"The mother dances with her son! The mother dances with her son!"

She laid down the head of her son at the foot of the Ark; she brought the memorial candle from its place by the door and placed it in the midst of the memorial candles in the center; and with her own hands she lit the candle, so that it burned among the others

Translated by Maurice Samuel

Kola Street

SHOLEM ASCH

1.

THE WESTERN tip of Mazowsze, south of the sandy hills along the bend of the Vistula between Plock and Wloclawek, is a region poor in water and sparse in forests. The horizon extends endlessly, and there is nothing to stop the eye: long monotonous fields stretch for miles and miles, for the most part covered with scanty grain, and only occasionally cut by the white ribbon of a cart road bordered with infrequent weeping willows. This triangular area, which includes Kutno, Zychlin, Gostynin, Gombin, and a number of smaller towns, has none of the mysterious charm of its neighbor, the province of Kujawy, so rich in legends about the souls of the dead that haunt black lanes, wander in the fields, and lure people into the swamps; nor is it as rich in color and in sound as its other neighbor, the Duchy of Lowicz, which gave birth to the greatest Polish composer and creator of the mazurka, Chopin. Flat and monotonous are its fields, and the peasant who cultivates them is as plain as the potatoes they yield Unlike the peasant of Lowicz, he does not deck himself out in white caftans and brightly colored trousers and hats adorned with ribbons and corals; nor does he go in for witchcraft like the peasant of Tall Poplars in Kujawy. Here the peasant is like a clod of earth into which God has breathed a soul, like the walking lime that grows in front of his house. He never quits his reed, on which he plays, far into the night, long formless tunes

that have no beginning and no end, tunes that are like his long, broad, green-covered fields. He is a man without guile—"I am as God made me." When he is friendly he will give you his very shirt, but when he gets mad he will take his revenge, let it be at the cost of his life. He is devoted to his cow, which lives with him, and will never slaughter it for his own use. But above all he loves and cherishes his horse, which he never subjects to daily labor: to plow his field he would yoke his cow or his wife rather than his horse. He saves his horse for Sundays, to drive it to church, and to show it off when he goes to visit friends in a neighboring village.

The Jew native to this region partakes more of the flavor of wheat and of apples than of the synagogue and the ritual bath. The land is rich for grazing: the peasant breeds cows and oxen and sheep, and the Jew buys them from him to take them to Lodz or across the German border, which is nearby. Among the Jews there are the renowned fishermen of the Lonsk ponds, who supply fish to Lodz and the surrounding country in the Kalisz and Plock areas, the sturdy teamsters who take Litvaks to the frontier where the railway has not yet penetrated, and the big horse dealers who sell the horses bred and nurtured by the peasants to Germans coming from Torun and Berlin. The poor Jews rent orchards from the peasant for the summer; in the winter they wash his pelts in the town pond and take them to the fair in Lowicz or Gombin. Throughout the week the Jew stays in the village, sharing the peasant's life. For the Sabbath he comes to town to attend services at the Three-Trade Synagogue, where fishermen, cattlemen, and teamsters divide the honors among them, and where they discuss the events of the week. On Saturday, after the Sabbath meal, they go into the field, where the horses are fed and the boys play games. After sunset they settle on benches in front of the houses, watch the promenading servant girls, and tell stories.

In one of these towns there was a street called Kola Street, so named because it lies on the road that leads from Zychlin to the neighboring town of Kola. The Three-Trade Synagogue was in Kola Street. This street was not in the Diaspora, as it were: there no Jew was ever beaten. If it happened that recruits passing through the town in the fall began to riot, members of the congregation would take matters into their own hands: armed with shafts torn from carts and iron bars wrested from shutters, they would go out into the streets and teach the hooligans a lesson.

The street of the scholars, the street where live the rabbi and the teachers, and where the bathhouse and the poultry slaughtering yard are situated, felt very much ashamed of Kola Street: "They're illiterates, butchers, fishmongers!" The scholars lived entirely on the festival money contributed by Kola Street; and whenever they were in trouble—whenever, for instance, a shepherd set his dog on a Jew or a drunken peasant started a row in their street—Jews, young and old, would run to Kola Street, crying for help. Nevertheless, at heart, the scholars condemned the Kola Street crowd "Not at all like Jews," they would say to one another, "and when the Messiah comes, they will come to us for help." The upper-class people of Broad Street, such as Reb Berachiah the moneylender, also had the greatest contempt for them: "Savages, with no manners at all! But we need this rabble sometimes—for instance, to keep the recruits quiet and to stop them from smashing our windows."

Kola Street reciprocated the feelings of the gentry in the other streets, whom they called limp rags—"Jews soaked in water." But when they needed to appeal to heaven—to write a petition to a rabbi to pray for a sick child or to recite the Psalms (they were not too good at it themselves), they had to depend on the scholars. When the High Holy Days were close at hand the Kola Street crowd treated the scholars with the greatest respect—"Moses' bodyguard," they would call them. Sometimes, on the eve of Yom Kippur, a tall vigorous Jew, a teamster or a fisherman, would lie prostrate on the threshold of the synagogue, and then the street of the scholars scourged Kola Street in the sight of God in Heaven.

In Kola Street there stood a one-story house built of timber. It was known as The Benches, because of the long benches in front of it, on which the Three-Trade congregation used to sit. Israel Zychlinski lived in that house.

Reb Israel was the oldest and most respected inhabitant of Kola Street. He was a man in his seventies, yet he walked without a stick and did not wear glasses—a survival of bygone days when a five-kopeck coin could buy a quart of brandy. When a bull broke loose from his rope and Reb Israel, after chasing him for a couple of hours, finally caught him by the horns and bent the bull's mighty neck, he would groan and say with a little laugh, "Eh, my old strength is gone." He was an important cattle-dealer who bought up all the cattle in the surrounding country and sold it to the Germans by the thousand. Be-

cause he was a man who did not begrudge the other fellow his share, everybody, Jew and gentile, treated him with great respect. To him they gave their money for safekeeping, from him they borrowed money when they needed it, and to him they came for advice and to have their quarrels settled; and what Reb Israel said—that was final. Reb Israel could, if necessary, slap the face of the biggest and strongest tough. No one would dare disobey him. If anyone did, Kola Street might kill him on the spot. The ox-drivers who took the cattle to Lodz or to the German frontier always stopped at Reb Israel's, spending the night in the stables with the horses and cows. Food in his house was free for everyone. There was always bread and butter on the table—you came in, helped yourself, and went on your way. There was an abundance of everything—cows, oxen, horses, goats, sheep, geese, and helpers, Jews and gentiles. Nothing in Reb Israel's house was under lock—here no one would steal: that would mean death on the spot. When anyone was wronged in the town he came to Reb Israel to complain, and Reb Israel went out and slapped faces right and left.

One day the Hasid who was licensed to sell spirits had the house of a Jewish widow searched on a Sabbath eve. Brandy was discovered there, and the woman was thrown into jail. Reb Israel was summoned to intervene in her behalf. He took a stick and went to talk to the Hasid.

"Get the widow out of jail."

"Reb Israel, she is robbing me of my daily bread!"

Reb Israel said no more. He went home and sent two of his helpers to the tavern with sticks in their hands. They took two barrels of spirits, put them outside the shop, and opened the taps—help yourself, get your fill! And Jews had a Sabbath until they rolled in the streets. As for the licensed tavernkeeper, he got a black eye into the bargain and was promised more of the same next week—and he couldn't do a thing about it either.

One day a tough young fellow entered Reb Israel's house and stood there by the big wardrobe.

"What do you want?" said Reb Israel, going up to him and smacking him across the face. "I hear you think you're tough. You beat your mother. Don't you know who feeds you? And yet, if somebody else says a word to her, you're ready with a knife!"

"Reb Israel, it's my mother. I can beat her—she's *my* mother. But a stranger better watch out. I'll tear him to pieces. Isn't that as it should be, Reb Israel?"

"And what have you come for, Zirel?"

"Screwface, the Hasid who keeps the oil store, offered me a gold piece to climb the wall at night and have some fun with the oil barrels belonging to his competitor, Yoske's son-in-law."

"I'll break your head if you do. Take the gold piece and then do nothing."

"But he won't give me the gold piece before I've done the job."

"Tell him to deposit it with me. Then go to Yoske's son-in-law and tell him to raise a cry tomorrow, pretending that his barrels were opened. I'll give you the gold piece, and if Screwface has anything to say, knock his teeth out."

Every Friday evening Reb Israel, on returning home from the road, sat down on the bench in front of his house, with his pocket full of coins, and prayed to God in his heart: "Father, send me Jews who need money for the Sabbath." And he did not go in before distributing all his change among the poor Then he washed himself, put on his best caftan, and went to the Three-Trade Synagogue to welcome the Sabbath. Wandering beggars took good care to stop in the town for the sake of Reb Israel's Sabbath—the taste of his *kugel* made their mouths water for the rest of the year—and the congregation was always full of them Reb Israel would post himself at the door with the crowd of beggars—no Jews love having a poor man as guest for Sabbath more than cattlemen or fishermen—and took home all who were left over. The *shammes* of the congregation would call out, "Three gulden for a guest," auctioning them off just as he auctioned off the privilege of reading from the weekly chapter of the Torah in the synagogue—so many members of the congregation were eager to take a guest home Next morning, when the rabbi expounded the *midrash* to the congregation, Reb Israel listened to him with tears in his eyes, and after the service he invited the worshipers to his home to toast the Sabbath over a glass of brandy And while they drank one another's health he banged his fists on the table, urging them, "Drink, Jews! To our father Abraham! To our teacher Moses!" The whole house shook from the blows of his fist on the table.

Reb Israel could read his chapter of the Torah, and he was at home in the commentary of Rashi when it was free from Aramaic words. Reb Israel loved Rashi with all his heart, looking upon him as a near relative, a member of the family of all Jews. And there was another Jew whom Reb Israel loved—King David. His Psalms are so sweet that they melt every limb in your body—and he is just a Jew, King

David is. Reb Israel could imagine meeting him in the street and exchanging greetings with him—"How do you do, King David?" "How are you, Reb Israel?"—and then talking with him about the market.

Whenever a daughter of Reb Israel reached marriageable age, he went to the rabbi and said, "Rabbi, choose a son-in-law for me from among your pupils."

He took the son-in-law and set him up in his own house for the rest of his life. "Here is your food and your drink, your Sabbath clothes and your pocket money, and you, study the holy Torah!"

His sons-in-law with their great volumes of the Talmud inspired him with such awe that he walked on tiptoe before them. He reserved for them the best and most precious of his possessions, and when he heard the voice of the Torah resounding in his house the old man wept for joy.

Reb Israel's sons were real giants. "Zychlinski's bodyguard," they were called—and they were no scholars either. But Notte, the son of his old age, was stronger than any of them Notte was a strapping young fellow who went out in the morning with Burek his dog, and Bashke his sheep, and his whistle. A pigeon perched on his shoulder. The whole street trembled before him as he stood in front of his house with his straw hat tipped rakishly on his head, his riding crop in his hand, whistling for his pigeons, which circled over his head. Josephine brought his horse from the stable; if it was not groomed to perfection, or if the mane was not well combed and braided with straw, he gave her a slash with his crop, so that her young blood spurted from her full red hand.

Josephine was a servant, a gentile girl who had been brought from the village and had been in Reb Israel's house since her childhood. Strong as iron, she fitted into the household; she was one of them, took part in discussions, gave her opinion, and voiced her displeasure when she did not have her way. Notte maltreated her, sometimes cruelly, but she never held a grudge against him for that She would toss her head and stand defiantly. "Go ahead, hit me if you feel like it."

Half an hour later, when she saw him on his horse, she walked out in front of the house and stood with arms akimbo, her eyes smiling through the red and blue welts he had left on her face. "There's no rider like him!"

When he returned he beckoned to her with his finger. She at first

pretended not to see, then she went up, pouting, and lazily took the reins. He winked at her and went up to the attic, to his pigeon cote. She briskly led the horse to the stable.

In the doorway she ran into the caretaker's wife, who asked her, "Who's marked your face up for you?"

"What's that to you? Whoever did it, did it." Josephine thumbed her nose at her and quickly followed Notte upstairs.

Notte kept a pigeon cote. The attic in which the oats for the horses were stored was traditionally used as a pigeon cote; wherever the pigeons were taken, on being set free they always flew back to the attic and settled on the roof. The gentile baker at the other end of the town also had a pigeon cote, and Notte and the baker were continually at war. Notte would release his pigeons, and the baker his; sometimes one side would take a pigeon from the other—a hen from one flock would come to court a cock from the other flock, trying to get him to accompany her to her home

It was just such occasions that the gang lived for. For Notte had his gang of Jewish and gentile boys who spent the night in his house; just as the baker had his own gang of gentile baker boys. When one side won a pigeon from the other, it was as jubilant as if it had conquered the world, while the losers went about downcast, meditating revenge. This led to vicious brawls between the rival gangs, brawls from which God preserve us!

2.

It was a Friday afternoon in the summer. Reb Israel had just returned from the road. Casimir, the stable boy, led the horse to the pump to drink. Josephine removed the things from the carriage, including a goose, a turkey, and a bagful of fish that Reb Israel had bought on the way for the Sabbath. Suddenly one of Notte's boys rushed into the courtyard, stuck two fingers between his lips, and let out an ear-piercing whistle.

"What's the matter, you bastard?" said Notte, coming into the courtyard with Bashke.

"The baker let his pigeons loose. His entire flock is perched on a roof near the city hall."

In two leaps Notte was in the attic: he opened his pigeon cote and let out the pigeons.

With his crop in his hand, surrounded by his gang, Notte went into

the street. Across the market square stood the baker and his gang, armed with sticks; overhead, high in the clouds, the pigeons hovered, fluttering their light wings, in two separate flocks. One flock flew into the other, and the two mingled for a short time, then separated again, swooping down to the market square or soaring upward. After circling above the market several times the pigeons settled on the roofs High on one roof perched an isolated pigeon, as if cast out by his companions A hen from Notte's flock flew up to him, and the two birds began to whisper. Notte's gang waited with baited breath for the moment when the pigeons would come to an understanding and fly together to Notte's attic.

Suddenly one of the baker's gang hurled a stone at the pigeons, which flew away. That was the signal for hell to break loose. One of Notte's boys went up to the offender and smacked him across the legs with his stick The gentile boy fell to the ground, screaming. The baker's gang charged with sticks, and a vicious battle began. All you could see were sticks flying in the air and coming down on heads; Jewish and gentile boys lay on the ground with blood on their faces. The blind Leib came running from the slaughterhouse with a shaft in his hand, whirling it above the crowd

Notte grabbed the baker, held his lapels with one hand to prevent him from running away, and with the other hand smashed into his face, his ribs, his stomach—each blow resounded loudly—and he kept pounding with his bare fist until his victim went down. All this time the pigeons were flying above them, one flock into the other, as if they knew that the fight was about them. They flapped their wings as they swooped down close to the combatants' heads, and then they soared into the sky.

With the baker out of the way the gangs separated, waiting for what would happen next. With the help of God the two pigeons had reached an agreement: the hen lured the cock into Notte's pigeon cote.

Notte's boys were beside themselves with joy. But the baker's gang laid plans for revenge.

That Friday night the baker sneaked into Reb Israel's attic, made his way to the pigeons, and proceeded to strangle one after the other. But he had miscalculated his chances. The pigeons, sensing a stranger among them, flapped their wings and flew from one end of the attic to the other, clucking loudly.

Josephine, who slept in a room under the attic, ran to Notte and pulled him by his hair. "Master, someone's in the pigeon cote!"

Notte grabbed an iron bar—there was always one lying next to his bed—and went upstairs.

As he rushed into the attic something struck his head so hard that he saw stars, but he took no notice and got hold of the intruder. Notte held the man's mouth to stifle his cries, and he hit him over the head and in the chest until he felt it was enough. Then he took him by the head, dragged him down the stairs, and deposited him in front of his own house.

A few days later Notte was taken to jail. But it is no easy thing to arrest a fellow like Notte. When the police officer came for him Josephine asked him to go with her to the stable under the pretext that she wanted to tell him something. He went quite willingly, but the boys were waiting for him in the dark and gave him such a thrashing that he was in no condition to return for Notte. Alarming rumors began to circulate in the town. It was said that Notte was going about the streets with his leaded crop, Bashke following him. Then he was caught by three jail guards and the two police officers stationed in the town and taken to jail.

In the meantime the baker died. The town lived in ever-growing fear. Various stories were told about peasants gathering here and there. Yechiel, the village peddler, reported in the synagogue that a peasant woman in a village had asked him to look into a mirror; he had seen the rabbi's head there, whereupon the woman had said that she had cast a spell. There were rumors of ritual murder, and reports came from neighboring villages that Jewish dairymen had been held up and robbed of everything. A town meeting was called in the rabbi's house and a day of fasting was decreed. The well-to-do Jews left town. The street of the scholars looked as if Death had swept it with his black wings. In the House of Study candles burned all day and Jews recited Psalms; the Psalm-readers stayed up all night Mothers would suddenly grab their children coming home from school and hug them and lament over their young lives. Betrothals and weddings were postponed till "after"—when things would calm down. Jewish guards armed with heavy sticks patrolled the streets after dark.

Notte looked out from behind the tiny bars in the cell window giving on the market square. Each morning Josephine led his horse in front of the jail to show him that it was well groomed. All day Bashke and the dog Burek lay outside his window, and their master spoke to them through the bars. And each day his gang had to drive his pigeons past

the jail, and Notte from behind the bars gave orders to his boys, telling them what was to be done.

The town was more and more in the grip of fear. The Jews went about looking like ghosts. Gentiles of the town with whom they associated the year round terrified them The water carrier who supplied Jewish houses was said to have told a Jew that on St John's Day they would go for Moshkowski's house. The synagogue candlelighter would become supervisor over the Jews; the gentile attendant at the graveyard would become governor and the Jews would have to pay him tribute. The Jews listened to these tales, and their hearts sank. Young children and girls were sent away from home, to stay with forgotten aunts and uncles discovered in other towns. The street of the sch lars prepared for the worst. "God, we are under Thy protection, Thy will be done!"

Kola Street was calm, ignoring the whole thing. When one of them met a Jew from the street of the scholars walking with a gloomy face, he would say, "Hey, bigwig, have you prepared your mousehole at home?"

It was said that the day of judgment would be on St. John's Day. That is the day of one of the biggest fairs, when the peasants come to town for the first time after the harvest. Then the barns are full of grain, and potatoes and cabbages are piled high in the fields The peasant comes to the fair with wife and children to buy them gifts. He sells the grown cattle and buys young ones to graze on the stubble. At the fair he meets his cronies, discusses the year's harvest with them, and then they all go to have a drink.

And that day to which the Jews had always looked forward with so much hope of good business, this year filled their hearts with terror, and they longed for it to be over as soon as possible.

When the day came Jews hurried to the synagogue early in the morning and began to pray. The rabbi stood at the lectern, and the entire congregation burst out weeping, as though it were the concluding prayer of Yom Kippur. After the service the rabbi opened the Holy Ark, and all the worshipers together recited the confession of sins which is usually said at the deathbed. The rabbi recited a verse, and then the congregation recited a verse. Before going home they said farewell to one another and voiced their hope that they would be alive to meet again on the morrow.

All this time they could hear peasant carts rolling over the bridge.

Carts arrived at the market square, and each sound of a cart was like Death knocking at Jewish hearts. It was as though the carts were rolling differently today, as though the peasants and their women were walking differently.

For a time the day wore on as usual. The peasants sold their wares, bargained hard about the price, gave in at the end, and then bought what they needed.

At first the Jewish stores remained closed A peasant wanted to buy some herring, so a herring woman opened her stand just to sell him herring; but then a second peasant came, and a third one. When the storekeeper across the street saw a store open, he opened his too, and one after another all the stores opened. The day began to resemble all market days. The Jews regained confidence and held their ground more firmly when bargaining with the peasants Then suddenly a boy came running from the horse market, crying, "Help, they're beating Jews!"

In no time all stores were closed, shutters down, doors locked. Men and women grabbed whatever was at hand—a baby, a lamp, a table, a blanket—and ran as though from a fire, but soon stopped, not knowing where to go. They crawled under their beds, lay there awhile, then thought better of it, crawled out, shoved aside wardrobes, hid behind them, then out again, and up to the attics. Some scrambled into cellars, some climbed up on stoves. Children cried, and mothers silenced them with pillows. Stragglers knocked at doors, begging to be let in; people sought shelter in strange houses, entering the first door they found open. Stranded fathers groaned over their children and pressed other people's children to their hearts.

When the news that Jews were being attacked reached Kola Street, Hershele Cossack ran out of his butcher shop, grabbed a bag, threw into it three ten-pound weights, and slung it over his shoulder. Come on, brothers! And all of Kola Street surged after him—butchers with cleavers and knives, teamsters with shafts from their carts, fishermen with grappling irons, horse-dealers with steel whips on their horses—all of them streamed to the horse market.

The big square at the intersection of the two roads was teeming with carts, carts, carts, which were surrounded on all sides and lost in a mass of horses, oxen, people, and pigs. It was a scene of many colors, and resounding with many cries. Drunken peasants with clubs in their hands were chasing Jews in long caftans, who were jumping frantically over carts, horses, and people. The horrible scream of a man leaping over a wagon and shouting desperately for help mingled with the

wild laughter of a drunk. Horses reared and kicked, and under their hoofs people were rolling on the ground, and pigs were squealing. Sticks, earthenware, caps, were flying over people's heads. Frightened geese and chickens flitted around the carts, cackling and squawking, filling the air with feathers from their disheveled wings. Everywhere Jews in black caftans were darting in all directions, shrieking with terror.

Like a stream of glowing steel pouring into the deep cold sea, Kola Street plunged into the fray. In a minute the battle was joined. Bars of steel and iron slammed into human bodies, blood ran into eyes, down caftans, over carts and wheels. You couldn't see what or when; all was confusion, horses on top of men, men on top of horses. A bleeding peasant woman dragged her wounded husband while he kept punching her in the belly trying to wrench himself free from her hands. Little children clung to their mothers' skirts. Fathers shoved their children away from them, and with tight lips and bloodshot eyes pressed into the melee. One man thrust his fist into another's mouth, trying to pull his tongue out, and then took him by the throat and strangled him to death. Two men set upon each other, got squeezed against a cart, and one of them smashed hard fists into his chest and stomach and bit him with his teeth. No one was fighting for any definite reason; all were seized by the same frenzy; the beast that slumbers in man was roused. They were one seething mass in the sight of heaven and God, and each was trying to eat the other alive.

3.

All day Notte looked out of the cell window. He did not regret the fun he had started—he was not the kind of man who is given to regrets. He had been waiting for the moment it would start. He had not formed any plan, he had not thought of how he would break out—he was not the kind of man who makes plans. For him, things had to come of their own accord, and when they did come, they burst into flame and broke forth like thunder.

Then he caught sight of people fleeing from the horse market. A boy ran with a bleeding head, women darted across the square to get their children. Stores were being closed. His lips tightened, and with bloodshot eyes he flung himself against the door. It was only a small-town jail, but the door was too strong to be smashed by a man's fist. He shook the bars at the window, and they bent under the impact,

but they were cemented firmly in the wall. He seized his pallet and banged it against the stove—in a minute bricks and boards were smashed. Like thunder imprisoned in a room, he hurled himself against the walls. In the end he dug his teeth in his hands and, crouching with his head between his knees, began to howl, and his howling rose to the ceiling and surged against the bars and went out through the window.

He crouched like that for a long time. Then a voice called from outside, "Master! Master!"

He looked up and saw Josephine, her hair streaming.

"They're after your father," she cried, handing him an iron bar through the window.

In one jump he was at the door He thrust the iron bar behind the door handle, leaned his chest against it, and pushed with all his strength. One, two, three—the door crashed open. A guard tried to intercept him, but a punch in the jaw knocked him off his feet, and he sprawled on the floor, drenched in blood Notte rushed home to his father.

The peasants had set out from the horse market to Reb Israel's house. "To Zychlinski's! His son killed a peasant!" they shouted, brandishing spades and rakes.

As they swarmed into the courtyard and stood in front of the house with their weapons cries rang out, "They're at Reb Israel's!" And all of Kola Street, young and old, went into action. The blind Leib—a giant who could snap an iron bar—grabbed a three-pronged pitchfork in the stable. Kola Street surrounded the courtyard.

"What's this?" Reb Israel cried out Holding the iron bar he sometimes used on the Lodz road against thieves, he came out to face the peasants all by himself.

"Whom have you come to attack?" he said. "Me? I have toiled for you all my life, buying your cattle from you, you dogs, paying in hard cash and taking it to foreign places! I have sweated for you on your roads, burned for you in the summer heat, frozen for you in the winter cold, to cram your pockets with money! Come on, you dogs! Here I am! I want to see who dares to lay his hands on me!"

The peasants stood silent. Then one of them said, "We've nothing against you, Zychlinski. We're only after your son, who killed one of our people."

"Here I am!" cried Notte, throwing open the gate and rushing into the courtyard. He grabbed the nearest peasant by the sides, raised him

in the air, and banged him down on the ground, so that you could hear his legs cracking under him. The others flew at him like a whirlwind. But Notte seized another peasant by the head, lifted him up in the air, and used him as a living cudgel against the others. The Kola Street crowd swept forward with their pitchforks.

Reb Israel's voice rose above the tumult. "Stop, I tell you! He has killed a man! Let him defend himself alone."

And Notte defended himself alone. With one of the assailants in his mighty arms he slammed away at the others. Men dropped around him as ears of grain fall before the scythe. A peasant whacked him on the head with a shovel, and red blood poured down his face. Still holding his living club, he charged deeper into the crowd; then, snatching a spade from the hands of one of them, he struck out right and left, as though a demon had entered him, filling his mighty arms with blood so that the veins almost burst out of his skin. Another peasant behind him dealt him a savage blow in the side with an iron bar. He doubled up and remained motionless for a moment, and then lunged forward again. Someone caught one of his hands from behind, but he still kicked and bit. Then he doubled up again and held his side.

"You goddam sons-of-bitches!" Josephine emerged suddenly as though from under the earth, wielding a rake. "You've killed the young master!" She slammed at the head of the peasant who had caught Notte's hand and moved threateningly toward another. "I'll teach you!" Brandishing her rake, she drove the assailants away from Notte, who stood bent in half, almost touching the ground, holding his side with one hand and banging at the heads of the peasants trying to grab him with the other. Finally Josephine managed to lead him into the house and put him to bed.

The peasants wanted to follow, but, seeing the Kola Street crowd with their weapons, they fell back, some with bleeding heads and others with broken arms, muttering, "That bitch isn't even a Jew!" Seven or eight of their blood-drenched companions were left lying in the courtyard.

Now that market day was over the street of the scholars crawled out from behind stoves and wardrobes, from attics and cellars. Next morning they came to the synagogue, greeted one another, and loudly sang praises to the Lord. After the service they sent for cake and brandy, and resolved to meet again at night and hold a banquet. Kesriel and Ozer, Reb Israel's sons-in-law, promised to get him to contribute

his youngest son's pigeons. Since the son was a mass of broken bones he would surely not resist, and it was certainly fitting that Jews should feast on the pigeons that had put the entire Jewish community in jeopardy, and thus get rid of the whole brood that had been the cause of so much affliction.

And so it was. The two young men, on returning from the service, discussed the matter with their father-in-law, and then they went up to the attic, took all the pigeons, and sent them to the slaughterer

Notte lay on his bed, deathly pale An icebag was placed on his head, which was wrapped in one large bandage, his lips were still clenched tight, and his chest was heaving Josephine sat by his side, handing him whatever he asked for He heard a noise in the attic, he heard the pigeons flapping their wings--the very thought lifted him from his bed, but he could not move He kicked off his blanket and lay there listening.

The pigeons were flapping their wings- he looked at Josephine, pointing his finger at the ceiling

Josephine went to the attic and came back holding in her arms three tiny fledglings, with scarcely any feathers, whose mothers had just been taken away from them to be slaughtered They kept flapping their bald wings, looking for something Their thin necks, with thin warm skin covering the delicate bone that could be snapped with a finger, were pulled in; their heads were hidden between their little wings, and their little wings were seeking something

Notte took them in his hand, tightened his lips, and kicked away a chair that stood near his bed The little birds were trembling softly in his hand, miserably seeking something He tucked them under his shirt, held them against his bare breast, and warmed them The fledglings quivered pitifully on his breast, begging for something, flapping their wings.

His face grew whiter. His eyes were glazed, sunk in their sockets; his nose grew longer, whiter and thinner, and his lips were pressed together so tightly that they seemed locked in a spasm

The room was silent now A light breeze trembled on the windowpanes. Everyone had gone out, leaving the house to the thunder that was about to break forth in a fury of destruction.

He lay there and felt the helpless little birds quivering on his breast. His eyes bulged and filled with blood He was silent.

He sat up on his bed and looked around him He caught sight of some grains of wheat, chewed them into flour, thrust a fledgling's bill into his

mouth, and fed the bird with his tongue. The thin little neck throbbed between his fingers and the wings pleaded.

"God!" he cried out. He grabbed the fledgling, gave a twist to its head (the little bird uttered one squeak, and a thin jet of blood sputtered into his face), and threw it away. He twisted the neck of the second fledgling, and threw it away. The third fledgling . . . Then he got down from his bed, snatched the mirror, and smashed it on the floor. He went up to the wardrobe, split it open, and flung it down. He went to the bed, ripped the bedding with his teeth, and the feathers flew in the air. With one blow he bashed in the table. He grabbed a chair and flung it at the stove, and the stove crashed to the ground. He tore his shirt and bit his hands. In the end he collapsed, and, lying amid the wreckage, he pressed his face to the floor and fell asleep, and slept long . . . long .

No one dared enter the room to rouse the sleeping thunder.

Translated by Norbert Guterman

The Poor Community

ABRAHAM REISEN

THE LITTLE town of Voinovke, which consists of forty houses and thirty-five householders, since five of the houses stand empty, rocked and rumbled and boiled like a stream on the eve of Passover, when the snow begins to melt. But it wasn't the eve of Passover. It was a week before Rosh Hashonoh, and the community had no prayer leader.

In the nearby town of Yachnovke, which is several times larger than Voinovke, one could not only get a prayer leader, but quite a good one —with a neck, a double chin, and in general a cantor's bearing, only he would want to be well paid, and that was the trouble! The town of Voinovke had already disposed of its few public rubles on a cantor whom, through ill luck, the past summer had brought; he had prayed a full Sabbath service with a choir of six. In a way, it had been worth it: since Voinovke had been Voinovke, it had not heard such beautiful