
HODL

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You've been wondering, have you, Pan Sholem Aleichem, where I've been all this time? Tevye's changed quite a bit, you say, grown suddenly gray? Ah, if only you knew the troubles, the heartache, that I've been through! It's written that *odom yesoydoy mi'ofor vesoyfoy le'ofor*, that a man can be weaker than a fly and stronger than steel—I tell you, that's a description of me! Maybe you can tell me, though, why it is that whenever something goes wrong in this world, it's Tevye it goes wrong with. Do you think that's because I'm a gullible fool who believes whatever he's told? If only I'd managed to remember what our rabbis said a thousand times, *kabdeyhu vekhoshdeyhu*—a man musn't trust his own dog . . . But what can I do, I ask you, if that's my nature? And besides, I'm a man of faith, as you know, I have no complaints against God. Not that they would do me the least bit of good if I had them! Whatever He does must be for a reason, though. It's like the prayer book says, *haneshomoh lokh vehaguf shelokh*—what does a man ever know and what is he really worth? My wife and I quarrel about that. "Golde," I'm always telling her, "it's a sin even to think such things. There's a story in the Talmud that—" "Leave me alone with your Talmud!" she says. "We have a daughter to marry off, and after her, touch wood, two others, and after them three more, if first they don't break a leg . . ." "You musn't talk that way, Golde," I say. "Our rabbis warned against it. In the Talmud it also says—" But she never lets me finish. "A house full of growing daughters," she says, "is all the Talmud I need to know!" Go argue with a woman, I tell you!

In short, I don't have to remind you that I have, touch wood, some fine goods at home, each better-looking than the other. God forgive me for boasting. It's not a man's job to praise his own daughters, but you should hear the whole world tell me what knockouts they are! And most of all my Hodl, who's next after Tsaytl, the one who fell for the tailor, if you recall. I can't begin to tell you how gorgeous she is—I mean Hodl, my second daughter; she's like the Bible says of Queen Esther, *ki toyvas mar'eh hi*—prettier than a picture! And if looks aren't bad enough, she has

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(1899)

the brains to go with them; she reads and writes both Yiddish and Russian and swallows books like hot cakes. What, you may ask, do a book and a dairyman's daughter have in common? Well, I ask them the same riddle—I mean all those nice Jewish youngsters who, begging your pardon, don't own a pair of britches for their backsides, yet only want to study all day long. *Kulonu khakhomim, kulonu nevoynim*, as it says in the Haggadah—nowadays everyone wants to be a student. Where? How? Why, a cow can sooner jump over a roof than a Jew get into a Russian university! *Al tishlakh yodkho*: they guard their schools from us like a bowl of cream from a cat. Not that it keeps us from studying anyway—and plain ordinary boys and girls too, the children of tailors and shoemakers, God help me if I don't see them everywhere! They leave home for Yehupetz or Odessa, they live there in attics and garrets, they eat the ten plagues of Egypt with the eleventh for dessert, they go for months on end without seeing a scrap of meat, a single roll and a herring is a feast for a dozen of them. *Vesomakhto bekhagekho*—life for them is one big holiday . . .

Well, one such character turned up in our neck of the woods, a real vagabond, too. In fact, I once knew his father, a man who peddled homemade cigarettes and was a beggar seven times over. But that's a whole other story—and besides, if the Talmud tells us that Rabbi Yochanan the Cobbler made a living patching shoes, a person can be permitted a father who didn't make one selling cigarettes. What annoyed me was something else: where did a pauper like him get off thinking he was a student? Not that he was born feeble-minded, God forbid, because he had a good head on his shoulders. And though his name was Pertchik, we all called him Peppercorn, because that's exactly what he looked like: a small, black, puny little ragamuffin. Still, they don't come any brighter, and when he let loose with his tongue . . . whew, you had better step back!

Listen to how I met him. *Vayehi hayoym*, one fine day I'm on my way home from Boiberik, having sold a bit of merchandise, a whole wagon full of cheese, cream, butter, and other such vegetables. As usual I was thinking about the world's problems, such as why in Yehupetz they had it so good, whether Tevye ever would, what my horse would say if he could, and so on and so forth. It was summertime; the sun was shining down; the flies were biting; and the whole wide world seemed such a

delicious place that it made you want to sprout wings and fly off into it . . .

Just then I looked ahead and saw a young man trudging along by the side of the path, a bundle under one arm, all sweaty and falling off his feet. "Hurry up or you'll be late for the wedding!" I called out to him. "Come to think of it, hop aboard; I'm going your way and my wagon is empty. You know what the Bible says: help the jackass of your neighbor if you pass him on the road, and your jackass of a neighbor too."

He laughed and jumped into the wagon without having to be asked twice.

"Where might a young fellow like you be coming from?" I asked.

"From Yehupetz," he says.

"And what might a young fellow like you be doing in Yehupetz?" I ask.

"A young fellow like me," he says, "is preparing for his entrance exams."

"And what," I ask, "might a young fellow like you be planning to study?"

"A young fellow like me," he says, "hasn't decided that yet."

"In that case," I ask, "why's a young fellow like you beating his brains out?"

"Don't you worry, Reb Tevye," he says. "A young fellow like me knows what he's doing."

"Tell me," I say, "since you seem to be a personal acquaintance of mine, just who exactly are you?"

"Who am I?" he says. "A human being."

"I already guessed as much," I said, "because you didn't look like a horse to me. What I meant was, whose child are you?"

"Whose child?" he says. "I'm a child of God's."

"I knew that too," I say. "After all, it's written, *vaya'as eloyhim*—and God made every creeping thing. I mean, who's your family? Are you from hereabouts or from elsewhere?"

"My family," he says, "is the human race. But I was born and raised around here. You even know me."

"Then out with it!" I say. "Who is your father?"

"My father," he says, "was named Pertchik."

"The devil take you!" I say. "Did you have to take all day to tell me that? Are you Pertchik the cigarette maker's boy, then?"

"Yes," he says. "I'm Pertchik the cigarette maker's boy."

"And you're truly a student?" I ask.

"Yes," he says. "I'm truly a student."

"And what exactly do you live on?" I ask.

"I live," he says, "on what I eat."

"Good for you!" I say. "Two and two is four, four and four is eight, and ate and ate and had a tummy ache. But tell me, my fine friend, what exactly is it that you eat?"

"Whatever I'm given," he says.

"Well, at least you're not choosy," I say. "If there's food, you eat, and if there isn't, you bite your lip and go to bed hungry. I suppose it's worth all that to be a student. After all, why shouldn't you be like the rich Jews of Yehupetz? *Kulom ahuvim, kulom brurim*, as it says . . ."

Sometimes I like to cite a verse or a prayer. Do you think that Pertchik took it lying down? "Those Jews," he says, "will never live to see the day when I'll be like them. I'll see them all in hell first!"

"Why, bless my soul if you don't seem to have something against them," I say. "I hope they haven't gone and put a lien on your father's estate."

"It's their estates," he says, "that will be yours, and mine, and everyone's some day."

"You know what?" I say. "I'd leave that sort of talk to your worst enemies. I can see one thing, though—and that's that with a tongue like yours, you're in no danger of getting lost in the shuffle. If you're free tonight, why don't you drop over? We can chat a bit, and have some supper while we're at it . . ."

You can be sure I didn't have to repeat the invitation. My young man made sure to turn up at dinnertime sharp, just when the borscht was on the table and the knishes were sizzling in the pan. "You've timed it perfectly," I said. "If you'd like to wash your hands and say the Lord's blessing, go ahead, and if not—that's fine with me too, I'm not God's policeman. No one's going to whip me in the next world for your sins in this one."

Well, we ate and we talked—in fact, we talked on and on, because something about the little fellow appealed to me. I'm damned if I know what it was, but it did. You see, I've always liked a man I can have a Jewish word with; here a verse from the Bible, there a line from the Talmud, even a bit of philosophy or what-have-you; I can't help being who I am . . . And from then on the

boy began dropping in regularly. As soon as he finished the private lessons that he gave for a living each day, he would come to us to rest up and have something to eat. (Mind you, I wouldn't wish such a living on anyone, because in the most generous of cases, I assure you, our local squires pay eighteen kopecks an hour to have their sons taught, for which they expect their letters to be addressed, their telegrams corrected, and their errands run in the bargain. And why not? Doesn't it say *bekhoyl levovkho uvekhoyl nafshekho*—if you expect to eat, expect to pay the bill too!) The boy could count himself lucky to take his meals with us and tutor my girls in return for them. An eye for an eye, as it says—one good turn deserves another. Before we knew it, he had all but moved in with us; whenever he arrived, someone would run to bring him a glass of milk, and my wife made sure he always had a clean shirt and two whole socks, one for each of his feet. It was then that we started calling him Peppercorn. He really did seem like one of the family, because at bottom, you know, he was a decent sort, a simple, down-to-earth boy who would have shared all his worldly possessions with us, just as we shared ours with him, if only he had had any . . .

The one thing I didn't like about him was his habit of disappearing now and then. Suddenly he would vanish—*vehayeled ey-nenu*, Peppercorn was nowhere to be found. "Where have you been, my wanderbird?" I would ask him when he came back. Peppercorn kept silent as a fish, though. I don't know about you, but secretive people annoy me. Even God, when He created the world, did it out loud, or else how would we know all about it? But I will say this for Peppercorn: when he opened his mouth, it erupted like a volcano. You wouldn't have believed the things that came out of it then, such wild, crazy ideas, everything backwards and upside down with its feet sticking up in the air. A rich Jew, for instance—that's how warped his mind was!—wasn't worth a row of beans to him, but a beggar was a big deal, and a workingman—why, a workingman was king, he was God's gift to the world—the reason being, I gathered, that he worked.

"Still," I would say, "when it comes to livelihoods, you can't compare work to making money."

That would get him so mad that he'd go all out to convince me that money was the root of all evil. All the monkey business in the world, he said, was due to it and nothing honest could ever

come of it. And he would give me ten thousand proofs and demonstrations that stuck to me like a radish to a wall. "Stop talking like a madman," I would say. "I suppose it's dishonest of my cow to give milk and of my horse to pull my wagon for me?" I had some idiot question like that for every idiot statement that he made; trust Tevye not to let him get away with anything. If only Tevye hadn't trusted Peppercorn! . . . And he wasn't embarrassed to speak his mind, either. One evening, for instance, as we were sitting on the front stoop of my house and philosophizing away, he says to me, "You know what, Reb Tevye? You have some wonderful daughters."

"You don't say!" I said. "Thanks for letting me know. They have a wonderful father to take after."

"Especially your second eldest," he says. "What a head she has! She's perfection itself."

"So what else is new?" I say. "The apple fell close to the tree." Between you and me, though, my heart swelled with pleasure. Show me the father who doesn't like to hear his kids praised! Was I a prophet that I should have known what a crazy love affair would come of it? Listen and I'll tell you all about it.

In a word, *vayehi erev vayehi voyker*—one afternoon as I was making my rounds of the Boiberik dachas, someone hailed me in the street. I looked around to see who it was—why, it's Efrayim the Matchmaker! Efrayim the Matchmaker, you should know, is a Jew who makes matches. "Begging your pardon, Reb Tevye," he says, "but I'd like to have a word with you."

"With pleasure," I say, reining in my horse. "I hope it's a good one."

"Reb Tevye, you have a daughter," he says.

"I have seven, God bless them," I say.

"I know you do," he says. "So do I."

"In that case," I say, "we have fourteen between the two of us."

"All joking aside," he says, "what I want to talk to you about is this: being as you know a matchmaker, I have a match for you—and not just any match either, but something really exclusive, extraprime and superfine!"

"Perhaps you can tell me," I say, "what's hiding under the label, because if it's a tailor, a shoemaker, or a schoolteacher, he can save himself the trouble and so can I. *Revakh vehatsoloh ya'amoyd layehudim mimokoyim akher*—thank you very kindly but I'll look for a son-in-law elsewhere. It says in the Talmud that—"

"Good Lord, Reb Tevye," he says, "are you starting in on the Talmud again? Before a body can talk with you, he has to spend a year boning up. The whole world is nothing but a page of Talmud to you. If I were you, I'd listen to the offer I'm about to make you, because it's going to take your breath away."

And with that he delivers himself of an after-dinner speech about the young man's credentials. What can I tell you? Champagne and caviar! In the first place, he comes from the best of families, not from the hoi polloi—and that, I want you to know, is what matters most to me, because although we have all kinds in my family, *akudim nekudim wvrudim*—well-off folk, working folk, even some pretty common folk—I'm far from a nobody myself. . . . Secondly, Efrayim tells me, his man can parse a verse with the best of them, he knows how to read the small print—and that's no trifle with me either, because I'd sooner eat a buttered pig than sit down to a meal with an illiterate. A Jew who can't read a Jewish book is a hundred times worse than a sinner. I don't give a hoot if you go to synagogue or not; I don't even care if you stand on your head and point your toes at the sky; as long as you can match me quote for quote and line for line, you're a man after my own heart, that's just the way Tevye is. . . . And finally, says Efrayim, the fellow is rolling in money; why, he rides about in a droshky pulled by a pair of horses who leave a trail of smoke wherever they go—and that, I thought, is certainly no crime either. Any way you look at it, it's an improvement on being poor. How does the Talmud put it? *Yo'oh aniyuso leysisro'eyl*, not even God likes a beggar. And the proof of it is that if He liked them, He wouldn't make them beg. . . .

"Is that all?" I say. "I'm waiting to hear more."

"More?" he says. "What more can you want? He's crazy in love, he's dying to have you. That is, I don't mean you, Reb Tevye, I mean your daughter Hodl. He says he wants a beauty. . . ."

"Does he now?" I say. "He should only deserve to have her. But just who is this hotshot of yours? A bachelor? A widower? A divorcé? Or the Devil's own helper?"

"He's a young bachelor," he says. "That is, he's not so young as all that, but a bachelor he certainly is."

"And what might his God-given name be?" I ask.

That, though, was something I couldn't get out of him for the life of me. "Run your daughter down to Boiberik," Efrayim says, "and I'll be glad to tell you."

"Run my daughter down to Boiberik?" I say. "Do you think she's a horse being brought to a fair?"

Well, a matchmaker, as you know, can talk a wall into marrying a hole in the ground; we agreed that after the Sabbath I would run my daughter down to Boiberik. I can't tell you what sweet dreams that gave me. I imagined Hodl trailing smoke in a droshky, and the whole world burning up too, but with envy—and not just for the droshky and the horses, but for all the good I would do once I was the father of a rich woman. Why, I'd become a real philanthropist, giving this beggar twenty-five rubles, that one fifty, that one over there an even hundred; I'd let everyone know that a poor man is a human being too . . . That's just what I thought as I traveled home that evening. "Giddyap," I told my horse, giving him a taste of the whip. "If you want your oats tonight, you'd better dance a little faster, because *im eyn kemakh eyn Toyroh*, by me there's no something for nothing."

In a word, there I was talking to him in Horsish when who do I see slipping out of the forest but a young couple, a boy and a girl, deep in talk and walking so close that they're practically hugging. Who can that be in the middle of nowhere, I wondered, squinting into the setting sun at them. Why, I could have sworn it was Peppercorn! But who was the schlimazel out with at this hour? I shaded my eyes with my hand and looked again: who was the female? My God, I said to myself, can that be Hodl? Yes, it's her, all right, or else I'm not a Jew . . . so these are the grammar lessons he's been giving her! Ah, Tevye, I thought, are you ever a jackass—and I stopped my horse and called out to them, "A good evening to you both! What's the latest war news from Japan? I hope it isn't too nosy of me to ask what you're doing here, because if you happen to be looking for pie in the sky, it's already been eaten by Brodsky . . ."

In short, I gave them such a hearty greeting that the two of them were left speechless, *loy bashomayim veloy ba'orets*, neither here nor there, embarrassed and blushing all over. For a moment they just stood there, staring down at the ground. Then they looked up at me, so that now we were staring at each other.

"Well," I said, half in anger, half in jest, "you're looking at me as though you hadn't seen me in a donkey's years. I can assure you that I'm the same Tevye as always, not a hair more or less of me."

"Papa," says my daughter Hodl to me, blushing even brighter. "You can wish us a mazel tov."

"I can?" I say. "Then mazel tov, you should live to be one hundred and twenty! Only what might I be congratulating you for? Have you found a buried treasure in the forest or been rescued from some great danger?"

"You can wish us a mazel tov," says Peppercorn, "because we're engaged to be married."

"You're engaged to be *what*?" I say. "What are you talking about?"

"To be married," he says. "Isn't that a custom you're familiar with? It means that I'll be her husband and she'll be my wife."

That's just what he said to me, Peppercorn did, looking me straight in the eye. So I looked him straight back and said, "Excuse me, but when was the engagement party? It's rather odd that you forgot to invite me to it, because if she'll be your wife, I just might be your father-in-law." I may have seemed to be making a joke of it, but the worms were eating my heart. Say what you will, though, Tevye is no woman; Tevye hears it out to the end. "I'm afraid I still don't get it," I said. "Whoever heard of a match without a matchmaker, without even a betrothal?"

"What do we need a matchmaker for?" says Peppercorn. "We're as good as married already."

"Oh, you are?" I say. "Will wonders never cease! And why have you kept it such a secret until now?"

"What was there to shout about?" he says. "We wouldn't have told you now either, but seeing as we're about to be parted, we decided to make it official."

That was already too much for me. *Bo'u mayim ad nefesh*, as it says: I felt cut to the quick. That he should tell me they were as good as married already—somehow I could still put up with that, how does the verse go? *Ohavti es adoyini, es ishti*: he loves her, she loves him, it's been known to happen before. But *make it official*? What kind of Chinese was that?

Well, even my young man must have seen how befuddled I was, because he turned to me and said: "You see, it's like this, Reb Tevye. I'm about to leave these parts."

"When?"

"Any day now."

"And just where," I asked, "are you off to?"

"I can't tell you that," he says. "It's confidential."

Would you believe it? *Confidential*: put that in your pipe and smoke it! Along comes a black little ragamuffin of a Peppercorn

and informs me all in one breath that he's my son-in-law, and that he's making it official, and that he's going away, and that where is confidential! It made my gorge rise. "Look here," I said to him, "I understand that a secret is a secret—in fact, you're one big secret to me . . . But just tell me one thing, brother: you pride yourself on your honesty, you're so full of humanity that it's coming out of your ears—how can you marry a daughter of mine and run out on her the same day? You call that honest? You call that human? I suppose I should count myself lucky that you haven't robbed me and burned my house too."

"Papa!" says Hodl to me. "You don't know how happy it makes us to finally tell you the truth. It's such a load off our minds. Come, let me give you a kiss." And before I know it she grabs me from one side, he grabs me from the other, and we all begin to kiss so hard that pretty soon they're kissing each other. A scene from the theater, I tell you! "Don't you think that's enough for a while?" I finally managed to say. "It's time we had a practical talk."

"About what?" they ask.

"Oh," I say, "about dowries, trousseaus, wedding costs, everything from soup to nuts . . ."

"But we don't want any soup or nuts," they say.

"What do you want, then?" I ask.

"An official wedding," they say. Did you ever hear of such a thing in your life?

Well, I don't want to bore you. All my arguments did as much good as last winter's snow. We had an official wedding. Take my word, it wasn't the wedding that Tevye deserved, but what doesn't pass for a wedding these days? A funeral would have been jollier. And to make matters worse, I have a wife, as you know, who can be a royal pain. Day in and day out she kept after me: how could I ever permit such a higgledy-piggledy, such a slapdash affair? Go try explaining to a woman that time is of the essence! There was nothing for it but to smooth things over with a tiny little fib about a childless old aunt of Peppercorn's in Yehupetz, oodles of money, a huge inheritance that would be his one bright day in the middle of the night—anything to take the heat off me . . .

That same day, a few hours after the splendid wedding, I harnessed my horse to the wagon and the three of us, myself, my daughter, and my heir-in-law, piled into it and drove to Boi-

berik. As I sat there stealing a glance at them, I thought, how clever it is of God to run His world according to the latest fashions! And the weird types He puts in it! Why, right next to me was a freshly married couple, still wet behind the ears, so to speak, one of them setting out for the Devil knows where and the other not shedding a tear for him, not even one for the record—but Tevye was no woman, Tevye would wait and see . . . At the station were a few youngsters, born-and-bred Kasrilevkites to judge by the state of their boots, who had come to say goodbye. One, wearing his shirt down over his pants and looking more like a Russian than a Jew, stood whispering with my wanderbird. I do believe, Tevye, I told myself, that you've married into a gang of horse thieves, or purse snatchers, or housebreakers, or at the very least, highway murderers . . .

On the way back from Boiberik I couldn't restrain myself any longer, and I told my Hodl what I thought of them. She laughed and tried explaining to me that they were the best, the finest, the most honorable young people in the world, and that they lived their whole lives for others, never giving a fig for their own skins. "For example," she says, "that one with the shirt hanging out: he comes from a rich home in Yehupetz—but not only won't he take a penny from his parents, he refuses even to talk to them."

"Is that a fact?" I say. "I do declare, honorable is hardly the word! Why, with that shirt and long hair, all he needs is a half-empty bottle of vodka to look the perfect gentleman."

Did she get it? Not my Hodl! *Eyn Esther magedes*—see no evil, hear no evil. Each time I took a dig at her Peppercorn's friends, back she came at me with capital, the working class, pie in the sky. "What do I care about your working class," I said, "if it's such a military secret? There's an old saying, you know, that if you scratch a secret, you'll find a thief. Tell me the truth, now: where is Peppercorn going and why is he going there?"

"Ask me anything but that," she says. "Better yet, don't ask me anything. Just pray that there'll be some good news soon . . ."

"Amen," I say. "I only hope God's listening. My enemies should worry about their health as much as I'm beginning to worry about the little game that you and your friends are playing . . ."

"The trouble is, you don't understand," she says.

"What's to understand?" I say. "I'd like to think I understand harder things."

"It's not something you can grasp with just your head," she says. "You have to feel it—you have to feel it with all your heart!"

And on she went, my Hodl, her face flushed and her eyes burning as she talked. What a mistake it was to go and have such daughters! Whatever craziness they fall for, it's head and heart and body and soul and life and limb all together . . .

Well, let me tell you, a week went by, and then another, and still another, and another, and another—*eyn koyl ve'eyn kosef*, there's not a letter, not a single word. That's the last of Peppercorn, I thought, looking at my Hodl. There wasn't a drop of blood in her poor cheeks. All the time she did her best to keep busy about the house, because nothing else helped take her mind off him—yet couldn't she have said something, couldn't she at least have mentioned his name? No, not one syllable: you'd think that such a fellow as Peppercorn was a pure figment of my imagination . . .

One day when I came home, though, I could see that my Hodl had been crying; her eyes were swollen with tears. I asked around and was told that not long before, a character with long hair had been in the house and spoken to her in private. Oho, I said to myself, that must be our fine friend who goes about with his shirt hanging out and tells his rich parents to jump in the lake! And without thinking twice I called my Hodl out to the yard and put it straight to her. "Tell me," I asked her, "have you heard from him?"

"Yes," she said.

"And where," I ask, "is your true love?"

"He's far away," she says.

"And what," I ask, "might he be doing there?"

"He's doing time," she says.

"Time?"

"Time."

"But where?" I ask. "For what?"

Hodl didn't answer. She looked straight at me and said nothing. "Just explain one thing to me, Daughter," I said. "I don't need you to tell me that he's not doing time for horse theft. And if he isn't a thief and he isn't a swindler, what good deeds has he been put away for?"

Eyn Esther magedes—mum's the word! Well, I thought, if you don't want to talk, you don't have to; he's your bit of bad luck, not

mine; may the Lord have mercy on him! . . . My heart didn't ache any less, though. After all, she was my daughter. You know what it says in the prayer book: *kerakheym ov al bonim*—a father can't help being a father . . .

In short, the summer passed, the High Holy Days came and went, and it was already Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of Sukkos. It's my habit on holidays to give myself and my horse a breather, just like it says in the Bible: *atoh*—you yourself; *veshorkho*—and your wife; *vekhamorkho*—and your horse too . . . Besides, there's nothing to do then in Boiberik anyway; as soon as Rosh Hashanah comes along, all the dacha owners take off like a pack of hungry mice and Boiberik turns into a ghost town. It's a good time to stay home and relax a bit on the front stoop. In fact, it's my favorite season. Each day is a gift. The sun's not as hot as an oven anymore and has a mildness about it that makes being out-of-doors a pleasure. The leaves are still green, the pine trees give off a good tarry smell, and the whole forest is looking its best, as if it were God's own sukkah, a tabernacle for God. It's there that He must celebrate the holiday, not in the city, where there's such a commotion of people running about to earn their next meal and thinking only of money, of how to make more and more of it . . . And at night you might think you were in Paradise, the sky such a deep blue and the stars twinkling, sparkling, winking on and off at you like eyes; sometimes one shoots through the air as fast as an arrow, leaving behind a green trail—that's a sign that someone's luck has run out. Every Jew has his star . . . why, the whole sky is Jewish . . . I hope it's not mine that just fell, I prayed, suddenly thinking of Hodl. Lately she'd seemed cheerier, livelier, more her old self again. Someone had brought her a letter, no doubt from her jailbird. I would have given the world to know what was in it, but I was blamed if I was going to ask. If she wasn't talking, neither was I; I'd show her how to button up a lip. No, Tevye was no woman; Tevye could wait . . .

Well, no sooner had I thought of my Hodl than she appeared by my side. She sat down next to me on the stoop, looked around, and said in a low voice, "Papa, are you listening? I have to tell you something. I'm saying goodbye to you tonight . . . forever."

She spoke in such a whisper that I could barely hear her, and she gave me the strangest look—such a look, I tell you, as I'll never forget for as long as I live. The first thing to flash through

my mind was that she was going to drown herself . . . Why did I think of drowning? Because there was once an incident not far from here in which a Jewish girl fell in love with a Russian peasant boy, and, not being able to marry him . . . but I've already told you the end. The mother took it so hard that she fell ill and died, and the father let his business go bankrupt. Only the peasant boy got over it; he found himself another and married her instead. As for the girl, she went down to the river and threw herself in . . .

"What do you mean, you're saying goodbye forever?" I asked, staring down at the ground to hide my face, which must have looked like a dead man's.

"I mean," she said, "that I'm going away early in the morning. We'll never see each other again . . . ever."

That cheered me up a bit. Thank God for small comforts, I thought. Things could have been worse—though to tell you the truth, they conceivably could have been better . . .

"And just where," I inquired, "are you going, if it's not too much of me to ask?"

"I'm going to join him," she said.

"You are?" I said. "And where is he?"

"Right now he's still in prison," she said. "But soon he's being sent to Siberia."

"And so you're going to say goodbye to him?" I asked, playing innocent.

"No," she says. "I'm going with him."

"Where?" I say. "What's the name of the nearest town?"

"We don't know the exact place yet," she says. "But it's awfully far away. Just getting there alive isn't easy."

She said that, did my Hodl, with great pride, as if she and her Peppercorn had done something so grand that they deserved a medal with half a pound of gold in it. I ask you, what's a father to do with such a child? He either scolds her, you say, or spansks her, or gives her an earful she'll remember. But Tevye is no woman; it happens to be my opinion that anger is the worst sin in the book. And so I answered as usual with a verse from Scripture. "I see, Hodl," I told her, "that you take the Bible seriously when it says, *al keyn ya'azoyv ish es oviv ve'es imoy*, therefore a child shall leave its father and its mother . . . For Peppercorn's sake you're throwing your papa and your mama to the dogs and going God only knows where, to some far wilderness across the trackless sea where even

Alexander the Great nearly drowned the time he was shipwrecked on a desert island inhabited by cannibals . . . And don't think I'm making that up either, because I read every word in a book . . ."

You can see that I tried to make light of it, though my heart was weeping inside me. But Teveye is no woman; Teveye kept a stiff upper lip. And she, my Hodl, was not to be outdone by me. She answered whatever I said point by point, quietly, calmly, intelligently. Say what you will about them, Teveye's daughters can talk! . . . Her voice shook dully, and even with my eyes shut, I felt that I could see her, that I could see my Hodl's face that was as pale and worn as the moon . . . Should I have thrown myself on her, had a fit, begged her not to go? But I could see it was a lost cause. Damn them all, every one of those daughters of mine—when they fall for someone, they do it hook, line, and sinker!

In a word, we sat on the stoop all night long. Much of the time we said nothing, and even our talk was in bits and snatches. Sometimes I listened to Hodl, and sometimes she listened to me. I asked her one thing: whoever heard of a girl marrying a boy for the sole purpose of following him to the North Pole? I tried using reason to convince her how unreasonable it was, and she tried using reason to convince me that reason had nothing to do with it. Finally, I told her the story of the duckling that was hatched by a hen; as soon as it could stand on its feet it toddled down to the water and swam away, while its poor mother just stood there and squawked. "What, Hodl, my darling, do you have to say about that?" I asked. "What is there to say?" she said. "Of course, I feel sorry for the hen; but just because the hen squawks, is the duckling never to swim?" . . . Now, is that an answer or isn't it? I tell you, Teveye's daughters don't mince words!

Meanwhile time was going by. The dawn began to break. Inside the house my wife was grumbling. She had let us know more than once that it was time we called it a night—and now, seeing all the good it had done, she stuck her head out the window and bawled with her usual tact, "Teveye! What in God's name do you think you're doing out there?"

"Ssshhh, don't make so much noise, Golde," I said. "*Lomoh rogshu*, says the Bible—have you forgotten that it's Hoshana Rabbah? On the night of Hoshana Rabbah one isn't supposed to sleep, because it's then that the Book of Life is shut for the year . . . And

now listen, Golde: please put up the samovar and let's have tea, because I'm taking Hodl to the station." And right on the spot I made up another whopper about Hodl having to go to Yehupetz, and from there to somewhere else, on account of Peppercorn's inheritance; in fact, she might very well have to spend the winter there, and maybe even the summer, and possibly the winter after that—which was why she needed a few things for the trip, such as linens, a dress, some pillows and pillowcases, and whatever else a young lady had to have . . .

Those were my orders—the last of which was that there better not be any tears, not when the whole world was celebrating Hoshana Rabbah. "No crying allowed on a holiday!" I said, "It's written in the Talmud, black on white." It could have been written in solid gold for all anyone listened to me. Cry they did, and when the time came to part, such a wailing broke out as you never heard in all your life. Everyone was shrieking: my wife, my daughters, my Hodl, and most of all, my eldest, Tsaytl, who spent the holiday at our place with her Motl. The two sisters hugged each other so hard that we could barely tear them apart . . .

I alone stayed strong as steel—that is, I steeled myself, though I was about as calm as a boiling kettle inside. But do you think I let anyone see it? Not on your life! Tevye is no woman . . . Hodl and I didn't say a word all the way to Boiberik, and only when we were nearly at the station did I ask her one last time to tell me what her Peppercorn had done. "It's got to be something!" I said.

She flared up at that; her husband, she swore, was as clean as the driven snow. "Why," she said, "he's a person who never thinks of his own self! His whole life is for others, for the good of the world—and especially for the workers, for the workingman . . ."

Maybe some day I'll meet the genius who can explain to me what that means. "You say he cares so much about the world?" I said. "Well, maybe you can tell me why, if he and the world are such great friends, it doesn't care more about him . . . But give him my best wishes, and tell your Alexander the Great that I'm counting on his honor, because he is the very soul of it, isn't he, to see to it that my daughter isn't ruined and that she drops her old father a line now and then . . ."

I was still in the middle of the sentence when she hugged me and burst into tears. "We'd better say goodbye now," she said. "Be well, Papa. God knows when we'll see each other again . . ."

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

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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