

There was an uproar in the heavens, and Nicholas was about to be cast down from his rule. But then Nicholas's angel intervened and began to protest:

"What is this—no law and no judge? If both of them were contending for the throne at the same time, there would be room to argue about who should cede to whom. But now, seeing that His Majesty Nicholas is already Tsar, how can he be deposed?"

So the heavenly court decided that Nicholas would remain king and that the Ruzhiner would yield and allow himself to be revealed. But in order to conciliate him, the Ruzhiner was allowed to go through all the heavens and take whatever he wanted. As he went through the Heaven of Song he took the most beautiful melody from it.

Nicholas has long been dead and forgotten, but the war between him and his opponent has not ceased. He has stretched his dead hand across three generations of Tsars. He has destroyed the Ruzhiner's court, desecrated his synagogue and cast up his bones from his grave. In their evil deeds "dead hands" are as terrible as living ones.

1914-1917

54 Tales of 1001 Nights

SHOLEM ALEICHEM

So we're at the point, aren't we, where my son Yekhiel was made mayor of Krushnik, and was running things, as they say, with an iron hand, and the Poles were scraping and digging, looking everywhere for lies to tell, spreading Haman's slanders against him and against all of us. Well, they kept at it, those Poles, ~~may~~ their names be blotted from memory, until finally the Germans began making "forays" into town. That is, they began searching and scavenging and shaking up people. And God helped them—they actually found something at Aba the sho'het's,^o some hidden circumcision knives, along with a packet of circumcision powder, which looks a bit like gunpowder. And then the fun began—God Almighty!

First off, they took the *schlimazel* (the *sho'het*, I mean) and threw him into jail, solitary confinement, so that God forbid no evil should come near him, and no one disturb his rest. And the whole town became, what should I say, a very pit of desolation and bitter lament. And all at once they came running to me. "What's going on?" they said. "Yankel, why don't you speak up? Your son," they said, "is the mayor, isn't he? And you," they said, "you're such a big shot, if you said the word, that schlimazel (the *sho'het*, that is) would be a free man."

Well, I tried to reason with them. "Get off my back," I said. "You're making a bad mistake, my dear friends. In the first place," I said, "I'm not the big shot you think me, and even if I am, let's say, that's no special advantage. On the

Just because," I said, "my Yekhiel is mayor, and because I'm pretty important around here—a big shot, as you say—just because of this," I said, "I'd do more harm than good. Because if you knew the Germans," I said, "like I know them, you wouldn't talk that way. I'll tell you exactly what a German is," I said. "A German hates flattery as much as a kosher Jew hates pork. A German won't stand for empty words, and as for bribery," I said, "forget it. A German's not a Russian who'll watch your hand to see if you've got a bribe there for him. A German," I said, "needs delicate handling, if you see what I mean."

You'd think that that would do it, right? But you're dealing with Jews. You say salt, they say pepper. So you say pepper, they say garlic. And all the while the *sho'het's* wife and her children were standing off to one side, weeping and wailing, tearing their hair out. I don't know about you, Mr. *Sholem Aleichem*, but I have an odd habit—when I see tears, I'm struck dumb. I can't stand to see someone crying. I can't, that's all. I'm not bragging that I'm good-hearted; it's the power of tears, if you see what I mean. But in the long run all that made no difference anyway. As it turned out, I didn't have to be begged. The authorities ordered me to come. And not only me, but our rabbi too, and the rabbiner,^o along with all the other first citizens of Krushnik. Our hearts sank, I can tell you, but we gathered up our courage and got ready to go. That is, we dressed in our Sabbath best, with top hats—very elegant, very fitting and proper. It was as if we weren't being sent for, but had decided on our own to go as a *delegation*.

Meanwhile, my wife saw me all decked out on a Wednesday afternoon. "Yankel," she said, "where are you off to?"

Naturally I didn't tell her they'd sent for us. Does a woman have to know everything? So I made up a story that we were going as a delegation to the Germans, to the commandant I mean, in order to save a poor Jew from the gallows.

Well, she wrung her hands and started wailing, "Yankel, you mustn't do it!" There was a terrible pain in her heart, she said. Lightning, she said, had struck her. Evil days were coming upon the children of Israel. . . .

As you'd expect, a wife. What does a woman know anyway? Though to tell the truth, my wife (may she rest in peace) was not as foolish as other women. In fact, she wasn't foolish at all. You might even say the opposite. She was clever, quite clever; and sometimes she could talk like a wise woman, a wonderfully wise woman! I don't say it because she was my wife or because she's now in heaven. After death, as they say, you become a saint on earth, but that's not why I praise her. I'm not like other men. Here's an example—if you'd go to Krushnik and ask around about Yankel Yunever's wife, Miriam Mirel, you'd hear only praise and praise and more praise! First, she was pious, and not just "respectable," God forbid, like other women who won't move an inch from the letter of the law. Besides that, she was religious, very religious! But who's discussing religion? We're talking about kindness, about the meaning of character. This was a woman! A vessel of goodness! A person without a gall!^o Well, maybe not *without* gall. Everyone has a gall, naturally, and if you step on it, it's got to burst, because a human being can't be more than a human being. if you see what I mean.

But I don't want to mix things up, and as you know I hate to brag. So I'll get right to the point. We are going, I and the rabbi and the *rabbiner*, and the other good men of Krushnik, to the head authority, the commandant, to hear him out. And we went confidently. After all, we made quite a show, as they say, with the

The rabbi appointed by the government.

N/F

A good-natured person.

now master

digression on wives

perished in the pogrom

Ritual slaughterer.

irony

- 1 - Poles accuse Jews of smuggling and arrested

rather himself or Krushnik's mayor there—you can't just dismiss something like that with a wave of your hand! And on our way we discussed what we'd say to the commandant. We decided that I would begin and address him in the words of Moses: "O Lord, you have begun to show your servants your greatness—that is to say, you have been gracious toward us, Herr German, from the day you set foot upon our land." And more of that kind of high talk. Why should we wait until he'd start? It would be best to get in a few words first, and then by the way, if you see what I mean, we could throw in something about the *shohet*—explain who the *schlimazel* was, why he'd hidden the ritual knives, just what that packet of circumcision powder meant—a regular lecture.

But as they say, if it's fated to be a disaster, you lose your tongue. That's where my real story begins. When I think of it even now, it makes my hair stand on end. . . .

In short then, we arrived at the commandant's headquarters, and there we found the *schlimazel*, Aba the *shohet* himself, tied up in the courtyard, and two soldiers with loaded rifles, one at each side of him. The *shohet* was trembling like a leaf and muttering something, probably his last confession. We were going to cheer him with a word or two, something like "Aba, God is with you!" But the soldiers gave us a nudge with their rifles—meaning one word to him, the *shohet*, and we'd be shot dead. And if a German says he'll shoot, trust him, especially when the whole world has gone crazy. At the slightest whim they'd shoot. Do you see what I mean or not? For example, someone comes by and says, "Got some tobacco, pal? If you do, all right. If not, I'll shoot." He doesn't give you time to think it over, let alone to defend yourself, to explain that you never use tobacco. Your life wasn't safe, that's the kind of world it was—try and do something about it.

To make a long story short, I don't have to tell you how we Krushniker Jews felt when we saw the *shohet* tied up and making his last confession. You can imagine it for yourself. I could only think, great God Almighty, what's going to happen to this Jew? And what will happen to his wife, the poor widow, and to his children, the orphans, if God forbid we can't get them to listen?

As we were standing around like that, thinking, out came not the commandant, but some other devil—a redhead, fat, well-fed, a cigar in his teeth. He'd just had a good supper and apparently more than a few drinks to wash it down. Along with him came two other officers. They looked at us; we looked at them. We examined each other, that is, without words for a while. No one knew what would happen. Now if it had been the commandant himself, and if he'd received us like human beings in his house, not outside there in the courtyard, then it would have been a different matter altogether, and quite a different sort of conversation. But this way, nothing. We stood and were silent—I and the rabbi and the *rabbiner* standing right up front, in the firing line. If you see what I mean. The other Krushniker dignitaries were standing behind us and pushing us from behind to say something. But how can you say something if you can't talk? Besides I was waiting for the rabbi to start—he was older. And the rabbi was waiting for the *rabbiner*—he'd been appointed by the government.

When they saw what they had there—a speechless delegation, a feast without food—the fat one yelled out to us, "Who are you?" So I stepped forward, let happen what may, and introduced him to the old man. "This is our rabbi," I said. "And the younger one, he's the *rabbiner*, the rabbi appointed by the government, and as for

me, I said, I'm Yankel. However, the *rabbiner*, I said, of the Lord Mayor of Krushnik."

You'd think, wouldn't you, that he'd be impressed? Not at all. He didn't move a muscle. So seeing that reputation didn't work, I began to plead, putting first things first, as they say. "We, the foremost citizens of Krushnik," I said, "come before you as a delegation," I said, "with a request, to beg mercy for this Jew"—and I pointed to the *schlimazel*, to Aba the *shohet*, that is.

The fat German heard me out, then motioned to the soldiers to take us away. So they took us, if you see what I mean, and put us into prison like real criminals, each in a separate cell. It all happened in a minute, much less time than it's taken me to tell you about it. Did they let us send word at least to our wives and children? No, they shoved us in, locked the doors, and that's that. Should we have asked them why? Useless! First, a German won't answer. That's one reason. Another is it could make things worse, God forbid. Wartime's a powderkeg. You have to watch what you say, if you see what I mean, because who knows which side will win and what the result will be? It could be that the top dogs will be turned out into the cold, and the winners wind up six feet below.

In short, we were in a tight spot. Although if you look at it another way, what could they have against us? After all, we were dealing with Germans, with gentlemen. But then again, this was a time when Germans weren't really German, or Frenchmen French, or Englishmen English. They were wolves, not men—human beings acting like animals, like wild beasts, a plague on them! It was worse now than at the time of the flood; it was the end of the world. You probably think they fined us or beat us with whips. Well, think again. But you'd never guess, not if you'd live nine lives, so don't trouble yourself. Give me a minute or two to catch my breath, and I'll tell you a pretty story. Then he so good as to tell me what it was—a joke? the real thing? or a dream? . . .

Let's call it a story about the new moon—I mean, a story about how we Krushniker Jews prayed to the new moon. You remember, don't you, where we left off? They had kindly seated us in prison, me and the rabbi and the *rabbiner* and the other good men of Krushnik, the town's pride and joy, because of the crime we'd committed—we'd taken the part of Aba the *shohet*, pleaded on his behalf, if you see what I mean, and tried to save a Jew from the gallows. So there we sat, each one of us in his own cell, not studying Torah and not sitting at work for ten rubles a week, but just sitting, like common thieves and drunkards, in prison. What could we do? We'd been seated, as they say, so we sat . . . sat one hour, sat two hours, sat three hours. . . . Soon it would be night—what were we sitting there for, I ask you? At home they didn't even know where we were, that's where it hurt! And besides, everything has to end sometime, as they say, so let it come, I thought, one way or another!

I tell you, my head was ready to burst. I kept thinking and thinking, and only of evil things, and of worse to come. I imagined, first, that they'd condemn us as criminals and sentence us according to the laws of war. Next they'd politely line us up—the finest Krushniker citizens, including the rabbi and the *rabbiner*, all in a row, and twelve soldiers would stand ready, rifles loaded, waiting for the good word. And then the commandant enters in person, so I imagine, and asks us to say our last prayers—he's a German, after all, a gentleman! At this I get a hot under the collar and I think, "Yankel, the ends approaching only 2 minute

Yankel
ready-made
speech

imaginary
speech

Gen. 40:18.

to death anyway; why not ease your conscience, as they say, and give him a piece of your mind?" And I begin in the language of our fathers, speaking as Abraham spoke before the gates of Sodom: "My Lord, harken to me, and hear me out. Do not take offense, O German, but let your servant's words find favor in the ears of his lord and master"—and so on, without putting the least emphasis on the fact that he's a German and a commandant and the conqueror of Krushnik.

And as I'm arguing with him (in my imagination, that is), the door opened and who do you think came in but a soldier with a loaded rifle. Once inside, he winked at me as if to say, "Be so kind as to follow me." Well, I could see there wasn't much choice, so I went. Outside it was pitch black. I looked around and saw the others were there, too—all of Krushnik's finest, the rabbi and the *rabbiner* included. Behind each of them stood a soldier, armed to the teeth.

Then the captain shouted "Forward!" and we went, the whole delegation, quietly, no words spoken, because talking wasn't allowed—strictly forbidden, as they say. Only sighs and groans that would break your heart—just like at Rosh Hashanah, during prayers before the *Shofar* is sounded. Did you ever hear the groaning then? My heart ached, especially for our rabbi, an old man seventy years old. What am I saying, seventy? He must have been then, according to my calculations, at least seventy-five, and if you really want to know, maybe even eighty, because I can still remember him at my wedding in Yunev. I was married in Yunev, you know. They brought him down from Krushnik, and by that time he was already an old man. I mean, not an *old* man, but gray-haired. And since then it's been... let's see, to be exact... no doubt as much as—actually, I don't remember; and anyway, I don't want to get off the track. That weakens the point of the story, if you see what I mean. I might forget where I'm at. Though as for my memory—God keep it always as clear as it is now. And to prove it, I'll tell you where I left off.

I was telling you about the old man, our rabbi, how he was walking out in front, and we Krushniker dignitaries were walking behind him, sighing and moaning and not allowed to speak a word. If only our families knew where we were—if only we ourselves knew where they were taking us! But nothing doing; like sheep to the slaughter, as they say. No sign they might be taking us to something good, because if so why wouldn't the Germans tell us where we were going? And certainly no one was waiting there to heap honors upon us, because then they wouldn't be pushing and shoving us—"Forward, march! Forward, march!" Before we could look around we found ourselves on Death Street, which leads to the new cemetery. I say the new one because in Krushnik we had two cemeteries, thank God, an old one and a new one. Of course, the new one was already old enough, and well populated, one grave set snugly beside the other. Pretty soon we'd have to find space for a third cemetery, if only God would let us live, and put an end to the war, and let Krushnik remain Krushnik and Jews, Jews.

Well, I won't drag this out. As we were going along the moon came out, and we could see that we were at the cemetery. What was I to think? Had someone in town died, some important person, or were they bringing some dead person here from another town, to be buried in a Jewish grave? But then why should we be here, and why, for that matter, a funeral with soldiers? But then again what

The shofar is blown in three sequences during the musaf service, and forty blasts conclude the entire morning service.

Judah standing before Joseph

home front vs. battle front

"miraculous" intervention

instincts on fails him; fails to grasp the situation

to the burial grounds?

As we were thinking this over, we looked up and saw—there he was, too, the *schlimazel*, *Aba the shofet*, I mean. He, and two soldiers with him! What was he doing here? Nothing much—just standing there with a shovel in his hands, digging a grave, and weeping, tears streaming down his face. Well, we didn't like the looks of it. In the first place, who was he digging a grave for? Second, what sort of a gravedigger was *Aba the shofet*? And besides that, what was he weeping about? Any way you looked at it, it was a puzzle. If you see what I mean, a mystery of mysteries, incomprehensible.

But it didn't take long—maybe as long as it's taking to tell you this, maybe even less—and all questions were answered. The captain gave an order and there emerged from out of nowhere a group of soldiers carrying shovels, and they took us, if you see what I mean, and stood us several steps apart from each other. Then they handed each of us a shovel and asked us to be so good as to dig graves, every one on his own private plot, since in two hours at most, so they gave us to understand, we'd be shot.

You want to know how we felt when they told us the good news? I can't speak for the others; that's their business. But for myself I can say absolutely, and give you my oath, that I felt—nothing. Simply and truly nothing. What do I mean *nothing*? Take a healthy person, strong and able, with wife and children and suddenly put a shovel in his hand and order him to dig his own grave since he's about to be shot! I ask you, Mr. Sholem Aleichem, think it over carefully—do you have any idea of what that means? No, you have to go through it yourself. It's a waste of time to explain. Though actually it wasn't so complicated. If a person had brains and was level-headed and could think around and about, he could see it all plainly for himself and stop worrying himself so much. "After all," I said to myself, "what's so special here? It's the old story. As they say, if God wants you to die, don't be a smart aleck; you've got to die. You're not the only one. People are dying in the thousands, tens of thousands, falling like flies, like straws in the wind. So just imagine, Yankel Yunever, that you're a soldier and in the heat of battle. Fool! Who thinks of death in the heat of battle? Or rather who thinks of anything but death? Because if you get right down to it, what's war if not the angel of death? And what's the point of telling the angel of death, if you see what I mean, to fear death?" Think it over, Mr. Sholem Aleichem. You'll soon see how deep that is!

Still, what's the good of philosophy? You want to get to the point, right? Well, I can tell you this much—I know as much about what happened next as you do. Suddenly confusion broke out, a clamor from heaven, a drumming of drums, a chaos of soldiers running and horses galloping. Great God Almighty, I thought, what's going on? A revolution? The earth opening under Sodom and Gomorrah? The end of the world? In an instant the soldiers vanished, and we Krushniker Jews remained all alone on the new burial grounds, shovels in hand, and—silence.

It was then we understood—not that we understood anything (why should I lie to you?), but we felt with all our five senses, if you see what I mean, that something extraordinary had happened, a true and genuine miracle from heaven, and we'd been saved from disaster. But for all that, we just couldn't say a word to each other, not a word! We'd lost our tongues, and that was that. And like one man, as if we'd decided on it beforehand, we threw down the shovels, pulled ourselves

together, and hit the road, saying—slowly, at first, then faster, and then

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pragmatic philo.

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Russian winter-offensive

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we ran, but really ran if you see what I mean, like you run from a blazing fire. Where did we get the courage? And especially the old rabbi, where did he get the strength to run like that? But he didn't last long, poor thing, and when he couldn't go any further he stopped short, with his hand on his chest, barely breathing. So we stopped too—it's not decent to leave a rabbi by himself in the middle of nowhere. We still couldn't say a word, and we still didn't know what was happening. But we could hear the drumming and the galloping and the shooting. Something was going on, God only knows what, but as it's written, "God will provide, so keep quiet." Quiet we were—we couldn't speak.

The first to say something was the old rabbi. "Children," he called to us, looking up toward the bright moon. "I can tell you that it's the Almighty," he said, "the Creator of heaven and earth who has done these things. God Himself," he said, "has taken pity on our wives and children and saved us from disaster. And so we owe it to God," he said, "to give thanks to His moon; it's the right time of the month." And without another word, he turned his face to the new moon—the rabbi, I mean—right there in the middle of town, and we stood around him. And the rabbi started chanting, "Hallelujah," cheerfully, and we all followed him, growing livelier as we went along, chanting, clapping, and leaping. By the time he got to "Let us dance in praise of His name," we were really dancing! Such a prayer to the new moon, believe me, Krushnik had never heard of since Krushnik was Krushnik. Never had and never will again. It was, as they say, a once-in-a-lifetime prayer to the new moon.

You can imagine we didn't know where we were, whether in this world or the next, when it came to the "Sholem aleichem's." I heard someone blubbing, right into my ear, "Sholem aleichem." I answered, "Aleichem sholem!" and looked around. It was him, the *schlimazel*, *Aba the sho'et*, I mean. How did he get here? Had he also been with us there at the burial grounds? A curse on it all! I'd completely forgotten—he'd been the first one! We must have been out of our minds. If you see what I mean, I only wanted to hug and kiss that *schlimazel*, and at the same time I wanted to hug the rabbi (may his memory stay with us always—he's now in another world, a better one). And the way he died! God Almighty! May it happen to all our enemies! You'll hear about it, don't worry; I won't leave out the details. That was a Jew! Where can you find Jews like him today?

But just think what a rabbi can do. Once we'd finished our prayer to the new moon, he wanted to say a few more words. He decided if you see what I mean, to explain a passage from the Song of Songs. "The voice of my beloved," he began. . . . I hope he'll forgive me for saying this, but he had one fault, our rabbi: he loved to hold forth, to give lectures. So we took counsel and decided nothing doing. A prayer to the new moon was one thing, but a commentary on the Song of Songs, with interpretations and illustrations and exhortations, in the middle of town, late at night, after such horrors and such miracles and wonders—that, brother, we could leave for another occasion. So we tucked in our coattails, as they say, and ran for home, each one of us. And there we met with another happy scene, I mean a real celebration. By comparison, everything we'd been through was mere child's play. You'll say that yourself when you hear the story. . . .

You know, Mr. Sholem Aleichem, Jews brag about the town of Kishinev.

Kishinev, they say, was world-famous for its pogroms and hooligans. 42! 42!

laugh at them if there were any Jews left there to laugh at. Kishinev! You call that a town? Kishinev was a dog compared to Krushnik. Do you hear me? Kishinev wasn't worthy of washing Krushnik's feet. Concerning the treatment of Jews, the Kishinever hooligans could have learned a lesson or two (if they don't mind me saying so) from our Russian Cossacks. To begin with, they didn't even have the right weapons. In Kishinev, if they felt like smashing a house, they'd have to gather up a hundred people, along with sticks and rocks and pebbles. But what good are such weapons?—if you can call them weapons. By the time you get something going, smash up a house or two, all the excitement's gone out of it and the party's over. Now in our town in Krushnik, there were dozens of good guns, or if you preferred there was a fine cannon. A few blasts of that cannon, and you've shot up the whole area, wiped out the marketplace with all its stores and stalls and the houses all around to boot. Do you see what I mean, or don't you? With one blow they wiped out all of Krushnik, didn't leave a shred behind, not a trace! They rooted us out from the bottom up, demolished everything Jewish, just as if it wasn't their own country they were in but the enemy's. As if Krushnik was some kind of fortress, another Paris, or a Warsaw! Though I must tell you that Krushnik was always, what should I say, a helter-skelter town, a town thrown open to the wind and the rain, without courtyards, without orchards, without gardens, without fences or walls—only houses and shacks, naked, bare Jewish homes; and these they smashed up, cut down, hacked apart, split in pieces, ground up, wiped out. Finished, no more Krushnik!

And was it only Krushnik, you think? The way it was with Krushnik, that's how it was with Rakhev, too, and with Mazel-Bozhetz, and with Bilgoray, and with every other Jewish town all around as far as Lublin. But not Lublin, of course—that was the provincial capital, and Poles lived there as well as Jews; and it was they, the Poles, who unleashed the furies. If not for them, if they hadn't poured oil on the fire with their lies, then maybe nothing would have happened.

The first to show up was the Honorable Mr. Pshepetsky, head of the administrative council. The morning after our prayer to the new moon, he ran to tell the Russian officials, personally, that we Krushniker Jews were hand in glove with the Germans. Proof was, he said, that no one wanted the job of mayor; only my Yekhiel, he said, would take it on.

Well, the Russians didn't have to hear more. They were furious, beside themselves with rage against all Jews, and especially against the mayor himself, against my Yekhiel. A summons was issued from headquarters that he should be taken—my Yekhiel, that is—dead or alive! And not only him. They were to take all of us, if you see what I mean, all the first citizens of Krushnik, along with the rabbi and the rabbiner, and bring us to Ivan, dead or alive—he desired to see us.

Don't you think I knew beforehand it would turn out that way? I knew! My word as a Jew I knew, and the proof is that I warned everyone. "Jews," I said, "as you love God, let's get out of here!" I told them in good time, too, that night, just as soon as we heard the Germans running and Ivan coming on with his Cossacks. Because I knew that where Ivan set foot no grass would grow. So I told them, "Let's get out of here, wherever our feet will carry us. Anywhere in the world," I said, "but not here."

Well, I almost convinced them—all but one. That was the old man, the rabbi. He just dug in his heels and refused to budge. He didn't want, said,

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pogrom
no strategic value

perfidy of the Poles

accuses Jews of collaboration w/ enemy

Gen. 47:30.

the sake of running. "If the God of Israel wants to preserve us," he said, "He'll preserve us, as He has up until now; and if not, God forbid, then it's a sure sign," he said, "that that's our fate. And if so," he said, "then let it at least be as it's written, 'I shall sleep with my ancestors,' "" In short, all he wanted was to be buried like a Jew and remain forever in his own Krushnik. The world's full of evil temptations. But he couldn't have even that satisfaction. Man thinks and God winks, as they say. He forgot to reckon, our rabbi, with those two-legged beasts.

If you remember, the whole business began during the night of the new moon. Ivan and his Cossacks set out to ransack our homes on the pretense of looking for runaway Germans, and in the course of things they did what they always do— what they did, for example, in Kishinev, in Bialystok, in Balta, in Kateri-Neshoy, and in other Jewish towns. The only difference was that there they beat people and robbed them, while here they very methodically emptied our pockets, inquiring of each one of us, "*tshasiki? tshasiki?*" ("watches? any watches here?"), not meaning watches in particular: watchchains, rings, earrings, and money-purses would also do. Then when they'd taken it all, everything finished and done with—as the text has it, "emptied out Egypt," carried off all its treasures of wealth—then they proceeded to the people: bound them, beat them, stabbed them, shot them, and hanged them. Especially hanged them. They hanged so many of us there weren't any trees left for hangings. They had to place logs over the rooftops, and there on the logs they continued hanging the Jews of Krushnik, one by one.

Their first victim was our rabbi, the old man, blessed be his memory. The Cossacks broke into his house early, just at daybreak. He'd already put on his prayer shawl and phylacteries and was starting to pray, when they tore in like a flood. "Vodka!" they shouted—meaning they wanted whiskey. Why whiskey at daybreak? Simply out of hunger, if you see what I mean, they were faint and famished, poor men, and so they needed a drop of whiskey. But how would an old rabbi come by whiskey, especially at a time when it was, as they say, strictly forbidden? So he gestured with his hands (not wanting to interrupt his prayers) that he had no vodka to offer them. For that he received a healthy curse, along with a slap for good measure, so that his prayer book fell from his hands. When he bent to pick it up he received another blow to the head from behind. Then the Cossacks lifted him, unconscious, from the floor, wrapped him neatly in his prayer shawl and phylacteries, tied him to a horse (to the horse's tail, I mean), and dragged him through town into the marketplace. There they hanged him from a tree and set guard over him, with orders that he must hang like that for three days and three nights. No one should dare take him down.

So he hung there, the old rabbi, wrapped in his prayer shawl, beaten and bloodied, in the middle of the marketplace, swaying back and forth in the wind, as though standing in prayer. Whoever passed by stopped to look, then ran off shuddering to tell his neighbor, and the neighbor told *his* neighbor, and soon people all over town were whispering the news to each other, and then the crowd came running to see. Cows! Cattle! Why were they running? What was so special here? Hadn't they seen a hanged man before? And for that matter, what about me, old fool that I was—why did I run to see it? Don't ask how much health it cost me, how many sleepless nights. To this day I see him when I close my eyes—wrapped in his prayer shawl, his face petrified, blue and streaked with blood,

Hengt shimenesre;
the moment of
most intense
devotion is the
Eighteen

aying back and forth so he stood there saying his prayers.
What am I saying?

Benedictions, the
so-called Standing
Prayer.

He wasn't standing, he was hanging, if you see what I mean, hanging in prayer!°
But let's not talk about it anymore. Silence is best, as they say. Let's talk of happier things. Wasn't there a pogrom in your town? Didn't they hang Jews there? And by the way, what country are *you* running from, Mr. Sholem Aleichem?

1915

55 A Night

MOYSHE-LEYB HALPERN

I

Ohay, oh—

Who calls this way? Who is the man who rode the slopes
At midnight down the mountain? At the wildest gallop
He came straight down the mountain, arms stretched long and wide,
As a host of horsemen hunted him down the cliffsides,
A nation of riders with whips held high in the air
Flashing from clouds of smoke, sharp as lightning. Here, there,
Flames rose through the night like wild birds taking flight,
And echoing, echoing, the wild call crisscrossed the valley—
Ohay, oh, oh, ohay—

5

10

III

And bringing us all a world of rest and peace
Will come a king mounted on a snow-white steed.
Whether as a blessing, whether as a curse—
Thus it stands written in the sacred verse:
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

5

While stars glowed and flowers into blossoms burst
And the bird lifted its song in the forest,
Life hung on, waiting an eternity
To make the king welcome when he rides by.
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

10

This earth was brought to ashes through blood and fire.
And who among us has the sword ever spared?
On whom will his most holy radiance shine,
Pure and lucid as the sun, when he rides in?
And it shall come to pass in the end of days.

15