

# Forevermore & Other Stories



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A Graphic Novel by Shay Charka

# FOREVERMORE & OTHER STORIES

S.Y. AGNON

EDITED AND ANNOTATED BY  
JEFFREY SAKS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
YOSL BERGNER

*The Toby Press*

*Forevermore & Other Stories*  
by S.Y. Agnon  
Edited and Annotated by Jeffrey Saks  
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## *Foreword*

# Writing in Prose What Was Sung in Praise

**S**.Y. AGNON, well past the prime of his life and capped by his large black yarmulke, looking somewhat ridiculous in his white tie and tuxedo tails, ascended the stage to receive his Nobel Prize exactly fifty years ago. At the time he was the first Israeli and, to this day, the only Hebrew author so fêted. At the Nobel Banquet, standing before the King of Sweden and reciting the customary blessing prescribed by the Talmud upon being in the presence of royalty, Agnon declared that he felt compelled to explain who he was and from whence he—and his art—had sprung. What resulted, however, was a most remarkable description of Jewish history (and presumably his place within it) and the impact of the arc of that history on Hebrew literature and Jewish storytelling. In telling his life's story he hearkened back nearly two-thousand years and said: "As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem."

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Agnon went on to explain that as a descendent of the Levites, the Temple choristers, he felt the destruction of Jerusalem most profoundly:

In a dream, in a vision of the night, I saw myself standing with my brother-Levites in the Holy Temple, singing with them the songs of David, King of Israel, melodies such as no ear has heard since the day our city was destroyed and its people went into exile. I suspect that the angels in charge of the Shrine of Music, fearful lest I sing in wakefulness what I had sung in dream, made me forget by day what I had sung at night; for if my brethren, the sons of my people, were to hear, they would be unable to bear their grief over the happiness they have lost. To console me for having prevented me from singing with my mouth, they enable me to compose songs in writing.

If taken at face value (and so little in Agnon should be taken at face value), he is declaring that his literary gift and artistic output are some form of divine compensation and source of consolation for the tragedies of destruction and exile. Destined to be a singer of the Temple Psalms, but prevented from his destiny by the vicissitudes of history, he has been divinely tasked to write in prose what was formerly sung in praise.

In the Nobel speech (included as an appendix to this volume) as well as in a variety of other places in his writing—both in the guise of autobiography as well as outright fiction—he described that his very first composition came to him almost prophetically as a statement of poetic longing and lamentation for his beloved father, travelling on business to the regional fair, absent from the happy home in Buczacz in which young Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes (Agnon's birth-name) was raised. This theme, that writing and storytelling becomes a balm for pain, runs throughout Agnon's work. One need not be steeped in the working of Jewish midrash to understand that a little boy's longing for his father might also be read on the national plane of Israel's pining for its Father in heaven. This type of multi-layered writing (and reading) is at the core of Agnon's genius, and why a writer who—on the surface—is so steeped in the “old world” of eastern European Judaism, can be simultaneously

read and understood as one of the greatest modernist authors. In almost every case, if reading any of the stories in this collection leads you to think Agnon has merely piously retold an old ḥasidic tale, you are not fathoming what is written between the lines, nor are you hearing the ironic tones which almost always accompany the work.

Perhaps no selection better demonstrates these themes than our title story, “Forevermore,” among Agnon’s most enigmatic works, and the object of continual fascination for critics. It contains a compelling “story within a story” as the hero’s modern life in Jerusalem resonates with the ancient history that exercises such a pull on the present. It is the story of a compulsive academic, searching for the “truth” that eludes him in his scholarly pursuits. Adiel Amzeh, that cloistered scholar, has been at work for twenty years attempting to unravel the secrets of an ancient city, now reduced to dust and ashes, and to uncover it he is willing to pay with his own life—a sacrifice he makes in the present in order to recover the past. “Forevermore” is an (unstable) allegory with meaning for today’s readers and contemporary Jewish history, and part of that meaning is encased in the symbolism of books, writing, the nature of the artistic calling of an author, and the relationship of all these to the “historic catastrophe,” and personal and national pain, alluded to in Stockholm in 1966.

“Forevermore” is a heroically tragic tale (at least it can support one such reading), and Amzeh’s encounter with the lost text he seeks can be read as a meta-reflection on Agnon’s view of books and reading, their power in our lives and the lives of nations and cultures, and their ability to harness their power to experience pain and draw consolation:

And when Adiel Amzeh read the story, he shed many tears. How great is the true writer, he thought, who does not abandon his work even when the sword of death hangs over his neck, who writes with his very blood, in his soul’s own script, what his eyes have seen!... Yet learning bestows a special blessing on those who are not put off easily. Yes, Adiel Amzeh would ask himself for what and for whom he was working. But Wisdom herself would take hold of him and whisper: “Sit, my love, sit and do not leave me.” So he would sit and discover new things which had been unknown to all the learned men of the ages until he

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came and revealed them. And since there were many things and learning is endless and there is much to discover and investigate and understand, he did not put his work aside and did not leave his place and he remained there forevermore.

This collection of stories, we hope, will demonstrate to you the reader that Agnon was indeed one of the “great, true writers”—like that encountered so powerfully by Amzeh—and that you will appreciate Agnon’s artistry, richness, and sophistication. I am often asked, usually by Israelis demonstrating their natural chauvinism for the most decorated Hebrew author, how anyone could possibly understand Agnon in translation? – How could that Nobel committee have recognized his greatness without encountering him in the original? It is hoped that this volume, and others in the Toby Press’ Agnon Library, will help answer these questions. For readers unfamiliar with the complex weaving of Agnon’s texts with the mastertexts of biblical and rabbinic literature, the annotations will help him or her encounter the “Jewish bookshelf” and gain an appreciation for how Agnon distilled millennia of Jewish scholarship and storytelling, recasting it into the mold of modern literature. Since this series’ aspiration has been to even the playing field for the English reader without littering the pages with footnotes, major references, terms or quotations that are candidates for glossing or explication are not flagged by special markings in the body of the text, but can be found referenced by page number in the annotations. It is the reader’s choice in any given instance whether or not to seek elucidation there.

The history of Agnon translation—along with its challenges, successes and failures—is a long and interesting one, and is deserving of a full telling at some other time. While a number of the translations in *Forevermore & Other Stories* are original to their publication here, many of the selections in this volume appeared in an array of publications over the years, almost none of which are readily available to readers without access to microfilm or a university library. As we collect these stories between two covers in honor of the fiftieth Nobel Prize anniversary, we are grateful to the many translators who worked over the years to bring Agnon to English-reading audiences (many of the translators are no longer with us; some of them are “identity unknown”!). In almost every case,

each story has been revised to one degree or another for accuracy or to update out-fashioned style (the earliest translation collected here was published in 1931). However, it was not possible or prudent to impose a unified style on works by such a wide variety of translators working across continents and over many decades.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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My special thanks to Audrey and Yosl Bergner for permission to reprint some of Yosl's wonderful illustrations of Agnon's stories (and to Neal Lehrman for his role in bringing this about).

This volume's dedication to Ilana Joy does not presume to express fully that which is felt forevermore in the heart of her "Agnon scholar."

*Jeffrey Saks*

Series Editor, S.Y. Agnon Library

*The Toby Press*

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*50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Agnon's Nobel Prize*



# Forevermore

## I

FOR TWENTY YEARS Adiel Amzeh worked on his history of the great city of Gumlidata, the pride of mighty nations until it was reduced to dust and ashes by the Gothic hordes, and its people enslaved.

After he had gathered all his researches together, examined and tested them, sorted, edited, and arranged them, he decided that his work was finally ready for publication and he sat down and wrote the book he had planned for so many years. He took the book and made the rounds of the publishers but without success. He looked about for patrons and benefactors but had no luck. During all the years he had been occupied with his research he had not taken the trouble to ingratiate himself with the learned men of the universities—nor with their wives and daughters—and now when he came to them seeking a favor, their eyes shone with such cold anger that their glasses seemed to warp. “Who are you, Sir?” they said to him. “We’ve never seen you before.”

Amzeh shrugged his shoulders and went away, disappointed and dejected. He understood that in order to be recognized he would have to become friendly with them and he had no idea of how to go about it. Many years of painstaking research had made him a slave to his work from dawn till night, neglectful of all worldly cares. When he left his bed in the morning, his feet would carry him to the desk, his hands would pick up pen and paper, and his eyes, if not pursuing some obscure vision, would plunge into a book or into maps and sketches of the city and its great battles; sometimes he would add to what he had written,



sometimes he would erase many days worth of writing. And when he lay down to sleep he would go over his notebooks again, sometimes in despair, sometimes with a sense of satisfaction. And sometimes laughing over his own mistakes that would make him ponder and rework things. Years passed and his book remained unpublished. You know, a scholar who is unable to publish his work often benefits from the delay, since he can reexamine his assumptions and correct his errors, testing those hypotheses whose ingenuity may take them far from historical reality and truth. So Adiel Amzeh revised and refined his work and brought it to the purest state, without, however, finding a publisher for it.

## II

Finally, when he had despaired of ever seeing the results of his work in print, his luck took a turn for the better. Gebhard Goldenthal, the richest man in the city, informed him that he would publish the book. How did it happen that the name of a humble scholar had reached the ear of this famous man? And why would such an eminent personage want to publish a work which was sure to bring no profit? Some said he felt so uneasy about his great wealth that he had decided to become a patron of learning because his wealth gave him no inner satisfaction. He closely followed the world of scholarship and somehow had heard the story of Adiel Amzeh's book. According to another explanation, Gebhard Goldenthal secretly believed that his ancestors were among the unhappy people who were driven out of Gumlidata, that they had belonged to the city's aristocracy and that one of them had been an army general, the head of the palace guard, who fought valorously until the Goths destroyed the city. Of course, this was obviously untrue since Gumlidata was destroyed during the first wave of the Gothic invasions, and no person can say with any certainty that he is a descendant of the exiles of Gumlidata.

But whatever the reason, Gebhard Goldenthal was ready to publish Adiel Amzeh's book, even though printing this kind of work would involve many extra expenses. Several colored maps were necessary, requiring many expensive inks: one for a general view of the city, another for its temples, a third for each of its gods—Gomesh, Gush, Gutz, Guach, and Guz; one for the founding mothers of the city, one for their offspring, another for Gomed the Great, one for Gichur and

Amul—the twin pillars of prayer—and one each for all the remaining holy men, the priests and priestesses, not to mention the temple prostitutes of both sexes, the whores of noble lineage and those who were plebeian on their fathers' side, and the dogs—for each and every one a different color, to denote position and function, harlot's pay, or price. Add to all these the Goths and their allies, the Gazaens and their dwarfs, their carts and wagons, their weapons and battle defenses, and you can see how much money was needed to print such a work.

Nevertheless, Gebhard Goldenthal was ready to publish the book and make it a fine volume with beautiful printing and good paper, carefully detailed maps, expensive binding—perfect in every respect. His staff had already consulted with illustrators, engravers, and printers, and all that remained was for the author and publisher to meet, for in all his business affairs Gebhard Goldenthal would allow his staff to take care of the preliminaries—but the final arrangements had to be conducted between the client and the head of the business himself. If the client was unknown, he would be invited to Goldenthal's office; if the man was recognized in his field, he might be invited for a cup of tea to Goldenthal's home; and if he was important, he would be invited for dinner. Adiel Amzeh, who was more than a nobody but not well-known enough to be considered important, was invited by the rich man for a cup of tea.

So it was that one day Adiel Amzeh received an invitation for afternoon tea at the home of Gebhard Goldenthal. He was asked to be prompt and to come at the designated hour since Mr. Goldenthal was soon to leave for abroad and was pressed for time.

An author who for years has searched without avail for a publisher is not likely to be late for an appointment with the one he has finally found. Almost before he put down his publisher's invitation, he took out his best suit of clothes—untouched since the day he received his doctor's degree—shook it out and pressed it. He hurried to the barber, and from the barber to the bath; from there he ran to a shop where he bought a new tie, and from the shop back home to look over his book again. By morning of the day of his appointment, he had made all his preparations for his visit to the publisher. Never in his life had he experienced such a day as this. Adiel Amzeh, who for the sake of a city's destruction had put aside all personal affairs, who cared nothing for clothes or any human

vanity, was utterly changed. He had become like most celebrated learned men who neglect their work for the sake of the honor they receive from others who know nothing of learning and scholarship. He sat and stared at his manuscript, rose and inspected himself in the mirror, glanced at his watch, examined his clothes, and rehearsed his gestures.

This is the regimen of all who wish to meet with a rich man. You must preen yourself and be careful of your demeanor and graces: the rich, even those who honor learning, prefer to honor it when it comes wrapped in a pleasing mantle. Yet that same love of learning which had used up so much of his energy and strength, furrowing his brow and bowing his shoulders, had touched his face with a special kind of radiance that one doesn't find except among those who are truly devoted to seeking wisdom. It's a pity Goldenthal did not see him then; had he done so he might have realized that a pleasant and happy face can be shaped from things other than money. But you see, my friend, for the sake of a little moralizing, I have gone and given away the ending at the very beginning of my story.

Well, Amzeh sat for a while, then got up, sat down again, rose again—all the time thinking of the future when the printer would take up his manuscript and transform it into attractive pages; he thought of how he would correct proofs, add and delete, omit and include certain passages; of how the printer does his work and how his book would finally be published and received. Sitting there dreaming he might have missed the appointed hour, except that all the years he had devoted to his work had sharpened him in his external affairs as well. When the moment came for him to leave for his appointment, he jumped up from his chair, picked up his house key, and made ready to leave and lock the door behind him. He stared at himself in the mirror once more and glanced about his home, astonished that his house had not changed as he had. There ought to have been some transformation, he thought, for this would have been only just for a man who was about to undergo a blessed metamorphosis.

### III

At that moment, he heard the sound of footsteps and suddenly became alarmed. Perhaps Mr. Goldenthal had to leave before the appointed time and someone was coming to tell him the interview had been postponed. Amzeh stood transfixed and could hardly catch his breath; his reason was

gone, only his senses functioned. His entire body seemed to become one big ear. As he listened intently to the footsteps, he realized that he was hearing the slow shuffling of an old woman. In a moment, his rationality returned and he understood that a gentleman like Goldenthal would not send an old woman to deliver a note canceling their appointment. When the sound of the old woman's footsteps came closer, he recognized them as those of a nurse who visited him once each year in order to collect journals and illustrated magazines to take to the inmates of the lepers' hospital where she worked. It was difficult for Amzeh to put the old woman off by telling her he was busy and asking that she come the following year; he had high regard for this nurse who devoted her entire life to those whose existence was a living death. But it was equally hard for him to tarry on her account, for if he was delayed, with Mr. Goldenthal about to go abroad and no one knowing when he would return, then the publication of his book would also be postponed. I should mention another factor as well, which might seem absurd but perhaps was decisive. To a man whose home is his whole universe, every unnecessary article in the house can cause annoyance. So it was with our scholar. When his mind was occupied with Gumlidata and he strolled through its ruins carrying on long conversations with the temple dogs about their price, he would occasionally raise his eyes and notice a pile of dusty old magazines. Now that the old woman had come, here was an opportunity to get rid of them; if he didn't act now, they would accumulate and gather dust for another year.

At the very moment when he was deciding what to do, whether to get rid of the superfluous volumes or to devote all his efforts to his own book, the old woman knocked on the door. He opened it and greeted her. The old woman understood immediately that he was worried and preoccupied, like a man uncertain whether to take an affirmative or negative course. "I see, Herr Doctor," she said, "that I have come at an inconvenient time. I'll leave and go about my business."

He was silent for a moment and didn't answer her. When she finally turned to go, he realized how tired the old woman must be from her long walk. After all, the lepers' home was far from the city, and she had to come on foot. She was unable to travel by bus for fear that if recognized she would be thrown off—most people are still terrified by the sight of someone who works with lepers.

“I’m sorry,” Amzeh said to her as she was about to go, “but I can’t take care of you the way I would like. I have been invited to afternoon tea by Gebhard Goldenthal, the famous industrialist whose name you have probably heard.” (As a matter of fact, forty years previously Gebhard Goldenthal had courted the nurse and wanted to marry her, but she refused him because she had already given her heart to God’s maimed, the poor prisoners of the lepers’ home.) “I have a very important matter to discuss with Mr. Goldenthal,” Adiel Amzeh went on. “I’ll be back in an hour or so. Please sit down until I return, and later I’ll fill your basket with books and journals and pamphlets and anything else I have about—they take up so much room here I can hardly breathe.”

“I would like to sit here and wait for you, Herr Doctor,” the old woman answered, “but I can’t leave my good people for more than a short while. They are used to me and I am used to them, and when I’m away from them I miss them as much as they miss me. They are used to receiving all their needs from me. I’ll go now, Herr Doctor, and if God grants me life and peace, I’ll come back next year.”

But Amzeh was unable to let her go away like that, without an explanation of why he was in such a hurry. Without thinking about how little time he had, he began to explain: “Perhaps you have noticed my appearance today. For many years you have been coming to visit me and you have always found me with slippers on my feet and a cap on my head, unshaven, my collar open, my hair disheveled. Today I’m dressed in a good suit and wearing shoes and a hat and a nice tie. The reason for the change is simple: for twenty years I have worked on a book and it is finally ready for publication. Mr. Gebhard Goldenthal has decided to publish it, and I’m now going to see him. He’s waiting for me and for my book.”

The old woman’s face glowed. “You mustn’t delay a moment, Herr Doctor. Hurry, hurry, don’t wait, an hour like this doesn’t come every day, don’t put off even a minute what you have waited many years for. It is good that you found Mr. Goldenthal. He’s an honest man. He keeps his promises. I, too, in my poor state owe him a debt of gratitude. I remember when I began to serve in the lepers’ hospital, the rooms were full of dust and broken beds and chairs, the roof was caved in, the walls tottering and moldy. If he hadn’t given us money to put the place together again,

to buy new beds and equipment and make all the necessary repairs, it would have been impossible to get along there.”

After the old woman had recounted all of Gebhard Goldenthal's good deeds, she let out a deep sigh. “Are you unhappy?” Adiel Amzeh asked her. “Unhappy?” she replied with a shy smile. “I've never been unhappy.” He was quiet for a moment. “You are unique, Nurse Eden, you are the only one in the world who can make such a declaration,” he said.

The old woman blushed with confusion. “I really should correct what I just said, Herr Doctor. I have had great unhappiness, but not on my own account.” Her face turned scarlet and she lapsed into silence.

“You stopped right in the middle of what you were saying, Nurse Adah,” Amzeh said, “and perhaps at the crucial point. I'm certain it would be worthwhile to hear.”

“Worthwhile?” the old woman cried, stammering in her confusion. “How do we know what is worthwhile and what isn't? I'm an old woman whose grave is waiting for her—let me boast once that I told the whole truth. I flattered myself falsely when I said that I've never been unhappy. On the contrary, I haven't known a day without sorrow, a sorrow greater than that of my good people who suffer more than any other creatures in the world. For the merciful God who inflicts suffering on man provides him with the strength to withstand his woes; but if one is healthy and without physical disability, then he has no special allotment of strength, and when he looks on those who suffer and on their pain he is tormented and has nothing with which to withstand his sorrow. And especially someone like myself, who has to look after the suffering ones. I'm always afraid that I won't fulfill my obligations, that I don't do the right thing for the good people. A healthy person cannot know the inner needs of the sick. Since I don't leave them for a moment, my suffering does not leave me. . . . But I'm talking too much. I've forgotten that you are in a hurry. Now I'll be going. I hope, Herr Doctor, that your business will bring you a full life and peace. Only it's too bad about the poor people who must see me return empty-handed, without any books.”

“Why is it too bad?” he asked, facing her. “Have they finished all the books? They've read them all?”

“They've read them dozens of times,” answered the old woman.

“What kind of books do they have?”

“Oh, I can give you the names of all of them.”

“All of them? Surely you’re exaggerating.”

“No, there aren’t very many. I’ve been there so many years, every article and every book is familiar to me.”

The old woman then recited the name of each book in the hospital library. “Not many, not very many at all,” Amzeh said after she had finished. “I can imagine how happy they must be to receive a new book. But,” he went on, jokingly, “I’m sure you have forgotten one or two, and perhaps they were the best books of the lot. For that’s the way we are—we always forget the most important thing. Isn’t that so, Nurse Adah?”

The old woman smiled. “I have no love of dialectics. But I must say for truth’s sake that there isn’t a book in our library that I haven’t mentioned—except for one, which is hardly worth discussing, since it isn’t read anymore.”

“Why isn’t it read anymore?”

“Why? Because it has decayed with age, and on account of the tears.”

“On account of the tears?”

“Because of the tears, yes, because of the tears that every reader of the book sheds on its pages after reading the awful tales it contains.”

“What are these terrible stories?”

“I don’t know what they are,” the old woman answered. “Whatever I know I’ve told you already. It’s an old, worn-out book, written on parchment. They say it was written more than a thousand years ago. Had I known you would ask, I would have made inquiries. There are still old men in the hospital who can tell the story, which I remember many years ago the old men before them used to tell with tears—the same story that is in the book. But they say that even then, years ago, the old men already had difficulty in reading the book because its pages were torn and the words blurred. The manuscript is a heap of moldy, decayed matter. They even tried to burn it. In my time one of the caretakers was all set to destroy it, but I asked him to return it. I told him that a book which had found shelter with us mustn’t be treated like a rag. I believe, Herr Doctor, that a piece of work done by an artist gives joy to the creator as long as it endures.”

“Tell me, Nurse Adah,” Amzeh said, mulling over the old woman’s words, “perhaps you have heard something about the contents of the

book. What do your old men say about it? I'm sure if they say anything at all, they must know more."

"I've heard that all its pages are of parchment," the old woman answered. "As far as what is written in it, I've heard that it contains the history of a city which was destroyed and disappeared from the face of the earth."

"A city which was destroyed and disappeared from the world!" Amzeh repeated excitedly. "Please tell me, Nurse Eden, perhaps you have heard the name of the city?"

"Yes, I have heard the name. The name of the city is Gumlidata. Yes, Gumlidata is the name."

"What? What? What?" Amzeh stammered, his tongue caught in his mouth. "Have ... have ... you heard the name correctly... ? Gum ... Gum ... Gumli ... lidata ... you said. Please, my good nurse, tell me again, what is the name of the city you mentioned? Guml..."

She repeated what she had said. "Gumlidata is the name of the city, and the book is an account of its history."

Adiel Amzeh grasped a table in front of him, leaning forward so that he would not collapse and fall. The old woman noticed his sudden paling and moved to help him. "What is the trouble, Herr Doctor," she said staring at him, "are you ill? Is it your heart?"

He straightened up and pulled himself together. "It's nothing, my good nurse," he began with a smile, "there's nothing wrong with me. On the contrary, you have given me new life. Let me tell you about it. For twenty years I have devoted myself to the history of this same city. There isn't a piece of paper which mentions the city's name that I haven't read. If I were king, I could build the city anew, just as it was before its destruction. If you want, I'll tell you about the historical trips I have taken. I have walked in the city's markets, strolled in its streets and alleys, seen its palaces and temples. Oh, my good nurse, what headaches I've suffered from the walks I've taken there. And I know how it was destroyed, who took part in the destruction, the name of each and every tribe that helped reduce it to ruins, how many were killed by the sword, how many died of starvation and thirst, and how many perished from the plague that followed the war.

"I know everything except one detail—from which side Gediton's brigades entered the city, whether from the side of the great bridge which



was called the Bridge of Valor, or whether they entered secretly by way of the Valley of Aphardat, that is, the Valley of the Cranes... the plural of crane in the language of Gumlidata is *aphardat*; the word does not mean ravens or chestnut trees or overshoes as is claimed by Professor Alpha, Professor Beta, or the true private advisor to the court, Professor Gamma, whose pictures you may have seen in the magazines when they were given honorary titles and medals by the empire. In point of fact, 'raven' in the language of Gumlidata is *eldag* and in the plural *elgadata*, since when the letters 'd' and 'g' come together in the plural they reverse their order. I don't know the words for chestnut trees or overshoes in the language of Gumlidata. I really don't know what they are."

Suddenly his expression changed, his voice dropped, his lips twisted, and he let out a hoarse, stuttering laugh. His knees began to shake and he pinched his mouth. "I'm surprised at you, Nurse Adeh," he said, "after all, you are an intelligent woman. You should be more careful about what you say. How can you believe something which doesn't make any sense. How can you say that your hospital possesses a book containing the history of Gumlidata. Gumlidata was destroyed in the days of the first Gothic invasions. And you say that a book from these ancient times has come down to our day, and the old people in the hospital have read it. Now really, my dear nurse, how can you reconcile this kind of nonsense with simple reality? How could a book like this ever get to the hospital... to the hospital which you, my dear nurse, serve so well.... How? How?"

"Pardon me, my dear Adinah, if I tell you that this is a very doubtful story. A gelded goat has got in your grange: you have heard a silly old folk tale and it has enchanted you with its romance. Or perhaps you have confused Gumlidata with... with... I don't know with what city you might have confused Gumlidata. What did you hear about this manuscript? How did it get to the hospital? You have made me curious, my dear lady, very curious for more information. I feel just like a psychoanalyst. Aren't you surprised at me, the author of a book myself, being so curious about someone else's book? It's not enough that my house is filled with books, I must go looking for others. Let me tell you, just between us, all these books in my cabinet are not there for reading, they're there for effect. And if you want, I'll tell you the real reason: self-preservation.