That did it! I couldn't keep it in a second longer. You see, just then I thought of my Hodl when I held her as a baby in my arms . . . she was just a tiny thing then . . . and I held her in these arms . . . please forgive me, Pan, if...if I...just like a woman...but I want you to know what a Hodl I have! You should see the letters that she writes me...she's God's own Hodl, Hodl is...and she's with me right here all the time...deep, deep down...there's just no way to put it into words...

You know what, Pan Sholem Aleichem? Let's talk about something more cheerful. Have you heard any news of the cholera in Odessa?

(1904)

CHAVA

Hoydu lashem ki toyv—whatever God does is for the best. That is, it had better be, because try changing it if you don't like it! I was once like that myself; I stuck my nose into this, into that, until I realized I was wasting my time, threw up my hands, and said, Tevye, what a big fool you are! You're not going to remake the world . . . The good Lord gave us *tsa'ar gidul bonim,* which means in plain language that you can't stop loving your children just because they're nothing but trouble. If my daughter Tsaytl, for example, went and fell for a tailor named Motl Komzoyl, was that any reason to be upset? True, he's a simple soul, the fine points of being a Jew are beyond him, he can't read the small print at all—but what of it? You can't expect the whole world to have a higher education. He's still an honest fellow who works hard to support his family. He and Tsaytl—you should see what a whiz she is around the house!—have a home full of little brats already, touch wood, and are dying from sheer happiness. Ask her about it and she'll tell you that life couldn't be better. In fact, there's only one slight problem, which is that her children are starving . . .

Ad kan hakofoh alef—that's daughter number one. And as for number two, I mean Hodl, I hardly need tell you about her. You

already know the whole story. She's lost and gone forever, Hodl is; God knows if I'll ever set eyes on her again this side of the world to come . . . Just talking about her gives me the shakes, I feel my world has come to an end. You say I should forget her? But how do you forget a living, breathing human being—and especially a child like Hodl? You should see the letters she sends me, it's enough to melt a heart of ice! They're doing very well there, she writes; that is, he's doing time and she's doing wash. She takes in laundry, reads books, sees him once a week, and hopes, so she says, that one glorious day her Peppercorn and his friends will be pardoned and sent home; then, she promises, they'll really get down to business and turn the world upside down with its feet in the air and its head six feet in the ground. A charming prospect, eh? . . . So what does the good Lord do? He's an *eyl rakhum vekhanun,* a merciful God, and He says to me, "Just you wait, Tevye. When you see what I have up my sleeve this time, you'll forget every trouble you ever had . . ." And don't think that isn't just what happened! I wouldn't tell anyone but you about it, because the shame is even worse than the sorrow, but *hamekhaseh ani mey'Avrohom*—do you and I have any secrets between us? Why, I don't keep a thing from you! There's just one request I have, though—that this stay between the two of us, because I'll say it again: as bad as the heartache has been, the disgrace is far worse.

In a word, *rotsoh hakodoysh borukh hu lezakoys,* God wanted to do Tevye such a big favor that He went and gave him seven daughters—and not just ordinary daughters either, but bright, pretty, gifted, healthy, hardworking ones, fresh as daisies, every one of them! Let me tell you, I'd have been better off if they all were as ugly as sin . . . You can take the best of horses—what will it amount to if it's kept in a stable all day long? And it's the same with good-looking daughters if you raise them among peasants in a hole like this, where there's not a living soul to talk to apart from the village elder Anton Paparilo, the village scribe Chvedka Galagan, and the village priest, damn his soul, whose name I can't even stand to mention—and not because I'm a Jew and he's a priest, either. On the contrary, we've known each other for ages. I don't mean that we ever slapped each other's backs or danced at each other's weddings, but we said hello whenever we met and stopped to chat a bit about the latest news. I tried avoiding long discussions with him, though, because they always ended up with the same

rigamarole about my God, and his God, and how his God had it over mine. Of course, I couldn't let it pass without quoting some verse from the Bible, and he couldn't let that pass without insisting he knew our Scriptures better than I did and even reciting a few lines of them in a Hebrew that sounded like a Frenchman talking Greek. It was the same blessed routine every time—and when I couldn't let *that* pass without putting him in his place with a midrash, he'd say, "Look here, your Middyrush is from your Tallymud, and your Tallymud is a lot of hokum," which got my goat so that I gave him a good piece of my mind off the top of it . . . Do you think that fazed him, though? Not one bit! He just looked at me, combed his beard with his fingers, and laughed right in my face. I tell you, there's nothing more aggravating than being laughed at by someone you've just finished throwing the book at. The hotter under the collar I'd get, the more he'd stand there and grin at me. Well, if I didn't understand what he thought was funny then, I'm sorry to say I do now . . .

In short, I came home one evening to find Chvedka the scribe, a tall young goy with high boots and a big shock of hair, standing outside and talking to my third daughter, Chava. As soon as he saw me he about-faced, tipped his hat, and took off.

"What was Chvedka doing here?" I asked Chava.

"Nothing," she says.

"What do you mean, nothing?" I ask.

"We were just talking," she says.

"Since when are you and he on such talking terms?" I ask.

"Oh," she says, "we've known each other for a while."

"Congratulations!" I say. "You've found yourself a fine friend."

"Do you know him, then?" she says. "Do you know who he is?"

"Not exactly," I say, "because I haven't read up on his family tree yet, but that doesn't keep me from seeing what a blue blood he is. In fact, if his father isn't a drunk, he may even be a swineherd or a handyman."

Do you know what my Chava says to me? "I have no idea who his father is. I'm only interested in individuals. And Chvedka is no ordinary person, that I'm sure of."

"Well, then," I say, "what sort of person is he? Perhaps you could enlighten me."

"Even if I told you," she says, "you wouldn't understand. Chvedka is a second Gorky."

"A second Gorky?" I say. "And who, pray tell, was the first?"

"Gorky," she says, "is only just about the most important man alive."

"Is he?" I say. "And just where does he live, this Mr. Important of yours? What's his act and what makes him such a big deal?"

"Gorky," she says, "is a literary figure, a famous author. That means he writes books. He's a rare, dear soul, even if he comes from a simple home and never had a day's schooling in his life. Whatever he knows, he taught himself. Here, this is his picture . . ."

And she takes out a little photograph from her pocket and shows it to me.

"This tsaddik is your Rabbi Gorky?" I say, "I could swear I've seen him somewhere before. You can search me, though, if I remember whether he was toting sacks at the train station or hauling logs in the forest . . ."

"And is it so shameful," says my Chava, "for a man to work with his own two hands? Whose hands do you work with? Whose hands do we all?"

"Of course," I answer. "You're quite right. It even says as much in the Bible: *yegia kapekho ki toykheyl*—if you don't work yourself to the bone, no one will throw you one, either . . . But what's all that got to do with Chvedka? I'd feel better if you and he were friendlier at a distance. Don't forget *meyayin boso ule'on atoh hoyleykh*—just think of who you are and who he is."

"God," says my Chava, "created us all equal."

"So He did," I say. "He created man in His likeness. But you had better remember that not every likeness is alike. *Ish kematnas yodoy,* as the Bible says . . ."

"It's beyond belief," she says, "how you have a verse from the Bible for everything! Maybe you also have one that explains why human beings have to be divided into Jews and Christians, masters and slaves, beggars and millionaires . . ."

"Why, bless my soul," I say, "if you don't seem to think, my daughter, that the millennium has arrived." And I tried explaining to her that the way things are now is the way they've been since Day One.

"But why are they that way?" she asks.

"Because that's how God made them," I say.

"Well, why did He make them like that?"

"Look here," I say, "if you're going to ask why, why, why all the time, we'll just keep going around in circles."

"But what did God give us brains for if we're not supposed to use them?" she asks.

"You know," I say, "we Jews have an old custom that when a hen begins to crow like a rooster, off to the slaughterer she goes. That's why we say in the morning prayer, *hanoyseyn lasekhvi binoh*—not only did God give us brains, He gave some of us more of them than others."

"When will the two of you stop yackety-yacking already?" calls my Golde from inside the house. "The borscht has been on the table for an hour and you're still out there singing Sabbath hymns."

"Well, well, well," I say, "strike up the band! Our rabbis weren't kidding about *shivoh dvorim bagoylem*—anyone can be a nincompoop, but being a woman helps. Here we are talking about the universe and all you can think of is your borscht."

"You know what?" says my Golde. "Better my borscht without the universe than the universe without my borscht."

"Mazel tov," I say, "a philosopher is born before our eyes! It's enough my daughters all think they're a mental notch above the angels without you deciding to join them by flying head first up the chimney . . ."

"As long as you're on the subject of flying," she says, "why don't you go fly a kite!"

I ask you, is that any way to talk to a hungry man?

Well, let's leave the princess in her castle and get back to the young prince—I mean to the old priest, God rot his soul! As I was driving home near our village with my empty milk cans one evening, who should ride by in his iron buggy, that combed beard of his blowing in the wind, but His Eminence in person. Damn your eyes, I think, it's just my luck to run into you!

"Good evening there!" he says to me. "Didn't you recognize me?"

"They say that's a sign you're about to come into money," I said to him, tipping my hat and making as if to drive on.

"Hold on a minute, Tevel," he says. "What's the hurry? I'd like a word or two with you."

"If it's a good word, why not?" I say. "Otherwise let's make it some other time."

"What other time did you have in mind?" he says.

"How about the day the Messiah comes?" I say.

"But he already has come," says the priest.

"I believe," I say, "that I've heard that opinion from you before. So tell me, Father, what else is new?"

"That's just what I wanted to see you about," he says. "I'd like to speak to you privately about your daughter Chava."

That made my heart skip a beat! What business of his was my daughter? "My daughters," I said to him, "don't need to be spoken for. They're quite capable of speaking for themselves."

"But this isn't a matter that can be left up to her," he says. "It involves others too. I'm talking about something of great importance. Her whole life depends on it."

"What makes you such a party to her life?" I say. "I should think she had a father to be that, may he live to a ripe old age . . ."

"So she does," he says. "You're certainly her father. But you don't see what's been happening to her. Your daughter is reaching out toward a new life, and you either don't understand her or else don't want to understand."

"Whether I do or don't understand her or want to is a story in itself," I say. "But what does it have to do with you, Father?"

"It has a great deal to do with me," he says, "because she's in my charge right now."

"She's in your *what*?" I say.

"My custody," he says, looking right at me and running a hand through that fine, flowing beard of his.

I must have jumped a foot in the air. "What?" I said. "My child in your custody? By what right?" I was beside myself, but he only smiled at me, cool as a cucumber, and said, "Now don't go losing your temper, Tevel. Let's talk this over calmly. You know I have nothing against you, God forbid, even if you are a Jew. You know I think a great deal of you Jews. It just pains me to see how stubbornly you refuse to realize that we Christians have your good in mind."

"I wish you wouldn't talk about my good," I say, "because instead of telling me what you just did, Father, it would have been kinder to poison me or put a bullet in my head. If you're really such a good friend of mine, do me one favor: leave my daughter alone!"

"Don't talk like a fool," he says to me. "No harm will come to your daughter. In fact, this is the happiest moment of her life.

She's about to be married—and to a young man any girl would envy her for."

"My best wishes," I say, pretending to smile, though I'm burning up like hellfire inside. "And just who, if you don't mind my asking, might this young man of hers be?"

"You probably know him," he says. "He's a fine, upstanding fellow, and educated too, entirely self-taught. He's in love with your daughter and wants to marry her. The only problem is, he's not a Jew."

Chvedka! I thought, feeling hot and cold flashes all over. It was all I could do not to fall right out of my wagon. I'd be hanged if I was going to show it, though, so I grabbed my horse's reins, gave him a lash of the whip, and *holakh Moyshe-Mordekhai*—away I went without so much as a by-your-leave.

I came home—the house was a wreck. My daughters were sprawled out on the beds, crying into the pillows, and my wife Golde looked like death warmed over. I began searching all over for Chava. Where could she be?

But Chava wasn't anywhere, and I saw I could save myself the trouble of asking about her. I tell you, I knew then what it must feel like to turn over in the grave! I had such a fire in my bones without knowing what to do with it that I could have punched myself in the nose—instead of which I went about shouting at my daughters and taking it out on my wife. I couldn't sit still for a minute. When I went out to the stable to feed the horse and saw he had slipped a foot through the slats of his stall, I took a stick and began to skin him alive. "I'll put the torch to you next, you moron, you!" I screamed. "You'll never see a bag of oats again in your life! If you're looking for trouble, you'll get it: blood, darkness, death—all the ten plagues of Egypt!"

After a while, though, it occurred to me that I was flaying a poor dumb beast who had never hurt a fly. I threw him some hay, promised him the sun would rise again in the morning, and went back inside, where I laid my aching body down while my head . . . but I tell you, I thought my head would burst from trying so hard to figure things out! *Ma pishi uma khatosi*—was I really the world's greatest sinner, that I deserved to be its most-punished Jew? God in heaven, *mah onu umeh khayeynu*—who am I that You don't forget me even for a second, that You can't invent a new calamity, a new catastrophe, a new disaster, without first trying it out on me?

There I lay as though on a bed of hot coals when I heard my wife Golde let out a groan that could have torn your heart in two. "Golde," I said, "are you sleeping?"

"No," she says. "What is it?"

"Nothing," I say. "We're ruined, that's all. Maybe you have some idea what we should do?"

"God help us all if you have to ask me for ideas," she says. "All I know is that she rose this morning a healthy, normal child, dressed herself, and then suddenly burst out crying and began to hug and kiss me without telling me why. I thought she had gone mad. 'Chava,' I asked, 'what's wrong?' She didn't say a word except to tell me she was going out to the cows—and that was the last I saw of her. I waited an hour, I waited two, I waited three . . . where could she have gone? She wasn't anywhere to be seen. So I called the girls and told them, 'Listen, I want you to run over to the priest's and—' "

"But how, Golde," I interrupted, "did you guess she was at the priest's?"

"How did I guess she was at the priest's?" she says. "So help me God! Do you think I'm not a mother? Do you think I don't have eyes in my head?"

"If you have eyes and you're a mother," I say, "what made you keep so quiet? Why didn't you say something to me?"

"What could I have said?" she says. "You're never home. And even if I had said it, would you have heard it? All you ever do when you're told anything is spout some verse from the Bible. You Bible a person half to death and think you've solved the problem."

That's just what she said, my Golde, as she lay there crying in the dark . . . and I thought, in a way she's right, because what can a woman really know? It broke my heart to hear her sighing and snuffling away, though, so I said, "Look here, Golde. You're angry at me for always quoting the Bible, but I have to quote it one more time. It says *kerakheym ov al bonim*—as a father loves his own child. Why doesn't it also say *kerakheym eym al bonim*—as a mother loves her own child, too? Because a mother isn't a father. A father speaks to his children differently. Just you wait: tomorrow, God willing, I'm going to have a talk with her."

"If only you would!" she says. "And with him too. He's not a bad

sort for a priest. He has human feelings. If you throw yourself at his feet, he may pity you."

"What?" I say. "I should go down on my knees before a priest? Are you crazy or are you crazy? *Al tiftakh peh lasoton*—just suppose my enemies got wind of it . . ."

"What did I tell you?" she says. "There you go again!"

We spent the whole night talking like that. As soon as the cock crowed, I rose and said my prayers, took down my whip from the wall, and drove straight to the priest's. A woman may be only a woman, but where else should I have gone—to hell in a bucket?

In short, I drove into his yard and had a fine good morning said to me by his dogs, who set about straightening my caftan for me and sniffing my Jewish feet to see if they were edible. It's a good thing I had my whip with me to remind them that Scripture says, "And against the Children of Israel not a dog stuck out its tongue" . . . The racket we made brought the priest and his wife running from their house. It was all they could do to break up the party and get me safely indoors, where they received me like an honored guest and put the samovar up for tea. But tea, I told them, could wait; first I had something to talk to the priest about. He didn't have to guess what that was; with a wink he signaled his wife to leave the room—and as soon as the door shut behind her, I came straight to the point without shilly-shallying. The first thing I wanted to know was, did he or did he not believe in God? Next I asked him, did he have any idea what it felt like for a father to be parted from a child he loved? Then I insisted on his telling me where he drew the line between right and wrong. And finally, I demanded to know, with no ifs or buts, what he thought of a man who barged uninvited into another man's house and turned it upside down—the benches, the tables, the beds, everything . . .

You can be sure he wasn't prepared for all that. "Tevel," he said, "how does a clever fellow like you expect to ask so many questions at once and get answers to them all in one breath? Be patient and I'll deal with each one of them."

"Oh no you won't, Father dear," I said. "You won't deal with any of them. And do you know why not? Because I already know all your answers by heart. I want you to tell me one thing: is there or is there not any chance of my getting my daughter back?"

"But what are you saying?" he says. "Your daughter isn't going anywhere. And nothing bad will happen to her. Far from it!"

"Yes," I say. "I already know all that. You have only her good in mind. But that's not what I'm talking about. I want to know where my daughter is and whether I can get to see her."

"Ask me anything but that," he says to me.

"That's spoken like a man at last," I say, "short and sweet! You should only be well, Father—and may God pay you back with lots of interest for what you've done."

I came home to find my Golde in bed, cried dry and curled up like a ball of black yarn. "Get up, woman," I said to her. "Take off your shoes and let's begin the seven days of mourning as we're supposed to. *Hashem nosan vehashem lokakh,* the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away—we're not the first and we won't be the last. Let's just pretend there was never any Chava to begin with, or that she's gone off like Hodl to the far ends of the earth where we'll never see her again . . . God is merciful, He knows what He's doing . . ."

Though I meant every word of it, I had a lump like a bone in my throat. Mind you, Tevye is no woman; Tevye doesn't break down and cry. Still, that's easier said than done when you have to live with the shame of it . . . and just try not breaking down yourself when you've lost your own daughter, and a jewel like Chava at that, who always had a special place in my and her mother's heart, more than any of her sisters. Don't ask me why that was. Maybe it had to do with her being a sickly child who came down with every illness in the book; why, the times we sat up all night with her, trying to snatch her from the very jaws of death, watching her fight for her life like a trampled little bird—but if God only wills it, He can even resurrect you from the grave, and *loy omus ki ekhyeh,* if your number hasn't come up yet, there's no reason to say die . . . And maybe it also had to do with her always having been such a good, dependable child who loved her parents body and soul. How then, you ask, could she have gone and done such a thing? Well, to begin with, it was just our rotten luck; I don't know about you, but I believe in fate. And then too, someone must have put a hex on her. You can laugh all you want at me, but (though I'm not such a yokel as to believe in haunts, spooks, ghosts, and all that hocus-pocus) witchcraft, I tell you, is a fact—because how do you explain all this if it isn't? And when you hear what happened next, you'll be as sure of it as I am . . .

In a word, our rabbis meant it when they said, *be'al korkhekho atoh khai*—a man must never say the jig is up with him. There's no wound in the world that time doesn't heal and no misfortune that can't be gotten over. I don't mean to say you forget such things, but what good does it do to remember them? And *odom kiveheymoh nidmeh*—if you want to eat, you can't stop slaving like a donkey. We took ourselves in hand, my wife, my girls, and I, went back to work, and *oylom keminhogoy noyheyg*—life went its merry way. I made it clear to them all that I never wanted to hear of Chava again. There simply was no such person.

And then one day, having built up a fresh stock of merchandise, I set out for my customers in Boiberik. I received a hero's welcome when I got there. "What's new with a Jew, Reb Tevye? Where have you been all this time?" "What should be new?" I said. "The more things change, the more they stay the same. I'm still the same sap I always was. A cow just died on me, that's all."

Well, everyone had to know, of course, which cow it was, and what it had cost, and how many cows I had left. "What is it with you, Reb Tevye," they asked, "that all the miracles happen to you?" They laughed and made a big joke of it, the way rich people do with us poor devils, especially if they've just had a good meal, and are feeling full and cozy, and the sun is shining outside, and it's time for a little snooze. Not that Tevye begrudges anyone a bit of fun at his expense. Why, they can croak, every last one of them, before they'll know what I'm feeling! . . .

When I had finished my rounds, I started back with my empty cans. Once I was in the forest I let go of my horse's reins and let him amble along and munch on some grass while I sat there thinking of one thing and another: of life and death, and of this world and the next, and of what both were all about, and so on and so forth—all to keep my mind off Chava. Yet as though to spite me, my thoughts kept coming back to her. I couldn't stop picturing her, as tall, fresh, and lovely as a young willow, or else as a tiny baby, a sick little rag doll of a thing, a teeny chick that I could hold in one hand with its head against my shoulder. *What is it you want, Chavaleh? Something to suck on? A bit of milk to drink?* . . . For a moment I forgot what she had done, and then I missed her terribly. As soon as I remembered, though, the blood rushed to my head and I began to rage like the Devil at her, and at Chvedka, and at the whole world, and at myself for not being able to forget

her. Why couldn't I get her out of my mind, tear her from my heart? It's not as if she didn't deserve it! Was it for this I had been such a good Jew all my life, had bled myself white and raised seven daughters—for them to break away in the end like the leaves that fall from a tree and are carried off by the wind? Why, just think of it: here a tree grows in the forest, and here along comes a woodsman with an axe and begins to hack off its branches one by one . . . what good is the tree without its branches? Far better, woodsman, for you to chop it down all at once and have done with it! Who needs a branchless tree sticking up in the middle of the forest?

There I was arguing with myself when suddenly I noticed that my horse had come to a halt. Red light! What could it be? I looked ahead . . . Chava! The same Chava as always, not a hair more or less of her . . . why, even her dress was the same. My first thought was to climb down and grab her in my arms, but right away I thought again. What sort of woman are you, Tevye? I asked myself—and I jerked the reins to the right and cried, "Giddyap there, you moron!" Well, no sooner did my horse veer to the right than Chava ran in front of it again, gesturing as if to say that she had something to tell me. I could feel my heart split in two, my arms and legs wouldn't obey me . . . in a second I knew I would jump right out of the wagon . . . Just then, though, I got a grip on myself and jerked the reins back to the left. Back to the left runs Chava, a wild look in her eyes, her face the color of death . . . What do I do now, I wondered, hold my ground or full speed ahead? Before I could make up my mind she grabbed the horse by its bridle and cried, "Papa! May I hope to die if you drive away now! Oh, Papa, Papa, I beg you, at least listen to me first . . ."

Oho, I thought, so you think you can make me knuckle under? Well, guess again, my darling! If that's your idea of your father, it just shows how little you know him . . . And I began to whip my horse for all he was worth. He lunged forward, all right, though he kept looking back and pointing his ears at her. "Giddyap!" I cried again. "*Al tistakeyl bakankan*—keep your eyes on the road, you smart aleck! . . ." Do you think I didn't want to turn around too and take one last look at my daughter? But Tevye is no woman, Tevye puts Satan behind him . . .

Well, I won't bore you with more details. Why waste your time?

I can only say that if I have any sins to account for after my death, I'm already paid up for them in advance more than all the torments of hell; just ask me and I'll tell you a few things . . . All the way home I kept imagining that my Chava was running after me and screaming, "Oh, Papa, Papa . . ." Tevye, I said to myself, enough is enough! What harm would it do to stop for a minute and listen? Maybe she really has something important to say to you. Maybe she's sorry and wants to come home. Maybe her life with him is such hell that she needs your help to run away . . . I thought of a thousand such maybes, I pictured her again as a child, the words *kerakheym ov al bonim* kept running through my head—could there be anywhere a child so bad that a father still couldn't love it? What torture to think that I was the only exception . . . why, a monster like me wasn't fit to walk the earth! "What are you doing, you crazy old loon?" I asked myself. "Why are you making such a production of this? Stop playing the tyrant, turn your wagon around, and make up with her! She's your own child, after all, not some street waif . . ."

I tell you, I had even weirder thoughts than that in the forest. What did being a Jew or not a Jew matter? Why did God have to create both? And if He did, why put such walls between them, so that neither would look at the other even though both were His creatures? It grieved me that I wasn't a more learned man, because surely there were answers to be found in the holy books . . .

In a word, to take my mind off it all I began to chant the *ashrey*—that is, to say the afternoon prayer like any other good Jew. What use was it to pray out loud, though, when everything inside me was crying Cha-va? The louder I prayed, the more it sounded like Cha-va, and the harder I tried not to think of her, the more clearly I saw her and heard her begging me, "Papa, Papa, please . . ." I stopped my ears, I shut my eyes, and I said the *shimenesre,* beating my breast in the confessional without knowing for what sins . . . My life is a shambles and there's no one I can even talk to about it. I never told a living soul about meeting Chava in the forest or anything else about her, though I know exactly where she and he are living and even what they're doing there. Just let anyone try to worm it out of me, though! My enemies won't live to see the day that I complain. That's the sort of man Tevye is . . .

Still, I'd give a great deal to know if everyone is like me or if I'm

the only madman of my kind. Once, for example . . . but do you promise not to laugh at me? Because I'm afraid you'll laugh . . . Well, once I put on my best clothes and went to the station in order to take the train there—I mean, to where he and she live. I stepped up to the window and asked for a ticket. "Where to?" says the ticket seller. "To Yehupetz," I say. "Yehupetz?" he says. "I never heard of such a place." "Well, it's no fault of mine if you haven't," I say—and I turn right around, walk home again, take off my best clothes, and go back to work, to my little dairy business with its horse and wagon. How does the saying go? *Ish lefo'aloy ve'odom le'avoydosoy*—the tailor to his needle and the shoemaker to his bench . . .

Ah, you're laughing at me anyhow? What did I tell you! I even know just what you're thinking: you're thinking what a screwball Tevye is . . . If you ask me, then, *ad kan oymrim beshabbes hagodol*—it's time to call it quits for the day. Be healthy and well, and drop me a line now and then. For God's sake, though, remember what I told you: you're not to breathe a word about any of this, or put it in any of your books! And if you absolutely must write about it, write that it happened to somebody else, not to me. As it says in the Bible, *vayishkokheyhu*—me, Tevye the Dairyman, please forget . . .

(1905)

SHPRINTZE

Why, Pan Sholem Aleichem, what a pleasure to run into you! I haven't seen you in a dog's age. My oh my, the water that's flowed under the bridge since we last met! What you and I and Jews everywhere haven't been through these past years: pogroms in Kishinev, riots, troubles, the new Constantution—dear Lord, it doesn't stop . . . Don't take it wrong, but I'm surprised to see you haven't changed a bit, there's still not a gray hair on you! I only wish you could say the same of me. *Harey ani keven shivim shonoh*—I haven't even turned sixty, and just look how old and gray I am. It's no laughing matter what we go through with our children,