than a bloated, empty balloon that goes around by the name of Solomon. However, truth be told, perhaps Solomon will manage to prove such a severe, accusatory reader quite wrong. After all, is Solomon indeed incapable of powerful emotions, of heady, considerable labor – even in that very field where no one is challenging his status as an expert – namely, when it comes to the field of women? Will he truly never be touched even once by that deep love that brings with it those sleepless nights, takes hold of the heart of man in its soft hands, and turns his life into a chaos of Sodom and Gomorrah?

That is all that the author – who is caught, as noted, between the hammer and the anvil – truly wished to say. And now, following this brief preamble, let us proceed to the very heart of the matter.

In one of the alleyways that encircle Arbat Street, namely down Filipov Alley, in one of the basement apartments of that selfsame alleyway, there lived the Shotland family – consisting of the father, Zalman, the mother Raissa, and their daughters Elena and Esther. They too were former residents of Hadiach and it was now almost ten years that they had been living in the capital city.

Now, this family cannot be said to have been lifelong residents of Hadiach. They had come to the town from Poland in the year 1915 as refugees of the First World War. Zalman Shotland, the patriarch of the family, had a most gypsy-like look to his face, with a round, black, shining beard, flaming eyes, whose whites were lined with thin red veins; and tanned features, whether in the summer months or the winter. And above all – he had a tremendous wanderlust. It is quite a puzzling thing, just how much this Polish man seemed to love traveling about and wandering from place to place. In Hadiach he used to leave his family for months on end, going back and forth among the big cities and other settlements – on business trips, ostensibly. In the year 1930 he moved his family to that apartment in Filipov Alley, and there he

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went to work making briefcases, which provided him with a rather ample livelihood. But the end of the days of the NEP soon arrived and the source of that livelihood was stopped up. So, what is a Jewish soul to do when times of trouble come upon him? He could well turn himself, for example, into a bookkeeper. But Zalman Shotland did not become a bookkeeper. This particular trade requires you to sit stuck to your chair for ten to twenty hours a day and ends up rewarding you with nothing more than a troublesome, bloody set of hemorrhoids – no, this particular trade was not at all to Zalman Shotland's liking. He loved life, loved being in motion, loved the endless road and its wanderings. He had no love whatsoever for bookkeeping, with its hemorrhoids and black depressive funks.

And so, Zalman Shotland got himself appointed as a salesman in the distribution department of a watch factory and was soon once more off wandering around from place to place – as is the way with salesmen. Once again, he was off traveling about for months on end, and the household was left in the hands of the mother – Raissa Issakovna. Now the Shotland family had a rather pleasant nature, including the fine trait of taking in guests and showing them a good time. This atmosphere reigned in the basement apartment thanks to Raissa Issakovna. She was a rather common Jewish mother and housewife, who was no lover of silence, and she would often give rather free reign to her tongue and go telling over all sorts of things that were indeed rather superfluous. To the same extent that everything about Zalman Shotland spoke of a gypsy background, Raissa Issakovna had, on the contrary, a stark white face, blond hair, and the personality of a homebody. Her eyes, too, were grey-blue.

Now the eldest daughter, Lenchka, had married a young locksmith, who was employed at the same watch factory as the father. Binyamin got to know this young man, Shaul Levin, just a few years after his marriage, when the latter was still a relatively recently married man, and the father of a fine, flourishing, baby boy. Now this Shaul was a master locksmith, truly a pioneer in his profession, and had even earned himself many patents, including a patent related to the stop-motion of the hands of the watch. As a prize for this invention he had been awarded five thousand rubles. Shaul Levin could certainly be said to have had a certain creative spark in him, a true Jewish brain, and hands of gold. At any rate, Lenchka, this beautiful young woman, was in love with him, and he, for his part, returned that love tenfold. The second

daughter, Esther, blossomed and turned into a real beauty, as well. In the year 1940, the year in which our story takes place, Firochka, as Esther was known in the family, was 18 years old. That year she was to complete her studies at the high school and enter the university.

But oh, hell! What a beautiful young woman that Jewish-gypsy girl was, truly a flower in full bloom! With that erect posture of hers and those eyes so pure! Though her eyes were not at all gypsy eyes, no, they were light blue – blue just like the purity of the very heavens above.

Solomon Feigin had already gotten to know the Shotland family back in Hadiach, and from time to time he would visit the basement apartment in Filipov Alley, which was a sort of central meeting place for former residents of Hadiach in Moscow. Aside from this little Hadiach colony, the capital city also sported a Pashutovka colony, and other expat colonies from all over the country. And if my good readers will be so kind as to allow me to once more go off on a little tangent, I might note that these meager connections, namely the connections that went back to the faraway small town, were, perhaps the only connections between many of our brethren, the Children of Israel, in this country. For Jews were regular Soviet citizens, they worked at various jobs, in offices and factories, attended the schools and universities, and were assimilated and scattered among the rest of the nation. Mixed marriages were not at all a rare phenomenon. A new generation had arisen, and its members attended the Russian schools along with the other sons and daughters of the Soviet Union, and they were not at all familiar with the traditional songs and sounds of the Jews. The bonds that had once marked them as members of their People were now as flimsy as mere cobwebs. And among the last remaining bonds that kept them connected to one another in the big cities, perhaps the ties of the small town were in fact the strongest. All the former residents of Hadiach and Pashutovka got together and created their little Hadiach and Pashutovka colonies. The people would all gather a few times a year – on the first of May, the seventh of November, the eighth of March, and sometimes on Jewish holidays as well – such as Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Chanukah – and treat themselves to a proper feast of food and drink, during which they would recall their memories from the small towns, pull out some age-old Jewish ballad, and a few typical Yiddishe 'bon-mots' from back in the day. But all this was little more than childhood memories, mere silliness covered in the cobwebs of the past. And the people themselves too just got older as time passed on.

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Now, some of the former residents of Hadiach used to visit the basement apartment in Filipov Alley, including Solomon. The father, Zalman Shotland, was always on the road, and so the visitor was welcomed to the house by Raissa Issakovna. And once you came into the circle of this woman with her penchant for giving guests a proper welcome, there was no way you were getting out of a hardly meager meal, and a none-too brief conversation. The lady of the house would sit you down at the table and begin prattling away at you. That was the custom of the house: eat and drink and lend the matriarch your ears all day and night. But that year, the younger daughter Esther was considered the jewel in the crown. Her tall bearing, those pure eyes of hers, and the sound of her laughter all lit up the pleasant darkness in that basement apartment and won the hearts of all who beheld her.

Solomon had already known Firochka Shotland for a few years now, but in the year 1940 that fateful day came when he looked at her and was deeply wounded by love. Anyone with eyes, even someone whose weakness for the fairer sex was perhaps not as developed as that of Solomon's – could easily fall prey upon looking just once at Firochka. But only great God above, who knows and sees all, could manage to decipher the way that Solomon succeeded to find his way into the heart of that young beauty. There were not too many young Jewish men – jokesters or otherwise – who could manage to hit upon the proper path through that labyrinth, wrapped as it was in shadow and fantasy.

However, Solomon got the job done.

Say what you will, but the ways and nature of our young people these days are sometimes rather hard to take. Have a look for yourselves: it is the month of May, and all serious, diligent students in the last year of high school are sitting there day and night studying and working away, as they prepare themselves for the coming examinations. The responsible students – that is true students, who have a bit of a conscience, set aside their negligence and laziness and delve deeply into their studies, exams and laboratory sessions. At that very same moment one of female high school students, and one of male university students go and detach themselves from the community, shirk their examinations, and dive into a brand-new, wonderful world, full of light and color, clinging closely to one another without any plans and without any sense of just what time of year it is!

Solomon does not at all feel himself beholden to the examination

period. Solomon, if you will, spits in the face of those same examinations. Every evening Binyamin sees him standing there before the mirror for quite a while – just the same way as he used to do when it was the season of Klava Bobrova, if you'll pardon the comparison.

"And what's going to be with your exams, Solomon?"

"Exams?" He is sprucing himself up before the mirror and his voice seems to come from someplace far away.

Binyamin goes into full-color detail describing the approaching examination period and says that instead of wasting time before the mirror and in the company of some young woman, Solomon would do well to pick up a copy of Bobrikov's or Bach's 'Introduction to Engines' and study a few chapters therein. Now although Solomon listens to Binyamin's words with the utmost attention and seeming interest, he gives his friend a rather foolish look, the look of a true ass, and then turns back to gaze once more into the mirror, and now the look on his face is actually rather pleasant, and sweet, and full of human feeling – and there is really no need to force one's features to work themselves up into a look of pleasure, when what you see in the mirror is a freshly shaven young man with a necktie, and golden teeth glinting away in his mouth beneath those dark eyes of his!

One of those evenings Binyamin went to see Rachel Feigin in that room of hers in Dubinin Street. This time, other than the lady of the house there was no one else in the room. Outside the sky was getting dark, but the noise of the city was still in full swing.

Binyamin: "I've come about Solomon. He's sinking ever deeper into the abyss. This time I don't think a few blows, a shattered leg, or broken teeth will get him to wise up. Firochka Shotland is not one of those girls who settle for mere scraps. She requires the whole man in full – from head to toe."

Rachel: "Is there some possibility that they might get married, then?"

"It's not just a possibility but a guaranteed danger."

She laughs. Binyamin once more sees that laugh of hers and the shining teeth of this beloved woman. Suddenly he forgets the various twists and turns in their relationship, moves a bit closer to her, and embraces her, cautiously. This time he does not suffer a slap in the face

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– no, this time the voice of the young woman comes to him like the very melody of heaven.

"Nu!" Rachel says, and her voice is somewhat husky, her eyes are a bit tired, but in her vicinity the light, cleanliness, and delicate fragrances still hover. "Did you miss me?"

"With all my soul, Rachel."

"So why didn't you come see me?"

"I was afraid."

She laughs.

"Are you not going to slap me again, Rachel?"

She laughs once more. He moves in closer until he is just a step away from her and then kisses the bend in that warm neck.

There is laughter and trembling – warmth, and trembling, and that melody of heaven. She gets up from her seat and puts the kettle on the Primus stove to make some tea. Epstein steps in to the room from outside.

"Ah, Binyamin!" he says, as he shakes the latter's hand. "What does your mother write?"

Binyamin does not immediately respond to this question. However, a few minutes later his calm and joy return, and he chats a bit with Epstein about family matters and things related to Pashutovka.

Epstein, Zinovy Clementyovich, was one of those former inhabitants of Pashutovka, and twenty years ago or more he was a young friend of uncle Hanich Alper. They were both hewn from the same rock, as it were, Epstein and uncle Hanich, and at the turn of the century, when they were still fresh-faced young boys, they had attended the same Cheder run by Meshulem Pupik, whom Binyamin too had gotten a chance to know a bit – that teacher whose chin would rise when he laughed, along with that goat-like beard of his, rising ever higher and higher, seemingly unto the very heavens. Later, the two older men had studied under other teachers – for, as far as teachers, instructors, and sacred articles are concerned, there was no crisis or shortage whatsoever at that time in Pashutovka. But eventually, the day arrived when uncle Hanich got married to aunt Pearl and set up house in Pashutovka permanently, going to work in that office of his, and filling

his bookcases with Hebrew literature, and secretly writing those poems and literary works of his, and then he died and left this world behind. Epstein, meanwhile, left for the city to conquer the great, wide world, and within a year he completed his high school studies as an external student, and then went on to complete his university studies in Forestry, going from strength to strength, until he became the head engineer at the agency for firewood supply in the capital city.

No, Epstein had not simply faded from the world into oblivion or old age, he was most alive, and finding his fair share of satisfaction in this life. True, he was not the youngest man around, but he still bore the burden of his years rather lightly. After all, had he not found the courage in his soul to get involved with that young woman – Rachel Feigin, that is – and leave his pleasant Maria Abramovna behind? Such a move requires considerable energy and a real lust for life!

Epstein was still alive, he was holding on tight to life hand and foot. However, it is perhaps a bit difficult for an older man to concern himself with youthful affairs. There the three of them sit now at the table, drinking their tea. Epstein's face is wrinkled and tired, tired and rather old. Lord above, where are all those ironic remarks that were always to be found on the tip of the tongue of that cunning little man? Good heavens, the man is sitting there yawning! – Yet what a shining picture Rachel presents, by contrast, what a festive look her youthful features wear!

Binyamin says: "We must rescue Solomon, he is standing on the edge of the abyss. This Firochka, in my opinion, is not one of those easygoing girls. No, she wants a lifelong commitment, she's got him in a veritable death grip."

Rachel: "I think we should let him be! Let him marry this young girl, perhaps it'll smarten him up."

The three of them are sitting and sipping tea in silence for a little while.

"I'll come visit the two of you tomorrow!" Rachel says, turning to Binyamin. "What time will I find Solomon at home?"

"After about seven or eight in the evening he devotes all his time to Firochka, so, don't be late!"

Epstein steps out to accompany Binyamin to the Metro station.

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Night has fallen, but the infants down Dubinin Street are still raising their cries; you can hear their voices rising to the heavens above. The streetlamps have been lit, even though the great lamp of the moon stands overhead in full, casting its own deceptively playful light over all. In the yard of the neighboring factory named after Vladimir Ilyich the sound of locomotives can be heard blasting away. Two different engines can be heard, one honking out a broken staccato, and the other letting loose a deep, sustained cry. The two sounds carry off into the distance.

At that moment Zinovy Clementyevich takes hold of Binyamin by the arm and begins talking to him about trees, and stones, and the weather, and all sorts of other minor topics. However, he soon moves from the weather to his own situation, speaking of these strange days that he is now experiencing, and his voice is the voice of sadness and suffering, a voice emerging from the very depths of his heart.

"Do you follow, Binyamin? She's sweet – Rachel Yefimovna, that is, but I am busy with work from morning to night – that's the first thing. And second – if only this had all taken place twenty years ago."

"What are you talking about, Zinovy Clementyevich?"

No, he is responsible for that little mistake, he is the one who got involved with Rachel Feigin. When a man on the verge of turning fifty takes such a step, he must properly assess his own strength.

He continues talking, and his voice can hardly be said to be shot through with fire and lightning. Perhaps he should never have left Maria Abramovna, this too was a painful mistake. It is difficult for a man his age to detach himself from family life, and all those daily habits that you just can't get away from. Maria Abramovna is a comforting, merciful woman – that is how she sees her entire role in life. But here, with Rachel, he is not afforded any comfort. Rachel is the one who demands comforting...

They are approaching Metro station. With the Pavelezky railway terminal right nearby, they can hear the whistling locomotives, each engine with its particular loud call. These locomotive whistles, near and far, blend together in the silence of the night and turn themselves into a single, unified melody.

Epstein asks: "Have you seen Maria Abramovna recently?"

"I went to see her two or three times during the winter."

"Go see her, Binyamin!"

They separate, and Binyamin heads for the escalator. At that point he hears a man calling his name. It is Epstein. They stand there once more in the fancy hall of the Metro station, the illuminating lights raining down upon them, and Binyamin notes a certain change in Epstein, and he has the look of a man who has finally come to a decision.

"Go see her, Binyamin!" he says, and his clever eyes are shining. A few moments later Binyamin senses a commanding tone in Epstein's voice, the voice of a high official, as he delivers his terse, precise instructions: "To hell with it, go see her!"

And he did not say another word, but off behind the curtains one could hear a request in those words of his that had risen from the very bottom of his heart.

"Go see her, Binyamin!" That was how his request could have been understood – "And see what she says. Ask her if she can forgive me, and if we can still fix what got broken..."

At last they finally part ways. The escalator takes Binyamin down to the Metro corridor. How complicated life is!

.... How complicated life is! Take Solomon, for example. He suddenly finds himself amidst a disaster – pure platonic love, full of poetry, fantasy, and all sorts of other foolish things. And now Binyamin once more finds Solomon standing before the mirror, combing his hair and sprucing himself up, and his face is there shining away, and there is splendor and happiness in those dark eyes of his. In addition – he is whistling!

"Your sister Rachel will be here in a bit. You must wait for her!"

"Ah, my friends! Today I can't wait around. I have a ticket in my pocket, and I must head over to the theater."

"Which theater?"

"The Maly Theater. To see 'The Glass of Water', by Scribe."

He continues looking in the mirror, as he knots his necktie and continues to whistle away.

"Is it really nice of you to have grown so distant from your sister,

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Solomon?"

"She's the one who is distant."

And he proceeds to criticize his sister with a few harsh words. Truth be told, nothing is sacred in her eyes – not her elderly parents, not her brother, and not family life. What will become of her in the end?

Binyamin: "If only I had a sister like her. But I don't have any sisters. We're just two brothers – myself and Shimon, my older brother."

The final words remind Solomon of some long, meaningless tune that has to do with ten brothers. And so, the light cloud that had previously come to rest across his forehead now disappears, and he suddenly breaks out in song, as he continues all the while to dress and spruce himself up before the mirror:

*Zehn bruder seinen mir gewehnen,
Haben mir gehandelt mit wein...¹*

You have all heard the song, that song as long and sad as the exile itself – you must know it! Well, Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov and congratulations! Solomon has finished his labors – having finally knotted that fancy tie around his neck. By any standard he can be said to have done the job quite tastefully. However, the song about the ten brothers continues to ring out in the room. And lo and behold, Solomon's voice is joined by the voice of another fool, as Binyamin chimes in...

"Nu, it seems to me that I'm about ready to head out!" Solomon interrupts the long song, as he twists his face up in a few final grimaces, and dances a few last steps about the room, dousing himself with a minor ocean of eau de cologne, bending his face this way and that, and fixing an expert eye on his look in the mirror. At last he gives Binyamin's hand a friendly shake and asks him to convey his warm regards to Bobrikov.

The door can be heard opening and closing – and Binyamin is left all by himself. As a diligent student, he must rush to open his copy of Bobrikov and delve into 'Engine Parts'. But the devil take it! Instead of fulfilling his obligations as a citizen he goes on singing that silly tune

¹ 'We were ten brothers / and our business was wine' ([Yiddish]).

about the ten brothers!

At last he falls silent and reaches for his copy of Bobrikov. It is now time for Engine Parts. He picks up the boring book and sinks head and shoulders into the text. At around ten the door opens and Rachel walks in.

She asks in an angry voice: "Where is Solomon?"

"Didn't I tell you that you wouldn't find Solomon here at this late hour?"

"Why didn't you stop him from leaving?" – her voice is raging with anger.

"He had a date at the theater this evening."

"He should have waited for me."

"But I warned you that from eight o'clock on you wouldn't find Solomon here."

They stand there facing each other and shouting.

"I was busy."

"That's not my problem!"

There are complaints and arguments, a rising storm and more shouting. It is not a pretty picture. In fact, it is a rather ugly picture! Binyamin sits down and pretends to get lost in his Bobrikov. But Rachel sits down, yanks the book from his hands and tosses it across the room in quite a rage.

"It's not polite to go reading books when you have guests!"

"You didn't come to see me!"

"Yes, I did!" her voice is still filled with anger and resentment; the game has not yet been played out to the end.

Binyamin: "But what can I do? There isn't much time left, and the exams are about to begin."

"Today you have to take your mind off your studies. After all, the hour is rather late, Binyamin!"

It seems that the storm has subsided somewhat.

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"At times we spend whole nights on end hunched over our books." She gets up from her seat.

"I should go. I must certainly be getting in your way..." The game has now ended. In her voice, in her eyes, in the look on her face, a hidden change has taken place. Binyamin jumps at her, helping her remove her coat. The fragrance of her perfume reaches his nostrils and intoxicates him.

"Rachel!" With a warm groan he embraces the woman. Suddenly she turns to face him, and there is light and softness in her eyes – and so she embraces his head forcefully and kisses him a few times, then quite a few more times, around his face, and on his eyes. There is a fog and a certain force in the eyes of this woman, both strength and a complete lack of strength, shame and shamelessness and a raging fire.

The dying shouts of the city crept into the room, along with the chill of the night. The two of them sit before the open window. She presses herself against him, and he caresses her head.

She says: "I didn't come for Solomon – I came for you. You're not going to throw me out again, are you Binyamin?"

From this point forward, they seem to be murmuring in some sort of dream. He says:

"What have you got to do with a sinful man like me?"

"I'm not ashamed..."

She embraces him, and continues to embrace him without refuge or escape, pressing against him to the very depths of his soul, and then they seem to fall into and mesh with one another, until they have no strength left whatsoever.

Spring is here.

"I've lain right here and dreamt of you more than once, Rachel!"

"Is that so?"

She lies there with her eyes closed. There is laughter blossoming in her face, and her wondrous teeth flutter in the darkness of the room.

At one in the morning Binyamin accompanies Rachel to the Metro station, and from that point on she would come to visit him in his room rather often. And yet, there is a certain difference between those

miraculous nights along the shore of the Psel River – as the leaves of distant sounds and stars fluttered to the ground, and their hearts were enveloped in darkness and the chilly air – and these nights in room number 224, whose sole furnishings consisted of two iron bedsteads and a wobbly desk. But even in this shabby cell the fever of love burned bright and overflowed its banks.

That spring of 1940 Binyamin had more than his share of troubles and problems. Have a look at things for yourselves: first, he had to prepare for his exams; second, there were the hours spent with Rachel Feigin in that dark room. Aside from all this he had quite a few other burdens to bear. He had recently become a sort of matchmaker and mediator – and God knows what else! Take Epstein, for example. This good Jew here had had an accident and he had veered off the proper path. And now Binyamin was the one tasked with effecting his repentance and making peace between him and Maria Abramovna!

One cloudless evening Binyamin tucked his copy of Bobrikov's 'Engine Parts' under his arm and headed out for Obolensky Alley, for that building whose windows look out on Samotyoky Square. The Epsteins lived in this building. It was eight in the evening and Maria Abramovna was not at home. Binyamin sat for about two hours on one of the benches along the boulevard next to Samotyoky Square and read intermittently in the book by Bobrikov. It was only at around ten o'clock that the lights came on in the windows of Maria Abramovna's room, and Binyamin went in to see her.

Maria Abramovna was ever her pleasant, big-boned self. She stood in the kitchen before the gas stovetop and cooked lunch and dinner at the same time – she was rather short on time of late. The research institute, where she worked as a chemist, had received an important commission from the government and, as a result, Maria Abramovna was spending no less than twelve hours a day at work. All the same, she was not at all in low spirits, and she received Binyamin rather warmly. Maria Abramovna was an active woman. Though she had been conceived and born in the city of Starokonstantinov, and not Pashutovka, she too was from the Volyn region, and the Jews of Volyn were not the type who took pleasure in getting lost in mourning and lamentations.

The two of them sit down at the table and talk a bit about Maria Abramovna's work, Binyamin's examinations, and a few of their

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common acquaintances from the Pashutovka enclave. Maria Abramovna is also a child of this town, even if, as noted, she was born in Starokonstantinov.

Binyamin says: "The day before yesterday I saw Zinovy Clementyevich, and he asked me to come and see you."

She jumps up from her seat and cries out in a terrible rage:

"Don't even mention his name in this house! Don't bring him up! I have erased the very memory of him from my heart."

She sits back down as her eyes cast fiery sparks all around. Of all the strange parts of this woman's body, her eyes are the strangest. And once we have touched on this subject, we ought to mention that these eyes were a bit crossed, and when they looked at you, one of them penetrated the very depths of your being, while the other looked off into the Land of Goshen, as it were. There are folks – and the author confesses that he is among them – who have a soft spot for such eyes, the eyes of the *Sitra Achra*, you might say. Maria Abramovna's eyes took hold of you, filling you with curiosity and terror, chasing after you and troubling your sleep.

At that moment these terrible eyes of hers were casting off fiery sparks, but a little while later, the sparks had died down and left just a suffering look in the eyes. Binyamin notes the look of suffering and he is sorry – sorry that he is the one who rubbed salt in the bloody wound. But on the other hand, if the anger is really as great as all that, then it is a sign that Epstein's chances are not in fact all that bad here, with Maria Abramovna. Say what you will, she certainly is not indifferent on the matter.

Binyamin says rather cautiously: "I must ask you to forgive me, Maria Abramovna, but he looked pretty sick to me, he looked exhausted and in pain."

He suddenly sensed that his words had found their way into the woman's heart. She was sick of Epstein, the cheating husband. But as for the exhausted, aging, suffering man in him, that she could not reject. Every fiber of her womanly nature rebelled against it – the nature of that big-boned woman with her terrible eyes, whose very purpose in this world was to love and comfort, to serve as shield and succor, and to spread her sheltering wings.

It is not to be believed! Binyamin has become a mediator and an intercessor lately – and it is a source of no small amount of laughter and ridicule! Take, for example, the Feigin siblings. We once more must turn our attention to Solomon and his sister and their hearty playfulness. A few days went by before Binyamin was able to arrange a meeting between the brother and sister. The time of the meeting was set, and Solomon sat there waiting and waiting for his sister until he fairly ran out of patience – but Rachel still did not show up. It was only between nine and ten in the evening, as the day faded away, that she would steal into their room and stay with Binyamin for three or four hours – may she be blessed, this comforting woman, this veritable queen among women, with her cold, pure teeth, and the burning whispers and kindnesses she offered. And all that time she had been waiting for Solomon. But now it seems that during all those hours Solomon was suffering from his own lovesickness in the company of Firochka Shotland.

That was how Binyamin put it to this beloved woman, as he put a puzzled expression on his face. But Rachel presses herself against him quite a bit – she seems to have all but adopted this rather miserable habit – and she laughs loudly.

She says: "Silly boy, today too I only came to see you... didn't you miss me just a teeny bit?"

Spring is here! The golden season with its gentle green hue, the season when life is fairly filled to the brim! In the western countries war has broken out. In the Forest of Compiègne, where Germany had signed its embarrassing armistice in November 1918, France was now forced to sign its own embarrassing defeat. But all this happened somewhere far away, in distant lands, whereas the heroes of our story were wrapped up in their shells and did not pay any attention to the significant events that were taking place that spring in Western Europe. The two of them had their own minor events to look after. The examination period had arrived. Binyamin and Solomon sank for days and nights on end into their textbooks, notebooks, summaries, and all sorts of other papers filled front and back with dense writing. Binyamin and Rachel's heartwarming encounters tapered off a bit, but they did not altogether cease. From time to time they still gave themselves up with all their energy to that spring madness, and when they were in a good mood it was as though they were murmuring away in a dream.

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Binyamin: "I can't quite see your face clearly, Rachel. The window is open, but the light of the stars is too faint, and the streetlamps are weak as well..."

"Ha-ha!"

"There, you're laughing, you've poured a bit of your laughter about the room, and now it's as though the whole space has been ever so slightly illuminated."

There is a kiss, a kiss filled with caution and emotion. She presses herself against him as they sit there at the open window. Sometimes she pretends to get angry with him and she runs away from him off into the opposite corner of the room. She stands there, with her erect posture and delicate figure, enveloped in the darkness.

And then the silent hunt begins. No, they don't make a sound, but he chases after her, and she slips away from his grasp. At times they go running around the table. One of them bumps into a chair and the chair falls, and the loud sound it makes causes them to come to a standstill for a moment. Binyamin takes advantage of the interval to grab hold of the young woman.

She says: "Ha, what a heroic hunter! Have pity on me, please don't finish me off!"

"No, I'm going to finish you off!"

She gets down on her knees.

"What are you going to do to me, you lazy old student?"

She suddenly leaps to her feet and tries to run away again. But Binyamin grabs hold of her and embraces her with all his heart.

"You're not going to run away again, woman?"

"No, I won't run away again." The scent of raspberries rises from her lips, and Binyamin gulps down the fragrance. "I won't run away again. Crush me, do what you want with me!"

Suddenly tears flashed in her eyes. A mixture of tears, and raspberries, and laughter moves in closer to Binyamin, with all its strength and magic. He trembles and fights to contain the tremor – after all, he is a real man!

Just like that, as though playing roles on the stage, the two of them

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murmur whisperingly in tones of assault and intoxication. Rachel is the one who taught him this tremor-inducing game.

Spring is here. There is poetry and trembling, joy of the flesh and the heart, and life boiling over for all it's worth!

Sometimes that's how it is, just before the bitter hand of death comes down, life gathers all its strength in a flame that ignites and burns, rising to the very heavens.

Chapter 1.10

That sweet, foul blow, which swoops down suddenly on the foolish man at a certain age, has now been visited upon our good friend Solomon. He got married! His young wife, Firochka Shotland, having snared a young man like Solomon in her net, would no longer let him go. And Solomon clung to her with all his might. That was the end of all his adventures – the end of what we knew as Solomon!

In the spring, that same spring in which our tale is now unfolding, we find the two young men, Binyamin and Solomon, busy with various things up to their eyeballs. On the one hand – there were the examinations at the university, and on the other hand – there were those spring nights. For days and nights on end Binyamin and Solomon sat working away at their studies. But then that obstacle too was at last removed. Praise the Lord and Creator of the Universe – the examinations were done. And now it is time to draw up a balance sheet. As far as Solomon goes the results are not at all too comforting: in the end, Firochka and 'Engine Parts' were his undoing...

However, in the wider world it was then the end of June, and the summer was singing its joyful tune all around them, and Solomon's spirits were not at all crushed. There was nothing to it. Before the first of September, when the new school year would begin, he would grab those 'Engine Parts' by the tail. For now, in any case, he had plenty of work to do.

Solomon is getting married! One cloudless morning he went and registered Firochka as his wife with the 'ZAGS'¹, and in the evening, there was a light celebration at the apartment in Filipov Alley. True, no gilt-edged invitations had been sent out to the guests, but a rather sizeable crowd came out to the party – both from the side of the bride and from the side of the groom.

¹ ZAGS – Marital registry office in Russia.

Binyamin was among the guests on the groom's side. In the basement apartment he found all the members of the Shotland company. The head of the family was there among the guests too, having just recently returned from his wanderings as an emissary on behalf of the watch factory. His black, gypsy head stood out like a mighty clod among the bright white and blond colors that otherwise filled the basement apartment. With a festive, silent, preoccupied air, Raissa Issakovna moved from room to room among the tables and refreshments, and her face shone with joy. She did not raise her voice much that evening. The bride and groom were shining, shining and fluttering over all! The two of them were both dressed in white from head to toe.

There was a wide array of colors, from the blond to the gypsy, all crowded together there! There was a variegated collection of the eyes of our Nation's young men and women there, and pleasantly joyful shouts, and flashing teeth in that basement apartment, as quite a few glasses were raised in honor of the young couple. And as is the custom among our people – the guests did not tire of screaming 'Gor'ko!'¹ The kisses between the bride and groom were pure and cautious. She was a daughter of valor, that Firochka, a true woman of valor! Although she was as airy and soft as a supple reed, she was yet the practical one between the two of them. When Solomon had been wrestling with those 'Engine Parts', Firochka had sat for her own exams without stumbling, and the marks she received on her graduation certificate were not poor at all. This beautiful young woman had a rather wonderful ability to grasp things...

Yes, Solomon was shining – from his necktie right down to his shoelaces he was blazing bright and flying high, and those two gold teeth in his mouth had their part in this blaze of glory as well. He had his share to drink, though he did not overdo it either. The thing is, that young wife of his sat to his right like a guardian angel, and she managed their joint affairs with a warm, gentle hand. Indeed, from that point on Solomon would never be without that guardian angel who would be watching over his every step. On the other hand, the head of the family

¹ Gor'ko! – 'Bitter'! an old Russian tradition: a shout by wedding guests urging the newlyweds to kiss, thus removing the "bitterness".

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Zalman Shotland went and drank quite a bit, and no one made any attempt to rein him in. He was a wild man who loved his freedom, loved his wanderings and adventures. In addition, he had always been a rather silent type, ever since he was a boy, and his wife Raissa Issakovna had been the one to assume the burden of having to carry the conversation.

Yet that rather pleasant evening there Binyamin got the chance to hear the voice of that Polish Gypsy in all its glory. Zalman Shotland, once he was well in his cups, suddenly burst forth in song. But what a laughable scene! God may well have denied him a musical ear, but in recompense, He had given him the gift of a deep bass voice that could make the very roof shake. And so, a series of none-too-recent tunes could be heard in the room, tunes that were quite common some thirty years ago in the city of Warsaw.

*Oy, where did you go,
My Lithuanian boy,
Once you had the dowry in your pocket?*

They were silly songs, the sounds of the beating heart! This gypsy man roared his song with all his might, and it was at that moment that Shaul Levin, the locksmith, began to share his problems with Binyamin. Shaul Levin was an inventor by trade, and now he was losing sleep over the watch spring – that same watch spring whose secret, till this very day, not a single soul had known. It was ridiculous! To go and import the steel for the spring from abroad even these days, when everything was being industrialized! Did we not have enough bright brains of our own, for God's sake? And Shaul is now busy with the steel for watch springs – concerning himself with all aspects of tempering, heating, cooling the steel, and so on. Have you ever heard of such a thing? Indeed, we have a rather creative type before us, a man who refuses to rest for an instant, day or night!

*Oy, you've only come now,
When I have fallen low,
And there isn't a cent left from the dowry...*

Shotland continues to bellow out the tune about the tender young girl like a roaring lion – Good Lord, there were tears of laughter all around! Instead of pronouncing the word for 'cent' properly, he pronounced it 'sant', in the matter of our good old people from Poland

and Volyn. In that tone-deaf bass voice of his he roared and growled out the heartfelt words of the song.

Rachel Feigin laughed at the sound of all that soulful roaring. She is sitting by Binyamin's side – the two of them are representatives from the groom's side, and they have a few rights of their own, as such.

"Get him to quiet down, Binyamin!" Rachel says, and the flash of her teeth captivates him, despite all the other light around the room.

The two of them had had a bit to drink themselves. And now Binyamin was tasked with taking charge of the record player. The records included dance numbers, arias, and well-warbled versions of portions of the liturgy sung by some of the most famous cantors in Warsaw decades ago. The room now rings out with a husky rendition of the prayer, '*Hashkiveinu*'¹. However, Zalman Shotland could care less about such trifles, he could care less about '*Hashkiveinu*'. He is going to roar and growl away until the very Messiah himself shows up.

*Heint bist du da,
Nur kein gelt iz nita,
Und das Leben iz geweren azoi miyus...²*

And Rachel Feigin, that attractive woman with the slender hips, laughs at all those growled sounds, she keeps on laughing until she has absolutely no strength left...

As of that evening Solomon moved in to the basement apartment. They were happy, the young couple that is, there was no denying it. With a sparkle in their eyes and the sound of their secret laughter, the two of them were drawn to each other, and that basement apartment seemed like a true castle of gold to them.

A few days later a letter arrived from Hadiach. "My dear, beloved son! – so began the letter from Pesya – we received the cable in due time. I would hereby like to communicate to you and my new daughter-in-law Esther my most faithful blessings, the blessings of a mother, and

¹ Hashkiveinu - a petitionary prayer to be able to lie down in peace at night and to return to life the following day (Hebrew).

² 'Today you're here / But the money's gone / And life has become quite a source of disgust...' (Yiddish).

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the prayer for you both that comes straight from my heart. May the Good Lord grant you a long life, a life filled with good health and satisfaction and all good things. I have one major request to make of you, and of our daughter-in-law Esther – long may she live – and all our in-laws: you should all come to Hadiach to spend the summer here. If you have not yet celebrated a proper Chuppah and Jewish marriage, we will have a modest ceremony here. For the ZAGS is the ZAGS, but the religion of Moses and Israel is just as valid as ever. The summer vacationers have already begun to gather in Hadiach and Vilbovka. You must not forget, my son, and our heart's treasure, that you are after all a Jew..."

And so on and so forth went the letter from Pesya to her reckless son, who, with every fiber of his heart, was, in the end, a faithful son to that mother of his. The in-laws also received written invitations to come to Hadiach – just a few warm words, words that touched the very heart. Binyamin, too, was among those invited – indeed, not a single soul was forgotten, no one was left out. At that point all eyes turned to Firochka. Although she was only eighteen years old, it turns out that she was the one in charge of all comings and goings in the Shotland home, and it was her tender hands that held the reins. Firochka read the letters from Hadiach and made her decision: "Yes, we all must go!"

And so it was. No one asked Solomon for his opinion. He had not yet reached the level at which he would be able to formulate any resistance to those blue eyes of Firochka. For the time being, Solomon was completely beholden to that fine wife of his, and she ruled his life with a gentle touch. Like all recently married young men, he felt himself to be something like a mere decorative flourish of secondary importance in the apartment in Filipov Alley, as though all that went on there did not really concern him that much. Everything in life, the entire universe with everything in it, completely revolved around Firochka – her eyes, her voice, that warm, attractive physique of hers, the chaste hue of her features, and her laugh – that laugh of a woman who is at once a young girl and a grown lady.

And so, one day at the start of July, eight brave souls took off for Hadiach. There were the young husband and wife – who made up first couple; there were Zalman Shotland and his son-in-law Shaul Levin, along with their respective wives – who made up couples number two and three; and there was the lively boy Borinka Levin, and that young

man, Binyamin – who made up the final couple.

Rachel was not able to join them on their journey. She had not yet completed the required number of days of labor at the agency for firewood supply, and so she was not yet eligible for a vacation. That year the government had issued a rather severe set of new laws concerning the discipline of the work force, and so Rachel was not able to be granted a vacation.

This was quite a disappointment for Binyamin. True, his relationship with Rachel was a bit strange, and the bonfire that raged between them had a way of catching fire and then dying down by turns...

The evening before they were to leave, Binyamin went to see Rachel in that room of hers in Dubinin Street. She now lived alone. Epstein had repented, and Maria Abramovna, that considerable woman with those terrifying eyes of hers, who was well-versed in the art of spreading her sheltering wings over that chick of a man of hers – Maria Abramovna had taken him in, comforted him and forgiven him, even if, between the two of them, she was really the one more in need of comfort.

"And so, you're going away..." Rachel said. As ever, this graceful woman held herself erect, with that delicate figure of hers. It was amazing to see just how much those teeth of hers shone in the darkness of the room.

"Yes, I'm going away, Rachel." The window was open, the day was fading away, and the noisy ruckus rising from the factory named after Vladimir Ilyich came to them as though filtered through a soft shawl.

"So, don't let the moment slip away, then!" Her eyes, filled with loathing, are fixed on him rather fiercely.

She is once again consumed by jealousy and a fighting spirit. Vain, empty words follow, with all sorts of deceptive tricks! If he dares to move closer to this angry woman, she will once more deal him a slap on the cheek – it's something he knows from experience. Little by little Binyamin has gotten to know the Bible of how to behave oneself with this veritable actress here. He lends his eyes an angry look and hardens his tone.

"I don't owe you any explanations!" he says harshly. "I've had it

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with all these pretexts of yours. Goodbye!"

He turns to leave, moving toward the door, and at that moment he hears her voice.

"If you're going to leave like that, it can only mean..."

"Nu?"

"It can only mean that you are nothing more than a brainless young man. Yes, you haven't got even a scrap of a brain in that empty skull of yours."

"I don't need a brain when I'm dealing with a madwoman like you!"

"If that's the case, why don't you go run to that Lidochka of yours? Go, run to her..."

"That's right, I'll run to her, and I don't need your approval!"

"Yes, you do!"

"No, I don't!"

"Yes, you do!" and now a certain hidden shift enters her voice, and Binyamin goes back over to her and embraces her with all the strength in his heart. The game is over now. She suddenly bursts into tears and buries her head in his shoulder. The scent of her perfume once more rises to his nostrils and intoxicates him.

"What are you crying for, you foolish woman?" There are tears in his eyes too now. Who knows? Perhaps it was all quite a long, long way off from being a mere game. "Why are you crying? If you want – I'll stay here for the summer."

No, she doesn't want that. The only thing she is asking of him is that he bring Tamar back with him from Hadiach. She misses her daughter with all her heart. Truth be told, all that she has found here in the capital city is loneliness and indifference. It's every man for himself...

The sounds that seep in from Dubinin Street through the open window are gradually growing softer. Darkness mixed with the muted sounds of evening echo between the walls of the room.

"Are you going to shout at me anymore, Binyamin?"

"Yes I am."

"Good Lord above! Is that a nice way to treat a frail woman like myself?"

The words have merely left her lips and it is as though a warm, sweet fog has descended over the two of them, and they once more forget the rest of the world and everything in it.

Indeed, it is a rather puzzling thing to see just how far this woman manages to stray from the straight path! After all, what might have happened, for example, if Tamar had remained with her Grandma Pesya back in Hadiach?

But how could a silly young man like Binyamin manage to comprehend the compassionate feelings of a mother who longs for her baby girl, left behind in that small town so far away?

That year Sarah Samuilovna did not come to Hadiach. She, her daughter-in-law, and the young lad Sashinka spent the summer near Kharkov, in the village of Pokotilovka.

In Hadiach Binyamin once again stayed at the Feigin home, in the Garden alley. True, the house was filled to the brim with in-laws and guests, but Solomon, and particularly his mother Pesya, had pleaded with Binyamin not to mind the crowd and spend that summer too in the garden-filled alley. And so, he was given a corner in the main room, and he got the chance to be a witness to everything he heard and saw of the pleasant events that took place in the house that summer.

This time Binyamin did not make the same foolish mistake as the previous summer, and he brought his bicycle with him to Hadiach. Every morning he would climb onto the seat and take the road that led from Hadiach to Vilbovka. Professor Edelman was staying in Vilbovka with aunt Nastasya. Binyamin would spend about five hours in the company of Stepan Borisovich, drafting diagrams, making corrections, and indulging in a bit of idle conversation as well. Despite his illness the Professor had not lost his talent for pontificating. At three in the afternoon Binyamin would return to Hadiach.

Yes, a rather pleasant series of events took place that summer in the Feigin household. First – there was the Chuppah. This was not delayed all that much, in order not to lead the young couple, God forbid, into temptation. Solomon had only one condition to make – that it be celebrated modestly. For after all, there was a certain difference

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between the man of the Komsomol and the *yeshiva bachur*¹.

And indeed, the Chuppah was celebrated modestly. About thirty men and women gathered in the rooms of the house. There were the eight members of the in-laws' family, along with guests, including the bride and groom themselves – all from the capital city – there were the three members of the Feigin household, two women to cook and provide general assistance - Esther the noodle-maker and her daughter, as after all, it would be impossible to throw the two of them out of the house. Nu, and what about the group of old long-time friends? How could there be a Chuppah at the house of Chaim Yaakov Feigin without the presence, for example, of old Reb Dovid the shochet with that one good eye of his, or Aharon Ginsburg, the black-clad cemetery attendant, or the members of the Loytin household, both young and old, or Berman and Golda and Sarka, and a few other young boys and girls who were friends of Tamar?

The Chuppah was a modest affair, but of all the people that Binyamin had gotten to know the year before in Hadiach, not even one was missing that evening. In those days life still flowed along stealthily, day after day, month after month, year after year. The old people got older, but little by little, in silence, and the Angel of Death would occasionally pay them a visit. Take, for example, Esther the noodle-maker. In theory, there isn't really much to say here, is there? If the previous year she had already lived to be ninety-three, then it follows that this year she is ninety-four – and that's that! But the end had not yet arrived, and Esther the noodle-maker was still alive. She came over, with her cane in her hand, her face furrowed and flattened out, while those eyes of hers looked this way and that, taking in the rest of the world as it spun all around her. Her firm hand and outstretched arm, with which she ruled over that minor kingdom of hers, had not lost any of their strength over the intervening year. But, how could they? How else would her daughter Nechama locate her own hands and feet without that domineering hand of her mother's and those piercing eyes of hers?

And so old Esther sits there in the kitchen, with her cane in her hands, and her lips hard at work.

¹ Yeshiva bachur - a young man who spends all his time learning Torah.

"Nechama, did you already add salt to the soup?"

"In a minute, in a minute, Mother. I just need to finish chopping up the liver and then I will take care of the soup."

"Oy, you, lazy good-for-nothing! The guests have already begun to arrive, and there you are wasting the entire day cutting up that liver there!"

The pleasant scents of the golden soup¹, chopped liver mixed with eggs, onions and duck fat, and the warm, delicate fragrance of fresh baked goods fill the kitchen, and spread throughout the rest of the rooms of the house, as they float outside like a priceless harbinger of things to come. Indeed, the guests have already begun to arrive. One of the very first to arrive is our old acquaintance, Reb Dovid the shochet, who could care less about proper manners and pedantic details. Reb Dovid the shochet has also added another year on to his life since we last saw him, and in his case, the year seems to have rather left its mark. His good eye has begun to be covered with a film as well and has almost gone completely blind. The world before his one dying eye is now rather faint and dim, and Reb Dovid the shochet now feels along with his cane for quite a long while before he dares to take a step. Yes, the steps of that old man who was all alone in the world were now immeasurably cautious, moderate, and slow. Yet all the same, his spirit was not broken, his knees had not buckled beneath him – all the same he was not yet wallowing away in the dirt. No, he was alive, he was still breathing, he still prayed to God – for, indeed, we still had our God up in Heaven who provided us with our sustenance in this life, and guided our steps, knowing just where the proper path lay before us, in this life that was our lot and destiny upon the earth.

And so, the guests had begun to arrive. At one and the same time Aharon Ginsburg walked in along with the members of the Loytin household. The cemetery attendant bore something of a resemblance to the bride's father – that gypsy Shotland. As ever, he still spent his

¹ Golden soup - chicken soup that is served to the bride and groom as the first course at a Jewish wedding feast, which, with the circles of fat that float along the surface looking like gold coins, is considered a sign of abundance and good fortune.

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days in the lonely Shtiebel in the Jewish cemetery, guarding the spark of light over the holy grave of the Alter Rebbe. Lord have mercy, this too is a respectable occupation in the Jewish community – watching over the faint light of some Menorah. I am sure that there are those among my readers and fellow brethren who would mock this particular labor and consider it little more than the dust beneath their feet. But the author is not a member of your little cabal. For, perhaps we ought to consider this Jew as safeguarding the very flame of our downtrodden Nation.

And now old Shapira and his wife entered the room. He is not in the best of health today, his heart continues to grow weaker from year to year, and his face is sunken, and the look of pain and suffering in those clever eyes of his has also grown sharper over the year. However, by contrast, that sparse beard of his is the same as it ever was and has not grown even the slightest little bit. Stepping soundlessly Shapira enters the room and sits for a few minutes in a chair without moving a muscle, breathing heavily. He would have been better off staying in bed at home, but how could he not show up to the Chuppah of Solomon – Chaim Yaakov Feigin's only son?

Everyone, absolutely everyone showed up today, and so we once more see this little group of people, old and young, filling the rooms of the house in honor of Solomon. As ever, Berel Loytin carried the conversation, which revolved around matters of politics and state policy, all high and lofty things. Berel Loytin went wandering up and down through this sublime world, moving about like a man who was very much in his element.

"Fine!" Loytin was saying, as his thumb followed in his wake, seeming to egg him on. "That may well be! Let's assume that Hitler and Mussolini conquer Europe..."

His thumb executes an incomparably dismissive gesture. Berel Loytin's thumb has already mastered this doubtful assumption and is letting those European dictators have it. But now listen in to just what is going to follow! Do you think that the world will just revert to a state of '*tohu wa-bohu*'?¹ Thank God, there were still some world powers that

¹ Tohu wa-bohu - is a Biblical Hebrew expression that describes the condition of confusion and emptiness of the earth before God said, "Let there be light."

would ensure that those evil men got what was coming to them.

And Berel Loytin went dancing back and forth through the world of high diplomacy, and there was no corner so lofty that he did not rummage through it and about which he did not offer his opinion. Take, for example, North America, or, if you will, South America... and the speaker refused to relax, as he proceeded to delve into the nature of the Balkan states, and the countries in Africa and the Arab world – and this was no superficial survey, but a fundamental examination of their politics and economies.

At that moment the women and young girls were sitting with the bride in the other room, while here, in the main room, only the men were gathered. But not all those present were lending their ears to the speech of Berel Loytin and that thumb of his; there was also a general hum of voices moving about the room. But just then a voice emerged from the other room:

"The bride is ready. It is time for the Chuppah!"

The Chuppah itself was spread in the main room over its four poles, the candles were lit, and there was silence. From the other room the women and young girls began to emerge one by one. Then came the bride, and she was incredibly beautiful, wrapped up in a white shawl, with a wreath of light-blue flowers adorning her forehead. On either side her mother and mother-in-law held her arms.

The groom was now brought under the Chuppah. From the kitchen Esther the noodle-maker and her daughter Nechama emerged as well. Old Esther leaned there on her cane, and her eyes were fixed on the events as they unfolded all around her. Seventy-five years ago, this elderly mother had also been accompanied to the Chuppah – that was when she had married her husband Zerah, may he rest in peace. Quite a few years have passed since then, and no small number of people has passed before her eyes, raging away here beneath the heavens, and then sinking down into the abyss of oblivion.

Indeed, an innumerable number of weddings have been held here, in Hadiach, between the local young men and women, over the course of these many years. And life went on in silence, with one generation fading away as another came up to take its place, and this dizzying dance went on repeating itself in circles before the eyes of Esther the noodle-maker. And there she stands on this day as well, in the year

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1940, with her cane in her hand, and her lined and wrinkled face, and it is only the living spirit, that eternal living spirit that is reflected in those dim eyes of hers.

Now the official part of the ceremony is over, and the room is filled with the sounds of kisses and cries of 'Mazal Tov'. There are tears in the eyes of the womenfolk. The Chuppah is folded up with its four beams and placed in a side corner of the room. The families of the young couple and the other guests now head for the waiting tables.

This time the old folks and the young people did not sit separately, but every man and woman sat where his or her heart desired at the two tables covered with their bright, white tablecloths. Solomon and Firochka sat at the head, like the sun and moon, and all the other guests, like the lesser lights of heaven, sat wherever the hand of fate, or chance, decided.

The first glass was raised in honor of the young couple, and the accompanying speech was given by the most important member of the party – Shlomo Shapira. For Binyamin this was the first time that he got a chance to hear this man speak, with his hoarse, sickly voice, the voice of an elderly man who has seen many things during his days on this earth. And yet, there was something in this voice that made you tremble and warmed your heart, and the woman sitting to Binyamin's left, Berta Abramovna, listened to the faint voice of this invalid Jew with all her might. It was nothing less than a raft of long-lost memories that had risen to envelop her. She was recalling those days of old...

"Today we are celebrating the wedding of two young souls among the Children of Israel," Shapira began, "who are as one with our own flesh and bones. The spring lies all spread out before them, like a field of flowers covered in the morning dew. May your way be filled with good fortune! May you carry on this existence of ours! For we old people are gradually passing away from this world. The Jewish nation, which has had its share of troubles and hardships, is becoming assimilated among the other nations of the world, and there are those who say that the end will shortly be upon us. But the Nation of Israel is still alive! Through all the years of its existence it has had many gravediggers, as it were, but many of them have already been lost to time. And yet our nation is still alive, and still fighting for its survival. For the day will come, when the members of our people will unite in a single land as one nation and

serve as a role-model for the rest of the world, an example for the human race over the entire globe..."

Indeed, the speech this old man gave was rather strange! What was he possibly thinking? He was standing there giving the young couple a lesson in these terrifying laws, the laws of what it meant to be a Jew!

"Lechaim tovim u'leshalom! Mazal Tov! May you live with mazal!" Everyone drank off the first glass, and from that point on there was a joyful hum in the room. Each of the members of the party did as they saw fit. Pesya and Nechama were constantly kept busy. From one of the tables a silly song could be heard:

*Let us all get together as one
And greet the arrival of the groom...*

The women gathered the first round of bowls from the tables – and now it was time for the stuffed fish. In the meantime, the bottles were gradually emptying out and new ones were arriving to take their place. And the old people were hardly lagging behind – God forbid! Other than Shapira, who, at every party, was always concerned about his many illnesses, the old folks drank away to their hearts' content. Nobody had quite gotten drunk yet, but the hum kept growing in the room. There was laughter over in the corner where Tamar was seated. And what were they doing to celebrate? A series of none-too-small glasses had been placed before these little kids as well – and the reins had been loosened! Now the children were laughing away at every little thing...

No, the various pranksters were not in the habit of holding back their laughter – they spread its joyful sounds in every direction. Binyamin was busy filling Berta Abramovna's cup from time to time – this evening it was his civic duty. "May you always be hale and hearty, Berta Abramovna, let us once more raise this little glass here – Le'chaim!" She refuses – and then drinks off the little glass. Aharon the cemetery attendant joins them as well. At last the pleasant fog descends, and through that fog the voice of the bride's father, Zalman Shotland, can suddenly be heard, a powerful, mighty voice:

*I was gripped by fear and trembling,
I was fairly falling down,
The gall in me was fit to burst...*

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The bass voice of the father of the bride is out of tune – completely out of tune! Berta Abramovna, who has a rather delicate musical soul, has stopped up her ears. "Oy, Berta Abramovna, may you live long, and here – raise just one more little glass! To long life!" And the three of them empty their glasses to the very bottom. The out-of-tune thundering of that gypsy continues to blast forth from the general hubbub in the room.

*Ich gehe un ich fehl,
Es fletzt in mir mein gell...¹*

At this point it seems to Binyamin that the people gathered at the party have perhaps had a bit more to drink than they ought to have. However, he is in fact the only one to have yet exaggerated in that department. Pesya and Nechama place the stuffed fish on the table and Golda Ginsburg is now lending a hand. Generously filled bowls now appear on the table, and each one is piled high with fragrant, peppery fish. Suddenly the groom, Solomon, rises from his place of honor at the head of the table and embraces his mother Pesya, embracing her and kissing her and offering her a glass of wine. "Mother, let us drink Le'chaim!" Pesya's cheeks turn red, and a smile of pleasure and satisfaction illuminates her face from within. "Le'chaim! Mazal Tov to you, my son!" She sips from the glass in her hand and turns back to the fish. However, Solomon, that rash young man, is not letting her go. He embraces his mother and follows her all around the tables. Binyamin spots this Jewish mother and he, too, quickly rises from his seat.

"Le'chaim aunt Pesya! Lechaim tovim u'leshalom!"

Everything is now getting covered by that fog. Berta Abramovna begins regaling Binyamin with stories from her life in Poltava some forty years ago. She came from a good family and her father was one of the wealthy men in Poltava. Already as a young girl she knew both English and Yiddish, and how to play the piano. But the winding road of man was indeed rather puzzling! About thirty-five years ago this young girl had begun to frequent the Zionist circles of Poltava. The footsteps of the Messiah could then be heard going forth in the world, and the Redemption was on its way and making rather hasty strides. One evening, at one of those gatherings, she met Shapira, who had come

¹ I am fairly falling down / The gall in me is bursting...(Yiddish).

with his father from Hadiach on business and had also gotten swept up in the flow of things. From time to time he would give speeches about the destiny of the Nation and its future. Indeed, he was something of a minor leader, and his brief speeches made quite an impression.

Berta Abramovna is recalling those days back then. The fog continues to grow thicker and thicker. The mighty roars of the gypsy father of the bride seem to now be coming from some far-off place:

*Oy, woe is me, for I loved
A trickster from Odessa...*

Reb Dovid the shochet has not yet given his speech, but little by little the decisive moment seems about to arrive. And now we hear his voice. For what do you think, you barefoot kids, you heathen vermin, do you think this is the end of all mankind? Here there stands before you this one-eyed shochet, and he is going to demonstrate the force in his arms for you! Do you see this *kantshik*¹ here? Oy, beware – you rash clowns, you well-educated heretics! Do you think that you've conquered the entire world, and that the Master of the Universe, The Holy One Blessed Be He, and blessed be His name, has been defeated and cast down, as it were, from his glorious throne, and that His place has been taken by secularism and apostasy? Not in the least! This much your old shochet can clearly tell you all: we still have our God up in Heaven!

And Reb Dovid the shochet casts around with those blind eyes of his with a victorious look. He has fulfilled his obligation, he put the fear of God in them, those barefoot, rotten heathen vermin, he tossed them into the dust, and now not one of them dares to open his mouth and go on hooting away!

Yes, that old man was a member of the circle of great warriors. "Le'chaim, Reb Dovid!" says Berman, as he hands a glass to the blind shochet. Golda, with those reddish cheeks of hers, extends her modest, motherly smile in every direction. That dearest of all young women! And Shotland refuses to heed any of their pleas. He continues to let loose with his pleasant growling:

¹ Kantshik - whip (Yiddish).

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*Oz ich hob sich doch eingeliebt
In ein Odesser charlatan...¹*

And now every member of the party that evening, both young and old alike, began to make their pleasant voices heard. Ezekiel Loytin breaks out in a Russian song, and there are those among the party who join in with him on the tune. The suffering and hardship of the mother who is in the process of losing her little girl suddenly assails Raissa Issakovna, and she falls on Firochka's neck in tears. Now it is the turn of Aharon the cemetery attendant. He starts with a heartbreaking Hassidic song that is bound to get everyone on their feet. The song hits its target and manages to unite all those assembled, old and young alike. At first their feet are simply beating away mightily to the rhythm of the tune underneath the tables. Then those same feet make their way into the middle of the room. Everyone assembled, aside from the invalid Shapira, has now risen from their chairs, and a fiery Hassidic dance circle is now blurring all the lines between them.

That evening our hero Binyamin was also one of the fervent dancers in the group. Quite a few years have now passed since then, and he can still well recall the wedding night of his friend and brother Solomon. He recalls that first dance, and the various dances that followed, and the warm night that stood out in the Garden alley and peeked in through the windows. And he recalls the old man Shapira, who remained seated at the table with a worried look on his wrinkled face.

¹ For indeed, I fell in love, / With a trickster from Odessa...(Yiddish).

Chapter 1.11

Almost absent-mindedly, the Shotland family found themselves amidst a season of memories. Here, in Hadiach, the two girls had spent their childhood. Soft light and illumination flowed out of every garden and surrounding fence, from every house, even from the very dust of the roads. The sisters were constantly finding all these little signs...

Pesya's hands were always at work. It is not at all a trifling matter – having to feed such a large, extended family! In the average year there were just the three of them there, whereas now, '*bli ayin hara*' eight more had been added! And one of them was Borin'ka, the five-year-old boy, who required a rather particular menu. True, Raissa Issakovna tried to ease the burden of labor on Pesya. She enlisted her daughters to help keep the rooms in order, particularly Lenchka Levin. However, Firochka, the young bride herself, did not try to get out of doing this work as well. She was such a pleasant young woman – the most pleasant of all possible brides! Each morning she and her sister would set about putting the rooms in order. Firochka would move silently around the house, with a white frilled apron tied around her waist and a ready song on her lips. Waves of joy flowed forth from this fine young bride.

Where is the street, and where is the house?

Where is the girl that my heart has longed for?

They dust off and polish up the furniture around the house, sweeping the floors and making order everywhere. The morning sunlight bursts into the rooms through the open windows, as the curtains tremble – part bright white and gold, and part hidden off in the shadows.

"Oy, Firochka!" Solomon leaps at his young wife and kisses her right in front of everyone. Firochka does not protest. White and light blue flow from her eyes. She slips from Solomon's hands and continues washing and sweeping the floors. All the while she sings, still singing that silly, heartwarming song.

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*The light-blue ball keeps spinning around
Spinning and spinning – until it is about to fall down...*

Shaul Levin sits off on the side, immersed head and shoulders in a book. Yet if you think that this young married man allows himself the pleasure of delving into ordinary literature, you would be making a serious mistake. He brought some technical book with him to Hadiach that deals with the process of heating steel, and he is busy studying away at it with tremendous diligence. What a strange Jew! He is now completely occupied with the steel for watch springs, and even the days of his vacation are dedicated to that selfsame steel. Old man Shotland intends to head out while it is still morning. It is a rather puzzling thing to see just how incapable he is of sitting around and resting a bit! A sort of evil inclination just seems to seize him by the hair, and he begins to pronounce all sorts of strange things. "Raissa!" he says. "Don't you think the time has come to head back home?"

With a twisted look on her face, Raissa Issakovna hears what her husband has to say. "Back home" – that is to say, to the basement apartment in Filipov Alley. What joy! If, God forbid, you managed to escape from that place for a few days, you had to pay with your life! What did he care if the children rested up a bit in Hadiach for a little while longer? But do you all think that once he got back home he would actually come to rest? Not in the least! He would most certainly hurry off on some *Komandirovka*¹ into the hinterlands...

That was Raissa Issakovna's opinion anyway, as she twisted her lips in a grimace, and that Polish-Jewish tongue of hers went rising and falling, rising and falling away in a melodious tune. Indeed, this golden woman, such a talkative homebody, got a raw deal when she married this gypsy here, who is always on the go, enamored as he is of wandering and always being on the road.

Shotland steps out of the house as he makes a resigned gesture with his hand. What can this woman possibly understand when it comes to the laws that govern a man's life? Binyamin pulls out his bicycle to head over to Vilbovka. The rear tire is a bit flat, so he takes the hand pump with him. A wonderful morning is already humming away out in

¹ Komandirovka - official business trip (Russian).

the yard. White clouds seem frozen still high above, there is rustling green foliage all around – and everything, everything is covered in gold and sunlight. What a blessed life this is, and what a blessed, quiet little town – with its skies and forests, its sunlight and its stars!

Binyamin heads over to Vilbovka. Since last year there has not been any positive change in the health of the Professor. The coughing has not stopped. On the contrary, his other lung has also been found to be damaged, and his fever keeps rising every evening, as his face has gotten thinner, more wrinkled, and older over the course of the year. Nevertheless, his daily schedule has not changed one bit. Take this principle here firmly in hand: it is only once you have established a regular work schedule for yourself that you will manage to achieve a full level of productivity. Order, precise adherence to the clock – that is the main thing, above all else. On this point, we Russians have what to learn from the American man of action...

Binyamin has heard these speeches from Stepan Borisovich more than once already. But when he looks at him he is literally struck with amazement. God almighty! What good does that order do him, or all that work there? Is he not mortally ill, this man of order here? Is he not marching towards the end with that very ticking watch of his in his hands?

Day after day, for five straight hours, Binyamin sits there in Stepan Borisovich's room. In the room and throughout the forest there is silence, and through the open window only the silent voice of the treetops and the occasional croaking or chirping makes its way in. Vera the maid is working away in the kitchen – scrubbing, peeling, cooking, and frying. Tempting fragrances emerge from that pleasant laboratory of hers. The woven rope hammock is tied to its two pine trees, and Klara Ilynishna lies there with a French book in her hands. Her neck is wrapped up in a kerchief, however her health has not gotten any worse in the intervening year. Klara Ilynishna places the blame for this, as it were, on Doctor Kirilov – a homeopathic doctor whom she came across almost by accident. Until now she always considered such doctors to be among the charlatans who were only out to make a buck. And now all of a sudden, she had begun to believe in this Kirilov here! He had started out by giving her alcoholic drops and tiny pills, and within a month she was feeling much better. The main thing is to have faith, the psychological side of things, that is.

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This is what Klara Ilynishna has to say, and her voice is like the wind moving through the pipes of an organ, a warm womanly voice that caresses you until your very soul gives out! Afterwards Stepan Borisovich voices his opinion as well, as he derides psychology and that blind faith of hers. He is an engineer, and his business is with engines and technology, and all that psychological stuff is nothing more than a waste of time and mere empty words. No, strictly between us, he does not believe in what lies behind the curtains, as it were – it is all nothing more than a relic from medieval times. Stepan Borisovich is a practical man of action from head to toe.

True, life in the Edelman family home has gone a bit dark and dull in the interim. Perhaps the cause of this change is the absence of Lida. The thing is, you see, that Lida did not come to Vilbovka this year, and Stepan Borisovich is not going to try and hide the reason for this. Bobrov, Ivan Dimitrievich, who had dealt that foolish student such a murderous serious of blows the previous year – this Bobrov here is now spending his vacation in Sestrozek, along the shores of the Gulf of Finland, and Lida is there with him.

What a disappointment! What a scandal and utter delusion! Lida's running away was perhaps the main cause for the complete collapse of Stepan Borisovich's health. Lida was something of a goddess in the Edelman home, and her father loved her dearly. Her education had also hardly been lacking. He had tried to keep her away from the ugliness and filth of this life. And there you have the results! Oy, that his eyes should have to see such things! That pure, delicate girl, with that beautiful, musical soul of hers – that very girl had gone off with Bobrov, who was a coarse man, already married with a child, and here the parents were left behind – old, childless, and sick.

And Stepan Borisovich bursts into a forceful, extended round of coughing, seeming to shrivel up, as he turns red and wrinkled, and his face is a rather Jewish face at that moment. Lately he has occasionally been revealing just a touch of his soul to Binyamin – as Binyamin now feels more comfortable at the home of the Professor and stays on almost every day for lunch. The three of them sit there out on the porch, and Vera the maid serves them the sweet borscht and the fragrant, tasty roast. Stepan Borisovich speaks of the trees and the stones, of illnesses and doctors, and of the principles of hygiene, and the tremendous order that the practical man of action requires in

everything he does, from the time he rises till the time he goes to sleep.

"If you would only be quiet for a bit, Syoma!" says Klara Ilynishna. "All that talk is no good for you!"

Stepan Borisovich remains silent for a little while. Truth be told, what good does it do him to try talking to anyone? He would do better to let the forest speak, let the heavens heap their words upon them, let the minor shouts of the sun pierce through the branches, let the warm song of Glasha, the landlord's daughter, come to them from the garden:

*The sun has gone down, evening is here,
Come out to me, oh love of my heart!*

Indeed, life has turned a bit empty around Stepan Borisovich, and he drowns his newfound poverty in a constant patter. If only he could find a willing ear though! Not only does Klara Ilynishna not listen to what he has to say, but she even tries to silence him!

And now Stepan Borisovich turns to Binyamin with his offer. After all, is it really all that convenient to go traveling back and forth every day on his bicycle from Hadiach to Vilbovka and back? What does he have in that dusty little town over there, compared with the healthy, fragrant air here, or the peace and tranquility of this great forest? In the family's summer home there is a small room, where Lida lived the year before, and now Vera the maid sleeps there. They can move her into the kitchen...

He offers Binyamin to move to Vilbovka for the duration of the entire summer, and to live in that very room there. He will assume responsibility for Binyamin's meals, and not a penny will be deducted from the latter's salary.

The soft singing of Glasha can once more be heard from the garden.

"I'll look into it!" says Binyamin embarrassedly, as he gets on his bicycle. He rides along the forest path, trampling the dust and silence beneath his feet. Then he turns off the well-trodden path and heads down a narrow footpath, moving deeper into the thick of the forest, until he comes to a hidden patch, covered with bushes and high grass. He places the bicycle in the shade of one of the trees and sits down in the refreshing grass. Joy and a silent sheen dance about among the flowers.

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He is a bit occupied by Stepan Borisovich's offer. But he concludes that he must turn it down and remain in the Garden alley. Life would be rather alien and boring at the home of the Professor. The tumult in the Feigin home is dearer to his heart than all the shiny order that reins in Stepan Borisovich's house. In the Garden alley he is after all a free man, and he can do whatever his heart desires, whereas at the Edelman home he would be bound to that daily schedule. Good God! What is so wrong with a man who wishes to rebel a bit once a year in the face of all the precision and severity that life burdens him with from morning to night?

The Garden alley was dear to Binyamin's heart, and the world of the Feigin household was his world too. True, Solomon was now off on his own with Firochka, but on the other hand, Binyamin had now become friends with a few of the other women among the summer vacationers along the shores of the Psel River, and Tamar and her friends were the loves of his life, and he was also truly fond of getting into heated discussions with a few of the old folks who would come over to the Feigin home for a bit of idle talk and a sip of something to drink.

No, he was not going to move to Vilbovka – to all that order, polish, and boredom. He sits down on the bicycle and heads out of the forest. It is four o'clock in the afternoon. A few wagons are dragging along in his direction, and at the sight of the bicycle the horses' ears shoot up in confusion, and a few of them – the foolish cowards of the group – even get spooked and step off to the side of the road. It is then that one hears the cries of the coachman, with the reins there in his hands.

Life went on as usual, and the banks of the river had not aged at all – there were shadows and sunlight raining down over all, just as they ever did. During the summertime there is quite a hum of people here. There are children and adults, a series of rather hefty women among the summer vacationers, and the mix of near-naked bodies here beneath the sun, lying on their backs, sun tanning, and drinking in the sunlight by the bucket. The little children dig away in the sand, turning it into cakes, and braided, curved challahs, carving out pits and caves, creating whole worlds by the hour and then destroying them in an instant. It is now six in the evening. You can already feel the sun beginning to dip down in the west, however the jumpy mosquitoes have not yet made their appearance. The air is warm and gilded, and the

banks of the river are humming with humanity.

That near-naked young man there, lying on his back off on the side, immersed head and shoulders in some book – is none other than Binyamin. Day after day, upon returning from Vilbovka, he spends a few hours down here. And just as the previous year he was never alone along the banks of the Psel River, so now too he has been joined by his good friend Tamar, and Sarka Ginsburg, along with their friend Kim, a thirteen-year-old boy from Kharkov.

Oy that the eyes should have to witness such a thing! A proper young man, twenty-five years of age, a senior student with that clean-shaven face of his, who instead of chasing after the girls, or any women for that matter, has become a sort of camp counselor for a group of little children!

But the thing is, that summer Binyamin did not have much luck with the ladies. True, he had gotten to know a few of the women among the summer vacationers along the banks of the river. First, he had begun exchanging a few words with Galina Levovna. She was a rather talkative member of the fairer sex, and from the little experience that he had, Binyamin knew that talkativeness and stubborn resistance are two sides of the same coin when it comes to women. Now Galina Levovna, like all the other women among the summer vacationers who gathered in Hadiach, had a husband back in the city, who bore the heavy burden of supporting the family financially all by himself; and here, in Hadiach, she had a little eight-year-old daughter with her. Galina Levovna was a pleasant woman with an easygoing temperament, but the problem was that all the sunspots in the entire world seemed to have assembled there on her face and arms. And when it comes to freckles, Binyamin had always suffered from a rather fastidious aversion. He himself was something of a mixed breed: the hair on his head was dark, and his beard – may you be spared such a fate – was red. And yet those same freckles had not quite skipped over his own nose either.

Once he had willingly turned his ear into a receiver and swallowed all nine measures of chatter that Galina Levovna had to offer, he was introduced through her to Rachel Borisovna and Natalya Victorovna. All three of them, including Natalya Victorovna, were his ethnic sisters, and themselves members of the same tribe as Binyamin, and all three of them had a child or two with them, as well as a husband toiling away in

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the city. The three women would come down to the banks of the river, along with their sons and daughters, strip off a third or half their clothes, lie down beneath the sun and work on their tans. And at times Binyamin would join them and work on his tan there as well.

Now, Rachel Borisovna was the most pleasant one of the group. She had a brave set of teeth that seemed ready to tear her prey to pieces, and the faint trace of a mustache. Any man with a bit of taste would have aspired to be the object of those ravenous teeth there. However, Rachel Borisovna's eyes were the eyes of a good woman, with a sad, caressing look in them – and this mixture just melted a man's heart.

Life along the banks of the Psel River hummed and beat steadily. With all their might the adults and children would give themselves up to the sun, the heavens, the water, the flourishing grass, and the blue of the forests off on the horizon. Somewhat inadvertently, Binyamin had become the director of those rash little kids there. The gang had gotten attached to him and appointed him as their commander, and it was his task to teach them all just how to swim. The year before Tamar and Sarka had already learned the ABC's of the front crawl from him, and this year they were busy perfecting the art form.

Kim was the only member of the group who did not know how to swim at all. What a ridiculous sight he was! A thirteen-year-old boy – and he swam just like a stone sinking to the bottom! He had been born and raised in Kharkov, and he was only half Jewish. His father, Shimon Wartman, worked at the cooperative factory making soap and shoe polish. His mother was a Russian, and her sister Agrippina Andreyevna Soloveyko lived in Hadiach and worked in the town library. Kim would come to stay with his aunt every summer. He was a tall, good-looking Russian boy, and it was only his eyes that were dark and Jewish, as they stuck out there, filled with fire and suppressed suffering.

Now it goes without saying that Kim, as a city boy, was full of self-importance and a sense of his own worth. And since he was already a man's man, he treated the country girls with a slightly scornful, paternally patronizing air, for they had never even seen a streetcar in their lives, nor been to a proper theater, and they walked around here all robust and barefoot – living examples of the impoverished provinces.

And yet Kim had his own weak spot – he did not know how to

swim. The city of Kharkov was not blessed with a river, and so most of the residents of that godforsaken city lived a rather sorry land-locked life. But these country girls, on the other hand – Sarka and Tamar – got to demonstrate for him a rather pristine version of the front crawl. Tamar, that mocking little goat, would regularly ridicule the gentleman from Kharkov, and the bite of her sharp tongue was like a scalpel cutting away at his very flesh. That summer the little lambs seemed to be turning into full-grown animals themselves!

But Kim would not succumb to his fate and refused to allow these little babies to have any advantage over him – Kim Wartman, the city boy who was already a man. And so, he went to work as well. Rather quickly he cleared the first obstacle, which was learning to stay afloat on the surface of the water, as his arms and legs went splashing away noisily in the river. Next, he began to gain control over his limbs and learned a bit of the proper breathing method, and each day he would gradually move further off from the strip of the river bank.

It was a rather pleasant season for Kim. He would get up early to head down to the river. He would spend all morning in the water. Day by day he was gradually making progress, until one morning he managed to swim across the entire width of the river. From that point on he began working on perfecting the details of the front crawl, and at that point Tamar could no longer laugh at him all that much. Say what you will, Kim was truly a man, all the same, and he had gritted his teeth and learned just how to swim that summer!

Yes indeed, that summer a rebellious, joyful spirit reigned among the young people, like the first harbingers of the onset of the season of adulthood. Sarka Ginsburg also began to bare her nails a bit. She was one of those silent girls, but in the hidden recesses of her soul, as one might expect, she cultivated a world of complex fantasies.

Yes, at times one might have even thought that this curly-haired girl there was making eyes at Kim. But what did this daughter of the black-clad cemetery attendant have to do with the child of a mixed marriage? In any event, when it came to swimming, Sarka was Binyamin's finest student. For hours on end she would loll about in the water, shooting back and forth, and there was no one as agile as her when it came to the speed and grace of her jumps into the water, or the heights she managed to reach as she dives in.

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The dynamics of the relationship between the boy and the two girls were rather strange – at times Binyamin was under the impression that Kim was drawn to that mocking little goat there – Tamar, that is. But it was a bit early for all that – much too early! Was it right that such grown-up thoughts should be troubling these little chickadees?

In the meantime, Galina Levovna, all blond and freckled, continued to dump the full nine measures of chatter on Binyamin's head. Rachel Borisovna and Natalya Victorovna were not as talkative, and Binyamin tried his hand with the former. All the Rachels in the world now gave him no rest, and this Rachel had not yet turned thirty years old. However, once he was rejected by her, he tried to move on to Natalya Victorovna. There was something animal-like, naïve, and pleasant in this hefty woman. It looked like Binyamin had found favor in her eyes and a certain readiness on her part to fall prey to him. And now the decisive day had finally arrived, and all his hard work seemed like it was about to bear fruit. But his “Jewish luck” deserted him! Natalya Victorovna's husband suddenly arrived in Hadiach, and the scent of papirosa and cologne now enveloped this pleasant, elephantine woman, and Binyamin was left empty-handed.

True, it wasn't every summer that the young Jewish man could expect to find his path lined with roses. And so, life went on rather slowly – slow days, evenings, and nights. Rachel Feigin, Binyamin's good friend, was far away, Solomon and Firochka were off in a world of their own, and even Berman and Golda had disappeared. Only the banks of the river were still humming with life, and yet here too one found one's share of minor embarrassments.

The sun has now begun to dip into the west, as fire and light flame away in the water. The air begins to cool off, but the water is still quite warm. The river continues to flow along. Along the banks of the river on the far side the shepherds have begun to gather their flocks. Off on the side a fisherman and his fishing rod seem to be frozen in midair – the two of them plotting a slay. It is then that the light breeze kicks up, coming from somewhere far off, and envelops the world with a certain lovingkindness as it sweeps onward – sweeping along as it caresses towns, fields, and countries. The sun slips downward yet another step. A few more people arrive to take a dip in the Psel. The usual visitors, those who come here to suntan, now get in the water one last time. Binyamin is lying on his back in the river and raises his eyes up to the

heavens overhead. A deep restfulness, mixed with golden light and darkness, descends over the world. The mosquitoes have now made their appearance: they dance up and down, celebrating that little festival of theirs, as they too sing their minor song. One can hear mooing and bleating and the calls of the shepherds. The movement along the banks of the river now increases. Some are coming out of the water and drying off their tanned, dripping bodies. Some are getting dressed, and others are still jumping into the water and buzzing about in the river. "Kolya, Kolya!" one of the young boys' voices rings out. "And can you do this?" The speaker dives headfirst into the water. Kolya, a five-year-old boy, cannot in fact do that. He stands there for a moment with a puzzled look on his face, and then, without saying a single word, he falls away into the arms of the water, as he clings to the moist sand along the shore with his hands, and his legs go kicking up a storm in the water behind him. "Kolya!" the other boy can be heard calling once again. "And can you do this?" Little by little the darkness gradually takes over the world. There is a slight movement in the direction of the fisherman. The fishing rod is raised, and a squirming fish has now appeared in the darkening world. A white, silvery body sends its silent scream up to the heavens above.

The Shotland family stayed in Hadiach until the end of July. After they left the atmosphere in the house quieted down, and only the restrained melody of the young couple continued to play through the rooms.

Every morning, as we already noted, Binyamin would head out on his bicycle for Vilbovka, and he would also encounter Glasha there. At first these were just chance meetings, but in the month of August Glasha began to wait for his arrival every morning. She had grown over the course of the year, and she was no longer that wild young girl, and she no longer had that piercing look in her eyes. Mitrofan Petrovich Gavrilenko, the principal of the school in Vilbovka, had found an experienced teacher for her, and this woman had been giving her lessons in Russian and Math throughout the year. Indeed, Glasha was now an educated young woman.

Binyamin and that bicycle of his are now climbing the road as they reach the edge of the forest of Vilbovka. Glasha is there to greet the two of them. She is barefoot with those cinnamon-colored legs of hers, her flaxen hair is braided into a thick braid, and her eyes are the clear eyes

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of a child.

"Good morning, Glasha!" Binyamin says as he jumps down from the bicycle, as though the very Queen of the Forest had crossed his path.

This girl gives off the refreshing scent of the forest. They stand there chatting a bit. She continues to call him "Uncle Binyamin". Her uncle gets to hear everything that happened the day before in Vilbovka. At last the potatoes have begun to blossom. Stepan Borisovich keeps on coughing away. And there is another piece of news in the world – one of the yellow chicken's little chicks seems to have disappeared...

After a little while Binyamin seats Glasha on the bicycle and they all go rolling away in the direction of the Edelman's summer home. Binyamin has to squeeze the brakes doubly hard. There are roots and other things protruding along the path – all of which pose considerable stumbling blocks for the bicycle.

Glasha sits between the seat and the handlebars with a serious look on her face, all bunched up, with her legs swinging in the air and her hands gripping the handlebars. Binyamin must hug her a bit, to make sure that she doesn't fall. Drops of sweat appear across his forehead, but he is in a good mood. He redoubles his efforts. The bicycle goes rolling along rather quickly, and the look on Glasha's face becomes ever more focused. The bicycle comes to a halt, and Glasha easily jumps down from her rather uncomfortable perch. At that point, Binyamin raises his voice, the voice of an experienced coachman.

"Baryshnya, you owe me a half-ruble!"

She gives him a puzzled look. The coachman continues in a dull bass voice:

"For you know, Baryshnya, the price of oats is rather high right now."

At this point the young girl lets out a laugh. Binyamin mops his forehead and steps up to the porch. Stepan Borisovich is there to greet him. Glasha glances for a moment at the bicycle where it stands in the shade and then moves off with her head bent down, as though she is sorry, really sorry to leave all this behind.

Yes, her uncle still treats Glasha like a little baby. Good Lord, after all, there is a bit of a difference between twenty-five years of age and

seventeen! True, those little children there are gradually growing up, at a rather fast pace. In the three years that her uncle has known Glasha she has turned from a thin, wild girl into a tall, young woman with a rather powerful feminine force. However, the slightly older young men have also been aging a bit in the interim, and the distance between Binyamin and Glasha has not really been narrowed down all that much.

And so, Binyamin finishes his work for the day with the Professor, gets on his bicycle once more, and rolls off from Vilbovka in the direction of Hadiach. Along the forest path he once more runs into Glasha. He presses down the button on the bell and sets it ringing. The girl turns her face in his direction and steps off the path, but something makes him get off the bicycle and walk up to the girl. She has a children's book in her hands, a book with large print and illustrations. She is currently reading the story of the ugly duckling who one day spread his white wings and turned into a swan...

This year Glasha emerged from the shadows of her own ignorance, and to a certain extent Binyamin was the one behind this change. To this day, the girl sees him as her patron saint when it comes to matters of reading and writing. Every day they hold a minor series of examinations – and she demonstrates for him her new reading powers.

They turn off the path and sit down in the shade of one of the pines. Glasha reads slowly and Binyamin listens to the wonderful tale. Over the course of the year Glasha managed to complete a program of studies encompassing the first two grades at school, and she is now addicted to reading. Little by little Andersen opens brand-new worlds up before her, and she goes wandering in the land of the lakes, where those white swans go gliding about.

The exam is now over, and Glasha asks him to let her sit up on the bicycle once more as they head downhill – until the bridge. "But then you'll have to return on foot, Glasha!" That's no big deal, she isn't tired at all.

Binyamin seats the girl between the saddle and the handlebars, gets the bicycle moving, and sits down as well. The road now leads downhill, and the bicycle goes rolling along on its own, and he can sit back and relax. You can hear Glasha laughing now – but don't you all know just why she is laughing like that? The reason is none other than the fact that she feels a sense of freedom, with the light breeze hitting

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her in the face, the tremendous expanse of the blue skies overhead, and the strip of the river that is gradually approaching. The chill of her hands grips Binyamin's hands where they are holding the handlebars, and he must hug the girl a bit in turn too. And there they go flying downhill! They have now reached the bridge, and from this point on the road begins to rise once more. What more does this wild young girl want?

"Perhaps you'd like to go for a swim, Glasha?"

Yes, she'll hardly refuse going for a dip.

"After all, wasn't it precisely so that I could go swimming that I asked you to bring me down here, uncle Binyamin?"

No, she never mentioned a word of all that. The two of them head down to the shore, and Binyamin turns his back to the girl. A few moments later he hears her voice rising from the water. With several fierce, dull beats the palms of her hands are slapping away at the crystal surface of the river. Indeed, she knows just how to swim, without any need for any fancy makeup, none of that front crawl or breaststroke for her!

Binyamin jumps into the water as well. "Glasha, sweetheart, but you're wearing nothing more than your birthday suit like Eve in the Garden of Eden! What an embarrassment! You've got to knit yourself a bathing suit!" She laughs. "What's the difference, if robbers come after me, a bathing suit is not going to do me any good!" What do robbers have to do with anything? The two of them swim around in the water, holding a few little contests – and Binyamin can hardly be said to win every time.

After a little while he comes out of the water, gets dressed, and gets on the bicycle. Glasha is still buzzing away in the river. Farewell, Glasha!

Despite all the wildness in her, there is something in this girl that is still pure and childish. Binyamin rides along the banks of the river, and then he heads up onto the road. He sits there thinking for a little while longer about this young woman in bloom, with those large, cold hands of hers, her flaxen hair, and those clear eyes of a child.

The next day he returns to Vilbovka and once more runs into the girl at the edge of the forest.

"Good morning, Glasha!"

A brilliant morning is humming all around them in all its silent splendor. As though lost in thought the tall pines stand there, whispering their secrets to one another, coming to a standstill for a moment, and then whispering some more. The sun is flooding the forest with its gold and brilliant sheen. However, down here, at the foot of the trees, the diagonal shadows heap their chilly air, and the scent of tiny flowers reigns supreme. Glasha asks Binyamin to let her sit on the bicycle. He gives in once again and the bicycle rolls off in the direction of the Edelmans' summer home. And the task can hardly be said to be like taking candy from a baby. Binyamin's forehead is covered in sweat, and he is huffing and puffing like a wild bull. But Glasha is not interested in his heavy breathing, her face is turning red from all the fun she is having: indeed, he must somehow cool off that red blush a bit, that feeling that life is about to overflow! He stops the bicycle near the porch, jumps down from the seat, and repeats the old wisecrack in that bass voice of his:

"Baryshnya, you owe me a two *grivenniks*¹ for tip!"

He mumbles something else about the price of oats. Glasha can be heard laughing once again. No, her liveliness has not been dimmed one bit. She asks him to let her take the bicycle out for a little bit. She wants to learn how to ride. "What do you care, uncle Binyamin?"

She stands there before him, this blessed young girl, and the look in those clear eyes of hers is directed straight at him, and beneath her blouse those fine mounds rise there, and a gentle feminine force envelops the girl from her tanned legs and bare feet, right up to that flaxen hair of hers – how can he turn down a face like that?

"But be careful, Glasha!"

He steps in to Stepan Borisovich's room, sits down at the desk, and gets to work. Today he has to draft two simple diagrams and type up a few of the Professor's densely handwritten pages on the typewriter. He leaves space for the equations – which he will add later by hand. He types with a single finger – as he has not yet quite mastered this new art, even though he is gradually improving day by day, and is already quite familiar with the location of the various letters and numbers.

¹ Grivennik – Russian 10 kopek coin.

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But now his work is done, and the diagrams have both been sketched. Stepan Borisovich invites him to stay for lunch – lately Binyamin has become like another member of the household in the family.

The sun is burning away in the treetops, pouring down its heat and flame in warm silence. They all wash their hands off and sit down at the table. At that moment the mailman brings in the latest installment of the "Journal of Engineers and Technicians", along with two letters. The first letter contains some sort of official notification from Leningrad, but the envelope of the second letter bears the stamp of Sestrorezk, and it is addressed in Lida's handwriting – the beloved daughter. The Professor reads the letter, and then he hands it to Klara Ilynishna. He takes the letter back a second time and reads it out loud. No, there is nothing of any real substance in the letter. The weather in Sestrorezk is not bad. They are enjoying themselves, Lida and Bobrov that is, spending many hours along the shore. Sometimes a seagull glides down along the surface of the water with a shriek. The two of them, she and Vanya, are in good health and rather satisfied with things. How is father doing?

It is dry, a rather dry letter, without even the shadow of real emotion. With an irritated gesture Stepan Borisovich removes the wrapper from the "Journal" and casts an experienced eye over the volume. The articles are not too interesting this time, but in the section of reviews and bibliography he finds a rather sharp article concerning his book, "Kinematics of Engines". The author of the review is the University Lecturer Abramovenko, a former student of Stepan Borisovich's. At the time he was a rather ignorant student, who had little more than a head of cabbage on his shoulders. He, Stepan Borisovich, told the man as much during his exams. True, this Abramovenko was one of the influential party members in the University, but what do you all think? That just because he was one of the 'noblemen', could he, Professor Edelman, that is, be expected to allow himself to twist the results of the examination? Not one bit! At any rate, he had not yet descended to such a low level.

Vera brings the meatballs. She is not a bad-looking girl, and God graced her with a pleasant face, though it is pockmarked with pimples from A to Z. The diners sit there eating the meatballs and listening to the angry voice of Stepan Borisovich. The Professor refuses to calm down as far as Abramovenko is concerned. This empty-headed man has

now become a major figure – a University Lecturer and Doctor of Science, and God knows what else! And now he has gone and published a critical review of the Professor's book, "The Kinematics of Engines", and the article was full of harsh words. No, he – Stepan Borisovich, that is – is not going to let any ignoramus or moron to mock his books, he is going to show this University Lecturer a thing or two, he is going to prove that even now this Abramovenko has nothing more than a head of cabbage on his shoulders!

Stepan Borisovich is an expert warrior in his field, and at times he wages a rather fierce, energetic battle against some adversary in one of the technical journals. Binyamin sees this man sitting here over his meat balls, and it is as though he is looking at a mighty stallion who has already caught the scent of far-off lands, pawing the ground with his hoof, and champing at the bit, as white foam appears in the corners of his mouth. Indeed, there is no more stubborn warfare than the battles waged over knowledge!

Stepan Borisovich now suddenly bursts into a mighty, extended round of coughing, and his face is contorted and red, as a splotch of blood appears in his phlegm and begins to spread across the surface of his handkerchief. Klara Ilynishna gets up quickly from her seat and brings out a jar of medicine from inside, along with a cup of milk. She then turns to Binyamin to ask him to ride into town and bring the doctor back with him.

Glasha! Where did she disappear to? At that moment she shows up along the path, her face all lit up and sweaty from the hard work, her bare feet covered in dust, and the bicycle dragging along behind her. Her entire flexible body is overflowing with activity.

"I have to hurry in to town, Glasha!"

A minute later the bicycle is rolling along the surface of the road.

Stepan Borisovich has been instructed to lie in bed for a week, but even during his sick days he does not stop working away. He dictates the material to Binyamin, and the latter writes it all down in a notebook, and then later writes up the notes on the typewriter. In this manner, for example, the contentious response to that 'head of cabbage' was written up. No indeed, Stepan Borisovich is not one of those who gives in easily. He has no intention of getting down on his knees before the Angel of Death. The Angel of Death, if he comes, will just have to wait

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awhile. He still has quite a few things that he must take care of in this world, and that destructive angel has not yet obtained permission to put an end to it all!

And so, the Professor lies there in bed, with newspapers and books in his hands, that he flips through and reads around in, and he is busy dictating to Binyamin the third edition of his book "Dynamics". During that time Glasha is busy with the bicycle. One must admit that in three days she has managed to rather master the art of riding a bicycle. And so, the day comes when she proposes that Binyamin sit in that same uncomfortable spot where she previously sat, between the seat and the handlebars, while she, Glasha, will be the one to wear the pants this time – that is, she will do the actual riding. Whatchutzpah and brazenness! But who is not familiar with the strength of those wayward girls these days? In the end, Binyamin agrees to this act of discrimination against the male tribe, and sits down in that troubling spot, as Glasha jumps onto the seat and begins to set the wheels rolling along.

Glasha is a true daughter of valor! The bicycle is heading downhill, and they have not yet broken their necks. But what else? Obviously, things like this can't quite end without some sort of an outcome. The rear tire catches on a sharp stone, and the inner tube is slashed, and there is the sound of a long hiss of air, as the tire goes flat. This little accident took place right near the bridge. The main thing now is to find the spot where the tire was pierced. They take the bicycle down to the banks of the river and dunk the tire in the water to see where the bubbles rise. Then it is time to get to work patching things up. Binyamin gets the girl to step aside and pulls the tools out of the bicycle case – a bottle of glue, sandpaper, and a piece of rubber.

The relationship between them is easygoing, easygoing and rather endearing. Day after day this wild girl would be waiting there for him and his bicycle. During the year she had learned to read and write, and Andersen was rather fitting material for her. New worlds opened before her. At the same time, her mother Nastasya continued to live that industrious, sinful life of hers, but the ugliness did not touch the daughter at all. When the mother was under the spell of that madness, the young girl would run away from the house. She had a few hidden spots, full of the kindness of the Lord Himself.

In the vegetable garden tomatoes and potatoes grew, along with

heads of cabbage, cucumbers, and watermelons. Glasha spoke the language of that arid, sandy earth. She did not skimp on the fertilizer, hoeing, watering, and making general improvements. Good mother that she was, she walked among the rows of vegetables softly singing her song. As though listening in rather intently, the vegetables would perk up their curious heads.

Every morning the young girl would head out to the forest to gather berries and mushrooms, with her basket in her hands. The soil of the forest was blessed, and Glasha was familiar with all the hidden patches. The earth yielded its juicy marrow up to her with a generous eye.

In the ancient hollow of a pine tree, a pair of yellow squirrels made its home. Other than Glasha, not a soul knew of the location. She would bring them nuts and alder catkins to eat. The squirrels recognized her, and when she would come to see them, they would slip out of their hollow to greet her, receiving her with a veritable 'Welcome', and then coming over to nibble at the refreshments with looks on their faces that were at once rather serious and ridiculous. These squirrels were the undisputed rulers in this corner of the forest.

She was also friends with a few birds of the forest, and they recognized her as well. At times she would come to visit their nests. Early in the morning, when a thin fog was still climbing among the bushes, Glasha would head out to visit these forest creatures. The birds would welcome her and talk with her a bit. There was whistling and chirping and the frightened flapping of wings... Glasha was fond of all the residents of the forest, she had a warm word for each of them, and a little smile. She understood the language of the birds and the trees, was familiar with the whisper and hum of the wind, as well as the language of the fog and vapors. Even the light of the sun spoke to her heart. All of nature sang its songs inside her soul.

No, Glasha was not alone. When her mother had her low moments, when wild songs could be heard in the yard of their house, along with the twisting notes of the harmonica, and the voices of coarse, drunken people – then Glasha would head out to the forest. And the forest would receive her like a comforting father, and the young girl would press her head against its massive, kindly knees.

Chapter 1.12

At the start of the century Arki's life was rolling along in “Odessa - Mama”. In Staroportofrankovsky Street, there was a two-story house, and on the ground floor there was a little retail store. Arki's parents worked in this tiny store, and he was fifteen at the time – an ignorant boy already chasing pipe-dreams. Observance of the commandment to be fruitful and multiply was a trait impressed deeply in the foundation of this family, and Arki's parents were rather diligent in this field. It goes without saying that they were unable to look after the education of their rather considerable army of kids. For three years Arki was a student at the Cheder of Itzik the Teacher, where, despite his carelessness, he managed to learn to read and write a bit – limping along from word to word as he went. After he had completed his studies with Itzik the Teacher, he did not enroll at any school of higher learning thereafter. On the other hand, he was one of the most ardent fans of cinema and circus, along with lemonade and roasted nuts. A few years passed, and the young boy also began to be interested in girls.

Now, since the stumbling blocks of the evil inclination require money, Arki took up with a few of the street kids from Odessa and began to work in a rather shady business – buying and selling stolen goods. But even so, he was one of the cautious ones, and he never dirtied his hands playing with a marked deck of cards or indulging in any other fraudulent activities.

Take a look if you will, my distant readers, at this dark-haired, fine-looking young man, a real hooligan from Odessa. During the week he wore shiny creaking boots – boots that produced a rather manly tune as one walked were all the rage at the time. He had a pair of riding trousers tucked into the boots, and a traditional Russian shirt fluttered over the pants, while a graceful hat with a shiny visor completed the outfit.

On weekends and holidays, a pair of brownish-yellow shoes replaced the boots, polished and creaking as well – Arki refused to take

a step without that creaking sound. Over the shoes he wore a pair of wide-leg sailor pants, and above the pants he wore a stylish grey coat, the very essence of splendor and elegance. And so, this young man with the dark eyes went walking along Deribasovsky Street in the company of a beautiful young woman.

Shimki Weiner was Arki's friend and adversary. The Good Lord had graced Shimki with height, a fine face, and that gentle, playful, easygoing nature that is so common among the people of Odessa.

Shimki did not yet have to make a living – his father was a well-to-do grain merchant. However, the study of Torah hardly spoke to this young man's heart either. He took up with the frivolous, empty-headed lot too – and you could shout at him until you were blue in the face! Avraham Abba Weiner, Shimki's father, shouted indeed, but what good did all that shouting do? It was like putting bandages on a dead man.

In the year 1910 Arki happened to meet one bright young girl – Sarka Plotkin. She was eighteen years of age, short, with a good heart and a pleasant face. That year Sarka began to look very pretty.

Now, a girl's blossom is rather brief, and each fruit has its season, as it were. Those foolish young men go wandering about the world, and any young girl with a bit of smarts in her head must plan her steps carefully, if she intends to go hunting and catch herself a fish when it is her time. The clever young girl must have an intelligent strategy, for without this she may well miss her chance. For there is no more fickle nation than those wild young boys there. At one point they might seem to be in a good mood, and they all come after you like a pack of wolves, each and every one of them wanting to just swallow you whole. But then something goes wrong and the moment of desolation and abandon comes upon you. You turn this way and that – but there isn't a single boy in sight or flight! All you're left with is solitude and boredom.

No, Sarah Plotkin was not one of those girls who was going to let her destiny slip away from her. She was a lucky girl – that was what the girls of Staroportofrankovsky said. For what did that ordinary girl have in her, that all the young men went trailing after her? She was short, thin, a baby with tiny feet, for whom a size 33 shoe was way too big. But she had a pleasant, pure face, and there were sparks flying in those dark eyes of hers, and her laugh was like hearing silver bells ringing.

And so, the fateful moment came, and the image of young Sarka

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became etched deep in Arki's soul. Afterwards, certain spring evenings descended along the shores of the sea. The world was filled with the sounds of the waves breaking on the stones and the gravel, the fading illumination of the twilight hour, the fragrant pull of the moss, the flaming stars overhead, and the flight of a light breeze – all of which was covered by the flash in those dark eyes and the silvery laugh of Sarka, that most bloodthirsty of all young girls.

This was not the first time that Arki had gotten involved with a member of the fairer sex. He also had certain tricks and stratagems of his own, and more than once he had spent the night in some forgotten inn, lost in the warm arms of some sinful young woman. However, back in those days there were still some young women in Odessa who were quite expert at the art of refusal. And who could say if little Sarka herself was not also an expert in that selfsame art?

But oy, what a disaster, what a stumble! All those refusals and petty excuses brought the great calamity upon Arki and he began to have sleepless nights. The spark caught fire and turned into a blazing bonfire. Sarka too began to feel that sweet, debilitating confusion in Arki's arms. The heart of that wise girl was not made of stone, and it seemed that just a little while longer and she too would fall prey to the madness. Every evening Arki's attempts at getting the girl to yield increased. Pleasure, embarrassment and happiness all seeped into the heart of this tough young woman. A few more evenings passed, yet Arki had still not pronounced the all-important words, the words that every strategizing girl so looked forward to.

And so Sarka gathered all her strength. With a torn, tear-filled heart she pulled away from that beloved young dark-haired man of hers, and out of nowhere Shimki Weiner appeared on the scene.

Oh, what twisted plots and empty vanities! Shimki got to know Sarka one evening and was drawn to her. True, Nechama Chefetz, the daughter of a wholesale merchant – a young woman always dressed in the very best, who was about four years older than Shimki – was already Shimki's fiancé. However, some of the majesty of Arki – who was number one among the street kids – had already rubbed off on Sarka. She was now considered a first-rate girl, and not a single member of the gang would dare to put her down.

With a suffering, storm-tossed soul, the girl smiled upon Shimki

and captivated his heart. A few days later Arki noticed the fact that Sarka was no longer the same person she had been a few days earlier. Shimki was now completely smitten with her, and he went following her everywhere like her very shadow. It was all too much to take, and one evening, when he was all alone with Sarka down along the shore, Arki's lips at last pronounced the longed-for words. With a sigh Sarka tucked her head into the chest of the dear young man. With all the might in her womanly soul she clung to him.

And so, it seemed that a calm had descended over the world, as it were. Shimki went back to his older fiancé, and Sarka's silvery laugh was not at all diminished – but Arki did not forget the betrayal.

But oh, the evil plots of the *Sitra Achra* and its deceptive tricks!

In the year 1912, a year after Arki was married, he was drafted into the army. He was accepted into the cavalry, and from that point on he was occupied with horses. Just as before in his business, Arki did not fail in handling horses as well. In the year 1914, when the war broke out, his division was sent to the front. He was among those who climbed the Carpathian Mountains, and encountered new lands, mountains, and rivers.

Like all soldiers, he would occasionally send letters home. His rigid hand was not accustomed to such delicate matters, and the calligraphy of his letters stood high and angry – like soldiers standing on file. And yet Sarka's letters were written in a round script – like the tiny handwriting of a child. "My dear Ahara'le! I am writing you from Odessa, from that quiet room of ours. In the evenings I sit at the window and watch the pleasant spring that arrived here two weeks ago, and I smell the fragrance of the blooming acacias, and I get tears in my eyes. I long for you with all my soul, my dear Arki, oh, how I long for you!"

At the end of the letter there were a few references to acquaintances and relatives of theirs, including, first and foremost – Shimki Weiner, who had married Nechama and become one of the kulaks and biggest merchants on their street. That waif-like Nechama of his, it seemed, was not at all to his liking. He went around making eyes at married women – seemingly under the impression that he could do whatever he wanted if he had the money!

But Sarka made a rather critical mistake in gossiping like that. For it seems that Shimki would not let her be, and there is no obstacle that

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stands in the way of a man with deep enough pockets. Arki was seized by a rather evil spirit, and the foul *Sitra Achra* once more emerged from its hiding place and began to gnaw away at his soul.

At that time the great assault of the Russian Army was undertaken, and Arki demonstrated his valor and was decorated with two Crosses of Saint George. However, he was constantly plagued by those dark thoughts, and his face was gloomy and fitful with rage.

During one of the battles, near Premissel, he was badly wounded, and hovered for about two months between life and death. The bullet had hit him in the head. Two difficult surgical operations saved his life, but his head – his head hurt him ever since.

And so, a marvelous evening leaned down over Odessa, a multitude of lights and colors trembled off on the horizon to the west, the dimly-lit streets were full of strolling young people and heartfelt memories of youth. Arki, dressed in military clothes, with his knapsack over his shoulder and his pistol in his belt, walked from the train station to Staroportofrankovsky. Somewhere off in the distance, on far-off horizons, the war still raged, but here in this charming city the impudent young men and none-too-strict young women went wandering about, and it was as though they were all gripped in the throes of some sort of madness. Certainly, Shimki and his Sarka were not going to miss out on the moment. Shimki had it all – guys like him were not drafted by the army, they could go on doing what they did without any interference.

"Oy, Arki, Ahara'le!" Sarah said as she opened the door. She was dressed in a pretty silk dress, a light-blue dress, with silver stripes. "Oy, Arki, how I waited for you!"

She fell on her husband's neck and cried a bucketful of tears, hugging the shamefaced soldier with all her might, kissing him all over the face, and not letting him go. She quickly prepared dinner and put a bottle of wine on the table. However, in the middle of the meal the door opened and in walked Shimki Weiner. He spotted Arki and at first, he seemed puzzled, but then he burst out with a joyful cry. "Hoy, Arki! I heard you were coming and rushed over to welcome you home!"

But that was a lie. Nobody knew that Arki was coming home. However, Shimki continued to show signs of true joy. He sent out for more wine and refreshments in honor of Arki. Just imagine the scene for yourselves, His lifelong friend came home! Ar-ki – one hell of a friend!

After a few glasses of wine Arki became relaxed, and he began to recount all sorts of episodes from the hard life spent at war, including battles with the Austrians, and the way of life of the inhabitants of those faraway lands, and the lives of those strange Jews over in Galicia – what with their Payot¹ and Shtreimels².

Indeed, Arki's tongue was just as sharp as ever. He had come home and found that little wife of his and Shimki, his friend and colleague. And so, he drank a bottle of wine and went telling tall tales as he was in a good mood now. And the words just burst into the air overhead – go know what was the truth and what was fiction! However, behind all those words he had a wounded, painful head, sickly nerves, and a black hole in his soul, which eyed these two people before him, inspecting every little move and gesture. He drank another glass, and Shimki could hardly be said to have lagged behind, though Sarka just took a few light sips from hers. Perhaps her heart was already foretelling the future? It was not the same Arki from before the war, something had taken place in that soul of his. Be careful, be very careful! Topsy and in a good mood, Shimki at last rose from his chair. He was a tall, good-looking young married man. Over the course of the intervening three years he had put on a little weight, but you could still sense the easygoing young man from Odessa underneath it all. He invited the two of them to come see him the next day. He now lived with his father-in-law, the wealthy merchant, and he had everything a man could possibly desire. All the same, he was sorry about those days back then – you still remember, my brother? He was a bit drunk. The two of them, Shimki and Sarka, stepped out into the hall. Then Arki got up to see the guest off. At that moment he heard a whisper:

"Now we can't keep seeing each other like before!" That was what Arki seemed to hear in the whisper. Shimki squeezed the young woman's palm in the hallway. The light-blue dress, with the silver stripes, fluttered in the darkness. At that moment Arki came up to them, and his wife saw the look in his eyes and became terrified. They

¹ Payot - sidelocks or sidecurls worn by some men and boys in the Orthodox Jewish community.

² Shtreimel - a fur hat worn by Haredi Jewish men, particularly members of Hassidic Judaism.

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were black, hollow, stubborn, and wrapped in a dark, threatening shawl.

Yes, a sort of dark shawl seemed to descend over Arki's mind. It seemed to him that he had placed his pistol beneath his pillow, as he used to do in the army. In the morning Sarka was found shot to death in her bed. The bullet had pierced her heart. The sheets, the blanket, and the mattress were all soaked with blood. But Arki could not remember a thing. To this day he does not know if he had a hand in the murder. The doctors found that he suffered from a mental illness that can often cause a man to experience complete forgetfulness and a lack of control over his actions.

He was imprisoned for a short time, and then he was released. It would seem that those Crosses of Saint George played a part in all that, to some extent. After he was released from prison he moved to a small town in Ukraine where his eldest brother lived, with his rather large family.

In the town he fell in with the Hassids. In those days life still hummed brightly in that loud sect of theirs, and any hard-hearted, bitter soul could find shelter beneath its wings. Arki went to see the *Tzaddik*¹ of his generation and remained at the court of the Tzaddik for three months. The holy man, with those thick, white eyebrows and deep eyes of his, who had seen sinners and wounded souls brought before him for many years now, understood the ways of the human spirit and was familiar with the path of consolation for the man of sorrow and suffering. This holy Rabbi sent the dark-haired young man to Hadiach, telling him to pray at the grave of the Alter Rebbe and wallow in the dust there, that he might find solace.

From that point on the young man remained in Hadiach. Days of blood and loud thunder blew through the world, it was the season of revolutions and sacrifices, but he clung to the grave and the eternal flame of the Alter Rebbe.

At times he would be assailed by depression and then he would have his moments of weakness. He would then sit in the Shtiebel and repent before his Creator. Through the windows the grey light filtered

¹ Tzaddik - righteous one - a title in Judaism given to people considered to be particularly pious.

in, and the moldy smell of sanctity and many generations hovered inside the edifice. The Holy Ark stood naked, and it looked like a nobleman who had lost all his possessions. In a corner there were piles of ripped and worn prayer books, orphaned Torah scrolls rested on a long wooden bench, and their cadavers let out a silent scream.

And so, the man sat there in that dying world and pounded penitently on his soul. Outside the Shtiebel lay the earth of the living God. The passing wind struck the trees, bushes, and the grass. Thousands of minor events take place out in the world, but an individual living soul only sees a tiny fraction of them. Each of those souls has its little light and its miniscule flame, that illuminates but a small patch of earth for them.

Mazal Tov! Congratulations! After an extended period of hesitation our acquaintance Berman fulfilled his obligation, and one August day that year he took that dear young woman – Golda Ginsburg – for his bride. The author was there as well and had his fill of honey and wine.

But do let us tell the story in its proper order.

For many months Golda Ginsburg, that young woman and would-be-mother, was together with Berman, and there were many unseen things that went on between the two of them. Berman, the principal employee at the hair salon in Hadiach, the godfather of all hairdos and patron saint of the cleanshaven face, had lost his youth over the course of the years, but in recompense, he had accumulated his fair share of experience, seniority, and talent in managing his dealings with the womenfolk with the utmost decorum and civility.

True, there was nothing grand about Berman. Every day, six days a week, the man worked in the hair salon – cutting hair, giving shaves, snipping away with his scissors, applying steaming towels to chins dripping with blood, sprinkling drops of eau de cologne – just a few on the face and bald spots, and the majority right in the eyes – chattering away quite a bit, and then snipping some more with those scissors of his. That was the fate of a barber. Yet when the evening came he would slip off his white jacket, brush the strands of hair from his clothing, and become a rather pleasant-looking man, a real pleasure for the eyes to behold. That year he had turned thirty-six years old. It was a serious age, yet Golda, who was fifteen years younger than Berman, did not notice it at all. The two of them clung to one another, and every evening

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they would spend time alone together, and play the age-old game. The thing is, Golda was in love with this dark young man, she loved the tiny wrinkles that had gathered around his eyes, and the scent of cologne that he always gave off. And Berman, although he was a professional bachelor, could not resist the waves of admiration and affection that flowed from this pleasant young woman.

Golda was not cautious in her behavior with Berman – it was over a year now that she had not been taking any precautions. There was a special magic in the air in that spring of 1940, the spring of Golda's great love. The heaven with all its hosts, the warm breeze, the world of flowers and green foliage, the chilly evenings, soaked in light and silence – it was as if all of existence was getting down on its knees before this lady of a young woman. Her life opened wide before her, and Berman went walking along therein.

That spring the couple revealed a double and triple share of incautious behavior. The young man in question believed life was nothing more than a vista filled with milk and honey. It was his opinion that one could take oneself a young woman of tender age and a pleasant temperament, have one's way with her – and then remain exempt from all responsibility.

And so, the fateful day came, and the ill signs began to sprout and flourish from week to week. The light in Golda's face went out as she turned colors in anger and shame, and dark, round circles began to appear underneath her eyes. This young woman was no longer a proud bird who took flight with a beating heart for the distant heavens. She now seemed to be bound in chains, and those same chains troubled Berman's legs as well.

It was a truly ridiculous sight to see the two of them walking around and suffering like that... Lord Almighty, how much longer could this go on? Had the hour of wedded bliss not come for this foolish couple? Was there any Jewish sense in all those delays and refusals? Indeed, there is no tribe more choosy, hesitant, and nitpicking than the tribe of old bachelors!

But once we have touched on such delicate matters, we must delve into the very heart of the matter and have a closer look at the lives of these two individuals, examining each one of them separately.

Berman and his mother Haya Sarah lived in Vokzalny Street, in two

small rooms, including the kitchen. The mother, a short, big-bellied Jewish woman, was the ruler of the house. She had known better days than these. Before the Revolution, in earlier times, they had had a large 'colonial' store in Bobruysk – her husband, may he rest in peace, had been an active man filled with initiative. Thank God, he knew how to deal well with people – whether it was the buyers and sellers, or anyone else he came across. The store had everything. There were all sorts of salamis, candies, chocolates, tea and coffee, canned goods and fish, grains, flours, oils, and a wealth of good things. The merchandise was brought in from Warsaw and St. Petersburg, and the finest items – were imported from abroad. Absolute order and cleanliness reigned inside the store. Everything was scrubbed and polished, bright and shiny, and it was all laid out in accordance with the latest European fashion of the time. On the side of the paper bags was printed in fancy script: "Yaakov Berman, Bobruysk, Colonial Goods Shop". What more was there to say? Even the string that was used to secure the bags for the customers was colored light-blue, red, and navy – everything about the store was regal. There were two salespeople, a fresh and sturdy boy and girl, whose skin flashed beneath the edges of their sleeves, as they stood at the counter and served the customers with the utmost politeness, fairly bowing and scraping before them. The store was filled with a range of pleasing, sharp fragrances that were enough to make your head spin.

Yes, Haya Sarah Berman had known better days than these. Back then she had been the real lady of the house. Everyone – the help, and the customers, and even her husband himself, may he rest in peace – all knew that everything hung on her word. But it didn't stop there. All of Bobruysk wallowed in the dust at her feet, and when her uncle Haim Zaidel, whose soul is now in Heaven, had still been alive...

And Haya Sarah begins to recall those distant days, when the great pillars of the world had not yet crumbled, and everyone knew their proper place in life. But now the years had passed, and what was left of all that splendor and glory? Yosef, may he live long and prosper, had become a barber – that was the reward for all her toil. And so there she is now, a none-too-thin widow, sighing soft and slow.

But despite her sighs, and despite all the hardships, Haya Sarah still has a few principles left, in accordance with which she manages the affairs of life at their home in Vokzalny Street. The first of these principles is: a man must look after his health like the apple of his eye.

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For there is no fickler thing than the health of a man. And when she says health, she means: the stomach, for that is what the whole world is built upon. If you ignore the stomach – you are bound to pay for it with your life.

And so, Haya Sarah Berman delved head and shoulders into culinary matters. Food became a sort of cult for her, and it was at the altar of the edible that she offered up her incense and sacrifices. But what? Did you expect that that Yossel of hers should come home from work and not find a succulent, tasty meal that melted in your mouth, caused every cell in the body to blossom, and every vein to rejoice? After all the hard work that he put in at the barbershop from early in the morning, for eight straight hours, on his feet, giving shaves and cutting hair for all those large, filthy faces – after such tawdry work should he not come home to find some comfort in a bowl of fragrant soup or a slice of roast meat, or a dish of sweet compote?

And Haya Sarah Berman sighs and goes about her business. She looks after the two rooms – above all the kitchen – taking care of the market and the house, with that big, pregnant-looking belly of hers, economizing, and cooking, and frying, and seeing to all those little things from which proper treats for the stomach are created. And so, having finished her day's work, Haya Sarah removes her filthy apron and puts on a clean dress, and Yosef comes home from work and sits down to the table covered with a white tablecloth, and his mother sets all those pure dishes on the table, and the two of them sit down with all due respect, and chew, and drink, and lick their lips in complete satisfaction – and who can compare with her at that moment, with Haya Sarah, that is?

Berman's life was steady and firm, set in stone since the six days of creation, as it were, and it was hard for him to make any change. That is the sentence visited upon conservative bachelors, and that is their bitter fate in this world! However, there had been that fateful little mishap now between Golda and him, and the time had come for Yosef Berman to come to a decision.

Like a little child who had misbehaved – with a red face and downcast eyes – Berman one day let his mother know that he had to take Golda for his bride. This bit of news did not give Haya Sarah one bit of pleasure. True, this secret was not exactly what one could call well-kept, and she had noticed and understood a thing or two about it even

beforehand. Hadiach is not exactly a big city in the Jewish community. The walls have ears, and Haya Sarah's ears themselves were hardly sealed.

So, Haya Sarah Berman sighs. Who is this man Ginsburg? Some cemetery attendant – a beggar with a passel of kids. She had known days in which she would never have agreed to a match between her family and one such as his. The Berman family had a right to certain expectations, their family pedigree included fabulously wealthy individuals and shop-owners of the highest order. What more was there to say? She herself, Haya Sarah, had had her own 'Colonial' store – may we all be so fortunate! And on her mother's side there was also her uncle Haim Zaidel, may his merit stand in our stead...

It was strange talk, the very dust of ancient days! All those things, including her uncle Haim Zaidel himself, were now worth no more than a wooden nickel! Haya Sarah Berman sighs. Is there any choice in the matter? Yossele must fulfill his obligations.

And so that same evening Golda came over to visit the Berman home in Vokzalny Street, and she had a long talk with Haya Sarah. This bashful bride found favor in the eyes of the old woman. In hindsight, perhaps the situation was not all that tragic after all. How long could a grown-up young man like Yossele remain single? This young woman, it seemed, was from a respectable family, and she was devoted to Yosef with all her heart. The next day Haya Sarah put on her Sabbath clothes and went with Yosef to visit the home of her new in-law Ginsburg.

In the Ginsburg home the little stream of life also had its ebb and flow. Golda's mother had died ten years earlier and left behind six boys and girls. Golda was the eldest child, and with the death of her mother, it fell on her to handle most of the housework, and it was as though she had herself become a mother in miniature. Her aunt Tzipa Lea, her mother's sister, helped her out at first, but a year later her father, took Tzipa Lea for his wife, and she began to give birth in no small measure herself. In all, the two sisters had brought ten children into the world. Taking care of all these kids was no easy matter, and Golda, as the eldest child, bore a healthy share of the household yoke on her shoulders.

The Ginsburg family was rather populous, and things were rather tight and often lacking in the home. Indeed, in those days work as a

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cemetery attendant did not provide its employees with much of a living. Tzipa Lea, who was now forty years old, was a pretty woman, but she was always inundated with little children, rags, and worries. This life had worn away her beauty, but she was essentially a quiet woman and a good mother to ten children, both her own, and those of her sister.

And behold, the following are the names of the older children: Golda, Nachman, Hasya, Hana, Sarka, and Leibel – four girls and two boys. And this gang was blessed with a common strain of Jewish charm and grace. Despite all the things they lacked, they did not harbor any dark sadness in their souls.

Nachman was nineteen years old, dark-haired, brave, and blessed with a beautiful pair of eyes. He left his moustache unshaved, and this flickering moustache was a source of ridicule and laughter for the older folks. However, there were girls in Hadiach who hardly laughed at the sight of that moustache, and they took careful note of the sparkle in the eyes, and the breadth of the shoulders, and they found nothing to complain about, even when it came to that moustache itself. Nachman was employed as a salesman in the central warehouse for office supplies and writing materials. He demonstrated an abundance of expertise when it came to the merchandise. There were notebooks, pads, bottles of ink and glue, globes and India ink, blocks of blank receipts and chess boards, records and pictures, pencils, pens, and pencil cases – and amid all these items the dark young man spent his workday. He received four hundred rubles a month, and this sum served as a bit of a support for the family. However, as support goes it was hardly stable. Who knew where destiny would take Nachman'ke when he would be drafted into the army in another year?

Hasya did not follow in Golda's footsteps and was not as bounded as her to the household chores. And yet the easy life did not quench her thirst; she studied in the Technical School for Agriculture in Hadiach – that same Technical School that was located in the former prison, surrounded by that high whitewashed wall. Hasya received a scholarship for her studies and for two years now she had been a member of the Komsomol. At home she tended to the vegetable garden, and she was also responsible for taking care of the spotted cow. At the Technical School this capable girl had acquired a certain amount of knowledge in the field of agriculture, and she had also befriended Roman Nazarovich Ivanchuk and learned the trade of vegetable growing

from him with all its practical applications. She was an active girl with a joyous playfulness in her eye. Indeed, not even one of the members of the Ginsburg household was afflicted by the black moods of depression, other than the man of the house himself, whose soul would sink into a certain gloominess from time to time.

Hana had already turned fifteen years old, and she was the prettiest of the Ginsburg daughters. That summer she had completed the seventh grade at the local high school, and she too had rather lofty aspirations. It was her desire to go to Kiev. Her father would not agree to this. In the wide world out there the *Sitra Achra* reigned, and there were many, many obstacles and stumbling blocks along the path people had to tread. Could Hana, that fine, gentle girl, be expected to stay strong in such complicated times as these? No, Ginsburg was not going to allow the members of his family to be scattered far and wide, it would be better for them to remain together here in Hadiach – for who knew what tomorrow might bring?

Aharon Ginsburg did not run his household with a high hand, though, and his children loved him. However, life had its own way of seeing to things, as it flowed on, flooding the world and all things in it, and the children continued to grow up, and stepped out into the world outside and were caught up in the flowing stream. Sarka and Leibel were still attending the local high school, and they too had certain aspirations of their own. Back at home, there were yet another four young children chirping away, and their names were as follows: Shimon, Abba, Mira, and Rivochka. The last of the group was only four years old, and yet she already had mastered her child's tongue and her eyes were growing wiser day by day.

Yes, Ginsburg's home was always filled to the brim with chatter and tumult. All day long that gang of children hummed away around the rooms and out in the yard; the sounds rose up to the very heavens above. The lady of the house – the mother, stepmother, and aunt – was not one to raise her voice, though she could hardly be said to have held her tongue either. The house was run in accordance with Jewish traditions – the Sabbath was the Sabbath, and not a drop of *treyf*¹ ever found its way into the kitchen. Ginsburg made sure of this, and Tzipa

¹ Treif - food that does not satisfy the requirements of Jewish law.

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Lea was a faithful wife to her husband. At sundown on Friday, as the Sabbath was coming, and the tumult had died down in the house, after all the children had been bathed and their hair combed down, then Tzipa Lea would change out of her weekday clothes and appear as the mother of the house – with her hair braided and her face clear and pure, crowned as she was with the colors of Shabbat that imbued the entire home with a touch of the festive and holiday spirit.

Golda was a rather domestic girl, a true mother-to-be, and this was her entire purpose in life. Now this little mishap had occurred, and she had begun to take the necessary measures. However, these measures were all in vain. That was how the Ginsburg family was – they abounded in vitality.

Now the cemetery attendant's eldest daughter was plunged into a period of mourning. Ginsburg noted her worn features with some concern, yet he did not know the reason for the change. Of all the members of the household only aunt Tzipa Lea, the stepmother, recognized the nature of the tragedy. She noticed it and stayed silent, only crying occasionally in private.

One day the pleasant thunder exploded. Golda announced that she would be getting married to Berman. All at once the girl's face began to glow. A holiday atmosphere reigned in the home. Berman and his mother came for a visit at the Ginsburgs' house, and they brought candies with them for all the children. Mirochka and Rivochka sat on the groom's knees and chattered away excitedly. Berman had a weakness for little children, and they were rather fond of him as well. Golda placed the refreshments on the table, her face filled with life and joy.

Not too long afterwards, the couple was registered at the ZAGS office in accordance with the civil law, and then they held a proper Chuppah and *Kiddushin*¹ in accordance with the religion of Moses and Israel. Golda had to go live in Berman's home now. However, as is the tradition in Jewish communities, the Chuppah itself was held in the bride's home. There was a rather pleasant party, a truly joyous Jewish party, filled with song, a bit of drink, and plenty of good humor and sharp wit. The author was present as well and had his fill of honey and

¹ Kiddushin – part of Jewish wedding ritual.

wine.

Solomon and Firochka did not attend the party, for they had already left Hadiach. However, the remaining members of the Feigin household, including Binyamin, were among the guests. Joyful shouts, song and dance filled the house from end to end. Haya Sarah Berman, the honorable mother of the groom, showed what she was capable of this time. With her face all flushed she danced that dance from days long gone by, days when her uncle Haim Zaidel was still alive. All those present clapped their hands for the big-bellied mother of the groom.

Around midnight the eyes of the little children began to close of their own, and one by one, beginning with little Rivochka, they dropped off into beds all around the house. However, the older folks kept right on humming until the first light of day, until the blinding sun took its first cautious steps off on the eastern edge of the horizon.

Hasya, Hana, and Sarka stepped out to walk the members of the Feigin household back home to the Garden alley. A rather comely smile played over the face of Hana, the most beautiful of the daughters. The cool morning breeze tossed the hair about on her head. From all corners of the earth came the cries of the roosters.

Many years have now passed since then, and yet that refreshing dawn comes floating back up to the surface in these sad lines here, as Hana's wonderful face went silently passing by, along with the chatter of the little girls, through the quiet streets.

It was a secretive, hidden world in which Solomon and his young wife lived; a song-filled, delicate world, at once vibrating and dozing gently.

However, Firochka was a practical young woman. That very spring she completed her studies at the high school and intended, despite her recent marriage, to continue her studies at a school of higher learning. After some discussion of the matter it was decided that she would take admission exams to the Medical University. All paths were open before her; however, the medical profession was the most convenient for the female sex.

The exams for the universities began on the 20th of August. So, the young couple would have to leave Hadiach a bit early. Yes, Solomon was still trailing along behind him those unfinished strands of "Engine Parts".

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What an utter embarrassment! How could this fine young man, with his rather fine talents, allow himself such delays and loose ends? Apparently, his studies at the University were not proper. Simply put, the young man sat around idly throughout the year, and only a week or two before the exams he would finally get down to work. No, Firochka would see to a change in this foul arrangement, she would take the reins in her soft hands. From this point on there would be no more loose ends and no exams to be retaken!

Solomon would just laugh when he heard these things. Ah, friends! Have you ever seen a police officer such as her?

He pats the young woman who is already blossoming into quite a lady on the shoulder, and as his hand touched her he feels all the warmth that her body gives off – his eyes go soft as velvet, and her blue eyes look at him with sincere emotion and a wide smile, as he embraces this police officer of his with all his heart. All the same though, discipline is discipline, and now that he has gotten caught up in the covenant of marriage, he must obey his wife. What can you do? That is the life of a Jew in diaspora...

And so, bit by bit Solomon begins to take up the yoke himself. The young couple left Hadiach ten days before the examination period was to begin. The house in the Garden alley seemed to dim somewhat as a result. The little girl Tamar was still there, her laughter could still be heard around the house, along with her constant chatter, but in just a few more days she too would be leaving, and Binyamin was the one tasked with bringing her to the capital city. O Master of the Universe, whom will the old folks be left with now?

Meantime, the leaves have begun to turn yellow out in the gardens. The season of the strawberries and cherries is over, and it is now time for the tomatoes and apples. The buzz of the marketplace continued to rise to the heavens every morning. The produce of the blessed earth was displayed atop all the long tables. On Sundays a few blind men would gather there too, sitting in the shade with their bowls on the ground before them and their shepherd pipes humming in their hands. With hoarse voices they would sing their sorrowful, heavenly songs. The local girls, pretty, rough country girls, wrapped up in colorful scarves, with those measured farmers' voices of theirs and a trace of a moustache on their upper lips, stood in their wagons and sold their produce to all takers. The wagons were filled with vegetables and all

sorts of other types of crops. That year the crop of tomatoes and watermelons was extremely plentiful: the price of a bucket of the best tomatoes was only two or three rubles.

That summer Binyamin continued to live that rather busy life of his, running back and forth between Hadiach and Vilbovka. As we already noted, he did not have any luck that year when it came to the women. He tried to latch on to some of the women among the summer vacationers a bit – those plump cows, who sat grazing, along with their offspring, along the banks of the Psel River. However, his bad luck held, and he did not manage to earn himself even a trace of functional sympathy among this public. Binyamin was a poor student, the personal secretary of some professor, and the flock of women treated him with a rather insulting indifference.

Every evening Binyamin would head to the home of one of these women, the spot where this lively group would get together for a cup of tea, a few light jokes, and a bit of singing. They would sit beneath the vault of heaven in the fenced-in garden. Nearby a tree stood as though lost in thought, waiting for the darkness that would gradually take over the world. Off on the western edge of the horizon the colorful bonfire would appear as it caught fire and then died down. A breeze blew warm and chilly at the same time, bringing the fragrance of perfumes and fresh grass on its wings. The sadness would then step forth from its hiding place and spread through the silent world. Natalya Victorovna, that pleasant, sizeable woman, would break out into a long, gentle Ukrainian song, and all those assembled would join in, each one doing the best they could.

From time to time, one by one, the husbands would come out from the cities for their vacations. In the darkness the scent of papiroso would rise from the land of men, and those foolish women would now show up with painted lips and powder on their tanned cheeks.

No one powdered their cheeks or painted their lips for Binyamin. As such, what did he indeed find in Hadiach that summer? Affairs as insubstantial as the air itself, meaningless events that aroused no real desire. Only the pine trees stood whispering in place, their upper branches raised to the heavens, sending their rustling and trembling blossoming up into the distant sky. And at their feet there was a teeming multitude of song, cool air, and shadows.

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The Psel River flowed in its narrow bed, between banks of sand and grass. Here and there were stands of reeds and clumps of white and yellow water lilies. A real bounty of colors was reflected in the flowing river. In the face of the dawn and the stars, the sun and the clouds, the silvery moon and the grey light of twilight, the river spread the crystalline surface of its waters, and they all left the mark of their reflections and their colors therein. It was an upside-down, ephemeral world, renewing itself and then passing away once again in turn.

Life passed slowly on by. The hearts beat, the rivers all ran to the sea, and the winds continued to blow. Everything flowed on ceaselessly, endlessly. However, the banks of the Psel were not as they had been the year before. Something had changed in their color and nature.

The year before Rachel had been here, whereas now Binyamin was surrounded by all the little schoolchildren, including Tamar. Little by little strange things had begun to transpire among these merry little pranksters. Once, Binyamin had seen Sarka Ginsburg lying along the banks of the river with tears in her eyes. Who had caused this curly-haired girl to suffer? It could only have been Kim and Tamar, who were running around in the water and filling the air for miles and miles around with shards of water. Indeed, Kim had concentrated his energies on learning to swim and he was no longer an embarrassment to our manly tribe. And yet, Tamar too would be leaving in just a few days for the capital city. From this point on the boy would no longer be able to lord it over that poor provincial girl!

However, Sarka Ginsburg was going to remain here. Binyamin went over to the girl.

"What's the matter Sarka?" She hid her face in the ground, as the tears continued to fall and get swallowed up by the sand. But then she suddenly cast her flashing eyes in his direction – filled simultaneously with laughter and tears. They were a mixture of overcast skies and sunlight. She leaps into the water and joins the rest of the gang.

High drama! Little children, with their mother's milk still moist about their lips – and yet they were already making their debuts on the cruel stage of life, with tears, and laughter, and the deep joys of the soul!

Yes, life went on – passing by slowly, second by second, minute by minute. The summer vacationers had now begun their exodus from

Hadiach, and Esther the noodle-maker's season was now in full swing. For there was no woman among the summer vacationers worthy of her name who would belittle her obligation – that is, the obligation to take back some lokshen with her, and there were no more tasty, fragrant noodles, that literally melted in your mouth, as light as a feather, than those of old Esther and her daughter Nechama. And so, the mother and daughter had begun making the rounds of the homes of the summer vacationers, and here and there could be heard that faint sound of musical suffering – the sound of eggs being cracked open.

That summer Binyamin did not have to face the noodle problem, as it were, and so he continued to go back and forth between Hadiach and Vilbovka. Stepan Borisovich's health had improved. It was the end of the month of August, and the days were hot and brightly lit. His book 'Dynamics' was almost finished. Stepan Borisovich now completely set aside his work, something that he would allow himself only once a year. Yes, it was time for a few days of complete rest – moving around, getting fresh air, and some forced nourishment.

He hands Binyamin his stipend and they bid each other farewell. The Professor's molars begin moving ever so slightly, and Binyamin is treated to one final lecture on that well-known subject – just how order was created in the world out of all that *tohu wa-bohu*. Binyamin listens patiently to the lecture, and then he goes over to bid farewell to Klara Ilynishna. She is swinging back and forth in her hammock. It was none other than that homeopathic doctor who had managed to heal her somewhat. Ten times a day she swallows the drops and pills that he prescribed; and along with them she gulps down a decent allopathic portion of faith. And what a miracle it is to behold – her health is improving day by day!

Binyamin shakes her hand and hears her soft voice, like the sound of the wind blowing through the pipes of an organ.

"Farewell, Binyamin! Don't forget us in the future. Perhaps Lida will be here with us next year."

The name of Lida – the wayward daughter – rang through the forest without leaving any echo behind. It seems that her mother had noticed a little something the previous year. But now the young woman does not speak to his heart even the slightest bit. Binyamin shakes the mother's warm hand, and her prominent, sad eyes gaze at him fixedly

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for a moment with hidden compassion. Farewell, Klara Ilynishna, until next year!

He jumps onto his bicycle and runs into Glasha at the edge of the forest. It is no festival or holiday today, and yet there Glasha is before him in a colorful dress and a pair of shoes. Did she truly put those clunky shoes and that holiday attire on in his honor? For a few minutes they go traveling along the forest path, and they are both holding the handlebars on either side. It is now time to say goodbye. Glasha tells him that she wants to move into town for the winter. Maria Sergeyevna, the director of the kindergarten, who spent the summer in Vilbovka, offered her regular work in Hadiach, with room and board. This life here in Vilbovka, at her mother's house, is not to her satisfaction. In all honesty, uncle Binyamin, what peace of mind can one find in all this boozing and wildness? Her childhood has now come to an end, and Glasha is beginning to understand the nature of the life that is passing before her eyes.

They sit on the bicycle and head downhill towards the bridge. Binyamin jumps down from the seat and carefully helps Glasha get off the bicycle. Today they do not go for a swim in the river. For a little while they stand their silently, without making a sound. The sun now seems like a tired mother, hiding by turns, as it tucks its head away between the cushions of white clouds. When the clouds cover the face of the sun it is as though a sort of minor twilight has fallen over the forest and the fields, the silence of evening, with a sort of wagging finger saying: hush, children, mommy is sleeping!

Now it is time to say goodbye to Glasha, and in the end it seems that a certain sadness has now settled in to stay between the two of them. The palm of the girl's hand is cool and large, and with immeasurable delicacy a few strands of flaxen hair twirl behind her ear, as those two blossoming little devils lie hidden beneath her colorful blouse, and her neck, tanned almost black, rises with the innocent charm and grace of a child. The girl raises her clear, pure eyes to Binyamin, and he rouses himself as though from some deep slumber. At that moment the cushions of clouds part over the head of the tired sun, which in turn opens its confused eyes – and now gold and light and playful warmth have arrived in the world.

"And so, we must say goodbye until next year, Glasha!"

"And what if you don't return?" Glasha is speaking in Ukrainian, and the sounds of the words mingle with the view that is spread out before them. She adds in a soft voice: "But it's all the same to me. I'll never forget you, uncle Binyamin!"

"I'll never forget you either, Glasha!" Taking great care, he kisses the cool palm of her hand. Something endearing and attractive hovers all about this young woman. It doesn't matter at all that her shoes are so coarse – it is for him that she put them on. What can he do to give her some satisfaction as they bid each other farewell?

He heads up the road towards the town, which welcomes him with the dust of its silence. The banks of the river rise to his left, and once more the holy sanctuary of the Alter Rebbe juts forth from between the headstones and bushes. This too is an all-seeing, meticulous eye, sending forth its rays from beyond the dust of many generations, observing the actions of man and his weaknesses.

It is as though some unified conscience is reflected in that hidden grave. Binyamin enters the town. He has one more day remaining in Hadiach. Tamar will be leaving with him as well.

Tamar has blossomed like a small, delicate flower in the Garden alley. It was here that she was born, crawled along, and grew up to stand on her own two feet. She was like a late child for Pesya, her sole comfort in life. Now the girl would be leaving here too. What would the old folks be left with? The summer has passed, and the days of rain, mud, and fog were on their way. Old age, desolation, and loneliness would reign here among these rooms.

Pesya stands in the kitchen tending to the pots and the simmering dishes. A pleasant fragrance moves through the house. Binyamin is packing up his things and Tamar is lending him a hand. Other than the three of them there is no one else in the house. Old Pesya steps into the room with a broom in her hand. Tamar sees her shriveled face and falls upon her. The doings of a child!

"Grandma, Grandma!" Tamar shouts, as she embraces the old lady. She stands on her tiptoes and kisses her grandmother's face.

Tears suddenly appear in Pesya's eyes.

"Oy, you, my little goat!" The old lady says, as she begins to sweep the floor of the house.

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In the season that we are now describing Tamar was currently thirteen years old, and she was a dark girl with slender legs. Her close-cropped hair was decorated with a dark ribbon. Her face was tanned in the summertime and pale in the winter. Her eyes were dark brown, lively, flashing eyes, full of soul and joy, a more than average pair of Jewish eyes. Her teeth were even, strong, resembling somewhat those of her mother. As for the rest of her, nothing really stood out – she was a regular girl who liked to get dressed up a bit and do her homework without any real excitement. She did not receive particularly high grades at school. Everything about the girl was average. She had girlfriends, perhaps some male friends as well, but she had never been the leader of the group. She was not fearful, and when necessary she had made use of those strong, little fists of hers as well. It was some time now that she had learned to swim, and ever since she spent long hours in the Psal River.

That was how Tamar was. Binyamin knew her well, and it seemed to him that the girl was no fool. Every year he got a chance to see Tamar, and she was gradually growing into a tall young specimen, like a delicate birch tree. Most of the responsibility for bringing the girl up fell to Grandma Pesya. Tamar had not missed out on anything as a result.

Rachel, Tamar's mother, had not found much success in the world. She moved through life with a smile in her grey eyes and a desolate wilderness in her heart. She was rather well-versed in the art of acting and playing dress-up, and, like a chameleon, she could fill the world with a range of different-colored words, emotions, and behaviors.

Yes, Binyamin knew her through and through – he knew the magic of her love, and her indifference, and her hard hatred. Grandma Pesya was quite different from her. She moved all about the house, baking and cooking and sweeping the floors, and she spoke in a soft voice of simple things that a housewife could master, along with a few other general topics – things that went on between people, matters among family and friends, business, and the weaknesses in a man's soul. It seemed that the life of the average human being on the face of the earth was rather clear to Pesya. And so, folks would hear her soft voice, and in times of embarrassment and shame there were those who also came to seek her advice. She would wipe her mouth with her handkerchief and cautiously express her opinion. There was a certain sympathy in her words, and a motherly warmth.

From this old woman, a woman at once practical and heartfelt, Tamar absorbed all those Yiddishe magic tricks – like managing to adapt to situations, and developing a loving soul, capable of understanding another human being's tears.

In contrast to her mother, Tamar was an innocent girl, and her dark, brown eyes looked at the world around her innocently and honestly and had not yet become familiar with the sharp edges of its hidden mysteries.

Now Binyamin had been tasked with bringing this brown girl, whose short dress revealed her delicate, cinnamon-colored legs, from Hadiach to the capital. It was the first time that Tamar would be setting off on such a long journey. It goes without saying that Grandma Pesya had gone to considerable trouble to prepare adequate provisions for the trip, and the baskets and suitcases were filled with home-baked goods, and a range of dishes from the well-fried to the roasted; and not to mix the sacred with the profane, but challahs for Shabbat and hardboiled eggs were also included.

Tamar was a wide-eyed, observant girl, and Binyamin had to summon the full range of his knowledge to answer all her questions. She stared out the window, and a rather extended world went passing by before her eyes during the hours it took to make the journey; it was the first time she had seen such things.

But now the train was approaching the capital city, and Binyamin could breathe freely. At the Kievsky railway station a rather splendid meeting had been prepared for them. The train squeezed in under the gigantic glass vault, and the chain of travelers, with their bags and suitcases, gravitated towards the exit, as the white spots of the porters' aprons stood out here and there, along with the multicolored tin lettering, and this entire fleeting confusion was enveloped in the powerful, lazy blasts of the locomotive. It was a heartwarming morning towards the end of August. Somewhere off in the distance the autumn was already sharpening the soft soles of its feet, but this morning still had something of the hot summer days about it, as the sun continued to shine, and people's autumn coats were still hidden away in their closets and boxes, their necks all still exposed and uncovered.

Binyamin and Tamar were greeted by Rachel, Firochka, and Solomon. Tamar was the first one to make out the group. "There's

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Mom!" she cried, and at that moment Binyamin also spotted her, along with the shining couple. The women had arrived wearing straw hats and silk blouses, but Rachel's blouse was light blue and truly caught one's eye; her laughter shone brightly from a distance. Tamar hurries over to her mother, and mother and daughter embrace and kiss one another to the sounds of their own laughter. Solomon and Firochka also embrace Tamar. At last poor Binyamin also makes his way over to the group, laden down with baskets and suitcases. "How are you doing, Binyamin?" Rachel asks, non-committedly, and immediately turns back to Tamar.

The meeting between them was cold and frosty. On the other hand, Solomon extends a warm handshake, and Firochka offers Binyamin that wonderful smile of hers. A decent share of the baggage now passes to Solomon's hands. A veritable riot of words follows. "Nu, how is mother doing? And father's wine and mead business?" – "Ach, lest I forget: Reb Dovid the shochet and Esther the noodle-maker, and all the young folks in Hadiach for that matter, all asked me to specially convey their heartfelt greetings to you all." – "Are people still swimming in the Psel? Is the water still warm enough?" – "Swimming? Of course, they're swimming..."

That evening they all gathered at Rachel Feigin's place. Five people sat around the table. When it came to the matter of setting and decorating the table, Rachel was a true daughter of valor. This time the table was laden with all those tasty treats prepared by old Pesya, and the spirit of Hadiach shone down Dubinin Street. There was even a bottle of wine, made in Hadiach as well.

Yes, it was a pleasant evening. Aside from the lady of the house and her daughter, three students sat around the table. For Firochka had passed her exams brilliantly and been admitted to the Second Medical University. She was now no longer a green high school student but a serious young woman, newly married, and enrolled at the School of Medicine. Solomon Feigin continued to serve as this woman's shadow and prisoner. They now lived in Filipov Alley, where the young couple had been given a little room of their own. The room was indeed in a basement apartment, but this tiny space was a dwelling filled with affection and youth, where happiness reigned supreme.

Solomon gets up from his seat and gives a short speech in honor of the old man and woman who have been left behind in the distant Garden alley. He offers a few warm words, which recalled the wrinkled

hands of their mother back in their hometown. All five of them drank a toast from their glasses, as Tamar too sipped from that little glass of hers. She was exhausted from the exertion of the trip, and her eyes were closing of their own accord. Rachel begins to prepare the beds, as she makes up Tamar's. A sad smile appears on her face, and her teeth shine and give off the scent of raspberries and cleanliness.

The hours are now marching towards oblivion. In just a bit it will be midnight. Firochka and Solomon, slender and beautiful, are the first ones to leave. Binyamin carries a bit in the apartment as he stares at Tamar, who has sunk into a deep slumber. Rachel is still sitting at the table, and they talk a bit in the quiet room. "You better go, Binyamin," Rachel says, "it's rather late already." Meaningless words! Binyamin does not sense an absolute order in Rachel's voice. "Look, I brought you Tamar," he whispers, and his words, as well, are rather senseless. After all, everyone can see that the girl has been brought here, sleeping as she is right there, in the room. Binyamin's eyes are looking for something, they are beseeching and praying. Rachel asks, without any connection whatsoever to what preceded it: "But didn't you have any girlfriends in Hadiach?"

What's this – womanly jealousy? Or is it a continuation of the act? Binyamin answers the question without holding back any details. Galina Levovna, the freckled, talkative woman, Rachel Borisovna with that shadow of a moustache of hers, and Natalya Viktorovna, with something animalesque and dear about her – all these names were mentioned in the silent room, in a whisper. The two of them were now discussing rather puzzling matters in a whisper. "Other than you, Rachel, I haven't been intimate with a single woman!" Binyamin says, and they both know that it is a lie, a rather tall tale. "The same goes for me, Binyamin!" the young mother whispers.

It is a play for two, without an audience. But something rather committed stirred hotly in the hearts of both actors. A chilly August night gradually drifted off to sleep outside. The locomotive once more sounded its blasts – two short ones followed by one long one. Binyamin gazed at Tamar where she slept, and they both looked on for a little while at this sad girl. Then Binyamin found the courage in his heart to turn out the light and reach for that good woman who had waited for him, and for whom he had waited so far away, and he was as a husband to her, as a reckless youth, a brother, and a man.

Part Two

Chapter 2.1

In the capital city Tamar began attending school in the fifth grade. Here the young boys and girls all studied together and the language they spoke was the harsh Russian of Moscow, which was completely different from the Ukrainian of Hadiach. However, Tamar was a true scion of the Jewish people and she had inherited her talent for adapting from her many ancestors. A month or two went by and her classmates were no longer calling her '*khokholka*'¹. She had begun speaking with a proper Russian accent. However, she had to really focus on quite a few different things, as she truly had to put down roots in this new ground.

That entire winter Binyamin would come to visit at the apartment in Dubinin Street. He was happy when he found Rachel at home alone; however, he was not sorry when the daughter was home as well.

What was it with Rachel? The more that Binyamin became a regular in her home the more indifferent she seemed to become. Once more she no longer received him with a sparkle in her eyes. That was Binyamin's lot in the company of this fickle woman. She was a stranger to deep emotions, and to her, everything was merely material for laughter and playacting. She was thirty-three years old, and it was still rather common for men to turn around and look at this pretty woman. However, her delicate feet tended to trample, and at times Binyamin felt himself to be one of those getting caught underfoot. In the end, he began avoiding setting foot in the apartment in Dubinin Street and he immersed himself in his books and studies.

This year, Binyamin and Solomon were already students in their

¹ Khokhol - pejorative name for ethnic Ukrainians.

fourth year of studies. Little by little the boys were becoming men. Solomon left behind his charming yet ugly ways with the weaker sex. He was now no longer drawn to the skirt of every good-looking girl, to those attractive smiles and piercing eyes. No, Solomon was now nailed to the doorpost like a devoted biblical slave, as it were, and the soft hands of Firochka were at the wheel. Firochka was assiduously studying the laws of anatomy, in addition to handling the housework and generally trying to create a firm nest for the couple and any eventual little chicks that might hatch. And indeed, as spring arrived, and the sun began to appear down the Maiden Field and Kaluga Prospect, and the joyous green foliage began to slowly flicker up from the cracks in the ground, the halls of the university and the rooms in the medical clinic noticed that a strange set of spots and blotches had begun to appear in the face of this young woman.

Like all pregnant women, there was something at once bold and shabby, and sorry, about Firochka. The lack of air in the basement apartment did not have a positive effect on her. Raissa Issakovna, Firochka's mother, would look at her and sigh: the girl, her heart's treasure, was so young, she had not even turned nineteen yet – and there you have it! That was a woman's fate. Her father as well, that gypsy Jew Zalman Shotland, took pity on his young daughter, in whose blue eyes the pangs of pregnancy had already begun to appear, and whose face had turned pale and become strewn with spots. It seems that Solomon went and wrote some letter to his mother.

In a flash the response arrived. "What's this all about?" Pesya wrote, using the very purest of Yiddish expressions. "Ceremony and hesitation have no place among relatives. Is not Firochka – may she live long and prosper – our very own flesh and bone? Spring is on its way, and the footsteps of summer can already be heard. Come here, Firochka, and you will not lack a thing. God willing, you can rest here, and then give birth in peace to our grandson, or, on the contrary, a granddaughter. Why should you go sour over there in Moscow now? Here you will find fresh air, forests, fields..."

This was what old Pesya wrote to her daughter-in-law Esther. The letter also contained a request to bring Tamarka for the summer. They were bored in Hadiach without that little goat of theirs.

Despite her pregnancy, the reins were still in Firochka's hands and she was still firmly in command. Solomon had to go to the Ural for the

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months of June and July for a professional apprenticeship at a factory, and Raissa Issakovna could only sigh – there was a certain softness in her character, and she had never been able to impose her will upon the members of her household. All eyes were therefore turned to Firochka. And she decided to go.

The month of May passed, and June began to knock at the windows of the basement apartment. The sun, the green foliage, the flowers, dust, and the dog days of summer were all out in full force in the streets and gardens. The school year was over for the fifth grade at school, and so it was decided that Tamar would travel with Firochka to Hadiach. Solomon and Binyamin intended to go to Hadiach in July. Rachel was not yet able to go on vacation, as she had to work at the government agency for the supply of firewood until August.

These were the plans, at any rate. However, 'There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the council of the Lord, that shall stand'. On Saturday, the twenty-first of June, Binyamin and Rachel accompanied Tamar to the train station. The evening was the very height of splendor. The taxi brought them and their things to the Kursky Railway Station. The entire family came to see Firochka off: there was Zalman, Raissa Issakovna – who was prattling away as ever, and then, when the time was to say goodbye, even cried. Firochka's older sister, Elena, also came, along with her husband Shaul Levin – the locksmith and inventor. Solomon was the only one missing, as it was two weeks already that he was working at the factory in the distant Ural.

This time Firochka and Tamar were traveling via Kharkov, Romodan, and Lukhovitsy. Gaiety and high spirits reigned that evening among the crowd of travelers and those who had come to see them off. There was laughter, and kisses, flowers, and cigarette smoke. The bell rang, and somewhere off in the distance, the sounds of the locomotive's bark could be heard. It was evening time, but the stars had not yet come out. The golden-hued windows flashed with the final spark of the day. A tangled junction of iron tracks went narrowing away into the distance. Once more the locomotive blew its mighty blasts. The tempest of kisses and parting words raged even stronger. The train pulled out in the direction of the Black Sea – towards Tuapse, Sochi, and other resort towns. It was therefore no wonder that the mood among the travelers was rather radiant. The bell rang out a few final times. The six people who were seeing Firochka and Tamar off stood beside the open

window. From inside the train window the heads of the two young women flickered. Tamar's mouth, eyes, and face were laughing, smiling, and endlessly happy. She knew that in Hadiach her Grandma Pesya was waiting for her, along with the Psel River and all her friends. "Farewell, Mamochka!" Tamar cried. Among those seeing them off, only Raissa Issakovna cried. With her handkerchief crumpled between her fingers she dried her eyes. Firochka did not cry, but a pale smile froze in her face. The blast of a horn split the warm evening air. The locomotive tried to move, but the brakes had not been properly released, and two more blasts of the horn were let loose into the darkening evening. This time the locomotive began to move, as the wheels began to turn. At first the six of them walked along by the side of the train car before the open window. Tamar's voice could be heard once more: "Farewell, Mamochka! I'll write you!" The six people seeing them off began to fall behind, and now all handkerchiefs were taken out to wave goodbye. The red eye on the end of the final car still winked at them for some time, but then it too went out.

The six of them now stepped out onto the darkening square. Only the God of Destiny knew why Firochka had been so pale as she stood there before the window that final time.

On Sunday, June twenty-second, as the train approached Kharkov, Firochka and Tamar heard that war had broken out. German airplanes had bombed Kiev, Minsk, and Smolensk. In Kharkov the two of them found most of the windows had gone dark. A gloom hung over the city. The faces of the travelers, that just the day before had been so joy-filled and shining, were now all at once filled with concern, and most of them got off the train in Kharkov in order to go back home, to the capital. Firochka hesitated – Lord Almighty, was it really fit that this so very willful girl, who had forever been the one to decide, should now have doubts and hesitate in the face of this question, the question of life or death? "What do you think, Tamar, should we go back home, or travel on to Hadiach?" Firochka turned to Tamar with the intention of easing a bit of the responsibility that had suddenly fallen on her shoulders. "Oy, Fira, let's go home – to Hadiach!" Tamar responded. She had not yet really put down solid roots in the capital city, and Hadiach was still the home of her ancestors.

The two young travelers arrived at the station in Hadiach. It was a beautiful morning. With a mighty tremor the chirping of the birds split

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the air. The tops of the poplars slowly swayed as the light breeze stole through their branches; the leaves, green on one side and silver on the other, rustled and turned this way and that, as though they were shy. The round fenced-in flower garden on the square sang its modest song as well. The heavens were light blue, pure, and vast. The dust still lay beneath them silently. A rustling silence, laced with the occasional rooster's cry, reigned in the world.

Although a telegram had been sent to announce the girls' arrival, no one came down to meet them. The old folks were sure that Firochka and Tamar would postpone their journey due to the emergency. However, Mordechai, the coachman and former butcher, along with his horse Pavlik, had come to the station just as they always did. It was only the third day after the war had broken out, and the world had not yet returned to its original *tohu wa-bohu*.

Firochka and Tamar sat in Mordechai's ramshackle wagon with their faces turned towards the Garden alley. Romny Street stretched out before them, being the main street in Hadiach. The sun had already begun its day's labors, and its splendid glare flooded the peaceful gardens. At some point along the way, on one of the street corners, a soldier stood with the belt of his gas mask hung diagonally across his shoulder. The dust moved politely at the feet of the horse, accompanying the wheels of the wagon. It did not rise into the air – as the dew of the night still clung to it and kept it bowed to the ground.

The two travelers filled their breasts with the refreshing air. Firochka was silent, but Tamar carried on a bright conversation with old Mordechai. They knew each other quite well, and Mordechai the coachman had an easy, familiar way with people. In normal times, these days now, towards the end of June, were the busiest season for Mordechai. It was during these days that the summer vacationers would begin to arrive. Day after day the train would bring down women and their children. Mordechai would be there to receive them and take them in his wagon – family after family – off to their destination.

But this year was not like the ones that had preceded it. This mad war had broken out – O Master of the Universe, this was the last thing we needed to complete the picture! As for new summer vacationers – there wasn't hide or hair of them! The ones that had already arrived were bundling up their things and heading back to the cities. It was a time of emergency, and it would be better not to stray too far from

house and husband – who knew what tomorrow might bring? That was what the women among the summer vacationers were saying, and their eyes had a scared look in them, as telegrams went flying back and forth, and Mordechai the coachman was once more up to his neck in passengers heading down to the train station in Hadiach.

He was telling all this to Tamar at this point on this pure, clear summer morning. His voice was measured and ordinary, a regular, everyday voice. What concern was the war to him? Everyone had lost their minds, everyone, but he stood there off on the side. Who would ever raise their hand to harm him?

And so, Mordechai the coachman spat as usual, pulled on the reins, and cracked his whip: "Nu, Pavlik!" Firochka remained silent. She sat there in the bobbing, creaking wagon. She had been born in this little town, and it was here that she had experienced her golden days. And now Romny Street lay there spread out before her once again. There were trees planted on either side; the houses and their windows were silently awash in sunny splendor. Mordechai fell silent. He finished smoking his papirosa, spat once or twice, curled up in that grey, tattered shawl of his – and fell silent.

Despite the early hour, old Pesya was already tending to the yard. "We've brought you some guests!" Mordechai said, thus including Pavlik among those who had brought them. But the latter just stood there, waving his tail with a rather horsey look on his face. Tamar jumped down from the wagon and leapt at her grandmother. The latter clapped her hands: "Oy, the children have arrived!" Her arms embraced this beloved young girl. "How you've grown, my little goat, you're now a real Baryshnya!" Immediately Tamar's laughter could be heard in the yard, and it was the first sound of laughter that had been heard there since the previous year. Firochka took her time getting down from the wagon, as befit a pregnant woman. The two ladies kissed each other on the cheek. The mother-in-law's heart was completely open to this girl who was now like a daughter to her. Firochka's lips were pursed, but she sensed that her eyes were seeing a mother.

Now had some little bird gone and brought the news? Word of the girls' arrival had already spread throughout the town, and Haim Yakov appeared in the yard. "We had stopped hoping to see you!" He too kissed the girls and helped them bring their things inside. A little while later we see old Pesya at work by the stove and her face is aglow. The

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guests washed up after the hardships of the road; the scent of soap and perfume wafted through the rooms. Firochka told them of Solomon, and all the goings-on at the Shotland home. The pleasant scent of an omelet moved through the house. The samovar could be heard humming away. Despite the spots in her face, Firochka's look was delicate and pretty. She was in her sixth month, and the signs of the pregnancy were not yet too prominent. The four of them sat down at the table, as the samovar continued humming away off on the side. Pesya's face was shining. The war had broken out. Signs had been hung around town by the Military Commandant concerning the urgent drafting of men both young and old.

However, for the moment, the girls were sitting there at the table. There was still time to confer as to what ought to be done, and they would yet see just how things would turn out.

During the first days after she had arrived, it seemed to Tamar that considerable changes had taken place in the Garden alley. It seemed as if everything had come down in size – the people, the houses, and even the trees. Hadiach had been emptied of those difficult, joyful creatures – the summer vacationers. The forest was silent, rustling the tops of its pines, and intermittently raising its whisper to the heavens. The birds chirped in the mornings, knocked away with their beaks and stirred noisily among the trees and bushes. The twisted paths, that bore on their shoulders every summer the feet of the women and children, now hid in the remote recesses of the forest, and only the trees and grass that grew in their vicinity knew the secret of their existence.

The banks of the river were also almost completely empty of people swimming and sun-tanning. On rare occasions a group of little creatures with close-cropped hair would come down here – students from the local high school. And so, they would go swimming for a little while, but then they would squeeze their legs back into their pants, and march off in single file – with tanned backs, bare feet, and serious looks on their faces. From time to time a platoon of soldiers would come this way with their horses. After quite a bit of back and forth the horses would cautiously get into the water, and then take their time easily in the river, with their necks sticking out of the water – and the naked soldiers on their backs. At that point the river would be filled with the joyful sounds of young men and their horses.

Since the summer had arrived, the tension had gradually grown and taken hold in Hadiach. That was how things were in the world of the adults. However, Tamar and her friends ran away from this gloomy world and would spend the morning hours by the banks of the Psel River. Most of the time Kim Wartman was also among the group – that mixed-breed from Kharkov, who was spending the summer this year as well at the home of Agrippina Andreyevna.

Kim was the leader of this group of young people. He was now fourteen years old, and the shadow of a moustache had already begun to flicker over his upper lip. Tamar was indifferent to the moustache, but Sarka Ginsburg perhaps continued to suffer in secret. However, Binyamin was far away from all this.

The hardships of heart and soul along the banks of the Psel.

Yes, the riverbanks were abandoned, only horses and ducks would gather there in the mornings. But, in general, everything was as it had always been. As ever, the wooden bridge stood spread over the strip of water. A military guard had now been installed on the bridge. The forests of Vilbovka shone blue in the distance; beyond them, further off in the distance, the broad expanses of the forests of Veprik lay spread out. Beyond them were the cities of Zinkov, Poltava, and the entire rest of the world.

And so, the war continued. Little by little terror took hold in the world of the adults. At first the young men were drafted, but then came the turn of the men who were more advanced in age. Bad news began to arrive in Hadiach. The residents began leaving the town, and the percentage of Jews among those who left was quite large. During the month of July and the first half of August the Hadiach-Romny train still ran daily, but then – it began to run only every other day. In August, it started running only occasionally, and the breaks in service became longer. The town was not yet thrown into complete turmoil, but the Jews were leaving one by one, two by two. But some of them, mostly the old folks and invalids, were not in any condition to head out on a long journey. And there were also those who did not grasp the extent of the danger or simply did not believe it.

How, for example, could Reb Dovid the shochet go wandering off, eighty years old as he was, and almost completely blind? The man had lived out his days, and the world had gone dark before him. But if you

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think that it was the end of Reb Dovid, you would be making a serious mistake. He was still living and breathing, tapping along with his cane and slowly making his way, pouring forth his talk before our God up in Heaven. Or take Esther the noodle-maker, for example. Ninety-five years old! Have you, my fellow reader, ever been ninety-five years old? At any rate, a woman her age was not capable of going wandering off from the town where she had been born, into the unknown wilderness. She had her concave house, the bench out in the yard, a none-too-young daughter named Nechama, and a decent trade. That was Esther's world, this was where she reigned supreme, and she was not afraid of this war. This woman had seen her fair share of wars in the course of her days on earth.

But if old folks such as these could not pull themselves away from Hadiach, why didn't someone like Aharon Ginsburg, the cemetery attendant, run for his life? And that big family of his? There were many reasons behind it, and the first one was – the eternal flame over the grave of the Alter Rebbe. Who would look after the light of generations if Aharon the cemetery attendant would slip away from Hadiach? Many years ago, Arki's eyes had beheld the Tzaddik of the generation, with those thick eyebrows and deep voice of his, that penetrated the very heart of man. Who was Arki? Perhaps he had been a murderer, perhaps he had been a madman. And so, the holy man had commanded him to go to Hadiach and wallow in the dust of the grave of the Admor Reb Schneur Zalman. At that time the community of Hadiach was at its height. But now that world was falling apart, gradually falling apart day by day, week by week. And now this war had arrived, the very war of Gog and Magog. Who would now stand in the breach? Who would lift the downcast spirits of the people? Was it not the very holy, powerful spirit of the Alter Rebbe?

And so, the black-clad cemetery attendant, whom no one had officially appointed to the task, spent the majority of the hours of his day in the Shtiebel at the cemetery, watching over that fiery spark. And it was precisely now, in these terrible days, that the number of visitors to the sacred grave had increased. Women and old men were coming, each one with their affliction, their illness, their troubles. And Aharon the attendant would write out messages for them on little scraps of paper in a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish.

The second reason – was the size of his family. Nachman had been

drafted into the army, and his salary, which had served as a bit of a support for the family, had disappeared along with him. Hasya had completed her year of studies at the Technical School of Agriculture and gone off to Poltava. From there she had been sent to a Kolkhoz. She was an industrious, agile girl, and it was to be expected that she would manage to withstand even the harshest conditions. Hana longed to go to Kharkov. But how could she undertake the journey at such a critical moment as this? And so, there was Hana, Sarka, Leibel, Shimon, Avka, Mirochka, and Rivochka – seven sons and daughters, and nine people in all in the house. Would it ever even occur to you to take such a group of little chicks off on a distant trip? Even here, in Hadiach, it was hardly easy to provide for such a veritable community. However, there was a roof over their heads, and a garden out in the yard, planted with potatoes and vegetables, and there was the spotted cow – but what would happen to the kids over there, in once they evacuated?

Aharon the cemetery attendant believed that he had to cast his burden onto the Blessed Lord. Whatever would be with the Jewish people would fall to him and his family as well. After all, quite a few Jews had remained in Hadiach. For example, there was his daughter's mother-in-law, Haya Sarah Berman. From the time the war had broken out and the Germans had flooded the Ukraine one heard strange things coming from this mother-in-law. Oy, Haya Sarah had not forgotten that 'Colonial' store in Bobruisk, which had been a flourishing business in its time, when her husband Yakov Berman had still been alive. And she still lost sleep over her departed uncle, Haim Zaidel. The four of them now lived in two little rooms in Vokzalny Street – as Golda had moved in to live with her husband, and a few months after her wedding she had given birth, with the help of God, to a charming little girl, who had been given the name Ahuva; the baby was not yet six months old. Golda was now completely occupied with domestic chores – cleaning the rooms, doing the laundry, ironing, and, above all – taking care of Ahuva. But she had no complaints – this was her very purpose in life, to be a mother and a wife.

Yes, the life of this respectable mother-in-law, Haya Sarah Berman, had changed quite a bit. Truth be told, all that she was left with now were matters related to providing sustenance – purchasing the necessary provisions, working in the kitchen, and, yes, prattling away as usual. These two latter labors were quite dear to that relative of the departed uncle Haim Zaidel, and she worked away at them with true

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devotion. However, the first occupation required money in a double and triple measure. If previously, up until Berman's wedding, his salary had sufficed for two people – well, now times had truly changed. First, the family consisted of four people. Secondly, times of war were not at all the same as times of peace. And third, this daughter-in-law – may she live long and prosper – had been taken in to the home naked as the day she was born and bereft of all material possessions. That was the fate of anyone who went and married into a beggar's family. A fine time she was having in her old age!

And so, Haya Sarah, that expert in the laws of the marketplace, buying and selling, began dealing in the somewhat suspect business of providing basic food products. In their little pantry there now appeared sacks of flour, jugs of butter, all sorts of grains, sugar, and other items one might ordinarily find in the supermarket. Customers began coming to their home – mostly Jewish women – and Haya Sarah would hold whispered conversations with them, selling them this and that – all in the utmost secrecy.

Golda did not get involved in these business dealings, she had enough work as it was. Occasionally she would bring a little flour or sugar to her father's house, and other times the little children would come to her in pairs and not leave before having had themselves a meal. But the fleshy mother-in-law did not look kindly on all this. That was all she needed – to go working for the family of that mad in-law of hers, sitting there idly wasting his days and nights away in the Shtiebel!

And so, little by little, arguments and fights began breaking out between the daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. In the latter, the evil inclination towards a love of money and miserliness had been awakened. The war was gradually spreading over Ukrainian territory. Who knows? The enemy might well reach Hadiach. But what did that mean exactly? Should she leave like those fools, who were abandoning all their belongings and running away to the east? Not a chance! Haya Sarah still had a little sense left in that brain of hers. Even if the Germans came, God forbid, one might still get by. Haya Sarah did not believe the slander that the newspapers and authorities were spreading concerning German cruelty. Europe was still Europe. Uncle Haim Zaidel, may his soul be blessed in heaven, had certain opinions of his own when it came to Europe.

Berman continued working at the barbershop. He was a faithful

son, husband, and father. He loved and respected his mother, but he had always and forever been a passive individual, and he had gotten used to listening to what his mother said. Given the fact that he was nearsighted he had not been drafted into the army, but two other barbers had been drafted and so, he had additional work to do in the barbershop. There was no shortage of customers. Soldiers would come to him as well, in addition to ordinary citizens, young boys and girls, along with old people and all sorts of individuals, and Yosef Berman stood there all day, cutting hair and shaving beards and spraying perfume and cologne over heads of hair and freshly shaved chins. Afterwards he would return home and the three of them would sit down to eat a hearty meal together. It was summertime in Hadiach, and in the evenings one might spot the young Berman couple in the public park. That summer an army orchestra played in the town park. Despite the rumors of how the war was going the evenings were warm and filled with perfume and sadness. Along the paths of the park young girls and soldiers went walking, eating seeds and smoking cigarettes rolled from cheap mahorka tobacco.

And in the night Haya Sarah, exhausted from her day's labors and from the fullness of her stomach, would go snoring away peacefully in the neighboring room, while Berman would embrace his young wife, who would cling to him tremblingly, inhaling the scent of perfume and cologne that filled the dark room. In that hidden corner of the world there stood Ahuva's cradle. One could not hear this little infant's breathing in the room, however Golda constantly sensed her presence all the same.

Delicate bonds were being formed between the little girl and her mother. Only death itself would be able to separate the two of them.

Kim Wartman's father was drafted into the army. They received a telegram from his mother: "Let Kim stay in Hadiach for the time being". Kim had already turned fourteen years old, and from time to time he would boast before the girls that he was going to run away to the Red Army. His words were intended for Tamar; however, the girl's brown eyes were blind to these displays. At thirteen years old the time was not yet ripe for feeling the effects of separation.

In the evenings the children would head out to the town park. Many of them were students at the local schools, and only Tamar and Kim were from the city. The children spoke a mixed language, part

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Ukrainian and part Russian, and from time to time a pronounced Yiddish tone spiced up this mixed tongue. Over the past year Tamar had picked up the pure Russian language in the capital city, and this served as a sort of barrier between her and the other kids. Even Kim Wartman, that windbag from the great city of Kharkov, felt himself taken down a rung or two in Tamar's company.

Yes, it was rather puzzling to see just how far Kim was willing to debase that manliness of his in recent days. Agrippina Andreyevna was not at all satisfied with the behavior of her nephew, and at times she would even rebuke him. Have you ever seen such a thing? The boy couldn't sit still for even a minute in the house. He came home only to eat, and then he would gulp down his food and rush back outside. What was pulling him away out there like that?

The thing is, that dark little goat there, Tamar Feigin, drew Kim to her as though she had him in a vise. He would show up in the park early in the afternoon, and he was also the first to come down to the riverbank in the mornings. He went to get his hair cut by Berman, and now he sported the latest look. His white shirt was tucked neatly down in his ironed pants, and a leather belt set off his tall figure. What more could she possibly desire, that ridiculous young girl there, with those long, slender legs of hers? Kim's eyes were always turned towards her, but she didn't seem to see a thing, still being in her diapers on that score, as it were...

But the cemetery attendant's daughter, Sarka Ginsburg – she was Tamar's closest friend, even though she was a year and a half older than her. And so Sarka's world of innocence had been dealt a blow. A sweet, warm fog, drenched with tearful longing and dreams, enveloped her heart.

That summer, a mad, stormy wind blew about among those foolish children beneath the skies of Hadiach, which gradually turned ever darker overhead. The war thundered away in the wide world, and the evil rumors ate away at people's hearts – but all this was the bitter lot of the adults.

And yet, it seemed that the lives of the adults had not changed that much. Old Pesya continued doing her housework. Haim Yakov still left every morning for work at the Cooperative Factory making fruit wine and mead. One day the order came down to hand over the entire supply

of bottles to defend against the coming tanks. However, even after all the bottles had been gathered up, the barrels still remained, and so the factory's output was not at all diminished.

The updates from the official news agencies were rather depressing, and the rumors were filled with fear and turmoil. There was talk of the danger facing Kiev. Many people were leaving Hadiach in wagons. The train now came only once in a blue moon and getting hold of tickets was about as difficult as parting the Red Sea. The fever to run for it had now taken hold of everyone. "We must make a move too, Haim Yakov, before we miss our chance!" Pesya would whisper in the night. The evil rumors would arrive in the thick of the night and stand there before you all filled with horror. But Haim Yakov had his own opinion about things. It was not easy to leave one's home, along with all the possessions that one had amassed over the course of decades. And besides – Shapiro was not leaving, and the Ginsburg and Rosenkranz families were also staying put. Thank God, there were still quite a few Jews in Hadiach. Haim Yakov kept all these reasons to himself, but to Pesya he spoke in a whisper of Firochka. Firochka's condition necessitated the utmost caution. She perhaps had only a few days left before giving birth, and the hardships of the road might well endanger the lives of both the mother and the unborn child.

"Let's wait a little while longer," the old man would whisper.

The room was plunged in darkness, the windows were sealed, with strips of paper stuck across them diagonally. Everywhere there was darkness and gloom. Strange circles hovered around everyone's eyes. Sleep would not come to the downtrodden body. Pesya sighed silently, taking care that she not be heard in the neighboring room where the children slept. Hard times had come, they had come indeed. Firochka barely went outside anymore, even though taking walks was a good thing for a pregnant woman. She understood that she had become a heavy burden on the other members of the household. The day before last she had said to Pesya: "You all should really leave – I'll stay behind. Nothing will happen to me." Her wide, blue eyes stared straight at that old mother there.

And so, a few more days passed. Tamar went wandering along the banks of the river, around the park, and even went to the cinema. It was only at lunchtime that the entire Feigin family gathered at the house. The old man would return from the factory, and Tamar would come

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home from her wanderings. In the main room Pesya would set the table, and the four of them – three women and one man – would eat their meal. Most of the time the adults remained silent while Tamar went prattling away. This too was a sort of minor joy – to see this talkative little granddaughter there among the gloomy adults, this girl who had grown so much over the year, as her eyes began to shine. Only a few days after she had arrived from Moscow the sun had struck the young girl's skin with all its force, and her body had been covered heavily with boils and splotches. But that season of spots and burns had passed rather quickly, and now a rather gypsy-looking girl sat at the table, talking away quite freely.

After lunch, Tamar would spend time alone with her book. Kim's aunt, Agrippina Andreyevna, worked at the library, and at the young boy's recommendation, Tamar occasionally received rather rare volumes. She was now reading 'The Three Musketeers' for the second time, and Athos, with his noble lineage, Porthos, the innocent giant, Aramis, who was not all that consistent, drawn as he was to both Catholicism and the fairer sex, and above all, D'Artagnan, the wonderful young man from the Gascony whose spirit knew no fear – all these captivated Tamar's heart, and she dove fervidly into the book. Kim's recommendation enabled Tamar to also obtain some fine books on behalf of Firochka.

At times there were tears in Firochka's eyes. In the mornings she would stay in bed until rather late. The baby was running about in her womb, and with a concentrated look on her face she would listen to its motions. Yes, the time had come that this woman shed a tear rather easily.

Solomon's last letter arrived in the middle of July. He had been drafted into the army. With warmth, love, and hope, the letter had been penned, and its ending went as follows: "If we are not to meet again, Firochka, my star, it will fall to you to bring up our child. It is my hope that you will fulfill your obligation faithfully". These lines from that reckless young man had once more brought forth hidden tears. What was it with Firochka? She hadn't even turned twenty yet.

One day a telegram arrived from Moscow, from the Shotland home. The factory where old man Shotland and his son-in-law Shaul Levin were employed had been ordered to evacuate, and they were all heading east, to the region of Chelyabinsk. "You should all come and

stay with us." 'You should all come and stay with us!' Yet was it really all that easy to head out on such a long, difficult journey with Firochka, who had only a few days left to her pregnancy?

And so, the month of August passed on by. One night, Firochka went into labor. The old folks jumped into action, lighting the stove to boil water, while suffocated screams burst forth intermittently from the room where the young woman was giving birth. Only Tamar continued sleeping. From time to time one could hear Golda the midwife's words of encouragement, yet Firochka's screams began tearing the very heavens asunder. Even Tamar now woke from her slumber. She had had a nightmare – everything was spinning around, there was lightning and thunder, horrifying monsters – and then she had awoken to the sounds of Firochka's mad screams. Soon the first light of dawn began to shine, and Haim Yakov hurried out of the house to fetch Mordechai the coachman. Golda was not pleased with the course that the birth seemed to be taking, and it would be better to bring the laboring young woman to the hospital.

Tamar lay in bed and listened to the screams emerging occasionally from the room of the young girl who was having such difficulty giving birth. She opened the window and peeked out at the garden. A chill breeze silently entered the room, flipping through the pages of the new day. Out the window she could see the vegetable garden, two or three trees, the grey picket fence, and the whitewashed house of the neighbor, Ivan Matveyevich Harkusha. The sun had not yet risen, but somewhere off on the edge of the horizon its traces were already flickering. In just a little while half of the picket fence would be awash in its splendor, while the other half would be enveloped in shadow, and a diagonal line would separate between the two of them. Tamar stood there before the open window, with her bare feet, and only a nightshirt covering her tanned skin. Once more the laboring woman's cries could be heard. Tamar went back to bed, with 'The Three Musketeers' in her hand. For a moment she lay there with her eyes closed, as the light breeze cautiously twirled her hair. No, she would not be able to sleep anymore this morning. Grandma Pesya moved quickly through the room, on her tiptoes. "Oy, Mama!" screamed Firochka, in the other room, and old Golda's words of encouragement could once more be heard. Tamar opened the book and forgot the world and all that was in it. She immediately sank into the world of plots and assassins – the world of the magnificent Cardinal Richelieu.

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Out in the yard came the voice of Mordechai the coachman: "Nu, Pavlik!" The wheels of the wagon creaked, and Pavlik let out a long, calming whinny. A minor tumult rose in the house and out in the yard. They covered the bottom of the wagon with hay and cushions, and lay Firochka down on it. The old man Mordechai directed the work. It was not the first time that he was dealing with a woman in labor.

"Nu, Pavlik!" came the cry once more, and the wheels went creaking away out in the yard.

Chapter 2.2

The days that followed were immeasurably worse. The maternity ward of the hospital was rather deprived at that moment – half of the building had been turned into a military hospital tending to the wounded, even though the number of pregnant women in Hadiach and its environs had hardly diminished. Most of the doctors had been enlisted in the war effort.

Anna Dimitriyevna, the somewhat elderly nurse with the pretty hair, was now the one in charge of all comings and goings in the hospital. She assigned Firochka a bed. She then stood there before the bed and stared at the young woman for a little while. There were five beds in the room. Five women in labor were there hard at their woman's work. Anna Dimitriyevna fixed her gaze on Firochka, her unkempt hair, and her suffering, sweaty face. So, this was the wife of that young man who used to come visit her in her apartment two years ago?

"Oy, Mommy!" Firochka burst out screaming. Anna Dimitriyevna looked at her for a little while longer, and then cautiously stepped out of the room. The senior nurse at the hospital bore a rather heavy yoke. True, by rights she ought to quickly bring Doctor Orlov from the military ward to the bedside of this young woman in labor. He was an expert obstetrician. But the senior nurse was busy, she was so very, very busy!

In the evening the condition of the young woman who was having such difficulty giving birth took a turn for the worse, as her fever rose to over thirty-nine degrees. Haim Yakov and Pesya, who had been waiting all this time out in the hospital yard, were notified that Firochka's condition was critical. At last Orlov had been rushed to her bedside. He examined the woman in labor and shook his head.

On top of all this, the skies went dark and a pouring rain began to come down. Tamar shut the windows. The old folks were over at the hospital and she was all alone in her room. Outside the storm was raging, the rain was whipping down, and the thunder was rolling

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through. However, in the house the sound of the clock on the wall could be heard ticking away as usual. Its pendulum went swinging back and forth.

Somebody hurriedly opened the door. It was Grandma Pesya. She was wrapped up in her robe, with drops of water falling from her body. Her face was bewildered and aflame. She turned to Tamar and said in a firm voice:

"Get dressed, Tamar, and let's go!"

"Where are we going? It's raining outside!"

"The rain has stopped. We must go! Firochka is very ill."

The old woman and her granddaughter stepped outside. The rain had stopped, and a multicolored rainbow was cutting a path for itself between the thick clouds. The sun still hid, but one could already hear its approaching footsteps. The rainbow cut across the face of the heavens. The world was steeped in moisture, and the green foliage lay there in the gardens, saturated and dripping. A fresh, lively scent of recent rainfall, mixed with flowers, grass, and palm trees, went wandering through the air.

The two women turned towards the Jewish cemetery. Their legs tramped and slipped through the mud. Behind them a moist wind blew, warm and fresh.

The evening had not yet fallen, but the Shtiebel was already plunged in darkness. The cemetery attendant Aharon Ginsburg sat at the table. With the trace of a smile he welcomed Pesya as she arrived.

"I have already prepared a little note for you in advance. Take off your shoes!"

The note was written, as usual, half in Hebrew and half in Yiddish. However, old Pesya had a few prayers of her own to offer. On tiptoe Pesya and Tamar entered the room where the Admor Schneur Zalman was buried. As ever, the round wooden dome stood over the holy grave. Pesya inserted the folded note into the dome and began to pray silently:

"My Rebbe and Master, your servant Pesya, daughter of Zelig, is here on bended knee before you, beseeching you. May it please you in your tremendous kindness to rise up into the highest reaches of Heaven and stand before the Throne of Honor to pray before the Holy One

Blessed Be He, on behalf of the young woman Esther daughter of Zalman, who is having great difficulty giving birth.

"Esther daughter of Zalman is but a young girl, and she has not yet seen much of life. Esther daughter of Zalman has but now barely opened her eyes to look out upon the world, and she is already in danger of dying. Please, be compassionate and take pity on her, do not take her young soul away!

"O Holy Rebbe of ours! Please, save her! Save your people as they are faced with this bitter hour of death!"

Old Pesya stood there before the grave as the tears flowed from her eyes. Tamar stood off on the side in silence. The window that faced the cemetery gradually went dark, but across from it the slim light of the Menorah stood out on the tiny table in the corner of the Ohel.

... Had Firochka indeed been sentenced to die? Yes, Pesya's prayers did not help, nor did the pills and injections administered by Orlov. In the latter's estimation the young woman's kidneys had been somewhat damaged and she had developed a severe kidney infection.

Firochka died, but the infant was born alive. In the morning the body of Esther daughter of Zalman lay on the floor in the main room in the Garden alley. Old Pesya's face was pale and wrinkled, and her eyes were swollen from all the crying. The front door slammed as it opened and closed. Jewish men and women arrived, along with young boys and girls – there was Shapiro and his wife, old Reb Dovid, the family of Ezekiel Loytin, Golda and Yosef Berman – and, it goes without saying, the cemetery attendant Ginsburg was there as well. The women washed the body under the watchful eye of Esther the noodle-maker.

Yes, when death came to the Feigin home many men and women gathered there, both relatives of the household along with ordinary members of the Jewish community. Kim came over as well, that half-Jewish young boy. All of Tamar's girlfriends came as well. Little by little eighty or a hundred people gathered, all of them there to attend the funeral of the young woman who had died.

They lay the departed soul down on the bed and stepped out to take her on her final journey. "Charity shall save us from death!" The

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*tzedaka*¹ box was carried by the local *gabbai*² Belomordik. The sun was shining, and white clouds went wandering in the heavens as a moist wind blew through the town. It could mean nothing more than the arrival of autumn. The people's galoshes went tramping through the mud; they walked along with a certain haste, as though startled by some monster wrapped in a burial shroud that hovered there in the air at their heels.

The grave was dug, and the burial began. Immediately the sound of screams and groans could be heard here and there. That was the way with women! Esther the noodle-maker was the only one who did not cry. She stood there before the open grave, with her cane in her hand and those wrinkles etched in her face. It was not the first time that she was seeing the dead off to their final, narrow resting place. Yet another soul had been taken from this land of utter confusion – what was there to cry about in all this? In normal times, she and her daughter Nechama went around from house to house, preparing noodles. But this summer the war had arrived, and people's hearts had no room for noodles. But life gradually went on, and people went on living and dying. Her day too would come, and she would be lowered down into the grave as well.

Tamar was not experienced in the tricks and stratagems that a woman had to employ in the tremendous war she was constantly forced to wage during her days on earth. She stood there before the open grave and wept bitterly. Her face lost its beauty, her eyes turned red, her legs were covered in mud, and her entire figure had the look of an abandoned orphan. Kim Wartman stared at the weeping young girl and his heart was crushed in his breast. After all, he too was still but a fresh-faced young boy and it was the first time that he was seeing death eye to eye.

The men stood there crowding around the mound of dirt. Jews well-versed in lowering the dead into their graves began to display their expertise. The prayers for the dead – "O Lord of Compassion" and "*Kaddish*"³ – were intoned. The voices were hoarse. A fierce wind shook the treetops, the grass went waving away, and the thorn bushes were

¹ Tzedaka - Charity.

² Gabbai - Synagogue attendant.

³ Kaddish - Jewish prayer for the dead.

strewn with red berries. Leaves went flying through the air, stopping a moment by the headstones, where they got caught and came to a standstill, dead in their own right.

In the evening a few people came to the Feigin home, which was plunged in mourning. Haim Yakov sat on a low stool reading the Book of Job. The old folks sat around him in a semicircle. Pesya was busy with her housework and her eyes were red. People talked about current events, and their intention was not merely to take the mourners' minds off their tragedy. Should one leave Hadiach or not? About three hundred Jews remained in the town, and they were all lost and bewildered. They were mainly old folks, invalids, and women with young children. Not a soul knew the extent of the danger that was coming. Shapiro was the only one who advised them all to run for their lives. Hitler was an evil beast of prey. Haman had been an innocent lamb in comparison with the present enemy. They had to run for it, no matter what. Were it not for the fact that he himself was ill, he would leave the town on foot. But now – where could he turn? The day he left Hadiach would be the end of him. Whoever still had a little strength left would do well not to let the moment slip on by!

Silence reigned in the room, only the pendulum of the clock went ticking softly away. Haim Yakov opened his mouth to speak, but only a few mumbled sounds emerged as he sat hunched over the Mourner's Book, being the Book of Job. The black-clad cemetery attendant offered a few words. No, he had no intention of leaving Hadiach – if only to spite Hitler, he was going to stay in the town. Everything hinged on fate, and in times of trouble no clever tricks were going to help you. Remember the *Aseret Harugei Malchut*¹, my fellow Jews, or think of the martyrs of 1648-49². If your luck held – then you lived, and if not – what good would all this jumping around and running away do you? In addition, if he left town – who would look after the eternal flame?

These words were heard in the room, and it was as though they had been pronounced by a man whose mind was confused. Haim Yakov

¹ Aseret Harugei Malchut - Ten Rabbis martyred by the Romans in the period after the destruction of the Second Temple.

² Martyrs of 1648-49 - Massacres of the Jews by the Cossacks during the Khmelnitsky Uprising.

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broke off his reading of Job and began talking about the new grandson. He, Feigin, agreed with Shapiro and advised each and every one of them to leave Hadiach. He himself was concerned with the problem of the grandson. The infant had to be ushered into the covenant of Abraham our forefather¹.

"Where is the baby now?" asked Shapiro.

The day that Firochka died a *'goya'*² acquaintance of theirs had had a miscarriage, and she had agreed to take care of Firochka's boy. The substitution, as it were, appealed to her, and one might assume that the infant would stay with her for the foreseeable future as well, until the fury had passed.

Grandma Pesya now made her voice heard. The old folks all fell silent and listened well to what she had to say.

"In my opinion, we ought to put off the Brit Milah. Who knows what we can expect? If, God forbid, the Germans come to Hadiach and begin cutting down the Jews, then this Brit Milah might well endanger the life of both the infant and his wet nurse as well."

The old folks began discussing the matter. An argument was on the verge of breaking out between Ginsburg and Shapiro. The latter tended to agree with Pesya's opinion – the law was different when it came to saving a life. Ginsburg believed it was precisely if they failed to treat the Brit Milah of the infant with the proper respect that they would be endangering his life. This time Haim Yakov was not of one and the same mind as Pesya. What was written in the Holy Bible? "An uncircumcised male who failed to remove the foreskin from his flesh – that soul shall be eradicated from the community".

Haim Yakov returned to the Book of Job. What could a woman possibly understand when it came to matters of Brit Milah and the foreskin? He, the former shochet and mohel, knew well just how important the thing was. When the eighth day after the birth of the infant arrived, they would hold a *bris* for the boy in accordance with the

¹ Covenant of Abraham – alternate way of saying that the newborn boy had to be circumcised.

² 'Goya' – non-Jewish woman.

religion of Moses and Israel.

Once more Shapiro made his voice heard. He spoke energetically, without any hesitation. The situation was dire. The trains were no longer running. They all had to leave Hadiach, no matter what.

The old folks were sunk in bitter thoughts. Tamar was there as well. She heard the sound of the silence that rose in the room.

On the first of September, at nine in the morning, the bell rang at the local high school. Tamar sat on a bench alongside Anya Aronson – a girl her age and her loyal friend. The two of them were beginning the sixth grade. Anya was talkative and full of laughter, a light-headed girl, whereas Tamar had already tasted a bit of the vicissitudes of life, and this experience would be there for her when the real troubles arrived.

The first lesson was a History lesson but the teacher Roman Nazarovich Ivanchuk started out by addressing current events. For thirty years now, he had been living in Hadiach, teaching at the local high school and tending to his vegetable garden in his spare time. He knew the secret of getting inside the hearts of the young people. A light Ukrainian joke always flickered among his talks, and his students loved him. However, this time, there were no jokes.

At that moment a student from one of the higher grades came in and whispered something into Roman Nazarovich's ear. The principal of the school had requested that they interrupt their classes and gather all the students in the auditorium.

The students from all the various grades gathered in the auditorium. The principal, Serafim Ivanovich Karpenko, got up on the stage and gave a speech devoted to bottles. In contrast to Ivanchuk the students had no love for Karpenko. He was a forty-five-year-old man, with a smooth face, without a single sign of beard or moustache, a straight, sharp nose, a tiny forehead with a bristly tuft of hair stretched across the top, thin lips that covered a mouth whose teeth were quite bad, and a squeaky voice, along with a prominent, stubborn chin. That was Karpenko. His eyes, like that well-pressed suit of his, were grey. There was something uncommon about his body. His broad shoulders did not match his slender legs or dumpy stature. The principal looked like a hunchback, even though his spine was quite straight.

And so, Serafim Ivanovich gave a speech devoted to bottles. The

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order had come down to enlist the students to gather bottles among the residents of Hadiach. The enemy tanks were trampling our land. With their very bodies our soldiers were preventing them from penetrating deep into the country. They required bottles and gasoline.

After this short speech the students were divided up into pairs and sent out to return home to gather bottles.

"Will you come with me?" Kim asked Tamar. He too was enrolled at the school, given the fact that he had remained in Hadiach. Yet he was an older boy, a student in the eighth grade, and Tamar was embarrassed to go with him. It would be better if she went with Anya. Why was he always following her around, this Kim Wartman here? Why didn't he go with someone from his own class?

In normal times, Kim was a student in Kharkov. This was his first day at this school, and he did not yet know a single soul there...

And so, the young boy fixed his protruding, sad eyes on Tamar, and something made this slender-legged girl agree to his request. The students scattered off in pairs. Tamar and Kim were assigned the area around the Garden alley. In the roof of their house, as Tamar knew, and down in the basement, there was no small number of empty bottles. They were left over from the years when her grandfather used to produce wine on his own. In this time of emergency, it was certain that her grandfather would be willing to give up his bottles.

It was the first of September. Even though the sun flooded the streets and gardens, there were already yellow spots among the green foliage where it had begun to wither. Huge transport trucks loaded down with fodder crawled along the road one after the other. All the drivers were soldiers. Travel by train had been suspended, and so the fodder was being brought out of town by truck. Some of the stores were still open, and the rest were closed. From the hotel restaurant the scent of roasted meat burst forth. The sound of a radio announcer could be heard from the black maw of a speaker: "From the official news agency". The news was no cause for joy.

They did not find Haim Yakov at home, and so Tamar turned to her grandmother with her request. The latter wholeheartedly opened the basement before them and showed them a pile of bottles.

The basement door was wide open, but the corners of the

basement were dark. Little by little their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. The two students began gathering up the bottles. Tamar's smile was pale and shining, and her teeth glowed white in the faint light. The girl had inherited her pretty teeth from her mother. Kim takes her hand and asks if he can squeeze it. Something stops up his throat, his eyes alone are speaking.

"What are you doing, Kim, the nerve of you!" she tears her hand away and goes red all over. She would have done better to go with Anya Aronson.

The pile of dusty bottles is heaped up on the floor of the basement. The scent of pickled cucumbers and potatoes has been slumbering down here for many years. Until his final hour Kim will remember the chill of that basement and the scent of the pickled cucumbers.

That entire day and the next as well they tended to the bottles. On Wednesday, September third, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Hadiach got a taste of its first bombing. The wail of the air raid siren could be heard suddenly in the streets. Two airplanes appeared in the sky. They buzzed away intermittently, as though complaining about something, then a whistling sound could be heard gradually drawing nearer – and then the thunder exploded. The second bomb, which fell about a minute later, wrought havoc in the marketplace. There were no factories of any military value in Hadiach, and the wine and mead factory, where Haim Yakov Feigin was the technical director, was typical of the industrial activities in this town. The square in the marketplace, which was full of people at the time, had caught the attention of the German pilot.

At that moment Tamar was at school. Classes had not yet begun. The students were rinsing off the bottles. They had been divided up into brigades consisting of four or five students each. One of them would bring water from the nearby well, and the rest would take care of washing and drying the bottles. Kim, armed with a yoke and pails, was the one who brought the water for their group. The young people were joking around, and from time to time the order would ring out: "Kim, more water!" With a ridiculous sigh Kim would pick up the empty buckets and head for the well.

When the air raid siren sounded the students were gathered in trenches that had been dug out in the schoolyard. From inside the

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trenches the heads of the young boys and girls peeked out at the towering heavens overhead and the airplanes that were fouling the face of the skies.

The first bomb fell somewhere off in the distance – the pilot had intended to hit the bridge over the Psel River. However, the sound of the second explosion, in the market square, had deafened the students in the trenches for a few seconds, and the fierce wave of air that followed had left them somewhat stunned.

After the initial panic passed, the students were sent home. And so, Tamar and Kim found themselves once more walking along in tandem. It seems that working on the bottles had brought them a bit closer. They walked through the streets, and in no roundabout fashion, but straight through the marketplace. There they saw a group of men – the staff of the Civil Guard: sanitary workers, firemen, and drivers who had all gathered at the spot where the bomb had fallen. About ten stands had been destroyed in the market, and a few of them had gone up in flames. Two of the stands had housed butchers and the scent of roasted meat hovered in the air. About twelve people had been wounded in the market – many of them had not managed to take protective measures. One woman had been killed. She was a country girl about twenty-five years old. The shrapnel had struck her in the head. There was a tiny pool of dried blood and whitish brain matter. It generally looked as though the woman had simply sunk into a deep slumber. Her hand still gripped a basket of flashing dark blue, almost black, plums.

"Go home, kids! You can't stay here!" came the voice of one of the supervisors.

The war which, up until that point, had not yet left any mark on Hadiach, had now arrived in the form of that first bombing. At the Feigin home a group of Jews once more gathered that day – for the Garden alley and the local House of Prayer served as gathering spots for the Jews. Shapiro opened with his usual tune.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he said. "We must run for it, we must save our lives. If many of the gentiles are leaving this place, then how much more so must we Jews leave as well."

As usual, the Jews listened to what he had to say. Indeed, there was some internal force hidden in this weakened old man, which had

perhaps been there in him already thirty years ago, when he had been in his prime and was constantly occupied with serving the community. At that time, he had given voice to a single ideal: 'Come, let us return to the House of Jacob...'

Old Pesya sighed. First, how were they supposed to travel? Where were they supposed to obtain the means of transport?

They addressed this matter a bit. The day before Itzik Steinberg had purchased a horse and wagon for ten thousand rubles. This sort of merchandise was getting more expensive by the day, but what could you do when you had no other choice?

Reb Dovid the shochet now also offered a little encouraging speech. Why were they all bowing their heads, he asked, and why had they completely lost their sense of balance? No, let them say what they had to say outright, don't beat around the bush – do we still, he asked, have our God up in Heaven, or not? What, did they all think that the world had returned to its original *tohu wa-bohu*, that there was no longer an all-seeing eye overhead, that we had been abandoned like a flock without its shepherd? If that was what they thought, then all those fellow 'tramps' were right when they said: there was no judge and no justice, and let each man do as he saw fit.

He continued speaking, that blind man there, who, during his eighty years on earth, had more than once caught a glimpse of the muddied human soul, yet all the same, he had never blamed Heaven for anything. He believed that everything God did, He did for the best. After all, what did they think – that the end of days had finally arrived? No, as far as he, the old shochet was concerned, he knew quite well just what he had to do. Faith, my fellow Jews, without faith life is hard, oy, it's so very hard!

"Reb Dovid!" Pesya said. "How sweet your words are today – may you live long and prosper!"

Pesya – that Jewish mother and grandmother, despite all her experience, was also in need of some support. Shapiro did not say a thing this time, only his eyes expressed his sadness, and his sparse beard, which had never grown as it ought to have, seemed doubly shabby at that moment.

The new grandson was still in the hospital, and that was the sole

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connection that prevented the Feigin family from leaving Hadiach. That was the opinion of Haim Yakov. Darya Petrovna, the wet nurse, had agreed to keep the newborn child with her. But how could they go away and leave behind that young soul without having entered him into the covenant of our forefather Abraham? They had to wait another few days, circumcise the grandson, and then head into exile – if there would still be a need for that. Who knows? Perhaps a heaven-sent miracle would take place. The Holy One Blessed Be He might turn things upside down, and Hitler could suffer defeat, and everything would go back to the way it had been before...

Here Shapiro dumped a bucket of cold water on Haim Yakov's head, as it were. He once more voiced his opinion. They must not waste any time. The danger was fast approaching. The first bombs had now fallen, and from this point on, they would be bombed daily. The front was not that far off, and the military authorities were removing food and ammunitions from the town.

Ezekiel Loytin came in. This year his father had not come to Hadiach. He had remained in Kharkov, and they probably had troubles of their own over there. Pesya ushered Ezekiel into the other room. You couldn't quite say that fortune had smiled on this *Shlemiel*. It was not for nothing that Berel Loytin had so much resentment towards this wayward son of his. Any troubles that came down seemed to automatically strike this hard-luck individual. At the start of the war Ezekiel had been working at the steam mill. This was a military operation that supplied flour to the front. And so, Ezekiel had not been drafted. His wife Miriam was busy with the housework. This year she had raised two pigs – what could she do when the basic necessities were many and the household income was so low? What did an employee at the mill bring home? Four hundred rubles a month! Was it really possible to provide for an entire family on such a salary? This year Yekel had turned fifteen, and the boy, '*bli ayin hara*', had grown by leaps and bounds, and he was going to need a new suit of clothes. His limbs were literally bursting at the seams...

Why was Ezekiel Loytin recounting all these boring details? He sat at the table and spoke in a measured voice about the children, and the pigs, and his wife Miriam, whose hair was now strewn with a handful of grey, though she was still full of willpower and energy as she tried with all her might to be there for her husband and children. Pesya

understood what Ezekiel was getting at. She placed a cup of tea and some biscuits before him, and she said in a soft voice:

"Eat, Ezekiel, eat to your heart's content!"

The intention behind all those boring details, therefore, was that providing sustenance for the family was about as hard as splitting the Red Sea. The two of them, he and his wife Miriam, worked like dogs, and the results were rather meager. And now there was this war! His salary had not changed, but things were getting more and more expensive by the day. And now their lives were even in danger. In short – things seemed foul and bitter indeed! In addition to all that, at the end of August his younger daughter, Lea, had fallen ill. It seems that poverty truly followed the poor, as they say. They had laid her in bed and given her medication – they were doing everything they could. But what? The girl's illness was preventing them from leaving Hadiach.

Ezekiel swallowed his tea. He was a simple man, without any clever tricks, and he stood side by side with Miriam as they struggled in the face of the great hardships in life. Today he had received a summons to come to the Military Commandant in the evening. It could only mean that he had been drafted. What would become of the children now? What would Miriam do all by herself with Yekel, that wild boy, who was plunged day and night in those books of his, and Lea, their invalid girl?

"Have another biscuit, Ezekiel!" Pesya said, in a soft voice. She stared at his rough hands and his powerful body, she listened to his lost voice and she felt a desire to comfort him in his weakness. A sort of fountain of compassion sprang forth in the heart of this old woman.

"Why doesn't Miriam come and see me? Let her come here and we'll see what we can do."

Ezekiel drank another cup of tea and chewed on one of the tasty biscuits. In this house, in the company of Pesya, Ezekiel felt himself a little more secure, here he found some drop of calm and comfort.

"Oy, aunt Pesya, if only you knew just how hard it is to leave Miriam and the children in times like these!"

"You're not the only one who has been drafted into the army, and Miriam is not the only wife to be left behind. Whatever will happen to the rest of the men will be the lot of your family as well. God will not abandon us."

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Ezekiel gets up to go. Truth be told, he had come to say goodbye, and he had one big favor to ask. Let her keep an eye on Miriam and the children. If, God forbid, the Germans should come and there would be no chance to escape – let her keep an eye on his family.

Ezekiel Loytin has faith in old Pesya, he knows that she is a reliable woman when times get rough. For a moment he stands there with a worried look on his face. They are alone in the room – he and Grandma Pesya. She has developed the habit of staying in the house, and welcoming home her husband and the children when they come in from outside, sensing how their moods are changing by the day. Now she is faced with this clumsy man, Ezekiel Loytin, with his fists of iron and innocent eyes. She can sense the storm that is raging inside him. He needs comfort, but how can she, broken-down woman that she is, comfort him, if the waves are busy carrying her off as well to the gloomy shore of the unknown?

"Ezekiel, don't worry! This war too shall pass, God willing, and you'll return home, and you'll find everyone hale and whole."

He clenches his fists and says softly, yet fiercely: "Ha, that cursed Hitler! I'd choke him with my bare hands!"

"Don't worry and have no fear! We'll keep an eye on Miriam and your children. Go strike Hitler down with all your might!"

That was the blessing that Pesya offered this man as he was about to leave his town and his family, heading off for blood and death, as he went into battle with clenched fists and a heart torn asunder.

Well I'll be! In Vilbovka, at the house of aunt Nastasya, there were still some summer vacationers left – Stepan Borisovich Edelman, Klara Ilynishna, Lida, and Vera too, their maid.

With the arrival of spring that year Stepan Borisovich's health had deteriorated. Springtime in the city is a thousand times harder on people suffering from tuberculosis, and the doctors had urged the Professor to leave Leningrad that year a bit earlier: at times, this disease tends to progress rather rapidly.

And so Stepan Borisovich and his family had come to Vilbovka about two weeks before the outbreak of the war. Lida had joined her parents as well this time – indeed, her 'story' with Bobrov had not been

a lasting one.

In July-August Stepan Borisovich's health was rather shaky, and the journey out of Hadiach was not in the realm of possibility. Bad news had also arrived from Leningrad. The way home was almost completely cut off, and if they were going to make any move at all – then it ought to be to head in the direction of the Ural. His condition precluded any such journeys, and so he had to stay put where he was.

Stepan Borisovich thought of himself as an expert in the ways of the world. He believed that in the worst-case scenario, even if the Germans came to Hadiach, his family would not be harmed. True, there were rumors of how the Germans were eliminating the Jews, but in his heart of hearts he did not believe these rumors. How could he? Had the Germans turned into cannibals? And even if they were going after the Jews – they would not harm him, Stepan Borisovich Edelman, or his family. In his passport he was listed as a Russian, and so were his wife and daughter. It was hard to believe that the Germans would go after elderly, invalid Russians.

And so, the Edelman family had remained in Vilbovka. Stepan Borisovich's lot did not show any signs of improvement! The windows were covered with yellowish curtains, to protect him from catching cold. The invalid's bed stood against the wall facing the curtained windows. Beyond the windows the war was raging, and Stepan Borisovich lay on his sickbed, and his great faith in the stability of the reigning order, that which had existed since the very six days of creation, was gradually falling to pieces.

From the day the war had broken out almost all contact had ceased between Stepan Borisovich and the technical publishing houses, but that did not mean that his sources of labor had dried up at all. He was now planning a new work. Over the course of two years it would be possible to complete the book. And so Stepan Borisovich got down to business, and indeed he had written three chapters over the course of the summer – a chapter a month.

At the start of September, his health took a turn for the worse. At that point Klara Ilynishna too became bedridden. The alcoholic drops and tablets that she had been swallowing for months on end now seemed to lose their effect. It was all a mirage! Indeed, it turned out that the homeopathic doctor Kirilov was a charlatan. And once she lost

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her faith in Kirilov, the seeming influence of his medications had also worn off. Once more her thyroid was swollen, her eyes were protruding, and Klara Ilynishna was getting thinner and thinner week by week.

Was this indeed going to be the end of the Edelman family? Lida too had tasted her share of bitterness, her soul too had been trampled somewhat, and she was no longer that shining young woman with the music case fluttering in her hands. She had given Bobrov her entire heart, and he had abused her – after several months of living together he had gone back to Klava and his son Seryozhenka. It could only mean that his 'story' with Lida had been a mere means to take revenge on Klava for her relationship with that Jewish student in the forest of Vilbovka. Lida had therefore been like a spittoon, into which he had spat his scorn for his wife. He would not have gone back to her if it were not for Seryozha. What had the boy done wrong? – That was how Bobrov put it to Lida the night they separated.

And so, the delicate daughter of the Professor had to eliminate the results of their relationship. After the abortion she returned to her parents' home, broken in both body and spirit. She continued playing Chopin, but her playing had taken something of a more profound turn, as overtones filled with depression and suffering began appearing in the music. Since coming to Vilbovka she had practiced for a while at the house of the teacher Ivanchuk, playing that blessed Bluthner piano of his. Her boring lessons with Tanya, Roman Nazarovich's daughter, had also been taken up once again.

But the war had put an end to all that. That summer the pianos had fallen silent, and the weapons began making their voices heard. The Army Club alone continued to put on concerts occasionally, and Lida was often invited either as a soloist or an accompanist. But the concerts were rare, and Lida could not leave her sick parents alone too often. She knew that the deterioration of their health was due in large part to her foolish behavior with that stale slice of bread there – Bobrov. In the end it turned out that it was not Solomon, with his anecdotes, who suffered the harshest blows, but she, Lidia Stepanovna, the dreamy pianist.

But was there anything that time could not fix? What sins could it not atone for, and what ills could it not cure? Recently, Lida had begun spending a lot of time around town. At times she was spotted out and about, and not solely at the Army Club. From time to time she was seen in the company of several officers. And so, a car would be seen driving

through the streets of Hadiach, with one, two, or three officers in it, and there among them sat the daughter of the celebrated professor from Leningrad. In the company of these powerful men it seemed that she found some measure of comfort for the gloom of life in Vilbovka.

Yes, the rainy season had come to Vilbovka, and in the forest boredom and barren darkness reigned, everything was damp and muddy, and foul rumors went crawling through the air.

Glasha spent the entire summer in the forest of Vilbovka, and at the start of September she returned to the house of her mother Nastasya, since it had been decided to transfer the kindergarten from Hadiach to one of the towns further east. Glasha was therefore left behind in Vilbovka.

Over the past year a tremendous change had taken place in this wild girl. She had already become quite proficient at reading and writing, and her grey eyes now looked out at the world without their previous caution or that erstwhile penetrating gaze. Her look had also changed for the better. She was now a rather tall young woman of seventeen, with flaxen hair and a slender figure. Her dress and shoes were no longer rough and coarse, and her tresses were tastefully braided and clung prettily to her head. In the spring, Maria Sergeyevna, the director of the kindergarten, had already bought her a coat whose color quite suited her. The children had become quite fond of Glasha. It seems that this odd girl knew the secret of endearing herself to the little children in the kindergarten. There was some joyful, lively spirit that bubbled away inside her. Maria Sergeyevna as well truly loved this happy lass with all her heart. And so, the day had arrived – it was in the month of August that it came to pass, about two months after the war had broken out – and Glasha was accepted to the Komsomol.

Recently, the girl had become somewhat close with Stepan Borisovich. More than once he had given her a book to read. For this Professor here had a weakness: he was an admirer of Tolstoy. And so Stepan Borisovich lay there in his bed and listened with his eyes closed as Glasha read to him from 'War and Peace'. The Rostov and Volkonsky families, Pierre Bezukhov, Kutuzov, etc., all those events from years ago during the war against Napoleon, went passing by bit by bit in the dimly-lit room, with those yellow curtains covering the windows. Glasha's heartwarming voice flooded the room, as it burst from the depths of her breast.

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Afterwards they would talk a bit about various events, discussing this and that.

"Do you remember Binyamin, Stepan Borisovich?" Glasha asked. And then the clever girl went and blushed little by little, as she lowered her eyes and fixed her gaze on some colorful flower in the carpet on the floor, continuing to stare at it without raising her eyes, as her head sank ever further down until the part in her flaxen hair could be seen flickering in the pale light of the lamp.

"A fine young man!" the Professor gave his verdict. "An excellent draftsman with a sharp mind. If he falls into the right hands he will become a terrific engineer. When I was a student, yes, after I completed my studies at the university and went to work for three years at Allis-Chalmers..."

And so, Allis-Chalmers returns once more to the stage! Only Glasha is not at all interested in what happened thirty years ago. The tanned, freckle-faced young man, Binyamin, flashes before her eyes, as he goes walking along on one side of the bicycle, and she, Glashka, goes walking along on the other side. "I'll never forget you, uncle Binyamin!" – "I'll never forget you either, never, Glasha!" Perhaps Binyamin had not actually pronounced those words, but his eyes – his eyes had said it all! He had kissed her hand and then went away.

She straightens up at the sound of the fierce coughing that now assails Stepan Borisovich. In the little kitchen Vera, the maid is working hard. From somewhere nearby comes the sound of a car engine rattling, and Lida soon enters the house. She has a small package of food items in her hands. She now moves in the officers' circles, and from time to time she brings home some canned goods and a package of sugar. Something has happened to this girl with the good upbringing. It can only be that her feminine weakness is eating away at her.

Vera the maid waits expectantly for the arrival of these food items. This pimple-faced girl has been working for several years now in Klara Ilynishna's home. She was not blessed with any great beauty, but twenty-five is hardly the upper limit for a girl, and Vera could hardly be said to be over the hill already. Despite her ugliness she loved laughter and innocent playfulness, and when she laughed she would raise her clenched fist to her face. A rather odd habit! And it was not because her teeth were bad. No, Vera's laugh revealed two rows of shapely teeth,

and when she laughed her ugly face turned at once ridiculous and pleasant.

Recently the excuses for Vera's laughter had gradually grown fewer. It was one thing when a young woman such as her, a maid in the home of Professor Edelman, was living in Leningrad during times of peace, with all the comforts that the city offered – electricity, gas, a bathtub, the cinema, girlfriends, and sometimes male friends as well, dances on her days off, to which she would wear her light-blue silk dress with the muslin collar, put that coral necklace around her neck, and go out dancing until her feet gave out. This pimple-faced Vera had a weakness for dancing ever since the childhood she had spent in the village in the Kalinin region, not far from the town of Kimry.

But now Vera had no excuse for a joy or laughter. She was running the household in Vilbovka, and when Klara Ilynishna had taken to bed, she had become a true housewife in every sense of the word. Lida did not concern herself at all with domestic chores, she loathed such things. Only on occasion would she iron some piece of her own clothing.

In the previous summers, Vera was able to manage her duties with the assistance of Klara Ilynishna, however, this year obtaining the basic necessities involved all sorts of tremendous difficulties. Walking to the marketplace on rainy days was rather troublesome, as the ground turned into a thick swamp, and the mud clung to your shoes. Aside from that, the market was not at all what it had been prior to the war, and in the wake of that first bombing, it had almost completely emptied out. And yet four adults required food, soap, and fuel.

In the end, the money ran out and they began exchanging all sorts of pieces of clothing for food. A few of Klara Ilynishna's and Lida's dresses, some of their whites, one rug, a suit and pair of pants of the Professor's – all these items had already disappeared from the house. And what could they now expect down the road?

Things took a turn for the worse at the start of September that year. The Germans were gradually approaching Hadiach, and foul rumors were floating around. At night one could hear the sounds of the forest through the windows. The tall pines stood there with their heads in the heavens, covered in gloominess and darkness, abandoned to the damp wind, complaining and rustling away.

We have thus spoken a bit, my sisters and brothers, of Professor

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Edelman and his family. And just as it did back then, the damp wind goes sweeping over the land both high and low, carrying with it the bark of distant dogs, and a powerful scent of autumn, the scent of things rotting and withering, along with the very smell of terror.

Chapter 2.3

Meantime, the nights continued to grow darker, and the colors of autumn spread through the gardens and along the paths. During the day the sun still came out, bathing the forests and roads in its golden hue. The foliage turned yellow little by little. Withered leaves rolled through the dust of the streets, but then the rain would come whipping through that yellowing heap, and the dust in the streets would turn into mud and the gloom would then hang from the heavens.

Train travel had now been cut off completely. There was word that two bridges had been hit, and there was scant hope of their being repaired. Transport trucks continued to pass through the main street of Hadiach, carrying ammunition, sacks of grain, and fodder. From time to time they also carried the wounded. The front was gradually drawing closer to Hadiach.

Another few Jewish families left Hadiach, including the family of Anya Aronson. Of all Tamar's friends only Sarka Ginsburg, Kim Wartman, and Raya Rosenkranz were now left. Raya, an eighteen-year-old girl who had completed her studies at the local high school that year had become attached for some reason to this group that was not quite the same age as her. She was a pretty young woman of average height, with joy-filled eyes and a reckless step. She lived with her parents on Vorovsky Square. Before the war her father had worked at a service shop for machines and tractors outside of Hadiach. Now, with the onset of the panic of war, he had come home. Her mother, Frida Levovna, was about fifty years old – a short, fleshy woman, with a twisted nose and piercing eyes. When she spoke, the twirling Yiddish tone could clearly be heard in her voice.

Kim's aunt, Agrippina Andreyevna, the director of the town library, was not yet married, although she was already about forty years old. Kim was not terribly fond of her – in his opinion, she was a dry old spinster with a pair of spectacles perched on her nose, and that was all.

On September seventh the town library was closed 'for the sake of

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inspecting the books¹, as was written in the notice that had been attached to the front door. Agrippina Andreyevna decided to leave Hadiach. Had she caught the bug? She feared the bombings. It would be better, she said, to head out to one of the villages – like Vepruk, for example, where she knew a few of the Kolkhozniks – and to wait there until the situation became clearer. Villages out in the boondocks, like Vepruk – what did they have that might be bombed? Whereas here, in Hadiach, she said, they would never have peace. Hadiach was a known community, a regional capital, with a mill, a grain-house, and other convenient targets for the bombings.

Kim was against leaving. To head back to his mother, in Kharkov – that, yes! Otherwise, he was going to stay in Hadiach. That was what his mother had told him to do in her last telegram. Who knew what she had had in mind? He had to listen to his mother, he was not afraid of the bombs...

Those were some of the things that Kim Wartman claimed. But he hid the real reason in the deep recesses of his heart. That was where the image of Tamar had been engraved, that sad girl with the slender legs. It was a rather puzzling thing to see just how deeply ingrained this image was in the boy's heart, given the fact that he had only recently been exposed for the first time to the strange, sweet experiences in this area of life. And yet there we see this young man, all of fourteen years old, following that foolish little twelve-year-old Jewish girl around during these hard times. Who knows? The days are perhaps coming when you would do better, Kim Wartman, to distance yourself somewhat from those people and their daughters, if you don't want to share in the same fate as them.

But Kim is incapable of tearing himself away from that dark young girl. Agrippina Andreyevna's glasses are unable to understand, and they occasionally flash stubbornly in their own right. What does his mother's telegram have to do with anything? How could she possibly know how things truly stand? They must leave Hadiach. As long as she, Agrippina Andreyevna, is responsible for him, he must do what she says. Enough foolishness!

With great difficulty the aunt manages to locate a wagon that will take them the next day to Vepruk. That evening Kim is therefore seeing Tamar's face for the final time. They go walking a bit in the town park, and then they head out on the road that leads to Vilbovka. The rain only

recently stopped, and the skies seem freshly washed. The stars sparkle overhead. However, the wind continues to blow through the fields, striking the trees, and turning over the withered leaves. Kim walks by Tamar's side in silence.

"Why are you so quiet, Kim? Say something!"

What can he say? Tomorrow he is leaving, and who knows if they will ever see each other again. What's there to say? As far as Tamar is concerned, it's all the same whether he stays or goes. But for him, for Kim, it's not all the same. It's rather hard for him to leave this friend of his, with whom he spent the entire summer. No, he would have done better to run off to the army!

His voice trembles somewhat. He breaks off a tall stalk and puts it between his teeth, humming and whistling some simple tune, and then he falls silent once again. The evening breeze picks up, as all of existence wraps itself in darkness. The muted sounds of barking can be heard, soaked in sorrow, as they reach the ears of the young boy and girl.

Walking in the streets is only allowed until eight in the evening. They must hurry, or they might be stopped by the guards. They head back up to the town, walking along the steep path. There is not a soul in the streets. Grey fences and dark houses greet them as they enter the town.

"And so, what was it that you wanted to say to me, Kim?"

There was nothing he wanted to say. Life is going to be pretty boring in Veprik – that was what he wanted to say. He is going to run away from his aunt.

"Where will you go?"

"Back to Hadiach."

"But you don't have any relatives in Hadiach!"

"I'll come to you!"

Tamar has no clue as to what is going on inside the heart of this boy, but something warm and feminine floats up inside her throat. And so, her dark eyes turned to this boy, as his face alternated between showing some meaningful signs and then going dim in the darkness.

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"Okay, run away and come here. I'll hide you in our basement."

The sound of the whistle can be heard down Poltava Street. They must say goodbye. With his heart and soul, and feigned indifference, he shakes her hand. "Farewell, Tamar!" She walks down the alleyway. Her dress is short, and her legs are slender and dark. Something terribly attractive goes walking along beside her.

"Tamar!" Kim's soft call can be heard. She does not turn around. He stands there for a little while with his eyes fixed on that easygoing girl, as she gradually walks away from him in the darkness.

The next day a *minyan*¹ of Jews gathered at the Feigin household. The day of the Brit Milah had finally come. Grandma Pesya prepared a small meal in honor of the event. True, when it came to matters of the meal, the conditions were not all that conducive lately. Following the first bombing the marketplace had completely emptied out, and the provision of basic necessities had been taken up by a few lady merchants, including Haya Sarah Berman. The villagers would bring their goods to these women, and they would then sell them at full price to the Jews of Hadiach. The bartering of goods was also increasing day by day.

As the reach of the police was weakened speculation and profiteering reared its head.

And so, at the Feigin home there was a minyan of Jews. The wet nurse Darya Petrovna herself sat in the second room tasting a few of the dishes that had been prepared for the meal – meat, soup, baked peas, as well as wine and fruit. It was not at all a poor menu, given the difficult times in which they were living. The infant was asleep in Darya Petrovna's arms, and when he woke up and cried, she pulled out her breast for him. In matters of sucking and nursing, the little boy is already quite the expert. True, he is not aware of the fact that in a short while he is going to be welcomed into the sad covenant of our forefather Abraham. He is still but a red, wrinkled bundle of flesh, breathing and nursing, excreting, sleeping, and screaming.

¹ Minyan - a meeting of Jews for traditional public worship. A minimum quorum of ten men is required.

The role of the mohel was taken up by Grandpa Haim Yakov. He had performed this job for quite a few years. Come what may – the world might well return to its original *tohu wa-bohu* – but this infant, his own flesh and bone, had of necessity to be welcomed into the covenant of our forefather Abraham.

Ginsburg and his wife filled the roles of the *kvatterim*¹, and Shapiro was the *sandak*². The child screamed, but Shapiro held him with a firm hand and a warm look in his eyes. A festive silence reigned in the room. Everyone was standing. The chair, where the sandak sat, stood next to the window, and the window itself looked out on the Garden alley. It was a murky day. A piercing wind blew through the alleyway, turning over the fallen leaves and the columns of dust that rose in their wake.

They named the child Isaac, after Haim Yakov's father. Isaac Feigin had been a shochet and bodek in the Jewish community, and Isaac's father – Zvi Hirsh Feigin, had also practiced this same art. It had been a long line of shochet-and-bodeks, and if Haim Yakov had broken the chain and become a winemaker, the blame could not be placed on him alone. New times called for new songs.

Old Pesya, wearing a pretty kerchief on her head, brought the soup and meat to the table, assisted by Tamar. Tamar was already a big girl now. Today she was wearing her light blue woolen dress, with a black ribbon braided in her hair. Yes, there was a certain charming grace and purity about her, in that well-tanned young girl.

In the kitchen stood a barrel of wine, and Tamar continually filled the emptying bottles. The Jews there drank wine and ate peas. At first, they discussed current events, analyzing the situation at the front and drawing their various conclusions. It was too bad that Berel Loytin was missing from the gathering, with his sharp mind and expertise in the laws of politics. Today his place was taken by that man Shapiro. But strictly between us, the latter was little more than a second-rate substitute. Shapiro sat at the head of the table, to the right of Haim Yakov. His wife, Berta Abramovna, was among those sitting around the

¹ Kvatterim - Traditional ceremonial honors, a male and a female who bring the baby into the room where the ceremony of Brit Milah takes place.

² Sandak - "Godfather", holds the infant during the ceremony of Brit Milah.

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table as well. She seemed the very image of an aristocratic woman. She was quite fluent in English and German and knew how to play the piano. In normal times she had quite a few students, and she was usually busy from morning till evening. Now that her students had all been scattered far and wide, she had the time to come attend a Bris in the middle of the morning.

This was perhaps the final *Seudat Mitzvah*¹ for these people. "Tamarka!" Pesya hinted to the young girl, and the latter grabbed two empty bottles off the table and headed over to the barrel in the kitchen. Mordechai the coachman was also among those in attendance. He had come alone, without Pavlik. As far as he was concerned, he was not inclined to leave Hadiach. No, he had been born here and this was where he would die. Everyone had suddenly been seized by this feverish wanderlust. Did they think that off in some foreign land the Angel of Death would not catch up with them? The world had turned upside down, in all honesty! Who would bother to harm you, you beggars, who would try to touch all those riches of yours? Did you think that the Germans had nothing better to do than tend to you and your rags?

Mordechai the coachman went and emptied some more of that red, red liquid into his throat. He had ever been fond of the bottle, both in the past, as a butcher, and now in the present, as a coachman. These two occupations could hardly be said to turn their practitioners into lovers of mere water. Mordechai's tongue was sharp, and he was a bit wound up from the wine, as he heaped ridicule and scorn on all those terrified Jews who believed in every fleeting fiction as they took fright and ran off at the slightest sign of any vain danger.

Mordechai the coachman had a sharp eye, and he understood the soul of man. But perhaps the man was mistaken in this case, and he may well have done better not to take things so lightly this time. Once more Shapiro's sober voice was heard. Due to his illness he was absolutely forbidden to drink wine, and he was quite scrupulous about obeying this prohibition. His wise, measured voice could once more be heard as he turned to Mordechai the coachman:

¹ Seudat Mitzvah - A meal in honor of the fulfillment of some commandment, usually a marriage, Brit Milah, or Bar Mitzvah.

"You would do well, Reb Mordechai, to consider just where one might now procure more horses. Perhaps one might still leave via Kharkov or Poltava, and head east from there."

"Who do you want to run away from?" Aharon Ginsburg, the black-clad cemetery attendant asked. He too had had his fair share to drink. His cheeks were red, his eyes were glazed, and he was all worked up and ready to catch fire. Shapiro was the exact opposite of this matchstick of a cemetery attendant, the two of them were entirely different from head to toe. The former was a moderate *mitnaged*¹, and the latter was a fiery Hassid. "Who are you running away from, and where will Mordechai's horses take you? Do you think that you can change the destiny that you have been assigned? That if the verdict has been issued, it won't be carried out just because of those horses of yours?"

He drinks off another glass of wine. Then he begins singing in a low voice:

Ha'aderet ve'ha'emuna, lechai olamim
*Ha'bina ve'ha'beracha, lechai olamim.*²

But this time no one else joined in with the cemetery attendant. Heavy stones lay on the hearts of all those gathered, and no songs would be sung.

Once more Shapiro's voice was heard, the weak voice of an elderly invalid, a voice emerging from the deep understanding that was forever swirling in its hidden depths.

"My fellow Jews!" Shapiro said. "These are all empty words – destiny, and fortune, and the ways of the Master of the Universe! The Master of the Universe does not have time now to tend to the Jews of Hadiach. The Master of the Universe is busy, and each one of us must decide on our own – whether to live or die."

And he turned once more to Mordechai the coachman in the matter of the horses. Mordechai was a bit worked up. What was there

¹ Mitnaged - opponent of Hassidism (Hebrew).

² The splendor and the faith, of the Eternal One / The understanding and the blessing of the Eternal One' (Hebrew).

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to talk about? There was nothing that stood in the way of a little 'candy'. You needed coin, and if you didn't have cash, you could use its equivalent. The prices were rising higher and higher every day, but all the same, he figured that for fifteen thousand rubles you could still get yourself a pair of horses and a wagon. Shapiro turned to all those assembled:

"My fellow Jews, lay down your money and go! Whoever does not have the means – let two or three families get together, put the children and invalids in the wagon, and the rest should leave on foot!"

Haim Yakov hesitated. How could he undertake the journey, he who had never handled horses in all his life? He was an expert when it came to *shechita*¹, he understood the winemaking business a bit, he was well-versed in the art of Brit Milah. If need be, he could get up before the ark and lead the congregation. He was also something of a *ba'al koreh*². But horses?

Tamar interrupted her grandfather: "Grandpa, I'll handle the horses!" They had to leave, come what may. Her heart sensed evil things to come. Mordechai the coachman burst out laughing. She, tiny flea that she was, was going to handle the horses! Had she ever even seen a horse in all her life? If you got yourself some old mare, then instead of having the horse carry you, you were often forced to carry the horse yourself. But when you were dealing with a horse truly worthy of its name, then handling the animal was not an easy thing, and not every beginner could do the job.

And so, Mordechai the coachman grew more and more excited, and even offered a little advice of his own. Where did they want to go? Romny, Poltava, Pryluky? He, Mordechai, would take them to one of those towns. There were surely railway stations there as well, and they could join one of the mass exoduses on the freight trains. He would return here, to Hadiach, and put his fate in the hands of God! As far as the price was concerned, he was pretty sure that they could reach some

¹ Shechita - slaughtering of certain mammals and birds for food according to Jewish dietary laws.

² Ba'al koreh - one who reads aloud from the Pentateuch on behalf of the rest of the congregation.

sort of compromise, in his opinion...

"Oy, Grandpa, let's go!" Tamar said, as she clapped her hands. She wanted to leave. Her heart longed for her mother, for Moscow, and Dubinin Street.

It seemed to her that it was only here, in Hadiach, that the war had left its mark.

A wagon hitched to two horses stood in the yard outside Haim Yakov Feigin's home. Our old friend Pavlik, that veritable eagle, stood at ease, chewing away at his fodder in rather tasteful, elegant fashion. The second horse, whose coat was a bit lighter than Pavlik's, stood there to his left and imitated him – eating ravenously. The horse's name was Ryzhyi, and his price had been six thousand rubles. In accordance with the terms of their agreement, Haim Yakov had purchased the horse and given him to Mordechai. In return, Mordechai would bring the Feigin family to the distant train station.

The wagon stood in the yard, but it was not all that easy to pack up their things. The old folks were handling the whites and clothes, the sewing machine and utensils, pillows and blankets – and so there was plenty of back-and-forth, arguments, and grievances... Haim Yakov took the two shochet's knives, wrapped in their cases. Who knows what tomorrow might bring? It may well be that over there, in evacuation, he would have to take up Shechita once again. Along with the knives, he took his large Siddur and a copy of the *Tanakh*¹. The Shas he left in the house.

One by one people gathered in the yard. There were Ginsburg and Shapiro, Reb Dovid the shochet, Esther the noodle-maker and her daughter Nechama, and Nachman Moiseevich Rosenkranz. The group of old folks had come to say goodbye to the Feigin family. Who knows if they would ever see each other again? They stood off on the side, conversing and joking around, but their faces were sad and furrowed. Nechama was helping Pesya out, but Esther the noodle-maker just stood off on the side, leaning on her cane. Her back was a bit bent, but the look in her eyes had not dimmed one bit. No, she was still looking

¹ Tanakh – Hebrew Bible, an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of three parts: Torah ("Teaching"), Nevi'im ("Prophets") and Ketuvim ("Writings").

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out at the world of the Holy One Blessed Be He! Despite her ninety-odd years she was looking out at that yard, and up at the heavens overhead, at the entire world spinning all around her – and her eyes were dry.

Tamar was the happiest one among all those gathered in the yard. She was silent, but something was singing inside her soul. The faraway places were secretly calling to her: "Come! Come! Hurry!"

No small number of items was loaded onto the wagon. Off on the side the wet nurse stood with Isaac Solomonovich Feigin, the decorated grandson, in her arms. It had been decided to leave Darya Petrovna with the infant at the Feigin home. First, she would serve as a wet nurse to Isaac, and secondly – she would keep an eye on the house, the furniture, and the rest of their things. This decision was taken not without a certain amount of soulful regret. Isaac, the grandson, was being left behind sort of like an infant captive among the gentiles. Shapiro tried to comfort Pesya. Berta Abramovna would keep an eye on the little one. Miriam Loytin also promised to come over from time to time and keep an eye on the boy.

Tears flash in Pesya's eyes. It was not easy to leave the grandson behind, along with the entire town - the place where she had been born. The horses stood ready to head out. Mordechai the coachman, wrapped up in his coat and shawl, completed the final preparations. The group of people gathered around the wagon. Old Pesya took the sleeping Isaac from the hands of the wet nurse and hugged him to her heart. A tear fell onto the cheek of the little child.

"Take good care of him, Dasha!"

Tears began to drop from the eyes of the women who were seeing them off as well. "Have a safe trip, Pesya! May the Good Lord help us, and may we get the chance to see each other once again!"

Esther the noodle-maker's eyes were dry. With her wrinkled face she stood there in the yard, leaning on her cane, in silence. "Farewell, aunt Esther!" Pesya said, as she kissed the latter's cheeks, cautiously and respectfully – all the women of Hadiach treated the elderly lady with great respect.

There were handshakes and best wishes. A low mood gripped the old folks. Only Tamar's eyes were flashing, and a smile hovered across her face. She felt hot, so she took off her coat and sat there in her black

dress with the muslin collar. The wagon headed out. It rode along the Garden alley, turned right, and disappeared.

Tamar sat up on her perch to the left of Mordechai and gazed out at the world. The tears still stood there in Grandma Pesya's face. Grandpa's yellow beard lost its splendor that morning. Pavlik was not used to having a partner and seemed somewhat confused. They crossed the central square, passed by the post office, and approached the road that led down to the bridge in Vilbovka. It was not the first time that Mordechai was taking this road, however, in recent times all the roads were filled with refugees, cars, and army platoons. From time to time a traffic jam formed, and you ended up standing there for a good long while, until the vehicles in front of you got moving once again.

It turned out that there was just such a traffic jam in front of the bridge between Hadiach and Vilbovka. For a solid hour our travelers waited there. At last the wagon pushed its way in between the army vehicles and crossed the bridge. On the other side of the river the path was clearer and the horses, who had gotten a good rest during the idle hour, demonstrated their speed and agility.

Haim Yakov and Pesya turned around to say goodbye to the town of Hadiach and the Psel River. The water flowed slowly along, reflecting the grey heavens overhead, the top of a lone tree, and the silent riverbanks. To the right of the road was the cemetery. Their eyes turned in their own accord in the direction of the reddish wall that rose between the trees of the cemetery. Over the grave of the Alter Rebbe the eternal flame burned. Many generations of Jews had passed this way on their final journey. The rains had erased all traces of their footprints. The heavens were indifferent, as was the wind, the foliage both green and withered, and the entire world as well.

The wagon headed uphill, and the horses began to drag along lazily. Mordechai the coachman, as was his way in a spot like that, pulled out his pouch of mahorka and began rolling himself a papirosa. Haim Yakov lit his pipe as well. Soon the wagon was enveloped in columns of smoke. Mordechai began to talk.

Life had taken a rather strange turn of late, he said. The world had turned upside-down – its head was on the bottom and its legs were up in the air. Since there had been wars in the world he had never seen one like this. Everyone was afraid, everyone was running away like so

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many rabbits. Thirty-five years ago, during the Russian-Japanese War, not a soul ran away from Hadiach. Or twenty-five years ago. Hadiach had been quiet then, and everything had continued as usual. True, in the year 1919 the men under Denikin and Petliura had begun striking the Jews, but then too there was still no greater confusion. The Jews had remained where they were, and, on the contrary, there were even those among them who had known how to defend themselves – like Mendel Zucker there...

And here the spitting, sucking sound, and pulling on the reins returned: "Nu, kids!" Pavlik responded with a flick of his tail. The other lazybones, Ryzhyi, showed no greater signs of life.

Amid the columns of smoke, Mordechai continued his tale, in simple Yiddish:

"You really ought to hear what happened with Mendel Zucker in Sary in the year 1919, the year of the pogroms.

"It was nighttime in the village of Sary, at the home of Mendel Zucker. In the bedroom facing the garden the man of the house was asleep with his wife. Suddenly he sensed that a cold breeze was blowing through the room over his feet. He cautiously opened his eyes and saw that the window was open, and someone was trying to get into the house. The window frames at Mendel's house were not all that wide, and this clumsy *goy*¹ was forced to lie on his side and push his way in bit by bit. Mendel didn't hesitate, he woke his wife up and said to her in a whisper: 'Sarah, don't be afraid, but some robber is trying to crawl in through the window over there. Give me the ax!' Sarah, confused and scared, handed him what he had asked for. Mendel saw that it was the old ax, the blunt one. 'Fool, give me the new ax!' Sarah silently brought him the new ax. The goy continued trying to squeeze his way in. It looked like he was hoping to find some great riches there. It never even occurred to him that these fearful *Zhids*² might try to defend themselves. His head appeared on the windowsill, as his eyes searched around in the darkness. Mendel's moment had come. He raised the ax

¹ Goy - a non-Jew.

² "Zhid" or "Zhidovka" – the pejorative and insulting terms for Jewish man and woman.

and brought it down on the neck of the murderer. The thief's head fell to the floor. In the morning it turned out that he had been one of the infamous bandits."

Once more they heard the cars chugging along behind them. The vehicles caught up with the wagon and covered it in columns of dust. Vilbovka was completely desolate this time, and Tamar felt like a foreigner in this place. There was a heavy silence in the forest. The tall pine trees stood there like sentinels watching over the silence. But then the wind went whipping through them, and they began rustling away and sending that rustling of theirs forth into the murky morning. A terror grabbed hold of Tamar. The rustling of the pines sounded to her like a terrifying alarm.

The main street of Vilbovka was long and empty. Smoke rose from a few chimneys. A barefoot girl passed by with a yoke and two full pails on her shoulders. She did not stop to look at the travelers. That was a good sign, those full pails there, and Pesya blessed the *shiksa* in her heart. "Nu, kids!" Mordechai's whip flew over the backs of the horses. This time he was in no mood for their jokes, and Pavlik and Ryzhyi girded their loins and the wagon began to bounce along in a livelier fashion.

It was Thursday, September eleventh. A group of country women was walking in to town – bold Ukrainian girls, with grey or black eyes, white teeth, and tanned faces. Their soft speech filled the air. Everything moves, spins, and swirls, and chance has its hand in many encounters. And so, the eyes of our two heroines met – Tamar and Glasha. Glasha had not yet given up her habit of wandering about the forest. She was now coming back from a long journey – she had spent three days in the forest of Veprik. Now she stood there at the edge of the forest, a tall, ridiculous-looking girl, keeping an eye on the road. Everything she saw was a part of her birthplace, including the road along which people and vehicles were constantly moving, such as this refugee-filled wagon with its horses and occupants. The eyes of Tamar and Glasha met and said something. The eyes of that foolish girl, with the flaxen hair, scanned the ground. In the year 1812 the Russian people had also set out on similar journeys, when it was the Frenchman who had invaded their borders and was destroying their towns and villages. Natasha Rostova had not feared the enemy then.

Haim Yakov nods off. Pesya's eyes are wide open. Tamar looks out

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at the white world. A flock of leaves runs along the road, rolling around and seemingly chasing its own tail. Stop! The leaves come to a standstill, waiting for the next wave to come along and uproot them and send them rolling away once again.

At the start of September, we find Solomon Feigin and his friend Binyamin in the Red Army, at the southwestern front. General Kirponos was in command on this front. A topographic battalion had been assigned to headquarters, and it was headed up by Vozhynov. The battalion had been divided up into platoons numbering twenty soldiers, who carried out topographic assignments on behalf of headquarters.

The commander in charge of one such platoon was Lieutenant Feigin, being none other than our old acquaintance Solomon Yefimovich, and one of the soldiers in his platoon was Binyamin. If, my enlightened reader, you ever found yourself in the marshlands between Polesye and Chernihiv, between the Dnieper and Pripyat Rivers, north of Chernobyl, then you might have some sort of an idea of the conditions in which Solomon Feigin's platoon found itself at the start of that September. On their way to Chernihiv the men were forced to abandon their vehicles and march on foot with all their equipment and ammunition. Here and there they stumbled on deep pits filled with water, covered in moss and high grass. A few of the soldiers slipped along the way and began to drown.

The tallest soldier in the platoon was the driver Adamchuk, so Solomon ordered him to remove his baggage and march out in front. Behind him, in single file, the soldiers marched with their baggage – though, truth be told, it was more like hopping from mound to mound. This forced advance wore them down, and thirty kilometers of this hopping along took four days. After about a week they reached Chernihiv and found it razed to the ground. From Chernihiv the platoon headed off to Pryluky where they came upon command headquarters. From Pryluky the platoon was sent off into the region of Konotop-Vorozhba. As they were leaving Pryluky they saw a group of enemy airplanes over the city and parachutists leaping out of the planes.

When they completed their assignment along the Vorozhba-Konotop line they heard that command headquarters were now somewhere between Leningrad and Kharkov, and so they headed for Kharkov via Sumy-Okhtyrka. The roads were filled with refugees, army units, artillery, transport vehicles, and motorcycles. At any moment the

bombing might begin. Moving along with this stream Solomon Feigin's platoon reached Okhtyrka on the 12th of September.

The Vorskla River runs through Okhtyrka. The bridges over this river had been blown up, and a horde of infantry and vehicles had gathered before the temporary crossing. It was about 75 kilometers from Okhtyrka to Hadiach, and Solomon decided to turn off the road and pay a visit to Hadiach – it might well be that Firochka, his parents, and Tamar needed help. Under ordinary circumstances the journey took about four to five hours. Solomon ordered his soldiers to wait on the banks of the Vorskla, and he headed out by car in the direction of Zinkov. Binyamin joined him on the trip.

And indeed, little more than four or five hours had passed since they had left Okhtyrka. With great difficulty the car had reached Zinkov and from there it had headed for Pavlovka. There the news spread that hundreds of airplanes had bombed Okhtyrka and the town had then been taken by German parachutists. The road back was therefore blocked. All the same Solomon ordered the driver to press on. All sorts of rumors were flying about in the towns and along the roads, and often they all turned out to have been false.

Solomon sat in the cabin by the driver, and Binyamin sat in the open compartment in the back. The road wound through the forest between Pavlovka and Veprik. The evening was beginning to settle in. Sorrow filled the air. Binyamin, who was sitting on his folded army coat, loosened the collar of his shirt and looked this way and that. Pine trees with their thick trunks and high tops hugged the side of the road, casting a dark shadow over it as they shook back and forth, as though lost deep in thought. Damp moss and the gloominess of autumn filled the spaces between the pines, and yellow needles and pine cones sat at the foot of the trees. Patches of green where the grass had not yet withered flashed here and there. A darkening strip of sky bent low over the road.

At that moment Binyamin caught sight of Mordechai the coachman. "I must ask him how things stand in Hadiach, how the members of the Feigin household are doing." The moment this thought flashed in his mind, he noticed the travelers in the wagon.

"Adamchuk, stop!" Binyamin's fists pounded on the outside of the tin roof of the driver's cabin.

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The car came to a halt. At first the travelers in the wagon did not recognize the two army men who suddenly popped up before their eyes. Tamar was the first to notice who they were.

"Uncle Solomon! Uncle Binyamin!" There immediately followed a certain amount of confusion, and the sound of Pesya crying could be heard.

"Where is Firochka? How is Firochka doing?" The eyes of Tamar, Pesya, and Haim Yakov were all lowered to the ground.

"Young man, it's not a time for lamentations," Mordechai the coachman said, in his simple fashion, the act of a man who had seen plenty in his life. "Your wife has left this world behind. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. May the name of the Lord be blessed!"

Solomon stood there for a moment as though thunderstruck, his gaping mouth revealing those front teeth of gold. Binyamin was also in shock. Pesya began telling them what had happened. Her voice was measured, reserved, and the memory of Firochka, wife and young woman that she had been, came to stand there before them for a few minutes as though it were the very memory of all living things that had ever passed away beneath the heavens. They talked a bit about the boy too, about Isaac.

Binyamin turned to Tamar, to that girl, who also seemed to have the odd habit of growing and growing with every passing year. While the sorrow of their tragedy continued to hover in the air between Solomon and the old folks Binyamin and Tamar moved off a few paces from the wagon, and he heard her tell of the situation in Hadiach. Questions and answers bumped up against one another among the rustling pines. Tamar's dark brown eyes fluttered in her tanned face. The black dress with the muslin collar was quite a pretty match for that face of hers.

"Binyamin!" came the commanding voice of Solomon.

He must get back to his soldiers. True, there was talk that the fascist parachutists were now located in Okhtyrka, but such a rumor was not enough to release him from his obligation. They would certainly manage to break through the line and locate command headquarters.

A light panic began to hover in the air around the people gathered there. In that case, Mordechai the coachman said, he was going to turn

his horses around and head back to Hadiach. Since they had the opportunity to transfer all the travelers' belongings to the vehicle and travel with Solomon – they would be better off doing that. As for him, Mordechai, he was going to head back to Hadiach.

Against the backdrop of the darkening forest one more farewell took place – as they said goodbye to this somewhat ridiculous old man who seemed to have a certain understanding when it came to the affairs of the world around him. The number of years he had lived was not that far from the great age of eighty spoken of in Psalms. He was short, neither fat nor thin, with a proper beard that had not yet turned completely silver, a hurried, almost reckless step, and a sharp eye. This Jew here wrapped himself in his shawl, and after the baggage had been removed, he turned his wagon in the direction of Veprik. The call and crack of the whip came simultaneously this time: "Nu, kids!"

It was raining, and the trees were rustling in the dim, sealed vault high overhead. Adamchuk turned on the headlights for a moment. They lit up a little patch of the road, splashed as it was with drops of rain, and surrounded by shiny blackness. Old Pesya prayed a bit in her heart.

Ah, roads upon roads! That little prattler, Tamar, continued talking away with Binyamin as they sat on the bench in the bouncing car. It was a rather puzzling thing to see just how well-developed that talkative streak was in this dark, thin girl! She was now telling over all sorts of tales involving uncle Berman and that heavysset mother of his. She also recalled Raya Rosenkranz, that older friend of hers.

Most of the burden as they proceeded now fell on Adamchuk. Due to the constant danger it was forbidden to turn on the headlights for too long, yet the road was dark and hardly clear. Solomon's eyes did not cut through the darkness this time. They were filled with tears. Tears covered the world before him. Firochka stood there in her white apron, sweeping the floor and singing that little song of hers:

*Ha'aderet ve'ha'emunah, lechai olamim
Ha'bina ve'ha'beracha, lechai olamim...¹*

¹ The splendor and the faith, of the Eternal One / The understanding and the blessing of the Eternal One (Hebrew).

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It was cold. Tamar now wore her coat. The rain stopped. The old folks nodded off. Tamar was telling of Vilbovka. Every little thing seemed to interest Binyamin. The shadows of dreams and emotions burst into the air and then passed away, as the memory of last year's loves sank down into the abyss of oblivion. And so, Binyamin forgot to ask about Lidia Stepanovna, but instead he asked about Glasha. The day before Tamar had seen Glasha along the road by pure chance. The barefoot girl was standing there keeping an eye on the road. Tamar had nothing to add. She could go on and on about Sarka Ginsburg, about Kim – but Glasha? The barefoot girl had been standing there in the forest near the road, with a white kerchief covering her head.

The car approached the town of Pavlovka. There was a traffic jam once more. Solomon emerged from the driver's cabin and talked a bit with the people on foot who were coming from the direction of Zinkov. As ever in such instances, there were all sorts of differing accounts. One of them confirmed the rumor that Okhtyrka was now in the hands of the Germans. A second one claimed that all the parachutists had been eliminated. A third contradicted both and said that in Okhtyrka there had not been any parachutists whatsoever. The soviet authorities had already left Zinkov, but the enemy had not yet entered the town. It seemed that the offensive was being carried out in the direction of Kharkov. God knows what was happening off at the front! Everything was utter chaos, and it was impossible to understand where our forces were and where the Germans stood.

Haim Yakov recommended they head back to Hadiach. Yes, something was eating away at him, at that old man there, something that was dragging him back towards the very Angel of Death.

Chapter 2.4

Once more we see the yard outside the Feigin home in Hadiach in motion. An army vehicle stood in the yard and the soldiers were removing all sorts of odd bundles from the rear compartment, including bags and suitcases. It was early in the morning. The darkness still lay in the hidden recesses of the yard, and from some unseen source a grey light began to flow forth. The roosters began to crow, and wings began to flap off in the distance, as the morning breeze gently caressed the streets and human cheeks.

The infant Isaac was asleep in his cradle, and Darya Petrovna, that fat, dumpy thirty-year-old woman, warmly greeted the new arrivals. The boy was sleeping, and his eyelids were a bit reddish, as though he already understood the goings-on in the world, the bloody chapter that was approaching this nation, to which he had been tragically sentenced as one of its sons. Solomon caressed the white kerchief that enveloped Isaac's head. Perhaps that moment of silence was dedicated to the young mother who had passed away before her time. Solomon, lieutenant and father, mumbled two or three words: "Grow strong, Isaac!" He bent down and cautiously, attentively, kissed the infant's forehead.

"Mother!" Solomon said. "We must wash up, eat something, and head out."

"Take me with you!" Tamar suddenly burst out crying. "I'm afraid to stay here!"

Pesya raised her finger: "Tamar, you foolish girl, don't wake the baby up!" Tamar continued to cry. She wanted to go back to her mother. Let them bring her to Kharkov. Once there she no longer needed anyone to accompany her.

Solomon produced sugar, bread, and canned food from his knapsack. Pesya refused to touch the food. The army men, they were the ones who needed it. Solomon, Binyamin, and Adamchuk drank the wine of which there was still a bit left down in the basement. Adamchuk

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had himself a double portion. He was a tall, blond-haired soldier, from the region of Poltava as well, from a Kolkhoz near Piryatin. He drank his double portion with pleasure and said that if it turned out that they were surrounded, he would head off in the direction of Piryatin. His wife and two children would be waiting for him.

"Forget it, Kolya!" Solomon said angrily. He was a platoon commander, and responsible for every soldier. They should never have left Okhtyrka. By now all the soldiers had certainly been scattered. They had to hurry, fast. If the Germans were indeed in Okhtyrka, the danger facing them would be even greater.

They ate and made their decisions hastily. They were not going to take Tamar with them. How could they uproot a girl like that from the house of her grandmother and then abandon her out in the raging, chaotic world? If they would not manage to cross the front lines Solomon and Binyamin would also have to return to Hadiach. There was no need for Tamar to leave Hadiach, risking her life and becoming a burden to the two of them. If they would succeed in reaching their battalion – what would become of Tamar when she would be left all alone at the front?

"I'm not a baby!" Tamar screamed. "If you don't take me with you, I'll run away!"

Her eyes grew deeper and darker. Something rather serious, almost somber, flashed in them, as though her very soul had risen from the depths and peeked out at the dark world all around.

"Don't be silly, Tamar!" Solomon said. "We have to go!" The morning, which until then had been crawling up lazily out of its hidden recesses, suddenly sallied forth all at once, lighting up the town of Hadiach, touching the people therein, spreading out all around and then moving onwards, ever onwards with a certain fearful, measured step. "Binyamin! Adamchuk! To the vehicle."

Binyamin did not say a thing, he just silently kissed the grandmother's face, and it was as though he had a lump in his throat. He quickly and agilely got into the car and looked this way and that. Hadiach lay there stretched out before him, Hadiach in mid-September. The whitewashed houses to either side of the road stood there wrapped in their terror.

Solomon was still in the house, giving brief orders to Pesya, Darya Petrovna, and his father.

Come what may – the main thing was to take care of the baby! Isaac was relatively safe in the hands of the Russian wet nurse. If there was an emergency, it would be better if they took the baby and left the house. We'll all return one day to Hadiach, Solomon said, I'll be back too – in a month, or a year. At that time, he would retrieve his son and pay the wet nurse everything that she deserved. Was that understood?

He then turned to Pesya:

"Mother, there's no need to cry. Better days will come..."

Solomon kisses the downcast faces of his mother and father. His voice is trembling.

"Father, take care of mother, don't let anyone hurt her! We'll all return and see each other once again!"

The engine roared. The gate was opened. Tamar, feeling hurt and weeping, remained in the house. The old folks stepped out into the Garden alley to see their son off. They stood there by the open gate and Binyamin saw their sorry stance there for a little bit, saw their eyes fixed on the receding vehicle, saw Pesya's pale face, and Haim Yakov's beard – a spot of fine gold waving on the grey morning breeze.

The vehicle disappeared, and the gate was closed. The wall clock chimed seven times. The baby woke up. They changed his diaper. He screamed a bit and then began sucking at the wet nurse's breast.

"I'm going to step out to fetch a bit of wine!" Haim Yakov murmured, as he picked up an empty bottle and a pickax and headed stealthily down the steps to the basement. He moved aside some shards of glass and a few rags that had piled up in the right-hand corner and dug a pit about sixty centimeters deep. He hid a wrapped-up bundle in the hole and then sealed it once more. The old man patted down the dirt with his feet, smoothing out the surface. Then he went and threw the rags and shards of glass back into the darkened corner.

Haim Yakov emerged cautiously from the basement with a bottle of wine and the pickax in his hands. No one had seen him enter or leave. Now the remainder of his wealth from back in the day when he had produced wine was hidden there in the basement. Aside from some gold and silver coins, a few of which were still left over from the times

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of the Czar, there were a couple of other valuables in the bundle, along with some Soviet-era bills.

It was seven-thirty in the morning. He said to Pesya:

"I'm going to head out to the minyan and see what's new."

Of all the synagogues and houses of study that had existed in Hadiach before the Revolution, there now remained only this spare minyan that gathered on the Sabbath and Festivals. On ordinary weekdays, prayers were only held in honor of some 'Yahrzeit'¹, and after they had finished praying and recited the Kaddish, they would have a bit to drink and serve honey cake.

Lately the building housing the minyan had become a sort of gathering spot for the Jews of Hadiach. Here, every morning, one could find Shlomo Shapiro. He had once more returned to those vanities of his from thirty years ago, telling of the wonders and miracles among our Nation in Zion – go see for yourself if he wasn't telling the truth! There, as he put it, our brethren lived in safety, each man in the shade of his own vine; there the soil yielded its harvest twice a year. There, as he said, the Hebrew language was flourishing, both the spoken and liturgical tongue. There, in the land our forefathers so loved and longed for...

The Jews listened to these fantastic tales. What a difference there was between the golden fairy tales Shapiro told and the foul rumors that were so widespread in Hadiach at the time! A Jewish refugee now stepped in and swore that it was the God's honest truth that the Germans were eliminating all the Jews. Second, they were cutting off the ears and noses of all prisoners of war. Third, they were cutting off all means of making a living. Fourth...

Such were the rumors that were circulating at the time. However, there was also some talk of a different nature. Frida Levovna, Raya Rosenkranz's mother, as well as Haya Sarah Berman, who was in constant contact with many people due to her speculative dealings providing basic necessities – both of these women spread the rumor that the Germans were giving the Jews equal rights, and that they had a

¹ Yahrzeit – anniversary of the death of a relative.

secret pact with the British to gather up all the Jews – men, women, and children – in camps, and then bring them en masse to Israel.

Rumors, rumors... One depended on the other, and then along came another to contradict the first. No one knew for sure if the Germans were indeed murdering the Jews. Over the last two days German airplanes had once more appeared in the sky over Hadiach. They had not dropped any bombs this time; it seems they were merely surveying the town. A few of them had dropped pamphlets, one of which said, rather briefly: "Kill the Jews, and save Russia!"

Blind fear now invaded all hearts. Shapiro had therefore spoken wisely when he had constantly warned all those who were hesitating to leave town. Little by little that sickly Jew, with all his tall tales and pipe dreams, became the head of the congregation. Now that the roads out of town were all cut off, Reb Shlomo no longer went around preaching to those who were left behind. What good would it do now to place blame? What people needed at this point was a bit of comfort, after all.

Desperation had not yet grabbed hold of the entire Jewish population, though it had begun to make its presence felt as it spread from one to the next. There was at least some minor comfort in the fact that they were all in the same boat. The appearance of Haim Yakov at the minyan aroused general curiosity and made quite an impression, even though the Feigin family was not the first to have turned back from the road heading east. Rumors of the invasion of Okhtyrka by parachutists had seeped into Hadiach. The return of the Feigin family confirmed these rumors, although there were some doubters among the community who knew of facts that disproved these very rumors. Old man Feigin himself could not tell for sure that Okhtyrka had indeed fallen into the hands of the Germans.

Rumors, rumors... Nachman Moiseevich Rosenkranz, who had worked for many years as an accountant at the MTS¹, a forty-five-year-old Jew with a long moustache and blinking eyes, entered the minyan with news of his own. The day before a car had crossed Vorovsky Square and stopped at his home. There was a colonel in the car. The officer had entered his house and asked to spend the night with his

¹ MTS - Service shop for machines and agricultural equipment.

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driver. Nachman Moiseevich had taken them in and offered them dinner. The officer was from the tank corps that was passing through Hadiach as it retreated towards Lipova Dolina - Romny. During dinner the officer had said that there was no danger of the Germans entering Hadiach. The fascists' tanks and artillery would get mired down in the swamps of Hadiach and get stuck there. Hadiach would be the salvation of our army, it would become a famous town in the annals of Mother Russia's wars – like Borodino¹ in its time.

Among the members of the minyan Moshe Sokhorinsky and Itzik Slutsky now offered their opinions – two men whose acquaintance we have not yet had the chance to make. The former said that this colonel was clearly no windbag, and if he was truly from the tank corps, then it meant that he well knew the ability of these vehicles to cross the swamps of Hadiach. Moshe Sokhorinsky was one of the optimists. But then Itzik Slutsky got up and said that if our own tanks had managed to cross the swamps, why wouldn't the German tanks be able to cross them as well? At the Battle of Borodino, the Russians had been defending Moscow, whereas Hadiach was some out-of-the-way town, with no history and no real industry.

Itzik was one of those with a bleak view of things. No one else came to his support. Haim Yakov Feigin said that it was all a mystery, and none of us really knew a single thing for sure, only God knew what the solution was. Somebody mentioned the Poltavian War at the time of Peter the Great. Shapiro remained silent.

The Jews needed comfort. They believed in every castle in the sky, every positive fantasy and benign product of the imagination. From Romny Street came the loud rumble of heavy vehicles. It was the sound of the Soviet tanks retreating towards the northeast. The mighty noise they made drowned out the voices of the men in the minyan. Aaron Ginsburg pounded on the table: it was time to pray *Shacharit*²! He stepped over to the lectern, and the old folks quickly rose, wrapped in their tallit and tefillin, as they began to whisper the age-old prayers.

¹ Borodino - Battle of Borodino fought during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. It is remembered by Russians as a symbol of national courage.

² Shacharit – the morning prayers.

Aharon Ginsburg had, as we have already noted, a passel of kids, each with a special face of his or her own, and at this point we must turn our attention to Hasya, the eighteen-year-old girl, who had completed her studies that spring at the Technical Agricultural School and been working for a few months now at the 'Road to Socialism' Kolkhoz north of Hadiach, not far from Lipova Dolina. You couldn't very well call her beautiful, though each of Ginsburg's children had some unique inner charm and grace of their own. Hasya was the most industrious member of the family, and for as long as she had lived in Hadiach, she had been the main provider of food for the household.

Ah, to earn a living – the devil take that 'living' there! This saying, ever on the tip of the tongue of Mordechai the coachman, was particularly suited to the Ginsburg family. If not for the vegetable garden and the cow the Ginsburg family would have literally gone hungry. They lived in a sparse shack deep in the yard of a house, the front of which faced Poltava Street. Serafim Ivanovich Karpenko, the principal of the local high school, lived in the house. The vegetable garden was spread out behind the shack. During the summer, the Ginsburg family would tend to the garden, and these efforts earned them potatoes and vegetables that lasted through the Passover holiday.

It was too bad that Hasya had left the house this year – she had been in charge of the workers out in the garden. This year she had only assisted in the planting, all the other labors had fallen to Hana, Sarka, and Leibke.

Hasya had more initiative in her than her brothers and sisters. During her studies at the Agricultural Technical School, she used to read books concerning growing grain, fruits and vegetables, and she also focused on these things in the practical realm as well. She befriended Tanya Ivanchuk, and Roman Nazarovich as well was fond of conversing with this joyous girl in the matter of cultivating vegetables.

Roman Nazarovich, who taught Russian and History at the local high school, had, as you might recall, a weakness for vegetables, and, in his day, he had even corresponded with Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin and the Academy of Agricultural Sciences. Ivanchuk's vegetables had earned themselves a reputation, particularly the watermelons, cantaloupe, and pumpkins. For many years he had been working assiduously on refining a type of massive, particularly sweet pumpkin – which was known by the name of 'Tanya', as he had named it after his

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daughter. In the year 1940 'Tanya' had been presented at the All-Soviet Agricultural Expo, and it had received an award for its excellence.

Tanya Ivanchuk had no interest in vegetables. Although she was rather big-boned, she was in fact a delicate girl, the only child of Roman Nazarovich and Maria Matveyevna, who loved her madly and brought her up as though in a protective incubator: there was school, piano lessons, sewing and embroidery – a stay-at-home life, in short. Hasya was entirely different; she loved wide-open spaces and great heights, along with the lightning that struck between heaven and earth. That was how Roman Nazarovich had been in his youth as well, and he harbored a fondness for this Jewish girl.

What was it about that vegetable there – the pumpkin? And yet, Roman Nazarovich had gone through many a grafting and quite a few experiments before he succeeded in producing 'Tanya'. Over the last two years Hasya had assisted him a bit in his labors. Roman Nazarovich loved to talk, and Hasya loved to listen. She was the first to receive a handful of seeds for 'Tanya' to plant in her own garden. The results had been wondrous.

One must admit that Hasya had gained most of her knowledge not from books, but from the lips of the old teacher. That was the way with this rather active young girl: she would invest all that she knew in her own little farm. Take, for example, the spotted cow. Though the animal was not all that big, she had proper udders, and she provided the Ginsburg family with no less than 3000 liters of milk per year. This too was one of Hasya's accomplishments. She had something of the man of action about her.

In addition to the vegetable garden and the spotted cow the Ginsburg family had a few hens and an entire crowd of little chicks. And so, there was quite a bit of work. Recently Hasya had been in charge here – along with her assistants, Hana and Sarka. Little by little Leibke had joined in with them. Aunt Tzipa Lea, Aharon Ginsburg's wife, could not be of much help to them. She constantly had her hands full. It was hardly a small matter – having a Kolkhoz like that in the house!

Hasya's absence was felt quite strongly during the first days after she departed. Hana, the sixteen-year-old, was quite different from Hasya. When it came to domestic chores, she lacked all initiative whatsoever. The problem was, she was the prettiest of the Ginsburg

girls. The flash of her dark eyes, her shapely nose, the noble charm and grace that filled her face, her delicate figure, and the simple elegance of her clothing – all these things attested to the fact that this girl had other opportunities. She wanted to go to Kiev, but her father was against it. Then the war had broken out, and she had remained at home. Although she was now the oldest child in the house, Sarka, at fourteen, was required to take up the reins at the family farm.

'Bli ayin hara', Sarka had matured recently – she was just as tall as Hana already. Of all the children she was the one who most took after her father, and there was something strange in her character, something a little off-balance. She had gotten a bit of exposure to some grown-up experiences that were perhaps related to the half-Jew Kim Wartman, and that thin little goat there, her best friend Tamarka Feigin.

It may well be that Sarka had benefited somewhat from Hasya's absence. She was now responsible for tending to the family farm, and little by little she had taken upon herself the management of both the vegetable garden, as well as tending to the spotted cow. She not only had to work herself, but she also had to demand discipline from the others. Hana had no love for this labor, and all twelve-year-old Leibke knew how to do was roam around outside with his friends, go swimming in the river, and pick unripe apples in other people's gardens. Nine-year-old Shimon was more of the same. And so Sarka had to bring the whip down on her brothers. There were certain labors that Leibke and even Syoma had begun to handle – including spraying the rows of vegetables and feeding the cow.

And so, the days passed. Out in the world the war thundered away, and blood was spilled. But in this modest corner here the silence reigned supreme. Everything was subject to the most precise order, from the shape of the rows of vegetables and their cultivation, right down to the very scarecrows. The yellow sunflowers prayed to the sun, as they followed in its footsteps in the morning, noon, and evening time. Towards the end of the summer calming cobwebs wove their way among the plants, partly washed in golden sunlight, and partly enveloped in the shadows. The buzz of the flies and mosquitoes was moderate, almost lazy, you might say. Only the butterflies flitted among the plants in excited silence.

One evening a wagon drew up to the shack of Aharon Ginsburg. Hasya had come! In a flash the children surrounded the horse, the

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wagon, and Hasya, who had jumped down with her whip in her hand. What a daughter of valor Hasya was! After she had unharnessed the horse and placed a fragrant helping of hay before him, she stepped inside the house. Leibke rushed off to fetch Golda. Tzipa Lea wiped her hands on her apron and kissed Hasya. The children gathered around their sister. She had brought them gifts: bread, millet and spelt, sunflower oil, and fruit.

"Where's father?"

"He must be at the Shtiebel, he'll be back soon."

Hasya stepped out into the garden. The vegetable rows were naked, only the yellow-green heads of cabbage still lay there, with their leaves splayed. Sarka took her sister down to the basement, and showed her the pile of potatoes, along with the barrels of pickled cucumbers and tomatoes, and all the other vegetables.

Oy, Hasya, Hasya! The little kids gathered around her in small groups and pressed up against her; little Rivochka got swept up in her arms, hugging her sister's neck. Oh sister, sweet soul of mine! Mirka and Avka also leaned against their older sister. Tzipa Lea sat there with a silly look on her face, shedding tears. She could hardly be said to have been having an easy time around the house, and recent days had been filled with horrors. The Germans were approaching – what would happen to the children? Golda and Yosef Berman came rushing over. There were stolen kisses and laughter in the pale faces. How was Ahuva doing? Berman had brought candies for the kids. Golda told them some story about the baby. Evening came, and Golda and her husband hurried off to head back home. They would return early the next morning.

Evening came, the windows were shut, and Aharon Ginsburg came back home. He was glad to see Hasya. This daughter of his recalled something of those bygone days, back in Odessa. Arki Ginsburg, the boy with the squeaky boots, had run with the street kids back then, and become their leader. Arki had not been one to sit on his hands at the time, and he had known how to get to work – to get to work and take his share. Hasya was constantly active and filled with plenty of positive initiative.

They sat down to have tea. Hasya said that she could take Mirka and Rivochka with her for a bit. During these three months she had become friends with quite a few members of the Kolkhoz, and she was

like a member of the family there. She hoped to put the kids up with them. The Germans would not get to the children there. Here, in Hadiach, the danger was much greater.

What was there to really consider here? Hasya was no baby, she knew what she was doing. There was word that the Germans were plundering the Jews' possessions. The spotted cow was in danger. Hasya recommended that they move the cow as well to the Kolkhoz. When the time was right, she would send them cream and butter from the Kolkhoz.

The darkness sallied forth. The spotted cow and the guest horse stood out in the barn. From time to time there came the dull sound of hoofs stamping out there. The rooster and the hens were asleep. There was silence in Hadiach. The shutters of all the windows were closed. In the Ginsburg home they were preparing for the departure of the little children. Tzipa Lea was quickly doing a load of whites and dresses for the girls. Hasya, Hana, and Sarka were sewing by the light of the lantern. Ginsburg sat at the table reading a book. In the other room the children were asleep.

All was silent. There was silence in the Berman home in Vokzalny Street as well, where only the wall clock ticked away. Golda pressed up against Yosef. "We should have left here earlier!" Golda whispered. Yosef remained silent. He had more than once tried to convince his mother that the only way out – was to head east. Haya Sarah had been against leaving Hadiach. She was certain that the rumors of German cruelty were exaggerated. Was this mad old lady truly planning on returning the Berman family to its former glory, back in the days of her uncle Haim Zaidel and the big store that specialized in colonial merchandise?

All was silent. The windows were closed. There was darkness, darkness everywhere. Only at the house of Miriam Loytin, right by the market, a little light still flickered. Yekel Loytin was reading away. This time he was reading Dreiser's 'The Titan', and the vicissitudes of the life of Cowperwood helped him forget the present with all its fears. Miriam and Lea were asleep in the other room, which was dark. Yakov, who was now free of the yoke of school, was busy reading all sorts of meaningless books. They had not received a single letter from Ezekiel from the time he had been drafted.

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Things were foul and bitter! Everything was getting worse, turning darker. Not everyone was asleep in Hadiach. The eyes of Shlomo Shapiro were also wide open, as though they intended to cut right through the darkness. The last of the tanks had left Hadiach, and the calm before the storm now reigned in the town. The authorities had all left. It seemed that the town was caught in a trap and its days were numbered. Recently rumors had spread of the enemy's treatment of the Jewish population. Many Ukrainians had begun training their eyes on the possessions of their Jewish neighbors. The rabble often burst forth in foul anti-Semitic insults, at times even giving voice to outright threats. Swastikas had begun appearing on fences, doors, and walls. Hateful posters, which had been dropped by the German planes, had been hung up here and there.

Yes, Shlomo Shapiro had plenty of things with which to keep his mind occupied. It seemed that this old man had become responsible for all the souls that had been left behind in Hadiach. The old man sat thinking and drew his conclusions; and those conclusions were based on logic, on experience. The primary danger was posed by the first days after the enemy would come to town. The Jews had to disappear for a little while, they had to go into hiding until the fury passed.

Where to? The old invalid's glance went feeling its way around the town and its environs. About three hundred Jews were left in Hadiach, and many of them lived in the heart of town. It was almost certain that the Germans would begin their plunder and murder in the center of town, down Romny, Poltava, and Shevchenko Streets. The Jewish population had to move for a little while to the Zayar neighborhood on the outskirts of town. This neighborhood, which was near the cemetery, was completely inhabited by Ukrainians, and the Jewish families could simply disappear in their midst.

There were concerns and troubling thoughts, sleepless nights... Shlomo Shapiro swallowed a tablet of Luminal with a sigh. In the dark he found his glasses and put them on. Perhaps he intended to take a good look at something in a dream, and that was why he had donned his glasses before drifting off to sleep.

And so, another grey dawn rose over Hadiach. A wagon hitched to a horse emerged from one of the yards. A spotted cow was tethered to the wagon, and above it, the heads of four girls emerged. A group of people was accompanying the wagon on foot. The procession dragged

along slowly. The faces of the people were pale, and their eyes were sad and tired.

Serafim Ivanovich Karpenko, that wolf in sheep's clothing, stood there in his bedroom in his underwear and peeked out through the cracks in his shutters. There was hatred and scorn in his eyes. So, they're running away, those Jews there, like rats from a sinking ship.

Karpenko lay down in his bed with a yawn and covered himself with the green woolen blanket. They would not get away. The mighty hand would catch up with them and crush them wherever they went.

It was high season once again for Mordechai the coachman – for all three of them: himself, Pavlik, and Ryzhyi. The Jews of Hadiach were taking off for Zayar. A sort of contagious disease had begun to spread among them, heaven help us! True, during a riot, a man's mind can hardly be said to function clearly. The first to leave had been Shlomo Shapiro, followed by Itzik Slutsky, Haim Yakov Feigin, and Nachman Moiseevich Rosenkranz. They all seemed like Jews who were well-respected members of the community, and yet they had all been afflicted with this fever to suddenly settle down in Zayar. It seemed they believed a change of place might bring a change of fortune – that seemed to be what they were thinking.

Within two days most of the Jews of Hadiach had moved to Zayar. Only a handful of stubborn residents remained – Ginsburg, Esther the noodle-maker, and Mordechai the coachman. The Feigin family had found refuge with Ulyana Mazurok, who lived with her daughter and grandson in one of the houses of Zayar. This Ulyana here, a fifty-year-old woman, had worked for many years at the factory producing wine and mead. Her daughter Ksenya handled the running of the house, along with tending to her son Vasya, the vegetable garden, and the fruit trees. Her husband was serving in the army.

The Germans approached Hadiach on the 16th of September. That morning the bombing began. At eleven in the morning we find the Feigin and Mazurok families sitting by the radio. The broadcast announced that the war had spread to the suburbs of Kiev.

There were six people in the room – Haim Yakov, Pesya, Ulyana, Ksenya, Tamar, and five-year-old Vasya. Isaac and his wet nurse had been left behind in the Garden alley.

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Ksenya, the young housewife, did not look kindly on the new residents. There was word that the Germans were eliminating anyone who provided shelter for the Jews. At the first chance they got they had to get rid of these Jews here. Ulyana was of a different opinion. She had been working for a few years now with Yefim Issakovich, and she had respect for this old man, and could not find any fault with him. Furthermore, she was not the only one providing refuge for the Jews. Many of the residents of Zayar had taken in such people. A human being had to have a conscience, after all, if he wanted to deserve to be called a human being.

Pesya was cooking up potatoes. Potatoes and a glass of warm milk – that was going to be lunch this time. They all sat down to eat together. Even Ksenya put on a kind face with an, albeit, sour look. She was one of those big eaters. They all chewed away in silence. Suddenly a tremendous thundering sound broke – as one of the bombs fell not far from the house. Tamar had learned the basics of personal protection at school. Her command was now heard: "Lie down on the floor!" All six of them slipped off their chairs. Her grandfather's lips immediately began to whisper away. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Grandma Pesya sat there and her gaze went wandering. She feared that that little goat there, her granddaughter Tamar, was going to get swallowed up.

"Come here, Tamar, lie down under the table!" Ulyana sat there with her legs spread wide and crossed herself. She crossed herself and cried out: "Lord, have mercy!" Ksenya, as she fell to the floor, had not forgotten to take the plate of potatoes with her. She lay there chewing away. Only Vasya stared straight ahead with a surprised look on his face. They were all older, serious folks, yet they were behaving like little children.

"Mother!" he said. "I have to pee..."

The chamber pot sat in the hallway. Tamar was suddenly assailed by a wave of laughter. At first, she tried to restrain herself. She held her breath, tried to think of something else. The laughter began to burst from her mouth in wave after wave. Then the laughter turned nervous, wild. Haim Yakov's lips continued to whisper the 'Song of Degrees' from Psalms, only his lidless eyes continued to observe his granddaughter's convulsions. "Nu, nu!" he gave Pesya a sign. Pesya got up and brought Tamar a cup of water, but the latter was now no longer capable of

swallowing a single thing. The laughter now grew stronger. Ulyana continued to sit there with her legs spread. She uttered some Ukrainian saying that meant: In the morning, there's laughter, and in the evening, tears. It was over ten minutes now that this sick laughter had been echoing in the low-ceilinged room. Ksenya continued to chew on the potatoes with a dull look on her face.

This was perhaps Tamar Feigin's final round of laughter.

The big guns continued to bombard the town from near and far over the course of two days. There were still some Soviet army units left in Hadiach, some of which had arrived from the nearby forests. A fierce battle was pitched near the bridge that led from Hadiach to Veprik. The Germans bombed it quite often from the air and bombarded it with their heavy artillery. A tremendous traffic jam had formed near the bridge – consisting of soldiers, refugees, and cars, all headed for the forest. The German bombs were not at all precise: the bridge lay unharmed. However, on the third and fourth days confusion and panic took hold everywhere.

The cemetery lay near the bridge, and Aharon Ginsburg, who spent those days sitting in the Shtiebel, could hear the sounds of the battle. A few bombs that fell not far from the cemetery sent fierce shockwaves blasting through the air, but the attendant did not leave his spot there. And so, we find him sitting at the long table flipping through a sacred text.

He heard the rising tumult near the bridge, the shouts and shots fired. He knew that all the Jews of Hadiach, old and young alike, were expecting impending days of terror. Everything, literally everything hung by a thread. Everywhere the fascists took over, the lives of the Jews hung in the balance. However, Aharon Ginsburg had but a single fortress and shelter in this world – the Alter Rebbe. The Rebbe was a safe harbor, the shield that protected our people throughout their diaspora, and most certainly shielded the Jews of Hadiach. Ginsburg believed that so long as the eternal flame burned over the grave of the Alter Rebbe, there was some connection between the eternal light and the scattered, disjointed nation.

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It came time to recite *Mincha*¹ prayers. Ginsburg opened the doors of the Holy Ark. He prayed standing up, with tremendous concentration. He stood there all alone as he prayed. He was the sole member of the congregation before the open Ark. There were Torah scrolls in the Ark, each standing on its squat legs, wrapped in its velvet wrapper. Ginsburg could see the letters squirming about where they adorned the parchment – each letter with a life of its own, each crown and tassel with its various incarnations and ramifications. Outside the shots rang out, the heavy artillery raged, and the engines roared. In that solitary building a modest, splendid silence reigned. There were lights flickering in the darkness.

The prayers were concluded, and the Ark was shut. Someone opened the door, and the voice of a boy could be heard: "Father, are you here?"

"What is it, Leibke?" The meager light of the lamp in the Shtiebel lit up the face of the boy. "What is it, Leibke?"

"I came to see you," the son replied. He was a twelve-year-old boy, a real street kid, a right proper prankster. He had brought food with him. For more than a day now his father had remained in the Shtiebel. Even in normal times the cemetery attendant was often assailed by a black, depressing funk. Perhaps it was due to the wound he had suffered to his head during the First World War near Premissel. Ginsburg would spend the days during which he was thus afflicted in the Shtiebel, sleeping on two benches placed side by side. They would bring him food from the house. This time Leibel had brought warm soup, bread and tomatoes, along with a bottle of milk and bread with butter.

"Father!" he said. "I'm going to sleep here this time. They're shooting outside."

"Does your mother know?"

"Yes, I discussed it with her."

Truth be told, Leibke had come here to seek shelter in the shadow of his father. What did he have back in the house, among the women and little children?

¹ Mincha - the afternoon prayers.

Evening began to fall. Ginsburg washed his hands and ate the soup. During the meal Leibke told him what was new. The eyes, eyebrows, and hair of the boy were blacker than black – only his teeth shone white. Most of the Jewish homes were bolted shut, and the shutters on the windows were all sealed. Word was that almost all of them had moved to Zayar. The rumor had spread that the Germans were going to enter the town via the train tracks, and so it would be better to stay far away from the station and the center of town. Itzik Slutsky's wife had cried bitterly when they had left their house and fruit trees behind. Leibel was quite familiar with the fruit in the garden at the Slutskys. Aside from apples, there were plums, apricots, and pears. There was more news: the neighbor Karpenko had said to Tzipa Lea today: "Now you're going to give me back the vegetable garden. You better save your lives." But Leibke was not afraid of Karpenko, he was not afraid of the Germans either. The fascists were not going to get him – that was ridiculous! Right, father?

Evening began to fall. "Go see if the stars have come out, Leibke." Leibke cautiously opened the outer door. His eyes embraced the horizon, scanning the clouded heavens. But even if the stars had come out, the clouds were blocking the view. The sound of the trees rustling could be heard, as they chased after one another, and reached the ears of the boy. The thick forest covered the slope of the riverbank on the near side, where tombstones reared their heads in the dark, like mute souls mourning in silence. The far bank was covered in sand, and grazing pastures stretched out beyond, pastures and solitary trees, with their many naked branches. A green flare rose to the heavens, illuminated the area around the bridge for a moment, and then went out. The shooting and bombing began once again. Leibke stepped back inside the Shtiebel, closing the door behind him.

"No, father, I can't see the stars. It's cloudy out."

Ginsburg began *Ma'ariv*¹ prayers. But what was he doing, the madman? It was neither Shabbat nor a holiday today, and yet, as though it was not enough that he had wrapped himself in his tallit, he

¹ Ma'ariv – the evening prayers.

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had also donned his white *kittel*¹, opened the doors of the Ark and begun invoking divine judgment and mercy: "May the Lord have pity and forgive our sins and not destroy us..."

He was celebrating Yom Kippur today, the holiest Sabbath of the year! Tears streamed from his eyes, dampening his black beard, in which certain strands of old age had begun to flicker of late.

All that night and the next morning the battle continued to rage in Hadiach. On the seventeenth of September the Germans entered the town. At the house where the Feigins were staying Vasya was the first to break the foul news.

"Mother, the fascists are coming!" - the child's voice could be heard saying. He stood in the hallway peeking through a crack in the shutters.

With a trembling heart the women stepped over and peeked out as well. Haim Yakov did not leave his spot. From this point on he would keep out of sight – that was what Pesya had ordered. He had a very Jewish look, and it was imperative that he not risk his life. He would lay low somewhere, in the hopes that 'out of sight' he would manage to remain 'out of mind'.

Through the window Tamar saw three German soldiers in the neighboring yard, armed from head to toe. They were terrifying giants with huge boots, armed with rifles and hand grenades. In the neighboring yard a military kitchen was emitting its smoke. An officer stepped into the yard and shouted something in a foreign language, shouting and pointing with his hand. It seemed that this yard was deemed suitable for stationing a piece of heavy artillery. About a half hour later the kitchen was moved, and the big gun was placed along the slope. It soon began to fire away. With each shot the earth trembled, the windows sank within their frames, and the entire house seemed to virtually fall to pieces.

The day passed, limping along on its wounded legs. The doors and shutters were closed tight, not a soul came or went. Haim Yakov Feigin

¹ Kittel - a white cotton robe worn by Orthodox Jews only on unique occasions, such as Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Passover Seder.

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remained hidden in the attic, his lips whispering selections from Psalms. Ulyana Mazurok crossed herself with each shot fired from the big gun. The house was shut up. All the houses were shut up and locked tight.

The women of Hadiach shrank back and cringed.

Chapter 2.5

If we were to step back into the labyrinth of time, then in that yard there, where the two warring neighbors Aharon Ginsburg and Serafim Karpenko now lived, we might find Abraham Liobertov, one of the heads of the Jewish community in town, who had once lived in the house with the fancy façade, which had been passed down to him from his ancestors. Liobertov was a cattle merchant, but he also did not shun the swine business. The Poltava region was rich with cattle and swine. Liobertov would send off wagon after wagon of living merchandise into the big cities – both within Russia and abroad.

Previous authors have already told the story of the generations that lived quietly in the Jewish communities prior to the Revolution. And so, I will cut to the chase here. I need but make mention the name of the young Hassid Nachman Choroshinsky, one of Liobertov's assistants, who served this prominent citizen for many years. Choroshinsky lived with his young wife Shifra in a small shabby house, that stood in Liobertov's yard; behind the house there stretched a little patch of soil, and it too belonged to the landlord.

Shifra came from the village of Shyshaky, located along the banks of the Psel, and from the time she was a little girl she had been accustomed to working the land. This village girl began tending to the vegetables in the little plot of land. Active hands require labor and Liobertov was not in the habit of handing out great riches to his assistants. Nachman Choroshinsky was more of a Hassid than a businessman, and other than living rent-free and being given a drop of money, he did not receive a single thing from Liobertov. The vegetables were therefore hardly superfluous.

And so, the years passed by, filled with minor dramas. Mazal Tov! Little Mira appeared in this world of *tohu wa-bohu*, then the nineteenth century ended, and at the start of the twentieth century Tzipa Lea saw the light of day as well. Their mother Shifra was the very life of the household. Little by little the girls grew up. They were quiet, hard-

working girls. A few more years passed and Mirka, followed by Tzipa Lea, became faithful assistants to their mother.

Aharon Ginsburg arrived in Hadiach towards the end of the year 1916. Liobertov was still Liobertov back then, and Choroshinsky was Choroshinsky – while Czar Nicholas, may his name be erased, was an enemy and oppressor of the Jews. And so, as fate would have it, Aharon Ginsburg, who was twenty-six at the time, was taken in by Nachman Choroshinsky. This young, dark widower soon joined the ranks of the Hassids in Hadiach, and a few years passed before he felt a certain lightening of the load of heavy stones that sat upon his heart. In the year 1920 a wave of typhus swept through Hadiach, and members of the Hassidic community were afflicted as well. Nachman Choroshinsky took sick, and about a week later he was laid to rest.

It was then arranged by the matchmaker – though perhaps the girls' mother Shifra had a hand in things as well – and Aharon Ginsburg and Mira Choroshinsky were married. There isn't much to tell about the young wife, may she rest in peace. One after another the children began to emerge. New souls arrive, and old souls are taken away – that is the order that the Great Lord has imposed upon this world of His. Grandma Shifra's hands were always full, and in the end, she buckled under the burden of the little hardships of running the household. And so here we are now accompanying Shifra to the afterlife.

There is no end to the many changes that take place beneath the sun. The tale is told rather quickly, but the years pass by quite slowly, and they are filled with many minor matters, and an endless procession of events. What, for example, happened in the end to Abraham Liobertov, that leader of the Jewish community of Hadiach? When the Revolution arrived, the sun ceased to shine at people like Liobertov. The wealthy people were hit hard all over the country, and the iron fist touched down in Hadiach as well. The Department of Education took up residence at the fancy home of Liobertov. And so, the years flowed on by. In that shack way back in the yard the Ginsburg family lived, and in the big house up front clerks worked hard at improving the people's education in Hadiach and its environs, as the pens scratched away, the calculators clacked, and the sounds of Ukrainian and Russian rang out.

Towards the end of the twenties a new director of the Regional Department of Education arrived in Hadiach – Serafim Ivanovich Karpenko. His physical appearance has already been described above.

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His father had been a high-ranking officer in the army of the Czar. During the years of the civil war General Karpenko had fought under Denikin, and when the White army was defeated, he escaped abroad with his wife and daughters. His son Serafim, who had then completed his university studies in Kharkov, was employed at the time as a secondary school teacher. His wife, Margarita Fridrichovna, was employed at the same school. During the Revolution this couple of teachers remained unharmed, and Karpenko got quite good at pretending. In 1924, after the death of Lenin, the Communist Party announced the massive Party enrolment campaign, and Karpenko was admitted as a member of the Party. In the years when battles were waged against any divergences to either the left or the right, when people were imprisoned en masse, and many heads rolled, Karpenko hewed to the Golden Mean, following the party line of the Central Committee. And though his origins prevented him from rising too high in the ranks, he yet obtained decent appointments within the Department of Education. Documents upon documents, orders, spinelessness in the face of your superiors and an iron fist in the face of your subordinates – this was how Karpenko functioned in the field of Education.

When he and his wife arrived in Hadiach, they were assigned a room on a temporary basis at the Department Headquarters. However, Karpenko was not one to be satisfied with a single room. He labored for quite a while before getting his office transferred to another building that was somewhat less comfortable, and the entire fancy home, that had once belonged to Abraham Liobertov, now came into the possession of Karpenko. After redoing the house from the ground up, at the State's expense, the couple settled in to the house with aristocratic expansiveness. Aharon Ginsburg and his family continued to live in the shack out in the yard, tending to the vegetable garden and barely getting by. Tzipa Lea was still a girl at the time, and she was employed in a Cooperative Workshop making socks. Her salary barely covered her own needs.

A few years later Karpenko was appointed to the position of Principal of the local High School in Hadiach. Karpenko's wife, Margarita Fridrichovna, who came from a German Colony in the South, taught German at the school. This bespectacled, swollen-limbed woman was fond of order and cleanliness in everything. At her mother's house she had handled the domestic chores and tended to the yard, including a

flower garden, and a vegetable garden. As she was childless, she had more than enough free time on her hands. When Serafim Ivanovich moved into the fancy house, he was certain that the little plot of land behind the yard would also come into his possession. And yet it turned out that the right of ownership belonged to the dark-haired Jew who lived with his noisy family in that shabby shack deep in the yard.

And so, we have come to the tale of the origins of the friction between Karpenko and the Ginsburg family. Two neighbors are often bound to descend together into the whirlpool of quarrels and disputes. Karpenko did not look kindly on this Jewish family that had inherited Liobertov's garden. How could such a thing be? Here was Karpenko, on the one hand, a responsible Soviet worker, and there was Ginsburg on the other hand, a dubious devout Jew, with a passel of filthy kids – I mean, there you have it! No, Karpenko was not going to allow them to muck up this proper Soviet backyard, he was going to throw them out!

But what do you know? Karpenko took Ginsburg to court over the vegetable garden, and he lost the case. The Soviet authorities are not in the habit of harming the children of their workers. There were six kids at the time in the Ginsburg home, and Tzipa Lea was employed at a workshop, so Karpenko emerged quite disappointed.

The years pass by, as minor celebrations and major tragedies rain down on the mere mortals of this earth. Aharon Ginsburg was widowed a second time. A little while later, Tzipa Lea inherited the place of her sister Mira, and the children once again began popping out one after the other. The Ginsburg family had to hold on tight to that vegetable garden.

For a few years now, the quarrel between the two homes had not ceased for an instant. Only Frosya, Karpenko's maid, a forty-year-old woman, took no part in the fighting, and from time to time she would even kindly greet one of the little kids. However, the Karpenko couple displayed a rather open hatred for the members of the Ginsburg clan. We have no way of knowing what the party member Karpenko pronounced in the privacy of his own home, but Margarita Fridrichovna was incapable of holding herself back and often hurled such sweet expressions at the Ginsburg children as 'Jewish runts', and 'filthy Rabbis'. Golda was a quiet girl, just like her departed mother before her, whereas Nachman, Hasya, Sarka, and Leibel could not resist responding to the evildoers in kind. The dark folds of depression had never taken up

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residence in the souls of these merry pranksters, and they were neither given to maintaining any great silence. 'Hunchbacked devil' – this was the nickname for Serafim Ivanovich that often emerged from the mouths of this group of kids, while 'ugly fatso' was the nickname reserved for Fridrichovna. The Ginsburg children had no shortage of nicknames in their repertoire, and they were neither in the habit of voicing them in a whisper. Should they happen to be playing soccer in the yard, it was not out of the question that the ball might hit Karpenko's window. If the spotted cow headed out early in the morning on her way to join the herd, then a particularly deep 'moo' would be directed at the shuttered windows of Karpenko's home. No, these little children, and their spotted cow as well, showed absolutely no respect towards the couple responsible for disseminating of the Education in Hadiach and its surroundings.

The tale is told rather quickly, but the years pass by quite slowly. In this yard here as well, where we are currently looking in, the years passed one by one. Serafim Ivanovich harbored a deep hatred in his heart for this group of dark-haired, impertinent Jewish children. Aharon Ginsburg and Tzipa Lea would often reprimand the little kids, but the kids refused to heed their parents' authority, and the relations between the two families did not improve at all over the years.

And so, we have come to September 1941. The town was taken over by the Germans, and Karpenko became a major player. Serafim Ivanovich was appointed the *Burgermeister*¹ of Hadiach. Margarita Fridrichovna was also assigned some role by those agents of evil.

Things had turned harsh and bitter for the Jews; harsh and bitter times had come for the family of Aharon Ginsburg! Karpenko was not going to let the moment slip away.

It was the autumn season, and the basement was full of potatoes and vegetables, and wood had also been chopped and set aside for the winter – in theory, they ought to be able to survive, were it not for Karpenko. He would not give them any respite. It was Shapiro's opinion that the Ginsburg family ought to immediately move someplace else. Many of the Jewish homes were empty. The Ginsburg family might

¹ Burgermeister - Mayor of town (German).

move, for example, into the Aronson home. They should move in secret, so that Karpenko did not get wind of it.

Shapiro said these things in the Shtiebel. The cemetery was not far from Zayar. Most of the Jews, including Haim Yakov Feigin, were afraid to step outside. Yet there was Shapiro, that invalid Jew, who, so long as his heart still beat within, went dragging himself through the swamp of Hadiach, going from house to house, offering advice, support, and comfort – as though he had indeed become the leader and guide of the Jewish community in times of trouble. And so, Shapiro made his way to the Shtiebel as well, and he had a conversation with Aharon Ginsburg.

Yet behold the wonder of it all – Ginsburg, that hot-tempered Hassid, was now heeding the soft voice of Shapiro. Leibke was sent to fetch Mordechai the coachman. Ginsburg's luck held, and they found the old man at home. In a flash the horses were harnessed, and shortly thereafter we see the wagon standing outside the basement of the Ginsburg home. They are quickly loading up the potatoes and vegetables, along with barrels of pickled cabbage and cucumbers. Karpenko and his wife were not at home at the time, they were busy working at the office – and if not for that fact, it would have been quite difficult for the Ginsburgs to manage to secretly move all their vegetables, furniture, and belongings to the Aronson home.

The house was emptied out. Ginsburg nailed up two diagonal boards to the outside of every window and door. Leibke lent him a hand. Now the final call could be heard: "Nu, kids!" The members of the Ginsburg family left the shack behind. Darkness froze in the rooms, as it covered up a certain Jewish scent, a fragrance that was rather close to the heart, a somewhat sour scent, filled with warmth – the fragrance of a house that had been populated through several generations with adults and children. Now the warmth dissolved, was sheared off, the same way it departs from the body of a human being once they've died. These walls had heard their fair share of laughter and heartfelt sighs down through the years. Now this shack was left to its own devices, as the indifferent wings of autumn began to spread over all.

And so, we are leaving this orphaned home behind. Quite a few homes were orphaned during those years in the Jewish communities throughout the diaspora.

Old Pesya looked around and found just the right moment to go

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and get sick – precisely in Zayar, at the Mazurok home! She had a high fever. During these hard times it was not easy to find a proper doctor and medication. And so Shlomo Shapiro stepped once more onto the stage. He brought over Doctor Engertov, who had remained in Hadiach due to his advanced age. It was pneumonia! They got hold of some medication, but life continued to get more and more complicated day by day. As things now stood, Haim Yakov and Tamar had to take care of the domestic chores. Tamar handled the cooking, washed the dishes, and put the rooms in order. Haim Yakov was her assistant.

Tamar had no great experience running a household. Ksenya looked on with those piercing eyes of hers, but Ulyana's face as well was no longer what it had been just a few days earlier. Only the boy Vasya lived in his own little world, completely unaware of the severe problems that were now facing the adults.

Haim Yakov had now become both a literal and proverbial woodcutter and water-bearer. He had never been too fond of pulling out his wallet, but now he was in no position to be stingy, and so he gave generously. Ulyana was the one who went to the market every day. Little by little the market was returning to normal. The Soviet currency was still good, but it was getting weaker by the day. German marks now began to appear, along with gold and silver coins from the times of the Czar, and more and more goods were being bartered.

How was one to persevere and get by? From day one Ksenya had had no patience for the members of the Feigin family that had squeezed into their home. Then the old lady Ulyana's face had gradually gone dark as well. It was hard for a person to be kindhearted for too long. And so, the members of the Feigin family began to have these little darts tossed their way, and then the darts began to dig deeper and deeper until they pierced the very soul. Most of the Jewish families in Zayar sensed the chilly, suspicious looks that the residents of this outlying neighborhood had begun giving them, and the minor incidents between the homeowners and their guests began to increase and get worse. There was word that an SS platoon was soon going to arrive in Hadiach, and the Gestapo was going to get organized and then begin striking the Jews and their Ukrainian protectors. Where was the madman who was willing to die on behalf of the Jews?

Tamar stood before the stove at the Mazurok home cooking soup and cereal for lunch. The kosher foods were prepared in kosher pots,

but this avoidance of the homeowners' own pots did not sit well with them. A neighbor stepped in, and she told them how she had put up two German soldiers in her home. For now, she had no bones to pick with them, they shared their schnapps and canned meat freely with their hosts. The neighbor stepped out; whispers and foul looks went flying about the rooms. Who was responsible for cleaning the rooms? Ksenya believed the Jews had to do all the housework. The day had now arrived when Tamar scrubbed and washed the floors, while Ksenya sat there twiddling her thumbs. Tamar was not yet an expert at washing floors. But the time would yet come when she would be well-versed in this art.

"Give it here!" Ksenya said, as she grabbed the mop, dipped it in the water bucket, and demonstrated for Tamar just how to scrub a floor. "You would have been better off not even starting the job, it isn't fit for those pristine hands of yours."

Her lip curls, and her harsh eyes cast a piercing glance... They continue to take their meals together. Pesya the invalid receives somewhat more delicate fare, but the ladies of the house do not take kindly to this either, even though Pesya hardly even touches the food. How are they to go on? Two German soldiers now enter, asking for some water to drink. Haim Yakov Feigin, with his unkempt beard and those lidless eyes of his, happens to be in the kitchen at just that moment. This blond Jew is going to bring down a disaster on the heads of the ladies of the house one of these days. The soldiers drank and left without doing a thing, but the darts continued to fly and dug in ever deeper.

Pesya is lying in bed, and her temperature is up around forty degrees Celsius. Doctor Engertov and Shlomo Shapiro come over once more. The doctor examined the patient, while Shapiro asked about their spirits, and the relations between them and their host, the landlady. In many of the houses in Zayar friction had broken out between the Jewish guests and their hosts. Many of the latter had taken the Jews in out of covetousness. At first, they figured that the Germans would kill the Jews, and the booty would fall to them. But now the rumor had spread that the Germans were going to punish those who offered shelter to the Jews rather severely – even putting them to death. Many Jewish families had been forced to return to their former homes.

Shlomo Shapiro continued to talk in that measured voice of his. On

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the other hand, there were also some reassuring rumors. A few German soldiers, who had been asked what would be done with the Jews, had responded that, for now, they were not going to be harmed, and that things might in fact stay that way. Indeed, several Jews had shown up in town. The Berman family had returned to their old residence in Vokzalny Street, and Haya Sarah had begun providing food items on the black market once again. Yitzhak the shoemaker from the Garden alley, a neighbor of the Feigin family, had not only returned to his former domicile, but he had also reopened his workshop, purchased reams of leather, and word was that he intended to make shoes on a rather wide scale.

The two old men left. Pesya lay in bed, burning up, as a faint smile played about her lips. During these difficult times it was not proper to go lying in bed all day, and Pesya was not happy with the fact that her work was being done by other people. Haim Yakov stepped over to her bed and cast a blinking, compassionate eye at his wife. He wrapped her up well in her blanket, gave her a pill to help her sweat out the fever, and whispered: " He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber...."

"Pesya!" he asked. "How are you feeling?"

Pesya replied with a weak, completely exhausted laugh. She started recalling memories that were completely unrelated to the matter at hand, from days long gone by, back when she was still living at her father's house, and Haim Yakov was still a blond boy among the other kids in town. Why had she gotten it into her head to go sifting through all this ancient dust?

Haim Yakov peels potatoes, fetches water from the well, and once more approaches Pesya's bed. He offers her a few words of comfort. There is word that the devil is not that bad after all, for the time being the Germans are not raising a hand to the Jews, and it may well be that better days are just around the corner.

He rests the palm of his hand on her burning forehead. His voice is filled with compassion and emotion. A smile continued to shine in Pesya's face. Her little, wrinkled hand touched Haim Yakov's hand – big and firm and covered with blond hairs. They spoke of ancient trifles, they spoke the language of the withered past! In just a little while all this would drop into the depths of emotions that had been alive so long

ago and sink away into the abyss.

Pesya is sleeping now. Ksenya Mazurok steps outside and runs into a few of the ladies from the neighborhood. They converse in the Ukrainian dialect of Poltava, and they have plenty to talk about. Their lives as well are shattered. Their husbands and sons are off in the Red Army. In Hadiach, Veprik, and Sary there have been incidents of violence and plunder. There is word that they have begun searching for Jews. These people are not going to be left alive, and all their possessions will be confiscated by the Germans. They tell of Petro Kravchenko and Trofim Yashchuk...

Yes, some folks have begun taking matters into their own hands. Petro, for example, broke into a house whose Jewish residents had escaped to the east and grabbed a lot of stuff, including pots, furniture, and clothing. They've also heard that Trofim Yashchuk went digging and found the hidden treasure of some rich Jew. Some people are truly lucky! As if it's not enough that these fools of ours here in Zayar have not raised their hands to the Jews, they've even gone and given them shelter, despite the danger.

"Ladies, what are you talking about?" comes the voice of one of the women. "Do you really think that if there weren't any Jews in the world you would all be sitting pretty under the Germans? Think of all the troubles they brought with them back in the First World War!"

But no one sides with this woman. Such talk is considered rather dangerous. No one has any love for the Germans. But you must stay silent on that score.

Ksenya Mazurok goes back home. She sees that blond Jew there, Haim Yakov Feigin. She sees Pesya, sleeping, rolling around all day in bed. And then Tamar is always underfoot. She begins whispering with her mother.

It is hard, so hard for a person to remain kindhearted for too long. And so, a rather ugly conversation takes place between Ulyana Mazurok and Haim Yakov Feigin.

"Yefim Issakovich, it's my advice that you ought to head back into town, to your own home. I've heard that the Germans are not doing anything to the Jews. On the contrary, there have even been cases where they have plundered the possessions of ordinary Ukrainians."

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"But my old lady is sick, Ulyana, where are we supposed to go now?"

But Ulyana refuses to let him soften up her heart. Enough already! She worked for a few years at the factory making wine and mead. Yefim Issakovich knew his job quite well, and he never treated his workers badly. But they had after all agreed at the outset that his family would stay at her home for just a few days. Now there was word that the Germans were going to shoot anyone who was harboring Jews in their home.

And then she added apologetically, with an ultimatum that left no room for discussion:

"Yefim Issakovich! If you all won't leave, then we ourselves will be forced to go."

Foul and bitters times! Haim Yakov was at a loss, his blond face was focused and downcast. He sent Tamar to ask Shapiro for his advice. And Shapiro didn't hesitate but came straightaway to see Haim Yakov. He walked through the streets of Zayar without a drop of fear.

What an odd Jew! He came over with all his groans and pains. He sat down next to Pesya's bed. They spoke a bit about her illness. The fever had come down, but the illness had wrought havoc on the old lady. Her face was shriveled, and seemed to have gotten older all at once, looking a rather waxen yellow. Haim Yakov and Shapiro stepped off into a corner. Feigin told him of Mazurok's warning.

"You must go back to town!" Shapiro decided.

Shapiro had his reasons. The Germans had taken over the entire town, right along with Zayar. The initial days of panic had already passed. The bombing had stopped, and life was returning to normal. True, the new Burgermeister Karpenko was a cruel dog, and he was enlisting the very rabble, those haters of the Jews, in the Polizei. It was also true that they were apparently awaiting the arrival of a German officer who would organize the Gestapo in Hadiach, and then rather harsh times were expected to come for the Jews. However, on this score, Hadiach and Zayar were one and the same, and so they might as well head back home. If the landlady was hustling them out, then they better dress Pesya in a heavy fur coat, to ensure she didn't catch cold on the way...

Shapiro left. His sparse beard, that very shadow of a beard of his, was raised up to the heavens, and his feet went kneading and kneading away in the mud. He walked from one house to the next, and, wonder of wonders: not a single soul did him any harm.

But there were new troubles! Mordechai the coachman had fallen prey to the arbitrary whims of the police. He had managed to save his life, but his 'children' – Pavlik and Ryzhyi – along with the harness and the wagon, had all been confiscated, they were gone for good. The Burgermeister Karpenko was behind it all. From the time he had become aware that the Ginsburg family had left their shack for some unknown destination, he was on the warpath. Somebody told him that the old man Mordechai's horses had been the ones to help move the Ginsburg family. Mordechai was a well-known figure in Hadiach, and Karpenko knew him as well. And so, we now find two police officers in Mordechai's yard, where they have been sent to whisk the old man down to see the Burgermeister, along with his horses and wagon. The *Kommandatura*¹ was in the center of town, not far from the hotel, facing the public park, in the building that formerly housed the Regional Soviet Council. What an odd sight! Mordechai – at the Kommandatura, in the office of the Burgermeister Karpenko. And so, we find the old man in the bandits' lair, with his shawl on his shoulders, filled with confusion and concern. However, the concern he hid deep in his heart.

"Nu you, old dog!" Karpenko turned to him. "Say goodbye to your horses. You've laid eyes on them for the last time. We're confiscating them."

The Burgermeister sat there in his armchair, and there was something unnatural in the way his back was tensed. The hunchbacked devil stared at Mordechai, and Mordechai stared back at that hunchbacked devil.

"How can that be, Mister Burgermeister? The horses are all I have. What am I to do now?"

"Where did you take Ginsburg?" Karpenko's squeaky voice could be heard asking.

¹ Kommandatura - military government headquarters (German).

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Mordechai remained silent, silent and lost in thought.

"Where did you take Ginsburg?" The two gazes crossed paths once more. The fear now crawled and squeezed its way into the room.

"I can't recall the place," said the old man Mordechai. The Burgermeister rang a bell. A police officer came in with a whip in his hand.

"Ah nu, give him five hot ones!" Karpenko ordered. The officer swung the whip and struck the old Jew in the face and across the back. "Now then, where did you take Ginsburg?"

As though through a fog, Mordechai could hear Karpenko's squeaky voice. "Give him five more!" There was silence. The whip continued to come down. Mordechai was enveloped in darkness, as he fell.

A little while later he found himself outside. His face was covered in blood, and he wiped it off with his handkerchief, but the blood continued to spurt out. He dragged himself home, back to his wife Basya. There he would wash up and lie down in bed.

And so, Mordechai the coachman came home on foot without his horses, without his wagon and harness, naked as the day he was born. And the wounded old man lay down in his bed and listened to the sighs of his old wife Basya, as she paced around the room on tiptoe.

Solomon and Binyamin were also doomed to drink from the bitter cup of hardship. The same day that they set out from Hadiach for Okhtyrka with the driver Adamchuk there was quite a mass of people on the move through that region of Poltava. The road was buzzing with wayward refugees, soldiers who had been cut off from their units, and all sorts of different vehicles. Their vehicle got as far as Pavlovka, and from there they headed in the direction of Zinkov. In Pavlovka there were widespread rumors that Zinkov had fallen into the Germans' hands, but Solomon did not believe the rumors. What a shame that was!

The vehicle was heading down the road between Pavlovka and Zinkov. Solomon and Adamchuk sat up in the driver's cabin. Binyamin, as before, sat in the rear compartment of the vehicle. Suddenly a group of motorcycles appeared in the road. "The Germans! The Germans!" Shots pierced the air. Off on the horizon a row of vehicles appeared all

filled with German soldiers. Fortunately, our friends noticed a narrow path that led off the main road and disappeared into the forest. "Adamchuk! Turn here! Quickly!" Solomon ordered. The vehicle turned sharply onto the path, and Binyamin was almost tossed from the rear compartment. "Quickly! Quickly! Step on it, Adamchuk!"

Adamchuk pressed down on the accelerator. They were now doing 60 km/h. At that speed both the vehicle and your body could very well get dashed to pieces. "*Halt! Halt!*" There were shouts, and shots fired. A few motorcycles gave chase to the vehicle as it dove deeper into the forest.

But what was the matter with Adamchuk? He must have lost his mind! The car was slowing down and coming to a stop. "*Halt!*" The motorcycles were getting closer. Solomon cautiously opened the door of the truck and jumped to the ground. "Binyamin! Adamchuk! Follow me!" Binyamin grabbed his military coat and jumped out of the vehicle as well. "*Haende hoch! Halt!*"¹ Binyamin ran between the pines. Where was Solomon? Lieutenant Solomon Feigin was standing behind a pine tree and aiming his gun at the motorcycles. Shots were fired. Binyamin did not have a weapon. He kept running down the slope, past pine trees, bushes, grass, and pine cones. Run, run! Farther and farther! The shouts and shots kept getting further away. There was the distant rumble of a car engine. Suddenly everything went silent. There was only the forest and darkness; and the indifferent cry of a bird. Now he could slow down, rest a bit. Binyamin spread his coat at the foot of a tall pine tree and lay down on it. His heart was still on the verge of bursting its cage, his back was drenched in sweat, and he was breathing hard. Now the feeling of being all alone began to come over him. He had to find Solomon and Adamchuk.

He was unable to locate the path all at once. He hid behind a thick tree, looked this way and that, cringed and folded himself up, then crossed the space between each pine tree and the next at a run. Suddenly he spotted Solomon half-sitting, half-lying down, in a rather strange position.

That was the last thing they needed – Solomon was wounded!

¹ Hands up! Stop! (German).

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True, it was a minor wound – the bullet had hit him in the flesh of his leg. But he had lost a lot of blood, and he was now wrapping his wound with a strip of cloth that he had torn from his shirt. Binyamin rushed over to him and assisted him.

Ah, things were getting complicated! The rumors had proven true. Solomon and Binyamin were surrounded, and they had nothing other than their military coats to keep their bodies warm. It was prohibitive for them to be taken captive. First and foremost, the enemy was eliminating Jews. Adamchuk and the vehicle had disappeared – the two of them had both fallen into the hands of the Germans, it would seem.

Solomon tried to get up from the ground. His leg was in pain. Due to the loss of blood he felt dizzy. The provisions of food had been left behind in the vehicle. What were they to do? They had to move. Binyamin supported Solomon as the latter limped along.

The two friends walked slowly down the forest path. Where to? It was certain that the Germans would soon enter Hadiach. The young men took a moment to weigh the various options. Perhaps it would be better for them to head east, with the intention of crossing the front lines? Where was the front now? They had to make progress slowly, walking at night and sleeping during the day. The winter was on its way. Solomon's leg required medical treatment. If the Germans or the police got a hold of them, they would be shot immediately.

They turned in the direction of Hadiach. Solomon, the commander of the topographic platoon, still had a detailed map in his hands. He also had a compass. In Hadiach – there was his son, his parents, and Tamar. He was wounded, and progressed with difficulty, supported by his friend Binyamin.

They had a long way to go, going slowly on foot, without any food, moving cautiously and worriedly through a region where the cruel enemy reigns. They walked at night, taking care that no one should notice them in the settled areas. All the same, they were forced to beg for food at the farmers' houses. And Binyamin was the one to do this. He looked less like a Jew. His beard, which had grown during those days, was blond, and his eyes – were blue-grey, his accent was pure Russian, and only his Jewish nose attested to his origins. He would leave Solomon in the forest, and approach one of the villages, observing how things stood in the village from his hiding place; then he would pick out

an isolated house, walk up cautiously, and knock on the door. In most cases the lady of the house would feed him and give him something for his wounded friend back in the forest.

And so, a few days passed. The nights were cold, but they walked at night, and so they did not feel the cold all that much. But then the days turned cold as well. They would sleep during the day, in a hidden spot, among the bushes and pine trees. The rain, when it fell, hardly skipped over them. Many times, they would wake up from their sleep, trembling from the cold and the damp. But their greatest trouble – was the lice. It was quite a few days since they had had a bath. Along the way they had washed their underwear once, without soap, in a stream in the forest, but afterwards the lice had gone right on eating away at them with even greater force.

However, it is the way of all living things to adapt to the conditions of their existence, and twenty-five is hardly a ripe age for coming down with serious colds or illnesses. The two men walked along in the direction of Hadiach, and the closer they got, the more Binyamin was assailed by rather strange memories. They would come to him at dawn, as they lay down to sleep. His mattress consisted of branches plucked from the bushes, leaves from the year before, pine needles, and the beaten autumn vegetation. Atop this sorrowful, fragrant pile of detritus they would lie down and cover themselves with their coats. Binyamin would close his eyes. Distant shadows, sights, and figures would appear before him. He would begin rubbing himself – those cursed vermin! A light snoring could be heard, Solomon had fallen into a deep slumber. But Binyamin was not sleeping. Ancient figures from the life of that little town in Volyn rose before his eyes. Uncle Hanich, may his soul rest in peace, wagged his finger at him, warning him in a whisper: "Binyamin, pick your head up! You're a scion of the Alper family, after all. They were experts in the laws that govern troubles and hard times!" Those Hebrew books, the legacy of his uncle Hanich, were filled with the stories of many different calamities that had befallen the Jews throughout their history in the various lands of their exile. Once more the blood-filled years had returned.

Glasha's flaxen head now appeared. The two of them were walking along the forest path, and the bicycle was rolling along between them. Light and shadow trembled between the trees, strips of blue sky bent down overhead, and they were enveloped by the scent of the forest and

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the foliage. Binyamin responds to Glasha's question, and this time he is saying rather bold things, his words filled with amity and emotion. "Yes, Glasha, I'll be back here next year. Day and night – I think if you, I think of you all the time." There is silence. She walks along without saying a word, as a tiny vein pounds in her tanned neck. "Glasha, I thought about you the entire time. It's a strange thing, just how deeply you've become etched in my heart." The girl's face is covered in crimson, as the vein goes beating back and forth. Her flaxen hair stands out. Now her voice can be heard: "Say that again, uncle Binyamin!" – "You're such a pure girl! Has the forest not adopted you as its own daughter? Be kind to me, Glasha, and allow me to think of you just a little bit." The crimson hue grows deeper, as the girl remains silent, and a grown-up look is frozen in her childish face. "You're making fun of me, uncle Binyamin!"

There is silence and light. Two people are walking along in the forest, with a bicycle in the middle. What silliness! It is cold. The lice are crawling along in two or three different spots. Binyamin scratches himself and slowly falls asleep. Glasha stands there at his head, bending down to him, as her hair flows over his face.

A few hours later he wakes up, and he begins thinking about Glasha once again. Her image clings to him like a leach. Solomon can now be heard yawning.

"What do you think, Solomon – perhaps we ought to first head for Vilbovka? We'll find Glasha there. She can help us get in touch with your folks back in Hadiach."

Solomon has completely woken up now, and stopped yawning too. Binyamin tells him the story of his relationship with this wild girl. How old would she be now? Sixteen – no, over seventeen. The last day of his vacation in Hadiach she had accompanied him up to the bridge. She had stood before him, dressed in her Sunday best, and said: "I'm going to wait for you, uncle Binyamin!"

Solomon asks the questions, and Binyamin responds, and the things he says are light and innocent, silly memories of the heart. Solomon is not asking his questions out of curiosity. They must examine the situation to see if Glasha poses any danger for them. Solomon also has a few non-Jewish acquaintances in Hadiach – Anna Dimitriyevna, for example, that nurse from the hospital...

Binyamin objects with all his might. How could they rely on her,

how could he compare her to Glasha? Glasha would never betray them. Binyamin, would vouch for her.

They took a turn to Vilbovka. It's only a few kilometers away, but Solomon's leg is in pain, and they drag along slowly. "Lean on me a bit more!" says Binyamin. The forest is enveloped in darkness. High above, where the tops of the pines wave silently, does a star occasionally flicker, blinking and wondering at the ways of man down below.

At last, after several days, our young men arrive in Vilbovka at dawn, and they are exhausted, muddy, and bearded. They find themselves a hiding place and lie down on the ground. Now they must keep an eye on Nastasya's house, all-seeing and unseen. They will only reveal their hiding place to Glasha. Solomon recommends that they work in shifts. One of them will sleep, while the other remains awake, taking turns every four hours.

Solomon curls up in his military coat and falls into a deep slumber. Little by little the autumn dawn bursts forth in the forest. Nastasya's house is slumbering right nearby. "Come out, Glasha!" Binyamin fixes his eyes on the porch, staring straight ahead without blinking. "Glasha, come out!" He gathers all the strength in his soul, murmuring those words like a prayer. They go running about among the pines and the bushes, flowing onward and onward, until they reach Glasha.

The door opens, and a girl appears, all wrapped up. How can he get her attention? Binyamin begins to softly hum the age-old tune:

*The sun has gone down, evening is here,
Come out to me, oh love of my heart!*

The girl turns her head in the direction of the sound. In the early light of dawn Binyamin is seeing her face for the first time since the last year. The girl has changed a lot. Her eyes! The eyes are different now – they are serious, focused, filled with life and sorrow, the eyes of a grown-up woman. He continues humming away. Like a lodestone, the tune draws the girl in. She comes closer, little by little. "Glasha!" Binyamin gets up. "Come here, Glasha! Don't you recognize me?"

"Is that you, Binyamin?" Her eyes express deep interest, interest and astonishment. Her lips have parted, revealing her tiny, bold teeth, with a little space in between each one. Her flaxen hair is wrapped in a grey kerchief and looks darker now. "Is that you, Binyamin?"

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She looks at the soldier in the crumpled military coat and muddy boots. In his pale, exhausted face, covered as it is with blond whiskers, a sorry smile sits frozen.

"Yes, Glasha, it's me. And my friend Solomon Feigin is over there. We've come a long way to get here. My friend's leg is wounded. Are there any Germans in the area?"

Glasha shakes her head no. She looks at Binyamin's face for a long time, after having so looked forward to seeing him all year long. He has come to her now from far away, asking for shelter and assistance. She takes his hand in her long, warm fingers. "Is that really you, Binyamin?" Her voice has changed somewhat, it is deeper and huskier now.

Three human beings hold a rather long consultation. First, they must change out of their uniforms into civilian clothing. Glasha must head into town, to the Feigin home, and bring back clothing, bandages, and iodine. A few items of food and some soap wouldn't hurt either. For now, Glasha recommends that the young men hide in the attic, in the isolated wing where Nastasya and Glasha live in the summer, when the vacationers come. They must make that move during the night. There is no need for her mother Nastasya or the Edelman family to know anything. They are to pass the time in the forest until nightfall. They also must have a proper bath – there is no escaping the vermin.

Meanwhile the morning is dawning. The late October sun is trying to liberate itself from the clouds and appear in the east. "Wait a moment, guys, and I'll try to bring you something!" Glasha disappears, and a few minutes later she brings with her a pot of warm cereal and two slices of bread. The three of them sit down to eat together. May you be blessed, Glasha! Solomon writes a short note to his mother.

Glasha is heading off. Binyamin gets up to accompany her a few paces. The sun has come out. Glasha stands among the bushes for a moment. Binyamin comes up to her. This time he is no longer uncle Binyamin; now she is the caretaker. "Wait here in the forest, I'll find you!" Her face is serious and cloudy, but those kind eyes of hers appear between the clouds. She moves away at a quick pace. Tears appear in Binyamin's eyes.

How sorely in need of a drop of warmth a mere mortal is, just a drop of soul as he stands at the edge of the abyss!

Chapter 2.6

Haya Sarah Berman's dreams of returning the family to its former glory had not been in vain. Since the Soviet army had been pushed out of Hadiach it seemed to this woman that her dreams were on the verge of being realized. True, she never got involved in politics, but the Bolsheviks' time had passed, and Haya Sarah was not in the least bit sorry. Twenty-four years ago, the Bolsheviks had risen to power, eliminated that glorious colonial store and established a new way of life. And *oy*, what a sorry life it was! Haya Sarah longed for things to return to their former ways, as in the days of her uncle Haim Zaidel. She figured that the Germans would look kindly on anyone with initiative, people who might open new shops or establish various enterprises. However, she had yet to wait and see just what would be done with the Jews.

But waiting – did not mean just sitting around on your hands. A man needed food, and it was not every Jew that now dared to show their nose in public in the market. The Jews preferred to purchase their provisions at the home of Haya Sarah Berman. And so, in that narrow pantry in Vokzalny Street, we now find sacks, and bags, and crates, and packages, and bottles, and big-bellied Haya Sarah is there toiling away and working hard, busy negotiating sales, and chattering freely, gathering rumors and giving rise to them in equal measure.

Ho, the rumors, the intrigues! The worst ones seem to sprout wings as quick as lightning. But in times of trouble a man needs some positive news, and Haya Sarah is not at all stingy when it comes to offering such comfort.

Indeed, like that fly in Titus' head in the Talmud, the idea of opening a store was gnawing away at that woman's mind. And so, we see her donning her Sabbath dress and heading out to survey the center of town. For a long while she looked over the stores, seeing which ones were still standing, which ones had been destroyed, calculating and weighing her options, and drawing her conclusions. Was she insane or

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just plain stupid? Haya Sarah Berman went and chose a spot for her colonial store!

The more deeply Haya Sarah got involved in the black market, the more housework fell on Golda's shoulders. Taking care of Ahuva took up quite a bit of the latter's time both day and night. In just a little while the baby girl was going to be nine months old. Her first teeth had come in, she had spoken her first, sweet word: Ma-ma. Golda invested quite a bit of effort in her daughter. She worked hard and stayed silent, even though she was troubled by various concerns. Two months had passed, now three, and yet her period still had not come. Golda did the calculations, worried, and suffered. She took all the housework on herself, cooking, sweeping, washing the floors, walking around for a good long while with Ahuva in her arms. She had heard that in such circumstances, a lot of work can often lead to 'liberation', as it were. But it was all in vain! Children in the Ginsburg family, once they have been destined to emerge into the world, are rather hard to remove from their mother's womb before their proper time has come.

Berman no longer went out to work now because of the hooligans. The barbershop was now a public thoroughfare. Policemen were constantly wandering the streets. Berman helped Golda out a bit with the housework. She has not spoken of her concerns with him. What good would it really do her if that black mood of his went and got even darker than it already was?

There was another worry gnawing away at Golda's heart – the situation in her father's house. Basya, Mordechai the coachman's wife, had come over in secret one day to the Aronson house, where the Ginsburg family was hiding out, and told them of Mordechai's meeting with the Burgermeister Karpenko. She warned them that the Ginsburg family had better hide away quite well from the murderers.

It was an easy thing to say – to remain hidden! But six people – that was not quite like hiding a needle in a haystack. Aside from Ginsburg and Tzipa Lea the house was also filled with Sarka, Leibke, Shimon and Avka. That last child was only eight years old. How could you keep hidden with such a group of little urchins? They had to move Shimon and Avka over to Vokzalny Street. Haya Sarah did not look kindly on the idea – this mother-in-law's money-hungriness was eating away at her. Yet what's more: it was dangerous.

Ah, things! Fights began to break out between the two women. Haya Sarah – had a rather healthy throat on her and a mouth that could produce its share of sharp, stinging phrases. And so, words of blame and scorn concerning the beggar family of that dark cemetery attendant went fluttering about the two rooms, as memories of the lofty lineage of the Berman family began to well up once more. How could one possibly compare all that glory and splendor with the poor family of some Ginsburg?

But what had gotten into Golda, what had happened to that soft, moderate character of hers? Berman looked at his young wife in confused amazement. The innocent dove had turned into a howling wolf! With all her might she protected the two little boys, Shimon and Avka, who would cringe, sorry and dejected, in a corner of the room, as they awaited the outcome of the battle between the two women. And so, we now hear some rather harsh words emerging from Golda's mouth. For shame! No, this time she was going to tell her mother-in-law just what was on her mind! In such harsh times, when the sword hung by a thread over every head, her mother-in-law saw fit to throw her two little brothers out of the house. Over her dead body! What would her mother-in-law lose if the two boys stayed in the house? Nobody was asking her for a thing. She, Golda, will take care of her brothers. She is willing to do all the housework by herself. And as far as food is concerned – you ought to help others out. The times were so foul – who knew if any of them would be left alive?

A stubborn spark had been lit in Golda's dark eyes. When it comes to matters of life and death, Golda was not one to give in. A deep crimson hue blossomed in her cheeks. Berman stared at his young wife with eyes filled with affection. At that moment a customer came in, and Haya Sarah stepped off with the woman into the pantry. Berman walked up to Golda and embraced her in front of the boys. His will was weak, he was incapable of defying his mother's wishes – and yet there was Golda, that little wife of his, daring to do so!

In the end Shimon and Avka remained at the Berman home. Haya Sarah would voice her resentment from time to time, but Golda would then flash her fangs, and the mother-in-law would retreat.

Now Ginsburg and Tzipa Lea were left with only Sarka and Leibke. But did Ginsburg stay out of sight, and did his fear force him to remain sitting at home all the time? If that's what you're thinking, then it's clear

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that you don't know Ginsburg. If he were to hide out at home, what would become of the eternal flame over the grave of the Alter Rebbe? And if, God forbid, the Menorah were to die down – what would become of the Nation of Israel in these times of trouble? You might object: what of Karpenko, that sworn enemy, the very angel of death himself? Ginsburg does not fear bodily suffering. The Alter Rebbe put it well: bodily suffering – is a great benefit for the sinful soul, as it enables one to purify oneself in this world and save one from having to atone for one's sins in *Gehenna*¹.

And so, Ginsburg leaves the house at dawn, when the streets are still empty, the houses are all covered up, all of existence is silent, and the powers of the *Sitra Achra* have not yet begun stirring. And there we see this Jew with his black beard, in which a few white hairs have already begun to flicker, walking silently through the darkness. His shoes wallow in the mud, as the morning star flashes in the heavens overhead, blinking away in that silent language all its own. A chill morning breeze goes wandering through town, rustling, caressing, passing by and then going back over its own tracks. How good it is to be all by oneself with the darkness, the wind, and the morning star – without Karpenko and without the Germans! Ginsburg's lips begin to whisper:

*The wicked watches the righteous and seeks to slay him;
The Lord will not leave him in his hand.*

The man arrives at the cemetery and passes among the headstones – stony remembrances of departed souls. He opens the door to the Shtiebel, removes his shoes, and steps inside. A heavy silence envelops the grave of the Alter Rebbe. The weak Menorah illuminates a small area roundabout, flickering away and speaking to one's heart. The spark of light emerges from the silent Ohel and moves onward and onward through the darkness at dawn, throwing its arms around the world, as it slices through the upper and lower worlds, locating the Hassids wherever they are, and being absorbed into their hearts.

Ginsburg tends to the Menorah, cleaning it and adding more oil. Then he stands there for a little while, wrapped up in the silence. The

¹ Gehenna – from the Hebrew 'Gehinnom', a Biblical term for Hell.

only window in the room is sealed, covered with a black curtain. It is the hour of the morning prayers – a time of compassion and goodwill. Ginsburg prepares himself for the Shacharit prayer. He recalls the words of the Holy Rebbe. A prayer or blessing that is uttered without proper intention – is like a body without a soul. The soul must overcome, it must ignite itself, it must emerge from the prison of the body and pour itself out into the bosom of its Father.

He stares for quite a while at the light of the Menorah and meditates once more on the words of the Rebbe. The sacred light is always rising upwards – that is the very soul of Israel, which desires to separate itself from the body, and cling to its root, to its origin.

The light of the *Ein-Sof* fills the entire world. Material things appear to be dead, but there is light in them. In every world there are an endless array of creations, tens of thousands of levels and categories, and the light of the *Ein-Sof* fills these worlds, giving them life.

Foul times have come upon the Children of Israel. All because of their many sins. But not every man can merit to be a tzaddik, and in this matter man does not have the right to choose.

The fear of God – is not enough. Every Jewish soul has this great love inside it – that is the legacy handed down to us from our forefathers. There is a straight path that extends before every man – where he must awaken and ignite the light of love that is hidden in his heart, must give himself up to God body and soul, particularly when he is reciting the *Shema*¹.

Love – pushes the flesh aside. It is right for a man to abandon all that he has, to give up everything, so that there be nothing to prevent him inside or out – neither body nor soul, not money, not a wife, and not his own children – from clinging to the Blessed Lord.

Rachel is the Congregation of Israel, the source of all souls, and Jacob our forefather awakens tremendous divine compassion on her behalf. 'And he raised his voice' – on high, towards the source of compassion in the upper worlds, 'and he cried' – to awaken divine

¹ Shema - Sh'ma Israel (Hebrew: Hear, Israel) - a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services.

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compassion for all souls, for the very source of the Congregation of Israel.

That was what the Alter Rebbe had said. On tiptoe Ginsburg stepped out into the second room, wrapped himself in his tallit and put on his tefillin and began the Shacharit prayer. In the meantime, the world turned from black to light grey. Outside the Shtiebel one could make out more and more headstones, naked trees, the elongated mounds of the graves, the forest down the slope, and the Psel River. Little by little day began to break.

Day began to break. Cautiously adults and children began to appear in the streets of the town. The rumor had spread that an SS Platoon had arrived in Hadiach. Shlomo Shapiro continues to concern himself with community matters. The financial situation of many of the Jews in Hadiach has crumbled. Food prices have risen, and the money has run out. The situation is particularly difficult for the weak and the solitary among them, such as Reb Dovid the shochet, or Esther the noodle-maker. Reb Dovid, for example, in normal times, would receive a small sum of money from his children, which would enable him to provide for himself. Now the old man was almost completely blind and all contact with his children had been cut off. Who, then, was going to keep an eye on the old man?

Esther the noodle-maker was the oldest member of the Jewish community in Hadiach. Her daughter Nechama was none too young herself. But who needed these two old ladies now? Were they therefore to die of hunger?

And so, Shapiro, the former head of the Hadiach community, stepped in to organize some assistance for the elderly. There we see him walking through the streets of the town. As before, he knows no fear, his plucked beard preceding him, as his cane digs away in the mud. He goes door to door, collecting a little bit at a time. At every home they respond favorably to his request and give generously. Charity shall save one from death!

The situation is getting worse. The Germans are going around accompanied by police officers from house to house, conducting searches and taking everything – both valuables and worthless objects, clothing and rags, household utensils and food items – whatever they can get their hands on. What's to be done? There's only one thing to do:

hide it all! Better even to destroy things than hand them over to the Germans. They won't show any mercy when the truly hard times come. They've already begun dragging people off to forced labor. Old folks can be seen working away from dawn to all hours of the night. Every day might be the one when all hell breaks loose. Shapiro advises people to find hiding places, places where they might seek shelter. There are attics, basements, ruins, and the homes of trusted Ukrainians.

Shapiro continues to drag his way through the mud. He enters the concave house of Esther the noodle-maker. A man has thus come to the home of these two elderly ladies. He hands Nechama some money, so that she can go to Haya Sarah and buy a bit of flour and grease. Old Esther is sitting on a stool by the stove with her cane in her hand. Perhaps the old woman has weakened somewhat, it is hard for her to get up now without the cane and a series of groans. When one has grown old one is no longer drawn with all one's heart towards what life one has left beneath the sun. She sits near the stove and stares at the kettle as it boils and the pot of potatoes cooking there. Nechama is cleaning the room. She stands there, with the broom in her hands, and listens to what Shapiro has to say.

"Ladies!" says Shapiro, as he is about to leave. "One should expect violent riots and plunder very soon. Hide your things and find a good hiding place for yourselves."

Nechama continues to sweep the floor.

"What kind of way is that to sweep, Nechama?" Esther can be heard saying. "Look at all the dust you're kicking up! Spray the floor with water, you dog!"

Esther's harsh words for her daughter are like second nature, and she will continue going on like that until her final hour. As far as hiding places are concerned – Esther is not in need of any advice. There is a square hole in the floor, with a camouflaged wooden cover over it. All you have to do, is to raise the cover, and a ladder leads down to a dry basement underneath the floor. This spot had already been prepared way back by her husband Zerah, may he rest in peace.

A column of steam shoots out of the kettle. The warm scent of cooked potatoes spreads through the room. The two women sit down to eat their spare meal.

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Five people now live in the Garden alley: Grandma and Grandpa, Tamar, Isaac, and the wet nurse Dasha. The woman pulls out a breast for the infant and shares a bit of her warmth with him. A motherly feeling for the orphaned babe beats in the heart of the wet nurse. It may well be that in this cruel world into which the child was born Dasha will serve as his protector.

Grandma Pesya is still considered to be sick, even though her health has greatly improved. Engertov came one day to the Garden alley and took in the wondrous sight – Isaac asleep in Pesya's bed, with the old lady lying by his side and staring at him with a look in her eyes that overflowed with contentment and happiness. Old man Engertov is an experienced physician. He examined the invalid and found that things had changed for the better. That sleeping infant there – was the best of all possible medications! Pesya takes part in putting on the baby's diaper, and she even gets out of bed and does some housework. The old woman's hands are used to always being busy. She is troubled by a bit of a cough at times, but she has no desire to just lie around all day. And so, she goes silently walking through the rooms.

The Jews of Hadiach now have a new matter to keep them occupied – setting up a hiding place. Now that the violent riots have begun to break out and the incidents of plunder and theft have spread through the town, the Jews have begun arranging their hiding places – both for themselves, and for their belongings. It was truly miraculous to see how deeply Shlomo Shapiro had understood and foreseen just what would be needed in that moment! He was a trusted member of the community and numbered among the wise men and leaders of the people. He was wont to say that the congregation in Hadiach was now tiny and sparse, and under the present circumstances it was imperative to try not to stand out, to wrap oneself up in a shawl, to go into hiding, crawl up into the cracks, until the fury passed. Faith and hope! Perhaps the day would come when it would be possible to save oneself in some other manner.

That was what Shlomo Shapiro said. The members of the Feigin household also prepared their hiding places. Haim Yakov demonstrated some rather unique initiative in this area. What was one to do when the devils showed up? First off, they had to take care of Isaac. A secret passage was prepared in the fence out in the yard: a few of the nails were removed, and two of the planks were left hanging there by a

thread – they could thus be moved aside, and one could slip out of the yard. Dasha had to escape first, with the baby, and then Tamar was to escape next. Haim Yakov also set up a rather winning hiding place in the attic. Behind a sealed partition he had created a none-too-large space and outfitted it with a hidden entrance. A person could squeeze in there, and no one would notice. A few items were moved into the hiding place, including clothing and food items – in the event of whatever calamity might befall them.

It was not for nothing that the hiding place had been set up and that they had taken the necessary precautions. For the fateful day had come and certain events were unfolding after all. The members of the Feigin household were not yet aware of all this, but Glasha, Glasha was rushing towards them! With a light step the girl traversed the region between Vilbovka and Hadiach. It was an autumn morning filled with sun and wind. As ever, the wooden bridge stretched over the face of the river. No one gave any thought to this Ukrainian girl, with her grey eyes and her flaxen hair. She entered the Garden alley and passed back and forth before the Feigin home a couple of times. The shutters were all closed and locked from inside, and the gate too was closed and locked. She knocked at one of the shutters.

"Haim Yakov, go have a look and see who is there?" Once more the light knocking can be heard. Haim Yakov and Tamar peek out through a crack.

They open the wicket gate, and Glasha steps inside. The soft Ukrainian tongue now rings out in the room.

"Is Grandma at home?"

Glasha stands there in the dining room looking this way and that. The windows face the yard, and only a single shutter is open. By the woodshed two trees rustles away with their naked branches. The yard is surrounded by a wooden fence. Grandma Pesya is lying on the low sofa. The baby is sleeping next to her in his cradle.

Glasha's grey eyes survey everything rather seriously. All the members of the household are in the room, including Darya Petrovna who has come in from the kitchen. They all stare at the girl.

"I know you!" the talkative Tamar says. "I've seen you in Vilbovka."

Glasha turns to Pesya:

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"Are you the mother of Solomon Yefimovich Feigin?"

"Yes."

"I must speak with you in private."

Haim Yakov, Dasha, and Tamar all step out into the other room. Glasha locks the door, undoes the buttons of her coat, and removes Solomon's letter from inside her blouse.

Pesya reads the note and begins to tremble in shock. So, Solomon did not manage to elude the Germans and return to the Red Army! She pelts Glasha with questions. Where is he? How does he look? What's his story? Is he in a safe place? How is Binyamin doing?

A veritable deluge of questions! Glasha thinks a bit and does not answer all at once. Grandma Pesya considers the girl sitting across from her and speaking so softly. The grandmother trusts her. She has seen plenty during her days on earth, and she has a bit of experience when it comes to reading people's appearance. A girl like that would not deceive you; she hadn't come to extort clothing and food. Solomon would not have placed his letter in the hands of a suspect individual.

Pesya gets up to prepare the package. There are two of Solomon's used suits left in the house, along with underwear, shirts, a hat, an old coat, and a newer coat that is Haim Yakov's. From among the food items she takes bread, grease, grains, onions, and salt. Matches and soap were also not forgotten. Haim Yakov takes part in putting together the package. Darya Petrovna and Tamar have not been told of Solomon's return.

The things are added one by one, and a little pile has formed. How would it be best to carry all this? In a bag! A simple bag that would not catch anyone's eye. They roll up the clothes, the bags of food, and the bread. Glasha's visit has only lasted a half an hour, and there she is leaving with the bag in her hands. Pesya accompanies her to the door. They stand a moment in the hallway, and the old lady kisses the girl's face, kissing her and crying at the same time.

"God will not forget you, girl!" Pesya says. "Things are very bad for us now, for the Jews. Things aren't all that good for the Ukrainians either, but they're literally doing away with the Jews."

Glasha does not respond to the tears. In her mind's eye she sees the two young men waiting for her there in the forest.

Pesya: "If they are able to find a safer spot – it would be better that they not come back to town for now. The Germans are now going house to house, destroying and plundering. The killings have now also begun."

Glasha says that, in her opinion, it is easier to hide out in the forest. After a few days have passed, she will try to come to town, and at that point she will bring them further word from their son.

Glasha leaves. Darya Petrovna locks the front gate behind her.

But wait, we are not yet done with the events of that day. Dasha had barely managed to close the wicket when it swung open once more, and two German officers walked into the yard – young, armed, and arrogant, with rather grasping hands. They entered the house and demanded a Primus stove.

"*Wir brauchen ein Primus!*"¹ Do you understand? You have two hours to bring us one! Otherwise – "*Kaputt!*"².

The officers are staying in the Garden alley, at the home of Harkusha. Their request is directed at Haim Yakov, and that "*kaputt*" of theirs is intended for him as well. Where can he get a Primus stove at this point? Although it is a rather dangerous thing to undertake, Haim Yakov himself steps out to see what he can do. He heads over to see Haya Sarah Berman, then he'll go to Shlomo Shapiro, and after that, perhaps he'll stop by Rosenkranz...

An hour goes by, and Haim Yakov has not yet returned. But one bad turn deserves another! Once more people are knocking at the wicket and the shutters. This time the knocking is accompanied by shouts of: "Open up!" Pesya is standing by the stove and cooking the final chicken that was just slaughtered that very day.

"Tamar! Go have a look and see who is knocking there!" Tamar peeks through a slit in the shutter. There are about ten German soldiers, some of them dressed in black, all crowding around the gate.

"Oy, Grandma, it's the fascists!" The members of the household begin running about in a panic on tiptoe. A bundle of whites for the

¹ 'We need a Primus stove!' (German).

² 'You're finished!' (German).

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baby is sitting on the windowsill. Pesya wraps Isaac up in a blanket. The voices outside begin to grow louder. Dasha and Tamar quickly put on their coats. The pendulum of the clock is swinging back and forth, but the beating hearts drown out its ticking. Hands and feet go about their work of their own accord. Quickly, quickly now! Tamar grabs the bundle of whites, and Dasha – grabs the boy. They head out into the yard at a run and make for the secret passage. Dasha removes the planks and crosses into the neighboring yard with the infant. Tamar – is right on her heels. She puts the planks back in place. Dasha and Tamar's panicky feet hurry along with all their might. Through backyards and gardens, they make their way to the road that leads from Hadiach to Vilbovka. Given that no one is chasing after them at that point, they stop rushing along like that.

Darya Petrovna lives with her Russian mother-in-law on the outskirts of town, along the slope that leads down to the banks of the river. Dasha is now taking Isaac to this house.

They reach Dasha's house. "Come inside, Tamar!" the woman says. It is an honorable invitation, but Tamar does not yet know just how valuable a good refuge truly is. Something urges her to refuse. She knows that her grandmother has been left all alone with the murderers. What do you want? The girl is only thirteen years old, she is still filled with innocence, the ugliness of life and its terrors have not yet dealt her any direct blows. She turns her back – this dark girl here – on the safe harbor, and heads back to the Garden alley at a run.

In the meantime, unpleasant things took place in the Feigin household. After Dasha and Tamar escaped with the baby, Pesya stepped out into the yard, her head wrapped in a grey kerchief, and opened the gate. Cursing and shouting, about ten men entered the house, including three who spoke Russian quite well. A few Ukrainian boys were chuckling nearby, including Vitya Harkusha, the son of the neighbor, Ivan Matveyevich. What an abominable disgrace! Can it really be that these boys brought the thieves down, indicating to them that the Feigin house was a Jewish home?

At first the violent bandits stepped over to the oven and pulled out the pot. The fascist army now crowded around this Jewish chicken, which had been properly slaughtered, plucked, and salted. Like beasts of prey the lions now fell on the chicken, which had not yet been fully cooked through, dividing up the still-tough meat among themselves –

each one of them receiving a piece.

We would do better to turn our eyes away, my dear readers, from this sight. Let us step outside and breathe in some fresh air. A slender-legged girl, dressed in a simple coat, is hurrying towards the Garden alley. It is Tamar. Right nearby the Feigin home the little ruffians are standing around, including Vitya Harkusha, laughing and baring their teeth.

"How are you not ashamed of yourself, Vitya? There are thieves and bandits in our house – and you're laughing!"

Vitya, who is fourteen years old, points to the plaque with the name of the owner of the house on it and reads it out with a stupid laugh, laced with a touch of scorn and cruelty:

"Feigin! The Zhid Feigin!"

The boys burst out laughing, and it is as though the world has gone dark before Tamar, who, in her as-yet brief life, does not yet know what it tastes like for one human being to abuse another. She casts a glance at the whitewashed house of Ivan Matveyevich. In the yard those two German officers are standing around. The sound of laughter can be heard. Tamar approaches the officers and says to them in German that is partly Yiddish:

"My grandpa is working for you, he's getting a Primus stove, and now people have come over and have begun mistreating us!"

The officers certainly did not understand what she said, but one of them reacted cruelly to Tamar's grievances. He pulled his gun out of its holster and fired a few times. Tamar fell to the ground; she was not hit. The officers went back inside the Harkushas' home. Tamar got up. The Ukrainian boys were still standing right nearby the Feigin home; they were not laughing now. Run, Tamar! But she is still being driven by the insult and puzzlement, still ready to wage her fruitless war. She screams with all her might: "Thieves! Bandits!"

One of the soldiers comes out of the house and asks her in Russian:

"Did you just scream?"

He drags her into the house. There Tamar sees the fascists moving about the rooms, each one of them with a piece of uncooked chicken in their hands. They are gnawing at the chicken and, at the same time,

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looking about for things. They are in no hurry, they move about opening the closets and drawers, emptying them out and eyeing every rag. Rachel's bathing suit is lying on the low sofa – black satin with red stripes. The lady of the house, old Pesya, is sitting on the side and answering their questions.

"Who does this suit belong to?"

"My daughter."

"Where is she?"

"In Saratov."

"We'll meet up with her soon!" One of the Russians utters something coarse in German, and they all burst into laughter.

The soldier who brought Tamar in points to the girl and asks:

"Is she also your daughter?"

"No, she is my granddaughter."

He turns to Tamar:

"Are you the one who shouted that we're thieves and bandits?"

Tamar turns to the pile of clothing and other items, and all the confusion in the room:

"And what's this then? Isn't it thievery and banditry?"

The Russian says something in German. A soldier dressed in black walks up to Tamar, gnawing at the tough chicken meat all the while.

"*Auch Jude?*"¹

"*Auch Jude!*" Tamar replies. She pronounces the two bitter words energetically, and it is as though something broke within her. The strength in her soul gave out – as though her time had come. She slipped through the doorway, crossed the hallway at a run and escaped into the yard, heading for the planks that covered the gap in the fence.

"*Halt!*"¹ shouted the German, as he rushed after her. "*Jude, halt!*"

¹ Are you also Jewish? (German).

With her head held high and her hands dropped at her side, Tamar came to a standstill. Her face is turned towards the black-clad German. Their eyes meet. He does not say a word, as he tosses away the bone he was gripping in his hand in disgust, and heads back inside the house. Perhaps the girl was rescued from the hands of the Angel of Death. We still have plenty more to tell of her many adventures. For the time being she went walking through the streets of Hadiach, with her heart pounding hard, and her soul all atremble. For some time, the eyes of that German pursued her. Afterwards, she slipped into the house of Shlomo Shapiro. Berta Abramovna was there to receive her.

"What happened, Tamar?"

Tamar sits down, covers her face – which seems to have grown old all at once – and bursts into silent tears. For a long while the tears flow down between her fingers where they are pressed to her eyes. Tamar's childhood has now come to an end, the girl has grown up.

From this point on she will change the way she behaves in this world of blood.

We must now bid farewell to Haim Yakov Feigin, as he heads off on his long, mysterious journey.

We shall accompany him as he goes searching for a Primus stove. Who among us would not hurry along if the danger of death were pursuing us? Haim Yakov was not quite yet fed up with his life. Each time he recalled that 'kaput', a burst of warmth would flood his heart, and set his legs moving like a whip coming down on the back of a horse and sending it off at a gallop.

Haim Yakov Feigin goes walking through the streets of Hadiach, and here we are following along in his footsteps. The old man's appearance is no good at all. Although he is covering up his yellow beard, and attempting to melt away, to disappear – he remains an old Jew. His back is bent somewhat, his nose is hooked, there is a shabby look about him, and his lidless eyes are a bit scared, as though asking forgiveness for the fact that they are still there looking out at the white world all around.

¹ Stop! (German).

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The house of Nachman Moiseevich Rosenkranz – is the first one along Haim Yakov's route. The bandits have already been here. The house has been completely ransacked and is in utter disarray. Nachman Moiseevich, that mustachioed Jewish hero, whose equilibrium was never shaken in his entire life, is there walking through the rooms, his eyes blinking a thousand times more than usual, his moustache looking tattered and dangling. Frida Levovna is putting away in the closet a few torn rags that the bandits rejected, and putting the drawers back in place, as she tries to give the rooms their old look back, even though it is not an easy task – the furniture is all naked, without any tablecloths, curtains, or blankets. Raya is sitting at the table with a dumbfounded, opaque look on her face.

"Do you have a Primus stove?" asks Haim Yakov.

"What Primus stove? They completely emptied the place out!"

Frida Levovna is the one who said this. She was not blessed with any sublime beauty. Truth be told, she was rather ugly. Among the women of all countries, there are always some who bear a certain resemblance to witches. But, God forbid, not Frida Levovna – although there was something repulsive about her. When a woman speaks Yiddish with a Jewish tone, that hardly hurts the ears. But if a none-too-young woman goes speaking Russian with that same singsong Jewish tone, it's not a good thing, particularly during the times in which we currently find ourselves. Add to that a piercing set of eyes, an aquiline nose, a short body, and a somewhat thick belly – and, other than the eyebrows, you're left with nothing. Frida Levovna's eyebrows – were like two drawn bows, rising and falling, like two velvet bows vibrating and speaking away.

Nachman Moiseevich tries to overcome his feeling of weakness. Haim Yakov tells him of the request made by the two officers and that 'kaputt' of theirs. Frida Levovna and Nachman Moiseevich can certainly relate to his plight and are sorry for him, but they do not have a Primus stove.

The visit is over. Haim Yakov must hurry. Without saying a single word, he wraps himself up in his coat and continues on his way. He saw something there at the Rosenkranz home, but right now the Primus stove is his sole concern. But wait a moment, Grandpa, in just a little bit you'll get the chance to see what your own house looks like after it has

been ransacked.

Haim Yakov goes walking through the streets of Hadiach, with his beard covered, his hat pulled down low on his forehead, and his eyes almost completely shut. The ostrich is hiding its head; if Haim Yakov cannot see the world, it must mean that the world can also not see him.

He comes to Vokzalny Street and enters the home of Haya Sarah Berman. The two little rooms are hidden from view, as the front door is concealed off in a narrow, unseen passageway, and for the time being the Berman family has not been harmed. Haim Yakov finds a rather sizeable crowd in Vokzalny Street. Aside from the mother, there are five other people in the rooms, including the two little boys, Shimon and Avka Ginsburg. The guest of honor is seated at the table, and he is offered tea and candies. But Haim Yakov refuses to dally – he has come on urgent business. A Primus stove! He must get hold of a Primus stove, no matter what. Otherwise, his life is in danger.

"Yosef, give him our Primus stove!" says Golda. However, the Primus stove is meant for Ahuva, and if he takes it, how will they boil the milk and cook up the cereal for the little girl?

Haya Sarah gives her daughter-in-law a piercing look. It is easy to be kindhearted at other people's expense. Now Haya Sarah will have to get hold of a Primus stove from one of her customers. Albeit, in exchange for food items you can obtain not only a Primus stove, but just about anything your heart could desire.

Yosef Berman hands the Primus stove to Haim Yakov. Although the time he was allotted is not yet up, Haim Yakov refuses to drink the tea, and hurries off. He heads for the Garden alley, going straight to the house of his neighbor Harkusha.

The Harkusha and Feigin homes have been standing there facing each other for all these years. Ivan Matveyevich worked in a grocery store. He was a good-hearted man, though he could be grasping when the opportunity presented itself. He ran his house generously and was not one to abstain from hitting the bottle, though he also never drank to excess. In normal times, his relationship with Feigin could hardly be said to be sour. Now two German officers were living at his house.

Haim Yakov, with the Primus stove in his hand, stood before the gate. From the yard came the sound of a dog barking – Sultan had no

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love for the scent of strangers; it was a good thing that he was on a chain. Haim Yakov opened the wicket and stepped into the yard. The barking grew louder, and the chain began to rattle. Yevdokia Aleksandrovna, Harkusha's wife, appeared. Haim Yakov asked her to give the Germans the Primus stove. But just then one of the officers came out into the yard and ordered Haim Yakov to head out to work the next day. At seven in the morning he had to be at the steam mill.

The mill, where Ezekiel Loytin used to be employed, had been hit by a bomb. The Germans had decided to restore it, given the fact that both the authorities and ordinary citizens were in need for flour. The area around the mill had to be cleaned up, and all the bricks and building fragments had to be piled up in one place.

Haim Yakov now went back home. Why was the gate open? He stepped inside and began to tremble in shock. The rooms were a complete mess – as though the world had been turned upside down. The furniture had all been tossed about, there was filth and disorder everywhere, and sacred texts and chicken bones were rolling around on the floor. The closet was overturned, and there was not a soul in the house. Where was Pesya? A sort of groaning sound could be heard coming from the closet. He turned it right-side up, opened the door, and found Pesya.

Before they left, the bandits had shoved the old lady into the closet, knocked it down, turned it over a few times, and then left it face-down.

With Haim Yakov's help Pesya emerged from the closet. She had not been physically harmed – only her spirit had been damaged. "Oy, Haim Yakov!" Tears burst from her eyes. She lay down on the low sofa, as all her strength left her. Haim Yakov gives her a look filled with astonishment and compassion: in a single day her hair has turned white.

Darya Petrovna walked in. "Ach, the dogs!" she says, catching sight of the mess in the rooms. She left Isaac at her house; he is sleeping. This good woman began putting the rooms back in order. Pesya is lying there helplessly. Haim Yakov drags himself around in Dasha's wake, helping her somewhat. They put all the furniture back in place. Where is Tamar?

They discuss Isaac a bit and decide to leave him for the time being at Dasha's house. It was a good thing that she had had the chance to take some whites with her otherwise the bandits would have taken

them too. Haim Yakov disappeared for a little bit. He went up to the attic, and cautiously stepped inside the hiding place. There he turned his face to the east and closed his eyes. "A Song of Degrees. I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help?"

The trusted prayer comes to an end. Haim Yakov looks this way and that. He grabs a few concealed items and a winter coat, and heads downstairs. He hands all the items to Dasha. He has always been quiet by nature, and he does not say a word now, but Dasha understands. 'Who knows if we will soon see each other once again?' Haim Yakov's silence seems to be saying. 'Take these things and do not abandon the boy!'

Haim Yakov has never been a spendthrift. Dasha takes the items and says:

"The boy will be like a son to me."

It was a contract drawn up between two hearts, a contract signed without any official seal. In the evening Tamar came back. A change had taken place in her as well. "Where were you, Tamar?" She remains silent, this talkative girl here – something has happened in her soul. From the basement and the hiding place in the attic Haim Yakov brings potatoes and onions, along with a little grease. Pesya cooks up the potatoes, as the scent of fried onions fills the room. The windows have been shut tight, and the lantern has been lit. The three of them sat down to have dinner.

"What's the matter, Tamar?" her grandmother asks her hoarsely. Her eyes are lost and filled with sorrow.

"Nothing, Grandma!" Tamar replies, as she hides something in her eyes. The desire for life is washing over this thirteen-year-old girl. Perhaps she is planning something. She must think hard, she must meditate and think.

Tamar lies down, but she cannot fall asleep. For a long while she lies there with her eyes wide open, staring off into the darkness and the silence. The old folks are not sleeping either. Haim Yakov must be up early for work, he is lying there but his heart is wide awake. Outside – all is silent, from time to time only the dull bark of a dog can be heard off in the distance; Sultan then responds immediately from the neighboring yard.

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Tamar is planning to run away from Hadiach, to cross the front lines, and find her mother. She must disguise herself as a Ukrainian and get out of here. If she does not manage to cross the front lines, she will take shelter in one of the Kolkhozes until the war is over.

She recalls the cruel laughter of Vitya Harkusha and is terrified. Little by little she drifts off to sleep. The hours pass by, and there is an unusual stillness nestling in the rooms. The sound of the clock has gone silent – the bandits took it away as well. However, in some hiding place Haim Yakov still has a pocket watch. Throughout the entire night he barely closed his eyes, and now it is already six in the morning. With an elderly groan he climbs out of bed and gets dressed. Oy, that a sixty-year-old Jew must go dragging stones and bricks. He quickly prays Shacharit. Pesya gives him a little something to eat, and wraps up a slice of bread and some apples for him. The dawn has begun to break, and Haim Yakov now appears in the street dressed in a short, crumpled coat. He heads for the mill. Tamar is sleeping; a look of mourning and maturity is frozen in her face. For a long while the grandmother stares at her granddaughter.

About twenty men have gathered near the ruins of the mill, along with a German and a police officer, who are overseeing the work. It is a damp, cloudy morning. Among the workers – there are twelve Jews and the rest – are Russians. The police officer informs them that they are to gather the bricks in a single spot. The workers will receive two marks a day, while the Jews – are to receive one mark. The work hours – are from seven in the morning until seven in the evening.

Nachman Moiseevich's luck was no better and he was among the workers as well. They began gathering the bricks and plaster, along with the building fragments. Haim Yakov is working with Rosenkranz. Handling the bricks takes their minds off their troubles somewhat.

Evening comes, and the men head back home. The next day they must be back here at seven. We now continue following Haim Yakov Feigin, looking in on him during his final hours. He arrives at the Garden alley and knocks on the shutter at the window. Tamar opens the wicket for him. He steps inside the house. The windows are shut, and the lantern is lit. Pesya brings the light meal to the table. They talk a bit about the events of the day, but Haim Yakov's eyes are closing of their own accord. He slips out of his clothes and falls into a deep slumber.

And so, it is once more six in the morning. Haim Yakov wakes up and heads off to work. But something has happened: right nearby the mill a German soldier was murdered during the night, and his body was just now found in the area. Foul and bitter tidings! A black vehicle comes down hurriedly, rattling and signaling. An SS Officer gets out of the vehicle, along with assistants and soldiers. It would better to get away from this place, but as though just to spite them, the police officer and the German are there; and they have got eyes in the backs of their heads. Haim Yakov and Nachman Moiseevich pile the bricks on a stretcher, carry the load over and dump it on the pile from the day before. There was nothing to notify them that the end was coming, but it came. The officer and the soldiers surrounded the body of the soldier. The officer lifted his eyes and saw the workers handling the bricks, taking note of the Jews among them. He would have to provide a reckoning of the event to the *Obersturmbannfuhrer*¹, including the retributive measures that were adopted. And so, their fate was sealed. Haim Yakov, Rosenkranz, and the rest of the men continued gathering the bricks. An hour went by, and now there was a truck standing alongside the mill. The Jews were separated from the other workers – there were twelve of them in all – and they were ordered to get into the rear of the truck. Four armed SS soldiers now leaped into the truck. The Deputy Officer Peter Maigoert, commander of the platoon, rode up in the driver's cabin. The vehicle headed off in the direction of Vilbovka. On the floor of the truck lay a bunch of hoes.

"Where are we being taken?" asked Nachman Moiseevich, in broken German.

"To work!" replied one of the soldiers. One of the others chuckled.

Some distance from Vilbovka there is a place called Grabila, and on this morning we find that Glasha of ours here. What is this village girl doing here? We'll tell all about that later, but for now she catches the sound of the rattling engine. In the blink of an eye she hides, making herself small and surveying the area. A truck loaded with Jews and soldiers appears. The men all get out of the truck. The Jews have hoes in their hands, and they begin digging a pit, while the Germans stand

¹ Literally: 'Senior Assault Unit Leader', a senior military rank in the SS.

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around them in a circle and urge them on: "*Schneller! Schneller!*"¹. The soil – is sandy, and easy to dig, but the men are constantly wiping the sweat from their brows. Among the workers Glasha spots the father of Solomon Feigin; his yellow beard caught her attention.

The pit has been dug, and now, against the backdrop of the grey horizon the Jews can be seen with those hoes in their hands. Glasha cannot believe her eyes – in the chill and damp of autumn, in the mud and heavy rain, the men remove their clothes and stand their naked as the day they were born! Four Jews step over to the ditch, their faces turned towards the pit. A hail of bullets splits the air. Glasha's eyes go wide, a look of terror frozen there in her glance. Shouts can be heard; the remaining eight men are crying out for help. But who will help them? With the butts of their rifles the murderers shove another four men to the edge of the pit, and among them Glasha can make out Haim Yakov and his yellow beard. Once more the shots are fired, and those who are hit fall into the pit. There are only four left now. The hangmen move quickly to get the job done with. The soldiers take up the hoes and fill the pit. This is not proper labor for representatives of the master race, and the next time they will bring along some police officers from among the local residents.

It was all done in haste. They loaded the hoes and the clothing of the murdered men into the rear of the truck, and then the soldiers got in. The Deputy Officer sat in the driver's cabin. The engine rattled, and the vehicle headed off, and disappeared. For a little while Glasha could still hear the sound of the motor. Then there was silence. Glasha came out from her hiding place and walked slowly over to the ditch where the slaughter had taken place. A thin layer of sand covered the bodies of those killed. There was silence and dampness, a chill in the air, and cloudy skies overhead. A faint groan rises from the depths. Glasha, that forest girl, who had only recently turned seventeen, ran away from the spot of such horror. With all her heart she ran through the silent expanse of autumn. Something ran after her, caught up with her, grabbed her by her hair, and dug its nails into her neck.

And so, we, my readers and I, have thus bid farewell to one of our heroes – Haim Yakov, of the Feigin family. We got to know the man a

¹ Faster! Faster! - (German)

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bit, including his history and his doings in the here and now. Some sixty years ago he came into the world, grew up in the house of his father Isaac, son of Rebbe Zvi Hirsh, the shochet, of blessed memory; and when his time came he married and went to work as a shochet as well. He slaughtered chickens and cows and livestock in accordance with Jewish custom, was fond of the Cantor Sirota, did not abstain from having himself a bit of wine now and then, and had been a family man among his people. When the Revolution came he had ceased working as a shochet and gone into the business of making wine and mead. He had fathered a son and a daughter – Solomon, and that charming girl, Rachel. They too have their stories to tell in this world.

However, at this point we have bid farewell to Haim Yakov Feigin, as he heads out on his long, mysterious journey.

Chapter 2.7

Two days ago, we left Binyamin and Solomon in the forest of Vilbovka. At the time, Glasha was heading into town, to the Feigin home, on a mission from Solomon. Let us now cautiously approach the two young men. We can make them out among the bushes. One of them seems to be sleeping, and the other seems to be awake. A clear day has descended on the forest. The azure of the sky is deep into autumn, the sun seems to be a bit closer, and the light breeze is a bit cooler. The world – remains just as it was. There are lofty heavens, the pines, the half-naked bushes, the mixture of faded yellow and still-green foliage; and at the foot of the bushes – there is a layer of dry branches, pine cones, and leaves, a carpet to be trod underfoot, and a bed for the exhausted body.

Taking a circuitous route, Glasha approaches the young men with a bag over her shoulder. A cautious rustle can be heard with every step she takes, as the earth speaks stealthily. Thin branches crack, and pine cones are thrust into the ground. Binyamin and Solomon turn their heads around all at once. It's Glasha!

They speak in a whisper. The bag has been placed among the bushes, as Glasha responds to Solomon's questions. Afterwards, she removes the clothes and provisions from the bag. She does not allow them to touch the clothes – they must take themselves a good bath first. They will do that when night falls.

And indeed, when darkness descends over the forest of Vilbovka, the young men slip into the empty shack. Two tubs of water, one hot and one cold, have been just recently prepared. It was not easy to do this in secret. The members of the Edelman family are now living in the house, along with their maid Vera. It is a good thing that Glasha's mother Nastasya has not slept at home for a few days now. But Vera? The girl is there moving around the kitchen all day long, and not a thing escapes her eye.

Glasha revealed everything to Vera. Vera was fond of Glasha and

was like an older sister to her. Glasha had her fantasies, she saw the world with rose-colored glasses, and fate had not yet laid its harsh hand upon her; whereas Vera was an ugly girl, with a pockmarked face, and she had never known any happiness in her life.

And so, the two girls are there whispering away. Vera hears about the two Soviet soldiers who wound up in Vilbovka exhausted and famished and infested with vermin. One must prepare a proper bath for them in the shack.

Glasha reveals everything to Vera, other than the names of the soldiers. Vera remains silent. She does not care to get involved in such affairs, but neither is she going to try to get out of them. This none-too-young girl has herself a conscience. Glasha picks up the pails and the yoke. She fills up the tub, as Vera adds wood to the stove, and steps into the shack to help make sure it is completely dark inside. The windows are sealed with curtains made of rags, and a faint lantern is lit. Evening falls, and everything is ready for their bath. Our two young men now slip into the shack.

An hour passes, and we now find Solomon and Binyamin in the attic, completely scrubbed and polished. Solomon's leg has been nicely bandaged. Were it not for the dark, we might make out the red flush that has blossomed in their faces. It is cold. They huddle against one another and slip into a deep slumber. Downstairs, in the room below, Glasha is still hard at work. She is washing the clothing and underwear of our two young men. Vera silently brings her more pails of boiling water. The cursed vermin! Three or four times already Glasha has soaped up and scrubbed the clothing, scrubbing and soaking them in water. At last she wrings them out one final time and blows out the lantern. Tomorrow she will dry and iron their clothing.

The next morning a counsel is held. Our two young men are now wearing civilian clothing. Solomon is not too impressed with this hiding place up in the attic. The Party and the Komsomol demand from us that we wage a non-stop struggle against the fascist invaders. Here, in the forests of Hadiach, the necessary conditions exist for waging a partisan war.

Glasha agrees excitedly with Solomon's words. If during the days of Napoleon partisan brigades were active, then in current times – there is even more need for them! True, she has never come across any

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partisans in the forest, however she knows of several hidden spots. One must survey the area over and over. She is prepared to head out at once.

What a daughter of valor! She will fulfill her obligations without any hesitation. Lieutenant Feigin, the commander of this future platoon, notes a few of the conditions that are essential for organizing a partisan base of operations. It would be better to establish the camp in a dense patch of the forest; there must be a nearby water source; it is easier to dig a trench along sloping terrain; it is also easier to dig in sandy soil; and one must not stray too far from the residential areas – as the group will need to obtain food.

Binyamin adds a few words of his own. He believes he ought to join Glasha in her search for a proper spot. But Solomon will not allow him to go. After the hardships of their journey, they must rest up a bit. And aside from that, Glasha's tour of the area will not arouse any suspicions, as she is already in the habit of wandering about in the forest, whereas if the two of them go together, it might bring down a real disaster on their heads.

Solomon removes a map from his bag and spreads it on the bed. Three bent heads now pore over the map. A lock of flaxen hair grazes Binyamin's cheek, and a warm, sweet wave floods his heart. Solomon's finger goes wandering over the face of the map, drawing lines and circles. A few possible routes begin to appear.

Glasha brings the young men a warm meal, a pail of water, and a few books to read – the first two volumes of 'War and Peace'. Permission for the loan was not requested from the owner of the books, Stepan Borisovich...

And so, the hours once more trickle by. Solomon's leg no longer hurts him. His thoughts now go flying off in the direction of the Garden alley. How are his parents doing – and his son, and Tamar? Perhaps they need an assistance? He must pay them a visit. It would be better to head out early in the morning, when the road is still covered in darkness. He fishes around and finds some new justifications for his visit to the Garden alley. If they have truly decided to organize a platoon, he must determine who among the trustworthy young people has remained in Hadiach. Yes, tomorrow at five in the morning he will try to get into town. He knows a roundabout route, through various gardens

and backyards. He will slip into the Garden alley, and not a soul will spot him.

In the evening Glasha comes, and the whispering resumes. She spent all day in the forest, but she could not find any suitable spots. Tomorrow she will head in the direction of the Grabila. There you have the forest, as well as a nearby residential area, and sandy soil.

There is more whispering, like a light rustle, as secrets are traded in the dark. Glasha's face is all lit up. Binyamin's hand touches hers, caressing it cautiously. She moves her hand aside and is embarrassed.

The hours pass, and it is now five in the morning. Solomon dresses cautiously, and a little while later we hear him stepping along the path that leads into town. His hand is in his pocket, gripping a loaded gun. It is dark, and there is silence in the forest and all along the road. Solomon crosses the wooden bridge. A cool breeze is blowing off the river. Solomon continues walking along the road. The first houses have now appeared in the distance. He must now proceed with even greater caution. He hears the cries of the roosters, and the lazy barking of the dogs. Solomon's eyes are now accustomed to the dark. He can make out the houses and the road. Here and there a few ruins rise. And over there are the remains of the mill...

"*Halt! Stehen bleiben!*"¹ comes the German command, as the figure of a guard in a helmet suddenly pops up before Solomon. In his hands – the guard has an automatic rifle. In a flash Solomon pulls his hand out of the pocket of his coat. There is a shot. The guard falls. Solomon yanks the rifle from the man's hands and turns around. Quickly, quickly now! He does not run, so as not to make too much noise with his feet. He walks along on tiptoe as quickly as he can. He clutches the rifle hidden beneath his coat and hurries along, onward and onward. There is the bridge. He is breathing hard, and his entire body is covered in sweat. At last he enters the forest of Vilbovka. A grey light began to appear in the east. There is Nastasya's house. He goes up to the attic. Binyamin is still sleeping. Solomon gets undressed, covers himself with the blanket, and closes his eyes.

He is not aware of the fact that, in an indirect fashion, that shot he

¹ Stop! Stay where you are! (German).

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fired killed his father, but they might well have eliminated his father in any event. A leaden light slips in through the cracks in the roof. The attic is small, spare, and empty. Thin wooden beams and strips of tar to insulate against the rain, set horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, support the roof. Tolstoy's book sits near the bed. Solomon decides not to tell Binyamin and Glasha about the incident.

There is silence in the attic. Morning has broken. Cautious footsteps can be heard – the young girl is on her way. Today she is dressed like a typical village girl. She has two kerchiefs on her head, there is an old coat covering her shoulders, and she has a rough pair of boots on her feet. This ridiculous-looking village lass here, with her upturned nose, and her rumpled clothing – how could such a girl arouse any real emotions? Why was Binyamin's heart so astir at the sight of this girl, why was his soul so drawn to her? Once more she has brought water and a warm meal with her. The two young men and the girl eat and converse a bit. Today Glasha is heading out to the Grabila. A sort of youthful arousal flashes in her eyes. She removes her coat. But what silliness! She is wearing corals around her neck, everyone can see them, as Binyamin, too, notices the strand of painted glass balls. What an odd fellow Solomon is! It seems he is unable to fathom that at times it is necessary to cover oneself up in a blanket and pretend to be fast asleep. But Solomon – is clueless, and the charming girl puts on her coat and leaves the attic. It seems to Binyamin that the very morning light itself has now left this upper chamber as well. A smile freezes on his lips, and something warm begins to hum deep within him.

About two hours later Glasha once more slips into the attic and her face is pale and she has a frightened look. Why did you come back so quickly, Glasha? She tells them of the slaughter that she witnessed with her very own eyes. She does not reveal to them that Solomon's father was also among those murdered, but there is terror in her eyes, as she is not an expert at camouflaging her emotions, and Solomon's heart is filled with a foul sense of foreboding.

He sends Glasha out to survey the forest once more, and the silent hours again go flowing by. Solomon has a concerned look on his face. When the first opportunity presents itself, he must pay a visit to the Garden alley. The main thing is – to prepare a proper shelter in the forest. Tomorrow they must get to work, setting up a mud hut in a concealed spot, along with locating some suitable vehicle, to move the

necessary appliances, provisions, and equipment into the forest.

There is silence in the *daled amos* of the two young men. Binyamin peeks through the cracks and sees how life is proceeding out in the yard. Vera returns from the forest with a big bunch of branches in her hands. She is chopping wood for the winter. Through the crack Binyamin can also see a little patch of the forest and a strip of cloud-filled sky – a miniscule corner of this groaning countryside.

And so, once more, night falls. Glasha goes up to the attic. Her perky Ukrainian tongue can once more be heard. This time she has found a suitable spot – a hidden patch among the trees. There is a stream flowing right nearby, and the soil is sandy.

Three people go whispering away in the dark. Solomon now speaks. One must contact a trustworthy person among the local residents. Glasha mentions the name of Gavrilenko – Mitrofan Petrovich – the former principal at the school in Vilbovka. Binyamin knows the man a bit too. Isn't that right, Binyamin? Glasha believes that Gavrilenko will help them obtain a wagon and will also be willing to provide other forms of assistance.

Out in the forest Binyamin can hear the measured rustling of the pines. A rather strange world, a black world in reverse, peeks in through the cracks. The Angel of Death is running about, landing blows on all sides, and reaping a rather bountiful harvest. A monster with myriad, protruding eyes begins to swell before Binyamin's vision, as it holds its breath, hatching evil and terror in its cursed belly.

Up in the attic people are hiding out, however life has not gone completely silent in the winter vacation home of aunt Nastasya. Stepan Borisovich is laid up in bed. It is a rather puzzling thing to see: this stable man, with that rock-solid sense of order of his, who spent his entire life contemplating nothing but mechanics and technology – this same man seems to have suffered some sort of brain damage, as odd notions go running about his head while he lies there in his sickbed facing the yellow curtains. Lately Glasha no longer stops by to spend time at his bedside. All day long she goes wandering about the forest, and when she returns home, she busies herself in the kitchen, humming softly all the while. During these difficult times the girl has found the energy for the old meaningless tunes! From time to time she comes over to Stepan Borisovich's bedside, and they then engage in a brief conversation. The

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old man stares at the girl, and it seems to him that she is blossoming. He sees her as a sort of bird that is spreading its wings and about to fly. That happy, contented sense of youth seems to be peeking through even in these times of trouble.

Vera serves Stepan Borisovich a bowl of millet and boiled milk. Stepan Borisovich has lost his appetite and is gradually shriveling up. Klara Ilynishna also stares at the meal with an indifferent look in her eyes. Her appetite as well has begun to falter, as her disease is consuming her, and she is getting thinner by the day.

Stepan Borisovich's thoughts are now stuck in the past. It is the beginning of the century, over in the United States, in Milwaukee. Sweet Jane is there, the daughter of Mrs. Robbins, the landlord. The girl has blue eyes, and she was his first love. Almost thirty years have passed since then, thirty years of work, work, and more work. Certainly, Jane must now be about fifty years old, yet there she stands before the ill man as youthful and erect as ever, standing there and smiling warmly.

"Why don't you eat, Syoma?" Klara Ilynishna asks. There is no response. A different voice, a distant, sweet echo, goes ringing in Stepan Borisovich's ears.

"Please, eat, Mister Edelman!" Jane Robbins is standing there before the invalid's bed. Her face, her eyes, her cheeks, her teeth – everything is smiling at him with joy and affection.

He wants to offer some response, but he is wracked by that cough of his. He cannot get any air. There is no life left. Stepan Borisovich has begun to get to know a new form of order, not that old one that is associated with a precise, set work schedule, but the logical progression of minor events that then repeat themselves. The most elevated form of this logical progression consists of building and destroying, of living bodies that carry within their bosom their own necessary death. You are still alive, you still have hope and a purpose in life. And yet then all those hopes and purposes seem to dry up, until the day comes when you are swallowed up by the void, by that great, eternal silence, amidst a strangling cough.

Indeed, Stepan Borisovich does not have many things to occupy his mind these days. The earth has been around for x number of revolutions, and Syoma Edelman, former student of the technical high school, the top student in his class, with that sharp mind of his, has

crawled this way and that along the face of our earth, he soaked up knowledge and impressions, and even emitted a certain number of original thoughts, he wrote and published, and now his work is done. An old man now lies there in his bed in silence, and a bowl of cereal, a bowl of millet and boiled milk, sits there on the chair beside him.

Lida steps into the room. What has happened to this beloved daughter of his over the past two years? Following that episode with Bobrov, it is as though her soul became polluted, and the filth spread and grew deeper in her like some cancerous growth. There is something sick in that pale daughter of his, something that was born and grew in that northern town, that city of rain and fog, along the banks of the Neva.

What was it with Lida? It can only be that during these times of terror the young woman thirsted for something that she could lean on. If only it were possible to leave Hadiach, she would be among the first to do so. But her parents' illnesses kept her bound to the place.

And so Lida fell. Volodya, the Soviet officer that she had befriended that final night, had offered her to escape from Hadiach to the east. He unfolded before her the various sufferings that the population could expect, particularly the Jews. But Lida did not think of herself as a Jew and she could not bring herself to leave her parents. And so, the Germans had arrived. What shoulder could she lean on now?

While considering these various developments, we must talk a bit about Tichon Sidorenko, a broad, well-built man of about forty, who was one of aunt Nastasya's regular guests. During the Soviet reign he had dabbled a bit in literature and kept himself quite busy drinking and doing nothing. He was married and had three children. His wife was a beaten-down village woman, always busy with her children and housework. During normal times Sidorenko was fond of spending time at Nastasya's, drinking plenty of *horilka*¹, singing wild, sad songs to the accompaniment of the harmonica, threshing about in Nastasya's sparse flesh, and feeling the look of those mad, burning eyes of hers.

Yes, Tichon Sidorenko had his own fair share of emotions and experiences. Two years ago, this boorish, coarse man had set his sights

¹ Horilka - Ukrainian vodka.

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on Lida Edelman, that pale girl, who, at the time, had been all music and delicacy. Once the fascists had come to town, Sidorenko had begun to follow the girl, and then tragedy had struck. One day the scoundrel overtook Lida in the forest, dragged her off underneath one of the bushes, and raped her. She resisted forcefully, scratching at his face and hands, but what was the strength of the professor's daughter against Tichon Sidorenko? She got up and dusted off her clothing and felt as though someone had spit on her very soul. Then the two of them had a rather bad conversation. Lida condemned the hooligan, heaping a load of foul words on his head. But Sidorenko was one of those who offends and is not himself offended. He had done his deed, and he was not inclined to now let the bird out of its trap. And so, the girl heard a rather shameful command from the man's mouth. Once a week – no, twice a week, they were to meet. It was some time now that he had had his eye on her. She had had dealings with officers in the Red Army. If she wished to remain alive, and even save her parents, she had better be kind to him.

"I'm Russian, Russian!" her terrified scream echoed in the forest. "My parents are Russian too!"

"Don't go hooting and hollering! You're all pretending to be Russians now!" Sidorenko had had about a third of a liter to drink beforehand, and though he was not quite drunk yet, he was pretty tipsy. His indifferent ears now absorbed a deluge of curse-words and insults from the mouth of the riled-up girl.

"You bastard! You foul pig! You leprous dog! We're Russians!"

"Nu, nu, my dear, don't get angry!" he said softly. "I have your best interests at heart..."

Dear God – to become Tichon Sidorenko's whore! Whom could she turn to? Where could she go with her complaint? Where might she find some scrap of support?

Most of the time their filthy meetings took place in the forest, whereas on rainy days the two of them would slip into Nastasya's summer shack.

And so, things went on like that, and one autumn day Binyamin and Solomon – who were up in the attic of that selfsame shack – were witnesses to one of those meetings. That day the rain was falling in the

forest, the pines were dripping wet, and an endless desolation reigned in the small patches of the forest that could be seen through the cracks in the walls of the attic. It was early afternoon, and restrained voices could be heard from below. Our young men immediately perked up their ears, and Solomon brought his finger to his lips, saying: "Silence!" The voices were repressed somewhat. There was the voice of a woman, who said in an angry whisper: "Why did you have to latch on to me, of all the damn things!" And then there was the rough voice of a man, saying: "Nu, nu, my sweet, what's all that anger for? Let's sit down for a bit!" There was some brief activity. Then a slap. "You son of a bitch, how dare you?" Then once more the man's voice, speaking lazily: "A Jewish girl hitting a Russian. You can get killed for such a thing. We're gonna get rid of your parents too. Nobody is gonna get away from us." There then followed the emotional voice of the woman once again, rising from the very depths, from the bottom of her heart, and it was only then that Binyamin recognized the voice of Lida Edelman. "I'm not Jewish!" Lida called out in a whisper. "My parents are Russian as well – Ru-ssian!" – "Don't turn around, you stupid girl!" The activity increased, accompanied by squeaks and groans. Binyamin's wrath was boiling inside him, and he was ready to wreak havoc. He got up. "I'm going to go down there and put an end to their lives and mine as well!" – "Have you lost your mind?" Solomon grabbed Binyamin by the leg. Silence followed. From downstairs they could hear Lida's suppressed tears. "I'm Russian, Russian, my parents are Russian too! Why must you cling to me?" – "Okay, okay, have a sip from this bottle here!" Tichon grumbled in a sleepy voice. He fell asleep. For a long while the two young men listened to the oppressive silence. It seemed that Lida had left. Outside the rain was recounting its long, monotonous tale. Binyamin's ears rang with the silent words about a love that had once been and since died:

My heart, all my heart goes out to my girl!

Touch me – and I would cry from the joy of such happiness...

It seems to Binyamin that the words were spoken some hundred years ago. Is not all this just some sort of nightmare?

No, it was not in some mere dream in the night that our young men witnessed the shame of Lida Edelman. Indeed, at this point the young woman no longer had anything to hold on to in this world. It was autumn, and a bothersome rain was falling, her father and mother were deathly ill, the forest was silent, damp and angry, and a gloomy

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darkness went wandering from tree to tree.

After some hesitation Lida decided to go seek the advice of Roman Nazarovich Ivanchuk.

When the Germans invaded Hadiach, classes were suspended at the local school, and Roman Nazarovich was thus out of work. For dozens of years he had been the one to educate the younger generations, and he had a rather observant eye. Hundreds of his students throughout this wide land were fighting, toiling, and suffering during these harsh times. Roman Nazarovich understood a bit when it came to the circuitous ways in which politics and administrative policy worked. He was convinced that Hitler would be defeated in the end, but he had not expected that within the course of three months the fascist thorn would have managed to penetrate so deeply into the body of Mother Russia. All the same, he was certain that the retreat of our army was only temporary.

"Ah, nu, ah, nu, come in, Lidia Stepanovna!" With those words Ivanchuk welcomed Lida to his home. She removed her coat and sat down at the table. Her dress was well-ironed, but the splendor and cleanliness, at which Lida had always excelled, now seemed somewhat dimmed. It was only a few months since Ivanchuk had last seen her. He looked at her and noticed that it was as if the girl had been crushed and suddenly grown old.

She was invited to stay for lunch. There was Ukrainian borscht, potato patties, and a glass of homemade mead. It was a simple meal, and most it came from the produce generated by the man of the house's garden.

The meal came to an end, and Tanya busied herself with some embroidery. Maria Matveyevna was washing the dishes in the kitchen, and Lida and Roman Nazarovich were conversing in the other room.

"I would like to get your advice, Roman Nazarovich!" said Lida, with a suppressed laugh. The teacher was smoking his post-meal pipe, and his entire being emanated relaxation and attention. The laughter dissolved, and the teacher saw before him a girl completely at a loss. Little by little the sorrowful tale of the two elderly invalids who had remained in Vilbovka was unfolded. Then she murmured a few isolated words, and the detested name of Sidorenko began to roll about within the four walls of the room. Her cheeks turned rosy, and her dark eyes,

covered with those long lashes of theirs, were fixed on her interlocutor. Many words then emerged in a somewhat slurred fashion, one after the other, as though she were somehow afraid to lose them. Tichon Sidorenko, the rapist and scoundrel, was threatening to murder them all, including her father and mother. He claims that they are Jews, and that all the Jews will be led to the slaughter.

Ivanchuk got up from his chair, with his pipe in his hand, and paced about the room a bit. For a little while he stood before the window, staring out at his garden.

The old teacher turned his face towards Lida, who was sitting there pale and a bit hunched over, and there was failure and filth imprinted on that well-ironed dress of hers. The young woman heard some practical advice from the old man. The Edelman family had to leave Vilbovka and head into town. There were many empty homes here, whose owners had left town. Right next to his yard there lived a Jewish family that had headed east already back in August and left the keys to their home with him. Of his own accord he was advising Lida to take up residence in that house there.

They discuss the move to Hadiach a bit. They must procure a wagon, as her father and mother cannot undertake the move on foot. There are also a few items of clothing and some other belongings. – The old teacher assures her of his assistance with all this.

"Don't step out of the house in the coming days. Pack up your things. Do not reveal your intentions to anyone – in this way you may well get rid of Sidorenko. I will find a wagon for you."

They step into the other room. Tanya continues working away at her embroidery. In a corner the polished piano sparkles. The girls talk a bit. Lida calms down. She heads out. It is a grey day. A cool breeze is drying up the traces of the rain. Here is the forest of Vilbovka.

"Lida!" comes the voice of Sidorenko, and it is now a particularly detestable voice. He is standing behind one of the pines. It may well be that he has been waiting for her here for hours. "Lida, my dove! Where have you been?"

He comes up to her and pushes her towards the bushes. Today he has had a bit too much to drink. His eyes are murky, his lips are swollen, and the smell of alcohol is thick on his breath. Nausea and terror assail

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the girl. She resists, trying to pull her hand free, and run away. But it is all in vain! He continues to push the girl onward, mumbling a few blighted words.

He removes his coat and spreads it on the floor of the chilly forest. He sits down on his coat and pulls Lida towards him. An immeasurable sense of anger and hatred pervades her heart. She gathers all her strength and digs her nails into Sidorenko's throat.

The unfair struggle between the rough, drunken man and the weak girl is abandoned. In the blink of an eye he has subdued the Russian-Jewish girl beneath him. For a little while he sat there breathing heavily, as blood flowed from where he had been scratched. Then he raped the squirming girl. Lida was assailed by an infinite sense of hatred on behalf of all who had ever been oppressed. She quickly dug her nails once more into Tichon's throat. This time the nails dug in more deeply, but the struggle was even briefer. He snorted: "You Jewish *morda*!¹ Damn Zhidovka!" His eyes were filled with blood and madness. The vise of his fingers squeezed Lida's delicate neck.

About an hour later a girl was headed from Hadiach to Vilbovka. It was Tanya, Roman Nazarovich's daughter. She looked about suspiciously and then headed for Gavrilenko's house, the house of Mitrofan Petrovich, Ivanchuk's colleague. In the utmost secrecy, she was to convey Roman Nazarovich's request to transfer the Edelman family in a wagon from Vilbovka to Hadiach.

It is now two in the afternoon. The silence seems frozen still in the forest. Somewhere off in the distance Tichon is walking along heavily, walking and licking his wounds. Among the bushes lies Lida's strangled body. Her glassy eyes are turned up to the heavens.

An autumn bird cries out in terror. She is taken aback by the outrage that seems to reign over this evil land beneath the sun.

Since Haim Yakov had not returned home, and Pesya had begun running about within her own *daled amos*, people came to comfort her. All sorts of different things were said. As ever, Haya Sarah Berman was the one to give rise to the most agreeable lies. In her opinion the men

¹ Morda - derogatory term for 'face' (Russian).

had been taken to distant villages, to serve as translators from German to Ukrainian, since there was not all that much of a difference between Yiddish and German. And as far as Haim Yakov was concerned, it may well be that he was taken off to work as a winemaker; as was well known, there was no greater expert in all Hadiach than Haim Yakov Feigin when it came to making fruit wine.

That was what Haya Sarah had to say. We are no great admirers of Haya Sarah, but her desire to build castles in the sky to offer some comfort in times of trouble – is certainly something that stands in her favor.

Twelve Jews that had been working on clearing the area of the mill had not returned home. Somebody said that the twelve Jews had all been taken off and executed. Pesya was concerned. Her face is wrinkled and turning colors from the pain. Frida Levovna and her daughter Raya Rosenkranz are also at a loss and suffering over the disappearance of Nachman Moiseevich. Misfortune did not skip over the house of Mordechai, the former coachman, either. After the lashes that he had suffered during his visit to the Burgermeister Karpenko, it was as though the entire essence of his life had been destroyed. For how was this Jew different than all the other Jews? You might say that it was the sharp eye with which he looked out on the world all around him. He was a simple Jew, a butcher and a coachman, who was fond of a glass of liquor, and not one to abstain from small talk and a pipe of mahorka. He looked upon the world with a pair of comprehending eyes. And yet this old man had been taken off and dealt a murderous series of blows. What did an eighty-year-old Jew really need after all? A Jew like that – the older he got the more one figured that he could expect to live to the ripe, old age of Methuselah. But then the world was struck by a sort of plague, and it seemed that, in fact, the first ones to leave this world were precisely the old folks whose roots were stuck so deep in the soil, as it were.

Since Mordechai had been stripped of his horses – his friends and breadwinners – and he had been given those lashes in return, the old man realized that life was not worth a wooden nickel. His entire life he had had dealings with Jewish housewives, those plump cows there, and he was quite familiar with their ways, and could tell his share of stories and jokes about them, both from his days as a butcher and as a coachman. He was also familiar with the ways of all sorts of animals,

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both wild and domestic. Quite a few animals had been slaughtered before his eyes, and he had witnessed and gotten to know the passage between life and death; he was familiar with the vibrant, sorrowful look in the eyes of a heifer, her warmth, that mooing of hers that bordered on screaming, as she carried in her bosom hidden emotions that knew no deliverance. A tremendous treasure disappeared with the slaughter of any living thing. With the final spasm of the slaughtered animal, before it had even gone cold, the butcher Mordechai stepped up to his work – stripping the skin, chopping up the animal, hanging the parts on the hooks of the butcher shop, to be divided up among the housewives. And then it was done! A living thing had once walked this earth, and now it had disappeared into the bellies of the men of Hadiach and their wives. That was the order of the world, and it had not changed since the very days of creation.

Mordechai lay in bed in silence, but the thread of his thoughts continued to lead on. After some consideration he concluded that in the eyes of Karpenko and the police officers he was like an animal destined for the slaughter. True, there was precious little difference between man and animal. But you know what? The animal does not sense the danger that is hovering over its head, since the animal has no sense in its skull; whereas a human being – possesses a brain and a heart, emotions and nerves.

Well I'll be! Mordechai the coachman is meditating on the development of things in this world of '*tohu wa-bohu*'! Where had the joyful disposition of that old man gone, where was his good mood? Basya walked through the room and sighed. She herself cannot quite be numbered among the young women of the world. She is seventy-something and has gotten used to listening to her husband. It is not a simple matter to be Mordechai's spouse, and it has been over fifty years now that Basya has been harnessed to his chariot, as it were.

"Basya!" Mordechai calls to his wife in a weak voice. And so, she is treated to a wondrous summary of his thoughts. "When I leave this world, Basya, don't be sorry, and don't be depressed. Forgive me, if at times I raised my voice to you. Loving words are said softly, but harsh words are always screamed. Basya-nu!" Mordechai's voice became slower; it was dozens of years since Basya had heard her husband pronounce any affectionate words. "Basya-nu! Your entire life you have been a faithful wife to me. Why shed any tears now?" Basya's wrinkled

face was wet, as tears streamed down her cheeks non-stop. "Man grows old and weak – then he must leave this world behind. Karpenko simply sped things up a bit."

Basya takes a cup of sweet jelly – Mordechai's favorite food – from the table and serves it to the sick man. "Have a bit of this, Mordechai!" Her voice is warm, heartfelt, and hoarse; it rises from the very depths. He refuses, pushing her hand away with a weak wave. He continues to pronounce his little last will and testament.

"Basya! When I leave this place, you must see that I am buried in accordance with Jewish custom. Go see Spiridonovich" (this was the other coachman in Hadiach, Mordechai's colleague and competitor) "and say to him as follows: 'Sergei Spiridonovich! My husband Mordechai has died, and he requested that you take him to the Jewish cemetery, that he might be buried there in accordance with the custom of Israel...'"

The sick man fell silent. A few hours passed, and the end indeed came for Mordechai the coachman. His body was laid on the floor, and there is nothing more for us to tell concerning this joyous old man, or his horse Pavlik and his wagon that once dragged its way from Hadiach to Vilbovka and back. The final chapter of Mordechai's life had come to a close. Basya locks the door from the outside and heads over to see Sergey Spiridonovich. She was accustomed to listen to her husband while he was still alive, and how much more so now that he had died.

The two coachmen, Mordechai and Spiridonovich, were not at all mortal enemies. Sergey Spiridonovich was not one to abandon his colleague in his time of trouble. And so, a wagon went rolling through the streets of Hadiach, with the body of our friend Mordechai in it, wrapped in its burial shroud as is the custom, and covered with a black blanket. Only two people are accompanying the wagon – Basya, and the ridiculous gabbai, Belomordik. The gabbai has the crushed charity box in his hands.

It is an autumn day in Hadiach. Children are playing outside, playing and shouting. A ten-year-old girl is making a rubber ball dance from the ground to the wall and back again. "Charity shall save us from death!" – the shabby, longtime gabbai murmurs the age-old words as though they are second nature. Basya walks along bent over behind the wagon. As long as she is still alive – her soul yet vibrates within her, and she still

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has a heart and a store of tears.

"Stop!"

A police officer, one of those who had whipped the departed Mordechai at Karpenko's orders, approached the wagon and raised the black blanket. He then ordered the coachman to turn off into the main street and load another corpse that was wallowing in the road onto the wagon. It was the body of an anonymous Jew, one of the various refugees who had recently begun flowing into Hadiach from the surrounding villages.

Here is the cemetery. From the Shtiebel a few Jews slip out, headed up by the attendant Ginsburg. They pick up hoes and begun digging two graves. Spiridonovich and his horse head off on their way. Now the Jews set about burying their dead. That year the earth opened its mouth wide, thirsting for Jewish blood, crying: 'More, more!' And so, the graves were dug, the two bodies were lowered down, the tombs were sealed, and two new mounds of dirt now appeared. In one grave – lay Mordechai the coachman, a longtime resident of Hadiach since the day he was born. In the second grave – lay the body of the anonymous murder victim. They recited 'Kaddish', and '*El Malei Rachamim*' and it was all over.

Aharon Ginsburg now took up permanent residence at the Shtiebel, and other Hassids would come to him seeking pity and protection. If there was a need to hide, then it would be better to hide out in a sacred place. On Yom Kippur, which fell that year on the first of October, they prayed there as a congregation. Somehow Aharon Ginsburg managed to assemble a minyan of Jews – Reb Shlomo Shapiro came as well, as it was impossible that ten Jews would gather together in a single place without his presence, particularly in times of trouble such as these, and on the holiest day of the year, no less. There was only one thing that concerned him – comforting and picking up spirits and telling tales of the Holy Land. True, we have been exiled from our homeland and sent far away from our mother country. But in that place, there are yet, there are yet indeed Jews, our brethren and fellow Children of Israel, a brand-new, liberated nation, which feels and shares our pain. If the redemption is to come – it shall come from there, from the land of Zion and Jerusalem. There the Jews live, each man beneath his own vine, toiling dedicatedly, laboring in agriculture and industry, in the fields of Torah and secular wisdom, abounding in joy and song. He

has seen it all with his very own eyes. The Jewish nation lives!

Did you hear? The Jewish nation lives! And in the same way that Reb Shlomo Shapiro spread comfort and beneficent fantasies, so too did he attempt to organize some minimal form of salvation. For example, at the former house of the local minyan a soup kitchen had been opened for refugees, the elderly, and the poor. And what do you think – who were the regular workers there? Pesya Feigin and Beila Belomordik, the wife of the gabbai. Shlomo Shapiro would obtain the provisions in exchange for cash, with the help of Haya Sarah Berman. Leibke and Shimon Ginsburg, as well as our own Tamar, assisted in transferring the provisions to the kitchen. The meals were simple but good. Older people who were too weak had their meals brought directly to their homes, or else they were provided with raw items that they might prepare themselves. The guiding spirit behind the soup kitchen, the one who would gather the funds and purchase the necessary provisions, was Shlomo Shapiro.

The Jewish nation lives... even though new graves were constantly springing up in Hadiach, there were also young people who were dedicating their entire souls to the struggle. In the forest, in a spot well hidden from view, we find our old acquaintances Solomon and Binyamin constructing a mud hut. Glasha is there assisting them.

But the job is not quite as simple as removing a fly from your soup. First – you must prepare the building materials, including proper wooden logs that can serve as a frame for the mud hut. The logs must be measured, sawed, and planed. One must dig holes in the ground into which the logs will then be inserted, and these must then be covered with planks. One must then scatter branches, twigs, and dirt over the planks.

Our young men are taking true pleasure in working away at all this, and Glasha is assisting as well with all her might. They are building a hideout, a hidden shelter along a slope of the forest, the first partisan outpost in the area. Two pairs of eyes there cannot seem to get any rest. They meet, and the glances they cast go flying about this way and that. It seems to Glasha that peace has been restored in the world. What a wondrous thing! Only a few days have passed since she met up with Binyamin once again, and she now sees before her this young man, with his white smile, his slightly stooped shoulders, and his grey eyes that gaze at her with a touch of sorrow and joy all at once, beseeching

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her, dreaming and drawing her in incessantly. The eyes are constantly fixed on her, and she too is attracted to the young man, as some ancient tune seems to both hold itself back and burst forth all at once from her blossoming lips, as it is intoned silently in a world without any listeners.

The mud hut was completed and well camouflaged. Now they begin their life in the forest. Glasha the contact person receives her orders. She is to return to Vilbovka and communicate something to Gavrilenko. Binyamin goes along to accompany her. They walk along among the pines. Now that they are alone, they are both filled with shame and silence. The soil is silent, but their hearts are off dreaming.

"Go back, Binyamin, lest you get lost!"

They stand still a moment, hidden in the autumn forest. She raises her eyes to him and catches his warm gaze.

"Glasha!" he says. "I feel good, so good when I behold you before my eyes."

She turns red. At first, she turns red, and then she too murmurs a few things, as the slightly grieved tone in her voice quickly unravels a heartfelt thought.

"Two years ago, you were completely smitten with Lidia Stepanovna. You cast a spell on me, Binyamin!"

She says her piece and then runs off. The evening comes on. Glasha disappears among the pines and the forest, and with a faint, trembling smile, Binyamin heads back to Solomon. Without taking notice of anything around her, the girl rushes back to Vilbovka. An autumn evening falls, caressing and blanketing both the forest and the roads. The girl's heart has been flung open, and it now sings, singing away there in the dark. She steps up her pace and suddenly stumbles upon the rotting body of a woman among the bushes. How did Lidia Stepanovna get here?

She approaches the body, and sees the polished glassiness of the eyes, feels the cold hands. Her joy fades, as though someone dumped a bucket of cold water over her head.

This was certainly the work of Tichon Vasilyevich. Glasha had heard and was aware of a few things, and she had known Tichon Sidorenko for a long time. She was quite familiar with his unchecked character, his hands – those iron hands of his – and the songs he sang when he was

drunk.

But how was she to break the news of the tragedy to the invalid parents? She hurried back home and brought Vera with her. The two girls stood there and stared in horror at Lida's murdered body. The sky went black. The earth remained silent, it was at a complete loss for words. Everything was swallowed up by that cold, black shawl.

Chapter 2.8

When word of the murder of Lidia Stepanovna reached Roman Nazarovich, he once again sent Tanya to Vilbovka to invite Gavrilenko and Vera to come see him. Gavrilenko was not in the habit of refusing a request from Roman Nazarovich, given the fact that in his own time he had been a student of the latter's and a warm relationship reigned between the two teachers. With Mitrofan Petrovich's permission, Glasha joined Vera for the meeting.

At the home of Ivanchuk a minor consultation was thus taking place. Before her death Lida had confessed her situation to the old teacher, and he had not forgotten the name of Tichon Sidorenko. The owner of the house offered his opinion, and Glasha and Vera added a drop of their own feelings to the proceedings. The people there assembled briefly discussed the crime and its punishment; in essence, it was something of a trial in miniature.

"There is no place for Sidorenko beneath the sun!" said Roman Nazarovich Ivanchuk, irritably.

"He shall not live!" concluded Gavrilenko. A death sentence was issued against Tichon Vasilyevich Sidorenko.

Well I'll be! Gavrilenko, who in all his days had never heard tell of the decorated Professor from Leningrad, was now concerned with the latter's destiny. Vera and Glasha told of the state of health in which Stepan Borisovich and his wife found themselves. It was decided to transfer the old folks to Hadiach. Here things would be easier both for them, as well as for Vera.

The consultation was thus ended. Vera was now the sole means of support for the old folks. She and Glasha came armed with a made-up story about Lida. A German officer had heard Lida tinkling the ivories of Ivanchuk's piano and had been so impressed that he had at once taken her off to Poltava to have her perform a few concerts there. Before leaving, Lida had asked that her invalid parents be moved into town. There they had a comfortable residence waiting for them.

With a frozen look in his eye and a shabby smile on his face Stepan Borisovich listened to the kindly fiction. It was all the same to him. Who knew how many days he had left? He was gradually drifting further and further away from this place. His breath was coming shorter and shorter, his lung was shriveling up ever more – there was simply no air left for one to breathe! It was a shame that Lida had suddenly gone away like that. Would she still find him alive when she returned from Poltava?

And so, a wagon now stood beside the home of aunt Nastasya. Vera was packing up their things. The Edelman couple was moving to Hadiach. Up until now Stepan Borisovich had plotted his own way through life, but now the time had come that the man had grown weak, he had grown ever so weak. Klara Ilynishna's condition had also worsened.

People come, and people go. In the first half of our story we had a chance to get to know Mitrofan Petrovich Gavrilenko a bit – both the man and that prominent Adam's apple of his. He had been a permanent resident of Vilbovka, and due to his illness (a duodenum ulcer) he had not been drafted into the army at the start of the war. Later on, he had been given certain assignments by the central committee of the Party, and he had remained in his place when the Germans had arrived. He had developed an interest in the forest hideout that Glasha, Solomon, and Binyamin had established. After he had visited the spot and surveyed the surroundings he had found it suitable for organizing an expanded base of partisan operations.

Gavrilenko was an authoritative person. The hidden spot that Glasha had revealed to him was gradually turning into a well-populated camp. About a month ago various battles had raged here, as a large portion of the Soviet army along the southwestern front had been surrounded, and units from the southern camp of the German army had attacked on all sides. There had been many casualties, many men were taken prisoner, and many more had been scattered throughout the surrounding forests and villages. People were constantly moving through and along the paths of the forest of Vilbovka as well – both singly and in pairs – and some of them were even armed. They all wished to cross the front lines and escape the fascists. Many of them joined up with partisan units that were being organized here and there throughout the forest.

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People joined Gavrilenko's camp as well – most of them former army men, while only a handful were mere refugees. New mud huts now began popping up. A partisan platoon was quickly established. The commander of the platoon, Major Tikhonov, demonstrated a rather active spirit and a talent for organization. His second in command, Solomon Feigin, was also an active force, both diligent and filled with initiative. Glasha now served as the contact person between the partisan camp and Hadiach and its environs. Every day her youthful legs traversed rather considerable distances. Gavrilenko, who had been appointed as the *Kommissar*¹ of the battalion and had come to live in the forest as well, taught her how to take the necessary precautions. In general, she spent the night in Vilbovka at the home of her mother, Nastasya, but at times she would stay in the camp, and then she would find the opportunity to meet up with Binyamin. These meetings in the autumnal forest were filled with embarrassment and small talk.

This young woman had found her way into Binyamin's heart. Her entire being, from head to toe, was beloved to him. Her feet, shod with their rough boots, seemed to him to be the most delicate, beautiful pair of feet in the world. Her alertness, her readiness for action – which could be discerned in those youthful gestures of hers – her severe, grey eyes, her candid spirit, her soft, heartfelt voice – all these things were boundlessly attractive to him. For hours on end he would lie on that low ledge of his in the thick of the night, with his eyes wide open, envisioning and thinking about this girl here. But when the longed-for hour came and the two of them were alone in the forest, then he seemed to be unable to locate his own hands and feet, as it were. The more her feminine power grew, the less he seemed to be able to speak. She sensed his embarrassment, as she walked along by his side in those rough boots of hers, with a hidden smile frozen on her lips.

They go walking in the forest, and the pines murmur away as ever, giving voice to that sorrowful rustle of theirs. Binyamin is silent, his heart is full. Lately Glasha feels herself rather beautiful in his presence, and she has even adopted several rather ladylike behaviors. If fate has handed her such a soft-spoken young man, then she must take up the slack for both of them. And so, this daughter of Eve's gentle story comes

¹ Kommissar – a supervisory political officer in Russian army.

pouring forth.

But what does a young woman have to tell? She speaks of this and that, says silly things, loveable small talk, recounts the events of today and the day before. After a few meetings one begins to hear from the mouth of this girl the things that she keeps closest to her heart. And so, for example, she told Binyamin of the slaughter of the Jews in Grabila. Among those murdered there had also been Solomon's father.

"You must tell Grandma Pesya!" said Binyamin; he was horrified. "People must know what the fascists have in store for them."

Glasha related the details to him. The world seemed to gradually go dark. For many hours thereafter, the terrifying image continued to play before Binyamin's eyes.

And so, we once more encounter Glasha's face down the Garden alley. She has come in the utmost secrecy, towards evening. Pesya has already returned from her work in the communal kitchen, but Tamar is still at the Rosenkranz home. An odd friendship has formed lately between her and Raya Rosenkranz. In theory, there is a considerable difference between a thirteen-year-old girl and a grown young woman who has already completed high school. And yet the only thing they seem to know is – exchanging secrets, whispering away, and perhaps striking some secret pact.

And so, Glasha appears once more in the Garden alley. There she is once again in the dining room of the Feigin home. What neglect now reigns in this room here. The fascists did not skip over the place, and traces of their presence stick out everywhere. Only a few days have passed since Glasha's visit here, and now this shriveled old woman is standing there before her, and it seems that the lady's hair has just recently turned white.

"Grandma!" says Glasha. She sits down at the table and stares out the window. The two trees in the yard are wrapped in the faint light of evening. Still, silent, and sorrowful, the trees stare back in their own right at the girl. "Grandma!" she says once more, in embarrassment, and Pesya's heart foretold foul tidings. "Your son Solomon Yefimovich is well. He and Binyamin are in a secure place. They do not need a thing, other than tobacco."

There is a brief, threatening pause. There is evil news yet hidden in

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Glasha's bosom. Pesya places a kettle and cups for tea on the table, and then she freezes on the spot. Glasha hesitates a moment. Something is weighing down on her, something that cannot be avoided, hanging there in the air.

"Grandma!" now the harshest things of all shall be told. "I saw Grandpa in his final moments. The fascists killed him, along with several other men. I saw it all with my own eyes."

The cup fell from Pesya's hands. There was the sound of glass shattering. With a meek groan, the groan of a slaughtered bird, Pesya fell as well. At that moment Tamar walked in. The two girls tended to the old woman who had fainted.

Things were foul and bitter in Ukraine, and they were a hundred times worse throughout the Soviet Union. Between the 9th and 15th of October Oryol, Bryansk, and Vyazma had all fallen into enemy hands. The fascists were approaching Moscow. They had already conquered Kharkov.

One day, during the second half of October, a '*Bekanntmachung*'¹ was hung in Hadiach that announced that all the Jews – men, women, and children – were to come down at ten the next morning to the central square for general registration. Whoever did not show up – would be severely punished.

There were arguments and discussions among the Jewish population: should they respond to the summons, or not? Shlomo Shapiro would not budge from his strategy – they must hide! Whoever among them had prepared a hiding place for themselves – they should waste no time and disappear at once. And whoever had not prepared a hiding place – should do so at once. The refugees from the nearby towns had made it rather clear just what the intent was behind this said '*Bekanntmachung*'. Either instant death for all, or else the old folks and little children were to be led to the slaughter, while the remainder of them would be transferred into forced labor. The refugees all told the very same story and they had their own bitter experiences to back up their tale.

¹ '*Bekanntmachung*' - public announcement (German).

The signal was transmitted; notice had been given by the village elder. But it is not easy to decide where to run to when you find yourself caught between the hammer and the anvil. The passive and delicate souls among them, those who believed that everything the Lord did - He did for your best, decided to heed the summons and show up in the square. As a matter of course, it turned out that Moshe Sochorinsky was among those who showed up. It was all such stupidity! The Germans loved order. How could they possibly gather hundreds of people and march them off to the grave without the slightest investigation or a proper trial? What sins can they say that I, Moshe Sochorinsky, have committed? I never took a position against the Russians, or against the Germans, the devil take them. Why should I hide?

There were other simple-minded, innocent Jews in Hadiach, who did not believe that their final day had indeed arrived. Isaac the shoemaker from the Garden alley, who had opened a proper workshop and was making a decent living, was also not inclined to go into hiding – not himself and not his family either. What do you want? There was money to be made, and thanks to the boots and shoes that he fabricated for free on behalf of policemen and German officers, he felt a certain sense of security. He would head for the square at the appointed hour, register, and return home – after all, he had to finish a pair of shoes for the Burgermeister Karpenko and another pair for one of the German officers by tomorrow. Would they truly do wrong by a man such as him, an artisan who lived by the sweat of his own brow?

An individual begins to turn a bit rotten when he gives himself up to the desire for lucre. Haya Sarah Berman's way of thinking was the same as that of Isaac the shoemaker. It was a puzzling thing to behold! That grand store still stood before her eyes like a shiny dream. But what value was there in lightning once it had already struck? Yet Haya Sarah was still of the opinion that things would come back around again. It was difficult to reason with this full-bellied woman. She would go down and register, and then she would continue her activities in those two rooms of hers in Vokzalny Street. Hear what this woman, Haya Sarah Berman, is telling you! This narrow pantry, with all these sacks and bags along its shelves, will yet become a grand supermarket, with various departments, and salespeople dressed to the nines. On the colorful paper bags for the customers' purchases there will be printed in huge letters: C. S. Berman...

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With a mixture of anguish and revulsion Golda listens to the words pronounced by her mother-in-law. Her own eyes have not been similarly blinded. Golda is responsible for her little girl, along, perhaps, with the newest scion of the house, that hidden spot of warmth that she is carrying around in her womb. The friction once more breaks out in the Berman home. There is absolutely no way to make peace between them, between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law! Berman is torn between the two women, as he fails to comport himself as the man of the house. The day passes with stinging remarks and harsh words. Evening comes.

'Register!' the signs call out from the walls, where the word is written in German from left to right, and in Ukrainian from right to left.

"You must hide! You must hide, no matter what!" Shlomo Shapiro is steadfast in his opinion. "In any event, if a few fools go down to register, and then allowed to return home, one can still emerge from one's hiding place in a matter of a few days and find some excuse for not showing up – such as an illness or the like."

The modest words are passed around from soul to soul. A few of them feverishly prepare their hiding places. There are secrets and whispers all around, accompanied by the muffled knock of ax and hammer. Pickaxes split the earth, there is a slow rustle, as clumps of dirt are shuffled off in silence. Itzik Slutsky is depressed, but also agrees with Shapiro's opinion. He is a short, broad-shouldered Jew, with an angry look in his eye and an active pair of hands. In normal times this man was fond of tending to his garden. Apples, plums, pears and cherries, dozens of fruit trees – all these needed tending, and Itzik Slutsky was not one to try to get out of work. But the thing was – the young boys gave him no rest. From the moment the unripe apples first began to appear, the youths would immediately begin invading his garden during the nighttime. How could one not be in a foul mood?

Slutsky had lost his faith in people in general and even more so in fascists. As for the question of whether to go down and register with those murderers – what, was he crazy, was he completely out of his mind? It would be better to hang oneself than to fall into their hands. If Moshe Sochorinsky, who was in the habit of finding what to praise in every abomination there was, desired to go and commit suicide – let him head out and register. He, Itzik, was going to stay home. He even had himself a hiding place.

Slutsky had an industrious pair of hands, and the hiding place was properly prepared, and well camouflaged. Itzik had a black, lazy dog, named Jacques – a none-too-young creature that assisted its owner in his war against the local thieves about as much as a round of bloodletting might help a dead man. Jacques' lair served as a cover for Slutsky's hiding place. He had set up a sealed partition in the basement, and the hiding place was arranged in the rear section, which led straight to Jacques' lair.

The folks were trying to be wise, but there was terror and helplessness in their dejected eyes.

Let us now pay a visit to the Shtiebel, since there too certain events are gradually shaping up. Aharon Ginsburg labors there in the name of the Holy Rebbe, the Admor Reb Schneur Zalman, of blessed memory. The wooden dome seemed to stoop over the grave. As ever, there were Hebrew words engraved on marble tablets in golden letters. The eternal flame illuminated a tiny patch of the earth, yet its faint light spread wide and penetrated the very depths, across broad expanses, up into the very heavens. Aharon Ginsburg kept watch over that spark of light to ensure that it did not die down, making sure that the emissaries of the *Sitra Achra* not gain control over it. Aharon Ginsburg shall neither slumber nor sleep, as he guards the eternal flame. Perhaps a few white hairs have been added to his beard, perhaps his eyes are somewhat red and swollen, but he refuses to give up.

His son Leibke is standing to his right. The boy believes in his father – this same wild boy who previously had eyes only for the fruit in the gardens of strangers. His tanned face has turned even darker, a serious look now flashes in his eyes, and his cheeks are sunken. The boy has come of age. From this point on, he will not leave his father's side. And he fulfills quite precisely the commands that Ginsburg issues, as he goes into town from time to time, serving as the contact person between the Shtiebel and the Jews of Hadiach, in addition to bringing his father provisions.

Ginsburg is certain that only the Rebbe has the power to save the community of Hadiach from extermination. The fascists would not dare to come here and were they to come – they would meet with utter defeat.

News of the 'Bekanntmachung' made it all the way to the Shtiebel,

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and Ginsburg now sends Leibke into town to invite Jews to come and take shelter beneath the wings of the Rebbe. Leibke obeys his orders, even though wandering through the streets of Hadiach is a dangerous enterprise. By chance he might well run into Karpenko or Margarita Fridrichovna, and then he would meet with a rather bitter end, and he might well bring down disaster on the other members of the family as well. Yet no harm comes to those on a sacred mission, so Leibke heads into town and notifies the folks of the good news, that they should have no fear, nor allow their spirits to flag! Let them come to the Shtiebel, there no harm shall befall them.

And what do you know? A few Jews did indeed gather in the Shtiebel. The thing is, not a soul knew which way to turn for guaranteed safety. Time was short, and one had to decide. There were more Jewish faces out and about in the streets of Hadiach today. Tomorrow it would be prohibitive to appear in public. Today – was the last day. And so various Jews gathered in the Shtiebel with their bundles; there were women and children among them as well. Who knows? Perhaps the spirit of the Rebbe would perform a miracle. Even those of little faith believed that while the power of the great Rebbe might not be all that great at a distance, but perhaps right here, in the town of Hadiach, and even more so in the Shtiebel, the Alter Rebbe might have a certain control over things, and here they might manage to make themselves small and stay out of sight until the fury passed. These folks cast their burdens upon the Alter Rebbe. The holy man is hidden in the earth, and the cemetery attendant Ginsburg is acting in his name. Faith, my fellow Jews! He sits there in the Shtiebel in his regular spot, right next to the Holy Ark, and his lips are whispering away in prayer. The people assembled there stared at him with fear in their eyes.

As evening approaches, several more people slip into the Shtiebel. Well I'll be! Even Shlomo Shapiro and his wife Berta Abramovna have come. Wherever there is a minyan of Jews, there you are sure to find Shlomo Shapiro. In theory, the man called for people to set up hidden hiding places. How could you possibly trust in the Shtiebel, if the home of the Alter Rebbe was open to the four winds, as it were? Yet Shlomo Shapiro said: wherever one finds the Children of Israel, there must also be a Rabbi for the Children. Ginsburg is conversing with God, yet Shapiro, for his part, makes a simple conversation with the people who have gathered here.

It is now evening. New faces show up. Doctor Engertov appears with various medications in his suitcase. Mazal Tov! Golda the midwife has arrived as well! This Jewish lady has brought many children into the world, but she too is now in need of salvation.

The windows are sealed. The people whisper amongst themselves. Shlomo Shapiro tries to toss them some comforting words. At the last moment, well into the night, the Ginsburg family arrives – including Tzipa Lea and Sarka, Golda with Ahuva in her arms, along with her three brothers, Leibke, Shimon, and Avka. Berman is the last one to enter. But where is Haya Sarah?

We will yet tell of Haya Sarah. The ridiculousness of it all! Berman, the man unable to decide which side to support, finally went into action. He joined Golda and began trying to convince his mother that it was urgently imperative to go into hiding. The old lady objected with all her might. How could she leave behind all the merchandise that she had amassed at her place? No, she was going to stay. She, thank God, had not yet lost her mind.

Just then, in walked Leibke, Golda's brother, and he was exhausted and sweaty.

"Father said that you should all come to the Shtiebel! There the fascists will not lay a hand on you."

Haya Sarah broke into a scornful laugh, a somewhat artificial laugh. Truth be told, this woman too was being consumed by doubt.

"And why does my daughter's father-in-law think that salvation will come from the Shtiebel?"

"Let's go!" said Golda, decisively. In the end, she too was a mother, and she had her own responsibilities. She had faith in her father. Aharon Ginsburg, despite all his strangeness, was a respected and beloved father. It was now Berman's turn.

"Mother, let's go!" he said, launching himself into his first and final battle against his mother. "Let's leave this place, mother! How can you possibly remain all by yourself at such a time?"

"No one's going to rob me!" said Haya Sarah angrily.

Golda finished packing her things. She stood there, with Ahuva in her arms, waiting silently. Her silence spoke volumes.

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"Go! Go to hell, all of you!" the old lady burst out screaming. "No matter what, I'm staying here!"

"Fare thee well!" Berman pronounced the hollow words and gave Haya Sarah a faint kiss on the cheek. Yet something suddenly crumbled in the soul of that mother there. She embraced her son, pressing him close to her breast and standing still like that for a few seconds. Something between a groan and a brief sob burst forth from her heart.

They took their things. Leibke, Shimon, and Avka were also tasked with carrying some of the bundles. The adults and children said goodbye to Haya Sarah and left the home. Grey shadows went moving through the streets and along the pathways. Haya Sarah locked the house door from inside. A black terror descended upon her. It was not that late yet, and she did not put on the light. She sat there and stared out at Vokzalny Street. The street gradually grew darker. A non-Jewish woman was sitting on a bench across the way and chewing something hastily, as though she was afraid that someone might come and tear the morsel out of her mouth. She finished chewing and continued looking about indifferently. She was wearing a none-too-fresh multicolored dress and a striped blouse that was torn and patched up; the heels of her shoes were worn.

We are familiar with this woman – it is Ksenya, the daughter of Ulyana Mazurok. She gets up from her seat and moves away from the bench with a measured gait.

Haya Sarah's heart is filled with repressed fear. She steps over to the bed and lies down, still fully dressed. She buries her face in the pillow. There is silence. Only the near-silent nibbling of the mice can be heard coming from the pantry.

And that is how we shall leave Haya Sarah. It may well be that she is not sleeping – the sound of her snoring cannot be heard this evening. We stealthily step into the Garden alley, into the Feigin home. Here we see them making some minor preparations for the struggle. Pesya has invited the Rosenkranz family to her hideout – that is, Frida Levovna and her daughter, Raya. Haim Yakov and Nachman Moiseevich passed away the same day, and a sort of pact writ in blood was sealed between the two women. True, Frida Levovna, who is ten years younger than Pesya, sees the latter as a representative of the older generation. Whereas Pesya's home is kosher, in accordance with the tradition of our

ancestors, Frida Levovna has little respect for matters related to Judaism. Pesya – is a simple Jewess, whereas Frida considers herself a member of the enlightenment. Yet this is not the place to get into an extended discussion of such things.

And so, two women and two girls are now preparing themselves to go up to the hiding place in the attic. They are speaking in a whisper and working swiftly and skillfully, as they prepare food items, and a supply of water. They transfer all this to the hiding place, along with sheets, pillows, and blankets. Then they close the shutters on the windows quite well and lie down for one final time to sleep in their rooms. The evil hour shall strike tomorrow at ten o'clock. First thing in the morning they must head up to the hideout and remain silent.

Raya and Tamar are lying side by side, and for a long while the sound of their whispering can be heard. What are the girls whispering about? At this point we can reveal their secret. They are getting ready to disguise themselves as Ukrainians and escape from Hadiach. For the time being they are not revealing their plans for fear of encountering resistance on the part of the old ladies.

Tamar had long ago decided to run away, from the time the fascists paid their visit at the Feigin home along with those gunshots fired by the German officer. If she is to continue being a daughter of the Jewish people, she must disappear from the world. Children demand security from the adults, and a thirteen-year-old wishes to live. Tamar was rather obedient by nature, and she particularly loved her mother, and her Grandma Pesya. But she was not to blame for having been born Jewish, nobody had asked her opinion in the matter. Now she was facing extermination because of that.

She came to a decision in her heart to fight for her very existence. Given the fact that her life in Hadiach brought with it the danger of death, she had decided to run away with Raya Rosenkranz to a place where no one knew her.

Raya – was a pretty girl whose hair was blond and whose eyes were blue. Although her nose was a bit curved, and at times a rather Jewish look flashed in her prominent eyes –her appearance was that of an average Aryan. The girls were now discussing their outfits; these must be in line with their general attempt to camouflage their identities.

A few more minutes passed, and the girls fell silent. They have now

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drifted off to sleep – that is the advantage of youth. Whereas the old ladies were busy tossing and turning from side to side. Suppressed sighs could be heard.

There is silence and darkness in Hadiach. We now move on. Miriam Loytin's lot has not improved. Her husband Ezekiel – is off in the Red Army, and she has been left behind in Hadiach with her two children. The tension of recent days has left its mark on Lea, her invalid daughter. The epileptic attacks have increased in frequency, and the girl now regularly lies in bed swallowing medication. Pesya Feigin, who had promised Ezekiel at the time to keep an eye on his family, invited Miriam and her children to the Garden alley. However, Lea could not leave her bed, and Miriam had decided that they would remain at their house. With the appearance of the 'Bekanntmachung' she moved with the children to the back room, the entrance to which was slightly hidden.

The fascists had paid a visit to Miriam's house as well, and with all the rest of the booty they took they had also stolen her two pigs. The Loytin family was thus stripped completely naked and left with nothing. Miriam exchanged what few items they had left for food. She was forced to sell Ezekiel's holiday suit. The bandits came and even took his good coat.

Our little tour of Hadiach has thus ended. Perhaps we should recall the old folks a moment. Esther the noodle-maker and her daughter Nechama also desire to live. Esther's hiding place had been prepared both wisely and elegantly many years previously by Zerah the coachman, and the old ladies made their beds there in good time and took with them the necessary provisions. It would be superfluous to mention that Nechama was the one who did all the work, though her mother Esther was the one giving the orders.

Reb Dovid the shochet lived with his distant relatives. He refused to go into hiding. The blind old man had not lost his faith in the God of Israel. He had witnessed much in his life and he knew that the hand of God's oversight was in everything. During the six days of creation the world had been formed – including the heavens and the earth, light and darkness, life and all the various plants, and the first human being. And during creation of the world, this eternal warfare was also brought into being. Light and darkness clash with one another, the plants shove one another's feet out of the way, and living things tear each other to

pieces. For many generations now, human beings as well have kept themselves busy spilling one another's blood. The Blessed Lord chose Israel as His nation and gave them the Torah and the practical commandments for them to follow. Now along came the heretics who began denigrating God's Torah. Was it any wonder that the patience of He-Who-is-Slow-to-Anger had been worn out, and that He had risen to erase this lawless generation from the face of the earth? As far as Reb Dovid the shochet was concerned – he had faith, and trust in the Lord. God was looking down from His sacred heights, overlooking and observing all the actions of every human being. When the final moment would come, Reb Dovid would wrap himself up in his tallit and immerse himself in prayer. If he was to be tasked with bearing the sins of this crooked generation, he was not at all inclined to go into hiding and try to slip away from the rod of the Lord.

This is the position of Reb Dovid, the blind shochet, and there were no forces in the world that might change his mind.

Night passed, and morning came.

Up until the final moment the Germans did not reveal a thing. This was how they acted generally – every move was planned in the utmost secrecy, so that the victims would neither flee nor go into hiding.

In the morning there were an increased number of SS men and police officers in the town. They sealed off the roads that led out of town. A military guard appeared along every street. At around ten o'clock some Jews could be seen in the streets, walking in the direction of the central square. However, they were few in number, and the Gestapo commander nearly burst in anger. According to their calculations, there were between 200 and 250 Jews in Hadiach, yet at the appointed spot only twenty-something Jews had assembled.

The order was then issued, and SS vehicles spread out through town to uncover the hiding places and drag the remaining Jews to the square. Shouts and screams could be heard in the streets. The small group of people standing in the square near the Kommandatura headquarters gradually grew in number.

But this is just not to be believed! The first people to be brought down here were Stepan Borisovich and Klara Ilynishna, those Russian folks from Leningrad.

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For several days now, the Edelman family had been living in Hadiach under more comfortable conditions than back in Vilbovka. Their new living quarters were spacious and well-lit. A sufficient amount of dry wood for heating had been prepared. There were also a few provisions and articles of clothing left in the house. Vera handled the various items and provisions as though they were her own. In any event the Germans or the neighbors were going to take them. If Stepan Borisovich got better, the war would come to an end and our forces would claim victory (on this score Vera had no doubts whatsoever), and then the Professor would repay twice the value of whatever she had taken.

Today Vera is doing the laundry. The dry wood is burning away with a crackling sound. A tub filled with warm water stands on the stovetop. Vera is standing there before the washtub, and her pockmarked face is glowing with sweat. Stepan Borisovich is lying motionless – it would seem that he has now fallen asleep following a sleepless night. Since Vera is busy doing the laundry, Klara Ilynishna is tending to a few light household chores. The three of them know that his morning the Jews must go to register, but they are at peace – the matter does not concern them.

Disaster struck all of a sudden.

The door was not locked, and it was suddenly thrown wide open. Two SS men, dressed in black uniforms, along with a single police officer, burst into the hallway and opened the door to the kitchen. Pockmarked Vera is of no interest to them. They noisily enter the room where the old folks are. The sound of boots clacking on the floor awakens Stepan Borisovich from his slumber.

"*Juden?*" asks the SS man.

"*Wir sind Russen!*"¹ replies Stepan Borisovich in a weak voice. He is quite fluent in both German and English; he is rather familiar with the French language as well.

Where is his passport? With trembling hands, he begins searching for the document. There it is written plainly in black and white that he is

¹ 'We are Russians!' (German).

Russian. Quickly, Professor, remember, show them! Yet the Professor's mind is all confused, and he is unable to find his passport. For several days now, the Professor has not shaved his beard, and his face is very clearly a Jewish face. At last he remembers that their passports are hidden in the volume of 'War and Peace' that is resting on the bookcase.

"Klara!" he calls out, with just a touch of panic in his voice. "Hand me the Tolstoy!"

He shows the SS men the documents, making small talk with them all the while in the German language, as he tells the murderers his life story. He – is a Professor from Leningrad, and he came here because of his illness, namely tuberculosis. The fascists stared at him with a sour look on their faces. At that moment the police officer pulled the blanket off the invalid and revealed his circumcision. Stepan Borisovich had been born in Kiev, to a rich family that was quite separated from Judaism, yet his father had found some minor, unfortunate merit in circumcising his sons. To the Jewish aristocracy in Kiev he had explained that he did it out of hygienic concerns.

Which of the signs was preferable – a suspect entry in a passport, or the mark of the covenant of our forefather Abraham? The murderers were not inclined to adopt a merciful stance. The documents were most definitely forged. And besides, the Gestapo commander was out there raising hell...

"Schnell! Schnell! Aufstehen!"¹

"Where are you taking him? I mean, the man is quite sick!" said Vera, who had come into the room with her hands wet and red from doing the laundry.

"Shut up, fool, or they'll take you too!" said the Russian police officer.

The vehicle was waiting outside. The police officer dragged Stepan Borisovich out like he was a sack of potatoes. Klara Ilynishna walked along behind him. Her eyes were sticking out and throwing off sparks, her face was aflame, and she kept screaming incessantly: "Be careful! Carefully now!", as though the men were dragging along some fragile

¹ 'Quickly! Quickly! Get up!' (German).

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porcelain vase. And now the Professor is sitting in the back of the vehicle. They shove Klara Ilynishna in there as well. She does not put up any resistance.

With a concerned look on her face, Vera walks along behind the vehicle as it disappears into the distance. In the kitchen the wood continues to burn with that crackling sound, the water starts to boil, and the whites lie there in the tub.

The vehicles go moving through the streets of Hadiach. Watch out, you Jews! Let no man make a sound, let no infant raise their voice! Vigorous knocks at the door go moving along from house to house. "Open up!"

The hunt continues. Hard times came to the home of Ezekiel Loytin as well. There was a mighty knocking at the door. Three souls froze in the back room. The door that led to this room was camouflaged, but only in a rather symbolic fashion: there was wallpaper covering it over on the outside. The knocking grew louder. "Yekel! Jump out the window and go hide!" came Miriam's emotional whisper.

The boy cautiously opened the window and leaped into the yard. A moment later his panic-stricken head appeared. "Mother, what about the two of you?" The murderers were raising quite a ruckus. "Yekel! Run for it this instant!" At that moment Lea suffered an epileptic attack. A spasm shook her limbs, the foamy spit began to appear in the corners of her mouth, and the mattress bounced beneath her. Miriam shut the window. At that moment the fascists burst into the room.

"*Judische Schwein*¹, why didn't you open the door?"

Like a bird protecting her chick Miriam bent over the body of her flailing daughter. *Schneller! Schneller!* Lea, who had fainted, and Miriam were dragged to the vehicle. The number of Jews in the square had now increased by two more. Moshe Sochorinsky, who had come down of his own volition, greeted those who were brought down by force with a pleasant look on his face. Why try to hide, I mean, they'll anyway manage to find your hiding place? A little more time passes. Reb Dovid the shochet is brought down. He is pressing his black velvet tallit bag

¹ 'Jewish swine' (German).

close to his heart, and his lips are murmuring chapters from Psalms. He is a short man with a broad beard. Due to his blindness, he is taking cautious steps as he proceeds. It is a few years now already that we have been acquainted with this blind warrior. Old and blind as he is, Reb Dovid was known to sally forth against those brazen youths, the barefoot heretics, who thought that they had conquered the world of the Holy One Blessed Be He. Yet Reb Dovid knows that we do, indeed, have our God, and He shall be the one to judge, He alone shall be the one to decide when the Day of Judgment comes.

And the Day of Judgment is now here. But what happened in the end to Haya Sarah Berman? Haya Sarah's luck did not hold. The hooligans discovered her residence. It can only be that someone turned her in. Lately many different people had come to visit her home, including both Jews and non-Jews. They conducted a search and found the pantry-cum-supermarket. One of the bandits found a bag filled with lard. Now they went rummaging about for some hard liquor. These wild beasts have quite a sense of smell: they found two bottles. A glass of liquor and some pork for dessert – what could be better? Haya Sarah saw her merchandise being plundered by this rabble, and her spirit began to boil within her. "Don't touch the lard, that's not yours!" she screamed in Yiddish. Every sip and bite echoed in her heart, as those ravenous teeth went tearing through her things.

The bottles were emptied. The order then came: "You old lady, let's go!" She stepped outside and wanted to lock the door to her house.

"There's no need!" said the SS man, as he shoved her towards the vehicle. She insisted, as her hand with the key in it was drawn once more to the keyhole. The fascist tore the key from her hand, locked the door, and slipped the key into his pocket. In the meantime, they were shoving Haya Sarah into the rear of the vehicle. She began to scream: "The key! Give me the key!"

Some more time passed. The number of Jews gathered in the square had now reached sixty. They stood there all huddled together, waiting for their bitter fate to be decided. Moshe Sochorinsky was puzzled: why weren't they beginning the registration process? After all, in the notice it had been written in black and white that the Jewish population had to come down for that purpose at ten in the morning.

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A certain restlessness and lack of peace began to stir in the people's hearts. Nechama, the daughter of Esther the noodle-maker was brought down. The ridiculousness of it all – old Esther had truly lost her mind! The two women had hidden themselves away quite well. It was hard to imagine that their hiding place would be discovered. From the early morning, for three or four hours, they had sat there in the hideout. Then Esther had decided to check and see if the danger had already passed.

"Nechama!" she commanded; all her life, Esther had always been the one in charge. "Go outside and see what's going on in town!"

Nechama refused. Who knew if she would not be placing herself in mortal danger? But Esther the noodle-maker was not accustomed to any signs of rebellion on Nechama's part.

"Go, you dog!"

The old lady had lost it! Even on this day of widespread slaughter she was demanding the same old discipline!

"I told you to go! It's clear to me that the alarm has passed, and all is quiet throughout the town."

Nechama opened the camouflaged hatch, went up into the room, and put the cover back in place. And so she now found herself in the room where she had spent the more than seventy years of her life. She locked the front door, and this was a mistake. She sat down for a few minutes, listening to the silence. Poverty reigned in the room. The furniture was worn, the walls were tattered – they had not been repainted in ages. Suddenly Nechama heard an engine rattling, and a little while later there was a vigorous knocking at the door. Nechama was terrified. What was she to do? The door was now locked from the inside. The murderers would realize that people were hiding here. Even if she managed to return to the hiding place, they would burst inside, carry out a detailed search, and then both she and her mother would pay with their lives.

It seemed to her that she could hear the angry voice of her mother rising up from the very depths:

"You dog, open the door!"

And so Nechama opened up. SS men burst into the room and saw the old Jewish lady, who was laying her life down for her domineering

mother. The search they carried out was a superficial one, the hiding place was not discovered, and Nechama was brought down to the square.

The vehicles continued to rattle through the streets. Let us take our minds off these dreadful sights for a moment. Down the Garden alley, up in the attic, our old friend Tamar is lying there with her eyes wide open. The voice of Kim Wartman is ringing in her ears. Was it in a dream or she had really heard his voice?

How does love finds its way into a person's heart? Somebody waves their magic wand, and a silent violin begins to play inside the soul. One by one, other instruments begin to join in – and soon an entire silent orchestra is raising its voice, as all of creation seems to be playing the tune.

Kim Wartman lived with his aunt Agrippina Andreyevna in Veprik, and there too the lawlessness and abandon was running wild. The German unit that occupied the village, the *Starosta*¹, and the local police – they all stole and plundered, in addition to dragging people off to do forced labor. Kim was quite fond of his studies at school. In the autumn following their vacation was when classes were the most interesting. And yet now the school was closed, and he had not had a chance to make any new friends. His aunt, a forty-year-old woman, wore a pair of glasses perched on her nose, and she was boring enough to make you want to throw up. He was fed up with this kind of life. It was true that Tamar's absence made him suffer. Day and night the boy saw the image of that dark-haired girl before his eyes. The soul of this little man, with his flaming Jewish eyes and his statuesque height, was full of that sad figure.

Kim decided to run away from Veprik. But where to? First, he would go to Hadiach, and see his friends, especially Tamar, and then he would try to reach Kharkov, and see how his parents were doing. The entire night he barely closed his eyes. He had already written his farewell letter the evening before.

"My dear aunt!" he had written in the letter; despite all his indifference regarding Agrippina Andreyevna, he knew that the latter

¹ Starosta - civil administrator (Russian).

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was quite devoted to him, and that she was his sole means of support in this horror-filled world. "My dear aunt! I am leaving you. Please do not go looking for me, you won't be able to find me in any case. Goodbye, Kim".

The dawn broke, and Agrippina Andreyevna was still sleeping soundly – along the road that led from Veprik to Hadiach we can make out the boy walking along swiftly. About three hours passed – and he found himself in the Garden alley. The gate was closed and locked, but what was a fence a meter and a half high to a fourteen-year-old boy? With a single bound – Kim was in the yard. The shutters were closed, and only the door to the basement, where he had once gathered bottles with Tamar, was open. He went down into the basement, and the scent of pickled cucumbers hit him in the face. Here he had stood with Tamar, as her sad, attractive smile had flickered in the darkness. He left the basement behind.

"Tamar!" he called softly. "It's me, Kim! Look, I've come back! Where are you?"

At that moment Tamar was lying in the concealed hiding place in the attic with Raya, Frida Levovna, and Grandma Pesya. She was terrified. Was it in a dream or in reality that she had heard the voice? It was drawing Tamar downstairs, to the rooms below. But at that moment the sound of a rattling motor could be heard nearby, along with voices calling: "Open up!" The voices were coming from the house of Isaac the shoemaker. He and his family had gone down to register, yet all the same the bandits were breaking into his house and carrying out a detailed search. They found a supply of leather and boots, and they transferred it all to their vehicle. They took Karpenko's boots with them as well. Kim heard the ruckus they were raising, and he went and jumped back over the fence and hid behind it.

The murderers now moved on to the Feigin home. The gate was locked from the inside, and the sounds of their shouting and knocking could be heard. Two women and two girls froze where they were in their hiding place, their hearts were petrified, they held their breath, even the flow of blood in their veins came to a halt. Only in their minds did the hammer of fear continue banging away.

The murderers burst into the yard. They broke down the door and entered the house. Kim lay there behind the fence and peeked through

one of its cracks. A few minutes later the SS men reappeared in the yard – they had not discovered the hiding place and they had not found anything worth stealing.

They stepped back out into the Garden alley. The vehicle disappeared into the distance. With a leap – Kim was back in the yard. The front door of the house was wide open. There was confusion and disorder in all the rooms. Perhaps the girl was hiding out somewhere?

"Tamar!" Kim called out once more. "It's me, Kim!"

There was no response. Kim stepped outside, and wandered through town, making his way to the central square. A group of Ukrainians stood off at a distance. He pressed up amongst them. More than sixty Jews were there, standing, sitting, and lying around right next to the Kommandatura. A little boy was crying bitterly, and his voice rose up to the murky heavens above. SS men, all fully armed, would not let a single soul leave the circle. Kim surveyed the faces of those assembled; Tamar was not among them. A Ukrainian gave him a look. "*Chi ti chasom nye yevrey, chalopchik? Tikai otsyudova!*"¹

He left once more to wander about the town, and then returned to the Garden alley. Like a magnet Tamar was drawing the boy to her. He entered the house, locked the broken door and lay down on the low couch. He was exhausted. He had not slept the night before. He would just rest for a few minutes.

He quickly fell asleep.

¹ 'Hey boy, aren't you Jewish? Get out of here!' (Ukrainian).

Chapter 2.9

It was two in the afternoon. The Jews who had been gathered in the central square were still waiting for their fate to be decided. The SS men and the armed police officers were standing around them in a circle.

Professor Edelman, who was mortally ill, was lying there on the damp ground! At first, he was rather active, even displaying a certain aggrieved anger. In fluent German he had demonstrated that the men who had brought him down here had made a mistake. How could this be? He was not a Jew, he was Russian! His books had earned themselves a reputation not only in Russia, but abroad as well. The passports had been left behind in the house – both his and his wife's. There it was quite clearly listed that...

This was the second time that this man was running away from his dangerous kinship with the Hebrew nation. The first time was when he had converted to Christianity. He was now piling on the words, and the things he was saying were directed at the SS man who was nearest him. This was a pale individual dressed in a black uniform decorated with the sign of a skull; he had a pair of spectacles on his nose, which lent the beast of prey the look of a rather cultured individual. Stepan Borisovich turned to the owner of those spectacles and went on talking to him for quite a while. His bothersome voice finally tired out the SS man.

"Tell him to pull his pants down!" one of the others – who had been to Stepan Borisovich's house and knew the secret of his circumcision – advised the bespectacled SS man.

At that moment the Professor was seized by a prolonged bout of coughing. With rough hands and a look of disgust on his face the SS man pulled down the old man's pants and revealed the Jewish mark that was engraved in his shriveled foreskin. The owner of the spectacles gaily notified his comrades of what he had found. The ridicule and laughter of the fascists grew to a crescendo in the square. Stepan Borisovich was coughing and flailing, as his last bit of strength left him. He fell silent for

a little while. Klara Ilynishna whispered something to him – and it looked like she was either trying to comfort him or persuade him of something.

Reb Dovid the shochet stood there motionless, as his lips continued to murmur chapters from Psalms. He held his tallit bag in his hands. His blind eyes were turned toward the east. The heavens, the earth, and all those who walked it, did not distract him. Nechama stared at the old man. His whispered, prayerful plea could not be heard. Dovid was now serving as a middleman between her and the Master of the Universe. Nechama's life in this world had not been sweet in the least. When she was just a girl her father, Zerah the coachman, had died, and her mother had ruled over her like a tyrant. Her entire long life had been filled with hard work, rebukes, and vulgar insults. All the same, she loved Esther, and as she stared at the murmuring lips of the old shochet, she prayed in her heart for her mother who had been left all alone down in the basement. Who would serve her now?

This was the first time that Nechama had been liberated from the authority of her mother and she seemed to have jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

Miriam Loytin's eyes went wandering over the square, seeking Yekel. She was hoping to catch sight of the boy, but she was also afraid. The sky grew dark. The first drops of rain began to fall at the people's feet. Lea, Miriam Loytin's daughter, was lying there somewhere between waking and sleeping. Miriam sat by the girl's head, supporting it in her lap.

The last Jew was now brought down – it was Belomordik the gabbai, and he had the charity box in his hands. He had been caught in the street, as he was returning from a funeral that had been held earlier in the day. Every day corpses turned up in the streets of Hadiach, and brave gravediggers brought those who had been murdered to be buried.

It was three in the afternoon. It was impossible to wait any longer. "*Aufstehen!*"¹ The German order was repeated in Russian by the police officers. The people all got up. The invalids were raised from the ground

¹ 'Stand up!' (German).

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as well. Stepan Borisovich was carried along by two other Jews, as his legs would no longer support him. Moshe Sochorinsky was helping Miriam carry Lea, who was also unable to stand on her own two feet.

"Now they will begin the registration process!" said Sochorinsky, half-heartedly.

The people were lined up six by six. There were ten full rows and only five Jews in the final row. Sixty-five people had been gathered up in the square. The SS men and the armed police officers surrounded the procession.

A bothersome autumn rain was now falling. The heavens wore a monotonous color, grey and oppressive. The march turned down Romny Street. To the right – was the two-storied hotel. The restaurant was open, as the scent of roast meat wafted outside. From the start of the occupation the restaurant had been reserved for German officers. Ordinary soldiers and the local residents were not even allowed to enter. To the left – the shops were either shut or in ruins. The street went on living its life, and this life would not come to an end when the sound of the folks being marched off had faded. Were there fearful pairs of eyes peeking through the closed shutters and the gaps in the gates? The movie house – was to the right. The rain sprayed the branches of the trees that stood motionless to either side of the street. It was as though the entire world was holding its breath. The people's feet treaded through the silence, and you could hear the rustle of the raindrops.

Where were they taking the Jews? Perhaps to the train station? Hadiach was not a large town, and its streets were not all that long. Where Romny Street came to an end, Vokzalny Street began. There was the home of Haya Sarah Berman. She was walking along in line – short, big-bellied, and with an angry look on her face. The sound of a little boy crying could be heard. Stepan Borisovich could not take a single step, other Jews were carrying him along on their shoulders. During his illness, he had become a mere bag of bones.

Perhaps my readers already understand where they are taking these folks, but not so the folks who are themselves being forced to march. Moshe Sochorinsky assumed that they were taking them to the station, and from there they would certainly transfer them to do work somewhere.

But even he, who was always inclined to look at the positive side of things, began to have his doubts. Where were they taking these people? When would they start the registration process?

The rows began to get mixed up. It was now one big herd of exhausted, desperate people. Klara Ilynishna continued walking along behind the two Jews who were carrying Stepan Borisovich. From time to time she would admonish them: Careful! Careful now! You must handle the Professor with care, otherwise the glass jar just might break.

Belomordik still had the charity box in his hands. In his imagination he envisioned the march as a sort of funeral. Charity would save one from death! Moshe Sochorinsky chided the old man. Sochorinsky still had faith in life. His wife and two children were also among those marching along.

Now it was time to turn left, towards the iron rails, yet the procession continued heading in the direction of the pig farm. The tall buildings of the grain house overshadowed the road on the left. From somewhere nearby came the sound of chickens clucking. A Ukrainian boy with flaxen hair stood near the fence and stared in amazement and curiosity at the strange parade. A door was opened. A woman emerged and hastily grabbed the boy. She cast a glance at the march and hurried back inside.

Here was the pig farm. Before the war this had been quite a well-developed farm with hundreds of pigs. Now there wasn't even a single head of swine here, as the Germans had taken them all. Yet the stench was still the same as ever, as it enveloped the farm and its environs. "*Schneller!*" - the SS men urged them on. In the stuffy air Stepan Borisovich burst out into a heart-rending bout of coughing. What had been left of his lung now fell to pieces. How could they not rush to help a dying man? Klara Ilynishna clapped her hands. She had fallen behind somewhat and turned to one of the SS men. Her eyes were sticking out, her swollen thyroid was both protesting and giving voice to despair. She pointed at Stepan Borisovich and demanded that they bring the dying man to the hospital.

And now came the biggest moment in the life of this woman here.

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"*Zuruck!*"¹ - the soldier ordered her curtly as he pointed the mouth of his machine gun at Klara Ilynishna. She continued screaming. Shots were fired. Klara Ilynishna is not screaming anymore. She fell down, flailed about a few times, and then she was still.

Perhaps we should offer a brief eulogy for this woman who just now fell to longer rise again, there in the muddy road. She had been the daughter of Eliyahu Broder, that prominent, wealthy member of the community, owner of a tea factory, which had made quite a name for itself throughout the world. When this author was still just a boy he too used to chew a few crumbs of sugar from the miniscule piece that his mother used to give him every morning and sip a bit of Broder's tea. Klara had been the beloved daughter of this famous, and rather wealthy, community leader. She had had a modestly pleasant singing voice, was fluent in various foreign languages, and knew how to play the piano as well. Her pretty voice had remained such even when she had become an older woman, and when she spoke it had been like hearing the wind blow through the pipes of an organ.

Now this old woman lay rotting not far from the pig farm. Stepan Borisovich had not heard the shots being fired. That cough had torn his heart to pieces. But all those walking along turned their heads and saw the body of the woman lying there at the crossroads. The sight of this first sacrifice was quite a shock to all those who were left. "*Schneller!*" They stepped up their pace. At last Moshe Sochorinsky too was convinced that this was not any ordinary registration process. The procession turned to the left, passed underneath the little bridge and emerged along a muddy path that led off to the side. Fields extended to the right, and there was a deep ditch running along the left. A row of poplars stood all along the edge of the ditch; at the bottom of the slope a tiny stream ran along the floor.

The rain stopped, although the sky was still gloomy overhead. The people's feet went tramping through the mud.

The order was given to turn to the right. "*Halt!*" Sixty-four people stood there in a broad field. The armed enemy forces stood all around them. Some of the SS men disappeared among the bushes and the

¹'Go back!' (German).

poplars and then quickly returned. A truck now showed up. In the driver's cabin sat Peter Maigoert, the commander of the SS platoon.

A few minutes passed. The vehicle moved a bit in reverse, in the direction of the poplars. There it came to a standstill, hidden from view. A few people were separated from the rest of the group: the family of Moshe Sochorinsky – himself, his wife, and his two children. There were two other Jews along with them. They were ordered to drag Stepan Borisovich with them as well.

These people disappeared among the bushes and poplars. A deep, steep ditch now opened before their eyes. Were they indeed staring at their own grave? The order was given to undress. The murderers suspected that the Jews had valuable items hidden in their clothing, like gold, and jewels, and foreign currency. Rather than searching through the clothes of the living, it would be better to do so after they were already dead. In addition, the clothes of the murdered people could also be put to good use in the Third Reich.

Moshe Sochorinsky was the first to undress. We see him standing there naked now. He is a man with sparse limbs, with hair covering his chest and legs, his skin irritated by the cold, and a look of panic in his eyes. The children get undressed as well. They begin to cry.

Stepan Borisovich opens his eyes. "Get undressed, you old Zhid!" one of the police officers shouted in Russian. But the Professor understands German. His eyes go looking around. So, the end has come. Where is Klara? He is now lying in the withered, damp, and muddy grass. The police officer stripped off his clothing, and not at all delicately, at that. A brief grown man's cry burst from the mouth of the Professor. "Have pity on the children!" came the scream of Sochorinsky's wife. The police officers gathered up the articles of clothing and tossed them into the truck. With cries and shouts they had those naked people stand there with their faces turned to the ditch. The shots did not miss their marks. The bodies fell into the ditch. Blood began to flow, and the death throes sent forth their tremors. The apostate Professor had been sentenced to lie in eternal rest alongside Moshe Sochorinsky, a modest man and a homebody.

The second group was now brought over. There was Isaac the shoemaker and his family. At that moment Isaac tried to tell the hangmen about the boots for the Burgermeister Karpenko and a certain

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officer. Who would finish fixing up the boots for these important clients of his?

"Get undressed!" came the shouted reply, in response to this senseless mumbling.

One group after the next was murdered. The pile of bodies began to build up at the bottom of the ditch. It was now the turn of Haya Sarah Berman. What did they want from her? That she should get undressed? Not a chance! A stubborn, disobedient spirit came over the old lady as she stood on the threshold of death. Perhaps she really had some valuables hidden away in her clothing? She refused to get undressed. Shouts could be heard. An SS officer, filled with anger and bloody murder, came over to her, and his short whip struck the old lady over and over again. She continued to show signs of rebellious resistance. She began to scream with all her might, cursing and hurling insults and swear words at the heads of the hangmen. You bastards! Murderers! May your innards rot! May you all die a foul death, you and that Hitler of yours!

Now, this woman was not able to leave life behind politely! Her piercing, bothersome voice spread far and wide, causing the very horizon to tremble, and shaking the tops of the poplars. She yanked the whip from the hands of the soldier and waved it threateningly in his direction. What a daughter of valor Haya Sarah is! A few shots put an end to her life. The SS officer pulled the whip from the hand of the dead woman and shoved her body into the ditch. She fell onto the pile of corpses still wearing her clothing.

Yes, Haya Sarah was the only one who did not get undressed. The remaining people quickly got undressed, including Miriam Loytin and her daughter Lea. We have encountered them as well a few times in our story. Miriam, the woman with the youthful face and the grey hair, kept our imaginations occupied at the time. She had been a housewife, had labored and struggled day and night on behalf of the other souls in her family. Now she was not consumed by fear, the fear was swallowed up by the motherly compassion that was stirring in her heart. Her invalid daughter was going to die. Love and boundless mercy flowed through her soul. The two of them stood there naked at the edge of the ditch. The girl – began calling to her mother, her faithful shelter and rock. Miriam shielded the girl with her body. Desperation, helplessness, pain, and endless pity filled her soul in those final moments.

All this was swept off the face of the earth in a hail of bullets.

The final group was now brought over. Here we see Reb Dovid the shochet, Nechama, and Belomordik. Wrapped up in his tallit, with measured steps the blind shochet approached his death. In a loud voice he pronounced the *Shema*, and he cried out loud the line "Blessed is the name of His honorable kingdom forever and ever". Only on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, were the Children of Israel given the right to pronounce this blessing out loud. Nechama walked along by the side of Reb Dovid, huddling against the old man, asking for his protection.

*And you shall love the Lord your God
With all your heart, and all your soul, and all your means...*

The old shochet was praying fervently, with fiery devotion. His blind eyes were raised up to the heavens, he was hereby representing the nation of Israel that was stepping up to the gallows. But then the shouts were heard: "Get undressed!" A rough hand pulled his tallit off.

"Here, let me help you, Reb Dovid!" said Nechama. He removed his clothes with her help, and then she too got undressed. And then the final moment came. A push. A tremor. Then darkness.

But what's this? By chance the bullets somehow did not hit Belomordik. He is standing there in his spot, naked as the day he was born, with that charity box in his hands. "Charity shall save us from death! Charity shall save us from death!" These were the final words to be pronounced before that murderous ditch. The old gabbai was the one to say them, and he too had thus fulfilled his role. One more shot rang out, and this time the bullet hit its mark. The gabbai and his charity box fell onto the pile of bodies.

The police officers picked up hoes and began covering the pile of bodies. The SS men tended to the clothes of those who had been put to death. From somewhere off in the distance the darkness sallied forth. Evening fell. Peter Maigoert sat there in the driver's cabin, and the rest of the murderers now got into the truck. Maigoert had not yet had his lunch! The vehicle brought him to the officer's restaurant at the hotel. The scent of roast meat continued to waft forth from inside. Peter Maigoert stepped into the restaurant and sat down at the marble table. The Polish waitress, a pleasant girl, with a certain charm lent her by that flowery kerchief on her head and the coquettish apron around her waist, came over to serve him.

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Kim Wartman was sleeping in the Feigin home in the Garden alley. In the hiding place overhead four souls were hiding out. Tamar lay there with her eyes wide open. It was such a puzzling thing! Kim's voice continued to ring in her ears.

There was silence. The women conversed in a whisper. They were arguing a bit. Tamar was the cause of it all! Suddenly she desired to go downstairs. She was pleading with her grandmother to let her go. The girl was insane! Frida Levovna voiced her objection. She warned of the danger that such a move involved. She denounced Tamar, and the girls in general these days, who did not have any manners, or discipline, or respect and decorum.

Tamar had no love for aunt Frida. She ignores her rebukes. Thank God, she knows just how to comport herself with her all-forgiving grandmother. For quite a while she tried to convince the old woman, until the latter gave in to her request. Frida Levovna pursed her lips. Nunu, what an education! You go spoiling the children, and then they don't listen to you – even if you fairly burst at the seams!

Tamar cautiously opened the camouflaged hatch and crossed over on her belly to the other side. Then she silently went down the stairs and walked through the rooms. Everywhere – the fascists had left their mark.

The girl cast a glance at the low couch and saw Kim sleeping there.

He was sleeping, and everything seemed to be asleep all around him as well. The violin began to play its song of longing and sorrow. Tamar sat down and stared at the boy. His long eyelashes gave him a babyish look. The warmth of a girl, woman, and mother spread through her heart.

He opened his eyes and caught sight of Tamar looking at him with a serious look in her eyes. "You came?" she asked and fixed her hair with a rather womanly gesture. He shook himself awake and sat up on the low couch. His lips were still swollen from sleeping.

"Tamar! And here I thought that I wouldn't find you at home!"

"You must be hungry. I'll try and find you something."

She fished around the pantry and the oven and found a few cold potatoes and a cup of sour milk.

"Eat!"

He chewed on the potatoes, and at the same time she told him in a whisper of all that had happened recently: her grandfather's murder, the 'Bekanntmachung'. Suddenly she remembered that she could not just sit where she was for such a long time – her grandmother would begin to worry about her.

"Wait for me a moment!"

She disappeared. Like a doe she leaped silently up the stairs and squeezed into the unseen hiding place, informing her grandmother of Kim's arrival and asking permission to bring him into their hideout. Of course, Frida Levovna objected and voiced her resentment. The hiding place was too small. The supply of provisions would not hold out for too long. It was also not right to bring a boy into the midst of four women.

Raya expressed her own opinion – beautiful Raya. She was acquainted a bit with Kim. He was a brave boy, who could perhaps be helpful to them when the time came. Pesya decided not to reveal the hiding place to Kim, but if he desired to help them, he should head out into town and determine what had happened to the Jews who had gone down to the square. They needed to know how long they had to remain hidden.

Tamar went downstairs and passed her grandmother's request on to Kim. "When you come back," she added, "knock on the wall five times: three quick knocks, and then two slow ones."

Secret signs of the resistance! He went out into town. About an hour later he returned and knocked on the wall as they had arranged. Tamar appeared. He gave her the bad news: all the people had been shot, and their bodies had been tossed into the ditch. The women in hiding were horrified. Permission was now granted, and Kim came up to the hiding place. No candle was lit. In the attic – it was dark and cold. The mold reigned supreme here, mold and a terrified silence. Kim lay down on Tamar's mattress, and she lay down beside Pesya. They conversed in a whisper. Kim replied to their questions.

Many of the Jews in Hadiach had thus been slaughtered without having committed any crime. This was the fate that awaited them as well. Tamar now announced their decision for the first time – the decision she and Raya had come to – to get dressed up as Ukrainians

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and leave this place. It was clear that here it was impossible to remain in hiding for an extended period of time. They were under siege. How were they to get food? Who knew how long the war was going to last? There was word that the fascists had taken Kiev, Leningrad, and Moscow. No, she and Raya were going to leave this place. In Hadiach everyone knew quite well that they were Jews, but that was not the case in some other town.

Frida Levovna was shocked. In a whispered scream she interrupted what Tamar was saying. No, she was not going to give Raya permission to go! Let Tamar do what she would, let her stand on her head and spit wooden nickels – Raya was not going to leave her mother behind.

This was what Frida Levovna said in that singsong voice of hers, with that accent of hers that so grated on the ears. Perhaps my readers are not at all fond of this woman, but at the moment it was not easy to be Frida Levovna. Nachman Moiseevich had been killed, and even though Frida Levovna believed that her departed husband had not entirely fulfilled his obligations to his family – all the same he had been a husband and a father and someone to lean on in times of trouble. Who did she have left now in the world? Only Raya. Would the girl leave her mother behind to be slaughtered?

We now hear Raya whispering, as she too had what to say on this fearful day. Frida Levovna burst into tears. Raya, who was already fully grown, had freed herself from her mother's authority, though the law of the jungle did not yet hold sway in the holy community of Hadiach. The girl said:

"There's no need to cry, mother! If you want, you can come along with us too!"

There was a cold silence where Tamar sat. The latter was not at all happy about Frida Levovna joining up with them. Kim Wartman alertly raised his own voice:

"I'm coming too!"

He had found the right moment to cry out loud! "Hush, you thief!" the women silenced him. Tamar was glad that Kim would be joining them. What was it with her? In this time of terror her heart was making its presence known. She turned to Pesya:

"You come too, Grandma!"

But Pesya shook her head, and there was a look of resignation in her eyes. To go wandering through the forests and the villages? She would not manage to make it on those broken paths. The children wished to live, but her own life did not seem to hold all that much for her anymore.

"Don't be a fool, Tamarka! Where could I go? First, I don't have the strength. Secondly, an old Jewess like me would bring disaster down on all of you. No, I am going to stay here, and whatever will be, will be."

The matter was decided. Tamar, Raya, and Frida Levovna would leave first thing in the morning. Kim was going to join them. What an odd group! In those days all sorts of various strange groups of refugees were wandering along the roads and through the forests, the surviving members of families that had joined up and gone wandering abroad together.

There was silence. Tamar slept in Pesya's arms. The grandmother listened to the girl's light breathing. Her lips touched the cold forehead. If only God would see to it that the girl might remain alive.

The long hours passed and now the dawn was breaking. One opened one's eyes and the soul recalled the danger that was lying in wait. A stream of blood flooded the heart, the nerves went taut, and all were seized with fear. Pesya had barely slept during the night. She prepared breakfast for them – bread, butter, and pickled cucumbers. They ate in silence.

If they had decided to go, then they had better not delay their departure. The girls tended painstakingly to their dress. Three kerchiefs – one white, one blue, and one brown – formed a fitting mosaic on their heads. They donned simple dresses, shredded their coats a bit, and pulled rope belts around their waists. A regular costume party! And so, two Ukrainian girls now stood there up in the attic. Kim looked at Tamar in amazement. With the help of the girls Frida Levovna also prepared herself for the road. She wrapped a colorful kerchief around her head and tore her coat a bit. In a side pocket she hid all that she had – about two thousand rubles. Who knew if the money would be helpful to her? And yet, despite all her preparations, her appearance is still the same as ever. That twisting pronunciation of hers has also not undergone any change.

Pesya prepares some provisions for the road – just as she has

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always done. They decide to take bags with them that are not too big, containing only the most essential provisions and items. Four souls now head downstairs silently. They bid farewell to Pesya. A sense of contrition steals into Tamar's heart at the sight of her yellowed, wrinkled grandmother. Tamar has grown over this past year, and the world has expanded a bit around her, but now she no longer has to stand on her tiptoes to kiss her grandmother's face. There are tears in the eyes of that dark little goat. The two of them begin to cry – ah, the foolishness of women!

"Grandma, I'll come back for you, you hear me?"

"There's no need for that, Tamarka! Just try to save your own life!"

Frida Levovna, Raya, and Kim are standing off to the side and are ready to head out. "Keep an eye on the girl!" Pesya says, turning to Frida Levovna. But who knows? Perhaps that big-nosed, singsong mother will actually need Tamar's protection?

They say their farewells, offer whispered blessings to each other, and the tears continue to flash. Kim is the first to step outside, as he surveys the Garden alley and then returns. The road is clear. And so, they head out, while Pesya is left behind in the silent rooms. The old lady is assailed by a sense of desperation. The foundations of her life have crumbled. She sits there helplessly, her gaze fixed on a single spot in space. How shall she continue to live now, childless and all alone? She would do better to move over to the Shtiebel. There are some Jews hiding out there – including Ginsburg, Beila Belomordik, and others. Knowing you're all in the same boat is a partial comfort.

But how is she to go about doing that? It was not for nothing that our sages said that the Holy One Blessed Be He provides the balm before the blow. Once more we must turn our attention to Glasha.

News of the murder of the sixty-five Jews spread through hidden channels. That same day, in the evening, the news reached the partisan camp, and Solomon's heart nearly burst: how were his mother, his son, and Tamar? What had become of the rest of the Jews in Hadiach? After consulting with Tichonov and Gavrilenko it was decided to send Glasha off to Hadiach in the morning.

And so here is our old friend Glasha arriving in the Garden alley. There she finds Pesya fast asleep. There is confusion in the rooms.

Glasha entered silently and stared at the grandmother all wrapped up and wrinkled. Indeed, the old lady seemed to be getting older by the day. The girl's voice could then be heard in the silent room:

"Good morning, Grandma! It's me, Glasha!" Her voice was soft and cautious, and Pesya, who had barely closed her eyes throughout the night, continued sleeping. There was silence. Glasha raised her voice a bit, saying: "Nu, are the two of us just going to sit here without speaking? Perhaps you'd like to tell me just what happened here?"

Pesya woke up from her slumber and saw that *shiksa* who was in contact with Solomon and who had now come to her home for the third time. A ray of hope and salvation shone forth in the white image of this girl.

"Good morning, Glasha! How is Solomon doing?"

"Solomon Yefimovich, and Binyamin too, are both hale and whole. What happened here though? Where is your granddaughter?"

Pesya told her everything.

"That was wrong of her. How could she leave you all alone like this?"

Pesya waved her hand in a dismissive gesture as if to say: if I perish, I perish.

"It is not good for a person to be left all alone during times of trouble!"

"And what am I to do?"

Glasha hesitated. At the partisan base – military discipline reigned, and she could not bring the old woman there on her own initiative. She said:

"Wait here a day or two. I will come first thing in the morning, or at twilight, and I will take you someplace else."

"Take me now to the Jewish cemetery. I'll wait there until you return."

That meant there were other people hiding out at the cemetery! – was Glasha's conclusion, and she decided to help the old woman.

New times called for a new look! Pesya Feigin now got dressed up

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as a blind beggar. She put on Haim Yakov's worn coat and took up a long cane in her hand. She wrapped her head in a black kerchief. The kerchief was pulled down over her forehead and nose, and the ends were tied at the back of her neck. She practiced for a little bit walking cautiously and slowly. They wrapped up some provisions and a few articles of clothing in some bags.

We are now about to bid farewell for a good long time to the Feigin home in the Garden alley. The women locked the door and headed out in the direction of the cemetery. They walked along heel to toe. Glasha – was the one who led, while Pesya walked along with her eyes closed.

"Alms in the name of Christ!"

Not a soul paid any attention to the blind old woman. There were many people in those days that were in a bad way, orphaned, or injured, and compassionate souls had no shortage of people to pity.

"Alms in the name of Christ!"

They reached the cemetery safely. It was the second half of October. The strip of the Psel River shone down the slope. Spare autumn bushes were reflected in the water. Ducks with few feathers were pecking about among the vegetation along the shore. There was a festive assembly of trees in the cemetery. Each one seemed to be making its voice heard.

Just then the screech of a raven pierced the grey heavens overhead.

About twenty-five Jews had gathered in the Shtiebel. News of the murder of the sixty-five Jews was brought by Yekel Loytin, who had escaped through the window when the murderers had come to Miriam's house. He arrived at the Shtiebel at night, in a state of fright.

Let us step inside as well right behind him.

The windows are sealed, with only the scant light of a lantern illuminating the room. The people sit there in shock upon hearing the awful news. Aharon Ginsburg is the first to respond.

"Let us sit *Shiva*¹" - he said as he slipped from the bench to the floor. Ginsburg was never one to treat divine matters lightly, yet Shapiro is lost in rather secular concerns. All the assumptions have thus proven true. The folks gathered here can also expect to die.

He sat there on the floor, that old, sickly man, lost in bitter thoughts. Beila Belomordik was weeping. Today her husband and the gravediggers had brought three bodies down, including two who had been murdered. The graves had been dug along the slope, in a spot hidden from view, so that the enemy should not notice any movement in the cemetery. Following the hasty ceremony Beila had begun to try to convince Belomordik to remain in the Shtiebel. But what do you think he did? Belomordik insisted: "Tomorrow is yet another day in the world of the Holy One Blessed Be He. Tomorrow as well there will be dead bodies, and there will be a need to bury them..."

Have you ever heard of such a thing? Belomordik had taken upon himself the sacred labor – to bring those killed to be properly buried in accordance with Jewish tradition.

Ah, the ways of women! Beila's soft weeping stirs others to begin groaning and sobbing. Just a few minutes later there was truly mournful wailing and lamentations. At this point they began eulogizing those who had been killed. Berman recalled his mother Haya Sarah, and the silent tears of a grown man began to flow from his eyes. It was certain that she was no longer among the living – she herself had chosen to die like that.

"Ladies!" came the soft voice of Shlomo Shapiro. "You must restrain yourselves and remain silent! With all this screaming and groaning we're going to bring down disaster on our own heads. Hush."

Indeed, this Jew here truly had the power of authority. The women fell still. In the silence the only thing that could be heard was Aharon Ginsburg murmuring his prayers.

Shlomo Shapiro did not pray. Although he kept the matter hidden

¹ Shiva - Traditional period of mourning numbering seven days following the death of a close relative, during which the mourners sit on, or close to, the floor, among other rituals.

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deep in his breast, the old man was seized with desperation. The wild beast had opened its jaws. There was no salvation. The end had come.

Where was Shlomo Shapiro's lucid mind? Had he too truly fallen prey to panic and shock? No, from the depths of the black abyss the faint sound of song began to rise, as a vague plan started to take shape. What was the greatest danger? It seemed clear that this was posed by the possibility of the SS men finding out that there were Jews hiding in the Shtiebel. There was only one thing to do: when the fascists came they had to run from the Shtiebel and scatter themselves throughout the forest that surrounded the cemetery. Whoever's luck held out would remain among the living. The forest was now the best of all possible hiding places.

And Shapiro began to draw his conclusions. They had to organize a watch that would be able to signal when the murderers arrived.

And now one could sense a certain awakening in the Shtiebel. Shapiro called Aharon Ginsburg and Berman over. They formed a sort of minor central command, as they began to consult one another. The shifts were set up for keeping watch outside. Those on guard had to lie in wait and keep tabs on all those who arrived in the cemetery. The length of each shift – would be three hours. The Ginsburg family assumed a considerable share of the mission. Among those who would take turns on guard – there was Sarka, Leibke, and Shimon Ginsburg, along with Yosef Berman, Yekel Loytin, and others. The old folks were relieved of this obligation, but they too were given certain tasks to perform. Tzipa Lea Ginsburg and Beila Belomordik were responsible for the water supply. Engertov and Golda the midwife would tend to people's health. Berta Abramovna, Shapiro's wife, and Basya, Mordechai's widow, were put in charge of keeping the place clean and orderly. Aharon Ginsburg would keep watch over the eternal flame and serve as the leader of the congregation when it came to represent them before the Lord. Shlomo Shapiro, as the leader of those assembled there, was to oversee the overall living conditions and general arrangements.

Two guards received their orders and were sent outside – one in the direction of the slope leading down to the river, and the other in the opposite direction. Aharon Ginsburg was not getting mixed up in these foolish activities. If we are not worthy of being redeemed – then the guards were keeping watch in vain, and if we were indeed worthy –

then the Lord was the one who would keep watch over us.

They put out the lantern, as the darkness took over, and they opened the outer door to let in some air. Tzipa Lea Ginsburg and Beila Belomordik stepped out silently with pails in their hands; they were to bring water from the nearby well while it was still night. A few folks slipped into a troubled sleep, yet Shlomo Shapiro was wide awake. He was considering the situation and calculating the possibilities. Here, in the Shtiebel, a few of them would hole up to try to hold out. The rest of the survivors would have to flee into the distant forests and stay there until the war was over. If only there had been a few young people here, people full of initiative and action!

The hours pass, they pass on by, and a new morning arrived. Leibke Ginsburg was lying in wait underneath the bushes and keeping watch over the surrounding area. Do not make fun of this guard here, his eye is all-seeing! And he sees something now. Two women, an old lady and a girl, enter the cemetery. They are proceeding cautiously, as they turn their heads from side to side. The old lady – has a long cane in her hands, and she seems to be feeling her way around. In accordance with his orders Leibke rushes back to the Shtiebel and informs Shapiro.

Trees conceal the front door of the Shtiebel, and it is possible to slip in and out without anyone seeing you. Shapiro, Berman, and Leibke step cautiously outside. Shapiro's eyes are a bit dim, and Berman's vision is somewhat defective as well. Leibke, with his sharp eyes, gives a look and recognizes the old lady who is approaching.

"That's Pesya Feigin!" he whispers. "And there's a non-Jewish girl with her."

The women approach the Shtiebel. The three men suddenly pop up before them and block their path.

"Oy, Reb Shlomo!" cries Pesya in a mixture of panic and joy at the same time.

"Who is the girl?" asks Shapiro.

"She's a trustworthy *shiksa!*" replies Pesya. "Solomon sent her to me."

Pesya now believes in this girl with all her heart. They approach the door to the Shtiebel.

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"Let her come inside too!" Shapiro decides; he has something in mind. "Leibke! Go back to your position and keep your eyes peeled!"

Leibke's shift has not yet ended. The group, including Glasha, now steps inside the Shtiebel. Who among the residents of Hadiach does now know Pesya Feigin? Her appearance in the Shtiebel is an emotional moment. The women do not let the opportunity pass to shed a few tears. Glasha sees them as they rush to embrace Pesya. Even the old men now get up and invite her to sit down, treating her with a certain deference.

"I must go!" says Glasha. Pesya kisses her for all to see.

"May the Lord bless you, my child!" Tears appear in the old lady's eyes. Now Shapiro makes his voice heard.

"Pesya!" he says. "Tell Solomon that he should try to transfer these people to a hidden spot in the forest, since otherwise, we can all expect to die."

Pesya realizes that transferring the people to the forest involves a certain amount of danger, but she does not hesitate. If the young Jewish men will not offer them assistance in these times of trouble – who will?

And so Pesya whispers something to Glasha.

"Okay, Grandma!" says Glasha, as she turns to go. Before leaving she surveys the room. In her memory the desperate eyes of a young woman stood out, as she sat on the long bench with a baby in her arms. She was nursing the infant, and at the same time she was shielding her uncovered breast with her hand.

Glasha cautiously opened the door and disappeared. Avka Ginsburg shuts the door behind her.

And so Glasha goes walking down the roads and the forest paths. The eyes of the nursing woman followed her around all day, beseeching her and urging her on. In the evening she reported to the camp commander, Major Tichonov, informing him of her visit to the Jewish cemetery and of the twenty-five people who had been left to their own devices in the Shtiebel.

The partisan camp had not yet been properly organized, there was not enough ammunition, and there were also difficulties in obtaining food. Tichonov, Gavrilenko, and Solomon discussed how to save the

people in the cemetery. Several refugees had already been absorbed by the partisan camp, including women and children, who were, to a certain extent, a burden on the combat brigade. They decided to set up a family camp in the forest, about five kilometers away from the combat camp. Tomorrow they would have to begin building the mud huts. During the night it would be possible to transfer the people from the cemetery, and then they themselves could continue organizing their camp. The combat platoon would help out only during the initial days and would also provide a limited number of armed guards.

This task – preparing the location and transferring the twenty-five people – was assigned to Solomon and Binyamin, given the fact that the two of them were quite familiar with the cemetery and with the people who were hiding out there. Our young men decided to slip into the cemetery at night. They left without further delay for Hadiach.

They left, and Glasha accompanied them. Solomon assumed that she wished to say goodbye to Binyamin without any witnesses; this assumption could be said to have had some basis. Solomon stepped up his pace, and the couple fell behind. A few words were now exchanged in the forest in a whisper.

"Binyamin!" said Glasha; her voice was soft and concerned, the voice of a woman whose man was facing the danger of death as he set out on his distant journey. "You must be very careful."

He took her by the arm. The darkness grew thicker. Solomon's image disappeared among the trees.

Glasha had grown quite a bit over the last few days. What was she doing? For the first time she threw her hands around Binyamin's neck. Their lips met. Binyamin picked the girl up, as his heart was flooded with longing. He lifted Glasha up and went walking with her for a little while, kissing her on the eyelids, on her forehead, on her neck. She closed her eyes, as a smile that was a mixture of light and sorrow went fluttering across her face.

A whistling sound could be heard in the forest – Solomon had run out of patience.

"I must go!" Binyamin whispered sadly. He put the girl down and stood her there carefully on the forest floor. "Farewell, Glasha!"

His hand caressed her cheek. Delicate velvet seemed to be pressed

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against the rough palm of his hand.

"Farewell, Binyamin!" She stood there without moving until he had disappeared among the pines.

You do not traverse twelve kilometers of forest in a single bound, and even though Solomon had a compass, they reached the cemetery when it was already well into the night.

Pesya was the first to spot the new arrivals. "Oy, Solomon!" she pressed up against him and stood there frozen like that for quite some time. Her face seemed more wrinkled than before, and older, and her hair had all turned white. Was this truly Pesya? Binyamin looked at her compassionately by the faint light of the lantern. They conversed a bit. The names of various people were now pronounced in the Shtiebel, souls that had once been and were no longer. The name of the murdered father was mentioned – Haim Yakov Feigin.

In a flash many of them woke up. When they saw Solomon and Binyamin it was as though they were looking upon the Redeemer himself. Shlomo Shapiro immediately began to hold a consultation in the Ohel, over the grave of the Alter Rebbe. There was Shapiro, Aharon Ginsburg, Pesya Feigin, Yosef Berman, Solomon, and Binyamin. Before stepping inside, they removed their shoes.

Binyamin looked this way and that. Not a thing had changed inside the Ohel. As ever the eternal flame was scattering its light, along with a bit of warmth for the soul. The people who were gathered here had gotten together more than once in the Garden alley, at the home of Haim Yakov Feigin, yet at this point it was as though Binyamin were seeing brand-new faces. Shapiro informed them of the situation. Of the two hundred Jews in Hadiach, first twelve had been murdered, and now – sixty-five. In all – seventy-seven had been killed. Twenty-five were here in the Shtiebel. It was safe to assume that between seventy and eighty people were still hiding out in their various hiding places. All the Jews had to be transferred to a safe spot in the forest.

Now Solomon spoke. The first stage of the operation – would be transferring the people who had gathered in the Shtiebel. As second in command of the partisan battalion he promised to transfer them to a secure location. It was a shame that there were almost no young people here.

Berman: "We will perform all the necessary labor with our own hands. The main thing is – to save these people."

"Okay!" Solomon decided. "I am going to return to the forest and all day tomorrow I will tend to the preparations. We must find a suitable spot in the forest, to set up the mud huts. Binyamin will remain here. Tomorrow night I will return, and then we will make the move to the forest."

Over the grave of the holy man a tense silence spread. All eyes were turned towards the flickering flame. It seemed to Binyamin that his eyes were looking upon the very soul of the nation. The nation that was wallowing in its own blood was holding on to that flame, raising its suffering eyes in its direction, pleading for mercy as the judgment was being handed down. It seemed to him that his feet were standing on the ground of a Holy Temple in miniature, which was the extension of those sacred sites of old, the caves of the Hashmoneans¹, the Conversos² of Spain.

The moment of silence came to an end.

"Time to go!" said Solomon.

¹ Hasmonean – a Hebrew dynasty, that defeated the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt.

² Converso - a Jew who publicly recanted the Jewish faith and adopted Christianity under the pressure of the Spanish Inquisition.

Chapter 2.10

Nighttime. A lazy wind goes moving through the cemetery, rustling as it goes, encircling the headstones, caressing the graves, and then moving onward. A few seconds later the wind appears elsewhere, returning to its playful ways, whispering, and shaking the autumn chill.

In the Shtiebel the people lie about on the benches and the floor. There is a stifling silence. The children are asleep, but the old folks, all seized with fear, are lying there with their eyes wide open. Yosef Berman is the guard about to go on duty for the next three-hour shift. Right now, it is still Yekel Loytin's turn. Just two months ago the boy knew but one thing: lying on that low couch of his and reading books. Now he is lying there outside on the damp ground, pricking up his ears at every little sound, trembling from the cold and the fear.

Fear is consuming old and young alike, fear is reaping its harvest in the hiding places and homes.

It takes many different paths, and it is constantly changing shape and form. At times it freezes the blood, and at other times it sets the blood boiling; at times it sends a tremor through a single individual's heart, and at other times it turns into a disaster that comes down on many heads.

You are lying there in a dark, damp basement. A profound silence grips everything all around you. From somewhere off in the distance comes the near-silent sound of something moving. Someone is slipping in here – you can hear their cautious steps, hear them holding their breath right behind you. Their sword is drawn – in just another moment, just another moment and they will cut off your head. You suppress the scream that is about to burst forth from your throat. Your flesh, your bones, your muscles, your heart, your mind, your nerves – they are all so tightly wound that they are about to explode.

You stand there in the attic and your ears are attuned to every single sound. You note the stamping of those hobnailed, squeaky boots, hear the shouts that cut off your breath: open up! There are vigorous

knocks at the doors and windows, shots are fired, the screams fly – it is the enemy who has come to take your life.

You march along in your final procession. Brothers and sisters are marching alongside you down the blind path. Where to? There are women with their children in their arms, frail old folks leaning on their relatives. Where to, Master of the Universe? The faces are yellow and pale, wrinkled and shriveled. The eye sockets are covered with a faded film, one's legs begin to give out. Bags, bundles, suitcases, knapsacks, all weigh you down as you go. There is silence throughout the ranks. Everyone is lost in the depths of their own soul.

The fear is constantly changing shape and form. Somebody begins to scream – they cannot take the awful tension anymore. Where are they taking us? His neighbors get him to quiet down – one must not provoke the hangmen. But now a few more people begin to take up the first man's screaming. They are screams fit to make your hair stand on end, as tears and groans burst forth and rise to the very heavens.

And then sometimes someone will burst out laughing. His neighbors begin to look at him with compassion, but he is one of the happiest in the group: he is being led to the slaughter without even knowing it, the fear has no hold over him. O, woe to those of us whose minds are in good working order! The madman's hour has finally come.

The fear covers everything else. It stupefies the soul of man, wiping out every other emotion. When a man is seized with fear – the fear completely fills him up. His frayed nerves are focused in one direction only. All that he can do is be afraid. The man hurries, panics, every gesture drives him out of his mind. He can't think, can't speak, can't sleep, can't even sit still. There is only fear...

There is a slight rustling once more. It seems that someone is approaching. Yekel's heart is about to burst. There is another step, and then another. The boy cringes. In just another moment the beast is going to leap at him.

"Yekel!" comes Berman's whisper; he has come to relieve the boy. All at once the heavy burden is rolled off the boy's soul. He heads back to the darkness of the Shtiebel. He lies down on the floor and falls asleep.

He falls asleep and grows calm. Fear, my dear reader, cannot hold

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sway over the soul of man forever. Even Yekel Loytin will perhaps yet get used to this life of terror. The little grasshopper will perhaps yet grow wings.

No, Yakov has not yet fallen off into the abyss. There is a process among the resistance fighters, and sometimes a little man can gradually free himself bit by bit from his fear, and then he no longer trembles at the sound of every falling leaf. He pulls himself up to his full height, dresses his will in proper armor, and then his fists begin to take part in the battle as well.

The first light of dawn begins to break, as a hazy red light shines forth in the east. They are alert in the Shtiebel, and there is the sound of a stifled cough. The water was prepared the evening before, but the allotted portion for each person to wash themselves – is but a teacup per head. Ahuva has woken up and begun making her voice heard. Golda pulls out a breast for the baby. As in any place where dozens of people are gathered, in the Shtiebel as well a certain way of life has established itself. The air is tense in the building. Fear chokes the soul. Golda's heart was not made of stone. The fear is spoiling the milk in her breasts. Since the nursing mother's milk was no longer good, Ahuva's stomach at once began to react. The little girl's screams can now be heard. Those screams might well cause their hiding place to be discovered. The ladies, in a panic, try to silence the little girl. Here Engertov's role stands out, as he steps up to tend to the screaming child. A warm compress has now been wrapped around the infant's belly, but the screaming still does not stop. The ladies begin to complain – something must be done. Engertov must put the sick baby to sleep.

And so Engertov puts her to sleep. It is the first injection to be administered in the Shtiebel! The little girl falls silent. Golda pulls her sleeping daughter close to her heart; the face of the young mother is gentle and concerned.

The women go talking away in a whisper; this too has been part of a woman's work since the six days of creation. Berta Abramovna herself also had an easy way with people and by nature she was not all that good at remaining particularly silent. The Shapiros – were a childless couple. Shlomo Shapiro had contracted his illnesses and had spent day and night poring over his Hebrew books, whereas Berta Abramovna had busied herself with the mundane matters of this world. A none-too-young barren woman had plenty of time to spare. Berta Abramovna

tended to the household chores and knew how to prepare all sorts of dishes in accordance with both the traditional and modern bibles of cooking. "She has hands of gold!" they had said about her when she had been a young woman. Shlomo Shapiro needed to follow a strict diet, and Berta Abramovna, that wonderful housewife, was quite adept at such matters.

And so, the women go talking away in a whisper. Berta Abramovna is surrounded by Pesya Feigin, Tzipa Lea Ginsburg, Beila Belomordik, Basya – Mordechai the coachman's widow – Golda the midwife, and other elderly ladies, none of whom are mere beginners when it comes to preparing a proper Jewish meal consisting of meat, vegetables, and other delicacies. At this point, though, they cannot even boil a cup of water. There is only dry food, and even that is scarce. And so along comes Berta Abramovna and begins bringing up old memories from the kitchen. If you do not have an actual Jewish roast on the plate, you can at least swallow hard and go whispering about all the various ways in which you could prepare such a roast. Every item in its proper order, amount, and time! There are those who add carrots and tomatoes, but if we are dealing with the classic Jewish roast, then aside from the meat, onions, water, salt, pepper, bay leaves, and a little bit of sense in the head, there is no need for anything else. Berta Abramovna explains it all quite well, and the saliva begins to run from the mouth down the throat, as the women have found something to keep them occupied!

Not everything has come to a standstill in the Shtiebel. Every three hours the guards change shifts. Sarka also expressed her desire to take part in this activity. Last year, and the year before, we encountered Sarka as one of Binyamin's swimming students. Now, *'bli ayin hara'*, she is a fourteen-year-old girl, and though her body may not have completely come into its own, yet the Ginsburg girls were always a bit ahead of their time in matters of growth, and for a little while now Sarka has sensed the sweet desires and longings of a girl reaching maturity. She had even already tasted her first disappointment, and something repressed and sorrowful was present in her eyes. But fourteen years is not yet an age at which one develops lasting scars in the heart and from some unseen depths life seemed to be bubbling over. Despite the circumstances, Sarka was the last one to go and bow her head.

All sorts of little things were going on in the Shtiebel. The kids as

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well were getting together and making small talk in a whisper. Each generation had its own concerns. Where had Leibke managed to amass such a detailed wealth of information concerning all sorts of weaponry, cars, tanks, and airplanes? The girls' eyes opened wide, as the world was reflected therein and left its mark. Leibke had faith in the Red Army. The Red Army would yet show the fascists just how mighty it truly was.

And now the tales began to flow...

Binyamin had to spend a day waiting in the Shtiebel, and in the event of any danger he had to act in accordance with the circumstances. As a matter of course, it turned out that he ended up spending almost the entire time in the company of Shlomo Shapiro. He had what to discuss with the old man. We have already told earlier of the fact that Hanich Alper, Binyamin's uncle, had taken it upon himself to educate his nephew in matters pertaining to the spirit of Judaism. Binyamin's cousin Lipa, Binyamin's childhood friend, had not gotten caught in the moldy trap, whereas Binyamin had immersed himself in the age-old books. He had read Dovid Frishman, and Dr. Joseph Klausner, but his true loves were Bialik, Gnessin, and Berdyczewski. Shlomo Shapiro too was no ignoramus when it came to all this. He was constantly hunched over his Hebrew books, read around in the Ein Yakov, 'Guide to the Perplexed', and Weiss' 'Each Generation and its Scholars', along with the various volumes of Greetz' 'History of the Jews', in Rabbinowich' Hebrew translation.

Shlomo Shapiro was an ardent lover of our Hebrew language. An active love of Zion was forbidden in our land, yet in the wondrous region of Poltava, in the holy community of Hadiach – which was no different for better or worse than any of the other holy communities in our country – in this town, as I was saying, Shapiro had found himself an isolated corner in which to read, study, and meditate. Now he had found himself a pair of willing ears – in Binyamin, our old friend.

Have you ever heard of such a thing? In the Ohel of Rebbe Schneur Zalman Schneerson whispered words concerning the future of our people went hovering in the air. It was an old man who was voicing these thoughts, and they went straight to the heart. At the start of the century Shapiro had gone wallowing in the dust of the first Zionists to go to the Holy Land. Many of us had yet to be born, yet a few Jewish men had risen up and taken care to provide us with the path that we ought to follow through this twisted world. Perhaps the Old Testament

had lighted their way. The Book was full of poetry and the national history of our ancestors, as well as heartwarming stories of Zion and Jerusalem, along with the strange laws of the Priests and Prophets. In the Cheders, day schools, and Talmud Torahs Jewish children studied the words of poetry and sorrow, the laws and the legends. The lines written there had been engraved in their souls and made them into proper heirs of the ancients. Later, the children had grown up and seen the scandals that held sway in the country, and how the name of the Jew there had become a source of shame and disgust. The Zionists then appeared and many of the young people were drawn to them. Shlomo Shapiro had also thrown his lot in with them and paid his Zionist dues.

Shapiro was emotional as he spoke, as a man might speak but once in his entire life. He filled Binyamin's ears with his own personal 'I believe'. It might well be that this was a sort of minor last will and testament, which one generation was passing on to the next during the days of the tremendous catastrophe.

Shapiro touched upon the life and death of our wretched nation. The Jewish question was being resolved in several ways. Hitler had begun the extermination. Many, including the Marxist leaders, were preaching absolute assimilation. But the Zionists, on the other hand, were fighting for a Jewish state and an ingathering of all the exiles.

Shapiro believed that the battle over these various attempts had been waged for generations now. The violence of the Middle Ages, the murders of 1648-49, the pogroms in Czarist Russia, in Ukraine, the slaughter going on right now – all these had gotten rid of many, many Jews. In theory, this would seem to be the most effective solution. The slaughter of multitudes could be carried out by just a handful of people, if there was no resistance on the part of those being eliminated. All the same, the complete destruction of the Jewish people was not fathomable unless all the nations of the world would get together for that express purpose. Shapiro was convinced that the majority of the non-Jews were not enemies of the Jews. There were those who supported the rights of the Jews, and then there were the hangmen both in theory and in practice. Now the days had arrived when the enemies had gone forth to do their dark work. The members of the indifferent majority were not holding them back, as they had concerns of their own. A minority, at the most, was saving a few individuals in mortal danger. In any event, Shapiro believed that it was not possible to

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destroy the Jewish nation without leaving any survivors whatsoever. Once upon a time, our people had numbered but a few tens of thousands throughout the entire world...

Be astonished, O ye heavens – Shlomo Shapiro was arguing with Vladimir Ilyich, that man so dear to us all! About forty years earlier Lenin had published an article in '*Iskra*'¹, in which he had criticized the 'Bund'², and spoken in favor of the assimilation of the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora. The *Bundists* were disturbing Lenin's attempts at the time to establish the Bolshevik party. Lenin had not written anything about the Gypsies, who were also scattered far and wide throughout the land, because they did not have themselves any 'Bund'. Yet Shapiro believed that if Lenin had been alive now in our time, he would have changed his mind. His article had been published at the start of the century, and at that time it would have been impossible to foretell the arrival of Hitler, and the establishment of the ghettos, and all the terrible slaughter.

Assimilation, even of the forced kind, therefore did not have the power to resolve the Jewish question. Most of the Jews were not inclined to assimilate, and the majority of the general population did not wish to absorb the Jews. The wave of cruel anti-Semitism was strengthening the Zionist idea. Zionism had in fact ceased to be a mere idea – it was gradually being realized. And Shapiro then began to go on about the Zionists, who were calling for the people to return to the desolate ancient homeland. That was the sole country which could safeguard the existence of the nation, and only this nation could bring that country back to life.

Shapiro began to recount his impressions from his visit to the Land of Israel before the First World War. He had been about thirty years old at the time. In the Land of Israel, he had gotten to know Jewish workers and farmers, shopkeepers and autodidacts, the God-fearing and the heretics. He had heard the Hebrew language being spoken in everyday life, he had seen the blue skies overhead, and the waves of the sea licking at the shore. His feet had walked the streets of Jaffa and Jerusalem, Haifa and Tiberias, and trod the paths strewn with red rocks

¹ Iskra - a political newspaper of Russian socialist emigrants.

² Bund - a Jewish workers' union.

that led to the village of Modi'in...

His words were filled with magic, they were the very expression of peace and tranquility! The old man regaled Binyamin with the sweet fairy tale. The fascist beast was scheming to do away with the folks who had gathered in the shade of the Alter Rebbe, and Shlomo Shapiro was confessing his lifelong dream to this young Jewish man. Beyond the Shtiebel lay the cemetery, with its silent tombstones, those polished blocks of stone with the sad Hebrew lettering etched along their surfaces.

And it was precisely those very tombstones that were the cause of the events that followed. We shall tell the tale in full below.

The day crept along slowly, and noontime arrived. It was now Sarka Ginsburg's turn to go out and lie in wait. She put on her coat, wrapped a kerchief around her head, and slipped outside. And so now we find her lying there in a hollow in the ground. The ancient tombstones, along with a few naked, chattering bushes, are keeping watch over her. She surveys the surrounding area.

She must lie there like that for three straight hours, listening and keeping watch. However, Sarka was made of quite different stuff than someone like Yekel Loytin, for example. It could only be because she had inherited a certain amount of her father's odd strength. Yekel was a child of the People of the Book, his glance tended to overlook the real world somewhat. He saw the world through a prism of books and imaginary figures. Whereas Sarka was as agile as quicksilver, and her eyes were opened wide before the world all around.

She lay there in that concave hollow, which had been created by a combination of the gravediggers' hoes and nature itself. Her head stuck out a bit.

It was a clear day, even though the sun was not actually out. The leaves of the trees had withered and fallen to the ground, yet here and there a few evergreens still stood, and so the rustling green foliage had not completely disappeared. Some old grass still raised and bowed its head before the glancing blows of the light breeze. Sarka preferred lying here to rotting in the stifling air of the Shtiebel. How much life and motion there was out there in the great white world! If you spent all your time among the old folks, looking at their wrinkled faces and their bent backs, listening to their whispers and their silences – then in just

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another twenty years you too would become an old lady, just like them. But if you lay here beneath the wide-open skies, where those feathery clouds went wandering by, then you felt that there was still life out there somewhere off in the distance, along with youth and happiness.

Strange thoughts went moving through the mind of this intelligent fourteen-year-old girl on that gray autumn day, as she lay among the Hebrew tombstones. But just then she heard something that caught her attention. It seemed that a wagon was approaching. Where was it coming from? Yes, the wheels were creaking right nearby now. Two non-Jews were sitting on the wagon. In accordance with her instructions, Sarka was to rush back to the Shtiebel and inform them of what was happening. But she had waited a bit too long. The wagon came to a halt not far from the hollow where Sarka was lying. If she were to get up now, her hiding place would be revealed.

Sarka cringed and shrank back in her hidden spot, and she did not dare raise her head more than once every now and then. But what's this? The men were getting down from the wagon, and taking out heavy axes and hoes, and beginning to uproot one of the tombstones. Why were they interested in the headstone?

The thing is, granite – was an excellent building material, particularly when it came to laying the foundation for a house. Since the reins had now been loosened, the rabble had begun scouring the abandoned Jewish homes, and now they had even turned their attention to the stones in the cemetery.

It was first come, first serve, and these two brothers, Petro and Filimon Grechuk, who had long ago decided to build a new house together, were the first ones to come down and begin removing tombstones from the Jewish cemetery. They spat into the palms of their hands and began loosening the first tombstone. The heavy axes were striking the earth, knocking up against the granite. There was a dull, ringing, tapping sound. Each blow echoed in Sarka's heart. In the Ginsburg home a cult of reverence reigned for the departed, their graves and headstones, and, in particular, for the Ohel of the Alter Rebbe. Sarka had never walked over a grave or stepped upon a tombstone. She knew that such a thing constituted an act of desecration.

With a great effort the bandit brothers lifted the first tombstone

into the wagon. They then stepped over to the next one. Something boiled over in Sarka's heart. The guard on duty forgot her mission. She leaped up from her hiding place and stood there before the two men.

"What are you doing here?"

Four furious eyes, the eyes of people who have been caught sinning red-handed, were fixed on the girl.

"It doesn't concern you!" said Filimon, the younger of the two brothers.

"You have no right to take tombstones from this place. The tombstones – belong to us!"

"Who is 'us'?" asked Filimon; the two brothers stood there leaning on their hoes. "Ah, nu, get lost, if you still want to live!"

"This cemetery belongs to us!" Sarka maintained stubbornly. "Go back to where you came from!"

These were the negotiations between that Jewish girl and the two tombstone thieves!

"Nu, get a move on it!" Petro warned her, as he raised his ax, and there was a threatening look on his face. Petro had been accustomed all his life to obey those in charge, but that this Jewish girl, who was about to be slaughtered, should stand there giving him a lesson in how one ought to behave in the world these days – that was more than he could stand.

Sarka got scared when she saw the mad, menacing look in Petro's eyes. She stepped back and ran. She opened the door of the Shtiebel and squeezed into the tight atmosphere. In the haste, she forgot her discipline and, instead of reporting to Shapiro, she went over to her father who was hunched over his holy book.

"What happened Sarka?"

"Father, they're destroying and stealing the tombstones!"

Ginsburg was the cemetery attendant and keeping watch over the tombstones was his responsibility.

"They're stealing the tombstones? How's that?"

Shapiro was busy at that moment conversing with Binyamin and he

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did not notice as Ginsburg and his daughter stepped out of the Shtiebel. Ginsburg walked along fully erect. The head of the cemetery was not in the habit of crawling along on his belly through the realm of the dead. He caught sight of the guests and the foul deeds that they were up to. He did not hesitate. He leaped up onto the wagon and began moving the headstone, intending to toss it down to the ground. But my good people, what was he doing? He was endangering his own life and the lives of others! His strength had lately given out somewhat, but it was not completely gone. The heavy stone moved, moved again, and then fell off the wagon. Ginsburg was breathing heavily. His beard was disheveled, his eyes seemed to have dimmed, and a yellowish pallor covered his face. He had to rest a moment. But at that moment the two brothers came up to him.

"What are you doing?" said Petro in a threatening tone as he approached Ginsburg.

A scythe hit the stone. Ginsburg had no intention of retreating.

"And what are you doing?" he repeated Petro's question in a slightly different tune. "Go back to where you came from!"

He had barely finished speaking when he received the first blow. Petro was not kidding around. They needed those stones to begin building. Winter was approaching, and they had to lay the foundation in the coming weeks. What did the Jews need the headstones for? The days were coming when there would be nothing whatsoever left of these people in Hadiach. A bounty like this, granite blocks in excellent condition, were just lying there and serving no purpose! And now this mad Jew had come along out of nowhere. They had to shut him up.

Ginsburg fell to the ground. He fell down and got back up. Two sparks flashed in his eyes. Before us there now stands Arki Ginsburg from Odessa, who never retreated in the face of a hooligan.

An unfair battle was now being waged in the cemetery. The rows of tombstones looked on in puzzlement. The bones of the people that had been gathered here, beneath mounds of dirt for hundreds of years, suppressed their laughter. The grey heavens overhead and the strips of forests off in the distance were immeasurably gloomy and sad. The tombstone, the rock at the root of their quarrel, lay there silently between the wheels of the wagon. Those fighting were silent as well, only their heavy breathing went rustling and wheezing away. The two

horses did not make a sound. Ginsburg was absorbing quite a few blows, as the fists of the bandits were dripping with Jewish blood.

"Father, let's go!" pleaded Sarka. She felt that she herself was to blame. Ginsburg was dealt a mighty blow and fell to the ground. The faces of the two brothers were pale and aflame. Petro turned to raise the heavy ax, but Filimon held him back. Filimon was younger than Petro, he had just turned forty-five. Essentially, Petro was the one who had come up with the idea of removing the headstones.

"The devil take him!" Filimon tried to convince his brother. "The stones aren't going anywhere. We'll come back another time!"

Victory! The bandits are sitting there in their wagon and disappearing into the distance. Filimon is holding the reins. Petro turns around and makes a threatening gesture with his fist. The tombstones are silent. It is a victory and a defeat all in one! How tattered Ginsburg looks! The sacred battle had taken quite a toll on the warrior. Blood was dripping from his wounds. The father and daughter returned to the Shtiebel. Shapiro, Binyamin, and Berman listened with anguished looks on their faces to the tale Sarka told. Engertov came over to bandage Ginsburg's head. What a disaster! This unbridled behavior was bound to bring destruction down on all their heads. A hail of grievances rained down on Ginsburg and Sarka. There were tears of sorrow in the girl's eyes, with that curly hair of hers bursting like a black waterfall from beneath her kerchief. Ginsburg did not respond. Were the incident to occur a second time, he would once more react the very same way.

The dead Jews had found themselves a shield of iron in this man here. He was not alone. He was surrounded by the members of his family. The Ginsburg children believed in their father. They now rallied around him, as the odd, bandaged head of the father stuck out among the women and children of the Ginsburg family.

Little by little all those who were hiding out now began to gather around Shapiro and Binyamin. Shapiro began to speak. All the people could hear his hoarse whisper. In his opinion, for the time being, they ought to remain in the Shtiebel. There were only two or three hours left before nightfall. At night Solomon would come to transfer them to the forest. Shapiro recommended that they send a larger group outside to stand guard. Berman, Binyamin, and Leibke Ginsburg were chosen – these people could be trusted, they would not endanger all the other

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souls over a few stones...

And so, we now find Binyamin lying among the tombstones. The treetops and the cold vault of heaven are covering him with an indifferent mantle.

It is four in the afternoon. Time is crawling along like a tortoise. If only evening would hurry up and arrive! Binyamin's thoughts now turn to Glasha. With all his heart he loved that fair, Ukrainian girl. There was a time (to him it seemed to have been many years ago) when Rachel Feigin had been his entire world. Along the banks of the Psel River, during those wondrous summer nights, and in that little room in Dubinin Street as well, Rachel had been like a wife to him. But time passes, and kisses and sighs sink down into the abyss, the storms in the soul subside, and the loves of yesterday are forgotten. Of Rachel there remained a certain warmth, and the distant fragrance of her perfume. Rachel was a comely woman, a bit wild, but a charming woman, who had lost her way in life. Glasha – was not pretty, there were tens of thousands just like her. Yet why was his heart so smitten with her?

Little by little the snail of time crept along. It was five o'clock. Evening was beginning to fall, and now along came the disaster. It came in the form of three armed police officers. Indeed, the tombstone bandits had informed on the Jews!

Binyamin, Berman, and Leibke noticed the approaching police officers at one and the same time. The three of them rushed back to the Shtiebel. The officers noticed some movement among the tombstones. Shouts were heard: "Stop!" There were footsteps. Shots were fired. There were more hurried footsteps. Then they panicked and ran. "Stop!" More shots were fired. It was hard to hit your mark in the dark. Binyamin and Leibke burst into the Shtiebel. About five seconds later Berman came in as well. They must run for it! They must run! The people all crowded around the door. The first to break out was Shim'ke Ginsburg. What could you expect from a ten-year-old boy? He was scared, so he ran. "Shim'ke, come here!" screamed Tzipa Lea, but the boy had already slipped outside. Shots were fired. They heard Shim'ke scream. One of the police officer's bullets had hit the boy. From the building Tzipa Lea's screams burst forth. The folks closed the door in panic and retreated into the interior of the Shtiebel.

The police officers are not just standing around now and yawning.

One of them was sent back to town to bring backup – perhaps there were partisans hiding out in the building! The remaining officers cautiously approached the door of the Shtiebel. They heard the soft mournful wailing coming from inside the building. O-ho! It seemed they had stumbled upon a proper band of Jews. The Burgermeister and the German officers would be quite satisfied.

They were trapped! Two armed murderers now guarded the door of the Shtiebel. Their hiding place had been discovered.

Now night truly fell. Everything went black. The scythe of the moon at the start of the month of *Cheshvan*¹ shrank back somewhere off in the distance behind the gloomy layer of clouds. The distant barking of dogs burst forth on all sides. There were the rustling murmurs of the night, and a soft creaking sound, as of a chicken coop being opened and closed.

Twenty-Five Jewish souls were imprisoned in the Shtiebel. People, many of whom we have observed throughout our tale, were all caught in a trap. It was a fine ending! The way the world worked at the time was – if the hiding place was discovered, then the Jews who were caught hiding there were to be put to death.

They put out the lantern. There was complete darkness now in the room. Shapiro and Binyamin were plotting to have everyone burst outside and scatter themselves in every direction. Shapiro now makes his voice heard, and it is an angry, commanding voice, that leaves no room for objection. And it is precisely this commanding tone that calls to them and draws them in, even offering a bit of calm and comfort.

"Prepare to break out of here!" says Shapiro. "If we act as fast as a flash of lightning there is hope we might yet save ourselves. At night someone will come to take us into the forest. The main thing is – to get out of here and scatter ourselves throughout the surrounding area. Berta, come over here!"

A spark of hope flickered in the dark. They picked up their bundles. There were whispers. "Golda, where are you?" – "Here, here, Yosef!"

¹ Cheshvan - the second month in the Jewish calendar, which usually falls out around October-November.

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Ahuva was still sleeping, but the effect of the injection was gradually wearing off. Leibke called to his father. For some reason Ginsburg does not respond. Quickly! Quickly! The people all crowd around the door, with their bundles in their hands. Binyamin is tasked with opening the door and being the first to make a run for it.

"Is everyone ready? Nu, Binyamin! One, two, three!"

Utter defeat! The door is locked... The police officers have bolted the door from the outside. They are standing there on the other side of the door keeping watch to make sure that not a soul escapes. The cemetery is silent, just as it has always been. The sensitive ears of those locked inside can hear their own beating hearts as loudly as if they were rolling thunder. Seized with panic they all swallow hard. They are silent, their eyes sticking out in the dark, as they await their fate.

In the other room, in the Ohel, the eternal flame continues to flicker over the grave of the Rebbe. Ginsburg is standing there near the wooden dome. His head is bandaged, and there is a strange-looking wound beneath one eye. He is now standing face to face with the holy Rebbe.

He, Ginsburg, is to blame for the fact that they have all fallen into this deadly trap. But how could he stand there and tolerate the desecration of all that was sacred? The Ari, of blessed memory, had said that even the silent realm, the realm of stones, dirt, and water, contained an aspect of the soulful. How could he have allowed them to desecrate the Hebrew tombstones, in which there was bound up a touch of the infinite light of the *Ein-Sof*?

Man possessed two souls – one divine, and one carnal. So long as a man was among the living – the two souls were at war with one another. Once a man departed this world – then the divine soul claimed victory over the carnal soul, and caught fire from those mighty sparks, rising ever higher, as it strove to separate itself from the wick that clung to it.

The light of God is the soul of man. That soul strove to reconnect with its root and source, with everlasting life. Up to this point, Ginsburg's divine soul had been held captive inside the carnal soul. But in just a little while, it would return to the house of its Father, where it had spent its youth, as it were, back when it was still a part of the light of the *Ein-Sof*.

The end of this earthly life was now approaching, and darkness was going to be turned into light. A festive feeling began to fill Ginsburg up inside. In the silence of the Ohel it seemed to him that the Alter Rebbe was standing over him, observing him and examining his heart and insides. O holy Rebbe! Your children are in a rough spot! Pray for us! Were it not for the prayers of the righteous in the world to come, this world here would not be able to continue to exist for even a single moment...

Ginsburg's eyes were closed. Suddenly he felt that a wave of light was flooding the Ohel. It was coming from above, from below, from all sides. And then he heard a heavenly voice filling up the Ohel, as it repeated what it had to say a second and a third time...

"I could not suffer this!" said the voice. *"The trait of Jacob is the trait of mercifulness. Open the cave beneath the eternal flame! Open the cave beneath the eternal flame! Open the cave beneath the eternal flame!"*

Ginsburg opened his eyes. What's this? What cave? Everything was just as before in the Ohel. The light of the menorah flickered in the darkness. The dome was pitched over the grave of the Rebbe. In a dim, secretive light, the Hebrew letters glowed where they were etched in the marble tablets. There were whispers all around, the sounds of rustling murmurs. Ginsburg turns his head. And so, it is! Since they had nowhere left to turn, and the people hiding out in the Shtiebel had come to the realization that they were trapped in the vise of death, they had slipped into the Ohel, to seek the protection of the Rebbe.

Several voices from outside now split the silence of the night. The sound of tramping boots could be heard near the door. It was thrown open. The boots stepped inside the Shtiebel. Iron footsteps now approached. Three SS men and two armed police officers burst into the Ohel. *"Hier sind sie!"*¹ Flashlight beams moved over the faces of the people who were crowded into the corners of the room, pale and fearful.

Berta Abramovna Shapiro began to speak. In fluent German she said that the people had gathered here to pray over the sacred grave.

¹ 'Here they are!' (German).

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"Money!" screamed Kurt Wirt, the platoon commander, a rather fat, thirty-year-old man, with a moustache that curled upward, and a harsh pair of eyes. He ordered them to gather all their money and valuables in a pile. Whoever would try to conceal even the slightest little thing – would be put to death on the spot.

The bundles were now opened, and hands went fishing around in pockets, rummaging through their clothing. Paper currency was now pulled forth from its hiding places, along with coins and watches. "More! More!" Everything was swallowed up by the grasping hands of the murderers. The walls of the Ohel were solid, there was only a single, narrow window, through which it was impossible to squeeze one's way outside, which looked on from the side like an angry eye.

"Wait here until the morning!" shouted the SS man.

The murderers stepped out into the next room, into the Shtiebel. The door was locked. First thing in the morning the Jews would dig their own graves. The head of the Gestapo would be quite satisfied. In the opinion of the SS men the cemetery – was a fine spot to carry out the operation. The murdered should be quite satisfied as well – their corpses would find rest here in the company of other Jews.

In the Shtiebel, where there was the Holy Ark and the Torah scrolls, the SS men and the police officers arranged themselves in shifts. Throughout the night they would have to keep watch over those filthy Jews.

In the vehicle that brought the SS men down here they found something to eat for dinner. Bottles of wine were now brought forth. The hangmen were in good spirits, as they raised their glasses and ate. There were the festive shouts of good friends on one side, and the silence of the broken-hearted on the other. Only Ginsburg's mumbling continued to spread through the Ohel. He was reciting Psalms from memory. His eyes were closed, and in the tense silence he made his loud voice heard.

*He sits in the lurking places of the villages,
In the secret places he murders the innocent,
His eyes are privily set against the poor...
O God, lift up your hand: Do not forget the humble...*

The door flew open noisily, and the tipsy eyes of the SS man looked

over the people inside. *Donnerwetter*¹, they were actually praying! Instead of saying goodbye to this life, they were saying goodbye to their God. Rest assured that tomorrow morning you will all get to meet that Jewish God of yours face to face!

There was laughter and chatter, as the bottles clinked. The door was locked from the outside. The murderers would now no longer touch the prisoners until the morning. Ginsburg suddenly made a sign to Binyamin to come over to him. The emotional whisper of the elderly cemetery attendant fairly grated on Binyamin's ears.

*I heard a heavenly voice...
Underneath the eternal flame there is a cave.
It is possible to save everyone...*

Ginsburg's fiery eyes were fixed for a brief moment on Binyamin's eyes. What strange words, words of hopes and dreams!

"Pray, pray, Reb Aharon!" Binyamin whispered back.

*Be not far from me; for trouble is near;
For there is none to help...
For dogs have compassed me.
The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me...
Deliver my soul from the sword!...
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil: for thou art with me!*

Very carefully, Binyamin moved aside the little table upon which the eternal flame stood. Beneath the table – there was a short dusty runner, and beneath the runner – there was a camouflaged wooden hatch! Binyamin lifted the hatch – and a black opening gaped before him. A few rungs led downward. He went down and came up against a closed door. With a creaking sound the door opened...

Binyamin lit a match – there was a cave! Had he actually been here some time long ago? He recalled one of the stories he had heard from Esther the noodle-maker, in some ancient dream... It seemed that the cave led down to the river.

¹ 'Damn it all to hell!' Literary -'thunderstorm' (German).

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He went back up into the Ohel. As one, the prisoners all rose from their seats. All eyes were fixed on him in fear and hope. He put his finger to his lips. The main thing was – not to start a riot! In the other room they could hear the hoarse songs being sung by the drunken murderers. The sorrowful chapters of Psalms filled the air inside the Ohel.

"Pray, pray, Reb Aharon!"

*My heart is dizzy, my strength fails me,
As for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me...
Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me.
Make haste to help me...*

In the room there is now a bit of a commotion. Shapiro's soft voice can be heard. For the sake of God – maintain absolute silence! Binyamin will go first – Binyamin along with Yekel Loytin. They are to be followed by Golda and Ahuva, Pesya, Basya, Sarka, Golda the midwife, Engertov, and the rest of the old folks. Shapiro, Leibke, and Berman will bring up the rear. Ginsburg will be the last to descend.

"Pray, pray, Reb Aharon!"

*O send out thy light and thy truth!...
O that I had wings like a dove!...
I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.*

Ahuva begins to stretch nervously in Golda's arms. They must get her to quiet down. Engertov quickly administers another injection. They begin to descend in the pre-arranged order. The people are holding their bundles in their hands. One by one they are swallowed up in the cave. Shapiro steps down. Then Berman begins to descend. Now it is Ginsburg's turn. But what is he doing, the madman? Instead of descending into the cave, he is closing the door, spreading the runner back out, and returning the table to its regular spot. All the while he continues to sing lines from the book of Psalms:

From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed...

My soul is thirsty for thee, my flesh longs for thee...

Berman, Shapiro, and Leibke, who were the last ones to descend, stand there for a little while on the underground rungs, with their heads bent and their ears alert, waiting for Ginsburg. But it seems that the

latter has no intention of interrupting his prayers. From above they can hear his muffled voice, as it penetrates every world:

*Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink...
Thou art my help and my deliverer;
O Lord, make no tarrying...
Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee!*

Leibke breaks out into suppressed tears. "Father!" Shapiro silences him. It can only be that Ginsburg intends to delay the murderers. When they fall asleep he too will slip out of the Ohel. His voice is lulling them to sleep. He is putting himself in danger for the sake of the entire group...

"Let's go!" Shapiro says in a whisper. In the cave – they all now move along silently. They tread softly. The people are holding their breath. Binyamin is walking out in front. From time to time he lights a match and looks around. Then he takes a few more steps. Another match is lit and illuminates a patch of the cave. From behind he can hear Golda's cautious breathing. Ahuva has fallen asleep. Over and over Leibke turns his head around, waiting for his father to arrive. A few more minutes pass. Binyamin is the first to arrive at the mouth of the cave.

But what a disappointment! The mouth of the cave is sealed... The people stand there panicking, in shock.

Binyamin: "In my opinion, this spot will lead us down to the river. I have never actually been here before but have heard tell of this cave. I'm pretty sure that the cover blocking the mouth of the cave cannot be all that large. The earth – is loose, it's sandy clay."

Binyamin and Yekel Loytin get to work. Without any tools, they must dig with their bare hands. Berman and Leibke take turns relieving the first two. Bathed in sweat, they continue digging away. A half hour passes. Then another half hour.

A fresh wave of nighttime air bursts into the cave and silently caresses the faces of the sweaty men. Binyamin and Yekel replace the other two and get back to work. The opening gradually grows wider. Yakov is the first to squeeze through, and he begins to sweep away the dirt, widening the mouth of the cave even further. One by one the people's shadows emerge into the black of night. The autumn chill has

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not yet hit them, they are still all lit up from the haste and hard work. What is left of the holy community of Hadiach is now standing there in silence beneath the vault of heaven.

The people begin to move. Someone stays put and slips away. It is Leibke. He cannot bear to leave his father behind. He decides to go back to the cemetery. He must also check to see what happened to Shim'ke in the end. Perhaps the latter is lying there wounded and in need of assistance.

Along the Psel River, among the whispering trees and the lazy splashing of the waves, the people's shadows go moving along, as they make their escape. They must cross the river. The water is cold, black, and menacing. Most of the people – are old and infirm. The river is rather deep in some places.

But miracles do still occur on this earth! Along the far shore the dark profile of a boat can be made out. Who will bring it over to this side? There is no time to do too much thinking. Binyamin gets undressed. He will now have to dive into a none-too-warm tub. The cold of the water sears his skin. He dives in and begins to swim, holding his breath, as he crosses half the river in a single stretch, and then reaches the boat. There is a single broken oar on the floor of the vessel. Shivering from the cold, he rows the boat back to the other side and quickly puts his clothing back on.

Quickly! Quickly now! The boat crosses the river several times. Binyamin does the rowing – he must warm himself up. Now the final group has come across. The shadows begin crawling along in the direction of Vilbovka. For a long while they go moving along the edges of the road, staying behind the bushes, cringing, making themselves small, then taking a few steps and coming to a halt once again. At last they reach the edge of the forest and hide behind the trees.

Binyamin steals up to the house of aunt Nastasya – Glasha is sleeping here this evening. He cautiously knocks at the window. Glasha appears – her face filled with sleep, youth, and affection. She is covered in nothing but a coat. She recognizes Binyamin. A womanly flame catches fire in her heart.

"What is it, Binyamin?"

"Glasha, come quickly! Over twenty people are waiting not far from

here. They just escaped from certain death. They must be transferred into the forest. At any moment the fascists might begin hunting for them."

In a flash Glasha loses her abashed, feminine tone. A minute later we see her and Binyamin walking along hastily. The people are standing crowded around among the pines, ready to move off in the direction of the partisan camp. There are about five hours left before dawn. The people must be brought to a safe place. This is not an easy task in the pitch-black of the forest. Glasha is the only one who can get them there.

Tzipa Lea once more bursts into tears. She just realized that Leibke has disappeared. It is a black day for the Ginsburg family! Shim'ke was murdered, Ginsburg stayed behind in the lions' den, and now Leibke too has left them. Solomon too is in mortal danger as he is heading to the cemetery tonight and might well run into the fascists. Pesya Feigin is in a bad way. If, God forbid, anything bad should happen to Solomon – it would be her own fault.

These Jewish mothers are standing there, and their eyes are shedding tears over the fate of their sons. Shapiro now makes his voice heard: in his opinion, Binyamin must go back to the road and wait for Solomon. If he does not show up within the hour, then Binyamin must slip back into the cemetery and check on the situation.

"No!" says Glasha. She grabs at Binyamin's sleeve, that soft-spoken girl, whose own spring is blossoming amidst this bloody autumn.

"I must go, Glasha!" whispers Binyamin, as he gives a heartfelt tug and pulls his sleeve free. He walks away. He was just here a moment ago, but now his footsteps have disappeared, dissolved into the darkness.

Off we go! Glasha leads them on. She knows the way well. Her firm, fleet legs go dancing along the forest path. Golda, with Ahuva in her arms, goes walking right alongside her. Shapiro too is walking out in front. He is breathing hard, dragging his feet along with difficulty. There are other old men and women among the group. It will be quite some time before they all reach the longed-for campsite. Glasha slows down her pace. Berman, bringing up the rear, notifies her that some people have fallen behind. Glasha slows down even further. Golda too is breathing heavily. For a few nights in a row now she has not gotten any sleep. The fear for her baby's welfare sucked the very life out of her

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body.

"Give me the baby!" orders Glasha. At the kindergarten she had learned to take care of little children, although they had been somewhat older than Ahuva. The slow march continues. The night, the forest, and the darkness lend cover to the movement of these human shadows. The stars could be seen among the pines.

A group of Jews, with Glasha leading the way, moves deeper into the forest. Solomon and three armed partisans are walking somewhere off in the distance in the opposite direction. Glasha knows that Solomon is bound to run into her along the way. She keeps casting highly focused glances from side to side. It is difficult to hide from her discerning eyes, the eyes of a wild forest rat. A certain way off she senses some motion, and orders those following her to disappear among the pines, as she steps out to have a look around in the wake of those mobile shadows. And now the first meeting takes place – between Glasha and the partisans. Glasha gives Solomon a report concerning the most recent events. Then comes the second meeting – between Solomon and his mother Pesya. Pesya had not dreamt of such a hasty meeting, but she has no complaints.

"Are you going to accompany us now?" asks Pesya.

"No, mother! We must continue on our way."

In the partisan camp they are suffering from a lack of ammunition and clothing, and Solomon has decided to attack the group of SS men and police officers that has taken over the Shtiebel and is now trapped inside. It will be a surprise attack, and there is a chance that they will be able to eliminate several fascists, along with collecting some German weapons and uniforms. They must also check up on old man Ginsburg and his sons and meet up with Binyamin.

"I'll go with you!" says Glasha.

Solomon rejects her offer. Glasha must bring the refugees to the campsite.

Brief orders are given. The two groups say goodbye. Glasha once more takes Ahuva from Golda's arms. Pesya falls silent, but her eyes are open wide to the black of night, filled with sorrow and concern. A silent blessing bursts forth from her heart: "Go in peace and return in peace, my son!" – "Don't worry, mother, we'll see each other again soon!"

The partisans continue their way in the dark. They move cautiously in a parallel line to the road, keeping behind the bushes. From time to time, in the absolute silence of the night, they can hear a soft whistle, their secret means of communication. It is Solomon whistling to Binyamin:

*Zehn bruder seinen mir gewehen,
Haben mir gehandelt mit wein...¹*

In the ditch that runs alongside the road, in a spot hidden from view, Binyamin is lying there and hears the tune. Now you too, my fellow readers, can well recall that endless song about the ten brothers, whose number keeps on diminishing. The two students used to sing the song when they were living in the dormitory at the university.

And now the third meeting takes place – between the partisans and Binyamin. They are five armed men – a none-too-small force. Now Binyamin takes the lead. They head down to the banks of the river, turn left, and locate the boat. A few minutes later – and the partisans are approaching the Shtiebel in the shadow of the trees. Now a young boy joins up with them – Leibke Ginsburg. Indeed, this little man is gradually growing up. He is lying in ambush now, not far from Shim'ke's body, trying to catch every sound that comes from the Shtiebel.

In the Ohel of the Rebbe, Ginsburg is still murmuring chapters from Psalms. His eyes are closed, his face is turned toward the east, and he is standing there conversing with his God in the ancient tongue.

*I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up,
While I suffer thy terrors...
Thy fierce wrath goes over me;
Thy terrors have cut me off.*

Disaster! A tremendous disaster now comes down on Ginsburg's head! Kurt Wirt, the commander of the platoon of fascists, just woke up from his slumber. He yawns. He peeks at his watch – it is one-thirty. Damn it all to hell! They went and drank themselves drunk once again. He gets up and stretches lazily. He walks over to the other room, to check what the martyrs are up to, and, while he is at it, he will try to

¹ 'We were ten brothers, Our business was wine...' (Yiddish).

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squeeze some more money and valuables out of them. The Jews – are a clever bunch. It's clear that they are still hiding quite a bit.

He opens the door and is shocked at what he sees. The martyrs have disappeared! As he begins shouting the rest of the guards wake up in a panic. Indeed, it's true! The Ohel has completely emptied out, only the old man with his bandaged head is left, murmuring his prayers:

Hide not thy face far from me...

I become like them that go down into the pit...

Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk!

At first, they screamed at him. He fell silent. Then they beat him with their fists, their whips, and their boots. But he remained silent. They shot him in the legs – he fell to the ground and still remained silent. Three machine guns put an end to the life of Aharon Ginsburg. A wayward bullet hit the menorah with the eternal flame. The glass shattered. The menorah went out. Complete darkness now reigned.

But what's this? In the darkness came the sudden sound of the wheel of heaven beginning to spin. It was as though the very earth was crumbling. The head of the platoon, the SS man Wirt, had had his share of liquor. His head was spinning. What was happening? An earthquake? What silliness! There was no time to waste. The Gestapo commander would make him pay. They might well send him off to the front lines. *Donnerwetter!* They had to get hold of those Jews, no matter what! No doubt they had not yet had a chance to get too far. In the darkness he gives the order. One by one the fascists and police officers step out of the Ohel.

*"Haende hoch!"*¹ - it is Solomon's voice.

Five minutes later it was all over. The bodies of the fascists and the police officers are now lying there on the threshold of the Shtiebel. The partisans gather up the weapons and strip the uniforms off the dead men. Now Binyamin will lead them out through the hidden passageway, through the cave. The partisans step inside the Ohel, with the lantern in their hands. Ginsburg's crushed body is lying there stretched out on the floor. His bandaged face is stuck in the ground. "Father! Father!" Leibke

¹ 'Hands up!' – (German)

leans over him in tears. Quickly now! Binyamin moves the table aside and picks up the runner...

But it must have been a miracle! There is no hatch, no ladder, and no cave... It was but a fantastic vision! The cave, if indeed there had ever been one, has been stopped up...

"Uncle Solomon!" says Leibke Ginsburg. "We must bury father and Shim'ke."

Solomon hesitates. The hour is getting late. In a corner of the Shtiebel the hoes are arrayed – the tools of the *Chevra Kadisha*¹. Without a word the partisans dig a shallow grave by the side of the Shtiebel. In this instance the *kittel* serves as the winding sheet. They lower the bodies into the grave. Not a soul utters a single word. Hastily they close the grave up. Leibke stands there silently over the fresh grave.

"Let's go *Halopchik*²!" one of the partisans says to Leibke.

And so, they leave the same way that they came. In the Ohel of Rebbe Schneur Zalman Schneerson, may his merit protect us – the Rebbe and master of the Hassids of Chabad – the dead menorah is lying on the ground. The darkness has taken over in the world of the Holy One Blessed Be He. The eternal flame, that little bit of light of the *Ein-Sof*, no longer burns over the grave of the Alter Rebbe. Its fire no longer warms that little patch of earth.

¹ Chevra Kadisha - Community group in charge of burials (Hebrew).

² Kid (Ukranian).

Chapter 2.11

In September of 1941 the land of Poltava was conquered by Germans, and in September of 1943 it was liberated. Tamar had to groan under the fascist yoke for two years less four days.

At the end of October 1941, it was possible to observe Tamar Feigin, Kim Wartman, Frida Levovna, and her daughter Raya Rosenkranz moving along the forest paths between Hadiach and Romny. In those terrifying years there was no shortage of made-up names, and Tamar Feigin had become Nina Makarova, an orphan girl who had been born in Saratov in the year 1929 and had been educated in Moscow. Her foster home had been transferred, as it were, as early as 1940 from Moscow to Poltava. With the outbreak of the war the teachers had been scattered; many of the children, including Tamar, had run away from Poltava due to the bombings. Now she was heading to Saratov, to her aunt's house.

Fictions and lies! Raya Rosenkranz changed her name to Nadia Sosnova, and she too had a lie of her own made up, a true theatrical comedy! Frida Levovna became Praskovya Ivanovna Tarasyuk – or aunt Pasha. Her home in the south of the country had been bombed, and she was heading for the city of Michurinsk, where her son lived. Aunt Pasha's appearance was horrible, and her accent was ridiculous. As far as possible the three younger people tried to keep their distance from this aunt. Her only daughter, Raya-Nadia, was among those keeping their distance.

Kim became Kim Andreyevich Voronenko. He was the only one whose tale contained a drop of truth. Andrey – was the name of his maternal grandfather, who was no longer alive. Kim was headed to Kharkov, where his mother lived...

It was the beginning of November, and in the mornings the frost formed an icy crust on the roads. The farmers were kind-hearted, and they were not in the habit of turning away any passersby. Tamar's group was also received with a warm welcome, and they were fed and put up

for the night. At night, the young people would enter one of the farmer's homes, and the old lady would accompany them, trying hard to remain unremarkable. But a person with a blemish tends not to be aware of their blemish, and Frida Levovna was not at all familiar with the wisdom of silence and was liable to bring down a real disaster on all their heads.

And indeed, one day a disaster struck. In one of the villages, about a two-day's journey from Hadiach, we find Tamar and her entourage in the evening, sitting at the table in the kitchen of one of the farmers' homes. The lady of the house is serving them bowls of Ukrainian borscht, along with some bread. Two girls – aged somewhere between fifteen and sixteen, the daughters of the lady of the house – are staring at our heroes and their considerable appetites with a penetrating look in their eyes.

"You're not Jews by any chance, are you?" one of the girls asked. She had a little cross hanging around her neck, and the nostrils of her slender nose went rising and falling.

"I'm Tarasyuk, Praskovya Ivanovna!" Frida Levovna replied to the wicked little girl... Her accent, her eyes, and her nose all contradicted her words. Why did she have to go and open her mouth?

Tamar grabbed the bread and began to chew it up, swallowing her borscht hastily. Meanwhile, the conversation had turned to other unrelated topics. As they continued talking, it turned out that a relative of the lady of the house, Petro Gavrilovich, worked for the police.

What a rotten deal! On the floor of the kitchen the mother of the family laid out a wide mattress for the travelers. They lay down in the warm kitchen and immediately drifted off to sleep. When you have been walking all day long on the roads, in the cold, and then, in the evening, exhausted and frozen, you step into a warm room and eat until you're full – you should not expect to spend a sleepless night. In only a matter of seconds, Frida Levovna's nose had begun humming its tune and Kim and Raya's breathing had joined in on the symphony. Tamar was the only one not sleeping. The anonymous Petro Gavrilovich appeared before the Jewish girl's closed eyes. She was afraid to fall asleep.

And indeed, just a little while later, the door opened slowly, and that wicked daughter walked in with a tall man dressed in civilian

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clothing. By the scant light of the lantern Petro Gavrilovich took a good look at the faces of the people sleeping there. Tamar held her breath and pretended to be fast asleep. The two people stepped out of the kitchen and began whispering behind the door. Cautiously, Tamar leaped up from her spot and pressed her ear against the door. "We'll be back in a little while!" she heard the man whisper.

The door was shut with a dull thud. The snores continued to rise and fall. Her heart beat fast. They had to get away at once! She hastily put on her coat and leaned over Kim. In the room – all was dark. The roosters had not yet begun their morning labors. Tamar shoved the boy's shoulder. "Kim, we have to go!" She could barely make out his face, as a certain warmth and a kindly smile hovered across his features. "Kim, Kim!" He opened his eyes. The girl who was the love of his life was leaning over him. In the darkness he could make out the worried expression on her face, frozen as it was in a tense look of concern. Suddenly he pulled her down to him; and she fell on top of him. He had certainly found the right time and place for it! He kissed her eyelids.

In those days childhood loves blossomed and fell off into the abyss. Tamar's eyelids trembled between the warm lips of the boy. She remained silent. She gave herself completely to this moment that would never again repeat itself. But in a flash the fear of death subjugated everything else. "Stop, Kim, we have to run for it immediately! In just a little while the police will be here. We have to make a run for it without waiting another second!" She pulled herself away from him, got up, and peeked out the window. By the light of the moon she saw the police officers nearing the house. She let out a terrified scream: "They're on their way!" Raya and Frida Levovna woke up in a panic. Tamar, who was already dressed, quickly opened the door and slipped outside. The officers did not notice her. For a few moments she went running along the road, then turned off and hid behind one of the fences. The officers came closer. Kim burst out of the house, but he had waited too long. "Stop!" There were pounding footsteps. Screams. The sound of dogs barking came from the various yards. It was all over! Kim, Raya, and Frida Levovna had fallen into the hands of the police officers. Tamar pulled herself away from the fence and ran through the street. The sound of dogs barking accompanied her as she went. Onward, onward! At last the forest enveloped the terrified girl. She slowed down and relaxed ever so slightly. She stood there in place for a little while, listening to the rustling of the trees.

A grey dawn broke. Tamar headed out on her way. From this point on she was separated from her companions. There were still more adventures waiting for her among the wolves, and some kind souls would still shine forth among them on her behalf. The road to Romny took eight days. No small number of broken people crossed her path – including the wounded, captives, deserters, and refugees. One, Tatar, who claimed that he was headed for Crimea – a man who seemed to be about thirty years old – looked very much like a Jew. His eyes, his face, his unshaven chin, all testified to the fact like a hundred witnesses. At the crossroads he spoke with Tamar a bit, and perhaps also realized that a fellow daughter of his people was standing there before him. Tamar's eyes met the eyes of the Tatar. Those four eyes read one another, took pity on one another, were drawn to one another – and yet their lips remained silent.

In the late evening we find Tamar at the Grinov Farm, about four kilometers from Romny. In Romny they have already begun eliminating the Jews. Some of them ran away from the city and had gone wandering about in the surrounding area without finding shelter. In all the villages around Romny signs had been posted on the walls of the houses declaring in German and Ukrainian that every person had an obligation to stop the Jews who had escaped and bring them to the police. The residents were forbidden to put the Jews up, feed them, or help them hide. Such signs had been posted at the Grinov Farm as well, and the farmers would not put up any passersby at their place. Crushed and freezing, Tamar went around from house to house, until she managed to squeeze her way into one of the kitchens, almost against the will of the owners.

In the early morning the girl left for Romny. She crossed the bridge over the Sola River in peace. They were not checking documents there. She reached the center of the city. In the doorway of the Kommandatura an armed Ukrainian police officer was standing, and he would not let her in. She had to sign up and get in line and get an entry pass. There were many people crowding the permit office. You signed up for an interview with the Burgermeister, his assistant, the Kommandant, and other authorities. For a long while Tamar stood there in line. It was now noon. A few more hours passed. What bad luck! If she would not be able to obtain an identification card today not a soul would let her stay the night – as every evening the authorities conducted searches. When they found someone without documents,

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the landlord met with a bitter end.

Tamar pressed up against the window outside the line. The desire to live was working in tandem here with her elbows. The people standing in line gave the brazen, suspect girl angry looks. Complaints could be heard up and down the line... At the window they said that it would only be her turn in another three days. She began screaming in Ukrainian that she was an orphan, just passing through, and that she had no place to stay. The complaints from the people in line ceased. After a few more questions and answers they wrote her name down, but without any promise that her turn would indeed come today. Her number was one hundred and fifty-three.

This time, at the sight of the official slip of paper in her hands, the guard allowed her to enter the Kommandatura. She sat down on a long bench in the waiting room. There were many people sitting on the benches, including women and old folks who were discussing all sorts of different matters: a lost cow, the murder of the Jews, a permit to open a kiosk in the market, a house that had been bombed, assistance for one's children. Tamar remained silent. The secretary soon came out and announced that the Burgermeister would not be seeing anyone else. All those registered had to return the next morning at nine o'clock.

Tamar moved over to the second line, which was shorter and dedicated to the Deputy Burgermeister Vasiliyev. She was hungry, her face was gloomy and shabby-looking, and only her dark eyes were burning. Her luck held, and it was now her turn to go in and see Vasiliyev – she was the last person to be seen that day.

There were three people in the room. Vasiliyev sat in the chair in the center – he was a yellowish man of about forty, whose eyes were surrounded by dark circles. The second individual – was a mustached young man with an odd tuft of hair on his head; he had a bottle of hard liquor stuffed in the pocket of his jacket. The third individual – was a graceful, smiling woman. The three of them talked amongst themselves alertly, and yet although Tamar heard what they were saying, she did not actually register the meaning of the words one bit. They did not pay any attention to the girl who was standing by the door excitedly with her head bowed.

"Let's go, Vasya!" said the man with the bottle, as he got up from his seat; his moustache was painstakingly twirled and pointed. The

three of them got up from their chairs. Tamar walked up to Vasiliyev. Her eyes had a pleading look in them.

"Nu, what do you want?" asked Vasiliyev, impatiently. He had to go at once.

Tamar mumbled something about the foster home that was transferred from Moscow to Poltava. But Vasiliyev was not listening to what she was saying.

"A foster home? In that case, we'll send you to our own foster home."

With an indifferent look and a trembling heart, Tamar followed the movements of Vasiliyev's pen. On a piece of official stationary, he was standing there writing a note to the Director of the orphanage, telling him that he ought to take in Makarova Nina Ivanovna, twelve years old, born in Saratov... He signed his name with a flourish and stamped the paper with the seal of the eagle and swastika. The man, who was in a hurry, handed that life-giving document to the persecuted girl on the run.

The foster home was on the other side of the river, in Zaslav. Although she only arrived there in the evening, she still found the Director of the orphanage and the Director of housekeeping. The former was a none-too-young man, and it seemed to Tamar that his sharp eyes looked her over from head to toe, and then winked at the Director of housekeeping and gave Tamar another peek. The girl handed him the note from Vasiliyev. He looked it over for quite some time.

"Fine!" he said, and then called out loudly: "Aunt Gronya!"

Along came aunt Gronya, or Agrippina Anisimovna Yermolenko. The formal process of accepting a new girl to the foster home got under way. Tamar took a bath and changed her clothes, donning a tattered uniform. In accordance with the rules, she was given a bed in the isolation room. She would be quarantined for two weeks.

Agrippina Anisimovna brought her dinner – cereal, a slice of bread, and some tea. Tamar ate. The tension in her soul had barely dissipated, and the fear of death had not left her. She unlocked the two doors of the isolation room. If the police officers would come bursting in at one door, she might manage to flee by way of the other.

The walls of the room were filthy. The blanket gave off a sour

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smell. Everything was foreign and frightening. She removed her clothes, lay down in bed, and curled up in the sour blanket.

The first tears now appeared in her closed eyes. For a long while they streamed down her cheeks in the dark.

Aside from the village of A., several other farms in the area belonged to 'The Path to Socialism' collective farm; it consisted of about five hundred families. The village was quite some distance from any other settlements, and the sole authority figures during the years of the occupation were the village elder Luzhkin, and two police officers – Shatov and Panasenko. Only on rare occasions did a few Germans ever show up here. It was in this village that Hasya Ginsburg lived with her three sisters: Hana, Mira, and Rivochka. Rivochka was only five years old. The spotted cow was still there, but the animal's life was not in the same danger as the lives of those Jewish girls.

After Hasya had completed her studies at the Technical Agricultural School in Hadiach, she had begun working at 'The Path to Socialism' collective farm, and she had found herself a home in the house of a kind woman – Maria Maksimovna Maiboroda – whose husband had been drafted into the Red Army at the start of the war. Maria Maksimovna was the mother of two children: Natasha, who was ten, and Misha, who was six. The village of A. was not one of the larger villages around, and the members of the Maiboroda family were quite numerous. There were close relatives, distant relatives, colleagues, and friends. In the beginning of September that same year, when the German forces were gradually taking over the land of Poltava, Maria Maksimovna's cow took sick. The veterinarian lived in Lipova Dolina. The roads were packed with people, and by the time the doctor could make it to the village of A., the cow had already breathed her last. In those hard times, it was not a good thing for a family with two children to be without a cow. The rest of the Maiboroda family offered some assistance, but in those difficult times everyone had troubles of their own. And so, Hasya traveled to Hadiach and brought the spotted cow back with her from her father's house, along with her three sisters. There was still a supply of fodder in Maria Maksimovna's cow shed, and the spotted cow provided food for all of the children in this expanded family.

The situation took a turn for the worse when the Germans arrived in the village. Luzhkin, who was appointed as village elder, was no thief;

he tried to ease weight of the fascist yoke on the farmers, but in the face of the deluge of orders to gather grain and vegetables, livestock, chickens and eggs, lard and winter coats, Luzhkin was forced to demand that each household provide its share. The police officers as well did not just sit around doing nothing. Shatov, a broadly built man of about forty, was in the habit of locating any hidden provisions. In his day he had been one of the kulaks, and he was very well aware of the nature of an agricultural farm – whether in matters of working the land, or handling the poultry and livestock, or the personalities of the farmers themselves. In contrast to Shatov, who was moderate and disciplined, the other officer, Ivan Grigoriyevich Panasenko, was a wild young man, easygoing and left to his own devices, who early on in life had already begun to hit the bottle. At school he had only finished the fifth grade, and then he had joined up with the other good-for-nothings. Once, he had gotten together with a group of his friends in an attempt to rob the Cooperative Store. Due to his unchecked behavior he had earned himself a bad name. Yet now the village had been taken over by the enemy, and the leadership of the collective farm and the regional council had been scattered. Vanya Panasenko, who was nineteen at the time, donned a police officer's uniform and became Ivan Grigoriyevich. He was almost constantly in his cups. He was the one to carry out the most abominable missions on behalf of the fascists. He would snoop around and uncover the hiding places of Jews, communists, partisans, and soviet army men. The members of the village feared his suspicious eyes, which were constantly muddied by a strange film – the fruit of all that samogon and horilka.

Four Jewish souls living all together in the same place was not a desirable thing, so Hasya and Maria Maksimovna decided to split the sisters up. Mira and Riva were handed off to relatives of the lady of the house, also belonging to the Maiboroda family. These relatives had a house full of children, and the addition of another mouth or two to feed would not throw them off kilter at all. However, they had to act cautiously. The physical appearance of the three sisters – Hasya, Mira, and Riva – was not exactly what you would call the best.

Hana was the exception. Her smooth hair, as shiny as a raven's wing, the delicate lines of her face, her shapely nose, the cheekbones that protruded ever so slightly, her innocent, dark eyes, her long lashes, the scent of youth in bloom – all these things lent her a unique, eastern charm. Hasya was different. Her hair was curly, her face was plain – the

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face of an ordinary Jewish girl. Her eyes were dark as well, but they were never at rest; whereas Hana was soft-spoken and dreamy, a real child of the upper class.

The two older girls lived with Maria Maksimovna. The latter was a thirty-five-year-old woman. Her mother had been an experienced seamstress in her time, and as a girl Maria Maksimovna had already learned the art of sewing herself. With the outbreak of the war her industrious hands were occupied with this work, and she had no shortage of customers. The sewing machine was constantly active. In those days, the problem of outfitting oneself was not a simple one. People were constantly shortening and lengthening items, putting additional patches over already existing ones, and Maria Maksimovna's hands were constantly busy. She required an assistant, and Hana willingly helped her with the sewing, sitting there for long hours, working and dreaming.

Just to be sure, the rumor was spread through the village that Hasya had run away with the Red Army, though in secret she remained active, still tending to the cow, the pig, and the domestic chores; Natasha and Misha also required no small amount of attention. When customers would come to see Maria Maksimovna, Hasya would disappear. Up in the attic, on a pile of hay, the girl would take shelter.

Beneath the wings of which nation did the members of our people not seek sanctuary at the time? Hana Ginsburg, that rare, graceful flower, became Georgian, and her name was now Lula Kitashvili. Any nation in the world could be proud of such a beautiful, soft-spoken daughter as her. A fictional tale was also concocted: Hasya and Maria Maksimovna were the ones to come up with it. Lula's father – was from Georgia, from the town of Oni. During the civil war he had married a Russian woman and settled down in Kalinin. When the front lines neared that town, Lula had left with her mother for Georgia, heading for relatives of her father's. Along the way the train had been bombed, and her mother had been killed. The tragedy had taken place not far from Lukhovitsy. Along with a group of refugees Lula had wandered around quite a bit until she had found her way to the village of A., where Maria Maksimovna had taken the girl in, to work for her as an assistant seamstress.

But it was impossible to keep a secret in the village for too long. The police became aware of the fact that at the house of Maria

Maksimovna a Jewish girl was hiding out. One day in November the two officers came down. Hasya managed to go into hiding in the attic, whereas Hana was still sitting at the sewing machine; and the machine went clacking away. "Who is that girl?" asked Shatov, as he demanded Hana's documents. But Hana did not have any. Maria Maksimovna began telling the officers the tale of the train that had been bombed.

"You must come with us," Shatov said to Hana. "You'll stay with us until the matter is clarified."

"Wait!" said Panasenko. He was a bit tipsy. From the moment he had stepped into the room his eyes had been fixed on the girl. "Don't touch her!"

When it came to such matters Panasenko was the one in charge, and Shatov had to do as he was told. But what had happened to the young police officer? It can only be that he had fallen in love at first sight, and the girl had found herself someone to sigh on her behalf – Vanya Panasenko.

Ah, the worries, the concerns... the girls needed a mother, and even more so in those tragic times. Behind the scenes Hasya was hard at work. Rivochka was living at the home of a well-to-do farmer, but Mira had it hard, and from time to time Natasha would bring her some food. The village of A. was not one of the larger settlements in the Poltava region, and the homes were not too far from one another.

During the winter the flu made the rounds from house to house, and the girls in the Ginsburg family were not spared. Mirka was the first to get sick. She was living at the home of a widow with many children of her own. For five days she ran a rather high fever. There was no medicine to be had, so they were giving the girl fruit juice, and she would sweat profusely during the night. Next Hana got sick as well. She would lie there with her face all aflame and groan. Up in the attic, hidden in the pile of hay, her older sister would cry silently, so that no one might hear her voice. Back at her father's house, Hasya had earned herself a reputation as a '*berya*'¹ and she was a real pearl among the womenfolk. Yet here, in this distant village, burdened with being responsible for the lives of her sisters as well, Hasya was forced to

¹ Berya - daughter of valor (Yiddish).

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remain in hiding so that no one might lay an eye on her. She began to fade, as though her strength had been taken from her. Only her heart knew no rest, as it nearly burst from the pity and compassion she felt.

At last a savior was found for Hana in her illness! The police officer Panasenko brought her medication to counteract the influenza, including Sulfidin – which had just then begun to appear on the market.

What was to be done about the matter of the police officer's love for Hana? Heavy stones lay on her sister Hasya's heart. Every evening Panasenko would come into the house of Maria Maksimovna, ask how Lula was doing and sit down on her bed. The shining hair of the sick girl was scattered over the pillow, her eyes were a bit enflamed, and her lips were pale. Panasenko would sit there in silence, his eyes peeled to the face of the girl, as her modest beauty conquered his heart.

Hana got better. She once more began to busy herself with the sewing, putting one patch over another. Her head was bent over the sewing machine, with her neck partially sticking out. The part in her hair seemed to express both weakness and purity. Nearly every evening the police officer would come to the home of Maria Maksimovna, sit down across from the girl bent over her needle, and remain silent. At that same time Hasya would be lying on the pile of hay up in the attic.

What was therefore to be done about this murky love that Panasenko felt for Hana? The cruel solution arrived all of a sudden. That evening Panasenko did not come around. Maria Maksimovna went out with Natasha to go see one of her friends, where she stayed for some time. Snow began to fall outside. It was a sad, silent winter evening, at the twilight hour. It seemed that the police officer was not going to come. Hasya had prepared some food for the spotted cow, and she was cautiously carrying the pot over to the shed at the far end of the yard. There was nothing to indicate the trouble that was approaching. The snow was falling in flakes, covering the entire earth, and darkening the horizon. Hasya did not notice that the wicket gate was open. Panasenko stepped into the yard and caught sight of the girl who now appeared through the screen of snow. She stood the pot next to the snow-covered door, opened it up, and then bent down to pick up the pot.

"Who are you?" came the voice of the police officer. The murderer stealthily approached his sacrifice.

Hasya lifted her head. Their eyes met. He recognized the girl.

What a foul, bitter turn! Panasenko hated Hasya Ginsburg, he had hated her already back in Soviet times. Panasenko, who had then been a member of the Kolkhoz, was known for his laziness and his wild behavior. Hasya, who had been in charge of the Cultural Committee at the Komsomol had once given a speech in which she had denounced those who did nothing, who got drunk without any restraint, and created scandals at the cooperative center. She called out Panasenko in particular, as he was the head parasite in the Kolkhoz.

"Ah, it's you!" came the festive voice of the police officer. "At last I've found you, you damn Jewess!"

If she did not get away from the officer – then Hasya was to perish indeed. Like a flash of lightning she slipped away, and her brave feet were already carrying her off in the direction of the open gate. But it was not easy to get away from Panasenko. A gun appeared in his hand. "Stop!" Hasya kept running. There was another wild cry: "Stop!" The girl had reached the wicket gate. The officer was running as well, running and firing at his hated target. Hasya fell next to the gate. Two bullets had struck her. A patch of blood began to spread in the snow. There were a few spasms. Then silence.

Hana suddenly burst out of the house, as she skipped down the stairs with a fearful heart and caught sight of the body laid out there against the darkening white background. With a scream she fell on the body of her sister. "Hasya! Hasya!" Snowflakes fell on the face of the dead girl. The pool of blood continued to expand in the snow. "Hasya!"

"Is she a relative of yours?" asked Panasenko; something now became clear to him. So, they had been making fun of him, and Lula too was a Jewess.

"Ah, nu, let's go!" ordered the police officer. He pulled the girl off the body of the murder victim.

"Misha is alone in the house..." Hana's face was covered in tears.

"Let's go, let's go!" He shoved her in the direction of the street. They stepped through the wicket gate and walked beneath the avalanche of snow. Hana's coat had been left behind at the house, and she was only wearing a light dress.

The young officer's mind was undergoing a complete revolution. He had loved the girl, she had been like a goddess to him. He, Ivan

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Grigoriyevich Panasenko, who had greater authority than the village elder, who had it in his power to imprison and eliminate people at will – had found himself turned into a fool whose most sublime emotions had become a source of ridicule for these people. And who was responsible for this? A lowly Jewish girl, who had adopted the habit of a queen held captive in a foreign land.

"Was she a relative of yours?" hissed the officer through pursed lips. His face had gone pale from the insult and madness that was taking hold of him.

"A sister..." replied Hana. She was no longer capable of telling lies, even though her own life hung in the balance. Hasya's murder had changed something inside her soul, and it was all the same to her now – life or death. The snow continued to come down. Everything went dark. The police station was locked. The officer opened the door with his key. He shoved the girl inside the room. Now he would take revenge on this desecrated love of his. He would treat her as though she were one of those cheap whores. Love demanded respect. But this girl had abused him, and now he would repay her in droves.

All night long he tortured her atop the low, filthy couch in the police house. He filled the space with the stench of alcohol and rot. Afterwards he let her go back to the home of Maria Maksimovna. He intended to make use of her yet again. Before she left he warned her not to reveal to anyone that she was a Jew. It would be better if she remained a Georgian.

Vanya Panasenko was demonstrating such kindness! With her legs faltering beneath her Hana stepped outside. Snowflakes were still dancing in the air. Here and there the roosters were beginning to raise their voices. Blind windows could be seen in the walls of the silent houses. In the gardens the trees stood laden with snow. Afflicted and in shock, as though she had been completely emptied inside, the beautiful daughter of Aharon Ginsburg dragged her way through the far-flung village. The snow fell on her head, her neck, and her bare hands.

Hana opened the wicket gate and looked this way and that. Hasya's body had been taken away, and the blood had been covered with snow. She knocked at the window. Maria Maksimovna opened the door.

"Where have you been, Lula?" Hana could sense a sort of note of disappointment in Maria Maksimovna's voice. She too was the mother

of two children, and the fascists did not look kindly on those who offered shelter to the Jews.

The girl stepped silently into the house. Hasya's body lay on the floor. With dry eyes the girl looked at the face of her sister for several minutes. "I'll head up to the attic!" Her dull footsteps hit the steps. She lay down on Hasya's bedding, disappearing into the pile of hay. For a long while she lay there with her eyes wide open. An apathetic dawn broke, as strips of light and gray shadows stretched forth side by side.

Up in the attic there were several pieces of rope stretched out which Maria Maksimovna used for drying laundry. Hana emerged from her hiding place. Her soul was shattered, there were bits of hay stuck in her disheveled hair. Her eyelids were red and puffy. Her steps were absent-minded, and she moved – as though in a dream. She loosened the rope and tied it around one of the beams, then fastened the rigid noose around her neck.

Petya the rooster let out a cry in the chicken coop.

At noon that day a few members of the Maiboroda family buried the two sisters. The grave was dug a little way off from the Christian cemetery. The two bodies were lowered into a single grave. The people stood there for a moment of silence with their heads uncovered.

And so Hasya and Hana were gone. But the Maiboroda family took care of the two remaining sisters, Mirochka and Rivochka, until the war ended, and they survived.

The murder of the SS men and police officers in the Jewish cemetery was a cause of embarrassment and anger in the Gestapo circles in Hadiach. After an investigation the authorities concluded that the operation had been carried out by a platoon of partisans. They brought down hunting dogs, and the dogs followed the scent to the banks of the river. There all traces of their quarry disappeared.

The Grechuk brothers' luck had run out! The Gestapo became aware of the fact that they were the very ones who had notified the police that there were Jews hiding out in the Jewish cemetery. Blood called for blood! There had been partisans hiding out in the cemetery, and it can only mean that the Grechuk brothers had been their accomplices. It was not for nothing that they had stripped the victims of their uniforms and taken their weapons.

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The brains of Nazis running wild are bound to invent quite a few tall tales. There was now no reason to envy the Grechuk brothers. Had they known at the outset that they would be asked to pay such a heavy price for those damned headstones, they would have fled from the cemetery as though it were death itself. After a cruel examination at Gestapo headquarters the Grechuk brothers were taken out to die. They tied placards around their necks with the words: 'Partisan Murderers', and the two of them were hung in the park in town.

The Burgermeister Karpenko was called before the Gestapo commander. Margarita Fridrichovna served as the translator. This time a pail of boiling water was dumped on Karpenko's head. What's this? There were still Jews left in Hadiach, and they were hiding out in the cracks and hiding places. And what were the Burgermeister and the police doing about it? They were sitting around on their hands and allowing the Jews to make a mockery of Germany.

He had been openly rebuked and silently threatened. Karpenko left the office of the Gestapo commander in a foul mood. All the members of the police were enlisted to uncover the Jewish hiding places, and the night watch was doubled. Posters were put up informing the public of a reward in exchange for every Jewish head that would be brought down to the police.

Disaster now struck at the home of Itzik Slutsky and his family. You no doubt recall the man, the owner of that wondrous garden filled with fruit trees. He had a clever hiding place that he had set up in the basement, behind a sealed partition. From there, a brief tunnel led to the lair of Jacques, his lazy dog. The hiding place was almost too good to be true, but, dear God above, every creature needs a little patch of land, no matter how small, to call his own on this earth! Slutsky's house was taken over by *Volksdeutsche*¹, who worked at the Kommandatura. They confiscated the house and the garden, the valuables and furniture, and they also decided the fate of Jacques. This dog here slept all day long in his lair, had gotten old, and did not seem at all to be appreciated by the new tenants. They evicted Jacques from his lair and shot him in the alley. Poor Jacques had come to the end of the line, and in the lair in the yard there now lived a wicked German dog with a keen sense of smell.

¹ A Nazi term for Germans who were not citizens of the Third Reich.

And so, all Itzik's work, therefore, now went up in smoke. The only way out of their hiding place had been closed off, and the German dog's irate barking made their blood run cold.

The days passed by and they ran out of food and water. Itzik, his wife Zlata, and their two daughters became weak. A Jewish family was thus left there in that dark basement, without any air or water, and dying of hunger.

Things had turned bitter and dark – it was the very biblical darkness of Egypt! Itzik's active brain was stirring there in the dark. First, they had to get rid of that barking dog. One night Itzik took a hoe – his sole weapon – and moved forth cautiously from his hiding place. Immediately he could hear the German dog's grunted complaints coming from above. The closer Itzik got to the camouflaged hatch, the louder that devil's barking grew. With a single sweep of his hand, Itzik opened the hatch. A blast of cold air hit him in the face. Barking angrily, a wide-open mouth and two fiery eyes flew at the tunnel. With all his might Itzik brought the edge of the hoe down on the head of the dog.

The German dog was finished, but Itzik too was breathing heavily. For a few seconds he remained frozen where he was, listening tensely to the sounds of the night. Thank God, all was quiet in the house. Not a soul had heard the German dog's final whimpers. Now Itzik would try to go fetch some water. He crawled back down, took the pail, and stepped cautiously out to the well. He stood there before the wheel like some monstrous, ugly idol, as he tied the handle to the chain, and lowered the pail. The wheel creaked softly. The pail filled up with water. For a long while Itzik drank the cool water. Then he brought the pail back downstairs, to his wife and daughters.

A little while later we see several shadows slipping through the streets of Hadiach. It is Itzik and his wife Zlata. Two-year-old Nina is resting in her mother's arms, and Itzik is carrying four-year-old Fanya. The Slutsky family has turned its back on the fruit trees, the house, and the yard. In Zayar they have a good Ukrainian friend, who might be willing to take them in. There is silence in the streets, only the snow is creaking beneath their feet. After sitting for many long days in the damp, dark basement, living a life of filth and fear, one's legs do not quite obey one all that well. They leave behind a trail of confused footprints in the snow in their wake. The two girls and their bundles are weighing them down immeasurably, yet their fear is giving life to those

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wasted muscles of theirs.

But Slutsky just can't catch a break! Ninochka bursts into tears. Immediately they hear the night watchmen's feet approaching. The police officers drag the Slutsky family off to the basement of Gestapo headquarters. It was a Friday night, Shabbat, the sixth night of Chanukah...

There were those doing the dragging and those being dragged along... The days of killing and combat were filled with abominable actions and heroic deeds. The partisan base in the forests of Hadiach was not resting on its laurels. Every day had its own story to tell. The commander of the battalion, Major Tichonov, was an active man filled with initiative, and he had managed to make contact with Soviet headquarters. Through hidden channels his battalion received weapons, medicine, and rations. A radio transmitter was also set up. They carried out attacks against the fascists and their henchmen. About twenty kilometers away they had blown up their first train. Now, along with Glasha, there were several other girls in the combat camp. They operated the radio transmitter in shifts. Two of them also assisted Engertov in performing his medical duties. There were also women tending to the domestic chores around the camp.

In the meantime, spring had begun to arrive in the forest. The wind blew warm and chilly at the same time. The sun began to make its soft voice heard. The sky turned blue. The snow had not yet melted away completely, but here and there snowdrops began to appear, putting forth their heads and speaking a bit to the hearts of the young. The pines began to raise their voices with a brand-new rustle, filled with longing and life. Loves began to blossom among the young men and women in the camp.

Alongside the alternating highs and lows of partisan life, the bond between Glasha and Binyamin gradually grew deeper. The girl had grown up, in just a little while she would be turning eighteen. The girlish lines in her face and in the build of her body had gradually disappeared, and the shape of a young woman now appeared in their place. In theory, she did not stand out from among the other girls all that much. She had flaxen hair, grey eyes with a serious look in them, and an ordinary face. Her clothes too were ordinary, as a boring coat enveloped her fresh, budding body. A kerchief was always knotted beneath her chin, and her feet were shod with rough shoes, while her stockings were

thick and grey.

Life in the partisan camp did not allow for anything but the most random meetings; and these were filled with laughter and sadness. The meetings took place at a certain distance from the camp, in a spot that was hidden from view. Glasha was familiar with spots like that. She was a child of the forest, sister to every silent tree as it went rustling and storming away, friend to every bird and bush, every branch and pine cone, squirrel and blade of grass, worm and flower. There was not a single breeze that blew that did not caress the girl. Her soul was open to the entire world, and the world was mirrored there in her soul.

Binyamin, who had forever been a literary man, also began to live the life of the community in which he now found himself. Little by little he learned to lie for hours on end in an ambush, freezing in the damp and the cold. If need be, he was capable of walking 40-50 kilometers in a day, armed with a machine gun and hand grenades, and carrying a backpack on his back. In skirmishes with the fascists he showed no weakness or fear whatsoever. He made himself a dear friend among the partisans, Pasha Ovchinnikov, a broad-shouldered young man from the north, who taught Binyamin to shoot with amazing accuracy. He learned both to remain awake for days on end, as well as to fall fast asleep in the blink of an eye and rest for sixteen hours straight.

It is a puzzling thing to see just how much a human being can adapt to the conditions that he is dealt by the hand of fate! Of all the habits that Binyamin had had up until the war the only one left was that of keeping a diary, and from time to time he would write down a few lines. He never wrote about partisan activities, for fear that the notebook might fall into the hands of the enemy.

"Sunday, March 15. Glasha returned yesterday from a mission in Hadiach. The little devil burst into the mud hut. "Hello, Binyamin!" She greeted Pasha as well. For three days now, I have not seen her, and here we are now walking towards our hideout in the forest. She offers me greetings once more. "My dear!" she says. "Hello there!" Then she closes her eyes a bit, and I know just what I must do. My greetings are so long and drawn out that the very treetops manage to whisper a lengthy prayer while bowing and scraping away in genuflections of green. "I missed you. It's been ages since I saw your face!" Her soft Ukrainian tongue sounds like a melody to me.

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Wednesday, March 18. Yesterday we once more sat in our hideout. I never before saw her cry, but this time there were tears in her eyes. "What's the matter, Glasha?" She remained silent. When the right moment comes, she will reveal her secret to me, and then she will unload the usual nine measures of discourse on my head.

I carry her a bit through the darkening forest. She has her arms around my neck, pressing up close, as she kisses my eyes. "Stop, Glasha!" I say. "We'll end up bumping into a pine tree along the way!" But she does not let go of my eyes – she has found herself a new toy! She is blocking out the light of the world before me, and there I go actually bumping into one of the pines. The tree did not move to make way for us...

We headed back to our spot and lay down with our faces turned up to the sky. The sky is gradually being covered by a dull film, strewn with azure, gold, and shadows. Glasha, my good friend, is lying there by my side. "I am afraid," she says, "that all this will come to an end." She moves closer to me, and against the dull, light blue of the sky, I can see her clear eyes, and inhale the delicate scent of the forest flowers that her mouth gives off. She presses up against me with all the faith a human being can muster."

Glasha often spent the night in the camp, but from time to time she also spent the night at her mother's house in Vilbovka. Aunt Nastasya continued her sinful ways, as this had forever been her art and craft. Tichon Sidorenko had not forgotten the path that led to her home. He had murdered Lida Edelman, but Nastasya had no knowledge of this. Her weakness for the bottle had not faded with time, and she had also never learned to stay away from the company of men. Her connection to Tichon went back to well before the war.

Tichon Sidorenko had now come up in the world – he had been appointed as the village elder! Now he was even more brazen than ever, as though it was all about him! Despite his newfound importance he continued to visit the home of aunt Nastasya. Glasha was now afraid to sleep in Vilbovka, fearing that she might fall into the murderer's hands. Those glassy eyes of Lida's there among the bushes still seemed to stare out at her. And indeed, one night, when his 'heart was merry with wine', Tichon tried to have his way with Glasha. Nastasya, who was also tipsy, was sleeping in the living room, in a corner of which the icons of Christ the Savior and Nicolay the Miracle Worker were hanging. It is not easy

to wake up an exhausted, drunken woman, but Glasha's screams made the very walls tremble. Nastasya opened her eyes in a panic and saw her daughter, partly naked, running around the room, with Tichon chasing after her. Glasha's shouts and Sidorenko's abominable laughter horrified Nastasya. That lean woman with the sparse braid leaped down from her bed and stood by the side of her daughter. It is not easy for a man, even if he is Tichon Sidorenko, to stand there in the face of two screaming women and their fingernails, and so Tichon beat a retreat. He spat out a few curse-words, got dressed, and left the house.

The matter of Sidorenko was brought before Tichonov, Feigin, and Gavrilenko. At the battalion's headquarters a consultation was held. Gavrilenko, who knew Tichon quite well, told all about the man, including the murder of Lida Edelman. It was decided to eliminate that rapacious tiger, who had sold his soul to the enemy.

Glasha, Ovchinnikov, and Binyamin headed out one evening for Vilbovka to carry out the sentence. For two days the two partisans hid out in the attic in the summer shack. Glasha brought them food, along with some books to read – including Tolstoy, which was among the books left behind by Stepan Borisovich, as well as Andersen's fairy tales. Binyamin read the Tolstoy, and Pasha – read the Andersen.

Sidorenko only showed up in the evening of the third day. Everything had been planned out beforehand. Glasha sat on the porch and greeted the visitor. "Good evening, if you're not just playing with me!" responded Tichon self-importantly. "Is your mother home?"

Nastasya was not at home, she had gone out to one of her neighbors to borrow a little kerosene. Glasha began to smile. The smile did not match the serious look in her eyes, which were usually silent, and often piercing as well. However, Tichon was not sensitive to such delicate matters, and all he noticed was her smile. From the time he had been appointed village elder he saw quite a few people all around him smiling at him submissively. He struck the girl with a mixture of protection and authority as she sat there on that sad and gloomy porch. Glasha recoiled, but she did not wipe away the smile from where it was plastered across her face.

"My mother will be back in a little bit!"

"If that's the case, let's go for a little walk!" offered Sidorenko. It was clear that this girl had found favor in the eyes of his highness. In

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time she would be exactly like her mother in all things.

Tichon gets excited. They must move quickly; the old lady will be back and she'll get in the way. There are good spots in the forest as well.

"Get dressed!" orders the village elder.

Glasha puts on her coat. In doing so, she is obeying a different command. The two of them go down the steps from the porch. The house of aunt Nastasya is located all by itself off in the forest. This evening it has spread its dark wings in the vicinity. There is not a single soul around, yet four eyes are watching everything from the attic.

"Let's go!" whispers Ovchinnikov, the one responsible for the operation.

Sidorenko walks along in the forest, as Glasha leads him on. Tichon is following her willingly, filled with desire. In this abandoned spot the little bird will not get away from him. He raped Lida as well among the distant bushes. Glasha begins to show signs of life – asking questions. The Starosta has dealings with the fascists. Politely and cunningly, the questions emerge one after the other from the mouth of the girl as she plays dumb. Tichon replies – why not brag a little bit, why not reveal to the girl just how important he truly is? There is not a soul around, only some old lady chopping wood off in the distance. Glasha's ears are on the alert. For a few minutes now, she has been hearing the cautious footsteps of the two partisans coming from behind. A little more time passes, and Sidorenko is still putting on airs.

"My mother must definitely be home by now," says Glasha. "We must get back!"

She has squeezed the necessary information out of him and now she intends to go back the way she came. But it is not easy to slip out of the vise of Tichon Sidorenko's hands. "Are you playing with me?" He grabs the girl's arm tightly, so that she cannot run away, and drags her off into the bushes. Why isn't she screaming? It is forbidden for her to scream, she is obeying orders. Ovchinnikov will not let Sidorenko do her any harm, while Binyamin would give his life for her.

Sidorenko pushes Glasha into the bushes and pulls her towards him. She panics a bit, as she whispers in fear. "Tichon Vasilyevich! Tichon Vasilyevich!" She tries to pull her hand free. But it is all in vain! There is a rustle in the bushes and at last she spots her saviors. A

sudden storm bursts upon Tichon from behind. There is a truncated groan. Two daggers have been stuck into the village elder's back. A brief search is conducted. The three partisans now move off. The body of Sidorenko is left there among the bushes. A note stands out there in white, where it has been affixed, reading: "Death to the traitor!" Binyamin had written the note up in the attic, using the 'Rondo' font.

Death to the traitor! Ovchinnikov, a practical young man from the Kotlas region on the banks of the Northern Dvina, took Tichon's boots, along with the two bottles of samogon that he found in his pockets. Glasha's swift feet are carrying her forward. She enters the house. "Mother, I will not be sleeping here at your place tonight!" Nastasya has lately grown accustomed to not asking any questions. The lantern is giving off a faint light. Dinner is already on the table – consisting of bread, pickled cucumbers, and unpeeled potatoes.

"Glashenka, my dear, eat something!"

"It would be better if I took it with me..." She wrapped up a none-too-small bundle of provisions and kissed her mother's face; her eyes expressed embarrassment and concern. "Goodbye, mother! I'll be gone for a few days."

She tied the ends of her kerchief around her neck and disappeared. Pasha and Binyamin were waiting for her. The three partisans moved deeper into the forest. In the meantime, spring has put an end to the winter slumber. With youthful tricks, it shakes off her moldy old age. New forces begin to stir from the depths. A festive parade of stars appears overhead. They are blinking and flickering there among the trees, offering their blessings and greetings to the three warriors.

It is the beginning of *Nissan*¹, 5702 [1942]. Despite all the destruction and the horrors, something seems to be bustling with life. The spring breeze is promising, like an awakening. In just a little bit the buds will begin blossoming among the bushes.

¹ Nissan – a month in the Jewish calendar that usually falls out around March-April.

Chapter 2.12

A new child at the Foster Home had to stay in quarantine for two weeks. In Tamar's case she remained in quarantine for a month. One of the other students came down with scabies and she too had been placed in the isolation room. Tamar caught the disease from this girl.

Three times a day aunt Gronya brought her food. This Ukrainian woman imbued all her surroundings with kind-heartedness. There was a certain repressed orphanhood in the look of Tamar's face, her eyes gave off a feeling of fumbling sorrow and pain, and Agrippina Anisimovna developed a fondness for the dark girl.

But now the days of quarantine were over, and Tamar was brought before the Director. There was a file on the desk with her documents inside. Every one of the children in the Foster Home had a file of their own. Tamar's file was rather slim, containing only a questionnaire, and the letter of the Deputy Burgermeister Vasiliyev. "Nu, what are we going to do with you?" asked the Director. His piercing eyes were fixed on Tamar's eyes. Perhaps he suspected something.

In the meantime, aunt Gronya had stepped into the room and she turned to the Director. They needed workers in the kitchen. Peeling potatoes. Keeping the place clean. Makarova – was a mature girl. It would be best if she went to work in the kitchen.

Agrippina Anisimovna's recommendation was not unexpected. Tamar had asked her to take her on as an assistant.

"Fine!" said the Director, as he wrote something down on the questionnaire.

Her clothes were tattered, her apron was grey and wet, she had to peel and wash potatoes, wash the dishes and the floors – in short, it was lowly manual labor, and it was exhausting. Who would have prayed for such a position a year ago? Tamar had become a veritable woodcutter and water-drawer. But it was not the hard labor that weighed on her – it was her past. We find her there cringing, making herself small, trying

with all her might to erase her Jewish past. But how could she wipe out the memory of her mother and grandmother, of the Psel River and Dubinin Street, the school and her friends, or Kim's face, which had once been so close to her in this cruel, foreign land?

Not all the workers at the Foster Home treated Tamar kindly. Maria Fedorovna, the senior instructor, an aging woman with a foul character, had no love for her. In essence, this block of wood had never loved anything in all her life. Tamar was fortunate, however, not to run into this woman all too often. But for some reason Dosya, another one of the assistants in the kitchen, had it in for her. This coarse woman, with that deep voice of hers that was constantly complaining about something, did not care for Tamar's face. "*Mabut ti Zhidovka, Nina!*"¹ - that was the gist of Dosya's questions every morning. "Don't talk foolishly, Yevdokia Zaharovna!" would be the response of aunt Gronya. Seething silently with stifled bitterness, Tamar would get to work. Those questions were too much to bear.

Most of the instructors treated the children in a rather beastly fashion. There were rebukes and screams, lashes and blows, and the cries of the little children would slice through the air all day long. The instructors bared their fangs at one another as well. The Director with the suspicious eyes was rather quickly removed from his position. There was word that Maria Fedorovna, the senior instructor, had informed on him to the authorities. The Gestapo arrested him and appointed Maria Fedorovna in his stead.

After that, things did not improve in the running of the place, and the dynamics of the various relationships remained as before. In addition to all that, police officers were constantly visiting the Foster Home, and digging around in the files, trying to uncover any full or partial Jews that might have slipped into the institution.

The elimination of the Jews in Romny was carried out in three stages. First, they killed all those who presented themselves willingly at the orders of the German authorities. Many Jews went into hiding places or fled to the homes of farmers and pretended to be Ukrainians or Russians. The authorities then disseminated the lie that the order

¹ Maybe you are a Jew, Nina! (Ukrainian).

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had come from Berlin to let the Jews live and work for the benefit of the German Reich. Most of the martyrs believed this fiction, came back to Romny, and entered the ghetto. One day they were all put to death.

The third stage consisted of seeking out and murdering anyone who was only half-Jewish, or a quarter Jewish, the children of mixed marriages. The police officers came to the Foster Home as well, and checked the files, as well as any suspect children. The latter were dragged off to police headquarters. A few returned, but most of them were put in jail and then put to death.

To this day Tamar is unable to forget Tolya, a seven-year-old boy from Leningrad. His father was Russian, but his mother – was a Jew. He lived in Romny, at the home of his maternal grandmother. His grandmother spoiled him, and his pockets were constantly full of apples and candies. Tolya's face had an Aryan look to it. When they took his grandmother and him to the killing pit, the boy slipped away into one of the yards and hid behind the gate. Then he ran to some Russian acquaintances of theirs, who handed him over to the Foster Home. What did they want from a seven-year-old boy? In response to the Director's questions he had told the man how things truly stood, and in his questionnaire, it was listed that his mother was a Jew.

Tamar loved Tolya because of his joyful character. But when the police officer came to take him off to headquarters, it was as though the joy had been turned off all at once. Katya came over to him, Katya the instructor. "Tolya, get dressed, we're going to go for a walk!" He burst out crying, as his blue eyes filled with tears. "I don't want to go for a walk! I'm going to run away!" Katya got him dressed against his will. "I'm going to run away!" he kept on screaming. The police officer took him by the hand. He did not run away. Not a soul offered a word of comfort to the boy as he was taken off to be killed. Tamar too remained silent.

All the children about whom it became known that one of their parents was Jewish were removed from the Foster Home and eliminated. But they did not touch Tamar. Vasiliyev's note was her life-saving certificate.

For Tamar, the days and months passed by, filled with hard work and fear. Little by little she began to be able to tell the difference between the beasts of prey and the true human beings. There were only

a small number of good women in the Foster Home, but they all belonged to the evangelical sect. Agrippina Anisimovna, or aunt Gronya, and her oldest daughter Nina, who was the same age as Tamar, were also evangelicals. In her free time Tamar would go to visit them at their home.

Aunt Gronya, a simple woman who was forty years old, bathed Tamar in motherly warmth. When Tamar was still staying in the isolation room, aunt Gronya would go see her, and bring her food and tea, offering her comfort and picking up her spirits. Aunt Gronya's husband was in the Red Army, and she and her three children were not having an easy time of it in life.

In those days they had begun to enlist the young people to go off and do forced labor in Germany. Aunt Gronya was afraid that they might enlist her daughter Nina, and for that reason she arranged for the latter to work in the Foster Home as a seamstress. The two Ninas became friends, and they frequently read together from the New Testament. Members of the evangelical sect considered it a great *mitzvah*¹ to bring new souls into the church.

In the autumn of the year 5702, Tamar went for the first time to an evangelical gathering. These gatherings took place every Sunday, Wednesday, and Saturday. The day was fading into evening, and a kerosene lamp lit up the room. The prayers lasted for about two hours. The opening speech was given by the head of the congregation, the Presbyter. After that all those assembled got down on their knees. A few people began to pray out loud, one after the other. After the prayers, all those gathered sat on the benches and listened to the speeches that a few of the members of the congregation gave concerning various religious topics. After each speech the choir sang sad songs. At the end the Presbyter gave a closing speech, and all those gathered once more got down on their knees and listened to the prayers.

Tamar saw the evangelicals as being simple, kind-hearted folk. From them she got to hear straightforward, comforting words. It seemed to her that, among them, everyone was equal, and there were

¹ Mitzva - fulfillment of a positive commandment, or good deed (Hebrew).

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no wolves and sacrificial lambs. Here she did not feel herself to be a rung below all the rest.

She continued attending the evangelical gatherings. Little by little this sect began to serve as a sort of shelter for her in the cruel world. She did not yet fully understand the speeches, but the religious songs that were sung by the choir warmed her heart. At the Foster Home she had to stifle every living gesture, she was constantly cautious as to what she said and did, and she worked very hard all the time. With the evangelicals she encountered sympathy and compassion. Every Sunday one of the members of the congregation would invite Tamar for lunch. It was autumn in Romny, and the streets and yards were covered in mud. Tamar's shoes were worn through, and her feet were cold and wet. From time to time the Foster Home received the clothing of Jews who had been murdered, but now there was a severe shortage when it came to footwear.

One day Tamar came to the evangelical gathering and she received a surprising gift – a pair of new shoes. The brothers and sisters had collected money for that express purpose.

The shoes did not merely free Tamar from the damp and the cold; they also spoke to her soul. She began to think about things.

At the home of Haim Yakov Feigin, the former shochet, Tamar had absorbed a bit of the Jewish spirit, its shining past and its fading present. She had been to the Shtiebel a few times, as her grandmother would bring her there on the Sabbath and festivals. Tamar, a student of the Soviet school system, with her red tie around her neck, was not, however, all that fond of these visits. Yet she loved the Hebrew songs, and the folk songs. Grandma Pesya's kitchen had been kosher. On the Sabbath eve the candles were lit. And one must admit – that Tamar used to look forward to the festivals and holidays. The melons and grapes on Rosh Hashanah, the chicken gizzards on the eve of Yom Kippur, the *latkes*¹ on Chanukah, the new fruits of *Tu Bi'Shevat*², the roasted matzos and foods made with matzo meal on Passover, the

¹ Latkes - fried potato pancakes.

² Tu Bi'Shevat - a Jewish holiday occurring on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat.

blintzes on Shavuot...

The food in the Foster Home was monotonous, and Tamar would recall the delicacies at her grandmother's house. But all that was now finished and gone. Tamar now saw with her own eyes what a defeat the God of Israel had suffered. If His might had not helped Him overcome the impure forces of evil, it could only mean that He was weak, so terribly weak. The God of the evangelicals had not abandoned his children in their time of need.

The position of the God of Israel was not a respected one in the eyes of our friend Tamar Feigin, also known as Nina Makarova. Even under normal conditions, this daughter of Israel had a rather highly developed ability to adapt, and it had only increased tenfold in those troubling times. Little by little she came to the decision in her heart to join the evangelicals. To do so, she had to cross herself, and in order to cross herself, she had to undergo an examination, and in order to undergo the examination, she had to give a speech out loud, and in order to give such a speech, she had to pray before the congregation. Only once she had gone through all these stages could she demonstrate that she had been born again in the Holy Spirit.

When something bad happened to one of the members of the sect, the council would declare a fast that might last anywhere from half a day to two days. Upon completion of the fast the evangelicals would conduct a ceremony known as 'the breaking of the bread'. They would break up a loaf of bread and every brother or sister would take themselves a piece – which was regarded as the body of Jesus. On just such a day of prayer following one of the fasts Tamar decided that she was going to pray before the congregation.

The first series of prayers had already finished, and now came the speeches, along with the songs from the choir. Tamar was still hesitating. But had she really been born again in the Holy Spirit? True, she now believed in all honesty and simplicity that there was indeed a compassionate God, who was the ultimate judge, the one who showed those suffering human beings the path of truth. Following the closing speech at that gathering, she bravely began to offer her first prayer out loud in an emotional voice. What did she pray for? After all, it was forbidden for her heart to reveal to her lips that she was indeed longing to see her Jewish mother once again. Her prayer was vague. She pleaded before her Father in heaven that He might grant her wish

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(which was to see her mother), and establish rulership by the good and the just (meaning that all the killing ought to stop throughout the land), and that all mankind might be pardoned.

All beginnings are difficult. From that day forward, Tamar began praying before the congregation rather often. Then she also began giving speeches. At the evangelical house of prayer there were a few copies of 'Christianen', a periodical published by the evangelical Christians. On the cover of every copy there was a picture – Jesus preaching the word of God in a boat. His disciples were listening intently from the shore. Nearby, children were playing, and off in the distance there were rather leafy trees, seemingly lost in thought.

In these periodicals Tamar found innocent poems, along with commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments. It was from these sources that Tamar drew the material for her speeches.

In those days the girl was gradually growing up. Her breasts were getting larger, and her girlish voice was changing, as it became filled with silence and emotion. The brothers and sisters were fond of listening to her speeches. At times she would recite religious poems from memory from those selfsame periodicals.

Why, say I, have you bowed your head, lowered your eyes, why is thy countenance fallen? Why are you so sad?

Why do you sometimes groan bitterly, and other times cry buckets of tears?

Look around you, let your spirits lift! All of nature is alive, singing the praises of its Creator, singing a hymn of blessed acclaim.

Look at the flowers – are they sad? Do the shoots of spring in the garden shed tears?

Look at the grove – there it stands in all its splendor, staring up at the blue heavens overhead.

Why, then, have you bowed your head, and lowered your eyes? Why do you strike such a sad pose?

Why not tell your Creator of your suffering and sorrow, and the burdens weighing down your heart?

Lift your eyes up to the clear heavens above, those wondrous heavens, strewn as they are with stars – see how they glitter!

Let your youthful heart be just as innocent and pure in those difficult and gloomy times.

Be the very image of the clear heavens, those wondrous heavens, strewn as they are with stars!

Then shall our eternal Lord Jesus, your protector and savior, rejoice in you.

It would not be superfluous to include a few of the parables that Tamar made use of in those speeches of hers.

...A ship is sinking out at sea. The rescue boats are not enough to provide for all those on board. A man leaps into the water from the deck of the sinking ship, approaches one of the packed boats and grabs on to the side with his last remaining strength. One of those in the boat draws his sword and slices off the man's fingers. The drowning man grabs hold of the boat with his other hand. They cut off the fingers on this hand as well. The poor wretch clings to the side of the boat by his teeth. Not a soul dares to cut off his head. They draw him up out of the water and sit him in the boat. Why was this man saved? Because he strove for salvation with strength and persistence.

With just such strength and persistence we must strive to draw near to our Lord Jesus.

...In a military hospital there are those who are lightly wounded and those who are gravely wounded. To whom does the doctor tend first? You might say, he tends to those who are suffering more, those whose wounds pose a greater danger. It is the same with Jesus the Comforter. He rushes to help those in greater need of his succor.

...A preacher announces at a gathering that he just now lost a very valuable gem in the prayer hall, and whoever finds it after his speech can do with it as he wishes. You should have seen the audience! Only a few of them were listening to the speech, while almost every one of them was lost in thoughts and dreams. What a fine thing it would be to find the gem, which had the power to free them from worrying about making a living for the rest of their lives! The speech was barely finished when all those assembled began to rush about trying to find the gem.

If only people would seek Christ like that! He is of greater value than the most valuable gem there is!

..."My heart is so hard, so hard indeed!" complained one man after

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the gathering was over. "It is bound in chains. How can I come before our Father in heaven?" – "Come to him in those chains of yours!" replied the preacher.

And this soul came to Christ, and Christ freed him from his chains.

...Young men come down to enlist in the army. The rich are dressed in fancy clothes, and the poor – are dressed in rags. But soon they have all gotten undressed and donned the selfsame uniforms.

In this same way the righteous and the wicked come before Christ, and he receives them all and dresses them in vestments of sanctity and purity.

The evangelicals were fond of listening to the simple speeches of this fourteen-year-old girl. From among the articles of clothing formerly belonging to murdered Jewish girls that were donated to the Foster Home, Tamar was given a blue silk dress. Her friend Nina, the seamstress, fixed up a fine, fitting dress for her. And so, we now find this Jewish girl standing before the congregation of brothers and sisters. A silent courage was frozen there in those dark eyes of hers, and she was putting forth words of faith and hope.

One day in September, our good friend Tamar was baptized in the Sola River. That morning seventeen people were baptized, most of them young people. The water was cold, but there was a tradition in the annals of the evangelical sect that even if the baptism was performed during the winter, not a soul would catch cold.

The entire congregation gathered first thing in the morning along the banks of the river. It was a Sunday. The morning chill still reigned along the riverbank. The heavens overhead were greyish-blue. Reeds and high grass covered the riverbanks. Lilies bowed their yellow heads and rocked them gently in the transparent waters.

The choir softly sang the following hymns: 'I know the Church of Life', and 'Lord, be with us!' Then all those who were to be baptized stepped into the water, dressed in white gowns, and led by the Presbyter. The latter then stepped up to each of those who were to be baptized, and placed one palm on the individual's chest, and the other on the individual's back. "Do you believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?"

Each of the individuals responded: "Yes!" The Presbyter then

dunked their heads in the water. Tamar responded "Yes", as well, and she too was baptized in the cold water. The matter was concluded. A daughter of Israel dressed in a white gown had officially left her nation behind. She hung an iron cross around her neck. The choir sang the closing hymn: 'Rejoice, ye friends of Christ!' For the first time since the German occupation had begun, there was a look of tranquility in Tamar's face.

One day goes by and another day comes in its place. Tamar was gradually growing up. A warm, sweet fog began to envelop the girl in the mornings. During the early morning hours, when her eyes were still closed, her youthful body longed for and dreamt of she knew not what. Then the bell rang. She had to get up. Today she could expect exhausting duties in the kitchen, along with speeches and prayers at a gathering of the sect. She got down on her knees in bed. "Christ, our Savior! Allow me to see my mother once again in this life!" She gets dressed quickly and rushes off to the kitchen. She must fetch water, peel potatoes, and listen to the coarse, abominable voice of Yevdokia Zaharovna, then wash the dishes after breakfast is done...

We will now leave Tamar there in the Foster Home, under the aegis of the evangelicals. If the Holy Spirit is a kindly spirit, then perhaps the evangelicals were truly born again in the Holy Spirit.

And these are the generations of Tamar: Zvi Hirsh begat Isaac, Isaac begat Haim Yakov, Haim Yakov begat Rachel, and Rachel begat Tamar – the great-granddaughter of a long line of shochets and bodeks among the Jews.

Disaster sits there lying in wait; it goes crawling along, freezes up a moment, then crawls along some more. Suddenly it sallies forth and strikes down the very best among us. This time it was that dear young woman, Glasha's turn.

It seems that an old lady chopping wood noticed Sidorenko when he stepped out that final evening into the forest with our young friend. The village of Vilbovka cannot quite be counted among the larger settlements around, and its residents knew one another quite well. Aunt Nastasya and her daughter Glasha were not the most respected people around. New brides and married women did not look kindly on Nastasya's behavior. In the summer evenings men were drawn to the shack of this brazen lady, and she had diverted more than one of them

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from the path of the straight and narrow. The son-in-law of the old lady chopping wood had also been a regular visitor at Nastasya's shack before the war.

Women can be quite vengeful, and when the murder of Sidorenko became known, and gendarmes and investigators came down from Hadiach to investigate the matter, the old lady did not hold back, and she let them know that she had seen Sidorenko taking that final walk of his with Glasha.

A meticulous search was conducted at the home of Nastasya. In the attic of the summer shack they found traces of people hiding out, including some leftover bits of bread and cereal. Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' was open, and the fairy tales of Andersen also seemed to attest to something. The end had now come for aunt Nastasya. She would no longer drink hard liquor and seduce the young men and the sons-in-law. Aunt Nastasya was imprisoned by the Gestapo. She had to respond to a single question: "Where is Glasha?"

How was she to know? The girl had grown up and was no longer beholden to her. When she was a young girl she had already loved to go off on her own in the forest, spending days on end out there. The reason can only be that there were a few loose screws in the girl's head.

"What is she doing in the forest?"

"God knows where she's off wandering about!" This thin woman, with that sparse braid of hers and the flaming-dying eyes, perhaps truly knew something, but in the face of the Gestapo she demonstrated a talent for evasion and stubbornness. The more they beat her, the more stubborn she became.

"When will your daughter be coming home? Tell us, you bitch!"

"I don't know. Perhaps in a few days."

It was not a winning answer, although the gendarmes would have posted an ambush in Vilbovka in any event. Two armed SS men now lived at aunt Nastasya's house. The beasts of prey were waiting for their sacrifice. The bird would not escape, and they would obtain detailed information about the partisan camp.

Three days passed. Glasha was walking through the forest with a song in her heart. She was heading home, and from there – she would be heading to Hadiach, to the house of the Teacher Ivanchuk.

She steps up onto the porch and opens the door. Her voice is filled with joy: "Greetings, mother!" Hands like a vise grab hold of her. The bird had fallen into the trap. All at once her joy, and the song of youth and life, had all been erased, never to return. From this point on she can expect a few days of torture and slow death, days in which she must demonstrate an iron resistance, enlisting all the strength that she has.

Glasha was transferred to the basement of the Gestapo. Day and night, she was dragged before the fascist interrogators. Is this the same joyous girl that we have known until now? She is completely broken. Her body is covered with wounds and scars, her face is swollen, a bloody welt appears over her left eye, and a fair baldness flickers on her flaxen head, a remembrance of the hairs they tore out.

"Where have you been? What were you doing in the forest? Who killed Sidorenko? Where are the partisans? Who was hiding out in the attic at your house?" These were just a few of the questions to which Glasha had to respond and did not. The girl chose to deny everything and play dumb. She had not seen Sidorenko that evening. When the interrogator posed the question to her it was the first time that she had ever heard of the partisans. She had no idea who was hiding out in the attic – perhaps someone had snuck in there without the permission of the lady of the house? She herself was in the habit of taking long walks in the forest ever since she had been a little child. She had been to visit a few squirrels she knew, and she had surveyed the pines, and said hello to the birds she had known for a long time now. She had not run into a single human being in the forest...

Glasha's terrible interrogation lasted a week, and she did not reveal a thing. One morning they hung both the mother and her daughter. For three days their crushed bodies hung in the park in town. The people of Vilbovka came down, simple members of the collective farm, and stared at the bodies hanging there, in silence, and then left without saying a word. Nastasya, that wayward soul, suddenly rose to glory in the eyes of the common folk.

At the partisan camp Glasha's end was the cause of great pain and mourning. This girl, it seems, had been dear to the hearts of all the members of the camp. What can we say concerning Binyamin? Binyamin's love had died, she had been led up to the scaffold. He moved off deep into the forest, fell to the ground, and rolled around there over and over from all the pain and suffering. His heart had

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suffered a mortal blow, and he shed the suppressed tears of a grown man. For several days he could not see another soul, even his friend Ovchinnikov left him to his own devices. Glasha appeared before him, Glasha, the girl of his heart. Her laughter, her faithful eyes, her modest caresses, her chatter, her alertness and energy – all these things stormed and hummed away inside his heart, dealing him fiery blows and causing him much suffering. At last, he calmed down somewhat, and he had but one desire: revenge! He asked Tichonov, Solomon, and Gavrilenko to send him off to carry out the most daring missions. He, Ovchinnikov, and Petrikov, three precise marksmen, were sent to attack passing vehicles. In the bushes along the side of the road they would lie in wait for isolated German vehicles. It was not an easy thing – to hit a target moving at high speed. Pasha would take the driver, and Binyamin and Petrikov, who were lying a bit further off in the forest – would take the other riders. In this manner they eliminated both soldiers and officers and amassed a trove of weapons and ammunition.

At times there would be shots fired back and forth between the partisans and the fascists. In such instances Binyamin demonstrated an inordinate amount of courage. And indeed, this lack of caution had certain repercussions. During one of their assaults, Binyamin was hit in the shoulder. He had to lie for many days without moving, under the watchful eye of old Engertov, who had now become the head doctor in the combat camp.

Once he could get back on his feet he was no longer able to take part in the battles for quite some time. Wounded individuals of this nature were transferred to the family camp, a few kilometers away from the combat camp, where there was also an infirmary. Binyamin too was transferred there.

Summer had now come to the forest! Here and there a pine cone would fall to the ground which was now strewn with islands of grass, forest flowers, anthills, and the leaves of the previous year. The sound of a bird's call could be heard. The latter did not cease its labors for an instant – capering and pecking away, chirping, and giving voice to all the love it had inside. A squirrel went leaping from branch to branch, his round tail several times larger than his head. Clear patches of white clouds, feathery clouds, sat frozen still in the blue heavens. Another pine cone fell, and one could hear the rustle as it fell, before it landed on the ground. The pine cone hit the forest floor, bounced once or

twice, and then came to rest; it would now lie there for all eternity. Summer had come to the forest! There was light and warmth, sky-blue, and a certain stirring in the air. There was the scent of the pines. And silence.

In the family camp life flowed onward in an orderly fashion. In those camouflaged mud huts over fifty people lived, including thirty Jews, most of whom were old folks and women, children and the wounded. In the winter they had eaten frozen potatoes that they would dig up in the abandoned gardens. The fascists had laid waste to the isolated farms so that they should not serve as partisan bases, and the potatoes had remained in the frozen ground. After a little while the camp had developed contacts with the nearby villages and was able to obtain horses and wagons. Armed men would then journey to distant settlements and obtain food and various other provisions from the residents there.

What would a man not do in his time of need? There were all sorts of professionals and artisans among the people in the camp. Each of them would perform a certain labor. One was responsible for cutting down trees, another would split the logs, a third would light the bonfire, a fourth would cook, and a fifth would take out the trash. Shlomo Shapiro continued his work on behalf of the community. The camp commander was Bachmutov, one of the wounded Russian partisans, who had been appointed to his position by Tichonov. Yosef Berman, who could not take part in the combat because of his short-sightedness, was Shapiro's assistant.

Little by little Binyamin's pain passed, and he began to take note of his surroundings. He was living in a mud hut containing ten makeshift beds. The iron stove, known as a '*burzhuyka*', gave off almost too much heat, as there was an abundance of wood lying around for the fire. This mud hut served as a sort of hospital in miniature.

One day Shlomo Shapiro was brought to the hut as well. A heart attack at his age! For a long time, he lay on his back without moving hand or foot. There were mustard bandages on his chest, and the pills and injections that he was given afforded him some minor alleviation of the suffering. At last he could sit up in bed. His face was thin, pale yellow and wrinkled, and his beard, which had anyway always been sparse, had now turned into a sort of rag. However, in this shabby receptacle life was still bubbling away, and his mind was still lucid. Have

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a look at things for yourselves: this broken man was still plotting operations that might benefit Zion and Jerusalem! When his condition had improved ever so slightly, he returned to his activities on behalf of the community.

Indeed, there was no remedy for Shapiro! His lifelong aspirations remained the same as ever, and the love of Zion had not faded from his heart. On the contrary – in the face of this hell that was running riot all around, he began to move from theory into practice. During Soviet times he had been somewhat restrained – as our government did not support any Hebrew activities. However, for all that they tried to uproot this point it still went whispering away down in the depths, demanding to be realized. Among the members of the camp, Shlomo Shapiro organized a Hebrew Association, which would get together and hold meetings from time to time.

With the help of Binyamin and Berta Abramovna, Shapiro emerged from the mud hut while he still had some life left in him. He sat at the foot of one of the pines with the members of the Association surrounding him in a circle. Here we find a few of our old acquaintances. The Ginsburg family is quite well represented here – there is Sarka, Leibke, Golda and Berman, as well as little Avka. Pesya Feigin and Yekel Loytin are there as well – old and young alike surrounded Shapiro and were treated to a chapter from the annals of the Children of Israel. This time Shapiro is telling them of King Solomon.

King David had grown old, and the heir to the throne had not yet been appointed. In David's inner circles there was a powerful party that was working to anoint Adoniyahu, Solomon's older brother. This party met with defeat thanks to Natan the Prophet and Batsheva, Solomon's mother. After Solomon ascended to the throne he eliminated all those who had opposed him – his brother Adoniyahu, and Yoav the military commander, in addition to removing Eviatar from his position as High Priest. He chose officers who were faithful to him – the military commander Benayahu, the minister of the treasury Adoniram, the head governor Azariah ben Natan, the High Priest Azariah ben Zadok... Solomon's primary activity – was the construction of the first Holy Temple. Even though three thousand years have passed since then, the Holy Temple still serves the Jewish nation to this day as a symbol of hope and redemption. Solomon's wisdom made a name for itself. His judgment in the matter of the child and the two mothers is well-known

down through the generations. The Queen of Sheba came from Africa to listen to his wisdom and her spirit was deeply moved.

And yet is that the way – without even a drop of poetry – to recount the Golden Age in the annals of our people? However, although the words were as dry as stale bread, all those gathered there listened intently to the tales of ancient days.

Shapiro rested a bit and then recounted some more. Indeed, he knew no fatigue. So long as he was still breathing, and so long as there were still those willing to lend an ear, he would disseminate the Torah of Zion among his brothers and sisters. If you will it, it is no dream. He told them of the leader and prophet who had sent this cry forth to the members of our nation scattered about among the beasts of prey. We must unite and return, at last, to our homeland. Its heavens are blue, its sun warms, its flowers are fragrant, and its soil is fertile. Our Hebrew tongue rings forth there out the mouths of babes. Young boys and girls, men and women alike, all work in the fields, the orchards, and the factories. Hebrew newspapers come out there every morning. Our forefathers walked that land in ancient times. Every mountain and valley, every stone and ruin – is a monument to our past.

An elderly, invalid Jew was sitting there explaining to the people what they had to do in those dark times. The seeds that he was planting in their hearts would yet bring forth fruit. Golda Berman, that young Jewish mother, was standing off to the side with her very pregnant belly. Yes, Golda was pregnant. And in a little while, yet another Berman-Ginsburg would emerge into the light of day.

This was Shapiro's final activity. That night, he had yet another severe heart attack, and now the man is dying. He is lying there on his back with his legs spread, without any air to breathe, his mouth agape, and his eyes have sunk deep into their hollows. Binyamin is sitting at his feet. From time to time he can hear the weak, hoarse voice, as it continues to rise from those dying depths, inspiring, murmuring, and leaving its traces in the listener's soul.

It was the last will and testament of the man as he was leaving this world. Between long pauses he was saying that the two of them, he and

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Berta, had aspired throughout their entire lives to make *aliyah*¹ to the land of Israel. But he thought that someone had to remain in the Diaspora, to prepare the people, and send new souls off to Zion. Later, times had changed, and he was not able to leave on aliyah. The entire project was blocked off, and the people living on this side began to gradually forget about their homeland. Now his final hour had come, and yet he believed that all his labors had not been for naught. He was certain that the remnant of the Children of Israel would yet return to their land.

"You are still young, Binyamin... you will yet live to see Hitler be defeated... you have a Jewish heart... you must remind the nation of its past... you must show them the future... we have but one homeland..."

The old man passed his last will and testament on to the generation that was to follow him. Shapiro was now no longer with us. He had passed away. The soft weeping of Berta Abramovna could now be heard.

The entire camp, old and young alike, accompanied Shapiro to his final resting place. Binyamin inscribed in Hebrew on the wooden beam the traditional formula among Jews that one finds on headstones. Shapiro was lowered into his grave, the beam with the Hebrew words was stuck deep into the ground, and Leibke Ginsburg recited the Mourner's Kaddish. He was assisted by the chirping of the birds. The rustle of the forest cautiously caressed the mound of dirt.

One soul passes away, and a new soul arrives in its stead. Mazel Tov! Golda Berman gave birth to a boy. Indeed, the time had not yet come for Golda the midwife to give up her profession. The baby was named Aharon – in memory of Aharon Ginsburg, who had fallen on his watch at the sacred Ohel.

There were now new worries, new difficulties. Ahuva still required care and attention, and here little Ahara'le had already emerged into the light of day! Yet the young mother did not bow her head. This was her purpose in life – to raise children, to feed them and give them what to drink, to take them into her heart. She performed her motherly labors without the slightest complaint. Her hands were assiduous, her

¹ Aliyah - immigration to Israel (Hebrew).

eyes were all-seeing, her ears were ever alert, and her soul was ever open. Perhaps fortune would smile upon her and the children would yet survive.

One day followed close on the heels of the last. A strict order reigned in the modest camp. Each member had his or her labors to perform. One of the biggest responsibilities – was that of standing guard. At a certain distance from the camp the guards worked in shifts that alternated every three hours. Today it was the turn of Sarka Ginsburg. We now find her there, standing guard on one of those dark nights. Although there is a rifle hanging over her shoulder, we must tell the truth: she is afraid. The slightest rustle causes the girl's heart to tremble. Suddenly she spots two flickering eyes. It can only be a wolf approaching her. If you could only have seen Sarka! At last the Ginsburg blood made its presence known in the girl. She pulled the rifle from her shoulder and stood there ready to do battle. The wolf was going to meet with a foul, bitter end as he was about to run into Sarka. As luck would have it, the animal turned aside. The light in that pair of eyes went out. Sarka calmed down. From this point forward, the noises in the darkness no longer caused her to go into a panic. She stood there, with that rifle over her shoulder, and her eyes were peeled to the black of the night.

One day during the fall we observe a little drop of joy rising in the family camp. The day before a calf was brought over from one of the villages, and the women are now preparing a meat meal – for the first time since they arrived here. The calf was slaughtered, though not in full accordance with religious ritual, yet the women nevertheless intend to prepare a fine roast in the pure, Jewish fashion.

The people now begin to flow with their dishes into the mud hut that serves as both kitchen and restaurant. The women hand out generous portions and their faces are flushed. It is the very taste of paradise! The people are there licking the tips of their fingers. Berta Abramovna is a true daughter of valor! Give her a cut of meat, and she knows just what to do with it. Following the meal Berman got up from his seat – he was a man who had a weakness for making speeches, even in honor of a tasty Jewish roast.

And so, Berman got up from his seat and gave a short speech. It was a thank-you. He praised Berta Abramovna and her assistants by name – including Tzipa Lea Ginsburg and Beila Belomordik. These

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women of valor had not spared themselves any effort and, for the first time, had brought us the taste of home with all its warmth and tranquility, and the sleeping cat there on the windowsill. Thank you, you women and mothers! May we all live to witness the downfall of Hitler! May we all yet return to our homes!

Binyamin's shoulder was almost completely healed, and he intended to return to the combat camp. How long could he continue living among the women and children? Something in him constantly attracted young boys and girls, and even here, in the family camp, the little urchins clung to him. Sarka Ginsburg, his longtime friend from days of old, comes up to him. Leibke and Yekel approach him as well. There are still more people. They just ate a meat meal and they now wish to hear a few tales. Binyamin is an expert storyteller, and this is not his first time. He tells the story of Elisha and Elijah the Prophet; tells of their miracles and wondrous deeds. Is he not thus, after all, carrying on the work of the departed Shapiro?

As the autumnal forest grows dark, ancient legends can now be heard, filling everyone with warmth, memories, and hopes. In the evening Solomon arrived. Once a week he came over to visit his mother. Pesya has gotten weak, and she is ill. She has a weak heart and a stomach illness. Pesya had always been the strongest member of her family. Since the home had collapsed, her life had collapsed as well. In the end, even the heart of a mother is not made of iron.

She is lying there in her bed and her eyes are closed. Once more the memories of her youth return to her face. At the start of the century her life proceeded at an easy pace. Blond-haired Haimka, the son of Zelig the shochet, had set his bashful eyes on her. Her face went red, their eyes had met, and she had lowered her head. It had all taken place in Hadiach, in the springtime.

Solomon stepped inside, filled with energy and life, bringing with him the scent of the road and the forest.

"How are you doing, mother?" He kissed her forehead. Pesya opened her eyes, shook herself awake, and sat up in her makeshift bed. A slight crimson color blooms in her withered cheeks. She had brushed her hair and changed her dress – since the early morning she has been looking forward to Solomon's arrival. Thank God, he is hale and whole. Solomon has changed quite a bit in recent months. He is no longer the

prim and proper student with a Tarzan-like look in the eye and a properly knotted tie around his neck. Before Mother Pesya there now stood a tall and somewhat rough-edged man, who had lately been doing his very utmost to try and secure a victory over the forces of evil. The partisan life, the assaults and gunfights, the wind and the rain, the cold and the dark, had all left their mark on him. With sad eyes the man stared at his mother who was sitting there in that mud hut on her coarse makeshift bed. How thin her face now looked! Over the past week her features had turned even darker and more wrinkled than before. Her exposed neck was slender and wrinkled, her back was bent, and the fingers on her hands were yellow and lean. The mother in her only continued to shine forth in her eyes, only her eyes continued to express softness, concern, and endless, boundless love.

Solomon told her of Isaac. The day before news had arrived from Hadiach. Isaac was alive, and healthy. He had already sprouted a few teeth. He was crawling along beautifully, and even walking a bit. The wet-nurse Darya Petrovna was looking after him faithfully, he was like a son to her. He had an Aryan look to him, and if not for that Jewish mark he bore, they could have been absolutely sure that he would survive. His eyes were blue, and he looked like the very image of Firochka, in everything. Mother, do you remember Firochka's eyes?

People began to crowd into the mud hut, as their number gradually grew. Everyone wanted to see Solomon, shake his hand, and hear the news. Solomon recounted the latest news that he had heard over the radio and began to analyze the situation at the various fronts, sowing hope and confidence all around.

In the morning several people left for the combat camp – where they were planning a comprehensive military operation – to assist the fighters. This time, Binyamin joined Solomon as well. Among those walking through the forest we spot Berman, Leibke Ginsburg, and Yekel Loytin. The two latter boys have grown up before their time. The fascists eliminated several of their family members, and they now desire to take revenge on the murderers. Leibke, like all the other members of the Ginsburg family, knows no fear or cowardice. He inherited this trait from his father. But what had happened lately to Yekel Loytin, who, back at his mother's house, used to sit around twiddling his thumbs and devouring all sorts of different books? At the camp, he had gradually given up that shameful habit of his. He was now getting his education

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from real life – a life filled with adventures and hardships. It can all only mean that he had completely changed his skin, as it were. He had become friends with Leibke Ginsburg, and the latter would not allow him to get lost in fantasies. Together they learned to handle weapons, and little by little they turned into fine assistants for the partisans.

It was an autumn morning. The path wound its way through the forest. It connected between the two camps. Solomon and Binyamin were walking out in front. Pine trees lost in thought were standing around them on all sides. There was the dirt mound of a grave to the right of the path, with a wooden plaque over it. On the plaque, there was a Hebrew inscription that was turning black: 'Here lies Reb Shlomo, son of Reb Dovid Shapiro. May his soul be granted eternal life'.

Suddenly the sun shone forth high overhead. Everything changed around the people walking in line. Shadows now lay spread out at the feet of the trees, all stretching forth in the same direction. A clear patch of deep blue began to spread through the heavens. The pines shook themselves awake, straightening their boughs. The birds began to call out deep in the heart of the forest.

The partisans pick up their pace. There is still plenty of bloody work to be done before Hitler will be wiped off the face of the earth.

Our forces have liberated the Ukraine. The front lines are approaching the soil of Poltava. German deserters begin to appear in the forests. The partisans hunt them down one by one, and two by two. They also get into armed confrontations with larger platoons. The partisans were literally assisting the regular army.

Hadiach was liberated on September 12, 1943. That night the military engineers erected crossings over the Psel River. Early the next morning the artillery opened fire in a concentrated manner in the direction of the opposite shore. The enemy displayed a stubborn resistance. Russian units crossed the river one after the other and stormed forth in assault. The German positions were breached, and our forces reached the outskirts of town. While battles were taking place to the north of Hadiach, several other military units stormed forth and crossed the Psel River to the south. In this fashion, the town was liberated.

In the middle of September rains washed over the soil of Poltava.

The roads had all turned to mush. As they advanced, Russian forces ran into various obstacles, but they did not stop. On September 16th Romny was liberated, and on the 23rd, Poltava. The war continued to roll onward.

Pale and wasted night owls, people emerging from hiding places and bunkers, returned to Hadiach, looked all around, and took in the destruction and desolation. Only a very small number of Jews had survived.

Lost people went looking for one another. The remnants of the community tried to get in touch with relatives and acquaintances. Many of them were in the Soviet Army, while others had taken off for the eastern and northern reaches of the country. The postal service was working feverishly. Thousands of letters and postcards flew back and forth to all four corners of the land. The content of the letters was ever the same – people were searching for their relatives. Many of them were no longer among the living, but miracles did also occur. Days of celebration and mourning alternated back and forth with one another.

They were free! It was a wonderful feeling as of emerging from bondage into liberty. It was now possible to breathe once more without casting suspicious glances around in every direction, possible to sleep without any nightmares, to remove one's clothing and lie down in a normal bed that squeaked, to meet up with other people without the beast of prey opening its jaws to swallow you up.

The Ginsburg family also returned to town. They now lived in the fancy house where the Burgermeister Karpenko and his wife Margarita Fridrichovna had previously lived. These two had run off with the fascist forces, and the Soviet authorities in Hadiach had returned the house to the large Ginsburg family whose eldest son Nachman had served in the army.

After the rains a gilded autumn arrived, as a chilly sun went moving through the sky and its rays did not skip over Hadiach. In the mornings the fog would rise from the river valley, but then the sun would come out, and the fog would dissipate, as a plethora of gold and splendor would flood the entire area.

Only a small number of Jews returned to Hadiach. It was only on rare occasions that one ran into a Jewish face. Yosef Berman is once more working at the barber shop, his scissors ringing away, as he moves

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his razor over the lathered chins, and sprays perfume in an unspecified direction. He did not get any younger since we last encountered him at the home of his mother Haya Sarah. The wrinkles around his eyes and at his temples had only expanded and deepened. Before us there now stands a man, approaching forty, father to two children – and who knows? Perhaps the foundations have already been laid for a third. Offspring in the Ginsburg family does not require any particular efforts to emerge into the light of day.

Sarka and Leibke now think of themselves as grown-ups. It is not just any old thing – to have been partisans! Leibke has begun chattering away, saying rather groundless, senseless things. He has made his mind up to leave Hadiach. Here there is no chance to lead a normal life. The treatment of the Jews is also not any good. It may well be that this is not the case, but to the urchins it seems like the rest of the population is constantly giving them puzzled looks, as if to say: "But how can that be? How did you manage to survive? Is this not some further Jewish subterfuge?"

No, Leibke is not at all satisfied with life in Hadiach. The youth is farsighted, he has no desire in his heart to put down roots in this bloody soil. The air is still filled with menace, the monsters' jaws are still agape, and a cold sweat still covers the body in the blind nights.

Have you ever heard of such a thing? The last two years have forged Leibke's resolve. He is set in his opinion, and he is not unwilling to head off to Poltava, or Kiev, or anywhere, for that matter. Berman recommends that he first head out to 'The Path to Socialism' collective farm, to find out what happened to the four sisters. Yes, and, not to confuse the sacred with the mundane – with the spotted cow as well.

And so, it was decided. Sarka also joined him on the journey. Tzipa Lea prepared a backpack, put a bit of food inside – and now there they are walking along the roads and through the forests. The roads are hardly empty, as vehicles go traveling back and forth all along the way. The brother and sister stand there at the crossroads and raise their hands. Not all the drivers have hearts of stone, and so the two of them end up walking a bit and riding a bit, and that same day, at noon, we find the two young Ginsburgs before the Local Council of the Village of A., to which 'The Path to Socialism' collective farm belongs. The Chairman of the Council was a member of the Maiboroda family, and he sends the two young people to the house of Maria Maksimovna. This

seamstress' flow of customers has not dried up. The war wrought havoc on people's wardrobes, and the children all around had hardly forgotten how to grow, while their clothes – continued to shrink. Maria Maksimovna was now busy extending items and patching them up. What else could she do? She had to bring up her two children, Natasha and Misha.

Leibke and Sarka were given a warm welcome, but the bad news was not too long in coming. Hasya, good old Hasya, of whom all the members of the Ginsburg family had been particularly fond, and Hana, the crowning glory of the family – both of them were no longer among the living. Sarka burst into the tears of a little child, and Leibke's features were contorted and colored with anger, hurt, and frustration. Maria Maksimovna left with Sarka and Leibke to go over to the home of aunt Oksana, where they had been bringing up Mashenka – being none other than Mirka Ginsburg – for two years now. Aunt Oksana had four children, and now there were five, but the members of the Maiboroda family helped her out – some with money, and others with food, and still others by pitching in to help with the chores. Rivochka was living under better conditions, and her name had been changed to Irochka. She was now seven years old, and Mira – was a year and a half older than her. Thanks to the Maiboroda family the spotted cow had also survived.

The Village of A. – was a distant settlement, and not one of the larger ones at that, and managing to save a few Jewish children here was not at all a simple matter. Rather quickly a few relatives had gathered at the home of Maria Maksimovna. A warm lunch was brought to the table, and aside from the Ukrainian borscht there was also meat in the bowls. Perhaps Maria Maksimovna's heart was filled with a certain regret at the memory of the two lost Jewish girls. She brought out a bottle of samogon. The glasses were filled with the murky liquid and the visiting brother and sister were forced to drink a little liquor to the memory of their sisters who had been cut down in the prime of their lives. That was the custom, and the two young people drank off their memorial glasses. Sarka's eyes filled with tears once more, and they flowed into her bowl. She ate the borscht, the meat, and the roasted potatoes until there was nothing left. It was borscht flavored with the salt of tears! Leibke did not cry, it would not have been befitting for a manly partisan to do so. The two of them listened to the measured conversation. The name of Vanya Panasenko was

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pronounced a few times. "Where is Panasenko now?" asked Leibke, as he clenched his fists. Police officers like him were regularly destroyed by the partisans without any pity.

Panasenko had been caught and he was in jail in Lipova Dolina. He would pay for his crimes. Maria Maksimovna drank off a glass of samogon. They brought out more liquor – that was the custom. Everyone raised a glass to the memory of the Ginsburg girls. Sarka kissed her two sisters who had been saved; they had grown over the course of the two years. The girls, for their part, who had not recognized Sarka at first, now remembered her, they remembered her, and they recognized her. The sewing machine stood silent in the corner. It was ages since so many people had gotten together at the home of Maria Maksimovna.

The four Ginsburg children now headed over to the cemetery. Maria Maksimovna and a few other members of the Maiboroda family accompanied them. There was the abandoned mound of dirt, where the two sisters were buried – one of them shot to death, and the other after hanging herself. The tipsy people stood silently around the isolated mound of dirt. The children of the former attendant at the Jewish cemetery in Hadiach gathered up a few handfuls of green and sparse flowers and tossed them onto the mound of dirt.

The next day the Ginsburg children and the spotted cow were brought back to Hadiach. The house was filled with a mixture of joy and mourning. Of the twelve members of the Ginsburg family they had lost the head of the house, as well as Hasya, Hana, and Shimon. Nachman, the eldest son, was off in the Red Army, and they had not received any word from him for quite some time now. But news finally arrived – and it was of the bitterest sort there is. "Nachman Aronovich Ginsburg fell in battle in the war for the honor and freedom of our homeland".

Tzipa Lea and Golda were busy from morning till evening – it was not easy to feed and dress all those urchins. The spotted cow also required care and food. Yosef, may he live long and prosper, was on his feet all day at the barber shop, and when he came home he was not one to skimp on a tasty meal. His mother, Haya Sarah, of blessed memory, had spoiled and pampered his stomach.

Tzipa Lea and Golda managed to get all the work done. Aside from Rivochka all the children attended school, including Mirka, who was

already over eight years old. The high schools opened on the first of October. Mitrofan Petrovich Gavrilenko had also returned to his civilian duties. In just another few days the day school in Vilbovka was going to open its doors. They were plastering and whitewashing the walls, making the necessary repairs, and washing the floors. Parents and older students pitched in to help with the labors. Gavrilenko and that Adam's apple of his were also working away as usual.

Solomon Feigin remained for a few days in the newly liberated Hadiach before he was drafted a second time into the army. Grandma Pesya had survived and returned to Hadiach, even though she had weakened considerably in the partisan camp. Yes, there is movement once more down the Garden alley. Several people were now living there all together, and Pesya, so long as there was still life left in her, rose to rebuild her home from the ashes. Solomon, Binyamin, and Yekel Loytin all lived now in the Garden alley. Pesya had not forgotten the conversation she had had with Ezekiel Loytin before he had left this place. She had promised him to keep an eye on his wife and children. Miriam and Lea had been murdered, but Yekel had survived. The grandmother took in the boy – who had grown in the meantime – and adopted him as her own.

Prior to the Nazi occupation Haim Yakov Feigin had hidden a bundle down in the basement. The bundle was now removed from its hiding place, and it contained money and valuables. There was no shortage of work to be done around the house. The windows needed new panes, they needed to obtain wood for the winter, and they had to purchase potatoes and vegetables. The house was desolate, completely lacking furniture and utensils, clothing or linen. Dasha came over, with Isaac in her arms. His name was now Edik. He was a two-year-old boy, who did not yet understand the vicissitudes of history. Dasha had become like a mother to him, but he did not know his father. A pale baby with blue eyes and a Jewish forehead looked around this way and that, suspiciously. With his eyes full of memories and sorrow, with a sad smile that revealed a bit of his gold teeth, Solomon Feigin stared at his son. Firochka! The memory of Firochka rose before him, flickering in the lines of the child's face. "Come here, Edik!" The latter did not move, only his finger rose and went straight into his mouth. Edik was giving it some thought! Solomon lifted him up in his arms, and held him to his heart, caressing his head. "But don't you recognize your father, Isaac?"

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A tear rolled forth from Pesya's eyes and fell away to the floor.

Pesya began to prepare breakfast. The young men had already returned from the market and they had brought a little something with them. There were potatoes, sunflower oil, onions and tomatoes, as well as bread, apples, and they had even gotten hold of some eggs. What a fancy meal! The pleasant fragrance of a fried omelet filled the rooms. Once more the chimneys were emitting smoke in the homes of the remaining Jews, and there was a drop of life amid all that emptiness and abandon. Scents and colors emerged into the light of day, as a mother went about tending to the household chores, doing the dishes now that the meal was over.

After breakfast Solomon and Binyamin headed over to the hospital. There they ran across Ana Dimitriyevna and they talked with her a bit as they stood there. Before them they found a respectable woman with grey hair. The shiny gown and the white cap on her head gave off a sense of cleanliness and kind-heartedness.

This woman had undergone a considerable transformation in recent years. We first got to know her when she was on the verge of turning old, whereas now, she seemed to be decidedly elderly. She had spent the years of the occupation in Hadiach, and had continued to work in the hospital, and had served the fascists even at her own home. This villainous grandmother now saw Solomon and recalled those earlier years. Her eyes were drawn to his gold teeth. She recalled the young man at the time when he had still been missing his front teeth. How many years had passed since then? In theory, what could one see in a young man with missing teeth? Yet Ana Dimitriyevna had been fond of this brave young man at the time, back when he used to step into her place armed with a bottle of wine and those greasy anecdotes of his.

"Ana Dimitriyevna!" said Solomon, and he was in no mood for jokes now. "Here in this hospital my wife died. What was the cause of death?"

His voice was demanding, and Ana Dimitriyevna had to give him an answer. What did these young men know when it came to matters of medicine? She recalled the woman in labor; she had tended to her quite a bit. Doctor Orlov as well, an expert obstetrician, from the military hospital, had stopped by to check up on her twice a day. It had been a kidney infection – the very kiss of death for a woman in labor.

The justifications were now over. The wanton cat now reared its

head in the old lady's eyes. "Stop by in the evening, Solomon Yefimovich!" Her voice was soft and feminine, cuddly. Solomon stared at the twitching face of this white old lady, and a spark of hatred flickered in his eyes. He uttered a few coarse words. At first, he called her a 'filthy whore', then he added a few words that were even sharper, all drawn from the tremendous treasure trove of the rich Russian tongue.

The matter of Ana Dimitriyevna was now closed. Firochka was not going to come back from the grave. Solomon appeared before the medical board and his furlough was not extended. His health was found to be in decent working order, and so he was immediately drafted into the army. Solomon spent his last remaining hours in the company of his mother and his son. The medical council found Binyamin's health to be somewhat unstable due to that old wound of his, and he was given an additional month's furlough. Where would he go now? His mother and the family of his older brother had certainly headed east with the factory, and he had no idea what their address might be. He wrote to the Central Office that handled the search for relatives, but who knows when he might receive a response?

Grandma Pesya recommended that Binyamin remain in the Garden alley until it was his own turn to leave. Pesya could not stand to be alone. Yekel Loytin was also living at the house, and, it goes without saying – Dasha and the grandchild came over every day. Pesya's hands were constantly busy. People helped the old lady out, bringing her this and that. The basement began to function once more at full capacity. The grandson Edik was not all that fond of taking naps. The tears and laughter of the child could be heard throughout the house and in the yard. '*Bli ayin hara*', Isaac Solomonovich had a healthy throat and his lungs, too, were gradually developing. Now that the concerns in the family had increased it was as though the grandmother had woken up from a prolonged slumber. Her shaky health gradually improved, and Doctor Engertov, who would come over to the Garden alley from time to time for a cup of tea and some small talk, stopped giving her those pain-filled looks.

Binyamin went wandering through Hadiach, looking about and taking note of things, and he did not steer clear of the company of other folks either. The flowers! In the market autumn flowers now appeared, and there were buyers for them as well. The marketplace of Hadiach

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was coming back to life. The bartering business was flourishing once again, with food items being exchanged for shoes and clothes. The Soviet ruble came back to life, but it could not yet be said to be functioning at full strength. And so, the Kolkhozniks preferred to barter. Sometimes Sarka Ginsburg would tag along with Binyamin; the slender, curly-haired girl had grown up recently and one could already note in her the manners of a mature young woman. "But haven't you received any word from Kim, Sarka?" – "I'm not interested – I was never interested in Kim!" Go try and figure out just what lies wrapped up inside the flourishing souls of seventeen-year-old girls!

Binyamin continued to go wandering through the alleyways of Hadiach, and so one morning he arrived before the shack of Esther the noodle-maker. A non-Jewish family now lived in the shack. Binyamin conversed a bit with the lady of the house. She was dressed in an old apron and wearing a pair of tattered shoes. Two babies with filthy faces sat silently inside the house. Indeed, this shack had witnessed no small amount of hard work and difficulties, and it had never been inhabited by any sort of aristocrats. "Perhaps you know what happened in the end to the two old Jewish ladies who lived here before the war?" Binyamin asked politely.

She knew indeed, and she told him the story. Nechama was put to death with all the rest of the Jews. The old mother had sat for several days in the hiding place until the food and water had run out. Then she was forced to come out. Somebody noticed her sitting there on the bench in the yard and went and informed the police. The officers came and dragged her down to the Gestapo.

The old lady now appeared before Binyamin's eyes, all skin and bones. She was crawling along and emerging from her hiding place there beneath the floor. She leaned on her cane, and dragged her way out to the yard, all hungry, foul-smelling, and filled with death. She sat down on the bench. The autumn heavens were reflected in her faded eyes. She was waiting for Nechama. That dog was disrespecting her obligations and had gotten waylaid somewhere. The elderly ogre, nearly a hundred years old, was starving and thirsty. It was cold, damp, and grey throughout the world. What did they want from her? Why wasn't there silence in the world?

Binyamin continued to wander around Hadiach. One day he ran into his acquaintance from back when, the teacher Ivanchuk. Every man

can be said to have his weakness. The elderly teacher had not stopped tending to his vegetable garden. He was currently preparing for the coming season – raking and spreading fertilizer over his patch of land.

"Ah, nu, ah, nu, Comrade Student! Come in!"

They stepped inside the house. Maria Matveyevna, that fat, kind-hearted woman, was working away in that clean, orderly kitchen of hers, where the flower pots stood as ever along the windowsill. The broad laughter of the lady of the house greeted the entrance of the unexpected guest. It goes without saying that Roman Nazarovich began the conversation by talking about politics. The names of countries and cities, diplomats and military men, went buzzing through the air among the four walls of that quiet room.

Not a word was said about Lida. She was recalled but silently in the whispered depths of their souls. Tanya was also there now in the room. This big-breasted young woman was sitting at the table and doing some embroidery. She was twenty-something now, and had already come of age, but there were no proper young men in Hadiach. This generation of young women was suffering due to the lack of young men. The latter had fallen, and now others must sally forth to take their place at the front lines. A wealth of potential husbands had disappeared into oblivion, and ripe, young women were now sitting around and embroidering.

It was nighttime. The hour was late, but Binyamin could not manage to fall asleep. Yekel Loytin, who lived with him in the same room, had just fallen off to sleep. The little rascal was once more glued to the books, and regularly continued reading until midnight. Agrippina Andreyevna, the librarian, had reopened the town library at the beginning of October, and Yekel was, of course, among the first to take out a membership. He now had a better understanding of the ways of the world, and he was no longer a green reader for whom the works of Maupassant, Galsworthy, and Balzac were like sealed tomes. He had just gulped down a decent portion of the Human Comedy and was now snoring softly away. But Binyamin was awake. His ears caught the rustling and barking sounds around the house and beyond. The neighbor Harkusha's dog, Sultan, was raising quite a ruckus. Indeed, the dog's throat had not at all weakened, and his teeth were still bold, and woe to anyone who tried to slip into the yard of Ivan Matveyevich.

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The next day Binyamin went over to have a look at the Jewish cemetery. The wealth of headstones, which had been the distinguishing feature of the cemetery in Hadiach – seemed to have disappeared. The headstones were gone! The Grechuk brothers had started the job, and the desecration of the headstones had been their downfall. But the thing was, there were people who had picked up where they had left off, and all the new houses in the area had been built on a foundation of abandoned Jewish headstones. And the Good Lord of the Jews seemed to have made His peace with this scandal, as the houses did not look like they were about to crumble or fall.

Binyamin wandered around the cemetery. Here and there a few shattered stones lay about, the remains of certain headstones. At times a Hebrew letter could be seen sticking out on some broken piece of stone. A bent woman stood there along the slope with her head all wrapped up and bowed, her entire being the very image of Jewish sorrow and suffering. It was Basya, the wife of Mordechai the coachman, may he rest in peace. Binyamin knew her, as she had spent two years in the family camp, off in the forest. What was she doing in the cemetery? She was looking for her husband's grave. Two years ago, Spiridonovich the coachman had brought two bodies down here to be buried. One of them had been Mordechai, and the other – had been an unknown murder victim. Each of them had been buried separately – right here, it would seem, beneath these two mounds of dirt. But which one was Mordechai's grave? Basya had forgotten, and now her eyes went wandering from one mound of dirt to the other, and there was no one that she could turn to for help.

People were searching for their living relatives, and here this Jewish woman was looking for her dead. What was the difference anyway, Basya? What good would it really do you if it was one mound of dirt or the other? She intended to erect a headstone for her husband. Perhaps the days would come when they would allow a Jewish headstone to remain standing beneath the lofty heavens above, and the memory of the man Mordechai would not be erased – resident of Hadiach that he once was, a one-time butcher and coachman, who had been well-versed in the ways of the daughters of Eve.

What could he advise Basya? Perhaps she could place the headstone between the two mounds of dirt, and the words engraved in the stone could serve as a memorial to both men at the same time?

It was a grey autumn day. A sad wind went blowing through the neglected field. What had happened to the Shtiebel in the end? Had the holy building been hit by a bomb, or had the local residents destroyed it and used its bricks as building blocks? The only thing left of the entire structure was the Ohel. Binyamin stepped over the pile of broken bricks and stiff plaster, slipped through the breach, and opened the door to the Ohel. There was a moldy darkness inside. A mere drop of light snuck in through the window in the wall where the glass was missing; the two marble tablets with their gold lettering had been torn loose and disappeared. There were only the broken remains of the letters on the wall, wounded, crushed words that it was rather difficult to make out. "Here lies the sac- tomb of the divine Gaon...". Binyamin struggled to read the letters, guessing at what they might have been as he lit match after match. As for the eternal flame – there was no sign of it anywhere. Everything was plunged in a deathly silence. That flame, the spark of the *Ein-Sof*, had been put out and swept off the face of the earth. The cave, which led from the grave of the Rebbe down to the river, had been stopped up.

Just a moment... had it indeed been stopped up? Binyamin looked all around and caught sight of the wooden hatch. He lifted the hatch – and indeed! There were the rungs, and the closed door standing before him. He went down the ladder, lifted the hook on the door, and listened as the hinges creaked open, then lit a match – and there was the cave! The cave had not been stopped up! The cave was alive, the path still existed, and it was so clear to him, he had been down that path both while awake, and in a dream. Binyamin walked through the cave by the light of the match. A boundless joy filled his heart. So, the chain had not been broken then. A spark still flickered beneath the pile of ashes. The entire nation had not been slaughtered; it would yet come back to life. Even Avigdor the informer, the eternal wanderer, would yet return to this place.

Binyamin broke forth with '*Od lo avda*'¹ – the Hebrew song that our forefathers and ancestors had sung throughout the towns in this land. The match went out, but the hymn continued to echo in the cave. It was a lone voice, yet it split the darkness in the cave, and reached the Psel

¹ '(Our hope) is not yet lost' (Hebrew).

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River, where it dove into its waters. The waters received the voice and carried it onward, ever onward. Not far from the city of Kremenchuk the waters of the Psel empty into the Dnieper. The Dnieper in turn flows into the Black Sea. Straights and crossings link up the Black Sea with all the seas and oceans on the face of the globe. They lap at the shores of every one of the continents.

And so, the days pass by. Binyamin is now leaving Hadiach. What a strange young man! He is bidding farewell to this place and the surviving remnant of the community with a heavy heart. There we see him walking towards the train station. In his knapsack, aside from his soldier's rations and the honey cakes that Grandma Pesya baked for him, alongside the razor and the soap, he has also tucked away a copy of the Old Testament. It is early in the evening, towards the end of October. The rains fell just recently, and a dense, muddy swamp covers the road and the path that runs alongside it. A slender, dark young woman comes up to him – it is Sarka Ginsburg, his old friend. "Where have you been and where are you headed, Sarka?" – "I'll accompany you a bit of the way, Binyamin." Her dark eyes are ready for both laughter and sadness. A single strand of hair has slipped out from underneath her kerchief, slipped out to make its presence known that autumn evening. They walked along through the dense mud and made small talk about the trees and the stones. She did not let a single opportunity slip in which she might burst into laughter. Her voice has deepened and matured. She is ten years younger than Binyamin. Go try and figure out just when the little baby turned into a young woman! Had it not been for the war she would now be attending the tenth grade, whereas now, following an interruption of two years, she was attending the eighth grade. She was a potential bride among little girls, and the only Jewish kid in the class! Yet Sarka had already been through all the circles of hell, and her spirit was not broken. Binyamin stared at her in amazement. It seemed that the years of terror had not left any mark on her face. Her feet went tramping through the mud, as her youthful body sliced through the air, filled with a stormy energy.

At the train station, given the fact that Binyamin had gone up to the window to pick up a ticket, she went over to sit on the bench amid the crowd of people who had gathered in the long room, filled with the smoke of mahorka tobacco. Her face seemed to have fallen and the awakening had now passed. Binyamin came back over to her. Her burning eyes stared silently at him. Suddenly he saw tears rolling down

her cheeks and falling away to the floor.

"What's the matter, Sarka?" She lifted her eyes to him. There were tears as big as pearls in them.

"Nothing."

"If that's the case, then let's go!"

The train stood there on the tracks, as the locomotive huffed and puffed in bursts both extended and brief. Binyamin was traveling as far as the station at N., and from there he would be sent to join his unit. It was time to say goodbye.

"You must let me know your address, Binyamin! I'll write back, I'll write you!" She hugged the grey young man. Her warm lips clung to him softly. "I'll be waiting! I'll be waiting!"

It was like a solemn oath. Binyamin's head flickered from the window of the car. The train began to move. A slender girl, dressed in a worn coat and wearing muddy boots, gradually disappeared into the distance where she stood there on the platform. Her raised hand waved like a promise. The clacking of the wheels grew faster and stronger. The girl disappeared. Farewell, Sarka! Farewell, Hadiach! Farewell, dear Psel!

Who knows if I will yet get to kiss your soil once more, o Hadiach?

The years passed. Most of the events that we have recounted here were now covered with moss. In the spring of 1962 a few of our heroes gathered at the residence of Rachel Yefimovna Popova. A wedding in the capital! Little Isaac was getting married. He was only twenty-one years old – and there you have it! The young man had fallen head over heels in love. The apple had not fallen too far from the tree. Just as in his youth his father Solomon had not been in the habit of steering clear of the ladies, the same could be said of Isaac – or Edward Semyonovich, if you will – from the time he was just a boy onward. His bride-to-be was a proper daughter of Israel. What, did you think for a minute that the grandson of Haim Yakov Feigin, the former shochet and bodek and mohel, was going to go and marry a non-Jewish girl? Bronichka was a thin student, with a pair of dark glasses behind which hid a pair of black, blinking eyes. There was absolutely no doubting her Jewish origins.

Like a pair of turtledoves, the bride and groom sat at the head of the long table. But let us divert our attention a moment from this

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pleasant couple – they are busy with their own concerns. Let us turn to the guests who are seated around the tables. We got to know a few of them almost twenty years ago.

With the passage of time Rachel had become a rather respectable bird. Vladimir Antonovich Popov, an actor with the National Theater and an excellent director, a man of somewhat uncertain age, who held himself rather erect and was always clean-shaven, had noted Rachel's talent for acting and taken her for his bride. This had all taken place in a city way off in the east, to which Rachel's office had been transferred at the start of the war. There the bookkeeper had gotten to know Popov, who had come with his theater troupe for a few performances and had then settled down there for the duration of the war. As chance would have it, Rachel and Popov lived in the same residence, and she was then already an old hand at the art of the hunt. After a little while, she revealed to him the full force of her womanly mastery of the art of acting, and Popov had fallen for her.

Vladimir Antonovich had worked with the Dramatic Theater for many years. It was just another one of those rather bruising lines of work. Popov lived in a lavish residence with Rachel and his dog Lora, whose neck was adorned with a brown leather collar. Every morning, at a certain hour, he would step out to take his dog for a walk. He gripped the end of the leash in his hand, and Lora would drag the actor after her down to the boulevard, and then they would cross over to the square.

The Popovs were childless, and in the year 1944, when Rachel and her daughter had just gotten back in touch with one another, they took Tamar in to their home. For many months Rachel labored until she was able to remove the stale layer that the evangelicals had coated her daughter with back in Romny. I mean – what? Here was this fancy residence in Kropotkin Street, with all these actors and musicians, cultured people, people of the arts – and in their midst, you had a benighted daughter who had dealings with some suspect religious sect?

Tamar went back to being like any ordinary person: she joined the Komsomol, completed her high school studies, enrolled at the medical university, and completed her studies there too. Now she worked at a local clinic. She is here with her husband Volodya. Although she is only thirty-five years old, she is not in the best of health. She has stomach problems, and they suspect it might be an ulcer.

On her identification card Tamar was listed as a Ukrainian; and Volodya, though he too is also a Jew from birth – was listed as a Russian. Many Jews had begun renouncing their religion and clinging to the considerable, promising body of the general population. But there were also others, precisely among the young people, who did not deny their religion and even stubbornly insisted on being identified as Jews.

The groom Edik – was an orphan all around. His mother had died giving birth to him in 1941, and his father had fallen in the war in 1944. Grandma Pesya had not managed to outlive her son by all that much. But that does not mean that the groom's side was not duly represented at the party. Rachel Yefimovna, Edik's aunt, had gathered no small number of relatives and friends for the bash. There was almost nothing about this clumsy matron that recalled the Rachel we had gotten to know before the outbreak of the war. And yet, Vladimir Antonovich could hardly have been said to have spoiled his own supper in taking her as his wife. She honorably bore the burden of being a veritable lioness of the theatrical aristocracy. Their home was frequented by important figures, including other actors with the National Theater in the Republic and throughout the Soviet Union. Popov himself was also an actor with the National Theater, and he was constantly up to his ears in work. True, he was sixty-something years old, and Rachel, with her fifty-odd years, was still in the habit of putting on makeup and powdering herself and living under the illusion that her youth and vigor had not yet dried up. It may well be that there was even some sycophant among Popov's acolytes who was drawn to this fleshy 'Wife of Potiphar', who still doused herself as ever with the delicate line of 'Red Moscow' perfumes.

Yes, yes indeed, there were plenty of guests here on the groom's side. Our old friend Binyamin and his wife Sarah Aronovna were there as well. Binyamin, an engineer, now worked at a research institute, handling engine design. Ever the diligent one, he had completed his university studies with honors. Professor Edelman's labors had therefore not all gone up in smoke.

The memory of little Glasha had not left his heart. Loves come and go, and yet one will always remain, etched there for all eternity. A coil of affection and longing was submerged somewhere deep inside his soul, and not all the gales in the world would ever manage to destroy it. And yet life went on. To Binyamin's right sat his wife Sarah Aronovna, she who had formerly been known as Sarka Ginsburg. Their three

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children were left at home, in the care of the neighbor. Sarka has not yet turned forty, and she is in the prime of her life. Her high, wavy hairdo, clarion call of the very latest fashion, flutters there like a wondrous two-story building. Her cheeks have turned red after just a few glasses, and the cherry eyes are sparkling, as her red silk blouse lends a certain festive charm to her features. She completed her studies at a textile university, and now works at a factory. All Ginsburg children left Hadiach and settled down in the big cities. They all got married quite some time ago. The boys and girls in the Ginsburg family are not in the habit of remaining bachelors and virgins – God forbid! Only Golda's family was now left back in Hadiach...

But I have not told you of all the guests yet on the groom's side. The Shotland family was also here. And look for yourselves – Grandpa Zalman Shotland, the old gypsy, was still alive! He is over seventy years old now, and he is drawing a pension, but he has no intentions of stepping down from the stage just yet, there is still plenty of life left in him. The horse has gotten old, but he still longs to go galloping off for distant lands, and now, when springtime comes, something begins to stir in the old man. Raissa Issakovna, that blond-haired wife of his, died a few months after they received the bitter news concerning the death of Firochka. The mother's heart just did not hold up, as Firochka had been the beloved daughter of this talkative, homebody of a woman. Zalman Shotland now lived with his eldest daughter Elena Levin, who was also widowed; her husband Shaul Levin had been killed in the war. From the entire Shotland family, therefore, only the old man is left, along with his daughter Elena and his grandson Boris. The three of them are all here – including Boris, a veritable cedar of a young man, with broad shoulders, whose own turn it is already for some time now to get married.

Vladimir Antonovich is busy this evening at the theater, and Rachel did not skimp on the invitations. The table has been set without any of the aristocratic delicacies, and in place of the celebrated cognac we find ordinary bottles of Moskovskaya vodka, whose forty proof certainly manages to raise one's spirits.

I too, the author, managed to sneak in among the in-laws and guests on the groom's side – thanks to my friendship with several of the heroes of my story, many of whom I have known for dozens of years now, unlike those authors who simply pull their characters out of thin

air. The bride's side as well – with all due respect – was no laggard in this regard, and the number of their representatives at the party was no less than on the groom's side. All in all about thirty people had gathered at the spacious apartment of aunt Rachel. The glasses clinked, blessings and toasts were offered, and there were people on both sides who got rather tipsy in the very best of all possible fashions, after they had poured a decent amount of eighty proof down their throats. Among those who did so I ought to mention, first and foremost, Zalman Shotland, whose habit remained the same as ever: whenever he swallowed liquid of any proof whatsoever, the spirit of music and song descended upon him, and he would begin to moo and rumble forth with those ancient tunes from Warsaw...

*The old bloke is full of jealousy,
The old bloke is filled with hatred,
The old bloke envies me the very bread I eat.
But the old bloke can't see,
No the old bloke doesn't know
That my soul has been crushed,
That my pockets have been torn,
And that I would prefer death
To being a thief anymore...*

A thief's tune was now being roared out right next to the table of Rachel Yefimovna, in all its force and tone-deaf glory! During the intervening twenty years old man Shotland had not managed to properly master the art of song, and he still sang as though he was sawing off a log. But the bass voice was still a bass voice, and when the old man was in his cups he could shake the very rafters. Indeed, it was not every day that people got to marry off a grandchild, and Shotland was no Chaliapin. On the other hand, the bride's side wished to impose their own order on the proceedings. When they were in their own cups, the only thing they knew how to sing was '*Lamir alle in-einem*':

*Let's all get together now as one
And welcome the arrival of the bride!*

Oy, you thieves and bastards, the Jewish spot still beat deep in the recesses of your hearts! Rachel Yefimovna's face was all flushed. Say what you will, it is a good thing sometimes to take your mind off all the lionesses prowling the ether of the theatrical world. The matron opened her mouth wide and she too began to sing some folk song. Her teeth

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shone. There they were in a neat row, recalling a bit the Rachel she had once been, that dear bookkeeper from Dubinin Street who would set her abacus clacking, and whose mood was so fickle that you never knew just what to expect from your next meeting with her – whether a kiss or a slap in the face.

No, that Jewish spot was still flickering there; it had not yet faded away completely. The glasses were filled once more, and this time Binyamin rose from his seat. The old age had crept into his step, and the tuft of hair on his head was now no longer what it used to be, a pleasant bald spot had already begun to shine in its midst, and the wrinkles were growing ever more brazen as they overtook one tract of land after the next across his forehead and around his eyes. Sarah Aronovna's dark eyes stared at Binyamin with a smiling, maternal look.

"My dear friends and acquaintances!" began Binyamin. "Mazal Tov! I would like to raise a toast to the young couple. May they live long and experience much blessing in their lives. We must bring up a new generation that will not cut itself off from its people. We must not forget that over a third of our nation was murdered by the fascists and their henchmen. Many of the murderers are still walking the face of the earth, and they still wish to destroy us. It is the way of the world that for every action there is a reaction. We must come together and oppose the slaughter. Our fiercest enemy at the time was our belief in faded words and illusions. The fascists made fine use of this weapon. We must remember the lesson that we learned."

A Jewish man, who had been torn to pieces and plucked bare by life, was standing there and preaching unity and nationalism. It was heresy! If we do not stop him he will even drink a Le'chaim in honor of the distant State of Israel, where most of the remnant of our people has gathered. But the wonder of it all is that all those assembled, including the young boys and girls, all lent him a willing ear. Good Lord, in just another minute they are going to rise and declare as one that they are raising this next toast in recognition of the fact that they are still Jews.

Twenty years ago, in a mud hut in the forest, on a hard wooden bed, the old man Shapiro had passed his last will and testament on to a young partisan. The testament had been etched in the latter's heart, and he would carry it in his bosom until he breathed his last.

"Next year in Jerusalem!" shouted old man Shotland. He has had

just a bit too much to drink today, and he does not at all understand the finer points of political matters. Around midnight Vladimir Antonovich returns from the theater. He is greeted with a tipsy roar, as they fill a large glass for him as a sort of fine to make up for his tardiness. But Vladimir Antonovich manages to evade that fine of a glass – he must not behave coarsely. The actors at the National Theater eat and drink in moderation, they consume very little wine or meat, butter or salami, as they concentrate their diet on fruits and cabbage, rye bread, and other such boring items.

No, at the sound of that Jewish roar, Vladimir Antonovich's smile seemed just a little bit sour. The people who have gathered at his home are not at all to his liking. The guests begin to slip away. Grandpa Shotland's tone-deaf bass voice continues to growl away a bit, but then he too steps out of the house. Wish a kiss on the hand, Binyamin bids farewell to Rachel Yefimovna. Sarah's soft, kind hand clings to his arm. Today she is dressed to the nines, wearing perfume, with her hair all done up, and she is overflowing with life. But even if she were in the grip of absent-minded neglect and silence, she would still cling to Binyamin, her rock and fortress.

This charming, pleasant woman went chattering away as they walked down Kropotkin Street. It was midnight. The street was silent. The flow of cars had thinned out, and there were few people out walking. The multicolored lights of the signs stood out in the dark. The windows in the houses were mostly dark, while the display windows of the stores were all wondrously lit up. The shows have all ended at the theaters and movie houses, and the final trolleys of the night are wailing away as they cry. The police officers on duty stand in the shadows, with a bored look on their faces, yet they are ready for whatever. What is Sarah talking about? She is discussing the young couple, Edik and Bronichka, as well as Tamar, and her mother, Rachel. Rachel is gradually getting old, and Tamar is sinking ever deeper into her illnesses. She did not taste a thing this evening. Did you notice how her face looked? She was a mere shadow of herself.

Binyamin emitted a dull sound, without any real meaning. "How do you think the children behaved?" she asks. By this she means their three children that they left at home – Hasya, Nachman, and Shimon. These names – are in memory of the two brothers and one sister who were killed during the war. Hana's name as well did not die – one of the

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daughters of Leib Ginsburg carried this very name. Leib, Abba, Miriam, and Rivka – all Ginsburgs' children had gotten married and there was no shortage of children. Golda and her family still lived in Hadiach, but the rest of the brothers and sisters had scattered in all four directions throughout the world.

"Hasenka kept an eye on them," replied Binyamin. Hasya, the eldest daughter, was about sixteen years old, and one could rely on her. Sarah spoke once more. Hasya was a cause of concern for her. It seemed that at school some boy was chasing after her. She was so young, and already she got all dressed up like an adult, fond as she was of standing before the mirror, laughing and giving herself endearing looks. The day before she had come up to Sarah and said: "Mother, I'm beautiful!" The day before that, she had brought home a bunch of flowers – no doubt a gift from the boy. Binyamin remained silent; he does not get involved in feminine matters – that is Sarah's realm. His realm – is the boys. He tells them stories drawn from the chronicles of the Jewish people. Nine-year-old Shimon – has a sharp ear. Recordings of Jewish songs can often be heard at the home. But could all that truly be called a Jewish education?

All is silent. To the right lies the immense swimming pool. In the dark the columns of the Pushkin Museum flicker. Tomorrow will bring a new spring day. The babies will lie in their cradles. Young girls will play with their jump-ropes and at hopscotch in the squares they will have drawn in chalk on the sidewalks. Young men and women will fall in love. One generation passes away, as a new generation rises to take its place. Each one will assume the spot that it has been allotted, and overhead the heavens will cover our globe with an indifferent halo of air and space.

Binyamin and Sarah ascend the steps. He opens the door with his key. They step inside cautiously so as not to wake up the children. A green table lamp illuminates the walls of the room with a meager light. Binyamin takes off his clothes. Tomorrow is a day of work, and he can only look forward to six hours of sleep. Sarah stands there before the mirror and undoes her clever hairdo. Waves of curly hair sink down along her naked shoulders.

A little time passes. There are a few brief whispers. Then silence.

Iyar, 5722 [1962]