

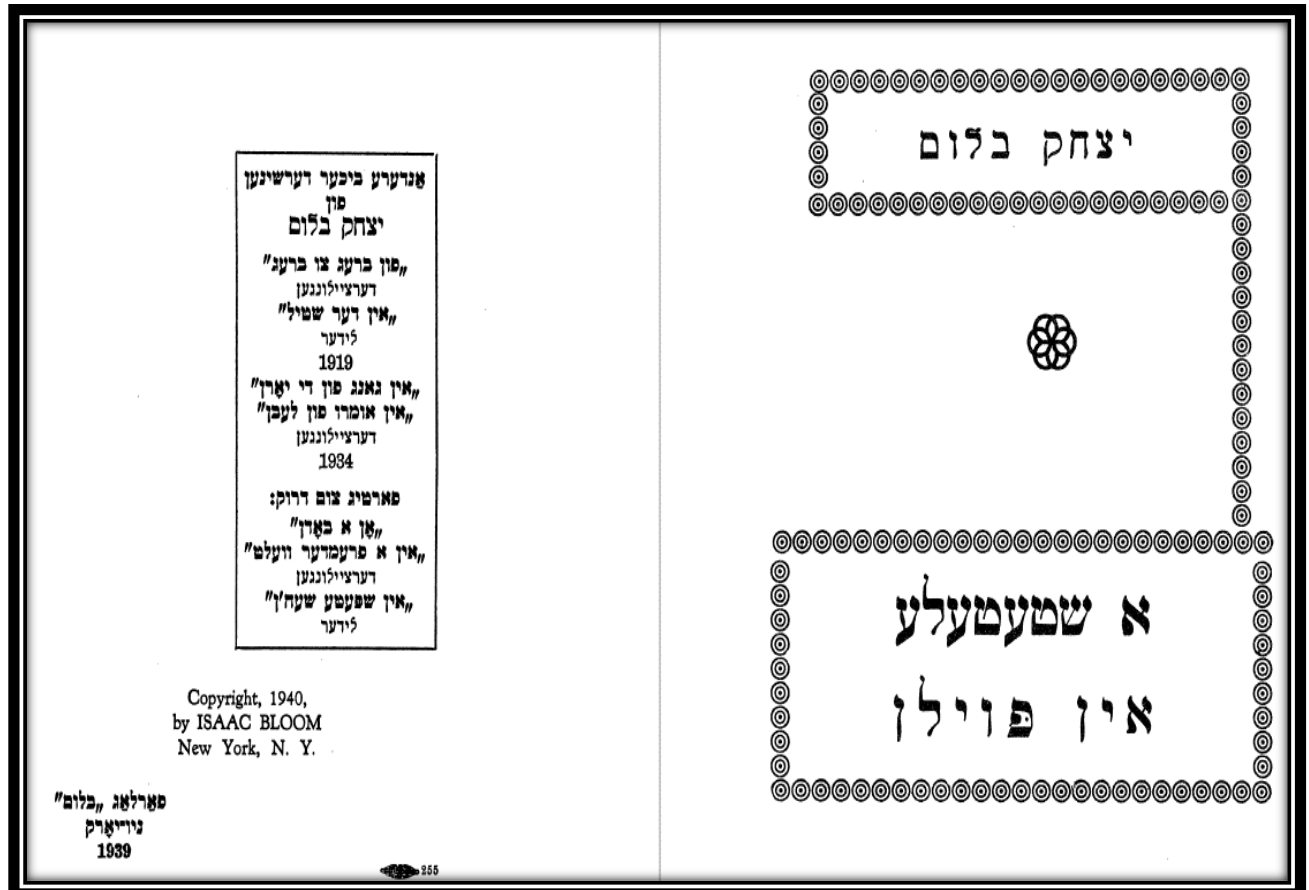
# A Shtetele in Poyln- A Shtetl in Poland

See: [A shtetele in Poyln | Yiddish Book Center](#)

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*Translator's notes: Contents in [ ] are mine. Contents in ( ) are by the author*

*Please note that the original book has no page numbers.*

*The spelling of Yiddish and Hebrew words mostly follows the YIVO standard or the Yiddish-Ashkenazi pronunciation*

## **Translator's Foreword**

In 1930, after 25 years in America, Yitskhok Blum [Isaac Bloom] returned to reunite one last time with his remaining relatives in his small hometown of Ciechanowiec, near Bialystok.

In introspective, sensitive and sometimes melancholy recollections, he returns with his memories and revisits the places of his childhood, compares the "past" with the "present", takes many photographs and writes a touching travelogue.

It is only after the years of the Shoah that he realizes with horror that with his personal notes and photos he has created an enduring testimony that will serve as a "tombstone" for the living Jewish shtetl of Ciechanowiec...

I am donating my volunteer translation to the Jewish Museum in Białystok <https://www.jewishbialystok.pl/EN> to JewishGen org. [JewishGen - The Home of Jewish Genealogy](#) and to my friend, Dr. Mirosław Reczko, the former mayor of the town of Ciechanowiec.

As always, my heartfelt thanks go to my friend,  
Dr. Susan Kingsley Pasquariella.

Beate Schützmann-Krebs



יצחק בלום

Yitskhok Blum [Isaac Bloom]

## I - the last one - will set up a tombstone for you...

No, my nearest and dearest,  
Who perished in the huge Jewish Shoa-  
I will not let your memory be forgotten  
Over the years.

As long as I live, and even after me,  
My tribe from which I remained will be known.  
I will not let your traces disappear-  
I, the last one after you...

I want to collect your pictures and names in my book:  
"A Shtetele in Poyln",  
Along with the ashes of your bodies  
Burned in the crematoria-  
And scatter them over the leaves of the tombstone,  
Like black, crushed coal,  
Together with my heart,  
Burned by torment...

And when I, the last remaining  
Of my family tree,  
Will no longer be here,  
The tombstone that I will set up  
Above you-will be my tombstone, too!  
We will all lie together  
And a dream will hover over us ---  
A dream of eternal life, of immortality...

And even though none of us will be around,  
Generations will still turn the pages that tell  
Of the Jewish destruction and annihilation ---  
And among them, also the pages  
Of "A Shtetele in Poyln".  
And they will stop to look at our tombstone.

.....  
I, the last of my family tree,  
Who has erected a tombstone for those who have died -  
And for himself...

## In Words and Pictures

### (An appendix to the new edition of my "A Shtetle in Poyln")

From the time I visited my hometown after an absence of twenty-five years in America and wrote my "A Shtetle in Poyln" on my return, something happened that even the wildest imagination could not have imagined. With the advent of Hitler, may his name be blotted out, began the extermination of all European Jewry; and with the war he imposed on the entire democratic world began the destruction and annihilation of entire countries and cities, with millions of people as victims...

And as always in world catastrophes, the Jews were the first and greatest victims: millions of Jewish lives were taken by various violent means of death, whole Jewish villages, towns and shtetls were devastated...

But all this is well known... Is there a Jewish home, a Jewish person who was not touched by this catastrophe on the other side of the sea? Whose heart should not bleed and mourn for the loss of their nearest and dearest? - And I am certainly no exception!

In difficult days and sleepless nights, I never stop thinking about the fate of my own little family. I had the sweet, painful pleasure of seeing them shortly before the world catastrophe, of looking at their tired bodies, their faces pale with pain - traces left by the difficult experiences of the First World War...

It is hard for me to understand how they would have been strong enough to survive another war, even without Hitler and without his extermination...

The Jewish life I encountered during my visit to the old homeland is already history. Who knows if such a life will ever return...

Hitler tore everything up by the roots; devastated Jewish sanctuaries, destroyed "shuln" [synagogues and schools], Bote-Medroshim [houses of study], desecrated besoylems [Jewish cemeteries], even tore out the tombstones of the graves... Therefore, everything that remains of the destroyed old homeland must be immortalized in memory, in whatever form...

During the time I spent in my homeland, I photographed everything that was related to the descriptions in my book "A Shtetl in Poyln". Of course, I did this in my own private interest, as a souvenir of all that is dear to me...

I didn't think it necessary to include them in the first edition of my book, because I didn't want it to look like a family photo album...

But today it is not just my shtetl, but the towns and shtetls of all of them that were hit by one and the same fire... The destroyed shul[n], Bote-Medroshim, besoylems and tombstones are a great destruction, everyone's destruction...

Even the pictures of one's own family are no longer "private," but a [single] Jewish body and soul that may lie burned in a great collective grave.....

And we are all now one great mourner, one lamenting orphan.

All hearts in one pain,  
All houses in one door;  
All, all - one grieving  
Sick orphan we remain...

Sh. Frug

All of us together must erect a great tombstone for those who have been tortured to death...  
I want to contribute my small part by immortalizing (in the new edition) the memory of a  
life that no longer exists - except in words and pictures.

אין זיין

xxx [bleached]

## **At the Empty Cradle...**

### **My Shtetl**

(In memory of my -and all- deceased)

I erected a tombstone for my shtetl  
Before the disaster took place;  
Sleeping on a homey bed  
Was still granted to me.

I visited the streets, the alleys,  
Wandered around alone;  
Everything will remain unforgotten  
In memory, in the bones.

I still want to cradle it in my heart,  
Deeply wounded and sore-red,  
As a mother swings her empty cradle,  
Even though her child is long dead...

**To the sacred memory of my tragically perished family, the perished of my hometown and all Jewish perished from all cities and countries by the barbaric murderous Nazi people.**

The train takes me from Warsaw to the station "Tshizeve" [Czyżewo], from where I have to travel to my shtetl "Tshekhanovtse" [Ciechanowiec]. My brothers with their families and my sister Rakhel are already waiting for me there, because I wrote to them from the ship. And they already know from the Warsaw newspapers that I'm going to arrive.

I sit on the train, tense and impatient, thinking that in a few hours I will arrive in my shtetl after twenty-five years in America.

I look out of the window at the fields and forests, at the small rural village houses floating by. It's the early part of June, everything is green and blossoming with the beginning of summer festivities...

I wonder why I don't feel any joy, only excitement at the return of experiences, feelings and images of childhood and youth long gone. Obviously, those years do not evoke happy memories in me.

I see peasants in poor, rural clothing striding barefoot over the hard, stony path: traces of Polish lifestyles and poverty.

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I feel melancholy and anxious. My own poor life as a child haunts me, when as a little boy I ran barefoot through the streets of the city and scraped the skin off my feet on the sharp stones...

And now my gaze falls on a "vetrak" (windmill), where the large wooden blades, driven by the wind, turn heavy and eerie like the heavy hands of wall clocks, as if they were pointing to the course of the heavy life at home...

"Czyżewo station!" I suddenly hear the Polish conductor call out, and I feel everything inside me stir a little, fluttering with excitement and expectation.

Several old carters from the surrounding shtetl, recognizing an "American pike", approach me. They all want me to "take the bait". I call out the name of my shtetl and they all run away disappointed - except one, the wagoner from my shtetl. He stops, takes my packages and leads me to the cart...

But it's not a carriage like it was 25 years ago,

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but it's an "omnibus" (a bus), actually a real omnibus that can "walk" without a horse. It chases across the highway- not at all provincial- frightening the horses and cattle, which the farmers can barely restrain...

In the past it took two or three hours to get from the train station to my shtetl. But today, I'm told, it only takes 30-40 minutes...

I look out of the open window in amazement. It's evening, a homey evening in the field, with a homey sunset and homey evening peace. Only now, this minute, I feel at home, in the old homeland, in the native forest and field, with native birds and native songs...

I can't tear my eyes away from all that is disappearing before my eyes: everything seems so new and yet old and familiar. So far away and yet so close...

The closer we get to the city, the more familiar and homelike the road becomes to me, the little paths, the trails, the houses here and there...

And when the "omnibus" suddenly enters the town

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and stops next to my brother's house, I pull myself together because my face is wet with tears. I quickly wipe them away, ready for new ones...

...

They're waiting for me at the house. Who are they? I don't know. I only see people, men and women, standing and waiting. I'm surrounded on all sides and someone is always kissing me, but I don't know who this "someone" is... I'm lost and excited in the crowd of relatives and strange, just curious people...

I am finally "led" into the house. It is only now that I recognize some of my own family members from the photographs that have been sent to me: My brother's two daughters, who were very little children when I left... My sister-in-law, my brother's wife, her mother is standing there looking at me. It seems to me that's her. She was once a rare personality, but now - a shadow...

I look around...

And who do you think is standing behind me? Someone so aged, so gray, but with such lively, young eyes.





ס'שטיבעלע קליינע  
מיט מי אויפגעבויט: —  
די מענטשן פארטריבן,  
פארפייניקט צום סוים.

ס'וואוינט היינט גיט קינער  
אין שטיבעלע מער,  
פארבליבן איז שטיבעלע,  
פינצטער און לער.

[Handwriting:] The little house where I stayed during my visit to my brother; his daughter and son-in-law, my brother also lived there. The window with the shutters closed - that's where I slept.

Nobody lives today  
In the little house anymore,  
The little house has remained  
Dark and empty.

The little house, the small one,  
Constructed with difficulty:-  
The people driven away,  
Tormented to death.



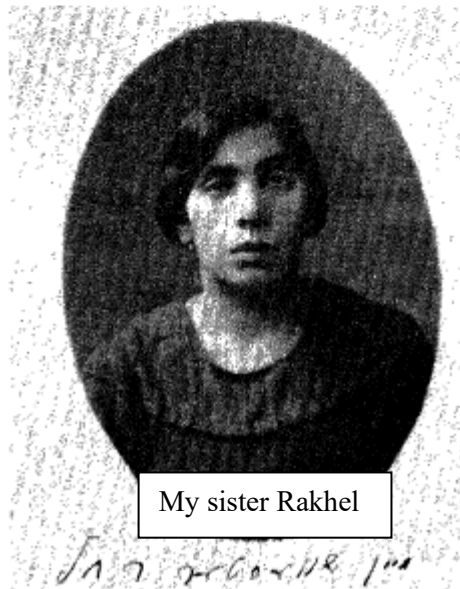
My brother Alter in his youth



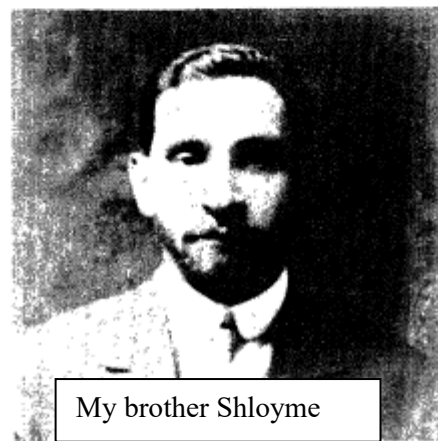
My brother Alter, 1931



My brother's wife, my sister-in-law  
Leah Hinde



My sister Rakhel



My brother Shloyme

Tears are streaming from his eyes now. Oh yes, that's my brother Alter...Alter...The very one I left as a young lad - with black hair and a moustache, with a young, firm step... He was considered "a gifted writer" - still from the time when he came back from Zamoshtsh [Zamość], the town of [Yitskhok Leybush] Peretz, where he did his military service a few years before I left...how he has changed!

And my brother Shloyme...

And there is my sister Rakhel...

All older, changed, perhaps more by poverty and need than by time and years...

The house is small and low inside. The few people there can barely turn around... It is already tidy, sprinkled with local yellow sand...

The walls are painted with white lime. The old clock hanging on the wall goes its old, heavy way, like an old man who can hardly drag his legs behind him.... Not far from the brick oven standing at the side, an emaciated yellow cat lies and plays... Some of my people are very busy preparing the food for me - for the guest...

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...

In the evening, after dinner, the first home-cooked meal, I ask my loved ones to take me out into the street, because I long to see the city... They do it for my sake, although they would rather have me in the house with them for the evening, to talk together as a family, to spend time together, to talk at length about everything that's on their minds... They haven't seen me for so many years...

It's dark on the street. You can hardly see how to walk here. I have to hold on to my relatives to keep from falling - even though they tell me that "electricity" has been introduced for a year. But the electric lamps are so far apart and so small that it is difficult for someone who is accustomed to a lot of light to get used to such "electric lighting". Only at the market, where there is already a narrow sidewalk, is it a little brighter. I can see a bit around me, but not much further...

In the nightly darkness at home, I can hardly see, but I feel that I am among my nearest and dearest, whom I have missed all the years I have been away from them.

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And the more steps I take with these poor people who walk beside me and whom I have supported all the time I have been in America, the more I feel their closeness and our deep mutual bond. ...I feel it in their handshake, in their silent steps, in the way they snuggle up to me...

We walk slowly, because my goal is not to move forward, but to look, to gaze, to absorb the air, the atmosphere, the life of this place... I am burning with curiosity to find out what everything looks like; will I find something new now, after twenty-five years, or is everything the same as before?

No, I think to myself, it can't be the same as before, at least not on the surface. Because during the war, before they left, the Russians set fire to many places, and almost the whole shtetl went up in flames. But I can't see anything new in the darkness...

Before I could look around, my neighbors began to hurry home.

"Why are you rushing?" I ask them.

"Because it's half past eleven at night", my brother answers,

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"and at twelve o'clock on the dot, the electricity is turned off in the whole city at the same time, and it becomes as dark as it was twenty-five years ago"...

"Why are they doing this everywhere at the same time?" I can't understand it. "Why don't they do it individually?" I ask my brother.

"Because the city is poor and they can't afford to set up the technology needed to do that."

And before I have time to ask anything, the "electricity" has gone out everywhere and we are left in the dark.

"Twelve o'clock already?" I ask.

"A quarter to twelve," my brother answers, "the darkness lasts only a minute. A signal for those who are still on the street to go home as quickly as possible, because soon it will be really dark".

We hurry to get into the house as soon as possible. That means the others are hurrying because of me, since they don't want me to have to walk home in the dark. They themselves are used to it.

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But me? An American? I was too far from home - and that's nothing for my fine American shoes.

We leave the narrow pavement and step quickly over the sharp cobblestones.

The electricity fades and the walk becomes heavier... Those closest to me lead me with hooked arms to keep me from falling.

Once inside the house, in the dim light, I manage to undress in time and lie down on the bed that the young couple, my brother's daughter and son-in-law, have given me to rest from the journey.

The electricity is turned off at exactly twelve.

...

I lay in bed but couldn't fall asleep. On the one hand, I was disturbed by the heat generated by the bedclothes with which one covers oneself, whether it's summer or winter, and by the stuffy air because of the closed windows and shutters. People are afraid to leave them open at night so that, God forbid, poverty might be stolen from them...

The experiences of the first few hours

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of my return to my old home completely confused me. I lay awake and couldn't believe that I was actually at home and that I was actually lying in a bed at home in my brother's house...

If I hadn't touched the warm blanket with my own fingers every minute, it would have seemed like a dream...

How is this possible? How did I get here so suddenly? Where did the distance of over three thousand miles of sea and land go, and where are my roots of nearly three decades in New York, where I have lived almost twice as long as here, in the city of my birth? Why has everything drifted away from me? Why are my thoughts no longer connected to this distant land, to this distant city of New York, where the night is as bright as the day, where you don't have to be afraid of the darkness, where my apartment is, where hot and cold water flows from the wall?

Where are the people, the societies, with whom I have chosen to live together and with whom I come into contact every day? Where has all this gone from me, here in the dark, silent hour

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of the night in the old country, as I lie in bed on a summer's night, snug in a warm blanket, with the door and window closed?...

And my thoughts continue to search for this distance...I want to explain to myself what has suddenly happened in my whole life, in my thinking and feeling...Where does this transformation in my whole psychic being come from?

I begin to think about whether I really crossed the Atlantic on that ship or whether I miraculously fell here from the sky...All the details of my journey come to mind, the people I met on the ship, the hours I spent standing on the deck staring at the endless expanse of the sea....I seem to feel the nasty symptoms of "seasickness"....

As a result, I've actually traveled on a ship and experienced all the comforts and discomforts of travel, even the domestic trains where two people can't avoid each other in the middle of the aisle...

I went through the border controls, where I had to constantly pull my red American passport out of my pocket, which stood by me like an amulet

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with the border officials of the various countries... and...

My reflection was interrupted by a stalking and weeping song behind the window, echoing so lonely and sad in the silent dark night...

I lay there with bated breath, listening to the singing, which on the one hand frightened me, but also drew me out into the street...

In the silence I covered myself with something and began to turn around in the dark to look for the window...

My brother's daughter heard from the other room that someone was prowling around the house....

"Who is it?" she asked sleepily.

"It's me, Itshe, Yitskhok," I answered softly, so as not to wake anyone.

"What, can't you sleep?" she asked worriedly.

"Oh, I slept quite well...but someone is singing behind the window and woke me up."....

"Oh, it's Berl the Meshugge!" she said sleepily, and obviously fell asleep right away, because she said nothing more.

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I realized that the people at home are obviously used to it and don't care... In the dark I hardly found my bed where I lay down again and only fell asleep when it was already dawn... ---.

It was already noon when I woke up. My eyes met the bright rays of the local June sun.

It was quiet in the house because my relatives had all left the house so as not to disturb my rest... It was a dear silence that came from a feeling that said something like: Although no one is there, you are not lonely, because on the other side of the wall, dear and close people are walking with silent steps, waiting for you to get up....

I quickly jumped out of bed and got dressed.

When I went to wash and shave, I encountered the first difficulties, the difficulties of an uncomfortable small-town life...

It was as if my loved ones had sensed that I was already out of bed. They all came in and noticed that I was wandering around rather lost.

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They asked me, with devoted kindness, what they could do to make me more comfortable...I asked them to heat some water...I unpacked my American shaving kit, put it on the table, set up my mirror, and somehow agonized over the shave... ....

It was Friday. And since I had slept in late, Shabes [Shabbat] preparations were a little behind schedule...I rushed out of the house to give my loved ones a chance to get ready for Shabbat....

Some of my family wanted to go with me, but I insisted on going alone, and I walked the streets and alleys where my childish steps had walked a quarter of a century before...I soaked up the joy and sadness of old memories and new experiences...

My dearest ones looked after me with love and devotion:

"Just don't get lost!"

Slowly, without hurrying, I walked through the courtyard of the shul, which was not far from my brother's house.

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I counted the stones, touched and smoothed them with the soles of my American shoes, as if I were greeting each little stone... A few times I even bent down and felt them with my hand, as if to check if they were still the same ones that my little child's footsteps had once walked over, or if I was greeting completely different stones that were already quite foreign to me...

The whole courtyard of the "shul" [synagogue] seemed so small and impoverished to me now, as if it had shrunk during my absence and shriveled up over the years. My eyes searched for the tall, white "shul" that had been the "mirror of the city" in my childhood. The "shul". As far as I could remember, it was indeed a marvelous beauty, both on the outside and the inside: magnificent, high, thick, white walls with semicircular "cornices" looking out high above the city and still visible far beyond the city...

Inside was a rarely beautiful, gold-plastered "orn-koydesh" [holy ark] with carved, gilded "lions", "deer", "leopards", "tigers", which both frightened and attracted me in my childhood...

The "shul" embodied the city's Shabbat and holidays...Only on Shabbat and holidays did people pray there...When the huge candelabra that hung high in the center of the "shul" was lit, along with all the other lamps and candles, the surrounding streets were illuminated....

The beauty and luminosity was most evident on the night of "Kol Nidre" ["All Vows", the Yom Kippur prayer], when dozens of large wax candles were lit alongside the large hanging candelabra and all the other lamps, and all the lights merged into one great brightness that illuminated the faces of the praying, who looked out of their white "taleysim" [prayer shawls], pale and frightened in the face of "Yom Hadin" [Day of Judgement]...

And when Dovid, the "khazn" [cantor, prayer leader], stood with his tall, massive figure opposite the open "orn-koydesh" and shouted in his lion's voice, "Kol Nidre!", the walls actually shook...

A holy fear seized everyone, and the congregation suddenly began to sway like trees in a forest when a storm is coming.

Even Christians used to come to "Kol Nidre" in the "shul", the elite of the city, led by the city officials...



[Handwriting:] The window below [is] from the "talme-toyre" [free Jewish community school].  
The destroyed entrance to the "shul".



[Handwriting:] The other side of the "shul" and the entrance to the "children's school" where Alter was a teacher.

They [the elite] used to stand all evening and listen and watch the event with great reverence... You could really only feel and see such a "Kol Nidre" celebration in the big "shul"... ---.

Now all that remains of the "shul" are memories: Broken, sooty, shot-up pieces of wall... The Russian soldiers set the town on fire during the World War before fleeing from the Germans and did not spare the "shul" either...

I noticed that on the right side of the "shul" a piece of a broken window was sticking out like a blind eye, and it made me shiver. It is this window that I associate with my childhood. There, behind the window, was the cheder, where poor children - including me - were taught Talmud and Torah under the supervision of the strict teacher and rabbinic supervisors...

It was through this very window that I used to look longingly out onto the street when I found it difficult to endure the close, stuffy air of the cheder and the constant grunting and croaking of my sick, asthmatic teacher, Eliyah Dovid, who almost coughed in my face during the "khumesch" [Pentateuch]...



And when his coughing stopped, he would throw himself viciously

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at the children, striking them with his long, thin hand, right and left and wherever he could reach...

It was there, on the other side of the window, that I began to learn Yiddish from Sholem the Teacher. He was appointed by the "talme-toyre" to teach the two to three hundred students of the "talme-toyre" for one hour every morning. They would come together from all the shtiblakh (classes), and whoever had the energy would manage to go up to the teacher and ask him to write down a "shure" (line), which he, the student, would then copy from top to bottom...

As far as I can remember, during the whole time I was studying in the "talme-toyre", I only managed to go to the teacher two or three times to ask him to write down a "line" for me. I didn't need him more often, because I had already taught myself the rest... - on the other side of the window...

I was so busy looking at the destroyed "shul" that I didn't even look at the two Bote-Midroshim [study houses] that are in the neighborhood of the "shul"...

Of the two Bote-Midroshim, only one was

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called "the new Bes-Medresh" before I left. It remained intact...

The "old Bes-Midresh" was half burnt. But it was somehow restored and Jews used to pray in it...

I was drawn to the "new" Bes-Medresh, which was now quite old...

The "new" Bes-Medresh always captured my imagination when I was a boy, because in the evenings, between the "Minkhe" and "Mayrev" prayers, "Moyshe the Maged" would preach there, and he was a mischievous fellow, telling beautiful stories and parables. And I loved to hear them very much....

I went in...

I was struck by the old, musty smell of tallow and old books... It was quiet, no one was in the bes-hamedresh. I felt a restless, mysterious shudder take hold of me...I stood at the door for a while, as if afraid to go any further....

Gradually I came to myself and began to walk slowly, with uncertain steps, until I stopped at the tiled stove, which was not far from the door.

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The stove, once snow-white, was now black and dirty, like a child that hadn't been washed in a long time...

Behind the stove was an old, wide bench - the same bench as twenty-five years ago! This was the "bench of sighs", where the very poor people, such as craftsmen, carters and others

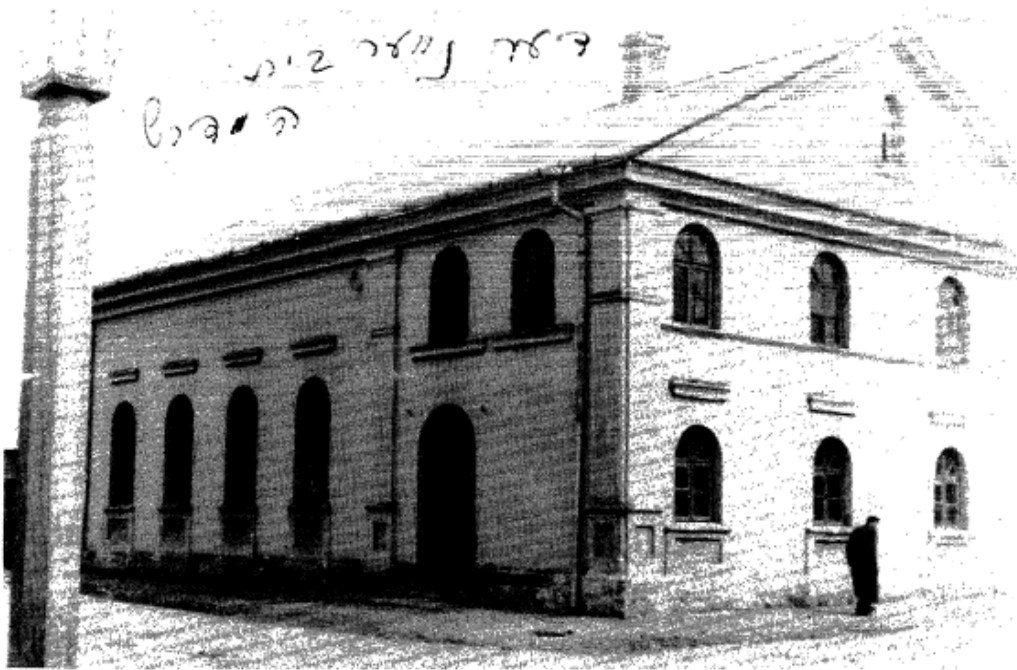
of "low status", used to sit during the long winter nights, pouring out their hearts, complaining about their hard lives, and - sighing...

At night, the bench was occupied and used as a refuge by those derided as the "house owners of the night". They were all kinds of idlers, moochers, "naughty boys" and strays from other towns...

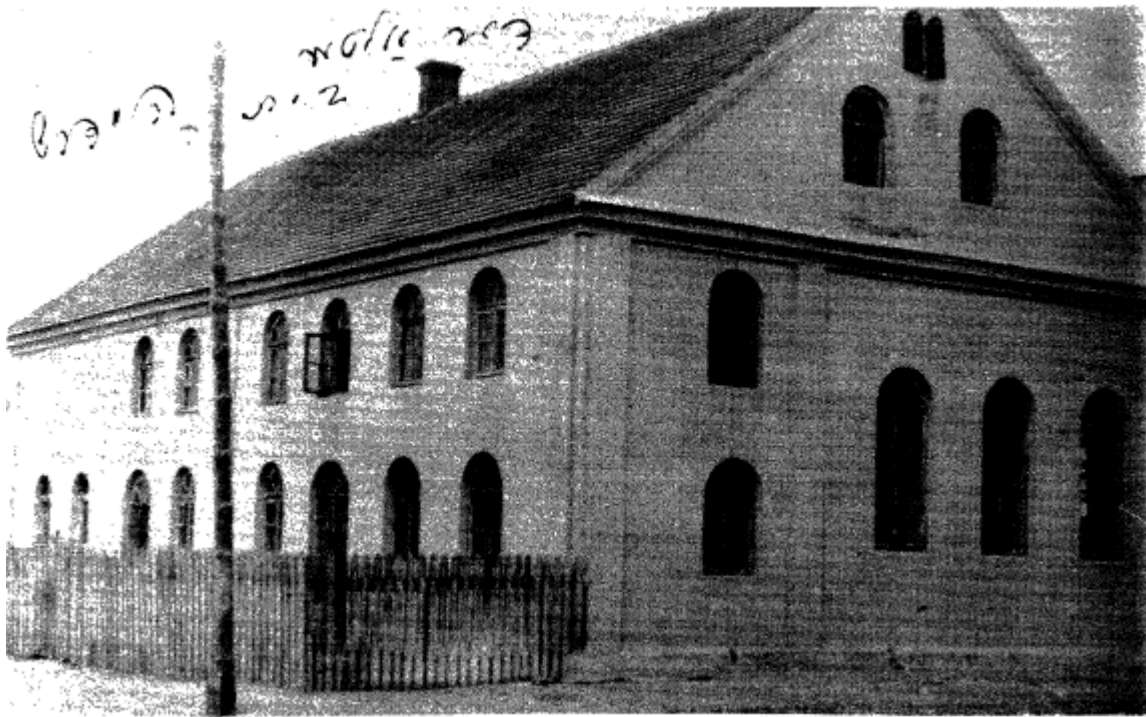
I stood there and looked at the bench from all sides...yes, this is the same old faithful bench where dozens, perhaps hundreds of the poorest and lowest of the people have found their rest for dozens of years. And "she", the bench, who is now an old woman and can barely hold herself up, still takes in all those who need her.

On her old back, which is already cracking inside, she carries and cradles them like an old, faithful grandmother her grandchildren.

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[Handwriting:] The „new“ Bes-Hamedresh [House of Study]



[Handwriting:] The „old“ Bes-Hamedresh

"How much pain, how many tears, how many sighs has the old bench already absorbed?" I thought wistfully, "and what will be its end when it collapses completely? Will it be burned in the oven of the Bes-Hamedresh, in the same oven beside which it has stood for so many years? And there will be no memory of it... How could anyone do this? A bench like this should definitely be preserved in a museum as a symbol of human misery and suffering..."

-----  
I walk on, looking at each stand, each bench, each table. Everything just as I left it: Old, scuffed, scratched, covered with tallow, blackened - but the same. ....

Nothing has been replaced, even the "sforim" [religious books] in the sforim cupboards next to the filthy walls are the same: torn, tattered, patched - but the same, as if the city had not been able to renew everything all this time. Or maybe they just didn't want to change the appearance of anything in the Bes-Hamedresh, just like a person doesn't want to change his face with another, foreign one, even though it gets old and wrinkled with time...

And now my eyes suddenly fall on the large, long table in a corner of the Bes-Hamedresh, with long, narrow benches around it. I stand there as if forged, looking at the table, the area around it, the benches, and I can't take my eyes off it. Somehow it seems to me that this corner is much more familiar to me than anything else in the Bes-Hamedresh... I recognize something there that has to do with my childhood, with my early years, with my life as a child.

I feel myself completely disappearing as a person - as a big, grown-up person... The span of years dissolves, I become a little boy, a poor "ingl" of poor parents, who has no other pleasure than playing buttons with other poor "inglekh" [boys], right there in the Bes-Hamedresh. And the most popular corner for us was actually there, at the table... There, at the table, we would spread out with our colorful, large and small buttons, draw numbers and distribute our winnings.

Right there, on the table, I can still recognize the cracks

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and the letters we carved into it with our little knives, quietly - so the shames [synagogue caretaker] wouldn't see it - each one the first letter of his first name...

It's hard to see the letters now, they've buried themselves deep, worn away like those on old tombstones...

But they are there...time could not erase them completely...-----

My thoughts are suddenly interrupted by a "gemore" [Talmud] melody, sung by a young, tender voice, echoing over the Bes-Medresh....

I pull myself out of a dream...I noticed a Bes Medresh boy, unaware of me, swaying and singing somewhere in a corner of the Bes Medresh. He was standing at a stand, over a large Talmud folio... And since I didn't want to disturb him, I quietly slipped out of the Bes-Hamedresh and into the street...

...

On the way to the marketplace I came across a very narrow and short cul-de-sac (on both sides were walls without windows) - with thick cobblestones that stuck out sharply and made walking difficult... I walked back and forth down the alley a few times.

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I looked at the alley from all sides, as if I would perceive who knows what great miracle here... The "miracle" was that as a young boy I used to sneak through this very alley several times a day. You had to go through this "blind lane" on your way to the market, and so it was deeply engraved in my memory as one of the "local objects" associated with the general image of the shtetl...

When I finally stepped out onto the market square, I stood there for a while with my eyes wide open. The whole panorama of my childhood, of my years as a little boy, unfolded before my [inner] eyes...

Although the market was just as big, wide and long, and just as square, at first glance - after twenty-five years - it seemed much smaller to me than it had been before... But basically it was the same as before, although it had changed a little here and there - rebuilt and redesigned after the fire.

The first thing I noticed was the row of booths in the middle of the market... The booths were still the "poor man's shops", where the poor women and the impoverished farmers of the village

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could get everything much cheaper than in the stores at the market.... The booths were new, but already looked old and greasy, like the vendors in the booths...

Of the booth owners, only one seemed somewhat familiar to me...but I was wrong. It was the daughter of the one I was thinking of...

This one, Sore-Gitel, was an institution at the market in my childhood years... Her booth was the only one facing the cul-de-sac, so you could see it as soon as you walked through the alley to the market. All the other booths had their "faces" to the width, hers - to the length...

Sore-Gitel was a broad, round Jewish woman with a worried, wrinkled face. Even in summer she wore many kaftans piled on top of each other and a thick headscarf. In winter, her face barely peeked out. The "fire pot" she used to warm herself in winter was famous in the market. It was a large, round clay pot in which coals were constantly glowing with small flames.

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It was a miracle that her clothes didn't catch fire. Sore-Gitel often lent her famous fire pot to her neighboring "stallholders" to warm their frozen limbs, for which the neighbors couldn't thank her enough...

Sore-Gitel's hands and clothes always smelled of the herring she was selling. She sold it to poor children in small pieces, for a penny or two, and added a little fish roe or fish milk (oh, how many pieces of herring I bought from her!).

Sore-Gitel knew all the "heavy hearts" of her customers. They poured out their hearts to her, told her about all their sorrows and pains, both their own and those of others, and if one of them was short of money for bread or herring, she would lend it...

Now Sore Gitel's place has been taken by her daughter Khaye Bayle. Although she looks like her mother, she is not yet her mother, Sore-Gitel, the "institution" of the market. --- Slowly, as if not quite sure of my footing, I began to walk...

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I walked the length and breadth of the market, looking at the houses, many of which were still unfinished. I looked into the empty stores and stopped at the fountain in the center of the market that had replaced the old "plump" [water pump]. If you wanted to get water from it, you had to pump with an iron lever, whereupon the water flowed from the "mouth" of the pump into the bucket. Now you had to lower the bucket down on a chain and when it was full, pull it up again.

At the market, the eve of Shabbat was clearly in the air... The "market sitters" [women vendors in the booths] sat on small boxes next to their bit of green fruit and called out their wares. Hurried women bent over them, looked at them, touched them, and wondered if they should really afford such a Shabbat luxury with the half zloty they had left in their pockets...

Everything was as if I had just left yesterday: the same market bustle on the eve of Shabbat, the same rush and hurry, only there were fewer goods for the sellers and more anxiety and problems for the buyers...

I stop at the corner of the street where

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Motye the Pharmacist's house and the pharmacy once stood, next to a tall telegraph pole. A shudder goes through me, as if I had suddenly touched a live telegraph wire...

Twenty-five years ago my feet touched the ground of the shtetl for the last time. I left from there. That's where my old parents said goodbye to me - they stood there, sad and worried, looking at me with tears in their eyes until the wagon pulled away...

Right there, and they are both gone... both of them...

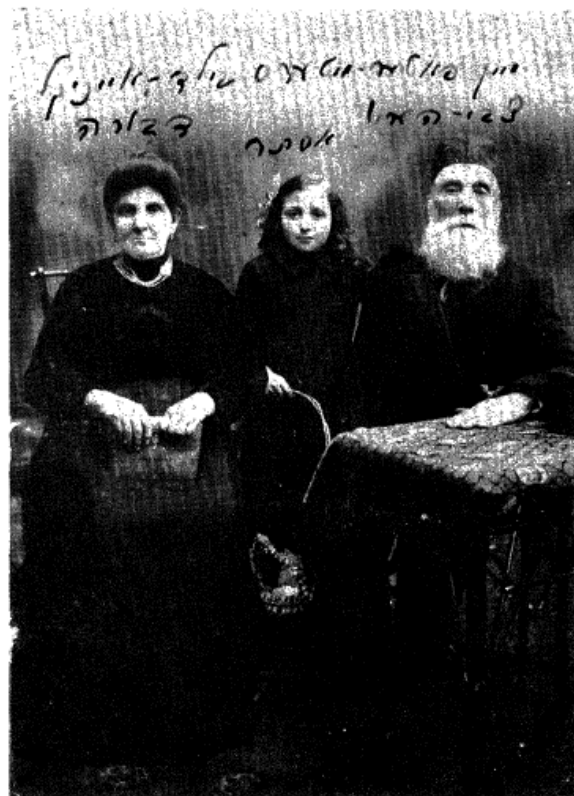
I feel tears streaming from my eyes, and the whole market with the people and everything around it turns pale and foggy.

Only the small place where I am standing, next to the telegraph pole, becomes the center on which my heart and soul concentrate, and my clouded eyes now see no other place than this spot, where my parents stood before me alive for the last time on the night of my departure... - - -

...

I'm back in the house. It's already evening.

45



[Handwriting:] My parent's picture with the grandchild- Tzvi-Hersh, Ester, Dvoyre [Deborah]

Everything is already prepared in honor of Shabbat - and for me, the guest from America. My sister, my sister-in-law and my brother's daughter have helped prepare for Shabbat...each of them has cooked so that everything would have the real local flavor... The house is filled with the homey aroma of gefilte fish and baked challah...raisin pastries and all the other Shabbat foods.

I soak in these homey, sweet, Shabbat eve smells that I haven't smelled in so long.... I sit thoughtfully by the window, looking out at the street. Jews, washed and combed, are coming out of the bathhouse. The "market sitters" are running down the street with their baskets, and late women customers are running home with their paper bags full of kernels, so that they will have something to peel all Shabbat long...

The sun is already high in the west. A pink streak of sunlight lines the tops of the rooftops, as if it had deliberately wrapped and adorned the city in a silky pink Shabbat veil.

"I n s h u l a r a y n!" [Come to shul!]

All of a sudden this sound comes into my ears, a familiar, broad, drawn-out "goat voice"...

I give myself a jolt, as if someone had poked me with something in my sleep to remind me of something.

I actually jump up:

"What's going on? Where am I? Am I mistaken? It's the same voice I heard twenty-five years ago - as if nothing had happened. As if I had never left, as if I hadn't grown older in twenty-five years, as if I were still a little boy"...

My family notices my amazement, they look at me and smile:

"Did you hear the call to go to shul?" my brother asks me.

"Yes", I say, "and didn't the same one call there?"

"Yes, Yehuda Leyb", my brother confirms.

"Yehuda Leyb, the sub-shames?" I ask in surprise.

"He is no longer a sub-shames", my brother replies with a laugh, "he has already moved up in rank. Today he's already a full shames..."

The "institution" of Yehuda Leyb, the "shul-caller," evoked another urban "institution" in my memory, namely "Berl Shabes" [Berl Shabbat].

"Berl Shabes" was a rare pious Jew, although, as the story goes, he was not a great Jewish scholar. He dressed almost Chassidically, but for the Chassidim he was too much of a "Misnaged" [opponent of the Chassidim], and for the Misnagdem he was too much of a Chassid... Everyone agreed, however, that he was a great poor man who also loved the "bitter drop"... He was forgiven, however, because everyone was aware of Berl's tragic life, his great suffering in general, that not a single child experienced growing up with him... - - -

I don't know what "Berl Shabes" did to support himself and his capable wife. But I did know that he was really starving. You could tell by his emaciated body and pale face. On the "Yomim Neroim" [Days of Awe], "Berl Shabes" was usually the prayer leader during the "Musef" prayer in a "shtibl" [room for prayer] for craftsmen. This earned him a few rubles. He was not a great prayer leader, but he was a strong reciter in his own way.

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When he stood at the "omed" [lectern for the cantor], he used to argue loudly and strongly with "the one who sits up there and judges". He really made a fuss with his infernal noise and shouting. Every now and then he would hit his head with his skinny, bony hands, so that it echoed throughout the shtibl...

I still don't understand why this man had so many powers.

He considered it his greatest "mitsve" [commandment] to put on his festive clothes on Friday night, after the call to shul, and go out into the streets and the marketplace to see if the Jews were really responding to Yehuda Leyb's call to synagogue. The shopkeepers and market stallholders were not granted permission to close their shops late or to remove their goods from the market too late for the sake of a few pennies. Sweaty and out of breath, "Berl Shabes" would come running and shout with all his might:

"Shabes! Shabes! Shabes!"

That's why he was called "Berl Shabes" in the city.

In the beginning he would ask good-naturedly: "Idelakh, kinderlakh, kroynelakh, [Jews, children, dear ones], you can see that Shabes is already here, go home for my sake!"

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If people did not follow him, he would begin to shout, make noise, and punish them:

"Jews, you are sinning! You are sinning, Jews! Shabes! Shabes!"...

Berl would not leave until the shops were closed and the goods were removed from the market...

"Berl Shabes" used to fight the hardest battles in the bathhouse, where the "pare" [steam] made it so dark you couldn't tell what time it was. Just at the right peak, when the bathers were lying on the top benches and yelling: "Davay, pare!" [Let's steam], enjoying the lashes of the burning "bezimlekh" [brushes or brooms made of twigs] as their heat penetrated every limb, "Berl Shabes" would burst in, panting and shouting:

"Shabes! Shabes! Shabes! Jews, you should be blessed". He would usually begin to ask kindly, "Look, it's already late, you don't want to desecrate the Shabes!"

"One more tiny little minute, Reb [Mr.] Berl, now...there...one more rub...", the Jews begged him from the upper benches....

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But Berl became angry and shouted as if possessed:

"You are godless! Get off the bench at once! Shabes! Shabes! Shabes!"...- - -

And if they didn't follow him, he would pull them by force, one by the feet, one by the hands, until they had to give in, because to mess with "Berl Shabes" at such a minute meant danger to life... It wasn't long before the bath was emptied of Jews...



"Berl Shabes" was an even more necessary institution in the city than Yehuda Leyb, the shul caller, one of whose duties as a shames was to call to the shul... Berl, however, was not required to do this, nor was he paid for it, he did it out of his piety, to save Jews from the desecration of the Shabbat... - - - -

Now, after Yehuda Leyb's call to the synagogue, I waited to hear Berl Shabes's voice thunder out:

"Shabes! Shabes! Shabes!"

But I waited in vain.

"I don't even hear 'Berl Shabes' shouting, 'Shabes!', 'Shabes!'," I say to my brother.

"Berl Shabes has been dead for a long time", my brother replies with regret in his voice.

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"And there's no other Shabbat caller left?" I ask.

"No one has taken his place yet. Who wants to run around screaming his head off for nothing? There are no more Berls like that."

"Yes", I agree, "there are no more 'Berl Shabes's', not even here with you!"

...

In the evening I go with my brother to the Bes-Hamedresh, the same "new Bes-Hamedresh" where I was alone during the day. Now it's bright and cozy in the Bes-Hamedresh. Those who stand "above" by the east wall speak the "Lechu-Neraneno" [Come, let us sing] with all their hearts, and those who are in the back around the stove have quiet conversations...

I look at the people, at those who are praying and those who are talking to each other, to see if I can find some small change, but I find nothing, just as I found nothing during the day in the same Bes-Hamedresh without the people.

What I do notice is that the people look poorer, older, and more hopeless than they did twenty-five years ago, as if the faith in God that once watched over them and helped them in their distress has now completely abandoned them.

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The prayer is over. People welcome me with a melancholy smile... I am greeted with "Good Shabes!" I reply, but I don't know anyone, the faces are strange to me...I see only the deep sadness of many years of difficult experiences in their hopeless eyes.

"How are you, Itshe?" someone asks me, breaking away from the crowd and coming towards me. I look at the man. A Jew with a beard, with a pale face, without any sign of youth...I don't recognize him....

"I see that you don't recognize me, well, no wonder, after so many years...I am Leybl, Leybl...I studied together with you in the same cheder...Yes, Leybl, your former friend!"

He shakes my hand warmly.

I remember:

"Sorry, Leybl, I haven't seen you for so long"....

"If you'd been here all the time and gone through what I did, maybe people wouldn't recognize you either"...

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I feel this twinge, but I don't ask to find out more and I don't respond. Maybe I really do feel a little guilty when I notice that almost everyone looks at me as if to say:  
"There's a happy person!"

In the end, I think my former school friend is right, because if I hadn't had the good fortune to be torn away from here, I would already look like him. He was once happy... - - -

...

I sit at the Shabbat table and eat the hot Friday night meals that my sister-in-law, my sister, and everyone else serves me. And what a good, homey flavor everything has...local fish, local chicken and meat, local pastries, local cakes, everything, everything local. Not even the blackened appearance of the dishes - from the black earthen pots - interferes with the delicious local flavor...

Because of me, and because of the few American dollars that the Shabbat dinner cost, everyone indulged in a piece of meat and chicken that they wouldn't be able to afford for a whole week.

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And on Shabbat they just taste something...

My heart swells with joy as I feel that I am sitting there surrounded by my whole little family of "have-nots". But who is richer than me at this moment - and than them? I feel everyone's faces resting happily on me... The house is filled with brightness, with a recovery from all the years of hard living, suffering, misery and pain...

But the happiest right now is definitely my sister Rakhel, a lonely, weak woman whose husband had been killed in the war shortly after their marriage. No one knew where his body was. The life of this unfortunate widow depended on her mother. After her mother's death, she remained alone, even in the same room, without happiness and without joy, living on the money I used to send her. Her only happiness and joy was my letter from America. And now I am sitting beside her. Who can be happier, and where and when can you expect more happiness in life?

Her eyes are full of happy tears... Maybe she is already thinking with a tremble about the minute I leave, when everything will end for her again?



מיין ברודער אלטערס טאכטער און איידעם



אין וועמענס הויז איך בין געשלאפן

[Caption and handwriting]: My brother Alter's daughter and son in law, in whose house I spent the night.

Poor Sister, how hard it is to depend on the life of someone who is thousands of miles away. And she has to wait a quarter of a century for the small pleasure of being with him for a short time... Poor Sister Rakhel...

...

The first Shabbat day at home began with the home Shabbat silence, calm and coziness. It was a local summer day, but one could breathe easily and freely. Right after dinner, I went for a walk outside with my brother Alter, stepping over the "New Bridge" that leads to the neighboring town [twin town] "Neustadt" [New Town], and from there to the old, native forest. ....

As I crossed the "New Bridge", I could see in the distance the remains of the "Old Bridge", which was destroyed during the war. All that remained of it were pieces of the "sluice" where I used to undress and bathe as a little boy, not far from the water mill that always captivated my childhood imagination with its constant sound of water and the creation of a white, silvery, foaming stream around it.

Now nothing was left of the mill.

58

The water, the large and wide "Governits" <sup>[1]</sup>, also seemed to have dried up a bit. The water had moved to only one side of the bridge. The other side was dry, which annoyed me and hurt me at the same time, because it disturbed the image I had carried for so long...

The walk to the forest, which took half an hour, was a stimulus for me. I kept stopping, looking at each house, each object, trying to compare it in my mind with the image I had stored inside. People looked at me from a distance, pointed their fingers at me, but at that moment I was more interested in the dead things than the living ones.

As we entered the forest, I was haunted by the old native scent of the forest, which almost hypnotized me. It took me back to my years as a child and boy, when I used to walk around there quietly with my school friends, picking small berries and taking care that the landowner's "leshnik" [forest ranger] didn't come and set his evil dog on us...

<sup>[1]</sup> note: The river's name is Nurzec. "Governits" is similar to the Ukrainian word for governess, perhaps the author's nickname for the river. But maybe the author means Gawroniec. This was the area next to the river where people went swimming. The last last name of the Jewish owner of that place was Gawroniec.

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It is quiet. You can barely hear the footsteps of my brother and me creeping across the deep, soft green grass. The tops of the trees are bathed in sunlight, and the leaves sway and bend slightly, as if bowing to me, the guest from America, and greeting me in a friendly, native way:

"Good Shabes! Good Shabes!"

And now I suddenly stop and stare. I see a white dot in the distance. It was exactly this "dot" that I had always had in mind. It was a reminder of my childhood...

In those years, when I would enter the forest, I would stop at the same place and look at the white dot from a distance. It was the forest palace <sup>[1]</sup> of the "khrabine" [countess], the great landowner, which stood somewhere embedded among the trees, and from a distance you could see nothing more than a white dot peeking out.

I used to stand there all the time and look at that white spot from afar, very much drawn there to catch at least a glimpse of that white, magical castle that my childhood imagination conjured up.

<sup>[1]</sup> Possibly the Starzeński Palace is meant [Palace and park complex - Zabytek.pl](http://Zabytek.pl)

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But it was life-threatening to approach the castle, because the dogs might have torn you to pieces. And so, like many of my childhood dreams, it remained an eternal wish...

My brother noticed me standing there, pondering, my eyes fixed on that spot.

"What do you see there?" he asks me, puzzled.

I told him, a little shyly, that I had always wanted to see the palace.

"If you want, we can go there!"

I look at him in astonishment:

"What do you mean, the landlord's dogs will tear us apart?"....

My brother smiles:

"It's legal to go there nowadays. The old countess died a long time ago and her heirs allow it. After all, we have a 'free republic' today."

With my heart pounding and my breath catching in my throat, I didn't walk, but I ran to the white spot I had dreamed of in my childhood.

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My brother can hardly keep up. Finally, my long-held dream of visiting the palace has come true, albeit decades later...and another childhood dream has been shattered.

...

In the evening I hear that there is a wedding in town. I am very curious to attend a local wedding now, after twenty-five years!

In those days, I remember, the bride and groom were led to the shul for the chuppah ceremony, and the local klezmerim [musicians] from the shtetl led the way: Yitskhok, Yenkl and Velvel with the fiddles; Ziske with the clarinet and Shmuel'ke with the bass. And who are the musicians today? Because most of those listed have been in America for a long time, and they all do something else there, and have even forgotten how to hold a musical instrument in their hands!

I think about this as I walk with my sister and my brother's daughter, who are taking me to the wedding site.

I can hear the musicians playing at the wedding from a distance, but it's very different from the way they used to play.

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The mewling voice of the trumpet and the deep hum of the big brass bass echo through the city.

"What musicians are playing today?" I ask my loved ones.

"They're the musicians from the volunteer fire department", they answer.

"Well, always something new in the shtetl", I think.

But the closer I get to the wedding, the more I realize that, despite the "musicians", everything is just as it used to be. Just like twenty-five years ago, curious onlookers stand around the house and peer through the windows, people jostle to get a glimpse of the bride, who is already besieged by everyone, and the wedding jester sadly says the old familiar:

"My dear bride, my dear bride, weep, weep!"....

And the women, who surround the bride with lighted candles in their hands, do not spare their tears. There is enough to cry about here, in a small local Polish shtetl, so you thank God that you have found an opportunity...

I was disappointed: in fact, this time the bride and groom were not led into the shul "to the chuppah", but the chuppah was next to the house - although the chuppah ceremony was the old one, just as it had always been twenty-five years ago...

63

Shortly after I arrived at my old home, it was the "yortsayt" [anniversary] of my father's death. I was at a loss as to what to do and how to behave.

In all the years I had been in America, and since I had received the sad news of my father's death, I had never forgotten my father's yortsayt. But since I didn't have the opportunity to celebrate the yortsayt in a pious, Jewish way, I celebrated it in my own way - keeping him in my feelings and lighting an anniversary candle in my heart...

On the day of my father's yortsayt, I usually felt an exceptionally strong and deep sadness. An image of my father never left my mind for a minute. He stood before me, gray and tired, a prematurely aged man, and my heart cried so bitterly on the day of the anniversary, as if someone were saying the Kaddish prayer there in the silence...

That day I avoided every place and every kind of entertainment. That day was completely different for me than any other day.

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(I felt the same way on my mother's yortsayt.) My father's anniversary day was usually like this... - - - -

Here, in my small, familiar shtetl, the anniversaries are still celebrated in the old, pious, homely way. I felt that a thousand eyes were watching me, the American... The "town" knows that it is my father's yortsayt, and they want to see how I behave; they will probably take offense at the way I performed it in America.

Those closest to me, my little family, look at me with such suspicion the day before the anniversary. Somehow they are not sure how I, the American, will behave. Maybe they themselves don't mind - well, I'm not that pious. They would forgive me if only I had a good heart. But - the "town", what will the "town" say?

However, they don't want to mention it to me openly and they don't want to ask, because maybe they wouldn't strike the right note with me, the American... So they remain silent, with a mute and deep sadness in their eyes... ....

My brother Shloyme, a pious, worn-out Jew, with a half-bent shoulder and a heartbreakingly worried face, still can't hold back.

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Uncertainly, and as if it were not in his voice, he stammers:

"I think, Itshe, that you know that today we must 'oyfshteln yortsayt' [perform the yortsayt ceremony] for our father, he rest in peace?"

"You ask if I know? Of course I know! I remember our father's anniversary very well", I reassure my devout brother.

Shloyme, my brother, is so moved by my answer that a tear flashes in his eye. I can see that he wants to tell me something else, but he gets embarrassed and the words get stuck in his throat...

"Is there something you want to tell me, Shloyme?" I ask with love and affection in my voice.

"Yes...I mean that a yortsayt candle needs to be bought..." he finally says it, looking at me so strangely.

"A candle? Let's get a candle", I say.

"A big candle! A candle that will burn for twenty-four hours," he says with relief.

"Well, go and buy the candle you want and light it where it's customary. You'll have money for it", I tell my brother, handing him enough for several anniversary candles...

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My brother's eyes actually light up.

"I'm going to put the yortsayt candle on the table in the old Bes-Hamedresh", he tells me cheerfully before he leaves, "where the Jews learn the 'Ein-Yaakov' [Well of Jacob, title of a popular religious book], next to the window facing the Shul-Yard Street..."

Late in the evening, I "sneaked" out of the house quietly, so that no one would notice, and went to the "old Bes-Hamedresh" alone. I stood under a window overlooking Shul-Yard Street.

It was quiet and dark. Nightly gloom and melancholy desolation lay over the silent, dark streets... The low, gloomy little houses were shrouded in horror and fright... - - - -.

I stood in the darkness and looked through the window of the Bes-Hamedresh at the place where my father's yortsayt candle stood deserted, casting dull, dark rays onto the gloomy street...

The dark flame of my father's anniversary candle filled my heart with deep longing. My whole being was flooded with feelings of holy grief for my father...

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I stood there looking for a long time. And as I walked back, the dark rays of my father's anniversary candle followed me a little way...

...

It is four o'clock in the morning. We're on our way to the "bes-oylem" [cemetery] to visit our parents' graves...

It's a beautiful sunny day. We, my brother and I, are walking together. We walk in silence, with our heads down, not saying a word, as if we were mute.

My brother knows and feels what is stirring in my heart, and he does not want to desecrate my thoughts and feelings with profane words.

We are behind the city. We are wading through the swamp, silently trying to reach the dry path that leads to the cemetery.

Fields of young ears of rye spread out on both sides, gilded by the rays of the sun. It smells and breathes of summer, of quiet, festive life and blossoming. There is a sense of sacredness in the air. The ears of corn move lightly and silently, like the soft fluttering of wings, somewhere high up.

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And now we hear from afar the singing of the village women. The singing is so melancholy, so pleading, as if it were a prayer to their God that it will be a good year, that everything will grow and ripen, that they will be protected from all kinds of natural disasters, so that their laborious cultivation will not perish.

My brother nudges me lightly with his hand and points to something with his finger.

I start and see the gate from afar, the passage to the cemetery.

We go through the gate, on the side of which is the "meysim-shtibl" [mortuary room], where all the things are kept that are used to prepare the body for the grave. I remember that when I went to the cemetery as a little boy, I was always more afraid of this "shtibl" than of the graves.

There was a kind of eerie horror emanating from this "mortuary room". And although the door of the "shtibl" was usually locked, the horror tore its way through the hidden crevices and carried itself into my young mind. I couldn't sleep for many nights afterwards.

69

And now that I am an adult and have traveled the world, far away from the former childish, homely, small-town superstition and fright - even now I trembled as I walked past this "shtibl", which looked just as it once did, miserably lonely and deserted, just as people remain after they have passed through this "shtibl" for the last time...

I passed it quickly, with an uneasy feeling - a feeling that brought back the years of my childhood.

And now we walk among the graves, through the deep, wild cemetery grass, from which a sad cemetery smell emanates. We trudge to the place where my parents are buried. My brother walks silently in front of me, and I walk behind him, sad and thoughtful.

The leaves of the huge trees in the cemetery move slightly, as if they were speaking softly, letting each other know that a "living" guest has come to them from far away. In these "oylem-hoemes" [world of truth, place of the dead] - to pray at the graves of their parents.

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The green, overgrown field is full of gravestones of all kinds; very old and very new; small and large; low and high; "poor" and "rich". As if here, in the "world of truth," there was a difference from person to person.

Finally, my brother stopped at a small, "poor" tombstone with the inscription almost worn off.

"Father's grave", he said sadly.

I stood frozen. Something inside me wanted to cry, to fall down to the grave and cry out:

"Father! Here I am, Itshe, your son from America!"

But I didn't. I stood there in silence, looking at the buried mound of earth, thinking more of my living father than my dead one. I remembered his hard, poor life all these years, his constant running around trying to earn a little bread somewhere for his family, his shortness of breath and his constant asthmatic cough. Little by little it came back to me.

My brother quietly took my hand:

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*[Handwriting] above: My mother's grave; below: My Father's grave*

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"Come on, it's getting late!"

And once again we walk among graves overgrown with wild grasses and silent tombstones, until we come to a small tombstone leaning to the side.

"Mom's grave", my brother says in the same sad but even more choked voice.

I stood at my mother's grave for a long time, as if I had been forged. With my head bowed, I looked and looked, digging my eyes into the small mound of earth. I thought and thought...but what? Who can describe the feelings of a son who has not seen his mother for twenty-five years - and all he can do now is stand in front of the mound and look, look, look, think, think, and let the pain gnaw silently and the eyes weep silently... ....

As we walked back, the sun began to set. The cozy summer evening crept with silent and soft footsteps from the fields of the shtetl to the quiet houses and streets. The shepherd, leading his sheep from the fields, walked quietly behind his flock, whistling melancholically his evening song.

...

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For days on end, I would wander dreamily through the streets and alleys of the shtetl. A step, a glance, I look at everything and can't get enough of it...

For hours I stand lost in thought next to the garden of Mordekhay Mishna, next to the house where I lived as a boy. It would be necessary to write a whole book about the house and its owner, Mordekhay Mishna, because both the house and its owner were sad, unique "institutions" in the city, and those who lived there for a while will never forget them for the rest of their lives. Here I only want to remind you of the garden, because the house was destroyed by fire during the war years anyway...

And the owner is no longer among the living...

But the garden remained. Remained as a memory of my childhood years, when this garden was my greatest comfort. I lived and breathed with it. The garden was perhaps the blessed force that breathed a poetic feeling into me from an early age, a love of nature and everything that grows and blossoms...

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In the spring, I was there when the garden was tilled and sown... And then I would greet every new blade of grass and every new leaf that peeped out with the joy of a little boy as I went to the cheder early in the morning and returned in the evening. This would continue day after day until midsummer, when everything had grown to full beauty and bloom under the hot summer sun that warmed and illuminated the garden.

When I saw ripe green cucumbers, red beets, and all the other plants peeking out from under the leaves, my joy was boundless. I looked at everything as if it belonged to me, as if I had dreamed of it all, longed for it and raised it myself...

Even though I didn't dare to take a single step into the garden and had to watch everything from the outside, standing behind the picket fences...

In the autumn, when the garden was barren and desolate, with lumps of black earth torn out, from which something like dead bones peeked out- the remaining roots of various plants- my joy used to disappear, and a deep melancholy gripped my young heart...

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And it made my difficult life as a boy in that house even more difficult, and my mood even darker... - - - -

Now, decades later, I stand once again and look at the garden in full bloom, as it once was, just as it was then.

Nature remains forever young, only my heart has grown older. The joy of the little boy is gone. But perhaps the childlike sadness too... - - - -

...

The tall, round, chopped ricinus tree in the „Hoyfisher-Gas“ [Courtyard Street] that stood there many years ago is still standing next to the house that once belonged to Khayim [Chaim] Fuks. We lived there until I was eight or nine years old. That house doesn't really exist anymore, there's another house there. Chaim Fuks is no longer alive either, but the ricinus tree is still in the same place, as if it had never been touched, as if it had just been put there yesterday...

So I stand there and look at the ricinus tree, and once again a part of my childhood comes flooding back... Right next to the ricinus tree I used to play, romp around with our neighbor's daughter, Ester'ke.

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She was my age, a beautiful blonde girl with bright blue eyes. We were born in the same house, grew up together, and felt a strong bond. We sat together all the time, one in the other's house, and our mothers fed us from the same bowl.

It was said that we loved each other very much from an early age and would surely be in love forever, even when we grew up and became adults.

Well, as it turned out, my parents had to move to another town, probably because of their income, where I suddenly found myself in a different environment, with new friends - boys and girls...

But I couldn't get Ester'ke out of my mind for a single minute, I had a strong longing for her...

After two or three years we went back and settled in our shtetl again. I could hardly wait to see my friend Ester'ke again. I was sure that she would be just as happy as I was, that she would embrace me with the same childlike joy as she did when,

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for various reasons, we hadn't been able to see each other for a day or two...

The closer the carriage came to our shtetl, the faster my childish heart beat, swelling with the joy of meeting Ester'ke...

But being the boy that I was, I was bitterly disappointed right from the first time I met Ester'ke again. She was now two or three years older, and her whole appearance was that of a grown-up girl...

The childlike joy, the childlike openness and carelessness were missing...  
No, I had not expected such a "reception" from my friend Ester'ke...  
And I felt very offended and insulted by my childish heart... Maybe this was my first bitter disappointment from a woman in my life...

I became angry and avoided her during the following years of my presence at home, until I left for America...  
When we met again years later, we became good friends, but - not lovers.  
...

In the same "Hoyfisher Gas" [Courtyard Street], where I now see the "elekterovne" (power station), there

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used to be the "guzhelnye", where Moyshe Simen Shmaye's used to "compete" with the tsar by secretly distilling "treyfn" [illegal] liquor, and where for four or five pennies you could get the best "drink", even some for Passover...  
When my father, may he rest in peace, sent me to Moyshe Simen Shmaye's to buy liquor for a few pennies, I would usually find the tsar's "meshores" [assistant], the city constable, sitting there drunk as a skunk by the boiling cauldron, throwing logs into the stove to make the cauldron of liquor boil better...

This same constable lent his sword when local "actors" staged the "Bar Kokhba" [Jewish revolt led by Simon Bar Kokhba] for the first time in the history of the shtetl in the volunteer fire department's shed, which still stands in the same place on Courtyard Street...  
The constable's sword came in handy for "Bar Kokhba", who dared to stand up to the Romans with such heroism. And when the "army" swore allegiance to Bar Kokhba, the drunken constable's voice "commenting" on the game could be heard louder than any other:

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"We swear! We swear!"  
My brother Alter was the "prompter" who stood behind a curtain and made the announcements. And every time he was late with a word, he got such a kick in the legs from the "actor" that he had to think about it for a long time...  
I also took part in this game. That was the only time, after that I didn't do theater anymore. Because since then it was life that played theater with me... - - -

...

Now I'm in the "Deutscher Gas" [German Street], the only street that remained intact after the catastrophic fire of the war. Once, before the war, many Germans lived in this street. They ran textile factories and Jewish girls worked for them for five guilders a week (50 cents) from five in the morning until nine at night. Today I rarely meet a German, and the German church is empty, dirty and abandoned.  
And now I'm in Maltser Street, where the "tserkve" [Russian Orthodox Church] still stands, around which, on Sundays or Russian holidays,

Russian officials and, in general, the Russian intelligentsia of the shtetl used to walk around proudly in a bourgeois manner, talking and laughing loudly.

Today it is empty and dead, no one is attracted to the "tserkve", as if they were ashamed to approach it. Orphaned and blackened, it stands isolated in its loneliness, like a sad reminder of its tsarist past...

The Polish church, on the other hand, is cheerful and lively. Carts arrive from the villages on all sides, loaded with old and young Poles, Christian peasant boys and girls. Dressed in their best clothes, they stand in front of the church, talking, laughing, and making mischief. With true Polish arrogance, they walk in all breadth, occupying the space around the church, as if to say:

"Today is our time, today we are the masters here!" ...

So, all day long, I squeeze myself into every little corner and never stop looking and pondering what thoughts might come to my mind, because it is familiar to me and has a relationship to my childish steps as a little boy...

...

I've been wandering like this for two months now. A few days a week I lie in the woods, rest and think about everything I experience. I try to take it all in, swallow it, absorb it, so that I can remember it for years to come.

Little by little I begin to feel that my small hometown is beginning to bore me. The inconveniences of small town life are getting on my nerves. There is a lack of opportunities to fulfill the most basic needs that a city dweller is used to and cannot do without.

The difficulty of shaving in the morning becomes a punishment for me... And I'm starting to cheat myself by skipping a day or two... But when I look in the mirror, I'm afraid, because it won't be long before I'll be walking around with a big beard, just like everyone else, and just like they would have wanted it in the "town"...

Because the "town" can't stand the fact that I'm dressed so nice and clean and look different from them. I, a do nothing, have no worries about making a living, lie quietly in the woods on the hammock and rock...

The problem of taking a bath is even more difficult for me. There's no place or opportunity for it here. The only way is to do it like everyone else - to go to the "merkhets" [bathhouse] on Fridays and hang my clothes on a pole... Well, I've been away from that for twenty-five years, and I just can't do it, however necessary it may be for me....

So I often go away from my shtetl to Warsaw to take a bath... And each bath costs me so much money that it would be enough to live on for ten weeks in the shtetl. There is even a murmur that Americans are big spenders, since it is against their dignity to go to the municipal bath with everyone else, so that the "pidyen" [proceeds, gift to the rabbi] is dragged off somewhere abroad...

From time to time I leave my shtetl to go to the larger cities, to escape the monotony of small-town life and soak up a bit of big-city life... But I can't stay there for more than a few days because I'm drawn back to my shtetl, where I feel so uncomfortable, but also so good...

I couldn't even stay a few days in another small neighboring shtetl, where I was invited by a family to stay for a few weeks.

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Only the journey gave me pleasure: the three-mile ride through the homeland in a simple, homely cart, on a seat that lifted, shook, and almost threw me off the cart, pulled along the sandy road by an old, decrepit horse. The horse was driving at random because Moyshe Ber, the local driver, had long since fallen asleep. He lay propped up on one side of the coachman's seat, holding the whip in one hand and the reins in the other, tightening them instinctively from time to time and smacking his lips.

The more the cart shook and swayed, the more fun I had. Just like a child sitting on its mother's lap is happy and bursts out laughing when its mother bounces it, I was just as happy and almost choked of laughter every time the cart swayed... It reminded me of my childhood: when Rakhmiel the wood merchant let me ride on his rocking wooden cart, it was a great joy and happiness for me as a child...

What's more, the day was so beautiful, so sunny and bright, it was in bloom and smelled so homely.

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-At least try to crawl down from the cart and throw yourself into the deep, soft grass and get drunk with the scent of the white and yellow field flowers...or jump into a small river and dive under together with the white water lilies...

But as soon as the carriage takes me into the shtetl, I feel melancholy... I feel strange and lost, although my loved ones there welcomed me very warmly and friendly, were happy with me, gave me their "best" room to sleep in...

However, to their great disappointment and annoyance, I didn't sleep there for more than one night. In fact, the very next morning I went back to my shtetl on the same cart...

I don't know how I would have felt if I didn't have anyone from my family in the town of my birth, which has now become uncomfortable for me; how long would I have lasted there without them?

But with my few living have-nots at my side and my dead parents in the municipal cemetery, I haven't been in the shtetl long enough, and when I think that I will have to say goodbye again soon, I feel terribly sad and afraid... - - - -.

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...

Early fall arrived at home in a flash. It became cool, cloudy, and rainy. All the small-town, homey, summer beauty that had given the impression of a quiet, peaceful summer place was suddenly turned off, and it became "osyen" [autumn].

I could no longer go to the woods, where I spent whole days lying in my hammock with my face to the tops of the trees drenched in sunlight. No one went there anymore. The forest had completely lost its summer charm, it had become severe and began to look evil and unfriendly.

I could not go out as much in the streets and alleys. The whole image of the shtetl had changed overnight: it seemed more melancholy, sadder, more gloomy; the people were more downcast. They began to sit quietly, hidden and absorbed in their homes...

The atmosphere of the month of "Elul", with the fear of the coming "Yomim Neroim" [Days of Awe], came from all corners and

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spread throughout the Jewish streets, homes and Bote-Medroshim. The air was saturated with "Elul"...

When I heard the first blast of the shofar, my heart trembled. I felt that these were my last days at home, together with my nearest and dearest.

I began to search furtively for the place where my suitcases were. I was sure that I would not wait for the arrival of the "Days of Awe" with all their weeping and wailing. And when I said the first word to my loved ones about "going back", they turned pale and became terribly upset... And from that moment on, the sadness and worry never left their faces...

My sister Rakhel began to come to my brother's house, where I was staying all the time, earlier than usual in the morning.

Her happy, bright-eyed look, which had never left her haggard face since my arrival, was now gone. Her whole body seemed to have shrunk somehow. Her walk was lower, deeper, as if she was dissolving as a whole.

She watched my every step and movement with silent, desperate eyes, as if to prevent me from slipping out of her sight unnoticed...

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"Come to my home for a while", she asks me, "you haven't even looked at my room yet, where I live."

I realize that she's right, because while my sister has been coming to my brother's every day, where I'm staying, it never occurred to me to be in her room.

"All right", I say, "come on, let's go to your house!"

We walk through a number of poor, winding alleys, where all sorts of old, broken things are piled here and there behind the little houses, no longer usable and no longer for sale.

Behind other, tidier houses, poverty hides behind a fragrant little garden.

My sister leads me with the expression of a doctor to a sick person... She doesn't talk, but her eyes speak; sometimes with a plea, sometimes with a complaint. Her heavy footsteps scrape nervously and hurriedly over the sharp stones, as if she were afraid of being late.

We come to a small curved house at the corner of the town. She leads me into a narrow, dark front house.

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A stinking dampness penetrates my nose. A few more steps and we are in her room... "This is where I live", my sister says with a certain emphasis, as if she wanted me to take a good look around, to perceive the appearance of her chamber and to keep in mind where she spends her lonely days, nights and years...

The room is small, narrow and low, but tidy. There is a bed against one wall, the same bed where Mother slept when she was alive, and where Rakhel now sleeps alone...

Against the second wall is a sleeping-bench (presumably left after father's death). On one side is a small table where she eats her meager meals. There are also some old chairs and a partially broken mirror. This is the furniture...

On one wall hang the pictures of our deceased parents mounted in black frames. There is also my printed poem, which I wrote and sent home under the fresh impression of my father's death. The poem is framed in black...

On another wall, hung with special care and protection, are my own

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few pictures, sent from America and taken at different times.

I stand there depressed, looking at her apartment, where, it seems to me, melancholy creeps out of the walls...

I wished I could say something to her, but I can't because I'm choked with tears...

My sister stands at my side the whole time and doesn't take her eyes off me. I know she has so much to talk about, so much to tell me, because it's almost the first time we've been alone, in private, but she can't seem to find the words...

"You look tired and sleepy", she finally says with concern and loyalty in her voice,

"perhaps you would like to rest a little on the sleeping bench?"

"Yes, I would indeed like to lie down for a while, I'm really a bit sleepy"...

She quickly grabs a pillow from the bed and puts it under my head...

I lay on the bed, half asleep. I feel the warmth of the large feather pillow on which my mother's living head still rested, its feathers perhaps plucked by her hands.

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An old pillow that has carried the fate of our family for years - the fate of eternal misery, sorrow, poverty and loneliness...- Mom's pillow...-

-----



When I woke up, I found my sister sitting next to me. She was gently waving a cloth over my face to drive the flies away...

...

Even my brother Alter, my only "spiritual friend" at home, had not stopped looking at me in silence as he often took me for walks behind the town, where the approaching autumn was already spreading on all the paths and trails, waving the already empty branches and twigs of the lonely trees in the manner of Elul...

"Perhaps you would like to stay a little longer? We haven't seen you for so many years, twenty-five years. Not a small thing, twenty-five years! Why are you in such a hurry? America won't run away from you! Is it big business that's waiting for you?" my brother argued with me.

"Business!" I have to smile when I think of the "business" that awaits me in America after twenty-five years

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of absence. But I feel that my home is no longer here, but there, in the New World, in America, where I once felt perhaps even more melancholy than here. But I don't say it. I just shake my head silently and sadly: "No!" The way back home on our walk is silent and sad, as if we were returning from a funeral...

-----

...

My thoughts are no longer at home, my mind is already wandering. Gone is the peace, the coziness, the established habits. I want to get on the cart as soon as possible, not so much for myself, but for them - my loved ones. Why should I torture them with my presence when only my body is still in my homeland, but not my soul? My soul is already somewhere across the sea, back in New York. In the noise, in the hustle, in the bustle! There, where I spent almost half of my life and where I will end my life, good or bad... There, where I belong to two "orders" and two cemeteries are waiting for me...

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My eyes weep and are consumed with compassion for my brother, for all my loved ones, but above all for my sister Rakhel, whose consolation, satisfaction, and hold in life I am. I have only one consolation, because from there I can at least support her, help her to bear her lonely, unhappy life - but if I were to stay, for example, we would both be lost.

...

The day of my departure back to America is fixed. My last days at home are long, boring and difficult. Like a mourner, I drift around in solitude, as if I'm angry with everyone. Somehow I have the feeling that I'm avoiding everyone in order to be alone...

During the day I wander alone through the streets and alleys, and in the evenings I walk like a shadow, in the courtyard of the shul, around the Bote-Medroshim, which already

now, in the time of the month of Elul, even on weekday nights, are more brightly lit; and visited by more Jews than usual.

They prepare for Yom Hadin, some sit around tables with tallow candles and learn "Ein-Yaakov" with a group of Jews, some look at a religious book alone, and some stand and listen to others learn...

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Through the closed windows, together with the glow of the candles, pierce the muffled, melancholy sounds that evoke a house where a corpse lies and Jews sit singing Psalms.

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Suddenly, I hear a familiar voice tearing sadly through the window:

"And He is merciful, He will atone for injustice and not destroy!"

I stand still, petrified:

My God, it's the voice of my brother Alter! What has happened all of a sudden?...I know that my brother does not usually lead congregational prayers.

My eyes fall to the window of the small "shtibl" that is on the side of the Bes-Hamedresh...

Yes, it really is my brother... He is standing at the "omed" [prayer leader's desk], wrapped in a "talit" [prayer shawl], and praying with such a strange "nign" [melody]. I feel that this is not the usual weekday "nign" of the "Mayriv" [evening prayer], but a cry that tears at the heart. As if something had cut into his body and he was groaning out the pain and sorrow....

I stood behind the window and listened to my brother's wailing voice until the end of the evening prayer. I waited for him to come out into the street to go home.

מיון ברודער אלטערס מאכטער טשעשע



*[Caption:] My brother's daughter, Tsheshe*

"Alter!" I shouted in a voice that sounded like it wasn't mine.

"Itshe! What are you doing here?" my brother wondered.

"I was just standing here and listening to you say the evening prayer...what happened so suddenly?"

My brother bowed his head and was sadly silent...

"What are you hiding?" I asked.

"Nothing, I'm celebrating the yortsayt of my daughter's death", he said emotionally, "her name was 'Tsheshele'. Perhaps you remember her? She was four when you left. You often held her in your arms. She was a beautiful, well-behaved child."

"Yes, I remember", I sighed heavily.

"It is the fault of the World War that my child is lying in the ground so young", he poured out his heart in front of me, "we were lying in the fields in the cold, she caught a cold... no doctor could be found... well, that is why I am celebrating her anniversary today", my brother ended with a broken voice choked with tears... - - -

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"But why didn't you remind anyone at home that today is your daughter's anniversary?"....

"I can't, I'm happy if they forget. Her mother, the other sister, when they remember the anniversary days, they break down, they run to the cemetery, and it tears their hearts. I will tell them a few days after the anniversary"... - - -

I have taken with me the picture of my brother's daughter, who died young... I often look at her beautiful, serious face, at her wise, thoughtful eyes... I would like to find at least a trace of that cheerful, childlike, carefree four-year-old child I once held in my arms, but I can find nothing...

It seems to me that out of her eyes weeps the melancholy, broken [Psalm-song] of her father, "And He is merciful", which I heard him sing behind the window of the Bes-Hamedresh on her yortsayt....

...

Once again, and perhaps for the last time, I am drawn alone, unaccompanied, to the graves of my parents, in order to weep well during my visit there,

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to mourn, to pour out my silenced and closed heart before them...

And again, this time alone, I wade through the rain and mud on my way to the cemetery. And when I see the tall, white gate of the cemetery from afar, I become a little more comfortable. I feel as if my parents are coming to meet me alive to say farewell to me - there, by the telegraph pole, on the street corner...

...

I'm sitting on the packed bus, ready to go. It is ten o'clock in the morning and there is a large crowd of curious people, including my nearest and dearest.

I sit transfixed. And like the cold eye of a camera that wants to photograph everything before it's too late, my eyes penetrate the people, the houses and everything around them...

My loved ones look at me, talk to me, draw close to me. My sister Rakhel is in tears. And I'm surprised that I'm as indifferent as a doctor who has to operate on a patient.

It wasn't until the bus began to move, quickly crossing the stone bridge on its way to the highway, that a flood of tears began to flow from my eyes - - - - - .



*[Handwriting:] Alter as caretaker of a Jewish kitchen for poor children*



שיינע „די קאוואלקע“ (ראזען) אין וועמענס שטיבעלע היינט  
טערן שטאט די יוגנט האט זיך אָפּגערוט נאָכן שבת'דיגן  
שפּאַציר ביי אַ גלעזל סאַדאַ וואָסער און צובייסן. האָט דאָ  
צוויי זין, עזריאל און רפאל ראָזען, קולטור־טוער אין פאַר-  
טעלומאַ, קאַליפּ. רפאַל (מיט דער מוטער אויפן בילד) איז  
לעצטנס געשטאַרבן. עס איז געווען זיין וואונש כ'זאל דאָס  
בילד אַריינגעבן. זיין פרוי מאַטעל און זיין זון סאַל (שלמה)  
האַבן דאָס בילד, וואָס איז שוין אַלט אַ יאָר 50, צוגעשיקט.

[Caption:] Sheyne "the Kovalke" (Rozen), in whose little house behind the city the young people would rest after a Shabbat walk with a glass of soda water and a snack. Here she had two sons, Azriel and Rafael Rozen, a cultural activist in Petaluma, California. Rafael (pictured with his mother) recently passed away. It was his wish that I include this photo. His wife Matel and son Sol (Shloyme) sent me the photo, which is already 50 years old.

## וואס די גאנצע אידישע פרעסע האט געשריבן וועגן „א שטעטלע אין פוילן“

. . . די סענטימענטן און די צאָרטע געפילן קומען פון זיך אליין . . . איז טאָקע נישט זיין שולד וואָס עס נעמט דעם לייענער צום היינען.

**ש. מענענבוים — „שיקאגער קוריער“ :**

. . . א בוך וואָס איך האָב פאַרשלאָנגען אין איין אָנזע . . . די טעמע איז אַן אָניווערסאַלע . . . שוין אין די ערשטע שורות ווערן מיר אַריינגעצויגן אין די צאָרטיטרויעריקע זיסע געפילן פונעם שרייבער . . . און סך-הכל — עס איז אַ גלענצענד בוך, אַ שטימונגס-פול בוך . . .

**נ. גאָטליב — „קענעדער אדלער“ :**

. . . עס איז אַנגעשריבן אין אַ סיינעם זויבערן אידיש אין אַ געשליפענעם סטיל. „א שטעטלע אין פוילן“ איז מער ווי ליטעראַטור, עס איז אַ רירנד טיילן זיך מיטן לייענער פון אַ מענטשנס באַזוך אין די טייערסטע אינטימע ערטער פון אַ מענטשנס לעבן.

**מ. ג. גלען — „פילד. אידי. וועלט“ :**

. . . יצחק בלום'ס „א שטעטלע אין פוילן“ איז אַ פיניע לידישע שילדערונג, כדאי צו האַלטן אויפן טיש אָפּט אַ לייען צו טאָן.

**י. מ. — „אידישע פאלק“ :**

יצחק בלום פאַרמאָגט אַ לייכטן פשוטן סטיל, וואָס דערגרייכט די מדרגה פון אַ צאָרטן ליריום . . . מיט צוויי דריי שטריכן מאַלט ער אויס אַ לעבעדיק בילד . . . „א שטעטלע אין פוילן“ איז אַ שטיק אינטערעסאַנט לעבן.

**ש. מ. — טאראנטער „אידישער זשורנאַל“ :**

„א שטעטלע אין פוילן“ איז מיר געבליבן אויף שטענדיק אין זכרון מיט זיין ליריום און פאַלקס-טימלעכקייט. מיטן פשוט און רירענד געפיל. אַ דאַנק דעם שרייבער'ס רירענדן אינטימען אופן פון איבער-געבן זאָכן — ווערן מיר באַהערשט חי פון אור-אַלטער מוזיק.

**מ. ל. — „קאליפאָרניער שטימע“ :**

. . . יצחק בלום איז אַ פייער אבוערוואַטאַר, זיין וואכנאַם פאַעטישע אויג כאַפּט אויף דעם מינדסטן שטריך און גואנס.

**אב. קאָהאַן — „פאָרווערטס“ :**

. . . עס איז אַ רייע פון בילדער און סצענעס און פילע פון זיי האָבן אויף אונז אַלט לעזער געהאַט אַזאַ חירקונג, אַז דאָס האַרץ האָט אַ ציטער געטאָן. אַ פאַר מאַל האָט עס פשוט דעם אָטעם פאַרכאַפּט. אייניקע סצענעס אָדער מאַמענטן זיינען אומפאַרגעסלעך.

**אברהם רייזען — „רי פעדער“ :**

אַ פאַעטיש ווערק איז „א שטעטלע אין פוילן“, וואָס אונזער יונגער-אַלטער באַקאַנטער, דער טאַלאַנטי-פולער דיכטער און דערציילער, יצחק בלום, האָט אַני געשריבן און אָפּגעדרוקט אין אַ היפש ביכל. עס איז אַן עכטע פאַעמע, געשריבן אין זאנפטע פאַרבן, אין לירישער בענקשאַפט. ס'איז דאָס שטעטלע אין פוילן נאָך דער וועלט-מלחמה. עס איז אַ רירנדע שילדערונג; טיף שפּאַנענדיק.

**ד.ר. מוקדוני — „מאָרגן-זשורנאַל“ :**

. . . עס איז זייער אַ לעזבאַרער בוך . . . אַ רירנדער בוך.

**י. קיסין — „פאָרווערטס“ :**

. . . דאָס בוך מאַכט אַ שטאַרקן איינדרוק מיט דער טיפער אויפריכטיקייט און פשוטקייט . . . די פשוטע דערציילונג מאַכט אויף אייך אַ טיפן רושם . . . בלום הייזט דאָ אַרויס אַ זעלטענעם טאַקט און אמת קינסטלערישן חוש.

**א. אלמי — „פרייע אַרבעטער שטימע“ :**

כ'האָב „א שטעטלע אין פוילן“ געלייענט מיט אַ פאַרכאַפּטן אָטעם . . . יצחק בלום האָט זיך אין דער דאָזיקער שילדערונג געפינען. אַזוי טיף איינגע-האַלטן, אַזוי רירנד שיין, אַזוי מענטשלעך-עכט און קינסטלעריש געראָטן איז זיין „באַשרייבונג“, אַז די גאַנצע צייט וואָס מען לייענט עס געפינט מען זיך אונטער דעם צויבער פון אַ וואונדערלעכער מוזיק . . . דער מחבר איז אויסגעהאַלטן פון דער ערשטער ביז דער לעצטער שורה. גיטאָ קיין איין פאַלשער טאָן אין דער גאַנצער סימפאניע . . . איך האָב עס נאָך אַמאָל גע-לייענט און נאָך אַמאָל איבערגעלעבט דעם טיפן קינסטל-לערישן גענוס . . .

**גרשם באדער — „וואַכנבלאַט“ :**

[Positive voices of the whole Jewish Press on the book "A Shtetle in Poyln" - "A Shtetl in Poland"]

## ATTACHMENT

### A Few Words About the Author [written by the translator]



*[Yitskhok Blum, source of the photograph: Fun breg tsu breg | Yiddish Book Center]*

**Yitskhok Blum** [Isaac Bloom, alias Y. Krivonogi or, less likely, Krygovagi] was born in Ciechanowiec, Grodno gubernye [administrative district], on June 6, 1887, and died in Miami, Florida, on August 11, 1965, at the age of 79.



He came from a very poor background and emigrated to America in 1905, where he worked mainly in factories in New York. In 1919 he became a member of the New Yorker "Pinsker Brentsh 210 [of the] Arbeter Ring/Workmen's Circle". In 1906, his first poem was published in "Fraye Arbeter Shtime", and in the same year, his first sketches appeared in "Forverts". His works were published regularly thereafter and marked the beginning of his further career as a writer.

**In an obituary of August 14, 1965, written by L.Lasavin in "Der Tog", we read [translation of excerpts]:**

"Throughout his life, Yitskhok Bloom engaged in verbal battles with real and fictitious enemies. And when he could not do so in 'legitimate writings', he published special pamphlets and even mimeographed letters for that purpose. He was a firm believer in the printed word - especially his word. Mistakes in his stories or poems, even accidental ones, were hardly excusable to him. He was the kind of writer who made his living, as the saying goes, 'by the sweat of his brow'.

He mostly traveled around the country with his books, 'going door to door'.

Like everyone [...] he longed for a permanent position with a newspaper. Such a hope 'lit up for him' when the 'Forverts' began to print his 'A Shtetele in Polyn'.

In recent years, Bloom wrote very little. He suffered several illnesses that took away not only his enthusiasm for his work, but even the strength to hold a pen in his hand...

The Jewish Cultural Center in Mexico has therefore shown true generosity to the old scribe by publishing his youthful memoirs 'In Mayn Literarisher Akhsanye'. Bloom associated this booklet with the most beautiful chapter of his life. It has to do with a time when the group 'Yunge' [Young] was emerging in American Jewish literature, and Bloom had the opportunity to become acquainted with it.

He had opened a store to wash and iron clothes. This store became a meeting place for the young writers who lived in the area.

Bloom was seen by many as a grumpy, unfriendly, and stingy person, but in his book mentioned above, he reveals himself to his readers as the exact opposite:

Here is how he describes 'Apotosh', then known as 'Apatovski'...

'I can still see him standing before me - a thin man, his shoulders bent on one side, obviously from the heavy load of newspapers he delivers. On winter mornings, when he would return from work, and I knew he would be tired and

frozen after so many hours in the cold, I would hurry to open my shop early... I would make coffee and prepare a snack in a hurry, and when he was warm and full, he could barely utter a few words... '

And when Moyshe Leyb Halperin was up to his neck in need, Bloom responded: 'You can stay with me as long as you want. Eat and sleep here and write your poems'... And the proud Moyshe Leyb replied: 'No, I don't want that. I want to work and earn my own living'.

'Well, good! ' Bloom agreed. 'Take off your suit coat!' But Moyshe Leyb didn't just burn one pair of trousers [while ironing], because his mind was occupied with a new poem, and Bloom comforted him: 'It's all right, Moyshe Leyb! Don't get upset. The poem you're going to write is worth more to me than the trousers... '

And the old writer continues:

'For three months he was with me, sharing my room and every morsel of bread, which was difficult for both of us. But every bite had all the flavors, because we were constantly talking about the Torah, the poetic Torah... '.

Bloom's thin memoir booklet was warmly received by his colleagues. His colleague Glanz-Leyeles paid him great compliments in his weekly 'Tog-Morgn-Zhurnal' and asked his readers in the sunny city of Miami not to forget the lonely and ailing writer. Unfortunately, they did not follow him...

## תוצאה

May his soul be bound up in the everlasting bond of life. "

[Sources: 7 צו | יצחק פז'ט עו. יצחק פז'ט עו. 14 לבאקאנסער אירישער שווינעו. | [PDI] | [FSI] דער טאג (ניו יורק) | [PDI] | [FSI] ראר August 1965 | Newspapers | The National Library of Israel (nli.org.il) and Blum, Yitskhok (June 6, 1887–August 1965) — the Congress for Jewish Culture and | [FSI] 2 | [PDI] | [FSI] דער טאג (ניו יורק) | [PDI] | [FSI] יצחק בלום ע"ה September 1965 | Newspapers | The National Library of Israel (nli.org.il) ]

## **Photo Album**

I have inserted a few of my own photos which I took in Ciechanowiec in 2019 and will remove them immediately as soon as I get more suitable photos...





















