

Purim of the Curtains

An Historic Tale

from the

Prague Ghetto

by

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Honorably dedicated
to my dear, precious father

Salomon Kisch

on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

Foreword

In the first half of our century, a family festival was still always celebrated by some Jewish families in Prague on the evening of the 22nd of Tevet which was called Purim of the Curtains. Many hardly knew the actual cause of this festival, they only knew that this evening was solemnly celebrated by their fathers and grandfathers, and in order to not break the tradition, they continued to emulate them. In earlier times, there were Hebrew scrolls that were written on parchment called *megillot* in which the events were recorded in remembrance of which this festival was started. Over time, though, these copies were for the most part lost, and along with them, the festival itself also sank into oblivion.

Dr. Alexander Kisch, rabbi and preacher of the Meisel Synagogue in Prague, recently published a copy of this *megillah* in the celebratory publication that came out in honor of the seventieth birthday of Prof. Grätz in Breslau [Wrocław]. I am taking the liberty of including in advance of my tale a literal translation [into German] from the Hebrew of the preface with which the learned editor introduced that copy, with his gracious consent:

[Preface]

Without dispute, among the fundamental pillars of the history of a people are those family memorial books in which parents recount their experiences in order to inform their descendants. These are esteemed and gladly made use of by scholarly historiographers even as fragments or small excerpts.

With the Jewish people, family books of that kind tend to occur only extremely rarely.

Our forefathers lived under the constant oppression of severe decrees under the state of exception. They had to suffer on a daily basis through their trials and tribulations of which their ancestors had no idea. What did the present offer them? Grief, sorrow, and hardships, which is why they for the most part thought of their past, that shining period of their history in which Israel could still enjoy freedom, independence, and the Holy Torah. And just as much, they hoped for a comforting future in which God rewards those who believed in him but would punish their adversaries who wished to destroy them through severe oppression. The ignominious future was not even comprehensible.

The subsequent generations, however, also would not have made any sense of the occurrences at the time of their parents, since the new sorrows did not leave room for any memories of the old ones to emerge.

Just for this reason alone, the pious sense of our forefathers comes in useful for us. They in fact did not pen any writings in order to announce their own glory or to ensure their own remembrance in posterity, but rather the putting down of experiences took place solely and singularly for the purpose of their descendants fulfilling a commendable commandment, as it has been written:

“When one comes to a place at which a miracle occurred to one of his ancestors, then he is obligated to say the prescribed blessing.”

(Orach Chayim, §218)

To that end, those whom God has saved from the hands of the enemy through a miracle are obligated to compose writings and *megillot* making it an obligation for their descendants to celebrate these days of Purim (liberation) and to read the memorial writings of the fathers on each recurring anniversary.

Some of these *megillot* have been handed down to us, including the *Megilat Ebah* [*Eivah*] of the most laudably famous Rabbi Lipmann Heller, author of the “*Tosefet Yom-Tov*” as well as the *megillah* which serves as the basis of the following tale.

The literal translation of the inscription of this *megillah* reads [English translation of the German translation of the Hebrew original]:

In eternal memory for the teaching of his descendants, this *megillah* is to be read out every year on the 22nd of Tevet in the evening with joyful spirits and at a festive meal, as has been prescribed by the learned *sofer* (scribe) Chanoch, son of Moses Heni Asch, author of a morality work “The Burning Mirror” [“*Der Brandspiegel*”], on the 22nd of Tevet in the 383rd year of the sixth millennium after the creation of the world.

Vienna, May 1888

A. Kisch

“Remember the days of old,

Consider the years of many generations,
Ask thy father, and he will tell thee;
Thy elders, and they will say unto thee.”

Deuteronomy, the Fifth Book of Moses, 32, 7.

After the Battle of White Mountain on November 8, 1620, the power of the Protestant Union was broken. Emperor Ferdinand II once again came into possession as the absolute lord of all those provinces which his predecessor Matthias had lost through dilly-dallying and weakness. Ferdinand placed Prince Carl of Liechtenstein over Bohemia as his alter ego, and he set up a severe court over the land. Every day, hundreds of Protestant ringleaders and supporters of the uprising – who had ignominiously left their destiny in the hands of the Winter King, Frederick V of the Palatinate – were executed, and others bemoaned their lives in the dark night of the dungeon.

All of these events, which threw all of Europe into turmoil, passed over the Jews of the Prague Ghetto nearly without a trace.

Why should the Jews worry about the religious war, when not even one out of all of the parties had been engaged with studying the Jewish question? The Protestant Union simply demanded that “there would no longer be any difference between religions and that the same law should hold sway for all Christian churches.” No one thought about the poor subjugated Jews.

And what were they anyway, such that anyone had to be occupied with them? Mockery and scorn were their lot. They were servants of the royal chamber [*servi camerae regis*] and were only tolerated in return for hard cash. As such, they were subservient not only to the corresponding emperor, but also to the subjects of that government and authority in whose land or on whose property they stayed, and thus they were doubly subservient and for the most part had to serve two lords. But only in the rarest of cases were they dealt with mildly, and the

rulers occupied themselves with these unfortunate ones only if they and their money were needed.

Indeed, it often came in useful to the Jews that the two lords were not always of one mind, and one or the other of them did not want to give up the advantage which the Jews offered. No matter how much they may have been hated, no matter how fanatically the actions against Jews were, they paid taxes and contributions and loaned and provided money at a time when it was greatly needed.

One such time was when Ferdinand II, bereft of any funds for maintaining legions which were to reconquer the rebellious cities and provinces, turned to the Jewish community of Prague to provide him with money. They immediately paid 40,000 guildens and committed themselves to paying the same amount every year to the Imperial Treasury. In return, Ferdinand renewed all of the privileges which Maximilian had granted them in 1567, Rudolf in 1577, and Matthias in 1611. In addition, they received the right to purchase the houses of the executed rebels which had passed to the Treasury.

But special rights were received by the court Jew Jacob Bassevi Schmile [Jacob Batschewi von Treuenberg, Ya'akov Bassevi of Treuenberg],¹ since he had separately handed over a large sum to the emperor.

It was in the month of Tevet in the year 5382 (1622) after the creation of the world when Bassevi was honored with an imperial letter, the contents of which were essentially:

In consideration of the honest way of life and the loyal services which Bassevi has shown thus far and will still subsequently show to the Imperial and Royal Treasury through all manner of revelations, services with regard to the regalian rights, and tributes, he, along with his wife, children, and household staff, shall be taken under special protection. It is permitted for him and his descendants together with their families to live anywhere in the imperial hereditary lands, be it in cities, market towns, or small towns, regardless of whether Jews live there or not, including in Prague, Vienna, or anywhere else, to purchase houses as their own property, and to publicly carry out wholesale and retail trade of any sort at any place. Both he personally and his assets and real property are exempted from any sort of taxes or contributions, and his goods which he draws from the court warehouse are exempt from all toll charges; he is also permitted to live in the imperial district. Furthermore, it is hereby declared that he shall enjoy Austrian hereditary nobility granted to him and his descendants as well as the permission to bear a coat of arms, a blue lion with eight red stars on a black field, in perpetuity and it is permitted for him to use this in

¹ All of the names in this story are historical ones.

signets, seals, paintings, gravestones. business, and otherwise at his pleasure, as he may also use all of the rights and freedoms, benefits, and honors that are associated with this, as befits all bearers of coats of arms who are located in the Holy Empire. He is also granted the mark of nobility "von Treuenberg" such that he and his descendants are to use this surname in all of their signatures, titles, and seals, and finally he is granted the right that he shall not be subject to any other tribunal other than simply to those of the office of the Hofmarschall [Lord Steward of the Household].

The house which passed to the Treasury which is situated outside of the Judengasse [Jew's Lane] on the Dreibrundenplatz which is called "Drei Brunnen" ["Three Fountains"] is to be given to him and his descendants as a residence.

These letters patent were signed by Ferdinand as the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia on January 18, 1622 and countersigned by Chancellor Popel von Lobkovitz and the private secretary Filip Fabricius, who was defenestrated in the company of the governor Martinitz and Slavata out of the window of Prague Castle.

General joy prevailed on the Judengasse following this news. People gathered on all of the streets to discuss this great event. The Jews, who always had to collectively pay for the error of one individual, even felt honored themselves if a distinction from those of another faith was bestowed upon one of their brothers.

A *redl* even gathered on the corner of the "Goldene Gasse" ["Golden Street"] and spoke of this news. Everyone wanted to have seen themselves the messenger who had delivered the emperor's handwritten letter to Bassevi. The portly clothing merchant Chaim Emerichs swore up and down that in the morning, when he was in fact leaving *hashkomo*,² he had seen a high officer, a captain or similar, with a mighty envelope in his hand that was given to Bassevi.

"Something like that is not given to an ordinary captain," retorted Avraham, the Pinkas Synagogue *shamas*,³ ironically, in order to outdo Chaim, who was known as a braggart, "That must have indeed been at least a general or even the *srore*⁴ who brought it himself from up there. You would not have recognized him!"

"What, I don't recognize the *srore*?" replied Chaim angrily, who guessed the intent of his mocker, "I recognize him as well as I recognize you! Haven't I even already bought old clothes from his servants a few times?"

"You want to talk me into believing that the *srore* buys his *yontiv malbushim*⁵ from you!" replied Avraham, laughing.

² Morning service.

³ Sexton.

⁴ The prince, the ruler, what was meant by this was Prince Liechtenstein.

⁵ Holiday clothes.

“What *narishkeiten*⁶ we have here!” said a third, interrupting the dispute, and turned to a woman who sat behind a small table on which fried fish, *dalken* pancakes, and other pastries were laid out for sale. She warmed her hands over a tin pot in which charcoal embers had been fanned till they glowed, hardly seeming to heed the conversation that was going on right next to her table.

“What do you have to say, Telzeleben, you really must know who handed the letter from the *malches*⁷ to Bassevi?”

“*Evadeh*⁸ I know,” replied the woman who had been addressed. “My Mirlleben told me.” All of the men then crowded around Telze who, when she saw the number of listeners, struck up a posture and began:

“The day before yesterday, after *maariv*,⁹ a *shelich*¹⁰ from the *srore* came to Reb Ya’akov Bassevi, may he grow old to *meo shonim*,¹¹ and requested him to come over the next morning bright and early. My daughter Mirl who, as you all know, has been at the home of Reb Ya’akov since the *shlemazel*,¹² was already there in the room. Reb Ya’akov, who is accustomed to strolling through the corridor right around the *malches*, for him, something like that is nothing new. On the very next day, he ran to the *srore*, but the prince had had to go to Vienna, and a provincial government councilor told him that a letter had come, signed by the *malches*’ own hand, upon which a great and mighty seal was affixed, and inside it was written that from today forward, Reb Ya’akov Bassevi Schmiles was to be a nobleman, just like all of the other counts and princes.”

“*Hast e s’chie*¹³ for us *yehudim*,” interjected Avraham.

“When he heard that, Reb Ya’akov toppled over out of sheer *naches*,¹⁴ but then he ran home immediately and fell upon the neck of his wife Hendl and kissed her, then he called

⁶ Nonsense.

⁷ Emperor.

⁸ Of course.

⁹ Evening prayers.

¹⁰ Messenger.

¹¹ One hundred years.

¹² Misfortune.

¹³ Stroke of luck.

¹⁴ Joy.

together all five of his sons and his daughter and told them of the great *psire*¹⁵, that he and all of them along with him were now nobility called von Treuenberg. He gave my Mirl ten ducats and said that she ought to make a good day out of it for herself, but first she had to pack the things because that very day he had to ride to Vienna to the *malches* to express his thanks. That is the entire *maase*.¹⁶ You see that there was no captain and no general there, and that Reb Chaim, may he *mochel*¹⁷ me for it, is a *shakren*.”¹⁸

“And out of *ga’ave*,¹⁹ you don’t know what you’re talking about and think that you yourself have become a *srorete* [noblewoman],” Elle, Chaim’s wife, screamed at her venomously.

These two women had been sitting next to each other for twenty years now, each one offered foods for sale on the Judengasse. It’s just that Telze Tein only sold products with dairy created from his kitchen. Elle Emerichs, on the other hand, produced exclusively delicacies with meat, and these were: roast goose, liver, fried cracklings, and similar. Telze, the widow of Jekutil Tein, had two children: Mirl and Josef. The latter married the daughter of the butcher Schmerl. Elle, Chaim Emerichs’ wife, had just one son, Gadl. He was a *bochur*²⁰ of Rabbi Jesaia Hurvitz and was among his most gifted pupils. As a young boy, he already demonstrated a particular talent and with the Talmudic disputations, he always knew how to make the most astute and most apt interjections, which is why his colleagues jokingly called him the *chariferl*.²¹

A love relationship had woven itself between the *chariferl* and Mirl, one that was so chaste and pure, as was not to be expected otherwise with the morally raised Jewish girls of that time. The two mothers viewed this inclination of their children to each other with amusement and already treated each other in spirit as *machetenesters*,²² when a hasty act by Gadl brought an abrupt end to this friendly relationship. Specifically, one evening a young cavalier came to the Judengasse, as occurred more frequently at that time when the young nobility were in need of money. He saw the charming Mirl and wanted to steal a kiss from her by force. The young girl defended herself as long as she could. Then she cried for help, and by chance Gadl came by. He grabbed the young cavalier with a strong hand and threw him to the ground. Snorting with rage, the stranger got up, drew his rapier from its scabbard, struck out at Gadl, and wounded him on the forehead.

¹⁵ Event.

¹⁶ Story.

¹⁷ Forgive.

¹⁸ Liar.

¹⁹ Pride.

²⁰ Pupil.

²¹ Little Astuteness [smart aleck].

²² Related by marriage [respective mothers-in-law].

The young cavalier was the son of a high-ranking figure. In spite of being extremely unwell and injured as a consequence of the wound, Gadl was picked up the next day and thrown into the dungeon.

All of the means that were exerted by the Jews to free him were in vain, the vengeful father of the reprimanded cavalier insisted upon Gadl's judgment. The *bochur* was sentenced to death. However, it was also the case that his execution would not take place if he converted to Christianity.

Gadl decided upon baptism and was handed over to the Jesuits. Soon the astute Talmudist that formerly lay within him was recognized. He was sent to Rome with special recommendations. And five years later, at the same time as when our story played out, he was known in Prague as the most famous preacher, under the name Pater Paulus.

Mirl could never forget her beloved, and no matter how much effort anyone made to marry her, she turned away every suitor resolutely with the remark that she would, "Never marry." The charitable Hendel, Bassevi's wife, had pity on the girl who was pining away and took her into her home as a companion of her daughter Freidl.

Since that time, their mothers, Telze and Elle, who had always been the best of friends through twenty years, had become the greatest of adversaries. Not a day went by without "the dairy woman and the meat woman", as they were jokingly called on the Judengasse because of their culinary arts, having quarreled with each other. This constant woman's war between the dairy woman and the meat woman was so famous that one joker very accurately remarked, "If the two were ever to finally actually have at each other, they would be *tref*."²³

One such occasion now presented itself when Telze had cursed the husband of the meat woman as a *shakren*, and things certainly would have come to an angry row if the sudden drumbeat of Aberl, the town crier, had not brought an end to this dispute.

He placed himself directly in front of the dairy woman's table and beat his flat drum until a large number of people had gathered around him. He then announced that the *rosh ha kol*²⁴ wanted it made known that "damask curtains" had been *geganvent*²⁵ from Prince Liechtenstein. Anyone who may have bought them had to turn them over to the *stoot shamas*,²⁶ Reb Henoeh Asch, or else would face great punishment.

One hour later, Telze's Josef showed up in a hurry at his mother's stand and asked her to follow him into the apartment, he had something important about which to inform her. Once he

²³ Inedible [unkosher].

²⁴ The head of the city.

²⁵ Stolen.

²⁶ City servant.

arrived in the parlor, Josef said, “*Mameleben*, with God’s help, today I was able to purchase a great *metziah*.”²⁷ At the same time, he took a package out of his sack, opened it, and showed his mother two splendid damask curtains interwoven with gold. Telze had hardly caught sight of them when she clasped her hands over her head horrified and shrieked, “*Shma Yisrael!*”²⁸ Josef what have you got there? That is the *geneve*²⁹ from the *srone!* Quick, disappear! Before anyone finds out! Bring it to Reb Henschel.”

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you, Mama, I bought it a *shoh*³⁰ ago from two *balmichomes*.³¹ I paid a pretty penny for it. And now, alas, when *massematten*³² is just constantly so bad, and I can earn a couple of coppers, you want to force me to do such a *narishheit!*”³³

“If you want your mother to stay alive, you have to bring the curtains right away to Henschel!” pled Telze, “This *geneve* that can bring a *gesere roe*³⁴ on *kol yisrael*³⁵ cannot stay in your house one more minute! Josefleben, my child!” she added pleadingly, as he continued to make no move to carry out her order, “Think of your wife and child, don’t forget the *maase* of Gadl Emrich! Go! I will not have any peace as long as I know that the curtains are with you.”

Josef took the package and went away with it.

²⁷ As if found [a bargain].

²⁸ Lord of Israel [Hear, O Israel!]

²⁹ Stolen goods.

³⁰ An hour.

³¹ Soldiers.

³² Business.

³³ Stupid thing.

³⁴ Disaster.

³⁵ All of Israel.

II.

In the courtyard of the Altschule, one of the oldest synagogues in Prague which was built in 1495 by some of the Jews who had been exiled from Portugal, stood a halfway dilapidated little shack. In one of its small, dark rooms lived the old Reb Henoah Asch,¹ the *shamas* and representative of the community. A fire burned in the fireplace, which radiated a cozy warmth and at the same time provided the necessary light for a large tome, the *sh'loh hakodesh*,² which Reb Henoah was studying keenly.

The old man, in a cheerless mood, today dove very especially deeply into the sea of contemplations of the big thick volume in which it is elaborately described in great detail “what the whole world carries out, including the visible and invisible spirits in the seven heavens above and the four elements below; but particularly what happens with the soul from the moment when the angel carries it away from the body and brings it to the throne of the Holy One, where it then has to answer for its earthly ways before the gates of eternal justice.” This book was his actual vade mecum; for every event in his life, he knew to find a fitting passage in it, and if he did not always find an explanation and counsel within those lines, then it was all the more certain that he always would between the lines.

In the morning, he had announced the theft of the prince's curtains in all of the synagogues, and he in fact sought out in the book whether one of the good spirits couldn't put him on the trail of the stolen curtains. He tried for an hour, and it seemed to him to be in vain. A mild doubt had already begun to stir within him as to the infallibility of this vade mecum, when

¹ Abbreviation for *Altschule*.

² A work on rites and morality.

right then the door was quietly opened and Josef Tein entered shyly, joining him with the package under his arm.

“*Baruch habah!*”³ Reb Henoah greeted him.

“*Baruch nimzoh!*”⁴ said Josef with thanks.

“To what do I owe the *kovid?*”⁵ began the former.

“Reb Hanochleben, I bought curtains from two *balmichomes*, but at home I heard that they were *gegannevt*,⁶ and so that, *chas v’shalom*,⁷ no *chillul hashem*⁸ comes out of this, I brought them to you.”

Reb Henoah – who believed nothing other than that at the moment of his doubt, the angel had brought Josef there along with the stolen goods – bent deeply over the book so far that his nose was nearly buried in it as he mumbled unintelligible words. It seemed as if he were begging the pardon of all of the good spirits. After a while, Henoah stood up, took the package from Josef, and said, “Good, Reb Josef, go home now *besholem*.⁹ You have done a great *toove*¹⁰ to the entire *rehille*.¹¹ The Lord our God shall reward you for it.”

As soon as Josef had left, Reb Henoah hurried with the curtains to the Jewish council hall. There was actually a meeting going on there of the council under the chairmanship of the rich timber merchant, Reb Jakob Tumim who, a year before, had been elected as *parnas* in the place of Bassevi, who had given up the office of president.

Reb Henoah informed the *parnas* that he had come into the possession of the stolen goods but did not mention who had delivered them to him.

The council members, who were happy to have found an opportunity to be able to do a service to the prince, even such a small one, immediately resolved that the *parnas*, Reb Jakob Tumim, should personally deliver the curtains immediately the next day to the prince’s steward.

He thereupon called his servant and *famulus*, who was always present at all of the proceedings in the hall and who drew up special notes about the proceedings for his master, and ordered him to bring the package with the curtains home. He, the *parnas*, would soon follow.

³ Blessed be the one who comes.

⁴ Blessed be the one who is found there.

⁵ Honor.

⁶ Stolen.

⁷ As God may protect us.

⁸ Desecration of the name.

⁹ In peace.

¹⁰ Good deed.

¹¹ Community.

Since the famulus, who was named Naphtali, is assigned a role in this tale, it is necessary to linger with him somewhat longer.

Naphtali Milnik was a distant relative of Jakob Tumim, and as his name already indicates, he originated from the Bohemian town of Mělník. In his earliest youth, he lost both parents, and out of compassion he was taken into the home of the parnas. He had him raised at the same time as his only daughter Tsiporah, who was two years younger and whose birth had cost her mother her life.

Naphtali was indeed a gifted boy, but he always demonstrated an unmanageable and malicious character, such that no one could stand the small boy. Only the circumstance of him being an orphan had kept the pious Jakob from throwing him out of the house. Once he grew older, better sense seemed to have taken hold with him; he was loyal and attached to his master who, because of that, appointed him his scribe and representative. He showed himself to be so skillful and versatile that over time, he became completely indispensable to Jakob. But he was especially devoted to Tsiporah. Whenever he was able to divine a wish from her eyes, he rushed to fulfill it. One friendly word from her – and she offered them frequently – seemed to make him happy. But it actually turned out that his devotion to his master was nothing more than a clever calculation in order to worm his way into his trust. His activity entailed him having to often be absent from the house. He was also always in possession of money, which on one hand was bestowed upon him abundantly through the generosity of Jakob and his daughter, but which on the other hand he also acquired through dishonest conduct. This carefree attitude led him astray. He came into bad company without his master having any idea about it, and he took to gambling passionately. And a second passion had taken hold of his heart. He had his eye on the lovely Tsiporah. The charming daughter of the house had ignited a fire inside him that threatened to consume him. Reinforced by Tsiporah's affectionate behavior toward her former young playmate, for a long time he cherished the hope that in spite of his lower station, she could in fact one day become his. Up until the day when she became betrothed to Asher, Bassevi's second oldest son, when it became clear to her [*sic* – him] that Tsiporah was lost to him forever. Jakob also learned by chance in which company Naphtali spent his time every evening, and not only did he reproach him for that, but he also declared that if he should ever learn of something like that once again, he would throw him out of the house without mercy because he “could not have any trust”, he said, “in a gambler and a drinker.” At that point, the embittering feeling of his low

position acted against him, and a boundless hatred of Jakob forced itself against the unutterable love of Tsiporah. He swore that with the first opportunity that would present itself to him, he would ruin his master.

The stolen curtains seemed to him to be the suitable object for his black act.

He hurried home. Tsiporah was alone. The charming girl stood at the window and looked raptly at the sky. She thought of her distant betrothed. In the haste with which Bassevi left on his trip, Asher had found only little time to properly say good-bye. A handshake, a quick kiss, that was all.

But Tsiporah interpreted that differently. She tormented herself with the idea that Asher's love had suddenly cooled off, that she was now too low for the newly ennobled one. That squeezed and crushed her heart, and tears came to her eyes.

That is how she was found by Naphtali, who had come quietly into the room, unnoticed by her. He observed her for a lengthy period of time, and he seemed to guess what was occupying her inside. A terrible passion came over him. Shaking from emotion deep inside, he crept closer to her. All at once, he grabbed both of the girl's hands.

Shocked by his materializing so suddenly, and even more by his wild appearance, she wanted to hurry away from him. But he held her firmly.

"Tsiporah," he screamed more than he spoke, "I love you! You must have known it for a long time! And you loved me, too, up until this misery came, which will leave you humiliated, now that his father has been ennobled. Tsiporah, be my wife!"

"Away with you, you drunkard! How dare you? You... you... you *slave*, you!" the horrified girl ordered, and pushed him away from her with all her might provided by desperation and her loathing of the apparent drunkard.

"You have to be mine, and right now, too! And no power on earth can keep you away from me!" roared Naphtali, and he grabbed the girl like a madman and carried her to the divan as she struggled in vain.

Tsiporah screamed for help. He held her mouth shut. She lost her strength, and half unconscious, she collapsed.

The door suddenly opened and Jakob, her father, came in. With one glance, he grasped what had happened, sprang at the bold youth, seized him, and pushed him away from the girl. With a voice that was choked with rage, he could only bring forth, "Away with you, traitorous scoundrel!"

Naphtali ran away.

Tsiporah soon recovered, and when she saw that the monster was no longer before her, she fell upon her father's neck and sobbed violently.

Jakob asked what had happened there, and she recounted to him the entire series of events.

“Unfortunately, I warmed a snake at my breast,” said her father. “But I will see that ungrateful one punished!”

Yet the good girl still defended the rogue. She said, “Don’t be so hard, Father. He could only be that bold if he were drunk.”

“You’re right, my child. For the love of you, I will be gentle. But he may no longer enter my house.”

And with that, the matter appeared to be settled.

And although it hurt Jakob that his goodness had been repaid in that way, he still made the effort to just get that ungrateful churl out of his mind and no longer think of him.

Jakob finished some important business letters that he wanted to send off the next morning by messenger. In the meantime, night had fallen. He and his daughter had their supper, and then he began to loudly chant the after-dinner grace.

A noise was then heard on the stairs, as if several men were hurrying around all at once, while at the same time, commands were heard from the street. Startled, Jakob wanted to rush to the window to see what all the commotion was about, when the door burst open and a corporal entered along with four guards.

The soldiers remained standing at the door.

His whole body shaking, Jakob stepped forward in order to ask after the cause of this peculiar visit.

“Quiet, Jew! And don’t move from your spot!” ordered the leader, and turning to the soldiers, he said, “Anyone who takes a step, knock him down without mercy!”

Then he turned to Jakob: “Out with the stolen goods, wretch!”

“I don’t know what you want,” Jakob dared to remark.

“You don’t know!” repeated the corporal laughing, and his gaze fell upon the package that had been laid by Naphtali on top of a chest. “Good, so I’ll tell you!” He picked it up, tore away the paper, and unrolled the damask curtains. “You see? That’s what I want! We’ve got you now, you thieving Jew! Tie him up and take him away!”

Tsiporah fell on his feet and begged him, crying, “Have mercy! My poor father is innocent...”

“Away!” shouted the corporal, and pushed the girl violently away from him.

The order was carried out and they all left the room, the bound parnas in the lead.

With a horrible shriek, Tsiporah plunged unconscious to the floor.

III.

The next morning, in the great hall of the town hall in the Lesser Town of Prague, the town commandant, Baron Rudolf von Waldstein, sat on an elevated armchair, arms folded, a dark expression clouding his face.

He was an extremely courageous warhorse who had distinguished himself at the Battle of White Mountain through personal bravery. For that reason, he had been appointed by Ferdinand as town commandant.

Waldstein was known as a wild and raw man who was groveling and subservient before his superiors but was ruthless to his subordinates to the point of tyranny. Already as major, he had had his soldiers tortured to death for the smallest offence. And he was feared and hated by everyone.

During the absence of Prince Liechtenstein, he functioned as his acting representative in disconcerting matters. He had barely had that office for four days when five people, including three soldiers, were already sentenced by him to death by hanging without a further hearing. His entire outward appearance attested to the fact that mercy and leniency were never to be hoped for, and only in the rarest of cases was he completely rational.

Not far from Waldstein sat a councilor in black garb, a gold chain around his neck. Before him stood six Jesuits. They formed a deputation to request a reprieve for a soldier who was the brother of one of the monks who was present.

“Your honor, Mr. Town Commandant,” pled the speaker, “please do not visit upon us the shame of having the man hanged. His offense is really just to be ascribed to his youth and cannot possibly merit death.”

“Who dares to criticize my sentence?” Waldstein answered furiously. “The man is to be hanged this morning, and that’s that!”

“Then you remain merciless?!”

“Yes!”

“And so the blood of this innocent person will flow...”

“*Not another word!*” screamed Waldstein, jumping up wildly, “or I will have you put in chains. Away with you to your monastery!” And he gave a sign to the regiment sheriff who was waiting at the door. He got two soldiers who drove the muttering monks out of the hall.

The town commandant then grabbed the tankard that was standing before him on a little table and took a long draft, then he ordered the Jew and his accuser brought forward. Two soldiers led in the parnas Jakob Tumim, who was bound with heavy chains and who was broken in body and soul.

“Now confess, wretched thief’s accomplice!” the town commandant shouted at him, “Who are the thieves of the prince’s curtains?”

“I am not a thief’s accomplice, nor do I know the thieves,” Jakob replied, seeming calm.

“I will have you quartered, despicable Jew!” screamed Waldstein, wildly flying into a rage, and he pounded the table with his fist so hard that the tankard fell crashingly to the floor and spilled its contents. “Do you mean to deny that the stolen curtains were found with you, and that this virtuous man,” he continued, pointing at Naphtali, who had come in and was now standing behind Jakob, “did not see for himself how a soldier brought the stolen goods to you and how you handed over to him the wages of Judas?”

Jakob turned around, looked for a few seconds with a horrifying gaze at the lying informer, then threw him a look in which all of his contempt was expressed which this misery deserved, and asked, “He’s the one that testifies to that?”

“Yes, he’s the one!”

“This one here,” he replied, with a shaky voice, “was my servant up until last night, he committed a transgression, and he was thrown out of the house.”

“What, scoundrel? You dare to brand this man as a criminal, the one who opened my eyes to everything about you Jews? For that you shall be hanged!”

Then the councilor stood up, came forward bowing, and said, “Have mercy, Your Honor, town commandant. I know this man,” he said, pointing to Jakob. “He is the president of the Jewish community and an honorable Jew. He has not lied to you. The informer was his

servant. I had to associate with Tumim often in Jewish matters, and his servant also came to my office several times.”

“Well, then,” said Waldstein to Jakob, “if that is so, then speak. Is what your servant testified about you correct? Woe to you if one word of your defense is a lie.”

“Your honor,” Jakob began, “yesterday, while the council was meeting, the representative of the community brought me the stolen curtains. He had also sworn that he would never reveal the name of that person who handed him the stolen goods. This arrangement was made so that the people did not need to be afraid of giving back the objects which they bought and which were afterwards announced as having been stolen. The council resolved that today I would give the curtains myself to the prince’s steward. I gave them to my servant Naphtali with the indication that he bring them to my house. That, Your Honor, is the truth, so help me God!”

“Good,” said Waldstein, “we’ll see for ourselves if you’re telling the truth. What is the name of this representative?”

“Hench Asch, Your Honor.”

“Bring me that Jew!” the town commandant ordered the regiment sheriff. “But throw this one in the dungeon, and also take the informer into custody.”

The order was carried out. Both of them, Jakob and Naphtali, were led away.

An hour later, Reb Henoch was brought in. The old man’s entire body began to tremble when the town commandant shouted at him, “You, with the soul of a dog! So you’re the one who always buys the stolen goods?! I’ll have the hands cut off of all of these traffickers!”

“Your mercifulness,” replied Henoch, half in tears, “as God lives in seventh heaven, I have never bought anything of the kind in my entire life. I am not a merchant.”

“So then how did you acquire the curtains?” Waldstein interrupted him.

“I received the order from the council to proclaim in the synagogues that the prince’s damask curtains had been stolen. I did so right away, and it was also announced on the entire Judengasse. I had hardly gotten home and sat down when someone came in and brought me a package with the curtains in it. He said he had bought them from two soldiers, but he didn’t know that they were stolen...”

“Listen, you, I’ll have your tongue cut out! Who is the someone?” Waldstein interrupted him.

“Your mercifulness, I am not *tor* to say. I swore by the hand of our rabbi never to reveal the someone.”

The town commandant turned bright red with rage. He could not comprehend that any man, let alone a Jew, would give up his life before he would break an oath. He waved to the constables, and they brought in the parnas who was still bound. And when Waldstein set eyes upon him, he screamed in his greatest rage, “All of you, including your rabbi and council, are nothing but thieves and accomplices! I see now that everything was worked out with all of you in advance, but you can’t fool me that easily! Constable, have a gallows built immediately for these Jews on Schinderberg mountain so that these dogs can’t pollute the post where Christians breathe their last breath. These two are to be hanged tomorrow as early as possible. Understood?”

“Yes sir, Your Honor,” replied the constable, and he disappeared.

Jakob turned as pale as a corpse and was not capable of uttering a single word. But the aged Henoah fell upon his knees, raised both hands, and moaned, “Your Grace, what have we done that we are to be hanged like robbers? I have only done my duty. A case such as this also occurred under Emperor Rudolf. A golden goblet disappeared from the castle. The buyer brought it to me and I gave it to the commander of the castle. No one asked who the buyer was, and I was released with good words. Why does my lord wish to spill innocent blood?”

“Wretched Jew!” raged Waldstein, “You want to serve up such a pack of lies to me? You don’t want to name the name of the buyer because you don’t know it, because you yourself and your deceitful council themselves are the buyers! Both of you shall be hanged and that’s that!”

“Well, Your Grace, since you will not have it any other way, then not for my own sake, because my days are so numbered, but rather for the upstanding Reb Jakob, I will break my vow and name the buyer in your merciful presence.”

With these words, Reb Henoah stood up, walked toward his parnas, and said, “The buyer who gave me the goods is Josef ben Jekutil Tein.”

It was difficult for the old man to reveal this. Hardly had he pronounced the name when he beat his chest. Jakob also recognized his sacrifice and squeezed his hand gratefully.

² Reliant.

The simple words of the old man and his gentle manner of dealing with things may then even have moved the wild town commandant to a better position. He spoke somewhat more quietly to Jakob, "Since, as I have learned from the councilor, you are the leader of the Jews, and he also knows you as a respectable man, then for the time being I will trust your words. You are free."

When Jakob heard this, he wanted to sink down before the town commandant to thank him. But the latter continued, "Wait, we're not done yet. You have to bring me the buyer of the curtains here by tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Otherwise, this old Jew, whom you have to thank for your freedom, will be hanged and you will have to pay a fine of one thousand gold guildens." Jakob bowed humbly.

"But you, you scoundrel!" Waldstein continued, turning to Naphtali. "You have lied to me. For that, you shall also be hanged. But since you have the intention to be baptized, then I will temper justice with mercy. Take this ragtag to the Dominicans immediately. He is to be baptized on the spot there. And then put him in a soldier's uniform right away. I will cure him of lying all right."

The regiment sheriff had Naphtali led away. Then the chains were removed from Jakob's feet, and Henschel was bound with them and taken to the dungeon.

Even though he had escaped death, Jakob was distressed about the fate of Henschel and Josef as he hurried back to the Judengasse.

Once he arrived there, he first of all reassured his daughter, who had taken to her sick bed out of fright. He then had the entire council as well as the college of the rabbinate, which was headed by the learned Rabbi Jesaia Hurvitz, called into assembly, and then he went into the council hall.

With brief words, he told those present about the events with the town commandant and closed with the inquiry as to whether Josef Tein should be handed over.

The council members argued for a long time. One of them was of the opinion that Josef, who was the father of a family, should not be handed over to the tyrant so indifferently. Rather, every possible effort should be made to free Reb Henschel, and that might be successful with him because he was innocent, while Josef, on the other hand, would go to a certain death. A second one followed his remarks and believed that God would work a miracle to free the guiltless ones.

Rabbi Hurvitz stood up. "Hush!" someone called out, "The rebbe wants to speak!" And suddenly it grew quiet. "*Rabbosai*," began Rabbi Jesaia, "man may not be *somech*² on a *nes*.³

² Reliant.

³ Miracle.

Everyone has to do his part. The *roshe* [villain] wants Josef to be handed over to him. So I think he should be sent over. Why should we be guilty of the *shfoch dam noki*⁴ being spilled? First of all, Henoch has to get out of the *tvise*.⁵ *Efsher*⁶ Josef remembers who the two *balmichomes* were from whom he bought the curtains and he will get out of it just with a fine. In any case, the matter will be delayed, and so a lot will already have been gained. Every Jew who only has one customer on the Judengasse will ask for that person to help out the poor fellow, and with *shemis borachs*,⁷ there will be assistance, and Josef will be *mazel*⁸ and will be out of the hand of this *roshe mole*.⁹

The rabbi's advice met with general approval. In order to be certain of Josef's person, the parnas had him locked in the *ketzel*¹⁰ overnight.

The next morning, the parnas and Josef Tein, both of them with heavy heart, went to the town commandant. Everything that had happened thus far remained a tight secret to the entire community except for the council members, and Josef also had no idea what was actually awaiting him.

Hardly had they arrived there when Jakob was immediately released again, but Josef was brought to Reb Hersch [*sic* – Reb Henoch?] in prison. The parnas immediately sought counsel that would be friendly to him. But unfortunately he did not find anything comforting. He was told that once the actual buyer of the curtains had been brought in, Henoch's execution would be suspended, but in no way did Jakob want to surrender himself to the belief that the town commandant was not serious about having Josef hanged. He was merciless and absolutely wanted to make an example of Josef.

The sentence would be irrevocably pronounced in the afternoon. Distressed, Josef headed toward home and made Josef's fate known on the Judengasse. Everyone who enjoyed an acquaintanceship with the rulers or citizens hurried to plead for their intercession for the innocent man so that the tyrant's cruel order would not be executed or would at least be delayed for eight

⁴ The blood of the innocent.

⁵ Captivity.

⁶ Perhaps

⁷ May his name be praised.

⁸ Saved.

⁹ One filled with malice.

¹⁰ Cell.

days until Bassevi had been informed in Vienna. Because his request to the emperor would certainly be aid to be hoped for.

But all of the efforts were in vain. Nobody had the courage to even dare to make just one request for the Jews with the universally hated and feared Waldstein. And evening came. Great moaning prevailed in the Judengasse. A group prayer together was ordered by the rabbi that God would soften the heart of the town commander.

Just at the moment that the men left the synagogues, old Henoch arrived in the Judengasse, doubled over in grief, looking as if he had aged ten years overnight. Hardly had the people noticed him then everyone crowded against him to congratulate him upon his successful deliverance. Everybody wanted to know how he had been released and what had happened with Josef.

Henoch had trouble fending off all the curious people and he stepped directly into the house of the parnas without answering. Once he arrived there, he nearly would have collapsed from weakness if the crowd that was accompanying him had not supported him.

Reb Jakob, happy to see Henoch with him again, rushed up to him and led him into his room, where the old man who had gone through such sore tribulations sank down into his armchair. Behind Henoch, hundreds of people crowded into the parlor, but in spite of that a sacred silence prevailed. Henoch asked if someone could get him a glass of water, he had not consumed the slightest thing for twenty-six hours.

Tsiporah, who since her father had happily returned home had recovered to the point that she could get out of bed, brought the old man a glass of wine. Once Henoch had fortified himself, he began, “*Mekass*¹¹ Reb Jakob, you know that right after your departure, they threw me in the *tvise* again. I stayed there alone with two other *razchanim*.¹² I knew that I would be *talyenen*¹³ the next day and *davened*¹⁴ the *vide* and *al chet*¹⁵ the entire night. Toward morning, I *eingenapzt*¹⁶ on the bare dirt. I don’t know how long I lay there that way, but suddenly the constable brought Reb Josef Tein in to me, the chains were then removed from me and put on him. He moaned and cried until it broke my heart. I gave him *menachem*,¹⁷ I told him that *chas*

¹¹ Venerable.

¹² Robbers.

¹³ *Corumpiert tolo*, hanged

¹⁴ Prayed.

¹⁵ Prayers of repentance.

¹⁶ Dozed off.

¹⁷ Consolation.

v'shalom he should not *hivush*,¹⁸ that *shem yisborach* [the One of the Blessed Name] who had helped the parnas would also have me and him *mazel* [saved] from the hand of this *achbrosh*.¹⁹ He then even calmed down a little. So it got to be afternoon, and I had just *geort*²⁰ *mincha*,²¹ when the constable came again and led both of us to the town commandant. He told me that I could leave, but that tomorrow, Friday, at ten in the morning, Josef is to be hung by his feet on the gallows until he is dead, and next to him, on each side, a dog is to be strung up so that, the *roshe* said, he will have company along the way, and..."

A sudden cry, "*Sh'ma yisrael*, for God's sake, help my Josef!" interrupted Henoeh's report, and through the crowd pushed Telze, the mother of the condemned man, followed by her daughter Mirl. The poor mother, who had heard Henoeh's last sentence, now threw herself at the feet of the parnas filled with despair, begged and beseeched him with raised hands to save her innocent son from the miserable death that awaited him.

It was heart rending to hear the old mother. Everyone cried along with her, everybody wanted to help, but there were nearly no prospects for deliverance. All means had already been exhausted.

Jakob comforted the poor woman. He promised to muster everything that was humanly possible to at least achieve a postponement of the execution. He told her that a messenger had already been sent to Vienna to Bassevi, and other things, as well. But from the sound of his voice, you could tell that it was simply words of comfort and that he himself doubted the rescue.

Henoeh, too, shook his head and quietly murmured, "It's no use to plead with the *roshe*."

But Mirl heard these quietly uttered words, stepped forward, and said, "Come, Mammeleben, if not one out of all of these people here wishes and is able to save my poor brother, then I will try it myself."

"Mirl!" cried her mother. "For God's sake, what are you trying to do? Now you're all I've got, my child, in the whole world!"

"Mammeleben, calm down, I'll help Josef," she said decisively, and hurried away.

The girl ran home, put a heavy veil over her face, and raced away from the Judengasse to the Jesuit monastery located nearby, and she asked the porter if he could take her to Pater Paulus.

¹⁸ Despair.

¹⁹ Villain.

²⁰ From *orare*, prayed.

²¹ Afternoon prayers.

Although the porter of the monks shook his head in astonishment, he told her that Pater Paulus was in fact celebrating a Holy Mass in the monastery church, but it would be over soon and she was welcome to just go to the church and wait for him there.

With a pounding heart, Mirl went into the church. It was the first time in her life that she had entered into this place that was strange to her. A shudder ran through her entire body as she strode through these halls steeped in incense. She was afraid that she would be recognized as a Jew. The only ones present were only a few people praying. Mirl positioned herself behind a column. After five long years, she saw Gadl again, Gadl whom she still loved and who for her was lost forever, as a clergyman in full vestments. She looked at Paulus for a long time. Then a bell rang, everyone sank to their knees, and Mirl also spontaneously kneeled down and prayed reverently to her God. The girl had already started to falter, but this prayer caused fresh courage to pour into her.

When she stood up, the mass was already over and the church was nearly empty of people, and she just caught sight of Pater Paulus disappearing through a side door.

Mirl hurried out of the house of worship so as to not lose him. She wandered around the church for a long time and already doubted that she would succeed in meeting Paulus when a dark-clad figure entered from a side building. Mirl's heart told her that this was Gadl. Courageously, she went up to the figure. He stood there, astonished.

"Venerable sir," Mirl began, stuttering, but she could say no more, her voice failed her, she had recognized him by that scar on his forehead that he had once received because of her.

"What do you desire, my daughter?" asked Paulus.

"Gadl, most venerable one!" she managed to gasp through her tears.

Shocked, the monk moved a few steps back with the uttering of this name. Mirl tore the veil from her face.

Then he recognized her, saw his onetime beloved once again, and the spark that he had kept hidden those long years in the depths of his heart flared up again right then and there with new force. He took the shaking girl by the hand and led her into the sacristy. She felt the trembling of his hands and was filled with the awareness that he still loved her.

"Mirl! For heaven's sake! What brought you to me, the apostate, the clergyman? And at such a late hour?" he began.

She sank down before him and begged, "For God's sake, save my poor, innocent brother!"

Paulus lifted her up affectionately and said, "Your brother Josef? Tell me! What happened?"

Briefly and nearly breathlessly, she told him what had befallen her brother Josef. Once she was done, a deep stillness set in. Paulus thought long and hard about what was to be done now.

Mirl observed his expression, her bosom rising and falling convulsively. Fearfully, she awaited the words that would announce to her the life or death of her brother.

"My child," he began at last, "no mercy is to be expected from Waldstein personally. He has even chased away our brothers who in fact enjoy significant influence. But all is not yet lost. I will try my luck with his pious wife, who is one of my confessants. Now hurry home, my child! Any later and the path will be unsafe for a woman. Calm your mother. You will receive news from me yet this evening."

"A thousand thanks, you noble man!" said Mirl, in an outburst of her feelings, and wanted to kiss his hand. But he gently took hold of both of her arms and looked into her eyes for a long time. Tears appeared in his own, and he turned away.

The girl walked to the door.

"Mirl!" he called after her "Answer me one question. Are you married yet?"

She turned around and said, "Never!" Then she hurried away as fast as her feet could carry her out the door and home.

Once she arrived, she called to her mother, "Mammeleben, our Josef shall be free!"

Telze asked where she had been and what she had undertaken.

"Mutterleben, don't ask me. You will soon learn everything."

Calmed by the certainty that lay in her words, Telze did not ask any more questions. She did in fact suspect where her daughter must have been, but she remained silent.

IV.

It was already nine o'clock in the evening, a fierce north wind whipped snowflakes against the window of the parnas Reb Jakob.

Everyone had already retired, only he himself, standing at the window, looked out into the dark night as the snowstorm howled. And inside of him, a storm also raged. Heavily pressing against him was the awareness that he, the parnas, the head of the Jewish community, had so little influence that it was not possible for him to free an innocent man from certain death by the hangman's hand. He fervently raised his hands to heaven and prayed, "Oh Lord! Protector of Israel, if it not be your will or decided in your unfathomable counsel that this unfortunate man should lose his life, then show me the path that I should take to his deliverance. Do not allow this ignominy to come to your unfortunate people to whom you have always shown only love. Blessed are you who loves your people."

"Amen!" intoned a voice behind Jakob.

Startled, he turned around. A strange man, closely wrapped in an overcoat, stood in the half-open door. He entered the room and spoke. "The Lord God has heard your pious prayer. Josef has received a reprieve."

When Jakob heard this, he hurried to the stranger and spoke, shaking from joyous excitement. "Sir, you are either an angel of God or the most noble man, because your eyes shine joyously from the glad tidings you bring me."

"I am neither one nor the other," laughed Paulus, throwing off his overcoat, "*Mekass* Reb Jakob."

Jakob, astonished to see a priest before him, and even more so by his speech, had no idea what to say out of embarrassment, and in order to hide that, he offered the monk a chair.

The latter finally broke the awkward pause with the words, “My name is Paulus. Once you did indeed know me, back when I was still a *bochur* and was called Gadl Emerichs.”

“Reverend, you are the...”

“*Meshumed*,²² yes,” Paulus interrupted his astonished cry, because the time was pressing. “As you must know, Josef Tein is to be hanged tomorrow at nine in the morning. With the help of heaven, I was successful in attaining his reprieve.”

Jakob joyously shook the monk’s hand. He continued, “But this is only to be achieved through *pecunia numerate* [money to pay a debt], and specifically, you have to pay ten thousand gold guldens to the town commandant by eight in the morning sharp as ransom.”

“Ten thousand!” repeated Jakob, appalled at the size of the amount.

“I know that it is a heavy sacrifice,” continued the monk.

“No, Sir,” replied Jakob, “no sacrifice is too big for us to save the life of an innocent condemned man. The money will be paid at the determined time. But how can I ever thank you?”

“You owe me no thanks. I would just have one request.”

“Whatever you command!”

“It is a trivial matter,” Paulus continued. “Immediately send to...” He wanted to say “Mirl”, but the word died on his lips. “to Josef’s mother to inform her of her son’s salvation.”

“You are a noble man, Pater Paulus. I will gladly take on this responsibility.”

Paulus took his hat and coat, gave Jakob his right hand, which he shook heartily, and then he went to the door. But he stopped there, turned to the parnas who was accompanying him, and said, “One more thing. How are my parents?”

“Both are alive and they’re healthy.”

“I thank you, *Mekass* Reb Jakob. Keep me in your good remembrances. Perhaps I will need them soon. Very soon,” said Paulus, and then he quickly left.

Once Jakob was alone, he looked after him reflectively, then he hurried out to the street, woke up the beadle, and ordered him to instruct all of the council members to get to the rabbi as fast as possible. He himself went to Telze Tein in order to deliver to her the joyous message.

²² Apostate.

He informed the council members that life would be bestowed upon Josef for a ransom that was to be paid of ten thousand gold guildens. To the honor of these men, it must be said that each one of them immediately declared himself to be willing to provide a large part of the money from his own means, and the rest was to be paid from the community treasury.

Only after all of the council members had left did Jakob inform the rabbi who it was that Josef actually had to thank for his freedom.

V.

It was Friday morning. Thousands of people streamed to the “playground” where the gallows had been erected on the Schinderberge for Josef and the two dogs. Everyone crowded to get to see such a rare show, a Jew hanged between two dogs.

Meanwhile, ten council members brought the designated ransom, which three porters carried in baskets, to the town commandant.

Waldstein’s pious wife, influenced by her confessor Pater Paulus, had made every possible effort and had mustered all of her eloquence to move her cruel husband so that he would give the Jew a reprieve and accept a ransom of ten thousand gold guldens. “That money,” she said, “will help you to have a good name for all eternity. Give it to the Jesuits with the provision that they establish a foundation in their St. Bartholomew School for the promotion of Christian religious instruction, but especially for those Jewish children who convert to the Christian faith.”

At first, Waldstein did not want to give in. “The Jew must be hanged. I can’t withhold such a show from the people.”

But after lengthy persuasion by his wife, he decided to reconcile things with the Jesuits who were hostile to him and accept the ransom for that purpose.

The council members, with Jakob at their lead, humbly thanked the town commandant for the great mercy that he had shown and gave him the baskets filled with gold.

“What kind of coins is this money made up of?” asked Waldstein.

“Ducates, Rhenish guilders, three kreutzers, and double guldens in gold and silver,” Jakob replied.

“You scoundrels! Do you think that I will accept your shaved and half-value gold? Away with you! Take it with you and bring me back the money by three o’clock in the afternoon in nothing but double guildens, and specifically with one thousand guildens in each sack. And you may fear my wrath if every single piece is not of full weight! If the money is not already in my hands at the stroke of three, the Jew will be hanged!”

The poor, tormented council members ran back to the Judengasse. Each one hurried to change the money. Anyone who had even one piece of that kind of coin brought it to the council house. All of the money was divided into ten sacks, and those were placed in the baskets and brought that way to the town commandant at the appointed hour. Since everything was now precisely according to Waldstein’s wishes, they thought that he would now be satisfied and Josef’s release would finally take place.

But they were wrong. Their suffering was not yet at an end. The hardhearted tyrant almost regretted releasing the Jew for such an “easy bargain”, as he called it, and wanted to at least take it out on them.

“You miserable Jew dogs!” he screamed at them. “Why are you carrying the money hidden in baskets? Are the people perhaps to believe that I’m allowing myself to be bribed by you? Take the sacks out of the baskets and carry them right now to the mayor in the city hall in the Old Town. You, regiment sheriff, send ten soldiers with these wretches. Anyone who tries to hide his pile or doesn’t keep up with the procession shall be beaten with gun butts by the soldiers. But have the bound Jew bring up the rear between two soldiers and hang a sign around his neck upon which is clearly written, ‘This is how our gracious monarch punishes all receivers of stolen goods and thief’s accomplices.’ Only when the money has been handed over to the mayor and you have received written confirmation of its accurateness are you to let the wretch go. Now go, and carry out my orders!”

A short time later, the peculiar procession left the town hall. Every council member carried a heavy sack on his shoulder, and behind each one walked a soldier.

In the back was Josef, the heavy chains dragging behind him. They were followed by a crowd from the people, laughing and howling. All of the windows along the way were so densely occupied with people leaning out to gawk that it seemed like the arrival of a flying army.

It was the worst for the council member Eberl Geronim, who was nearly seventy years old, the father of Hendl, the wife of the newly ennobled Bassevi. Gasping for breath, with thick drops of sweat on his forehead in spite of the January cold, the old man could barely drag

himself forward. At the Charles Bridge, he collapsed under his load. The soldier who was true to the form of his superior beat upon the old man with his gun butt against the laughs of the brutal mob, and it almost seemed as if the poor old man was about to give up the ghost.

The count general, who had been viewing this show for a long time with disgust up above from his window, hurried down to the soldier who was still beating away, ripped the gun out of his hands, and angrily threw it at his feet. “Are you knaves so inhuman that you have no pity at all on a dying old man? I spit on you!” he bellowed.

“General, sir,” said the regiment sheriff, stepping forward, “we received strict orders to proceed precisely like that and in no other way.”

“Who dares to issue such cruel orders?” asked the general.

“The lord town commandant,” replied the former.

“I was thinking that this could only have come from him. I order you, sheriff, to give the old man’s sack to the soldiers. But you will leave the old man with me. I take on all responsibility.” The general then had his sedan chair brought and had the old man transported home.

It was Friday evening. Outside, it began to get dark. The Old-New Synagogue was already brightly lit. In all of the hanging lamps as well as in the numerous wall lamps, those thin wax candles were burning which are produced just for Friday evenings, because they soon burn down after the people have left the house of worship and it is not necessary to extinguish them. That evening, there was extraordinary attendance at the synagogue, even by many people who did not belong to that synagogue community.

The *mincha* prayers had already been finished for more than a quarter hour and yet the *chazzan*¹ with his *meshorerim*² made no move to step onto the *almemor*³ in order to immediately begin Psalm 95 with which the Sabbath prayer is initiated. A general mood of gloom and dejection prevailed overall. And that was also not inexplicable: the ten council members who had already gone to the town commander in the Lesser Town at two in the afternoon were still not back, in spite of the highest time for the Sabbath celebration. Everyone knew that with Waldstein, everything was to be feared. No one had any idea what had happened and whether

¹ Prayer leader [cantor].

² Choir.

³ Raised platform [bimah].

Josef Tein had been reprieved or not. Rabbi Jesaia had already sent out messengers half an hour before to look around for those who were absent and to immediately report their return. But none of them had come back yet.

A longer delay of the service was not possible without violating the laws of the Sabbath, and the rabbi gave the cantor the sign to begin. And then the call was heard from the street, “They’re coming, the *gaboim*⁴ are already here!” And shortly thereafter, all of the council members, with the exception of Eberl Geronim, entered the house of worship.

Reb Jakob Tumim, who knew how heavily the uncertainty must have been pressing upon everyone, immediately climbed the steps that led to the *aron hakodesh*,⁵ and with a loud and clear voice, he announced, “*Reb Josef Tein is free and already with his family!*”

All at once, the mood of all those present changed. The deepest sorrow was followed by the greatest jubilation. Everyone crowded around the council members, but especially around the parnas in order to congratulate him upon his success. The noisiest ovation would certainly have been offered to him if the *chazzan* had not brought an end to this ecstasy by pounding heavily three times upon his *siddur*.⁶

Since that time, it has been rare that a normal Friday evening saw prayer with such fervor as that night. When the *chazzan* arrived at the prayer passage, “O Lord, our God, let us lie down in peace, and raise us up again to good life” and then “Protect us that we may spend our lives in peace until the eternal hereafter. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who protects his people of Israel,” loud sobbing was heard.

After the service, many people hurried to Josef.

⁴ Council members.

⁵ The Holy Ark, in which the Torah scrolls are kept.

⁶ Prayer book.

VI.

A short time thereafter, late in the evening, Rabbi Jesaia Hurvitz sat alone in his study, deep in contemplation. Next to him, aside from several thick tomes that lay open, also lay a piece of parchment upon which he wrote some words from time to time. It was the learned rabbi's intention to leave Prague after the shortest possible time in order to make a pilgrimage to the destination of his most longing desire, to Jerusalem. But first he wanted to complete his most important work, *Shnei luchot habitit*.¹

Suddenly, there was a soft knock on the door and then Pater Paulus immediately came in. Without laying down his coat and hat, he fell at the feet of the startled rabbi and began to weep intensely.

Out of the astonishment at seeing a completely strange man in this humble position, the rabbi could not find any words. After a while, Paulus began, "Rabbi, I come to you as a *baal teshuva*.² Take me back into Judaism! My soul is torn to pieces as long as I still belong to the faith that was not my choice. I will gladly submit to any severe penitence. Just do not turn me away!"

"Who are you, man, who wishes to return to the faith of his fathers?" asked Rabbi Jesaia. "Do you even know what awaits you on the part of your fellow believers?"

"I know everything, rabbi. My decision is unshakeable, even if it costs me my life. I am Gadl Emerichs, your former pupil."

The rabbi laid both of his hands on the man's head and said reverently, "God bless you, you noble youth. *Olam haba* [the world to come] is certain for you, you have given a man his life back."

¹ *The Two Tablets of the Covenant*

² Penitent [one who has returned].

The monk and the rabbi conferred until late into the night.

It was decided that Gadl, as he now called himself once again, would secretly leave Prague the next morning, in order to flee directly to Amsterdam to some men originally from Moruny with whom he had become acquainted during his stay in Rome, in order to be able to live there again as a Jew. The rabbi gave him a letter of recommendation to the Amsterdam rabbi, Menasse ben Israel, and then he warmly and touchingly bid farewell to his former *bochur*.

They would never see each other again in life. Rabbi Jesaia began his pilgrimage to Jerusalem eight days later, where soon after his arrival he achieved great honors.

The day after Gadl's visit to the rabbi, a small boat was picked up on the Moldau River in which lay Pater Paulus' overcoat. Since he himself had disappeared without a trace, it was assumed that he had met his death in the waves. The beloved preacher was mourned all over.

Meanwhile, he happily arrived in Amsterdam where, thanks to the recommendations, he soon found a job for life. A short time thereafter, Mirl followed him, accompanied by her brother Josef, in order to finally find the happiness for which she had yearned for so long by Gadl's side.

And Tsiporah, the daughter of the parnas Jakob Tumim, soon celebrated her marriage to Asher von Treuenburg. The entire Jewish community of Prague participated in this celebration, and even the emperor was to directly send a representative to the wedding.

The dairy woman and the meat woman, who still stood next to each other for many more long years on the Judengasse with their buffets, were now the best of friends as *machetenesters*.

Reb Henoch Asch recorded the entire event in a *megilla*³ and decided that "up to the latest times, his descendants should always read out this *megilla* on the 22nd of Tevet", the day which was named **Purim of the Curtains**, "with a festive meal and with joyous spirits, so that they may remember that God, blessed be he, had saved him and Josef Tein out of the hands of an evildoer."

THE END

³ Scroll.

Directory of Names

Name	Role	Alternate Spellings in Text or Alternate Names in the Literature
Aberl	the town crier	
Asher Bassevi	son of Ya'akov and Hendl Bassevi, betrothed to Tsiporah Tumim	Asher von Treuenburg
Avraham	sexton of the Pinkas Synagogue	Avrohom
Bassevi von Treuenberg, Jacob		Jacob Batschewi Schmiles, Ya'akov Bassevi of Treuenberg, Jekew Batschewi
Carl, Prince of Liechtenstein	Vice-regent of Bohemia	Karl I, Prince of Liechtenstein
Chaim Emerichs	a clothing merchant	
Elle Emerichs	wife of Chaim Emerichs, mother of Gadl Emerichs, the "meat woman"	
Fabricius, Filip	Secretary of the Royal Bohemian Chancellery	Philipp Fabricius
Ferdinand II	Holy Roman Emperor	
Frederick V	King of the Palatinate	
Freidl Bassevi	Daughter of Ya'akov and Hendl Bassevi	
Gadl Emerichs	son of Chaim and Elle Emerichs	Pater Paulus
Hendl Bassevi	wife of Ya'akov Bassevi	
Henoch Asch	scribe, author of the tale	Chanoch Asch, Henochen
Jakob Tumim	parnas, secular head of the Jewish community	Jekew Tumim
Jekutil Tein	deceased husband of Telze Tein, father of Josef Tein	
Jesaia Hurvitz		Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Horowitz, Rabbi Jesai, Jesaias
Lobkovitz, Popel von	Chancellor to the Bohemian Kingdom	Matthew Leopold Popel Lobcowitz, Zdeněk Vojtěch Popel z Lobkovic
Martinitz	Representative of Emperor Ferdinand II in Prague	Jaroslav Borzita of Martinice, Jaroslav Bořita z Martinic
Matthias	earlier Holy Roman Emperor	
Maximilian	earlier Holy Roman Emperor	
Menasse ben Israel	rabbi in Amsterdam	
Mirl Tein	daughter of Telze Tein, sister of Josef Tein	Mirlleben

Naphtali Milnik	servant of the parnas Jakob Tumim	Naphtalie, Napthali
Pater Paulus	Jesuit monk	Gadl Emerichs
Rudolf	earlier Holy Roman Emperor	
Schmerl	father-in-law of Josef Tein	
Slavata	Vice-regent of Ferdinand II in Prague	Vilém Slavata of Chlum
Telze Tein	mother of Mirl Tein and Josef Tein, the “dairy woman”	Telzeleben
Tsiporah Tumim	daughter of the parnas Jakob Tumim, betrothed to Asher Bassevi	
Waldstein, Rudolf von	town commandant	

Glossary of Foreign Words

<i>achbrosh</i>	villain
<i>almemor</i>	raised platform, <i>bimah</i>
<i>aron hakodesh</i>	Holy Ark
<i>baal teshuva</i>	one who has returned
<i>balmichomes</i>	soldiers
<i>Baruch habah</i>	Blessed be the one who comes
<i>Baruch nimzoh</i>	Blessed be the one who is found there
<i>besholem</i>	in peace
<i>bochur</i>	pupil
<i>chariferl</i>	smart aleck
<i>chas v'shalom</i>	May God protect us!
<i>chazzan</i>	cantor
<i>chillul hashem</i>	desecration of the name
<i>dalken</i>	pancakes
<i>davened</i>	prayed
<i>efsher</i>	perhaps
<i>eingenapzt</i>	dozed off
<i>evadeh</i>	of course
<i>famulus</i>	servant working for a scholar
<i>ga'ave</i>	pride
<i>gaboim</i>	council members
<i>gegannevt, geganvent</i>	stolen
<i>geneve</i>	stolen goods
<i>geort</i>	prayed
<i>gesere roe</i>	disaster
<i>hashkomo</i>	morning service
<i>hast e s'chie</i> [?]	a stroke of luck
<i>hivush</i>	despair
<i>ketzel</i>	cell
<i>kol yisrael</i>	all of Israel
<i>kovid</i>	honor
<i>maariv</i>	evening prayers
<i>maase</i>	story
<i>machetenesters</i>	respective mothers-in-law
<i>malches</i>	emperor
<i>Mameleben</i>	endearing name for Mama
<i>massematten</i>	business
<i>mazel</i>	lucky, saved
<i>megillah</i> (pl. <i>megillot</i>)	scroll
<i>Mekass</i>	venerable
<i>menachem</i>	consolation
<i>meo shonim</i>	one hundred years
<i>meshorerim</i>	choir
<i>meshumed</i>	apostate
<i>metziah</i>	bargain

<i>mincha</i>	afternoon prayers
<i>mochel</i>	forgive
<i>naches</i>	joy
<i>narishkeiten</i>	nonsense
<i>narishheit</i>	stupid thing
<i>nes</i>	miracle
<i>olam haba</i>	the world to come
<i>parnas</i>	secular head of a Jewish congregation
<i>pecunia numerata</i>	money to pay a debt
<i>psire</i>	event
<i>rabbosai</i>	gentlemen
<i>razchanim</i>	robbers
<i>redl [Rädl]</i>	small discussion group?
<i>rehille</i>	community
<i>rosh ha kol</i>	head of the city
<i>roshe</i>	villain
<i>roshe mole</i>	one filled with malice
<i>sh'loh hakodesh</i>	a Jewish text on rites and morality
<i>shakren</i>	liar
<i>shamas</i>	sexton
<i>shelich</i>	messenger
<i>shem yisborach</i>	the One of the Blessed Name
<i>shemis borachs</i>	May his name be praised!
<i>shfoch dam noki</i>	blood of the innocent
<i>shlemazel</i>	misfortune
<i>Shma Yisrael</i>	literally "Hear O Israel", used as "Oh my God!"
<i>Shnei luchot habrit</i>	<i>The Two Tablets of the Covenant</i>
<i>shoh</i>	hour
<i>siddur</i>	prayer book
<i>somech</i>	reliant
<i>srore</i>	prince
<i>srorete</i>	noblewoman
<i>stoot shamas</i>	city servant
<i>talyenen</i>	hanged
<i>toove</i>	good deed
<i>tor</i>	allowed
<i>Tosefet Yom-Tov</i>	a commentary on the <i>Mishnah</i>
<i>tref</i>	unkosher
<i>tvise</i>	captivity
<i>vide and al chet</i>	prayers of repentance
<i>yehudim</i>	Jews
<i>yontiv malbushim</i>	holiday clothes