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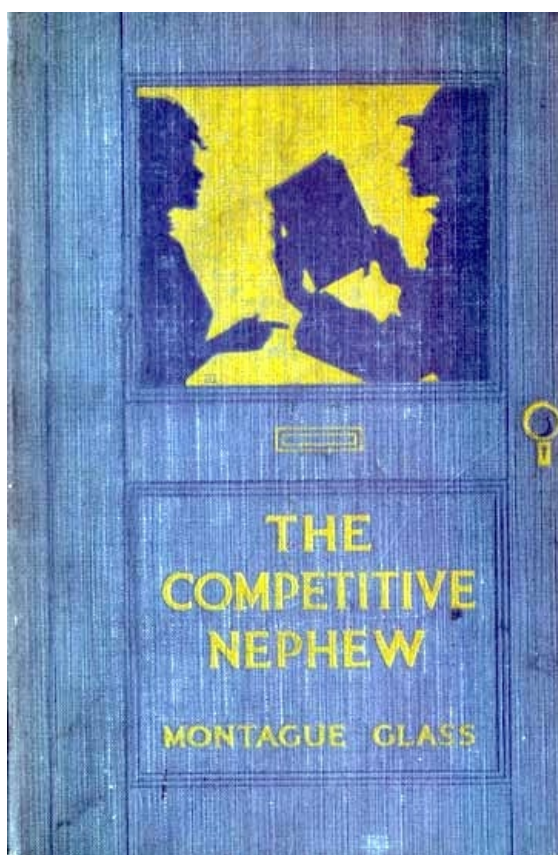
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE COMPETITIVE NEPHEW ***



THE COMPETITIVE NEPHEW

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"He ain't been in the place a year, y'understand, and to-night he marries a relation of his boss and he gets three hundred dollars in the bargain"

The Competitive Nephew

By

MONTAGUE GLASS



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"He ain't been in the place a year, y'understand, and to-night he
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in the bargain"

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THE COMPETITIVE NEPHEW

CHAPTER ONE

"THAT'S the way it goes," Sam Zaretsky cried bitterly. "You raise a couple of young fellers up in your business, Max, and so soon they know all you could teach 'em they turn around and go to work and do you every time."

Max Fatkin nodded.

"I told it you when we started in as new beginners, Sam, you should got a lady bookkeeper," he said. "The worst they could do is to get married on you, and all you are out is a couple dollars cut-glass for an engagement present and half a dozen dessert spoons for the wedding. But so soon as you hire a man for a bookkeeper, Sam, he gets a line on your customers, and the first thing you know he goes as partners together with your designer, and what could you do? Ain't it?"

"Louis Sen was a good bookkeeper, Max," Sam rejoined.

"Sure, I know," Max agreed, "and Hillel Greenberg was a good designer. That sucker is such a good designer, Sam, he will take away all our trade."

"Not all our trade, Max," Sam declared. "*Gott sei dank*, we got a few good customers what them suckers couldn't steal off of us. We got, anyhow, Aaron Pinsky. I seen Aaron on the subway this morning, and he says he would be in to see us this afternoon yet."

"That's nothing new, Sam. That feller comes in here whenever he's downtown. I guess some of our customers think he's a partner here."

"Let 'em think so, Max, it don't do us no harm that people should think we got it a rich man like Pinsky for a partner."

"Sure, I know," Fatkin rejoined. "But the feller takes liberties around here, Sam. He tells us what we should do and what we shouldn't do. If it wouldn't be that Pinsky was all the time cracking up Louis Sen I would of fired him *schon* long since already. Louis was always too independent, anyhow, and if we would of got rid of him a year ago, Sam, he wouldn't have gone as partners together with Hillel Greenberg, and we wouldn't now be bucking up against a couple of dangerous competitors."

"That's all right, Max. As I told you before, Aaron Pinsky is a good customer of ours, and if a good customer butts into your business he is only taking an interest in you; whereas, if a fellow which only buys from you goods occasionally, y'understand, butts in, then he's acting fresh and you could tell him so."

"But Pinsky butts into our business so much, Sam, that if he was the best customer a concern ever had, Sam, he would be fresh anyhow. The feller actually tells me yesterday he is going to bring us a new bookkeeper."

"A new bookkeeper!" Zaretsky exclaimed. "Why, we already got it a new bookkeeper, Max. I thought we hired it Miss Meyerson what used to be with Klinger & Klein. She's coming to work here Monday. Ain't it?"

"Sure, she is," Fatkin replied.

"Well, why didn't you tell him so?"

Fatkin shrugged.

"You tell him," he said. "I didn't got the nerve, Sam, because you know as well as I do, Sam, if I would turn him down and he gets mad, Sam, the first thing you know we are out a good customer and Greenberg & Sen would get him sure."

"Well, we got to go about this with a little diplomasher, y'understand."

"Diplomasher?" Max repeated. "What is that—diplomasher?"

"Diplomasher, that's French what you would say that a feller should watch out when you are dealing with a grouchy proposition like Aaron Pinsky."

"French, hey?" Max commented. "Well, I ain't no Frencher, Sam, and neither is Aaron Pinsky."

And, furthermore, Sam, you couldn't be high-toned with an old-fashioned feller like Aaron Pinsky. Lately I don't know what come over you at all. You use such big words, like a lawyer or a doctor."

Sam was working his cigar around his mouth to assist the cerebation of a particularly cutting rejoinder, when the elevator door opened, and Pinsky himself alighted.

"Hallo, boys," he said, "ain't this rotten weather we are having? December is always either one thing or the other, but it is never both."

"You shouldn't ought to go out in weather like this," Max said. "To a feller which got it a cough like you, Aaron, it is positively dangerous, such a damp mees-erable weather which we are having it."

Aaron nodded and smiled at this subtle form of flattery. He possessed the worst asthmatic cough in the cloak and suit trade, and while he suffered acutely at times, he could not conceal a sense of pride in its ownership. It sounded like a combination of a patent automobile alarm and the shaking of dried peas in an inflated bladder, and when it seized Aaron in public conveyances, old ladies nearly fainted, and doctors, clergymen, and undertakers evinced a professional interest, for it seemed impossible that any human being could survive some of Aaron's paroxysms. Not only did he withstand them, however, but he appeared positively to thrive upon them, and albeit he was close on to fifty, he might well have passed for thirty-five.

"I stood a whole lot of Decembers already," he said, "and I guess I wouldn't die just yet a while."

As if to demonstrate his endurance, he emitted a loud whoop, and started off on a fit of wheezing that bulged every vein in his forehead and left him shaken and exhausted in the chair that Max had vacated.

"Yes, boys," he gasped, "the only thing which seems to ease it is smoking. Now, you wouldn't believe that, would you?"

Max evidenced his faith by producing a large black cigar and handing it to Pinsky.

"Why don't you try another doctor, Aaron?" Sam Zaretsky asked. Pinsky raised his right hand with the palm outward and flipped his fingers.

"I've went to every professor in this country and the old country," he declared, "and they couldn't do a thing for me, y'understand. They say as I grow older, so I would get better, and certainly they are right. This is nothing what I got it now. You ought to of heard me when I was a young feller. Positively, Max, I got kicked out of four boarding-houses on account the people complained so. One feller wanted to make me arrested already, such hearts people got it."

Max Fatkin nodded sympathetically, and thus encouraged Aaron continued his reminiscences.

"Yes, boys," he said, "in them days I worked by old man Baum on Catherine Street. Six dollars a week and P.M.'s I made it, but even back in 1880 P.M.'s was nix. The one-price system was coming in along about that time, and if oncet in a while you could soak an Italiener six twenty-five for a five dollar overcoat, you was lucky if you could get fifty cents out of old man Baum. Nowadays is different already. Instead of young fellers learning business by business men like old man Baum, they go to business colleges yet, and certainly I don't say it ain't just as good."

Sam Zaretsky exchanged significant glances with his partner, Max Fatkin, and they both puffed hard on their cigars.

"You take my nephew, Fillup, for instance," Aaron went on. "There's a boy of sixteen which just graduated from business college, and the boy writes such a hand which you wouldn't believe at all. He gets a silver medal from the college for making a bird with a pen—something remarkable. The eyes is all little dollar marks. I took it down to Shenkman's picture store, and seventy-five cents that sucker charges me for framing it."

"That's nothing, Aaron," Sam Zaretsky broke in, with a diplomatic attempt at a conversational diversion. "That's nothing at all. I could tell you myself an experience which I got with Shenkman. My wife's mother sends her a picture from the old country yet—"

"Not that I am kicking at all," Aaron interrupted, "because it was worth it. I assure you, Sam, I don't begrudge seventy-five cents for that boy, because the boy is a good boy, y'understand. The boy is a natural-born bookkeeper. Single entry and double entry, he could do it like nothing, and neat—that boy is neat like a pin."

"Huh, huh!" Max grunted.

"Yes," Aaron added, "you didn't make no mistake when you got me to bring you Fillup for a bookkeeper."

It was at this point that Max threw diplomacy to the winds.

"Got you to bring us a bookkeeper!" he exclaimed. "Why, Aaron, I ain't said a word about getting us this here—now—Fillup for a bookkeeper. We already hired it a bookkeeper."

"What?" Aaron cried. "Do you mean to say you got the nerve to sit there and tell me you ain't asked me I should bring you a bookkeeper?"

"Why, Aaron," Sam interrupted with a withering glance at his partner. "I ain't saying nothing one way or the other, y'understand, but I don't think Max could of asked you because, only this morning, Aaron, Max and me was talking about this here, now—what's-his-name—and we was saying that nowadays what future was there for a young feller as a bookkeeper? Ain't it? I says to Max distinctively: 'If Aaron would bring us his nephew we would give him a job on stock. Then the first thing you know the boy gets to be a salesman and could make his five thousand dollars a year.' But what could a bookkeeper expect to be? Ain't it? At the most he makes thirty dollars a week, and there he sticks."

"Is that so?" Aaron retorted ironically. "Well, look at Louis Sen. I suppose Louis sticks at thirty a week, hey?"

"Louis Sen is something else again," Sam replied. "Louis Sen is a crook, Aaron, not a bookkeeper. That feller comes into our place two years ago, and he ain't got five cents in his clothes, and we thought we was doing him a charity when we hired him. It reminds you of the feller which picks up a frozen snake and puts it in his pants-pocket to get warm, and the first thing you know, Aaron, the snake wakes up, and bites the feller in the leg. Well, that's the way it was with Louis Sen. Gratitude is something which the feller don't understand at all. But you take this here nephew of yours, and he comes from decent, respectable people, y'understand. There's a young feller, Aaron, what we could trust, Aaron, and so when he comes to work by us on stock, Aaron, we give him a show he should learn all about the business, and you take it from me, Aaron, if the boy ain't going out on the road to sell goods for us in less than two years he ain't as smart as his uncle is, and that's all I can say."

Aaron smiled, and Sam looked triumphantly at his partner.

"All right, Sam," Aaron commented, "I see you got the boy's interest at heart. So I would bring the boy down here on Monday morning. And now, Max, let's get to work on them misses' Norfolk suits. I want eight of them blue serges."

There was something about Miss Miriam Meyerson that suggested many things besides ledgers and trial balances, and she would have been more "in the picture" had she been standing in front of a kitchen table with her sleeves tucked up and a rolling-pin grasped firmly in her large, plump hands.

"I don't know, Sam," Max Fatkin remarked on Monday. "That girl don't look to me an awful lot like business. Mind you, I ain't kicking that she looks too fresh, y'understand, because she reminds me a good deal of my poor mother, *selig*."

"Ain't that the funniest thing?" Sam Zaretsky broke in. "I was just thinking to myself she is a dead ringer for my sister Fannie. You know my sister, Mrs. Brody?"

"I bet yer," Max Fatkin said fervently. "That's one fine lady, Mrs. Brody. Me and my Esther had dinner there last Sunday. And, while I got to admit my Esther is a good *cook*, y'understand, Mrs. Brody—that's a *good* cook, Sam. We had some *fleisch kugel* there, Sam, I could assure you, better as Delmonico's—the Waldorf, too."

Sam nodded.

"If she is as good a bookkeeper as Fannie is a cook, Max," he replied, "I am satisfied. Sol Klinger says that she is A Number One. Always prompt to the minute and a hard worker."

"Well, why did he fire her, Sam?" Max asked.

"He didn't fire her. She got a sister living in Bridgetown married to Harris Schevrien, and Miss Meyerson goes up there last spring right in the busy time. Of course Klinger & Klein has got to let her go because under the circumstances, Max, she is the only sister Mrs. Schevrien got, y'understand. Then when the baby is two weeks old it gets sick, y'understand, and Miss Meyerson writes 'em not to expect her back before August. Naturally they got to fill her place, but Sol Klinger tells me she is a dandy, Max, and we should be lucky we got her."

"Well, certainly she don't seem to be loafing none," Max commented, with a glance toward the office where Miss Meyerson was making out the monthly statements. "So far what I could see she is working twicet as fast as Louis Sen, and we ain't paying her only fifteen dollars."

"Sure, I know," Sam said, "but you got to consider it we would also got to pay Fillup Pinsky five dollars a week, so we ain't in much on that."

"Why ain't we, Sam? I bet yer we would get our money's worth out of Fillup. That boy ain't going to fool away his time here, Sam, and don't you forget it."

The corners of his mouth tightened in a manner that boded ill for Philip, and his face had not resumed its normal amiability when Aaron Pinsky entered, with his nephew Philip in tow.

"Hallo, boys," he said. "This is the young man I was talking to you about. Fillup, shake hands with Mr. Zaretsky and Mr. Fatkin."

After this operation was concluded, Mr. Pinsky indulged in a fit of coughing that almost broke the carbon filaments in the electric-light bulbs.

"Fillup," he gasped, as he wiped his crimson face, "make for them a couple birds with a pen."

"That's all right," Max interrupted, "we take your word for it. Birds is nix here, Aaron. We ain't in the millinery business, we are in the cloak and suit business, and instead Fillup should be making birds yet, he shouldn't lose no time, but Sam will show him our stock. Right away we will learn him the line."

"Business ahead of pleasure, Aaron," Sam broke in hurriedly, with a significant frown at his partner. "The boy will got lots of time to make birds in the dull season. Just now we are rushed to death, Aaron. Come, Fillup, I'll show you where you should put your hat and coat."

Max forced an amiable smile as he handed Aaron Pinsky a cigar.

"I congratulate you, Aaron," he said. "You got a smart boy for a nephew, and I bet yer he would learn quick the business. For a start we will pay him three dollars a week."

Aaron stared indignantly and almost snatched the proffered cigar from Max's hand.

"Three dollars a week!" he exclaimed. "What do you take the boy for—a greenhorn? Positively you should pay the boy five dollars, otherwise he would put on his clothes and go right straight home."

"But, Aaron," Max protested, "I *oser* got three dollars a week when I started in as a new beginner. I was glad they should pay me two dollars a week so long as I learned it the business."

"I suppose you went to business college, too, Max. What? I bet yer when you first went to work you got to think hard before you could sign your name even."

Max shrugged his shoulders.

"Birds, I couldn't make it, Aaron," he admitted; "but the second week I was out of Castle Garden my mother, *selig*, sends me to night school, and they don't learn you birds in night school, Aaron. But, anyhow, Aaron, what's the use we should quarrel about it? If you want we should pay the boy five dollars a week—all right. I'm sure if he's worth three he's worth five. Ain't it? And what's more, Aaron, if the boy shows he takes an interest we would give him soon a raise of a couple of dollars. We ain't small."

"I know you ain't, Max," said Aaron, "otherwise I wouldn't bring the boy here at all."

He looked proudly toward the rear of the showroom where Philip was examining the ticketed garments under the supervision of Sam Zaretsky.

"The boy already takes an interest, Max," he said; "I bet yer he would know your style-numbers by to-night already."

For half an hour longer Sam Zaretsky explained the sample line to Philip, and at length he handed the boy a feather duster, and returned to the front of the showroom.

"The boy is all right, Aaron," he said. "A good, smart boy, Max, and he ain't afraid to open his mouth, neither."

"I bet yer he ain't," Aaron replied, as Philip approached with a sample garment in one hand and the feather duster in the other.

"Look, Mr. Zaretsky," he said, "here's one of your style twenty-twenty-two with a thirty-twenty-two ticket on to it."

Sam examined the garment and stared at his partner.

"The boy is right, Max," he said. "We got the wrong ticket on that garment."

For one brief moment Aaron glanced affectionately at his nephew, and then he voiced his pride and admiration in a paroxysm of coughing that made Miss Meyerson come running from the office.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Couldn't I do something?"

For almost five minutes Aaron rocked and wheezed in his chair. At length, when he seemed to be at the point of suffocation, Miss Meyerson slapped him on the back, and with a final gasp he recovered his breath.

"Thanks, much obliged," he said, as he wiped his streaming eyes.

"You're sure you don't want a doctor?" Miss Meyerson said.

"Me? A doctor?" he replied. "What for?"

He picked up his cigar from the floor and struck a match. "This is all the doctor I need," he said.

Miss Meyerson returned to the office.

"Who's that?" Aaron inquired, nodding his head in the direction of Miss Meyerson.

"That's our new bookkeeper which we got it," Max replied.

"So you hired it a lady bookkeeper," Aaron commented. "What did you done that for, Max?"

"Well, why not?" Max retorted. "We got with her first class, A Number One references, Aaron, and although she only come this morning, she is working so smooth like she was with us six months already. For my part it is all the same to me if we would have a lady bookkeeper, or a bookkeeper."

"I know," Aaron continued, "but ladies in business is like salt in the cawfee. Salt is all right and cawfee also, but you don't got to hate salt exactly, y'understand, to kick when it gets in the cawfee. That's the way with me, Max; I ain't no lady-hater, y'understand, but I don't like 'em in business, except for saleswomen, models, and buyers, y'understand."

"But that Miss Meyerson," Sam broke in, "she attends strictly to business, Aaron."

"Sure, I know, Sam," Aaron replied. "Slaps me on the back yet when I am coughing."

"Well, she meant it good, Aaron," Sam said.

"Sure, that's all right," Aaron agreed. "Sure, she meant it good. But it's the *idee* of the thing, y'understand. Women in business always means good, Max, but they butt in too much."

"Other people butts in, too," Max added.

"I don't say they don't, Max. But you take it me, for instance. When something happens which it makes me feel bad, Max, I got to swear, y'understand. I couldn't help it. And, certainly, while I don't say that swearing is something which a gentleman should do, especially when there's a lady, y'understand, still, swearing a little sometimes is good for the *gesund*. Instead a feller should make another feller a couple blue eyes, Max, let him swear. It don't harm nobody, and certainly nobody could sue you in the courts because you swear at him like he could if you make for him a couple blue eyes. But you take it when there is ladies, Max, and then you couldn't swear."

"Sure, I know," Max rejoined; "and you couldn't make it a couple blue eyes on a feller when ladies would be present neither, Aaron. It wouldn't be etty-kit."

"Me, I ain't so strong on the etty-kit," Sam broke in at this juncture; "but I do know, Max, that we are fooling away our whole morning here."

Aaron Pinsky rose.

"Well, boys," he said, "I got to be going. So I wish you luck with your new boy."

Once more he looked affectionately toward the rear of the room where Philip industriously wielded the feather duster, and then made his way toward the elevator. As he passed Miss Meyerson's desk she looked up and beamed a farewell at him. He caught it out of the corner of his eye and frowned absently.

"I wish you better," Miss Meyerson called.

"Thanks very much," Aaron replied, as the floor of the descending elevator made a dark line across the ground-glass door of the shaft. He half paused for a moment, but his shyness overcame him.

"Going down!" he yelled, and thrusting his hat more firmly on his head he disappeared into the elevator.

Three days afterward Aaron Pinsky again visited Zaretsky & Fatkin, and as he alighted from

the elevator Miss Meyerson came out of her office with a small package in her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Pinsky," she said, "I've got something for you."

"Me?" Aaron cried, stopping short in his progress toward the showroom. "All right."

"You know I couldn't get to sleep the other night thinking of the way you were coughing," she continued. "Every time I closed my eyes I could hear it."

Evidently this remark called for comment of some kind, and Aaron searched his brain for a suitable rejoinder.

"That's nice," he murmured at last.

"So I spoke to my cousin, Mrs. Doctor Goldenreich, about it," she went on, "and the doctor gave me this medicine for you. You should take a tablespoonful every four hours, and when it's all gone I'll get you some more."

She handed the bottle to Aaron, who thrust it into his overcoat-pocket.

"Thanks; much obliged," he said hoarsely.

"Don't mention it," she commented as she returned to the office.

Aaron looked after her in blank surprise. "Sure not," he muttered, starting off for the showroom in long, frightened strides.

"Say, Max," he said, "what's the matter with that girl? Is she *verrückt*?"

"*Verrückt!*" Max exclaimed. "What d'ye mean—*verrückt*? Say, lookyhere, Aaron, you should be careful what you are saying about a lady like Miss Meyerson. She already found where Louis Sen makes mistakes, which *Gott weiss wie vile* it costed us yet. You shouldn't say nothing about that girl, Aaron, because she is a cracker-jack, A Number One bookkeeper."

"Did I say she wasn't?" Aaron replied. "I am only saying she acts to me very funny, Max. She gives me this here bottle of medicine just now."

He poked the package at Max, who handled it gingerly, as though it might explode at any minute.

"What d'ye give it to me for?" he cried. "I don't want it."

"Well, I don't want it, neither," Aaron replied. "She ain't got no right to act fresh like that and give me medicine which I ain't asked for at all."

He looked exceedingly hurt and voiced his indignation with a tremendous whoop, the forerunner of a dozen minor whoops which shaded off into a succession of wheezes. It seemed to Max and Sam that Aaron would never succeed in catching his breath, and just when he appeared to be at his ultimate gasp Miss Meyerson ran up with a tablespoon. She snatched the bottle from Max's grasp and, tearing off the wrapping paper, she drew the cork and poured a generous dose.

"Take this right now," she commanded, pressing the spoon to Aaron's lips. With a despairing glance at Max he swallowed the medicine, and immediately afterward made a horrible grimace.

"T'phooee!" he cried. "What the—what are you trying to do—poison me?"

"That won't poison you," Miss Meyerson declared. "It'll do you good. All he needs is about six more doses, Mr. Fatkin, and he'd be rid of that cough in no time."

Max nodded.

"Miss Meyerson is right, Aaron," he said. "You ought to take care of yourself."

Aaron wiped his eyes and his moustache with his handkerchief.

"You ain't got maybe a little *schnapps* in your desk, Max?" he said.

"*Schnapps* is the worst thing you could take, Mr. Pinsky," Miss Meyerson cried. "Don't give him any, Mr. Fatkin; it'll only make him worse."

She shook her head warningly at Aaron as she and Sam walked back to the office.

"What d'ye think for a fresh woman like that?" he said to Max as Miss Meyerson's head once more bent over her books.

"She ain't fresh, Aaron," Max replied. "She's just got a heart, y'understand."

"But—" Aaron began.

"But nothing, Aaron," Max broke in. "I will wrap up the medicine and you will take it home with you. The girl knows what she is talking about, Aaron, and the best thing for you to do is to leave off *schnapps* a little while and do what she says you should. I see on the bottle it's from Doctor Goldenreich. He's a specialist from the chest and lungs, and I bet yer if you would go to him he would soak you ten dollars yet."

No argument could have appealed so strongly to Aaron as this did, and he thrust the bottle into his breast-pocket without another word.

"And how is Fillup coming on?" he asked.

"We couldn't complain," Max replied. "The boy is a good boy, Aaron. He is learning our line like he would be with us six months already."

"That's good," Aaron commented. "I bet yer before he would be here a month yet he would know the line as good as Sam and you."

Max smiled.

"I says the boy is a good boy, Aaron," he said, "but I never says he was a miracle, y'understand."

"That ain't no miracle, Max," Aaron retorted. "That's a prophecy."

Max smiled again, but the prediction more than justified itself in less than a month, for at the end of that time Philip knew the style-number and price of every garment in Zaretsky & Fatkin's line.

"I never see nothing like it, Sam," Max said. "The boy is a human catalogue. You couldn't stump him on nothing."

"Sure, I know," Sam replied. "Sometimes I got to think we make a mistake in letting that boy know all our business."

"A mistake!" Max repeated. "What d'ye mean a mistake?"

"I mean, Max, that the first thing you know Aaron goes around blowing to our competitors how well that boy is doing here, Max, and then a concern like Sammet Brothers or Klinger & Klein would offer the boy seven dollars a week, and some fine day we'll come downtown and find that Fillup's got another job. Also the feller what hires him would have a human catalogue of our whole line, prices and style-numbers complete."

"Always you are looking for trouble, Sam," Max cried.

"Looking for it I ain't, Max. I don't got to look for it, because when a feller got it a competitor like Greenberg & Sen, Max, he could find trouble without looking for it. Them suckers was eating lunch in Wasserbauer's on Monday when Aaron goes in there with Fillup. Elenbogen, of Plotkin & Elenbogen, seen the whole thing, Max, and he told it me this morning in the subway to make me feel bad. Sometimes without meaning it at all a feller could do you a big favour when he tells you something for spite. Ain't it?"

"What did he tell you?" Max asked.

"He says that Greenberg & Sen goes over to Aaron's table and the first thing you know a box of cigars is going around and Fillup is drinking a bottle of celery tonic. Elenbogen says you would think Aaron was nobody, because them two fellers ain't paid no attentions to him at all. Everything was Fillup. They made a big holler about the boy, Max, and they asks Elenbogen to lend 'em his fountain pen so the boy could make it birds on the back of the bill-off-fare. Elenbogen says his fountain pen was put out of business ever since. Also, Sen insists on taking the bill-off-fare away with him, and Elenbogen says Aaron feels so set up about it he thought he would spit blood yet, the way he coughs."

"That's a couple of foxy young fellers," Max said. "You could easy get around a feller like Aaron Pinsky, Sam. He's a soft proposition."

Sam nodded and was about to voice another criticism of Aaron much less complimentary in character, when the elevator door clanged and Aaron himself entered the showroom.

"Well, boys," he said, "looks like we would get an early spring. Here it is only February already and I feel it that the winter is pretty near over. I could always tell by my throat what the weather is going to be. My cough lets up on me something wonderful, and with me that's always what you would call a sign of spring."

"Might it's a sign that Miss Meyerson's medicine done you good, maybe," Max commented.

"Well, certainly it ain't done me no harm," Aaron said. "I took six bottles already, and though it ain't the tastiest thing in the world, y'understand, it loosens up the chest something wonderful."

He slapped himself in the region of the diaphragm and sat down deliberately.

"However," he began, "I ain't come to talk to you about myself. I got something else to say."

He paused impressively, while Max and Sam exchanged mournful glances.

"I come to talk to you about Fillup," he continued. "There's a boy which he got it ability, y'understand. Five dollars a week is nothing for a boy like that."

"Ain't it?" Max retorted. "Where could you find it a boy which is only six weeks in his first job and gets more, Aaron?"

Aaron waved his hand deprecatingly.

"I don't got to go very far away from here, Max," he said, "to find a concern which would be willing to pay such a boy like Fillup ten dollars a week, and that's twicet as much as five."

"But, Aaron——" Max began, when Sam Zaretsky rose to his feet and raised his hand in the solemn gesture of a traffic policeman at a busy crossing.

"Listen here to me, Aaron," Sam declared. "Always up to now you been a good friend to us. You bought from us goods which certainly we try our best to make up A Number One, and the prices also we made right. In return you always paid us prompt to the day and you give us also a whole lot of advice, which we took it in the spirit in which it was given us. That's all right, too."

He stopped for breath and wet his dry lips before he proceeded.

"Also," he continued, "when you come to us and wanted us we should take on Fillup, Aaron, we didn't need him, y'understand, but all the same we took him because always you was a good customer of ours, and certainly, Aaron, I got to say that the boy is a good boy and he is worth to us if not five dollars a week, anyhow four dollars a week."

There was an ominous silence in the showroom as Sam gave himself another rest before continuing his ultimatum.

"But," he went on, "when you come to us and tell us that Greenberg & Sen offers the boy ten dollars a week and that we should raise him also, Aaron, all I got to say is—we wouldn't do it. Greenberg & Sen want your trade, Aaron; they don't want the boy. But if they got to pay the boy ten dollars a week, Aaron, then they would do so, and if it was necessary to pay him fifteen, they would do that, too. Then, Aaron, when you would buy goods off of them all they do is to add Fillup's wages to the price of the goods, y'understand, and practically he would work for them for nothing, because the wages comes out of your pocket, Aaron, and not theirs."

"I never said nothing at all about Greenberg & Sen," Aaron blurted out.

"No one else would make such a proposition, Aaron," Sam said, "because no one else wants business so bad as that. Ourselves we could offer the boy ten dollars, too, and although we couldn't raise prices on you, Aaron, we could make it up by skimping on the garments; but we ain't that kind, Aaron. A business man is got to be on the level with his customers, Aaron, otherwise he wouldn't be in business long; and you take it from me, Aaron, these here two young fellers, Greenberg & Sen, would got to do business differencely or it would be quick good-bye with 'em, and don't you forget it."

Aaron Pinsky rose to his feet and gazed hard at Sam Zaretsky.

"Shall I tell you something, Sam?" he said. "You are sore at them two boys because they quit you and goes into business by themselves. Ain't it?"

"I ain't sore they goes into business, Aaron," Sam replied. "Everybody must got to make a start, Aaron, and certainly it ain't easy for a new beginner to get established, y'understand. Also competition is competition, Aaron, and we ourselves cop out a competitor's trade oncet in a while, too, Aaron, but Greenberg & Sen takes advantage, Aaron. They see that you are fond of that boy Fillup, and certainly it does you credit, because you ain't married and you ain't got no children of your own, Aaron. But it don't do them credit that they work you for business by pretending that they want the boy because he is a smart boy and that they are going to pay him ten dollars a week because he's worth it. No, Aaron; they don't want the boy in the first place, and in the second place he ain't worth ten dollars a week, and in the third place they ain't going to pay him ten dollars a week, because they will add it to the cost of their garments; and, Aaron, if you want any fourth, fifth, or sixth places I could stand here talking for an hour. But you got business to attend to, Aaron, and so you must excuse me."

He thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets and walked stolidly toward the cutting room, while Aaron blinked in default of a suitable rejoinder.

"My partner is right, Aaron," Max said. "He is right, Aaron, even if he is the kind of feller that would throw me out of the window, supposing I says half the things to you as he did. But,

anyhow, Aaron, that ain't neither here nor there. You heard what Sam says, Aaron, and me, I stick to it also."



"You heard what Sam says, Aaron, and me, I stick to it also"

Aaron blinked once or twice more and then he put on his hat.

"All right," he said. "All right."

He turned toward the front of the showroom where his nephew was sorting over a pile of garments.

"Fillup!" he bellowed. "You should put on your hat and coat and come with me."

It was during the third month of Philip Pinsky's employment with Greenberg & Sen that Blaukopf, the druggist, insisted on a new coat of white paint for the interior of his up-to-date store at the northwest corner of Madison Avenue and One Hundred and Twenty-second Street. His landlord demurred at first, but finally, in the middle of June, a painter's wagon stopped in front of the store and Harris Shein, painter and decorator, alighted with two assistants. They conveyed into the store pots of white lead and cans of turpentine, gasoline, and other inflammable liquids used in the removal and mixing of paints. Harris Shein was smoking a paper cigarette, and one of the assistants, profiting by his employer's example, pulled a corn-cob pipe from his pocket. Then, after he had packed the tobacco down firmly with his finger, he drew a match across the seat of his trousers and forthwith he began a three months' period of enforced abstinence from house-painting and decorating. Simultaneously Blaukopf's plate-glass show-window fell into the street, the horse ran away with the painter's wagon, a policeman turned in a fire alarm, three thousand children came on the run from a radius of ten blocks, and Mr. Blaukopf's stock in trade punctuated the cremation of his fixtures with loud explosions at uncertain intervals. In less than half an hour the entire building was gutted, and when the firemen withdrew their apparatus Mr. Blaukopf searched in vain for his prescription books. They had resolved themselves into their original elements, and the number on the label of the bottle which Aaron carried around in his breast-pocket provided no clue to the ingredients of the medicine thus contained.

"That's a fine note," Aaron declared to Philip, as they surveyed the black ruins the next morning. "Now what would I do? Without that medicine I will cough my face off already."

He examined the label of the bottle and sighed.

"I suppose I could go and see that Doctor Goldenreich," he said, "and right away I am out ten dollars."

"Why don't you ring up Miss Meyerson over at Zaretsky & Fatkin's?" Philip suggested.

Aaron sighed heavily. His business relations with Greenberg & Sen had proved far from

satisfactory, and it was only Philip's job and his own sense of shame that prevented him from resuming his dealings with Zaretsky & Fatkin.

As for Sam and Max, they missed their old customer both financially and socially.

"Yes, Sam," Max said the day after Blaukopf's fire, "things ain't the same around here like in former times already."

"If you mean in the office, Max," Sam said, "I'm glad they ain't. That's a fine bookkeeper we got it, Max, and a fine woman, too. Ain't it a shame and a disgrace for young fellers nowadays, Max, that a fine woman like Miss Meyerson is already thirty-five and should be single? My Sarah is crazy about her. Her and Sarah goes to a matinee last Saturday afternoon together and Sarah asks her to dinner to-morrow."

Max nodded.

"With some bookkeepers, Sam," he said, "you couldn't do such things. Right away they would take advantage. Miss Meyerson, that's something else again. She takes an interest in our business, Sam. Even a grouch like Aaron Pinsky she treated good."

"I bet yer," Sam replied. "I seen Elenbogen in the subway this morning and he tells me Aaron goes around blowing about paying a thousand dollars to a professor uptown and he gives him a medicine which cures his cough completely. I bet yer that's the same medicine which he got it originally from Miss Meyerson."

"I bet yer," Max agreed as the telephone bell rang. Sam hastened to answer it.

"Hallo!" he said. "Yes, this is Zaretsky & Fatkin. You want to speak to Miss Meyerson? All right. Miss Meyerson! Telephone!"

Miss Meyerson came from her office and took the receiver from Sam.

"Hello," she said. "Who is this, please?"

The answer made her clap her hand over the transmitter.

"It's Aaron Pinsky," she said to Max, and both partners sprang to their feet.

"What does he want?" Sam hissed.

Miss Meyerson waved them to silence and resumed her conversation over the 'phone.

"Hello, Mr. Pinsky," she said. "What can I do for you?"

She listened patiently to Aaron's narrative of the fire in Blaukopf's drug store, and when he had concluded she winked furtively at her employers.

"Mr. Pinsky," she said, "won't you repeat that over again? I didn't understand it."

Once more Aaron explained the details of the prescription book's incineration, and again Miss Meyerson winked.

"Mr. Pinsky," she said, "I can't make out what you say. Why don't you stop in here at twelve o'clock? Mr. Zaretsky is going to Newark and Mr. Fatkin will be out to lunch."

She listened carefully for a few minutes and then her face broke into a broad grin.

"All right, Mr. Pinsky," she concluded. "Good-bye."

She turned to her employers.

"He's coming here at twelve o'clock," she said. "He told me that the drug store burnt down where he gets his cough medicine, and he wants another prescription. And I said I didn't understand him so as to get him over here."

"Well, what good would that do?" Max asked.

"I don't know exactly," Miss Meyerson answered, "but I saw Mr. Pinsky coming out of Greenberg & Sen's last week and he looked positively miserable. I guess he's just as anxious to get back here as you are to have him."

"Sure, I know," Max commented, "but we wouldn't pay that young feller, Fillup, ten dollars a week, and that's all there is to it."

"Perhaps you won't have to," said Miss Meyerson. "Perhaps if you leave this thing to me I can get Pinsky to come back here and have Philip stay over to Greenberg & Sen's."

"Huh!" Max snorted. "A fine chance that boy got it to keep his job if Aaron Pinsky quits buying goods! They'll fire him on the spot."

"Then we'll take him in here again," Sam declared. "He'll be glad to come back at the old figure, I bet yer."

"That's all right," Max grunted. "Never meld your cards till you see what's in the widder. First, Miss Meyerson will talk to him, and then we will consider taking back Fillup."

"Sure," Sam rejoined, "and you and me will go over to Wasserbauer's and wait there till Miss Meyerson telephones us."

It was precisely twelve when the elevator stopped at Zaretsky & Fatkin's floor. Aaron Pinsky alighted and walked on tiptoe to the office.

"Hallo, Miss Meyerson!" he said, extending his hand, "is any of the boys around?"

"They're both out," Miss Meyerson replied, shaking Aaron's proffered hand. "It looks like old times to see you back here."

"Don't it?" Pinsky said. "It feels like old times to me. Is the boys busy?"

"Very," said Miss Meyerson. "We're doing twice the business that the books show we did a year ago."

Aaron beamed.

"That's good," he said. "Them boys deserves it, Miss Meyerson. When you come to consider it, Miss Meyerson, I got pretty good treatment here. The goods was always made up right and the prices also. I never had no complaint to make. But certainly a feller has got to look out for his family, and so long as my nephew gets along good I couldn't kick if oncet in a while Greenberg & Sen sticks me with a couple of garments. Last week they done me up good with eight skirts."

"And how is Philip?" Miss Meyerson asked.

"Miss Meyerson," Aaron began, "that boy is a good boy, y'understand, but somehow or another Greenberg & Sen don't take no interest in him at all. I don't think he learns much there, even though they did raise him two dollars last week."

"And how is your cough getting on, Mr. Pinsky?" Miss Meyerson continued.

"Since I ain't been taking the medicine it ain't been so good," Aaron announced, and, as if in corroboration of his statement, he immediately entered upon a fit of coughing that well-nigh strangled him. After Miss Meyerson had brought him a glass of water he repeated the narrative of the burned-out drug store and produced the bottle from his breast-pocket.

"That's too bad that the prescription was burned," Miss Meyerson said. "I'll get another one from my cousin's husband to-night and bring it down here to-morrow."

"Hold on there, Miss Meyerson," Aaron said. "To-morrow them boys might be in here, and I don't want to risk it."

"Why, they wouldn't bite you, Mr. Pinsky," she declared.

"Sure, I know. But the fact is I feel kind of funny about meeting 'em again—just yet a while, anyhow."

"But, Mr. Pinsky," Miss Meyerson went on persuasively, "it's foolish of you to feel that way about it."

"Maybe it is," Aaron admitted, "but, just the same, Miss Meyerson, if you wouldn't think it fresh or anything, I'd like to come up and call on you to-night, if you don't mind, Miss Meyerson, and you could give me the prescription then."

"Why, certainly," Miss Meyerson cried heartily. She turned to her desk and opened her handbag.

"Here's my card," she said. "I live with my cousin, Mrs. Goldenreich."

"Thanks; much obliged," Aaron murmured, pocketing the card. "I'll be there at eight o'clock."

Once more he glanced furtively around him and then, with a final handshake, he started off on tiptoe for the stairs. As soon as he disappeared Miss Meyerson took up the receiver.

"Ten-oh-four-oh, Harlem," she said.

"Hello," she continued, "is this you, Bertha? Well, this is Miriam. Will you send over to Reisbecker's and get a four-pound haddock? Never mind what I want it for. I'm going to have company to-night. Yes, that's right, and I want to make some *gefüllte fische*. You say you have plenty of onions? Well, then, I'll bring home ten cents' worth of Spanish saffron and half a dozen fresh eggs. I'll make some *mohnkuchen* after I get home. Did my white silk waist come back from the cleaners? I don't care. You can't jolly me. Good-bye."

It was almost one o'clock before she remembered to telephone over to Wasserbauer's, and when Sam and Max returned they dashed into the office and exclaimed: "Well?" with what the musical critics call splendid attack.

"He's coming over to call on me to-night," Miss Meyerson replied with a blush, "and I'll see what I can do then."

"You see, Sam," Max commented, "I told you you shouldn't reckon up how much chickens you will got till the hen lays 'em."

Max Fatkin visited a buyer at an uptown hotel on his way to the office the following morning, so that it was nearly nine before he entered his showroom. As he walked from the elevator he glanced toward Miss Meyerson's desk. It was vacant.

"Sam," he cried, "where's Miss Meyerson?"

Sam Zaretsky emerged from behind a rack of skirts and shrugged his shoulders.

"She's late the first time since she's been with us, Max," he replied.

"Might she is sick, maybe," Max suggested. "I'll ring up her cousin, the doctor, and find out."

"That's a good idee," Sam replied. Max was passing the elevator door when it opened with a scrape and a clang.

"Hallo, Max!" a familiar voice cried.

Max turned toward the elevator and gasped, for it was Pinsky who stepped out. His wonder grew to astonishment, however, when he beheld Aaron tenderly assisting Miss Meyerson to alight from the elevator.

"Good morning," she said. "I'm late."

"That's all right," Max cried. "Any one which is always so prompt like you has a right to be late oncet in a while."

He looked at Aaron shyly and wet his lips with his tongue.

"Well," he began, "how's the boy?"

"Fillup is feeling fine, *Gott sei dank*," Aaron replied. "But never mind Fillup now. I come here because I got to tell you something, Max. Where's Sam?"

"Here I am, Aaron," Sam said, as he came fairly running from the showroom. "And you don't got to tell us nothing, Aaron, because a feller could buy goods where he wants to. Always up to three months ago you was a good friend to us, Aaron, and even if you wouldn't buy nothing from us at all we are glad to see you around here oncet in a while, anyhow."

"But, Sam," Aaron replied, "give me a chance to say something. Goods I ain't buying it to-day. I got other things to buy."

He turned to Miss Meyerson with a wide, affectionate grin on his kindly face.

"Yes, Sam," he continued, "I got a two-and-a-half carat blue-white solitaire diamond ring to buy."

"What!" Sam cried, while Max gazed at Miss Meyerson with his eyes bulging.

"That's right," Aaron went on; "a feller ain't never too old to make a home, and even if there would be ten years difference in our ages, ten years ain't so much."

"Especially when it's nearer twenty," Sam added gallantly.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," Aaron said. "The thing is, Max, that a woman ain't got no business in business unless she's got to, and Miriam ain't got to so long as I could help it. Yes, Sam, three months from to-day you and Max and Mrs. Fatkin and Mrs. Zaretsky would all come to dinner at our house and Miriam would make the finest *gefüllte fische* which it would fairly melt in your mouth."

"I congradulate you, Miss Meyerson," Sam said. "We are losing the best bookkeeper which we ever got."

"Well, that's all right, Sam," Aaron cried. "You know where you could always get another. Fillup ain't going to hold that job with them suckers any longer."

"And since we aren't going to be married for two months yet," Miss Meyerson added, "I'll keep my position here and break Philip into his new job."

"That suits us fine," Sam declared. "And to show you we ain't small we will start him at the

same money what we pay Miss Meyerson—fifteen dollars a week."

Aaron turned toward the two partners and extended both his hands.

"Boys," he said, "I don't know what I could say to you."

"Don't say nothing," Max interrupted. "The boy is worth it, otherwise we wouldn't pay it. Business is business."

"I know it, boys," he said; "but a business man could have also a heart, ain't it?"

Max nodded.

"And you boys," Aaron concluded, "you got a heart, too, believe me. What a heart you got it! Like a watermelon!"

He looked at Miss Meyerson for an approving smile and, having received it, he gave final expression to his emotions of friendship and gratitude in the worst coughing-spell of his asthmatic career.

CHAPTER TWO

OPPORTUNITY

"**W**HAT is brokers?" Mr. Marcus Shimko asked. "A broker is no good, otherwise he wouldn't be a broker. Brokers is fellers which they couldn't make a success of their own affairs, Mr. Zamp, so they butt into everybody else's. Particularly business brokers, Mr. Zamp. Real-estate brokers is bad enough, and insurings brokers is a lot of sharks also; but for a cutthroat, a low-life bum, understand me, the worst is a business broker!"

"That's all right, too, Mr. Shimko," Harry Zamp said timidly; "but if I would get a partner with say, for example, five hundred dollars, I could make a go of this here business."

Mr. Shimko nodded skeptically.

"I ain't saying you couldn't," he agreed, "but where would you find such a partner? Nowadays a feller with five hundred dollars don't think of going into retail business no more. The least he expects is he should go right away into manufacturing. Jobbing and retailing is nix for such a feller, understand me—especially clothing, Mr. Zamp, which nowadays even drug stores carries retail clothing as a side line, so cut up the business is."

Harry Zamp nodded gloomily.

"And, furthermore," Shimko added, "business brokers could no more get you a partner with money as they could do miracles, Mr. Zamp. Them days is past, Mr. Zamp, and all a business broker could do nowadays is to bring you a feller with experience, and you don't need a business broker for *that*, Mr. Zamp. Experience in the retail clothing business is like the measles. Everybody has had it."

"Then what should I do, Mr. Shimko?" Zamp asked helplessly. "I must got to get a partner with money somewhere, ain't it? And if I wouldn't go to a business broker, who then would I go to? A bartender?"

"Never mind!" Mr. Shimko exclaimed. "Some people got an idee all bartenders is bums, but wunst in a while a feller could get from a bartender an advice also. I got working for me wunst in my place down on Park Row a feller by the name Klinkowitz, which he is now manager of the Olympic Gardens on Rivington Street; and if I would have took that feller's advice, Mr. Zamp, instead I am worth now my tens of thousands I would got hundreds of thousands already. 'When you see a feller is going down and out, Mr. Shimko,' he always says to me, 'don't show him no mercy at all. If you set 'em up for a live one, Mr. Shimko,' he says, 'he would anyhow buy a couple of rounds; but a dead one, Mr. Shimko,' he says, 'if you show him the least little encouragement, understand me, the least that happens you is he gets away with the whole lunch-counter.' Am I right or wrong?"

Mr. Zamp nodded. He resented the imputation that he was a dead one, but he felt bound to agree with Mr. Shimko, in view of the circumstance that on the following day he would owe a month's rent with small prospect of being able to pay it. Indeed, he wondered at Mr. Shimko's amiability, for as owner of the Canal Street premises Shimko had the reputation of being a harsh landlord. Had Zamp but known it, however, store property on Canal Street was not in

active demand of late, by reason of the new bridge improvements, and Shimko's amiability proceeded from a desire to retain Zamp as a tenant if the latter's solvency could be preserved.

"But I couldn't help myself, Mr. Zamp," Shimko went on. "I got no business keeping a restaurant at all."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Shimko's late restaurant was of the variety popularly designated as a "barrel-house," and he had only retired from the business after his license had been revoked.

"Yes, Mr. Zamp," Shimko continued; "in a business like that a feller shouldn't got a heart at all. But I am very funny that way. I couldn't bear to see nobody suffer, understand me, and everybody takes advantage of me on account of it. So I tell you what I would do. My wife got a sort of a relation by the name Miss Babette Schick, which she works for years by a big cloak and suit concern as a designer. She ain't so young no longer, but she got put away in savings bank a couple of thousand dollars, and she is engaged to be married to a young feller by the name Isaac Meiselson, which nobody could tell what he does for a living at all. One thing is certain—with the money this Meiselson gets with Miss Schick he could go as partners together with you, and pull you out of the hole, ain't it?"

Mr. Zamp nodded again, without enthusiasm.

"Sure, I know, Mr. Shimko," he said; "but if a young feller would got two thousand dollars to invest in a business, y'understand, why should he come to me? If he would only got five hundred dollars, Mr. Shimko, that would be something else again. But with so much as two thousand dollars a feller could get lots of clothing businesses which they run a big store with a couple of cutters, a half a dozen salesmen, and a bookkeeper. What have I got to offer him for two thousand dollars? Me, I am salesman, cutter, bookkeeper, and everything; and if this feller comes in here and sees me alone in the place, with no customers nor nothing, he gets an idee it's a dead proposition. Ain't it?"

Shimko pulled out a full cigar-case, whereat Zamp's eye kindled, and he licked his lips in anticipation; but after Shimko had selected a dark perfecto, he closed the case deliberately and replaced it in his breast-pocket.

"A business man must got to got gumption," he said to the disappointed Zamp; "and if you think you could got a partner just by bringing him into the store here, and showing him the stock and fixtures which you got it, you are making a big mistake."

"Well, of course I am expecting I should blow him to dinner maybe," Zamp protested, "with a theayter also."

Shimko evidenced his disgust by puffing vigorously at his cigar.

"You are just like a whole lot of other people, Zamp," he said. "You are always willing to spend money before you make it. Meiselson comes in here and sees you only got a small stock of piece goods, understand me, and you couldn't afford to keep no help, and then, on the top of that yet, you would take him out and blow him. Naturally he right away gets the idee you are spending your money foolishly, instead of putting it into your business, and the whole thing is off."

Zamp shrugged impotently.

"What could I do, Mr. Shimko?" he asked. "I got here a small stock of goods, I know, but that's just the reason why I want a partner."

"And that's just the reason why you wouldn't get one," Shimko declared. "A small stock of piece goods you couldn't help, Zamp; but if you let that feller come into your store and find you ain't got no cutters or customers, that's your own fault."

"What d'ye mean, Mr. Shimko?" Zamp demanded.

"I mean this," Shimko explained. "If I would got a store like you got it here, Zamp, and a friend offers to bring me a feller with a couple thousand dollars for a partner, understand me, I would go to work, y'understand, and get a couple cutters and engage 'em for the afternoon. Then I would turn around, y'understand, and go up and see such a feller like Klinkowitz, which he is manager of that theayter on Rivington Street, and I would get him to fix up for me a half a dozen young fellers from his theayter, which they would come down to my store for the day, and some of 'em acts like customers, and others acts like clerks. Then, when my friend brings in the feller with two thousand dollars, understand me, what do they see? The place is full of customers and salesmen, and in the rear is a couple of cutters chalking lines on pattern papers and cutting it up with shears. You yourself are so busy, understand me, you could hardly talk a word to us. You don't want to know anything about getting a partner at all. What is a partner with two thousand dollars in a rushing business like you are doing it? I beg of you you should take the matter under consideration, but you pretty near throw me out of the store, on account you got so much to do. At last you say you would take a cup coffee with me at six o'clock, and I go away with the two-thousand dollar feller, and when we meet again at six o'clock, he's pretty

near crazy to invest his money with you. Do you get the idee?"

"Might you could even get the feller to pay for the coffee, maybe," Zamp suggested, completely carried away by Shimko's enthusiasm.

"If the deal goes through," Shimko declared, in a burst of generosity, "I would even pay for the coffee myself!"

"And when would you bring the feller here?" Zamp asked.

"I would see him this afternoon yet," Shimko replied, as he opened the store door, "and I would telephone you sure, by Dachtel's place, at four o'clock."

Zamp, full of gratitude, shook hands with his landlord.

"If I would got such a head like you got it to think out schemes, Mr. Shimko," he said fervently, "I would be a millionaire, I bet yer!"

"The thinking out part is nothing," Shimko said, as he turned to leave. "Any blame fool could think out a scheme, y'understand, but it takes a pretty bright feller to make it work!"

"If a feller wouldn't be in business for himself," Shimko said to Isaac Meiselson, as they sat in Wasserbauer's Café that afternoon, "he might just as well never come over from Russland at all."

"I told you before, Mr. Shimko," Meiselson retorted, "I am from Lemberg *geboren*."

"*Oestreich oder Russland*, what is the difference?" Shimko asked. "If a feller is working for somebody else, nobody cares who he is or what he is; while if he's got a business of his own, understand me, everybody would respect him, even if he would be born in, we would say for example, China."

"Sure, I know, Mr. Shimko," Meiselson rejoined; "but there is businesses and businesses, and what for a business is a small retail clothing store on Canal Street?"

"Small the store may be, I ain't denying it," Shimko said; "but ain't it better a feller does a big business in a small store as a small business in a big store?"

"If he does a big business, yes," Meiselson admitted; "but if a feller does a big business, why should he want to got a partner?"

"Ain't I just telling you he *don't* want no partner?" Shimko interrupted. "And as for doing a big business, I bet yer we could drop in on the feller any time, and we would find the store full of people."

"*Gewiss*," Meiselson commented, "three people playing auction pinochle in a small store is a big crowd!"

"No auction pinochle gets played in that store, Meiselson. The feller has working by him two cutters and three salesmen, and he makes 'em earn their money. Only yesterday I am in the store, and if you would believe me, Meiselson, his own landlord he wouldn't talk to at all, so busy he is."

"In that case, what for should he need me for a partner I couldn't understand at all," Meiselson declared.

"Neither could I," Shimko replied, "but a feller like you, which he would soon got two thousand dollars to invest, needs *him* for a partner. A feller like Zamp would keep you straight, Meiselson. What you want is somebody which he is going to make you work."

"What d'ye mean, going to make me work?" Meiselson asked indignantly. "I am working just as hard as you are, Mr. Shimko. When a feller is selling toilet soaps and perfumeries, Mr. Shimko, he couldn't see his trade only at certain hours of the day."

"I ain't kicking you are not working, Meiselson," Shimko said hastily. "All I am telling you is, what for a job is selling toilet soaps and perfumery? You got a limited trade there, Meiselson; because when it comes to toilet soaps, understand me, how many people takes it so particular? I bet yer with a hundred people, Meiselson, eighty uses laundry soap, fifteen *ganvers* soap from hotels and saloons, and the rest buys wunst in six months a five-cent cake of soap. As for perfumery, Meiselson, for a dollar bill you could get enough perfumery to make a thousand people smell like an Italiener barber-shop; whereas clothing, Meiselson, everybody must got to wear it. If you are coming to compare clothing with toilet soap for a business, Meiselson, there ain't no more comparison as gold and putty."

Meiselson remained silent.

"Furthermore," Shimko continued, "if Zamp sees a young feller like you, which even your worst enemy must got to admit it, Meiselson, you are a swell dresser, and make a fine, up-to-date appearance, understand me, he would maybe reconsider his decision not to take a partner."

"Did he say he wouldn't take a partner?" Meiselson asked hopefully.

"He says to me so sure as you are sitting there: 'Mr. Shimko, my dear friend, if it would be for your sake, I would willingly go as partners together with some young feller,' he says; 'but when a business man is making money,' he says, 'why should he got to got a partner?' he says. So I says to him: 'Zamp,' I says, 'here is a young feller which he is going to get married to a young lady by the name Miss Babette Schick.'"

"She ain't so young no longer," Meiselson broke in ungallantly.

"By the name Miss Babette Schick," Shimko continued, recognizing the interruption with a malevolent glare, "'which she got, anyhow, a couple thousand dollars,' I says; 'and for her sake and for my sake,' I says, 'if I would bring the young feller around here, would you consent to look him over?' And he says for my sake he would consent to do it, but we shouldn't go around there till next week."

"All right," Meiselson said; "if you are so dead anxious I should do so, I would go around next week."

"Say, lookyhere, Meiselson," Shimko burst out angrily, "don't do me no favours! Do you or do you not want to go into a good business? Because, if you don't, say so, and I wouldn't bother my head further."

"Sure I do," Meiselson said.

"Then I want to tell you something," Shimko continued. "We wouldn't wait till next week at all. With the business that feller does, delays is dangerous. If we would wait till next week, some one offers him a good price and buys him out, maybe. To-morrow afternoon, two o'clock, you and me goes over to his store, understand me, and we catches him unawares. Then you could see for yourself what a business that feller is doing."

Meiselson shrugged.

"I am agreeable," he said.

"Because," Shimko went on, thoroughly aroused by Meiselson's apathy, "if you're such a fool that you don't know it, Meiselson, I must got to tell you. Wunst in a while, if a business man is going to get a feller for partner, when he knows the feller is coming around to look the business over, he plants phony customers round the store, and makes it show up like it was a fine business, when in reality he is going to bust up right away."

"So?" Meiselson commented, and Shimko glared at him ferociously.

"You don't appreciate what I am doing for you at all," Shimko cried. "I wouldn't telephone the feller or nothing that we are coming, understand me? We'll take him by surprise."

Meiselson shrugged.

"Go ahead and take him by surprise if you want to," he said wearily. "I am willing."

In point of fact, Isaac Meiselson was quite content to remain in the soap and perfumery trade, and it was only by dint of much persuasion on Miss Babette Schick's part that he was prevailed upon to embark in a more lucrative business. It seemed a distinct step downward when he compared the well-nigh tender methods employed by him in disposing of soap and perfumery to the proprietresses of beauty parlours, with the more robust salesmanship in vogue in the retail clothing business; and he sighed heavily as he contemplated the immaculate ends of his finger-nails, so soon to be sullied by contact with the fast-black, all-wool garments in Zamp's clothing store.

"Also, I would meet you right here," Shimko concluded, "at half-past one sharp to-morrow."

After the conclusion of his interview with Isaac Meiselson, Shimko repaired immediately to Zamp's tailoring establishment, and together they proceeded to the office of Mr. Boris Klinkowitz, manager of the Olympic Gardens, on Rivington Street. Shimko explained the object of their business, and in less than half an hour the resourceful Klinkowitz had engaged a force of cutters, salesmen, and customers sufficient to throng Harry Zamp's store for the entire day.

"You would see how smooth the whole thing goes," Klinkowitz declared, after he had

concluded his arrangements. "The cutters is genu-ine cutters, members from a union already, and the salesmen works for years by a couple concerns on Park Row."

"And the customers?" Zamp asked.

"That depends on yourself," Klinkowitz replied. "If you got a couple real bargains in sample garments, I wouldn't be surprised if the customers could be genu-ine customers also. Two of 'em works here as waiters, evenings, and the other three ain't no bums, neither. I called a dress-rehearsal at your store to-morrow morning ten o'clock."

On the following day, when Mr. Shimko visited his tenant's store, he rubbed his eyes.

"Ain't it wonderful?" he exclaimed. "Natural like life!"

"S-s-sh!" Zamp exclaimed.

"What's the matter, Zamp?" Shimko whispered.

Zamp winked.

"Only the cutters and the salesmen showed up," he replied.

"Well, who are them other fellows there?" Shimko asked.

"How should I know?" Zamp said hoarsely. "A couple of suckers comes in from the street, and we sold 'em the same like anybody else."

Here the door opened to admit a third stranger. As the two "property" salesmen were busy, Zamp turned to greet him.

"Could you make me up maybe a dress suit *mit* a silk lining?" the newcomer asked.

"What are you so late for?" Zamp retorted. "Klinkowitz was here *schon* an hour ago already."

The stranger looked at Zamp in a puzzled fashion.

"What are you talking about—Klinkowitz?" he said. "I don't know the feller at all."

Zamp gazed hard at his visitor, and then his face broke into a broad, welcoming smile.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am making a mistake. Do you want a French drape, *oder* an unfinished worsted?"

For the next thirty minutes a succession of customers filled the store, and when at intervals during that period Klinkowitz's supernumeraries arrived, Zamp turned them all away.

"What are you doing, Zamp?" Shimko exclaimed. "At two o'clock the store would be empty!"

"Would it?" Zamp retorted, as he eyed a well-dressed youth who paused in front of the show-window. "Well, maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't; and, anyhow, Mr. Shimko, if there wouldn't be no customers here, we would anyhow got plenty of cutting to do. Besides, Shimko, customers is like sheep. If you get a run of 'em, one follows the other."

For the remainder of the forenoon the two salesmen had all the customers they could manage; and as Shimko watched them work, his face grew increasingly gloomy.

"Say, lookyhere, Zamp," he said; "you are doing here such a big business, where do I come in?"

"What d'ye mean, where do *you* come in?" Zamp asked.

"Why the idee is mine you should get in a couple salesmen and cutters," Shimko began, "and ___"

"What d'ye mean, the *idee* is yours?" Zamp rejoined. "Ain't I got a right to hire a couple salesmen and cutters if I want to?"

"Yes, but you never would have done so if I ain't told it you," Shimko said. "I ought to get a rake-off here."

"You should get a rake-off because my business is increasing so I got to hire a couple salesmen and cutters!" Zamp exclaimed. "What an idee!"

Shimko paused. After all, he reflected, why should he quarrel with Zamp? At two o'clock, when he expected to return with Meiselson, if the copartnership were consummated, he would collect 10 per cent. of the copartnership funds as the regular commission. Moreover, he had decided to refuse to consent to the transfer of the store lease from Zamp individually to the copartnership of Zamp & Meiselson, save at an increase in rental of ten dollars a month.

"Very well, Zamp," he said. "Maybe the idee ain't mine; but just the same, I would be back here at two o'clock, and Meiselson comes along."

With this ultimatum Shimko started off for Wasserbauer's Café, and at ten minutes to two he accompanied Meiselson down to Canal Street.

"Yes, Meiselson," Shimko began, as they approached Zamp's store. "There's a feller which he ain't got no more sense as you have, and yet he is doing a big business anyhow."

"What d'ye mean, no more sense as I got it?" Meiselson demanded. "Always up to now I got sense enough to make a living, and I ain't killed myself doing it, neither!"

For the remainder of their journey to Zamp's store Shimko sulked in silence; but when at length they reached their destination he exclaimed aloud:

"Did you ever see the like?" he cried. "The place is actually full up with customers!"

Zamp's prediction had more than justified itself. When Shimko and Meiselson entered, he looked up absently as he handled the rolls of piece goods which he had purchased, for cash, only one hour previously. Moreover, his pockets overflowed with money, for every customer had paid a deposit of at least 25 per cent.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Zamp," Shimko cried. "This is Mr. Meiselson, the gentleman which I am speaking to you about. He wants to go as partners together with you."

Zamp ran his hand through his dishevelled hair. He was more than confused by his sudden accession of trade.

"You got to excuse me, Mr. Shimko," he said, "I am very, very busy just now."

Shimko winked furtively at Zamp.

"Sure, I know," he said, "but when could we see you later to-day?"

"You *couldn't* see me later to-day," Zamp replied. "I am going to work to-night getting out orders."

"*Natürlich*," Shimko rejoined, "but couldn't you take a cup coffee with us a little later?"

Zamp jumped nervously as the door opened to admit another customer. The two clerks, supplemented by a third salesman, who had been hired by telephone, were extolling the virtues of Zamp's wares in stentorian tones, and the atmosphere of the little store was fairly suffocating.

"I couldn't think of it," Zamp answered, and turned to the newly arrived customer. "Well, sir," he cried, "what could I do for *you*?"

"Say, lookyhere, Zamp," Shimko exploded angrily, "what is the matter with you? I am bringing you here a feller which he wants to go as partners together with you, and——"

At this juncture Meiselson raised his right hand like a traffic policeman at a busy crossing.

"One moment, Mr. Shimko," he interrupted. "You are saying that I am the feller which wants to go as partners together with Mr. Zamp?"

"Sure!" Shimko said.

"Well, all I got to say is this," Meiselson replied. "I ain't no horse. Some people which they got a couple thousand dollars to invest would like it they should go into a business like this, and kill themselves to death, Mr. Shimko, but *me* not!"

He opened the store door and started for the street.

"But, lookyhere, Meiselson!" Shimko cried in anguished tones.

"*Koosh*, Mr. Shimko!" Meiselson said. "I am in the soap and perfumery business, Mr. Shimko, and I would stay in it, too!"

Six months later Harry Zamp sat in Dachtel's Coffee House on Canal Street, and smoked a post-prandial cigar. A diamond pin sparkled in his neck-tie, and his well-cut clothing testified to his complete solvency.

Indeed, a replica of the coat and vest hung in the window of his enlarged business premises on Canal Street, labelled "The Latest from the London Pickadillies," and he had sold, strictly for cash, more than a dozen of the same style during the last twenty-four hours. For the rush of trade which began on the day when he hired the "property" salesmen and cutters had not only continued but had actually increased; and it was therefore with the most pleasurable sensations that he recognized, at the next table, Isaac Meiselson, the unconscious cause of all

his prosperity.

"Excuse me," he began, "ain't your name Meiselson?"

"My name is Mr. Meiselson," Isaac admitted. "This is Mr. Zamp, ain't it?"

Zamp nodded.

"You look pretty well, considering the way you are working in that clothing business of yours," Meiselson remarked.

"Hard work never hurted me none," Zamp answered. "Are you still in the soap and perfumery business, Mr. Meiselson?"

Meiselson shook his head.

"No," he said, "I went out of the soap business when I got married last month."

"Is that so?" Zamp commented. "And did you go into another business?"

"Not yet," Meiselson replied, and then he smiled. "The fact is," he added in a burst of confidence, "my wife is a dressmaker."

CHAPTER THREE

THE SORROWS OF SEIDEN

"**S**AY, lookyhere!" said Isaac Seiden, proprietor of the Sanspareil Waist Company, as he stood in the office of his factory on Greene Street; "what is the use your telling me it is when it ain't? My wife's mother never got a brother by the name Pesach."

He was addressing Mrs. Miriam Saphir, who sat on the edge of the chair nursing her cheek with her left hand. Simultaneously she rocked to and fro and beat her forehead with her clenched fist, while at intervals she made inarticulate sounds through her nose significant of intense suffering.

"I should drop dead in this chair if she didn't," she contended. "Why should I lie to you, Mr. Seiden? My own daughter, which I called her Bessie for this here Pesach Gubin, should never got a husband and my other children also, which one of 'em goes around on crutches right now, Mr. Seiden, on account she gets knocked down by a truck."

"Well, why didn't she sue him in the courts yet?" Seiden asked. "From being knocked down by a truck many a rich feller got his first start in business already."

"Her luck, Mr. Seiden!" Mrs. Saphir cried. "A greenhorn owns the truck which it even got a chattel mortgage on it. Such *Schlemazel* my family got it, Mr. Seiden! If it would be your Beckie, understand me, the least that happens is that a millionaire owns the truck and he settles out of court for ten thousand dollars yet. Some people, if they would be shot with a gun, the bullet is from gold and hits 'em in the pocket already—such luck they got it."

"That ain't here nor there, Mrs. Saphir," Seiden declared. "Why should I got to give your Bessie a job, when already I got so many people hanging around my shop, half the time they are spending treading on their toes?"

"*Ai, tzuris!*" Mrs. Saphir wailed. "My own husband's Uncle Pesach is from his wife a cousin and he asks me why! Who should people look to for help if it wouldn't be their family, Mr. Seiden? Should I go and beg from strangers?"

Here Mrs. Saphir succumbed to a wave of self-pity, and she wept aloud.

"*Koosh!*" Mr. Seiden bellowed. "What do you think I am running here—a cemetery? If you want to cry you should go out on the sidewalk."

"Such hearts people got it," Mrs. Seiden sobbed, "like a piece from ice."

"S enough!" said Mr. Seiden. "I wasted enough time already. You took up pretty near my whole morning, Mrs. Saphir; so once and for all I am telling you you should send your Bessie to work as a learner Monday morning, and if she gets worth it I would pay her just the same wages like anybody else."

Mrs. Saphir dried her eyes with the back of her hand, while Mr. Seiden walked into his

workroom and slammed the door behind him as evidence that the interview was at an end. When he returned a few minutes later Mrs. Saphir was still there waiting for him.

"Well," he demanded, "what d'ye want of me now?"

For answer Mrs. Saphir beat her forehead and commenced to rock anew. "My last ten cents I am spending it for carfare," she cried.

"What is that got to do with me?" Seiden asked. "People comes into my office and takes up my whole morning disturbing my business, and I should pay 'em carfare yet? An idee!"

"Only one way I am asking," Mrs. Saphir said.

"I wouldn't even give you a transfer ticket," Mr. Seiden declared, and once more he banged the door behind him with force sufficient to shiver its ground-glass panel.

Mrs. Saphir waited for an interval of ten minutes and then she gathered her shawl about her; and with a final adjustment of her crape bonnet she shuffled out of the office.

Miss Bessie Saphir was a chronic "learner"—that is to say, she had never survived the period of instruction in any of the numerous shirt, cloak, dress, and clothing factories in which she had sought employment; and at the end of her second month in the workshop of the Sanspareil Waist Company she appeared to know even less about the manufacture of waists than she did at the beginning of her first week.

"How could any one be so *dumm*!" Philip Sternsilver cried as he held up a damaged garment for his employer's inspection, "I couldn't understand at all. That's the tenth waist Bessie Saphir ruins on us."

"*Dumm*!" Mr. Seiden exclaimed. "What d'ye mean, dumb? You are getting altogether too independent around here, Sternsilver."

"Me—independent!" Philip rejoined. "For what reason I am independent, Mr. Seiden? I don't understand what you are talking about at all."

"No?" Seiden said. "Might you don't know you are calling my wife's relation dumb, Sternsilver? From a big mouth a feller like you could get himself into a whole lot of trouble."

"Me calling your wife's relation dumb, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver cried in horrified accents. "I ain't never said nothing of the sort. What I am saying is that that *dummer* cow over there—that Bessie Saphir—is *dumm*. I ain't said a word about your wife's relations."

"Loafer!" Seiden shouted in a frenzy. "What d'ye mean?"

Sternsilver commenced to perspire.

"What do I mean?" he murmured. "Why, I am just telling you what I mean."

"If it wouldn't be our busy season," Seiden continued, "I would fire you right out of here *und fertig*. Did you ever hear the like? Calls my wife's cousin, Miss Bessie Saphir, a *dummer Ochs*!"

"How should I know she's your wife's cousin, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver protested. "Did she got a label on her?"

"Gets fresh yet!" Seiden exclaimed. "Never mind, Sternsilver. If the learners is *dumm* it's the foreman's fault; and if you couldn't learn the learners properly I would got to get another foreman which he could learn, and that's all there is to it."

He stalked majestically away while Sternsilver turned and gazed at the unconscious subject of their conversation. As he watched her bending over her sewing-machine a sense of injustice rankled in his breast, for there could be no doubt the epithet *dummer Ochs*, as applied to Miss Saphir, was not only justified but eminently appropriate.

Her wide cheekbones, flat nose, and expressionless eyes suggested at once the calm, ruminating cow; and there was not even lacking a piece of chewing-gum between her slowly moving jaws to complete the portrait.

"A girl like her should got rich relations yet," he murmured to himself. "A *Schnorrer* wouldn't marry her, not if her uncles was Rothschilds *oder* Carnegies. You wouldn't find the mate to her outside a dairy farm."

As he turned away, however, the sight of Hillel Fatkin wielding a pair of shears gave him the lie; for, if Miss Bessie Saphir's cheekbones were broad, Hillel's were broader. In short, Hillel's features compared to Bessie's as the head of a Texas steer to that of a Jersey heifer.

Sternsilver noticed the resemblance with a smile just as Mr. Seiden returned to the workroom.

"Sternsilver," he said, "ain't you got nothing better to do that you should be standing around

grinning like a fool? Seemingly you think a foreman don't got to work at all."

"I was laying out some work for the operators over there, Mr. Seiden," Philip replied. "Oncet in a while a feller must got to think, Mr. Seiden."

"What d'ye mean, think?" Seiden exclaimed. "Who asks you you should think, Sternsilver? You get all of a sudden such *grossartig* notions. 'Must got to think,' *sagt er!* I am the only one which does the thinking here, Sternsilver. Now you go right ahead and tend to them basters."

Sternsilver retired at once to the far end of the workroom, where he proceeded to relieve his outraged feeling by criticising Hillel Fatkin's work in excellent imitation of his employer's bullying manner.

"What is the matter, Mr. Sternsilver, you are all the time picking on me so?" Hillel demanded. "I am doing my best here and certainly if you don't like my work I could quick go somewheres else. I ain't a *Schnorrer* exactly, Mr. Sternsilver. I got in savings bank already a couple hundred dollars which I could easy start a shop of my own; so I ain't asking no favours from nobody."

"You shouldn't worry yourself, Fatkin," Sternsilver said. "Nobody is going to do you no favours around here. On the contrary, Fatkin, the way you are ruining garments around here, sooner as do you favours we would sue you in the courts yet, and you could kiss yourself good-bye with your two hundred dollars in savings bank. Furthermore, for an operator you are altogether too independent, Fatkin."

"Maybe I am and maybe I ain't," Fatkin retorted with simple dignity. "My father was anyhow from decent, respectable people in Grodno, Sternsilver; and even if I wouldn't got a sister which she is married to Sam Kupferberg's cousin, y'understand, Sam would quick fix me up by the Madison Street court. You shouldn't throw me no bluffs, Sternsilver. Go ahead and sue."

He waited for his foreman to utter a suitable rejoinder, but none came, for in Fatkin's disclosure of a two-hundred dollar deposit in the savings bank and his sister's relationship to Sam Kupferberg, the well-known legal practitioner of Madison Street, Philip Sternsilver conceived a brilliant idea.

"I ain't saying we would sue you exactly, understand me," he replied. "All I am saying, Hillel, is you should try and be a little more careful with your work, y'understand."

Here Sternsilver looked over from Hillel's bovine features to the dull countenance of Miss Bessie Saphir.

"A feller which he has got money in the bank and comes from decent, respectable people like you, Hillel," he concluded, "if they work hard there is nothing which they couldn't do, y'understand. All they got to look out for is they shouldn't Jonah themselves with their bosses, y'understand."

"Bosses!" Hillel repeated. "What d'ye mean, bosses? Might you got an idee you are my boss maybe, Sternsilver?"

"Me, I ain't saying nothing about it at all," Sternsilver declared. "I am only saying something which it is for your own good; and if you don't believe me, Hillel, come out with me lunch time and have a cup coffee. I got a few words, something important, to tell you."

For the remainder of the forenoon Sternsilver busied himself about the instruction of Miss Bessie Saphir. Indeed, so assiduously did he apply himself to his task that at half-past eleven Mr. Seiden was moved to indignant comment. He beckoned Sternsilver to accompany him to the office and when he reached the door he broke into an angry tirade:

"*Nu*, Sternsilver," he began, "ain't you got to do nothing else but learn that girl the whole morning? What do I pay a foreman wages he should fool away his time like that?"

"What d'ye mean, fool away my time, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver protested. "Ain't you told me I should learn her something, on account she is a relation from your wife already?"

"Sure, I told you you should learn her something," Seiden admitted; "but I ain't told you you should learn her everything in one morning already. She ain't such a close relation as all that, y'understand. The trouble with you is, Sternsilver, you don't use your head at all. A foreman must got to think oncet in a while, Sternsilver. Don't leave all the thinking to the boss, Sternsilver. I got other things to bother my head over, Sternsilver, without I should go crazy laying out the work in the shop for the foreman."

Thus admonished, Sternsilver returned to the workroom more strongly convinced than ever that, unless he could carry out the idea suggested by his conversation with Fatkin, there would be a summary ending to his job as foreman. As soon, therefore, as the lunch-hour arrived he hustled Fatkin to a Bath-brick dairy restaurant and then and there unfolded his scheme.

"Say, listen here, Fatkin," he commenced. "Why don't a young feller like you get married?"

Fatkin remained silent. He was soaking zwieback in coffee and applying it to his face in such a manner that the greater part of it filled his mouth and rendered conversation impossible.

"There's many a nice girl, which she could cook herself and wash herself A Number One, y'understand, would be only too glad to get a decent, respectable feller like you," Sternsilver went on.

Hillel Fatkin acknowledged the compliment by a tremendous fit of coughing, for in his embarrassment he had managed to inhale a crum of the zwieback. His effort to remove it nearly strangled him, but at length the dislodged particle found a target in the right eye of an errand boy sitting opposite. For some moments Sternsilver was unable to proceed, by reason of the errand boy's tribute to Hillel's table manners. Indeed, so masterly was this example of profane invective that the manager of the lunchroom, without inquiring into the merits of the controversy, personally led Hillel's victim to the door and kicked him firmly into the gutter. After this, Philip Sternsilver proceeded with the unfolding of his plan.

"Yes, Hillel," he said, "I mean it. For a young feller like you even a girl which she got rich relations like Seiden ain't too good."

"Seiden?" Hillel interrupted, with a supercilious shrug. "What is Seiden? I know his people from old times in Grodno yet. So poor they were, y'understand, his *Grossmutter* would be glad supposing my *Grossmutter*, *olav hasholam*, would send her round a couple pieces clothing to wash. The whole family was beggars—one worser as the other."

"Sure, I know," Philip said; "but look where he is to-day, Hillel. You got to give him credit, Hillel. He certainly worked himself up wonderful, and why? Because the feller saves his money, understand me, and then he turns around and goes to work to pick out a wife, and married right."

"What are you talking nonsense—got married right?" Hillel said. "Do you mean to told me that Seiden is getting married right? An idee! What for a family was all them Gubins, Sternsilver? The one Uncle Pesach was a low-life bum—a *Shikerrer* which he wouldn't stop at nothing, from *Schnapps* to varnish. Furthermore, his father, y'understand, got into trouble once on account he *ganvers* a couple chickens; and if it wouldn't be for my *Grossvater*, which he was for years a *Rav* in Telshi—a very learned man, Sternsilver—no one knows what would have become of them people at all."

For the remainder of the lunch-hour Hillel so volubly demonstrated himself to be the Debrett, Burke, and Almanach de Gotha of Grodno, Telshi, and vicinity that Sternsilver was obliged to return to the factory with his scheme barely outlined.

Nevertheless, on his journey back to Greene Street he managed to interrupt Hillel long enough to ask him if he was willing to get married.

"I don't say I wouldn't," Hillel replied, "supposing I would get a nice girl. *Aber* one thing I wouldn't do, Sternsilver. I wouldn't take no one which she ain't coming from decent, respectable people, y'understand; and certainly, if a feller got a couple hundred dollars in savings bank, Sternsilver, he's got a right to expect a little consideration. Ain't it?"

This ultimatum brought them to the door of the factory, and when they entered further conversation was summarily prevented by Mr. Seiden himself.

"Sternsilver," Mr. Seiden bellowed at him, "where was you?"

"Couldn't I get oncet in a while a few minutes I should eat my lunch, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver replied. "I am entitled to eat, ain't I, Mr. Seiden?"

"'Entitled to eat,' *sagt er*, when the operators is carrying on so they pretty near tear the place to pieces already!" Seiden exclaimed. "A foreman must got to be in the workroom, lunch-hour *oder* no lunch-hour, Sternsilver. Me, I do everything here. I get no assistance at all."

He walked off toward the office; and after Sternsilver had started up the motor, which supplied power for the sewing-machines, he followed his employer.

"Mr. Seiden," he began, "I don't know what comes over you lately. Seemingly nothing suits you at all—and me I am all the time doing my very best to help you out."

"Is that so?" Seiden replied ironically. "Since when is the foreman helping out the boss if he would go and spend a couple hours for his lunch, making a hog out of himself, Sternsilver?"

"I ain't making a hog out of myself, Mr. Seiden," Philip continued. "If I am going out of the factory for my lunch, Mr. Seiden, I got my reasons for it."

Seiden glared at his foreman for some minutes; ordinarily Sternsilver's manner was diffident to the point of timidity, and this newborn courage temporarily silenced Mr. Seiden.

"The way you are talking, Sternsilver," he said at last, "to hear you go on any one would think

you are the boss and I am the foreman."

"In business, yes," Philip rejoined, "you are the boss, Mr. Seiden; but outside of business a man could be a *Mensch* as well as a foreman. Ain't it?"

Seiden stared at the unruffled Sternsilver, who allowed no opportunity for a retort by immediately going on with his dissertation.

"Even operators also," he said. "Hillel Fatkin is an operator, y'understand, but he has got anyhow a couple hundred dollars in the savings bank; and when it comes to family, Mr. Seiden, he's from decent, respectable people in the old country. His own grandfather was a rabbi, y'understand."

"What the devil's that got to do with me, Sternsilver?" Seiden asked. "I don't know what you are talking about at all."

Sternsilver disregarded the interruption.

"Operator *oder* foreman, Mr. Seiden, what is the difference when it comes to a poor girl like Miss Bessie Saphir, which, even supposing she is a relation from your wife, she ain't so young no longer? Furthermore, with some faces which a girl got it she could have a heart from gold, y'understand, and what is it? Am I right or wrong, Mr. Seiden?"

Mr. Seiden made no reply. He was blinking at vacancy while his mind reverted to an afternoon call paid uptown by Mrs. Miriam Saphir. As a corollary, Mrs. Seiden had kept him awake half the night, and the burden of her jeremiad was: "What did you ever done for my relations? Tell me that."

"Say, lookyhere, Sternsilver," he said at length, "what are you trying to drive into?"

"I am driving into this, Mr. Seiden," Philip replied: "Miss Bessie Saphir must got to get married some time. Ain't it?"

Seiden nodded.

"*Schon gut!*" Sternsilver continued. "There's no time like the present."

A forced smile started to appear on Seiden's face, when the door leading to the public hall opened and a bonneted and shawled figure appeared. It was none other than Mrs. Miriam Saphir.

"*Ai, tzuris!*" she cried; and sinking into the nearest chair she began forthwith to rock to and fro and to beat her forehead with her clenched fist.

"*Nu!*" Seiden exploded. "What's the trouble now?"

Mrs. Saphir ceased rocking. On leaving home she had provided herself with a pathetic story which would not only excuse her presence in Seiden's factory but was also calculated to wring at least seventy-five cents from Seiden himself. Unfortunately she had forgotten to go over the minor details of the narrative on her way downtown, and now even the main points escaped her by reason of a heated altercation with the conductor of a Third Avenue car. The matter in dispute was her tender, in lieu of fare, of a Brooklyn transfer ticket which she had found between the pages of a week-old newspaper. For the first ten blocks of her ride she had feigned ignorance of the English language, and five blocks more were consumed in the interpretation, by a well-meaning passenger, of the conductor's urgent demands. Another five blocks passed in Mrs. Saphir's protestations that she had received the transfer in question from the conductor of a Twenty-third Street car; failing the accuracy of which statement, she expressed the hope that her children should all drop dead and that she herself might never stir from her seat. This brought the car to Bleecker Street, where the conductor rang the bell and invited Mrs. Saphir to alight. Her first impulse was to defy him to the point of a constructive assault, with its attendant lawsuit against the railroad company; but she discovered that, in carrying out her project to its successful issue, she had already gone one block past her destination. Hence she walked leisurely down the aisle; and after pausing on the platform to adjust her shawl and bonnet she descended to the street with a parting scowl at the conductor, who immediately broke the bell-rope in starting the car.

"*Nu!*" Seiden repeated. "Couldn't you open your mouth at all? What's the matter?"

Mrs. Saphir commenced to rock tentatively, but Seiden stopped her with a loud "*Koosh!*"

"What do you want from me?" he demanded.

"*Meine Tochter* Bessie," she replied, "she don't get on at all."

"What d'ye mean, she don't get on at all?" Seiden interrupted. "Ain't I doing all I could for her? I am learning her the business; and what is more, Mrs. Saphir, I got a feller which he wants to marry her, too. Ain't that right, Sternsilver?"

Philip nodded vigorously and Mrs. Saphir sat up in her chair.

"Him?" she asked.

"Sure; why not?" Seiden answered.

"But, Mr. Seiden——" Sternsilver cried.

"*Koosh*, Sternsilver," Seiden said. "Don't you mind that woman at all. If Bessie was my own daughter even, I would give my consent."

"*Aber*, Mr. Seiden——" Sternsilver cried again in anguished tones, but further protest was choked off by Mrs. Saphir, who rose from her seat with surprising alacrity and seized Philip around the neck. For several minutes she kissed him with loud smacking noises, and by the time he had disengaged himself Seiden had brought in Miss Bessie Saphir. As she blushing laid her hand in Sternsilver's unresisting clasp Seiden patted them both on the shoulder.

"For a business man, Sternsilver," he said, "long engagements is nix; and to show you that I got a heart, Sternsilver, I myself would pay for the wedding, which would be in two weeks at the latest."

He turned to Mrs. Miriam Saphir.

"I congratulate you," he said. "And now get out of here!"

For the next ten days Mr. and Mrs. Seiden and Miss Saphir were so busy with preparations for the wedding that they had no leisure to observe Sternsilver's behaviour. He proved to be no ardent swain; and, although Bessie was withdrawn from the factory on the day following her betrothal, Sternsilver called at her residence only twice during the first week of their engagement.

"I didn't think the feller got so much sense," Seiden commented when Bessie Saphir complained of Philip's coldness.

"He sees you got your hands full getting ready, so he don't bother you at all."

As for Seiden, he determined to spare no expense, up to two hundred and fifty dollars, in making the wedding festivities greatly redound to his credit both socially and in a business way.

To that end he had dispatched over a hundred invitations to the wholesale houses from which he purchased goods.

"You see what I am doing for you," he said to Sternsilver one morning, a week before the wedding day. "Not only in postage stamps I am spending my money but the printing also costs me a whole lot, too, I bet yer."

"What is the use spending money for printing when you got a typewriter which she is setting half the time doing nothing, Mr. Seiden?" Philip protested.

"That's what I told Mrs. Seiden," his employer replied, "and she goes pretty near crazy. She even wanted me I should got 'em engraved, so *grossartig* she becomes all of a sudden. Printing is good enough, Sternsilver. Just lookyhere at this now, how elegant it is."

He handed Philip an invitation which read as follows:

MR. AND MRS. I. SEIDEN AND MRS. MIRIAM SAPHIR
REQUEST THE HONOUR OF
THE INTERCOLONIAL TEXTILE COMPANY'S
PRESENCE AT THE MARRIAGE OF HER DAUGHTER
BESSIE
TO
MR. PHILIP STERNSILVER
ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1909, AT SIX O'CLOCK

NEW RIGA HALL, 522 ALLEN STREET, NEW
YORK

Bride's Address:
c/o SANSPAREIL WAIST COMPANY
ISAAC SEIDEN, *Proprietor*
Waists in Marquissette, Voile, Lingerie,
Crepe and Novelty Silks
also a Full Line of
Lace and Hand-embroidered Waists
800 GREENE STREET, NEW YORK CITY

"What's the use you are inviting a corporation to a wedding, Mr. Seiden?" Philip said as he returned the invitation with a heavy sigh. "A corporation couldn't eat nothing, Mr. Seiden."

"Sure, I know," Seiden replied. "I ain't asking 'em they should eat anything, Sternsilver. All I am wanting of 'em is this: Here it is in black and white. Me and Beckie and that old *Schnorrer*, Mrs. Saphir, requests the honour of the Intercolonial Company's presents at the marriage of their daughter. You should know a corporation's presents is just as good as anybody else's presents, Sternsilver. Ain't it?"

Sternsilver nodded gloomily.

"Also I am sending invitations to a dozen of my best customers and to a couple of high-price sales-men. Them fellers should loosen up also oncet in a while. Ain't I right?"

Again Sternsilver nodded and returned to the factory where, at hourly intervals during the following week, Seiden accosted him and issued bulletins of the arrival of wedding presents and the acceptance of invitations to the ceremony.

"What do you think for a couple of small potatoes like Kugel & Mishkin?" he said. "If I bought a cent from them people during the last five years I must of bought three hundred dollars' worth of buttons; and they got the nerve to send a half a dozen coffee spoons, which they are so light, y'understand, you could pretty near see through 'em."

Sternsilver received this news with a manner suggesting a cramped swimmer coming up for the second time.

"Never mind, Sternsilver," Seiden continued reassuringly, "we got a whole lot of people to hear from yet. I bet yer the Binder & Baum Manufacturing Company, the least you get from 'em is a piece of cut glass which it costs, at wholesale yet, ten dollars."

Sternsilver's distress proceeded from another cause, however; for that very morning he had made a desperate resolve, which was no less than to leave the Borough of Manhattan and to begin life anew in Philadelphia. From the immediate execution of the plan he was deterred only by one circumstance—lack of funds; and this he proposed to overcome by borrowing from Fatkin. Indeed, when he pondered the situation, he became convinced that Fatkin, as the cause of his dilemma, ought to be the means of his extrication. He therefore broached the matter of a loan more in the manner of a lender than a borrower.

"Say, lookyhere, Fatkin," he said on the day before the wedding, "I got to have some money right away."

Fatkin shrugged philosophically.

"A whole lot of fellers feels the same way," he said.

"Only till Saturday week," Sternsilver continued, "and I want you should give me twenty-five dollars."

"Me?" Fatkin exclaimed.

"Sure, you," Sternsilver said; "and I want it now."

"Don't make me no jokes, Sternsilver," Fatkin replied.

"I ain't joking, Fatkin; far from it," Sternsilver declared. "To-morrow it is all fixed for the wedding and I got to have twenty-five dollars."

"What d'ye mean, to-morrow is fixed for the wedding?" Fatkin retorted indignantly. "Do you want to get married on my money yet?"

"I don't want the money to get married on," Sternsilver protested. "I want it for something else again."

"My worries! What you want it for?" Fatkin concluded, with a note of finality in his tone. "I

would *oser* give you twenty-five cents."

"S enough, Fatkin!" Sternsilver declared. "I heard enough from you already. You was the one which got me into this *Schlemazel* and now you should get me out again."

"What do you mean, getting you into a *Schlemazel*?"

"You know very well what I mean," Philip replied; "and, furthermore, Fatkin, you are trying to make too free with me. Who are you, anyhow, you should turn me down when I ask you for a few days twenty-five dollars? You act so independent, like you would be the foreman."

Hillel nodded slowly, not without dignity.

"Never mind, Sternsilver," he said; "if my family would got a relation, y'understand, which he is working in Poliakoff's Bank and he is got to run away on account he is missing in five thousand rubles, which it is the same name Sternsilver, and everybody in Kovno—the children even—knows about it, understand me, I wouldn't got to be so stuck up at all."

Sternsilver flushed indignantly.

"Do you mean to told me," he demanded, "that I got in my family such a man which he is stealing five thousand rubles, Fatkin?"

"That's what I said," Hillel retorted.

"Well, it only goes to show what a liar you are," Sternsilver rejoined. "Not only was it he stole ten thousand rubles, y'understand, but the bank was run by a feller by the name Louis Moser."

"All right," Fatkin said as he started up his sewing-machine by way of signifying that the interview was at an end. "All right, Sternsilver; if you got such a relation which he *ganvered* ten thousand rubles, y'understand, borrow from him the twenty-five dollars."

Thus Sternsilver was obliged to amend his resolution by substituting Jersey City for Philadelphia as the seat of his new start in life; and at half-past eleven that evening, when the good ferryboat *Cincinnati* drew out of her slip at the foot of Desbrosses Street, a short, thick-set figure leaned over her bow and gazed sadly, perhaps for the last time, at the irregular skyline of Manhattan. It was Sternsilver.

When Mr. Seiden arrived at his factory the following morning he found his entire force of operators gathered on the stairway and overflowing on to the sidewalk.

"What is the matter you are striking on me?" he cried.

"Striking!" Hillel Fatkin said. "What do you mean, striking on you, Mr. Seiden? We ain't striking. Sternsilver ain't come down this morning and nobody was here he should open up the shop."

"Do you mean to told me Sternsilver ain't here?" Seiden exclaimed.

"All right; then I'm a liar, Mr. Seiden," Hillel replied. "You asked me a simple question, Mr. Seiden, and I give you a plain, straightforward answer. My *Grossvater*, *olav hasholam*, which he was a very learned man—for years a rabbi in Telshi—used to say: 'If some one tells you you are lying, understand me, and——'"

At this juncture Seiden opened the factory door and the entire mob of workmen plunged forward, sweeping Hillel along, with his quotation from the ethical maxims of his grandfather only half finished. For the next quarter of an hour Seiden busied himself in starting up his factory and then he repaired to the office to open the mail.

In addition to three or four acceptances of invitations there was a dirty envelope bearing on its upper left-hand corner the mark of a third-rate Jersey City hotel. Seiden ripped it open and unfolded a sheet of letter paper badly scrawled in Roman capitals as follows:

"December 12.

"I. SEIDEN:

"We are come to tell you which Mr. Philip Sternsilver is gone out West to Kenses Citter. So don't fool yourself he would not be at the wedding. What do you think a fine man like him would marry such a cow like Miss Bessie Saphir?

"And oblige yours truly,

"A. WELLWISHER."

For at least a quarter of an hour after reading the letter Mr. Seiden sat in his office doing sums in mental arithmetic. He added postage on invitations to cost of printing same and carried the result in his mind; next he visualized in one column the sum paid for furnishing Bessie's flat, the price of Mrs. Seiden's new dress—estimated; caterers' fees for serving dinner and hire of New Riga Hall. The total fairly stunned him, and for another quarter of an hour he remained seated in his chair. Then came the realization that twenty-five commission houses, two high-grade drummers, and at least five customers, rating L to J credit good, were even then preparing to attend a groomless wedding; and he spurred himself to action.

He ran to the telephone, but as he grabbed the receiver from the hook he became suddenly motionless.

"*Nu*," he murmured after a few seconds. "Why should I make a damn fool of myself and disappoint all them people for a greenhorn like Sternsilver?"

Once more he sought his chair, and incoherent plans for retrieving the situation chased one another through his brain until he felt that his intellect was giving way. It was while he was determining to call the whole thing off that Hillel Fatkin entered.

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

He wore an air of calm dignity that only a long rabbinical ancestry can give, and his errand in his employer's office was to announce his impending resignation, as a consequence of Seiden's offensive indifference to the memory of Hillel's grandfather. When Seiden looked up, however, his mind reverted not to Hillel's quotation of his grandfather's maxims, but to Sternsilver's conversation on the day of the betrothal; and Hillel's dignity suggested to him, instead of distinguished ancestry, a savings-bank account of two hundred dollars. He jumped immediately to his feet.

"Sit down, Fatkin," he cried.

Hillel seated himself much as his grandfather might have done in the house of an humble disciple, blending dignity and condescension in just the right proportions.

"So," he said, referring to Mr. Seiden's supposed contrition for the affront to the late rabbi, "when it is too late, Mr. Seiden, you are sorry."

"What do you mean, sorry?" Mr. Seiden replied. "Believe me, Fatkin, I am glad to be rid of the feller. I could get just as good foremen as him without going outside this factory even—for instance, you."

"Me!" Fatkin cried.

"Sure; why not?" Seiden continued. "A foreman must got to be fresh to the operators, anyhow; and if you ain't fresh, Fatkin, I don't know who is."

"Me fresh!" Fatkin exclaimed.

"I ain't kicking you are too fresh, y'understand," Seiden said. "I am only saying you are fresh enough to be a foreman."

Fatkin shrugged. "Very well, Mr. Seiden," he said in a manner calculated to impress Seiden with the magnitude of the favour. "Very well; if you want me to I would go to work as foreman for you."

Seiden with difficulty suppressed a desire to kick Hillel and smiled blandly.

"*Schon gut*," he said. "You will go to work Monday morning."

"Why not to-day, Mr. Seiden?" Hillel asked.

Seiden smiled again and this time it was not so bland as it was mechanical, suggesting the pulling of an invisible string.

"Because, Fatkin, you are going to be too busy to-day," Seiden replied. "A feller couldn't start in to work as a foreman and also get married all in one day."

Hillel stared at his employer.

"Me get married, Mr. Seiden! What are you talking nonsense, Mr. Seiden? I ain't going to get married at all."

"Oh, yes, you are, Fatkin," Seiden replied. "You are going to get married to Miss Bessie Saphir at New Riga Hall, on Allen Street, to-night, six o'clock sharp; otherwise you wouldn't go to work as foreman at all."

Hillel rose from his chair and then sat down again.

"Do you mean to told me I must got to marry Miss Bessie Saphir before I can go to work as foreman?" he demanded.

"You got it right, Fatkin," Seiden said.

"Then I wouldn't do no such thing," Fatkin retorted and made for the door.

"Hold on!" Seiden shouted, seizing Fatkin by the arm. "Don't be a fool, Fatkin. What are you throwing away a hundred dollars cash for?"

"Me throw away a hundred dollars cash?" Fatkin blurted out.

"Sure," Seiden answered. "If you would marry Miss Bessie Saphir you would not only get by me a job as foreman, but also I am willing to give you a hundred dollars cash."

Fatkin returned to the office and again sat down opposite his employer.

"Say, lookyhere, Mr. Seiden," he said, "I want to tell you something. You are springing on me suddenly a proposition which it is something you could really say is remarkable. Ain't it?"

Seiden nodded.

"Miss Bessie Saphir, which she is anyhow—her own best friend would got to admit it—homely like anything, Mr. Seiden," Fatkin continued, "is going to marry Sternsilver; and just because Sternsilver runs away, I should jump in and marry her like I would be nobody!"

Seiden nodded again.

"Another thing, Mr. Seiden," Hillel went on. "What is a hundred dollars? My *Grossvater, olav hasholam*—which he was a very learned man, for years a rabbi in Telshi——"

"Sure, I know, Fatkin," Seiden interrupted. "You told me that before."

"—for years a rabbi in Telshi," Hillel repeated, not deigning to notice the interruption save by a malevolent glare, "used to say: 'Soon married, quick divorced.' Why should I bring *tzuris* on myself by doing this thing, Mr. Seiden?"

Seiden treated the question as rhetorical and made no reply.

"Also I got in bank nearly three hundred dollars, Mr. Seiden," he concluded; "and even if I was a feller which wouldn't be from such fine family in the old country, understand me, three hundred dollars is three hundred dollars, Mr. Seiden, and that's all there is to it."

Seiden pondered deeply for a minute.

"All right, Fatkin," he said; "make it a hundred and fifty dollars *und fertig*."

"Three hundred dollars *oder* nothing!" Fatkin replied firmly; and after half an hour of more or less acrid discussion Fatkin agreed to accept Miss Bessie Saphir plus three hundred dollars and a job as foreman.

An inexplicable phase of the criminal's character is the instinct which impels him to revisit the scene of his crime; and, whether he was led thither by a desire to gloat or by mere vulgar curiosity, Philip Sternsilver slunk within the shadow of an L-road pillar on Allen Street opposite New Riga Hall promptly at half-past five that evening.

First to arrive was Isaac Seiden himself. He bore a heavily laden suitcase, and his face was distorted in an expression of such intense gloom that Sternsilver almost found it in his heart to be sorry for his late employer.

Mrs. Seiden, Miss Bessie Saphir, and Mrs. Miriam Saphir next appeared. They were chattering in an animated fashion and passed into the hall in a gale of laughter.

"Must be he didn't told 'em yet," Sternsilver muttered to himself.

Then came representatives of commission houses and several L to J customers attired in appropriate wedding finery; and as they entered the hall Sternsilver deemed that the pertinent moment for disappearing had arrived. He left hurriedly before the advent of two high-grade salesmen, or he might have noticed in their wake the dignified figure of Hillel Fatkin, arrayed in a fur overcoat, which covered a suit of evening clothes and was surmounted by a high silk hat. Hillel walked slowly, as much in the realization that haste was unbecoming to a bridegroom as on account of his patent-leather shoes, which were half a size too small for him; for the silk hat, fur overcoat, patent-leather shoes, and dress suit were all hired, and formed Combination Wedding Outfit No. 6 in the catalogue of the Imperial Dress-suit Parlour on Rivington Street. It was listed at five dollars a wedding, but the proprietress, to whom Hillel

had boasted of his rabbinical ancestry, concluded to allow him a clerical discount of 20 per cent. when he hesitated between his ultimate selection and the three dollar Combination No. 4, which did not include the fur overcoat.

The extra dollar was well invested, for the effect of Combination No. 6 upon Miss Bessie Saphir proved to be electrical. At first sight of it, she dismissed forever the memory of the fickle Sternsilver, who, at the very moment when Bessie and Hillel were plighting their troth, regaled himself with *mohnkuchen* and coffee at a neighbouring café.

He sat in an obscure corner behind the lady cashier's desk; and as he consumed his supper with hearty appetite he could not help overhearing the conversation she was carrying on with a rotund personage who was none other than Sam Kupferberg, the well-known Madison Street advocate.

"For a greenhorn like him," said Sam, "he certainly done well. He ain't been in the place a year, y'understand, and to-night he marries a relation of his boss and he gets a job as foreman and three hundred dollars in the bargain."

The cashier clucked with her tongue. "S' imagine!" she commented.

"Mind you," Sam continued, "only this afternoon yet, Seiden tells him he should marry the girl, as this other feller backed out; and he stands out for three hundred dollars, y'understand, and a job as foreman. What could Seiden do? He had to give in, and they're being married right now in New Riga Hall."

"S' imagine!" the cashier said again, adjusting her pompadour.

"And, furthermore," Sam continued, "the girl is a relation of Seiden's wife, y'understand."

"My Gawd, ketch him!" the cashier exclaimed; and Sam Kupferberg grabbed Philip Sternsilver just as he was disappearing into the street. It was some minutes before Philip could be brought to realize that he owed ten cents for his supper, but when he was at length released he made up for lost time. His progress down Allen Street was marked by two overturned pushcarts and a trail of tumbled children; and, despite this havoc, when he arrived at New Riga Hall the ceremony was finished by half an hour or more.

Indeed, the guests were gathered about the supper table and soup had just been served, when the proprietor of the hall tiptoed to the bridal table and whispered in Isaac Seiden's ear:

"A feller by the name of Sternsilver wants to speak a few words something to you," he said.

Seiden turned pale, and leaving half a plateful of soup uninhaled he rose from the table and followed the proprietor to the latter's private office. There sat Philip Sternsilver gasping for breath.

"Murderer!" he shouted as Seiden entered. "You are shedding my blood."

"*Koosh*, Sternsilver!" Seiden hissed. "Ain't you got no shame for the people at all?"

"Where is my Bessie—my life?" Sternsilver wailed. "Without you are making any inquiries at all you are marrying her to a loafer. Me, I am nothing! What is it to you I am pretty near killed in the street last night and must got to go to a hospital! For years I am working for you already, day in, day out, without I am missing a single forenoon even—and you are treating me like this!"

It was now Seiden's turn to gasp.

"What d'ye mean?" he cried, searching in his coat pocket. "Ain't you wrote me this here letter?"

He produced the missive received by him that morning and handed it to Sternsilver, who, unnoticed by the excited Seiden, returned it without even glancing at its contents.

"I never seen it before," he declared. "Why should I write printing? Don't you suppose I can write writing, Mr. Seiden?"

"Who did send it, then?" Seiden asked.

"It looks to me"—said Sternsilver, who grew calmer as Seiden became more agitated—"it looks to me like that sucker Fatkin writes it."

"What!" Seiden yelled. "And me I am paying him cash three hundred dollars he should marry that girl! Even a certified check he wouldn't accept."

Although this information was not new to Sternsilver, to hear it thus at first hand seemed to infuriate him.

"What!" he howled. "You are giving that greenhorn three hundred dollars yet to marry such a beautiful girl like my Bessie!"

He buried his face in his hands and rocked to and fro in his chair.

"Never mind, Sternsilver," Seiden said comfortingly; "you shouldn't take on so—she ain't so beautiful; and, as for that feller Fatkin—"

"You are talking about me, Mr. Seiden?" said a voice in the doorway.

Sternsilver looked up and once again Wedding Outfit Combination No. 6 conquered; for assuredly, had Fatkin been arrayed in his working clothes, he would have suffered a personal assault at the hands of his late foreman.

"Mr. Seiden," Fatkin continued, "never mind; I could stand it somebody calls me names, but Mr. Latz wants to know what is become of you for the last quarter of an hour. Mr. Latz tells me during November alone he buys from us eight hundred dollars goods."

"Us!" Seiden cried, employing three inflections to the monosyllable.

Before Seiden could protest further, however, Sternsilver had recovered from the partial hypnosis of Combination No. 6, and he gave tongue like a foxhound:

"*Oe-ee tzuris!*" he wailed.

"*Koosh!*" Fatkin cried, closing the door. "What do you want here?"

"You know what I want," Sternsilver sobbed. "You are stealing from me three hundred dollars."

Fatkin turned to Seiden and gazed at him reproachfully.

"Mr. Seiden," he said, "what for you are telling me that Sternsilver wouldn't get a cent with Bessie? And you are trying to get me I should be satisfied with a hundred dollars yet. Honestly, Mr. Seiden, I am surprised at you."

"*Schmooes*, Fatkin!" Seiden protested. "I never promised to give him nothing. Dreams he got it."

Sternsilver rose from his seat.

"Do you mean to told me that a greenhorn like him you would give three hundred dollars," he asked, "and me you wouldn't give nothing?"

"You!" Fatkin bellowed. "What are you? You are coming to me throwing a bluff that you got a relation by the name of Sternsilver, which he *ganvers* ten thousand rubles from Moser's Bank, in Kovno; and this afternoon yet, I find out the feller's name was Steinsilver—not Sternsilver; which he ain't got a relation in the world, y'understand. Faker!"

Sternsilver nodded his head slowly.

"Faker, am I?" he said. "All right, Mr. Fatkin; if I am a faker I will show you what I would do. You and this here Seiden fix it up between you, because I am all of a sudden sick in the hospital, that you steal away my Bessie and the three hundred dollars also. *Schon gut!* I would sue you both in the courts *und fertig!*"

"Sternsilver is right, in a way," Seiden said, "even though he is a bum. What for did you write me this letter, Fatkin?"

"Me write you that letter, Mr. Seiden!" Fatkin protested as he looked at the document in question. "Why, Mr. Seiden, I can't write printing. It is all I can do to write writing. And, besides, Mr. Seiden, until you are telling me about getting married, the idee never enters my head at all."

There could be no mistaking Fatkin's sincerity, and Seiden turned to Sternsilver with a threatening gesture.

"Out!" he cried. "Out of here before I am sending for a policeman to give you arrested."

"Don't make me no bluffs, Seiden!" Sternsilver answered calmly. "Either you would got to settle with me now *oder* I would go right upstairs and tell them commission houses and customers which you got there all about it. What do you take me for, Seiden—a greenhorn?"

"Fatkin," Seiden commanded, "do you hear what I am telling you? Take this loafer and throw him into the street."

"Me?" Fatkin said. "What are you talking nonsense, Mr. Seiden? I should throw him into the street when I am standing to lose on the coat alone ten dollars!"

Seiden looked at Fatkin and the validity of his objection was at once apparent.

"*Nu*, Sternsilver," he said. "Be a good feller. Here is five dollars. Go away and leave us alone."

Sternsilver laughed aloud.

"You are talking like I would be a child, Seiden!" he said. "Either you would give me cash a hundred dollars *oder* I would go right away upstairs to the customers."

Seiden turned to Fatkin.

"Fatkin," he said, "I am giving you this evening three hundred dollars. Give him a hundred dollars and be done with it."

"What d'ye mean, me give him a hundred dollars, Mr. Seiden?" Fatkin demanded. "They ain't my customers."

At this juncture the proprietor of the hall opened the door.

"Mr. Seiden," he said, "everybody is through eating; so, if you would give me the key to the suitcase which you got the cigars and *Schnapps* in, Mr. Seiden, I would hand 'em around."

"I'll be there in a minute," Seiden replied. He turned to Sternsilver and made one last appeal. "*Nu*, Sternsilver," he said, "would you take a check?"

"*Oser a Stück*," Sternsilver declared; but, although for five minutes he maintained his refusal, he finally relented.

"Well, Mr. Seiden," he said, offering his hand, "I congratulate you."

Seiden refused the proffered palm and started for the door. Before he reached it, however, Fatkin grabbed him by the arm.

"At such a time like this, Mr. Seiden," he said, "you couldn't afford to be small."

Once more Sternsilver held out his hand and this time Seiden shook it limply.

"No bad feelings, Mr. Seiden," Sternsilver said, and Seiden shrugged impatiently.

"You, I don't blame at all, Sternsilver," he said. "I am making from my own self a sucker yet. A feller shouldn't never even begin with his wife's relations."

At the end of a year Hillel Fatkin left the employ of the Sanspareil Waist Company to embark in the garment business on his own account. Many reasons contributed to this move, chief of which was the arrival of a son in Fatkin's household.

"And we would call him Pesach," Hillel said to his mother-in-law shortly after the birth of his heir, "after your Uncle Pesach Gubin."

"My Uncle Pesach Gubin!" Mrs. Miriam Saphir protested. "What are you talking nonsense, Hillel? That lowlife is Mrs. Seiden's uncle, not my uncle."

"Your cousin, then," Hillel continued. "What's the difference if he's your cousin *oder* your uncle—we would call the boy after him, anyhow."

"Call the boy after that drinker—that bum! What for? The feller ain't no relation to me at all. Why should we call the precious lamb after Beckie Seiden's relations?"

"Do you mean to told me," he said, "that Pesach Gubin ain't no relation to Bessie at all?"

Mrs. Saphir nodded and blushed.

"The way families is mixed up nowadays, Hillel," she said, "it don't do no harm to claim relation with some people."

Her face commenced to resume its normal colour.

"Especially," she added, "if they got money."

CHAPTER FOUR

SERPENTS' TEETH

"ALL right, Max," cried Samuel Gembitz, senior member of S. Gembitz & Sons; "if you think you know more about it as I do, Max, go ahead and make up that style in all them fancy shades. But listen to what I'm telling you, Max: black, navy blue, brown, and smoke is plenty enough; and all them copenhagen, wisterias, and tchampanyers we would get stuck with, just as sure as little apples."

"That's what you think, pop," Max Gembitz replied.

"Well, I got a right to think, ain't I?" Samuel Gembitz retorted.

"Sure," Max said, "and so have I."

"After me," Samuel corrected. "I think first and then you think, Max; and I think we wouldn't plunge so heavy on them 1040's. Make up a few of 'em in blacks, navies, browns, and smokes, Max, and afterward we would see about making up the others."

He rose from his old-fashioned Windsor chair in the firm's private office and put on his hat—a silk hat of a style long obsolete.

"I am going to my lunch, Max," he said firmly, "and when I come back I will be here. Another thing, Max: you got an idee them 1040's is a brand-new style which is so original, understand me, we are bound to make a big hit with it at seven-fifty apiece—ain't it?"

Max nodded.

"Well, good styles travels fast, Max," the old man said; "and you could take it from me, Max, in two weeks' time Henry Schrimm and all them other fellers would be falling over themselves to sell the self-same garment at seven dollars."

He seized a gold-mounted, ebony cane, the gift of Harmony Lodge, 100, I.O.M.A., and started for the stairway, but as he reached the door he turned suddenly.

"Max," he shouted, "tell them boys to straighten up the sample racks. The place looks like a pigsty already."

As the door closed behind his father Max aimed a kick at the old-fashioned walnut desk and the old-fashioned Windsor chair; and then, lighting a cigarette, he walked hurriedly to the cutting room.

"Lester," he said to his younger brother, who was poring over a book of sample swatches, "what do you think now?"

"Huh?" Lester grunted.

"The old man says we shouldn't make up them 1040's in nothing but black, navy, brown, and smoke!"

Lester closed the book of sample swatches and sat down suddenly.

"Wouldn't that make you sick?" he said in tones of profound disgust. "I tell you what it is, Max, if it wouldn't be that the old man can't run the business forever, I'd quit right now. We've got a killing in sight and he Jonahs the whole thing."

"I told you what it would be," Max said. "I seen Falkstatter in Sarahcuse last week; and so sure as I'm standing here, Lester, I could sold that feller a two-thousand dollar order if it wouldn't be for the old man's back-number ideas. Didn't have a single pastel shade in my trunks!"

"Where is he now?" Lester asked.

"Gone to lunch," Max replied.

Lester took up the sample swatches again and his eyes rested lovingly on a delicate shade of pink.

"I hope he chokes," he said; but even though at that very moment Samuel Gembitz sat in Hammersmith's restaurant, his cheeks distended to the bursting point with *gefüllte Rinderbrust*, Lester's prayer went unanswered. Indeed, Samuel Gembitz had the bolting capacity of a boa-constrictor, and, with the aid of a gulp of coffee, he could have swallowed a grapefruit whole.

"Ain't you scared that you would sometimes hurt your di-gestion, Mr. Gembitz?" asked Henry Schrimm, who sat at the next table.

Now this was a sore point with Sam Gembitz, for during the past year he had succumbed to more than a dozen bilious attacks as a result of his voracious appetite; and three of them were directly traceable to *gefüllte Rinderbrust*.

"I ain't so delicate like some people, Henry," he said rather sharply. "I don't got to consider

every bit of meat which I am putting in my mouth. And even if I would, Henry, what is doctors for? If a feller would got to deny himself plain food, Henry, he might as well jump off a dock and *fertig*."

Henry Schrimm was an active member of as many fraternal orders as there are evenings in the week, and he possessed a ready sympathy that made him invaluable as a chairman of a sick-visiting or funeral committee; for at seven P.M. Henry could bring himself to the verge of tears over the bedside of a lodge brother, without unduly affecting his ability to relish a game of auction pinochle at half-past eight, sharp.

"Jumping off a dock is all right, too, Mr. Gembitz," he commented, "but you got your family to consider."

"You shouldn't worry about my family, Henry," Gembitz retorted. "I am carrying good insurance; and, furthermore, I got my business in such shape that it would go on just the same supposing I should die to-morrow."

"*Gott soll hüten*, Mr. Gembitz," Henry added piously as the old man disposed of a dishful of gravy through the capillary attraction of a hunk of spongy rye bread.

"Yes, Henry," Gembitz continued, after he had licked his fingers and submitted his bicuspid to a process of vacuum cleaning, "I got my business down to such a fine point which you could really say was systematic."

"That's a good thing, Mr. Gembitz," Henry said, "because, presuming for the sake of argument, I am only saying you would be called away, Mr. Gembitz, them boys of yours would run it into the ground in no time."

"What d'ye mean, run it into the ground?" Gembitz demanded indignantly. "If you would got the gumption which my boys got it, Schrimm, you wouldn't be doing a business which the most you are making is a couple thousand a year."

"Sure, I know," Henry replied. "If I would got Lester's gumption I would be sitting around the Harlem Winter Garden till all hours of the morning; and if I would got Sidney's gumption I would be playing Kelly pool from two to four every afternoon. And as for Max, Mr. Gembitz, if I would got his gumption I would make a present of it to my worst enemy. A boy which he is going on forty and couldn't do nothing without asking his popper's permission first, Mr. Gembitz, he could better do general house-work for a living as sell goods."

Gembitz rose from his table and struggled into his overcoat speechless with indignation. It was not until he had buttoned the very last button that he was able to enunciate.

"Listen here to me, Schrimm!" he said. "If Lester goes once in a while on a restaurant in the evening, that's his business; and, anyhow, so far what I could see, Schrimm, it don't interfere none with his designing garments which you are stealing on us just as soon as we get 'em on the market. Furthermore, Schrimm, if Sidney plays Kelly pool every afternoon, you could bet your life he also sells him a big bill of goods, also. You got to entertain a customer oncet in a while if you want to sell him goods, Schrimm; and, anyhow, Schrimm, if it would be you would be trying to sell goods to this here Kelly, you wouldn't got sense enough to play pool with him. You would waste your time trying to learn him auction pinochle."

"But, Mr. Gembitz," Schrimm began, "when a feller plays Kelly pool——"

"And as for Max," Gembitz interrupted, "if you would be so good a boy as Max is, Schrimm, might your father would be alive to-day yet."

"What d'ye mean?" Schrimm cried. "My father died when I was two years old already."

"Sure, I know," Gembitz concluded; "and one thing I am only sorry, Schrimm: your father was a decent, respectable man, Schrimm, but he ought to got to die three years sooner. That's all."

No sooner had Mr. Gembitz left Hammersmith's restaurant than the *gefüllte Rinderbrust* commenced to assert itself; and by the time he arrived at his place of business he was experiencing all the preliminary symptoms of a severe bilious attack. Nevertheless, he pulled himself together and as he sat down at his desk he called loudly for Sidney.

"He ain't in," Max said.

"Oh, he ain't, ain't he?" Mr. Gembitz retorted. "Well, where is he?"

"He went out with a feller from the New Idea Store, Bridgetown," Max answered, drawing on his imagination in the defence of his brother.

"New Idea Store!" Gembitz repeated. "What's the feller's name?"

Max shrugged.

"I forgot his name," he answered.

"Well, I ain't forgot his name," Gembitz continued. "His name is Kelly; and every afternoon Schrimm tells me Sidney is playing this here Kelly pool."

For a brief interval Max stared at his father; then he broke into an unrestrained laugh.

"*Nu!*" Gembitz cried. "What's the joke?"

"Why," Max explained, "you're all twisted. Kelly ain't a feller at all. Kelly pool's a game, like you would say straight pinochle and auction pinochle—there's straight pool and Kelly pool."

Gembitz drummed on his desk with his fingers.

"Do you mean to told me there ain't no such person, which he is buying goods for a concern, called Kelly?" he demanded.

Max nodded.

"Then that loafer just fools away his time every afternoon," Gembitz said in choking tones; "and, after all I done for him, he——"

"What's the matter, popper?" Max cried, for Gembitz's lips had suddenly grown purple, and, even as Max reached forward to aid him, he lurched from his chair on to the floor.

Half an hour later Samuel Gembitz was undergoing the entirely novel experience of riding uptown in a taxicab, accompanied by a young physician who had been procured from the medical department of an insurance company across the street.

"Say, lookyhere," Sam protested as they assisted him into the cab, "this ain't necessary at all!"

"No, I know it isn't," the doctor agreed, in his best imitation of an old practitioner's jocular manner. He was, in fact, a very young practitioner and was genuinely alarmed at Samuel's condition, which he attributed to arteriosclerosis and not to *gefüllte Rinderbrust*. "But, just the same," he concluded, "it is just as well to keep as quiet as possible for the present."

Sam nodded and lay back wearily in the leather seat of the taxicab while it threaded its way through the traffic of lower Fifth Avenue. Only once did he appear to take an interest in his surroundings, and that was when the taxicab halted at the end of a long line of traffic opposite the débris of a new building.

"What's going on here?" he asked faintly.

"It's pretty nearly finished," the doctor replied. "Weldon, Jones & Company, of Minneapolis, are going to open a New York store."

Sam nodded again and once more closed his eyes. He grew more uncomfortable as the end of the journey approached, for he dreaded the reception that awaited him. Max had telephoned the news of his father's illness to his sister, Miss Babette Gembitz, Sam's only daughter, who upon her mother's death had assumed not only the duties but the manner and bearing of that tyrannical person; and Sam knew she would make a searching investigation of the cause of his ailment.

"Doctor, what do you think is the matter with me?" he asked, by way of a feeler.

"At your age, it's impossible to say," the doctor replied; "but nothing very serious."

"No?" Sam said. "Well, you don't think it's indigestion, do you?"

"Decidedly not," the doctor said.

"Well, then, you shouldn't forget and tell my daughter that," Sam declared as the cab stopped opposite his house, "otherwise she will swear I am eating something which disagrees with me."

He clambered feebly to the sidewalk, where stood Miss Babette Gembitz with Dr. Sigmund Eichendorfer.

"*Wie gehts*, Mr. Gembitz?" Doctor Eichendorfer cried cheerfully as he took Sam's arm.

"*Unpässlich*, Doctor," Sam replied. "I guess I'm a pretty sick man."

He glanced at his daughter for some trace of tears, but she met his gaze unmoved.

"You've been making a hog of yourself again, popper!" she said severely.

"*Oser!*" Sam protested. "Crackers and milk I am eating for my lunch. The doctor could tell you the same."

Ten minutes afterward Sam was tucked up in his bed, while in an adjoining room the young physician communicated his diagnosis to Doctor Eichendorfer.

"Arteriosclerosis, I should say," he murmured, and Doctor Eichendorfer sniffed audibly.

"You mean Bright's Disease—ain't it?" he said. "That feller's arteries is as sound as plumbing."

Doctor Eichendorfer had received his medical training in Vienna and he considered it to be a solemn duty never to agree with the diagnosis of a native M.D.

"I thought of Bright's Disease," the young physician replied, speaking a little less than the naked truth; for in diagnosing Sam's ailment he had thought of nearly every disease he could remember.

"Well, you could take it from me, Doctor," Eichendorfer concluded, "when one of these old-timers goes under there's a history of a rich, unbalanced diet behind it; and Bright's Disease it is. Also, you shouldn't forget to send in your bill—not a cent less than ten dollars."

He shook his confrère warmly by the hand; and three hours later the melancholy circumstance of Sam's Bright's Disease was known to every member of the cloak and suit trade, with one exception—to wit, as the lawyers say, Sam himself. He knew that he had had *gefüllte Rinderbrust*, but by seven o'clock this knowledge became only a torment as the savoury odour of the family dinner ascended to his bedroom.

"Babette," he called faintly, as becomes a convalescent, "ain't I going to have no dinner at all to-night?"

For answer Babette brought in a covered tray, on which were arranged two pieces of dry toast and a glass of buttermilk.

"What's this?" Sam cried.

"That's your dinner," Babette replied, "and you should thank Gawd you are able to eat it."

"You don't got to told me who I should thank for such slops which you are bringing me," he said, with every trace of convalescence gone from his tones. "Take that damn thing away and give me something to eat. Ain't that *gedämpftes Kalbfleisch* I smell?"

Babette made no reply, but gazed sadly at her father as she placed the tray on a chair beside his bed.

"You don't know yourself how sick you are," she said. "Doctor Eichendorfer says you should be very quiet."

This admonition produced no effect on Sam, who immediately started on an abusive criticism of physicians in general and Dr. Sigmund Eichendorfer in particular.

"What does that *dummer Esel* know?" he demanded. "I bet yer that the least he tells you is I got Bright's Disease!"

Babette shook her head slowly.

"So you know it yourself all the time," she commented bitterly; "and yet you want to eat *gedämpftes Kalbfleisch*, when you know as well as I do it would pretty near kill you."

"Kill me!" Sam shouted. "What d'ye mean, kill me? I eat some *Rinderbrust* for my lunch yet; and that's all what ails me. I ain't got no more Bright's Disease as you got it."

"If you think that lying is going to help you, you're mistaken," Babette replied calmly. "To a man in your condition *gedämpftes Kalbfleisch* is poison."

"I ain't lying to you," Sam insisted. "I am eating too much lunch, I am telling you."

"And you're not going to eat too much dinner!" Babette said as she tiptoed from the room.

Thus Sam drank a glass of buttermilk and ate some dry toast for his supper; and, in consequence, he slept so soundly that he did not waken until Dr. Sigmund Eichendorfer entered his room at eight o'clock the following morning. Under the bullying frown of his daughter Sam submitted to a physical examination that lasted for more than an hour; and when Doctor Eichendorfer departed he left behind him four varieties of tablets and a general interdiction against eating solid food, getting up, going downtown, or any of the other dozen things that Sam insisted upon doing.

It was only under the combined persuasion of Max, Babette, and Lester that he consented to stay in bed that forenoon; and when lunchtime arrived he was so weakened by a twenty-four-hour fast and Doctor Eichendorfer's tablets, that he was glad to remain undisturbed for the remainder of the day.

At length, after one bedridden week, accompanied by a liquid diet and more tablets, Sam was allowed to sit up in a chair and to partake of a slice of chicken.

"Well, popper, how do you feel to-day?" asked Max, who had just arrived from the office.

"I feel pretty sick, Max," Sam replied; "but I guess I could get downtown to-morrow, all right."

Babette sat nearby and nodded her head slowly.

"Guess some more, popper," she said. "Before you would go downtown yet, you are going to Lakewood."

"Lakewood!" Sam exclaimed. "What d'ye mean, Lakewood? If you want to go to Lakewood, go ahead. I am going downtown to-morrow. What, d'ye think a business could run itself?"

"So far as business is concerned," Max said, "you shouldn't trouble yourself at all. We are hustling like crazy downtown and we already sold over three thousand dollars' worth of them 1040's."

Sam sat up suddenly.

"I see my finish," he said, "with you boys selling goods left and right to a lot of fakers like the New Idea Store."

"New Idea Store nothing!" Max retorted. "We are selling over two thousand dollars to Falkstatter, Fein & Company—and I guess they're fakers—what!"

Sam leaned back in his chair.

"Falkstatter, Fein & Company is all right," he admitted.

"And, furthermore," Max continued, "we sold 'em fancy colours like wistaria, copenhagen, and champagne; and them navy blues and browns they wouldn't touch."

"No?" Sam said weakly.

"So you see, popper, if you would be downtown we wouldn't got that order at all," Max continued. "So what's the use worrying yourself?"

"He's right, popper," Babette added. "You're getting too old to be going downtown every day. The boys could look after the business. It's time you took a rest."

At this juncture Doctor Eichendorfer entered.

"Hello!" he said. "What are you doing sitting up here? You must get right back to bed."

"What are you talking nonsense?" Sam cried. "I am feeling pretty good already."

"You look it," Eichendorfer said. "If you could see the way you are run down this last week yet you wouldn't talk so fresh."

He seized Sam by the arm as he spoke and lifted him out of the chair.

"You ain't so heavy like you used to be, Mr. Gembitz," he went on as he helped Sam to his bed. "Another week and you could sit up, but not before."

Sam groaned as they tucked the covers around him.

"Now you see how weak you are," Eichendorfer cried triumphantly. "Don't get up again unless I would tell you first."

After leaving some more tablets, Doctor Eichendorfer took his leave; and half an hour later Sam knew by the tantalizing odours that pervaded his bedroom that the family dined on stewed chicken with *Kartoffel Klösse*. For the remainder of the evening Sam lay with his eyes closed; and whenever Babette approached his bedside with a tumbler of water and the box of tablets he snored ostentatiously. Thus he managed to evade the appetite-dispelling medicine until nearly midnight, when Babette coughed loudly.

"Popper," she said, "I'm going to bed and I want you to take your tablets."

"Leave 'em on the chair here," he replied, "and I'll take 'em in a few minutes."

He watched her place the tablets on the chair; and as soon as her back was turned he seized them eagerly and thrust them into the pocket of his night-shirt.

"Where's the water?" he mumbled; and when Babette handed him the tumbler he gulped down the water with noise sufficient to account for a boxful of tablets.

"Now, leave me alone," he said; and Babette kissed him coldly on the left ear.

"I hope you'll feel better in the morning," she said dutifully.

"Don't worry," Sam said. "I'm going to."

He listened carefully until he heard the door close and then he threw back the coverlet. Very

gingerly he slid to the carpet and planted himself squarely on his feet. A sharp attack of "pins and needles" prevented any further movement for some minutes; but at length it subsided and he began to search for his slippers. His bathrobe hung on the back of the door, and, after he had struggled into it, he opened the door stealthily and, clinging to the balustrade, crept downstairs to the basement.

He negotiated the opening of the ice-box door with the skill of an experienced burglar; and immediately thereafter he sat down at the kitchen table in front of a dishful of stewed chicken, four cold boiled potatoes, the heel of a rye loaf, and a bottle of beer. Twenty minutes later he laid away the empty dish on top of the kitchen sink, with the empty beer bottle beneath it; then, after supplying himself with a box of matches, he crept upstairs to his room.

When Babette opened the door the following morning she raised her chin and sniffed suspiciously.

"Ain't it funny?" she murmured, "I could almost swear I smell stale cigar smoke here."

Sam turned his face to the wall.

"You're crazy!" he said.

During the ensuing week Sam Gembitz became an adept in the art of legerdemain; and the skill with which he palmed tablets under the very nose of his daughter was only equalled by the ingenuity he displayed in finally disposing of them. At least three dozen disappeared through a crack in the wainscoting behind Sam's bed, while as many more were poked through a hole in the mattress; and thus Sam became gradually stronger, until Doctor Eichendorfer himself could not ignore the improvement in his patient's condition.

"All right; you can sit up," he said to Sam; "but, remember, the least indiscretion and back to bed you go."

Sam nodded, for Babette was in the room at the time; and, albeit Sam had gained new courage through his nightly raids on the ice-box, he lacked the boldness that three square meals a day engender.

"I would take good care of myself, Doctor," he said, "and the day after to-morrow might I could go downtown, maybe?"

"The day after to-morrow!" Doctor Eichendorfer exclaimed. "Why, you wouldn't be downtown for a month yet."

"The idea!" Babette cried indignantly. "As if the boys couldn't look after the place without you! What d'ye want to go downtown for at all?"

"What d'ye mean, what do I want to go downtown for at all?" Sam demanded sharply, and Miss Babette Gembitz blushed; whereupon Sam rose from his chair and stood unsteadily on his feet.

"You are up to some monkey business here—all of you!" he declared. "What is it about?"

Babette exchanged glances with Doctor Eichendorfer, who shrugged his shoulders in reply.

"Well, if you want to know what it is, popper," she said, "I'll tell you. You're a very sick man and the chances are you'll never go downtown again." Doctor Eichendorfer nodded his approval and Sam sat down again.

"So we may as well tell you right out plain," Babette continued; "the boys have given out to the trade that you've retired on account of sickness—and here it is in the paper and all."

She handed Sam a copy of the *Daily Cloak and Suit Record* and indicated with her finger an item headed "Personals." It read as follows:

NEW YORK.—Samuel Gembitz, of S. Gembitz & Sons, whose serious illness was reported recently, has retired from the firm, and the business will be carried on by Max Gembitz, Lester Gembitz, and Sidney Gembitz, under the firm style of Gembitz Brothers.

As Sam gazed at the item the effect of one week's surreptitious feeding was set at naught, and once more Babette and Doctor Eichendorfer assisted him to his bed. That night he had neither the strength nor the inclination to make his accustomed raid on the ice-box, nor could he resist the administration of Doctor Eichendorfer's tablets; so that the following day found him weaker than ever. It was not until another week had elapsed that his appetite began to assert itself; but when it did he convalesced rapidly. Indeed, at the end of the month, Doctor Eichendorfer permitted him to take short walks with Babette. Gradually the length of these promenades increased until Babette found her entire forenoons monopolized by her father.

"Ain't it awful!" she said to Sam one Sunday morning as they paced slowly along Lenox

Avenue. "I am so tied down."

"You ain't tied down," Sam replied ungraciously. "For my part, I would as lief hang around this here place by myself."

"It's all very well for you to talk," Babette rejoined; "but you know very well that in your condition you could drop in the street at any time yet."

"*Schmooes!*" Sam cried. "I am walking by myself for sixty-five years yet and I guess I could continue to do it."

"But Doctor Eichendorfer says——" Babette began.

"What do I care what Doctor Eichendorfer says!" Sam interrupted. "And, furthermore, supposing I would drop in the street—which anybody could slip oncet in a while on a banana peel, understand me—ain't I got cards in my pocket?"

Babette remained silent for a moment, whereat Sam plucked up new courage.

"Why should you bother yourself to *schlepp* me along like this?" he said. "There's lots of people I could go out with. Ain't it? Take old man Herz *oder* Mrs. Krakauer—they would be glad to go out walking with me; and oncet in a while I could go and call on Mrs. Schrimm maybe."

"Mrs. Schrimm!" Babette exclaimed. "I'm surprised to hear you talk that way. Mrs. Schrimm for years goes around telling everybody that mommer *selig* leads you a dawg's life."

"Everybody's got a right to their opinion, Babette," Sam said; "but, anyhow, that ain't here nor there. If you wouldn't want me to go around and see Mrs. Schrimm I wouldn't."

Babette snorted.

"In the first place," she said, "you couldn't go unless I go with you; and, in the second place, you couldn't get me to go there for a hundred dollars."

Beyond suggesting that a hundred dollars was a lot of money, Sam made no further attempt to secure his liberty that morning; but on the following day he discreetly called his daughter's attention to a full-page advertisement in the morning paper.

"Ain't you was telling me the other evening you need to got some table napkins, Babette?" he asked.

Babette nodded.

"Well, here it is in the paper that new concern, Weldon, Jones & Company, is selling to-day napkins at three dollars a dozen—the best damask napkins," he concluded.

Babette seized the paper and five minutes later she was poking hatpins into her scalp with an energy that made Sam's eyes water.

"Where are you going, Babette?" he said.

"I'm going downtown to that sale of linens," she said, "and I'll be back to take you out at one o'clock."

"Don't hurry on my account," Sam said. "I've got enough here in the paper to keep me busy until to-night yet."

Five minutes later the basement door banged and Sam jumped to his feet. With the agility of a man half his age he ran upstairs to the parlour floor and put on his hat and coat; and by the time Babette had turned the corner of Lenox Avenue Sam walked out of the areaway of his old-fashioned, three-story-and-basement, high-stoop residence on One Hundred and Eighteenth Street en route for Mrs. Schrimm's equally old-fashioned residence on One Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street. There he descended the area steps; and finding the door ajar he walked into the basement dining-room.

"*Wie gehts*, Mrs. Schrimm!" he cried cheerfully.

"Oo-ee! What a *Schreck* you are giving me!" Mrs. Schrimm exclaimed. "This is Sam Gembitz, ain't it?"

"Sure it is," Sam replied. "Ain't you afraid somebody is going to come in and steal something on you?"

"That's that girl again!" Mrs. Schrimm said as she bustled out to the areaway and slammed the door. "That's one of them *Ungarischer* girls, Mr. Gembitz, which all they could do is to eat up your whole ice-box empty and go out dancing on *Bauern* balls till all hours of the morning. Housework is something they don't know nothing about at all. Well, Mr. Gembitz, I am hearing such tales about you—you are dying, and so on."

"Warum Mister Gembitz?" Sam said. "Ain't you always called me Sam, Henrietta?"

Mrs. Schrimm blushed. In the lifetime of the late Mrs. Gembitz she had been a constant visitor at the Gembitz house, but under Babette's chilling influence the friendship had withered until it was only a memory.

"Why not?" she said. "I certainly know you long enough, Sam."

"Going on thirty-five years, Henrietta," Sam said, "when you and me and Regina come over here together. Things is very different nowadays, Henrietta. Me, I am an old man already."

"What do you mean old?" Mrs. Schrimm cried. "When my *Grossvater selig* was sixty-eight he gets married for the third time yet."

"Them old-timers was a different proposition entirely, Henrietta," Sam said. "If I would be talking about getting married, Henrietta, the least that happens to me is my children would put me in a lunatic asylum yet."

"Yow!" Mrs. Schrimm murmured skeptically.

"Wouldn't they?" Sam continued. "Well, you could just bet your life they would. Why, I am sick only a couple weeks or so, Henrietta, and what do them boys do? They practically throw me out of my business yet and tell me I am retired."

"And you let 'em?" Mrs. Schrimm asked.

"What could I do?" Sam said. "I'm a sick man, Henrietta. Doctor Eichendorfer says I wouldn't live a year yet."

"Doctor Eichendorfer says that!" Mrs. Schrimm rejoined. "And do you told me that you are taking Doctor Eichendorfer's word for it?"

"Doctor Eichendorfer is a *Rosher*, I admit," Sam answered; "but he's a pretty good doctor, Henrietta."

"For the *gesund*, yes," Mrs. Schrimm admitted. "But if my cat would be sick, Sam, and Doctor Eichendorfer charges two cents a call yet, I wouldn't have him in my house at all. I got too much respect for my cat, Sam. With that feller, as soon as he comes into the bedroom he says the patient is dying; because if the poor feller does die, understand me, then Eichendorfer is a good prophet, and if he gets better then Eichendorfer is a good doctor. He always fixes it so he gets the credit both ways. But you got to acknowledge one thing about that feller, Sam—he knows how to charge, Sam; and he's a good collector. Everybody says so."

Sam nodded sadly.

"I give you right about that," he said.

"And, furthermore," Mrs. Schrimm began, "he——"

Mrs. Schrimm proceeded no further, however, for the sound of a saucepan boiling over brought her suddenly to her feet and she dashed into the kitchen.

Two minutes later a delicate, familiar odour assailed Sam's nostrils, and when Mrs. Schrimm returned she found him unconsciously licking his lips.

"Yes, Sam," she declared, "them *Ungarischer* girls is worsen as nobody in the kitchen. Pretty near ruins my whole lunch, and I got Mrs. Krakauer coming, too. You know what a talker that woman is; and if I would give her something which it is a little burned, y'understand, the whole of New York hears about it."

"Well, Henrietta," Sam said as he rose and seized his hat, "I must be going."

"Going!" Mrs. Schrimm cried. "Why, you're only just coming. And besides, Sam, you are going to stop to lunch, too."

"Lunch!" Sam exclaimed. "Why, I don't eat lunch no more, Henrietta. All the doctor allows me is crackers and milk."

"Do you mean Doctor Eichendorfer allows you that?" Mrs. Schrimm asked, and Sam nodded.

"Then all I could say is," she continued, "that you are going to stay to lunch, because if Doctor Eichendorfer allows a man only crackers and milk, Sam, that's a sign he could eat *Wienerwurst*, dill pickles, and *Handkäse*. *Aber* if Doctor Eichendorfer says you could eat steaks and chops, stick to boiled eggs and milk—because steaks would kill you sure."

"But Babette would be back at one o'clock and if I didn't get home before then she would take my head off for me."

Mrs. Schrimm nodded sympathetically.

"So you wouldn't stay for lunch?" she said.

"I couldn't," Sam protested.

"Very well, then," Mrs. Schrimm cried as she hurried to the kitchen. "Sit right down again, Sam; I would be right back."

When Mrs. Schrimm appeared a few minutes later she bore a cloth-covered tray which she placed on the table in front of Sam.

"You got until half-past twelve—ain't it?" she said; "so take your time, Sam. You should chew your food good, especially something which it is already half chopped, like *gefüllte Rinderbrust*."

"*Gefüllte Rinderbrust!*" Sam cried. "Why"—he poked at it with his knife—"Why, this always makes me sick." He balanced a good mouthful on his fork. "But, anyhow—" he concluded, and the rest of the sentence was an incoherent mumbling as he fell to ravenously. Moreover, he finished the succulent dish, gravy and all, and washed down the whole with a cup of coffee—not Hammersmith's coffee or the dark brown fluid, with a flavour of stale tobacco pipe, that Miss Babette Gembitz had come to persuade herself was coffee, but a fragrant decoction, softened by rich, sweet cream and containing all the delicious fragrance of the best thirty-five-cent coffee, fresh-ground from the grocer's.

"*Ja, Henrietta,*" Sam cried as he rose to leave; "I am going to weddings and fashionable hotels, and I am eating with high-grade customers in restaurants which you would naturally take a high-grade customer to, understand me; but—would you believe me, Henrietta!—I am yet got to taste such coffee *oder* such *gefüllte Rinderbrust* as you are giving me now."

Mrs. Schrimm beamed her acknowledgment of the compliment.

"To-morrow you would get some chicken fricassee, Sam," she said, "if you would get here at half-past eleven sharp."

Sam shook her hand fervently.

"Believe me, I would try my best," he said; and fifteen minutes later, when Babette entered the Gembitz residence on One Hundred and Eighteenth Street, she found Sam as she had left him—fairly buried in the financial page of the morning paper.

"Well, Babette," Sam cried, "so you see I went out and I took my walk and I come back and nothing happened to me. Ain't it?"

Babette nodded.

"I'll get you your lunch right away," she said; and without removing her hat and jacket, she brought him a glass of buttermilk and six plain crackers. Sam watched her until she had ascended the stairs to the first floor; then he stole on tiptoe to the sink in the butler's pantry and emptied the buttermilk down the wastepipe. A moment later he opened the door of a bookcase that stood near the mantelpiece and deposited five of the crackers behind six full-morocco volumes entitled "Prayers for Festivals and Holy Days." He was busily engaged in eating the remaining cracker when Babette returned; and all that afternoon he seemed so contented and even jovial that Babette determined to permit him his solitary walk on the following day.

Thus Sam not only ate the chicken fricassee but three days afterward, when he visited Mrs. Schrimm upon the representation to Babette that he would sit all the morning in Mt. Morris Park, he suggested to Henrietta that he show some return for her hospitality by taking her to luncheon at a fashionable hotel downtown.

"My restaurant days is over," Mrs. Schrimm declared.

"To oblige me," Sam pleaded. "I ain't been downtown in—excuse me—such a helluva long time I don't know what it's like at all."

"If you are so anxious to get downtown, Sam," Mrs. Schrimm rejoined, "why don't you go down and get lunch with Henry? He'd be glad to have you."

"What, alone?" Sam cried. "Why, if Babette would hear of it—"

"Who's going to tell her?" Mrs. Schrimm asked, and Sam seized his hat with trembling fingers.

"By jimminy, I would do it!" he said, and then he paused irresolutely. "But how could I get home in time if I did?"

A moment later he snapped his fingers.

"I got an idee!" he exclaimed. "You are such good friends with Mrs. Krakauer—ain't it?"

Mrs. Schrimm nodded.

"Then you should do me the favour, Henrietta, and go over to Mrs. Krakauer and tell her she should ring up Babette and tell her I am over at her house and I wouldn't be back till three o'clock."

"Couldn't you go downtown if you want to?" Mrs. Schrimm replied. "Must you got to ask Babette's permission first?"

Sam nodded slowly.

"You don't know that girl, Henrietta," he said bitterly. "She is Regina *selig* over again—only worser, Henrietta."

"All right. I would do as you want," Mrs. Schrimm declared.

"Only one thing I must got to tell you," Sam said as he made for the door: "don't let Mrs. Krakauer talk too much, Henrietta, because that girl is suspicious like a credit man. She don't believe nothing nobody tells her."

When Sam entered the showroom of Henry Schrimm's place of business, half an hour later, Henry hastened to greet him. "*Wie gehts*, Mr. Gembitz?" he cried.

He drew forward a chair and Sam sank into it as feebly as he considered appropriate to the rôle of a convalescent.

"I'm a pretty sick man, Henry," he said, "and I feel I ain't long for this world."

He allowed his head to loll over his left shoulder in an attitude of extreme fatigue; in doing so, however, his eye rested for a moment upon a shipping clerk who was arranging Henry's sample garments on some old-fashioned racks.

"Say, lookyhere, Henry," Sam exclaimed, raising his head suddenly, "how the devil could you let a feller like that ruin your whole sample line?"

He jumped from his chair and strode across the showroom.

"*Schlemiel!*" he cried. "What for you are wrinkling them garments like that?"

He seized a costume from the astonished shipping clerk and for half an hour he arranged and rearranged Henry's samples until the job was finished to his satisfaction.

"Mr. Gembitz," Henry protested, "sit down for a minute. You would make yourself worse."

"What d'ye mean, make myself worse?" Sam demanded. "I am just as much able to do this as you are, Henry. Where do you keep your piece goods, Henry?"

Henry led the way to the cutting room and Sam Gembitz inspected a dozen bolts of cloth that were piled in a heap against the wall.

"That's just what I thought, Henry," Sam cried. "You let them fellers keep the place here like a pig-sty."

"Them's only a lot of stickers, Mr. Gembitz," Henry explained.

"Stickers!" Sam repeated. "What d'ye mean stickers? That's the same mistake a whole lot of people makes. There ain't no such thing as stickers, Henry. Sometimes you get ahold of some piece goods which is out of demand for the time being, Henry; but sooner or later the fashions would change, Henry, and then the stickers ain't stickers no more. They're live propositions again."

Henry made no reply and Sam continued:

"Yes, Henry," he went on, "some people is always willing they should throw out back numbers which really ain't back numbers at all. Take them boys of mine, for instance, Henry, and see how glad they was to get rid of me on account they think I am a back number; but I ain't, Henry. And just to show you I ain't, Henry, do you happen to have on hand some made-up garments which you think is stickers?"

Henry nodded.

"Well, if I don't come downtown to-morrow morning and with all them there stickers sold for you," Sam cried, "my name ain't Sam Gembitz at all."

"Say, lookyhere, Mr. Gembitz," Henry protested, "you would make yourself sick again. Come out and have a bite of lunch with me."

"That's all right, Henry," Sam replied. "I ain't hungry for lunch—I am hungry for work; and if you would be so good and show me them stickers which you got made up, Henry, I could assort 'em in lots, and to-morrow morning I would take a look-in on some of them upper Third Avenue stores, Henry. And if I don't get rid of 'em for you, understand me, you could got right uptown and tell Babette. Otherwise you should keep your mouth shut and you and me does a whole lot of business together."

Half an hour later Sam carefully effaced the evidences of his toil with soap and water and a whisk-broom, and began his journey uptown. Under one arm he carried a bundle of sample garments that might have taxed the strength of a much younger man.

This bundle he deposited for safekeeping with the proprietor of a cigar store on Lenox Avenue; and, after a final brush-down by the bootblack on the corner, he made straight for his residence on One Hundred and Eighteenth Street. When he entered he found Babette impatiently awaiting him.

"Why didn't you stay all night, popper?" she demanded indignantly. "Here I am all dressed and waiting to go downtown—and you keep me standing around like this."

"Another time you shouldn't wait at all," Sam retorted. "If you want to go downtown, go ahead. I could always ask the girl for something if I should happen to need it."

He watched Babette leave the house with a sigh of relief, and for the remainder of the afternoon he made intricate calculations with the stub of a lead pencil on the backs of old envelopes. Ten minutes before Babette returned he thrust the envelopes into his pocket and smiled with satisfaction, for he had computed to a nicety just how low a price he could quote on Henry Schrimm's stickers, so as to leave a margin of profit for Henry after his own commissions were paid.

The following morning Sam arrayed himself with more than ordinary care, and promptly at ten o'clock he seized his cane and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Babette demanded.

"I guess I would take a little walk in the park," he said to his daughter in tremulous tones, and Babette eyed him somewhat suspiciously.

"Furthermore," he said boldly, "if you want to come with me you could do so. The way you are looking so yellow lately, Babette, a little walk in the park wouldn't do you no harm."

Sam well knew that his daughter was addicted to the practice of facial massage, and he felt sure that any reference to yellowness would drive Babette to her dressing-table and keep her safely engaged with mirror and cold cream until past noon.

"Don't stay out long," she said, and Sam nodded.

"I would be back when I am hungry," he replied; "and maybe I would take a look in at Mrs. Krakauer. If you get anxious about me telephone her."

Ten minutes later he called at the cigar store on Lenox Avenue and secured his samples, after which he rang up Mrs. Schrimm.

"Hello, Henrietta!" he shouted, "This is Sam—yes, Sam Gembitz. What is the matter? Nothing is the matter. Huh? Sure, I feel all right. I give you a scare? Why should I give you a scare, Henrietta? Sure, we are old friends; but that ain't the point, Henrietta. I want to ask you you should do me something as a favour. You should please be so good and ring up Mrs. Krakauer, which you should tell her, if Babette rings her up and asks for me any time between now and six o'clock to-night, she should say I was there, but I just left. Did you get that straight? All right. Good-bye."

He heaved a sigh of relief as he paid for the telephone call and pocketed a handful of cheap cigars.

"Don't you want a boy to help you carry them samples, Mr. Gembitz?" the proprietor asked.

"Do I look like I wanted a boy to help me carry samples?" Sam retorted indignantly, and a moment later he swung aboard an eastbound crosstown car.

It was past noon when Sam entered Henry Schrimm's showroom and his face bore a broad, triumphant grin.

"Well, Henry," he shouted, "what did I told you? To a feller which he is knowing how to sell goods there ain't no such things as stickers."

"Did you get rid of 'em?" Henry asked.

Sam shook his head.

"No, Henry," he said, "I didn't get rid of 'em—I sold 'em; and, furthermore, Henry, I sold four hundred dollars' worth more just like 'em to Mr. Rosett, of the Rochelle Department Store, which you should send him right away a couple sample garments of them 1040's."

"What d'ye mean, 1040's?" Henry asked. "I ain't got no such lot number in my place."

"No, I know you ain't; but I mean our style 1040—that is to say, Gembitz Brothers' style 1040."

Henry blushed.

"I don't know what you are talking about at all," he said.

"No?" Sam retorted slyly. "Well, I'll describe it to you, Henry. It's what you would call a princess dress in tailor-made effects. The waist's got lapels of the same goods, with a little braid on to it, two plaits in the middle and one on each shoulder; yoke and collar of silk net; and——"

"You mean my style number 2018?" Henry asked.

"I don't mean nothing, Henry," Sam declared, "because you shouldn't throw me no bluffs, Henry. I seen one of them garments in your cutting room only yesterday, Henry, which, if it wasn't made up in my old factory, I would eat it, Henry—and Doctor Eichendorfer says I got to be careful with my diet at that."

Henry shrugged.

"Well," he began, "there ain't no harm if——"

"Sure, there ain't no harm, Henry," Sam said, "because them garments is going like hot cakes. A big concern like Falkstatter, Fein & Company takes over three thousand dollars' worth from the boys for their stores in Sarahcuse, Rochester, and Buffalo."

"Falkstatter, Fein & Company!" Henry cried. "Does them boys of yours sell Falkstatter, Fein & Company?"

"Sure," Sam answered. "Why not?"

"Why not?" Henry repeated. "Ain't you heard?"

"I ain't heard nothing," Sam replied; "but I know that concern for twenty years since already, Henry, and they always pay prompt to the day."

"Sure, I know," Henry said; "but only this morning I seen Sol Klinger in the subway and Sol tells me Simon Falkstatter committed suicide last night."

"Committed suicide!" Sam gasped. "What for?"

"I don't know what for," Henry replied; "but nobody commits suicide for pleasure, Mr. Gembitz, and if a man is in business, like Falkstatter, when Marshall Field's was new beginners already, Mr. Gembitz, and he sees he is got to bust up, Mr. Gembitz, what should he do?"

Sam rose to his feet and seized his hat and cane.

"Going home so soon, Mr. Gembitz?" Henry asked.

"No, I ain't going home, Henry," Sam replied. "I'm going over to see my boys. I guess they need me."

He started for the door, but as he reached it he paused.

"By the way, Henry," he said, "on my way down I stopped in to see that new concern there on Fifth Avenue—Weldon, Jones & Company—and you should send 'em up also a couple of them princess dresses in brown and smoke. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Do you think you could get down again to-morrow?" Henry asked.

"I don't know, Henry; but if lies could get me here I guess I could," Sam replied. "Because, the way my children fixes me lately, I am beginning to be such a liar that you could really say I am an expert."

Ten minutes later Sam Gembitz walked into the elevator of his late place of business and smiled affably at the elevator boy, who returned his greeting with a perfunctory nod.

"Well, what's new around here, Louis?" Sam asked.

"I dunno, Mr. Gembitz," the elevator boy said. "I am only just coming back from my lunch."

"I mean what happens since I am going away, Louis?" Sam continued.

"I didn't know you went away at all, Mr. Gembitz," the elevator boy replied.

"*Dummer Esel!*" Sam exclaimed. "Don't you know I was sick and I am going away from here *schon* three months ago pretty near?"

The elevator boy stopped the car at Gembitz Brothers' floor and spat deliberately.

"In the building is twenty tenants, Mr. Gembitz," he said, "and the way them fellers is sitting up all hours of the night, shikking and gambling, if I would keep track which of 'em is sick and which ain't sick, Mr. Gembitz, I wouldn't got no time to run the elevator at all."

If the elevator boy's indifference made Sam waver in the belief that he was sorely missed downtown the appearance of his late showroom convinced him of his mistake. The yellow-pine fixtures had disappeared, and in place of his old walnut table there had been installed three rolltop desks of the latest Wall Street design.

At the largest of these sat Max, who wheeled about suddenly as his father entered.

"What are you doing down here?" he demanded savagely.

"Ain't I got no right in my own business at all?" Sam asked mildly.

"Sidney!" Max cried, and in response his youngest brother appeared.

"Put on your hat and take the old man home," he said.

"One minute, Sidney," Sam said. "In the first place, Max, before we talk about going home, I want to ask you a question: How much does Falkstatter, Fein & Company owe us?"

"Us?" Max repeated.

"Well—you?" Sam replied.

"What's that your business?" Max retorted.

"What is that my business?" Sam gasped. "A question! Did you ever hear the like, Sidney? He asks me what it is my business supposing Falkstatter, Fein & Company owes us a whole lot of money! Ain't that a fine way to talk, Sidney?"

Sidney's pasty face coloured and he bit his lips nervously.

"Max is right, popper," he said. "You ain't got no call to come down here and interfere in our affairs. I'll put on my hat and go right home with you."

It was now Sam's turn to blush, and he did so to the point of growing purple with rage.

"Don't trouble yourself," he cried; "because I ain't going home!"

"What d'ye mean, y'ain't going home?" Max said threateningly.

"I mean what I say!" Sam declared. "I mean I ain't going home never again. You are throwing me out of my business, Max, and you would soon try to throw me out of my home, too, if I couldn't protect myself. But I ain't so old and I ain't so sick but what I could take care of myself, Max."

"Why, Doctor Eichendorfer says——" Sidney began.

"Doctor Eichendorfer!" Sam roared. "Who is Doctor Eichendorfer? He is a doctor, not a lawyer, Max, and maybe he knows about kidneys, Max; but he don't know nothing about business, Max! And, so help me, Max, I would give you till Wednesday afternoon three o'clock; if you don't send me a certified check for five thousand dollars over to Henry Schrimm's place, I would go right down and see Henry D. Feldman, and I would bust your business—my business!—open from front to rear, so that there wouldn't be a penny left for nobody—except Henry D. Feldman."

Here he drew a deep breath.

"And, furthermore, Max," he concluded, as he made for the door, "don't try any monkey business with spreading reports I am gone crazy or anything, because I know that's just what you would do, Max! And if you would, Max, instead of five thousand dollars I would want ten thousand dollars. And if I wouldn't get it, Max, Henry D. Feldman would—so what is the difference?"

He paused with his hand on the elevator bell and faced his sons again.

"Solomon was right, Max," he concluded. "He was an old-timer, Max; but, just the same, he knew what he was talking about when he said that you bring up a child in the way he should go

and when he gets old he bites you like a serpent's tooth yet!"

At this juncture the elevator door opened and Sam delivered his ultimatum.

"But you got a different proposition here, boys," he said; "and before you get through with me I would show you that oncet in a while a father could got a serpent's tooth, too—and don't you forget it!"

"Mr. Gembitz," the elevator boy interrupted, "there is here in the building already twenty tenants; and other people as yourself wants to ride in the elevator, too, Mr. Gembitz."

Thus admonished, Sam entered the car and a moment later he found himself on the sidewalk. Instinctively he walked toward the subway station, although he had intended to return to Henry Schrimm's office; but, before he again became conscious of his surroundings, he was seated in a Lenox Avenue express with an early edition of the evening paper held upside down before him.

"*Nah*, well," he said to himself, "what is the difference? I wouldn't try to do no more business to-day."

He straightened up the paper and at once commenced to study the financial page. Unknown to his children, he had long rented a safe-deposit box, in which reposed ten first-mortgage bonds of a trunkline railroad, together with a few shares of stock purchased by him during the Northern Pacific panic. He noted, with a satisfied grin, that the stock showed a profit of fifty points, while the bonds had advanced three eighths of a point.

"Three eighths ain't much," he muttered as he sat still while the train left One Hundred and Sixteenth Street station, "but there is a whole lot of *rabonim* which would marry you for less than thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents."

He threw the paper to the floor as the train stopped at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and, without a moment's hesitation, ascended to the street level and walked two blocks north to One Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street. There he rang the basement bell of an old-fashioned brown-stone residence and Mrs. Schrimm in person opened the door. When she observed her visitor she shook her head slowly from side to side and emitted inarticulate sounds through her nose, indicative of extreme commiseration.

"Ain't you going to get the devil when Babette sees you!" she said at last. "Mrs. Krakauer tells her six times over the 'phone already you just went home."

"Could I help it what that woman tells Babette?" Sam asked. "And, anyhow, Henrietta, what do I care what Mrs. Krakauer tells Babette or what Babette tells Mrs. Krakauer? And, furthermore, Henrietta, Babette could never give me the devil no more!"

"No?" Mrs. Schrimm said as she led the way to the dining-room. "You're talking awful big, Sam, for a feller which he never calls his soul his own in his own home yet."

"Them times is past, Henrietta," Sam answered as he sat down and removed his hat. "To-day things begin differently for me, Henrietta; because, Henrietta, you and me is old enough to know our own business, understand me—and if I would say 'black' you wouldn't say 'white.' And if you would say 'black' I would say 'black'."

Mrs. Schrimm looked hard at Sam and then she sat down on the sofa.

"What d'ye mean, black?" she gasped.

"I'm only talking in a manner of speaking, Henrietta," Sam explained. "What I mean is this."

He pulled an old envelope out of his pocket and explored his waistcoat for a stump of lead pencil.

"What I mean is," he continued, wetting the blunt point with his tongue, "ten bonds from Canadian Western, first mortgage from gold, *mit* a *garantirt* from the Michigan Midland Railroad, ten thousand dollars, interest at 6 per cent.—is six hundred dollars a year, ain't it?"

"Ye-ee-s," Mrs. Schrimm said hesitatingly. "*Und?*"

"*Und*," Sam said triumphantly, "fifty shares from Central Pacific at 154 apiece is seventy-seven hundred dollars, with dividends since thirty years they are paying it at 4 per cent. is two hundred dollars a year more, ain't it?"

Mrs. Schrimm nodded.

"What has all this got to do with me, Sam?" she asked.

Sam cleared his throat.

"A wife should know how her husband stands," he said huskily. "Ain't it so, Henrietta, *leben?*"

Mrs. Schrimm nodded again.

"Did you speak to Henry anything, Sam?" she asked.

"I didn't say nothing to Henry yet," Sam replied; "but if he's satisfied with the business I done for him this morning I would make him a partnership proposition."

"But, listen here to me, Sam," Mrs. Schrimm protested. "Me I am already fifty-five years old; and a man like you which you got money, understand me, if you want to get married you could find plenty girls forty years old which would only be glad they should marry you—good-looking girls, too, Sam."

"*Koosh!*" Sam cried, for he had noted a tear steal from the corner of Mrs. Schrimm's eye. He rose from his chair and seated himself on the sofa beside her. "You don't know what you are talking about," he said as he clasped her hand. "Good looks to some people is red cheeks and black hair, Henrietta; but with me it is different. The best-looking woman in the whole world to me, Henrietta, is got gray hair, with good brains underneath—and she is also a little fat, too, understand me; but the heart is big underneath and the hands is red, but they got red doing *mitzvahs* for other people, Henrietta."

He paused and cleared his throat again.

"And so, Henrietta," he concluded, "if you want me to marry a good-looking girl—this afternoon yet we could go downtown and get the license."

Mrs. Schrimm sat still for two minutes and then she disengaged her hand from Sam's eager clasp.

"All I got to do is to put on a clean waist," she said, "and I would get my hat on in ten minutes."

"The fact of the matter is," Max Gembitz said, two days later, "we ain't got the ready money."

Sam Gembitz nodded. He sat at a desk in Henry Schrimm's office—a new desk of the latest Wall Street design; and on the third finger of his left hand a plain gold band was surmounted by a three-carat diamond ring, the gift of the bride.

"No?" he said, with a rising inflection.

"And you know as well as I do, popper, we was always a little short this time of the year in our business!" Max continued.

"Our business?" Sam repeated. "You mean your business, Max."

"What difference does it make?" Max asked.

"It makes a whole lot of difference, Max," Sam declared; "because, if I would be a partner in your business, Max, I would practically got to be one of my own competitors."

"One of your own competitors!" Max cried. "What d'ye mean?"

For answer Sam handed his son the following card:

SAMUEL GEMBITZ	HENRY SCHRIMM
GEMBITZ & SCHRIMM	
CLOAKS & SUITS	
—WEST NINETEENTH STREET	NEW YORK

Max gazed at the card for five minutes and then he placed it in his waistcoat-pocket.

"So you are out to do us—what?" Max said bitterly.

"What are you talking about—out to do you?" Sam replied. "How could an old-timer like me do three up-to-date fellers like you and Sidney and Lester? I'm a back number, Max. I ain't got gumption enough to make up a whole lot of garments, all in one style, pastel shades, and sell 'em all to a concern which is on its last legs, Max. I couldn't play this here *Baytzimmer* feller's pool, Max, and I couldn't sit up all hours of the night eating lobsters and oysters and ham and bacon in the Harlem Winter Garden, Max."

He paused to indulge in a malicious grin.

"Furthermore, Max," he continued, "how could a poor, sick old man compete with a lot of healthy young fellers like you boys? I've got Bright's Disease, Max, and I could drop down in the street any minute. And if you don't believe me, Max, you should ask Doctor Eichendorfer. He will tell you the same."

Max made no reply, but took up his hat from the top of Sam's desk.

"Wait a minute, Max," Sam said. "Don't be in such a hurry, Max, because, after all, you boys is my sons, anyhow; and so I got a proposition to make to you."

He pointed to a chair and Max sat down.

"First, Max," he went on, "I wouldn't ask you for cash. What I want is you should give me a note at one year for five thousand dollars, without interest."

"So far as I could see," Max interrupted, "we wouldn't be in no better condition to pay you five thousand dollars in one year as we are to-day."

"I didn't think you would be," Sam said, "but I figured that all out; and if, before the end of one year, you three boys would turn around and go to work and get a decent, respectable feller which he would marry Babette and make a home for her, understand me, I would give you back your note."

"But how could we do that?" Max exclaimed.

"I leave that to you," Sam replied; "because, anyhow, Max, there's plenty fellers which is designers *oder* bookkeepers which would marry Babette in a minute if they could get a partnership in an old, established concern like yours."

"But Babette don't want to get married," Max declared.

"Don't she?" Sam retorted. "Well, if a woman stands hours and hours in front of the glass and rubs her face *mit* cold cream and *Gott weiss* what else, Max, if she don't want to get married I'd like to know what she does want."

Again Max rose to his feet.

"I'll tell the boys what you say," he murmured.

"Sure," Sam said heartily, "and tell 'em also they should drop in oncet in a while and see mommer and me up in One Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street."

Max nodded.

"And tell Babette to come, also," Sam added; but Max shook his head.

"I'm afraid she wouldn't do it," he declared. "She says yesterday she wouldn't speak to you again so long as you live."

Sam emitted a sigh that was a trifle too emphatic in its tremulousness.

"I'm sorry she feels that way, Max," he said; "but it's an old saying and a true one, Max: you couldn't make no omelets without beating eggs."

CHAPTER FIVE

MAKING OVER MILTON

"TAKE it from me, Mr. Zwiebel, that boy would never amount to nothing," said Levy Rothman, as they sat in the rear room of Wasserbauer's Café and restaurant.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Rothman," Charles Zwiebel replied; "the boy is only a little wild, y'understand, and if I could get him to settle down and learn a business, Mr. Rothman, he would settle down. After all, Mr. Rothman, he is only a boy, y'understand."

"At twenty-one," Rothman replied, "a boy ain't a boy no longer, Mr. Zwiebel. Either he is a man or he is a loafer, y'understand."

"The boy ain't no loafer, Mr. Rothman. He's got a good heart, Mr. Rothman, and he is honest

like the day. That boy wouldn't dream of taking no money from the cash drawer, Mr. Rothman, without he would tell me all about it afterward. That's the kind of boy he is, Mr. Rothman; and certainly Mrs. Zwiebel she thinks a whole lot of him, too. Not that he doesn't think a whole lot of her, Mr. Rothman. Yes, Mr. Rothman, that boy thinks a whole lot of his mother. If he would stay out all night he always says to her the next morning, 'Mommer, you shouldn't worry about me, because I could always take care of myself,' and I bet yer that boy could take care of himself, too, Mr. Rothman. I seen that boy sit in a game with such sharks like Moe Rabiner and Marks Pasinsky, and them fellers couldn't do nothing with him. Yes, Mr. Rothman, that boy is a natural-born pinochle player."

"Might you think that a recommendation, maybe?" Rothman exclaimed.

"Well, Mr. Rothman, my brother Sol, *selig*, used to say, 'Show me a good pinochle player and I will show you a natural-born salesman.'"

"Yes, Mr. Zwiebel," Rothman retorted, "and show me a salesman what is a good pinochle player, Mr. Zwiebel, and I will also show you a feller what fools away his time and sells the firm's samples. No, Mr. Zwiebel, if I would take your boy in my place I certainly wouldn't take him because he is a good pinochle player. Ain't he got no other recommendation, Mr. Zwiebel?"

"Well, certainly, everybody what that boy worked for, Mr. Rothman, couldn't say enough about him," Mr. Zwiebel said enigmatically; "but, anyhow, what's the use talking, Mr. Rothman? I got this proposition to make you: Take the boy into your place and learn him the business, and all you would got to pay him is five dollars a week. Myself I will put ten to it, and you could pay him fifteen, and the boy wouldn't got to know nothing about it."

"I wouldn't give him five dollars a week or five cents, neither," Mr. Rothman answered in tones of finality. "Because I don't need nobody in my place at present, and if I would need somebody I would hire it a feller what knows the business. I got lots of experience with new beginners already, Mr. Zwiebel, and I always lost money by 'em."

Mr. Zwiebel received this ultimatum in so crest-fallen a manner that Rothman's flinty heart was touched.

"Lookyhere, Mr. Zwiebel," he said, "I got a boy, too, only, *Gott sei dank*, the young feller ain't a loafer, y'understand. He's now in his third year in law school, and I never had a bit of trouble with that boy. Because I don't want you to feel bad, Mr. Zwiebel, but if I do say it myself, that boy is a good boy, y'understand; none better, Mr. Zwiebel, I don't care where you would go. That boy comes home, y'understand, every night, y'understand, except the night when he goes to lodge meeting, and he takes down his books and learns it till his mommer's got to say to him: 'Ferdy, *lieben*, you would ruin your eyes.' That boy is only twenty-three, Mr. Zwiebel, and already he is way up in the I.O.M.A. They give that young feller full charge for their annual ball two years already, and——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Rothman," Zwiebel broke in. "I got to get back to my business, and so, therefore, I want to make you a final proposition. Take the boy into your place and I would give you each week fifteen dollars you should pay him for his wages."

"I wouldn't positively do nothing of the kind," Rothman cried.

"And"—Mr. Zwiebel said as though he were merely extending his remark instead of voicing an idea that had just occurred to him—"and I will invest in your business two thousand dollars which you would only pay me savings-bank interest."

Rothman's eyes glittered, but he only laughed by way of reply.

"Ain't that a fair proposition?"

"You must think I need money bad in my business," Rothman commented.

"Every man in the cloak and suit business needs money this year, Rothman," said Zwiebel, who was in the cigar business. His specialty was the manufacture of cigars for the entertainment of cloak and suit customers, and his own financial affairs accurately reflected conditions in the woman's outer garment trade. For instance, when cloak buyers are anxious to buy goods the frugal manufacturer withholds his hospitality; but if the demand for cloaks is slack, then M to Z customers are occasionally regaled with cigars from the "gilt-edged" box. This season Zwiebel was selling more and better cigars than for many years past, and he made his deductions accordingly.

"Yes, Mr. Rothman," Zwiebel concluded, "there's plenty cloak and suit men would be glad to get a young feller like my Milton on such terms what I offer it."

"Well, why don't you talk to 'em about it?" Rothman replied. "I am satisfied."

But there was something about Rothman's face that to Zwiebel augured well for his son's

regeneration. Like the advertised loft buildings in the cloak and suit district, Mr. Rothman's face was of steel construction throughout, and Zwiebel felt so sure of Rothman's ability to cope with Milton's shortcomings that he raised the bid to three thousand dollars. Firmness, however, is a quality that makes for success in every phase of business, particularly in bargaining; and when the deal was closed Rothman had hired Milton Zwiebel for nothing a week. Mr. Zwiebel, on his part, had agreed to invest five thousand dollars in Rothman's business, the same to bear interest at 3 per cent. per annum. He had also bound himself to repay Rothman the weekly salary of fifteen dollars which Milton was to receive, and when they parted they shook hands warmly on the transaction.

"Well, Mr. Rothman," Zwiebel concluded, "I hope you will see to it the boy behaves himself."

Rothman's mouth described a downward arc.

"Don't worry, Mr. Zwiebel," he said; "leave it to me."

Milton Zwiebel had not found his *métier*. He had tried almost everything in the Business Directory from Architectural Iron Work to Yarns, Domestic and Imported, and had ascertained all of them to be lacking in the one quality he craved—excitement.

"That boy is looking for trouble all the time, mommer," Charles Zwiebel said to his wife on the night after his conversation with Rothman, "and I guess he will get so much as he wants by Rothman. Such a face I never seen it before, like Haman. If Milton should get fresh with him, mommer, he would get it a *Schlag*, I bet yer."

"Ain't you ashamed to talk that way?" Mrs. Zwiebel protested.

"It'll do the boy good, mommer," Mr. Zwiebel replied. "That boy is a regular loafer. It's eleven o'clock already and he ain't home yet. What that lowlife does when he stays out till all hours of the night I don't know. One thing is sure, he ain't doing no good. I hate to think where that boy will end up, mommer."

He shook his head and heavily ascended the stairs to bed, while Mrs. Zwiebel settled herself down with the evening paper to await Milton's return.

She had a weary vigil ahead of her, for Milton had at last found serious employment. Only that evening he had been engaged by Professor Felix Lusthaus as a double-bass player in Lusthaus's grand orchestra of forty pieces. This organization had been hired to render the dance music for the fifteenth annual ball of Harmony Lodge, 142, I.O.M.A., and the chairman of the entertainment committee had been influenced in his selection by the preponderating number of the orchestra's members over other competing bands.

Now, to the inexperienced ear twenty-five players will emit nearly as much noise as forty, and in view of this circumstance Professor Lusthaus was accustomed to hire twenty-five bona-fide members of the musical union, while the remaining fifteen pieces were what are technically known as sleepers. That is to say, Professor Lusthaus provided them with instruments and they were directed to go through the motions without making any sound.

Milton, for instance, was instructed how to manipulate the fingerboard of his ponderous instrument, but he was enjoined to draw his bow across the metal base of the music-stand and to avoid the strings upon peril of his job. During the opening two-step Milton's behaviour was exemplary. He watched the antics of the other *contra basso* and duplicated them so faithfully as to call for a commendatory nod from the Professor at the conclusion of the number.

His undoing began with the second dance, which was a waltz. As *contra basso* performer he stood with his fellow-artist at the rear of the platform facing the dancing floor, and no sooner had Professor Lusthaus's baton directed the first few measures than Milton's imitation grew spiritless. He had espied a little girl in white with eyes that flashed her enjoyment of the dreamy rhythm. Her cheeks glowed and her lips were parted, while her tiny gloved hand rested like a flower on the shoulder of her partner. They waltzed half-time, as the vernacular has it, and to Milton it seemed like the apotheosis of the dance. He gazed wide-eyed at the fascinating scene and was only brought to himself when the drummer poked him in the ribs with the butt end of the drumstick. For the remainder of the waltz he performed discreetly on the music-stand and his fingers chased themselves up and down the strings with lifelike rapidity.

"Hey, youse," Professor Lusthaus hissed after he had laid down his baton, "what yer trying to do? Queer the whole thing? Hey?"

"I thought I—now—seen a friend of mine," Milton said lamely.

"Oh, yer did, did yer?" Professor Lusthaus retorted. "Well, when you play with this here orchestra you want to remember you ain't got a friend in the world, see?"

Milton nodded.

"And, furthermore," the Professor concluded, "make some more breaks like that and see what'll happen you."

Waltzes and two-steps succeeded each other with monotonous regularity until the grand march for supper was announced. For three years Ferdy Rothman had been chairman of the entertainment and floor committee of Harmony Lodge I.O.M.A.'s annual ball, and he was a virtuoso in the intricate art of arranging a grand march to supper. His aids were six in number, and as Ferdy marched up the ballroom floor they were standing with their backs to the music platform ten paces apart. When Ferdy arrived at the foot of the platform he faced about and split the line of marching couples. The ladies wheeled sharply to the right and the gentlemen to the left, and thereafter began a series of evolutions which, in the mere witnessing, would have given a blacksnake lumbago.

Again Milton became entranced and his fingers remained motionless on the strings, while, instead of sawing away on the music-stand, his right arm hung by his side. Once more the drummer missed a beat and struck him in the ribs, and Milton, looking up, caught sight of the glaring, demoniacal Lusthaus.

The composition was one of Professor Lusthaus's own and had been especially devised for grand marches to supper. In rhythm and melody it was exceedingly conventional, not to say reminiscent, and when Milton seized his bow with the energy of despair and drew it sharply across the strings of the *contra basso* there was introduced a melodic and harmonic element so totally at variance with the character of the composition as to outrage the ears of even Ferdy Rothman. For one fatal moment he turned his head, as did his six aids, and at once the grand march to supper became a hopeless tangle. Simultaneously Milton saw that in five minutes he would be propelled violently to the street at the head of a flying wedge, and he sawed away with a grim smile on his face. Groans like the ultimate sighs of a dying elephant came from underneath his bow, while occasionally he surprised himself with a weird harmonic. At length Professor Lusthaus could stand it no longer. He threw his baton at Milton and followed it up with his violin case, at which Milton deemed it time to retreat. He grabbed his hat and overcoat and dashed wildly through the ranks of the thirty-nine performers toward the front of the platform. Thence he leaped to the ballroom floor, and two minutes later he was safely on the sidewalk with nothing to hinder his exit save a glancing kick from Ferdy Rothman.

It was precisely eleven o'clock, the very shank of the evening, and Milton fairly shuddered at the idea of going home, but what was he to do? His credit at all of the pool parlours had been strained to the utmost and he was absolutely penniless. For two minutes he surveyed the empty street and, with a stretch and a yawn, he started off home.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Zwiebel recognized with a leaping heart his footsteps on the areaway. She ran to the door and opened it.

"Loafer!" she cried. "Where was you?"

"Aw, what's the matter now?" Milton asked as he kissed her perfunctorily. "It's only just eleven o'clock."

"Sure, I know," Mrs. Zwiebel said. "What you come home so early for?"

Again Milton yawned and stretched.

"I was to a racket what the I.O.M.A.'s run off," he said.

He rubbed the dust from his trouser leg where Ferdy Rothman's kick had soiled it.

"Things was getting pretty slow," he concluded, "so I put on my hat and come home."

Breakfast at the Zwiebels' was a solemn feast. Mr. Zwiebel usually drank his coffee in silence, or in as much silence as was compatible with an operation which, with Mr. Zwiebel, involved screening the coffee through his moustache. It emerged all dripping from the coffee, and Mr. Zwiebel was accustomed to cleansing it with his lower lip and polishing it off with his table napkin. Eggs and toast followed, and, unless Mrs. Zwiebel was especially vigilant, her husband went downtown with fragments of the yolks clinging to his eyebrows, for Mr. Zwiebel was a hearty eater and no great stickler for table manners.

To Milton, whose table manners were both easy and correct, the primitive methods of his father were irritating.

"Get a sponge!" he exclaimed on the morning after his orchestral experience, as Mr. Zwiebel absorbed his coffee in long, gurgling inhalations.

"Yes, Milton," Mr. Zwiebel commented, replacing his cup in the saucer, "maybe I ain't such a fine gentleman what you are, but I ain't no loafer, neither, y'understand. When I was your age I didn't sit down and eat my breakfast at nine o'clock. I didn't have it so easy."

"Aw, what yer kicking about?" Milton replied. "You don't let me do nothing down at the store, anyway. All I got to do is sit around. Why don't you send me out on the road and give me a show?"

"A show I would give you," Zwiebel cried. "You mean a picnic, not a show. No, Milton, I got some pretty good customers already, but I wouldn't take no such liberties with 'em as sending out a lowlife like you to sell 'em goods."

"All right," Milton said, and relapsed into a sulky silence.

"Lookyhere, Milton," Zwiebel commenced. "If I thought you was really willing to work, y'understand, I would get you a good job. But with a feller what's all the time fooling away his time, what's the use?"

"Maybe the boy would behave himself this time, popper," Mrs. Zwiebel interceded. "Maybe he would attend to business this time, popper. Ain't it?"

"Business!" Mr. Zwiebel exclaimed. "Business is something what the boy ain't got in him at all. Honest, mommer, I got to sit down sometimes and ask myself what did I done that I should have such a boy. He wouldn't work; he wouldn't do nothing. Just a common, low-life bum, what you see hanging around street corners. If I was a young feller like that, Milton, I would be ashamed to show myself."

"Aw, cut it out!" Milton replied.

"Yes, mommer, if I would get that boy a good job, y'understand," Mr. Zwiebel went on, "he would turn right around and do something, y'understand, what would make me like I could never show myself again in the place where he worked."

"Aw, what are you beefing about now?" Milton broke in. "You never got me a decent job yet. All the places where I worked was piker concerns. Why don't you get me a real job where I could sell some goods?"

"Talk is cheap, Milton," said Mr. Zwiebel. "But if I thought you meant it what you said I would take up an offer what I got it yesterday from Levy Rothman, of Levy Rothman & Co. He wants a young feller what he could bring up in the business, mommer, and make it a salesman out of him. But what's the use?"

"Maybe if you would take Milton down there and let Mr. Rothman see him," Mrs. Zwiebel suggested, "maybe the boy would like the place."

"No, sir," Mr. Zwiebel declared, "I wouldn't do it. I positively wouldn't do nothing of the kind."

He glanced anxiously at his son out of the corner of his eye, but Milton gave no sign.

"Why should I do it?" he went on. "Levy Rothman is a good customer of mine and he wants to pay a young feller fifteen dollars a week to start. Naturally, he expects he should get a hard-working feller for the money."

He felt sure that the fifteen dollars a week would provoke some show of interest, and he was not mistaken.

"Well, I can work as hard as the next one," Milton cried. "Why don't you take me down there and give me a show to get the job?"

Mr. Zwiebel looked at his wife with an elaborate assumption of doubtfulness.

"What could I say to a young feller like that, mommer?" he said. "Mind you, I want to help him out. I want to make a man of him, mommer, but all the time I know how it would turn out."

"How could you talk that way, popper?" Mrs. Zwiebel pleaded. "The boy says he would do his best. Let him have a chance, popper."

"All right," he said heartily; "for your sake, mommer, I will do it. Milton, *lieben*, put on your coat and hat and we will go right down to Rothman's place."

When Mr. Zwiebel and Milton entered the sample-room of Levy Rothman & Co., three quarters of an hour later, Mr. Rothman was scanning the Arrival of Buyers column in the morning paper.

"Ah, Mr. Rothman," Zwiebel cried, "ain't it a fine weather?"

"I bet yer it's a fine weather," Rothman agreed, "for cancellations. We ain't never had such a warm November in years ago already."

"This is my boy Milton, Mr. Rothman, what I was talking to you about," Zwiebel continued.

"Yes?" Mr. Rothman said. "All right. Let him take down his coat and he'll find a feather duster in the corner by them misses' reefers. I never see nothing like the way the dust gets in here."

Mr. Zwiebel fairly beamed. This was a splendid beginning.

"Go ahead, Milton," he said; "take down your coat and get to work."

But Milton showed no undue haste.

"Lookyhere, pop," he said. "I thought I was coming down here to sell goods."

"Sell goods!" Rothman exclaimed. "Why, you was never in the cloak and suit business before. Ain't it?"

"Sure, I know," Milton replied, "but I can sell goods all right."

"Not here, you couldn't," Rothman said. "Here, before a feller sells goods, he's got to learn the line, y'understand, and there ain't no better way to learn the line, y'understand, than by dusting it off."

Milton put his hat on and jammed it down with both hands.

"Then that settles it," he declared.

"What settles it?" Rothman and Zwiebel asked with one voice; but before Milton could answer the sample-room door opened and a young woman entered. From out the coils of her blue-black hair an indelible lead pencil projected at a jaunty angle.

"Mr. Rothman," she said, "Oppenheimer ain't credited us with that piece of red velour we returned him on the twentieth, and he's charged us up twice with the same item."

"That's a fine crook for you," Rothman cried. "Write him he should positively rectify all mistakes before we would send him a check. That feller's got a nerve like a horse, Mr. Zwiebel. He wants me I should pay him net thirty days, and he never sends us a single statement correct. Anything else, Miss Levy?"

"That's all, Mr. Rothman," she replied as she turned away.

Milton watched her as she closed the door behind her, and then he threw down his hat and peeled off his coat.

"Gimme the feather duster," he said.

For two hours Milton wielded the feather broom, then Mr. Rothman went out to lunch, and as a reflex Milton sank down in the nearest chair. He opened the morning paper and buried himself in the past performances.

"Milton," a voice cried sharply, "ain't you got something to do?"

He looked up and descried Miss Levy herself standing over him.

"Naw," he said, "I finished the dusting."

Miss Levy took the paper gently but firmly from his hands.

"You come with me," she said.

He followed her to the office, where the monthly statements were ready for mailing.

"Put the statements in those envelopes," she said, "and seal them up."

Milton sat down meekly on a high stool and piled up the envelopes in front of him.

"Ain't you got any sponge for to wet these envelopes on?" he asked.

Miss Levy favoured him with a cutting glance.

"Ain't you delicate!" she said. "Use your tongue."

For five minutes Milton folded and licked and then he hazarded a conversational remark:

"You like to dance pretty well, don't you?" he said.

"When I've got business to attend to," Miss Levy replied frigidly, "I don't like anything."

"But I mean I seen you at the I.O.M.A.'s racket last night," Milton continued, "and you seemed

to be having a pretty good time."

Miss Levy suppressed a yawn.

"Don't mention it," she said; "I feel like a rag to-day. I didn't get home till four o'clock."

This was something like friendly discourse, and Milton slackened up on his work.

"Who was that feller with the curly hair you was dancing with?" he began, when Miss Levy looked up and noted the cessation of his labour.

"Never you mind who he was, Milton," she answered. "You finish licking those envelopes."

At this juncture they heard the sample-room door open and a heavy footstep sound on its carpeted floor.

"Wait here," she hissed. "It's a customer, and everybody's out to lunch. What's your other name, Milton?"

"Milton Zwiebel," he replied.

Hastily she adjusted her pompadour and tripped off to the sample-room.

"Ain't none of them actors around here to-day, Miss Levy?" a bass voice asked.

"They're all out to lunch," Miss Levy explained.

"Where's Pasinsky?" the visitor asked.

"Mr. Pasinsky's in Boston this week, Mr. Feigenbaum," she replied.

Pasinsky was Rothman's senior drummer and was generally acknowledged a crackerjack.

"That's too bad," Feigenbaum replied. "Ain't Rothman coming back soon?"

"Not for half an hour," Miss Levy answered.

"Well, I ain't got so long to wait," Feigenbaum commented.

Suddenly Miss Levy brightened up.

"Mr. Zwiebel is in," she announced. "Maybe he would do."

"Mr. Zwiebel?" Feigenbaum repeated. "All right, *Zwiebel oder Knoblauch*, it don't make no difference to me. I want to look at some of them misses' reefers."

"Mis-ter Zwiebel," Miss Levy called, and in response Milton entered.

"This is one of our customers, Mr. Zwiebel," she said, "by the name Mr. Henry Feigenbaum."

"How are you, Mr. Feigenbaum?" Milton said with perfect self-possession. "What can I do for you to-day?"

He dug out one of Charles Zwiebel's Havana seconds from his waistcoat-pocket and handed it to Feigenbaum.

"It looks pretty rough," he said, "but you'll find it all O.K., clear Havana, wrapper, binder, and filler."

"Much obliged," Feigenbaum said. "I want to look at some of them misses' reefers."

Miss Levy winked one eye with electrical rapidity and gracefully placed her hand on the proper rack, whereat Milton strode over and seized the garment.

"Try it on me," Miss Levy said, extending her arm. "It's just my size."

"You couldn't wear no misses' reefer," Feigenbaum said ungallantly. "You ain't so young no longer."

Milton scowled, but Miss Levy passed it off pleasantly.

"You wouldn't want to pay for all the garments in misses' sizes that fit me, Mr. Feigenbaum," she retorted as she struggled into the coat. "My sister bought one just like this up on Thirty-fourth Street, and maybe they didn't charge her anything, neither. Why, Mr. Feigenbaum, she had to pay twenty-two fifty for the precisely same garment, and I could have got her the same thing here for ten dollars, only Mr. Rothman wouldn't positively sell any goods at retail even to his work-people."

Mr. Feigenbaum examined the garment closely while Miss Levy postured in front of him.

"And maybe you think the design and workmanship was better?" she went on. "Why, Mr.

Feigenbaum, my sister had to sew on every one of the buttons, and the side seams came unripped the first week she wore it. You could take this garment and stretch it as hard as you could with both hands, and nothing would tear."

Milton nodded approvingly, and then Miss Levy peeled off the coat and handed it to Feigenbaum.

"Look at it yourself," she said; "it's a first-class garment."

She nudged Milton.

"Dummy!" she hissed, "say something."

"Sammet Brothers sell the same garment for twelve-fifty," Milton hazarded. Sammet Brothers were customers of the elder Zwiebel, and Milton happened to remember the name.

Feigenbaum looked up and frowned.

"With me I ain't stuck on a feller what knocks a competitor's line," he said. "Sell your goods on their merits, young feller, and your customers would never kick. This garment looks pretty good to me already, Mr. Zwiebel, so if you got an order blank I'll give it you the particulars."

Miss Levy hastened to the office and returned with some order blanks which she handed to Milton. Then she retreated behind a cloak-rack while Milton wielded a lead pencil in a businesslike fashion. There she listened to Feigenbaum's dictation and unseen by him, she carefully wrote down his order.

At length Feigenbaum concluded and Miss Levy hastened from behind the rack.

"Oh, Mr. Feigenbaum," she said in order to create a diversion, "wasn't it you that wrote us about a tourist coat getting into your last shipment by mistake?"

"Me?" Feigenbaum cried. "Why, I ain't said no such thing."

"I thought you were the one," she replied as she slipped her transcription of Mr. Feigenbaum's order into Milton's hand. "It must have been somebody else."

"I guess it must," Feigenbaum commented. "Let me see what you got there, young feller."

Milton handed him Miss Levy's copy of the order and Feigenbaum read it with knit brows.

"Everything's all right," he said as he returned the order to Milton.

He put on his hat preparatory to leaving.

"All I got to say is," he went on, "that if you was as good a salesman like you was a writer, young feller, you'd be making more money for yourself and for Mr. Rothman."

He closed the door behind him and Miss Levy turned to Milton.

"Well, if you ain't the limit!" she said, and walked slowly into her office.

For a quarter of an hour Milton moped about with the feather duster in his hand until Rothman came back.

"What's the matter, Milton?" he said, "Couldn't you find nothing better to do as dust them garments all day? Why, if them garments would of been standing on the sidewalk already, they would be clean by now. Couldn't you help Miss Levy a little?"

"He did help me," Miss Levy cried from the doorway. "And, oh, Mr. Rothman, what do you think? Milton sold a big bill of goods to Henry Feigenbaum."

Ferdinand Rothman divided his time between a downtown law school and the office of Henry D. Feldman, in which he was serving his clerkship preparatory to his admission to the bar. He was a close student not only of the law but of the manner and methods of his employer, and he reflected so successfully Mr. Feldman's pompous address that casual acquaintances repressed with difficulty an impulse to kick him on the spot. His hair was curly and brushed back in the prevailing mode, and he wore eyeglasses mounted in tortoise-shell with a pendent black ribbon, albeit his eyesight was excellent.

"Good evening, Miss Levy," he said patronizingly, when he entered her office late in the afternoon of Milton's hiring. "How d'ye feel after the dance last night?"

"Pretty good," Miss Levy replied through a pen which she held between her teeth. "Milton, tell Mr. Rothman not to go home till he talks to me about Mr. Pasinsky's mail."

Milton hurried out of the office, while Ferdy Rothman stared after him.

"Who's he?" Ferdy asked.

"He come to work to-day," Miss Levy replied, "and he's going to be all right, too."

Ferdy smiled contemptuously. He was accustomed, on his way uptown, to stopping in at his father's place of business, ostensibly for the purpose of accompanying his father home. Other and more cogent reasons were the eyes, the blue-black hair, and the trim little figure of Miss Clara Levy.

"And what's he supposed to be doing around here?" Ferdy continued.

"He's supposed to be learning the business," Miss Levy answered, "and he ain't lost much time, either. He sold Henry Feigenbaum a bill of goods. You know Henry Feigenbaum. He's only got one eye, and he thinks everybody is trying to do him."

Here Milton Zwiebel returned.

"It's all right," he said; "Mr. Rothman will see you before he goes."

Ferdy Rothman lolled back in a chair, with one arm thrown over the top rail after the fashion of Henry D. Feldman's imitation of Judge Blatchford's portrait in the United States District Courtroom.

"Well, young man," he said in pompous accents, "how go the busy marts of trade these days?"

Milton surveyed him in scornful amazement.

"Hire a hall!" he said, and returned to the sample-room. It lacked half an hour of closing time, and during that period Milton avoided Miss Levy's office.

At length Ferdinand Rothman and his father went home, and Milton once more approached Miss Levy.

"Say, Miss Levy," he said, "who's that curly-haired young feller? Ain't he the one I seen you dancing with last night?"

"Sure he is," Miss Levy replied.

"I thought he was," Milton commented. "And wasn't he one of them—now—floor managers?"

"Ain't you nosy?" Miss Levy answered as she swept all the torn paper on her desk into her apron.

"Well, wasn't he?" Milton insisted.

"Suppose he was?" she retorted. "All *you've* got to do is to mail these letters and be sure to get down at half-past seven sharp to-morrow morning."

"Do you get here at half-past seven?" he asked.

"I certainly do," Miss Levy replied.

"All right," he said, as he gathered up the mail, "I'll be here."

Thus began the regeneration of Milton Zwiebel, for he soon perceived that to Miss Clara Levy a box of candy was not nearly so acceptable a token of his esteem as was a cheerful dusting of the sample stock. Moreover, he discovered that it pleased Miss Levy to hear him talk intelligently of the style-numbers and their prices, and it was not long before he became as familiar with his employer's line as was Miss Levy herself. As for his punctuality, it soon became a habit, and every morning at half-past six he ate a hurried breakfast and left the house long before the elder Zwiebel had concluded his toilet.

"I couldn't understand it, mommer," said Mr. Zwiebel, after Milton had completed the sixth month of his employment with Levy Rothman. "That boy goes downtown every morning, mommer, before daylight practically, y'understand. He don't get home till half-past seven, and he stays home pretty near every night, mommer, and that feller Rothman kicks yet. Always he tells me the boy ain't worth a pinch of snuff and he wants I shouldn't charge him no interest on that five thousand."

"That's something I couldn't understand, neither," Mrs. Zwiebel replied. "I ask Milton always how he gets along, and he tells me he is doing fine."

"The boy tells me the same thing," Zwiebel continued, "and yet that young feller, Ferdy Rothman, comes up to see me about getting a check for Milton's wages, and he says to me the boy acts like a regular lowlife."

"Why don't you speak to Milton?" Mrs. Zwiebel broke in.

"I did speak to him, mommer," Zwiebel declared, "and the boy looks at me so surprised that I couldn't say nothing. Also, I speaks to this here Ferdy Rothman, mommer, and he says that the boy acts something terrible. He says that Rothman's got a bookkeeper, y'understand, a decent, respectable young woman, and that Milton makes that girl's life miserable the way he's all the time talking to her and making jokes. Such a loafer what that boy is I couldn't understand at all."

He sighed heavily and went downtown to his place of business. On the subway he opened wide the *Tobacco Trade Journal*, thrust his legs forward into the aisle, and grew oblivious to his surroundings in perusing the latest quotations of leaf tobacco.

"Why don't you hire it a special car?" a bass voice cried as its owner stumbled over Zwiebel's feet.

"Excuse me," Zwiebel exclaimed, looking up. "Excuse me, Mr. Feigenbaum. I didn't see you coming."

"Oh, hello there, Zwiebel!" Feigenbaum cried, extending two fingers and sinking into the adjacent seat. "How's the rope business?"

"I ain't in the rope business, Mr. Feigenbaum," Zwiebel said coldly.

"Ain't you?" Feigenbaum replied. "I thought you was. I see your boy every oncet in a while down at Rothman's, and he hands me out a piece of rope which he gets from your place, Zwiebel. I take it from him to please him."

"You shouldn't do him no favours, Feigenbaum," Zwiebel cried. "That rope, as you call it, stands me in seventy dollars a thousand, and the way that boy helps himself, y'understand, you might think it was waste paper."

"Sure, I know," Feigenbaum answered. "I thought so, too, when I smoked it. But, anyhow, Zwiebel, I must say that boy of yours is all right."

"What!" Zwiebel cried.

"Yes, sir," Feigenbaum went on, "that boy has improved something wonderful. And certainly they think a great deal of him down there. Rothman himself told me that boy will make his mark some day, and you know what I think, Zwiebel? I think the whole thing is due to that young lady they got down there, that Miss Levy. That girl has got a headpiece, y'understand, and certainly she took an interest in your boy. She taught him all he knows, Zwiebel, and while I don't want to say nothing about it, y'understand, I must got to say that that young feller thinks a whole lot of Miss Levy, and certainly I think that Miss Levy somewhat reciprocates him."

"Reciprocates him?" Zwiebel said. "That's where you make a big mistake, Mr. Feigenbaum. They don't reciprocate him; they reciprocate me, y'understand. Fifteen dollars every week they reciprocate me for that boy's wages, and also a whole lot more, too."

"You don't understand me," Feigenbaum declared. "I mean that Miss Levy seems to think a good deal of Milton, and maybe you don't think Ferdy Rothman is jealous from them, too? That feller could kill your boy, Zwiebel, and he done his best to get Rothman to fire him. I know it for a fact, because I was in there as late as yesterday afternoon and I heard that young feller tell Rothman that Milton is too fresh and he should fire him."

"And what did Rothman say?" Zwiebel asked.

"Rothman says that Ferdy should shut up his mouth, that Milton was a good boy and that Rothman knew what was the matter with Ferdy, and I knew it, too, Zwiebel. That boy is jealous. Also, Rothman says something else, what I couldn't understand exactly."

"What was it?"

"He asks Ferdy if he could pick up in the street five thousand dollars at savings-bank interest."

"S'enough!" Zwiebel cried. "I heard enough, Feigenbaum. Just wait till I see that feller Rothman, that's all."

When the train drew up at the Fourteenth Street station Zwiebel plunged through the crowd without waiting for Feigenbaum and stalked indignantly to his place of business. When he entered his private office he found a visitor waiting for him. It was Ferdy Rothman.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Zwiebel," Ferdy cried, extending his hand in a patronizing imitation of Henry D. Feldman. "Glad to see you."

Zwiebel evaded Ferdy's proffered hand and sat down at his desk without removing his hat.

"Well," he growled, "what d'ye want?"

"I wanted to see you about something personal," Ferdy went on.

"Go ahead," Zwiebel cried; "you tell me something personal first and I'll tell you something personal afterward what you and your old man wouldn't like at all."

"Well," Ferdy continued, "I came to see you about Milton. There's a young man, Mr. Zwiebel, that is a credit to you in every way, and I can't help thinking that he's wasting his time and his talents in my father's place of business."

"He is, hey?" said Zwiebel. "Well, he ain't wasting none of your old man's time, Rothman, and he ain't wasting none of his money, neither."

"That's just the point," Ferdy went on. "I can't stand by and see you wronged any longer. Not only is my father getting the service of a more than competent salesman for nothing, but he's having the use of your five thousand dollars as well. Disgraceful, that's what I call it."

Zwiebel gazed at him earnestly for a minute.

"Say, lookyhere, Rothman," he said at length, "what monkey business are you trying to do?"

"I'm not trying to do any monkey business at all," Ferdy cried with a great show of righteous indignation. "I'm doing this because I feel that it's the only proper thing. What you want to do now is to take Milton out of the old man's place and find him a job with some other cloak and suit concern. That boy could command his twenty-five a week anywhere. Then, of course, the old man would have to cough up the five thousand."

Zwiebel nodded his head slowly.

"You're a pretty good son, Rothman," he commented, "I must say. But, anyhow, you ain't very previous with your advice, because I made up my mind this morning already that that's what I would do, anyhow."

He lit a cigar and puffed deliberately.

"And now, Rothman," he said, "if you would excuse me, I got business to attend to."

"Just one word more," Ferdy cried. "My father has got a girl working for him by the name of Levy, and I think if you knew what kind of girl she is, you wouldn't want Milton to go with her any more."

Zwiebel rose from his chair and his eyes blazed.

"You dirty dawg!" he roared. "Out—out from my place!"

He grabbed the collar of Ferdy's coat together with a handful of his curly hair, and with a well-directed kick he propelled the budding advocate through the office doorway. After a minute Ferdy picked himself up and ran to the stairway. There he paused and shook his fist at Zwiebel.

"I'll make you sweat for this!" he bellowed.

Zwiebel laughed raucously.

"Say something more about that young lady," he cried, "and I'll kick you to the subway yet."

It was nearly half-past twelve when Charles Zwiebel entered the sample-room of Levy Rothman & Co., on Eighteenth Street. He descried Milton in his shirt sleeves extolling the merits of one of Rothman's stickers to a doubtful customer from Bradford County, Pennsylvania.

"Hello, pop!" Milton cried. "Too busy to talk to you now. Take a seat."

"Where's Rothman?" Zwiebel asked.

"Out to lunch," Milton replied. "I'll be through in a minute."

Zwiebel watched his son in silence until the sale was consummated, and after Milton had shaken the departing customer's hand he turned to his father.

"Well, pop," he said, "this is the first time you've been up here since I've been here, ain't it?"

Zwiebel nodded.

"I wish I would of come up here before," he said. "Say, Milton, who is this here Miss Levy what works here?"

Milton blushed.

"She's in the office," he murmured. "Why, what do you want to know for?"

"Well, I met Henry Feigenbaum in the car this morning," Zwiebel went on, "and he was telling me about her. He says she comes from a family what him and me knows in the old country. The father drove a truck already."

"That's where you make a big mistake," Milton cried indignantly. "Her father's in the real-estate business and pretty well fixed at that."

Mr. Zwiebel smiled.

"That must be Simon Levy, the feller what owns a couple houses with that shark Henochstein. Ain't it?" he hazarded.

"Her father ain't in partnership with nobody," Milton rejoined. "His name is Maximilian Levy and he owns a whole lot of property."

At this juncture Miss Levy herself poked her head through the doorway.

"Milton," she cried sharply, "ain't you got something to do? Because if you haven't there are a lot of cutting slips to be made out."

Charles Zwiebel's face spread into a broad grin. "Go ahead, Milton," he said, "and attend to business. I'll wait here till Rothman comes in."

Ten minutes later Levy Rothman entered. He greeted Zwiebel with a scowl and glared around the empty sample-room.

"Well, Zwiebel," he growled, "what d'ye want now?"

"Oh, nothing," Zwiebel replied blandly. "I thought I'd step in and see how my Milton was getting along."

"You see how he is getting along," Rothman said. "He ain't here at all. That feller takes an hour for his lunch every day."

Zwiebel drew a cigar out of his pocket and licked it reflectively.

"So," he said, "you couldn't do no better with him than that, hey? Well, Rothman, I guess it ain't no use fooling away your time any more. Give me my five thousand dollars and I will take back the boy into my business again."

Rothman turned pale.

"If you would let the boy stay here a while," he suggested, "he would turn out all right, maybe."

"What's the matter?" Zwiebel asked. "Ain't you got the five thousand handy?"

"The five thousand is nothing," Rothman retorted. "You could get your five thousand whenever you want it. The fact is, Zwiebel, while the boy is a low-life, y'understand, I take an interest in that boy and I want to see if I couldn't succeed in making a man of him."

Mr. Zwiebel waved his hand with the palm outward.

"S all right, Rothman," he said. "You shouldn't put yourself to all that trouble. You done enough for the boy, and I'm sure I'm thankful to you. Besides, I'm sick of fooling away fifteen dollars every week."

Rothman shrugged his shoulders.

"Nah!" he said. "Keep the fifteen dollars, I will pay him the fifteen dollars out of my own pocket."

"But the boy is all the time complaining, Rothman, he couldn't live on fifteen dollars a week."

"All right, I'll give him twenty."

Zwiebel rose to his feet.

"You will, hey?" he roared. "You couldn't get that boy for fifty, Rothman, nor a hundred, neither, because I knew it all along, Rothman, and I always said it, that boy is a natural-born business man, y'understand, and next week I shall go to work and buy a cloak and suit business and put him into it. And that's all I got to say to you."

Maximilian Levy, real-estate operator, sat in his private office and added up figures on the back of an envelope. As he did so, Charles Zwiebel entered.

"Mr. Levy?" Zwiebel said.

"That's my name," Levy answered.

"My name is Mr. Zwiebel," his visitor announced, "and I came to see you about a business matter."

"Take a seat, Mr. Zwiebel," Levy replied. "Seems to me I hear that name somewheres."

"I guess you did hear it before," Zwiebel said. "Your girl works by the same place what my boy used to work."

"Oh, Milton Zwiebel," Levy cried. "Sure I heard the name before. My Clara always talks about what a good boy he is."

"I bet yer that's a good boy," Zwiebel declared proudly, "and a good business head, too, Mr. Levy. In fact, I am arranging about putting the boy into a cloak and suit business, and I understood you was a business broker as well as a real-estate operator."

"Not no longer," Levy answered. "I used to be a business broker years ago already, but I give it up since way before the Spanish War."

"Never mind," Zwiebel said; "maybe you could help me out, anyway. What I'm looking for is a partner for my boy, and the way I feel about it is like this: The boy used to be a little wild, y'understand, and so I am looking for a partner for him what would keep him straight; and no matter if the partner didn't have no money, Mr. Levy, I wouldn't take it so particular. That boy is the only boy what I got, and certainly I ain't a begger, neither, y'understand. You should ask anybody in the cigar business, Mr. Levy, and they will tell you I am pretty well fixed already."

"Sure, I know," Mr. Levy replied. "You got a pretty good rating. I looked you up already. But, anyhow, Mr. Zwiebel, I ain't in the business brokerage no more."

"I know you ain't," Zwiebel said, "but you could find just the partner for my boy."

"I don't know of no partner for your boy, Mr. Zwiebel."

"Yes, you do," Zwiebel cried. "You know the very partner what I want for that boy. Her name is Clara Levy."

"What!" Levy cried.

"Yes, sir," Zwiebel went on breathlessly. "That's the partner I mean. That boy loves that girl of yours, Mr. Levy, and certainly he ought to love her, because she done a whole lot for that boy, Mr. Levy, and I got to say that she thinks a whole lot of him, too."

"But——" Mr. Levy commenced.

"But nothing, Mr. Levy," Zwiebel interrupted. "If the girl is satisfied I wouldn't ask you to do a thing for the boy. Everything I will do for him myself."

Mr. Levy rose and extended his hand.

"Mr. Zwiebel," he declared, "this is certainly very generous of you. I tell you from the bottom of my heart I got four girls at home and two of 'em ain't so young no more, so I couldn't say that I am all broke up exactly. At the same time, Mr. Zwiebel, my Clara is a good girl, and this much I got to say, I will give that girl a trousseau like a queen should wear it."

Zwiebel shrugged.

"Well, sure," he said, "it ain't no harm that a girl should have a few diamonds what she could wear it occasionally. At the same time, don't go to no expense."

"And I will make for her a wedding, Mr. Zwiebel," Levy cried enthusiastically, "which there never was before. A bottle of tchampanyer wine to every guest."

"And now, Mr. Levy," Zwiebel said, "let us go downstairs and have a bottle tchampanyer wine to ourselves."

That evening Milton and Clara sat together in the front parlour of the Levy residence on One Hundred and Nineteenth Street. They had plighted their troth more than an hour before and ought to have been billing and cooing.

"No, Milton," Clara said as she caressed her fiancé's hand, "credit information shouldn't be entered on cards. It ought to be placed in an envelope and indexed on a card index after it's been filed. Then you can put the mercantile agency's report right in the envelope."

"Do you think we should get some of them loose-leaf ledgers?" he asked her as he pressed a kiss on her left hand.

"I think they're sloppy," she replied. "Give me a bound ledger every time."

"All right," Milton murmured. "Now, let's talk about something else."

"Yes," she cried enthusiastically, "let's talk about the fixtures. What d'ye say to some of those low racks and——"

"Oh, cut it out!" Milton said as he took a snigger reef in his embrace. "How about the music at the wedding?"

"Popper will fix that," she replied.

"No, he won't," Milton exclaimed. "I'm going to pay for it myself. In fact, I'll hire 'em to-morrow morning."

"Who'll you get?" she asked.

"Professor Lusthaus's grand orchestra," Milton said with a grin.

CHAPTER SIX

BIRSKY & ZAPP

"**A** CHARITABLE sucker like Jonas Eschenbach, of Cordova, Ohio, is always a close buyer, Barney," said Louis Birsky to his partner, Barnett Zapp, as they sat in their show-room one morning in April. "For every dollar he gives to an orphan asylum *oder* a hospital, understand me, he beats Adelstern down two on his prices; and supposing Adelstern does sell him every season, for example, eight thousand dollars, Barney—what is it?"

"Sure, I know, Louis," Barnett Zapp retorted satirically. "The dawg says the grapes ain't ripe because he couldn't reach 'em already."

Birsky shrugged his shoulders.

"For that matter, Barney," he said, "if the dawg could reach 'em *oder* not, y'understand, it wouldn't make no difference, Barney, because a dawg don't eat grapes anyhow. He eats meat, Barney; and, furthermore, Barney, if you think it's *bekovet* one partner calls the other partner a dawg, y'understand, go ahead and do so, Barney."

"I ain't calling you a dawg, Louis," Zapp protested.

"Ain't you?" Louis rejoined. "All right, Barney, then I must be getting deaf all of a sudden; but whether you are calling me a dawg *oder* not, Barney, I ain't looking to sell no goods to Jonas Eschenbach. On account even if he would buy at our price, y'understand, then he wants us we should *schnoder* for this orphan asylum a hundred dollars and for that orphan asylum another hundred, understand me—till we don't get no profit left at all."

"That's all right, Louis," Barney said. "It don't do no harm that a feller should give to charity oncet in a while, even if it would be to please a customer."

"I wouldn't argue with you, Barney," Louis agreed, "but another thing, Barney: the feller is crazy about baseball, understand me, which every time he is coming down here in August to buy his fall and winter line, Adelstern must got to waste a couple weeks going on baseball games *mit* him."

"Well, anyhow, Louis, Adelstern don't seem so anxious to get rid of him," Zapp said. "Only yesterday I seen him lunching with Eschenbach over in Hammersmith's, y'understand; and the way Adelstern is spreading himself *mit* broiled squabs and 'sparagus and hafterward a pint of tchampanyer to finish, understand me, it don't look like he is losing out on Eschenbach."

"That's all right, Barney," Birsky declared as he rose to his feet; "some people wastes money and some people wastes time, and if you ain't got no objections, Barney, I would take a look into the cutting room and see how Golnik is getting on with them 1855's. We must positively got to ship them goods to Feigenbaum before the end of next week; because you know as well as I do, Barney, with a crank like Feigenbaum we couldn't take no chances. He is coming in here this morning yet, and the first thing he wants to know is how about them 1855's."

As he started for the door, however, he was interrupted by Jacob Golnik, who comported himself in a manner so apologetic as to be well-nigh cringing.

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

"What's the matter, Golnik?" exclaimed Birsky. "Did you spoil them 1855's on us?"

Ordinarily the condescension that marks the relations between a designer and his employer is exerted wholly by the designer; and the alarm with which Birsky viewed his designer's servility was immediately communicated to Zapp.

"I told you that silk was too good for them garments, Birsky," Zapp cried.

"What d'ye mean, you told me the silk was too good?" Birsky shouted. "I says right along giving silk like that in a garment which sells for eight dollars is a crime, Zapp; and——"

"*Aber* I ain't touched the silk yet," Golnik interrupted; "so what is the use you are disturbing yourself, Mr. Birsky? I am coming to see you about something else again, entirely different already."

Birsky grew suddenly calm.

"So, Golnik," he said, "you are coming here to see us about something else again! Well, before you begin, Golnik, let me tell you you stand a swell chance to gouge us for more money. We would positively stand on our contract with you, Golnik; and even if it would be our busiest season, Golnik, we——"

"What are you talking nonsense, Mr. Birsky?" Golnik broke in. "I ain't coming here to ask money for myself, Mr. Birsky; and, furthermore, Mr. Birsky, you must got to understand that nowadays is a difference matter already from conditions in the cloak and suit trade ten years ago. Nowadays an employer must got to take some little benevolence in the interests of his employees, understand me, which when me and Joseph Bogin and I. Kanef gets together with the operators and formed the Mutual Aid Society Employees of Birsky & Zapp, understand me, we done it as much out of consideration by you, Mr. Birsky, as by us."

Birsky exchanged disquieting glances with his partner.

"Sit down, Golnik," he said, "and tell me what is all this *Verrücktheit*."

"*Verrücktheit!*" Golnik cried indignantly. "What d'ye mean, *Verrücktheit*, Mr. Birsky? This here is something which a big concern like H. Dexter Adelstern is taking up, and you would see that other people gets in it, too. These here mutual aid societies is something which it not only benefits the employees but also the employers, Mr. Birsky."

"You already said that before, Golnik," Birsky interrupted; "and if you think we are paying you you should make speeches round here, Golnik, let me tell you, Golnik, that Feigenbaum would be in our place any minute now; and if we couldn't show him we are going ahead on them 1855's, understand me, the first thing you know he would go to work and cancel the order on us."

"That may be, Mr. Birsky," Golnik went on, "*aber* this here proposition which I am putting up to you is a whole lot more important to you as Feigenbaum's order."

Birsky opened his mouth to enunciate a vigorous protest, but Golnik forestalled him by pounding a sample table with his fist in a gesture he had observed only the night before at a lodge meeting of the I.O.M.A. "Yes, Mr. Birsky," he shouted, "if you would want to do away with strikes and loafing in your shop, understand me, now is your chance, Mr. Birsky; because if an operator is got on deposit with his employers ten dollars even, he ain't going to be in such a hurry that he should strike *oder* get fired."

"Got on deposit ten dollars?" Zapp inquired. "How does our operators come to got with us a deposit of ten dollars, Golnik?"

"It's a very simple thing, Mr. Zapp," Golnik explained: "From the first five weeks' wages of every one of your hundred operators you deduct one dollar a week and keep it in the bank. That makes five hundred dollars."

Zapp nodded.

"Then after that you deduct only twenty-five cents a week," Golnik went on; "*aber*, at the end of five weeks only, the operator's got ten dollars to his credit—and right there you got 'em where they wouldn't risk getting fired by loafing or striking."

"*Aber*, if we deduct one dollar a week from a hundred operators for five weeks, Golnik," Zapp commented, "that makes only five hundred dollars, or five dollars to each operator—ain't it?"

"Sure, I know," Golnik replied; "*aber* you and Mr. Birsky donate yourselves to the mutual aid society five hundred dollars, and——"

"What!" Birsky shrieked. "Zapp and me donate five hundred dollars to your rotten society!"

"Huh-huh," Golnik asserted weakly, and Zapp grew purple with rage.

"What do you think we are, Golnik," he demanded, "millionaires *oder* crazy in the head? We got enough to do with our money without we should make a present to a lot of low-life bums five hundred dollars."

"Well, then, for a start," Golnik said, "make it three hundred and fifty dollars."

"We wouldn't give three hundred and fifty buttons, Golnik!" Birsky declared savagely. "If you want to be a mutual aid society, Golnik, nobody stops you, *aber* we wouldn't deduct nothing and we wouldn't donate nothing; so if it's all the same to you, Golnik, you should go ahead on them 1855's and make an end here."

Having thus closed the interview, Louis Birsky turned his back on the disgruntled Golnik, who stood hesitatingly for a brief interval.

"You don't want a little time to think it over maybe?" he suggested.

"Think it over!" Louis bellowed. "What d'ye mean, think it over? If you stop some one which he is trying to pick your pocket, Golnik, would you think it over and let him pick it, Golnik? What for an idee!"

He snorted so indignantly that he brought on a fit of coughing, in the midst of which Golnik escaped, while the bulky figure of One-eye Feigenbaum approached from the elevator.

"What's the matter, boys?" he said as with his remaining eye he surveyed the retreating figure of Jacob Golnik. "Do you got trouble with your designer again?"

Birsky shrugged his shoulders.

"Who ain't got trouble *mit* a designer, Mr. Feigenbaum?" he asked. "And the better the designer, y'understand, the more you got trouble *mit* him. Actually, Mr. Feigenbaum, you wouldn't believe the nerve that feller Golnik is got it. If we wouldn't sit on him all the time, understand me, he tries to run our business for us. Nothing is too much that he asks us we should do for him."

Feigenbaum pawed the air with his right hand and sat down ponderously.

"You ain't got nothing on me, Birsky," he said. "Honestly, if you would be running a drygoods store—and especially a chain of drygoods stores like I got it, understand me—every saleswoman acts like a designer, only worsen yet. Do you know what is the latest craze with them girls?"

He emitted a tremulous sigh before answering his own rhetorical question.

"Welfare work!" he continued. "Restrooms and lunchrooms, *mit* a trained nurse and *Gott weiss was noch!* Did you ever hear the like, Birsky?—I should go to work and give them girls a restroom! I says to Miss McGivney, my store superintendent in Cordova, I says: 'If the girls wants to rest,' I says, 'they should go home,' I says. 'Here we pay 'em to work, not to rest,' I says."

He paused for breath and wiped away an indignant moisture from his forehead.

"In my Bridgetown store they ain't kicking at all," he went on; "*aber* in my Cordova store—that's different again. There I got that *meshugganeh* Eschenbach to deal with; which, considering the monkey business which goes on in that feller's place, y'understand, it's a wonder to me that they got any time to attend to business at all. Two people he's got working for him there—a man and a woman—which does nothing but look after this here welfare *Närrischkeit.*"

"Go away!" Birsky exclaimed. "You don't say so!"

"The man used to was a *Spieler* from baseball," Feigenbaum continued; "and him and Eschenbach fixes up a ball team from the clerks and delivery-wagon drivers, which they could lick even a lot of loafers which makes a business of baseball already."

Birsky wagged his head from side to side and made incoherent sounds through his nose by way of expressing his sympathy.

"And yet," Feigenbaum continued, "with all Eschenbach's craziness about baseball and charities, Birsky, he does a big business there in Cordova, which I wish I could say the same. Honestly, Birsky, such a mean lot of salespeople which I got it in Cordova, y'understand, you wouldn't believe at all. They are all the time at doggerheads with me."

"It's the same thing with us here, Mr. Feigenbaum," Birsky said. "Why, would you believe it, Mr. Feigenbaum, just before you come in, understand me, Golnik is trying to hold us up we should donate five hundred dollars for an employees' mutual benefit society!"

Henry Feigenbaum pursed his lips as he listened to Birsky.

"I hope," he said in harsh tones, "you turned 'em down, Birsky."

Birsky nodded.

"I bet yer I did," he replied fervently, "like a shot already."

"Because," Feigenbaum continued, "if any concern which I am dealing with starts any such foolishness as that, Birsky, I wouldn't buy from them a dollar's worth more goods so long as I live—and that's all there is to it."

"We ain't got no such idee in our head at all," Zapp assured him almost tearfully. "Why, if you would hear the way we jumped on Golnik for suggesting it even, you wouldn't think the feller would work for us any more."

"I'm glad to know it," Feigenbaum said. "Us business men has got to stick together, Zapp, and keep charity where it belongs, understand me; otherwise we wouldn't know whether we are running businesses *oder* hospitals *mit* lodgeroom annexes, the way them employees' aid societies is springing up."

He rose to his feet and took off his hat and coat, preparatory to going over Birsky & Zapp's sample line.

"What we want in towns like Bridgetown and Cordova is less charities and more asphalt pavements," he declared. "Every time a feller comes in the store, Birsky, I couldn't tell whether he is a collector for a hospital *oder* a wagon shop. My delivery system costs me a fortune for repairs already, the pavements is so rotten."

Zapp clucked his tongue sympathetically.

"If it ain't one thing it's another," he said; "so, if you're ready to look over the rest of our line, Mr. Feigenbaum, I could assure you the first operator which he is going into a mutual aid society here gets fired on the spot, Mr. Feigenbaum. We would start showing you these here washable poplins, which is genuine bargains at one seventy-five apiece."

When Louis Birsky seated himself in Hammersmith's restaurant at one o'clock that afternoon his appetite had been sharpened by a two-thousand dollar order from Henry Feigenbaum, who that noon had departed for his home in western Pennsylvania. Hence Louis attacked a dish of *gefüllte Rinderbrust* with so much ardour that he failed to notice the presence at an adjoining table of Jonas Eschenbach, the philanthropic drygoods merchant; and it was not until Louis had sopped up the last drop of gravy and leaned back in voluptuous contemplation of ordering his dessert that the strident tones of Charles Finkman, senior member of Finkman & Maisener, attracted his attention.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Eschenbach?" Finkman cried. "What brings you to New York?"

"I got to do some additional spring buying the same like every other drygoods merchant," Eschenbach replied. "You've no idee what elegant weather we got it out on the Lakes this spring. Spring styles was selling like hot cakes in March already; and our store employees' association held a picnic the first Sunday in April which we beat the tar out of a nine from a furniture factory—five to four in a ten-inning game."

"Is that a fact?" Finkman said. "*Aber* how does it come that you are lunching alone, Mr. Eschenbach?"

"Adelstern was coming with me," Eschenbach replied, "but at the last minute he had to attend the weekly luncheon of his cutting staff. It's wonderful the way that feller has got his workpeople organized, Mr. Finkman! He's a very enlightened merchant, with a lot of very fine ideas for the welfare of his employees. And you can well believe it, Mr. Finkman, goods made under such ideel conditions are very attractive to me. I've been a customer of Adelstern's for many years now; and sometimes, if he ain't got exactly what I am looking for, I take the next best thing from him. I believe in encouraging ideas like Adelstern's—especially when he is got a very nifty little ball team in his society, too."

If there was one quality above all others upon which Charles Finkman prided himself it was his philanthropy; and as a philanthropist he yielded precedence to nobody. Indeed, his name graced the title pages of as many institutional reports as there were orphan asylums, hospitals, and homes appurtenant to his religious community within the boundaries of Greater New York; for both he and his partner had long since discovered that as an advertising medium the annual report of a hospital is superior to an entire year's issue of a trade journal, and the cost is distinctly lower. The idea that philanthropy among one's own employees could promote sales had never occurred to him, however, and it came as a distinct shock that he had so long

neglected this phase of salesmanship.

"Why, I never thought that any concern in the cloak and suit business was doing such things." Finkman continued; and his tones voiced his chagrin at the discovery of Adelstern's philanthropic innovation. "I knew that drygoods stores like yours, Mr. Eschenbach, they got a lot of enlightened ideas, but I never knew nobody which is doing such things in the cloak and suit trade."

At this juncture Louis Birsky abandoned his plans for a Saint Honoré tart, with Vienna coffee and cream. Instead he conceived a bold stroke of salesmanship, and he turned immediately to Finkman.

"What are you talking nonsense, Mr. Finkman?" he said. "We ourselves got in our place already an employees' mutual aid society, which our designer, Jacob Golnik, is president of it—and all the operators belong yet."

It cannot truthfully be said that Finkman received this information with any degree of enthusiasm; and perhaps, to a person of less rugged sensibilities than Louis Birsky, Finkman's manner might have seemed a trifle chilly as he searched his mind for a sufficiently discouraging rejoinder.

"Of course, Birsky," he growled at last, "when I says I didn't know any concerns in the cloak and suit business which is got a mutual aid society, understand me, I ain't counting small concerns."

"Sure, I know," Birsky replied cheerfully; "but I am telling you, Finkman, that we got such a mutual aid society, which, if you are calling a hundred operators a small concern, Finkman, you got awful big ideas, Finkman, and that's all I got to say."

Eschenbach smiled amiably by way of smoothing things over.

"Have your hundred operators formed a mutual aid society, Mr. —"

"My name is Mr. Birsky," Louis said, rising from his chair; and, without further encouragement, he seated himself at Eschenbach's table, "of Birsky & Zapp; and we not only got a hundred operators, Mr. Eschenbach, but our cutting-room staff and our office staff also joins the society."

"You don't tell me," Eschenbach commented. "And how do you find it works?"

"W-e-e-ll, I tell yer," Birsky commenced, "of course we ourselves got to donate already five hundred dollars to start the thing, Mr. Eschenbach."

While he made this startling declaration he gazed steadily at Finkman, who was moving his head in a slow and skeptic nodding, as one who says: "*Yow! Ich glaub's.*"

"Five hundred dollars it costs us only to-day yet, Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky went on, clearing his throat pompously; "but certainly, Mr. Eschenbach, in the end it pays us."

"How do you make that out?" Finkman demanded gruffly.

"Why, the money remains on deposit with a bank," Birsky explained, "and every week for five weeks we deduct from the operators' wages also one dollar a week, which we put with the five hundred we are giving."

Finkman continued to nod more briskly in a manner that proclaimed: "I see the whole thing now."

"So that at the end of five weeks," Birsky went on, "every operator is got coming to him ten dollars."

Finkman snorted cynically.

"Coming to him!" he said with satirical emphasis.

"Coming to him," Birsky retorted, "that's what I said, Finkman; and the whole idee is very fine for us as well as for them."

"I should say so," Finkman commented; "because at the end of five weeks you got in bank a thousand dollars which you ain't paying no interest on to nobody."

"With us, a thousand dollars don't figure so much as like with some people, Finkman," Birsky retorted; "and our idee is that if we should keep the money on deposit it's like a security that our operators wouldn't strike on us so easy. Furthermore, Finkman, if you are doubting our good faith, understand me, let me say that Mr. Eschenbach is welcome he should come round to my place to-morrow morning yet and I would show him everything is open and aboveboard, like a lodge already."

"Why, I should be delighted to see how this thing works with you, Mr. Birsky," Eschenbach said. "I suppose you know what an interest I am taking in welfare work of this description."

"I think he had a sort of an idee of it," Finkman interrupted, "when he butts in here."

Again Eschenbach smiled beneficently on the rival manufacturers in an effort to preserve the peace.

"I should like to have some other details from your plan, Mr. Birsky," he said. "How do you propose to spend this money?"

Birsky drew back his chair from the table.

"It's a long story, Mr. Eschenbach," he replied; "and if it's all the same to you I would tell you the whole thing round at my place to-morrow morning."

He rose to his feet and, searching in his waistcoat pocket, produced a card that he laid on the table in front of Eschenbach.

"Here is our card, Mr. Eschenbach," he said, "and I hope we could look for you at eleven o'clock, say."

"Make it half-past ten, Mr. Birsky," Eschenbach replied as he extended his hand in farewell. "Will you join me there, Mr. Finkman?"

Finkman nodded sulkily.

"I will if I got the time, Mr. Eschenbach," he said; "*aber* don't rely on me too much."

A malicious smile spread itself over Birsky's face as he started to leave.

"Me and my partner is going to feel terrible disappointed if you don't show up, Finkman," he declared; and with this parting shot he hurried back to his place of business.

"Say, Barney," he said after he had removed his hat, "ain't it surprising what a back number a feller like Charles Finkman is?"

"We should be such back numbers as Finkman & Maisener, Louis," Barney commented dryly, "with a rating two hundred thousand to three hundred thousand, first credit."

"Even so," Louis commented, "the feller surprises me—he is such an iggeramus. Actually, Barney, he says he never knew that a single garment manufacturer in the city of New York is got in his shop one of them there mutual aid affairs. 'Why, Mr. Finkman,' I says, 'we ourselves got such a mutual aid society,' I says; and right away Eschenbach says he would come round here to-morrow morning and see how the thing works. So you should tell Kanef he should fix over them racks to show up well them changeable taffetas. Also, Barney, you should tell Kanef to put them serges and the other stickers back of the piece goods; and——"

At this point Barney raised a protesting hand.

"One moment, Louis," he cried. "What d'ye mean Eschenbach comes to-morrow?"

"Why, Eschenbach is interested in our mutual aid society; and——"

"Our mutual aid society!" Barney cried. "What are you talking about, our mutual aid society?"

"Well, then, Golnik's mutual aid society," Louis continued.

"Golnik's mutual aid society!" exclaimed Zapp. "Golnik ain't got no mutual aid society no more, Birsky. I told him after you are gone to lunch, Birsky, that if him *oder* anybody else round here even so much as mentions such a thing to us again we would fire 'em right out of here, contracts *oder* no contracts."

Birsky sat down in a chair and gazed mournfully at his partner.

"You told him that, Zapp?" he said.

"I certainly did," Zapp replied. "What do you think I would tell him after the way Feigenbaum takes on so?"

Birsky nodded his head slowly.

"That's the way it goes, Zapp," he said. "I am sitting there in Hammersmith's half an hour already, scheming how we should get Eschenbach round here so he should look over our line—which I didn't hardly eat nothing at all, understand me—and you go to work and knock away the ground from under my toes already!"

"What d'ye mean, I am knocking away the ground from under your toes?" Zapp cried indignantly. "What has Golnik's mutual aid society got to do *mit* your toes, Birsky—*oder*

Eschenbach, neither?"

"It's got a whole lot to do with it," Birsky declared. "It's got everything to do with it; in fact, Barney, if it wouldn't be that I am telling Eschenbach we got a mutual aid society here he wouldn't come round here at all."

"That's all right," Zapp said. "He ain't in the mutual aid society business—he's in the drygoods business, Louis; and so soon as we showed him them changeable taffetas at eight dollars he would quick forget all about mutual aid societies."

Birsky shook his head emphatically.

"That's where you make a big mistake, Barney," he replied; and forthwith he unfolded to Zapp a circumstantial narrative of his encounter with Eschenbach and Finkman at Hammersmith's café.

"So you see, Barney," he continued, "if we are ever going to do business *mit* Eschenbach, understand me, for a start the mutual aid society is everything and the changeable taffetas don't figure at all."

"But I thought you are saying this morning you wouldn't want to do business *mit* Eschenbach," Zapp protested.

"This morning was something else again," Birsky said. "This morning I was busy getting through *mit* Feigenbaum, which if I got a bird in one hand, Barney, I ain't trying to hold two in the other."

"That's all right, Louis," Zapp replied, "if you think when you booked Feigenbaum's order that you got a bird in one hand, Louis, you better wait till the goods is shipped and paid for. Otherwise, Louis, if Feigenbaum hears you are monkeying round *mit* mutual aid societies he would go to work and cancel the order on us, and you could kiss yourself good-bye with his business."

"*Schmooes*, Barney!" Birsky protested. "How is Feigenbaum, which he is safe in Bridgetown, going to find out what is going on in our shop? We could be running here a dozen mutual aid societies, understand me, for all that one-eyed *Rosher* hears of it."

Zapp shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, Louis," he said; "if you want to fix up mutual aid societies round here go ahead and do so—only one thing I got to tell you, Louis: you should fix it up that some one else as Golnik should be president, understand me, because a designer like Golnik is enough stuck on himself without he should be president of a mutual aid society. Treasurer is good enough for him."

Birsky received the suggestion with a satirical smile.

"You got a real head for business, Zapp, I must say," he said, "when you are going to make a feller like Golnik treasurer."

"Well, then, we could make Golnik secretary, and Kanef, the shipping clerk, treasurer," Zapp suggested. "The feller's got rich relations in the herring business."

"I don't care a snap if the feller's relations own all the herring business in the world, Zapp," Birsky continued. "This afternoon yet we would go to work and get up this here mutual aid society, *mit* Jacob Golnik president and I. Kanef vice-president."

"And who would be treasurer then?" Zapp asked meekly; whereat Louis Birsky slapped his chest.

"I would be treasurer," he announced; "and for a twenty dollar bill we would get Henry D. Feldman he should fix up the by-laws, which you could take it from me, Zapp, if there's any honour coming to Golnik after me and Feldman gets through, understand me, the feller is easy flattered, Zapp—and that's all I got to say."

It was not until after five o'clock that Birsky returned from Feldman's office with the typewritten constitution and by-laws of a voluntary association entitled the Mutual Aid Society Employees of Birsky & Zapp. Moreover, under the advice of counsel, he had transferred from the firm's balance in the Kosciusko Bank the sum of five hundred dollars to a new account denominated L. Birsky, Treasurer; and the omission of the conjunction "as" before the word "Treasurer" was all that prevented the funds so deposited from becoming the property of the mutual aid society. In short, everything was in readiness for the reception of Jonas Eschenbach the following morning except the trifling detail of notifying Jacob Golnik and the hundred operators that their mutual aid society had come into being; and as soon as Birsky had

removed his hat and coat he hastened into the cutting room and beckoned to Golnik.

"Golnik," he said, "*kommen Sie mal h'rein* for a minute." Golnik looked up from a pile of cloth and waved his hand reassuringly.

"It's all right, Mr. Birsky," he said. "I thought the matter over already; and you and your partner is right, Mr. Birsky. This here mutual aid society is nix, Mr. Birsky. Why should I take from my salary a dollar a week for five weeks, understand me, while a lot of old *Schnorrers* like them pressers in there is liable to die on us any minute, y'understand, and right away we got to pay out a death benefit for forty or fifty dollars?"

"What are you talking about a death benefit?" Birsky exclaimed. "Why should you got death benefits in a mutual aid society? A mutual aid society, which if you got any idee about the English language at all, Golnik, means a society which the members helps each other, Golnik; and if a member goes to work and dies, Golnik, he couldn't help nobody no more. In a mutual aid society, Golnik, if a member dies he is dead, understand me, and all he gets out is what he puts in less his share of what it costs to run the society."

Golnik laid down his shears and gazed earnestly at his employer.

"I never thought that way about it before," he said; "but, anyhow, Mr. Birsky, *Gott soll hüten* such a feller shouldn't die sudden, understand me, then we got to pay him a sick benefit yet five dollars a week; and the least such a *Schlemiel* lingers on us is ten weeks, which you could see for yourself, Mr. Birsky, where do I get off?"

"Well, you would be anyhow president, Golnik—ain't it?" Birsky said.

"Sure, I know, Mr. Birsky," Golnik continued; "but what is the *Kunst* a feller should be president, understand me, if I got to pay every week my good money for a lot of operators which they *fress* from pickles and fish, understand me, till they are black in the face *mit* the indigestion, y'understand, while me I never got so much as a headache even? So I guess you are right, after all, Mr. Birsky. A feller which he is such a big fool that he joins one of them there mutual aid societies deserves he should get fired right out of here."

"*Aber*, Golnik," Birsky protested, "me and Zapp has changed our minds already and we are agreeable we should have such a society, which you would be president and Kanef vice-president."

There was a note of anxiety in Birsky's voice that caused Golnik to hesitate before replying, and he immediately conjectured that Birsky's reconsideration of the mutual aid society plan had been made on grounds not entirely altruistic.

"Well," he said at length, "of course if you and Mr. Zapp is changed your minds, Mr. Birsky, I couldn't kick; *aber*, if it's all the same to you, you should please leave me out of it."

"What d'ye mean, leave you out of it?" Birsky cried. "When we would got here an employees' mutual aid society, Golnik, who would be president from it if the designer wouldn't, Golnik?"

Golnik gave an excellent imitation of a disinterested onlooker as he shrugged his shoulders in reply.

"What's the matter with Kanef, Mr. Birsky?" he asked.

"Kanef is a shipping clerk only, Golnik," Birsky replied; "and you know as well as I do, Golnik, a shipping clerk is got so much influence with the operators like nothing at all. Besides, Golnik, we already got your name in as president, which, if we would change it now, right away we are out twenty dollars we paid Henry D. Feldman this afternoon he should draw up the papers for us."

"So!" Golnik exclaimed. "Feldman draws up the papers!"

"Sure he did," Birsky said; "which, if we started this thing, Golnik, we want to do it right."

Golnik nodded.

"And he would do it right, too, Mr. Birsky," he commented; "which, judging from the contract he is drawing up between you and me last December, an elegant chance them operators is got in such a society."

Birsky patted his designer confidentially on the shoulder.

"What do you care, Golnik?" he said. "You ain't an operator—and besides, Golnik, I couldn't stand here and argue with you all night; so I tell you what I would do, Golnik: come in this here society as president and we wouldn't deduct nothing from your wages at all, and you would be a member in good standing, anyhow."

Golnik shook his head slowly, whereat Birsky continued his confidential patting.

"And so long as the society lasts, Golnik," he said, "we ourselves would pay you two dollars a week to boot."

"And I am also to get sick benefits?" Golnik asked.

"You would get just so much sick benefits as anybody else in the society," Birsky replied, "because you could leave that point to me, Golnik, which I forgot to told you, Golnik, that I am the treasurer; so you should please be so good and break it to Bogin and Kanef and the operators. We want to get through with this thing."

For the remainder of the afternoon, therefore, the business premises of Birsky & Zapp were given over to speechmaking on the part of Birsky and Golnik; and when at the conclusion of his fervid oration Golnik exhibited to the hundred operators the passbook of L. Birsky, Treasurer, the enthusiasm it evoked lost nothing by the omission of the conjunctive adverb "as." Indeed, resolutions were passed and spread upon the minutes of such a laudatory character that, until the arrival of Jonas Eschenbach the following morning, there persisted in both Birsky and Zapp a genuine glow of virtue.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Eschenbach?" Louis cried, as Eschenbach cuddled his hand in a warm, fat grasp. "This is my partner, Mr. Zapp."

"Ain't it a fine weather?" Barney remarked after he had undergone the handclasp of philanthropy.

"I bet yer it's a fine weather," Eschenbach said. "Such a fine weather is important for people which is running sick-benefit societies."

"*Warum* sick-benefit societies, Mr. Eschenbach?"

"Well," Eschenbach replied, "I take it that in a sick-benefit society the health of the members is paramount."

"Sure, it is," Barney agreed. "You couldn't expect otherwise, Mr. Eschenbach, from the *Machshovos* them fellers eats for their lunch—herring and pickles *mit* beer."

"I am not speaking from the food they eat," Eschenbach continued; "*aber*, in bad weather, Mr. Zapp, you must got to expect that a certain proportion of your members would be laid up with colds already."

Zapp waved his hand carelessly.

"For that matter," he said, "we told them fellers the sick-benefit society wouldn't fall for no colds *oder* indigestion, which both of 'em comes from the stummick."

"May be that's a wise plan, Mr. Zapp," Eschenbach continued; "but the best way a feller should keep himself he shouldn't take no colds *oder* indigestion is from athaletics."

"That's where you make a big mistake, Mr. Eschenbach," said Zapp, who had served an apprenticeship in the underwear business. "Even in the hottest weather I am wearing a long-sleeve undershirt and regular length pants, and I never got at all so much as a little *Magensäure*."

"I don't doubt your word for a minute, Mr. Zapp," Eschenbach went on; "but it ain't what you wear which is counting so much, y'understand—it's what you do. Now you take them operators of yours, Mr. Zapp, and if they would play once in a while a game of baseball, *verstehst du mich*—especially this time of the year, Mr. Zapp—their health improves something wonderful."

"Baseball!" Birsky exclaimed. "And when do you suppose our operators gets time to *spiel* baseball, Mr. Eschenbach?"

"They got plenty time, Mr. Birsky," Eschenbach replied. "For instance, in Adelstern's shop, Mr. Birsky, every lunch-hour they got the operators practising on the roof; while on Sundays yet they play in some vacant lots which Adelstern gets left on his hands from boom times already, up in the Bronx somewheres."

"*Aber* we got stuck *mit* only improved property," Birsky protested, "on Ammerman Avenue, a five-story, twelve-room house *mit* stores, which we bought from Finkman at the end of the boom times already, and which we couldn't give it away free for nothing even; and what for a baseball game could you play it on the roof of a new-law house on a lot thirty-three by ninety-nine?"

"Such objection is nothing, Mr. Birsky," Eschenbach rejoined, "because for five dollars a month the landlord here lets you use the roof lunch-hours; and for a start I would get Adelstern he should lend you his lots. Later you could get others, Mr. Birsky, because Mr. Adelstern ain't the only one which gets stuck from boom times *mit* Bronx lots already. I bet yer there is hundreds of real-estate speculators which stands willing to hire vacant lots for baseball Sundays, and they wouldn't charge you more as a couple dollars, neither."

"Well," Birsky said, handing his visitor a cigar, "maybe you are right, Mr. Eschenbach; but, anyhow, Mr. Eschenbach, we got here an elegant line of popular-price goods which I should like for you to give a look at."

"I got plenty time to look at your line, Mr. Birsky," Eschenbach assured him. "I would be in town several days yet already; and before I go, Mr. Birsky, I would like to see it if Adelstern's ideas would work out here."

"*Aber* we are running our society on our own ideas, Mr. Eschenbach," Zapp said.

"Quite right, too," Eschenbach agreed; "but I don't mind telling you, Mr. Birsky, that Adelstern's baseball team is originally my idea, Mr. Birsky—and if you don't mind, Mr. Birsky, I would like to look over your employees and see if I couldn't pick out nine good men."

"For my part," Birsky said, rising to his feet, "you could pick out twenty, Mr. Eschenbach."

Forthwith they proceeded to the rear of the loft, where the hundred odd members of the mutual aid society were engaged in the manifold employments of a cloak and suit factory, and the smiles and nods with which they greeted their treasurer rekindled in Birsky and Zapp the glow of virtue that to some degree had abated at Eschenbach's refusal to examine their sample line.

"You see, Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky said proudly, "what a good feeling the operators has for us. And you wouldn't believe how it shows in the work, too, Mr. Eschenbach. Our goods is elegant made up."

"I don't doubt it," Eschenbach said. "Which of your operators do you consider is the strongest, Mr. Zapp?"

"Well," Zapp replied, pointing to a broad-shouldered giant whose long black beard swept his torso to the waist, "that feller over there, by the name Tzvee Margoninsky, is strong like a bull, Mr. Eschenbach. Last week he moves for us the safe from the show-room to the office like it would be an empty packing-case already."

Eschenbach shook his head and smiled.

"*Mit* one arm already," he declared, "a feller could better play baseball as *mit* such a beard. What we must got to do is to pick out only fellers which looks more up to date."

"Go ahead and use your own judgment, Mr. Eschenbach," said Birsky; and thereat Jonas Eschenbach immediately selected three long-armed operators for outfielders. In less than half an hour he had secured the remainder of the team, including as pitcher I. Kanef, the shipping clerk.

"I seen worser material, Mr. Birsky," Eschenbach said after he had returned to the showroom; "so, if you would get these fellers up at Adelstern's lots on Northeastern Boulevard and Pelham Parkway on Sunday morning at ten o'clock, Mr. Birsky, I'll show 'em a little something about the game, understand me. Then on Monday morning I should be very glad to look over your sample line."

"*Aber*, Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky cried, "why not look at it now?"

Eschenbach smiled enigmatically as he clasped Birsky's hand in farewell.

"Because, in the first place," he said, "I got an appointment downtown, Mr. Birsky; and, in the second place, lots of things could happen before Monday."

"You shouldn't worry yourself, Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky protested, "them fellers would be up there all right."

"If we got to pay 'em overtime even," Zapp added as he conducted Eschenbach into the elevator, "union rates."

When Jonas Eschenbach arrived at Adelstern's vacant lots the following Sunday morning he was more than delighted with the size and enthusiasm of the gathering that awaited him. Practically all the members of Birsky & Zapp's working force were assembled, surging and gesticulating, round a little group composed of Birsky, Zapp, and Golnik.

"Did you ever hear the like, Mr. Eschenbach?" Birsky exclaimed as the philanthropist elbowed his way through the crowd. "The feller don't know the first thing about the game, understand me, and he kicks yet that he wants to be pitcher!"

Golnik flapped the air with his right hand.

"Never mind I don't know nothing about the game!" he declared. "Not only I am president of the society, but I am the designer in your place—ain't it? And if you think it's *bekovet* you are giving this *Aleer* to Kanef, which he is only a shipping clerk, understand me, I think differencely."

"But what is the honour about being a pitcher?" Eschenbach protested. "There's a whole lot of pitchers which they couldn't sign their names even."

"That's all right, too," Golnik declared. "Might I don't know nothing about this here baseball, Mr. Eschenbach, but I could read in the papers, understand me; and an up-to-date, high-grade pitcher is getting his ten thousand a year yet."

"*Schmooes*, ten thousand a year!" exclaimed Eschenbach. "What does a pitcher amount to anyway? Supposing a pitcher gets fresh with the umpire, *verstehst du mich*, and the umpire orders the pitcher he should get off the field, y'understand—he dassent give him no back talk nor nothing. He must got to go, *verstehst du*, because in baseball the pitcher is nothing and the umpire everything."

"Umpire?" Golnik replied. "What is that—an umpire?"

"The umpire is a kind of a foreman," Eschenbach continued, "only bigger yet—which if you would be umpire, that's an honour; *aber* a pitcher is nothing."

Here he winked furtively at Louis Birsky.

"And I says to Mr. Birsky only the other day," he went on, "I says, 'We must make the designer the umpire,' I says; 'because such an *Aleer* really belongs to the designer.' *Aber* if you are so stuck on being pitcher, understand me, we would make you the pitcher, and the shipping clerk will be the umpire."

Golnik shrugged his shoulders.

"It don't make no difference to me one way or the other," he said; "so I am content I should be the umpire."

"*Schon gut!*" Eschenbach cried as he laid down a heavy valise he had brought with him. "And now, boys, let's get busy."

He opened the valise and produced a catcher's mask and mitt, a bat, and three balls.

"Here, you!" he said, throwing one of the balls to Kanef.

During the discussion with Golnik, Kanef had maintained the bent and submissive attitude becoming in a shipping clerk toward his superior; but when Eschenbach flung the ball at him he straightened up immediately and, to the surprise and delight of the philanthropist, he caught it readily with one hand.

"Well, well!" Eschenbach exclaimed. "I see you played ball already."

"Used to was shortstop with the Scammel Field Club," Kanef murmured. "We was champeens of the Eighth Ward."

"Good!" Eschenbach cried. "Might we would got another ballplayer here?"

"Sure," Kanef replied, pointing to a short, thick-set presser who stood grinning among the spectators. "That feller there, by the name Max Croplin, he plays second base already."

"You don't say so!" Eschenbach exclaimed. "Well, supposing Max Croplin catches and you pitch, understand me, and I would go on the bat and give them fellers here a sample play already."

He threw the mask and mitt to Croplin, who proceeded to put them on amid the murmured plaudits of his fellow workmen, while Eschenbach seized the bat and planted himself firmly over the home plate. Meantime, Kanef proceeded to the pitcher's box and, wiping his right hand in the dirt, he struck a professional attitude that made Eschenbach fairly beam with delight.

"Play ball!" the philanthropist yelled, and Kanef swung his arm in the regular approved style.

The next moment the ball flew from his hand and, describing an outcurve, grazed the tangent point of Eschenbach's waist-line into the outstretched palm of Max Croplin.

"Strike one!" Eschenbach shouted. "You should please remember this is a sample play only, and 'tain't necessary you should send 'em so fast."

Kanef nodded, while Croplin returned the ball; and this time Eschenbach poised himself to knock a heaven-kissing fly.

"Play ball!" he cried again, and once more Kanef executed a pirouette on the mound preparatory to pitching the ball. Simultaneously Eschenbach stepped back one pace and fanned the air just as the oncoming ball took a sudden drop. A moment later it landed squarely in the pit of his stomach, and with a smothered "Woof!" he sank to the ground.

"Oo-ee!" wailed the hundred operators with one breath, while Birsky and Zapp ran wildly toward the home plate.

"Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky exclaimed, "*um Gottes willen!* What did that loafer done to you?"

"It's all right," Eschenbach gasped, struggling to his feet. "I ain't hurted none, and in a regular game I would take my first base already."

"Well, take it here," Birsky said. "Don't mind us, Mr. Eschenbach—or maybe you ain't got none *mit* you."

He put his hand to his hip-pocket and drew out a pocket flask, which Eschenbach, however, waved away.

"That's expressly something which a ballplayer must never got to touch during a game," Eschenbach cried as he dusted off his trousers with his handkerchief and once more seized the bat. "Now, then, Mr. Pitcher," he cried, "send me a real slow one straight over the plate."

Birsky and Zapp returned to the edge of the lot, scowling savagely at Kanef, who was once more engaged in wiping his hands in the dust. This time, however, he executed no preliminary dance steps, and Eschenbach swung his bat to such good purpose that the ball went sailing between the first and second bases at the height of a short man's shoulder—or, to be exact, at the height of Jacob Golnik's right shoulder, from which it rebounded into the left eye of Joseph Bogin, the shop foreman.

Amid the scene of confusion that ensued only Jonas Eschenbach remained calm.

"As clean a hit as ever I see!" he cried proudly, and strolled off toward the excited mob that surrounded Golnik and Bogin, both of whom were shrieking with fright and pain.

"D'ye think they're hurted bad, Mr. Eschenbach?" Zapp inquired anxiously.

"*Schmooes*—hurt bad!" Eschenbach retorted. "Why should a little thing like that hurt 'em bad?"

He was still intoxicated with the triumph of making what would have been a home run in a regular game, and his face bore a pleased smile as he turned to Birsky.

"I says to myself when I seen that ball coming," he continued, "I would put that right between first and second bases, about where that short and that big feller is standing—and that's exactly what happened."

Birsky stared at his prospective customer in shocked surprise.

"Then you done it on purpose!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly I done it on purpose," declared Eschenbach. "What do you think it was—an accident?"

He swung his bat at a pebble that lay in his path and Birsky and Zapp edged away.

"Well, if I was you, Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky said, "I wouldn't say nothing more about it to nobody. Even if you would meant it as a joke, understand me, sometimes them things turns out serious." With this dictum he elbowed his way through the sympathetic crowd that hemmed in the victims. "*Koosh*, Golnik!" he bellowed. "You might think you was injured for life the way you are carrying on."

"Never mind, Mr. Birsky," Golnik whimpered, "I am hurted bad enough. If I would be able to handle a pair of shears in six weeks already I'm a lucky man." He heaved a tremulous sigh and nodded his head slowly. "Little did I think," he wailed, "when I fixed up this here mutual aid society that I would be the first one to get the sick benefit."

Joseph Bogin ceased his agonizing rocking and turned fiercely to Golnik.

"What d'ye mean, the first one?" he demanded. "Ain't I in on the sick benefit also? Not alone would I draw a sick benefit, Golnik, but might I would come in for the losing-one-eye benefit, maybe, the way I am feeling now."

"You would what?" Birsky shouted. "You would come in for nothing, Bogin! All you would come in for is losing your job, Bogin, if you don't be careful what you are saying round here."

At this juncture Jonas Eschenbach bustled toward them and clapped his hands loudly.

"Now, then, boys," he called, "the whole team should please get out on the field."

He pointed to a tall, simian-armed operator who stood listening intently to the conversation between Golnik and Birsky.

"You, there," Jonas said to him, "you would play right field—and get a move on!"

The operator nodded solemnly and flipped his fingers in a deprecatory gesture.

"It don't go so quick, Mr. Eschenbach," he said, "because, speaking for myself and these other fellers here, Mr. Eschenbach, I would like to ask Mr. Birsky something a question."

He paused impressively, and even Golnik ceased his moaning as the remaining members of the baseball team gathered round their spokesman.

"I would like to ask," the operator continued, "supposing *Gott soll hüten* I am getting also *Makkas* in this here baseball, Mr. Birsky, which I would be losing time from the shop, Mr. Birsky, what for a sick benefit do I draw?"

Birsky grew livid with indignation.

"What for a sick benefit do you draw?" he sputtered. "A question! You don't draw nothing for a sick benefit." He appealed to Eschenbach, who stood close by. "An idee, Mr. Eschenbach," he said. "Did y'ever hear the like we should pay a sick benefit because some one gets hurted *spieling* from baseball already? The first thing you know, Mr. Eschenbach, we would be called upon we should pay a benefit that a feller breaks his fingers leading two aces and the ten of trumps, or melding a round trip and a hundred aces, understand me; because, if a feller behaves like a loafer, y'understand, he could injure himself just so much in pinochle as in baseball."

"*Schon gut*, Mr. Birsky," the operator continued amid the approving murmurs of his fellow players, "that's all I want to know."

As they moved off in the direction of the West Farms subway station, Golnik's resentment, which for the time had rendered him speechless, gave way to profanity.

"So," he cried, choking with indignation, "I was acting like a loafer, was I? And that's how I got hurted!"

Here he contorted his face and clapped his hand to his injured shoulder in response to a slight twinge of pain; and for at least two minutes he closed his eyes and gasped heavily in a manner that suggested the agonies of death by the rack and thumbscrews.

"You will hear from me later, gentlemen," he said at last, "and from Bogin also, which we wouldn't take no part of your sick benefit."

He fell back exhausted against the outstretched arm of a bearded operator; and thus supported, he seized Bogin's elbow and started to leave the lot, with the halting steps of Nathan the Wise in the last act of that sterling drama, as performed by the principal tragedian of the Canal Street Theatre.

"And you would see, Mr. Birsky," he concluded, "that we got plenty witnesses, which if we wouldn't get from you and Mr. Eschenbach at the very least two thousand dollars, understand me, there ain't no lawyers worth the name in this city!"

Three minutes later there remained in Adelstern's lot only two of Birsky & Zapp's employees—namely, the pitcher and the catcher of Eschenbach's team; and they were snapping the ball back and forth in a manner that caused Eschenbach's eyes to gleam with admiration.

"*Nu*, Mr. Eschenbach," Birsky croaked at last, "I guess we are up against it for fair, because not only we would lose our designer and shop foreman, y'understand, but them fellers would sue us sure."

Eschenbach waved his hands airily.

"My worries!" he said. "We would talk all about that to-morrow afternoon in your store."

Again he seized the bat and swung it at a pebble.

"But, anyhow," he concluded, "there's still five of us left, Mr. Birsky; so you and Zapp get out on right and left field and we'll see what we can do."

He crossed over to the home plate and pounded the earth with the end of his bat.

"All right, boys," he called. "Play ball!"

Louis Birsky limped wearily from the cutting room, where he had been busy since seven o'clock exercising the functions of his absent designer.

"Oo-ee!" he exclaimed as he reached the firm's office. "I am stiff like I would got the rheumatism already."

Barney Zapp sat at his desk, with a pile of newly opened mail in front of him, and he scowled darkly at his partner, who sank groaning into the nearest chair.

"I give you my word, Barney," Birsky went on, "if that old *Rosher* would of kept us a minute longer throwing that *verflüchte Bobky* round, understand me—never mind he wouldn't come in here and buy a big order from us this morning—I would of wrung his neck for him. What does he think we are, anyway—children?"

Zapp only grunted in reply. He was nursing a badly strained wrist as the result of two hours' fielding for Jonas Eschenbach; and thus handicapped he had been performing the duties of Joseph Bogin, the shop foreman, who only that morning had sent by his wife a formal note addressed to Birsky & Zapp. It had been written under the advice of counsel and it announced Bogin's inability to come to work by reason of injuries received through the agency of Birsky & Zapp, and concluded with the notice that an indemnity was claimed from the funds of the mutual aid society, "without waiving any other proceedings that the said Joseph Bogin might deem necessary to protect his interests in the matter."

"*Nu*, Zapp," Birsky said after Zapp had shown him Bogin's note, "you couldn't prevent a crook like Bogin suing you if he wants to, understand me; and I bet yer when Eschenbach comes in here this afternoon he would buy from us such a bill of goods that Bogin's and Golnik's claims wouldn't be a bucket of water in the ocean."

For answer to this optimistic prophecy Zapp emitted a short and mirthless laugh, while he handed to his partner another letter, which read as follows:

HOTEL PRINCE CLARENCE,—*Sunday night.*

FRIEND BIRSKY: AS I told you Saturday, lots of things might happen before Monday, which they did happen; so that I cannot look over your sample line on account I am obliged to leave for Cordova right away. Please excuse me; and, with best wishes for the success of your society, I am

Yours truly,

JONAS ESCHENBACH.

P.S. I will be back in New York a free man not later than next week at the latest, and the first thing I will call at your place. We will talk over then the society and what happens with your designer yesterday, which I do not anticipate he will make you any trouble—and the other man, neither.

J. E.

"Well," Birsky commented as he returned the letter to Zapp, "what of it?"

"What of it!" Zapp exclaimed. "You are reading such a letter and you ask me what of it?"

"Sure," Birsky replied; "I says what of it and I mean what of it! Is it such a terrible thing if we got to wait till next week before Eschenbach gives us the order, Zapp?"

"If he gives us the order next week!" Zapp retorted, "because, from the way he says nothing about giving us an order *oder* looking over our sample line, Birsky, I got my doubts."

"*Schmooes*, you got your doubts!" Birsky cried. "The feller says as plain as daylight—" Here he seized the letter to refresh his memory. "He says," Birsky continued: "'P.S. I will be back in New York a free man not later than next week at the latest, and the first thing I will call at your place.' Ain't that enough for you?"

Zapp shrugged his shoulders in a non-committal fashion.

"I would wait till next week first," he said, "before I would congratulate myself on that order."

Birsky rose painfully to his feet.

"You could do as you like, Zapp," he said, "but for me I ain't worrying about things not happening until they don't, Zapp; so, if any one wants me for anything I would be over in Hammersmith's for the next half-hour."

Ten minutes later he sat at his favourite table in Hammersmith's café; and, pending the arrival of an order which included *Kreploch* soup and some *eingedämpftes Kalbflieisch*, he gazed

about him at the lunch-hour crowd. Nor was his appetite diminished by the spectacle of H. Dexter Adelstern and Finkman engaged in earnest conversation at an adjoining table, and he could not forbear a triumphant smile as he attacked his plate of soup. He had barely swallowed the first spoonful, however, when Adelstern and Finkman caught sight of him and they immediately rose from their seats and came over to his table.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Birsky?" Adelstern cried. "I hear you had a great game of baseball yesterday."

Birsky nodded almost proudly.

"You hear correct," he said. "Our mutual aid society must got to thank you, Mr. Adelstern, for the use of your Bronx lots."

"Don't mention it," Adelstern replied; "in fact, you are welcome to use 'em whenever you want to, Mr. Birsky."

He winked furtively at Finkman, who forthwith broke into the conversation.

"Might he would buy 'em from you, maybe, Adelstern," he suggested, "and add 'em to his other holdings on Ammerman Avenue!"

Birsky felt that he could afford to laugh at this sally of Finkman's, and he did so rather mirthlessly.

"Why don't you buy 'em, Finkman?" he suggested. "From the way you are talking here the other day to Mr. Eschenbach, you would need 'em for your mutual aid society which you are making a bluff at getting up."

"I ain't making no bluffs at nothing, Birsky," Finkman replied, "because, *Gott sei dank*, I don't got to steal other people's idees to get business."

"Do you think I am stealing Adelstern's idee of this here mutual aid society, Finkman?" Birsky demanded, abandoning his soup and glaring at his competitor.

"We don't think nothing, Birsky," Adelstern said; "because, whether you stole it *oder* you didn't stole it, Birsky, you are welcome to it. And if you would send round to my place this afternoon yet I would give you, free for nothing, a lot of bats and balls and other *Bobkies* just so good as new, which I ain't got no use for no more."

"What d'ye mean, you ain't got no use for 'em?" Birsky demanded. He began to feel a sense of uneasiness that made nauseating the idea of *eingedämpftes Kalbfleisch*.

"Why, I mean I am giving up my mutual aid society," Adelstern replied. "It's taking up too much of my time—especially now, Mr. Birsky, when Eschenbach could hang round my place all he wants to, understand me; he wouldn't give me no peace at all."

For a brief interval Birsky stared blankly at Adelstern.

"Especially now!" he exclaimed. "What are you talking about, especially now?"

"Why, ain't you heard?" Adelstern asked in feigned surprise.

"I ain't heard nothing," Birsky said hoarsely.

"Do you mean to told me," Finkman interrupted, "that you ain't heard it yet about Eschenbach?"

"I ain't heard nothing about Eschenbach," Birsky rejoined.

"Then read this," Finkman said, thrusting a marked copy of the *Daily Cloak and Suit Review* under Birsky's nose; and ringed in blue pencil was the following item:

CORDOVA, OHIO—Jonas Eschenbach to Retire. Jonas Eschenbach's department store is soon to pass into new hands, and Mr. Eschenbach will take up his future residence in the city of New York. Negotiations for the purchase of his business, which have been pending for some time, were closed Saturday, and Mr. Eschenbach has been summoned from New York, where he has been staying for the last few days, to conclude the details of the transaction. The purchaser's name has not yet been disclosed.

As Louis laid down the paper he beckoned to the waiter. "Never mind that *Kalbfleisch*," he croaked. "Bring me only a tongue sandwich and a cup coffee. I got to get right back to my store."

By a quarter to six that afternoon the atmosphere of Birsky & Zapp's office had been sufficiently cleared to permit a relatively calm discussion of Eschenbach's perfidy.

"That's a *Rosher* for you—that Eschenbach!" Birsky exclaimed for the hundredth time. "And mind you, right the way through, that crook knew he wasn't going to give us no orders yet!"

"But," he cried, "we got the crook dead to rights!"

"What d'ye mean, we got him dead to rights?" Zapp inquired listlessly.

"Don't you remember," Birsky went on, "when he hits the *Schlag* there yesterday, which injured Golnik and Bogin, he says to us he seen it all the time where they was standing and he was meaning to hit 'em with the ball?"

Zapp nodded.

"And don't you remember," Birsky continued, "I says to him did he done it on purpose, and he said sure he did?"

Zapp nodded again and his listlessness began to disappear.

"Certainly, I remember," he said excitedly, "and he also says to us we shouldn't think it was an accident at all."

Birsky jumped to his feet to summon the stenographer.

"Then what's the use talking?" he cried. "We would right away write a letter to Golnik and Bogin they should come down here to-morrow and we will help 'em out."

"*Aber* don't you think, if we would say we would help 'em out, understand me, they would go to work and get an idee maybe we are going to pay 'em a sick benefit yet?"

"Sick benefit nothing!" Birsky said. "With the sick benefit we are through already; and if it wouldn't be that the bank is closed, understand me, I would right away go over to the Kosciusko Bank and transfer back that five hundred dollars, which I wouldn't take no chances, even if Feldman did say that without the 'as' the 'Treasurer' don't go at all."

"Do it to-morrow morning first thing," Zapp advised; "and write Golnik and Bogin they should come down here at eleven o'clock, y'understand; so that when they get here, understand me, we could show 'em if they are going to make a claim against the mutual aid society, Birsky, they are up against it for fair."

When the two partners arrived at their place of business the following morning at eight o'clock, however, their plans for the dissolution of the mutual aid society were temporarily forgotten when, upon entering their office, they discerned the bulky figure of Henry Feigenbaum seated in Birsky's armchair.

"Honestly, boys," Feigenbaum said as he bit off the end of a cigar, "the way you are keeping me waiting here, understand me, it would of served you right if I would of gone right over to Adelstern's and give him the order instead of you, y'understand; *aber* the way Adelstern treats Jonas Eschenbach, understand me, I would rather die as buy a dollar's worth of goods from that *Rosher*."

"What d'ye mean, the way Adelstern treats Eschenbach?" Birsky asked.

"Why, just so soon as Eschenbach tells him he is going to sell out," Feigenbaum continued, "Adelstern right away disbands his mutual aid society; and he also just so good as tells Eschenbach to his face, y'understand, that all this baseball business was a waste of time, understand me, and he only done it to get orders from Eschenbach! And a man like Eschenbach, which he is a philanthropist and a gentleman, understand me, takes the trouble he should give Adelstern pointers about this here mutual aid society, which they are a blessing to both employers and employees, *verstehst du mich*, all I could say is that Adelstern acts like a loafer in throwing the whole thing up just because Eschenbach quits!"

"*Aber*, Mr. Feigenbaum," Birsky said, while a puzzled expression came over his face, "I thought you said when you was here last time that Eschenbach goes too far in such things."

"When I was here last," Feigenbaum replied, "was something else again; but when I left here Friday, understand me, right up till the last minute Eschenbach says no, he wouldn't let twenty thousand of the purchase price remain on a real-estate mortgage of the store property. When I got to Cordova Saturday morning my lawyers there says that Eschenbach stood ready to close the deal on them terms, y'understand, provided I would let the old man look after our store's employees' association, which I certainly agreed to; and so I bought his business there and then, and I must got to buy at least five thousand dollars goods before Wednesday morning for shipment by ten days already."

"You bought Eschenbach's store!" Zapp exclaimed.

Feigenbaum wriggled in Birsky's chair, which fitted him like a glove; and after he had freed himself he rose ponderously.

"*Aber* one moment, Mr. Feigenbaum," Birsky pleaded. "Did I understand you to say that Eschenbach is to look after the mutual aid society in your store?"

"I hope you ain't getting deaf, Birsky," Feigenbaum replied.

"And you agreed to that?" Zapp cried.

"I certainly did," Feigenbaum said; "which, as I told you before, I am coming to believe that this here mutual aid society business is an elegant thing already, boys. And Eschenbach tells me I should tell you that if he don't get here by next Sunday you should warm up that pitcher and catcher of yours, as he would sure get down to New York by the Sunday after."

Birsky led the way to the showroom with the detached air of a somnambulist, while Zapp came stumbling after.

"And one thing I want to impress on you boys," Feigenbaum concluded: "you want to do all you can to jolly the old boy along, understand me, on account I might want to raise ten or fifteen thousand dollars from him for some alterations I got in mind."

"Zapp," Birsky cried after he had ushered Feigenbaum into the elevator at ten minutes to eleven, "I am going right over to the Kosciusko Bank and——"

"What are you going to do?" Zapp cried in alarm, "transfer back that five hundred dollars after what Feigenbaum tells us?"

"Transfer nothing!" Birsky retorted. "I am going over to the Kosciusko Bank, understand me, and I am going to change that account. So, when them *Roshoyim* come in here, Zapp, tell 'em to wait till I get back. By hook or by crook we must got to get 'em to come to work by tomorrow sure, the way we would be rushed here—even if we must pay 'em a hundred dollars apiece!"

Zapp nodded fervently.

"*Aber* why must you got to go over to the bank now, Birsky?" he insisted.

"Because I don't want to take no more chances," Birsky replied; "which I would not only put in the 'as,' understand me, but I would write on the bank's signature card straight up and down what the thing really is"—he coughed impressively to emphasize the announcement—"Louis Birsky," he said, "as Treasurer of the Mutual Aid Society Employees of Birsky & Zapp!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MOVING PICTURE WRITES

WHEN Max Schindelberger opened the door leading into the office of Lesengeld & Belz his manner was that of the local millionaire's wife bearing delicacies to a bedridden laundress, for Max felt that he was slumming.

"Is Mr. Lesengeld disengaged?" he asked in the rotund voice of one accustomed to being addressed as Brother President three nights out of every week, and he cast so benevolent a smile on the stenographer that she bridled immediately.

"Mis-ter Lesengeld," she called, and in response B. Lesengeld projected his torso from an adjacent doorway.

"Miss Schimpf," he said pleadingly, "do me the favour and don't make such a *Geschrei* every time somebody comes in the office. Goes through me like a knife yet."

Max Schindelberger's smile took on the quality of indulgency as he advanced slowly toward B. Lesengeld.

"How do you do, Mr. Lesengeld?" he said, proffering his hand; and after glancing suspiciously at the extended palm Lesengeld took it in a limp clasp.

"I already suscribed to that—now—asylum, ain't it?" Lesengeld began, for his experienced eye had at once noted the fraternal society charm, the I.O.M.A. lapel button, and the white tie that proclaimed Max to be a philanthropist.

Max laughed as heartily as he could.

"Ain't it funny," he said, "how just so soon as anybody sees me they think I am going to do something charitable? As a matter of fact, Mr. Lesengeld, I am coming here to see you on a business matter which really it ain't my business at all."

Lesengeld grudgingly held open the door, and Max squeezed past him.

"You got a comfortable place here, Mr. Lesengeld," he began, "plain and old-fashioned, but comfortable."

Lesengeld removed some dusty papers from a chair.

"It suits me," he said. "Take a seat, Mr. —"

"Schindelberger," Max said as he sat down.

"Used to was Schindelberger, Steinfeld & Company in the underwear business?"

Max nodded and his smile began to fade.

"My partner Belz got a couple of the composition notes in the middle compartment in our safe for six years already," Lesengeld continued. "He keeps 'em for sowveneers, on account the feller he took 'em off of—a relation from his wife's—was no good, neither. Which you was telling me you wanted to see me about a business matter."

Max Schindelberger cleared his throat.

"Anybody could have reverses in business," he said.

"Sure, I know," Lesengeld commented. "Only there is two kinds of reverses, Mr. Schindelberger, reverses from up to down and reverses from down to up, like when a feller couldn't pay his composition notes, Mr. Schindelberger, and two years later is buying elevator apartments yet in his wife's name, Mr. Schindelberger." He tapped the desk impatiently. "Which you was saying," he added, "that you wanted to see me about a business matter."

Max coughed away a slight huskiness. When he had started from his luxuriously appointed office on lower Nassau Street to visit Mr. Lesengeld on East Broadway, he had felt a trifle sorry for Lesengeld, so soon to feel the embarrassment and awkwardness incidental to meeting for the first time, and all combined under one frockcoat, the District Grand Master of the I.O.M.A., the President of the Bella Hirshkind Home for Indigent Females, and director and trustee of three orphan asylums and of an eye, ear, and throat infirmary. With the first reference to the defunct underwear business, however, Max began to lose the sense of confidence that the dignity of his various offices lent him; and by the time Lesengeld had mentioned the elevator apartment houses he had assumed to Max all the majesty of, say, for example, the Federal Grand Master of the I.O.M.A., with Jacob H. Schiff and Andrew Carnegie thrown in for good measure.

"The fact is," Max stammered, "I called to see you about the three-thousand dollar mortgage you are holding on Rudnik's house—the second mortgage."

Lesengeld nodded.

"First mortgages I ain't got any," he said, "and if you are coming to insinuate that I am a second-mortgage shark, Mr. Schindelberger, go ahead and do so. I am dealing in second mortgages now twenty years already, and I hear myself called a shark so often, Mr. Schindelberger, that it sounds like it would be a compliment already. I come pretty near getting it printed on my letterheads."

"I didn't said you was a second-mortgage shark, Mr. Lesengeld; a man could be a whole lot worse as a second-mortgage shark, understand me, and do a charity once in awhile, anyhow. You know what it stands in *Gemara* yet?"

Schindelberger settled himself in his chair preparatory to intoning a Talmudical quotation, but Lesengeld forestalled him.

"Sure, I know," he said, "it stands in *Gemara* a whole lot about charity, Mr. Schindelberger, but it don't say no more about second mortgages as it does about composition notes, for instance. So if you are coming to me to ask me I should give Rudnik an extension on his Clinton Street house, you could learn *Gemara* to me till I would become so big a *Melammed* as you are, understand me, and it wouldn't make no difference. I never extend no mortgages for nobody."

"But, Mr. Lesengeld, you got to remember this is an exception, otherwise I wouldn't bother myself I should come up here at all. I am interesting myself in this here matter on account Rudnik is an old man, understand me, and all he's got in the world is the Clinton Street house; and, furthermore, he will make a will leaving it to the Bella Hirshkind Home for Indignant Females, which if you want to go ahead and rob a lot of poor old widders of a few thousand

dollars, go ahead, Mr. Lesengeld."

He started to rise from his chair, but he thought better of it as Lesengeld began to speak.

"Don't make me no bluffs, Schindelberger," Lesengeld cried, "because, in the first place, if Rudnik wills his house to the Bella Hirshkind Home, what is that my business? And, in the second place, Belz's wife's mother's a cousin got a sister which for years, Belz, makes a standing offer of five hundred dollars some one should marry her, and finally he gets her into the Home as single as the day she was born already."

"One or two ain't widders," Schindelberger admitted, "but they're all old, and when you say what is it your business that Rudnik leaves his house to charity, sure it ain't. *Aber* it's your business if you try to take the house away from charity. Even if you would be dealing in second mortgages, Mr. Lesengeld, that ain't no reason why you shouldn't got a heart once in a while."

"What d'ye mean, I ain't got a heart?" Lesengeld demanded. "I got just so much a heart as you got it, Mr. Schindelberger. Why, last night I went on a moving pictures, understand me, where a little girl gets her father he should give her mother another show, *verstehst du*, and I assure you I cried like a baby, such a soft heart I got it." He had risen from his chair and was pacing excitedly up and down the little room. "The dirty dawg wants to put her out of the house already on account she is kissing her brother which he is just come home from twenty years on the Pacific Coast," he continued; "and people calls me a shark yet, Mr. Schindelberger, which my wife and me is married twenty-five years next *Succos Halamode* and never so much as an unkind breath between us."

"That's all right, Mr. Lesengeld," Schindelberger said. "I don't doubt your word for a minute, but when it comes to foreclosing a mortgage on a house which it, so to speak, belongs to a home for poor widders and a couple of old maids, understand me, then that's something else again."

"Who says I'm going to foreclose the mortgage?" Lesengeld demanded.

"You didn't said you was going to foreclose it," Schindelberger replied, "but you says you ain't never extended no mortgages for nobody."

"Which I never did," Lesengeld agreed; "but that ain't saying I ain't never going to. Seemingly, also, you seem to forget I got a partner, Mr. Schindelberger, which people calls him just so much a shark as me, Mr. Schindelberger."

"*Aber* you are just telling me your partner is putting into the Bella Hirshkind Home a relation from his wife's already, and if he wouldn't be willing to extend the mortgage, Mr. Lesengeld, who would? Because I needn't got to tell you, Mr. Lesengeld, the way business is so rotten nowadays people don't give up so easy no more; and if it wouldn't be that the Bella Hirshkind Home gets from somebody a whole lot of assistance soon it would bust up sure, and Belz would quick find himself stuck with his wife's relation again, and don't you forget it."

"But——" Lesengeld began.

"But nothing, Mr. Lesengeld!" Schindelberger cried. "Here's where the Bella Hirshkind Home is got a show to make a big haul, so to speak, because this here Rudnik has got something the matter with his liver which it is only a question of time, understand me, on account the feller is an old bachelor without anybody to look after him, and he eats all the time twenty-five-cent regular dinners. I give him at the outside six months."

"But are you sure the feller makes a will leaving his house to the Bella Hirshkind Home?" Lesengeld asked.

"What d'ye mean, am I sure?" Schindelberger exclaimed. "Of course I ain't sure. That's why I am coming up here this morning. If you would extend first the mortgage on that house, Mr. Lesengeld, Rudnik makes the will, otherwise not; because it would cost anyhow fifteen dollars for a lawyer he should draw up the will, ain't it, and what's the use we should spend the money if you take away from him the house?"

"But if I would extend first the mortgage, Schindelberger, might the feller wouldn't make the will maybe."

Schindelberger clucked his tongue impatiently.

"Just because I am so charitable I don't got to be a fool exactly," he said. "If you would extend the mortgage, Mr. Lesengeld, I would bring Rudnik up here with a lawyer, and before the extension agreement is signed Rudnik would sign his will and put it in your safe to keep."

Lesengeld hesitated for a minute.

"I'll tell you, Schindelberger," he said at length; "give me a little time I should think this matter over. My partner is up in the Bronx and wouldn't be back till to-morrow."

"But all I want is your word, Mr. Lesengeld," Schindelberger protested, "because might if I would go back and tell Rudnik you wouldn't extend the mortgage he would go right away to the river and jump in maybe."

"Yow, he would jump in!" Lesengeld cried. "Only the other day I seen on a moving pictures a fillum which they called it Life is Sweet, where an old man eighty years old jumps into the river on account his grandson died in an elegant furnished apartment already; and when a young feller rescues him he gives him for ten thousand dollars a check, which I wouldn't believe it at all if I didn't seen the check with my own eyes yet. I was terrible broke up about the grandson, Mr. Schindelberger, *aber* when I seen the check I didn't got no more sympathy for the old man at all. Fifty dollars would of been plenty, especially when the young feller turns out to be the son of the old man's boy which he ain't heard from in years."

"Sure, I know," Schindelberger agreed, "*aber* such things only happen in moving pictures, Mr. Lesengeld, and if Rudnik would jump in the river, understand me, the least that happens him is he would get drowned and the Bella Hirshkind Home would go *Mechulla* sure."

"Well, I'll tell you," Lesengeld said; "you could say to Rudnik that I says I would extend the mortgage supposing my partner is agreeable, on consideration he would leave the house to the Bella Hirshkind Home, and Rudnik is to pay three hundred and fifty dollars to my lawyer for drawing the extension agreement."

"*Aber*, Mr. Lesengeld—" Schindelberger began. He was about to protest against the size of the bonus demanded under the guise of counsel fee when he was interrupted by a resounding, "*Koosh!*" from Lesengeld.

"That is my last word and the very best I could do," Lesengeld concluded, "except I would get my lawyer to fix up the will and *shenk* it to you free for nothing."

"I don't know what comes over you lately, Belz," Lesengeld complained the following morning. "Every day you come down looking like a bear *mit* a spoiled tail."

"I got a right to look that way," Belz replied. "If you would got such a wife's relation like I got it, Lesengeld, there'd be no sitting in the same office with you at all. When it isn't one thing it's another. Yesterday my wife's mother's a sister's cousin gets a day off and comes round and gets dinner with us. I think I told you about her before—Miss Blooma Duckman. Nothing suits that woman at all. The way she acts you would think she lives in the bridal soot at the Waldorfer, and she gets my wife so mad, understand me, that she throws away a whole dish of *Tzimmus* in the garbage can already—which I got to admit that the woman is right, Lesengeld—my wife don't make the finest *Tzimmus* in the world."

"Suppose she don't," Lesengeld commented. "Ain't it better she should spoil some *Tzimmus* which all it's got into it is carrots, potatoes, and a little chuck? If it would be that she makes a failure *mit Gänse oder* chickens which it really costs money, understand me, then you got a right to kick."

"That's what I says," Belz replied, "*aber* that Miss Duckman takes everything so particular. She kicks about it all the way up in the subway, which the next time I get one of my wife's relations in a Home, either it would be so far away she couldn't come to see us at all, or it would be so nearby that I don't got to lose a night's rest seeing her home. I didn't get to bed till pretty near two o'clock."

He stifled a yawn as he sat down at his desk.

"All the same, Lesengeld," he added, "they certainly got a nice place up there for old women. There's lots of respectable business men pays ten dollars a week for their wives in the Catskills already which they don't got it so comfortable. Ain't it a shame, Lesengeld, that with a charity like that which is really a charity, people don't support it better as they do?"

"I bet yer!" Lesengeld cried. "The way some people acts not only they ain't got no hearts, y'understand, but they ain't got no sense, neither. I seen a case yesterday where an old *Rosher* actually refuses to pay a month's rent for his son's widder *mit* a little boy, to save 'em being put out on the sidewalk. Afterward he goes broke, understand me, and when the boy grows up he's got the nerve to make a touch from him a couple of dollars and the boy goes to work and gives it to him. If I would be the boy the old man could starve to death; I wouldn't give him not one cent. They call us sharks, Belz, but compared with such a *Haman* we ain't even sardines."

"Sure, I know," Belz said as he consulted the firm's diary; "and if you wouldn't waste your time going on so many moving pictures, Lesengeld, might you would attend to business maybe. Yesterday was ten days that feller Rudnik's mortgage is past due, and what did you done about it? Nothing, I suppose."

"Suppose again, Belz," Lesengeld retorted. "A feller was in here to see me about it and I agreed we would give Rudnik an extension."

"What!" Belz cried. "You agreed you would give him an extension! Are you crazy *oder* what? The way money is so tight nowadays and real estate gone to hellandall, we as good as could get a deed of that house from that feller."

"Sure we could," Lesengeld replied calmly, "but we ain't going to. Once in a while, Belz, even in the second-mortgage business, circumstances alters cases, and this here is one of them cases; so before you are calling me all kinds of suckers, understand me, you should be so good and listen to what I got to tell you."

Belz shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Go as far as you like," he said, "*aber* if it's something which you seen it on a moving pictures, Lesengeld, I don't want to hear it at all."

"It didn't happen on a moving pictures, Belz, but just the same if even you would seen it on a moving pictures you would say to yourself that with a couple of fellers like you and me, which a few hundred dollars one way or the other wouldn't make or break us, understand me, we would be all kinds of crooks and highwaymen if we would went to work and turn a lot of old widders out into the street."

"Lesengeld," Belz shouted impatiently, "do me the favour and don't make no speeches. What has turning a lot of old widders into the street got to do with Rudnik's mortgage?"

"It's got a whole lot to do with it," Lesengeld replied, "because Rudnik's house he is leaving to a Home for old women, and if we take away the house from him then the Home wouldn't get his house, and the Home is in such shape, Belz, that if it wouldn't make a big killing in the way of a legacy soon they would bust up sure."

"And that's all the reason why we should extend the mortgage on Rudnik?" Belz demanded.

"That's all the reason," Lesengeld answered; "with three hundred and fifty dollars a bonus."

"Then all I could say is," Belz declared, "we wouldn't do nothing of the kind. What is three =hundred and fifty dollars a bonus in these times, Lesengeld?"

"But the Home," Lesengeld protested.

"The Home should bust up," Belz cried. "What do I care about the Home?"

"*Aber* the widders?" Lesengeld insisted. "If the Home busts up the widders is thrown into the street. Ain't it?"

"What is that my fault, Lesengeld? Did I make 'em widders?"

"Sure, I know, Belz; *aber* one or two of 'em ain't widders. One or two of 'em is old maids and they would got to go and live back with their relations. Especially"—he concluded with a twinkle in his eye—"especially one of 'em by the name Blooma Duckman."

"Do you mean to told me," Belz faltered, "that them now—widders is in the Bella Hirshkind Home?"

"For Indignant Females," Lesengeld added, "which Max Schindelberger is president from it also."

Belz nodded and remained silent for at least five minutes.

"I'll tell you, Lesengeld," he said at last, "after all it's a hard thing a woman should be left a widder."

"You bet your life it's a hard thing, Belz!" Lesengeld agreed fervently. "Last week I seen it a woman she is kissing her husband good-bye, and the baby also kisses him good-bye—decent, respectable, hard-working people, understand me—and not two minutes later he gets run down by a trolley car. The next week they take away from her the furniture, understand me, and she puts the baby into a day nursery, and what happens after that I didn't wait to see at all. Cost me ten cents yet in a drug store for some mathematic spirits of ammonia for Mrs. Lesengeld—she carries on so terrible about it."

Belz sighed tremulously.

"All right, Lesengeld," he said; "write Rudnik we would extend the mortgage and he should call here to-morrow."

"If I got to lose the house I got to lose it," Harris Rudnik declared as he sat in B. Lesengeld's revolving chair on the following morning. "I ain't got long to live anyhow."

He tucked his hands into his coat-pocket and glared balefully at Schindelberger, who shrugged his shoulders.

"That's the way he is talking right along," he said. "Did you ever hear the like? Mind you, it ain't that he's got anybody he should leave the house to, Mr. Belz, but he ain't got no use for women."

"What d'ye mean, I ain't got no use for women?" Rudnik cried. "I got just so much use for women as you got it, *aber* not for a lot of women which all their lives men make suckers of themselves working their heads off they should keep 'em in luxury, understand me, and then the men dies, y'understand, right away the widders is put in homes and other men which ain't related to 'em at all must got to leave 'em their hard-earned *Geld*, Mr. Belz, so they could sit with their hands folded doing nothing."

"What are you talking nonsense doing nothing!" Schindelberger retorted. "Them old women works like anything up there. I told you before a dozen times, Rudnik, them women is making underwear and jelly and stockings and *Gott weiss was noch*."

Rudnik turned appealingly to Belz.

"Mr. Belz," he said, "do me the favour and let me leave my money to a *Talmud Torah oder* a Free Loan Association."

"Free Loan Association!" Lesengeld and Belz exclaimed with one voice.

"An idee!" Belz shouted. "What d'ye take us for, Rudnik? You are going too far."

"Cutthroats!" Lesengeld muttered hoarsely. "Stealing bread out of people's mouths yet. A lot of people goes to them *Roshoyim* and fools 'em into lending 'em money they should play *Stuss* and *Tarrok*, while their families is starving yet. If you want to leave your house to a Free Loan Association, Rudnik, you might just so well blow it up *mit* dynamite and be done with it."

"*Aber* a *Talmud Torah* School," Rudnik cried; "that's something which you couldn't got no objection to."

"Don't talk like a fool, Rudnik!" Schindelberger interrupted. "When you got a chance to leave your money to a Home for widders, what are you fooling away your time making suggestions like *Talmud Torah* schools for? A young feller would get along in business if he never even seen the outside of a *Talmud Torah*, *aber* if the widders lose their Home, understand me, they would starve to death."

"Yow, they would starve to death!" Rudnik said. "You could trust a widder she wouldn't starve, Mr. Schindelberger. Them which didn't got no relations they could easy find suckers to give 'em money, and them which did got relations, their families should look after 'em."

Belz grew crimson with pent-up indignation.

"Loafer!" he roared. "What d'ye mean, their families should look after 'em?"

Belz walked furiously up and down the office and glowered at the trembling and confused Rudnik.

"Seemingly you ain't got no feelings at all, Rudnik," he continued. "Schindelberger tells you over and over again they are working them poor widders to death up there, and yet you want to take away the roofs from their backs even."

"No, I didn't, Mr. Belz," Rudnik said. "I didn't say nothing about a roof at all. Why, I ain't even seen the Home, Mr. Belz. Could you expect me I should leave my money to a Home without I should see it even?"

"My worries if you seen it *oder* not!" Belz retorted. "The thing is, Rudnik, before we would extend for you the mortgage you must got to make not a will but a deed which you deed the house to the Bella Hirshkind Home, keeping for yourself all the income from the house for your life, because otherwise if a man makes a will he could always make another will, *aber* once you give a deed it is fixed *und fertig*."

This ultimatum was the result of a conference between Belz and his counsel the previous evening, and he had timed its announcement to the moment when he deemed his victim to be sufficiently intimidated. Nevertheless, the shock of its disclosure spurred the drooping Rudnik to a fresh outburst.

"What!" he shouted. "I should drive myself out of my house for a lot of widders!"

"*Koosh!*" Schindelberger bellowed. "They ain't all widders. Two of 'em is old maids, Rudnik, and even if they would be all widders you must got to do as Mr. Belz says, otherwise you would

drive yourself out of your house anyway. Because in these times not only you couldn't raise no new second mortgage on the house, but if Lesengeld and Belz forecloses on you the house would hardly bring in auction the amount of the first mortgage even."

Rudnik sat back in his chair and plucked at his scant gray beard. He recognized the force of Schindelberger's argument and deemed it the part of discretion to temporize with his mortgagees.

"Why didn't you told me there is a couple old maids up there?" he said to Schindelberger. "Old maids is horses of another colour; so come on, Mr. Schindelberger, do me the favour and go up with me so I could anyhow see the Home first."

He slid out of his chair and smiled at Schindelberger, who stared frigidly in return.

"You got a big idee of yourself, Rudnik, I must say," he commented. "What do you think, I ain't got nothing better to do as escort you up to the Bella Hirshkind Home?"

"Rudnik is right, Schindelberger," Lesengeld said; "you should ought to show him the Home before he leaves his house to it."

"I would show him nothing," Schindelberger cried. "Here is my card to give to the superintendent, and all he is got to do is to go up on the subway from the bridge. Get off at Bronx Park and take a Mount Vernon car to Ammerman Avenue. Then you walk six blocks east and follow the New Haven tracks toward the trestle. The Home is the first house you come to. You couldn't miss it."

Rudnik took the card and started for the door, while Belz nodded sadly at his partner.

"And you are kicking I am cranky yesterday morning," he said. "In the daytime is all right going up there, but in the night, Lesengeld, a bloodhound could get twisted. Every time I go up there I think wonder I get back home at all."

"I bet yer," Lesengeld said. "The other evening I seen a fillum by the name Lawst in the Jungle, and——"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Schindelberger interrupted, "I got a little business to attend to by my office, and if it's all the same to you I would come here with Rudnik to-morrow morning ten o'clock."

"By the name Lawst in the Jungle," Lesengeld repeated with an admonitory glare at Schindelberger, "which a young feller gets ate up with a tiger already; and I says to Mrs. Lesengeld: 'Mommer,' I says, 'people could say all they want to how fine it is to live in the country,' I says, 'give me New York City every time,' I says to my wife."

Harris Rudnik had been encouraged to misogyny by cross eyes and a pockmarked complexion. Nevertheless, he was neither so confirmed in his hatred of the sex nor so discouraged by his physical deformities as to neglect shaving himself and changing into a clean collar and his Sabbath blacks before he began his journey to the Bella Hirshkind Home. Thus when he alighted from the Mount Vernon car at Ammerman Avenue he presented, at least from the rear, so spruce an appearance as to attract the notice of no less a person than Miss Blooma Duckman herself.

Miss Duckman was returning from an errand on which she had been dispatched by the superintendent of the Home, for of all the inmates she was not only the youngest but the spryest, and although she was at least half a block behind Harris when she first caught sight of him, she had no difficulty in overtaking him before he reached the railroad track.

"Excuse me," she said as he hesitated at the side of the track, "are you maybe looking for the Bella Hirshkind Home?"

Harris started and blushed, but at length his misogyny asserted itself and he turned a beetling frown on Miss Duckman.

"What d'ye mean, am I looking for the Bella Hirshkind Home?" he said. "Do you suppose I come up here all the way from Brooklyn Bridge to watch the trains go by?"

"I thought maybe you didn't know the way," Miss Duckman suggested. "You go along that there path and it's the first house you are coming to."

She pointed to the path skirting the railroad track, and Harris began to perspire as he found himself surrendering to an impulse of politeness toward this very young old lady. He conquered it immediately, however, and cleared his throat raspingly.

"I couldn't swim exactly," he retorted as he surveyed the miry trail indicated by Miss Duckman,

"so I guess I'll walk along the railroad."

"You could do that, too," Miss Duckman said, "*aber* I ain't allowed to, on account the rules of the Home says we shouldn't walk along the tracks."

Harris raised his eyebrows.

"You don't mean to told me you are one of them indignant females?" he exclaimed.

"I belong in the Home," Miss Duckman replied, colouring slightly, and Rudnik felt himself being overcome by a wave of remorse for his bluntness. He therefore searched his mind for a sufficiently gruff rejoinder, and finding none he shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said at last, "there's worsen places, lady."

Miss Duckman nodded.

"Maybe," she murmured; "and anyhow I ain't so bad off as some of them other ladies up there which they used to got husbands and homes of their own."

"Ain't you a widder, too?" Rudnik asked, his curiosity again getting the upper hand.

"I ain't never been married," Miss Duckman answered as she drew her shawl primly about her.

"Well, you ain't missed much," Rudnik declared, "so far as I could see."

"Why," Miss Duckman exclaimed, "ain't you never been married, neither?"

Rudnik blinked solemnly before replying.

"You're just like a whole lot of ladies," he said; "you must got to find out everything." He turned away and stepped briskly on to the railroad track.

"But ain't you married?" Miss Duckman insisted.

"No," he growled as he started off. "*Gott sei dank*."

For a brief interval Miss Duckman stood and watched his progress along the ties, and then she gathered her parcels more firmly in her arms and began to negotiate the quagmire that led to the Home. She had not proceeded more than a hundred feet, however, when a locomotive whistle sounded in the distance.

"Hey, mister!" she shouted; but even if Rudnik heard the warning it served only to hasten his footsteps. Consequently the train was almost upon him before he became aware of it, and even as he leaped wildly to one side the edge of the cowcatcher struck him a glancing blow. Miss Duckman dropped her bundles and plunged through the mud to where Rudnik lay, while the train, which was composed of empty freight cars, slid to a grinding stop a short distance up the track.

She was kneeling recklessly in the mud supporting Rudnik with both her hands when the engineer and the fireman reached them.

"Is your husband hurted bad?" the engineer asked Miss Duckman.

The tears were rolling down Miss Duckman's worn cheeks, and her lips trembled so that she could not reply. Nevertheless, at the word "husband" her maidenly heart gave a tremendous bound, and when the engineer and the fireman lifted Rudnik gently into the caboose her confusion was such that without protest she permitted the conductor to assist her carefully up the car steps.

"Sit ye down on that stool there, lady," he said. "As far as I can see your man ain't got no bones broken."

"But——" Miss Duckman protested.

"Now, me dear lady," the conductor interrupted, "don't ye go worritin' yerself. I've got me orders if anybody gets hit be the train to take him to the nearest company's doctor in the direction I'm goin'. See? And if you was Mister and Missus Vanderbilt, they couldn't treat you no better up to the Emergency Hospital."

"But——" Miss Duckman began. Again she attempted to explain that Rudnik was not her husband, and again the conductor forestalled her.

"And if he's able to go home to-night," he said finally, "ye'll be given free transportation, in a parlour car d'ye mind, like ye'd be on your honeymoon."

He patted her gently on the shoulder as he turned to a waiting brakeman.

"Let her go, Bill," he cried, and with a jubilant toot from the engine Miss Duckman's elopement

was fairly under way.

When Harris Rudnik opened his eyes in the little white-curtained room of the Emergency Hospital, Miss Duckman sat beside his bed. She smiled encouragingly at him, but for more than five minutes he made no effort to speak.

"Well," he said at length, "what are you kicking about? It's an elegant place, this here Home."

Miss Duckman laid her fingers on her lips.

"You shouldn't speak nothing," she whispered, "on account you are sick, *aber* not serious sick."

"I know I am sick," Rudnik replied. "I was just figuring it all out. I am getting knocked down by a train and——"

"No bones is broken," Miss Duckman hastened to assure him. "You would be out in a few days."

"I am satisfied," he said faintly. "You got a fine place here, Missis."

Miss Duckman laid her hand on Rudnik's pillow.

"I ain't a Missis," she murmured. "My name is Miss Blooma Duckman."

"Blooma," Rudnik muttered. "I once used to got a sister by the name Blooma, and it ain't a bad name, neither." He was not entirely softened by his mishap, however. "But, anyhow, that ain't here or there," he said. "Women is just the same—always kicking. What is the matter with this Home, Miss Duckman? It's an elegant place already."

"This ain't the Home," Miss Duckman explained. "This is a hospital, which when you was hit by the engine they put you on the train and took you up here."

"*Aber* what are you doing here?" he asked after a pause.

"I come along," Miss Duckman said; "and now you shouldn't talk no more."

"What d'ye mean, you come along?" he cried. "Didn't you go back to the Home?"

Miss Duckman shook her head, and Rudnik turned on his pillow and looked inquiringly at her.

"How long am I up here, anyhow?" he demanded.

"Four days," Miss Duckman said, and Rudnik closed his eyes again. For ten minutes longer he lay still and then his lips moved.

"What did you say?" Miss Duckman asked.

"I says Blooma is a pretty good name already," he murmured, smiling faintly, and the next moment he sank into a light sleep.

When he awoke Miss Duckman still sat by the side of his bed, her fingers busy over the hem of a sheet, and he glanced nervously at the window through which the late afternoon sun came streaming.

"Ain't it pretty late you should be away from the Home?" he inquired. "It must be pretty near six, ain't it?"

"I know it," Miss Duckman said; "and the doctor says at six you should take this here powder."

"*Aber* shouldn't you got to be getting ready to go back to the Home?" he asked.

Miss Duckman shook her head.

"I ain't going back no more," she answered. "I got enough of them people."

Rudnik looked helplessly at her.

"But what would you do?" he said. "You ain't got no other place to go to, otherwise you wouldn't got to live in a Home."

"Sure, I know," she replied as she prepared to give him his powder; "but *Gott sei dank* I still got my health, and I am telling the lady superintendent here how they work me at the Home, and she says I could stop here till I am finding something to do. I could cook already and I could sew already, and if the worser comes to the worst I could find a job in an underwear factory. They don't pay much, but a woman like me she don't eat much. All I want is I could get a place to sleep, and I bet yer I could make out fine. So you should please take the powder."

Rudnik swallowed his powder.

"You says you could cook," he remarked after he had again settled himself on his pillow. "*Tzimmus*, for instance, *und Fleisch Kugel*?"

"*Tzimmus und Fleisch Kugel* is nothing," she declared. "I don't want to say nothing about myself, understand me, because lots of women to hear 'em talk you would think wonder what cooks they are, and they couldn't even boil a potater even; *aber* if you could eat my *gefüllte Rinderbrust*, Mister —"

"Rudnik," he said as he licked his moist lips, "Harris Rudnik."

"Mister Rudnik," she proceeded, "*oder* my *Tebeches*, you would got to admit I ain't so helpless as I look."

"You don't look so helpless," Rudnik commented; "I bet yer you could do washing even."

"Could I?" Miss Duckman exclaimed. "Why, sometimes at the Home I am washing from morning till night, *aber* I ain't kicking none. It really agrees with me, Mr. Rudnik."

Rudnik nodded. Again he closed his eyes, and had it not been that he swallowed convulsively at intervals he would have appeared to be sleeping. Suddenly he raised himself on his pillow.

"Do you make maybe a good cup coffee also?" he inquired.

"A good cup coffee I make in two ways," Miss Duckman answered. "The first is——"

Rudnik waved his hand feebly.

"I'll take your word for it," he said, and again lapsed into quietude.

"D'ye know," he murmured at length, "I ain't drunk a good cup coffee in years already?"

Miss Duckman made no answer. Indeed she dropped her sewing and passed noiselessly out of the room, and when she returned ten minutes later she bore on a linen-covered tray a cup of steaming, fragrant coffee.

"How was that?" Miss Duckman asked after he had emptied the cup.

Rudnik wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"All I could say is," he replied, "if your *Tzimmus* ain't no worsen as your coffee, Miss Duckman, nobody could kick that you ain't a good cook."

Miss Duckman's faded cheeks grew pink and she smiled happily.

"I guess you are trying to make me a compliment," she said.

"In my whole life I never made for a woman a compliment," Rudnik declared. "I never even so much as met one I could make a compliment to yet except you, and *mit* you it ain't no compliment, after all. It's the truth."

He lay back on his pillow and gazed at the ceiling for fully a quarter of an hour, while Miss Duckman sewed away industriously.

"After all," he said at last, "why not? Older men as me done it."

"Did you say something?" Miss Duckman asked.

Rudnik cleared his throat noisily.

"I says," he replied, "you should please be so good and don't bother yourself about that—now—underwear factory job till I am getting out of here."

"A Home is a Home," B. Lesengeld said as he and Belz sat in the office nearly a week later; "but if Schindelberger wouldn't show up here with Rudnik to-day yet, Belz, we would foreclose sure."

"Would we?" Belz retorted. "Well, I got something to say about that, too, Lesengeld, and I'm going to give the Bella Hirshkind people a couple days longer. To-day is Blooma Duckman's day out again, and me and Mrs. Belz we sit home last night and we couldn't do a thing on account Mrs. Belz is dreading it so. Think what it would be if that woman is thrown back on our hands."

"If she is so terrible as all that why do you let her come at all?" Lesengeld asked, and Belz heaved a great sigh.

"I'll tell you, Lesengeld," he said, "she's really got a very good heart, y'understand; *aber* is it Mrs. Belz's fault she ain't such a A Number One cook? Every time that Blooma Duckman comes round she rubs it in yet, and she snoops under beds to see is it clean *oder* not, and she gets the girl so worked up, understand me, that we are hiring a new one every week. At the same time the woman means well, Lesengeld, but you know how that is: some people means so well you couldn't stand 'em at all."

Lesengeld nodded.

"Sure, I know," he said. "I seen it last week a case where a feller all the time means well and is trying to do good. He is taking pity on a tramp, understand me, and the tramp *ganvers* his silver spoons and everything, and I says to Mrs. Lesengeld: 'Mommer,' I says, 'it only goes to show,' I says, 'if you feel you are beginning to take pity on a feller,' I says, 'you shouldn't got no mercy on him at all,' I says. 'Otherwise he will go to work and do you every time,' I says. So that's why I am telling you, Belz, I guess the best thing we could do is we should right away foreclose Rudnik's house on him. Then if Schindelberger is such a charitable sucker as all that, let him buy in the house for the Bella Hirshkind Home and be done with it. All we want is our money back and we would be satisfied. What is the use we consider Rudnik's feelings. Ain't it?"

"Do you think I am holding off on Rudnik's account?" Belz exclaimed indignantly. "I never even got an idee to take pity on the feller at all. An old snoozer like him which he's got only one house to his name, understand me, he don't deserve no better. So go ahead and ring up Schindelberger and tell him that's what we would do."

Lesengeld turned to the desk, but even as he took the telephone receiver from the hook Schindelberger himself came in.

"*Endlich!*" Belz exclaimed. "We was expecting you a whole week yet. Are you ready to fix up about Rudnik's mortgage?"

Schindelberger sat down and carefully placed his hat on Belz's desk.

"The mortgage I didn't come to see you about exactly," he said. "I got something else to tell you."

"Something else I ain't interested in at all," Belz rejoined. "We was just going to telephone and ask you why don't Rudnik fix it up about the mortgage?"

"I am coming to that presently," Schindelberger said. "What I want to say now is, Mr. Belz, that I am very sorry I got to come here and tell you an information about your wife's cousin, Miss Blooma Duckman."

"Blooma Duckman!" Belz exclaimed. "What's the trouble; is she sick?"

Schindelberger shook his head.

"Worser as that," he explained. "She disappeared from the Bella Hirshkind Home a week ago already and nobody sees nothing from her since."

For a brief interval Belz stared at his visitor and then he turned to Lesengeld.

"Ain't that a fine note?" he said.

"All we are discovering is a couple packages she got with her, which the superintendent sends her over to West Farms she should buy some groceries, and on her way back she drops the packages and disappears."

"Might she fell down a rock maybe?" Lesengeld suggested. "The other day I am seeing a fillum where a feller falls down a rock already and they search for him a hundred people yet. They get near him as I am to you, Schindelberger, and still they couldn't find him anyhow on account the feller is too weak to say something."

"How could she fall down a rock?" Schindelberger interrupted. "It's all swamps up there. But, anyhow, Belz, we are wasting time here talking about it. The best thing is you should ring up the police."

"What d'ye mean, wasting time?" Belz cried. "You're a fine one to talk about wasting time. Here the woman disappears a week ago already and you are only just telling me now."

Schindelberger blushed.

"Well, you see," he said, "we all the time got hopes she would come back." In point of fact he had purposely delayed breaking the news to Belz in order that the settlement of Rudnik's mortgage extension should not be prejudiced. "But now," he added ingenuously, "it don't make no difference, because Rudnik telephones me yesterday morning that the whole thing is off on account he is married."

"Married!" Lesengeld cried. "Do you mean to told me that old *Schlemiel* gets married yet?"

"So sure as you are sitting there. And he says he would come round here this morning and see you."

"He should save himself the trouble," Belz declared angrily. "Now particularly that Blooma Duckman ain't up there at all, I wouldn't extend that mortgage, not if he gives a deed to that Home to take effect right to-day yet. I shouldn't begun with you in the first place, Schindelberger."

Schindelberger seized his hat.

"I acted for the best," he said. "I am sorry you should get delayed on your mortgage, gentlemen, *aber* you shouldn't hold it up against me. I done it for the sake of the Bella Hirshkind Home, which if people gets sore at me on account I always act charitable, that's their lookout, not mine."

He started for the door as he finished speaking, but as he placed his hand on the knob some one turned it from the other side and the next moment he stood face to face with Rudnik.

"So!" Schindelberger exclaimed. "You are really coming up here, are you? It ain't a bluff, like you are taking my card to go up to the Home and you never went near the place at all."

Rudnik shut the door behind him.

"What d'ye mean, I didn't go near the place at all?" he said angrily. "Do you think I am such a liar like you are, Schindelberger? Not only did I go near the place, but I got so near it that a hundred feet more and the engine would knocked me into the front door of the Home already."

It was then that Lesengeld and Belz observed the stout cane on which Rudnik supported himself.

"I come pretty close to being killed already on account I am going up to the Home," he continued; "and if nobody is asking me to sit down I would sit down anyway, because if a feller gets run over by a train he naturally don't feel so strong, even if he would escape with bruises only."

"Did you got run over with a train?" Schindelberger asked.

"I certainly did," Rudnik said. "I got run over with a train and married in six days, and if you go to work and foreclose my house on me to-day yet, it will sure make a busy week for me." He looked pathetically at Belz. "Unless," he added, "you are going to give me a show and extend the mortgage."

Belz met this appeal with stolid indifference.

"Of course, Rudnik," he said, "I'm sorry you got run over with a train; but if we would extend your mortgage on account you got run over with a train and our other mortgagees hears of it, understand me, the way money is so tight nowadays, every time a mortgage comes due them suckers would ring in trolley-car accidents on us and fall down coal-holes so as we would give 'em an extension already."

"And wouldn't it make no difference that I just got married?" Rudnik asked.

"If an old feller like you gets married, Rudnik," Belz replied, "he must got to take the consequences."

"An idee!" Lesengeld exclaimed. "Do you think that we are making wedding presents to our mortgagees yet, Rudnik?"

"It serves you right, Rudnik," Schindelberger said. "If you would consent to the Home getting your property I wouldn't said nothing about Miss Duckman's disappearing and Belz would of extended the mortgage on you."

"I was willing to do it," Rudnik said, "*aber* my wife wouldn't let me. She says rather than see the house go that way she would let you gentlemen foreclose it on us, even if she would got to starve."

"I don't know who your wife is," Schindelberger rejoined angrily, "but she talks like a big fool."

"No, she don't," Rudnik retorted; "she talks like a sensible woman, because, in the first place, she wouldn't got to starve. I got enough strength left that I could always make for her and me anyhow a living, and, in the second place, the Home really ain't a home. It's a business."

"A business!" Schindelberger cried. "What d'ye mean, a business?"

"I mean a business," Rudnik replied, "an underwear business. Them poor women up there makes underwear from morning till night already, and Schindelberger here got a brother-in-law which he buys it from the Home for pretty near half as much as it would cost him to make it."

"*Rosher!*" Max Schindelberger shrieked. "Who tells you such stories?"

"My wife tells me," Rudnik replied.

"And how does your wife know it?" Belz demanded.

"Because," Rudnik answered, "she once used to live in the Home."

"Then that only goes to show what a liar you are," Schindelberger said. "Your wife couldn't of been in the Home on account it only gets started last year, and everybody which went in there ain't never come out yet."

"Everybody but one," Rudnik said as he seized his cane, and raising himself from the chair he hobbled to the door.

"*Blooma leben,*" he cried, throwing the door wide open; and in response Mrs. Rudnik, née Blooma Duckman, entered.

"*Nu,* Belz," she said, "ain't you going to congratulate me?"



"Nu, Belz, ain't you going to congratulate me?"

Belz sat back in his chair and stared at his wife's cousin in unaffected astonishment, while Schindelberger noiselessly opened the door and slid out of the room unnoticed.

"And so you run away from the Home and married this *Schnorrer*?" Belz said at length.

"*Schnorrer* he ain't," she retorted, "unless you would go to work and foreclose the house."

"It would serve you right if I did," Belz rejoined.

"Then you ain't going to?" Mrs. Rudnik asked.

"What d'ye mean, he ain't going to?" Lesengeld interrupted. "Ain't I got nothing to say here? Must I got to sacrifice myself for Belz's wife's relations?"

"*Koosh,* Lesengeld!" Belz exploded. "You take too much on yourself. Do you think for one moment I am going to foreclose that mortgage and have them two old people *schnorring* their living expenses out of me for the rest of my days, just to oblige you? The mortgage runs at 6 per cent., and it's going to continue to do so. Six per cent. ain't to be sneezed at, neither."

"And ain't he going to pay us no bonus nor nothing?" Lesengeld asked in anguished tones.

"Bonus!" Belz cried; "what are you talking about, bonus? Do you mean to told me you would ask an old man which he nearly gets killed by a train already a bonus yet? Honestly, Lesengeld, I'm surprised at you. The way you talk sometimes it ain't no wonder people calls us second-mortgage sharks."

"But, lookyhere, Belz——" Lesengeld began.

"S enough, Lesengeld," Belz interrupted. "You're lucky I don't ask you you should make 'em a

wedding present yet."

"I suppose, Belz, you're going to make 'em a wedding present, too, ain't it?" Lesengeld jeered.

"That's just what I'm going to do," Belz said as he turned to the safe. He fumbled round the middle compartment and finally produced two yellow slips of paper. "I'm going to give 'em these here composition notes of Schindelberger's, and with what Blooma knows about the way that *Rosher* is running the Bella Hirshkind Home she shouldn't got no difficulty making him pay up."

He handed the notes to Rudnik.

"And now," he said, "sit right down and tell us how it comes that you and Blooma gets married."

For more than a quarter of an hour Rudnik described the details of his meeting with Miss Blooma Duckman, together with his hopes and aspirations for the future, and when he concluded Belz turned to his partner.

"Ain't it funny how things happens?" he said. "Honestly, Lesengeld, ain't that more interesting than most things you could see it on a moving pictures?"

Lesengeld nodded sulkily.

"It sure ought to be," he said, "because to go on a moving pictures you pay only ten cents, *aber* this here story costs me my half of a three-hundred-and-fifty dollar bonus. However, I suppose I shouldn't begrudge it 'em. I seen the other evening a fillum by the name *The Return of Enoch Aarons*, where an old feller stands outside on the street and looks through a winder, and he sees a happy married couple *mit* children sitting in front of a fire. So I says to my wife: 'Mommer,' I says, 'if that old snoozer would only get married,' I says, 'he wouldn't got to stand outside winders looking at other people having a good time,' I says. 'He would be enjoying with his own wife and children,' I says, and I thinks right away of Rudnik here." He placed his hand on Rudnik's shoulder as he spoke. "But now Rudnik is married," he concluded, "and even if he wouldn't got children he's got a good wife anyhow, which it stands in the *Siddur* already—a good wife is more valuable as rubies."

Rudnik seized the hand of his blushing bride. "And," he added, "rubies is pretty high nowadays."

CHAPTER EIGHT

COERCING MR. TRINKMANN

"I DON'T know, Mr. Trinkmann, what comes over you, you are always picking on me," Louis Berkfield said. "Me, I am doing my best here."

"You are doing your best here, Louis!" Harris Trinkmann exclaimed. "Do you call them ashtrays doing your best? They got on them *Schmutz* from the time I bought 'em off of Dreiner which he busted up way before the Spanish War already. The knives and forks, too, Louis. Do you think it's a pleasure to a customer when he is eating *Kalbfleisch* that he finds on his fork a piece of Bismarck herring from last night already? You are ruining my trade, Louis."

"What do you mean, ruining your trade, Mr. Trinkmann?" Louis rejoined. "I ain't no pantryman. If the customers complains that the fork got on it a piece Bismarck herring, that is from the pantryman a *Schuld*. What have I got to do with herring on the forks?"

"You got everything to do with it," Trinkmann declared. "A pantryman is a feller which no one could depend upon, otherwise he wouldn't be a pantryman, Louis; but a waiter, that's something else again. If a waiter wouldn't see that the forks ain't *schmutzig*, who would see it? The trouble is here nobody takes any interest at all. Me, I got to do everything myself."

Mr. Trinkmann returned to the cashier's desk over which Mrs. Trinkmann habitually presided, and taking a cigarette pen-fashion twixt thumb and forefinger, he lit it slowly and threw away the match with a gesture that implied more strongly than words, "I am sick and tired of the whole business."

The fact was that Mr. Trinkmann had undergone that morning as much as one man could endure without the relief that profanity affords. To be precise, only three hours before, Mrs. Trinkmann had presented him with twins, both girls.

"The thing has got to stop sometime, Louis," he said, as he came from behind the desk. He referred, however, to the ashtrays and the forks. "Either you would got to turn around a new leaf, or you could act like a slob somewheres else, understand me, because I wouldn't stand for it here."

"What are you talking nonsense—act like a slob, Mr. Trinkmann?" Louis cried. "I am working here for you now six years next *Tishabav*, and everybody which comes here in the place I always give 'em good satisfaction."

"You got too swell a head, Louis," Mr. Trinkmann continued, gaining heat. "You would think you was a partner here the way you act. You talk to me like I would be the waiter and you would be the boss. What do you think I am, anyway?"

"But, Mr. Trinkmann——" Louis began.

"Things goes from bad to worst," Trinkmann went on, his voice rising to a bellow. "You treat me like I would be a dawg."

"*Aber*, Mr. Trinkmann," Louis whimpered, "I——"

"*Koosh!*" Trinkmann shouted. "I got enough of your *Chutzpah*. I am through with you. Comes three o'clock this afternoon, you would quit. D'ye hear me?"

Louis nodded. He would have made some articulate protest, but his Adam's apple had suddenly grown to the dimensions of a dirigible balloon; and though there surged through his brain every manner of retort, ironical and defiant, he could think of nothing better to do than to polish the ashtrays. Polishing powder and rags alone could not have produced the dazzling brilliancy that ensued. It was a sense of injustice that lent force to every rub, and when he began to clean the forks Louis imparted to his labour all the energy of a discharged waiter wringing his employer's neck.

Before he had half concluded his task the other waiters arrived, for Louis was but one of a staff of three, with the distinction that though his two associates were only dinner waiters, Louis served breakfast, dinner, and supper. Marcus, the elder of the two, bore a brown-paper package with an air of great solemnity, while Albert, his companion, perspired freely in spite of a chill March air blowing outside.

"Mr. Trinkmann," Marcus began, "Louis telephones me this morning which you got a couple new arrivals in your family and——"

"Louis!" Trinkmann roared, and Louis in response approached the desk with the polishing cloth in his hand. "Do you mean to told me you are using the telephone without asking me?"

"I thought, Mr. Trinkmann," Louis hastened to explain, "that so long you got in your family——"

"What is it your business *what* I got in my family?" Trinkmann asked.

Louis' eyes kindled and he gave free play to his indignation.

"For you I don't care at all, Mr. Trinkmann," he said, "but for Mrs. Trinkmann which she is always acted to us like a lady, understand me, I am telephoning Marcus he should bring with him a few flowers, Mr. Trinkmann, which if you wouldn't take 'em to her, we could easy send 'em up by a messenger boy, and here is a nickel for using the telephone."

He plunged his hand into his trousers-pocket and dashed a coin on to the desk. Then, reaching behind him with both hands, he untied his apron. "Furthermore," he said, "I wouldn't wait till three o'clock, Mr. Trinkmann. Give me my money and I would go now."

"Pick up that apron, Louis," Trinkmann commanded, "because, so sure as I am standing here, if you wouldn't wait on the customers till three o'clock I wouldn't pay you not one cent."

"So far as that goes, Mr. Trinkmann," Louis commenced, "I ain't——"

"And if you get fresh to me *oder* to the customers, Louis," Trinkmann concluded, "you wouldn't get your money, neither."

"Did the customers ever done me anything, Mr. Trinkmann?" Louis retorted. "Why should I get fresh to the customers which every one of them is my friends, Mr. Trinkmann? And as for getting fresh to you, Mr. Trinkmann, if I would want to I would. Otherwise not."

With this defiance Louis picked up his polishing cloth and his apron and proceeded to the kitchen, to which Marcus and Albert had already retreated. His courage remained with him until he had refastened his apron, and then he discerned Marcus and Albert to be regarding him with so mournful a gaze that the balloon again expanded in his throat, and forthwith—to pursue the simile further—it burst. He opened the door leading from the kitchen to the paved space littered with packing boxes, which had once been the backyard, and despite the cold March weather he stepped outside and closed the door behind him.

Ten minutes later the first luncheon customer arrived and Louis hastened to wait upon him. It was Max Maikafer, salesman for Freesam, Mayer & Co., and he greeted Louis with the familiarity of six years' daily acquaintance.

"*Nu*, Louis," he said, "what's the matter you are catching such a cold in your head?"

Louis only sniffled faintly in reply.

"A feller bums round till all hours of the night, understand me," Max continued, "and sooner or later, Louis, a lowlife—a *Shikkerer*—gives him a *Schlag* on the top from the head, *verstehest du*, and he would get worsen as a cold, Louis."

Louis received this admonition with a nod, since he was incapable of coherent speech.

"So, therefore, Louis," Max concluded, as he looked in a puzzled fashion at Louis' puffed eyelids, "you should bring me some *Kreploch* soup and a little *gefüllte Rinderbrust*, not too much gravy."

He watched Louis retire to the kitchen and then he motioned to Albert, who was industriously polishing the glasses at a nearby table.

"What's the matter with Louis, Albert?" he asked.

"Fired," Albert said out of the corner of his mouth, with one eye on the cashier's desk, where Mr. Trinkmann was fast approaching the borderline of insanity over a maze of figures representing the previous day's receipts.

"What for?" Max asked.

"I should know what for!" Albert exclaimed. "The boss is mad on account he got twins, so he picks on Louis that the ashtrays ain't clean and the forks, neither. So Louis he don't say nothing, and Trinkmann gets mad and fires him."

He glanced furtively at the cashier's desk just as Trinkmann suddenly tore up his paperful of figures, and in one frightened bound Albert was once more at his glass polishing.

"Well, Trinkmann," Max cried, as he made ready to absorb the soup by tucking one corner of his napkin into the top of his collar, "I must get to congratulate you."

Trinkmann was on his way to the kitchen for the purpose of abusing the pantryman as a measure of relief to his figure-harried brain. He paused at Max's table and distorted his face in what he conceived to be an amiable grin.

"No one compels you to congratulate me, Mr. Maikafer," he said, "and, anyhow, Mr. Maikafer, with business the way it is, understand me, twins ain't such *Simcha*, neither."

"Sure, I know," Max rejoined; "but so far as I could see, Trinkmann, you ain't got no kick coming. You do a good business here. You got three good waiters and the customers don't complain none."

"Don't they?" Trinkmann grunted.

"Not at the waiters, Trinkmann," Max said significantly. "And the food is all right, too, Trinkmann. The only thing is, Trinkmann, when a feller got a nice *gemütlicher* place like you got it here, y'understand, he should do his bestest that he keeps it that way."

Trinkmann's smile became a trifle less forced at Max's use of the adjective *gemütlicher*, for which the English language has no just equivalent, since it at once combines the meanings of cozy, comfortable, good-natured, and homelike.

"Certainly, I am always trying to keep my place *gemütlich*, Mr. Maikafer," Trinkmann declared, "but when you got waiters, Mr. Maikafer, which they—"

"Waiters ain't got nothing to do with it, Trinkmann," Max interrupted. "On Sutter Avenue, Brownsville, in boom times already was a feller—still a good friend of mine—by the name Ringentaub, which runs a restaurant, Trinkmann, and everybody goes there on account he keeps a place which you could really say was *gemütlich*. The chairs was old-fashioned, *mit* cane seats into 'em, which they sagged in the right place, so that if you was sitting down, y'understand, you *knew* you was sitting down, not like some chairs which I seen it in restaurants, Trinkmann, which if you was sitting down, you might just as well be standing up for all the comfort you get out of it."

"The chairs here is comfortable," Trinkmann remarked.

"Sure, I know," Max continued. "Then in this here restaurant was tables which they only got 'em in the old country—big, heavy tables, understand me, which you pretty near kill yourself trying to move 'em at all. A feller sits at such a table, Trinkmann, and right away he thinks he must drink a cup coffee; and not alone that, Trinkmann, but he must get to order coffee for the

crowd. He couldn't even help himself, Trinkmann, because such a table makes you feel good to look at it. That's what it is to keep a *gemütlicher* place, Trinkmann."

Trinkmann nodded and sat down at Max's table.

"Furthermore, Trinkmann," Max continued, "everything in the place was the same. The ashtrays was from brass like them there ashtrays you used to got here, Trinkmann."

Max looked meaningfully at the burnished brass utensil that stood in the middle of the table.

"That's the same ashtrays which we always got here," Trinkmann retorted.

"Are they?" Max said. "Well, somebody must of done something to 'em on account they don't look so *gemütlich* no longer. That's the same mistake Ringentaub made it, Trinkmann. He ain't satisfied he is got such a big trade there, Trinkmann, but he must go to work and get a partner, a feller by the name Salonkin, which he pays Ringentaub two thousand dollars for a half interest in the business. Salonkin is one of them fellers, understand me, which is all for improvements, Trinkmann. *Gemütlichkeit* is something which he don't know nothing about at all, y'understand, and the first thing you know, Trinkmann, Salonkin says the chairs is back numbers. He fires 'em right out of there, understand me, and buys some new chairs, which actually for a thin man to sit on 'em for five minutes even would be something which you could really call dangerous. Also the tables Salonkin says is junk, so he sells 'em for fifty cents apiece and puts in them marble-top tables like a lot of tombstones in a cemetery."

"Marble-top tables is anyhow clean," Trinkmann declared.

"Clean they may be," Max admitted, "but *gemütlich* they ain't. And, anyhow, Trinkmann, do you know what started the whole trouble there?"

Trinkmann shook his head.

"Well, it was the forks," Max said solemnly. "The forks which Ringentaub got it before he goes as partners together with Salonkin always looks like they would be a little dirty, understand me. So what does the customer do, Trinkmann? They take first thing after they sit down the fork in hand, understand me, and dip it in the glass of water which the waiter brings 'em. Then when the time comes which they want to drink the water, Trinkmann, they remember they cleaned the fork in it and they order instead a glass of beer. Afterward when Salonkin takes ahold there, y'understand, he raises hell with the waiters they should keep clean the forks, which they done it, Trinkmann, because the feller Salonkin was a regular *Rosher*, understand me, and the waiters is scared to death of him. What is the result, Trinkmann? The sales of beer right away drops to nothing, understand me, and everybody drinks the glass water instead."

At this juncture Trinkmann looked up and observed Albert at work on the tumblers.

"Albert!" he cried. "Leave the glasses alone, d'ye hear me?"

Albert put down the glass he was wiping and commenced to rub the knives and forks, whereat Trinkmann jumped to his feet.

"The forks, neither," he yelled. "Instead you should be standing there wasting your time, fill up with water the glasses and tell Louis never mind, he shouldn't polish any more them ashtrays."

When Max Maikafer concluded his lunch he proceeded at once to the cashier's desk, over which Trinkmann himself presided.

"Cheer up, Trinkmann," he said, as he paid his check. "You got a face so solemn like a rich uncle just died and left you to remember him by a crayon portrait."

"Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Maikafer," Trinkmann said, "I got all I could stand to-day. Not alone my wife goes to work and has twins on me, Mr. Maikafer, but I also got to fire a feller which is working for me here six years."

"What d'ye mean?" Max cried in well-feigned astonishment. "You are going to fire Albert?"

"Not Albert," Trinkmann said; "Louis."

"Why, what did Louis done?" Max asked.

"He done enough, Mr. Maikafer," Trinkmann replied. "Here lately he gets to acting so fresh you would think he owns the place."

"Well, why not?" Max commented. "After all, Trinkmann, you got to give Louis credit; he works hard here and he keeps for you many a customer. Because I want to tell you something, Trinkmann, which I am only saying it for your own good, understand me—there's lots of times

you are acting so grouchy to the customers that if it wouldn't be Louis smoothes 'em down they wouldn't come near your place at all."

"What the devil are you talking about?" Trinkmann shouted. "If you wasn't such a big fool you would know I am always polite to my customers. Furthermore, I never lost a customer since I am in business, and if you don't like the way I run my restaurant you don't got to come here. That's all."

Maikafer nodded as he pocketed his change.

"All right, Trinkmann," he said. "But you know what happens when a concern lets a salesman go. He easy finds a partner and starts to do business with his old firm's customers on his own account."

Trinkmann laughed aloud.

"That *Schnorrer* ain't got money enough to stock a pushcart, let alone a restaurant," he jeered.

"That's all right," Maikafer retorted. "I know a feller which runs for years a place in East New York—Brownsville—Trinkmann, and when he hears Louis ain't working, not only he would be glad to give him a job as waiter, but he would stake him to an interest in the restaurant yet."

Trinkmann flapped his right hand at Maikafer in a gesture of derision.

"*Schmooes!*" he cried.

"No *Schmooes* at all," Max said, as he passed out of the door. "He's the feller I am talking to you about by the name Ringentaub, and across the street is plenty vacant stores."

Ten minutes after Max had departed Simon Feinsilver entered.

"Say, Trinkmann," he asked, as he paused at the cashier's desk on his way to one of Louis' tables, "did you seen it Max Maikafer this morning?"

Had Trinkmann scrutinized Simon's face with any degree of care he might have observed a mischievous gleam in Simon's eyes; but at the mere mention of Maikafer's name Trinkmann exploded.

"What d'ye mean, did I seen it Maikafer?" he demanded.

"Why I just asked you," Simon said calmly, "on account he was to meet me at my office and he ain't showed up at all."

"Well, I ain't surprised to hear that, Mr. Feinsilver," Trinkmann rejoined less viciously. "Because even if Maikafer is such a good friend of yours, the feller is so busy with other people's business, what he ain't got no business to butt in at all, that his own business he lets go to the devil. Am I right or wrong?"

Simon nodded and sat down at one of Louis' tables.

"Albert," Trinkmann cried, "wait on Mr. Feinsilver."

"That's all right," Feinsilver declared; "I got plenty time."

"Albert," Trinkmann repeated, "take Mr. Feinsilver's order."

Albert left his station on the opposite side of the room and approached Feinsilver with a conciliatory smile.

"What would you like to-day, Mr. Feinsilver?" he said.

"I would like Louis," Feinsilver replied; "so go ahead, Albert, and tell Louis when he gets through serving those two fellers over there to wait on me."

"What's the matter you ain't giving your order to Albert, Mr. Feinsilver?" Trinkmann asked.

"Albert is all right," Feinsilver replied, "but Louis knows just how I want things, Trinkmann. You ain't got no objections to me waiting for Louis?"

"Why should I got objections, Mr. Feinsilver?" Trinkmann protested.

"I don't know why you should got objections, Trinkmann," Feinsilver said, "and if you did got 'em I would wait for Louis anyway."

He closed the discussion by spearing half a dill pickle with a fork and inserting it endwise in his mouth. Hardly had the metal tines touched his lips, however, than he hastily disgorged the pickle and uttered a resounding "T'phoo-ee!"

"What are you trying to do here to me, Trinkmann?" he demanded. "Poison me?"

He dipped his napkin into the glass of water that stood on the table and performed an elaborate phylaxis about his mouth and teeth.

"What d'ye mean, poison you?" Trinkmann cried.

"Why, there is something here on the fork," Simon declared.

"Let me see," Trinkmann said, advancing to the table; "might it be some Bismarck herring, maybe."

"Bismarck herring ain't poison," Feinsilver said, examining the fork closely. "Bismarck herring never harmed nobody, Trinkmann; but this here fork has got poison onto it."

He turned it over in his hand and sniffed at it suspiciously.

"Why, bless my soul," he roared. "Somebody has been cleaning it with polishing powder."

"Well, suppose they did?" Trinkmann said calmly.

"Suppose they did!" Simon exclaimed. "Why, don't you know you should never clean with polishing powder something which it could touch a person's lips? A friend of mine, by the name Lambdan, once puts his cigar onto an ashtray which they are cleaning it with this powder, and the widder sues in the courts the feller that runs the restaurant for ten thousand dollars yet. From just putting the cigar in his mouth he gets some of the powder on his tongue, Trinkmann, and in two hours, understand me, he turned black all over. It ruined the restaurant man—a decent, respectable feller by the name Lubliner. His mother was Max Maikafer's cousin."

Trinkmann grew pale and started for the kitchen.

"Albert," he said huskily, "take from the tables the ashtrays and the forks and tell that pantryman he should wash 'em off right away in boiling water."

He followed Albert, and after he had seen that his instructions were obeyed he returned to the desk. In the meantime Simon had engaged Louis in earnest conversation.

"Louis," Simon said, "I am just seeing Max Maikafer, and he says you shouldn't worry, because you wouldn't lose your job at all."

"No?" Louis replied. "What for I wouldn't? I am going to get fired this afternoon sure, three o'clock."

"Never mind," Simon declared, "you shouldn't let him make you no bluffs, Louis. Not only he wouldn't fire you, Louis, but I bet yer he gives you a raise even."

Louis nodded despairingly.

"A couple of kidders like you and Mr. Maikafer ain't got no regards for nobody," he said. "Maybe it is a joke for you and Mr. Maikafer that I get fired, Mr. Feinsilver, but for me not, I could assure you."

"I ain't kidding you, Louis," Simon declared. "Keep a good face on you, Louis, and don't let on I said something to you. But you could take it from me, Louis, comes three o'clock this afternoon you should go to the boss and say you are ready to quit. Then the boss says no, you should stay."

"Yow! He would say that!" Louis said bitterly.

"Surest thing you know, Louis," Simon rejoined solemnly. "Me and Max will fix it sure. And after the boss says you should stay you tell him no, you guess you wouldn't. Tell him you know lots of people would hire you right away at two dollars a week more, and I bet yer he would be crazy to make you stay; and if he wouldn't pay you the two dollars a week more I would, so sure I am he would give it to you."

It was then that Trinkmann returned to the cashier's desk, and Louis moved slowly away just as the telephone bell rang sharply. Trinkmann jerked the receiver from the hook and delivered himself of an explosive "Hallo."

"Hallo," said a bass voice; "is this Mr. Trinkmann?"

"Yep," Trinkmann replied.

"I would like to speak a few words something to a waiter which is working for you, by the name Louis Berkfield," the voice continued.

Instantly Trinkmann's mind reverted to Maikafer's parting words.

"Who is it wants to talk with him?" he asked.

"It don't make no difference," said the voice, "because he wouldn't recognize my name at all."

"No?" Trinkmann retorted. "Well, maybe he would and maybe he wouldn't, Mr. Ringentaub; but people which they got the gall to ring up my waiters and steal 'em away from me in business hours yet, Mr. Ringentaub, all I could say is that it ain't surprising they busted up in Brownsville. Furthermore, Mr. Ringentaub, if you think you could hire one of them stores across the street and open up a *gemütlicher* place with Louis for a waiter, y'understand, go ahead and try, but you couldn't do it over *my* 'phone."

He hung up the receiver so forcibly that the impact threw down eight boxes of the finest cigars.

"Louis," he shouted, and in response Louis approached from the back of the restaurant.

"I am here, Mr. Trinkmann," Louis said, with a slight tremor in his tones.

"Say, lookyhere, Louis," Trinkmann continued, "to-morrow morning first thing you should ring up Greenberg & Company and tell 'em to call and fetch away them eight boxes cigars. What, do them people think I would be a sucker all my life? They stock me up *mit* cigars till I couldn't move around at all."

"But, Mr. Trinkmann," Louis protested, "this afternoon three o'clock you are telling me——"

"*Koosh!*" Trinkmann roared, and Louis fell back three paces; "don't you answer me back. Ain't you got no respect at all?"

Louis made no reply, but slunk away to the rear of the restaurant.

"*Schlemiel!*" Simon hissed, as Louis passed him. "Why don't you stand up to him?"

Louis shrugged hopelessly and continued on to the kitchen, while Simon concluded his meal and paid his check.

"You didn't told me if you seen Max Maikafer to-day?" he said, as he pocketed a handful of tooth-picks.

"I didn't got to told you whether I did *oder* I didn't," Trinkmann replied, "but one thing I *will* tell you, Mr. Feinsilver—I am running here a restaurant, not a lumber yard."

At ten minutes to three Trinkmann stood behind the cashier's desk, so thoroughly enmeshed in the intricacies of his wife's bookkeeping that not even a knowledge of conic sections would have disentangled him. For the twentieth time he added a column of figures and, having arrived at the twentieth different result, he heaved a deep sigh and looked out of the window for inspiration. What little composure remained to him, however, fled at the sight of Max Maikafer, who stood talking to a stout person arrayed in a fur overcoat. As they conversed, Max's gaze constantly reverted to the restaurant door, as though he awaited the appearance of somebody from that quarter, while the man in the fur overcoat made gestures toward a vacant store across the street. He was a stout man of genial, hearty manner, and it seemed to Trinkmann that he could discern on the fur overcoat an imaginary inscription reading: "*Macht's euch gemütlich hier.*"

Trinkmann came from behind the desk and proceeded to the rear of the restaurant, where Louis was cleaning up in company with Marcus and Albert.

"Louis," he said, "I want you you should go into the kitchen and tell that pantryman he should wash again the forks in hot water, and stay there till he is through. D'ye hear me?"

Louis nodded and Trinkmann walked hurriedly to the store door. He threw it wide open, after the fashion of the lover in a Palais Royal farce who expects to find a prying maidservant at the keyhole.

Maikafer stood directly outside, but, far from being embarrassed by Trinkmann's sudden exit, he remained completely undisturbed and greeted the restaurateur with calm urbanity.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Trinkmann," he said, "ain't it a fine weather?"

Trinkmann choked in mingled rage and indignation, and before he could sufficiently compose himself to sort out an enunciable phrase from all the profanity that surged to his lips Maikafer had brought forward the man in the fur overcoat.

"This is my friend, Mr. Ringentaub," he said, "also in the restaurant business."

"I'm pleased to meet your acquaintance," Mr. Ringentaub said. "Before I got through talking with you on the 'phone this morning some one cut us off."

At this juncture Trinkmann's pent-up emotion found expression.

"Away from here," he bellowed, after he had uttered a highly coloured preamble, "away from here, the both of youse, before I call a policeman and make you arrested!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Trinkmann," Maikafer interrupted, "do you got a lease on the sidewalk, too?"

"Never mind what I got a lease on," Trinkmann said. "You are coming around here trying to steal away my waiters and——"

"One moment, Mr. Trinkmann," Max said. "We are not trying to steal away your waiters at all. Mr. Ringentaub here is a gentleman, even if some people which is in the restaurant business don't act that way, Mr. Trinkmann; but as you told me yourself, Mr. Trinkmann, you are firing Louis and he's going to quit you at three o'clock; and as it is now five minutes to three——"

"Who is going to quit me at three o'clock?" Trinkmann demanded.

"Louis is," Maikafer said.

"That's where you make a big mistake," Trinkmann cried. "Louis ain't going to quit me at all. Here, I'll show you."

He led the way into the restaurant.

"Come inside, Mr. Ringentaub," he said excitedly. "No one is going to harm you. Come right inside, and I'll show you suckers you are mistaken."

He closed the door after them and almost ran to the kitchen.

"Louis," he said, "come here; I want to talk a few words something to you."

He grabbed Louis by the arm and led him to the cashier's desk, where Maikafer and his companion were standing.

"Louis," he said, "tell these gentlemen didn't I told you you should ring up sure to-morrow morning Greenberg & Company about the cigars?"

Louis nodded and Trinkmann glared triumphantly at his visitors.

"Then if I told him to ring up Greenberg & Company about the cigars to-morrow morning, understand me," he cried, "how could it be possible that he quits me this afternoon?"

"But, Mr. Trinkmann," Louis protested, "you did told me I should quit this afternoon."

"*Dummer Esel!*" Trinkmann exclaimed. "Couldn't I open my mouth in my own restaurant at all?"

"Well, if that's the case," Ringentaub said, "then Louis could come to work by me. Ain't that right, Louis?"

Louis looked at Max Maikafer, whose right eyelid fluttered encouragingly.

"And I would pay him twenty-eight dollars a month," Ringentaub continued, "and guarantee to keep him a year. Is that satisfactory, Louis?"

Louis' tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, but he managed to enunciate a monosyllable of assent.

"That's all right, Mr. Ringentaub," Trinkmann declared; "I would pay him thirty dollars a month and keep him for a year and longer if he wants to stay."

Louis' gaze wandered from Max Maikafer to Trinkmann, and his lower lip jutted out and trembled with gratitude.

"I mean it, Louis," Trinkmann declared. "I mean it from the bottom of my heart."

"Then in that case, Louis," Ringentaub retorted, "I would give you thirty-two fifty a month."

Louis shook his head.

"I am working here by Mr. Trinkmann six years come this *Tishabav*," he replied, "and even if he would only say twenty-eight dollars I would of stayed anyway."

Max Maikafer turned disgustedly to Ringentaub. "Did you ever hear the like for a fool?" he said.

"Never mind, Maikafer," Trinkmann interrupted, "even if he would be satisfied with twenty-eight I wouldn't go back on my word. I will pay him thirty dollars a month, and, furthermore, Maikafer, you will see if he stays by me a year and does his work good, maybe—who knows—I would even pay him more yet."

He held out his hand to Louis, who grabbed it effusively.

"When a feller's wife goes to work and has twins on him, Louis," he continued, "he ain't responsible for what he says exactly. Especially if they're both girls."

Three weeks later Mrs. Trinkmann sat behind the cashier's desk, awaiting the luncheon customers, and her eye wandered to the vacant store across the street at the very moment when a wagon backed up against the curb and the driver and his helper unloaded two large signs.

"Trinkmann," Mrs. Trinkmann called, "some one rents the store across the street."

Trinkmann hastened to the door and glanced nervously toward the two signs. Beads of perspiration sprang out on his forehead as he discerned the lettering on one of the signboards, which read as follows:

FELIX RINGENTAUB

He uttered a faint groan and was about to communicate to Mrs. Trinkmann the melancholy tidings that a rival establishment had come into being, when the driver and his helper turned over the second sign. It contained the words:

TAILORS' AND DRESSMAKERS' TRIMMINGS

Hardly had Trinkmann recovered from his astonishment when Felix Ringentaub himself came hurriedly down the street, accompanied by Max Maikafer. A moment later they entered the restaurant.

"Why, how do you do, Mrs. Trinkmann?" Max cried, "How's the twins?"

"Getting on fine," Mrs. Trinkmann said.

"Shake hands with my friend, Mr. Ringentaub," Max continued, as he looked meaningly at Trinkmann. "Mr. Ringentaub, up to a couple of weeks since, used to was in the restaurant business in Brownsville. He goes now into the tailors' and dressmakers' trimmings business instead."

Trinkmann maintained a discreet silence and led them to one of Louis' tables. There he sat down with them, for he was determined to get at the heart of the mystery.

"Mr. Maikafer——" he began, but Max held up his hand protestingly.

"Ask me no questions, Trinkmann," he said, "and I wouldn't tell you no lies. But one thing I will say, Trinkmann, and that is that Louis didn't know nothing about it. We conned you into keeping him and raising his wages. That's all. Am I right or wrong, Ringentaub?"

Ringentaub made no reply. He was holding a fork in his hand and examining it critically.

"Of course, Trinkmann," he said, "I don't want to say nothing the first time I am coming into your place, but this here fork's got onto it something which it looks like a piece Bismarck herring."

"Don't take it so particular, Ringentaub," Maikafer said, blushing guiltily. "Wash it off in the glass water."

"A glass water you drink, Maikafer," Ringentaub rejoined, "and forks should be washed in the kitchen. And, furthermore, Trinkmann," Ringentaub said, "it don't do no harm if the waiters once in a while cleans with polishing powder the forks."

"I thought, Maikafer," Trinkmann said in funereal tones, "you are telling me that polishing powder is rank poison."

"I didn't told you that," Maikafer replied. "It was Feinsilver says that."

"Rank poison!" Ringentaub exclaimed. "Why, you could eat a ton of it."

"Sure, I know," Maikafer concluded; "but who wants to?"

He turned to Louis, who had approached unobserved. "Bring me some *Kreploch* soup and a plate *gefüllte Rinderbrust*," he said, "not too much gravy."

"Give me the same," Ringentaub added, as he gazed about him with the air of an academician at a private view. "You got a nice *gemütlicher* place here, Mr. Trinkmann," he concluded, "only one thing you should put in."

"What's that?" Trinkmann asked.

Maikafer kicked him on the shins, but Ringentaub failed to notice it.

"Marble-top tables," he said.

CHAPTER NINE

"RUDOLPH WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN"

ALL that J. Montgomery Fieldstone had done to make his name a theatrical boarding-household word from the Pacific Coast to Forty-sixth Street and Seventh Avenue was to exercise as a producing manager nearly one tenth of the judgment he had displayed as Jacob M. Fieldstone, of Fieldstone & Gips, waist manufacturers; and he voiced his business creed in the following words:

"Now listen to me, kid," he said, "my idea has always been that, no matter how much value you give for the money, goods don't sell themselves. Ain't I right?"

Miss Goldie Raymond nodded, though she was wholly absorbed in a full-length enlarged photograph which hung framed and glazed on the wall behind Fieldstone's desk. She looked at it as a millionaire collector might look at a Van Dyck he had recently acquired from an impoverished duke, against a meeting of protest held in Trafalgar Square. Her head was on one side. Her lips were parted. It was a portrait of Miss Goldie Raymond as Mitzi in the Viennese knockout of two continents—"Rudolph, Where Have You Been."

"Now this new show will stay on Broadway a year and a half, kid," Mr. Fieldstone proceeded, "in case I get the right people to push it. Therefore I'm offering you the part before I speak to any one else."

"Any one else!" Miss Raymond exclaimed. "Well, you've got a nerve, after all I've done for you in 'Rudolph!'"

"Sure, I know," Fieldstone said; "but you've got to hand something to Sidney Rossmore."

"Him?" Miss Raymond cried. "Say, Mont, if I had to play opposite him another season I'd go back into vaudeville."

Fieldstone began to perspire freely. As a matter of fact he had signed Rossmore for the new show that very morning after an all-night discussion in Sam's, the only restaurant enjoying the confidence of the last municipal administration.

"Then how about the guy that wrote the music, Oskar Schottlaender?" he protested weakly. "That poor come-on don't draw down only ten thousand dollars a week royalties from England, France, and America alone!"

"Of course if you ain't going to give me any credit for what I've done——" Miss Raymond began.

"Ain't I telling you you're the first one I spoke to about this?" Fieldstone interrupted.

"Oh, is that so?" Miss Raymond said. "I wonder you didn't offer that Vivian Haig the part, which before I called myself after a highball I'd use my real name, even if it was Katzberger."

"I told you before, kid, Vivian Haig goes with the Rudolph Number Two Company next month to play the same part as she does now; and you know as well as I do it ain't no better than walking on and off in the second act—that's all."

"Then you'd oughter learn her to walk, Mont," Miss Raymond said as she rose from her chair. "She fell all over herself last night."

"I know it," Fieldstone said, without shifting from his desk. "She ain't got nothing to do and she can't do that!"

Miss Raymond attempted what a professional producer had told her was a bitter laugh. It turned out to be a snort.

"Well, I can't stay here all day talking about people like Haig," she announced. "I got a date with my dressmaker in a quarter of an hour."

"All right, Goldie," Fieldstone said, still seated. "Take care of yourself, kid, and I'll see you after the show to-night."

He watched her as she disappeared through the doorway and sighed heavily—but not for love,

because the domestic habits of a lifetime in the waist business are not to be so easily overcome. Indeed, theatrical beauty, with all its allurements, reposed in Fieldstone's office as free from temptation to the occupant as thousand dollar bills in a paying-teller's cage.

What if he did call Miss Goldie Raymond "kid"? He meant nothing by it. In common with all other theatrical managers he meant nothing by anything he ever said to actors or playwrights, unless it appeared afterward that he ought to have meant it and would stand to lose money by not meaning it.

The telephone bell rang and he lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Who d'ye say?" he said after a pause. "Well, see if Raymond is gone down the elevator, and if it's all right tell her I'll see her."

A moment later a side door opened—not the door by which Miss Raymond had departed—and a young woman of determined though graceful and alluring deportment entered.

"Well," she said, "how about it, Mont? Do I get it or don't I?"

"Sit down, kid," Fieldstone said, himself seated; for he had not risen at his visitor's entrance. "How goes it, sweetheart?"

It is to be understood that "sweetheart" in this behalf had no more significance than "kid." It was a synonym for "kid" and nothing else.

"Rossmore says you're going to play Raymond in the new piece," she went on, ignoring his question; "and you know you told me——"

"Now listen here, kid," he said, "you ain't got no kick coming. In 'Rudolph' you've got a part that's really the meaty part of the whole piece. I watched your performance from behind last night, kid, and I hope I may die if I didn't say to Raymond that it was immense and you were running her out of the business. I thought she'd throw a fit!"

"Then I do get the part in the new piece?" Miss Vivian Haig insisted—for it was none other than herself.

"Well, it's like this," Fieldstone explained: "If you play another season with 'Rudolph,' and——"

Miss Haig waited to hear no more, however. She bowed her head in her hands and burst into sobs; and she might well have saved herself the trouble, for to J. Montgomery Fieldstone the tears of an actress on or off were only "bus. of weeping." He lit a fresh cigar, and it might have been supposed that he blew the smoke in Miss Haig's direction as a substitute for smelling salts or aromatic spirits of ammonia. As a matter of fact he just happened to be facing that way.

"Now don't do that, kid," he said, "because you know as well as I do that if there was anything I could do for the daughter of Morris Katzberger I'd do it. Him and me worked as cutters together in the old days when I didn't know no more about the show business than Morris does to-day; but I jumped you right from the chorus into the part of Sonia in 'Rudolph,' and you got to rest easy for a while, kid."

"I g-got notices above the star," Miss Haig sobbed; "and you told popper the night after we opened in Atlantic City that you were planning to give me a b-better part next season."

"Ain't your father got diabetes?" Fieldstone demanded. "What else would I tell him?"

"But you said to Sidney Rossmore that if I could dance as well as I sang I'd be worth two hundred and fifty a week to you."

"I said a hundred and fifty," Fieldstone corrected; "and, anyhow, kid, you ain't had no experience dancing."

"Ain't I?" Miss Haig said. She flung down her pocketbook and handkerchief, and jumped from her seat. "Well, just you watch this!"

For more than ten minutes she postured, leaped, and pranced by turns, while Fieldstone puffed great clouds of smoke to obscure his admiration.



She postured, leaped, and pranced by turns

"How's that?" she panted at last, sinking into a chair.

"Where did you get it?" Fieldstone asked.

"I got it for money—that's where I got it," Miss Haig replied; "and I got to get money for it—if not by you, by some other concern."

Fieldstone shrugged his shoulders with apparent indifference.

"You know your own book, kid," he said; "but, you can take it from me, you'll be making the mistake of your life if you quit me."

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't!" Miss Haig said as she gathered up her handkerchief and pocketbook. "I ain't going to do nothing in a hurry; but if you want to give me my two weeks' notice now go ahead and do it!"

"Think it over, kid," Fieldstone said calmly as Miss Haig started for the door. "Anything can happen in this business. Raymond might drop dead or something."

Miss Haig slammed the door behind her, but in the moment of doing it Fieldstone caught the unspoken wish in her flashing eyes.

"So do I!" he said half aloud.

Lyman J. Bienenflug, of the firm of Bienenflug & Krimp, Rooms 6000 to 6020 Algonquin Theatre Building, was a theatrical lawyer in the broadest sense of the term; and it was entirely unnecessary for Mrs. Ray Fieldstone to preface every new sentence with "Listen, Mr. Bienenflug!" because Mr. Bienenflug was listening as a theatrical lawyer ought to listen, with legs crossed and biting on the end of a penholder, while his heavy brows were knotted in a frown of deep consideration, borrowed from Sir J. Forbes Robertson in "Hamlet," Act III, Scene 1.

"Listen, Mr. Bienenflug! I considered why should I stand for it any longer?" Mrs. Fieldstone went on. "He usen't anyhow to come home till two—three o'clock. Now he don't come home at all sometimes. Am I right or wrong?"

"Quite right," Mr. Bienenflug said. "You have ample grounds for a limited divorce."

While retaining or, rather, as a dramatic producer would say, registering the posture of listening, Mr. Bienenflug mentally reviewed all J. Montgomery Fieldstone's successes of the past year, which included the "Head of the Family," a drama, and Miss Goldie Raymond in the Viennese knockout of two continents, "Rudolph, Where Have You Been." He therefore estimated the alimony at two hundred dollars a week and a two-thousand dollar counsel fee; and he was proceeding logically though subconsciously to a contrasting of the respective motor-car refinement displayed by a ninety-horse-power J.C.B. and the new 1914 model Samsoun—both six cylinders—when Mrs. Fieldstone spoke again.

"Listen, Mr. Bienenflug!" she protested. "I don't want no divorce. I should get a divorce at my time of life, with four children already! What for?"

"Not an absolute divorce," Mr. Bienenflug explained; "just a separation."

"A separation!" Mrs. Fieldstone exclaimed in a manner so agitated that she forgot to say, "Listen, Mr. Bienenflug!" "If I would want a separation I don't need to come to a lawyer, Mr. Bienenflug. Any married woman if she is crazy in the head could go home to her folks to live, Mr. Bienenflug, without paying money to a lawyer he should advise her to do so, Mr. Bienenflug; which I got six married sisters, Mr. Bienenflug—and before I would go and live with any of them, Mr. Bienenflug, my husband could make me every day fresh a blue eye—and still I wouldn't leave him. No, Mr. Bienenflug, I ain't asking you you should get me a separation. What I want is you should get him to come home and stay home."

"But a lawyer can't do that, Mrs. Fieldstone."

"I thought a lawyer could do anything," Mrs. Fieldstone said, "if he was paid for it, Mr. Bienenflug, which I got laying in savings bank over six hundred dollars; and——"

Mr. Bienenflug desired to hear no more. He uncrossed his legs and dropped the penholder abruptly. At the same time he struck a handbell on his desk to summon an office boy, who up to the opening night of the "Head of the Family," six months before, had responded to an ordinary electric pushbutton. But anyone who has ever seen the "Head of the Family"—and, in fact, any one who knows anything about dramatic values—will appreciate how much more effective from a theatrical standpoint the handbell is than the pushbutton. There is something about the imperative Bing! of the handbell that holds an audience. It is, in short, drama—though drama has its disadvantages in real life; for Mr. Bienenflug, after striking the handbell six times without response, was obliged to go to the door and shout "Ralph!" in a wholly untheatrical voice.

"What's the matter with you?" he said when the office boy appeared. "Can't you hear when you're rung for?"

Ralph murmured that he thought it was a—now—Polyclinic ambulance out in the street.

"Get me a stenographer," Mr. Bienenflug said.

In the use of the indefinite article before stenographer he was once again the theatrical lawyer, because Bienenflug & Krimp kept but one stenographer, and at that particular moment she was in earnest conversation with a young lady whose face bore traces of recent tears.

It was this face and not a Polyclinic ambulance that had delayed Ralph Zinsheimer's response to his employer's bell; and after he had retired from Mr. Bienenflug's room he straightway forgot his message in listening to a very moving narrative indeed.

"And after I left his office who should I run into but Sidney Rossmore," said the young lady with the tear-stained face, whom you will now discover to be Miss Vivian Haig; "and he says that he just saw Raymond and she's going to sign up with Fieldstone for the new piece to-night yet."

She began to weep anew and Ralph could have wept with her, or done anything else to comfort her, such as taking her in his arms and allowing her head to rest on his shoulder—and but for the presence of the stenographer he would have tried it, too.

"Well," Miss Schwartz, the stenographer, said, "he'll get his come-uppings all right! His wife is in with Mr. Bienenflug now, and I guess she's going in for a little alimony."

Miss Haig dried her eyes and sat up straight.

"What for?" she said.

"You should ask what for!" Miss Schwartz commented. "I guess you know what theatrical managers are."

"Not Fieldstone ain't!" Miss Haig declared with conviction. "I'll say anything else about him, from petty larceny up; but otherwise he's a perfect gentleman."

At this juncture Mr. Bienenflug's door burst open.

"Ralph!" he roared.

"Oh, Mr. Bienenflug," Miss Haig said, "I want to see you for a minute."

She smiled on him with the same smile she had employed nightly in the second act of "Rudolph" and Mr. Bienenflug immediately regained his composure.

"Come into Mr. Krimp's room," he said.

And he closed the door of Room 6000, which was his own room, and ushered Miss Haig through Room 6010, which was the outer office, occupied by the stenographer and the office boy, into Mr. Krimp's room, or Room 6020; for it was by the simple expedient of numbering rooms in tens and units that the owner of the Algonquin Theatre Building had provided his

tenants with such commodious suites of offices—on their letterheads at least.

"By jinks! I clean forgot all about it, Miss Schwartz," Ralph said after Mr. Bienenflug had become closeted with his more recent client. "He told me to tell you to come in and take some dictation."

"I'll go in all right," Miss Schwartz said; and she entered Mr. Bienenflug's room determined to pluck out the heart of Mrs. Fieldstone's mystery.

It needed no effort on the stenographer's part, however; for as soon as she said "How do you do, Mrs. Fieldstone?" Mrs. Fieldstone forthwith unbosomed herself.

"Listen, Miss Schwartz," she said. "I've been here about buying houses, and I've been here about putting out tenants—and all them things; but I never thought I would come here about Jake."

Out of consideration for Ralph, Miss Schwartz had left the door ajar, and Ralph discreetly seated himself on one side where he might hear unobserved.

"Why, what's the trouble now, Mrs. Fieldstone?" Miss Schwartz asked.

"Former times he usen't to come home till two—three o'clock," Mrs. Fieldstone repeated; "and last week twice already he didn't come home at all; but he telephoned—I will say that for him." Here she burst into tears, which in a woman of Mrs. Fieldstone's weight and style of beauty—for she was by no means unhandsome—left Ralph entirely unmoved. "Last night," she sobbed, "he ain't even telephoned!"

"Well," Miss Schwartz said soothingly, "you've got to expect that in the show business. Believe me, Mrs. Fieldstone, you should ought to jump right in with a motion for alimony before he spends it all on them others."

"That's where you make a big mistake, Miss Schwartz," Mrs. Fieldstone said indignantly. "My Jake ain't got no eyes for no other woman but me! It ain't that, I know! If it was I wouldn't stick at nothing. I'd divorce him like a dawg! The thing is—now—I consider should I sue him in the courts for a separation or shouldn't I wait to see if he wouldn't quit staying out all night. Mr. Bienenflug wants me I should do it—but I don't know."

She sighed tremulously and opened wide the flap of her handbag, which was fitted with a mirror and a powder puff; and after she had made good the emotional ravages to her complexion she rose to her feet.

"Listen, Miss Schwartz. I think I'll think it over and come back to-morrow," she said.

"But, Mrs. Fieldstone," Miss Schwartz protested, "won't you wait till Mr. Bienenflug gets through? He'll be out in a minute."

"He didn't have no business to leave me stay here," Mrs. Fieldstone replied. "I was here first; but, anyhow, I'll be back to-morrow or so." Here she put on her gloves. "Furthermore, I ain't in no hurry," she said. "When you've been married to a man sixteen years, twenty-four hours more or less about getting a divorce don't make no difference one way or the other." She opened the door leading into the hall. "And, anyhow," she declared finally, "I ain't going to get no divorce anyway."

Miss Schwartz shrugged her shoulders.

"My *tzuris* if you get a divorce or not!" she said as she heard the elevator door close behind Mrs. Fieldstone.

"I hope she does!" Ralph said fervently. "He's nothing but a dawg—that fellow Fieldstone ain't!"

"Most of 'em are dawgs—those big managers," Miss Schwartz said; "and, what with their wives and their actors, they lead a dawg's life, too."

Further discussion was prevented by the appearance of Miss Haig and Mr. Bienenflug from Room 6020.

"I can throw the bluff all right," Mr. Bienenflug was saying; "though I tell you right now, Miss Haig, you haven't any cause of action; and if you did have one there wouldn't be much use in suing on it."

He shook his head sorrowfully.

"A producing manager has to get a couple of judgments entered against him every week, otherwise every one'd think he was an easy mark," he commented; "and that's why I say there ain't any money in the show business for the plaintiff's attorney—unless it's an action for divorce." Here he snapped his fingers as he realized that he had completely forgotten Mrs. Fieldstone during his twenty-minute consultation with Miss Haig. "Well, good-bye, Miss Haig,"

he said, pressing her hand warmly. "I've got some one in there waiting to see me."

"No, you ain't," Ralph blurted out. "Mrs. Fieldstone went away a few minutes ago; and she said ___"

"Went away!" Mr. Bienenflug exclaimed. "Went away! And you let her?"

"He ain't no cop, Mr. Bienenflug," Miss Schwartz said, coming to Ralph's defence. "What did you want him to do—put handcuffs on her?"

"So," Bienenflug said bitterly, "you let Mrs. Fieldstone go out of this office with a counsel fee of two thousand dollars and a rake-off on two hundred a week alimony!"

"Alimony!" Miss Haig cried, with an excellent assumption of surprise. "Is Mrs. Fieldstone suing Mont for divorce?"

She was attempting a diversion in Ralph's favour, but it was no use.

"Excuse me, Miss Haig," Bienenflug said raspingly, for in the light of his vanished counsel fee and alimony he knew now that Miss Haig was a siren, a vampire, and altogether a dangerous female. "I don't discuss one client's affairs with another!"

"Oh, all right!" Miss Haig said, and she walked out into the hallway and slammed the door behind her.

"Now you get out of here!" Bienenflug shouted, and Ralph barely had time to grab his hat when he found himself in front of the elevators with Miss Haig.

"What's the matter?" she said. "Did Mr. Bienenflug fire you?"

Ralph could not trust himself to words; he was too busy trying to prevent his lower lip from wagging.

"Well," Miss Haig went on, "I guess you wouldn't have no trouble finding another job. What did he do it for?"

"I couldn't help her skipping out," Ralph said huskily; "and besides, she ain't going to sue for no divorce, anyway. She said so before she went."

Miss Haig nodded and her rosebud mouth straightened into as thin a line as one could expect of a *rouge-à-lèvre* rosebud.

"She did, eh?" she rejoined. "Well, if she was to change her mind do you suppose Bienenflug would give you back your job?"

"Maybe!" Ralph said.

"Then here's your chance!" Miss Haig said. "You're a smart kid, Ralph; so all you've got to do is to get Mrs. Fieldstone round to Sam's at half-past eleven to-night—and if she don't change her mind I miss my guess."

"Why will she?" Ralph asked.

"Because," Miss Haig replied, as she made ready to descend in the elevator, "just about that time Fieldstone'll be pretty near kissing her to make her take fifty dollars a week less than she'll ask."

"Kissing who?" Ralph demanded.

"Be there at half-past eleven," Miss Haig said, "and you'll see!"

Though Ralph Zinsheimer had performed the functions of an office boy in Rooms 6000 to 6020 he was, in fact, "over and above the age of eighteen years," as prescribed by that section of the Code of Civil Procedure dealing with the service of process. Indeed he was so manly for his age that Mr. Bienenflug in moments of enthusiasm had occasionally referred to him as "our managing clerk, Mr. Zinsheimer," and it was in this assumed capacity that he had sought Mrs. Fieldstone and had at length persuaded her to go down to Sam's with him.

"A young man of your age ought to be home and in bed long before this," she said as they turned the corner of Sixth Avenue precisely at half-past eleven.

"I got my duties to perform the same as anybody else, Mrs. Fieldstone; and what Mr. Bienenflug tells me to do I must do," he retorted. "Also, you should remember what I told you about not eating nothing on me except oysters and a glass of beer, maybe, as I forgot to bring much money with me from the office."

"I didn't come down here to eat," Mrs. Fieldstone said, with a catch in her voice.

"Even so, Mrs. Fieldstone, don't you try to start nothing with this woman, as you never know what you're stacking up against in cafés," Ralph warned her. "Young Hartigan, the featherweight champion of the world, used to be a—now—coat boy in Sam's; and they got several waiters working there who has also graduated from the preliminary class."

"I wouldn't open my head at all," Mrs. Fieldstone promised; and with this assurance they entered the most southerly of the three doors to Sam's.

One of the penalties of being one of the few restaurants in New York permitted to do business between one A.M. and six A.M. was that Sam's Café and Restaurant did a light business between six P.M. and one A.M.; and consequently at eleven-thirty P.M. J. Montgomery Fieldstone and Miss Goldie Raymond were the only occupants of the south dining-room.

It is true that there were other customers seated in the middle and north dining-rooms—conspicuously Mr. Sidney Rossmore and Miss Vivian Haig; and it was this young lady who, though hidden from J. Montgomery Fieldstone's view, formed one of the subsidiary heads of his discourse with Miss Raymond.

"Well, I wish you could 'a' seen her, kid!" he said to Miss Raymond. "My little girl seven years old has took of Professor Rheinberger plain and fancy dancing for three weeks only, and she's a regular Pavlowa already alongside of Haig. She's heavy on her feet like an elephant!"

"You should tell me that!" Miss Raymond exclaimed. "Ain't I seen her?"

"And yet you claim I considered giving her this part in the new piece," Fieldstone said indignantly. "I'm honestly surprised at you, kid!"

"Oh, you'd do anything to save fifty dollars a week on your salary list," she retorted.

"About that fifty dollars, listen to me, Goldie!" Fieldstone began, just as Ralph and Mrs. Fieldstone came through the revolving doors. "I don't want you to think I'm small, see? And if you say you must have it, why, I'll give it to you." He leaned forward and smiled affably at her. "After the thirtieth week!" he concluded in seductive tones.

"Right from the day we open!" Miss Raymond said, tapping the tablecloth with her fingertips.

"Now, sweetheart," Fieldstone began, as he seized her hand and squeezed it affectionately, "you know as well as I do when I say a thing I mean it, because——"

And it was here that Mrs. Fieldstone, losing all control of herself and all remembrance of Ralph's admonition, took the aisle in as few leaps as her fashionable skirt permitted and brought up heavily against her husband's table.

"Jake!" she cried hysterically. "Jake, what is this?"

Fieldstone dropped Miss Raymond's hand and jumped out of his chair.

"Why, mommer!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter? Is the children sick?"

He caught her by the arm, but she shook him off and turned threateningly to Miss Raymond.

"You hussy, you!" she said. "What do you mean by it?"

Miss Goldie Raymond stood up and glared at Mrs. Fieldstone.

"Hussy yourself!" she said. "Who are you calling a hussy? Mont, are you going to stand there and hear me called a hussy?"

Fieldstone paid no attention to this demand. He was clawing affectionately at his wife's arm and repeating, "Listen, mommer! Listen!" in anguished protest.

"I would call you what I please!" Mrs. Fieldstone panted. "I would call you worser yet; and——"

Miss Raymond, however, decided to wait no longer for a champion; and, as the sporting writers would say, she headed a left swing for Mrs. Fieldstone's chin. But it never landed, because two vigorous arms, newly whitened with an emulsion of zinc oxide, were thrown round her waist and she was dragged back into her chair.

"Don't you dare touch that lady, Goldie Raymond!" said a voice that can only be described as clear and vibrant, despite the speaker's recent exhausting solo in the second act of "Rudolph Where Have You Been." "Don't you dare touch that lady, or I'll lift the face off you!"

Miss Raymond was no sooner seated, however, than she sprang up again and with one begemmed hand secured a firm hold on the bird of paradise in Miss Vivian Haig's hat.

"No one can make a mum out of me!" she proclaimed, and at once closed with her adversary.

Simultaneously Mrs. Fieldstone shrieked aloud and sank swooning into the arms of her husband. As for Sidney Rossmore and Ralph Zinsheimer, they lingered to see no more; but at the first outcry they fled through a doorway at the end of the room. In the upper part it was fitted with a ground-glass panel that, as if in derision, bore the legend: Café for Men Only.

When they emerged a few minutes later Miss Goldie Raymond had been spirited away by the management with the mysterious rapidity of a suicide at Monte Carlo, and Miss Vivian Haig, hatless and dishevelled, was laving Mrs. Fieldstone's forehead with brandy, supplied by the management at forty cents a pony.

"You know me, don't you, Mrs. Fieldstone?" Miss Vivian Haig said. "I'm Hattie Katzberger."

Mrs. Fieldstone had now been laved with upward of two dollars and forty cents' worth of brandy, and she opened her eyes and nodded weakly.

"And you know that other woman, too, mommer," Fieldstone protested. "That was Goldie Raymond that plays Mitzi in 'Rudolph.' I was only trying to get her to sign up for the new show, mommer. What do you think?—I would do anything otherwise at my time of life! Foolish woman, you!"

He pinched Mrs. Fieldstone's pale cheek and she smiled at him in complete understanding.

"But you ain't going to give her the new part now, are you, Jake?" she murmured.

"Certainly he ain't!" Miss Vivian Haig said. "I'm going to get that part myself, ain't I, Mr. Fieldstone?"

Fieldstone made a gesture of complete surrender.

"Sure you are!" he said, with the earnestness of a waist manufacturer and not a producing manager. "And a good dancer like you," he concluded, "I would pay the same figure as Goldie Raymond."

The following morning Lyman J. Bienenflug dispatched to Mrs. J. Montgomery Fieldstone a bill for professional services, consultation and advice in and about settlement of action for a separation—Fieldstone versus Fieldstone—six hundred dollars. He also dispatched to Miss Vivian Haig another bill for professional services, consultation and advice in and about settlement of action for breach of contract of employment—Haig versus Fieldstone—two hundred and fifty dollars.

Later in the day Ralph Zinsheimer, managing clerk in the office of Bienenflug & Krimp, and over and above the age of eighteen years as prescribed by the Code, served a copy of the summons and complaint on each of the joint tort-feasors in the ten-thousand dollar assault action of Goldie Raymond, plaintiff, against J. Montgomery Fieldstone and others, defendants. There were important changes that evening in the cast of "Rudolph Where Have You Been."

CHAPTER TEN

CAVEAT EMPTOR

FOR many years Mr. Herman Wolfson had so conducted the auctioneering business that he could look the whole world, including the district attorney, in the eye and tell 'em to go jump on themselves. This was by no means an easy thing to do, when the wavering line of demarcation between right and wrong often depends on the construction of a comma in the Code of Criminal Procedure. Nevertheless, under the competent advice of Henry D. Feldman, that eminent legal practitioner, Mr. Wolfson had prospered; and although his specialty was the purchasing *en bloc* of the stock in trade and fixtures of failing shopkeepers, not once had he been obliged to turn over his purchases to the host of clamouring creditors.

"My skirts I keep it clean," he explained to Philip Borrochson, whose retail jewellery business had proved a losing venture and was, therefore, being acquired by Mr. Wolfson at five hundred dollars less than its actual value, "and if I got an idee you was out to do somebody—myself or anybody else—I wouldn't have nothing to do with you, Mr. Borrochson."

The conversation took place in the business premises of Mr. Borrochson, a small, poorly-

stocked store on Third Avenue, one Sunday morning in January, which is always a precarious month in the jewellery trade.

"If it should be the last word what I ever told it you, Mr. Wolfson," Borrochson declared, "I ain't got even a piece of wrapping-paper on memorandum. Everything in my stock is a straight purchase at sixty and ninety days. You can take my word for it."

Mr. Wolfson nodded.

"When I close the deal to buy the place, Borrochson," he said, "I'll take more as your word for it. You got a writing from me just now, and I'll get a writing from you. I'll take your affidavit, the same what Henry D. Feldman draws it in every case when I buy stores. There ain't never no mistakes in them affidavits, neither, Borrochson, otherwise the party what makes it is got ten years to wait before he makes another one."

"Sure, I know it, you can make me arrested if I faked you, Mr. Wolfson," Borrochson replied, "but this is straight goods."

"And how about them showcases?" Wolfson asked.

"Only notes I give it for 'em," Borrochson answered him. "I ain't give a chattel mortgage or one of them conditional bill-off-sales on so much as a tin tack."

"Well, Feldman will look out for that, Borrochson," Wolfson replied, "and the safe, too."

Borrochson started.

"I thought I told it you about the safe," he exclaimed.

"You ain't told me nothing about the safe," Wolfson answered. "The writing what I give you says the stock and fixtures."

Borrochson took out the paper which Wolfson had just signed, and examined it carefully.

"You're wrong," Borrochson said. "I stuck it in the words 'without the safe' before you signed it."

Wolfson rose heavily to his feet.

"Let see it the writing," he said, making a grab for it.

"It's all right," Borrochson replied. "Here it is, black on white, 'without the safe.'"

"Then you done me out of it," Wolfson cried.

"I didn't done you out of nothing," Borrochson retorted. "You should of read it over before you signed it, and, anyhow, what difference does the safe make? It ain't worth fifty dollars if it was brand-new."

"Without a safe a jewellery stock is nothing," Wolfson said. "So if you told it me you wouldn't sell the safe I wouldn't of signed the paper. You cheated me."

He walked toward the door of the store and had about reached it when it burst open to admit a tall, slight man with haggard face and blazing eyes. He rushed past Wolfson, who turned and stared after him.

"Mr. Borrochson," the newcomer cried, "what's the use your fooling me any longer? Five hundred dollars I will give for the safe, and that's my last word."

"Sssh!" Borrochson hissed, and drew his visitor toward the end of the store. There a whispered conversation took place with frequent outbursts of sacred and profane exclamations from the tall, slender person, who finally smacked Borrochson's face with a resounding slap and ran out of the store.

"Bloodsucker!" he yelled as he slammed the door behind him. "You want my life."

Wolfson stared first at the departing stranger and then at Borrochson, who was thoughtfully rubbing his red and smarting cheek.

"It goes too far!" Borrochson cried. "Twicet already he does that to me and makes also my nose bleed. The next time I make him arrested."

"What's the matter with him?" Wolfson asked. "Is he crazy?"

"He makes me crazy," Borrochson replied. "I wish I never seen the safe."

"The safe!" Wolfson exclaimed. "What's he got to do with the safe?"

"Oh, nothing," Borrochson answered guardedly; "just a little business between him and me about it."

"But, Mr. Borrochson," Wolfson coaxed, "there can't be no harm in telling me about it."

He handed a cigar to Borrochson, who examined it suspiciously and put it in his pocket.

"Seed tobacco always makes me a stomachache," he said, "unless I smoke it after a meal."

"That ain't no seed tobacco," Wolfson protested; "that's a clear Havana cigar. But anyhow, what's the matter with this here Who's-this and the safe?"

"Well," Borrochson commenced, "the feller's name is Rubin, and he makes it a failure in the jewellery business on Rivington Street last June already. I went and bought the safe at the receiver's sale, and ever since I got it yet he bothered the life out of me I should sell him back the safe."

"Well, why don't you do it?"

"Because we can't come to terms," Borrochson replied. "He wants to give me five hundred for the safe, and I couldn't take it a cent less than seven-fifty."

"But what did you give for the safe when you bought it originally already?" Wolfson asked.

"Forty-five dollars."

Wolfson whistled.

"What's the matter with it?" he said finally.

"To tell you the candid and honest truth," Borrochson replied, "I don't see nothing the matter with the safe. Fifty dollars I paid it to experts who looked at that safe with telescopes already, like they was doctors, and they couldn't find nothing the matter with it, neither. The safe is a safe, they say, and that's all there is to it."

Wolfson nodded gravely.

"But there must be something the matter with the safe. Ain't it?"

"Sure, there must be," Borrochson agreed, "and if Rubin don't want to buy it back, either I will blow it up the safe or melt it down."

"That would be a foolish thing to do," Wolfson said.

"Well, if the safe is worth five hundred to Rubin," Borrochson declared, "it's worth seven hundred and fifty to me. That's the way I figure it."

Wolfson blew great clouds from one of his seed tobacco cigars and pondered for a minute.

"I tell you what I'll do, Borrochson," he said at last. "Give me a day to examine the safe and I'll make you an offer right now of five hundred and fifty for it."

Borrochson laughed raucously.

"What do you think I am?" he said. "A greenhorn?"

Then commenced a hard, long battle in which a truce was declared at six hundred dollars.

"But mind you," Wolfson said, "I should be alone when I examine the safe."

"Alone without a safe feller you couldn't do nothing," Borrochson declared, "but if you mean that I shouldn't be there to see the whole thing, I tell you now the deal is off."

"Don't you trust me?" Wolfson asked, in accents of hurt astonishment.

"Sure I trust you," Borrochson said; "but if you should find it a big diamond, we will say, for instance, in that safe, where would I come in?"

"You think I would steal the diamond and tell you nothing, and then refuse to take the safe?" Wolfson asked.

"I don't think nothing," Borrochson replied stubbornly, and lapsed into silence.

Here was a deadlock that bade fair to break up the deal.

"Take a chance on me, Borrochson," Wolfson said at last.

"Why should I take a chance on you, Wolfson," Borrochson replied, "when we can both take a chance on the safe? If you don't want to take it, I will take it. You don't got to buy the safe, Wolfson, if you don't want to."

For five minutes more Wolfson pondered and at length he surrendered.

"All right," he said. "I'll make you this proposition: If I find it anything in the safe I will pay you

six hundred, and if I don't find it nothing in the safe, I will pay you one hundred dollars for the privilege of looking. I'm willing to take a chance, too."

"That ain't no chance what you take it," Borrochson cried. "That's a dead-sure certainty."

"Why is it a certainty, Borrochson?" Wolfson retorted. "If I don't find nothing in the safe you can keep it, and then you got it one hundred dollars from me; and when Rubin comes into the store you could sell him the safe for five hundred dollars, anyway. So which whatever way you look at it, Borrochson, you get six hundred dollars for the safe."

Borrochson frowned in deep consideration of the plan.

"I tell you what it is, Wolfson," he said at last, "and this is my last word, so sure as you stand there. If you don't want to consider it, the deal is off. Pay me two hundred dollars now in advance and four hundred dollars additional when you find it something in the safe. That is all there is to it."

Wolfson looked hard at Borrochson, but there was a glitter of finality in the jeweller's eyes that clinched things.

"And you and the safe feller can look at the safe alone," Borrochson concluded.

"I'm satisfied," Wolfson said finally, and drew a checkbook from his waistcoat-pocket.

Borrochson raised his hand solemnly.

"Either cash *oder* nothing," was his ultimatum, and Wolfson replaced the checkbook in his vest pocket and drew a roll of bills from his trousers. He peeled off two hundred dollars and handed it to Borrochson.

"You see," he said, "I trust you. Ain't it?"

"You got to trust me," Borrochson replied, as Wolfson rose to examine the safe.

"Who did you get to look at the safe?" he asked Borrochson.

"Experts from everywhere," Borrochson replied. "I must of got ten fellers here from every big safe house in town. I can show you the bills already."

Wolfson waved his hand.

"I don't want to see 'em," he said. "But on the front of the safe I see it, J. Daiches, maker, Grand Street, New York. Did you have him to look at it?"

"Daiches!" Borrochson repeated with a laugh. "I should say I didn't get him to look at it. Why, that feller Daiches don't know no more about safes than I do about aljibbery what they learn it young fellers by night school. He come from Minsk ten years ago and made it a little money as an operator on shirts. So he buys out a feller in Grand Street and goes into the safe business since only a year ago."

"I take a chance on him, anyhow," Wolfson declared. "So do me the favour and go to the saloon on the corner and ring him up."

Borrochson shrugged his shoulders.

"You're up against a bum proposition in Daiches, Wolfson," he said, "because that feller don't know nothing about safes."

"But he's in the safe business, ain't he? And a feller can learn a whole lot about a business inside a year."

"A horse could pull it a truckload of books for a hundred years, Wolfson," Borrochson said, "and when he got through he wouldn't know no more what's inside of them books than when he started; ain't it?"

"S enough, Borrochson," Wolfson said, "if you're afraid to trust me alone in the store here while you go and telephone, why we can lock up the store and I will go with you."

Accordingly they repaired to the sabbatical entrance of the nearest liquor saloon and rang up Daiches' store in Grand Street. They had no difficulty in speaking to him, for on the lower end of Grand Street business goes forward on Sunday as briskly as on weekdays.

"Mr. Daiches," Borrochson said, "this is Philip Borrochson from Third Avenue. Could you come up by my store and look over my safe?"

"I ain't in the market for no safes, Borrochson," Daiches replied at the other end of the telephone wire.

"Not to buy no safes," Borrochson corrected. "There's a feller here what wants you to look at

my safe."

"Tell him for five dollars," Wolfson whispered in Borrochson's ear.

"He wants to give you five dollars for the job," Borrochson repeated.

"For five dollars is different," Daiches answered. "I will be up in half an hour. Should I bring it tools?"

Borrochson turned to Wolfson.

"He wants to know should he bring it tools," he said.

"Sure he should bring it tools," Wolfson cried; "powder also."

"Powder!" Borrochson exclaimed. "What for?"

"Powder what you blow it up with," Wolfson answered.

"Positively not," Borrochson declared. "I wouldn't tell him nothing about powder. Might you wouldn't find nothing in the safe, and when you blew it up already I couldn't sell it to Rubin for a button."

He turned to the 'phone again.

"Hullo, Daiches!" he said. "Bring up tools, sure; but remember what I tell you, you shouldn't do nothing to harm the looks of the safe."

"Sure not," Daiches replied. "Good-bye."

An hour later J. Daiches knocked at the door of the store and was admitted by Borrochson.

"Mr. Wolfson," he said, "this is J. Daiches."

"Pleased to meetcher," Daiches replied. "Which is the job what I got to do it?"

They led him to the safe in the rear of the store.

"Why, that's a safe what myself I sold it," Daiches exclaimed. "What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing's the matter with it," Wolfson said. "Only Borrochson should go outside on the sidewalk and stick there until we get through."

"Tell me, Wolfson," Borrochson said pleadingly, "why should I go outside?"

"An agreement is an agreement," Wolfson replied firmly, and Borrochson left the store and slammed the door behind him.

"I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Wolfson," Daiches said; "my name is on the safe as maker, but I didn't got nothing to do with making the safe. I bought the safe from a Broadway concern what put my name on the safe. So if the combination gets stuck it's up to them."

"There ain't nothing the matter with the combination, Daiches," Wolfson said, "only I got it an idee that safe must have a secret apartment."

"A secret apartment!" Daiches exclaimed. "Well, if that's the case somebody put it on after I sold it."

Wolfson looked at Daiches, whose uninteresting face expressed all the intelligence of a tailor's lay figure.

"Supposin' they did," Wolfson said, "it's your business to find it out."

"I thought you said it was a *secret* apartment."

Wolfson made no reply; he felt that he was leaning on a broken reed, but he commenced to pull out the safe's numerous drawers, all of which contained cheap jewellery.

"Let me help you do that, Mr. Wolfson," Daiches said, and suited the action to the word by seizing the top drawer on the left-hand side of the safe. He jerked it clumsily from its frame without supporting the rear, and the next moment it fell heavily to the floor.

"Idiot!" Wolfson hissed, but simultaneously Daiches emitted a cry.

He pointed excitedly to the floor where the drawer lay upside down. A small velvet-lined tray extended from the rear of the drawer, while scattered on the floor beneath lay six unset diamonds that winked and sparkled in the half-light of the shuttered store.

Wolfson made a dart for the stones and had managed to tuck away three of them in his waistcoat pocket when Borrochson burst into the store and ran up to the safe.

"What's the matter?" he gasped.

Wolfson wiped his forehead before replying.

"Nothing's the matter," he croaked. "What for you come into the store? Ain't you agreed you shouldn't?"

"Where did them diamonds come from?" Borrochson demanded, pointing to the three gems on the dusty floor.

"I dropped a drawer, the top one on the left-hand side," Daiches said, lifting up the drawer and pointing to the secret slide in its rear, "and this here little tray jumps out."

Wolfson turned on the little safe dealer with a terrible glare.

"You got to tell everything what you know," he bellowed.

Borrochson smiled grimly.

"I guess it's a good thing that I come in when I did, otherwise you would of schmeared Daiches a fifty dollar note that he shouldn't tell me nothing about it, and then you would of copped out them diamonds and told me you didn't find it nothing. Ain't it?" he said.

Wolfson blushed.

"If you would say I am a thief, Borrochson," he thundered, "I will make for you a couple blue eyes what you wouldn't like already."

"I ain't saying nothing," Borrochson replied. "All I want is you should pay me four hundred dollars balance on the safe and twenty-six hundred and fifty what we agreed on for the store and I am satisfied."

"And how about my five dollars?" Daiches cried.

"That I will pay it you myself," Borrochson said.

"Don't do me no favours, Borrochson," Wolfson exclaimed, "I will settle with Daiches."

"But," Daiches broke in again, "how about them diamonds, Mr. Wolfson?"

He looked significantly at Wolfson's waistcoat pocket.

"What diamonds?" Borrochson asked.

"He means the diamonds what you just picked up off the floor," Wolfson hastened to explain. "He wants his rakeoff, too, I suppose."

He fastened another hypnotic glare on the shrinking Daiches and, taking the remaining diamonds from Borrochson, he put them with the others in his vest pocket.

"Well," he concluded, "that I will settle with him, too. To-morrow is Monday and we will all meet at Feldman's office at two o'clock. Daiches, you and me will go downtown together and take it a little dinner and some wine, maybe. What?"

He took Daiches' arm in a viselike grasp and started to lead him from the store.

"Hold on there!" Borrochson cried. "How about them diamonds? You got the diamonds and all I get is two hundred dollars. What security have I got it that you don't skip out with the diamonds and give me the rinky-dinks? Ain't it?"

"About the stock and fixtures, you got it a writing from me. Ain't it?" Wolfson cried. "And about the safe, Daiches here is a witness. I give you two hundred dollars a while ago, and the balance of four hundred dollars I will pay it you to-morrow at two o'clock when we close."

He took the keys of the store from Borrochson after the door was locked, and once more he led Daiches to the street.

"Yes, Daiches," he said, as they neared the elevated station, "that's the way it is when a feller's tongue runs away with him. You pretty near done yourself out of a fine diamond."

"A fine diamond!" Daiches exclaimed. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean, if you wouldn't say nothing to Borrochson about them diamonds what I stuck it in my waistcoat pocket before he seen 'em, as soon as we close the deal I give you one. Because if you should say something to Borrochson, it would bust up the deal; and might he would sue me in the courts for the diamonds already."

A shrewd glitter came into Daiches' eyes.

"That's where you make it a mistake, Mr. Wolfson," he said. "If you give it me the diamond now, Mr. Wolfson, I sure wouldn't say nothing to Borrochson about it, because I run it the risk of losing the diamond if I do. But if you wouldn't give it me the diamond till after the deal is closed, then you wouldn't need to give it me at all; y'understand?"

Wolfson stopped short in the middle of the sidewalk.

"You are a fine schwindler!" he said.

"Whether I am a schwindler or I ain't a schwindler, Mr. Wolfson, is got no effect on me," Daiches replied stolidly; "for otherwise, if I don't get it the diamond right this minute I will go back and tell it all about the diamonds to Borrochson."

Wolfson clenched his right fist and grasped Daiches by the shoulder with his left hand.

"You dirty dawg!" he began, when a tall, slender person bumped into him. The intruder was muttering to himself and his face was ghastly with an almost unnatural whiteness.

"Rubin!" Wolfson cried, and stared after the distracted Rubin who seemed to stagger as he half ran down the street.

"Leggo from my arm," Daiches said, "or I'll——"

Wolfson came to himself with a start. After all, Rubin would be around the next day to buy back his safe, and Wolfson argued that he might as well be rid of Daiches.

"All right, Daiches," he said, "I'll give you a diamond."

He stopped under a lamppost and carefully placed the six diamonds in a little row on the flat of his hand between his second and third fingers. Then he selected the smallest of the six stones and handed it to Daiches.

"Take it and should you never have no luck so long as you wear it," he grunted.

"Don't worry yourself about that, Mr. Wolfson," Daiches said with a smile. "I ain't going to wear it; I'm going to sell it to-morrow."

He folded it into a piece of paper and placed it in his greasy wallet, out of which he extracted a card.

"Here is also my card, Mr. Wolfson," he said with a smile. "Any time you want some more work done by safes, let me know; that's all."

When Borrochson and Wolfson met the next afternoon in the office of the latter's attorney, Henry D. Feldman, they wasted no courtesy on each other.

"Feldman has sent up and searched the Register's office for chattel mortgages and conditional bill-off-sales, and he don't find none," Wolfson announced. "So everything is ready."

"I'm glad to hear it," Borrochson said. "When I get into a piece of business with a bloodsucker like you, Wolfson, I am afraid for my life till I get through."

"If I would be the kind of bloodsucker what you are, Borrochson," Wolfson retorted, "I would be calling a decent, respectable man out of his name. What did I ever done to you, Borrochson?"

"You tried your best you should do me, Wolfson," Borrochson replied.

"You judge me by what you would have done if you had been in my place, Borrochson," Wolfson rejoined.

"Never mind," Borrochson said. "Now we will close the whole thing up, and I want it distinctively understood that there should be no comebacks, Wolfson. You seen it my stock and fixtures, also my safe?"

"Sure I seen it and examined everything, and I don't take your word for nothing, Borrochson," Wolfson declared as they were summoned into the presence of Feldman himself.

There Borrochson executed a bill-of-sale of the stock, fixtures, and safe, in which he swore that he was their sole owner.

"It is distinctively understood," Borrochson said, as he dipped his pen in the ink to sign the affidavit, "that I don't guarantee nothing but what I am the owner of the goods. Quality and quantity he got to judge it for himself."

Mr. Feldman bowed.

"In the absence of a specific warranty the same doctrine applies in this as in any other case," he replied sonorously, "and that is the doctrine of *caveat emptor*."

"Caviare?" Wolfson murmured in complete mystification. "What for caviare is that?"

"*Caveat*, not caviare," Feldman replied. "*Caveat emptor* means 'Let the purchaser beware.'"

Wolfson heaved a deep sigh.

"I bet yer it applies in this case," he commented; "if ever a purchaser had to beware it is in this case."

Borrochson grunted and then pocketed Wolfson's certified check for the balance of the purchase price, including the four hundred dollars due for the safe. A minute later he departed, leaving Feldman alone with his client.

"Mr. Feldman," he said as soon as Borrochson had gone, "supposing a feller thinks that a safe has got diamonds into it, and supposing I got that safe, but I know there ain't no diamonds into it because I took 'em out already. And supposing that feller doesn't think that I know there was diamonds into the safe because them diamonds was supposed to be in a secret apartment what he only is supposed to know it. Supposing he buys the safe from me, thinking them diamonds is still into it, and pays me six hundred dollars for a safe what is only worth fifty. Would there be any comeback?"

"Decidedly not. And I sincerely hope you haven't been buying any such safe."

"*Gott soll hüten!*" Wolfson exclaimed.

"No, indeed, there will be no recourse to the vendor," Feldman replied. "The doctrine of *caveat emptor* would apply in that case, too."

Wolfson was effusive in his thanks and hastened to return to his recently acquired jewellery business.

When he left the elevated station on the way to the store Wolfson glanced around him for the haggard features and the attenuated form of Rubin, but without avail. He unlocked the store door and immediately made a thorough examination of the stock and fixtures. Nothing was missing, and, after consulting the figures furnished him by Borrochson, he succeeded in opening the combination lock of the Rubin safe. He took out the top drawer on the left-hand side and scrutinized it carefully. No one could have detected the secret slide, which was now replaced. Nevertheless, he found that, unless the drawer was handled with the utmost delicacy, the secret slide invariably jerked out, for the slightest jar released the controlling spring.

"The wonder is to me," he muttered, "not that Daiches and me discovered it, but that Borrochson shouldn't have found it out."

He pondered over the situation for several minutes. If Rubin came in to buy the safe, he argued, the first thing he would do would be to look at the drawer, and in his feverish haste the slide would be bound to open. Once Rubin saw that the diamonds were missing the jig would be up and he, Wolfson, would be stuck with the safe. At length he slapped his thigh.

"I got it," he said to himself. "I'll shut the safe and lock it and claim I ain't got the combination. Borrochson must have changed it when he bought it at Rubin's bankruptcy sale, and so Rubin couldn't open it without an expert, anyhow. And I wouldn't bargain with Rubin, neither. He wants the safe for five hundred dollars; he shall have it."

After emptying it of all its contents he closed and locked the safe and sat down to await developments. Four o'clock struck from the clock tower on Madison Square and Rubin had not arrived yet, so Wolfson lit a fresh cigar and beguiled his vigil with a paper he had found under the safe.

"I guess I'll lock up and go to my dinner," he said at eight o'clock. "To-morrow is another day, and if he don't come to-day he'll come to-morrow yet."

Half an hour later he sat at a table in Glauber's restaurant on Grand Street, consuming a dish of *paprika schnitzel*. At the side of his plate a cup of fragrant coffee steamed into his nostrils and he felt at peace with all the world. After the first cup he grew quite mollified toward Borrochson, and it was even in his heart to pity Rubin both for the loss he had sustained and the disappointment he was still to suffer. As for Daiches, he had completely passed out of Wolfson's mind, but just as pride goeth before a fall, ease is often the immediate predecessor of discomfort.

Perhaps there is nothing more uncomfortable than to receive a glassful of cold water in the back of the neck, and although Wolfson's neck bulged over his celluloid collar so that none of

the icy fluid went down his back, the experience was far from agreeable. After the shock had spent itself he turned around to find J. Daiches struggling in the grasp of two husky waiters.

"Schwindler!" Daiches howled, as he was propelled violently toward the door. "For all what I have done for you, you give me a piece from glass."

"Wait a bit!" Wolfson cried. "What is that he says about a piece from glass?"

But the waiters were too quick for him, and Daiches struck the car tracks and bounded east on Grand Street, toward his place of business, before Wolfson had an opportunity to question him.

Wolfson returned to his table without further appetite for his food. Hastily and with trembling fingers he took from his wallet a tissue-paper package wrapped after the fashion of a seidlitz powder. This he opened and exposed five glittering gems, but it seemed now to Wolfson that they possessed almost a spurious brilliancy. He glanced around nervously and at a table in the rear of the room he espied Sigmund Pollak, the pawnbroker, who could appraise a gem at a minute's notice by virtue of his long experience with impecunious customers.

At a frenzied gesture from Wolfson, Pollak leisurely crossed the room.

"Hullo, Wolfson," he said, "what's the trouble now?"

"Nothing," Wolfson replied, "only I want it you should do me a favour and look at these here diamonds."

Pollak examined them carefully.

"How much did you give for 'em?" he asked.

"I didn't give nothing for 'em," Wolfson replied. "I found 'em in a safe what I bought it from a feller by the name Philip Borrochson, in the jewellery business."

"Well," Pollak replied slowly, "you ain't made nothing by 'em and Borrochson ain't lost nothing by 'em, because they ain't worth nothing. They're just paste. In fact, there's a lot of that stuff around nowadays. A feller by the name Daiches showed me one of 'em about half an hour ago yet, and wants to sell it to me. I offered him a quarter for it."

Pollak returned the paste gems to Wolfson, who tossed them into his trousers-pocket with a nonchalance engendered of many years' poker playing.

"Have a little something to drink, Pollak?" he said.

"Thanks, I shouldn't mind if I did," Pollak replied. "By the way, ain't that your friend Borrochson what is coming in now?"

Wolfson again turned around in his chair, and this time, despite his poker training, he was shaken out of all self-possession.

"Who's this here tall, white-face feller what comes in with him?" he hissed.

"Him?" Pollak answered. "Why, that's a great friend from Borrochson's, a feller by the name Rubin what is one of the actors by the Yiddisher theayter."

Wolfson faced about again and essayed to tackle his *schnitzel*.

"Say, Pollak," he croaked, "d'ye want to buy a good safe cheap?"

THE END



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