

The Bridal Canopy

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Book One

CAST THY BURDEN UPON THE LORD
AND HE SHALL SUSTAIN THEE

Chapter One

There Once Was a Hassid ❖ Three Sisters ❖
Wisdom of Women ❖ Text of a Letter:
And Fear Shall Not Pass o'er His Head

The following story deals with a devout man, a Hassid, who was so poor as to be overborne by his poverty, may Mercy deliver us, but who always sat at the holy toil of the Torah, because he kept his distance from the current affairs of the world; so he had no commerce nor traffickings nor dealings like other folk, but found his entire delight in God's Torah, both the generally revealed and that which is held secret, to wit, the lore of Kabbala. He served The Name in awe and fear and love and never thought of acquiring honor through study or of being esteemed a scholar by himself or others; nor yet of his own advantage in assuring himself a portion of the World to Come. He studied to fashion a seat for the Divine Presence, and to no other end whatsoever.

His dwelling was underground in a damp, narrow, gloomy cellar lacking seat upon which to sit and table at which to sit, bed upon which to lie and all other household furniture save a straw mat spread out on the ground; upon it his folk would lie, never moving thence by night or day so that their garments might not spoil even

more. And so poverty-stricken was he that his only property was one cock called Reb Reveille, who used to rouse him to serve the Creator. And he had been named Reb Reveille because of the verse in Psalms, "He rallied light through the darkness for the upright."

Ere his cock was done crowing this poor Hassid would speed to the House of Study in order to fashion a link 'twixt the night and the day, by means of Torah and prayer uttered with sweet sound and pleasant voice, till his spirit would mount to the Universe of Intelligence as though it were freed of the senses and the things known of the senses. And he had a fine custom of prolonging his entreaties until midday, in order that his prayers might accompany all those of Israel; since men are sometimes in no mood for prayer early in the day, and may delay for an hour or so.

His prayers ended, he never dashed away, as do the gluttons, to fill his frame with perishables and corruptible things which increase the flesh and the worms that later feed thereon; but he would sustain his intellectual self on the Story of the Manna and the like. When his desires rebelled and turned too strongly toward matters of food and drink he would subdue them with a page of Gemara according to the prescription of the verse in Proverbs, "Come break of my bread," and therein he would find a sufficient breakfast; all the more was this so at the third meal of the day, in which words of Torah are a regular part of the menu. At noon, when folk are accustomed to eat meat, he would say to himself, Is it meat you want? Well, what am I to do when our sages of blessed memory said that the ignorant may not eat meat; so let us study first; maybe the Holy and Blest One will light your eyes so that you discover some new point in the Law, and you'll be entitled to a flesh meal. Then, thinking it over, this Hassid would grieve himself for fear he was making his Torah a pickax to delve with, against all the injunctions of the sages, thereby consuming his portion of Paradise in his present life.

Now this Hassid was burdened with daughters, each older than the next by a year or more; that is, Gittele, the youngest, was about seventeen; then came Blume, her sister, who was about nineteen; and oldest of all was Pessele, the first-born, about twenty; ragged and barefoot they went, without proper clothing or garments, so they

stayed at home perforce and never showed their faces in the street. And they all were charming, graceful and fair, with well-grown breasts and well-grown hair, but within their hearts, alas, fluttered despair at the days of their youth that were almost done; but redeemers from their maidenhood there were none.

When the youngest reached the age at which a virgin should be wed, Frummet, the wife of the Hassid in question, began to address herself to her husband. How much longer, said she to him, will you be as unfeeling as a raven toward your children? Have you no pity for your hapless, hopeless daughters who sit sighing and weeping like wives whose husbands have vanished, and who know not whether they are widowed or not? Why, the girls have all but wept their eyes away and the hair on their head is turning white, yet here you sit like a lump of clay in form of a man, without lifting a finger to marry them off. Come, look at their old-time playmates, and see how many babies are nestling at their teats, while these maidens shrivel and wither away, suffering with never a word to say, just because there is no bridegroom to make an end of shame and gloom.

The words went to the heart of the Hassid and aroused within him his fatherly pity. He sighed a bitter sigh, then turned his gaze back upon the Gemara, putting his trust in the Lord, since all things accord with His Will and Word.

What did Frummet do? She went to the saintly Rabbi of Apta, who was a true lover of Israel and who was wont to say, I can boast even in the presence of the Court on High that the love of Israel is embedded in my heart. And she cried out to him, did Frummet, Rabbi, aid me. My daughters have reached a fitting age for marriage, but I lack the wherewithal to wed them off, while their father is too far from worldly matters to concern himself. Not enough that we eke out the scantiest living plucking feathers for cushions; now there are ripe and ready maidens with none to cover their heads and lead them under the Bridal Canopy.

The saint took the end of his beard in his hand, combing his white hair with his fingers, and said, Go and borrow some fine garments for your husband. I and my acquaintances will hire him a covered waggon so that he can make the round of the villages and

hamlets for money, to carry out the commandment of bringing a maiden under the Bridal Canopy, until such time as His Blessed Name prepares a suitable match for him.

Frummet's heart overflowed with joy, and she asked, Rabbi, what portion shall he promise his daughter? Whatever sum the bridegroom's father may promise for his son, he answered, let your husband promise as much for your daughter. And he gave her his blessing, and she departed.

Returning home, Frummet said to her husband, Yudel, do you know where I now come from?—from the house of the holy Rabbi of Apta. Do you know what he said? This is what he said, Long life to him. And she told him all the details.

The Hassid hesitated whether to take the road, since travel diminishes the study of the Torah and prayer with the congregation, as well as disturbing a man's customary ways. Nonetheless he did not dismiss the matter, for it is a duty to hearken to the words of the wise. So he applied to himself the saying of the sage, When your daughter attains puberty free your slave; that is, free yourself, for you are one of the slaves of the Blessed Creator. So he went to good men, God-fearing and true, such as do not hold back their workers' hire or fail through any kind of ill faith; and they lent him fine garments, a long coat of silk, a satin robe, a broad-woven girdle, silverbuckled shoes, a sable hat and a handsome stick; and fellow Hassidim hired him a waggon with a canopy.

And the holy Rabbi, that lover of Israel, took pen in hand, soared on the wings of lofty speech and wrote a letter for Rabbi Yudel to en-flame the hearts of all good people who love charity and deeds of loving-kindness; and blessed him, that The Name might prosper his way. And this is a copy of the text:

Hear, O Israel, my people, give ear, gather all ye who hold wisdom dear, look around with discerning eye, lend ear to these my words concerning this Hassid and pious one, Rabbi Yudel Nathanson, regarding a dowry for his daughter, the bride (who shall be exalted) to give the maiden a marriage portion, and the needs of the wedding in proportion. Now the bridegroom comes to wed, but wealth and prosperity are fled; yet lad and lass wed not unless cash be paid, so let him come singing with the sheaves of his mead.

Rabbi Yudel took the letter of commendation, folded it, put it away, took his leave of the Rabbi and returned home to his wife and daughters. They brought him the fine garments and he did them on, setting a small cushion over his belly after the fashion of worthies who have not been blessed with a paunch. Then they brought him a light meal which he ate and followed with Grace; after which he rose and recited the Prayer for a Journey.

His neighbor entered to bid him God speed, took a coin, pressed it against the mezuzah on the doorpost, gave it to Rabbi Yudel and said, Rabbi Yudel, I give you this coin so that you may serve as my emissary. When you reach the place to which you journey, offer it for charity in my name, so that you may fall under the rule that those who are sent to carry out a commandment come to no harm.

Then Nuta, the waggoner, arrived with his two horses, one named Ivory, the other Peacock, which matched one another in points and looks and were familiar with all the roads; there was no inn which they could not smell a full Sabbath day's journey away. A pair of horses was required because the holy Rabbi of Apta had remarked, Two are better than one since they add to the importance of the traveler.

Nuta pulled up in front of Rabbi Yudel's dwelling and cracked his whip so that the sound could be heard far and wide. Peacock raised his hoofs, kicked the ground and started tugging at the waggon. Not so fast, brother Peacock, says Ivory to him; give your legs a rest; sure as you're standing here you don't need to shake them yet a while. And he smiled at his partner who always forgot one of the rules of travel; namely, that even when the traveler has already mounted the waggon it is no sign that he will start out, if the waggon is still near his home; therefore a much-traveled horse is always ready to stand waiting a while.

But Rabbi Yudel would not start out until he had finished reciting the account of the Offering of Isaac and added, Lord of the Universe, as Father Abraham offered his son Isaac, so mayst Thou offer up all my foes and those that hate me; and mayst Thou treat me with the qualities of loving-kindness and of mercy; and mayst Thou fulfil, O Lord our God, the verse which says, let all these Thy servants descend and bow down before me saying, Go thou forth and all the

people at thy feet, and afterward I shall go forth; and send me Thy holy Princes and Angels who derive from this verse, to accompany me in all my ways; and deliver me from all foes and robbers and every manner of trouble; and let them seal up all those that hate me and trouble me so that they may possess no power against me for ill; and make Thou my way prosper. Amen, selah.

Now the neighbors came, men and women, when they heard that Rabbi Yudel was starting out. And Rabbi Yudel took three of his friends and said in front of them, A Song of Degrees, I shall lift up mine eyes unto the hills; whence shall my help come? My help cometh from the Lord who maketh heaven and earth. And after him they responded, The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in now and evermore. And his three gentle daughters repeated each verse in a whisper, and wiped their eyes so that their sleeves became sopping wet.

Here Nuta entered in a fury and seized Rabbi Yudel by the cloak, for he feared that that Hassid might suddenly decide to finish the whole Book of Psalms with all the following prayers before he started out; so he urged him to mount the waggon. Rabbi Yudel moved a short pace, said, Right away, set his lips to the mezuzah, kissed it three times and said, The Lord is my guardian, the Lord is my keeper; He shall guard my going out and my coming in. And his wife and daughters said, For life and peace, now and henceforth evermore. And then he mounted the waggon.

To cut a long story short, Rabbi Yudel sat on the waggon and turned his face to all the four quarters, while his family called after him, Go to life and blessing and success, and all his neighbors, men and women, called, And to joy and to peace without ill meetings, and may you merit to return home speedily to life and peace, amen. And when he sat down he twirled his stick three times in the air and prayed the Short Prayers, including the waggoner in his prayers, that he might be delivered from any manner of foe or robber or despoiler or highwayman, also from every fashion of weapon. Having completed his prayer he began to sing "Mighty, Awesome and Dread." Nuta took the whip, cracked it over the horses' heads, and up came their hoofs happily, raising a dust which covered the waggon.

The city of Brod spins away; fine big houses pass in the twinkling of an eye; huts sprout up from the ground, folk standing by them with their hands above their eyes gazing after the waggon.

Within a few moments they were out of the town and its dust, and the face of the world was revealed, with the heavens a half-globe above the earth, as though land and sky were akissing one another. Rabbi Yudel crossed his legs, gazed about him, sang, "Lord of the World," nodded to the passers-by, whether circumcised or, saving your presence, uncircumcised, and marveled at the great light which the Holy and Blest One had, by His loving-kindness, spread over the entire Universe; as though the Holy and Blest One had brought out sparks and gleams of His hidden store of light in order to deck and array the world.

Then Rabbi Yudel began to perfume the air with holy words for a great and special purpose. Many are the souls which had no time to repent before death and so cannot come to their rest. These wander wide in the world, some floating on the waters, some hanging in the trees. And whenever a Jew utters a holy word or thought they hasten thereto, array themselves therein and mount aloft; and the Masters of Wrath and the Masters of Judgment have no dominion over them.

After the Hassid had done his good deed for the dead, he bestirred him to do a good deed for the living, moved toward the waggoner, condescended to everyday speech and began conversing with him of the world's affairs, in order to cheer and liven him up. He began to ask him how business was, and all those other questions with which people filled with the milk of human kindness try to do good with their words when they cannot do good with their money. He let his face give light on the whole world. When they passed a man he greeted him. If a non-Jew greeted him he answered, Amen, according to the advice of Rabbi Tanhuma in the Jerusalem Talmud who said, when a non-Jew greets you respond, Amen, as is written in Deuteronomy, "Blest shalt thou be by all the nations."

They journeyed southwest amid woods arrayed in trees and treacherous with robbers; they passed through the gentile villages, Hotnik and Kuzmir, also the village, New Smolensk, where little urchins came out and began throwing stones after them. Reb Yudel,

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says Nuta to him, keep your head inside the waggon under cover so the stones won't hit you. I have no fear of them, responds Reb Yudel, I've already said the Prayer for a Journey, so I'm safe.

Thereupon Nuta whipped up his horses, thinking to himself that folk really have little sense if they go giving Ivory and Peacock all this trouble for such a donkey. And Rabbi Yudel, hovering on the wings of the intellect, said, The devout Rabbi Behaya wrote in his book, *The Duties of the Heart*, that Man is composed of spirit and body, both being the goodness of the Creator toward us. Now that the soul's armed, it clearly protects the Man's limbs, for it's impossible that it should forsake them at a time of danger.

And a few minutes later they reached the village of Pinkevitz.

Chapter Two

In the Villages to Lodge

Nuta tugged the reins, pulled up the waggon in front of the inn, descended and helped Rabbi Yudel down; then unharnessed the horses and gave them their oats, while Reb Yudel entered the inn and prayed the Afternoon and Evening Prayers. The innkeeper stared at Reb Yudel and said, It seems to me that I have seen your honor before, though I don't know where. Of course you have, nodded Reb Yudel, since all the souls of Israel were present at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given us; so now that our two souls meet again you recognize me. And maybe your honor has recognized me in the way of nature, for I come from Brod and I'm Yudel Student and I pray in the southwest corner of the old House of Study.

Then give me to wit my master, says Paltiel, the innkeeper, to Reb Yudel, what blessing I should say on seeing you—Who doth clothe the naked, or Who doth make the creatures strange? For I've never before seen your honor dressed in such fine clothes.

Rabbi Yudel raised his two hands on high and replied, His Name knows and can be witness that it isn't for my own honor I wear these clothes, nor yet to deceive folk; I was ordered to put them on by the holy Rabbi of Apta, when my wife went to beseech mercy from

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him for the sake of my three daughters, who've reached a marriageable age, and I haven't anything to wed them off with; so he told me to go out to the countryside to seek for a dowry. And so as the Children of Israel should turn a charitable eye on me they made me dress like well-off folk do, because anybody who wears fine clothes is given a fine alms; only as soon as The Name has me find my daughter a bridegroom I'll do off these fine clothes; and I trust that He, may He be blest, won't hold that I've done something sinful; for all I do I'm only doing in order to bring the bride to the Bridal Canopy.

The moment Paltiel heard that Rabbi Yudel was traveling to fulfill the commandment of the Bridal Canopy, he brought brandy tintured with wormwood, and glasses, and a sort of cake; and they sat down at the table in front of the oven, and he filled the glasses, and they said a blessing and drank. Paltiel seized Reb Yudel's hand, shook it and blessed him with the wish that he might find fine bridegrooms for all three of his gentle daughters and have the merit of seeing an upright generation from them. Reb Yudel answered, Amen, to the blessings, adding, And may we merit to hear salvations and comforts together with All Israel our brethren, amen; and may we merit to see the Redeemer revealing himself speedily, amen. They tasted some crumbs of cake and took another sip. In came Nuta, put down his whip, gazed at the bottle and poured himself out a glass. Once started he did not stop, since bitter brandy is a choice drink, and one you do not meet with at all hours of the day.

And why is it such a specialty? Because it's made with wormwood. How, you ask? Like this. A man goes and plucks wormwood, puts them in a bottle of brandy and leaves the bottle tight closed until the liquor is green as the herb and the herb is sopping with brandy. Once the liquor is green and the herbs have sucked up the brandy they are removed, squeezed out and the liquor is absorbed. And what should be done until you get as far as that? Drink plain brandy, of course.

Meanwhile Sarah, Paltiel's wife, was kneading and pressing and rolling and cutting up a dough of barley meal; then she stuffed onions and pepper in meat, and meat in the pieces of dough, folded the dough into pancakes, put them in the pot, put the pot on to

cook until they were done, garnished them with onions cooked in fat and brought them to the table.

And they ate and ate again until their spoons dropped from their hands. Then Nuta moaned and said, Sarah, you have cooked fine pancakes, but we haven't the strength to eat; while Reb Yudel put his hands on his belly and said, Oh dear, oh dear.

That night there were no strangers at the inn, and Paltiel and his wife made much of their guests, and fulfilled the commandment of hospitality joyfully, after the fashion of our brethren who dwell in hamlets and villages, plying them with food and drink and gladness; and they addressed themselves to Reb Yudel's heart with good words and comfortable. See here, said Paltiel to Reb Yudel, I'll go bail that you'll soon be giving your daughters out; and you and I will dance before the bride so that the dust mounts to the very ceiling. Come and have a look at His blessed power and love, and how He does not overlook even the last and the least of Israel. See, I'm precious poor in commandments fulfilled and the doing of good deeds, but all the same there's never yet been a time or an occasion when He hasn't treated me with loving-kindness. While yet I dwelt within my mother's vitals He treated me with favor; when I came out into the air of the world He treated me with favor; when it was my time to serve in the army He treated me with favor; and when it was my time to make a match He again treated me with favor. And once his tongue was set a wagging he began to relate

THE GENERATIONS OF A MAN

It was at this spot and in this very house that my fathers and forefathers dwelt, and it was here that I too was born. Not in the house, truth to tell, but next to it. As to how I came to be born next to the house—well, it was like this. My father, may he rest in peace, was highly thought of by the Lord of the Manor because he always used to pay the yearly rent on the inn before it fell due. But the time came when his affairs went badly, may Mercy deliver us, and he wasn't able to pay even when it fell due, let alone beforehand. So he asked him to wait. Says the Lord of the Manor to him, You know I won't do that for any Jew. And he sent his men along and they ejected the furniture

and put my mother out of the house. At that time my mother, may she rest in peace, was in the family way, and when this trouble came her birth pangs began, and she gave birth.

But, when trouble came, salvation came with it. The Almighty may wound with one hand, but with the other He heals. You knew Reb Yerahmeel; if you didn't learn from him your fathers learnt from him. All his life Reb Yerahmeel was a veritable pauper, with daughters every one of them older than her sisters and unluckier. When the youngest one was old enough to marry, the whole town began to boil up. Was it possible? Here was a man who had taught so much Torah and set up so many pupils to wed wives and have sons and daughters born to them, and now were his own daughters to sit and wait till their hair turned white?

They took counsel and decided to buy him a cow, for they said, A cow gives milk, so let his daughters sell the milk and they'll earn themselves their dowries. Two of Reb Yerahmeel's former pupils made the round of the town, but they didn't collect enough to buy a cow. What did they do? They said, We'll take a money box and hang it up in Rabbi Yerahmeel's house; and anybody who comes along will drop in a coin or two. Israel is merciful and we are the children of the merciful ones; there have been collecting boxes for charity all these ages, and we've never found any spider webs over the slots. As long as there's no other way there's no better way. So they took a money box and hung it up in Reb Yerahmeel's house. If a woman came to her son in the class she'd slip a coin in. If a man came to pick himself a bridegroom for his daughter he'd slip a coin in. In a little while the box was full and had to be emptied, and Reb Yerahmeel's wife put the coins in a stocking, which she kept in a chest. When she came to take out the stockings one Eve of Passover, in honor of the festival, she found all the stockings filled with coins to a value of two hundred thalers. Says Reb Yerahmeel, That's enough, and put the box away.

Then they began to get busy about the cow and the best way to make it yield a lot of milk; and Reb Yerahmeel found a charm against witchcraft. Before ever they had purchased the cow Reb Yerahmeel's daughters were renowned all over the town. And what

was their renown? A milch cow. Only as yet Rabbi Yerahmeel had not been able to turn his attention to buying one.

When the thirty-third day of the Omer came round his wife said to him, Today you're taking your pupils to the village of Pinkevitz to play in the countryside; please drop in on the innkeeper while you're there, and maybe he can advise you or go and buy a cow with you. So he took his stick and his money in hand and set off for Pinkevitz.

There he found a woman lying in the open, and the innkeeper weeping and wailing. What are you crying for, Yehiel? Reb Yerahmeel asks him. What can I do but weep, answers the innkeeper; here's my wife has just borne a son and the Lord of the Manor has put us out of doors. Reb Yerahmeel seized him by the coat and said, Quick, go and pay the Lord of the Manor what's coming to him. Said the innkeeper, Reb Yerahmeel, you're making mock of me. How can I pay the Lord of the Manor when I haven't a doit?

Thereupon Rabbi Yerahmeel takes out his money bag, saying, Take all my cash and pay him. They put the furniture back in the inn, put the mother to bed and congratulated the father that a son had been given him. But the father sighed and said, If only the mother lives.

The innkeeper went back to the beginning and said, Well, and neither died. My mother used to tell me that then the midwife took the child and raised it to its mother. When the mother saw her son she kissed him and said, Lord of the World, such tiny ears, and wept for joy. The children who had come with Reb Yerahmeel opened their wallets, took out all kinds of dainties and gave her to eat and drink, stayed there until it grew dark and repeated the Hear O Israel at her bedside. On the eighth day from the birth Reb Yerahmeel came with a congregation of ten Jews to the village, and they brought the child into the Covenant of Father Abraham and called his name Paltiel. Paltiel, that's me.

Paltiel grew like yeasty dough, long and broad; and his father and mother dwelt in peace. The villagers were fond of Father Yehiel, and whatever trouble mightn't come, they would always be asking his advice about it. If the priest drank a drop too much and sold the

church vessels Father would redeem them and return them. If the head of the village went wrong and was in danger of his life Father would give him a tip how to get out of the hands of the law. He was a good advocate for them before the Lord of the Manor as well. And since he hadn't been able to make a good enough living out of the inn he began to go in for business. How? If a fox pelt happened to come his way, or the skin of a hare or a bushel of wheat or a cake of wax, he used to buy it for sale in the town.

Before long he began to make the round of the neighboring hamlets, and went into partnership with Peretz, the grocer. When two Jews in a village live at peace the Holy and Blest One gives them both bread. Peretz was a widower with a daughter and a little shop, a sort of shed jutting out of the house. He used to say, did Peretz, In any case I buy my own household requirements in town, so I'll also buy for the villagers who have their own work to do, and I'll get paid for my trouble. But he lost as much as he earned, because he used to give credit on the strength of goods they promised to bring and didn't bring. In brief, Father and Peretz used to go about their business on Mondays, each in his own direction; and sometimes they would meet somewhere and come home together.

One Thursday a Jew came to town and told how he had seen Yehiel, the innkeeper, lying murdered in the forest; and the whole congregation mourned and brought him to town. The rabbi sent to us to tell us not to mourn, nor was I to say the Mourner's Prayer, until it had been proven by reliable and decisive evidence who the slain man was. But it was not simple to identify; the head had been hacked off the body. So my mother was left a widow, and not only a widow but also a desolate, forsaken wife; while I was not even permitted to repeat the Mourner's Prayer. But Brod is a city of scholars, sages and scribes; they began to exchange questions and responses and finally decided that in this special case the possibly forsaken woman might remarry. But truth to tell that permission served no practical purpose save to magnify the Torah and glorify it; for my mother had taken sick with grief and pain.

And what happened to Father happened to his partner as well. Once a farmer summoned Peretz to sell him honey. They went down

into the cellar together to examine the honey, and there the farmer turned a cauldron of boiling pitch on him. Some time later his body was found, but nobody could recognize him. And they brought him to a Jewish grave, burying him next to Father among all the others martyred to hallow The Name.

Mother didn't live long after Father was dead. But The Blessed Name did not permit her to depart from the world until he had brought fresh troubles upon her. At that time I had to go to serve the Kaiser, and I was in the bloom of strength. I did all I could to weaken myself. The amount of vinegar I drank! And the number of nights I did without sleep! And in case I might begin to fall asleep I had someone standing over me to wake me up again, and I didn't spare my strength trying to lose it.

When the appointed day came I went to the Rabbi of Ziditshov to ask him to beseech mercy on my account, so that I might be discharged from the Kaiser's service. He saw that my earlocks were cut off and my beard was kept impiously short and my clothes weren't those of the youngsters who sit in the Houses of Study, and he says to me, Lout, and who *should* go to the army then if not you and the likes of you?

Rabbi, said I to him, if I am taken to the army my mother will die of hunger. Wait a while, says he to me, and went out. I stood waiting for half an hour or an hour or so, and he didn't return. Where is the Rabbi? I asked. In the privy, they told me. Woe's me, I thought, whether I go or don't go. If I go the Rabbi will be vexed, and if I don't go I lose the fifty thalers I sent to the army physician so that he should exempt me from the Kaiser's service; and now he's waiting for me at his house so as to know me at the examination and let me go. And if I come late he won't be there.

At last the Rabbi came in. When he saw me he said, Are you still standing there? Bring the basin and ewer so that I may wash my hands. You can do that much service to a disciple of the wise. I brought them and poured water from the ewer over his hands. He chanted the blessing, Who hast formed man in wisdom and created in him many orifices and cavities; and he groaned so that my blood curdled for fear. Then he sat down on his seat, turned his two holy

eyes aloft and said, A fine new generation without earlocks or beard. Lovely Jews you have in your world, Lord of the Universe. Then he turned to me and said, May it be His will that they may like the look of you just as much as I like the look of you. Now let me see your back.

I went off and found the doctor at his door. Said I to him, I'm Paltiel from the village of Pinkevitz. He looked at me but had nothing to say. I followed him to the Town Hall. When I entered, the officers looked up and said, Here's a lion from the village. And I began wondering to myself what I would be able to tell Mother if they didn't let me go, and I stood all startled and upset. The recruiting sergeant put his hand on me, said, Strip, and stood me against the measuring rod; and I stood a full head and shoulders above him and the rod together. Why, I already saw myself with a sword hanging on my thigh agoing to the wars. But then the doctor gets up, passes his hands over my body, raps round about my heart with his fingers and sends me away. The recruiting sergeant took a kick at me for luck, and I departed in peace.

Home I rushed to tell Mother. When I got there I found her lying on the bed in the open, like the day she had borne me, when the servants of the Lord of the Manor had turned her and my father out of the inn; for just then they were putting the house in order for the Passover. And what do you suppose Mother was doing? Holding a cushion in her arms like a mother holds her baby to her; with her lips she was twittering to it, calling it all manner of loving names. Before I could say a word to her she raised the cushion toward me and said, See, Yehiel, the child's alive as well. And so she remained all the time she was ill, not recognizing me; and when I stood by her she thought it was my father Yehiel, nor did her queer smile leave her blackish lips until she gave up the ghost and passed away.

When a man's rich he can devote himself to mourning, may Mercy deliver us; but a poor man has no opportunity of weeping his dead even at the very hour of death. The Passover was at the door; I had to prepare all the requirements of the festival, scalding the vessels with tears running from my eyes. May such a Passover befall all foes of Zion.

After the festival I returned to my work. The compassion with which His Blessed Name has stamped His creatures was suddenly aroused in the villagers. If anybody had anything to sell, he sold it to me in a friendly way; if anybody had anything to buy, he bought it from me in a friendly way. What they drank they paid for. And on Sabbaths and festivals I even had Jews for company.

Matchmakers began to propose matches to me. Take up the tambour, lad, and the fife; wed a wife and enjoy your life. But I sent them away. I told them that as long as I was saying the Mourner's Prayer I would not take a wife. And The Name was of the same mind, and I had the merit of getting what I merited.

It happened one morning that coming out of the synagogue I thought to myself, Village homes are tombstones. My mother has died, and I can say the Mourner's Prayer for her only once a day, since I haven't time to go to town twice in twenty-four hours to pray both morning and evening prayers with the congregation. Suddenly my heart felt drawn to the cemetery. I began thinking that I must get back to the village and that a mourner is forbidden to visit the cemetery during the first twelve months. All the same I never turned back but went there.

While I stood over my father's grave I observed a girl standing over the grave of Peretz and weeping, Father, Father. Turning my eyes on her, I saw she was Sarah, my neighbor. I remembered her father's death and how she had no relation or person to stand for her; I clean forgot that I must go back to the village; and she and I remained standing in the graveyard.

As we stood there, the sky became covered with clouds and rain fell. Come under cover with me, I said to her. We entered the deadhouse, and I said to her, Sarah, you and I are orphans without either father or mother except the Great Father in Heaven; will He not take pity upon us both? While we were standing, a flash of lightning from the clouds lit up the tombstones of our two fathers. Said I, Sarah, our fathers let their faces shine on us; by your life the in-laws approve of the match.

When the rains stopped and the sun began shining again, the sexton and his wife came out. Wish us good luck and *mazal tov*, I said

The Bridal Canopy

to them; we have plighted our troth today. Says the sexton's wife, All the world comes here to die and these two come to get married, *mazal tov, mazal tov*. Thereupon the sexton brought out a bottle of brandy and drank long life to us, and seized his pick and shovel and began dancing and shouting, Jews, I rejoice. And he took us to Reb Yerahmeel in town. Reb Yerahmeel wept for joy and laughed through his tears and said, Happy am I to have merited this, and woe's me that your parents never merited this. After I stopped saying the Mourner's Prayer I took Sarah to be my wife after the faith of Moses and Israel, may it be till we are a hundred and twenty years old.

The innkeeper ended with a sigh, drinking a glass of blessing thereby; while each guest with address did his best, you may guess, that thirsty he might not die.

Paltiel, seeing that his guests enjoyed listening to him, wanted to continue, but his wife tapped him gently over the lips, saying, These folk are tired out, and he goes filling their ears with foolishness and triflings as though the end of the whole world had come and he was afraid he might leave it, God forbid, before he has a chance of telling them all his secrets. Tomorrow the Holy and Blest One will make His sun shine as well and bring day. You had all better go to sleep. Paltiel, I'm ashamed of you, sitting and telling stories and having no pity on the candle and the wick. Even in Brod all the world's asleep by now, and this fellow's still wide awake.

Paltiel smiled and wiped his mouth, saying, They didn't invent when they said that ten measures of chatter descended to the world and womenfolk grabbed nine. Did you hear how she rattled on? As I'm a Jew I'm prepared to give up the other measure as well, if only they shut up. If you please, Reb Yudel, climb up on top of the stove and turn your attention to sleeping; while as for you, Nuta, don't be afraid you'll have to sleep in the air. Here's the table at your service. Stretch yourself out and go to sleep, and, The Name willing, tomorrow we'll recount the deeds of God.

So Rabbi Yudel mounted the stove and covered himself over with his cloak, while Nuta stretched out on the table, covered himself with a sheepfell and lay there. Ere they had completed the blessing, "Who maketh sleep to fall upon my eyes," their lids were closed in