

# Zikhroynes un Shriftn fun A Bialystoker- Memoirs And Writings From A Bialystoker

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The *goldene pave*, or golden peacock, is a traditional symbol  
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STEVEN SPIELBERG DIGITAL YIDDISH LIBRARY  
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## ZIKHROYNES UN SHRIFTN FUN A BYALISTOKER

—  
Jacob Jerusalemski  
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<p>צום אנדענען פון אויספארעמלעכע סאז אויף פאסט אויסגעגעבן דורך זיין טאכטער, זיין טאכטער רעגיןע ע"ה</p>	<p>יעקב ירוזאלימסקי זכרונות און שריפטן פון אַ ביאַליסטאָקער</p>
<p>קאמיטעט צום ארויסגעבן די שריפטן פון יעקב ירוזאלימסקי: מלכה ירוזאלימסקי, קאליפארניע, אמעריקע; גרשון יערוס (יערוזאלימסקי), קאליפארניע, אמעריקע; אידא ירוזאלעם קאליפארניע, אמעריקע; זלמן ריבאלט, תל-אביב, ישראל; יצחק ריבאל (ריבאלאווסקי), ניו-יארק, אמעריקע; דורה קליין, קאנעקטיקעט, אמעריקע; ירחמיאל דאווידסאן, אנטווערפן, בעלגיע; געניא דרייען פאריז, פראנצויזן; יוסף כהן (קאגאן), בני-ברק, ישראל</p>	

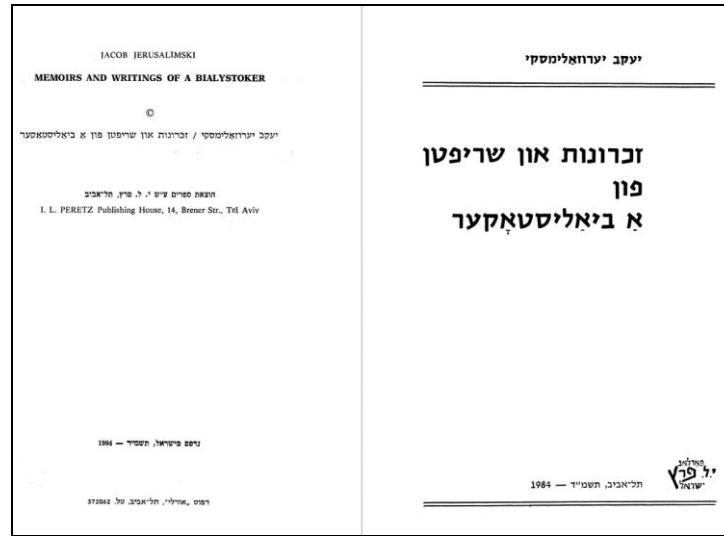
Author: Jacob Jerusalemiski

Memoirs And Writings Of A Bialystoker

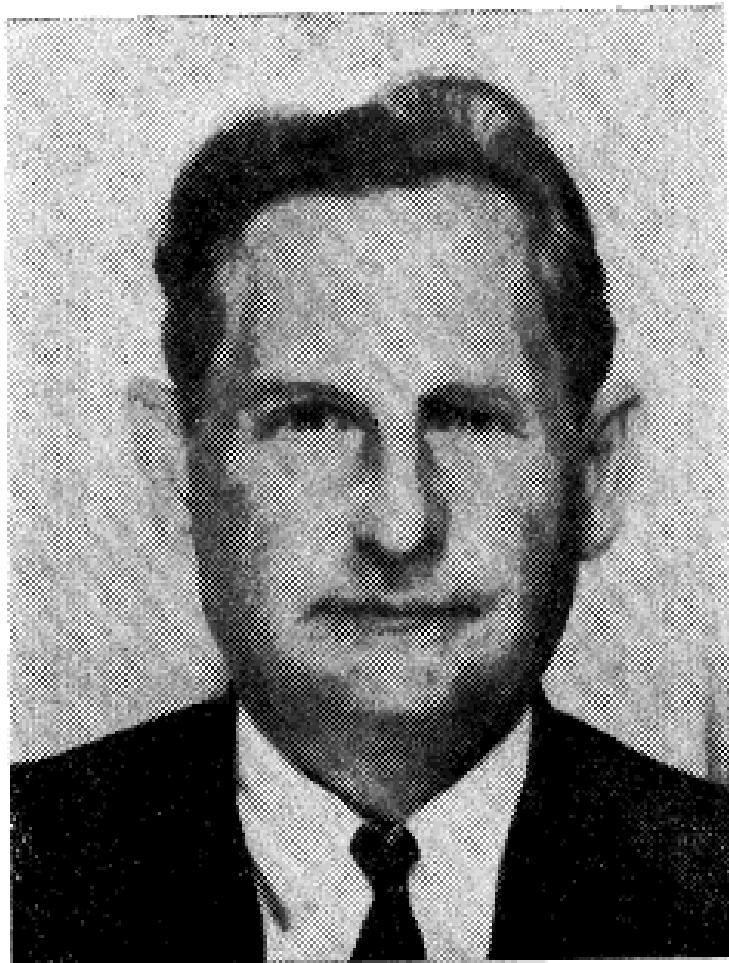
In memory of the unforgettable  
man and father  
published by his wife, daughter,  
son and daughter-in-law, Regine, peace should be upon her

**Committee for the publication of the writings of Jacob Jerusalemiski:**

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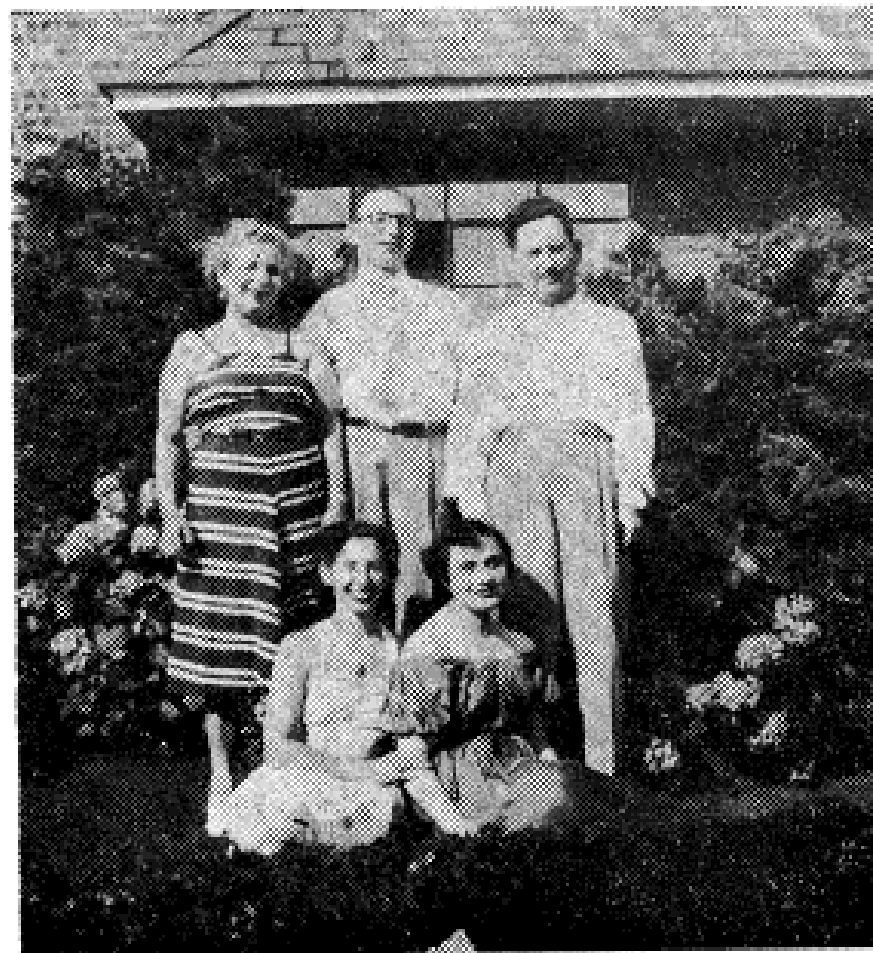
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דער מחבר אין עלטער פון 68 יאָר

The author at 68 years

(source: Page 6 of the original book)



דער מחבר מיט זיין פאמיליע

The author with his family

## Table of Contents

7	<b>Jacob Jerusalimski- a Biography of a Writer from Bialystok</b>
---	---

### First Part

11	<b>Bialystok- Sunny Pictures from my Youth, Bloody Pieces from my Heart</b>
18	<b>The New Modern "Talmetoyre", Named after Zeev Visotski</b>
28	<b>The Old Jewish Cemetery and the Neighboring Quarters of Poverty</b>
36	<b>The "Remeslenoye" [Artisans' School]: Combining Work with Education</b>
51	<b>A Walk through the Streets of Bialystok on Shabbat Afternoon</b>
57	<b>Romantic Evenings in the Bialystok City Park</b>
64	<b>Types of Bialystok's Crazies and Eccentrics</b>
86	<b>The Way to "Roskosh" [Rozkosz] Park</b>
91	<b>Tsertl's Forest</b>
97	<b>Roskosh [Rozkosz] Park</b>
105	<b>Neighbors of Gonyondzski's Yard [Translation until page 114]</b>
119	<b>The Death of a Bialystok Teacher</b>
125	<b>Bialystok in the First World War</b>

140	The Invasion of the Germans
149	The New German Order
153	The New Rich and the New Poor under German Occupation
159	Hunger and the Hunt for Work
165	Electricity, Love and Art in Supraśl
170	The Romantic Years in the First World War
177	My Brother Dovid Takes War Revenues
182	The Flourishing of Yiddish in Bialystok under the German Occupation
189	The Wonderful Help of "Lines-Khoylim" (Linias-Cholim) for the Bialystok Sick
191	What the Bialystok Youth Dreamed of
194	The First Symptoms of the German Revolution
198	The Collapse of German Militarism
205	Types of "Breml" Storekeepers
215	Literature, Art and Romanticism in Bialystok
219	"Lines-Khoylim" and "Lines-Hatsedek" - Medical Aid and Jewish Culture
225	Art and Romanticism

230	Jewish Theater
234	The Omens of the Approaching Storm
236	The Eulogy on Bialystok
240	„Veynen Vintn“ [The Winds are Crying] (poem)

### Second Part

241	The Spider
246	Diamond Cutter
249	The Will
254	A Cossack's Mercy
260	Grandmother's Joys
266	The Death of Leyzer Bal-Tshuve [the Penitent]
274	Three Anniversary Candles
281	The Bouquet of Jasmine and Roses
286	She Became a Social Activist
298	Late Again
310	The Error

318	Brush Strokes of the Bialystok Ball
322	Three Bialystok Girls
329	Past
331	On a Rainy Evening
333	The Eternal Struggle between Jewish Critics and Jewish Actors
335	The Former Theater and Press in Bialystok
337	Regarding the Discussion between Varshavski, Shefner, Reykh
339	November 11 in Paris
341	Beauties from France and from my Provincial Town

Page 7

### **Jacob Jerusalemiski- a Biography of a Writer from Bialystok**

Jacob Jerusalemiski is one of the branched Jerusalemiski family in Bialystok. (In the United States the name was changed to Jerusalem, and later, in Israel, to ירושלמי=Yerushalmi). [1]

He was born in Russian-ruled Bialystok in 1897 [2], and was the second of three sons of his parents, Teme and Gershon. However, he was their only son who remained. When he was thirteen years old, his father, who was a teacher and principal at a Jewish school in Bialystok, died. His father had a great influence on little Yankele and was his spiritual guide.

Yankele had a great thirst for knowledge and used to read with passion everything written in Yiddish or Russian. The tragic situation of



the Jewish population under the Tsarist regime and later, after Poland became independent and Bialystok came under Polish rule, weighed heavily on him. He felt a strong identification with his people and suffered together with them for the injustice done to them.

At the age of 17 he finished the Bialystok "Remeslenoye" (Artisans' School) as a specialist in textiles, which was one of the main branches of Bialystok industry. In 1919 he married Manja (Malka), one of 11 children in the distinguished family of Tsvi-Hirsh and Reyzl Kagan (née Levkovski). During the Polish-Russian War he lost all his fortune and tried his luck in the "shpagat" [cord] business.

In 1920 his son Gershon was born, and in 1921 his daughter Ida. Seeing no future for his family in Poland, he emigrated to Belgium in 1924. His wife and their two children joined him in 1925. The family settled in Antwerp, Belgium, where he (Jacob) learned the diamond trade. He

Page 8

thus led quite a comfortable life until 1931, when the world crisis greatly affected the diamond industry in Belgium.

To get through the hard times, his wife took various jobs as a seamstress until the two of them worked their way up to a corset salon, which proved quite satisfying. Jacob, who contributed his experience in the textile trade, established a "tsudatn" (accessories) business in the corset industry, which developed very favorably until the day of the Nazi invasion of Belgium, in 1940.

In Antwerp Jacob took an active part in Jewish life, especially in the Zionist movement. He was elected secretary of the "Poale-Zion" in Belgium, at the time when Leon Kubovitski [3] was president and Dr. Pruzhanski vice-president. At the same time he was also secretary of the Committee of Polish Jews. His abilities to observe events with a keen eye and to draw conclusions from them elevated him to the rank of journalist for the newspaper "The Belgian Day".

He additionally specialized in critiques of Jewish theater in Antwerp. Artists greatly respected his sharp reviews, for he was not ashamed to describe a play as he saw and felt it. His will to convey his impressions to others in words led him to become a belletrist; an author of short stories, sketches, and of episodes about Jewish life in Antwerp.

His works were well received by the Jewish press and were printed in various editions. With his keen eye and noticeable instinct for the future, he accurately analyzed the political situation in Europe when the Nazi regime began to show its true face.

In August 1939, a month before the Nazi invasion of Poland, he visited his hometown of Bialystok as a journalist. During this brief visit, he saw "the handwriting on the wall" and tried to warn his relatives of the impending disaster. Unfortunately, his warning was not taken seriously. It was dismissed as mere fantasy. On his way back to Belgium from Poland, he spent 24 hours in Berlin and saw that the Nazi machinery was in full swing

Page 9

and was preparing to storm. Upon his return to Belgium, he warned the Jewish population against the spread of Nazism throughout Europe. He became a member of the committee to boycott German goods. His foresight was unbelievable. He predicted the German invasion of Western Europe. He packed a suitcase with the most necessary things for each of his relatives in order to escape quickly. He also sent his son to the "Belgian Congo" (now Zaïre) in April 1940 on the last ship before the Nazi invasion of Belgium, and the son arrived in Léopoldville 5 days before the invasion (on May 10, 1940).

Jacob and his wife and daughter were temporarily housed in a place in "Marsey" [Marseilles (?)], where they obtained the American visa. (Preparations for obtaining an emigrant visa to the United States had already been made by Jacob in Antwerp before the outbreak of the war).

They departed via Spain and Portugal, arriving by ship in New York in September 1941. According to the suggestion of the American consulate in Marsey [Marseille?], they shortened their family name to Jerusalem; but in all his writings Jacob continued to use the name Jerusalimski.

In New York, Jacob returned to the diamond trade. At the same time, he was active in Jewish national organizations, but especially for Eretz Israel [Palestine]. He began writing short stories again and earned his first \$10 in America with the publication of his story "Three Yahrzeit Candles" in "The American". Encouraged by this beginning, more work followed. Shortly after the end of the war, he began to write a memoir about his former hometown of Bialystok, which he had printed in the "Bialystoker Stimme", the periodical of the Bialystoker "landslayt".

He began to publish his memoirs in 1949, which were delayed until 1969; the title was: "Bialystok - sunny pictures of my youth".

Together with his friends, Messrs. Ribalovski (the present secretary of "Bialystoker Heym" in New York), Kaganovski, Falan, Goldberg and others, whose names escape us at the moment, they founded the "Club of Bialystoker Friends" in New York.

Page 10

After his children emigrated to Los Angeles, he also moved there in 1962 to be closer to his family.

In early 1970, he began to suffer from health problems. It dragged on for longer years. He had some serious heart attacks and was close to death several times; the doctors managed to save him, but his health continued to deteriorate.

In April 1979, he got pneumonia and then additionally a heart attack. He left us forever on May 24, 1979 (27 Iyyar 5739). He found his final resting place at Mount Sinai Memorial Park in Forest-Lawn, California.

He is survived by his grieving wife, two children, daughter-in-law Regine and grandson Nemi-Roze. Honor his memory, which this book seeks to perpetuate.

**The family,**  
Los Angeles, 1981

[1] I also found the name written as Jeruslimsky.

[2] The date of birth is corrected here to "1897", but there is evidence in the book that the author was born in 1900: due to an oversight in the birth records, Jacob was incorrectly registered in 1897 instead of 1900.

[3] Arye Leon Kubovi(tski), see <http://www.blogglistene.no/blog/blogger-com/yleksikon/>



דער מחבר און די מיטגרינדערס פון קלוב פון ביאליסטאקער פריינד אין ניו-יארק

The author and the co-founders of the Club of "Bialystok Friends" in New York



The author's gravestone [Yakev, son of Gershon] in Los Angeles <https://gravez.me/en/deceased/DC1B7039-70F0-4AD6-9FD3-7413768C8EF4>  
The date of birth is antedated by three years, in accordance with the incorrect entry in the birth register.

**First Part**  
**Bialystok- Sunny Pictures from my Youth,**  
**Bloody Pieces from my Heart...**

Dear readers,

Please excuse my audacity to write autobiographical notes. My humble personality does not give me the right to do so, but I do it with one aim: to stand in the shadows and draw pictures in the background, snapshots, types and personalities related to the cultural and social life of that time of our f o r m e r much beloved Bialystok, the city of Bialystok.

This is my duty, my eulogy and my memorial to my murdered family members, friends, neighbors, schoolmates and society friends, as well as to the many female childhood friends who awakened the man in me, who penetrated deep into my heart and reigned there, who raised me like a prince and gave me my vision and my dreams day and night. They gave a sweet charm to the streets and alleys of our "svidanyes" [meetings], as there were:

The main street "Nikolayevske" [Mikołajewska] and the commercial "Gumyener" [Gumienna Street], the "Folksgas", the "Surazer" [Suraska Street] and the "Markgas" [Rynek Główny], the quarter Pyaskes [Piaski] and in the scattered expanse "Boyare" [Bojary] and "Hinter der Turme" ["Behind the Prison", also called "Wasilkowa Street"].

There were the centers of poverty, "Khanaykes" [Chanajki] with its "Shayes Gas"; in addition, the commercial street "Lipove" [Lipowa] and the place of dispersals and urban walks:

"Gorodskoy Sad" [City Garden], the place of "svidanyes" [meetings], "Zverinyets" [today Branicki Park], "Tsertls Forest", "Park Rosko" [Park Rozkosz] in the "Griner Alee" [Green Alley].

And there were those forest corners,  
where I, under the accompaniment of melancholic, night singing of folk songs -  
such as "Margaritkelekh", "Sheyn iz Reyzele dem Shoykhets", "Freytik oyf der Nakht", "A Brivele der Mamen" and "Dos Talit'l", mixed with the Russian heartfelt songs such as  
"Otshi Tshornya" [Black Eyes], "Yamshtshik nye gony loshadyey" [Coachman, Don't Rush The Horses!], "Akh zatshem eta notsh" [Oh Why This Night] -  
felt my first physical "tremors"

from the touches and kisses of young girls, from the warmth of bodies and feverish blood, from the innocent romance and the nightly sighing of the longing for our quiet, virtuous, sentimental Bialystok daughters, adorned with modesty, who asked for so little and could give so much happiness.

I dedicate my words to you, who came here or disappeared, and I bow to your souls floating above

Page 12

the dark sky of Bialystok. My words are a deep gratitude for the happy years I spent in your company; and my articles shall be a remembrance of your names and a silent, tear-stained Mitzvah, for your lives cut off early, torn up by the roots. Your lives that carried more spirit than generations of "German culture". And [so ] finally the life of a Bialystoker Jew was more valuable than the existence of the entire German people...

Woe to a world that is blind to the beauty of the Jewish spirit and its morality, to Jewish family life and to the millennial heritage of "לא תרצח" [Thou shalt not kill] and its virtuous "טהרת-המשפחה" [Purity of the Family], illuminated by Friday night candle flames of the eternal Jewish Shabbat, the Shabbat of "המבדיל בין קודש לחול" [Who makes distinction between Sacred and Ordinary], the eternal Shabbat and holiday that we Jews carry in our feelings and our hearts and which distinguishes us so much from the great, ordinary, weekday, materialistic Christian world....

A Russian song resounds in my ears:

Where are you, happy days?  
Forgotten, vanished, flown away.  
Only much sorrow and many pains  
have bent my body...

\*

Bialystok in 1907, in July. A sunny Tamuz day. My father kisses me warmly and congratulates me. I turned seven today.

"Yankele, I have a surprise for you today for your birthday! And he doesn't even ask me, but takes me by the hand and leads me from Shayes Gas [Shayes Street], where we lived, to the end of "Mirke's Gesl" where, across from "Leybl Rachel's Bes-Medresh" [Study-House] and "Vyetshorke's Factory," I catch sight of a two-story building, with a large sign with gold letters: "dvukla[n]soye narodnoye utshilishtshe"[1].

"Yankele, you will no longer go to the kheyder," my father says to me, "I want to lead you on the path of education and give you more opportunities...there is Fridman's school. He will test you now. So don't embarrass your father..."  
(When I received my student card from the Paris Polytechnic in 1925, I kissed it and cried, remembering my father's words).

So I find myself in a small room of Fridman's "utshilishtshe", which is decorated with two pictures of "Father Tsar", Nikolay

[1] Possibly it must be dvukhklasnyye Narodnyye uchilishcha [Two-grade public school] [see](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5_%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%89%D0%B0;)

[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5\\_%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%89%D0%B0;](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5_%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%89%D0%B0;)

Page 13

Aleksandrovitsh, looking sternly down at me, and "Her Majesty", Marya Fyodorovna, the "sentimental German", as she was called before the First World War.

Fridman, the school's manager, a short, fat man with a fleshy, contourless face and small eyes, short-shorn hair and a green uniform with golden buttons, looks at me and, laughing mockingly, says to my father, with whom he is on good terms as a colleague and member of the committee of the Teachers' Association:

"Gregory Zelmanovitsh! Who have you brought with you? We will still need a nanny for him..."  
My father smiles mysteriously, he does not answer, but straightens me up,  
"Jacob, natshinay [start]!"



My little young heart beats fast, the blood rushes to my young brain, my voice trembles, but for a moment I forget the sneering, round-faced Fridman and move over to the starry sky over Ukraine in Pushkin's "Ukrainian Nights" and my dreamy little voice recites:

"Silent are the Ukrainian nights. The stars twinkle, wide rivers chase each other between fields, forests and mountains on full moon nights. The slumbering waters glide through winding paths, kissing the banks and whispering mysteriously, spinning legends of water maidens who laugh seductively on full moon nights and lure couples in love to the depths of the gurgling, lulling to sleep river..."

I stop. I give myself a jolt and remember where I am. I meet the delighted gaze of the good-natured laughing Fridman, who pinches my cheek and says:

"-ti prinyat...utshoni mush...[you are accepted...learned man!]"

And strangely enough, near Fridman's school, I came across four symbols of eternal conflict that I was to encounter throughout my life, these were:

The little dear "Rachel's Bes-Medresh", a lost one at the corner of Merkes [Mirkes] Gesl, where in the evening hours of the dawning night in the almost dark windows small flames of light rippled on the Gemore [Talmud] stands of the Jews, together with their half melancholy languishing melody. Opposite Fridman's school, surrounded by a high wooden fence, the red glowing sun multiplied in the hundreds of windows

Page 14

of Vyetshorek's factory, which looked like a dark gigantic beast with hundreds of half-dead eyes. It devours the sleepy figures of the workers in the early morning and spits them out again into the dark blue sky of the evening.

The last image of the neighborhood of Fridman's school, however, is the red-haired "Khazernik" ["The Piggish", the Jew who does not eat kosher food], who every few days would slaughter pigs right next to the wall of Fridman's school in the yard of his fenced-in pigsty, and with a chopping stump would beat their heads with wild, unrestrained blows. And the pigs would scream in agony, drowning out the air with their dying rattle, filling our young hearts with something like an unconscious fear of the future...

Fridman's school, Vyetshorek's factory, Libe [Leibl?] Rachel's Bes-Medresh and, to change to the profane, the "Khazernik", pushed themselves into my eyes on my future path through life - as eternal symbols of the human, worldwide conflict: culture, work, religion and

murder....

Fridman's school was one street away from "Shayes Gesl" [Shaye's Alley], where we lived, and "Shayes Gesl" was in the heart of the famous "Khanaykes," the alley bordered on both sides by Christian cemeteries, as if they were fitted into a frame.

On one side stood the "Shvyenti Rokh" [Basilica of St. Roch] [1] on a hill that stretched on both sides of the Old and New Highway, and on the other side were the "mogilkes" [tombs] that rose from the "Kratshak's Gas" to the "Moyshe-Ruven [Moshe-Reuven] Gesl".

Khanaykes [2] was the heart of poverty. Carriers, carters, cobblers, tailors, organ grinders (in Italian style, with a little monkey or a parrot pulling out "the lucky notes"), comedians who spread out a flowered mat in the middle of the street and in short striped pants did somersaults, swallowed fire and swords, in addition to hammering on the cymbalom [dulcimer] and collecting donations. There, on Shayes Gesl, I saw my first marionette theater, with little puppets on the top of a rectangular covered wagon, singing and playing, confessing their love and slapping each other, to the great amusement of the poor children, who clapped their hands in delight at their first street theater performance for children.

Khanaykes has professional beggars who earn their living by going from house to house begging for an entire week. There is also a small "quiet" alley with streetwalkers, "khasanim" ["grooms"] and thieves... And on the corner of this street there is an inn where "Sorokovke shnaps" [3], hard-boiled eggs and pickles are sold.

And "Leyzer the Innkeeper", a pious Jew

[1] see <http://www.swroch.bialystok.opoka.org.pl/>

[2] "Chanajki was located on the west side from Bialystok center around the streets Młynowa and Sosnowa. The district included the pre-war, mostly short streets surrounding Sosnowa Street, including Kiewska, Minska, Odeskaa, Palestine, and Zion streets. Today's streets lying within the boundaries of the post-war residential area are Sosnowa Street from the intersection with Krakowska Street, Młynowa Street and Sienny Rynek. The center of former Chanajki is today huge complex of Bialystok Opera" (Quote of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski, Bialystok).

[3] Sorokovke shnaps: a vodka, mentioned in the famous poem by Juliusz

Słowacki "Bienowski" <http://wspolnotapolska.org.pl/kultura/literatura/slowacki/beniowski.pdf>, the word „sorokov“ actually means "magpie".



יענקעל דער קאטערינשטיק מיט זיין פאפונאי, וואס ציט ארויס  
א מול'דיגען צעטעלע.

Yankel, the organ-grinder, with his parrot drawing one of  
his lucky tickets.



א ביאליסטאקער יאטל פון כאנייקעס

A Bialystoker urchin from  
"Chanaykes."

Both photographs see <https://archive.org/details/nybc313696/page/76/mode/2up?q=%D7%B0%D7%A2%D7%92%D7%A2%D7%A0%D7%A2%D7%A8>

with a prayer cap, a pointed beard and forelocks, with a large "tales-kotn" [ritual bodice with tassels] that comes down to his knees and looks like a geographical map with its many grease stains, recites the first blessings before the prayer and walks around busily serving his upscale guests, the residents of the "Silent Alley"...

How did we come to the Shayes Gesl? My father was an idealistic teacher who liked the idea of "narodnitshestvo" (the "Go to the People" movement) and "mefitsey-haskole" [1], that is, spreading education among the Jews. My father, an educated and highly literate man, spoke four languages fluently: Russian, Hebrew, French and German.

(After his death I inherited a considerable library of French and Russian books, a source of famous works for me, which certainly influenced my sense of romance, aesthetics, morality and my thirst for beauty in all forms of life).

My father had chosen the poorest neighborhood, settled there and opened a school with the belief and hope of educating the poorest and most disadvantaged Jewish people.

The Shayes Gesl also had residents of high-class ancestry...

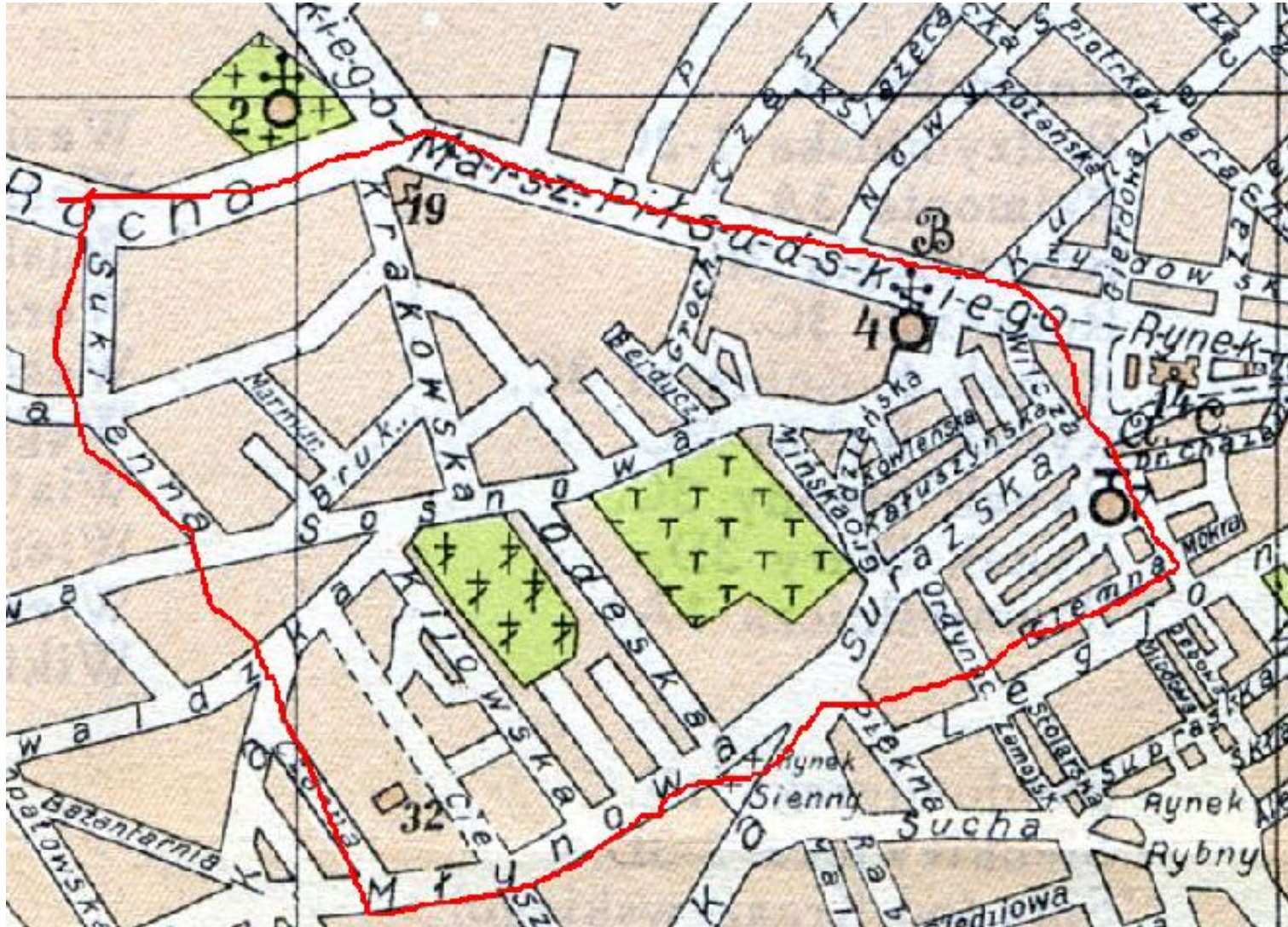
There were the two Kanel families, owners of a large textile factory and steam-powered looms, a weaving mill and a spinning mill. Four of their children were my comrades: Avigdor and Khayim (I think they are in Israel today), Ester and Glike. The first two were students at the Aleksandrov Gymnasium and the two girls, dressed in brown dresses with green belts stiffly embracing their young girl bodies, were students at the commerce school.

It was Ester who stood out. She was a strong, athletic and perky girl who was always with us, playing croquet and "plant" and even "tshort" [2], throwing the little pieces of wood into the mound no worse than we did; and even when a little piece of wood hit her in the foot, she gritted her teeth and jumped on one foot until she put an end to it with a skillful laugh...(One of the Kanels, Hershke, is now in New York).

The second of those of noble lineage was Shloymke the Feldsher (Shloymke Goldberg), whose occupation as a feldsher was not enough to support him, so he also ran a barber shop. He, a Jew with a goatee and a pince-nez, was always busy walking through the poor streets of Khanaykes with his little bag, often sneaking out of a poor patient's house and asking nothing for his rounds.

[1] מפ"צ"י השכלה = "Propagation of Enlightenment", name of a Jewish cultural society

[2] tshort: "Devil", name of a boys game with sticks which depended on speed and skill. In his book, "As It Happened Yesterday", Yosl Cohen describes on pages 197/198 this game in detail, see <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Krynki2/kry177.html#Page196>



Excerpt of a Białystoker map from 1935 (with Khanaykes/Chanaikes/Chanajki in its center), courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski [the Red line is made by the translator]



A street in the Chanajki district, 1932. [see](#) , source [NAC](#), [Domena publiczna](#)

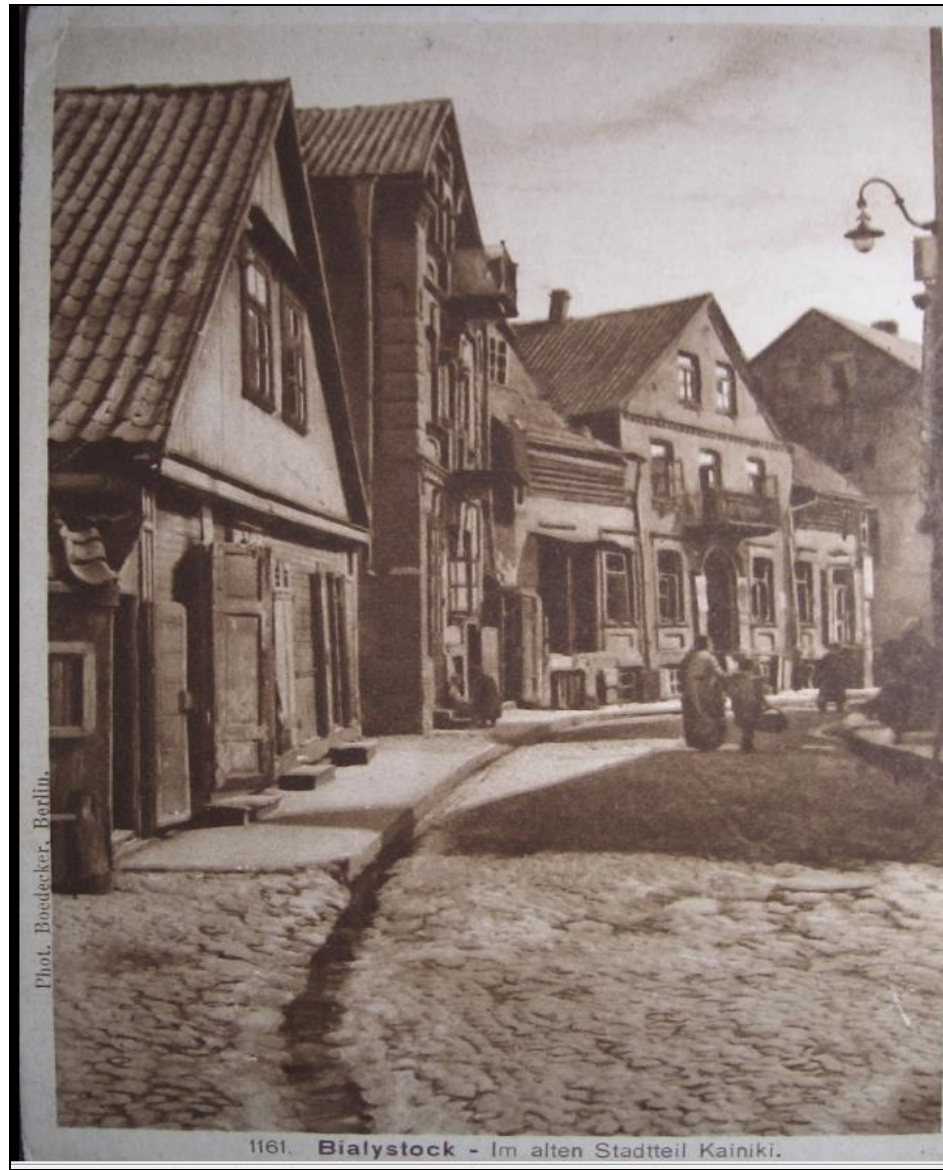


photo card courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski

Shloyme the Feldsher had a number of children, including my friends Rote and Dovtshik. Rote, the eldest girl, looked down on us as if we were young fools who had yet to show her any kind of "sex appeal". Dovtshik, a handsome boy with feminine features, was awkward, a bit jumpy, and could not join in our brawls with the louts of the Old Highway and the alleys that led around the tombs of the "Basilica of Saint Roch".

Other comrades of our "aristocratic group" of the Shayes Gesl were Pesach Farbshteyn, the son of Itshe Farbshteyn, a hot-tempered Jew who often spanked his children, but for that he was a devoted Jew who urged his children to Judaism and education.

Pesach, my friend, was a healthy, strong boy who talked fast and was always chewing. He had allowed us to climb the trees in his family's garden and pick the half-ripe apples; but his two sisters, Dabtshe and Shoshke, didn't think we were "chivalrous" enough to date. (They are all in New York).

Itshe Farbshteyn was the owner of houses and a grocery store. He had a small band of children, healthy, beautiful, strong, who were all busy in the store, selling Bialystok cakes, strudel, matzo with poppy seeds, a pound of "montshe" [granulated sugar], or tapping a bucket of water outside for a kopeck.

I must complete the line of the privileged from the Shayes Gesl with the children of Gusinski the Karetnik [the Coachman], Tsalke and Muntshik, who spoke Yiddish like the "goyim" with the Russian "r", a legacy of their mother, who, it was said, came from the distant Caucasus and had converted to Judaism.... (I heard that they are in Israel, and their sister, who married the Bialystok Jew, Mr. Kaplan, is in New York).

Khanaykes had another kind of "privileged ones": The "toyre-yakhsonim" ["Torah Nobility"], the group of craftsmen from the "Poalei Tsedek" ["Workers of Justice"], simple laborers who, after a hard day's work, would take a piece of brown bread with herring and "krupnik" (barley soup) with milk, to go to the "Khanaykever" Bes-Medresh. And there, in a corner of the "Bes-Sheyne" [1], they would become "lomdim" [scholars of Jewish science]. Under the supervision of their Rebbe, Rabbi Moyshe, a Jew with a broad "takak" beard and silent, sad eyes, they would study a sheet of gemore [Talmud]. And humming melodies carried through the Bes-Medresh, while the bearded artisans, chewing the tip of their beards, swayed to the beat of their dancing shadows on the walls, and a secret fear was felt, for it seemed, as if the souls

[1] obviously the nickname of this Bes-Medresh with an allusion to the "second temple"



of invisible angels were hovering in the corners around the Holy Ark, [accompanied by] cherubim with the 10 Commandments...

And in what part of the city did one feel the Shabbat more than in the poor Khanaykes, when on Friday evening the trembling flames of light shone from the wooden, whitewashed one-story cottages of Shloyme der Shtrikdreyer [the Knit Twister]. He was a Jew with a round, broad face framed by a broad, fan-shaped white beard, and he used to say the kiddush with a trembling, God-fearing nign [melody].  
Shabbat in Khanaykes!

Or, [remember] when Shmuel Ma'as the tailor was preparing to eat the first piece of bread after the blessing, and he nodded his head to his wife Dobe:

"Now, come on...

the sakin (the knife), and now the melakh (the salt) ..."

because Dobe, a small, shriveled Jewish woman, was a little deaf...

In the small room, hung with white lace curtains and strewn with bright, clean sawdust in honor of Shabbat, the planed wooden table with its starched tablecloth beckoned to the serving platter of stuffed fish, each piece with red carrot slices placed like dots in the center.

On a summer Friday evening, after supper, the girls with combed hair and red and white ribbons in their plaits, and the boys with polished shoes and with really clean handkerchiefs in their hands, used to walk across the Shayes Gesl, cracking fruit stones and chewing beans and peas, which could be bought at the "Bobitske" on Popovtshizne next to Kormon's houses, or next to Veler der Katsev [the Butcher].

And turning from Shayes Gesl onto the New Highway, paved on both sides, under the dark shadows of two rows of trees, under the beckoning flames of the electric street lamps, the grown-up lads, the "cavaliers", and the girls, the "barishnyes" [ladies], supposedly would meet quite by chance, joking and laughing with beating hearts, and enjoying in all their fullness the sweet minutes of pleasure of Shabbat rest, in Shabbat clothes and with a really full stomach, at least once a week...

Indeed, Khanaykes, you have had a bad reputation because of your poverty and bad, fallen Jews. But your craftsmen, your scholars, your tzadikim [righteous people], the cordial relation among neighbors, the rich imagination of the poor children, the hospitality and

generosity in the narrow apartments! Strangers did not see all this, but we who lived there saw it very well!

Later, when we already lived in Gumyener Gas [Ul. Gumienna], I was even more convinced of this attitude towards Khanaykes.

Translator's note : A nice film with pictures of the old Bialystok can be seen here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozEzOT2e6JE>

Page 18

### **The New Modern "Talmetoyre" [1], Named after Zeev Visotski [Wolf Wissotzky]**

The year 1905, when the modern "Talmetoyre" and "Remeslenoye" were built, was a year of great political, social and cultural achievements for Bialystok. In the same year, the Bialystok Girls' Commercial School was opened, as well as the Girls' Technical School in the yard of Yudl Kaletskin at Lipowa Street.

In the same year, the later famous Bialystok cultural society "Idishe Kunst" was founded, which in 1916, during the German occupation, was led by the editor of "Dos Naye Leben", Pesach Kaplan. He acted as the director of the literary and musical part with the cooperation of his son, Yosef Kaplan.

But in the same year, in July 1905, our Bialystok was also hit by the "Shabes-Nakhmu" pogrom [2], with its Russian military punitive expedition on Surazer Gas [Suraska Street] because of the Jewish revolutionary activity; more than thirty Bialystoker Jews were killed. The stormy winds of the revolutionary epoch in Russia created a turning point regarding the petty-bourgeois attitude of the Jews, and the slogan spread:

"Craft brings happiness and blessings"

As a result, in 1905, on the initiative of Yudl Kaletski, a rich merchant, social activist and owner of houses in Lipowa Street, the new modern „Talmetoyre“ and the "Remeslenoye" [Artisans' School) were opened in the name of Zeev Visotzki [Wolf Wissotzky] [3], who was the main patron and supporter of these two institutions. He appointed his own son, Samuil Yulyanovitsh Kaletski, as the director of the

Remeslenoye.

Zeev Visotski is known all over Russia as the King of Tea, and even in the remotest corners of the gigantic Russia, from the warm Caucasus to the cold Siberia, from the richest halls of the Russian aristocracy to the straw huts of the lonely villages, people know the tea package made of silver paper with a golden inscription: "Shtai [Tea] V. Visotski".

And Bialystok enjoys the favor of this tea magnate, because this Visotski is the close relative [4] of Bialystok's respected social activist Khayim Ber Zakheym.

Years later, after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, a joke was circulated throughout Russia to illustrate the power of the Jews. According to this joke, there were three most important things in Russia

[1] Talmud Torah School, traditional free school for poor children

[2] Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat after the Ninth of Av

[3] find more here [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky\\_Tea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky_Tea)

[4] original: "mekhutn", the father of the son-or daughter-in-law



Kalonimus Wolf Wissotzky, Unknown photographer - [www.jewage.org](http://www.jewage.org)  
[Public Domain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky_Tea#/media/File:Wissotzky_Tea_Moscow.jpg)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky\\_Tea#/media/File:Wissotzky\\_Tea\\_Moscow.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky_Tea#/media/File:Wissotzky_Tea_Moscow.jpg)



Wissotzky Tea logo, Russian Empire, Wissotzky Tea Company, Russian Empire - [http://www.tea-terra.ru/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013\\_07\\_24\\_01\\_005.jpg](http://www.tea-terra.ru/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013_07_24_01_005.jpg)  
[Public Domain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky_Tea#/media/File:Kalonimus_Wolf_Wissotzky.jpg)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky\\_Tea#/media/File:Kalonimus\\_Wolf\\_Wissotzky.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wissotzky_Tea#/media/File:Kalonimus_Wolf_Wissotzky.jpg)

that were in powerful Jewish hands: Visotsky's tea, Brodsky's sugar, and Trotzky's work.

\*

The buildings of the modern "Talmetoyre" and the "Remeslenoye" were located in the large round square, which extended from the Khanaykes in the background and in the front to Lipowa Street, framed on the right by the Christian Hospital and on the left by Bats'er's Yard.

The "Talmetoyre" was called "modern" because in Bialystok there was also an old "Talmetoyre" in an old-fashioned building, where the boys received an orthodox, conservative, religious education without secular education. The newly created "Zeev Visotski" Talmetoyre was the exact opposite: it was a large, new building with wide windows, full of light and air, and with a large yard where one could play.

One learned "Khumesh" [Pentateuch] and "Rashi" [the commentaries of] Rabbi Shloyme Yitskhok, "Tanakh", [toyre-neviim-ksuvim, the Bible], "Shulkh'n-orekh" [collection of halakhic rules], grammar and texts in Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish literature and history ("גרעס"). In addition, geography and mathematics, singing (with the famous conductor of the Bialystok "Choir School", Berman) and even physical exercises (gymnastics), which was the height of modernity at that time.

The new "Talmetoyre" already had such modern teachers of Hebrew, "Khumesh" and "Tanakh" as the later famous writer and editor, cultural activist and musician, Pesach Kaplan. I was fortunate to have him as my first Hebrew teacher and editor. There was a strange contrast between his outward appearance and his inner intellect.

Nature had disadvantaged him physically, but rewarded him richly spiritually, which is a common occurrence and has a philosophical justification. He was short and out of proportion, with short legs and an overlong upper body that swayed when he walked. But his head, with its energetic appearance, with its somewhat sunken cheeks and chin full of determination, with its deep, wise, piercing eyes, penetrated his interlocutor and subjected him to the effect of his deep, wise, analytical thinking.

He was frequently despotic, as is often the case with talented autodidacts and "self-made men" who work their way up to extraordinary abilities through their own energy.

His comments on the "Tanakh", with his somewhat hoarse but clear articulation and the richness of his language, were so biblically and

and engaging that he kept the whole class in suspense. Later, when I read his book "Biblishe Gezangen" [1] on the occasion of my visit to Bialystok in July 1939, those unforgettable hours of his Tanakh lessons, which I experienced in my childhood years in the "Talmetoyre", flashed before my eyes again.

By the way, Pesach Kaplan's [Bialystok newspaper] "Unzer Leben" published my last story on European soil. It was the story "Diamond Cutter", about the life of Belgian diamond workers.

I can still see the figure of the director of the new "Talmetoyre," where I was a student for two years. Samson Yakovlevitsh Grosman was tall and powerfully built, with a clean-shaven, "goyish" face and black, thick, frizzy hair that fell in poetic curls over his ears, for he always walked without a hat.

With his splendid, accented, precise Russian, this proud, national and Russianized Jew, with his non-Jewish face and his good Jewish heart, fought with all his strength to educate the Jewish children (in this "modern Talmud" whose name did not quite fit) to become beautiful, pure, nationally conscious Jews with self-respect and respect for one another.

And undoubtedly such famous educators as editor Kaplan and conductor Berman were very supportive of [director] Grosman.

Such a great figure as Pesach Kaplan still needs a biographer; and I must express my great appreciation to our editor David Sohn, the talented writer. He has the warm soul of a cultural activist and is a connoisseur and lover of Jewish literature. In his possession is a rich archive of correspondence of famous people, including many letters of Pesach Kaplan, which are very valuable material for the future biographer of Pesach Kaplan.

Conductor Berman was also popular and beloved among us. Knowing that he was our teacher, we took special pride and pleasure in looking at Berman: his proud, upright figure with his noble, white face, his wise eyes and his wonderfully beautiful, carved features, his silver hair and his pointed, finely trimmed little beard.

He always wore his double blue pelerine over his shoulders, which made him look like a professor at a music conservatory.

And I still see before me the figure of the teacher Druskin,

[1] "Biblishe Gezangen" ["Biblical Songs"], see <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yiddish-books/spb-nybc212548/kaplan-pesach-biblishe-gezangen-vol-2>



**PESACH KAPLAN**



**JAKOW BERMAN**

source: <http://wirtualnie.lomza.pl/wirtualnie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ksi%20ga-album-pami%20ci-gminy-%20Cydowskiej-w-Bia%20ymstoku-cz%2099%209B%2087-1.pdf>

a highly educated person, who later himself opened a high school in Bialystok. Teacher Druskin also belonged to the "Russianized" intelligentsia, with his aristocratic appearance and beard, like that of a Montparnasse painter, and with his correct attitude he forced even the boys of Khanaykes, of "Mirkes Gesl" and "Koratshakes", to respect him.

There were two teachers, however, who had no luck with us and whose lives we made miserable.

One of them was the Hebrew teacher Rakovski, a man of medium height, red-haired, with a dry, cold face and evil eyes. We never saw a smile on his face, and he was a person of strict discipline. If a student was late and opened the door of the classroom where Rakovski was teaching, the whole class would hold its breath in anticipation of what would happen.

Rakovski approached the victim with slow steps, his face covered with yellow freckles that turned red like his hair. Without saying a word, he grabbed the student's satchel filled with books and threw it into a corner of the classroom, then began to shake the boy several times like a "lulev" [palm branch].

If the student did not comply and dared to protest, he even slapped him.

The second teacher, actually a very quiet one, but not popular with the students, was called Lusternik. He taught Russian history and geography and was known in Bialystok as a good pedagogue, who [also] taught in Yafe's school.

Lusternik, a small man with a pink, chubby face, always thought he was big and important. He wore a green uniform with gold buttons, and his face was full of smug haughtiness.

It happened more than once that while teacher Lusternik was pointing to the geographical map where the archipelagos, the Arctic countries of the North Pole, Siberia or Alaska were located, a student sneaked up and smeared his golden buttons with ink. And since he had the habit of holding his hands backwards, he would smear ink on his fingers next to the backmost buttons. Then, when he wiped the sweat from his fat face, he covered it with ink, even his nose.

As soon as he turned his face to the class and the students saw his face covered with ink,

making him look like a tattooed Indian. The whole class burst out laughing. And the longer the students looked at the teacher's face, the more they laughed hysterically. Lusternik's face became red with rage, and he ran out of class, only to return ten minutes later, washed clean and accompanied by the director, Samson Yakovlevitsh Grosman.

Seeing the director, the children suddenly fell silent. In those days, Grosman, who made every word count with his splendid Russian, used to give a bitter lesson about education and good manners. He would end his harsh sermon with bitterness and the exclamation: "nie zabivaytye, tut nie talmud-tora!" (Remember, this is not a "Talmetoyre"!)..

Every early morning, Director Grosman used to inspect the classes. As soon as he came in, all the students stood up and then sat down again, and there was silence in the classroom. He looked at each student to see if they had been washed, looked at their necks and in their ears to make sure they weren't dirty either. He looked at the clothes to see if they were clean and if the buttons were sewn on.

And woe betide if a boy showed up with a dirty neck or dirty ears, or if his clothes were torn after a fight with someone during "peremene" (recess). Grosman would then purse his lips, roll his eyes upward, and, while the class remained silent, lead the student to the center of the classroom. Accentuating every word of his first-rate literary Russian, he would end the matter with his recurring speech, tinged with mockery and irony: "nie zabivaytye, tut nie talmud-tora!"

I always felt that the proud, educated, Russianized Samson Yakovlevitsh Grosman suffered greatly from the fact that he was a teacher and director of an educational institution called "Talmetoyre". The reason was that the name of the old "Talmetoyre" was synonymous with old-fashionedness and conservative piety. Moreover, it was in the hands of educators who were far from secular education.

As in the old "Talmetoyre", it was mostly children of craftsmen and the poor middle class who studied, and you could tell by their clothes and the food parcels in their satchels, by their elaborately patched trousers and their darned stockings with elaborately sewn



patches "in the right place" and above the knees, by their father's sewn-on fur capes and overcoats, or their older brother's outgrown and worn-out [clothes].

But poverty was also evident in the food packages that the dear, faithful mothers of Bialystok gave their children to take to school to soothe their stomachs during the school break.

The brown paper bags (usually used to cover the lid of the Shabbat cholent, which was covered with potato peels) contained a piece of brown bread with a piece of smoked herring.

For the somewhat richer there was a piece of soft bread with homemade "klops" [Jewish meatballs] with garlic in the package, and for the even richer there was a black piece of peasant bread with "darer kishke" [1] or a Bialystoker pastry with a piece of halvah. This was considered a luxury, and the comrades begged to be allowed to taste a little bit.

On top of that, the richer ones usually got a few kopeks in addition, which they had already spent at the "vaybele" [little woman], that is, the Jewish woman with her buffet, which consisted of a simple wooden table set up in the schoolyard in the summer and in the hallway of the school in the winter, with good things on display for the little customers.

The "vaybele", which is besieged by flies during the school holidays, usually offers the following "delicacies":

Brown, shiny bagels from "Tanchum the Baker", buckwheat potato pancakes, "kitshmitsh and novent" (candies sprinkled with rice or poppy seeds), "fleyshelekh" (round, soft, colored jams), famous Ladrynka candies.

It is still a mystery to me how the "vaybele" managed to serve dozens of customers, because the school break lasted only ten minutes. And even then, there were those "Marxists" among the poor students who looked at "private property" with contempt and considered it a "mitsve" [2] to secretly steal an "irisl" [caramel] or a "kugel" from the "vaybele's" buffet.

Between the two large buildings of the "Talmetoyre" and the "Remeslenoye", connected by a large courtyard, the garden of the gentile hospital occupied a space. It was surrounded by a low fence.

So it happened that the schoolboys crawled on the fence and silently watched what was going on in the gentile hospital. And I will never forget how, in the garden, among the patients of the hospital, who were walking around in gray linen dresses and slippers, there was a

beautiful young Christian girl. She had long, blond, loose hair and a bare chest (she was probably

[1] dare or grobe kishke= colon, a type of sausage, see [Kishka \(food\) - Wikipedia](#)

[2] mitsve, mitzvah, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitzvah>

Page 24

mentally abnormal). And a few days later, I shuddered.

In the garden, this time empty of other patients, I saw the beautiful blonde Christian girl lying with her hair down on a simple wooden table used for dissecting corpses. She was dead, and a doctor was opening the skin of her brain with a sharp dissecting knife to examine it.

It was a summer day, and masses of flies were buzzing around the dead body. A gentile hospital employee, lazily trying to do at least a little of his duty, fanned a green twig over the corpse, but the flies quietly settled on the parts of the dead body where they found it comfortable.

The scene startled me for two reasons:

How could a city goy hospital allow itself to dissect a corpse in public, in the middle of the garden and with many small children sitting on the fence, and what a tremendous hygienic crime it was to dissect a corpse that flies could calmly bite and later spread epidemic diseases among the inhabitants.

I remembered this scene in connection with the fact that in Bialystok, on Aleksandrovske [Aleksandrowska/ Warszawska Street] there was a Jewish hospital, which was exemplary for its medical equipment, treatment and sanitary cleanliness, and yet some Polish gentile city fathers published a "Pinkas Bialystok" (I think in 1932), in which, in their Polish-Christian way, they praised to the skies the merits of the Polish-Christian cultural and community activists, but at the same time minimized the great cultural, social and industrial merits of the Jewish social activists of Bialystok.

I remember my visit to Bialystok, in July 1939. During a personal conversation with the [later] deceased great scholar and historian, Sh. Herschberg, z"l, whom I met in the dacha in "Tsertl's Forest" with my father-in-law, Tsvi Hersh Cohen, may he rest in peace, Sh.

Hershberg really motivated me with his writing of the "Pinkas Bialystok": a rehabilitation and historical truth of the great merits of the Jewish population of Bialystok.

He reminded me of a "Kanapinski" or "Kvapinski", head of the Bialystok City Council, who was the initiator of the shameful "Pinkas Bialystok", which had moved him, Sh. Hershberg, to create the true, historically correct "Pinkas Bialystok".



#### PIEŁĘGNIARKI I LEKARZE SZPITALA

Szpital żydowski w Białymstoku miał ponad sto lat. Został założony przez Sendera Błocha w roku 1840, na podwórku synagogi. Później bogacz Icchak Zabłudowski (teść Błocha) podarował sporą działkę na Nowym Mieście (ul. Aleksandrowska-Warszawska), gdzie zbudowano duży, nowoczesny szpital, który służył ludności żydowskiej z Białegostoku i okolicznych miasteczek przez całe sto lat.

*The Nurses and Doctors of the Hospital. The Jewish Hospital in Bialystok, founded by Sender Bloch in 1840, was more than 100 years old.*

It was intended to show the huge contribution of Bialystok Jews to the construction of the city as a whole.

\*

"Where do you get a horse and cart,  
to hunt for the child years..."

In 1909:

I was nine years old when I entered the third grade of the new "Talmetoire" and spent two sweet, light-filled years there, learning the beauty and historical greatness of our Jewish people and experiencing through the "Khumesh" and "Tanakh" our rich, proud past. There I absorbed the beauty of the works of the first rising stars of Hebrew literature and poetry, and formed the aesthetic pride of a Jew with national consciousness.

The proud words of the Hanukkah song used to ring in my ears:

"Once you were a people,  
once you had a land..." [1]

I used to exchange books every Friday in the library of the "Talmetoire" and later, when I had already exhausted its stock, I had the privilege of receiving books from the personal library of our director Grosman.

On wintry Friday evenings after dinner, when it was warm in the living room from the heated tile stove and the copper kettles in the top tube of the oven sang, boiled and bubbled, my mother used to serve me nourishing tea with lemon, accompanied by mother's preserved raspberries as a snack, with the words, "May God grant you don't need them," for occasionally the raspberry juice was used to promote perspiration when someone was ill.

The flames of Friday night's candles are already yielding, but they are still struggling, not wanting to be extinguished. As if there were living souls in them, they filled the room with a sweet smoke of tallow candles, which to this day brings back memories of Friday nights, and sweet, sad feelings of lost childhood years in mother's house.

Father would go off to learn a Talmud lesson with the craftsmen in the "Poalei-Tsedek" [Workers of Justice] of the Khanaykevker Bes-Medresh, and mother, still in her clothes, would fall dead tired on the black, shiny, worn couch. I sat down

[1] see <https://www.jewishaustralia.com/yiddishchanukahpoem.htm>

Page 26

with my Hebrew books, supported my cheeks with both hands, and with the power of the imagination of the authors of the books merging with my own imagination, I rose to the ceiling of the room, opened the roof, and flew out into the high, wide, starry sky. I walked in the air to faraway lands, to the caliphs of Persia and the sheiks of Baghdad, to the princess Scheherazade from "One Thousand and One Nights," flew on the legendary air carpet, and admired the magical wonders after wiping my hand over Aladdin's magic lamp.

There I am among the childish heroes of Andersen's and Brothers Grimm's stories, there I am chasing through the big world in the perpetual night, together with a finger-sized boy who can hide in a matchbox. Or I stand next to the snow-white beauty "Snegurochka", whom the evil families and the envious, wicked princesses tried to kill with a poisoned apple. But during the funeral procession [the coffin] bumps into a tree, the poisoned apple falls out, fortunately for me, and "Snegurochka" is alive. ....

I would fall asleep now and then, lay my small, young, blond head on a book, and in my sweet, childlike, innocent sleep I would end my travels through the forests and seas in the [Jewish Temple], the Bes- Hamikdash, in Jerusalem, then by the heroes of Bar Kokhba [2], and sing in my dream Goldfaden's "In Bes-Hamikdash in a vinkl kheyder zitst di almone Bas-Zion aleyn" [3].

The song I heard so often from my worried, complaining mother when she was panting with worry, or on Shabbat after supper when she held her hands behind her back against the tiled stove. The warm little room would be filled with the smell of brown potato skins and sauerkraut in the pot that stood in a corner, covered by a pasta board with a stone on top. Mama would take my head in her lap, nestle it against her chest, and sing those Zion songs.

And I, with my eyes half-closed like a cat in the sun, listened to the light-filled, sweet-dreaming, fantasy-awakening national songs of Goldfaden, Elyakum Zunser, Ch.N. Bialik, Sh. Frug and other great [poets] and singers, lamenting and weeping over Jewish suffering and pain.

When I was eleven years old, I finished the "Talmetoire" and began to study Russian literature in Fridman's school, while in the "Talmetoire" I had studied Hebrew literature. My father, my mother

[1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snegurochka>

[2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon\\_bar\\_Kokhba#See\\_also](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_bar_Kokhba#See_also)

[3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raisins\\_and\\_Almonds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raisins_and_Almonds)

Page 27

and brother David had come together to discuss how I should continue my studies.

My brother David was four years older than me and a student of the "Remeslenoye" [Artisans' School]. I, on the other hand, dreamed of the elegant uniforms of the Real School, the Commercial School or the "Aleksandov's" Gymnasium. My brother argued that I was not more noble than him and therefore I should go to the "Remeslenoye". My father was sadly silent, because he loved me very much and considered my abilities very high. However, he was aware of our sad financial situation.

My mother quietly wiped a tear from her beautiful round face with her apron. It was full of life and laughter, but also full of sadness and tears, which so often alternated on her face. Her brown, warm, motherly eyes looked at me, and in her imagination she probably saw her Yankele already walking in a beautifully fitting high school uniform, with the shiny gold buttons, the high school student hat with the Royal Eagle emblem.

But the sad reality prevailed. My parents hung their heads, and my brother raised his head in victory, but then a glimmer of hope appeared in my mother, and she said:

"But Gershon, you forgot that in Remeslenoye they don't accept boys younger than thirteen, and our Yankele is only eleven!"

Father thought for a while, understanding my mother's last plea to save my high school uniform, but then he replied:

"Teme, you forget that Yankele was registered three years older due to an error in our late Shloymkele's birth certificate. On his birth certificate he is already fourteen years old".

My mother took me in her arms, leaned my head against her, and wet, motherly tears moistened my face. ....

She sighed softly, as if it were her fault that her child could not be led along the broad main road of "worldly education" with "distinguished children".

My next "alma mater" was the "Remeslenoye Utshilishtshe", or known by the short name "Remeslenoye" (Artisans' School).

I, an eleven year old boy, was stretched into a year of work and education, and my further way to wide endeavors, goals, and horizons of that cruel something called "life" was left to my own hands....



Budynek Szkoły Rzemieśniczej przy ul. Lipowej 39  
*The Building of the Artisans' School.*

source: <http://wirtualnie.lomza.pl/wirtualnie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ksi%20ga-album-pami%20ci-gminy-%20Cydowskiej-w-Bia%20ymstoku-cz%209B%2087-1.pdf>

## The Old Jewish Cemetery and the Neighboring Quarters of Poverty

The old Jewish cemetery in Bialystok spread out in the middle of the poverty-stricken neighborhoods, admonishing its inhabitants with cold, silent certainty: Sooner or later you too will come to me...

At the back of the cemetery the front lanes of Khanaykes were crowded, on the left - the "Popovshtshizne" [1], popularly called "Po Vitshizne". Probably the lane was so named because of the high, proud, half-domed Russian Orthodox church in Byzantine style.

It was surrounded by small whitewashed houses where the rich families of [Russian Orthodox] priests lived, and it occupied the whole corner formed by the commercial Lipova Street and the beginning of Popovshtshizne.

Across the street was the well-known "cheap kitchen" ("dyeshovaya stolovanya"), where some charitable ladies from Bialystok served cheap lunches to poor Jews for two kopeks. They consisted of a thin slice of meat that looked like the sole of a shoe. It was accompanied by barley porridge with beans or lentils and black bread, the smell of which wafted through the whole street.

In the same neighborhood lived my friend Kurlandski, a handsome, blond, romantically transfigured young man. He was an art painter and exhibited his work in Belgium in the 1930s, but he earned his living with "gems," that is, as a diamond cutter, like me. I wrote [on the side] and he painted. So we both had artistic ambitions and sighed with the prosaic world that did not appreciate our talents.

In the same area was the bookstore of Lipshits, whom I envied greatly, for was it a trifle that a Jew had such a treasure of books at his disposal?!

I devoured books with my eyes, looking at the spines, reading the interesting, fascinating names of the works and Russian authors. I also devoured them with my eyes at night, lying on my bed until two o'clock in the morning by the glow of a red-extinguishing kerosene lamp, which, unfortunately, struggled with the last drops of kerosene to keep the red-hot wick burning.

[1] Popowsczyzna, derived from the meaning of land belonging to a pop, that is, an Russian orthodox priest



My mother used to admonish me sleepily from the next room, "Yankele, haven't you blinded your eyes enough? You won't be able to straighten your head tomorrow!"

But I would relentlessly twist the head of the wick one more time to rekindle the dying flame and answer:

"Right now, Mom, I'm about to quit!"

But I thought to myself, "Well, go on, be a capable person, and don't give up until you've actually reached the end of L.F. Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" or Maxim Gorky's "Oyfn Opgrunt".

Opposite the round, majestic church, next to Veler the Katsev [the Butcher], lived Doctor Fin, a short, fat man with a big, round head and thinning hair. He was our family doctor, but he was only called in at the last minute, when, God forbid, you were already dying... It was such a Bialystok custom.

There was also a large courtyard with an inn where the small-town carters drove up in their "drongove" [1] wagons, with passengers divided into two categories:

Either legs up or legs down. If you had your feet down, that was the poor class, because you had to let your legs hang over the top of the wagon. And if you traveled from Zabłudów or Choroszcz for about two hours, you arrived with numb, asleep legs and stitches in your sides, so that when you got off the wagon you had to dance around for half an hour to feel your legs again.

In this yard with the inn there was also an egg store, which belonged to a Jew named "Barakin".

His son, a Belgian doctor of medicine, used to visit me in Belgium, and I admired the contrast between his father, a simple Jew, and his son, a doctor, and I was proud of Bialystok that from such simple, uneducated parents could come such recognized doctors.

To the right of the cemetery spread the Pyaskov [Piaski] district with its Pyaskov market, where there were many fairs and small, dark and poor shops with their doors always open.

Herring was sold here, as well as kerosene, wagon grease, cheese lime [casein], whip sticks, bran, chopped straw, sour milk, "svorekhts" [2] [cottage cheese], black cumin bread, rye and mixed bread, Bialystok pastries with onions and poppy seeds, and round "striezel" pastries sprinkled with granulated sugar. There were also shops with clay pots and copper jugs, wooden rolling pins and tin graters. In addition, wooden spoons,

[1] Broad, flat, horse-drawn wagons that carried loads and people.

[2] probably "tvorekhts" is meant, cottage cheese

Page 30

for burning the "khomets" [sourdough] and brown varnished "soldier's spoons", which the Russian soldier, the "fonye zemlyak", carried around during the day and night, slipped under the shaft of his boots which were rubbed with wagon grease.

And around all these shops on Pyaskes [Piaski] there was a swarming and bustle of small, pot-bellied Jewish women with headscarves, walking barefoot, flaxen-haired peasant boys with haughty noses, female gentiles who had marched barefoot from the villages, with their shoes thrown over their shoulders, hardly daring to put them on, at least in the city.

To the left of the old Jewish cemetery ("kladbishchanskaya") [1] stretched a series of narrow streets with small, low, sunken houses. Often a pane of paper was stuck in one of the windows, giving the impression of a beggar blind in one eye. These small, dirty streets, crossed by a gutter in the middle, had beautiful names that sounded holy to Jews:

Yerusalimske [Jerusalem] Street, Palestina Street, Zion Street....

Thus, as if to mock the Jews and their national dreams, the tsarist regime made a bitter joke by changing the names of these narrow, poor side streets to Yerushalimskaya, Palenstinskaya, and Syonskaya.

Crossing the winding, dark, narrow Yerusalimske Street and arriving at the wide corner of several alleys, the two-story wooden building of the famous Khanaykever Bes-Medresh suddenly rose from the ground, dark brown in color, with wide windows. It radiated Jewishness, religious devotion, and an appreciation of the proud history of the Jewish past. It bore witness to the study of "Khumesch and Tanakh" [2], morality and the laws of justice and family life contained in the ancient folios of the Gemore [3] and the Shulkhn-Orekh [4].

Like a source of light, like a brightly shining lighthouse in the sea of darkness, there stood the wooden carrier of Judaism, the Khaynayker Bes-Medresh, unwilling to yield even under severe financial conditions. It was located in the center of poverty, moral decay, slipping into the abyss of crime, theft and fornication, which was the consequence of economic hardship, desperate misery, an upbringing on the street and no education.

An atmosphere of underworld types with their overbearing sneers of foppish glory.

This was the revenge of poverty against satiation, of decay against arrogance.

[1] Kladbischanskaja= Cemetery Street

[2] Pentateuch and Hebrew Bible, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chumash\\_\(Judaism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chumash_(Judaism)) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible)

[3] Gemara, part of the Talmud, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemara>

[4] Shulchan Aruch, compilation of the most important halakhic laws, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shulchan\\_Aruch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shulchan_Aruch)

Page 31

The great merit of securing the existence of this Khanaykever Bes-Medresh in perpetuity, given the meager income of the synagogue's worshippers, must be attributed to some Jewish wealthy gentlemen ["balebatim"]. Among them was Reb Yakev Valye, the "Scribe of the Benkl" [1], a busy, lively Jew, the owner of a grocery store in Khanaykes. One of his children could always be seen sitting in the store doing his homework, engrossed in his tasks, his tongue twisting and sticking out.

However, the main role in supporting the Khanaykever Bes-Medresh was played by Ayzik the Shames [the synagogue caretaker], a stiff, serious Jew with bright, energetic eyes. Ayzik the Shames was a legendary figure of the Khanaykever Bes-Medresh.

Such a milieu, in which there were porters and carters, very often pious and honest but bitter and bitterly poor people, as well as fences, Jews with half-secret incomes, and common thieves of the lower class (of the type described by "Urke Nachalnik") [2], could [only] be kept in check by such a Jew as Ayzik the Shames.

All he had to do was stop abruptly during the Torah reading and raise his eye or move his mighty eyebrow over his sharp, penetrating gaze, and he would instantly stop a major argument in the "polish" [ante-chamber of the study house] or end a brawl in the back of the tiled stove. His slow but powerful blow over the lectern in the midst of the reading of the Purim Megillah could stop the wild din of the rattles and ratchets of the uncontrolled, loudly shouting "voyle yungen" [3], who were not so much concerned with the "terrible Haman" but were happy to make noise and riot, panting and whistling in a "legal way", so that the Bes-Medresh actually trembled. But the number of Jews whom the Khanaykever Jews were ashamed of was not large. They were relegated to a corner of the Bes-Medresh,

because the front part was occupied by the Jewish artisans and shopkeepers, the Jewish scholars and pious people, who made sure that the "unclean" did not "raise their heads" in "their" Khanaykes, but remained segregated in the dark holes of Khanaykes.

We lived in the same house as Ayzik the Shames and were neighbors. I was very attracted to his family. Ayzik the Shames had two children: a daughter, Esterke, a girl of 14-15, two years older than me. I dreamed of her round, full face, her fiery eyes, her hearty laugh full of life,

[1] „benkl“= The word can mean chair or small bank, but sometimes the bank house was also affectionately called so

[2] Urke Nachalnik: The literary name of a Yeshiva boy who came from a wealthy Jewish family, became a prominent gangster, then an author, and later the founder of a small underground group that saved Torah scrolls from destruction. He was murdered on November 11, 1939

[3] „voyler yung“= a term whose meaning changed over time from "good, well-behaved boy" to "good-for-nothing, naughty boy or playboy"

Page 32

that teased me. She had full, passionate lips, a healthy, rosy village face with red cheeks as if they had just been patted.

In a small garden with countless green trees and tall grass, we met by chance and together we picked white-blue, innocent bird's milk twigs.

And when, by chance we both reached for the same branch and our hands touched like a warm blow, we laughed loudly, but our laughter sounded artificial, because the touch of her hand aroused in me a vague, sweet pleasure that seized my whole body, as if I had to cry and laugh at the same time at something that had awakened in my young body. This something - it has been known for ages and will be the eternal theme of novels, theater, art and life.

Her brother, Ben-Zionke, was the complete opposite of her. A slim, slender boy, with a milky, fanatically religious face, with looping temple curls, a thoughtful one, who reminded me of the sadly dreaming Bes-Medresh student from [Chaim Nachman] Bialik's "The Masmid" [1].

The old cemetery was surrounded on all four sides by a low, wide stone wall that reached up to the windows of some houses that leaned

close to the cemetery.

The children used to walk along the wide stone wall of the cemetery to the cheder. In the summer they walked there, too, but in the winter, on cold nights with a full moon and blue stars, they walked back along the cemetery wall, on the stiff frozen snow that crunched in the hard frost and even pulled at their ears under their earmuffs.

And with tied lanterns made of tin or paper, they took their revenge on the "Rebbe with the whip" by singing:

"The Rebbe went to Berlin,  
There he bought a scratching machine,  
atsma, atsmalya!"...

In the summer I was a frequent visitor to the cemetery. I would wander among the graves, reading the inscriptions and stopping with special respect at the ohels [Jewish monumental tombs] of the Rabbis and Sages. In my childhood imagination, they always reminded me of our ancestors in the land of Israel in the biblical cave near Hebron, and I used to put my ear to the wall [of the ohel] with palpitations and curiosity,

[1] "The Diligent Learner"

Page 33

waiting to hear a distant, mysterious voice from that world, or a lament from Our Mother Rachel.

At Tishe-Bov [1] we boys scattered around the cemetery, filling it with our children's voices as we searched for the green, nut-like, stinging burrs and tore them from the low green bushes.

At Tishe-Bov we began a wild hunt for girls and young women, aiming at them and throwing the stinging burrs into their hair. We took a "sadistic" pleasure in watching them flee from us, struggling to get the burrs out of their hair, while laughing and squealing and hurling the worst curses at us with a good-natured laugh.

In the "yomim-neroim" [2], when the harbingers of the joyous holidays of Sukkot and Shmini-Atseres [3], Hoyshayne-Raven [4] and Simkhes-Toyre [5] were already in the air, with delicious feasts and new clothes, little girls used to walk through the cemetery with slaughtered chickens.

They had been sent by their mothers from Khanaykes to the slaughterhouse on the other side of the cemetery in the Piaski district to have a chicken slaughtered for the holiday. And so a little girl would stand, frightened, between the noise of the women and the hysterical, screaming chickens. The chickens cried out in rebellion against the kosher butcher and, blinking their eyes in confusion and wiping their snotty noses with their "sleeves," pushed under the butcher's nose to ask:  
"Reb slaughterer, slaughter me first!"

The slaughterer, a bearded blond Jew with cold, calm eyes, would pluck a few feathers from the chicken's neck, mutter a sacred phrase, make a cut with his knife, and throw the slaughtered chicken at the girl's feet. And the little girl, trembling and splattered with blood, after some struggle with the dying chicken, would hang it on an iron hook and look with a trembling heart at its white, twisted eyes, which closed in the last twitch. Later, she would carry the chicken from the slaughterhouse in Piaski across the cemetery to Khanaykes.

In the autumn days of the month of Elul, when the cold sun, which only warmed like a stepmother, covered the cemetery with crooked rays of sunny shadows, the cemetery used to be strewn with dozens of Jews who lay stretched out on the graves of their loved ones, sobbing and wailing bitterly and heartbreakingly. It was a wailing and groaning mingled with

[1] The ninth day of the month of Ov, day of mourning after the destruction of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

[2] The 10 Days from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur

[3] Shemini Atzeret, the festival directly after Sukkot, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shemini\\_Atzeret](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shemini_Atzeret)

[4] Hoshana Rabbah, seventh day of Sukkot

[5] Simchat Torah, Feast for the completion of the annual circle of reading the Torah

Page 34

supplications [1] "to the loving Father in heaven" or "to our dear Mother in this world" to intercede as their intercessor so that the Jewish sufferings would end and they would be enrolled for a good year and receive a good "kvitl" [a good slip of paper for the Book of Life].

The cemetery also served as a hiding place for stolen goods and as a conspiratorial place for revolutionary youth. And sometimes it happened that the inhabitants of the cemetery, who had fallen asleep forever, were disturbed in their eternal rest by police raids, whistling squads, and revolver shots of the Russian police or the agents of the secret service. I can still clearly see before my eyes the types of the revolutionary youth of that time; in black shirts with collars closed up to the neck and black, braided silk belts around their waist.

The girls wore the same shirts and had their hair cut short (like the boys in "La Garçonne" by the French writer Viktor Marguerite [2]). [And I can still see] those who, with smoking revolvers and squinting eyes, aimed at the tombstones of the cemetery and learned to shoot. And it was not uncommon for a Russian policeman, a police chief, or even a governor-general, to be found on a dark night at the corner of a dark street, shot by the bullet of a revolutionary who had practiced in "my" cemetery.

In the moonlit nights, when I climbed the stone wall of the cemetery to close the shutters of our house overlooking the tombstones, I paused for a very long time. I would look at the cemetery under the big sky-blue cloth curtain, where the eternally mysterious, smiling moon floated through the white clouds, as if accompanied by white angels.

The moon covered the cemetery with pale moonlight and the wan trees swayed in the wind like beggars in the light dance of [S.] Anski's "The Dybbuk." In addition, the small tombstones of the children's graves nestled against the large ohels of the rabbis and sages, just as grandchildren nestle against their beloved grandfathers.

I was never afraid of the cemetery. And in the pale, silent, mysterious nights of the full moon, I felt that I had a common language with it and that we could speak quietly in our silent language, our language of thought, about how the transition from this world to the world of the dead is a quiet walk that we experience on our journey through life from the cradle to the grave.

[1] takhanunem= „Supplications“, daily penitential Jewish prayers

[2] Victor Margueritte, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor\\_Margueritte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Margueritte)

At some point, however, the old cemetery lost its privilege. It was in danger of being forgotten because it had a great competitor in the form

of the new and last Jewish cemetery. It was the ghetto cemetery of the entire Jewish population of Bialystok.

Tens of thousands of Bialystokers, now scattered all over the world, get up every morning and go to bed at night with hearts full of sorrow and sad eyes. [Their thoughts] turn to the new cemetery...

And many Bialystokers will die of a "heart attack". The dry diagnosis of a cold doctor will justify this with arteriosclerosis or coronary thrombosis. For he does not know that the new cemetery in Bialystok has caused yet another victim, that it has caused yet another Jewish heart to burst after it could no longer bear the suppressed grief, pain and remorse.

For he, the brother from America, thought that perhaps he had a share in the tragic fate of his brothers and sisters lying there, in the decaying heap of rotting human flesh. And the holey eyes of skulls haunt him with the piercing reproach like skewers, reaching him right there, in his quiet home in America, right from this place, from the new Bialystok cemetery....

I never want to set foot on the soil of Bialystok again, because I cannot bear to see today's Bialystok, which is a big, new cemetery.

And like a mad mother who holds her dead child close to her, caresses it, kisses it and sings it a lullaby, and does not want to admit that her child is dead, I want to caress the Bialystok of my childhood imagination and my youthful dreams forever, forever, and sing my sad songs to it. And I do not want to believe that "my" Bialystok has already died.

No, for me Bialystok, the former Bialystok, is not dead, it lives around me and in me...





Cmentarz w getcie na ulicy Żabiej w roku 1943

*The Ghetto cemetery on Szaba Street in 1943.*

source: [Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf \(wirtualnie.lomza.pl\)](#)



אויפ'ן געטא בית-עלמין צום 5-טען יארצייט (אין 1948) פון אויפשטאנד און ליקוידאציע פון דער ביאליסטאקער געטא. מען לייגט בלומען אויפ'ן ברודער-קבר. דער נייער פארקאן איז אויפגעבויט געווארען מיט דער הילף פון ביאליסטאקער רעליף אין אמעריקע.

AT THE GHETTO CEMETERY, 1948.—Flowers are placed on the mass grave on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the uprising and liquidation of the Bialystoker Ghetto. The new fence in the background was erected with the aid of the Bialystoker Relief Committee in America.

source

see <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yizkor-books/yzk-nybc313696/sohn-david-byalistok-bilder-album-fun-a-barimter-shtot-un-ire-iden-iber-der-velt>

### The "Remeslenoye" [Artisans' School]: Combining Work with Education

On gray, cold, snowy winter mornings, but also in summer, in bright sunshine, hundreds of Jewish boys went to the "source of work and education": To the "Remeslenoye."

Among them were the still hungry children of poor coachmen, carters, porters and whitewashers of Khanaykes, the children of the owners of grocery and iron stores, of the teachers, the ready-made clothing sellers and of the shoe shop owners on Suraza [Suraska] Street, around the synagogue courtyard and the market. But also the more privileged children of the dry-goods and haberdashery merchants, the owners of colonial goods, paper and glass stores on Lipowa, Gumienna, and Mikołajewska Street.

There were also boys from the provinces studying in the "Remeslenoye", healthy, strong lads with tanned faces, lively, shining eyes, who were raised in the surrounding lush Jewish towns and villages, in the chunky houses covered with green moss, in village huts with orchardists and gardeners, surrounded by miles of green, wild forests and green fields tilled by the peasants.

There were boys from Sokolka and from the aristocratic "high school" Lomzha, from the Jewish orchard tenders of Chartsh and from the grocery stores of Staroseltse, from Vashlikov with its sawmills and from the weaving town of Horodok, from Supraśl, the town of Shmuel Citrin (the "Jewish Krull"), from the tanning center of Krynki, and last but not least, "dembene" boys from far-off Białowież.

From the famous Białowieża Forest with its ancient, hundred-year-old trees, with its light-footed deer and roe deer and with its heavy-bodied wild bison. This wild, ancient Białowieża Forest, where the mighty "Emperor of All Russia", Tsar Nikolai Romanov the II [2], would appear with his suave, royal escort, enlivening the eternally silent, empty royal highways, paved with small stones and two-headed eagles, where only the buzzing of bees could be heard in the echo of bird concerts among the tall oak trees.

Ah yes, the "provincial"... the provincials and their nicknames... How could a town be called without its "nickname"? Somehow the nickname became almost involuntarily associated with the shtetl, or rather its inhabitants. And here is a small selection: The Krinkers were "the thieves", the Zabludovers were "the goat-cakes", the Vashlikovers were "the goats",

[1] demben= oaken, boys like oaks

[2] see [Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich of Russia \(1856–1929\) - Wikipedia](#)

Page 37

the Sokolkers were "the lords of the world", the people of Brisk were "the moons", the people of Lomzha were "the little challahs", the people of Grajewo were "the dartfishes", and last but not least, the Bialystokers were "the cake-eaters".

And it was exactly this mixture of Jewish youth from Bialystok and from the provinces who came to the "Remeslenoye", which was still known hundreds of miles away from Bialystok, to acquire knowledge and a trade, and who later sent their graduates out into the world, across the vast expanse of Russia, to Western European countries, and even far across the sea, to the land of Columbus and to South American Argentina.

After I passed the exams and was accepted as a student, I, still half a child, had to divide my sunny children's day between studying and working. Remeslenoye had three departments:

Textile, Mechanics and Carpentry.

In the textile department, at the end of school, you got a diploma as a master of steam chairs and "master of patterns," because we learned to analyze the patterns of woven fabrics by drawing them up thread by thread to determine the pattern and the yarn material, whether it was wool, cotton, or worsted. Only then could we copy [a woven fabric].

The mechanical looms were called steam looms. They were started by electricity from dynamo machines [generators], which converted the power [mechanical energy] of steam boilers [into electrical energy]. We also learned dyeing, finishing, winding, "shern" [1] and "nupn" [2].

In the factory "Remeslenoye" there were about eight mechanical looms of different German companies, which were famous at that time: "Grasneyner", "Shvabishe" and "Sheyner" looms. The "Zhakard" [Jacquard] looms [3], which became famous at that time, were also "Grasneyner" steam looms. They made flowered woolen "Montanyak" blankets, the name of which may have come from the French word "montagnard", meaning "mountain dweller".

These flowered blankets made it to the remotest corners of vast Russia, and hundreds of Bialystok "peddlers" traveled all over the world to spread the Bialystok products of Jewish diligence, sweat, and energy.

A number of Bialystok manufacturers specialized in the production of blankets, including such famous companies as: Preysman, Triling, Gubinski, Citrin, Moreyn Brothers, Markus Brothers, Novik, Kanel, Komichau, and others.

The "Remeslenoye" also produced the famous Bialystok

[1] shern= The Yiddish occupational title "shererke", in German "Schärererin", in English "warper", is a technical term from weaving. "Warping" is the process of preparing warp yarn tapes for the subsequent weaving process, see <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sch%C3%A4ren>

[2] nupn= The Yiddish verb "nupn" is a technical term from the weaving trade. It refers to an activity of correcting small processing defects in the finished woven fabric, for example, taking out the knots. A woman who practiced this profession was called "nuperke".

[3] see [Jacquard machine - Wikipedia](#)

Page 38

suit fabrics, such as "karelekh" (from a cheap woollen fabric made from torn scraps), which in later years, during my travels to other countries, I found in clothing stores on the "Grenadierstraße" in Berlin, on the "Rue de Rivoli" in Paris, on the "Diepestraat" in Antwerp and on the "Whitechapel Road" in London.

Bialystok also specialized in the production of "kastor", a cheap suit fabric made of a mixture of cotton and wool. A large part of the Bialystok factory owners made their living from "kastor", and there was a famous joke about a cloth merchant with very limited knowledge of Russian who wrote an urgent telegram [in Russian]:

"Nye mogu viderzhat visilayte kastorku". In Yiddish it means: "I can't hold out any longer, send kastorke". Only - in Russian "kastorke" means castor oil!

Bialystok also produced a lot of "drap", a coarse, double-sided winter fabric for coats. The inner side was colorfully patterned and it was possible to avoid sewing an inner lining into the winter coats.

We, the students of "Remeslenoye", had the utmost difficulty in drawing up the patterns of the coarse, double, patterned "drap" fabric..

In the mechanical department they learned how to cut and file metals, repair machine parts, cast metals (with oxygen), draw plans of machine parts to cast them [later] in metal factories, draw and copy mechanical parts from the perspective of "facade", "profile", "distance", "prism" to the millimeter. In addition, they learned the differences between metals and the colors used in the factories to identify the various metals on drawings and plans.

And at the annual exhibitions, the exhibits of the mechanical department, for example, the manufactured machines, always attracted great attention. There were: machines for building, filing and sawing, but also tools such as hammers, drills, metal rulers, linch pins and other useful items.

The carpentry department enabled a student to become a first-class qualified master furniture maker with great expertise in making plan drawings, applying modern systems for bending wood, gluing of strips of wood and assembling furniture to the finest modern taste and with high resilience. They learned the theory of atmospheric effects on different types of wood, and how to cross certain types of wood in the wrong direction to prevent shrinkage of the wood material. Polishing with chemical paints and liquids was also taught to achieve a smooth and durable shine.

\*

[1] loynketnik, leynketnik= Occupational title within the weaving trade, a leynketnik could be the owner of a small factory, a guild master or a foreman.

Page 39

I started in the textile department. My comrades were all "clumsy big fellows" between the ages of 14 and 18, and I looked like a little Lilliputian, like a dwarf in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale. The others taught me a harsh lesson, the lesson of the power of the strongest.

In general, my classmate Farush made my life difficult (he was from the family of "Farushes", from the sausage shop). Farush was a tall, yellowish-blond boy with freckled, rosy skin and about four years older than me. When he was in a bad mood because he had only gotten a "two" ["B"] in Russian, he would wait for me in a corner of the hallway like a silent inquisitor with a sadistic smile. He would approach me with slow steps, like a spider to a fly, and grab me by the head. As I could only reach up to his arm, he pressed my head down with his hand, as if with iron pincers, and held my twisted body like this for a long time, always with the same calm, poisonous, sarcastic smile.

I used to have a rising revolting hatred for the "oppressor". I kicked him with my feet, bit him with my teeth, scratched him with my fingernails, and offered all my weak, clumsy "tools" in my defense. But, of course, I came out of the unequal force as the injured one.

And according to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the "early childhood effect", the type of my schoolmate Farush is one of the reasons why I developed a hatred for oppression, dictators and despotic power.

This episode of brutality on the part of classmates, which is a frequent and tragic occurrence in educational institutions, served me as the subject of a story that I published in 1930 in the Warsaw "Weekly of Art and Literature" under the title "The Spider".

I had little interest in the practical work, the lessons of "tepen" [drawing up] and assembling patterns, disassembling and building steam chairs. I never kept pace with the practical classes. But I was one of the best in two subjects: Russian and painting.

The manager of the new "Talmetoyre", Samson Yakovlevitsh Grosman, was at the same time our Russian teacher in the "Remeslenoye". During the three years I was in this school, he went through almost all the classical Russian literature with us. This was nothing new for me, as I had already "absorbed"

Page 40

the works of the Russian classics when I was still in Fridman's school, and had also devoured the works of my beloved Russian writers late into the night during the long winter evenings in Bialystok.

I will never forget how we learned "Taras Bulba" [1]. That same day my mother had dressed me in new trousers, very wide and long, "to grow into" (my mother was always looking for charms because of my small stature), and I ran to school full of joy, but, as usual, late.

So the students were learning "Taras Bulba", and when our teacher had just described the wide pants of the Ukrainian Kozak Taras Bulba with the words "they were as wide as the Black Sea", the door of our classroom opened, and I, the little one, stopped on the threshold with my new, bombastic wide pants. As soon as the teacher and the students saw my new pants, they burst out laughing, rattling the boards of the "skameykes" (school desks) and pointing with their fingers at my wide pants, which fell in folds. And I stood there blushing as if I had been stewed. If I had gotten hold of my mother at that moment, who knows what I would have done to her. ....

From then on, for a while, they called me "Sharavari shirinoi tshornoye morye" ("Pants as wide as the Black Sea").

I loved writing essays in Russian, and when our teacher read them aloud, in the tense silence of our classroom, I felt for the first time the palpitations of a writer's heart, the sweet trembling of attaching myself to the reader and seducing him into my dream worlds.

Every morning in the Bialystok winter, my mother would wake me up at seven o'clock and drag me out of my warm bed, for better or worse. She would fill a brown paper bag with a bit of black bread and a piece of "darer kishke" or a Bialystok pastry with a piece of smoked herring. She dressed me in a few woolen jackets and a pair of galoshes, tied a torn scrap of an old headscarf around my neck, wrapped me in a long fur coat that reached down to my feet, pulled a torn black "Barashkov" cap over my head, put some ear flaps over my ears and a hood over my head.

Walking from Khanaykes to Lipowa Street in the frosty morning, I looked like a little "steam mill", because from far away you could see only a little dark ball of stuff

[1] see [Taras Bulba - Wikipedia](#)

Page 41

with steam coming out of its mouth (because that was the only uncovered part of my body).

So that's how I, the little creature, went to learn and work to integrate into society and become a decent human being.

\*

Childhood, sweet childhood,  
Forever you remain awake in my memory...  
(by Mordechay Gebirtig)

I describe the "Remeslenoye" for three reasons: To give a small idea of a vocational school of that time, to illustrate the threefold combination of work, education and Judaism, and to let [the reader] pass by a gallery of boys of that time from Bialystok and the



province - with their joys and sorrows.

It will be a satisfaction and a reward for me if as many former Bialystokers from America and other parts of the world as possible recognize among my Bialystok schoolmates their former friends, relatives or neighbors with whom they lived next door and breathed the Bialystok air together. Furthermore, if my humble pen succeeds in illuminating the long, distant past of Bialystok in the present tragic darkness, it will give shape to my love for Bialystok and will bring the city out of oblivion after the black night of the Shoa.

It is for you that I am writing these sentences, for you Bialystokers who have remained alive, like splinters of diamonds that have broken off from the sparkling brilliance of the Shabbats, holidays, Torah and education that were called: Bialystok!

—

At that time new winds were blowing in Russia, and the famous slogan applied: "Utshenye svyes, nyeutshehye tma" ("Education leads to light, ignorance to darkness").

The doors of the closed world of cheder and Bes-Medresh were opened wide, and the Jewish youth set out to nibble from the pot of Russian secular culture, which was still so unknown

Page 42

yet so enticing. And in close cooperation between the Russian government and the Jewish russified intelligentsia, russification ran in great, mighty strides through the Jewish streets, sowing there the Russian language and the love of Russian literature.

Our "Remeslenoye" was also swept away by the current of Russification. And during the long, snowy winter nights in Bialystok, I used to devour dozens of books of the [main] pillars of Russian literature, and I was so assimilated to Russian that when I got angry, I automatically cursed in Russian.

And even in ordinary conversation, after two Yiddish words, I had to use four Russian ones; so poor was my Yiddish vocabulary.

My two strongest competitors on the "Remeslenoye" in the Russian language were comrades Smazanovitsh and Shatski. (Smazanovitsh died, Shatski is in New York today).

Maytshik Smazanovitsh was a boy of poor parents, from a poor, narrow alley next to "Shayes Street" in Khanaykes, which was close to

the fence of the sadly famous "Granovsky Garden". Maytshik's father came from somewhere in Russia, and Russian was spoken in their poor but intelligent household. In Khanaykes, the father was nicknamed "Klyenter", a corruption of "klarnet" [clarinet]. He was probably a klezmer musician and played on that instrument.

Maytshik Smazanovitsh also had a nickname on Shayes Street. We called him "Tshizhik" [little bird], because when he met a friend on the street, he would sing to him, "Tshizhik, Tshizhik gdye ti bil...na veselye vodku fil..." [Roughly: Tshizhik, Tshizhik, where have you been...for fun a lot of vodka...] and ended his song with the question:

"Well, what are you doing now, Tshizhik?"

"Tshizhik" Smazanovitsh spoke in a Russian with grammatical variety and a real Russian accent.

My second competitor, Shatski, was the brother of Doctor Shatski and the son of Manye, the Akusherke [midwife] of Gumienner Street. He was a slim, stiff, quiet boy with eyes like fiery coals and an eagle's nose, a type of Cirkassia [Caucasian region], and spoke a beautiful, eloquent Russian. However, he was a bit lazy about studying, his head was already occupied with the girls of the "Profesyonal-Shule" (Women's Professional School) in Yudl Kletski's yard on Lipowa Street. He and other comrades from the "Remeslenoye" were already in contact with the girls and arranged to meet in the Green Alley in the Bialystok Forest, which they filled in the summery, starry, light-blue nights with tender, mournful tones of "Otshi Tshornye" [Black Eyes] and "Margaritkelekh" [1].  
A whole

[1] [Khava Albershteyn - Margaritkelekh חוה אלבערשטיין - מארגאריטקעלעך - YouTube](#)

group of students from the "Remeslenoye" had already formed, flirting with the "profesyonalkes".

There, before my eyes, I still see "Don Juan" Halpern, a medium-sized, dreamy, romantic fellow from Białowieża, who brought from the Białowieża forests Russian songs and something melancholic in his eyes. He wore a dark blue pelerine in the style of the French "Agent de Police", which was very fashionable at the time. His heart belonged to the "profesyonalke" Zlatke Kesler, a sentimental, graceful girl with romantic, always questioning eyes. (Zlatke is now in New York, married to Khayim Keshin, a young man from Bialystok, who is the son of the famous Bialystok tailor Knishinski).

The group also included the quiet Pokshive, also from Białowieża, a tall, blond lad with freckles, a brother of the then famous Bialystok

amateur wrestler, the heavyweight hero Pokshive, who was handsome and intelligent - a rarity in this profession.

Besides, Utkes belonged to the group of "ukhazhorn" [suitors], the best student in the subject "drawing" in the class, a slender, handsome, tall lad, with a bashful, feminine laugh. He was the son of a poor Bialystok painter and glazier somewhere on Suraska Street. Utkes had a considerable talent for drawing and had great skill as a painter.

I always admired Utkes for three qualities:

His artistic talent, the beauty of his body (he looked like a Hollywood star), and his modesty.

But this flower, full of beauty and talent, grew up in great poverty.

The quiet Veynshteyn [Weinstein] also belonged to the group of "cavaliers." He had considerable skills in poetry and painting - one of the innumerable [bright] talents that are extinguished in the darkness of poverty. But Weinstein also had another talent - eating....

He was a boy with a terrible hunger. Every day at noon we would go down to the cellar of the "Remeslenoye" to be served our lunch in the dining room, which consisted of black bread, lentils, pearl grits and a slice of meat, brought from the famous Bialystok "Cheap Kitchen" of Popovshtshizne, which was expanded in 1905 with the help of Dr. Sh. Citron. Weinstein then devoured his plate of lentils in a minute

Page 44

(which was his favorite dish, and why we called him "Esau's competitor") [1]. And since I, the little one, didn't need much physical nourishment for my small body, I became his "delivery boy" and bosom friend, bringing him joy with an [extra] plate of lentils or a slice of bread.

Among the types of "cavaliers" from the "Remeslenoye" were the Gelbart brothers, whom we also called "Poylishe", because they had come to Bialystok from a Polish shtetl and spoke a Polish-Yiddish dialect that sounded strange and odd to our Bialystok Lithuanian ears. We imitated them with their "yakh", "enk" and "ets"[2].

Our drawing teacher was Abukov. He was of medium height, had a contented, always smiling, rosy, shaved face and a small beard of an artist. He spoke slowly, dragging out each word, measuring pictures in perspective from a distance with his pencil, squinting one eye to look for proportions in the length and width of an object.

One of the best students in "drawing" was, as I mentioned, Utkes, whom we nicknamed "Vid iz mayeva okna" [Picture through my

window]. Utkes had once painted a landscape through a window, crowned his picture with that very title, and our cheeky gang [3] had already found a fitting nickname for him.

Together with Yacob Gelbart, the "poylishn", I competed for second place. By the way, our teacher Abukov had given me the name "Dyevotshka" (Girl) because of my feminine face and quiet thoughtfulness.

We used to paint motifs from nature, copied or enlarged them, painted dead objects from imagination, but also living objects. We painted with a special Japanese ink (engravings), with watercolor paint, with special colored pencils and, finally, with oil paints for artists.

But we also painted types of people and landscapes. Winter landscapes and dreamy rivers in scattered forests. Once a year the "Remeslenoye" organized a public exhibition of the best drawings, and thousands of Jews used to come by and look at and admire our drawings. We were always very proud of our "Remeslenoye".

Yes, this was our "Remeslenoye"! Anyone who wanted to could end up with a lot of knowledge. But if someone did not want to learn, he was forgiven, knowing that he came from poor parents. And the most

[1] the biblical Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a dish of lentils

[2] These words are familiar to me from the Warsaw dialect

[3] literally= Our gang of those who "make life miserable for others".

Page 45

important thing for him was to learn his trade so that he could support his poor parents, who were already waiting for their child's first earned rubles.

We had two masters of textile craftsmanship: Shifer and Grabovski. Shifer, a short, corpulent, round-bellied "Jewish Jekke," acted as our master of fabric patterns. He was a first-class expert, but he was terribly in love with Germany.

Later he worked in Germany as a textile engineer, speaking only German. He lived in Potshtove Street and was the neighbor of my

elegant, aristocratic cousin, Khaytshe Shustitski. About me he used to say in German:  
"Your cousin is quite a capable fellow, but he has no trade expertise".  
And it was true, because craftsmanship was not for me at all.

The second master, Grabovski, was himself a former student of the "Remeslenoye". He was one of the first to graduate, and then actually became the master of the steam chair in the "Remeslenoye". In 1920, he became my partner in textile manufactured goods; together we bought old rags and tore, spun, wove and finished them at "Moysey" Preysman's [1], who died recently in New York. (This was five years before I left for Belgium and France).

Grabovski was a reserved, serious person, a bit rude like a certain Jewish type of craftsman, always in his work clothes, and felt lost among his colleagues, the Russified intelligentsia of teachers.

We, the students, also divided ourselves into "castes". It was a kind of Roman patrician and plebeian system (nobles and "lowly"), or in the style of Indian "paryas" [outcasts]. The type of parental descent played a role in relations between comrades, both in the "Remeslenoye" and even in family life in Bialystok.

I remember once visiting my rich cousin, Yehudit Rozental, the wife of Gershon Rozental, the owner of "Apretur" [refining of fabrics, etc.]. Her little twelve-year-old girl stuck out her little belly, focused on me, examined my clothes, and, holding her finger ring [2] in her mouth, asked me in Russian: "Vi bogati? (Are you rich?). (My cousin Rosental was the sister-in-law of the well-known social activist Zeydl Khabatski of the Bialystok Branch 88).

I remember this in connection with the student Nyevyadomski,

[1] Mehr über den Fabrikanten Preysman erfahren wir in der Biografie von Rachel Kositza, die ich aus dem Jidischen übersetzt habe, see [Memoirs of a Woman from Bialystok translated from Yiddish - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu \(jewishbialystok.pl\)](#)

[2] literally, "dos fingerl", a ring. Here, her finger could also be meant.

a poorly dressed boy with badly patched shoes, a crumpled suit of cheap cloth, and a guilty face. Few befriended him, and he was usually isolated and alone. And the students - boys who knew no pity - called him "Baytele," because his father, a poor Jew in an old caftan and Hasidic hat, blind in one eye and wearing a black blindfold, used to stand next to the big shul, across from the old Bes-Medresh, with a bag full of lottery tickets. The children would draw a lot from him for a kopek to win an "irisl" [caramel], a sweet, or money. That was how he made a living.

We also had merry comrades, and one of them was Kornyanski with his dimples. (He is in New York today). He was always laughing and cheerful, swaying as he walked, and when he said something funny, his eyes would narrow and moisten, and the dimples on his face would become even sweeter.

One guy who often made us laugh was the quiet Kaplanski (now in New York). A wild, good, always smiling comrade, but also an artist in the sense that part of his face was permanently smeared. Either with ink, soot, or black gunk from the machines. When Kaplanski entered the classroom, the teacher would wink at us, turn around and look at him, laughing good-naturedly. And it never happened that Kaplanski's nose or cheek was not covered with black oil stains (from the machines of the "mechanical department"), so that he looked like a completely greasy locomotive engineer.

And when the teacher and his pupils turned to him and burst out laughing, the good Kaplanski smiled good-naturedly, as if he had not been meant at all.

A very opposite type to all the other comrades was Podrobinik, a quiet and pious Jewish boy (now living in New York). He came from the Podrobinik family, one of whose girls was killed by a German aerial bomb during World War I, in 1914. This was at the corner of Aleksandrovske Street).

Podrobinik's transfigured face with its slightly longer forelocks, bore something like the stamp of a yeshive [Talmud school]. In fact, he looked like a Talmud student who had accidentally fallen into a gang of merry pranksters.

A good career was made by our schoolmate Segal, with nickname "Kugelnickl". He was quite small, and to look more like a "man", he once came to our school with a round, rise, hard

„Kapelyushl“ [Fedora hat] on his head. Our "gang of jokers" immediately gave him the name "Kugelnikl". Later he married the daughter of a rich factory owner, became an important fabric manufacturer and laughed at us.

But I would also like to remember two village "dembes" [boys like oak trees], and they were the two tall, blond, freckled Babbitsh brothers. They had a grocery store on Starovoseyne Street, but they were also very talented in recitation and writing. One of them, Mordekhay ("Max"), later became a contributor to Pesach Kaplan's "Dos Naye life" and is now in New York. The two went to the higher classes and were close friends of my late brother.

One of the "Hidden Tzadikim" [1] of the "Remeslenoye" was the bookkeeper Goldstein, a warm, secular Jew. He was nearsighted, had a fatherly smile, and was as good as an angel. He lived in the courtyard of the "Remeslenoye", and he used to quietly and secretly, in the spirit of "ביודעים ובלא יודעים" [2], distribute free textbooks to the poorer students and was truly like a father to them.

At the entrance of "Remeslenoye" in Lipowa Street there was a rich, first-class canning and fruit company of H. Gutman. The shop window attracted everyone's attention. Here were the most beautiful fruits, which held me for a few minutes as if hypnotized. Only today, in rich, saturated America, I can understand the drama of poverty, when a boy from Bialystok stopped for a long time just to look at the fruits, because he had such a craving for a fruit or a "tshaste" [cake] in the shop window.

Today I strongly doubt the hypothesis of psychology and jurisprudence that poverty and economic hardship are the mother of crime. According to this theory, 90% of my schoolmates would have become thieves or criminals.

The fact that this was not the case is probably due to the Jewish religious education and Jewish ethics of our Bialystok homes, which were the counterbalance to the evil inclinations and instincts of the starved body. Over the years, I have become aware of the importance and depth of the Jewish religion, which may be an answer to the great epidemic of juvenile delinquency in the so-called Jewish homes of New York today.

[1] The "Tzadikim Nistarim", the so-called "Hidden Righteous"= [Tzadikim Nistarim - Wikipedia](#)

[2] ביודעים ובלא יודעים= Words spoken during the prayer of confession concerning sins committed knowingly, but also unknowingly. Rabbi Meir Soloveitchik interprets these words: „In confession we say, 'For sin that we have sinned before you, knowing and unknowing.' knowing' – that we

knew things we shouldn't have known; 'And we don't know' – that we didn't know what we needed to know" , see [Chabad | Conversation of the Week 1810 | Knowing and Not Knowing](#) Obviously, Goldstein, the fatherly bookkeeper, was operating in some kind of legal gray area when he gave the books away for free...

Page 48

The whole "Remeslenoye" used to prepare feverishly for the annual Chanukkah ball, and the hearts of the "profesyonalkes" (girls from the vocational school) were already beating impatiently that they would soon be at the big ball and in the big halls of the "Remeslenoye". These were specially decorated for the occasion, so that the girls could "legally" flirt with the students of the "Remeslenoye", or have, "under the fan" [1], a witty-galant conversation; they would blush at the compliments and at the end dance a breathtaking valzer, polka, or pa-d'espan (in French: "Spanish steps", Pas d'Espagne) in the arms of their chosen cavalier.

All the teachers were there with their wives, they were cheerful, funny and so exuberant! In general, our strict teacher Samson Yakovlevitsh Grosman was unrecognizable, with a beaming face, running his fingers through his thick, poetic mop of hair and going from one student to another to have a little chat.

But when the couples were dancing rhythmically with happy, dreamy eyes, I was left out because I was too young and too small to dance. He, the teacher, always took pity on me, put his hand on my head (I could only reach his knuckles) and said to me with an ironic smile, as if to comfort me:

"Well, "utshoni muzh" [learned man], we are left, two useless dancers, and we can talk about Russian literature".

The Hanukkah Ball was also accompanied by a theatrical performance with a mixed program:

A comedy by Sholem-Aleykhem [2], plus declamations, recitations and "living pictures" illuminated by Bengal fires.

I still have the Hanukkah Ball of 1913 before my eyes. The great hall was brightly lit, with iridescent fires sparkling in the dazzling light that contrasted so sharply with the pitiful, dull illumination of the sooty kerosene lamps in our homes.

The theatrical performance begins. The director and main actor is, as always, the talented, black-haired, lively, and always bustling around Nokhem Glagovski (now in Australia). I knew Nokhem Glagovski well, because every Friday before the light blessing my brother sent me to his house to bring [a new booklet] of the then famous detective stories with Nat Pinkerton - not Carter and Sherlock Holmes.



One of Sholem-Aleykhem's comedies, the two-act "The Divorce," is reenacted there.

[1] „unter di fekhers“ : I think this is an ironic allusion to an old German saying, "behind/under the fan", based on historical facts. Behind the fan, for example, a fine lady in the Baroque period could not only coquettishly hide her face when she blushed, but she could also talk about certain things, unheard by the "chaperone". Supposedly, there was even a "secret fan language" in the 18th century. However, with reference to the text, it certainly means that certain formulations and allusions were used in the conversation in order to remain "harmless" and that the conversations also took place in the protected area, quasi "under the supervision of the teachers present".

[2] Sholem Aleichem, see [Sholem Aleichem - Wikipedia](#)

Page 49

(Nokhem Glagovski also performed the one-act plays "Mazel Tov", "Expropriation", "A Doctor - A Merchant", etc.) ....

There is a commotion in the middle of the performance. The performance must be interrupted. There are whispers that the Russian police will not allow the performance in Yiddish. Supposedly there are negotiations with the Russian police chief, and finally we learn that he has been slipped a "make" [1], and the performance continues.

We set up a "living picture" for "Oyfn Pripetshik" [2], in which the Rebbe teaches small children, and it is lit with fantastic colors of Bengal fire. Berman stands behind the scenes with our choir and we sing "Oyfn Pripetshik". The small, enthusiastic, constantly moving girl Augustovski sings with a male alto, and I, the boy, squeal with a thin treble voice.

Then "Khane mit Di Zibn Zin" [Hannah and Her Seven Sons] [3] is shown. Our hearts throb with enthusiasm as Hannah does not allow her last and youngest, seventh son to bow down before the Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes [4], even under the pretext of picking up a ring, and is willing to die with her seven sons for the honor of the Jewish God.

A series of living pictures is shown, illustrating the love of work. On the stage there is a tailor, a shoemaker, a blacksmith... Jewish craftsmen [5]. Each carries his typical tool, is illuminated by glittering colored Bengal fires, and sings his special song in Hebrew. The tailor begins, "I am a tailor and seamstress," the cobbler, "I am a shoemaker," and we enjoy the group, which embodies the beauty and value of work.

Then our master of the mechanical department, Belenki, appears with a declamation. He is young, tall and powerfully built, with an iron, muscular body and the "gentile" face of a factory worker. He declares in a splendid "goy" Russian. Apukhtin's poem [6] about the Hungarian countess sounds wonderful in his mouth. The latter, on her last visit to her son, condemned to death in prison, says that she believes she can obtain his pardon. When she leads him to the gallows with a white scarf around her, it is a sign that he has been pardoned. At the last moment, when they put the noose around his neck, he would know of his pardon.

When the Hungarian count appears at the place of execution and sees his mother in the white shawl, he is sure that he will be pardoned and goes cheerfully and brazenly

[1] מכה= a make, probably a small amount of money was paid as a bribe.

[2] „On The Hearth“, a Yiddish song about a Rebe teaching his pupils the aleph-bet. The lyrics can be found here [OYFN PRIPETCHIK \(hebrewsongs.com\)](http://OYFN PRIPETCHIK (hebrewsongs.com))

[3] see [Digital Yiddish Theatre Project \(uwm.edu\)](http://Digital Yiddish Theatre Project (uwm.edu))

[4] see [Antiochus IV Epiphanes - Wikipedia](http://Antiochus IV Epiphanes - Wikipedia)

[5] literally "amkho... sher un ayzn" : I think that this refers not only to the tailor, but to the Jewish craftsman as such.

[6] see [Aleksey Apukhtin - Wikipedia](http://Aleksey Apukhtin - Wikipedia)

Page 50

to the gallows. The Hungarian countess has achieved her goal. Her son will die a hero's death, and will not stain the noble count's tribe with fear and terror.

—  
Hanukkah has already arrived at my father's house! The street swings in the bluish darkness of the night. Frozen icicles sparkle from the double windows, filled with white absorbent cotton and taped with paper. The streets are covered with white frosty snow like white

feather beds, and hundreds of Hanukkah candles glimmer and wave on the window frames.

There is a festive tension in the house. My father lights the candles and pauses each time after lighting a flame, lost in thought. I know my father. Probably philosophical thoughts are running through his head as the lit candle sways with its flame, like a tiny living creature, as if the candle with its red, fiery little head wants to interact with him.

The house is filled with the aroma of fried potato pancakes, and my mother stands next to my father, cheeks glowing, looking at each candle he lights with reverent silence, as if it were a shrine.

I stand by the window, swaying to the beat of the fiery flames. For me, these are not simple flames, but the souls of the heroic figures of Yehuda HaMakabi [1] with his sons, in the heroic struggle for the Jewish land, for the people and for the "Beys-Hamigdash", [the Holy Temple of Jerusalem]. My father sings "Haneirot Halalu" [These Candles] [2] and my mother holds my head against her chest, with wet streams of tears running down her cheeks. She whispers a silent prayer:

"God in Heaven, God of Abraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, protect my child from evil and wickedness. O Great God, may the flame of love for you and for your people Israel burn in his heart like the Eternal Light"...

And it is as if I feel something like a fear of the future storms of life and great dangers. So I bury my head in my mother's headscarf and cry silently, not really knowing why.

[1] see [Judas Maccabeus - Wikipedia](#)

[2] listen to the song here [\(2\) הנרות הללו - YouTube](#)

Page 51

### **A Walk through the Streets of Bialystok on Shabbat Afternoon**

Bialystok, Shabbat at noon. Silence lies over the streets. The blinds are lowered over the stores. A few scattered peasants, slowly and lazily driving their horse[wagons] from „Shoseyne“ to Lipowa Street, point out that today is "zhidovska subota" [Jewish Shabbat] and there is no need to hurry.  
They used to joke,

"Nyema zhidki, nyema ditki" [No Jews, no money...].

From time to time, Jewish girls pass by, running late. They wear colorful ribbons on their combed heads and carry cholent; both pots topped with potato peels and vessels covered with brown paper bags.

Some shops are open. There is the shop of the famous Macedonian on Lipowa, next to Osher Topolski's glass store and the Turkish bakery on the corner of Lipowa Street. Their customers are young people who don't give a damn about "being Jewish". The Macedonian opens the "buza" beer bottles with a crack, which still smoke and foam in their necks before they pour angrily into the glasses, as if complaining that they are being forced to desecrate Shabbat.

The Jewish customers feel a little uncomfortable. They cast a glance through the window at the individual Jews passing by and pretend to be heroic, because they very well sense an inner uncertainty that something is not quite right.

With feigned bravado, they eat a few pieces of halvah and would have preferred to sneak back outside. Also at the "Turk" there are quite a few customers for the then famous cookies and sweet and sour

"Kislo-Slodkes" pastries made of brown flour and raisins.

Bialystok Jews celebrate Shabbat in their homes, together with their families. The father performs the ceremonial Kiddush, while the members of the household stand silently in reverence. Then the "Bialystok delicacies" are served:

- Radish with fat, "frozen petshai" [1] (calf's feet) with garlic, a heavenly taste, the Lithuanian "stuffed fish", a little peppered and with a red carrot on top.
- The sweet multi-layered browned "Lokshen Kugel" [noodle casserole] or the square baked "Ulnik" (grated potato cake).
- Meatballs, roasted with bay leaves and English spices and long, brown, braided challah bread, from which a sweet tooth had already secretly pilfered the tasty decoration.
- The cholent with fried potatoes in the reddish-brown stew [2], the stuffed [goose] neck, on which was still pulled the white cobbler's thread with which the neck was sewn.

[1] farfroyrener Petsha[i]= A Yiddish dish of calves feet in jelly

[2] The cholent was prepared just before the beginning of Shabbat and left overnight in the warm oven. The contents were mostly potatoes, soup meat and beans



Липовая улица. Бѣлостокъ.  
Ulica Lipowa. Białystok.

Lipowa Street, photo courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski



Suraska Street, photo courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski

The dark yellow turnip stew fills the house with the aroma of turnips and remains for a while on Shabbat in the upper tube of the oven, next to the boiling tea in the copper "bunke,"[1] bubbling proudly, for it is all that is left after all the tasty delicacies.

It has been eaten. Time for the blessing, and it is promptly followed by Father's admonition directed to the boys,[2]

"Nu-o-o-nu...", so that they would not miss the blessing.

Then the family disperses. The boys go to the yard to play with "tombakes" [uniform buttons] made of brass and "nyupikes" (a variety of buttons). The mother usually goes to the neighbor's house to return the cast-iron pot, and at the same time get something off her chest.

Dad pulls the fringed curtain closed, groans a little, and sighs, growling, about the youth of today who presume to "throw the czar from his throne".

He is referring to his older son, who has been away from home for a few days. The clatter of father's pulled-down boot can be heard, the smell of sweaty socks is in the air and immediately, the parlor is filled with the sound of beeping and soft snoring. Father has fallen asleep!

Only the daughter remains in the room. She goes to the window, draws the curtain a little, and looks out at the sharp stones of the muddy street. She closes the curtain, goes to the closet, takes out her only Shabbat dress, red with plaids, or the white flowered linen dress. In the kitchen, she washes herself on a wooden stool next to the sink, in a white enamel bowl with fragrant soap from "Friedrich Puls".

She waxes her high shoes with the buttons, silently, so that her father would not hear her, and puts on a wreath of red coral, which she bought at the "Yan", the fair on Piaskes, and slips on a worn signet ring, which her brother had sent from America as a gift from New York. She looks at herself in a half-broken, wooden-framed mirror and is pleased with herself.

From the broken mirror shines out a combed, hot, fresh face, with rosy cheeks, like ripe morellos [cherries], and natural red lips that harmonize with the white, full neck. She, the poor Bialystok girl, looks like a freshly bloomed flower. Well, who understands the secret of where the daughters of Bialystok get their freshness, grace and fragrance - like ripe roses on the fence of a poor abandoned garden. She is ready for a walk.

Shabbat afternoon. My mother sits with moist eyes over the "Tsenerene" [3].

[1] bunke= copper jug with narrow neck

[2] free translation

[3] Jewish devotional book for women, see <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/tsene-rene>

Page 53

But, after all, when has my mother not cried? She, a mother with moods, is like all Jewish, lamenting mothers. Either she laughed heartily and infectiously when she told a funny story (and when she told it, she was an artist). Then her face would breathe with life and youthful freshness. Or she cried silently.

My father would look at her ironically, tearing his eyes away from a novel by Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy, and I, taking advantage of the opportunity, would sneak out for an afternoon walk on Shabbat.

Between afternoon and evening. Lipowa Street fills with youthful strollers, leisurely walking to Nikolayevske [Mikołajewska]. On Lipowa there is a new movie theater, the "Iluzion" in Kaletsin's house. There, for the first time in my life, I saw pictures of picturesque natural landscapes in remote corners of the world. Also the then famous comedians Durashkin and Glupishkin and the children's idol, the first world-famous comedian Max Linder [1], who was accompanied by a storm of children's laughter when he crawled out of the chimney like a black chimney sweep or rolled down all the stairs.

Opposite is the second cinema, which is a bit more modern, and fact it is called "Modern". It is for older, wealthier people, because a ticket costs several kopecks more.

And there is the Russian Church, where military parades are often held on Sundays, and where elegant Russian officers with splendid gloves drill soldiers. And Bialystok high school students, especially Jewish ones, would silently "flirt" with them and accompany them with their charming smiles.

Such a Russian general in his red "Lampasn" trousers [2] used to give orders with his bass voice thundering all over Lipowa: "Smirno! Zdorova rebyata!" [Attention, greetings, guys!"] And a thunder of rural bass voices of the soldiers would echo: "Zdrvyva zhelayu vashe visoko prevoskhadityelstvo." [Greetings to Your Majesty!]



And there's usually a smell of barracks and sauerkraut emanating from them, from their soldier's spoons, from their boot shafts.

I take my Shabbat walk alone. As always, I love solitude, and as always, my mind doesn't rest for a minute. It works, sees, perceives, picks up something, creates a photograph somewhere in a corner of the brain, stores it there in a drawer, only to retrieve everything from the memory archive 35 years later and refresh it while writing the memories.

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max\\_Linder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Linder) [2] tight fitting green military pants with a red stripe on the side



source, see <http://wirtualnie.lomza.pl/wirtualnie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ksi%20ga-album-pami%20ci-gminy-%20Cydowskiej-w-Bia%20ymstoku-cz%2099%209B%2087-1.pdf>



## UL. BAZARNA RÓG MIKŁAJEWSKIEJ

Na prawo w rogu stara apteka, na lewo – sklep z materiałami Sloana i papierniczy Kadela Barenbluma. Główne miejsce spacerów i spotkań wstydlwych, uroczych dziewcząt żydowskich w szabatowe wieczory.

*Bazarne Corner Nikola-jewska – on the right the well-known pharmacy; on the left Sloan's Textile store and Barenblum's Paper House. This was also the main promenade for the youth of Białystok.*

source, see <http://wirtualnie.lomza.pl/wirtualnie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ksi%C4%99ga-album-pami%C4%99ci-gminy-%C5%BCydowskiej-w-Bia%C5%82ymstoku-cz%C4%99%C5%9B%C4%87-1.pdf>



#### UL. WASILKOWSKA (Mikołajewska)

Najszersza i najdłuższa ulica miasta z pięknymi wysokimi kamienicami. Tu znajdowały się żydowskie domy bankowe, tu mieszkali adwokaci i lekarze, tu znajdowały się eleganckie kafejki i restauracje: Mec, Szejn, Bar Angielski i inne oraz najlepszy kinoteatr „Apollo”. Tu mieścił się również Bet Midrasz Pułkowy. Ul. Wasilkowska ciągnęła się do „rogatek” przy Kolei Poleskiej, na trasie do pobliskiego miasta Wasilkowa.

*Waslikower Street was the widest and longest street in the city, where the important buildings were located. This was the center of the financial district and here the doctors and lawyers made their residence.*

source, see <http://wirtualnie.lomza.pl/wirtualnie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ksi%20ga-album-pami%20ci-gminy-%20Cydowskiej-w-Bia%20ymstoku-cz%2099%209B%2087-1.pdf>

I continue my Shabbat walk. There is Osher Topolski's glass store. Osher Topolski! The Jew with the big beard and the even bigger heart. The Jew who sneaks out of his glass store to join his guests in prison. There he does his "business of good deeds". Always busy and stressed, his wife's loving grumbling often accompanies him when he disappears.

But in the end, Osher Topolski carries the burden of the prison's large crowd of "Jewish criminals" on his shoulders: there is a citizen who did not clean the gutter on time, or a summons because one secretly kept his store open on Sunday. And other crimes of this kind. But Osher Topolski knows that pious Jews, kholile [God forbid], would rather die of hunger than eat something "treyfes" ["impure"]. So, he brings them kosher food.

However, a romantic memory connects me with Osher Topolski, and that is with his daughter Eva, "Khavle".

I often used to visit my friend, Yisroelke Faynsod (he was the son of Leybl Faynsod, who had the mirror store). I became friends with his sister, Sonya, and she introduced me to Eva Topolski. On winter evenings, when darkness crept into the house, I used to sit on the soft divan. To one side of me sat Sonya, silently dreaming in the darkness, leaning her head against my shoulder, and to the other side Eva propped her head against my chest. And Eva's bulging and well-developed body and full cheeks made my heart beat faster. While she nestled against me, she asked melancholically:

„Yakov Dorogoy, razskazivay nam skazku.“ (Yakov, my dear, tell us a story!).

I felt the warmth of the two girls' bodies and shyly pressed myself against the plump Khavle, and the warmth of her body made me feel so good!

I closed my eyes and dreamed myself into faraway worlds, and in my imagination of a magical world and fantastic stories, I began:

"In a faraway land beyond the wide seas, in a rich kingdom, there lived and dwelt a king and a queen. They had three princesses. The two older ones were proud, wicked and ugly as the black night, but the youngest was beautiful, sweet and good as an angel. The older, wicked princesses hated the younger and more beautiful one, and spun dark thoughts of hatred and revenge.“

I would forget the two dear heads that cuddled up to me and fly with my thoughts into the wide world.

But life is not only beautiful stories, but also tragic, and one dark night in Bialystok a fire broke out in Osher Topolski's house! The sky was colored red by the flames crackling and shooting sparks, and in the fire Osher Topolski's child perished, he [or she] died a cruel death and burned in the hellish flames.

Yes, life is not just a nice story.

But now back to my Shabbat walk. I approach the elegant "Aquarium" restaurant, where in the shop window an aquarium is displayed, in which golden-scaled little fish swim around. And I feel sorry for the little fishes who were so longing for freedom. In the famous gastronomic store of Muravyov, which has the most magnificent delicacies, the shelves bent under the most expensive canned goods, wines and fruits. If someone wanted to make fun of a small spice shop in a side street of Bialystok, which had a few pounds of sugar, a few herring and a barrel of kerosene, the shop was mockingly called "Muravyov's department store".

Above Muravyov's store there was the "Club Blogorodnovo sobranya", where elegant Russian officers met to drink alcohol and play cards or billiards, and it often happened that a romantic Bialystok high school student, under the impression of the delicate poetic verses of Pushkin, Lermontov [1] and Nadson [2], became a victim of the tender Russian language, the sounding spurs and the elegant uniforms of the Russian officers. The latter hated the bearded "zhidovsken" [3] father, but enjoyed amusing themselves with the Jewish daughter in love.

I often heard the story of the noble daughter Z., who became the mistress of the governor general Bogayevski [4].

On the corner of Market Street and Lipova there were two Jewish pharmacies of Ayznshtat and Vilbushevitsh, which were famous not only for their medicines, but also for their beautiful "dandy" pharmacists, known for their elegance and success with Bialystok girls.

And here I am already in the dense mass of couples walking to Shabbat on Nikolayevske [Mikołajewska]. Careless acquaintances are made here. The Russian

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail\\_Lermontov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Lermontov)

[2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semyon\\_Nadson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semyon_Nadson)

[3] derogatory for "Jewish"

[4] Afrikan Petrovich Bogaewsky or Bogayesky, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikan\\_P.\\_Bogaewsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikan_P._Bogaewsky)

Page 56

language sounds a bit louder to prove that you belong to the higher class of intelligentsia by speaking Russian. After all, what distinguished person would speak "jargon"? [1]

It is nothing to be proud of. And like a dense procession of demonstrators the company walks along Mikołajewska to the bridge to Nadretshne Street and the "Polkovoyen" [2] Bes-Midresh. The Jewish crowd of young people dressed up for Shabbat spread a cheerful laughter and hum of voices, and the eyes of the men flash to the hot looks of the girls.

I pass by the "Apollo"[3] theater and I am satisfied and proud of our elegant, lush Bialystok cinema with palm trees in the entrance hall; not even in the largest city would it have to be ashamed! And I have no doubt at all that the son of the owner, "Vaynshteyn" [Weinstein], the son-in-law of the well-known editor Pesach Kaplan and later owner of the "Apollo", committed suicide years later. He was so distressed by the cruelty of the Polish authorities, who had revoked his concession of the "Apollo" because he was a Jew.

And I would like to remember two other famous Bialystok Jews, Dr. Pines and Dr. Rubinshteyn. Dr. Pines, the ophthalmologist, was world famous, and people from the larger towns and the smallest villages flocked to his clinic.

When I was already living in Antwerp, I once met at my uncle's house Kalman Dimentshteyn, a diamond broker, a great Talmudist, a Jewish scholar. He was very modest and it turned out that he was the brother of the legendary Dr. Pines. I met Dr. Rubinshteyn by a strange coincidence when I suddenly became his assistant.

A woman in my family had a difficult delivery and suddenly, in the last push contraction, the baby was about to be born feet first. And not having an assistant at the last minute, my family "delegated" me to help sterilize the instruments and deliver a Jewish daughter.

So I witnessed the remarkable talent of our famous obstetrician, who turned the little creature (who was a girl) several times so that she would come head down into our sinful world. Yes, as you can see, man goes out with his head down at birth.

However, I cannot leave unmentioned the well-known store of electrotechnical articles of the German "Sherschmid", because of

[1] the Yiddish language was pejoratively referred to as "jargon“

[2] The term actually has something to do with "regiment" or "soldiers", here it seems to be a proper noun.

[3]see

[https://www.jewishbialystok.pl/Kinoteatr\\_Apollo\\_B.\\_Wajnsztadt,5401,3551?fbclid=IwAR114Dgf8qBL1weCIxNfSNWsWwopMOiDRwhITfYNTf8g3Rnb51kWJSjTZVE](https://www.jewishbialystok.pl/Kinoteatr_Apollo_B._Wajnsztadt,5401,3551?fbclid=IwAR114Dgf8qBL1weCIxNfSNWsWwopMOiDRwhITfYNTf8g3Rnb51kWJSjTZVE)

Page 57

a completely different matter.

The "fellow believers" of the "Shersmid" brothers (short shaved Germans with red necks), together with the "Volksdeutsche" and German Nazis, killed their fellow citizens and neighbors of Bialystok in flaming fire and a terrible fire catastrophe; sixty thousand Jews! If you leaf through the "Pinkas Bialystok", you will be confronted with the German anti-Semitic [ugly] face. One hundred and fifty years ago, when they administered Bialystok, they introduced the Prussian Jewish Regulations, which were in fact an Aryan Paragraph, or racial legislation.

Please forgive me, I accidentally jumped from the past to the present. But how many times will we have to face the bloody wind of the destruction of our city?

I continued my walk and now I am near the "Polkovoy" Bes-Medresh. How many times, after my father's death, I sneaked in there quietly and sadly to join a "minyem" [prayer quorum] and say "Kaddish"!

And the "Yisgadal v'Yiskadash" of the "Polkovoy" Bes-Medresh still rings in my ears, like a farewell Kaddish for all Bialystok. And the echoes of the Kaddish come to me from thousands of miles away, in long, vibrating tones of silent prayer and stifled crying.

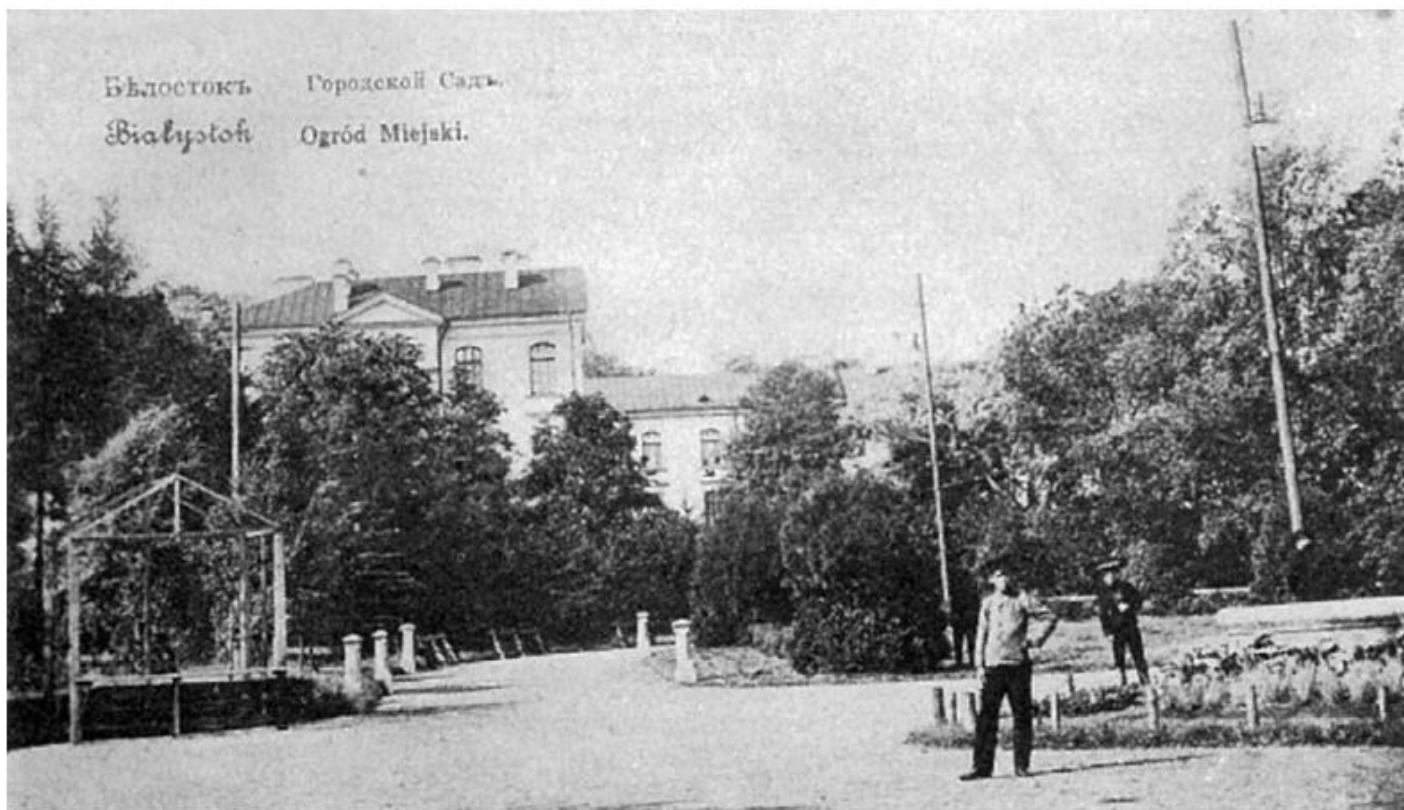
### **Romantic Evenings in the Bialystok City Park**

A writer is like a photographer, he photographs what his eye and brain perceive, whether it is the pious sounds of Jewish melodies from the old Bes-Medresh, or the night dreams of the lads sung with fresh blood. The writer may still "touch up" a little to give a clear picture, but it must be true, even if it is shocking to a pious, virtuous reader.

\*

The Bialystok City Park! How much longing, youthful dreams and sweet, romantic hours are woven into this name:  
Bialystok City Park!





### W OGRODZIE MIEJSKIM

Pierwszy białostocki Ogród Miejski (Gorodskoj Sad) z czarownymi alejami, drzewami i kwieciami. Miejsce dawnych radosnych „gulianies” (spacerów) i wieczornych romantycznych „swidanies” (spotkań).

*In the city's gardens – the beautiful, spacious lanes where the city's young men and women “chanced” to meet.*

source: [Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf \(wirtualnie.lomza.pl\)](#)



#### INNA CZĘŚĆ OGRODU MIEJSKIEGO

W tej części ogrodu grywano muzykę, dzieci tańczyły, a starsze pary beztrudnie spędzały letnie wieczory.  
W oddali widać budynki szkoły Joffego.

*Another section of the city's garden – where children romped about and music played and where older couples would spend a carefree hours in relaxation.*

Source: [Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf \(wirtualnie.lomza.pl\)](#)

The first awakening of young men's feelings is accompanied by a desire to dress up and a thirsty search for the one who will become the future bride. It is characterized by the fact that the eyes begin to wander over the young, innocent, shamefully blushing faces, with rapture make out the female bodies developing to maturity.

Bialystok girls in their first awakening of femininity and physical desire, still unconsciously and vaguely wrapped in night dreams, wake up and are aroused by the first kisses they receive in the quiet avenues of the sweet Bialystok City Park, planted with green, motherly trees.

The youth of Bialystok matured to the sound of music in the "gulyanyes", to the soft tones of the "vengerkas" and "mazurkas" [1,2], and tenderly sang Russian and Yiddish love songs in the Bialystok City Park, enveloped in the quiet corners of the evening darkness.

\*

Bialystok City Park is surrounded by four sides, four points and four contrasts.

In the background there is the important and busy industrial power plant, which supplies the whole of Bialystok with electric light and power for thousands of motors that drive the Bialystok textile factories and shower the world with Bialystok "karelekh" [cheap woolen cloth], "kastorke" [cloth for suits] and "drap" [chunky winter cloth].

On the second side, to the left of the city park, there is the famous "Yafe's School", which strives for "Russification", where every morning 240 Jewish boys immerse themselves in the sounds of the Russian language and Russian verses by [Alexander Sergeevich] Pushkin, [Mikhail Yurievich] Lermontov and the then famous poet [Semyon Yakovlevich] Nadson, who died young.

Opposite the entrance to the city park is the modern, semicircular "Hotel Ritz" with beautifully wallpapered rooms and the latest, most modern equipment: bathrooms with hot water, luxurious and elegant, like a hotel in a great spa. At the front, at the entrance, a doorman with golden buttons, like a general, opens the door and bows aristocratically.

On the right you can see the "Institut Blagorodnikh Dyevits", called "Insitut" for short. It is the Russian educational institution for the noble daughters of Russian military men, aristocrats and Russian "first guild" merchants. Every morning, as in a luxurious, elegant

[1] Vengerke [Vengerka, Hungarian dance]= a partner Folk Dance based on the Hungarian csárdás

{2} Mazurka= Polish Folk Dance

Page 59

prison, they go for their morning walk in the Institute's green, flowery garden, which is surrounded by a high fence. They [the daughters] look dreamily at the streets of Bialystok outside, at the cheerfully beckoning city park, from which so often seductive sounds of sentimental music emanate.

\*

Bialystok, Shabbat evening. The evening fights with the brightness of the day and is superior to it. Gray-blue streaks cover the sky and waving little stars jump out, like waving little fires in the restless night. The little stars are lighting themselves, more and more often and more brazenly. More and more of them are mysteriously dancing in the sky of Bialystok on Shabbat evening.

Dark silhouettes of lamplighters move around with boxes filled with lamps. In Khanayker- and Suraska Street they put ladders to the gas lamps, climb up, clean the sooty lamp glasses, and already red flames are waving from the gas lamps in the bluish Shabbat twilight.

But the showy streets, Lipowa, Gumienna, Mikołajewska and "Daytshishe" [German or Niemiecka] Street are already equipped with electric street lamps, and they sway, looking down haughtily from their tall electric poles, shining dry and distant with their cold electric light.

\*

In the summer of 1913, large posters were hung on the fences of Bialystok, bearing the signatures of the city's fathers: the head of the Russian government, police chief "rotmister" [captain] Pulan and the rabbi of the city of Bialystok, Dr. Yosef Mohilever, a grandson of the famous Zionist leader, Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever.

Colorful posters inform the citizens of Bialystok that in the evening in the "gorodskoy sad" [city park] there will be a "gulyanye" for the benefit of poor, needy students of the Bialystok "Commercial School", with music by a first-class military orchestra, confetti and streamers, and a grand finale with fireworks. And the main thing: it's fun for the children - "dyeti bezplatno", children are free.

Hundreds of young boys and girls meander along Lipowa and Nyemetski [Niemiecka, German] Street. They monkey about and peel fruit pits. Dressed up for Shabbat, they walk happily and contentedly to the Shabbat evening paradise, Bialystok City Park.



Hotel Ritz, source [Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf \(wirtualnie.lomza.pl\)](https://www.wirtualnie.lomza.pl/Ksiega-album-pamieci-gminy-zydowskiej-w-Bialymstoku-czesc-1.pdf)

Page 60

At the entrance to the "Gorodskoy Sad" [City Park] many people are standing close together, pushing impatiently, because they can

already hear the sounds of music, a sign that "it has already begun".

The ticket seller in his booth is irritated and yells, and the Russian policeman with the red nose of a drunkard and a sabre dragging behind him "makes order" by giving strong blows to the right and left and wiping his large, drooping moustache. The "barishnyes" [young ladies] stand tensely, proudly, holding their barrels, quietly showing that they are already grown up and well-behaved. The boys pay for the ladies' tickets, acting important and proud, in the manner of a gentleman.

It's "free for children," and little girls, poorly dressed, wipe their dripping noses with their sleeves, step on others' feet, get caught on ladies' dresses, lift their little heads and beg, singing:

"Take me in...take me in..."

They cling to the dress of a young lady who can't bring herself to refuse, because six or seven years ago she did exactly the same thing.

So the young lady takes a girl by the hand and "innocently" walks past the ticket seller in the booth, who looks suspiciously at the beautifully dressed "mom" and the snotty "daughter". He realizes the trick they are playing on him, but he plays dumb and lets them pass.

And as soon as the poor girl from Khanaykes or Piaski is "inside" with her one little foot, she tears herself away like a whirlwind, jumps happily on one leg and disappears into the wide avenues, forgetting even to thank her temporary "mother".

\*

The park is noisy. Two languages compete: proud, singing, romantic Russian and Yiddish - pleasantly maternal, hearty and charming, interspersed with local expressions, idioms and jokes.

In the middle of the avenues hang the white electric globular lamps, which look festive with their big, bright, milky light. The avenues are densely strewn with colorful confetti and long streamers. Loud conversations and peals of ringing, youthful laughter can be heard. Hundreds of boys and girls march slowly in wide, scattered rows. Most of them are schoolchildren. Eyes meet, shy and bold, waving and lowered, ardent and sober, young, curious and old, extinguished.

The different colored eyes are partly young, carefree or thoughtful, partly calm and older. They are bold eyes, thirsty or hungry, cold and apathetic. The noblest of them belong to the "golden youth", the studious youth.

There walk the students of the Women's Commercial School. They wear dark dresses with green decorated belts that tighten their young maiden bodies and accentuate their figures. Next to them are the students of the commercial school for men, dressed in smart suits with brass buttons, like Austrian Junkers. They come from the commercial school on Alexandrovske [Warsaw] Street, sponsored by the famous German textile manufacturer in Bialystok, Moes.

The "komersantn" [merchants] walk in blue uniforms with the "Kokarde" on their hats, an old insignia of "Mercury", the Greek god of merchants and thieves. The students of the secondary school walk stiffly and proudly, with yellow decorated hats and "Kokardes", often together with their colleagues, Christian realists, because the number of Jews in the secondary school is very small, given the "percentage rule", which is strict.

There are the Jewish merchant's sons of the Alexandrov Gymnasium, who speak a Russian interspersed with Jewish expressions. Very few are the students of the "Gorodskoye" [Municipal School] on Mazur Street, a school known in Bialystok for its Christian character and Christian prayers before the beginning of classes.

There is a mixture of students from high schools and middle schools, from "Shtsheglov", "Meltreger", "Druskin", "Gurevitsh" and "Lakhankas". (The Lakhankas gymnasium, located on the street "Behind the Prison", was turned into a German military hospital for the wounded during the First World War).

The students of the Yafes School walk elegantly. They tell jokes about their teachers Klyatshko, Lusternik and Tsipkin, especially about Zhmudskin, who is known as a Jewish anti-Semite...

And then there are the somewhat more modest pupils of the Gvirt's'es girls' school and the "amkho" [ordinary] Jewish children of the two-class elementary schools of Bibitski, Menakhovske, and Fridman.

A certain group of students differs greatly from the "pampered, white-handed" youth, and these are the students of the "Remeslenoye" [Artisans' School], who work in the textile, mechanical, and furniture workshops, and in whose language you will not find a single Russian

word.

Page 62

They speak in their native Yiddish, interspersed with a Hebrew quotation, with lively Jewish gestures, and from time to time you hear an extended Jewish folk song, still from their childhood, when their mother sang it while rocking the cradle.

\*

The sounds of the music echo far into the air. The musicians of the "Vladimirsk" and "Uglitsk" regiments are wearing dandy, shiny boots, trousers with white or red stripes, epaulettes and belts hanging from their shoulders. They look into the eyes of the conductor, who majestically waves his baton.

Aware of his importance, he greets them politely, bowing to the famous young ladies who pass by and with whom he often flirts during the intermissions.

The musicians' round, carved wooden pavilion is surrounded by a swarm of Jewish children who beat the music with their hands. At each break, they clamour, exclaiming their favorite musical pieces:

"Play 'Pa-despan' [Pas d'Espagne] or 'Padekoter' [Pas de Quatre]" and the handsome conductor with the thick, curly hair that our Jewish brothers often have responds good-naturedly:

"All right, children, it's all right, everything will be all right!"

From the fence of the city garden, noise and shouts penetrate. A crowd has gathered, a policeman has grabbed a barefoot, ragged boy and is leading him by the ear. The boy had taken the "free admission" at its word and crawled over the fence without a ticket. The Jewish youth, in a Shabbat mood, take pity on the unfortunate fence climber. They deliberately create a crowd around the policeman, pushing him from all sides, and in the general commotion the "criminal" breaks free and disappears, accompanied by the whistling of the irritated policeman and the general laughter of the "audience".

The musicians indulge in the intoxicating, swaying tones of the "Padekoter", "Vengerke", "Espan", "Pa-despan", "Polka-koketka" and "Mazurka". The main avenues that run from the entrance to the small fence gate opposite the power station are lined with rows of strolling young people. They march past the music pavilion, on which hangs a board with a printed program of the concert, mostly a classical repertoire of light dances and waltzes.



A light dust hangs in the air and settles on the already dusty gray shoes.  
Groups walk around. There goes a group

Page 63

of quite a few schoolgirls, a mixture of female high school students, and behind them a group of male students from the Alexandrov Gymnasium, dressed in dark blue, stiffly starched uniforms. The female students pretend to talk only to each other, but so loudly that the male students behind them can understand and interfere in their their conversation. They approach from behind on their high heels, interjecting to get to know each other better and perhaps, if the occasion arises, to arrange a date.

The girls behave dismissively. They respond with a bratty, so popular feigned anger:

"Nakhal! [Impudent man]!"

And, they laughingly top it off with feigned haughtiness:

"We don't accept street acquaintances!"

But the high school students walking in a group do not remain silent with admiration, but on the contrary react with chutzpah, and continue their "attack" until it is crowned with success. And after half an hour they are already walking together, diligently trying to outdo each other with Pushkin's declarations, flirting a little, full of wit, a little cynical and with ambiguous allusions to love.

The sky is already dark blue. Night is falling. In a side avenue, on the other side of the quiet, whispering river, opposite the Yafes School, couples sit on benches under trees with hanging branches, far from the hustle and bustle of the avenues. This side of the river is quiet. Young couples embrace each other passionately and silent kisses sigh out, swallowed by the distant echo of the music, which with its lyrical tones so romantically adorns the open young hearts when they are first excited by fantasy and hot young blood.

\*

The "gulyanye" is in full swing. The ladies of the "charity society" fly around like night butterflies in bright summer dresses, selling lottery tickets promising "golden luck": A Japanese tea set, a dinner service of "Severan" French crystal (both items probably came from Osher Topolski's glass shop), silver trays and wine cups.

All this is displayed on a table decorated with colorful ribbons and lit by colorful Chinese paper lanterns, and hearts beat with sweet excitement: Maybe their ticket number will be drawn and they will win? (I remember a curious incident when a cow was once raffled off

at a "gulyanye," a real flesh-and-blood cow. And the story goes that the winner was the beautiful Naya Vilner, now the wife of our famous

Page 64

compatriot, Dr. Khayim Shoshkes. And the Bialystok pranksters joked that everyone saw how the beautiful, elegant Nadya proudly led the cow by the rope and half of Bialystok followed her...

\*

It is almost 11 o'clock. The end of the "gulyanye" is approaching, but first comes the last attraction: fireworks! Various firecrackers and Bengal fire in the shape of a cross are attached to sticks. A dense crowd surrounds the square and in the general silence and expectation the fireworks are lit one after the other.

Brightly colored windmills rotate, spraying colorful fire upward. Like mills in a hurry, everything spins faster and faster, suddenly exploding into the air with a bang like colorful rockets. They sink into the blue, star-filled sky, where they explode with a final bang and are extinguished, swallowed by darkness.

The "gulyanye" in the city park is over. Visitors leave the park in groups, sometimes noisily, sometimes thoughtfully, and the park empties out.

Gradually, the white electric lights go out. A few couples remain, hiding in the corners of the park. There they sit in the darkness, tenderly embracing each other, unable to tear themselves away from this beautiful, romantic evening, the "gulyanye" in Bialystok's city park.



#### RZECZKA BIAŁA

Ruczka Biała przechodząca przez ogród miejski przecinała miasto przez całą szerokość. Od „Nowego” do Białostoczku. W oddali most, który znajduje się dziś w „Nowym”, na przedmieściach Białegostoku.

*The “Bialy” Lake which wound its way through the city’s gardens. The lake cut through the entire width of the city. In the distance may be seen the bridge located in “Novi”, a suburb of Bialystok.*

source: [Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf \(wirtualnie.lomza.pl\)](#)

## Types of Bialystok's Crazies and Eccentrics

Evening. The darkness of the night is spreading over Bialystok. Naughty little stars, impatient guests, jump into the sky much too early, waving their fiery little eyes at Mama Earth, my Bialystok.

There is a little commotion at home. Mama is wiping her nose with her apron. She is hot from closing the oven with the glowing coals and locking the door.

She wipes her flushed face, runs to the door again and again,

Page 65

sticks her head out and listens for footsteps in the street, waiting with motherly concern for me to come home. She mumbles to the street, but when she talks to my father, words come out of her mouth:

"The father doesn't care that his child is lost, such a cold person. It's so late and he's not here yet!"

Quietly, at the window, my father drums a military march from his military service in Bessarabia and smiles good-naturedly. He understands a mother's heart.

Finally, she sees me coming home with my satchel on my shoulder, flushed and hurried from running so fast. Mama throws herself at me:

"Where do you get lost for whole days? At four o'clock your school ends and now it's already eight!- He just walks around at random, but everywhere he finds something. Where there are two, he must be the third. He is curious about everything. Probably he's been standing and gawking at some crazy guy in town again."

This time my mother is right, she got to the point. It is my mad passion to keep an eye out for "crazy people", confused drunks and other derelicts on the streets of Bialystok.

\*

During the long winter nights in Bialystok, when the city was covered with white, freshly fallen snow, I used to lie under a warm blanket and relive, as if in a fever, dozens of images and types that I had experienced during the day or that had passed me by.

I lived permanently, almost like a moon addict, dreaming while awake, wandering the streets of Bialystok for hours in silence and thought. After school or on the festive Shabbath days, I automatically absorbed everyday life. Almost without realizing it, I absorbed the images, characters and scenes.

I followed and observed strange people, eccentric types, half-addled and maniacs, melancholics, official madmen, and the simply inexperienced, who were already slipping into the status of recognized, "madman of the city".

With my young mind and good child's heart, in my night

Page 66

visions I used to feel pity for the unfortunate ones, thinking of the miserable wandering madmen who had no roof over their heads: Where were they now, in the cold, snowy winter night? With what did they warm their starving bodies? What parts of their naked bodies were probably sticking out of their patched and torn clothes? There is something special about the naked human body, even when it is peeking out of worn beggar's clothes.

The creatures who have been rejected by God and man and who have lost their human appearance, who are victims of ignorance, hereditary diseases, alcoholism, and unrestrained human lust, are above all victims of the powerful ruler and tyrant of the world, the executioner and torturer, His Majesty, "Lord Hunger and Misery".

\*

Crazy people can be divided into categories and distinguished like writers: There are the "recognized" and the "non-recognized" who still have to "work their way up. There are those who have already reached "seniority" and are famous, and those who are still beginners but have already been eternalized.

There are the serious, dramatic and comic madmen, then those whose appearance evokes horror and portrays a tragic story or reveals a page full of human tragedy. There are madmen who make you laugh, entertain you, distract you and make you forget your own worries.

And the crazies whose condition indirectly drives you into a state of sweet selfishness because you're still okay: "Now look at that crazy guy - he's even worse off!"

How magnanimously beautiful and sublime, and how base and mean, a man can be when he finds comfort in the suffering of another. People who have learned to look into their own souls are often shaken by the destructive contrasts between the heavenly grandeur and the mean baseness that are so artfully united within us and in the same bundle of brain which we call "markh" [1] and the same tangle of feelings we call "neshome" [spirit, soul].

And now, writer, with your super ability to wrap tangled thoughts into an endless chain without stopping, disappear and remain an observer and painter. Become a calm portraitist, suppress your own emotions and, with the power of the magic word, evoke images and figures whose limbs are already resting under the ruins of your hometown..

[1] markh= marrow, in Lithuanian Yiddish, the meaning is "brain"

Page 67

### **Bendet, der Tshayner Yat** [1] [2]

Bendet is a tall, broad-shouldered Jew with a red, bloodshot face framed by a blond beard. His tipsy dark blurry eyes peer into the air. He walks shakily on his legs, which are stuck in dried-out, hard leather boots smeared with wagon grease.

He holds on to the rope tied around his belt and shouts in a hoarse voice that echoes down Gummienna Street and ends with a "nign"[melody]- a mixture of a psalm, a human groan and tears- due to the "bitter drop" [schnapps].

"Bendet is a Tshayner yat... אשרי האיש [blessed is the man]... a hardship [3] for bourgeois people ... למנצח מזמור שיר [a psalm song for the cantor]"

Bendet bawls half-singing, with snatches of psalms. And his hearty, serious face seems so immensely sympathetic that he is the darling of the mercantile Gumienna Street, where the bourgeois, the factory owners, the grocers, and the simple stick-turners [with irregular income] are very happy about him.

Bendet is not a "madman". He is an eccentric, curious guy, a combination of a hard-working Jew who thinks a lot about the Torah and quotes biblical verses, but also one who loves his glass of liquor and his horse.

Bendet is a proud Jew. His face expresses seriousness and self-confidence as he stands on Gumienna Street, next to Shoshkes' tobacco shop or Ferder's fur shop, waiting for a crate of goods to be carried away.

Next to Bendet, on the corner of Gumienna, Bishkele, the newspaper vendor, is busy walking around. He is so small that one third of his body is taken up by a dusty pair of leather boots, and the remaining two thirds by Bishke. He works hard, yelling obsessively and raining newspapers into receiving hands. At the same time, he throws his body like a juggler, nimbly pulling out a "Haynt," a "Moment," or a "Togblat," and, in search of scraps, letting his hand crawl into the large leather bag that takes up Bishke's entire belly.

Tall Bedet looks at little Bishkele with contempt, and disdain is [even] reflected on his face as he looks at him with his calm, typical "Bendet'ish" philosophical seriousness.

Bendet was not always a simple carrier. He was once a wagoner, the owner of his own horse, and he and his horse were always together, like a couple in love. And when Bendet

[1] „Tshayner“ or „Tsheyner“= Since there are no vowel signs, I don't know for sure which of the two variants it is. "Tsheyner" could derive from "sheyner" = "beautiful", but also from a family name, a city or from the Russian word for "black". I'm leaning toward "Tshayner", which could derive from "tshayne" = "tavern, tea-house".

[2] yat= The meaning of the term changed over time from "[fine] lad" to "rascal."

[3] nikhpe= Epilepsy, irascibility, disease

Page 68

would sip from his bottle, he would also give his mare a sip, and the horse would often be as drunk as its owner.

But when Bendet began to shout, singing his confused, psalm-like song aloud and leaning against the horse's head, the horse would usually close its eyes and turn its head away, as if to show its contempt for its master for not behaving as well as he should and making such a racket in the streets.

In a philosophical way, the horse also had a bit of Bendet in it, but as for Bendet's hoarse charivari, it behaved in a more dignified manner, as befitted a horse.

Bendet played politics with his horse and did not give it anything to eat, but accustomed it to his way of life, to get by on nothing but schnapps. Anyway, the horse did not have Bendet's indestructible health and could not stand it. He said goodbye to Bendet with his bottle and disappeared into the world of horses.

I just can't bring myself to say that Bendet's horse was anything like "croaked".

After the death of his beloved friend and breadwinner, Bendet began to pour huge amounts of alcohol into himself and wail with his "Bendetish" melody:

"שרי האיש" [Blessed is the man], I made my carrion a man, taught him the craft of fasting, is "למנצה מזמור שיר" [a psalm song to the cantor]... She finished her song and left, בגן עדן תהיה מנוחתה, [she will rest in heaven]...Bendet is a Tsheyner yat. It is a misery for the poor and a hardship for the bourgeois."

### **Blume, the Socialist**

To the group of only slightly crazy people, who were not yet very well known, belonged Blume. She was somewhat manic, dreamed of social justice and was a child of the Bialystok revolutionary years 1905-1907.

Very often she visited the textile factory family Moreyn on Bialystokshanke [Bialostoczanka Street]. Between the noise of the machines, the pounding of the steam looms and the heavy breath of the steam engine, Blume's voice could be heard, usually asking for a gift and demanding "justice" in the Moreyn's kitchen. What she got was very little. And when Blume looked at the alms on her hand, she always went out with the same "saying".

Her eyes began to flicker, her chest heaved,

and her squeaky voice spread out, drowning out the noise of the machines: "What, are you sick of not giving more? Do you really think



all this is yours?"

And switching to Russian, she continued to shout:

"Eto nie moyo, i nie tvayo. eto ikhnye. Rabotshye narabotali." (This is not mine and not yours. It is theirs, the workers have made it for you).

When she went out on Bialostoczanka Street, she would rant heatedly, ending her tirade with half-mad eyes:

"But I gave it to them!...I spared them nothing, those disgusting bourgeois people!"

And for a long time one could hear the angry voice of this unhappy soul, who did not know on whom to vent her anger, and who, exposed to the "revolutionary epidemic" that filled the air of Bialystok, demanded "social justice"....

### **"Plush Velvet" and the "Kalkher [Whitewasher] of the City Clock"**

Among the lunatics of Bialystok one can also count the two maniacs "Plush Velvet" and the "Kalkher of the City Clock".

"Plush Velvet" was a madman who was attracted to girls in plush or velvet dresses. When he saw a woman in plush or velvet, he would run after her and just have to stroke her coat or dress. Of course, the girl would squeal in fright and run away, and he would not stop running after her until he could touch her.

The men were very amused and perhaps sexually aroused by this. Many admitted with a laugh:

"This 'plush velvet' is not that crazy! You can count on him, he knows what he wants!"

The "Kalkher of the town clock" was a gaunt, thin man with sunken cheeks and feverish eyes. Every Monday and Thursday he would appear on the "Bremelekh" with a ladder and a bucket of lime, calmly and earnestly place a ladder against the town clock amidst the general throng of "Breml" merchants and passers-by, and set about whitewashing it.

Under the general laughter of the "Breml" [1] merchants, who were very happy about the free "attraction", the rushing police

[1] It is apparently the area around the clock tower, where there were many Jewish stores in whitewashed cottages ["Bremelekh"] standing in rows.



ZEGAR MIEJSKI (Kołancza)

W centrum naszego drogiego Białegostoku z dumą wznosił się nasz własny drapacz chmur – zegar miejski, gdzie na górze, na balkoniku, dniem i nocą w kółko przechadzał się strażnik, „ochotniczy strażak” z binoklem. Wypatrywał pożaru, by od razu zadać w trąbkę i wybrać numer „uczastka”. Młodzi białostoccy strażacy udawali się na ratunek żydowskim „posiadłościom”, a nieraz też ratowali Żydom życie.

*The town clock – In the center of the city towered the “Białystoker Skyscraper” – the Town Clock, atop of which a fire-warden with a set of binoculars was on the lookout 24 hours a day, scanning the city and surrounding territory for any fires.*

source: [Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf \(wirtualnie.lomza.pl\)](#)

Page 70

could only with great difficulty keep the volunteer amateur from beautifying our popular town clock.

### **The Białystok "Messiah"**

I walk through the streets of Białystok. I am drawn to the "big shul" [Wielka Synagoga], where on festive Shabbat days the big electric light shines through the colorful windows and cheerfully illuminates the whole synagogue courtyard, which is filled with dressed-up Jewish youngsters and girls who quickly seize the opportunity to flirt before their father comes out of the shul and they have to be back home for father's kiddush.

Groups of people stand around. A group of Jews has formed, laughing and joking around a tall, pious Jew. He wears a beard that swings as he prays and gestures with his hands, gazes up at the sky with his eyes, and talks as fast as if he doesn't want to miss a minute:

"The Messiah is already here....Be aware, Jews! Be aware, Jews, that the Messiah is already here!"

And as he passes by the people around him, he speaks as softly as if he were announcing a great mystery to them:

"I am the Messiah! But this must not yet be made known. Hush, sh...sh....! I am the Messiah!"....

The Jews around him make fun of him, cracking jokes and asking, "Reb Mikhel! When are you going to lead us to the Land of Israel?" Then the Jew, with his wandering eyes turned to heaven, bends to them once more and says quickly:

"Soon! The time is near! Soon the end of the days will be revealed! The right moment...the redemption..."

The children, dressed up for the holiday, push him, laugh, tear at his clothes and shout:

"Messiah! Messiah!"...

A young man approaches the Messiah, takes him by the hand and says sternly:

"Reb Mikhel, go home! They are already waiting for you at home with the Kiddush!"

With his head raised, the Messiah disappears, his eyes gazing far into the sky, as if reading something in the dark blue clouds. One Jew says to another:

"What a heartbreak about that Jewish merchant! After all, the Mikhl Grodzenski has a furniture store, there, across from the old Bes-Medresh. But when his crazy impulse gets the better of him, he thinks he's the Messiah."

"Is that a miracle?" replies the other Jew, "when a people has been dreaming of the Messiah for two thousand years, everyone gets the idea that he is a bit of a Messiah...Everyone thinks in his own way that he is the Messiah...even the socialist and the Zionist!"

And the Jew ends his speech with a sigh, "Who knows which one of us is clear, and which one is crazy?"

### **„Alyampas“**

One of the main "stars" of the Bialystok madmen was the well-known "Alyampas". Small he was, with short, coarse feet, with a large, coarse, swollen belly and a round, big, puffy head, which grew in on his broad shoulders. His narrow, dull eyes gave the impression of a snarling, wild beast, and his voice resembled one of the oink of a pig. He had developed a system of "mooching".

He would lie down on the ground next to a shop (usually in the "Bremlekh") and begin to roar wildly. And while stamping his red, bare, swollen feet, he would repeat one word without stopping,:

"a kopek...a kopek....a kopek..."

"Alyampas" always arranged it so that he would lie on the threshold of the shop, so that no one could enter. And the lady shopkeeper, shouting and scolding, could not help giving him a kopek. As soon as he got his kopek, he looked at it carefully. His dull eyes shone with an expression of triumph, and, without a word, he stole away to another shop to do the same trick again.

There was something hulking, animal in his coarse, chunky red half-naked body. Only the dull, wild, cunning eyes showed signs of a stubborn will to live, like a primitive, coarse wild animal.

### **„Shmaye“**

A famous lunatic in Bialystok was Shmaye. Everyone knew him. He was an unhappy, bitter madman, and children made his life a misery. But he did not owe them anything.

Shmaye was a mad beggar, a privileged one. He used to go to the rich houses of textile manufacturers and merchants, to trading houses and large stores.

His appearance was comical. He was small, with a long, wide suit coat that reached down to his knees, and his pockets were full of sugar and bread. One of his eyes was always closed, distrustful, as if he was looking at you with suspicion and could not clearly assess your intentions.

The children used to run after him, stooping in front of him and tugging at his wide, unbuttoned skirt tails from behind, shouting at him:

"Shmaye with the fiddle,  
play me a lidl [song]!"

He usually walked crossly and sullen, with one shoulder slumped forward, and would suddenly throw a stone from the pavement in the direction of the children, while growling with his half-closed eye:

"I want to split your heads...crooks!..."

Girls and women trembled before Shmaye, who had the fault to approach them and lift their clothes. Squealing, they fled from him, to the great amusement of the passers-by.

Shmaye was a madman and a songwriter. He had a penchant for cantorial prayers. When we lived on Gumienna Street in Ganyandzkin's yard, above Khashe Goldshteyn's cloth store, and our back door faced the "Rokhe the Shvartser" Alley, Shmaye used to go into the corridor with his "famous colleague, Sane", and give a concert of cantorial prayers.

He had a penchant for "yomim-neroimdike" [1] prayers. I used to sneak quietly into the stairwell area and listen to Shmaye's concert. There was really a change in him. He was unrecognizable. His face lit up. His suspicious half-closed eye opened, and a naive smile appeared on his otherwise always malevolent lips.

He instructed Sane to sing the cantor's accompaniment. He himself devoted himself to the [songs] on Rosh Hashanah, "Kevakorat Ro'eh Edro...[As a shepherd guards his flock]" [2].

And Sane used to echo him:

"Kevakorat, kevakorat..."

Shmaye's hoarse voice rose to the high notes of the melodies of the Days of Awe.

[1] yomim-neroimdik= Full of fear and trembling with anxiety, for it is the 10 Days of Awe before Yom Kippur

[2] בבקרת רועה עדו, excerpt from the haftarah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashannah, from Jeremiah, 31:10

And when it soared to very high notes, his voice sounded strangely wild and weird, like the howling of a miserable dog at midnight. Outside, a crowd of listeners was already gathering to open the closed door of the corridor to enjoy Shmaye's concert.

Usually Shmaye would interrupt his "singing", run out angrily and disappear. His "singing" made a strange impression on me. Something resonated in his hoarse prayers with his weeping, dog-like yowling - a kind of Jewish groaning, not just a bitter heart poured out because of his personal fate, but a kind of Jewish lament that united the mad son of his people Israel with the whole Jewish people. Thus, although he was a madman, he was still a Jew whose entire madness disappeared in contact with Jewish prayer, as if this very madman felt the tragic fate of „madness“, poverty and a dog's life. Who can crawl into the soul of a madman? Especially, a mad Jew?

### **"Bobtshe with her Children"**

The well-known "Bobtshe with her children" was a strange type of a feeble-minded and mentally ill person. She was small in stature, in her early thirties, a round, plump, big-breasted woman with a good, childishly foolish, awkward smile, with a certain feminine charm, which in today's modern world would be called "sex appeal".

She was always out and about with her two children, running from shop to shop asking for alms. She was always good-natured and smiling, and her full, voluptuous lips expressed a kind of joie de vivre. Almost always barefoot, she held her children by the hands, who looked contented [1] from their soiled faces. Bobtshe didn't even know who their father was. Often pregnant with another child, she was the object of jokes and ridicule by the grocers, who usually asked her with a laugh:

"Bobtshe, what is it? Are you pregnant again?"

[1] literally "batamt", tastefully, tasty

Then Bobtshe would charmingly draw out each word, sharply accentuate each sentence, as is characteristic of a Bialystoker, and answer quickly, good-naturedly, and unaffectedly:

"May cholera strike those Khanaykover scoundrels! They put me in a stable! May a disease take them away!"

The grocers would then laugh cackling and ask more:

"Well, Bobtshe, why did you let it happen? Why didn't you call for help?"

Bobtshe would always give a simple answer with the same good-natured smile, while looking into the distance, as if trying to understand her own words:

"Because the disaster knows it. Because I love it." [1]

And, "the disaster knows it; I love it" was a popular saying in Bialystok, and many did not even know that this naive, simple, honest answer, in which there is so much frank truth that rarely a woman dares to say, came from the crazy Bobtshe.

But Bobtshe was a passionate mother. She spent every penny she got, every piece of cake, every bit of cooked food on her children. And once, when two gypsy women were pressuring her to buy the children from them, she screamed for help so loudly that people ran together and the gypsy women barely escaped with their lives.

There was something of a quiet grace, motherliness, of Jewish spirit and naive, vague philosophy of life in this miserable, run-down woman and mother, who did not even understand her tragedy, but accepted everything with a good-natured smile. Her imbecility was like a serum to not have to comprehend the magnitude of her drama.

**"Asara Dibraye" [The Ten Commandments]**

An exact opposite type of a tragic mental patient was the popular "Asara Dibraya". Her madness was actually based on a personal life drama that brought her to this state.

The [real] name of "Asara Dibraya" was Sore Kaplan. She was the sister of the well-known Bialystok editor Pesach Kaplan, who after her death inherited her small wooden house on "Nayvelt" [Nowy Świat], not far from Bialostotshanske [Bialostoczanka].

[1] in Yiddish: "az der brokh veyst dos. az ikh hob dos lib".

Sore Kaplan was the victim of a love tragedy, the plot of which could be the material for a theatrical drama. Sore, who was beautiful and educated in her youth, had an intimate love affair for a long time with a student whom she supported financially and to whom she was faithfully devoted.

She loved the student with all the passion of a young, Jewish-Russian, sentimental, romantic girl. But the student, having finished his studies to become a doctor, fell in love with another girl and married her. Wanting to forget her lover, Sore decided to marry another. But under the chupah, she realized the full tragedy of a romantic girl about to marry a man she does not love.

Her love for the former bridegroom burst forth in her with strong passion, and unable to bear it any longer, she went mad under the chupah.

She was not completely insane, but, as they say in French, "déséquilibre" [unbalanced]. In Yiddish, they say: she lost her balance, the control over herself.

She walked the streets of Bialystok finely dressed, always in black or dark clothes, often with a black veil over her face. She walked erect, stiff and proud, with a face that was always thoughtful and excited. She talked to herself as she walked, and that's why she was nicknamed "Asara Dibraya".

She had a little girl living with her, whom she raised in her own way. It was tragicomic to see her dressing the little ten-year-old girl in dark clothes with a veil over her face. But when the melancholy left her, in normal moments she became a philanthropic lady, going to parties and weddings to collect money for the poor and doing many humane good deeds.

I often watched her. How she walked with quick steps and talked to herself, often gesticulating, getting more and more agitated as she talked. But her stiff, proud figure and dark clothes inspired respect, compassion and pity.

**"Shoye-Toye" or "Byedni David s'Semyeystvos" [Poor David with his Family]**

Shoye-Toye was an urban figure in Bialystok. On busy weekdays or Shabbat afternoons, Shoye-Toye used to stand leaning



against the corner of a wall on Vashlikover [Vasilkowska] or Gumyener [Gumienna] Street and hand out leaflets from the then "silent" movie theaters "Vyes Mir" on Vasilkowska Street or "Modern" on Lipowa Street. Later [he distributed leaflets] from the "Apollo" and the "Palace Theater" or from a festive Shabbat "gulyane" [1] of a popular Bialystok city park immersed in green trees.

Tall he was, scrawny, with one side sunken in, a paralytic. His beetroot-colored, half-crooked face had an awry mouth and a pair of dull, empty, expressionless eyes, typical of paralyzed people. His paralyzed leg was leaning against the corner of the wall, and his half-paralyzed hand was carefully pulling out the playbill with its fingertips, carefully groping so as not to give out, kholile [God forbid], two playbills.

One had become so accustomed to the sight of Shoye-Toye that something was missing if one did not see his stooped figure leaning against the wall. Probably also because he was the messenger of news from the cinemas and places of accommodation, announcing that today in "Roskosh" Park, in "Tsertl's Forest" or in the city park there is a "gulyanye", where you can take your "barishnye" [lady] in for free, because today is "Damy Besplatno" [Ladies Free]...

Shoye-Toye was a Jew with many children, and when a Bialystok Jew, a joker, once asked him cynically, "David, why do you make so many children?" David stammered, struggling to pronounce the words more clearly as his red cheeks blushed even more:

"What... should I do? Making... children is what I do for a living."

This was no joke, for his large number of children was indeed a means of earning an income. He had himself photographed with his wife and nearly half a dozen children: Shoye-Toye with his wife in the center and around them his children, with bright, spirited [2] eyes, haughty little noses, and in a proud pose, as if they were royal children of the tsar, standing around their famous father.

The sale of this family picture provided him with extra income. There was not a single Jewish house on Khanaykes, Piaskes, or Suraska Street where the litographic reproduction of the family photograph of Shoye-Toyve with his family, covered with flyspeck, did not hang, pinned to the wall.

Apparently, the flies

[1] Place to stay and diversion such as city parks, event

[2] literally „peppered“

Page 77

had little respect for Shoye-Toye and his family members and took care of their needs right next to the large Russian inscription "Byedni David s'Semyeystvos" (Poor David with his family).

I was very close to Shoye-Toye because we lived in a stone house together with Shoye-Toye's sister, "Sheyne the Molyerke" [1].

I was a frequent guest at all our neighbors' houses. There one had to read the agenda of the Russian court, such as a tax notice or a criminal record, because the gutter or the "privy" had not been cleaned, because one had "disturbed the order" ("narushenye poryadka"), or one had quarreled with the neighbor. One was also held responsible by society for having caused suffering to an animal ("pokrovytelstvo zhyvotnikh"), for having killed a cat or a dog.

If one had to write a Russian letter or a Yiddish letter with a non-Jewish address, one always turned to "Yankel the Teacher" [me].

I was "the little one" who couldn't even reach the table, and I was very popular with my neighbors. Love was mixed with respect. And, strangely enough... the whole "gallery" of neighbors, various types of rough, simple and uncouth people, without education and manners, those cobblers, tailors, porters, packers, coachmen, adapted.

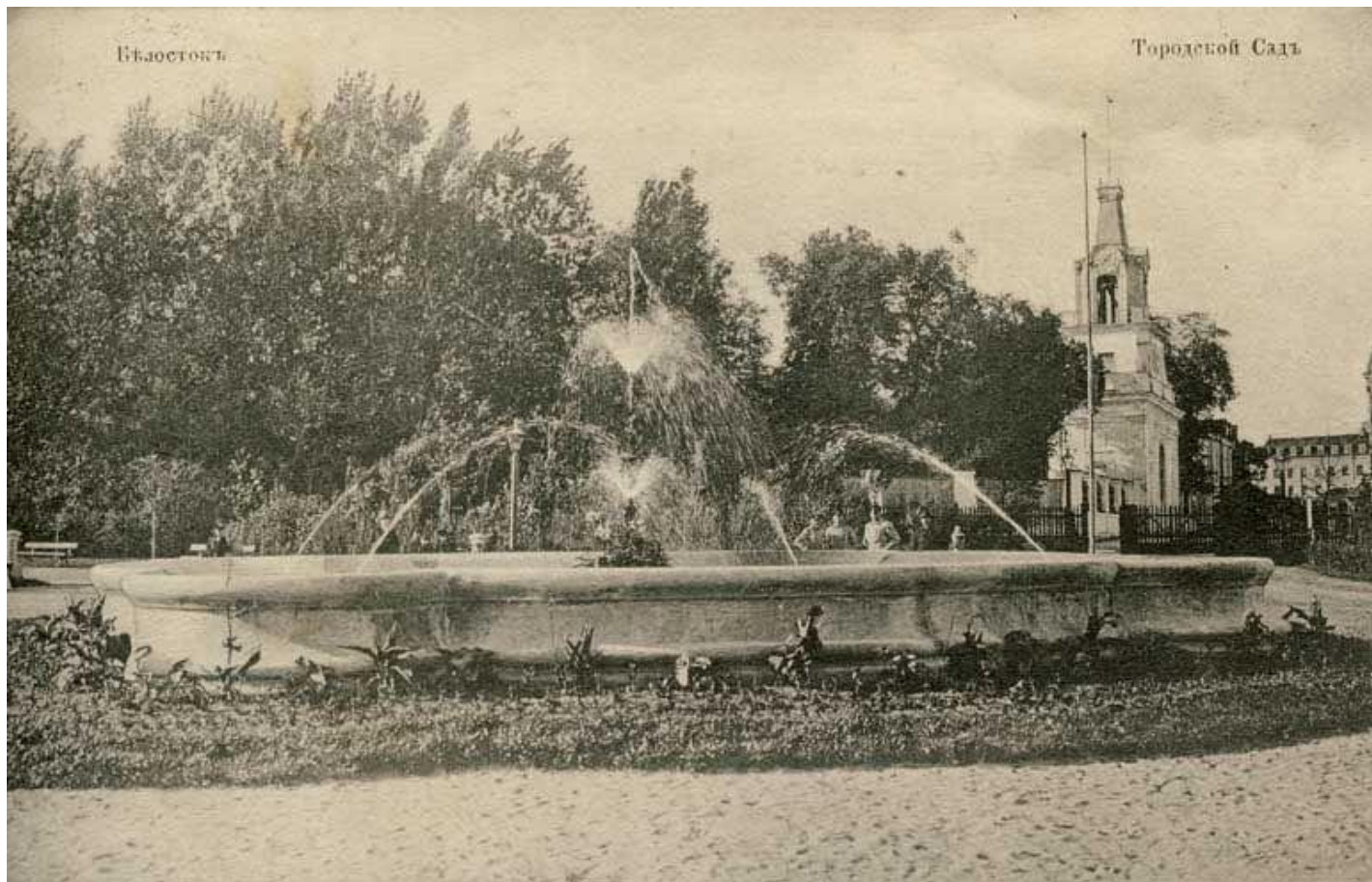
They spoke to me in a tone of exaggerated courtesy, with a stilted posture, a warm smile, and selected noble words. The very people who were accustomed to using coarse language in their colloquial speech, peppered with cynical expressions, avoided any coarse language when speaking to me.

By the way, among our neighbors we had the family of "Lyalke the Izvoztshik", whose mother and son are now in New York, the latter being a member of the "Bialystok Friends Club". I remember how I always admired the tall, stocky figure of the burly Lyalke the Izvoztshik.

He had red cheeks, a brown face, a wrinkled neck, and a pair of coarse, powerful fists that marked the type of a bold, daring, and strong Jew who knew no submission. If necessary, he would deliver a powerful blow to the gentile's teeth if he dared to show "Esau's hands" or mock a "parkhati zhid" [mangy Jew].

He belonged to that race of Jews who, together with the Jewish workers, excelled in "samoobrone" (self-protection) when it came to sacrificially defending Jews in the dark "Shabes nakhmu" [the Shabbat Nachamu pogrom, the Shabbat after Tish'a B'av] and in the bloody Bialystok pogrom.

[1] molyarke= maybe from „mulyarske“, the bricklayer’s



Mieski Park, Old Bialystok, photo courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski



Famous city parks in Białystok around 1929 [with the Hotel Ritz], photo courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski



photo courtesy of Dr. Tomek Wisniewski



photo courtesy of Tomek Wisniewski

Page 78

But I also remember other neighbors who represented the specific types of poor Khanaykes.

Katshalski, the painter, a man of medium height, always smiling, with thick hair and a slightly graying forelock, and his wife, Maryashke, a beauty with a tall, slender, aristocratic figure, with shiny hair as black as pitch, which surrounded a constantly laughing face, which seemed to be "felt-turned," as if shaped by a sculptor. In a milieu of hopelessness, despondency, withered faces, and perpetual worry marked by poverty, she was a contrast like a blossoming flower among yellowed, trampled autumn leaves.

Shmuel Kamenetski, or Shmuel the Shoemaker, was a small, hunchbacked Jew with a short, round-shaven beard. He loved the khaynaykover bes-medresh, was in love with all the khazonim [cantors], and sang all the festive Shabbat prayers at work, to which he would beat the time with a small hammer, tapping the nails in his shoes, which he held in his mouth.

The smell of softened leather and beet stew, which his wife cooked in a large milk pot before Shabbat for the entire week, constantly wafted through the house.

His wife Khaye, a small, skinny Jewess, dealt in chickens and offal and carried a basket of kosher-slaughtered poultry. Always smiling, she thanked the Creator of the World for the mercy he showed her.

But when Shmuel the Shoemaker flew into a rage at one of his two sons- both tall, handsome boys with biblical names, Yisroel and Yakev- the crooked, hunchbacked shoemaker did not even bother to get up from his little bench, but threw a shoe or a kopek at his son's face, screaming with bloodshot eyes:

"Obezhane [Monkey!]...a disaster shall befall you!"

One of Shmuel the Shoemaker's sons, Yakev, later became my student, and I prepared him for the "Remeslenoye" [Artisan's School]. He grew up to be a handsome, intelligent, well-read fellow with good manners, and later became a clerk in the Bialystok "Jewish Bank" on Kilinski Street, which was next to the editorial office [of the newspaper] "Dos Naye Lebn".

Closest to me, however, was Enye-Bashe, Hersh Fisher's daughter, a girl of thirteen, a year older than me. She gave me my first lesson in "innocent love" by pushing me against the wall and kissing my face. And when she burned me with her young, blossoming girlish body

Page 79

she made me feel so wonderful that I didn't know what was happening to me, because my little heart was pounding and I was filled with a feeling of unknown pleasure and shame, as if I were doing something forbidden.

She was the first to open my eyes to the fact that there is a difference between boys and girls and an incomprehensible but so sweet happiness that lies hidden within her young, beautifully formed girlish limbs.

Shoye-Toyve's sister, Sheyne di Molyerke, was a short, plump, red-cheeked woman with a noble face. Goodness and softness flowed from her every word. I was very fond of her. She was a "good neshome" [good soul] and always ready to do favors for her neighbors, not considering that she herself was in need.

I kept thinking about the contrast between Shoye-Toyve and his sister. Anyway, I remember an episode which illustrated to me somewhat the type of Sheyne the Molyerke, but also gave me a terrible picture of the manners and scenes of the Khanaykes of that time. For it was a quarter that stood out from the other streets, full of unusual types that only the Khanaykes quarter knew, types that fit so well into the group of unusual types of Bialystok at that time.

In the corner of Mirkes-Shayes Street there was a small alley with a name that did not fit at all into the customs of the alley. It was called "Tikhe Gas" (the Silent Alley). One half of this narrow alley looked like a painting by Marc Chagall, with small, crooked houses, curved roofs and dirty courtyards, full of narrowness, suffering and hardship.

The other half was a nest of streetwalkers, thieves, and fences.

On the corner of the "Quiet Street" there was a wooden house that served as a tavern, selling beer, hard-boiled eggs, pickled cucumbers, fried fish on "pulumislekh" [large plates] - and secretly under the counter also a glass of "Sorokovke" vodka from a [government] "Monopol" bottle, or a "forty" Russian liquor, for the sale of which one had to pay "special guild dues".

The innkeeper, "Leyzerke the Shenker [Innkeeper] ", was famous throughout Khanaykes. He was a Jew with a pointed yarmelke [skullcap] and a goatee, with curly, frizzy forelocks over his ears, and a brown, dirty "tales-kotn" [a fringed undershirt] with "tsitses" [ritual fringes] dangling down to his boots, which were rubbed with shiny blue cod-liver oil.

Page 80

Leyzer the Shenker [Innkeeper] was the owner as well as the waiter and servant of his "high class" guests: smart, garishly primped young people with boastfully twirled mustaches. Their heads were smeared with shiny black fixing pomade, and they wore silk shirts with colored rubber bracelets, black shoes with reflective lacquer, and gold signet rings on their hands.

These were the professional railroad gamblers, "aristocrats" of their "trade," who used to cheat at card games on the railroad. When they picked up a "yold" [1] or a "frayer" [2], they "pestered" him and, to use the language of crooks, robbed him of his "mamtakem" [money].

Among these "shady" young men were also pickpockets and burglars [thieves] in houses with their helpers, who looked out for "black goods" watched during the theft, and then helped to hide the "goods" in a "maline" [hiding place] 3].

And this whole gang of criminal types was grouped around a group of laughing "ladies," garishly made-up prostitutes with cynically perky movements and disheveled hair. They wore sheer, flowered dresses with wide-open, unbuttoned tops, and their exposed breasts wobbled in the large necklines. Their short dresses revealed their legs, bare above the knee.

Leyzerke would run into the courtyard to attend to his human needs. He would return impetuously, but with tiny steps, to the kitchen to practice the ritual of "nail water" [4] with the copper "kvort," [4] overzealously wiping his hands in the long tail of his caftan, and quietly



whispering the "Asher-yotser" [5]. Then, with a pious mien, he would serve his guests and, with half-closed eyes, count with sweet pleasure the copper, dark-stained "ditkes" and "tsenerlekh" [6].

Leyzer the Shenker, exactly the same type as the pious Jew from "Yankel Shapshovitsh" [7], was an "authority", an exceptional type, a local celebrity. In an incomprehensible way, his piety and strict religious habits were combined with the boisterous environment of thieves, fences, thugs armed with knives and prostitutes of the lowest kind.

Once it happened that the Jewish porters and packers of Leyzer got drunk and got into a fight. The two protagonists were the husband of Sheyne the Molyerke (Shoye-Toye's brother-in-law), who, depending on the season, worked sometimes as a bricklayer and sometimes as a porter, and another porter, his bloody rival.

In order to settle the dispute in a serious way, two "duellists" went to the yard of Mirke the Kremerke [grocer], in the street that was actually popularly known

[1] "yold" = [„klezmer jargon“] = a "yokel" or "husband"

[2] "frayer" = slang, a punter

[3] In this paragraph there are several words of the so-called "rogue language" [klezmer jargon], I am not quite sure if my translation of individual words is quite correct

[4] "opgish negl-vaser mit der kuperner kvort" = The ritual practice of washing hands with the copper "kvort", a container with two handles for ritual washing of the hands

[5] Asher-yotser [Asher-yatzar] = Blessing to be pronounced after accomplishing natural needs. By the way, in Yiddish the name for toilet paper is "asher-yotser papir"

[6] "ditkes un tsenerlekh" = three-kopeck coins and 10-unit silver money

[7] Yankel Shapshovitsh from Sholem Asch's "God of Vengeance."

as "Mirke's Street". They closed the gate of the surrounding wall and immediately began a fight with steel, shining knives, a brawl to the death and life.

Sheyne the Molyerke also managed to get into the courtyard to help her husband, and with all her impetuosity she threw herself wildly at her husband's opponent, striking him on the temples with a stone.

The whole of Mirke and Shaye Streets came together, for it was the middle of the day. But no one dared to enter Mirke's yard to tear apart the two Jews who were competing for a morsel of bread and a shot of liquor to wash down their sorrows. Their constantly suppressed bitterness and their vulgar, degenerate environment could lead to severe beatings and bloodshed, which are so repugnant to the Jewish character.

Later, when the two wings of the gate were pushed open, the two Jewish porters were seen there with their heads covered with blood, and Sheyne di Molyerke, the good, noble, hearty Sheyne, was still standing there with a stone in her hand, hammering it on the bloody head of her husband's opponent.

It was then that I understood the intricacies of the human soul, and what suppressed feelings of need, suffering, and despair can do to a quiet person when they turn into burning, raging anger.

We often see this in outbursts of popular hatred, a spontaneous revolutionary convulsion of suppressed rage that turns the silent, dejected "Bontshe Shveig" [1] into a wild, bloody beast.

### **Tanchum and the Songs**

Tanchum was the favorite of the "Bremlekh". He spent much time there. In the warm summer months, the grocers of the "Breml" would stand by the doors of their shops, "breathing in" the life of the streets and spending time with Tanchum, enjoying his singing and good-natured jokes.

The women, the splashed, pot-bellied grocers of the "Breml", would put their hands together under their aprons and keep an eye on the charming, amiable and cheerful man who was the half jester and half madman of the city.

Tanchum was slender, taller than average, with a noble face and canny, lively, yet dreamy eyes under his tangled, unkempt chestnut hair.

His elastic body, which swayed in his gait

[1] Bontshe Schweig, a Jewish folk legend written by Yitskhok Leyb Peretz

Page 82

as if he were a drug addict or an opium smoker, gave a special grace to his movements. He always spoke in a way that was partly joking, partly noble and almost feminine soft, for he had a light tenor and loved his "craft" of amusing his audience.

He sang cantatas and folk songs or chatted with the "Breml" grocers, who were bored on weekdays without sales. They would sit by their doors and Tanchum would be a free attraction for them, driving away their evil thoughts of the Polish sequestrator and the taxes and the creditors with their promissory notes.

Tanchum walked around in the middle of the Breml like a popular actor sure of his success with the public. Nobody thought of him as a madman, but only as a town jester, a joke-maker, a kind of Bialystok "Hershele Ostropolyer" [1], endowed with the strange ideas of a madman.

Even his tattered suit-a gift from a generous Jew-with the long trousers that clashed and wrinkled on top of the torn, shoe-waxed shoes with holes in the sides, nestled tastefully and charmingly against him. If Tanchum had been dressed in an elegant suit and taught a few "salon manners," he would have looked like an elegant "heartbreaker" and movie star in Hollywood.

Tanchum was in love with his watch, a yellow, scuffed, copper watch with a big face that hung on a rusty nickel chain.

Every few minutes, he would proudly pull it out of the top pocket of his jacket and hold it anxiously to his ear. When he heard the "tick-tock," his face would smile happily, and he would wave mischievously and contentedly at the women, as if to say that his watch was already a [household] appliance, and he would proudly and carefully put the watch back in his pocket.

The women were delighted with their favorite, and when they began to ask him to serenade them, he would stand in the middle of the "Breml" so that all could hear him. He would raise his head and fix his eyes on the top of the city clock, lengthen a nign [melody] from a prayer to the "Yomim-Neroim" [2] that he had heard in elementary school, or, while tapping his foot to it, sing one of the folk songs that the Bialystok youth used to sing when they walked along the "Green Alley" in the Bialystok city forest with its dense trees on summer evenings.

Tanchum would never ask for money, oh no! He was proud. If he was given something, he would shyly and quietly put it in his pocket, smile quietly and dreamily, and not even say thank you.

[1] [YIVO | Ostropolyer, Hershele \(yivoencyclopedia.org\)](http://YIVO.org/Ostropolyer,Hershele)

[2] Yomim-Neroim/Yamim-Noraim, the Ten Days of Awe

Page 83

But Tanchum's main attraction was to tell how he had been freed from Polish military service. This was his "royal role" that made him famous. And it was based on real facts confirmed by the "prizivnikes" [conscripts]. Namely, they were present at the comic scene in the Polish "uzhond voyskovi" [recruitment office] at the "komisya poborova" [military commission]. And my acquaintance, who also had to register [for the draft] at that time and witnessed Tanchum's appearance before the military commission, also confirmed this.

And this is the story:

On a hot, summer day in July, Tanchum received a draft notice to join the military. Tanchum scratched his ear and said with a smile: "The hell I will serve him, that Polish crook!"

On the day Tanchum reported, hundreds of young people marched to "Old Shoyseyner Street", where in a large, whitewashed wooden building the Poles had designated the place for the registration of new recruits to the Polish Army.

In the large, rectangular barracks, about 50 young, half-naked people had lined up. They had taken off their shirts and wore only trousers. They were gentile peasant boys from the village, giggling, coughing, blowing their noses, and spitting on the ground, and Jewish youths from Bialystok, with sunken chests and narrow shoulders. Among the latter was Tanchum.

By the large window, next to the table, sat the other members of the military commission. A short, gray colonel with the red face and red nose of a drunkard, with a drooping Piludski moustache, and a young lieutenant dressed like a dandy, with white-manicured nails and a bold, leering look.

His freshly shaved face with a cheeky, haughty nose expressed contempt. Also sitting [there] was a plainclothes clerk with quick, short-sighted eyes. With his eyes squinted behind his glasses, he held each form up to his nose and looked at it for a long time.

When it was Tanchum's turn, the colonel examined him carefully. He had been born in Bialystok and could speak a broken Yiddish with "coarse reysh" [1]. Tanchum seemed familiar to him, even though he was half-dressed. Tanchum was standing beside the table, and behind him, in a long line, were Jewish youths from Bialystok, curiously awaiting the "spectacle" of Tanchum's enlistment, their faces beaming, forgetting their own worries.

{1} the letter " ר " [r]

Page 84

The nearsighted clerk read Tanchum's name on the form, and the dandy lieutenant raised his head haughtily at Tanchum and asked: "What do they call you? What is your name?"

Tanchum moved a little closer to the table, bent his head to one side, stared at the ceiling with his eyes wide open, and began to sing:

"Friday evening,  
every Jew is a king,  
in every corner there is laughter  
in every corner there is merriment..."

A loud laugh came from the row of conscripts. The Polish lieutenant rose to his feet, a wild rage in him, and he was about to grab Tanchum by the throat. But then the old Polish colonel, who understood Yiddish and knew Yiddish songs, began to laugh with joy; his narrow eyes closed and his belly vibrated with laughter.

He gestured to the lieutenant, pointing to his head: "This draftee is a lunatic. Presumably the colonel had recognized him and, now taking over the muster himself, asked Tanchum in a mixture of Polish and Yiddish with tears in his eyes from laughter:

"Tanchum, psha-krev [damn it], where were you born?"

Tanchum, still standing in the same pose, raised his eyes to the ceiling, stretched, and let out a song:

"Who knocks in the night,  
Khone, the gas man,  
Nekhome, Foygele, open to me,  
I am your lover after all."

The Polish lieutenant, with bloodshot eyes, smiled a little crookedly. But when he saw his superior, the colonel, laughing half to death, he smiled sheepishly, not knowing what to do.

The whole line of conscripts, however, laughed in different ways, from a squeaky soprano to a thundering village chest tone. The colonel's eyes filled with tears, and he fell into a fit of laughter that tossed him back and forth in his chair, but he kept asking:

Page 85

"Tanchum, cursed plague, what is your mother's name?"

Tanchum continued to stare, spreading his hands as if praying to God and singing:

"A Jew has a little wife,  
he has sorrow because of her.  
If she can't make a pudding,  
she's good for nothing".

The colonel almost fell off his chair with laughter, and, waving to his assessors, continued his question:

"Tell me, Tanchum! Do you want to be a soldier in the Polish army?"

With his tender smile, Tanchum calmly looked at the colonel, felt that he had won the battle, and again answered with a song:

"Do you remember, do you remember, behind the gate,  
I told you a secret in your ear.  
Me without you and you without me,  
is like a doorknob without a door."

The colonel, recovering a little from his laughter and realizing that he had overdrawn the bow a bit, shouted with feigned malice while his laughter still choked his breath:

"Silence, you dog's blood! Throw him out!"

Then the lieutenant grabbed Tanchum's back with one hand and his neck with the other, led him to the wide-open door, and, to the general laughter of the draftees, threw Tanchum out into the yard. Tanchum rolled over twice and stayed there, butt up.

When he came to, he stood up, brushed the back of his pants with his hands, and smiled good-naturedly. He waved mischievously at the Jewish conscripts and muttered dreamily:

"But the hell I'll go to military service for that Polish crook!"

All of Bialystok knew about this story at the military commission, and many came to the conclusion that Tanchum was not at all as crazy as they thought.

### The Way to the "Roskosh" [Rozkosz] Park [1]

A Shabbat afternoon. The summer sun spreads over Bialystok, caressing and warming. Bundles of light rays break through the fringed, flowered curtains, illuminating thousands of dust motes that spin like flies around the sun's arrows.

My father sits hunched over a Russian novel, hands behind his ears, seeing and hearing nothing. My mother lies slumbering on the black leather canape. But when I tiptoe to the door and grab the knob, her maternal ear hears it and she murmurs half asleep, "Yankele, where are you going? Don't be out too long. Be back for Havdalah."

I am already outside. I squint my eyes for a sunbath and warm up like a cat for a while. Oy! How sweet is freedom! I don't even want to go to any of my friends, just walk alone through the streets. Watching the life around me.

I notice unnoticed things and feel a sweet delight in the vibrancy of life. I see people and catch images with serious observation and youthful curiosity.

On Shabbat afternoon, the streets of Khanaykes are dozing. An old Jewish woman with two pairs of glasses on her nose sits by the window, bent over a pleading prayer. She sways her upper body, gazes indifferently into the distance, and moves her lips silently in a God-fearing and pious whisper. At the second window stands a little girl with a bundle of red ribbons entwined in her braids. Her face is red as a beet, with big doll's eyes and laughing cheeks. When she sees me, she cheekily sticks out the tip of her red tongue.

Two cheder boys stand by a fence, their pockets full of buttons. One, with a pockmarked face and tousled blond hair, is shaking his pants in glee. He pulls out a mountain of little buttons. The second boy, black-haired and thin, with peppery, shining eyes, puts the "tombak" (a brass soldier's button) into the wall and aims at the buttons. Both boys are heated, totally absorbed in what they are doing, as if they were trading capital.

In the house next door, the windows are wide open, and an old Jew with a fan-shaped, curly beard is rocking over a religious book, singing

[1] "Pleasure Park"



a "nign" [melody], chewing on the tip of his beard, and chasing away the flies that circle stubbornly around a glass of tea with a red scarf.

I cross a field that leads from Khanaykes to Piaskes - pieces of empty fields. Here are mountains of dung and pits of light sand that the Jews dig to pour on the floor on Friday afternoons, because the so-called "shitn pilinyes" [pouring of sawdust] costs a fortune!

The field is dear to me. Here I used to burn the "khomets" [leaven] in a wooden soldier's spoon. I would put some bread and a goose feather on it and tie a piece of white linen from an old torn shirt around it. I liked to sit there for hours, watching the red, crackling fire and breathing in the smell of burnt leaven.

Leaving the field, I enter Piaskes. A drunken gentile staggers on wobbly legs, strokes his mustache, looks with blurred eyes at the Jewish children who run away from him and stop at a distance, frightened and curious. In a state of intoxication, saliva flows from his mouth and words come out of his lips:

"zhidi, zhidki, mosheniki". [1]

The head of a Jewish woman with disheveled hair sticks out of a window. She is shouting something to her daughter. She is carrying a copper pot of hot water, which she took from the teahouse in exchange for a receipt. She has stopped in the street to watch a "heaven and hell" game. Her mother shouts:

"Mirtshe! Zgrabne lyalike! Why are you dawdling so long? The hot tea will be cold by now as if it came from the ice cellar!"

Two girls in flowered linen aprons are dancing on one leg in the chalked boxes, a group of girls standing around them and clapping for the winner. Two full-grown fifteen-year-old girls, almost of bridal age, sit on a small wooden bridge and play "tsheykhes" [a kind of jackstones], reaching nimbly and tipping their hands in the air.

A boy and a girl, leaning against a gate, look lovingly into each other's eyes, crack fruit stones, look at each other with bright, laughing eyes, and burst out laughing, poking each other in the sides.

The market on Piaskes is empty, the stalls are closed. The tables are covered with a tarpaulin made of linen. An old dog trots across the silent market and suddenly stops next to a hidden cat, which hisses viciously with bloodshot eyes and sets its claws.

I cross Piaskes, passing "Polyak's Pharmacy", next to "Rabbi's Street".

[1] roughly: "Jews, Jewish pack, swindlers"

Page 88

It is the only shop open. In the windows of the shop are white jars with labels with Latin words on them. I have respect and fear for the pharmacy and stop for a while. The door of the pharmacy opens, and a gang of dressed up, drunken goyim rushes out, carrying a young peasant boy with a bloody bandaged head.

A bride, a village goy with cheeks as red as apples, in a white wedding dress, comes running from behind, crying and wringing her hands. Apparently the goyim have been fighting to the knife at a village wedding.

I enter "Flaker's Gas" [Oficerska Street]. Girls with colored cheeks, blackened eyes, and short, light, bright, see-through dresses sit on the veranda and wave to the passing men. Three soldiers walk by, stop, lift their heads to the loudly laughing girls, exchange glances. One pulls out a leather wallet, opens it, counts the copper and silver coins, and scratches his close-cropped hair. He embraces his soldier friends and climbs up to the porch, where the "girls" rise from their straw chairs. They disappear into the house with its mysteriously drawn curtains and locked shutters.

I am not far from the forest, and the outlines of the tall trees, like a giant broom, are already clearly visible. You can hear an organ grinder playing, the chirping of children's voices, a humming of sounds. I am already at the merry-go-round [1]. Wooden, colorful little horses and sledges are turning, going up and down.

Children with fluttering blonde and dark heads sit on the little horses, holding on to the nickel bars, their faces shining with happiness. A young peasant boy with wildly tousled hair, an unbuttoned shirt and a hairy chest, barefoot and in short, rolled-up trousers made of drillich, jumps from one child to the next to collect the kopeks.

The hurdy-gurdy squeaks the famous song "na tshto mnye mat' rodila" (Why did my mother bring me into the world?). A little blonde girl cries in a loud voice, rubs her teary eyes with her little fist, pulls her mother's hand toward the merry-go-round and tears herself away. The mother scolds the merry-go-round and shouts to her child:

"She's already wasted a fortune. She spent almost two kopecks on rides, and she wants more. These children today!"

An old man with a brown, gypsy-like face stands with a small box of "neviy-brivelekh" [divination slips]. A shabby parrot with a yellow nose [sic] gurgles on the box.

Page 89

It is tied to the box with a rusty chain.

The parrot squawks torn pieces of words and pulls with its pointed beak several colored "divination slips", promising good luck and far journeys.

I am already at the soldiers' barracks. A group of soldiers with red, steaming faces from the sweat bath and cheerful, washed-out eyes are marching with brooms and towels under their arms, singing in chorus after a first solo, accompanied by whistling.

They sing the well-known soldier's song of the Russian doctrine "Dyevki v'lyes" [Girls in the Forest] with the following lyrics:

Girls in the forest,  
I go after them,  
Girls in the field,  
I go after them,  
Where the girls are  
There I am.

Three barefoot "shikslekh" [non-Jewish girls] walk by, carrying their high shoes by the laces thrown over their shoulders. The whole platoon of soldiers turns their heads to them, smiles at them cynically, makes humorous remarks, winks at them with their eyes. The blond "shiksles" with the freckles on their cheeks blush up to their ears, giggle happily and shamefacedly. [Finally], they pant with laughter and hide their faces in their colorful aprons.

The scent of green trees. Shadows of the cool wind. Green-yellow leaves falling into the sand. Groups and pairs of walkers meet me at the edge of the forest that leads to "Roskosh" Park.

Dark gray streaks have stained the sky. Night has begun to fall. A round red aura has struggled before it sets, crawling once more with effort to the distant sky with its bloody red tinted horizon, creeping through the sparse trees of Tsertl's forest. Powerless, it retreats, sinking lower

and lower and then disappearing, leaving red fiery streaks in the bluish sky like glowing iron.

On the poles on both sides of the sandy road the electric lamps are lit. The municipal Bialystok "konke" [horse-tram] creeps past to "Roskosh" Park with a ringing sound produced by the conductor's foot pressure.

The "konke" is pulled by two small, lean, sweaty horses, from which hot steam rises. The passengers: School youth in student hats, men in hard "kapelyushn" [1] and ladies in big yellow straw hats, in bright summer dresses with white umbrellas in their hands. They sit gracefully on the benches of the open "konke", next to the polished wooden poles.

Boys in silky

[1] According to the author's note, the hats were called "kugelniklekh" in Yiddish

Page 90

black suits, caps with twisted visors and big, dusty shoes, have jumped up from behind in the middle of the ride and latched on to grab a free ride. They look nervously at the conductor from behind and wipe their noses with their sleeves.

Individual coachmen drive back from the forest, their scrawny mares crawling lazily and slowly, chewing hay that hangs from a sack around their necks.

From time to time, the coachmen in their shiny leather hats crack their whips in the air. They sit on the seat of the "rezinke", as the modern carriages with rubber tires are called, and when they meet a "konke" they cover it with curses and look at their passengers crossly. In the distance you can see the chandeliers of the verandas of the weekend houses. Many electric lamps, like big, soft, milky balls, surrounded by a big wooden fence, whose four corners disappear in the large forest, tell me that I am already near the "Roskosh" Park. I slowly approach the park with my eyes wide open, as if hypnotized.

Countless lamps beckon to me. I stop. A mysterious force pulls me back into the city. In front of my eyes appears the good, tender and loving face of my mother. She is floating in the air in front of me and her lips are whispering:  
"Yankele, don't forget to come to Havdalah!"

I try to chase the figure away, but the words now sound even closer and louder, as if they were screaming in my ear:

"Yankele! Don't forget to come to Havdalah!"

I dreamily stop beside a tree. In my imagination I am walking home. My father's house floats before my eyes, on Shabbat evening. The darkness is getting thicker. Stars appear in the sky. My father opens the curtain and looks at the bluish horizon. My father, the intelligent one, is attached to Judaism, he guards the Jewish customs and never misses a Havdalah.

He lights a large candle of colored braided tallow, lifts my hand with the candle high up (a charm to grow higher). The little flame flickers and bends in all directions.

My mother looks at the small flame and her eyes become moist. She mumbles unintelligible words and moves her lips silently. My brother David looks thoughtfully at the flame and picks his nose, as is his habit.

Our gray cat sits, paws tucked under her, on the chair, and her half-closed, predatory eyes peer, unblinking, at the flame of the Havdalah candle.

Page 91

My father stands stretched out like a soldier on sentry duty, a silver cup in his hand, his eyes half closed. His head is turned toward the ceiling and his melodious voice clearly captures every word:

–"יי הגה אל ישועתי, אבטח ולא אפחד..."

And I translate the words for myself with my poetic interpretation: "Here I stand before You, O Almighty God, and ask You for help! Nothing frightens me, for I believe in You and am safe with You."

I open my eyes. The image of my mother's house disappears. The countless fiery electric lamps attract me, call me. A mysterious world I don't understand beckons me from there. My young heart beats in anticipation of the new pleasures that the future enticing unknown will draw into the picture of the blue, starry night in the promising, brightly illuminated "Roskosh" Park.



THE HORSE-CAR IN THE WOODS—The horse-drawn trolley which stretched from the city to Roshkash Park in the woods. Tickets were priced according to the passenger's proximity to the horses' tails.

Source: [Byalistok bilder album fun a barimter shtot un ire Iden iber der velt](#) | Yiddish Book Center

## Tsertl's Forest

Summer. Shabbat afternoon. A quiet warmth rolls over the city and drives people into the forest. The forest swings with its green treetops as if calling to itself. It, the forest, begins where "Zverinyets" [today Branicki Park] ends and the long, whitewashed rectangular buildings of the soldiers' barracks can be seen, from which the smell of Russian soldiers' "kapuste" [cabbage borsht] permeates, filling the area and tickling the nostrils.

From there you can hear Russian military songs with contrived soldier's majesty, interspersed with tones of nostalgia. Longing for Mother Russia, for the vast fields of the Russian countryside, for the Sunday dances and songs accompanied by the harmonica, longing for the village "shikse" with the colorful headscarf, for the native wooden hut and the unworked earth.

The soldiers' songs echo to the Jewish young men and girls who fill the forest on Shabbat afternoons, mingling with the Yiddish songs, with the traditional Yiddish sob and with the silent, tear-stained melodies, interspersed with a cantorial nign.

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Page 92

The "Green Path" of the forest is littered with couples and groups. Silent, melancholy tones of "Margeritkelekh" mingle with "Reyzele dem Shoykhets" [Reizele the Slaughterer's].

The tender nign "Oyfn Pripetshik" drowns in an imitation of [Fyodor] Shalyapin's bass song "Blokhe" [Song of the Flea] [1].

A couple walks arm in arm, looking into each other's eyes and seeing no one, their heads nestled together. A cheder boy is running after a bush cricket. He desperately wants to catch the wildly fleeing creature and would love to stick a needle into its little tail.

An old couple is walking with shaky steps. He, carefully plucking his little gray beard and fanning himself with his shiny black jacket, and she, hobbling along her swollen legs and sighing.

A "cavalier" cracks white fruit kernels, expertly peels the seeds, and, like a gentleman, holds a small brown bag to the sweaty girl with the red cheeks, who limps a little on one foot, for her high leather shoes with twenty buttons are very tight.

Flies and bees buzz through the air, whizzing past the ears with their song as fast as airplanes.

A young groom with a stiff bow tie puts his finger to his neck to let in some air and is drenched in sweat. His shoes are covered with white dust, and from time to time he wipes them with the back edge of his pants.

The bride beside him is a coarse, short-grown clumsy maid, fiercely constricted in a corset that pushes up a pair of broad, full breasts at the top that look as if they belonged to a longtime wet nurse.

The bride wipes her face with the wide sleeve of her fringed blouse and tosses green, soft, hairy gooseberries into her mouth for refreshment.

The winding "Green Path" in the forest ends and leads to an open triangle where lively Shabbat trading takes place. This is also where Roskosh Park begins, with verandas scattered here and there among the green pines and birches.

Roskosh Park is enclosed by a high fence, which surrounds it like a paradise and hides it from the [glances of] Bialystok's poor boys and young men, who seek "oylem-haze" [earthly] pleasures without paying and shrewdly want to enter over the fence.

The adjacent cottages are inhabited by Bialystok merchants, who every year after Passover pack their, shabby, polished wooden beds for "the master and the madam," plus the maid's bed, a few eiderdown quilts for cold nights, the crockery and cutlery for "meaty and dairy," a pasta board, a rolling pin, and a few vessels.

All this is loaded onto a pole cart,

[1] [Fyodor Shalyapin sings Song of the Flea - YouTube](#)

Page 93

on which one still wisely packs a "quarter eighth" of birch wood to heat the hearth of clay.

\*

In the triangle of Tsertl's forest, next to Roskosh Park, a lively Shabbat trade is flourishing. A young man in a pink revolutionary shirt, buttoned up to the neck, carries on his head a padded pillow on which he has placed glass bowls of lemon water with a few pieces of ice floating in them. Every few minutes he calls out mechanically:  
"A cold drink...a cold drink!"



A short-grown Jew with a red bulbous nose, wearing an apron that was once white and has now taken on all the colors of the rainbow, stands next to an ice cream cart and shouts, his head raised like a rooster on a fence:

"Sakharnoye morozhenoye, sakharnoye morozhenoye!" [Sweet ice cream, sweet ice cream].

A little boy, with a shoe on one foot and a scarf tied around the other, is licking from a tin of pink ice cream. He is disheveled and sweaty but happy, and with his sleeve he wipes a liquid from his nose, which with all its strength sets out to trickle into the ice cream....

A Jewish woman, her headscarf wrapped around her, stands next to a table and conducts a lively trade with customers, who greedily let their eyes glide over the goods on display: A tied box of "kitshmitsh" (a kind of sweet dough with raisins), a tin of "landrin-tsukerkes", brown and yellow "irislekh" [caramels], and gray, browned "ulniklekh" [buckwheat potato pancakes].

A young girl stands with a woven basket of peas, fruit seeds, and beans leaning against her legs.

A tall, thin young man with an Adam's apple and an uncovered chest is haggling with the girl over the measure of beans. She adds two more beans to the measure for him, and the young man is very pleased with the bargain, artfully tossing one bean in the air and catching it in his mouth.

A small, thin, withered Jew with a whitish opacity [2] in his eye and a belt around his neck, to which a small board with a white tablecloth is attached, sells square candies sprinkled with rice and sings loudly and audibly to a special, well-known motif:

"Zolotoy sovar, zolotoy sovar kharoshi [Golden goods, golden fine goods]...tralya-lya-lya, tra-lya-lya lya lidl, lidl lyam..."

A lame "goy" with a red scarf around his neck and a shabby black plush "kapelyush" on his head spins a barrel organ that fills the air with the Russian song:

"Na tshto mnye mat rodila" [Why did my mother bring me into the world?]

[1] hard "landrynka" candies made of syrup

[2] lit. „vayse [white] belme“= in the original sense the word "belme" means cataract.

It ends with "A Brivele der Mamen" [A Letter to Mama]. The young men and girls, peeling fruit stones and sucking landrynka candies, pick up the "nign" and throw grateful glances and copper groschen at the organ grinder in his shabby "kapelyush". The "goy" holds it up, bowing

and turning submissively, calling out with a flattering smile, "spasibo, bbrattsi rodnye" [Thank you, my dear friends] ...

In a corner, on a high mound, a Jewish woman with a yellow, ragged, freckled face stands next to a table with glass jars of juice and a large copper siphon of soda water sitting in a bucket of ice.

A little girl with a perky nose and blond braided pigtails, "sings" in a stretched voice:

"Give me a glass of soda water with raspberry juice, raspberry juice!"

But as the saleswoman carefully pours a scant spoonful of juice, the girl's mother growls:

"Passable! If you're going to take a whole kopek for a splash of water, you could at least put a little more juice in it! There's a Jewess enriching herself on a poor child!"

\*

Night falls. The residents of the vacation homes, coming to their senses after their Shabbat afternoon nap, move to their verandas, stretch, rub their eyes and reddened cheeks, for sleep has not yet sobered them up.

The verandas fill up with guests. Families from the city come to visit, to breathe some fresh air and eat a free meal, especially after such a walk, when the stomach stirs and the appetite becomes that of a wolf.

On the table show up home baked oil-challah, cake and small honey cakes that surround the large copper samovar. The latter boils and bubbles and stands tall, majestic and proud, like a grandfather surrounded by his grandchildren, by jars and trays of preserves and sliced lemon. All of this is in line with the large glass bowls full of fruit.

I stop next to such a porch and feel a growl in my stomach. My young stomach makes itself felt and demands its portion. That's when I remember that my uncle Meylekh Darshin, my mother's brother, the powerful, distinguished man in our family, the rich cloth seller on commission, who sends telegrams day and night to deep Russia, to vast Siberia and near Lodzh, has a vacation home not far from here. I am on my way there.

From a distance, I can see my uncle Meylekh sitting

comfortably in a wide, woven chair. He is wearing a silk caftan tied with a belt, from which the ends of a spic and span white shirt peek out.

The table is set with plates, glasses, small jars and genuine "frazhet" forks, spoons and knives.

There are earthenware bowls of sour cream, flowered plates of strawberries, black huckleberries, radishes and chives, a basket of pastries and a huge braided challah with reddish-brown kitke. And around the table, my corpulent aunt Yakhe rushes hysterically, ordering the maid around the kitchen in a commanding tone.

Bashfully, I come up to the veranda. My aunt Yakhe turns her head to me and, not stopping to set the table, she says in an energetic voice:

"Nu Yakov [well, Jacob]! What are you standing around for? Surely you are hungry, now sit down! What is Mama doing? Your father is still the same shlimazl [unhappy man]? I feel sorry for your mom, such a well turned out woman, she just has no mazl! Now come, sit down, sit down to eat!"

Uncle Meylekh turns his head from a Jewish religious book, takes off his glasses and adds:

"Nu, yo [well, ok]! How's Mom? Long time no see."

I don't get a chance to answer, because a crowd of Uncle Meylekh's grandchildren is streaming in from the back rooms. Aunt Yehudit Rozental's children, Roze, Dare and Nyomke, and Aunt Khaytshe Shustitski's children, Tsilye and Sashe (later the wife of Dr. Reygrodski's son).

They sit around the table. I am squeezed into a corner. After all, I am only the son of poor Aunt Teme, and they are the rich merchants and high school students with new uniforms and brass buttons. And they don't even say "zdrastvoytye" [hello] to me.

I choke down a bite. My pride rebels in me. They talk about "klasne urokn" [best lessons], "stikhotvarenyes" [poems] and poetry.....

Nyomke can't remember who wrote about Peter the Great. I join the conversation. I remind him and begin to recite in Russian the famous poem "Kto On" [Who is He?], dedicated to the Russian Tsar Peter the Great [1]:

"Iyesos tshastim i dremutshim, po tropinkas i po mkham, yekhal vsadnik probirayas, k'svyetlim nyevskim beregam..."  
(Through a dense forest full of moss and wild paths, a horseman rides, making his way to the bright banks of the Neva) ...

I forget my embarrassment and fall into a kind of ecstasy, accentuating every Russian sentence, and at the end of my poem recitation there is a

[1] see [Peter the Great - Wikipedia](#)

Page 96

reverent silence. When I finally finished, everyone applauded, and the tender gaze of my beautiful cousins did me so much good. Suddenly they see me, and my cousin Tsilye puts it this way:

"Ya sovyersheno nye znala, tshto Yakov tak kharasho vldyeyet ruskim yazikom". (I didn't know that Yakov spoke Russian so well).

But in Tsilya's innocent remark lay the whole tragedy of that epoch of Russification: what kind of person is one who does not know Russian? True, the ice was broken. I have become one of them, but I feel foreign. As always, I am too sensitive. I withdraw and hide in my solitude.

I say goodbye to my mother's brother, to my uncle Meylekh Darshin, the Hasid with the kaftan and the belt, and to his beautiful assimilated grandchildren, who are already dreaming of other worlds, far away from Judaism and Hasidism.

\*

Thirty-eight years later, in 1951, my mother's brother, my uncle, the pious Hasid in kaftan and belt, received his punishment. Thirty-three years after his death (he died in Yekaterinoslav, at the same time and in the same town where Dr. Yosef Khazanovitch died) [1].

My cousin Sashe Shustitski was one of the heroes of the episode in Tsertl's forest in 1913. In 1939 she escaped to Sweden with her husband, the son of Dr. Reygrodksi. There she divorced him and moved to America.

When I once visited the "world ambassador" of the Bialystok compatriots- who carries the concerns of the Bialystok people from all over the world- my friend David Sohn, the editor and director of the Bialystok Center, I was surprised to find my cousin Sashe in his office. She had come to inquire, a little faded, but still the beautiful, elegant, aristocratic Sashe with the manners of a salon lady of noble birth.

She greeted me in good Russian, later in bad German, later in even worse French, or even in tortured English. But never in Yiddish, which she knew very well because her parents didn't speak any other language. She always remained the same dogged assimilator who had grown up and taken root in the then Russianized environment.

However, "Mama Yiddish" is terribly vindictive. Sooner or later, she will take a cruel toll on those who run from her.

[1] for Yiddish readers [Dr. Yosef Hazanovitsh der idealist, natsyonalist un folksmentsh | Yiddish Book Center](#), and see [Chazanowicz Józef - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu \(jewishbialystok.pl\)](#)

Page 97

A few weeks ago I received a phone call from a friend who congratulated me with a sarcastic undertone:  
"Yakov! Mazl Tov! You have enriched your noble lineage...your cousin Sashe has married a Christian, a German Christian and aristocrat, a nobleman!"

And a few days later I received an official notification from Sashe personally that she had married a Christian of the German nobility, a respected member of the German aristocracy. She celebrated her wedding with a Christian German, with a son of the people who murdered my family and hers and many millions of our unfortunate Jewish people.

This is the terrible price that my uncle, the pious Hasid in the kaftan, paid for raising his grandchildren in false, empty pride to accept foreign cultures and foreign languages and to alienate them from their Jewish language, Jewish tradition and the Jewish people.

### **Park Roskosh [Rozkosz]**

Summer. A Shabbat afternoon in Tertl's Forest. Bluish shadows cover the sky as if with a gigantic curtain. The red, fiery blazing sun fades on the far, far horizon, still struggling as if not yet to set, sending its red, fiery projections into the windowpanes of the weekend homes, lighting them up as if they were on fire.

Early starlets leap out gleefully and impatiently, like the first guests at a wedding.

From afar, the bells of the lighted "konke" [horse-drawn carriage] ring out. Open on both sides, it carries passengers from the city, dressed in bright summer clothes, with happy, laughing faces and resounding voices. The horses' hooves clatter merrily and the sweaty, panting horses swish their tails as they carry new passengers to Roskosh Park.

Colorful posters signed by the omnipotent police chief, "Rotmeister" [Captain] Pulan, are pasted on the town's fences and kiosks,

announcing the noble purpose of the "gulyanye," which is to support the needy students of the commerce school. The "konkes" bring new passengers, filling Tsertl's forest with commotion and laughter.

Page 98

On the verandas of the cottages begins a hustle and bustle. On one veranda, a group of Jews is standing and praying the "Mayrev" [evening prayer] in a beautiful manner. A Jew with an meticulously combed white "Franz Joseph beard" [1], dressed in a silk caftan, sways with his eyes closed, swings his body on all sides and taps his chest in religious ecstasy.

On a second porch, a young man wearing a golden pince-nez and a short-shaven "komets" beard [2], performs Havdolah, singing an ornate, cantorial melody.

A young student plays the guitar on the veranda surrounded by youth. Young men clap their hands to it and a young slender girl snaps her fingers and gracefully dances a tango to the beat, with turns and figures, writhing like a snake.

The entrance to Roskosh Park is brightly lit. Next to the ticket office stands a line of young people, wasting no time in making acquaintances with a romantic flirtation, interspersed with Russian.

The carved, brown, garishly lit gate to Roskosh Park is strictly guarded by the police.

A lout of sixteen years with a little hat of the "gorodskoye" [Municipal School], flaxen hair and a haughty nose, tries to sneak in between the students with a mien of "holy innocence".

Noticing this, a policeman with a long mustache shoves him out, gives him a blow with the dull side of his saber, and growls at him, "sukin sin!" [son of a bitch].

The lout is "less than thrilled," trots away and tries his luck in the darkness, in a far corner of the fence. He takes a "forbidden ticket" and climbs over the fence.

Roskosh Park is filling up with people. In a large wooden "litanke" there is a restaurant counter. Officers in elegant uniforms with shining sabers and jingling spurs, and students in new uniforms, with all their buttons buttoned up and with their student hats boastfully tilted on the side, are joking cheekily with the young, beautiful waitresses in their white aprons.

They serve at the tables of the guests, serving portions of roast goose, boiled eggs, marinated herring with white sauce, tasty black and rye bread, and secretly pass over a bottle of "monopolke" [whiskey] made of white Russian vodka.

It becomes more and more cheerful. The voices are getting louder. The eyes are shining. Groups are forming: At one table are hysterical, drunken officers. At another table are quieter, more serious students. Next to the dense, wide-spreading trees, groups of the Bialystok intelligentsia gather.

[1] the beard of Emperor Franz Joseph I, see [Franz Joseph I of Austria - Wikipedia](#)

[2] Komets: the vowel sign that means an "o" in Yiddish **◌ױ**

Page 99

The sons and daughters of factory owners and merchants, whose religious upbringing does not allow them to get too close to the Christian officers' circles, keep themselves stately and strictly separate.

The corpulent figure of the middle-sized Yakov Markus, with his dignified, beautifully shaped, proud face of a magnate, catches the eye. His chubby body is squeezed into an elegantly sewn suit. Next to him stands his younger brother, the darkly handsome Misha, with the swarthy face, black hair and black, passionate eyes of an Oriental.

Two brothers- two contrasts. The Markus family is very well known in Bialystok. When talking about themselves, its members proudly say "mi Markus" (we, the Markus'es).

Yakov Markus is a textile manufacturer with his own spinning and weaving mill and is also the commander of the Bialystoker fire brigade. He is the favorite of the women of Bialystok and is on friendly terms with the Russian authorities.

Next to them stands the slender notary Klobukov, with his eagle nose and lean, ascetic, cold, stiff face. In another group you can see the Plovski brothers and sisters, the children of the famous merchant Hilel Plovski [1]. They are tall figures, full of wit and enthusiasm, respected in the boisterous life of the "golden youth of Bialystok".

There is the engineer Gonyondzki, who has inherited a large house on the busy commercial corner of Gumienna and Lipova streets, where there is Khashke Goldshteyn's factory shop, Mlinazhevitch's oil shop, Khazan's ladies' dress shop, and Voroshilsky's jewelry shop.

Gonyondzki, with his beak-like nose and red cheeks, is surrounded by a group of merchants, "realistn and gymnazistn" [2] and their "ladies", schoolgirls and studying youth.

In a corner. Two famous Bialystok wrestlers stand proudly leaning against a tree: Pokzhive, "the Byelovezher [Białowieża]," with a gigantic body and bulging chest, and an intelligent, noble face that does not match the massive, fleshy body at all.

The second is Ostrinski, a strong young man who often performs with Pokzhive in the circus on Soloveytshik [Nightingale] Lane in the "French Fights" [3]. Ostrinski is also a member of the Bialystok fire brigade, and he takes particular pleasure in walking around in the fire brigade uniform, with the brightly polished hat that shines like gold.

When he [4] passes by the Jewish youths, he looks at them with pride and feels safer among the Christians in the company of the two powerful Jewish men.

[1] The name is written here with different vowel signs, also possible is the variant "Plavski".

[2] I assume that he means students from high schools and junior high schools

[4] possibly he means "French style wrestling".

[5] Gonyondzki?

Page 100

A warm wind, coming from the Ignatke [1] and Gorodyani areas, picks up the scents of Tsertl's forest and shakes the tops of the trees. Two foolish birds snap their little heads in the air and chirp a serenade of rapid trills for no particular reason.

The illuminated Roskosh Park is filled with a hum of voices. The drunken voices of the alcoholic officers are swallowed up by the deafening noise of the military orchestra "Uglitski Polk" [2], which sits in full width next to the "okriter stsene" [open-air stage] and plays energetically and continuously waltzes, tangos and polkas.

The conductor, with his pretentious mustache and golden epaulets hanging wide over his shoulders, waves his baton with affected grace and greets the well-known ladies with a smile. Passing cavaliers toss confetti into the faces of the ladies, who laugh in feigned protest and thank the men with fiery glances.



A loud commotion can be heard. The whistling of the policemen indicates that they are looking for a nimble pickpocket of the "blate yatn" [3], who apparently picked the pocket of a drunken officer while he was flirting with a lady. The thief is chased by the rampaging police and now runs like a squirrel in tight turns between bushes and trees.

In the "litanke" where the restaurant counter is located, angry shouts and excited voices can be heard. A group of students is surrounded by drunken officers. An officer with a red drunken face and glassy eyes is drawing his saber with difficulty to teach a lesson to a student who made an insulting remark about His Majesty the Tsar, mocking his military uniform and the honor of his royal people.

The other officers, with proud, condescending expressions, look at the students threateningly, but hold back their colleague to avoid a scandal. Suddenly, the famous Bialystok police chief Reshute appears in his short varnished boots, elegantly saluting and speaking with affected erudition:

"Raskhodityes gospoda ofitseri... raskhodityes gaspoda studenti!"

[Disperse, gentlemen officers... disperse, gentlemen students!]. And to the audience standing around he shouts:

"Nu tshevo nye vidali..razaydis! [So what, we haven't seen anything, get lost!]

As the crowd disperses, Reshute looks victorious and proud, fully aware of his greatness.

The orchestra becomes silent. Loud applause rages. The guests rush to sit down on the long, wooden benches of the open-air stage. The men rise gallantly

[1] ignatike= Ignatki, Polish, Grodno district

[2] Uglicki pułk = Uglicki regiment, an infantry unit of the Russian Empire, disbanded in 1918

[3] blate yatn= "criminal urchins", possibly in this case also the name of a gang

from their seats to make room for the elegant ladies dressed in white. They flirtatiously wave their fans, politely thanking the cavaliers. The silence grows. The tension is great. The performance on the open-air stage begins.

\*

Everything is still. Next to the open-air stage, a branch breaks from a tree under the weight of a hidden boy. One hears a silent "sha, sh..." [shush!...] from the audience. A police dog with black and white spots and drooping ears moves, growls and barks softly.

This is followed by a "sha, sha, sh..." from the audience waiting with anticipation. The well-worn brown plush curtain opens. A singer dressed as a clown appears, with a white-smearred face, a big mouth and wild eyes, singing in Russian the aria of "Payats" [Pagliacci] [1]. His tenor voice makes the air vibrate with choked tears as he reaches the phrase: "Laugh, Payats, at your broken love, laugh and cry..."

The sentimental female high school students sob silently, blowing their little noses into their unfolded handkerchiefs. Their boyfriends look lovingly into the eyes of their romantic ladies and laugh mockingly, but also sympathetically, while they jokingly dab the eyes of their sweethearts with their large men's handkerchiefs.

After a roar of applause and repeated bows from Payats, now "happy" with his success, a man with a black pointed beard and a monocle in his eye, dressed in an elegant black tuxedo, appears on stage with a black lacquered cane, which he holds playfully in his white curved fingers. He steps forward for a demonstration of his magical arts.

He catches playing cards in mid-air and gracefully pulls white eggs from his black sleeve. He lifts his shiny top hat to reveal a bald head with a few black hairs attached to his head with shiny gel. And to the general groans and sighs of surprise, beautiful white innocent doves fly out of the top hat, which flap their wings, fly across the stage and back again, landing on the shoulders and head of the magician.

Now comes the most interesting part of the program. A famous dance troupe touring Russia performs the famous "Shantekler" dance [2]. Here a group of women and men dressed up as chickens and roosters with colored feathers, tails and heads of chickens dance the "Shantekler" dance in a row one after another.

[1] the tenor aria "Vesti La Giubba", from the opera "Pagliacci" [clowns] from 1892, see [Luciano Pavarotti - Vesti La Giubba {Leoncavallo's Pagliacci} - YouTube](#)

[2] "Chantecler" is an old French animal fable from 1910 about a rooster who believes that the sun can only rise through his wake-up call.



Lucien Guitry in his role as “Chantecler”, photo: [Auguste Bert](#) , file: hantecler Le Théâtre numéro spécial février 1910.jpg, [Domaine public](#)

This was the "hit" of the season and the name became the fashion for colorful women's costumes and wild men's ties.

The French group "Kvi Pro Kvo" [Qui Pro Quo] ends their performance with the famous French "Can-can", in which the dancing girls lift their dresses and brazenly reveal their round, soft bottoms in white, lace-trimmed panties. This leads to loud applause and shouts of "bravo" from the men, because what man - seeing a half-naked, graceful, blooming, lively, young, flexible female body in white underwear ( and even its hindmost part) - wouldn't be happy to overlook the fact that the women gave a very rude performance. The sentimental ladies of Bialystok blush, shyly lower their eyes and look furtively at their male companions. Their looks seem to ask: "Does this mean that men really like this? Are they really not interested in an intelligent discussion about art, literature and social problems? ....

A tall, thin man with disheveled long hair and a white, stiffly starched shirt appears. He hurries to the stage, clutching his hands in excitement at the thunderous applause. Joyfully the name of the couplets [1] is shouted, which are currently circulating in Bialystok and are sung in the remotest wooden huts of Bojari, Nove, Skorupy and Khanaykes.

The singer is the favorite of the Jewish audience. Happily, he gives a little cough, covering his mouth with his fists, then bows cheerfully and jokingly to the audience and, waving his white, stripped glove, he sends air kisses and asks:

"Well, gospoda [men]! Now, rebyata [boys] of Khanaykes, which couplet shall I sing?"

A buzz of voices rises, snatches of words, applause, heckling, laughter and shouting:

"Sing 'Kot Makha [Cat Macha]', sing 'Vyetyerotshek Tshut Tshut Dishet' [2], sing 'Zhil Bil Na Khanaykakh' [3]. "

The singer raises his hands like a conductor raising his baton, and in a minute there is silence:

"All right, my dear beloved guests of 'Nikolayevske' [Mikołajewska] Street and Khanaykes, of 'Kupetsheske' and 'Plakers' Street, of 'Aleksandrovsk'e' and 'Moyshe Ruves' Street, I will sing 'Kot Makha'. Every Bialystok high school student will recognize himself in it, and you will support me! And every Bialystok 'mamashke' will learn how she is fooled by her daughter!"

In the pose of a sentimental girl in love, the singer contorts his face into a sweet expression and sings a song. At night in her room's bed, she dreams of her beloved one.

[1] couplet= this word has more than one meaning. I think here, it is a multi-strophic witty, ambiguous, political or satirical song with a distinctive refrain.

[2] Something like 'The breeze is blowing'

[3] Something like 'There used to live in Khanaykes'

Page 103

And suddenly, in the blue, starry night, under the pressure of a light summer breeze, the window opens and her beloved appears, approaching her with a small jump and outstretched arms. He puts his finger to his mouth to warn her not to cry out in surprise.

And when her dreamed lover is already going to her bed in the darkness of the moonlight, he knocks over a vase on a high flower stool, which shatters with a terrible bang.

In the next room, her mother's panting, sleepy voice sounds, asking anxiously:

"Kashenka, who is it?"

And she, Kashenka, is very embarrassed and does not know what to say. It escapes her:

"A cat, mama, a cat, mama, a cat!"

The whole audience joins in: "A cat, mama, a cat, mama, a cat has caused Mashenka great trouble!"

The audience goes wild with joy, laughing, stamping their feet, applauding and shouting:

"Bis, bis! [Encore, encore!]"

The second number of the singer, who made a strong impression in Bialystok, is the popular song "Rivotshka", which the singer sings with much feeling in Russian. It is the drama of a young Jewish girl from Khanaykes, whose father is very pious and fanatical. He studies day and night in the Bes-Medresh and guards his daughter very strictly. The daughter longs for an easy life as a woman and for pleasures, and the audience, sympathizing with the unhappy Rivotshka, sings silently along with the singer, accompanying him and repeating the words:

"Zhil bil na Khanaykakh Borekh Pik....

In Khanaykes once lived Borekh Pik,

He was a pious Jew.....  
He went to the Bes-Midrash,  
To pray to God with songs,  
Protected from unkosher things..."

And the audience, which the singer leads with his hands, joins in:  
"Oy, oy, Rivotshka! Oy, oy, Rivotshka! Oy, oy, Riva,  
Riva moy kumir..." [1]

The audience is in ecstasy. The cheeks are glowing. The girls nestle tenderly against their cavaliers, and a warm, summer night breeze plays with the hair of the amorous, dreamy girls who radiate

[1] something like „Riva is my idol“

Page 104

the scent of the forest, of chamomile, field flowers and freshly mown hay, which makes the young blood drunk. The last applause slowly abates, still lingering in the air, until it gradually dies away completely. The performance is over.

The men are still humming the melodies of "Zhil Bil Na Khanaykakh", looking with amorous eyes at the young girls, and the youthful passion flows into the luscious bodies.

In the distance, a rooster crows, not asleep and annoyed that the others are asleep. The big lamps slowly go out. A few women's mouths open to a slight yawn, which is quickly covered with a hand so that the gentlemen do not notice.

The officers click their boots and say goodbye to their ladies, kissing their hands and glancing hostilely at their corpulent mothers, who bustle about and won't leave their daughters.

Outside Roskosh Park, several brightly painted carriages wait. The coachmen with their long whips sit stiffly like wooden dolls, waiting for their "barines", the rich textile manufacturers of Bialystok, the powerful ones who live in grand style. Most of the visitors to

Roskosh Park, however, have to run to get a seat on one of the last "konkes", which are specially reserved for park visitors.

The richer people, who can pay five kopecks, sit at the back of the "konkes". At the front, near the ponytails, sit those who want to save two kopecks, paying only one copper "ditke" [1]. Poor people and "crooks" from Khanaykes hang on from behind, and to the musical accompaniment of the "konke" bells, the fully loaded vehicles move toward the city.

Couples walk arm in arm along the "Green Alley" and the wide main roads of the Bialystok Forest. They are faithfully accompanied by the white, smiling moon, which does not leave them and looks down on the children of the earth with love, while it curves into its eternal, mysterious, ironic smile.

But the naive children of the earth forget that, compared to the infinity of the moon, their birth and death are like a short, quick child's laugh that sounds in carefree joy, only to immediately turn into a long, wailing cry.

[1] ditkes= three-kopeck coins

Page 105

### **Neighbors of Gonyondzski's Yard**

May, 1912. The spring sun no longer has to melt the icicles, shimmering like diamonds, that appeared after Passover and hung from the windows. The absorbent cotton has already been removed from the space between the windows, and and through the wide-open windows you can already hear the cheerful chirping of birds fluttering about on the thin, bare branches with their young buds.

My mother is busy at work, walking around the room, looking in the drawers and talking to me with great joy. And while her beautiful face is radiant with the joy of life, her eyes are wet with tears, for as usual, my mother laughs in times of sadness and cries in moments of joy.

"You see, Yankele, you got to have family! Blood is thicker than water. My brother is going away... and you, Yankele, are going to perk up! I'm sick of Khanaykes! No, God forbid, may God not punish me for my words, because we have good neighbors here. They are simple people, workers, but good, warm people. But what is the result? You won't learn good manners from them. Khanaykes and Gumienna Street, where all the merchants live - it's quite a difference! Once I get a foothold there, I'll never want to leave!" [1]

I already know the reason for my mother's joy. Her brother, my uncle Meylekh Darshin, is going to his summer house in Tsertl's Forest. He asked my mother to move to his apartment for the summer, which is located in Gonyonzki's yard on Gumienna Street. So my mother "floats" around the room, packs the laundry, talks half to me and half to herself, and finally infects me with her enthusiasm. I'm already curious to get to know the new area, Gumienna Street and the people and neighbors of Gonyondzki's Hof.

\*

The carriage, with its [three] iron wheels, drives over the edged pavement of Lipowa Street, bumps into my childish buttocks, tosses me up like a ball from underneath, and each time throws me into the arms of my mother, who holds the big sack with the blankets, sheets, and linen in one hand, and pulls me to her with the other hand each time [when I am hurled up]. Now we are in my uncle Meylekh's big, bright apartment. It has five rooms with beautifully carved tan furniture, armchairs with

Page 106

white covers, and floors covered with red furs.

In the office room there is a desk with an iron box. Next to it is a large front room with opaque floral curtains in the color of yellowed autumn leaves. They cover a large, white-painted iron balcony facing Gumienna Street. The apartment has another balcony facing "Rokhe the Shvartser's" Alley, and on this balcony I discovered a treasure, a small keg of Hungarian red wine with a tap.

I can't resist my curiosity, so I tiptoe over to the keg with a glass in my hand. I open the tap and drink half a glass of sour Hungarian red wine in one go. Immediately the wine has such an effect on my childish head that I begin to stammer drunkenly. And the ceiling blurs with the floor and begins to spin before my eyes. My mother is wringing her hands and speaking to me, angrily and softly, as if she were telling me a secret in my ear:



"You are not to touch this, do you hear me? This is not Khanaykes. The neighbors will soon be gossiping about it. .... What were you thinking? Aunt Yakhe is strict, and we should behave accordingly in view of her kindness. You've done quite a foolish thing, the measure is full...". [1]  
Mother continued to speak for a long time, and she seemed to float in the air in front of me. My face twists into a foolish grin in a state of intoxication, and I am so content, so satisfied....  
I like the new apartment.

\*

My favorite place is the balcony overlooking Gumienna Street. I sit there for hours and watch the life on the street. To the right I can see the semicircle of the market. The sounds can actually be heard all the way to me: A jumble of human voices, the clatter of horseshoes on Lipowa Street, the whistle of the police and the clang of the Bialystok horse-drawn tram, all melting into one sound.

Small-town "drongove" wagons [2], loaded with Jews and Jewesses, their feet pointing up or down, roll down Gumienna Street. The drivers crack their whips and take their passengers to Khoroshtsh or Vashlikove.

In the market you can see peasant women with their carts. Barefoot and wearing colorful headscarves, they peer over the hustle and bustle of the big city market. In their arms, they carry a straw basket with some silver money tied to it wrapped in a handkerchief.

[1] For better comprehensibility I have slightly modified the sentence.

[2] Broad, flat, horse-drawn wagons that carried loads and people, see page 29.

Page 107

Market thieves hover around them, watching them closely, and suddenly a loud, high-pitched scream is heard from a gentile woman from the village. She is pushed aside, wringing her hands and wailing, almost crying, in a kind of monastic chant:  
"Matko a boska, shvyenta Maria! Zlodzhey mi obrokali!" [Mother of God, Holy Mary! The thieves have stolen from me!]

A policeman turns to her, yells angrily to the bystanders, trills on his pipe, wipes his moustache vigorously, and the curious people around the goy bombard her with advice and "wise sayings".

In the midst of the market, the women sellers of fruit, pears, apples, and plums, which they have laid out in wooden crates and straw baskets, bustle about squealing and trying to shout over one another:

"Unique apples, Madameshi, you shall have a long life! You real 'Antonover', 'Citrinover', 'Pergamatn', [here are] sweet pears, flavorful as from the Garden of Eden, here are grapes like Passover wine and fresh plums, a meal for the tsar!"

In the center of the market, the tall, shapelessly fat, heavy-set Kheylutshke, the fruit merchant, stands out. She is a warm Jewish woman and known for her benevolence and goodness. She lets her thunderous, masculine bass voice ring out. Next to her in support is a tall, strikingly elegantly dressed man, with a small black mustache and patent leather boots. He is a well-known figure in Khanaykes, called "Khayim Puter". He feels out of place there, in the market, and looks down on the Jewish women from above, as if the trade is not appropriate for him.

A small, thin Jewish woman with a large headscarf pulled low over her forehead waves a kosher slaughtered goose with bloody hands and shouts angrily at a "madame," who bashfully slips away:

"Madameshi, since when do you eat geese? Did you get sick from eating such cheap stuff? How can you eat geese when you are used to eating meat from fattened animals?" And turning to the women around her, she says, "She can kiss my ass, that rich social climber! I guess my geese offend her dignity!"[1]

From afar you can see the whitewashed "Bremlekh" [2] built in rows, with the proud, cocky city clock at its center. At the top, on its tower, walks a fireman in a brass cap, a faithful sentry protecting the city from fire.

In the market, next to the "Bremlekh", you can see the tall, strong figure of Yashke. His tall, broad-shouldered body with a red neck and the appearance of a Russian gentile, dressed in a rustic fur coat and high boots, gives the impression of a metropolitan "goy". A remnant [of cloth] is hanging over his arm. Now his eyes find a victim: a young peasant woman from the village,

[1] free translation

[2] Here are meant the houses that stood on the "Breml", the square near the town clock.

her cheeks burned blood-red by the sun, her high bosom heaving under her fringed blouse.

Yashke approaches her. He pats her good-naturedly on the shoulder, shows her the rest of his cloth, and whispers something in her ear. Suddenly a second person appears, giving the impression that he wants to buy the goods. He fingers it and purses his lips in amazement at the quality of the fabric.

But Yashke snatches the goods from his hands and shouts:

"Pashal, parkati! [Get lost, you idiot!] I don't deal with Jews!" And he whispers in the ear of the gentile woman, whom the patriotic Christian "goy" pleases very much:

"Well, my dear, I don't deal with the Jews and the infidels, only with the people of my faith, the children of Jesus!"

And the "goye" is all carried away with Christian pride and the "bargain". She counts out the silver coins for Yashke, and he measures out the goods so skillfully that with him 4 "arshin" [yard] becomes 5 ½ "arshin", and after receiving the money he stands for a while looking into the eyes of the "goye" with his kosher, honest, innocent eyes of a "tzadik" [1].

Then he leisurely walks off to meet his Jewish partner, the supposedly interested person, at the corner of the street and laughs out loud: "There, we have fooled the goye, let the cholera strike her. See how she melted away when I ranted about Jews!" Yashke, however, quickly disappears, knowing that the goye will soon be screaming for help and looking for a policeman, even though they are all bribed and get cash in their hands.

On the corner of Gumienna Street, the small, lively Bishke the "Gazhetnik" [newspaper vendor] whirls, clamors and shouts:

"A 'Haynt,' a 'Moment,' a 'Togblat,' a 'Sinai Zhurnal,' an 'Ogonyok,' a 'Bizhevye Vyedomosty!'"

He pulls the newspapers out of his large leather bag, which reaches up to little Bishke's neck, and searches with his hand for remnants in a large leather wallet [2].

A carrier with an emaciated, bony face, dressed in a yellowed caftan, with a singed rope tied around him, short boots greased with blue blubber, gazes around in all directions, looking for customers.

A small, shriveled Jewish woman with a kerchief around her ears walks around with a large, rectangular, black-burnt tin on which she carries the goods from her shop:

Brown baked buckwheat-potato pancakes.

[1] tsadek, tzadik= „righteous one“, honorary title for a particularly righteous, pious, wise man

[2] Bishke is also described on page 67, where he is looking in the large leather bag for some leftovers, presumably from newspapers. Perhaps he is looking for change in the second description? The author may also have made a small mistake.

Page 109

Groups of merchants stand on the corner of Gumienna Street and talk about textile goods, long journeys in the Great Russia and bankruptcy, about the nouveau riche and and about world politics.

A big "drongove" wagon with a harnessed poor worn out horse carries highly loaded bales of cloth goods: "kastor", "karelekh", "drap" [1] and flowered "montanyak" blankets.

The cart driver sits on the bales, purses his lips, pulls the reins and drives the laboriously moving broken-down horse.

Next to the famous bakery of "Grek" [Greek] in the market street, where the famous "tshastes" [pastries], "pirozhines" [pirozhki] and "kislos-ladkes" [sour potato pancakes] are sold, a few idlers stand and anxiously and amusedly watch a little titmouse, which has lost its way among the pastries in the shop window. Excited by all the curious onlookers, it ran back and forth in search of an escape route.

A Jewish woman with a woven straw basket over her arm, filled with "Avnet's" pastries, Striezeln, Haman bags, "rogalyes" [rugelach] and pastries, rejoices at the scene and speaks in a loud voice for all to hear:

"It serves them right, after all, they are not supposed to eat Grek's pastries. Look at the chickadees hopping around on the pastries. Ugh, those gluttons!"

A Jewish woman carries a basket from Tanchum's Bakery full of baked bagels and small bagels tied together on string to form a wreath. She shakes her head and cheerfully agrees: "It serves them right, the little gluttons! They really want to eat pastries!"

Next to the "Grek" is the "tshayne" [tearoom], where I go every Shabbat afternoon with a receipt to buy a jug of [hot] water for tea. From far away I can see the clothing store of "Varat the Gotovoplatnik", where there is a balcony on the second floor facing the front. There lives "Mr. Shuster the Khazn" [cantor], where as a choirboy I would sing to "Yomim-neroim" and accompany him, the cantor, for

one silver ruble.

I look at the shops on Gumienna Street from my vantage point on the balcony. There is Inditski's bookstore with newspapers and books displayed in the wide window. There is Ferder's fur shop with fur collars hanging down like ponytails. In the middle is a musk collar that the women of Bialystok wear proudly on their shoulders when they go to the Bes-Midresh on Shabbat.

In Shoshke's Tobacco Store, you can see colorful boxes and cardboard men in the display. Cigarette packs are stacked in a high "barricade" shape, forming

[1] see page 38

Page 110

a pyramid of decorated boxes.

In the far corner, a sign with a top hat painted on it swings in the air. This is Tal's little hat shop.

Below my balcony is Khashe Goldshteyn's fabric shop, with a large door and two windows. Early every morning, when I am still wandering in my unfinished dreams, I hear the sound of the iron blinds she opens in her cloth shop.

The sharp, grating "clang" would ring in my ears for a long time and wake me from my childlike sleep.

Next door is Shtupler's soap store, where boxes of blue-green soap are hauled out all day. But the most festive shop is Khazan's women's clothing store. There are always women walking in front of his shop window and inside. They go in and out, staring with avaricious eyes at the colorful floral fabrics, in a never-ending hunt to show off their feminine beauty and physical charms.

\*

Friday evening. The sounds fade. The hustle and bustle disappears more and more. The air has become quiet.

The group of traders has dispersed. The market becomes quieter. A last fruit seller picks out the rotten apples, throws them away and packs her baskets.

A coachman on his rubber-wheeled cart lazily pushes his tired horse, which can only drag along after a day of hard work. A last late carter, powdered with white flour, passionately encourages his horse, which noisily pulls his floured "drongove" cart over the sharp pavement, its noise fading into the almost silent street.

Opposite the market is Grudki's wine shop. The owner himself serves there, a Jew with an intelligent face and a strawberry-blond goatee. He sells wine for kiddush to his late customers. His two daughters, rosy-white skinned with red-blonde fiery hair, assist their father.

A Jew with an unbuttoned kaftan and wide coattails sticks his red, sweaty, combed head out of the bathhouse and shouts angrily: "Reb Yid, hurry up, Shabbat is about to begin, only a quarter of an hour until the blessing of light!"

The shutters of the shops on Gumienna Street begin to close. Khashe Goldshteyn's shutters close with a loud, noble and powerful sound. .  
[The shutter] of Shoshkes'es tobacco shop slides down with a quiet, respectful "swish," and that of Tal's hat shop with a small, modest, rusty "squeak.

A fat Jewish woman in a floral headscarf pokes her head into Shtupler's soap shop through a half-closed door. But the other door closes unceremoniously,

Page 111

right in front of the Jewish woman's nose.

A "goy" with a red nose and an unbuttoned jacket sweeps the asphalt with a long broom, pushing the dirt into the gutter.

A young woman with tangled hair hurriedly walks past with small steps. In her hand she holds candles wrapped in white paper with white hanging wicks.

Blue streaks cover the sky. A gray darkness spreads over the empty streets. The footsteps of individual pedestrians echo loudly on the

asphalt sidewalks. From the windows, the small flames of Shabbat candles, swaying and submerged in God-fearing silence, shine solemnly on the bright-white, opened out tablecloth.

In Gonyondzki's courtyard, across from our balcony, two large, rectangular, brightly colored flower windows shine from "Salye Oge's" Bes-Medresh.

The large hanging chandelier plays with its flickering flames, making them shine brightly over the full height of the windows, indicating that the "kaboles-shabes"[1] are being prepared to celebrate the sweet, blessed Shabbat with the delicate sounding "lekhu-neraneno"[2]. Its melody swings in time to the swaying flames of the large, proud, snow-white candles placed at the top of the "omed" [podium][3].

\*

A summer morning. Birds are chirping, jumping from one roof to another below my window. The street is quiet. It's "kanikul" [summer vacation] and that's why I'm lying in bed so early with my eyes wide open. And strangely, I can't fall asleep. I feel that every minute of my life is too good to sleep. I dress quietly so as not to wake my mother and go out into the street.

Gonyondzki's yard awakens, shakes off its nightly sleep, and the gray dawn opens a new day of life.

The door of a little house stands wide open. Vinograd the upholsterer, a tall, stately, broad-shouldered Jew with rosy cheeks, is carrying a large mattress that is very stubborn and refuses to go through the narrow door. As soon as he manages to maneuver it through, the springs of the mattress make an unpleasant noise.

A cloud of dust escapes from its innards, and with a bang the mattress is placed on a small, sturdily built cart with massive iron wheels.

[1] קבלת-שבת = the "welcoming of Shabbat", prayers said in the synagogue on Friday evening to welcome Shabbat

[2] לכו-נרננה = "Come, let us sing", first words and name of a chapter of the Psalms sung on Friday evenings.

[3] For better comprehensibility, I have translated the sentence somewhat freely.

On the mattress are large, blurry marks, like oceans on a map, and in its corners are brown, spreading stains, the signs of a bitter struggle between a Bialystoker jewess and her red, uninvited guests. [1]

The wind has fun shaking a metal sign in the courtyard above the stairs to the first floor, where the tailor Vilentshik lives. His window proudly looks out onto Lipowa Street, where you can see wooden fashion dolls and heads that look like frightening ghosts.

Deep in the courtyard, the iron bars of the Noviks' small shoe shop are falling down [2].

A brother and sister are talking in a "squeaky" tone of voice. Both are runtish, energetic and agile, with round faces. Brother Novik looks like a little boy in a man's suit that's too big. The doors of their shop are open wide, and shoes and galoshes hang from the doorposts.

Inside is a tall, fat Jewish woman sitting on a wooden stool. She has one leg half rolled up, and little Novik, squatting on one knee, puts on a "lastenem" [3] linen shoe and quickly "squeaks" the words:

"The shoe fits like a glove! As if it was tailor-made just for you! I'll give you a very good price right off the bat!"

The Jewish woman gets up, tries to walk a few steps, limping on one leg, and then croaks:

"It hurts! Here, and there, and on the big toe too!"

From his apartment, which is connected to his mechanical workshop, comes the locksmith Kalman Meler. He is a medium-sized Jew with yellowish skin, a slightly bent head, and a thoughtful, absent-minded face.

He takes a few steps, but then he realizes that he has forgotten something. So he turns around and comes right back out with some tools in his pockets. He searches for something with his brown, hard, calloused fingers that look like they've been burned, feels through his clothes, and finds a folded tape measure in the top pocket. Then he disappears through the exit of the narrow courtyard into "Rokhe the Shvartser's" Alley.

With an annoying bell-like sound, the large lock and metal bars of Feygele Kirzhner's glass shop move, which she, the owner, opens herself. Feygele is a small, portly woman with an apple-red, warty face. Full of confidence and energy, she looks around proudly as she opens her large glass shop. A little later, her two daughters join her, looking just like their mother: lively, confident,



[1] I assume that bed bugs are meant

[2] certainly is meant that they are opening

[3] I do not know this word. Maybe they are shoes from a leftover stock

Page 113

and with red cheeks as if they had been dyed with red paper. Gorondzki's yard begins a day of its usual life.

\*

The hustle and bustle of everyday life drives me away. Too many people. I look for a corner to be alone. I climb the iron staircase that connects the balconies and floors inside the courtyard. Now I'm standing next to a door in the attic, I open it, go in, and warm air and silence surround me.

Old suitcases, iron beds, boxes stacked on top of each other. From above, the skylight laughs at me. On one side I discover a mountain of books, newspapers and notebooks. A real treasure! I lie down on my stomach on the floor and am happily surprised by the Russian books, newspapers and textbooks stacked there.

I pull out fully written notebooks wrapped in shiny blue "obyortkes" (covers) with red labels that read: "G. Gonyondzki." I realize that I have come across the former schoolbooks of the son of the yard owner.

There is a geometry book with drawings and parallelograms, cones, trapezoids, and there is a physics book. I open the page about "Archimedes' principle" [1], which says that a body placed in water loses as much [its own weight] as the weight of the water it displaces.

This makes me think of a connection with the wonderful legend of Rabbeinu Reb Gershom[2], who constructed a golden throne for his royal monarch and was sentenced to prison because of the intrigues of the court ministers and the denunciation of his second, young wife. Therefore, Rabbeinu Gershom proclaimed a ban on polygamy among the Jews forever.

There are newspapers that are barely touched: "Ogoniok" [3] with the humoresques of the famous Russian writer Arkady Averchenko

[4] and Teffi [5]. The "Sinai Zhurnal", even with blue paper cuttings. Additional books to the newspaper "Birzhevyie Vedomosti" [6], whose famous editor Proper turned away from Judaism.

And there, tied with a rope, are books of Russian classics:

Tolstoy, Gogol, Nyekrasov, Tshekhov, Dostoevsky, Mikhailov, Alexander Kuprin, Leonid Andreyev, Maxim Gorky, and others.

I'm drunk with happiness over all these books, and I don't even know which one to pick up first. I open, read, shuffle some pages.

Then I hear a pigeon cooing. I raise my head and see a gray spotted

[1] [Archimedes' principle - Wikipedia](#)

[2] [Rabbeinu Gershom Ben Judah - \(4720-4800; 960-1040\) - Chabad.org](#)

[3] [Ogoniok - Wikipedia](#)

[4] [Arkady Averchenko - Wikipedia](#)

[5] [Nadezhda Teffi - Wikipedia](#)

[6] [Birzhevyie Vedomosti - Wikipedia](#)

Page 114

dove coming out of her nest in the corner, pitter-pattering, raising and lowering her head. It approaches me. Gently and tenderly, I reached out my hand to stroke it. But her trust in me doesn't go that far. She quickly runs back, raises her wings and disappears into her nest. Yes! Poor little pigeon, you're right! You can't trust anyone!

Who knows what the evil man will come up with in his wild, evil, twisted brain?

## List of Names [Page 7 – Page 114]

Abukov	44
Aleksandrovitsh, Nikolay	13
Alyampas	71
Andersen, Hans Christian	26, 39
Anski	34
Archimedes	113
Averchenko, Arkady	113
Avnet	109
Ayzik the Shames, daughter Esterke and son Ben-Zionke	31, 32
Ayznshtat	55
Babitsh Brothers	47
Babitsh, Mordekhay [Max]	47
Barakin	29
Belenski	49
Bendet	67
Berman, [Jakow]	20, 49
Bialik, Ch.N.	26
Bialik, Chaim Nachman	32
Bibitski	61
Bishkele	67, 108
Blume	68
Bobitske	17
Bobtshe	73
Bogayevski	55
Brodsky	19
Chagall, Marc	79
Citrin	37

Citrin, Shmuel	36
Citron	43
Cohen, Tsvi Hersh	24 [the author's father-inlaw]
Darshin, Meylekh	94 ff, 105
"Dyevotshka"	44
Dimenshteyn, Kalman	56
Dostoyevsky	53
Dr. Pruzhanski	8
Druskin	21
Durashkin	53
Falan	9
Farbshteyn, Dabtshe and Shoshke	16
Farbshteyn, Itshe	16
Farbshteyn, Peysekh [Pesach]	16
Farush	39
Farushe family	39
Faynsond, Yisroelke	54
Ferder	109
Fin, Dr.	29
Fisher, Enye-Bashe	78
Fisher, Hersh	79
Fridman	12, 13, 40
Frug, Sh.	26
Ganyandzkin	72
Gelbart Brothers, "Poylishe",	44
Gelbart, Yakob	44
Glagovski, Nokhem	48,49
Glupishkin	53
Goldberg	9
Goldberg, Dovtshik	16
Goldberg, Rote	16

Goldberg, Shloymke [the Feldsher]	15
Goldfaden	26
Goldshteyn/Goldstein, Khashe	72, 99, 110 [and others]
Goldstein	47
Gorky, Maxim	29
Gonyondzki	99, 105 [and others]
Grabovski	45
Grabowski	45
Graseneyner	37
Grek	109
Grimm	26
Grudski	110
Grodzenski, Mikhl	70, 71
Grosman, Samson Yakovlevitsh	20, 22, 25, 39, 48
Gubinski	37
Gurevitsh	61
Gusinski' children Tsalke and Muntshik	16
Gusinski the Karetnik [the Coachman]	16
Gutman, H.	47
Halpern, "Don Juan"	43
Hershberg, Sh.	24
Jerusalimski, David	27, 90 [the author's brother]
Jerusalimski, Gershon and Ida	7 [author's children]
Jerusalimski, Gregory [Gershon] Zemanovitsh	13 [and others] [the author's father]
Jerusalimski, née Kagan , Manja (Malka),	7 [the author's wife]
Jerusalimski, Nemi-Rose	10 [author's grandson]
Jerusalimski, Regine	10 [author's daughter-in-law]
Jerusalimski, Shloymeke	27
Jerusalimski, Teme	27 [and others] [the author's mother]
Jerusalimski/ Jerusalem/ Jerushalmi, Jacob [Yankele]	7 ff [the author]
Kagan, Reyzl (née Levkovski)	7 [author's wife's mother]

Kagan, Tsvi-Hirsh	7 [author's wife's father]
Kaganovski	9
Kaletsin	53
Kaletsin, Yudl	18
Kaletski, Samuil Yulyanovitsh	18
Kalkher of the City Clock	69
Kamenetski, Khaye [Chaia]	78
Kamenetski, Shmuel, [the Shoemaker]	78
Kamenetski, Yakev	78
Kanapinski	24
Kanel	37
Kanel , Avigdor	15
Kanel, Hershke	15
Kanel, Khayim [Chaim]	15
Kaplan	16
Kaplan, Peysekh [Pesach]	18, 19, 20, 47,56, 74
Kaplan, Sore ["Asara Dibraye"]	74
Kaplan, Yosef	18
Kaplanski	46
Katshalski [the Painter]	78
Keshin, Chaim	43
Kesler, Zlatke	43
Khabatski, Zeydl	45,46
Khayim Puter	107
Khazan	99, 110
Khazanovitsh/Hazanovitsh, Yosef	96
Kheylutshke	107
Khazernik	14
Kirzhner, Feygele	112
Kletski, Yudl	42
Klobukov	99

Klyatshko	61
Knishinski	43
Komichau	37
Kormon	17
Kornyanski	46
Kurlandski	28
Kvapinski	24
Lakhankhas	61
Leon Kubovitski	8
Lermontov	55
Lermontov, Mikhail Yurievich	58
Leyzer the Shenker [Innkeper]	14, 15, 80
Linder, Max	53
Lipshits	28
Lusternik	21, 22
Lusternik	61
Lyalke the Izvoztshik	77
Ma'as, Dobe	17
Ma'as, Shmuel the Tailor	17
Manye, the Akusherke [midwife]	42
Marguerite, Viktor	34
Markus Brothers	37
Markus, Misha	99
Markus, Yakov	99
Marya Fyodorovna	13
Meler, Kalman	112
Meltreger	61
Menakhovske	61
Mirtshe	87
Mirke the Kremerke [Grocer]	80
Mirtshe	87

Mlinazhvitsh	99
Moes	61
Mohilever, Dr. Yosef	59
Moreyn Brothers	37, 68
Muryvyov	55
Nadson	55
Nadson, Semyon Yakolevich	58
Novik	37, 112
Nyevyadomski	46
Ostrinski	99
Piludski	83
Pines, Dr.	56
Plovski, Hilel [with children]	99
Plush Velvet	69
Pokshive	43, 99
Preysman	37, 45
Pulan	59, 97
Puls, Friedrich	52
Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyeovich	58
Rabbeinu Reb Gershom	113
Rabbi Moyshe	16
Rakovski	21
Reshute	100
Reygrodski	95
Ribalovski	9
Rokhe the Shvartser's	112
Rozental, Gershon	45
Rozental, Yehudit [with her children Roze, Dare, Nyomke]	45, 95
Rubinshteyn, Dr.	56
Segal ["Kugelnik"]	46
Shatski	42



Shershmid Brothers	57
Sheyne di Molyerke	79, 81
Sheyner	37
Shifer, "Jewish Jekke"	44
Shloyme der Shtrikdreyer [the Knit Twister]	17
Shmaye	71, 72
Sholem-Aleykem	47
Shoshke	109
Shoshkes, Khayim [Chaim], Dr.	64
Shoye-Toye, David ["Byedni David s'Semyeystvos"]	75, 76, 79
Shoye-Toyes's brother-in-law	80
Shtsheglov	61
Shtupler	110
Shuster the Khazen	109
Shustitski, Khaytshe [with her children Tsilye, Sashe]	45, 95, 96
Shvabishe	37
Smazanovitsh, Maytshik	42
Sohn, David	20, 96
Tal	110
Teffi	113
Tanchum	81ff, 109
Tolstoy, Gogol, Nyekrasov, Tshekhov, Dostoevsky, Mikhailov, Alexander Kuprin, Leonid Andreyev, Maxim Gorky	29, 113
Topolski, Eva [Khavele]	54
Topolski, Osher	51, 54, 55
Triling	37
Trotzky	19
Tsar Nikolai Romanov the II	36
Tsar Peter the Great	95
Tsipkin	61
Utkes	43, 44

Valye, Reb Yakev, „Scribe of the Benkl“	31
Varat the Gotovplatnik	109
Vaybele	23
Veler the Katsev [the Butcher]	17, 29
Veynshteyn [Weinstein]	43, 56
Vilbushevitsh	55
Vilner, Naya	63
Visotski, Zeev [Wissotzky, Wolf]	18
Voroshilsky	99
Vyetshorek	14
Yankel the Teacher [the author]	77
Yakhe	95 ff
Yashke	107
Zakheyim, Khayim [Chaim] Ber	18
Zhmudskin	61
Zunser, Elyakum	26