



Di Goldene Keyt

(The Golden Chain)

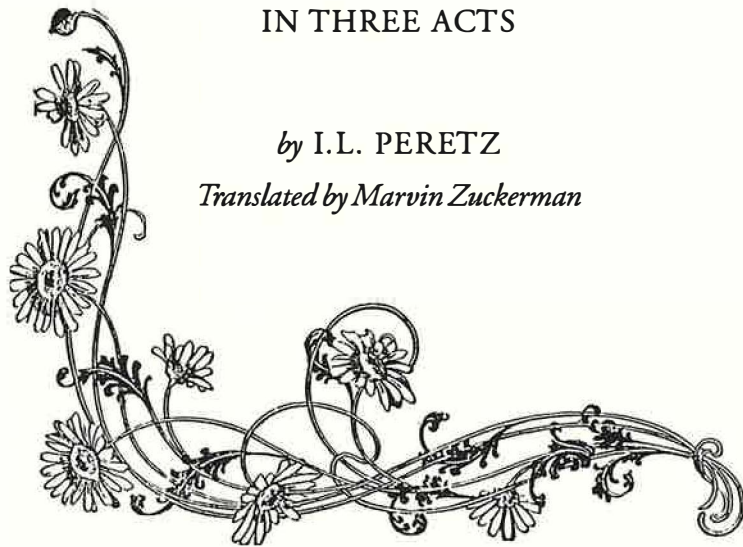
A CHASSIDIC FAMILY-DRAMA

(In Free Verse)

IN THREE ACTS

by I.L. PERETZ

Translated by Marvin Zuckerman



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Shloyme

Pinkhes – *his son*

Moyshe – *Pinkhes's son; Shloyme's grandson*

Jonathan }
Leah } *Moyshe's children; Shloyme's great-grandchildren*

Deborah – *Pinkhes's wife; Moyshe's mother*

Miriam – *Moyshe's wife*

Israel – *head beadle*

Second and Third Beadles

Crowd

Chassidim – *among the crowd*

Avrom

Lemekh }
Beynish } *Elders*

Old Chassidim

An Old Chassid and a Young, Rich Chassid

Young, Rich Chassidim

A Local Chassid

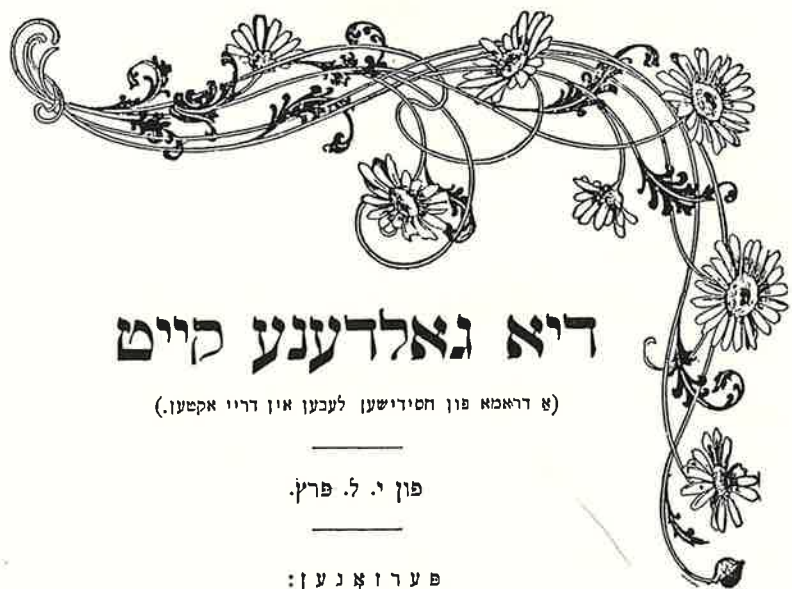
A Poor Chassid

A Village Jew

Bergman – *a doctor*

Intimates

Old Men



דיא גאלדענע קייט

(א דראמא פון חסידישען לעבען אין דריי אקטען.)

פון י. ל. פריץ.

פערזאנען:

ציפּע, האַלכ־דיענסט, האַלכ־קרובה אין רב'נס הויז	שלמה
ישישים (מקורבים) 1טער, 2טער און 3טער	פנחס, זיין זוהן
זקנים — 1טער, 2טער און 3טער	משה, פנחס'עס זוהן, שלמה'ס אייניקע
חסידים	מרים, משה'ס ערשטע ווייב
א היימישער חסיד	יונתן
אן אַרימער חסיד	לאה
דער עולם	דבורה, משה'ס צווייטע ווייב
א פויער מיט א פוהר אונטער'ן פענסטער	ישראל, גבאי

ערשטע אקט.

די סצענע:
 (מרים'ס צימער אין רבינ'ס הויז. אַלט־פרענקיש־רייך מעבליים. מיטען טירען און באַלקען — גע- שניצט און געמאַלט. דאָס מעכעל: אַ קאַנאַפּע, פאַר- בער־שוהלען און בענק אַהן אַנלענען ביי די ווענד. — אַלץ רויט־סאַמעסען געכעט, אויף די אַנלענען פון קאַנאַפּע און פאַטער־שוהלען — שטיקערייען. ס'זען זיכער־בלעך קינסטליך געבויגענע עסען, מיט קאַ- לירשע וואַקס־קורצען, מיט גאַלד פאַפּירלעך געבונ- דען — ארום די ווענד. מאַחאַנענע סטרימ־שענק; שויכען־שענק מיט גאַלד, זילבער, גלאַז, פאַרזעליי און פּריסט־אַוואַרג. אויף אַ קינציגער בראַנזענער קייט הענגט פון באַלקען אַראָב אַ קריסט־אַלענער הענג- לייכטער, וואָס קלינגט זעהר מעלאָדיש ביי יעדעם שווערערען טריט. שווערע זיגענע פאַרהאַנגען און פאַרטייען. איבער אַלעם שוועבט אַ פּאַעמישער פּרויען־געשמאַק. טהירען רעכטס און לינקס, אין הינטערגרונד — פענסטער. אונטער די פענסטער זעהט זיך אַ שטיל־פּערשנױט ווינטער־בילד, וואָס ווערט וואָס אַ מאָל טריבער, רוישענדיגער און צע- שפּיעלט זיך, ענדע אָפּ, אין אַ שניי־שטורם. צױט: מוצא־שבת, אין צימער, וואו עס איז גאַרנישט אַנגעצונדען, ציטערט אַ זילבערנע נעץ, געפּלאַכטען פון שניי־גלאַנץ און לבנת־לויב.)

(פאַרהאַנג געחט אויף.)

First Page of *The Golden Chain* as it Appeared in *Di Tsukunft*, 1907



ACT ONE

The Rabbi's room; richly furnished with antiques in the old manner. A carved ceiling from which hangs a crystal chandelier that tinkles when there is a firm step in the room. Under it, a table of tiled mosaics, a couch upholstered in red velvet, an armchair and other chairs. At the walls—benches, long, armless. Glass cabinets holding books and gold and silver dishes. Aside from the *khanike* candelabrum, spice jars, *esrog*-containers, etc., a goblet—because of its large size—captures one's attention—a silver, old-aristocratic goblet. Doors to the right and left: stage-right, two narrow ones for private use: one leading to the small synagogue, the other to the women's section of the synagogue; stage-left, ordinary doors leading to other rooms. Upstage, a door and a large Venetian window looking out onto a courtyard garden. On the walls, silver sconces.

It is the end of the Sabbath, late in the evening. The candles have still not been lit in the house. Over the floor, a dim web of moonlight, reflected from the snow, vanishes soon after the curtain rises. Outside it becomes more and more gloomy and dreary, exploding at the end of the act into a snow-storm.

Disorder and neglect prevail in the room. Some sort of misfortune must have befallen this household. From the right and left, whenever a door opens, a forlorn, faint noise, outcries, etc., are heard.

From the courtyard door enter the OLD CHASSID and the YOUNG, RICH CHASSID. Behind them, the POOR CHASSID and the LOCAL CHASSID, their "hangers-on."

OLD CHASSID:

In other words, we've lost a Sabbath!
 So many businesses deserted—
 And they give us no peace...

YOUNG, RICH CHASSID:

May it never happen to you...

LOCAL CHASSID:

God forbid...

It's just a mystery . . .
"Troubles shared by many . . ."

POOR CHASSID:

He sequesters himself . . .
Storms the heavenly spheres.

YOUNG, RICH CHASSID (softly):

Did perhaps a young doctor
Come here to see you?

LOCAL CHASSID (noticing the change in tone):

Cursed be his name . . .

POOR CHASSID:

A sorcerer . . .
Conjures up rain in the house
And snow . . .

LOCAL CHASSID (sadly):

He, long may he live,
Has sequestered himself
For the good of the community.
Evil decrees are being issued.
From somewhere, people say,
Wagons-full of knives
Are being sent to attack
Whole communities.
In the meantime he works in various ways:
Preaches to young men . . .
About the physical nature of man . . .

THE YOUNGER RICH CHASSID:

And has he come to the Rabbi? . . .

LOCAL CHASSID:

The Rabbi is not afraid!

POOR CHASSID:

He has no power over him . . .
(The RICH CHASSIDIM no longer listen to them, walk around
the room looking.)

THE OLDER RICH CHASSID:

Heavy curtains.
(Feels them.)
Made of silk . . .

LOCAL CHASSID:

Purchased from the landowner
this way,
Came with the house . . .

YOUNG RICH CHASSID:

Ceiling—carved; furniture—carved;
Sconces, armoires—decorated with figures . . .

POOR CHASSID:

Their noses have been chipped off . . .

YOUNGER RICH CHASSID:

In the corner, clothes—
Hangers made of antlers . . .

LOCAL CHASSID:

With those
He thrust against Satan . . .
Here he used to sit at night . . .
On dark nights . . .
In solitude, alone.
Waging war with all that is Evil . . .

POOR CHASSID:

With great devotion, placing himself in danger.

YOUNG RICH CHASSID: (Aside, to the younger RICH CHASSID)

He is ill . . .

YOUNGER RICH CHASSID:

People say: lost his mind . . .

THE OLDER RICH CHASSID:

That may be . . .
Who knows what kind of spell inheres
In all these things . . .

YOUNG RICH CHASSID:

Could it harm such a Rabbi too,
And—such an old one?

THE OLDER RICH CHASSID:

Come into the inn ... (beginning to move towards the door to
the small synagogue)

LOCAL CHASSID:

Don't push your way through!
Quite a crowd—
May no evil befall them ...

POOR CHASSID:

I will lead you through the courtyard—
(Leads them out; local Chassid exits to the small synagogue.
From stage left, one after the other, come the elders.)

AVROM: (cracking his knuckles, struggling against the gloom that is
overpowering him, intones in a low voice to himself):

Sabbath! Sabbath!
It is, nevertheless, still the Sabbath!
He has still not made the
Blessing to end the Sabbath.
(To those just arriving.)
Eh?

LEMEKH:

So, then, it will be a week ...

BEYNISH:

A week ... God help us—a week!
(Dispersing themselves around the room.)

LEMEKH (pausing):

Something told me,
Drew me here ...

BEYNISH:

I—something drew me
Like a magnet ...

LEMEKH:

So just at this moment
It occurs to my son-in-law
To divorce ...

BEYNISH:

I could not cross the river
No ferry and no boat;
It would have taken a miracle,
Like the parting of the sea.

AVROM (pauses, leaning on the table, bitterly):

You are, in other words then,
Envious of me?
(Lemekh and Beynish walk about the room.)

LEMEKH (stopping in front of Avrom):

But what exactly has happened?

BEYNISH (echoing him):

What exactly has happened here?
What?

LEMEKH:

Say something!

BEYNISH:

You are tormenting us!

AVROM:

What? Nothing!
Actually, nothing ...
Visions seen ...
Of visions always speaking ...

LEMEKH:

Was any of it clear?

AVROM:

Miriam ...

LEMEKH and BEYNISH (lovingly):

Miriam, dear ... Miriam ...



Maurice Schwartz as Jonathan and
Bertha Gersten as Leah.

LEMEKH:
She understood . . .

BEYNISH:
It is certain . . .

AVROM:
The heart, she said, feels . . .
(OLD CHASSIDIM have entered, quietly, one after the other.
Upon seeing the elders, stop, with respect and a little fear, not
far from the door. Some of them sit down hesitantly, on the
edge of their seats.)

FIRST OLD CHASSID (reporting):
Merchants want to go home,
Are afraid . . .
(Sits, unnoticed next to the elders.)

SECOND OLD CHASSID:
A woman in the women's section of the synagogue
Is fainting . . .

THIRD:
She cannot be revived . . .
And the synagogue, in darkness, murmurs . . .

SECOND:
Like the rushing of a river . . .

FIRST:
Like a forest . . .
(They remain silent. The elder begins to speak.)

AVROM (as if rousing himself from a dream . . .)
Dozes off . . .
He dozes off out of faintness,
And starts awake . . .
Opens his eyes wide.
"A scarlet world," he says
"A scarlet world,"
And trembles . . .
Miriam is at his side . . .

INTIMATES and OLD MEN:

Miriam...

Miriam's name has been mentioned...

AVROM:

She tells us:

Blood will flow,

Jewish blood, like water...

A CHASSID (entering):

People huddle in the square...

People are frightened, whisper...

And all around—chaos.

No stores are opened,

No candles are lit...

(Cuts himself short upon seeing the elders.)

AVROM:

And dozes off...

And starts again...

His white beard trembles,

His head trembles...

"Lost souls" he says,

"Lost souls fly about my ears."

(laying his head down on the flat of his hand)

Says, "Miriam, dear..."

VOICES IN THE ROOM:

"Miriam, dear" and "Miriam, dear..."

AVROM:

Cities and towns

Will go up in smoke...

POOR CHASSID (having returned from the house):

Weeping echoes in the square...

A woman in childbirth...

In labor for three days now...

A child fell ill...

With diphtheria...

May our merciful God protect us...

(Off to the synagogue.)

VOICES IN THE ROOM:

What will happen?

How will it end?

AVROM:

And a forest...

A boundless forest...

Tree by tree they stand,

Their crowns entangled;

Branches entwined...

They thrust their naked roots upwards;

They are confined...

If its time has come,

A tree is sentenced to death...

It is ripped out of the earth,

But it cannot fall...

The tree has no place;

It remains hanging, a corpse.

LEMEKH:

Mouth and ears...

BEYNISH:

Hair and nail...

LOCAL CHASSID (entering from the front-door):

The courtyard is full...

A murmuring, a thronging...

And—a fear—

AVROM:

And below, around the tree trunks

Fearful secrets run about...

Like animals,

Like wild animals...

Burning, hunger-eyes...

Run, chase,

Tear themselves out of the forest...

[Pause]

Of all of this,

Says Miriam:

Evil decrees . . .
Disease and extinction . . .

VOICES IN THE ROOM:

What Jews say . . .
What they bring
Out of their mouths . . .
“Do not create an opening . . .”
“Do not create an opening for Satan . . .”

LEMEKH:

Disease and extinction—

BEYNISH:

And evil decrees . . .

RELATIVES / INTIMATES:

But the lords
Have convened a council . . .

AN OLD MAN:

So then they are
Thinking of us . . .

ANOTHER:

Disease and extinction . . .
God Almighty . . .

A THIRD:

And he won't let us near . . .
Sends us off to the doctor . . .

SECOND OLD MAN:

— To the young doctor

LOCAL CHASSID:

— And the doctor . . .

RELATIVES / INTIMATES:

— We know . . . we know.
Says nothing . . .

LOCAL CHASSID:

He is ruining everything!

OLD MAN:

May his name be erased . . .
(Stops abruptly.)

AVROM:

— And above— on high
Among the entwined branches,
Where life and death are
Mixed together . . .
Nests of birds, heavy . . .
Heavy—he says— birds . . .
Big . . . and they hop
And skip
From branch to branch
From tree to tree
And laugh . . .
And mock . . .

INTIMATES:

— Yes . . . A gang have they formed.
The doctor . . .
Teaches them to laugh,
Teaches them to mock.

LOCAL CHASSID:

Prayers do not help . . .
Things go their own way . . .
And the rabbi remains silent . . .

SECOND CHASSID (entering from the synagogue with fear and rage):

At the Holy Ark
With his head,
His dark head,
Thrust into
The Cover of the Ark,
Stands— Pinkhes.

THIRD CHASSID (Following him, full of suspicion):

And Israel
Stands at his side
Whispers in his ear,
Incites him . . . to some evil . . .

Pinkhes answers softly,
He catches his meaning,
Runs and whispers
Secrets to various people ...
Runs farther
And sniffs around,
Here a word,
There a word,
Runs to Pinkhes
And tells ...

AVROM:

Yes ... yes ... they laugh
And Miriam hears and interprets:
Ridiculed and scorned—
Says she, shall we be ...

MOYSHE (from the front door, morbidly frightened, with a religious
book in his hand):
According to Rabbi Bove ...

FIRST RELATIVE (angry, pointing at the synagogue):
What's going on in there?
What kind of secrets
Does your father Pinkhes
Have with Israel?

MOYSHE (turning to the window):
I don't know ...
How should I know?
Honestly, I have no idea ...

AVROM:

So ... so ...
We shall be held up
To scorn and ridicule.

MOYSHE (to the elders)

Let it be ...
Old men, let it be!
Is there not enough
Darkness and gloom?
We are sinking in

Melancholy and gloom ...
We are saturated
With sadness ...

OLD MAN:

But we wander about
Like blind sheep ...

ANOTHER:

And the shepherd
Does not show himself ...

CHASSID (Enters without closing the door behind him):

Sits behind the
Holy Ark
And remains silent ...
His white beard trembles ...
His whole head
Trembles

(From the synagogue loud crying is heard.)

OLD MAN:

The villager is crying ...
Shouting ...

ANOTHER:

Because he's not allowed
To approach!

A THIRD:

The mill—
Rented to a neighbor ...
Homeless, with wife and child
In the snow ...

(Someone shuts the synagogue door. At that moment weeping is heard from the woman's section.)

VOICES IN THE ROOM (Astonished, frightened):

— Women are tearing apart
— The synagogue ...
— For the child ...
— For the woman in labor ...
— Could wait no longer ...

AVROM (having heard, stands quickly up, with an outstretched hand):
Desecrate the Sabbath!
Before *havdole!**

(Local Chassid runs out into the woman's section where it becomes still and yet stiller. Avrom remains standing thus, till the end of the act, as if frozen.)

MIRIAM (clothed in light-blue. Steps like a sleepwalker. Enters from the front door. Walks to the window, with a voice sorrowfully weak—):

Why does no-one
Perform the *havdole?*

(The crowd is silent. Elders lower their heads. Older Chassidim and relatives back away with frightened respectfulness. Chassidim want to remove themselves from the presence of the "female"; one already places his hand on the door-knob, but nevertheless remains standing there.)

MOYSHE:

How are the children,
Miriam?

MIRIAM (seating herself at the window):

They've fallen asleep ...
Children don't know ...
Children don't feel ...
Playing on the floor,
They fell asleep ...
Their hands entwined ...
Under their heads
I placed some pillows,
They smile in their sleep
And blush ...
Terrible are the smiles
Of children....

(Pauses, staring out the window.)

MIRIAM:

The snow is turning to mud ...
Wintry ...

*Ceremony ending the Sabbath

Saplings rock,
Snow-laden branches
Tremble,
As if shaken by fear ...
And bleak and dismal
The sky becomes ...
From the West
A cloud lowers ...
And comes ... approaches
Our house ...
Children don't know ...
Children don't feel ...

(Into the room, somewhat louder than before.)

Why does no-one
Perform the *havdole?*

(The synagogue door opens; a new and louder uproar.)

MOYSHE (standing):

Fear envelopes ...
How the crowd roars ...

MIRIAM:

The crowd ...
The haggard faces,
The hungry eyes ...

VOICES IN THE ROOM:

The rabbi!
The rabbi, long may he live!
The rabbi!

SHLOYME (a very tall, gray, pale Jew, except for the black pointed skull-cap on his head—clothed in pure white. An unusually high forehead, exceptionally large, wide-open eyes, with a childlike-naive smile over his shrunken face, congealed by sadness. Israel, who had opened the door for him, and Pinkhes—and behind them, the crowd—remain standing at the door. Shloyme, moving to the middle of the room, when they all remain standing, looks around and turns to the synagogue door):

To no avail all talk
All pleadings, useless ... (firm)
I perform no *havdole!*

ISRAEL (moving in somewhat):

Rabbi, the congregation demands ...

OTHERS (from the synagogue and in the room):

—The congregation begs!

—The congregation prostates itself out of fright ...

—Have pity ...

—Have pity, rabbi, on the people ...

SHLOYME (whom MIRIAM provides with an armchair; without sitting and leaning on it with one hand):

The people ...

Two ... three ... four ...

Five little congregations ...

Tiny, tiny, little Jews ...

Starved

Shriveled

Little Jews ...

Hunchbacked, they come,

Knocking at the Rabbi's door ...

(Tone shift: sadness.)

Frozen souls ... hearts ...

To the eternal light they come,

Present their hands:

A spark! A spark!

Alms,

A sign ...

A miracle, a signal

From the Other World ...

And each wants

Something for himself,

For himself,

For his own wife and child,

For his own household ...

(Pauses.)

And here,

Between life and death,

The world balances!

A world sinks in

Deep despair,

A world!

(Pauses.)

(Into the stillness, staring out the window.)

It spreads,

The black cloud spreads apart ...

Like a black bird

Spreading its black wings ...

SHLOYME

Dressed in black,

Enveloped in black,

The soul of the world—

The Divine Presence rumbles.

And cries, mourns,

And trembles,

Drowned in its own blood,

The heart of the world!

(Straightening himself with outstretched arm.)

Delivered from pain and fear

Must be—

The world!

(Tone changes.)

I perform no *havdole!*

MIRIAM:

Angrily the cloud darkens ...

An angry-dark sky looks down,

And they smile there—

Children see not!

SHLOYME (bitterly):

The heavens rage!

“Why does he not,

My little Shloyme,

Perform the *havdole!*?”

Little souls

Have flocked together,

Sureties that have been recalled ...

Have the little doves

Besmirched themselves below?

Is, perhaps, one of them

Missing a wing?
Or perhaps had
Its little feather plucked?—
It must be examined!
And to judge the matter
The Heavenly Court stands ready,
With its throne of gold
And its crown of flawless diamonds;
And they want to be seated
To judge and to sentence . . .
 (Compassionately.)
And the little souls —
Flutter . . .
The little sureties flutter . . .
For fear of the Day of Judgement!
For fear of the Day of Judgement! (change of tone)
Do not tremble,
Do not flutter!
Shloyme will not perform the *havdole* . . .
There will be no judgment!
 (People are frightened. Pause. Winds are heard.)

MIRIAM:

Winds blow,
Hurry, drive . . .
Around the house,
Around the house.
How they blow
How they howl . . .

SHLOYME:

Hell, then, is raging,
Sends his messengers abroad!
Black birds flutter in the wind.
That black dog there
Strains at his chain!
The holy Sabbath is over
The Sambatyon* is active again

*A legendary river, impassable, because it hurls rocks every day but on the Sabbath, when it is forbidden to journey. According to some folk beliefs, the ten lost tribes of Israel live beyond its other shore.

And Shloyme remains stubborn:
Perform the *havdole*!
He will not.
Kettles—fired up,
Boil,
Seethe . . .
Smoky flames lift, curl,
Oily, burning clouds . . .
“Return, evil ones!
“For fear and torment,
“For heavy agonies,
“For severe woes . . .
“Why don’t you return?”
And the poor little souls,
The besmirched, the sinful—
When the holy Sabbath is extinguished,
They know,
and tremble . . .
And cling,
and hold onto,
With their black little wings
With their burnished feathers
To the mists,
And grasp, grasp
With trembling little hearts
To the little clouds,
And tremble . . .
Tremble! (change of tone.)
Do not tremble!
Do not flutter . . .
Fly around, free and easy,
Wherever you want,
Wherever a little breeze
May carry you—
I will not perform the *havdole*!

PEOPLE (in fright):

And what will be?
Rabbi, what will be?

SHLOYME:

Sabbath—let there be Sabbath!
With iron pincers do I hold the Sabbath back!
No judging, no punishing! (pause)
A scale hangs there on high
In front of the heavenly throne . . .
Balances up and down, this scale . . .
The pointer wavers, wavers . . .
A Jew performs a small good deed
And—a small sin . . .
The pointer cannot rest . . .
Not entirely guilty
Not entirely innocent—
So it wavers . . .
And God, merciful and forgiving, looks;
Help he cannot . . . (pause)
And so he sits, the Messiah,
At the gates of the heavens
And waits.
Leave he cannot . . .
His wounds do not heal . . .
He unbinds them,
He binds them up—
And redeem the world
He cannot!
And there is no strength to wait . . .
Into deep despair sinks the world
(Standing up; speaking forcefully.)
The world must be redeemed!
(Out of the house come Leah and Jonathan, holding hands;
no-one notices them. Bewildered and somewhat frightened,
they remain standing in the door.)

QUIET VOICES IN THE ROOM:

How? How?

SHLOYME (even more forcefully):

Let the Sabbath reign!
Sabbath!
No plowing,
No sowing,

No building and no repairing . . .
No business nor trade . . .

LOCAL CHASSID:

And shall the world go to waste?

SHLOYME:

Let the world go to waste!
And we—
We, Sabbath,
We, festive,
We, spiritual Jews,
Will stride over its wastes . . .

MIRIAM:

Where to?
Rabbi, where to?

SHLOYME:

To Him, to Him!
Singing and dancing we will go
To him!
(Pause, ecstasy.)
Sing with me!
Dance with me!

(It grows very still. SHLOYME begins to dance in a circle around himself. In the stillness is heard the tinkling of the chandelier. The ELDERS dance singly. JONATHAN and LEAH—swept along, push aside the table and chairs from the windows, take their mother's hands, and dance. Opposite the ELDERS, two half circles. MOYSHE looks at all of them as if they were not there—CHASSIDIM sidle quietly out of the room into the synagogue. MIRIAM lets go of her children's hands, catches hold of one end of SHLOYMES prayer belt and dances around him dreamily, somewhat shamefacedly happy, modest, joyful, like a bridal-dance. The children, in turn, take each other's hands and dance by themselves. The chandelier's tinkling grows louder and louder.)

LEAH:

Look, look—Mother is radiant,
As if the Divine Spirit were upon her.

JONATHAN:

Look at great-grandfather,
Like an angel—
Enveloped in holiness—

SHLOYME (not noticing, stops by himself):

And thus!
Thus we go,
Singing and dancing...
We great-big Jews,
Sabbath-festive Jews,
With souls blazing!
For us—clouds part!
Heaven's gates—open wide!
We float into the cloud
Of the Divine Presence!
Up to the Divine Throne,
To the Divine Throne!
We stand on the
Pure marble stone!
And we do not plead,
And we do not beg,
Big, proud Jews are we—
Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

SHLOYME:

We could wait no longer!
The Song of Songs we sing,
Singing and dancing we go!

MIRIAM (lets go the belt, places her hands under her head, bows it slightly; with radiant eyes, clarinet-clear, sings, cantillating):

“Let him kiss me with the
Kisses of his mouth.”
(Pause. Silent, unmoving ecstasy.)

ISRAEL (with sudden swiftness opens the synagogue door directly across the stage. A streak of light floods in, slicing across):

A good week, Jews!

SHLOYME (falling back into his chair):

It was not permitted!

AVROM:

Who rebelled?

ISRAEL:

Pinkhas performed the *havdole*.
(Emphasizing)
Reb* Pinkhes!

SHLOYME (rising):

My son, my dark son...
(Pinkhas appears in the synagogue door; behind him, the crowd.)

ISRAEL (stepping to one side so that Shloyme should see the crowd.)

The congregation requested it!
The congregation demanded it,
Commanded it did the congregation—
(Pause. Shloyme, very slowly retreats. At the same moment, Pinkhes enters.)

ELDERS and OLDER CHASIDIM (murmuring)

Reb Pinkhes, Reb Pinkhes...
(Miriam leads Shloyme offstage to his room. ELDERS darkly, silently, with sunken heads, follow. LEAH and JONATHAN, holding hands, follow behind the ELDERS. JONATHAN, as he walks, looks around, sees PINKHAS, suddenly tears his hand away from LEAH, and goes back into the room. The OLDER CHASSIDS stop at both sides of the door and turn around facing the room. PINKHES goes to the armchair. Behind him ISRAEL and the other beadles. The CROWD begins to move, with hope and fear, into the room.)

ISRAEL (to Pinkhes who is considering whether to sit in the armchair):

Be seated, please, Rabbi...
(All shudder. Pinkhes slowly sits.)

DEBORAH (from the front door, entering hastily):

The young doctor wants
To see his father-in-law!
(General consternation. Curtain.)

*In this context, rabbi.



ACT TWO

The same room, even more neglected. Moved in from elsewhere—a black oilcloth-covered sofa. The crystal chandelier—taken down. On the kitchen table brought in for this purpose lie scattered around several crystal chandeliers; the draperies have also been removed from the doors. The last curtain is being removed from the Venetian windows. From outside, the light of a beautiful Spring day beams into the room. The blossoming trees in the garden can be seen.

(MOYSHE lies on the sofa. MIRIAM, sickly and drawn, walks about the room, looks with heartache and defeated submissiveness at the removed articles, which are being carried off, left, by the BEADLES with the help of the LOCAL POOR CHASSID, under the strict supervision of ISRAEL. DEBORAH throws glances full of motherly compassion that seem to say: "I cannot help you, children."—The BEADLES and the POOR CHASSID carry everything out through the door, left; the LOCAL CHASSID follows them.)

DEBORAH (stopping him):

Moyshe probably wants to sleep;
Curtain the window!

(Removes her shawl; throws it with trembling hands onto the table; the LOCAL CHASSID takes the shawl and pushes the kitchen table over to the window. During this movement the crystal chandeliers fall noisily off the table.)

MIRIAM (stops, full of sadness):

The last sounds . . .
(Looks around the room.)
All that was sound
And color—
Vanished!

DEBORAH:

Do not speak, Miriam . . .

MOYSHE (imploringly):

Better to be silent, Miriam,

Be silent...
(To ISRAEL.)
Where is Jonathan?

ISRAEL (on his way out—just waiting for the LOCAL CHASSID):
Jonathan is secure...
Jonathan is ours...

DEBORAH (with quiet pride):
Sits whole days and nights
And studies!

ISRAEL (indicating with his glance the door of the study-house):
Right now,
At the Rabbi's right hand.
At his grandfather's right hand,
Under his influence, he sits...
Better ask instead,
Where Leah is.
(Off, with the local CHASSID.)

MOYSHE (anxiously):
Leah's not here?

JONATHAN (bursting in with pride and joy from the House of Study):
Mother, Father, Grandmother!
A new victory,
A new one!
Couriers from other congregations
Have come to Grandfather!
They sue for peace!
And he—
How he looks at them—
He rejects them—
He wants no peace...
And these are Jews—
Old,
Gray, hoary,
Honored,
One can see it
In their faces...

(Not getting any response from anyone, seats himself out of
the way, to the side. His face changes expression, reflects, asks,
after a while, with concerned love)

Mother,
Where is Leah?

MIRIAM (sits at the curtained window):
My poor child...
Two souls struggle—
My unfortunate child—
In you.

DEBORAH:
What kind of
Talk is that?

MOYSHE:
What kind
Of souls,
Miriam?

JONATHAN:
Whose souls, Mother?

MIRIAM:
Grandfather's
And Great-Grandfather's...

MOYSHE:
And I,
Where am I in this?
Have I no part
In my own child?

MIRIAM:
Of you? His self,
Is always being
Overwhelmed
By his Grandfather
And his Great-Grandfather...
This is what
Wracks this child
And casts him about...

And he battles,
Restlessly,
Between the light
And the dark . . .

JONATHAN (rebelliously)

Do not speak
Of darkness, Mother!
Grandfather is the light,
Holy light!
And great and sublime.
Like an angel!
Go, Mother, see,
How they stand in front of him,
They,
The couriers from the
Congregations.
You see,
They stand before him
And you feel
That they lie
Stretched out before him
And kiss his feet . . .
And should he lift his eyebrows,
Grandfather,
They tremble,
Like leaves in a storm . . .
And he rises up
And he furrows his brow,
Lightning is in his eyes
Thunder in his voice:
"I will annihilate them all . . .
"The heretics and apostates . . ."

DEBORAH (wringing her hands):

That's how he is,
That's how he speaks . . .

JONATHAN:

"And all those
Who gird themselves

And do not accede to my rule,
Those rabbis
Not of the true stem,
The false messiahs,
And those rabbis
Who support them,
The judges of ritual cleanliness
And the ritual slaughterers—
I curse them!"

MIRIAM:

Be silent, child,
Be silent
Do not repeat
Evil!
Terrible do you become,
Child!
Dark become
Your light,
Your blue eyes,
Your grandfather's sweet,
Quiet eyes!
And your visage changes,
A cloud obscures your face,
Your lips grow thin
And tremble . . .

(Jonathan shields his face, lowers his head and hands; a quiet pause.)

MOYSHE:

Only he punishes!
And he is a judge unto himself!
He—the judge,
He—the policeman . . .
Do you hear, Miriam?
Yesterday he spoke of the doctor—
"He must not be here!"

JONATHAN (springing up):

Probably not!
He misleads . . .

MOYSHE:

Why, just now . . .
Israel gave the nod
To his crowd . . .

DEBORAH:

Moyshe, you are so weak,
It's bad for your health
To talk so much . . .
What's wrong with you?

MOYSHE:

Nothing, Mother!
The blood cools
In my veins . . .
One lives and breathes
In fright . . .
All is shrouded in
Sorrow . . .
Only the Law
And—the Law.

JONATHAN (proudly):

Pinkhes—reincarnate!

MOYSHE:

Clouds, lightning, thunder!
And the House of Israel
Has houses made of wood,
Roofs made of straw . . .

JONATHAN:

He wants
All declared innocent!

MOYSHE:

Do you understand, Mother?

DEBORAH:

What does a woman know?

MOYSHE:

Riders on horseback have passed through
With sword and flame . . .

Destroyed whole communities,
Laid them to waste,
And over the ruins,
Over the ash,
Over the heads of the homeless,
Of the orphans and widows,
Over the masses
Of starved beggars,
Thunders his word,
Punishes his Law . . .

(his voice cracking)

You have not
Dealt justly, Mother!

DEBORAH (startled):

I?

MOYSHE:

You! A woman,
A wife, and a mother!
You—the vessel of mercy,
Speak with him!

DEBORAH:

I cannot!
I tremble before him
Like a leaf,
He breaks me in two
With his glance . . .
He speaks to me kindly;
He wills,
And his voice
Is the thunder—

(Wants to exit so as not to burst into tears in front of the children. Opens the door, left, runs into LEMEKH and BEYNISH, lets them through, and looks after them for a while, astonished. Off.)

MOYSHE (has gotten off the bed):

Hello.

(Remains standing with his hand outstretched; the ELDERS stand in front of MIRIAM with guilty countenances.)

LEMEKH:

Couldn't any longer . . .

BEYNISH:

Like sheep without a shepherd . . .

LEMEKH:

There must be a shepherd . . .
A leader—

MIRIAM (very quietly):

To the grave . . .

MOYSHE:

And Avrom
Where is he?

BEYNISH:

May his memory be blessed . . .

MOYSHE:

Punished.
(Painful pause.)

LEMEKH (urging BEYNISH):

Come, let us make peace!

BEYNISH:

He is in the House of Study
(Both exit.)

MIRIAM:

All surrender, all.

LEAH (who just entered from the courtyard door):

Not all!

JONATHAN (leaping up with a hoarse choked voice)

Where were you, Leah?

LEAH (who didn't hear, hurries over to the window, yanking the shawl):

Outside everything shines, blossoms,
Outside everything sings and rings so free . . .
And here, enveloped in shadow,
Entangled in a spider web,

Knitted up in a dark net,
Souls tremble and suffocate.

(Spirited.) Let there be light! (Tears open the window.)
And air!

JONATHAN:

"Air" . . .

You've been with him!

MOYSHE (frightened):

With whom?

MIRIAM:

My heart is filled
With evil premonitions.

LEAH (firmly, turned to Jonathan):

Yes, I was!

And I have asked him to come!

JONATHAN (grimacing):

Leah!

LEAH (sarcastic):

Your anger
Won't do any good, grandfather!
Brother-grandfather!
Father is sick,
Look, mother . . .

JONATHAN (beside himself):

And while you were there,
You heard fine things!
"Nature!" Rabbis are swindlers!
Placed two hemispheres together,
And couldn't tear them apart,
Even with horses . . .
Eh?

MOYSHE (despondent):

Miriam, dear . . .
What are they speaking of?
My children speak,
And I understand

Not a word . . .
You understood grandfather—
Do you understand them,
Miriam, dear?

MIRIAM:

They are too young,
I already too old . . .
(After a pause.)
Leah has called the doctor for you!

JONATHAN:

Father!
Don't let him
Over the threshold!
Mother, dear!
Don't let him
Cross the threshold!
He is the snake
In the Garden of Eden!

MOYSHE (broken):

Daughter,
Against whom
Are you trying?
With whom
Do you want to struggle?
A lamb against a lion—
A little bird . . .

LEAH:

Against a snake?

JONATHAN (suddenly altered; fright and brother-love):

Leah . . .

LEAH:

What,
Poor brother?

JONATHAN:

I saw a vision . . .
I, the Baal-Shem's grandchild,

Was shown a vision . . .
I want to tell it to you,
Leah . . .

LEAH (moved):

Tell,
You tell so beautifully . . .

JONATHAN (excited):

I was in heaven!
(Looks about to see the impression he's made.)

MOYSHE:

What children are privileged to see!

LEAH:

Tell!

MIRIAM (wanting to smooth things over):

Tell, Jonathan, tell . . .
When you tell,
The black cloud
Lifts from off your soul.
Your blue eyes become clear again
And your mother's heart
Bathes in them
As in a crystal pool . . .

JONATHAN (tells):

In the heavens I was . . .
All about is marble,
Fresh fallen snow—
Clear! So white, so bright around,
So holy—
(Sudden change.)
Not laughing yet, Leah?

LEAH:

No!
I love your dreams,
Pearls drop from your lips . . .
And I,
Poor me,

I, your poor sister,
Beg for them!

MOYSHE:

What kind of talk is that?
(No-one listens to him.)

JONATHAN:

And such still,
Still, silver-white mists,
Bordered with gold and purple,
Are drawn, swim,
Wrap themselves around
High, high . . . over my head,
I tear my glance upwards to them
With longing,
With total joy . . .
And in the mists
Tremble, shimmer,
Flash and extinguish themselves,
Hidden,
Flying up and down and around,
Little stars,
Golden, small, twinkling stars . . .

LEAH (catches on to her mother's hand):

His eyes,
See, mother!
Doves,
Pure doves!

JONATHAN (bewildered):

Doves, you say?
Doves?
(Suspicious.)
How do you know, Leah?
(Altered.)
True, doves there were!
Silver-white doves . . .
And the little stars—
Were their eyes . . .

LEAH:

What does it mean?

JONATHAN (hasn't heard):

Pure-hearted, sweet doves,
Bill and bathe
In the silvery mists.
And they see me
And they come at me . . .
And they glide
And fly, fly,
Lower, lower,
Over to my head
And around,
Around my head!
Touch me,
Flying,
With their bills,
With their wings,
My clothes,
Stroke my cheeks,
Lovingly,
With their white wings . . .
Kiss my lips with their bills . . .
And whisper in my ear
So feelingly begging—

MOYSHE, MIRIAM, LEAH:

What? What?

JONATHAN:

"Believe! Believe! Believe!"

LEAH (suspicious):

Whom?

JONATHAN:

All good, pious folk
All those in the golden chain . . .

LEAH, MIRIAM:

What kind of chain?

JONATHAN (not paying attention to this):
And suddenly—
(His eyes darken; his countenance darkens; he breathes hard.)

LEAH:
Come back, grandfather!

JONATHAN (angry, decisive):
Suddenly—steps!
I hear steps!
Two approach, two!
(Covers his face with his hands.)
I don't want to say who.

LEAH (imploringly);
Say!

JONATHAN (uncovers a part of his face):
You and... he!

MIRIAM:
Who?

MOYSHE:
What kind of "he"?

JONATHAN (turned to LEAH):
He—
A man of ice!
Eyes of steel!
Glances of sharp knives!
And a knife in his hand...
And he hands it to you!
(Covers his face again, deeply sorrowful.)
And says to you:
Cut!
And you,
Bad sister,
Obey,
Wave the knife about!
Over your head
You brandish the knife
Over your head

Without looking up;
You throw your hands about...
And the knife rushes about
And flashes...
(Grasps himself by his head with his hands.)
And the doves
That fly into the knife,
Fall!
Killed,
Slaughtered, they fall...
Onto the white marble,
They fall and bleed,
And flutter, dying,
And expire in blood.
They look to me
And murmur:
"Believe, believe, believe!"
And their eyes close.

BERGMAN (entered somewhat earlier from left):
Declaiming are you, Jonathan?

JONATHAN (beside himself with fright):
Grandfather!
Grandfather! Come!...
(Pause. PINKHES appears in the doorway of the House of Study, still turning to the Jews come from other communities who are following him.)

PINKHES:
It is for naught!
Out of fright you came,
And out of fright you will go...
With fright your path is paved...
(Takes several steps into the room; several of those who were following him enter following—the rest remain in the doorway.)

NON-LOCAL CHASSID:
You are laying waste a world.

PINKHES (who has not had time yet to notice who was present in the room, turns back again to them):

All must be adjudged innocent!
"I purify the world
Like silver with fire" —
Says God!
Winds he sends
Which shake
The sins from off the world!
"Now I will sing
To my well beloved
A song touching his vineyard" —
His vineyard,
Planted by his own Hand
Are we —
And the storm sings:
Thorns have I pulled
And the weeds destroyed!

NON-LOCALS:

But rabbi —
That cannot sustain the people;
It cannot sustain the community!

PINKHUS (sarcastic):

The people! . . . the community!
Who needs the people!
Who needs the community!
And if only a mere *minyan** were left,
And even only one Jew!
A devoted water-carrier!
With his rope around his waist,
And with his mistakes in Hebrew,
Then let him shout the Psalms!
This alone would cause joy in Heaven,
And in Hell — consternation . . .
And if only a poor roofer were left!
If one Jew
Should to the Heavens hurl,

*Minimum number of men (ten) needed to perform certain religious services.

With all his strength, "Hear O Israel!" —

Even a leprous Jew!
Half dead,
With his last breath,
Call out God's name;
Renewed and saved
Is the world,
And Hell — defeated . . .
One God,
And let there be but one Jew,
A devoted Jew,
Ready to die for his faith . . .
Then your "people" — be gone!
(Turns away with disgust, Sees BERGMAN, becomes confused, frightened, steadies himself by catching hold of the chair.)
You . . . you are here . . .

BERGMAN (cold):

Dr. Bergman, at your service!

PINKHES:

No . . .
(Sits, drained of strength.)
You have been sent for
From below . . .
Sent for by them . . .
By the blacknesses —

LEAH:

No!
He is white!
He is my groom, grandfather!
(PINKHES looks at her as if she weren't there.)

JONATHAN (falls on his neck):

Do not punish her, grandfather!
Do not consume her with your glance!
He is a magician;
She — drawn into his net . . .

PINKHES (talking with his head on the backrest, broken):

"But my own vineyard

Have I not kept" ...
I have purified a world
And have forgotten my own house ...
God, God in Heaven!
I waged your wars
In the wide world!
Paved your garden with stones
Tore up thorns ...
And Satan ... the were-wolf
Silently, under my eyes,
Snaked his way
Into my house, to my own,
And the clearest,
The purest,
My whitest lamb devoured ...
Will you remain silent, God?
Not perform your wonders?
Not help me in my need?

(Long pause. Sidling steps are heard—LEMEKH and BEYNISH come from the House of Study—the non-locals make way for them and let them through with great respect. They approach the RABBI. At the same time, judging by the commotion coming from there, the crowd in the House of Study is growing in numbers. People are also to be seen—and their numbers grow as well—in the courtyard. From the door left, enter, somewhat later, DEBORAH, and following her, ISRAEL.)

LEMAKH (approaching PINKHES):
Rabbi ... (Gasps.)

BEYNISH:
Rabbi ... News

LEMEKH:
Not good news ...

DEBORAH (entering):
The town is burning!

ISRAEL (right after DEBORAH):
The doctor is burning!

MOYSHE (collapsing):
Another punishment!

JONATHAN (defiantly):
A miracle!

DEBORAH:
One sign after another!
(The ELDERS look at each other; the CROWD is uneasy.)

PINKHES:
I thank you,
God in Heaven!
You heard my plaint!

BERGMAN:
I am insured, Rabbi.

LEAH (to Israel):
And you, show your hands!
You must have black hands, Israel!
(Israel slides away, frightened. At the window appears the reflection of the blaze. Into the garden come running a great CROWD; they hurry to the window, tear it open—people press their way from the House of Study to the door.)

VOICES:
—Rabbi, there's a fire!
—The town is going up in smoke!
—The wind hurls the flames from roof to roof.
—Help, Rabbi, help!

BERMAN:
That he cannot do!

ISRAEL (falling on him; after him, others):
Heretic, enemy of Israel!
(To the CROWD.)
He set it himself!
He's insured!

CROWD:
Ah!
(Fall on BERGMAN.)

LEAH (to the CROWD):

Stop!

(They stop.)

Let me through!

(It happens; she approaches, takes BERGMAN by the hand.)

Come my bridegroom

Come, you man of light

Away from the darkness,

From this nest of vipers . . .

Adieu, Mother!

Father, be well . . .

Remember us, Jonathan . . .

We go from here!

(When the CROWD wants to surround them again.)

Away!

Make way!

Let through, dark spirits,

People pure, clear,

Who go toward the light!

(It happens. LEAH, BERGMAN exit. PINKHES falls from the chair.)



ACT III

The same room, converted into a small House of Study. An Ark of the Torah, and nearby an open cupboard with prayer shawls and *shofars**. Under a brass chandelier—a simple table with scattered writing instruments and "*kvitlekh*"**. Nearby—an armchair. On the sides, neglected pieces of furniture from the first act. A dreary afternoon, clearing up later.

(MIRIAM sits all alone in the room with a prayer book in her hands, but she isn't praying. From the House of Study through the closed door can be heard the commotion of a large crowd. She pays it no notice, sits, immersed in herself, with an expression of frozen sorrow on her face. From the courtyard garden enter CHASSIDIM with prayer shawls and sacks of phylacteries, notice MIRIAM and go quietly over to the House of Study; among them the YOUNG, RICH CHASSID and the LOCAL POOR CHASSID, who accompany him.)

YOUNGER, RICH CHASSID: (stopping for a moment in passing)

*Rebetsin**** —

(As MIRIAM starts out of her reverie.)

Good morning to you, Rebetsin.

I can give you regards

From your son-in-law . . .

(Miriam brightens.)

I was in the province . . .

MIRIAM (standing):

At my daughter's? . . .

YOUNGER, RICH CHASSID:

At your son-in-law's . . .

He freed a brother of mine . . .

*Ram's horn blown in synagogues on the High Holy Days.

**Notes or messages given to chassidic rabbi by his community or followers so that he will intercede on their behalf regarding health, making a living, marriage, etc.

***Term of address for the wife of a rabbi—i.e., "rabbi's wife."

It cost me enough ...
He's getting rich ...

MIRIAM:

And my daughter?

YOUNGER, RICH CHASSID:

I did not see ...

Not altogether ...

(Remembers something, interrupts himself confused.)

Please don't be offended, Rebetsin.

(Off; LOCAL and POOR CHASSID want to follow.)

MIRIAM:

Wait ...

You know that man ...

Ask him—

Ask him about my daughter—

(LOCAL CHASSID makes quick exit; addressing the POOR one,
who is hesitating.)

You loved her ...

She was always good to you ...

She had a child ...

At least ask after the child ...

POOR CHASSID:

I am afraid, Rebetsin ...

Israel is ever vigilant ...

I will try, Rebetsin—

(Exits.)

DEBORAH (entering from the door to the women's section of the syna-
gogue, sorrowfully):

Oh, Miriam, dear, Miriam ...

Your husband is about to preach

His first sermon to the congregation ...

And you sit and mourn ...

MIRIAM:

I have something to mourn about, mother-in-law ...

My one and only daughter

Married—

And I did not lead her
To the wedding canopy!
Once she wrote me the news:
Had a child—
I will not see my grandchild!

DEBORAH (compassionate, yet stern):

Forget!

MIRIAM:

A brother forgets ...

Maybe a father too ...

And maybe not ...

Moans whole nights through,

Cries quite often in his sleep ...

A mother—cannot forget ...

DEBORAH:

Come hear the sermon ...

He has been speaking

Some time already ...

ISRAEL (falls into the room from the House of Study):

We are saved, Rebetsin,

We are saved!

DEBORAH:

What happened?

ISRAEL:

Listen!

And you too,

Young Rebetsin ...

Listen to his voice!

The rabbi's voice!

At the lectern,

In front of the congregation,

Straightened

To his full height,

He stands and speaks!

Those eyes of his are alight

With succor ...

Words fly from his lips:
Belief, faith, love of His Dear Name,
And devotion ...
Like the doves ...
They fly ...

MIRIAM:

Jonathan's words ...

DEBORAH:

A house of miracles;
Again a miracle!

ISRAEL:

The community!
Rebitsin, it is
The power of the community!
I assembled them
From the ends of the earth ...
Sent letters with riders on horseback,
And they came—
Little Jews, little Chassidim ...

MIRIAM (with quiet disgust):

The crowd ...

ISRAEL (with uplifted head):

The crowd!
(Turning to Deborah.)
And everyone in the crowd
Is a Jew!
And every Jew
Has a spot,
A spark in his heart!
And small is the spark,
And full of ash is the heart,
So it barely glows ...
And each one alone walks in gloom ...
But then if all gather together,
They unite,
And the spots are joined,
And the sparks burst into flames

And blend together
Into a sun,
Into a great sun
On the crown of the *tsadik's** head!
(Victoriously.)
No!
The golden chain is not broken!

DEBORAH:

What kind of chain?

MIRIAM:

Heard it before ...

ISRAEL:

The chain,
From the Baal-Shem** on,
The golden chain ...

JONATHAN (entering from the House of Study, joyously):

Mother, grandmother!
Go into the House of Study!
Hear my father's voice,
See his radiant face ...
See how the Holy Spirit
Blooms over him,
Over his head ...

DEBORAH:

Come, Miriam dear ...

JONATHAN:

Mother!

DEBORAH:

Come, daughter ...
(Pulls her.)

MIRIAM (letting herself be pulled):

For you, child.

*Chassidic rabbi; pious, saintly man.

**Short for "Baal-Shem-Tov," literally, "Master of the Good Name," the name given to the eighteenth-century founder of Chassidism.

DEBORAH and MIRIAM exit. Outside it is brightening. The sun bursts forth.)

JONATHAN (to Israel):

See!

A sun, a golden sun!
Summertime suddenly!
Summertime for us!

(Runs to the window.)

The cloud has turned away
From our house . . .
Our little garden blossoms,
Our hearts—too!

Do you hear?

There is a gurgling
Rivers are gurgling,
Streams rushing
Down from the hills—
Our salvation!

(In the House of Study it is suddenly quiet.)

What is that, Israel?

(A commotion and then again, silence.— Israel and Jonathan hurry to the door and open it. Enter MOYSHE, led by the first and second BEADLE. Behind them—the LOCAL and POOR CHASSID. MOYSHE is downcast, diminished.)

JONATHAN:

Father, dear . . .

(Taking him over from the BEADLES.)

ISRAEL (to the BEADLES, to the LOCAL and POOR CHASSID):

Don't let the crowd in—

Lock the door!

(The crowd is pushed back, the door forced closed and locked. DEBORAH and MIRIAM appear; they remain standing, frightened, in the doorway.)

CROWD (from the other side of the door):

—Let us in!

—Rabbi!

—Have mercy, Rabbi!

ISRAEL:

We cannot!

We must not!

The rabbi wants to be secluded* . . .

The rabbi wants

To meditate upon his soul.

CROWD (banging again)

—Rabbi!

—We have so many requests!

—We have our *kvitlekh* prepared! . . .

—We have so many pleas . . .

ISRAEL:

Later!

(To the BEADLES)

Go out through the courtyard . . .

Trick the crowd somehow

To go out,

If that doesn't work—

Drive them away,

With sticks, drive them away . . .

(BEADLES and the LOCAL CHASSID exit.)

POOR CHASSID (looking for and finding under a bench a package of his):

There is nothing more

To be done . . .

Be well . . .

(Off, with his package on his shoulder.)

MOYSHE (somewhat restored):

Requests they make . . .

Kvitlekh . . .

I know . . .

(Takes the *kvitlekh* from the table, reads one after the other, throws them away.)

“Sons” . . .

“Male children” . . .

*Seclusion was considered by cabbalists and other mystics as the best means of achieving a higher plane of spirituality, of elevating the soul.

"Liberate us from the soldiers" ...

(Rummaging further.)

"A living" ...

Again "A living" ...

A rich man, a saloonkeeper

Asks for "Prosperity" ...

"Snow"—a timber merchant

"Rain"—a man from Danzig*

(Stretches out his weak, thin hand in front of his eyes.)

They've taken a man,

A weak man,

And into his weak, trembling hands

Given the keys to

Male children, making a living, prosperity,

To rain and snow.

I cannot bear them ...

They've taken a man,

A sick man,

Who barely breathes:

"Run the world!"—

(Bitterly.)

MIRIAM (touched, approaching):

What's wrong, Moyshe?

DEBORAH (behind her):

What's happened to you

So suddenly?

ISRAEL:

It is the work of Satan.

It was such a good beginning ...

JONATHAN:

Father,

It was such a good beginning!

MOYSHE:

A beginning ...

It was a beginning ...

*Danzig (now called Gdansk), Poland's port-city on the Baltic; rain would make it possible to float the timber down the river to Danzig.

It seemed

What once was

Was returning,

The radiant-sweetness ...

The congregation around me,

With prayer shawls,

Like angels,

White angels,

Eyes—radiant,

Brilliantly colored rays

Of faith, belief, confidence

In me,

A willingness

To sacrifice self for me,

For a grandson

Of the Baal-Shem ...

So the heart soaks up these rays

And grows

And begins to blossom

Does the heart,

And the heart calls out:

I am!

An eagle am I,

Broad, white, strong wings

Have I ...

And surrounding me here

Are my "fledglings."

And I lead them

Into the blue vault,

Up, up, higher and higher!

And every so often

I look around at them:

Is, perhaps, somebody falling?

Is someone, perhaps, tarrying?

I strengthen the weak ones

With my glance,

Lift up the fallen with my call!

And we fly ...

Far, far, and high,

Over the earth,

Over the world,
And I call,
And my voice echoes over seas!
Over hill and valley,
Field and wood,
Villages and cities . . .
Echoes my voice,
The voice of the leader of his generation
Of a real giant . . .

(Rises.)

And strong is the voice—
Clouds burst apart,
Heavens part for it . . .
Paradise opens wide its gates . . .

(Falls back, tired; rises again.)

And the patriarchs come to greet us,
And saints!
And at their head—
My father Pinkhes!
Smiles beneath his
Brows and mustache . . .
“Not my way of thinking . . .

Not my way . . .
You didn't need to come around here . . .
And not in this way . . .

But, well,
Now that you've come!—”
And grandfather Shloyme appears!

(Tenderly, softly.)

“Yes, just in this way!
Exactly in this way!”
All follow me, flying,
Higher and higher is the way . . .
To the sapphire* moon,
To the marble—”
And suddenly—

ISRAEL:

What suddenly? . . .

* Made of the sapphire-stone from the breastplate of the High Priest (S. Rollanski's note).

MOYSHE:
“Swindler”
Someone calls out!

ISRAEL:
Who?

MOYSHE:
I don't know.
Perhaps Leah from someplace . . .
Perhaps the doctor—her husband . . .
Maybe even someone in
The House of Study . . .
Perhaps even the voice
Of an oracle . . .
Or perhaps something
In my own heart?

CROWD (from the other side of the door to the House of Study):
Rabbi—
The beadles are driving us with force,
Have pity,
Let us in . . .
We are so frightened!

MOYSHE (entreating ISRAEL and all those around him):
Let them in . . .
Let the congregation into my presence . . .
Let me prostrate myself
Before them,
Confess,
Admit,
A Jew must be honest!

DEBORAH (who has been standing at the window):
Someone's coming . . .
Leah, I think, is coming . . .
Is it a delusion,
Or what? . . .

MIRIAM (running over to the door and wanting to but unable, with
her trembling hands, to open it):
It is Leah . . .

It is Leah . . .
(Frightened.)
But alone,
Without the child . . .
And she is tottering,
And how pale she is . . .
Jonathan,
Your sister is coming—
(Jonathan turns away)

MOYSHE:

She comes to castigate us,
To castigate . . .

LEAH (entering, clasps her mother's hands; to her father—)
No father,
Not to castigate . . .

JONATHAN (turning to her, sternly):
From whence do you come, Leah?

LEAH:
From there,
From far away . . .

JONATHAN:
Whence are you going, Leah?

LEAH:
To you . . .

JONATHAN:
For what?

LEAH:
For help!

JONATHAN:
You—to us?

ISRAEL:
But you had your way,
You were victorious!

LEAH:
Light is—

Cold . . .
(Trembles.)
So cold . . .

MOYSHE:

Do you lack for something, Leah?

LEAH:

What do I have, Father?!

ISRAEL (studying Leah):

Much thinner . . .

LEAH (confirming):

Much thinner . . .

(Pause.)

And there,
There in its cradle
I have left a child . . .
Your only sister's child,
Jonathan!
Your grandchild,
Father!
Mother,
Your grandchild lies there,
Blind!

ALL:

Blind!

LEAH:

Eyes,
It has,
Big eyes!
My eyes, its mother's
Its great-grandfather's eyes . . .
Also, once, such eyes
Had Jonathan . . .
And perhaps
You have still
Such eyes . . .

JONATHAN (hard):

No!

LEAH:

My child does!
And it looks
With great big,
With its great-big dove-eyes.
But see,
It does not!

MIRIAM:

Daughter!

DEBORAH:

What, how?

MOYSHE:

Why?

LEAH:

Because that
Which looks out through
People's eyes,
Slumbers there yet . . .
Its young soul
Sleeps,
Not yet awakened . . .
(Full of pain.)
And if its little soul
Awakens some time,
I,
Its mother,
It will not see!
Help me!

ISRAEL:

And the doctor,
Your husband?

LEAH:

I have him not . . .
Together with my flesh-and-blood
Which fell from me
I have lost his love . . .
And the pharmacist

Has no remedy for me.
He says this:
It's all the same!
You help . . .
Let me be with my child!
Help!

JONATHAN:

To people of darkness
You come,
Person of light,
For help!

LEAH:

I am no longer proud!
Death placed his hand
On my shoulders,
Presses me down, down,
To your feet—
(Falls into mother's arms.)

JONATHAN:

She wanted clarity,
Desired the light!

LEAH:

Silence!
Have pity and be silent!
Snow is clear—
And snow is cold,
Snow is dead!
It chills the bones!
Clarity is—death!
The secret
Is enveloped
In white shrouds!
What is clear
Is cold
And hard as iron,
Like steel . . .
If it flashes,
It is, Jonathan,

A knife,
Which slaughters your doves!
If clear,
 (Despairing.)
If clear,
Then I am lost!
The last drop of oil
Is burning itself out—
In the lamp.
So says he! . . .

MOYSHE:
 A "law" said he . . .

JONATHAN:
 And—"nature" . . .

LEAH:
 Pitilessly false!
 Law is a chain!
 Nature—a rope around
 The neck . . .
 Choking, suffocating;
 The rope
 Doesn't let one breathe!
 (Gravely.)
 It cannot be
 That the world
 Is without rule, abandoned,
 Left to its own devices—

MOYSHE:
 Leah, I am a worm!

LEAH:
 And you, Jonathan?!
 Poor father!
 But you are young
 And strong . . .

JONATHAN:
 Where are my doves,
 Leah?

LEAH (dove-like):
 Believe . . . believe . . . believe! . . .

JONATHAN (hard):
 They are dead!

MOYSHE (suddenly, rising, to ISRAEL, with a rabbi's proud bearing, bitterly):
 Open!

ISRAEL:
 I'm opening!
 I'm opening!

MOYSHE:
 Let them in!
 Let the crowd in—
 Let the whole crowd in!
 If there is a world,
 Then there must be One
 Who rules the world,
 There must be an eye
 That watches us!
 In us,
 In us beats a heart—
 The world must also
 Have a heart!
 A merciful heart . . .
 (Pleads.)
 Pray for me—
 Pray to the Heart
 For me,
 To the Merciful Heart,
 Pray!—

MOYSHE, JONATHAN:
 We?— We?

LEAH:
 You!
 You,
 The great,

The holy—
You!

ISRAEL (opening the door with trembling hands, in great despair):
They've gone off . . .
Hardly a quorum left—

MOYSHE:
Call them in!

ISRAEL:
I obey, Rabbi, I obey!
(Motions the crowd in, turning back to the room.)
Those eyes of his!
Those eyes!
(About ten frightened Jews enter, mostly beggars, among them an ELDER led by two CHASSIDIM.)

MOYSHE:
Light!
Let the candles be lit!
(ISRAEL and the Jews do it.)
My prayer-shawl!
(ISRAEL runs to the cabinet for the prayer-shawl!)

MIRIAM:
What do you want,
Moyshe?

MOYSHE:
To try!

JONATHAN:
Try, father, try . . .
See how pale she is . . .

MOYSHE:
To fall—
To fall like Dathan and Abiram,
Like Korah!*
Not to be crushed underfoot
Like a worm!

*Numbers, Chapter 16.

(Wraps himself feverishly in a proffered prayershawl; ISRAEL steps back, away, with fear, while MOYSHE approaches the Ark.)

LEAH (calling after him with frightened regret):
Father—
(When he doesn't hear.)

Mother . . .
A great fear
Grips me—
Jonathan . . .
(Grasps his hand; JONATHAN tears himself out of her grasp, turns.—MOYSHE, kissing passionately the curtains of the Ark, and saying something, quietly, weeping.)

LEAH (to JONATHAN):
See—
See, how his shoulders shudder—
How his hands tremble!

MOYSHE:
... Pray . . .
I pray for her—
For my daughter,
For Miriam's daughter,
Leah!
And because I am so weak,
And because I am so,
So fallen,
And because I am
The weakest link
In the chain,
The golden one—
I ask for help from
My fathers—
With you!
(Pause, change of tone.)
Father!
I, your weak son,
Moyshe—
Ask you for her sake,

For your grandchild!—
Here, with us, you were
Zealous in the service
Of almighty God,
Lord of Hosts!
Wherever there was a bad root—
You uprooted it!
An unclean lamb—
You drove it off—
Like silver,
You purified us with fire—
Your own father
And *all*
All around you,
You surrendered
For God!
Now!
Now you have come
For your reward!
Great—
At the Throne of Glory,
At His right hand—
Is your place!
Help!
And if you should be
Angry at her—
She was rebellious against you—
Remember:
It is written, “Do not wreak vengeance,”
It is written, “Do not harbor enmity.”
Remember, you are in the
True world.

JONATHAN:

Thus, thus,
Father,
Thus...

LEAH (swept along):

Not thus!
Not this way,

Father...
Say: My heart regrets!
Say: I believe in him,
That I lie at his feet,
That I wash them
With tears...
That I throw myself
In the dust
Before him...

MOYSHE:

Do you hear
Father?
(Pause.)
And you, grandfather!
You,
Great Jew,
Proud Jew—
Be not angry with me,
That I come, thus,
To you,
That I stretch out
My hands
To you
And ask for your favor!
Not sabbath-like
And not holiday-like
Is your grandchild—
We are fallen!
For beggars's bread
Have we come...

MIRIAM:

Not this way,
Moyshe,
Not this way...
He will not forgive that—

LEAH:

No,
Not this way,

Father.
Say
I loved him . . .
Say
That I remember him still—
That the rays from his eyes,
Bloom still in my heart.
That in my soul
There trembles still
His dear, dear smile!

MOYSHE:

And you,
You, great-grandfather—
(Quietly prayed.)
And you, great-grandfather!
And—
The chain!
The whole golden chain—
(Quietly praying, despairing.)
They are silent!

LEAH:

A cloud approaches . . .
Over my eyes
A mist is drawn—
It grows dark.
Father!
Once,
I want my child
To see me!
Let my reflection
Remain there in its eye!
Once,
No more!

(POOR CHASSID removes his sack from under the bench.)

MOYSHE:

And you,
You, the One,
When I call to you—

Give me a sign!
That you are !
That there is an eye—

POOR CHASSID:

Bad!

(Slings the sack over his shoulders and starts toward the door.)

JONATHAN (running at the same moment over to his father, placing himself between his father and the Ark):

It is not permitted
To test God!!

(The crowd gasps with fright, eyes begin to flash.)

MOYSHE (turning, despairing):

Leah,
He won't permit me!

LEAH (collapsing out of fright):

Grandfather Pinkhes,
Grandfather Pinkhes . . .

FRIGHTENED VOICES:

Broken,
The chain has been
Broken!

ISRAEL (suddenly decisive):

No!
Jonathan is Rabbi!

LEAH (frightened):

Jonathan?!

MIRIAM (protectively):

My child!
(Jonathan hesitates.)

ISRAEL:

The crowd wants it so,
The crowd demands it!

MIRIAM (anguished cry):

The crowd . . .

CROWD:
We want it,
We demand it!

LEAH (hopefully):
Be!
Become!

JONATHAN (suddenly decisive):
I am!

(Curtain.)

