

CHAPTER IV

Early in the spring, having become a full-fledged Jew who has assumed full responsibility for his own deeds good and bad in late December (I was born ten days in Teveth), I packed my Tefillim and other belongings, took my money from its hiding place, and marched to the narrow gauge railroad station. There I bought a ticket. Where to? I'll tell you in just a moment. First I have to mention that in Russia, one cannot go outside the county of his birth without a passport. In order to obtain this, one's father had to give written permission. This I did not know, but I was fully aware that for some reason the births of all the children in my family had been recorded not in Starodub, but in Novozipkov, some sixty miles cross country or one hundred by train. So I went there. Should I tell you that the cost was small? Perhaps you will be amused at the way I traveled: I bought a full-paid ticket to Oonietsche, where the main line runs. On the wide-gauge line, I knew that the conductors were grafters and would take less. If they could steal from the railroad, why not cut down their take? Besides, my limited funds needed considerable stretching until I could reach somewhere. From Oonitsche Station there was a main railroad line. In one direction, it ran to Moscow; in the other, toward Kiev. That was the way I was headed,--to Novozipkov. I think it cost me twenty kopeks instead of a ruble and something.

So I was on my way. And that was the first time

I had ever been in a railway car. First from Starodub to Oonitsche on the privately-built railroad and then on the regular gauge tracks with the huge engine. Food? I thought you would want to know. No, I didn't go hungry. But before I go on, I must describe a third class train. It was not like traveling from Waterville to Skowhegan on the five a.m., when you had to sit in the caboose filled with smoke and dirt for two and a half hours and yet pay the standard price of forty-five cents for the nineteen miles. In Russia there were express trains, not, however, in my class. The regular train I went on had some cars marked first class, second class, and I went third.

Now I shall try to describe the details of its interior. Come to think of it, the car might have been built especially for a passenger such as myself, and there must have been thousands who caught onto the trick of travel I used. You enter just as you would on passenger cars here in America, but, as soon as you turn toward the inside of the car, there is a sharp, goose-neck-like turn. This leads to a narrow passage on one side, like a corridor; on the other, there are built-in booths with benches on each side, but with no tables in between. Four passengers sit facing each other. I should explain that there were some conveniences: there was a lid that opened up from your back upwards; it served three purposes. (1) A fellow could stretch out there for a snooze; (2) it could serve as a shelf for baggage; (3) a small fellow like myself could sneak up there. The fellow-passengers were kind folks who would hide you with all the luggage they had. This was much like the duffel bags carried by

soldier boys, but likely to contain, besides a possible change of underwear, and a towel or two, bread, sugar, tea, perhaps a herring. Some, of course, brought salt pork, and, among six or eight passengers, there might have been three or four who had a Chainik (tea kettle). This tea kettle served a splendid purpose for passengers like me. Every station had a place where boiled water was sold, the price depending on the size of the kettle. I do not think that it exceeded two kopeks.

You take two or three such containers with sugar and tea, a piece of bread and leaving out the pork. Some of the more experienced travelers had provided themselves with an onion or garlic. You see, you had to know the art of blending and using the two. The Waldorf Astoria may have a master chef who gets fifty thousand dollars a year for mixing up a lot of combinations of different ingredients for which people pay ten to twenty-five dollars a meal. And don't forget that this fifty thousand dollar a year man has many assistants and sub-assistants, busily engaged in preparing the tasty meal that will be served promptly at a certain hour. But if you were to call a meeting of this entire trained staff, put before them a piece of hard bread, a few cloves of garlic, a dipper, a Chainik, a piece of lump sugar with a few tea leaves, what then? They would look on in amazement. What is this all about? So you relieve the suspense and tell them that right here at this table a meal is going to be prepared. Go ahead and mix it! Go ahead; you are supposed to be experts! Then would you ever hear a chorus of different dialects, some French and some

Italian ; and such gesticulating and shrugging of shoulders as would be going on! But your meal would not be ready, and the water in the Chainik would still be cold.

So you let the dumbbells stand there, and, without white cap or apron, you break off a piece of the hard bread. You cannot use a knife on it, and no axe is handy. You simply place the piece of bread across your knee, grasp it with both hands, strike it a few times, and lo and behold! you have two pieces. The chances are that it may have started to crack in other places. It is a chance, of course. But if that didn't happen, then it is all the harder to break. So you are a good fellow and share it with your neighbor. He may have brought an extra lump of sugar. Now you begin to rub the cloves of garlic into the bread, one piece after another. All done? Now you pour the hot water into the dipper, bite off a bit of sugar and manipulate so as to bite off some of the garlic-covered bread. Now that you have the sugar and bread in your mouth, you sip a bit of the hot water, weakly flavored with the tea leaves. At all times you have to gauge how far you are traveling and how many meals you will need.

You ration by eye. You look at what you have sideways, with one eye closed, measuring minutely. Don't forget what you have in your mouth now. You have a piece of lump sugar, the bite of bread with garlic, and now you have to exercise your ability to sip through the water to soften the bread, just touching the bit of sugar enough to get the taste, for it has to last you for several more bites. Don't forget that. You can't be a Nasher and bite off a piece of sugar with

each bite of bread and each sip of tea. Now can you see how simply a meal was prepared?

After this, Jewish people offer prayers and Goyim cross themselves as an offering of thanks for their daily bread. Then, some doze off, and we continue on our way. As the time for departure nears, the conductor discharges his official obligation by calling, "All aboard!" and the train pulls out. Who heard him? Well, in Russia, every station has a big bell. The ringer strikes one gong and calls out, "First bell for train to Portland, Lewiston, Waterville, and Bangor." Only in his case it sounded much more like Novozipkov, Zlinke, Gomen, and Kiev. You had time to get the hot water before he had finished ringing twice, but watch out for that third bell! If the agent was handy with his red cap and the signal had been given, you might find yourself left behind. So you concentrated on the second bell. As for the fellow who didn't take that one seriously, don't ask me how he fared. I am on the train, and, in cases like this, it is every man for himself. Now that I am thirteen and have, since my Bar Mitzvah, been accepted by the Jewish elders as an adult, I must behave that way.

My first stop will be Novozipkov, where I shall get my passport. There were some relatives in the jewelry business there, my mother's uncle and her cousin, Hirshe. Of my mother's girl cousins, I know practically nothing. My father's brother had died in that city, long before I ever arrived on the scene. Although I never met him, I shall try to show his relationship with Zlinke and my meeting Manya. Anyway, I did know that my aunt was still living there and also a

daughter who had married her sister's husband, after the sister had died leaving a small child.

So, since I was a small watchmaker, I stuck to the union and made my way to the man whom we called Uncle Avrohom Ber. He was a fine old gentleman with a handsome beard. I was impressed with his jewelry store, which was much larger than the one owned by his son, Hirshe. The aunt was a small, kind, motherly figure. In five minutes, they knew all about me, the purpose of my being there, and my intention to leave as soon as I had obtained the passport. They fed me, gave me a place to sleep, and made me very comfortable. Was this because I had made it clear that I planned to continue to Ekaterinaslav and not to depend on relatives? Maybe so. I visited Cousin Hirshe, a fine man in his early thirties. He was married, but I don't know if he had any children. His store was clean and attractive, and he had a man working at the bench with him. To this son of a gun, I will return later. I also visited my widowed aunt, who was not noticeably hospitable. She asked me if I was hungry, but not in a particularly friendly manner. This may have been because she had been affected not only by the death of her husband and daughter but also by the disappearance of a son, who had left home and never been heard from. This is the only cousin of all the uncles on my father's side that has never been accounted for. (Cousin Abe told me in 1947 that the young man had left home to marry a Shikseh, and that the General Russakoff so prominent in the Soviet Army in World War II was his son. Well, maybe.)

I must tell you a bit about my Uncle Moshe and try to bring out a point so as to give you a reason why

Zlinke, of all places, should enter my life so early and what part it has played in my life for almost fifty years until now. There were a few uncles on my father's side: one Uncle Liebe, whom I met in Brooklyn, New York, where I landed from the boat; I will come to him a little later. Then, there was Uncle Zelik, who died. And this Uncle Moshe, who was in partnership in the manufacture of matches, with the label of Gorlov and Russakov, Zlinke, Chernigov Gubernia, on every box. There was another match factory in Zlinke, owned by Ossipov, who must have been a rich Goy. I guess that Zlinke must have been situated near the kind of timberland needed for the match sticks.

Zlinke was several miles from the railroad station. I had never been there, but now you can understand why Zlinke was on my mind. My uncle's name was on a box of matches; that was why, after I left Novozipkov, I kept an eager eye out for the station name, Zlinke. Little did I know then that I was trying to penetrate through the thick trees to try to catch sight of the girl who would be my life companion and the mother of our seven darling children. But who cared for girls--just then?

While still in Novozipkov, I learned that a notarized permit from my father was required in order to obtain a passport for the first time. That was the law; and without the passport, I dared not move on. So I sat down and wrote a fully explanatory letter to my father. I told him that there was no future for me in Starodub, that the relatives were not interested, and, moreover, that I didn't want to ask favors. I tried to make it clear to him that with God's help I could

accomplish more by going away than by being stuck in surroundings that did not appeal to me; I asked that he send the necessary permission and not worry about me, for I was determined to stay out of mischief and be a good Jew. I explained that I was sorry to have left the way I had, but that I wanted to avoid having to face a lot of questions for which I had no definite answers. This had seemed the best way to handle my departure, I said, and pointed out that I hoped some day to say a happy hello to them all instead of such a goodbye.

The letter was sent off and I waited, either for a call back home or the permission, which I naturally preferred. But here I must tell you of the incident of a child's prank, which held me in suspense and finally broke me down. In Starodub I had never had much candy and had had a plan for the use of the few kopeks of my own. I mentioned earlier that I had given the five rubles received from the two Barishnies (spinsters) to my only sister as a wedding present. Anyway, here in Novozipkov with nothing to do, I developed an overwhelming desire for candy. Everywhere I turned I saw it, candy on stands, candy in stores, sour, sweet, wrapped in fancy paper. Why not spend a few kopeks? No, I might need the money later. Later. Later. But when is later? I went into one place, bought two or three kopeks' worth, and started to suck, chew, and eat the pieces with gusto. These gone, I went into another place and again got two or three kopeks' worth of assorted kinds. I must have visited ten or twelve places that day and spent a fortune of twenty-five to thirty kopeks. Too bad. Thirty kopeks. It takes a long time to save up that much capital. But hadn't I saved it up

by not spending all these years? Yes, but how would I get to my destination? So why had I attended Yeshivah? God would help me. Didn't I pray every day? Oh yes, I did. I was a good boy, and even though a runaway, had I not written home that I was going to help my folks? I meant it, too. I had no unpleasant after-effects from eating so much candy, and my craving for it was satisfied. And God was good to me, for He helped me replenish my twenty-five or so kopek pieces forty times over. Not a bad return for such an investment and in just a few days, too!

Cousin Hirshe asked me, Zushke, do you think you are a watchmaker? -- No, I replied, not a full-fledged one, but I know a little of everything. No one knows it all; that's why people have to keep learning. -- Do you know clocks? -- I certainly worked on a lot of clocks at Uncle Gershen's; I had even earned a pair of custom-made boots for repairing all of the clocks he had. -- Well, I have a clock for you to fix; if you can get it to run right for twenty-four hours and not stop, I'll give you ten rubles.

Can you imagine my amazement at such a bargain? Does the clock have a dial? wheels? pendulum? -- Oh yes, the hands and every screw and pin. Here it is. Take it and work on it; do what you wish, take your time. When it is finished and keeps running for twenty-four hours, I'll pay you.--So I didn't stand to lose anything by trying. It took but a few minutes to get the clock off the wall and study its operation. It was a regulator, about three feet long, with a weight, and no spring to wind. The movement was a French import. These clocks are very nice but extremely delicate. Most

important was the fact that in the best of condition, they had to be adjusted to hang properly so that the pendulum did not lean on anything. The sound of the tick-tock must be even.

I took the clock apart, set it down on the end of the bench so as not to bother the worker I mentioned earlier and, as they say in watchmakers' language, sich geporket (poked around). This dirty guy began to nag me. Everyone had worked on this clock; what kind of big shot do you think you are in making it run? Do you think your cousin would be so quick to offer ten rubles? Your work won't make any impression; you're just being made a fool of. Well, said I, I have nothing to lose by trying. Until my permit comes from my father, I'm just hanging around anyway. As young and inexperienced as I was, I was not mistaken in judging that this character would try to harm me however he could. So I swallowed his remarks painfully and kept doing as I thought was right.

For me, two important matters were at stake. First and foremost, I wanted to prove to Hirshe and his father that I had learned something and was not just a novice. Second, the ten rubles were a major consideration, for what couldn't I do with a sum like that? As I started to put the clock together, Hirshe would occasionally stop by and watch me for a few minutes; the other fellow made his belittling remarks constantly. Before I hung the clock, I told Hirshe that I did not trust his man, for I was sure that he would make the clock stop to spite me. I explained that I intended to hang the clock in the evening, when he had left for home. I planned to fasten the case to the wall with a

screw so that it could not be moved to a side and lose its even tick-tock. So as to insure further that this character wouldn't open the door and stop the pendulum, I told Hirshe, I would put a bit of tissue paper under the door. Then, if anyone opened it, the paper would fall out and we would know who was the conspirator between me and the ten rubles I so longed to have.

I did as I had planned and made sure of two important things: first, to pull up the weight of the clock as high as it would go, and second, to be there when the fellow closed up shop for the night. Next morning, I arrived just a bit too late; my deadly enemy was already there, a Mephistopheles. With a devilish ha-ha, he launched his tirade on the kind of clock-maker I was, my showing off, and so on. Little did he guess that I knew, with a glance, that he had rigged my failure. How? -- Well, it seems that watchmaking to me was a live thing; I took it seriously and my eye was keen. I hope that it will continue to be. The moment I looked at the clock and the relative position of the weight that I had pulled the night before, I immediately knew that the clock had run through the night. It was about three inches lower than when I had left it. Since this was an eight-day clock, and since I, as a grade school graduate, knew my arithmetic, it was easy to figure out where we stood. Now say nothing, I cautioned myself. When Hirshe came in, he glanced at the clock. By gesturing silently and by my head-shake, he knew. He asked the big hero if he had touched the clock and received a loud no in reply. So, gently, Hirshe climbed up on a chair and put his hand under the clock door so as to catch the piece of tissue paper. Lo and behold!

the paper was gone. I called his attention to the weight, how much it had moved down, an indication that the clock had run just about eight or nine hours. Then, he laced into this big brute, telling him how ashamed he ought to be not only for not helping a boy who was eager to try but for trampling him when he was just starting out on his own, away from home and parents. I knew, said my cousin, that you would make the clock go. Here Zushke, is your kosher earned ten rubles. I know you will do well.

Was I proud? I guess I was, particularly with the ten rubles in my pocket. Little did I dream that some ten years later, when my father came to Skowhegan, I would learn that he had heard about the clock incident three or four years after it occurred. And my father knew then that Zushe would be all right.

CHAPTER V

You may ask how I happened to know how to get from Starodub to Ekaterinaslav and that from Novozipkov I had to take the train to Gomel and then proceed by boat on the Dnieper. I can't answer; perhaps it was instinct. Anyhow, I was on my way and eagerly watching so as not to miss Zlinke. Was I interested in catching a glimpse of my uncle's match factory, or was I trying to telescope the seven miles from the station to where Manya lived with her folks? Did I have some sort of premonition? Later, when I give you the details of our meeting, you, too, will wonder.

In the evening, when we reached Gomel, I bribed the conductor with a silver piece. I told him that I was going to look for a job and had no money, so he let me go. I strolled through the city with its beautiful railroad station, streets paved with cobble-stones, and nice, big gas street-lamps. I inquired where the Parachod (ferry) was and was directed to the waterfront. The nearer I came to it, the darker it became; the gas lamps were spaced far apart. I kept going, expecting to find some sort of waiting room. But alas! I could see nothing, not even water. I tried to make out in the dark what this was all about; evidently I had come to a dead end. There stood a sort of shed, from the open door of which came the sound of human snoring and a far from pleasant odor.

Since I had not begun to smoke yet, I carried no matches. But the raw carrots I used to like to eat in

Starodub came to the rescue, and in the dim light from a far-off gas lamp, I tried to make out my surroundings. There seemed to be people lying on the floor and not on Simmons mattresses, either. And I could hear all kinds of nasal instruments each playing in a different key. What it sounded like only a Tchaikovsky could resolve into a symphony. But to a mere mortal like me, seeking a place to earn my future living, this was not music. I will admit that I had been in places before where the air had been saturated with the perfume of humans. But, compared to this, the others were like heliotrope. Occasionally, some peasant would sneak inside, where, I imagine, he joined in the community slumber and added to the stench, but I stood my post outside, with thoughts of home, Novozipkov, and I don't know what else.

What was behind this building? I could hear water splashing. Is this the Parachod? It can't be; it doesn't sway. I can see that it is on solid ground on this side. What does a Parachod look like? How is it possible to load so many people and still stay on the surface of the water? How many passengers will it hold? Will it take them all? or just those sleeping close to the farther door? How does it feel to be on the water? Daybreak clarified matters somewhat. The Muzhiks came out, yawned and stretched noisily, and scratched vigorously. You can't imagine how they were dressed, for the style was far different from anything worn here. Certainly there were no creased trousers and starched shirts. They mostly favored homespun linen, almost as hard as dried hides. Everything was white, even the hats, worn Cossack-style. Being experienced

travelers, they knew exactly what the fare was to Kiev, Uman, Kremenchuk, and Ekaterinaslav. Naturally, there was competition among the several Parachod owners to get a full load to the longest distance. Ekaterinaslav was the end of the journey, even though the Dnieper runs still farther. Navigation is not possible beyond, however, because of the many rocks. Sure enough, there appeared to be a good deal of rivalry next morning, for three Parachods were ready to leave. The first entry obviously enjoyed an advantageous position for loading the crowd; but the second company wanted to attract customers and loudly called out prices to various destinations. The third company, still farther away, tried to outshout the first two. As a result, I not only did not pay any fare, but even received a French Piroh, a white roll with pointed ends.

I still do not understand how they did it. Some of the passengers were afraid that the company might put us to work, but nothing like that happened. It was very pleasant sailing. I strolled around the contraption, looking down into the machinery, watching as the huge wheels cut the water, forcing our way ahead, on and on. Where to? What was there waiting for me? or who to meet me? Along the way, the boat paused to let off and take on passengers. Among them would come food vendors, many of them Jewish, from whom you could buy Kichlach, Baigle, Knishes filled with potatoes, beans, or Lungen. Don't forget that the Chainik was still popular, and on the boat you could buy water. I do not guarantee that it was boiled, but it was hot enough for the few kopeks' worth of tea leaves that you had purchased.

You ask what was my room number? If you mean by that where could I lay myself down, that would be more

like it. As you chose your place with your eyes on the floor, you sort of asked the fellows already there if the place near them was spoken for. Naturally, you have found Jews among the group, and they invite you to join them. No seats, no mattresses. During the day, you wander about; if tired, you sit down wherever you wish, front, aft, or on the side, but on the floor. So you already have a place to sit and to sleep, and you eat there, too. The food you bought from the peddlers tastes mighty delicious. Time is not important just now; you'll get there when the boat does. You rather enjoy this leisure.

The Dneiper is not a wide river. You can see both shores as you sail along. At some seasons, when the water is low, a man stands at the front of the boat with a long stick in hand. As he draws the stick up out of the water, he calls out how deep the water is. I imagine that this gives the captain a chance to order a change in the Parachod's course to right or left. Another sight on the Dnieper that impressed me was the rafts of timber tied together, row on row, cross-wise, perhaps ten or twelve deep. On top of them would be a camp and people. As the Dnieper's current goes downriver in the direction we are going, the rafts drift along. They have to be steered only to prevent their getting wedged against the shore. It was interesting to watch the men work. There might have been ten or fifteen of them. They also stood with sticks, but theirs were like stirrers. You saw them wave to each other. Sometimes you passed so closely that you could see them heat their Chai, eat their meals, or you could call to them. At night, they dropped anchor and lit tail lamps to warn

the Parachod. The lumber originated from above Gomel, where there was a heavy timber tract; it cruised on such rafts all the way downstream, as this was the cheapest mode of transportation.

Travel didn't cost me much, either. I ate moderately, well acquainted with the proverb that if you want two meals, you have to make two of what you have. It may have been short of the luxury of the Queen Mary, but for me it was exciting. After two days and two nights, we reached the city of Ekaterinaslav.

What thoughts, what imaginings, what hopes, what fears marched with me as I left the boat and set foot on land! Mother had a second cousin there, one whom you might call a laborer. Anyway, a tongue was not created merely to stick out but to ask if you want information. So I asked if anyone had heard about a Belodubrovsky, and, pronto, I found myself at his house. What a house! It seems that either poor people make such houses or such houses are made for them. Would you have hoped for better in a big city? Really, this was not only the wrong side of the tracks, but the farthest end of that place! But it was good to be with relatives; although we had never met, he and his wife were very hospitable, and I found at least a temporary place to lay my head. And so my head was on another floor. It made no difference whether the wood was soft or hard, for I guess my head had turned into a pillow. No matter what its composition, the floor seemed soft to me. I probably rested one day and then went to a Russian bath, a good place to scald off the pests that had been acquired on the trip. They may have had a playful time running around my body, but I found them most annoying. This

was no novelty. But since I had traveled third class on slow trains, I objected to their first class express all over me! The bath was a great relief. I felt relaxed and optimistic, and, on the third day, went to the city itself on the good side of the track.

Picture a young newcomer walking, walking, and coming into a street which runs from one end of the town to the other, about one-eighth of a mile, and not knowing whether to turn right or left. Of course, I was looking for a watchmaker so as to inquire about a job. For no particular reason, I turned left and walked down a third-class business street. Now I was on the soil of a generally considered prosperous southern city of one hundred thousand population, some two hundred miles from Odessa and the same distance from Charkov and Kiev. It was a melting pot of people. How to describe their clothing? One could say that it was colorful, but to me it looked hashy at first. People dressed in whatever they had, and most of them had nothing. You have never seen such Liapties (sandals), made of wooden strips about an inch wide and as thin as thick sugar bag paper woven basket-style. Rags wrapped around the legs constituted leggings, and these were tied with ko'ol haminim shihu,--all kinds of rope, string, or cloth strips. As you walked on, you also saw many more shoes and boots, some new, some old. The ratio was like the fifty-fifty that Dr. Borden offered me when he wanted to go into partnership. He would say, I'll put in a rabbit and you put in a horse. And he would laugh his cynical laugh, ha-ha-ha.

I want to go back a few years and explain why someone like myself has not up to now described the scenery of Russia. I traveled some distances and saw

much of the countryside; why not try to depict it? Well, a kid like me who had seen poverty and filth and was trying to better himself overlooked all this. His vision was strained to one point,--work, earn, and save. Let writers like Lermontov, Dostoyevski, or Pushkin, who can describe such beauty and mix it with human misery, perform this task. Or let a Rimsky-Korsakov compose a symphony carrying the message of Russia through a vast array of instruments. In my day, there was no jazz music, and the trumpet did not have a special mute that made it sound like a cry, wah-wah-wah. Over there, it would have been most appropriate.

I mingled with ordinary folks who were lost. Fundamentally, they were kind-hearted, even those who participated actively in pogroms against me and my people. And, in saying this, I not only recall the mild pogrom that I had the misfortune to experience but can imagine the hideous situation which prevailed at Keshinyev, where thousands of Jews were slaughtered in cold blood by just such folks as I was associating with. Then why pity them? The answer is that they didn't know what they were doing. Just as a maniac who commits a crime here is not punished in the same way as the sane person, so there the fault did not lie directly with the peasants involved. Tremendous in number, they had known only deprivation in their lives. Some of them were beginning to mutter and complain at their hard lot. You have probably seen movies of groups of forty to sixty of them starting out for the fields in the morning with their pitchforks, axes, shovels, hoes, and rakes, singing away at the top of their lungs. And they had fine voices. The folk songs had lyrics about work, work,

work. As in the Bible passage, "With the sweat of your brow, you shall earn your daily bread," they got sick and tired of eating salt pork with bread and onions,--not always a very tasty dish. They began to ask questions and to make their objections heard.

Just as in this country there is a Gerald K. Smith, so in my day over there was a fellow named Krushevanin, who was especially trained to spread poison against the Jews. He blamed everything on the Jew. If it did not rain, it was the sinner Jew's fault because in waiting for the Messiah, he did not accept the Saviour. He is a Christ-killer and his people are determined to take advantage of us; the sooner they are destroyed, the better for us. Henry Ford, in his Dearborn Independent, with Cameron in charge, preached the same gospel. I, for one, would ascribe the Nazi ideology to Henry Ford. And to me it was not new; I had seen it before in another time and in another land.

There were good Goyim, who would whisper a warning to a Jew if there was agitation about a pogrom in the air. Then the Governor having been bribed, a company of Cossacks would descend and crisis would be averted. But I think that some were murderers, who pocketed the money and allowed the hoodlums to work their destruction. But never was a pogrom perpetrated by sober Goyim. It was always the vodka drinkers,--and for good reason: The government needed large sums to support monks like Rasputin, who were numerous. When they started a wild, drunken stampede against the Jews, they did it with sharp impact, or, as the Crusaders might have reported to their superiors, "a job well done." But, deep down, these Chamules (churls) were a kind

people. They were very hospitable, would give you their best bunk and, if in doubt, would come to the Jew for advice. With vodka, they could be turned against their real friend, the Jew.

When I first came to Skowhegan, there were many Poles and Russians working in the woods upriver. Whenever they got in trouble with the law, they asked if there was a Jew nearby, for they knew that a Jew would help them. And they invariably found me. I wonder if it will ever be told behind the Iron Curtain that the Jews helped them overthrow the Czarists?

But I had work to do and little time for dreaming. I had to find out what I was faced with. The first place I reached was a two-window store, occupied by a barber on one side and a watchmaker on the other. He had no merchandise to sell and wasn't in besides, so I kept going. When I came to a watch repair sign on a building with a high stoop, I went in. A nice young man, tall, fair, about twenty-six years old, with a friendly face, listened pleasantly to the recital of who I was and what I wanted. He explained that he had just started and had little work, but that I could come in with him if I wanted to. He would provide room and board, and we would see how things worked out. I decided to stay; let me be on my own near someone young and kind. No, I did not see my bedroom or other accommodations, but that sort of thing wouldn't have bothered me. In a few days, something did; it was the kind of language that filled the atmosphere. The words were not Greek or Turkish,-- just a terrible conglomeration of Polish and Jewish curses the like of which I had never heard before, exchanged between the father, mother, and daughter, but

not my gentle-faced boy-boss.

To describe what it was all about would be foolish if it hadn't been so tragic. It seems that the father was a scribe, or letter-writer. This was a profession found in the larger cities of Russia. The writer, along with others in this trade, wait around in the post-office until some illiterate (and there were many in Russia) comes along and wants a letter written. The two then retire to a tea-drinking place and order a Chainik of tea. This is a double-boiler-like affair, the lower part holding eight or ten Stakanes (cups) of water, the upper the steeped tea. First, pour a little from the top, add water from the bottom, and you have tea, the luxury costing five kopeks. Whether a lump of sugar was included I do not recall. Perhaps you had a piece in reserve in the pocket that contained matches, Machorka (a tobacco resembling Bull Durham), and so on. You blow the sugar free of bits of whatever has stuck to it and are ready to start. The Pisar (writer) produces pen, ink, and paper, and the production gets into motion. The sender dictates, and the letter begins to take on meaning. The other tea drinkers are not concerned with these secrets, which may be expressed in a love letter, a message home, or very often a legal document for some official matter.

The turmoil began when the father had not written enough letters on that or previous days. You are a good-for-nothing; other men provide for their families; your daughter needs a dowry and should have been married three years ago. If it were not for Michel, where would we be? The father answers that his wife is just so much poison and so is his daughter. The son begs for peace.

After having heard violent curses three times in a week, I decided that I hadn't come here to acquire the vocabulary of a Yenteh Telebendeh, and told my employer that I couldn't stand this place and would try to find a more congenial one. I later learned that the Polish are great arguers, but I avoided staying with them. I had not left home to join misery even though it is said that misery loves company. While I had no definite plan as to who my future companions would be, I did not care to repeat this experience.

So again I went to Poltara Judah ("one and a half Jew") which was what my mother's cousin was called. He was a tall, dark man with wide shoulders and the Keiches (strength) to unload a barge of timber. An incident occurred in this cousin's place that so bewildered and hurt me that I vowed never to forget it. Do you doubt that a lad of thirteen can know a hurt so deep that he'll never forget it? Do you think that he can't eventually retaliate?--To this day, I do not know why another fellow was there. He was a second cousin to my mother but a first cousin to the Poltara Judah Belodubrovsky. I had known his brothers and sisters and all his family, and recall that his father had had a lumber yard near the synagogue in Starodub. I had fallen asleep on the floor but awoke in pain and astonishment, screaming. At first, I did not realize what had happened to me but, when I gathered my senses, realized that he had given me a hot foot. Do you know what that is? He had taken a piece of cigarette paper, which most people carried, as they rolled their own; he didn't have to exert himself, for the whole room was as big as a Genetz (yawn). He wet the paper, pasted it to my bare heel, lit the top, and gradually the flame reached my

skin. Horrors! It was terrible! Picture to yourself, from peaceful slumber to such a painful awakening. And, like a Torquemada or a Mephistopheles, he sat there sipping tea and laughing.

Shocked beyond words, I just looked at them both,-- Zuteh, as he was called in Starodub, with reddish beard cut somewhat like Lincoln's, near-sighted, but not so blind that he could not see my feet. And the Poltara Judah, who worked along the river fronts with rough fellows of the type described by Maxim Gorki and appreciated this type of crude humor. So, quietly, I turned over and fell asleep again. Some fifteen to eighteen years later, after World War I, when I sent several food and clothing packages to Poltara Judah, this Zuteh asked me to send him one. I hesitated for a few days but never replied to his letter, for I wanted to remind him of the hot foot. Instead, I sent an extra package to his cousin. Maybe he remembered then why I had disregarded his plea.

And so I went out to seek a place for myself. Again I returned to the same street, to the place near the barber shop where previously the owner had been absent. This time I found him, bent over his bench. The picture was a familiar one. We talked. He asked me what I could do. He did not get much clock work but said that sometimes he got a lot of watches. I could not figure out the "sometimes," for there is no season in this occupation. Some days, you might take in an extra job or two, but he had mentioned "a lot." He said, I can't pay you much, twenty-five rubles a year with room and board, as I'll have to teach you a lot of watchmaking and give up so much of my time. I don't

know what you'll be able to do to help me, but you look like a fine boy; so I'll be glad to help you. -- I thanked him and told him that I would come back later in the day, as I wanted to think it over. I walked out and marched around the corner and another corner, and there was another watchmaker. When I went in and talked to him, lo and behold! this fellow offered me five rubles a week. Wasn't that quite different? I was really overwhelmed, told him that I'd have to think it over, and left.

Now I walked in bewilderment. Fifty kopeks a week. Five rubles a week. These kept repeating themselves over and over again. Then, an idea developed in my young mind: Why not try to find out what kind of workman each employer was? But where to check when you are a stranger? I formulated my own research and entered several nearby stores. In each I asked the same question: Which of the two watchmakers, Chavkin or Kuritzky, was the better man? They all agreed that Gospodin Chavkin was a man who could do anything, a nice fellow, with a fine wife of the motherly type. By all means, if I wished to learn something, Chavkin was my man.

When I returned to Mr. Chavkin, we closed the deal by shaking hands, the agreement being that I stay with him a year at a salary of twenty-five rubles for that period. The barber broke apart our clasped hands, thus making the deal binding. As I had no other place to stay, he said he would put me up in the area behind a partition where the coal stove stood. There was a board laid from wall to partition with Shmates (rags) on it. This, Zushkeh, I told myself, is your abode. I had supper in his house, not far around the corner. So I was all set.

This Mr. Chavkin was a kindly, short, stout, and bearded man. His wife was just as short and stout, and they were both friendly. Their family consisted of three daughters, the oldest about ten. It was not long before I became her tutor. When I did not perform as well as Mr. Chavkin expected at the bench, he would say, you needn't think that just because of Rocheleh you are a Ganze Yatebedam (big shot). I attached little significance to teaching the girl, but he referred to it many times.

To digress a little...Mrs. Chavkin liked me very much and often asked what I'd like for dinner. I do like Zharkoi, pot roast with potatoes, and said so. Consequently, we had Zharkoi every day except Saturday, when she fixed the traditional Tcholent. Once, for some reason, she prepared a cabbage and tomato borstch, which really tasted chaloshes (just terrible). After a few spoonfuls, I could take no more; nor could her three children. That was the end of that borstch, but later I will recount an amusing incident about this famous food, something like the Vienna soup story. (If you don't take it in one way, you'll get it in another; but have it you will!)

Life went on in a simple, regulated schedule, up very early in the morning and work until the end of the kerosene in the lamp, which was a big one. On Friday nights and Saturdays, I took to reading, mostly Russian books. There were libraries and theaters, too, the latter housed in the library buildings. The plays were presented by local talent, with an orchestra thrown in, for the admission fee of twenty kopeks. Also, since Ekaterinaslav was a large city with a substantial

Jewish population, there were several beautiful synagogues. Traveling Jewish theatrical companies would stop for two or three weeks at a time, their cast usually including some of the famous actors. Actually, because they played in Yiddish, they were not allowed under Russian law; but, thanks to graft in the right places, they got their permit as a German troupe. I managed to see a number of good plays.

I got along fairly well except for having to sleep in the barber-shop, which was far from sanitary. After a Muzhik and several of his type were parted from their hair and what was in it, my bunk would be infested with crawling pests. Really, it was no fun. I can truthfully say that those insects were my worst enemies and I put up a hard fight with them. But the job was progressing satisfactorily and, even though I felt capable of handling anything that might come along, I did not want to make a change.

Why had Mr. Chavkin told me that at times he would have a heavy load of work? Well, as in any city in Russia, there was a market square where activities took place on different days. In Starodub, it was on Mondays, and here on Fridays. Various people brought out articles to sell or swap, and others came to buy. It was here that I purchased my second-hand wearing apparel during my first two years. Among the traders were a few who regularly sold and exchanged watches. Some of them brought their trade-ins for Mr. Chavkin to repair, and I helped him. At the beginning of the second year, we shook hands over a figure of seventy-five rubles, which put me in the money, with a ruble a week more. Right about then, my brother Samuel came to the

city. He followed the iron trade and worked in factories when he worked. When he didn't, I supported him. With what? Well, he wasn't very demanding. With a five-kopek-piece he would buy a good-sized watermelon and two kopeks' worth of black bread, just enough to quiet the pangs of hunger. This went on and off; but he was my older brother, and I didn't fuss about providing the five-kopek pieces.

The fellow who worked in the barber shop spent his Mondays off somewhere or other. It made no difference to me where, for he was much older than I and a sort of old-maidish type. He never had much to say, compared with the other helpers in the shop. One Monday, he asked whether I had a relative married to a Simkin. I forgot to mention that there was a cousin who later lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut, whom I met only once. But he was so inhospitable that I wasn't even invited to his home. Aunt Ida's brother, Max Belson, worked in a book bindery in Ekaterinaslav, and was about as warm as he is now. He hadn't been any different when he worked at the same trade in Starodub. Always a secluded person. Then, there was Cousin Israel, single at first, and the Carson cousins now in Philadelphia, on whom I called very few times. But I did not know of a Russakoff girl who came from near Novozipkov and was married to a Simkin nor how the barber's helper had discovered that her maiden name was Russakoff. It was this way:

As he claimed to be related to the Simkins, he often went there for his day off. One Monday, while there on his regular visit, the letter carrier inquired if there was someone named Prusakov among them. Uncle Moteh's wife heard the name, but, mistaking it for

Russakoff, said at first that this was she. That was how the connection was made and the switch turned on. This Roskin told her that there was a young man named Russakoff working next door to him and that he was a newcomer from Starodub. She immediately asked him to bring me along on one of his calls, but since the place was at the other end of the city, I put off going until Purim, when he suggested that we attend the party there. Since you know what my salary was, you can well understand that I had nothing new, neither shoes nor suit. But about dusk, we set forth. I was sort of interested in pursuing the matter of relationship.

A sign outside said, "M. Simkin, Ladies' Tailor." We entered a yard and then the house from the back, first into a shed, then a long, dark kitchen, with a bedroom, also dark, to the right. Where one would expect to have found the livingroom was the shop, with long tables and sewing-machines. For tonight, these had all been moved aside, and, on one of the tables where ordinarily the girls did their work, there were all the delicacies appropriate for celebrating the downfall of Haman and the victory of the Jews.

Ma's family were all present. Her father and mother. Tante Dvoseh, her husband Avrom, and their youngster. Tante Pasheh and Uncle Lazar, who were engaged. Uncle Moteh, his wife Maria (whose maiden name was Russakoff), and child. Uncle Isaac. And Ma. Such a beautiful, sweet person, really little more than a child. As we entered, I, a stranger, was carefully scrutinized. After the introductions and Sheloms, with handshaking all around, it did not take long to establish the fact that there was no family connection

with Maria. Consequently, for a short time at least, I felt like an intruder and a little uncomfortable. But then the father began asking me questions: Who am I from Starodub? Do you know anyone there? I asked. Yes, he knew Zusheh Belodubrovsky. I replied that he was my grandfather and that I was his first namesake. Why did my future father-in-law study me so searchingly, as though trying to find someone in my eyes? Since he was very near-sighted and wore no glasses, you can understand that he came very close. Then, at the top of his lungs, he called, Feige, come here! Do you know who our guest is? His wife was nearby; the others came running, too. He paused a moment that to me lasted an eternity. I just couldn't see why it was so important that I was a Belodubrovsky. I knew that my grandfather had been a fine man, but was that something to make a great fuss about?

But then I heard him tell something I had never known before. My grandfather used to cover great distances to buy one or many pearls from some drunken count, trade for oats with another duke, and then sell the oats or flax. Since the Pritzim (nobility) lived on their estates, Grandpa always arranged for food and lodging with Jewish settlers or Yeshuvniks, as they called Jews who lived in small communities. Somewhere in his travels he had met my father-in-law and at another place he had met my mother-in-law. And he had played the part of a Shadchen (match-maker) between them!

So I became the guest of the evening and was made to feel most welcome. The evening passed very pleasantly. I do not mind admitting that I cast my eyes in Ma's direction and that I caught her looking at me not once

but several times. Oh! her sweet smile and dimples and dear, blue eyes! and the lovely complexion with white skin and pink cheeks! Her beautiful, soft brown hair was covered with a Shaten (shawl). She was dressed simply but neatly. Right then and there I wondered when I could see her again and if she would want me to return. We left quite late, my barber friend and I. Back in my bunk, I had wonderful thoughts as a lullaby. The few days until the next Saturday were the longest I had ever known. But, slow as it was in coming, Saturday finally rolled around. I proceeded over there, unaware that she lived with Tante Dvoseh some distance farther off. That fazed me not at all, and I spent the day there very happily. In arranging a wedding between her parents, my grandfather had provided his namesake with a bride. No wonder Zlinke had seemed so important to me as I had ridden past in the train. Someone that I loved lived there, although I had not yet met her!

Thus, I became a regular guest at two houses, whichever was the handier. Often I would wait at Uncle Moteh's until Ma had finished her day's work. He was a high-class tailor who designed suits and coats for a large store, where customers' orders were taken. Then, his workers would sew the garments. My welcome there was most hospitable and, in fact, on stormy nights, I was given a couch to sleep on. At times, Ma chose to stay at her own home, where her father, mother, Tante Pasheh, and Tante Dvoseh and husband and child lived. Whenever we returned after a show at the Library Theater, the little snack that I mentioned earlier awaited us, Tante Dvoseh having prepared it. (As I write, on December 19, 1948, I must set down the sad news

that today I received a letter from Paris saying that on the thirteenth, she passed away. She was a dear woman and her life was hard.)

I think that they considered me different from most other young men. The watch-traders having tipped me because they liked the way I polished their merchandise, I always had a few rubles in my pocket. Once this aunt asked if I would lend her a few rubles; this I gladly did. Another time, her mother borrowed some money, perhaps ten rubles, and do you know what she did with it? She bought grapes and other fruits, which she then sold in the market so as to bring a few extra pennies into the house. It seems that Tante Dvoseh's husband, although a splendid men's tailor, was both lazy and very stingy. If he ever did give her one ruble, he required a report on how it had been spent. He was a conceited ignoramus and never treated his wife decently.

Later, I discovered that in her household, Aunt Maria held the purse strings. If any member of the family needed money, he had to try to get it from her. There was always an argument, just as if her husband couldn't have given it and not made a Tsimes (fuss). The whole thing pivoted around ten rubles and the mother, Feige Simkin. I did not like it but, being a stranger, had to pretend that I had observed nothing. Ma told me that they expected her to work harder than their hired help. I suggested that since they made good relatives but not employers, she should find work elsewhere. When she did this, a crisis was created. Her poor mother was used as a medium to get Ma to return to work for her brother. To be sure, he now offered a bit more pay than before, but even so it was a pitiful

amount. However little it was, every penny of it went to her mother for their meager home.

Ma and I continued to see a lot of each other. But at one point, there was a lapse of about a week when I didn't show up; I can't remember why. How pleased I was that Manya came to Chavkin's to find out what was wrong! It was in the evening, and so Mr. Chavkin let me off. With extra work coming in from the traders, he sometimes paid me an additional five rubles for the rush jobs. There was always a place ready for the cash; I needed underwear and shoes to wear when I took Ma out. A theater, a glass of soda, some Marozheneh (ice cream) could spoil a ruble. And my brother could not be allowed to go hungry.

With the end of my second year approaching, I had begun to think about my prospects. Ma and I went everywhere together. She was a little jealous if I danced with any other girl and I did not tease her. We never discussed serious things; I was nearly sixteen and she was fourteen. What was there to talk about? We attended youth meetings, where revolutionary songs were sung; every minute your heart was in your mouth in fear that the police would attack the house and arrest the group.

A week before my term expired, Mr. Chavkin told me in tears that he could not renew the agreement because I was worth a better salary elsewhere. He assured me that I could stay on with him until I found the right place. I know that my Manya was afraid; there was a tense feeling between us, each reluctant to talk about it. The job that turned up was with a bachelor, soon to be married, in a place some two hundred miles away. The salary was ten rubles a week with room and board.

We parted in good spirits and promised to write to each other. Did I mention that I was her Russian tutor? Well, I was. Her folks did not consider it necessary for girls to be educated, even to the extent of reading and writing. They knew a little Jewish and that was enough. The tutoring came in handy, for we kept on writing. For the first time, I reached the exalted state of being clean as a pin with no express runners on me. I looked presentable, with a new supply of shirts, collars, ties, and a made-to-order suit. Something always told me ahead of time just what morning I would receive a letter from Manya.

My boss got married at the age of forty to a thirty-year-old girl from Rostov on the Don. He found living accommodations for me until they could set up housekeeping. Debaltsevo, where I now resided, had been little more than a railroad junction, from which lots of lines fanned out. Because it was built on a duke's estate, the inhabitants had to pay land rent. As the town developed, the population was made up largely of railroad workers and then laborers from the nearby coal mines. There were, of course, farms scattered about the countryside. The small enterprises that served the community, the tailors, barbers, shoemakers, and so on, were mostly Jewish-owned. As this was a territory prohibited to Jews, these people held special permits, which had been issued because their grandfathers had served in the army of Nikolas I for twenty-five years. My right to be there was based on the fact that I was a watchmaker. I boarded at the home of the Chazan-Sheched (cantor-butcher), and the synagogue was in a private house.

Some of these Jews could talk Yiddish, and so it did not take long to become acquainted. But here you did not just step up and introduce yourself; it was more formal than that. My *début* among the Jewish folks came when my boss brought his wife home and staged a fine dinner. I attached little importance to the matter of whether or not I was to be included among the guests, but my boss told me that I was to come dressed in my best clothes and that as of the next Sunday, I was to board at his house. That day, arriving a little early, I was introduced to the bride and I offered my help. Although I had assured her that I was handy in the kitchen, she insisted that I join the other guests. When the tables were set, the effect was the most beautiful I had ever beheld. Beside each plate was a large glass and a Rinmetchkeh (wine glass) and even a napkin. As the people came in, I was introduced to each formally, and when all were present, the toasts began. I naturally kept up with all of them. During the folk songs, in which everyone joined, one fellow produced his accordian. At that time, I had a good voice and, with my guitar, gave of what I had.

This was the prelude to dinner. Then it began, and can you ever imagine what the main course was? No. I haven't forgotten my promise some pages back to tell you more about *borstch*. It was just that; and was I uncomfortable! I scarcely knew what to do. If I had been sitting near the door, you can be sure that I would have sneaked out, but I had no such good luck. I couldn't look at the stuff. I've known people who can't stand the mention of certain foods even if they haven't tasted them. As for me, I had tasted this and hated it. And yet here I was at a party and what did I

get? If only I had a bag or something I could pour it into! Well, I made up my mind right there to do just as the others did, and that was that. Spoon in hand, and my eyes on the others to observe their facial expressions, I waited. But no one grimaced, so slowly I tasted it. What a pity that no photographer was present, for I should like to glimpse my own gleaming pleasure at discovering how very delicious this soup was. Ever since, I have liked borstch. Rostov women had the reputation for being good cooks, and this lady was no exception. She also played the piano well. She was not particularly handsome, but neither was my boss. Together, they made a fine pair.

My popularity dated from this occasion; I received many invitations. Greeted as Zinovvey Abramovitch or Gaspodin Russakov, I was the kind of young man of whom it could be said, "Em chosid tichasod," or "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." The current favorite topic of argument was, "Chto takoe lyubov?" ("What is love?") and I had many points to offer. Not only did my Jewish acquaintances like me but also the customers who brought in work. Since it developed that my boss was a partach, one who murders a job, I earned his respect, and soon my salary was increased. The railroad men insisted that I work on their watches and often tipped me.

Among my acquaintances was a young man named Alter Michailovitch Lipschitz. He was two or three years older than I and more reserved and serious. He was an only son. His father owned a store specializing in woolen yard goods but also carrying some apparel; they catered to the railroad people. Budget plan payments were known there, for his procedure was to let the

customer select the material, a tailor would measure, fit, and make the garment, and the buyer would make payments on the first and fifteenth of the month. The business flourished.

This Alter had a sister, a bright girl, who worked more conscientiously in the store than did her brother. I found out the reason for this afterward. Because Alter played an important part in my future, I must describe what took place between him and his sweetheart, Rachil, and its connection with hastening my departure for America. Among the three of us, there developed love and jealousy, and then departure came. In later years, after World War I, I helped them get back on their feet. After World War II, I tried to find them or perhaps some member of their family. I wanted to help them if they were in need; if not, I wanted to send a gift to show that a friend is always a friend. Distances do not form an iron curtain.

Alter introduced me to his Rachil, who was not pretty but was slim and lively and enjoyed dancing. Her home didn't seem to be a very happy place; she lived with her pale, white-haired mother, who looked rather mysterious, and an older, unmarried sister. They were friendly enough and to this day I do not know why this was a broken family. The father was alive and prosperous in his butcher shop; a brother was serving in the army. Whether before the break with her husband or after it, I can't say, but at some time, the mother had gone to the church to arrange to have her two daughters turn Catholic and marry Schkotzim. At that time, the Far East Railroad was in operation, and the latter were both somewhere in Siberia.

Ma knew of my friendship with Alter and Rachil; I used to visit her fairly frequently on passes provided by the railroad men. It did not cost me much to travel to see my Manyetchka, but I couldn't do so as often as I liked because my work kept me busy. When I did come, her brother Moteh and his wife Maria made my stay comfortable, and Ma was given time off so that she could entertain me. On my trip, I had to pose as the person to whom the pass had been issued,--Stepan Fedorovitch Lopato or Ivan Ivanovitch Rogatchov. This was not difficult, for I did not look particularly Jewish with my red hair; besides, my Russian accent was good. But when the conductor asked my name, I was not Zinovey Abramovitch, but Ivan Ivanovitch, and I was never caught.

On one of my trips, Alter asked me to take his sister Vera along. I attached no special importance to her coming; he had provided money to cover her fare, food, and entertainment. We stayed at Moteh's house, took Ma wherever we went, and had a pretty good time. Vera's brother was stationed in the army there and the two of them had a chance to visit. But Ma was jealous of Vera, perhaps because Vera lived in the same town I did, whereas Ma was alone, and letters were not enough. This I came to realize later.

So it was Vera and Alter, Alter and Vera. After a while, I began to go to their home for dinner; their mother welcomed me cordially. Did they have the idea that I was interested in marrying Vera? Perhaps. But she was not for me. I had my girl even though we had never discussed future plans. Right now, I was approaching the age for military service. But why bring that up?

Perhaps something would happen. And it did, sooner than I expected.

Now to return to the Alter-Rachil-Zinia triangle. In Debaltsevo there was not much social life, except for a kind of club, with pool tables, card room, a buffet, and dance hall. Music was provided by local talent, and the orchestra was quite good. The whole thing was government controlled. A policeman was posted at the door of the card room, and every so often a new pack of cards was distributed. I never went in, but Alter certainly did. Meanwhile, I danced with Rachil, took her to the buffet, where fruit, pastry, and soft drinks were sold. Alter, who supplied the money for all this, came out for an occasional dance. He was an enthusiastic cardplayer and didn't blink an eye at winning or losing two or three hundred rubles in one evening. Alter's folks did not approve of Rachil and her family and were glad that we had become friends, because they thought that I might have a good influence on him. I liked to talk with his father, an intelligent man, born in Bessarabia in a colony of Jews who had settled there on land granted by Katherine the Great some years back. Little did I realize that Rachil was using me as a tool to make Alter jealous. But it came to me that the game had gone a bit too far.

So one day, I gave up my job and went home. I hadn't been back for five years and wanted to see my parents and younger brothers. Mother had once come to Ekaterinaslav to see Samuel and me; she always was one to pick up and travel. Where did she go? Did you ever hear of a Gute Jüd? Higher than a rabbi? Well, this outstandingly learned Rebbe would maintain an estate

and people would come to him from far and wide for discussion and advice. It was a free, open house. But before you could see him, you had to pay Khai. In Hebrew this means eighteen and also life. By giving eighteen, you secured assurance of long life and the privilege of obtaining advice and a blessing. This eighteen could be in kopeks, rubles, or hundreds, just so long as it was eighteen. I don't know whether any of the advice resulted in extra flour for bread; I only remember that my mother would not be at home, and Grandmother would be in charge. On one such visit to a Gute Jüd, Mother came to visit me and Samuel. Of course, out of my one and one-half ruble salary, I did contribute to her return trip. That meant that I had to work three or four weeks and be extremely frugal in order to save up this amount again.

I forgot to mention that in addition to having tutored Manya, I had another pupil somewhat later. He was a Turk named Edrich Boretz Albanetz, whose appearance was just like what you might see in movies. He dressed in the native costume of that period, and his hair was shaved in a half moon around his head. Most of the bakers in the southern part of Russia were from Turkey or Greece, and their pastry was really fine. They were not allowed to bring women into the country, nor to marry, and so they had mistresses. Large groups of Turks would live around a large courtyard, owned by a Turk who had been very successful in the baking business. Naturally, they used only the Turkish language and were like the Jewish immigrants who settled in the East Side in New York. They lived among their own, made money--sometimes a lot of it--and died with an

English vocabulary of sure, yes, no, hello, good-bye. Some of them never learned how to write their own names. But this Edrich Boretz Albanetz was a leader among his compatriots and desired to learn Russian.

He became my pupil, and it was no easy task to teach him to read and write. Hardest of all was the pronunciation of Russian words and sounds. My pay was not a set amount; sometimes he gave me fifty kopeks, sometimes a ruble. During my absences when I went to visit Ma, he was very jealous. If he failed to find me in the "classroom," an old table and bench in a cellar, he was quite upset. This made me quite bold; I told him that I was in love with a girl who lived far away but that to go see her I had to walk because I had no money for railroad fare. My absences would be shorter if I could ride; he could help by paying me more. He then made this proposition: He would pay me as he acquired knowledge. The more reading, writing, and spelling (this was hardest for him), the more extra pay. How much extra and how could we measure the scope of his education was too much of a corporation tangle. We simply let it stand at that. The following Saturday, after I had spent much time that past week trying to cram into his head just as much as I possibly could, he inquired about my plans. I told him that I wanted to go to a park in the afternoon and to a show in the evening with my girl. Thereupon, he handed over a five ruble piece but with the understanding that he and I go together to buy the tickets. When he bought himself a ticket, too, and sat a few chairs away, I was worried about his intentions, but they were harmless. He did

like Ma and, from then until I left for Debaltsevo, I always had at least a few rubles in my pocket, certainly enough to lend Tante Dvoseh and Ma's mother what they needed.