

Y. L. PERETZ

The Three Wedding Canopies

First Part

FIRST CHAPTER

The palace—The king and the princess—The king's worries.

Far, far away, beyond the Mountains of Darkness, on the other side of the Sambatyon River, there is a country known as Wonderland, where the red-haired Jews dwell, the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes. And in that country of Wonderland, in the city where the king lives, in Faithstone, the royal residence, there once stood a high, white, marble palace. And it was beautiful, that high, white, marble palace, standing in a green, luxuriant park as in a green ocean, with its hundreds of golden columns and its thousands of diamond windows.

And at the foot of the white marble palace, a small, clear, crystal river murmured softly and flowed dreamily, and the little river was lined on both sides with the finest flowers and the noblest plants. And in the small, clear, crystal river, there were thousands of golden fish, dancing and flashing about, and on top, on the blue surface of the water, there were swans floating about, snow white, full of myriad charms, and with thin, long, white necks and long, sharp yellow bills....

It was a fascinating sight!

But it was most beautiful at night, when the moon was shining.... The marble palace was reflected in the river along with the moon and the stars.... The flashing golden fish merrily hopped and danced, springing from one golden column to the next, from

one diamond window to the other, and the white swans gravely and majestically swam about from one silvery patch of fog to the next, from one golden star to the other.... And trembling, as if deeply in love, they wove around all these things the finest, most wonderful shadows of the flowers and plants that blossomed along both sides of the water.... And the song of the nightingale could be heard among the branches, which were bending under the weight of golden fruits. Anyone might think that there was no garden here, no palace here—that it was all a dream, an enchanted dream....

And yet it was *not* a dream. ✓

At that time, the king of the Red Jews, in the country of Wonderland, was Solomon XXVII, our King Solomon's great-great-grandson; and he lived in the palace, with his only daughter, Princess Shulamite.

For fifteen years now, the king had been a widower, but he never remarried, because he didn't want to bring a stepmother for the apple of his eye, his second soul, the princess.

And the princess was worthy of his great love.

She had all the qualities and virtues of her father, the king; in addition, God graced her with a beauty that dazzled all eyes.

And because the princess did not resemble her father or her dear departed mother, people thought that the queen had stared at an angel in heaven when about to give birth....

Shulamite's beauty was famous throughout Wonderland, but the people loved her for her goodness, her kind heart, kind eyes, and deep piety.

Every day, people would gather in front of the white palace, the poor, the old, and the sick, and all those in need of help, and the princess would come to them with her friend Deborah, the daughter of Joab the grand vizier. The two young women listened to everyone, gave them gifts and presents, helping and healing....

So that the princess wouldn't need to ask for money every time, the king, her father, had a second golden key made for his treasury, and presented it to her; and in front of his treasury, he put a trained parrot, who, upon seeing the princess, would call out: *canvass*

"Take, angel, take! Take with full hands, and give with a full heart!"

And the king's treasury did not shrink; on the contrary, it was

blessed. The more the king and the princess gave away, the fuller the treasury became, and this was a sign that their charity was having an effect.

Yet in spite of all this, King Solomon XXVII was not happy.

On his golden bed, under the silk canopy, the king would lie awake all night, never closing his eyes, listening to the soldiers walking up and down on their watch.

In Wonderland, a person's conscience is a ruler that won't let you sleep; but this was not the case with Solomon XXVII . . . And in the second chapter we will find out why he couldn't sleep.

SECOND CHAPTER

The cuckoo—The sorceress and the princess's oath.

One day, on L'ag Bomer, a spring holiday that Jews celebrate with outings, the princess and her friend Deborah went strolling in the nearby forest.

When the birds caught sight of them, they began to sing more freely and merrily. The birds didn't realize that one of the girls was a princess and the other the grand vizier's daughter. All they knew was that these were the lovely girls, the golden girls, that gave them food whenever they appeared at the palace.

These were the girls who fed them all year long with royal white bread, on the Sabbath with challah and gravy, and, on the special Sabbath when Moses' song is read, with the finest honey cake.

And in honor of the lovely girls, they sang a rare concert.

"C'mon, brother, c'mon!" they called from branch to branch. "In honor of the golden girls, in honor of the lovely girls."

The flowers, usually hiding in high grass in the shade behind the trees, and trembling in terror at an empty hand or a heavy tread—the flowers heard them and thought to themselves:

"If birds praise, then it must be so! Birds never flatter! So we needn't be afraid of the girls!"

And the flowers stuck their lovely heads out of the deep, green grass; and they breathed freely and merrily, so that the whole forest was filled with the finest fragrances!

And the stags and does, who at the slightest rustle, hide in the intertwining branches, emerged and looked at the girls with faithful, loving eyes, as only stags and does can look!

2016 2nd: from girlhood → womanhood
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Now the happy princess also felt like singing; her young heart was so full. No sooner had she opened her coral lips than all the birds fell silent, they wanted to hear the golden girl sing . . .

One cuckoo stopped too late, and Deborah, the grand vizier's daughter, was the first to see him.

She went over to the cuckoo and, half in earnest, half in jest, asked him:

"Cuckoo, how old is my future husband now?"

The bird began to call: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" over and over again, and Deborah mirthfully counted five hundred and eighteen years. And her voice tinkled like a silver chime.

The princess heard the cuckoo, she also came over and asked him:

"And tell me, how long will I live, you tree sage?"

And the bird again called out: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

And who can say how many years he would have numbered off if the princess hadn't got tired of counting.

She interrupted him and asked:

"And how many years has God provided for my good father?"

The good princess wanted the cuckoo to call and call and not stop calling, as before.

But the princess stood there petrified, the cuckoo wouldn't emit another sound.

The frightened girls made up their minds to consult the sorceress living in the woods and ask her whether the cuckoo was merely being rude or whether this signified some disaster.

No sooner had they thought of it than a mass of little animals appeared, small, merry, wonderful, multicolored animals, that began dancing and jumping and running on ahead, leading the way to the sorceress.

The sorceress was surrounded by rabbits and squirrels, whom she was feeding, she was old and shrunken, but her eyes were so kindly that the girls weren't the least bit frightened, and they drew nearer. The princess was too saddened to speak, and so the grand vizier's daughter spoke for her:

"Listen," she asked, "how long will her father live?"

She didn't want to tell her that her friend was a princess, so that the witch wouldn't be afraid to speak the truth.

"How's that?" asked the witch.

And Deborah repeated the question, pointing at the princess.

But the witch was obviously stone-deaf, and she misunderstood Deborah's pointing her finger. She was accustomed to girls who asked when their wedding day would be.

So she replied:

✓ "Who? This fine young daughter? Ahh! She's so beautiful! She's so marvelous! Suitors will come to her from the East and the West! ✓ And soon she'll get married. Very soon!"

Deborah had to stand on tiptoe and shout her question into the sorceress's ear.

✓ This time the sorceress heard her and replied:

✓ "Her father will live—to see her get married!"

The princess let out a terrible cry. And at that moment the witch and her animals disappeared.

The stags, the deer took refuge. The birds and flowers vanished.

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All that could be heard in the hushed forest was the gnawing of the woodworms in the hearts of the trees, and the princess swearing that she would never marry. Her father would live, he would outlive her!

Then she begged Deborah to keep all this a secret.

We will see how they kept their word.

THIRD CHAPTER

A gathering of suitors—A conversation between the king and the princess—The white dove and her advice.

Now there came a gathering of lords and princes.

(5) They were all invited to the palace First they went hunting in the woods. Naturally, when a Jewish king goes hunting, the sportsmen only shoot at beasts of prey and poisonous snakes. After the chase, they had a royal banquet.

The food, strictly kosher, was plentiful. Old wines, also kosher, were fit for a king When a bottle was uncorked, a bouquet as of the most precious perfumes wafted through the hall. The princess ate, drank, talked, and discussed all sorts of wise topics and faraway lands and countries. All eyes were hanging on the beautiful and radiant face of the princess.

Every man was hoping to see a smile on her lips, a good omen for himself!

The princess, however, was equally friendly to all, and yet refused each one.

The king asked the entire company to leave the dining hall and then said to the princess:

"Shulamite, God is with you! Today, the greatest and the highest and the finest men in the world were here! Princes from the greatest countries came here and sat at our table And you have turned them down!"

The king went on:

"And they came to you from the East and from the West! They were brought here by your renown, they were dazzled by your beauty."

And tears could be heard in the king's words.

"What's wrong with them? If you're not certain of their intelligence, then give them riddles to solve. You know so much, I've taught you so many things!"

"Aren't they rich enough?" the king went on. "Some of them have wealthier countries than I, greater treasuries than I! And all of them swear that they love you!"

The king continued:

"Daughter, my dear devoted daughter! Look! My old head is already covered with snow! Look at my beard, it's as white as milk And when God calls me, whom shall I leave you with, daughter? What do you desire? They love you so much, they swear they do!"

The princess's heart was weeping at her father's unhappiness, but she couldn't tell him the truth.

So she said she didn't believe their oaths. ✓

"I'm rich, father dear, and I'm your only daughter! How can I tell whether they want me or my wealth? Do they desire me or, after you pass away, your kingdom, father dear?"

And she offered some evidence for her words:

"Look," she said to the king, her father, "isn't my friend Deborah more beautiful than I, finer, smarter, and more learned than I? Yet why don't suitors gather to ask for her pure hand? Why hasn't a single prince fallen in love with her?—Because I'm *your* daughter! Because I'm the princess!"

The king didn't want to say that he didn't believe anyone could be lovelier, smarter, or finer than his daughter, so he replied:

"Goodness knows! Your flashing red hair, your deep, blue eyes,

attract them, and her silken, flaxen hair and deep, honest eyes don't attract them Every person has his own fortune"

And in his heart, he thought: "Oh me! Isn't this sadness a legacy from great-great-grandfather Solomon: Such a fresh little apple, and already a worm is gnawing at it."

That same instant, a milk white dove appeared at the window.

The princess thought it was one of her doves and turned to it so that it would perch on her shoulder.

But the dove refused.

The milk white dove flew into the room and alighted on the table in front of the king.

She bowed three times and began cooing to the king.

Now, you must know, that in the land of the Red Jews, they observe the old Jewish custom that a man sitting in the Sanhedrin, the highest tribunal, has to know all the seventy languages of the world, and a king, like Solomon in his day, must even know the languages of beasts and birds.

And the white dove churred to the king:

"King, great king! Do not worry, everything will turn out for the best. You will reap pride and happiness from your daughter But don't force her to take any of the princes who are asking for her hand. None of them is her destined bridegroom, nor does he live in Faithstone, her one and only."

And the king replied in dove language:

"Good dove, wise dove, tell me where her destined bridegroom lives, I will have my servants harness the finest horses to bring him here. Whether he's a prince, or the lowliest pauper, or the hardest laborer, I shall give him my only daughter and my crown—or my name isn't Solomon XXVII!"

And the dove answered:

"King, great king, may you be healthy and live long! But I was not told to tell you that. Your princess wants to be certain that the man who swears he loves her, wants only her, and her alone, not the treasury, not the kingdom. The good, pious heart is afraid, so we'll have to calm her fears."

"But how, wise, white dove?" asked the king.

And the dove replied:

"Great king, wise king, may you be healthy and strong and live to see your grandchildren! Tell her to pick the poorest clothes that her heart desires, for you and for her, Your Majesty, and the two

of you shall wander away from the places where people can easily recognize you. And when her destined bridegroom desires her in filth and poverty, then the princess's golden heart will not tremble or be afraid."

"I am ready to do everything you say," he replied to the dove, and she hopped back and forth and bowed three times, like a Jew after reciting the eighteen blessings, and then she flew out the window.

The princess had no excuse for not going along with the dove's advice. So, for their wanderings, she picked out the clothes of rag-pickers.

She thought the following: "In such dirty clothes, I won't attract anyone."

But man proposes, and God disposes.

While the king and the princess were talking about their traveling clothes, Joab, the grand vizier, was standing behind the silken curtain, eavesdropping.

Only a bad, false man would do such a thing, and that was what he was. ✓

The populace was murmuring against him. But the king was beguiled by him. *political*

Nations and children have a keen eye, that is to say, they can recognize at first glance things that the wisest sages fail to see. Their very first impression tells them who is truly good, honest, and pious, and who is wearing a mask on his face—and has hell in his heart.

This man should not have been the grand vizier of Wonderland.

He had come into the palace by chance. The queen, may she rest in peace in Paradise, died in childbirth, and they needed a wet nurse for the baby. As fate would have it, they chose Joab's wife. Through her, he gained entry into the palace.

One day, King Solomon noticed him and asked him who he was and what he wanted.

He said he was the husband of the princess's wet nurse, and all he desired was permission to sate his eyes on the radiance of the king's face.

Flattery is to a king as a hook to a fish.

Joab remained in the palace. His power grew from day to day, and in time he became grand vizier.

He was intelligent, like Ahitophel in his time, and he played his

pious and honest role so cleverly that the people who murmured couldn't show that there was anything wrong with him.

The princess couldn't stand Joab, the grand vizier. Whenever he looked at her, she felt as if a cold, slimy worm were slithering across her face. But she never mentioned it because of her wet nurse, Joab's dear departed wife, because of the king, her father, and perhaps most of all because of Deborah, in whom she had a devoted and beloved sister. So she controlled herself, and spoke a kind word to him from time to time.

The evil man however misinterpreted the kind word. He wanted to use it for his own ends and become the king's son-in-law!

Joab was no spring chicken, but he tried to look young. He dyed his hair and beard so that everyone forgot how old he was.

The ladies-in-waiting all winked at him, and so he thought that Shulamite too Only a false and evil man can think such things.

Just to make sure, he bought love potions from all kinds of sorcerers and secretly put them into everything the princess ate and drank.

Wise Joab didn't realize that all these drops help only when the person using them really and truly loves, whereas all that Joab had in mind was the kingdom.

Now when the princess turned down all the princes, he regarded this as a good omen for himself. And to make more certain of his plans, he kept spying and eavesdropping on the king and the princess.

And when, standing behind the silken curtain, he heard that they were planning to wander away in poor clothes, he didn't lose heart at all. In fact, it even raised his hopes falsely.

He thought that the princess, who had swallowed so many love drops, had suggested the match herself, and that they were going off in disguise to test whether he was worthy of being a king and to hear what the people thought of him.

He was afraid that people would say nasty things about him to the king and especially to the princess, that he sent out spies to follow them everywhere and write back daily in code where they were and what they were doing.

The first few letters he received from the spies didn't surprise him. The king and the princess were wandering and wandering, never stopping. But later on, when his spies informed him that they

had crossed the border, the grand vizier was delighted. He hit upon a different and much easier plan for getting the kingdom!

He would have both the king and the princess killed! And he could do so abroad, with no fear whatsoever!

He sent for two cutthroats and said to them:

"I, the grand vizier, and now regent, know very well that you two are robbers and murderers and that I should have you strung up in the middle of the marketplace and then cut into pieces, and have the pieces sent to all parts of the kingdom. It is up to you to be saved from the gallows and make something of yourselves.

"If you do what I tell you, and keep it a secret, I shall make one of you prime minister and the other the head of the Sanhedrin."

The cutthroats fell to the feet of the grand vizier, and he made them swear, as they knelt, that they would do what he wanted!

The cutthroats swore: One, by all the wild and deserted ruins where demons and devils dwell, and by all the unburied remains of robbers and murderers:

"If ever I fail to keep my word, may all the demons of forests and ruins, and all the evil spirits of lost bones, wreak vengeance on me."

And the second cutthroat also swore the same oath, and added that he swore by his secret—by his father's mouth which he kept in a bladder full of vinegar.

The evil grand vizier said:

"You have sharp swords, and I'll give you naked spears. I'll also give you horses, the best in the royal stables, they fly like eagles and they soar over the wind.

"Ride out into the world. And when you meet two ragpickers, an old man as gray as a dove and a young girl whose face shines out of her dirty clothes like a sun from behind a leaden winter cloud—then stop them!

"Kill the old man on the spot! And as for the daughter, you will do the following: Ask her whether she's willing to keep it all a secret and return to become my wife. If she agrees, and if she swears by the soul of her dead mother, then let her live and bring her here.

"Otherwise: Kill her! And then bury them on the spot. And as a sign that you've done everything properly, bring me back their clothes. I'll be able to recognize them!"

The murderers agreed, and he gave them money for traveling ex-

penses, armed them from head to foot, put them on horseback, and sent them out into the world.

The evil man was certain that his plan would work.

He would become king!

And the moment he became king, he would know what to do.

He would fortify the kingdom! And he would emulate Ahasuerus! He would give a royal banquet—a banquet for all Wonderland.

He would set up golden tables in a great garden. And they would groan under the weight of the choice foods, and the choicest wines would flow like water.

And all players, and all dancers, and all singers in the entire country would come to play and sing and dance.

It would be a festive day, a rejoicing for all Wonderland!

And they would eat and drink for seven days and seven nights, and they would celebrate for seven days and seven nights.

And the most beautiful girls in the country would come.

And he would go from table to table, looking and choosing.

And the most beautiful girl would be his wife, his queen.

FOURTH CHAPTER

unnatural father

Deborah has to escape—She says goodbye—The witch's cavern.

Deborah, the grand vizier's daughter, was very unhappy ever since the princess left. She was all alone.

Her father had never loved her. He hadn't rejoiced at her birth. He was poor at the time, and didn't look forward to another mouth to feed. When the baby was a few weeks old, he suddenly began hating it, he complained it wasn't his child but a changeling. Later, after coming to the king in the palace, he concealed his hatred and played the same false role toward his own daughter as toward everyone else.

No sooner had the king and the princess gone away, however, than he pulled the mask from his face.

The first thing he did was to drive all the sick and the poor from the palace and make Deborah give him the key to the king's treasury.

She was even unhappier when she saw what her father was doing to the country. He immediately discharged all the honest veteran generals, all the veteran officials of the towns and hamlets, and all

the honest judges and policemen, from the lowest to the highest senators in the Sanhedrin. He replaced them all with evil and dishonest men, with flatterers and spongers, who were prepared to help him with all evil plans.

Deborah tried to reason with him, but she only made matters worse. He decided once and for all to get rid of his daughter. He would have had her killed but he was afraid of the inhabitants of the country, who were as fond of Deborah as of the princess. Instead, he decided to marry her off to someone living abroad and he looked for a bridegroom among the rich lords of other countries who came to Faithstone on business.

There was one such businessman whom he liked. He was a big, fat man with sharp, grim eyes. He, thought the grand vizier, won't let go of her so easily. He called for him in the marketplace where he was standing with his wares, brought him back to the palace, and presented him as a bridegroom to his daughter.

She wrung her hands, a wellspring of tears came gushing out of her eyes. Her legs gave way beneath her. She knelt down before her father and threw her arms around his legs. But he kicked her away.

"You're getting married tomorrow!" he snapped and walked out.

That same night, Deborah escaped from the palace.

The soldiers on guard felt sorry for her and didn't stop her, and a pale, merciful moon lit the way through the park to the remote paths.

As she fled, Deborah couldn't help it, she kept stopping at different flowers, saying goodbye and kissing them. And her tears remained on several rose-petals or lily-petals like drops of fresh dew.

"Who knows whether I'll ever see you again!" she called to the flowers, the trees, and the golden fish in the river, waking them with her light steps, and to the birds, who were swaying among the silent branches.

And a soft, barely audible rustle passed from branch to branch, from tree to tree, as though saying: "Quiet! Shhhh! The good, the golden girl is running away, running away from her fine palace, from her bad father, her nasty father . . . Shhh! Don't wake them up, don't wake them up . . ."

From the park, she slipped into the forest.

At the first tree in the forest, three strange beasts were waiting

unicorn

for her, as white as milk, with golden stripes, two of the animals each had a horn of tortoise shell and one had a horn of ivory.

Deborah stopped and asked them:

"Oh, you good animals with your white skins, golden stripes, and tortoise-shell or ivory horn! Please take pity on me, and show me the way to the cave where the good sorceress lives."

She told them she had never been in the woods at night before, everything looked different in the moonlight, she might easily go astray, and bad people could find her and bring her someplace where she shouldn't and mustn't be

The animals apparently understood every word, they nodded their heads, and lowered their horns several times.

This was a sign that they considered it right and that they would show her the way.

And the animal with the ivory horn stepped out of the row and stood in front of her; the two with the tortoise-shell horns—to her left and her right.

And they started to walk.

And they walked and they walked, downhill and uphill, through intertwining branches, until Deborah caught sight of a fine golden beam shining from the earth.

The animal with the ivory horn knocked upon it softly.

"Who's there?" someone asked from underground.

Deborah recognized the sorceress's voice and wondered how the deaf woman had heard the soft knocking of the little horn.

"I, I, I," the animal kept knocking—it couldn't speak. But that same instant, there was a noise in the branches of a nearby tree, a white dove appeared and called out in a human voice:

"Auntie, open up! Deborah's here! Deborah with the big, black eyes, and hair like flax Open up, Auntie, it's high time"

The cave opened, and Deborah stepped in and found the old woman sitting and plucking feathers, which she threw into a large pot.

"Good evening," murmured Deborah. And gaping at everything that was going on in the cave, she forgot to ask whether she could come in.

There was a tiny lamp in front of the old woman, lighting up the entire cave. In the middle of the space, there was a bed with fine linen, and she recognized it, her own bed, with her bedding, with her silken, gold-embroidered quilt.

"Good evening to you," replied the sorceress. "I knew you were coming, and I sent out my crows to steal your bed from the palace. It's not so nice sleeping on a strange bed."

Deborah remained silent and even more amazed.

And the old woman went on:

"You're tired, Deborah, get undressed, go to bed. Tomorrow, you'll know everything."

Deborah obeyed, and when she fell asleep, the old woman got up quietly and took a snow-white wing, like a swan's, and fanned it through the air in all directions, muttering softly:

Good dreams, come,
From all sides, come
To the lovely girl,
To the pious girl,
To the darling girl,
To Solomon's daughter.

And white doves came flying from all sides, with snow-white chrysanthemums and lilies in their beaks, and flew over Deborah's bed softly and quietly.

FIFTH CHAPTER

A morning in the cave—What's going on in the other half of the cave?—The story of a great soul—How it was born and fell asleep.

And it was evening and it was morning. And in the morning, when Deborah awoke, she noticed that the cave was divided by a curtain embroidered with all sorts of flowers and birds; she was unable to remove her eyes from them.

"What? Do you want to know," the old woman asked her with a smile, "what's going on in that half of the cave?"

"No, Auntie, if you don't tell me of your own accord, I won't ask."

"Since you're so good," replied the old woman, "I'll tell you. Meanwhile the milk that I've put on for your breakfast will heat up."

And the old woman told her the following story:

"Once God looked down at our poor world and saw that things weren't going so well, there were tiny little souls that couldn't devise

anything and if they ever did devise something, then they couldn't carry it out. So God sent down a single soul, a proper one—a large, tall soul.

"And somewhere, a child was born with such a soul. It was a boy, and when he opened his big eyes upon the world, he became full of sorrow and pity.

"But as he grew up, he couldn't devise anything either because he had no time to think.

"There was so much unhappiness all around him, so much helplessness, so much sorrow.

"And he started helping, giving advice, doing good things. . . . If someone fell, he would help him up. If someone was drowning, he would reach out a branch. If someone couldn't carry a load, he would give him a hand. If someone needed some good advice, he would think it over and then give it to him . . . And if none of this helped, he would take out his harp, and sing and play.

"Now the harp had a sweet tone, and his voice was even sweeter than the sound of the harp, and sweetest of all was the song he sang.

"He sang about later, happier times . . . When all people would be helped, when all tears would be dried, all illnesses wiped out, all wrongs done away with, and all people, even the weakest, would be happy."

"Is that a true story?" asked Deborah.

"Oh my! How your eyes lighted up!" answered the old woman.

"Is it a true story? I don't know. He sang and people believed him, and that alone made life easier for them.

"Little by little, he became famous throughout the land, and the more famous he became, the more poor, helpless, and unhappy people needed his help . . . And yet he was just one man, all alone.

"'God,' he once argued with heaven, 'why did you create me all alone? How can I help all people by myself?'

"And an oracular voice replied from heaven:

"'I created an Adam, and the world descended from him. Look for your Eve.'

"And he abandoned everything and started looking.

"But he didn't find her. A true woman is hard to find. Authentic, genuine, not childish and foolish and greedy. And then after a time he argued with God again: 'I can't find her,' he said.

"And from heaven there came an answer:

"'Since you can't find her, wait until she looks and finds you.'

"And he was put to sleep, here in the cave. And he has been sleeping for a long, long time. I was told to watch over him so that no harm would come to him while he slept."

"How long has he been sleeping, Auntie?"

"Over a century now, even longer. Would you like to see him, Deborah?"

Deborah trembled all over, unable to speak a word.

The old woman tugged on a string, the curtain drew apart, and in the second half of the room, a young man appeared, he was asleep, and as lovely as the dream of an innocent young girl.

Deborah sprang up and dashed from the cave into the woods. The old woman peered after her with a smile, and then she stuck her old head out of the cave and whistled. The three animals appeared at the edge of the cave the very instant she whistled.

"What is your wish, soul of the forest?" they asked.

And the old woman looked at Deborah who could still be glimpsed among the trees, running farther.

"What happened to her?"

"A dream," smiled the old woman benevolently, "was born in her girlish heart, and now it's carrying her as if on wings. Watch over her and bring her back to the cave this evening."

"Fine!"

And the animals disappeared.

SIXTH CHAPTER

The second night in the cave—Deborah wakes up uneasily—What she sees and hears.

The second night, Deborah slept uneasily. The dream was growing in her girlish heart, spreading its wings. But that wasn't the only thing that woke her from her sleep. What disturbed her even more was worrying about Princess Shulamite and her father King Solomon.

She awoke and, with her eyes still closed, she thought:

"Where are they? Where are they wandering now? Why did they leave the kingdom in bad hands—unhappy and poor . . . without help?"

Once awake, she couldn't say anything nasty against her father.

"What are they doing, Auntie?"

"They're wandering Soon they'll be crossing the border of Wonderland Just as the dove advised them to do."

"But they're standing"

"King Solomon is a bit worried."

"Why? Is it hard for him to wander in his old age?"

"No, child. He's noticed that someone is riding after them."

"Bad people, Auntie?"

"Cutthroats!"

"Do they want to hurt them?"

"They want to— But their threads are weaving out of the frame It doesn't matter!"

"And Shulamite, is she afraid too?"

"She doesn't know about it, child."

"She's standing and thinking."

"She's staring."

"At what, Auntie? She looks as if her entire soul were staring out of her eyes"

"Look to the left of the frame. What do you see, child?"

"I see a window The window of a small house, like a green-covered hut in the Feast of Huts"

"And in the window?"

"Someone's sitting, a young man He's embroidering . . . embroidering on pressed velvet with golden threads He's embroidering an eagle He's working on the wings now Just look at the wings, those golden wings, growing under his nimble, white, alabaster white, hands Golden wings But the radiance of his deep, blue, pure eyes is even more golden A river is like that at times, blue, and clear like the sky, and deep, very deep Just look at his eyes glow!"

"With pride!"

"Pride over what?"

"With the pride, with the joy of God creating the world Whoever creates, is radiant like that And the light of the eyes weaves into the thing one creates And the radiance remains in the work forever, in the creation, and if anyone else looks at it, then the pride and the joy radiate into his soul Do you understand me, child?"

"I can feel it, Auntie. But why are his lips trembling?"

"He's singing, daughter. Whoever works and creates in his work, he sings! The song is magically transformed into the work!"

"When the Messiah comes, everyone will work like that."

"Do you like it, daughter?"

"Yes . . . very much Only, that other man I like him more."

"The one behind the curtain?"

"Yes."

"Goodness, how hot your breath is. It smells hot, it's very hot! That's how a rose trembles sometimes, a sweet rose Yes, child, what else do you see?"

"Shulamite looking at him! Is that her destined bridegroom, Auntie?"

"Perhaps!"

But Deborah remembered something and exclaimed in fright:

"Make her go away, Auntie! Make her run away! She mustn't, she swore she wouldn't!"

"You talk too much!" the old woman exclaimed, laughing.

That same instant, the embers faded, the weaving disappeared, and the cave was aglow with the morning that rushed in through the opening at the top.

"If you want to see, you have to keep quiet," the old woman reproached her kindly.

Second Part

FIRST CHAPTER

Wandering through Wonderland and toward the border of Wonderland—Working here, and there—Feelings about foreigners abroad—"Help yourself" and "Begging is prohibited"—The princess's certainty.

At ease again, Deborah closed her eyes and fell asleep, or else, still awake, continued spinning the sweet dream in her quiet soul about the man in the second half of the cave. We'll take advantage of the time and see what's happening with the king and the princess.

The hardest thing for us Jews, the punishment that a Jewish penitent has to suffer for the worst sins—wandering, "the sorrows of

In her heart she knew how bad her father was. It did no good to fret and reproach herself for not loving him! She couldn't love him—He was a bad person, very bad! She knew that if Solomon, the real king, didn't return, then her father would destroy Wonderland, and turn Faithstone into a Gehenna. Generals and judges would be thrown out of office, and honest men would be chained up and thrown into dark holes.

And what would become of Shulamite?

Deborah's heart was full of fear and trembling. She opened her eyes.

A few burning embers in the fireplace were shedding a bright, reddish glow over the entire cave. The walls were covered with green branches and flowers of all colors, and all these things appeared to be growing in the reddish light. The curtain fluttered softly, quietly, dividing the niche with its sleeper from the rest of the cave. And in the red glow, the large birds and tiny flies embroidered in the curtain seemed to be alive, trembling and moving their wings. They quivered and struggled as though trying to tear themselves loose from the curtain and soar off into space!

She could not tear herself away from the curtain!

Oh, how she wanted that curtain to move a lot more, open a bit, reveal a tiny crack so that she might see him again! If only one light ray could reach her from his radiant face!

But what good did it do! It was not for her that heaven had put him to sleep. If only Shulamite had been here!

All she wanted to do was see him, merely see him! See him!

She was frightened by her own thought as though it were sinful, and she looked around for the old woman.

The old woman wasn't asleep.

She was sitting on the three-legged stool in a corner of the cave. A marvelously white shimmer arose, like an airy crown, over her silvery hair. With her head bowed, she looked down at her lap. She looked so earnest, so deep!

Deborah saw that balls of different-colored threads were lying at the old woman's feet, and the balls were stirring as though of their own accord. The different-colored threads slowly rose, very slowly, up to the old woman's lap, weaving themselves into a frame, a flashing golden frame.

Was she awake, was she dreaming?

"Auntie, aren't you sleeping?" she asked, a bit frightened.

"No, daughter! I'm not sleeping. I never sleep! After all, I'm the soul of the forest, you know, the soul of the forest, yes indeed! And I'm a watchwoman! I simply can't sleep. The forest would fall asleep altogether. And you would find barkless trees tomorrow, withered flowers and leaves, and dead animals.... Everything would turn into refuse and carrion if I fell asleep! And he, the man behind the curtain there, would never awake again."

Deborah was scared.

"But then what do you do, Auntie?"

"I, daughter? I don't do anything, not for the time being! I merely look! I look and I see what's happening! When the time comes, I will do something, do what I have to, by all means.... My thread will also weave in!"

"In what, Auntie?"

"In the things that are happening."

"What is happening, Auntie?"

"Do you want to see, daughter?"

"May I?"

"A little. Come! Get behind me, quick! While the coals are still burning!"

And Deborah sprang down from the bed and got behind the old woman to look at what was weaving on her lap.

"I don't see anything, Auntie!" she exclaimed in disappointment.

"Look harder, wipe your eyes three times."

Deborah did so and screamed in joy:

"I can see, Auntie, I can see!"

"Shush! We mustn't wake the forest! What do you see, child?"

"I see a square, a quiet marketplace, it looks like a frame of small, hushed houses."

"A marketplace!"

"A quiet marketplace."

"Empty?"

"Wait, Auntie.... I can see... two figures... poor people, tattered, with ragged clothes...."

"Ragpickers?"

"They look like... an old man and a young girl...."

"Look harder, maybe you'll recognize them!"

"Oh my God!" Deborah leaped up. "Shulamite! The king!"

"Shush!... It's not time yet to wake up the man behind the curtain."

exile—was a very easy matter in Wonderland and brought a great deal of pleasure.

In a land where people are good, everything is good. You feel at home anywhere.

Whatever you look at gives you joy and peace; it welcomes you with a smile. From the tiniest blade of grass in the forest to the loftiest, sky-high pinetree, the strongest spreading oak—everything welcomes you cheerfully! Thousands of different colorful mushrooms nod to you with their fine caps. The flowers stick their heads out of the grass and call out to you: “Good morning!” Towering trees embrace you in their shadows for a sweet rest.

If you meet a lumberjack in the woods, he puts his axe aside the moment he sees you, walks along with you, and shows you which tree offers a refreshing sap, where a living wellspring gushes forth, which tree contains a beehive with honey. Anything your heart desires!

And the field where the peasant sings as he works is equally good to you. He greets you heartily and shows you his basket of milk and bread hidden from the sun. “Have a bite,” he says. And overhead, singing flocks of birds are flying about. He doesn’t drive them away, he doesn’t begrudge them anything, God’s blessing is for all, and they soar around him and sing to him as he works The birds promptly realize that you are a stranger, and they greet you and sing for you—a greeting from home: “We were just there, everyone’s fine, thank goodness!”

And wherever you lay your head, on white moss of fine gold, on the bare earth, on a hard-looking stone, you sleep calm and sound. Balmy breezes play around your face, whispering the loveliest dreams into your ears, wishing you: “Sleep, you good man, sleep. No harm will come to you here.”

And it’s just as good in the city.

The houses are open, like the hearts of the inhabitants! You walk through the streets, and the people working in doors and windows accompany you with kind gazes, with friendly words: “Have a good trip!” or “Get there safe and sound!” And they’ll share their last crumb with you, their last drop of water.

But even Wonderland comes to an end. Solomon XXVII and his daughter, the princess, both disguised as ragpickers, passed across the border.

or 2de

Those were the words of the dove: Far, far away from the land, in a foreign country, no one would recognize them!

And they wandered farther and farther away from the border, and the journey became harder and harder, more and more arduous. Different towns, different fields and forests, everything changed. Bad and cunning people live in these towns, and they have locked themselves up in their homes as in prisons, barring and bolting their doors!

Every door is guarded, at every gate people glare at you suspiciously, eyes and mouths ask: Who are you, who do you have here?

They glare most harshly of all at garbage-pickers! Everyone steps away so as not to get dirty.

“Hurry, hurry! There’s garbage behind the town, old women are picking the old rags! Go on, go on!” And they drive them from the city.

“Our garbage isn’t for foreigners, it’s our property. Our own people barely have enough!”

And the king and the princess wandered and wandered, farther and farther

And the woodsman glared at them nastily, and the peasant in the field retorted to their greetings with an ugly curse.

“Daddy,” asked Shulamite, “why are they so nasty?”

“Because they work hard and joylessly. If your soul isn’t in your work, you won’t succeed. Thorns grow among the sheaves and all sorts of evil seeps into the mind! They are accursed. Their work is accursed, their fields and forests are accursed Their woods are full of predatory beasts. Their fields are full of thorns and their hearts full of curses; they are thorns themselves, burning brambles!

“No free birds can be seen in the air, they shoot them down for the most trivial uses, or merely for fun, out of pure nastiness, to vent their spleen, or show off. So the birds flee, they flutter past in mute, cloudy nights, and no human ear has heard them sing for a long, long time

“And you can’t see any flowers. They are all torn out. Useful things are sown instead. And they’ve killed and devoured all the pets and cattle.

“A man without flowers, birds, and pets may be smart, but he won’t be good. Each of them thinks of nothing but himself. And if a man can’t get along on his own and starts falling, then he falls,

and no one here will reach out and hold him up, no one will offer him a crumb of food to keep up his strength, or a drop of water to keep his lips from burning!

"And whoever falls, falls down and dies by himself, or else gets up to kill others in his place."

"And the highways are crawling with murderers and robbers, and with soldiers and policemen hunting them down."

"And the air is full of cursing and shooting instead of singing."

The king and the princess kept wandering here, disguised as rag-pickers. Their money ran out, and to make matters worse, they lost their way. When they asked about Wonderland, people laughed at them: "There's no 'Wonderland' in any geography book! Old women used to ramble about Wonderland, scholars of ancient history once came upon some old children's songs about an imaginary place called Wonderland. But today, all those things are forbidden. You're not allowed to tell such falsehoods to even the youngest child. All that counts is truth, pure, bare truth."

"They're crazy!" And people would shake their heads.

If they had been local people, the others would have locked them up in a madhouse. But they didn't want to lodge and feed foreigners, so they drove them away: "Get along with you, you crazy foreigners! C'mon, get moving!"

And their disguise became a reality.

The king and the princess became real ragpickers.

As long as it was summer, they didn't complain about their lot. "The dove knew what she was saying, everything will turn out for the best," thought King Solomon, and Shulamite comforted herself with her only thought: "My father will live, he'll live! Praised be God, no one wants to look at me!"

But at times she did sigh. Was she homesick or, as her father smiled at her kindly, was she unable to forget the embroiderer by the border? But her sighs were light.

In winter, however, things were different.

A hard winter, such as never comes to Wonderland, covered the earth. It came abruptly, attacking like a wild murderer, and its first breath brought down a rain of frozen birds.

And everything was rigid with cold.

<And a heavier punishment fell upon Solomon XXVII than upon his great-great-grandfather.>

In tattered clothing, he wandered about with his daughter Shula-

mite, starving, freezing. He might have called out: "I am Solomon." But he knew that the people here not only didn't believe in Solomon, they didn't even believe in his kingdom—in Wonderland.

Begging was illegal. There were gilded signs on all the doors and gates: Begging is prohibited. Once, the old man held out his hand, and a kind-hearted lady didn't report him to the police, she mercifully handed him a pamphlet, a very intelligent pamphlet. Its title was: Help yourself!

And he helped himself as best he could. He bent over the garbage behind the city, grubbing around with his frozen hands. His old bones were cracking. A free world! And when you're a garbage-picker you really believe it!

And the princess stood across from him, her hands were weak, her delicate skin was cracking in the frost, the spade was pushing holes into her flesh.

She dug, and drops of blood ran from her wounded hand and froze to the spade.

The old king couldn't just watch indifferently.

He burst into tears.

"You have sinned, daughter!" he exclaimed bitterly. "And this is our punishment!"

"Sinned?" stammered Shulamite.

"Yes, daughter. You had pride in your heart, great pride! You wanted to be certain of your happiness, and hold it in your hand. But God doesn't want it that way! Happiness isn't a bird to keep in a cage! God wants human beings to hope and have faith! Each one should follow his star, his fortune, with half-closed eyes. That is what God wants!"

Shulamite remained silent, and Solomon went on:

"This is God's punishment. We will have to remain here. We will never see Faithstone or Wonderland again!"

Shulamite likewise thought that this was the end.

"Now," she thought, "I can tell him everything, everything, at least we can leave the world with no secrets between us, with open hearts! So that my father won't accuse me wrongly."

And she fell upon her father, embracing him, kissing him, holding him tight, and told him everything.

She hadn't been proud, she had feared for his life.

The cuckoo and the sorceress had said ... he would only live to see her get married.

With cold, cracked lips, old Solomon kissed her.

“Don’t be afraid,” he exclaimed joyfully. “If that’s so, then God will help us! He won’t abandon us!”

That same moment, a dull sound came from the earth, and far off in the distance, two horsemen loomed into sight on wild horses, flying like eagles, and they held swords in their hands.

“There they are! There they are!” one called to the other. “And this will be their end!”

“Murderers!” Solomon yelled in terror, casting about in vain for a place to escape, to hide—but it was an open field, with no caves and no trees.

“Then let the earth swallow us up!” he shouted. “It’s better than falling into their hands.”

SECOND CHAPTER

A lucky moment—A hanged man’s mouth—What the earth threw out.

Meta-discursive (If Solomon XXVII and his daughter, Princess Shulamite, had died at the hands of the murderers, God forbid!, then there would have been no story, or at best a bad story, and bad stories are told only by bad, embittered people.)

Solomon called out his wish at the right moment: “Let the earth swallow us up! It’s better than falling into their hands!”

It was a lucky moment. The earth split open under their feet, and he and his daughter fell in. A red, flaming glow poured out like red lightning, vanished, and the earth closed up again.

The two robbers halted, stunned.

Coming to their senses, they realized this was no easy matter.

“What can it be?” one murderer asked the other.

“I’ll soon find out,” the other one replied. “I always have my hanged father’s mouth on me. He was hung for committing fourteen robberies in one week, and anything I ask it will be answered.”

Having said these words, he took out the mouth and began asking it.

“Mouth! Mouth! You mouth of my hanged father, may he rest in peace! What’s going on here?”

And the mouth answered with a muffled voice as though from underground: “It’s a cave belonging to a rich dwarf.”

“And what was the flame?”

“The reflection of the mountains of gold that he has gathered in his cave. He has whole treasuries of gold!”

The eyes of both murderers were ablaze with lust for gold.

“Should we break into the cave?” one asked the other.

“No!” he replied. “First of all, the earth is too frozen for us to split it open. Secondly, I’m scared of dwarfs, they’re all wizards. And thirdly, anyone who wants to work will never be a thief.”

“What else can we do?”

They decided to stay there until the earth split open again. A thing that happens once can happen once more.

And the two thieves made up their minds to keep watch until something appeared.

Meanwhile, the evening came on, and to keep from falling asleep, they resolved to keep talking all night long.

Naturally, thieves do not talk about religious commandments and good deeds.

First, they spoke about themselves, praising their murderous strength and their cunning robberies. Next, when they ran out of their own thieveries and robberies, they began talking about other criminals. But even this subject wasn’t enough for a long winter’s night. And finally, one of them yawned wide, and then asked:

“Do you know, brother, why dwarfs collect gold?”

“I know why,” the second one replied. “I once asked my hanged father’s mouth, and it told me the reason.”

“What is it?”

“Wait, it’s a long story.”

They lit their small pipes. Now they were two red dots in the silent, white-flashing winter night.

And the cold heavy air cut through the robber’s voice:

“Once, my dead father’s mouth told me, there were two kinds of people in the world—two human races.”

“One race had small bodies and big souls—”

“The students, the unworldly scholars and teachers!” remarked the other one, his voice full of shame.

“And the other race had small souls, but big strong bodies.”

“They’re the ones we’re descended from!” said the other with pleasure.

“Don’t interrupt, it’s a long, long story!”

“I’m doing it on purpose, so I won’t go to sleep!”

"You won't go to sleep. Listen!

"The two races never lived in peace with one another."

"That's obvious."

"The two races never intermarried. They never ate at the same table, they never drank together, they never even did business with one another."

"That was silly! You can do business even with your worst enemy."

"They always fought wars with one another, merciless and ruthless, killing and killing! And so much blood was shed that all the rivers and all the oceans turned blood-red. They sailed on blood, they drank blood from the wells. And the earth couldn't soak in so much blood, and the fleshless bones of wild beasts and wild birds drifted around in blood.

"They didn't even bury the corpses. Occasionally, a famous man, perhaps a king!

"And finally, when men started fearing a deluge of blood, both sides made up their minds—they would have an arbitration before a rabbinical court!

"Justice, and not the sword, would decide who was right.

"But who would judge them? No one came down from heaven, and here on earth only human beings could speak and judge, but all men were at loggerheads with one another.

"So they resolved to find an intermediary man, that is to say, a man with an in-between body and soul. He wouldn't be biased.

"And they had an armistice for a while, to look around for an in-between man. They found him and took him to a high mountain, had him sit in the shade of an old, sacred tree, and said to him: 'Be our judge!'

"They spanned a canopy of white silk over his head, and a pressed velvet carpet under his feet, as is proper for a great judge, and they gave him three days to hear the arguments and reach a decision!

"And both sides swore they would abide honestly by the decision.

"But this in-between man, who wasn't biased at first, became biased, he allowed himself to be bribed!"

"Who by?"

"Our forefathers, the ones with big bodies and small souls. It never even occurred to the people with the big souls!

"For a fat cow and two calves, the in-between man pronounced a fine judgment: Both races of man would have to divide the earth between them, fifty-fifty! Only, the people with large bodies and small minds were to live above ground, and the people with large souls and small bodies—underground."

"Aha! A fine judgment. And so that's who the dwarfs are!"

"That's right!"

"And why do they need gold under the earth?"

The two robbers had been sipping liquor, and the one who knew everything from his hanged father's mouth, continued his story:

"This is what happened:

"In time, the men with big bodies and small souls were no longer satisfied with the area above ground. They began digging into the earth, deeper and deeper. They looked for iron, copper, gold, and silver.

"And the dwarfs (according to my hanged father) realized what was happening. *They* were gathering treasures. The dwarfs thought to themselves: There'll be a war. That will settle it. We'll see who's stronger, the body with its *strength* or the soul with its *ideas*. And if it comes to another arbitration, they'll gild the judge!"

"It's unbelievable," replied the second robber. "It was too smart of the scholars with the great souls."

"Could be," replied the first robber. "My father, God bless him, never spoke a true word in all his life."

"But it's quite plain," exclaimed the second one. "Maybe they collect everything that glitters—gold, diamonds, all precious stones, because it's so dark in their caves! They long for the sun, the daylight, the things they lost through the in-between man who was bribed, and so they gather radiant metals . . . God knows!"

That very same instant, the earth split open again, spewing out the poor clothing that Solomon and the princess had been wearing; then it closed up again.

"Look!" the robbers shouted joyfully. And at the break of day, they saddled their horses to ride back to Faithstone. They were going to tell the grand vizier that they had carried out his orders and killed both the king and the princess and were bringing back their clothes as a sign!

And they wouldn't get lost. At every parting of the roads, they would halt and ask the hanged man's mouth.

THIRD CHAPTER

*In the cave—The white dove—The black eagle—
Royal clothes again—Presenting the dwarf—
The dwarf sets the table and tells
who he is.*

When the earth closed up over King Solomon and his daughter the princess, they both remained stunned and dazzled, no less than the robbers up above.

In the reddish golden light that was blazing from all the walls of the cave and all its niches, white, flashing rays were twisting and flaming—from all the precious stones among the gold that was lying around the walls.

Solomon and Shulamite were dazed, they didn't even notice their old friend—the white dove, who had just arrived and was flying overhead with a cheerful cooing.

She began descending, hovered before their eyes, and said in a human voice:

"Don't be frightened. You've followed my advice, and everything will turn out for the best.

"Meanwhile," she went on, seeing that Solomon and Shulamite were so surprised they couldn't answer, "meanwhile, you're safe here in the dwarf's cave. Soon, you'll be redeemed and you'll be happy."

Solomon shook his head sadly, and the princess exclaimed with a sigh:

"No, my good, white dove! There's no happiness possible for me!"

"Have hope and faith!" replied the dove. "Your happiness is spinning and weaving in a small window near the border of Wonderland."

"No, no!" screamed Shulamite.

"Have hope and faith!" continued the dove. "Your happiness shall not hurt a single hair on the gray head of Solomon XXVII!"

"Is it possible? The cuckoo . . . the sorceress . . . they all said . . ." Shulamite stammered.

"I am the cuckoo, I am the dove, I am the sorceress, and I am the one to tell you."

And as she spoke, the dove turned into a cuckoo and then back again into a dove, and then into the sorceress, whom we know from the forest behind Faithstone, and then the sorceress turned back again into a white dove.

"God's miracles!" exclaimed Shulamite, overjoyed. "Is it magic, or the hand of God?"

"Magic is also godly!" the dove answered with a smile. "But we don't have time to talk about it now, the dwarf will be here soon, and you'll have to change your clothes before then."

Solomon and Shulamite were surprised. Where would they get new clothes? They looked around, but couldn't see a sign of clothing anywhere. At that moment, a black eagle with huge, wide wings came flying into the cave and threw an enormous bundle down in front of them. As it fell, it opened up by itself, and Solomon and Shulamite were even more amazed: they recognized their clothes, their royal garments, which they had left in the palace at Faithstone when they disguised themselves as ragpickers!

"Hurry up!" warned the dove. "I can already hear the dwarf's footsteps. Let him find you in your own clothes. . . . I'll fly off to get some food for you."

The white dove flew out of the cave, and the dwarf appeared at the entrance to a niche.

He was tiny, awfully tiny, but his long, silver beard was huge. He had to hold the ends of it so as not to trip over them.

And huge were his two deep, blue eyes which he riveted upon Solomon and Shulamite.

"Welcome!" the dwarf greeted them with a sweet voice, "Welcome! Solomon XXVII, king of Wonderland, in whom the Messiah is sleeping and will soon awaken and redeem the world. . . . Welcome, Shulamite! I can see a golden star lighting up over your head—your good fortune is beginning to glow!"

And he clapped his little hands, careful not to drop the ends of his beard, and three golden chairs came down from the air.

He invited them to sit down, and all three did so.

He clapped his hands again, and four lions appeared; they loped along slowly, carrying an onyx tabletop decorated with mother-of-pearl and set with crystal dishes. The lions halted in the middle of the cave between the three golden chairs.

"Go to sleep!" the dwarf commanded the lions. And they settled

Very playful

beginning of restitution

on their back legs, drew in their tongues, closed their eyes, and remained petrified, like lions of copper or bronze.

The dwarf turned to Solomon and Shulamite.

"The table," he said, "is set, we only have to bring the food from aloft, from above. We don't have any ritual slaughterers down here. And before the food arrives, let me introduce myself. If you want to be saved, and save others along with you, you have to have full trust in me, you have to have faith in me!"

"I have faith in you!" the words came rushing out of Shulamite's heart.

"The fortunate star is twinkling above you, its rays are in your heart already, but you have to get to know me more closely. There are a lot of things we have to do together!"

"Tell us," said Solomon, "I don't even know what to call you."

"As you can see," the dwarf began to talk, "I live in a cave, like all dwarfs, I gather gold, silver, and precious stones, like the others. I certainly look like a dwarf, and yet I was not born of one. I was once a simple human being, living above the ground, I had a wife and children. How many? I can't even remember..."

"Was it that long ago?" asked Solomon in surprise.

"About six centuries ago!" replied the dwarf.

"It was in Baghdad," he continued, "I was a small person, a shames in a synagogue, a poor beadle in a poor synagogue, in a poor back street.

"And in the same city of Baghdad there lived a rich and powerful young man, a relative of the royal family and a descendant of priests. A divorced woman caught his fancy, and he wanted the chief rabbi to perform the wedding ceremony, even though Jewish law forbids a descendant of priests to marry a divorcee. When the rabbi refused, he informed against him falsely, and the authorities drove the rabbi out of the city, and out of the country. The rich man issued a proclamation that if any scholar would grant him a dispensation and perform the ceremony, he, the rich man, would use his power and make that scholar chief rabbi of Baghdad! The burghers remained silent, they were all afraid of the rich man.

"There wasn't a single rabbi in all the land who was ready to take such a sin upon himself. No judge had the courage to do it. So the rich man turned to learned men, to scholars—not one was willing. He went down to the beadles of synagogues and houses of

study, but not a single beadle, no matter what his job and income, was prepared to sell his soul—until he came to me!

"And with me, he was in luck.

"I was very poor, and my wife and children were sick.

"And my sick wife talked me into it, she led me astray, and I worked out a false dispensation. We talked about the rich man's mother, saying that after all there was no proof that he was actually descended from priests.... I performed the ceremony, and a rabbinical certificate was already lying in the rich man's pocket for me. A rabbinical certificate signed by all the burghers who were dependent on the rich man.

"The wedding canopy was embroidered with gold, and all around us hundreds of twisted wax candles were burning and torches were blazing.... And the rich clothes of the wealthy were glittering with gold and precious stones. It was dazzling!

"On earth it was very bright, very, very bright. But up above, the sky was very dark, a dark heaven, moonless, starless, and suddenly, from the dark heavens, came God's burning wrath! A storm began, a sudden wild torrent came pouring down, and one peal of thunder chased the next, burning flashes of lightning flew by like serpents—The heavens and the earth were shuddering!

"And suddenly, the wedding canopy was torn from the hands of the attendants and rose like an umbrella on the wind. The guests ran away, screaming dreadfully, driven by the thunder and lightning, lashed by the torrent!

"I alone was struck by lightning.

"And in the other world, a judgment was pronounced:

"Because I had wanted to be great, so great—I was to become smaller than small, my spirit was to pass into the body of a dwarf, and I was to live like the dwarfs, under the earth....

"And because I had wanted to become rich and have gold and silver, I was to gather gold for centuries, and silver, and precious stones, not for myself, but for men or women worthy of it."

His eyes alighted on Shulamite.

But she didn't notice.

"How awful!" she exclaimed, her voice full of compassion.

"But God's grace is enormous!" replied the dwarf. "I will be saved along with you. And this is how—"

He broke off.

A soft rustle could be heard.

"The dove's coming," said the dwarf. "We'll talk about the rest after we've eaten."

FOURTH CHAPTER

The meager breakfast—Who is the dove?—

The way kings hear groans—

The day is blasting—

Off to Faithstone!

It really was the dove, and she was bringing a meager breakfast: A pot of rice.

"Have you brought this meager breakfast from the palace?" asked the dwarf.

"It's enough for me," Solomon broke in. "I haven't had meat for a long time."

"And Shulamite," said the dove, "will certainly like this breakfast when she hears where it comes from."

This was probably the first time that anyone sitting on golden chairs before crystal dishes had eaten such a poor and scant repast.

And the dove related where she had gotten the breakfast:

"I wasn't in the palace!" she said. "Ever since Joab has been in charge, things aren't strictly kosher! I wasn't even in Faithstone. Things aren't quite right there either. Bad morals are spreading from above! I got the rice at the border of Wonderland."

"There's a little town by the border, a quiet little place, and there, in a small window, an artist is sitting, an embroiderer!"

"I noticed him!" remarked Solomon, and Shulamite blushed silently.

"He works so beautifully, the young man! And the picture he's finishing is so lovely! And with what marvelous eyes he looks at the picture he's finishing on the velvet! You know him Shulamite! You must have looked deeply into his heart, for he's embroidering your portrait from memory!"

Shulamite lowered her eyes.

"But he's pale, the young man is! His dark, burning eyes have a moist film over them. He must be sick."

"Sick?" Shulamite exclaimed in fright.

"He looks sick! An old woman was standing at his side, stroking

his hair, asking him to eat—from this pot of rice, which she put in front of him. And he asked her: 'What for?' She told him that if people don't eat they can't live, and he replied he had nothing to live for The woman he could have lived for appeared to him once and then vanished, like a dream He looked for her, he said, on hills and in valleys, in villages and towns, but he hasn't found her."

The dove fell silent and was delighted to see Shulamite's face changing color, her young bosom heaving. The dove finished abruptly:

"And while he was weeping out his heart to the old woman, I flew over and bought the pot of rice from him."

"You bought it?" Shulamite sprang up with flashing eyes.

"Of course!" the dove replied laughing. "And I paid quite a bit for it. I told him where he can find the woman he's looking for."

"He's coming here?" asked Shulamite.

"Oh no! I told him the following: *map of redemption* In a few days he's going to hear that Joab, false, evil Joab, who stole the kingdom, wants to get married. And Joab is going to give a banquet, like Ahasuerus in his time. They're going to slaughter countless fowl and kill countless birds in the forest, they're going to unyoke bulls and bring them to the slaughterhouse, they're going to take the last remaining lamb from every pauper and prepare it for the feast. And wine, and all sorts of liquors, will flow like water.

"And players, singers, and dancers will come together from the East and from the West, conjurors and jesters.

"And the most beautiful girls in Wonderland will be invited, and the one he desires (so he thinks) will become his wife, the queen of Wonderland!"

"And when he hears this (I said to the young man), he should join a group of singers or players—he can sing and play, you can see it in his eyes, you can tell by every gesture of his—and he should come with them to the wedding."

"Come, Shulamite," the dove concluded. "I'll whisper the rest into your ear."

Shulamite and the dove went out into a side cave.

"May I," said Solomon to the dwarf, "ask who the dove is?"

"I'd be glad to tell you. She was once human, a beautiful girl, and then a young wife. But love is blind, and she couldn't see her young husband's fault—it's a hard thing to recognize. Just as it's hard for

the king to tell who is truly loyal to him and who is merely licking his boots.

"And by the time they had a child, a little girl, he had already wasted everything they had, they didn't even have hot water for the mother giving birth, not a single piece of linen to cover the baby. But then fortune smiled on them. The palace was looking for a wet nurse for the princess, and they found the young mother to be the loveliest and the best . . .

"With a sorrowing heart she left her own child without a cradle, and went into the palace to nurse the princess for the country.

"She sent her salary and all the presents she got to her husband.

"And yet when she came back after a few weeks to see her child, she found it sickly and starving.

"Now a bad thought came to her. She decided to exchange the babies! Not for long—she would exchange them again afterward. Once the sick child was well again.

"But then she couldn't change them back.

"In the course of time, both children were thriving. Her own child, in the royal cradle, grew golden flashing hair; the true princess got hair as fair as flax!

"When did this happen, and where?" asked Solomon in dismay.

"In Wonderland," replied the dwarf, "it happened in Faithstone, and Shulamite and Deborah are the changelings."

Solomon lowered his gray head under a burden of thoughts.

"Was she afraid to tell the truth?" he asked, "or didn't she know that I forgive anything for the truth?"

"She couldn't. Joab had become important in the meantime. For the sake of his wife they had let him into the palace, he was given rich presents, and he thanked the king! That was all he needed to do, he beguiled him with flattery, stole into his heart, and became more and more important every day.

"When his wife completed her service, he locked her up in a cellar. And there she died. She screamed and called for help, but no one could hear her voice behind the thick walls!"

"I deserved this exile!" exclaimed Solomon. "I have sinned gravely! At times, strolling about my palace, at night I thought I heard someone groaning, but I proudly said to myself: No one could be groaning in my palace, it must be the wind rushing out of the cellars.

"That's it! A king's ears are keen for any flattery, but dense to the groans of poor people. It's always the wind."

"But now," said the dwarf, "your exile is ending, you will be redeemed. But this must remain a secret. Shulamite will remain princess."

"What about my daughter Deborah?"

"She'll be happy. All the treasures of the cave will be hers.

"She will be richer than any king and any emperor. She'll know what use to make of the treasures."

That same moment they heard a blast, as from a trumpet.

The dwarf stood up:

"It's beginning," he said. "Our redemption is beginning. My aunt is blowing the trumpet in the forest of Faithstone. It's the sign for daybreak, our pure, bright day!"

That instant, Shulamite and the dove returned.

And the dove merrily said to the dwarf:

"Shulamite believes. I swore to her once again in my name and in his name that she will be happy, and that not a single hair will be harmed on the head of Solomon XXVII. And she will trust me with her appearance.

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed the dwarf. "The eagle is waiting in front of the cave!"

At that moment, Shulamite and the dove exchanged appearances! The dove, in the guise of Shulamite, left the cave, and Shulamite, in the guise of the dove, flew up and perched on Solomon's shoulder.

The dwarf clapped his hands, the cave opened, and Solomon saw an enormously strong eagle carry the dove, in the guise of Shulamite, into the air.

"She's flying off to Faithstone," said the dwarf. "We'll be right behind her, our eagles are waiting too."

And the cave closed up again.

FIFTH CHAPTER

The ray—The sorceress's blessing

—Deborah's dream.

A pale, late-winter morning crept in through a crack in the cave within the forest of Faithstone. Caressing the face of the sorceress, it woke her up.

The old woman simply loved the ray that the morning had sent into the cave—it was as if it were bringing her good news from heaven.

She shook her old head merrily, a billow of silvery hair parted on either side of her, and a smiling face with shining eyes appeared.

Her lips quivered, she was saying the morning prayer of thanks. Next, she washed her hands, lifted her eyes, and said in a soft, trembling voice:

"I thank thee and praise thee, Creator of the world, for this new morning, for the golden ray, for the good news it has brought me, for the redemption beginning for myself and my people.

"I was so tired, oh Lord, I was already yearning for my rest. A crow doesn't want to live so long!"

Then she cast a hard glance at the curtains behind which the enchanted young man was sleeping.

"Praised be the Lord, may His Name be exalted! The boy's sleep is light now, his breathing is stronger, the curtains are stirring! It's time to waken him!"

She got to her feet and walked over to the second half of the cave, to Deborah's bed. She put her hand on Deborah's forehead and awoke her with a kiss.

"A very hearty good morning to you, my child."

Deborah awoke, half-frightened, and looked about in surprise.

"Where are you coming from, daughter? Where did the angel of dreams take you?"

Deborah hugged the old woman and said:

"A terrible and wonderful dream!"

"Can you tell it to me?"

"Certainly, Auntie, I don't have any secrets from you!"

The old woman sat down on the edge of Deborah's bed, and the girl told her the following:

"I was sitting somewhere in a foreign country, in a completely unfamiliar city, in a remote and narrow little street, between two rows of dark, closed, weather-beaten houses . . . I was sitting on a rock, all by myself, trembling with fear.

"And overhead, a black sky was coming down upon me, brooding and angry—as if covered with clouds, and it lay heavy and wrathful over the lifeless street. And I was sitting and thinking: Who am I? What am I doing here? Who has abandoned me here?"

"And I felt as if I had to go somewhere and do something, so that

the cloud would rip apart, so that a serene summer sky would burst forth, so that the dead street would come to life again, so that the tiny houses would start growing and growing toward the sky like the loftiest palaces and holy places, and a singing, a shouting of happiness, should arise from the palaces and holy places—a glad tidings should fly from home to home, house to house . . .

"And I only had to walk several steps and do some trifling thing. But I couldn't remember where to walk or what to do!"

"And my heart ached terribly! I remembered that something had to be done before the poor, accursed street could awake. I felt that otherwise it would awake with a sinful anger, awake like a predatory beast, roaring a curse on foaming lips. And it would be too late. The sky would turn even darker, and God would nail the gates shut and never let out another morning star, another sun . . . There would only be endless night.

"And everything turned to me, and I forgot everything!"

"And suddenly I saw a floating white spot under the black sky.

"It drifted toward me from the east, coming lower and lower.

"And it was a white dove."

"She perched on my lap, and I saw that she had a letter on her neck, and that she offered me her snow-white neck so that I might remove the letter.

"And I untied the red string from the white throat and opened the letter, but I couldn't read, it was too dark!"

"Yet at that moment, a star blazed overhead in the sky and shone upon the letter."

Deborah paused as if to catch her breath.

"And what did the letter say?" asked the old woman.

"It said . . . it said that I . . . I, I . . ." Deborah began stammering.

"Let *me* tell you what it said!"

"You? Do you know, Auntie?"

"I know everything! The letter said that you are not the daughter of wicked Joab, that you are the princess! That you had been exchanged with Shulamite!"

"Yes!"

"It also said that you must hurry back to the palace of Faithstone, to a great feast—Joab is giving a huge banquet—and Solomon and Shulamite will also be there, and Solomon will be redeemed from his exile and be crowned king again. At that point (says the letter),

you should take Solomon by the hand and lead him to the portrait of the dear departed queen and show him whom you resemble!"

"That's what the letter said!"

"And you shall be princess."

"Yes, yes . . ."

"And what did you say?"

"I? I tore the letter into little pieces and threw them into the wind. They flew apart like tiny white wings . . ."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I knew that the path I have to take does not lead to Faithstone, and that what I have to do is not put a crown on my head. I have other things to do and other places to go to. Though in the dream I couldn't remember what or where . . ."

"And now?"

Deborah's face flamed like a rose.

"May I?" she asked with trembling lips.

"Wait, a little later. Just tell me the end of the dream first. What happened then?"

"Then? The dove flew away, and the star came down and settled like a crown on my head."

"That is your fortune, Deborah," the old lady joyfully kissed her. "Stand up and come into the forest with me."

SIXTH CHAPTER

*The ram's horn blows—Ahasueras's feast—
Quick! Quick!—Wake them up.*

There was a breath of spring in the air, yet all the forest of Faithstone was blanketed in snow. The trees looked like topsy-turvy tassels with white flowers, and on the snowy carpet covering the forest floor, billions of snowy diamonds were glittering toward the rising sun.

The sorceress and Deborah emerged from the cave, and the old woman had a shofar, a ram's horn, hanging on a long golden chain from her neck. She halted and put the shofar to her lips: "*Tekiah*."

The blare of the shofar was still trembling in the air, and Deborah could feel the ground quaking with thousands of treading feet.

The shofar had aroused the sleeping deer, who were gathering from all parts of the forest in a single file to the right of the sorceress.

Was this a dream? Deborah heard the sorceress greeting them with a cheerful "Good morning," and the deer, who were trembling with cold, answered with an equally cheerful: "Good morning to you!"

And again the sorceress put the shofar to her lips:

"*Teruah*!"

It echoed through the air again, and with trembling hides, wakened stags came running from all parts of the forest and gathered in single file facing the deer, to the left of the sorceress.

"Good morning, stags!"

"Good morning to you, Auntie!"

And the old woman put the shofar to her lips yet a third time. And she blew it yet a third time, and the white crowns on the trees began to quiver, heaps of snow burst open all over the forest, and little animals came springing out, running, racing through the forest—squirrels half-asleep, rabbits, hares and bunnies, tiny yellow foxes, and all kinds of little creatures, with silver whiskers, and silvery and ivory horns, came running and formed a line across from the sorceress.

"Good morning, animals!"

"Good morning to you, Auntie!"

And then for the fourth and last time, the old woman blew the shofar, it blared even louder in the air, and under the sky, floating white and black and colored spots began appearing, and there was a loud rustling, a humming, a fluttering of wings, and a whole cloud of birds and fowl were floating through the air and wheeling around the old sorceress's head.

"Good morning!" And "Good morning to you!" And the old woman said to them:

"First of all, please forgive me for waking you up and calling you together so early this year! Next year, when God gives you life again, you'll be able to rest longer to make up for this time. But now you have to do something for me!"

"We'd love to! We'd love to!" they shouted from all sides. "Whatever your heart desires!"

"All of you," said the sorceress, "all of you who jump, hop, dance, run, and fly! All of you are to go this very instant to Uncle Dwarf's cave, over your usual roads, in your seven-league boots. Tell him that I said: 'Good morning!' And take his treasures and bring them to the palace of Faithstone! Each stag should carry a

hundred pounds of gold, each doe fifty, and each little animal—twenty-five! And the white birds should wear black strings of pearls, and the black birds white strings of pearls, and the colored birds—all sorts of corals and precious stones!”

The old woman paused for a moment and then turned to Deborah:

“What would you do, child, if they turned over the entire wealth to you?”

Deborah thought for a while and then answered:

“I would abandon it, so that gold would lose its value, and all envy, hatred and rivalry would stop.”

“Fine, fine,” smiled the old woman. “That sounds like a good possibility.”

And turning back to the birds and the animals, she went on:

“Take all those things, and fly, run, and dash to the palace of Faithstone. Joab is giving—”

“False Joab!” broke in the animals and birds.

“Mind your business!” the old woman snapped. “Joab is giving a feast!”

“And a feast,” the old woman continued with a peculiar smile, “like Ahasuerus in his day! He wants to choose a queen! He wants the most beautiful girl in the land!”

“The pig!”

“Shush!” The old woman stamped her foot. “This is his daughter!”

“That’s not his daughter!” The noise swelled up. “We know, we know!”

“It’s a wise child that knows its own father!” laughed the old woman. “But silence is golden!”

Her face became earnest again and she said:

“And the feast will be absolutely royal. It will last for seven days and seven nights! A thousand colored lanterns will burn in the palace and in the garden. Countless tables will be groaning under the weight of food and wine, hundreds of orchestras, hundreds of choruses of singers and musicians will be scattered throughout the rooms and garden paths. Songs will waft over from golden, ivory, and mother-of-pearl skiffs gliding over the blue surface of the water, every bouquet of flowers will emit singing and playing . . .

“An embarrassed yellow moon will float in the sky, and not a star will be visible. The stars will be hiding out of envy.

“There’ll be more beautiful ones below! All the stars of Wonderland—the loveliest women in Wonderland will pass before the throne. And Joab will be sitting on the throne, Joab with his old, wizened face, with glassy eyes, with a gaping mouth, like a fish. And he’ll gawk and gawk and try to choose a queen.”

“Ugh!” all the animals yelled and whistled.

“Shush!” called the old woman severely. “Bring the treasures to the palace! I’ll take care of the rest!”

“And now,” she continued, “get moving! Walk, fly, dash! Joab’s hunters are coming! They’re looking for wild game! Let no arrow strike you, no bullet hit you! Hurry! Hurry!”

The birds and the animals vanished, and the old woman hugged Deborah, kissed her, and said:

“Now, in God’s name, go and wake you know who!”

SEVENTH CHAPTER

What the old crow knew and told.

back to beginning

During these last few days, the forest of Faithstone was uneasy.

No sooner had the wakened birds and animals flown and dashed away than whole masses of hunters appeared in the forest. They began shooting and chasing. They shot and chased single creatures and whole flocks, and they killed the last few lazy animals, sleepy-heads, who hadn’t heard the sorceress calling and blasting, or else they had heard her but merely turned over and gone back to sleep. The huntsmen woke them and killed them as game for Joab’s feast.

Now the guests came walking, riding, and rolling from all corners of the country, in all sorts of conveyances, drawn by all sorts of animals.

Players and singers and conjurors—on foot, or else a whole bunch rumbling along in one farm wagon—hitchhikers! Heavy carriages were trundling along, carrying the loveliest village maidens—merry eyes glittered by, particolored ribbons wafted past, cheerful ditties sounded through. Coaches, carriages, cabriolets showed up. With glittering windows, with gold-and-silver harnesses, and expensive horses . . .

No animals snorted, no birds warbled, yet the woods were filled with noise and song, and the earth underfoot was shaking from the many people walking, galloping, trundling.

despoiled idyll - more humans than animals, plants

ending as narrated by crow-

And when all the noise reached Faithstone, the forest remained silent, dreadfully silent.

The snow was trodden and slushy, the earth full of wheel ruts and footprints.

Only a few crows were left on a white tree, and the oldest was telling the younger ones what had happened in Faithstone.

She was in the middle of her tale:

"An enormously long line of beauties filed past Joab.

"They walked slowly, marching step by step, to a soft, sweet, magical music. All the bands were playing at the windows of the palace, all the choruses were singing, and the parlor was aglitter with diamonds and adamantine eyes.

"Clothing of all colors was dazzling and blinding.

"And old Joab sat there, hunched over, with a pale face and bulging eyes, gaping and gaping

"Suddenly, not far from the throne, he saw a handsome young man with a white dove on his shoulder. What was he doing? He looked to the left and saw his own daughter, Deborah, with a brightly shining star, like a crown, on her head, and standing next to her was a young man who looked at everyone with eyes like two stars. And in front—he saw Shulamite coming in

"Only it wasn't really Shulamite, it was just her shape.

"Shulamite, in the guise of a white dove, was perching to the right, on the shoulder of the famous embroiderer; and, in the guise of Shulamite, the spirit of Joab's wife, whom he had tortured to death in the cellar, was coming over.

"And in the distance, Solomon appeared, dressed once again in his royal garments.

"Joab was so frightened he fell from his chair and crawled over to Shulamite on all fours, that is to say, to his departed wife, who had disguised herself as Shulamite.

"He crawled over, fell down, and put his white lips to the hem of her dress, croaking:

" 'I did all this because I loved you. Please forgive me, Shulamite, be my wife!' "

"The old fool!" called out the younger crows.

The old crow kept right on talking:

"That moment the miraculous thing happened.

"Shulamite and the white dove exchanged their shapes."

"The true Shulamite stood next to the famous embroiderer, and

the white dove changed her appearance again and for the last time, and Joab, insane with lust and terror, saw his dead wife before him. ✓
She was standing there in her shroud, and she put her dead white hand on his head

"That same moment, three doors opened, in front, and to the left and right.

"Four white bears came in from the right, four white bears carrying four golden poles of a red velvet wedding canopy, embroidered with pearls and diamonds, and the four bears stopped next to the famous embroiderer and Shulamite and took them under the canopy.

"And four white bears came in from the left and took the second couple under such a canopy: Deborah, Joab's daughter, with the bright star on her head, and the young man with the radiant starry eyes

"And in the front, four black, terribly black, crows flew in, with a black, black wedding canopy and halted in the air above Joab and his wife

"And our aunt also appeared.

"Our old aunt with white hair, burning eyes, and the shofar on the long golden chain. faded

"And Uncle Dwarf appeared in black velvet clothes and in a fur cap—a black fur cap with long, long silver rays—he was going to perform the ceremonies under the red canopies.

"And the old woman blew her shofar. Broken sounds came out. And the four demons in the guise of crows flew up with the black canopy and soared off with Joab and his wife, with whom he had once again stood under the wedding canopy.

"And as they flew, the crown dropped from Joab's head and rolled over to Solomon XXVII's feet.

"And the ceremony began at the red canopies, and soon other animals and birds appeared and laid the dwarf's treasures at Deborah's feet.

" 'Here is your dowry!' they said."

"Instead of the kingdom," said the young crows and asked: "What happened next?"

But the old crow called to them: "Listen, listen!"

A soft noise passed through the woods, quiet steps were heard.

A troop of tiny, very tiny, people, dwarfs in black velvet clothing, golden belts with glittering diamond ends, small, silvery fur-

edged hats, the kind worn by Jews on high holidays, and eyes that outshone everything else, appeared in the forest and marched through, calm and quiet.

The crows peered after them until they vanished.

"What was that?" the young crows asked the old crow.

The old crow replied: "I know and I'll tell you.

"That is a delegation that the dwarfs have sent to Solomon XXVII. These people of small bodies and large souls want to make peace with the people of large bodies and small souls."

"You mean they've never tried before?"

"Goodness! They know that until now the people in command over those with large bodies and small souls were the men who loved war. Each victory was a new diamond in their crowns.

"But the little people are certain that Solomon XXVII will not wage any more wars. He has suffered through exile and he has lived with a dwarf under the earth. He'll listen to them and understand what they have to say."

"Why didn't they try with Solomon the First? He never fought any wars and he was wise."

"They did visit him three times, but they never found him in. He never had time for them.

"The first time he was bringing back Pharaoh's daughter as his thousandth wife, and for her sake, and for her pleasure, he left the kingdom for a whole year.

"The second time—someone was bringing him a stable of horses from Egypt, so he had even less time, and the people of Jerusalem made fun of the little visitors!

"The third time, it was even worse. The Queen of Sheba was visiting Solomon.

"It seemed to be a matter of heavenly intervention! They probably didn't want peace there, and the dwarfs began to doubt whether Solomon was really all that wise! It didn't matter what the world said!"

The old crow fell silent and wistfully pecked at her tail.

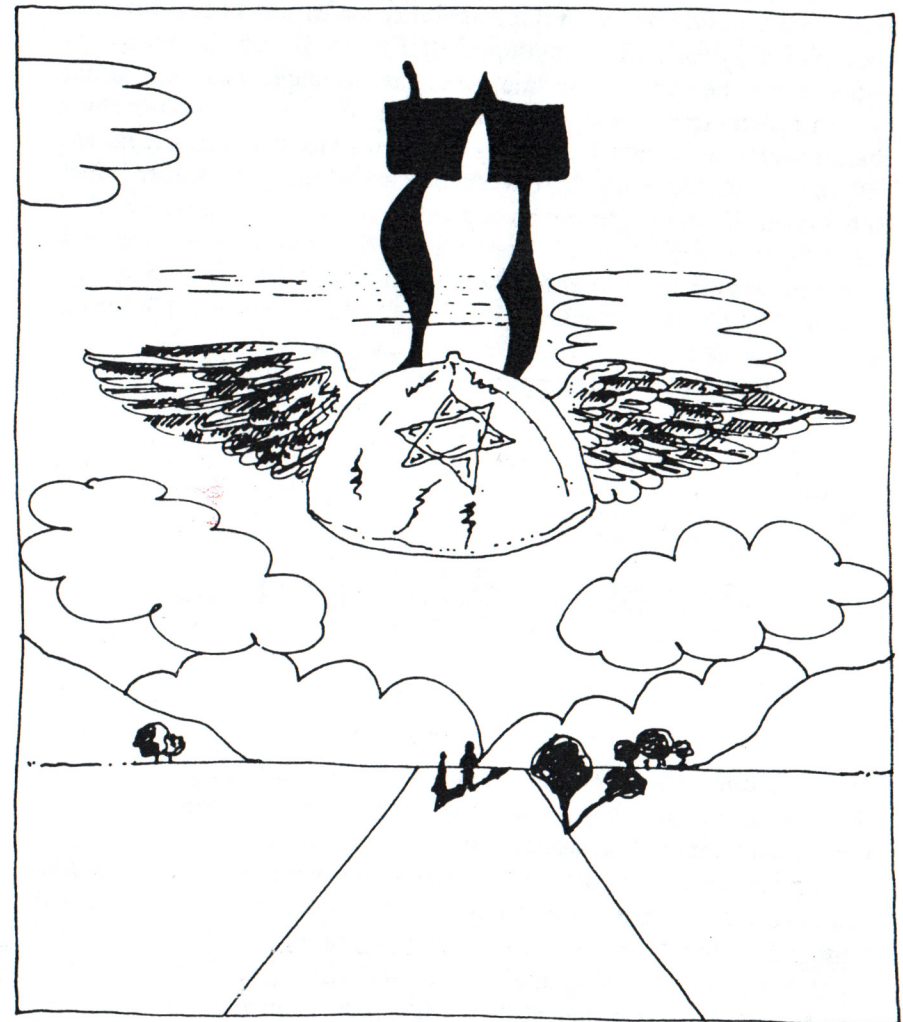
"Will they succeed this time?" asked the young crows.

"Who knows? The present Solomon is honest and decent. The famous artist is his son-in-law. Deborah's husband with the star-bright eyes is to become grand vizier . . ."

The crow began musing again and pecking at her tail.

Final tikken deferred

The Second Day



—you hear what I say?—knew all about Yeremei and the official and the red band and the visor and the conductor's Your Excellency—the whole show. He himself, Sholem Shachnah, that is, denied everything and swore up and down that the Kasrilevke smart-alecks had invented the entire story for lack of anything better to do. It was all very simple—the reason he came home late, after the holidays, was that he had made a special trip to inspect a wooded estate. Woods? Estate? Not a chance—no one bought *that!* They pointed him out in the streets and held their sides, laughing. And everybody asked him, 'How does it feel, Reb Sholem Shachnah, to wear a cap with a red band and a visor?' 'And tell us,' said others, 'what's it like to travel first class?' As for the children, this was made to order for them—you hear what I say? Wherever he went they trooped after him, shouting, 'Your Excellency! Your excellent Excellency! Your most excellent Excellency!'

"You think it's so easy to put one over on Kasrilevke?"

Translated by Isaac Rosenfeld

Devotion without End

I. L. PERETZ

THERE once dwelt in Safed a Jew of great wealth and good fortune, who traded in jewels, diamonds, and other precious stones. He was truly a man of great wealth, not like the upstarts of our day.

This Jew lived in a palace of his own, with windows that shone like gleaming eyes upon the Sea of Galilee; and about this palace bloomed a magnificent garden with all manner of beautiful trees and fruits. Songbirds sang in the sky, and on the earth there grew aromatic herbs that were a joy to behold and of much use in healing. Wide paths, strewn with golden sand, wound through the garden, and over these paths the crowns of the trees wove into one another to form a canopy of shade. Little arbors in which one could rest lay scattered along the edges of the garden, and in the ponds, which glistened like mirrors, there swam the rarest and whitest of swans. It was an earthly paradise.

The Jew had his own mules and camels with which to cross the desert;

and for sailing the sea he had his own ship, with his own crew and captain. Would that all Israel knew such blessings!

Nor was this Jew miserly with his wealth. He married his children into rabbinical families and into the families of the learned in both Babylon and Palestine; he sent his sons to study Torah, and when the time came for his sons to leave he would joyfully give to each of them his share of the inheritance. In time there remained at home only his youngest child, the beloved Sarah, whom he treasured above all others.

Sarah was exceedingly beautiful, a maiden soft in heart and sweet in temper.

And when the time came he presented his youngest daughter with a wonderful gift, brought from the Babylonian yeshiva: a youth named Chiya. The head of the Babylonian yeshiva wrote to the Rabbi of Safed that Chiya was no less than "the crown of my head" and "the crown of the yeshiva." And as for lineage, Chiya's was the finest, the very finest in Israel.

Rumors soon spread through the world that Chiya came from a princely line; but the records of his descent had been destroyed in the siege of Babylon, where Chiya had lost mother and father, brothers and sisters, and had himself been saved only through a miracle. Of this none ever knew for certain, since Reb Chiya, in his great modesty, never spoke of it. But it is known that when people saw the lad Chiya walking in the street they would gaze upon him as upon a radiant picture, and some would even stop to recite a blessing over his loveliness. For Chiya had a truly royal face: the Divine Presence shone down upon him.

Chiya settled with his father-in-law at Safed, devoting himself entirely to the study of Torah. Soon, however, his life of seclusion and repose came to an end, for his father-in-law died shortly after the wedding. The young man had no choice but to take over the worldly affairs of the family and to make journeys to every corner of the earth. So it was that he became one of the greatest merchants of his time.

But this, God forbid, did not tempt him to relinquish his study of the Torah. When Reb Chiya rode upon his camel in the desert, a servant would lead the animal by the reins, while he kept his eyes fastened upon the sacred book that lay in his hand. And in his ship there was a separate cabin where he would sit in privacy, giving himself unto Torah, both to that which is revealed and that which is unrevealed.

Reb Chiya even found time to devote himself to the Seven Wisdoms of the old sheiks whom he met on his journeys in the desert: to the