

*Источники к мини-курсу Марка Каплана*

**"Идишский модернизм  
в Веймарском Берлине"**

*Sources for Marc Caplan's mini-course*

**"Yiddish Modernism  
in Weimar Berlin"**

**Dovid Bergelson *Tsvishn emigrantn*,  
translated as "Among Refugees"  
in Joachim Neugroschel's collection  
*Shadows of Berlin*  
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## Among Refugees

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

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

"He's sort of –"

"Very impatient..."

They had told the young man that I wouldn't return before evening. But instead of answering, he had gone right into my study and had sat himself down. They had made it clear to him: it would be better if he came back later on. At first, he hadn't taken in their words; then a bewildered look had come over him. And he had answered coldly: "No, it's better if they don't see me coming and going here too much.... You might have problems with the police."

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

He seemed to be in his mid-twenties. He was sitting hunched over in a corner, in the farthest easy chair, as if drowsing.

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

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

I didn't understand.

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

"No!" He made a face. "I hate political parties!"

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

"He's sort of –"

"Very impatient...."

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

His left cheek, however, was crooked; it looked as though it were his, and yet.... It was like a cheek at war with the world – it had fallen out of favor with life, and therefore life had fallen out of favor with it. The left cheek made the young man look ugly, but apparently he had sided with it. He reminded me of a mother who has a beautiful child and a freak – for justice, ' sake he was on the side of the hideous left cheek and bore its badness within himself. Because of the ugly cheek he wore a moustache. He wanted it, no matter how slightly, to cover the crookedness. I spotted the moustache instantly and thought to myself: "The right cheek isn't pleased with the moustache because it has the unusual color of dirty brass. It commands your attention and it announces: 'Don't bother me, I'm nasty. It would be better if you went your way and I went mine.'"

All these things were sharply etched on his features. Sitting in the other room, I was very ill at ease. I kept feeling his eyes boring into me through the thick wall.

When I went back, he was still sitting in the same place, indifferent. Two bright embers were blazing in his eyes – akin to the flames of memorial candles lit early in the evening. But perhaps they glowed that way because of the sunset.

Outside, beyond the long curtains, I could sense the gigantic, checkered streets beginning to come alive, to teem and swarm, to radiate the huge dry heat they had been breathing the whole long day – a day like a year, a day like a long, long road. On a day like this, looking back, you think to yourself that you've walked a tremendous distance. A day like this drives all the lonely eccentrics outdoors, and they haunt the streets like mute, restless ghosts.

Once, in the park, on a day like this, a lonely person had sat down on my bench and had started saying that you're never so lonely as among people, and that you're never so thoroughly "among people" as in a big city. I couldn't help remembering that incident as I gazed at my visitor. I asked him: "Are you a refugee?"

"A refugee."

"From where?"

He named a large city in the sandy areas of Volhynia. He glanced around to make sure the door was tightly shut, and he showed me some documents to prove that he really came from the city and also that he had been a pioneer in Palestine. Next, he mentioned the name of a notorious Ukrainian pogromist. He asked me whether I'd heard about that man's terrible butcheries. He glared hard at me with the blazing flames in his eyes, and I sensed that the difficult and terrible thing he had to tell me was beginning. So far, he had been polite – he had been speaking on behalf of his right cheek. But now, he would be speaking on behalf of his left cheek, the crooked one....

We sat facing one another in a remote corner of the room. He uttered the name of that notorious pogromist and he began with these words:

"Listen... he's here now... in Berlin."

He glared at me even harder and he started telling me the whole story.

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Listen, for nearly three weeks now I've been living "with him," here, in this city, in a squalid rooming house. I, in room number three. He, in room number five – our doors facing one another. I'm a stranger here. No one knows me. He doesn't know me either. But I know him very well.

Sometimes: we bump into one another in the corridor. At the entrance there's a worn red door-mat – both of us wipe the dust off our boots. You understand – on the very same mat.... And then: as he passes, he glances at me. I bolt into my room, and I can still feel his glare right here and here.

[The young man quickly smacked both his cheeks.] My eyes dart into the mirror. I wonder what the pogromist saw in me. A sordid young Jew. Sometimes I don't shave for days on end. I gaze with tired, bloodshot eyes. I'm often pasty, like someone who's been fasting and fasting. That's all, isn't it? What else can he possibly see in me?

But I know him from back home. I've known him since my childhood: from every Jewish trouble, from a lot of different troubles. He aroused the populaces of four whole provinces. You think he's like Puriskevitch, who led the anti-semitic faction in the Russian Parliament, who founded the Black Hundreds? You think he's like Krushevan, who was the chief instigator of the Kishinev Pogrom? He's a lot worse. He led pogroms himself, the recent ones, the most terrible ones. He vanished each time, then resurfaced, leading a new slaughter of Jews. He wore a beard, he spoke simply, so that the peasants would take him for one of their own and believe him. But here, abroad, he's shaved off his beard and he dresses up. He's become an aristocrat again. He's strong, tall, his face is ruddy, full. His moustache is cheerfully twirled out. His eyes are nasty and they have a venomous twinkle. The venomous twinkle of his butcheries.

Next to him, I'm pale and bent. Do you see? Not so much short as bent. Ever since childhood, my face has been squashed and twisted as though it had been run over, I wear a moustache, see?... I'm

not attractive, especially in profile.... It runs in the family.... You think I don't realize it? Of all the young men I know, I'm the ugliest. And I was the ugliest back home, in my town. That's why I lived apart from the other children, all alone, like an orphan. Picture me back then on summer evenings: a twelve-year-old schoolboy with brass buttons, a schoolboy running off to synagogue after his pious grandfather to say evening prayers, like a puppy finding refuge with him. And not because others are biting the puppy, but because the other schoolboys never notice me. I can stand among them, and it's as if no one were standing among them. To go to synagogue, you have to walk along the Boulevard – that's the main thoroughfare. On a summer evening, schoolboys, you know, like to get all dressed up and stroll about five or six abreast. The schoolboy running after his grandfather halts. He looks at the strollers, they don't notice him. The schoolboy takes fright and runs fast, fast, after his grandfather....

And I really was an orphan – from the age of eight. My grandfather's children died young. He was short, gray, with a hairy face. Waxen features, with hair in his nose and his ears, with smacking lips and cold, black little eyes, darting every which way like a monkey's eyes. But there was no hair growing from those eyes. When he spoke, very few people could understand him. People seldom visited his home, but they did come to pay him money, interest. His mansion was huge and deserted.... It stood on the Boulevard, at the very end. The only inhabitants were Grandfather, myself, and an elderly maid from way back.

Now Grandfather had a bizarre habit: every time a child of his died, Grandfather would buy a clock and set it up or hang it in one of the rooms. By the time I was fourteen or fifteen, the clocks were everywhere: a clock in every room – all of Grandfather's children had died. At dawn, when Grandfather got up, he would first wind all the clocks, like a mother who starts the day by feeding all her children. Grandfather hums, he has no voice. When he sings, it's like a cat snorting under the table. Our whole family is like that. And so am I – I can't carry a tune, I have no voice. Grandfather's hairy face is like a clock – the nose is the hand, the eyes are two numbers. The clocks strike, Grandfather hums.

And right across the Boulevard, likewise at the very end, is where the Pinskys live. A large family, a merry one. Almost every week they enjoy some new success. They give banquets. And Pinsky's younger son, Zorah, lives right across from our windows, which are always shut. But the windows over there are always open, always merry; so are the balconies. Zorah has nothing but daughters, nothing but young girls, nothing but schoolgirls in dark-brown dresses with well-ironed white collars, nothing but lovely, charming, dark-haired girls. With the scent of Palmolive soap, especially the youngest, with a dimple below her two front teeth. You know? The way it happens sometimes? And right there, with that dimple below her two front teeth, is where it all begins: all the beauty in her face, in her body, in her movements, when she rides a bicycle like all her sisters. They play piano over there. Even now, whenever I hear a piano playing somewhere, I remember: Ahhh! It's the Pinskys. They're having a birthday party, schoolboys are arriving – we can see everything from Grandfather's window.

In our house, the clocks are striking. Somewhere, in one of the rooms, Grandfather is humming over a holy tome, snorting like an old cat. And I wander among the clocks. Every clock is a grave, a memorial candle. I am a schoolboy. I study hard, all day long, all summer long. And what do you think? What do I think about? I think about doing something for spite.... Do you understand? About doing something. A thing that no one across the way, over on that merry balcony, would do. And for spite, you can do something ugly. For spite, you can do something lovely – it's all the same, so long as it's for spite.

Then the war caught up with me, but I didn't try to get out of it, as others tried – do you understand?... As though for spite. But right after the war ended, my feeling of spite likewise ended, almost by itself. I felt a sorrow at my loss.

Where is my spite? That's why I was one of the first to leave my town after it was ravaged by a pogrom, and I became a common laborer in Palestine – as though for spite. But later on, when lots of children from prosperous families in my town, including some of the young Pinskys, started moving to

Palestine, I left Palestine and came here, to this city. Here, at the very same time, I began to go hungry and to write. And I thought to myself: "People like me are the kind who want to blow up the world with dynamite. I won't let it happen. On the contrary: I'll break in on the other side."

I thought up a story, not about me, but about someone else. The story begins by describing a certain Jewish pauper in our town. Every Thursday (as is customary among Jews), he goes begging among the rich Jews who live in the gentile neighborhood. The pauper is greatly despised by the Christian children there. They can't stand him. The moment they spot him, they pelt him with rocks and sic their dogs on him. Loud yells arise all over the Christian neighborhood. The air is full of cries, a trampling of feet, a barking of dogs. The pauper is terrified of dogs. His teeth chatter. Yet he is glad. Because the yelling and barking inform everyone that the pauper has arrived in the Christian neighborhood. The alms are brought out to him from every Jewish home. He doesn't have to waste time knocking on each Jewish door individually. When the pauper arrives in the Christian neighborhood, he halts in the middle of the street and starts to cough, so that the children will see him and sic their dogs on him....

I wrote the story in one breath. Those were the opening chapters, and I instantly felt that the pauper was myself: do you understand? Again myself.... The Christian neighborhood, that was my town in disguise, my life. But no one is sicking dogs on me. They don't even bark at me, and yet I can feel them barking. My cough – that's my military service, my going to war, my leaving for Palestine as a common laborer.... The act of spite that I've wanted to commit ever since my childhood – that's my way of begging for alms.... But since I actually want to give on my own... you understand? To be a rich man just once in my life, to cast out alms like this, with an open hand – just look.... And in those days when I'd thought such things (I couldn't sleep night after night), I'd heard a faint noise in the rooming house corridor early one morning, and the noise was mixed with the sharp sounds of Ukrainian. I looked out into the corridor, and first I saw a chambermaid. She was carrying two heavy valises; and then I saw him in the flesh, with his cheerfully twirled moustache. He was respectfully followed by some younger man.

"Oh, yes?" he asked the younger man in Ukrainian and he sniffed the air. "Aren't there any Jews here?"

I was standing by my door. I watched the chambermaid take him right across from me, to room number five. I was stupefied. And suddenly a feeling of lightness came to me in my daze, as though I weren't alone anymore. Some portion of me had arrived. I felt so much lighter, though I still didn't know what this lightness was. It wasn't until later that I asked myself: "Just why do I feel so joyous? Why?"

There was a knock at the door of my study. They were calling me to the dining room. And then it started darkening in my studio as though evening were settling in. The young man asked for some water. He held the glass by its edge. His hand shivered slightly; he gazed very pensively at his feet as if trying to see whether he had lost something down there, something of what he wanted to tell me. He said: "What was my purpose in telling you these things? I want you to understand who I am.... Now you'll believe me because no one could make up such a story out of thin air. I don't sense I've left anything out, have I? I've told you about Zorah Pinsky and his daughter, haven't I? Yes, I have. That was everything, everything that happened to me back then, until I felt I was going to kill him. You understand? Among so many Jews, I, of all people, I, to whom the entire story happened. Just think: Who else if not I?"

In the darkness of the room I could see the two white spots in the corners of his mouth. White spots caused by a lot of talking. He put down the glass.

We were again sitting face to face in the corner of the room. I asked him a question, and the two memorial candles in his eyes started going out and flaring up over and over again, like fires with which mariners signal at sea. He began talking again.

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Why do you ask when I decided to kill him? What difference does it make? And anyhow: Does a man decide a thing like that? I remember the first thing I decided on was the place.... One day I left my room and stepped into the corridor, and I saw him: He was stranding there, talking on the phone. He was obviously hearing bad news. As he held the receiver to his ear, his eyes began to widen, the savage venom blazed stronger in them. He asked: "Whaaaa?" And the "what" was drawn out and terrified. I stood aside and someone within me thought: "Right there by the phone is the best place, right there. You could kill him with one shot." You understand? It wasn't I who had those thoughts, it was someone else.

True, in one of the slaughters for which he alone was responsible, they killed my grandfather, the old man with the waxen face and the two cold eyes that darted every which way, like a monkey's eyes. But the pity I've always felt for my grandfather is not really mine either, it too belongs to someone else.... "So then there! Right by the phone," I thought. "There's no better place possible."

And as I thought this, I felt myself imbued with joy. I suddenly wanted things to be joyful. I went to a restaurant and ate lunch, spending nearly all the money I possessed – a lunch with a glass of wine. My heart felt it was carrying something that hadn't been in my heart earlier and that no one around me had. I saw, as if for the first time in my life, that it was a beautiful summer day. Lots of people were sauntering about in the streets, lovely people.... My feeling for them was like that of a man who has to go on a long trip and is having a difficult time saying goodbye to his family: he hasn't even managed to embrace them, as is proper, to hug them tight, as is proper, but he does have to leave. And that was how I felt about all those people, all of them without exception – like shadows. I haven't really clasped them properly and I already have to leave them.

I walked around a whole day with that feeling in my heart, and then, by the time I got home, it was already evening. Our two doors glared at each other harshly. I tell you, the only doors that can glare at each other like that are the doors in a rooming house where that thing has to happen. Door number three glared at door number five and appeared to be saying: "My man, who lives behind me, is going to kill your man, who lives behind you."

Have you ever seen such doors? You sleep in your room all night long. You seem to be sleeping very soundly, but in your sleep you remember their numbers – number three glares at number five....

And then suddenly, I awoke very early, at sunrise. I peeped into the corridor and saw that our boots had been put out for shining: mine at my door, and his at his door. Mine – worn out Jewish boots with sagging elastics (they've already been to Palestine); and his – solid goyish boots with shafts that go up under the trousers.

"He's here at home," I thought to myself.

And I felt good at the thought, as if I weren't alone anymore. I looked at the place by the phone – the best place....

And again I wanted everything to be joyful around me. Back in my room I opened the window facing the street.

The sun was coming up.

Deserted streets.

A few sleepy, freshly scrubbed faces.

Workers going to work, one by one.

"Tu-whit, tu-whit!" The whistling of a bird came into my room from a nearby tree, a whistling more reminiscent of life than any others; and at the sound of that "Tu-whit, tu-whit," I felt the same as I'd felt the previous night about people, as if I were about to leave on a long trip, and were having a difficult time saying goodbye to that "Tu-whit, tu-whit."

From then on, I started watching him in the rooming house.

It was good to know that he was there, in the room across from me, behind door number five. And I always felt desolate whenever he went off somewhere and his room remained empty. The hours would stretch and stretch, and the minutes too.

I'd shuffle about my room and through the corridor, and I'd feel; "If he doesn't come back in the next few minutes, my heart will explode!..."

I have to tell you:

He signed his own name, personally, in the rooming house guestbook. Under his name there's the flourish of a man who's satisfied with himself. He came from Copenhagen. A ghost town, Copenhagen. Jews there are preoccupied with their own bits of life. Nobody was even hunting for him there.

I look at the flourish under his name and I'm annoyed at his peace of mind. He'd never dream of keeping up his guard. We're like bedbugs in his eyes – I, you, all the victims he's massacred.

He's got a lot of visitors.

The young Russian comes, the one who first brought him to this rooming house. Someone else comes, an older man, with a beard, and someone else, a young woman in black.

And you can hear him then, across the corridor.

Snorting with a hard, cheerful guffaw.

And then late at night, when I lie awake, I feel such a strong desire to go out into the corridor with a knife and do something.... Even if it's just to cut a hole in his boots there.

Just like that. So he'll know that someone's after him. It wouldn't disturb his peace of mind....

I don't do it... simply because that would ruin all my plans and because both of us are guarded by that place by the phone – that place now controls us both.

He comes to the phone several times a day, and I already know:

The thing will take place by evening, at least no earlier than in the afternoon.

Although I don't think about it beforehand. It came precisely, automatically, as if someone had given me an assignment and had said: "You have to do it by such and such a time, in such and such a place."

And that's why I didn't worry about anything, as if someone had prepared everything for me in advance. All I'd have to do is accept it and carry it out. And it was only then that I remembered, once, at night– "I have nothing to do it with."

You understand, don't you? A knife is no good. A knife often barely leaves a scratch. The surest thing is – a gun. I'm a veteran. I'm strong and I can shoot. But I'm a stranger in this city, this cauldron. There's no one I can get a gun from. And besides, I've very little money, just enough to get by on for a few days. The money won't suffice, but even if it did, where could I buy the gun? In a weapons store? That's no good. With someone of my appearance – just look at me – with someone like me, they'd instantly realize that I'm buying the gun with my last few pennies, and that I want to do something with it. Assuming you can buy firearms in a store, without a license. But in a city like this, a cauldron, the police certainly never stop hunting for various "elements" that are preparing to do something. And if the police hunt for them anywhere, then what better place than a weapons store? Suppose they apprehend me there. They won't find anything on me, but there'll be a great commotion. As far as the police here are concerned, my papers aren't quite in order.

They could come and inquire about me at the rooming house.

He could find out and vanish.

I could ruin the whole thing.

I'm such a bungler!

I've got to hit on a solution and do something, but it's already hard for me to think. You understand? I mulled quite a bit before I started preparing the thing. Now I'm like a drunk doing everything



in his power to keep people from realizing he's drunk. A man like him feels that with every move he makes, everyone around him will catch on, catch on.

What would you do in my place?

Just imagine – you're sober...

You'd certainly ask someone for help. But you must realize: I have no family in the city, and no friends either.

There are several people here from my home town, but I never see them. I don't even know where they live.

There's a man here from my home town, Beryl Hum – that's what he was called back home, though his real name was Boris Blum. That's what he was called, Beryl Hum, because he was always buzzing around the Zionists and writing for their Russian newspapers. He's a capable man, he knows several languages, he always hits it off with perfect strangers, even Christians.

He's already ingratiated himself with the editors of a few German gazettes, and now he's writing for them. He runs around with a briefcase under his arm.

There's someone else here from my home town – Zorah Pinsky and his daughter. I've already told you about her. She was the most beautiful girl in town, and you can imagine what happened to her in the pogrom.... That's what people said, although no one ever heard it from the Pinskys.

People said that among the Pinskys every swelling goes down; the Pinskys wipe their lips. I was told they'd come out unscathed. They've got their wits about them, even in times of pogroms....

The Pinskys are here now – I knew it even before I left Palestine. But I don't want to ask for their help. I don't even want them to know I'm here. Do you understand? It's more important to me than anything else. It's my secret.

I go to the big park every day. I sit on a bench. I think about finding a solution. And while I sit there and think, I'm glad that the Pinskys don't know anything about it. They'll find out later, as soon as I've done the thing. They'll learn about it at dusk, from evening prayers. It will be cloudy out. It will be raining. Or else the sky may be clear, the sun may be setting. No matter: every future moment of my life seems strange, every moment that will come later, after I do the thing. All people, whether strangers or from my native town, seem indifferently near and indifferently far. They're all scrambled in my mind with the vesper sounds of a distant church, reaching me in the big park after I've sat on a bench all alone, through a long, long day, thinking that I'm going to do the thing.

And at such times, what do I care about this whole foreign cauldron of yours with its hubbub and with all the people scurrying around in it and filling it up? What do I care about them even if she is here – Pinsky's daughter – one of the people for whom I'm going to do the thing?

All I care about is the days when I sit on and on in the city park.

I can't tell you how long it went on. Perhaps a whole week and more; perhaps just three or four days. I no longer count the weeks. Or the days. I've stopped.

But once, when I was sitting near a lively avenue in the park, who should come passing by but Beryl Hum, or rather, Boris Blum, which is his real name. He strode quickly with his briefcase under his arm, with the sweaty little forelock of a man who has to scurry all over the city cauldron every day. He turned to me with his darkly tanned face and with the white handkerchief in his lapel pocket, ready to wipe his wet forehead. He spotted me with his bewildered eyes, greeted me, promptly settled at my side, and, astonished, began asking: "How long have you been in Berlin?"

"Not very long," I said, "not very long."

"Why, I heard you were in Palestine."

"I came here from Palestine."

"You have a job here?"

"No," I said, "I don't have a job here."

I can't recall everything we talked about. I noticed him scrutinizing me in a bewildered way. He was staring at my clothes and my overall appearance.

I didn't like it, and that may have been the very reason why I told him everything I've told you so far, but much more briefly. He remembered me very clearly from back home. He knew my grandfather and he could believe every word I said.

I told him that now the whole thing depended solely on him. And so our meeting should not remain a chance encounter, because the thing I'm going to do is not just my thing. Precisely because I've got no one else to help me, he himself will have to obtain everything for me, everything I need for the thing. And besides, he's always involved in Jewish groups here. He associates with them, and they associate with him. As a result, he has more responsibilities than a speculator or a simple man in the street. Who should I turn to if not him?

I saw that even though he was very busy and very bewildered, he was nevertheless listening to everything I had to say, and he wasn't hearing me coldly – there was sympathy in his large, bewildered eyes.

"That's incredible!" he said. "Simply... why, in Palestine, if an Arab kills a Jew, then a couple of hours later, you'll find a dead Arab. And here, among so many Jews, all these pogromists are running around scot-free, and there's not a single Jew around to get rid of even one pogromist. A strange people! What a strange people!"

And he started gazing at me again in bewilderment. He looked at my face, at my overall appearance, even at my shoes and my hat.

"It's simply incredible!" he said. "Simply incredible! A knife certainly won't be of any use for a thing like that. A Jewish student once used a knife on a Jew-baiter, and all he did was scratch him. You really have to have a gun.... Too bad.... You fought in the war.... You know how to shoot.... Wait a moment.... Wait a moment...."

And he rested his chin on his hand and he started thinking. "Fine!" He suddenly stood up from the bench and shook my hand. "I'll take care of it. I'll get it for you. But wait a moment – when? Tomorrow. Give me your address.... Tomorrow morning you'll get a note from me.... OK? No, it would be better if we met someplace. Where? Right here in the park would be best, right here on this bench. Tomorrow afternoon, at the very same time, 3 P.M."

He took off with his briefcase under his arm. I saw him hurrying for a while and then looking back at me. He hurried again for a while, and then again he looked back at me. That's the way it was....

The next afternoon, at the stroke of three, to the very minute, I was already sitting on the very same bench in the park. I kept waiting and waiting for him. I just sat there, waiting. I was sure he wouldn't come. But I still kept waiting there.

Suddenly, around five o'clock, he showed up on the promenade. He didn't come over to my bench.

"C'mon," he beckoned to me with his eyes, in passing. "Follow me."

And off we went. He first, and I a few yards behind him, as if we didn't know one another. He boarded a trolley, and so did I, still as if I didn't know him.

He sat in one corner of the trolley, and I in the other. We thus rode on, for a long, long time, and perhaps it only seemed long because I was so impatient.

I thought to myself: "Where is he taking me?" We were already downtown, the streets were crowded.

We kept going – the streets were still crowded.

We got out, he first, I behind him. Again an unfamiliar street, a narrow one, and then another street. We stole into a courtyard, crept up a stairway. We entered through a door – a small, dark, dusty corridor.

I instantly realized: It wasn't his home. It looked like some kind of commercial office where you don't work past 3 P.M., and then you lock up and leave the space empty.

In the second or third little room after the corridor, there were about five men sitting around a table; and by the way they were sitting there, I could tell they had gathered specifically because of the thing I was going to do. I understood that they were important figures in the community, and that Beryl Hum had summoned them because he didn't wish to take full responsibility by himself. The men were no longer young. One of them had gray hair, a second one was tall and chubby and he was completely bald. His sharp, bulging eyes gaped severely, his chin jutted out, and he looked like a man who is always puffing his cheeks. Imagine: I was confused enough, but it suddenly hit me that he is always fighting with his wife – I mean the man with the bald head – I really don't know why, but it simply struck me that way, and he kept gaping at me incessantly.

And nobody said anything to me. For a while, we sat around the table wordlessly. I waited. They'd start talking to me any moment now.

But instead of talking to me, they kept summoning one another into the next room, to exchange secrets. From the very start, they kept whispering there in pairs, then in threes or fours, and all of them with Beryl Hum. They kept returning and then summoning one another to talk in private....

I noticed: The group was slowly shrinking, the men were exiting one by one.

I heard; They were stepping into the corridor one by one and hurrying down the stairs.

But why was Beryl Hum one of the first to vanish? I simply couldn't understand....

And when all but one of them had gone, only the tall, chubby man was left, the one with the bald head and the severe, bulging eyes.

I noticed: He kept shifting closer and closer to me, his sharp eyes gaped right into my face, and so severely that I could feel his bulging gape in my eyes, in my heart. But he kept shifting closer and closer to me. And when his chest was already grazing mine, he abruptly said: "Listen!" he said to me. "I am a doctor... a psychiatrist...."

He gaped even more severely into my eyes and he said more boldly: "I am a doctor... a psychiatrist...."

What could I answer him? I shifted away, and my heart started pounding even though he was still talking to me.

Then something pushed me toward him, and not so much me as my hand... this very hand.... Do you see my hand? My arm is muscular.... It was in the war.... And it wasn't till later, when I was down in the street again, that I felt it hadn't helped me at all – I mean slapping his face so vehemently.... Because if they think I'm out of my mind, then the fact that I slapped him will just convince them all the more.... And besides, my sorrow won't be any the less for it.

Beryl Hum had really made a mess of things. A few big, pot-bellied Jews got together – for what? For curiosity's sake? To size me up? One of them was Beryl Hum, who only yesterday had said: "Incredible! It's really incredible! In Palestine, when an Arab kills a Jew, they promptly kill an Arab, even if he's a perfect stranger!"

Then why am I out of my mind if I want to kill a pogromist who's guilty of so much bloodshed?

Walking all alone, I immediately began sorting out the words that the tall, bald man had spoken when he had shifted so close to me. He had said something about a sanitarium where I could "rest" for a few weeks.... About prosperous people from my town who were here now and who'd expressed their willingness to pay for my sojourn in the sanitarium....

But just who are those prosperous people from my town if not Zorah Pinsky and his family? Does this mean that Beryl Hum had discussed the matter with them too, that they too regard me as being that way? And suddenly I had a fit of depression, as never before in all my life.

I was pained by everything around me, everything my eyes caught along the way – the street, the cars, the noise. And most of all, I was pained by the time of day... the evening hour, 7 P.M. At this time of day, he stands there, in the corridor, by the phone, every day.... All night long, I'd paced up and down my room. I was certain that today, finally, at this time, by the phone, I would make an end of it... What was there left to do?

And I felt all the more strongly about doing the thing, so people would read about it in the evening papers. Let them all read about it, all of them, the five important men, Beryl Hum, and the Pinskys – let her read about it.... She was one of the people for whom I'd be doing the thing....

I began thinking: "Isn't there a Jewish group around here, a group that would help me." I thought to myself: "Is there anybody at all – possibly a writer?" Writers, I thought, were the conscience of the nation. They are its nerves. They present their nation to the world. People read a writer's works because they want to learn how his nation lived in his time.

And so I've come to you. I've told you everything. You must know – tomorrow, or the day after, he may suddenly get up and vanish from the rooming house. And now that I've told you everything, you are as responsible as I am, and even more than I am because you're a writer.... I've been sitting with you here, in this dark room, and for a long time I've been wanting to ask you: "Please switch on the light. I want to see your face."

\* \* \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Der Nister *In Vayn-keler*,  
translated as "In the Wine Cellar"  
in Joachim Neugroschel's collection  
*Great Works of Jewish Fantasy*  
(Macmillan Publishing Co, 1976)**

## In The Wine Cellar

And whenever the carrier who carries our earth-and-world upon his back grows weary of carrying, he hands it over to someone else, a friend of his with nothing to do, and the carrier goes off drinking...

One evening, when it was dark and eerie, he came to a large and respectable town. There, just off a bustling street, lay a deserted alley. And there, in a brick building you can find a storage cellar. You can enter the cellar by going down a few narrow steps. People gather there in several old rooms with low ceilings, and the walls of these rooms are covered with enamel, a shiny black, and on these walls, on the blackness, there are old pictures painted red. Inside these rooms you'll find old tables, leftovers from the past, plain wood, and scoured white, and next to the tables old benches, likewise plain, and long, so that several people can sit on them, and the ceilings are low, and from the walls the old portraits of old-time drunkards, great men and visitors, are gazing down.

When the world-carrier arrived in the evening, the little rooms were already filled, couples were sitting at every table, but in one room there were only men to be found, and here he found a place at a table, sat himself down, and asked the waiter to serve him wine. So he served him, and the clientele was already drunk, the faces were red from wine and drinking, and their eyes couldn't see straight, they were blurred and bewildered. And every so often one drinker or another would jump up from his seat to clink glasses with the man across from him, or simply, in his drunkenness, let out a yell.

At one table, there was a bunch of young men, young scholars who hadn't left their school benches yet, and among them rich children, and people who hang around the rich: Cheap dreamers and chintzy drinkers, who think they can make the world over and talk away its present condition. And they yell and they rage as they drink, and they shout and carry on, no one listening to anyone else, and one of them, the hottest head, sticks out from the crowd and carries on more than anyone else, and hollers and shrieks at the world:

"The world is up to its ears in debts, and even its hair is not its own."

"Send it to prison – it's bankrupt!" others shouted, banging their fists on the table.

"Pawn it," one of them threw in, "sell it to the owner of The Blind Man." (That was the name of the tavern!)

"Put a hole in it, stick in some powder, blow it up!" someone else hollered.

"Hey cousin!" a souser turned to the world-carrier, who, at his table, was sitting aloof. "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"I'm the carrier of the world!" was the answer.

"Who?!" The souser didn't quite get it, and didn't quite believe what he got.

"The carrier of the world!"

"Hahahaha!" He burst out laughing and, turning to his boon companions, he cried:

"Gang, get a load of who's sitting here with us! The carrier of the world!"

And the gang dashed over to the world-carrier, surrounding his table in drunken mockery, they thought he was crazy and they advised him to carry the world gingerly, and warned him not to drop it, or else it might break, God forbid!...

"Okay!" the carrier agreed.

"What a waste of effort, no one's gonna pay him for his trouble," said one of them.

"There are certainly better lines of work around," said another.

And the drinkers eventually gave up and left him there to sit and be crazy, they went back to their places and their drinking, on and on, into the night, until they had all gone to sleep where they were, some with their heads and arms on the table, some on a neighbor's shoulder, and some just sitting up straight. They fell asleep, and no one awoke them, because no one ever throws you out of The Blind Man, it's open day and night, and people can carry on as long as they like. At midnight, the rooms are

actually cleared out, but whoever is staying simply stays, whoever is drinking drinks, and whoever isn't – can just sit.... So the carrier sat on, and there was no one left in his little room except for those who were fast asleep, and the other rooms were also empty, and the night waiters, idle at the table corners, were napping, and the bustle in town had faded out, and the alley outside The Blind Man was deserted, only the occasional feet of someone going home late and passing the low windows could be heard...

At this point, into the carrier's room walked the night-wanderer, unnoticed by anyone and passing the napping waiters. And there he halted at the threshold. He was wearing a sort of tigerskin, like a sleeveless jacket, and the tiger's tail came after him, lifeless and dangling. And he himself looked red and puffy and bloated from constant drinking, and was still in his cups, which he had drained somewhere else and not just one. He stood there at the threshold barely holding himself up, but he knew what he was after and his face showed someone here was of interest to him. The moment he saw the world-carrier sitting at his table, he went over to him as though they were old friends, came to his table, and sat down opposite him, shaking his hand.

"How are things?" he asked the world-carrier.

"Fine, going uphill."

"And what are you so happy about? The fact that you're carrying these drunkards without pay?"

And the wanderer pointed to the nightbirds sleeping all around them.

"No," the carrier answered him, "what about you?"

"Bad!"

"How?"

"The pious are dead and gone, and the people still left are being grabbed up by, how do you say, the devil."

"And who are you left with?"

"I live with a distant relative?"

"Who is he?"

"He's small and slight, skinny and bony, and his face is yellow and wrinkled, and there's earth in the wrinkles. His eyes are messy, the whites have flooded the blacks, the sockets are filled with a gray liquid, and if he ever gets dreamy-eyed he looks other-worldly. He has nothing to do in this world, whatever he's had he's spent, whatever energy he had he devoted to wine and women, and that's how he is, and every evening he's afflicted by hallucinations..."

"Whenever he comes home at night to his bachelor's quarters, he closes the door behind him, switches off the light, and stays all alone in his room, and soon the opposite wall starts to move, a pale shadow appears to him, at first feeble and faint, but then a man emerges before him – tall and neat, his hair smooth and carefully parted, his manners impeccable, and with a monocle in his eye. He appears to my relative, sits down at the table, opposite him, crosses his legs, remains informal and relaxed, and my relative has gotten used to him, he's never frightened by him or his unbidden arrival, he just waves..."

"Recently though, he visited my relative with his visit. He sat down, and kept silent for a spell, and my relative noticed he was holding a peculiar book: black covers and black pages, with a bizarre format.

" 'What's that?' he asked him.

" 'I brought it for you, I wanted to show you.'

" 'What is it?'

" 'What they wrote about us.'

" 'Who about whom?'

" 'A few millenia from now about our millenium.'

"And the man handed him the book, and my relative took it and peered inside. And the book wasn't anything like our books, it wasn't printed with black ink on white paper, but the other way around – white on black. And my relative couldn't read the writing and he couldn't make out the book at all. So he gave it back for the man to read to him. And the man read: It was all one to him – a writing from thousands of years ago, a writing from thousands of years from now, and he said that the book came from a black human race that took over the present world, without a single trace remaining of the whites, and only the history of the whites somehow or other flickers about in their memories and sometime or other someone remembers them.

"And the book says: 'After great battles and wars between the whites, when a great despair came over them because they saw that they would never achieve the peace they had been longing for, and that they would never become any better than they were, and that they had already given away anything good they had had, and that their time was drawing to a close, and that their blood and their mission were coming to an end, and that others, stronger ones, were to inherit them, and that these others might not be any better – then they brought their best and most carefully chosen minds together for a conference, and then, for the survivors, for their big and little nations, they passed a resolution: THE END! Let it be, there was no way of doing better, and there was no one left to bother about, let everyone end his life however he wished, it was senseless to worry about another group or another individual.'

"And the historian adds, and goes on to say:

" 'And it became a normal and regular occurrence, the magazines wrote it up, and you could read about it in the daily newspapers: Sometimes here and sometimes there, one after another, those sages who had passed the resolution were being found, every morning, in their homes, in their bathrooms, in their tubs, undressed and sitting in the water, quite dead, with the water full of blood. They had opened their arteries, thereby settling their accounts with the world...'

"The man finished reading to my relative, closed the book, and exchanged glances with him.

" 'What about it?' my relative asked him. 'Are we supposed to follow their example?'

" 'Uhhh...' the man stammered, 'I mean, it's time... there's no hope for our world...'

And the night-wanderer added:

"My relative and his man are already won over, and I've joined them myself."

"So what do you want?" the world-carrier asked the night-wanderer.

"We don't think you're any more foolish than we are, and so I've come to propose the same thing to you."

"For preventing cruelty to animals?"

"Call it whatever you like, it doesn't matter."

"No!" answered the world-carrier.

"And what about your joy, and your 'things are going uphill'?"

The carrier didn't answer. He merely clutched his winecup in his hands and turned his wistful face toward his hands, and The Blind Man was filled with a great nocturnal silence, and the young men sleeping at the carrier's table were sleeping now in truth, and the waiters as well, the ones who had stayed for the night, were drowsing and dozing, and sitting down on the corners of tables, for just a while, they remained seated, and the night-wanderer sat facing the carrier, sat there and waited for him...

"Ha! –" the carrier awoke from his quiet mulling, and more to himself than to his opposite he exclaimed:

"My joy? Yes... Not long ago, from the farthest corners of the universe, at night, I heard something like a quiet shot. Was it a world going under, was it a world encountering, colliding with, another world, I couldn't see...However, I did see a window on earth, in a little house, respond to that shot



with a light shiver. And a man woke up there and got out of bed, and washed his hands and looked at God's universe, and said: 'Something has happened out in the world, we've got to pray, and we've got to think.'

"And he stood there and said:

" 'What's happened up there? I can't tell whether a heavenly body has exploded or a new sphere has been born, it's not clear; but whatever it is, it's happened, and it's linked with eternal life and divine death, and perhaps it doesn't have any mouth, and someone has to be its mouthpiece, and I've been found worthy, and I heard it in my sleep, and I am already standing before God, outside his mansion and window, and the waking world-carrier is occupied, bearing his burden and labor, and who shall speak for what has happened?'

"And I was the carrier at the time, on the world's beaten path, and I heard the singing of rare spheres, and I was carrying my weighty burden, my holy and heavy load, when I caught the words of that man, and I bent my shoulders more and took the yoke more deeply upon myself, my yoke and my labor, my love and my joy...

"We've heard the like from you before," the night-wanderer broke in, "have you nothing new, world-carrier?"

"Doesn't the old mean anything to you?" the carrier asked angrily.

"No, I'm sick of it... and your man is a fool and he spouts foolish things."

"And what would you have said?"

"I would have spit and gone to bed..."

And both remained silent for a while. The carrier again dropped his eyes to his cup, and the night-wanderer looked at him as though pitying his foolish innocence. At this point, the night watchman came over the threshold, and he also entered unnoticed, from the quiet street into The Blind Man, all bundled up in fur, roly-poly in his clothes, with a watchman's whistle dangling on his chest, in case anything were ever to happen, were ever to stir up the street – to whistle and inform the other watchmen. And in he came, a man of few words, an old friend of the carrier and the wanderer. He sat down at their table and filled out a place with his bundled-up-infurness – and the wanderer and the carrier were happy to see him, and the two of them turned their eyes and their attention to him.

"What do you say, watchman?" the wanderer turned to him in a joking mood.

"Say, say," replied the watchman, "say what you like, people hear you a lot, they sleep as a matter of course."

And the watchman fell silent, and earnest and watchful in his silence, and the wanderer turned away from him, and addressed the carrier:

"Talk to us, carrier, it's still too early to go home, the night is still enormous, and you've had experiences, the carrier mulled for a moment, and remembered something, and said: 'Listen, wanderer, and understand.' "

And the carrier began to talk.

Just the other night, he said, he had run into Aquarius, the water-bearer, with his pole and his pails across his shoulders, and the pole stretched across the breadth of his back, and the pails were bobbing about, and idly water-bearing he came walking toward him.

"And so I peered into the pails, and I saw they were parched and thirsty. So I looked at him and asked what was going on, it appear as though the pails had run dry, and how long hadn't they seen a well? Whereupon he replied: 'Virgo the Virgin is getting married, and I want to pass her by with empty buckets... I was the one who got her to heaven, I got her a place among the constellations, and she's marrying someone else.'

" 'What do you mean?' "

## Aquarius' Tale

Her father was a fallen angel, he lived with an earthwoman, they had a child, and he coveted and was satiated, and thought of the heavens and earth as his own. But then, upon such angels, the punishment fell, and heaven had to close to them, and they were condemned not to return – they were given a tiny moment of time, and whoever wanted to use it could. Many of the angels, however, were busy with their earthliness and their wives, and thus they missed their moment, and wailing, and akin to men, they were left behind, and only a few of them perceived, and bethought themselves of the time, and up and back, in that moment, they went. Among these few was the virgin's father, and he didn't want to go back up alone, he wanted to take his wife and the fruit of her womb, so quickly and first he handed up his child, and I happened to be standing in the sky, watching him doing the handing, and I grabbed from his hands and took it over, and he wanted to boost up his wife, and then himself, but that very moment the heavens closed up, and the angel with his wife in his hands in the air found himself standing before a sky that was shut and bolted up.

And now the child was in my hands, and at first I didn't know what to do, but gradually it got used to me, and I was its father and mother. And I brought it up, and I got to like it, and it was always around me when I worked, and when I drew water from the well and showered the world with rain and plenty, and I always kept it at my side, and I never left it as a waif.

And when she was growing up and the other constellations saw her with me, they watched her and praised her to the skies, and some were even envious of her, and then of me for having her so close all the time.

Now in those days the heavenly spheres and constellations were still unsettled, and every now and then a star would slide away and would fall from the zodiac and be gone, it really happened every so often, and a constellation would stray from its path and wander off, perhaps into some gulf, and in the zodiac a tenant was gone, a place stood vacant, so the other signs got together and resolved to give that spot to the child I had raised and – fine, there was nothing to be ashamed of, she shone no less than the others, and she was lovelier than the others, and the child took the place, and she became an equal among equals.

And I grew so fond of the child, and I felt closer to the child than anyone else, and she never did a thing without me, and she came to me for the least little thing, because, as I've said, she barely knew her parents, and I had taken the place of her parents.

And I would teach her how to look down, and how to hold herself in the zodiac and not to get dizzy, and sometimes she would ask me, the waterman, to show her what to douse, and I never said no, I gave her the bucket, the child already knew the earth, and she knew the summer and winter, and what to do in summer and winter, and often, as she held the bucket, she would lose herself in daydreams, and douse too little or douse too much, like a child, and I would smile and forgive her for what she had "done to me."

And the child kept growing, and I grew to love her, and she took on forms as a certain kind of those children do, and she began attracting me, and frequently and secretly I would watch from the side, and she didn't know, and she didn't guard against me, but I did guard against others, and guarded her against anyone else: How did they act toward her, how did they look at her, who glanced at her, and to whom did she pay the most attention...

I didn't notice anything except her loyalty and devotion to me, and I was glad and I was cheerful, and deep down I looked forward to the time when she would grow some more, and I would grow close to her, and I would explain to her what was impossible then, and in the meantime I guarded her, and allowed no one else to look at her. And the years wore on, and I kept looking after her, and she kept looking down at the earth, and she didn't really like the earth, and often she would call to me and show me in back and below.

"Uncle Aquarius, what doesn't grow of yours?"

"What doesn't?"

"Something you water and keep watering: Those grasses and those trees of yours."

"But the trees are tall."

"You call that tall? How come they never reach the sky?" "That's as high as they're fated to grow."

And she would turn away from the earth, and walk away from me, hurt and disappointed, and she would go to the other constellations, to pursue another interest with others and not with me... And they would tell her things and spend a lot of time with her, and all of them told her what they knew and brought out the loveliest things they had, and told about bygones and made up never-was's, and she heard and hung on their every word, and she believed anything, especially the unbelievable, and they thought up things that she had never even seen any traces of on the earth or found any signs of among the constellations; she fell in love with the tales of higher-stars, and they provided her with such, and they never spared their fantasies.

Now she became a stranger and hardly ever came to me, and no longer took any part in my earth work, and she would sit in seclusion, and it was hard to get her out of her seclusion. And in the evenings, after sundown, she would sit down on her star bed and for hours on end before falling asleep she would stare at the sky and the faraway stars...

At this point I felt it was the right time, and I wanted to let her know how I felt, because I could see why the constellations were so occupied with her and why the constellations were so attentive to her, because she brought them all such joy, and everyone was so happy to be around her; so, one evening, when they had all gone to bed, I whispered in her ear – that when all were asleep and all in the zodiac was still, she was to come out to me, I would wait for her, I wanted to talk to her at the well...

She didn't understand, she looked at me, and stared at me in amazement, unwontedly, and yet, unsuspectingly, she promised to come and she kept her promise... I waited at the well, and a moon went up, and summer night drew over the earth, and from there a lot of good things and earthliness came wafting up, and secret fragrances from secret woods and rivers; and then she came and asked me something:

"What is it, Uncle Aquarius? What did you have to say to me?"

"Nothing," I could feel her estranged question, I answered it and looked at her in the moonlight. "Sit down."

And she sat next to me on the edge of the well, and I reached out my arm and wanted to put it around her –

"You're all wet, and you smell of water, Uncle."

And she pushed away my arm and gave it back to me. And I couldn't say a thing to her, but then I did say that I couldn't sleep nowadays, and that I was very fond of her, and that she ought to spend some of the evening with me... and she spent it as best she could, and she sat with me until she felt sleepy, and I told her to go to bed, and I looked after her long after she left, and thus, remaining with nothing at all, I mulled that evening for a long, long time.

And the constellations kept telling her stories, and they looked at her from all around, and she didn't notice, and in her unawareness of herself was more than happy; and she herself was happy, and her beauty rejoiced in her, and her beauty was prepared for others, and not for me and not for any of the constellations: her prince was a higher constellation.

Once, looking up at the sky, one evening when I couldn't sleep, I caught sight of a woman in veils. With a thin web across her face, and fully wrapped and fully covered, she was standing and staring at other constellations. I could see that her hidden gaze was fixed on Virgo, guarding her sleep, watching her bed, and coming into her dreams... I couldn't understand it because what I saw was so out of the ordinary, it seldom occurs even in the heavens, so I stared and I never turned my gaze, until she went away from where she was... The next morning, she whom I yearned for came to my well, and because I was lost in thought when she arrived, she called to me and called my name:

"Uncle, hey, Uncle!"

"What's up?" I started and caught sight of her.

"I had a dream last night."

"What kind of dream?"

"My mother came to me, all dressed up and in veils, and I couldn't see her face, but she stood over my bed, and talked to me, and said to me:

'Daughter, your father wanted to raise me to the skies, and that was why he had to stay on earth, and you were privileged, you were set among the constellations, now see if you can do something and raise us too.'

"And what should I do, Mother?" I asked.

"Love the lofty," she answered. – "What did she mean, Uncle?"

"I don't know," I replied, and I became earnest.

And she walked away and she went to ask the other constellations, and they explained it all to her, the way they felt they ought to explain it, and they all set her thinking that her time was coming, that her time for love was coming soon, and all eyes were rejoicing with her, everyone loved the way she looked, and her mother had come to tell her it was time, and that she had said she ought to seek her love among the lofty.

And she thought to herself, and looked up at the welkin, and looked around among the stars, to find some explanation for the question of her youth...

And after a certain time had gone by, I saw him one night, next to that star, her father standing, a man like any man, but with the face of a former angel, and he had, no wings, as angels have, but instead of wings he had a bag—he looked like an earthly penitent, and he was standing there, and staring at his daughter, and in the morning she came to me again and with a new dream:

"Uncle, my father appeared to me!"

"And what did he say?"

"Love is aloft and love is below; there's no need to fall into great love.' – I don't understand, Uncle!"

"Neither do I."

Then she went to ask others again, and they told her what they had to tell. And she was starting to understand, and to reach the very beginning of that awareness... She started casting glances about and in that time and in great youth she saw herself, and she had already heard of such things, and had understood more than she had heard; and I found that time was the very last, and if not now then all was lost. In the first case, whatever came her way, she would go and leave me, and let herself be led away at the first call of a stranger, anyone... And I saw that the stars knew what I meant, and that they were laughing at me below. And having despaired of attaining her love, they were bursting with envy, and wanted to destroy my chances too...

So I found a time, and once, when walking with brimming buckets, I caught sight of her and I asked her to halt with my buckets, and I stood before her, and standing there I revealed to her all the things that were in my heart. And so on, and so forth, and ever since she had come to the sky my gaze had always been turned to her, and ever since she'd been growing up I had never let her out of my care, and guarded her against all other eyes, and longed, and yearned for the time to come, and now my well was for her, and the welfare of the world was hanging on her given word. And if she became the mistress of my well, it would pour all its goodness upon the earth and turn the world back into a Garden of Eden, and she was the world to my well, and my well loved her more than the world...

She stood there and heard what I had to say, and she seemed to be lost in her thoughts, and then, when I took her pensiveness for approval, for fondness, and I remembered the things I had done for her, I wanted to put the buckets down, and set them aside and go up to her, I knocked the buckets over, and the water poured out, and she burst out laughing and sobered me up from my haste:

"Ha ha ha, Uncle, you've spilled your water... Hahaha, Uncle, what did you say?"

I couldn't go up to her and I couldn't move, and she went away and vanished from sight, and from then on we didn't meet, and each of us avoided the other, and our paths would never cross, and we never spoke of it again...

And the constellations found out, they managed to guess, she never told them anything, they shouldn't be told, and whenever I happened to be walking past, they would point their fingers at me, and smile, and their eyes would wink at one another...

And she remained free for a while, and didn't belong to anyone, until one day she laid eyes upon him, saw him and rose in love with him, saw him, and with all her heart and soul, the way a young girl, and a girl like her, can fall in love...

He was the star, the one near whom her father and mother appeared to her, and it happened at nightfall again, when after a day of work, I was wandering around our constellation garden, around the fence, and I kept looking inside, but I wouldn't go inside, because she was inside, and spending her time by herself, rather than going to bed as usual. And the garden was filled with a peculiar evening-tree-hush, and even more than in the trees the hush was resting on the white, sandy paths, and the garden was fragrant with constellations, and with earthly goodness that the earth had brought up from its depth. I saw that next to that star a child had appeared, an infant, a little messenger, and the child was holding a lantern, and the lantern was burning, and the child was holding it as though preparing to start on a journey. And the star became bigger than a star, and grew, and grew out in his roundness, and yet he was covered and darkened up, but on one of his sides, and right on the edge, a thin round blade of light was sharpened and honed, and it looked like the roundness of the sickle of a moon during the early days of its being. – The brightness illuminated the star, and a face in the star began to appear, and that very moment, I, on my side of the garden, and she, on her side of the garden, we noticed the face, and she lifted her hands up to her head, and brushed back her hair, and felt slightly embarrassed and shifted her eyes from looking there, and the star was looking at her, and he saw me too, and he felt a little embarrassed then, and the child with the tiny lantern separated from its place, and then down, and to us, and straight to the garden, and to her, in her embarrassment, it came. And the child was coming, and lighting the way, and every so often she stole a glance, and noticed the child and its coming. And she was nervous and couldn't stay put, and the child kept coming from aloft, and it came directly to her in the garden. And the child then called her aside, and hid somewhere in the trees, and she hesitated, and at first she walked unsteadily, and you could see her follow the child, and not so much the child as him who was standing above and peering below – the star. And then she came into the trees, and I don't know what she did with the child, there was something it told her, and there was something it gave her, but what it was I couldn't tell. Then, when the child rose back up in the air and started back with its tiny lantern, I saw her emerge from the trees, and swiftly and quickly abandon the garden, stealing through the gate and closing it behind her, and silently, as she closed the gate, she raised her head one last time, and had another upward look, a single look and then away, and then she raced back to her home and her bed...

And she became a different person, and I knew what had happened. And other constellations that didn't know could also tell, and she kept smoothing her hair with her hands and she would suddenly blush, as though embarrassed about herself, and from then on and often I would notice her coming to the well when I wasn't there, and bending over the well, and silently and hastily catching her image in the well and its depth... And in the garden too she became a frequent guest, and in that place among the trees, as though forgetting something, she would come and seek: She would conceal herself there with the picture of the star, with what the child had brought to her, and what she had concealed from everyone else, and I was the only one who knew, because I had peered after her and noticed it...

I was saddened, and I neglected my work, and my buckets would wait and wait for me, and I would forget them for a while. And huge droughts came upon the earth, and the trees and the grass were

pleading for drink, and the fields were parched, and forests were smoking, and rivers dried up, and the beds of creeks lay empty, and I didn't notice, and the constellations kept reminding me, and even then I would work so lazily, and I did my job so listlessly.

And she was always in good spirits, and a great joy shone from her eyes, and the constellations beamed with pride, and their spirits became as good as hers, and they didn't know the why and how, but they did know that her time was upon her...

And fairly soon, on another evening, the star's messenger-boy came bearing gifts: necklaces and adornments of pearls, earrings and rings for her fingers. And these were things that she couldn't conceal, and everyone saw the gifts she was wearing, and they all surrounded her and estimated the value of the jewels, and she didn't know what to do, what should she say, what should she answer, and they all began to interrogate, and to encircle her with questions, and she ran from the well and she ran to the garden, and then from the garden to the well, and back and forth, and her young legs carried her...

And I lost my head, and I envied the star, and I didn't speak a word to her, and she always evaded me. And she didn't want to show her joy before me, and I was unable to look at her joy, and so I kept to myself, and I also avoided the constellations. And then, on an evening, the sky-beggar came, and he came and called the constellations together, called them together and said to them:

"Prepare yourselves, you constellations, Virgo the Virgin will be taken from you!"

"What's happening?"

"She's ascending, she's being given to a great star. Prepare yourselves, you'll all be asked to the wedding."

The constellations began to prepare, and they've been preparing themselves ever since, and they surrounded the bride with love, and they all provided her with the loveliest things, and she remained quiet and gave herself over to their devotion, and they're teaching her, and advising her, how to behave, and conduct herself. And all their hands are busy at work, to prepare themselves and prepare the bride, and they're looking forward with great expectations, they're unable to part, and they're giving her the best they can, the best of all good things and whatever constellations possess... I'm the only one who can't go to the wedding, I'm the only one who can't lose his envy, and (this is only for you) I've secretly made up my mind to pass her by with empty buckets...

And the present state of the earth – it's all been caused by my neglect. My abundance is closed off, and that's why your world is as it is – and the earth has to drink – though it drink blood for water, and people have to eat, though they eat people for bread, and spirit enters the houses and eats the garbage and dry pieces, and human seers are struck with eye diseases, and certain world-providers get drunk in the taverns, and poets mock, and certain writers, when they hear the constellations blowing their noses, they think it's thunder and portentous events – ugh! – and now I've been told that worst of all, the night-wanderer is hanging around in taverns, and among people like him, among the senile and infirm, he's recruiting members for a society, for preventing cruelty to animals.

" 'And there you have the story, wanderer,' And that's what Aquarius said to me... That was quite a stone in my garden," said the night-wanderer.

"Yes, not bad," smiled the world-carrier.

"Well, and what about you and the wedding?"

"I've been invited, and I'll go."

"And what about the empty buckets?"

"I'm not afraid."

"What's going to happen?"

"The sky-beggar showed us a way. This is what happened:"

Recently, as I was walking along with the weight of the world on my shoulders, with my head in the clouds and lost in thought, and providing purposes for my things, and my heart was heavy and filled

with rue, thinking about the times, and I felt so desolate, and a mountain of questions hovered above me, and I recalled the questions that people keep asking me, and all the mockers and laughers came to my eyes, and there was one question I couldn't get rid of: It's all in your hands... One wrong move, and the ball will fall, and – that will be all, and the past will be past, and the future won't come, and so why bother holding it, where will you bring it, if the road is marked out, and the path is revealed, and there's no way of going out of your way... ?

"There's a way!" something suddenly said in my ears. I turned my head to see where the sudden voice was coming from, and I saw the sky-beggar, in a cheerful mood, with a merry face, and he quickly spoke to me:

"World-carrier, you're invited to heaven, to attend the marriage of Star and Virgo, and don't wait to be coaxed." "How can I go," I said to him, "and how can I think of marriages now that Aquarius has done away with our abundance? Aquarius has made his well run dry, and he's abandoned his job, his buckets are full of holes, and soon we won't have anything left."

To which the beggar replied: "Don't be afraid, something is going to happen at the ceremony... The Seven Wayfarers and the Seven Beggars will attend... And that will be a propitious time, and everyone in need will be asked to come, and in regard to you and your burden, you'll both no longer depend on your star; and what you've yearned for all these years, you'll get; you're going to be raised and you'll stand higher than the constellations..."

"What do you mean?"

"It's possible, just be sure to come... And here's the road, it's all uphill, and if you'll follow it you'll avoid the waterman with his buckets..."

And so I started out on the road, and made my way upward, and soon I heard the winds of the spheres, whirling remote and strange, the likes of which I had never heard, and I heard the singing of alien suns, and their wheels of fire were dazzling, and I also sang out, and on the way I kept meeting people like myself, and all of them were invited too, walking along in sublimity, and in front the Elephant, shaking his heavy head, and with mountains of wealth, and with wedding gifts, to make the bride and groom rejoice...

"And that," said the world-carrier, "is my joy and my uphill," and now, wanderer, I'm leaving..."

And the world-carrier arose from sitting at the table, from sitting and from telling so long, and the night watchman in his furriness also got up, and nothing was written on his face, he had come that way, before the story, and even now, even after the telling, he still looked the same, and watchmanlike he straightened his fur, and the watchman's whistle was on his chest, and he turned around to the window there, and he saw it was true, it was dawning soon. He gave the wanderer a nasty glance, and the wanderer vanished from his sight, and the world-carrier left the room, and just before he left for good, he looked at the drunkards asleep at the table, and he left them in silence, and the watchman after him; and the day was already blossoming, and one by one, from the courtyards, with their brooms in their hands, the janitors started coming out, to sweep the yards and clean the streets, and the carrier said good morning to the watchman and took his leave, and the watchman went off, to his house, to his home, to spend the day resting for the night...

And that morning, when the day was broad and bright, when the sun was high in the heavens, and a huge bustle in the streets, and the streets had been cleaned again to be dirtied again by the day and the din; and the carrier and the world had gone far, with his heavy weight to carry uphill, and to strain with it – it was only then that the drinkers awoke, the ones who had spent the night, in the tavern, in The Blind Man, they awoke and rubbed their eyes, and they were nocturnally pale, and had pale smiles on their lips, and they left the room in The Blind Man and came out on the street, and first they went to an unclean place, they went there and stood there facing the wall, stood there and yielded their nightly drinking...

**Moyshe Kulback**  
***Meshiekh ben-Efrayim*, translated as**  
**"The Messiah of the House of Ephraim"**  
**in Neugroschel's**  
***Great Works of Jewish Fantasy***



## Opening

All those who have set their souls on the word YAHWE, the Lamed-vovniks, the thirty-six secret saints, go about at the edge of the world, alone and isolated.

In the darkness, they suddenly come to a halt, they sense each other from afar, but no one sees anyone else. They walk about at midnight, at the edge of the earth, tall Jews with long staffs, hunched over against the blueness of the sky.

And on the Day of Doom, they come with their disheveled beards, in their fur coats and boots, clutching their birch staffs. And they ask nothing. They come and sit at the foot of the Throne of Glory.

They put one sleeve in the other and warm themselves in the holiness of the Almighty.

And they smoke their pipes.

The Almighty sits on the Throne of Glory and smiles. He likes his simple saints.

## The Miller

Once there was a miller in the land of White Russia.

His wife died and his son was taken off into the army.

The mill was overgrown with mosses and weeds.

The roof crept down like a fur over the mill until it touched the ground.

The countryside was deserted.

Only magpies were flying around, just poor magpies.

The miller didn't know what to do.

He went into his stable and saw that of all his livestock only his cow was left.

He felt so lonely and miserable that he sat down on the threshold of his house and wept bitter tears.

His name was Benye.

## What Happens When a Man Lives Alone

I once read in an ancient volume that a man should be careful not to remain alone. At first he thinks it doesn't matter. But then his mind turns to dismal thoughts. His voice changes and he walks about in a daze.

If Benye had known, he might not have stayed all by himself in the mill, he might have moved to a nearby town or else married again.

Life in the country is too hard for an elderly person.

Every day, Benye would cook his bit of food alone, milk the cow alone, and then stroll around the mill with his hands behind his back, or else recite the psalms, as lonely people tend to do.

One day, he came to wash at the well, and in the water he saw that his lower lip was hanging down.

Never before had Benye's lower lip hung down.

He realized then and there that it came from living alone. He went back into the house, took down the mirror from the wall, and lo and behold, his lip was really hanging down. Furthermore, his eyebrows were growing denser, and all in all, he was hairy, shabby, and shaggy, like a polecat. Benye clutched his lip, and it was as dry as clay.

And even though the evening was warm, he climbed up on the oven, snuggled under the old clothes, and fell asleep.

## Benye Feeds the Cow

A forest of firs stood behind the mill.

It was the season of foggy days in White Russia, and the rains were drenching the entire countryside.

In the gray dawn, Benye took the cow to pasture.

They walked along the loamy paths, over the foul-smelling fields, and into the old forest.

Benye led the way with the rope in his hands and the cow at his heels.

They climbed through the thicket and among the trees, and the wet branches soaked them with water, but Benye was so lost in thought that he paid no heed.

Thus they went from one thicket to the next.

From time to time, the cow would nibble a few wet blades of grass by a root, and that was her refreshment.

The tree stumps were huddling and rotting in the ferns.

The moss covered everything, it touched the earth and the trees all over. And in the petrified stillness, the cold noises of the woods were mingling and fading out.

Benye led the cow along the road, through the rainy spaces.

They trudged along, worn and weary, their heads hanging down, loaded and heavy from not thinking.

Benye was used to having thoughts without the effort of thinking.

It was silent, his bare feet were red with cold and caked with mud. The cotton was spilling out of the dirty coat. Benye stopped, looked over his clothes and the clothes of the forest.

Benye, the fir trees have lovely garments!

## Levi the Moneylender

Levi the moneylender, a brother of Benye's, had moved from Zamkevitz to Vilna, the capital of Lithuania. He quickly acquired power by doing business with generals and wealthy men.

He had a daughter and she was so beautiful, the most beautiful girl in Vilna.

He hung a sign in front of his house: Here I live, Levi Patashnik.

Levi dealt in lumber and grain.

At night, in his study, he would sometimes have his servant open his business books.

His beautiful daughter would read the figures to him.

His grain was being freighted along all highways.

His lumber was floating down all rivers.

Gold was being sown in his garden.

Gold was being laid by his chickens.

Levi Patashnik smiled.

"That's enough for now," he told his daughter, "you can go to bed!"

And all night long in his study, he walked up and down his soft carpets, thinking:

"Gold is, evidently, gold! Gold is, evidently, gold!"

## The Three Guests

Benye was sitting out in front, looking at the road. It was a white evening in White Russia. Opening his eyes, he saw three men coming along the road.

He stood up and began walking toward the three men.

Three hairy Jews in furs, with bags over their shoulders, were trudging along from the forest.

Benye reached the travelers on the road and said hello to them, and the Jews returned his greeting, they stared at him and mumbled something in a hoarse tone but didn't say a word.

(There are people who are destined to keep silent.)

Benye led the guests to his house and opened the doors up wide.

The three Jews bowed as they entered, for they were large and tall.

Indoors, it was already night.

The guests slowly put down their bags and staffs. Their clothing smelled of pitch and the fragrance of the woods.

Benye stared at his guest curiously.

They sat down on the broad benches around the table, and their large bodies hulked in the darkness like the stumps of old trees.

Benye asked them: "Where do you come from?"

The eldest of the guests raised his brows, took out the clay pipe from his pocket, and said:

"White Russia."

Benye had nothing else to ask because his thoughts had grown into his flesh.

And in the gloomy darkness, the blue windows were shining, and the Jews spread their furs on the benches.

Benye kindled a pine splinter. The visitors turned around in the darkness, casting strange shadows on the walls. The cow in the stable sensed something, she left her warm stable and stuck her head through the window of the house. She was listening.

Benye quietly sat down at the table with his visitors, staring and making a great effort at framing a thought, but he was fully unable to do so.

All at once he turned to the guests:

"Friends, what should I do?"

The visitors looked at him stupidly, and a bit later the eldest of the three asked him:

"Do you have any food?"

"I do!"

"Don't do anything."

"Really? But what's the sense?"

"There's no sense."

And the eldest guest, who had answered him, now stretched out on the hard bench with his back to Benye and covered himself up in his fur from his feet to his head, just like the other two guests. They wanted to go to sleep.

Benye was standing over him.

He stood over him for a long time. Then he put his hand behind his back and quietly paced up and down the room, and the cow watched him from the window.

Suddenly a thought came into his mind and gave him a sharp jolt. He dashed over to the guest and started yanking his leg.

"What happens after this? Do I die?"

The visitor tried with all his strength to pull his foot back out of Benye's hand, but Benye wouldn't let go, he merely shouted even louder:

"What?! Do I die?!"

And he burst into tears:

"Die?"

The visitors sat up on their benches, and Benye wailed, grabbed at the walls, ran across the room, threw his clothes off breathlessly, and roared in pain.

At midnight, the guests got up, washed their hands, and took out their psalters.

All four Jews sat down upon the ground.

The clay floor was cold in the cool dawn. The cow was still standing at the same window and freezing. The air was icy.

The men recited the psalms in their hoarse voices with a gloomy enthusiasm.

They closed their eyes and gazed out of this world.

They didn't hear the voice that was squeaking, only the dark stillness that remained within and couldn't leave.

The prayer of a poor man who was hidden.

And he pours out his heart to God...

And in the night, the first flames were already darting out of the dawn.

Toward morning, Benye was somewhat purified, his long arms were dangling about his body like alien things, pointing into the psalter, bony and cold. He stared at the guests and slowly leaned over to the man sitting next to him.

"What kind of work do you do, sir?"

"I'm a water-carrier."

"And you?"

"I'm a musician."

"And you?"

"A chimneysweep."

Benye liked these fine trades.

Meanwhile, the guests had already gotten up from the ground and were preparing to get underway again.

Benye was stumbling around them, not knowing what to do next. Each guest silently kissed the mezuzah and went out into the red darkness.

A stork came flying past with its red legs tucked in, soaring from one meadow to the next. Its flapping wings nearly grazed the heads of the Jews.

The third guest, a grumbler, who had kept silent all night long, suddenly started talking a blue streak. He was furious at Benye, babbling that Benye would not resist. He touched the confused miller's sleeve and pointed at the scraggy bird in the sky:

"That bird is a bird." He peered straight into Benye's nose. "And you – are a jackass."

The third guest was a nasty man, he spit angrily, didn't look around, and wrathfully took off. Benye stood there dazed, not understanding a thing.

Now the eldest visitor came over to him and, saying farewell, he murmured:

"You will have temptations to resist, Benye."

And the three guests followed the road back to the woods.

## The Prayer

The prayer of a poor man who was hidden.

And he pours out his heart to God.

Why are we so tormented, Lord!

Wherever I stand I am too much present, and wherever I go I carry

The smell of darkness.

I envy the bird who is better off than we are,

And the clay which is better off than all.

What shall I do with my hand, which is useless,

And with my heart, which is useless?

## Knowledge

The miller spent the whole next day lying on the loamy hill that stood behind his home. He gradually understood the clay of his body, his face was buried in the sand, and his crooked fingers were clutching the roots.

He felt terrible.

He lay there with the hill and it was as though he had been poured into it; and if a blade of grass were to spring up anywhere, it would grow out through him, out of his back.

And it was as if the clay were breathing and shaping up in hands, feet, head, chest, and there were no difference in the world between Benye and the clay of the earth.

He spent whole weeks lying on the hill.

The cow wandered alone over the fields, hungry, and feeding on grass and indolence.

Benye had forgotten everything, he was nearly lifeless.

Sometimes, at dawn, a magpie would come flying out of the mists, it alighted on his back as on a hog, and he didn't care, for he was almost asleep and unable to tell reality from the dreams passing through his mind.

Nor did he know whether he was a human being or a stone lying on the road and overgrown with lichen.

One evening, he was sitting there, faint, at the edge of the hill.

His feet were hanging down and dangling against the clay, and he himself was gazing, not thinking, just sitting quietly, and gazing.

He didn't know why something inside him was urging him to see everything, but it did give him a great pleasure. Slowly a feeling of amazement passed through Benye, his eyes bulged and gaped, big and round. For a while, he forgot how to think.

The world stretched out before him, vast and cold, and God was in it. The world echoed like a blue cavern of ice, and he crawled around in it like a muddy bear.

He stood with his front paws on the cold clods, gazing and gazing. He was looking for Him, for God, who was hiding from him.

The sparkling ice in the cavern shone a bright blue.

And here...

Here he saw Him, God, but then God was gone again.

But he had seen God!

And a great joy poured through his body, a fine, bright joy. He smiled; a yoke had fallen from his heart.

Benye stood up, beaming with joy and goodness, and suddenly a shriek tore from his heart, a dull bellow, like the bellow of his cow. He stood with his arms akimbo, and the setting sun was gilding him red.

Benye the miller was transfigured.

Off to the west, under the sunset, there were flayed red oxen as at the Covenant of the Pieces, God's covenant with Abraham.

Now he understood the world in the very marrow of his bones, in the burning skin of his body. He smirked at the clothes he was wearing. Single strips of cloth were hanging on him, single strips of cloth.

Benye came down the hill. The old mill had become shaggier and older, and a sapling was growing from one wall.

He came to the door and was about to go in, but all at once he stopped. He could hear a voice full of tears and joy.

## Levi Patashnik

One gloomy evening, Levi Patashnik was standing at his open iron cabinet as though at an open Holy Ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept in the synagogue. The fading light of day was spread over the shadowy wallpaper, shimmering, and spotting bright areas on the dark floors. Inside the cabinet, a heap of hot coins, imperials, was glowing, bleeding, stabbing his heart. Breathlessly Levi thrust both hands into the coins.

He slowly sifted the gold in his hands as though letting a white sand pour through his fingers, and he listened keenly to the clatter, the true clatter of gold.

His pudgy hand was rosy from the waning daylight, it softly caressed the coins, grazed them tenderly, the way a boy touches a girl's hair.

A deep, secret crooning emerged from the cabinet. Gold!

Wellsprings of gold are throbbing in the earth, and the eyes of man sparkle golden.

High up, above the golden stars, God sits on His royal throne of gold.

Levi Patashnik gently closed the heavy door of the cabinet, clutched the upper molding so as not to fall, and his heavy head dropped upon his chest.

The huge evening settled hauntingly in the room.

Levi stood there with his hot head lowered, leaning against the cold iron of the cabinet. His knees were buckling with fatigue, his eyes were shut, and deep in his breast, a thick drop was oozing out, heavy and glowing. It fell down his inner darkness and scorched his bowels with a sharp pain.

At the door, the eldest guest was standing in the shadows.

## Simkhe Plakhte

Not far from the mill, just a few miles away, there was a Jew living in the forest. His name was Simkhe Plakhte.

Simkhe's work had been very hard. He thought to himself: It's hard enough living as it is, so I'll simply live in the woods.

He built himself a shack of branches and weeds and plastered it with clay inside and out.

Now Simkhe Plakhte was a cheerful man, he ate all sorts of vegetabes, drank water, and smoked an herb that he himself prepared.

Simkhe raised chickens and doves. The chickens because they lay eggs that are good to eat, and doves because they lay eggs that are not good to eat.

He never met anyone, and was cheerful just the same.

He was always smiling: smoking his pipe, drowsing with half-closed eyes, and smiling – who knows at whom. He would talk aloud though he was always alone.

In wintertime, he would sit in his hut and crack jokes to himself. In the summer, he would look for fresh meadows in the forest and dance all kinds of dances.

He was a great dancer!

In the springtime, he was completely intoxicated. Even though he was sixty years old, he would scramble up a tree with the strength of a boy.

He didn't act rational at all.

Simkhe liked to eat the blossoms and the buds in the trees, climb through the dense branches, and sing like a canary.

That was how he lived in the woods.

Yes, Simkhe looked like a Christian peasant, he wore a straw hat on his head and, on his feet, shoes of birch bark; but he did have a beard, an enormous Jewish beard, that was bright gray.

His beard was beautiful!

As a boy husband, Simkhe had been a water-carrier. Later on, in his old age, he became a Hassidic rabbi, as everyone knows, kept a pious table and lived grandly, very grandly. But living among people was too difficult for him, so he ran away and settled in the woods as a hermit.

And, when the wind blasted the treetops and broke the branches, what did Simkhe Plakhte do? He perched on an uprooted tree inside the thicket, his pipe in his mouth, listening and listening: The nests were tumbling from the trees.

The female birds soared maternally to the ground, but the fledglings were already lying there dead. A rare featherless wing trembled here and there.

Simkhe would perch in the thicket, listening and listening. His hair bristled and fluttered on his body. His teeth shone in the thicket, and his eyes burnt from the storm.

And when a long, blue crackle of lightning sprang through the woods and tore through the trees, like a hot whip, what did Simkhe Platkhe do?

He would stand up, stretch his arms to heaven, and try to grab the lightning in its course. His beard was tousled, and a vapor arose from his hairy chest.

Simkhe Platkhe was alone in the woods!

But when it grew still:

The wet responsive woods echoed the whooping of the cuckoos,  
The strawberries, like drops of blood, were splattered over the grass.

Then, oh then!

Simkhe Plakhte walked through the echoing woods, with his hands behind his back.

His head held high.

And he hummed and crooned.

And he clacked his tongue.

And he swung his feet.

Humming and crooning!

The man had no sense of modesty.

And that was his life in the woods.

It was a lovely day in summer.

Simkhe Platkhe walked out of the woods toward the town on the main road, and then along a side road.

On the way, he came to a low ground and saw a cow browsing on the grass. What was she doing here? He went farther and came upon a Jew lying in the mud, right in the mud, and the Jew had a big, swollen head and long arms down to his ankles, he was holding a psalter, and reciting, and rocking, and he was as gloomy as a cinder.

What was the matter?

Simkhe stopped and asked a question.

"Why sit here of all places?"

And the Jew snuffled, but then he replied:

"Where else should I sit?"

"Where else should you sit? In heaven, my friend!"

The Jew in the mud told him all the whys and wherefores: He was Benye the miller.

And Benye stood up, gazed at him with pleading eyes, and said:

"Help me, my friend!"

But Simkhe was already asking something else, he was asking Benye about the cow:

"Does she give milk?"

"Of course she gives milk."

"Could I taste a little of her milk?"

Benye replied that he didn't have a milk pail along.

Why did he need a milk pail? Who needs a milk pail?

And Simkhe Plakhte stepped over to the cow, went down on all fours beneath her, like a calf, and began to hungrily suck the milk from her udders.

He turned red and the sweat came gushing from him.

## The Ten Sefirot or Emanations of God

There are thousands of worlds in the mystery of the ten emanations.

A human soul wanders through the crystal of the worlds and echoes the tone of each emanation that it traverses.

And know, the thousands of worlds reside in the glow of every emanation alone and all the emanations together. That is the mystery of the ten that are one and the mystery of the one that is ten.

The Infinite, which comes in the raiment of the ten emanations, includes the numbers and it inspires with the holiness of eternity, and the holiness of eternity does not enter the level of measure and quality.

And know that just as we cannot distinguish between the numbers of the ten emanations by the inspiration of holiness, we like wise cannot know or distinguish the area of the emanations.

The saying "The mystery of the ten that are one and the mystery of the one that is ten" refers not only to life that moves in succession, but also to life that moves hand in hand, that is to say, the numbers of thought are like the numbers of substance. That is why we do not say like the ancients: Our world is the world of action, which lies on the lowest level of the effluence of holiness.

The "mystery of the ten that are one" requires that our world contain the Emanation of the Crown, which is the crown of the Revelation of Holiness.

There are people in our world who find themselves under the power of the Emanation of Beauty. Their gait is different, their voices are different!

I have seen people whose souls were radiant with the light from the Emanation of the Crown.

The soul bursts asunder, it wants to absorb the light of eternity, it wanders through the crystal of the worlds and echoes the tone of every emanation that it traverses.

And know that the soul of a child that was born today, is as old as the soul of a dying man, and if you ever come to a festivity for the birth of a child, and you see the people rejoicing, say to them:

"Fools, what are you rejoicing about?"

And if you come into a house where a cleaned corpse is lying, and you see the mourners sitting on the ground, inconsolable, say to them:

"Fools, what are you mourning about?"

Man does not know the mystery glowing in Creation.

If you come to a city, do not look at the buildings and high towers. They are all smoke that will waft away.

Do not look at the people running around the streets, scurrying about as though they were busy. They are nothing but vanity and delusion.

If you come to a city, stretch out on the ground, place your ear to the earth, and listen to what the city is saying in utter secrecy.

And know: Benye, in his simplicity, saw the hidden things, he understood the millions upon millions of worlds and the Name:



## YAHWE

It was a vast, a cold night, aglow with stars around and around.

Benye left his house, it was too dark and stuffy. He walked out into the deserted field and sat down beneath a tree.

The branches hung overhead in long rods, and the darkness came tricking down.

A hidden hush emanated from the earth, and Benye sat there, tattered, under the tree, his arms folded on his chest.

The heavens overflowed into one another, like rivers, and they were enveloped in a great coldness. And then Benye saw something.

The moon floated out, white and big, as in a wheel on the sky, and silent wheel.

The moon came floating from one side of the sky, and a shrouded figure was sitting on it:

The Archangel Raphael.

And the figure sat there, leaning over the moon, and peering through the darkness at the other side of the world.

And from the other side of the world, a star came floating out. It was Mars, dark and red, and blood was oozing from it, and a dark, shrouded figure was sitting on Mars:

The Archangel Metatron.

And the figure sat there, leaning over the star and peering into the great brightness at the other side of the world.

It was clear and cold in the abyss of the heavens, there wasn't a wisp of a cloud, and the space beneath was astir with echoes, like a house that has been untenanted for a long time.

And now the two stars came together and they poured patches of light and clumps of fire over the entire countryside.

The world was boiling with hatred!

And the landscape could hear a bitter weeping and a deep joy.

Benye fell upon his face and felt the universe crumbling overhead.

A keening sounded above him.

And suddenly he felt a wrench, he lifted his head and was amazed to see a tall, pure man emerging far, far away from the darkness on the earth.

He was approaching with soft steps, faint steps, his gait was light and without weariness. And the man approached Benye, who was so frightened that he dropped his head back upon the ground.

Benye could feel the palpable light from the man's clothing, he could hear the soft steps of the tall, thin man overhead.

The man walked softly over him.

Benye wanted to peer after him, he wanted to kiss the hem of his coat, but he couldn't lift his head, it was too heavy, and with his face to the ground he laughed joyously inside himself even though a dim longing enveloped his soul like a warm breath.

Benye lay there in the cold all through the night, never lifting his head.

At daybreak, he was all white and shrouded in frost, like a morning branch in autumn.

## Levi Patashnik and His Visitors

It was late in the evening when Lord Vrublevsky, a Polish squire, left Patashnik's home. He had just sold him a forest of timber, the forest in which Simkhe had built his hut.

On the porch, Vrublevsky ran into Leah, Levi's daughter. Leah was startled because the man had such long eyes, and they lashed out like black rods. She curtsied and then breathlessly dashed into the hallway and slammed the door.

Levi was sitting in the leather armchair, his fingers dangling over the soft arms. He had one more matter to settle after Vrublevsky.

Today, one of Patashnik's men had fallen under one of the saws, the poor fellow had gotten all sawed up, and now he was coming to present his grievance.

Levi Patashnik was sitting heavily in the chair, his head buried in his hands, and the man was lamenting: "It was horrible!"

It had hurt terribly: After all, if you tumble under a saw, it hurts.

Hahahaha!

Levi Patashnik was sitting in the dark parlor with the chandelier sparkling in its rainbow glass throughout the gloomy space.

Levi Patashnik didn't care for light!

Wide highways opened in the darkness, long distances. Walking from road to road, you would run into people, an old brother, long forgotten, or Lord Vrublevsky, or a man who was all sawed up.

The door opened slowly, and in walked three elderly Jews, with sacks on their shoulders and staffs in their hands.

The newcomers stopped at the door, Levi was too busy to notice them. The three guests could barely be seen in the darkness.

Levi just sat there, thinking about his problems and arguing. Suddenly he started up, there seemed to be someone here, and he looked around toward the door:

"Who's there? What do you want?"

The three men stood there, wordless, like wooden beams, not answering. Then the eldest of the three blurted out quietly:

"Nothing."

And Levi got up from the easy chair, barely standing on his feet because of his heavy belly. He peered deeper into the darkness, and asked:

"What did you say? I can't hear you."

The eldest visitor replied a bit louder:

"We were passing by, and we thought we should come in."

Levi turned crimson with rage, clenching his soft, effeminate kinds into fists. He strode over to the Jews and stuck his head in their faces.

"Are you going to talk to me or not?"

And his yelling left the visitors speechless.

Leah, blanching, hurried in from the other room. Pausing at the door, she could barely make out the shapes at the wall, and, with her white hands at her throat, she crept into a corner of the room, peering terror-stricken through the darkness.

However, the eldest guest finally answered:

"Why bother with words, Mr. Patashnik, there are no words to express it."

Levi screamed, he ran across the room and screamed: "I can't hear you, damn it, I can't hear you! What are there no words for?"

The eldest guest said to him, quiet and gloomy:

"There are no words for the grief, Levi, for the grief that passes to Him, to the long, pale face..."

But Levi did not understand.

"What face? Whose face?"

The eldest guest refused to answer, he hesitated, and then he slowly leaned over toward Levi, gazed at him, and, dreadfully quiet, he said:

"The Messiah! The Messiah's face!"

Levi was stunned, he felt a sharp jab through his body, deep inside, and he stood there for a while, staring at the visitor's face, staring, because he understood nothing.

Gradually, he turned away, clutched at his own short, yellow brown beard, bit his lip, and started pacing the large room.

And the visitors stood hunched over at the door.

The only sound was the soft clapping of Levi Patashnik's slippers across the floorboards.

He was pacing to and fro with broad steps, pausing for an instant in the middle of the room, and then starting off again, angry and hasty. All at once, he turned around and stood face to face with the guests, and then he took the eldest visitor's sleeve:

"Come!"

And he took them into the other room. The door remained open. Leah leaned over to the open door, peering in and watching as her father led the visitors into a corner of the room.

The darkness was broken by a grating noise when Levi opened a lock. He was opening the door of the cabinet for the visitors. A heap of gold sparkled and shone, burning like a deep fire, glowing in the darkness of the cabinet like an eternal light in a synagogue. Levi stood up straight and boldly pointed at the gold:

"This is the Messiah!"

One of the visitors, dark, hairy, and angry, let out a roar. The eldest turned and murmured something to him.

But Levi was exultant with victory, he stood there, short of stature and with his big belly jutting out, his arms akimbo, and his eyes sparkling.

His innards were swelling, and he thought he had put an end to things, but then the eldest of the guests said to him:

"Levi, gold is sin, gold is the fire of hell!"

"What is gold?" retorted Levi.

And he strode toward them with his mouth foaming:

"You beggars! Have you ever had a penny in your pockets?! Daydreamers!"

"Tramps!"

"Fools!"

"Gold is sin? – Then why do you want alms?"

And he slammed the door to the cabinet:

"There are no alms here!"

The angry guest, Ber Ben-Tsippe, raised his brown paw. He wanted to bring it down on the short, fat man, but the eldest guest pushed him away harshly, and said to Levi in a cold tone:

"Remember, Levi, gold is soaked in blood!"

And the third guest, tall and foolish, and as skinny as a beanpole, waved his hand, and stammered:

"It really did hurt him!"

Levi jumped at him:

"You impudent fool! Who got hurt?! "

"The man who fell under your saw!"

Levi's eyes bulged glassy:

"What saw? Huh?! That saw? How do you know? Tell me!"

He grabbed his own head, turned pale, and dashed into the other room.

The visitors remained by the cabinet.

Leah, trembling, ran over to her father in the darkness, trembling. She fell upon his neck, embraced him:

"Papa, what is it, papa?!"

And she began to cry softly.

Levi looked around, greatly upset, not knowing what was happening. He gradually got his daughter away from him, took a deep, hard breath, and peered through the open door into the other room.

"What's wrong, Leah? Don't you know?"

He calmly buttoned his robe, and suddenly he was taller. Standing up straight, he remained there for a while, and then he strode back into the other room.

The guests were standing by the cabinet, gazing at him coldly, apparently waiting for him to return. He muttered calmly:

"It hurt him, gentlemen, because it had to hurt him. Now, leave!" They didn't answer. He told them to go, and they followed him, but they were boiling with rage. Levi stopped at the door and let the visitors pass.

"Leave," he said, "and tell them that I, Levi Patashnik, say: Who cares!"

"Did you hear? Who cares!"

And he slammed the door. He walked back and forth across the room several times, lost in thought, and then he sat down again in his easy chair as though nothing had happened.

And sitting there, facing the window, he called out to Leah who was standing somewhere behind him. He told her, the grown daughter, to sit down on his lap:

"Did you play the piano?"

"Yes."

"Did you take a walk in the garden?"

"Yes."

"And do you want a new dress, darling?"

But Leah, greatly distracted, didn't answer. She said:

"Papa, their Messiah is better!"

And she was frightened by her own words. Levi stared at her with terror in his eyes. She moved away and hurried into the next room.

## Gimpel the Philosopher

"You know, Benye, in late summer, when the fruit is fragrant through the world, it's not so bad to live on the earth." These words were spoken by Simkhe Plakhte.

Benye didn't answer. He was standing on a log by the oven, boiling potatoes. Simkhe was sitting behind him at the closed window, with a pipe in his mouth, staring out at the road.

The road was glowing in the sun. The gravel was twinkling in the sand.

Simkhe Platkhe was sitting and gazing into the distance because a man had emerged on the road. A thin man was walking in the distance with a staff in his hand.

Whereupon Simkhe said:

"Looks like a man coming along the road."

But Benye didn't answer, he was cooking the potatoes.

Simkhe opened the window and looked out. The man waved at him.

He was a very merry wanderer, jigging along, and the lovely songs he was singing could be heard from far away.

Gimpel Zamkevitser was his name, a clown, a "flossafer."

Walking toward the mill, he sang a cheerful ditty.

Then he entered the house as if it were his own. He leaned his staff in a corner, put down his sack, and said:

"Good morning, fellow Jews!"

"Good morning to you."

He spun around on his high heels, tied the red cloth around his throat, and asked with a smile:

"Do you have anything to nibble on, friends?"

"To nibble on? You'll get something soon enough, but just who are you, my fine feathered friend.

Gimpel had no steady trade and so he devoted himself to idleness, but no matter, he knew what to say:

"I'm a philosopher, a great philosopher!

And pay no attention," he went on, "to the fact that my knees are worn. My suit was once dotted with dots and striped with stripes, yes indeed!

"And girls love me because I'm so handsome. It's too bad that Mr. Simkhe is old, he doesn't know about girls anymore." And he sang a verse of his ditty!

Simkhe was confused and was so embarrassed by the song that he began rubbing his hands. Gimpel was on his high horse now. Overjoyed with his victory, he began to chatter:

"I, Gimpel, discovered a new star in the sky."

All at once, Benye turned around to him and yelled as though his breath had been cut off:

"Two stars!"

"No, just one, and it's going to be called Gimpelinus."

"Two stars," yelled Benye, there was a white man sitting on one and a black man sitting on the other."

"No, there were no people." He had discovered one star and without men.

Benye spat and angrily went back to the stove, where he bustled around the fire. In a little while he said aloud to himself:

"The guy's a liar!"

Gimpel was stunned, he had been caught. He was so abashed that he rubbed his eyes and began changing his story:

"It could be that there's another star somewhere that still remains to be discovered. I, Gimpel, am certainly not a stargazer, I'm a philosopher. I've got my entire philosophy written out, right here in my breast pocket.

"Later on, when I've had a bite to eat, my thoughts will be clearer, and I'll be able to explain even the most difficult parts of my philosophy."

And while sitting at the table and devouring the hot potatoes, Gimpel said:

"There is no human being in the world. Everything exists, but there is no human being here, and that is the difference between me and a man named Schopenhauer. Man is a dream of matter."

And from his breast pocket, he took out a pack of papers, leafed through them, and gave Simkhe a note written in tiny letters.

"Here, read it."

Benye came over, and the two men sat down at the window and began toiling.

## The Note

The mind is now against nature, which has no mind.

Behold, how small is the notion that man has of himself, in contrast to the mountain that has no notion. Man, renounce your mind.

We should curse God, for the sea is more beautiful than God.

Behold, God was invented to beautify nature, but in so doing, they merely annoyed him.

There is no soul and no matter, both things are inventions of man's mind.

Oh, just occupy your area, because the area outside yourself is stronger and more wondrous than you.

It is not the fire emanating from the soul that knows the world; it is the body that knows the world while we restrain it.

If we keep from thinking, we can find out the ultimate truth.  
The world has to go through me, just as I go through the world.  
Oh, the proper notion is: not to know that I understand.

Dr. Lionson

And Gimpel laughed, it made him feel good, but Simkhe and Benye didn't laugh, evidently because they hadn't understood.

The sun was about to set.

The house became hot and dark, and as Gimpel came over to them with a new note, he looked like a long, narrow stick. Grinding his black teeth in pleasure, he looked even skinnier, like a Frenchman in Russia.

"Just read this."

They didn't feel like reading anymore.

"This is about the fact that we're all a dream. It stands to reason that we don't exist."

But they didn't feel like reading anymore.

He stood before them furiously, the way a man stands before a huge audience, and he began to speak aloud, in a lovely voice, like a Germanized Jew:

"Gentlemen!"

There was a hush, the spectators sat there, all ears, their hands in their laps.

"Please be so good as to listen quietly to my lecture. You have asked me to explain the system of irrational thinking... "

And he burst out laughing, and laughed so hard that Benye began to smirk, but Gimpel kept talking:

'When we reject reason, we also do away with the categories of rational thinking: space and time. We acquire an understanding of the world only when we refuse to give in to the traditional conception of pluralism and individual entities. The body does not comprehend pluralism, everything is one for it, inalterably and unchangeably.

"Gentlemen, just one moment!"

"Knowledge occurs the moment the body realizes that there is no void between itself and the world. It is the object without a subject, like the world itself. When man becomes the subject, he stops knowing."

Simkhe stood up laughing, not because he liked what he heard, but simply because he felt like laughing, and he wiped his hand across Gimpel's face:

"Philosopher!"

But Gimpel shook him off, the thoughts kept pouring from his brain, leaping like fleas, running off to all sides – he wanted to gather them in one bundle.

"Gentlemen, may I ask you to maintain silence! You fail to comprehend me, gentlemen, now that you're involved in living, and your heads are working, but you shall understand me at night when you are asleep, you shall understand when you are dead or asleep.

"Dear friends, the world itself is the subject of its own object, space presupposes pluralism and individual entities, and just as the body cannot comprehend any pluralism, there is thus, according to correct knowledge, no such thing as space. Time is abstracted spatiality, gentlemen, and there is no such thing as motion, because there is no such thing as pluralism or individual entities. If motion does not exist, then neither does time, because we cannot imagine time without motion. Ergo, ladies and gentlemen, the world exists, but man does not exist! Hooray!"

Gimpel stationed himself before them with his hands at his sides, earnest and haughty, and all three men started gazing at one another like roosters, gazing and gazing, until they exploded.

Simkhe laughed himself under the table, gasping choking, panting with tears in his eyes, and Gimpel moved down to him, tickling his armpits. Simkhe couldn't stand it anymore and from under the table he yelled:

"You monster!"

Benye smiled too.

And at night they were stretched out on Benye's wide benches, fast asleep.

Simkhe Plakhte was lying in his furs with his face up and his hands under his head, and he was snoring away, but every so often he would suddenly burst out laughing like a thin bolt of thunder.

Benye was huddled up under the rags in his bed, facing the wall and softly sobbing, but every so often he would suddenly yell that someone was killing him. Gimpel was the only one lying there peacefully.

His skinny legs were sticking out from under the cover. Then, softly and sleepily, he got up from his bench.

Gimpel was a sleepwalker. He stood up on the bench with his pale hands stretched out before him. Softly, with quiet steps, he moved from bench to bench.

Benye was weeping hard.

The simple philosopher strained his entire body listening to the muffled weeping. Then he slowly climbed on the table which was lit up by the moon.

His short blouse reached down only to his belly.

He stood there with parted lips, pale in the moonlight, like an outsider, and he was murmuring something, whispering softly, speaking voicelessly to Simkhe Plakhte and Benye.

In their sleep, they were listening, catching every word, and answering with their terrified bodies:

"We understand, Gimpel, we understand... you... and the moon... and the field..."

Benye was crying, and his tears blended with the moonlight, which Gimpel and Simkhe Plakhte were absorbing.

And the dreaminess that came wafting from behind the moon was spun about the shadowy men, and they were all living the same secret life.

## The Cow

The cow came out of the stable and trotted off.

The cow was so overcome with loneliness that she started out to wander through the world, into her diaspora.

She wandered from one place to the next, and wherever she came she saw that life was a tohubo-hu, waste and wild.

In the daytime, she would sleep in the shade of a willow tree or in a birch grove, and at night in a ditch by the side of the road.

But the cow spent most of her nights wandering about.

Benye once awoke from his sleep, and in the darkness he crept over to the window and saw, far, far away, at the edge of the earth, looming against the sky, the cow, trotting along.

All alone, holding her head up, her ears taut, and her tail tucked between her legs.

She wandered along, a pious cow, a tsaddik, listening to the sorrows of the world.

And then, one moonlit night, she suddenly trembled, her eyelids opened, and in a far land, on a riverbank, she saw seven lean cows, her ancestral mothers!

They were lit up by the moon, haughty and helpless, and the strength of the earth was coursing through their bones with a hot, stormy darkness.

Their big bones stuck out like chunks of wood, and their rigid bovine eyes took in the entire world, for even cows yearn for the silent earth, they envy the mountains that stand quietly, and even cows curse the day they were born.

The cow's legs collapsed beneath her, and in the middle of the night she lay down, bellowing and lamenting that she had ever been created...

## Lilith

And in the night, Benye was lying on his bed at home, as in a deep grave. He was barely breathing, and he was drenched with sweat, he lay among the foul rags, disheveled and stretched out like a carcass.

He held out his hands in the darkness, trying to grab on to something, to keep from falling, a stench arose from him and the drool was running from his mouth.

Benye, the saint of his generation, was drooling.

He untangled his hands from the darkness, and he stretched his hands into the darkness, but then he quickly pulled them back.

Benye seemed to have touched someone next to his bed.

He peered deep into the room. Someone was really standing not far from him, a stiff shape, a tall, warm shape.

Benye sat up in terror.

It was obviously a female, her hips and breasts were curving out of the stiff, black cloth.

He asked her softly:

"What are you doing here?"

She didn't answer. Slowly, unhurriedly, she walked over to the door, where she turned around to face him and remained standing in that position.

A yellow radiance poured through the room like a fine dust.

"Benye," she said, "once you summoned me."

Her voice was burning hot, it was lulling and it drew his body to her.

"I?"

"Yes, once, when you were still a little boy."

Benye stuck out his tangled beard.

"I? I was a little boy?"

"Yes, yes, Benye, you were wandering around the cows in pasture, you had a big swollen belly and calflike eyes. Do you remember? Whenever a bull would lust for a cow, you would wring your hands, and weep in pain, and start counting on your fingers to see how many years it was till you could marry."

Benye began recollecting, but he didn't want to answer.

"Benye, you summoned me then.... But I don't come to little children," and she added with a smile: "Now you're a solid adult, a man... A strong, handsome man... Handsome and dear! I want to put my head on your young chest... I want your hot hands embracing me, darling! I want to feel the fresh breath of your body..."

Benye's calflike eyes bulged in the dark. He stammered:

"Woman, you must be mistaken.

"Look," she cried ecstatically, "you're the only man for me!

Look at my fresh young body..."

And wordlessly she began tearing off her clothes.

"Benye, my hips are still chaste, virginal, solid, and my thighs are supple and straight... The nipples of my breasts are stiff, and my breast have never suckled a child... never suckled... never suckled..."



And she wept with passion, wept, glowed, and her naked body sparkled in the yellow darkness, like the scales of a serpent.

Benye heard the benumbing voice, and in the yellow twilight he saw her, Lilith, standing at the door, bending slightly, her hands over her head, framed in the doorposts.

Benye grabbed the sides of the bed and clenched his teeth. He felt drawn to her. He was choking, and suddenly he screamed, and an alien voice yelled out of him:

"Get out! Get out of my house!"

He started throwing the rags and the pillows at her.

"Go away, you monster!"

He spat, tore his shirt, all at once he sprang from the bed and, in confusion, began beating his head and his chest.

Lilith stood at the door in silence, staring gravely with a grave smile on her lips. She was waiting until Benye calmed down.

"You whore! Get a way!"

Benye realized he was practically naked in front of this woman, so he jumped back into bed, pulling the covers over him, closing his eyes, and turning his face to the wall.

He groaned softly.

Lilith stood there quietly for a while, then she slowly tiptoed over to him, and gently tickled his armpit.

Benye bit his lips, the pleasure ran through his entire body, every nook and cranny. He wouldn't turn around, but he gradually stopped groaning.

Lilith sat down on his bed, smiled, and began tickling the soles of his feet.

It was so delicious that it dazed him.

Benye knew that Lilith was sitting next to him, so he held back his deep laughter, and lay there as mute as a wooden beam.

She began stroking his hair, and her slender fingers curled up the disheveled strands. He couldn't bear it anymore, he turned around to her, and his thick yellow teeth were grinding with his sweet sufferings.

He tittered like an old goat: "Darling, sweetest...!"

Lilith said: "Your beautiful face drives me crazy, Benye, darling! Don't smile at me like that!"

Suddenly Benye realized it was Lilith, and he started laughing and grinding his teeth all the harder, to drive her away.

She moved away from the bed.

"You slut!"

He leaped after her, dropping his rags in his excitement, but she managed to elude him.

"I'm going get you, Lilith," he shouted, "I'm going get you."

Benye dashed after her through the yellow light, storming like a wind, panting, screaming, until he caught her with his right hand, in a corner.

He dug his brown, dirty fingers into her white body and thrust his tangled beard into her face. Lilith curved away from him, but he pressed her closer and yelled with foaming lips:

"Deborah, you Deborah, you!"

For his dead wife's name was Deborah.

Lilith tried to fight back. She was delighted, but she fought back. Suddenly she grabbed his dirty beard and kissed him so hard on the thick parched lips that Benye nearly fell over, then she lifted him up on her hot shoulders and carried him off to his bed...

"Oh God! Oh God! And the rooster hasn't crowed!"

It grew dark in the room, their breath merged, sparks were flashing in the darkness, and slippery limbs were wrapped around the body with green eyes, and with a faint flickering... There is no salvation, oh God!

And Benye was struggling, he didn't know with whom, he fell down and reached out in the darkness to take hold of something, he dashed off the bed, but it was quiet in the room, and no one was there.

And his blood stopped in his veins, it curdled, froze.

Lilith, fresh, young Lilith, the wife of Satan, had killed him.

Adam's first wife.

Benye dragged himself across the room, climbed up on the oven, and then climbed down again. He sat naked, as he was, on the floor, sat and sat, and then stood up again with his head drooping, crept over to the pail of water, thrust in his hands, and then kept dragging around the room...

He stumbled over to the door and opened it. The cold air refreshed him. He opened the door to the porch and stepped out. A cold, silvery blueness enveloped his face and naked body.

At first he didn't notice that a Jew was standing there with a sack and a staff in his hand – it was one of the three guests that had once visited him, and now the man touched his hand.

"Benye, you didn't resist!"

Benye remained cold, he didn't care, but then all at once he turned to the guest, and his eyes filled with blood:

"Thieves! Damn you all!"

And he burst into moans:

"Why don't you leave me alone?! You monsters!"

And he dashed back into the house, grabbed a stick of wood, and ran out again to the porch. But the guest was gone.

Benye hurried down the road after him.

## Leah

Grandmother was sitting at the window, and the girl sat opposite her, pale, with a book in her lap. Bending over to the old ear, she asked:

"Is he handsome?"

"A delight, Leah, he's out of this world."

"And where is he, Grandmother?"

"He lives alone in his home, secluded and remote, where there are no people."

"Alone, all alone?"

"Yes, he walks around, all alone, in the ancient woods."

The cool blue fires of evening drew around the world, frozen and fine, making reality look like a dream.

And Leah, Levi's daughter, longed for the Messiah. The long pale face that the guests had spoken about floated like a radiance through the vast house.

She felt it in the rustle of the empty rooms.

She avoided the large mirrors on the walls, she was frightened of the dim reflections of the furnishings.

"Maybe he's resting somewhere with that hidden face of his."

Levi remained in the dim room, more somber every day. He kept silent, stopped in his tracks, not knowing why.

Leah would avoid him, and if they met she would lower her eyes. She wanted to tell him something, but she couldn't find the words. She wanted to tell her father, Levi Patashnik:

"Father, I have to go to him..."

And her father would reply:

"Silly! Respectable girls aren't pious, girls shouldn't be pious at all."

But she would retort:

"No, Papa, I'm not pious at all."

He would then leap up and shout:

"Well, then what do you want?"

"I want to go to him. I have to go to him."

"But he doesn't exist, silly!"

"I know he does exist, he has to."

And her father came closer and stroked her hair:

"But Leah, I'm old. What will I do all by myself?"

She didn't answer, she had nothing to say.

"Don't go away, Leah darling, don't go..."

But at lunch they would sit like mutes, never uttering a word. Levi would mumble something in his beard; he was afraid to express what he was thinking. He threw the dishes... Got up in the middle of the meal and angrily hurried to his room.

At the table, they could sense someone, a third person, who drove them apart.

And haunting days and nights wore by, without rest or sleep.

It was past midnight. Leah was wandering through the rooms, dressed only in a nightshirt.

The place where the visitors had spoken his name, that was where He must be...

The rooms were filled with a silent darkness. He couldn't be heart. The place where the visitors had stood was empty.

She slowly opened a door into the next room... Half-naked, holding a candle, Levi was standing there, bending into the open cabinet... counting, counting...

Leah quietly hurried to bed and began weeping, whispering incomprehensible words to Him... to Him...

And one evening she put on her coat, took her umbrella. Silently she crept out of the house, never to come back again... Outside it was raining...

At the corner, a squire was standing, with a feather in his hat, a rifle over his shoulder, and a drenched hound on a leash.

## In the Forest

Simkhe Plakhte and Gimpel Zaskevitser were lying by the hut in the woods, which were blue deep into the thickets.

The fir trees were stretching out their strong branches, hung with cobwebs, and the redness of evening was dripping from them.

The sun was just going down.

Dark Jews were passing between the trees, they were soaked in the redness and dipped in the shadows.

No foot had ever trodden through the forest. What were these Jews in furs doing here, with their lambskin hats and their staffs, walking in single file, foolish, hidden? If they met anyone, they would slip behind the trees.

"Maybe they're Cabbalists," said Gimpel.

"Hey! Out of my woods!" yelled Simkhe into the thickets. "Out!"

The Jews vanished for a short spell into the bushes.

"They're giving him a hard time, they're making fun of Benye!"

"Is Benye one of them?" asked Gimpel.

"Yes."

"A Lamed-vovnik?"

"A Lamed-vovnik."

"Do the Lamed-vovniks want to turn the world upside-down?" "Leave me alone, you monster!"

They were lying on the earth, chewing straws, wallowing and talking.

Where had they driven Benye?

"They drove him to the devil, Gimpel. They tortured him, damn their eyes!"

"A peasant saw him at night, riding a cow."

"Really?"

"Is that Cabbalah, too, Simkhe?"

Simkhe Plakhte didn't answer, he sat down, hugging his knees, and just gazed into the woods.

"Gimpel, you're a fool. Why don't you go back to town? We and those people in the trees, we've all got old blood!"

"So what?"

"So old blood stinks."

Gimpel propped himself up on his elbows and cocked his ears.

"If only you didn't talk so much, you monster. All those men among the trees bear the yoke in silence, like an old forest. But you talk too much, Gimpel, much too much."

"My mind has worn me out, Simkhe."

"Too much mind, you're right."

After a silence, Simkhe Plakhte began talking again.

"Now once I was a Hassidic rabbi, I had a large, pious following, I delved into the secrets of the Torah. But then I couldn't stand it anymore, I fled here, to this hut."

"Why couldn't you stand it?"

"There was no one I could really talk to, Gimpel. Too much intellect!"

And Simkhe turned red with anger, leaped up, and yelled at the Jews in the thickets:

"Hey! Get out of my forest! Out!"

And then he said to Gimpel:

"That's my forest. It's grown up around me. My forest. If you want to come to me, you have to pass through the thickets, walk between the trees, on tiny paths, and you'll find me at home in my hut. Gimpel!" He took hold of Gimpel's jaw. "Don't come to me in a storm. I, Simkhe Plakhte, would be struggling along with the forest, and every dead bird would be lying dead here, right here, in my heart."

"You must be important, Mr. Simkhe." "Important?" cried Simkhe Plakhte. "Some day, they'll be coming to me in carriages!"

Gimpel broke in excitedly:

"Really? When?"

"When our friends in the woods are no longer in the world."

"Oh really? And who'll come?"

"Not snotnoses like you. There'll be others coming. Lusty men."

Meanwhile, a Lamed-vovnik came up behind them, a tiny little Jew, a famished creature. He asked for water.

"What do you need water for?"

The Lamed-vovnik in his meekness answered:

"To drink."

"So go, you little creep, to the right, you'll find a little spring, drink, and praise God, but don't come to me."

The little man walked off wordlessly into the darkness of the forest.

It was very late now. The dew was settling on the grass. Gimpel was stretched out, with his head in his hands, staring at a beetle crawling through the haulms.

Simkhe went over to the hut, he sat down on a log and sprinkled seeds for the pigeons. The Lamed-vovniks, somewhere deep among the trees, were finishing their evening prayers, they began scattering again one by one, each with his winter hat and his secret.

Each one chose a tree in some corner, sat down all by himself beneath the branches, slipped one sleeve into the other, and waited. What does a Lamed-vovnik wait for?

Perhaps for Him, the man sitting at the gates of Rome.

His footsteps are burnt out by fire in the high mountains.

He's taking His time, the man born in torment, but He has to come any day now, He has to come.

A dry darkness was burning in the woods. The leaves were softly veiling the trees. Here and there, glowworms were glowing. Gimpel was all rolled up in the grass, sound asleep.

Simkhe was sitting at the threshold of his hut, his burning blue eyes flashing into the forest.

A dull heaviness hung over the trees.

A cry rang out deep in the forest. A Lamed-vovnik was singing tearfully with an old, hoarse voice, lamenting, wailing from the forest darkness, and it was mirrored in his voice, the way he lay there, with his face to the earth, bowing to the old sacred city, which had been destroyed:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,  
We hung our hearts on your walls,  
We built you with our tears,  
Your stones are our bodies  
And our eyes – your caves.  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem,  
City of priests, of kings and prophets,  
You lament over us like a storm,  
And tear the blood from our burnt hearts.  
We bear the yoke upon our bony shoulders  
Of your towers and your bridges,  
And with the foxes of your ruins we grieve:  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem!

With his burning blue eyes, Simkhe Plakhte peered sharply into the darkness. The voice choked, it was throttled in the thickets.

Suddenly Simkhe leaped up as though something had bitten him. He turned his broad shoulders, stretched out his arms, clenched his fists, and let out a scream that was cast in copper:

"Crows, hey crows!"

And he dashed up a tree, like a cat, soft, and with sharp nails, grabbed hold of the branches, and then leaped from tree to tree, from one treetop to the next...

In the stillness, he glided over the heights of the forest, screaming through the night, waking the birds and storming, as before the start of day.

## Lord Vrublevsky

Lord Vrublevsky had a palace near the town of Lebereve.

In the evening, people could see him walking around in the vast blue fields, a tall, thin man, with his rifle over his shoulder, and a long hound running ahead of him on a leash. Gloomy and lonesome, he would wander over his ruined estates.

Benye's mill was his property.

The woods, his ancient woods, were standing ready to be chopped down, and his villages, all ruins, lay in the valleys with protruding beams, like petrified birds.

Lord Vrublevsky, at night, would take his dog and poke around the Jewish villages, looking round in the farms, peering into windows, eavesdropping.

He fancied Jewish girls!

He had a marble palace, it was empty, the beds were untouched, the heavy curtains drawn across the windows, and he, the lonesome master, wandered through the blue fields, poking around, eavesdropping... The palace stood empty. But at times, once a year, the windows would light up, the flames of large lamps would flash through it, and the palace would resound haughtily in the night. Lord Vrublevsky was celebrating.

And now, what was he after?

Walking through the darkness almost every night, looming firmly against the blue sky, the Gentile was seeking a salvation for his Gentile soul.

And once, in early winter, during his nightly wanderings, he came to the edge of the sky and met the angry guest, Ber Ben-Tsippe, walking out of the world.

Ber, the dark, angry vagabond. They faced one another, stonestill, like two gray wolves.

Vrublevsky's dog, about to pounce upon the vagabond, remained in midleap, with his front paws raised and his body stretching through the air.

And Jewish hatred clashed with Gentile hatred.

## **Towns... Towns...**

Rainy days had come. The little Jewish towns were shaking, house against house. The muddy streets were rocking, the ancient roofs, one atop the other, were dancing with the thick rains, swaying back and forth, gray and soaked.

Shoemakers were banging their hammers. Bathhouses were heated up, chimneysweeps were standing on the roofs.

From White Russia to Zhamut, from Zhamut to Lithuania, the little towns banged and yelled to one another, like huge clocks scattered across the plains...

Draymen traveling through the countryside heaved their shoulders against their wagons, which were heavily loaded down.

Psalms were recited in all homes – a sea of psalms.

Kyрил, the Gentile who took care of the bath, was preparing the rubbing brooms for the pre-Sabbath cleansings on Friday. He sat, sickly, on the ground, staring at his big toes. He was tormented by the mystery of creation.

Velve the water-carrier, a Lamed-vovnik, was walking with his shoulder board on his back, drudging with his body to understand the world. He caught sight of Motte up on a roof, with his smoky beard in a chimney. Velve set his full pails on the ground.

"Motte, hey Motte!"

And he raised the long tangles of his beard up to the sky:

"Velve, is that you, Velve?"

And the two drudging saints conversed from roof to ground, comforting one another in the midst of their toil, looking at one another, but their thoughts were somewhere else.

"Motte, hey Motte!"

The tall, thin cap-makers were measuring the peasants for enormous caps, Gittel, the beadle's wife, was standing at the window, casting down food to the magpies. Hammers were clanging in smithies.

Big, silent blacksmiths in leather aprons were standing and dreaming, in the tiny smithies, they were so tall they looked as if they might surge through the roof at any moment.

Seven silent blacksmiths in Zhamut, Lamed-vovniks.

But unexpectedly, and gradually, there came a hush – tick-tock, tick-tock, and then nothing.

Velve stood there with his beard raised to the roof.

The magpie was unable to fly down from the pig.

The draymen on the roads stood up straight, rubbed their eyes, and gaped all around. A peculiar hush.

And from the foggy fields, into the little town, Benye came riding on his cow.

A shred of clothing was hanging from his naked body, his miry feet were dragging along the ground, one hand was holding on to the back of the cow, the other was clutching – a piece of clay.

The rain ran down his body in muddy drops.

And Benye's eyes? Like the eyes of a pike when it's hauled in from the water.

The cow with her craning neck, with her stiff tail between her legs, was carrying a man more dead than alive, heavy and worn out - an atonement for a cow, for grave sins, for a wretched life.

And Benye was babbling, rattling to her from his parched throat...

Benye was riding through the little Jewish towns with the tiding on his lips.

Velve, moaning, heaved the pails up on his shoulders. The narrow streets began shaking inside, from house to house.

The hammers were clanging in the smithies.

Kyril sat there, staring at his big toes, and all at once his calflike eyes opened wide and he saw:

Somewhere on a main road, there was an ancient crucifix soaked by the rains.

And from it, Jesus came climbing down, God's son, he looked around at the autumn fields, sighed, and started off through the world.

## On the Way

Leah traveled by train, by wagon, on foot, and everywhere she met shrunken Jews, who spoke to her compassionately. They were standing along the main roads, but Leah didn't need the signposts, she knew the way instinctively.

The fine autumn drizzles splashed through the ragged mists, and the clay squeaked underfoot.

Once, at a crossroads, she ran into a village tailor, huddled under an ancient crucifix.

The wooden cross was leaning over him, like a weeping willow branch, the kind used in the Sukkoth ceremony. A tin garland was attached to the wood, and inside it, nailed to the cross, hung Jesus.

The painted deity had faded in the rains, his loincloth was rotting, and it fluttered in the wind.

Leah stopped suddenly. Jesus and He, both had been thrown down from heaven. Who knows, perhaps He too would be hung up on crossroads for the sins of mankind?!

The wind blew apart the ends of the black shawl that stiffly enveloped her white face. Her widened eyes gaped at the worn-out deity, at the tin crown suspended over him.

"Is that God?"

Leah trembled, with tears in her eyes she stared at him and absorbed the solitude of the crucified Jesus.

The tailor, half-dazed replied:

"Daughter, the cross goes throughout the world, from land In land, like a shadow of God, it is the gospel of Him who has to come, He will pass through gallows and crosses... through dead forests... to us...

The tailor broke off, dissolving in tears. He huddled more into himself under the cross, frozen and soaked through; shuddered with muffled sobs and wiped the tears on his sleeve.

"My daughter, I have been sitting right here under this cross for twenty years now, waiting. It keeps rotting and bending more and more from year to year... But He... He doesn't come."

The tailor drew up his knees, buried his head in his lap, and fell silent.

Leah, willy-nilly, and with a heavy heart, bent down before the cross and murmured something, praying quietly, whispering wordlessly, and the wind toyed with Jesus' loincloth.

A man came walking down the road, Vrublevsky. In his green hunting outfit, he looked like spring dew on the autumn field. His black eyes sparkled like pitch, he stopped before Leah, stood there mute, and began undressing her with his eyes.

Leah, terrified, began to back away. She thought the man had suddenly leaped down to her from the cross.

The tailor was huddled up, he didn't turn around, he seemed unaware of the aristocrat's arrival.

Leah, blanching, ran out into the field, she tried to scream but couldn't, and she felt the aristocrat behind her, following her, coming closer...

The eldest guest appeared on the road. Calm, and with great strides, he went over to Leah, took her hand, and gently led her to another road.

### **Simkhe Plakhte Says That Gimpel Is Right**

Indeed, why should Simkhe Plakhte care? – The Hassids yearn for their spiritual leader the rebbe, and come to him like calves to their mother's nipples.

There were two old Hassids sitting at the reader's desk in the synagogue, talking about the rebbe's deserting them and going off to the woods.

But why should Simkhe Plakhte care?

He was lying on his fur in a treetop like a stork in its nest, and the wreaths of smoke from his pipe were curling up to the sky.

The lush countryside faded far away into a foggy blueness.

The streams gurgled along, through the fields, up and down the hills, the way people go to God over mountainous roads, uphill and downhill, to God.

You, oh you, who are so overcome by the world that God yells out of you, you, the terror of the fields echoes in your bones, it echoes in your voice, why should you really care, after all?

Isn't Man a vanished forest, an upheaved stone? Doesn't Man wash by, like a wave over God, like water over the shores?

Gimpel, oh Gimpel. We have to curse God, because the sea is more beautiful than God!

Yes, Hassidism is a heroic cloak, but I, Simkhe Plakhte, go about naked!

No one opened up for me, and I stepped in all alone and did not find soul, only a steamy field and laughing earth in my body...

And as long as I, this clod of world, have a loaf of bread in my shack and a sheepskin, why should I care?

And singing proudly, he climbed down from the tree, danced off into his shack and flung open the window.

"Holiday! Holiday!"

He kicked off his bast shoes and sprang like a goat, intoxicated with the summer.

Look! The body is a motherly earth! Does the earth breathe?

Doesn't the misty earth live, doesn't she think?

No one opened up for me, and I stepped in.

Raw, irritated branches,

Soaked moss,

fragrances, like faraway violins,

blood,



sleepy stones.

That is a strong, radiant weeping from me, Simkhe Plakhte, through dampnesses, wails, roots, veins, sucking out the fragrances, benumbing, crushing marrow, and passing, passing, like light in all things.

Gimpel, oh Gimpel, we have to curse God, because a bird is more beautiful than God!

And then a peasant girl trudged past with a bundle of wood on her back. She didn't see Simkhe although she sensed a man nearby, and he beamed proudly, with his rosy eyes shining, delighted at what he saw.

The tawny breasts were fresher than the forest, her bare feet, with their springtime gait in the high grass, hurried to the window.

Simkhe laughed, a laugh like thunder, and he yelled out:

"Hey, Marilia! Haven't you seen, haven't you looked at God?"

And the strapping, radiant peasant girl answered: "What haven't I seen, what haven't I looked at!"

He leaped through the window, took her in his arms, danced with her, and spun her around.

The peasant girl laughed, struggled, tickled him saucily, and they tumbled down into the grass, heady with the wet earth like trees in springtime, and their hot faces drank up the cold dew of the grass haulms...

Gimpel, oh Gimpel, the mountain has no power of conception!

Yes, Simkhe had been a saint among the Hassids, he was the piety of the world, and perhaps, who can say, he might have been the Messiah of the House of David.

He committed no sins,  
He knew no hatred,  
He knew no love,  
He never desired or needed justice,  
No war,  
No peace.

While the earth was raging in his blood, and his limbs were scattered by God among the trees in the forest, the waters, the cattle at pasture, the fields and the plains.

Gimpel, perhaps you're right, the world exists and man does not exist!

And he came with heavy strides, Simkhe Plakhte, into the thicket, and stopped by a dark meadow in the forest.

The earth shook dull beneath him, something was working dully on the dark, isolated meadow, a writhing of clods of earth, tree stumps, a silent joining of unmolded limbs.

And now, a heavy piece of coarse cloth stirred, and then crept grossly, crept from the earth, a cruel, gray, earthen head was creeping, the earthen man.

The gray eyelashes – nettles; the eyes – waters; the nose – earth; tangled hair – like branches; teeth – stony; and the lolling tongue – clay.

Not grieving, not smiling.

And now, slowly, the head was creeping forth, stuck without a link on the wooded shoulders, his chest matronly, and his arms, twisted into the trees of the forest, intertwined with the roots and herbs, it spread out to Simkhe.

And then out from the earth all the way to the knees, but still interknaded with the motherly field, and the clay tongue snuffled something to Simkhe in the eternal language, and he, understanding the blossoming voice, fell into the crooked lap and nestled in the bosom, disheveled and stirred up, like a bird in a storm...

And suddenly Simkhe felt a radiant presence overhead, he was so intoxicated he could barely open his eyes: The Prophet of Tashbe was standing next to him, looking like the eldest guest. The venerable old man was not grieving, not smiling. He barely grazed Simkhe's shoulder:

"Simkhe, son of Stetye, what is the matter?"

And Simkhe burst into tears and tumbled upon the earth's lap:

"Oh, God! I want to live, why did you make me a human being?"

I want to live, live..."

## The Great Assembly

In the middle of the night, the Lamed-vovniks gathered at Benye's home. Simkhe came too. A scant fire stick was burning by the oven.

The Lamed-vovniks trudged into the room, the water-carriers with their yokes on their shoulders, the chimneysweeps with their brooms, the draymen holding their whips.

Gimpel, a heretic, was not permitted to attend. But he began hollering, and so the Lamed-vovniks had to give in.

The eldest guest put his bag on the table, and then sat down gravely and rested his head in his hands.

The Lamed-vovniks sat down on the benches and the beds, others climbed up on the oven.

The seven silent men sat down on one bench in a corner, big, strong, tan Jews in large fur coats – the seven from Zhamut.

Kyril, the Gentile in charge of the bathhouse (Abraham son of Isaac), stretched out at the threshold. He too was a Lamed-vovnik,

And all that was visible in the darkness were the tangled beards, the ragged knees, and eyes filled with a turbid fire.

Simkhe was sitting somewhere, hidden, with his pipe in his mouth.

The hot leaden air weighed down on the heads, it smelled of the sweat on furs and bodies, and a sorrow was gnawing deep inside the hairy chests.

The eldest guest, Wolf the son of Bird, quietly asked for politeness' sake:

"Where is the host?"

Gimpel, who had been waiting for this, blurted out:

"The host is away, he's ridden off on a cow."

No one replied.

Wolf raised his head and looked at the others. They were sitting crowded together, around the room. The silent ones were silent, the oven-sitters stuck out their heads. Wolf cleared his throat, apparently about to speak:

"Masters and friends!"

But the air suddenly turned foul, the Jews looked every which way, Wolf held his nose and peered around. A tiny Lamed-vovnik, upon whom suspicion fell, defended himself:

"I swear, as sure as I'm a Jew, it wasn't me!"

It was the same one who had asked Simkhe for a drink of water in the forest.

Wolf began speaking. His voice was barely audible, and the Jews craned their necks, amazed, hanging on his every word.

"Oh, the sadness that comes to Him, with the long pale face from eternity to eternity!

"He wanders about in the ten sefirot,

"Seeks to join the body,

"But,

"But the body is mere clay, the members unmolded,  
"No arms or legs.  
"And the long pale face wanders from eternity to eternity."

Wolf was breathing heavily, he buried his face in his hairy hands, and in a trembling voice, he spoke deeply, as though to himself:

"Who lacks the Divine Image?  
The seas have the shape of eternity.  
The earth and the heavens have the shape of eternity.  
The stars drift from eternity to eternity.  
"Only Man does not have the Divine Image."

And Wolf rocked and began weeping and spoke:

"Man on earth is seeking his face!  
"He thought that Adam was his image, but Adam did not know the torment of being born."  
"He thought that Moses was his image, but Moses did not know the torment of being killed."  
"He thought that Jesus was his image, Jesus of Nazareth..."

Tears were pouring from the seventy-two gaping eyes, the listeners sat with bated breath, with open mouths, drawn irresistibly to him. Wolf sighed and then spoke faintly:

"And here, Man stumbled."

Kyril, the son of Fedot, was sitting at the threshold with his head drooping, his fists rubbing away the tears. His heart was heavy. Someone, a drayman, jabbed him to make him stop, they couldn't hear. Kyril kissed the hand that had jabbed him, and stretched out his arms beseechingly.

All at once, Wolf began talking in a loud angry voice, pounding the table, rocking to and fro:

"Crosses stand on all roads, and on them hangs Jesus!"

"Woe to us, men have sinned, they have gone to him so that he would be tormented in their stead."

"And he, the fool, he took the gallows and went up to Golgotha." "Men say: We have sinned, now someone must come to be tormented."

"Crosses stand on all roads, and on them hangs the Messiah, and the Messiah is nailed to them."

"And so they call him Messiah."

"Woe, the world has become clean, and the world has been purified, because he, the Messiah, hangs on all roads."

Gimpel shot up like a spring, propped his hands on the table, and screamed with all his might:

"I protest!"

The Lamed-vovniks stood up, terrified, no one knew what was going on. Clambering down from the oven, one of them knocked over the burning fire stick. In the darkness, they all bumped into one another. There was a stampede, and Gimpel's shrieks drowned out everything else.

"This isn't scientific! This is fanaticism!"

The Lamed-vovniks were furious, Ber Ben-Tsippe, managed to grab hold of the "flossafer," and Gimpel's poor bones cracked in the darkness:

"Shut your mouth, you shrimp, or I'll smash you!"

And the seven silent men of Zhamut dashed over, the way powerful rocks plummet in a storm. They roared and pushed. Someone kindled the fire stick.

Simkhe was still sitting in a corner. He looked at the silent men, and when he saw that things were going badly for Gimpel, he slowly got up. The little Lamed-vovnik was standing in his way, he grabbed his scrawny neck and twisted the creature around, and then he quietly went over to Gimpel, took his arm and led him back to the corner.

The silent ones glared at him fiercely. Ber grumbled into his beard, but they still felt reverence for Simkhe – though they weren't sure why.

The Lamed-vovniks sat down again in their places, Wolf didn't even turn, he had propped his head on his elbows the whole time as though not noticing anything.

It was already late at night, the exhausted men were dying to go to sleep, but Wolf wouldn't begin. A tall, skinny beanpole of a man, the one who had spoken to Levi Patashnik about the saw, gave the eldest guest a pleading look, leaned toward him, and said:

"Wolf, can you hear? Your listeners are waiting."

Wolf didn't answer, and the beanpole was so overcome with despair that he shrugged his shoulders and sat down again.

The men lost all hope that Wolf would ever speak. They sat there, wordless and waiting. Simkhe, however, smiled faintly. All at once, the eldest guest turned, straightened, and looked about for Ber. It was evidently because of him that he wouldn't speak.

Ber was holding both hands on the table, he sat there like a log, his hat slouching over his eyes.

Wolf smiled, his face turned radiant, his eyes moist, as though from a faraway joy. He began rocking with enthusiasm, his voice became purer and more joyful. The listeners became more relaxed, they breathed more easily.

Listen, but we say: The Messiah of the House of David does not atone.

"But we say: Each man must take his gallows and go to Golgotha by himself, and every beam must be taken from the wall, and every tree from the forest, for we shall hang ourselves on all roads.

"We!"

Wolf pointed his finger, he had broken into a strong chant of deep joy and enthusiasm.

"Gallows stand on all roads, and we are the ones hanging on them.

"The blood running down the wood of the crosses burns like an impure sunset.

"Our blood, our blood, is running down the wood of the crosses.

"And from this blood, He shall arise – the Messiah of the House of David!"

But now it happened, the thing that Wolf was afraid of. Ber lumbered off his bench like an ox, red, with bloodshot eyes. His mouth was foaming, he couldn't speak.

The Lamed-vovniks retreated into the corners, and he began scurrying around the room. Suddenly, he stopped, dashed over to the table, and pointed at his own chest:

"We?! We?!"

And he wrung his hands at the ceiling, clenched his fingers, and let out a dark roar that sounded as if it came from under the earth.

"Scoundrels! For whom?! Scoundrels!"

And he ran amuck around the table, pounding the benches with the full strength of his fists:

"Revenge! That's what! Revenge for little children. Revenge for blood."

A dreadful hush fell upon the room. Gimpel was so terrified he slipped behind Simkhe. The quiet Lamed-vovniks wept, whining into their beards, and Ber tore himself bloody, tore the hair from his head, and yelled:

"We want blood!"

He grabbed the little Lamed-vovnik on whom suspicion had fallen earlier. The Lamed-Vovnik writhed and struggled in his hands. Ber clutched his mouth:

"You rebel, did you draw blood? Why didn't you draw blood?" And Ber spat in his face. The little Lamed-vovnik twisted out of his hands, barely alive; he quietly crept into a corner and wiped his face on his sleeve, on his coattails, on a cloth, there was so much spit on it. Ber didn't quiet down. The others were terrified, they hugged the walls, Kyril crawled under the bed, frightened that Ber would take vengeance on him for the Gentiles.

Suddenly, Simkhe got up, totally pale, his eyes gaping.

"Look!"

He pointed at the windows. A strong, turbid white light was glaring through the panes. Blood was running down the doorposts. The terrified Lamed-vovniks peered outside, they could hear the heavy tolling of a thousand bells.

Ber was the first to run to the window.

## Benye Rides His Cow

And that night, Benye, riding his cow, reached the edge of the world.

The cow dug in her hooves, poked her tormented head and stiff ears into the darkness, and her tail curled upward.

Benye sat up straight, stopped breathing, the life in his heart came to a halt; he peered with dark, empty eyes – gaping holes; his mouth opened, he gazed and stared into the dark void of the dreadful beginning...

The cow stood with her legs wide apart, the disheveled rider and the cow looked like one single creature.

The stony landscape, with its huge crags, loomed into the cloudy emptiness. Far, far off, among the stones, a small silver calf was standing all by itself, radiating a thin blueness upon the edges of the towering rocks.

Benye gingerly leaned over and peered into the chasm.

This was the chasm where Samael was falling head-first, heavy as a stone. Samael, the Angel of Evil; he plunged with outstretched arms, on and on, deeper and deeper, and his long, thin legs thrashed about, trying to land on something.

And all at once, his one hand grabbed a crooked thorn just at the side of the chasm and he twisted his head up to Benye.

His crooked skull was covered with wooly, pitchy hair.

Samael saw Benye, he gave him an evil smirk, and ground his long, narrow teeth.

Benye was astonished, he gaped at him, gaped, and craned his neck, but suddenly the face looked like that of his brother.

"Levi? Levi the moneylender?"

Samael gazed straight up at Benye. He pressed his thin black lips together and spat at him – a torrent of gold came pouring out of his mouth up to the highest edge of the chasm and stopped, he kept falling headfirst, the Angel of Evil, heavy as a rock, deeper and deeper, his arms outstretched, his long thin legs trying to catch hold of something.

The cow stood with her legs wide apart, her body alive with the terror of the world that has come to naught...

And Benye gaped, gaped with bulging eyes.

## The Spectacle

These things happened in a night without stars or moon. A bit of light flickered in the fields. No one knew where it came from.

The tombstones and the thick fresh woods of our graveyards turned over, and out of the depths came the bones – old men to old men, with wormy beards, women to women, foolish creatures, tiny children, toddlers.

Hosts of the dead went out on the dimly lit fields, and they walked along the highways toward the city of Rome.

All in step, all in step.

Old men to old men, and the wind sighed out of their bones, the lovely girls nestled together, and they were so modest that they covered their nakedness with their hands.

And the little children walked along, like flocks, in order, lamb by lamb.

Suddenly, an old man halted, a maze of patches, like an old Sabbath pot, he waited for the children on the roads, the old man liked death in the world:

"The Holy Flock of the Jewish People!"

And the passing herds of children replied:

"Baah, baah!"

And the old man laughed and laughed, he danced a jig, and slapped their empty behinds.

"You little rascals!"

At midnight, they arrived in Rome from all parts of the world, and the corpses groped the walls of the city – damp walls, they knocked on the gates, but no one would open.

"What should we do?"

The old men put their heads together, and the children put their little shoulders together, and they clambered up the walls, and if a corpse, a good-for-nothing, lost an arm on the way, the hand would stand up, climb on its own strength, and then, clever creature that it was, go through the city by itself. And one executed cadaver removed the noose from his neck, and tied on his boot so that it wouldn't drop...

And thus they all silently lay down on the rooftops, in the soft attics, on the warm porches, and these heaps of the dead beleaguered the high towers of the city.

The church bells slowly began swaying, and then tolling heavily of their own accord. Vast peals, heavy as stones, fell into the city. And a red turbid stream ran down from the bells, looking like blood, oozing down to the earth in heavy drops, drip, drip, drip...

Rome!

A corpse was lying under every window, a cadaver under every bed. The old men, exhausted, sat down in the cradles and covered themselves with the quilts: Goodnight, Father. And there were two occupants in every bed – one living and one lifeless, for brotherhood. The girls modestly crept in with the young boys, for love, and secretly, silently, they scraped their bony voices and snored into the night:

"Vengeance... Vengeance... Vengeance..."

And far, far away, in the windows of Benye's house, the Lamed-vovniks were piled atop one another, breathlessly watching the spectacle.

Ber was pressing his head against the window, forcing back his fears and cursing the Christians. The others were choking and gasping were squeezed into the windows like herrings, with their eyes bulging, and Gimpel stood higher than anyone, peering through his fist, as though through a telescope.

A piece of night tore open for the city of Rome, revealing the spectacle of the bones. Gimpel observed every last detail.

"Look at that virgin!" he cried. "What passion!"

The little Lamed-vovnik ran over to Gimpel and nagged him:

Show me, show me! What is it?!"

Gimpel showed him, the Lamed-vovnik clutched at his own heart, screwed up his tiny face, and felt such delight that he scratched himself.

"Why are you so excited, friend?"

The Lamed-vovnik pretended not to hear. Meanwhile, the distance grew darker, the scenes in that depth began fading, all that was visible now was a white emptiness, far beyond the darkness.

Some of the Lamed-vovniks at the windows were dozing off. The elder ones, the Cabbalists, were sitting barely conscious, staring at the white void and saddened by the long night.

All at once, in the silent brightness, a shape appeared, it was Benye, he was leading the cow.

Benye was walking ahead, with the rope in his hand, and the cow trudged after him. They only reached the mill at dawn.

The cow was carrying a mangled wolf on its horns.

## The Town Blesses the New Moon

It was a cloudy night in winter. The snow warmly covered the roofs, and icicles hung from the thin looming trees.

The whole little town was doubly illuminated by the snow and by the moon.

The Jews came out of their homes, sheathed in furs and wrapped in scarves. Silently, they moved toward the courtyards of the synagogues and the white marketplaces to bless the new moon.

Through the dazzling whiteness they trudged like bundles of rags, past the houses and street corners.

The god of the town was sitting on a low rooftop, an old scrawny nag with dried-up hooves and a ragged tail behind.

The Jews clustered in the marketplaces, rocking to and fro, and their long shadows stretched across the clean, twinkling spaces of the streets.

The houses curved their roofs, stretching aloft with their crooked edges, like fearful humps.

The praying Jews raised their hands to God. The white bony fingers stretched out, across the moon, and their shadows moved over the vast, white bluenesses.

The dark shapes of the Jews grew high, they were as thin as sticks of wood, with their skinny knuckles stretching in the snow, and with their flat heads looming in the sky, and the scrawny, narrow bodies swayed across the entire landscape.

A yearning was blended in the snow, in the squinting eyes, and in the narrow little houses, whose bright crevices stretched out longer and longer to the sky.

The god of the town stretched out on his low rooftop, trying to put his front hooves around the moon, which was lying ready above the town, like a large, cold sickle.

A group of tall Jews emerged from a side street, hunched over, gloomy, a wordless flock, they made for a corner of the marketplace, and hollered greetings at one another.

These were the old Hassids of the town, the ones whose spiritual leader, the rebbe, had recently disappeared.

The Jews stretched their hands across the sky, beseeching help for themselves and salvation for the man who had forsaken other men and gone to end his life in the fields and woods.

The heavy snow echoed out of its blueness, and a hushed yearning passed through it from the other side of the world.

A man who was not celebrating peered out along the houses, it was Lord Vrublevsky coming into town, with a lantern in his hand even though the brightness of the night was dazzling, and the snow and the new moon were shining with a fresh radiance.

## In the Palace

The windows of Lord Vrublevsky's palace were aglow. The Jews came from the corners of the town, staring in amazement at the sudden light in the distance and not saying a word to one another.

Terrified, they went back to their homes, still silent, and locked their doors and shutters.

On the roads, buggies, coaches, and carriages were streaking through the night, cracking whips, and racing with a solemn laughter to Vrublevsky's family celebration.

The huge lamps of the palace were blinding. Footmen were hurrying up and down the snow-covered steps, carrying the fur coats of the guests, whispering busily, bowing and scraping.

Then Prince Lubomirsky arrived with his daughters, and Lord Vrublevsky welcomed them personally, smiling so politely, bowing, kissing the fingertips of the lovely girls.

The trains of their French crinolines rustled along the stained checkered floors, the thick moustaches of noblemen were rocking in the air.

And the wide doors stood open, the servants were bringing long platters with spiced geese, cakes, wines in silver buckets.

The impoverished squires were sitting in readiness, holding their forks, telling jokes, greedily eyeing the food.

And a Jewish orchestra was playing. Wolf, the eldest guest, who was standing in front with closed eyes, began playing a fiddle. His soft, tired hand guided the bow, stroking, weeping secretly.

The prayer of a poor man who was hidden,  
And he poured out his heart to God...

The officers strutted in, fresh and stiff, like roosters, their spurs sparkling on the floor, and their smiles going out to everyone. They called to Lubomirsky's beautiful daughters in the distance.

A priest with a dry face was walking through the crowd.

The couples presented themselves for the dance. White and pink ladies in a long row, against the black jackets of the men, their fingertips met over the heads of the women, the dancers turned slowly in a circle, bowing ceremoniously and sometimes whispering amorous words to one another.

The bottles popped open.

The fat wives of landowners, with big bosoms, were dancing with young boys, the little gentlemen led them about with both hands, pressing hard against the bosoms, forgetting everything, and not abating.

The priest halted at the orchestra, listened for a while, and then came closer to Wolf:

"I don't really care for your music, sir!"

And before Wolf could even get a look at him, the priest hurried away, apparently frightened by his own words. He caught sight of Vrublevsky at the corner of a table, the man was sitting all alone, a bit sad, by an open bottle.

The priest sat down next to him.

An old aristocrat at the table ignored etiquette, he quickly tucked in a napkin at his throat, grabbed a knife and fork, and, fiercely mumbling, he started carving the goose.

A few of the guests came from the ballroom.

The women were dazzling, they swished their white plumes with nimble hands, and smiled saucily as they listened to the tender words of their escorts.

Lord Vrublevsky leaned over to the priest:

"What can I do, Father, I feel sick at heart."

"Repent, my son, confess your sins!"

Lord Vrublevsky scowled into the priest's face:

"But I don't believe in God, Father!"

The old aristocrat with his mouth full of goose felt obligated to join in:

"One must believe, Lord Ignats, one must believe."

But Lord Vrublevsky ignored him. He moved closer to the priest, took hold of his hands, and, even gloomier than before, he shouted into his face:

"But I don't believe in God, Father!"

His nostrils were flaring. He grabbed the bottle from the table and smashed it on the floor. The laughter in the room broke off.

The entire crowd was transfixed.



From another corner, Prince Lubomirsky hurried over with quick steps. He began soothing Vrublevsky, stroking his head, and he turned to the company with a smile on his lips:

"It's nothing, a bottle fell down."

And the orchestra played and played without stopping. The musicians were on a platform, crouching, bending over their instruments, with their coats, their beards, like a swarm of spiders. They ignored the sparkling all around them, the joyousness of the young bodies. They were absorbed in the instruments and reciting psalms through the trumpets, flutes, and drums.

The company began to drink. Officers were quietly downing bottles of wine like water. Ladies were telling one another marvelous things about their sons in Paris. The old aristocrat was getting drunk. With one hand on the back of his head, he guzzled down glass after glass, arrogantly shouting:

"What do you young pups know about drinking?"

And he would grab his long thick mustache and pull it down to his shoulder while refilling his glass with the other hand.

Young girls were falling in love. One lordling was performing black magic, with gold coins vanishing from his hands. And Vrublevsky ordered more wine, the oldest wine they had. Standing up to talk to his footmen, he suddenly caught sight of Wolf in the orchestra. Something jogged his memory. Vrublevsky slipped away from his guests and, with a pale face, he went over to Wolf in the corner:

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before, sir?"

Wolf looked coldly into his eyes:

"I can't say."

"Wasn't it over on the crossroads, by the old crucifix?"

"I can't say."

The orchestra played on. Wolf joined in again with his fiddle. Vrublevsky remained before him, transfixed. The melody had struck him to the quick, it drew tears from his heart, and he suddenly felt as if he were standing in front of the orchestra in a coma, with his heart in his hands.

The old aristocrat joined the dancing. He banged the high heels of his red boots, squatted down, stood up, bowed his head, flung out his hands like a cross, whirled in a wide circle, jigged about, quickly, quickly, banged his boots again, while boastfully clapping his hands and panting like an ox.

The guests were gathering around him, egging him on, admiring his dexterity, making fun of him, the impoverished landowner, who had to feast at other tables.

Lubomirsky was standing in the circle, holding his loveliest daughter, the youngest. She had a full figure, and a birthmark on her lips. Lubomirsky's daughter, a decent person, realized she ought to smile at the old nobleman, but she didn't feel well at all: "Unbelievers!"

The nobleman was dancing more wildly, he was so drunk he didn't know what he was doing, he dropped his head and flung his arms about like a scarecrow. The guests moved away in annoyance, they glanced around; the room became too quiet, the guests stopped talking... Someone was standing at the door, a disheveled, barefoot Christian: Kyril.

He was gawking at the landowners, he couldn't understand what this celebration was all about. Diamonds from shapely female ears were glittering at him, gold on hands was scorching him, his breath was cut off, his eyes were dazzled, he was so exhausted he could barely regain consciousness. Scratching himself with his long hands, he began to speak in a husky voice:

"Brothers, Jesus has climbed down from the cross, oh my brothers!"

The guests stood there mute. The old aristocrat was already lying on the floor with his head flung back, but no one even bothered to glance at him. They stood at a distance, head by head, with round eyes, and there was no air to breathe.

Kyril was talking as though out of a darkened room:

"I swear by my life, I saw him on a rainy day, he climbed down from the crucifix at the crossroads, and went out into the world... I swear by my life, brothers..."

And he crossed himself. The guests remained mute. A heavy, cold-blooded lady stared at the bare-foot intruder. She had been the first to recognize him, and suddenly she burst out laughing:

"Why are you all gaping? That's Kyril, the bathhouse attendant!"

Now the priest, the Protector of God, came to his senses. With a pale face and tight blue lips, he emerged from the crowd and stomped over to Kyril, and his dry face began showing red spots:

"You, stop profaning God!"

The guests bent toward them. Kyril gave him a sheepish stare, failing to understand what the priest meant:

"Who, me?"

And the priest hollered out:

"You're profaning God, you bathhouse attendant!"

"Who, me?"

And Kyril suddenly flared up, the breath poured out of his nostrils like smoke from a chimney. He came to his senses and pointed his finger at the priest:

"You, Father, you're the one who profanes God, you, do you understand!"

The guests burst into a roar and threw themselves at Kyril. Bitterly, he pushed them away with his bony shoulders. The guests rolled on the ground, they were stunned, they choked one another, and spat in the old aristocrat's face.

Lubomirsky's young daughter quietly took Kyril aside:

"Kyril, please, go back to your people, they'll kill you here... I'll come too, I'll come to you and your people..."

Kyril stared at her in fright, and she smiled at him excitedly, instead of weeping. She led him out to the door, and then all at once she clutched him:

"Come, Kyril, come..."

And the orchestra gave a fearful crash. The musicians ran into the crowd. Wolf tore his bow across the strings, as he stepped over the heads of the prostrated guests. A shofar blasted darkly. A small musician with a stiff hat over his ears exerted his last ounce of strength pulling and pushing the long slide of his trumpet, puffing out his cheeks, and marching with military steps over the guests.

The company dashed out to the carriages.

The whips cracked, the furious horses charged away with their light buggies, over the foggy fields, flew through the night. The confused guests threw off their clothes, moaned, tore their hair, screamed for help.

That night, Lubomirsky's daughter disappeared.

## **An Incantation**

And he, who came from the House of David, goes from land to land, from city to city, and wherever he meets people, he says to them:

"Sons of man, why do you love one another?"

"The mountain knows nothing of love.

"The field knows nothing of love."

## **What Lord Vrublevsky Did to Gimpel**

And the dawn broke through, red. The worms got up. The soaked forest was smoking, and patches of fog were hanging from the branches.

Gimpel climbed out of the bushes, shaking from the cold, rubbing his drowsy eyes with his fists, and yawning.

The grass was astir and arustle with creatures. Far, far away, the fresh morning air resounded with the thudding of axes. They were chopping away at the forest.

Gimpel felt sick at heart. He put his finger to his lips and listened carefully. They were chopping away at the forest! He took off on a path towards Simkhe, not knowing why he felt so awful.

Breathlessly he ran from path to path, and suddenly, in the dense ness of the forest, he saw Lord Vrublevsky coming toward him with a feather in his hat, and with his dog trailing him.

Gimpel quickly struck off to the side, but Vrublevsky stopped him:

"What are you doing in the woods?"

"Nothing my lord!"

"What do you mean nothing? "

"Just that, absolutely nothing, my lord."

"Who mangled a wolf in the forest? Was it you?"

"Not me, my lord."

"Who?"

"A cow."

"What?!"

"A cow, my lord!"

Vrublevsky slapped him several times. With his cheeks burning from the blows, Gimpel thought to himself that the man must be an anti-Semite. He touched his cheeks, lamenting:

"Why did you hit me, my lord? Why should I mangle your wolves! Don't I have better things to do?!"

But the lord was already creeping off into the bushes. Gimpel dashed down the road. He thought the man was chasing him, and he ran into an enclosure. Plopping down on a tree stump, he wiped the sweat off on his sleeve, breathed a sigh of relief, and then a keen thought jabbed through his mind. He took out his pencil stub and a scrap of paper and started jotting down the thought.

A rabbit came leaping wildly out of the bushes, jumped over Gimpel's head, and then the hound came shooting out of the thickets, and there was Lord Vrublevsky again. Gimpel sprang up as white as a sheet:

"What are you doing in these woods?"

"Nothing, my lord!" "What do you mean nothing?"

"Just that, absolutely nothing, my lord!"

And Gimpel got two more burning slaps. Not looking around, he sensed that he ought to vanish on the spot, and he dashed off into the thickets. The hound forgot about the hare and took off after Gimpel.

Gimpel ran helter-skelter. He wouldn't stop, but the hound ground his teeth into Gimpei's calves and tore off the legs of his trousers, which had once been dotted with dots and striped with stripes. But he didn't stop, he ran straight to Simkhe.

He could already make out the hut from far away.

Gimpel reached the door with his last bit of strength and began pounding with his fists:

"Simkhe, help!"

Simkhe Plakhte was sitting inside, very calm. With no loss of composure, he asked:

"What's the matter?"

"Simkhe, the carriages are here!"

The door whipped open, Simkhe dashed out, pale, disheveled, horrified.

"What?! Where are they?!"

He saw the philosopher with his calves naked, his trousers gone, and his birdlike face full of terror. Simkhe calmed down again.

"Listen, Simkhe, do you hear?"

From far away, they could hear the dull thudding of the axes. Birds were flying from that direction, their nests had been destroyed. Simkhe glared toward that area, listened hard, and then exclaimed furiously:

"Levi the moneylender! May he rot in hell!"

And he trudged back into his shack, locking and bolting the door behind him. Gimpel stood there, dazed, not knowing where to turn. He cautiously knocked at Simkhe's door:

"Simkhe, can you spare some trousers?"

"Can't you go without pants, you dandy?"

Gimpel stared a while at the door which had been slammed in his face. Then he lost heart, thrust his hands in his pockets, and started off into the woods. The road was asparkle with dew, and Gimpel burst into song:

The road merged into the highway. Each blade of grass awoke in the moistness of dawn. Never had a daybreak moved him so deeply.

He strode proudly along the road, danced a bit, and sang the song of the idler.

At the edge of the woods he ran into the little Lamed-vovnik. The kind little Jew was shouting at the bushes:

"Come on out, miss, this is the road."

And a young, black-haired girl, with a pack on her shoulders, leaped over the ditch. The Lamed-vovnik stared at her with a bit of drool on his lips, admiring her agility. It was Leah.

Gimpel's passions were aroused. Leah slowly glanced at him and then modestly lowered her eyes again. He clutched at his pants, felt as if the earth were opening under him, and then he cautiously walked over to her, from the side, as red as a glowing ember, and introduced himself:

"Dr. Gimpel Abramovich Lionson!"

Leah shook his hand. The jealous Lamed-vovnik ran around to Leah's other side and his eyes bored into the handshake.

"I must apologize for meeting you in my work clothes, mademoiselle..."

Leah put her arm into the Lamed-vovnik's. The little saint didn't resist, he actually kept time with the music of her gait. Leah felt terribly good between these two men, she walked calmly, thinking about Him and smiling. Gimpel was talking:

"But actually, my area of specialization is speculative science. With my philosophical system I have succeeded in refuting the greatest thinkers in the world. Socrates was a bourgeois, he was unable to rise beyond social life. Kant, you see, is a learned man —"

"Did you ever talk to him?"

"Who? Kant?"

"No, the man who lives in the mill."

"You mean Benye? He's quite backward, even though he does possess a certain intuition in regard to universal understanding." Gimpel looked around at the sides of the forest, he had to run off into a corner for a while, it was vital and crucial. He apologized and dashed into the thickets. It was already noon... Returning into the depths of the forest, he felt a terror, and wanted to run back out, but it was too late. Behind a tree, he caught sight of Vrublevsky with a feather in his hat and a rifle over his shoulder, and cold as ice. Gimpel lost his voice:

"What are you doing in these woods?"

Gimpel was speechless.

"Why don't you answer?"

Gimpel was speechless.

"Who mangled a wolf in these woods?"

Gimpel was speechless.

"Was it you, you wanderer?"

Gimpel was speechless.

"Who?"

Gimpel was speechless.

"Speak up!"

In the darkness of the thicket, sparks of phosphorus came flaring from hand to cheek. Gimpel realized there was no way of dealing with Vrublevsky, and another fear caught hold of him, an unknown fear, interwoven with the earth and the stars. The tip of his skull and the point of his nose began freezing. Suddenly he burst into a run, screamed in terror, and leaped from bush to bush. He ran around the squire in a circle and stretched out his hands to him.

## The Ten Sefirot

Now, know that the myriad crystal worlds in the mystery of the ten sefirot overflow into one another, an orbit into an orbit, like waters.

And the light that overflows from one world to the other echoes for trillions upon trillions of leagues.

Now, know that no human being ever born knows his road or the worlds through which he shall go in and through which he shall go out.

Trillions upon trillions of radiant leagues in length and in height, and a black, thin man is crawling along them.

He climbs up the dazzling walls from one world to the next, strains his big ears, opens up his eyes, and scans the various resounding waters to find out who is listening. No one, no one is listening to him, no one is listening.

Now, know that there is no one in the great world, no God, and no devil, no kith, no kin, no redeemer.

The crystal worlds are shining, sparkling for millions of leagues upon leagues, and the thin black man knocks on a dazzling wall, puts his ear against it, and listens: And the loud enormous distances respond with an emptiness, a splendid void.

And know that this is the secret of Infinity.

## Leah Comes to Him, and He Also Claims that Gimpel is Right

The little Lamed-vovnik was standing by Benye's house, showing Leah the work she was supposed to do. The daylight was waning.

Leah was pale, more pale than ever. She listened to the sounds of the countryside, looked about in amazement, her heart racing. The Lamed-vovnik was comforting her, but Leah paid no attention, she wanted to wait and see: Should she enter the house tomorrow, or should she keep out of it altogether? The Lamed-vovnik explained that Benye was one of our people, Benye would welcome her with open arms, she could count on it, and he pinched her arm, the old lecher!

"You sly thing!"

The Lamed-vovnik had been accepted by the saints only because of his great meekness, although he had committed a good many sins with women. He scurried around Leah like a rooster. Leah finally got up enough courage to enter the house. She walked over to the door with her pack on her shoulders, carefully raised the bolt, and then turned her face once again to the Lamed-vovnik. He waved his hand:

"Go on in, silly, c'mon!"

Leah entered the porch. It smelled of rotten sacks and tatters. In the darkness, she could make out old, unnailed wheels up on the rafters, and a bagpipe on the wall. She saw the door leading into the house and went over to it with soft, gentle steps, not daring to raise the bolt. She remained standing at the entrance.

All at once, she opened the door wide. The house was pitch dark. The oven had gotten larger in the course of time, it filled half the room. She looked for Him in the darkness...

Benye was sitting on a log in the corner, he had been wringing his hands and now they were clenched together in his lap, his heavy head and tangled beard were drooping on his open, dirty chest. He was in mourning. His thick lips kept closing, parting, closing, like the mouth of a fish, and single words came rolling out, clumsy, mossy, like stones:

"I'm going to the earth... Gimpel is right... There is no God..."

Leah clutched at the wall. Her knees began shaking, and the whole room turned upside-down. Burning dots flashed before her eyes, her head became heavy and fell to one side, she could barely sit down on the bench against the wall.

Patches of darkness were weaving before her eyes, intertwined with bright spots, and her heart was gnawed by bitterness and despair. She wanted to say something, but couldn't:

"Give me some water!"

Benye heard a voice asking for water, he got on his feet, trudged over to the wooden bucket standing by the oven, barely heaved it up, and lugged it over to Leah.

He stood in front of her for a while, holding the bucket. She raised her hand lifelessly and stuck it into the water, opened her eyes, but they closed again, her head fell even deeper on her breast.

Benye stood and waited, he saw she wasn't drinking, so he carefully took her hand out of the pail, and brought the water to her face.

He whistled heartily as though giving water to a horse, he wanted to talk her into drinking. Leah turned her face to the water, drank, and felt a sense of relief...

The Lamed-vovnik was moving past the windows, surprised that the welcome was taking so long. He was already suspecting Benye of a sinful act. He raised himself up to the window and peeked through the glass, but it was dark inside. He slowly clambered up on the mound of earth surrounding the house, pressed his face against the window, covered himself with his hand – he couldn't see a thing. His heart hammering, he climbed back down with the intention of going in, but then he heard a running from far away. It was Gimpel whizzing through the night, his naked calves shining in the dark, he ran up to the Lamed-vovnik, panting:

"Where is she?"

But the Lamed-vovnik played the fool:

"Who?"

"You oaf! I'm asking you: Where is the young lady?"

"Oh, the girl. She's inside, with Benye."

Gimpel wiped his sweat off on his sleeve. He didn't want to have anything to do with the Lamed-vovnik. He halted at the corner of the house, crossed one leg over the other, and whistled a tune. The Lamed-vovnik looked at him suspiciously. Gimpel suddenly remembered something, he pulled out a pouch of tobacco, poured some into a slip of paper, rolled it up, and smoked a cigarette. He held one hand in his pocket, and smoked with the other, smoothed back his hair, and serenely blew the smoke into the air.

The Lamed-vovnik held his beard, and stood there silently looking at Gimpel, and looking. All at once he got up on his tiptoes and blurted right into Gimpel's face:

"That is pride, nothing more!"

Gimpel put the cigarette in his mouth, turned his back to the Lamed-vovnik with his hands behind him, and casually strolled past the house.

But then the door opened, Leah stepped out as white as snow, holding on to the doorposts, and Benye came after her with the pail in his hand. Gimpel's heart froze at the sight of the wan girl. He stared at her, and sudden tears poured out of his eyes, he couldn't hold them back. He ran over to her and threw himself on the ground:

"Darling, I love you!"

And he hugged her feet and kissed her black shoes, he wept and twisted on the grass like a long, thin worm. Leah mechanically stepped back to the wall and burst out crying, her whole small body was trembling, and suddenly everything turned radiant before her eyes.

## **An Incantation**

And he, the Son of David, comes to a city that is being built. He sees the masons on the scaffolds, the bricklayers at work, the carpenters in the windows, and he is overcome with a deep joy, and he says:

"Look, work comes out of men as a web comes out of a spider.

"Look, the water is working in the mountains for the sake of work."

## **Perhaps Simkhe Is Also a Saint**

Simkhe was spread out like a piece of cloth in the autumn field, he was silent and bitter. Somewhere people were eating the harvested rye, and here the pieces of straw were withering. The earth was lying there deceived and forsaken, like a woman who had been promised things and then cast aside.

The brown gold of autumn was grieving, and the trees that were barely surviving, and the wet bony rocks in the ditches.

Simkhe threw himself upon the earth like a mourner, he clenched his hand into the soil, pressed his face and body into the ground, and wept bitterly for the vanished life of the earth.

The foggy countryside was grieving, and so were the rows of storks flying overhead through the bluish wetness of the rains.

He could hear one branch after another dying, the millions of grass haulms languishing, and once they had so silently been woven into the large brown body of the earth.

Simkhe was lying on a corpse – the earth was exhaling her final motherly pang, and she came out to Simkhe in her warm grief.

Simkhe slowly got to his feet. A melancholy was gnawing at his bones. With his large body bowing, he walked around, raking up the fallen yellow leaves.

He gathered together a heap of leaves in the middle of the field, like a huge hill, the fog embraced, crushed, and extinguished the melting glow of the living body.

Simkhe sat down on the heap of leaves, took out his clay pipe, and blew out curls of smoke that enveloped him like a cloud.

The thudding of axes echoed through the smokey blue forest.

Fresh logs were visible through the thin fog at the edge of the forest, fresh wood, with its bark stripped off. A few enormous boughs with clumps of needles on them had been flung around the wood, like limbs that have not been buried with the rest of the body.

Simkhe was sitting in his fur, which was wet with dew, he was squinting through the smoke into the distances which had faded in the fog.

A shout came from nearby in the forest. Leah ran out of the trees, exhausted, with her hair flying, she was screaming for help, and Lord Vrublevsky and his hound were raging after her.

Leah dashed over to Simkhe in the field and collapsed, the squire managed to grab her hair with a shriek of lust, clutched her in his arms and showered her breasts with kisses.

Simkhe quietly climbed down from the heap of leaves, his eyes filled with blood, he slowly moved towards Vrublevsky.

He lifted one foot heavily and then put it down again heavily. The field bent beneath his tread.

Vrublevsky didn't notice him, he was bending over Leah, crushing her against his body, swaying, with his lips on her throat.

Simkhe trudged over, grabbed Vrublevsky and lifted him high in the air while his foot pressed the dog's head to the ground. Leah was lying on the earth, stretching her hands out to protect herself. Terror-stricken, she looked at Simkhe, who was growing broader, bigger, with his solid, bony chest swelling, and she looked at the green nobleman whom Simkhe was hoisting aloft.

"God, pour out Thy wrath on the Gentiles!..."

And then he flung him across the autumnal fields, hurled him with all his strength across the meadows and woods up into the sky. His thin legs struggling to catch hold of something, he swam like a fish through the fog, not knowing where, perhaps to the jagged and gloomy Mountains of Darkness. The dog shot off, whining, after his master, who was plunging and whizzing like an arrow, and the poor animal clutched his tail between his legs.

## Levi Patashnik Looks for His Daughter

And in the middle of the night, Levi Patashnik began smashing the objects in his home, he knocked out the windowpanes, splintered the mirrors, tore down the drapes and the pictures.

He scurried around the rooms, half-naked, calling for Leah, peering under the beds and in the closets. But no one answered.

The tufts of yellow brown hair were bristling around his bald pate like prickly straw, and his eyes were shaking madly in their sockets.

From under a bed, he took out a sack which, as it turned out, had been prepared long ago. He slung it around his neck and ran over to the open cabinet, and his hot hands raked all the gold into the bag. But he couldn't rest, he rubbed his head, his short beard, and ran from corner to corner.

Suddenly, beneath a bed, he saw one of Leah's shoes, grabbed it, and then dropped it, as though it were a piece of white-hot iron, into the bag. Whimpering like a beaten dog, he stood up and made for the door.

Outside, there was a terrible darkness, a few scant windows were shining yellow under a roof somewhere...

Levi passed through the streets, weeping, screaming, flailing his arms, clenching his fists at heaven...

But no one heard him. Clouds lay on the sky, like lichen in old forests.

Levi rambled through the autumnal fields, shaking, his bare feet treading in clay, he wandered from the roads to the isolated meadows.

The silent villages were sprawling over the dewy plains, they were so quiet, as if covered with moss.

They were indifferent to the wanderer.

He came into the villages, poked around the courtyards, looked into the stables, and tearfully knocked on the walls of the peasant huts.

"Have you seen, have you heard, anything of my daughter Leah?"

No one had seen, no one had heard, anything of Levi Patashnik's daughter Leah.

Frightened sheep bleated in the folds.

The ignorant peasants sleepily crawled back into bed with their wives.



A pointed moon slipped out from the clouds, it had eyes, and beams of light rained down on the sides of the roads.

Levi trudged across the fields, munching and gnawing the silvery silence of the night... Somewhere far, far away, in a dale, a dog was howling long and sorrowfully.

No other soul was awake. Levi climbed down into the valley to find this one living creature.

A long female dog was standing there, weeping her yearning for her master, who had been hurled away, she didn't care about Levi although she knew the secret of his wanderings.

Somewhere in the moonlit night, her green master was plunging headfirst, plunging like an arrow, and no one could help him.

Levi stood crouching near her, with the bag of gold around his neck, staring at the bony ribs of the dog, while tears came gushing into his eyes.

And all at once – Levi turned to the moon with bulging eyes and began whining in the night, even louder than the grimy dog.

### **A Light World, Nearly Like a Dream or Gimpel Talks in Rhymes but Means Something Else**

It was snowing, a dense, warm snow, at the end of autumn, reviving the countryside. Simkhe's shack once again received a thick white cover, which gave it a festive air, and the white forest all around it bore the bright, noble yoke joyously.

Simkhe, Leah, and Gimpel the philosopher were sitting inside the shack.

The snow had a healing effect on their lives, it opened many new eyes inside them, and they watched as the world became transfigured, transparent, and its clear, quiet heart was open and would tremble at the slightest rustle of a branch... white joy... white, sad joy...

Simkhe lay on the broad bench by the window, leaning on his elbows and staring into the festive room, not thinking, but dreaming with his body, and warmly inhaling the breath of the cool golden air seeping in through the windows. Leah was sitting next to him on the same bench, her bright clear eyes staring into the woods, as she talked to Simkhe. He comforted her, assured her that the Messiah shouldn't be handsome, and that Benye might well light up in his last hour, his hide would slough off and he would appear to her fresh and young again.

Gimpel shook the pouch of tobacco over the table, snorted, and rolled a cigarette. He spoke wordlessly, joyously, warm thoughts came from deep inside him, drifted through him like mists, talked silently in his limbs, as light with light. He fixed his moist eyes on Leah, and a white joy lamented within him:

"I, Gimpel, need no language; I, Gimpel, can get along without language."

And Simkhe lay comfortably on the oaken bench with his beard spread out on his chest, he was gazing at the philosopher, who was sad because of the sweet dazzlement beyond the windows.

He sat opposite Simkhe, transparent, looking as if he might shatter into pieces at a single touch, tinkling gently and blending into the airy world around him.

Gimpel smoked the cigarette, put his hand in his pocket, stretched out his legs, and, staring at Leah, he began speaking in rhymes:

"Smoking this cigarette of mine,

"I quietly sit here and I feel so fine, so fine..."

Simkhe said to him comfortably:

"If you feel fine, then I feel dandy."

And Leah, peering through the window, folded her arms and cupped her elbows in her hands. She didn't turn toward Gimpel though she did listen and clearly understood his dismal intention.

Gimpel had never been so pale and radiant, even if he cracked jokes and kept up the pretense of speaking in rhymes:

The above necessity  
 To wit, that accumulation brings noninfinity  
 Will someday be decorated by a man like me  
 With a bald pate for all to see,  
 With eyes – bags  
 And legs like crags,  
 And will bring me to the Almighty  
 – A person like me, who's very flighty."

"Fine, Gimpel, fine. You're a very flighty person."

But Gimpel didn't answer, he didn't feel like scolding him. He wasn't dealing with Simkhe. He was sitting and, in his way, longing for Leah. He explained to the mistress of his soul that the two of behind his back, he lifted his whiskers up to the tall guest and the world:

God is God! – A twofold substance,  
 In infinity,  
 A female possibility,  
 Dynamic and static,  
 An inference,  
 A birth pang and a song and dance.

He twirled the cigarette. His long fingers dangled on the table. He looked at the soft profile of the mistress of his soul, who was even paler and more quiet because of the snow outside. Suddenly he felt a slow twinge under his heart a tearful twinge. Very nobly, and with utmost devotion, he asked her, using her Russian name: "Liza Leonovna, why are you silent?"

She turned to him with a doleful smile:

"I'm not silent at all."

And Simkhe stretched out on the bed and replied:

"Because you do enough talking for everyone else, Gimpel." "What a day," said Gimpel, "it's a transcendental day, it is."

And Leah was silent.

"A snow, a springtime snow?"

"Yes."

And the thing he had wanted to convey was uttered past the words. Actually, he had already expressed it, and now he fell into a sudden gloom. He stood up from the bench and started walking around, he felt as if he were a little too big, a little too present in this world. He stopped at the wall, touched the plaster (Simkhe's work), meditated, and then began talking to himself in rhymes again:

A person like me who's very flighty.  
 A voice in the chasms began to call:  
 What is his name?  
 What is his name?  
 I don't recall.  
 A lazy fellow, oh God, an indolent...

Poor Gimpel felt hemmed in by the world, even though this day was lighter than crystal. He was permeated with the yearning snow. His mind turned white, and tender as if prepared for the softest sorrows around him. Then all at once, he couldn't bear it anymore, tears came gushing out of his eyes, he burst into a bitter weeping, on and on. With bated breath, he shrieked:

"Will the Messiah come, or not?"

"The Messiah!!"

He ran over to Simkhe, fell on top of him, and started hitting him with his skinny little hands, writhed against his chest, lamented, and tore the poor man's clothes:

"Make the Messiah come! Make Him come!"

Gimpel wept, Leah trembled and buried her face in her hands, she held her breath and froze. She could see Benye before her eyes and smell his putrid smell, and now she remembered his chest which looked like the mangy hide of a carcass. Simkhe sat on the bed, took Gimpel in his arms, and began speaking softly, as though not to him:

"Why are you bawling, you poor devil?"

Simkhe was somewhat affected by what had happened, gingerly she started, turned to him, and fell wordlessly upon his breast.

Simkhe softly caressed her hair, he was still holding Gimpel, and he said to them:

"My goodness, you're still children, little children!"

He gazed through the white window, far, far away... Among the soft, snowy trees in the woods, Lubomirsky's daughter was wandering about, looking for the road. She clasped herself, shivering with cold, in her summer clothing, which she had been wearing at the family celebration in Vrublevsky's palace.

## They Work Upon Benye

The Lamed-vovniks assembled by Benye's home in the morning cold. The mill, already looking like a mountain of garbage, was covered with frost. The Lamed-vovniks were sitting with frozen beards on the logs by the roadside, some of them clustered in groups, mournfully talking to one another.

He touched Leah, who was sitting with her back to him. Suddenly Princess Lubomirsky was standing on the road, not far from the mill, trembling with cold; she was peering at the windows. The Lamed-vovniks had often seen her around the mill, wondering what she was doing there. None of them spoke about her, though all of them had noticed her.

It was late autumn, the cold crept under the fur coats, noses were freezing, and red, swollen hands cracked and dangled like alien things.

The village tailor was sitting on the seat of earth around the house, he had a sack of potatoes on his shoulder. Jews were standing around him, trying to get him to say something, but he merely gazed at them, sick and feeble, and kept silent. Wolf and the angry guest had gone into Benye's home at dawn, they had argued with him, trying to tell him about redemption. The Lamed-vovniks kept waiting outside, but no one asked them in, no understanding was reached.

Simkhe and Leah appeared on the road, silently walking towards Benye's home. Leah was afraid of Benye. She hated him, but she had to obey Simkhe and come along. The Lamed-vovniks were becoming uneasy, they paced around the house warmed their hands under their armpits, there was no end to the waiting. The silent ones were annoyed, but the talkative ones were hoping: If only it would end!

The tall guest, who looked like a beanpole, was standing in front of Kyril, counting off on his fingers the delicacies in store for them on the table of the Messiah:

"Winey apples, pears, paprika, white bread, smoked herring, sausages..."

And the little Lamed-vovnik was standing there with his hands behind his back, he lifted his whiskers up to the tall guest and beamed with ease and joy:

"And we'll drink, won't we, raisin wine or even cyprus wine.

Meanwhile, the tall guest, lost in thought, wandered off somewhere else, meditating, walking about among the silent Lamed-vovniks. One had been a great Cabbalist, knowing the secret of the

seven shepherds, but in his old age he had become senile. People would think he wanted to tell them something and they lent him an ear, but all he did was to fill it up with nasal ramblings, and nothing more. The silent ones were sitting on a log, like oxen, with broad necks, big, sheeplike eyes, not uttering a word.

The eldest guest came out on the threshold and stood there for a while, thinking, wavering. He finally motioned them to enter the house. The Lamed-vovniks streamed over to the door, each one trying to get in first, a pushing, shoving mob. The tall guest remembered something, he peered around, looking for Kyril in the stampede. He could just barely make him out, and with all his strength he elbowed his way over to him and said:

"Yes, and ice cream too!"

The crowd burst into the room and climbed up on the benches, and windowsills, blocking out the little light that came in through the panes. Benye sat on a log in the corner, wringing his hands on his knees and not even looking about. The Lamed-vovniks thronged around him with bulging eyes, the shorter men standing on tiptoe, and everyone shoving noisily.

Wolf waited until they quieted down.

The seven silent ones went out first, the men who had understood the world, like mossy stones in ditches, who had not tasted of death or life, and knew the secret of creation with their oxlike shoulders.

Wolf distributed them around the room, he and the angry guest slowly walked over to Benye, placing themselves on either side of him like the men who lead a groom to a wedding canopy.

A hush fell, and it was so quiet you could hear the woodwork creak.

Benye was sitting with his head drooping, he was staring at his dirty toes and didn't see anyone, as though he were already dead. Wolf began talking in a loud voice:

"Benye, son of Blume!"

Benye didn't answer.

"Benye, son of Shloyme. Because of the great torment of our life on earth, we hereby declare you to be the Messiah of the House of Ephraim!"

Benye didn't answer.

"Benye son of Blume, tell us what you want."

With difficulty, Benye lifted his head, his open mouth was charred, he could barely reply:

"I want to die!"

The Lamed-vovniks turned around with a sigh, a few began crying, for all of them suddenly felt that death was better than life, and that there was nothing left to lose anyway. But Wolf raised himself over everyone else and kindled like a flame, his face radiated, lighting up the others:

"Benye, listen, I want us to be redeemed, I want us to rip off the

hide of the living world! Benye, listen, I want us to break through to God! Do you hear!"

But Benye didn't answer.

## **Gimpel Gives a Sermon on the Mount and Then Goes to Sleep**

It was a hot, blood-red evening, crimson mountains floated out from the other side of the world and loomed on the fields, and the sky burnt over them like blazing copper. The gory sunset stormily flooded the countryside, the old forest was flaming in its blueness, spurting fire and darkness.

Gimpel Zaskovitser, dunked in the evening redness, was climbing the loamy mountain behind the mill, he lifted his arms to the blazing landscape and spoke to the four corners of the world:

"Why shouldn't I use reason? If it were a bird, I would prepare it for dinner; if it were a necktie, I would wear it to attract girls.

"My body works day and night to comprehend the world – reason interferes with me and my work.

"Oh God! Irrationality can understand irrationality.

"Just look, the earth is alive, the earth thinks and works, and there is no divinity in it—and no rationality.

"What is life, God?—I want to comprehend my own area in the world.

"Here am I, Gimpel, all alone in the field. My power of conception soars over the plains and valleys, but – it never lets my body know the secret of the world.

"Oh God! I want to throw my reason out the window!"

And he came down the mountain with his head flung back, the way a general gets down from a horse after a war.

He walked down to the road, looking for a soft ditch to lie in and sleep. He felt around in the holes, hoping that Leah would come to him in his sleep.

Somewhere, in a mossy hole, he snuggled up with his head on his hand, and went to sleep. The moon shone on his back, warming him, the green light soaked through his clothes and lapped at his body like a sweet water.

He smiled in his sleep.

Someone softly touched his shoulder, telling him to stand up. He got to his feet, holding out his arms, and walked off across the silvery misty fields.

The moon was driving him.

He walked lightly, almost on tiptoe, whispering soft words, with his eyes closed, yet he saw the white landscape clearly before him, the splotches of the trees and villages in the valleys.

Leah didn't come to him, so he went off in his sleep to scour the world. The drops of light fell heavily upon him, like drops of rain, and coursed over his body, and he felt as if he were walking across a riverbed.

Suddenly he halted, there was a shoe lying in the road.

Gimpel bent over, keeping his head toward the moon, he took hold of the shoe and pressed it to his heart. It was clear to him that the shoe belonged to Leah, she had worn it once, he could feel the breath of Leah's body in it.

The road stretched on between shiny poplars.

Gimpel walked along with the shoe at his heart, his eyes were closed, and he was smiling at the moon, he felt as if he were walking over the heads of people. No one knew about him, but he didn't need anyone. He went out on the highest lunar fields, eyeless, and the earth bent out beneath him, writhing, like a big river in the moonlight.

In the stillness, he could make out voices from the trees, the earth, the singing of heaven and the ultimate secret of the world.

He raised his head; over him, someone was standing among the clouds, a long, green shape:

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing, Gimpel, just that."

Lord Vrublevsky was still floating over the world, and now – the roads were swaying, there was no earth underfoot – a dream, a dream.

And the world was transformed for him into moonlight, the field was white smoke, Leah a foggy sound emerging from him, from infinity, and Gimpel didn't exist at all.

## The Trek of the Lamed-Vovniks

And then came the night of the annual Jewish Day of Judgment. Clouds from the farthest ends of the world gathered overhead, brown and blazing. A thick, crooked rain lashed into the faces; and it was so dark they couldn't see their own hands.

At the mill, the Lamed-vovniks got into line, with Benye in front, he had no hat on, his hair was soaked and snarled, and behind him stood the seven silent men of Zhamut. The Lamed-vovniks were holding one another. Gimpel, half-naked, was also wandering among them.

The wind bent the trees over, tearing their boughs aloft, it ripped the furs and swept the coats up over the men's heads, and the air was so thin they could hardly breathe.

Simkhe Plakhte and Leah went to the end of the row, with the cow behind them. But no one noticed that Princess Lubomirsky had slipped in among the Lamed-vovniks. She walked through the crowd, wringing her hands, crossing herself, and praying to God in her language.

The road led across loamy fields. Dense fogs emerged from the darkness and drifted over the landscape like enormous rags. The travelers would put down a foot, not knowing where. Water came pouring down the mountains, and the jutting ridges were freezing. The winds tore into the clouds, scattering dark shreds over the fields and pouring torrentially on the Lamed-vovniks. The cow, who didn't have a hair left on her skin, kept lying down, she could barely keep up with the trekers. The land became deeper and darker, each Lamed-vovnik was absorbed in himself, staring mutely into his own darkness, praying to God for mercy:

God, God, have mercy on the boot tree,  
 On the tiny hammer,  
 On the needle and on the scissors.  
 Have mercy on our tiny little souls,  
 A patchwork of torment and tatters,  
 On our children, who want cake.  
 On our wives, who do not lust but have too many babies.  
 On our daughters whose blood has dried.  
 Have mercy on those who lie behind the ovens,  
 On the putrid,  
 On those with ruptures,  
 On those who go begging.  
 Have mercy on the broken-down horses,  
 On the traveling draymen,  
 On the hatters and the tailors...  
 God. God!

And the air was so thin they could scarcely breathe. They sighed in their misery, only the silent ones held out their gravel faces and peered into the darkness with their calflike eyes. The little Lamed-vovnik trudged along, with his coat folded up on his head, he was wringing his hands and weeping.

They came into the forest. The trees were tearing at their roots, a suffocating steam came up from the ground and weighed on backs like a yoke. Simkhe's shack was lying on its side, the furnishings were smashed and scattered. Simkhe didn't halt, he hollered into the weeping of the wind:

"I'll build it again!"

No one heard him. The wind was whining overhead, through the treetops, it struck against the chests of the men and tugged on their beards. Its lament sounded like a human voice. The Lamed-vovniks opened their mouths; somewhere, deep in a ditch, a man was screaming, wailing from the earth, like an old branch. Wolf trudged over to the roadside and screamed into the darkness with all his strength:

"You, who are you, you accursed man, come with us!"

A man came crawling out of the ditch on all fours, with a bag around his neck. Leah shuddered, nestled against Simkhe. In the darkness, no one could discern what the man looked like. The wind flung him among the Lamed-vovniks, he merged into the crowd and remained silent.

And in the town, the Jews came trudging out of the houses, whole families, tattered men, women wrapped in shawls, disheveled children. Out came the lame, the blind, the consumptive with swollen bellies, the ruptured with empty eyesockets, asthmatic men in rags, men in sacks.

They gathered in the crooked marketplaces, along the sides of the streets, head to head, nestled together, and the clammy rain lashed into the faces and poured over the bodies. The houses, ramshackle with age, were about to collapse, they cracked and leaned on one another, and on the low rooftop sat the god...

## An Incantation

And the Jews came out to him from the synagogues, the priests from the churches, the yeshivah students, the women. They gathered around him, they kissed the tails of his coat.

"Messiah, what have you come to add to the Torah?"

And he replied:

"I have not come to you to add anything to the Torah, I have come to take back the Torah."

"Gimpel, do human beings exist?"

"No, human beings do not exist."

"What does exist?"

"There exists a body without eyes, a mouth that does not speak, and a heart that does not beat."

"But Gimpel, we believe that the body sees, the mouth speaks, and the heart beats."

"Because, Leah, our shapes are reflected in streams, because waters speak and trees bloom."

"Tell me, Gimpel, what does a tree dream about?"

"Leah, I am a tree and I dream about you."

## Help, Lord of Heaven, Help

And the Lamed-vovniks arrived in the town. The wind banged them along like hammers, it wouldn't let them go back. The seven silent men trudged and trudged, bowed over as though they were carrying the world on their backs.

The houses moved closer to the marketplace.

Benye trudged at the head of his crowd, trembling, his hands dragging over the mud. The mouths were full of rushing wind, the eyes sealed with cloudiness, and the tongues parched.

The marketplace stirred with the clatter of crutches – the cripples were trying to walk without them, the blind men were yelling to their wives that they could see. Women were holding their bellies, perhaps they had become pregnant. Dying men were being carried out on their beds, and the barren women came dancing out, waving mannish hands toward the Messiah, jiggling with long, dry bodies like withered trees, lowering their heads in shame, and the wind accompanied them on the roof shingles. The Lamed-vovniks entered the marketplace. Benye thumped his broad, bare feet over the miry pavement, he saw the courage in the eyes, and he crooned his last prayer to God:

The prayer of a poor man, who was hidden,  
And he poured out his heart to God...

There was someone walking next to him, the dark man who had sat on Mars. He looked at him cold and taciturn. From time to time, Benye turned to the man, waiting for him to say something, but the man showed him that he had no tongue and he continued to follow him. The women saw Benye from

afar; screaming, they flung themselves toward him with flying hair; the men stretched out in the mud before him; the cripples and the asthmatic came leaping toward him, the dying held out their arms to him; and the blind, in tears, broke into a run toward the other side of the marketplace, not knowing where he, the Messiah, could be, they stopped at the pump, dropped to the ground, and began weeping to it and holding out their blind hands to it. And Benye was trudging somewhere else, there were men lying at his feet, kissing the ground he stepped upon:

"Messiah, step on us!"

"Messiah, touch my womb, I have no children!"

"Messiah, take the hump off my back!"

"Messiah, I have no erotic desires!"

And he, the Messiah, walked over the heads of the men, over the drooping breasts of the women, letting them kiss his feet. The Lamed-vovniks, mute and bitter, followed him, scanning the marketplace with their calflike eyes, choking, and suddenly they screamed:

"Help, Lord of heaven, help!"

Benye was struck deaf, he turned around to the Lamed-vovniks, saw them lifting their hands to the sky, their faces looking up toward God. Benye heard the weeping and shouting in the marketplace, he was terrified. And suddenly he felt the torment of all these people, tears poured out of his eyes. He lifted up the first woman lying at his feet and kissed her bare breasts, he healed the lame, he stroked the heads of the scabby, he comforted the despairing:

"Die, my poor things, die!"

And the blind came running, with holes under their eyebrows, a foam gushing from their mouths, they fell upon him, threw him down, gouged the eyes out of his face:

"Messiah, we were praying to the pump!"

Benye lay on the ground with bloody eyes, he no longer felt the people. He saw the great beginning, which was nothing, like the time he and the cow had come to the edge of the world, and a great joy overtook him, his soul was leaving him, it was being redeemed. The cripples attacked him with their crutches, tore his legs from their joints, the hunchbacks jabbed him in the back, felt him to see whether he had at least a tiny hump.

And the Lamed-vovniks prayed to God. Simkhe and Leah stood over Benye; in the darkness, they couldn't see what was happening to him, but both of them sensed that he was nearing his end. Leah tore out of Simkhe's arms. She felt all her hatred for Benye, he had deceived her. With her hands outstretched, she dashed across the marketplace, weeping; she wrung her hands and veiled at the Jews:

"Kill him! Kill him!"

And mobs of men and women ran over to where Benye was lying. The old crones threw rags at him, they kicked him into the mud, the men beat him with sticks, they threw stones at him, struck him with hearth brooms, rollingpins, paving stones.

"He deceived us, oh God, he deceived us!"

And Benye lay there, tattered in the mud. His soul left him, and all at once he became as big and as strong as the earth, his limbs joined together with his body, they grew out for miles, permeated with the icy soul of the world. He was lying in the town, in the fields, seeing with other eyes, lying, hearing differently, amazed at the greatness of God. The Jews were crawling about on the earth, kicking him, pouring out the anger of their despairing lives upon him. The rain was plunging in torrents, the houses were cracking, collapsing in the storm, and the men, women, and children were lying in the mud, weeping, cursing their lives. Suddenly, Simkhe Plakhte rose up above the Jews, he struggled over them, like a bright flame from a living sun, and a choking scream boomed across the town:

"Worms!"



Simke trod over the Jews with gigantic paces; in the darkness, his huge body shone with a quiet light. He trod away over the houses, huge, fearful, and solid, and returned to his shack. Now, the poor cow was standing by Benye, hanging her head, with Kyril sitting next to her, his arms around his knees, rocking back and forth, lamenting the death of the Messiah. Out of the night came Lubomirsky's daughter, white and terrified. She fell upon Benye, kissed his bloody face, held him in her arms, and wept over him, wept over him...

## The Prayer

The prayer of a poor man who was hidden,  
And he poured out his heart to God,  
Why are we so tortured, God!  
Wherever I am, I am too much present,  
And wherever I go, I take along the smell of the darkness.  
I envy the bird, who is better than we are,  
And the clay, which is better off than anything else.  
What shall I do with my useless hand,  
And with my useless heart?