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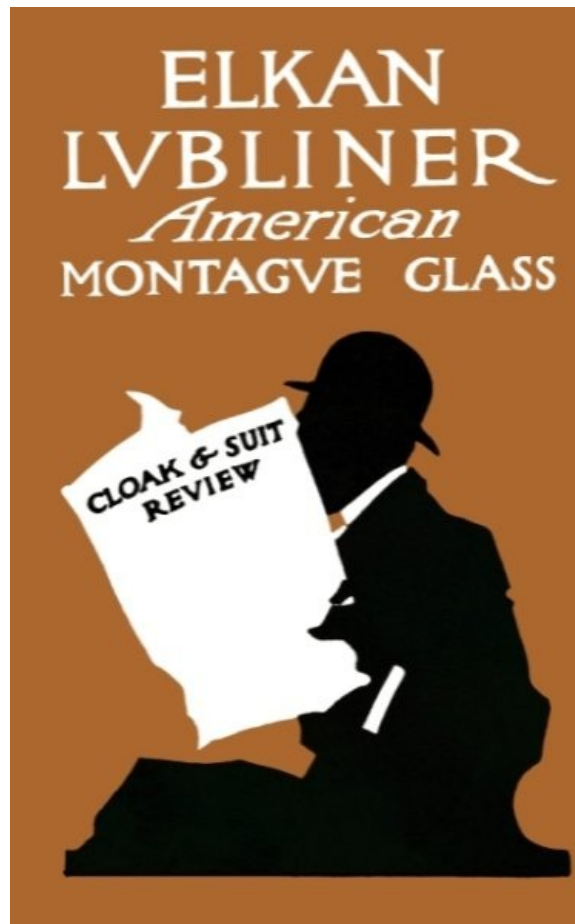
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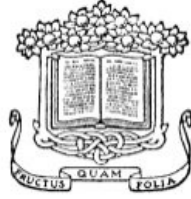
ELKAN LUBLINER, AMERICAN



ELKAN LUBLINER, AMERICAN

By MONTAGUE GLASS

AUTHOR OF
"Potash & Perlmutter," "Abe & Mawruss,"
"Object: Matrimony," etc.



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ELKAN LUBLINER, AMERICAN

ELKAN LUBLINER

CHAPTER ONE

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

POLATKIN & SCHEIKOWITZ CONSERVE THE HONOUR OF THEIR FAMILIES

"N U, PHILIP," cried Marcus Polatkin to his partner, Philip Scheikowitz, as they sat in the showroom of their place of business one June morning, "even if the letter does got bad news in it you shouldn't take on so hard. When a feller is making good over here and the *Leute im Russland* hears about it, understand me, they are all the time sending him bad news. I got in Minsk a cousin by the name Pincus Lubliner, understand me, which every time he writes me, y'understand, a relation dies on him and he wants me I should help pay funeral expenses. You might

think I was a Free Burial Society, the way that feller acts."

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"Sure, I know," Philip replied as he folded the letter away; "but this here is something else again. Mind you, with his own landlord he is sitting playing cards, Marcus, and comes a pistol through the window and the landlord drops dead."

"What have you got to do with the landlord?" Polatkin retorted. "If it was your brother-in-law was killed that's a difference matter entirely; but when a feller is a landlord *im Russland*, understand me, the least he could expect is that he gets killed once in a while."

"I ain't saying nothing about the landlord," Philip protested, "but my brother-in-law writes they are afraid for their lives there and I should send 'em quick the passage money for him and his boy Yosel to come to America."

Polatkin rose to his feet and glared angrily at his partner.

"Do you mean to told me you are going to send that loafer money he should come over here and bum round our shop yet?"

"What do you mean bum round our shop?" Philip demanded. "In the first place, Polatkin, I ain't said I am going to send him money, y'understand; and, in the second place, if I want to send the feller money to come over here, understand me, that's my business. Furthermore, when you are coming to call my brother-in-law a loafer and a bum, Polatkin, you don't know what you are talking about. His *Grossvater, olav hasholem*, was the great Harkavy Rav, Jochannon Borrochson."

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"I heard that same tale before," Polatkin interrupted. "A feller is a *Schlemiel* and a lowlife which he couldn't support his wife and children, understand me, and it always turns out his grandfather was a big rabbi in the old country. The way it is with me, Scheikowitz, just so soon as I am hearing a feller's grandfather was a big rabbi in the old country, Scheikowitz, I wouldn't got nothing more to do with him. If he works for you in your place, understand me, then he fools away your time telling the operators what a big rabbi his grandfather was; and if he's a customer, Scheikowitz, and you write him ten days after the account is overdue he should pay you what he owes you, instead he sends you a check, understand me, he comes down to the store and tells you what a big rabbi he's got it for a grandfather. *Gott sei Dank* I ain't got no *Rabonim* in my family."

"Sure, I know," Philip cried, "your father would be glad supposing he could sign his name even."

Polatkin shrugged his shoulders.

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"It would *oser* worry me if my whole family couldn't read or write. So long as I can sign my name and the money is in the bank to make the check good from five to ten thousand dollars, y'understand, what do I care if my grandfather would be deaf, dumb and blind, Scheikowitz? Furthermore, Scheikowitz, believe me I would sooner got one good live business man for a partner, Scheikowitz, than a million dead rabbis for a grandfather, and don't you forget it. So if you are going to spend the whole morning making a *Geschreierei* over that letter, Scheikowitz, we may as well close up the store *und fertig*."

With this ultimatum Marcus Polatkin walked rapidly away toward the cutting room, while Philip Scheikowitz sought the foreman of their manufacturing department and borrowed a copy of a morning paper. It was printed in the vernacular of the lower East Side, and Philip bore it to his desk, where for more than half an hour he alternately consulted the column of steamboat advertising and made figures on the back of an envelope. These represented the cost of a journey for two persons from Minsk to New York, based on Philip's hazy recollection of his own emigration, fifteen years before, combined with his experience as travelling salesman in the Southern States for a popular-price line of pants.

At length he concluded his calculations and with a heavy sigh he put on his hat just as his partner returned from the cutting room.

"Nu!" Polatkin cried. "Where are you going now?"

"I am going for a half an hour somewheres," Philip replied.

"What for?" Polatkin demanded.

"What for is my business," Philip answered.

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"Your business?" Polatkin exclaimed. "At nine o'clock in the morning one partner puts on his hat and starts to go out, *verstehst du*, and when the other partner asks him where he is going it's his business, *sagt er!* What do you come down here at all for, Scheikowitz?"

"I am coming down here because I got such a partner, Polatkin, which if I was to miss one day even I wouldn't know where I stand at all," Scheikowitz retorted.

"Furthermore, you shouldn't worry yourself, Polatkin; for my own sake I would come back just so soon as I could."

Despite the offensive repartee that accompanied Philip's departure, however, he returned to find Polatkin entirely restored to good humour by a thousand-dollar order that had arrived in the ten-o'clock mail; and as Philip himself felt the glow of conscious virtue attendant upon a good deed economically performed, he immediately fell into friendly conversation with his partner.

"Well, Marcus," he said, "I sent 'em the passage tickets, and if you ain't agreeable that Borrochson comes to work here I could easy find him a job somewheres else."

"If we got an opening here, Philip, what is it skin off my face if the feller comes to work here," Polatkin answered, "so long as he gets the same pay like somebody else?"

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"What could I do, Marcus?" Philip rejoined, as he took off his hat and coat preparatory to plunging into the assortment of a pile of samples. "My own flesh and blood I must got to look out for, ain't it? And if my sister Leah, *olav hasholem*, would be alive to-day I would of got 'em all over here long since ago already. Ain't I am right?"

Polatkin shrugged. "In family matters one partner couldn't advise the other at all," he said.

"Sure, I know," Philip concluded, "but when a feller has got such a partner which he is a smart, up-to-date feller and means good by his partner, understand me, then I got a right to take an advice from him about family matters, ain't it?"

And with these honeyed words the subject of the Borrochson family's assisted emigration was dismissed until the arrival of another letter from Minsk some four weeks later.

"Well, Marcus," Philip cried after he had read it, "he'll be here Saturday."

"Who'll be here Saturday?" Polatkin asked.

"Borrochson," Philip replied; "and the boy comes with him."

Polatkin raised his eyebrows.

"I'll tell you the honest truth, Philip," he said—"I'm surprised to hear it."

"What d'ye mean you're surprised to hear it?" Philip asked. "Ain't I am sending him the passage tickets?"

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"Sure, I know you are sending him the tickets," Polatkin continued, "but everybody says the same, Philip, and that's why I am telling you, Philip, I'm surprised to hear he is coming; because from what everybody is telling me it's a miracle the feller ain't sold the tickets and gambled away the money."

"What are you talking nonsense, selling the tickets!" Philip cried indignantly. "The feller is a decent, respectable feller even if he would be a poor man."

"He ain't so poor," Polatkin retorted. "A thief need never got to be poor, Scheikowitz."

"A thief!" Philip exclaimed.

"That's what I said," Polatkin went on, "and a smart thief too, Scheikowitz. Gifkin says he could steal the buttons from a policeman's pants and pass 'em off for real money, understand me, and they couldn't catch him anyhow."

"Gifkin?" Philip replied.

"Meyer Gifkin which he is working for us now two years, Scheikowitz, and a decent, respectable feller," Polatkin said relentlessly. "If Gifkin tells you something you could rely on it, Scheikowitz, and he is telling me he lives in Minsk one house by the other with this feller Borrochson, and such a lowlife gambler bum as this here feller Borrochson is you wouldn't believe at all."

"Meyer Gifkin says that?" Philip gasped.

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"So sure as he is working here as assistant cutter," Polatkin continued. "And if you think that this here feller Borrochson comes to work in our place, Scheikowitz, you've got another think coming, and that's all I got to say."

But Philip had not waited to hear the conclusion of his partner's ultimatum, and by the time Polatkin had finished Philip was at the threshold of the cutting room.

"Gifkin!" he bellowed. "I want to ask you something a question."

The assistant cutter laid down his shears.

"What could I do for you, Mr. Scheikowitz?" he said respectfully.

"You could put on your hat and coat and get out of here before I kick you out," Philip replied without disclosing the nature of his abandoned question. "And, furthermore, if my brother-in-law Borrochson is such a lowlife bum which you say he is, when he is coming here Saturday he would pretty near kill you, because, Gifkin, a lowlife gambler and a thief could easily be a murderer too. *Aber* if he ain't a such thief and gambler which you say he is, then I would make you arrested."

"Me arrested?" Gifkin cried. "What for?"

"Because for calling some one a thief which he ain't one you could sit in prison," Scheikowitz concluded. "So you should get right out of here before I am sending for a policeman."

"But, Mr. Scheikowitz," Gifkin protested, "who did I told it your brother-in-law is a thief and a gambler?"

[Pg 11] "You know very well who you told it," Scheikowitz retorted. "You told it my partner, Gifkin. That's who you told it."

"But I says to him he shouldn't tell nobody," Gifkin continued. "Is it my fault your partner is such a *Klatsch*? And, anyhow, Mr. Scheikowitz, supposing I did say your brother-in-law is a gambler and a thief, I know what I'm talking about; and, furthermore, if I got to work in a place where I couldn't open my mouth at all, Mr. Scheikowitz, I don't want to work there, and that's all there is to it."

He assumed his hat and coat in so dignified a manner that for the moment Scheikowitz felt as though he were losing an old and valued employee, and this impression was subsequently heightened by Polatkin's behaviour when he heard of Gifkin's departure. Indeed a casual observer might have supposed that Polatkin's wife, mother, and ten children had all perished in a common disaster and that the messenger had been indiscreet in breaking the news, for during a period of almost half an hour Polatkin rocked and swayed in his chair and beat his forehead with his clenched fist.

"You are shedding my blood," he moaned to Scheikowitz.

[Pg 12] "What the devil you are talking nonsense!" Scheikowitz declared. "The way you are acting you would think we are paying the feller five thousand dollars a year instead of fifteen dollars a week."

"It ain't what a feller makes from you, Scheikowitz; it's what you make from him what counts," he wailed. "Gifkin was really worth to us a year five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand buttons!" Scheikowitz cried. "You are making a big fuss about nothing at all."

But when the next day Polatkin and Scheikowitz heard that Gifkin had found employment with their closest competitors Philip began to regret the haste with which he had discharged his assistant cutter, and he bore his partner's upbraidings in chastened silence. Thus by Friday afternoon Polatkin had exhausted his indignation.

"Well, Philip," he said as closing-time approached, "it ain't no use crying over sour milk. What time does the boat arrive?"

"To-night," Philip replied, "and the passengers comes off the island to-morrow. Why did you ask?"

"Because," Marcus said with the suspicion of a blush, "Saturday ain't such a busy day and I was thinking I would go over with you. Might I could help you out."

[Pg 13] Philip's trip with his partner to Ellis Island the following morning tried his temper to the point where he could barely refrain from inquiring if the expected immigrant were his relation or Polatkin's, for during the entire journey Marcus busied himself making plans for the Borrochsons' future.

"The first thing you got to look out for with a greenhorn, Philip," he said, "is that you learn 'em good the English language. If a feller couldn't talk he couldn't do nothing, understand me, so with the young feller especially you shouldn't give him no encouragement to keep on talking *Manerloschen*." Philip nodded politely.

"Look at me for instance," Marcus continued; "six months after I landed, Philip, I am speaking English already just so good as a doctor or a lawyer. And how did I done it? To night school I am going only that they should learn me to write, *verstehst du, aber* right at the start old man Feinrubin takes me in hand and he talks to me only in English. And if I am understanding him, *schon gut*; and if I don't understand him

then he gives me a *potch* on the side of the head, Philip, which the next time he says it I could understand him good. And that's the way you should do with the young feller, Philip. I bet yer he would a damsight sooner learn English as get a *Schlag* every ten minutes."

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Again Philip nodded, and by the time they had arrived at the enclosure for the relations of immigrants he had become so accustomed to the hum of Marcus' conversation that he refrained from uttering even a perfunctory "Uh-huh." They sat on a hard bench for more than half an hour, while the attendants bawled the common surnames of every country from Ireland to Asiatic Turkey, and at length the name Borrochson brought Philip to his feet. He rushed to the gateway, followed by Marcus, just as a stunted lad of fifteen emerged, staggering under the burden of a huge cloth-covered bundle.

"Uncle Philip," the lad cried, dropping the bundle. Then clutching Marcus round the neck he showered kisses on his cheeks until Philip dragged him away.

"I am your uncle," Philip said in *Jüdisch Deutsch*. "Where is your father?"

Without answering the question Yosel Borrochson took a stranglehold of Philip and subjected him to a second and more violent osculation. It was some minutes before Philip could disengage himself from his nephew's embrace and then he led him none too gently to a seat.

"Never mind the kissing," he said; "where's your father?"

"He is not here," Yosel Borrochson replied with a vivid blush.

"I see he is not here," Philip rejoined. "Where is he?"

"He is in Minsk," said young Borrochson.

"In Minsk?" Philip and Marcus cried with one voice, and then Marcus sat down on the bench and rocked to and fro in an ecstasy of mirth.

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"In Minsk!" he gasped hysterically, and slapped his thighs by way of giving expression to his emotions. "Did you ever hear the like?"

"Polatkin, do me the favour," Philip begged, "and don't make a damn fool of yourself."

"What did I told you?" Polatkin retorted, but Philip turned to his nephew.

"What did your father do with the ticket and the money I sent him?" he asked.

"He sold the ticket and he used all the money for the wedding," the boy replied.

"The wedding?" Philip exclaimed. "What wedding?"

"The wedding with the widow," said the boy.

"The widow?" Philip and Marcus shouted in unison. "What widow?"

"The landlord's widow," the boy answered shyly.

And then as there seemed nothing else to do he buried his face in his hands and wept aloud.

"Nu, Philip," Marcus said, sitting down beside young Borrochson, "could the boy help it if his father is a *Gane!*?"

Philip made no reply, and presently Marcus stooped and picked up the bundle.

"Come," he said gently, "let's go up to the store."

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The journey uptown was not without its unpleasant features, for the size of the bundle not only barred them from both subway and elevated, but provoked a Broadway car conductor to exhibit what Marcus considered to be so biased and illiberal an attitude toward unrestricted immigration that he barely avoided a cerebral hemorrhage in resenting it. They finally prevailed on the driver of a belt-line car to accept them as passengers, and nearly half an hour elapsed before they arrived at Desbrosses Street; but after a dozen conductors in turn had declined to honour their transfer tickets they made the rest of their journey on foot.

Philip and young Borrochson carried the offending bundle, for Marcus flatly declined to assist them. Indeed with every block his enthusiasm waned, so that when they at length reached Wooster Street his feelings toward his partner's nephew had undergone a complete change.

"Don't fetch that thing in here," he said as Philip and young Borrochson entered the showroom with the bundle; "leave it in the shop. You got no business to bring the young feller up here in the first place."

"What do you mean bring him up here?" Philip cried. "If you wouldn't butt in at all I intended to take him to my sister's a cousin on Pitt Street."

Marcus threw his hat on a sample table and sat down heavily.

"That's all the gratitude I am getting!" he declared with bitter emphasis. "Right in the busy season I dropped everything to help you out, and you turn on me like this."

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He rose to his feet suddenly, and seizing the bundle with both hands he flung it violently through the doorway.

"Take him to Pitt Street," he said. "Take him to the devil for all I care. I am through with him."

But Philip conducted his nephew no farther than round the corner on Canal Street, and when an hour later Yosel Borrochson returned with his uncle his top-boots had been discarded forever, while his wrinkled, semi-military garb had been exchanged for a neat suit of Oxford gray. Moreover, both he and Philip had consumed a hearty meal of coffee and rolls and were accordingly prepared to take a more cheerful outlook upon life, especially Philip.

"*Bleib du hier*," he said as he led young Borrochson to a chair in the cutting room. "*Ich Komm bald zurück*."

Then mindful of his partner's advice he broke into English. "Shtay here," he repeated in loud, staccato accents. "I would be right back. *Verstehst du?*"

"Yess-ss," Yosel replied, uttering his first word of English.

With a delighted grin Philip walked to the showroom, where Polatkin sat wiping away the crumbs of a belated luncheon of two dozen zwieback and a can of coffee.

"Nu," he said conciliatingly, "what is it now?"

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"Marcus," Philip began with a nod of his head in the direction of the cutting room, "I want to show you something a picture."

"A picture!" Polatkin repeated as he rose to his feet. "What do you mean a picture?"

"Come," Philip said; "I'll show you."

He led the way to the cutting room, where Yosel sat awaiting his uncle's return.

"What do you think of him now?" Philip demanded. "Ain't he a good-looking young feller?"

Marcus shrugged in a non-committal manner.

"Look what a bright eye he got it," Philip insisted. "You could tell by looking at him only that he comes from a good family."

"He looks a boy like any other boy," said Marcus.

"But even if no one would told you, Marcus, you could see from his forehead yet—and the big head he's got it—you could see that somewheres is *Rabonim* in the family."

"Yow!" Marcus exclaimed. "You could just so much see from his head that his grandfather is a rabbi as you could see from his hands that his father is a crook." He turned impatiently away. "So instead you should be talking a lot of nonsense, Philip, you should set the boy to work sweeping the floor," he continued. "Also for a beginning we would start him in at three dollars a week, and if the boy gets worth it pretty soon we could give him four."

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In teaching his nephew the English language Philip Scheikowitz adopted no particular system of pedagogy, but he combined the methods of Ollendorf, Chardenal, Ahn and Polatkin so successfully that in a few days Joseph possessed a fairly extensive vocabulary. To be sure, every other word was acquired at the cost of a clump over the side of the head, but beyond a slight ringing of the left ear that persisted for nearly six months the Polatkin method of instruction vindicated itself, and by the end of the year Joseph's speech differed in no way from that of his employers.

"Ain't it something which you really could say is wonderful the way that boy gets along?" Philip declared to his partner, as the first anniversary of Joseph's landing approached. "Honestly, Marcus, that boy talks English like he would be born here already."

"Sure, I know," Marcus agreed. "He's got altogether too much to say for himself. Only this morning he tells me he wants a raise to six dollars a week."

"Could you blame him?" Philip asked mildly. "He's doing good work here, Marcus."

"Yow! he's doing good work!" Marcus exclaimed. "He's fresh like anything, Scheikowitz. If you give him the least little encouragement, Scheikowitz, he would stand there and talk to you all day yet."

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"Not to me he don't," Philip retorted. "Lots of times I am asking him questions about

the folks in the old country and always he tells me: 'With greenhorns like them I don't bother myself at all.' Calls his father a greenhorn yet!"

Marcus flapped his right hand in a gesture of impatience.

"He could call his father a whole lot worse," he said. "Why, that *Ganef* ain't even wrote you at all since the boy comes over here. Not only he's a crook, Scheikowitz, but he's got a heart like a brick."

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"What difference does it make if he is a crook?" he rejoined. "The boy's all right anyway. Yes, Marcus, the boy is something which you could really say is a jewel."

"*Geh weg!*" Marcus cried disgustedly—"a jewel!"

"That's what I said," Philip continued—"a jewel. Tell me, Marcus, how many boys would you find it which they are getting from three to five dollars a week and in one year saves up a hundred dollars, y'understand, and comes to me only this morning and says to me I should take the money for what it costs to keep him while he is learning the language, and for buying him his clothes when he first comes here. Supposing his father is a crook, Marcus, am I right or wrong?"

[Pg 21] "Talk is cheap, Scheikowitz," Marcus retorted. "He only says he would pay you the money, Scheikowitz, ain't it?"

Philip dug down into his pocket and produced a roll of ragged one and two dollar bills, which he flung angrily on to a sample table.

"Count 'em," he said.

Marcus shrugged again.

"What is it my business?" he said. "And anyhow, Scheikowitz, I must say I'm surprised at you. A poor boy saves up a hundred dollars out of the little we are paying him here, and actually you are taking the money from him. Couldn't you afford it to spend on the boy a hundred dollars?"

"Sure I could," Philip replied as he pocketed the bills. "Sure I could and I'm going to too. I'm going to take this here money and put it in the bank for the boy, with a hundred dollars to boot, Polatkin, and when the boy gets to be twenty-one he would anyhow got in savings bank a couple hundred dollars."

Polatkin nodded shamefacedly.

[Pg 22] "Furthermore, Polatkin," Philip continued, "if you got such a regard for the boy which you say you got it, understand me, I would like to make you a proposition. Ever since Gifkin leaves us, y'understand, we got in our cutting room one *Schlemiel* after another. Ain't it? Only yesterday we got to fire that young feller we took on last week, understand me, and if we get somebody else in his place to-day, Polatkin, the chances is we would get rid of him to-morrow, and so it goes."

Again Polatkin nodded.

"So, therefore, what is the use talking, Polatkin?" Philip concluded. "Let us take Joe Borrochson and learn him he should be a cutter, and in six months' time, Polatkin, I bet yer he would be just so good a cutter as anybody."

At this juncture Polatkin raised his hand with the palm outward.

"Stop right there, Scheikowitz," he said. "You are making a fool of yourself, Scheikowitz, because, Scheikowitz, admitting for the sake of no arguments about it that the boy is a good boy, understand me, after all he's only a boy, ain't it, and if you are coming to make a sixteen-year-old boy an assistant cutter, y'understand, the least that we could expect is that our customers fires half our goods back at us."

"But——" Scheikowitz began.

"But, nothing, Scheikowitz," Polatkin interrupted. "This morning I seen it Meyer Gifkin on Canal Street and he ain't working for them suckers no more; and I says to him is he willing to come back here at the same wages, and he says yes, providing you would see that this here feller Borrochson wouldn't pretty near kill him."

"What do you mean pretty near kill him?" Scheikowitz cried. "Do you mean to say he is afraid of a boy like Joe Borrochson?"

[Pg 23] "Not Joe Borrochson," Polatkin replied. "He is all the time thinking that your brother-in-law Borrochson comes over here with his boy and is working in our place yet, and when I told him that that crook didn't come over at all Meyer says that's the first he hears about it or he would have asked for his job back long since already. So he says he would come in here to see us this afternoon."

"But——" Scheikowitz began again.

"Furthermore," Polatkin continued hastily, "if I would got a nephew in my place, Scheikowitz, I would a damsight sooner he stays working on the stock till he knows enough to sell goods on the road as that he learns to be a cutter. Ain't it?"

Scheikowitz sighed heavily by way of surrender.

"All right, Polatkin," he said; "if you're so dead set on taking this here feller Gifkin back go ahead. But one thing I must got to tell you: If you are taking a feller back which you fired once, understand me, he acts so independent you couldn't do nothing with him at all."

"Leave that to me," Polatkin said, as he started for the cutting room, and when Scheikowitz followed him he found that Gifkin had already arrived.

"*Wie gehts*, Mister Scheikowitz?" Gifkin cried, and Philip received the salutation with a distant nod.

"I hope you don't hold no hard feelings for me," Gifkin began.

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"Me hold hard feelings for you?" Scheikowitz exclaimed. "I guess you forget yourself, Gifkin. A boss don't hold no hard feelings for a feller which is working in the place, Gifkin; otherwise the feller gets fired and stays fired, Gifkin."

At this juncture Polatkin in the rôle of peacemaker created a diversion.

"Joe," he called to young Borrochson, who was passing the cutting-room door, "come in here a minute."

He turned to Gifkin as Joe entered.

"I guess you seen this young feller before?" he said.

Gifkin looked hard at Joe for a minute.

"I think I seen him before somewheres," he replied.

"Sure you seen him before," Polatkin rejoined. "His name is Borrochson."

"Borrochson!" Gifkin cried, and Joe, whose colour had heightened at the close scrutiny to which he had been subjected, began to grow pale.

"Sure, Yosel Borrochson, the son of your old neighbour," Polatkin explained, but Gifkin shook his head slowly.

"That ain't Yosel Borrochson," he declared, and then it was that Polatkin and Scheikowitz first noticed Joe's embarrassment. Indeed even as they gazed at him his features worked convulsively once or twice and he dropped unconscious to the floor.

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In the scene of excitement that ensued Gifkin's avowed discovery was temporarily forgotten, but when Joe was again restored to consciousness Polatkin drew Gifkin aside and requested an explanation.

"What do you mean the boy ain't Yosel Borrochson?" he demanded.

"I mean the boy ain't Yosel Borrochson," Gifkin replied deliberately. "I know this here boy, Mr. Polatkin, and, furthermore, Borrochson's boy is got one bum eye, which he gets hit with a stone in it when he was only four years old already. Don't I know it, Mr. Polatkin, when with my own eyes I seen this here boy throw the stone yet?"

"Well, then, who is this boy?" Marcus Polatkin insisted.

"He's a boy by the name Lubliner," Gifkin replied, "which his father was Pincus Lubliner, also a crook, Mr. Polatkin, which he would steal anything from a toothpick to an oitermobile, understand me."

"Pincus Lubliner!" Polatkin repeated hoarsely.

"That's who I said," Gifkin continued, rushing headlong to his destruction. "Pincus Lubliner, which honestly, Mr. Polatkin, there's nothing that feller wouldn't do—a regular *Rosher* if ever there was one."

For one brief moment Polatkin's eyes flashed angrily, and then with a resounding smack his open hand struck Gifkin's cheek.

"Liar!" he shouted. "What do you mean by it?"

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Scheikowitz, who had been tenderly bathing Joe Borrochson's head with water, rushed forward at the sound of the blow.

"Marcus," he cried, "for Heaven's sake, what are you doing? You shouldn't kill the feller just because he makes a mistake and thinks the boy ain't Joe Borrochson."

"He makes too many mistakes," Polatkin roared. "Calls Pincus Lubliner a crook and a murderer yet, which his mother was my own father's a sister. Did you ever hear the like?"

He made a threatening gesture toward Gifkin, who cowered in a chair.

"Say, lookyhere, Marcus," Scheikowitz asked, "what has Pincus Lubliner got to do with this?"

"He's got a whole lot to do with it," Marcus replied, and then his eyes rested on Joe Borrochson, who had again lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Oo-ee!" Marcus cried. "The poor boy is dead."

He swept Philip aside and ran to the water-cooler, whence he returned with the drip-bucket brimming over. This he emptied on Joe Borrochson's recumbent form, and after a quarter of an hour the recovery was permanent. In the meantime Philip had interviewed Meyer Gifkin to such good purpose that when he entered the firm's office with Meyer Gifkin at his heels he was fairly spluttering with rage.

"Thief!" he yelled. "Out of here before I make you arrested."

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"Who the devil you think you are talking to?" Marcus demanded.

"I am talking to Joseph Borrochson," Scheikowitz replied. "That's who I'm talking to."

"Well, there ain't no such person here," Polatkin retorted. "There's here only a young fellow by the name Elkan Lubliner, which he is my own father's sister a grandson, and he ain't no more a thief as you are."

"Ain't he?" Philip retorted. "Well, all I can say is he is a thief and his whole family is thieves, the one worser as the other."

Marcus glowered at his partner.

"You should be careful what you are speaking about," he said. "Maybe you ain't aware that this here boy's grandfather on his father's side was *Reb* Mosha, the big *Lubliner Rav*, a *Chosid* and a *Tzadek* if ever there was one."

"What difference does that make?" Philip demanded. "He is stealing my brother-in-law's passage ticket anyhow."

"I didn't steal it," the former Joseph Borrochson cried. "My father paid him good money for it, because Borrochson says he wanted it to marry the widow with; and you also I am paying a hundred dollars."

"Yow! Your father paid him good money for it!" Philip jeered. "A *Ganef* like your father is stealing the money, too, I bet yer."

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"*Oser a Stück*," Polatkin declared. "I am sending him the money myself to help bury his aunt, Mrs. Lebowitz."

"You sent him the money?" Philip cried. "And your own partner you didn't tell nothing about it at all!"

"What is it your business supposing I am sending money to the old country?" Marcus retorted. "Do you ask me an advice when you are sending away money to the old country?"

"But the feller didn't bury his aunt at all," Philip said.

"Yes, he did too," the former Joseph Borrochson protested. "Instead of a hundred dollars the funeral only costs fifty. Anybody could make an overestimate. Ain't it?"

Marcus nodded.

"The boy is right, Philip," he said, "and anyhow what does this loafer come butting in here for?"

As he spoke he indicated Meyer Gifkin with a jerk of the chin.

"He ain't butting in here," Philip declared; "he comes in here because I told him to. I want you should make an end of this nonsense, Polatkin, and hire a decent assistant cutter. Gifkin is willing to come back for twenty dollars a week."

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"He is, is he?" Marcus cried. "Well, if he was willing to come back for twenty dollars a week why didn't he come back before? Now it's too late; I got other plans. Besides, twenty dollars is too much."

"You know very well why I ain't come back before, Mr. Polatkin," Gifkin protested. "I was afraid for my life from that murderer Borrochson."

Philip scowled suddenly.

"My partner is right, Gifkin," he said. "Twenty dollars is too much."

"No, it ain't," Gifkin declared. "If I would be still working for you, Mr. Scheikowitz, I would be getting more as twenty dollars by now. And was it my fault you are firing me? By rights I should have sued you in the courts yet."

"What d'ye mean sue us in the courts?" Philip exclaimed. He was growing increasingly angry, but Gifkin heeded no warning.

"Because you are firing me just for saying a crook is a crook," Gifkin replied, "and here lately you found out for yourself this here Borrochson is nothing but a *Schwindler*—a *Ganef*."

"What are you talking about—a *Schwindler*?" Philip cried, now thoroughly aroused. "Ain't you heard the boy says Borrochson is marrying the landlord's widow? Could a man get married on wind, Gifkin?"

"Yow! he married the landlord's widow!" Gifkin said. "I bet yer that crook gambles away the money; and, anyhow, could you believe anything this here boy tells you, Mr. Scheikowitz?"

[Pg 30] The question fell on deaf ears, however, for at the repetition of the word crook Philip flung open the office door.

"Out of here," he roared, "before I kick you out."

Simultaneously Marcus grabbed the luckless Gifkin by the collar, and just what occurred between the office and the stairs could be deduced from the manner in which Marcus limped back to the office.

"*Gott sei Dank* we are rid of the fellow," he said as he came in.

Although Philip Scheikowitz arrived at his place of business at half-past seven the following morning he found that Marcus and Elkan Lubliner had preceded him, for when he entered the showroom Marcus approached with a broad grin on his face and pointed to the cutting room, where stood Elkan Lubliner. In the boy's right hand was clutched a pair of cutter's shears, and guided by chalked lines he was laboriously slicing up a roll of sample paper.

"Ain't he a picture?" Marcus exclaimed.

"A picture!" Philip repeated. "What d'ye mean a picture?"

"Why, the way he stands there with them shears, Philip," Marcus replied. "He's really what you could call a born cutter if ever there was one."

"A cutter!" Philip cried.

[Pg 31] "Sure," Marcus went on. "It's never too soon for a young feller to learn all sides of his trade, Philip. He's been long enough on the stock. Now he should learn to be a cutter, and I bet yer in six months' time yet he would be just so good a cutter as anybody."

Philip was too dazed to make any comment before Marcus obtained a fresh start.

"A smart boy like him, Philip, learns awful quick," he said. "Ain't it funny how blood shows up? Now you take a boy like him which he comes from decent, respectable family, Philip, and he's got real gumption. I think I told you his grandfather on his father's side was a big rabbi, the *Lubliner Rav*."

Philip nodded.

"And even if I didn't told you," Marcus went on, "you could tell it from his face."

Again Philip nodded.

"And another thing I want to talk to you about," Marcus said, hastening after him: "the hundred dollars the boy gives you you should keep, Philip. And if you are spending more than that on the boy I would make it good."

Philip dug down absently into his trousers pocket and brought forth the roll of dirty bills.

"Take it," he said, throwing it toward his partner. "I don't want it."

"What d'ye mean you don't want it?" Marcus cried.

[Pg 32] "I mean I ain't got no hard feelings against the boy," Philip replied. "I am thinking it over all night, and I come to the conclusion so long as I started in being the boy's uncle I would continue that way. So you should put the money in the savings bank like I says yesterday."

"But——" Marcus protested.

"But nothing," Philip interrupted. "Do what I am telling you."

Marcus blinked hard and cleared his throat with a great, rasping noise.

"After all," he said huskily, "it don't make no difference how many crooks *oder* *Ganevim* is in a feller's family, Philip, so long as he's got a good, straight business man for a partner."

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CHAPTER TWO

APPENWEIER'S ACCOUNT

HOW ELKAN LUBLINER GRADUATED INTO SALESMANSHIP

"**W**HEN I hire a salesman, Mr. Klugfels," said Marcus Polatkin, senior partner of Polatkin & Scheikowitz, "I hire him because he's a salesman, not because he's a nephew."

"But it don't do any harm for a salesman to have an uncle whose concern would buy in one season from you already ten thousand dollars goods, Mr. Polatkin," Klugfels insisted. "Furthermore, Harry is a bright, smart boy; and you can take it from me, Mr. Polatkin, not alone he would get my trade, but us buyers is got a whole lot of influence one with the other, understand me; so, if there's any other concern you haven't on your books at present, you could rely on me I should do my best for Harry and you."

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Thus spoke Mr. Felix Klugfels, buyer for Appenweier & Murray's Thirty-second Street store, on the first Monday of January; and in consequence on the second Monday of January Harry Flaxberg came to work as city salesman for Polatkin & Scheikowitz. He also maintained the rôle of party of the second part in a contract drawn by Henry D. Feldman, whose skill in such matters is too well known for comment here. Sufficient to say it fixed Harry Flaxberg's compensation at thirty dollars a week and moderate commissions. At Polatkin's request, however, the document was so worded that it excluded Flaxberg from selling any of the concerns already on Polatkin & Scheikowitz's books; for not only did he doubt Flaxberg's ability as a salesman, but he was quite conscious of the circumstance that, save for the acquisition of Appenweier & Murray's account, there was no need of their hiring a city salesman at all, since the scope of their business operations required only one salesman—to wit, as the lawyers say, Marcus Polatkin himself. On the other hand, Klugfels had insisted upon the safeguarding of his nephew's interests, so that the latter was reasonably certain of a year's steady employment. Hence, when, on the first Monday of February, Appenweier & Murray dispensed with the services of Mr. Klugfels before he had had the opportunity of bestowing even one order on his nephew as a mark of his favour, the business premises of Polatkin & Scheikowitz became forthwith a house of mourning. From the stricken principals down to and including the shipping clerk nothing else was spoken of or thought about for a period of more than two weeks. Neither was it a source of much consolation to Marcus Polatkin when he heard that Klugfels had been supplanted by Max Lapin, a third cousin of Leon Sammet of the firm of Sammet Brothers.

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"Ain't it terrible the way people is related nowadays?" he said to Scheikowitz, who had just read aloud the news of Max Lapin's hiring in the columns of the *Daily Cloak and Suit Record*.

"Honestly, Scheikowitz, if a feller ain't got a lot of retailers *oder* buyers for distance relations, understand me, he might just so well go out of business and be done with it!"

Scheikowitz threw down the paper impatiently.

"That's where you are making a big mistake, Polatkin," he said. "A feller which he expects to do business with relations is just so good as looking for trouble. You could never depend on relations that they are going to keep on buying goods from you, Polatkin. The least little thing happens between relations, understand me, and they are getting right away enemies for life; while, if it was just between friends, Polatkin, one friend makes for the other a blue eye, understand me, and in two weeks' time they are just so good friends as ever. So, even if Appenweier & Murray wouldn't fire him, y'understand, Klugfels would have dumped this young feller on us anyway."

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As he spoke he looked through the office door toward the showroom, where Harry Flaxberg sat with his feet cocked up on a sample table midway in the perusal of the sporting page.

"Flaxberg," Scheikowitz cried, "what are we showing here anyway—garments *oder* shoes? You are ruining our sample tables the way you are acting!"

Flaxberg replaced his feet on the floor and put down his paper.

"It's time some one ruined them tables on you, Mr. Scheikowitz," he said. "With the junk fixtures you got it here I'm ashamed to bring a customer into the place at all."

"That's all right," Scheikowitz retorted; "for all the customers you are bringing in here, Flaxberg, we needn't got no fixtures at all. Come inside the office—my partner wants to speak to you a few words something."

Flaxberg rose leisurely to his feet and, carefully shaking each leg in turn to restore the unwrinkled perfection of his trousers, walked toward the office.

"Tell me, Flaxberg," Polatkin cried as he entered, "what are you going to do about this here account of Appenweier & Murray's?"

"What am I going to do about it?" Flaxberg repeated. "Why, what could I do about it? Every salesman is liable to lose one account, Mr. Polatkin."

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"Sure, I know," Polatkin answered; "but most every other salesman is got some other accounts to fall back on. Whereas if a salesman is just got one account, Flaxberg, and he loses it, understand me, then he ain't a salesman no longer, Flaxberg. Right away he becomes only a loafer, Flaxberg, and the best thing he could do, understand me, is to go and find a job somewheres else."

"Not when he's got a contract, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg retorted promptly. "And specially a contract which the boss fixes up himself—ain't it?"

Scheikowitz nodded and scowled savagely at his partner.

"Listen here to me, Flaxberg," Polatkin cried. "Do you mean to told me that, even if a salesman would got ever so much a crazy contract, understand me, it allows the salesman he should sit all the time doing nothing in the showroom without we got a right to fire him?"

"Well," Flaxberg replied calmly, "it gives him the privilege to go out to lunch once in a while."

He pulled down his waistcoat with exaggerated care and turned on his heel.

"So I would be back in an hour," he concluded; "and if any customers come in and ask for me tell 'em to take a seat till I am coming back."

The two partners watched him until he put on his hat and coat in the rear of the showroom and then Polatkin rose to his feet.

"Flaxberg," he cried, "wait a minute!"

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Flaxberg returned to the office and nonchalantly lit a cigarette.

"Listen here to me, Flaxberg," Polatkin began. "Take from us a hundred and fifty dollars and quit!"

Flaxberg continued the operation of lighting his cigarette and blew a great cloud of smoke before replying.

"What for a piker do you think I am anyhow?" he asked.

"What d'ye mean—piker?" Polatkin said. "A hundred and fifty ain't to be sneezed at, Flaxberg."

"Ain't it?" Flaxberg retorted. "Well, with me, I got a more delicate nose as most people, Mr. Polatkin. I sneeze at everything under five hundred dollars—and that's all there is to it."

Once more he turned on his heel and walked out of the office; but this time his progress toward the stairs was more deliberate, for, despite his defiant attitude, Flaxberg's finances were at low ebb owing to a marked reversal of form exhibited the previous day in the third race at New Orleans. Moreover, he felt confident that a judicious investment of a hundred and fifty dollars would net him that very afternoon at least five hundred dollars, if any reliance were to be placed on the selection of Merlando, the eminent sporting writer of the *Morning Wireless*.

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Consequently he afforded every opportunity for Marcus to call him back, and he even paused at the factory door and applied a lighted match to his already burning cigarette. The expected summons failed, however, and instead he was nearly precipitated to the foot of the stairs by no less a person than Elkan Lubliner.

"Excuse me, Mr. Flaxberg," Elkan said. "I ain't seen you at all."

Flaxberg turned suddenly, but at the sight of Elkan his anger evaporated as he recalled a piece of gossip retailed by Sam Markulies, the shipping clerk, to the effect that, despite his eighteen years, Elkan had at least two savings-bank accounts and kept in his pocket a bundle of bills as large as a roll of piece goods.

"That's all right," Flaxberg cried with a forced grin. "I ain't surprised you are pretty near blinded when you are coming into the daylight out of the cutting room. It's dark in there like a tomb."

"I bet yer," Elkan said fervently.

"You should get into the air more often," Flaxberg went on. "A feller could get all sorts of things the matter with him staying in a hole like that."

"*Gott sei dank* I got, anyhow, my health," Elkan commented.

"Sure, I know," Flaxberg said as they reached the street; "but you must got to take care of it too. A feller which he don't get no exercise should ought to eat well, Lubliner. For instance, I bet yer you are taking every day your lunch in a bakery—ain't it?"

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Elkan nodded.

"Well, there you are!" Flaxberg cried triumphantly. "A feller works all the time in a dark hole like that cutting room, and comes lunchtime he *fresses* a bunch of *Kuchen* and a cup of coffee, *verstehst du*—and is it any wonder you are looking sick?"

"I feel all right," Elkan said.

"I know you feel all right," Flaxberg continued, "but you look something terrible, Lubliner. Just for to-day, Lubliner, take my advice and try Wasserbauer's regular dinner."

Elkan laughed aloud.

"Wasserbauer's!" he exclaimed. "Why, what do you think I am, Mr. Flaxberg? If I would be a salesman like you, Mr. Flaxberg, I would say, 'Yes; eat once in a while at Wasserbauer's'; *aber* for an assistant cutter, Mr. Flaxberg, Wasserbauer's is just so high like the Waldorfer."

"That's all right," Flaxberg retorted airily. "No one asks you you should pay for it. Come and have a decent meal with me."

For a brief interval Elkan hesitated, but at length he surrendered, and five minutes later he found himself seated opposite Harry Flaxberg in the rear of Wasserbauer's café.

"Yes, Mr. Flaxberg," he said as he commenced the fourth of a series of dill pickles, "compared with a salesman, a cutter is a dawg's life—ain't it?"

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"Well," Flaxberg commented, "he is and he isn't. There's no reason why a cutter shouldn't enjoy life too, Lubliner. A cutter could make money on the side just so good as a salesman. I am acquainted already with a pants cutter by the name Schmul Kleidermann which, one afternoon last week, he pulls down two hundred and fifty dollars yet."

"Pulls down two hundred and fifty dollars!" Elkan exclaimed. "From where he pulls it down, Mr. Flaxberg?"

"Not from the pants business *oser*," Flaxberg replied. "The feller reads the papers, Lubliner, and that's how he makes his money."

"You mean he is speculating in these here stocks from stock exchanges?" Elkan asked.

"Not stocks," Flaxberg replied in shocked accents. "From *spieling* the stock markets a feller could lose his shirt yet. Never play the stock markets, Lubliner. That's something which you could really say a feller ruins himself for life with."

Elkan nodded.

"Even *im Russland* it's the same," he said.

"Sure," Flaxberg went on. "*Aber* this feller Kleidermann he makes a study of it. The name of the horse was Prince Faithful. On New Year's Day he runs fourth in a field of six. The next week he is in the money for a show with such old-timers as Aurora Borealis, Dixie Lad and Ramble Home—and last week he gets away with it six to one a winner, understand me; and this afternoon yet, over to Judge Crowley's, I could get a price five to two a place, understand me, which it is like picking up money in the street already."

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Elkan paused in the process of commencing the sixth pickle and gazed in wide-eyed astonishment at his host.

"So you see, Lubliner," Flaxberg concluded, "if you would put up twenty dollars, understand me, you could make fifty dollars more, like turning your hand over."

Elkan laid down his half-eaten pickle.

"Do you mean to say you want me I should put up twenty dollars on a horse which it is running with other horses a race?" he exclaimed.

"Well," Flaxberg replied, "of course, if you got objections to putting up money on a horse, Lubliner, why, don't do it. Lend it me instead the twenty dollars and I would play it; and if the horse should—*Gott soll hüten*—not be in the money, y'understand, then I would give you the twenty dollars back Saturday at the latest. *Aber* if the horse makes a place, understand me, then I would give you your money back this afternoon yet and ten dollars to boot."

For one wavering moment Elkan raised the pickle to his lips and then replaced it on the table. Then he licked off his fingers and explored the recess of his waistcoat pocket.

[Pg 43] "Here," he said, producing a dime—"here is for the dill pickles, Mr. Flaxberg."

"What d'ye mean?" Flaxberg cried.

"I mean this," Elkan said, putting on his hat—"I mean you should save your money with me and blow instead your friend Kleidermann to dinner, because the proposition ain't attractive."

"Yes, Mr. Redman," Elkan commented when he resumed his duties as assistant cutter after the five and a half dill pickles had been supplemented with a hasty meal of rolls and coffee, "for a *Schlemiel* like him to call himself a salesman—honestly, it's a disgrace!"

He addressed his remarks to Joseph Redman, head cutter for Polatkin & Scheikowitz, who plied his shears industriously at an adjoining table. Joseph, like every other employee of Polatkin & Scheikowitz, was thoroughly acquainted with the details of Flaxberg's hiring and its dénouement. Nevertheless, in his quality of head cutter, he professed a becoming ignorance.

"Who is this which you are knocking now?" he asked.

[Pg 44] "I am knocking some one which he's got a right to be knocked," Elkan replied. "I am knocking this here feller Flaxberg, which he calls himself a salesman. That feller couldn't sell a drink of water in the Sahara Desert, Mr. Redman. All he cares about is gambling and going on theaytres. Why, if I would be in his shoes, Mr. Redman, I wouldn't eat or I wouldn't sleep till I got from Appenweier & Murray an order. Never mind if my uncle would be fired and Mr. Lapin, the new buyer, is a relation from Sammet Brothers, Mr. Redman, I would get that account, understand me, or I would *verplatz*."

"*Yow*, you would do wonders!" Redman said. "The best thing you could do, Lubliner, is to close up your face and get to work. You shouldn't got so much to say for yourself. A big mouth is only for a salesman, Lubliner. For a cutter it's nix, understand me; so you should give me a rest with this here Appenweier & Murray's account and get busy on them 2060's. We are behind with 'em as it is."

Thus admonished, Elkan lapsed into silence; and for more than half an hour he pursued his duties diligently.

"*Nu!*" Redman said at length. "What's the matter you are acting so quiet this afternoon?"

"What d'ye mean I am acting quiet, Mr. Redman?" Elkan asked. "I am thinking—that's all. Without a feller would think once in a while, Mr. Redman, he remains a cutter all his life."

"There's worser things as cutters," Redman commented. "For instance—assistant cutters."

[Pg 45] "Sure, I know," Elkan agreed; "but salesmen is a whole lot better as cutters *oder* assistant cutters. A salesman sees life, Mr. Redman. He meets oncet in a while people, Mr. Redman; while, with us, what is it? We are shut up here like we would be sitting in prison—ain't it?"

"You ain't got no kick coming," Redman said. "A young feller only going on eighteen, understand me, is getting ten dollars a week and he kicks yet. Sitting in prison, *sagter!* Maybe you would like the concern they should be putting in moving pictures here or a phonygraft!"

Elkan sighed heavily by way of reply and for a quarter of an hour longer he worked in quietness, until Redman grew worried at his assistant's unusual taciturnity.

"What's the trouble you ain't talking, Lubliner?" he said. "Don't you feel so good?"

Elkan looked up. He was about to say that he felt all right when suddenly he received

the germ of an inspiration, and in the few seconds that he hesitated it blossomed into a well-defined plan of action. He therefore emitted a faint groan and laid down his shears.

"I got a *krank* right here," he said, placing his hand on his left side. "Ever since last week I got it."

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"Well, why don't you say something about it before?" Redman cried anxiously; for he remembered that Elkan Lubliner was not only the cousin of Marcus Polatkin but the adopted nephew of Philip Scheikowitz as well. "You shouldn't let such things go."

"The fact is," Elkan replied, "I didn't want to say nothing about it to Mr. Polatkin on account he's got enough to worry him with this here Appenweier & Murray's account; and——"

"You got that account on the brain," Redman interrupted. "If you don't feel so good you should go home. Leave me fix it for you."

As he spoke he hastily buttoned on his collar and left the cutting room, while Elkan could not forego a delighted grin. After all, he reflected, he had worked steadily for over a year and a half with only such holidays as the orthodox ritual ordained; and he was so busy making plans for his first afternoon of freedom that he nearly forgot to groan again when Redman came back with Marcus Polatkin at his heels.

"*Nu*, Elkan!" Marcus said. "What's the matter? Don't you feel good?"

"I got a *krank* right here," Elkan replied, placing his hand on his right side. "I got it now pretty near a week already."

"Well, maybe you should sit down for the rest of the afternoon and file away the old cutting slips," Marcus said, whereat Elkan moaned and closed his eyes.

"I filed 'em away last week already," he murmured. "I think maybe if I would lay in bed the rest of the afternoon I would be all right to-morrow."

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Marcus gazed earnestly at his cousin, whose sufferings seemed to be intensified thereby.

"All right, Elkan," he said. "Go ahead. Go home and tell Mrs. Feinermann she should give you a little *Brusttee*; and if you don't feel better in the morning don't take it so particular to get here early."

Elkan nodded weakly and five minutes later walked slowly out of the factory. He took the stairs only a little less slowly, but he gradually increased his speed as he proceeded along Wooster Street, until by the time he was out of sight of the firm's office windows he was fairly running. Thus he arrived at his boarding place on Pitt Street in less than half an hour—just in time to interrupt Mrs. Sarah Feinermann as she was about to start on a shopping excursion uptown. Mrs. Feinermann exclaimed aloud at the sight of him, and her complexion grew perceptibly less florid, for his advent in Pitt Street at that early hour could have but one meaning.

"What's the matter—you are getting fired?" she asked.

"What d'ye mean—getting fired?" Elkan replied. "I ain't fired. I got an afternoon off."

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Mrs. Feinermann heaved a sigh of relief. As the recipient of Elkan's five dollars a week board-money, payable strictly in advance, she naturally evinced a hearty interest in his financial affairs. Moreover, she was distantly related to Elkan's father; and owing to this kinship her husband, Marx Feinermann, foreman for Kupferberg Brothers, was of the impression that she charged Elkan only three dollars and fifty cents a week. The underestimate more than paid Mrs. Feinermann's millinery bill, and she was consequently under the necessity of buying Elkan's silence with small items of laundry work and an occasional egg for breakfast. This arrangement suited Elkan very well indeed; and though he had eaten his lunch only an hour previously he thought it the part of prudence to insist that she prepare a meal for him, by way of maintaining his privileges as Mrs. Feinermann's fellow conspirator.

"But I am just now getting dressed to go uptown," she protested.

"Where to?" he demanded.

"I got a little shopping to do," she said; and Elkan snapped his fingers in the conception of a brilliant idea.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I would go with you. In three minutes I would wash myself and change my clothes—and I'll be right with you."

"But I got to stop in and see Marx first," she insisted. "I want to tell him something."

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"I wanted to tell him something lots of times already," Elkan said significantly; and Mrs. Feinermann sat down in the nearest chair while Elkan disappeared into the adjoining room and performed a hasty toilet.

"*Schon gut*," he said as he emerged from his room five minutes later; "we would go right up to Appenweier & Murray's."

"But I ain't said I am going up to Appenweier & Murray's," Mrs. Feinermann cried. "Such a high-price place I couldn't afford to deal with at all."

"I didn't say you could," Elkan replied; "but it don't do no harm to get yourself used to such places, on account might before long you could afford to deal there maybe."

"What d'ye mean I could afford to deal there before long?" Mrs. Feinermann inquired.

"I mean this," Elkan said, and they started down the stairs—"I mean, if things turn out like the way I want 'em to, instead of five dollars a week I would give you five dollars and fifty cents a week." Here he paused on the stair-landing to let the news sink in.

"And furthermore, if you would act the way I tell you to when we get up there I would also pay your carfare," he concluded—"one way."

When Mrs. Feinermann entered Appenweier & Murray's store that afternoon she was immediately accosted by a floorwalker.

"What do you wish, madam?" he said.

[Pg 50] "I want to buy something a dress for my wife," Elkan volunteered, stepping from behind the shadow of Mrs. Feinermann, who for her thirty-odd years was, to say the least, buxom.

"Your wife?" the floorwalker repeated.

"Sure; why not?" Elkan replied. "Maybe I am looking young, but in reality I am old; so you should please show us the dress department, from twenty-two-fifty to twenty-eight dollars the garment."

The floorwalker ushered them into the elevator and they alighted at the second floor.

"Miss Holzmeyer!" the floorwalker cried; and in response there approached a lady of uncertain age but of no uncertain methods of salesmanship. She was garbed in a silk gown that might have graced the person of an Austrian grand duchess, and she rustled and swished as she walked toward them in what she had always found to be a most impressive manner.

"The lady wants to see some dresses," the floorwalker said; and Miss Holzmeyer smiled by a rather complicated process, in which her nose wrinkled until it drew up the corners of her mouth and made her eyes appear to rest like shoe-buttons on the tops of her powdered cheeks.

"This way, madam," she said as she swung her skirts round noisily.

[Pg 51] "One moment," Elkan interrupted, for again he had been totally eclipsed by Mrs. Feinermann's bulky figure. "You ain't heard what my wife wants yet."

"Your wife!" Miss Holzmeyer exclaimed.

"Sure, my wife," Elkan replied calmly. "This is my wife if it's all the same to you and you ain't got no objections."

He gazed steadily at Miss Holzmeyer, who began to find her definite methods of salesmanship growing less definite, until she blushed vividly.

"Not at all," she said. "Step this way, please."

"Yes, Miss Holzmeyer," Elkan went on without moving, "as I was telling you, you ain't found out yet what my wife wants, on account a dress could be from twenty dollars the garment up to a hundred and fifty."

"We have dresses here as high as three hundred!" Miss Holzmeyer snapped. She had discerned that she was beginning to be embarrassed in the presence of this self-possessed benedick of youthful appearance, and she resented it accordingly.

"I ain't doubting it for a minute," Elkan replied. "New York is full of suckers, Miss Holzmeyer; but me and my wife is looking for something from twenty-two-fifty to twenty-eight dollars, Miss Holzmeyer."

Miss Holzmeyer's temper mounted with each repetition of her surname, and her final "Step this way, please!" was uttered in tones fairly tremulous with rage.

[Pg 52] Elkan obeyed so leisurely that by the time Mrs. Feinermann and he had reached the rear of the showroom Miss Holzmeyer had hung three dresses on the back of a chair.

"H'allow me," Elkan said as he took the topmost gown by the shoulders and held it up in front of him. He shook out the folds and for more than five minutes examined it closely.

"I didn't want to see nothing for seventeen-fifty," he announced at last—"especially from last year's style."

"What do you mean?" Miss Holzmeyer cried angrily. "That dress is marked twenty-eight dollars and it just came in last week. It's a very smart model indeed."

"The model I don't know nothing about," Elkan replied, "but the salesman must of been pretty smart to stuck you folks like that."

He subjected another gown to a careful scrutiny while Miss Holzmeyer sought the showcases for more garments.

"Now, this one here," he said, "is better value. How much you are asking for this one, please?"

Miss Holzmeyer glanced at the price ticket.

"Twenty-eight dollars," she replied, with an indignant glare.

Elkan whistled incredulously.

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"You don't tell me," he said. "I always heard it that the expenses is high uptown, but even if the walls was hung *mit* diamonds yet, Miss Holzmeyer, your bosses wouldn't starve neither. Do you got maybe a dress for twenty-eight dollars which it is worth, anyhow, twenty-five dollars?"

This last jibe was too much for Miss Holzmeyer.

"Mis-ter Lap-in!" she howled, and immediately a glazed mahogany door in an adjoining partition burst open and Max Lapin appeared on the floor of the showroom.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Miss Holzmeyer sat down in the nearest chair and fanned herself with her pocket handkerchief.

"This man insulted me!" she said; whereat Max Lapin turned savagely to Elkan.

"What for you are insulting this lady?" he demanded as he made a rapid survey of Elkan's physical development. He was quite prepared to defend Miss Holzmeyer's honour in a fitting and manly fashion; but, during the few seconds that supervened his question, Max reflected that you can never tell about a small man.

"What d'ye mean insult this lady?" Elkan asked stoutly. "I never says a word to her. Maybe I ain't so long in the country as you are, but I got just so much respect for the old folks as anybody. Furthermore, she is showing me here garments which, honest, Mister—er—"

"Lapin," Max said.

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"Mister Lapin, a house with the reputation of Appenweier & Murray shouldn't ought to got in stock at all."

"Say, lookyhere, young feller," Lapin cried, "what are you driving into anyway? I am buyer here, and if you got any kick coming tell it to me, and don't go insulting the salesladies."

"I ain't insulted no saleslady, Mr. Lapin," Elkan declared. "I am coming here to buy for my wife a dress and certainly I want to get for my money some decent value; and when this lady shows me a garment like this"—he held up the topmost garment—"and says it is from this year a model, understand me, naturally I got my own ideas on the subject."

Lapin looked critically at the garment in question.

"Did you get this style from that third case there, Miss Holzmeyer?" he asked, and Miss Holzmeyer nodded.

"Well, that whole case is full of leftovers and I don't want it touched," Lapin said. "Now go ahead and show this gentleman's wife some more models; and if he gets fresh let me know—that's all."

"One minute, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said. "Will you do me the favour and let me show you something?"

He held up the garment last exhibited by Miss Holzmeyer and pointed to the yoke and its border.

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"This here garment Miss Holzmeyer shows me for twenty-eight dollars, Mr. Lapin," he said, "and with me and my wife here a dollar means to us like two dollars to most

people, Mr. Lapin. So when I am seeing the precisely selfsame garment like this in Fine Brothers' for twenty-six dollars, but the border is from silk embroidery, a peacock's tail design, and the yoke is from gilt net yet, understand me, I got to say something—ain't it?"

Lapin paused in his progress toward his office and even as he did so Elkan's eyes strayed to a glass-covered showcase.

"Why, there is a garment just like Fine Brothers' model!" he exclaimed.

"Say, lookyhere!" Lapin demanded as he strode up to the showcase and pulled out the costume indicated by Elkan. "What are you trying to tell me? This here model is thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents; so, if you can get it for twenty-six at Fine Brothers', go ahead and do it!"

"But, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said, "that ain't no way for a buyer of a big concern like this to talk. I am telling you, so sure as you are standing there and I should never move from this spot, the identical selfsame style Fine Brothers got it for twenty-six dollars. I know it, Mr. Lapin, because we are making up that garment in our factory yet, and Fine Brothers takes from us six of that model at eighteen-fifty apiece."

[Pg 56] At this unguarded disclosure Lapin's face grew crimson with rage.

"You are making it up in your factory!" he cried. "Why, you dirty faker you, what the devil you are coming round here bluffing that you want to buy a dress for your wife for?"

Elkan broke into a cold perspiration and looked round for Mrs. Feinermann, the substantial evidence of his marital state; but at the very beginning of Max Lapin's indignant outburst she had discreetly taken the first stairway to the right.

"Bring that woman back here!" Max roared. Miss Holzmeyer made a dash for the stairway, and before Elkan had time to formulate even a tentative plan of escape she had returned with her quarry.

"What do you want from me?" Mrs. Feinermann gasped. Her hat was awry, and what had once been a modish pompadour was toppled to one side and shed hairpins with every palsied nod of her head. "I ain't done nothing!" she protested.

"Sure, you ain't," Elkan said; "so you should keep your mouth shut—that's all."

"I would keep my mouth shut *oder* not as I please," Mrs. Feinermann retorted. "Furthermore, you ain't got no business to get me mixed up in this *Geschichte* at all!"

"Who are you two anyway?" Max demanded.

[Pg 57] "This here feller is a young feller by the name of Elkan Lubliner which he is working by Polatkin & Scheikowitz," Mrs. Feinermann announced; "and what he is bringing me up here for is more than I could tell you."

"Ain't he your husband?" Max asked.

"*Oser a Stück!*" Mrs. Feinermann declared fervently. "A kid like him should be my husband! An idee!"

"That's all right," Elkan rejoined. "*Im Russland* at my age many a young feller is got twins yet!"

"What's that got to do with it?" Max Lapin demanded.

"It ain't got nothing to do with it," Elkan said, "but it shows that a young feller like me which he is raised in the old country ain't such a kid as you think for, Mr. Lapin. And when I am telling you that the concern which sells you them goods to retail for twenty-eight dollars is sticking you good, understand me, you could take my word for it just the same like I would be fifty-five even."

Again he seized one of the garments.

"And what's more," he went on breathlessly, "the workmanship is rotten. Look at here!—the seams is falling to pieces already!"

He thrust the garment under Lapin's nose with one hand, while with the other he dug down into his trousers pocket.

"Here!" he shouted. "Here is money—fifty dollars!"

[Pg 58] He dropped the gown and held out a roll of bills toward Lapin.

"Take it!" he said hysterically. "Take it all; and if I don't bring you to-morrow morning, first thing, this same identical style, only A-number-one workmanship, which you could retail for twenty dollars a garment, understand me, keep the money and *fertig*."

At this juncture the well-nourished figure of Louis Appenweier, senior member of

Appenweier & Murray, appeared in the door of the elevator and Max Lapin turned on his heel.

"Come into my office," he hissed; and as he started for the glazed mahogany door he gathered up the remaining garments and took them with him.

For more than half an hour Elkan and Max Lapin remained closeted together, and during that period Elkan conducted a clinic over each garment to such good purpose that Max sent out from time to time for more expensive styles. All of these were in turn examined by Elkan, who recognized in at least six models the designs of Joseph Redman, slightly altered in the stealing by Leon Sammet.

[Pg 59] "Yes, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said, "them models was all designed by our own designer and some one *ganvered* 'em on us. Furthermore, I could bring you here to-morrow morning at eight o'clock from our sample racks these same identical models, with the prices on 'em marked plain like the figures on a ten-dollar bill, understand me; and if they ain't from twenty to thirty per cent. lower as you paid for these here garments I'd eat 'em!"

For at least ten minutes Max Lapin sat with knitted brows and pondered Elkan's words.

"Eight o'clock is too early," he announced at last. "Make it half-past nine."

"Six, even, ain't too early for an up-to-date buyer to look at some genuine bargains," Elkan insisted; "and, besides, I must got to get back to the shop at nine."

"But——" Lapin began.

"But nothing, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said, rising to his feet. "Make it eight o'clock, and the next time I would come round at half-past nine."

"What d'ye mean the next time?" Lapin exclaimed.

"I mean this wouldn't be the last time we do business together, because the job as assistant cutter which I got it is just temporary, Mr. Lapin," he said as he started for the door—"just temporary—that's all."

He paused with his hand on the doorknob.

"See you at eight o'clock to-morrow morning," he said cheerfully; and five minutes later he was having hard work to keep from dancing his way down Thirty-third Street to the subway.

[Pg 60] From half-past seven in the morning until six at night were the working hours of all Polatkin & Scheikowitz's employees, save only Sam Markulies, the shipping clerk, whose duty it was to unlock the shop at quarter-past seven sharp. This hour had been fixed by Philip Scheikowitz himself, who, on an average of once a month, would stroll into the shipping department at closing-time and announce his intention of going to a wedding that evening. Sometimes the proposed excursion was a pinocle party or a visit to the theatre, but the dénouement was always the same. The next morning Scheikowitz would arrive at the factory door precisely at quarter-past seven to find Markulies from five to ten minutes late; whereupon Markulies would receive his discharge, to take effect the following Saturday night—and for the ensuing month his punctuality was assured.

During the quarter of an hour which preceded the arrival of the other employees, Markulies usually dusted the office and showroom; and on the morning following Elkan's holiday this solitary duty was cheered by the presence of Harry Flaxberg. Harry had sought the advice of counsel the previous day and had been warned against tardiness as an excuse for his discharge; so he was lounging on the sidewalk long before Markulies's arrival that morning.

"Nu, Mr. Flaxberg," Markulies cried, "what brings you round so early?"

"I couldn't sleep last night," Flaxberg said; "so I thought I might just so well be here as anywhere."

[Pg 61] "Ain't that the funniest thing!" Markulies cried. "Me I couldn't sleep neither. I got something on my mind."

He unlocked the door as he spoke; and as he passed up the stairs he declared again that he had something on his mind.

"*Yow!*" Flaxberg said. "I should got your worries, Markulies. The simple little things which a shipping clerk must got to do would *oser* give anybody the nervous prostration."

"Is that so?" Markulies retorted. "Well, I ain't just the shipping clerk here, Mr.

Flaxberg. You must remember I am in charge with the keys also, Mr. Flaxberg; and I got responsibilities if some one *ganvers* a couple sample garments once in a while, y'understand—right away they would accuse me that I done it."

"Don't worry yourself, Markulies," Flaxberg said. "I ain't going to *ganver* no garments on you—not this morning anyhow."

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"You I ain't worrying about at all," Markulies rejoined; "but that young bloodsucker, Lubliner, Mr. Flaxberg—that's something else again. Actually that young feller is to me something which you could really call a thorn in my pants, Mr. Flaxberg. Just because he is assistant cutter here and I am only the shipping clerk he treats me like I would be the dirt under his feet. Only last night, Mr. Flaxberg, I am locking up the place when that feller comes up the stairs and says to me I should give him the key, as he forgets a package which he left behind him. Mind you, it is already half-past six, Mr. Flaxberg; and ever since I am living up in the Bronx, Mr. Flaxberg, I am getting kicked out of six places where I am boarding on account no respectable family would stand it, Mr. Flaxberg, that a feller comes, night after night, nine o'clock to his dinner."

"You was telling me about Lubliner," Flaxberg reminded him.

"Sure, I know," Markulies continued. "So I says to him the place is closed and that's all there is to it. With that, Mr. Flaxberg, the feller takes back his hand—so—and he gives me a *schlag* in the stummick, which, honest, if he wouldn't be from Mr. Polatkin a relation, Mr. Flaxberg, I would right then and there killed him."

For two minutes he patted gently that portion of his anatomy where Elkan's blow had landed.

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"He's a dangerous feller, Mr. Flaxberg," he went on, "because, just so soon as he opens the door after I am giving him the key, Mr. Flaxberg, he shuts it in my face and springs the bolt on me, Mr. Flaxberg—and there I am standing *bis* pretty near eight o'clock, understand me, till that feller comes out again. By the time I am at my room on Brook Avenue, Mr. Flaxberg, the way Mrs. Kaller speaks to me you would think I was a dawg yet. How should I know she is getting tickets for the theaytre that evening, Mr. Flaxberg? And anyhow, Mr. Flaxberg, if people could afford to spend their money going on theaytre, understand me, they don't need to keep boarders at all—especially when I am getting night after night boiled *Brustdeckel* only. I says to her, 'Mrs. Kaller,' I says to her, 'why don't you give me once in a while a change?' I says—"

"Did Lubliner have anything with him when he came out?" Flaxberg interrupted.

"Well, sure; he'd got the package he forgets, and how a feller could forget a package that size, Mr. Flaxberg—honestly, you wouldn't believe at all! That's what it is to be a relation to the boss, Mr. Flaxberg. If I would got such a memory, understand me, I would of been fired long since already. Yes, Mr. Flaxberg, I says to Mrs. Kaller, 'For three and a half dollars a week a feller should get night after night *Brustdeckel*—it's a shame—honest!' I says; and—*stiegen!* There's Mr. Scheikowitz!"

As he spoke he seized a feather duster and began to wield it vigorously, so that by the time Philip Scheikowitz reached the showroom door a dense cloud of dust testified to Markulies's industry.

"That'll do, Sam!" Philip cried. "What do you want to do here—choke us all to death?"

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Gradually the dust subsided and disclosed to Philip's astonished gaze Harry Flaxberg seated on a sample table and apparently lost in the perusal of the *Daily Cloak and Suit Record*.

"Good-morning, Mr. Scheikowitz," he said heartily, but Philip only grunted in reply. Moreover, he walked hurriedly past Flaxberg and closed the office door behind him with a resounding bang, for he, too, had sought the advice of counsel the previous evening; and on that advice he had left his bed before daylight, only to find himself forestalled by the wily Flaxberg. Nor was his chagrin at all decreased by Polatkin, who had promised to meet his partner at quarter-past seven. Instead he arrived an hour later and immediately proceeded to upbraid Scheikowitz for Flaxberg's punctuality.

"What do you mean that feller gets here before you?" he cried. "Didn't you hear it the lawyer distinctively told you you should get here before Flaxberg, and when Flaxberg arrives you should tell him he is fired on account he is late? Honestly, Scheikowitz, I don't know what comes over you lately the way you are acting. Here we are paying the lawyer ten dollars he should give us an advice, understand me, and we might just so well throw our money in the streets!"

"But Flaxberg wasn't late, Polatkin," Scheikowitz protested. "He was early."

"Don't argue with me, Scheikowitz," Polatkin said. "Let's go outside and talk to him."

Philip shrugged despairingly as they walked to the office door.

"Flaxberg," he began as he discerned the city salesman again using a sample table for a footstool, "don't let us disturb you if you ain't through reading the paper yet."

"Yes, Flaxberg," Polatkin added, "you could get down here so early like you would be sleeping in the place all night yet, and what is it? Take from the table the feet, Flaxberg, and be a man. We got something to say to you."

"Go ahead, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg said as he leisurely brought his feet to the floor. "I'm listening."

"In the first place, Flaxberg," Polatkin said, "did it ever occur to you that, even if your uncle would get fired up to Appenweier & Murray's, Redman designs for us a line of garments here which them people might be interested in anyhow?"

"*Yow*, they would be interested in our line!" Flaxberg cried. "Lapin wouldn't buy only Sammet Brothers' line if we got Worth and Paquin both working for us as designers. You couldn't convince him otherwise, Mr. Polatkin."

"That's all right," Polatkin went on; "but it wouldn't do no harm for you to anyhow see the feller and show him a couple garments which we got it here. Take for instance them 1080's, which we are selling Fine Brothers, *oder* that 2060—that overskirt effect with the gilt net yoke and peacock-feather-design braid, Flaxberg. Them two styles made a big hit, Flaxberg. They are all hanging on that end rack there, Flaxberg, and you could look at 'em for yourself."

Polatkin walked across the showroom to the rack in question.

"Especially the 2060's," he said as he pulled aside the heavy denim curtain which protected the contents of the rack, "which you could really say is——"

Here he paused abruptly—for, with the exception of a dozen wooden hangers, the rack was empty.

"What's this, Scheikowitz?" he cried with a sweep of his hand in the direction of the rack. "Where is all them 1080's and 2060's?"

Hastily the two partners examined every rack in the showroom; and not only did they fail to discover the missing samples, but they ascertained that, in addition, seven other choice styles had disappeared.

"See maybe is Redman using 'em in the cutting room," Scheikowitz suggested; and forthwith they made a canvass of the cutting room and factory, in which they were joined by Markulies.

"What is the matter, Mr. Scheikowitz?" he asked.

"We are missing a dozen sample garments," Scheikowitz replied.

"Missing!" Markulies loudly exclaimed. "What d'ye mean—missing, Mr. Scheikowitz? Last night, when I was covering up the racks, everything was in place."

Suddenly a wave of recollection swept over him and he gave tongue like a foxhound.

"Oo-oo-ee!" he wailed and sank into the nearest chair.

"Markulies," Polatkin cried out, "for Heaven's sake, what is it?"

"He must of *ganvered* 'em!" Markulies wailed. "Right in front of my eyes he done it."

"Who done it?" Scheikowitz cried.

"Lubliner," Markulies moaned.

"Lubliner!" Polatkin cried. "Do you mean Elkan Lubliner?"

"That's what I said," Markulies went on. "Comes half-past six last night, and that *ganef* makes me a *schlag* in the stummick, Mr. Polatkin; and the first thing you know he goes to work and steals from me my keys, Mr. Polatkin, and cleans out the whole place yet."

"Lubliner was here last night after we are going home?" Polatkin asked.

"Sure, he was," Markulies replied—"at half-past six yet."

"Then that only goes to show what a liar you are," Polatkin declared, "because myself I am letting Elkan go home at one o'clock on account the feller is so sick, understand me, he could hardly walk out of the place at all. Furthermore, he says he is going right straight to bed when he leaves here; so, if you want to explain how it is the garments disappear when you are in the place here alone, Markulies, go ahead with your lies. Might Mr. Scheikowitz stole 'em maybe—or I did! What?"

Markulies began to rock and sway in an agony of woe.

"I should never stir from this here chair, Mr. Polatkin," Markulies protested, "and my mother also, which I am sending her to Kalvaria—regular like clockwork—ten dollars a month, she should never walk so far from here *bis* that door, if that *ganef* didn't come in here last night and make away with the garments!"

"*Koosh!*" Polatkin bellowed, and made a threatening gesture toward Markulies just as Scheikowitz stepped forward.

"That'll do, Polatkin," he said. "If the feller lies we could easy prove it—ain't it? In the first place, where is Elkan?"

"He must of been sick this morning on account he ain't here yet," Polatkin said.

"*Schon gut.*" Scheikowitz rejoined; "if he ain't here he ain't here, *verstehst du, aber* he is boarding with Mrs. Feinermann, which her husband is Kupferberg Brothers' foreman—ain't it?"

Polatkin nodded and Scheikowitz turned to Markulies.

[Pg 69] "Markulies," he said, "do me the favour and stop that! You are making me dizzy the way you are acting. Furthermore, Markulies, you should put on right away your hat and run over to Kupferberg Brothers' and say to Mr. B. Kupferberg you are coming from Polatkin & Scheikowitz, and ask him is he agreeable he should let Marx Feinermann come over and see us—and if he wants to know what for tell him we want to get from him a recommendation for a feller which is working for us."

He turned to his partner as Markulies started for the stairway.

"And a helluva recommendation we would get from him, too, I bet yer!" he added. "Wasserbauer tells me Elkan was in his place yesterday, and, though he don't watch every bit of food a customer puts into his mouth, understand me, he says that he eats dill pickles one right after the other; and then, Polatkin, the young feller gets right up and walks right out of the place without giving any order even. Wasserbauer says he knows it was Elkan because one day I am sending him over to look for you there. Wasserbauer asks him the simple question what he wants you for, and right away Elkan acts fresh to him like anything."

"He done right to act fresh," Polatkin said as they walked back to the showroom. "What is it Wasserbauer's business what you want me for?"

[Pg 70] "But how comes a young feller like him to be eating at Wasserbauer's?" Scheikowitz continued. "Where does he get the money from he should eat there?"

"The fact is"—said Flaxberg, who up to this point had remained a silent listener to the entire controversy—"the fact is, Mr. Scheikowitz, yesterday I am taking pity on the feller on account he is looking sick; and I took him into Wasserbauer's and invited him he should eat a little something."

Here he paused and licked his lips maliciously.

"And though I don't want to say nothing against the feller, understand me," he continued, "he begins right away to talk about horseracing."

"Horseracing?" Polatkin cried.

Flaxberg nodded and made a gesture implying more plainly than the words themselves: "Can you beat it?"

"Horseracing!" Scheikowitz repeated. "Well, what do you think of that for a lowlife bum?"

"And when I called him down for gambling, Mr. Polatkin, he walks right out, so independent he is. Furthermore, though it's none of my business, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg went on, "Markulies tells me this morning early the same story like he tells you—before he knew the goods was missing even."

"Sure, I believe you," Polatkin retorted. "He was getting the whole thing fixed up beforehand. That's the kind of *Rosher* he is."

[Pg 71] As he spoke Markulies entered, and there followed on his heels the short, stout figure of Marx Feinermann.

"What did I told you?" Markulies cried. "The feller ain't home sick at all. He eats his supper last night, and this morning he is got two eggs for his breakfast even."

"S'nough, Markulies!" Polatkin interrupted. "You got too much to say for yourself. Sit down, Feinermann, and tell us what is the reason Elkan ain't here this morning."

"You tell me and I would tell you," Feinermann replied. "All I know is the feller leaves my house the usual time this morning; only before he goes he acts fresh to my wife like anything, Mr. Polatkin. He kicks the coffee ain't good, even when my wife is giving him two eggs to his breakfast anyhow. What some people expects for three-fifty a week you wouldn't believe at all!"

"What do you mean—three-fifty a week?" Polatkin demanded. "He pays your wife five dollars a week *schon* six months ago already. He told me so himself."

"I ain't responsible for what that boy tells you," Feinermann said stolidly. "All I know is he pays me three-fifty a week; and you would think he is used to eating chicken every day from *zu Hause* yet, the way he is all the time kicking about his food."

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Markulies snorted indignantly.

"He should got the *Machshovos* Mrs. Kaller hands it to me," he said—"gekochte *Brustdeckel* day in, day out; and then I am accused that I steal samples yet! I am sick and tired of it!"

"*Stiegen!*" Polatkin cried. "Listen here to me, Feinermann. Do you mean to told me the boy ain't paying you five dollars a week board?"

As Feinermann opened his mouth to reply the showroom door opened and Elkan himself entered.

"Loafer!" Scheikowitz roared. "Where was you?"

Elkan made no reply, but walked to the centre of the showroom.

"Mr. Polatkin," he said, "could I speak to you a few words something?"

Polatkin jumped to his feet.

"Before you speak to me a few words something," he said, "I want to ask you what the devil you are telling me lies that you pay Mrs. Feinermann five dollars a week board?"

"What are you bothering about that for now?" Scheikowitz interrupted. "And, anyhow, you could see by the way the feller is red like blood that he lies to you."

"Furthermore," Feinermann added, "my wife complains to me last night that young loafer takes her uptown yesterday on a wild fool's errand, understand me, and together they get pretty near kicked out of a drygoods store."

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"She told you that, did she?" Elkan cried.

"That's what I said!" Feinermann retorted.

"Then, if that's the case, Feinermann," Elkan replied, "all I can say is, I am paying your wife five dollars a week board *schon* six months already, and if she is holding out on you a dollar and a half a week that's her business—not mine."

"Don't make things worsen as they are, Lubliner," Flaxberg advised. "You are in bad, anyhow, and lying don't help none. What did you done with the samples you took away from here?"

"What is it your business what I done with 'em?" Elkan retorted.

"Don't get fresh, Elkan!" Polatkin said. "What is all this about, anyhow? First, you are leaving here yesterday on account you are sick; next, you are going uptown with Mrs. Feinermann and get kicked out of a drygoods store; then you come back here and steal our samples."

"Steal your samples!" Elkan cried.

"You admitted it yourself just now," Flaxberg interrupted. "You are a thief as well as a liar!"

Had Flaxberg's interest in sport extended to pugilism, he would have appreciated the manner in which Elkan's chest and arm muscles began to swell under his coat, even if the ominous gleam in Elkan's dark eyes had provided no other warning. As it was, however, Elkan put into practice the knowledge gained by a nightly attendance at the gymnasium on East Broadway. He stepped back two paces, and left followed right so rapidly to the point of Flaxberg's jaw that the impact sounded like one blow.

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Simultaneously Flaxberg fell back over the sample tables and landed with a crash against the office partition just as the telephone rang loudly. Perhaps it was as well for Flaxberg that he was unprepared for the onslaught, since, had he been in a rigid posture, he would have assuredly taken the count. Beyond a cut lip, however, and a lump on the back of his head, he was practically unhurt; and he jumped to his feet immediately. Nor was he impeded by a too eager audience, for Markulies and Feinermann had abruptly fled to the farthest corner of the cutting room, while Marcus and Philip had ducked behind a sample rack; so that he had a clear field for the rush he made at Elkan. He yelled with rage as he dashed wildly across the floor, but the yell terminated with an inarticulate grunt when Elkan stopped the rush with a drive straight from the shoulder. It found a target on Flaxberg's nose, and he crumpled up on the showroom floor.

For two minutes Elkan stood still and then he turned to the sample racks.

"Mr. Polatkin," he said, "the telephone is ringing."

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Polatkin came from behind the rack and automatically proceeded to the office, while Scheikowitz peeped out of the denim curtains.

"You got to excuse me, Mr. Scheikowitz," Elkan murmured. "I couldn't help myself at all."

"You've killed him!" Scheikowitz gasped.

"*Yow!* I've killed him!" Elkan exclaimed. "It would take a whole lot more as that to kill a bum like him."

He bent over Flaxberg and shook him by the shoulder.

"Hey!" he shouted in his ear. "You are ruining your clothes!"

Flaxberg raised his drooping head and, assisted by Elkan, regained his feet and staggered to the water-cooler, where Elkan bathed his streaming nostrils with the icy fluid.

At length Scheikowitz stirred himself to action just as Polatkin relinquished the 'phone.

"Markulies," Scheikowitz shouted, "go out and get a policeman!"

"Don't do nothing of the kind, Markulies!" Polatkin declared. "I got something to say here too."

He turned severely to Elkan.

"Leave that loafer alone and listen to me," he said. "What right do you got to promise deliveries on them 2060's in a week?"

"I thought——" Elkan began.

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"You ain't got no business to think," Polatkin interrupted. "The next time you are selling a concern like Appenweier & Murray don't promise nothing in the way of deliveries, because with people like them it's always the same. If you tell 'em a week they ring you up and insist on it they would got to got the goods in five days."

He put his hand on Elkan's shoulder; and the set expression of his face melted until his short dark moustache disappeared between his nose and his under lip in a widespread grin.

"Come inside the office," he said—"you too, Scheikowitz. Elkan's got a long story he wants to tell us."

Half an hour later, Sam Markulies knocked timidly at the office door.

"Mr. Polatkin," he said, "Marx Feinermann says to me to ask you if he should wait any longer on account they're very busy over to Kupferberg Brothers'."

"Tell him he should come in here," Polatkin said; and Markulies withdrew after gazing in open-mouthed wonder at the spectacle of Elkan Lubliner seated at Polatkin's desk, with one of Polatkin's mildest cigars in his mouth, while the two partners sat in adjacent chairs and smiled on Elkan admiringly.

"You want to speak to me, Mr. Polatkin?" Feinermann asked, as he came in a moment afterward.

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"Sure," Polatkin replied as he handed the astonished Feinermann a cigar. "Sit down, Feinermann, and listen to me. In the first place, Feinermann, what for a neighborhood is Pitt Street to live in? Why don't you move uptown, Feinermann?"

"A foreman is lucky if he could live in Pitt Street even," Feinermann said. "You must think I got money, Mr. Polatkin."

"How much more a month would it cost you to live uptown?" Polatkin continued. "At the most ten dollars—ain't it?"

Feinermann nodded sadly.

"To a man which he is only a foreman, Mr. Polatkin, ten dollars is ten dollars," he commented.

"Sure, I know," Polatkin said; "but instead of five dollars a week board, Elkan would pay you seven dollars a week, supposing you would move up to Lenox Avenue. Ain't that right, Elkan?"

"Sure, that's right," Elkan said. "Only, if I am paying him seven dollars a week board, he must got to give Mrs. Feinermann a dollar and a half extra housekeeping money."

Is that agreeable, Feinermann?"

Again Feinermann nodded.

"Then that's all we want from you, Feinermann," Polatkin added, "except I want to tell you this much: I am asking Elkan he should come uptown and live with me; and he says no—he would prefer to stick where he is."

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Feinermann shrugged complacently.

"I ain't got no objections," he said as he withdrew.

"And now, Elkan," Polatkin cried, "we got to fix it up with the other feller."

Hardly had he spoken when there stood framed in the open doorway the disheveled figure of Flaxberg.

"*Nu*, Flaxberg," Polatkin said. "What d'ye want from us now?"

"I am coming to tell you this, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg said thickly through his cut and swollen lips: "I am coming to tell you that I'm sick and so you must give me permission to go home."

"Nobody wants you to stay here, Flaxberg," Polatkin answered.

"Sure, I know," Flaxberg rejoined; "but if I would go home without your consent you would claim I made a breach of my contract."

"Don't let that worry you in the least, Flaxberg," Polatkin retorted, "because, so far as that goes, we fire you right here and now, on account you didn't make no attempt to sell Appenweier & Murray, when a boy like Elkan, which up to now he wasn't even a salesman at all, could sell 'em one thousand dollars goods."

Flaxberg's puffed features contorted themselves in an expression of astonishment.

"Lubliner sells Appenweier & Murray a bill of goods!" he exclaimed.

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By way of answer Polatkin held out the order slip for Flaxberg's inspection.

"That's all right," Flaxberg declared. "I would make it hot for you anyhow! You put this young feller up to it that he pretty near kills me."

"*Yow!* We put him up to it!" Polatkin retorted. "You put him up to it yourself, Flaxberg. You are lucky he didn't break your neck for you; because, if you think you could sue anybody in the courts yet, we got for witness Feinermann, Markulies and ourselves that you called him a liar and a thief."

"*Nu*, Polatkin," Scheikowitz said, "give him say a hundred dollars and call it square."

"You wouldn't give me five hundred dollars," Flaxberg shouted as he started for the door, "because I would sue you in the courts for five thousand dollars yet."

Flaxberg banged the door violently behind him, whereat Polatkin shrugged his shoulders.

"Bluffs he is making it!" he declared; and forthwith he began to unfold plans for Elkan's new campaign as city salesman. He had not proceeded very far, however, when there came another knock at the door. It was Sam Markulies.

"Mr. Flaxberg says to me I should ask you if he should wait for the hundred dollars a check, or might you would mail it to him maybe!" he said.

Scheikowitz looked inquiringly at his partner.

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"Put on it, 'In full of all claims against Polatkin & Scheikowitz or Elkan Lubliner to date,'" he said. "And when you get through with that, Scheikowitz, write an 'ad' for an assistant cutter. We've got to get busy on that Appenweier & Murray order right away."

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CHAPTER THREE

A MATCH FOR ELKAN LUBLINER

MADE IN HEAVEN, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF MAX KAPFER

"I WOULDN'T care if Elkan Lubliner was only eighteen even," declared Morris Rashkind emphatically; "he ain't too young to marry B. Maslik's a *Tochter*. There's a feller which he has got in improved property alone, understand me, an equity of a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars; and if you would count second mortgages and Bronx lots, Mr. Polatkin, the feller is worth easy his quarter of a million dollars."

"Sure I know," Polatkin retorted. "With such a feller, he gives his daughter when she gets married five thousand dollars a second mortgage, understand me; and the most the *Chosan* could expect is that some day he forecloses the mortgage and gets a deficiency judgment against a dummy bondsman which all his life he never got money enough to pay his laundry bills even!"

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"*Oser a Stück!*" Rashkind protested. "He says to me, so sure as you are sitting there, 'Mr. Rashkind,' he says, 'my dear friend,' he says, 'Birdie is my only *Tochter*. I ain't got no other one,' he says, '*Gott sei Dank*,' he says; 'and the least I could do for her is five thousand dollars cash,' he says, 'in a certified check,' he says, 'before the feller goes under the *Chuppah* at all.'"

"With a feller like B. Maslik," Polatkin commented, "it ain't necessary for him to talk that way, Rashkind, because if he wants to get an up-to-date business man for his daughter, understand me, he couldn't expect the feller is going to take chances on an uncertified check *oder* a promissory note."

"That's all right, Mr. Polatkin," Rashkind said. "B. Maslik's promissory note is just so good as his certified check, Mr. Polatkin. With that feller I wouldn't want his promissory note even. His word in the presence of a couple of bright, level-headed witnesses, which a lawyer couldn't rattle 'em on the stand, *verstehst du*, would be good enough for me, Mr. Polatkin. B. Maslik, y'understand, is absolutely good like diamonds, Mr. Polatkin."

"All right," Polatkin said. "I'll speak to Elkan about it. He'll be back from the road Saturday."

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"Speak nothing," Rashkind cried excitedly. "Saturday would be too late. Everybody is working on this here proposition, Mr. Polatkin. Because the way property is so dead nowadays all the real estaters tries to be a *Shadchen*, understand me; so if you wouldn't want Miss Maslik to slip through Elkan's fingers, write him this afternoon yet. I got a fountain pen right here."

As he spoke he produced a fountain pen of formidable dimensions and handed it to Polatkin.

"I'll take the letter along with me and mail it," Rashkind continued as Marcus made a preliminary flourish.

"Tell him," Rashkind went on, "that the girl is something which you could really call beautiful."

"I wouldn't tell him nothing of the sort," Polatkin said, "because, in the first place, what for a *Schreiber* you think I am anyway? And, in the second place, Rashkind, Elkan is so full of business, understand me, if I would write him to come home on account this here Miss Maslik is such a good-looker he wouldn't come at all."

Rashkind shrugged.

"Go ahead," he said. "Do it your own way."

For more than five minutes Polatkin indited his message to Elkan and at last he inclosed it in an envelope.

"How would you spell Bridgetown?" he asked.

"Which Bridgetown?" Rashkind inquired—"Bridgetown, Pennsylvania, *oder* Bridgetown, Illinois?"

"What difference does that make?" Polatkin demanded.

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"About the spelling it don't make no difference," Rashkind replied. "Bridgetown is spelt B-r-i-d-g-e-t-a-u-n, all the world over; *aber* if it's Bridgetown, Pennsylvania, that's a very funny quincidence, on account I am just now talking to a feller which formerly keeps a store there by the name Flixman."

"Do you mean Julius Flixman?" Marcus asked as he licked the envelope.

"That's the feller," Rashkind said with a sigh as he pocketed the letter to Elkan. "It's a funny world, Mr. Polatkin. Him and me comes over together in one steamer yet, thirty years ago; and to-day if that feller's worth a cent he's worth fifty thousand dollars."

"Sure, I know," Marcus agreed; "and *Gott soll hüten* you and I should get what he's got it. He could drop down in the streets any moment, Rashkind." Rashkind nodded as he rose to his feet.

"In a way, it's his own fault," he said, "because a feller which he could afford to ride round in taxicabs yet ain't got no business walking the streets in his condition. I told him this morning: 'Julius,' I says, 'if I was one of your heirs,' I says to him, 'I wouldn't want nothing better as to see you hanging round the real-estate exchange, looking the way you look!' And he says to me: 'Rashkind,' he says, 'there is a whole lot wosser things I could wish myself as you should be my heir,' he says. 'On account,' he says, 'if a *Schlemiel* like you would get a relation which is going to leave you money, Rashkind,' he says, 'it would be just your luck that the relation dies one day after you do, even if you would live to be a hundred.'"

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He walked toward the door and paused on the threshold.

"Yes, Mr. Polatkin," he concluded, "you could take it from me, if that feller's got heart disease, Mr. Polatkin, it ain't from overworking it. So I would ring you up to-morrow afternoon three o'clock and see if Elkan's come yet."

"I'm agreeable," Polatkin declared; "only one thing I got to ask you: you should keep your mouth shut to my partner, on account if he hears it that I am bringing back Elkan from the road just for this here Miss Maslik, understand me, he would never let me hear the end of it."

Rashkind made a reassuring gesture with his right arm after the fashion of a swimmer who employs the overhand stroke.

"What have I got to do with your partner?" he said as he started for the elevator. "If I meet him in the place, I am selling buttons and you don't want to buy none. Ain't it?"

Polatkin nodded and turned to the examination of a pile of monthly statements by way of dismissing the marriage broker. Moreover, he felt impelled to devise some excuse for sending for Elkan, so that he might have it pat upon the return from lunch of his partner, Philip Scheikowitz, who at that precise moment was seated in the rear of Wasserbauer's café, by the side of Charles Fischko.

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"Yes, Mr. Scheikowitz," Fischko said, "if you would really got the feller's interest in heart, understand me, you wouldn't wait till Saturday at all. Write him to-day yet, because this proposition is something which you could really call remarkable, on account most girls which they got five thousand dollars dowries, Mr. Scheikowitz, ain't got five-thousand-dollar faces; *aber* this here Miss Maslik is something which when you are paying seventy-five cents a seat on theaytre, understand me, you don't see such an elegant-looking *Gesicht*. She's a regular doll, Mr. Scheikowitz!"

"Sure, I know," Scheikowitz agreed; "that's the way it is with them dolls, Fischko—takes a fortune already to dress 'em."

Fischko flapped the air indignantly with both hands.

"That's where you are making a big mistake," he declared. "The Masliks got living in the house with 'em a girl which for years already she makes all Miss Maslik's dresses and Mrs. Maslik's also. B. Maslik told me so himself, Mr. Scheikowitz. He says to me: 'Fischko,' he says, 'my Birdie is a girl which she ain't accustomed she should got a lot of money spent on her,' he says; 'the five thousand dollars is practically net,' he says, 'on account his expenses would be small.'"

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"Is she a good cook?" Scheikowitz asked.

"A good cook!" Fischko cried. "Listen here to me, Mr. Scheikowitz. You know that a *Shadchen* eats sometimes in pretty swell houses. Ain't it?"

Scheikowitz nodded.

"Well, I am telling you, Mr. Scheikowitz, so sure as I am sitting here, that I got in B. Maslik's last Tuesday a week ago already a piece of plain everyday *gefüllte Hechte*, Mr. Scheikowitz, which honestly, if you would go to Delmonico's *oder* the Waldorfer, understand me, you could pay as high as fifty cents for it, Mr. Scheikowitz, and it wouldn't be—I am not saying better—but so good even as that there *gefüllte Hechte* which I got it by B. Maslik."

Scheikowitz nodded again.

"All right, Fischko," he said, "I will write the boy so soon as I get back to the office yet; but one thing I must beg of you: don't say a word about this to my partner, y'understand, because if he would hear that I am bringing home Elkan from the road just on account of this *Shidduch* you are proposing, understand me, he would make my life miserable."

Fischko shrugged his shoulders until his head nearly disappeared into his chest.

"What would I talk to your partner for, Mr. Scheikowitz?" he said. "I am looking to

you in this here affair; so I would stop round the day after to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Scheikowitz, and if your partner asks me something a question, I would tell him I am selling thread *oder* buttons."

"Make it buttons," Scheikowitz commented, as he rose to his feet; "because we never buy buttons from nobody but the Prudential Button Company."

On his way back to his office Scheikowitz pondered a variety of reasons for writing Elkan to return, and he had tentatively adopted the most extravagant one when, within a hundred feet of his business premises, he encountered no less a personage than Julius Flixman.

"*Wie geht's*, Mr. Flixman?" he cried. "What brings you to New York?"

Flixman saluted Philip with a limp handclasp.

"I am living here now," he said. "I am giving up my store in Bridgetown *schon* six months ago already, on account I enjoyed such poor health there. So I sold out to a young feller by the name Max Kapfer, which was for years working by Paschalson, of Sarahcuse; and I am living here, as I told you."

"With relations maybe?" Philip asked.

"*Yow*, relations!" Flixman replied. "I used to got one sister living in Bessarabia, Mr. Scheikowitz, and I ain't heard from her in more as thirty years, and I guess she is dead all right by this time. I am living at a hotel which I could assure you the prices they soak me is something terrible."

"And what are you doing round this neighborhood, Mr. Flixman?" Philip continued by way of making conversation.

"I was just over to see a lawyer over on Center Street," Flixman replied.

"A lawyer on Center Street!" Philip exclaimed. "A rich man like you should got a lawyer on Wall Street, Mr. Flixman. Henry D. Feldman is our lawyer, and——"

"Don't mention that sucker to me!" Flixman interrupted. "Actually the feller is got the nerve to ask me a hundred dollars for drawing a will, and this here feller on Center Street wants only fifty. I bet yer if I would go round there to-morrow or the next day he takes twenty-five even."

"But a will is something which is really important, Mr. Flixman."

"Not to me it ain't, Scheikowitz, because, while I couldn't take my money with me, Scheikowitz, I ain't got no one to leave it to; so, if I wouldn't make a will it goes to the state—ain't it?"

"Maybe," Philip commented.

"So I am leaving it to a Talmud Torah School, which it certainly don't do no harm that all them young loafers over on the East Side should learn a little *Loschen Hakodesch*. Ain't it?"

"Sure not," Philip said.

"Well," Flixman concluded as he took a firmer grasp on his cane preparatory to departing, "that's the way it goes. If I would got children to leave my money to I would say: 'Yes; give the lawyer a hundred dollars.' But for a Talmud Torah School I would see 'em all dead first before I would pay fifty even."

He nodded savagely in farewell and shuffled off down the street, while Philip made his way toward the factory, with his half-formed excuse to his partner now entirely forgotten.

He tried in vain to recall it when he entered his office a few minutes later, but the sight of his partner spurred him to action and immediately he devised a new and better plan.

"Marcus," he said, "write Elkan at once he should come back to the store. I just seen Flixman on the street and he tells me he's got a young feller by the name Karpfer *oder* Kapfer now running his store; and," he continued in an access of inspiration, "the stock is awful run down there; so, if Elkan goes right back to Bridgetown with a line of low-priced goods he could do a big business with Kapfer."

Polatkin had long since concocted what he had conceived to be a perfectly good excuse for his letter, and he had intended to lend it color by prefacing it with an abusive dissertation on "Wasting the Whole Afternoon over Lunch"; but Scheikowitz' greeting completely disarmed him. His jaw dropped and he gazed stupidly at his partner.

"What's the matter?" Scheikowitz cried. "Is it so strange we should bring Elkan back here for the chance of doing some more business? Three dollars carfare between here and Bridgetown wouldn't make or break us, Polatkin."

"Sure! Sure!" Marcus said at last. "I would—now—write him as soon as I get back from lunch."

"Write him right away!" Scheikowitz insisted; and, though Marcus had breakfasted before seven that morning and it was then half-past two, he turned to his desk without further parley. There, for the second time that day, he penned a letter to Elkan; and, after exhibiting it to his partner, he inclosed it in an addressed envelope. Two minutes later he paused in front of Wasserbauer's café and, taking the missive from his pocket, tore it into small pieces and cast it into the gutter.

"I suppose, Elkan, you are wondering why we wrote you to come home from Bridgetown when you would be back on Saturday anyway," Scheikowitz began as Elkan laid down his suitcase in the firm's office the following afternoon.

"Naturally," Elkan replied. "I had an appointment for this morning to see a feller there, which we could open maybe a good account; a feller by the name Max Kapfer."

"Max Kapfer?" Polatkin and Scheikowitz exclaimed with one voice.

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"That's what I said," Elkan repeated. "And in order I shouldn't lose the chance I got him to promise he would come down here this afternoon yet on a late train and we would pay his expenses."

"Do you mean Max Kapfer, the feller which took over Flixman's store?" Polatkin asked.

"There's only one Max Kapfer in Bridgetown," Elkan replied, and Polatkin immediately assumed a pose of righteous indignation.

"That's from yours an idee, Scheikowitz," he said. "Not only you make the boy trouble to come back to the store, but we also got to give this feller Kapfer his expenses yet."

"What are you kicking about?" Scheikowitz demanded. "You seemed agreeable to the proposition yesterday."

"I got to seem agreeable," Polatkin retorted as he started for the door of the factory, "otherwise it would be nothing but fight, fight, fight *mit* you, day in, day out."

He paused at the entrance and winked solemnly at Elkan.

"I am sick and tired of it," he concluded as he supplemented the wink with a significant frown, and when he passed into the factory Elkan followed him.

"What's the matter now?" Elkan asked anxiously.

"I want to speak to you a few words something," Polatkin began; but before he could continue Scheikowitz entered the factory.

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"Did you got your lunch on the train, Elkan?" Scheikowitz said; "because, if not, come on out and we'll have a cup coffee together."

"Leave the boy alone, can't you?" Polatkin exclaimed.

"I'll go right out with you, Mr. Scheikowitz," Elkan said as he edged away to the rear of the factory. "Go and put on your hat and I'll be with you in a minute."

When Scheikowitz had reëntered the office Elkan turned to Marcus Polatkin.

"You ain't scrapping again," he said, "are you?"

"*Oser a Stück*," Polatkin answered. "We are friendly like lambs; but listen here to me, Elkan. I ain't got no time before he'll be back again, so I'll tell you. As a matter of fact, it was me that wrote you to come back, really. I got an elegant *Shidduch* for you."

"*Shidduch!*" Elkan exclaimed. "For me?"

"Sure," Polatkin whispered. "A fine-looking girl by the name Birdie Maslik, *mit* five thousand dollars. Don't say nothing to Scheikowitz about it."

"But," Elkan said, "I ain't looking for no *Shidduch*."

"S-ssh!" Polatkin hissed. "Her father is B. Maslik, the 'Pants King.' To-morrow night you are going up to see her *mit* Rashkind, the *Shadchen*."

"What the devil you are talking about?" Elkan asked.

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"Not a word," Polatkin whispered out of one corner of his mouth. "Here comes Scheikowitz—and remember, don't say nothing to him about it. Y'understand?"

Elkan nodded reluctantly as Scheikowitz reappeared from the office.

"Nu, Elkan," Scheikowitz demanded, "are you coming?"

"Right away," Elkan said, and together they proceeded downstairs.

"Well, Elkan," Scheikowitz began when they reached the sidewalk, "you must think we was crazy to send for you just on account of this here Kapfer. Ain't it?"

Elkan shrugged in reply.

"But, as a matter of fact," Scheikowitz continued, "Kapfer ain't got no more to do with it than Elia Hanové; and, even though Polatkin would be such a crank that I was afraid for my life to suggest a thing, it was my idee you should come home, Elkan, because in a case like this delays is dangerous."

"Mr. Scheikowitz," Elkan pleaded, "do me the favour and don't go beating bushes round. What are you trying to drive into?"

"I am trying to drive into this, Elkan," Scheikowitz replied: "I have got for you an elegant *Shidduch*."

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"*Shidduch!*" Elkan exclaimed. "For me? Why, Mr. Scheikowitz, I don't want no *Shidduch* yet a while; and anyhow, Mr. Scheikowitz, if I would get married I would be my own *Shadchen*."

"*Schmooes*, Elkan!" Scheikowitz exclaimed. "A feller which is his own *Shadchen* remains single all his life long."

"That suits me all right," Elkan commented as they reached Wasserbauer's. "I would remain single *und fertig*."

"What d'ye mean, you would remain single?" Scheikowitz cried. "Is some one willing to pay you five thousand dollars you should remain single, Elkan? *Oser a Stück*, Elkan; and, furthermore, this here Miss Birdie Maslik is got such a face, Elkan, which, honest, if she wouldn't have a cent to her name, understand me, you would say she is beautiful anyhow."

"Miss Birdie Maslik!" Elkan murmured.

"B. Maslik's a *Tochter*," Scheikowitz added; "and remember, Elkan, don't breathe a word of this to Polatkin, otherwise he would never get through talking about it. Moreover, you will go up to Maslik's house to-morrow night with Charles Fischko, the *Shadchen*."

"Now listen here to me, Mr. Scheikowitz," Elkan protested. "I ain't going nowheres with no *Shadchen*—and that's all there is to it."

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"*Aber*, Elkan," Scheikowitz said, "this here Fischko ain't a *Shadchen* exactly. He's really a real-estater, *aber* real estate is so dead nowadays the feller must got to make a living somehow; so it ain't like you would be going somewheres *mit* a *Shadchen*, Elkan. Actually you are going somewheres *mit* a real-estater. Ain't it?"

"It don't make no difference," Elkan answered stubbornly. "If I would go and see a girl I would go alone, otherwise not at all. So, if you insist on it I should go and see this here Miss Maslik to-morrow night, Mr. Scheikowitz, I would do so, but not with Rashkind."

"Fischko," Scheikowitz interrupted.

"Fischko *oder* Rashkind," Elkan said—"that's all there is to it. And if I would get right back to the store I got just time to go up to the Prince Clarence and meet Max Kapfer; so you would excuse me if I skip."

"Think it over Elkan," Scheikowitz called after him as Elkan left the café, and three quarters of an hour later he entered Polatkin & Scheikowitz' showroom accompanied by a fashionably attired young man.

"Mr. Polatkin," Elkan said, "shake hands with Mr. Kapfer."

"How do you do, Mr. Kapfer?" Polatkin cried. "This here is my partner, Philip Scheikowitz."

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"How do you do, Mr. Scheikowitz?" Kapfer said. "You are very conveniently located here. Right in the heart of things, so to speak. I see across the street is Bleimauer & Gittelman. Them people was in to see me last week already and offered me a big bargain in velvet suits, but I was all stocked up along that line so I didn't hand them no orders."

"Velvet suits ain't our specialty at all," Polatkin replied; "but I bet yer if we never seen a velvet suit in all our lives, Mr. Kapfer, we could work you up a line of velvet suits which would make them velvet suits of Bleimauer & Gittelman look like a bundle of rags."

"I don't doubt it," Kapfer rejoined; "but, as I said before, velvet suits I am all stocked

up in, as I couldn't afford to carry very many of 'em."

"That's all right," Polatkin said as he led the way to the showroom. "We got a line of garments here, Mr. Kapfer, which includes all prices and styles." He handed Max a large mild cigar as he spoke. "So let's see if we couldn't suit you," he concluded.

For more than two hours Max Kapfer examined Polatkin & Scheikowitz' sample line and made so judicious a selection of moderate-priced garments that Polatkin could not forbear expressing his admiration, albeit the total amount of the purchase was not large.

"You certainly got the right buying idee, Mr. Kapfer," he said. "Them styles is really the best value we got."

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"I know it," Kapfer agreed. "I was ten years with Paschalson, of Sarahcuse, Mr. Polatkin, and what I don't know about a popular-price line of ladies' ready-to-wear garments, underwear and millinery, Paschalson couldn't learn me. But that ain't what I'm after, Mr. Polatkin. I'd like to do some high-price business too. If I had the capital I would improve my store building and put in new fixtures, understand me, and I could increase my business seventy-five per cent and carry a better class of goods too."

"Sure, I know," Polatkin said as they returned to the office. "Everybody needs more capital, Mr. Kapfer. We ourselves could do with a few thousand dollars more."

He looked significantly at Elkan, who colored slightly as he recognized the allusion.

"I bet yer," Scheikowitz added fervently. "Five thousand dollars would be welcome to us also." He nodded almost imperceptibly at Elkan, who forthwith broke into a gentle perspiration.

"Five thousand was just the figure I was thinking of myself," Kapfer said. "With five thousand dollars I could do wonders in Bridgetown, Mr. Scheikowitz."

"I'm surprised Flixman don't help you out a bit," Elkan suggested by way of changing the subject, and Kapfer emitted a mirthless laugh.

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"That bloodsucker!" he said. "What, when I bought his store, Mr. Scheikowitz, he took from me in part payment notes at two, four, and six months; and, though I got the cash ready to pay him the last note, which it falls due this week already, I asked him he should give me two months an extension, on account I want to put in a few fixtures on the second floor. Do you think that feller would do it? He's got a heart like a rock, Mr. Polatkin; and any one which could get from him his money must got to blast it out of him with dynamite yet."

Polatkin nodded solemnly.

"You couldn't tell me nothing about Flixman," he said as he offered Kapfer a consolatory cigar. "It's wasting your lungs to talk about such a feller at all; so let's go ahead and finish up this order, Mr. Kapfer, and afterward Elkan would go uptown with you." He motioned Kapfer to a seat and then looked at his watch. "I didn't got no idee it was so late," he said. "Scheikowitz, do me the favor and go over Mr. Kapfer's order with him while I give a look outside and see what's doing in the shop."

As he walked toward the door he jerked his head sideways at Elkan, who a moment later followed him into the factory.

"Listen, Elkan," he began. "While you and Scheikowitz was out for your coffee, Rashkind rings me up and says you should meet him on the corner of One Hundred and Twentieth Street and Lenox Avenue to-night—not to-morrow night—at eight o'clock sure."

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"But Kapfer ain't going back to Bridgetown to-night," Elkan protested. "He told me so himself on account he is got still to buy underwear, millinery and shoes."

"What is that our business?" Polatkin asked. "He's already bought from us all he's going to; so, if he stays here, let them underwear and millinery people entertain him. Blow him to dinner and that would be plenty."

Once more Elkan shrugged despairingly.

"You didn't say nothing to Scheikowitz about it, did you?" Polatkin inquired.

"Sure I didn't say nothing to him about it," Elkan said; "because——"

"Elkan," Scheikowitz called from the office, "Mr. Kapfer is waiting for you."

Elkan had been about to disclose the conversation between himself and Scheikowitz at Wasserbauer's that afternoon, but Marcus, at the appearance of his partner, turned abruptly and walked into the cutting room; and thus, when Elkan accompanied Max Kapfer uptown that evening, his manner was so preoccupied by reason of his dilemma that Kapfer was constrained to comment on it.

"What's worrying you, Lubliner?" he asked as they seated themselves in the café of the Prince Clarence. "You look like you was figuring out the interest on the money you owe."

[Pg 101] "I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Kapfer," Elkan began, "I would like to ask you an advice about something."

"Go as far as you like," Kapfer replied. "It don't make no difference if a feller would be broke *oder* in jail, he could always give somebody advice."

"Well, it's like this," Elkan said, and forthwith he unfolded the circumstances attending his return from Bridgetown.

"*Nu!*" Kapfer commented when Elkan concluded his narrative. "What is that for something to worry about?"

"But the idee of the thing is wrong," Elkan protested. "In the first place, I got lots of time to get married, on account I am only twenty-one, Mr. Kapfer; and though a feller couldn't start in too early in business, Mr. Kapfer, getting married is something else again. To my mind a feller should be anyhow twenty-five before he jumps right in and gets married."

"With some people, yes, and others, no," Kapfer rejoined.

"And in the second place," Elkan went on, "I don't like this here *Shadchen* business. We are living in America, not *Russland*; and in America if a feller gets married he don't need no help from a *Shadchen*, Mr. Kapfer."

[Pg 102] "No," Kapfer said, "he don't need no help, Lubliner; but, just the same, if some one would come to me any time these five years and says to me, here is something a nice girl, understand me, with five thousand dollars, y'understand, I would have been married *schon* long since already." He cleared his throat judicially and sat back in his chair until it rested against the wall. "The fact is, Lubliner," he said, "you are acting like a fool. What harm would it do supposing you would go up there to-night with this here Rashkind?"

"What, and go there to-morrow night with Fischko!" Elkan exclaimed. "Besides, if I would go up there to-night with Rashkind and the deal is closed, understand me, might Fischko would sue Mr. Scheikowitz in the court yet."

"Not at all," Kapfer declared. "Fischko couldn't sue nobody but B. Maslik; so never mind waiting here for dinner. Hustle uptown and keep your date with Rashkind." He shook Elkan by the hand. "Good luck to you, Lubliner," he concluded heartily; "and if you got the time stop in on your way down to-morrow morning and let me know how you come out."

[Pg 103] When Elkan Lubliner arrived at the corner of One Hundred and Twentieth Street and Lenox Avenue that evening, it might well be supposed that he would have difficulty in recognizing Mr. Rashkind, since neither he nor Rashkind had any previous acquaintance. However, he accosted without hesitation a short, stout person arrayed in a wrinkled frock coat and wearing the white tie and gold spectacles that invariably garb the members of such quasi-clerical professions as a *Shadchen*, a sexton or the collector of subscriptions for a charitable institution. Indeed, as Rashkind combined all three of these callings with the occupation of a real-estate broker, he also sported a high silk hat of uncertain vintage and a watch-chain bearing a Masonic emblem approximating in weight and size a tailor's goose.

"This is Mr. Rashkind, ain't it?" Elkan asked, and Rashkind bowed solemnly.

"My name is Mr. Lubliner," Elkan continued, "and Mr. Polatkin says you would be here at eight."

For answer Mr. Rashkind drew from his waistcoat pocket what appeared to be a six-ounce boxing glove, but which subsequently proved to be the chamois covering of his gold watch, the gift of Rambam Lodge, No. 142, I. O. M. A. This Mr. Rashkind consulted with knit brows.

"That's right," he said, returning the watch and its covering to his pocket—"eight o'clock to the minute; so I guess we would just so well go round to B. Maslik's house if you ain't got no objections."

"I'm agreeable," Elkan said; "but, before we start, you should please be so good and tell me what I must got to do."

[Pg 104] "What you must got to do?" Rashkind exclaimed. "A question! You mustn't got to do nothing. Act natural and leave the rest to me."

"But," Elkan insisted as they proceeded down Lenox Avenue, "shouldn't I say something to the girl?"

"Sure, you should say something to the girl," Rashkind replied; "but, if you couldn't find something to say to a girl like Miss Birdie Maslik, all I could tell you is you're a bigger *Schlemiel* than you look."

With this encouraging ultimatum, Mr. Rashkind entered the portals of a hallway that glittered with lacquered bronze and plaster porphyry, and before Elkan had time to ask any more questions he found himself seated with Mr. Rashkind in the front parlour of a large apartment on the seventh floor.

"Mr. Maslik says you should be so good and step into the dining room," the maid said to Mr. Rashkind. Forthwith he rose to his feet and left Elkan alone in the room, save for the presence of the maid, who drew down the shades and smiled encouragingly on Elkan.

"Ain't it a fine weather?" she asked.

Elkan looked up, and he could not resist smiling in return.

"Elegant," he replied. "It don't seem like summer was ever going to quit."

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"It couldn't last too long for me," the maid continued. "Might some people would enjoy cold weather maybe; but when it comes to going up on the roof, understand me, and hanging out a big wash, the summer is good enough for me."

Elkan gazed for a moment at her oval face, with its kindly, intelligent brown eyes.

"You mean to say you got to do washing here?" he asked in shocked accents.

"Sure I do," she replied; "*aber* this winter I am going to night school again and next summer might I would get a job as bookkeeper maybe."

"But why don't you get a job in a store somewheres?" he asked.

"I see myself working in a store all day, standing on my feet yet, and when I get through all my wages goes for board!" she replied. "Whereas, here I got anyhow a good room and board, and all what I earn I could put away in savings bank. I worked in a store long enough, Mr.—"

"Lubliner," Elkan said.

"—Mr. Lubliner; and I could assure you I would a whole lot sooner do housework," she went on. "Why should a girl think it's a disgrace she should do housework for a living is more as I could tell you. Sooner or later a girl gets married, and then she must got to do her own housework."

"Not if her husband makes a good living," Elkan suggested.

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"Sure, I know," she rejoined; "but how many girls which they are working in stores gets not a rich man, understand me, but a man which is only making, say, for example, thirty dollars a week. The most that a poor girl expects is that she marries a poor man, y'understand, and then they work their way up together."

Elkan nodded. Unconsciously he was indorsing not so much the matter as the manner of her conversation, for she spoke with the low voice that distinguishes the Rumanian from the Pole or Lithuanian.

"You are coming from Rumania, ain't it?" Elkan asked.

"Pretty near there," the maid replied. "Right on the border. I am coming here an orphan five years ago; and—"

"*Nu*, Lubliner," cried a rasping voice from the doorway, "we got our appointment for nothing—Miss Maslik is sick."

"That's too bad," Elkan said perfunctorily.

"Only a little something she eats gives her a headache," Rashkind went on. "We could come round the day after to-morrow night."

"That's too bad also," Elkan commented, "on account the day after to-morrow night I got a date with a customer."

"Well, anyhow, B. Maslik would be in in a minute and—"

Elkan rose to his feet so abruptly that he nearly sent his chair through a cabinet behind him.

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"If I want to be here Friday night," he said, "I must see my customer to-night yet; so, young lady, if you would be so kind to tell Mr. Maslik I couldn't wait, but would be here Friday night with this here—now—gentleman. Come on, Rashkind."

He started for the hall door almost on a run, with Rashkind gesticulating excitedly

behind him; but, before the *Shadchen* could even grasp his coattails he had let himself hurriedly out and was taking the stairs three at a jump.

"Hey!" Rashkind shouted as he plunged down the steps after Elkan. "What's the matter with you? Don't you want to meet Mr. Maslik?"

Elkan only hurried the faster, however, for in the few minutes he had been alone in the room with the little brown-eyed maid he had made the discovery that marriage with the aid of a *Shadchen* was impossible for him. Simultaneously he conceived the notion that marriage without the aid of a *Shadchen* might after all be well worth trying; and, as this idea loomed in his mind, his pace slackened until the *Shadchen* overtook him at the corner of One Hundred and Sixteenth Street.

"Say, lookyhere, Lubliner!" Rashkind said. "What is the matter with you anyway?"

Elkan professed to misunderstand the question.

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"I've lost my address book," he said. "I had it in my hand when you left me alone there and I must of forgotten it; so I guess I'll go back and get it."

"All right," Rashkind replied. "I'll go with you."

Elkan wheeled round and glared viciously at the *Shadchen*.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" he roared. "You get right down them subway steps or I wouldn't come up with you Friday night."

"But what harm——" Rashkind began, when Elkan seized him by the shoulder and led him firmly downstairs to the ticket office. There Elkan bought a ticket and, dropping it in the chopper's box, he pushed Rashkind on to the platform. A few minutes later a downtown express bore the *Shadchen* away and Elkan ascended the stairs in three tremendous bounds. Unwaveringly he started up the street for B. Maslik's apartment house, where, by the simple expedient of handing the elevator boy a quarter, he averted the formality of being announced. Thus, when he rang the doorbell of B. Maslik's flat, though it was opened by the little brown-eyed maid in person, she had discarded the white apron and cap that she had worn a few minutes before, and her hair was fluffed up in becoming disorder.

"You was telling me you are coming originally from somewheres near Rumania," Elkan began without further preface, "and—why, what's the matter? You've been crying?"

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She put her fingers to her lips and closed the door softly behind her. "They says I didn't got no business talking to you at all," she replied, "and they called me down something terrible!"

Elkan's eyes flashed angrily.

"Who calls you down?" he demanded.

"Mr. and Mrs. Maslik," she answered; "and they says I ain't got no shame at all!"

She struggled bravely to retain her composure; but just one little half-strangled sob escaped her, and forthwith Elkan felt internally a peculiar sinking sensation.

"What do they mean you ain't got no shame?" he protested. "I got a right to talk to you and you got a right to talk to me—ain't it?"

She nodded and sobbed again, whereat Elkan winced and dug his nails into the palms of his hands.

"Listen!" he pleaded. "Don't worry yourself at all. After this I wouldn't got no use for them people. I didn't come here on my own account in the first place, but——"

Here he paused.

"But what?" the little maid asked.

"But I'm glad I came now," Elkan went on defiantly, "and I don't care who knows it. *Wir sind alles Jehudim*, anyhow, and one is just as good as the other."

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"Better even," she said. "What was B. Maslik in the old country? He could *oser* sign his name when he came here, while I am anyhow from decent, respectable people, Mr. Lubliner."

"I don't doubt it," Elkan replied.

"My father was a learned man, Mr. Lubliner; but that don't save him. One day he goes to Kishinef on business, Mr. Lubliner, and——"

Here her composure entirely forsook her and she covered her face with her hands and wept. Elkan struggled with himself no longer. He took the little maid in his arms; and, as it seemed the most natural thing in the world to do, she laid her head against his shoulder and had her whole cry out.

Elkan spoke no word, but patted her shoulder gently with his right hand.

"I guess I'm acting like a baby, Mr. Lubliner," she said, after a quarter of an hour had elapsed. To Elkan it seemed like an acquaintance of many months as he clasped her more closely.

"My name is Elkan, *Liebchen*," he said, "and we would send all the heavy washing out."

"Well, Lubliner," Kapfer cried as Elkan came into the café of the Prince Clarence the following morning, "you didn't like her—what?"

"Didn't like her!" Elkan exclaimed. "What d'ye mean I didn't like her?"

"Why, the way you look, I take it you had a pretty rotten time last night," Kapfer rejoined.

[Pg 111] "What are you talking about—rotten time?" Elkan protested. "The only thing is I feel so happy I didn't sleep a wink, that's all."

Kapfer jumped to his feet and slapped Elkan on the shoulder.

"Do you mean you're engaged!" he asked.

"Sure!" Elkan replied.

"Then I congratulate you a thousand times," Kapfer said gleefully.

"Once is plenty," Elkan replied.

"No, it ain't," Kapfer rejoined. "You should got to be congratulated more as you think, because this morning I am talking to a feller in the clothing business here and he says B. Maslik is richer as most people believe. The feller says he is easy worth a quarter of a million dollars."

"What's that got to do with it?" Elkan asked.

"What's that got to do with it?" Kapfer repeated. "Why, it's got everything to do with it, considering you are engaged to his only daughter."

"I am engaged to his only daughter? Who told you that, Mr. Kapfer?"

"Why, you did!" Kapfer said.

"I never said nothing of the kind," Elkan declared, "because I ain't engaged to Miss Maslik at all; in fact, I never even seen her."

Kapfer gazed earnestly at Elkan and then sat down suddenly.

[Pg 112] "Say, lookyhere, Lubliner," he said. "Are you crazy or am I? Last night you says you are going up with a *Shadchen* to see Birdie Maslik, and now you tell me you are engaged, but not to Miss Maslik."

"That's right," Elkan replied.

"Then who in thunder are you engaged to?"

"That's just the point," Elkan said, as he passed his hand through his hair. "I ain't slept a wink all night on account of it; in fact, this morning I wondered should I go round there and ask—and then I thought to myself I would get from you an advice first."

"Get from me an advice!" Kapfer exclaimed. "You mean you are engaged to a girl and you don't know her name, and so you come down here to ask me an advice as to how you should find out her name?"

Elkan nodded sadly and leaned his elbow on the table.

"It's like this," he said; and for more than half an hour he regaled Kapfer with a story that, stripped of descriptive and irrelevant material concerning Elkan's own feelings in the matter, ought to have taken only five minutes in the telling.

"And that's the way it is, Mr. Kapfer," Elkan concluded. "I don't know her name; but a poor little girl like her, which she is so good—and so—and so——"

Here he became all choked up and Kapfer handed him a cigar.

[Pg 113] "Don't go into that again, Lubliner," Kapfer said; "you told me how good she is six times already. The point is you are in a hole and you want me I should help you out—ain't it?"

Elkan nodded wearily.

"Well, then, my advice to you is: *Stiegen*," Kapfer continued. "Don't say a word about this to nobody until you would, anyhow, find out the girl's name."

"I wasn't going to," Elkan replied; "but there's something else, Mr. Kapfer. To-night I am to meet this here other *Shadchen* by the name Fischko, who is going to take me up to Maslik's house."

"But I thought Miss Maslik was sick," Kapfer said.

"She was sick," Elkan answered, "but she would be better by to-night. So that's the way it stands. If I would go downtown now and explain to Mr. Scheikowitz that I am not going up there to-night and that I was there last night—and—" Here Elkan paused and made an expressive gesture with both hands. "The fact is," he almost whimpered, "the whole thing is such a *Mischmasch* I feel like I was going crazy!"

Kapfer leaned across the table and patted him consolingly on the arm.

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"Don't make yourself sick over it," he advised. "Put it up to Polatkin. You don't got to keep Scheikowitz's idee a secret now, Lubliner, because sooner or later Polatkin must got to find it out. So you should let Polatkin know how you was up there last night, and that Rashkind wants you to go up there Friday night on account Miss Maslik was sick, and leave it to Polatkin to flag Scheikowitz and this here Fischko."

"But—" Elkan began, when the strange expression of Kapfer's face made him pause. Indeed, before he could proceed further, Kapfer jumped up from his chair.

"Cheese it!" he said. "Here comes Polatkin."

As he spoke, Polatkin caught sight of them and almost ran across the room.

"Elkan!" he exclaimed. "*Gott sei Dank* I found you here."

"What's the matter?" Elkan asked.

Polatkin drew forward a chair and they all sat down.

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"I just had a terrible fuss with Scheikowitz," he said. "This morning, when I got downtown, I thought I would tell him what I brought you back for; so I says to him: 'Philip,' I says, 'I want to tell you something,' I says. 'I got an elegant *Shidduch* for Elkan.'" He stopped and let his hand fall with a loud smack on his thigh. "Oo-ee!" he exclaimed. "What a row that feller made it! You would think, Elkan, I told him I got a pistol to shoot you with, the way he acts. I didn't even got the opportunity to tell him who the *Shidduch* was. He tells me I should mind my own business and calls me such names which honestly I wouldn't call a shipping clerk even. And what else d'ye think he says?"

Elkan and Kapfer shook their heads.

"Why, he says that to-night, at eight o'clock, he himself is going to have a *Shadchen* by the name Fischko take you up to see a girl in Harlem which the name he didn't tell me at all; but he says she's got five thousand dollars a dowry. Did he say to you anything about it, Elkan?"

"The first I hear of it!" Elkan replied in husky tones as he averted his eyes from Polatkin. "Why, I wouldn't know the feller Fischko if he stood before me now, and he wouldn't know me neither."

"Didn't he tell you her name?" Kapfer asked cautiously.

"No," Polatkin replied, "because I says right away that the girl I had in mind would got a dowry of five thousand too; and then and there Scheikowitz gets so mad he smashes a chair on us—one of them new ones we just bought, Elkan. So I didn't say nothing more, but I rung up Rashkind right away and asks him how things turns out, and he says nothing is settled yet."

Elkan nodded guiltily.

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"So I got an idee," Polatkin continued. "I thought, Elkan, we would do this: Don't come downtown to-day at all, and to-night I would go up and meet Fischko and tell him you are practically engaged and the whole thing is off. Also I would *schenk* the feller a ten-dollar bill he shouldn't bother us again."

Elkan grasped the edge of the table. He felt as if consciousness were slipping away from him, when suddenly Kapfer emitted a loud exclamation.

"By jiminy!" he cried. "I got an idee! Why shouldn't I go up there and meet this here Fischko?"

"You go up there?" Polatkin said.

"Sure; why not? A nice girl like Miss—whatever her name is—ain't too good for me, Mr. Polatkin. I got a good business there in Bridgetown, and—"

"But I don't know what for a girl she is at all," Polatkin protested.

"She's got anyhow five thousand dollars," Kapfer retorted, "and when a girl's got five thousand dollars, Mr. Polatkin, beauty ain't even skin-deep."

"Sure, I know," Polatkin agreed; "but so soon as you see Fischko and tell him you ain't Elkan Lubliner he would refuse to take you round to see the girl at all."

"Leave that to me," Kapfer declared. "D'ye know what I'll tell him?" He looked hard at Elkan Lubliner before he continued. "I'll tell him," he said, "that Elkan is already engaged."

"Already engaged!" Polatkin cried.

"Sure!" Kapfer said—"secretly engaged unbeknownst to everybody."

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"But right away to-morrow morning Fischko would come down and tell Scheikowitz that you says Elkan is secretly engaged, and Scheikowitz would know the whole thing was a fake and that I am at the bottom of it."

"No, he wouldn't," Kapfer rejoined, "because Elkan would then and there say that he is secretly engaged and that would let you out."

"Sure it would," Polatkin agreed; "and then Scheikowitz would want to kill Elkan."

Suddenly Elkan struck the table with his clenched fist.

"I've got the idee!" he said. "I wouldn't come downtown till Saturday—because we will say, for example, I am sick. Then, when Fischko says I am secretly engaged, you can say you don't know nothing about it; and by the time I come down on Saturday morning I would be engaged all right, and nobody could do nothing any more."

"That's true too," Kapfer said, "because your date with Rashkind is for to-morrow night and by Saturday the whole thing would be over."

Polatkin nodded doubtfully, but after a quarter of an hour's earnest discussion he was convinced of the wisdom of Elkan's plan.

"All right, Elkan," he said at last. "Be down early on Saturday."

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"Eight o'clock sure," Elkan replied as he shook Polatkin's hand; "and by that time I hope you'll congratulate me on my engagement."

"I hope so," Polatkin said.

"Me too," Kapfer added after Polatkin departed; "and I also hope, Elkan, this would be a warning to you that the next time you get engaged you should find out the girl's name in advance."

"Yes, siree, sir," said Charles Fischko emphatically, albeit a trifle thickly. "I guess you made a big hit there, Mr. Kapfer, and I don't think I am acting previously when I drink to the health of Mrs. Kapfer." He touched glasses with Max Kapfer, who sat opposite to him at a secluded table in the Harlem Winter Garden, flanked by two bottles of what had been a choice brand of California champagne. "Née Miss Maslik," he added as he put down his glass; "and I think you are getting a young lady which is not only good-looking but she is got also a heart like gold. Look at the way she treats the servant girl they got there! Honestly, when I was round there this morning them two girls was talking like sisters already!"

"That's all right," Kapfer rejoined; "she's got a right to treat that girl like a sister. She's a nice little girl—that servant girl."

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"Don't I know it!" Fischko protested as he poured himself out another glass of wine. "It was me that got her the job there two years ago already; and before I would recommend to a family like B. Maslik's a servant girl, understand me, I would make sure she comes from decent, respectable people. Also the girl is a wonderful cook, Mr. Kapfer, simple, plain, everyday dish like *gefüllte Hechte*, Mr. Kapfer; she makes it like it would be roast goose already—so fine she cooks it. She learned it from her mother, Mr. Kapfer, also a wonderful cook. Why, would you believe it, Mr. Kapfer, that girl's own mother and me comes pretty near being engaged to be married oncet?"

"You don't say!" Kapfer commented.

"That was from some years ago in the old country already," Fischko continued; "and I guess I ought to be lucky I didn't do so, on account she marries a feller by the name Silbermacher, *olav hasholem*, which he is got the misfortune to get killed in Kishinef. Poor Mrs. Silbermacher, she didn't live long, and the daughter, Yetta, comes to America an orphan five years ago. Ever since then the girl looks out for herself; and

so sure as you are sitting there she's got in savings bank already pretty near eight hundred dollars."

"Is that so?" Kapfer interrupted.

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"Yes, sir," Fischko replied; "and when she is got a thousand, understand me, I would find for her a nice young man, Mr. Kapfer, which he is got anyhow twenty-five machines a contracting shop, y'understand, and she will get married *und fertig*. With such good friends which I got it like Polatkin & Scheikowitz, I could throw a little business their way, and the first thing you know she is settled for life."

Here Fischko drained his glass and reached out his hand toward the bottle; but Kapfer anticipated the move and emptied the remainder of the wine into his own glass.

"Before I order another bottle, Fischko," he said, "I would like to talk a little business with you."

"Never mind another bottle," Fischko said. "I thought we was through with our business for the evening."

"With our business, yes," Kapfer announced; "but this story which you are telling me about Miss Silbermacher interests me, Fischko, and I know a young feller which he is got more as twenty-five machines a contracting shop; in fact, Fischko, he is a salesman which he makes anyhow his fifty to seventy-five dollars a week, and he wants to get married bad."

"He couldn't want to get married so bad as all that," Fischko commented, "because there's lots of girls which would be only too glad to marry a such a young feller—girls with money even."

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"I give you right, Mr. Fischko," Kapfer agreed; "but this young feller ain't the kind that marries for money. What he wants is a nice girl which she is good-looking like this here Miss Silbermacher and is a good housekeeper, understand me; and from what I've seen of Miss Silbermacher she would be just the person."

"What's his name?" Fischko asked.

"His name," said Kapfer, "is Ury Shemansky, a close friend from mine; and I got a date with him at twelve o'clock on the corner drug store at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street that I should tell him how I came out this evening." He seized his hat from an adjoining hook. "So, if you'd wait here a few minutes," he said, "I would go and fetch him right round here. Shall I order another bottle before I go?"

Fischko shook his head.

"I got enough," he said; "and don't be long on account I must be going home soon."

Kapfer nodded, and five minutes later he entered the all-night drug store in question and approached a young man who was seated at the soda fountain. In front of him stood a large glass of "Phospho-Nervino," warranted to be "A Speedy and Reliable Remedy for Nervous Headache, Sleeplessness, Mental Fatigue and Depression following Over-Brainwork"; and as he was about to raise the glass to his lips Kapfer slapped him on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, Elkan," he exclaimed. "Her name is Yetta Silbermacher and she's got in savings bank eight hundred dollars."

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"What d'ye mean she's got money in savings bank?" Elkan protested wearily, for the sleepless, brain-fatigued and depressed young man was none other than Elkan Lubliner. "Did you seen her?"

"I did," Kapfer replied; "and Miss Maslik's a fine, lovely girl. The old man ain't so bad either. He treated me elegant and Fischko thinks I made quite a hit there."

"I ain't asking you about Miss Maslik at all," Elkan said. "I mean Miss Silbermacher"—he hesitated and blushed—"Yetta," he continued, and buried his confusion in the foaming glass of "Phospho-Nervino."

"That's just what I want to talk to you about," Kapfer went on. "Did I understand you are telling Polatkin that you never seen Fischko the *Shadchen* and he never seen you neither?"

"That's right," Elkan replied.

"Then come right down with me to the Harlem Winter Garden," Kapfer said. "I want you to meet him. He ain't a bad sort, even if he would be a *Shadchen*."

"But what should I want to meet him for?" Elkan cried.

"Because," Kapfer explained, "I am going to marry this here Miss Maslik, Elkan; and I'm going to improve my store property, so that my trade will be worth to Polatkin & Scheikowitz anyhow three thousand dollars a year—ain't it?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Elkan asked.

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"It's got this much to do with it," Kapfer continued: "To-morrow afternoon two o'clock I would have Polatkin and Scheikowitz at my room in the Prince Clarence. You also would be there—and d'ye know who else would be there?"

Elkan shook his head.

"Miss Yetta Silbermacher," Kapfer went on; "because I am going to get Fischko to bring her down there to meet an eligible party by the name Ury Shemansky."

"What?" Elkan exclaimed.

"Ssh-sh!" Kapfer cried reassuringly. "I am going to introduce you to Fischko right away as Ury Shemansky, provided he ain't so *shikker* when I get back that he wouldn't recognize you at all."

Elkan nodded and paid for his restorative, and on their way down to the Harlem Winter Garden they perfected the details of the appointment for the following afternoon.

"The reason why I am getting Fischko to bring her down," Kapfer explained, "is because, in the first place, it looks pretty *schlecht* that a feller should meet a girl only once and, without the help of a *Shadchen*, gets right away engaged to her; and so, with Fischko the *Shadchen* there, it looks better for you both. Furthermore, in the second place, a girl which is doing housework, Elkan, must got to have an excuse, understand me; otherwise she couldn't get away from her work at all."

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"But," Elkan said, "how do you expect that Yetta would go with a *Shadchen* to see this here Ury Shemansky when she is already engaged to me?"

"*Schafskopf!*" Kapfer exclaimed. "Telephone her the first thing to-morrow morning that you are this here Ury Shemansky and she would come quick enough!"

"That part's all right," Elkan agreed; "but I don't see yet how you are going to get Polatkin and Scheikowitz there."

Kapfer nodded his head with spurious confidence; for of this, perhaps the most important part of his plan, he felt extremely doubtful.

"Leave that to me," he said sagely, and the next moment they entered the Harlem Winter Garden to find Charles Fischko gazing sadly at a solution of bicarbonate of soda and ammonia, a tumblerful of which stood in front of him on the table.

"Mr. Fischko," Kapfer said, "this is my friend Ury Shemansky, the gentleman I was speaking to you about."

"No relation to Shemansky who used to was in the customer pedler business on Ridge Street?" Fischko asked.

"Not as I've heard," Elkan said.

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"Because there's a feller, understand me, which he went to work and married a poor girl; and ever since he's got nothing but *Mazel*. The week afterward he found in the street a diamond ring worth two hundred dollars, and the next month a greenhorn comes over with ten thousand rubles and wants to go as partners together with him in business. In a year's time Shemansky dissolves the partnership and starts in the remnant business with five thousand dollars net capital. He ain't been established two weeks, understand me, when a liquor saloon next door burns out and he gets a thousand dollars smoke damage; and one thing follows another, y'understand, till to-day he's worth easy his fifty thousand dollars. That's what it is to marry a poor girl, Mr. Shemansky." He took a pull at the tumbler of bicarbonate and made an involuntary grimace. "Furthermore, I am knowing this here Miss Silbermacher ever since she is born, pretty nearly!" Fischko cried.

"You did!" Elkan exclaimed. "Well, why didn't you tell me that, Kapfer?"

"I couldn't think of everything," Kapfer protested.

"Go ahead," Elkan said, turning to Fischko; "let me know all about her—everything! I think I got a right to know—ain't it?"

"Sure you have," Fischko said as he cleared his throat oratorically; and therewith he began a laudatory biography of Yetta Silbermacher, while Elkan settled himself to listen. With parted lips and eyes shining his appreciation, he heard a narrative that justified beyond peradventure his choice of a wife, and when Fischko concluded he smote the table with his fist.

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"By jiminy!" he cried. "A feller should ought to be proud of a wife like that!"

"Sure he should," Kapfer said; "and her and Fischko would be down at my room at the Prince Clarence to-morrow at two."

He beckoned to the waiter. "So let's pay up and go home," he concluded; "and by tomorrow night Fischko would got two matches to his credit."

"*K'mo she-néemar*," Fischko said as he rose a trifle laboriously to his feet, "it is commanded to promote marriages, visit the sick and bury the dead."

"And," Kapfer added, "you'll notice that promoting marriages comes ahead of the others."

When Marcus Polatkin arrived at his place of business the following morning he looked round him anxiously for his partner, who had departed somewhat early the previous day with the avowed intention of seeing just how sick Elkan was. As a matter of fact, Scheikowitz had discovered Elkan lying on the sofa at his boarding place, vainly attempting to secure his first few minutes' sleep in over thirty-six hours; and he had gone home truly shocked at Elkan's pallid and careworn appearance, though Elkan had promised to keep the appointment with Fischko. Polatkin felt convinced, however, that his partner must have discovered the pretence of Elkan's indisposition, and his manner was a trifle artificial when he inquired after the absentee.

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"How was he feeling, Philip?" he asked.

"Pretty bad, I guess," Scheikowitz replied, whereat a blank expression came over Polatkin's face. "The boy works too hard, I guess. He ain't slept a wink for two days."

"Why, he seemed all right yesterday when I seen him," Polatkin declared.

"Yesterday?" Scheikowitz exclaimed.

"I mean the day before yesterday," Polatkin added hastily as the elevator door opened and a short, stout person alighted. He wore a wrinkled frock coat and a white tie which perched coquettishly under his left ear; and as he approached the office he seemed to be labouring under a great deal of excitement.

"Oo-ee!" he wailed as he caught sight of Polatkin, and without further salutation he sank into the nearest chair. There he bowed his head in his hands and rocked to and fro disconsolately.

"Who's this crazy feller?" Scheikowitz demanded of his partner.

Polatkin shrugged.

"He's a button salesman by the name Rashkind," Polatkin said. "Leave me deal with him." He walked over to the swaying *Shadchen* and shook him violently by the shoulder. "Rashkind," he said, "stop that nonsense and tell me what's the matter."

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Rashkind ceased his moanings and looked up with bloodshot eyes.

"She's engaged!" he said.

"She's engaged!" Polatkin repeated. "And you call yourself a *Shadchen*!" he said bitterly.

"A *Shadchen*!" Scheikowitz cried. "Why, I thought you said he was a button salesman."

"Did I?" Polatkin retorted. "Well, maybe he is, Scheikowitz; but he ain't no *Shadchen*. Actually the feller goes to work and takes Elkan up to see the girl, and they put him off by saying the girl was sick; and now he comes down here and tells me the girl is engaged."

"Well," Scheikowitz remarked, "you couldn't get no sympathy from me, Polatkin. A feller which acts underhand the way you done, trying to make up a *Shidduch* for Elkan behind my back yet—you got what you deserved."

"What d'ye mean I got what I deserved?" Polatkin said indignantly. "Do you think it would be such a bad thing for us—you and me both, Scheikowitz—if I could of made up a match between Elkan and B. Maslik's a daughter?"

"B. Maslik's a daughter!" Scheikowitz cried. "Do you mean that this here feller was trying to make up a match between Elkan and Miss Birdie Maslik?"

"That's just what I said," Polatkin announced.

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"Then I can explain the whole thing," Scheikowitz rejoined triumphantly. "Miss Maslik had a date to meet Elkan last night yet with a *Shadchen* by the name Charles Fischko, and that's why B. Maslik told this here button salesman that his daughter was engaged."

Rashkind again raised his head and regarded Scheikowitz with a malevolent grin.

"*Schmooses!*" he jeered. "Miss Maslik is engaged and the *Shadchen* was Charles Fischko, but the *Chosan* ain't Elkan Lubliner by a damnsight."

It was now Polatkin's turn to gloat, and he shook his head slowly up and down.

"So, Scheikowitz," he said, "you are trying to fix up a *Shidduch* between Elkan and Miss Maslik without telling me a word about it, and you get the whole thing so mixed up that it is a case of trying to sit between two chairs! You come down *mit* a big bum and I ain't got no sympathy for you neither."

"What was the feller's name?" Scheikowitz demanded hoarsely of Rashkind, who was straightening out his tie and smoothing his rumpled hair.

"It's a funny quincidence," Rashkind replied; "but you remember, Mr. Polatkin, I was talking to you the other day about Julius Flixman?"

"Yes," Polatkin said, and his heart began to thump in anticipation of the answer.

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"Well, Julius Flixman, as I told you, sold out his store to a feller by the name Max Kapfer," Rashkind said and paused again.

"*Nu!*" Scheikowitz roared. "What of it?"

"Well, this here Max Kapfer is engaged to be married to Miss Birdie Maslik," Rashkind concluded; and when Scheikowitz looked from Rashkind toward his partner the latter had already proceeded more than halfway to the telephone.

"And that's what your *Shadchen* done for you, Mr. Scheikowitz!" Rashkind said as he put on his hat. He walked to the elevator and rang the bell.

"Yes, Mr. Scheikowitz," Rashkind added, "as a *Shadchen*, maybe I am a button salesman; but I'd a whole lot sooner be a button salesman as a thief and don't you forget it!"

After the elevator had borne Rashkind away Scheikowitz went back to the office in time to hear Marcus engaged in a noisy altercation with the telephone operator of the Prince Clarence Hotel.

"What d'ye mean he ain't there?" he bellowed. "With you it's always the same—I could never get nobody at your hotel."

He hung up the receiver with force almost sufficient to wreck the instrument.

"That'll do, Polatkin!" Scheikowitz said. "We already got half our furniture smashed."

"Did I done it?" Polatkin growled—the allusion being to the chair demolished by Scheikowitz on the previous day.

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"You was the cause of it," Scheikowitz retorted; "and, anyhow, who are you ringing up at the Prince Clarence?"

"I'm ringing up that feller Kapfer," Polatkin replied. "I want to tell that sucker what I think of him."

Then it was that Kapfer's theory as to the effect of his engagement on his relations with Polatkin & Scheikowitz became justified in fact.

"You wouldn't do nothing of the kind," Scheikowitz declared. "It ain't bad enough that Elkan loses this here *Shidduch*, but you are trying to Jonah a good account also! Why, that feller Kapfer's business after he marries Miss Maslik would be easy worth to us three thousand dollars a year."

"I don't care what his business is worth," Polatkin shouted. "I would say what I please to that highwayman!"

"What do you want to do?" Scheikowitz pleaded—"bite off your nose to spoil your face?"

Polatkin made no reply and he was about to go into the showroom when the telephone bell rang.

"Leave me answer it," Scheikowitz said; and a moment later he picked up the desk telephone and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Hello!" he said. "Yes, this is Polatkin & Scheikowitz. This is Mr. Scheikowitz talking."

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Suddenly the instrument dropped with a clatter to the floor; and while Scheikowitz was stooping to pick it up Polatkin rushed into the office.

"Scheikowitz!" he cried. "What are you trying to do—break up our whole office yet? Ain't it enough you are putting all our chairs on the bum already?"

Scheikowitz contented himself by glaring viciously at his partner and again placed the receiver to his ear.

"Hello, Mr. Kapfer," he said. "Yes, I heard it this morning already. Them things travels fast, Mr. Kapfer. No, I don't blame you—I blame this here Fischko. He gives me a dirty deal—that's all."

Here there was a long pause, while Polatkin stood in the middle of the office floor like a bird-dog pointing at a covey of partridges.

"But why couldn't you come down here, Mr. Kapfer?" Scheikowitz asked. Again there was a long pause, at the end of which Scheikowitz said: "Wait a minute—I'll ask my partner."

"Listen here, Polatkin," he said, placing his hand over the transmitter. "Kapfer says he wants to give us from two thousand five hundred dollars an order, and he wants you and me to go up to the Prince Clarence at two o'clock to see him. He wants us both there because he wants to arrange terms of credit."

"I would see him hung first!" Polatkin roared, and Scheikowitz took his hand from the transmitter.

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"All right, Mr. Kapfer," he answered in dulcet tones; "me and Polatkin will both be there. Good-bye."

He hung up the receiver with exaggerated care.

"And you would just bet your life that we will be there!" he said. "And that's all there is to it!"

At half-past one that afternoon, while Max Kapfer was enjoying a good cigar in the lobby of the Prince Clarence, he received an unexpected visitor in the person of Julius Flixman.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Flixman?" he cried, dragging forth a chair.

Flixman extended a thin, bony hand in greeting and sat down wearily.

"I don't do so good, Kapfer," he said. "I guess New York don't agree with me." He distorted his face in what he intended to be an amiable smile. "But I guess it agrees with you all right," he continued. "I suppose I must got to congratulate you on account you are going to be engaged to Miss Birdie Maslik."

"Why, who told you about it?" Kapfer asked.

"I met this morning a real-estater by the name Rashkind, which he is acquainted with the Maslik family," Flixman replied, "and he says it happened yesterday. Also they told me up at the hotel you was calling there this morning to see me."

"That's right," Kapfer said; "and you was out."

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"I was down to see a feller on Center Street," Flixman went on, "and so I thought, so long as you wanted to fix up about the note, I might just as well come down here."

"I'm much obliged to you," Kapfer interrupted.

"Not at all," Flixman continued. "When a feller wants to pay you money and comes to see you once to do it and you ain't in, understand me, then it's up to you to go to him; so here I am."

"But the fact is," Kapfer said, "I didn't want to see you about paying the money exactly. I wanted to see you about not paying it."

"About not paying it?" Flixman cried.

"Sure!" Kapfer replied. "I wanted to see if you wouldn't give me a year's extension for that last thousand on account I am going to get married; and with what Miss Maslik would bring me, y'understand, and your thousand dollars which I got here, I would just have enough to fix up my second floor and build a twenty-five-foot extension on the rear. You see, I figure it this way." He searched his pocket for a piece of paper and produced a fountain pen. "I figure that the fixtures cost me twenty-two hundred," he began, "and——"

At this juncture Flixman flipped his fingers derisively.

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"Pipe dreams you got it!" he said. "That store as it stands was good enough for me, and it should ought to be good enough for you. Furthermore, Kapfer, if you want to invest Maslik's money and your own money, *schon gut*; but me, I could always put a thousand dollars into a bond, Kapfer. So, if it's all the same to you, I'll take your check and call it square."

Kapfer shrugged resignedly.

"I had an idee you would," he said, "so I got it ready for you; because, Mr. Flixman, you must excuse me when I tell you that you got the reputation of being a good collector."

"Am I?" Flixman snapped out. "Well, maybe I am, Kapfer, but I could give my money up, too, once in a while; and, believe me or not, Kapfer, this afternoon yet I am going to sign a will which I am leaving all my money to a Talmud Torah School."

"You don't say so?" Kapfer said as he drew out his checkbook.

"That's what I am telling you," Flixman continued, "because there's a lot of young loafers running round the streets which nobody got any control over 'em at all; and if they would go to a Talmud Torah School, understand me, not only they learn 'em there a little *Loschen Hakodesch*, y'understand, but they would also pretty near club the life out of 'em."

"I'll write out a receipt on some of the hotel paper here," Kapfer said as he signed and blotted the check.

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"Write out two of 'em, so I would have a copy of what I am giving you," Flixman rejoined. "It's always just so good to be businesslike. That's what I told that lawyer to-day. He wants me I should remember a couple of orphan asylums he's interested in, and I told him that if all them suckers would train up their children they would learn a business and not holler round the streets and make life miserable for people, they wouldn't got to be orphans at all. Half the orphans is that way on account they worried their parents to death with their carryings-on, and when they go to orphan asylums they get treated kind yet. And people is foolish enough to pay a lawyer fifty dollars if he should draw up a will to leave the orphan asylum their good hard-earned money."

He snorted indignantly as he examined Kapfer's receipt and compared it with the original.

"Well," he concluded as he appended his signature to the receipt, "I got him down to twenty-five dollars and I'll have that will business settled up this afternoon yet."

He placed the check and the receipt in his wallet and shook hands with Kapfer.

"Good-bye," he said. "And one thing let me warn you against: A *Chosan* should always get his money in cash *oder* certified check before he goes under the *Chuppah* at all; otherwise, after you are married and your father-in-law is a crook, understand me, you could kiss yourself good-bye with your wife's dowry—and don't you forget it!"

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Max walked with him down the lobby; and they had barely reached the entrance when Charles Fischko and Miss Yetta Silbermacher arrived.

"Hello, Fischko!" Max cried, as Flixman tottered out into the street; but Fischko made no reply. Instead he suddenly let go Miss Silbermacher's arm and dashed hurriedly to the sidewalk. Max led Miss Silbermacher to a chair and engaged her immediately in conversation. She was naturally a little embarrassed by her unusual surroundings, though she was becomingly—not to say fashionably—attired in garments of her own making; and she gazed timidly about her for her absent lover.

"Elkan ain't here yet," Max explained, "on account you are a little ahead of time."

Miss Silbermacher's brown eyes sparkled merrily.

"I ain't the only one," she said as she jumped to her feet; for, though the hands of the clock on the desk pointed to ten minutes to two, Elkan Lubliner approached from the direction of the café. He caught sight of them while he was still some distance away, and two overturned chairs marked the last of his progress toward them.

At first he held out his hand in greeting; but the two little dimples that accompanied Yetta's smile overpowered his sense of propriety, and he embraced her affectionately.

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"Where's Fischko?" he asked.

Both Kapfer and Miss Silbermacher looked toward the street entrance.

"He was here a minute ago," Kapfer said.

"Did you tell him that I wasn't Ury Shemansky at all?" Elkan inquired.

"Sure I did," Miss Silbermacher replied, "and he goes on something terrible, on account he says Mr. Kapfer told him last night you was already engaged; so I told him I know you was engaged because I am the party you are engaged to."

She squeezed Elkan's hand.

"And he says then," she continued, "that if that's the case what do we want him down here for? So I told him we are going to meet Mr. Polatkin and Mr. Scheikowitz, and ___"

"And they'll be right here in a minute," Kapfer interrupted; "so you go upstairs to my room and I'll find Fischko and bring him up also."

He conducted them to the elevator, and even as the door closed behind them Fischko came running up the hall.

"Kapfer," he said, "who was that feller which he was just here talking to you?"

"What d'ye want to know for?" Kapfer asked.

"Never mind what I want to know for!" Fischko retorted. "Who is he?"

"Well, if you must got to know," Kapfer said, "he's a feller by the name Julius Flixman."

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"What?" Fischko shouted.

"Fischko," Kapfer protested, "you ain't in no Canal Street coffee house here. This is a first-class hotel."

Fischko nodded distractedly.

"Sure, I know," he said. "Is there a place we could sit down here? I want to ask you something a few questions."

Kapfer led the way to the café and they sat down at a table near the door.

"Go ahead, Fischko," he said. "Polatkin and Scheikowitz will be here any minute."

"Well," Fischko began falteringly, "if this here feller is Julius Flixman, which he is coming from Bessarabia *schon* thirty years ago already, I don't want to do nothing in a hurry, Mr. Kapfer, on account I want to investigate first how things stand."

"What d'ye mean?" Kapfer demanded.

"Why, I mean this," Fischko cried: "If this here Flixman is well fixed, Kapfer, I want to know it, on account Miss Yetta Silbermacher is from Flixman's sister a daughter, understand me!"

Kapfer lit a cigar deliberately before replying. He was thinking hard.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said at last, "that this here Miss Silbermacher is Julius Flixman's a niece?"

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"That's what I said," Fischko replied. "He comes here from Bessarabia thirty years ago already and from that day to this I never heard a word about him—Miss Silbermacher neither."

"Ain't the rest of his family heard from him?" Kapfer asked guardedly.

"There ain't no rest of his family," Fischko said. "Mrs. Silbermacher was his only sister, and she's dead over ten years since."

Kapfer nodded and drew reflectively on his cigar.

"Well, Fischko," he said finally, "I wouldn't let Flixman worry me none. He's practically a *Schnorrer*; he was in here just now on account he hears I am going to marry a rich girl and touches me for some money on the head of it. I guess you noticed that he looks pretty shabby—ain't it?"

"And sick too," Fischko added, just as a bellboy came into the café.

"Mr. Copper!" he bawled, and Max jumped to his feet.

"Right here," he said, and the bellboy handed him a card.

"Tell them I'll be with them in a minute," he continued; "and you stay here till I come back, Fischko. I won't be long."

He followed the bellboy to the desk, where stood Polatkin and Scheikowitz.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said.

"Well, Mr. Kapfer," Scheikowitz replied, "I guess I got to congratulate you."

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"Sure!" Kapfer murmured perfunctorily. "Let's go into the Moorish Room."

"What's the matter with the café?" Polatkin asked; but Scheikowitz settled the matter by leading the way to the Moorish Room, where they all sat down at a secluded table.

"The first thing I want to tell you, gentlemen," Kapfer said, "is that I know you feel that I turned a dirty trick on you about Elkan."

Scheikowitz shrugged expressively.

"The way we feel about it, Mr. Kapfer," he commented, "is that bygones must got to be bygones—and that's all there is to it."

"But," Kapfer said, "I don't want the bygones to be all on my side; so I got a proposition to make you. How would it be if I could fix up a good *Shidduch* for Elkan myself?"

"What for a *Shidduch*?" Polatkin asked.

"The girl is an orphan," Kapfer replied, "*aber* she's got one uncle, a bachelor, which ain't got no relation in the world but her, and he's worth anyhow seventy-five thousand dollars."

"How do you know he's worth that much?" Polatkin demanded.

"Because I got some pretty close business dealings with him," Kapfer replied; "and not only do I know he's worth that much, but I guess you do too, Mr. Polatkin, on account his name is Julius Flixman."

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"Julius Flixman?" Scheikowitz cried. "Why, Julius Flixman ain't got a relation in the world—he told me so himself."

"When did he told you that?" Kapfer asked.

"A couple of days ago," Scheikowitz replied.

"Then that accounts for it," Kapfer said. "A couple of days ago nobody knows he had a niece—not even Flixman himself didn't; but to-day yet he would know it and he would tell you so himself."

"But——" Scheikowitz began, when once again a page entered the room, bawling a phonetic imitation of Kapfer's name.

"Wanted at the 'phone," he called as he caught sight of Kapfer.

"Excuse me," Kapfer said. "I'll be right back."

He walked hurriedly out of the room, and Polatkin turned with a shrug to his partner.

"Well, Scheikowitz," he began, "what did I told you? We are up here on a fool's errand—ain't it?"

Scheikowitz made no reply.

"I'll tell you, Polatkin," he said at length, "Flixman himself says to me he did got one sister living in Bessarabia, and he ain't heard from her in thirty years; and——"

At this juncture Kapfer rushed into the room.

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"Scheikowitz," he gasped, "I just now got a telephone message from a lawyer on Center Street, by the name Goldenfein, I should come right down there. Flixman is taken sick suddenly and they find in his pocket my check and a duplicate receipt which he gives me, written on the hotel paper. Do me the favour and come with me."

Fifteen minutes later they stepped out of a taxicab in front of an old-fashioned office building in Center Street and elbowed their way through a crowd of over a hundred people toward the narrow doorway.

"Where do yous think you're going?" asked a policeman whose broad shoulders completely blocked the little entrance.

"We was telephoned for, on account a friend of ours by the name Flixman is taken sick here," Kapfer explained.

"Go ahead," the policeman said more gently; "but I guess you're too late."

"Is he dead?" Scheikowitz cried, and the policeman nodded solemnly as he stood to one side.

More than two hours elapsed before Kapfer, Polatkin, and Scheikowitz returned to the Prince Clarence. With them was Kent J. Goldenfein.

"Mr. Kapfer," the clerk said, "there's a man been waiting for you in the café for over two hours."

"I'll bring him right in," Kapfer said, and two minutes afterward he brought the gesticulating Fischko out of the café.

"Do you think I am a dawg?" Fischko cried. "I've been here two hours!"

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"Well, come into the Moorish Room a minute," Kapfer pleaded, "and I'll fix everything up with you afterward."

He led the protesting *Shadchen* through the lobby, and when they entered the Moorish Room an impressive scene awaited them. On a divan, beneath some

elaborate plush draperies, sat Kent J. Goldenfein, flanked on each side by Polatkin and Scheikowitz respectively, while spread on the table in front of them were the drafts of Flixman's will and the engrossed, unsigned copy, together with such other formidable-looking documents as Goldenfein happened to find in his pockets. He rose majestically as Fischko entered and turned on him a beetling frown.

"Is this the fellow?" he demanded sepulchrally, and Kapfer nodded.

"Mr. Fischko," Goldenfein went on, "I am an officer of the Supreme Court and I have been retained to investigate the affairs of Mr. Julius Flixman."

"Say, lookyhere, Kapfer," Fischko cried. "What is all this?"

Kapfer drew forward a chair.

"Sit down, Fischko," he said, "and answer the questions that he is asking you."

"But——" Fischko began.

"Come, come, Mr. Fischko," Goldenfein boomed, "you are wasting our time here. Raise your right hand!"

[Pg 145] Fischko glanced despairingly at Kapfer and then obeyed.

"Do you solemnly swear," said Goldenfein, who, besides being an attorney-at-law was also a notary public, "that the affidavit you will hereafter sign will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"But——" Fischko began again.

"Do you?" Goldenfein roared, and Fischko nodded. Forthwith Goldenfein plied him with such ingeniously fashioned questions concerning the Flixman family that the answers presented a complete history of all its branches. Furthermore, the affidavit which Goldenfein immediately drew up lacked only such confirmatory evidence as could easily be supplied to establish the identity of Miss Yetta Silbermacher as Julius Flixman's only heir-at-law; and, after Fischko had meekly signed the jurat, Goldenfein rose ponderously to his feet.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Polatkin," he said. "I think there is no doubt that your nephew's fiancée will inherit Flixman's estate, thanks to my professional integrity."

"What d'ye mean your professional integrity?" Kapfer asked.

[Pg 146] "Why, if I hadn't refused to accept twenty-two dollars for drawing the will and insisted on the twenty-five we had agreed upon," Goldenfein explained, "he would never have suffered the heart attack which prevented his signing the will before he died."

"Died!" Fischko exclaimed. "Is Julius Flixman dead?"

"*Koosh*, Fischko!" Polatkin commanded. "You would think you was one of the family the way you are acting. Come down to our store to-morrow and we would arrange things with you." He turned to Kapfer.

"Let's go upstairs and see Elkan—and Yetta," he said.

Immediately they trooped to the elevator and ascended to the seventh floor.

"All of you wait here in the corridor," Kapfer whispered, "and I'll go and break it to them." He tiptoed to his room and knocked gently at the door.

"Come!" Elkan cried, and Kapfer turned the knob.

On a sofa near the window sat Elkan, with his arm surrounding his fiancée's waist and her head resting on his shoulder.

"Hello, Max!" he cried. "What's kept you? We must have been waiting here at least a quarter of an hour!"

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CHAPTER FOUR

HIGHGRADE LINES

"SURE, I know, Mr. Scheikowitz," cried Elkan Lubliner, junior partner of Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company, as he sat in the firm's office late one February afternoon; "but if you want to sell a highgrade concern like Joseph

Kammerman you must got to got a highgrade line of goods."

"Ain't I am telling you that all the time?" Scheikowitz replied. "*Aber* we sell here a popular-price line, Elkan. So what is the use talking we ain't ekvipt for a highgrade line."

"What d'ye mean we ain't equipped, Mr. Scheikowitz?" Elkan protested. "We got here machines and we got here fixtures, and all we need it now is a highgrade designer and a couple really good cutters like that new feller which is working for us."

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"That's all right, too, Elkan," Marcus Polatkin interrupted; "but it ain't the ekvipment which it is so important. The reputation which we got for selling a popular-price line we couldn't get rid of so easy, understand me, and that *Bétzimmer* buyer of Kammerman's wouldn't got no confidence in us at all. The way he figures it we could just so much turn out a highgrade line of goods here as you could expect a feller which is acting in a moving pictures to all of a sudden sing like Charuso."

"Besides," Scheikowitz added, "highgrade designers and really good cutters means more capital, Elkan."

"The capital you shouldn't worry about at all," Elkan retorted. "Next week my Yetta gets falling due a second mortgage from old man Flixman for five thousand dollars, and——"

Polatkin made a flapping gesture with his right hand.

"Keep your money, Elkan," he said. "You could got lots of better ways to invest it for Yetta as fixing ourselves up to sell big *Machers* like Joseph Kammerman."

"But it don't do no harm I should drop in and see them people. Ain't it?"

"Sure not," Scheikowitz continued as he swung round in his revolving chair and seized a pile of cutting clips. "They got an elegant store there on Fifth Avenue which it is a pleasure to go into even; and the worst that happens you, Elkan, is you are out a good cigar for that Mr. Dalzell up there."

Elkan nodded gloomily, and as he left the office Polatkin's face relaxed in an indulgent smile.

"The boy is getting awful ambitious lately, Scheikowitz," he said.

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"What d'ye mean, ambitious?" Philip Scheikowitz cried angrily. "If you would be only twenty-three years of age, Polatkin, and married to a rich girl, understand me—and also partner in a good concern, which the whole thing he done it himself, Polatkin—you would act a whole lot more ambitious as he does. Instead of knocking the boy, Polatkin, you should ought to give him credit for what he done."

"Who is knocking the boy?" Polatkin demanded. "All I says is the boy is ambitious, Scheikowitz—which, if you don't think it's ambitious a feller tries to sell goods to Joseph Kammerman, Scheikowitz, what is it then?"

"There's worser people to sell goods to as Joseph Kammerman, Polatkin, which he is a millionaire concern, understand me," Scheikowitz declared; "and you could take it from me, Polatkin, even if you would accuse him he is ambitious *oder* not, that boy always got idees to do big things—and he works hard till he lands 'em. So if you want to call that ambitious, Polatkin, go ahead and do so. When a loafer knocks it's a boost every time."

With this ultimatum Scheikowitz followed his junior partner to the rear of the loft, where Elkan regarded with a critical eye the labors of his cutting-room staff.

"*Nu*, Elkan," Scheikowitz asked, "what's biting you now?"

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Elkan winked significantly—and a moment later he tapped an assistant cutter on the shoulder.

"Max," he said, "do you got maybe a grudge against that piece of goods, the way you are slamming it round?"

The assistant cutter smiled in an embarrassed fashion.

"The fact is," he said apologetically, "I wasn't thinking about them goods at all. When you are laying out goods for cutting, Mr. Lubliner, you don't got to think much—especially pastel shades."

"Pastel shades?" Elkan repeated.

"That's what I said," the cutter replied. "*Mit* colors like reds and greens, which they are hitting you right in the face, so to speak, you couldn't get your mind off of 'em at all; but pastel shades, that's something else again. They quiet you like smoking a cigarette."

Elkan turned to his partner with a shrug.

"When I was working by B. Gans," the cutter went on, "I am laying out a piece of old gold crêpe *mit* a silver-thread border, and I assure you, Mr. Lubliner, it has an effect on me like some one would give me a glass of schnapps already."

"*Stiegen*, Max," said Elkan, moving away, "you got too much to say for yourself."

Max nodded resignedly and continued the spreading of the goods on the cutting table, while Elkan and Scheikowitz walked out of the room.

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"That's the new feller I was telling you about," Elkan said. "*Meshugganeh* Max Merech they call him."

"*Meshugga* he may be," Scheikowitz replied, "but just the same he's got a couple of good ideas also, Elkan. Only this morning he makes Redman the designer pretty near crazy when he says that the blue soutache on that new style 2060 kills the blue in the yoke, y'understand; and he was right too, Elkan. Polatkin and me made Redman change it over."

Elkan shrugged again as he put on his hat and coat preparatory to going home.

"A lot our class of trade worries about such things!" he exclaimed. "So far as they are concerned the soutache could be crimson and the yoke green, and if the price was right they'd buy it anyhow."

"Don't you fool yourself, Elkan," Scheikowitz said while Elkan rang for the elevator. "The price is never right if the workmanship ain't good."

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That Elkan Lubliner's progress in business had not kept pace with his social achievements was a source of much disappointment to both Mrs. Lubliner and himself; for though the firm of Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company was still rated seventy-five thousand dollars to one hundred thousand dollars—credit good—Elkan and Mrs. Lubliner moved in the social orbit of no less a personage than of Max Koblin, the Raincoat King, whose credit soared triumphantly among the A's and B's of old-established commission houses.

Indeed it was a party at Max Koblin's house that evening which caused Elkan to leave his place of business at half-past five; and when Mrs. Lubliner and he sallied forth from the gilt and porphyry hallway of their apartment dwelling they were fittingly arrayed to meet Max's guests, none of whom catered to the popular-price trade of Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company.

"Why didn't you told him we are getting next week paid off for five thousand dollars a second mortgage?" Yetta said, continuing a conversation begun at dinner that evening.

"I did told him," Elkan insisted; "but what is the use talking to a couple of old-timers like them?"

Yetta sniffed contemptuously with the impatience of youth at the foibles of senility, as exemplified by the doddering Philip Scheikowitz, aged forty-five, and the valetudinarian Marcus Polatkin, whose hair, albeit unfrosted, had been blighted and in part swept away by the vicissitudes of forty-two winters.

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"You can't learn an old dawg young tricks," Elkan declared, "and we might just as well make up our minds to it, Yetta, we would never compete with such highgrade concerns like B. Gans *oder* Schwefel & Zucker."

They walked over two blocks in silence and then Elkan broke out anew.

"I tell you," he said, "I am sick and tired of it. B. Gans talks all the time about selling this big *Macher* and that big *Macher*, and him and Mr. Schwefel gets telling about what a millionaire like Kammerman says to him the other day, or what he says to Mandelberger, of Chicago, y'understand—and I couldn't say nothing! If I would commence to tell 'em what I says to such customers of ours like One-Eye Feigenbaum *oder* H. Margonin, of Bridgetown, understand me, they would laugh me in my face yet."

Yetta pressed his arm consolingly as they ascended the stoop of Max Koblin's house on Mount Morris Park West, and two minutes later they entered the front parlour of that luxurious residence.

"And do you know what he says to me?" a penetrating barytone voice announced as they came in. "He says to me, 'Benson,' he says, 'I've been putting on musical shows now for fifteen years, and an idee like that comes from a genius already. There's a fortune in it!'"

At this juncture Mrs. Koblin noted the arrival of the last of her guests.

"Why, hello, Yetta!" she cried, rising to her feet. "Ain't you fashionable getting here

so late?"

[Pg 154] She kissed Yetta and held out a hand to Elkan as she spoke.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Elkan, keeping Yetta's dinner waiting because you claim you're so busy downtown?" she went on. "I guess you know everybody here except Mr. Benson."

She nodded toward the promulgator of Heaven-born ideas, who bowed solemnly.

"Pleased to meet you, Mister——"

"Lubliner," Elkan said.

"Mister Lubliner," Benson repeated, passing his begemmed fingers through a shock of black, curly hair. "And the long and short of it is," he continued, addressing the company, "to-morrow I'm getting a scenario along them lines I just indicated to you from one of the highest-grade fellers that's writing."

Here ensued a pause, during which B. Gans searched his mind for an anecdote concerning some retailer of sufficiently good financial standing, while Joseph Schwefel, of Schwefel & Zucker, cleared his throat preparatory to launching a verbatim report of a conversation between himself and a buyer for one of the most exclusive costume houses on Fifth Avenue; but even as Schwefel rounded his lips to enunciate an introductory "Er," Benson obtained a fresh start.

[Pg 155] "Now you remember 'The Diners Out,' Ryan & Bernbaum's production last season?" he said, addressing Elkan. "In that show they had an idee like this: Eight ponies is let down from the flies—see?—and George DeFrees makes his entrance in a practical airyoplane—I think it was George DeFrees was working for Ryan & Bernbaum last year, or was it Sammy Potter?"

At this point he screwed up his face and leaning his elbow on the arm of his chair he placed four fingers on his forehead in the attitude known theatrically as Business of Deep Consideration.

"No," he said at last—"it was George DeFrees. George jumps out of the airyoplane and says: 'They followed me to earth, I see.'"

Benson raised his eyebrows at the assembled guests.

"Angels!" he announced. "Get the idee? 'They followed me to earth, I see.' Cue. And then he sings the song hit of the show: 'Come Take a Ride in My Airyoplane.'"

B. Gans shuffled his feet uneasily and Joseph Schwefel pulled down his waistcoat. As manufacturers of highgrade garments they had accompanied more than one customer to the entertainment described by Benson; but to Elkan the term "ponies" admitted of only one meaning, and this conversational arabesque of flies, little horses, aeroplanes and George DeFrees made him fairly dizzy.

[Pg 156] "And," M. Sidney Benson said before B. Gans could head him off, "just that there entrance boomed the show. Ryan & Bernbaum up to date clears a hundred and twenty thousand dollars over and above all expenses."

"Better as the garment business!" Max Koblin commented—and B. Gans nodded and yawned.

"Ain't we going to have no pinocle?" he asked. Max rose and threw open the sliding doors leading to the dining room, where cards and chips were in readiness.

"Will you join us, Mr. Benson?" he asked.

"That'll make five with Mr. Lubliner," Benson replied; "so supposing you, Gans and Schwefel go ahead, and Mr. Lubliner and me will join you later. Otherwise you would got to deal two of us out—which it makes a pretty slow game that way."

"Just as you like," Max said; and after Mrs. Koblin and Yetta had retired abovestairs to view the most recent accession to Mrs. Koblin's wardrobe, Benson pulled up the points of his high collar and adjusted his black stock necktie. Then he lit a fresh cigar and prepared to lay bare to Elkan the arcana of the theatrical business.

"Yes, Mr. Lubliner," he said, "the show business is a business like any other business. It ain't like you got an idee it is—opening wine for a bunch of chickens, understand me, and running round the streets till all hours of the morning."

"I never got no such idee," Elkan protested.

[Pg 157] "You ain't, Mr. Lubliner," Benson continued, "because it's very evidence to me that you don't know nothing about it; but there's a whole lot of people got that idee anyhow, y'understand; and what I am always trying to tell everybody is that the show business is like the garment business *oder* the drygoods business—a business for a business man, not a loafer!"

Elkan made an inarticulate noise which Benson took to be an expression of interest and encouragement.

"At the same time art has got a whole lot to do with it," he went on—"art and ideas; and when you take a feller like Ryan, which he could write a show, write the music, put it on and play the leading part all by himself, y'understand, and a feller like Bernbaum, which used to was Miller, Bernbaum & Company in the pants business—you got there an ideel combination!"

Elkan nodded and looked helplessly round him at the Circassian walnut, of which half a forestful had gone to make up the furnishings of Koblin's front parlor.

"But," Benson said emphatically, "you take me, for instance—and what was I?"

He told off his former occupations with the index finger of his right hand on each digit of his left.

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"First I was a salesman; second I was for myself in the infants' wear business; third I was *noch einmal* a salesman. Then I become an actor, because everybody knows my act, which I called it 'Your Old Friend Maslowsky.' For four years I played all the first-class vaudeville circuits here and on the other side in England. But though I made good money, Mr. Lubliner, the real big money is in the producing end."

"Huh-huh!" Elkan ejaculated.

"So that's the way it is with me, Mr. Lubliner," Benson continued. "I am just like Ryan & Bernbaum, only instead of two partners there is only just one; which I got the art, the ideas and the business ability all in myself!"

"That must make it very handy for you," Elkan commented.

"Handy ain't no name for it," Benson replied. "It's something you don't see nowheres else in the show business; but I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Lubliner—the work is too much for me!"

"Why don't you get a partner?" Elkan asked.

Benson made a circular gesture with his right hand.

"I could get lots of partners with big money, Mr. Lubliner," he said, "but why should I divide my profits? Am I right or wrong?"

"Well, that depends how you are looking at it," Elkan said.

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"I am looking at it from the view of a business man, Mr. Lubliner," Benson rejoined. "Here I got a proposition which I am going to put on—a show of ideas—a big production, understand me; which if Ryan & Bernbaum makes from their 'Diners Out' a hundred thousand dollars, *verstehst du*, I could easily make a hundred and fifty thousand! And yet, Mr. Lubliner, all I invest is five thousand dollars and five thousand more which I am making a loan at a bank."

"Which bank?" Elkan asked—so quickly that Benson almost jumped in his seat.

"I—I didn't decide which bank yet," he replied. "You see, Mr. Lubliner, I got accounts in three banks. First I belonged to the Fifteenth National Bank. Then they begged me I should go in the Minuit National Bank. All right. I went in the Minuit National Bank. H'afterward Sam Feder comes to me and says: 'Benson,' he says, 'you are an old friend from mine,' he says. 'Why do you bother yourself you should go into this bank and that bank?' he says. 'Why don't you come to my bank?' he says, 'and I would give you all the money you want.' So you see, Mr. Lubliner, it is immaterial to me which bank I get my money from."

Again he passed his jewelled fingers through his hair.

"No, Mr. Lubliner," he announced after a pause, "my own brother even I wouldn't give a look-in."

Elkan made no reply. As a result of Benson's gesture he was busy estimating the value of eight and a quarter carats at eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents a carat.

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"Because," Benson continued, "the profits is something you could really call enormous! If you got the time I would like to show you a few figures."

"I got all evening," Elkan answered, whereat Benson pulled from his waistcoat pocket a fountain pen ornamented with gold filigree.

"First," he said, "is the costumes."

And therewith he plunged into a maze of calculation that lasted for nearly an hour. Moreover, at the end of that period he entered into a new series of figures, tending to show that by the investment of an additional five thousand dollars the profits could be increased seventy-five per cent.

"But I'm satisfied to invest my ten thousand," he said, "because five thousand is my own and the other five thousand I could get easy from the Kosciusko Bank, whereas the additional five thousand I must try to interest somebody he should invest it with me. And so far as that goes I wouldn't bother myself at all."

"You're dead right," Elkan said by way of making himself agreeable, whereat Benson grew crimson with chagrin.

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"Sure I'm dead right," he said; "and if you and Mrs. Lubliner would come down to my office in the Siddons Theatre Building to-morrow night, eight o'clock, I would send one of my associates round with you and he will get you tickets for the 'Diners Out,' understand me; and then you would see for yourself what a big house they got there. Even on Monday night they turn 'em away!"

"I'm much obliged to you," Elkan replied. "I'm sure Mrs. Lubliner and me would enjoy it very much."

"I'm sorry for you if you wouldn't," Benson retorted; "and that there 'Diners Out' ain't a marker to the show I'm putting on, Mr. Lubliner—which you can see for yourself, a business proposition, which pans out pretty near two hundred thousand dollars on a fifteen-thousand-dollar investment, is got to be right up to the mark. Ain't it?"

"I thought you said ten thousand dollars was the investment," Elkan remarked.

"I did," Benson replied with some heat; "but if some one comes along and wants to invest the additional five thousand dollars I wouldn't turn him down, Mr. Lubliner."

He rose to his feet to join the pinoche players in the dining room.

"So I hope you enjoy the show to-morrow night," he added as he strolled away.

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From six to eight every evening Max Merech underwent a gradual transformation, for six o'clock was the closing hour at Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's establishment, while eight marked the advent of the Sarasate Trio at the Café Román, on Delancey Street. Thus, at six, Max Merech was an assistant cutter; and, indeed, until after he ate his supper he still bore the outward appearance of an assistant cutter, though inwardly he felt a premonitory glow. After half-past seven, however, he buttoned on a low, turned-down collar with its concomitant broad Windsor tie, and therewith he assumed his real character—that of a dilettante.

At the Café Román each evening he specialized on music; but with the spirit of the true dilettante he neglected no one of the rest of the arts, and was ever to be found at the table next to the piano, a warm advocate of the latest movement in painting and literature, as well as an appreciative listener to the ultramodern music discoursed by the Sarasate Trio.

"If that ain't a winner I ain't no judge!" he said to Boris Volkovisk, the pianist, on the evening of the conversation with Elkan set forth above. He referred to a violin sonata of Boris' own composition which the latter and Jacob Rekowar, the violinist, had just concluded.

Boris smiled and wiped away the perspiration from his bulging forehead, for the third movement of the sonata, marked in the score *Allegro con fuoco*, had taxed even the technic of its composer.

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"A winner of what?" Boris asked—"money? Because supposing a miracle happens that somebody would publish it nobody buys it."

Max nodded his head slowly in sympathetic acquiescence.

"But anyhow you ain't so bad off like some composers," he said. "You've anyhow got a good musician to play your stuff for you."

He smiled at Jacob Rekowar, who plunged his hands into his trousers pockets and shrugged deprecatingly.

"Sure, I know," Rekowar said; "and if we play too much good stuff Marculescu raises the devil with us we should play more popular music."

He spat out the words "popular music" with an emphasis that made a *Tarrok* player at the next table jump in his seat.

"*Nu*," said the latter as the deal passed, "what is the matter with popular music? If it wouldn't be for writing popular music, understand me, many a decent, respectable composer would got to starve!"

He turned his chair round and abandoned the card game the better to air his views on popular music.

"Furthermore," he said, "I know a young feller by the name Milton Jassy which last year he makes two thousand dollars already from syncopating *Had gadyo* and calling it the "Wildcat Rag," and this year he is writing the music for a new show and I bet yer the least he makes out of it is five thousand dollars."

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"Yow! Five thousand dollars!" Merech exclaimed. "Such people you hear about, but you *oser* see 'em."

"Don't you?" said the *Tarrok* player, drawing a cardcase from his breast pocket. "Well, you see one now."

He laid face upward on the table a card which read:

"THE SONGS YOU ALL SING"	
MILTON JASSY	
SIDDONS THEATRE BUILDING	
ROOM 1400	
"STUFF WITH A PUNCH"	
LAZY DAISY	EDDIE
WILDCAT	ALL ABOARD FOR
RAG	SLEEPYTOWN

For a brief interval Volkovisk, Rekower, and Merech regarded Jassy's card in silence.

"Well," Merech said at last, "what of it?"

Jassy shrugged and waved his hand significantly.

"Nothing of it," he said, "only your friend there is knocking popular music; and though I admit that I didn't got to go to the *Wiener* conservatory so as I could write popular music exactly, y'understand, still I could write sonatas and trios and quartets and even concerti and symphonies till I am black in the face already and I couldn't pay my laundry bill even."

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For answer Volkovisk turned to the piano and seized from the pile of music a blue-covered volume. It was the violin sonata of Richard Strauss, and handing the violin part to Rekower he seated himself on the stool. Then with a premonitory nod to Rekower he struck the opening chords, and for more than ten minutes Jassy and Merech sat motionless until the first movement was finished.

"When Strauss wrote that he could *oser* pay his laundry bill either," Volkovisk said, rising from the stool. He sat down wearily at the table and lit a cigarette.

"So you see," he began, "Richard Strauss——"

"Richard Strauss nothing!" cried an angry voice at his elbow. "If you want to practise, practise at home. I pay you here to play for my customers, not for yourselves, Volkovisk; and once and for all I am telling you you should cut out this nonsense and *spiel* a little music once in a while."

It was the proprietor, Marculescu, who spoke, and Volkovisk immediately seated himself at the piano. This time he took from the pile of music three small sheets, one of which he placed on the reading desk and the other on Rekower's violin stand. After handing the other sheet to the 'cellist he plunged into a furious rendition of "Wildcat Rag."

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In the front part of the café a group of men and women, whose clothes and manners proclaimed them to be slummers from the upper West Side, broke into noisy applause as the vulgar composition came to an end, and in the midst of their shouting and stamping Jassy rose trembling from his seat. He slunk between tables to the door, while Volkovisk began a repetition of the number, and it was not until he had turned the corner of the street and the melody had ceased to sound in his ears that he slackened his pace. When he did so, however, a friendly hand fell on his shoulder and he turned to find Max Merech close behind him.

"*Nu*, Mr. Jassy," Max said, "you shouldn't be so broke up because you couldn't write so good as Richard Strauss."

Jassy stood still and looked Max squarely in the eye.

"That's just the point," he said in hollow tones. "Might I could if I tried; but I am such an *Epikouros* that I don't want to try. I would sooner make money out of rubbish than be an artist like Volkovisk."

Max shrugged and elevated his eyebrows.

"A man must got to live," he said as he seized Jassy's arm and began gently to propel him back to the Café Román.

"Sure, I know," Jassy said; "but living ain't all having good clothes to wear and good food to eat. Living for an artist like Volkovisk is composing music worthy of an artist. *Aber* what do I do, Mister—"

"Merech," Max said.

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"What do I do, Mr. Merech?" Jassy continued. "I am all the time throwing away my art in the streets with this rotten stuff I am composing."

"Well, I tell you," Max said after they had reentered the café and had seated themselves at a table remote from the piano, "composing music is like manufacturing garments, Mr. Jassy. Some one must got to cater to the popular-price trade and only a few manufacturers gets to the point where they make up a highgrade line for the exclusive retailers. Ain't it?"

Jassy nodded as the waiter brought the cups of coffee.

"Now you take me, for instance," Max continued. "Once I worked by B. Gans, which I assure you, Mr. Jassy, it was a pleasure to handle the goods in that place. What an elegant line of silks and embroidery they got it there! Believe me, Mr. Jassy, every day I went to work there like I would be going to a wedding already, such a beautiful goods they made it! *Aber* now I am working by a popular-price concern, Mr. Jassy, which, you could take it from me, the colors them people puts together in one garment gives me the indigestion already!"

Again Jassy nodded sympathetically.

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"And why did I make a change?" Max went on. "Because them people pays me seven dollars a week more as B. Gans, Mr. Jassy; and though art is art, understand me, seven dollars a week ain't to be coughed at neither."

For a few minutes Jassy sipped his coffee in silence.

"That's all right, too," he said; "but with garments you could make just so much money manufacturing a highgrade line as you could if you are making a popular-price line."

Max nodded sapiently.

"I give you right there," he agreed, "and that's because the manufacturer of the highgrade line does business in the same way as the popular-price concern. *Aber* you take the composer of highgrade music and all he does is compose. He's too proud to poosh it, Mr. Jassy; whereas the feller what composes popular music he's just the same like the feller what manufacturers a popular-price line of garments—he not only manufacturers his line but he pooshes it till he gets a market for it."

"There ain't no market for a highclass line of music," Jassy said hopelessly.

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"Why ain't there?" Max demanded. "Did you ever try to market a symphony? Did Volkovisk ever try to get anybody with money interested in his stuff? No, sirree, sir! All that feller does is to play it to a lot of *Schnorrers* like me, which no matter how much we like his work we couldn't help him none. Now you take your own case, for instance. You told us a few minutes ago you are writing some music for a new show. Now, if you wouldn't mind my asking, who is putting in the capital for that show?"

"Well," Jassy replied, "a feller called Benson is putting it in and part of the capital is from his own money and the rest he borrows."

"Just like a new beginner would do in the garment business," Max commented. "*Aber* who does he borrow it from? A bank maybe—what?"

"Some he gets from a bank," Jassy replied, "and the rest is he trying to raise elsewheres. To-night he tells me he is getting an introduction to a business man which he hopes to lend from him five *oder* ten thousand dollars."

"Five *oder* ten thousand dollars!" Max cried. "*Shema beni*. For five thousand dollars Volkovisk could publish all the music he ever wrote and give a whole lot of recitals in the bargain. One thousand dollars would be enough even."

"That I wouldn't deny at all," Jassy rejoined. "*Aber* who would you find stands willing he should invest in Volkovisk's music a thousand dollars? Would he ever get back his thousand dollars even, let alone any profits?"

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"It's a speculation, I admit," Max commented; "but you take Richard Strauss, for instance, and if some feller would staked Strauss to a thousand dollars capital when he needed it, understand me, not alone he would got his money back but if we would

say, for example, the thousand dollars represents a ten-per-cent interest in Strauss' business, to-day yet the feller would be worth his fifty thousand dollars, because everybody knows what a big success Strauss made. Actually the feller must get orders at least six months ahead. Why for one song alone they pay him a couple thousand dollars!"

"Well," Jassy asked, "if you feel there's such a future in it why don't you raise a thousand dollars and finance Volkovisk?"

Max laughed aloud.

"Me—I couldn't raise nothing," he said; "*aber* you—you are feeling sore at yourself because you are writing popular stuff. Here's a chance for you to square yourself with your art. Why don't you help Volkovisk out? All you got to do is to find out who is loaning this here Benson the ten thousand dollars and get him to stake Volkovisk to a thousand."

Jassy tapped the table with his fingers.

"For that matter I could say the same thing to you," he declared. "You consider Volkovisk's talent so high as a business proposition, Merech, why don't you get some business man interested—one of your bosses, for instance?"

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He rose from his chair as he spoke and placed ten cents on the table as his share of the evening's expenses.

"Think it over," he said; and long after he had closed the door behind him Max sat still with his hands in his trousers pocket and pondered the suggestion.

"After all," he mused as Marculescu began to turn out the lights one by one, "why shouldn't I—the very first thing in the morning?"

It was not, however, until Polatkin and Scheikowitz had gone out to lunch the following day, leaving Elkan alone in the office, that Max could bring his courage to the sticking point; and so fearful was he that he might regret his boldness before it was too late, he fairly ran from the cutting room to the office and delivered his preparatory remarks in the outdoor tones of a political spellbinder.

"Mr. Lubliner," he cried, "could I speak to you a few words something?"

Elkan rose and slammed the door.

"Say, lookyhere, Merech," he said, "if you want a raise don't let the whole factory know about it, otherwise we would be pestered to death here. Remember, also," he continued as he sat down again, "you are only working for us a few weeks—and don't go so quick as all that."

"What d'ye mean, a raise?" Max asked. "I ain't said nothing at all about a raise. I am coming to see you about something entirely different already."

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Elkan looked ostentatiously at his watch.

"I ain't got too much time, Merech," he said.

"Nobody's got too much time when it comes to fellers asking for raises, Mr. Lubliner," Max retorted; "*aber* this here is something else again, as I told you."

"Well, don't beat no bushes round, Merech!" Elkan cried impatiently. "What is it you want from me?"

"I want from you this," Max began huskily: "Might you know Tschaikovsky maybe *oder* Rimsky-Korsakoff."

"Tschaikovsky I never heard of," Elkan replied, "nor the other concern neither. Must be new beginners in the garment business—ain't it?"

"They never was in the garment business, so far as I know," Max continued; "*aber* they made big successes even if they wasn't, because all the money ain't in the garment business, Mr. Lubliner, and Tschaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff, even in the old country, made so much money they lived in palaces yet. Once when I was a boy already, Tschaikovsky comes to Minsk and they got up a parade for him—such a big *Macher* he was!"

"I don't doubt your word for a minute, Merech; *aber* what is all this got to do *mit* me?"

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"It ain't got nothing to do with you, Mr. Lubliner," Max declared—"only I got a friend by the name Boris Volkovisk, and believe me or not, Mr. Lubliner, in some respects Tschaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff could learn from that feller, because, you could take it from me, Mr. Lubliner, there's some passages in the Fifth Symphony, understand me, which I hate to say it you could call rotten!"

Elkan stirred uneasily in his chair.

"I don't know what you are talking about at all," he said.

"I am talking about this," Max replied; and therewith he began to explain to Elkan the aspirations and talent of Boris Volkovisk and his—Max'—scheme for their successful development. For more than half an hour he unfolded a plan by which one thousand dollars might be judiciously expended so as to secure the maximum benefit to Volkovisk's career—a plan that during the preceding two years Volkovisk and he had thoroughly discussed over many a cup of coffee in Marculescu's café. "And so you see, Mr. Lubliner," he concluded, "it's a plain business proposition; and if you was to take for your thousand dollars, say, for example, a one-tenth interest in the business Volkovisk expects to do, understand me, you would get a big return for your investment."

Elkan lit a cigar and puffed away reflectively before speaking.

"*Nu*," he said at last; "so that is what you wanted to talk to me about?"

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Max nodded.

"Well, then, all I could say is," Elkan went on, "you are coming to the wrong shop. A business proposition like that is for a banker, which he is got so much money he don't know what to do with it, *Merech*."

Max' face fell and he turned disconsolately away.

"At the same time, Max," Elkan added, "I ain't feeling sore that you come to me with the proposition, understand me. The trouble ain't with you that you got such an idee, Max; the trouble is with me that I couldn't see it. It's like a feller by the name Dalzell, a buyer for Kammerman's store, says to me this morning. 'Lubliner,' he says, 'I couldn't afford to take no chances buying highgrade garments from a feller that is used to making a popular-price line,' he says, 'because no matter how well equipped your factory would be the trouble is a popular-price manufacturer couldn't think big enough to turn out expensive garments. To such a manufacturer goods at two dollars a yard is the limit, and goods at ten dollars a yard he couldn't imagine at all. And even if he could induce himself to use stuff at ten dollars a yard, y'understand, it goes against him to be liberal with such high-priced goods, so he skimps the garment.'"

He blew a great cloud of smoke as a substitute for a sigh.

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"And Dalzell was right, Max," he concluded. "You couldn't expect that a garment manufacturer like me is going to got such big idees as investing a thousand dollars in a highgrade scheme like yours. With me a thousand dollars means so many yards piece goods, so many sewing machines or a week's payroll; *aber* it don't mean giving a musician a show he should compose highgrade music. I ain't educated up to it, Max; so I wish you luck that you should raise the money somewheres else."

When M. Sidney Benson entered his office in the Siddons Theatre Building late that afternoon he found Jassy seated at his desk in the mournful contemplation of some music manuscript.

"*Nu*, Milton," Benson cried, "you shouldn't look so *rachmonos*. I surely think I got 'em coming!"

"You think you got 'em coming!" Jassy repeated with bitter emphasis. "You said that a dozen times already—and always the feller wasn't so big a sucker like he looked!"

"That was because I didn't work it right," Benson replied. "This time I am making out to do the feller a favour by letting him in on the show, and right away he becomes interested. His name is Elkan Lubliner, a manufacturer by cloaks and suits, and to-night he is coming down with his wife yet, and you are going to take 'em round to the 'Diners Out.'"

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"I am going to the 'Diners Out' *mit* 'em?" Milton ejaculated with every inflection of horror and disgust.

"Sure!" Benson replied cheerfully. "Six dollars it'll cost us, because Ryan pretty near laughs in my face when I asked him for three seats. But never mind, Milton, it'll be worth the money."

"Will it?" Jassy retorted. "Well, not for me, Mr. Benson. Why, the last time I seen that show I says I wouldn't sit through it again for a hundred dollars."

"A hundred dollars is a lot of money, Milton," Benson said. "*Aber* I think if you work it right you will get a hundred times a hundred dollars before we are through, on account I really got this feller going. So you should listen to me and I would tell you just what you want to say to the feller between the acts."

Therewith Benson commenced to unfold a series of "talking points" which he had

spent the entire day in formulating; and, as he proceeded, Jassy's eyes wandered from the title page of the manuscript music inscribed "Opus 47—Trio in G moll," and began to glow in sympathy with Benson's well-laid plan.

"There's no use shilly-shallying, Milton," Benson concluded. "The season is getting late, and if we're ever going to put on that show now is the time."

Milton nodded eagerly.

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"*Aber* why don't you take 'em to the show yourself, Mr. Benson?" he asked hopefully. "Because, not to jolly you at all, Mr. Benson, I must got to say it you are a wonderful talker."

Benson shrugged his shoulders and smiled weakly.

"I am a wonderful talker, I admit," he agreed; "but I got a hard face, Milton, whereas you, anyhow, look honest. So you should meet me at Hanley's afterward, understand me, and we would try to close the deal there and then."

He dug his hand into his trousers pocket and produced a modest roll of bills, from which he detached six dollars.

"Here is the money," he added, "and you should be here to meet them people at eight o'clock sharp."

On the stroke of eight Milton Jassy returned to Benson's office in the Siddons Theatre Building and again seated himself at his desk in front of the pile of manuscript music. This time, however, he brushed aside the title page of his Opus 47 and spread out an evening paper to beguile the tedium of awaiting Benson's "prospects." Automatically he turned to the department headed Music and Musicians, and at the top of the column his eye fell on the following item:

Ferencz Lánchid, the Budapest virtuoso, will be the soloist at the concert this evening of the Philharmonic Society. He will play the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Opus 35, and the remainder of the program will consist of Dvorák's Symphony, *Aus der Neuen Welt*, and the ever-popular Meistersinger Overture.

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Jassy heaved a tremulous sigh as he concluded the paragraph and leaned back in his chair, while in his ears sounded the adagio passage that introduces the first movement of the "New World Symphony." Simultaneously the occupant of the next office slammed down his rolltop desk and began to whistle a lively popular melody. It was "Wildcat Rag," and Milton struck the outspread newspaper with his clenched fist. Then rising to his feet he gathered together the loose pages of his "Opus 47" and placed them tenderly in a leather case just as the door opened and Elkan and Yetta entered.

"I hope we ain't late," Elkan said.

"Not at all," Milton replied. "This is Mr. and Mrs. Lubliner—ain't it?"

As he drew forward a chair for Yetta he saluted his visitors with a slight, graceful bow, a survival of his conservatory days.

"Sit down," he said; "we got lots and lots of time."

"I thought the show started at a quarter-past eight—ain't it?" Elkan asked.

"It does and it doesn't," Milton replied hesitatingly; "that is to say, some shows start at a quarter-past eight and others not till half-past eight."

"But I mean this here 'Diners Out' starts at a quarter-past eight—ain't it?" Elkan insisted.

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"'The Diners Out!'" Milton exclaimed as though he heard the name for the first time. "Oh, sure, the 'Diners Out' starts at a quarter-past eight, and that's just what I wanted to talk to you about."

He turned to Yetta with an engaging smile which, with his black hair and his dark, melancholy eyes, completely won over that far from unimpressible lady.

"Now, Mrs. Lubliner," he began, "your husband is a business man—ain't it? And if some one comes to him and says, 'Mr. Lubliner, I got here two garments for the same price—say, for example, two dollars. One of 'em is made of cheap material, *aber* plenty of it *mit* cheap embroidery on it, understand me; while the other is from finest silk a garment—not much of it, y'understand, but plain and beautiful.'"

"What for a garment could you got for two dollars?" Elkan asked—"especially a silk garment?"

"He's only saying for example, Elkan," Yetta interrupted.

"Garments I am only using, so to speak," Milton explained. "What I really mean is:

You got your choice to go to a popular show like the 'Diners Out' or to a really highgrade show, Mr. Lubliner. So I leave it to you, Mr. Lubliner. Which shall it be?"

Once again he smiled at Yetta.

[Pg 180] "Why, to the highgrade show, sure," Yetta replied, and she seized her husband by the arm. "Come along, Elkan!" she cried; and after Milton had secured the leather portfolio containing his "Opus 47" they proceeded immediately to the elevator.

"We could walk over there from here," Milton said when they reached the sidewalk, and he led the way across town toward Carnegie Hall.

"What for a show is this we are going to see?" Elkan asked. "Also a musical show?"

Milton nodded.

"The best musical show there is," he declared. "Do you like maybe to hear good music?"

"I'm crazy about it," Yetta replied.

"Symphonies, concerti and such things?" Milton inquired.

"Symphonies?" Elkan repeated. "What is symphonies?"

"I couldn't explain it to you," Milton said, "because we ain't got time; *aber* you would see for yourself. Only one thing I must tell you, Mr. Lubliner—when the orchestra plays you shouldn't speak nothing—Mrs. Lubliner neither."

"I wouldn't open my mouth at all," Elkan assured him solemnly; and a few minutes later Milton seated himself in the last row of the parterre at Carnegie Hall, with Elkan and Yetta—one each side of him.

[Pg 181] "So you ain't never been to a symphony concert before?" Milton began, leaning toward Elkan; and, as the latter shook his head, a short, stout person in the adjoining seat raised his eyebrows involuntarily. "Well, you got a big pleasure in store for you," Milton went on; "and another thing I must got to tell you: Might you would hear some pretty jumpy music which you would want to keep time to *mit* your foot. Don't you do it!"

Elkan's neighbour concealed a smile with one hand, and then, he, too, turned to Elkan, who had received Milton's warning with a sulky frown.

"Your friend is right," he said. "People always have to be told that the first time they go to a symphony concert; and the next time they go they not only see the wisdom of such advice, but they want to get up and lick the man that does beat time with his foot."

He accompanied his remark with so gracious a smile that Elkan's frown immediately relaxed.

"A new beginner couldn't get too much advice," he said, and his neighbour leaned farther forward and addressed Milton.

[Pg 182] "You've chosen a fine program to introduce your friend to good music with," he said; and therewith began a lively conversation that lasted until a round of applause signalized the appearance of the conductor. The next moment he raised his baton and the celli began to sigh the mournful phrase which ushers in the symphony. Milton leaned back luxuriously as the woodwind commenced the next phrase; and then, while the introduction ended with a sweeping crescendo and the tempo suddenly increased, Elkan sat up and his eyes became fixed on the trombone and trumpet players.

He maintained this attitude throughout the entire first movement, and it was not until the conductor's arm fell motionless at his side that he settled back in his seat.

"Well," Milton asked, "what do you think of it?"

"A-Number-One!" Elkan answered hoarsely. "It would suit me just so well if it would last the whole evening and we wouldn't have no singing and dancing at all."

"What do you mean—no singing and dancing!" Milton exclaimed.

"Sure!" Elkan continued. "I wish them fellers would play the whole evening."

The conductor tapped his desk with his baton.

"Don't worry," Milton commented as he settled himself for the next movement. "You'll get your wish all right."

Elkan looked inquiringly at his mentor, but Milton only placed his forefinger to his lips; and thereafter, until the conclusion of the symphony, the pauses between the movements of the symphony were so brief that Elkan had no opportunity to make further inquiries.

"Well, neighbour," asked the gentleman on his right, as the musicians filed off the stage for the ten-minutes' intermission, "what do you think of your first symphony?"

Elkan smiled and concealed his shyness by clearing his throat.

"The symphony is all right," he said; "but, with all them operators there, what is the use they are trying to save money hiring only one foreman?"

"One foreman?" his neighbour cried.

"Sure—the feller with the stick," Elkan went on blandly. "Naturally he couldn't keep his eye on all them people at oncet—ain't it? I am watching them fellers, which they are working them big brass machines, for the last half hour, and except for five or ten minutes they sit there doing absolutely nothing—just fooling away their time."

"Them fellers ain't fooling away their time," Milton said gravely. "They ain't got nothing to do only at intervals."

"Then I guess they must pay 'em by piecework—ain't it?" Elkan asked.

"They pay 'em so much a night," Milton explained.

"Well, in that case, Mr. Jassy," Elkan continued, "all I could say is if I would got working in my place half a dozen fellers which I am paying by the day, understand me, and the foreman couldn't keep 'em busy only half the time, *verstehst du*, he would quick look for another job."

Elkan's neighbour on the right had been growing steadily more crimson, and at last he hurriedly seized his hat and passed out into the aisle.

"That's a pretty friendly feller," Elkan said as he gazed after him. "Do you happen to know his name?"

"I ain't never heard his name," Milton replied; "but he is seemingly crazy about music. I seen him here every time I come."

"Well, I don't blame him none," Elkan commented; "because you take the Harlem Winter Garden, for instance, and though the music is rotten, understand me, they got the nerve to charge you yet for a lot of food which half the time you don't want at all; whereas here they didn't even ask us we should buy so much as a glass beer."

At this juncture the short, stout person returned and proceeded to entertain Elkan and Yetta by pointing out among the audience the figures of local and international millionaires.

"And all them fellers is crazy about music too?" Elkan asked.

"So crazy," his neighbour said, "that the little man over there, with the white beard, spends almost twenty thousand a year on it!"

"And yet," Milton said bitterly, "there's plenty fellers in the city which year in and year out composes chamber music and symphonic music which they couldn't themselves make ten dollars a week; and, when it comes right down to it, none of them millionaires would loosen up to such new beginners for even five hundred dollars to help them get a hearing."

The short person received Milton's outburst with a faint smile.

"I've heard that before," he commented, "but I never had the pleasure of meeting any of those great unknown composers."

"That's because most of 'em is so bashful they ain't got sense enough to push themselves forward," Milton replied; "*aber* if you really want to meet one I could take you to-night yet to a café on Delancey Street where there is playing a trio which the pianist is something you could really call a genius."

"You don't tell me!" Elkan's neighbour cried. "Why, I should be delighted to go with you."

"How about it, Mr. Lubliner?" Milton asked. "Are you and Mrs. Lubliner agreeable to go downtown after the show to the café on Delancey Street? It's a pretty poor neighbourhood already."

Yetta smiled.

"Sure, I know," she said; "but it wouldn't be the first time me and Elkan was in Delancey Street."

"Then it's agreed that we're all going to hear the genius," Elkan's neighbour added. "I heard you call one another Jassy and Lubliner—it's hardly fair you shouldn't know my name too."

He felt in his waistcoat pocket and finally handed a visiting card to Elkan, who glanced at it hurriedly and with trembling fingers passed it on to his wife, for it was

inscribed in old English type as follows:

**Mr. Joseph Kammerman
Fostoria Hotel
New York**

"Once and for all, I am telling you, Volkovisk, either you would got to play music here or quit!" Marculescu cried at eleven o'clock that evening. "The customers is all the time kicking at the stuff you give us."

"What d'ye mean, stuff?" Max Merech protested. "That was no stuff, Mr. Marculescu. That was from Brahms a trio, and it suits me down to the ground."

"Suits you!" Marculescu exclaimed. "Who in blazes are you?"

"I am *auch* a customer, Mr. Marculescu," Max replied with dignity.

"*Yow*, a customer!" Marculescu jeered. "You sit here all night on one cup coffee. A customer, *sagt er!* A loafer—that's what you are! It ain't you I am making my money from, Merech—it's from them *Takeefim*^[A] uptown; and they want to hear music, not Brahms. So you hear what I am telling you, Volkovisk! You should play something good—like 'Wildcat Rag'."

[A] *Takeefim*—Aristocracy.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Marculescu," Max interrupted. "Do you mean to told me them lowlife bums in front there, which makes all that *Geschrei* over 'Dixerlie' and such like *Narrischkeit*, is *Takeefim* yet?"

"I don't want to listen to you at all, Merech!" Marculescu shouted.

"I don't care if you want to listen to me *oder* not," Merech said. "I was a customer here when you got one little store *mit* two waiters; and it was me and all the other fellers you are calling loafers now what give you, with our few pennies, your first start. Now you are too good for us with your uptown *Takeefim*. Why, them same *Takeefim* only comes here, in the first place, because they want to see what it looks like in one of the East Side cafés, where they got such good music and such interesting characters, which sits and drinks coffee and plays chess *und Tarrok*."

He glared at the enraged Marculescu and waved his hands excitedly.

"What you call loafers they call interesting characters, Mr. Marculescu," he continued, "and what you call stuff they call good music—and that's the way it goes, Mr. Marculescu. You are a goose which is killing its own golden eggs!"

"So!" Marculescu roared. "I am a goose, am I? You loafer, you! Out of here before I kick you out!"

"You wouldn't kick nothing," Max rejoined, "because I am happy to go out from here! Where all the time is being played such *Machshovos* like 'Wildcat Rag,' I don't want to stay at all."

He rose from his chair and flung ten cents on to the table.

"And furthermore," he cried by way of peroration, "people don't got to come five miles down to Delancey Street to hear 'Wildcat Rag,' Mr. Marculescu; so, if you keep on playing it, Mr. Marculescu, you will quick find that it's an elegant tune to bust up to—and that's all I got to say!"

As he walked away, Marculescu made a sign to his pianist.

"Go ahead, Volkovisk—play 'Wildcat Rag!'" he said. Then he followed Max to the front of the café; and before they reached the front tables, at which sat the slummers from uptown, Volkovisk began to pound out the hackneyed melody.

"That's what I think of your arguments, Merech!" Marculescu said, walking behind the cashier's desk.

Max paused to crush him with a final retort; but even as he began to deliver it his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, for at that instant the door opened and there entered a party of four, with Elkan Lubliner in the van. A moment later, however, Milton Jassy pushed his guests to one side and strode angrily toward Marculescu.

"*Koosh!*" he bellowed and stamped his foot on the floor, whereat the music ceased and even the uptown revellers were startled into silence. Only Marculescu remained

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unabashed.

"Say," he shouted as he rushed from behind his desk, "what do you think this joint is?—a joint!"

"I think what I please, Marculescu," Milton said, "and you should tell Volkovisk to play something decent. Also you should bring us two quarts from the best Tchampanyer wine—from French wine Tchampanyer, not *Amerikanischer*."

He waved his hand impatiently and three waiters—half of Marculescu's entire staff—came on the jump; so that, a moment later, Jassy and his guests were divested of their wraps and seated at one of the largest tables facing the piano. It was not until then that Milton descried Max Merech hovering round the door.

"Merech!" he called. "*Kommen sie 'r über!*"

Max shook his head shyly and half-opened the door, but Elkan forestalled him. He fairly bounded from the table and caught his assistant cutter by the arm just as he was disappearing on to the sidewalk.

"Max," he said, "what's the matter with you? Ain't you coming in to meet my wife?"

Max shrugged in embarrassment.

[Pg 190] "You don't want me to butt into your party, Mr. Lubliner!" he said.

"Listen, Max," Elkan almost pleaded; "not only do I want you to, but you would be doing me a big favour if you would come in and join us. Also, Max, I am going to introduce you as our designer. You ain't got no objections?"

"Not at all," Max replied, and he followed his employer into the café.

"Yetta," Elkan began, "I think you seen Mr. Merech before—ain't it?"

Mrs. Lubliner smiled and extended her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Merech?" she said; and Max bowed awkwardly.

"Mr. Kammerman," Elkan continued, "this is our designer, Max Merech; and I could assure you, Mr. Kammerman, a very good one too. He's got a great eye for colour."

"And a good ear for music," Milton added as Kammerman shook the blushing dilettante by the hand.

"In fact, Mr. Kammerman, if he has got such taste in designing as he is showing in music," Milton went on, "he must be a wonder! Nothing suits him but the best. And now, if you will excuse me, I'll get Volkovisk he should play you his sonata."

[Pg 191] He left the table with his leather portfolio under his arm, and for more than five minutes he held an earnest consultation with Volkovisk and the cellist, after which he returned smiling to his seat.

"First Volkovisk plays his sonata, 'Opus 30,'" he explained, "and then he would do a little thing of my own."

He nodded briskly to Volkovisk, and Kammerman settled himself resignedly to a hearing of what he anticipated would be a commonplace piece of music. After the first six measures, however, he sat up straight in his chair and his face took on an expression of wonder and delight. Then, resting his elbow on the table, he nursed his cheek throughout the first movement in a posture of earnest attention.

"Why," he cried as the musician paused, "this man is a genius!"

Max Merech nodded. His face was flushed and his eyes were filled with tears.

"What did I told you, Mr. Lubliner?" he said; and Jassy raised his hand for silence while Volkovisk began the second movement. This and the succeeding movements fully sustained the promise of the earlier portions of the composition; and when at length Volkovisk rose from the piano stool and approached the table Kammerman jumped from his chair and wrung the composer's hand.

"Sit in my chair," he insisted, and snapped his fingers at Marculescu, who fumed impotently behind the cashier's desk.

[Pg 192] "Here," he called; "more wine—and look sharp about it!"

Marculescu obeyed sulkily and again the glasses were filled.

"Gentlemen," Kammerman said, "and Mrs. Lubliner, I ask you to drink to a great career just beginning."

"Lots of people said that before," Max murmured after he had emptied his glass.

"They said it," Kammerman replied, "but I pledge it. You shall play no more in this place, Volkovisk—and here is my hand on it."

Max Merech beamed across the table at his employer.

"Well, Mr. Lubliner," he said, "you lost your chance."

Elkan shrugged and smiled.

"Might you could find another of them genius fellers for me maybe, Max?" he said.

And therewith Kammerman slapped Milton Jassy on the back.

"By Jove! We forgot your trio," he said. "Play it, Volkovisk, as your valedictory here."

Again Volkovisk sought the piano, and after whispered instructions to his assistants he began a rendition of Jassy's "Opus 47," from the manuscript Milton had brought with him; but, allowing for the faulty technic of the 'cellist and the uncertainty that attends the first reading from manuscript of any composition, there was little to recommend Jassy's work.

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"Very creditable!" Kammerman said at the end of the movement. "Perhaps we might hear the rest."

Max kept his eyes fixed on the table to avoid looking at Jassy, and even Volkovisk seemed embarrassed as he swung round on the piano stool.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

Jassy emitted a bitter laugh.

"That'll do, Volkovisk," he replied hoarsely. "I guess it needs rehearsing."

At this point Max attempted to create a diversion.

"Look at that lady sitting there!" he said. "She puts on a yellow hat to an old-gold dress. She's committing murder and she don't know it!"

Kammerman seized on the incident as a way of escape from criticising Jassy's trio.

"That reminds me, Lubliner," he said. "Give me your business card if you have one with you. I must tell Mr. Dalzell, my cloak buyer, to look over your line. I'm sure, with a designer of Mr. Merech's artistic instincts working for you, you will be making up just the highgrade line of goods we need."

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One year later, the usual crowd of first-nighters lounged in the lobby of the Siddons Theatre during the intermission between the second and third acts of M. Sidney Benson's newest musical comedy, "Marjory from Marguery's," and commented with enthusiasm on the song hit of the show—"My Blériot Maid." A number of the more gifted even whistled the melody, skipping the hard part and proceeding by impromptu and conventional modulation to the refrain, which had been expressly designed by its composer, Milton Jassy, so as to present no technical difficulties to the most modest whistler.

Through this begemmed and piping throng, Kammerman and Volkovisk elbowed their way to the street for a breath of fresh air; and as they reached the sidewalk Kammerman heaved a sigh of relief.

"What a terrible melody!" he ejaculated.

"But the plot ain't bad," Volkovisk suggested, and Kammerman grinned involuntarily.

"To be exact, the two plots aren't bad," he said. "It's made up of two old farces. One of them is '*Embrassons nous, Duval*,' and the other '*Un Garçon, de chez Gaillard*.'"

"But the costumes are really something which you could call beautiful!" Volkovisk declared.

"Merech approved the costumes too," Kammerman agreed with a laugh. "He left after the first act; and he said that if you endured it to the end you were to be sure to tell Jassy the colorings were splendid!" He lit a cigarette reflectively. "That man is a regular shark for coloring!" he said. "It seems that when I first met him that night he was only an assistant cutter; but Elkan Lubliner made him designer very shortly afterward—and it has proved a fine thing for both of them. I understand we bought fifteen thousand dollars' worth of goods from them during the past year!"

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"He deserved all the good luck that came to him," Volkovisk cried; and Kammerman placed his hand affectionately on his protégé's shoulder.

"There's a special Providence that looks after artists," he said as they reëntered the theatre, "whether they paint, write, compose, or design garments."

CHAPTER FIVE

ONE OF ESAU'S FABLES

THE MOUSE SCRATCHES THE LION'S BACK; THE LION SCRATCHES THE MOUSE'S BACK

"NO, ELKAN," said Louis Stout, of Flugel & Stout. "When you are coming to compare Johnsonhurst *mit* Burgess Park it's already a molehill to a mountain."

"Burgess Park ain't such high ground neither," Elkan Lubliner retorted. "Max Kovner says he lives out there on Linden Boulevard three months only and he gets full up with malaria something terrible."

"Malaria we ain't got it in Burgess Park!" Louis declared. "I am living there now six years, Elkan, and I never bought so much as a two-grain quinine pill. Furthermore, Elkan, Kovner's malaria you could catch in Denver, Colorado, or on an ocean steamer, y'understand; because, with a lowlife bum like Max Kovner, which he sits up till all hours of the night—a drinker and a gambler, understand me—you don't got to be a professor exactly to diagonize his trouble. It ain't malaria, Elkan, it's *Katzenjammer!*"

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"But my Yetta is stuck on Johnsonhurst," Elkan protested, "and she already makes up her mind we would move out there."

"That was just the way with my wife," Louis said. "For six months she is crying all the time Ogden Estates; and if I would listen to her, Elkan, and bought out there, y'understand, instead we would be turning down offers on our house at an advance of twenty per cent. on the price we paid for it, we would be considering letting the property go under foreclosure! You ought to see that place Ogden Estates nowadays, Elkan—nothing but a bunch of Italieners lives there."

"But——" Elkan began.

"Another thing," Louis Stout broke in: "Out in Johnsonhurst what kind of society do you got? Moe Rabiner lives there, and Marks Pasinsky lives there—and *Gott weiss wer noch*. My partner, Mr. Flugel, is approached the other day with an offer of some property in Johnsonhurst, and I was really in favour he should take it up; but he says to me, 'Louis,' he says, 'a place where such people lives like Pasinsky and Rabiner I wouldn't touch at all!' And he was right, Elkan. Salesmen and designers only lives in Johnsonhurst; while out in Burgess Park we got a nice class of people living, Elkan. You know J. Kamin, of the Lee Printemps, Pittsburgh?"

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"Used to was one of our best customers," Philip Scheikowitz replied, "though he passed us up last year."

"His sister, Mrs. Benno Ortelsburg, lives one house by the other with me," Louis went on. "Her husband does a big real-estate business there. Might you also know Julius Tarnowitz, of the Tarnowitz-Wixman Department Store, Rochester?"

"Bought from us a couple years a small bill," Marcus Polatkin said. "I wish we could sell him more."

"Well, his brother, Sig Tarnowitz, lives across the street from us," Louis cried triumphantly. "Sig's got a fine business there on Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn."

"What for a business?"

"A furniture business," Louis replied. "And might you would know also Joel Ribnik, which he is running the McKinnon-Weldon Drygoods Company, of Cyprus, Pennsylvania?"

"That's the feller what you nearly sold that big bill to last month, Elkan," Scheikowitz commented.

"Well, his sister is married to a feller by the name Robitscher, of Robitscher, Smith & Company, the wallpaper house and interior decorators. They got an elegant place down the street from us."

"But——" Elkan began again.

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"But nothing, Elkan!" Marcus Polatkin interrupted with a ferocious wink; for Louis Stout, as junior partner in the thriving Williamsburg store of Flugel & Stout, was viewing Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's line preparatory to buying his spring line of dresses. "But nothing, Elkan! Mr. Stout knows what he is talking about, Elkan; and if I would be you, instead I would argue with him, understand me, I would take Yetta out to Burgess Park on Sunday and give the place a look."

"That's the idea!" Louis cried. "And you should come and take dinner with us first. Mrs. Stout would be delighted."

"What time do you eat dinner?" Philip Scheikowitz asked, frowning significantly at Elkan.

"Two o'clock," Louis replied, and Polatkin and Scheikowitz nodded in unison.

"He'll be there," Polatkin declared.

"At a quarter before two," Scheikowitz added and Elkan smiled mechanically by way of assent.

"So come along, Mr. Stout," Polatkin said, "and look at them Ethel Barrymore dresses. I think you'll like 'em."

He led Stout from the office as he spoke while Scheikowitz remained behind with Elkan.

"Honest, Elkan," he said, "I'm surprised to see the way you are acting with Louis Stout!"

"What do you mean, the way I'm acting, Mr. Scheikowitz?" Elkan protested. "Do you think I am going to buy a house in a neighbourhood which I don't want to live in at all just to oblige a customer?"

[Pg 200] "*Schmooes*, Elkan!" Scheikowitz exclaimed. "No one asks you you should buy a house there. Be a little reasonable, Elkan. What harm would it do you, supposing you and Yetta should go out to Burgess Park next Sunday? Because you know the way Louis Stout is, Elkan. He will look over our line for two weeks yet before he decides on his order—and meantime we shouldn't entegonize him."

"I don't want to antagonize him," Elkan said; "but me and Yetta made our arrangements to go out to Johnsonhurst next Sunday."

"Go out there the Sunday after," cried Scheikowitz. "Johnsonhurst would still be on the map, Elkan. It ain't going to run away exactly."

Thus persuaded, Elkan and Yetta on the following Sunday elbowed their way through the crowd at the entrance of the Brooklyn Bridge, and after a delay of several minutes boarded a train for Burgess Park.

"Well, all I can say is," Yetta gasped, after they had seized on the only vacant seats in the car, "if it's this way on Sunday what would it be on weekdays?"

[Pg 201] "There must have been a block," Elkan said meekly. Only by the exercise of the utmost marital diplomacy had he induced his wife to make the visit to Louis Stout's home, and one of his most telling arguments had been the advantage of the elevated railroad journey to Burgess Park over the subway ride to Johnsonhurst.

"Furthermore," Yetta insisted, referring to another of Elkan's plausible reasons for visiting Burgess Park, "I suppose all these Italieners and *Bétzimmers* are customers of yours which we was going to run across on our way down there. Ain't it?"

Elkan blushed guiltily as he looked about him at the carload of holiday-makers; but a moment later he exclaimed aloud as he recognized in a seat across the aisle no less a person than Joseph Kamin, of Le Printemps, Pittsburgh.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Kamin?" he said.

"Not Elkan Lubliner, from Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company?" Mr. Kamin exclaimed. "Well, who would think to meet you here!"

He rose from his seat, whereat a bulky Italian immediately sank into it; and as livery of seizin he appropriated the comic section of Mr. Kamin's Sunday paper, which had fallen to the floor of the car, and spread it wide open in front of him.

"Now you lost your seat," Elkan said; "so you should take mine."

He jumped to his feet and Kamin sat down in his place, while a Neapolitan who hung on an adjacent strap viciously scowled his disappointment.

"You ain't acquainted with Mrs. Lubliner?" Elkan said.

"Pleased to meetcher," Kamin murmured.

[Pg 202] Yetta bowed stiffly and Elkan hastened to make conversation by way of relieving Mr. Kamin's embarrassment.

"Looks like an early spring the way people is going to the country in such crowds," he said.

"I bet yer," Kamin rejoined emphatically. "I arrived in New York two weeks ahead of my schedule, because I simply got to do my buying now or lose a lot of early spring

trade."

"Have you been in town long?" Elkan asked.

"Only this morning," Kamin answered; "and I am going down to eat dinner with my sister, Mrs. Ortelsburg. She lives in Burgess Park."

"Is that so?" Elkan exclaimed. "We ourselves are going to Burgess Park—to visit a friend."

"A customer," Yetta corrected.

"A customer could also be a friend," Kamin declared, "especially if he's a good customer."

"This is a very good customer," Elkan went on, "by the name Louis Stout."

"Louis Stout, from Flugel & Stout?" Kamin cried. "Why, him and Benno Ortelsburg is like brothers already! Well, then, I'll probably see you down in Burgess Park this afternoon, on account every Sunday afternoon Louis plays pinoche at my brother-in-law's house. Why don't he fetch you round to take a hand?"

"I should be delighted," Elkan said; but Yetta sniffed audibly.

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"I guess we would be going home right after dinner, before the crowd starts back," she said.

"Not on a fine day like this you wouldn't," Kamin protested; "because once you get out to Burgess Park you ain't in such a hurry to come back. I wish we would get such a place near Pittsburgh, Mrs. Lubliner. I bet yer I would quick move out there. The smoke gets worsen and worsen in Pittsburgh; in fact, it's so nowadays we couldn't sell a garment in pastel shades."

"Well, we got plenty blacks, navy blues, Copenhagen blues and brown in our spring line, Mr. Kamin," Elkan said; and therewith he commenced so graphically to catalogue Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's new stock that, by the time the train drew into Burgess Park, Kamin was making figures on the back of an envelope in an effort to convince Elkan that his prices were all wrong.

"But, anyhow," Kamin said, as they parted in front of the Ortelsburgs' colonial residence, "I will see you in the store to-morrow morning sure."

"You'll see me before then, because me and Yetta is coming round this afternoon sure—ain't we, Yetta?"

Mrs. Lubliner nodded, for her good humour had been restored by Elkan's splendid exhibition of salesmanship.

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"This afternoon is something else again," Kamin said, "because a feller which tries to mix pinoche with business is apt to overplay his hand in both games."

"No, Joe; you're wrong," Benno Ortelsburg said to his brother-in-law, Joseph Kamin, as they sipped their after-dinner coffee in the Ortelsburg library that day. "It wouldn't be taking advantage of the feller at all. You say yourself he tries to sell goods to you on the car already. Why shouldn't we try to sell Glaubmann's house to him while he's down here? And we'll split the commission half and half."

Kamin hesitated before replying.

"In business, Joe—it's Esau's fable of the lion and the mouse every time!" Ortelsburg continued. "The mouse scratches the lion's back and the lion scratches the mouse's back! Ain't it?"

"But you know so well as I do, Benno, that Glaubmann's house on Linden Boulevard ain't worth no eighteen thousand dollars," Kamin said.

"Why ain't it?" Benno retorted. "Glaubmann's Linden Boulevard house is precisely the same house as this, built from the same plans and everything—and this house costs me thirteen thousand five hundred dollars. Suburban real estate is worth just so much as you can get some sucker to pay for it, Joe. So I guess I better get the cards and chips ready, because I see Glaubmann coming up the street now."

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A moment later Glaubmann entered the library and greeted Kamin uproariously.

"Hello, Joe!" he cried. "How's the drygoods business in Pittsburgh?"

"Not so good as the real-estate business in Burgess Park, Barney," Kamin replied. "They tell me you are selling houses hand over fist."

"*Yow*—hand over fist!" Barnett cried. "If I carry a house six months and sell it at a couple thousand dollars' profit, what is it?"

"I got to get rid of a whole lot of garments to make a couple thousand dollars, Barney," Kamin said; "and, anyhow, if you sell a house for eighteen thousand dollars which it cost you thirteen-five you would be making a little more as four thousand dollars."

"Sure I would," Glaubmann replied; "*aber* the people which buys green-goods and gold bricks ain't investing in eighteen-thousand-dollar propositions! Such yokels you could only interest in hundred-dollar lots between high and low water on some of them Jersey sandbars."

"There is all kinds of come-ons, Barney," Joe said, "and the biggest one, understand me, is the business man who is willing to be played for a sucker, so as he can hold his customers' trade."

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"You got the proper real-estate spirit, Joe," Benno declared, as he returned with the cards and chips. "You don't allow the ground to grow under your feet. Just at present, though, we are going to spiel a little pinocle and we would talk business afterward."

"Real estate ain't business," Kamin retorted. "It's a game like pinocle; and I got a little Jack of Diamonds and Queen of Spades coming round here in a few minutes which I would like to meld."

"Now you are talking poetry," Barnett said.

"Take it from me, Barney," Benno Ortelsburg interrupted, "this ain't no poetry. It's a fact; and if you could see your way clear to pay a thousand dollars' commission, y'understand, me and Joe is got a customer for your Linden Boulevard house at eighteen thousand dollars."

"Jokes you are making me!" Barnett cried. "You shouldn't drink so much schnapps after dinner, Benno, because I could as much get eighteen thousand for that Linden Boulevard house as I would pay you a thousand dollars commission if I got it."

"You ain't paying me the thousand dollars," Benno protested. "Don't you suppose Joe's got a look-in-here?"

"And furthermore," Joe said, "you also got Louis Stout to consider. If you think Louis Stout is going to sit by and see a commission walk past him, Benno, you are making a big mistake."

"I'm willing we should give Louis a hundred or so," Benno agreed. "We got to remember Louis is a customer of his also."

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"A customer of who's?" Barnett asked, as the doorbell rang.

"*Stiegen!*" Benno hissed; and a moment later he ushered Elkan and Yetta into the library, while Mr. Stout brought up the rear.

Benno cleared his throat preparatory to introducing the newcomers, but Louis Stout brushed hastily past him.

"Mr. Glaubmann," Louis said, "this is my friend, Elkan Lubliner."

"And you forget Mrs. Lubliner," cried Mrs. Ortelsburg, who had hurried downstairs at the sound of voices in the hall. "I'm Mrs. Ortelsburg," she continued, turning to Yetta. "Won't you come upstairs and take your things off?"

"Elkan," Louis Stout continued, "you better go along with her. I want you to see what an elegant lot of clothes-closets they got upstairs. You know most houses is designed by archytecks which all they are trying to do is to save money for the builder. *Aber* this archyteck was an exception. The way he figures it he tries to build the house to please the women, *mit* lots of closet room, and—excuse me, ladies—to hell with the expenses! I'll go upstairs with you and show you what I mean."

Benno frowned angrily.

"'Tain't necessary, Louis," he said. "Mrs. Ortelsburg would show him."

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He drew forward chairs; and, after Elkan and Yetta had followed Mrs. Ortelsburg upstairs, he closed the library door.

"Couldn't I introduce people in my own house, Stout?" he demanded.

Louis Stout shrugged his shoulders.

"If you mean as a matter of ettykit—yes," he retorted; "*aber* if it's a real-estate transaction—no. When I bring a customer to Mr. Glaubmann for his Linden Boulevard house, Ortelsburg, I do the introducing myself, which afterward I don't want no broker to claim he earned the commission by introducing the customer first—understand me?"

He seated himself and smiled calmly at Kamin, Glaubmann, and his host.

"I ain't living in the country for my health exactly," he declared, "and don't you forget it."

"Where's your written authorization from the owner?" Ortelsburg demanded, raising a familiar point of real-estate brokerage law; and Stout tapped his breast pocket.

"Six months ago already," Stout replied, "Mr. Glaubmann writes me if I hear of a customer for his house he would protect me, and I got the letter here in my pocket. Ain't that right, Mr. Glaubmann?"

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Glaubmann had walked toward the window and was looking out upon the budding white poplars that spread their branches at a height of six feet above the sidewalks of Burgess Park. He nodded in confirmation of Louis' statement; and as he did so a short, stout person, who was proceeding hurriedly down the street in the direction of the station, paused in front of the Ortelsburg residence. A moment later he rang the bell and Ortelsburg himself opened the door.

"*Nu*, Mr. Kovner!" he said. "What could I do for you?"

"Mr. Glaubmann just nods to me out of your window," Max Kovner replied, "and I thought he wants to speak to me."

Benno returned to the library with Max at his heels.

"Do you want to speak to Mr. Kovner, Glaubmann?" he asked, and Glaubmann started perceptibly. During the months of Max Kovner's tenancy Glaubmann had not only refrained from visiting his Linden Boulevard house, but he had also performed feats of disappearance resembling Indian warfare in his efforts to avoid Max Kovner on the streets of Burgess Park. All this was the result of Max Kovner's taking possession of the Linden Boulevard house upon Glaubmann's agreement to make necessary plumbing repairs and to paint and repaper the living rooms; and Glaubmann's complete breach of this agreement was reflected in the truculency of Max Kovner's manner as he entered the Ortelsburg library.

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"Maybe Glaubmann don't want to speak to me," he cried, "but I want to speak to him, and in the presence of you gentlemen here also."

He banged Ortelsburg's library table with his clenched fist.

"Once and for all, Mr. Glaubmann," he said, "either you would fix that plumbing and do that painting, understand me, or I would move out of your Linden Boulevard house the first of next month sure!"

Glaubmann received this ultimatum with a defiant grin.

"*Schmooes*, Kovner," he said, "you wouldn't do nothing of the kind! You got *mit* me a verbal lease for one year in the presence of my wife, your wife and a couple of other people which the names I forget."

"And how about the repairs?" Kovner demanded.

"If you seen the house needs repairs and you go into possession anyhow," Glaubmann retorted, "you waive the repairs, because the agreement to repair merges in the lease. That's what Kent J. Goldstein, my lawyer, says, Kovner; and ask any other lawyer, Kovner, and he could tell you the same."

"So," Kovner exclaimed, "I am stuck with that rotten house for a year! Is that the idee?"

Glaubmann nodded.

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"All right, Mr. Glaubmann," Kovner concluded. "You are here in a strange house to me and I couldn't do nothing; but I am coming over to your office to-morrow, and if I got to sit there all day, understand me, we would settle this thing up."

"That's all right," Ortelsburg interrupted. "When you got real-estate business with Glaubmann, Mr. Kovner, his office is the right place to see him. *Aber* here is a private house and Sunday, Mr. Kovner, and we ain't doing no real-estate business here. So, if you got a pressing engagement somewheres else, Mr. Kovner, don't let me hurry you."

He opened the library door, and with a final glare at his landlord Max passed slowly out.

"That's a dangerous feller," Glaubmann said as his tenant banged the street door behind him. "He goes into possession for one year without a written lease containing a covenant for repairs by the landlord, y'understand, and now he wants to blame me for it! Honestly, the way some people acts so unreasonable, Kamin, it's enough to sicken me with the real-estate business!"

Kamin nodded sympathetically, but Louis Stout made an impatient gesture by way of bringing the conversation back to its original theme.

"That ain't here or there," he declared. "The point is I am fetching you a customer for your Linden Boulevard house, Glaubmann, and I want this here matter of the commission settled right away."

[Pg 212] Ortelsburg rose to his feet as a shuffling on the stairs announced the descent of his guests.

"Commissions we would talk about afterward," he said. "First let us sell the house."

In Benno Ortelsburg's ripe experience there were as many methods of selling suburban residences as there were residences for sale; and, like the born salesman he was, he realized that each transaction possessed its individual obstacles, to be overcome by no hard-and-fast rules of salesmanship. Thus he quickly divined that whoever sought to sell Elkan a residence in Burgess Park must first convince Yetta, and he proceeded immediately to apportion the chips for a five-handed game of auction pinochle, leaving Yetta to be entertained by his wife. Mrs. Ortelsburg's powers of persuasion in the matter of suburban property were second only to her husband's, and the game had not proceeded very far when Benno looked into the adjoining room and observed with satisfaction that Yetta was listening open-mouthed to Mrs. Ortelsburg's fascinating narrative of life in Burgess Park.

"Forty hens we got it," she declared; "and this month alone they are laying on us every day a dozen eggs—some days ten, or nine at the least. Then, of course, if we want a little fricassee once in a while we could do that also."

[Pg 213] "How do you do when you are getting all of a sudden company?" Yetta asked. "I didn't see no delicatessen store round here."

"You didn't?" Mrs. Ortelsburg exclaimed. "Why, right behind the depot is Mrs. J. Kaplan's a delicatessen store, which I am only saying to her yesterday, 'Mrs. Kaplan,' I says, 'how do you got all the time such fresh, nice smoke-tongue here?' And she says, 'It's the country air,' she says, 'which any one could see; not alone smoke-tongue keeps fresh, *aber* my daughter also, when she comes down here,' she says, 'she is pale like anything—and look at her now!' And it's a fact, Mrs. Lubliner, the daughter did look sick, and to-day yet she's got a complexion fresh like a tomato already. That's what Burgess Park done for her!"

"But don't you got difficulty keeping a girl, Mrs. Ortelsburg?" Yetta inquired.

"Difficulty?" Mrs. Ortelsburg cried. "Why, just let me show you my kitchen. The girls love it here. In the first place, we are only twenty minutes from Coney Island; and, in the second place, with all the eggs which we got it, they could always entertain their fellers here in such a fine, big kitchen, which I am telling my girl, Lena: 'So long as you give 'em omelets or fried eggs *mit* fat, Lena, I don't care how many eggs you use —*aber* butter is butter in Burgess Park *oder* Harlem.'"

[Pg 214] In this vein Mrs. Ortelsburg continued for more than an hour, while she conducted Yetta to the kitchen and cellar and back again to the bedrooms above stairs, until she decided that sufficient interest had been aroused to justify the more robust method of her husband. She therefore returned to the library, and therewith began for Benno Ortelsburg the real business of the afternoon.

"Well, boys," he said, "I guess we would quit pinochle for a while and join the ladies."

He chose for this announcement a moment when Elkan's chips showed a profit of five dollars; and as, in his capacity of banker, he adjusted the losses of the other players, he kept up a merry conversation directed at Mrs. Lubliner.

"Here in Burgess Park," he said, "we play pinochle and we leave it alone; while in the city when a couple business men play pinochle they spend a day at it—and why? Because they only get a chance to play pinochle once in a while occasionally. Every night they are going to theatre *oder* a lodge affair, understand me; whereas here, the train service at night not being so extra elegant, y'understand, we got good houses and we stay in 'em; which in Burgess Park after half-past seven in the evening any one could find a dozen pinochle games to play in—and all of 'em breaks up by half-past ten already."

With this tribute to the transit facilities and domesticity of Burgess Park, he concluded stacking up the chips and turned to Mrs. Lubliner.

[Pg 215] "Yes, Mrs. Lubliner," he continued with an amiable smile, "if you wouldn't persuade your husband to move out to Burgess Park, understand me, I shall consider it you don't like our house here at all."

"But I do like your house!" Yetta protested.

"I should hope so," Benno continued, "on account it would be a poor compliment to a lot of people which could easy be good customers of your husband. For instance, this

house was decorated by Robitscher, Smith & Company, which Robitscher lives across the street already; and his wife is Joel Ribnik's—the McKinnon-Weldon Drygoods Company's—a sister already."

"You don't tell me?" Yetta murmured.

"And Joel is staying with 'em right now," Benno went on. "Furthermore, we got our furniture and carpets by Sig Tarnowitz, which he lives a couple of doors down from here—also got relatives in the retail drygoods business by the name Tarnowitz-Wixman Drygoods Company. The brother, Julius Tarnowitz, is eating dinner with 'em to-day."

"It's a regular buyers' colony here, so to speak," Louis Stout said, and Joseph Kamin nodded.

"Tell you what you do, Benno," Joseph suggested. "Get Tarnowitz and Ribnik to come over here. I think Elkan would like to meet them."

Benno slapped his thigh with a resounding blow.

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"That's a great idee!" he cried; and half an hour later the Ortelsburg library was thronged with visitors, for not only Joel Ribnik and Julius Tarnowitz had joined Benno's party, but seated in easy chairs were Robitscher, the decorator, and Tarnowitz, the furniture dealer.

"Yes, siree, sir!" Robitscher cried. "Given the same decorative treatment to that Linden Boulevard house, Mr. Lubliner, and it would got Ortelsburg's house here skinned to pieces, on account over there it is more open and catches the sun afternoon and morning both."

During this pronouncement Elkan's face wore a ghastly smile and he underwent the sensations of the man in the tonneau of a touring car which is beginning to skid toward a telegraph pole.

"In that case I should recommend you don't buy a Kermanshah rug for the front room," Sigmund Tarnowitz interrupted. "I got in my place right now an antique Beloochistan, which I would let go at only four hundred dollars."

"*Aber* four hundred dollars is an awful lot of money to pay for a rug," Elkan protested. He had avoided looking at Yetta for the past half-hour; but now he glanced fearfully at her, and in doing so received a distinct shock, for Yetta sat with shining eyes and flushed cheeks, inoculated beyond remedy with the virus of the artistic-home fever.

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"Four hundred ain't so much for a rug," she declared.

"Not for an antique Beloochistan," Sig Tarnowitz said, "because every year it would increase in value on you."

"Just the same like that Linden Boulevard house," Ortelsburg added, "which you could take it from me, Mrs. Lubliner, if you don't get right away an offer of five hundred dollars advance on your purchase price I would eat the house, plumbing and all."

At the word "plumbing" Glaubmann started visibly.

"The plumbing would be fixed so good as new," he said; "and I tell you what I would do also, Mr. Lubliner—I would pay fifty per cent. of the decorations if Mr. Ortelsburg would make me an allowance of a hundred dollars on the commission!"

"Could anything be fairer than this?" Ortelsburg exclaimed; and he grinned maliciously as Louis Stout succumbed to a fit of coughing.

"But we ain't even seen the house!" Elkan cried.

"Never mind we ain't seen it," Yetta said; "if the house is the same like this that's all I care about."

"Sure, I know," Elkan replied; "but I want to see the house first before I would even commence to think of buying it."

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"*Schon gut!*" Glaubmann said. "I ain't got no objection to show you the house from the outside; *aber* there is at present people living in the house, understand me, which for the present we couldn't go inside."

"Mr. Lubliner don't want to see the inside, Glaubmann!" Ortelsburg cried, in tones implying that he deprecated Glaubmann's suggestion as impugning Elkan's good faith in the matter. "The inside would be repaired and decorated to suit, Mr. Glaubmann, but the outside he's got a right to see; so we would all go round there and give a look."

Ten minutes afterward a procession of nine persons passed through the streets of Burgess Park and lingered on the sidewalk opposite Glaubmann's house. There

Ortelsburg descanted on the comparatively high elevation of Linden Boulevard and Mrs. Ortelsburg pointed out the chicken-raising possibilities of the back lot; and, after gazing at the shrubbery and incipient shade trees that were planted in the front yard, the line of march was resumed in the direction of Burgess Park's business neighbourhood. Another pause was made at Mrs. J. Kaplin's delicatessen store; and, laden with packages of smoked tongue, Swiss cheese and dill pickles, the procession returned to the Ortelsburg residence marshalled by Benno Ortelsburg, who wielded as a baton a ten-cent loaf of rye bread.

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Thus the remainder of the evening was spent in feasting and more pinocle until nearly midnight, when Elkan and Yetta returned to town on the last train. Hence, with his late homecoming and the Ortelsburgs' delicatessen supper, Elkan slept ill that night, so that it was past nine o'clock before he arrived at his office the following morning. Instead of the satirical greeting which he anticipated from his senior partner, however, he was received with unusual cordiality by Polatkin, whose face was spread in a grin.

"Well, Elkan," he said, "you done a good job when you decided to buy that house."

"When I decided to buy the house? Who says I decided to buy the house?" Elkan cried.

"J. Kamin did," Polatkin explained. "He was here by a quarter to eight already; and not alone J. Kamin was here, but Joel Ribnik and Julius Tarnowitz comes in also. Scheikowitz and me has been on the jump, I bet yer; in fact, Scheikowitz is in there now with J. Kamin and Tarnowitz. Between 'em, those fellers has picked out four thousand dollars' goods."

Elkan looked at his partner in unfeigned astonishment.

"So soon?" he said.

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"Ribnik too," Polatkin continued. "He makes a selection of nine hundred dollars' goods—among 'em a couple stickers like them styles 2040 and 2041. He says he is coming back in half an hour, on account he's got an appointment with a brother-in-law of his."

"By the name Robitscher?" Elkan asked.

"That's the feller," Polatkin answered. "Ribnik says you promised Robitscher the decorations from the house you are buying."

"What d'ye mean I promised him the decorations from the house I am buying?" Elkan exclaimed in anguished tones. "In the first place, I ain't promised him nothing of the kind; and, in the second place, I ain't even bought the house yet."

"That part will be fixed up all right," Polatkin replied, "because Mr. Glaubmann rings up half an hour ago, and he says that so soon as we need him and the lawyer we should telephone for 'em."

For a brief interval Elkan choked with rage.

"Say, lookyhere, Mr. Polatkin," he sputtered at last, "who is going to live in this house—you *oder* me?"

"You are going to live in the house, Elkan," Polatkin declared, "because me I don't need a house. I already got one house, Elkan, and I ain't twins exactly; and also them fellers is very plain about it, Elkan, which they told me and Scheikowitz up and down, that if you wouldn't buy the house they wouldn't confirm us the orders."

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At this juncture Scheikowitz entered the office. From the doorway of the showroom he had observed the discussion between Elkan and his partner; and he had entirely deserted his prospective customers to aid in Elkan's coercion.

"Polatkin is right, Elkan!" he cried. "You got to consider Louis Stout also. Kamin said he would never forgive us if the deal didn't go through."

Elkan bit his lips irresolutely.

"I don't see what you are hesitating about," Polatkin went on. "Yetta likes the house—ain't it?"

"She's crazy about it," Elkan admitted.

"Then what's the use talking?" Scheikowitz declared; and he glanced anxiously toward Tarnowitz and Kamin, who were holding a whispered conference in the showroom. "Let's make an end and get the thing over. Telephone this here Glaubmann he should come right over with Ortelsburg and the lawyer."

"But ain't I going to have no lawyer neither?" Elkan demanded.

"Sure you are," Scheikowitz replied. "I took a chance, Elkan, and I telephoned Henry D. Feldman half an hour since already. He says he would send one up of his

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When it came to drawing a real-estate contract there existed for Kent J. Goldstein no incongruities of time and place. Kent was the veteran of a dozen real-estate booms, during which he had drafted agreements at all hours of the day and night, improvising as his office the back room of a liquor saloon or the cigar counter of a barber shop; and, in default of any other writing material, he was quite prepared to tattoo a brief though binding agreement with gunpowder on the skin of the vendor's back.

Thus the transaction between Glaubmann and Elkan Lubliner presented no difficulties to Kent J. Goldstein; and he handled the details with such care and dispatch that the contract was nearly finished before Harvey J. Sugarberg remembered the instructions of his principal. As attorney for the buyer, it was Henry D. Feldman's practice to see that the contract of sale provided every opportunity for his client lawfully to avoid taking title should he desire for any reason, lawful or unlawful, to back out; and this rule of his principal occurred to Harvey just as he and Goldstein were writing the clause relating to incumbrances.

"The premises are to be conveyed free and clear of all incumbrances," Kent read aloud, "except the mortgage and covenant against nuisances above described and the present tenancies of said premises."

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He had brought with him two blank forms of agreement; and as he filled in the blanks on one of them he read aloud what he was writing and Harvey Sugarberg inserted the same clause in the other. Up to this juncture Harvey had taken Kent's dictation with such remarkable docility that Elkan and his partners had frequently exchanged disquieting glances, and they were correspondingly elated when Harvey at length balked.

"One moment, Mr. Goldstein," he said—and, but for a slight nervousness, he reproduced with histrionic accuracy the tone and gesture of his employer—"as *locum tenens* for my principal I must decline to insert the phrase, 'and the present tenancies of said premises.'"

Kent wasted no time in forensic dispute when engaged in a real-estate transaction, though, if necessary, he could make kindling of the strongest rail that ever graced the front of a jury-box.

"How 'bout it, Glaubmann?" he said. "The premises is occupied—ain't they?"

Glaubmann flapped his right hand in a gesture of *laissez-faire*.

"The feller moves out by the first of next month," he said; and Kent turned to Elkan.

"Are you satisfied that the tenant stays in the house until the first?" he asked. "That will be three days after the contract is closed."

Elkan shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?" he said.

"All right, Mr.—Forget your name!" Kent cried. "Cut out 'and the present tenancies of said premises.'"

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At this easy victory a shade of disappointment passed over the faces of Harvey Sugarberg and his clients, and the contract proceeded without further objection to its rapid conclusion.

"Now then, my friends," Kent announced briskly, "we're ready for the signatures."

At this, the crucial point of all real-estate transactions, a brief silence fell upon the assembled company, which included not only the attorneys and the clients, but Ortelsburg, Kamin, Tarnowitz and Ribnik as well. Finally Glaubmann seized a pen, and, jabbing it viciously in an inkpot, he made a John Hancock signature at the foot of the agreement's last page.

"Now, Mr. Lubliner," Kent said—and Elkan hesitated.

"Ain't we going to wait for Louis Stout?" he asked; and immediately there was a roar of protest that sounded like a mob scene in a Drury Lane melodrama.

"If Louis Stout ain't here it's his own fault," Ortelsburg declared; and Ribnik, Tarnowitz, and Kamin glowered in unison.

"I guess he's right, Elkan," Polatkin murmured.

"It is his own fault if he ain't here," Scheikowitz agreed feebly; and, thus persuaded, Elkan appended a small and, by contrast with Glaubmann's, a wholly unimpressive

signature to the agreement. Immediately thereafter Elkan passed over a certified check for eight hundred dollars, according to the terms of the contract, which provided that the title be closed in twenty days at the office of Henry D. Feldman.

"Well, Mr. Lubliner," Glaubmann said, employing the formula hallowed by long usage in all real-estate transactions involving improved property, "I wish you luck in your new house."

"Much obliged," Elkan said; and after a general handshaking the entire assemblage crowded into one elevator, so that finally Elkan was left alone with his partners.

Polatkin was the first to break a silence of over five minutes' duration.

"Ain't it funny," he said, "that we ain't heard from Louis?"

Scheikowitz nodded; and as he did so the elevator door creaked noisily and there alighted a short, stout person, who, having once been described in the I. O. M. A. Monthly as Benjamin J. Flugel, the Merchant Prince, had never since walked abroad save in a freshly ironed silk hat and a Prince Albert coat.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Flugel?" Polatkin and Scheikowitz cried with one voice, and Mr. Flugel bowed. Albeit a tumult raged within his breast, he remained outwardly the dignified man of business; and, as Elkan viewed for the first time Louis Stout's impressive partner, he could not help congratulating himself on the mercantile sagacity that had made him buy Glaubmann's house.

"And this is Mr. Lubliner?" Flugel said in even tones.

"Pleased to meet you," Elkan said. "I had dinner with your partner only yesterday."

Flugel gulped convulsively in an effort to remain calm.

"I know it," he said; "and honestly the longer I am in business with that feller the more I got to wonder what a *Schlemiel* he is. Actually he goes to work and tries to do his own partner without knowing it at all. Mind you, if he would be doing it from spite I could understand it; but when one partner don't know that the other partner practically closes a deal for a tract of a hundred lots and six houses in Johnsonhurst, and then persuades a prospective purchaser that, instead of buying in Johnsonhurst, he should buy in Burgess Park, understand me, all I got to say is that if Louis Stout ain't crazy the least he deserves is that the feller really and truly should buy in Burgess Park."

"But, Mr. Flugel," Elkan interrupted, "I did buy in Burgess Park."

"What!" Flugel shouted.

"I say that I made a contract for a house out there this morning only," Elkan said.

For a few seconds it seemed as though Benjamin J. Flugel's heirs-at-law would collect a substantial death benefit from the I. O. M. A., but the impending apoplexy was warded off by a tremendous burst of profanity.

"*Aber*, Mr. Flugel," Scheikowitz protested, "Louis tells us only last Saturday, understand me, you told him that Johnsonhurst you wouldn't touch at all, on account such lowlifes like Rabiner and Pasinsky lives out there!"

"I know I told him that," Flugel yelled; "because, if I would say I am going to buy out there, Stout goes to work and blabs it all over the place, and the first thing you know they would jump the price on me a few thousand dollars. He's a dangerous feller, Louis is, Mr. Scheikowitz!"

Elkan shrugged his shoulders.

"That may be, Mr. Flugel," he said, "but I signed the contract with Glaubmann for his house on Linden Boulevard—and that's all there is to it!"

Polatkin and Scheikowitz nodded in melancholy unison.

"Do you got the contract here?" Flugel asked; and Elkan picked up the document from his desk, where it had been placed by Goldstein.

"You paid a fancy price for the house," Flugel continued, as he examined the agreement.

"I took your partner's advice, Mr. Flugel," Elkan retorted.

"Why, for eighteen thousand five hundred dollars, in Johnsonhurst," Flugel continued, "I could give you a palace already!"

He scanned the various clauses of the contract with the critical eye of an experienced real-estate operator; and before he had completed his examination the elevator door again creaked open.

"Is Glaubmann gone?" cried a voice from the interior of the car, and the next moment

Kovner alighted.

Flugel looked up from the contract.

"Hello, Kovner," he said, "are you in this deal too?"

"I ain't in any deal," Kovner replied. "I am looking for Barnett Glaubmann. They told me in his office he is coming over here and would be here all the morning."

"Well, he was here," Elkan replied, "but he went away again."

Kovner sat down without invitation.

"It ain't no more as I expected," he began in the dull, resigned tones of a man with a grievance. "That swindler has been dodging me for four months now, and I guess he will keep on dodging me for the rest of the year that he claims I got a lease on his house for."

"What house?" Flugel asked.

"The house which I am living in it," Max replied—"on Linden Boulevard, Burgess Park."

"On Linden Boulevard, Burgess Park!" Flugel repeated. "Why, then it's the same house—ain't it, Lubliner?"

[Pg 229] Elkan nodded, and as he did so Flugel struck the desk a tremendous blow with his fist.

"Fine!" he ejaculated.

"Fine!" Kovner repeated. "What the devil you are talking about, fine? Do you think it's fine I should got to live a whole year in a house which the least it must got to be spent on it is for plumbing a hundred dollars and for painting a couple hundred more?"

"That's all right," Flugel declared with enthusiasm. "It ain't so bad as it looks; because if you can show that you got a right to stay in that house for the rest of the year, understand me, I'll make a proposition to you."

"Show it?" Kovner exclaimed. "I don't got to show it, because I couldn't help myself, Mr. Flugel. Glaubmann claims that I made a verbal lease for one year, and he's right. I was fool enough to do so."

Flugel glanced inquiringly at Polatkin and Scheikowitz.

"How about that?" he asked. "The contract don't say nothing about a year's lease."

"I know it don't," Elkan replied, "because when our lawyer raises the question about the tenant Glaubmann says he could get him out at any time."

"And he can too," Kovner declared with emphasis, but Flugel shook his head.

[Pg 230] "No, he can't, Kovner," he said; "or, anyway, he ain't going to, because you are going to stay in that house."

"With the rotten plumbing it's got?" Kovner cried. "Not by a whole lot I ain't."

"The plumbing could be fixed and the painting also," Flugel retorted.

"By Glaubmann?" Kovner asked.

"No, sir," Flugel replied; "by me, with a hundred dollars cash to boot. I would even give you an order on my plumber he should fix up the plumbing and on my house painter he should fix up the painting, Kovner; *aber* you got to stick it out that you are under lease for the rest of the year."

"And when do I get the work done?" Kovner demanded.

"To-day," Flugel announced—"this afternoon if you want it."

"But hold on there a minute!" Elkan protested. "If I am going to take that house I don't want no painting done there till I am good and ready."

Flugel smiled loftily at Elkan.

"You ain't going to take that house at all," he said, "because the contract says that it is to be conveyed free and clear, except the mortgage and a covenant against nuisances. So you reject the title on the grounds that the house is leased for a year. Do you get the idea?"

Elkan nodded.

[Pg 231] "And next Sunday," Flugel continued, "I wish you'd take a run down with me in my oitermobile to Johnsonhurst. It's an elegant, high-class suburb."

Insomnia bears the same relation to the calling of real-estate operators that fussyjaws does to the worker in the match industry; and, during the twenty days that preceded the closing of his contract with Elkan, Barnett Glaubmann spent many a sleepless night in contemplation of disputed brokerage claims by Kamin, Stout and Ortelsburg. Moreover, the knowledge that Henry D. Feldman represented the purchaser was an influence far from sedative; and what little sleep Glaubmann secured was filled with nightmares of fence encroachments, defects in the legal proceedings for opening of Linden Boulevard as a public highway, and a score of other technical objections that Feldman might raise to free Elkan from his contract.

Not once, however, did Glaubmann consider the tenancy of Max Kovner as any objection to title. Indeed, he was so certain of Kovner's willingness to move out that he even pondered the advisability of gouging Max for twenty-five or fifty dollars as a consideration for accepting a surrender of the verbal lease; and to that end he avoided the Linden Boulevard house until the morning before the date set for the closing of the title.

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Then, having observed Max board the eight-five train for Brooklyn Bridge, he sauntered off to interview Mrs. Kovner; and as he turned the corner of Linden Boulevard he sketched out a plan of action that had for its foundation the complete intimidation of Mrs. Kovner. This being secured, he would proceed to suggest the payment of fifty dollars as the alternative of strong measures against Max Kovner for allowing the Linden Boulevard premises to fall into such bad repair; and he was so full of his idea that he had begun to ascend the front stoop of the Kovner house before he noticed the odour of fresh paint.

Never in the history of the Kovner house had the electric bell been in working order. Hence Glaubmann knocked with his naked fist and left the imprint of his four knuckles on the wet varnish just as Mrs. Kovner flung wide the door. It was at this instant that Glaubmann's well-laid plans were swept away.

"Now see what you done, you dirty slob you!" she bellowed. "What's the matter with you? Couldn't you ring the bell?"

"Why, Mrs. Kovner," Glaubmann stammered, "the bell don't ring at all. Ain't it?"

"The bell don't ring?" Mrs. Kovner exclaimed. "Who says it don't?"

She pressed the button with her finger and a shrill response came from within.

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"Who fixed it?" Glaubmann asked.

"Who fixed it?" Mrs. Kovner repeated. "Who do you suppose fixed it? Do you think we got from charity to fix it? *Gott sei Dank*, we ain't exactly beggars, Mr. Glaubmann. Ourselves we fixed it, Mr. Glaubmann—and the painting and the plumbing also; because if you would got in savings bank what I got it, Mr. Glaubmann, you wouldn't make us so much trouble about paying for a couple hundred dollars' repairs."

"*Aber*," Glaubmann began, "you shouldn't of done it!"

"I know we shouldn't," Mrs. Kovner replied. "We should of stayed here the rest of the year with the place looking like a pigsty already! *Aber* don't kick till you got to, Mr. Glaubmann. It would be time enough to say something when we sue you by the court yet that you should pay for the repairs we are making here."

Glaubmann pushed his hat back from his forehead and wiped his streaming brow.

"*Nu*, Mrs. Kovner," he said at last, "it seems to me we got a misunderstanding all round here. I would like to talk the matter over with you."

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With this conciliatory prelude he assumed an easy attitude by crossing his legs and supporting himself with one hand on the freshly painted doorjamb, whereat Mrs. Kovner uttered a horrified shriek, and the rage which three weeks of housepainters' clutter had fomented in her bosom burst forth unchecked.

"Out from here, you dirty loafer you!" she shrieked, and grabbed a calcimining brush from one of the many paintpots that bestrewed the hallway. Glaubmann bounded down the front stoop to the sidewalk just as Mrs. Kovner made a frenzied pass at him with the brush; and consequently, when he entered Kent J. Goldstein's office on Nassau Street an hour later, his black overcoat was speckled like the hide of an axis deer.

"Goldstein," he said hoarsely, "is it assault that some one paints you from head to foot with calcimine?"

"It is if you got witnesses," Goldstein replied; "otherwise it's misfortune. Who did it?"

"That she-devil—the wife of the tenant in that house I sold Lubliner," Glaubmann replied. "I think we're going to have trouble with them people, Goldstein."

"You will if you try to sue 'em without witnesses, Glaubmann," Goldstein observed; "because suing without witnesses is like trying to play pinoche without cards. It can't be done."

Glaubmann shook his head sadly.

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"I ain't going to sue 'em," he said. "I ain't so fond of lawsuits like all that; and, besides, a little calcimine is nothing, Goldstein, to what them people can do to me. They're going to claim they got there a year's verbal lease."

Goldstein shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all right," he commented. "They want to gouge you for fifty dollars or so; and, with the price you're getting for the house, Glaubmann, you can afford to pay 'em."

"Gouge nothing!" Glaubmann declared. "They just got done there a couple hundred dollars' painting and plumbing, y'understand, and they're going to stick it out."

Goldstein pursed his lips in an ominous whistle.

"A verbal lease, hey?" he muttered.

Glaubmann nodded sadly.

"And this time there is witnesses," he said; and he related to his attorney the circumstances under which the original lease was made, together with the incident attending Kovner's visit to Ortelsburg's house.

"It looks like you're up against it, Glaubmann," Goldstein declared.

"But couldn't I claim that I was only bluffing the feller?" Glaubmann asked.

"Sure you could," Goldstein replied; "but when Kovner went to work and painted the house and fixed the plumbing he called your bluff, Glaubmann; so the only thing to do is to ask for an adjournment to-morrow."

"And suppose they won't give it to us?" Glaubmann asked.

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Goldstein shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm a lawyer, Glaubmann—not a prophet," he said; "but if I know Henry D. Feldman you won't get any adjournment—so you may as well make your plans accordingly."

For a brief interval Glaubmann nodded his head slowly, and then he burst into a mirthless laugh.

"Real estate," he said, "that's something to own. Rheumatism is a fine asset compared to it; in fact if some one gives me my choice, Goldstein, I would say rheumatism every time. Both of 'em keep you awake nights; but there's one thing about rheumatism, Goldstein"—here he indulged in another bitter laugh—"you don't need a lawyer to get rid of it!" he said, and banged the door behind him.

If there was any branch of legal practice in which Henry D. Feldman excelled it was conveyancing, and he brought to it all the histrionic ability that made him so formidable as a trial lawyer. Indeed, Feldman was accustomed to treat the conveyancing department of his office as a business-getter for the more lucrative field of litigation, and he spared no pains to make each closing of title an impressive and dramatic spectacle.

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Thus the *mise-en-scène* of the Lubliner closing was excellent. Feldman himself sat in a baronial chair at the head of his library table, while to a seat on his right he had assigned Kent J. Goldstein. On his left he had placed Mr. Jones, the representative of the title company, a gaunt, sandy-haired man of thirty-five who, by the device of a pair of huge horn spectacles, had failed to distract public attention from an utterly stupendous Adam's apple.

Next to the title company's representative were placed Elkan Lubliner and his partners, and it was to them that Henry D. Feldman addressed his opening remarks.

"Mr. Lubliner," he said in the soft accents in which he began all his crescendos, "the examination of the record title to Mr. Glaubmann's Linden Boulevard premises has been made at my request by the Law Title Insurance and Guaranty Company."

He made a graceful obeisance toward Mr. Jones, who acknowledged it with a convulsion of his Adam's apple.

"I have also procured a survey to be made," Feldman continued; and, amid a silence that was broken only by the heavy breathing of Barnett Glaubmann, he held up an intricate design washed with watercolour on glazed muslin.

"Finally I have done this," he declared, and his brows gathered in a tragic frown as

his glance swept in turn the faces of Kent J. Goldstein, Benno Ortelsburg, J. Kamin, and Glaubmann—"I have procured an inspector's report upon the occupation of the *locus in quo*."

[Pg 238] "Oo-ee!" Glaubmann murmured, and Louis Stout exchanged triumphant glances with Polatkin and Scheikowitz.

"And I find," Feldman concluded, "there is a tenant in possession, claiming under a year's lease which will not expire until October first next."

Mr. Jones nodded and cleared his throat so noisily that, to relieve his embarrassment, he felt obliged to crack each of his knuckles in turn. As for Ribnik and Tarnowitz, they sat awestruck in the rear of Feldman's spacious library and felt vaguely that they were in a place of worship. Only Kent J. Goldstein remained unimpressed; and in order to show it he scratched a parlour match on the leg of Feldman's library table; whereat Feldman's *ex-cathedra* manner forsook him.

"Where in blazes do you think you are, Goldstein?" he asked in colloquial tones—"in a barroom?"

"If it's solid mahogany," Goldstein retorted, "it'll rub up like new. I think you were talking about the tenancy of the premises here."

Feldman choked down his indignation and once more became the dignified advocate.

"That is not the only objection to title, Mr. Goldstein," he said. "Mr. Jones, kindly read the detailed objections contained in your report of closing."

[Pg 239] Mr. Jones nodded again and responded to Feldman's demand in a voice that profoundly justified the size of his larynx.

"Description in deed dated January 1, 1783," he began, "from Joost van Gend to William Wauters, is defective; one course reading 'thence along said ditch north to a white-oak tree' should be 'south to a white-oak tree.'"

"Well, what's the difference?" Goldstein interrupted. "It's monumented by the white-oak tree."

"That was cut down long ago," Mr. Jones said.

"Not by me!" Glaubmann declared. "I give you my word, gentlemen, the trees on the lot is the same like I bought it."

Feldman allowed his eyes to rest for a moment on the protesting Glaubmann, who literally crumpled in his chair.

"Proceed, Mr. Jones," Feldman said to the title company's representative, who continued without further interruption to the end of his list. This included all the technical objections which Glaubmann had feared, as well as a novel and interesting point concerning a partition suit in Chancery, brought in 1819, and affecting Glaubmann's chain of title to a strip in the rear of his lot, measuring one quarter of an inch in breadth by seven feet in length.

[Pg 240] "So far as I can see, Feldman," Goldstein commented as Mr. Jones laid down his report, "the only objection that will hold water is the one concerning Max Kovner's tenancy. As a matter of fact, I have witnesses to show that Kovner has always claimed that he didn't hold a lease."

For answer, Feldman touched the button of an electric bell.

"Show in Mr. and Mrs. Kovner," he said to the boy who responded. "We'll let them speak for themselves."

This, it would appear, they were more than willing to do; for as soon as they entered the room and caught sight of Glaubmann, who by this time was fairly cowering in his chair, they immediately began a concerted tirade that was only ended when Goldstein banged vigorously on the library table, using as a gavel one of Feldman's metal-tipped rulers.

"That'll do, Goldstein!" Feldman said hoarsely. "I think I can preserve order in my own office."

"Why don't you then?" Goldstein retorted, as he leaned back in his chair and regarded with a malicious smile the damage he had wrought.

"Yes, Mr. Glaubmann," Kovner began anew, "you thought you got us helpless there in your house; but——"

"Shut up!" Feldman roared again, forgetting his rôle of the polished advocate; and Goldstein fairly beamed with satisfaction.

"Don't bully your own witness," he said. "Let me do it for you."

He turned to Kovner with a beetling frown.

"Now, Kovner," he commenced, "you claim you've got a verbal lease for a year of this Linden Boulevard house, don't you?"

"I sure do," Kovner replied, "and I got witnesses to prove it."

"That's all right," Goldstein rejoined; "so long as there's Bibles there'll always be witnesses to swear on 'em. The point is: How do you claim the lease was made?"

"I don't claim nothing," Kovner replied. "I got a year's lease on that property because, in the presence of my wife and his wife, Mr. Goldstein, he says to me I must either take the house for a year from last October to next October or I couldn't take it at all."

Feldman smiled loftily at his opponent.

"The art of cross-examination is a subtle one, Goldstein," he said, "and if you don't understand it you're apt to prove the other fellow's case."

"Nevertheless," Goldstein continued, "I'm going to ask him one more question, and that is this: When was this verbal agreement made—before or after you moved into the house?"

"Before I moved in, certainly," Kovner answered. "I told you that he says to me I couldn't move in unless I would agree to take the place for a year."

"And when did you move in?" Goldstein continued.

"On the first of October," Kovner said.

"No, popper," Mrs. Kovner interrupted; "we didn't move in on the first. We moved in the day before."

"That's right," Kovner said—"we moved in on the thirtieth of September."

"So," Goldstein declared, "you made a verbal agreement before September thirtieth for a lease of one year from October first?"

Kovner nodded and Goldstein turned to Henry D. Feldman, whose lofty smile had completely disappeared.

"Well, Feldman," he said, "you pulled a couple of objections on me from 'way back in the last century, understand me; so I guess it won't hurt if I remind you of a little statute passed in the reign of Charles the Second, which says: 'All contracts which by their terms are not to be performed within one year must be in writing and signed by the party to be charged.' I mean the Statute of Frauds."

"I know what you mean all right," Feldman replied; "but you'll have to prove that before a court and jury. Just now we are confronted with Kovner, who claims to have a year's lease; and my client is relieved from his purchase in the circumstances. No man is bound to buy a lawsuit, Goldstein."

"I know he ain't," Goldstein retorted; "but what's the difference, Feldman? He'll have a lawsuit on his hands, anyhow, because if he don't take title now, understand me, I'll bring an action to compel him to do so this very afternoon."

At this juncture a faint croaking came from the vicinity of Louis Stout, who throughout had been as appreciative a listener as though he were occupying an orchestra chair and had bought his seat from a speculator.

"Speak up, Mr. Stout!" Feldman cried.

"I was saying," Louis replied faintly, "that with my own ears I heard Glaubmann say to Kovner that he's got a verbal lease for one year."

"And when was this?" Feldman asked.

"About three weeks ago," Stout replied.

"Then, in that case, Mr. Goldstein," Feldman declared, "let me present to you another proposition of law."

He paused to formulate a sufficiently impressive "offer" as the lawyers say, and in the silence that followed Elkan shuffled to his feet.

"It ain't necessary, Mr. Feldman," he said. "I already made up my mind about it."

"About what?" Louis Stout exclaimed.

"About taking the house," Elkan replied. "If you'll let me have the figures, Mr. Feldman, I'll draw a check and have it certified and we'll close this thing up."

"*Aber*, Elkan," Louis cried, "first let me communicate with Flugel."

"That ain't necessary neither," Elkan retorted. "I'm going to make an end right here and now; and you should be so good, Mr. Feldman, and fix me up the statement of what I owe here. I want to get through."

Polatkin rose shakily to his feet.

"What's the matter, Elkan?" he said huskily. "Are you crazy, *oder* what?"

"Sit down, Mr. Polatkin," Elkan commanded, and there was a ring of authority in his tone that made Polatkin collapse into his chair. "I am buying this house."

"But, Elkan," Louis Stout implored, "why don't you let me talk to Flugel over the 'phone? Might he would got a suggestion to make maybe."

"That's all right," Elkan said. "The only suggestion he makes is that if I go to work and close this contract, y'understand, he would never buy another dollar's worth of goods from us so long as he lives. So you shouldn't bother to ring him up, Mr. Stout."

Louis Stout flushed angrily.

"So far as that goes, Lubliner," he says, "I don't got to ring up Mr. Flugel to tell you the same thing, so you know what you could do."

"Sure I know what I could do," Elkan continued. "I could either do business like a business man or do business like a muzhik, Mr. Stout. *Aber* this ain't *Russland*, Mr. Stout—this is America; and if I got to run round wiping people's shoes to sell goods, then I don't want to do it at all."

J. Kamin took a cigar out of his mouth and spat vigorously.

"You're dead right, Elkan," he said. "Go ahead and close the contract and I assure you you wouldn't regret it."

Elkan's eyes blazed and he turned on Kamin.

"You assure me!" he said. "Who in thunder are you? Do you think I'm looking for your business now, Kamin? Why, if you was worth your salt as a merchant, understand me, instead you would be fooling away your time trying to make a share of a commission, which the most you would get out of it is a hundred dollars, y'understand, you would be attending to your business buying your spring line. You are wasting two whole days on this deal, Kamin; and if two business days out of your spring buying is only worth a hundred dollars to you, Kamin, go ahead and get your goods somewheres else than in our store. I don't need to be Dun or Bradstreet to get a line on you, Kamin—and don't you forget it!"

At this juncture a faint cough localized Joel Ribnik, who had remained with Julius Tarnowitz in the obscurity cast by several bound volumes of digests and reports.

"Seemingly, Mr. Polatkin," he said, "you are a millionaire concern, the way your partner talks! Might you don't need our business, neither, maybe?"

Polatkin was busy checking the ravages made upon his linen by the perspiration that literally streamed down his face and neck; but Scheikowitz, who had listened open-mouthed to Elkan's pronunciamento, straightened up in his chair and his face grew set with determination.

"We ain't millionaires, Mr. Ribnik," he said—"far from it; and we ain't never going to be, understand me, if we got to buy eighteen-thousand dollar houses for every bill of goods we sell to *Schnorrers* and deadbeats!"

"Scheikowitz!" Polatkin pleaded.

"Never mind, Polatkin," Scheikowitz declared. "The boy is right, Polatkin; and if we are making our living in America we got to act like Americans—not peasants. So, go ahead, Stout. Telephone Flugel and tell him from me that if he wants to take it that way he should do so; and you, too, Stout—and that's all there is to it!"

"Then I apprehend, gentlemen, that we had better proceed to close," Feldman said; and Elkan nodded, for as Scheikowitz finished speaking a ball had risen in Elkan's throat which, blink as he might, he could not down for some minutes.

"All right, Goldstein," Feldman continued. "Let's fix up the statement of closing."

"One moment, gentlemen," Max Kovner said. "Do I understand that, if Elkan Lubliner buys the house to-day, we've got to move out?"

Feldman raised his eyebrows.

"I think Mr. Goldstein will agree with me, Kovner, when I say you haven't a leg to stand on," he declared. "You're completely out of court on your own testimony."

"You mean we ain't got a lease for a year?" Mrs. Kovner asked.

"That's right," Goldstein replied.

"And I am working my fingers to the bone getting rid of them *verfluchte* painters and all!" she wailed. "What do you think I am anyway?"

"Well, if you don't want to move right away," Elkan began, "when would it be convenient for you to get out, Mrs. Kovner?"

"I don't want to get out at all," she whimpered. "Why should I want to get out? The house is an elegant house, which I just planted yesterday string beans and tomatoes; and the parlor looks elegant now we got the old paper off."

"Supposing we say the first of May," Elkan suggested—"not that I am so crazy to move out to Burgess Park, y'understand; but I don't see what is the sense buying a house in the country and then not living in it."

There was a brief silence, broken only by the soft weeping of Mrs. Kovner; and at length Max Kovner shrugged his shoulders.

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"*Nu*, Elkan," he said, "what is the use beating bushes round? Mrs. Kovner is stuck on the house and so am I. So long as you don't want the house, and there's been so much trouble about it and all, I tell you what I'll do: Take back two thousand dollars a second mortgage on the house, payable in one year at six per cent., which it is so good as gold, understand me, and I'll relieve you of your contract and give you two hundred dollars to boot."

A smile spread slowly over Elkan's face as he looked significantly at Louis Stout.

"I don't want your two hundred dollars, Max," he said. "You can have the house and welcome; and you should use the two hundred to pay your painting and plumbing bills."

"That's all right," Louis Stout said; "there is people which will see to it that he does. Also, gentlemen, I want everybody to understand that I claim full commission here from Glaubmann as the only broker in the transaction!"

"*Nu*, gentlemen," Glaubmann said; "I'll leave this to the lawyers if it ain't so: From one transaction I can only be liable for one commission—ain't it?"

Feldman and Goldstein nodded in unison.

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"Then all I could say is that yous brokers and drygoods merchants should fight it out between yourselves," he declared; "because I'm going to pay the money for the commission into court—and them which is entitled to it can have it."

"But ain't you going to protect me, Glaubmann?" Ortelsburg demanded.

Glaubmann raised his hand for silence.

"One moment, Ortelsburg," he said. "I think it was you and Kamin told me that real estate is a game the same like auction pinocle?"

Ortelsburg nodded sulkily.

"Then you fellers should go ahead and play it," Glaubmann concluded. "And might the best man win!"^[B]

^[B] In the face of numerous decisions to the contrary, the author holds for the purposes of this story that a verbal lease for one year, to commence in the future, is void.

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CHAPTER SIX

A TALE OF TWO JACOBAN CHAIRS

NOT A DETECTIVE STORY

"**Y**ES, Mr. Lubliner," said Max Merech as he sat in the front parlour of Elkan's flat one April Sunday; "if you are going to work to buy furniture, understand me, it's just so easy to select good-looking chairs as bad-looking chairs."

"*Aber* sometimes it's a whole lot harder to sit on 'em comfortably," Elkan retorted sourly. On the eve of moving to a larger apartment he and Yetta had invited Max to suggest a plan for furnishing and decorating their new dwelling; and it seemed to Elkan that Max had taken undue advantage of the privilege thus accorded him. Indeed, Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's æsthetic designer held such pronounced views on interior decoration, and had expressed them so freely to Elkan and Yetta, that after the first half-hour of his visit the esteem which they had always felt toward

their plush furniture and Wilton rugs had changed—first to indifference and then, in the case of Yetta, at least, to loathing.

[Pg 251] "I always told you that the couch over there was hideous, Elkan," Yetta said.

"Hideous it ain't," Max interrupted; "*aber* it ain't so beautiful."

"Well, stick the couch in the bedroom, then," Elkan said. "It makes no difference to me."

"Sure, I know," Yetta exclaimed: "but what would we put in its place?"

Elkan shrugged his shoulders.

"What d'ye ask me for?" Elkan cried. "Like as not I'd say another couch."

"There is couches and couches," Max said with an apologetic smile, "but if you would ask my advice I would say why not a couple nice chairs there—something in monhogany, like Shippendaler *oder* Sheratin."

Suddenly he slapped his thigh in an access of inspiration.

"I came pretty near forgetting!" he cried. "I got the very thing you want—and a big bargain too! Do you know Louis Dishkes, which runs the Villy dee Paris Store in Amsterdam Avenue?"

"I think I know him," Elkan said with ironic emphasis. "He owes us four hundred dollars for two months already."

"Well, Dishkes is got a brother-in-law by the name Ringentaub, on Allen Street, which he is a dealer in antics."

"Antics?" Elkan exclaimed.

[Pg 252] "Sure!" Max explained. "Antics—old furniture and old silver."

"You mean a second-hand store?" Elkan suggested.

"Not a second-hand store," Max declared. "A second-hand store is got old furniture from two years old *oder* ten years old, understand me; *aber* an antic store carries old furniture from a hundred years old already."

"And this here Ringentaub is got furniture from a hundred years old already?" Elkan cried.

"From older even," answered Max; "from two hundred and fifty years old also."

"*Ich glaub's!*" Elkan cried.

"You can believe it *oder* not, Mr. Lubliner," Max continued; "but Ringentaub got in his store a couple Jacobean chairs, which they are two hundred and fifty years old already. And them chairs you could buy at a big sacrifice yet."

Elkan and Yetta exchanged puzzled glances, and Elkan even tapped his forehead significantly.

"They was part of a whole set," Max went on, not noticing his employer's gesture; "the others Ringentaub sold to a collector."

Elkan flipped his right hand.

"A collector is something else again," he said; "but me I ain't no collector, Max, *Gott sei Dank!* I got my own business, Max, and I ain't got to buy from two hundred and fifty years old furniture."

[Pg 253] "Why not?" Max asked. "B. Gans is got his own business, too, Mr. Lubliner, and a good business also; and he buys yet from Ringentaub—only last week already—an angry cat cabinet which it is three hundred years old already."

"An angry cat cabinet?" Elkan exclaimed.

"That's what I said," Max continued; "'angry' is French for 'Henry' and 'cat' is French for 'fourth'; so this here cabinet was made three hundred years ago when Henry the Fourth was king of France—and B. Gans buys it last week already for five hundred dollars!"

Therewith Max commenced a half-hour dissertation upon antique furniture which left Yetta and Elkan more undecided than ever.

"And you are telling me that big people like B. Gans and Andrew Carnegie buys this here antics for their houses?" Elkan asked.

"J. P. Morgan also," Max replied. "And them Jacobean chairs there you could get for fifty dollars already."

"Well, it wouldn't do no harm supposing we would go down and see 'em," Yetta

suggested.

"Some night next week," Elkan added, "*oder* the week after."

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"For that matter, we could go to-night too," Max rejoined. "Sunday is like any other night down on Allen Street, and you got to remember that Jacobean chairs is something which you couldn't get whenever you want 'em. Let me tell you just what they look like."

Here he descanted so successfully on the beauty of Jacobean furniture that Yetta added her persuasion to his, and Elkan at length surrendered.

"All right," he said. "First we would have a little something to eat and then we would go down there."

Hence, a few minutes after eight that evening they alighted at the Spring Street subway station; and Max Merech piloted Elkan and Yetta beneath elevated railroads and past the windows of brass shops, with their gleaming show of candlesticks and samovars, to a little basement store near the corner of Rivington Street.

"It don't look like much," Max apologized as he descended the few steps leading to the entrance; "*aber* he's got an elegant stock inside."

When he opened the door a trigger affixed to the door knocked against a rusty bell, but no one responded. Instead, from behind a partition in the rear came sounds of an angry dispute; and as Elkan closed the door behind him one of the voices rose higher than the rest.

"Take my life—take my blood, Mr. Sammet!" it said; "because I am making you the best proposition I can, and that's all there is to it."

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Max was about to stamp his foot when Elkan laid a restraining hand on his shoulder; and, in the pause that followed, the heavy, almost hysterical breathing of the last speaker could be heard in the front of the store.

"I don't want your life *oder* your blood, Dishkes," came the answer in bass tones, which Elkan recognized as the voice of his competitor, Leon Sammet. "I am your heaviest creditor, and all I want is that you should protect me."

"I know you are my heaviest creditor," Louis Dishkes replied. "To my sorrow I know it! If it wouldn't be for your rotten stickers which I got in my place, might I would be doing a good business there to-day, maybe!"

"*Schmooes*, Dishkes!" Sammet replied. "The reason you didn't done a good business there is that you ain't no business man, Dishkes—and anyhow, Dishkes, it don't do no good you should insult me!"

"What d'ye mean insult you?" Dishkes cried angrily. "I ain't insulting you, Sammet. You are insulting me. You want me I should protect you and let my other creditors go to the devil—ain't it? What d'ye take me for—a crook?"

"That's all right," Sammet declared. "I wouldn't dandy words with you, Dishkes. For the last time I am asking you: Will you take advantage of the offer I am getting for you from the Mercantile Outlet Company, of Nashville, for your entire stock? Otherwise I would got nothing more to say to you."

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There was a sound of scuffling feet as the party in the rear of the store rose from their chairs.

"You ain't got no need to say nothing more to me, Mr. Sammet," Dishkes announced firmly, "because I am through with you, Mr. Sammet. Your account ain't due till to-morrow, and you couldn't do nothing till Tuesday. Ain't it? So Tuesday morning early you should go ahead and sue me, and if I couldn't raise money to save myself I will go *mechullah*; but it'll be an honest *mechullah*, and that's all there is to it."

As Dishkes finished speaking Elkan drew Max and Yetta into the shadow cast by a tall highboy; and, without noticing their presence, Leon Sammet plunged toward the door and let himself out into the street.

Immediately Elkan tiptoed to the door and threw it wide open, after which he shuffled his feet with sufficient noise to account for the entrance of three people. Thereat Ringentaub emerged from behind the partition.

"Hello, Ringentaub," Max cried. "I am bringing you here some customers."

Ringentaub bowed and coughed a warning to Dishkes and Mrs. Ringentaub, who continued to talk in hoarse whispers behind the partition.

"What's the matter, Ringentaub?" Max Merech asked; "couldn't you afford it here somehow a little light?"

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Ringentaub reached into the upper darkness and turned on a gas jet which had been burning a blue point of flame.

"I keep it without light here on purpose," he said, "on account Sundays is a big night for the candlestick fakers up the street and I don't want to be bothered with their trade. What could I show your friends, Mr. Merech?"

Max winked almost imperceptibly at Elkan and prepared to approach the subject of the Jacobean chairs by a judicious detour.

"Do you got maybe a couple Florentine frames, Ringentaub?" he asked; and Ringentaub shook his head.

"Florentine frames is hard to find nowadays, Mr. Merech," he said; "and I guess I told it you Friday that I ain't got none."

Elkan shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I thought might you would of picked up a couple since then, maybe," Max rejoined, glancing round him. "You got a pretty nice highboy over there, Ringentaub, for a reproduction."

Ringentaub nodded satirically.

"That only goes to show how much you know about such things, Mr. Merech," he retorted, "when you are calling reproductions something which it is a gen-wine Shippendaler, understand me, in elegant condition."

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It was now Elkan's turn to nod, and he did so with just the right degree of skepticism as at last he broached the object of his visit.

"I suppose," he said, "that them chairs over there is also gen-wine Jacobean chairs?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do with you, Mr. Merech," Ringentaub declared. "You could bring down here any of them good Fourth Avenue or Fifth Avenue dealers, understand me, or any conoozer you want to name, like Jacob Paul, *oder* anybody, y'understand; and if they would say them chairs ain't gen-wine Jacobean I'll make 'em a present to you free for nothing."

"I ain't *schnorring* for no presents, Mr. Ringentaub," Max declared. "Bring 'em out in the light and let's give a look at 'em."

Ringentaub drew the chairs into the centre of the floor, and placing them beneath the gas jet he stepped backward and tilted his head to one side in silent admiration.

"*Nu*, Mr. Merech," he said at last, "am I right or am I wrong? Is the chairs gen-wine *oder* not? I leave it to your friends here."

Max turned to Elkan, who had been edging away toward the partition, from which came scraps of conversation between Dishkes and Mrs. Ringentaub.

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"What do you think, Mr. Lubliner?" Max asked; and Elkan frowned his annoyance at the interruption, for he had just begun to catch a few words of the conversation in the rear room.

"Sure—sure!" he said absently. "I leave it to you and Mrs. Lubliner."

Yetta's face had fallen as she viewed the apparently decayed and rickety furniture.

"Ain't they terrible shabby-looking!" she murmured, and Ringentaub shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"You would look shabby, too, lady," he said, "if you would be two hundred and fifty years old; *aber* if you want to see what they look like after they are restored, y'understand, I got back there one of the rest of the set which I already sold to Mr. Paul; and I am fixing it up for him."

As he finished speaking he walked to the rear and dragged forward a resealed and polished duplicate of the two chairs.

"I dassent restore 'em before I sell 'em," Ringentaub explained; "otherwise no one believes they are gen-wine."

"And how much do you say you want for them chairs, Ringentaub?" Max asked.

"I didn't say I wanted nothing," Ringentaub replied. "The fact is, I don't know whether I want to keep them chairs *oder* not. You see, Mr. Merech, Jacobean chairs is pretty near so rare nowadays that it would pay me to wait a while. In a couple of years them chairs double in value already."

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"Sure, I know," Max said. "You could say the same thing about your whole stock, Ringentaub; and so, if I would be you, Ringentaub, I would take a little vacation of a couple years or so. Go round the world *mit* Mrs. Ringentaub, understand me, and by the time you come back you are worth twicet as much as you got to-day; but just to

help pay your rent while you are away, Mr. Ringentaub, I'll make you an offer of thirty-five dollars for the chairs."

Ringentaub seized a chair in each hand and dragged them noisily to one side.

"As I was saying," he announced, "I ain't got no Florentine frames, Mr. Merech; so I am sorry we couldn't do no business."

"Well, then, thirty-seven-fifty, Mr. Ringentaub," Max continued; and Ringentaub made a flapping gesture with both hands.

"Say, lookyhere," he growled, "what is the use talking nonsense, Mr. Merech? For ten dollars apiece you could get on Twenty-third Street a couple chairs, understand me, made in some big factory, y'understand—A-Number-One pieces of furniture—which would suit you a whole lot better as gen-wine pieces. These here chairs is for conoozers, Mr. Merech; so, if you want any shiny candlesticks *oder* Moskva samovars from brass-spinners on Center Street, y'understand, a couple doors uptown you would find plenty fakers. *Aber* here is all gen-wine stuff, y'understand; and for gen-wine stuff you got to pay full price, understand me, which if them chairs stays in my store till they are five hundred years old already I wouldn't take a cent less for 'em as fifty dollars."

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Max turned inquiringly to Mrs. Lubliner; and, during the short pause that followed, the agonized voice of Louis Dishkes came once more from the back room.

"What could I do?" he said to Mrs. Ringentaub. "I want to be square *mit* everybody, and I must got to act quick on account that sucker Sammet will close me up sure."

"*Ai, tzuris!*" Mrs. Ringentaub moaned; at which her husband coughed noisily and Elkan moved nearer to the partition.

"Would you go as high as fifty dollars, Mrs. Lubliner?" Max asked, and Yetta nodded.

"All right, Mr. Ringentaub," Max concluded; "we'll take 'em at fifty dollars."

"And you wouldn't regret it neither," Ringentaub replied. "I'll make you out a bill right away."

He darted into the rear room and slammed the partition door behind him.

"*Koosh*, Dishkes!" he hissed. "Ain't you got no sense at all—blabbing out your business in front of all them strangers?"

It was at this juncture that Elkan rapped on the door.

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"Excuse me, Mr. Ringentaub," he said, "but I ain't no stranger to Mr. Dishkes—not by four hundred dollars already."

He opened the door as he spoke, and Dishkes, who was sitting at a table with his head bowed on his hands, looked up mournfully.

"*Nu*, Mr. Lubliner!" he said. "You are after me, too, ain't it?"

Elkan shook his head.

"Not only I ain't after you, Dishkes," he said, "but I didn't even know you was in trouble until just now."

"And you never would of known," Ringentaub added, "if he ain't been such a *dummer Ochs* and listened to people's advice. He got a good chance to sell out, and he wouldn't took it."

"Sure, I know," Elkan said, "to an auction house; the idee being to run away *mit* the proceeds and leave his creditors in the lurches!"

Dishkes again buried his head in his hands, while Ringentaub blushed guiltily.

"That may be all right in the antic business, Mr. Ringentaub," Elkan went on, "but in the garment business we ain't two hundred and fifty years behind the times exactly. We got associations of manufacturers and we got good lawyers, too, understand me; and we get right after crooks like Sammet, just the same as some of us helps out retailers that want to be decent, like Dishkes here."

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Louis Dishkes raised his head suddenly.

"Then you heard the whole thing?" he cried; and Elkan nodded.

"I heard enough, Dishkes," he said; "and if you want my help you could come down to my place to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

At this juncture the triggered bell rang loudly, and raising his hand for silence Ringentaub returned to the store.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Paul!" he said.

He addressed a broad-shouldered figure arrayed in the height of Canal Street fashion.

Aside from his clothing, however, there was little to betray the connoisseur of fine arts and antiques in the person of Jacob Paul, who possessed the brisk, businesslike manner and steel-blue eyes of a detective sergeant.

"Hello, Ringentaub!" he said. "You are doing a rushing business here—ain't it? More customers in the back room too?"

He glanced sharply at the open doorway in the partition, through which Elkan and Dishkes could be seen engaged in earnest conversation.

"*Yow*—customers!" Ringentaub exclaimed. "You know how it is in the antic business, Mr. Paul. For a hundred that looks, understand me, one buys; and that one, Mr. Paul, he comes into your place a dozen times before he makes up his mind yet."

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"Well," Paul said with a smile, "I've made up my mind at last, Ringentaub, and I'll take them other two chairs at forty-five dollars."

Ringentaub nodded his head slowly.

"I thought you would, Mr. Paul," he said; "but just the same you are a little late, on account this here gentleman already bought 'em for fifty dollars."

A shade of disappointment passed over Paul's face as he turned to Max Merech.

"I congratulate you, Mister——"

"Merech," Max suggested.

"Merech," Paul continued. "You paid a high price for a couple of good pieces."

"I ain't paying nothing," Max replied. "I bought 'em for this lady here and her husband."

It was then that Jacob Paul for the first time noticed Yetta's presence, and he bowed apologetically.

"Is he also a collector?" he asked, and Max shook his head.

"He's in the garment business," Yetta volunteered, "for himself."

A puzzled expression wrinkled Paul's flat nose.

"I guess I ain't caught the name," he said.

"Lubliner," Yetta replied; "Elkan Lubliner, of Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company."

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"You don't tell me?" Jacob Paul said. "And so Mr. Lubliner is interested in antiques. That's quite a jump, from cloaks and suits to antiques already."

"Well," Merech explained, "Mr. Lubliner is refurnishing his house."

"Maybe," Elkan added as he appeared in the doorway of the partition, followed by Dishkes and Mrs. Ringentaub. "Buying a couple pieces of furniture is one thing, Merech, and refurnishing your house is another."

"You made a good start anyhow," Paul interrupted. "A couple chairs like them gives a tone to a room which is got crayon portraits hanging in it even."

Yetta blushed in the consciousness of what she had always considered to be a fine likeness of Elkan's grandfather—the Lubliner *Rav*—which hung in a silver-and-plush frame over the mantelpiece of the Lubliner front parlour. Elkan was unashamed, however, and he glared angrily at the connoisseur, who had started to leave the store.

"I suppose," he cried, "it ain't up to date that a feller should have hanging in his flat a portrait of his grandfather—*olav hasholem!*—which he was a learned man and a *Tzadek*, if there ever was one."

Paul hesitated, with his hand on the doorknob.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Lubliner," he said solemnly; "to me a crayon portrait is rotten, understand me, if it would be of a *Tzadek oder* a murderer."

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And with a final bow to Mrs. Lubliner he banged the door behind him.

"Well, what d'ye think for a *Rosher* like that?" Elkan exclaimed.

"The fellow is disappointed that you got ahead of him buying the chairs, Mr. Lubliner," Ringentaub explained; "so he takes a chance that you and Mrs. Lubliner is that kind of people which is got hanging in the parlour crayon portraits, understand me, and he knocks you for it."

Elkan shrugged his shoulders.

"What could you expect from a feller which is content at fifty years of age to be a collector only?" he asked, and Dishkes nodded sympathetically.

"I bet yer, Mr. Lubliner," he agreed; "and so I would be at your store to-morrow morning at ten o'clock sure."

"I don't doubt your word for a minute, Elkan," Marcus Polatkin said the following morning when Elkan related to him the events of the preceding night; "*aber* you couldn't blame Sammet none. Concerns like Sammet Brothers, which they are such dirty crooks that everybody is got suspicions of 'em, y'understand, must got to pay their bills prompt to the day, Elkan; because if they wouldn't be themselves good collectors, understand me, they would bust up quick."

[Pg 267] "Sammet Brothers ain't in no danger of busting up," Elkan declared.

"Ain't they?" Marcus rejoined. "Well, you would be surprised, Elkan, if I would tell you that only yesterday already I am speaking to a feller by the name Hirsch, which works for years by the Hamsuckett Mills as city salesman, understand me, and he says that the least Sammet Brothers owes them people is ten thousand dollars."

"That shows what a big business they must do," Elkan said.

"*Yow*—a big business!" Marcus concluded. "This here Hirsch says not only Sammet Brothers' business falls off something terrible, y'understand, but they are also getting to be pretty slow pay; and if it wouldn't be that the Hamsuckett people is helping 'em along, *verstehst du*, they would of gone up *schon* long since already."

"And a good job too," Elkan said. "The cloak-and-suit trade could worry along without 'em, Mr. Polatkin; but anyhow, Mr. Polatkin, I ain't concerned with Sammet Brothers. The point is this: Dishkes says he has got a good stand there on Amsterdam Avenue, and if he could only hold on a couple months longer he wouldn't got no difficulty in pulling through."

Polatkin shrugged his shoulders.

[Pg 268] "For my part," he said, "it wouldn't make no difference if Dishkes busts up now *oder* two months from now."

"But the way he tells me yesterday," Elkan replied, "not only he wouldn't got to bust up on us if he gets his two months' extension, but he says he would be doing a good business at that time."

Polatkin nodded skeptically.

"Sure, I know, Elkan," he said. "If everybody which is asking an extension would do the business they hope to do before the extension is up, Elkan," he said, "all the prompt-pay fellows must got to close up shop on account there wouldn't be enough business to go round."

"Well, anyhow," Elkan rejoined, "he's coming here to see us this morning, Mr. Polatkin, and he could show you how he figures it that he's got hopes to pull through."

Polatkin made a deprecatory gesture with his hand.

"If a feller is going to bust up on me, Elkan, I'd just as lief he ain't got no hopes at all," he grumbled; "otherwise he wastes your whole day on you figuring out his next season's profits if he can only stall off his creditors. With such a hoping feller, if you don't want to be out time as well as money, understand me, you should quick file a petition in bankruptcy against him; otherwise he wouldn't give you no peace at all."

[Pg 269] Nevertheless, when Dishkes arrived, half an hour later, Polatkin ushered him into the firm's office and summoned Scheikowitz and Elkan to the conference.

"Well, Dishkes," he said in kindly accents, "you are up against it."

Dishkes nodded. He was by no means of a robust physical type, and his hands trembled so nervously as he fumbled for his papers in his breast pocket that he dropped its contents on the office floor. Elkan stooped to assist in retrieving the scattered papers, and among the documents he gathered together was a cabinet photograph.

"My wife!" Dishkes murmured hoarsely. "She ain't so strong, and I am sending her up to the country a couple months ago. I've been meaning I should go up and see her ever since, but—"

Here he gulped dismally; and there was an embarrassed silence, broken only by the faint noise occasioned by Philip Scheikowitz scratching his chin.

"That's a *Rosher*—that feller Sammet," Polatkin said at length. "Honestly, the way some business men ain't got no mercy at all for the other feller, you would think, Scheikowitz, they was living back in the old country yet!"

Scheikowitz nodded and glanced nervously from the photograph to Elkan.

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"I think you was telling me you got a couple ideeas about helping Dishkes out, Elkan," he said. "So, in the first place, Dishkes, you should please let us see a list of your creditors."

With this prelude Scheikowitz drew forward his chair and plunged into a discussion of Dishkes' affairs that lasted for more than two hours; and when Dishkes at length departed he took with him notices of a meeting addressed to his twenty creditors, prepared for immediate mailing by Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's stenographer.

"And that's what we let ourselves in for," Scheikowitz declared after the elevator door had closed behind Dishkes. "To-morrow morning at eleven o'clock the place here would look like the waiting room of a depot, and all our competitors would be rubbering at our stock already."

"Let 'em rubber!" Elkan said. "If I don't get an extension for that feller my name ain't Elkan Lubliner at all; because between now and then I am going round to see them twenty creditors, and I bet yer they will sign an extension agreement, with the figures I am going to put up to them!"

"Figures!" Scheikowitz jeered. "What good is figures to them fellers? Showing figures to a bankrupt's creditors is like taking to a restaurant a feller which is hungry and letting him look at the knives and forks and plates, understand me!"

Elkan nodded.

"Sure, I know," he said; "but the figures ain't all."

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Surreptitiously he drew from his pocket a faded cabinet photograph.

"I sneaked this away from Dishkes when he wasn't noticing," Elkan declared; "and if this don't fix 'em nothing will!"

"Say, lookyhere, Lubliner," Leon Sammet cried after Elkan had broached the reason for his visit late that afternoon, "don't give me that tale of woe again. Every time we are asking Dishkes for money he pulls this here sick-wife story on us, understand me; and it don't go down with me no more."

"What d'ye mean don't go down with you?" Elkan demanded. "Do you claim his wife ain't sick?"

"I don't claim nothing," Sammet retorted. "I ain't no doctor, Lubliner. I am in the cloak-and-suit business, and I got to pay my creditors with United States money, Lubliner, if my wife would be dying yet."

"Which you ain't got no wife," Elkan added savagely.

"*Gott sei Dank!*" Sammet rejoined. "*Aber* if I did got one, y'understand, I would got *Verstand* enough to pick out a healthy woman, which Dishkes does everything the same. He picks out a store there on an avenue when it is a dead neighbourhood, understand me—and he wants us we should suffer for it."

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"The neighbourhood wouldn't be dead after three months," Elkan said. "Round the corner on both sides of the street is building thirty-three-foot, seven-story elevator apartments yet; and when they are occupied, Dishkes would do a rushing business."

"That's all right," Sammet answered. "I ain't speculating in real-estate futures, Lubliner; so you might just so well go ahead and attend to your business, Lubliner, because me I am going to do the same."

"But lookyhere, Sammet," Elkan still pleaded. "I seen pretty near every one of Dishkes' creditors and they all agree the feller should have a three months' extension."

"Let 'em agree," Sammet shouted. "They are their own bosses and so am I, Lubliner; so if they want to give him an extension of their account I ain't got nothing to say. All I want is eight hundred dollars he owes me; and the rest of them suckers could agree till they are black in the face."

"*Aber*, anyhow, Sammet," Elkan said, "come to the meeting to-morrow morning and we would see what we could do."

"See what we could do!" Sammet bellowed. "You will see what I could do, Lubliner; and I will come to the meeting to-morrow and I'll do it too. So, if you don't mind,

Lubliner, I could still do a little work before we close up here."

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For a brief interval Elkan dug his nails into the palms of his hands, and his eyes unconsciously sought a target for a right swing on Sammet's bloated face; but at length he nodded and forced himself to smile.

"*Schon gut*, Mr. Sammet," he said; "then I will see you to-morrow."

A moment later he strode down lower Fifth Avenue toward the place of business of the last creditor on Dishkes' list. This was none other than Elkan's distinguished friend, B. Gans, the manufacturer of highgrade dresses; and it required less than ten minutes to procure his consent to the proposed extension.

"And I hope," Elkan said, "that we could count on you to be at the meeting to-morrow."

"That's something I couldn't do," B. Gans replied; "but I'll write you a letter and give you full authority you should represent me there. Excuse me a minute and I'll dictate it to Miss Scheindler." When he returned, five minutes later, he sat down at his desk and, crossing his legs, prepared to beguile the tedium of waiting.

"Well, Elkan," he said, "what you been doing with yourself lately? Thee-aytres and restaurants, I suppose?"

"Thee-aytres I ain't so much interested in no more," Elkan said. "The fact is, I am going in now for antics."

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"Antics!" B. Gans exclaimed.

"Sure," Elkan replied; and there was a certain pride in his tones. "Antics is what I said, Mr. Gans—Jacobson chairs and them—now—cat's furniture."

"Cat's furniture?" Gans repeated. "What d'ye mean cat's furniture?"

"Angry cats," Elkan explained; and then a great light broke upon B. Gans.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "You mean Henri Quatre furniture?"

"Hungry cat *oder* angry cat," Elkan said. "All I know is we are refurnishing our flat, Mr. Gans, and we are taking an advice from Max Merech, our designer. It's a funny thing about that feller, Mr. Gans—with garments he is right up to the minute, *aber mit* furniture nothing suits him unless it would be anyhow a hundred years old."

"So you are buying some antique furniture for your flat?" B. Gans commented, and Elkan nodded.

"We made a start anyhow," he said. "We bought a couple Jacobson chairs—two hundred and fifty years old already."

"Good!" B. Gans exclaimed. "I want to tell you, Elkan, you couldn't go far wrong if you would buy any piece of furniture over a hundred years old. They didn't know how to make things ugly in them days—and Jacobean chairs especially. I am furnishing my whole dining room in that period and my library in Old French. It costs money, Elkan, but it's worth it."

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Elkan nodded and steered the conversation into safer channels; so that by the time Miss Scheindler had brought in the letter they were discussing familiar business topics.

"Also," Gans said as he appended his neat signature to the letter, "I wish you and Dishkes luck, Elkan; and keep up the good work about the antique furniture. Even when you would get stuck with a reproduction instead of a genuine piece once in a while, if it looks just as good as the original and no one tells you differently, understand me, you feel just as happy."

Thus encouraged, Elkan went home that evening full of a determination to acquire all the antique furniture his apartment would hold; and he and Yetta sat up until past midnight conning the pages of a heavy volume on the subject, which Yetta had procured from the neighbouring public library. Accordingly Elkan rose late the following morning, and it was almost nine o'clock before he reached his office and observed on the very top of his morning mail a slip of paper containing a message in the handwriting of Sam, the office boy.

"A man called about Jacobowitz," it read, and Elkan immediately rang his deskbell.

"What Jacobowitz is this?" he demanded as Sam entered, and the office boy shrugged.

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"I should know!" he said.

"What d'ye mean you should know?" Elkan cried. "Ain't I always told it you you should write down always the name when people call?"

"Ain't Jacobowitz a name?" Sam replied. "Furthermore, you couldn't expect me I should get the family history from everybody which is coming in the place, Mr. Lubliner—especially when the feller says he would come back."

"Why didn't you tell me he is coming back?" Elkan asked, and again Sam shrugged.

"When the feller is coming back, Mr. Lubliner," he said, "it don't make no difference if I tell you *oder* not. He would come back anyhow."

Having thus disposed of the matter to his entire satisfaction, Sam withdrew and banged the door triumphantly behind him, while Elkan fell to examining his mail. He had hardly cut the first envelope, however, when his door opened to admit Dishkes.

"*Nu*, Dishkes!" Elkan said. "You are pretty early, ain't it?"

Dishkes nodded.

"I'm a *Schlemiel*, Mr. Lubliner," he said, "and that's all there is to it. Yesterday I went to work and lost my wife's picture."

Elkan slapped his thigh with his hand.

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"Well, ain't I a peach?" he said. "I am getting so mixed up with these here antics I completely forgot to tell Yetta anything about it. I didn't even show it to her, Dishkes; so you must leave me have it for a day longer, Dishkes."

As he spoke he drew the cabinet photograph from his breast pocket and handed it to Dishkes, who gazed earnestly at it for a minute. Then, resting his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in his hands and burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing, whereat Elkan jumped from his seat and passed hurriedly out of the room. As he walked toward the showroom the strains of a popular song came from behind a rack.

"Sam," he bellowed, "who asks you you should whistle round here?"

The whistling ceased and Sam emerged from his hiding-place with a feather brush.

"I could whistle without being asked," Sam replied; "and furthermore, Mr. Lubliner, when I am dusting the samples I must got to whistle; otherwise the dust gets in my lungs, which I value my lungs the same like you do, Mr. Lubliner, even if I would be here only a boy working on stock!"

With this decisive rejoinder he resumed dusting the samples, while Elkan returned to his office, where he found that Dishkes had regained his composure.

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Despite the fact that all of Dishkes' creditors save one had signed an extension agreement, the meeting in Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's showroom was well attended; and when Leon Sammet came in, at quarter-past eleven, the assemblage had already elected Charles Finkman, of Maisener & Finkman, as chairman. He had just taken his seat in Philip Scheikowitz's new revolving chair and was in the act of noisily clearing his throat in lieu of pounding the table with a gavel.

"Gentlemen," he said, "first, I want to thank you for the signal honour you are doing me in appointing me your chairman. For sixteen years now my labours in the Independent Order Mattai Aaron ain't unknown to most of you here. Ten years ago, at the national convention held in Sarahcuse, gentlemen, I was unanimously elected by the delegates from sixty lodges to be your National Grand Master; and——"

At this juncture Leon Sammet rose ponderously to his feet.

"Say, Finkman!" retorted Sammet. "What has all this *Stuss* about the I. O. M. A. got to do *mit* Dishkes here?"

Again Finkman cleared his throat, and this time he produced a note of challenge that caused the members of the I. O. M. A. there present to lean forward in their seats. They expected a crushing rejoinder and they were not disappointed.

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"What is the motto of the I. O. M. A., Sammet?" Finkman thundered. "'Justice, Fraternity and Charity!' And I say to you now that, as chairman of this meeting, as well as Past National Grand Master of that noble order to which you and I both belong, *verstehst du*, I will see that justice be done, fraternity be encouraged and charity dispensed on each and every occasion.

"Now, my brothers, here is a fellow member of our organization in distress, y'understand; and I ask you one and all this question"—he raised his voice to a pitch that made the filaments tremble in the electric-light bulbs—"Who," he roared, "who will come to his assistance?"

He paused dramatically just as Sam, the office boy, stuck his head in the showroom doorway and rent the silence with his high, piping voice.

"Mr. Lubliner," he said, "the man is here about Jacobowitz."

Elkan flapped his hand wildly, but it was too late to prevent the entrance of no less a person than Jacob Paul—the connoisseur of antiques and fine arts.

"Hello, Finkman!" he said; "what's the trouble here?"

Elkan started from his seat to interrupt his visitor, but there was something in Finkman's manner that made him sit down again.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Paul?" Finkman exclaimed; and the clarion note had deserted his voice, leaving only a slight hoarseness to mark its passing. "What brings you here?"

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"I might ask the same of you, Finkman," Jacob Paul replied; and as his keen eyes scanned the assembled company they rested for a minute on Leon Sammet, who forthwith began to perspire.

"The fact is," Finkman began, "this here is a meeting of creditors of Louis Dishkes, of the Villy dee Paris Store on Amsterdam Avenue."

Paul turned to Louis Dishkes, proprietor of the Ville de Paris Store, who sat at the side of the room behind Scheikowitz's desk in an improvised prisoner's dock.

"What's the matter, Dishkes?" Paul asked. "Couldn't you make it go up there?"

Dishkes shrugged hopelessly.

"Next month, when them houses round the corner is rented," he said, "I could do a good business there."

"You ought to," Paul agreed. "You ain't got no competitors, so far as I could see."

"That's what we all think!" Elkan broke in—"that is to say, all of us except Mr. Sammet; and he ain't willing to wait for his money."

Leon Sammet moved uneasily in his chair as Jacob Paul faced about in his direction.

"Why ain't you willing to wait, Sammet?" he asked; and Leon mopped his face with his handkerchief.

"Well, it's like this, Mr. Paul—" he began, but the connoisseur of antiques raised his hand.

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"One moment, Sammet," he said. "You know as well as anybody else, and better even, that a millionaire concern like the Hamsuckett Mills must got to wait once in a while." He paused significantly. "If we didn't," he continued, "there's plenty of solvent concerns would be forced to the wall—ain't it? Furthermore, if the Hamsuckett Mills did business the way you want to, Sammet, I wouldn't keep my job as credit man and treasurer very long."

Sammet nodded weakly and plied his handkerchief with more vigour, while Elkan sat and stared at his acquaintance of Sunday night in unfeigned astonishment.

"Then what is the use of talking, Sammet?" Paul said. "So long as you are the only one standing out, why don't you make an end of it? How long an extension does Dishkes want?"

"Two months," Finkman answered.

"And where is the agreement you fellows all signed?" Paul continued.

Elkan took a paper from the desk in front of Dishkes and passed it to Paul, who drew from his waistcoat pocket an opulent gold-mounted fountain pen. Then he walked over to Leon Sammet and handed him the pen and the agreement.

"*Schreib*, Sammet," he said, "and don't make no more fuss about it."

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A moment later Sammet appended a shaky signature to the agreement and returned it, with the pen, to Paul.

A quarter of an hour later Jacob Paul sat in Elkan's office and smoked one of Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company's best cigars.

"Now I put it up to you, Lubliner," he said: "them Jacobean chairs are pretty high at fifty dollars, but I want 'em, and I'm willing to give you sixty for 'em."

Elkan smiled and made a wide gesture with both hands.

"My dear Mr. Paul," he said, "after what you done to-day for Dishkes I'll make you a present of 'em—free for nothing."

"No, you won't do no such thing," Paul declared; "because I'm going to sell 'em again and at a profit, as I may as well tell you."

"My worries what you are going to do with 'em!" Elkan declared. "But one thing I ain't going to do, Mr. Paul—I ain't going to make no profit on you; so go ahead and take the chairs at what I paid for 'em—and that's the best I could do for you."

It required no further persuasion for Jacob Paul to draw a fifty-dollar check to Elkan's order; and as he rose to leave Elkan pressed his hand warmly.

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"Come up and see me, Mr. Paul, when we get through refurnishing," he said. "I promise you you would see a flat furnished to your taste—no crayon portraits nor nothing."

It was late in the afternoon when Elkan's office door opened to admit Sam, the office boy.

"Mr. Lubliner," he said, "another feller is here about this here—now—Jacobowitz."

Elkan glanced through the half-open door and recognized the figure of Ringentaub, the antiquarian.

"Tell him to come in," he said; and a moment later Ringentaub was wringing Elkan's hand and babbling his gratitude for his brother-in-law's deliverance from bankruptcy.

"God will bless you for it, Mr. Lubliner," he said; "and I am ashamed of myself when I think of it. I am a dawg, Mr. Lubliner—and that's all there is to it."

Here he drew a greasy wallet from his breast pocket and extracted three ten-dollar bills.

"Take 'em, Mr. Lubliner," he said, "and forgive me."

He pressed the bills into Elkan's hand.

"What's this?" Elkan demanded.

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"That's the change from your fifty dollars," Ringentaub replied; "because, so help me, Mr. Lubliner, there is first-class material in them chairs and the feller that makes 'em for me is a highgrade cabinetmaker. Then you got to reckon it stands me in a couple of dollars also to get 'em fixed up antique, y'understand; so, if you get them chairs for twenty dollars you are buying a bargain, Mr. Lubliner."

"Why, what d'ye mean?" Elkan cried. "Ain't them chairs gen-wine Jacobean chairs?"

"Not by a whole lot they ain't," Ringentaub declared fervently.

"But Mr. Paul thinks they are!" Elkan exclaimed.

"Sure, I know," Ringentaub answered; "and that shows what a lot a collector knows about such things. Paul is a credit man for the Hamsuckett Mills, Mr. Lubliner; but he collects old furniture on the side."

For a moment Elkan gazed open-mouthed at the antiquarian and a great light began to break in on him.

"So-o-o!" he cried. "That's what you mean by a collector!"

Ringentaub nodded.

"And furthermore, Mr. Lubliner, when collectors knows more about antiques as dealers does, Mr. Lubliner," he said with his hand on the doorknob, "I'll go into the woollen piece-goods business too—which you could take it from me, Mr. Lubliner, it wouldn't be soon, by a hundred years even."

When Elkan emerged from the One-Hundred-and-Sixteenth Street station of the subway that evening a familiar voice hailed him from the rear.

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"*Nu*, Elkan!" cried B. Gans, for it was none other than he. "You made out fine at the meeting this morning—ain't it?"

"Who told you?" Elkan asked as he linked arms with the highgrade manufacturer.

"Never mind who told me," B. Gans said jokingly; "but all I could say is you made a tremendous hit with Jacob Paul, Elkan—and if that ain't no compliment, understand me, I don't know what is. Why, there ain't a better judge of men *oder* antique furniture in this here city than Paul, Elkan. He's an A-Number-One credit man, too, and I bet yer he gets a big salary from them Hamsuckett Mills people, which the least his income could be—considering what he picks up selling antiques—is fifteen thousand a year."

"Does Paul sell all the antiques he collects?" Elkan asked.

"Does he?" B. Gans rejoined. "Well, I should say he does! Myself I bought from him in the past two weeks half a dozen chairs, understand me—four last week and two today—which I am paying him five hundred dollars for the lot. They're worth it, too, Elkan. I never seen finer examples of the period."

"But are you sure they're gen-wine?" Elkan asked as they reached the entrance to his apartment house.

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"Paul says they are," B. Gans answered, slapping Elkan's shoulder in farewell; "and if he's mistaken, Elkan, then I'm content that I should be."

Two hours later, however, after Elkan had recounted to Yetta all the incidents of Dishkes' meeting and the resulting sale of the chairs, his conscience smote him.

"What d'ye think, Yetta?" he asked. "Should I tell Paul and Gans the chairs ain't gen-wine, *oder* not?"

For more than ten minutes Yetta wrinkled her forehead over this knotty ethical point; then she delivered her opinion.

"Mr. Gans tells you he is just as happy if they ain't gen-wine—ain't it?" she said.

Elkan nodded.

"And Mr. Paul acted honest, because he didn't know they wasn't gen-wine neither, ain't it?" she continued.

Again Elkan nodded.

"Then," Yetta declared, "if you are taking it so particular as all that, Elkan, there's only one thing for you to do—give me the thirty dollars!"

"Is that so!" Elkan exclaimed ironically. "And what will you do with the money?"

"The only thing I can do with it, *Schlemiel*," she said. "Ten dollars I will give Louis Dishkes he should take a trip up to the country over Sunday and visit his wife."

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"And what will we do with the other twenty?" Elkan asked.

"We'll send a present with him to Mrs. Dishkes," Yetta concluded with a smile, "and it wouldn't be no antics neither!"

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SWEET AND SOUR

ARE THE USES OF COMPETITIVE SALESMANSHIP

"**A** *BER* me and Yetta is got it all fixed up we would go to Mrs. Kotlin's already," Elkan Lubliner protested as he mopped his forehead one hot Tuesday morning in July. "The board there is something elegant, Mr. Scheikowitz. Everybody says so."

"*Yow!* everybody!" Philip Scheikowitz retorted. "Who is everybody, Elkan? A couple drummers like Marks Pasinsky, one or two real estaters, understand me, and the rest of 'em is wives from J to L retailers, third credit, which every time their husbands comes down to spend Sunday with 'em, y'understand, he must pretty near got to pawn the shirt from his back for car fare already."

"Scheikowitz is right, Elkan," Marcus Polatkin joined in. "A feller shouldn't make a god from his stomach, Elkan, especially when money don't figure at all, so if you would be going down to Egremont Beach, understand me, there's only one place you should stay, y'understand, and that's the New Salisbury."

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"Which if you wouldn't take our word for it, Elkan," Scheikowitz added, "just give a look here."

He drew from his coat pocket the summer resort section of the previous day's paper and thrust it toward his junior partner, indicating as he did so a half column headed:

MIDSEASON GAIETY AT EGREMONT BEACH

which reads as follows:

The season is in full swing here.

On Saturday night Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Gans gave a Chinese Lantern Dinner in the Hanging Gardens at which were present Mr. and Mrs. Sam Feder, Mr. and Mrs. Max Koblin, Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Feldman, Mr. Jacob Scharley and Miss Hortense Feldman.

Among those who registered Friday at the New Salisbury were Mr. Jacob Scharley of San Francisco, Mr. and Mrs. Sol Klinger, Mr. Leon Sammet and his mother, Mrs. Leah Sammet.

"I thought that Leon's brother Barney was staying down at Egremont," Polatkin said after he and Elkan had read the item.

[Pg 290] "Barney is at Mrs. Kotlin's," Scheikowitz explained, "because *mit* Leon Sammet, Polatkin, nothing is too rotten for Barney to stay at, and besides he thinks Barney would get a little *small* business there, which the way Sammet Brothers figures, understand me, if they could stick a feller with three bills of goods for a couple hundred dollars apiece, y'understand, so long as he pays up on the first two, he couldn't eat up their profits if he would bust up on 'em *mit* the third."

"Sure I know," Elkan said, "*aber* I ain't going down to Egremont for business, Mr. Scheikowitz, I'm going because it ain't so warm down there."

"*Schmooes*, Elkan!" Scheikowitz retorted. "It wouldn't make it not one degrees warmer in Egremont supposing you could get a couple new accounts down there."

"B. Gans don't take it so particular about the weather," Polatkin commented. "I bet yer he would a whole lot sooner take off his coat and shirt and *spiel* a little auction pinocle *mit* Sol Klinger and Leon Sammet and all them fellers as be giving dinners already in a tuxedo suit to Sam Feder. I bet yer he gets a fine accommodation from the Kosciusko Bank out of that dinner yet."

"The other people also he ain't *schencking* no dinners to 'em for nothing neither," Scheikowitz declared. "Every one of 'em means something to B. Gans, I bet yer."

Elkan nodded.

"Particularly Scharley," he said.

"What d'ye mean, particularly Scharley?" Polatkin and Scheikowitz inquired with one voice.

"Why, ain't you heard about Scharley?" Elkan asked. "It's right there in the *Daily Cloak and Suit Journal*."

[Pg 291] He indicated the front sheet of that newsy trade paper, where under the heading of "Incorporations" appeared the following item:

The Scharley, Oderburg Drygoods Company, San Francisco, Cal., has filed articles of incorporation, giving its capital stock as \$500,000, and expects to open its new store in September next.

"And you are talking about staying by Mrs. Kotlin's!" Scheikowitz exclaimed in injured tones. "You should ought to be ashamed of yourself, Elkan."

Elkan received his senior partner's upbraiding with a patient smile.

"What show do we stand against a concern like B. Gans?" he asked.

"B. Gans sells him only highgrade goods, Elkan," Scheikowitz declared. "I bet yer the least the feller buys is for twenty thousand dollars garments here, and a good half would be popular price lines, which if we would get busy, we stand an elegant show there, Elkan."

"You should ought to go down there to-morrow yet," Polatkin cried, "because the first thing you know Leon Sammet would entertain him *mit* oitermobiles yet, and Sol Klinger gets also busy, understand me, and the consequences is we wouldn't be in it at all."

"Next Saturday is the earliest Yetta could get ready," Elkan replied positively, and Polatkin strode up and down the floor in an access of despair.

[Pg 292] "All right, Elkan," he said, "if you want to let such an opportunity slip down your fingers, y'understand, all right. *Aber* if I would be you, Elkan, I would go down there to-night yet."

Elkan shrugged his shoulders.

"I couldn't get Yetta she should close up the flat under the very least *two* days, Mr. Polatkin," he said. "She must got to fix everything just right, *mit* moth-camphor and *Gott weisst was nach*, otherwise she wouldn't go at all. The rugs alone takes a whole day to fix."

"Do as you like, Elkan," Polatkin declared, "*aber* you mark my words, if Leon Sammet ain't shoving heaven and earth right now, y'understand, I don't know nothing about the garment business at all."

In fulfilment of this prophecy, when Elkan entered his office the following morning Polatkin waved in his face a copy of the morning paper.

"Well," he said, "what did I told you, Elkan?"

Scheikowitz nodded slowly.

"My partner is right, Elkan," he added, "so stubborn you are."

"What's the matter now?" Elkan asked, and for answer Polatkin handed him the paper with his thumb pressed against a paragraph as follows:

Mr. and Mrs. Sam Feder, Mr. and Mrs. Max Koblin, Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Feldman, Miss Hortense Feldman, and Mr. Jacob Scharley were guests of Mr. Leon Sammet at a Chinese Lantern Dinner this evening given in the Hanging Gardens of the New Salisbury.

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"I thought it would be at the least an oitermobile ride," Polatkin said in melancholy tones, "but with that sucker all he could do is stealing a competitor's ideas. B. Gans gives Scharley a dinner and Leon Sammet is got to do it, too, *mit* the same guests and everything."

"Even to Feldman's sister already," Scheikowitz added, "which it must be that Feldman is trying to marry her off to Scharley even if he would be a widower *mit* two sons in college. She's a highly educated young lady, too."

"Young she ain't no longer," Polatkin interrupted, "and if a girl couldn't cook even a pertater, understand me, it don't make no difference if she couldn't cook it in six languages, y'understand, Feldman would got a hard job marrying her off *anyhow*."

Scheikowitz made an impatient gesture with both hands, suggestive of a dog swimming.

"That's neither here or there, Polatkin," he said. "The point is Elkan should go right uptown and *geschwind* pack his grip and be down at the Salisbury this afternoon yet, if Yetta would be ready *oder* not. We couldn't afford to let the ground grow under our feet and that's all there is *to* it."

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Thus, shortly after six o'clock that evening, Elkan and Yetta alighted from the 5:10 special from Flatbush Avenue and picked their way through a marital throng that kissed and embraced with as much ardour as though the reunion had concluded a parting of ten years instead of ten hours. At length the happy couples dragged themselves apart and crowded into the automobile 'bus of the New Salisbury, sweeping Elkan and Yetta before them, so that when the 'bus arrived at the hotel Elkan and Yetta were the last to descend.

A burly yellow-faced porter seized the baggage with the contemptuous manner that Ham nowadays evinces toward Shem, and Elkan and Yetta followed him through the luxurious social hall to the desk. There the room clerk immediately shot out a three-carat diamond ring, and when Elkan's eyes became accustomed to the glare he saw that beneath it was a fat white hand extended in cordial greeting.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Williams," Elkan cried, as he shook hands fervently. "Ain't you in the Pitt House, Sarahcuse, no more?"

"I'm taking a short vacation in a sensible manner, Mr. Lubliner," Mr. Williams replied in the rounded tones that only truly great actors, clergymen, and room clerks possess. "Which means that I am interested in a real-estate development near here, and I'm combining business with pleasure for a couple of months."

Elkan nodded admiringly.

"You got the right idee, Mr. Williams," he said. "This is my wife, Mr. Williams."

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The room clerk acknowledged the introduction with a bow that combined the grace of Paderewski and the dignity of Prince Florizel in just the right proportions.

"Delighted to know you, Madame," he declared. "Have you made reservations, Mr. Lubliner?"

Elkan shook his head and after an exchange of confidential murmurs Mr. Williams assigned them a room with an ocean view, from which they emerged less than half an hour later to await on the veranda the welcome sound of the dinner gong. A buzz of animated conversation filled the air, above which rose a little shriek of welcome as Mrs. Gans rushed toward Yetta with outstretched hands.

"Why, hello, Yetta!" she cried. "I didn't know you was coming down here."

They exchanged the kiss of utter peace that persists between the kin of highgrade

and popular-priced manufacturers.

"I read about you in the newspapers," Yetta said, as they seated themselves in adjoining rockers, and Mrs. Gans flashed all the gems of her right hand in a gesture of deprecation.

"I tell you," she said, "it makes me sick here the way people carries on. Honestly, Yetta, I don't see Barney only at meals and when he's getting dressed. Everything is Mister *Scharley*, Mister *Scharley*. You would think he was H. P. Morgan *oder* the Czar of *Russland* from the fuss everybody makes over him."

[Pg 296] Yetta nodded in sympathy and suddenly Mrs. Gans clutched the arm of her chair.

"There he is now," she hissed.

"Where?" Yetta asked, and Mrs. Gans nodded toward a doorway at the end of the veranda, on which in electric bulbs was outlined the legend, "Hanging Gardens." Yetta descried a short, stout personage between fifty and sixty years of age, arrayed in a white flannel suit of which the coat and waistcoat were cut in imitation of an informal evening costume. On his arm there drooped a lady no longer in her twenties, and from the V-shaped opening in the rear of her dinner gown a medical student could have distinguished with more or less certainty the bones of the cervical vertebræ, the right and left scapula and the articulation of each with the humerus and clavicle.

"That's Miss Feldman," Mrs. Gans whispered. "She's refined like anything, Yetta, and she talks French better as a waiter already."

At this juncture the dinner gong sounded and Yetta rejoined Elkan in the social hall.

"What is the trouble you are looking so *rachmonos*, Elkan?" she asked as she pressed his arm consolingly.

"To-night it's Sol Klinger," Elkan replied. "He's got a dinner on in the Hanging Gardens for Scharley, Yetta, and I guess I wouldn't get a look-in even."

[Pg 297] "You've got six weeks before you," Yetta assured him, "and you shouldn't worry. Something is bound to turn up, ain't it?"

She gave his arm another little caress and they proceeded immediately to the dining room, where the string orchestra and the small talk of two hundred and fifty guests strove vainly for the ascendancy in one maddening cacophony. It was nearly eight o'clock before Elkan and Yetta arose from the table and repaired to the veranda whose rockers were filled with a chattering throng.

"Let's get out of this," Elkan said, and they descended the veranda steps to the sidewalk. Five minutes later they were seated on a remote bench of the boardwalk, and until nine o'clock they watched the beauty of the moon and sea, which is constant even at Egremont Beach. When they rose to go Yetta noticed for the first time a shawl-clad figure on the adjacent bench, and immediately a pair of keen eyes flashed from a face whose plump contentment was framed in a jet black wig of an early Victorian design.

"Why, if it ain't Mrs. Lesengeld," Yetta exclaimed and the next moment she enfolded the little woman in a cordial embrace.

"You grown a *bisschen* fat, Yetta," Mrs. Lesengeld said. "I wouldn't knew you at all, if you ain't speaking to me first."

[Pg 298] "This is my husband, Mrs. Lesengeld—Mr. Lubliner," Yetta went on. "He heard me talk often from you, Mrs. Lesengeld, and what a time you got it learning me I should speak English yet."

Elkan beamed at Mrs. Lesengeld.

"And not only *that*," he said, "but also how good to her you was when she was sick already. There ain't many boarding-house ladies like you, Mrs. Lesengeld."

"And there ain't so many boarders like Yetta, neither," Mrs. Lesengeld retorted.

"And do you got a boarding-house down here, Mrs. Lesengeld?" Yetta asked.

"I've gone out of the boarding-house business," Mrs. Lesengeld replied, "which you know what a trouble I got it *mit* that lowlife Lesengeld, *olav hasholom*, after he failed in the pants business, how I am working my fingers to the bones already keeping up his insurings in the I. O. M. A. and a couple thousand dollars in a company already."

Yetta nodded.

"Which I got my reward at last," Mrs. Lesengeld concluded. "Quick diabetes, Yetta,

and so I bought for ten thousand dollars a mortgage, understand me, and my son-in-law allows me also four dollars a week which I got it a whole lot easier nowadays."

"And are you staying down here?" Elkan asked.

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"Me, I got for twenty dollars a month a little house *mit* two rooms only, right on the sea, which they call it there Bognor Park. You must come over and see us, Yetta. Such a *gemütlich* little house we got it you wouldn't believe at all, and every Sunday my daughter Fannie and my son-in-law comes down and stays with us."

"And are you going all the way home alone?" Elkan asked anxiously.

"Fannie is staying down with me to-night. She meets me on the corner of the Boulevard, where the car stops, at ten o'clock already," Mrs. Lesengeld replied.

"Then you must got to come right along with us," Elkan said, "and we'll see you would get there on time."

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Lesengeld asked.

"Over to the Salisbury," Elkan answered, and Mrs. Lesengeld sank back on to the bench.

"*Geh weg*, Mr. Lubliner," she cried. "I am now fifty years old and I was never in such a place in my life, especially which under this shawl I got only a plain cotton dress yet."

Elkan flapped his hand reassuringly.

"A fine-looking lady like you, Mrs. Lesengeld," he said, as he seized her hands and drew her gently to her feet, "looks well in anything."

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"And you'll have a water ice in the Hanging Gardens with us," Yetta persisted as she slipped a hand under Mrs. Lesengeld's shawl and pressed her arm affectionately. Ten minutes later they arrived at the stoop of the New Salisbury, to the scandalization and horror of the three score A to F first credit manufacturers and their wives. Moreover, approximately a hundred and fifty karats of blue white diamonds rose and fell indignantly on the bosoms of twenty or thirty credit-high retailers' wives, when the little, toilworn woman with her shawl and ritualistic wig entered the Hanging Gardens chatting pleasantly with Elkan and Yetta; and as they seated themselves at a table the buzz of conversation hushed into silence and then roared out anew with an accompaniment of titters.

At the next table Sol Klinger plied with liquors and cigars the surviving guests of his dinner, and when Elkan nodded to him, he ignored the salutation with a blank stare. He raged inwardly, not so much at Elkan's invasion of that fashionable precinct as at the circumstance that his guest of honour had departed with Miss Feldman for a stroll on the boardwalk some ten minutes previously, and he was therefore unable to profit by Elkan's *faux pas*.

"The feller ain't got no manners at all," he said to Max Koblin, who nodded gloomily.

"It's getting terrible mixed down here, Sol," Max commented as he hiccupped away a slight flatulency. "Honestly if you want to be in striking distance of your business, Sol, so's you could come in and out every day, you got to rub shoulders with everybody, ain't it?"

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He soothed his outraged sensibilities with a great cloud of smoke that drifted over Elkan's table, and Mrs. Lesengeld broke into a fit of coughing which caused a repetition of the titters.

"And do you still make that brown stewed fish sweet and sour, Mrs. Lesengeld?" Yetta asked by way of putting the old lady at her ease.

"Make it!" Mrs. Lesengeld answered. "I should say I do. Why you wouldn't believe the way my son-in-law is crazy about it. We got it every Sunday regular, and I tell you what I would do, Yetta."

She laid her hand on Yetta's arm and her face broke into a thousand tiny wrinkles of hospitality.

"You should come Friday to lunch sure," she declared, "and we would got some brown stewed fish sweet and sour and a good plate of *Bortch* to begin with."

Sol Klinger had been leaning back in his chair in an effort to overhear their conversation, and at this announcement he broke into a broad guffaw, which ran around the table after he had related the cause of it to his guests. Indeed, so much did Sol relish the joke that with it he entertained the occupants of about a dozen seats in the smoking car of the 8:04 express the next morning, and he was so full of it when he entered Hammersmith's Restaurant the following noon that he could not forego the pleasure of visiting Marcus Polatkin's table and relating it to Polatkin himself.

Polatkin heard him through without a smile and when at its conclusion Klinger broke into a hysterical appreciation of his own humour, Polatkin shrugged.

"I suppose, Klinger," he said, "your poor mother, *olav hasholom*, didn't wear a *sheitel* neither, ain't it?"

"My mother, *olav hasholom*, would got more sense as to butt in to a place like that," Klinger retorted.

"Even if you wouldn't of been ashamed to have taken her there, Klinger," he added.

Klinger flushed angrily.

"That ain't here or there, Polatkin," he said. "You should ought to put your partner wise, Polatkin, that he shouldn't go dragging in an old *Bubé* into a place like the Salisbury and talking such nonsense like brown stewed fish sweet and sour."

He broke into another laugh at the recollection of it—a laugh that was louder but hardly as unforced as the first one.

"What's the matter *mit* brown stewed fish sweet and sour, Klinger?" Polatkin asked. "I eat already a lot of *a-la's* and *en cazzerolls* in a whole lot of places just so *grossartig* as the Salisbury, understand me, and I would *schenck* you a million of 'em for one plate of brown stewed fish sweet and sour like your mother made it from *zu Hause* yet."

"But what for an interest does a merchant like Scharley got to hear such things," Klinger protested lamely. "Honestly, I was ashamed for your partner's sake to hear such a talk going on there."

"Did Scharley got any objections?" Polatkin asked.

"Fortunately the feller had gone away from the table," Klinger replied, "so he didn't hear it at all."

"Well," Polatkin declared, taking up his knife and fork as a signal that the matter was closed, "ask him and see if he wouldn't a whole lot sooner eat some good brown stewed fish sweet and sour as a Chinese Lantern Dinner—whatever for a bunch of poison that might be, Klinger—and don't you forget it."

Nevertheless when Polatkin returned to his place of business he proceeded at once to Elkan's office.

"Say, lookyhere Elkan," he demanded, "what is all this I hear about you and Yetta taking an old *Bubé* into the Hanging Gardens already, and making from her laughing stocks out of the whole place."

Elkan looked up calmly.

"It's a free country, Mr. Polatkin," he said, "and so long as I pay my board *mit* U. S. money, already I would take in there any of my friends I would please."

"Sure, I know," Polatkin expostulated, "but I seen Klinger around at Hammersmith's and he says—"

"Klinger!" Elkan exclaimed. "Well, you could say to Klinger for me, Mr. Polatkin, that if he don't like the way I am acting around there, understand me, he should just got the nerve to tell it me to my face yet."

Polatkin flapped the air with his right hand.

"Never mind Klinger, Elkan," he said. "You got to consider you shouldn't make a fool of yourself before Scharley and all them people. How do you expect you should get such a merchant as Scharley he should accept from you entertainment like a Chinese Lantern Dinner, if you are acting that way?"

"Chinese Lantern Dinner be damned!" Elkan retorted. "When we got the right goods at the right price, Mr. Polatkin, why should we got to give a merchant dinners yet to convince him of it?"

"Dinners is nothing, Elkan," Polatkin interrupted with a wave of his hand. "You got to give him dyspepsa even, the way business is nowadays."

"*Aber* I was talking to the room clerk last night," Elkan went on, "and he tells me so sure as you are standing there, Mr. Polatkin, a Chinese Lantern Dinner would stand us in twenty dollars a head."

"Twenty dollars a head!" Polatkin exclaimed and indulged himself in a low whistle.

"So even if I *would* be staying at the Salisbury, understand me," Elkan said, "I ain't going to throw away our money out of the window exactly."

"*Aber* how are you going to get the feller down here, if you wouldn't entertain him or something?"

Elkan slapped his chest with a great show of confidence.

"Leave that to *me*, Mr. Polatkin," he said, and put on his hat preparatory to going out to lunch.

Nevertheless when he descended from his room at the New Salisbury that evening and prepared to take a turn on the boardwalk before dinner, his confidence evaporated at the coolness of his reception by the assembled guests of the hotel. Leon Sammet cut him dead, and even B. Gans greeted him with half jovial reproach.

"Well, Elkan," he said, "going to entertain any more *fromme Leute* in the Garden to-night?"

"Seemingly, Mr. Gans," Elkan said, "it was a big shock to everybody here to see for the first time an old lady wearing a *sheitel*. I suppose nobody here never seen it before, ain't it?"

B. Gans put a fatherly hand on Elkan's shoulder.

"I'll tell yer, Elkan," he said, "if I would be such a *roscher*, understand me, that I would hold it against you because you ain't forgetting an old friend, like this here lady must be, y'understand, I should never sell a dollar's worth more goods so long as I live, *aber* if Klinger and Sammet would start kidding you in front of Scharley, understand me, it would look bad."

"Why would it look bad, Mr. Gans?" Elkan broke in.

"Because it don't do nobody no good to have funny stories told about 'em, except an actor *oder* a politician, Elkan," Gans replied as the dinner gong began to sound, "which if a customer wouldn't take *you* seriously, he wouldn't take your goods seriously neither, Elkan, and that's all there is *to it*."

He smiled reassuringly as he walked toward the dining room and left Elkan a prey to most uncomfortable reflections, which did not abate when he overheard Klinger and Sammet hail Gans at the end of the veranda.

"Well, Mr. Gans," Klinger said with a sidelong glance at Elkan, "what are you going to eat to-night—brown stewed fish sweet *und* sour?"

Elkan could not distinguish B. Gans' reply, but he scowled fiercely at the trio as they entered the hotel lobby, and he still frowned as he sauntered stolidly after them to await Yetta in the social hall.

"What's the matter, Mr. Lubliner," the room clerk asked when Elkan passed the desk. "Aren't you feeling well to-day?"

"I feel all right, Mr. Williams," Elkan replied, "but this here place is getting on my nerves. It's too much like a big hotel out on the road somewheres. Everybody looks like they would got something to sell, understand me, and was doing their level best to sell it."

"You're quite right, Mr. Lubliner," the clerk commented, "and that's the reason why I came down here. In fact," he added with a guilty smile, "I made a date to show some of my lots to-morrow to a prospective customer."

At this juncture a porter appeared bearing a basket of champagne and followed by two waiters with ice buckets, and the room clerk jerked his head sideways in the direction toward which the little procession had disappeared.

"That's for Suite 27, the Feldmans' rooms," he explained. "Miss Feldman is giving a little chafing-dish dinner there to Mr. Scharley and a few friends."

He accepted with a graceful nod Elkan's proffered cigar.

"Which goes to show that it's as you say, Mr. Lubliner," he concluded. "If you have drygoods, real estate or marriageable relatives to dispose of, Mr. Lubliner, Egremont's the place to market them."

"Yes, Mr. Williams," said Jacob Scharley at two o'clock the following afternoon as they trudged along the sands of Bognor Park, one of Egremont Beach's new developments, "I was trying to figure out how these here Chinese Lantern Dinners stands in a sucker like Leon Sammet twenty dollars a head, when by the regular bill of fare it comes exactly to seven dollars and fifty cents including drinks."

"You can't figure on a special dinner according to the prices on the regular bill of fare," said Mr. Williams, the room clerk, who in his quality of real-estate operator was attempting to shift the conversation from hotel matters to the topic of seaside lots. "Why, ice cream is twenty-five cents on the bill of fare, but at one of those dinners it's served in imitation Chinese lanterns, which makes it worth double at

least."

"For my part," Scharley broke in, "they could serve it in kerosene lamps, Mr. Williams, because I never touch the stuff."

"It's a parallel case to lots here and lots on Mizzentop Beach, which is the next beach below," Williams continued. "Here we have a boardwalk extending right down to our property, and we are getting seven hundred and fifty dollars a lot, while there, with practically the same transit facilities but no boardwalk or electric lights, they get only four hundred and——"

"*Aber* you take a piece of tenderloin steak a half an inch thick and about the size of a price ticket, understand me," Scharley interrupted, "and even if you *would* fix it up with half a cent's worth of peas and spill on it a bottle cough medicine and glue, *verstehst du mich*, how could you make it figure up more as a dollar and a quarter, Mr. Williams? Then the clams, Mr. Williams, must got to have inside of 'em at the very least a half a karat pink pearl in 'em, otherwise thirty-five cents would be big yet."

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"Very likely," Mr. Williams agreed as a shade of annoyance passed over his well modelled features, "but just now, Mr. Scharley, I'm anxious to show you the advantage of these lots of ours, and you won't mind if I don't pursue the topic of Chinese Lantern Dinners any farther."

"I'm only too glad not to talk about it at all," Scharley agreed. "In fact if any one else tries to ring in another one of them dinners on me, Mr. Williams, I'll turn him down on the spot. Shaving-dish parties neither, which I assure you, Mr. Williams, even if Miss Feldman would be an elegant, refined young lady, understand me, she fixes something in that shaving dish of hers last night, understand me, which I thought I was poisoned already."

Williams deemed it best to ignore this observation and therefore made no comment.

"But anyhow," Scharley concluded as they approached a little wooden shack on the margin of the water, "I'm sick and tired of things to eat, so let's talk about something else."

Having delivered this ultimatum, his footsteps lagged and he stopped short as he began to sniff the air like a hunting dog.

"M-m-m-m!" he exclaimed. "What *is* that?"

"That's a two-room shed we rent for twenty dollars a month," Williams explained. "We have eight of them and they help considerably to pay our office rent over in New York."

"Sure I know," Scharley agreed, "*aber*, m-m-m-m!"

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Once more he expanded his nostrils to catch a delicious fragrance that emanated from the little shack.

"*Aber*, who lives there?" he insisted, and Mr. Williams could not restrain a laugh.

"Why, it's that old lady with the wig that Lubliner brought over to the hotel the other night," he replied. "I thought I saw Sol Klinger telling you about it yesterday."

"He started to tell me something about it," Scharley said, "when Barney Gans butted in and wouldn't let him. What *was* it about this here old lady?"

"There isn't anything to it particularly," Williams replied, "excepting that it seemed a little strange to see an old lady in a shawl and one of those religious wigs in the Hanging Gardens, and there was something else Klinger told me about Mrs. Lubliner and the old lady talking about brown stewed fish sweet and——"

At this juncture Scharley snapped his fingers excitedly.

"Brown stewed fish sweet and sour!" he almost shouted. "I ain't smelled it since I was a boy already."

He wagged his head and again murmured, "M-m-m-m-m!"

Suddenly he received an inspiration.

"How much did you say them shanties rents for, Mr. Williams?" he said.

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"Twenty dollars a month," Williams replied.

"You don't tell me!" Scharley exclaimed solemnly. "I wonder if I could give a look at the inside of one of 'em—this one here, for instance."

"I don't think there'd be any objection," Williams said, and no sooner were the words out of his mouth than Scharley started off on a half trot for the miniature veranda on the ocean side of the little house.

"Perhaps I'd better inquire first if it's convenient for them to let us in now," Williams said, as he bounded after his prospective customer and knocked gently on the doorjamb. There was a sound of scurrying feet within, and at length the door was opened a few inches and the bewigged head of Mrs. Lesengeld appeared in the crack.

"*Nu*," she said, "what *is* it?"

"I represent the Bognor Park Company," Williams replied, "and if it's perfectly convenient for you, Mrs.—"

"Lesengeld," she added.

"Used to was Lesengeld & Schein in the pants business?" Scharley asked, and Mrs. Lesengeld nodded.

"Why, Lesengeld and me was lodge brothers together in the I. O. M. A. before I went out to the Pacific Coast years ago already," Scharley declared. "I guess he's often spoken to you about Jake Scharley, ain't it?"

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"Maybe he did, Mr. Scharley, *aber* he's dead *schon* two years since already," Mrs. Lesengeld said, and then added the pious hope, "*olav hasholom*."

"You don't say so," Scharley cried in shocked accents. "Why, he wasn't no older as me already."

"Fifty-three when he died," Mrs. Lesengeld said. "Quick diabetes, Mr. Scharley. Wouldn't you step inside?"

Scharley and Williams passed into the front room, which was used as a living room and presented an appearance of remarkable neatness and order. In the corner stood an oil stove on which two saucepans bubbled and steamed, and as Mrs. Lesengeld turned to follow her visitors one of the saucepans boiled over.

"Oo-ee!" she exclaimed. "*Mein fisch*."

"Go ahead and tend to it," Scharley cried excitedly; "don't mind us. It might get burned already."

He watched her anxiously while she turned down the flame.

"Brown stewed fish sweet and sour, ain't it?" he asked, and Mrs. Lesengeld nodded as she lowered the flame to just the proper height.

"I *thought* it was," Scharley continued. "I ain't smelled it in forty years already. My poor mother, *olav hasholom*, used to fix it something elegant."

He heaved a sigh as he sat down on a nearby campstool.

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"This smells just like it," he added. In front of the window a table had been placed, spread with a spotless white cloth and laid for two persons, and Scharley glanced at it hastily and turned his head away.

"Forty years ago come next *Shevuos* I ain't tasted it already," he concluded.

Mrs. Lesengeld coloured slightly and clutched at her apron in an agony of embarrassment.

"The fact is we only got three knives and forks," she said, "otherwise there is plenty fish for everybody."

"Why, we just had our lunch at the hotel before we started," Mr. Williams said.

"*You* did," Scharley corrected him reproachfully, "*aber* I ain't hardly touched a thing since last night. That shaving-dish party pretty near killed me, already."

"Well, then, we got just enough knives and forks," Mrs. Lesengeld cried. "Do you like maybe also *Bortch*, Mr. Scharley?"

"*Bortch!*" Mr. Scharley exclaimed, and his voice trembled with excitement. "Do you mean a sort of soup *mit* beets and—and—all that?"

"That's it," Mrs. Lesengeld replied, and Scharley nodded his head slowly.

"Mrs. Lesengeld," he said, "would you believe me, it's so long since I tasted that stuff I didn't remember such a thing exists even."

"And do you like it?" Mrs. Lesengeld repeated.

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"Do I *like* it!" Scharley cried. "*Um Gottes Willen*, Mrs. Lesengeld, I *love* it."

"Then sit right down," she said heartily. "Everything is ready."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Scharley," Williams interrupted, "I'll wait for you at the office of the company. It's only a couple of hundred yards down the beach."

"Go as far as you like, Mr. Williams," Scharley said as he tucked a napkin between his collar and chin. "I'll be there when I get through."

After Mrs. Lesengeld had ushered out Mr. Williams, she proceeded to the door of the rear room and knocked vigorously.

"Don't be foolish, Yetta, and come on out," she called. "It ain't nobody but an old friend of my husband's."

A moment later Yetta entered the room, and Scharley scrambled to his feet, a knife grasped firmly in one hand, and bobbed his head cordially.

"Pleased to meetcher," he said.

"This is Mrs. Lubliner, Mr. Scharley," Mrs. Lesengeld said.

"Don't make no difference, Mrs. Lesengeld," Scharley assured her, "any friend of yours is a friend of mine, so you should sit right down, Mrs. Lubliner, on account we are all ready to begin."

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Then followed a moment of breathless silence while Mrs. Lesengeld dished up the beetroot soup, and when she placed a steaming bowlful in front of Scharley he immediately plunged his spoon into it. A moment later he lifted his eyes to the ceiling.

"Oo-ee!" he exclaimed. "What an elegant soup!"

Mrs. Lesengeld blushed, and after the fashion of a *cordon bleu* the world over, she began to decry her own handiwork.

"It should ought to got just a *Bisschen* more pepper into it," she murmured.

"*Oser a Stück*," Scharley declared solemnly, as he consumed the contents of his bowl in great gurgling inhalations. "There's only one thing I got to say against it."

He scraped his bowl clean and handed it to Mrs. Lesengeld.

"And that is," he concluded, "that it makes me eat so much of it, understand me, I'm scared I wouldn't got no room for the brown stewed fish."

Again he emptied the bowl, and at last the moment arrived when the brown stewed fish smoked upon the table. Mrs. Lesengeld helped Scharley to a heaping plateful, and both she and Yetta watched him intently, as with the deftness of a Japanese juggler he balanced approximately a half pound of the succulent fish on the end of his fork. For nearly a minute he blew on it, and when it reached an edible temperature he opened wide his mouth and thrust the fork load home. Slowly and with great smacking of his moist lips he chewed away, and then his eyes closed and he laid down his knife and fork.

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"*Gan-éden!*" he declared as he reached across the table and shook hands with Mrs. Lesengeld.

"Mrs. Lesengeld," he said, "my mother *olav hasholom* was a good *cook*, understand me, *aber* you are a *good cook*, Mrs. Lesengeld, and that's all there is to it."

Forthwith he resumed his knife and fork, and with only two pauses for the necessary replenishments, he polished off three platefuls of the fish, after which he heaved a great sigh of contentment, and as a prelude to conversation he lit one of B. Gans' choicest cigars.

"There's some dessert coming," Mrs. Lesengeld said.

"Dessert after this, Mrs. Lesengeld," he replied, through clouds of contented smoke, "would be a sacrilege, ain't it?"

"That's something I couldn't make at all," Mrs. Lesengeld admitted. "All I got it here is some *frimsel kugel*."

"*Frimsel kugel!*" Scharley exclaimed, laying down his cigar. "Why ain't you told me that before?"

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A quarter of an hour later he again lighted his cigar, and this time he settled back in his campstool for conversation, while Mrs. Lesengeld busied herself about the oil stove. Instantly, however, he straightened up as another and more delicious odour assailed his nostrils, for Mrs. Lesengeld made coffee by a mysterious process, that conserved in the flavour of the decoction the delicious fragrance of the freshly ground bean.

"And are you staying down here with Mrs. Lesengeld?" Scharley asked Yetta after he had finished his third cup.

"In this little place here?" Mrs. Lesengeld cried indignantly. "Well, I should say not. She's stopping at the Salisbury, ain't you, Yetta?"

Yetta nodded and sighed.

"It ain't so comfortable as here," she said.

"I bet yer," Scharley added fervently. "I am stopping there too, and them Chinese Lantern Dinners which they are putting up!"

He waved his hand eloquently.

"Poison ain't no word for it, Missus Er——" he concluded lamely as he tried to remember Yetta's name, which after so much soup, fish and coffee had completely escaped him.

"Lubliner," Yetta said. "I guess you know my husband, Mr. Scharley, Elkan Lubliner of Polatkin, Scheikowitz & Company."

Scharley struck the table with his open hand.

"Zoitently, I do," he cried. "Why, he is the feller which Sol Klinger is telling me about."

Yetta coloured slightly and bit her lips.

"What did he tell you about him?" she asked.

[Pg 318] "Why," Scharley said, drawing vigorously on his imagination, "he says to me what a bright young feller he is and——"

Here he reflected that in a highly competitive trade like the cloak and suit business this statement sounded a trifle exaggerated.

"And," he went on hurriedly, "he told me how he saw you and him with Mrs. Lesengeld up at the hotel the other evening, and I says, 'What,' I says, 'you don't mean Mrs. Lesengeld whose husband used to was in the pants business?' and he said he didn't know, 'because,' I says, 'if that's the same party,' I says, 'I would like for her to come up to the hotel and take dinner with me some time,' I says."

He smiled cordially at Mrs. Lesengeld.

"And I hope you will," he concluded earnestly, "to-morrow night sure."

Mrs. Lesengeld shook her head.

"I ain't fixed to go to no swell hotel," she demurred. "I ain't got no clothes nor nothing."

"What do you care about clothes, Mrs. Lesengeld?" Scharley protested.

"And besides," Yetta said with sudden inspiration, "we could get up a little chafing-dish dinner in our room, ain't it?"

"For that matter we could do it in my room," Scharley cried, as there sounded a vigorous knocking on the outside of the door leading to the veranda, and a moment later Williams entered.

[Pg 319] "Excuse me, Mr. Scharley," he said, "but I have to be getting back to the hotel and if you're quite through we'll go and look at that map of the lots down in the office."

Scharley waved his hand airily.

"Sit down, Mr. Williams," he said, "and drink the cup of coffee of your life."

He handed the room clerk a cigar.

"I could promise you one thing, Mr. Williams," he went on, "I got a great idee of buying some lots here and building a little house on 'em, *gemütlich* just like this, and if I do, Williams, I would take them lots from you for certain sure. Only one thing, Williams, I want you to do me for a favour."

He paused and puffed carefully on his cigar.

"I want you to pick me out a couple good vacant rooms on the top floor of the Salisbury for Saturday night," he said, "where I could give a shaving-dish party, so if any of the guests of the hotel objects, understand me, they wouldn't get the smell of the *Bortch*, coffee, and brown stewed fish sweet and sour."

On the following Wednesday afternoon Elkan sat at his desk, while Marcus Polatkin and Philip Scheikowitz leaned over his left shoulder and right shoulder respectively, and watched carefully the result of a pencilled addition which Elkan was making.

[Pg 320] "With them crêpe meteors," Elkan said at last, "Scharley's order comes to four thousand three hundred dollars."

Polatkin and Scheikowitz nodded in unison.

"It ain't bad for a start," Scheikowitz volunteered as he sat down and lit a cigar.

"For a finish, neither," Polatkin added, "so far as that's concerned."

Elkan wheeled round in his chair and grinned delightedly.

"And you ought to seen Sol Klinger when we walked into the Hanging Gardens," he said. "He got white like a sheet. It tickled Scharley to death, and he went right to work and put his arm through Mrs. Lesengeld's arm and took her right down to the middle table, like she would be a queen already."

"Sure," Scheikowitz agreed, "what does a real merchant like Scharley care if she would wear a *sheitel oder* not, so long as she is a lady already."

Elkan's grin spread until it threatened to engulf his ears.

"She didn't wear no *sheitel*," he said.

"What!" Scheikowitz cried. "I didn't think a religious woman like Mrs. Lesengeld would take off her *sheitel* at *her* time of life."

[Pg 321]

"What d'ye mean *her* time of life?" Elkan cried indignantly. "Friday afternoon yet before Yetta went home from her place there at Bognor Park, Mrs. Lesengeld says to her that a widder don't got to wear no *sheitel* if she don't want to, which if you think, Mr. Scheikowitz, that fifty-three is a time of life, understand me, I think differencely, especially when I seen her with her hair all fixed up on Saturday night."

"Who fixed it?" Marcus Polatkin asked, and Elkan grinned again.

"Who d'ye suppose?" he replied. "Why, her and Yetta spent pretty near an hour up in our room before they got through, and I tell yer with the way they turned up the hem and fixed the sleeves of one of Yetta's black dresses, it fitted her like it would be made for her."

"And did she look good in it?" Scheikowitz inquired.

"Did she look good in it!" Elkan exclaimed. "Well, you can just bet your life, Mr. Polatkin, that there Hortense Feldman wasn't one, two, six with her. In fact, Mr. Polatkin, you would take your oath already that there wasn't two years between 'em. I had a good chance to compare 'em on account when we went down to the Hanging Gardens, understand me, Miss Feldman sits at the next table already."

Polatkin smiled broadly.

[Pg 322]

"She must have had a big *Schreck*," he commented. "Why, B. Gans told me last Saturday that Henry D. Feldman thinks that he's going to fix the whole thing up between her and Scharley."

"I guess he ain't got that idee no longer," Elkan declared, "because everybody in Egremont knows Scharley was down visiting Mrs. Lesengeld over Sunday, and takes her and her daughter Fannie and Fannie's husband out oitermobiling."

"You don't tell me?" Scheikowitz exclaimed.

"Furthermore, on Monday," Elkan continued, "he goes down there to dinner with me and Yetta, and Mrs. Lesengeld cooks some *Tebeches* which fairly melts in your mouth already."

He smacked his lips over the recollection.

"Yesterday, as you know," he went on, "I took Scharley and Mrs. Lesengeld over to Coney Island in an oitermobile and to-night yet we are all going sailing on Egremont Bay."

Polatkin rose to his feet and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "why not? They're about the same age."

"He's two years older as she is," Elkan declared, "and I bet yer they wouldn't lose no time. It'll be next fall sure."

[Pg 323]

One busy morning three months later Elkan ripped open a heavy cream-laid envelope and drew out the following announcement, engraved in shaded old English type:

Mrs. Fannie Stubin
has the honor of announcing the marriage
of her mother

Mrs. Sarah Lesengeld

to

Mr. Jacob Scharley

**On Tuesday the first of October
at San Francisco, California**

"And what are we going to send them for a present?" Polatkin asked.

Elkan smiled serenely.

"A solid silver chafing dish," he replied without hesitation, "at the very least, big enough to hold five pounds of brown stewed fish sweet and sour."

THE END



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Transcriber's Note:

The 1912 edition of this text contains numerous words and phrases with variant spellings. For the most part these variations have been retained to maintain the flavor of the original text, and only obvious spelling and punctuation errors have been corrected, as detailed below. A few changes have also been made with formatting of punctuation for text consistency.

The name of character Kent J. Goldenfein, who is introduced on pages 142-145, changes on page 210 to Kent J. "Goldstein" and subsequently remains "Goldstein" for the remainder of the story. This inconsistency has been retained to match the 1912 text.

Typographical Corrections:

[Page 4](#). Added close-quotes. ("... Yosel to come to America.")

[Page 10](#). Removed close-quotes. (threshold of the cutting room.)

[Page 14](#). Changed question mark to comma. ("He is in Minsk," said young Borrochson.)

[Page 27](#). Changed "de,manded" to "demanded". (Philip demanded.)

[Page 27](#). Changed "jerred" to "jeered". (Philip jeered.)

[Page 37](#). Removed close-quotes. (Polatkin rose to his feet.)

[Page 50](#). Added period. (the tops of her powdered cheeks.)

[Page 64](#). Changed "Scheikowizt" to "Scheikowitz". (Scheikowitz protested.)

[Page 87](#). Changed "Sheikowitz" to "Scheikowitz". ("... Mr. Scheikowitz, so sure as I am sitting here....")

[Page 91](#). Added open-quotes. ("I suppose, Elkan, you are wondering....")

[Page 92](#). Changed "Poltakin" to "Polatkin". ("... Flixman's store?" Polatkin asked.)

[Page 97](#). Changed "Mr" to "Mr." ("... right buying idee, Mr. Kapfer....")

[Page 152](#). Removed close-quotes. (begun at dinner that evening.)

[Page 153](#). Added close-quotes. ("... oder Schwefel & Zucker.")

[Page 153](#). Changed "Kolbin's" to "Koblin's". (Max Koblin's house)

[Page 182](#). Removed end-quotes. (to make further inquiries.)

[Page 199](#). Added close-quotes. ("What time do you eat dinner?")

[Page 225](#). Changed "tansactions" to "transactions". (all real-estate transactions involving)

[Page 241](#). Added close-quotes. ("... the other fellow's case.")

[Page 263](#). Added period. ("... makes up his mind yet.")

[Page 279](#). Added period. (his high, piping voice.)

[Page 281](#). Added comma. ("If we didn't," he continued....)

[Page 294](#). Added close-quotes. ("... for a couple of months.")

[Page 295](#). Changed "deprecatio" to "deprecation." (gesture of deprecation.)

[Page 312](#). Corrected open-quotes. ("Brown stewed fish...")

[Page 317](#). Added close-quotes. ("... Scheikowitz & Company.")

[Page 320](#). Added close-quotes. ("... three hundred dollars.")

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