

# **Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto**

Abraham Cahan



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## Abraham Cahan

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## 1. Jake and Yekl

The operatives of the cloak shop in which Jake was employed had been idle all the morning. It was after twelve o'clock and the "boss" had not yet returned from Broadway, whither he had betaken himself two or three hours before in quest of work. The little sweltering assemblage—for it was an oppressive day in midsummer—beguiled their suspense variously. A rabbinical-looking man of thirty, who sat with the back of his chair tilted against his sewing machine, was intent upon an English newspaper. Every little while he would remove it from his eyes—showing a dyspeptic face fringed with a thin growth of dark beard—to consult the cumbrous dictionary on his knees. Two young lads, one seated on the frame of the next machine and the other standing, were boasting to one another of their respective intimacies with the leading actors of the Jewish stage. The board of a third machine, in a corner of the same wall, supported an open copy of a socialist magazine in Yiddish, over which a cadaverous young man absorbedly swayed to and fro droning in the Talmudical intonation. A middle-aged operative, with huge red side whiskers, who was perched on the presser's table in the corner opposite, was mending his own coat. While the thick-set presser and all the three women of the shop, occupying the three machines ranged against an adjoining wall, formed an attentive audience to an impromptu lecture upon the comparative merits of Boston and New York by Jake.

He had been speaking for some time. He stood in the middle of the overcrowded stuffy room with his long but well-shaped legs wide apart, his bulky round head aslant, and one of his bared mighty arms akimbo. He spoke in Boston Yiddish, that is to say, in Yiddish more copiously spiced with mutilated English than is the language of the metropolitan Ghetto in which our story lies. He had a deep and rather harsh voice, and his r's could do credit to the thickest Irish brogue.

"When I was in Boston," he went on, with a contemptuous mien intended for the American metropolis, "I knew a *feller*, *[note]* so he was a *preticly* friend of John Shullivan's. He is a Christian, that feller is, and yet the two of us lived like brothers. May I be unable to move from this spot if we did not. How, then, would you have it? Like here, in New York, where the Jews are a *lot* of *greenhornsh* and can not speak a word of English? Over there every Jew speaks English like a stream."

*[note] feller:*

English words incorporated in the Yiddish of the characters of this narrative are given in italics.

"Say, Dzake," the presser broke in, "John Sullivan is *tzampion* no longer, is he?"

"Oh, no! Not always is it holiday!" Jake responded, with what he considered a Yankee jerk of his head. "Why, don't you know Jimmie Corbett *leaked* him, and Jimmie *leaked* Cholly Meetchel, too. *You can betch you' bootsh!* Johnnie could not leak Chollie, *becaush* he is a big *bluffer*, Chollie is," he pursued, his clean-shaven florid face beaming with enthusiasm for his subject, and with pride in the diminutive proper nouns he flaunted. "But Jimmie *pundished* him. *Oh, didn't he knock him out off shight!* He came near making a meat ball of him"—with a chuckle. "He *tzettled* him in three *roynds*. I knew a feller who had seen the fight."

"What is a *rawnd*, Dzake?" the presser inquired.

Jake's answer to the question carried him into a minute exposition of "right-handers," "left-handers," "sending to sleep," "first blood," and other commodities of the fistic business. He must have treated the subject rather too scientifically, however, for his female listeners obviously paid more attention to what he did in the course of the boxing match, which he had now and then, by way of illustration, with the thick air of the room, than to the verbal part of his lecture. Nay, even the performances of his brawny arms and magnificent form did not charm them as much as he thought they did. For a display of manly force, when connected—even though in a purely imaginary

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way—with acts of violence, has little attraction for a "daughter of the Ghetto." Much more interest did those arms and form command on their own merits. Nor was his chubby high-colored face neglected. True, there was a suggestion of the bulldog in its make up; but this effect was lost upon the feminine portion of Jake's audience, for his features, illuminated by a pair of eager eyes of a hazel hue, and shaded by a thick crop of dark hair, were, after all, rather pleasing than otherwise. Strongly Semitic naturally, they became still more so each time they were brightened up by his good-natured boyish smile. Indeed, Jake's very nose, which was fleshy and pear-shaped and decidedly not Jewish (although not decidedly anything else), seemed to join the Mosaic faith, and even his shaven upper lip looked penitent, as soon as that smile of his made its appearance.

"Nice fun that!" observed the side-whiskered man, who had stopped sewing to follow Jake's exhibition. "Fighting—like drunken moujiks in Russia!"

"Tarrarra—boom—de—ay!" was Jake's merry retort; and for an exclamation mark he puffed up his cheeks into a balloon, and exploded it by a "*pawnc*h" of his formidable fist.

"Look, I beg you, look at his dog's tricks!" the other said in disgust.

"Horse's head that you are!" Jake rejoined good-humoredly. "Do you mean to tell me that a moujik understands how to *fight*? A disease he does! He only knows how to strike like a bear [Jake adapted his voice and gesticulation to the idea of clumsiness], *an' dot'sh ull!* What does he care where his paw will land, so he strikes. *But* here one must observe *rulesh* [rules]." At this point Meester Bernstein—for so the rabbinical-looking man was usually addressed by his shopmates—looked up from his dictionary.

"Can't you see?" he interposed, with an air of assumed gravity as he turned to Jake's opponent, "America is an educated country, so they won't even break bones without grammar. They tear each other's sides according to 'right and left,' [*note*] you know." This was a thrust at Jake's right-handers and left handers, which had interfered with Bernstein's reading. "Nevertheless," the latter proceeded, when the outburst of laughter which greeted his witticism had subsided, "I do think that a burly Russian peasant would, without a bit of grammar, crunch the bones of Corbett himself; and he would not *charge* him a cent for it, either."

[*note*] A term relating to the Hebrew equivalent of the letter *s*, whose pronunciation depends upon the right or left position of a mark over it.

"*Is dot sho?*" Jake retorted, somewhat nonplussed. "*I betch you* he would not. The peasant would lie bleeding like a hog before he had time to turn around."

"*But* they might kill each other in that way, *ain't it*, Jake?" asked a comely, milk-faced blonde whose name was Fanny. She was celebrated for her lengthy tirades, mostly in a plaintive, nagging strain, and delivered in her quiet, piping voice, and had accordingly been dubbed "The Preacher."

"Oh, that will happen but very seldom," Jake returned rather glumly.

The theatrical pair broke off their boasting match to join in the debate, which soon included all except the socialist; the former two, together with the two girls and the presser, espousing the American cause, while Malke the widow and "De Viskes" sided with Bernstein.

"Let it be as you say," said the leader of the minority, withdrawing from the contest to resume his newspaper. "My grandma's last care it is who can fight best."

"Nice pleasure, *anyhull*," remarked the widow. "*Never min'*, we shall see how it will lie in his head when he has a wife and children to *support*."

Jake colored. "What does a *chicken* know about these things?" he said irascibly.

Bernstein again could not help intervening. "And you, Jake, can not do without 'these things,' can you? Indeed, I do not see how you manage to live without them."

"Don't you like it? I do," Jake declared tartly. "Once I live in America," he pursued, on the defensive, "I want to know that I live in America. *Dot'sh a' kin' a man I am!* One must not be a *greenhorn*. Here a Jew is as good as a Gentile. How, then, would you have it? The way it is in Russia, where a Jew is afraid to stand within four ells of a Christian?"

"Are there no other Christians than *fighters* in America?" Bernstein objected with an amused smile. "Why don't you look for the educated ones?"

"Do you mean to say the *fighters* are not *ejecate*? Better than you, *anyhoy*," Jake said with a Yankee wink,

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followed by his Semitic smile. "Here you read the papers, and yet *I'll betch you* you don't know that *Corbett findished college.*"

"I never read about fighters," Bernstein replied with a bored gesture, and turned to his paper.

"Then say that you don't know, and *dot'sh ull!*"

Bernstein made no reply. In his heart Jake respected him, and was now anxious to vindicate his tastes in the judgment of his scholarly shopmate and in his own.

"*Alla right*, let it be as you say; the *fighters* are not *ejecate*. No, not a bit?" he said ironically, continuing to address himself to Bernstein. "But what will you say to *baseball*? All *college boys* and *tony peoplesh* play it," he concluded triumphantly. Bernstein remained silent, his eyes riveted to his newspaper. "Ah, you don't answer, *shee?*" said Jake, feeling put out.

The awkward pause which followed was relieved by one of the playgoers who wanted to know whether it was true that to pitch a ball required more skill than to catch one.

"*Sure!* You must know how to *peetch*," Jake rejoined with the cloud lingering on his brow, as he lukewarmly delivered an imaginary ball.

"And I, for my part, don't see what wisdom there is to it," said the presser with a shrug. "I think I could throw, too."

"He can do everything!" laughingly remarked a girl named Pessé.

"How hard can you hit?" Jake demanded sarcastically, somewhat warming up to the subject.

"As hard as you at any time."

"*I betch you a dullar to you' ten shent* you can not," Jake answered, and at the same moment he fished out a handful of coin from his trousers pocket and challengingly presented it close to his interlocutor's nose.

"There he goes!—betting!" the presser exclaimed, drawing slightly back. "For my part, your *pitzers* and *catzers* may all lie in the earth. A nice entertainment, indeed! Just like little children—playing ball! And yet people say America is a *smart* country. I don't see it."

"*F caush* you don't, *becaush* you are a bedraggled *greenhorn*, afraid to budge out of Heshter Shtreet." As Jake thus vented his bad humor on his adversary, he cast a glance at Bernstein, as if anxious to attract his attention and to re-engage him in the discussion.

"Look at the Yankee!" the presser shot back.

"More of a one than you, *anyhoy.*"

"He thinks that *shaving* one's mustache makes a Yankee!"

Jake turned white with rage.

"*Pon my vord*, I'll ride into his mug and give such a *shaving* and planing to his pig's snout that he will have to pick up his teeth."

"That's all you are good for."

"Better don't answer him, Jake," said Fanny, intimately.

"Oh, I came near forgetting that he has somebody to take his part!" snapped the presser.

The girl's milky face became a fiery red, and she retorted in vituperative Yiddish from that vocabulary which is the undivided possession of her sex. The presser jerked out an innuendo still more far-reaching than his first. Jake, with bloodshot eyes, leaped at the offender, and catching him by the front of his waistcoat, was aiming one of those bearlike blows which but a short while ago he had decried in the moujik, when Bernstein sprang to his side and tore him away, Pessé placing herself between the two enemies.

"Don't get excited," Bernstein coaxed him

"Better don't soil your hands," Fanny added.

After a slight pause Bernstein could not forbear a remark which he had stubbornly repressed while Jake was challenging him to a debate on the education of baseball players: "Look here, Jake; since fighters and baseball men are all educated, then why don't you try to become so? Instead of *spending* your money on fights, dancing, and things like that, would it not be better if you paid it to a teacher?"

Jake flew into a fresh passion. "*Never min'* what I do with my money," he said; "I don't steal it from you, do I? Rejoice that you keep tormenting your books. Much does he know! Learning, learning, and learning, and still he can not speak English. I don't learn and yet I speak quicker than you!"

A deep blush of wounded vanity mounted to Bernstein's sallow cheek. "*Ull right, ull right!*" he cut the

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conversation short, and took up the newspaper.

Another nervous silence fell upon the group. Jake felt wretched. He uttered an English oath, which in his heart he directed against himself as much as against his sedate companion, and fell to frowning upon the leg of a machine.

"Will you go by Joe tonight?" asked Fanny in English, speaking in an undertone. Joe was a dancing master. She was sure Jake intended to call at his "academy" that evening, and she put the question only in order to help him out of his sour mood.

"No," said Jake, morosely.

"Vy, today is Vensday."

"And without you I don't know it!" he snarled in Yiddish.

The finisher girl blushed deeply and refrained from any response.

"He does look like a *regely* Yankee, doesn't he?" Pessé whispered to her after a little.

"Go and ask him!"

"Go and hang yourself together with him! Such a nasty preacher! Did you ever hear—one dares not say a word to the noblewoman!"

At this juncture the boss, a dwarfish little Jew, with a vivid pair of eyes and a shaggy black beard, darted into the chamber.

"It is *no used!*" he said with a gesture of despair. "There is not a stitch of work, if only for a cure. Look, look how they have lowered their noses!" he then added with a triumphant grin. "*Vell*, I shall not be teasing you. 'Pity living things! The expressman is *darn stess*. I would not go till I saw him *start*, and then I caught a car. No other *boss* could get a single jacket even if he fell upon his knees. *Vell*, do you appreciate it at least? Not much, ay?"

The presser rushed out of the room and presently came back laden with bundles of cut cloth which he threw down on the table. A wild scramble ensued. The presser looked on indifferently. The three finisher women, who had awaited the advent of the bundles as eagerly as the men, now calmly put on their hats. They knew that their part of the work wouldn't come before three o'clock, and so, overjoyed by the certainty of employment for at least another day or two, they departed till that hour.

"Look at the rush they are making! Just like the locusts of Egypt!" the boss cried half sternly and half with self-complacent humor, as he shielded the treasure with both his arms from all except "De Viskes" and Jake—the two being what is called in sweatshop parlance, "*chance-mentshen*," i.e., favorites. "Don't be snatching and catching like that," the boss went on. "You may burn your fingers. Go to your machines, I say! The soup will be served in separate plates. Never fear, it won't get cold."

The hands at last desisted gingerly, Jake and the whiskered operator carrying off two of the largest bundles. The others went to their machines empty-handed and remained seated, their hungry glances riveted to the booty, until they, too, were provided.

The little boss distributed the bundles with dignified deliberation. In point of fact, he was no less impatient to have the work started than any of his employees. But in him the feeling was overridden by a kind of malicious pleasure which he took in their eagerness and in the demonstration of his power over the men, some of whom he knew to have enjoyed a more comfortable past than himself. The machines of Jake and "De Viskes" led off in a duet, which presently became a trio, and in another few minutes the floor was fairly dancing to the ear-piercing discords of the whole frantic sextet.

In the excitement of the scene called forth by the appearance of the bundles, Jake's gloomy mood had melted away. Nevertheless, while his machine was delivering its first shrill staccatos, his heart recited a vow: "As soon as I get my pay I shall call on the installment man and give him a deposit for a ticket." The prospective ticket was to be for a passage across the Atlantic from Hamburg to New York. And as the notion of it passed through Jake's mind it evoked there the image of a dark-eyed young woman with a babe in her lap. However, as the sewing machine throbbed and writhed under Jake's lusty kicks, it seemed to be swiftly carrying him away from the apparition which had the effect of receding, as a wayside object does from the passenger of a flying train, until it lost itself in a misty distance, other visions emerging in its place.

It was some three years before the opening of this story that Jake had last beheld that very image in the flesh. But then at that period of his life he had not even suspected the existence of a name like Jake, being known to himself and to all Povodye—a town in northwestern Russia—as Yekl or Yekelé.

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It was not as a deserter from military service that he had shaken off the dust of that town where he had passed the first twenty—two years of his life. As the only son of aged parents he had been exempt from the duty of bearing arms. Jake may have forgotten it, but his mother still frequently recurs to the day when he came rushing home, panting for breath, with the "red certificate" assuring his immunity in his hand. She nearly fainted for happiness. And when, stroking his dishevelled sidelocks with her bony hand and feasting her eye on his chubby face, she whispered, "My recovered child! God be blessed for his mercy!" there was a joyous tear in his eye as well as in hers. Well does she remember how she gently spat on his forehead three times to avert the effect of a possible evil eye on her "flourishing tree of a boy," and how his father standing by made merry over what he called her crazy womanish tricks, and said she had better fetch some brandy in honor of the glad event.

But if Yekl was averse to wearing a soldier's uniform on his own person he was none the less fond of seeing it on others. His ruling passion, even after he had become a husband and a father, was to watch the soldiers drilling on the square in front of the whitewashed barracks near which stood his father's smithy. From a cheder *[note]* boy he showed a knack at placing himself on terms of familiarity with the Jewish members of the local regiment, whose uniforms struck terror into the hearts of his schoolmates. He would often play truant to attend a military parade; no lad in town knew so many Russian words or was as well versed in army terminology as Yekelé "Beril the blacksmith's;" and after he had left cheder, while working his father's bellows, Yekl would vary synagogue airs with martial song.

*[note] cheder:*

A school where Jewish children are instructed in the Old Testament or the Talmud.

Three years had passed since Yekl had for the last time set his eyes on the whitewashed barracks and on his father's rickety smithy, which, for reasons indirectly connected with the Government's redoubled discrimination against the sons of Israel, had become inadequate to support two families; three years since that beautiful summer morning when he had mounted the spacious *kibitka* which was to carry him to the frontier-bound train; since, hurried by the driver, he had leaned out of the wagon to kiss his half-year-old son good-bye amid the heart-rending lamentations of his wife, the tremulous "Go in good health!" of his father, and the startled screams of the neighbors who rushed to the relief of his fainting mother. The broken Russian learned among the Povodye soldiers he had exchanged for English of a corresponding quality, and the bellows for a sewing machine—a change of weapons in the battle of life which had been brought about both by Yekl's tender religious feelings and robust legs. He had been shocked by the very notion of seeking employment at his old trade in a city where it is in the hands of Christians, and consequently involves a violation of the Mosaic Sabbath. On the other hand, his legs had been thought by his early American advisers eminently fitted for the treadle. Unlike New York, the Jewish sweatshops of Boston keep in line, as a rule, with the Christian factories in observing Sunday as the only day of rest. There is, however, even in Boston a lingering minority of bosses—more particularly in the "pants"—making branch—who abide by the Sabbath of their fathers. Accordingly, it was under one of these that Yekl had first been initiated into the sweatshop world.

Subsequently Jake, following numerous examples, had given up "pants" for the more remunerative cloaks, and having rapidly attained skill in his new trade he had moved to New York, the center of the cloak-making industry.

Soon after his arrival in Boston his religious scruples had followed in the wake of his former first name; and if he was still free from work on Saturdays he found many another way of "desecrating the Sabbath."

Three years had intervened since he had first set foot on American soil, and the thought of ever having been a Yekl would bring to Jake's lips a smile of patronizing commiseration for his former self. As to his Russian family name, which was Podkovnik, Jake's friends had such rare use for it that by mere negligence it had been left intact.

## 2. The New York Ghetto

It was after seven in the evening when Jake finished his last jacket. Some of the operators had laid down their work before, while others cast an envious glance on him as he was dressing to leave, and fell to their machines with reluctantly redoubled energy. Fanny was a week worker and her time had been up at seven; but on this occasion her toilet had taken an uncommonly long time, and she was not ready until Jake got up from his chair.

Then she left the room rather suddenly and with a demonstrative "Good-night all!"

When Jake reached the street he found her on the sidewalk, making a pretense of brushing one of her sleeves with the cuff of the other.

"So kvick?" she asked, raising her head in feigned surprise.

"You cull dot kvick?" he returned grimly. "Good-bye!"

"Say, ain't you goin' to dance tonight, really?" she queried shamefacedly.

"I tol' you I wouldn't."

"What does *she* want of me?" he complained to himself proceeding on his way. He grew conscious of his low spirits, and, tracing them with some effort to their source, he became gloomier still. "No more fun for me!" he decided. "I shall get them over here and begin a new life."

After supper, which he had taken, as usual, at his lodgings, he went out for a walk. He was firmly determined to keep himself from visiting Joe Peltner's dancing academy, and accordingly he took a direction opposite to Suffolk Street, where that establishment was situated. Having passed a few blocks, however, his feet, contrary to his will, turned into a side street and thence into one leading to Suffolk. "I shall only drop in to tell Joe that I can not sell any of his ball tickets, and return them," he attempted to deceive his own conscience. Hailing this pretext with delight he quickened his pace as much as the overcrowded sidewalks would allow.

He had to pick and nudge his way through dense swarms of bedraggled half-naked humanity; past garbage barrels rearing their overflowing contents in sickening piles, and lining the streets in malicious suggestion of rows of trees; underneath tiers and tiers of fire escapes, barricaded and festooned with mattresses, pillows, and featherbeds not yet gathered in for the night. The pent-in sultry atmosphere was laden with nausea and pierced with a discordant and, as it were, plaintive buzz. Supper had been despatched in a hurry, and the teeming populations of the cyclopic tenement houses were out in full force "for fresh air," as even these people will say in mental quotation marks.

Suffolk Street is in the very thick of the battle for breath. For it lies in the heart of that part of the East Side which has within the last two or three decades become the Ghetto of the American metropolis, and, indeed, the metropolis of the Ghettos of the world. It is one of the most densely populated spots on the face of the earth—a seething human sea fed by streams, streamlets, and rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe. Hardly a block but shelters Jews from every nook and corner of Russia, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Roumania; Lithuanian Jews, Volhynian Jews, south Russian Jews, Bessarabian Jews; Jews crowded out of the "pale of Jewish settlement"; Russified Jews expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kieff, or Saratoff; Jewish runaways from justice; Jewish refugees from crying political and economical in justice; people torn from a hard-gained foothold in life and from deep-rooted attachments by the caprice of intolerance or the wiles of demagoguery—innocent scapegoats of a guilty Government for its outraged populace to misspend its blind fury upon; students shut out of the Russian universities, and come to these shores in quest of learning; artisans, merchants, teachers, rabbis, artists, beggars—all come in search of fortune. Nor is there a tenement house but harbors in its bosom specimens of all the whimsical metamorphoses wrought upon the children of Israel of the great modern exodus by the vicissitudes of life in this their Promised Land of today. You find there Jews born to plenty, whom the new conditions have delivered up to the clutches of penury; Jews reared in the straits of need, who have here risen to prosperity; good people morally degraded in the struggle for success amid an unwonted environment; moral outcasts lifted from the mire, purified, and imbued with self-respect; educated men and women with their intellectual polish tarnished in the inclement weather of adversity; ignorant sons of toil grown enlightened—in fine, people with all sorts of antecedents, tastes, habits, inclinations, and speaking all sorts of subdialects of the same jargon, thrown pellmell into one social caldron—a human hodgepodge with its component

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parts changed but not yet fused into one homogeneous whole.

And so the "stoops," sidewalks, and pavements of Suffolk Street were thronged with panting, chattering, or frisking multitudes. In one spot the scene received a kind of weird picturesqueness from children dancing on the pavement to the strident music hurled out into the tumultuous din from a row of the open and brightly illuminated windows of what appeared to be a new tenement house. Some of the young women on the sidewalk opposite raised a longing eye to these windows, for floating by through the dazzling light within were young women like themselves with masculine arms round their waists.

As the spectacle caught Jake's eye his heart gave a leap. He violently pushed his way through the waltzing swarm, and dived into the half-dark corridor of the house whence the music issued. Presently he found himself on the threshold and in the overpowering air of a spacious oblong chamber, alive with a damp-haired, dishevelled, reeking crowd—an uproarious human vortex, whirling to the squeaky notes of a violin and the thumping of a piano. The room was, judging by its untidy, once-whitewashed walls and the uncouth wooden pillars supporting its bare ceiling, more accustomed to the whirl of sewing machines than to the noises which filled it at the present moment. It took up the whole of the first floor of a five-story house built for large sweatshops, and until recently it had served its original purpose as faithfully as the four upper floors, which were still the daily scenes of feverish industry. At the further end of the room there was now a marble soda fountain in charge of an unkempt boy. A stocky young man with a black entanglement of coarse curly hair was bustling about among the dancers. Now and then he would pause with his eyes bent upon some two pairs of feet, and fall to clapping time and drawling out in a preoccupied sing-song: "Von, two, tree! Leeft you' feet! Don' so kvick—sloy, sloy! Von, two, tree, von, two, tree!" This was Professor Peltner himself, whose curly hair, by the way, had more to do with the success of his institution than his stumpy legs, which, according to the unanimous dictum of his male pupils, moved about "like a *regely* pair of bears."

The throng showed but a very scant sprinkling of plump cheeks and shapely figures in a multitude of haggard faces and flacid forms. Nearly all were in their workaday clothes, very few of the men sporting a wilted white shirt front. And while the general effect of the kaleidoscope was one of boisterous hilarity, many of the individual couples somehow had the air of being engaged in hard toil rather than as if they were dancing for amusement. The faces of some of these bore a wondering martyrlike expression, as who should say, "What have we done to be knocked about in this manner?" For the rest, there were all sorts of attitudes and miens in the whirling crowd. One young fellow, for example, seemed to be threatening vengeance to the ceiling, while his partner was all but exultantly exclaiming: "Lord of the universe! What a world this be!" Another maiden looked as if she kept murmuring, "You don't say!" whereas her cavalier mutely ejaculated, "Glad to try my best, your noble birth!"—after the fashion of a Russian soldier.

The prevailing stature of the assemblage was rather below medium. This does not include the dozen or two of undergrown lasses of fourteen or thirteen who had come surreptitiously, and—to allay the suspicion of their mothers—in their white aprons. They accordingly had only these articles to check at the hat box, and hence the nickname of "apron-check ladies," by which this truant contingent was known at Joe's academy. So that as Jake now stood in the doorway with an orphaned collar button glistening out of the band of his collarless shirt front and an affected expression of *ennui* overshadowing his face, his strapping figure towered over the circling throng before him. He was immediately noticed and became the target for hellos, smiles, winks, and all manner of pleasantry: "Vot you stand like dot? You vont to loin dantz? or "You a detectiff?" or "You vont a job?" or, again, "Is it hot anawfff for you?" To all of which Jake returned an invariable "Yep!" each time resuming his bored mien.

As he thus gazed at the dancers, a feeling of envy came over him. "Look at them!" he said to himself begrudgingly. "How merry they are! Such *shnoozes*, they can hardly set a foot well, and yet they are free, while I am a married man. But wait till you get married, too," he prospectively avenged himself on Joe's pupils; "we shall see how you will then dance and jump!"

Presently a wave of Joe's hand brought the music and the trampling to a pause. The girls at once took their seats on the "ladies' bench," while the bulk of the men retired to the side reserved for "gents only." Several apparent post-graduates nonchalantly overstepped the boundary line, and, nothing daunted by the professor's repeated "Zents to de right an' ladess to the left!" unrestrainedly kept their girls chuckling. At all events, Joe soon desisted, his attention being diverted by the soda department of his business. "Sawda!" he sang out. "Ull kin's! Sam, you ought ashamed you'selv; vy don'tz you treat you lada?"

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In the meantime Jake was the center of a growing bevy of both sexes. He refused to unbend and to enter into their facetious mood, and his morose air became the topic of their persiflage.

By—and—by Joe came scuttling up to his side. "Goot—evenig, Dzake!" he greeted him; "I didn't seen you at ull! Say, Dzake, I'll take care dis site an' you take care dot site—ull right?"

"Alla right!" Jake responded gruffly. "Gentsh, getch you partnesh, hawrry up!" he commanded in another instant.

The sentence was echoed by the dancing master, who then blew on his whistle a prolonged shrill warble, and once again the floor was set straining under some two hundred pounding, gliding, or scraping feet.

"Don' bee 'fraid. Gu right aheat an' getch you partner!" Jake went on yelling right and left. "Don' be 'shamed, Mish Cohen. Dansh mit dot gentlemarn!" he said, as he unceremoniously encircled Miss Cohen's waist with "dot gentlemarn's" arm. "Cholly! vot's de madder mitch *you*? You do hop like a Cossack, as true as I am a Jew," he added, indulging in a momentary lapse into Yiddish. English was the official language of the academy, where it was broken and mispronounced in as many different ways as there were Yiddish dialects represented in that institution. "Dot'sh de vay, look!" With which Jake seized from Charley a lanky fourteen-year-old Miss Jacobs, and proceeded to set an example of correct waltzing, much to the unconcealed delight of the girl, who let her head rest on his breast with an air of reverential gratitude and bliss, and to the embarrassment of her cavalier, who looked at the evolutions of Jake's feet without seeing.

Presently Jake was beckoned away to a corner by Joe, where upon Miss Jacobs, looking daggers at the little professor, sulked off to a distant seat.

"Dzake, do me a faver; hask Mamie to gib dot feller a couple a dantzes," Joe said imploringly, pointing to an ungainly young man who was timidly viewing the pandemonium-like spectacle from the further end of the "gent's bench." "I hasked 'er myself, but se don' vonted. He's a beesness man, you 'destan', an' he kan a lot o' fellers an' I vonted make him satetzfiet."

"Dot monkey?" said Jake. "Vot you talkin' aboyt! She wouldn't lishn to me neider, honesht."

"Say dot you don' vonted and dot's ull."

"Alla right; I'm goin' to ashk her, but I know it wouldn't be of naw used."

"Never mm, you hask 'er foist. You knaw se wouldn't refuse *you* !" Joe urged, with a knowing grin.

"Hoy much vill you bet she will refushe shaw?" Jake rejoined with insincere vehemence, as he whipped out a handful of change.

"Vot kin' foon a man you are! Ulleways like to bet!" said Joe, deprecatingly. "'F cuss it depend mit vot kin' a mout' you vill hask, you 'destan'?"

"By gum, Jaw! Vot you take me for? Ven I shay I ashk, I ashk. You knaw I don' like no monkey beeshnesh. Ven I promish anytink I do it shquare, dot'sh a kin' a man *I* am!" And once more protesting his firm conviction that Mamie would disregard his request, he started to prove that she would not.

He had to traverse nearly the entire length of the hall, and, notwithstanding that he was compelled to steer clear of the dancers, he contrived to effect the passage at the swellest of his gaits, which means that he jauntily bobbed and lurched, after the manner of a blacksmith tugging at the bellows, and held up his enormous bullet head as if he were bidding defiance to the whole world. Finally he paused in front of a girl with a superabundance of pitch-black side bangs and with a pert, ill-natured, pretty face of the most strikingly Semitic cast in the whole gathering. She looked twenty-three or more, was inclined to plumpness, and her shrewd deep dark eyes gleamed out of a warm gipsy complexion. Jake found her seated in a fatigued attitude on a chair near the piano.

"Good—evenig, Mamie!" he said, bowing with mock gallantry.

"Rats!"

"Shay, Mamie, give dot feller a tvisht, vill you?"

"Dot slob again? Joe must tink if you ask me I'll get scared, ain't it? Go and tell him he is too fresh," she said with a contemptuous grimace. Like the majority of the girls of the academy, Mamie's English was a much nearer approach to a justification of its name than the gibberish spoken by the men.

Jake felt routed; but he put a bold face on it and broke out with studied resentment:

"Vot you kickin' aboyt, anyhoy? Jaw don' mean notin' at ull. If you don' vonted never min', an' dot'sh ull. It don' cut a figger, shee?" And he feignedly turned to go.

"Look how kvick he gets excited!" she said, surrenderingly. "I ain't get ekshitet at ull; but vot'sh de used a

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makin' monkey beesnesh?" he retorted with triumphant acerbity.

"You are a monkey you'self," she returned with a playful pout.

The compliment was acknowledged by one of Jake's blandest grins.

"An' you are a monkey from monkeyland," he said. "Vill you dansh mit dot feller?"

"Rats! Vot vill you give me?"

"Vot should I give you?" he asked impatiently.

"Vill you treat?"

"Treat? Ger—rr oyt!" he replied with a sweeping kick at space.

"Den I von't dance."

"Alla right. I'll treat you mit a coupel a waltch."

"Is dot so? You must really tink I am swooning to dance vit you," she said, dividing the remark between both jargons.

"Look at her, look! she is a *regely* getzke *[note]*: one must take off one's cap to speak to her. Don't you always say you like to *dansh* with me *becush* I am a good *dansher*?"

*[note] getzke:*

A crucifix.

"You must tink you are a peach of a dancer, am' it? Bennie can dance a sight better dan you," she recurred to her English.

"Alla right!" he said tartly. "So you don' vonted?"

"O sugar! He is gettin' mad again. Vell, who is de getzke, me or you? All right, I'll dance vid de slob. But it's only becuss you ask me, mind you!" she added fawningly.

"Dot'sh alla right!" he rejoined, with an affectation of gravity, concealing his triumph. "But you makin' too much fush. I like to shpeak plain, shee? Dot'sh a kin' a man I am."

The next two waltzes Mamie danced with the ungainly novice, taking exaggerated pains with him. Then came a lancers, Joe calling out the successive movements huckster fashion. His command was followed by less than half of the class, however, for the greater part preferred to avail themselves of the same music for waltzing. Jake was bent upon giving Mamie what he called a "sholid good time"; and, as she shared his view that a square or fancy dance was as flimsy an affair as a stick of candy, they joined or, rather, led the seceding majority. They spun along with all-forgotful gusto; every little while he lifted her on his powerful arm and gave her a "mill," he yelping and she squeaking for sheer ecstasy, as he did so; and through out the performance his face and his whole figure seemed to be exclaiming, "Dot'sh a kin' a man I am!"

Several waifs stood in a cluster admiring or begrudging the antics of the star couple. Among these was lanky Miss Jacobs and Fanny the Preacher, who had shortly before made her appearance in the hall, and now stood pale and forlorn by the "apron-check" girl's side.

"Look at the way she is stickin' to him!" the little girl observed with envious venom, her gaze riveted to Mamie, whose shapely head was at this moment reclining on Jake's shoulders, with her eyes half shut, as if melting in a transport of bliss.

Fanny felt cut to the quick.

"You are jealous, ain't you?" she jerked out.

"Who, me? Vy should I be jealous?" Miss Jacobs protested, coloring. "On my part let them both go. *You* must be jealous. Here, here! See how your eyes are creeping out looking! Here, here!" she teased her offender in Yiddish, poking her little finger at her as she spoke.

"Will you shut your scurvy mouth, little piece of ugliness, you? Such a piggish apron check!" poor Fanny burst out under breath, tears starting to her eyes.

"Such a nasty little runt!" another girl chimed in.

"Such a little cricket already knows what 'jealous' is!" a third of the bystanders put in. "You had better go home or your mamma will give you a spanking." Whereat the little cricket made a retort, which had better be left

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unrecorded.

"To think of a bit of a flea like that having so much *cheek!* Here is America for you!"

"America for a country and '*dod'll do*' [that'll do] for a language!" observed one of the young men of the group, indulging one of the stereotype jokes of the Ghetto.

The passage at arms drew Jake's attention to the little knot of spectators, and his eye fell on Fanny. Whereupon he summarily relinquished his partner on the floor, and advanced toward his shopmate, who, seeing him approach, hastened to retreat to the girls' bench, where she remained seated with a dropping head.

"Hello, Fanny!" he shouted briskly, coming up in front of her.

"Hello!" she returned rigidly, her eyes fixed on the dirty floor.

"Come, give ush a tvisht, vill you?"

"But you ain't goin' by Joe tonight!" she answered, with a withering curl of her lip, her glance still on the ground. "Go to your lady, she'll be mad atch you."

"I didn't vonted to gu here, honesht, Fanny. I o'ly come to tell Jaw shometin', an' dot'sh ull," he said guiltily.

"Why should you apologize?" she addressed the tip of her shoe in her mother tongue. "As if he was obliged to apologize to me! *For my part* you can *dance* with her day and night. *Vot do I care?* As if I *cared!* I have only come to see what a *bluffer* you are. Do you think I am a *fool?* As *smart* as your Mamie, *anyvay*. As if I had not known he wanted to make me stay at home! What are you afraid of? Am I in your way then? As if I was in his way! What business have I to be in your way? Who is in your way?"

While she was thus speaking in her voluble, querulous, harassing manner, Jake stood with his hands in his trousers' pockets, in an attitude of mock attention. Then, suddenly losing patience, he said:

"*Dot'sh alla right!* You will finish your sermon afterward. And in the meantime *lesh have a valtz* from the land of *valtzes!*" With which he forcibly dragged her off her seat, catching her round the waist.

"But I don't need it, I don't wish it! Go to your Mamie!" she protested, struggling. "I tell you I don't need it, I don't —" The rest of the sentence was choked off by her violent breathing; for by this time she was spinning with Jake like a top. After another moment's pretense at struggling to free her self she succumbed, and presently clung to her partner, the picture of triumph and beatitude.

Meanwhile Mamie had walked up to Joe's side, and without much difficulty caused him to abandon the lancers party to themselves, and to resume with her the waltz which Jake had so abruptly broken off.

In the course of the following intermission she diplomatically seated herself beside her rival, and paraded her tranquillity of mind by accosting her with a question on shop matters. Fanny was not blind to the maneuver, but her exultation was all the greater for it, and she participated in the ensuing conversation with exuberant geniality.

By—and—by they were joined by Jake.

"Vell, vill you treat, Jake?" said Mamie.

"Vot you vant, a kish?" he replied, putting his offer in action as well as in language.

Mamie slapped his arm.

"May the Angel of Death kiss you!" said her lips in Yiddish. "Try again!" her glowing face overruled them in a dialect of its own.

Fanny laughed.

"Once I am *treating*, both *ladas* must be *treated* alike, *ain' it?*" remarked the gallant, and again he proved himself as good as his word, although Fanny struggled with greater energy and ostensibly with more real indignation.

"But vy don't you treat, you stingy loafer you?"

"Vot elsh you vant? A peench?" He was again on the point of suiting the action to the word, but Mamie contrived to repay the pinch before she had received it, and added a generous piece of profanity into the bargain.

Whereupon there ensued a scuffle of a character which defies description in more senses than one.

Nevertheless Jake marched his two "*ladas*" up to the marble fountain, and regaled them with two cents' worth of soda each.

An hour or so later, when Jake got out into the street, his breast pocket was loaded with a fresh batch of "Professor Peltner's Grand Annual Ball" tickets, and his two arms—with Mamie and Fanny respectively.

"As soon as I get my wages I'll call on the installment agent and give him a deposit for a steamship ticket," presently glimmered through his mind, as he adjusted his hold upon the two girls, snugly gathering them to his

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sides.

### 3. In the Grip of His Past

Jake had never even vaguely abandoned the idea of supplying his wife and child with the means of coming to join him. He was more or less prompt in remitting her monthly allowance of ten rubles, and the visit to the draft and passage office had become part of the routine of his life. It had the invariable effect of arousing his dormant scruples, and he hardly ever left the office without ascertaining the price of a steerage voyage from Hamburg to New York. But no sooner did he emerge from the dingy basement into the noisy scenes of Essex Street, than he would consciously let his mind wander off to other topics.

Formerly, during the early part of his sojourn in Boston, his landing place, where some of his townsmen resided and where he had passed his first two years in America, he used to mention his Gitl and his Yosselé so frequently and so enthusiastically, that some wags among the Hanover Street tailors would sing "Yekl and wife and the baby" to the tune of "Molly and I and the Baby." In the natural course of things, however, these retrospective effusions gradually became far between, and since he had shifted his abode to New York he carefully avoided all reference to his antecedents. The Jewish quarter of the metropolis, which is a vast and compact city within a city, offers its denizens incomparably fewer chances of contact with the English-speaking portion of the population than any of the three separate Ghettos of Boston. As a consequence, since Jake's advent to New York his passion for American sport had considerably cooled off. And, to make up for this, his enthusiastic nature before long found vent in dancing and in a general life of gallantry. His proved knack with the gentle sex had turned his head and now cost him all his leisure time. Still, he would occasionally attend some variety show in which boxing was the main drawing card, and somehow managed to keep track of the salient events of the sporting world generally. Judging from his unstaid habits and happy-go-lucky abandon to the pleasures of life, his present associates took it for granted that he was single, and instead of twitting him with the feigned assumption that he had deserted a family—a piece of burlesque as old as the Ghetto—they would quiz him as to which of his girls he was "dead struck" on, and as to the day fixed for the wedding. On more than one such occasion he had on the tip of his tongue the seemingly jocular question, "How do you know I am not married already?" But he never let the sentence cross his lips, and would, instead, observe facetiously that he was not "shtruck on nu goil," and that he was dead struck on all of them in "whulshale." "I hate retail beesnesh, shee? Dot'sh a' kin' a man I am!" One day, in the course of an intimate conversation with Joe, Jake, dropping into a philosophical mood, remarked:

"It's something like a baker, *ain't it?* The more *cakes* he has the less he likes them. You and I have a *lot* of girls; that's why we don't *care* for any one of them."

But if his attachment for the girls of his acquaintance collectively was not coupled with a quivering of his heart for any individual Mamie, or Fanny, or Sarah, it did not, on the other hand, preclude a certain lingering tenderness for his wife. But then his wife had long since ceased to be what she had been of yore. From a reality she had gradually become transmuted into a fancy. During the three years since he had set foot on the soil, where a "shister *[note]* becomes a mister and a mister a shister," he had lived so much more than three years—so much more, in fact, than in all the twenty-two years of his previous life—that his Russian past appeared to him a dream and his wife and child, together with his former self, fellow characters in a charming tale, which he was neither willing to banish from his memory nor able to reconcile with the actualities of his American present. The question of how to effect this reconciliation, and of causing Gitl and little Yosseé to step out of the thickening haze of reminiscence and to take their stand by his side as living parts of his daily life, was a fretful subject from the consideration of which he cowardly shrank. He wished he could both import his family and continue his present mode of life. At the bottom of his soul he wondered why this should not be feasible. But he knew that it was not, and his heart would sink at the notion of forfeiting the lion's share of attentions for which he came in at the hands of those who lionized him. Moreover, how will he look people in the face in view of the lie he has been acting?

He longed for an interminable respite. But as sooner or later the minds of his acquaintances were bound to become disabused, and he would have to face it all out anyway, he was many a time on the point of making a clean breast of it, and failed to do so for a mere lack of nerve, each time letting himself off on the plea that a week or two before his wife's arrival would be a more auspicious occasion for the disclosure.

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[note]:

Yiddish for shoemaker.

Neither Jake nor his wife nor his parents could write even Yiddish, although both he and his old father read fluently the punctuated Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Prayer Book. Their correspondence had therefore to be carried on by proxy, and, as a consequence, at longer intervals than would have been the case otherwise. The missives which he received differed materially in length, style, and degree of illiteracy as well as in point of penmanship; but they all agreed in containing glowing encomiums of little Yossee exhorting Yekl not to stray from the path of righteousness, and reproachfully asking whether he ever meant to send the ticket. The latter point had an exasperating effect on Jake. There were times, however, when it would touch his heart and elicit from him his threadbare vow to send the ticket at once. But then he never had money enough to redeem it. And, to tell the truth, at the bottom of his heart he was at such moments rather glad of his poverty. At all events, the man who wrote Jake's letters had a standing order to reply in the sharpest terms at his command that Yekl did not spend his money on drink; that America was not the land they took it for, where one could "scoop gold by the skirtful"; that Gitl need not fear lest he meant to desert her, and that as soon as he had saved enough to pay her way and to set up a decent establishment she would be sure to get the ticket.

Jake's scribe was an old Jew who kept a little stand on Pitt Street, which is one of the thoroughfares and market places of the Galician quarter of the Ghetto, and where Jake was unlikely to come upon any people of his acquaintance. The old man scraped together his livelihood by selling Yiddish newspapers and cigarettes, and writing letters for a charge varying, according to the length of the epistle, from five to ten cents. Each time Jake received a letter he would take it to the Galician, who would first read it to him (for an extra remuneration of one cent) and then proceed to pen five cents' worth of rhetoric, which might have been printed and forwarded one copy at a time for all the additions or alterations Jake ever caused to be made in it.

"What else shall I write?" the old man would ask his patron, after having written and read aloud the first dozen lines, which Jake had come to know by heart.

"How do I know?" Jake would respond. "It is you who can write; so you ought to understand what else to write."

And the scribe would go on to write what he had written on almost every previous occasion. Jake would keep the letter in his pocket until he had spare United States money enough to convert into ten rubles, and then he would betake himself to the draft office and have the amount, together with the well-crumpled epistle, forwarded to Povodye.

And so it went month in and month out.

The first letter which reached Jake after the scene at Joe Peltner's dancing academy came so unusually close upon its predecessor that he received it from his landlady's hand with a throb of misgiving. He had always labored under the presentiment that some unknown enemies—for he had none that he could name—would some day discover his wife's address and anonymously represent him to her as contemplating another marriage, in order to bring Gitl down upon him unawares. His first thought accordingly was that this letter was the outcome of such a conspiracy. "Or maybe there is some death in the family?" he next reflected, half with terror and half with a feeling almost amounting to reassurance.

When the cigarette vender unfolded the letter he found it to be of such unusual length that he stipulated an additional cent for the reading of it.

"*Alla right, hurry up now!*" Jake said, grinding his teeth on a mumbled English oath.

"*Righd evay! Righd evay!*" the old fellow returned jubilantly, as he hastily adjusted his spectacles and addressed himself to his task.

The letter had evidently been penned by some one laying claim to Hebrew scholarship and ambitious to impress the New World with it; for it was quite replete with poetic digressions, strained and twisted to suit some quotation from the Bible. And what with this unstinted verbosity, which was Greek to Jake, one or two interruptions by the old man's customers, and interpretations necessitated by difference of dialect, a quarter of an hour had elapsed before the scribe realized the trend of what he was reading.

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Then he suddenly gave a start, as if shocked.

"Vot'sh a madder? Vot'sh a madder?"

"*Vot's der madder?* What should be the *madder*? Wait—a—I don't know what I can do"—he halted in perplexity.

"Any bad news?" Jake inquired, turning pale. "Speak out!"

"Speak out! It is all very well for you to say 'speak out.' You forget that one is a piece of Jew," he faltered, hinting at the orthodox custom which enjoins a child of Israel from being the messenger of sad tidings.

"Don't *bodder* a head!" Jake shouted savagely. "I have paid you, haven't I?"

"*Say*, young man, you need not be so angry," the other said, resentfully. "Half of the letter I have read, have I not? so I shall refund you one cent and leave me in peace." He took to fumbling in his pockets for the coin, with apparent reluctance.

"Tell me what is the matter," Jake entreated, with clinched fists. "Is anybody dead? Do tell me now."

"*Vell*, since you know it already, I may as well tell you, said the scribe cunningly, glad to retain the cent and Jake's patronage. "It is your father who has been freed; may he have a bright paradise."

"Ha?" Jake asked aghast, with a wide gape.

The Galician resumed the reading in solemn, doleful accents. The melancholy passage was followed by a jeremiade upon the penniless condition of the family and Jake's duty to send the ticket without further procrastination. As to his mother, she preferred the Povodye graveyard to a watery sepulcher, and hoped that her beloved and only son, the apple of her eye, whom she had been awake nights to bring up to manhood, and so forth, would not forget her.

"So now they will be here for sure, and there can be no more delay!" was Jake's first distinct thought. "Poor father!" he inwardly exclaimed the next moment, with deep anguish. His native home came back to him with a vividness which it had not had in his mind for a long time.

"Was he an old man?" the scribe queried sympathetically.

"About seventy," Jake answered, bursting into tears.

"Seventy? Then he had lived to a good old age. May no one depart younger," the old man observed, by way of "consoling the bereaved."

As Jake's tears instantly ran dry he fell to wringing his hands and moaning.

"Good-night!" he presently said, taking leave. "I'll see you tomorrow, if God be pleased."

"Good-night!" the scribe returned with heartfelt condolence. As he was directing his steps to his lodgings Jake wondered why he did not weep. He felt that this was the proper thing for a man in his situation to do, and he endeavored to inspire himself with emotions befitting the occasion. But his thoughts teasingly gambolled about among the people and things of the street. By—and—by, however, he became sensible of his mental eye being fixed upon the big fleshy mole on his father's scantily bearded face. He recalled the old man's carriage, the melancholy nod of his head, his deep sigh upon taking snuff from the time-honored birch bark which Jake had known as long as himself; and his heart writhed with pity and with the acutest pangs of homesickness. "And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day. And the heavens and the earth were finished." As the Hebrew words of the

Sanctification of the Sabbath resounded in Jake's ears, in his father's senile treble, he could see his gaunt figure swaying over a pair of Sabbath loaves. It is Friday night. The little room, made tidy for the day of rest and faintly illuminated by the mysterious light of two tallow candles rising from freshly burnished candlesticks, is pervaded by a benign, reposeful warmth and a general air of peace and solemnity. There, seated by the side of the head of the little family and within easy reach of the huge brick oven, is his old mother, flushed with fatigue, and with an effort keeping her drowsy eyes open to attend, with a devout mien, her husband's prayer. Opposite to her, by the window, is Yekl, the present Jake, awaiting his turn to chant the same words in the holy tongue, and impatiently thinking of the repast to come after it. Besides the three of them there is no one else in the chamber, for Jake visioned the fascinating scene as he had known it for almost twenty years, and not as it had appeared during the short period since the family had been joined by Gitl and subsequently by Yosselé.

Suddenly he felt himself a child, the only and pampered son of a doting mother. He was overcome with a heart-wringing consciousness of being an orphan, and his soul was filled with a keen sense of desolation and self-pity. And thereupon every thing around him—the rows of gigantic tenement houses, the hum and buzz of the scurrying pedestrians, the jingling horse cars—all suddenly grew alien and incomprehensible to Jake. Ah, if he

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could return to his old home and old days, and have his father recite Sanctification again, and sit by his side, opposite to mother, and receive from her hand a plate of reeking *tzimess*, [note] as of yore! Poor mother! He *will* not forget her— But what is the Italian playing on that organ, anyhow? Ah, it is the new waltz! By the way, this is Monday and they are dancing at Joe's now and he is not there. "I shall not go there tonight, nor any other night," he commiserated himself, his reveries for the first time since he had left the Pitt Street cigarette stand passing to his wife and child. Her image now stood out in high relief with the multitudinous noisy scene at Joe's academy for a discordant, disquieting background, amid which there vaguely defined itself the reproachful saintlike visage of the deceased. "I will begin a new life!" he vowed to himself.

[note]:

A kind of dessert made of  
carrots or turnips.

He strove to remember the child's features, but could only muster the faintest recollection—scarcely anything beyond a general symbol—a red little thing smiling, as he, Jake, tickles it under its tiny chin. Yet Jake's finger at this moment seemed to feel the soft touch of that little chin, and it sent through him a thrill of fatherly affection to which he had long been a stranger. Gitl, on the other hand, loomed up in all the individual sweetness of her rustic face. He beheld her kindly mouth opening wide—rather too wide, but all the lovelier for it—as she spoke; her prominent red gums, her little black eyes. He could distinctly hear her voice with her peculiar lisp, as one summer morning she had burst into the house and, clapping her hands in despair, she had cried, "A weeping to me! The yellow rooster is gone!" or, as coming into the smithy she would say: "Father—in-law, mother—in-law calls you to dinner. Hurry up, Yekl, dinner is ready." And although this was all he could recall her saying, Jake thought himself retentive of every word she had ever uttered in his presence. His heart went out to Gitl and her environment, and he was seized with a yearning tenderness that made him feel like crying. "I would not exchange her little finger for all the American *ladas*," he soliloquized, comparing Gitl in his mind with the dancing-school girls of his circle. It now filled him with disgust to think of the morals of some of them, although it was from his own sinful experience that he knew them to be of a rather loose character.

He reached his lodgings in a devout mood, and before going to bed he was about to say his prayers. Not having said them for nearly three years, however, he found, to his dismay, that he could no longer do it by heart. His landlady had a prayer book, but, unfortunately, she kept it locked in the bureau, and she was now asleep, as was everybody else in the house. Jake reluctantly undressed and went to bed on the kitchen lounge, where he usually slept.

When a boy his mother had taught him to believe that to go to sleep at night without having recited the bed prayer rendered one liable to be visited and choked in bed by some ghost. Later, when he had grown up, and yet before he had left his birthplace, he had come to set down this earnest belief of his good old mother as a piece of womanish superstition, while since he had settled in America he had hardly ever had an occasion to so much as think of bed prayers. Nevertheless, as he now lay vaguely listening to the weird ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece over the stove, and at the same time desultorily brooding upon his father's death, the old belief suddenly uprose in his mind and filled him with mortal terror. He tried to persuade himself that it was a silly notion worthy of womenfolk, and even affected to laugh at it audibly. But all in vain. "Cho-king! Cho-king! Cho-king!" went the clock, and the form of a man in white burial clothes never ceased gleaming in his face. He resolutely turned to the wall, and, pulling the blanket over his head, he huddled himself snugly up for instantaneous sleep. But presently he felt the cold grip of a pair of hands about his throat, and he even mentally stuck out his tongue, as one does while being strangled.

With a fast-beating heart Jake finally jumped off the lounge, and gently knocked at the door of his landlady's bedroom.

"*Eshcoosh me, mishesh*, be so kind as to lend me your prayer book. I want to say the night prayer," he addressed her imploringly.

The old woman took it for a cruel practical joke, and flew into a passion.

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"Are you crazy or drunk? A nice time to make fun!"

And it was not until he had said with suppliant vehemence, "May I as surely be alive as my father is dead!" and she had subjected him to a cross-examination, that she expressed sympathy and went to produce the keys.

## 4. The Meeting

A few weeks later, on a Saturday morning, Jake, with an unfolded telegram in his hand, stood in front of one of the desks at the Immigration Bureau of Ellis Island. He was freshly shaven and clipped, smartly dressed in his best clothes and ball shoes, and, in spite of the sickly expression of shamefacedness and anxiety which distorted his features, he looked younger than usual.

All the way to the island he had been in a flurry of joyous anticipation. The prospect of meeting his dear wife and child, and, incidentally, of showing off his swell attire to her, had thrown him into a fever of impatience. But on entering the big shed he had caught a distant glimpse of Gitl and Yosselé through the railing separating the detained immigrants from their visitors, and his heart had sunk at the sight of his wife's uncouth and un-American appearance. She was slovenly dressed in a brown jacket and skirt of grotesque cut, and her hair was concealed under a voluminous wig of a pitch-black hue. This she had put on just before leaving the steamer, both "in honor of the Sabbath" and by way of sprucing herself up for the great event. Since Yekl had left home she had gained considerably in the measurement of her waist. The wig, however, made her seem stouter and shorter than she would have appeared without it. It also added at least five years to her looks. But she was aware neither of this nor of the fact that in New York even a Jewess of her station and orthodox breeding is accustomed to blink at the wickedness of displaying her natural hair, and that none but an elderly matron may wear a wig without being the occasional target for snowballs or stones. She was naturally dark of complexion, and the nine or ten days spent at sea had covered her face with a deep bronze, which combined with her prominent cheek bones, inky little eyes, and, above all, the smooth black wig, to lend her resemblance to a squaw.

Jake had no sooner caught sight of her than he had averted his face, as if loth to rest his eyes on her, in the presence of the surging crowd around him, before it was inevitable. He dared not even survey that crowd to see whether it contained any acquaintance of his, and he vaguely wished that her release were delayed indefinitely.

Presently the officer behind the desk took the telegram from him, and in another little while Gitl, hugging Yosselé with one arm and a bulging parcel with the other, emerged from a side door.

"Yekl!" she screamed out in a piteous high key, as if crying for mercy.

"Dot'sh alla right!" he returned in English, with a wan smile and unconscious of what he was saying. His wandering eyes and dazed mind were striving to fix themselves upon the stern functionary and the questions he bethought himself of asking before finally releasing his prisoners. The contrast between Gitl and Jake was so striking that the officer wanted to make sure—partly as a matter of official duty and partly for the fun of the thing—that the two were actually man and wife.

"*Oi* a lamentation upon me! He shaves his beard!" Giti ejaculated to herself as she scrutinized her husband.

"Yosselé, look! Here is *taté!*"

But Yosselé did not care to look at *taté*. Instead, he turned his frightened little eyes—precise copies of Jake's—and buried them in his mother's cheek.

When Gitl was finally discharged she made to fling herself on Jake. But he checked her by seizing both loads from her arms. He started for a distant and deserted corner of the room, bidding her follow. For a moment the boy looked stunned, then he burst out crying and fell to kicking his father's chest with might and main, his reddened little face appealingly turned to Gitl. Jake continuing his way tried to kiss his son into toleration, but the little fellow proved too nimble for him. It was in vain that Gitl, scurrying behind, kept expostulating with Yossele:

"Why, it is *taté!*" *Taté* was forced to capitulate before the march was brought to its end.

At length, when the secluded corner had been reached, and Jake and Gitl had set down their burdens, husband and wife flew into mutual embrace and fell to kissing each other. The performance had an effect of something done to order, which, it must be owned, was far from being belied by the state of their minds at the moment. Their kisses imparted the taste of mutual estrangement to both. In Jake's case the sensation was quickened by the strong steerable odors which were emitted by Gitl's person, and he involuntarily recoiled.

"You look like a poritz," *[note]* she said shyly.

*[note]* poritz:

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Yiddish for nobleman.

"How are you? How is mother?"

"How should she be? So, so. She sends you her love," Gitl mumbled out.

"How long was father ill?"

"Maybe a month. He cost us health enough."

He proceeded to make advances to Yosselé, she appealing to the child in his behalf. For a moment the sight of her, as they were both crouching before the boy, precipitated a wave of thrilling memories on Jake and made him feel in his own environment. Presently, however, the illusion took wing and here he was, Jake the Yankee, with this bonnetless, wigged, dowdyish little greenhorn by his side! That she was his wife, nay, that he was a married man at all, seemed incredible to him. The sturdy, thriving urchin had at first inspired him with pride; but as he now cast another side glance at Gitl's wig he lost all interest in him, and began to regard him, together with his mother, as one great obstacle dropped from heaven, as it were, in his way.

Gitl, on her part, was overcome with a feeling akin to awe. She, too, could not get herself to realize that this stylish young man—shaved and dressed as in Povodye is only some young nobleman—was Yekl, her own Yekl, who had all these three years never been absent from her mind. And while she was once more examining Jake's blue diagonal cutaway, glossy stand-up collar, the white four-in-hand necktie, coquettishly tucked away in the bosom of his starched shirt, and, above all, his patent leather shoes, she was at the same time mentally scanning the Yekl of three years before. The latter alone was hers, and she felt like crying to the image to come back to her and let her be *his* wife.

Presently, when they had got up and Jake was plying her with perfunctory questions, she chanced to recognize a certain movement of his upper lip—an old trick of his. It was as if she had suddenly discovered her own Yekl in an apparent stranger, and, with another pitiful outcry, she fell on his breast.

"Don't!" he said, with patient gentleness, pushing away her arms. "Here everything is so different."

She colored deeply.

"They don't wear wigs here," he ventured to add.

"What then?" she asked, perplexedly.

"You will see. It is quite another world."

"Shall I take it off, then? I have a nice Saturday kerchief," she faltered. "It is of silk—I bought it at Kalmen's for a bargain. It is still brand new."

"Here one does not wear even a kerchief."

"How then? Do they go about with their own hair?" she queried in ill-disguised bewilderment.

"*Vell, alla right*, put it on, quick!"

As she set about undoing her parcel, she bade him face about and screen her, so that neither he nor any stranger could see her bareheaded while she was replacing the wig by the kerchief. He obeyed. All the while the operation lasted he stood with his gaze on the floor, gnashing his teeth with disgust and shame, or hissing some Bowery oath.

"Is this better?" she asked bashfully, when her hair and part of her forehead were hidden under a kerchief of flaming blue and yellow, whose end dangled down her back.

The kerchief had a rejuvenating effect. But Jake thought that it made her look like an Italian woman of Mulberry Street on Sunday.

"*Alla right*, leave it be for the present," he said in despair, reflecting that the wig would have been the lesser evil of the two.

When they reached the city Gitl was shocked to see him lead the way to a horse car.

"*Oi* woe is me! Why, it is Sabbath!" she gasped.

He irately essayed to explain that a car, being an uncommon sort of vehicle, riding in it implied no violation of the holy day. But this she sturdily met by reference to railroads. Besides, she had seen horse cars while stopping in Hamburg, and knew that no orthodox Jew would use them on the seventh day. At length Jake, losing all self-control, fiercely commanded her not to make him the laughingstock of the people on the street and to get in without further ado. As to the sin of the matter he was willing to take it all upon himself. Completely dismayed by

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his stern manner, amid the strange, uproarious, forbidding surroundings, Gitl yielded.

As the horses started she uttered a groan of consternation and remained looking aghast and with a violently throbbing heart. If she had been a culprit on the way to the gallows she could not have been more terrified than she was now at this her first ride on the day of rest.

The conductor came up for their fares. Jake handed him a ten-cent piece, and raising two fingers, he roared out: "Two! He am' no maur as tree years, de liddle feller!" And so great was the impression which his dashing manner and his English produced on Gitl, that for some time it relieved her mind and she even forgot to be shocked by the sight of her husband handling coin on the Sabbath.

Having thus paraded himself before his wife, Jake all at once grew kindly disposed toward her.

"You must be hungry?" he asked.

"Not at all! Where do you eat your varimess?" *[note]*

"Don't say varimess," he corrected her complaisantly; "here it is called *dinner*."

"Dinner?" *[note]* And what if one becomes fatter?" she confusedly ventured an irresistible pun.

This was the way in which Gitl came to receive her first lesson in the five or six score English words and phrases which the omnivorous Jewish jargon has absorbed in the Ghettos of English-speaking countries.

*[note] varimess :*

Yiddish for dinner.

*[note] dinner:* Yiddish for thinner.

## 5. A Paterfamilias

It was early in the afternoon of Gitl's second Wednesday in the New World. Jake, Bernstein and Charley, their two boarders, were at work. Yosselé was sound asleep in the lodgers' double bed, in the smallest of the three tiny rooms which the family rented on the second floor of one of a row of brand-new tenement houses. Gitl was by herself in the little front room which served the quadruple purpose of kitchen, dining room, sitting room, and parlor. She wore a skirt and a loose jacket of white Russian calico, decorated with huge gay figures, and her dark hair was only half covered by a bandana of red and yellow. This was Gitl's compromise between her conscience and her husband. She panted to yield to Jake's demands completely, but could not nerve herself up to going about "in her own hair, like a Gentile woman." Even the expostulations of Mrs. Kavarsky—the childless middle-aged woman who occupied with her husband the three rooms across the narrow hallway—failed to prevail upon her.

Nevertheless Jake, succumbing to Mrs. Kavarsky's annoying solicitations, had bought his wife a cheap high-crowned hat, utterly unfit to be worn over her voluminous wig, and even a corset. Gitl could not be coaxed into accompanying them to the store; but the eloquent neighbor had persuaded Jake that her presence at the transaction was not indispensable after all.

"Leave it to me," she said; "I know what will become her and what won't. I'll get her a hat that will make a Fifth Avenue lady of her, and you shall see if she does not give in. If she is then not *satetzfiet* to go with her own hair, *veil!*" What then would take place Mrs. Kavarsky left unsaid.

The hat and the corset had been lying in the house now three days, and the neighbor's predictions had not yet come true, save for Gitl's prying once or twice into the pasteboard boxes in which those articles lay, otherwise unmolested, on the shelf over her bed.

The door was open. Gitl stood toying with the knob of the electric bell, and deriving much delight from the way the street door latch kept clicking under her magic touch two flights above. Finally she wearied of her diversion, and shutting the door she went to take a look at Yosselé. She found him fast asleep, and, as she was retracing her steps through her own and Jake's bedroom, her eye fell upon the paper boxes. She got up on the edge of her bed and, lifting the cover from the hatbox, she took a prolonged look at its contents. All at once her face brightened up with temptation. She went to fasten the hallway door of the kitchen on its latch, and then regaining the bedroom shut herself in. After a lapse of some ten or fifteen minutes she re-emerged, attired in her brown holiday dress in which she had first confronted Jake on Ellis Island, and with the tall black straw hat on her head. Walking on tiptoe, as though about to commit a crime, she crossed over to the looking glass. Then she paused, her eyes on the door, to listen for possible footsteps. Hearing none she faced the glass. "Quite a *panenke!*" *[note]* she thought to herself, all aglow with excitement, a smile, at once shamefaced and beatific, melting her features. She turned to the right, then to the left, to view herself in profile, as she had seen Mrs. Kavarsky do, and drew back a step to ascertain the effect of the corset. To tell the truth, the corset proved utterly impotent against the baggy shapelessness of the Povodye garment. Yet Gitl found it to work wonders, and readily pardoned it for the very uncomfortable sensation which it caused her. She viewed herself again and again, and was in a flutter both of ecstasy and alarm when there came a timid rap on the door. Trembling all over, she scampered on tiptoe back into the bedroom, and after a little she returned in her calico dress and bandana kerchief. The knock at the door had apparently been produced by some peddler or beggar, for it was not repeated. Yet so violent was Gitl's agitation that she had to sit down on the haircloth lounge for breath and to regain composure.

*[note]* *Panenke* :

A young noblewoman.

"What is it they call this?" she presently asked herself, gazing at the bare boards of the floor. "Floor!" she recalled, much to her self-satisfaction. "And that?" she further examined herself, as she fixed her glance on the ceiling. This time the answer was slow in coming, and her heart grew faint. "And what was it Yekl called that?"—transferring her eyes to the window. "Veen—neev—veenda," she at last uttered exultantly. The evening before

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she had happened to call it *fentzter*, in spite of Jake's repeated corrections. "Can't you say *veenda*?" he had growled. "What a peasant head! Other *greenhornsh* learn to speak American *shtyle* very fast; and she—one might tell her the same word eighty thousand times, and it is *nu used*."

"Es is of'n *veenda* mein ich," *[note]* she hastened to set herself right.

*[note]*:

It is on the window, I meant to say.

She blushed as she said it, but at the moment she attached no importance to the Inatter and took no more notice of it. Now, however, Jake's tone of voice, as he had rebuked her backwardness in picking up American Yiddish, came back to her and she grew dejected.

She was getting used to her husband, in whom her own Yekl and Jake the stranger were by degrees merging themselves into one undivided being. When the hour of his coming from work drew near she would every little while consult the clock and become impatient with the slow progress of its hands; although mixed with this impatience there was a feeling of apprehension lest the supper, prepared as it was under culinary conditions entirely new to her, should fail to please Jake and the boarders. She had even become accustomed to address her husband as Jake without reddening in the face; and, what is more, was getting to tolerate herself being called by him Goitie (Gertie)—a word phonetically akin to Yiddish for Gentile. For the rest she was too inexperienced and too simple-hearted naturally to comment upon his manner toward her. She had not altogether overcome her awe of him, but as he showed her occasional marks of kindness she was upon the whole rather content with her new situation. Now, however, as she thus sat in solitude, with his harsh voice ringing in her ears and his icy look before her, a feeling of suspicion darkened her soul. She recalled other scenes where he had looked and spoken as he had done the night before. "He must hate me! A pain upon me!" she concluded with a fallen heart. She wondered whether his demeanor toward her was like that of other people who hated their wives. She remembered a woman of her native village who was known to be thus afflicted, and she dropped her head in a fit of despair. At one moment she took a firm resolve to pluck up courage and cast away the kerchief and the wig; but at the next she reflected that God would be sure to punish her for the terrible sin, so that instead of winning Jake's love the change would increase his hatred for her. It flashed upon her mind to call upon some "good Jew" to pray for the return of his favor, or to seek some old Polish beggar woman who could prescribe a love potion. But then, alas! who knows whether there are in this terrible America any good Jews or beggar women with love potions at all! Better she had never known this "black year" of a country! Here everybody says she is green. What an ugly word to apply to people! She had never been green at home, and here she had suddenly become so. What do they mean by it, anyhow? Verily, one might turn green and yellow and gray while young in such a dreadful place. Her heart was wrung with the most excruciating pangs of homesickness. And as she thus sat brooding and listlessly surveying her new surroundings—the iron stove, the stationary washtubs, the window opening vertically, the fire escape, the yellowish broom with its painted handle—things which she had never dreamed of at her birthplace—these objects seemed to stare at her haughtily and inspired her with fright. Even the burnished cup of the electric bell knob looked contemptuously and seemed to call her "Greenhorn! greenhorn!" "Lord of the world! Where am I?" she whispered with tears in her voice.

The dreary solitude terrified her, and she instinctively rose to take refuge at Yossel's bedside. As she got up, a vague doubt came over her whether she should find there her child at all. But Yossel was found safe and sound enough. He was rubbing his eyes and announcing the advent of his famous appetite. She seized him in her arms and covered his warm cheeks with fervent kisses which did her aching heart good. And by—and—by, as she admiringly watched the boy making savage inroads into a generous slice of rye bread, she thought of Jake's affection for the child; whereupon things began to assume a brighter aspect, and she presently set about preparing supper with a lighter heart, although her countenance for some time retained its mournful woebegone expression.

Meanwhile Jake sat at his machine merrily pushing away at a cloak and singing to it some of the popular American songs of the day.

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The sensation caused by the arrival of his wife and child had nearly blown over. Peltner's dancing school he had not visited since a week or two previous to Gitl's landing. As to the scene which had greeted him in the shop after the stirring news had first reached it, he had faced it out with much more courage and got over it with much less difficulty than he had anticipated.

"Did I ever tell you I was a *tzingle man*?" he laughingly defended himself, though blushing crimson, against his shop-mates' taunts. "And am I obliged to give you a *report* whether my wife has come or not? You are not worth mentioning her name to, *anyhoy*."

The boss then suggested that Jake celebrate the event with two pints of beer, the motion being seconded by the presser, who volunteered to fetch the beverage. Jake obeyed with alacrity, and if there had still lingered any trace of awkwardness in his position it was soon washed away by the foaming liquid.

As a matter of fact, Fanny's embarrassment was much greater than Jake's. The stupefying news was broken to her on the very day of Gitl's arrival. After passing a sleepless night she felt that she could not bring herself to face Jake in the presence of her other shopmates, to whom her feelings for him were an open secret. As luck would have it, it was Sunday, the beginning of a new working week in the metropolitan Ghetto, and she went to look for a job in another place.

Jake at once congratulated himself upon her absence and missed her. But then he equally missed the company of Mamie and of all the other dancing-school girls, whose society and attentions now more than ever seemed to him necessities of his life. They haunted his mind day and night; he almost never beheld them in his imagination except as clustering together with his fellow-cavaliers and making merry over him and his wife; and the vision pierced his heart with shame and jealousy. All his achievements seemed wiped out by a sudden stroke of ill fate. He thought himself a martyr, an innocent exile from a world to which he belonged by right; and he frequently felt the sobs of self-pity mounting to his throat. For several minutes at a time, while kicking at his treadle, he would see, reddening before him, Gitl's bandana kerchief and her prominent gums, or hear an un-American piece of Yiddish pronounced with Gitl's peculiar lisp—that very lisp, which three years ago he used to mimic fondly, but which now grated on his nerves and was apt to make his face twitch with sheer disgust, insomuch that he often found a vicious relief in mocking that lisp of hers audibly over his work. But can it be that he is doomed for life? No! no! he would revolt, conscious at the same time that there was really no escape. "Ah, may she be killed, the horrid greenhorn!" he would gasp to himself in a paroxysm of despair. And then he would bewail his lost youth, and curse all Russia for his premature marriage. Presently, however, he would recall the plump, spunky face of his son who bore such close resemblance to himself, to whom he was growing more strongly attached every day, and who was getting to prefer his company to his mother's; and thereupon his heart would soften toward Gitl, and he would gradually feel the qualms of pity and remorse, and make a vow to treat her kindly. "Never min'," he would at such instances say in his heart, "she will *oyshgreen* *[note]* herself and I shall get used to her. She is a *shight* better than all the dancing-school girls." And he would inspire himself with respect for her spotless purity, and take comfort in the fact of her being a model housewife, undiverted from her duties by any thoughts of balls or picnics. And despite a deeper consciousness which exposed his readiness to sacrifice it all at any time, he would work himself into a dignified feeling as the head of a household and the father of a promising son, and soothe himself with the additional consolation that sooner or later the other fellows of Joe's academy would also be married.

*[note] Oshygreen:*

A verb coined from the Yiddish

*oys*, out, and the English *green*, and

signifying to cease being green.

On the Wednesday in question Jake and his shopmates had warded off a reduction of wages by threatening a strike, and were accordingly in high feather. And so Jake and Bernstein came home in unusually good spirits. Little Joey—for such was Yossel's name now—with whom his father's plays were for the most part of an athletic

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character, welcomed Jake by a challenge for a pugilistic encounter, and the way he said "Coom a fight!" and held out his little fists so delighted Mr. Podkovnik, Sr., that upon ordering Gitl to serve supper he vouchsafed a fillip on the tip of her nose.

While she was hurriedly setting the table, Jake took to describing to Charley his employer's defeat. "You should have seen how he looked, the cockroach!" he said. "He became as pale as the wall and his teeth were chattering as if he had been shaken up with fever, *'pon my void*. And how quiet he became all of a sudden, as if he could not count two! One might apply him to an ulcer, so soft was he—ha—ha—ha!" he laughed, looking to Bernstein, who smiled assent.

At last supper was announced. Bernstein donned his hat, and did not sit down to the repast before he had performed his ablutions and whispered a short prayer. As he did so Jake and Charley interchanged a wink. As to themselves, they dispensed with all devotional preliminaries, and took their seats with uncovered heads. Gitl also washed her fingers and said the prayer, and as she handed Yosselé his first slice of bread she did not release it before he had recited the benediction.

Bernstein, who, as a rule, looked daggers at his meal, this time received his plate of *borshtch*—his *[note]* favorite dish—with a radiant face; and as he ate he pronounced it a masterpiece, and lavished compliments on the artist.

"It's a long time since I tasted such a borshtch! Simply a vivifier! It melts in every limb!" he kept rhapsodizing, between mouthfuls. "It ought to be sent to the Chicago Exposition. The *missess* would get a medal."

"A *regely* European borshtch!" Charley chimed in. "It is worth ten cents a spoonful, *'pon mine vort!*"

"Go away! You are only making fun of me," Gitl declared, beaming with pride. "What is there to be laughing at? I make it as well as I can," she added demurely.

"Let him who is laughing laugh with teeth," jested Charlie. "I tell you it is a—" The remainder of the sentence was submerged in a mouthful of the vivifying semi-liquid.

"*Alla right!*" Jake bethought himself. "*Charge* him ten *shent* for each spoonful. Mr. Bernstein, you shall be kind enough to be the *bookkeeper*. But if you don't pay, Chollie, I'll get out a *tzommesh* [summons] from *court*."

Whereat the little kitchen rang with laughter, in which all participated except Bernstein. Even Joey, or Yosselé, joined in the general outburst of merriment. Otherwise he was busily engaged cramming borshtch into his mouth, and, in passing, also into his nose, with both his plump hands for a pair of spoons. From time to time he would interrupt operations to make a wry face and, blinking his eyes, to lisp out rapturously, "Sour!"

*[note] Borscht:*

A sour soup of cabbage and  
beets.

"Look—may you live long—do look; he is laughing, too!" Gitl called attention to Yosselé's bespattered face. "To think of such a crumb having as much sense as that!" She was positive that he appreciated his father's witticism, although she herself understood it but vaguely.

"May he know evil no better than he knows what he is laughing at," Jake objected, with a fatherly mien. "What makes you laugh, Joey?" The boy had no time to spare for an answer, being too busy licking his emptied plate. "Look at the soldier's appetite he has, *de feller!* Joey, hoy you like de borshtch! *Alla right?*" Jake asked in English.

"Awrr—ra rr—right!" Joey pealed out his sturdy rustic in s, which he had mastered shortly before taking leave of his doting grandmother.

"See how well he speaks English?" Jake said, facetiously. "A *shight* better than his mamma, *anyvay*."

Gitl, who was in the meantime serving the meat, colored, but took the remark in good part.

"*I tell ye* he is growing to be Presdent 'Nited States," Charlie interposed.

"*Greenhorn* that you are! A President must be American born," Jake explained, self-consciously. "Ain't it, Mr. Bernstein?"

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"It's a pity, then, that he was not born in this country," Bernstein replied, his eye enviously fixed now on Gitl, now at the child, on whose plate she was at this moment carving a piece of meat into tiny morsels. "Vell, if he cannot be a President of the United States, he may be one of a synagogue, so he is a president."

"Don't you worry for his sake," Gitl put in, delighted with the attention her son was absorbing. "He does not need to be a pesdent; he is growing to be a rabbi; don't be making fun of him." And she turned her head to kiss the future rabbi.

"Who is making fun?" Bernstein demurred. "I wish I had a boy like him."

"Get married and you will have one," said, Gitl, beamingly.

"Shay, Mr. Bernstein, how about your *shadchen*" [*note*] Jake queried. He gave a laugh, but forthwith checked it, remaining with an embarrassed grin on his face, as though anxious to swallow the question. Bernstein blushed to the roots of his hair, and bent an irate glance on his plate, but held his peace.

[*note*] *shadchen*:

A matrimonial agent.

His reserved manner, if not his superior education, held Bernstein's shopmates at a respectful distance from him, and, as a rule, rendered him proof against their badinage, although behind his back they would indulge an occasional joke on his inferiority as a workman, and—while they were at it—on his dyspepsia, his books, and staid, methodical habits. Recently, however, they had got wind of his clandestine visits to a marriage broker's, and the temptation to chaff him on the subject had proved resistless, all the more so because Bernstein, whose leading foible was his well-controlled vanity, was quick to take offence in general, and on this matter in particular. As to Jake, he was by no means averse to having a laugh at somebody else's expense; but since Bernstein had become his boarder he felt that he could not afford to wound his pride. Hence his regret and anxiety at his allusion to the matrimonial agent.

After supper Charlie went out for the evening, while Bernstein retired to their little bedroom. Girl busied herself with the dishes, and Jake took to romping about with Joey and had a hearty laugh with him. He was beginning to tire of the boy's company and to feel lonesome generally, when there was a knock at the door.

"Coom in!" Gitl hastened to say somewhat coquettishly, flourishing her proficiency in American manners, as she raised her head from the pot in her hands.

"Coom in!" repeated Joey.

The door flew open, and in came Mamie, preceded by a cloud of cologne odors. She was apparently dressed for some occasion of state, for she was powdered and straight—laced and resplendent in a waist of blazing red, gaudily trimmed, and with puff sleeves, each wider than the vast expanse of white straw, surmounted with a whole forest of ostrich feathers, which adorned her head. One of her gloved hands held the huge hoop-shaped yellowish handle of a blue parasol.

"Good—evenin', Jake!" she said, with ostentatious vivacity. "Good—evenin', Mamie!" Jake returned, jumping to his feet and violently reddening, as if suddenly pricked. "Mish Fein, my wife! My wife, Mish Fein!"

Miss Fein made a stately bow, primly biting her lip as she did so. Gitl, with the pot in her hands, stood staring sheepishly, at a loss what to do.

"Say I'm glyad to meeche you," Jake urged her, confusedly. The English phrase was more than Gitl could venture to echo.

"She is still green," Jake apologized for her, in Yiddish.

"Never *mm'*, she will soon *oysgreen* herself," Mamie remarked, with patronizing affability.

"The *lada* is an acquaintance of mine," Jake explained bashfully, his hand feeling the few days' growth of beard on his chin.

Gitl instinctively scented an enemy in the visitor, and eyed her with an uneasy gaze. Nevertheless she mustered a hospitable air, and drawing up the rocking chair, she said, with shamefaced cordiality: "Sit down; why should you be standing? You may be seated for the same money."

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In the conversation which followed Mamie did most of the talking. With a nervous volubility often broken by an irrelevant giggle, and violently rocking with her chair, she expatiated on the charms of America, prophesying that her hostess would bless the day of her arrival on its soil, and went off in ecstasies over Joey. She spoke with an overdone American accent in the dialect of the Polish Jews, affectedly Germanized and profusely interspersed with English, so that Gitl, whose mother tongue was Lithuanian Yiddish, could scarcely catch the meaning of one half of her flood of garrulity. And as she thus rattled on, she now examined the room, now surveyed Gitl from head to foot, now fixed her with a look of studied sarcasm, followed by a side glance at Jake, which seemed to say, "Woe to you, what a rag of a wife yours is!" Whenever Gitl ventured a timid remark, Mamie would nod assent with dignified amiability, and thereupon imitate a smile, broad yet fleeting, which she had seen performed by some uptown ladies.

Jake stared at the lamp with a faint simper, scarcely following the caller's words. His head swam with embarrassment. The consciousness of Gitl's unattractive appearance made him sick with shame and vexation, and his eyes carefully avoided her bandana, as a culprit schoolboy does the evidence of his offence.

"You mush vant you twenty-fife dollars," he presently nerved himself up to say in English, breaking an awkward pause.

"I should cough!" Mamie rejoined.

"In a coupel a veeksh, Mamie, as sure as my name is Jake."

"In a couple o' veeks! No, sirree! I mus' have my money at oncet. I don' know vere you vill get it, dough. Vy, a married man! —with a chuckle. "You got a — of a lot o' t'ings to pay for. You took de foinitsha by a custom peddler, am' it? But what a do I care? I vant my money. I voiked hard enough for it."

"Don' shpeak English. She'll t'ink I don' knu vot ye shpeak in'," he besought her, in accents which implied intimacy between the two of them and a common aloofness from Gitl.

"Vot d'I care vot she t'inks? She's your vife, am' it? Vell, she mus' know ev'ryt'ing. Dot's right! A husban' dass'n't hide not'ink from his vife!"—with another chuckle and another look of deadly sarcasm at Gitl. "I can say de same in Jewish —"

"Shurr-r up, Mamie!" he interrupted her, gaspingly.

"Don'tch you like it, lump it! A vife mus'n't be skinned like a strange lady, see?" she pursued inexorably. "O'ly a strange goil a feller might bluff dot he am' married, and skin her out of twenty-fife dollars." In point of fact, he had never directly given himself out for a single man to her. But it did not even occur to him to defend himself on that score."

"Mamie! Ma-a-mie! Shtop! I'll pay you ev'ry shent. Shpeak Jewesh, pleashe!" he implored, as if for life.

"You'r afraid of here Dot's right! Dot's right! Dot's nice! All religious peoples is afraid of deir vifes. But vy didn' you say you vas married from de sta't, an' dot you vant money to send for dem?" she tortured him, with a lingering arch leer.

"For Chrish' shake, Mamie!" he entreated her, wincingly. "Shtop to shpeak English, an' shpeak shomet'ing differench. I'll shee you—vere can I shee you?"

"You von't come by Joe no more?" she asked, with sudden interest and even solicitude.

"You t'ink indeed I'm 'frait? If I wanted I can gu dere more ash I ushed to gu dere. But vere can I findsh you?"

"I guess you know vere I'm livin', don'ch you? So kvick you forget? Vot a sho't mind you got! Vill you come? Never mm, I know you are only bluffin', an' dot's all."

"I'll come, ash sure ash I leev."

"Vill you? All right. But if you don' come an' pay me at least ten dollars for a sta't, you'll see!"

In the meanwhile Gitl, poor thing, sat pale and horror-struck. Mamie's perfumes somehow terrified her. She was racked with jealousy and all sorts of suspicions, which she vainly struggled to disguise. She could see that they were having a heated altercation, and that Jake was begging about something or other, and was generally the under dog in the parley. Ever and anon she strained her ears in the effort to fasten some of the incomprehensible sounds in her memory, that she might subsequently parrot them over to Mrs. Kavarsky, and ascertain their meaning. But, alas! the attempt proved futile; "never min'" and "all right" being all she could catch.

Mamie concluded her visit by presenting Joey with the imposing sum of five cents.

"What do you say? Say 'danks, sir!'" Gitl prompted the boy.

"Shay 't'ank you, ma'am!'" Jake overruled her. "'Shir' is said to a gentlemarn."

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"Good-night!" Mamie sang out, as she majestically opened the door.

"Good-night!" Jake returned, with a burning face.

"Goot-night!" Gitl and Joey chimed in duet.

"Say 'cull again!"

"Cullye gain!"

"Good-night!" Mamie said once more, as she bowed herself out of the door with what she considered an exquisitely "tony" smile.

The guest's exit was succeeded by a momentary silence. Jake felt as if his face and ears were on fire. "We used to work in the same shop," he presently said. "Is that the way a seamstress dresses in America?" Gitl inquired. "It is not for nothing that it is called the golden land," she added, with timid irony.

"She must be going to a ball," he explained, at the same moment casting a glance at the looking glass. The word "ball" had an imposing ring for Gitl's ears. At home she had heard it used in connection with the sumptuous life of the Russian or Polish nobility, but had never formed a clear idea of its meaning.

"She looks a veritable panenke," *[note]* she remarked, with hidden sarcasm. "Was she born here?" "Nu, but she has been very long here. She speaks English like one American born. We are used to speak in English when we talk shop. She came to ask me about a *job*."

Gitl reflected that with Bernstein Jake was in the habit of talking shop in Yiddish, although the boarder could even read English books, which her husband could not do.

*[note] Panenke:*

A young noblewoman.

## 6. Circumstances Alter Cases

Jake was left by Mamie in a state of unspeakable misery. He felt discomfited, crushed, the universal butt of ridicule. Her perfumes lingered in his nostrils, taking his breath away. Her venomous gaze stung his heart. She seemed to him elevated above the social plane upon which he had recently (though the interval appeared very long) stood by her side, nay, upon which he had had her at his beck and call; while he was degraded, as it were, wallowing in a mire, from which he yearningly looked up to his former equals, vainly begging for recognition. An uncontrollable desire took possession of him to run after her, to have an explanation, and to swear that he was the same Jake and as much of a Yankee and a gallant as ever. But here was his wife fixing him with a timid, piteous look, which at once exasperated and cowed him; and he dared not stir out of the house, as though nailed by that look of hers to the spot.

He lay down on the lounge, and shut his eyes. Gitl dutifully brought him a pillow. As she adjusted it under his head the touch of her hand on his face made him shrink, as if at the contact with a reptile. He was anxious to flee from his wretched self into oblivion, and his wish was soon gratified, the combined effect of a hard day's work and a plentiful and well-relished supper plunging him into a heavy sleep.

While his snores resounded in the little kitchen, Gitl put the child to bed, and then passed with noiseless step into the boarders' room. The door was ajar and she entered it without knocking, as was her wont. She found Bernstein bent over a book, with a ponderous dictionary by its side. A kerosene lamp with a red shade, occupying nearly all the remaining space on the table, spread a lurid mysterious light. Gitl asked the studious cloakmaker whether he knew a Polish girl named Mamie Fein.

"Mamie Fein? No. Why?" said Bernstein, with his index finger on the passage he had been reading, and his eyes on Gitl's plumpish cheek, bathed in the roseate light.

"Nothing. May not one ask?"

"What is the matter? Speak out! Are you afraid to tell me?" he insisted.

"What should be the matter? She was here. A nice *lada*."

"Your husband knows many nice *ladies*," he said, with a faint but significant smile. And immediately regretting the remark he went on to smooth it down by characterizing Jake as an honest and good-natured fellow.

"You ought to think yourself fortunate in having him for your husband," he added.

"Yes, but what did you mean by what you said first?" she demanded, with an anxious air.

"What did I mean? What should I have meant? I meant what I said. *F cou'se* he knows many girls. But who does not? You know there are always girls in the shops where we work. Never fear, Jake has nothing to do with them."

"Who says I fear! Did I say I did? Why should I?" Encouraged by the cheering effect which his words were obviously having on the credulous, unsophisticated woman, he pursued: "May no Jewish daughter have a worse husband. Be easy, be easy. I tell you he is melting away for you. He never looked as happy as he does since you came."

"Go away! You must be making fun of me!" she said, beaming with delight.

"Don't you believe me? Why, are you not a pretty young woman?" he remarked, with an oily look in his eye.

The crimson came into her cheek, and she lowered her glance.

"Stop making fun of me, I beg you," she said softly. "Is it true?"

"Is what true? That you are a pretty young woman? Take a looking glass and see for yourself."

"Strange man that you are!" she returned, with confused deprecation. "I mean what you said before about Jake," she faltered.

"Oh, about Jake! Then say so," he jested. "Really he loves you as life."

"How do you know?" she queried, wistfully.

"How do I know!" he repeated, with an amused smile. "As if one could not see!"

"But he never told you himself!"

"How do you know he did not? You have guessed wrongly, see! He did, lots of times," he concluded gravely, touched by the anxiety of the poor woman.

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She left Bernstein's room all thrilling with joy, and repentant for her excess of communicativeness. "A wife must not tell other people what happens to her husband," she lectured her self, in the best of humors. Still, the words "Your husband knows many nice *ladas*," kept echoing at the bottom of her soul, and in another few minutes she was at Mrs. Kavarsky's, confidentially describing Mamie's visit as well as her talk with the boarder, omitting nothing save the latter's compliments to her looks.

Mrs. Kavarsky was an eccentric, scraggy little woman, with a vehement manner and no end of words and gesticulations. Her dry face was full of warts and surmounted by a chaotic mass of ringlets and curls of a faded brown. None too tidy about her person, and rather slattern in general appearance, she zealously kept up the over-scrupulous cleanliness for which the fame of her apartments reached far and wide. Her neighbors and townfolk pronounced her crazy but "with a heart of diamond," that is to say, the diametrical opposite of the precious stone in point of hardness, and resembling it in the general sense of excellence of quality. She was neighborly enough, and as she was the most prosperous and her establishment the best equipped in the whole tenement, many a woman would come to borrow some cooking utensil or other, or even a few dollars on rent day, which Mrs. Kavarsky always started by refusing in the most pointed terms, and almost always finished by granting.

She started to listen to Gitl's report with a fierce mien which gradually thawed into a sage smile. When the young neighbor had rested her case, she first nodded her head, as who should say, "What fools this young generation be!" and then burst out:

"Do you know what I have to tell you? Guess!"

Gitl thought Heaven knows what revelations awaited her.

"That you are a lump of horse and a greenhorn and nothing else!" (Gitl felt much relieved.) "That piece of ugliness should *try* and come to *my* house! Then she would know the price of a pound of evil. I should open the door *and—march* to eighty black years! Let her go to where she came from! America is not Russia, thanked be the Lord of the world. Here one must only know how to handle a husband. Here a husband must remember '*ladas foist*'—*but* then you do not even know what that means!" she exclaimed, with a despairing wave of her hand.

"What does it mean?" Gitl inquired, pensively.

"What does it mean? What should it mean? It means but too well, *never min'*. It means that when a husband does not *be ha be* as he should, one does not stroke his cheeks for it. A prohibition upon me if one does. If the wife is no greenhorn she gets him shoved into the oven, over there, across the river."

"You mean they send him to prison?"

"Where else—to the theater?" Mrs. Kavarsky mocked her furiously.

"A weeping to me!" Gitl said, with horror. "May God save me from such things!"

In due course Mrs. Kavarsky arrived at the subject of head gear, and for the third or fourth time she elicited from her pupil a promise to discard the kerchief and to sell the wig.

"No wonder he does hate you, seeing you in that horrid rag, which makes a grandma of you. Drop it, I tell you! Drop it so that no survivor nor any refugee is left of it. If you don't obey me this time, dare not cross my threshold any more, do you hear?" she thundered. "One might as well talk to the wall as to her!" she proceeded, actually addressing herself to the opposite wall of her kitchen, and referring to her interlocutrice in the third person. "I am working and working for her, and here she appreciates it as much as the cat. Fie!" With which the irate lady averted her face in disgust.

"I shall take it off; now for sure—as sure as this is Wednesday," said Gitl, beseechingly.

Mrs. Kavarsky turned back to her pacified.

"Remember now! If you *deshepoitn* [disappoint] me this time, well!—look at me! I should think I was no Gentile woman, either. I am as pious as you *anyhull*, and come from no mean family, either. You know I hate to boast; *but* my father—peace be upon him!—was fit to be a rabbi. *Vell*, and yet I am not afraid to go with my own hair. May no greater sins be committed! Then it would be *never min'* enough. Plenty of time for putting on the patch [meaning the wig] when I get old; *but as* long as I am young, I am young *an' dots ull!* It can not be helped; when one lives in an *edzecate* country, one must live like *edzecate peoples*. As they play, so one dances, as the saying is. But I think it is time for you to be going. Go, my little kitten," Mrs. Kavarsky said, suddenly lapsing into accents of the most tender affection. "He may be up by this time and wanting *tea*. Go, my little lamb, go and *try* to make yourself agreeable to him and the Uppermost will help. In America one must take care not to

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displease a husband. Here one is today in New York and tomorrow in Chicago; do you understand? As if there were any shame or decency here! A father is no father, a wife, no *wife—not'ing!* Go now, my baby! Go and throw away your rag and be a nice woman, and everything will be *ull right.*" And so hurrying Gitl to go, she detained her with ever a fresh torrent of loquacity for another ten minutes, till the young woman, standing on pins and needles and scarcely lending an ear, plucked up courage to plead her household duties and take a hasty departure.

She found Jake fast asleep. It was after eleven when he slowly awoke. He got up with a heavy burden on his soul—a vague sense of having met with some horrible rebuff. In his semiconsciousness he was unaware, however, of his wife's and son's existence and of the change which their advent had produced in his life, feeling himself the same free bird that he had been a fortnight ago. He stared about the room, as if wondering where he was. Noticing Gitl, who at that moment came out of the bedroom, he instantly realized the situation, recalling Mamie, hat, perfumes, and all, and his heart sank within him. The atmosphere of the room became stifling to him.

After sitting on the lounge for some time with a drooping head, he was tempted to fling himself on the pillow again, but instead of doing so he slipped on his hat and coat and went out.

Gitl was used to his goings and comings without explanation. Yet this time his slam of the door sent a sharp pang through her heart. She had no doubt but that he was bending his steps to another interview with the Polish witch, as she mentally branded Miss Fein.

Nor was she mistaken, for Jake did start, mechanically, in the direction of Chrystie Street, where Mamie lodged. He felt sure that she was away to some ball, but the very house in which she roomed seemed to draw him with magnetic force. More over, he had a lurking hope that he might, after all, find her about the building. Ah, if by a stroke of good luck he came upon her on the street! All he wished was to have a talk, and that for the whole purpose of amending her unfavorable impression of him. Then he would never so much as think of Mamie, for, indeed, she was hateful to him, he persuaded himself.

Arrived at his destination, and failing to find Mamie on the sidewalk, he was tempted to wait till she came from the ball, when he was seized with a sudden sense of the impropriety of his expedition, and he forthwith returned home, deciding in his mind, as he walked, to move with his wife and child to Chicago.

Meanwhile Mamie lay brooding in her cot-bed in the parlor, which she shared with her landlady's two daughters. She was in the most wretched frame of mind, ineffectually struggling to fall asleep. She had made her way down the stairs leading from the Podkovniks with a violently palpitating heart. She had been bound for no more imposing a place than Joe's academy, and before repairing thither she had had to betake herself home to change her stately toilet for a humbler attire. For, as a matter of fact, it was expressly for her visit to the Podkovniks that she had thus pranked herself out, and that would have been much too gorgeous an appearance to make at Joe's establishment on one of its regular dancing evenings. Having changed her toilet she did call at Joe's; but so full was her mind of Jake and his wife and, accordingly, she was so irritable, that in the middle of a quadrille she picked a quarrel with the dancing master, and abruptly left the hall.

The next day Jake's work fared badly. When it was at last over he did not go direct home as usual, but first repaired to Mamie's. He found her with her landlady in the kitchen. She looked careworn and was in a white blouse which lent her face a convalescent, touching effect.

"Good—eveni'g, Mrs. Bunetzky! Good—eveni'g, Mamie!" he fairly roared, as he playfully fillipped his hat backward. And after addressing a pleasantry or two to the mistress of the house, he boldly proposed to her boarder to go out with him for a talk. For a moment Mamie hesitated, fearing lest her landlady had become aware of the existence of a Mrs. Podkovnik; but instantly flinging all considerations to the wind, she followed him out into the street.

"You'sh afraid I wouldn't pay you, Mamie?" he began, with bravado, in spite of his intention to start on a different line, he knew not exactly which.

Mamie was no less disappointed by the opening of the conversation than he. "I ain't afraid a bit," she answered, sullenly.

"Do you think my *kshpenshesh* are larger now?" he resumed in Yiddish. "May I lose as much through sickness. On the contrary, I *shpend* even much less than I used to. We have two nice boarders—I keep them only for company's sake—and I have a *shteadada job—a puddin' of a job*. I shall have still more money to *shpend outshite*," he added, falteringly.

"Outside?"—and she burst into an artificial laugh which sent the blood to Jake's face.

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"Why, do you think I sha'n't go to Joe's, nor to the theater, nor anywhere any more? Still oftener than before!  
*Hoy much vill you bet?"*

"Rats! A married man, a papa go to a dancing school! Not unless your wife drags along with you and never lets go of your skirts," she said sneeringly, adding the declaration that Jake's "bluffs" gave her a "regula' pain in de neck."

Jake, writhing under her lashes, protested his freedom as emphatically as he could; but it only served to whet Mamie's spite, and against her will she went on twitting him as a hen pecked husband and an old-fashioned Jew. Finally she reverted to the subject of his debt, whereupon he took fire, and after an interchange of threats and some quite forcible language they parted company.

From that evening the specter of Mamie dressed in her white blouse almost unremittingly preyed on Jake's mind. The mournful sneer which had lit her pale, invalid-looking face on their last interview, when she wore that blouse, relentlessly stared down into his heart; gnawed at it with tantalizing deliberation; "drew out his soul," as he once put it to himself, dropping his arms and head in despair. "Is this what they call love?" he wondered, thinking of the strange, hitherto unexperienced kind of malady, which seemed to be gradually consuming his whole being. He felt as if Mamie had breathed a delicious poison into his veins, which was now taking effect, spreading a devouring fire through his soul, and kindling him with a frantic thirst for more of the same virus. His features became distended, as it were, and acquired a feverish effect; his eyes had a pitiable, beseeching look, like those of a child in the period of teething. He grew more irritable with Gitl every day, the energy failing him to dissemble his hatred for her. There were moments when, in his hopeless craving for the presence of Mamie, he would consciously seek refuge in a feeling of compunction and of pity for his wife; and on several such occasions he made an effort to take an affectionate tone with her. But the unnatural sound of his voice each time only accentuated to himself the depth of his repugnance, while the hysterical promptness of her answers, the servile gratitude which trembled in her voice and shone out of her radiant face would, at such instances, make him breathless with rage. Poor Gitl! she strained every effort to please him; she tried to charm him by all the simple-minded little coquetries she knew, by every art which her artless brain could invent; and only succeeded in making herself more offensive than ever.

As to Jake's feelings for Joey, they now alternated between periods of indifference and gusts of exaggerated affection; while in some instances, when the boy let himself be fondled by his mother or returned her caresses in his childish way, he would appear to Jake as siding with his enemy, and share with Gitl his father's odium.

One afternoon, shortly after Jake's interview with Mamie in front of the Chrystie Street tenement house, Fanny called on Gitl.

"Are you Mrs. Podkovnik?" she inquired, with an embarrassed air.

"Yes; why?" Mrs. Podkovnik replied, turning pale. "She is come to tell me that Jake has eloped with that Polish girl," flashed upon her overwrought mind. At the same moment Fanny, sizing her up, exclaimed inwardly, "So this is the kind of woman she is, poor thing!"

"Nothing. I *just* want to speak to you," the visitor uttered, mysteriously.

"What is it?"

"As I say, nothing at all. Is there nobody else in the house?" Fanny demanded, looking about.

"May I not live till tomorrow if there is a living soul except my boy, and he is asleep. You may speak; never fear. But first tell me who you are; do not take ill my question. Be seated."

The girl's appearance and manner began to inspire Gitl with confidence.

"My name is Rosy—Rosy Blank," said Fanny, as she took a seat on the further end of the lounge. "*F cou' se*, you don't know me, how should you? But I know you well enough, never mind that we have never seen each other before. I used to work with your husband in one shop. I have come to tell you such an important thing! You must know it. It makes no difference that you don't know who I am. May God grant me as good a year as my friendship is for you."

"Something about Jake?" Gitl blurted out, all anxiety, and instantly regretted the question.

"How did you guess? About Jake it is! About him and somebody else. But see how you did guess! Swear that you won't tell anybody that I have been here."

"May I be left speechless, may my arms and legs be paralyzed, if I ever say a word!" Giti recited vehemently, thrilling with anxiety and impatience. "So it is! they have eloped!" she added in her heart, seating herself close to

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her caller. "A darkness upon my years! What will become of me and Yosselé now?"

"Remember, now, not a word, either to Jake or to anybody else in the world. I had a mountain of *trouble* before I found out where you lived, and I *stopped* work on purpose to come and speak to you. As true as you see me alive. I wanted to call when I was sure to find you alone, you understand. Is there really nobody about?" And after a preliminary glance at the door and exacting another oath of discretion from Mrs. Podkovnik, Fanny began in an undertone:

"There is a girl; well, her name is Mamie; well, she and your husband used to go to the same dancing school—that is a place where *fellers* and *ladies* learn to dance," she explained. "I go there, too; but I know your husband from the shop."

"But that *lada* has also worked in the same shop with him, hasn't she?" Gitl broke in, with a desolate look in her eye.

"Why, did Jake tell you she had?" Fanny asked in surprise.

"No, not at all, not at all! I am just asking. May I be sick if I know anything."

"The idea! How could they work together, seeing that she is a shirtmaker and he a cloakmaker. Ah, if you knew what a witch she is! She has set her mind on your husband, and is bound to take him away from you. She hitched on to him long ago. But since you came I thought she would have God in her heart, and be ashamed of people. Not she! She be ashamed! You may sling a cat into her face and she won't mind it. The black year knows where she grew up. I tell you there is not a girl in the whole dancing school but can not bear the sight of that Polish lizard!"

"Why, do they meet and kiss?" Gitl moaned out. "Tell me, do tell me all, my little crown, keep nothing from me, tell me my whole dark lot."

"*Ull right*, but be sure not to speak to anybody. I'll tell you the truth: My name is not Rosy Blank at all. It is Fanny Scutelsky. You see, I am telling you the whole truth. The other evening they stood near the house where she *boards*, on Chrystie Street; so they were looking into each other's eyes and talking like a pair of little doves. A *lady* who is a *particla* friend of mine saw them; so she says a child could have guessed that she was making love to him and *trying* to get him away from you. '*F cou'se* it is none of my *business*. Is it my *business*, then? What do *I care*? It is only *becuss* I pity you. It is like the nature I have; I can not bear to see anybody in trouble. Other people would not *care*, but I do. Such is my nature. So I thought to myself I must go and tell Mrs. Podkovnik all about it, in order that she might know what to do."

For several moments Gitl sat speechless, her head hung down, and her bosom heaving rapidly. Then she fell to swaying her frame sidewise, and vehemently wringing her hands.

"*Oi! Oi!* Little mother! A pain to me!" she moaned. "What is to be done? Lord of the world, what is to be done? Come to the rescue! People, do take pity, come to the rescue!" She broke into a fit of low sobbing, which shook her whole form and was followed by a torrent of tears.

Whereupon Fanny also burst out crying, and falling upon Gitl's shoulder she murmured: "My little heart! you don't know what a friend I am to you! Oh, if you knew what a serpent that Polish thief is!"

## 7. Mrs. Kavarsky's Coup D'État

It was not until after supper time that Gitl could see Mrs. Kavarsky; for the neighbor's husband was in the installment business, and she generally spent all day in helping him with his collections as well as canvassing for new customers. When Gitl came in to unburden herself of Fanny's revelations, she found her confidante out of sorts. Something had gone wrong in Mrs. Kavarsky's affairs, and, while she was perfectly aware that she had only herself to blame, she had laid it all to her husband and had nagged him out of the house before he had quite finished his supper.

She listened to her neighbor's story with a bored and impatient air, and when Gitl had concluded and paused for her opinion, she remarked languidly: "It serves you right! It is all *becuss* you will not throw away that ugly kerchief of yours. What is the use of your asking my advice?"

"*Oi!* I think even that wouldn't help it now," Gitl rejoined, forlornly. "The Uppermost knows what drug she has charmed him with. A cholera into her, Lord of the world!" she added, fiercely.

Mrs. Kavarsky lost her temper.

"*Say*, will you stop talking nonsense?" she shouted savagely. "No wonder your husband does not *care* for you, seeing these stupid greenhornlike notions of yours."

"How then could she have bewitched him, the witch that she is? Tell me, little heart, little crown, do tell me! Take pity and be a mother to me. I am so lonely and—" Heartrending sobs choked her voice.

"What shall I tell you? that you are a blockhead? *Oi! Oi! Oi!*" she mocked her. "Will the crying help you? *Ull right*, cry away!"

"But what shall I do?" Gitl pleaded, wiping her tears. "It may drive me mad. I won't wear the kerchief any more. I swear this is the last day," she added, propitiatingly.

"*Dot's right!* When you talk like a man I like you. And now sit still and listen to what an older person and a business woman has to tell you. In the first place, who knows what that girl—Jennie, Fannie, Shmennie, Yomtzedemennie—whatever you may call her—is after?" The last two names Mrs. Kavarsky invented by poetical license to complete the rhyme and for the greater emphasis of her contempt. "In the second place, *aspose* [supposing] he did talk to that Polish piece of disturbance. *Vell*, what of it? It is all over with the world, isn't it? The mourner prayer is to be said after it, I declare! A married man stood talking to a girl! Just think of it! May no greater evil befall any Yiddish daughter. This is not Europe where one dares not say a word to a strange woman!

*Nu, sir!*"

"What, then, is the matter with him? At home he would hardly ever leave my side, and never ceased looking into my eyes. Woe is me, what America has brought me to!" And again her grief broke out into a flood of tears.

This time Mrs. Kavarsky was moved.

"Don't be crying, my child; he may come in for you," she said, affectionately. "Believe me you are making a mountain out of a fly—you are imagining too much."

"*Oi*, as my ill luck would have it, it is all but too true. Have I no eyes, then? He mocks at everything I say or do; he can not bear the touch of my hand. America *has* made a mountain of ashes out of me. Really, a curse upon Columbus!" she ejaculated mournfully, quoting in all earnestness a current joke of the Ghetto.

Mrs. Kavarsky was too deeply touched to laugh. She proceeded to examine her pupil, in whispers, upon certain details, and thereupon her interest in Gitl's answers gradually superseded her commiseration for the unhappy woman.

"And how does he behave toward the boy?" she absently inquired, after a melancholy pause.

"Would he were as kind to me!"

"Then it is *ull right!* Such things will happen between man and wife. It is all *humbuk*. It will all come right, and you will some day be the happiest woman in the world. You shall see. Remember that Mrs. Kavarsky has told you so. And in the meantime stop crying. A husband hates a sniveller for a wife. You know the story of Jacob and Leah, as it stands written in the Holy Five Books, don't you? Her eyes became red with weeping, and Jacob, our father, did not *care* for her on that account. Do you understand?"

All at once Mrs. Kavarsky bit her lip, her countenance brightening up with a sudden inspiration. At the next

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instant she made a lunge at Gitl's head, and off went the kerchief. Gitl started with a cry, at the same moment covering her head with both hands.

"Take off your hands! Take them off at once, I say!" the other shrieked, her eyes flashing fire and her feet performing an Irish jig.

Gitl obeyed for sheer terror. Then, pushing her toward the sink, Mrs. Kavarsky said peremptorily: "You shall wash off your silly tears and I'll arrange your hair, and from this day on there shall be no kerchief, do you hear?"

Gitl offered but feeble resistance, just enough to set herself right before her own conscience. She washed herself quietly, and when her friend set about combing her hair, she submitted to the operation without a murmur, save for uttering a painful hiss each time there came a particularly violent tug at the comb; for, indeed, Mrs. Kavarsky plied her weapon rather energetic ally and with a bloodthirsty air, as if inflicting punishment. And while she was thus attacking Gitl's luxurious raven locks she kept growling, as glibly as the progress of the comb would allow, and modulating her voice to its movements: "Believe me you are a lump of hunchback, *sure*; you may—may depend up—upon it! Tell me, now, do you ever comb yourself? You have raised quite a plica, the black year take it! Another woman would thank God for such beau—beautiful hair, and here she keeps it hidden and makes a bu—bugbear of herself—a *regele monkey!*" she concluded, gnashing her teeth at the stout resistance with which her implement was at that moment grappling.

Gitl's heart swelled with delight, but she modestly kept silent. Suddenly Mrs. Kavarsky paused thoughtfully, as if conceiving a new idea. In another moment a pair of scissors and curling irons appeared on the scene. At the sight of this Gitl's blood ran chill, and when the scissors gave their first click in her hair she felt as though her heart snapped. Nevertheless she endured it all without a protest, blindly trusting that these instruments of torture would help reinstall her in Jake's good graces.

At last, when all was ready and she found herself adorned with a pair of rich side bangs, she was taken in front of the mirror, and ordered to hail the transformation with joy. She viewed herself with an unsteady glance, as if her own face struck her as unfamiliar and forbidding. However, the change pleased her as much as it startled her.

"Do you really think he will like it?" she inquired with piteous eagerness, in a fever of conflicting emotions.

"If he does not, I shall refund your money!" her guardian snarled, in high glee.

For a moment, or so Mrs. Kavarsky paused to admire the effect of her art. Then, in a sudden transport of enthusiasm, she sprang upon her ward, and with an "*Oi*, a health to you!" she smacked a hearty kiss on her burning cheek.

"And now come, piece of wretch!" So saying, Mrs. Kavarsky grasped Gitl by the wrist, and forcibly conveyed her into her husband's presence.

The two boarders were out, Jake being alone with Joey. He was seated at the table, facing the door, with the boy on his knees.

"*Goot—evenik*, Mr. Podkovnik! Look what I have brought you: a brand new wife!" Mrs. Kavarsky said, pointing at her charge, who stood faintly struggling to disengage her hand from her escort's tight grip, her eyes looking to the ground and her cheeks a vivid crimson.

Gitl's unwonted appearance impressed Jake as something unseemly and meretricious. The sight of her revolted him.

"It becomes her like a—a—a wet cat," he faltered out with a venomous smile, choking down a much stronger simile which would have conveyed his impression with much more precision, but which he dared not apply to his own wife.

The boy's first impulse upon the entrance of his mother had been to run up to her side and to greet her merrily; but he, too, was shocked by the change in her aspect, and he remained where he was, looking from her to Jake in blank surprise.

"Go away, you don't mean it!" Mrs. Kavarsky remonstrated distressedly, at the same moment releasing her prisoner, who forthwith dived into the bedroom to bury her face in a pillow, and to give way to a stream of tears. Then she made a few steps toward Jake, and speaking in an undertone she proceeded to take him to task. "Another man would consider himself happy to have such a wife," she said. "Such a quiet, honest woman! And such a housewife! Why, look at the way she keeps everything—like a fiddle. It is simply a treat to come into your house. I do declare you sin!"

"What do I do to her?" he protested morosely, cursing the intruder in his heart.

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"Who says you do? Mercy and peace! Only—you understand—how shall I say it?—she is only a young woman; *vell*, so she imagines that you do not *care* for her as much as you used to. Come, Mr. Podkovnik, you know you are a sensible man! I have always thought you one—you may ask my husband. Really you ought to be ashamed of yourself. A prohibition upon me if I could ever have believed it of you. Do you think a stylish girl would make you a better wife? If you do, you are grievously mistaken. What are they good for, the hussies? To darken the life of a husband? That, I admit, they are really great hands at. They only know how to squander his money for a new hat or rag every Monday and Thursday, and to tramp around with other men, fie upon the abominations! May no good Jew know them!"

Her innuendo struck Mrs. Kavarsky as extremely ingenious, and, egged on by the dogged silence of her auditor, she ventured a step further.

"Do you mean to tell me," she went on, emphasizing each word, and shaking her whole body with melodramatic defiance, "that you would be better off with a *dantzin'-school* girl?"

"A *danshin'-shchool* girl?" Jake repeated, turning ashen pale, and fixing his inquisitress with a distant gaze. "Who says I care for a *danshin'-shchool* girl?" he bellowed, as he let down the boy and started to his feet red as a cockscorn. "It was she who told you that, was it?"

Joey had tripped up to the lounge where he now stood watching his father with a stare in which there was more curiosity than fright.

The little woman lowered her crest. "Not at all! God be with you!" she said quickly, in a tone of abject cowardice, and involuntarily shrinking before the ferocious attitude of Jake's strapping figure. "Who? What? When? I did not mean any thing at all, *sure*. Gitl *never* said a word to me. A prohibition if she did. Come, Mr. Podkovnik, why should you get *ektzited*?" she pursued, beginning to recover her presence of mind. "By the—by—I came near forgetting—how about the boarder you promised to get me; do you remember, Mr. Podkovnik?" "Talk away a toothache for your grandma, not for me. Who told her about *danshin'* girls?" he thundered again, re-enforcing the ejaculation with an English oath, and bringing down a violent fist on the table as he did so.

At this Gitl's sobs made themselves heard from the bedroom. They lashed Jake into a still greater fury. "What is she whimpering about, the piece of stench! *Alla right*, I do hate her; I can not bear the sight of her; and let her do what she likes. *I don' care!*"

"Mr. Podkovnik! To think of a *sma't* man like you talking in this way!"

"Dot'sh *alla right!*" he said, somewhat relenting. "I don't *care* for any *danshin'* girls. It is a — lie! It was that scabby *greenhorn* who must have taken it into her head. I don't *care* for anybody; not for her certainly"—pointing to the bedroom. "I am an *American feller*, a *Yankee—that's* what I am. What punishment is due to me, then, if I can not stand a *shnooza* like here. It is *nu ushed*; I can not live with her, even if she stand one foot on heaven and one on earth. Let her take everything"—with a wave at the household effects—"and I shall pay her as much *cash* as she asks—I am willing to break stones to pay her—provided she agrees to a divorce."

The word had no sooner left his lips than Gitl burst out of the darkness of her retreat, her bangs dishevelled, her face stained and flushed with weeping and rage, and her eyes, still suffused with tears, flashing fire.

"May you and your Polish harlot be jumping out of your skins and chafing with wounds as long as you will have to wait for a divorce!" she exploded. "He thinks I don't know how they stand together near her house making love to each other!"

Her unprecedented show of pugnacity took him aback.

"Look at the Cossack of straw!" he said quietly, with a forced smile. "Such a piece of cholera!" he added, as if speaking to himself, as he resumed his seat. "I wonder who tells her all these fibs?"

Gitl broke into a fresh flood of tears.

"*Vell*, what do you want now?" Mrs. Kavarsky said, addressing herself to her. "He says it is a lie. I told you you take all sorts of silly notions into your head."

"*Ach*, would it were a lie!" Gitl answered between her sobs. At this juncture the boy stepped up to his mother's side, and nestled against her skirt. She clasped his head with both her hands, as though gratefully accepting an offer of succor against an assailant. And then, for the vague purpose of wounding Jake's feelings, she took the child in her arms, and huddling him close to her bosom, she half turned from her husband, as much as to say, "We two are making common cause against you." Jake was cut to the quick. He kept his glance fixed on the reddened, tear-stained profile of her nose, and, choking with hate, he was going to say, "For my part, hang yourself together

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with him!" But he had self-mastery enough to repress the exclamation, confining himself to a disdainful smile.

"Children, children! Woe, how you do sin!" Mrs. Kavarsky sermonized. "Come now, obey an older person. Whoever takes notice of such trifles? You have had a quarrel? *Ull right!* And now make peace. Have an embrace and a good kiss and *dot's ull! Hurry yup*, Mr. Podkovnik! Don't be ashamed!" she beckoned to him, her countenance wreathed in voluptuous smiles in anticipation of the love scene about to enact itself before her eyes. Mr. Podkovnik failing to hurry up, however, she went on disappointedly: "Why, Mr. Podkovnik! Look at the boy the Uppermost has given you. Would he might send me one like him. Really, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Vot you kickin' aboyt, anyhoy?" Jake suddenly fired out, in English. "Min' jou on businessh an' dot'sh ull," he added indignantly, averting his head.

Mrs. Kavarsky grew as red as a boiled lobster.

"Vo—vo—vot *you* keeck aboyt?" she panted, drawing her self up and putting her arms akimbo. "He must think I, too, can be scared by his English. I declare my shirt has turned linen for fright! I was in America while you were hauling away at the bellows in Povodye; do you know it?"

"Are you going out of my house or not?" roared Jake, jumping to his feet.

"And if I am not, what will you do? Will you call a *politz man?* *Ull right*, do. That is just what I want. I shall tell him I can not leave her alone with a murderer like you, for fear you might kill her and the boy, so that you might dawdle around with that Polish wench of yours. Here you have it!" Saying which, she put her thumb between her index and third finger—the Russian version of the well-known gesture of contempt—presenting it to her adversary together with a generous portion of her tongue.

Jake's first impulse was to strike the meddlesome woman. As he started toward her, however, he changed his mind. "*Alla right*, you may remain with her!" he said, rushing up to the clothes rack, and slipping on his coat and hat. "*Alla right*," he repeated with broken breath, "we shall see!" And with a frantic bang of the door he disappeared.

The fresh autumn air of the street at once produced its salutary effect on his over-excited nerves. As he grew more collected he felt himself in a most awkward muddle. He cursed his outbreak of temper, and wished the next few days were over and the breach healed. In his abject misery he thought of suicide, of fleeing to Chicago or St.

Louis, all of which passed through his mind in a stream of the most irrelevant and the most frivolous reminiscences. He was burning to go back, but the nerve failing him to face Mrs. Kavarsky, he wondered where he was going to pass the night. It was too cold to be tramping about till it was time to go to work, and he had not change enough to pay for a night's rest in a lodging house; so in his despair he fulminated against Gitl and, above all, against her tutoress. Having passed as far as the limits of the Ghetto he took a homeward course by a parallel street, knowing all the while that he would lack the courage to enter his house. When he came within sight of it he again turned back, yearningly thinking of the cozy little home behind him, and invoking maledictions upon Gitl for enjoying it now while he was exposed to the chill air without the prospect of shelter for the night. As he thus sauntered reluctantly about he meditated upon the scenes coming in his way, and upon the thousand and one things which they brought to his mind. At the same time his heart was thirsting for Mamie, and he felt himself a wretched outcast, the target of ridicule—a martyr paying the penalty of sins, which he failed to recognize as sins, or of which, at any rate, he could not hold himself culpable.

Yes, he will go to Chicago, or to Baltimore, or, better still, to England. He pictured to himself the sensation it would produce and Gitl's despair. "It will serve her right. What does she want of me?" he said to himself, revelling in a sense of revenge. But then it was such a pity to part with Joey! Whereupon, in his reverie, Jake beheld himself stealing into his house in the dead of night, and kidnapping the boy. And what would Mamie say? Would she not be sorry to have him disappear? Can it be that she does not care for him any longer? She seemed to. But that was before she knew him to be a married man. And again his heart uttered curses against Gitl. Ah, if

Mamie did still care for him, and fainted upon hearing of his flight, and then could not sleep, and ran around wringing her hands and raving like mad! It would serve *her* right, too! She should have come to tell him she loved him instead of making that scene at his house and taking a derisive tone with him upon the occasion of his visit to her. Still, should she come to join him in London, he would receive her, he decided magnanimously. They speak

English in London, and have cloak shops like here. So he would be no greenhorn there, and wouldn't they be happy— he, Mamie, and little Joey! Or, supposing his wife suddenly died, so that he could legally marry Mamie

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and remain in New York— A mad desire took hold of him to see the Polish girl, and he involuntarily took the way to her lodging. What is he going to say to her? Well, he will beg her not to be angry for his failure to pay his debt, take her into his confidence on the subject of his proposed flight, and promise to send her every cent from London. And while he was perfectly aware that he had neither the money to take him across the Atlantic nor the heart to forsake Gitl and Joey, and that Mamie would never let him leave New York without paying her twenty-five dollars, he started out on a run in the direction of Chrystie Street. Would she might offer to join him in his flight! She must have money enough for two passage tickets, the rogue. Wouldn't it be nice to be with her on the steamer! he thought, as he wrathfully brushed apart a group of street urchins impeding his way.

## 8. A Housetop Idyl

Jake found Mamie on the sidewalk in front of the tenement house where she lodged. As he came rushing up to her side, she was pensively rehearsing a waltz step.

"Mamie, come shomeversh! I got to shpeak to you a lot," he gasped out.

"Vot's de madder?" she demanded, startled by his excited manner.

"This is not the place for speaking," he rejoined vehemently, in Yiddish. "Let us go to the Grand Street dock or to Seventh Street park. These we can speak so that nobody overhears us."

"I bet you he is going to ask me to run away with him," she prophesied to herself; and in her feverish impatience to hear him out she proposed to go on the roof, which, the evening being cool, she knew to be deserted.

When they reached the top of the house they found it over hung with rows of half-dried linen, held together with wooden clothespins and trembling to the fresh autumn breeze. Overhead, fleecy clouds were floating across a starry blue sky, now concealing and now exposing to view a pallid crescent of new moon. Coming from the street below there was a muffled, mysterious hum ever and anon drowned in the clatter and jingle of a passing horse car. A lurid, exceedingly uncanny sort of idyl it was; and in the midst of it there was something extremely weird and gruesome in those stretches of wavering, fitfully silvered white, to Jake's overtaxed mind vaguely suggesting the burial clothes of the inmates of a Jewish graveyard.

After picking and diving their way beneath the trembling lines of underwear, pillowcases, sheets, and what not, they paused in front of a tall chimney pot. Jake, in a medley of superstitious terror, infatuation, and bashfulness, was at a loss how to begin and, indeed, what to say. Feeling that it would be easy for him to break into tears he instinctively chose this as the only way out of his predicament.

"Vot's de madder, Jake? Speak out!" she said, with motherly harshness.

He now wished to say something, although he still knew not what; but his sobs once called into play were past his control.

"She must give you *trouble*," the girl added softly, after a slight pause, her excitement growing with every moment.

"Ach, Mamielé!" he at length exclaimed, resolutely wiping his tears with his handkerchief. "My life has become so dark and bitter to me, I might as well put a rope around my neck."

"Does she eat you?"

"Let her go to all lamentations! Somebody told her I go around with you."

"But you know it is a lie! Some one must have seen us the other evening when we were standing downstairs. You had better not come here, then. When you have some money, you will send it to me," she concluded, between genuine sympathy and an intention to draw him out.

"Ach, don't say that, Mamie. What is the good of my life without you? I don't sleep nights. Since she came I began to understand how dear you are to me. I can not tell it so well," he said, pointing to his heart.

"Yes, but before she came you didn't *care* for me!" she declared, laboring to disguise the exultation which made her heart dance.

"I always did, Mamie. May I drop from this roof and break hand and foot if I did not."

A flood of wan light struck Mamie full in her swarthy face, suffusing it with ivory effulgence, out of which her deep dark eyes gleamed with a kind of unearthly luster. Jake stood enraptured. He took her by the hand, but she instantly withdrew it, edging away a step. His touch somehow restored her to calm self-possession, and even kindled a certain thirst for revenge in her heart.

"It is not what it used to be, Jake," she said in tones of complaisant earnestness. "Now that I know you are a married man it is all gone. Yes, Jake, it is all gone! You should have cared for me when she was still there. Then you could have gone to a rabbi and sent her a writ of divorce. It is too late now, Jake."

"It is not too late!" he protested, tremulously. "I will get a divorce, *anyhoy*. And if you don't take me I will hang myself," he added, imploringly.

"On a burned straw?" she retorted, with a cruel chuckle.

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"It is all very well for you to laugh. But if you could enter my heart and see how I *shuffer!*"

"Woe is me! I don't see how you will stand it," she mocked him. And abruptly assuming a grave tone, she pursued vehemently: "But I don't understand; since you sent her tickets and money, you must like her."

Jake explained that he had all along intended to send her rabbinical divorce papers instead of a passage ticket, and that it had been his old mother who had pestered him, with her tear-stained letters, into acting contrary to his will.

"*All right,*" Mamie resumed, with a dubious smile; "but why don't you go to Fanny, or Beckie, or Beilké the 'Black Cat'? You used to care for them more than for me. Why should you just come to me?"

Jake answered by characterizing the girls she had mentioned in terms rather too high-scented for print, protesting his loathing for them. Whereupon she subjected him to a rigid cross-examination as to his past conduct toward herself and her rivals; and although he managed to explain matters to her inward satisfaction, owing, chiefly, to a predisposition on her own part to credit his assertions on the subject, she could not help continuing obdurate and in a spiteful, vindictive mood.

"All you say is not worth a penny, and it is too late, *anyvay,*" was her verdict. "You have a wife and a child; better go home and be a father to your *boy.*" Her last words were uttered with some approach to sincerity, and she was mentally beginning to give herself credit for magnanimity and pious self-denial. She would have regretted her exhortation, however, had she been aware of its effect on her listener; for her mention of the boy and appeal to Jake as a father aroused in him a lively sense of the wrong he was doing. Moreover, while she was speaking his attention had been attracted to a loosened pillowcase ominously fluttering and flapping a yard or two off. The figure of his dead father, attired in burial linen, uprose to his mind.

"You don' wanted? Alla right, you be shorry," he said half heartedly, turning to go.

"*Hol' on!*" she checked him, irritably. "How are you going tofix it? Are you *sure* she will take a divorce?"

"Will she have a choice then? She will have to take it. I won't live with her *anyhoy,*" he replied, his passion once more welling up in his soul. "Mamie, my treasure, my glory!" he exclaimed, in tremulous accents. "Say that you are *shatichfied*; my heart will become lighter." Saying which, he strained her to his bosom, and fell to raining fervent kisses on her face. At first she made a faint attempt at freeing herself, and then suddenly clasping him with mad force she pressed her lips to his in a fury of passion.

The pillowcase flapped aloud, ever more sternly, warningly, portentously.

Jake cast an involuntary side glance at it. His spell of passion was broken and supplanted by a spell of benumbing terror. He had an impulse to withdraw his arms from the girl; but, instead, he clung to her all the faster, as if for shelter from the ghostlike thing.

With a last frantic hug Mamie relaxed her hold. "Remember now, Jake!" she then said, in a queer hollow voice. "Now it is all *settled.* Maybe you are making fun of me? If you are, you are playing with fire. Death to me—death to you!" she added, menacingly.

He wished to say something to reassure her, but his tongue seemed grown fast to his palate.

"Am I to blame?" she continued with ghastly vehemence, sobs ringing in her voice. "Who asked you to come? Did I lure you from her, then? I should sooner have thrown myself into the river than taken away somebody else's husband. You say yourself that you would not live with her, *anyvay.* But now it is all gone. Just try to leave me now!" And giving vent to her tears, she added, "Do you think my heart is no heart?"

A thrill of joyous pity shot through his frame. Once again he caught her to his heart, and in a voice quivering with tenderness he murmured: "Don't be uneasy, my dear, my gold, my pearl, my consolation! I will let my throat be cut, into fire or water will I go, for your sake."

"Dot's all right," she returned, musingly. "But how are you going to get rid of her? You von't go back on me, vill you?" she asked in English.

"*Me?* May I not be able to get away from this spot. Can it be that you still distrust me?"

"Swear!"

"How else shall I swear?"

"By your father, peace upon him."

"May my father as surely have a bright paradise," he said, with a show of alacrity, his mind fixed on the loosened pillow case. "*Vell,* are you *shatichfied* now?"

"All right," she answered, in a matter-of-fact way, and as if only half satisfied. "But do you think she will

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take money?"

"But I have none."

"Nobody asks you if you have. But would she take it, if you had?"

"If I had! I am sure she would take it; she would have to, for what would she gain if she did not?"

"Are you *sure*?"

"*'F caush!*"

"Ach, but, after all, why did you not tell me you liked me before she came?" she said testily, stamping her foot.

"Again!" he exclaimed, wincing.

"*All right; wait.*"

She turned to go somewhere, but checked herself, and facing about, she exacted an additional oath of allegiance. After which she went to the other side of the chimney. When she returned she held one of her arms behind her.

"You will not let yourself be talked away from me?"

He swore.

"Not even if your father came to you from the other world—if he came to you in a dream, I mean—and told you to drop me?"

Again he swore.

"And you really don't care for Fanny?"

And again he swore.

"Nor for Beckie?"

The ordeal was too much, and he begged her to desist. But she wouldn't, and so, chafing under inexorable cross-examinations, he had to swear again and again that he had never cared for any of Joe's female pupils or assistants except Mamie.

At last she relented.

"Look, piece of loafer you!" she then said, holding out an open bank book to his eyes. "But what is the *use*? It is not light enough, and you can not read, *anyvay*. You can eat, *dot's all*. *Vell*, you could make out figures, couldn't you? There are three hundred and forty dollars," she proceeded, pointing to the balance line, which represented the savings, for a marriage portion, of five years' hard toil. "It should be three hundred and sixty-five, but then for the twenty-five dollars you owe me I may as well light a mourner's candle, *ain' it?*"

When she had started to produce the bank book from her bosom he had surmised her intent, and while she was gone he was making guesses as to the magnitude of the sum to her credit. His most liberal estimate, however, had been a hundred and fifty dollars; so that the revelation of the actual figure completely overwhelmed him. He listened to her with a broad grin, and when she paused he burst out:

"Mamielé, you know what? Let us runaway!"

"You are a fool!" she overruled him, as she tucked the bank book under her jacket. "I have a better plan. But tell me the truth, did you not guess I had money? Now you need not fear to tell me all."

He swore that he had not even dreamt that she possessed a bank account. How could he? And was it not because he had suspected the existence of such an account that he had come to declare his love to her and not to Fanny, or Beckie, or the "Black Cat"? No, may he be thunderstruck if it was. What does she take him for? On his part she is free to give the money away or throw it into the river. He will become a boss, and take her penniless, for he can not live without her; she is lodged in his heart; she is the only woman he ever cared for.

"Oh, but why did you not tell me all this long ago?" With which, speaking like the complete mistress of the situation that she was, she proceeded to expound a project, which had shaped itself in her lovelorn mind, hypothetically, during the previous few days, when she had been writhing in despair of ever having an occasion to put it into practice. Jake was to take refuge with her married sister in Philadelphia until Gitl was brought to terms.

In the meantime some chum of his, nominated by Mamie and acting under her orders, would carry on negotiations. The State divorce, as she had already taken pains to ascertain, would cost fifty dollars; the rabbinical divorce would take five or eight dollars more. Two hundred dollars would be deposited with some Canal Street banker, to be paid to Gitl when the whole procedure was brought to a successful termination. If she can be got to accept less, so much the better; if not, Jake and Mamie will get along, anyhow. When they are married they will

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open a dancing school.

To all of which Jake kept nodding approval, once or twice interrupting her with a demonstration of enthusiasm. As to the fate of his boy, Mamie deliberately circumvented all reference to the subject. Several times Jake was tempted to declare his ardent desire to have the child with them, and that Mamie should like him and be a mother to him; for had she not herself found him a bright and nice fellow? His heart bled at the thought of having to part with Joey. But somehow the courage failed him to touch upon the question. He saw himself helplessly entangled in something foreboding no good. He felt between the devil and the deep sea, as the phrase goes; and unnerved by the whole situation and completely in the shop girl's power, he was glad to be relieved from all initiative—whether forward or backward—to shut his eyes, as it were, and, leaning upon Mamie's strong arm, let himself be led by her in whatever direction she chose.

"Do you know, Jake?—now I may as well tell you," the girl pursued, *pro pos* of the prospective dancing school; "do you know that Joe has been *bodering* me to marry him? And he did not know I had a cent, either."

"An' you didn' vanted?" Jake asked, joyfully.

"Sure! I knew all along Jakie was my predestined match," she replied, drawing his bulky head to her lips. And following the operation by a sound twirl of his ear, she added: "Only he is a great lump of hog, Jakie is. But a heart is a clock: it told me I would have you some day. I could have got *lots* of suitors—may the two of us have as many thousands of dollars—and *business people*, too. Do you see what I am doing for you? Do you deserve it, *monkey you?*"

"Never min', you shall see what a *danshin' shchool* I *shta't*. If I don't take away every *shcholar* from Jaw, my name won't be Jake. Won't he squirm!" he exclaimed, with childish ardor.

"Dot's all right; but foist mm' dot you don' go back on me!"

An hour or two later Mamie with Jake by her side stood in front of the little window in the ferryhouse of the Pennsylvania Railroad, buying one ticket for the midnight train for Philadelphia.

"Min' je, Jake," she said anxiously a little after, as she handed him the ticket. "This is as good as a marriage certificate, do you understand?" And the two hurried off to the boat in a meager stream of other passengers.

## 9. The Parting

It was on a bright frosty morning in the following January, in the kitchen of Rabbi Aaronovitz, on the third floor of a rickety old tenement house, that Jake and Gitl, for the first time since his flight, came face to face. It was also to be their last meeting as husband and wife.

The low-ceiled room was fairly crowded with men and women. Besides the principal actors in the scene, the rabbi, the scribe, and the witnesses, and, as a matter of course, Mrs. Kavarsky, there was the rabbi's wife, their two children, and an envoy from Mamie, charged to look after the fortitude of Jake's nerve. Gitl, extremely careworn and haggard, was "in her hair," thatched with a broad-brimmed winter hat of a brown colour, and in a jacket of black beaver. The rustic, "greenhornlike" expression was completely gone from her face and manner, and, although she now looked bewildered and as if terror-stricken, there was noticeable about her a suggestion of that peculiar air of self-confidence with which a few months' life in America is sure to stamp the looks and bearing of every immigrant. Jake, flushed and plainly nervous and fidgety, made repeated attempts to conceal his state of mind now by screwing up a grim face, now by giving his enormous head a haughty posture, now by talking aloud to his escort.

The tedious preliminaries were as trying to the rabbi as they were to Jake and Gitl. However, the venerable old man discharged his duty of dissuading the young couple from their contemplated step as scrupulously as he dared in view of his wife's signals to desist and not to risk the fee. Gitl, prompted by Mrs. Kavarsky, responded to all questions with an air of dazed resignation, while Jake, ever conscious of his guard's glance, gave his answers with bravado. At last the scribe, a gaunt middle-aged man, with an expression of countenance at once devout and businesslike, set about his task. Whereupon Mrs. Aaronovitz heaved a sigh of relief, and forthwith banished her two boys into the parlor.

An imposing stillness fell over the room. Little by little, however, it was broken, at first by whispers and then by an unrestrained hum. The rabbi, in a velvet skullcap, faded and besprinkled with down, presided with pious dignity, though apparently ill at ease, at the head of the table. Alternately stroking his yellowish-gray beard and curling his scanty sidelocks, he kept his eyes on the open book before him, now and then stealing a glance at the other end of the table, where the scribe was rapturously drawing the square characters of the holy tongue.

Gitl carefully looked away from Jake. But he invincibly haunted her mind, rendering her deaf to Mrs. Kavarsky's incessant buzz. His presence terrified her, and at the same time it melted her soul in a fire, torturing yet sweet, which impelled her at one moment to throw herself upon him and scratch out his eyes, and at another to prostrate herself at his feet and kiss them in a flood of tears.

Jake, on the other hand, eyed Gitl quite frequently, with a kind of malicious curiosity. Her general Americanized make up, and, above all, that broad-brimmed, rather fussy, hat of hers, nettled him. It seemed to defy him, and as if devised for that express purpose. Every time she and her adviser caught his eye, a feeling of devouring hate for both would rise in his heart. He was panting to see his son; and, while he was thoroughly alive to the impossibility of making a child the witness of a divorce scene between father and mother, yet, in his fury, he interpreted their failure to bring Joey with them as another piece of malice.

"Ready!" the scribe at length called out, getting up with the document in his hand, and turning it over to the rabbi.

The rest of the assemblage also rose from their seats, and clustered round Jake and Gitl, who had taken places on either side of the old man. A beam of hard, cold sunlight, filtering in through a grimy windowpane and falling lurid upon the rabbi's wrinkled brow, enhanced the impressiveness of the spectacle. A momentary pause ensued, stern, weird, and casting a spell of awe over most of the bystanders, not excluding the rabbi. Mrs. Kavarsky even gave a shudder and gulped down a sob.

"Young woman!" Rabbi Aaronovitz began, with bashful serenity, "here is the writ of divorce all ready. Now thou mayst still change thy mind."

Mrs. Aaronovitz anxiously watched Gitl, who answered by a shake of her head.

"Mind thee, I tell thee once again," the old man pursued, gently. "Thou must accept this divorce with the same free will and readiness with which thou hast married thy husband. Should there be the slightest objection hidden

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in thy heart, the divorce is null and void. Dost thou understand?"

"Say that you are *saresfied*," whispered Mrs. Kavarsky.

"*Ull ride*, I am *salesfiet*," murmured Gitl, looking down on the table.

"Witnesses, hear ye what this young woman says? That she accepts the divorce of her own free will," the rabbi exclaimed solemnly, as if reading the Talmud.

"Then I must also tell you once more," he then addressed himself to Jake as well as to Gitl, "that this divorce is good only upon condition that you are also divorced by the Government of the land—by the court—do you understand? So it stands written in the separate paper which you get. Do you understand what I say?"

"*Dot'sh alla right*," Jake said, with ostentatious ease of manner. "I have already told you that the *dvosh* of the court is already *fikshed*, haven't I?" he added, even angrily.

Now came the culminating act of the drama. Gitl was affectionately urged to hold out her hands, bringing them together at an angle, so as to form a receptacle for the fateful piece of paper. She obeyed mechanically, her cheeks turning ghastly pale. Jake, also pale to his lips, his brows contracted, received the paper, and obeying directions, approached the woman who in the eye of the Law of Moses was still his wife. And then, repeating word for word after the rabbi, he said:

"Here is thy divorce. Take thy divorce. And by this divorce thou art separated from me and free for all other men!"

Gitl scarcely understood the meaning of the formula, though each Hebrew word was followed by its Yiddish translation. Her arms shook so that they had to be supported by Mrs. Kavarsky and by one of the witnesses.

At last Jake deposited the writ and instantly drew back.

Gitl closed her hands upon the paper as she had been instructed; but at the same moment she gave a violent tremble, and with a heartrending groan fell on the witness in a fainting swoon.

In the ensuing commotion Jake slipped out of the room, presently followed by Mamie's ambassador, who had remained behind to pay the bill.

Gitl was soon brought to by Mrs. Kavarsky and the mistress of the house. For a moment or so she sat staring about her, when, suddenly awakening to the meaning of the ordeal she had just been through, and finding Jake gone, she clapped her hands and burst into a fit of sobbing.

Meanwhile the rabbi had once again perused the writ, and having caused the witnesses to do likewise, he made two diagonal slits in the paper.

"You must not forget, my daughter," he said to the young woman, who was at that moment crying as if her heart would break, "that you dare not marry again before ninety-one days, counting from today, go by; while you—where is he, the young man? Gone?" he asked with a frustrated smile and growing pale.

"You want him badly, don't you?" growled Mrs. Kavarsky. "Let him go I know where, the every-evil-in-him that he is!"

Mrs. Aaronovitz telegraphing to her husband that the money was safe in her pocket, he remarked sheepishly: "*He* may wed even today." Whereupon Gitl's sobs became still more violent, and she fell to nodding her head and wringing her hands.

"What are you crying about, foolish face that you are!" Mrs. Kavarsky fired out. "Another woman would thank God for having at last got rid of the lump of leavened bread. What say you, rabbi? A rowdy, a sinner of Israel, a *regely loifer*, may no good Jew know him! *Never min'*, the Name, be It blessed, will send you your destined one, and a fine, learned, respectable man, too," she added significantly.

Her words had an instantaneous effect. Gitl at once composed herself, and fell to drying her eyes.

Quick to catch Mrs. Kavarsky's hint, the rabbi's wife took her aside and asked eagerly:

"Why, has she got a suitor?"

"What is the *differentz*? You need not fear; when there is a wedding canopy I shall employ no other man than

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your husband," was Mrs. Kavarsky's self-important but good-natured reply.

## 10. A Defeated Victor

When Gitl, accompanied by her friend, reached home, they were followed into the former's apartments by a batch of neighbors, one of them with Joey in tow. The moment the young woman found herself in her kitchen she collapsed, sinking down on the lounge. The room seemed to have assumed a novel aspect, which brought home to her afresh that the bond between her and Jake was now at last broken forever and beyond repair. The appalling fact was still further accentuated in her consciousness when she caught sight of the boy.

"Joeyel ! Joeyink ! Birdie! Little kitten!"—with which she seized him in her arms, and, kissing him all over, burst into tears. Then shaking with the child backward and forward, and intoning her words as Jewish women do over a grave, she went on: "Ai, you have no papa any more, Joeyel ! Yosel , little crown, you will never see him again! He is dead, *tat * is!" Whereupon Yosel , following his mother's example, let loose his stentorian voice.

"*Shurr—r up!*" Mrs. Kavarsky whispered, stamping her foot. "You want Mr. Bernstein to leave you, too, do you? No more is wanted than that he should get wind of your crying."

"Nobody will tell him," one of the neighbors put in, resentfully. "But, *anyhull*, what is the *used* crying?"

"Ask her, the piece of hunchback!" said Mrs. Kavarsky. "Another woman would dance for joy, and here she is whining, the cudgel. What is it you are snivelling about? That you have got rid of an unclean bone and a dunce, and that you are going to marry a young man of silk who is fit to be a rabbi, and is as *smart* and *ejecate* as a lawyer? You would have got a match like that in Povodye, would you? I dare say a man like Mr. Bernstein would not have spoken to you there. You ought to say Psalms for your coming to America. It is only here that it is possible for a blacksmith's wife to marry a learned man, who is a blessing both for God and people. And yet you are not *saresfied!* Cry away! If Bernstein refuses to go under the wedding canopy, Mrs. Kavarsky will no more *bodder* her head about you, depend upon it. It is not enough for her that I neglect *business* on her account," she appealed to the bystanders.

"Really, what are you crying about, Mrs. Podkovnik?" one of the neighbors interposed. "You ought to bless the hour when you became free."

All of which haranguing only served to stimulate Gitl's demonstration of grief. Having let down the boy, she went on clapping her hands, swaying in all directions, and wailing.

The truth must be told, however, that she was now continuing her lamentations by the mere force of inertia, and as if enjoying the very process of the thing. For, indeed, at the bottom of her heart she felt herself far from desolate, being conscious of the existence of a man who was to take care of her and her child, and even relishing the prospect of the new life in store for her. Already on her way from the rabbi's house, while her soul was full of Jake and the Polish girl, there had fluttered through her imagination a picture of the grocery business which she and Bernstein were to start with the money paid to her by Jake.

While Gitl thus sat swaying and wringing her hands, Jake, Mamie, her emissary at the divorce proceeding, and another mutual friend, were passengers on a Third Avenue cable car, all bound for the mayor's office. While Gitl was indulging herself in an exhibition of grief, her recent husband was flaunting a hilarious mood. He did feel a great burden to have rolled off his heart, and the proximity of Mamie, on the other hand, caressed his soul. He was tempted to catch her in his arms, and cover her glowing cheeks with kisses. But in his inmost heart he was the reverse of eager to reach the City Hall. He was painfully reluctant to part with his long-coveted freedom so soon after it had at last been attained, and before he had had time to relish it. Still worse than this thirst for a taste of liberty was a feeling which was now gaining upon him, that, instead of a conqueror, he had emerged from the rabbi's house the victim of an ignominious defeat. If he could now have seen Giti in her paroxysm of anguish, his heart would perhaps have swelled with a sense of his triumph, and Mamie would have appeared to him the embodiment of his future happiness. Instead of this he beheld her, Bernstein, Yosel , and Mrs. Kavarsky

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celebrating their victory and bandying jokes at his expense. Their future seemed bright with joy, while his own loomed dark and impenetrable. What if he should now dash into Gitl's apartments and, declaring his authority as husband, father, and lord of the house, fiercely eject the strangers, take Yoselé in his arms, and sternly command Gitl to mind her household duties?

But the distance between him and the mayor's office was dwindling fast. Each time the car came to a halt he wished the pause could be prolonged indefinitely; and when it resumed its progress, the violent lurch it gave was accompanied by a corresponding sensation in his heart.