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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A GHETTO VIOLET ***

A GHETTO VIOLET

By Leopold Kompert

From "Christian and Leah." Translated by A. S. Arnold.

1869

Through the open window came the clear trill of a canary singing blithely in its cage. Within the tidy, homely little room a pale-faced girl and a youth of slender frame listened intently while the bird sang its song. The girl was the first to break the silence.

"Ephraim, my brother!" she said.

"What is it, dear Viola?"

"I wonder does the birdie know that it is the Sabbath to-day?"

"What a child you are!" answered Ephraim.

"Yes, that 's always the way; when you clever men can't explain a thing, you simply dismiss the question by calling it childish," Viola exclaimed, as though quite angry. "And, pray, why should n't the bird know? The whole week it scarcely sang a note: to-day it warbles and warbles so that it makes my head ache. And what's the reason? Every Sabbath it's just the same, I notice it regularly. Shall I tell you what my idea is?"

"The whole week long the little bird looks into our room and sees nothing but the humdrum of work-a-day life. To-day it sees the bright rays of the Sabbath lamp and the white Sabbath cloth upon the table. Don't you think I 'm right, Ephraim?"

"Wait, dear Viola," said Ephraim, and he went to the cage.

The bird's song suddenly ceased.

"Now you 've spoilt its Sabbath!" cried the girl, and she was so excited that the book which had been lying upon her lap fell to the ground.

Ephraim turned towards her; he looked at her solemnly, and said quietly:

"Pick up your prayer-book first, and then I 'll answer. A holy book should not be on the ground like that. Had our mother dropped her prayer-book, she would have kissed it.... Kiss it, Viola, my child!"

Viola did so.

"And now I 'll tell you, dear Viola, what I think is the reason why the bird sings so blithely to-day.... Of course, I don't say I 'm right."

Viola's brown eyes were fixed inquiringly upon her brother's face.

"How seriously you talk to-day," she said, making a feeble attempt at a smile. "I was only joking. Must n't I ask if the bird knows anything about the Sabbath?"

"There are subjects it is sinful to joke about, and this may be one of them, Viola."

"You really quite frighten me, Ephraim."

"You little goose, I don't want to frighten you," said Ephraim, while a faint flush suffused his features. "I'll tell you my opinion about the singing of the bird. I think, dear Viola, that our little canary knows... that before long it will change its quarters."

"You're surely not going to sell it or give it away?" cried the girl, in great alarm; and springing to her feet, she quickly drew her brother away from the cage.

"No, I'm not going to sell it nor give it away," said Ephraim, whose quiet bearing contrasted strongly with his sister's excitement. "Is it likely that I should do anything that would give you pain? And yet, I have but to say one word... and I'll wager that you will be the first to open the cage and say to the bird, 'Fly, fly away, birdie, fly away home!'"

"Never, never!" cried the girl.

"Viola," said Ephraim beseechingly, "I have taken a vow. Surely you would not have me break it?"

"A vow?" asked his sister.

"Viola," Ephraim continued, as he bent his head down to the girl's face, "I have vowed to myself that whenever he... our father... should return, I would give our little bird its freedom. It shall be free, free as he will be."

"Ephraim!"

"He is coming—he is already on his way home."

Viola flung her arms round her brother's neck. For a long time brother and sister remained locked in a close embrace.

Meanwhile the bird resumed its jubilant song.

"Do you hear how it sings again?" said Ephraim; and he gently stroked his sister's hair. "It knows that it will soon be free."

"A father out of jail!" sobbed Viola, as she released herself from her brother's arms.

"He has had his punishment, dear Viola!" said Ephraim softly.

Viola turned away. There was a painful silence, and then she looked up at her brother again. Her face was aglow, her eyes sparkled with a strange fire; she was trembling with agitation.

Never before had Ephraim seen her thus.

"Ephraim, my brother," she commenced, in that measured monotone so peculiar to intense emotion, "with the bird you can do as you please. You can set it free, or, if you like, you can wring its neck. But as for him, I'll never look in his face again, from me he shall not have a word of welcome. He broke our mother's heart... our good, good mother; he has dishonored himself and us. And I can never forget it."

"Is it right for a child to talk like that of her own father?" said Ephraim in a tremulous voice.

"When a child has good cause to be ashamed of her own father!" cried Viola.

"Oh, my Viola, you must have forgotten dear mother's dying words. Don't you remember, as she opened her eyes for the last time, how she gathered up her failing strength, and raising herself in her bed, 'Children,' she said, 'my memory will protect you both, yea, and your father too.' Viola, have you forgotten?"

Had you entered that little room an hour later, a touching sight would have met your eyes. Viola was seated on her brother's knee, her arms round his neck, whilst Ephraim with the gentle love of a brother for a younger sister, was stroking her hair, and whispering in her ear sweet words of solace.

The bird-cage was empty.... That evening Ephraim sat up till midnight. Outside in the Ghetto reigned the stillness of night.

All at once Ephraim rose from his chair, walked to the old bureau which stood near the door, opened it, and took from it a bulky volume, which he laid upon the table in front of him. But he did not seem at all bent upon reading. He began fingering the pages, until he came upon a bundle of bank-notes, and these he proceeded to count, with a whispering movement of his lips. He had but three or four more notes still to count, when his sharp ear detected the sound of stealthy footsteps, in the little courtyard in front of the house. Closing the book, and hastily putting it back again in the old bureau, Ephraim sprang to the window and opened it.

"Is that you, father?" he cried.

There was no answer.

Ephraim repeated his question.

He strained his eyes, peering into the dense darkness, but no living thing could he see. Then quite close to him a voice cried: "Make no noise... and first put out the light."

"Heavens! Father, it is you then...!" Ephraim exclaimed.

"Hush!" came in a whisper from without, "first put out the light."

Ephraim closed the window, and extinguished the light. Then, with almost inaudible step, he walked out of the room into the dark passage; noiselessly he proceeded to unbolt the street-door. Almost at the same moment a heavy hand clasped his own.

"Father, father!" Ephraim cried, trying to raise his parent's hand to his lips.

"Make no noise," the man repeated, in a somewhat commanding tone.

With his father's hand in his, cautiously feeling his way, Ephraim led him into the room. In the room adjoining lay Viola, sleeping peacefully....

Time was when "Wild" Ascher's welcome home had been far otherwise. Eighteen years before, upon that very threshold which he now crossed with halting, stealthy steps, as of a thief in the night, stood a fair and

loving wife, holding a sturdy lad aloft in her arms, so that the father might at once see, as he turned the street corner, that wife and child were well and happy. Not another Ghetto in all Bohemia could show a handsomer and happier couple than Ascher and his wife. "Wild" Ascher was one of those intrepid, venturesome spirits, to whom no obstacle is so great that it cannot be surmounted. And the success which crowned his long, persistent wooing was often cited as striking testimony to his indomitable will. Gudule was famous throughout the Ghetto as "the girl with the wonderful eyes," eyes—so the saying ran—into which no man could look and think of evil. During the earlier years of their married life those unfathomable brown eyes exercised on Ascher the full power of their fascination. A time came, however, when he alleged that those very eyes had been the cause of all his ruin.

Gudule's birthplace was far removed from the Ghetto, where Ascher had first seen the light. Her father was a wealthy farmer in a secluded village in Lower Bohemia. But distant though it was from the nearest town of any importance, the solitary grange became the centre of attraction to all the young swains far and near. But there was none who found favor in Gudule's eyes save "Wild Ascher," in spite of many a friendly warning to beware of him. One day, just before the betrothal of the young people, an anonymous letter was delivered at the grange. The writer, who called himself an old friend, entreated the farmer to prevent his dear child from becoming the wife of one who was suspected of being a gambler. The farmer was of an easy-going, indulgent nature, shunning care and anxiety as a very plague. Accordingly, no sooner had he read the anonymous missive than he handed it to his daughter, as though its contents were no concern of his.

When Gudule had read the letter to the end, she merely remarked: "Father, this concerns me, and nobody else."

And so the matter dropped.

Not until the wedding-day, half an hour before the ceremony, when the marriage canopy had already been erected in the courtyard, did the farmer sum up courage to revert to the warning of the unknown letter-writer. Taking his future son-in-law aside, he said:

"Ascher, is it true that you gamble?"

"Father," Ascher answered with equal firmness, "Gudule's eyes will save me!" Ascher had uttered no untruth when he gave his father-in-law this assurance. He spoke in all earnestness, for like every one else he knew the magnetic power of Gudule's eyes.

Nowhere, probably, does the grim, consuming pestilence of gaming claim more victims than in the Ghetto. The ravages of drink and debauchery are slight indeed; but the tortuous streets can show too many a humble home haunted by the spectres of ruin and misery which stalked across the threshold when the *first card game* was played.

It was with almost feverish anxiety that the eyes of the Ghetto were fixed upon the development of a character like Ascher's; they followed his every step with the closest attention. Long experience had taught the Ghetto that no gambler could be trusted.

As though conscious that all eyes were upon him, Ascher showed himself most punctilious in the discharge of even the minutest of communal duties which devolved upon him as a denizen of the Ghetto, and his habits of life were almost ostentatiously regular and decorous. His business had prospered, and Gudule had borne him a son.

"Well, Gudule, my child," the farmer asked his daughter on the day when his grandson was received into the covenant of Abraham,— "well, Gudule, was the letter right?"

"What letter?" asked Gudule.

"That in which your husband was called a gambler."

"And can you still give a thought to such a letter?" was Gudule's significant reply.

Three years later, Gudule's father came to visit her. This time she showed him his second grandchild, her little Viola. He kissed the children, and round little Viola's neck clasped three rows of pearls, "that the child may know it had a grandfather once."

"And where are your pearls, Gudule?" he asked, "those left you by your mother,—may she rest in peace! She always set such store by them."

"Those, father?" Gudule replied, turning pale; "oh, my husband has taken them to a goldsmith in Prague. They require a new clasp."

"I see," remarked her father. Notwithstanding his limited powers of observation, it did not escape the old man's eyes that Gudule looked alarmingly wan and emaciated. He saw it, and it grieved his very soul. He said nothing however: only, when leaving, and after he had kissed the *Mezuza** he said to Gudule (who, with little Viola in her arms, went with him to the door), in a voice quivering with suppressed emotion: "Gudule, my child, the pearl necklet which I have given your little Viola has a clasp strong enough to last a hundred years... you need never, therefore, give it to your husband to have a new clasp made for it."

* Small cylinder inclosing a roll of parchment inscribed with the Hebrew word *Shadai* (Almighty) and with other texts, which is affixed to the lintel of every Jewish house.

And without bestowing another glance upon his child the easy-going man left the house. It was his last visit. Within the year Gudule received a letter from her eldest brother telling her that their father was dead, and that she would have to keep the week of mourning for him. Ever since his last visit to her—her brother wrote—the old man had been somewhat ailing, but knowing his vigorous constitution, they had paid little heed to his complaints. It was only during the last few weeks that a marked loss of strength had been noticed. This was followed by fever and delirium. Whenever he was asked whether he would not like to see Gudule, his only answer was: "She must not give away the clasp of little Viola's necklet." And but an hour before his death, he raised his voice, and loudly called for "the letter." Nobody knew what letter. "Gudule knows where it is," he said, with a gentle shake of his head. Those were the last words he spoke.

Had the old man's eyes deceived him on the occasion of his last visit to his son-in-law's house? No! For,

setting aside the incident of the missing pearls, the whole Ghetto could long since have told him that the warning of the anonymous letter was not unfounded—for Gudule was the wife of a gambler.

With the resistless impetuosity of a torrent released from its prison of ice and snow, the old invincible disease had again overwhelmed its victim. Gudule noticed the first signs of it when one day her husband returned home from one of his business journeys earlier than he had arranged. Gudule had not expected him.

"Why did you not come to meet me with the children?" he cried peevishly; "do you begrudge me even that pleasure?"

"I begrudge you a pleasure?" Gudule ventured to remark, as she raised her swimming eyes to his face.

"Why do you look at me so tearfully?" he almost shouted.

Ascher loved his wife, and when he saw the effect which his rough words had produced, he tenderly embraced her. "Am I not right, Gudule?" he said, "after a man has been working and slaving the livelong week, don't you think he looks forward with longing eyes for his dear children to welcome him at his door?"

At that moment Gudule felt the long latent suspicion revive in her that her husband was not speaking the truth. As if written in characters of fire, the words of that letter now came back to her memory; she knew now what was the fate that awaited her and her children.

Thenceforward, all the characteristic tokens of a gambler's life, all the vicissitudes which attend his unholy calling, followed close upon each other in grim succession. Most marked was the disturbance which his mental equilibrium was undergoing. Fits of gloomy despondency were succeeded, with alarming rapidity, by periods of tumultuous exaltation. One moment it would seem as though Gudule and the children were to him the living embodiment of all that was precious and lovable, whilst at other times he would regard them with sullen indifference. It soon became evident to Gudule that her husband's affairs were in a very bad way, for her housekeeping allowance no longer came to her with its wonted regularity. But what grieved and alarmed her most, was the fact that Ascher was openly neglecting every one of his religious duties. To return home late on Friday night, long after sunset had ushered in the Sabbath, was now a common practice. Once even it happened, that with his clothes covered with dust, he came home from one of his business tours on a Sabbath morning, when the people in holiday attire were wending their way to the synagogue.

Nevertheless, not a sound of complaint escaped Gudule's lips. Hers was one of those proud, sensitive natures, such as are to be met with among all classes and amid all circumstances of life, in Ghetto and in secluded village, no less than among the most favored ones of the earth. Had she not cast to the winds the well-intentioned counsel given her in that unsigned letter? Why then should she complain and lament, now that the seed had borne fruit? She shrank from alluding before her husband to the passion which day by day, nay, hour by hour, tightened its hold upon him. She would have died sooner than permit the word "gambler" to pass her lips. Besides, did not her eyes tell Ascher what she suffered? Those very eyes were, according to Ascher, the cause of his rapid journey along the road to ruin.

"Why do you look at me so, Gudule?" he would testily ask her, at the slightest provocation.

Often when, as he explained, he had had "a specially good week," he would bring home the costliest gifts for his children. Gudule, however, made no use whatever of these trinkets, neither for herself nor for the children. She put the things away in drawers and cupboards, and never looked at them, more especially as she observed that, under some pretext or another, Ascher generally took those glittering things away again, "in order to exchange them for others," he said: as often as not never replacing them at all.

"Gudule!" he said one day, when he happened to be in a particularly good humor, "why do you let the key remain in the door of that bureau where you keep so many valuables?"

And again Gudule regarded him with those unfathomable eyes.

"There, you 're... looking at me again!" he exclaimed with sudden vehemence.

"They 're safe enough in the cupboard," Gudule said, smiling, "why should I lock it?"

"Gudule, do you mean to say..." he cried, raising his hand as for a blow. Then he fell back in his chair, and his frame was shaken with sobs.

"Gudule, my heart's love," he cried, "I am not worthy that your eyes should rest on me. Everywhere, wherever I go, they look at me, those eyes... and that is my ruin. If business is bad, your eyes ask me, 'Why did you mix yourself up with these things, without a thought of wife or children?'... Then I feel as if some evil spirit possessed me and tortured my soul. Oh, why can't you look at me again as you did when you were my bride?—then you looked so happy, so lovely! At other times I think: 'I shall yet grasp fortune with both hands... and then I can face my Gudule's eyes again.' But now, now... oh, don't look at me, Gudule!"

There spoke the self-reproaching voice, which sometimes burst forth unbidden from a suffering soul.

As for Gudule, she already knew how to appreciate this cry of her husband's conscience at its true value. It was not that she felt one moment's doubt as to its sincerity, but she knew that so far as it affected the future, it was a mere cry and nothing more.

The years rolled on. The children were growing up. Ephraim had entered his fifteenth year. Viola was a little pale girl of twelve. In the opinion of the Ghetto they were the most extraordinary children in the world. In the midst of the harassing life to which her marriage with the gambler had brought her, Gudule so reared them that they grew to be living reflections of her own inmost being. People wondered when they beheld the strange development of "Wild" Ascher's children.

Their natures were as proud and reserved as that of their mother. They did not associate with the youth of the Ghetto; it seemed as though they were not of their kind, as though an insurmountable barrier divided them. And many a bitter sneer was hurled at Gudule's head.

"Does she imagine," she often heard people whisper, "that because her father was a farmer her children are princes? Let her remember that her husband is but a common gambler."

How different would have been their thoughts had they known that the children were Gudule's sole comfort. What their father had never heard from her, she poured into their youthful souls. No tear their mother shed was unobserved by them; they knew when their father had lost, and when he had won; they

knew, too, all the varying moods of his unhinged mind; and in this terrible school of misery they acquired an instinctive intelligence, which in the eyes of strangers seemed mere precocity.

The two children, however, had early given evidence of a marked difference in disposition. Ephraim's nature was one of an almost feminine gentleness, whilst Viola was strong-willed and proudly reserved.

"Mother," she said one day, "do you think he will continue to play much longer?"

"Viola, how can you talk like that?" Ephraim cried, greatly disturbed.

Thereupon Viola impetuously flung her arms round her mother's neck, and for some moments she clung to her with all the strength of her passionate nature. It was as though in that wild embrace she would fain pour forth the long pent-up sorrows of her blighted childhood.

"Mother!" she cried, "you are so good to him. Never, never shall he have such kindness from me!"

"Ephraim," said Gudule, "speak to your sister. In her sinful anger, Viola would revenge herself upon her own father. Does it so beseem a Jewish child?"

"Why does he treat you so cruelly, then?" Viola almost hissed the words.

Soon after fell the final crushing blow. Ascher had been away from home for some weeks, when one day Gudule received a letter, dated from a prison in the neighborhood of Vienna.

In words of genuine sympathy the writer explained that Ascher had been unfortunate enough to forge the signature to a bill. She would not see him again for the next five years. God comfort her! The letter was signed: "A fellow-sufferer with your husband."

As it had been with her old father, after he had bidden her a last farewell, so it was now with Gudule. From that moment her days were numbered, and although not a murmur escaped her lips, hour by hour she wasted away.

One Friday evening, shortly after the seven-branched Sabbath lamp had been lit, Gudule, seated in her arm-chair, out of which she had not moved all day, called the two children to her. A bright smile hovered around her lips, an unwonted fire burned in her still beautiful eyes, her bosom heaved... in the eyes of her children she seemed strangely changed. "Children," said she, "come and stand by me. Ephraim, you stand here on my right, and you, dear Viola, on my left. I would like to tell you a little story, such as they tell little children to soothe them to sleep. Shall I?"

"Mother!" they both cried, as they bent towards her.

"You must not interrupt me, children," she observed, still with that strange smile on her lips, "but leave me to tell my little story in my own way.

"Listen, children," she resumed, after a brief pause. "Every human being—be he ever so wicked—if he have done but a single good deed on earth, will, when he arrives above, in the seventh heaven, get his *Sechûs*, that is to say, the memory of the good he has done here below will be remembered and rewarded bountifully by the Almighty." Gudule ceased speaking. Suddenly a change came over her features: her breath came and went in labored gasps; but her brown eyes still gleamed brightly.

In tones well-nigh inaudible she continued: "When Jerusalem, the Holy City, was destroyed, the dead rose up out of their graves... the holy patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... and also Moses, and Aaron his brother... and David the King... and prostrating themselves before God's throne they sobbed: 'Dost Thou not remember the deeds we have done?... Wouldst Thou now utterly destroy all these our children, even to the innocent babe at the breast?' But the Almighty was inexorable.

"Then Sarah, our mother, approached the Throne... When God beheld her, He covered His face, and wept. 'Go,' said He, 'I cannot listen to thee.'... But she exclaimed... 'Dost Thou no longer remember the tears I shed before I gave birth to my Joseph and Benjamin... and dost Thou not remember the day when they buried me yonder, on the borders of the Promised Land... and now, must mine eyes behold the slaughter of my children, their disgrace, and their captivity?'... Then God cried: 'For *thy* sake will I remember thy children and spare them.'..."

"Would you like to know," Gudule suddenly cried, with uplifted voice, "what this *Sechûs* is like? It has the form of an angel, and it stands near the Throne of the Almighty.... But, since the days of Rachel, our mother, it is the *Sechûs* of a mother that finds most favor in God's eyes. When a mother dies, her soul straightway soars heavenward, and there it takes its place amid the others.

"'Who art thou?' asks God, 'I am the *Sechûs* of a mother,' is the answer, 'of a mother who has left children behind her on earth.' 'Then do thou stand here and keep guard over them!' says God. And when it is well with the children, it is the *Sechûs* of a mother which has caused them to prosper, and when evil days befall them... it is again the Angel who stands before God and pleads: 'Dost Thou forget that these children no longer have a mother?'... and the evil is averted...."

Gudule's voice had sunk to a mere whisper. Her eyes closed, her head fell back, her breathing became slower and more labored. "Are you still there, children?" she softly whispered.

Anxiously they bent over her. Then once again she opened her eyes, "I see you still"—the words came with difficulty from her blanched lips—"you, Ephraim, and you, my little Viola.... I am sure my *Sechûs* will plead for you... for you and your father." They were Gudule's last words. When her children, whose eyes had never as yet been confronted with Death, called her by her name, covering her icy hands with burning kisses, their mother was no more....

Who can tell what influence causes the downtrodden blade to raise itself once more! Is it the vivifying breath of the west wind, or a mysterious power sent forth from the bosom of Mother Earth? It was a touching sight to see how those two children, crushed as they were beneath the weight of a twofold blow, raised their heads again, and in their very desolation found new-born strength. And it filled the Ghetto with wonder. For what were they but the offspring of a gambler? Or was it the spirit of Gudule, their mother, that lived in them?

After Gudule's death, her eldest brother, the then owner of the grange, came over to discuss the future of his sister's children. He wished Ephraim and Viola to go with him to his home in Lower Bohemia, where he

could find them occupation. The children, however, were opposed to the idea. They had taken no previous counsel together, yet, upon this point, both were in perfect accord,—they would prefer to be left in their old home.

“When father comes back again,” said Eph-rahim, “he must know where to find us. But to you, Uncle Gabriel, he would never come.”

The uncle then insisted that Viola at least should accompany him, for he had daughters at home whom she could assist in their duties in the house and on the farm. But the child clung to Ephraim, and with flaming eyes, and in a voice of proud disdain, which filled the simple farmer with something like terror, she cried:

“Uncle, you have enough to do to provide for your own daughters; don't let *me* be an additional burden upon you; besides, sooner would I wander destitute through the world than be separated from my brother.”

“And what do you propose to do then?” exclaimed the uncle, after he had somewhat recovered from his astonishment at Viola's vehemence.

“You see, Uncle Gabriel,” said Ephraim, a sudden flush overspreading his grief-stricken features, “you see I have thought about it, and I have come to the conclusion that this is the best plan. Viola shall keep house, and I... I 'll start a business.”

“*You* start a business?” cried the uncle with a loud laugh. “Perhaps you can tell me what price I 'll get for my oats next market day? A business!... and *what* business, my lad?”

“Uncle,” said Ephraim, “if I dispose of all that is left us, I shall have enough money to buy a small business. Others in our position have done the same... and then...”

“Well, and then?” the uncle cried, eagerly anticipating his answer.

“Then the *Sechûs* of our mother will come to our aid,” Ephraim said softly.

The farmer's eyes grew dim with moisture; his sister had been very dear to him.

“As I live!” he cried, brushing his hand across his eyes, “you are true children of my sister Gudule. That's all I can say.”

Then, as though moved by a sudden impulse, he quickly produced, from the depths of his overcoat, a heavy pocketbook. “There!”... he cried, well-nigh out of breath, “there are a hundred gulden for you, Ephraim. With that you can, at all events, make a start; and then you need n't sell the few things you still have. There... put the money away... oats have n't fetched any price at all to-day, 't is true; but for the sake of Gudule's children, I don't mind what I do... Come, put it away, Ephraim... and may God bless you, and make you prosper.”

“Uncle!” cried Ephraim, as he raised the farmer's hand to his lips, “is all this to be mine? All this?”

“Yes, my boy, yes; it *is* a deal of money is n't it?”... said Gudule's brother, accompanying his words with a sounding slap on his massive thigh. “I should rather think it is. With that you can do something, at all events... and shall I tell you something? In Bohemia the oat crop is, unfortunately, very bad this season. But in Moravia it's splendid, and is two groats cheaper.... So there's your chance, Ephraim, my child; you 've got the money, buy!” All at once a dark cloud overspread his smiling face.

“It's a lot of money, Ephraim, that I am giving you... many a merchant can't lay his hands on it,” he said, hesitatingly; “but if... you were to... gam—”

The word remained unfinished, for upon his arm he suddenly felt a sensation as of a sharp, pricking needle.

“Uncle Gabriel!” cried Viola—for it was she who had gripped his arm—and the child's cheeks were flaming, whilst her lips curled with scorn, and her white teeth gleamed like those of a beast of prey. “Uncle Gabriel!” she almost shrieked, “if you don't trust Ephraim, then take your money back again... it's only because you are our mother's brother that we accept it from you at all.... Ephraim shall repay you to the last farthing.... Ephraim doesn't gamble... you sha 'n't lose a single penny of it.”

With a shake of his head the farmer regarded the strange child. He felt something like annoyance rise within him; an angry word rose to the lips of the usually good tempered man. But it remained unsaid; he was unable to remove his eyes from the child's face.

“As I live,” he muttered, “she has Gudule's very eyes.”

And with another thumping slap on his leg, he merrily exclaimed:

“All right, we'll leave it so then.... If Ephraim does n't repay me, I 'll take *you*, you wild thing... for you've stood surety for your brother, and then I 'll take you away, and keep you with me at home. Do you agree... you little spit-fire, eh?”

“Yes, uncle!” cried Viola.

“Then give me a kiss, Viola.”

The child hesitated for a moment, then she laid her cheek upon her uncle's face.

“Ah, now I 've got you, you little spit-fire,” he cried, kissing her again and again. “Are n't you ashamed now to have snapped your uncle up like that?”

Then after giving Ephraim some further information about the present price of oats, and the future prospects of the crops, with a side-shot at the chances of wool, skins, and other merchandise, he took his leave.

There was great surprise in the Ghetto when the barely fifteen-year-old lad made his first start in business. Many made merry over “the great merchant,” but before the year was ended, the sharp-seeing eyes of the Ghetto saw that Ephraim had “a lucky hand.” Whatever he undertook he followed up with a calmness and tact which often baffled the restless activity of many a big dealer, with all his cuteness and trickery. Whenever Ephraim, with his pale, sad face, made his appearance at a farmstead, to negotiate for the purchase of wool, or some such matter, it seemed as though some invisible messenger had gone before him to soften the hearts of the farmers. “No one ever gets things as cheap as you do,” he was assured by many a farmer's wife, who had been won by the unconscious eloquence of his dark eyes. No longer did people laugh at “the little merchant,” for nothing so quickly kills ridicule as success.

When, two years later, his Uncle Gabriel came again to see how the children were getting on, Ephraim was

enabled to repay, in hard cash, the money he had lent him.

"Oho!" cried Gudule's brother, with big staring eyes, as he clutched his legs with both hands, "how have you managed in so short a time to save so much? D' ye know that that 's a great deal of money?"

"I 've had good luck, uncle," said Ephraim, modestly.

"You 've been... playing, perhaps?"

The words fell bluntly from the rough countryman, but hardly had they been uttered, when Viola sprang from her chair, as though an adder had stung her. "Uncle," she cried, and a small fist hovered before Gabriel's eyes in such a threatening manner that he involuntarily closed them. But the child, whose features reminded him so strongly of his dead sister, could not make him angry.

"Ephraim," he exclaimed, in a jocund tone, warding off Viola with his hands, "you take my advice. Take this little spit-fire with you into the village one day... they may want a young she-wolf there." Then he pocketed the money.

"Well, Ephraim," said he, "may God bless you, and grant you further luck. But you won't blame me if I take the money,—I can do with it, and in oats, as you know, there's some chance of good business just now. But I am glad to see that you 're so prompt at paying. Never give too much credit! That 's always my motto; trust means ruin, and eats up a man's business, as rats devour the contents of a corn-barn."

There was but one thing that constantly threw its dark shadow across these two budding lives,—it was the dark figure in a distant prison. This it was that saddened the souls of the two children with a gloom which no sunshine could dispel. When on Fridays Ephraim returned, fatigued and weary from his work, to the home over which Viola presided with such pathetic housewifely care, no smile of welcome was on her face, no greeting on his. Ephraim, 't is true, told his sister where he had been, and what he had done, but in the simplest words there vibrated that tone of unutterable sadness which has its constant dwelling-place in such sorely-tried hearts.

Meanwhile, a great change had come over Viola. Nature continues her processes of growth and development 'mid the tempests of human grief, and often the fiercer the storm the more beautiful the after effects. Viola was no longer the pale child, "the little spit-fire," by whom her Uncle Gabriel's arm had been seized in such a violent grip. A womanly gentleness had come over her whole being, and already voices were heard in the *Ghetto* praising her grace and beauty, which surpassed even the loveliness of her dead mother in her happiest days. Many an admiring eye dwelt upon the beautiful girl, many a longing glance was cast in the direction of the little house, where she dwelt with her brother. But the daughter of a "gambler," the child of a man who was undergoing imprisonment for the indulgence of his shameful vice! That was a picture from which many an admirer shrank with horror!

One day Ephraim brought home a young canary for his sister. When he handed her the bird in its little gilt cage, her joy knew no bounds, and showering kisses by turns upon her brother, and on the wire-work of the cage, her eyes sparkling with animation:

"You shall see, Ephraim, how I 'll teach the little bird to speak," she cried.

The softening influence which had, during the last few months, come over his sister's nature was truly a matter of wonder to Ephraim. Humbly and submissively she accepted the slightest suggestion on his part, as though it were a command. He was to her a father and mother, and never were parents more implicitly obeyed by a child than this brother by a sister but three years his junior.

There was one subject, however, upon which Ephraim found his sister implacable and firm—their absent father, the mere mention of whose name made her tremble. Then there returned that haughty curl of the lips, and all the other symptoms of a proud, inflexible spirit. It was evident that Viola hated the man to whom she owed her existence.

Thus had it come about that Ephraim was almost afraid to pronounce his father's name. Neither did he care to allude to their mother before Viola, for the memory of her death was too closely bound up with that dark form behind the distant prison walls.

Let us now return to the night on which Ephraim opened the door to his father. How had it come about? A thousand times Ephraim had thought about his father's return—and now he durst not even kindle a light, to look upon the long-estranged face. As silent as when he had come, Ascher remained during the rest of the night; he had seated himself at the window, and his arm was resting upon the very spot where formerly the cage had stood. The bird had obtained its freedom, and was, no doubt, by this time asleep, nestling amid the breeze-swept foliage of some wooded glen. *He* too had regained his liberty, but no sleep closed his eyes, and yet he was in safe shelter, in the house of his children.

At length the day began to break. The sun was still hiding behind the mountain-tops, but its earliest rays were already reflected upon the window-panes. In the *Ghetto* footsteps became audible; here and there the grating noise of an opening street-door was heard, while from round the corner resounded, ever and anon, the hammer of the watchman, calling the people to morning service; for it was a Fast-day, which commenced at sunrise.

At that moment Ascher raised himself from his chair, and quickly turned away from the window. Ephraim was already by his side. "Father, dear father!" he cried from the inmost depths of his heart, as he tried to grasp the hand of the convict.

"Don't make such a noise," said the latter, casting a furtive glance in the direction of the window, and speaking in the same mysterious whisper in which he had asked for admittance into the house.

What a strange awakening it was to his son, when, in the gray twilight of the breaking day, he looked at Ascher more closely. In his imagination Ephraim had pictured a wan, grief-worn figure, and now he saw before him a strong, well-built man, who certainly did not present the appearance of a person who had just emerged from the dank atmosphere of a prison! On the contrary, he seemed stronger and more vigorous than he had appeared in his best days.

"Has he had such a good time of it...?" Ephraim felt compelled to ask himself... "how different our poor mother looked!"

With a violent effort he repressed the feelings which swelled his bosom. "Dear father," he said, with tears in his eyes, "make yourself quite comfortable; you have n't closed your eyes the whole night, you must be worn out. You are at home, remember... father!"

"It's all right," said Ascher, with a deprecating gesture, "*we fellows* know other ways of spending the night."

"*We fellows!*" The words cut Ephraim to the heart.

"But you may be taken ill, father," he timidly observed.

"I taken ill! What do you take me for?" Ascher laughed, boisterously. "I have n't the slightest intention of failing ill."

At that moment the watchman was heard hammering at the door of the next house. The reverberating blows seemed to have a strangely disquieting effect upon the strong man; a violent tremor seized him; he cast one of the frightened glances which Ephraim had noticed before in the direction of the window, then with one bound he was at the door, and swiftly turned the knob.

"Father, what 's the matter?" Ephraim cried, much alarmed.

"Does the watchman look into the room when he passes by?" asked Ascher, while his eyes almost burst from their sockets, with the intent-ness of their gaze.

"Never," Ephraim assured him.

"Let me see, wait..." whispered Ascher.

The three well-known knocks now resounded upon their own door, then the shadow of a passing figure was thrown upon the opposite wall. With a sigh of relief, the words escaped Ascher's bosom:

"He did not look inside..." he muttered to himself.

Then he removed his hand from the door-knob, came back into the centre of the room, and approaching the table, rested his hand upon it.

"Ephraim..." he said after a while, in that suppressed tone which seemed to be peculiar to him, "are n't you going to synagogue?"

"No, father," replied Ephraim, "I 'm not going to-day."

"But they 'll want to know," Ascher observed, and at the words an ugly sneer curled the corners of his lip; "they 'll want to know who your guest is. Why don't you go and tell them?"

"Father!" cried Ephraim.

"Then be good enough to draw down the blinds.... What business is it of theirs who your guest is? Let them attend to their own affairs.... But they would n't be of 'the chosen race' if they did n't want to know what was taking place in the furthest corner of your brain. You can't be too careful with them... you 're never secure against their far-scenting noses and their sharp, searching eyes."

It was now broad daylight. Ephraim drew down the blinds.

"The blinds are too white..." Ascher muttered, and moving a chair forward, he sat down upon it with his back to the window.

Ephraim proceeded to wind the phylacteries round his arm, and commenced to say his prayers softly.

His devotions over, he hurriedly took the phylacteries from his head and hand.

Ascher was still sitting immovable, his back to the window, his eyes fixed upon the door.

"Why don't you ask me where I 've left my luggage?" he suddenly cried.

"I 'll fetch it myself if you 'll tell me where it is," Ephraim remarked, in all simplicity.

"Upon my word, you make me laugh," cried Ascher, and a laugh like that of delirium burst from his lips. "All I can say, Ephraim, is, the most powerful giant upon earth would break his back beneath the weight of my luggage!"

Then only did Ephraim grasp his father's meaning.

"Don't worry yourself, father..." he said lovingly.

"Would you like to support me, perhaps!" Ascher shouted, with cutting disdain.

Ephraim's heart almost ceased to beat. Then movements were heard in the adjoining room.

"Have you any one with you?" cried Ascher, springing up. His sharp ears had instantly caught the sounds, and again the strong man was seized with violent trembling.

"Father, it's only dear Viola," said Ephraim.

A nameless terror seemed to have over-powered Ascher. With one hand convulsively clenched upon the arm of the chair, and the other pressed to his temple, he sat breathing heavily. Ephraim observed with alarm what a terrible change had come over his father's features during the last few seconds: his face had become ashen white, his eyes had lost their lustre, he seemed to have aged ten years.

The door opened, and Viola entered.

"Viola!" cried Ephraim, "here is our—"

"Welcome!" said the girl, in a low voice, as she approached a few steps nearer. She extended her hand towards him, but her eyes were cast down. She stood still for a moment, then, with a hurried movement, turned away.

"Gudule!" cried Ascher, horror-stricken, as he fell back almost senseless in his chair.

Was it the glamour of her maiden beauty that had so overpowered this unhappy father? Or was it the extraordinary resemblance she bore to the woman who had so loved him, and whose heart he had broken? The utterance of her name, the terror that accompanied the exclamation, denoted the effect which the girl's sudden appearance had produced upon that sadly unhinged mind.

"Viola!" Ephraim cried, in a sorrow-stricken voice, "why don't you come here?"

"I *can't*, Ephraim, I *can't*..." she moaned, as, with halting steps, she walked towards the door.

"Come, speak to him, do," Ephraim entreated, taking her hand in his.

"Let me go!" she cried, trying to release herself.... "I am thinking of mother!"

Suddenly Ascher rose.

"Where's my stick?" he cried. "I want the stick which I brought with me.... Where is it? I must go."

"Father, you won't..." cried Ephraim.

Then Viola turned round.

"Father," she said, with twitching lips... "you'll want something to eat before you go."

"Yes, yes, let me have something to eat," he shouted, as he brought his fist down upon the table. "Bring me wine... and let it be good... I am thirsty enough to drink the river dry.... Wine, and beer, and anything else you can find, bring all here, and then, when I've had my fill, I'll go."

"Go, Viola," Ephraim whispered in his sister's ear, "and bring him all he asks for."

When Viola had left the room, Ascher appeared to grow calmer. He sat down again leaning his arms upon the table.

"Yes," he muttered to himself: "I'll taste food with my children, before I take up my stick and go.... They say it's lucky to have the first drink of the day served by one's own child... and luck I *will* have again, at any price... What good children! While I've been anything but a good father to them, they run hither and thither and take the trouble to get me food and drink, and I, I've brought them home nothing but a wooden stick. But I'll repay them, so help me God, I'll make them rich yet, but I've got nothing but a wooden stick, and I want money, no play without money, and no luck either...."

Gradually a certain thoughtfulness overspread Ascher's agitated features, his lips were tightly compressed, deep furrows lined his forehead, while his eyes were fixed in a stony glare, as if upon some distant object. In the meantime Ephraim had remained standing almost motionless, and it was evident that his presence in the room had quite escaped his father's observation. With a chilling shudder running through his frame, his hair on end with horror, he listened to the strange soliloquy!... Then he saw his father's eyes travelling slowly in the direction of the old bureau in the corner, and there they remained fixed. "Why does he leave the key in the door, I wonder," he heard him mutter between his teeth, "just as Gudule used to do; I must tell him when he comes back, keys should n't be left in doors, never, under any circumstances." The entrance of Viola interrupted the old gambler's audible train of thought.

Ephraim gave a gasp of relief.

"Ah, what have you brought me?" cried Ascher, and his eyes sparkled with animation, as Viola produced some bottles from under her apron, and placed them and some glasses upon the table.

"Now then, fill up the glass," he shouted, in a commanding voice, "and take care that you don't spill any, or you'll spoil my luck."

With trembling hand Viola did as she was bidden, without spilling a single drop. Then he took up the glass and drained it at one draught. His face flushed a bright crimson: he poured himself out another glass.

"Are n't you drinking, Ephraim?" he exclaimed, after he had finished that glass also.

"I don't drink to-day, father," Ephraim faltered, "it's a fast."

"A fast? What fast? I have been fasting too," he continued, with a coarse laugh, "twice a week, on bread and water; an excellent thing for the stomach. Fancy, a fast-day in midsummer. On such a long day, when the sun is up at three already, and at eight o'clock at night is still hesitating whether he'll go to bed or not... what have I got to do with your Fast-day?"

His face grew redder every moment; he had drunk a third and a fourth glass, and there was nothing but a mere drain left in the bottle. Already his utterance was thick and incoherent, and his eyes were fast assuming that glassy brightness that is usually the forerunner of helpless intoxication. It was a sight Ephraim could not bear to see. Impelled by that natural, almost holy shame which prompted the son of Noah to cover the nakedness of his father, he motioned to his sister to leave. Then *he*, too, softly walked out of the room.

Outside, in the corridor, the brother and sister fell into each other's arms. Both wept bitterly: for a long time neither of them could find words in which to express the grief which filled their souls. At length Viola, her head resting upon Ephraim's shoulder, whispered: "Ephraim, what do you think of him?"

"He is ill, I think..." said Ephraim, in a voice choked with sobs.

"What, you call *that* illness, Ephraim?" Viola cried; "if that's illness, then a wild beast is ill too."

"Viola, for Heaven's sake, be quiet: he 's our own father after all!"

"Ephraim!" said the girl, with a violent outburst of emotion, as she again threw herself into her brother's arms... "just think if mother had lived to see this!"

"Don't, don't, Viola, my sweet!" Ephraim exclaimed, sobbing convulsively.

"Ephraim!" the girl cried, shaking her head in wild despair, "I don't believe in the *Sechûs*! When we live to see all this, and our hearts do not break, we lose faith in everything.... Ephraim, what is to become of us?"

"Hush, dear Viola, hush, you don't know what you are saying," replied Ephraim, "I believe in it, because mother herself told us... you must believe in it too."

But Viola again shook her head. "I don't believe in it any longer," she moaned, "I can't."

Noiselessly, Ephraim walked toward the door of the front room; he placed his ear against the keyhole, and listened. Within all was silent. A fresh terror seized him. Why was no sound to be heard?... He opened the door cautiously lest it should creak. There sat his father asleep in the arm-chair, his head bent on his bosom, his arms hanging limp by his side.

"Hush, Viola," he whispered, closing the door as cautiously as he had opened it, "he is asleep....I think it will do him good. Be careful that you make no noise."

Viola had seated herself upon a block of wood outside the kitchen door, and was sobbing silently. In the

meantime, Ephraim, unable to find a word of solace for his sister, went and stood at the street door, so that no unbidden guest should come to disturb his father's slumbers. It was mid-day; from the church hard by streamed the peasants and their wives in their Sunday attire, and many bestowed a friendly smile upon the well-known youth. But he could only nod his head in return, his heart was sore oppressed, and a smile at such a moment seemed to him nothing short of sin. He went back into the house, and listened at the door of the room. Silence still reigned unbroken, and with noiseless steps he again walked away.

"He is still sleeping," he whispered to his sister. "Just think what would have happened if we had still had that bird.... He would n't have been able to sleep a wink."

"Ephraim, why do you remind me of it?" cried Viola with a fresh outburst of tears. "Where is the little bird now, I wonder?..."

Ephraim sat down beside his sister, and took her hand in his. Thus they remained seated for some time, unable to find a word of comfort for each other.

At length movements were heard. Ephraim sprang to his feet and once more approached the door to listen.

"He is awake!" he softly said to Viola, and slowly opening the door, he entered the room.

Ascher was walking up and down with heavy tread.

"Do you feel refreshed after your sleep, father?" Ephraim asked timidly.

Ascher stood still, and confronted his son. His face was still very flushed, but his eyes had lost their glassy stare; his glance was clear and steady.

"Ephraim, my son," he began, in a kindly, almost cheerful tone, "you 've grown into a splendid business man, as good a business man as one can meet with between this and Vienna. I 'm sure of it. But I must give you one bit of advice; it 's worth a hundred pounds to one in your position. Never leave a key in the lock of a bureau!"

Ephraim looked at his father as though stupefied. Was the man mad or delirious to talk in such a strain? At that moment, from the extreme end of the *Ghetto*, there sounded the three knocks, summoning the people to evening prayer. As in the morning, so again now the sound seemed to stun the vigorous man. His face blanched and assumed an expression of terror; he trembled from head to foot. Then again he cast a frightened glance in the direction of the window.

"Nothing but knocking, knocking!" he muttered. "They would like to knock the most hidden thoughts out of one's brains, if they only could. What makes them do it, I should like to know?... To the clanging of a bell you can, at all events, shut your ears, you need only place your hands to them... but with that hammer they bang at every confounded door, and drive one crazy. Who gives them the right to do it, I should like to know?" He stood still listening.

"Do you think he will be long before he reaches here?" he asked Ephraim, in a frightened voice.

"Who, father?"

"The watch."

"He has already knocked next door but one."

Another minute, and the three strokes sounded on the door of the house. Ascher heaved a sigh of relief; he rubbed his hand across his forehead; it was wet with perspiration.

"Thank God!" he cried, as though addressing himself, "that 's over, and won't come again till to-morrow."

"Ephraim, my son!" he cried, with a sudden outburst of cheerfulness, accompanying the words with a thundering bang upon the table, "Ephraim, my son, you shall soon see what sort of a father you have. Now, you 're continually worrying your brains, walking your feet off, trying to get a skin, or praying some fool of a peasant to be good enough to sell you a bit of wool. Ephraim, my son, all that shall soon be changed, take my word for it. I 'll make you rich, and as for Viola, I 'll get her a husband—such a husband that all the girls in Bohemia will turn green and yellow with envy.... Ascher's daughter shall have as rich a dowry as the daughter of a Rothschild.... But there 's one thing, and one thing only, that I need, and then all will happen as I promise, in one night."

"And what is that, father!" asked Ephraim, with a slight shudder.

"Luck, luck, Ephraim, my son!" he shouted. "What is a man without luck? Put a man who has no luck in a chest full of gold; cover him with gold from head to foot; when he crawls out of it, and you search his pockets, you 'll find the gold has turned to copper."

"And will you have luck, father?" asked Ephraim.

"Ephraim, my son!" said the old gambler, With a cunning smile, "I 'll tell you something. There are persons whose whole powers are devoted to one object—how to win a fortune; in the same way as there are some who study to become doctors, and the like, so these study what we call luck... and from them I 've learned it."

He checked himself in sudden alarm lest he might have said too much, and looked searchingly at his son. A pure soul shone through Ephraim's open countenance, and showed his father that his real meaning had not been grasped.

"Never mind," he shouted loudly, waving his arms in the air, "what is to come no man can stop. Give me something to drink, Ephraim."

"Father," the latter faltered, "don't you think it will harm you?"

"Don't be a fool, Ephraim!" cried Ascher, "you don't know my constitution. Besides, did n't you say that to-day was a fast, when it is forbidden to eat anything? And have I asked you for any food? But as for drink, that's quite another thing! The birds of the air can't do without it, much less man!"

Ephraim saw that for that evening, at all events, it would not do to oppose his father. He walked into the kitchen where Viola was preparing supper, or rather breakfast, for after the fast this was the first meal of the day.

"Viola," he said, "make haste and fetch some fresh wine."

"For him?" cried Viola, pointing her finger almost threateningly in the direction of the sitting-room door.

"Don't, don't, Viola!" Ephraim implored.

"And you are fasting!" she said.

"Am I not also fasting for him?" said Ephraim.

With a full bottle in his hand Ephraim once more entered the room. He placed the wine upon the table, where the glasses from which Ascher had drunk in the morning were still standing.

"Where is Viola?" asked Ascher, who was again pacing the room with firm steps.

"She is busy cooking."

"Tell her she shall have a husband, and a dowry that will make half the girls in Bohemia turn green and yellow with envy."

Then he approached the table, and drank three brimming glasses, one after the other. "Now then," he said, as with his whole weight he dropped into the old arm-chair.... "Now I 'll have a good night's rest. I need strength and sharp eyes, and they are things which only sleep can give. Ephraim, my son," he continued after a while in thick, halting accents... "tell the watch—Simon is his name, I think—he can give six knocks instead of three upon the door, in the morning, he won't disturb me... and to Viola you can say I 'll find her a husband, handsomer than her eyes have ever beheld, and tell her on her wedding-day she shall wear pearls round her neck like those of a queen—no, no, like those of Gudule, her mother." A few moments later he was sound asleep.

It was the dead of night. All round reigned stillness and peace, the peace of night! What a gentle sound those words convey, a sound akin only to the word *home!* Fraught, like it, with sweetest balm, a fragrant flower from long-lost paradise. Thou art at rest, Ascher, and in safe shelter; the breathing of thy children is so restful, so tranquil....

Desist! desist! 'T is too late. Side by side with the peace of night, there dwell Spirits of Evil, the never-resting, vagrant, home-destroying guests, who enter unbidden into the human soul! Hark, the rustling of their raven-hued plumage! They take wing, they fly aloft; 't is the shriek of the vulture, swooping down upon the guileless dove.

Is there no eye to watch thee? Doth not thine own kin see thy foul deeds?

Desist!

'T is too late....

Open is the window, no grating noise has accompanied the unbolting of the shutter.... The evil spirits have taken care that the faintest sound shall die away... even the rough iron obeys their voices... it is they who have bidden: "Be silent; betray him not; he is one of us."

Even the key in the door of the old bureau is turned lightly and without noise. Groping fingers are searching for a bulky volume. Have they found it? Is there none there to cry in a voice of thunder: "Cursed be the father who stretches forth his desecrating hand towards the things that are his children's"?...

They *have* found it, the greedy fingers! and now, but a spring through the open window, and out into the night....

At that moment a sudden ray of light shines through a crack in the door of the room.... Swiftly the door opens, a girlish figure appears on the threshold, a lighted lamp in her hand. . . .

"Gudule!" he shrieks, horror-stricken, and falls senseless at her feet.

Ascher was saved. The terrible blow which had struck him down had not crushed the life from him. He was awakened. But when, after four weeks of gruesome fever and delirium, his mind had somewhat regained its equilibrium, his hair had turned white as snow, and his children beheld an old, decrepit man.

That which Viola had denied her father when he returned to them in all the vigor of his manhood, she now lavished upon him in his suffering and helplessness, with that concentrated power of love, the source of which is not human, but Divine. In the space of one night of terror, the merest bud of yesterday had suddenly blossomed forth into a flower of rarest beauty. Never did gentler hands cool a fever-heated brow, never did sweeter voice mingle its melody with the gruesome dreams of delirium.

On his sick-bed, lovingly tended by Ephraim and Viola, an ennobling influence gradually came over the heart of the old gambler, and so deeply touched it, that calm peace crowned his closing days. It was strange that the events of that memorable night, and the vicissitudes that had preceded it, had left no recollection behind, and his children took good care not to re-awaken, by the slightest hint, his sleeping memory.

A carriage drew up one day in front of Ascher's house. There has evidently been a splendid crop of oats this year. Uncle Gabriel has come. Uncle Gabriel has only lately assumed the additional character of father-in-law to Ephraim, for he declared that none but Eph-raim should be his pet daughter's husband. And now he has come for the purpose of having a confidential chat with Viola. There he sits, the kind-hearted, simple-minded man, every line of his honest face eloquent with good-humor and happiness, still guilty of an occasional violent onslaught upon his thighs. Viola still remains his "little spit-fire."

"Now, Viola, my little spit-fire," said he, "won't you yet allow me to talk to my Nathan about you? Upon my word, the boy can't bear the suspense any longer."

"Uncle," says Viola, and a crimson blush dyes her pale cheeks: "Uncle," she repeats, in a tone of such deep earnestness, that the laughing expression upon Gabriel's face instantly vanishes, "please don't talk to him at all. My place is with my father!"

And to all appearances Viola will keep her word.

Had she taken upon herself a voluntary penance for having, in her heart's bitter despair, presumed to abjure her faith in the *Sechûs* of her mother? Or was there yet another reason? The heart of woman is a strangely sensitive thing. It loves not to build its happiness upon the hidden ruins of another's life.

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