

Reb Yudl Shloboner or The Beautiful Minke

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This is a delightful tale of a certain maiden whom people called “The Beautiful Minke.” The daughter of a Hasid, she fell in love with a young man named Itsik Shvarts who was a Misnaged. This story is well-seasoned and only slightly abridged. It is pleasing and very pure, and reflected within is a moral lesson that shines as brightly as a sunbeam on the surface of a polished ruby.

I. Reb Yudl Shloboner

In a large city in the region of Volhynia, a city that was the very center of Hasidism, there lived some twenty years ago a dealer in oxen named Reb Yudl Shloboner, a Hasid with not a spare ounce of flesh on his body. He was a wealthy man, and loyal to his rebbe with body and soul. Without his rebbe’s agreement he neither bought nor sold any oxen, would not build a house, would not even have children, and especially would not make a match for his children—and things did go very well for him.

It was nearly time to marry off his youngest daughter, Mine, who was so clever and pretty that people called her “the beautiful Minke.” Her father was very certain, naturally, that he would secure the finest of matches for her, because he intended to give a few thousand rubles as her dowry. Consequently, by the time she was fifteen years old, the

matchmakers were beating a path to his doorstep. Prestigious unions were proposed with the families of influential magnates or great rebbes, and certainly he would have seen his daughter betrothed had it not been for a strange event that emerged at the same time. This event was none other than a secret love, which in that time and in that corner of the world—and especially among the Hasidim—was a quite extraordinary thing. There, men knew well the words “hate” and “animosity,” but not the obscene name “love.” There, it had yet to happen that one married from some sort of feeling of love and without a thought to money or pedigree.

People feared such things: “Oh, a secret love! A criminal offense!” And it just so happened that it transpired in such an important Hasidic locality. How, in spite of everything, did the girl come to such a thing? And who was the individual with whom she fell in love? What forced the parents to take their daughter’s feelings of love into account? Who, in that place, would ever ask a daughter or a son who they wanted to marry and who they didn’t? Because children have no say at all in such matters, just as they have no say in their being born. We will, however, explain this in the second chapter.

II. Efraim Shvarts and His Son Itsik

In our moralistic world, it has already been established once and for all that many questions are very often settled only through a larger question. This precept can also be applied in our case. Because, like it or not, an even harder question now emerges: How did this young man, a romantic hero who is himself capable of falling in love, stumble into such a place? This very question, however, can be easily answered.

Some thirty years back, a certain Russian writer, Efraim Shvarts, was forced to settle in Volhynia. He had been exiled there by the government on account of having written a petition on behalf of a peasant—peasants at that time still being considered as slaves of serfdom. Shvarts was from Vilna; he was quite the courageous person, a learned man in Judaic studies, well-educated: he was proficient in Russian, German, Polish, and Hebrew and was an expert in law.

He came with his wife and only son, a boy of thirteen or fourteen who had been educated as was the custom of Vilna; that is to say, the Volhynia school had to place him ahead into a fourth-year class. This young man was a very bright lad; he was tall, had a sensible mind, and was quite talented and also very well-mannered. He dressed respectfully and spoke a beautiful German. In short, he had outstanding qualities and would be very pleasing to a pretty girl from a rich family living in that obscure region. And this boy did indeed find favor.

As soon as his parents had settled in and people heard that the father was a practical man skilled in statutes and legal proceedings, the local rich men began utilizing him for their litigations. More than anyone else, he was kept busy by Reb Yudel Shloboner, who was entangled in large lawsuits. After Shvarts had deftly extricated him from several lawsuits, Reb Yudel installed him in an apartment within his courtyard so that he might always have him on hand, and he entrusted him with all his confidential business dealings. There was no need of regret for this on his part, because Efraim Shvarts served him honestly and true.

Both families adjusted well to each other; they would often visit each other for tea, pass the evenings with one another, and celebrate birthdays together. With time, they grew to know each other so well that

one knew what the other was thinking. By this means, perhaps they'd committed a grievous misjudgment against the old proverb "Moderate your intimacy with your friends so that you will not need to fear them, should they someday become an enemy." In the same way, one could also say that you should moderate your animosity toward your enemies in the case that at some point in time, you might convert them into a friend.

The friendship of which we speak of here, however, was entered into solely on account of economic interests. By nature, both parties were of completely different opinions and characters. Reb Yudel Shloboner was a passionate Hasid, while Reb Efraim belonged to the cold Misnagdim. Reb Yudel felt that Efraim was a man without a soul or a belief in the World to Come, a man who after dying would disappear into the depths of Gehennem until the End of Days, and felt a great pity for him that he was not a Hasid. Efraim, on the other hand, considered Reb Yudel Shloboner to be a fool and an idiot who believed in heathenish ideas and all kinds of nonsense. Monetary interests, however, are always sufficiently powerful, and thus each of the two men considered the other a friend, all the more so as Efraim didn't want to waste even one word on matters of faith, and Reb Yudel Shloboner would not speak with Efraim about Misnagdes or Hasidism, recognizing that the former saw faith as a hollow ceremony. He had not heard this from Efraim himself, but one could see it by the way Efraim rarely went to synagogue, made do with being called to read Torah only once a month, and often skipped reciting the afternoon prayer service. How does one speak with such a person about Hasidism and other things pertaining to faith?

In contrast, however, their children, Itsik and Minke, had a great deal to say to each other, although their conversations had nothing to do with Hasidism or Misnagdes. One could say that these were conversations devoid of any particular content, yet from which they both received great pleasure. When two people are in love, even if they speak of last year's snow, of the fortune that a certain ruined man once had, or of like things, these are all enjoyable conversations for them. It gives them an additional chance to look deep into one another's eyes and to embellish such kinds of conversations with a bit of insinuation to things that were

of greater importance and more relevant to their personal experiences. This is well known to all those who were once young, and to those who are young now. Our wise men, for example, tell of the woman Abigail, who even as she went before King David to plead for the life of her husband Novl hinted to the king that he should take her as a wife after the death of her husband.

Itsik and Minke could never completely refrain from talking to each other. Perhaps ten times a day they would meet, each time under a different pretext. Here, she needed to borrow his pocket knife; there, he required her pair of small scissors; here, she had come to look at his watch as their clock at home had stopped; and there, he had come to ask for a few pieces of thread—all the while becoming engrossed in a long conversation.

As they grew closer he began to teach her German, which she took to with gusto. Yet this all had to be carried out in secret because if her father knew, he would break her bones. They were cautious, and thus, in the course of a year, she had made much progress in the German language, and even greater progress—in love. For she was head over heels in love with Itsik, as was he with her, and it had already gone so far that they had declared their love to one another and solemnly agreed that they should be married. They would allow nothing in the world to deter them.

Ah, my dear reader, let those who wish us harm be plagued with a secret love. It is always accompanied by great pain and sorrow.

But let us continue recounting our story.

III. The Terrible Discovery

The two children were in love, but things had gone no further than that. Among intelligent and civilized parents, such cases as this are handled in a completely straightforward way and without the slightest amount of fuss, depending on whether the suitor is an honest and capable young man. If he is an honorable and conscientious person, and, on the other side, if the young lady is a good and decent girl, they are married and the lovers achieve their goal. If they are not suited to each other,* they are given to understand through wise words and examples that they will not be allowed to marry, because this would make them miserable for the rest of their lives, and they are separated.

Among uncivilized people, it is exactly the opposite. A secret love remains a secret only to the parents; the entire town talks about it, ultimately resulting in a scandal. The girl is consigned to become an object of gossip and is miserable all her life. Her own parents become her persecutors and tormentors, and he receives an equal fate. The whole town joins in the persecution, and their lives are now worthless.

In our case things could have been a lot worse, because the girl's father was a Hasid and the father of the groom—barely a Misnaged; that is to say, they worked as well as fire and water. It would have been, as people say, apples and oranges. At Reb Yudl's house, all the other members of his household already knew of it, as did all his neighbors and the market women. If the local rebbe, a sensible man with regard to worldly matters, had not nipped things in the bud and turned the situation around, it would have been very bad. But let us continue with our telling.

The first people to detect the secret romance between Minke and Itsik were none other than the servant girls of both houses. They were the first to overhear their conversations, the first to note Minke's concern with Itsik's food and drink and how she was constantly sending him tea, coffee, goose cracklings, and fruit. Whenever he was a bit under the weather, she was distraught. Moreover, they observed that each of the pair wore a medallion over their hearts with a picture of the other. The servant girls related all this (along with a few embellishments) to

their girlfriends, and these friends told it again to others (with even more elaborations) until the tale began circulating throughout the city, increasing in size like a rolling snowball.

Precisely the last ones to hear the news were her parents. They both learned of it on the same day, in two different places, told with thousands of enhancements and exaggerations. They heard that their daughter was pregnant and that she often visited Feygetshke the Professor; that she was seen going around with Itsik, who was dressed like a Polish lord; that small children had appeared in people's dreams announcing that they had died only because of her sin; and yet more such yarns and nonsense as rolls off the tongues of idle gossipers and of which even the smallest detail had been well-decorated, both for good and for ill, and a mountain is made of a molehill.

The mother heard of it from a kinswoman at the women's synagogue; the story having taken its toll on her health, she burst into the house half dead, half alive. The father, for his part, learned of it at the Hasidic prayer house and also came home like one dead. He immediately repeated what he'd heard to his wife, who having already learned of it was even more sickened than he, for she believed that she was guiltier than her husband. She was the one who was at home more. Moreover, how was it that she did not watch over her daughter and see that the girl had too much to do with Itsik?

"I already know of our trouble," she answered him. "Don't raise the alarm. As the proverb says, 'Speak not of what is distasteful to you, so that others will not speak of it.' The last thing we need is that our servants start talking; the entire city will be boiling over about it."

"It weighs on me very heavily," he answered. "Where is she, Minke? Most certainly with her lover! I'll leave no bone in her body unbroken, and you are no better than she."

"Yudl! Listen to me, Yudl!" she said firmly. "I'm asking that you have patience, until eleven o'clock when the maid goes off to sleep in the kitchen. Then we'll consider what we must do. We can't permit ourselves to become laughingstocks. In the meantime, we must hold our tongues. We can't even summon Minke to the house; we must wait

until she comes on her own; we'll have to swallow our anguish. And it's true that I'm at fault, but you are also to blame. Wait for now; we'll assess things later."

"What choice do I have?" he responded. "I'll wait, but I'm paying for each minute with my health. Who knows what kinds of deeds she can be up to with him until eleven o'clock? I was told that they both want to run away abroad or, God forbid, convert to Christianity."

"Eh, you're a fool," his wife said. "It hasn't gone that far. I know our daughter better than you, and I also know that there's no truth in what the world is saying. Don't forget that because we have a few pennies of our own, half the city is our enemy."

Thus did man and wife go back and forth over the matter.

**The history of the world gives us a fine example of this with the story of Karl I, emperor of France, Italy, and Germany. He had a daughter—Emma, she was called—who was the most beautiful of all the maidens of her time. Her father loved her very much and did not want her to marry: firstly, in case her husband might mistreat her; and secondly, that it could go badly for her during childbirth. Emma, however, held a completely different opinion. Despite the fact that she was an extremely modest girl and very pious, without her father's knowledge she had nonetheless fallen in love with a young man named Bernhardt. This beau of hers was a scribe for her father; he was himself descended from a humble family, as in those times the work of a scribe was not considered to be a prestigious occupation. That a person of nobility—especially an emperor—should himself know how to write, was considered an absolute disgrace. His only signature was his handprint, which had been smeared with ink and then put to the paper.*

It was Bernhardt's custom to visit Emma every evening and to sit with her until late at night. This was all done in utmost secrecy; only a chambermaid knew of it, and no one else. One night, though, there happened a rare occurrence—a snow fell. Bernhardt was afraid to leave her house, as the footprints in the snow would betray him. It was Emma herself who carried him out of the courtyard. Unfortunately, it was a bright,

moonlit night, and her father had by chance been unable to sleep. He happened to look out the window of his bedchamber at that very moment and spotted them. That night he remained silent, but in the morning he called together his synod and asked his bishops what penalty was owed to one who seduced his daughter, and what should be hers?

“He must be beheaded,” they answered, “and the girl must be put into a convent.”

The king then said, “And I tell you that I am guiltier than both of them, for I have gone against the laws of both nature and faith. Therefore, I issue forth this decree: they shall be married!”

Thus he married them in the court hall. They both lived long and happy lives, and Bernhardt later became the king’s historian.

IV. A Conversation between Man, Wife, and Daughter: Twelve O’Clock at Night

If you, my dear reader, have a good memory, you’ll recall how a few times already we have listened to nightly sermons from behind the curtain. One time there was our tale of the “Women’s Secret” and another time that of the “History of the Slaves.” Now we will eavesdrop on a late-night conversation between man, wife, and daughter.

The clock had barely struck eleven when all the house had crawled into their beds, and the maid had fallen as soundly asleep as does the night watchman after making his first call, “The clock has struck ten!” As soon as our Reb Yudl and his wife Sarah were certain that none of the household would enter their bedchamber—except for their daughter, who had not yet returned home from Itsik’s—Reb Yudl bolted the door of the vestibule, closed the door of his room, and opened his mouth. Now they both rushed to talk about Minke, each after their own style.

Reb Yudl Shloboner reclaimed his argument with his wife: “So it is that with me, my mind is always wrapped around business matters, and I have no idea what goes on in the house every day aside from the food I eat, and sometimes not even that. You, however, are the one who is home all day, and no fool besides. Moreover, how has it been permitted that your daughter spends day and night with a young fellow, a Litvak, a cross-head, a Vilna rascal who spends all his time poring over worldly books, who has not a spark of Jewishness in him, and whose parents are no better than he? How did you not see that our daughter would learn nothing good there? People have told me that he teaches her from these books, shows her how to write notes and, right in front of her eyes, freely mocks the Hasidim and the synagogue wardens. What more is there to say? She is not being taught anything good there, and what people say must be believed. It is my misfortune that I have just now learned of this, that they lie next to each other day and night, she at his house and he at hers, and that she is with him half the night. Where were your eyes and where was your brain? You are, after all, a homebody, such a great housekeeper. You can spot a pot, a spoon, a knife, or a plate out of place and make the maid pay for it almost with her life, yet your daughter is

nowhere to be found day or night, and this concerns you not at all. If your maid takes a little bit too long in the street, you interrogate her with the greatest of severity, yet your daughter comes home after midnight every night, and you pretend to know nothing of it. Woe be to us that she is with her beau so late. And who knows if she isn't spending her nights in even filthier places? I've heard that Feygetshke's house is a nest full of scoundrels and fast men and women; a truly fine house where you get pregnant before your time and give birth too early. And our child is spending her time at such a house."

After listening to his sermon, his wife now put forth hers to him:

"And I say the reverse," she contended, "that it is you who bears the blame, and I—not at all. You yourself let the wolf into the barn, not I. I even warned you that you should not let this Efraim Shvarts into our courtyard, because by nature I dislike Litvaks. Yet you got angry with me because of this. No, my husband, one cannot protect themselves from a house thief, even if you have a hundred eyes. By the way, I'm not so sure that she has fallen so far as people say. It could be, after all, that she is just as pure and innocent as an angel, and that all this talk is merely prattle and malicious gossip. This comes from the serving maids, and there's no more to it.

"I know Efraim, his wife, and their son Itsik better, much better than you," she suddenly switched topics. "I spend two or three hours there every day, and I swear to you by my life that they are absolutely good people, genteel people. Even though they are neither Hasidim nor zealous Misnagdim, they conduct themselves in a wholly Jewish way at home; they are generous in charity and benevolent to others. I have never heard them cause offense or speak ill of someone, and their son is a virtuous young man and quite the connoisseur. He is diligent with studying and writing and detests being idle. The truth be told, he is much dearer to me than all our Volhynia young men, who are coarse lads and do-nothings. The fact of the matter is that since I've known the family, I've a much higher esteem of Litvaks than previously, and in other things I hold them dearer than our Volhynians. They are more sober and smarter and are raising their child better than we do.

“I won’t deny to you that I myself have seen how our Minke pleases them, that Itsik has eyes only for her and the same with her for him. But I’ve never noted anything untoward between them, nor has anything wicked occurred. He gives her his hand when leaving because in Lithuania it’s already the style. The maids, those empty tongues, have made a big fuss over it because he’s a Litvak. A Litvak is a cross-head, and so then a cross-head is a demon . . . with the Volhynians, for example, many not-very-pretty things have happened to us in town and no rooster ever crowed, because there was no Litvak mixed up in them.

“She has already become the object of gossip, so we must see to it that either Minke stops going over there or that Efraim moves out of our courtyard. Yet with the latter, Efraim will be angry with us and this will not be advantageous, because you have already entrusted too much to him, and he knows all your business dealings. He can make your life miserable with the stroke of his pen. My advice, then, is to consult with the rebbe, because this is no small matter.”

Having heard out his wife, her husband then once more responded.

“Do you think, my wife, that it was not just empty words when a great man once said: ‘Daughters, daughters, my hair is turning white’? That is, that my daughters have caused me so much worry that my hair has become gray before its time. Those that have a daughter must be very cautious: because of her, he cannot live wherever and with whomever he wants. In the meantime, we must use whatever means possible to ensure that our daughter distances herself from Efraim’s house. First of all, so that people will stop talking, and secondly, so that it doesn’t eventually become some sort of scandal, because a love affair cannot be trusted. Its smallest spark becomes a flame that an ocean of water cannot extinguish.

“I will do as you bid me and go tomorrow to the rebbe and consult with him on how I must now act here. May God protect her from dealings with this Itsik, because she’ll then be wanting a fancy man for a bridegroom, a Litvak and not a Hasidic boy, and we will have to fight it out with her. This is an evil spirit brought on by our many sins, may God preserve us, especially as I know that she is already in love with him. Oh,

I could rip her to pieces right now! What is a young girl doing there until twelve o'clock at night? Certainly they are not discussing Hasidism and our holy men. Oh, may her memory be blotted out, and that her mother thinks this is perfectly correct."

In the midst of the conversation, they heard someone knock on the door. The mother spoke up. "That must be her knocking."

"Ah! She'll be knocking for the last time!" Reb Yudl cried. "Now I'll show her how one lies in strangers' houses until the middle of the night! So it seems that I'll now make her lie in bed until the end of her days. I'll give her a good thrashing and leave no bone unbroken!"

With these words he got down out of bed, intending to go open the door. His wife, however, held him back. "You maniac!" she told him. "Go lie back down where you were. You'll make things worse, not better. Don't forget that today is not like former times. You can't act out with anger against your children as you once could, especially with a beating. All you need is that Efraim finds out that you've beaten her because she was at his house. He'll light a fire under you and he'll be in the right, because who wouldn't be offended at such an insult? Moreover, you'll totally destroy the child's reputation; tomorrow the entire city will be in turmoil over it. It will be said that you yourself caught her with Itsik and that she had a miscarriage, and that's why she's confined to her bed. I'm telling you, Yudl, be careful! Watch over your child and remain calm.

"I'll go open the door, and if you want, you can rebuke her, but without a tempest, because I know that she is an innocent child and that Itsik is also an innocent boy. I have never heard a bad word from him, as I have from our young men. This is the truth. There at Efraim's house they don't speak of Hasidism and miracles, but nor do they talk about ugly things. They slander no one and ridicule no one. They play a little bit of cards at night there at home, or read a newspaper, or discuss worldly matters. So should we also begrudge her this pleasure?"

Having digested these words, Reb Yudl remained calm, and the mother went and opened the door for Minke.

Then her father proceeded to lay down a reprimand, but in a wholly mild tone. "My beloved child," he said to her, "it is not becoming

for a Jewish daughter to sit at a strange house until past midnight. I do know that you will not pick up any bad habits there, because they are good people. Nevertheless, it will make all of us a laughingstock. You are a child for whom matches are now being proposed, and because we are rich, we have no shortage of enemies. People will say that Yudl's daughter is infatuated with Efraim's boy and spends the entire night over there. A second person will add that you're in love with Itsik and he with you, and perhaps more than that, and people will believe this because he's a Litvak. Thus, my child, you will be maligned and remain an old maid until your braid turns gray. Therefore, from this day on, you must distance yourself from that place, little by little. I haven't said anything about this to you before today for two reasons: first, I wasn't aware that you were such a frequent visitor there, and second, this is now being talked about in the city, and a good friend even lectured me on it today. So now, my child, protect our honor and yours and stay in the house; Itsik will eventually stop coming over here."

The girl listened quietly to all her father's words and promised that she would heed them and obey.

V. The Consultation

It's a strange thing: long ago there were also great quarrels; for example, there were disputes between the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel. When one pronounced something impure, the other declared it pure; when one pronounced something nonkosher, the other ruled it to be kosher; when one pronounced something forbidden, the other proclaimed it as permitted; nevertheless they married into each other's families, dined in each other's houses, and were very good friends.

Yet here, with us, it's completely the opposite case. People are fierce enemies to each other—with a bloodlust; they want to bring the other person to ruin, and they fear one another as one does a ferocious enemy. There is no marriage between the different families. One doesn't trust the knife of the other's kosher slaughterer; one house has no confidence in the kashruth of the other's dishes, especially with those dishes set aside for Passover. They go to different rabbis: this one to a rebbe, the other to a rov; he is called a Hasid and that one a Misnaged. Given all this, however, we must truthfully say that the Hasid was a greater enemy to the Misnaged than the Misnaged to the Hasid. A Hasid can live among the Misnagdim quite securely and peacefully, but not so a Misnaged among the Hasidim. Among them he can't be sure of his livelihood, his possessions, nor even of his life. The only thing that keeps the Hasidim in check is that the Litvak has a mouth and can denounce them to the authorities, and it's better not to get involved with the police.

But now let us return to our story. The next morning, Reb Yudel went off to see his rebbe and poured his heart out to him, beseeching his advice. The rebbe did not make him wait long for an answer and moreover, for a clever answer.

"Hear me out, Yudel," he began by saying. "I'm surprised at you, that you took so long to come to me about your daughter. You just listen: I've known about this for more than half a year. Of course, it's well-known that strangers discover the sins of other people's children before the sins of their own—because love hides all defects. Yes, you've come too late, but one can still forestall disaster. You should know, though, that this is a hard nut to crack for both sides, as much on your daughter's side as on

the side of this Efroyke. Given that your daughter has already matched herself up with an apostate, this is a bad situation because it is a source of evil, may the Merciful One save us. Even if you manage to tear her away from this scoundrel, she'll have no appetite for a Hasidic youth who goes around with an open heart and a shaved head. She won't want to look at a Hasid. The proper thing to do, naturally, would be to send her off somewhere. Yet on the other hand, this wouldn't work either. It will be said in town that she needed to hide her pregnancy, and it was for that reason she was sent away.

"If you could be rid of Efroyke and his brat, this would be a very good thing. As our sages say, a man sins only with those people whom he sees all the time. Yet how to accomplish this? This is even more perilous than expelling your daughter. I know this Efroyke much better than you do; he's a dangerous person, with a mouth and with a pen. The last thing we Hasids need is to provoke this Litvak; he'll push us straight into the fire. After all, you can't use force to order him off your property. If he stays in the same city, isn't that just like being in the same house? Even a flood, as our wise men say, cannot separate a rooster and a hen, and certainly all the more so with a young man and an unspoiled girl who have already taken up with each other. Well, you will find yourself in the situation of having eaten fish that was already rotten and then drank water already muddied—the worst of both worlds. No, one must proceed much more intelligently. I know that this Efroyke wants to send his whelp to study in the province, only he lacks the money. If your daughter is dear and beloved to you, you should help him out with this. However, this must be done very skillfully so that your true motives are not revealed; otherwise he will end up being offended, and this also won't be any good."

"That is a very good plan," Reb Yudl asserted. "I too already know of this, that he—and even more, his son—wants the boy to go study in Kiev with all his heart and soul, only he doesn't have the funds, some three hundred rubles. Efroyke would like to borrow it, but he knows that he wouldn't receive a loan. No one would trust him. Men are afraid of a Litvak, and especially one like him, a schemer. Furthermore, he won't ask

me, because he knows I won't lend him any money for it. And in truth I wouldn't do it. I consider it a sin to lend to such a person, to someone who wants to turn his son into a gentile."

With this, the rebbe suddenly interrupted him.

"Woe! You are a fool!" the rebbe said. "What are you saying?"

It is not our responsibility to lessen a prohibition against one who is intentionally violating our religious law. Do as I say: appoint a middleman and lend him the money. However, the middleman is not permitted to say that you are the lender, and in the meantime, you'll be rid of the brat. I will be the guarantor that he will repay you to the last groschen, because the cross-heads are absolutely reliable in money matters. They believe that in money lies the whole of Judaism."

To sum things up, my dear gentle reader, no advice was ever followed as closely as this, and thus did Itsik prepare himself to go to Kiev.

VI. His Parting with Minke and His Studies

We left our Minke at exactly that moment when she was putting on a face of obedience and tranquility and had promised her father that she would obey his words on all things. In reality, though, she was completely opposed to this, because her heart had already been taken prisoner by her love for Itsik. She thought and did only for him. Itsik was her idol, her joy, her pleasure. She looked on him with the greatest delight, and to her his speech was as sweet as honey. And one can't really blame her, because she had never met his equal in her father's city. He was handsome and robust, smart and well-dressed, and moreover, well-educated. With such great virtues one can, it seems, capture the innocent heart of a fifteen-year-old girl, especially one with a sensibility for beauty and excellence.

Her father's words had greatly upset and confused her. She couldn't sleep, and to her, the night dragged on without beginning or end. She couldn't find a place to get comfortable, and her pillow was wet with hot tears. She felt short of breath. The exhausted traveler bears great suffering as he faces the sea but cannot drink. Yet a person in love who cannot set eyes on her beloved endures even greater suffering, especially as he lives alongside her in the same city, in the same courtyard, under the same roof.

She tortured herself so much that by the morning she was almost unrecognizable. It seemed as if she were a different Minke from the previous day. For the next two days, she never left her bed. On the third day Itsik, who knew nothing of the whole matter, called on her and, inquiring after her, was greatly shocked at how bad she looked. He then confided to her that he was going off to study, and this calmed her down a bit.

"Minele," he said, "I will soon be parting from you, but this separation will make our hearts even more united. Father has obtained a loan, so now I can journey to Kiev to study. I will begin with the fifth class in the gymnasium, and when I have finished that, I will enroll in the medical school. This will certainly last—with the gymnasium—a good seven years, but when I have completed all of it and become a doctor,

I will immediately lead you to the wedding canopy. Whether you are rich or poor, pretty or ugly, whether my parents approve or not, you will be mine for eternity. I swear to you before God that it will be so, and you have only to be patient and wait for me. You have my word and my sacred oath . . .”

Minke responded:

“Itsik! I will likely receive much tribulation from my parents. They want to marry me off to a Hasid. But I will resist, and I will wait. I have patience.

“Yet I am afraid,” she continued. “In the wide world you will see girls prettier, richer, and better educated than I . . . might I by chance wait in vain? You won’t break your oath?”

Itsik swore to her a total of three more times, and then they both were at peace.

When her parents learned of Itsik’s visit, they reprimanded her for it: what was the meaning of this? She had given her word that she would distance herself from him. But to this she replied to them:

“Itsik has only a few days left to spend here. It is better that I remain on friendly terms with him this short time, as we have been heretofore. To act otherwise would look unseemly to his parents. By the way, he is going away not for a day, not for a month, and not for a year but for seven whole years. The gossips will cease to chatter and will be proved to have been brazen liars.”

These words made an impression on Reb Yudl and his wife, and they gave their consent. Now Minke could spend time with her beloved, sometimes at her house and sometimes at his, and her parents no longer interfered.

On the day of his departure, both of them went about with red eyes. Speaking was impossible for them due to their enormous pain and sorrow, to their intense longing and grief.

Yet in spite of everything, they parted. Itsik went off to Kiev, entered into the fifth class of the gymnasium, and studied diligently. As to the teachers as well as his friends—they were all very pleased with him. All the same, he did not forget Minke, any more than he would

forget his own parents. He sent warm greetings to her in every letter to his parents, and she sent the same back to him in their letters, and later they wrote each other separately.

And who else in the world has so much to write about as two lovers? They are capable of filling an entire ocean with ink, especially our Minke, who had so much more to write about than he—because her love for him was a secret one, a forbidden one, and a forbidden love has so much more to say than an open one.

VII. Minke's Miseries

Here we will leave our Itsik to his studies in the Kiev gymnasium and tell of our beautiful Minke, who remained in her parents' house. This house, however, was worse than the gymnasium; it was a harsh school where she listened to much more difficult lessons than did her beloved in Kiev. As soon as Itsik had departed her parents rushed to make a match for her, because this was what the rebbe had ordered. When Minke refused to become engaged with anyone, her parents were greatly incensed.

"Well, there you have it!" Reb Yudel declared to his wife.

"She doesn't want a Hasidic boy. It doesn't suit her—she wants a cross-head. But that isn't going to happen. She can sit at home until her braid turns gray!"

To this, his wife remarked:

"Why are you in such a rush? Why do you believe that she must marry the first decent man put in front of her? Maybe she doesn't like him? To tell you the truth, I don't like him either. He's a good son from a distinguished family, but after all, there's not much else to him. She's not the first girl nowadays to be so choosy. Don't forget, we still have plenty of time."

Yet every day, the situation worsened. Excellent matches were proposed to Minke, but she would not even consider them. Her mother, who up to now had always been her defender, was also highly irritated with her, and both parents never let up, tormenting her day and night.

Minke, however, bore her sufferings like a true hero and kept her love for Itsik tightly concealed. Aside from his parents, no one knew the truth. She would receive letters from him sent to his parents' address, and they were the only ones to whom she opened her heart. They were also the only ones who could console her and calm her with a kind word.

"Our Itsik," they would say, "will be worth the suffering you are doing for him. He is handsome and sincere. You'll live a happy life with him, to spite our enemies. The match pleases us, although not because of your money. No, when our son completes his medical studies, he'll be able to receive a much larger dowry than your father intends to give you. We give our consent to this match because you love each other, because

we love you like our own child, and because you have a good heart. You are a precious child.”

These comforting words always soothed her and once again gave her the strength to wait for her Itsik. She received even more comfort and hope from Itsik’s letters, those kind and tender letters that always promised her a bright future and a happy life.

In this way, two years passed by. Her parents knew nothing of the secret love between their daughter and Itsik.

VIII. The Jewish Postmaster

At the end of these two arduous years, which had left Reb Yudl Shloboner old and gray due to his daughter's obstinacy, he once again brought his complaints to the rebbe, at the same time breaking down into tears.

"She shames me," he complained. "That a girl of seventeen refuses to marry! Whatever she says, she's always right. I don't know what's the reason behind this or what to do about it. She must be bewitched or have a demon inside her. I beg you, rebbe, tell me what it could be and what can be done to help her."

The rebbe said:

"To me, it's a very simple thing. It's more than certain that she's in love with Itsik, with that snake, may his name be blotted out. If you want to know this for sure, then get ahold of a few letters that the creep sends to his parents. There you will encounter something of great interest. I say this not from suspicion but from fact, because Shimen Tsuprinski, who picks up and delivers the Yiddish letters from the post office and whose custom it is to examine every letter before he hands it over—he knows this secret very well. You give him a few coins and he will put a letter in your hands that Itsik has written to your daughter. Inside each letter that Itsik sends to his parents there lies a letter for your daughter. He doesn't know what they say because they're written in Russian. I guarantee you that they're not talking about Hasidism. Shimen even tinkered with your daughter's letter, and Efroyke the cross-head quickly realized that the letter had been in strange hands. He was about to settle accounts with the postmaster; Shimen came running to me, told me the whole story, and pleaded with me to go to Efroyke and dissuade him from harming Shimen. I hate to admit that the Litvak was actually ashamed in front of me and did as I bid him. Regarding your matter, I'll tell Tsuprinski that he should take a few letters that Itsik has sent to his father and give them over to you instead. No one will ever know of it, because Efraim will think that the letters were lost in the mail, a thing that happens often enough. You bestow a ruble upon this Tsuprinski, and he'll do whatever you want, especially as I will ask him also."

Reb Yudl was filled with enthusiasm.

“You are a genius, Rebbe!” he exclaimed. “You’ve put me on the right path with your counsel. Of course, the wench must be in love with that worm. I’ll give him, this Tsuprinski, a couple of rubles as long as an end can be made of it and I’ll know what is really going on. If I find out from these letters that she’s had dealings with him, her life—you hear me—belongs to me. I’ll show her, then . . .”

Soon after this, Reb Yudel sent for Tsuprinski, and it was very easy to come to an agreement with him. Reb Yudel, incidentally, made sure that the rebbe’s opinion was brought to the table. The postmaster quickly gave his consent.

Several days later, Reb Yudel did indeed receive from the postmaster’s hand a letter that Itsik had written to his father, and in this letter was a short letter to his daughter, a little love letter, which revealed even more than he wanted to know. He immediately brought it to the rebbe to show him; this rebbe, what a genius he was, and what a divinely inspired man he was to have foreseen all this, as if it were written on the pages of a prayer book.

The rebbe then told him:

“No, Yudel—the job is only half-done. Tsuprinski must still put into your hands the letter from Efraim to his brat, because we must see what your daughter writes back. Thus, after going through this several times, you will at that point know how to approach your daughter and settle things with her, as does an honest father with a wayward daughter.”

Having heard these words, Reb Yudel said:

“I will do as you say, Rebbe, and keep a tight rein on my anger. I’ll remain patient until the third letter, even though it may drag on for several months, because they seldom write.”

“Well, let it drag on,” the rebbe said. “In return, however, you’ll put an end to it once and for all.”

Said and done. By way of Tsuprinski, all the correspondence for two entire months that went on between the father, son, and bride-to-be fell into Reb Yudel’s hands, and Reb Yudel then knew the entire course of their romance. Thus, so it began:

One day at about eleven o’clock at night, when Reb Yudel was alone

with his wife and Minke, he locked the doors and commenced to settle the score with his daughter. First he showed her all the letters from Itsik, and then her letters. When she simply had no answer to give him and her mother couldn't open her mouth and put in at least a few words for her daughter, he took his long Turkish pipe and set about beating her without mercy. He battered and bruised her; he pounded her like an apple into applesauce, from the nape of her neck to the soles of her feet. She made not one sound; she didn't even cry. Her mother was afraid to step in for fear it would become too loud a commotion. Reb Yudl beat her for so long that both of them, father and daughter, had no strength left.

Just as soon as he let the Turkish pipe drop from his hand and his anger had become somewhat abated, his wife began arguing:

"You've solved nothing with this," she said. "You won't drive her love for Itsik from her heart this way, and the fact is that she has not yet done anything so bad that you should beat her so cruelly. What has she done? She loves someone that we don't care for; does this require she be beaten for it?"

"One should speak wise words to her, as did Manoah did to his son Samson, when he had fallen in love with a daughter of the Philistines. Itsik is no gentile, and if you had been smarter, you would even have been able to dissuade him from studying and made him into none other than a Hasid. He would indeed have become a Hasid because he loves our daughter, and what doesn't one do for love? And a doctor is, after all, not an unimportant person . . . Now listen: we can't make our children be like we are, nor what we want them to be, especially with matches. Know, however, that you are taking responsibility for her soul upon yourself. Let us hope that she may survive this beating. Moreover, we can't even call a doctor for her, because God forbid that people find out why! We have plenty of enemies, and worse if it becomes known to Efraim Shvarts, who loves her as if she were his own child: he will ruin you. Look out, Yudl; your excessive Hasidism will get you into deep water."

Of course, this sermon was not given in the presence of their daughter but in their bedroom. However, one must concede that there

has not yet been a sermon in the world that had such an influence as this sermon had on her husband. He suddenly started crying like a small child and was deeply—very deeply—remorseful. For what reason had he beaten her? Yet the thing was already done. Even more, Minke nearly lost her life. She came down with a fever and was at death's door, and they must just ride it out, as one does when an unmarried girl goes into labor. Her mother never left her bedside, applied wet sheets and cold water to her head, and barely kept her alive. Four entire weeks Minke lay in bed, and her parents went around out of their minds. Yet they were to be hit by an even greater calamity, as we shall soon see.

IX. The Great Denunciation

And so, my gentle reader, we will here leave our beautiful Minke, sick in her bed, and turn to our Efraim Shvarts, the affectionate father, who had become extremely anxious that he had not received a single letter from his son in more than two months. At last he sent a messenger to his son, who brought back a reply that Itsik had also not received any letters from his father in over two months. What was the meaning of this? Itsik had written him several letters during this time. Efraim immediately realized that something fishy had been going on, that their letters must have been intercepted, and that the local postmaster must certainly have a hand in it. And perhaps Reb Yudl also? . . .

His suspicions became even greater when, by chance, he learned the cause of Minke's illness. This had been very hard to find out, because her illness was a closely guarded secret. Her mother sat day and night by her bed as if welded to the spot, and no mortal was allowed near her daughter. Even her neighbor, Efraim's wife, was not allowed to approach, and no one knew anything of the matter. But one time Minke became very faint, and her mother was not at home at that moment. The maidservant became very flustered and called in the neighbor, Efraim's wife. She didn't need to be asked twice as she'd always had much love for Minke, and she ran into the house with wine vinegar and a plate of snow. As she was reviving Minke, she saw how she was completely bruised and battered, as if she'd been whipped with a cat-o'-nine-tails.

"Minkele, what happened to you?" she asked her.

But Minke was silent.

Only after a time she murmured:

"Don't be frightened; I bear it quite easily. This is all because of my love for your son. I thank you for your trouble and beg that you leave me. I don't want my mother to find out that you were here . . . You can write to your son that I have demonstrated strong proof of my love for him. Write to him that only death can separate me from him!"

Efraim's wife related all this to her husband. Efraim became even firmer of the opinion that Yudl was intercepting his letters, and he decided to get even with him. First of all, he went to the postmaster

and sent a notice to the Kiev post office. He soon received clear evidence that his letter had been intercepted, and he then submitted a report about Tsuprinski. In this report he proved that Tsuprinski was delivering the mail into strangers' hands for money. The authorities conducted an investigation, which showed that Tsuprinski was guilty. Tsuprinski was dealt a harsh punishment: he was sentenced to five years of hard labor. In addition, many postal officials were removed from their positions.

Efraim became strongly detested in the city for this deed. Everyone avoided him like the plague. The only one, however, who still flattered him was Reb Yudl Shloboner. He showed him great friendship, feigning that Efraim was completely innocent of this matter. Efraim also pretended that he knew nothing, and the two got on together on very good terms. In reality, it would be best if the things they wished on each other fell into a deep sea.

Nonetheless, even though Efraim was despised throughout the city, he didn't lack for a livelihood, because at that time he was a wordsmith and a jurist and someone very influential with the authorities. Yet he wanted to be rid of the place. The city had become terribly hateful to him for a thousand reasons, especially for its hatred toward a Litvak. Incidentally, he was called in the city none other than "Efraim the informer"; this signifying, consequently, a Litvak, a Misnaged, and an informer . . .

For the Volhynians, a Litvak was, simply for being a Litvak, already a doomed man.*

But where should he go? How could he extricate himself from the city?

**When the Misnaged Reb Shimshen Blokh, a great Talmudist, an excellent secular scholar, and for those reasons the pride of Brody, died, the rebbe remarked, "A pity, a fine horse has died in town."*

X. The Ambush

Our beautiful Minke lay in bed an entire four weeks. Despite all that had now happened, she was not cured of her forbidden love of Itsik—she loved him even more than before, and she no longer made a secret of it. Even her parents now realized that a heart cannot be changed, and the one thing they asked of her was just this: that she not tell Efraim and his wife that her father had beaten her. Minke now went every day to Efraim's house and corresponded openly with Itsik. Even though this grieved her parents, especially her father, they held their tongues.

Her father still sought a way to be rid of Efraim, meaning for him to be removed from the city, and then, perhaps, an end could be made of the accursed romance between his daughter and the cur, who was already at the university and doing quite well in his studies. Moreover, Itsik no longer needed his father's financial help because he supported himself with lessons that he gave in respectable houses.

In the city there was a man, one Reb Ruvn Yokhved, a very cunning fellow, a big shot within the Jewish community and with the authorities and also a huge enemy of Efraim, because the latter had once rescued from his clutches a couple of b'ney yekhidim, only sons, whom he had turned into recruits to be conscripted into the tsar's army.

And we see that Reb Yudl did confer with this Ruvn in exactly what way one could be rid of Efraim, who knew all the secrets of the city and who was a very dangerous person who could bring down every person in the city.

Ruvn had responded:

“Well, it has been with great difficulty that the fool has found the right path! You've finally seen for yourself what kind of birdie this is. I recognized it from the first minute that this uninvited guest arrived in the city. Well, there's still time left. It won't be an easy bit of work, as he is a man with a pen who understands matters quite well, but it can be managed. I will tell you that the police also look askance at him, because the policemen—they too fear his pen . . . the bureaucrats are also sometimes weak against him. We must come up with something that leads him into temptation, and then the city shall be rid of him. First, we

will call a meeting.”

A few days later, a large meeting was convened in the community prayer house. It was decided that a bundle of counterfeit banknotes would be planted on Efraim, and then they would immediately denounce him to the authorities.

By the next day they had gotten together counterfeit banknotes, which they stuffed into Efraim’s prayer shawl bag. Efraim would bring it with him to the prayer house on Fridays before nightfall, and the beadle would return it to him at his home Sunday mornings, as it was against Jewish law to carry things on Shabbos. They were afraid that since he prayed every morning, he would discover the planted counterfeit money before the police arrived, and so they instructed the beadle that he should not return the prayer shawl bag until noon and that he make excuses to Efraim that something important had come up and therefore couldn’t bring the prayer shawl bag earlier. Efraim, who regarded the beadle as a virtuous man, forgave him, asked him to hang up the prayer shawl bag in its usual place, and after that even treated him to some schnapps and presented him, as was the custom, with a gift of five kopecks, and the beadle left.

The police came in the middle of the night along with gendarmes and three Jews to serve as witnesses—one of whom was Ruvn Yokhved—and invaded Efraim’s home, carrying out a rigorous search, stricter than the one when looking for bread crumbs before Passover.* The entire house was turned upside down and its contents rummaged through, but nothing was found until they came to the prayer shawl bag. There they struck gold: several twenty-five-ruble notes, two or three of the hundred-ruble notes, and on top of that a forged letter to Efraim from some merchant inquiring about counterfeit money.

Of course Efraim was immediately handcuffed and led off to jail. The next morning there was joy and jubilation in the city: to be rid of a Misnaged and a Litvak! Men raised their glasses in toasts; there was dancing, and tales were told of the miracles performed by the rebbes. His house was sealed off, and his wife, the lovely Beile, who at that time was scarcely thirty-six years old and who, until then, had lived with her

husband like a pair of doves, now went around friendless and forlorn and nearly half out of her mind with fear. There was only one creature who sympathized with her in her great misery, and this was our Minke. Yet Beile could benefit but little from this empathy because Minke's parents, who now believed that they were truly rid of this "terrible person," removed their mask of friendship and forbade their daughter to visit Beile. And several weeks later, when Efraim was sent off to Kiev where an entire commission had been established to deal with the then-burgeoning problem of counterfeit banknotes, Reb Yudl ran Efraim's wife out of her lodgings but kept many of their belongings in payment for the rest of the money Efraim owed him from when he had sent his son to go study.

Beile was thrown out of her home without a penny to her name, and if Minke had not quietly helped her out with a few rubles, she would have wasted away and certainly died of hunger. For her, apparently, all gates of mercy had been closed.

She left her home with only a small bundle under her arm; her only companion was our Minke. However, she escorted Beile only to the gate and not one step farther because she would have been stoned, plain and simple. How could she walk with the wife of one whom the community had just barely washed its hands? "Well, my child," Beile bade her. "Turn back, because why should you do yourself harm? Be well, my dear, and hope for better times. They'll not get the better of my husband. Meanwhile, though, my situation is a very bad one. Where should I go, my dear one?"

Minke murmured in her ear, "Go straight to Kiev . . . you have a son there, and your husband is there. Itsik will take care of you, and your husband can be helped a great deal by you both . . ." Standing under the gate they then bid each other a warm farewell, and Beile went off to Kiev, part of the way on foot and part of the way by wagon. Minke stayed with her parents, but she held herself firm and would have nothing to do with another match. Love will find a thousand ways, and Minke continued corresponding with Itsik: she simply made use of Efraim's copyist, a quiet man who would come quite often to her father. This person saw to it that

her letters got to Itsik and that Itsik's letters got to her.

And what these letters consisted of is to you, my dear reader, completely understood: they consisted of a heart and a heart!

**Known as bdikes-khomets (Yiddish of Hebrew origin), the ceremonial search for prohibited grains on the morning before Passover eve was indeed a stringent one, oftentimes with bread crumbs hidden in advance to be found and demonstrate the thoroughness of the search.*

XI. In Kiev

The first thing, my dear reader, that I must recall to you is that Itsik was already in the second part of his medical training and was one of the most excellent students in the program. He was highly esteemed by his professors and beloved by his friends. What is more, he was a favorite among those grand houses in which he gave lessons. He was already earning from sixty to seventy rubles a month, and by then was in a position to do something for his parents. The first thing he did was obtain permission to visit his father, whose situation was very sad. Efraim sat in shackles, in total isolation. Although they were not able to sit together very long, it nonetheless lightened both their hearts. Returning from the prison, he tried to soothe his mother. She did actually feel a bit reassured after this, but the trial dragged on much longer than Itsik had imagined. There sat in jail many Christians who were the forgers of the counterfeit bills and several Jews who had sold them, and Efraim's trial had been incorporated into theirs; more than half a year passed before he was brought to his first cross-examination.

In town, Reb Yudl was certain that Efraim was done for, especially as the rebbe had hinted this at the last meal that Shabes; those in attendance had rejoiced. In the meantime, however, Efraim's copyist, who was named Hershke Shleiermakher, had written a long letter to Itsik acquainting him with the whole matter and with the entire black piece of work that had been carried out under Yokhved's direction. The whole of the illicit plan with all its participants was disclosed to Itsik, and he handed it over to the prosecution in Kiev. Then on its side, the prosecution sent an investigative committee down to the city and began interrogations. Rubn Yokhved was brought in for questioning, along with Reb Yudl and even the local Jews. The truth immediately rose to the surface, as does oil on water.

The matter was concluded with several men sent to serve as soldiers in the army, and others were expelled to Siberia. Among the latter was also Reb Yudl Shloboner.

The story was told both far and wide.* All the newspapers reported on it, and every city had much to say about Efraim and Reb Yudl

and of the love affair between Minke and Itsik. The entire thing, however, was nothing more than a consequence of two hostile factions that had always bickered and quarreled—the Hasidim and the Misnagdim.

Now we will return to our two lovers—to Itsik and Minke.

**I recall as if it were yesterday how a certain Russian newspaper had erred when speaking about the matter: instead of the community in Volhynia, it announced that it was the Vilna community sentenced to serve in the army; in Vilna, this caused a great deal of upset.*

XII. Their Love Continues

My beloved reader, you can yourself imagine what kind of mourning and lamentations took place in the homes of those who had received their sentences. The entire time he sat in prison Reb Yudl cursed and reviled his daughter, gnawing at her image as does a worm. And she, whose life had become tiresome and odious, cursed the day that she had fallen in love with Itsik. She had, so to speak, tore him out of her bleeding heart and stopped writing to him.

“Oh, no!” she said to herself. “I have acted foolishly in loving; I’ve paid too great a price for it—my parents’ freedom. I renounce Itsik and will lead a miserable life, because there has not yet been born one who could take his place. I will remain an abandoned wife, an eternal virgin who has belted herself with an eternal girdle and laments her first love.”

Yet with all this she did not want to go with her father to far-off Siberia. First of all, because she knew that her father would keep throwing her love affair in her face and would force her to marry whatever person he could find there. Secondly, it was her desire that her mother, who was a fragile woman and would certainly not withstand the long journey—and even more so, the climate there—should remain with her there in the city. Thirdly, by remaining where they were, they could perhaps bring about a way to liberate her father.

Reb Yudl Shloboner also preferred that she and her mother stay in the city.

“If I live through it,” he said to his wife, “and if God brings me back here, I will have someone to come home to. If you come with me, you will certainly die before your time, because the journey is a long one and the harsh climate is not meant for your weak health.”

In short, Reb Yudl went off to Siberia by himself, and his wife and daughter remained in the city, although not for long. Minke had absolutely no desire to stay there, because the families that had suffered during the trial were very angry with her. Consequently, after having converted everything into cash and having raised a capital of forty thousand rubles, they quit the city. They settled in Warsaw, where Minke’s oldest sister lived. Her sister was quite rich, and her husband

was already more of the new world than the old. In time, the beautiful Minke regained her strength, became at peace with life, began her studies again—and the spark of the old love once again began to burn. The letter exchange with Itsik, which had of late collapsed, began anew with even more liveliness, although still in secret. With each letter, Itsik would cheer her up with buoyant reports of how well his studies were going, and she did the same with him, telling how she was making great progress in languages, music, and in handiwork.

At the same time, work was being done toward the liberation of her father; she and Itsik both worked on this matter with success.

In this way several years flew by in both fear and hope, and at the end of this time, Itsik completed his studies. He became a doctor and was already intending to return to Warsaw and throw himself at the feet of Minke's mother and ask her permission to marry her daughter. The inflexibility of destiny, however, would not yet permit it. No, he must endure a difficult test, as we shall write further of it, and with it conclude our story.

XIII. The Test

Itsik had barely received his medical degree when he became the personal physician to a great Russian duke who lived deep inside Russia. It paid a large salary, and Itsik needed to travel with him to his estates, because when it concerns earning a living, all other things fall to the wayside. Earning a living is the foundation of all other matters. Without a livelihood, one cannot be a devout, God-fearing person, for as the scripture tells us, “Lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of God”; that is, “Should I have been poor, I certainly would have already stolen and sworn falsely, because what doesn’t one do from need?” Without a livelihood, one cannot be a scholar; as other sages have said, “If there is no flour, there is no Torah.” Without a livelihood one can never be a sage; as the verse declares, “The poor man’s wisdom is despised”: the wisdom of a poor man has no value.

Therefore, my dear reader, Itsik was not being foolish when he went first to his posting rather than to his true love. He wrote to her about it, at the same time promising to come to her in the course of three or four months, when by that time he would be settled in and familiarized with the new job. She was no less wise than he and was content with this.

It was just then her mother became gravely ill; her doctors determined that she must go abroad, to Carlsbad, and she and her daughter set off. That year, Carlsbad received a large influx of visitors from all different lands, even from the farthest north. All the town promenades were teeming with bathhouse guests, and among them was always our beautiful Minke, who had created a grand sensation with her slim stature, lovely countenance, and exquisite poise. No one ever got tired of looking at her, because she was—as it could be said—a masterpiece of God. She would go strolling there with a certain Jewish lady who lodged with her at the hotel.

Amidst all of her admirers and followers stood out two young gentlemen, who trailed after her like shadows. They sat down where she was sitting and stood where she stopped. She had remarked on this, but was on her part quite indifferent to them until one time she heard one

of them call the other by the name “Shvarts.” The precious name shot through her like a bolt of lightning. She turned around, observed them for a little while, and in the older one recognized her beloved Itsik . . . he had changed very much in good ways; that is, he had become very distinguished and handsome, with a small round black beard and dressed according to the latest fashion. He was so much changed that were it not for the name “Shvarts” she would not have recognized him.

Yes, she recognized him, but she pushed it down inside her and remained outwardly indifferent. She began walking again with her friend and they along after her, but from that moment on, her ears were straining to hear their conversation so she might confirm her belief that he was truly Itsik.

With her ear attuned to them, she picked up on everything they said until it became sufficiently clear that this was her beloved and that the other person must certainly be a son of the duke for whom Itsik was personal physician. Itsik called him “Lopuchin,” which was the same family name that he had written to her about a few months ago when he had received the position.

Minke now very much needed someone with whom she could consult and talk things over. This couldn’t be done with her mother, because the continuation of the love affair was still a secret. Consequently, she turned to the lady with whom she went walking and who lodged at the same hotel as Minke. She confided to her everything that we ourselves know and asked her friend to help her in this matter by giving her the use of her hotel room, where she could see Itsik. To this her friend did promise her and kept her word.

“I want to put him to the test,” Minke told the woman, “whether he is still true to me; whether he is the same, passionate lover of mine. From what he writes to me, he is the same one. Even so, between writing and reality there lies a great distance; I’ve already noticed this from the way his eyes watch me intently, not knowing that I am Minke. He does not recognize me. I need to lure him here to your room. On the promenade I will pretend to fall ill. He will probably come to help me as doctor, and I will ask him to escort me home—meaning, to your room.

In this way, he'll have an opportunity to come see me often. Then I shall ferret out all the pathways of his heart and will know clearly whether I may entrust myself to him or not."

This very role was played the next day there on the promenade, exactly as it had been agreed upon. Itsik had very willingly allowed himself to be lured into her room, spent a bit of time there in a normal doctor's visit, and would not accept payment. The next day he also came at the appointed hour, and the next day—again the same. Yet the visits were already more those of a friend than a medical call, and each day they became longer.

The conversation was of the other guests, of politics, of marriage matches. He became so friendly with both women that one day he praised Minke's beauty to her face. "Fräulein, you are"—he said—"most amiable, and I certainly would court you, were my heart not already taken by another. She was very beautiful when I fell in love with her, but I haven't seen her in more than seven years. She resembled you a great deal. Now only God knows how she looks, because she has suffered a great deal, suffered because of me. Well, she may look however she will, but I shall never exchange her for another. And truth be told, I am drawn to you for that reason, because my beloved looks so much like you . . ."

"I am quite overjoyed," Minke responded, "to see a cultivated person who remains true to his love. I wish you good luck from the bottom of my heart. May you live out your years in happiness with your first love. Yet excuse my inquisitiveness, my dear sir, but women were created this way, that they wish to know what has happened with another, and especially in affairs of love. You say that she suffered much from her love for you; tell me about it, and in return, I promise to also tell you my secrets of love."

The doctor didn't need to be implored upon and began to tell all that had transpired with his love. By the time he had reached the end of the story, Minke had mentioned many things that he had forgotten or had skipped over, not wanting to speak of them. In the course of the story she had laughed and wept, and this in itself led Itsik to the realization that the young lady was none other than his beloved.

“You are my Minke!” he exclaimed, and fell into her arms as she fell into his. “What a fool I’ve been all this time that I didn’t recognize you for so long!”

I will not describe what was further said between the two, as I now lack both the time and space. I will just briefly recount the end of our story.

When they had collected themselves somewhat from such an emotional upheaval, Itsik wanted nothing but that they should go to her mother, throw themselves at her feet, and beg she give them permission to marry. Minke, however, was against this.

“No,” she said. “You must not do that. You will give her too great a shock. You must keep in mind that she is weak and sickly. The best thing will be that my friend introduces you to her as a well-known physician. Then, after several visits, you can tell her who you are and ask that she allow us to marry. My mother has long desired that I should wed, and to her, a doctor would be proper.”

He did as she bid him, and so it went. When her mother’s health had improved through his treatments, he easily persuaded her of what he wanted, and there was “rejoicing over rejoicing.” A formal engagement contract was drawn up, at which was present the younger duke Lopuchin, who had traveled with Itsik to Carlsbad. The wedding in Warsaw was postponed for a few months; soon after the engagement contract was signed, Minke and Itsik went their separate ways. The wedding was celebrated at the appointed time, and a few months later they were fortunate enough to receive another great happiness: Minke’s father had returned, liberated by a government edict.

Never was a guest received with so much joy as was her father into the circle of their family. Nor was anyone ever so greatly convinced of the proverb that “matches come from God.” He was much more satisfied with Itsik than with his own sons; he was still a Hasid, but he had learned a good lesson. He now knew that one must be extremely tolerant to a Misnaged, and respect each person.

Reb Yudel Shloboner and his wife lived out their days in peace, happiness, and honor with their son-in-law and daughter. They certainly

would not have had such golden years with their other children; the truth be told, the new world exceeds the old in the mitzvah of “honor thy father and thy mother.” We have enough examples of this in our Jewish city of Vilna, where the educated children support their parents, find husbands for their sisters, visit all family members, and remain bachelors into their middle years so that a wife will not impede them in this. Our children raised the old way, however, concern themselves not in the least about their parents, letting them waste away in need and loneliness, and woe to those parents who sit at their children’s table under the tongue-lashing of the daughter-in-law and grandchildren, who have had no decent upbringing. They are in their children’s house like the fifth wheel of a wagon, as one can infer from the Jewish saying, “As if all we were missing at this table were father and mother!”

And because my intention here is only the “Haggadah and not the matzo balls,” that is to say, my intent is not the story but rather the moral contained therein, I ask you, gentle reader, to learn from this story what there is worthwhile to learn. First of all, if your daughter falls in love with an honest young man who can ably support her, don’t forcefully interfere in it if he is not of such distinguished pedigree as yourself or doesn’t have as much money. No, we must not permit it, because the Creator himself is the arranger of matches, and our interference will only increase our suffering. In the second place, if you are a Hasid, you should not scorn a Misnaged, and the same if the reverse is true. Even the Christian world is sometimes more tolerant of us than the Hasidim to the Misnagdim and the Misnagdim to the Hasidim. No, my dear reader, we must be highly tolerant of one another. Thus our father Abraham conducted himself, who treated everyone well. I have much still to write, but I have no space left to pour out such a treasure.

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