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UNCLE MOSES

A Novel

BY

SHOLOM ASCH

Authorized Translation from the Yiddish by

ISAAC GOLDBERG

CENTRAL

NEW YORK

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UNCLE MOSES

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

OVER WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE

THE sun was setting over lower New York. It seemed that, of all places in the world, she had chosen as the scene of her setting the towering, darkening structures that rose on the banks of the East River. Yet despite the height of these box-like edifices, despite the rivalry in which one sought to climb higher than the other, here from the Williamsburg bridge they appeared humble and diminutive against the lofty dome of the sky, like so many card houses built by children at play. And the card houses were lost, forsaken amid the broad and lofty expanse, standing as if ashamed that they should have dared to raise their heads so high above the earth.

It was a fiery sun whose blood-red disk poured streams of light over the city. From the direction of the ocean a powerful hand drew delicate veils over the blood-red streams, and over the blue fields that stretched as far as the eye could reach across the heavens above lower New York. It was as if the veils sought to screen from human

sight what was going on there below. All at once the huge, forsaken stone boxes lighted up; the window-panes glowed and flashed with the crimson of the setting sun. And New York's down-town section, bathed in the fires of the waning day, looked like a new confused Babylon, like an ancient ruined city that had crumbled to dust from sheer old age. The high, solitary, flashing walls were the ruins of forgotten sun temples,—of wild heaven-climbing towers that men had once built whereby they might ascend to the sky and wage war with the gods.

The Williamsburg bridge was like a living giant of iron that had stretched across the East River clutching at either bank with his hands and feet while over his back, like wild iron creatures with flaming heads, flew one train after the other. And these wild creatures had devoured thousands and thousands of people. Tightly packed together they looked with terrified faces through the little windows,—the iron monster's window-eyes. It was the iron boxes, now aglow with the setting sun, sending back their dwellers for the night to their wives and children across the river.

The speeding trains and their human cargo were so many and ran so frequently, that the iron giant groaned under the burden. At times it seemed as if the colossus would be unable to endure the strain any longer,—as if he would release the grip of his hands and feet upon the banks and send everything pitching into the deep river below. But every time another train dashed across, the giant would merely shudder; his back would bend in soft, elastic fashion, and the train would glide over him like steel skates over ice.

The succession of trains was unending. From every corner of the metropolis they burrowed their way through

the holes in the earth, emerging upon the giant's back. One after the other; two at a time,—even three simultaneously, each seeking to outdistance the other. Across either side of the giant's belly ran a constant stream of trucks, automobiles and street cars like insects that had attacked a huge body. And the giant bore it all,—groaned and endured everything.

To one side there is a walk for foot-passengers, but this thoroughfare is the only deserted section of the bridge. Across it, on this early autumn evening, a father and daughter were returning from New York to Brooklyn—to Hopkins Street—on foot. Beneath them sped the trainloads of persons, and before their view shone lower New York in the hues of the setting sun. But they saw nothing of this. They were engrossed in their own conversation, and not even the din of the elevated trains drew their attention.

Their home was situated under an elevated railway structure, and their ears had therefore become so accustomed to the song of iron that the shrill screech of the wheel upon the rail seemed to them the sound of the air they breathed. . . . Nor were their eyes caught by the grandiose scene afforded by the sun as its colors played upon the countless window panes. Their eyes had become habituated to beholding only useful objects and to avoiding matters of external interest. Not even for a moment was their conversation interrupted. Now it was the daughter who continued her heated speech.

"Shame on you, papa. You didn't come home for two days. We didn't know where to hunt for you. Mamma was crying, and the children were crying. We all thought you were lost. Shame, papa!"

The daughter who addressed such words to her father

was fourteen and a half years of age, and attended the public grammar school, grade 8-B. Yet she was so well acquainted with all the family affairs and secrets that she was not at all ashamed to mention them to her parent. Moreover, Masha was no longer a child. With her fourteen and a half years, with her American "experience" and her 8-B public school education, she was wiser and better educated than her father and mother, who had remained as "green" and helpless as when they had first arrived from their Polish village.

For a moment Masha was silent. Her little cheeks grew red and her deep black eyes sparkled more brightly than ever. She straightened her long black braids, the sole adornment of her person, and one which ill became her short, outgrown dress. Her long red hands stuck far out of her short sleeves. She kept pulling her sleeves down over her wrists, but when one sleeve yielded the other would slide upwards, thus engaging her in a constant struggle.

A cool breeze blew from the sea, wafting the green, damp odor of the ocean across the bridge and bringing a salty taste into their mouths. The father and daughter became hungry. The wind played havoc with Masha's braids and raised her short skirt high, revealing altogether too much of her shapely legs. Masha fought with the wind, now thrusting down her skirt to cover her legs, now pulling down her sleeves to warm her hands. And the joyful knowledge that her father was going to work on the following day bore her home to her mother on wings.

By the time father and daughter had reached Hopkins Street, it had already grown dark. Warm gas lights illuminated the shop-windows. Before the moving-pic-

ture house and the ice-cream parlor, stood children gazing with envious eyes at the boys and girls who entered these precincts on pleasure bent.

Two of the children, catching sight of Aaron Melnick being led along by his daughter Masha, recognized their father and rushed to him with a joyous shout. "Papa!" They followed along. Masha, with a word and a nod, quieted the children. Afraid lest her father might disappear at the very door to the house, she kept him very close to her. But the nearer Aaron Melnick approached to the doorway of his home, the surer his return became to both him and Masha. Before the door of the house the women were taking the air in the mild evening; half washed and half dressed, they were awaiting the return of their husbands from work. The neighbors, who were intensely interested in one another's family affairs, were well acquainted, as may readily be imagined, with the tale of Aaron Melnick's desertion of his wife and children. It was with deep satisfaction, therefore, that they now beheld Masha leading her father back to his family; and as if they wished to admit her into their matronly companionship, they complimented her with glances and nods for the good work she had accomplished in bringing back her father.

Inside, Aaron found his wife Rosa with their infant child in her arms; the tot, as if he knew that it was the only son among the four girls that Aaron had had by his wife, always refused to leave his mother's hands. Rosa, who although but thirty looked like a woman past forty, had retained but a single token of her youth,—her thick black tresses, whose youthful sheen did not all become her aging face and the neglected gold teeth which flashed here and there from between her lips. Sorrow and mis-

fortune had embittered her; holding the child on her arm all day long caused her the keenest physical pain. She glared at her husband.

"Just look. Here he is, back again. The lost treasure has been found."

Rosa was on the point of adding to her sarcasm, when little Masha intervened, took the child out of her mother's arms and said:

"Mamma, hush! Won't you be still?"

"And why should I?—For fear that he'll run away,—the precious jewel?" retorted the mother more spiritedly than ever, after she had caught her breath with release from the daily burden of the infant. "Let him run off. Who sent for him?"

"Mamma, pa's going to work tomorrow. Uncle Berrel got him a place. Hush, now."

The word "work" produced a marked effect, and the mother's tone changed somewhat.

"So! He's going to work, is he? And he won't leave me and my little ones to starve, will he? The scoundrel!"

But Aaron did not care to give his wife the satisfaction of having her way. The daily troubles that life had brought them had poured so much bitterness into their hearts that their sole pleasure came to consist in provoking each other. Yet this enmity had not prevented them from living together for fifteen or sixteen years,—from having children. It was as if this very enmity were the cement that held their lives together, and when Aaron saw that the fires in his wife's eyes were quenched by his daughter's words, he grew vexed.

"Let your mother go to work. Isn't she healthy enough for it? Why do *I* have to be the one?" he grumbled from his corner.

"What did you bring him home for?" Rosa began to scream at her daughter. "I'll smash the door in his face. Out of my house! Out of my house this very minute."

Masha stood in a quandary, puzzling her brain for some way to save the situation. She ran from one to the other, imploring them with her childish eyes and hands.

"Mamma, be quiet, I beg you! Papa, hush, I beg you! It looks bad to the neighbors."

And into her little head came a big thought: Her father was hungry and tired; her mother, too, was exhausted and famished; the house was dark and gloomy. That was why they were quarreling. Now suppose she should set the table and serve supper! The room would be light, and they wouldn't quarrel. Quickly she lighted the gas and the room grew bright. And surely enough, no sooner had the light been turned on than man and wife ceased bickering. In the full glare of the light they seemed ashamed to face each other before their daughter's gaze. Rosa commenced to weep her ill fortune. Why had this cruel man dragged her to this hopeless "America"? And if only she could go to the graves of her father and mother and tell them into whose hands they had entrusted her, the poor folks would be unable to rest in their tombs. Aaron sat in his corner as silent and motionless as a graven image. The children began to come in from the street, clamoring for supper. Their mother sent them to their father and to the devil. At this Masha gave the infant into the arms of her sister and went out to get something to eat. She discarded her first plan, which had been to borrow fifty cents of the butcher's wife on the first floor, to be returned when her father resumed work. The fact that her father had come back, and had been provided with a position through her

uncle, infused strength and confidence in her. Boldly she entered the corner grocery and called for bread, butter, cheese and canned tomato-soup, even adding to her order pickles and pickled herring. The grocery man eyed her in astonishment. Whereupon she replied, proudly: "Papa's going to work tomorrow at a job that Uncle Berrel got for him." The grocery man understood and raised no further objections. Her statement that "papa's going to work tomorrow" was a magic-ring that opened up the grocery to her, and the butcher's shop as well. She got what she asked for. Masha was right. No sooner had the light been turned on and the sumptuous supper served by Masha,—pickles, pickled herring, canned tomato-soup and all,—than man and wife ceased their recriminations. Not only this, but Aaron Melnick recalled that he was the father of four girls and a boy, whereupon he sat the children around the table, admonishing them to behave themselves. And about that table sat the happiest of families, eagerly eating supper.

CHAPTER II

CHILDREN

AARON MELNICK had told a lie. Nobody had promised him a position. That night as he lay abed with a child at each side, the thought of his predicament came strongly home to him. He feared the coming day, when his wife and children would wake up and find him still at home. This grown-up man, the father of five children, felt as he had felt years before in his childhood days, when he had played hookjack from Hebrew school and tremblingly anticipated a thrashing. And the feeling overwhelmed him with a sense of abandonment and shame, as his children snuggled their heads against him.

Aaron was not fond of his children when he looked upon them as a group. Thus considering them he saw in them the cause of his misfortune, his servitude. Yet, viewing them as individuals he felt for each of them a distinct affection,—each had a special spot in his heart. Celia, the one next to Masha, was frightfully fond of the "movies." Ever since her uncle had taken her to a "movie show" she had been imitating everything she had seen. She would take a pillow, transform it into an infant, and wrap her mother's shawl around the child and herself, thus giving a performance of "Mother and Child." That very night, indeed, after the generous meal, the Melnick family celebrated the reconciliation of the parents with a special representation by Celia.

Aaron forgot his abandonment, his bitterness, and laughingly joined in the child's play. It was really Celia and her mimicry that had drawn Melnick back to the bosom of his family. But now Celia had become once more a very, very little girl, with a dirty mischievous face which even in the repose of sleep seemed to make an impudent, self-confident grimace at everybody. A sorrow seemed to have flown from the child's spirit; her father's return had brought to her a new sense of security and like a lambkin she nestled close to him, twining hands and legs about her father's body.

The next youngest child, Stella, was much different from Celia,—exceedingly timid and bashful. Whenever a stranger entered the room she would hide in a corner and cry. The perpetual quarrels of the parents, amid which she had been brought up, had instilled in the child such a fear of people that she would cry at night because of the terrible nightmare that had visited her. Ever since the father had left home the child had been afraid to sleep altogether. Habituated to snuggling against her father's strong bosom and there feeling secure against all harm, that night, for the first time since his disappearance, she had sought him out and found untroubled slumber.

To Aaron it seemed that the two childish bodies were tightly clasping him, determined to hold him fast, begging him for their sakes to harness himself once more to the yoke that he had so freely cast aside.

And he rebelled against resuming the yoke. He called to mind how many years he had been working on the Bowery, and the dreams and hopes he had had of liberating himself from the Bowery workshop, striking out in business for himself and building a foundation for the

future. And all these hopes he had sewn into the trousers that he made at the machine. Until once he gathered the strength to rebel, to put an end to such a life and go in quest of something new. And now must he return to the old life,—go back to the Bowery without any hope that things would ever change,—that this would be only temporary? Must he bury himself forever, without a ray of hope for anything better? . . .

Uncertainty and dejection tortured him at night,—stifled him like evil spirits. He dreamed a horrible dream, so horrible that he cried out in his sleep. It was not a human lamentation, however, but a certain beastly, incisive howl. His wild weeping was such that his children aroused him.

"Wha—what?" he asked. "What is it, Masha?"

"Papa, what's the matter with you? What are you crying about?"

"Who—I? Nothing. Why did you get up?"

"You were crying so terribly, as if you were being killed."

"Nothing. Come into bed. It's cold. . . ."

The children slept with their parents,—the younger ones with the mother, the older ones with the father. The only one that slept alone, on a bed made of three chairs, was the eldest, Masha. But even she, during cold nights, would steal into her father's bed. So that this night she gladly accepted her father's invitation, while her two little sisters rolled aside to make room for her.

No sooner had she lain down than Aaron suddenly said:

"Masha, you've grown up to be a smart girl. Listen. Do you want your father to be forever enslaved to a sewing-machine in Uncle Moses's shop? Do you want

us to live forever in poverty? You understand me,—you're a clever little girl. If I should go back to work now—I'll work at the machine for the rest of my days. I'll become and remain a wretched operator, without hope of anything better. And all of you,—you and the little ones,—will have no time to grow up. You'll have to go to work as soon as possible. Would you have it so? Would you?''

''It's our luck, I suppose, that we should have been born of poor parents. Then we can go to work, too. What else can you do?''

''If I only had time,—only a couple of months to look around for something else. And if I only had a little money with which to get a start in some other line. Why, just a short while ago a townsman of ours came from the old country and simply refused to enter Uncle Moses's employ. 'I'll sooner die of hunger in the streets than work for another,' he swore. Well, he managed to get some money together, is now in the jewelry line, selling it on the installment plan. and thus has a business of his own. If you people would only stop nagging me and let me catch my breath.''

The girl was for a moment lost in thought. She looked at her father, and by the dim light of the gas, which burned all night, she could make out his reddened eyes. She felt pity for him.

''Suppose you did have a little money,'' she asked finally,—''what then?''

''I'd buy some merchandise and go peddling. I'd sell jewelry on the installment plan, I'd take orders for grocery from door to door. Certainly I'd never go back to that prison on the Bowery.''

''And how much do you need?''

"A hundred dollars, my child, a hundred dollars."

"And can Uncle Moses lend you that much if he cares to?"

"If he cares to,—of course. But what's the use of talking? I'll have to go back. I'll . . . Let her be patient,"—he pointed to his wife—"until I get a place. As for Uncle Moses, I can't return to him. He certainly won't take me back."

"But you said you had a place,—that Uncle Berrel got you one."

"That was a lie. I didn't want to make all of you feel bad. How could I have a position? I can't face Uncle Moses. I've insulted him. And I will not go to work for anyone else. You'll have to get along as if I weren't here. Imagine that I'm dead and buried,—that I have gone forever."

The girl said nothing. A thought was stirring in her little head. She was concocting a plan whereby the hundred dollars could be got for her father, so that he might try his luck. There was but one way, and that way led to Uncle Moses. She had never seen this Uncle Moses, but she felt sure that when she met him she would get the money her father needed. She silently resolved upon such a course.

In the meantime Masha had made a place for herself in the bed. She twisted her legs about, and as she did so, she kicked against the other children until all three were awake. And when the smaller sisters saw that Masha had joined them, the unusual event deprived them of all desire to sleep. They began to play, to tickle one another and shove one another about, bursting into laughter. Masha forgot the deep plans she had laid for procuring the hundred dollars for her father,—the money

so necessary to his starting upon a new, "big," happy life. Feeling a dig and a kick, she paid back in kind. Her sisters began to climb about, using their father's strong, manly body as the ladder. Aaron, too, forgot all his troubles. There was something soothing and pleasant in the touch of these cool, childish bodies that caressed his skin. He began to frolic with them, patting them playfully. And there was a slap for every year in each child's age. This amused the children immensely and their joyous laughter woke up the tots in their mother's bed. Whereupon, migrations began from the father's bed to the mother's and vice-versa, until they had continued so long as to awake "the devil." Their mother awoke.

"What in thunder does this mean? Up already? Day isn't long enough for you, so you want the night to play in, too?"

The children quickly drew the quilts over their heads and pretended deep slumber, snoring loudly. One of them, the very youngest, could not restrain himself and burst into hearty laughter. Whereupon the others promptly followed suit, filling the room with their merry din.

Aaron had, together with his children, drawn the quilt over his head; he, too, was afraid of his wife. The joyous laughter of the children, however, infused him with new spirit. All at once he began to understand the sense of sewing trousers. He understood the eight years that he had been working at Uncle Mose's shop on the Bowery, and resolved to thread himself once again into the needle—that his children might laugh with the merry peal of youth.

CHAPTER III

DAWN

IT was still dark when sorrow thrust Aaron Melnick forth from his home. His wife and children except Masha, were still fast asleep. Aaron had dressed very quietly, had tip-toed into the kitchen, lifted up the inverted pot, under which his wife kept the children's bread, and was about to take out a piece. But he suddenly thought of something, made a gesture and turned to the door.

"Papa, where are you going?" Masha had grasped his hand.

"Is that you, Masha? Why have you got up so early? Back to bed!"

"I heard you dressing. I won't let you go. I'm afraid you won't come back."

Aaron's lips curled into a hard, bitter smile.

"Silly little goose, go back to bed. Do you expect to follow me around wherever I go? I'm going up to Uncle Berrel's. I must talk matters over with him. We'll go together to Uncle Moses."

Masha looked her father straight in the eye.

"Will you come home at night?"

"Of course I will. Where else do you imagine I'll go?"

Masha for the moment forgot that she was a "grown-

up.'' Something came over her. Suddenly she nestled her head against her father's bosom and said:

''Don't worry.—Why should you? We'll get out of this somehow or other. I'll get some groceries on trust. Don't worry, pa; everything will be all right.''

Aaron was somewhat vexed by the child's words, so he mumbled:

''It's all right. Good-bye.'' And he hurried out.

The sun was rising over lower New York. Like a foreigner entering a country for the first time it seemed to wander over the heaven's vast expanse, shedding before it streams of light that inundated the fields of the sky. The silence of night still reposed in deep slumber over the lofty towers and roofs of the down-town sky-scrapers. It was as if they were just stirring out of sleep, and the thousands upon thousands of window-walls began to blink in the morning light. The iron giant,—the Williamsburg bridge than spans the river,—woke, too, stretched its hands and legs and began its daily labors by helping across the sleepy car that carried Aaron Melnick and a half-awake conductor. Soon, on the streets, the first men began to appear. They were solitary souls,—persons who live in the night,—drivers of milk wagons and bakery wagons, newspaper deliverers. Greater New York is arising. There is the first call. From somewhere sounds the clang of a street car's bell, while overhead a solitary elevated train rumbles across. The streets are still littered with yesterday's refuse. Ash cans, half-burned boxes set on fire the night before by the urchins, old pieces of furniture thrown out from some house. On the boards before the house windows the remnants of yesterday's meal are being aired. And worn-out, dried clothes dance like spirits of the dawn upon the fire-

escapes and from the clothes lines. Darkness has been surprised by day, and the light has revealed all of night's secrets.

With a guilty, self-conscious smile Aaron climbed the dark stairway. Asphyxiating odors of yesterday's food, of sleeping persons, of unaired bed-clothing, issued from every door. The odors were mingled with the cries of infants in the cradle. From behind several doors could be heard the cursing of quarrelling couples, and above all the racket, on the top flight, Aaron could hear the familiar sing-song of his brother's pious readings.

He found his brother in his prayer-shawl and phylacteries, seated before the table in a tidy corner of the kitchen, reciting from the Mishnas. His sing-song intonation, however, did not wake his son Charlie, who was sleeping in the opposite corner upon an improvised bed. As soon as Berrel caught sight of his brother, he interrupted his chant and cried out with a joy that shone from his dove-like eyes:

"Well, see who's here! Aaron! What are you doing here so early?"

"I came up to listen to your praying. I know that you pray early in the morning, before going to work."

His brother looked around to make sure that no one overheard him, and replied, very softly:

"What are you so angry about? With whom? With your wife and children? What Jew does a thing like that? Your daughter, Masha, was here yesterday looking for you. It's a pity. Consider what you're doing!"

"Please don't bring that up," replied Aaron sharply. "If you do, I'll leave this very minute. I came up to ask you whether there happened to be a place for me in your shop. Is there?"

"What? You want to work at shirts, with all the Gentile girls? How much can you earn? And what's happened between you and Uncle Moses? They told me you were studying to be a cutter."

"May he be roasted alive. I'll never cross his threshhold again. Let him keep his favors. No more relatives for me. Working for relatives is worse than hell itself. I've had enough. I want to try my luck with a stranger."

"But in the shirt trade, among old Jews and Gentile girls? Heaven forbid,—you, the father of four children! How much can you earn?"

"I don't care how much, as long as I make a change to something new. We'll see. We'll go together."

Gnendel entered from the next room and although she was already a grandmother,—although she had been in America for twelve years and had had five children, whose pay she practically tore out of their hands, she still wore the same elegant wig with the three curls over her shining forehead, just as she had been accustomed to do at home, in Poland, when dressed in gala array for the synagogue on the Sabbath and other holy days. While America had had a devastating effect upon her husband Berrel, having in a very short time made a bent old man of him, it had affected Gnendel in quite the opposite way. Gnendel had grown younger in America. She had here become "liberal." Instead of *Zeena Ureena,** which had been her spiritual food in her old home, she began here to read Yiddish newspapers and take an interest in everything. The children often took her along to the Jewish theatre, which she enjoyed immensely; she was

* The "Zeena Ureena" is a book, particularly intended for Yiddish women, containing an exposition of the Bible plentifully besprinkled with folk tales.

fond, moreover, of attiring herself in her daughters' cast-off shoes and altered dresses, so that, in a certain manner, she managed to follow the fashions, except that she was a trifle behind. Her husband's piety and devotion to the sacred books, which at home had been her pride, had in America lost their value to her almost entirely. And because the machine had aged Berrel so quickly and bent him over, he lost all attraction and respect in her eyes. She made life hard for him in his declining years.

"Well, pack up and make room," cried Gnendel to her husband. "The children want their breakfast." (She accented the final word, as she was very fond of using the new English terms that she picked up from her children.)

"The day's begun. The family's getting up," said Berrel to his brother with a smile that streamed from his clear, liquid eyes. He gathered his sacred books and carried them to a corner. "You remember, Aaron,—at home I used to live by day, together with all the rest,—when they were awake. Here I live by night, when they're all asleep. What am I by day? Nothing. A wretched shirt-maker, sitting amongst Italian girls sewing shirts. To my wife and children I am nobody. But at night, if you please, when they're all asleep, I become Berrel once again. I study my page of the *Gemara*, my section of the *Mishna*,—I listen to the words of the Master as I did in the old country. Then it seems to me that I am back in the House of Study, studying away so contentedly. America is a topsy-turvy place. We live here by night. By day we are dead."

CHAPTER IV

BROTHER BERREL AND HIS FAMILY

"CHARLIE, Charlie, get up! Everybody's dressed!" Gnendel was trying to wake the boy who was asleep upon the improvised bed in the kitchen corner.

"What? Is he still sleeping,—the student? He imagines he's in the old country. He'll lose his job again and we'll have to work for him!" cried Deborah, Berrel's eldest daughter, a young lady of some twenty odd years. She had just entered from an adjoining room. She was dressed ready to go out and a pair of sparkling eyes seemed to light up her dark complexion. Her thick lips, however, and the blue veins that stood out upon her thin neck, detracted from her looks, thus giving the girl much concern. And ever since her younger sister Rachel had been married before her, Deborah had become simply unbearable.

"There! He's up already. What do you want of the boy?" interposed the mother.

Charlie, whose rumpled hair was covered with bed feathers and whose face was still clouded by sleep, jumped up as if fire had broken out and stared bewilderedly about. He soon gathered his wits, however, rubbed his eyes and slowly commenced to dress.

"Mamma, isn't breakfast ready yet? I don't care. I'll eat breakfast outside. I have no time to wait and

then be docked by the foreman for being late!" This from Deborah.

"But Deborah, it's all ready. The coffee is on the table. Your father prayed a little longer than usual. Then your uncle came. Here. What's your hurry?" And the mother dashed to the stove.

"That's no affair of mine. Uncle or no uncle, when I get up my breakfast ought to be waiting for me on the table. I can't afford to be late on account of my uncle."

"Deborah, dear," admonished her father as he put his phylacteries away. "Deborah!"

Deborah who well remembered her father as he had been in the old country, where he was the most highly respected *Khassid** in the town with a splendid home,—who had lived through the bitter times of advancing poverty that had forced him to move his family to America, when she was already a grown-up girl, felt, more than the rest of the children, a certain respect for her father. Her father's cry of "Deborah, dear!" summoned the remembrance of their former home in the little Polish town, where her parents called her by that same name. She paused, and was on the point of going to help her mother with the breakfast, as she was once wont to do, but as she looked at her brother who was dressing in such calm, leisurely fashion, she was provoked.

"Well, everything here goes upside down."

Deborah had been the first of the children to earn

* Member of a Jewish sect founded in Poland about 1750, by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer Baal-Shem, to revive the strict practises of the earlier Khassidism. This earlier sect was founded about the third century B.C. by opponents of the Hellenistic innovations. It was devoted to the strict observance of the ritual of purification and separation (Webster's New International Dictionary, under *Chasidim*).

money and bring it home to her mother; she had found employment from the very first day on which she landed. Wherefore she imagined that she was the real mistress of the household. She grudged her brothers and sisters their opportunity to attend the public schools—one of them for a year, the other for two years. She had been obliged to toil from the very first, whence she got the notion that she supported the rest. Her brothers and sisters indeed had now been working for a long time; it was Charlie whom she envied most. He was the only boy and had come to America while yet a child, thus having gone to the public schools longer than the others. To-day he was a grown-up fellow, yet he did not work "steady," in the evenings attending "preparatory school" and in the daytime sporadically picking up whatever work presented itself. His sister simply could not endure seeing that he would soon be ready to enter college; maybe he would finally become a lawyer, thus gratifying his ambition. She felt convinced that all this was due to her self-sacrificing youthful toil,—that because of him her lips and hands had become so coarse, and her neck so thin that the veins showed through. Because of him she had remained an old maid.

"Anyhow, my breakfast won't go to waste. There's someone here to eat it," she snarled, glaring daggers at Charlie.

He made no retort, however. He was too accustomed to such scenes, from his earliest childhood. He understood her and pitied her. And quietly, as one who had been brought up at her expense, he dressed in silence.

"What's the trouble? Is the 'boss' at it again?" came Clara's voice from the next room, soon followed by Clara herself.

"I see you're staring at me. You don't know me," smiled the elder of the two men good-naturedly. "The old Berrel has died. Here I was born anew. I myself don't remember the other Berrel. It's an utterly different fellow you have here."

Clara, too, had her hat and coat on. She was several years younger than Deborah, and had been able to get a year's public schooling. She worked at a better trade, too,—as a saleslady in a ladies' hat establishment, and the elegance required in her calling was visible in her dress and in her manner.

"Anyhow, mamma, she's not the whole 'boss' in this house. We pay in our share of the expenses, too. Isn't that so, mamma?"

Deborah, however, was out of reach of Clara's words. She had already slammed the door behind her

"Pack your phylacteries and your psalms and your prayer-shawl together, for the Lord's sake! It's all your fault. Every morning he spreads his books all over the table and the children haven't any room for breakfast!" grumbled Gnendel, pouring out the bitterness of her heart upon her husband.

Berrel tingled with shame that this should happen in his brother's presence, and only smiled through his clear, child-like eyes.

"Gnendel, we have company here. Gnendel."

Gnendel did not deign to reply, but silently prepared the table. In a moment the erstwhile prayer-desk was transformed into an eating table. Berrel washed and urged his brother to sit down for a bite.

Aaron, who felt most uncomfortable in his brother's home, had long yearned to flee the place, but he pitied Berrel from the bottom of his heart, becoming more fond

of him than ever as he witnessed his domestic sufferings. Therefore, with a powerful effort of his will he decided to remain, washed (although he was not in the habit of doing so before meals) and sat down to table with his brother.

Charlie came to table without his hat on; nor had he recited morning prayers or performed the matutinal ablutions. Berrel, who was reciting a blessing and must not interrupt it with other speech, mumbled reprovingly to the youth, "Nu, nu, nu!"

"What are you grumbling about?" asked Gnendel, taking the boy's hat and thrusting it upon his head. "Go, Charlie, and recite 'Hear, O Israel'."

The seventeen-year-old boy did as he was told,—took his father's prayer-shawl by the fringes, mumbled a few words, kissed the shawl and sat down to eat.

"Gnendel!" boomed Berrel, angrily.

"What's the trouble. You pray for him. You pray for us all. In America there's no time to pray."

Aaron stared at his sister-in-law in amazement. Was this the pious woman who in the old country used to lead the women in prayer at the synagogue and come running in to the House of Study every other day to discover whether a certain piece of meat or a fowl were fit for food from the Mosaic dietary standpoint? She had always had questions of food purity to be settled. What had become of her during the few years that she had been in America?

Gnendel, however, as we have seen, had become "liberal." Berrel's home was divided into two camps. One party was composed of the father and the two older daughters,—Deborah the 'old maid' and Rachel, who had married a Galician Jew. These two remembered

their father from his prosperous days, and still respected him. The other party was comprised of the mother and the two younger children, Charlie and Clara, who had completed their bringing up in America. They were fond of their mother, who returned their affection. The parties clashed at every meal.

Berrel himself could not understand what had come over his wife since she had landed. But he was used to this bepuzzlement. There were so many things he did not understand in America. He simply got used to them and stopped asking questions. The twelve years that he had been in America were lived in solitude, in abandonment amidst his family circle. He had none to converse with. Not only were his children estranged from him, but the very wife who had borne him the children and with whom he had shared so many years of his life, became a stranger to him here in America. This spiritual solitude drove the man to religious ecstasy. He sought life in his religion. This world he had already lost; so he desired the next world, for which he was preparing, to be richer and more glorious. He did not eat the same bread as the rest of his family. Saturday evening he would go to a friend who lived on a Jewish street and who dealt in kosher butter and cheese. He would recite prayers with him, would purchase a cheese and a half-pound of butter and would live upon this fare from one week to the next. It was of this food that he now ate his breakfast.

A quarter of an hour later Gnendel's kitchen was quiet and empty. Everybody had gone off to work.

When Aaron and Berrel reached the street Aaron looked closely at his brother and for the first time fully realized how old Berrel had become during his brief

residence in America. He was already an aged man with a grey beard and stooping shoulders. Yet what a short time ago, it seemed, had this man been Berrel the Khassid of Kuzmin, with a jet-black beard, blooming red cheeks and black, sparkling eyes! Berrel the Khassid, who was so active in all community affairs,—a veritable "live-wire." He had been a merchant, had ridden to Ger to the Chief Rabbi and had been a deep student. And was this he? It seemed to Aaron that he had two brothers,—that Berrel the Khassid had remained in the little Polish town and that this one at his side was a decrepit old operative, a complaining, broken-down old fellow.

Berrel noticed Aaron's glances and knew the thoughts that stirred behind them.

"But, Berrel," smiled Aaron, "how can you . . ."

Aaron choked back his query.

"Bah, the end isn't so far off. I ask nothing more of the world. I've had enough."

And now Aaron could understand why, amid his servitude, his brother had not lost hope and courage. Not until now had he discovered the reason for his brother's calm contentment, for the untainted clearness of his eyes. Now he saw it all. His brother believed in a future life, and the nearer he came to the next world, the happier and calmer he grew. It seemed to him that he could see his brother sailing to the shores of an island where there were awaiting him stored-up treasures that he had accumulated during his life, and that his enjoyment of them was soon to begin. The nearer he came to the island, the happier and calmer he grew. Belief in the future world infused the brother with strength to endure so placidly and patiently the vicissitudes of the present. For the first time Aaron envied his brother his belief,

and he began to seek in his own life something analogous to his brother's faith. But he could discover nothing. His life was empty—only poverty, monotony, and barren, slavish toil for his daily bread. . . .

"Come along with me, Aaron."

"Where to?"

"I want to take you to Uncle Moses. I'll speak a good word for you and see that he takes you back. It's our fate, I guess . . . We must suffer in exile. Decreed from above . . . But in the next world . . . who knows? Tell me, Aaron, do you ever pray?"

"I never gave the matter much thought," said Aaron, more to himself than in reply.

"If that's the case then where's the good of living altogether? What's the use?"

"What's the use?" echoed his brother's words in Aaron's thoughts, and he really couldn't see what good there was in it all, for he saw no life other than that he lived on this earth. And such a poor, ugly life it was—and so monotonous. Yet he followed his brother to Uncle Moses, bent upon begging Uncle Moses to let him continue that monotonous life. . . .

CHAPTER V

UNCLE MOSES

A LONG time before the beginning of this story, there suddenly appeared in a Polish town a stranger, dressed differently from all the inhabitants, in a short coat, strange checkered trousers made of woman's goods, a broad derby and a white ample winged collar,—what was then called a "father-murderer."* On his fingers flashed large gold rings, and on his velvet, checkered vest a gold chain. He had no mustache,—only a small beard. The stranger's coming caused such a sensation that, had he not appeared on the street in company of a well-known inhabitant,—with Joseph the Barley-Grinder in other words,—he would have spread terror wherever he went. Only very old inhabitants were able at last to recognize in the stranger Joseph's eldest son, who years before had left for distant parts. The younger folk did not even know that Joseph had so old a son, and those who did know thought that the son had died long before. His sudden return to the lanes of the village brought back to many the remembrances of their own youthful days. They recognized in this stranger their old boon companion, their school mate, and approached him with a warm welcome. And before long the whole village rang with news of "the American" who had come home from the far, far land. That night Joseph's home was besieged by relatives, near and distant, by neighbors and

* Cf. our slang "herring-choker."

by anxious members of the community, who came to ask news of the children and friends they had in America. If one of them had a son in Africa, in Brazil, or even in London, he came to ask news of the American. For what sort of place this America might be was not clearly understood in the village. In those days everything was called America. Just across the border, it seemed, was one vast city and the name of that city was America.

Soon the village began to resound with "the American's" wealth. Stories were told of a gold-knobbed cane that he had brought to his father, and of presents,—gold watches and chains,—that he had brought for his brothers and the whole family. And when he appeared on the Sabbath day in a new checkered suit, and a silk-lined overcoat (for the fine honor he had been shown, he had had a blessing recited for his father and had paid a whole ruble) he created such a turmoil that the village imagination flew to dizzy heights of conjecture as to this "American's" riches. Joseph, the Barley Grinder, who was not of very high standing in the community, earned his living by grinding barley in his little shop by night, and went about by day in a half-sleepy state. Yet over night he became one of the most respected of the denizens, as if he had won the grand prize in the lottery. And all day Saturday there was a procession of gifts,—puddings and *tsholent*,—from the kitchens of the leading families to Joseph the Barley-Grinder's table,—in token of welcome to the remarkable guest, the "American."

It was rumored that the American had come thither on big business,—that as soon as the Sabbath had passed he would set about establishing a huge barley-mill and that he had already purchased from the town landowner all the fields in the outlying district. The men folk cal-

culated that they would all grow rich from the enterprise. And no sooner was the Sabbath past than various business men came to Joseph's home,—brokers and merchants,—with divers proposals. One suggested oxen. Another, wool. A third, a loan to the landowner at high interest. Still others went farther and deeper and commenced to reveal a noble-spirited concern with affairs of the heart. For they had heard that the American was a bachelor. The American lent a respectful ear to everybody, displaying the keenest interest, making inquiries into all particulars, and holding out hope to all. It seemed that he was ready to begin at once. But he did no business in the town.

In a few weeks, after the American had wandered idly hither and thither about the village, still living at his father's, establishing no mills and starting no business, and yielding nobody a groschen's earnings, he lost all charm for the villagers. No one any longer took any interest in him. No more did the checkered trousers from America call forth the admiring wonderment of the populace. Even his golden rings and his golden gifts were forgotten. Joseph the Barley-Grinder likewise suffered a fall in the public esteem. Once more the grinding of the stone mill was heard by night, groaning away in Joseph's little shop, and by day there would be seen a sleepy, flour-covered old man. Everybody went back to his own affairs. No more thought was given to "the American."

But just at the point when the villagers had lost all interest in "the American," the American's interest in them began. He inquired of every acquaintance how he made his living, how much he earned a week and how much he really needed. He visited homes to see how the

people lived, what they ate and where they slept, and when asked why he needed to know all this, and whether he wished to engage their services, he would smilingly reply:

"A person should know everything. It's good to know."

Shortly afterward the stranger disappeared from the village, taking a younger brother along and leaving his father, it was bruited about, a couple of hundred rubles to enlarge his mill with. And just as he had suddenly appeared from America, so had he vanished. At first, indeed, his departure had not been remarked. Then, when the news had spread that the American had gone, it was agreed that matters could not have ended otherwise. For America is a magical charm that follows one everywhere, and he who has but crossed America's threshhold can never remain for long in any other part of the world, not even in his own birthplace, because something fascinates him, pulls him back, even as the criminal is drawn to the gallows.

Strange enough, the village began to follow "the American" to America! At first no one had noticed how the town was gradually, ever so gradually getting smaller. The old folks journeyed to the cemetery and the young folks vanished to America. At first "the American" took over his own family: his brothers; then his relatives, his brother's children, his uncles, the sons-in-law and the uncles' sons. Then there began to turn to him the children of relatives by marriage, acquaintances, and ordinary "townsfolk," asking him for passage across the ocean. Absolute strangers suddenly discovered that they were remotely related to "the American," sent him letters in proof of their claims and begged their passage.

Nor did the American refuse them. And gradually the village dwindled; the allotted places in the cold synagogue lost one occupant after the other: entire families disappeared.

Saturdays, after regular prayers, at the Dayon's* reading of the Pentateuch the diminution of the worshippers is plainly evident. There are now more women than men in the town,—more elderly persons than youths, more children and aged folk than persons in their prime. All the rest have followed the "American." Even the old grinder has closed shop, and the moaning of the mill-stones in the night is no longer heard in the market-place. He has left for America to see his children before he dies. And thus to this very day, one after the other journeys thither in the wake of "the American," as if he draws them on by a magic spell.

In America the inhabitants of the village found one another anew. On the Bowery stood a filthy, dust-laden three-story structure, covered with the dust that the elevated trains whirled up from the streets. And in the upper stories dwelt the entire village of Kuzmin. And the village sewed clothes for the American. And who might not be found here in this Bowery building? The Hebrew teachers of the town,—the leading citizens side by side with artisans and the scum of the village,—all sat on the top floor of the Bowery edifice, sewing and sewing away. And whosoever landed here, remained for the rest of his days. They knew but one round: in the morning from their homes to the Bowery; at night, from the Bowery to their homes. Over the entrance to the house on the Bowery was a small, dust-covered sign, which bore "the American's" name: Moses Melnick.

* Dayon,—assistant to a Rabbi.

CHAPTER VI

"THE AMERICAN" IN AMERICA

IN the clothes shop stood "the American," Uncle Moses, coatless, paring his nails with a pair of huge tailor's shears. Along the entire length of the shop stood a row of long, broad tables, laden half way to the ceiling with clothes of every description: coats, sack-coats, trousers and vests.

About the tables bustled robust youths with firm, full chests, silent through fear of the "Uncle." Only from time to time would one venture to wink to the other. It was early, and the operatives were just arriving.

"Kuzmin is crawling. Just look how Kuzmin crawls along," said Uncle Moses, pointing with the shears at the employees as they entered, some of them with beards, some of them without, some old and bent, others of middle age who walked in with a certain unwillingness, climbing up the stairs to the upper story, where the workshop was situated.

"Look, look at Kuzmin creeping along!—Hey there, you 'greenhorn' Notte! What was it they called him in the old country? Notte Buttermilk." And as he spoke he stopped one of the workmen, a man of middle age whose eyes were still dim with sleep and whose temple-locks were still wet from his morning ablutions.

"What makes you crawl so slowly? Do you imagine this is Kuzmin? Over in Kuzmin they crept along; in

America, we run. Hurry up! Understand? Lift your feet, you cucumber!''

The men at the tables smiled as if to flatter their employer, but they dared not laugh out loud. The ''Uncle'' raised his glance, his sparse yellowish eyebrows were lost in the flabby folds of his countenance, and as the young men caught sight of Uncle Moses's ''bare'' eyes staring out of his chubby, wide face, they grew suddenly dumb.

''Come over here, young man,'' called Uncle Moses to a youth whose beard, shorn round, attested his piety, and who had just entered last of all. He had permitted himself this liberty because, in the first place, he was a cousin to Uncle Moses, and secondly, he was a newly-wed; on his white cheeks, puffed with sleep, there could still be discerned the imprint of the kisses he had just abandoned.

''Young man, postpone all that until Saturday, so that it'll be at your expense. Not in the middle of the week, for in the middle of the week it's at my expense. Understand?''

The young man, who because of his relationship to the employers considered himself an exception in the shop, could not understand what Uncle Moses was driving at. He ventured to ask.

''What does Uncle mean?''

''I mean your billing and cooing.''

The young man's face flushed blood red; he was completely lost. The men at the tables burst into laughter, which Uncle Moses silenced with a glance, raising his sparse eyebrows.

''Hey, Harris, catch this fish here,'' cried a man's voice from outside. At the same moment a tall Italian and his wife were thrust into the salesroom.

"Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. I'll sell you the best suit in stock."

And before the customer had a chance to turn around, he was seized by two salesmen who tore off his trousers and put on a new pair, which was so small that the scam ripped in the back. Next he was squeezed into a tight coat, from the sleeves of which projected a pair of long arms that made him wonder where they had come from. One of the men pulled at the coat from behind, the other tugged at it from the front, straightened out his chest, pounded his shoulders, and soon a third salesman brought him a mirror and let him view himself.

"Doesn't he look like a gentleman? Sam, come over here, won't you? Take a look at this fellow," cried the young man who had helped the Italian on with the suit. "Doesn't he look like a gentleman?"

"He certainly does," answered Sam, approaching and smoothing the shoulders of the suit with his large palms. "He's all right."

At this juncture a little girl entered the place. Her two black braids had just been washed, combed and intertwined with ribbons, and fell across her shoulders. Her brown jacket, which was now too small and had been worn almost threadbare, was nevertheless immaculate. There rose from it a strong odor of vinegar which she had used to remove the stains. Under the jacket she wore a white apron, as if she had come to school for an examination.

"I want to see Uncle Moses. Can I see Uncle Moses?" the little girl inquired of the first person she met on the threshold.

The man stared at her.

"Uncle Moses isn't here. What do you want of Uncle Moses?"

"I know what I want," she retorted, and walked over to another young man.

"I'd like to see Uncle Moses."

Uncle Moses was still standing with the shears in his hand (a habit which he never succeeded in shaking) in the front part of his establishment, before the door to his private office. This was close to the stairway that led to the upper floors, where the workrooms were situated. Hearing the little girl inquire for him, he asked, without moving and without raising his eyes:

"What's the matter?"

From his voice the girl could tell that he was Uncle Moses. She quickly approached him and began in beseeching, childish tones:

"Please, Uncle Moses, be good to my father. You can help him. Please help him."

"Whose child is this?" asked Uncle Moses, turning to his men.

The employees shrugged their shoulders, as if they always used motions instead of words.

"What is your name? Whose daughter are you?"

"My name is Masha. I'm Aaron Melnick's daughter. You are his uncle. I know you. You're Uncle Moses. Papa told me."

"So that's whose daughter you are? I know now. I know you. Well, what do you want?"

"I want you to lend my father a hundred dollars. Pa wants to go into business. He hasn't any money. You have. Please, lend him a hundred dollars. Please, Uncle."

Uncle Moses raised his glance. He was about to say

something rude to his little visitor when he caught sight of her two wet braids and the white little apron, and took a liking to her. He lowered his eyes again and said:

"Go home, kid; go back to your mamma. I'll see what I can do."

"And you'll lend pa a hundred dollars, so that he can go into business? Yes, Uncle?"

"All right. Go home. I'll see what I can do."

The little girl remained for a moment facing Uncle Moses. As she turned to leave she confronted her father and his oldest brother Berrel, who had just entered. The two brothers had made their way thither in fear, and approached Uncle Moses with terror in their hearts.

"Here's pa!" cried Masha as she beheld her father.

"Do you know, papa,—Uncle Moses has promised to lend you money to go into business."

"What are you doing here? Home with you! Go home at once!" shouted Aaron, stricken with humiliation at the thought that his child should have come before all these men to intercede for him.

Masha huddled into a corner.

"What's the matter?" Uncle Moses had cried when he saw the two men enter. His "What's the matter?" had served to detain them.

Sam, a youth of twenty odd years, ran over to the two brothers, stopped them and said something.

Sam was Uncle Moses' favorite,—his sister's child, whom he had taken to America and given a place in the business. Sam was very loyal to his employer, guarding his uncle's interests like a watch-dog. Uncle Moses knew this and had more trust in Sam than in any other. He had made him cashier. When anything was sold no one except Sam was permitted to receive the money.

Uncle Moses was moreover fond of Sam because the youth resembled him, even when Moses himself had been a butcher's boy in the old country. Sam could win his uncle over to anything and all of the uncle's townsfolk in search of favors first turned to Sam, asking him to act as intercessor.

"Sam, speak for him. It would be a most charitable deed. Sam, do Aaron that favor," begged Berrel in his brother's behalf.

Sam went over to Uncle Moses.

"Uncle," he said, "Aaron Melnick of Kuzmin has returned to work. Shall we take him back?"

"Nothing doing," was the Uncle's reply; he busied himself with the shears, as if to say that all doors were closed. "Let him go with his brother to Brooklyn and sew skirts with Italian girls. I don't need him any more. He's too old for me."

Sam looked at Berrel, made a gesture of helplessness and pursed his lips. His attitude clearly said that he could do nothing.

"Uncle, have pity on . . . " began Berrel, venturing to advance a step closer to Moses. "He has a wife and children. Let Uncle have pity at least on the wife and children. It will be a merit in the eyes of the Lord. A great merit."

"I perform no more deeds of merit. I've done plenty, all I've got in return was curses. What was it he said about me? Just tell us, Sam, what he said about me when he stamped out of the workshop upstairs?"

"What does Uncle care what was said or who said it. The beggars! If it wasn't for the Uncle, they'd all be rotting away in Kuzmin yet. Uncle took him over,—him and the bed clothes, sent him money and passage for all

of them. And he dares to open his mouth against Uncle! I tell you, it's his luck that I wasn't around. I'd teach him to talk back to Uncle!" And Sam was seized with a vehement attack of loyalty to his employer.

"He said something, it's true. But really, does he know what he's talking about? He has a hard time of it, and his troubles make him speak harsh things. Even God pardons. He speaks nonsense. Let Uncle. . . ."

"Nonsense! Well, nobody must talk nonsense in my place. There must be no talking at all. Nobody must open his mouth. Did you hear? Not a sound!" Uncle Moses raised his brows "What did they call him in the old country, Sam?"

"Aaron the big-mouth."

"Big mouth, is it?" And Uncle Moses burst into loud laughter. "Big mouth—big mouth is good. But there's no mouthing in America. That's all right for Kuzmin, —not here in America."

During the conversation Aaron stood by with head bowed, his gaze directed to the floor. In unbroken silence he received all the mockery that was heaped upon him. He was anxious as soon as possible to return to the shop upstairs, to be back at the machine, to be harnessed once more to the yoke of life.

"Let Uncle Moses have pity,—if not on him, at least on his wife and children. How are they to blame if he talks nonsense? He'll know enough now to keep his mouth shut. He'll remember for the rest of his life. . . ."

"Nothing doing."

All this time Masha had been standing in a corner, seeing and hearing her father made the target for mockery and insult. Her cheeks flamed and her hands trembled. At first it seemed strange to her that her

father should submit in silence. Then it began to pain her. She felt a powerful impulse to weep, to scream, but managed to restrain herself. "They are grown-up folks; they know what they're doing." But when she heard them call her father "big mouth," she sprang from her corner, ran over to him and seized his hand. Large tear-drops bedewed her eye-lashes.

"Come right home, pa. Don't stay in this place. They're wicked persons. Don't worry, pa. We'll manage to get along. We'll find a way out. . . . Don't take any money from him" (she pointed to Uncle Moses). "You're a bad man!" she exclaimed, addressing Moses. "You're a brute, a beast,—a dog! That's what you are!"

"Masha, for God's sake, what are you doing? Beg Uncle's forgiveness. What have you said?"

"I *won't* ask his forgiveness. Come home, pa. Come! I don't want you to be here."

"Shut up! Take her away!" cried Sam to Aaron and Berrel, shoving Masha away from Uncle Moses.

Uncle Moses raised his brows, from under which stared his moist, bluish eyes. He laid aside the shears, folded his hands across his paunch and surveyed the girl who was tugging at her father's hand. He bit his clean-shaven lips and said, as if to himself:

"I like this kid."

Hearing the Uncle's voice, Sam released his hold upon the girl. For a moment the employer eyed the child, and she stared fearlessly back at him. The man attempted to look her straight in the eye; he became serious, bit his lips again, and said to Masha:

"I wish you were my daughter."

Masha looked squarely at him. Her lashes became again moist with tears and she retorted:

"I hate you!"

The Uncle smiled. His thick lips parted showing his sound, white teeth; he played with his golden watch-chain and suddenly called out:

"Sam!"

"Yes, Uncle!" cried Sam, hastening over to him.

"What was it they called him in the old country?" he asked pointed to Aaron.

"Big-mouth."

"Well, take Big-Mouth upstairs and set him to work. And give him a raise of five dollars per week. He has her to thank for it." And he pointed to Masha.

Aaron, Berrel, Sam and the bystanders opened their eyes and their mouths in amazement, and looked hard at Uncle Moses to see whether he really meant what he had said.

"Do you see? Do you see that? Thank Uncle. Kiss his hand," cried Berrel to Masha.

Masha, however, was looking at her father, waiting to see what he would do. She saw him joyfully dash upstairs behind Sam to the workshop while Uncle Moses cried after him:

"Run, Big-Mouth, run!"

Her father made no reply; he simply smiled contentedly.

The girl ran hurriedly from the place. The tears coursed down her glowing cheeks like shining pearls.

CHAPTER VII

UNCLE MOSES' CAREER

OF late Uncle Moses had been devoting much thought to himself, to his career, his past and his future. This was very unusual for him. And after Masha left, he fell into meditation anew. She had made a deep impression upon him.

Uncle Moses had never had a childhood. He had been brought up by his father, the barley-grinder, who ground barley for the peasants while his own children hungered. From his earliest days he had been obliged to pay his own way; he would carry bundles home for a woman, or take chickens to the slaughter-house. It was at the slaughter house that he fell in with the butcher boys, in whose company he might thereafter always be found. He would help prepare the cattle for slaughter and at times skin a sheep. In this fashion he managed to earn his bread, until he grew up unaided. He had nobody and belonged to nobody. When the time came for him to enter the army and he feared that he would be sent off, he ran away from his native village, stole across the border and crossed the ocean in a cattle-boat, paying for his passage by tending the cattle during the voyage. He landed with a body black and blue from the blows of the sailors and with two rubles in his pocket. And today he was Moses Melnick, the Bowery Manufacturer, President of the Congregation Anshi-Kuzmin, giving employment

to half of Kuzmin; the former leading inhabitants of Kuzmin were now pressers and operatives in his employ, trembling before him and fawning upon him. He owned tenement houses in which dwelt his townsfolk from Kuzmin. In the hospital a couple of beds bore his name; here the former citizens of Kuzmin came when illness overtook them in their old age. Above the gate to the cemetery in which the men and women of Kuzmin went to their last rest, glittered the inscription "Moses Melnick" in gilded letters.

But what was he getting out of life? At times it seemed to him that he, even as his workmen, was like a thread in a needle. The machine whirred and the needle sewed, sewed along, willy-nilly. Everybody in America was threaded into the needle; and he, too, from the very first day. Ever since he had carried the first can of beer from the saloon in which he had found work on the first day of his arrival, down to the present hour, he had been as a thread in a needle, without a moment's time to pause and reflect. His very vitality drove him ever on like a wild machine, affording him not a moment's release. Night after night he would lie awake in his bed planning, building his career.

And the beds on which he had done this planning were of different sorts. There were filthy mattresses in dark basements; there were better beds in bright apartments; but whatever bed he lay upon he concocted the same business plans,—plans for opening a lunch room on a street-corner, not far from a factory. This he had carried out, maintaining the restaurant for a couple of years during the early days before his marriage. Then he changed from the lunch-room to a store dealing in men's clothes that had been damaged in process of manu-

facture. These he bought from large factories and shipped south. Out of this store grew a men's clothing factory. Always his head was filled with plans for the future. Then followed schemes for building houses. This desire assailed him like a mania. Wherever he came upon an empty lot he was seized with a passion to raise high tenement houses upon it. He began to build at the very time when he was hardest pressed for money,—in the very midst of a crisis, standing on the brink of a financial abyss. It was at such times as these that he would initiate his most daring enterprises. It was like a game to him,—a wager,—as if he wished to measure his powers.

It was not need that spurred him incessantly on in this mad race for wealth. Uncle Moses himself had very few wants. For himself he desired next to nothing. It made no difference to him what sort of place he lived in, —what sort of bed he slept in. Even now he often felt a longing to sleep in some basement, and he really derived very little pleasure from his brightly lighted room, the soft bed, and the delicately carved furniture upon which he was afraid to sit down. And even today, at the lunch hour, he would go with his workmen to the cheap restaurant across the street, elbow his way in the crowd and bolt a sandwich, a potato and a cup of coffee while standing, not caring to go with the other business men to the better restaurant for merchants. It was not because he was stingy, but because he was more accustomed to the poor surroundings in which he had spent the greater part of his life, and he felt more at ease amid them than in more sumptuous quarters. It was something more than money that pulled him out of bed so early in the cold winter mornings in order that

he might be the first in the shop and see whether the workmen came on time; it was more than money, too, that held him in the city during the hot summer months. Despite the intense suffering the heat caused him, for he was of very corpulent build,—he refused to go off to a summer resort and sweltered amid the dusty piles of clothes, panting and fanning his sparsely covered head with a handkerchief, unwilling to entrust his affairs even to Sam, in whom he reposed the utmost confidence. It was something more than money. It was as if he were enslaved to his inexhaustible energy,—as if that energy goaded him ever on like an evil spirit whose commands he must fulfil to the letter.

For Uncle Moses had no one to work for,—no one to whom to leave his money. He was a widower. He did have children, but they had been born out of wedlock,—born of another man's wife. Nor was he certain that they were his children. In any case, he was not fond of them.

It had come about in this way:

When Uncle Moses was a young man, at the time he wished to make the change from his lunch room to the men's damaged-clothes store, he married a partner's daughter. The marriage was more a matter of business than of love. Uncle Moses had not known, in his younger days, what love was. He was so engrossed in his business that he had no time to devote to such interests. His young wife, who came from Galicia, was of a sickly, refined nature and endowed with a sentimental temperament. She really loved him. Not so much him personally, however; she would have loved any man that she might have married, because she was born to love a man, to deify him and be his willing slave, whoever he might

be. She looked up to him as to a god, she respected his powerful, manly neck, feared his serious careworn face and wondered at his vitality and his activity. But he did not see her. To him she was a thing. Often she lay at night by his side yearning for caresses, for a token of tenderness, and tried to nestle against him. She wished to be fondled like a child, and there he would lay with his massive body facing the wall either snoring loudly or absorbed in various projects. His mind was forever taken up with coats, trousers, vests, buttons, linens, goods. He kept forever thinking of these, seeing nothing around him. And whenever nature asked its amorous toll he would comply coarsely, with not a jot of sentimentality. His wife, however, had no amorous desires, —she yearned for love, for affectionate warmth. This he could not give, because it was not in him. He did not understand what she wished of him, and kept wondering why she had no children. And once, after visiting a friend,—an elderly person,—on the occasion of his silver wedding, and beholding how the children of the aged couple joyfully brought their parents a cake set with brightly burning candles, he came home in ill humor, and grumbled to his wife:

"Children. . . . Why have you no children? Go see a doctor."

But his wife was not anxious for children; she thirsted for love and languished away. Daily she grew weaker and more ill. To be sure he felt pity for her. Life held no pleasures for him. Whenever he would go out with his friends for a good time, he would condemn himself for having left her at home alone. He would rise, leave his companions and return to his house. But he could

give his wife nothing. He could not understand why she should be sick, and he would cry out:

"What ails you? Why don't you go to a doctor? Why are you always ill?"

Several years before her death he had already ceased to have a wife. As a result, his thoughts turned to other women. And he took a liking to a woman who ran a Jewish restaurant where he ate his lunch. She was a brunette, with well-arched black eyebrows. He became particularly fond of the jet-black hair that fell like temple-locks over her cheeks. Once he had seen her behind the counter in a white jacket and an apron, jingling her keys, and had ordered something of the waiters. She reminded him of a housewife from the old country and he commenced to make advances to her. Moses Melnick's actions caused general amazement; the woman, however, was very good to him. Her husband, whether he noticed things or not, pretended to see nothing. Moses lived with her in secret and she gave birth to a child every year. He was not sure whether the children were his or her husband's. The husband would come to him and extort money, threatening him with a scandalous exposure, and Uncle Moses would pay. This business he entrusted to Sam, who extricated him from all difficulties. He was well provided for now.

His relations with another woman brought about the complete ruin of his own wife. In a short time she died, without leaving him a child. Here was Uncle Moses left without an heir. The children of the restaurant woman were officially her husband's, and Moses was by no means sure that they were his. For ten years he continued a widower. Everybody said that he was still a young man, and the matchmakers wore out his threshold. He did

not intend, however, to marry a second time. He didn't need to. He continued his clandestine relations with the restaurant-keeper's wife. As he approached the fifties, however, he began to feel a certain lonesomeness without a family. His passion for business began slowly to diminish. He lost his enthusiasm for building new houses and starting new enterprises. He began to feel content with his old interests,—to long for domestic warmth, for children of his own with whom on holidays he could go to the synagogue services and appear before friends. His thoughts turned to marriage, and he listened to the matchmakers.

None of the matches proved to his satisfaction, however. There were widows, abandoned wives, women with sons, women with daughters, with cloak factories and still others with various establishments. Out of lonesomeness he sent to Kuzmin for his father. He sought out the most distant relatives and brought every one he could find to America. He was by no means fond of his relatives, and complained that they were good only for tailor-work, for the machines or for work as pressers. There was not a single educated person in their number, or a person of independence who had made his own way, who could stand on equal terms with Uncle Moses and be able to converse with him. Uncle Moses scorned them for the servitude which he had himself imposed; he detested their fawning, cringing manner. He longed to find among them an independent spirit who could address him as an equal. And thus, when Masha sprang from her corner and called him "beast . . . dog!" she made a strong impression upon him. For the first time some one had dared to upbraid him. And who? A little girl, a mere child, whose fate lay entirely in his hands. She would

take nothing from him. "She hates me," he laughed to himself, "because I insulted her father." And he envied Aaron Melnick the child that had taken his part.

He would have given his all to Aaron Melnick for that little girl who had so stoutly taken her father's part.

Uncle Moses still considered himself a young man. He did not feel within him that age which his fat face and his heavy body so plainly betrayed. He did not often look into a mirror; besides, the alterations in his face and his body had come on so gradually that he did not notice them and it seemed to him that his face was the same as ever. He felt capable of beginning all over again. Every new thought released in him new sources of energy, and the idea that now so suddenly came to him seemed to have fired him with a new flame of life.

". . . I must bring her up,—bring her up for myself. To be my child and take my part, too. . . ." A fresh stream of vitality bounded through his veins.

And with that impulsive spirit characteristic of him in carrying out whatever occurred to him, he proceeded at once to execute his plan.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW PHARAOH

KUZMIN was a faithful slave to "Pharaoh." Kuzmin sat at work, sewing coats, trousers and vests for persons whom they would never see. The whole village of Kuzmin worked upstairs in Uncle Moses' shop. There was Reb Joel Khayim, the head of the synagogue, and Itshe the cobbler's boy, and Junder the ladies' tailor, —the dandy of Kuzmin, who once had woven a spell around the hearts of Kuzmin's beauties,—and Khayim the barber-surgeon, who cupped the women (whatever happened to be the ailment of any woman in town he would always tell her to lower her chemise and would proceed to place the bleeding cups upon her) . . . As a result, Khayim had received a good drubbing at the hands of a couple of irate husbands, and two of his front teeth had been missing since. Today he applied no more bleeding-cups, but worked in Uncle Moses' garret sewing trousers. All Kuzmin sat there sewing for Uncle Moses; he had reduced the entire population to the same level. There were no more leading citizens, synagogue dignitaries and humble artisans,—no more Talmudic experts and coarse fellows. No more cobblers, foremen, men who applied bleeding-cups to women . . . and men who tickled the women while they fitted on their dresses. All now served a single idol; all performed the same rite—they sewed trousers. . . .

But Kuzmin refuses to die. In Uncle Moses' garret, in company of the needle, old Kuzmin and all its distinctive features are born anew. Every stone of the old home, every house and nook is lovingly and yearnfully recalled by the loyal sons of the village, sitting there with the garments in their hands, longing for their native spot. Here and there falls a tear; now and then a groan is heard from one who has recalled its beauty.

"Well, Leibel, why so silent? Let's hear the tune that the old cantor used to sing."

And Leibel, who had always been fond of appearing as cantor but had never in the old home had the opportunity of demonstrating his abilities in that direction, now shows Kuzmin at its needles and garments what he can do.

The sounds of the old cantor's melody transport the hearer to Kuzmin,—to the old synagogue,—and all recall the beautiful Pentecost Sabbath, when every worthy sat in his pew wrapped in his prayer-shawl, enraptured by the cantor's singing. And today all Kuzmin sits sewing trousers.

Soon, however, the old synagogue vanishes, together with the early Sabbath morn and the longing for Kuzmin. Only trousers and needles are left of the vision.

Sam appears on the threshold of the door leading to the shop and bawls out:

"Just look! Kuzmin is singing! Fine! You'll catch the devil from me, I promise you. I'll call Uncle Moses up in a second!"

And the word is passed along from one leading citizen of Kuzmin to the other.

"Hush, hush! The governor is here."

They called Sam "the governor," and Uncle Moses "the Czar."

And they were more afraid of the governor than of the Czar.

At such times Kuzmin would grow dumb with fright at sight of the little urchin Sam, who at home had been a butcher's boy and here was the "governor" of Kuzmin.

But Kuzmin possessed a valiant intercessor, in the person of old Melnick, the father of Uncle Moses. The old man would wander about with the gold-knobbed cane that his son had presented to him. The stiff derby to which he had not yet grown accustomed, tortured him, so he would put it on askew. He felt bored and lost in America, and missed his mill sorely; through ennui he had taken to drink. True, he had been fond of his glass of whiskey even in the old country, but here in America, while he could afford it and where there were always plenty of good fellows who would treat him, the old man was never sober. He had no friends. All of his former acquaintances worked in his son's shop so he liked to visit the shop and pass the time with them, chatting abut Kuzmin and the good old days. Often the old man would take it into his head to sit down and sew trousers himself, seeing all the companions of his childhood, all the most highly respected members of the community, sewing away there in the garret. Why shouldn't he sew, too? So he would come and help along in the work. Uncle Moses, however, would have none of this. Moreover, when the old man came to the workshop he interfered with Kuzmin's labor; he would engage the men in conversations about the old home,—about old landowners, town affairs, about the rabbi and the cantor. And often Kuzmin would become so engrossed in these discussions that

they would get into a quarrel over some rabbi or slaughterer, and the disputants would forget that they were no longer leading citizens of Kuzmin. The mere talking about these matters afforded them intense pleasure. The old father was drawn to the shop. Uncle Moses had given orders to Sam not to allow old Melnick to enter the work-room, but when old Melnick got drunk he heeded nobody, feared nobody, and would strike Sam with the golden knob of his cane, forcing entrance.

"The impudent rascal! Worthless rogue! The butcher's boy! He won't let me in, ha? My son's foreman, and he'll try to keep me out?" Whereupon he would brandish his cane and advance into the shop, his derby askew, waving his red bandana handkerchief and crying, "Out of here, you scoundrel, Out! Out!" And Sam would retreat.

Kuzmin would rejoice at the "governor's" defeat. They did not dare to show their joy aloud, however. The governor could wreak vengeance, so they would nudge one another and wink.

"What did they call him in the old country? Pilferer, hey you pilferer!" cried old Melnick to Sam as the latter descended the stairway. "Your mother used to steal barley from my shop. I once caught her at it myself. And here you've become a regular Pharaoh in America. May wolves devour you and my son and America all together!"

Kuzmin shook with suppressed laughter, the workmen nudged one another.

"Did you see what a licking the 'governor' got?"

"The same to all enemies of the Jew."

"His mother used to steal meat in the butcher shops.

What did they used to call her? They called her Nekhe."

And the workmen began to evoke memories of Kuzmin and tell tales about the good old times.

But soon everything grew suddenly hushed. Kuzmin trembled and sat as if transfixed. Then it became a machine that held a needle in its hand and sewed. Uncle Moses himself had appeared in the shop, coatless, with his huge shears in his hand. His watch-chain, stretched across the entire length of his rotund paunch, imparted to his figure a certain formidable authority. He spoke not a word, simply staring about him. Kuzmin bent low over its trousers and sewed away industriously. Uncle Moses approached his father and took him by the arm.

"Papa, come down."

"I don't want to. What do you want of me, anyway? I'm not afraid of you," cried old Melnick, tapping his cane with that defiance which a glass of whiskey always poured into him.

"Papa, you're interfering with the workmen. They mustn't be disturbed. Come down with me," urged the son in a soft voice, taking his father's hand.

"I don't care to go. I'm not afraid of you. What do you think;—you're a new Pharaoh,—a Czar? I'm not afraid of the policeman himself. I'm not afraid of anybody. I don't need you! What did you want of me? Why did you ever bring me here? Send me back! I want to go back to the old country!"

"You'll go back. You'll go back. Come down, papa. Don't bother the workmen."

"I will not!" cried the old man. "I don't need you, —damn you!" he fumed. "You and your whole America. I've saved up all I need by myself." Where-

upon he took out a little bag that hung next his bare chest.

"Here's the money for my burial expenses. All from my own labor. I ask nothing of you. Send me back. Why do you keep me here, as Pharaoh did with the Jews in Egypt? Send us back! Release us from Egypt. I don't care to remain here!"

Uncle Moses wondered what to do. He respected his father deeply; it was a matter of honor with him. But when it came to being humiliated before his own townsfolk, before whom he always appeared in the full authority of his sovereignty (for such was his power),—this he could not brook. He soon mastered himself, however, and altered his voice:

"If you don't want to go, you don't have to. Very well, remain here with your townsfolk, chat about Kuzmin, about old landowners, the pauper-king who was worth seventy and a half dollars in American money. Stay here; stay here. I like to have you stay here." And he left his father.

The old man cried after him:

"What sort of Pharaoh do you imagine you've become? Who are you, anyway? Old Melnick's son,—that's who. Your father is an old drunkard. A fine pedigree that is!"

Kuzmin dared not hear. Uncle Moses went from machine to machine, inspecting the work. He was plunged in serious thought. His grave mien filled his townsfolk with terror, banishing even the inner pleasure at the father's scolding. When Uncle Moses came to Aaron Melnick's table he paused, thrust his hands into his pockets for a moment and surveyed him.

"Leave your address with Sam. I'll come to see you

this Sunday,'' said Uncle Moses as if to himself. Then, with a smile on his face, he left and went over to his father.

''Well, daddy, will you come along with me now? Come downstairs with me, pa.''

''I won't go!'' shouted the old man again. ''What sort of Pharaoh do you think you've become in America? I'm not afraid of you! Ha! Just look at this Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Who are you, anyway?''

''All right,—if you wish to stay. Stay. Stay. . . .'' said Uncle Moses half to himself. ''Hey, Sam. Take the address of that fellow there. What's his name, now? Big mouth. I'm going over to his house this Sunday to see Masha. I like the kid,'' he said to himself as he went downstairs.

CHAPTER IX

UNCLE MOSES VISITS MASHA

AARON MELNICK sat in his place trembling with fright and confusion. Uncle Moses was coming to him on Sunday to see Masha! Uncle Moses—in his home. The Uncle himself,—to his humble home to see Masha!

Aaron and his wife Rosa tidied up the "parlor" for the reception of their distinguished guest. The large bed was taken out of the front room, where the whole family slept, and placed in a corner. The kitchen table was transferred to the "parlor" and was bedecked with the Passover tablecloth. On one wall they hung up the photograph of Aaron and Rosa taken at their wedding and representing them under the nuptial canopy; on the other, hung pictures of the respective fathers and mothers-in-law: dignified folk of Kuzmin who had already gone to their rest in the village cemetery. Then there were the wedding presents that were still preserved in the family: the spice-box, two small silver goblets, an Elijah the Prophet's glass, all washed and polished so that they should sparkle from their place by the mirror. The children were scrubbed and washed and combed as if in preparation for the Passover feast. There were not enough clothes, however, to dress all of them in festive attire. One of them had a pair of whole shoes, but no dresses. The other had a dress but not a pair of presentable shoes. So it was decided to "disown" one of the

children. Not exactly disown, but hide her,—send her out of the house during the uncle's stay,—and dress the other children in the pooled sartorial resources. Fate selected Celia, who had to leave the house; her new pair of shoes were worn by her younger sister Goldie. And poor Celia had looked forward to being present when the Uncle came. In her imagination she had already beheld the "movie" that she would act for the Uncle. In Uncle Moses she saw a person of such unbounded wealth that surely all the moving-picture houses and ice-cream parlors in New York belonged to him. If he but wished it he could enter any moving-picture house or sit down in an ice-cream parlor and eat one dish of cream after the other, and have whatever his heart desired,—all the "sundaes" and the "short-cake" he pleased. This was the only way in which she could picture Uncle Moses. He could give her a certain card that upon presentation would open all the doors of the "movie" houses and ice-cream parlors to her and entitle her to whatsoever she desired. And now she most forego all this and be content with a glimpse through a chink into the parlor where Uncle would be sitting. (That is, if they would let her.)

Rosa, too, recalled her girlhood days. She desired to make a good impression upon Uncle Moses. She was proud of her Masha,—proud to think that a daughter of hers should have found favor in the Uncle's eyes, and that Masha would mean the fortune of them all. Her child's beauty was her own. She rummaged through her chests for whatever she could find that might conceal their poverty from Uncle Moses' eyes. She had always been a tidy, capable housewife in the old country and it was as such that she now desired to impress Uncle

Moses. She tidied and beautified her humble home, her children and herself. The neighbors understood the importance of this visit, and lent all the aid they could. They willingly loaned the poverty of their own homes to Rosa. One gave her a piece of cut-glass that had been received as a wedding gift, and placed it conspicuously upon the table; another brought a tablecloth; yet another, two new chairs. For they had all heard of the great good fortune that had befallen the Melnicks next door,—that Uncle Moses had raised them all of five dollars per week on account of one of their children, a girl, and that Uncle Moses himself was coming to visit them. Wherefore all the neighbors were anxious to help the family secure the great fortune and win Uncle Moses' favor. Aaron Melnick surveyed critically his wife, his children, his home. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Never since he had come to America had he seen his wife so beautiful and so well dressed,—his children so neat and his home so comfortable and inviting. And he was grateful to Uncle Moses for this good fortune. He forgave Uncle Moses everything,—forgave him the servitude and the mockery he had to endure. He could see only the favors Uncle Moses had done him. The Uncle had given him a raise of five dollars per week,—the Uncle had taken a liking to one of his daughters and was coming to pay him a visit. Whereupon he became an ardent admirer of the Uncle, seeing only good qualities in the man. He was genuinely thankful for Uncle Moses' beneficence.

Aaron's brother Berrel, and Berrel's wife, were also present to receive Uncle Moses. Berrel's wife, indeed, had decked herself out as if she were going to theatre, donning her daughters' best clothes. The stylish youthful clothes looked funny upon her,—the hat with its

large plumes resting upon her worn-out mother's face! The closely trimmed suit, and the high-heeled shoes upon which the cramped woman walked as if they were stilts! The woman's effort to appear gaudily bedizened was so evident that she inspired pity. Everybody had heard of the Melnick's great fortune, and wished to bask in the sun. . . . Folks fawned upon Aaron and Rosa. Melnick and his wife, however, were by no means elated with the visit of his brother and sister-in-law. To the Melnicks it seemed that Uncle Moses already belonged to them. He was their uncle,—and here were their relatives coming to suck at the sugar that was their sole property!

The Uncle was late in coming. It was as if he grudged them the happiness he brought, letting it turn sour. And in the meantime the Melnick children soiled their dresses and the neighbors' eyes grew weary watching for the important guest. "Where is he?" was the question that passed from one to another. The eyes of the relatives began to glow with the fires of revenge. Sister-in-law Dvoshe was already chuckling, whispering to her husband:

"He's got nothing more important on hand than to come visiting here!"

Yet, as if to crush these folks with envy, the Uncle came, entering the kitchen suddenly with Sam. He planted himself in the kitchen and refused to go farther, as though to deprive them of the pleasure of having him see the decorated parlor. Without removing his coat or hat he sat down upon the first kitchen chair he saw. Grasping his cane firmly, he surveyed the room and the assembled friends and relatives who stood before him awestruck.

"It's all right here," he said, half to himself. "My townsfolk live very well."

He felt deep contentment with himself at the thought that he provided his townsfolk with a decent livelihood, enabling them to live and dress becomingly. The thought that he was a pretty good fellow after all put him in good humor. He began to smile, arose, and stepped into the parlor. The sight of this room pleased him more than ever. He looked with delight at the fine table which was laden with cake and fruits. He stretched out his hand toward the fruits and the onlookers were filled with joy. The Uncle was going to eat. But he took no fruit. He looked at the glass and said meditatively:

"Cut glass. It's all right."

Then he asked to see the children. Aaron introduced them. Uncle Moses surveyed the youngsters.

"And where is Masha? I'd like to see Masha!"

Masha, however, was not to be found. She had concealed herself somewhere. Her mother, her father, the entire roll of relatives, scurried hither and thither in search of her, for a long time in vain. At last she was discovered in a neighbor's home. Her father dragged her by the hand, while Uncle Berrel screamed advice:

"You silly girl, go in! What are you doing here? The Uncle has come. . . ."

"Masha, you're ruining me! You're ruining me for life," wailed her father, beggingly. Masha was dressed in a new skirt and white apron; her long, black braids were more attractive than ever. Her cheeks were flaming red. She bit her thin lips with her small white teeth, and growled:

"I don't want to see him!"

Uncle Moses looked at her for a long time, then smiled.

"She's the girl that called me 'beast'."

"A silly little goose. Much she knows what she's talking about," commented Berrel, trying to smooth matters over.

"That's nothing. I like it. Here. Because you called me 'beast,' I've brought you some chocolate. Sam!"

Sam silently handed Uncle Moses a box of chocolate. The Uncle offered it to Masha.

"Here. This is for calling me 'beast'."

Masha refused to accept the gift.

"Take it! Take it! Child, what are you doing?" cried the entire company.

Masha took the chocolate.

"Open the box. You'll find something."

"Open it, Masha, open it!" chorused the company.

Masha opened the box with trembling fingers. Out of the box fell a ten dollar piece and various articles of jewelry.

"The dollar piece is for your ma. And the jewelry is for you. For calling me 'beast'," added the Uncle with a smile.

Masha turned the light of her round black eyes upon him. They were still the eyes of a child, yet already a woman's tenderness shone in them. She rested her gaze upon Uncle Moses. There was a coquetry in her glance that betrayed the future woman,—a coquetry as yet veiled by childish bashfulness.

Uncle Moses was captivated by her glance. He smiled inwardly.

"Thank uncle!"

"Kiss his hand!" they all cried to Masha.

Masha grew confused. She wished to do what they were all telling her to. Uncle Moses, however, would have no hand-kissing. He took her head tenderly and imprinted a kiss upon her hair. The onlookers were entranced. Many eyes were filled with tears. Aaron and Melnick were in the seventh heaven of delight.

"I know you! I know you!" All at once Celia had come dashing into the room, half undressed and unwashed. She had been watching the scene from the kitchen; filled with jealousy, she could no longer contain herself.

"My God!" gasped her mother, seizing her and about to thrust her back into concealment.

But Uncle Moses had already seen her.

"Who is this child?"

"Nothing,—a child," answered Aaron.

"And what can *you* do?" asked Uncle Moses.

"Play 'movies'," replied Celia pertly, her mischievous eyes sparkling and her dirty face aglow, as she looked from behind her mother's festive dress.

"'Movies'? That is fine. Come on, come on. Here's . . . "

But Rosa had already sent the little heap of poverty into a corner, whence came the sound of the poor little girl's sobbing.

CHAPTER X

KUZMIN TOWNSFOLK

IT had proved impossible to organize Uncle Moses' shop into a union. The most ardent efforts on the part of the Jewish labor organizations seemed always to strike against an iron wall. The reason for this was that the relations between Uncle Moses and his townsfolk were not purely industrial, but rather personal,—almost in the nature of a family relationship. To the former inhabitants of Kuzmin, Uncle Moses was the head of a large family,—the ruler of a small kingdom. Kuzmin was proud of the Uncle's wealth and property. Whenever they visited a house that belonged to him, they swelled with pride as if it were their own. And Uncle Moses concerned himself with their domestic life. They made him the arbiter in their disputes and he delivered judgment, even as did the patriarchs of old. They were loyal to Uncle Moses, and should anyone ever try to introduce discontent or thoughts of union, the attempt was at once reported to Uncle Moses. Upon this, Uncle Moses would at once climb up to the shop, seek out the "revolutionist" and stand beside him, surveying him in silence so long that the poor fellow would wish to sink into the ground.

"Sam. What did they call this fellow in the old country?" he would inquire of his "governor," pointing to the union "revolutionist."

"Big Moyshe," would be Sam's curt reply.

"So! So you're Big Moyshe. And you'd like to unionize my shop! Not here, my friend. We don't work on Saturdays, nor on holidays. And this shop won't admit union men. All my employees are my relatives, townsfolk. If I were to let in ordinary workmen the shop would be open Saturdays, holidays, even on New Year's and the Day of Atonement, as in all union shops. I don't need that." And he would sweep the place with a gesture. "It costs me money. I maintain the shop only for your sakes,—so that my townsfolk may be able to make a living. What would you do without me? Who brought you to America? To whom did you appeal for your passage across, and for money to bring over your families? To whom do you come now when you're in trouble? When one of you, God forbid, falls ill?" Uncle Moses was now shouting at the top of his lungs and his hearers trembled. "To whom do you come? To Uncle Moses for everything! Don't you? Isn't that so? And this fellow wants to start a union in my shop! Not here, my good friend! Nobody can force me to keep open Saturdays and holidays. There aren't any mere workingmen here. They're my kith and kin. My relatives and townsfolk make a living from me and I work as hard as any of you. You can see that for yourselves. And for whom? I don't need to do it for myself! It's all for you,—for you alone. I'll close up shop, and you can go hunt work elsewhere. If you'll be hard up for a few dollars I'll let you have them anyway. So don't be afraid. But I'll have no more of this."

"Why is Uncle so angry? Why need he pay so much attention to the empty talk of a worthless fellow?" the townsfolk begin to whine.

"Must we all suffer because of him?" cries Aaron

Moyshe, a distant relative of the Uncle. At home he had been a hungry tramp, forever wandering about the country, and here he had become a presser. "Just let me get at him. I'll give him a union!" yells the irate relation, brandishing his fists.

"No, no. Hold on. No fighting in my place," cautions Uncle Moses. "But if there's anybody that isn't satisfied with conditions here, then let him find himself a better position. Sam, see what we owe him, and pay him to the penny. And here, take a few dollars extra to tide you over."

Uncle Moses' generosity touched all. His open hand won every Kuzmin heart. He never denied a townsman assistance. Indeed, the "revolutionist" himself was moved by Uncle Moses' speech and his present of a few extra dollars, and deeply regretted his words.

"Apologize to Uncle Moses. Beg his pardon this very instant!" cried his shopmates.

"Let him kiss the Uncle's hand. Kiss his hand," cried Aaron Moyshe to the "revolutionist."

Uncle Moses, however, refused to let the rebel kiss his hand but the man was not discharged. Ever since that time he was known as "the union man."

This is not to say that no work was done in Uncle Moses' place on Saturdays. On the contrary, Saturday was the busiest day in the store. To be sure, the pious townsfolk passed the day in the synagogue and at home with their families. Those of the employees who were not orthodox in their beliefs, chiefly the younger element, were invited by Uncle Moses on Saturday to come into the store and help sell or attend to alterations when a customer desired them. Saturday was the day of largest earnings. And the townsfolk, receiving no pay for this

work, looked upon it as a means of expressing their loyalty to Uncle Moses. The elder employees would gather on Saturday nights at the home of one of their number and recall the good old times in Kuzmin. They would send out for cans of beer and revel in their recollections.

The majority of the folk from Kuzmin had been brought up in intimate communion with nature. Kuzmin was situated upon the banks of the Vistula, nestling amid plum-trees, vegetables and grasses. When the Passover season drew near, the zephyrs from the open fields would come wafting youth into every heart. Among these Kuzmin townsfolk there were men who had lived half their lives in orchards; fishermen who swam across streams and dams splitting the ice of the frozen waters in winter: there were unassuming fellows, who at home had been engaged in milking cows, selling milk, vegetables and fruit. And here they dwelt walled off from nature, living out their days in a dust-laden shop. Whether the sun shone or the rain poured down, they saw only the trains that sped by. Seldom was any of them able to catch sight of the sky by day. And should a former inhabitant of Kuzmin on a clear winter's night suddenly discover the moon, which would peer for an instant through a cleft in the heavens down upon Essex street, it was as great a treat as if a new townsman had just arrived from Kuzmin. And Kuzmin's former inhabitants would be filled with a strange, undefinable yearning. They longed for the sky above Kuzmin, for its moon, for its fields and orchards and when they came together Kuzmin became the topic of discussion. For the only life they knew was the life they had left behind in their old home.

Uncle Moses, too, came from Kuzmin, and although he

was their "boss," their ruler, their sovereign, he was one of their own townsfolk. His life had been no different from theirs. His childhood, his youth, the happiest days of his life had been spent in Kuzmin. His sweetest memories were linked to that village, and whenever he was reminded of some friend of his youth or of a cherished spot where he used to play about with the Gentile boys, he was almost moved to tears. Often he would break in upon a Saturday night gathering of Kuzmin folk and listen to the stories told. But at such times they would be stricken dumb, afraid to utter a word; fawning upon the Uncle and listening to him instead. He could see that his intrusion had banished their high spirits. So he would leave.

The older Uncle Moses grew, the more he longed for Kuzmin. It seemed to him that he was still a carefree young man in search of a wife. He had ventured forth to foreign parts to make his fortune, and now he would return to Kuzmin a wealthy bachelor, and would marry the belle of the village. Yes, he would choose a girl from a refined family and make her his wife. His life in America was not taken into account. He had not married here; he had not established a home. Here he had worked himself up to a secure position and had accumulated money. Now he must marry, set up a home and live a dignified life, as befitted a man of his standing. The years had sped by, however, and he had been taken up with business and had overlooked the matter. When he awoke and was ready to begin his new life, he realized that he was too old to return to Kuzmin.

Masha had revived his hopes. Uncle Moses knew he was getting old and hesitated to entrust himself to an utter stranger. Never in his life had he relied entirely

upon another; never had he trusted in any one but himself. And now in his advancing years, when he felt the need of love and devotion, he was afraid to give himself into the hands of a stranger. This young, ripened girl, who had looked him fearlessly and proudly in the eye and called him "beast" had awakened in him a feeling of respect for another personality, and this feeling Uncle Moses had for none of the persons in the shop with whom he spent his days.

Besides, he looked upon Masha as belonging in a way to him. She was the daughter of one of his relatives,—one of the men who earned a living in his shop and whose fate depended upon him. And to Uncle Moses, all who earned their living through him belonged to him,—they and their wives and children. Masha had grown up for him. He must see to it now that her aversion for him be turned into adoration. She would idolize him, he told himself, if he showered her with favors.

Masha's position in her home had suddenly risen when it was discovered that because of her, her father's wages had been raised five dollars per week. She acquired dignity in her parent's eyes; they paid her marked respect, as if there had fallen upon her a ray of that power and grandeur which, in the eyes of all the townsfolk, surrounded Uncle Moses like a sun. . . . To her relatives Masha became a prodigy, a sorceress. She was spared all hard work and her mother refrained from scolding her. She had become a marked favorite. And Masha could not understand it all.

CHAPTER XI

ESTHER AND AHASUERUS

MASHA was now brought up in the warm rays of Uncle Moses' kindness. Through her, her parents and family were raised to new heights, for Masha had become the magic ring that unlocked the heart of Uncle Moses.

There was something in the little girl that made the man forget his business and his worriment and turn his thoughts upon himself; this was the reason for the powerful fascination Masha exercised upon him. He would lie at night unable to sleep; his mind would teem with business, competitors, debtors. And he asked himself: "Why? For whom? For what purpose am I giving up my whole life to them?" But the thought of Masha would come to him like a flood of light. He pictured himself as a young man, brimming with life and ambition. He could see himself in his own home; the table was all set, and beside him sat she who loved him, whose thoughts were all for him.

He no longer desired her to be his child. No . . . He began to show her father favor,—all for her. He had taken Aaron out of the shop, raised his wages and made him cashier of the sales department downstairs. He procured a piano teacher for Masha, sent her gifts frequently, and came to visit her every Saturday and Sunday.

First of all, he had her father move to a larger suite of rooms; Masha must study, and must go out often for walks. To the amazement of everybody, Uncle Moses began to take particular pains with his personal appearance. The older and maturer Masha became, the more Uncle Moses dyed his hair, kept himself always clean-shaven, dressed like a young man and used perfume. He evoked general pity and sympathy. Behind his back, indeed, he was made the butt of gibes,—a thing that had never happened before. In his presence, of course, people showed only the highest respect and pretended to have noticed no change.

Uncle Moses, however, saw nothing. He had begun to live as in a dream,—as in another world. It seemed that his life had taken a topsy-turvy course. In his youth he had been concerned only with business and his heart was as cold as the heart of an old man. And now in his declining years Uncle Moses was suddenly becoming young once again, recovering his lost youth. No longer did he dwell engrossed in commercial affairs, with damaged clothes, with unsold stock. His thoughts were wrapped about a maiden who was developing from a child into a woman. He noted every change that Masha displayed. And each Saturday he would regard her closely, telling himself that since the previous Sabbath her hair had grown thicker,—her teeth sharper and stronger. He rejoiced at the rounding of her figure, her increasing height and weight, the filling out of her body. Every week he discovered the budding of a new charm.

He became kinder to his employees; his eyes grew clearer and stood out from the flesh which surrounded the sockets. He was always smiling, and whenever it happened that anybody proved delinquent in his work,

there was no trace of anger on his part. The change in the man was almost beyond understanding, though everybody knew that the cause of it all was Masha, to whom they had recourse when they needed favors. Just as once upon a time the Jews resorted to Esther to influence Ahasuerus in their favor so did the Kuzmin folk look to Masha as their intercessor before Uncle Moses. If any of them was marrying off a daughter, or was having a set of gold teeth made, or needed to undergo an operation,—Masha was sent to Uncle Moses. Nor did he ever refuse her. No sooner did she appear than his eyes lighted up, the fleshy folds of his cheeks seemed to disappear, his entire appearance became more human and his countenance, usually so inscrutible, shone with a radiance that all could understand. And since Masha won whatever she asked of Uncle Moses, even as Esther with Ahasuerus, the folk from Kuzmin began to call her Esther; Uncle Moses became Ahasuerus, and Aaron Melnick—Mordecai.

. . . . . .

And now, in honor of the two "corpses," who were preparing for the next world, all Kuzmin gathered together to accompany them on their living funeral. Uncle Berrel had nothing left for him to live for in this world. Nothing to live upon, either. He had lost his "boarders," —his children. They had married. One by one they had grown up and wedded. Charlie, too, had grown up and no longer needed his sisters' aid. During the summer he washed dishes at a summer hotel and earned enough for his winter needs. In the early winter mornings he helped the proprietor of a newspaper-stand deliver papers to his customers, thus providing funds to pay his way through college, where he was already studying law.

He no longer needed his mother's assistance, either. The youngest sister,—the hat saleslady,—soon had a suitor. And suddenly the father and mother became aware that their children's happiness had proved the parents' misfortune. They were left without children, without "boarders," and there was nobody to sustain the household. To be sure the mother could have found "work"; —her eldest daughter was willing to take her in. None of the married children was willing to take in the father, however. No place could be found for him. He was already too weak to work; as for supporting him and giving him a place to live, one child passed that duty on to the next. Whereupon the old man said that he wished to die in Kuzmin; and be buried in Kuzmin's cemetery. So Masha got Uncle Moses to provide Berrel with the funds necessary to take him home to "die." . . .

In honor of the two "corpses" the townsfolk of Kuzmin had assembled at Berrel's home on the night before the ship sailed, to bid farewell to the departing friends. The two "corpses," Uncle Moses' father and Berrel, sat at the head of the table, drinking everybody's health, and the families,—the sons, daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren, took affectionate leave of them. They wept the departing men as they would weep the dead. And the townsfolk asked pardon of them.

"What's the difference? We'll all journey home. We'll all go where they're going!—" cried one townsman, an old man who longed for the Kuzmin cemetery.

"Reb Berrel, give them all our best wishes. Remember us to everybody over there."

"If you should meet any of my people, Reb Mordecai, remember me to them."

"Yes, do us that favor," wept an old lady.

The "corpses," however, were very lively. They did not feel at all as if they were going home to die. Berrel's eyes sparkled and his beard was carefully groomed. It seemed as if at last he had attained the happiness that he had been waiting for all his life,—that now he was to receive recompense for all his sufferings. Every motion revealed his tranquillity, his quiet joy.

Old Melnick, too, made merry, drinking everybody's health and exchanging quips.

"When I meet your old father Khayim in the next world, he'll ask me, of course, 'How's my son doing in America?' And I'll answer, Your son eats impure food and doesn't keep the Sabbath. That's why you turn about so in your grave. And he'll haunt you at night and choke you. You'll catch it, I promise you. Oh, maybe you won't catch it!"

And all the townsfolk greeted the "dead man's" jests with hearty laughter.

At the sailing of the ship, however, the scene truly resembled a funeral. The children wept, clung to their father's neck and implored his pardon for any wrong they had done.

"Father, forgive us if we have ever treated you badly."

"Father, we'll never forget you. As long as you live you'll receive money from us regularly."

"I'll not need your money very long," smiled the father calmly and good-humoredly. "Be happy, my children, and serve the Lord."

He called his only son, Charlie, aside, and whispered to him:

"I ask only one thing of you. I had other hopes; well, it can't be helped now. But promise me,—and give me your hand on it, that when you hear that all is over, you'll recite *Kaddish* for me. Promise me, my son."

The onlookers all knew what the father was asking of his son, and their thoughts turned to their own children. How far from them, how estranged from them, were their children in America! The townsfolk began to groan, here and there somebody wiped a tear.

"Is my own son any better?" whispered one to another. "Is yours any better?"

Charlie, who had grown into a tall, thin youth, with strong arms and a firm chest, stood as if petrified. He realized that it was something dear and sacred that his father had asked of him. He pitied the old man and nodded in acquiescence. But he spoke not a word; he could say nothing to his father. For his father was really a stranger to him. He loved his mother because she always took his part in quarrels and would protect him against his sisters. But toward his father, with his praying and reading from the holy books,—how did he feel towards his father?

In the meantime the sons-in-law were standing in a corner whispering to one another. They had been collecting some money and the oldest,—the Galician,—brought it to Berrel.

"Father-in-law, take this to help you along during the next hundred and twenty years. May you . . ."

"I don't require funds for a hundred and twenty years more. Thank God, I've saved up a little for my own needs,—from my own labor, too." And he pointed to the little sack of money that he wore next his heart.

But until those hundred and twenty years have gone, don't forsake me. The hundred and twenty years won't take very long. I can feel that now. . . ." And Berrel smiled.

When it came to bidding farewell to his wife, he and she first realized what America had been to them. They had brought their children to America. And America had taken the children away. America was spewing them forth, throwing them out as if they were a bit of rags. America had parted them in their old age. It still had a little use for the old mother. The aged father it was sending home to die.

"Death could not part us, and America has done it," shrieked the old woman. She did not know what she meant, but she was filled with a deep resentment against the country, which had taken away from her everything, —her strength, her children, her life,—and was now spewing forth what it no longer needed.

Soon, however, the ship began to rock with merriment, for Uncle Moses had just arrived with the other "corpse."

Old Melnick was dead drunk. In his hand he held the little sack of money he had saved up out of his own labors for his burial expenses; this he jingled as he shouted at his son:

"What do I need you for, you Pharaoh, King of Egypt, with all your kingdom of America extending from India to Ethiopia. I've saved up my own burial expenses. By my own toil. Ground it with my own hands out of my little coffee mill. So what do I need you for?"

"Come, Berrel. Come back to Kuzmin!" he cried to his companion, pulling at his sleeve. "The best of health

to you, Pharaoh, King of Egypt!" he shouted to his son. "Townsfolk all, slaves, back to work for Pharaoh!"

As the ship sailed off carrying the two "corpses," with it, the townsfolk stood watching with yearnful eyes, and more than one envied the old men their return to Kuzmin's burial-ground,—a better fate than returning to Pharaoh the King of Egypt.

The group was plunged in gloom. Even Uncle Moses was sad as he watched the departing vessel. Each individual thought of his own final days, when he, too, would sail home.

Standing apart from the rest were Masha and Charlie, the two children who had been reared in America. They made a fine looking pair and were of the same height, as if together they had shot up with their proud young heads. Their bosoms were on a level with each other. The maiden and the young man had met at the "funeral of the old men" for the first time since growing into adulthood. Youth called to youth. They were not looking at the departing vessel; they were conversing intimately and laughed aloud, revealing their glistening teeth. The townsfolk, hearing their laughter, turned around, and one said to the other:

"There! There's 'America' for you! Much they care! Much they feel! His old father is sailing home and he stands there with a girl, laughing!"

"They belong to a different world entirely, they are altogether a different sort. What do you want of them?" interrupted others.

Uncle Moses, too, was watching Charlie and Masha, who stood apart during all this time, laughingly oblivious to their surroundings. Uncle Moses grew sad and cast

a last glance at the disappearing vessel that was carrying off the two old men. For a moment he was in doubt: To which world did he belong,—to that which was now sailing back to die or to this one, which stood upon the sunny wharf, chatting with glistening teeth and laughing eyes?

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

"HE'LL HAVE CHILDREN!"

UNCLE MOSES entered his store early one morning, wearing a white flannel suit, filling half the place with Colgate's rose perfume, which might be scented from him afar. His brown shoes sparkled with a high polish, and their creaking seemed to announce: "Here he comes!" His wide, fleshy face was radiant with the clean shave he had just taken. It was as smooth as a freshly caught fish. He whisked off his high-crowned, stiff-brimmed Panama hat and mopped his perspiring head and his sweating neck with a white batiste handkerchief. From sheer terror his employees scampered off into the various corners and pretended to be very busy arranging the suits, the trousers and the coats. Uncle Moses paused in the middle of the establishment, looked about him in every direction and surveyed the townsfolk that worked for him. It seemed to them that he stood there a year inspecting them. He beckoned to Sam with two fingers, and asked his trusted adjutant:

"Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Uncle," replied Sam.

"What is Kuzmin doing?" asked Uncle Moses, pointing to the garret.

"They're sewing overcoats number 53."

"Good. See to it that they keep busy. All Kuzmin does is sweat and sleep. We need the cash. Work away, my boys, as hard as you can, and make money."

"All right, Uncle."

"I won't be here all day. Keep your eyes open, Sam. Everything's all right, then?"

"Yes, Uncle."

Uncle Moses winked at his cousin encouragingly and looked about him again.

"Boys, today's Sunday. A hot Sunday. Soak the Italians and the Chinamen. Make money. Money." And he left the store to the tune of his highly-polished, creaking russet shoes.

As they gazed upon his departing form the employees breathed with relief. They ventured to come forth from their places of refuge and could see the Uncle taking his place in the hired automobile that was waiting before the door. His lips were parted in a smile.

They all knew where the Uncle was going, and they cast furtive glances at Sam, whispering to one another when they were out of his hearing.

"He thought he was going to inherit the Uncle's business," snickered one, indicating Sam with his foot.

"Fool! Uncle Moses can have a dozen children yet. Do you think he can't? Just like old Petrik over the other side."

"Did you ever see such a bull-neck on a fellow?" growled another.

Sam felt the glances behind him and knew what the laughter meant. He looked around. His glance and his countenance assumed the same expression as those of the Uncle. And he really resembled him. He had

penetrating eyes, a sharp nose and a strong, masculine chin. The salesmen were frightened and became suddenly engrossed in business affairs.

Sam spat out and left by the front door. We wished to catch a fleeting glimpse of Uncle Moses, who had long ago disappeared. He bit his lip, his fists rolled into a ball and a curse escaped from between his strong white teeth.

Was it for this that he had served his uncle so faithfully, ever since he was fourteen, ever since he had been brought over after having been left an orphan by his father's death? He had been Uncle Moses' loyal watch-dog. Uncle had used him for every purpose,—had made him his servant, his ferret-hound. He spied upon the townsfolk and the relatives who worked for the Uncle, discovering who among them was true to the employer and who false, and reported to Uncle Moses. He had done for the Uncle things for which he would, if caught, have gone to prison for life; as, for example, the time when they had been detected with the stolen Fifth Avenue goods on their hands. Sam had hidden them in the cellar, coats and trousers upon which Uncle Moses had had his label sewed. Sam took all the blame, and it was only after hard effort that he was extricated from the mess. Whenever such troubles occurred, it was Sam who always assumed the guilt. When Uncle Moses had been summoned before the District Attorney on account of the Polish girl he had seduced, or whenever monthly settlements with the wife of the restaurant-keeper had to be made,—it was always Sam who saw to the details and took all the blame. He had risked his life for the Uncle; for Uncle Moses he would not only

have gone to prison, if necessary, but he would have committed murder. And all this he had done because he had hoped some day to take the Uncle's place.

His loyalty had not been fawning flattery. It was a sort of idol-worship. Uncle Moses was his model,—his ideal, whom he aspired some day to resemble. His worship of Uncle Moses, then,—his dog-like devotion,—were really the worship of, and loyalty to, himself and his future. It all looked ahead to the time when he should be the "Uncle." And to have all these plans and hopes suddenly crumble to dust! The Uncle would marry the little guttersnipe of a Masha,—Aaron the Big Mouth's daughter, who had got him into her clutches. She would bear him children,—one, two, three,—and everything would pass to the children. She'd see to it that she had children. And if need be, she would provide him with another's child, to make sure of inheriting his wealth. And she had already commenced to accomplish her purpose. One by one she was placing members of her family in the store. A younger sister was already a bookkeeper; her father had advanced to the position of cashier. Then what would become of him,—Sam? He would yet be driven out altogether.

He recalled the numerous occasions on which he might have cheated Uncle Moses out of money. His cousin Mannes, who had worked for the Uncle before Sam came, had warned him more than once.

"Eyes open, Sam. Let the Lord worry about tomorrow. You help yourself today. What you have in the bank is yours. As to the rest,—nothing doing. You don't know Uncle Moses. He'll marry a young girl in his old age. Remember what I'm telling you!"

Sam now recalled Mannes' admonition. Mannes was older than he and more experienced, yet Sam had paid little attention to his words. He trusted Uncle Moses implicitly,—made all the money he could for him. And now what had it profited him?

"I must go to see Mannes this evening. He, with all his lawyers and his Tammany Hall judges, will be able to cook up some sort of plan. Uncle Moses must be kept from marrying that beggar girl and letting Aaron Melnick run everything. For that's what will happen with him as the father-in-law. Otherwise,—we're all buried. The whole family is in danger."

Sam considered his plan for a long time. His loyalty to Uncle Moses still restrained him from doing his employer any harm. Sam idolized him too much. He was so fond of his benefactor that everything Moses did looked right. Sam understood the Uncle's actions and was proud of them. Even Moses' desire to wed Masha pleased Sam, and were it not for the fact that such a marriage would injure his interests, he would have done all he could to hasten the consummation of the Uncle's plans. Sam's ambitions for his future, however, had fully matured, and he was ready to trample sentimental considerations underfoot.

"Cholera seize the old duffer! He'll have children!" he thought, deeply concerned as to his own future.

He was not angry with Uncle Moses. His rage was directed against "the little guttersnipe Masha," and her father, who had sneaked into the "family." He regarded them as dangerous rivals.

"We must get the wife of the restaurant-keeper to pay a visit to that runt Masha with the three children

she's had by the old duffer. Let the restaurant woman have a good talk with Uncle's sweetheart."

Ho-ho! But there would be a rumpus when the Galician's wife would come to the young bride on the wedding day! The bride would be all dressed for the ceremony, when suddenly the other woman would present her five children.

"You are about to marry my husband,—the father of my children!"

"Hey! But that would be a wedding!" Sam told himself, avenging himself in thought.

And Uncle Moses? There he'd be standing, wearing a frock coat. He would be stricken dumb with shame! For a moment Sam pitied the Uncle. He paused, but again his own future rose before his eyes. He thought of Rosie, his own sweetheart, and bit his lips.

"The plague take him," he said to himself. "He'll have children, the old blackguard!"

Filled with these thoughts of vengeance he returned to the store. His countenance assumed the harsh, imperious aspect he had learned from Uncle Moses. His chin was set firmly and under his long nose appeared that family grimace which the townsfolk feared so much. He grunted, and then, imitating his Uncle, declared:

"Pull in as much money as you can, boys!"

Sunday had begun in Melnick's store.

CHAPTER II

MASHA

SOMETHING had come over Uncle Moses. To think that he should leave the store on a Sunday and go out on an all-day pleasure trip with a young girl!! And in all truth Uncle Moses was daily growing younger and taking to things that made him ridiculous in the eyes of all his friends and lowered him in the esteem of his townsfolk. He began to dress like a nineteen-year-old dandy. He donned shortened trousers that afforded a view of his white socks; he began to wear high, tight-fitting collars that nearly choked him; he doused himself with perfumes. At the Galician's lunch-room, where Uncle Moses was fond of eating his roast drumsticks of geese and ducks, the Bowery business men stared at him and stifled back their laughter. The new salesman, a young man from Warsaw who had just opened a cigar-store near Uncle Moses' establishment and was known in the whole vicinity as a "sport" and practical joker, played a joke on Uncle Moses. He had ordered of the restaurant woman a three cornered cake in the form of a heart, stuck in the center a colored picture of a red-cheeked girl, which he had torn off the cover of a cheap box of chocolates, and sent it over to Uncle Moses. Uncle Moses saw and heard the bystanders laugh at him and knew what the jest meant. His red neck seemed to

spurt blood. But he was quite helpless. He was compelled to be the rival of a nineteen-year-old college boy,—Charlie,—who had of late become a frequent visitor at Aaron Melnick's home, going out very often with Masha. Uncle Moses feared this nineteen-year-old college boy very much indeed; he dwelt in fear of all men younger than he. His one consolation was that the college youth wore a pair of threadbare trousers and dilapidated shoes and was always without a cent. He could not, therefore, dress in the height of fashion. Uncle Moses realized how ridiculous he was making himself, how undignified was his rivalry to Charlie, but he was at war. He had resolved firmly upon marrying Masha,—the eighteen-year-old maiden whose education he had paid for;—he was strongly determined to marry and have children in his later years,—children of his very own, for his own pleasure in life. He felt so justified in his aspirations that he could not understand why so much fun should be poked at him. His fastidious dress was a means toward winning the silly heart of the young girl. As long as she wished it, he must comply. In his abbreviated narrow trousers, his fitted coat buttoned tightly about his heavy paunch, and his close-cropped donjuanesque locks, Uncle Moses carried on his serious business. He haggled over the price of goods, bought and sold houses, went to meetings of charitable institutions, drove Kuzmin on to labor with the goad of his glances, all as if he was aware of nothing ridiculous in his foppishness, in his youthful dress, in his hair-dyeing and his face-powdering. He was the same stern "Uncle Moses" in his youthful clothes as he had been of old.

For three years he had patiently waited for the

fourteen-year-old Masha to grow up. Every other day he would visit Aaron Melnick to contemplate his future happiness, refreshing himself with the fruits of his hidden fancies,—the joys in store for him. He watched over her as one watches an increasing property. When Masha reached seventeen and a half, Uncle Moses began to reveal his deeply-wrought, sweetly-desirous feeling. He came to take Masha out for rides,—to take her out not, as hitherto, as a child, but as a young woman of sense who understood the good fortune awaiting her. He became her avowed suitor and sought to show his manly vigor.

He smiled to himself and pleasant sensations filled him as he thought of Masha, to whom he was riding this clear summer's morning which had been cooled by the night's rain and was now panting in the humidity. He could see her in her white batiste dress, the curves of her body revealed by the outlines of the gown. Ever since she had grown up the Uncle was fond of seeing her in white. The color white summoned pleasant thoughts. He pictured Masha and himself after the wedding. She had just become a mother and was lying in bed with the child beside her,—*his* child, and he was entering the room, a trifle tipsy. And she, all in white, looked at him beseechingly. Her face was so careworn and she seemed to ask pity. The thought filled him with contentment, for his inner, hidden joy was to behold her in child-bed, looking at him with a careworn, pale face. It was such pictures as these that Masha's white dress conjured up; this was why he was forever presenting her with white gowns. He had asked her to wear the white

batiste dress for this Sunday; he had promised to take her on an all-day excursion to a near-by beach

Masha was already waiting for him, dressed in white as he had requested. During the few years in which he had become interested in her and had her educated, she had come to look upon him as a father. She humored him, even as a tactful child often humors a capricious parent. She was brought up to comply with all of the Uncle's requests,—to obey him. Her father, her mother, her entire family and all the townsfolk had so trained her. Not only by word, but by example. And not only did they put up with his merest whim; they would have done anything for him. Even if he had asked of them their most hidden, most sacred, most personal possession, they would have surrendered it. Whenever the Uncle asked any of them a service, they were transported to the seventh heaven of delight. And should Uncle Moses ask after such a one's wife or grown-up daughter, his standing among the townsfolk would rise immeasurably.

All of the townsfolk envied and begrudged Aaron Melnick the good fortune that had come to him with Uncle Moses' interest in Masha. She had become the "open sesame" to his heart, and interceded for the townsfolk whenever they needed aid. And Aaron Melnick promised favors to anybody he chose to please. Aaron was fawned upon as once Sam had been, and Rosa, his wife, wielded a mighty influence upon the townsfolk of Kuzmin because of Masha's strategic position.

It was in such an atmosphere as this that Masha grew to womanhood, and although she was now beginning to understand (she had already felt it long

before) what a hateful role she played in the matter, she could not help herself. They all considered her position such an unspeakably enviable one, such a stroke of good fortune, that she dared not speak or think otherwise. And until recently she had considered herself most fortunate. Of late, however, as she grew older and learned more, she had begun to feel that she would have to pay for all this good fortune. It was not yet quite clear to her just what she would have to pay, but she considered herself a sacrifice to the welfare of her parents, her sisters, her relatives and all the townsfolk.

This feeling cast a shroud of gloom and silence over her refined, maidenly being. Whenever she was in the company of young companions and friends at a tea party or ball, she found it at times hard to laugh as freely and whole-heartedly as the rest. It seemed to her that something hovered above her,—something strange and sad, and that everybody could see it. Over her white satin dress, which was prettier and costlier than any of her friends' clothes, there hovered an ominous black veil, like the shroud of a dead bride. It seemed to her that she no longer had any right to rejoice and laugh like other girls of her age.

And at times, at dead of night, when everybody else was fast asleep, there could be heard crying,—a soft sobbing. It was Masha, who had burst all at once into tears without knowing why.

CHAPTER III

A SWEETHEART

ON the stairs were heard Uncle Moses' creaking shoes and his inquiring voice:

"Ready, Masha?"

The parents stood in the open door. The former operative, Aaron Melnick, had become corpulent. Rosa, too, had put on weight and looked better than ever. Aaron had allowed his beard to grow,—a black one,—and his beer-drinking had reddened his cheeks and his neck. He stood there coatless in a white ironed shirt. They had just finished breakfast. Rosa was in her silk petticoat, and both greeted the Uncle with a joyous smile.

"Ready, Uncle! Ready!"

As much as Aaron and Rosa had hated each other during their days of poverty, so much did they now in their prosperity love each other. In their days of sadness they had done nothing but exchange curses; now amid their contentment they showered blessings upon each other. They were deeply concerned with each other's health and comfort. It was "Aaron my dear," "Aaron crown of my life," and "Rosa, may you ever be well and happy," "Darling, you haven't had anything in your mouth yet today." And more tender exchanges of like sort. As the Uncle entered, each took him by the arm and led him into the room.

Masha was not long in appearing. Oh, she had grown so tall and lovely with the passing days! Her face still revealed the child. Her mother's milk, as it were, lay still upon her lips. But a certain refreshing youth and maturity emanated from her figure. Her thick black tresses were gathered in two braids that were tied with a black silk ribbon. She wore a wide-brimmed straw hat and was dressed in white, as Uncle Moses had requested. It was a long skirt of white tulle and her waist was girded by a wide ribbon of white silk tied in a knot; white silk stockings and high white shoes completed the costume. Uncle Moses took it all in with a single glance, and, as was his habit whenever he was pleased in a matter of business, he moistened his fingers and patted down his hair,—a habit he had contracted during his years as a butcher's boy and was unable to shake. "Good!" he muttered, smiling.

"Uncle dear, maybe you'd like to have a bite? The table is all prepared," ventured Aaron Melnick.

"No time. The machine is waiting."

"But perhaps—There are fresh eggs, young radishes and sweet cream," urged Rosa.

Uncle Moses looked at Aaron Melnick with a glance that plainly expressed annoyance.

"Don't you hear? No time. The machine's waiting," cried Aaron to his wife.

"Masha, come on. Come on! We'll stop to eat on the way."

Masha joined Uncle Moses. Her parents shouted good wishes from the doorway.

"Have a good time! Enjoy yourselves."

"It's all right. We'll see to that!" And Uncle Moses waved to them from below.

"Well, Masha. Do you like it?" And Uncle Moses took Masha's hand, while the automobile started through the streets.

"Certainly, I do!" replied the girl.

"I am going to give you a nice time, kid," he said, playfully patting her hand.

Masha was seized with a sudden fear of the Uncle. It was the first time she had felt this way toward him. As she sat there, she looked him over,—saw his massive form and grew frightened. This riding in an automobile was not at all to her liking. She would have preferred to go out,—to leave altogether. Uncle Moses, it seemed to her, had begun to act strangely; he had suddenly seized her by the hand and looked into her eyes, saying:

"Listen, Masha. I like you! And I want you to like me! To like me very much!"

"Certainly I like you, Uncle!"

"Well then, I want you to love me ever so much, to love me deeply. You must love Uncle very, very much!" he told her, holding her hand and gazing into her eyes.

Masha's fear increased. She smiled childishly.

"You're so funny today. Uncle!"

"Funny? Ha, ha! Funny! Listen, kid. I want to tell you something today. Something that many and many a woman has waited to hear from me. But none of them ever heard it. I never said it to anybody, and now I'm going to say it to you."

Masha was afraid to ask what that something was. Indeed, she feared to speak altogether. She desired but one thing,—to get out of the automobile as soon as she possibly could.

"Listen to me, Masha." Uncle Moses had all at once become serious, and had taken her hand again. "I know that you're a clever girl, and you'll understand. You must love your Uncle and obey him in all things; you must have respect for him,—great respect. You can see how everybody shows the greatest respect for him. And it's not for nothing, my child. They have good cause. Uncle is fond of obedience,—of having people do always as he tells them to. Do you hear? Everything." And he emphasized his words with a strong pressure of her hand. "You must never oppose him and never argue. If Uncle says today is Monday,—then it's Monday. If he says it's day, then day it is. And if he says night, it's night. And above all, obedience, my child, prompt obedience. In everything. Do you understand, Masha?"

"You are so funny, Uncle!" And Masha burst out laughing in his face.

Uncle Moses bit his lips. He said nothing and considered for a moment what to do. He decided to say nothing more on the subject for the present,—to give her time, to let his words sink deep into her maiden heart. He could see that his words had made an impression upon her.

Close by the sea, there was a Yiddish hotel frequented by well-to-do, ostentatious Jews. Thither the automobile took Uncle Moses and Masha. On the porch sat corpulent Jewish matrons,—the wives of vulgar, prosperous business men,—plentifully besprinkled with powder, clad in their bathing robes and playing cards. Here and there amid a group of women could be seen a young man, likewise in bathing costume. But he, also, was so stout and so covered by his bath robe that

he looked like a woman too. The proprietress of the hotel, the well-known matchmaker, Mrs. Fleishman, stepped forward to greet the new arrivals. The guests on the porch ceased their playing for a moment and stared inquisitively at the couple. They all knew Uncle Moses; he was of their own business fraternity. They knew, too, of his relations with Masha. The women called to him from the card tables:

"Mr. Melnick, did you see my husband?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Is he coming here today?"

"He's sweating away in the city," answered Uncle Moses bluntly.

Mrs. Fleishman took Masha by the hand and smiled into her face. She was at a loss as to how to greet the girl.

"This is my future wife, Mrs. Fleishman," said Uncle Moses, introducing Masha.

Masha blanched with terror and could not find breath to speak.

At the tables where the scantily-clad women were playing cards there suddenly rose a buzzing as if from a bee-hive.

CHAPTER IV

MANNES THE AGITATOR

UNCLE MOSES set about his marriage preparations in all earnestness. He told Aaron Melnick to prepare an elaborate engagement party and invite all the Kuzmin townsfolk. Let there be all the beer and brandy they desired—all at his expense. And Uncle Moses went about like the youngest of joyous sweethearts. It was a pleasure to see how he busied himself, purchasing presents for his beloved and showing them to everybody. The Kuzmin townsfolk rejoiced at Uncle Moses' betrothal as if he were marrying into their own family. Only they envied Aaron Melnick his good fortune. On the other hand, they told themselves, it was better that one of their own should strike such a gold mine rather than have it fall into the hands of strangers. It would thus be easier to obtain a favor. So they flattered Aaron and his wife and even his children, as if through them might be attained the pinnacle of good fortune.

In the meantime Sam was not letting the grass grow under his feet. The selfsame evening of the day on which Uncle Moses had gone out with Masha, Sam went to his cousin Mannes. Here he sought advice as to what course to pursue so as to prevent the threatened marriage of Uncle Moses to Masha, and the disaster it meant. Of all the Kuzmin townsfolk Mannes

alone followed the same calling in America as he had pursued in the old home. There he had been a wild youth and a troublemaker, got into controversies with the whole village,—the Rabbi, the richest man in town, the money-lender. He opposed every one of their customs and standards and lived his own life. In the old country he had as companions the rough and ready Gentile lads. He was the only Jew who kept pigeons, and simply could not bear injustice, whether to himself or to strangers. He never brought his cases to court; he was his own court. He was the judge and he punished folk for the wrongs they inflicted. All Kuzmin still remembered the joke he had played upon Joel the money-lender.

When Mannes was released from his military service he returned to find all Kuzmin in debt to Joel the money-lender, who was the wealthiest man in the place. All the trousers were held in pawn by Joel and all the engagement presents and wedding gifts of the place lay behind lock and key in one of Joel's large bureaus. The village groaned under the heavy yoke of the tribute which Joel the money-lender levied upon the inhabitants. They all labored for him. Every morning he scattered terror as he made his rounds from one house to the other, collecting his taxes. This was more than Mannes could bear. Whereupon he took counsel with the chief of police as to a course of action. Joel's maid servant knew where all the pledges were hidden, but she was so loyal to Joel that she would not divulge their whereabouts. Mannes, however, got one of his boon companions to make love to her, and the companion wormed out of the maid the information that Joel kept the pledges concealed in his high wardrobe;

and that the keys were kept under his pillow. He got the girl to promise she would one night secretly open the door. That night Mannes rode up in a wagon and with the help of another took the wardrobe out of the place, placed it on the wagon and drove it to the river. The notes Mannes returned to every signer. The humble pledges,—silver candlesticks, wedding rings, ear-rings, were all sent back to their owners, according to the name and address written on the little ticket tied to each article. (Joel was a very methodical fellow.) As to the gold watches, the chief took them for himself; the cash that was in the wardrobe was appropriated by Mannes. To the girl who opened the door he presented a dowry of two hundred rubles and married her off into the bargain. And the whole village danced and made merry at the wedding.

On the following night Mannes brought the empty wardrobe back and placed it just before Joel's door.

Thus had Mannes once delivered all Kuzmin from the heavy burden of Joel's yoke. To this very day the Kuzmin townsfolk recount the miracle of the deliverance and call down blessings upon him.

When Mannes landed in America (to tell the truth, he was compelled to flee because of this selfsame robbery), he found it difficult to work very long in Uncle Moses' shop. He made no change in his mode of living. He very quickly got his bearings and saw that if he was to live according to the laws he would not live very long. As to waiting for other better laws to be enacted,—he might wait until there was nothing left of him. Clearly, he said to himself, he must act at once. In America, it seemed to him, the most important thing was to have friends, good friends who

would give a fellow a "show." Whereupon at once he joined a large number of societies, becoming exceedingly active in the anti-prohibition organization. And very soon he reckoned many Irishmen among his friends; he had little use for his fellow Jews, and even lived among his Irish associates, not far from the butcher's shop. He became a house contractor, employing a couple of Polish masons, painters and so on. And friends threw jobs in his direction. Whenever there was any "trouble," he could reach the captain himself, or at least the political "boss" of the district. In return when election time came around, Mannes was on deck. His windows would be filled with the pictures and placards of his "people." He would run to see all his townsfolk and work in the interests of his candidates. Mannes was exceedingly busy and versatile. During the day he would put on a green necktie like his Irish friends, and would serve as a watcher. More than once there would be fist-fights and this was Mannes' specialty as a political agitator. When he was needed, he would be taken from one election station to the next that he might discuss the issues with his fists. The district boss had therefore nicknamed him "agitator." In the anti-prohibition club on the corner, on the walls of which hung the pictures of all previous bosses, Mannes was known as the best of the agitators.

At night before the results of the election would be known, Mannes would hang large brooms over the entire house, and he and his wife and children would make a racket with rattlers, in token of the other party's defeat.

This had been Mannes' year. The entire district

belonged to him. The judge was his—the district attorney was his, and all the "cops" were his. The whole city was his. And Mannes felt impregnable. His fame spread to all his townsfolk. So that when any of the Kuzmin folk were in trouble, mixed up with the police or with the courts, they always came to Mannes. And Mannes always straightened things out.

The truth was that Mannes possessed a certain love of justice. By nature he could not endure unfairness. The world was so made that matters did not always go hand in hand with justice; not always was it easy to approach the law, and not always was the law right. For this reason Mannes found his party's methods,—supporting friends and helping out adherents,—a more direct road to justice than the cold letter of the law. This was why Mannes was so loyal, so devoted to his party. He really thought it the best, the most just. For the judge, the leader of his party, who was a Jew into the bargain and always shook hands with Mannes when they met in the street, with a "Hello, agitator," —he would have laid down his life. The judge embodied Mannes' ideal. Judge Greenfield was "his man"; whenever there were any difficulties he would go to the judge's home and talk matters over with him. Mannes had no secrets from the judge; he told him the truth and the judge would tell Mannes how to testify in court next morning before him.

Judge Greenfield was not only Mannes' ideal, but because he was a Jew,—and a good Jew at that, who prayed every Saturday,—he was Mannes' pride as well. And although Mannes himself was not pious, and cared nothing about God, yet it pleased him that the Judge went to synagogue every Sabbath and was a

very prominent figure in all the Jewish organizations. And because in America there was a Jewish judge, because America contained a party like his own, which did so many favors for its members, Mannes loved America with all his soul. "America—my country!" as he would often exclaim to his Irish companions. And Mannes was a great patriot of America's and of Judge Greenfield's, for the judge was to him the symbol of America. On one of his walls hung a picture of Washington and on the other, the Judge's. On every national holiday Mannes would display a large American flag, with Washington's picture on one side and Judge Greenfield's on the other.

Mannes, therefore, hated the new party that had just sprung up,—the Socialist party. First, because they were not patriots and created disturbances. Second, because they opposed the Judge. He did not understand them; he did not know what they were after. He understood the other parties. "The Republicans want to elect their officials so that they can have the 'pull.' But we don't let them. But what do the Socialists want?" Justice? You can't carry justice that far! Suppose they did have honest elections, who'd ever be able to get a favor from anybody? "Who'd get anything out of it all?" He would argue the matter thus and convince himself that he was quite right. "Undependable persons would be elected,—nincompoops. And if a Jew got into trouble there'd be nobody to turn to."

"Did you ever hear the like? They want justice! Who wants justice, if justice can't do you a bit of good?"

It was to his friend Mannes that Sam now turned in

the misfortune brought about by Uncle Moses. Sam went over to him in the evening, finding him in the anti-prohibition club and saloon on the corner, where the picture of Washington and of the Judge hung likewise side by side. Mannes was tall, thin, with smooth-combed hair that parted in the middle. He was turning grey at the temples, as was his close-cropped mustache. Mannes understood at once that there was some trouble. For if Sam was coming to him,—Sam was a big bird, Uncle Moses' right hand,—if Sam so suddenly appeared, there must be something interesting in the wind. And although Mannes did not think very highly of him or care for him at all, because of the boy's loyalty to Uncle Moses and his refusal to give a fellow-partisan a chance to earn some money,—yet Sam was too important a bird not to cause Mannes pleasure with the visit.

"What's up? Trouble?" asked Mannes. For he knew that only trouble brought persons to him.

"Come out with me, and we'll talk it over."

"You can speak as freely here as in your own home. They're all good friends of mine. You can speak."

"The old man is going to get married," said Sam, drawing very close to him.

"Who? Uncle Moses?" asked Mannes, excited.

"Yes. To Aaron Melnick's little daughter."

"The old man will have children," declared Mannes, turning pale.

"Of course he will. Is he an invalid?"

Uncle Moses commanded universal interest among the townsfolk, whether they were related to him or not. He was a dominating figure, like a king with his subjects, or a father with his children. They all felt

pride in his wealth, and hoped to share in his favors.

"Well," said Mannes. "That means your funeral. I always warned you to take care of yourself. Tell me, have you laid aside anything?"

"I was as faithful to him as a dog and didn't cheat him out of a penny. I saved him money wherever I could and watched every nickel. I served him like a loyal hound. And now,—what do I get out of it? She'll be driving me out of the place yet. Who am I in her eyes, anyway?" And big Sam burst into tears before Mannes.

Mannes had a soft heart, and we have seen, a strong sense of what was right. He was not only sorry for the boy, but recognized the justice of his desire not to see Uncle Moses marry and thus lose all chance of coming into his property,—the purpose in which he had invested all his dog-like devotion. Mannes felt that he must help the youth.

"Let's see, now. Hasn't he had something to do with a certain woman?"

"He's had three or four children by her, whom he's now supporting."

"Then why don't you speak, you fool! Just take me to that woman. Uncle Moses won't marry. Take my word for it."

"Mannes. Don't do him any harm. Have pity on the old man," cautioned Sam as they went out.

"What do you mean,—'do him harm'? Isn't he my uncle, too, and an old man as well?" replied Mannes indignantly.

CHAPTER V

UNCLE MOSES IS NOT CAUGHT NAPPING

UNCLE MOSES, however, had foreseen all developments, and like the experienced business man he was, he liked to make sure of everything and everybody, and obviate the possibility of surprises and disappointments. Before he had decided to woo Masha, he had paid a visit to the restaurant-man's wife and had an understanding with her husband, too.

"How much do you ask? Name your price."

The husband was a slim, slight, swarthy fellow, covered with hair on every part of his body that was exposed,—his face, his hands, his neck. From out of this hair sparkled two beady eyes, like two mice. He was under his wife's thumb. It was she who really ran the lunch room, selling also a little Lemberg schnapps, sweets, home cooking and succulent liver. And because his wife was an attractive creature with a pair of dimples that played about her chubby cheeks, she drew the custom of elderly business men. These customers vowed that she was as tasty as the geese and the duck that she sold. Her husband served as her assistant, and his help consisted in his having convinced several business men who had a much nearer restaurant to patronize, that they had a share in his wife's children. On the strength of this he collected money from them. And since he had only three chil-

dren, his clients were limited and his receipts small. And in all truth he did not know to whom his children belonged; to him, to Uncle Moses, or to a certain other employer from Delancey Street. This did not, however, prevent him from being a good father to his children and attending to their religious education. He took them to synagogue for prayers, which he alone taught them.

"Mr. Melnick, what do you mean,—'how much do I ask?'—Are they my children, then? They are yours!"

"But, but,"—and Uncle Moses tickled the husband, —"you have a share in them, too."

"Mr. Melnick, they are your children," was the earnest reply. "Ask Gittel, if you like." (That was his wife's name.) "Ask her!"

"I don't know which is mine, which is yours and which belongs to the man from Delancey Street," laughed Uncle Moses.

"Mr. Melnick, she was more your wife than anybody else's, believe me," asserted the other man.

The young man spoke thus only to extort a larger sum from Uncle Moses. In his heart he was convinced that the children were his. The other two men were simply being deceived by his wife, because they were needed in the business.

"And suppose I appoint you collector for my houses on Essex Street? Will that make things all right?"

The man could hardly keep from falling on his knees before Uncle Moses and kissing his hand. His chief ambition in life was to become a tenement-house rent collector. Always subjected to his wife's will, this hairy fellow had ever dreamed of some day becoming a ruler, with power over others. And as his ambition

never flew beyond Essex Street, where he lived, he therefore yearned to become boss over the Essex Street tenants,—to strut into a home and bellow: "Give me your rent or you'll get an eviction notice!" He longed to revel in this power,—to evict families, to be such an awe-inspiring collector that he would send a tremor of terror through all Essex Street. Yet despite all this, he feared to agree at once to Uncle Moses' proposal, lest later he regret his action in the discovery that he might have extorted more. So he added, with an embarrassed grimace:

"With a hundred dollars cash." (He dared not say more.)

"And a hundred on top of that," smiled the visitor.

Once again the husband was seized with remorse. Why had he not said two hundred? Or five hundred altogether? The thought wrankled him. In a few moments he added:

"And a present for me."

"What sort of a present do you want?"

"A gold watch and . . . and . . ." He racked his brains for something else. " . .With another twenty-five dollar bill."

"The gold watch you'll get. But not the twenty-five dollars. Not another cent. Sign this paper declaring that the children are yours, and that you have no claim against me."

"At once, at once, my dear Mr. Melnick," cried the hairy fellow anxiously, trembling lest Uncle Moses should change his mind and at the same time satisfied that he had got as much as Uncle Moses was willing to give. Melnick, who, on his side, understood the husband's game, was for a moment sorry that he had

not granted the fellow the extra twenty-five dollars, thus causing him anguish in the thought that he might have extorted still more.

"Gittel my darling," called the man into the lunch room. "Come in here for a moment."

Gittel, her pearl ear-rings jingling in her ears, her black hair half undone, entered with a coquettish smile that peered from the dimples of her chubby cheeks.

"Pincus, dear. You called me," said the wife, noticing Uncle Moses.

"Mr. Melnick is going to be married. Wish him good luck, Gittel darling," said her husband.

"Gittel, dear," who knew all about the conversation between her husband and Uncle Moses, pretended utter ignorance.

"How should Mr. Melnick's marrying concern me?"

"And Mr. Melnick has just appointed me collector of his Essex Street tenements. Thank Mr. Melnick, Gittel dear."

And "Gittel dear," hearing this news, burst into tears.

Her husband stole out of the room, leaving her alone with the Uncle, that they might take leave of each other undisturbed. Uncle Moses admonished her to be true to her husband from that day on, to live more decently and not to weep. After his marriage he would remember her, too. And when her husband entered he found Gittel quite composed. Uncle Moses took the husband, too, aside, and told him to treat his wife well and keep an eye on her. And both man and wife wished him all happiness and joy with his young bride.

"May she have better luck with you than I, Uncle Moses," wept the woman.

When Mannes and Sam came to the woman to inform her that Uncle Moses was going to get married, the couple were undisturbed by the news. Indeed, they even rejoiced to hear it.

"Why shouldn't he marry?" asked the husband. "And what affair is it of ours?"

"Certainly. He's still a young man. Why shouldn't he marry?" added the wife, like a connoisseur.

Whereupon Sam and Mannes understood that Uncle Moses had been there before them and had already arranged everything. They said nothing.

"Sam, you'd better quit. Wipe your mouth and shut up. It's all up now," was Mannes' advice. "Pretend not to know anything about the matter, and when you are told of it, be very happy. Wish Uncle good luck,—congratulate him and get into Aaron's good graces. Become friendly with Masha's whole family and all her relatives. Flatter them, praise them, fawn upon them,—everything. You're in their hands, my friend," concluded Mannes.

Sam knew what course to follow without being told. Naturally he would do all this. Was there any alternative? Yet in his heart he thought otherwise. He himself was of the Melnick family, a cousin to Uncle Moses, and not for nothing had he taken Uncle Moses as a model, patterning himself upon him in all things.

No. He could not so easily relinquish his ambition to inherit his employer's wealth and to take Uncle Moses' place some day. He was ready to do anything, —he would stop at nothing. The marriage must not take place. "The old duffer will have children!" he kept thinking.

Having attended to everything and forestalled the possibility of unpleasant disturbances, Uncle Moses told Aaron to go ahead with the engagement preparations. Let there be plenty of geese and beer and brandy at his expense. He let the Kuzmin townsfolk off for half a day that they might attend the betrothal. And the Kuzmin townsfolk really looked upon the affair as a cause for communal rejoicing, beholding how Uncle Moses was choosing an ordinary girl from among his own townsfolk for a bride. The choice had elevated them all and they considered themselves closely bound to the couple by family ties.

At the betrothal it was announced that Uncle Moses would have the marriage take place in a synagogue that he was going to present to the Kuzmin townsfolk. Whereupon all the townsfolk felt like kissing his hand, and were filled with gratitude for having been invited and for the synagogue he was going to give them. They showered him with blessings and rejoiced in his good fortune and his wealth as if it were their very own. They likened him unto all the race's ancestors. One of them compared him with Jacob, predicting that tribes would descend from him; another, to Holy Moses, because he was buying them a house of worship. Already they sought a name for the synagogue and called it after Uncle Moses, "Synagogue Moses Anshi Kuzmin."

And Uncle Moses bustled about Aaron's rooms, perspiring, happy, beaming with generosity, and urging the guests to have a good time.

"Eat, drink, my good Kuzmin townsfolk. Make merry, rejoice, this is a happy day for me."

CHAPTER VI

AFTER THE BETROTHAL

EVERY former inhabitant of Kuzmin that lived in New York considered Masha the luckiest girl under the sun. So Masha, too, not daring to differ from all Kuzmin, considered herself most fortunate in having been affianced to Uncle Moses. She was deluged with gifts, bedecked with costly jewelry of the latest fashion. Every day he sent the dressmaker to her and ordered the most expensive clothes for her. Daily something new was brought to Masha from the Fifth Avenue shops,—silk underwear, high patent-leather shoes, fans, gloves. The girl well recalled the poverty of their Hopkins Street home. How, indeed, could she consider herself in any other light than that in which her family and her friends saw her? She was looked upon as happiness itself.

During the time in which she had grown up amidst Uncle Moses' favor, she had learned to obey him. She had seen how all Kuzmin,—her father, her mother and everybody she knew, rendered obedience to Uncle Moses, not daring to speak, act or think in contradiction to him. "Uncle Moses said we must do this." That was the holiest of commandments, the strongest of arguments. And Uncle Moses had said that she must be his bride. He wished her to be his wife, and Uncle must be obeyed in everything.

She began to realize what it meant to become the wife of Uncle Moses. She was no longer a child. Though she cherished no desire, her imagination was active, and summoned pictures of her as Uncle Moses' wife. At times she would be sitting beside him and he would be caressing her, clasping her to him, and his big face would grow red as his lips parted in a joyous smile. He would clutch her more tightly. And she would quake with fear. She did not resist, for she was used to him since her childhood days and Uncle Moses had always fondled her,—had always been privileged. Since they had been betrothed, however, she had begun to fear him. And whenever he embraced her she became so hot, and felt a strange uneasiness that made her feel like washing herself.

At night, when she was alone in her clean white room,—which was so richly decorated with polished furniture that Uncle Moses had long ago presented to her,—snuggling in her newly made bed, she would look forward to the days after the wedding. Following such thoughts she could not stay in the bed. After she had become engaged she would sit up for hours and hours before lying down, afraid to go to sleep. Since her betrothal, indeed, she had not undressed before going to sleep, as if she feared that someone, during the night, would touch her body.

After his father's departure, Charlie, Berrel's son, lived with his mother and his eldest sister. By day he went to college; early every morning he continued to deliver newspapers. His sister worked in a hat-shop, while his mother did the cooking, washing and house

chores. Despite her extreme poverty, the mother bent every effort to keep Charlie at college. With that same spirit of self-sacrifice which Jewish mothers abroad display in their eagerness to maintain their sons in the House of Religious Study, she sacrificed herself that Charlie might pursue his education. In the old country her greatest joy, perhaps, would have been to see her Charlie a Rabbi; in America, she longed to have him graduate from college. When the time came to pay her son's tuition fee the poor woman was in confusion; she would run to her relatives or to friends, knock at the door of Uncle Moses, and if absolutely necessary, she would take trousers home to sew from a small contractor, or else go to a small shop and served as an operative for a couple of weeks. Her ambition rested upon a purely idealistic foundation. It was not so much Charlie's career that concerned her as the learning itself. His education was to her (as were the religious attainments of young men in the old country to their mothers) a compensation for her drab, monotonous existence. Her son's learning was a consolation to her, and caused her to consider herself above the rest of the townsfolk. Not even her brother-in-law Aaron's great good fortune—(Masha's coming marriage to Uncle Moses)—could lessen her pride in the fact that Charlie went to college. And often, when in their conversations various members of the family betrayed their envy of Aaron Melnick and the luck his daughter had brought him, she would comment, with an indifferent yet exalted expression upon her face:

"Some folks look for money, and others, for education. I wouldn't swap my child's college education for all Uncle Moses' wealth."

"You'll have a golden chair in paradise for that," answered one of the townsfolk.

"Golden chair or no golden chair. What is the whole world, anyway? You must be a person of consequence in this world, too,—not a mere tailor." And this was the proud mother's gibe at the entire swarm of relatives, who had all become tailors in America.

During the first few weeks after Berrel had sailed for Europe, Masha would frequently meet Charlie. He would often visit Aaron Melnick's home and go out with Masha to entertainments, to friends, to lectures, and at times to theatre,—when he had the money. Masha liked to look at Charlie,—to see his mustache beginning to grow and his cheeks cover with a light down. She was fond of hearing him discuss books that he had read, of listening to his talk about college,—about Socialism, in which he had now become interested. And Charlie, it seemed to her, spoke so wisely. But when the girls began to poke fun at him, he would turn red and be at a loss for reply. At such times she liked to see how he stood there in embarrassment, while her chum Celia jested at his expense, ridiculing his mustache (they weren't growing on the right spot, she said). And Charlie would stand there helplessly, his long arms hanging down his side, his blushing face covered by a bashful smile.

"Never mind. When he grows up he'll shave off his mustache," asserted another of his young lady friends, trying to extricate him from the embarrassing situation.

"Please, Charlie, don't shave off your mustache," entreated Masha. "Ah, if I were a boy, I'd allow my

mustache to grow as long as this—not like yours which look as if they were daubed with soot."

The girls all laughed and Charlie,—clever, educated Charlie, with a shirt that plainly showed his mother's patch on the collar, stood in deep embarrassment.

Uncle Moses had noticed that Charlie was visiting Masha altogether too frequently. He therefore saw Aaron with reference to the matter.

"Listen, Aaron, I like Masha to have fun. And I don't mind her going out with Charlie, either. But watch, Aaron. Watch."

"Why, Uncle! What are you talking about? The child is crazy for you," assured Aaron.

But all at once Charlie stopped calling. Aaron explained that Charlie had entered politics. He had become a Socialist, and spoke at the street-corners. And "pa" said that Socialism was no worth-while sort of politics because the Socialists never had a chance to win an election. As long as he had gone into politics, Charlie should have joined the Democrats or the Republicans, said "pa." Then, at least, he would have been able to pay his college expenses and have a good position in view. But Charlie had no chance of getting anywhere with the Socialists, because they would never win an election.

Charlie never called and Masha gave no thought to him, yet since Masha had become engaged, she liked to meet him. She was a little bit afraid of him. Afraid? No. A trifle ashamed. And this is what kept her from approaching him. Yet what was there really to be ashamed about? And she would like to see him anyway. . . . It seemed to her that she had some-

thing very important to tell him, although she could never quite recall just what it was.

And one morning Masha arose after a sleepless night, with the firm conviction that she had nothing to be ashamed of. Not even of Charlie. For in a few weeks she was going to die anyway. Why she should be so positive that she was to die, she did not know. But she felt certain that something would happen to her. So early that morning she went off to her aunt. She knew that she would find Charlie home, for after his work distributing papers Charlie would sleep late until the morning was well advanced. She felt like taking Charlie out for a walk, through Fifth Avenue and Central Park, as she used to do years before she was engaged, when Charlie was so frequent a visitor. She was curious to see whether Charlie's mustache had grown any thicker, or whether he had shaved them off, as he had once jestingly threatened to do. There was nothing for her to be ashamed of. Charlie did not know that she was not going to marry Uncle Moses. He did not know that she was soon to die.

CHAPTER VII

CHARLIE MELNICK

MASHA found Charlie still sleeping. Her aunt received her with surprise.

"Charlie, Charlie! Just see who's come!"

Charlie came groping out of the next room with a dishevelled head of hair on which lay here and there a feather. His black, sparkling eyes were wide open. Masha was right. Charlie had not shaved off his mustache. They were so short and sparse that there was really nothing to shave. But because they were as black as soot they imparted a manly appearance to his face. Noticing Masha, Charlie was suddenly embarrassed and his childish face turned a fiery red; his body,—as much of it as showed from his clothes, likewise grew red. And a good deal of his body was exposed, for Charlie wore only a union suit. For a moment Charlie was too surprised to do anything and stood there with bare arms and bare legs, until his mother reminded him how scantily clad he was.

"Charlie, what are you doing?"

Whereupon Charlie disappeared into the next room, followed by Masha's laughter. His mother apologized for him.

"How can we stand this terrible heat? It's enough to make people go about naked."

She then threw into Charlie his shirt and trousers,

which had been drying on the fire escape. For Charlie had washed them on his return from his work.

"I've come to take Charlie out for a walk in the Park," said Masha.

"Better take a ride out to Coney Island and go in bathing.—It's so muggy. I'm always urging him to go to Coney Island, but he's such a lazy fellow. He just hangs around the house all day long over his books," said the mother.

"Your mother is right, Charlie. We'll go to Coney Island. On the way I'll step into my house for my bathing suit. Take yours along, Charlie."

Charlie came in, dressed, wearing his newly washed shirt and the washed trousers, which were not yet entirely dry and clung to his limbs. Large drops of water trickled from his black hair down along his cheeks, for he had just been holding his head under the faucet.

"I've come to take you out to Coney Island for a swim," said Masha. "Take your bathing suit."

Charlie was not very enthusiastic. He smiled, and said that he had something to attend to in the city, so that he had no time for the excursion. At his reply, Masha felt as if she had been doused with cold water and prepared to leave at once. The mother wondered why Masha remained in the city during such a hot spell,—why she didn't go off to some summer resort, and explained to herself that it must surely be because of the wedding trousseau she was having made. For she had heard that Masha's marriage was soon to take place.

"They tell me you're going to be married very soon. Well, may it be with the best of luck."

Masha made no reply. She blushed and remained silent. Suddenly, however, as if in spite, looking hard at Charlie, she said:

"There's so much to do here in the city before the wedding, and Uncle Moses—" But she did not end her sentence. She turned red at the name and stopped in the middle. And instead of the spite or the pride that the word "Uncle" had been meant to summon, it called forth sympathy for her.

Charlie felt pity for her, and he felt sorry that he should have been so cold to her. So he said to his mother.

"You are right, old chap." And he slapped her across the shoulder. "It's a hot day. Come, Masha. I'll take you out for a swim."

"Do you hear what my son calls me, Masha? Old shcap. That's what they call a horse in the old country. And in America that's what they call their mothers."

"Ah, you silly goose!" And Charlie picked his mother off her feet and carried her about the room.

"Let me down, for God's sake! You'll hurt me!" begged the old woman.

"Not until you say 'old chap.' Not 'shcap,' but chap, chap."

"What's the difference,—chap, *shcap*. Let it be chap, then, as long as you put me down. God forbid, you'll hurt me."

"And now, the 'salute.' Not until you recite the 'salute'."

"I pledge allegiance to my flag," stammered the woman, repeating the words that Charlie had taught her when he was still a pupil in the grammar-school.

"That's the way! And now you may go down, old chap," said Charlie, carefully lowering his mother into a chair.

"Do you see, Masha, how my son treats me?" complained the mother. "At the most unexpected moment he's liable to set me on his shoulders. And have I the strength to resist him?"

"Now come along, Masha. How do you do?" he suddenly exclaimed, as if he had just caught sight of her.

Charlie and his mother lived in Harlem, on one of the poor Jewish streets. Only when he and Masha reached the street did they realize what a hot day it was. It was one of those New York days on which the heat spreads over the city from the very first hours of daylight,—an oppressive, muggy heat, with no hope of relief.

From the very beginning of day life becomes a burden. Out of the open windows look heaps of filthy bed clothing, while the family wash is drying on the fire escapes; on the windows stand pots containing the remnants of yesterday's meal; on the stairs, from the entrance of the house down to the very curb of the street, like cast-off rags, and thrown-out, broken-down furniture, wallow women and children. Half-naked, they overflow the steps on to the sidewalk. The mothers try to quiet their children with pennies, which every moment they exchange for lolly-pops. The lolly-pops melt in the tots' little hands and besmear their faces, and the white, neatly ironed shirts that have cost the mothers so much labor the night before become now sticky with the melted sweets.

The children jumped off the burning sidewalk and

sought relief in the broad thoroughfare. And they all were riding about, some on roller-skates, others on old boxes, one on a herring-cask; somebody had got hold of an old cart-wheel and had invited all his friends for a "ride" over the street. The filth of the unswept streets arose amid all this joyous commotion, settling upon hands and faces, upon the stones and the windows until it reached the bosoms of the mothers, who fed the filth of the street to their infants together with their mothers' milk.

Charlie and Masha walked along the street in silence, with great difficulty making their way through the swarm of children. It seemed that these youngsters had been born with roller-skates on their feet, amid the horses, trucks and coal-wagons that drove through the district. So dense was the dust, so great the noise, that they could not hear each other's voices. The heat, too, seemed as deafening as if it, too, were gliding through the streets of New York upon children's roller skates. The farther they walked, however, the quieter it became,—the cleaner, less noisy, and better appearing the houses were. And soon the din had subsided completely. They had walked to the end of the street, which led to Central Park across Fifth Avenue.

The houses opposite the Park were in the shadow of the trees. Large windows faced the street, but the windows were blind, shut, their deep-green curtains drawn. All around the houses it was cool and quiet. But there was nobody inside; they were closed for the whole summer.

For a long time they strolled along the street that faced the Park. It was so pleasant to saunter here. The street was cooled by the fluttering shadows that

the green leaves of the trees cast in an intricate network over the sidewalk. How quiet it was! It was a festive silence that the trees and the grass spread about them. Not a living breath stirred from the houses. Doors and windows were locked and shut; all along the avenue stretched a row of closed dwellings,—opposite healthful Central Park. And not a living soul derived any benefit from the location.

Charlie smiled wistfully at Masha.

"These houses are the best proof of the incomplete development of American culture."

"How do you make that out, Charlie?"

"These houses are a crying proof of the injustice of our social order. We look upon it day after day, millions of persons see the crying proof. Yet they are silent."

"I don't understand you, Charlie," said Masha.

"Well, just imagine that somebody came to a city, bought up all the bread and then locked it up in huge granaries for himself. Or else, imagine that he had purchased all the wells and had fenced them around for his exclusive use. Why, such a person would be stoned. Why is this here any different from bread and water? The city possessed certain healthful locations opposite the Park, opposite Riverside Drive. These splendid health-giving sites have been bought up by wealthy persons for their own use and have been covered with palaces. Then they lock them up for the summer, at a time when such places are most needed by suffering humanity, and go off on vacation. Neither they nor anybody else have any use out of the palaces. And people see this day after day and say

nothing. I believe that such a thing is possible only in America."

"Do you mean to say that in other countries there aren't any wealthy persons with magnificent palaces?"

"Oh, yes, there are. Only in these other countries, I believe,—I am not sure, but I believe so,—property rights are restricted. The power of gold is limited to certain rights. It must not infringe upon the public interest. Here in America, however, gold has unlimited power. You may buy anything. And the best proof of what I say is afforded by these very palaces before us. Not the palaces so much as the land upon which they are built,—the land which in other countries would be public property, belonging to all, while here in America it is sold to individuals. That is the right of the fenced-off wells. And it is all so characteristically American."

"Why so?"

"America means—democratic. And Democracy, in my opinion, is the worst enemy that has arisen against mankind since the world began; for Democracy, as it is understood in America, gives to every individual possessed of wealth the right to enslave to his own whim unlimited property, whether it be in the shape of dead matter or living wills. Democracy is the Czar-incognito. Or let us rather call it an anonymous Czar. The Czar's crown has been taken off the head of an individual and placed upon the heads of those who are most skilled in robbery and crime. Thus, in America, the Czar has crumbled into countless petty Czars. Whoever proves most skillful acquires a larger measure of Czar-like power. Democracy without limitations placed upon property rights—is a race, a

scamper for sovereignty. It is a genuinely democratic world, surely. No limits are placed, no race distinctions are observed. Whoever has anything to stake in the play,—cleverness, criminal guile,—may take part in the game. And because of this, the Czar is here more dangerous, more difficult to combat than in Russia. For Czardom here is forever being strengthened with new blood. It is always being captured by stronger, more powerful men and is protected by His Majesty, His Holiness, the idol Democracy.''

''I don't understand you at all, Charlie. But I gather from all your talk that you hate the rich very much. Must every wealthy person, then, be a wicked one? Can't a man be rich and good at the same time?'' asked Masha, as if desiring to apologize for somebody.

''Yes, Masha, you are right. I must confess that I feel an instinctive enmity against every rich person. And more against the good one than the bad. Because wealth in itself is base. Wealth in itself is a proof of crime, robbery. It makes no difference how you get it. As long as you have more than you need you are robbing the others,—and that is base. And not only for that reason, but because of something entirely different. I mean that a wealthy person is an ugly person. He can't have beautiful feelings. I don't know why I should think so; perhaps my bringing-up is to blame, the poverty in which I have dwelt,—But instinctively I hate the rich.''

''You say that because you yourself aren't rich,'' she retorted. ''But if you were given money . . .''

''I have often thought of that. I have tried to imagine that they came to me and gave me a pile of

money or that I had suddenly become rich,—that I possessed beautiful palaces, horses, summer-homes, and travelled to Europe,—that I could contribute liberally to our 'Foreigners' Society.' I'll tell you about that society later. No, I've told myself I wouldn't care for that wealth. Because not all the feelings and possibilities that come with money,—not all the power it confers,—can equal the sentiments aroused by poverty, the feelings aroused by living on my street and looking upon the poor people,—the women and the children,—the feelings aroused in me when I think of the wealthy. I'm glad that I'm poor. I'd wish to be poor always,—to be always as I am now."

Masha was silent. Up to this point the conversation had been all Charlie's. It seemed that he wished to display his learning,—that was why he spoke as he did. But his last words suddenly moved her. She felt that he meant her, and that he really felt what he said. His words carried her back to her childhood on Hopkins street.

"Now I understand."

"What do you understand?"

"Now I understand why you dislike me so.—Yes, I know that you hate me and that your mother hates me, and everybody else, too. All the poor, good people hate me since I became engaged to Uncle."

Masha raised her large eyes and let their gaze rest upon Charlie. Her eyes were large and rather wide, like Spanish grapes of the best quality; they were as full, too, as a grape. The white of her eyes shone clear and resplendent, and she smiled, smiled like a child. But Charlie feared that at any moment she would burst into tears, and all the juice of her

grape-like eyes would run over. So he replied, with the same sort of smile:

"It's not your fault, I know."

The words set Masha to thinking of herself and her situation. His previous speech was entirely forgotten. She became absorbed in her own thoughts and said nothing during the rest of the walk, although not for a moment did her eyes cease to smile and to glitter as if they rather than Masha's conversation, desired to keep him company.

CHAPTER VIII

CONEY ISLAND

BY the time they had reached Coney Island beach Charlie himself had forgotten to chat with Masha. He became an "American boy." No sooner had he jumped into his bathing suit and felt the ocean atmosphere upon his bare arms and legs than he was filled with vibrant energy. Impatiently he waited for Masha to come out of the woman's section. A multitude of persons swarmed upon the beach, which looked like a continuation of the ocean. And often the multitude rivalled the ocean, seeming more active, more numerous than its waves. But neither the sea nor the crowd disturbed Charlie, who always felt at home amid masses of people. He loved to see the crowds bustle about; the countless colors of the kaleidoscopic maze that glittered upon the sea-shore stirred him to an intense joy in living. The half-nude women in red, blue and parti-colored bathing caps, and the naked children who ran about holding cake and candy in their hands, filling the air with joyous cries, the family groups nearby, made him think that he had come to a vast freedom-jubilee. The multitude it seemed, had gathered to celebrate a great holiday. All were naked, eating, bathing, swimming. On this holiday everything was permissible.

And he shared the revelry of the vast concourse.

He enjoyed watching persons at their pleasure. Never had he beheld such crowds enjoying themselves together. He had always seen them at work together, suffering together, mourning and ailing together. Here, however, the vast masses of persons, half naked, men and women in one another's company, with the children everywhere,—were eating together, bathing together, frolicking, laughing and playing together. And joy was universal. He was infected by the festive spirit; it woke all the zest of his youth. He wished to plunge at once into the midst of all this gladness,—to join the play and the merriment, to leap into the water, swim out among the bobbing heads and arms whose shrieks of joy floated over the waves. And here he must wait for Masha. . . . It occurred to him for a moment that he was in love with Masha;—that he had come to this picnic,—to this holiday of nakedness and unrestraint, and that he wished to plunge into it without delay.

In the meantime Masha was trying to find him in the dense crowd. Charlie did not see her. As if entranced by happiness, by the sight of the multitude, he walked from group to group, watching the half dressed men, women and children eat together, scattering the refuse about, looking on gleefully as he beheld them all snuggling and rolling about in the sand indiscriminately. Masha had caught sight of him and followed him for a time, at last succeeding in catching him by the hand.

"Where have you wandered to? I've been hunting for you everywhere!"

"Oh, Masha, hurry, hurry!" And he seized the girl by the hand and ran with her into the water.

A wave came rolling toward them, carrying in its

trough a group of human beings and water sprites. Masha and Charlie were showered with sea-water and human forms. It was sometime before the couple, holding hands, were able to make their way out of the waves and the swarm of swimmers. They emerged dripping water. Charlie shouted with laughter.

"Oh, Masha!" And once more he pulled her into the sea.

A second wave came rolling in and dashed the two young bodies together, kneading one into the other, as it were. Masha could feel Charlie's youthful, firm-fleshed body against her own, his strong hands about her bosom. Charlie felt Masha's light body rest against his; the touch of the cool maidenly form, so wet and soft as it reposed on him, was soothingly sweet. He pulled her farther out into the water. She grew afraid, screaming with fright and pleasure at the same time and clung tightly to Charlie's strong neck. Charlie held her with both his hands and the water aided him. He could see her slim, youthful figure delineated by her wet, clinging garment; the black, silk material assumed the same lines as her body. It clung to her and brought out every curve in strong relief. He liked to gaze upon the lines of her figure,—to feel the pulsing life in her,—the repressed desires that slumbered in the cold, hard bosom in his clasp. But it was impossible for him to gaze and meditate upon this sight for long. The sea tossed them about and the rolling waves brought them the cold secret of the deep, distant ocean. At every moment they felt between them a third body,—the cold, fresh, mysterious body of the deep, distant sea, which was like the body of a strange, haunting woman. And they

were afraid of this strange presence, embracing each other, nestling close to each other, while the cold, haunting water sprite snuggled into their midst, trying to warm itself against their young bodies and share their secret, shielding them from the eyes of strange persons.

CHAPTER IX

AMERICA AND THE JEW

THEY lay on the sand, warmed by the sun. Never before had they been so close together. And they had not known that people, young people, might be thus together without sin and without shame.

The sun enfolded them both, and together they caught the contagion of joy and contentment that had spread amongst the masses of half-naked merry persons that rested upon the beach. It did not occur to them that they were young, nor were they aware that they were in love. They simply rejoiced that the sun warmed them and everybody on the shore. It seemed that the whole variegated multitude that seethed upon the beach, with its bare arms and its bathing caps of countless hues, formed a single family, of which they were an infinitesimal part.

"I like to see joyous crowds," said Charlie to Masha. "I like to see everybody happy and to participate in their happiness. There are folks who don't care for Coney Island, because, they declare, it's the resort of the uncultured masses. They dirty the ocean with the refuse of their food and clutter the beach with their awkward, ugly bodies, say such folk. Yet it seems to me that only in a crowd can you find contentment and happiness,—in a vast, crude multitude. It would bore me to have my pleasure all by myself. It would

chafe me to be a lone happy mortal, or to belong to a happy chosen few who alone possessed the means of pleasure. Real pleasure may be had only in a place like this, beholding a vast crowd enjoying itself. At such times it seems that all evil and suffering have vanished from the earth, and joy belongs to all. Here it seems, one may enjoy pleasure to the utmost. Such communal pleasure affords genuine, inner joy. One is infected with the common gladness.''

Masha looked at him. She was fond of listening to him. Charlie could not speak calmly; he always waxed enthusiastic, his eyes flaming, his arms waving,—as if from his pious, Khassidic father he had inherited a certain exaltation of spirit. And not having anything else to vent this fervor upon, he poured it into his convictions. Nor had even the American public school been able to quench this inherited ardor.

''Just look around you, Masha.'' And Charlie danced about gleefully. ''See how far away the crowd stretches. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of people. Look. They're all happy,—all having a good time. I love crowds. When I'm in such a sea of persons it seems to me I'm capable of anything, of great things. There are Democrats, and even Socialists, who do not like large crowds. The masses are too coarse for them,—uncultured, insulting their aesthetic feelings. I've often heard some of my own comrades say that they felt lonesome in crowds. The fools! They don't understand what a crowd is! They imagine that it's nothing but a heaping together of many individuals,—coarse, uncouth, uneducated individuals. They don't realize that the masses form a body, a soul, a creature with an individuality of its own. Whenever I

get into a crowd it's as if I had been plunged into infinity,—into the secret of our existence, which can neither be felt nor endured as an individual. Masha, do you know what a multitude is? It is vast, eternal life itself, which existed before us and will exist after. We shall die,—every individual composing it will pass on, but the crowd will live. It has always lived, in every generation, in all manner of forms. It seems to me that God first created not the individual, but the crowd. Whenever I find myself in such an ocean of people, I feel certain that I have found my true self,—that I am a part of the vast infinite."

Masha eyed him in silent bewilderment. Many of his words she did not even understand; moreover, she had never heard anyone talk like this before. But stranger even than what he said was Charlie himself. During the year since she had become engaged to Uncle Moses and had not met Charlie, he had changed almost beyond recognition. He had always been so bashful in the presence of girls. They used to make fun of him, and he would reply with tasteless, meaningless, witless jests. What had come over Charlie? Where had he been during all this time? What had he been doing? She began to feel uncomfortable because she could not talk as he did. She felt a certain pride in him and liked him all the more for his being able to talk like that.

It mattered little to Charlie whether Masha understood him or not. He spoke more to himself than to her. Besides, it seemed to him that most people thought as he did. Charlie belonged to that growing youth in America whose faith and idealism were so young and fresh that they exhaled an odor of the dew of

growth. Just as everything in America was filled with the sap and energy of a young, blooming fruit, so was American idealism as it appeared in the full bloom of its youthful confidence. It was unstained by skepticism and doubt. It knew nothing of delving,—of mystic inquiry. All this idealism was centered upon the practical, upon immediate benefit, driven on by the impetuous, optimistic, life-loving stream of a young, growing stock. That same gushing stream of youthful energy that reared sky-scrapers and threw bridges miles long across valleys and rivers, urged America's brain-power to a practical, utilitarian idealism. Charlie belong to a small circle of studious Jewish youths who were not so much studying for a career as brimming over with this youthful American idealism. That optimism which had flowed into their blood with their ancient faith served, unknown to them, this practical idealism. Their thoughts did not cross the boundaries of the present,—of every-day life,—and did not wander into other worlds. It sought a practical answer to all problems right here in the every-day world.

Charlie had also become acquainted with a group of Russian-Jewish intellectuals who were active in the labor movement. Through them he learned of the proletarian movement in Russia,—of the Revolution, of Russian idealism, of Siberia and the prisons. Russia and the revolution became to him a magic legend, something sacred,—a Holy Land, and the Russian intelligentsia itself became sacred to him. He grew proud that he came from Russia,—from the land of revolution and idealism. And with all the innocence of his youthful enthusiasm he threw himself into the Ameri-

can branch of the movement. And as he thought of and felt the life of the Jewish immigrants, a protest awoke in him,—the protest of a healthy youth, educated in a land of freedom and equality,—against the life of his parents. Perhaps his father's excessive piety was to blame for Charlie's not seeking to better his position, like so many thousands of young men of his kind. All his strength, his faith and his hopes he threw into the service of the party, the triumph of which, he believed, would improve the position of all mankind.

Despite his twenty-one years Charlie was innocence itself, and his attitude toward Masha was that of the average educated American youth toward girls,—that of one comrade to another. His youthful body, which through his public school training had been well-developed, and rejoiced in vigorous exercise, was too chaste for physical passion. He had no time to hoard his strength for lust; it was consumed in the strenuous motions of jumping and ball-playing. The sight of a girl's body woke no unusual desires in him. He bathed with Masha, felt her body close to his own, and was now lying next to her on the sand in the sun viewing the lines of her maidenly figure, yet he spoke to her as he would have spoken to a child and such he really considered her. He played about with her, yet felt no sinful feelings. He tugged at her hand and pulled her over the sand by the arm, and the sun bathed them both in light and warmth.

"Come, Masha, let's plunge into the ocean of humanity. Just see how big the ocean of people is. Come. I just love to be engulfed in a sea of persons."

The entire beach, as far as the eye could see, was inundated with wet, barefoot, half-naked people. Bodies, bodies, bodies everywhere. The scant pieces of male and female attire were lost amid the bare arms, necks, breasts, feet, backs. It was as if the ocean had cast upon the shore wave upon wave of human forms: men, women, children, in a vast confusion.

Masha and Charlie, dressed only in their bathing-suits, walked among the half-naked crowds. It seemed that the whole world had assembled on this beach, casting off its sinful, soiled clothes, and had established a naked city. The only blot upon this sea of nudity was the remnant of clothing that the people had to wear for "decency's" sake. Thus they walked along hand in hand, their bodies striking against each other and against other bodies of strange persons. All of a sudden they would feel the contact of a strange skin. It was as if a Messiah had come and had lifted all bans. Everything was permissible; the whole world intermingled.

Charlie was seized with a desire to talk. He was overwhelmed by the sight of this universal joy. Whoever would have happened to be with him would have been the recipient of his overflowing sentiments.

"Look, Masha, look. How vast is the ocean of people. See, the whole world has assembled here. I love the New York crowds. When you look upon a New York crowd, you have the entire world before you. In all eyes shines a yearning for youth, a childhood that was lived somewhere else, in another land. That is New York. We are all New Yorkers. I—you—everybody that's lying here—all of us spent our youth elsewhere. And to be a New Yorker means to have

one's eyes filled with a homesickness for other waters, fields and suns. Every person before us was brought up in a different country. Many come from the vast steppes of Russia; many recall the bright sky of Italy, the richly-colored, picturesque fields of Hungary and Galicia. There are numbers who bring to memory the Arabian desert, and not a few who were brought up on the colorful rice-fields of Japan and China. Some come from lofty mountains where they tended sheep and cows; others have dwelt in tiny Jewish hamlets whose roofs were covered with snow in the winter time. Do you remember, Masha, how our village of Kuzmin looked in winter? I can see it as in a dream: the little synagogue, with a little banner floating from the roof, a furled flag. Papa would take me to synagogue on his shoulders, and I'd clutch a prayer book and an apple in my hand. And on the synagogue was a flag. And here we are now, all lying naked on Coney Island beach."

Masha became sad and meditative. Charlie's talk had centered her thoughts upon her position. She, too, recalled Kuzmin and could behold her childhood in her grandfather's home as in a vision. She thought of the pious old Jew who used to give her candy, and suddenly all this vanished and Hopkins Street arose before her. She could see herself running to the butcher's to beg him to trust her for some meat. "Pa is working." Then Uncle Moses and her relations with him. She grew moody, raising her thick black eyebrows and her full, grape-like eyes to Charlie:

"And you wouldn't have cared to be born in America?"

"No," was Charlie's response. "I'm happy to be a

New Yorker, born abroad, with a homesickness for Russia, just like all foreigners who have come here. And all of us foreigners will make of America a beautiful, free, glorious America. Every one of them will bring along with him the best his own country has to offer and will give it to America. That's what they bring with them on the ships. The Italians, the Russians and the Czechs and the Hungarians,—the Scandinavians and the Arabians,—all, all, bring along with them the best, the most beautiful that their country possesses, the longing of their childhood, and freely give it to America. One brings his beauty, his art, his faith. Another contributes his sense of justice, his honesty. All that is best and most beautiful in the world,—everything will merge and we shall all compose a vast, free, new America."

"And what will you give to America, Charlie?" asked Masha.

"What shall I give? I'll give that which every Jewish child from Russia gives. Oh, we owe so much to America, and we must give her so much! America gave us everything,—made us different from our parents. We owe America a great debt for the freedom she has given us. And we'll give her the same as we gave Russia,—we are in duty bound to give her our revolutionary spirit, our eternal protest, our ambitious dissatisfaction. We owe it to America to be different from our parents. When our parents landed, they became slaves in America, and we must free them. We are all the children of slaves. Weren't our own parents slaves? My father, your father. And hasn't your father surrendered you to his bread-giver just as a child is delivered into servitude?"

"Stop, for I'll . . ." And Masha turned red. Her grape-like eyes filled with tears. But she determined not to let Charlie see that he had hurt her. In order to laugh off the entire matter, she suddenly asked:

"Have you any money, Charlie?"

"I imagine, about a dollar." He knew exactly how much he had, but wished to appear a bit better supplied.

"And I've got a half. That can help out."

"For what?"

"I want to have a nice time. Aren't we at Coney Island?"

"That's right!" cried Charlie.

"Well, go and dress. I'll do the same. We'll meet outside."

He dashed off.

Only now did Charlie come to a full realization of what he had said; he was filled with remorse more because of her smile than because of the rash, inconsiderate words he had so tactlessly uttered.

CHAPTER X

"THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS"

AS a result of their dip in the water both felt fresh and vigorous. They were ready for anything. Charlie settled into an uneasy silence, troubled by his tactless words about Masha and Uncle Moses.

Masha, however, soon banished this disquietude. In a soft, maidenly voice, vibrating with the womanhood that already filled her being, she suggested:

"You, Charlie, better let me hold enough for car-fare and with the rest we'll have a nice time. Otherwise we're liable to spend it all and have to walk home."

Thus speaking, she took a quarter from her money and coquettishly dropped it into her purse, with an arch smile.—The rest she gave to Charlie.

"Here's my share."

"What do you want to see?"

"Everything. I want to have a real good time."

"All right! Come along! Aren't you hungry?—I'll tell you the truth, I'm awfully hungry," confessed Charlie in embarrassment.

"And I, too," laughed Masha.—"But we must be economical, I want to have enough money left for some fun."

"What shall I buy?"

"Cracker-jacks."

Charlie, however, was for having something more substantial, and proposed "frankfurters." They settled upon both, which they ate on the thoroughfare, pushed hither and thither by the tide of persons that washed over the boulevard, and laughing gaily at each other.

The first amusement place they encountered was "The Seven Wonders of the World." Here there were depicted a two-headed cow, imported from India; girl twins that had been born joined together, brought from China; two Liliputians,—one a Japanese, the other a negro; the fattest girl in the world, who weighed more than five hundred pounds; a lion-faced man; a young girl with grey hair; a negro woman who walked like a bear, and a wild Indian who had just been discovered by a captain.

They paid five cents and gazed upon "the seven wonders of the world" that had been gathered from every corner of the earth in which Nature had created a monstrosity. No matter if it were born on the most remote of desert islands, it was ferreted out and brought to Coney Island, there to be placed on exhibition for five cents. It seemed as if Coney Island were the center of the universe. In another place they promised to reveal the sorcery of Egypt, demonstrated by the great Caliph of Egypt himself, and in proof of this assertion the dark Caliph had with him a Chinese boy whom he put to sleep on a broomstick, resting him on the empty air, raising him at will. And all this was shown outside, free of charge, before everybody. Those who paid a nickel to go inside saw nothing more.

For another five-cent piece they found themselves

in China, and saw the sleeping Chinese princess, with her tiny compressed feet and her golden slippers. And yet another nickel gained them admission into Aladdin's magic lamp, where tall, muscular Aladdin, the tanned Arab with large hanging ear-rings and thick red lips, appeared before them. He seemed suddenly to have sprung to life out of their childhood dreams and their fairy-tale books. There he stood, Aladdin of "The Thousand and One Nights"; he rubbed his magic lamp and lo, there appeared in the air a table laden with gold and silver vessels. Aladdin takes a pitcher and pours out wine. Then he strokes his magic lamp once more, and a white dove comes flying. It is one of the slaves of the lamp and alights upon his shoulders, whispering a secret into his ear. A message from a mysterious, enchanted world.

They wandered from one palace of enchantment to the next. There were bared to them the secrets of India, the occult mysteries of Egypt and the wonders of distant Arabia. They were living, they felt, in the days of "The Thousand and One Nights," when the way to India had not yet been discovered; they were in the enchanted lands of the ancient Orient. They beheld the temples of China, the dances of India, and the Hindu princes told their fortunes and predicted their futures while the Aladdins of Arabia entertained them with their black magic.

Everywhere hovered the splendor and the glitter of the hidden, ancient Orient.

When they issued from the palaces of magic, they both felt as if drunk. They mounted two richly caparisoned horses that resembled the steeds of an

Arabian sheik. Upon these chargers hung huge, costly diamonds, rubies, sapphires and other precious stones, the booty from captured princesses and from Caliphs defeated in war. These horses descended from a costly Arabian thoroughbred.

The breath hissed from their wide, quivering nostrils, and their delicately moulded mouths were lathered with foam. And on these steeds, hand in hand, sat a prince and his princess,—Masha and Charlie,—and in front of them were mounted other princely pairs. On the richly bedecked coach, too, were seated children of royal blood. The entire company whirled about in merry pursuit of one another, yet could never reach the pursued. Whither were these princes galloping? Into the land of dreams, into eternal happiness, into youth.

The chase lasts only a minute. The horses are but wooden; the course is but a tiny circuit. Yet what is the difference? Reality itself is but a moment, and dream is eternal.

And soon they are seated in a ferris-wheel basket. The basket rises into the air,—higher and higher. There expand before them the wide heavens, Coney Island and its horde of people, the ocean of human beings and the ocean of water far below.

Higher still they go. Then suddenly they are plunged into a deep, subterranean cavern,—their feet, the ocean, and death staring them in the face. And once again they float upwards, higher, higher, forgetting the whole world.

Drunk with the magic of it all, they soon find themselves in the yellow-violet cloud that enfolds the wonder-city like a fantastic dream. Coney Island's

lights have been turned on. Streams of light flow from the houses, the towers and the roofs. Illuminated wheels whirl about at the top of the towers and glisten in the light; it seems that the sky has come down closer to earth, bringing the glow of the stars and the dazzling radiance of the comets. Coney Island has been transformed into a dream,—into a legendary city sprung to life out of a children's book. Childhood years have suddenly come back to life and all its dreams have come true. All the fairy tales have become real, and full-grown men and women live again like children,—have created a child-city out of the fairy books and dwell in it. Over Coney Island hovers a reddish-gold mist,—and in this haze the vast multitude lives, staggers about in a drunken ecstasy, moves as in a dream. From the stalls pour forth streams of red and yellow light; the bezaars themselves are built like huge toy houses, and before them stand big figures with trumpets in their hands. One woman, dressed like a queen in gold and silver, is conducting the music with a baton. Other figures are seated upon toy horses whirling around amid men and women similarly mounted. The human beings themselves take on the appearance of dolls, staggering from one booth to the other, purchasing whatever they wish,—eating, drinking, playing, dancing. All over the thoroughfare the light pours its enlivening flood, casting a glamor over everything. This is a world of children, —the magic world of juvenile years. Everybody, everybody, has become a child once more,—a grown-up child. All are at play in that child's paradise called Coney Island.

As they took their seats in the car, bound for home,

they both started, as if awakening from the dream they had just been through. Once again they were strangers. She felt a fetter tightening about her neck, while he was overcome by the sensation of having spoken nonsense all day long. To what purpose? To whom? Yet they felt that they had experienced something jointly,—something that for a moment had brought them ever so close together. And this could never be undone.—The recollection of a pleasant dream stirred in their weary thoughts. Together with the rest of the passengers, they snatched a final glimpse of the receding fairyland. From a distance, the island looked like a wonderful manifestation of nature,—like a miraculous phenomenon. Huge, flaming towers rose on high, one above the other. Fiery wheels whirled in the air, and remained suspended as if by a miracle. The flaming towers of the flaming palaces rose proudly and uncommonly beautiful, as if belonging to another world. They were, it seemed, the domes and minarets of sacred temples that had fallen from the skies. The burning wheels, the flaming spires, the illuminated streets, merged into the splendor of a Mecca, a Jerusalem, and their majestic, radiant, holy glow drew all hearts toward them. And every worshipper thanked and blessed the holy wonder-city of Coney Island that brought joy, exaltation and pleasure to millions.

CHAPTER XI

MASHA REBELS

MASHA'S parents were becoming uneasy. She had gone to Coney Island for the day, it was already getting late, and there was no sign of her. The table was set for supper; the cut-glass, which Aaron's wife had bought since they had begun to prosper, sparkled from the cupboard, and Rosa sat at the table impatiently, now tapping with the fork, now arranging a saucer.

"There's Coney Island for you!" And she pursed her lips in anger. Aaron was standing with his coat off at the open window, watching for Masha to appear. His wife's lip-smacking made him nervous, for although such a delay on Masha's part was not an uncommon thing, they felt uneasy this day. The slightest thing that happened to Masha unnerved them. It was the same concern that one feels for a vast treasure. Aaron thrust his head out of the window.

"Better let me go, Rosa," he muttered.

The other children were not at home. They had gone away on their vacations. Only her parents had remained at home with Masha, to help her arrange the trousseau. For Masha's wedding was not very far off. In all such cases parents are unusually concerned about the bride-to-be, and in this case the bride was Masha.

"Where did she go, Rosa?" Aaron had caught his wife's disquietude.

"Where? Didn't I tell you? To Coney Island. She wanted to go in bathing."

"And with whom did she go bathing, Rosa?"

"Why do you ask me? Don't you know? She telephoned that she was going to Coney Island with Charlie."

"With Charlie, ha? Rosa,—so she went to Coney Island with Charlie! And Uncle Moses telephoned me that he was coming here soon with the machine to take her out for a ride. He asked me about her to-day at least ten times. How am I to tell him that she went to Coney Island with Charlie! With Charlie! He'll be here any minute to take her out in his automobile. And he won't find her here. Went to Coney Island with Charlie! Ha, Rosa! Won't that look fine for you, ha?"

"How am I to blame? Did I see her? She got up early in the morning and left. What could I have done?"

"Tell that excuse to Uncle Moses. Tell it to him. He'll soon be here."

"Aaron, why do you frighten me so?"

And soon Aaron himself was frightened by the fright that he had sought to make her feel.

"Rosa, don't bother me! The child went bathing and she'll soon return. Why all this rumpus?"

"I,—a rumpus? It's you that's making the rumpus."

"Rosa, stop bothering me!"

Very soon, however, they were freed of the terror that each had inspired in the other. Into the room

came running Masha. The parents heaved a sigh of relief. Their eyes flashed with tears and anger. For a moment Masha stopped short and eyed her parents with a pitying, tearful glance; then suddenly she burst into loud weeping and dashed into her room.

"Rosa, what can this mean?" asked Aaron.

"How do I know? Why do you ask me? Let's go in to her."

The parents approached Masha's room, but found the door closed. The father entreated his child from the outside.

"Masha, darling, what is the matter? Tell me. Are you sick, God forbid? Maybe I ought to send for a doctor?"

"Masha, dear, we're ready to drop. What's the matter with you?" implored the mother.

Masha, however, remained speechless behind the closed door.

"What shall we do now, Rosa?" asked Aaron, as if his wife were solely to blame for this sorry state of affairs.

"I'll go right over to those beggars and tear their eyes out for them,—mother and son both. What have they against us? Why do they begrudge us our little share of happiness?" cried Rosa, raging against Charlie and his mother.

"Hush, for heaven's sake! Hush!" wailed the father. "Masha, Masha darling. Don't frighten us. You've scared us through and through," entreated Aaron from the outside of the door.

No answer came from Masha.

"Well, what will you do now? Uncle Moses will

soon be here. He telephoned that he's coming to take you out in the machine."

At this Masha's door suddenly flew open, and the girl, her eyes dilated, screamed to her father:

"I don't want to marry Uncle. I don't want to. I don't want to!"

Father and mother looked at each other as if misfortune itself had entered upon a thunderbolt.

"What are you talking about? What are you saying? Masha dear, what's come over you?"

"I don't want it! I don't want it!" And Masha stamped her foot.

"Hush, quiet! Woe is me, Uncle Moses will be here any minute."

Masha went back to her room and slammed the door in the face of her parents.

"Well, what are we going to do now? Rosa, I'll go crazy, I'll go mad. I'm losing my senses!" All at once Aaron beheld the abyss of poverty out of which he had risen; and now he stood again upon the brink of that abyss. He beheld himself once more an operator. He was in despair.

But, as usual in such cases, when Aaron lost himself completely, Rosa assumed command of the situation.

"Aaron, leave that door. Sit down to table and eat. Uncle Moses will soon come in," she ordered.

Aaron obeyed. He sat down before the table and began to wring his hands.

"What will come of it now? What?"

"Aaron, keep quiet. He's liable to pop in any moment. He need not know anything, or see anything."

The man saw that his wife was right. He therefore grew silent and tried to sit there calmly.

"What has happened? Nothing. She went to Coney Island with the fellow and came back all upset with wild notions in her head. She'll sleep it all off through the night and wake up clear headed again."

Now Aaron saw that his wife was altogether right, and he felt wholly at ease.

When Uncle Moses arrived he found the couple seated at the table, eating peacefully.

"Where is Masha?" asked Uncle Moses, before he had crossed the threshold. For before he had uttered "Good evening," he had noticed that Masha was not there.

"Hello, Moses!" (Ever since he had been betrothed to her daughter, Rosa had stopped calling him Uncle and had addressed him by his first name, which seemed more appropriate in the case of an engaged young man.) "Hello, Moses!" she greeted. "Masha has a headache. So she has lain down for a rest in her room." And before Uncle Moses had time to be seated, she called into the next room.

"Masha! Masha! See who's here!"

"Where has she been, to have such a headache?" asked Uncle Moses.

Aaron blanched with fear and felt confused and lost, as usual when confronted with a difficult situation. Rosa, however, was equal to the occasion.

"She was to Coney Island for a swim. Such a hot day. And she came home in a bad temper. I say, Moses," and she winked to the fiancé. "Suppose you go and speak to her. She'll refuse everybody else, but not you," she added, coquettishly.

Aaron became paler still, but Rosa calmed him with a nod. Uncle Moses did not stir from the table, however. He sat there indifferently, and said, as if to himself:

"If she wants to be angry, let her be angry." He took out a thick cigar from his golden cigar-case, threw one to Aaron, bit off the top of the other, spat out, chewed his cigar and addressed the father.

"What do you think of the new collector I've appointed for my houses down-town? Let's see,—what's his name now? Judel the restaurant keeper. Do you think he'll be all right?"

"I don't see why Uncle should need new people. It's never safe to trust in strangers," replied Aaron, with a little more self-confidence.

"So you don't believe it's safe to trust in strangers," commented Uncle Moses, indifferently. He arose, went to the mirror and looked at himself. Out of a habit which he had never been able to shake, he spat upon his hands and smoothed down the grayish hair that grew thickly near his neck, still retaining their black color near the roots.

"Moses, dear, do me the favor of tasting my cheese fritters. I made them especially for you," invited Rosa, whose easy manner with the wealthy man had reached the point of addressing him by the familiar pronoun,* a thing which Aaron simply could not bring himself to do.

Uncle Moses, however, made no reply. He ap-

* *I.e.*, "du" (often translated by thou, but lacking the stiffness of the English pronoun in regular speech. Cf. *tu* in the Romance languages).

proached the door to Masha's room, knocked, and said in imperious tones:

"Hey, child. Come out. The machine is waiting."

Aaron again turned as pale as the wall. But Rosa's glances reassured him.

It seemed as if Masha, too, was unable to resist Uncle Moses' voice, for soon the door opened and Masha came out, very pale. She walked with slow steps, came up to the Uncle and remained standing before him.

Uncle Moses raised her head with his short, stubby fingers and looked at her.

"What is the matter with you, Masha?"

Masha suddenly turned her eyes upon him. They had become much larger than usual, and were filled with tears. She looked him straight in the face and said:

"Must I marry you, Uncle? I can't. I can't." And her round tears rolled from her lashes down her cheeks.

Uncle Moses turned white and stood there speechless.

"Masha darling, what are you doing?"

"Masha, Masha!" shrieked her parents.

"Shut up!" commanded Uncle Moses in sharp, scornful tones.

"All right, kid. Go to sleep," he said to Masha, and he left without so much as a glance at the terrified father and mother.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEVIL TAKES HIM

UNCLE MOSES arrived late at his place of business. He was in a serious frame of mind and at once began to look over the orders. His clouded countenance and his labored breathing frightened everybody. He kept asking all manner of questions and seemingly trusted in no one. His adjutant Sam did not leave his side. Should anything displease him, he would complain to Sam at once. He would address his remarks to Sam, but his eyes would be riveted upon the offender, and this was enough to frighten the very life out of the poor culprit.

He went upstairs to the workshop. It was the slack season, but Uncle Moses kept the force busy so as to provide his poor townsmen with work. As usual when he let them cut stock, so now he paced hither and thither scattering terror wherever he went. Ever since he had become engaged, however, his visits to the workshop had been infrequent; during the hot weather he never showed up; his present appearance, therefore, came as a complete surprise.

The workmen really thought that Uncle Moses had not come in that day. Sam himself, ever since Uncle Moses' betrothal, had changed tactics and was no longer so faithful to his employer, so that the men permitted themselves numerous little liberties, and

freely exchanged gossip. This was one of the hot days. It was almost impossible to endure the heat in that low, narrow room which had been made over from a garret into a workshop. The brick roof, which lay bare above the workingmen's heads, sent the heat down in waves. Throughout the shop rose the sweetish, nauseating odor of gas, which leaked from the rubber pipes, to which the tailor's gooses of the presser were connected. The pressers stood half-naked, ironing out the newly made woolen garments. The steam from the moistened clothes filled the air with stickiness and cast an enervating spell over all. Weariness crept into one's .marrow and lulled one to sleep. Everybody was drowsy with the stench of gas and the odor of sweat. More than one was unable to resist the temptations of slumber and drooped over his machine to snatch a few moments of rest. Others,—piece-workers, managed to keep awake with a song. Yekel the cantor's son had called to mind an old, old melody from the Rosh Hashanah (New Year) service which the old cantor used to sing in the Kuzmin synagogue, and many started from their sleep, roused by the song, and suddenly recalled New Year's in Kuzmin. The music evoked sweet memories of fish and onions, of Psalm recitation, of green fields and cold water on *Tashlikh* day, and numerous other reminiscences of the old home,—the sky above the village, the cemetery with its solemn atmosphere, raisin wine and the Saturday evening ritual baths. And their hearts began to fill with longing. The yearning infused them with courage to fight the nauseating gas and the vapory atmosphere; it sustained their strength. All of a sudden Shloyme the Peddlar attacked his work with a

vim, plying the treadle of his machine with breakneck speed. This was what the townsmen called "evening prayers."

"Hey there!" cried Khayim the Ox, "what do you mean by saying your evening prayers so loudly?..."

The conversation turned to the old home. Kuzmin came to life with all its cottages, its roads, its taverns and its fish-ponds. Once again the old Rabbi of Kuzmin lived anew together with Reb Leibush'l the Dayon, the old cantor and all the lanes and nooks of Kuzmin. From the village burial-ground arose the dead from their couches of earth beneath the tombstones, and their souls hovered amid the tailor's gooses, the needle and thread, the overcoats and the newly-cut trousers. The Kuzmin townsmen did not notice Uncle Moses come in. Nor did they spy adjutant Sam. They were dwelling once again in old Kuzmin, in the twilight between afternoon and evening prayers, in the old House of Study.

"Hey, Kuzmin, what do you call this?"—bellowed Sam. "The idea! Here Uncle lets stock be cut so that the beggars may be kept at work, and they're loafing. They're right. Their work isn't needed anyway. If Uncle only took my advice—"

But Uncle Moses silenced him with a gesture and stared sternly at Kuzmin.

They were all men whom he had known in his youth. He had attended Hebrew school with some of them,—had run about the streets with them,—carried home orders for the fruit vendors on the marketplace and received rotten fruit as a reward. More than one he remembered as men of wealth and refinement, and he had not dared to consider himself their

equal. He knew them all, and now they were all his servants and feared him, being struck dumb whenever he appeared. All at once he was himself seized with a desire to hear tell of old Kuzmin,—old tales that had pleased him when he was a child, and it seemed to him that he had lived no other life than his childhood years about which the men were now speaking.

"Keep right on talking, Reb Shloyme. Tell us more about old Kuzmin," urged Uncle Moses, after long meditation.

But Reb Shloyme remained silent. The townsmen were not accustomed to speaking with Uncle Moses on terms of equality. They bowed their heads lower over the coats and trousers on which they were working, and filled the shop with the clamor of the machines; the pressers plied their irons with renewed vigor, amid the odor of leaking gas.

Uncle Moses became sad. For a moment the whole matter seem utterly incomprehensible. Why was he holding these refined fathers of Kuzmin captive in this stifling shop, enslaved to the needle? Why and for whom did he drive them and himself, wearying them at this monotonous toil? For a moment he wondered whether it would not be better to set Kuzmin free and himself journey back to the little village and become the wealthy man of the town, enjoying the Sabbath and the holidays,—owning two horses such as his former landlord, Itskhok the ox-dealer had possessed, and living the old Jewish life that he had known from his childhood.

"Do you remember, Reb Shloyme,—do you remember old Itskhok? Do you remember his Sabbaths? He'd come home on Friday evening with two nags,—

do you remember?—'' asked Uncle Moses with moist eyes.

The men were afraid to recall old Reb Itskhok at the time when ''Uncle'' used to be his driver. Their employer's words, however, stirred them deeply, and they were filled with boundless love for their benefactor, who did not consider himself their superior and recalled that dear old Kuzmin for which they all were so homesick.

''Who doesn't remember old Reb Itskhok. He was a hospitable, generous soul, and must surely be in Paradise now,'' replied the old man.

''Surely in Paradise, ha, Reb Shloyme?'' said Uncle Moses, as his thoughts wandered to heaven and hell, about which he had forgotten entirely. It seemed as if he had wasted his whole life, forfeiting his place in Paradise. Perhaps there was yet time to begin a good life; to build a large synagogue. Let all the Kuzmin townsfolk come there to pray, while he devoted himself all day to charity. For this world he was already too old. And perhaps the ancient Jews were right.—There was no present world. Real life began only in the next world.

But all these thoughts that had come so suddenly to Uncle Moses, stayed but a moment. Only for a moment had his renunciation of the present world lasted, —his surrender of Masha and all the delights in hope of which he so patiently suffered. Soon his body again throbbed with earthly ambitions and desires. Suddenly he arose, his countenance assumed the expression that made them all tremble, his eyes hard and motionless, his glance indifferent, a scornful smile upon his lips,— and said:

"This work must be ready by the first. Remember, for Baltimore. We must deliver the goods."—And without deigning a glance toward his employees he returned to his office, burying himself in his correspondence, in his orders, his books. But he could not concentrate his mind upon anything. No matter how much he tried to interest himself in the details of the business, he could not succeed. He did not care to go home. His home was a dreary place and he feared it. Most of all he would have liked to go and see Masha, take her out somewhere on an automobile trip,—to a summer resort, and stay there with her over night, taking delight in her beauty, her laughter, in her personality altogether, living hours of the sweet anticipations that filled his life and peopled his dreams ever since he had been waiting for her. These anticipations had not ceased, nor had he been in the least frightened by her words. He knew that he could carry out everything whenever he so desired, whether she was willing or not. He need but raise his finger. But he had begun to fear himself. Deep within him stirred a suspicion that he was too old to begin a new life—that he could not win the life he desired. Not all his wealth nor all his power could buy it. . . He fought against this thought, warding it off. And as if to convince himself that he was strong enough to begin a new life, he was taken with an impulse to commit a wicked deed, to do violence to Masha. He would ride over to Masha's, take her out, remain in some place with her over night, seduce her and then—not marry her. He would pay her damages, money, a dowry,—but not marry her. He knew that he could carry all

this through,—that no one could call him to account. No one.

In his mind's eye he could already see Masha helpless and broken, wailing in her home. She and her father and her mother came to him and implored his mercy. . . . He had ruined the child. . . And he:—"I'll give you money, but I refuse to marry her." The thought of such a revenge rejoiced him.

He would have executed this plan, too, only that something within told him that this was not right. From the first moment that he had met her, a paternal feeling for Masha had stolen into his heart and taken root there. It was this feeling that protested strongly against his project. Moreover, deep within him he felt that it was not this he desired of Masha,—that if he had merely lusted to possess her, he would have accomplished that long before. The real reason why he had waited so long for Masha and had devoted so much time to educating her, was that he wished her to care as much as he did,—that he desired her to love him of her own free will and not because Uncle Moses so wished it. He longed to have her love him, truly love him,—and to be just as anxious for the wedding as was he. This was what he was waiting for. This had been his chief hope during the past few years, ever since his interest had been aroused. Daily he could see this happy outcome in his mind's eye, and it refreshed him. She was his willing wife. He could behold her becoming pale and weak, and he felt pity for her. There she lay in child-bed, a mother through him. Through her tear-stained eyes she looked weakly up at him and filled him with compassion.—This was what he had been waiting for, and now it

would never be. They would marry, all right, and have children, but one thing would be missing: her willingness, her free consent. That would be absent. He had seen that yesterday in her glance, in her tears. Yet why should things be so? Why was her free consent impossible to win? It was this he had hoped for, this that made life worth while and compensated for his long waiting.

He became angry. His passion flamed up anew. If this was impossible, then let the whole matter be obliterated. He would trample upon her, crush her, and cast her aside. He burned with desire for vengeance. He would not break her once, but every day. He would marry her whether she wished it or not. But first she must come and beg him,—kiss his hand and entreat him: "Marry me."—"Oh," he promised himself, "I'll bring her to her knees before me. And she must have children. Whether she wishes to or not, She will have children by me. And I'll keep her like a dog,—tied like a puppy to me. I'll keep her up half the night waiting for me. And I'll be out with other women. Oh, I'll lead her a merry dance!"

Deep within him, however, lurked a doubt as to his virility. And his passion burned to overthrow that doubt. He muttered to himself:

"Whether she wishes to or not, she must have children."

At this juncture somebody approached him. He raised his glance and saw Masha's father standing before him pale and frightened, looking about in every direction to see whether they were being observed or overheard.

"Uncle, it was all a mistake. The poor girl cried

all night long. She can't imagine what came over her."

Uncle Moses knew that the man was lying,—that he was saying these things because he feared for his bread and butter. Yet it was pleasant to hear these words. Whereupon he busied himself with his correspondence and, pretending not to hear, let Aaron continue his apologies.

"In a few days, after she has come to her senses, let Uncle call again. Everything will be explained."

"Shut up! Let there be no more talk of this. Don't be afraid, I won't discharge you. I am not that kind of a man. Not right away, at any rate. Not until you find another place. But you must understand this much:—that maintaining your home as I have done hitherto is out of the question. Masha is no longer anything to me.—She don't like me. I have nothing against her. I wish her only the best, and should you ever need a dowry for her, why you're welcome to it, just like any other townsman of mine. I'm not that kind of a man. But you must understand that I'll not pay any extra expenses. If you care to remain with me, you'll have to go back to the shop upstairs. If not, I'll give you good recommendations."

"Uncle! What is Uncle saying! Why, nothing has happened. The poor girl will be disgraced.—What is Uncle saying!"

Aaron's words were as sweet music to Uncle Moses' ears. He put his letter aside for a moment and looked at Aaron.

"Sam!"

Sam came running to the spot.

"How did they call him in the old country?" he asked, pointing to Aaron.

For a moment Sam stood in doubt.

"Big Mouth, it seems to me."

"Mouth is all right!"—He arose and walked away without so much as a glance at Aaron.

"Sam, the goods must be delivered to Baltimore before the first, do you hear?"

"Yes, Uncle."

Uncle Moses reached the street. He did not know what to do. His passion still raged in him, and he went off to the restaurant-keeper's wife,—a thing he had not done since he had settled the matter of the children with her and her husband. He took her into a private room and sat down with her to a meal of roast goose and schnapps. Her husband, Uncle Moses' collector, had to serve them. He had, moreover, to remove Uncle Moses' shoes, for which he was rewarded with the sobriquet "Galician good-for-nothing." Uncle Moses got drunk, (something that very seldom happened to him) and remained at the place overnight.

CHAPTER XIII

MASHA SEES UNCLE MOSES

"WHAT shall we do now, Rosa? What?" wailed Aaron Melnick.

The Melnick home was steeped in gloom and confusion. The rooms had not been swept or tidied for several days. Nobody ate, nobody slept. The other children had returned from their vacation. Celia, who in her younger days on Hopkins Street had been so fond of playing "movies," had grown into a young miss and attended High School; indeed, she was beginning to look forward to being engaged. It was she who wept most, filling the house with lamentations, declaring that Masha's actions would ruin her. The younger children, who had been brought up in comfort, remembering the poverty of Hopkins Street only as a vague dream, felt the impending misfortune rather than understood it. They did not cry, but went about with childish, worrying, earnest faces, and it was this childish sorrow that influenced Masha more than her father's tears. Leah, the youngest, who from childhood had been fond of playing "the American lady," and would be forever correcting everybody's English at home, simply looked at Masha out of her big, childish eyes. Masha was her ideal, and she was at a loss for words. She felt that if Masha had decided on such a course, then that's how things would have to be.

Aaron paced up and down the room as weak and helpless as his children. His head was swathed in a towel, and he kept wringing his hands.

"What are we to do now? What will come of this?"

The poor man was terrified by the vision of poverty that rose before him. He had nothing in life—no self-confidence, no determination,—nothing except Uncle Moses' favor, which he had bought at the cost of his daughter's happiness. And this favor was imperilled. His whole livelihood, his food, his home. He beheld himself sinking into the abyss out of which he had so laboriously risen. The weight that he had gained since his ascension to comfort and ease he now lost; he began to look as he had appeared in former years when he worked in the shop.

Rosa, however, refused to acknowledge defeat. At first she laughed the whole matter away. The girl had taken crazy notions into her head. She'd sleep them off and wake up in her right senses. But when she saw that the girl had not awaked in her right senses, she argued with Masha, asserting that the girl had no right to change her mind.

"You imagine you can call it off now? Too late, my daughter. You've been leading him around by the nose for four years. He's missed all sorts of good matches on your account. He might have married the most beautiful young girl, not such a beggar as you, whom he even had to clothe. And do you think you can back out of it now? Now, after he has spent so much money on you, and has waited so long for you? And you are so crazy as to change your mind. Too late, my daughter, too late. You should have bethought yourself when he spent his first dollar on

you,—when you were yet a young girl, before he gave your father a job,—when we still lived on Hopkins Street, not now."

"Ah, Rosa, it is too late, anyway. Uncle Moses doesn't want to hear another word about the whole affair."

Masha had been convinced by her mother's words. Yet she did not feel in any way to blame. It had all happened without her knowledge. She had not known, in her childhood days, what marriage meant. Only now did she realize its significance. And what frightened her more than anything else was the thought that she would always, always be together with Uncle Moses. She would have to go everywhere with him—be always with him. She did not hate Uncle Moses. On the contrary, she was very fond of him, and very grateful besides. But it was so monotonous and boresome in his company. And this ennui terrified her.

"How am I to blame, mamma? I'm not to blame."

"Then who *is?* Am *I* to blame? Did he spend money on *me?* Did he send *me* to High School? Did he pay for *my* music lessons? He ruined his life for you. He might have married a lady,—a first class American lady. Anybody he chose. But he didn't marry. He waited for you. What do you think,—you can turn his head for years and then balk? Whom do you imagine you're toying with? Do you know who Uncle Moses is,—do you?"

Masha did not understand what her mother meant. She could not understand how she had turned Uncle Moses' head. She could not understand what she had done so to rouse his ire. It seemed to her that her mother and father did not know Uncle Moses,—that if

she were to go to him and tell him everything, Uncle Moses would settle everything at once, as he always did when trouble occurred.

"I'll go to Uncle. I'll tell him everything. You'll see. Uncle will be as good as before," said Masha.

"Too late! Too late! He doesn't want to hear another word about the whole matter," whimpered Aaron.

"What do you mean,—'too late?' Not at all!" scolded Rosa. "What do you mean by all this wailing? You dunce!" And she pinched him hard. "Let her go to Uncle. He'll rid her head of all that nonsense. Go, call Uncle up on the telephone!" she screamed at her husband. "Why do you stand there like a statue?"

Aaron did as he was bidden. He saw that she was right, as usual. With a palpitating heart he ran over to the telephone.

Uncle Moses was a long time in answering. First he had them told that he was angry and did not care to speak to anybody; then, that he was out and that he had been sent for. Finally, as it appeared, he himself grew uneasy and had Masha called up. As soon as he heard her voice over the wire his anger subsided. He arranged for her to come to the store at six o'clock that evening. From there he would take her to a "quiet little place" where they could have a talk.

About six that evening, Masha came to the store. She wore her tailored, terra-cotta colored, fall suit; on her head, the broad dark felt hat that had just come into fashion. She did not wait at the door, as she used to do, but entered the place at once. Sam hastened forward to greet her, then ran to tell Uncle

Moses that she had come. Uncle Moses was busy with a traveling salesman in his private office, which was in a corner partitioned off from the rest of the store. Here was the book-keeper's office as well as the safe. Uncle Moses would not be disturbed and asked Sam to entertain Masha until he should be ready. He waved to Masha from behind the office window, as if to say: "Wait, Masha, I'll be ready in a minute." Sam had guessed at once that something had taken place between Uncle Moses and Masha, and told himself that in any event it would be wise to follow the advice cousin Mannes had given him: "Get into Masha's good graces. You are now in her hands." Ever since Uncle Moses had drawn his attention to the girl, Masha had pleased him. Sam had taken advantage of every possible opportunity to cultivate her friendship and show her respect. Now, too, he remarked to her how well her suit, which Uncle Moses had bought as a sample, became her, and added that if a buyer from a big store in Chicago should see her in that suit, he, Sam, would be able to make a tidy sum. He would take the order and sell it to a friend of his, a cloak manufacturer. He added even more: that if he had Masha for a model,—a mere supposition, of course,—he would at once leave the employ of Uncle Moses and go into cloak-manufacturing himself, for whatever Masha put on at once acquired "dignity." (This was the highest compliment Sam could pay to a lady.) But Uncle Moses did not permit him to indulge these fancies for long. He soon came out of his private office, looked at Sam without saying a word, simply knitting his brows, and without a word even to Masha, he took her by the arm and walked out.

As soon as they reached the street Masha asked in English:

"Are you very angry with me, Uncle?"

Uncle Moses made no reply. Holding her tightly by the arm, he walked along, elbowing with difficulty through the stream of people that poured from every direction, and every building on to the thoroughfare, hastening to the elevated station. It was the hour of closing and the streets were black with humanity. Masha and Uncle Moses could not exchange many words on their way; he fairly pulled her along.

"Where are we going, Uncle?" asked Masha.

"Don't you care to dine with me?" he asked, without looking into her face.

"Certainly I do."

"Then come along."

They turned into a narrow side-street and Uncle Moses led her into a well known Hungarian restaurant; the owner recognized Uncle Moses at once, and gave them a place in a corner where they would be free from disturbance. Moses ordered food and Hungarian wine.

Even after they had started to eat he remained solemn, rarely looking at Masha, wrapped in thought, although he ate and drank heartily, from time to time inviting Masha to drink.

"Uncle, please set things right once more. You can always settle matters so well," Masha suddenly began, placing her slender hand upon his arm.

"What shall I set right?"

"You know. Things are so terrible over at our house now. Papa is going around crying, and mamma, too."

"And why are they crying?" asked Moses in surprise. "Has anything happened?"

"They're afraid that you'll discharge papa."

"And why should I discharge papa?"

"You know why . . ." Masha replied bashfully. For a moment she was silent, then suddenly she raised her large eyes, opened them wide and looked straight into his face with her child-like glance, saying in a girlish, but firm voice:

"I love you, Uncle. I love you ever so much. I love you more than my pa or ma. You may be bad to others, but you've always been good to me,—always very good. And I'll always love you. I'll never let anyone speak a word against you. I love you. You are my dear, dear Uncle."

"Hush, Masha, hush!" muttered Moses, as if to himself. "Drink some wine. Drink,—do."

"I can't." Masha removed the glass from her lips and placed it back upon the table. "Listen, Uncle," she added, blushing for the first time in his presence as her eyes began to glitter with a humid brilliancy. "Up to now I've never known what it meant to marry. Now I know. And I think . . . And I think . . . that for us to marry . . . would be unwise . . . It would be unwise . . . I'm willing to live with you as a daughter. I'll love you as my dear, dear Uncle. Not as your wife. Don't you agree with me?"

Uncle Moses was silent. He drank heavily and tried to cheer Masha.

"Drink, Masha, please. Drink."

"Don't, Uncle, don't," pleaded Masha, taking the glass from him and not permitting him to drink. I don't like the way you're drinking today. I love you.

Don't. Don't. Answer me, please. Answer. Why don't you speak to me today?"

Uncle Moses looked at her and smiled lovingly.

"Then you don't love your Uncle. Isn't that so, Masha? I'm too old for you, what? It's a bad match. Yes, Masha," laughed Uncle Moses, causing her to laugh too. And all at once the whole conversation was somehow or other laughed away.

"Oh, Uncle! An old man? Don't talk like that. I like you. You're my good old uncle. I want always to be with you. I want to live with you in the beautiful new house you've furnished. I like it. You dear old Uncle!"

Uncle Moses called the waiter and paid the bill. As they walked out, he said to Masha:

"Do you want to come with me?"

"Anywhere, Uncle."

He called a taxi and ordered the chauffeur to take them to Harlem West.

"I want to show you the new furniture. The upholsterer had completed everything. All is in readiness. I want you to see it."

Masha became moody and made no reply. Suddenly she spoke again.

"Uncle, why don't you answer me?"

"Answer what?"

"Don't you think it would be better for us if you remained my uncle,—my good, good pa, and I your daughter,—rather than for us to marry?"

"It's all right, Masha. Hush, say no more." And for the rest of the way to Harlem they were both silent.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLUE ROOM

UNCLE MOSES led Masha into the house which he had furnished as their future home. The place was in complete readiness; the furniture still shed an odor of fresh varnish, the curtains were already hung, and the house seemed to be waiting for its occupants. Uncle Moses turned the lights on in every room; the cut-glassware, the plants and the porcelain dogs and cats which everywhere abounded, began to sparkle. He led Masha from room to room. The apartments were sumptuously furnished, in the taste of a bourgeois,—they were cozy, cluttered with furniture, bric-a-brac and countless gewgaws. The parlor gave the effect of a store where electric lamps and porcelain dogs were sold. And every moment he would surprise Masha with a new light effect. Here a cat would stare out of yellow, illuminated eyes; there a cluster of grapes over a closet would suddenly glow with an inner radiance, and soon a piece of cut glass would be similarly suffused with light. It was easily to be seen that the man had expended much care in the furnishing of the home, lavishing a wealth of love and imagination. It was the bedroom, however, that most revealed the traces of his loving care. It was arranged with all the tenderness of a coarse person. Everything in it was blue. The wall was hung with

cheap landscapes. The bed rested upon a dais and overhead stretched a blue silk canopy. The lights alone did not harmonize with the color scheme; here, as in the parlor, they were of different colors,—red, blue, plain,—and this destroyed the ensemble. Uncle Moses pressed a button, and an electric pianola that was placed in another room began all at once to play.

Uncle Moses lingered for a long while in the bedroom and very carefully examined the bed and all the details. Masha turned red and her heart began to beat fast. She longed to leave the room as soon as possible. The room and the raised bed recalled thoughts that filled her with agony,—a hot, trembling agony,—as if it were a scaffold being shown to a man condemned to die upon it. Yet despite all, a mysterious power drew her gaze toward the bed. The room looked strangely familiar to her,—as if she had seen it in a dream, and she felt a certain family relationship to the room and to the bed, like that of a hopeless invalid to death. The thought terrified her; she moved to leave the room. Uncle Moses, however, remained seated on the edge of the bed and called her back.

"What are you running away for, Masha? Stay here. How do you like it, ha?"

"Oh, beautiful," replied Masha, looking away.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he laughed; he pressed a button in the wall and the room was flooded with a blood-red light that turned the blue of the wall paper to yellow; the whole room, indeed, assumed an otherworldly glow. Everything seemed to have been endowed with mystery,—the furniture, the colors on the wall, and Uncle Moses himself, who sat there on the edge of the bed like a huge, yellow monster.

The light did not last long. Soon he pressed another button and the room was plunged into bright blue. Uncle Moses was fond of light effects and had supplied the bed-room with any number of combinations. And all the while the electric pianola in an adjoining room played a cheap waltz.

"Well, how do you like it, Masha?"

"Oh, beautiful!"

"But what's the use, if you love me only as a good old Uncle,—only as a good old Uncle. That's what you said, wasn't it, Masha? Like a good old Uncle."

"Please don't talk like that, Uncle. I don't like the way your're speaking."

"Listen, Masha." Moses suddenly grew serious. "I must speak frankly with you. You're no longer a child. You know what I mean. I don't care to be a good old Uncle. That doesn't enthuse me one bit. I'll have none of it."

Masha said nothing and bowed her head.

"Well, I'm glad it came out now and not afterward," continued Uncle Moses. "Now, at least, there'll be no trouble on account of misunderstanding. I can rent the house or perhaps put it to some other purpose."

"Are you angry with me, Uncle?" asked Masha.

"Angry? Why should I be angry? For the money you've cost me? Oh, oh, my townsfolk cost me plenty as it is. No, no. I'm not angry, neither am I delighted. And in case you have a lover, I'll marry you off to him. Just send your father to me. What I do for all my other townsfolk I'll do for you. And I wish you happiness, Masha. If your young man is good for anything, let him come to me. Perhaps I can do something for him."

Masha raised her large eyes and gazed at Uncle Moses. She was as accustomed to him as a child to its father, and she had never heard him talk like this before. She grew frightened. Yet she was habituated to him, and she approached him and cajoled him, like a youngster who fears an older person:

"Dear Uncle, please don't talk like that. I don't know what to say. I'm a silly girl. You are right. You have done so much for me, my father, my mother, —and I'm so bad, so foolish. My good, good Uncle," —and she lay her head against his neck, while hot tears and a childish kiss, both of which came from fright and helplessness, warmed Uncle Moses' rough skin.

For a moment he was content, and allowed himself to be kissed. But soon his masculine pride rebelled against these innocent childish kisses. He was about to embrace her and kiss her upon the lips as man kisses woman, but her tears restrained him, for they made a child of her, and it was the woman in her that he longed to kiss. He removed her head from his neck and thrust her away from him.

"You forget yourself, Masha. You're no longer a child. You're a grown-up young lady."

Masha blushed with embarrassment; her tears seemed to remain suspended upon her lashes; she looked at Uncle Moses through the drops and was completely at a loss.

He turned off the light, very carefully locked all the doors and did not even glance at Masha. It was as if she were not there. Just before he left her, after taking her home, he said:

"Don't worry, Masha. I'll do all I can for you, the same as I do for all my townsfolk." And he left.

Masha's parents were awaiting her return on pins and needles. She, however, made no reply to their inquiring glances, but went straight to her room.

Aaron called after her, but his wife pulled him by the sleeve and growled:

"Let her be. Ask her nothing today."

Aaron saw that, as usual, his wife was right.

Masha passed a sleepless night. And through that night it became clear to her that she no longer had any right to happiness,—that she had been brought up with a rope around her neck,—that she had been sold when a child, for the benefit of her parents and the whole family. She thought of Hopkins Street, before Uncle Moses had intervened in their favor, and remembered how she had been the "little mother" of the household. She smiled as she recalled how she had deceived the grocer and the butcher with the magic phrase: "pa has a job." She thought of the day on which she had brought her father home after he had run away, and other similar scenes. And she saw clearly that even now she had not yet ceased to play the role of "little mother,"—that she must not dare to abandon that role.

She beheld the "scaffold,"—the bed-room with the blue, red and yellow lights,—and perhaps it was this gallows that was drawing her on. The memory of the blue bed-room made her shudder, yet she was powerfully attracted to it. Not for a moment could she turn her thoughts from it; it drew her on even as death lures the invalid. The following day, to the complete surprise of all, she asked her father to see Uncle Moses and tell him that she regretted everything she had said, and—

But Uncle Moses would listen to nothing. He was through with it for good. Aaron Melnick and his wife came and begged him to have pity on their daughter, —not to ruin her whole career. Uncle Moses, however, wished Masha herself to come to him and say to him whatever she had to say. Then he would see what he'd do. And he added:

"Please, do me the favor not to compel her to act against her will, merely to save your bread and butter."

Masha felt the insult, the humiliation, of Uncle Moses' request for her to come to him personally and entreat him. During the previous few days every feeling of respect and daughterly love that had been implanted in her by his kindly interest, had been uprooted. She felt for him now only scorn and disgust. She could not, however, resist the imploring glances of her parents and her little brothers and sisters, who looked at her like dumb creatures, seeming to entreat: "Do it for us." She was the "little mother," and could not withstand the instinct of that motherhood which she had taken upon herself from her earliest childhood days.

During this epoch of trial she had gone to see Charlie, not so much in hopes of receiving from any of his words encouragement to continue her struggle, as to try and summon that courage from the sight of him. She made an appointment with him and again they sauntered along Fifth Avenue and Central Park for a whole day; once more, too, Charlie's speech was of big things, of liberating the world, of life, and he told her of his plans to organize a strike in Uncle Moses' shop. For her alone, for her life, her interests,

he had not a word. As before, so now, Charlie was interested in universal problems, with everything under the sun except her, and he did not see her. She was on the point of confessing everything to him and begging him to help her be strong, to aid her to summon strength to begin life all over again on her own responsibility,—to help her regain her foothold. But Charlie was so engrossed in world-problems that she wondered how to intrude herself into the discussion,—herself and her petty life. It seemed to her that this would appear too insignificant to Charlie. He was above such private affairs.

She returned home from her walk with Charlie more despondent and helpless than ever. She had not mentioned a word about herself to him, and it had not occurred to Charlie to ask. For a moment she thought of taking everything into her own hands, and she actually answered an advertisement and accepted a position. Whereupon her home echoed with universal mourning, and her little brothers and sisters glanced at her in dumb entreaty and her father trembled with apprehension. Ah, what was the difference? The rope had been fastened around her neck long ago. She had been born with it.

She went to Uncle Moses. She felt only scorn and repulsion for him,—yet she went. She understood and felt clearly the significance of this call,—its results,—and she could behold the blue bed-room and the raised bed which caused her to stifle back all her humiliation, all her finer feelings, and go to Uncle Moses and beg him to marry her. It was as if the blue room had fascinated her, and deep, deep within her she longed for the blue room and its mysterious lights. Her imagina-

tion played about it and painted various terrifying scenes. And the blue room drew her even as death lures the invalid.

Uncle Moses took her, as he had done the first time, to the Hungarian restaurant. He spoke of everything under the sun except the subject that had brought Masha to him. He did not even afford her an opportunity to broach the matter. He wished to taste the full satisfaction of having her implore him, of having her initiate the entire conversation, unaided. And that satisfaction he tasted when they were once again in the new house and he had taken her into the blue room. Uncle Moses sat down upon the bed like an executioner before the block, and said:

"Well, you may tell me here what you have to say to me."

"Uncle, I am ready to marry you," said Masha.

"Is that so? And am I no longer too old for you?"

"Uncle——"

"I want you to speak openly. No dodging. Why did you refuse me before and why are you now willing? Is it because your pa forced you? Tell me."

"But Uncle, why do you speak to me like that?"

"I want to know. There must be a reason for all this. Why is it that you are now willing to marry me, when a short while ago you didn't care to?"

"The reason is, because—I love you!" asserted Masha bashfully.

"How do you love me? As a good old uncle, or as a man whom you are going to marry?"

Masha raised her big eyes to his and said:

"Why should you ask me such questions? You know yourself."

"Not at all. Before, you loved me differently."

"Before, I was a child," answered Masha softly.

"And now?"

Masha looked at him and recognized the Uncle Moses of old. She recalled the time when she had been a little girl and he had humiliated her father before her eyes, and now, as then, she was seized with an impulse to spring up and cry into his face: "Beast! Dog!" A feeling of vengeance upon herself, however, kept her rooted there, sullenly, enduring his inquisitorial questions.

"Well, and now?" asked Uncle Moses once more.

"Now?"

"Yes. How do you love me now?"

"Now I love you as a man whom I'm going to marry," she replied, looking straight into his eyes.

"As a man," echoed Uncle Moses. He drew near to her, embraced her ardently and kissed her full upon the lips. Masha left Uncle Moses. Now, she felt, she might do anything. And, in truth, she was capable of anything.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

MAN AND WIFE

IT was now two years after the wedding. Masha was with child and Uncle Moses watched her every step with the tender, trembling care that one devotes to a weak child. He could not sit at ease in his office, and every fifteen minutes he would telephone to his home. "Masha, my darling," he would admonish her, "please don't strain yourself." And hearing that all was well at home he would feel better and would go up to the workshop to jest with his townsfolk.

"Why are you so quiet, Reb Shloymele? Let's hear you sing that Kaddish-tune."

Ever since Uncle Moses had married, a remarkable change might have been noted in his character from day to day. Not only did his attitude toward people become different, but his very appearance itself was altered; it assumed a more human expression. A certain soft, helpless air had stolen into the fleshy folds about his mouth and into his sunken eyes. No longer did his face scatter terror. It was as if a tender, feminine hand had kneaded love into the furrows of his countenance,—had breathed love into them,—all the delicacy of her being. And by day it seemed as if he shed about him that love and tenderness which he had drunk

at some mysterious fount. Uncle Moses smiled—smiled—upon his people. Uncle Moses became friendly, genial, and from day to day his employees lost that fear and terror which they had formerly had for him.

The change in Uncle Moses had become most evident since Masha had begun to be with child. From the very first day the news had been spread in the store, among the workingmen upstairs as well as among all the townsfolk. The secret had been let out by Uncle Moses' own behavior,—by his restlessness, his constant telephoning to his home, his pleasant smile; they began to laugh at him behind his back, whispering secrets into one anothers' ears and casting furtive glances in Sam's direction.

But they feared to look at Sam. It was as if Sam had taken into his grasp the reins that Uncle Moses had thrown aside. Uncle Moses began to entrust the business more and more to Sam. Not only did Sam become the "inside man" but gradually he began to take orders from outside. He it was who looked over them as they came in. He it was who sent the salesman out over the various territories, and before long he had become the real "boss" in the place, inspiring more fear than Uncle Moses himself.

Uncle Moses, lately, had begun to interest himself in matters that lend no prestige to a business man, for whom his employees must feel a certain awe. He grew religious and busied himself with the synagogue for his townsfolk, and the promise that he had not fulfilled at the time of his marriage,—to buy his townsfolk of Kuzmin a synagogue of their own. Up to the time of his wedding he had been the President of the Kuzmin society—on paper. After his marriage, how-

ever, he had become personally interested in the society's welfare, and had bent every effort to give the society the benefit of his business experience. He bought the organization a new plot of land for a cemetery, and had at once sold half the land to another society, making so much money on the transaction that the Kuzmin organization procured its cemetery practically for nothing. And now he was employing all his business wits to get a synagogue for his townsfolk. Already, through a business trick, he had procured a piece of land almost free, and now he was negotiating to exchange it for a building. There was no doubt that he would soon obtain a synagogue for them. Since he had begun to interest himself in their affairs the society had grown, had prospered, and had already absorbed a number of smaller organizations. His services to the communal welfare soon spread his reputation across the borders of the Kuzmin group. Other organizations tried to interest Uncle Moses in plans for communal betterment; he had already been elected vice-chairman of the Home for the Aged, treasurer of a Hebrew School, and director of a small hospital. His fame as a public benefactor grew daily.

Naturally, Uncle Moses had severed all relations with that other woman who had claims upon him. He loved his home and his wife and became a thoroughly moral personage. He revered the purity of his household and could not understand how he could ever have lived differently. Whenever he happened to think of his previous life he shook off the memory as if it were a nightmare. Uncle Moses preached morals among his townsfolk, becoming in time a leader and a patriarch among them. They came to him with queries

about the innermost details of their private lives and looked to him for counsel. He would act as judge in their quarrels, summoning the guilty one and administering stern reproof. He would make peace between man and wife, and admonish them to see that such a thing never happened again. And every time he was able to look the woman whom he sermonized straight in the eyes . . .

Uncle Moses returned home early. He simply could not rest easy in his place of business since Masha had begun to approach childbirth. Entering his house he found Aaron and Rosa who, since Masha had become pregnant, had tacitly taken charge of the household, it seemed.

It was remarkable how this abject fellow's attitude toward Uncle Moses had changed since Masha's marriage. Not only had this former employee lost all fear and respect for his son-in-law, but he fairly considered himself more the proprietor of this household than did Uncle Moses himself. As for Rosa, there is no need to speak. Ever since her Masha had married Uncle Moses, ever since her Masha had been with child, Rosa had not only begun to think herself the directress of the home but she had commenced to mix into the business, becoming a most highly considered member of Uncle Moses' commercial diplomatic corps. Before Uncle Moses had time to sit down and inquire after Masha, Rosa attacked her favorite theme that she discussed with him during recent days.

"That old beggar, that Galician scoundrel, was here again. He asked after you, Moses. I can't understand how he could have got that position as collector. Did

you marry him? Or did you ever have some match with him, that you must continue to maintain relations with him?"

"Dear mother-in-law, please don't bother me with that. How's my dear little Másha? Has she eaten anything? Was Dr. Goldstein here? I want him to visit her every day. Do you hear? Every day."

"Father-in-law," he said to Aaron. "Call him up, will you?"

"What do we need the doctor here for? Don't be crazy, Moses. Masha is all right. Don't bother her with doctors. Dr. Goldstein will come when he's needed, never you mind."

"No. I want him to come every day," he said, more to himself than to anybody else. Then he climbed the staircase on tip-toe to the bedroom.

Soon, however, he paused on the stairs; his face lighted up with a joyful smile, while he panted with mingled happiness and fear.

"Careful, Masha. Please don't run," cried Moses uneasily, while involuntarily he spread out his arms as if to be ready for any contingency.

Masha came down the stairs. She was not so careful as her husband desired. Nor did she respond to his inquiring, happy glances. She did not even look at him, but continued on her way to the dining-room, where her parents were.

Uncle Moses followed, and his very soul filled every word.

"Masha darling, how do you feel today? I have just asked them to call Dr. Goldstein."

"There's no need of him. Papa, take a seat."

"Masha darling, what do you care?"

"Please, don't trouble me." She looked at her husband imperiously. "Sit down, why don't you?"—Uncle Moses sat down.

Masha, too, had changed since her marriage. It was as if Uncle Moses had absorbed all her maidenly tenderness and had breathed into her his masculine brutality. This could be read upon both their faces. If his countenance beamed with human helplessness and kindness, hers had lost every vestige of virginal amiability. She had become stronger, fuller, like a ripe, pulpy fruit, but her eyes gleamed with a certain fright, as if she feared something that were coming to life within her.—Her face, however, clearly betrayed her determination to protect herself. Her tall, firm figure and her determined glance expressed mastery

Her condition added to, strengthened, the impression of imperious mastery that she cast about her like a pregnant, dominating mother who knows that she is bringing life into the world.

Uncle Moses was filled with a certain timorous reverence for her, as if her condition were related to something beyond understanding, something religious, mysterious. Not only was he inspired with an ineffable tenderness toward his own flesh and blood, his other self, that lay in the deep mystery within his wife's bosom, but he felt a certain religious, mystic awe before that which was now taking place in Masha,—the miracle that God was working through her in the creation of a life.

This it was that made him so weak and subservient. This and something else. Ever since he had married Masha, Uncle Moses yearned for purity. It was just as if he had cleansed himself of all the impure feelings

that had been left over from his previous career. And Masha,—young, innocent Masha, whom he had brought up and married,—was to him the symbol of purity. Through her he cleansed himself of all his sinful life. Not only she, but the very room in which she slept, the very things she touched, the clothes she wore, awoke in him a feeling of purity. This contact with purity infected him and kept him faithful and true. This it was that helped make him submissive, weak, human.

It was a totally different impulse that stirred Masha now. She, too, had been infected with certain desires, and the consequences were quite different from those that appeared in her husband.

CHAPTER II

A NEW "UNCLE"

EVERY touch of his, every display of tenderness, which she forced herself to endure, awoke in her disgust and then indifference.

She did what was asked of her because she felt that when she had gone to Uncle Moses and promised to marry him, she had agreed to everything. She considered herself a sacrifice. From the very first days of her marriage a soft halo of suffering surrounded her,—the halo of a martyr, which imparted refinement and beauty to her. Uncle Moses, however, had little by little dimmed the halo, finally extinguishing it.

He had succeeded in appealing to her passion, but Dr. Goldstein's electrical treatment, which had warmed and rejuvenated Uncle Moses' slumbering blood (he took this in secret) was not powerful enough to bring back Moses' youth. He had waked her from her maiden's dream but was powerless to create another for her. A dream that would come true . . . She really had no husband . . . She was like a fresh young plant over which is placed a glass hood; the earth is fed, the plant is warmed, but the twigs are restrained by a glass . . .

Every touch of hers, every show of tenderness, made him more refined, more innerly beautiful, planting within him new desires to live. Yet she herself grew

uglier and more coarse. Like a Pharaoh who by night bathed in the blood of children, so Uncle Moses by day went around in excellent spirits, kind to all, smiling, better to God and man. His heart became softer, more responsive, more human . . . And thus, night after night, drop by drop, Masha fed her virginal innocence, her refined youth to an old, withered thorn,—a stranger. The thorn had commenced to blossom and she had begun to wither.

At first she was ashamed. It seemed to her as if her maidenly secrets that had been discovered to Uncle Moses, were seen by everybody,—that they lay exposed to everybody's view.—Whereupon for days at a time she would seek refuge in her room, would lock herself in, ashamed even to look into the mirror, to gaze upon her own face, her semblance.

Then she was seized with a yearning for her maidenly years. She was fond of dressing up as a young girl, in the same clothes that she had worn when at the boarding school, and of recalling every little thing that had happened to her as a girl. The conversations with her companions, her playful teasing of Charlie, her ridicule of him,—every minor detail evoked a host of pleasant recollections. For days at a time she would lock herself in, take out her school-books that she had stored away for memory's sake,—old letters, which she had long ago received from chums, birthday gifts, souvenirs and other innocent toys,—and fill her empty, yearnful days with them.

Often she thought of Charlie, and tried to imagine how things would have been if she had not married Uncle Moses. How different life would have been! She pictured herself as a working-girl. She was a

stenographer and worked eight hours a day in an office, and was contributing toward Charlie's expenses, that he might go through college. Every night he waited for her at the entrance to the office building, and together they went to a moderately-priced restaurant, going then to a show or to a lecture, or perhaps to the library. Often, when she wished to go shopping, they met Saturday afternoons at the door of a great department store. She had just received her pay-envelope and together they selected a suit for her. Charlie must say whether he liked it, and she put on the suit immediately. Charlie would likewise put on his newly-purchased necktie and they would go off to take in a matinee . . .

Then life became dreary to her. During the day, when her husband would be away to work, she could fill her hours with dreams. At night, however, she would be overcome by ennui. The porcelain dogs and cats and the silly cut-glass that sparkled from every corner, as well as everything else in the house, bored her; they were all so meaningless, so much alike from day to day, so incapable of speaking to her, so dumb and changeless. Every night,—the same rooms, the same lamps, the same "Uncle," the same smiles and his same "Masha dear, darling." The boredom that she suffered in his company was becoming utterly unendurable. It gave her headaches every night, even as one gets headaches from a bad odor. . . . Every night the same program; the foolish meal,—what purpose did it all serve? Then sometimes they would go to the moving pictures, or else her father and mother would intrude with their cheerless, bothersome, exaggerated fawning attentions. Her mother was trying to exert influ-

ence regarding positions in the shop and matters concerning the townsfolk and the family, and her husband would exchange coarse jokes with her father. She was starving for genuine love and youth.

Often Sam would come to visit them at night. For a long time he had been following her about with his speechless yet eloquent glances. And when life became dreary and meaningless for her she began to notice these speechless, yet eloquent glances. His face was the same as her husband's, only younger and more powerful. His nostrils still quivered and his lower lip trembled with strength and virility. He was, indeed, Uncle Moses, only younger and more brutal; he filled the evenings with his talk and his laughter, and his strong white teeth gleamed from between his ruddy lips. More than once, when she desired to forget, she summoned the picture of this younger, more brutal "Uncle" . . .

Sam was following cousin Mannes' advice to the letter: "Get into the good graces of the young wife. What you were unable to reach through the old man, you can attain through her . . ." And he took advantage of every opportunity to show her marked attention. At first, because of his intentions to acquire control of the business; but soon, as he approached her more closely and regarded her silent manner, her suffering muteness, he was touched. He fell in love with her. Because of her, indeed, he broke the match that he had made for the sole purpose of advancing his business career. His feeling for her dictated his attitude toward her. He was silent, not daring by word or deed to insult her or betray his feelings. He was often alone with her, often took her home from the store, and

spent many an evening with her when Uncle Moses was busy with meetings and the affairs of his numerous societies. He confided his plans to her and asked her advice about his match. This brought her closer to him, and Sam became a genuine, devoted friend. His feeling for her became so overwhelming that he was ready to do anything for her. Because of her he began to lead an altogether different life, a more respectable and more refined one. For her sake he longed to make himself a more worthy person, and was at a loss how to begin. So he began to attend a reformed synagogue, thinking to please Masha in this manner. He studied English and even began to read English books. His personal appearance, too, underwent a marked improvement. His friendship for her was a silent, devoted loyalty, and that devotion made him a finer and better man. . . .

CHAPTER III

A SON

ALL was quiet in the house. The servants went about on tip-toe, as if a corpse lay there, but from a room in another part of the house came sounds of bustling,—a muffled activity. A door opened and shut, dishes clattered, an order was issued in a soft, serious voice. And then more tip-toeing.

In the hall, which was seldom used, and which the coldness due to remaining unoccupied rendered most uncomfortable, Uncle Moses was pacing up and down, biting his nails with impatience. His face was pale and wan, as the result of not having slept for the previous two nights; his eyes gleamed with mingled terror and hope. He bit his nails and muttered:

"Father, Father in heaven—God—help me. I'll do anything. Everything, everything, everything. Only help me, let her not suffer. Father—let her not suffer. It is such a pity. Oh, oh, oh!"

Footsteps were heard in the next room and somebody ran by. Uncle Moses came out.

"What's the news, father-in-law? What?"

"God is with us, Moses, God is with us. Hush. The doctor is there with her."

"Oh, God! Have pity upon her! Father, mother, Only One!"

In a flash his life passed in review before him. He

called to mind everything he had ever done, and it seemed to him that somebody stood behind him, preventing him from founding a bright future,—holding him back from becoming the man he wished to be. Now for the first time he could see it. He had never realized it before.

All the time he had been yearning for a better life,—ever since he had managed to obtain a foothold, but some power had restrained him, and now that he was upon the threshold of this new life, and was about to have his wishes crowned with the arrival of that for which he had yearned so long,—a child of his own, a pure creature whose existence he need not conceal, his second self, new-born, who would give a new taste and a new meaning to life,—now that the moment had arrived he feared lest that haunting "somebody" should intervene,—let some misfortune should occur.

"No, Father in Heaven—forgive me—I will do everything. I'll live a totally different life.. Let me,—Father in Heaven,—let me know this joy—Help me, help me!"

With every passing hour of Masha's labor it became clearer to him how much Masha and the new-born child meant to him. He felt that not another life, but rather his very own, was either being born or dying behind those closed doors. His whole past life, his whole life to come,—everything lay in Masha's bosom. And at this very moment it hovered between creation or annihilation. With every passing hour the burdened man grew more pure, cleansed of his sinful life, refined by this longing for purity. In Masha's groans, he heard the voice of his own soul, which was now being purified in agony. How sweet were these

pangs, these groans of torture. He thought of his childhood years. It was Sabbath eve and he could behold his mother's wan face; all his surroundings were those of a Sabbath eve in his childhood. No, it was more like the eve of the Day of Atonement. Once, once in the old country, when he was a little fellow,—he could still remember it clearly,—the tall death-anniversary candle, stuck in the sand, in the brass pan stood on the white table-cloth, while his mother prayed before it in her white bonnet and wept,—and he, in a new coat of calico just purchased by his father, stood in a corner with a large devotionary in his hand, ashamed of his mother's white bonnet and her tears;—he had been gathering carrots in the field all day long. And stealing apples—stealing apples from a stall just before the Day of Atonement, and there was his mother praying before the tall candles.

The same contrite feeling came over him now. Masha's purity, her groans, her agony—and he—he had stolen apples.

The sound of footsteps woke him from his revery. There was a noise behind the door. He jumped up—ran out. There was Dr. Goldstein in his white apron and his rolled up sleeves advancing toward him, followed by Aaron.

"Congratulations, Moses! Congratulations. A boy, a boy, a boy!"

"Doctor, is it true? Doctor . . ."

"Yes, yes. Mr. Melnick—Congratulations! Everything is all right. She is doing well!"

"Doctor dear—" and he bounded like a child upstairs.

"A moment, Mr. Melnick. Let her alone. We'll soon be going."

"Doctor, dear! I'll never forget this favor, never! Wait a minute— And how is she,—and the baby?"

"She is all right. And the baby, too. What did I tell you, Mr. Melnick? Do you remember?" And the doctor looked into his eyes and laughed insinuatingly.

"I'll do something for you,—such a big thing that it will be the talk of the town. You'll see, doctor."

"All right, Mr. Melnick! We'll see."

Uncle Moses, however, was no longer aware of the doctor's presence. He ran along the hall. In the dining-room Aaron fell upon his neck, weeping and kissing him for joy. A half-dozen aunts, uncles, relatives and townsfolk surrounded him with joyous cries: "Congratulations, congratulations! A boy!" He could scarcely tear himself out of their clutches and made his way to the bed room with soft, cautious steps. On the outside of the door to Masha's room was Sam. He stood there, pale, and the tears coursed down his cheeks.

"Sam, you here? Sam, my boy. I am happy, your Uncle is happy, Sam, happy."

Sam made no reply,—did not even look at Uncle Moses. He stood as if rooted to the spot, trembling. His nostrils dilated as he drank in his breath and he bit his lips as if in anger. The tears continued to course down his cheeks.

Uncle Moses grasped the door-knob cautiously and was about to open it. The door, however, was locked.

"Don't go in now, Uncle, don't. She is tired. She's sleeping, Uncle, she's sleeping," whispered Sam, holding him back.

"Sam, my dear boy, I am happy. I am the happiest man in the world. I'm going to scatter happiness among all. Sam, I know what you are to me. I'm going to take you into partnership with me, Sam. I love you as a father loves his son." And he fell upon Sam's neck and kissed him.

The door opened silently and Masha's mother came out.

"Mother-in-law, how is she doing?"

"Hush. She's asleep. She's tired out."

"I want to see the child, just for a moment . . ."

Rosa carefully opened the door. Masha was reclining pale and weak, as if a holy treasure lay there. She did not look at him; her eyes were expressionless and stared vacantly and fixedly at one spot. Uncle Moses quivered and began to advance warily on tip-toe toward the bed. He bent over and kissed the silk quilt that covered Masha.

"Masha,—My, my—my little mamma!" Masha's pale cheeks flushed slightly, as if she were a little child and had been embarrassed.

Beside Masha's bed already stood the crib. The mother raised the silk covering and Uncle Moses beheld a red, perspiring shapeless mass. He fell upon his knees, buried his face in the infant's bed clothes and burst into tears.

Sam, who had looked on through the open door, had then advanced with soft steps until he was behind Uncle Moses. He, too, gazed into the crib. . .

Masha drew the silk quilt over her head and hid her face.

CHAPTER IV

SAM

IT was a beautiful summer's day. The spacious bedroom in Uncle Moses' mansion was flooded with light that came in from the two large windows, which looked upon the wide street. Masha, a young and strong mother, was bathing her five-months-old son in a tub of lukewarm water; then she wrapped it in batiste against cold. The infant's motions stirred the water about, and as it cried, it furrowed its brows like an old man. Masha was filled with delight, playing with the child as she washed it, and pouring the water over its body. Round about her the room was heaped with linens, sheets, towels; everything in the place shed an odor of purity and motherliness. She took the child out of the tub, rapidly wrapped it in fresh sheets and pressed it to her bosom, seeking to quiet the infant, who had not ceased to fill the room with piercing screams. Masha laughed with joy, for she knew why her little son was screaming.

"You little glutton!" she laughed to him playfully. "I know what you want. I know."

"You little glutton, you!" she laughed, and through the mother's being coursed a wonderful thrill, as if someone had kissed her in her sleep. A tremor of maternal delight passed over her. . . .

Every time she suckled the child, strange thoughts assailed her, and a mysterious sorrow filled her. A sorrow and yet a longing. She felt as if she had not yet been married,—that she had a child, but no husband . . . And she yearned for a husband, who would come and caress her, fondle her hair, as she sat lulling her child to sleep. A husband that should be the real and only father of her child. A tie between them that should be true and strong, as in the case of every young couple,—a real father for her child. And every time these thoughts came to her she was penetrated by a deep, hidden sorrow, which shamed her. She was cursed forever, she thought. Never—never would she be able to give her child a father . . .

She envied every young woman that had a husband. Often, as she rode in the elevated train on a Saturday night, and saw a young father holding a child in his arms, with his wife at his side, she would burn with envy. Doubtless they were on their way to visit their parents downtown, she would tell herself, and envied the wan-faced wife her husband. No, not so much the husband, as the fact that this woman had a one and only father for her child. And she would be seized with a longing for a pure, true, deep-rooted life.

She had no husband, she had only a child, and upon this child she showered all her maternal and wifely tenderness. The child brought back to her the forgotten innocence in which she had dwelt as a girl. In her child she re-discovered herself. She was not a wife—she was a maiden-mother.

She would lock herself with her child, not caring to see anybody, not caring to go out, concealing herself and her child within the bed-room like a High Priest

in his temple, and playing with it all day long. She bathed it, weighed it, dressed it, and felt secure in its presence. . . .

The door to the bed-room was softly opened. Masha had not noticed how Uncle Moses had stolen in on tip-toe. He had gazed furtively on as Masha hushed the infant, and for a moment had paused on the threshold, contemplating his sacred treasure. Every time he saw Masha nursing the baby he would be seized with trembling. With soft step and repressed joy he came over to Masha and caressed her head.

Masha shuddered at his touch, as if she had been rudely aroused from deep slumber.

"Who's that?" she cried in fright.

"It's I. Why so frightened? Every time I come in to the child you get scared. There aren't any kidnappers in America, my child."

"Don't ever come in while I'm feeding the baby. Please. For you give me a fright."

"But why, child?" smiled Uncle Moses. "I like it. I love to see you feed the child."

"And I don't want you to come in. Please, do me that favor."

"But why? You're a little child—my own little child, in fact. Both of you are my two little children." Whereupon Uncle Moses embraced both her and the child together and danced about for joy.

Masha was plunged into silent gloom; mute tears began to fall down her cheeks and trickled down upon her naked breasts.

"What's the matter with you? Why do you always cry when I come in? What have I done to you? Why

don't you let me enjoy my new-found pleasure, the pleasure that God sent me. Never have I had any pleasure in all my life. Only now does it come to me,—now in my advancing years—you and my little, little baby—mine—all my very own. And why do you cry? Why don't you rejoice together with me? Masha my darling, why don't you enjoy my great, great happiness with me?"

Masha raised her eyes and looked at him. Her eyes were wet with tears; she gazed at him with pity for him and herself, and was silent, as if she were a dumb animal to whom the Lord had not given the power of speech, and must express her feelings through her glances.

"Why do you stare at me so? Why don't you say something?—Ever since you gave birth to the child you never say a word to me.—Why? Aren't you happy with the child? Masha, dear, tell me."

"Yes, yes, I am happy with my child.—It's nobody's except mine.—I have nothing now, only the child.—I am happy." And the tears flowed more copiously than ever.

"And why this fresh outburst?—Why are you so sad, Masha? Why?"

"I don't know why, Moses. I don't know. Let me be. Let me be by myself. Please. Leave me alone with my child.—Don't come in to me. Don't come to see me.—Leave me alone, please."

"Oh, dear child.—I know. Your mother is right. Your mother said that it's always like that with young mothers when they suckle their children. You yourself are but a small child. One child suckling another,—My two little children," laughed Uncle Moses.

From the dining-room a voice was suddenly heard. Masha turned pale.

"Who's that there?"

"That's Sam.—Just imagine, Masha. Your cousin Charlie is the lawyer of the new union. We'll have to go to him to settle the strike in my shop. You know, our townsfolk are out on strike; they haven't been to work for two weeks—and that's all your cousin's work. I always told you that he was a dangerous young man. He'd make trouble for us, I said. And now you see, all this is caused by one of our own,—a relative."

"Go down; please go down and talk with them. Leave me alone," Masha begged her husband, tenderly taking the infant away from her breast and placing him in his crib.

"Just a minute. I just want to take a peep at him as he lies sleeping."

"Quiet, now. You'll wake him up."

"I'm going, I'm going." And Uncle Moses left on tip-toe.

Masha locked the door after him.

Very soon, however, there was a knock.

"Hush. Who's there?"

"Open, Masha my darling," whispered her mother. "Why do you lock yourself in? Nobody will steal you away.

"Well, what do you say to the beggars, ha? What do you say to our relatives? After we've been giving them work at our expense! Whenever there was a daughter to marry off, or a wife and children to bring over from the old country to America, they came to Uncle. No matter what they needed or when, they

always came to us. And we supported them. We kept them in work, and now they go and strike on us. There's America for you. And who's the ringleader of it all? That beggar's son,—Charlie!—He's become a regular general of the whole union. Did you ever hear the like?''

"Tell me, mamma, what happened?''

"Haven't you heard? The shop's out on strike.—They haven't yet returned to work. And Charlie is their leader.''

At this juncture a head was thrust in through the open door. Mother and daughter recognized Sam's pale but energetic face with its frightened, entreating eyes.

"Mamma, close the door,'' cried Masha, blanching.

"The beggars! Where are they trying to crawl? Isn't the business enough for them? They have to crawl right into your very bed-room!''—The mother slammed the door in Sam's face. . . .

CHAPTER V

KUZMIN GOES OUT ON STRIKE

A WONDERFUL thing had occurred. The townsfolk of Kuzmin, Uncle Moses' relatives, had gone out on strike. At first Uncle Moses could not understand what had happened. He saw the men rise from their places at the machines, lay down their needles and leave the shop. Whereupon he thought that some misfortune had taken place.

"What's the matter? Where are you all going?"

The townsfolk stole out of the shop as if they had committed a robbery and were ashamed to look Uncle Moses straight in the face. One by one they slunk out. Uncle Moses stopped Shloyme the Peddler.

"Shloyme, where are you going?"

"I don't know. I was told to get up and leave. So I'm leaving."

"What am I,—a stranger?"—cried Uncle Moses. "You strike in my shop? And that's the return I get for all I've done for you,—for bringing you all to America and giving you work and supporting your wives and children? The whole business is run only for your sake. And you have the ingratitude to strike? Very well! Very well! I'll teach them to strike!"

The townsfolk make no reply. They left the shop and gathered in the Khevra Anshi Kuzmin,—in the

very synagogue of which Uncle Moses was president.

It had taken a long time for the Garment-Workers' Union to organize Uncle Moses' shop. As long as he himself had been the "inside man" they had made no headway whatever. The townsfolk could not think of insulting him,—they could not think of doing him any wrong. "He is our bread-giver," they replied to every advance. Scarcely had Sam, however, become their boss and their employer got married, as a consequence of which Sam let them feel the burden of his yoke, than the dissatisfaction grew little by little. Charlie, with the aid of several prefessional agitators, finally succeeded in organizing the shop in secret. The word was passed from one employee to the other, until the strike burst unexpectedly upon Uncle Moses and his force.

In the beginning Kuzmin was filled with enthusiasm for the fight. When it came to picketing the shop, every one volunteered his services. There were selected, however, Shloyme Forman and Yossel, a couple of fellows who had been brought up as orchard-men and fisherman,—fellows who could deliver a powerful blow if it should prove necessary. They took bread and baked potatoes along in their pockets and planted themselves before the shop building at six in the morning. There they stood, guarding the place.

Now and then Uncle Moses would come out and try to discuss matters with them.

"What will all this standing about bring you?"

"We don't know. We got orders to stand here, and we're here," replied the two sturdy fellows.

"But what do you want? Let me hear what you want."

"We know nothing. Charlie . . . It's all in Charlie's hands. We are ordinary, common soldiers. We were told to take up our position here, and we're here," replied the men in military fashion, recalling the guard duty performed in the old country during their service in the Czar's army.

"What? Was it Charlie that brought you to America? Was it Charlie who gave you work? It is to Charlie's place you go to work all the year round? All right!"

"We're doing what we were told to do."

"Why should Uncle stand there arguing with them? You can't talk to them! Come inside!" cried Sam, tugging his sleeve with that effrontery that he had displayed toward Uncle Moses ever since the child had been born.

"Let me go. I want to talk this over with them."

"Uncle!" roared Sam. "I want you to go inside. You oughtn't to say a word to them. Have nothing to do with them. They're no longer relatives of yours. No longer townsfolk. I'll not let another relative cross our threshold."

And Charlie was the strikers' idol. Charlie came every evening to the Khevra Anshi Kuzmin and spoke to the townsfolk; Charlie brought other speakers; Charlie made the rounds of the newspapers; from some source or other Charlie managed to dig up money; Charlie was, indeed, the second Moses, come to release his townsfolk from the bondage of Uncle Moses,—Pharaoh King of Egypt.

In the synagogue were gathered all the strikers. Kuzmin was at rest, and it looked like *Khol-Hamayid**

* These are the intermediary days (half holidays) between

in the old country. Here it was neither Sabbath day nor any other holiday; it was an ordinary week day, yet nobody was at work. And Kuzmin was not accustomed to this. The strike had already been going on for a week. The first enthusiasm had evaporated, and Kuzmin had begun to long for the shop. As yet, none felt hunger, for everybody had laid aside a little in anticipation of the strike; the union, too, managed with ardent effort to collect a little for the same purpose. But it was irksome for Kuzmin to go around idle. They were as restless as could be, and their inactivity, as well as their uncertain prospects, gnawed like a canker-worm at their hearts.

"What will be the outcome of all this talk?" one would ask the other in secret.

"And what sort of outcome do you have in Uncle Moses' shop; a dry crust of bread is all the opportunity he holds out."

"Well, I suppose they all know what they're doing."

Kuzmin, however, did not spend its days in idle prattling and speculation. One would in the meantime strengthen his claims upon the next world by snatching a chance to recite the Psalms; another, who was fairly well acquainted with the sacred books, would spend some time reading parts of the Mishna; the ordinary, untutored fellows would play cards near the entrance to the synagogue, much to the displeasure of the elder folk. "In a holy place!" Whereupon the younger element would retort: "This is a strike hall!"

Kuzmin went about free and unoccupied, with nothing to do. The men in the meantime made the ac-

the first and last days of the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles.

quaintance of their own wives and children; during their working days there was never any time for this. They walked about and devoted themselves to domestic matters, mended their own clothes; yet Kuzmin was not happy.

"Good heavens, Joe, why is it dragging so? What will be the result?"

And Charlie's popularity with the townsfolk gradually began to diminish. The longer the strike lasted, without any end in sight, the more these townsfolk, as once their ancestors had done in the desert, began to murmur against their leader.

"What will the end of all this be? We old fellows should not permit ourselves to be led by a mere boy. Bah! A fine showing we make!"

During all this time Sam was by no means asleep. He called a family council and sent after his cousin Mannes, who was a Democrat, on good terms with the chief of police, and talked matters over with him. The faithful relatives were summoned, and secretly sent to the homes of the strikers. At first these persons went only to the homes of acquaintances whom Uncle Moses had most aided, and engaged them as follows:

"What does Charlie promise you,—that he'll fit out a shop for you? Well, let's see. Why doesn't he show what he can do? Why does he permit you to go hungry? If he has taken you away from your jobs, why doesn't he supply you with other work? He has plenty to eat. He takes his wages from the union. Why doesn't *he* strike? *He* doesn't strike, you see, but he sends *you* people out on strike."

And these final words were convincing. Before long Sam and cousin Mannes had succeeded in winning back

a number of townsfolk. It was not hunger or necessity that drove them; it was simply that Kuzmin could not stand idle talk,—it could not go about idle, and felt homesick for the shop.

Early next morning, when Charlie entered the synagogue strike-headquarters, he found the assembly crowded with the wives of the strikers. No sooner had they caught sight of him than they surged toward him, and Hannah-Rosa, the wife of Shloyme, opened her mouth as spokesman for them all:

"Who ever asked you, I'd like to ask you, to interest yourself in our affairs? Just because you have something against Uncle Moses on account of a love affair,—on account of a girl that he won away from you—must all of us undergo sufferings and hunger together with our children? How much did you get for this job?"

"For what?"

"For leading these old fools astray."

"No. Better ask him why *he* doesn't strike!" cried another woman.

"Why should I strike?"

"Why don't you strike against the union? Why do you tell *us* to strike?"

"But I have nothing to strike against. I don't work for anybody. I am my own employer. Against whom shall I strike?" asked Charlie with a laugh.

"Do you hear? *He's* not striking. But he tells *us* to!"

"Why waste time talking to him? Who is he, anyway, that he presumes to take sides against Uncle Moses? And we old fellows let ourselves be led astray by such a runt,—a mere child!"

"Come along, boys, come along! We ought to kiss Uncle Moses' hand and beg him to take us back. Did you ever hear such a thing?"

And the Kuzmin townsfolk were on the point of leaving the place in a body, bound for the shop. Charlie stood, it seemed, among a host of enemies; he was at a loss as to how to restrain them. He did, it is true, harangue them, counselling them to stick the fight out, speaking of a higher standard of living, of a new and more just social order, but the men paid no attention to his words. They even laughed behind his back. And one woman cried out:

"You better first take care that you don't have to go around with worn-out heels and threadbare trousers; then you can afford to provide for the world, my fine provider . . ."

Charlie did not know what to do. It had been his ambition, ever since he had become interested in the labor movement, to organize Uncle Moses' shop,—the shop in which his father, his family and all his relatives were enslaved. He held it as his duty, his debt to America, to the labor movement. And all at once he beheld the work of months, of years, crumble to nothing. He sought to bring every power of eloquence, all his cherished ideas and convictions, to bear upon the situation; he explained to Kuzmin the vast brotherhood which they were entering by adhering to the union and thus allying themselves with world labor. But Kuzmin answered him with glances of scorn and pity. All this brotherly alliance they left to him. They were afraid to lose their means of livelihood.

At this juncture Reb Aaron Zhakhliner arose. Reb Aaron had been a friend to Charlie's father in the old

country. They had both belonged to the same Khassidic household and when Charlie's father had sailed home to die, Reb Aaron had taken his place. Every Saturday he delivered a sermon at the Kuzmin synagogue, studied the Midrash with his fellow Jews on Saturday evenings, and on the occasion of the Rejoicing of the Law he would annually read to them the legend concerning the death of Holy Moses. Reb Aaron Zhakhliner was looked upon by them as a sort of Dayon, and, since they knew him from the old country as a scholar and a pious Jew, they felt a very deep respect for him. Therefore when he arose, all the voices were stilled, and they listened eagerly for what he had to say.

"Our case is exactly that of the Jews in the exodus from Egypt," began Reb Aaron in the sing-song, homiletic manner characteristic of his Saturday evening sermons. "When Moses led the Jews forth from Egypt,"—and he began to sway piously back and forth,—"as the Holy Book tells us, he took them into the wilderness. After the crossing of the Red Sea and other miracles, the Jews began to long for the flesh-pots of Egypt. Whereupon they began to murmur against Moses, and said: 'Let us choose a leader and let us follow him back to Egypt.' And it's the same thing here. No sooner have we managed to free ourselves after ardent effort from Uncle Moses, our Pharaoh, and from his taskmaster, Sam, who drives us to the hardest toil, just the same as the Jews in Egypt, and no sooner does Charlie come to join us in a union that shall be a source of strength and universal benefit, that we shall no more be treated so harshly, that no Sam shall hereafter per-

mit himself such slave-driving,—scarcely have we come in sight of victory, suffering a little more hunger rather than shame and harsh toil, than you begin to long for the flesh-pots and say: 'Let us choose a leader and return to Uncle Moses.' Only in Egypt it was the Egyptian disrupters that said it, while here, all of you say so. Wherefore I say unto you, even as the Midrash says of the Jews in Egypt: All of you shall die in the wilderness, even as the disrupters, and will not live to taste the joy of gazing upon the Holy Land. For you are as the Canaanite slaves, who say, 'I love my master'."

Terror fell upon Kuzmin; Reb Aaron's hearers were filled with humiliation. They were ashamed to look one another in the eye. All at once there awoke in them the determined resistance of the ancient Jewish folk,—the old obstinacy that always appeared when the gravity of the situation demanded it. All at once their fear for their livelihood vanished; vanished were the petty considerations that had filled their minds and gnawed at their hearts. The Kuzmin townsfolk had suddenly been infused with new spirit in their fight against Uncle Moses,—with a new view of the struggle. This was no mere contest for a crust of bread and a spoonful of soup. This was a battle for freedom out of slavery. And their Jewish blood began to tingle with the ancient ardor for a battle on the side of right and justice. Shloyme sounded the battle-cry.

"Fellows, come with me! Come, let's drive our townsmen out of the shop! As long as there's no working to be done then let nobody work!"

"Shloyme, where are you going? I won't let you!"

cried Hannah-Rosa, seizing her husband by the coat-tail.

"Out of my way! Off to the house with you! Follow me, boys!"

And the strikers launched forth to beleaguer Uncle Moses' shop.

CHAPTER VI

THE "FRAME-UP"

SAM had been expecting just such a visit, and was ready to receive the besieging townsfolk. He had seen cousin Mannes the "agitator,"—Mannes, who worked his head off at every election in the cause of the Democrats, and who, after victory, would decorate his house with flags and brooms and placards that screamed "I told you so." He was, therefore, on familiar terms with the Judge, the Chief and all the policemen of the district. Mannes had little love for Uncle Moses, but hearing that his business was imperilled, and that the "Socialists" were bent on ruining Uncle Moses, his family-feeling flamed up. For did not the whole clan swell with pride because of Uncle Moses' wealth, and weren't they highly honored when they could do him a good turn? Mannes went off to the chief and told him all about the "trouble-makers" and the chief sent a gang to give them a lusty reception.

As Shloyme approached the familiar shop in which they had toiled day in and day out, ever since they had come to America, they were accosted by a street-woman who suddenly appeared from somewhere or other and threw her arms around Shloyme's neck.

Shloyme was rooted to the spot in terror. He tried to free himself from the woman's clutches and dash

into the store to call out the non-strikers. But the woman tightly grasped his sleeve and cried:

"Police! Police! He has insulted me!"

All at once there came upon the scene a veritable avalanche of police, brandishing clubs; there were detectives in civilian clothes too, as well as a group of suspicious women who pulled at the beards and the temple-locks of the pious Jews.

"What's the matter?" asked a policeman.

"He insulted me. He suggested something shameful," cried the street woman, clutching poor Shloyme by the coat tails. His very temple-locks trembled with fright.

And this was the signal that had been agreed upon. Soon clubs were flying over the townsmen's heads. Some took to flight, one leaving behind a lock of his hair, another a wisp of beard in the women's fingers; some received cracked heads and welts upon their faces; still others, with Shloyme at their head, were led bleeding to the police station by the policemen and the prostitutes, accompanied by punches and curses. Within a quarter of an hour there was not a trace of the townsfolk; before Uncle Moses' shop all was quiet and peaceful. Only fragments of hats and pieces of coats that lay strewn about in the blood-bespattered street gave evidence of the battle that had just been waged.

Uncle Moses was in the store when the fray occurred. He looked on from within. These were his own townsmen, the companions and friends of his childhood that were being so mercilessly beaten before his store. There was Shloyme,—his old school-mate, with whom even today he was on such close terms of intimacy,—being dragged bleeding to the police-station; there was Reb

Aaron Zhakhliner, his teacher, whom to this very day he regarded with the highest respect, with his temple-locks torn off. He had no friends, no family outside of these people, who were being so brutally manhandled before his very door, because of him. And he could not understand how it had happened. Never had he dreamed that anything like this could take place. It seemed to him that he himself was down among the townsfolk that were being so savagely clubbed. All Kuzmin was there. He ran over to Sam, who was watching the scene with a pale face and quivering nostrils.

"What's the meaning of all these doings in my place? What do you call this? Who told you to do this?—Stop! Stop it, I say! This very minute!"

Sam raised his eyes to Uncle Moses. In those eyes flashed a glance that Uncle Moses had never beheld in anyone's eyes before. That glance, up to this moment, had only been beheld by others, in Uncle Moses' eyes.

"Uncle, don't meddle, please."

"Who's not to meddle? I am boss here!"

"If you're the boss, all right. Buy out my share of the business and I'll run a business of my own the way I think it ought to be run."

Uncle Moses was intimidated. For the first time he realized clearly that a new power had arisen beside him. He was afraid to remain in business alone; he feared the energy and strength that glittered in Sam's eyes and fairly spurted from his face. And he felt his weakness.

"But what are you doing, Sam? Beating up people?" asked Uncle Moses, stifling back his anger.

"Business!" was Sam's curt reply.

"But your own townsfolk and relatives?"

"No more relatives. No more townsfolk. Just plain workingmen. *I'll* not go into their synagogue and sit down among them to chat about the days in the old country. I know no relatives. In my place they must *work*. Otherwise——"

Uncle Moses tried to interpose an objection.

"But, Sam——"

"Uncle, I am tired of it!"—interrupted Sam. "I have my own way of running the business. You've had yours.—And I don't want to be interfered with—And I'll tell you the truth: Perhaps it would be for the best if we did separate. I want to get out and do things for myself. I've been working for somebody else altogether too long. I want to go into business on my own responsibility."

Uncle Moses was silent. He had grown pale and sad. A feeling of solitude enwrapped him. It seemed to him that all Kuzmin had been shamed, cast into the streets, and that he shared this shame and abandonment.

He left the store without a word and went home. He wished to pour out his woes to Masha; he longed for consolation, for a good word from somebody.

He desired to see his child,—to kiss it and rejoice in it; always, when worries preyed upon his spirit, his home life soothed him. He found Masha's room locked, however; Rosa beckoned to him.

"Moses, don't trouble her now. She is all upset."

Through the door he could hear Masha sobbing.

"Why is she crying? What's happened?" asked Uncle Moses apprehensively.

"She's weeping for her townsfolk. She just heard that they were clubbed and beaten. She'll calm down soon."

"Masha, darling! Masha, my dear! Please! Masha!—" entreated Uncle Moses behind the door.

But Masha made no reply. She lay in the nursery, her face pressed against the infant's pillow, and wept. Now she hated everybody,—not only her husband and Sam, but her child, too, who had been born of them. She hated herself, too, for having sold herself to them for a crust of bread; she hated her father and mother, who had urged the match upon her. Her youth rose before her eyes,—her days in Hopkins Street,—and it seemed to her that during all this time nothing had changed,—that she, too, was one of the townsfolk that was enslaved in the shop of Uncle Moses and that had passed into Sam's power. Sam was now boss over the townsfolk and over her, too. Together with them she had been given into his hands as part of Uncle Moses' legacy. In the struggle of the townsfolk against Uncle Moses, she beheld her own struggle. She, too, wished to free herself together with them from Uncle Moses and Sam. And on the street, before the shop, she, too, had been clubbed and maimed. Sam had struck *her* together with the rest of the townsfolk. She, too, was out on strike, and longed to be of aid in winning the great battle, freeing herself from Uncle Moses and Sam together with all the other townsfolk. . . .

She jumped from the bed, got together all the jewelry that her husband had given her,—the pearls and the turquoises and the sapphires, and everything in adornments and cash that she could collect,—rolled them

into a little bundle, dressed in simple garments and walked out.

"Masha, it's not my fault. I didn't want such a thing to happen! I couldn't help it!" asserted Uncle Moses, looking at her through entreating eyes.

She was inundated by a deep scorn for him. She felt not the slightest affection for him. There was nothing in her heart for him but vengeance,—the sweet feeling that life was wreaking vengeance upon him. She eyed him scornfully and cried out:

"I hate you! I hate every one of you!"

"Why?" begged Uncle Moses, stretching his hands toward her.

"Where are you going, daughter?" cried her mother, following her.

Masha made no reply.

Uncle Moses was left alone.

Amid the growing darkness, out of the shadowy corners, solitude came creeping toward him. Something terrified him,—he could not say what. It was coming closer and closer to him. Nothing was heard save the crying of the child in its room and the crooning of the maid. He went in to seek solace and happiness of his own flesh and blood. . . .

CHAPTER VII

"ON THE OTHER SIDE"

MASHA went to look for Charlie at her aunt's home. He was not there, however, and her aunt, who had not seen Masha since she had been married, received her in cold silence. Masha could not understand why. From her aunt she learned that she could find Charlie at the strikers' headquarters, which were situated in the religious association of which Uncle Moses was president. Thither went Masha with her little packet of jewels that she intended for her striking townsfolk. In the vicinity of the building she came across wives of strikers with their children in their arms; the women had come running to the headquarters at the news of the trouble that had taken place in front of Uncle Moses' shop.

A change of attitude had come over these women. As a result of the battle that had taken place in front of the shop their fighting spirit had been roused. The sight of their men returning home from the battlefield with bleeding heads, torn temple-locks and plucked beards ignited such a revolutionary flame in their bosoms that they were ready, on the very instant, to rush to the shop and renew the combat whence their men had so shamefully been routed by the "enemy." Oh, no longer did they send back their husbands, coun-

selling them to fall on their knees before Uncle Moses and kiss his hands. On the contrary, they warned their men that if they dared to cross Uncle Moses' threshold, they would be received at home with kettles of boiling water.

"If you dare to go to Uncle, you may as well look for another home and another wife," admonished one woman, holding her finger to her nose as a sign of warning.

"And do whatever Charlie tells you to do, you hear? Charlie knows what he's about. You just bet he does, long life to him!"

Once more Charlie became the "Moses" that would free the Jews from "Pharaoh King of Egypt," and deliver them from the oppressive yoke. Once more Charlie became the deliverer, the liberator of Kuzmin's townsfolk.

Hearing that a "lady" was asking after the folk of Kuzmin, the bystanders were plunged into excitement. The women surrounded Masha and soon one of them recognized her.

"Oho! That's Uncle Moses' wife. That's Masha,—tall Aaron's daughter."

"You can tell what she's come for. She wants to talk for Uncle Moses,—to tell them to return to work. You can see why she wants Charlie!"

"Because she sold herself to Uncle Moses, she imagines we'll all sell ourselves."

"To Uncle Moses alone, you say? And how about Sam?" muttered another.

Masha's face turned fiery red with shame. She wondered how she could escape from the hostile women that encircled her; she felt that she was the "enemy"

of the townsfolk, whether she wished it or not. Her one concern at this moment was how to escape the women.

"Women! Women! Calm yourselves! Why all this shouting?" interceded two men, quelling the din and helping Masha to extricate herself from the crowd.

"Charlie isn't here. He's running around the courts getting out the men that were arrested. But he ought to be back soon. Have a seat, Mrs. Melnick. He'll be back right away."

"Who is she, anyway? Just see how nicely they talk to her,—what a hearty reception they give her. She's not such a much. Her father sewed pants for Uncle Moses like the rest of them. He was nothing but a downtrodden, whining operator himself. His luck that Uncle Moses fell in love with his daughter. Just see what they make of her."

"You silly goose, we could all enjoy such luck if we cared to marry our daughters off to old men."

"It's because of her that he has our husband's heads split,—that he may make enough money to buy her whatever she wishes."

"Naturally if you marry an old man, at least get everything out of him you possibly can."

Masha gazed at the women with eyes that entreated mercy. She wished to tell them that she was just as unhappy as they,—that she, too, was but an employee of Uncle Moses,—likewise a slave of the firm "Moses Melnick and Company," and that she had come to strike together with them, to seek liberation together with all the townsfolk from the yoke of Uncle Moses' house. But the women neither could nor cared to read what was written in the young wife's large, tear-filled eyes. They beheld in her their enemy upon whom

they lusted to wreak vengeance for long years of suffering, for old, repeated humiliations and for their husband's battered heads.

"Just look at the fuss they're making over her. Uncle Moses is a wily rogue; he wants to decoy them back to the shop, so he's sent his young wife to do the trick. Just see how quiet they've become,—how afraid they are of her!"

"Uncle Moses sent her, you say?—No. It was Sam who sent her. She knows whom she must obey."

The burning gibes pierced Masha to the marrow. She took them upon herself as a punishment. At that moment she was ready for everything,—ready to cast off the shame and the slavery that had been forced upon her and to remain here with her townsfolk in the "Congregation,"—to make their lot her own. And she waited for Charlie's arrival, that she might tell him all.

To wait for him inside the synagogue was impossible. The women became so excited with animosity against her, and their words grew so insulting that she had to flee the place. Who can say to what all this might have led had not Charlie happened to enter.

"Hello, Masha!" greeted Charlie, with his usual smile, as if they had seen each other only the night before. "What are *you* doing here?"

Masha looked straight into his eyes. During the three years in which she had not seen him he had changed but little. He looked just as child-like as he had appeared that day on the beach at Coney Island, and involuntarily she made a comparison between herself and him. It seemed to her that during these years she had grown to be his mother, while he had

remained the same child as ever. The only change that had taken place was afforded by the long, black patch of hair that grew down from his temples in Spanish fashion; this made him look to her like a school-child who, anxious to have a mustache, smears his upper lip with soot. For a moment the sight of him made her forget the purpose for which she had come. There had after all been no change during the past three years, it seemed. Once again she had come to him as a young girl to her boy chum, to take him out for a walk or a pleasure trip as she had used to do.

"I'd like to have a personal talk with you, Charlie," she began, with her usual frank smile, which she borrowed from the days when she was still a maiden. "Come out with me."

"I'm sorry, but you don't understand the situation. The strikers regard everything with suspicion, and very naturally they'd soon be thinking all sorts of things. They'd imagine that I was going to betray them,—sell them out. Better let's talk right here."

Masha suddenly recalled where she was.

"Yes, you are right. There was something I wanted to talk over with you. Perhaps another time. For the present, let me beg you to take this for our townsfolk. It's everything I own." And she handed Charlie the bundle of jewels and cash.

Charlie, however, smiled bashfully at her.

"You know, Masha,—I can't do anything alone. We'll have to ask the strike committee whether they are willing to accept it."

"Very well, then, I'll wait."

Charlie called together a few of the strikers, took them into a corner and went into discussion with them.

Soon he returned and said to Masha, all the while smiling his childish smile:

"I'm sorry, Masha, but the workingmen refuse to accept this. They don't like the idea of accepting charity, you know. . . . And then, there's your position," he suddenly broke in. "You understand, Masha. I'm sorry."

"This isn't charity. It's my donation to the strike. I'm striking, too. I, too, want to join the strikers. Charlie, I want to side with them, to make their cause my own. . . . I want to be like them, like you, together with all of them. . . ." Tears appeared in Masha's eyes.

"What's the matter, Masha? Aren't you well?"

"It's nothing. You're right. Yes, I understand. I'm an enemy to you.—And donations can't be accepted from an enemy. Yes, you are right.—It is better so. Good-bye, Charlie, and thanks."

"But what's the matter with you?—Wait a minute. I'll go along with you. I'll take you home."

"No, don't go with me. The strikers will suspect things. No, no. You mustn't be seen with me. I belong to the other side.—You are right. Good-bye, Charlie!" And she hastened from the building.

Towards evening she returned home. The house was in almost total darkness. Above, however, in the bedroom, there was a light,—the many-colored light effect that Uncle Moses had installed. As she climbed the stairs she could hear Uncle Moses' bass voice quivering with hoarse laughter. For a moment she stood upon the threshold of the bedroom, the door to which was open, and gazed upon the scene. Her husband was upon the divan, playing with the hands of the infant,

who was lying nearby; the man laughed and rejoiced with his child, showering the little hands with kisses and smacking his lips loudly. Catching sight of Masha in the doorway, Uncle Moses turned to her with a beaming countenance and sparkling eyes.

"Come here, Masha. Come here. Just see the nose it's getting.—Looks more like me every day.—I'll bet your life it looks just like me."

Masha went over and contemplated the child. By his strong, energetic lips, by his long nose, by his heavy breathing, she saw whom he really resembled most. And the reddish light of the room recalled her shame, and more than ever she felt that she belonged "on the other side."

CHAPTER VIII

'WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, PEOPLE?''

THE Melnick family and relatives were assembled in Uncle Moses' large dining-room. It was late in the evening, and everybody was quiet, as if mourning the dead. Aaron Melnick was the only one who gave full vent to his feelings. His head swathed in a towel, he paced up and down the room groaning. "Oh, Father in Heaven!" The rest, however, were silent. Rosa, the mother, had grown suddenly old and infirm. Uncle Moses had become bent, while a senile smile had stolen into his features. He neither wept nor groaned, but looked about him good-humoredly, like an old child who did not know what to do and was ready to follow the first suggestion. All eyes were turned upon Sam, the one person present who seemed to possess unshattered nerves and health. The nostrils of his long, white nose drank in the air eagerly; he breathed heavily as if he could not suck in enough air for the strength that burned in his veins. He tried to calm the assembled relatives, although he was really the most excited and uneasy of them all. He bit nervously at his finger nails and tried to compose himself.

"And I tell you that nothing has happened. I maintain what I said before:—Charlie has a hand in this! It's as clear as the light of day. He has abducted her,

so as to force us to give in to the striking men. It's a plain case of kidnapping."

He knew very well that this tale was a pure bit of imagination, yet he told it not only to calm his hearers, but himself as well. His vibrant energy refused to believe that any harm had overtaken Masha. The surrounding family and relatives knew, too, that Sam's story was an empty accusation, and all were silent as before.

It was already three days since Masha had suddenly disappeared, leaving not a trace. She went out and never returned. Sam and his cousin Mannes had put the police to work on the case, had hired detectives, had sought her at the home of relatives, friends, among the striking townsfolk, at Charlie's home (where they had overturned the whole place). But Masha was not to be found. When three days had passed without any word from Masha, every one felt that something had happened to her, but the fear was held in their hearts, unspoken. The family and the assembled relatives had remained in the dining-room till late that evening. They were at a loss for what to do and could not separate.

At about this time there appeared just outside the house a feminine form. The woman had already approached the door more than once, immediately withdrawing, however, and disappearing somewhere, only to return anew.

It was Masha. The child that she had left behind was drawing her back to the Melnick home. In vain had she tried to efface the life she had lived during the past few years,—to obliterate it and reunite her life with that past in which she had been a carefree girl. Not a single day may be deleted from a person's life

and every event of our days demands its reckoning,—every deed of ours comes to ask its own, whether we have committed it of our own free will or not. In vain she tried to persuade herself that this was not her child,—that it was the Melnick family's child,—that it belonged to the "Melnick Company,"—that she had cast the child off together with the company.

In the little room where she had boarded for the past three days, in the home of a poor old woman to whom she represented herself as a shop-girl,—in that little room the child had appeared to her and begged her to return. She understood everything,—that the child was a result of her serfdom, of the pressure that had been exerted upon her, that she had little personally to do with it because it had not come as a result of her wish nor even been born as a fruit of her passion,—that it was the product of an error, of her weakness—that now all this had been blotted out, that the fruits of error and weakness had vanished with her step towards freedom and regeneration.

But all this amounted merely to so many words. The joy of the small, dark room, the joy of working in a shop,—which she had today tasted for the first time, the joy of her own personal life that she had created by force of her will and her strength, was troubled. Somehow or other she could not enjoy her freedom. It seemed to her that over at the Melnick home she had left half of herself,—that she was not wholly free. She felt a powerful impulse to take the little child along with her to that dark, tiny room.

She did not know how she would manage this. She sought means to accomplish her purpose, and suggested to the old landlady that she would bring her child there.

And on the evening of the third day, without any clear conception of how she would institute her new life together with the child, she went forth to take the child away from the Melnicks to her own apartment.

Several times she had already started to climb the outside steps and had retreated. It was not weakness that caused her to turn back; her simple maidenly mind was unable to develop any practical plan whereby she could begin her new life with the child. Her little mother-heart, however, was undaunted by her mind's uncertainty, and obeyed the strong impulse that filled it. Suddenly she pulled at the door-bell—and Masha strode into the dining-room where her family and relatives were seated at this late hour, bemoaning her fate.

She was pale; her hair was still wet with combing and her face wan with the suffering she had undergone, but on her countenance shone that glow which comes from a soul deeply at peace with itself. Her eyes were crystal clear. She paused to glance at no one, but advanced directly to the stairway that led to the child's room above.

The members of the company remained rooted to their seats in fright.

Uncle Moses was the first to recover his power of speech:

"Masha! Masha, my darling!" he cried, his voice hoarse with tears, and he ran to her weeping, with his face lighted up by joy. It seemed that he was about to fall upon his knees before her.

"Masha! Masha!" cried her father. Her mother, however, beckoned both of them to hold back.

"Let her be, for God's sake! Leave her alone!"

Sam said nothing. He had turned white. His lips

grew crisp, as if he were on the point of bursting into tears, and his large nostrils sucked in the air more eagerly than ever.

"Masha, my darling, everything has been arranged to everybody's satisfaction. He has given in to the workingmen's demands,—he has yielded every point, just for your sake." And Uncle Moses grovelled befor her, his eyes filled with tears of joy as he told her the news.

"Hush. This is no time for talk," whispered his mother-in-law, tugging at his sleeve.

Masha, however, neither saw nor heard anything. She went up to the room where the child lay.

"Masha!" cried Uncle Moses, about to follow her up the stairs.

"Don't go now, I tell you. Leave her alone!" warned Rosa, holding him back.

Silence again hovered over the room, but it was now a different sort of silence. The men and women exchanged glances, but refrained from disturbing their newly-found calm with speech, as if they feared to frighten away the vision that had arisen before their eyes. The only one who could not contain himself was, as usual, Aaron.

"God in Heaven, Father, Father Almighty, Father—" he gasped between his sobs.

"Won't you be quiet for a moment! Shut up!" scolded his wife.

"Let me cry," answered Aaron tearfully, and burst out more loudly than ever.

A few minutes went by. The family had regained a tithe of its former composure. Aaron Melnick's weeping soothed them all. Rosa was the first to go upstairs

to the child's room. She was met on the stairs, however, by Masha, who was holding the child in her arms. The infant was wrapped in a quilt and pressed tightly to the mother's bosom.

"Daughter, what do you call this?" questioned Rosa, trying to remove the child from Masha's grasp.

"Mamma!" cried Masha, restraining her mother by force of the strange light that came from her eyes.

"Moses, come here!" cried Rosa to her son-in-law.

"What's the trouble now?" Uncle Moses and Aaron hastened to the woman. Sam, however, held aloof from the scene, still pale with repressed emotion.

Masha avoided them all and tried to advance with her child in her arms.

"Where are you going, Masha?" they all cried.

Masha made no reply and continued on her way.

"I won't allow this!" cried Uncle Moses, seizing her and barring her way.

"You have no right to prevent me. Please, let me—"

A deep silence fell over the room. Only Sam's heavy, eager breathing could be heard.

"What are you talking about? What are you saying? Masha, what are you doing? Please, calm yourself. Everything is all right now. Everything is settled with the workingmen. What do you want? Everything is all right now."

"I don't want to remain here.—Let me get out of here."

"But where are you going? What's the meaning of all this?"

"Please, let me go!" cried Masha, tearing herself out of his grasp.

"I will not let you go. It's my child!" And he tried to grasp the child from her.

"It is not your child. You have no right to it."

"Not my child?" laughed Uncle Moses. "Whose child is it, then, you silly goose? What are you prattling about?"

"It is not your child. And—please, let me go,—release me!" And she looked gravely into his eyes.

Uncle Moses grew suddenly white. For a moment he looked about the room. For an instant his eyes flashed with that piercing glance that had once struck such terror into all beholders, and his voice echoed with that metallic clang that evoked fear, while his lips turned bloodless and began to tremble.

"I don't like this talk. I don't like it. Please, Masha," he said firmly.

"She is not well. Can't you see that she's not well? Let her alone, Moses. We ought to put her to bed. Moses, telephone for Dr. Goldstein. I'm afraid the girl is sick," said Rosa, approaching her daughter.

"Mamma, please. He has no right to the child."

"What is she saying, mother-in-law? What is that she's saying? I don't like those words. What is she saying?—I won't let you go." He hastened to the door and locked it.—"I'll not let you take the child along." Then all at once he huddled together, his face became sinister, his eyes were ringed with dark circles and he began to entreat her:

"Where are you going, Masha my darling? Where are you going? What is the meaning of all this? What is she saying? What? What is she saying? Tell me, people, what is she saying?"

"Does she know what she's saying, then? Can't you see that she's not well. Put her to bed."

"Mamma!" shrieked Masha, not letting Rosa get near her.

Silence. Masha approached the door and tried to open it. It was locked. She looked around, and then walked calmly over to Uncle Moses and said:

"You have no right to hold me back. I have told you the truth. The child is not yours."

Uncle Moses stood as one transfixed, and stared at her for a long while, as if he could not understand what she was saying. Then he raised his eyes and looked around at everybody in the room. Sam was still standing, as before, pale, biting his nails and avoiding Uncle Moses' glance. Suddenly Uncle Moses went to the door, opened it, and said, as if to himself:

"All right."

Without looking at anybody in the room Masha walked hastily out of the room.

"Daughter,—my child, where are you going?" cried Rosa, running after her into the corridor.

In the dining-room the silence was so deep that Sam could be heard chewing at his nails. For a long time Uncle Moses looked at him—Sam was unaware of the insistent gaze—and the silence remained unbroken, as if the company lay under a magic spell. All at once Aaron Melnick's child-like weeping burst out with a frightened wail:

"What's going on here, people? What's the meaning of it all? Tell me,—what's going on here? I can't understand. I can't understand."

But nobody answered him.

CHAPTER IX

ALONE

AROUND the establishment of "Melnick and Company" wandered an old man whom the employees, half in earnest and half in jest, called "Uncle." The old man spent most of his time upstairs in the workroom among the operatives. He would take a seat among his townsfolk, and was fond of passing the time with them, hearing and telling stories of the old home, of Kuzmin. Often the old fellow would simply hobble from one workingman to the other, and when the foreman would appear,—cousin Mannes, whom Sam had taken into the business,—Mannes would go over to Uncle Moses and slap him across the shoulder. "Come on, Uncle!" And should Uncle Moses happen not to hear him, or refuse to obey, Mannes would go to summon Sam. And just as once upon a time Uncle Moses used to coax his father away from the workmen, so now did Sam do with Moses. Sam's earnest face assumed a kindly expression, and tenderly he took Uncle Moses by the arm and said to him good-naturedly:

"Are you not ashamed, Uncle? Come on."

And Uncle Moses would really be filled with shame, and would go down from the shop with Sam, without speaking a word.

For a few minutes he would wander about the office, or the sales department, exchanging a jest here

and there with one of the employees. He would eventually tire of it all, and would leave for the saloon across the way.

This would at once be reported to Sam, who would be overwhelmed with humiliation to think that his Uncle should be idling his time away in a saloon. He would send over his cousin Mannes to bring Uncle Moses back. And when Moses returned Sam would say to him, this time without his kindly smile:

"Are you not ashamed, Uncle? Come on!" And he would call one of the store boys, telling him to lead Uncle Moses home.

Often Uncle Moses would sit by himself in the spacious bed-room and play with the various light effects that he had installed at the time of his marriage to Masha. Now he would flood the room with red, and now with a bright blue light, and would go over to the divan on which he had so often played with the child; he would mutter something to himself, smile, and smack his old, dry lips. Then suddenly he would start, gaze about him in fright and shame, to see whether he had been noticed by the servant in the next room. He would slam the door behind him and go out into the garden, or back to the shop. . . . He had also been seen on the steps of a large tenement house in the Bronx where a workingwoman and her child boarded with strangers. Often an old respectable gentleman would be noticed hovering before the tenement-house door, and when the neighbors asked whom he was looking for, he would smile and reply: "It's all right." Once it happened that he entered the home of those strangers with whom the workingwoman and her child

boarded, and sat down in silence. But on the selfsame day the workingwoman and her child moved away. Nobody knew where she had moved, and the old man never appeared again. . . .

Before the entrance to a tenement house on a noisy street in the Bronx lingered an aged man. The neighbors had noticed him a long time. And when they asked him whom he was looking for, he smiled and replied:

"It is all right."

He smiled and resumed his pacing to and fro, until he caught sight of a woman, or a girl, approaching from afar. At once he disappeared from the sidewalk. A little while later he hastened up the stairs and knocked at a door.

The door opened and he was asked what he wished.

"Do a young woman and a child live here?" he asked. "The woman's name is Masha."

"Mrs. Melnick! Does this gentleman mean you?" called the woman to her boarder.

Masha entered the room. In the darkness she did not recognize Uncle Moses.

"Who is that?"

"Masha," cried an old man's voice.

Masha was astounded.

"What are you looking for here?"

"I want to tell you something."

Masha was ashamed to create a scene before the old woman and was at a loss. Without a word she went back to her room and the old man followed her. He closed the door behind him and looked around, as if in quest of something.

In a corner of the room, on a bed, lay a child, whom Masha now approached and began to tend, as if nobody but them were present.

After a long while had passed, during which the old stranger stood motionless near the door and Masha did not even turn around toward him,—there was suddenly heard the sound of weeping,—the moaning of an old, sick beast, in cracked bass tones.

Masha was frightened. She walked over to him and said, sympathetically:

"Hush. People will be scared. It's not nice."

The old man did his best to restrain his weeping. He wiped the tears from his cheeks, which were hot with the drops, and sobbed softly.

"Calm yourself. Go home. It's not nice."

"Yes, yes, Masha. Soon. Right away." And the old man composed himself, like a weeping child who has promised to be good.

"I know it's all my fault. I am an old fool. Nobody's fault but my own,—my own. But why did God punish me? Why? What did I wish?—What every common laborer has,—a wife and a child." And the old man burst into tears anew.

"Uncle, please. Don't torture me, and go home."

"Yes, yes, right away. All right." He made as if to go, but paused near the door and gazed at Masha through sick, entreating eyes.

"Masha,—a single word. Please. Just one word.—It *is* my child. Say it is. I know. I know it is." He stepped toward the bed on which the child lay.

Masha, frightened, barred the way.

"Don't be afraid. Don't be—I'll do him no harm. I

just want to take a look at him. Just look at him and then leave. Please let me see him. That's all."

Uncle Moses stepped over to the bed, where the child lay playing with its little hands; he drank in the sight. All at once he fell across the bed, and clutching it with both hands he wept afresh.

"It *is* my child, Masha. I know.—The only thing that life holds for me. I know, Masha. Please, Masha, say,—that it is *my* child,—my own, my own."

It was a long time before Masha, by gentle means and harsh, was able to get Uncle Moses out of the room. She soothed him, promising to return to him, to permit him to live with her and the child. Uncle Moses left in peace and joy.

The next day, however, when he returned to the tenement, he found neither Masha nor the child. Nor could anybody inform him whither they had gone.

For many a day Uncle Moses wandered about inquiring of everybody after Masha and the child. He told everybody,—whether he knew the people or not,—that the child was his, that Masha had promised to come back and live with him. He even went to the police station and asked the police to hunt for his wife, and he was forever in search of a skilled detective whom he desired to put on her trail.

Folk took pity upon him and gave ear to his tale. They all assured him that the child was certainly his, and that his wife would return and live with him again.

Once in the down-town Galician quarter, he entered a saloon which was frequented by bakers and butchers.

Here he was received as an old boon companion. But no sooner had he become a bit tipsy than he began to use most scandalous language, prattling about children that he had had by the wife of the saloon-keeper and demanding the return of his children. The husband administered a severe rebuke: it was hardly fitting for such an old man to babble such indecent things. Such an old duffer ought to be in the synagogue chanting the Psalms, not wallowing about in a saloon. Whereupon the saloon-keeper opened the door and ordered him out. . . .

And once it happened that Uncle Moses, attending the funeral of one of his townsfolk, found himself in a cemetery. The name of the cemetery sounded familiar to him, and he recalled that somebody he knew reposed here,—somebody very close to him. He went to the office and asked for the location of his first wife, who had been buried there some twenty years before. The secretary looked the name up in the books and sent a sexton along with Uncle Moses. Amid neatly kept graves surrounded by carefully trimmed shrubbery rose a crumbling stone above an abandoned, forgotten grave that was almost hidden by the wild vegetation which had sprung up. Uncle Moses looked at the tombstone—and memories of his early years came back to him. Close by was fenced in another plot for another grave, which was as yet unoccupied. This was his own lot, which he had purchased for himself beside his departed wife.

And all at once the whole matter became clear to him: in his wife's grave reposed his life, his youth.—

He saw it all. And close beside it lay his own grave, waiting for him.

He had striven, had done business, had bought love, —had subjected other lives to his will,—and here, all the time lay a grave, quietly waiting for him. And now, it seemed to him that he could understand why the life he had sought to rear had crumbled. He had been building upon an open grave.—And it was not long before he occupied his place in the grave that had been waiting all this time beside his forgotten life. . . .

THE END

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